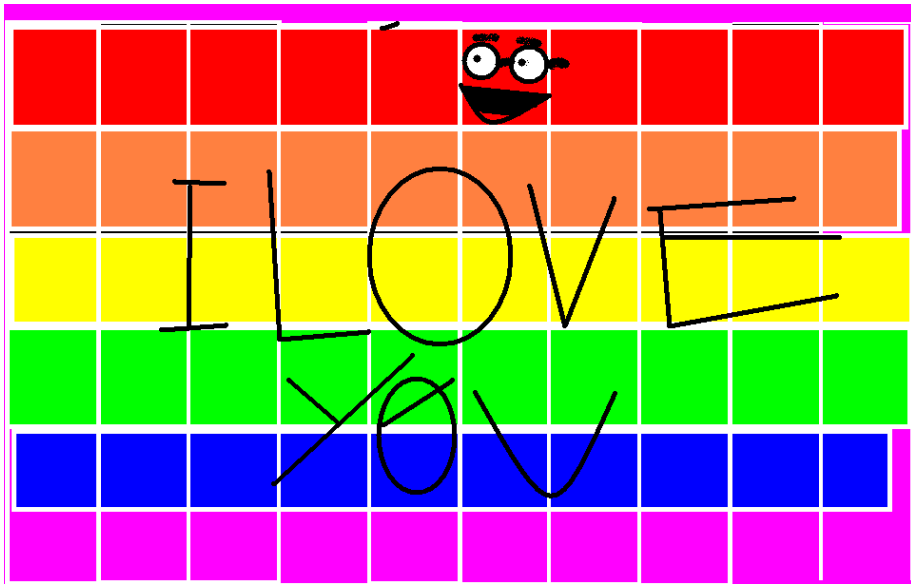


Before



& After

Dedicated to
Jocelyn & Geoff
and young lovers of all ages.

These themes may repeat themselves
But may you never tire of exploring them yourselves
Or sharing them with each other.

Cover Art
By
Lowie Tobin

?
2006?

Vail, Colorado
February 19th, 2006

The question is not
Whether the message gets sent
But rather, if it's received

It's not about whether
The messenger arrives
But rather, if (s)he is believed

From our doubts and distrust
And all forms of distraction
Surely we can be relieved

By recognizing the connections
Between our selves and each others'
But to see, it must first be conceived ...

... How all is provided
By the Power(s)-that-Be
And not get tangled in webs that get weaved...

...By all manner of thoughts
Seeming needs and desires
It's by our ego that are we deceived

If instead we let go
And let Thy will be done
Our sense of purpose is quickly retrieved

Lightly falling snow
Adds white to ever green
Blanketing mountain spires
Beckoning spirits to sights yet unseen

Exploring new possibilities
Renewing friendships lost
Re-examining habits and assumptions
And the balance 'tween benefits and cost

Remembering the virtue of laughter
The value of a smile
The importance of careful listening
To what's happening in the meanwhile

Distinguishing what we can change
From that which we simply can't
Finding our mission deeply rooted
In need of nurturing, just like a plant

Nature's beautiful places
Provide chances to consider
The wealth of opportunities
Only discerning eyes detect

A great Good Fortune
Already at our disposal
Its richness awaiting
Our formal proposal...

... to live life to the fullest
Accepting its suffering and joys
With the gratitude of a child
Receiving the greatest of toys

?
2006?

The greatest gift we can get
Is when we give of our selves
Freely, unconditionally, relentlessly
Without expectation of return
Or hope for recognition

It's true what they say:
About giving being its own reward
About how much more we get than we give
About it being better to give than receive
And about how such gifts keep on giving

And, of course, how we get back what we give out
Not necessarily in the immediate sense
--- It would otherwise not be a gift, but a loan --
But rather like an investment or insurance policy
More likely to pay off if one's dues are paid

It's really more an attitude than an action
A disposition toward life
That we can only preach through practice
Find by seeking
And learn-by-doing
... the ultimate Experiential Learning

Sometimes it takes a while for receivers to recognize/appreciate their gifts
As perhaps it's something they don't want or need
But it is always worth giving
That which we wish to receive
For it is only by knocking that doors open.

