



"When you're going through hell ...  
...keep going"

Winston Churchill

# *Reflections* *Reflections*

of Robert.

Cover photo: J. Spector

Undated

3/12/01

Wrinkled pages  
Worn out lines  
Ragged edges all around

Holding their own  
Finding their way  
Like two feet 'long the ground

Seeing the smiles  
Feeling the love  
Whether or not they're there

Keeping the faith  
Following the path  
No matter who may care

Hearing the calling  
Ignoring the doubt(er)s  
Without malice or scorn

Defying the odds  
Feeling the heat  
Like the sun on a hot desert morn

Wishing away sadness  
Hoping for gladness  
Accepting what comes in between

Moving onward  
Letting go  
Toward possibilities as yet unseen.

Fantasy gets trumped by reality  
As do dreams when one awakes  
Hope & trust fade in the absence of faith

Just as "facts" triumph over feelings  
And those who got get over those who don't  
Image, not substance, shapes perception

That's the world we live in—  
--the way things go –  
Defy the odds & you lose  
And labeled a loser

Fail to accept and get rejected  
Don't approve and get disallowed  
Neglect to but in & become devalued

Unreasonable are those who refuse to condone  
Emotional are those who refuse to desensitize  
Uninvolved are those who try to stay connected

That's the choice we make  
-or else live by chance  
Go your own way – alone  
Or else live someone else's life who  
Won't, can't or don't

The way things are ain't good or bad  
Unless you pretend they aren't that way  
How we look at it makes all the difference.

5/30/03

Wandering and wondering  
Along paths uncharted  
Going forward in order to  
Find out what we've started

Accepting the unexpected  
As all part of the plan  
Caring without knowing  
It's fit in life's span

Our growth experiences  
Come at great cost  
With the value we've gained  
Balanced by equal portions of loss

There's no other option  
No secret to hide  
Neither surprise or coincidence  
To be revealed or denied

Just now or else never  
Always here and not there  
Trusting amid doubts  
Reaching for the next stair

Staying calm, cool and clear  
As much as we can  
Within the limitations  
Of this species called "man"

2/26/05  
16<sup>th</sup> Minute of Emotional Sobriety

Willingness & wiliness  
Takes us where we need to go

Confidence & creativity  
Tell us all we need to know

Compassion & conviction  
Is what we need to show...

...Honesty & humility,  
Which teach us how to grow

Fears & Frustration  
Make the going slow

Persistence & patience  
Get us through feeling low

Anger & anxiety  
Always within a stone's throw

Healing and happiness  
Connect like foot & toe

Serenity & security  
Are seeds one must sow

3/4/05  
On the Beach

Powers of nature  
Beyond our control  
Shaping our world's fabulous features

Widening our eyes  
Encouraging our growth  
Introducing us to all the gods' creatures

Opportunities for learning  
Possibilities to explore  
Providing classroom as well as teachers

All front row seats  
With views unobstructed  
Can't opt for a seat in the bleachers

Twenty-something dimensions  
Hung by string theories  
Even the most simple idea's a reacher

Gulls on the wind  
Relentless waves rolling in  
Messages of hope from the Omniscient Preacher

Calling us out  
Calming within  
Could there be a more articulate beseecher?

4/9/05  
Spring Time

It's the same book  
But a new page  
It has the same look  
But a very different gauge

It's the same life  
But a whole new day  
Like the same knife  
That doesn't cut the same way

Or the same sky  
That brings new light  
On the same question: why?  
Bringing new insight

We're the same people  
In a new life each day  
Just as to the same steeple  
Different prayers people say

They're the same trees  
With new roots and limbs grown  
And the same possibilities  
Through which new chances are sown

It's the same smile  
With a whole new reason  
It's the same weather  
But a completely new season

4/12/05  
Sweet Dreams

God's children lay sleeping  
So quiet and serene  
Not knowing what brings the next day

And as it draws nearer  
Without fear or foreboding  
They allow it to arrive in its own unique way

Taking what this day brings  
And then awaiting the next  
As if all part of the game that they play

For its very own sake  
To which we all yearn  
Without that adult shade-of-gray

Where all that is there  
Is all that there is  
And it's in that state we stay

Glad for the gift  
We call The Present  
Delivered each day on a tray

With its own reward:  
A life, not just a living  
If close attention we pay

We rise in the knowledge  
That the day's in God's hands  
Asking only for the strength  
To find our part in His plans

In which assuredly we're provided  
Not our wants but our need  
For any more that we anguish  
Is just a symptom of greed

The bounties of nature  
Constitute aplenty of evidence  
With so much beauty and blessing  
Why then so much reticence?

