

WORDS TO THE SOIL

by D. A. Wilson

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WORDS TO THE SOIL AUGUST 18 DRAFT

2020, 2020
Hindsight is 2020.
Such a long-anticipated year.
Here is a poem from inside 2020.
That long ago
strange year not soon
to be forgotten.

January held so much
excitement and promise.

On Groundhog Day
Punxsutawney Phil
did not see his shadow
predicted an early spring.
I lit a candle February 2
for Persephone
to light a way back
from the deep underworld
toward the promised return
of Spring.
And I also wished James Joyce

a happy birthday.

February 3 near the end of my shift
I was summoned down a long hall.
To the Star Chamber
where Kreatures of Kulture
Awaited and Informed Me
that after nearly 20 years of service
my job had been eliminated
and I was erased
from the “family” of the Company.

Escorted to the Elevator
by the Kretin.

Out forever from cursed
101 California Street
without getting killed.

I was feeling lucky and liberated
passing the Tomb of Saint Stupid.
I took the California Street Cable Car
back up over the California Street Hill.

The next day I filed
for unemployment insurance,
and the day after that
my mom had knee
replacement surgery.
So, I waited at the hospital
and stayed at her East Bay house.
She required time to recover,
first in the Antioch hospital,
then at a Concord nursing home.

At the end of the month
I took a long-planned trip
to Southern California
and the strangeness of Los Angeles,

but found some special volumes
at The Last Bookstore
(and I fervently hope
that bookstore will survive).

On the way back up state
talk was getting louder
about the coronavirus
causing much sickness and death
in China and Italy.

My mom was back home
in need of assistance.
I came out
to stay for a while.
Within a week
the novel COVID-19 virus
was declared a global pandemic.
In many places,
including California,
citizens were ordered
to shelter in place
stay in their homes.

My parents,
Helga and John,
bought this lot and new house
in 1972 for about \$40 grand.
Last house on a steep street
backing onto parkland
views down the hill
into the big valley
and across
to the looming form
of Mt. Diablo.
The subdivision lots
carved from the hill.
There were native grasses
and a few wild oaks
and hard local dirt.

Not much else.

John O Wilson
began to build the soil
and create a remarkable garden.
Many years and truck loads
of horse manure
shoveled into
the gardens.
Many times
I was drafted
to shovel shit!

Writing this in 2020
nearing our half century mark,
beautiful rich soil
sustained by precious
expensive water
pumped up the hill.
Water, ever the concern
especially in dry years,
but the soil remains
and when there is water
the garden blooms.

A whole fortune cookie
was left out in the backyard
and a blue jay ate it,
just the paper fortune ribbon
remained.

“A feeling is an idea
with roots.”

That was the blue jay’s fortune.

48 years ago
there were lizards and frogs
at the Top of the Hill.
Hawks, owls, and smaller birds.

Spiders, ants, and many insects
the occasional tarantula
and garden snake.
When the garden began
the gophers soon followed
the scourge
of many flowers and crops.
John O fought a determined war
against them.
Building the raised
vegetable beds
with wire mesh bottoms
and mesh nets below his roses.
There were always deer about
and sometimes coyote.

The grey ground squirrels
migrated across the valley.
Red tree squirrels
came up the hill.
The working cats
and the big dog
kept the vermin at bay.

2020 garden.
John O has been dead six years.
The dog and cat are gone.
The squirrels have had a field day.

Majid the Gardener
fortified the vegetable beds.
But the tree squirrels
were still in the fruit trees.

Come to late winter 2020
I am sheltered here
looking out the back door
at the grey squirrels
running across the deck.

Majid sets traps
catches and removes
a few squirrels.
There are a couple of traps
out in the yard
one set to capture
the other set to crush.
The squirrels never seem
to go near the crushing one.

A grey squirrel draws the bait
from the catchy trap
and springs it, but escapes.
I go re-set the trap,
bait it with lettuce.
A few minutes later
I hear it snap.
The squirrel had come back.
Now it was caught.
It sat in there for days
furiously rattling the trap door
attempting to get out
and I began to feel weird.
These creatures born
to scatter seeds and feed hawks.
I have seen a hawk
drop straight down
out of our acorn tree
and swoop off
into the evening
with a doomed squirrel
in its talons.
But I
did not want to be cause
of any stupid little creature's pain.
I went over to the trap.
The squirrel looked up
with its mindless eyes

hissing at me
in primal fear
I lifted the trap
the back door opened
and the squirrel slid out
and scurried off
disappearing in the bushes.
So, I let that one go.

Half an hour later
I went back out in the yard
and there was a huge red squirrel
dead in the crusher trap.

I cannot play god
even with squirrels.

The next day
there must have been
two score baby grey squirrels
running all over the yard,
futile to trap them.

Luckily, Zandar the Magnificent
orange cat has arrived.
Squirrels are on notice
and looking to keep it
on the q.t.

The yard
that my father built.
The wooden fences
and the brickwork,
the bricks he salvaged
from the Howard Street Terminal.
If the Oakland A's play baseball, there
(in some future when people again
congregate in ballparks)
that field will be known to me
as John O. Wilson Park.

