

# WATER SEEKING LIGHT

Poems and Photos

Christopher Anderl

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## Introduction

This book represents a selection of my work in the Northwest mountains and streams from 1993 to 2008. I take as my masters and mentors the ancient Chinese nature poets and Daoists, who were writing remarkably subtle, infinitely wise observations of nature and cosmos in their succinct and beautiful poems of nearly two millennia ago.

The Chinese sage-poets of long ago are eminently relevant and valuable to us as guides along the Way of living in harmony with Nature. For Daoists then as now *Water* both as an element and spiritual principle serves as the primary guide to flowing with the myriad phenomena and constant flux of the universe, taking the path(s) of least resistance, in addition to inspiring much sentiment and verse. (We humans are 70-75% water, after all).

A good deal of humility (from *humus*, or forest soil layers of leaf, mold, moss, indeed, the very stuff of which come) is in order in our relation to nature. This begins, I believe, with quieting the ego enough to realize the complex, interconnected, and beautiful harmonies that hold the world together, that brought us into being as humans, and that are the source of endless wisdom, health, and happiness when we listen (with all our senses and being).

These poems, then, are offered in honor of the Chinese masters that perhaps we may yet hear their faint echoes inviting us to slow down, breath deep, *pay* attention (it is free, precious, and yet in such shortage) and listen.....listen.....listen.....

## A Note on reading (my) Poetry

For those who may be new to reading poetry (or not), may I suggest: a slower pace than is used for prose, thus a savouring of each word and its nuances (in meaning, musicality, and context within the line and poem), and a pause at the end of each line, with the understanding that each line (like each

word) stands somewhat on its own, is its own poem; the length of the pause being a personal, but necessary choice.

Empty space is as equally important as lines are in poems, just as in Chinese landscape painting: think of swirling mists, partially hidden crags and pine trees, mountains emerging from the emptiness. Finally, reading a poem aloud will often provide a quite different (and necessary) understanding and appreciation. I hope this helps your enjoyment.

## Preface to the Second Edition

**Part I** of the present book was originally published in 2003 as **Water Seeking: Poems of Wonder**, in a handbound, limited printing of 100 copies, all of which are now dispersed to the 6 directions. It was my first published book of poetry. By 2008 I had enough new material to grow this chapbook into the full-length version presented here. Somehow it came to be 2010. I think life intervened between, as well as other poetic projects. A brief semantic note: the title of Part II, “Eh-da-ho” is my rendering of an approximation of the Nez Perce pronunciation of their homeland in N. Central Idaho, which came to be known to white settlers as “Idaho.” It is said to mean: “[Behold the beautiful]Light on the Mountains,” and I take it as an apt description of this very mountainous land. Meanwhile, Idaho, like the rest of the Western U.S., continues to suffer the assaults of too many people and their machines, particularly their water craft, as I express from the kayaker’s perspective in “Into a Rippled Sky.” And more development continues to add houses, cars, et al ad naseum to the already ill-planned suburban sprawl. May those who *can* listen, still find places to hear nature’s teachings.

C.A.

Inverness, CA

January 23, 2011

**The Poet stands between the  
Singer, the Shaman, the  
Sage – is some of each.**



**I.**

**Water  
Seeking**



**Sage, grass hills and Mission Mountains beyond: Bison Natl. Monument, MT.**

## Where I Live

I live  
and have grown

where mountains rise

up from the plains, the steppe  
of the Plateau

of the River  
"Columbia"

Where I live

green mountains first rise  
in ridges against the Eastern sky

and stretch away

away until the next plains  
until the next ranges

rise and claim remaining  
rain from Ocean-bearing

clouds of storms.

I live  
where the arid flats are called  
a prairie and reach East

between these Selkirk mountains  
a dry Western finger

Where lakes abound beneath the green  
ridges and proclaim rain's

consummate journey

to these inland folds

of cedar-hemlock, fir and alder, birch,  
maple, and ash

northslopes

ponderosa dry southslopes

inland rainforest remnants  
small groves, scattered fragments

of what once was

## Two Fireweed Crossing

against the eastern sky  
deep lavender flowers,

seed pod spokes,  
ascending toward

lone mountain ridge:  
old firelookout,

long abandoned  
hermitage,

Eye  
of the mountain

in the purple dusk

## Young Moose

Young Moose  
takes a dip

in the cool cove,  
oversize hippo ears twitching

to the water, ahhh, it feels so good  
on this hot humid day

Swimming toward us  
on the crushed granite

beach, snuffling that Asiatic-American  
camel snout above the water, over the land

bridge and onto the other side,  
just a few feet away

Talk gently  
to an approaching moose

of any age,  
I always say.