Like a tree's rings, we're told  
People grow from within  
Appreciating the gifts we're given  
Is the place to begin

Sharing our song, like the birds  
Moving forward, like a stream  
Reaching up, like the flowers  
Bringing reality to our dream

Living by choice and not chance  
Looking with more than our eyes  
Listening for things one can't hear  
Learning life's lessons as they arise

These reminders patiently awaiting  
For whenever we stop to receive  
The gifts nature eternally offers  
Unwrapped, to help us believe.

5/7/05  
Yosemite in the Rain

5/30/05

Squirrels and birds scamper  
To receive what's been given  
Finding it's all been provided

We too wander in doubt  
And so desperately search  
Not knowing it's already decided

To see as our path as ordained  
Used to seem so confining  
About which I did not feel excited

Since it was also fatiguing  
As much trial as error  
With results for which we are chided.

To replace doubt with trust  
That all is as it should  
Its reason: that we be delighted(!!)

By how well it works  
For the goodness of all  
Other explanations are simply short-sighted

If faith is believing  
Then trust is knowing  
Learning the difference is how we become knighted

In a new Corps of Discovery  
That continues to explore  
How what's wrong will (eventually) be righted.

Holding on  
Holing back  
Unwilling to follow the path?

Resisting the messages  
Rejecting the methods  
When to do so incurs the gods' wrath

Tempting fate  
Trying patience  
Why not on the track do we stay?

Walking off  
Running amok  
Allowing distractions to chart our way

Accepting limitations  
Adapting inclinations  
That's how to handle what's presented

Appreciating blessings  
Acknowledging burdens  
Treating those imposters the same\*, but not resented

Analyzing motives  
Tightening focus  
Finding strength to implement the plan

Looking inward  
Reaching outward  
For help to do better – we know that we can

\* "if" by R. Kipling's

6/18/05  
Chestnut Street/SF

Jazz soaked rhythms  
Drive the coffeehouse beat  
While the sun-soaked customers  
Occupy warm sidewalk seats

The faces keep changing  
But their look stays the same  
The staff knows them well  
'Though perhaps not by name

They're part of the dance  
At times moving as one  
Some of them just finishing  
Others only just begun

As in life, also  
There's no ahead or behind  
Instead coming and going  
And seeking, to find

A place and a moment  
Where/when existence makes sense  
No more sitting on the sidelines  
Like so many birds on a fence

But till then they just sit  
Enjoying the view  
Or absorbed on their laptops  
Ordering refills on cue

Like the old town square  
Front porch or sweet shop  
Such places satisfy social needs  
Until our heart beats stop

7/18/05  
Realization

Winding our way  
From this world to the next  
No time outs 'long the way  
One step at a time  
Neither compass nor map  
Arrows pointing in every direction

Seemingly pain-free remedies  
At discount prices  
Short cuts there for the taking  
Offering more/providing less  
Putting us in a mood to buy  
For which we pay dearly

Distractions galore  
Keep us from awakening  
Fulfilling one's heart's desires  
With short-term benefits  
Lacking long-term gains  
By the heaping/hallow handful

Realization is the first  
Line of resistance  
Purposefulness as means and end  
Recognizing patterns ... possibilities  
Accepting the uncertainty of change  
As paving stones on a Circular Path

No beginning or end  
Starting or finishing  
Up or down  
Early or late  
Better or worse  
Just here and now

Summer 2005  
Ode to an  
Unresponsive Personals Ad

Receiving of a kindly "no thank you"  
Would keep one from wondering:  
Was my message received?

Was there some glaring typo?  
Perhaps some thoughtless gaff?  
Or false concern you were being deceived?

A computer malfunction?  
An electricity outage?  
Or perhaps from a job you're relieved?

There'd be no need to wonder, and  
Whatever the response,  
Surely it would be believed.

For there can be no judgment  
Of those yet we know not  
And thus one cannot be grieved.

So in the future consider  
"No thanks", to confirm  
That invited inquiries indeed were retrieved.