Scanning my father's
slides and film negatives
I cannot really see clearly
what they are
until I open them up
on the computer screen.

In addition
to all the holiday pictures
and his thousands
of wild western
landscape photographs,
John O also documented
The Top of the Hill's
changing eras
and evolving gardens.
I open a new scan
and see John O
building the wall
of this courtyard
where for months
I have shared my poetry
via Spoken World Online.

Top of the Hill MTZ
on some dark nights
also known as
Troll Hall atop Troll Hill.

Always, under sun, stars and moon

Casa Cantorosa.
The House of the Book of Roses.

Helga and John's little hobby
now there are well over 300
different roses in the yard.
In spring a riot

of scents and colors.
Helga has cut flowers
brought inside to arrange
in her vases.
The outside garden
comes inside.
Sometimes the roses fade
And lose their sweet scent,
and as the summer heats
then she does arrangements
with sunflowers
that look like Van Gogh
paintings come to life.

Before settling in, so to speak,
to confinement here
I brought from San Francisco
many files containing decades
of tax, business education & employment records.
Other files contained poetry
and scattered writings.
Between household chores
I dug deep into those files.
Working the first extensive index of my poems.
Consigning ancient tax documents
to the shredder.
Helga said, go ahead
add that shredded paper
to the compost heap
it is good for the soil.
Yes! These ancient documents
no one ever wants to see again
churn them into the compost
create new soil to feed
this ground at the top of the hill
to grow even more delicious
fresh herbs, fruits and vegetables.
Some of the writing files
had multiple copies
of drafts of poems.

Ah ha! I ran some of those
extra old poems
through the shredder
and some copies of
ROARSHOCK PAGE
and all these poetic words
fed back to the soil
next year to be eaten
via the beets and carrots
potatoes, garlic and lettuce.
You are what you write.
You are what you read.
You are what you eat.

Poetry we transcend time.
The poet, the writer
transcends being stuck in body
in the turning of the seasons
in the finite field of existence.
2020 now there was a year
and poets were active
to show they were here
the bars closed down
everybody went inside
Spoken Word Paris
went online
I tuned in.
Roarshock, David Barnes said,
There is a name out of the past.
Presently here
I come from the future
Many have said it
I sincerely mean it.

The shutdown continues
for many weeks
Spoken World Online

gathers every Monday night
from Paris
midday along the U.S. west coast.
I look forward each week
to familiar names and faces
distinct voices and solid poetry.

The microphone virtually
passed to me
I feel flutters
of stage fright.
This is an audience of poets
and none of them fucking around
about poetry.
And I always ended my set
energized
any fears melted away
because the poets were kind
whatever strange or silly thing
I might have read.
And from Paris
and our different cities
and the soil of our continents
we recited the words
from our imaginations.

All the natural horrors
of permafrost melting
in Siberia
sending up methane clouds
and Acqua alta (high water)
submerging ancient Venice.
Then the planes stopped
and the impossible gridlock
on the highways ended.
The canals in Venice
ran clear and full of fish.
Skies above Los Angeles and the Diablo Valley
clearer than anyone could remember
it was quiet enough

to hear the wind chimes on the breeze.

Sun came out and the
darling buds of May.
Youth went wild
as youth will do.
They flocked to frolic
on beaches, in parks
and swimming pools
and three weeks later
into hospitals and on to graveyards.
Whatever their beliefs
they are counted in statistics
the virus does not care
that they were people.
Not all of them dead, yet.

And the radicalized youth
pour out onto the streets
as they have before
but unlike before.
And the asshole supremacists
have this time, perhaps
looked too far down
their noses.

When Paris opened back up
David Barnes took Spoken Word
offline and outside
but David Leo Sirois
took over the online helm
from Canada
and we sailed on
through our global space
Amsterdam, Berlin
Barcelona to Morocco
New York, New Orleans
Chicago, Los Angeles
Jakarta.

“Sumer is icumen in
Lhude sing cuccu”

Turning of seasons
and the first half
of plague year 2020
already subject
of revisionist history.

The poem arrives
in bits and fits
Difficult nights for sleep
in seclusion.
I wake in the dark
am not sure of the direction
where I am pointed
on the earth
If I am facing the wall
or facing out into the room
my shirt draped over the chair
perhaps a figure?
No. There are no figures
but my own
during this seclusion.
This little corner room,
more, or less everything
in my universe
already happened to me
in here.
No need for any fear.
But for the heat of the wave
crashing through the roof.
More days like that every year.
Avoid the sun stroke.

July approaches
economic society begins
to open up
the empty highways
have more traffic

and there is more
traffic in the air.
From the Top of the Hill
I look out over Diablo Valley
the green hills of spring
have changed into
the Golden Hills of Northern California.
And the impossible blue sky of April
has now regained
the unnatural unhealthy
brown smog
we all know too well.

Baseball returns to television
with canned crowd noise
and paper cut-out fans in the stands.
Feels like watching
a paper puppet play
or being inside
Doctor Parnassus' *Imaginarium*.
Play Ball!