Foresthill, CA
March 10th, 2006

FOUR YEARS GONE - Part I

Subtle signals
Telltale signs
Baffling mystery

The search for life
Before death
Elusive enough

The spirit of life
Dwells within
Readily available

The meaning of life
Hides in plain sight
Largely ignored

The value of life
Often unappreciated
Rarely over-estimated

The beginning of life
Neither starting at birth
Nor ending in death

The living of life
Fulltime job
Fringe benefits aplenty

The way of life
Easily lost
Persistence required

Foresthill, CA
March 11th, 2006

FOUR YEARS GONE - Part II

Our search for life before death
Can distract us from the here *and* hereafter
Blocking us from the benefits of both
Leading often to preventable disaster

Yet constant messages and mystical sounds
Too loud and obvious to ignore
Hint at the strongest of likelihoods
That spirits await just beyond our closed door

Or, perhaps worse, only outside our window
Silent witness to each action and thought
Might there be no such thing as "hidden agendas"?
No such thing as not getting caught?

Of course we're loath to consider this option
For so many possibilities we seem to lose
Yet we're denied thereby also the benefits
Of Divine Guidance available, if we so choose

There's ultimately no way of proving
Whether there's any "there" after here
Except for the undeniable evidence
Of how better life is when we decide to be clear

To live every moment as if someone's watching
Noting well what we think, say and do
Matters less in the final analysis
Than whether we're done by the time that we're through

To make the most of life's opportunities
Why not let spirits that lost theirs be our guide?
If we're right, it leaves fewer stairs up to heaven
If we're wrong, well then what's the down-side?

Foresthill, CA
March 21st, 2006

Snow-laden tree branches
Bowed but unbroken
Accepting what's been given
Attesting by silent beauty
To nature's continuing wonders

Like each of us, these trees
Have all that's needed
Receive no burden they can't handle
And give and get in equal measure
A life-giving exchange of services

Naturally, they move towards the light
And get out of each other's way
Leave nourishment for their future generations
Tolerate others not of their kind
And leave behind products useful long after departure

Perhaps the ultimate expression of faith
Is to plant a tree you'll never see grow
Making an investment in life
And a commitment to growth
Beyond our immediate personal benefit

Then some one else will see
Its branches laden with life's burdens
Bending as if bowing to powers greater than itself
And recall with thankful appreciation
Life's lessons taught just beyond our window

San Francisco, CA
March 31st, 2006

IN MEMORIAL

Celebrating a life's ripple effects
Ten years after its passing
Attests to the infectious nature of spirit
An accumulation of goodness amassing

For unlike those laws of physics
About equal and opposite reactions
Good example generates more of the same
A clarity of purpose that alleviates distractions

And unlike a negative influence
That spreads only in a downward direction
A positive effect goes two ways at once
Hence this pause for reflection

For that ripple effect radiates inward
Clearing the way that we need to go
Translating obstacles into opportunities
Reminding that learning is how we come to know

And that wealth is no measure of richness
For only by giving do we ever receive
Helping other is our own way toward healing
The only untruth: an intent to deceive

Yet the positive effects of right effort
Flow in an outward direction as well
Carrying us past so-called limitations
Composing new stories for others to tell

Since life comes from one's way of living
Its value lies not in the role that we're in
Nor does its influence stop at an ending
Decided instead by whether (or not) we begin

Foresthill, CA
April 7th, 2006

Remaining calm and clear is required
To hear the voice of God
Above the din
Of cultural clutter
And clatter of conflicted interests

Keeping confident and conscious is essential
To follow the will of God
In moments of uncertainty
When adversities mount
And contrary indications abound

Finding the courage and commitment needed
To take the hand of God
On the uphill path
Through many detours
Across territories uncharted

Developing the creativity and consistency involved
To accept the plan of God
As our guiding light
Illuminating the pathway of life
Weaving between distractions and pitfalls

Acquiring the conscience and competence needed
To fulfill the commandments of God
Adhering to principles
Of health and happiness
That bring us here, and hereafter

Foresthill, CA
April 25th, 2006

California Coast
May 16th, 2006

Retaining exuberance for life
Is the greatest gift we can give
The best service we can render
The most positive influence we can leave behind

As a rose creates beauty and fragrance
And waterfall inspires wonder and awe
The weather arouses curiosity
And each start brings us closer to the beginning

So too does our exhilaration for existence
Reflect outward the discoveries within
Revealing the treasure awaiting
Rewarding exertions toward openness and _____

Moving away from the comfort that condones ignorance
And the familiarity that breeds indifference
Releases self-centered insecurities
Self-imposed anxieties and grandeur delusions

For to do anything unto others
We must first do unto ourselves
Whether lying or loving
We are first and most affected by our own behavior

Sharing our excitement for living
Proves the existence of life
A sign of intelligence on our own planet
That we so desperately seek on others'

Like our sun moving toward the shoreline
Our future moves before us
Radiance in the distance
Turbulence in between
But solid ground where we stand
With a view that is life giving
And breath taking