Revitalizing our connection  
To the purpose(s) of life  
Well hidden, yet well known

Rejuvenating our spirit(s)  
Strengthening our commitment  
To best/highest use of our gifts

Of time and talent,  
Of learning/growth possibilities  
Of opportunities for service

Renewing our appreciation  
For the wondrous nature  
Of discovery, change and healing

Replenishing our supply  
Of the energy source  
That is free, but never cheap

It needs not refining, but refinement  
Drawn from an unending supply  
That which we can give but not take

The rejoining of friends  
Provides this cause for reflection  
And reminder of those most important truths

About living and/or dying  
Resigning or trying  
Watching ... or flying



8/27/05  
Onward & Upward

9/17/05

As the sun again sets  
So another son rises  
To find his own way in life's Great Adventure

To feel his own rhythm  
To realize his purpose  
Whether it brings him to victory or censure

Learning what is teachable  
While discovering the unknown  
Differentiating thoughtful from thoughtless

Accepting imperfection  
As part of the gods' Perfect Plan  
No one should be blamed for not being faultless

Finding happiness within  
Giving what we wish to receive  
Without trying to control the result

Receiving help offers  
As a gift from above  
From whom else would we need to consult?

Avoiding unexpressed assumptions  
Unrealistic expectations  
And the myth that there's some thing called: "objective"

Separating feeling from fact  
Praying only for knowledge of god's will  
And seek it always, as if you're a detective

As candles brighten the darkness  
And full moon illuminates the night  
So love enriches the starkness  
Of living, knowing an end is in sight.

As by music our spirits are lifted  
And by prayer our trust level rises  
Through others we realize how gifted  
We are, when looking beyond life's disguises

As by reading our world is expanded  
And by exercise our health is increased  
Without another, we're otherwise stranded –  
From the prison of ego we're thereby released

As through meditation our fears are diminished  
And advance planning shrinks problems in size  
A true partnership lets us know that we've finished  
Our search for life's most valuable prize

As travel broadens our perspective  
And service to others gets us more than we give  
A companion provides a mirror that's reflective  
Of choices made about the way that we live

Just as eating nourishes our hopes  
And sleeping refreshes our dreams  
A good friendship cleanses like sweet soap  
Those dark stains that get caught in life's seams

Just as pain helps us appreciate life's pleasures  
And in dying a new adventure starts  
A deep connection lets us discover the treasure  
Revealed when we open our hearts.

10/23/05  
NY State of Mind

Awakening to church bells so pretty  
And other sounds of a city  
So nice  
You say the name twice

Thunder storms pounding  
Many languages abounding  
Sky so blue  
Can't believe that it's true

Every building a work-of-art  
And its smells oh! So very tart  
Multitudes stream  
Each with their own very personal dream

Moving at quick paces  
In this most human of races  
Not many winners  
But plenty of sinners

All finding their way  
At least through today  
Some get lost  
Not realizing the cost

Seeking the feeling of home  
As does this tome  
Instead finding  
Stories ever unwinding

Sharing a moment in time  
In the words of this rhyme  
With love  
The gods' gift from above

10/27/05

So hard when we forget  
Yet even harder to remember  
When in future or past we reside

All the would, should and could  
For which not a thing we can do  
Except perhaps choose to decide

To avoid those two pitfalls  
So filled with allure  
That first step on a steep downward slide

Into guilt, shame or blame  
And their pesky relations  
All waiting to debase or deride

To go not there, or there  
But instead stay right here  
In the now, as if it's a horse we're astride

In the only time that really is  
Or ever will be  
Where past and future collide

Any where else has less pressure  
But less possibilities too  
A difficult choice, if I may so confide

But one well worth choosing  
With solid returns for  
If you live with more humility than pride

10/30/05  
Fear & Faith

Like cat and dog  
Which ever vie for the upper hand  
Fear and faith  
Are pitted in so close a struggle  
But we decide which will be last to stand

Like night and day  
Their differences could not be greater  
Strength and persistence  
Are qualities they both share  
That will bring them into conflict sooner than later

Like happy and sad  
They're two parts of a whole  
Bad and good  
Cannot exist by themselves  
Finding balance is the ultimate goal

Like pain and pleasure  
They focus attention where it belongs  
Here and now  
The only place to find contentment  
That subject of so many songs

Like life and death  
What's in between makes us alive  
Asleep or awake  
Are states of our choosing  
It's that choice by which we survive

Like cat and dog  
Which ever vie for the upper hand  
Fear and faith  
Are pitted in so close a struggle  
But we decide which will be last to stand

11/7/05

Hard times  
Tough lessons  
No matter which choice we make

Long odds  
Small chances  
When the Uphill Road we take

Strange circumstances  
Stranger options  
If we try not to live as a fake

Unknown consequences  
Adverse reactions  
Should we move forward or put on the brake?