Reinvigorated in poetry
2300 scans into my project
archiving family history
for safe keeping
and future space travel.

I have no idea
what or if
my next paid job will be.
As of now and right understandably
the E.U. will not let Americans in
if they are ugly
or even if they are cool.
If this poem
will be read in Paris
it might be a while
because I will want
coffee at my familiar cafe

and drinks in specific special bars.
I will want to stand and read
of words to the soil
while the walls sweat
in the cellar of Au Chat Noir.

All day long
the hummingbird
is flying in the wind.
As night darkness descends,
Zandar and I
are on the back deck
listening to racoons
chattering down the hillside.
A startling screech
as the huge owl
flaps low through the yard
to perch in the plum tree.

August rolled along
suddenly the squirrels
were all gone.
Did they all infest another yard
without an imported cat?
Did the Idiot Clancy next door
poison them all?
That, I hope is not the explanation.

From dozens
of grey squirrels
invading
to zero
not knowing when, or if
they might return.

So long as Zandar remains,
they will not feel welcome.
Apparently, war with the squirrels
has concluded for the season,
but you never know.

The shredded papers
of my shredded words
escape the compost heap
and merge with the vegetables
and roses.
I see them converge
with the soil
near the old
horseshoe pits.
Dissolving into a clear mulch
strengthening the soil.
Next year's potatoes
next year's salad
will be nourished
by my own words
bringing together
that world of words and letters
that binds together
transforms and transcends
time and place
connected to the physical earth
this place and this soil
and the seasons circle around.

2020, 2020
Foresight is 2020.
Such a long, strange year.
If you told someone in the past
or from the future
about 2020
they might well laugh
and say it could not
possibly happen.
Well, here is a poem
from inside 2020
and it most certainly
did happen.
And I fed words to the soil.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

CASA CANTOROSA

My Mom and Dad
bought the house
and the lot
in 1972 for about \$40,000.
They insisted on this lot
and no other.
Last house on a steep street
top of the hill
backing onto parkland
and views back down the hill
into the big valley
and across it to the south
the looming-form
of Mt. Diablo.
The subdivision lots
had been carved from the hill
there were native grasses
and a few wild oaks
and hard local dirt.
Not much else.
John O Wilson
began to build the soil
and in close consultation
with his wife Helga E
create a remarkable garden
of rare beauty
and rare practical use.
Many years of truck loads
of horse manure
were shoveled into
the flower and vegetable gardens.
Many, many times

I was enlisted
to shovel shit!
Writing this in 2020
nearing our half century mark
@ the Top of the Hill.
Beautiful rich soil
full of all that manure
and years of our own compost
vegetable scraps and yard clippings
sustained by precious
and expensive water
pumped to us up the hill
via the mid-hill pump house
(where we sometimes hung out in youth)
by the City of Martinez.
Water, ever the concern
and especially in dry years.
Dry, hot years of the 21st century.
Some years the garden has gone dry
but the soil remains
and when there is water
the garden blooms.

I love the yard.
So much
that my father built
all around me.
The fences
and the brickwork
with the bricks he salvaged
from the Howard Street Terminal.
When the Oakland A's play baseball, there
(in some future when people again
congregate in ballparks)
that field will be known to me
as John O. Wilson Park.
And I will take
his great grandson
to a game.
Hey, since I am dreaming

of a social world beyond 2020,
Let us make it
a World Series game.

“A feeling is an idea
with roots.” -- what was inside
the blue jay’s fortune cookie
(I had left a whole
fortune cookie
out in the backyard
and a blue jay ate it,
just the paper
fortune ribbon
remained).

All day long
the hummingbird
is flying in the wind.
At night darkness descends.
Zandar the cat and I
on the back deck
listening to racoons
chattering down the hillside.
A startling screech
as the huge owl
flaps low through the yard
to perch in the plum tree.
I understand Gary Synder’s wisdom
about picking a place
in the physical world
and making a difference there.
I grew up here
but moved into the City
to make my difference
and my career
and raising children
was a success
with two beautiful, funny
and dazzlingly intelligent daughters
who are all the work

I really needed to do
according to evolution.
And now I have grandchildren
so great concern
that a world remains for them.
So that they may have
their chance to push
evolution a little further.

Helga and John's little hobby
now there are well over 300
different roses in the yard.
In spring a riot
of scents and colors.
Helga has cut flowers
brought inside to arrange
in her vases.
The outside garden
comes inside.
Sometimes the roses fade
And lose their sweet scent,
and as the summer heats
then she does arrangements
with sunflowers
that look like Van Gogh
paintings come to life.

Top of the Hill MTZ
on some dark nights
Troll Hall atop Troll Hill.
Always, under sun, stars and moon
Casa Cantorosa.
The House of the Book of Roses.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

WAR WITH THE SQUIRRELS

The grey ground squirrels
migrated across the valley.
Red tree squirrels
came up the hill.
The working cats
and the big dog
kept the vermin at bay.

2020 garden.
John O has been dead six years.
The dog and cat are gone.
The squirrels have had a field day.

