



The Straight And Narrow
2022 Poems, Pictures, Pieces
Christopher M. Brinson



big thicket night

winter has finally bitten
the trees
i see a lonely bonfire
on the other side
of my forest
it's flames reach up
to the heavens
it's embers encircle
the stars
but i am still too afraid
to bridge the darkness
in between.

01.08.2022



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"To Our Future Selves"

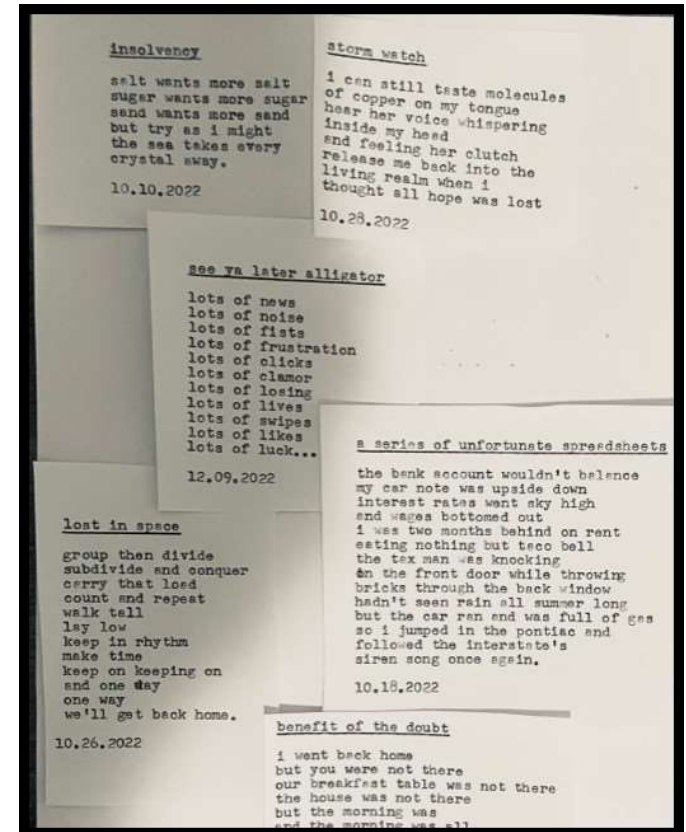
Seven years ago, when Thomas was twelve, he and I created a "time capsule". We included about 15 dollars of coins, a couple of magazines, some DVD's and one of my poetry journals. We double bagged these contents in layers of plastic, put it in a small plastic tub and duct tape sealed the lid thoroughly. We drove up to "the farm", crossed a barb wire fence, walked about 500 yards into the pasture and dug a hole, about 4 feet deep between two large oak trees on the edge of a small ravine, where I am told where the original Brinson "house" had been. We buried our time capsule and covered it. Once covered, I confirmed that I could still find it with a metal detector. We agreed to come back in 10, 15, or 20 years and dig it up-maybe just maybe, Thomas at that time, might have a child of his own. Imagine that-three generations of Brinsons could go wandering through the East Texas Woods in search of treasure together. Imagine how much fun that might be for a small kid of about 7 years old. Imagine how much fun that would be for old senior citizen(by that time) Chris. Just this past week, I drove up there, marched out into that pasture with the metal detector and confirmed I can still find that signal between those two oak trees. Confirmed, it's still down there, the signal is strong, though there is no trace that anything was ever buried there.

01.13.2022

an american summer

pick your own strawberries
pick your own blueberries
pick your own blackberries
make your own jam
make your own jelly
make your own preserves
come one come all
while supplies last
bring your baskets
bring your little red wagons
watch for snakes
watch for wasps
not responsible for injuries
not responsible for lost children
fifteen dollars per pound
buy before your try
pay as you leave
memories are free
in god we trust
all others pay cash
y'all come back now, ya hear?

01.15.2022



tonight's counter-programming

begin procedure
put that screen down
don't be afraid
go outside
run skip swing play
breathe in breathe out
listen to your heart beat
repeat as needed
the company may
own your ass
but your soul is in
your hands and
your hands alone,
friend
program ends
now execute.