Unwitting accomplice  
Unwilling collaborator  
In a task requiring shovel and rake

Confronting weaknesses  
Facing facts  
No having and eating the cake

Standing tall  
Falling short  
Finding that in which we all have a stake

Acknowledging resistance  
Experiencing reticence  
Like a swim in a very cold lake

Adapting attitude  
Accepting change  
No matter how much our world does it shake

Lessons Children Teach Us

11/10/05  
Quality of Life

With a splendor of color  
Dropping leaves mark the season  
Trees aren't dying – they're just changing  
Only God knows the reason.

It's by quality, not quantity  
That a full life gets measured  
It's only real indication of value:  
How much one is treasured.

By that token alone  
Little Mike's life is complete  
His scoreboard-of-life telling  
Of victory, not defeat.

How much is enough?  
It's not our decision  
Appreciating what we've got while we can  
Requires some precision.

He didn't just point the way  
But now leads us there too  
Leaving a path marked by love  
That reminds us what to do.

And so just as those trees  
Will be reborn in the spring  
Michael now lives on in our hearts--  
For him, our best we will bring.

We thank you Lord, for the lessons Michael taught us about **LAUGHTER**,  
the power of a smiling face, a positive attitude  
and the happiness that love brings into our lives;

We thank you Lord, for the lessons Michael taught us about **POSSIBILITIES**,  
growing from past experiences,  
finding magic in the present moment,  
and discovering the hope we need to face the future;

We thank you Lord, for the lessons Michael taught us about **HUMILITY**,  
reminding us to behave when we otherwise might not,  
listen when we might rather talk,  
and learn what we think we need to teach;

We thank you Lord, for the lessons Michael taught us about **FORGIVENESS**,  
about turning the other cheek,  
and not being the one to throw the first stone ...  
or the second or third ones either;

We thank you Lord, for the lessons Michael taught us about **COURAGE**,  
the importance of bouncing back,  
and renewing our capacity to face the unknown  
and the unexpected;

We thank you Lord, for the lessons Michael taught us about **GRATITUDE**,  
appreciating the blessings each new life brings  
as the most precious of God's gifts;

We thank you Lord, for the lessons Michael taught us about **STRENGTH**,  
that we may overcome the adversities  
that often accompany life's most wondrous joys ...

We thank you Lord, for the lessons Michael taught us about **ACCEPTANCE**  
... of the Mysteries of Life beyond our comprehension  
... of the Facts of Life that defy our understanding  
... of the Meanings of Life that are yet to be revealed.

We thank you Lord, for the lessons Michael taught us about **BOUNDARIES**-  
they're not as big as they look,  
they mark not our limits, but our capabilities.  
May we not see them as walls, but as bridges.

We thank you Lord, for the lessons Michael's life teaches us.  
He reminds us that life is measured  
not by how long it lasts, or what we achieve  
but by how much we love and are loved.

Like a comet across the heavens, Michael is a shooting star  
who leaves his bright and shining light to guide us.  
Forever young, Michael will always live in our hearts.  
Amen.

11/05  
Thanks Giving

The causes of gratitude  
Never run dry  
Yet how often its expression  
So easily slips by

Not for lack of willingness  
Or not feeling the need  
Or not recognizing the benefits  
Of a kind word or deed

Or for not realizing  
The difference that's made  
By a simple "please" or "thank you"  
By which debts are fully paid

And not for lack of seeing  
How another's spirits soar high  
When we acknowledge their consideration  
By looking them straight in the eye

Certainly not for not hearing  
The change in their voice  
When treated as they would like  
Rather than some other choice

Expressing appreciation  
Simply acknowledges these facts:  
That great things are not done alone  
And that gratitude keeps our train on the tracks

12/1/05  
Winter's Arrival

Sooner dark  
Cold and wet  
Trees stand starkly naked

Animals forage  
Preparing for the worst  
The annual ritual unfolds

Change cycles  
Consistent in their inconsistency  
Serve as recurring reminder

Hard lessons  
Like harsh realities  
Have their place in the Story of Life

Difficult people  
Like inclement weather  
Nourish our continual growth

Adverse circumstances  
Like a blast of cold air  
Heighten appreciation of sunnier days

Accepting inevitabilities  
Such a simple task  
Yet avoided like chilling rain

Mysterious regeneration  
As winter's decay brings spring flowers  
So from adversity we harvest Life's Lessons

12/4/05  
Memo to a Rising Star

There will be times  
When it might seem better  
If our talents were never uncovered;

Decisions and "problems" avoided  
-- No hopes to be dashed,  
But life's joy then would not be discovered.