Majid the Gardener
fortified the vegetable beds.
But the tree squirrels
were still in the fruit trees.

Come to late winter 2020
I am sheltered here
looking out the back door
at the grey squirrels
running across the deck.

Majid sets traps
catches and removes
a few squirrels.
There are a couple of traps
out in the yard
one set to capture
the other set to crush.
The squirrels never seem
to go near the crushing one.

A grey squirrel draws the bait

from the catchy trap
and springs it, but escapes.
I go re-set the trap,
bait it with lettuce.
A few minutes later
I hear it snap.
The squirrel had come back.
Now it was caught.
It sat in there for days
furiously rattling the trap door
attempting to get out
and I began to feel weird.
These creatures born
to scatter seeds and feed hawks.
I have seen a hawk
drop straight down
out of our acorn tree
and swoop off
into the evening
with a doomed squirrel
in its talons.
But I
did not want to be cause
of any stupid little creature's pain.
I went over to the trap.
The squirrel looked up
with its mindless eyes
hissing at me
in primal fear
I lifted the trap
the back door opened
and the squirrel slid out
and scurried off
disappearing in the bushes.
So, I let that one go.

Half an hour later
I went back out in the yard
and there was a huge red squirrel
dead in the crusher trap.

I cannot play god
even with squirrels.

The next day
there must have been
two score baby grey squirrels
running all over the yard,
futile to trap them.

Luckily, Zandar the Magnificent
orange cat has arrived.
Squirrels are on notice
and looking to keep it
on the q.t.

August rolled along
and suddenly the squirrels
were all gone.
Did they all migrate
en masse?
Or just infest another
garden yard
without an imported cat.
Or did the Idiot Clancy
poison them all?
That, I hope
is not the explanation.

It is weird
going from dozens
of grey squirrels
invading
to zero
and not know when, or if
they might return,
but so long as Zandar remains
they will not feel welcome.
Apparently,
war with the squirrels

has concluded for this season,
but you never know.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

WE ARE THE POMEGRANATE

Now has come October
the harvest mostly in
the last radishes dug
from the ground
the last green tomatoes
wrapped in paper
and stored in the pantry.
On the southside
of the house
the pomegranate-tree
droops beneath
the weight of fruit.
I watched them grow
all through
the solitary summer
small green bulbs
to large red balls.
Out of the unexpected blue
cosmic transmissions on the social web
where 2020 introduced me to many dozens
of brilliant supportive poets
spatially dispersed around the planet
but all caught in this same damn year
I am contacted by Paul Jolly
one of the first poets I personally knew
when we were students at Maybeck High School

in Bruce Henderson's poetry class
it had been 45 years since we last spoke together
Paul was returned at last to old Berkeley
after decades working the halls and lobbies
in Washington, DC
and all that time away from poetry,
but now returned with all his great sincerity.
We exchange video links
of our readings
and books via U.S. Mail
we meet virtually in cyber chat
bridge that great distance
at least in 2020
between Berkeley and Martinez.
In pleasing synchronicity
I had just been thinking of Paul
maybe a day before his contact.
Remembering that time he approached me
at Maybeck in Trinity Hall
and held forth two halves of
a pomegranate
the myriad bright red seeds
gleaming, glistening
under the high ceiling lights,
"We are the pomegranate."
Paul said laughing
and I laughed
for us "we are the pomegranate"
became a catch phrase
and metaphor.
I also told Paul Jolly
back in 1975
that it was the title of a poem.

Majid harvests the pomegranates
before they bend the tree to breaking
two huge baskets
these will be good
until February
(as was 2019's harvest this year)

when we are in a new year 2021
and 2020 has been endured
and the lucky have survived.

2020

Still a few weeks to go...
Fingers crossed, all nervous
spells and incantations
breath right
relieve stress
and whatever boosts immunity.

A nervously dry November
waiting for California rains
to douse the parched land
knock down the wildfires
for a while
while the United States
had the highest turnout
election for President ever
and over 70 million voted
to re-elect President Donald Trump
but more than 80 million voted for Joe Biden
and in the necessary states,
but Trump claimed fraud
and as has been the case for years now
disputed the factual basis of reality
and his fans backed his claims
on no other authority
and absent any objective evidence
perhaps the weirdest behavior
in utterly weird 2020.
Meanwhile the pandemic
sickened and killed
thousands and thousands
in the United States
and around the world
and dummkopfs
gathered and marched
from Berlin to Washington

to Sturgis, South Dakota.
Hell, no we will not wear masks!
More reason why
I am staying in
until this year is safely passed.