Like the trees up on the mountain
We can't choose where we're planted
But can learn to be firm-yet-flexible
A life-long education
In the powers of nature
Not just surviving, but striving
-- And thriving

What we can't do without is all found within
And we get by giving
Such important lessons
Not found in text books
Easier learned than taught

And you pass the test
When you've discovered your treasure
Accepting and appreciating
Who you are, How you feel, and
What difference it makes

To share your gifts
Take your place
Face the inevitable
Feel the power
Be the dream

Kingvale, CA
July 2nd, 2006

What once was mystery
Soon becomes history
In both cases, a compelling story is told
Of tribulation and trial
And experiences that rile
As uphill we carry our load

But more good times as bad
More often happy as sad
'less by compromise our values get sold
If when the bids get so high
We no longer try
To keep those things much more precious than gold

Look at the birds of the air
We're told they've no reason to care
Given all the food they can hold
Or lilies of the field
Whose beautiful yield
Continues even as they grow old

We've been given what we need
It's planted like a seed
For its nurturing, we must remain bold
That from within comes our wealth
And all aspects of health
Are secrets revealed as our stories unfold

It's not where you live
But how
That defines the place called "home"
Not where or when we go there
But why
That determines how we're welcomed

It's not how far you go
Or have gone
But rather, how much further
We're willing to travel
- No matter what -
That dictates the time of our arrival

If we realized how precious the cargo
We carry within
With how much more thought would we proceed?
With greater caution? More advance planning?
More discretion?
Smoother take-offs make for happier landings

Timing isn't just everything
It's the only thing
That keeps us 'tween the here and there
In that centered space
Where all good things begin
And we are ready for the no-matter-what

It's where we can find
What we never lost
And learn things we always knew
Finally discovering within
What we're never without
Forever opening that which can never be closed.

Gold Lake, CA
August 10th, 2006

Warm sun
Soft breeze
Sights, sounds and smells
Of nature's wonders

Live trees and dead
New growth and old
Different parts
of the same symphony
Swirling in and around us

Finding rest, relaxation, and respite
Is an inside job

Something we can receive
But cannot be given.

Gold Lake
August 14th, 2006

Deeply touched
Strongly moved
Slowly smiling
Clearly changed
Extremely curious
Fervently hoping
Closely following
Quietly thankful
Openly accepting
Freely choosing
Tantalizingly anticipating
Warmly regarding
Calmly proceeding

Gold Lake
August 12th, 2006

Sierra Buttes
August 13th, 2006

I saw no shooting start last evening
But instead a brighter light
Emitted from a soul-filled heart
On a moonlit mountain night

Willing to stay on the dance floor
Before the deck was clear
Seizing the moment – sharing the vision:
A better world for those held dear

Calm, inviting deep blue eyes
Soft cheeks, strong/gentle hands
Adding value, raising hope(s)
Helping others know where they stand

And yet with a shoulder shimmy
That would provide one cause for pause
A smile that's a gift to receive, and
Spirit that defies gravity's laws

To slow this moment's passing
I could and would not go to sleep
And for the joy we share thereby
My gratitude is deep

Yet another star-filled night
On a different mountain top
Filled with sweet sounds
Invigorating possibilities
Balanced by realism,
Respect and responsibility,
Acceptance and understanding.

Less about wants than needs
More to say and share
Not if, but when
- Perhaps the journey is the destination? -
Focusing on the discovery rather than the invention
No more hide-and-seeking
No more wondering "Why?"
No more doubts about the pathway
No more looking without seeing, listening without hearing, or touching without feeling.

With a sense of desire rather than urgency
- The Road to Intimacy has no short-cuts or detours -
Focused on giving rather than getting
On learning rather than teaching
And on talking rather than telling
Revealing a process that, like us all, is imperfect
With obstacles associated with every opportunity
Willfulness threatening to undermine willingness
Fear an ever-patient predator
Past and future pulling us from the present

Partnership with another-even for a moment- helps us to seek/find balance:
To try hard(er) when doing so seems unwise
To see the little things that make a big difference
To hear the messages we may have missed
And recognize the miracles already unfolding



Redlands, CA
September 2nd, 2006

No map, no plan, no toothbrush
Without a change of clothes
No deodorant or denture cream
No assumptions or expectations

Just sand in my shoes
Faith, hope and love in my heart
Ideas and ideals to share
And a frame of reference to establish

An open agenda, like an open book,
Draws attention to where it belongs
Extending an invitation to adventure
Along life's most harrowing/fulfilling path

The one that takes us to where we're headed
Although uphill all the way
The vistas it offers are breath-taking
It's sights, sounds and smells uplifting

It's a journey for which one cannot pack
Neither plan nor prepare in advance
Its destination known but duration eternal
Its beginning an end-in-itself

With feathers as trail markers
And life lessons our milestones
Meaningful moments our only accumulation
Progress measured by fulfilled aspirations.