It's the conundrum of life:  
That we receive by giving  
And fail only when we're not trying

To use all we've got  
The best that we can;  
To do otherwise would only be lying

To our selves, first of all,  
And all others thereafter,  
As if we could hide that which we're seeking.

Truth is: noone knows what they're doing;  
Blessed few, only that they must do it.  
Nothing else can be seen even by peeking.

The secret's so simple  
No wonder so many miss it:  
Just do your best and be who you are.

Don't look forward or back.  
Find your happiness within.  
That's how, in this life, you become a bright star.

If you "remember what your name is"  
You'll take it wherever you go  
Then "let 80% go over your shoulder"  
And that's on a good day—you know?

If "the afternoon knew what the morning never expected"  
Why didn't it tell us sooner?  
"Eat that and you'll get some more"  
...is that a promise or only a rumor?

Since "...it is all part of it..."  
There's nothing unconnected to the rest  
And there's never a choice to confuse us  
If "all you have to do is your best"

If we'd "only speak when there's good things to say"  
Our world would be a quieter place  
And if you "always know who your friends are"  
Less likely you'll be found in disgrace

If we all "become part of the solution"  
Our world would not be so much in trouble  
And if we just "look for the good in others"  
There's less chance it will turn into rubble

If all would "be of service to others"  
So many would not feel so alone  
And if we agreed to "give them your smile"  
There wouldn't be much for us to atone

This wit and wisdom we're been given  
So we don't have to figure everything out  
Instead, "make it better and pass it along"  
Thereby discovering what life's all about.

8/14/88  
40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

### **THE TOBIN CANNONBALL**

(to the tune of "Walbash Cannonball")

Now we're 'bout to tell a story  
The tale of how we came to be  
We'll skip the harrowing times and laundry lines  
And praying on our knees  
We might make up some details  
To fill in those we can't recall  
We may regret this but can't help it  
We're on the *TOBIN CANNONBALL*

**CHORUS:** Well there came a lot of children  
And there went a lot of years  
And how it all got paid for  
That ain't exactly clear  
The one thing that we've got is  
Each other, and that's all  
Love's the way that we all stay  
On the *TOBIN CANNONBALL*

It all began one evening  
At a dance at Riverview  
Who'd have guess it would come to this  
By the time that they were through  
To a girl from by the Lake Shore  
The Ohio/Navy boy looked tall  
And that's when it started rollin'  
This *TOBIN CANNONBALL*

### **CHORUS**

There's some doubt as to her age then  
Of that we're not quite sure  
But he waited 'til she got to college  
So his motives must've been pure  
If she knew what she was in for  
There might've been a longer stall  
But then some of us might not be ridin'  
On the *TOBIN CANNONBALL*

### **CHORUS**

How he proposed is kind of hazy  
None of us were there that day  
There's talk of a telegram that said:  
"Wild horses won't keep me away"  
When Grama Bangert heard the word  
Kettles rattled the kitchen walls  
She's the only one who could have stopped  
The *TOBIN CANNONBALL*

### **CHORUS**

Well they moved to Indiana  
Then Chicago's far South Side  
By the next time came to move again  
There were three kids for the ride  
Maybe it just turned out this way  
The coincidence is small  
Their neighborhood turned Greek on arrival  
Of the *TOBIN CANNONBALL*

### **CHORUS**

From Artesian Ave. then to Phoenix  
And on to Omaha  
Adding more than twenty grand kids  
Thanks to our spouses and in-laws  
Having been out on our own a while  
And finding it's quite a haul  
Makes us all the more appreciate  
The *TOBIN CANNONBALL*

### **CHORUS**

*Spouses' Verse Added:*  
Now you've picked up new passengers  
All along the way  
Though we weren't born a Tobin  
Still we're proud to say  
We're glad to be part of the family  
We love you one and all  
We're the in-laws and the outlaws  
On the *TOBIN CANNONBALL*