But - we are the pomegranate.
All of us, regardless of our vision
be it cloudy or clear
if we are striking out
because we are so injured
so emotionally hurt
so fearful that we hit and hurt
or we are forgiving
and loving
ourselves
we can reach out
in love
to all the brilliant seeds
all the love radiating from souls
we can help and heal
all together now
love is all we need
and the pomegranates
growing again next year
and every year
let the seasons roll around
we are the pomegranate.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

WORDS TO THE SOIL COMPLETE

2020, 2020
Hindsight is 2020.
Such a long, anticipated year.
Here is a poem from inside 2020.
2020 that long ago
strange year not soon
to be forgotten.
January held so much
excitement and promise
ROARSHOCK PAGE began
its ultimate Volume.
On Groundhog Day
Punxsutawney Phil
did not see his shadow
predicted an early spring.
I lit a candle February 2
for Persephone
to light a way back
from the deep underworld
toward the promised return
of Spring.
And I also wished James Joyce
a happy birthday.

February 3 near the end of my shift
at the newsroom helm
I was summoned down a long hall.
To the Star Chamber
where busines Kreature of Kulture
Awaited and Informed Me
that after 20 years of service
it had been decided
to eliminate my job
and I was erased
from “the family” of the Kompany.
The executive vice president Kretin
she had been on the job
less than 20 months

she said, we have not
formally been introduced before.
I said, it is a bit late
for that now.
She was quick to point out
that they could have fired me
the week before
and I would already be that down
and out person nobody loves
without health insurance.
In the U.S.A. in 2020
access to doctors and health care
was largely obtained
through employment
and many people kept working
in jobs they had outgrown
for bosses who were objectionable
for fear
of being left
out on the ice to die.
However, I remained covered
through February 29.
Now the Company
had an offer for me.
I just had to sign
a document
and not speak ill of them in public.
In this poem
I do not say who they are.
I show who they are.
They know who they are,
and what they do.
Ketamine, formerly of the newsroom,
you know what work you do now.
Escorted to the Elevator
by the Kretin.
At the front desk
Shirley gasped as I said,
Goodbye Shirley, I am laid off.
Out forever from cursed

101 California Street
without getting killed.
I was feeling lucky and liberated
passing the Tomb of Saint Stupid.
I took the California Street Cable Car
back home
up over the California Street Hill.

The next day I filed my claim
for unemployment insurance
and the day after that
my mom had full knee
replacement surgery.
I waited in the hospital for that
and began staying at her East Bay house
at the Top of the Hill, MTZ
while she recovered
first in the hospital in Antioch
and then at a nursing home in Concord.
She was still recovering
at the end of the month
when I had a trip long planned
to Southern California
and the strangeness of Los Angeles.
I found some special volumes
at The Last Bookstore
(and I fervently hope
that bookstore will survive).
On the way back up the state
talk was getting louder
about the coronavirus
causing much sickness and death
in China and Italy.

My mom was back home
but in need of some assistance
while she healed.
I came out
to stay with her for a while.
Within a week

the novel COVID-19 virus
was declared a global pandemic.
Businesses were shut down
all over the world.
In many places,
including California,
citizens were ordered
to shelter in place
stay in their homes.

“mi casa es mi casa”

2020 Shelter in Place
@ The Top of the Hill
Martinez
Helga’s House
and Helga’s House
is Helga’s House.

This house is a sentimental heirloom
but needs constant maintenance and upkeep
to accompany entropy.

This serving dish
is also a sentimental heirloom
and must be treated with respect.
My mom has admitted on occasion
that she can be a bit “fussy”
but she likes her house to be
the way she likes her house to be.

I really, really,
REALLY try
not to mess it up
but invariably fail
fuck it up as if I were
still a teenager
not a 59-year-old man.
She points out this mess
and that mess
that I missed
that I blindly made.
She trembles in fury

that I can be so blind.

My Mom and Dad
bought the house
and the lot
in 1972 for about \$40,000.
They insisted on this lot
and no other.
Last house on a steep street
top of the hill
backing onto parkland
and views back down the hill
into the big valley
and across it to the south
the looming formation
of Mt. Diablo.
The subdivision lots
had been carved from the hill
there were native grasses
and a few wild oaks
and hard local dirt.
Not much else.

John O Wilson
began to build the soil
and in close consultation
with his wife Helga E
create a remarkable garden
of rare beauty
and rare practical use.
Many years of truck loads
of horse manure
were shoveled into
the flower and vegetable gardens.
Many, many times
I was enlisted
to shovel shit!
[horse pucky, as John O called it]
Writing this in 2020
nearing our half century mark

@ the Top of the Hill.
Beautiful rich soil
full of all that manure
and years of our own compost
vegetable scraps and yard clippings
sustained by precious
and expensive water
pumped to us up the hill
via the mid-hill pump house
(where we sometimes hung out in youth)
by the City of Martinez.
Water, ever the concern
and especially in dry years.
Dry, hot years of the 21st century.
Some years the garden has gone dry
but the soil remains
and when there is water
the garden blooms.

“A feeling is an idea
with roots.” -- what was inside
the blue jay’s fortune cookie
(I had left a whole
fortune cookie
out in the backyard
and a blue jay ate it,
just the paper
fortune ribbon
remained).

War with the Squirrels

48 years ago
we had lizards and frogs
at the Top of the Hill.
Hawks, owls, and smaller birds.
Spiders, ants, and many insects
everything from roly-poly bugs on down
the occasional tarantula
and garden snake.