Foresthill, CA
September 7th, 2006

Life's greatest blessing
Can be found in love
That magical/mystical state
That fits, as hand in a glove

That state-of-mind
In which all things connect
Good ideas come more easily
Best intentions resonate and reflect ...

...The purpose of existence
And the meaning of life
Cutting straight to our core
Like through butter with a knife

And that state-of-spirit
Validates our dreams
Of fullness and one-ness,
A happiness that beams

It's true that these blessings
Are only released from within
A process rekindled in me
By a wide-awake Kristen

My prayer answered
My aspirations fulfilled
To freely give and receive
Along the path that gods' willed.

Foresthill, CA
September 13th, 2006

One month of todays
Each better than the last
Enjoying each moment
Appreciating every interaction
Grateful for every step on the path leading here

Yes – an end as well as means
An end to wondering if we'll reap what we sow
An end to looking forward or back
The end of asking: who? when? where? how? why?

And yes – a means also
Like what it means to be alive
To accept and be accepted
To understand, and be understood
To discover and be discovered

I need only to close my eyes to see you
Open my heart to be near you
Release my spirit to join you
Reach out my hand to feel you
Just be myself to touch you

If I get one more of those days, or a million
One more month or a thousand
Every second will still feel like an hour
Each day seem it lasts for a week
Every feather along the way affirming our path

Davenport, CA
September 23rd, 2006

Got your pen in my hand
Your songs in my head
And the fullness of you in my heart

I've witnessed miracles firsthand
That your love has engendered
When you humbly do your part

I see the ocean that calls you
The rising sun that warms you
And experience elation as we start

Moving toward one another
And closer to our true selves
Yet keeping horse well ahead of the cart

Discovering the powers of partnership
The joy(s) of ecstasy
Which register well off the chart

Finding balance and humor
Brilliance and beauty
Coming toward us as fast as a dart

Bonds of liberation—not confinement
Expanding possibilities
By blending the sweet and the tart

Foresthill, CA
October 20th, 2006

?
2006?

Midnight

Your candle must be burning bright tonight
For I am brightened by your light
Like those shining down from heaven
Which chase darkness from the night

Even from this too-great distance
Your inner glow is plain to see
Brightening the lives around you
Or at least those who want to be

This light also warms their heart
While opening up their mind
Connecting their soul and spirit
By removing ties that blind

It is emitted from your eyes
Exuded through your pores
Illuminating your sooooo sweet smile
Unlocking bolted doors

Your light's not hidden under a basket
Instead placed high upon the hills
Helping others find the place
Where they best deploy their skills

This light's unending fuel supply
Is a gift from gods above
That burns brightest whenever sharing
Our faith, and hope and love

We are where we need to be
We understand what we need to know
The solutions we seek are before us
The opportunities we dream of are available

Operators are standing by.

The map has been provided
The road made smooth
Our compass forever pointing: "Forward"
Our cup runneth over

No money down. Payment plan available.

The birds of the air neither sow nor reap
Neither the lilies of the field
They already have what they need
Their very being a celebration of nature's wonders
and the gods' goodness.

You are under no obligation to buy.

We are given the freedom of choice(s)
Among them: not to live in want or fear
And to stay in the Present – a gift we receive
Whenever we choose Now over all other alternatives

100% satisfaction guaranteed or return with no questions asked.

Chicago, Ill.
December 16-17, 2006

Neither time nor distance separates
Connections of the heart
So closely aligned
Whatever's lost, we find
Not where it ends, but how we start.

Whether it be with family or friends
The foundation is the same
It's built with love
That great gift from above
If missed is life's only shame.

In this recipe for successful relations
The secret ingredient is trust
In our selves and each other
As does a child its mother
More in bad times than good that we must.

From these pieces our puzzle assembles
To create such a beautiful sight
Appreciated by all
Who respond to the call
And receive by giving with all of their might

We look elsewhere
For that which lies within

Wishing, hoping, praying
Our worst fear won't be realized:
That we're asking the wrong questions,
And already know the answer:
That life is hard and, if lived right,
It only gets harder.

Scary thought indeed
Many spend a lifetime avoiding it.
Unsuccessfully.

