

STORIES THAT COULD BE TRUE
Segment One: *Poetry 101*

TRUST (*based on Psalm 4*)

Faithful God, hear my prayer.
You have helped me in the past.
When I've felt threatened by darkness I've tried to be calm.

When I've felt caught in endless night
I've tried to keep you as my lodestar.

In the face of trouble I hold tight to your word.
Your gifts mean more to me than material things.
My security in the face of the unknown is a loving blessing.

—Patricia Stevenson

PSALMS AND OTHER SONGS FROM A PIERCED HEART

ON A CHURCH LAWN

Dandelion cavalry, light little saviors,
baffle the wind, they ride so light.
They surround a church and outside the window
utter their deaf little cry: "If you listen
well, music won't have to happen."

After service they depart singly
to mention in the world their dandelion faith:
"God is not big: He is right."

—William Stafford

STORIES THAT COULD BE TRUE

PANDEMIC

What if you thought of it
as Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now, on trying to make the world different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those to whom you commit your life.
Center down.
And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.

Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.
Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

—REV. LYNN UNGAR

STORIES THAT COULD BE TRUE

Segment Two: *Gratitude 101*

Born as Son, led like a lamb,
sacrificed like a sheep, buried like a man,
he rises from the dead as God,
being by nature both God and flesh.
He is all things:
when he judges, he is law,
when he teaches, Word,
when he saves, grace.
when he begets, father,
when he is begotten, son,
when he suffers, lamb,
when he is buried, mortal,
when he rises, God.

Such is Jesus Christ!
To him be glory forever! Amen.

—MELITO OF SARDIS

+++ **Luke 5:12-16 and 17:11-19** Stories about people healed of leprosy +++

MY HAVEN (*based on Psalm 71*)

Lord, you are my shelter.
You are dependable.
You deliver and save.

Be my rock, my haven, my tower of strength.

From my mother's womb,
through my childhood and youth,
you have been a reliable presence.
For this I praise you.

Now that I am getting older,
do not toss me aside as others do.

From childhood you have taught me to praise you.
I still have the energy to teach a new generation
of your boundless goodness.

I thank you, Lord, for your true friendship.
I will make my life a melody of joy.

—Patricia Stevenson

PSALMS AND OTHER SONGS FROM A PIERCED HEART

A STORY THAT COULD BE TRUE

If you were exchanged in the cradle and
Your real mother died
Without ever telling the story
Then no one knows your name,
And somewhere in the world
Your father is lost and needs you
But you are far away.

He can never find
How true you are, how ready.
When the great wind comes
And the robberies of the rain
You stand on the corner shivering.
The people who go by—
You wonder at their calm.

They miss the whisper that runs
Any day in your mind,
“Who are you really, wanderer?”—
and the answer you have to give
no matter how dark and cold
the world around you is:
“Maybe I’m a king.”

—William Stafford

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Segment Three: *Poetry Is an Inside Job*

God of love, God of joy,
We’ve never had an Easter like this!
We greet the empty tomb with empty churches.
Like the disciples after the crucifixion
we have isolated ourselves,
trying to keep our spirits up while coping with
fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and grief.
And yet it is Easter!

Since we cannot come to church
to celebrate the resurrection of your Son,
please, this year, more than ever,
let us feel Jesus’ risen presence
here in our homes.

Help us hear the story of Jesus
visiting his disciples in the upper room
and know in our hearts

that we ourselves are now the disciples
on whom Jesus bestows peace and breathes the Holy Spirit.

Help us to feel in our hearts
the joy and comfort they felt at meeting their risen Lord.
Above all, Father, help us to tell the story and always remember
that your love and mercy are stronger than death,
that the resurrection is your promise
that what Jesus taught,
and the life he lived,
is the truth.
Father, never let us forget
that Jesus' resurrection is your promise
that no matter how frightening
the trials and tombs of our lives may be,
in the end they will all be empty.

—DAN CONNORS

TODAY

The ordinary miracles begin. Somewhere
a signal arrives: "Now," and the rays
come down. A tomorrow has come. Open
your hands, lift them: morning rings
all the doorbells; porches are cells for prayer.
Religion has touched your throat. Not the same now,
you could close your eyes and go on full of light.

And it already begun, the chord
that will shiver glass, the song full of time
bending above us. Outside, a sign:
a bird intervenes; the wings tell the air,
"Be warm." No one is out there, but a giant
has passed through town, widening streets, touching
the ground, shouldering away the stars.

—William Stafford

A SCRIPTURE OF LEAVES

LESSONS AT GRANDPA'S KNEE

Children, around us the Twentieth Century is happening.
Chunks of our heritage are falling into the sea.
Species of animals, birds and fish that we can't use
at the moment we are pushing to the edge, and over it.
Strange new diseases radiate out every season;
populations in the cities are preying on each other.

Certain people have dug mines in the earth
and accumulated materials that can kill you;
weapons worse than bad dreams are stacked
in places called forts, or in ships or airplanes.
Some of those people say they are on your side,
that they want to help you, that they need more weapons.