When the garden began
the gophers soon followed
they were the scourge
of many flowers
and many crops.
John O fought a determined war
against them.
Building the raised
vegetable beds
with wire mesh bottoms
and mesh nets planted
below his roses.
There were always deer about
and sometimes coyote.

The grey ground squirrels
migrated across the valley
from Briones Regional Park
in the 21st century.
Red tree squirrels
came up the hill
from Diablo Valley.
So did rats.
The working cats
and the big dog
kept the vermin at bay.

2020 garden.
John O has been dead six years
and his last German Shepherd, Casey
died soon after
and Moe the cat
wandered off.
The squirrels
had a field day.
Several years of field days.
Majid the Gardener
built sturdy
wire structures
above and around

those same
raised vegetable beds.
But the tree squirrels
were still in the fruit trees.

Come to late winter 2020
I am sheltered here
looking out the back
glass door
at the grey squirrels
running across the deck.
Majid sets traps
catches and removes
a few.
There are a couple of traps
out in the yard
one set to capture
the other set to crush.
The squirrels never seem
to go near the crushing one.
A squirrel draws the bait
from the catchy trap
and springs it, but escapes.
I go re-set the trap,
bait it with lettuce
from the wire
grow cages.
A few minutes later
I hear it snap.
The squirrel had come back.
Now it was caught.
It sat in there for days
furiously rattling the trap door
attempting to get out
and I began to feel weird.
These creatures are born
to scatter seeds and feed hawks.
I have seen a hawk
drop straight down
out of our acorn tree

then swoop off
into the evening
with a doomed squirrel
in its talons.

But I
did not want to be cause
of any stupid little creatures
undue pain.

I went over to the trap.
The squirrel looked up
with its mindless eyes
hissing at me
in primal fear
I lifted the trap
the back door opened
and the squirrel slid out
and scurried off
disappearing in the bushes.

I let that one go.
Half an hour later
I went back out in the yard
and there was a huge red squirrel
dead in the crusher trap.

I cannot play god
even with squirrels.
The next day
there must have been
two score baby grey squirrels
running all over the yard,
futile to trap them.

Luckily, Zandar the Magnificent
cat has arrived.

Squirrels are on notice
and looking to keep it
on the q.t.

August rolled along
and suddenly the squirrels
were all gone.

Did they all migrate
en masse?
Or just infest another
garden yard
without an imported cat.
Or did the Idiot Clancy
poison them all?
That, I hope
is not the explanation.

It is weird
going from dozens
of grey squirrels
invading
to zero
and not know when, or if
they might return,
but so long as Zandar remains
they will not feel welcome.
Apparently,
war with the squirrels
has concluded for this season,
but you never know.

All day long
the hummingbird
is flying in the wind.
At night darkness descends.
Zandar and I
on the back deck
listening to racoons
chattering down the hillside.
A startling screech
as the huge owl
flaps low through the yard
to perch in the plum tree.

I love the yard.
So much
that my father built

all around me.
The fences
and the brickwork
with the bricks he salvaged
from the Howard Street Terminal.
When the Oakland A's play baseball there
(in some future when people again
congregate in ballparks)
that field will be known to me
as John O. Wilson Park.
And I will take
his great grandson
to a game.
Hey, since I am dreaming
of a social world beyond 2020,
let us make it
a World Series game.

Scanning my father's
slides and film negatives
I cannot really see clearly
what they are
until I open them up
on the computer screen.

In addition
to all the holidays
babies and growing children
all our ancestral
cats and dogs
and his thousands
of western wilds
landscape photographs,
John O also documented
The Top of the Hill
and its changing eras
and evolving gardens.
I open a new scan
and there is John O
building the wall

of this courtyard
where for months
I've shared my poetry
on Spoken World Online.

John O wrote
some poetry
and his poetry
is better
than my carpentry,
or masonry,
or gardening.
Far better.
My dad's legacy
is all around me
and he is a tough act
to follow.

John O always respected me
and showed admiration
for my poetry.
Through this year 2020
despite our ups and downs
sequestered here together,
my mom has encouraged
and supported my poetry
and the live online readings
and I say to her,
Helga, thank you
so much for that.

Top of the Hill MTZ
on some dark nights
known as
Troll Hall atop Troll Hill.
Always, under sun, stars and moon
Casa Cantorosa.
The House of the Book of Roses.
Helga and John's little hobby
now there are well over 300

different roses in the yard.
In spring they are a riot
of scents and colors.
Helga has cut flowers
brought inside to arrange
in her vases
the outside garden
comes inside.
Sometimes the roses fade
as the summer heats
then she does arrangements
with sunflowers
they look like Van Gogh
paintings come to life.

I understand Gary Synder's wisdom
about picking a place
in the physical world
and making a difference there.
I grew up here
but moved into the City
to make my difference
and my career
and raising children
was a success
with two beautiful, funny
and dazzlingly intelligent daughters,
they are all the work
I really needed to do
according to evolution.
And now I have grandchildren
so great concern
that a world remains for them.
So that they may have
their chance to push
evolution a little further.

