

## Park Side Egalitarian

Pan handling nickels and dimes (5)  
Merchant Hotel, North-End of Winnipeg.  
Smell of stale beer and smoke  
Forever etched in my mind.  
Raiding bread trucks  
For gangs, at seven,  
Solo mom/nurse, graveyard shift,  
Double-day work bind  
Knew to move her  
Four kids, a year apart.  
Casualties of war  
Dad (16), Holland, Korea (20)  
West Kildonan Park, became safe haven  
Slow traffic and neighborhoods  
A casual kindness of hope  
Floated through the air.  
I met Laddy, sleeping on a doorstep  
Patiently waiting for  
The owners of Foy's store.  
We lived above.  
He was old and I young (8)  
We needed each other.  
Arnold Schwarzenegger of Collies,  
Looked like Lassie's grandfather.  
We explored the park and golf course  
Scrounging balls to sell  
To buy milk and bread for Mom,  
Saving enough for a hamburger at  
Ma's Chip Stand (homemade)  
End of the trolley line, Main Street.  
Pa, silently peeled pails of potatoes  
His cigarette ash defied gravity.  
Laddy saved me from river rats  
Jumping at my face.  
He caught one in mid-air, broke its neck,  
Knocking the other to frozen ground  
Ending its life abruptly.  
Over fences and trails, we roamed  
Cooling down at the Red River, catching:  
Frogs, turtles, and cat fish.  
Laying together looking at clouds  
Our thoughts intertwined, not a care in the world.  
I sometimes wondered where Korea was, and  
What a father was?

Laddy would steal my glove and  
Run away, making me chase him.  
-30, did not matter, we ran and  
Made snow forts, or  
Buried each other in colorful leaves  
Swam in the Red River, watching  
Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer  
Waving at us from their raft, it felt like  
Life would never end.  
One day the Foy's arrived and  
The woman knelt down, crying,  
She hugged me saying Laddy  
Passed away last night in his sleep.  
I knew not what death was, my first introduction.  
I ran to the park knowing  
He would meet me; we made a pact.  
Laddy and mother prepared me for life.  
I will forever be connected to carefree days  
In West Kildonan Park.  
Life charged on; one event led to another  
The open road awaited me, 17,  
Unlike my father, 17, a troop ship.  
Mom did the best she could with no father.  
His spirit on a battlefield in Korea.  
Mom made sacrifices to keep her children safe.  
I watched at night with her green shoe box  
Paying bills, marking every penny in her pocket book.  
She unknowingly molded an egalitarian,  
Forever an ally to women and children.  
An activist for social justice on many levels.  
Hitchhiking, looking for adventure in BC:  
Logging camps, booming grounds, railroad conductor,  
gandy-dancer, social worker, unionist,  
Pulled lumber on green-chains and set chokers.  
Mom's smile always present in mind's eye.  
I found the Polynesian love of my life  
Married (60 years) children and grandchildren  
Life continued like Sawyer's raft  
Down the river of life, experiencing  
One adventure after another, after all,  
Isn't that what life is for?  
"Life is but a dream."  
We are captains of our ships...  
The old man hospitalized  
Staring forlorn at the ceiling, reflecting...  
Maori soulmate kissed him lovingly

On weary Winnipeg brow  
Gently singing love songs.  
Between morphine and sleep  
Angels and nurses became one.  
He saw a big collie  
Beckoning him to play.  
Soon, frolicking through the park  
Catching turtles and frogs in muddy  
Waters of the Red River, stopping to  
Watch a raft float by...  
Neil Young's, Long May You Ride  
Plays in the backdrop of the Universe.  
Soul detaches worn ship,  
Captain's last word: "Laddy."