A thin haze of poison encircles the world; everyone
contributes to it, and it is making even the rain dangerous.
Lakes, rivers, and the whole ocean are becoming acid.

Fish are dying, and their flesh is lethal to eat. Sunlight
is wan. It carries ever more hurtful invisible rays.
Forests begin to droop, turn brown, begin to shrink inward.

Meanwhile all of us create whatever beliefs we need.
We cultivate allegiances and religions. A few turn
from work and sing or dance. Others gamble
and experiment with drugs. And we give awards
for excellence to each other, according to how well
we have adjusted to this world we have made.

—William Stafford

A SCRIPTURE OF LEAVES

A RITUAL TO READ TO EACH OTHER

If you don't know the kind of person I am
and I don't know the kind of person you are
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star.

For there is many a small betrayal in the mind,
A shrug that lets the fragile sequence break
sending with shouts the horrible errors of childhood
storming out to play through the broken dike.

And as elephants parade holding each elephant's tail,
but if one wanders the circus won't find the park,
I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty
to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.
And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy,
a remote important region in all who talk:
though we could fool each other, we should consider
Lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark,

For it is important that awake people be awake,
Or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
The signals we give—yes or no, or maybe—
Should be clear: the darkness around is deep.

—William Stafford

WEST OF YOUR CITY

TODAY

If ever there were a spring day so perfect,
so uplifted by a warm intermittent breeze

that it made you want to throw
open all the windows in the house

and unlatch the door to the canary's cage,
indeed, rip the little door from its jamb,

a day when the cool brick paths
and the garden bursting with peonies

seemed so etched in sunlight
that you felt like taking

a hammer to the glass paperweight
on the living room end table,

releasing the inhabitants
from their snow-covered cottage

so they could walk out,
holding hands and squinting

into this larger dome of blue and white,
well, today is just that kind of day.

—Billy Collins
POETRY magazine, April 2000

STORIES THAT COULD BE TRUE
Segment Four: *Gratitude When Life Hurts*

+++ “Roll Away the Stone” by Tom Conry (performed by Chris Brunelle) +++

LONGING (*based on Psalm 63*)

I thirst.

My body aches like the parched earth without rain.
Sleeplessness gives me time to recall your goodness.
I need a vision to call me on.

The Image of the eagle lifting its young comforts me.
I cling to you.

Truth is our constant joy.

—Patricia Stevenson
PSALMS AND OTHER SONGS FROM A PIERCED HEART

THE LITTLE GIRL BY THE FENCE AT SCHOOL

Grass that was moving found all shades of brown,
moved them along, flowed autumn away
galloping southward where summer had gone.

And that was the morning someone’s hearts stopped
and all became still. A girl said, “Forever?”
And the grass: “Yes. Forever.” While the sky—

The sky—the sky—the sky.

—William Stafford
STORIES THAT COULD BE TRUE

B.C.

The seed that met water spoke a little name.

(Great sunflowers were lording the air that day;
this was before Jesus, before Rome; that other air
was readying our hundreds of years to say things
that rain has beat down on over broken stones
and heaped behind us in many slag lands.)

Quiet in the earth a drop of water came,
And the little seed spoke: "Sequoia is my name."

—William Stafford

TRAVELING THROUGH THE DARK

STROKES

The left side of her world is gone—
the rest sustained by memory
and a realization: There are still the children.

Going down our porch steps her pastor
calls back: "We are proud of her recovery,
and there is a chiropractor up in Galesburg...."

The birthdays of the old require such candles.

—William Stafford

STORIES THAT COULD BE TRUE

BESS

Ours are the streets where Bess first met her
cancer. She went to work every day past the
secure houses. At her job in the library
she arranged better and better flowers, and when
students asked for books her hand went out
to help. In the last year of her life
she had to keep her friends from knowing
how happy they were. She listened while they
complained about food or work or the weather.
And the great national events danced
Their grotesque, fake importance. Always

Pain moved where she moved. She walked
ahead; it came. She hid; it found her.
No one ever served another so truly;
no enemy ever meant so strong a hate.
It was almost as if there was no room
left for her on earth. But she remembered
where joy used to live. She straightened its flowers;
she did not weep when she passed its houses;
and when finally she pulled into a tiny corner
and slipped from pain, her hand opened
again, and the streets opened, and she wished all well.

—William Stafford,

STORIES THAT COULD BE TRUE

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Segment Five: *Solitude and Gratitude*

My LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore I will trust you always
though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

—Thomas Merton
The Love of Solitude, Chapter 2

SAY YOU ARE LONELY

More still than a star, one thought shies
by: what if the sky loved you?
But nobody knew? But that magnet in space
pulled hard? But you acted like nothing at all
was reaching or calling for you? More still
than a star going by, that thought stays.
A day at a time pieces of it glow.
Nobody notices: quiet days.

—William Stafford
AN OREGON MESSAGE

NOTE

straw, feathers, dust—
little things

but if they all go one way,
that's the way the wind goes.

—William Stafford
ALLEGIANCES