Before settling in, so to speak,
to confinement here
I brought from home

in San Francisco
arms full of files
one contained tax, business
education & employment records
dating back decades.
The other arm files
contained poetry
and scattered writings.
Between household chores
and negotiating space with mom
I was able to dig deep
into those files.
Working the first extensive index
of my poems.
Delighted
consigning ancient tax documents
to the shredder.
Mom said, go ahead
add that shredded paper
to the compost heap
it is good for the soil.
Yes! These ancient documents
no one ever wants to see again
churn them into the compost
create new soil to feed
this ground at the top of the hill
to grow even more delicious
fresh herbs, fruits and vegetables.
Some of the writing files
I had multiple copies
of drafts of poems.
Ah ha! I ran some of those
extra old poems
through the shredder
and some copies of
ROARSHOCK PAGE
and all these poetic words
fed back to the soil
next year to be eaten
via the beets and carrots

potatoes, garlic and lettuce.
You are what you write.
You are what you read.
You are what you eat.

Poetry we transcend time.
The poet, the writer
transcends being stuck in body
in the turning of the seasons
in the finite field of existence.
2020 now there was a year
and poets were active
to show they were here
the bars closed down
everybody went inside
Spoken Word Paris
went online
I tuned in.
Roarshock, David Barnes said,
There is a name out of the past.
Presently here
I come from the future
Many have said it
I sincerely mean it.

Spoken Word Paris @ Au Chat Noir
I had attached to
since attending and reading
in September 2016
and again, in March 2018.
It was my doorway back
to perform my work live
with other poets
after 20 years
rising before the dawn
to coordinate the newsroom
when there was a nightlife
and a poetry scene
in San Francisco
but I did not know about it.

The shutdown continues
for many weeks
Spoken World Online
gathered every Monday night
from Paris
which was at midday
along the west coast
of America.
And I looked forward
each week
to seeing familiar names
and faces
and a baker's dozen plus
of distinct voices
and solid poetry.

The microphone virtually
passed to me
I am feeling flutters
of stage fright.
This is an audience of poets
and none of them fucking around
about poetry.
And I always ended my set
energized
any fears melted away
because the poets were kind
whatever strange or silly thing
I might have read.
And from Paris
and our different cities
and the soil of our continents
we recited the words
from our imaginations.

Sun came out and the
darling buds of May.
Youth went wild
as youth will do.

They flocked to frolic
on beaches, in parks
and swimming pools
and three weeks later
they began to drop like flies
as the old simile would have it
into hospitals and on to graveyards.
Whatever their beliefs
they are counted in statistics
the virus does not care
that they were people.
It's true, not all of them died, yet,
but so much grief could be avoided
with cooperation instead of competition.

When Paris opened back up
David Barnes took Spoken Word
offline and outside
but David Leo Sirois
took over the online helm
from Canada
and we sailed on
through our global space
Amsterdam, Berlin
Madrid to Morocco
New York, New Orleans
Chicago, Los Angeles
Jakarta.
John McMullen
posting links to so many other
virtual readings.
2020 probably had
more poetry
going on
outside and inside
than ever before.

This is Spoken World Online Week # 23

Spoken World Online

has been a touchstone of my weeks
in 2020 and I count each week.
I wish our friends in Paris
would tune in more often
Tuesday nights.

“Sumer is icumen in
Lhude sing cuccu”

Turning of seasons
and the first half
of plague year 2020
already subject
of revisionist history.

The poem arrives
in bits and fits
Difficult nights for sleep
in seclusion
in my room.
I wake in the dark
am not sure of the direction
where I am pointed
on the earth
If I am facing the wall
or facing out into the room
my shirt draped over the chair
perhaps a figure?
No. There are no figures
but my own
during this seclusion.
This little room
in the corner
more, or less, everything
in my universe
already happened to me
in here.
No need for any fear.
But for the heat
of the wave

crashing through the roof
and the air conditioning
in the middle of the day.
More days like that
every year.
Avoid the sun stroke.

And the radicalized youth
pour out onto the streets
as they have before
but unlike before.
And the asshole supremacists
have this time, perhaps
looked too far down
their long, crooked noses.
You can be as intolerant
as you like
in your own home,
but you still cannot beat
your wife or kids
torture the cat or dog
poison your neighbor's yard
or destroy the world
for future generations
those are societal limitations
on the freedom
to be a mean rotten asshole.
Please put on your mask
in public spaces
it is polite.
There are no limits
on imagination,
but good to know the line.
Over the line
and the villagers are likely
to give you a hell of a bad time.
The villagers live in the village
even though the landlords
collect the rents.
And the orange clown lovers

know not what hit them.
Perhaps seasonal
tornado storms
swept away the doublewide.

All the natural horrors
of permafrost melting
in Siberia
sending up methane clouds
and Acqua alta (high water)
submerging ancient Venice.
Then the planes stopped
and the impossible gridlock
on the highways ended.
The canals in Venice
ran clear and full of fish.
Skies above Los Angeles
and the Diablo Valley
clearer than anyone
could remember
it was quiet enough
to hear the wind chimes
on the breeze
and we could think a bit
be a little quieter
than normal
do meditation
despite our best intentions.
American blockheads
not surprisingly equated
personal hygiene and
community respect and support
as assaults on their freedom.