Ahhhh, refreshed, a shake of the coat, a look  
around, and a look back at the other side

indifference  
to us, but oh the pleasure

of wet moose  
on a hot day

should never  
be  
underestimated.

## I Awake

I awake  
to the quick movements  
of the busy acrobat  
Douglas Fir squirrel  
atop his towering  
tree silhouetted against  
the cool grey  
late August Pacific  
Inland morning,  
suggestions of coastal  
rain – he is nimbly  
clipping and flinging  
sap heavy cones,  
one-by-one,  
from the spindly heights,  
occasionally pausing to admire  
his work of raining cones  
that fall so fast  
straight down  
through the boughs.

## **Spring**

Spring Rain

Falling

Spring Rain

Falling straight

Spring Rain

Falling straight down

through the pine needles

## Tipi Creek, Cottonwood Grove

Cool Breeze  
Down the River  
Ruffles through  
the Cottonwoods  
lightly  
like tiny fans  
while robin bathes  
in the pool, tail splashing  
water over head  
dipping under for a drink,  
and plover plies and bobs  
its way  
along the river shallows,  
that river rock grey  
body in search  
of stoneflies, plentiful  
riverine mollusks for the shell  
accustomed bird;

coastal haze in horizontal  
and sandswept waves brushes in  
over these riparian valley wetlands  
of spruce, whitepine, willow,  
grandfather and grandmother  
old cottonwoods, along these meandering  
mountain streams, along this creek,  
on the soft riverine breeze  
somewhere,  
flowing to the Sea.



**Petroglyph Parking**

## Of Kootenay Lake

across by kayak

in search in pictographs I find instead  
skin-smooth stone palms,

cupped granite hands to the pure waters,  
and find myself

given over to them

lying back placing myself

at their holy mercy  
the waters of life

lapping softly up

polished, open, pious  
palms to my toes.

Not often do skin and stone meet

so close; glacial carved receptacle  
of mortal flesh can mesh so well

Looking for ancient paintings

on the rocks I found myself

in everlasting stone

upon the water.



**Aboriginal Kutn'axa (or Kutenai)  
Pictograph on Kootenay Lake, B.C., Canada.**

## In Search of Drumheller Springs

In Urban Spokane

In Search of "Spokane Garry"

And the Pale Purple White Irises

Ghosts

Of the Children of the Sun

Where Willow Springs drip

from a rusty misshapen pipe

and Willows Spring Old and Young

from the Basalt Square

Block bounded by Streets

in Urban Spokane

Garry, what would you say,

translate for your People,

if you would,

in the Native tongue:

is *this* what the Jesuits

promised you promised the People

who lived in wise cycles  
all those ages

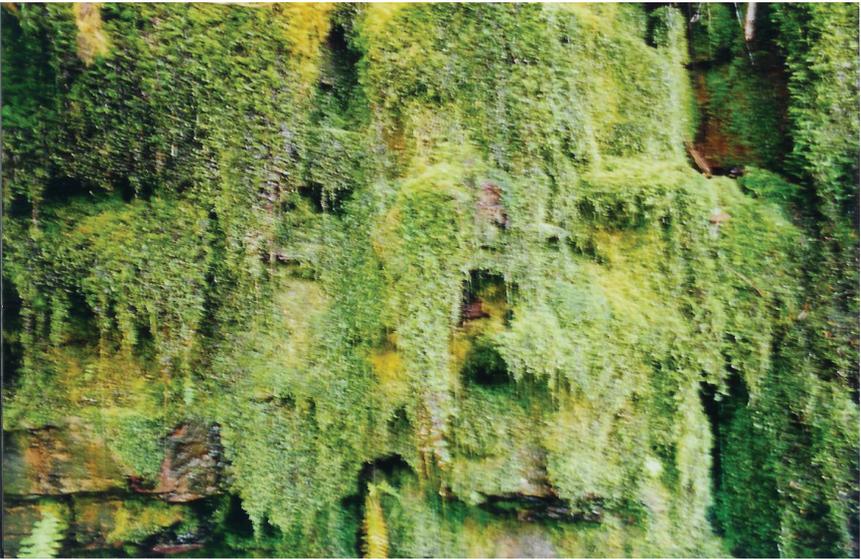
This, Progress? Toward Cemented  
Springs that drip

from rusting pipes  
like tear drop petals

of the pale iris.