12.31.2022

leftovers from a life

clothing that no longer fits
boxes of photographs
lego sets
high school yearbooks
mickey mouse ears
trumpets typewriters
trinkets
teddy bears
suit cases that won't close
tangled christmas lights
tinker toys
tonka trucks
comic books and fishing gear
monopoly sets
ghosts that cry
dreams that don't die
memories that can't
be set free as of yet.

02.08.2022

dandelion

i wait
you hide
i blink
you arrive
winter thaws
days grow
long
green upon
our lawn.

02.09.2022



the trouble with rubble

first came the fires
then came the floods
and what those demons
could not destroy
the wind
carried away
and all that was left
were tiny bits of polished
stone we had once carried
around in our pockets.

12.28.2022

sound check to soul check

alarm clock in the pitch dark
coffee pot running water
friendly voice
background murmur
dogs barking
baby crying
build a bigger home
make a better life
hammer nail saw
make the mortgage note
now i lay me down to sleep
dream a little dream
breaking glass
waking up in a scream
everything's gonna be ok
just hit replay.

12.26.2022

first aid kit

my religion
my refuge
my respite
my territory
my time
my therapy
my questions
my answers
my compass
my secrets
my sounds
my silence.

02.10.2022

"A Texas Hill Country Summer"

It was summer of 1983. I was going into 7th grade and my cousin Troy was going into 8th grade. I spent a week with him and his parents at a cabin in Junction, Texas. The cabin was about a quarter mile walk from the Llano River. Every day, he and I would walk down to the water and wade through the shallow currents where there was a spillway dam. The water was deeper and colder there. Right next to the spillway was a huge rock that we would climb and dive into the river from. One day, we met two girls about our age who were also staying with family and using the diving rock. That entire day, we took turns with them, climbing, jumping in, swimming to the bottom, coming up for air and doing it again. In between dives, we just causally talked with these girls about where they were from, where they went to school, and other middle school talk topics. Perfectly innocent. There on that rock, far away from parental supervision. Decades before smart phones. My cousin Troy, myself and those two girls-gods and goddesses of the Texas Hill Country that summer day. Forty years have passed, I still have scars up and down my legs from climbing that rock and think about it often.

02.20.2022

"The Cliffs Notes Of A Life"

I've been doing this "poetry thing" for what...36 years now-since I was 16. That's mind boggling when I let myself ponder upon it. To what end and what purpose this serves, I'm not sure. If nothing, I guess, just to keep me sane and give me a micro-burst of daily accomplishment. When I started all those years ago, I wrote maybe one or two poems a month. Now, I could pretty much write page after page and never stop. How many blank pages you got for me to scribble on? Twice in the past 10 years, I've made myself write a "poem a day" for 365 days straight. I'm finishing up the second iteration of that madness as I type this. I've had some pretty good results but ready to be over with the challenge and just write when the muse hits again come 2023. Out of 365 poems, about 25 are exceptional, about 25 are just plain horrible and the remaining 300 or so just right there in the middle. The poems grow shorter with age. Say more with less. Several times throughout the decades I've thought to myself, "to hell with it." and thought I might just take a vow and never write again, but so far, have not acted on that impulse.

forgone conclusion

where the asphalt meets
the wilderness
and the fields find
the forest
and the earth touches
the sky
i arrive at my home.

12.21.2022

one last time

i wade along the banks in
the calm towards the gentle
ripples towards
the raging headwaters
stopping only at our diving
rock that leads to a cold crisp
aquifer fed currents never touched
by the machinery of man.

02.21.2022

to everything there is a season

lots of nights
me throwing a basketball
at that backboard
dribbling running
packing a hard dirt court
summer heat and humidity
by the glare of floodlamps
listening to distant
radio stations
lot of years
lots of basketballs
alone but never lonely
mother earth has erased
the traces with a fresh blanket
of grass and awaits her
next rambunctious child.

02.23.2022

tunnel of love

pages that are turned
some stained
some frayed
revisited and retained
others skipped
forgotten
lost
like a note i once
played.