July approaches
economic society begins
to open up
the empty highways
have more traffic
and there is more

traffic in the air.
From the Top of the Hill
I look out over Diablo Valley
the green hills of spring
have changed into
the Golden Hills of Northern California.
And the impossible blue sky of April
has now regained
the unnatural unhealthy
brown smog
we all know too well.

Baseball returns to television
with canned crowd noise
and paper cut-out fans
in the stands.
Feels like watching
a paper puppet play
or being inside
Doctor Parnassus' *Imaginarium*.
Play Ball!

Reinvigorated in poetry
perhaps more than ever before.
Here I am
2300 scans
into my project
archiving
my family history
to digital files
for safe keeping
and future space travel.
I have no idea
what or if
my next paid job will be.
As of now and right understandably
the E.U. will not let Americans in
if they are ugly
or even if they are cool.
If this poem

is to debut in Paris
it might be a while
because I will want
coffee at my familiar cafe
and drinks in specific special bars.
I will want to see my friends
and stand and read
of words to the soil
while the walls sweat
in the cellar of Au Chat Noir.

We Are the Pomegranate

Now has come October
the harvest mostly in
the last radishes dug
from the ground
the last green tomatoes
wrapped in paper
and stored in the pantry.
On the southside
of the house
the pomegranate tree
droops beneath
the weight of fruit.
I watched them grow
all through
the solitary summer
small green bulbs
to large red balls.
Out of the unexpected blue
cosmic transmissions on the social web
where 2020 introduced me to many dozens
of brilliant supportive poets
spatially dispersed around the planet
but all caught in this same damn year
I am contacted by Paul Jolly
one of the first poets I personally knew
when we were students at Maybeck High School

in Bruce Henderson's poetry class
it had been 45 years since we last spoke together
Paul was returned at last to old Berkeley
after decades working the halls and lobbies
in Washington, DC
and all that time away from poetry,
but now returned with all his great sincerity.
We exchange video links
of our readings
and books via U.S. Mail
we meet virtually in cyber chat
bridge that great distance
at least in 2020
between Berkeley and Martinez.
In pleasing synchronicity
I had just been thinking of Paul
maybe a day before his contact.
Remembering that time he approached me
at Maybeck in Trinity Hall
and held forth two halves of
a pomegranate
the myriad bright red seeds
gleaming, glistening
under the high ceiling lights,
"We are the pomegranate."
Paul said laughing
and I laughed
for us "we are the pomegranate"
became a catch phrase
and metaphor.
I also told Paul Jolly
back in 1975
that it was the title of a poem.

Majid harvests the pomegranates
before they bend the tree to breaking
two huge baskets
these will be good
until February
(as was 2019's harvest this year)

when we are in a new year 2021
and 2020 has been endured
and the lucky have survived.

2020

Still a few weeks to go...
Fingers crossed, all nervous
spells and incantations
breath right
relieve stress
and whatever boosts immunity.

A nervously dry November
waiting for California rains
to douse the parched land
knock down the wildfires
for a while
while the United States
had the highest turnout
election for President ever
and over 70 million voted
to re-elect President Donald Trump
but more than 80 million voted for Joe Biden
and in the necessary states,
but Trump claimed fraud
and as has been the case for years now
disputed the factual basis of reality
and his fans backed his claims
on no other authority
and absent any objective evidence
perhaps the weirdest behavior
in utterly weird 2020.
Meanwhile the pandemic
sickened and killed
thousands and thousands
in the United States
and around the world
and dummkopfs
gathered and marched
from Berlin to Washington

to Sturgis, South Dakota.

Hell, no we will not wear masks!
More reason why
I am staying in
until this year is safely passed.

But we are the pomegranate.
All of us, regardless of our vision
be it cloudy or clear
if we are striking out
because we are so injured
so emotionally hurt
so fearful that we hit and hurt
or we are forgiving
and loving
ourselves
we can reach out
in love
to all the brilliant seeds
all the love radiating from souls
we can help and heal
all together now
love is all we need
and the pomegranates
growing again next year
and every year
let the seasons roll around
we are the pomegranate.

Last words –

The shredded papers
of my shredded words
escape the compost heap
and merge with the vegetables
and roses.
I see them converge
with the soil
near the old
horseshoe pits.

Dissolving into a clear mulch
strengthening the soil.
Next year's potatoes
next year's salad
will be nourished
by my own words to the soil
bringing together
that world of words and letters
that binds together
transforms and transcends
time and place
connected to the physical earth
this place and this soil
and the seasons circle around.

2020, 2020
Foresight is 2020.
Such a long, strange year.
If you told someone in the past
or from the future
about 2020
they might laugh
and say, it could not
possibly happen.
Well, here is a poem
from inside 2020
and it most certainly
did happen.
And I fed words to the soil.

-- D. A. Wilson

*Top of the Hill
Martinez, California
2020*

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