But the Bad News is also the Good
As at least our troubles are known
Indeed they lay right before us
Unmistakable – unrelenting – unavoidable
Patiently waiting to see
If we watch, listen and learn
Recognizing our path not only as the only one
But also the best possible option
Specially (specifically?) designed for our passing
From that way to this
Enthusiastically

It's one coin with two sides
Bad and good closely intertwined
Or so called,
Deceiving as appearances can be

Foresthill, CA
March 1st, 2007

Alone in a crowd
Then I see you
Or at least I wish I did
Your presence would sparkle
Even among diamonds
There's no way such love could be hid

And no reason too
For there's an unending supply
That comes from a renewable source
To which people are drawn
By kind eyes and sweet smile
Magnetic attraction of incredible force

Beneath the surface they're called
To the depth of their souls
Becoming honest about purpose and vision
And the potential of this moment
To materialize aspirations
Just by making a simple decision

By choosing to live
Do well by doing good
You carve a path and leave a clear trail
That leads those who are seeking
To find their power within
Finding strengths where Fear said they were frail

Foresthill, CA
March 4th, 2007

The paradox of life
- a coinciding of opposites that is no coincidence-
helps explain conflicts that would tear us asunder
or bring our selves and each other's together

These facts of life
- conundrums appearing as contradictions -
We can accept (or not) but never grasp
Deepening understanding of our life & world

How else could we learn
to both hold on and let go?
to both accept and choose our destiny?
to become willing but not willful?
to discover powerlessness as a strength?

"Paradox" is a latin word, hence obscure
Its meaning: two truths
The co-existence of seeming opposites
Which foster wholeness, balance and wonder.

Aptos, CA
March 11th, 2007

As from surging current
To crashing surf
Each wave achieves its purpose

And the call-and-response
Of birds greeting the day
Create an audio circus

So too we all
Each in our own way
Fulfill our role in The Drama

Unfolding each moment
With our knowledge, or not
How it turns out? All a matter of karma

As we sow shall we reap
As we seek we will find
And in giving, so we receive

Every person a story
That takes a lifetime to tell
Possibilities defined by how we conceive ...

... The world all around us
And the one deep within
As a place that provides what we need

Not just for our survival, but thrival
And oh! So much more
When with love we have planted the seed

St. Louis, MO
April 20th, 2007

No explaining
Because there's no understanding
How life and love intertwine
Joined forever
And sometimes never
Even when happening it's hard to define

No complaining
Because there's no one listening
When enjoyment our confusion inhibits
Our immediate pleasure
- a life-long endeavor -
As if something the Bible prohibits

No need describing
Because there's no way of hiding
When another to one is attached
That intimate feeling
That sends one reeling
No better plan has ever been hatched.

AWAKENING

At rest
and at peace,
those within enter
a new day
that ripens further with each tick
of that clock.

Bringing new chances/choices
for
knowing and loving,
learning and growing,
seeing and feeling,
listening *and* hearing,
touching and healing.

Like the fog that obscures
the experience of sunshine,
our perceptions, conditioning and fears
can cloud our experience of
this moment.
It's goodness,
greatness,
grandeur
and giftedness
patiently await our awakening
to this latest Dawn of Discovery,
calling us to open our eyes,
our minds
our hearts and hopes
to the wider and wilder possibilities
implied by our dreams.

Aptos, CA
May 27th, 2007

(continued)

Warm fire burns
in the hearth
and heart,
its snapping hum
join a steady tick-tock
join the rattle of acorns
occasionally rolling off the roof

As natural beauty beams
in from each window,
adding its strength and character
to that already growing within those still sleep.

Bright colors, soft textures
and pretty flowers add
vivid pictorial evidence of life
abounding
advancing
appreciating.

As light emanates
from outside and in
and above,
illuminating the
Past
Present
Future
the known and unknowable,
opportunities and obstacles,
joys and pains,
birth and death,
and all the living that happens in between.

Foresthill, CA
May 5th, 2007

The lushness of Spring
Birth, growth, change
An embarrassment of riches
An abundance of gifts
Reminding that our needs are provided

The well never runs dry
Continually replenished
Always offering what's needed
Unleashing energies
Otherwise absorbed by the panic
Triggered by an Illusion of Scarcity

Our fears, and economy, are fueled by
Worries about losing what we have
Or not getting what we want
Hiding from us deeper fulfillment
Flowing freely to those who seek its true source

Experiencing life and love in abundance
Opening ourselves to its pleasure(s) and pain(s),
Both its beginning(s) and ending(s)
Helps us appreciate that which lies in between,
drawing us to the middle rather than extremes

It is in that place
At that moment
Balance & harmony remove their disguise
And we discover they were always present
Waiting only to be treated like friends