12.20.2022

do it yourself day

i painted myself into this corner
so i went ahead and painted the walls
and i painted this ceiling
then i painted over my tracks
as i tried to take everything back
when i had shaken the blues
i threw away my shoes
then i painted no more
and left it all behind that door.

12.16.2022

port arthur central mall

walkers and talkers
retired chemical plant workers
massage chairs that
malfunction
nineteen eighties decor
friends sipping coffee
tired tenants starting
their business day
passers-through seeking
shelter from a gulf storm
a poet
a painter
a policeman
a portrait on the wall
slightly fading of a local
lady who sang the blues.

02.27.2022

"She Came In Through The Bedroom Window"

Summer of 1993. I was working the swing shift, 3:00 pm - 11:00 pm, in downtown Houston as a computer technician for an insurance company. I used to get home around midnight and fall right into bed and sleep like a rock. One night, sometimes between midnight and dawn, my mind suddenly became aware that my bedroom window was opening and some intruder was coming through it. I immediately woke up, grabbed this person by the throat and wrestled them to the floor. Me, right there in my bedroom, without my glasses on, in nothing but boxer shorts in the darkness on top of some stranger. I heard a raspy strained voice says "Chris, it's me...." I recognized the voice. It was a close friend of mine, drunk as a skunk. No sooner than I realized who this was, she passed out on the floor. I looked out the window, and could not see a vehicle. I had no idea how she got there. I got dressed, picked her up, carried her to my car, drove her home and tucked her into her own bed. Two days later, I got a very confused call from her saying, "I think I need your help finding my truck."

03.16.2022

minimum wage methodist

i dust your bibles
i mop those floors
i polish communion cups
i clean alters and pews
i worship alone.

12.12.2022

a field guide for daydreamers

find me on the wind
between the trees
among the light
surrounding fallen
leaves
under shade
upon the ground
digging in dirt
waiting to be found.

12.04.2022

digital transformation team sing-a-long

another way to connect
another way to communicate
another way to collaborate
another way to cooperate
another way to complicate
another way to collapse
another way to crumble
another way to catastrophe
another way to catastrophe
another way to catastrophe.

03.24.2022

the straight and narrow

riding my bike
throughout this town
rusty chain
broken spokes
searching for soda bottles
beneath houses
behind trees
coke pepsi mountain dew
in a milk crate
tied to my handlebars
exchanging them for
nickels dimes quarters
i count my money
i keep my secrets secure
soon i'll be a man.

04.02.2022

out of focus

i prefer not to look at the photo
instead i let my imagination go to
those regions outside the frame
where memories are never the same
hoping to find what's lurking there
because in love and war, all is fair.

11.27.2022

"I Love A Rainy Night"

Way before typewriters were a "thing" for your average upper middle-class millennial/gen-z to sport about town with their perfectly manicured beard and hundred-dollar flannel shirt, there was little old generation-x me one night there in Baytown on April 25, 1997. Perhaps even before the world "millennial" had been coined, there was little old me who got this crazy thought in my head that perhaps an old manual typewriter would be a good creative tool (I had typed up a few poems in the 80's on the Brother Electric). So, I went to "The Baytown Typewriter Exchange"(yes, such a thing did still exist in 1997) and I purchased an old Remington Model 5. I drove home to my apartment with it. It was raining something furious - a classic South East Texas Gully Washer. Most of the roads in the city were flooded. But I made it back to my apartment, went out to the balcony and set up shop with my new implement of creativity. I typed the night away as I watched lighting raging far in the western sky and I haven't stopped since.

11.15.2022

whispering pines

east of houston
west of baton rouge
north of nowhere
little towns
that are barely hanging on
or no longer there
at all
just a crossroads
a rusty sign
a deserted post office
an overgrown cemetery
rusty rail cars
a river that stops
for no one as it just
keeps rolling on
thicker by the decade
with mud and secrets.

04.14.2022



look but don't touch

curious corners
with
curious cabinets
rusted knobs
frames heavy
in copper-like
patina
frosted glass
windows cold to
the touch
barely visible
in the silver rays
of moonlight
seeping through
the curtains
of our room.

04.16.2022

renovation project

white linens
gently waving in the wind
scent of lavender
lingering in the salty
spring afternoon air
your shadow silhouetted
moving back and forth
beneath the clothesline.