## Water Only Sounds Like Clockwork

when it falls in straight lines  
down galvanized steel  
gutters from a flat roof – ping, ping  
ping, ping. Drip drip drip  
drip, but it ain't got no beat,  
man; it's just straight.



**Weeping green rock wall of moss and fern.**

## Sky Lake

Eating fire-baked  
west-slope cutthroat

trout from a wedge of lodgepole  
pine plate.

As fish fat seeps  
through the cracks

and drips on my lap  
I grin with delight,

for had we remembered  
butter or pan,

I'd have never had  
the pleasure of such fish

leapt from granite mountain  
reflection onto baking stones

by the popping fire  
into  
mouth in awe,  
pearled eyes,

tail curled

in still  
motion

## Untitled

### I.

Years  
to unlearn

what the wild deer  
has not

### II.

River snaking blue-  
  
green  
through the pines

### III.

This same sun  
I have seen

set so many times  
never seems

quite the same

#### IV.

Mountain breezes

scatter seeds

rustle leaves

sift thoughts

and spread

wildfire

#### V.

Cold expanse--

glacier

blue

moves mountains



**Salmon Glacier, S.E. Alaska**



**Bear grass blooms blowing in fog**

## I Went Out A'Seeking Today

seeking the Breath  
of the People

to the South and West of here;  
for the air they've breathed

is the air I breathe,  
and we all share in this connected world  
of bodies, breath, soil and soul.

So I drove my trusty horse-powered  
car-riage out to the Palouse, farm country,

away to where the fields run and tumble  
over hills for miles and the hard

winter wheat and the red winter wheat  
put the meat on the table

for the simple honest folks  
out there.

Who would want to be a farmer  
today – such an unglamorous career

by our modern info-tech-entertain-dustry  
standards that protrude into nearly every  
American

home including those  
of the combine-driving wheat farming families  
of the Palouse.

## Aspen: Kachina Peaks, AZ

A black raven  
fans against blue

sky, white-veined aspen reach  
for the pale moon

of a fading sun  
into the seamless blue

nourishing roots

that plunge

into earth.

Aspen are moon streamers  
that touch the Earth:

there, a white sanctity,  
rising

behind peaks

of snow  
and quivering aspen.

## Field Notes on Parking Lot Ecology

### I.

People come        and they go. Clutching

Paper prescription sacks

and a gallon of milk

or two

to wash down the pain

medicine

onto the next errand

maybe dinner

t.v.        bed.

## II.

Great Blue Heron

Flying Over parking lots

and industry

unending

into the fading sunset light.

Flying where?

Searching

Searching

for Water.



**Great Blue Heron and Cement Pier, by Patrick O'brien**

## I Rejoice

with outreached arms  
of gently swaying  
trees,  
at the end of drought:  
the coming of late  
August rain.

I rejoice with the cool  
perfume of cedar and hemlock  
down by the brooks  
where alder, fern,  
maple, birch  
and willow dwell.

## The Crickets Strum

their slow tune to the late  
September days the late September

evening that hangs  
on the fading light

the fading hues of fall  
the western horizon

just barely visible, but audible  
as the crickets who strum

their lovely lonely tunes  
of night into the late September

sky hanging on to the summer  
that barely was

strum now crickets  
strum on – to the westward  
march of Fall,

whose brilliant colors will shine and fade  
in a great last hurrah like this  
sunset,

at the end

of September.

## Like Every Piece of Earth

I cannot help but be touched  
and renewed by the rain, each drop

cleansing and penetrating the old  
Earth's skin, feeding life

and creativity –  
first Fall rains.

They begin the mouldering  
of leaves back into soil to nurture

those from which they fell.

the hydrologic cycle the pattering  
of drops

on the leaf-strewn ground is the sound  
of thirst quenched, of parched

old bones gladly receiving life again,  
after a long season of drought, and all the world

rejoices in the bestowing  
of liquid life in this  
baptism  
of the year.

When the rain comes

it cleanses all

such is the power of fresh water –  
pulling the salts

and poisons out of the land  
and ourselves

to the Great Mother Oceans  
with seemingly  
boundless tolerance

for our profane ways

of Being; replentishing and refreshing—

*This* is the New Year: when fresh shoots  
spring up or are stirred

to awaken Yes this

is the renewing.

## **II.**

### **Eh-daho: Light on the Mountain**