11.05.2022

post card from palo duro

lost in the dark
better than being
lost in the light
for i've been either
and i've been neither
one way you're blinded
and the other you
only have to wait out
another night.

11.01.2022



"Buggs and Bowie"

There were quite a few retired Exxon workers in my neighborhood where I grew up. And somehow, I knew many of them. It seemed, as kids, we just ran in packs through our neighbor's yards, even in and out of their houses. I probably knew most people for a 2-block radius from my house. One such of these retirees was named Buggs Marshall. I knew that he was a World War II veteran and had served on a submarine in the Navy. He had brought back a bride from Perth, Australia. She was a fairly short lady, perhaps under 5 feet tall. Buggs spent a lot of time in his "shop" in the back of his house, fixing stuff and building things. He had all kinds of wood working equipment in that shop. One time, a couple of my friends and I were just running through their yard and he called us in to the shop. He had us sit down on the bench, and he hand carved us each a "Bowie Knife" out of pieces of scrap lumber. I remember how authentic it looked and how cool we all thought we were running around the neighborhood with our Bowie Knives pretending we were Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie and William Travis.

04.18.2022

poem written at voss and westheimer

there is no parallel universe
there is no multiverse
there are no alternate dimensions
there is only reality
this reality
concrete asphalt carbon monoxide
an endless river of
vehicles not moving
though the traffic signal cycles
red green yellow red
all of us caught
in a reality that allows
time enough for a poem
to be scrawled on the back of
a grocery receipt before
fate determines our next move.

04.25.2022

the weeping willow

those ancient eyes
are windows to
a gentle soul
some days get lost
in translation
even years can get
lost in the fold.

10.31.2022

solitary confinement

the indigo woman
locked upon canvass
inside her frame
hung on a brick wall
watching over periodicals
books and the bustling
world before her
sleeps eternally in the
thoughts of a
forgotten creator.

10.27.2022



"Let Ye Cast The First Stone!"

I'm thinking about summer of 1981. That was the summer I had just finished elementary. This made me eligible to be part of the church "youth group". So, all us kids in the church aged 11 to 17 would get together every Sunday evening to do something fun (like go bowling or play volleyball). The church even hired their first ever "Youth Pastor". I distinctly remember her name-Nancy Starbuck. At the time, she couldn't have been a day over 21 years old herself. She had short strawberry blonde hair that was kind of cut in that 1980's hairstyle that girls wore back then. We (the youth of Highlands United Methodist Church) really thought the world of Nancy. We loved her and thought she was the absolute coolest thing in the world. But before the summer was over, she did something(apparently) that pissed off some person in church "leadership" (I'll never know what the alleged infraction was). They fired Nancy. I remember her saying goodbye to us, crying, telling how much she loved us and how it had been the best part of her life to be our youth pastor. Forty years later, I think about Nancy Starbuck and still have a bitter taste in my mouth in regards of how she was treated.

05.06.20223

the carpenter

i build your houses
beneath the scalding texas sun
hammer nail saw
sunrise to sunset
saturdays and sundays
when we finish this
neighborhood
hammer nail saw
we move on to
the next one
i build your houses
beneath the scalding texas sun
hammer nail saw
and some day
by god
i'll build my own.

05.07.2022

house of mirrors

man measures the rain
marks the passage of time
counts the stars
hides behind his pain.

10.25.2022



a forever home

wind blows sand
moons pulls tide
waves roll in
just as quickly as
the next one dies
earth rotates
universe remains
we walk while
silence between
us talks as
our footprints melt
within that day
where we once dwelt.

10.23.2022

the house on jones road

these walls whisper
in the silence of night
when the moon rises
they open their eyes
in the pale blue light
i hold my breath
and huddle under covers
frozen with fear and fright.

05.20.2022

texas, my texas

empty classrooms
empty flowers
empty words
empty thoughts
empty prayers
empty politicians
empty promises
empty actions
empty souls
empty endless circle.

05.30.2022



to the lighthouse and back

sunset in the canyon
jupiter rising above the walls
darkness descending below
every step more unsure
dim lighting starting to
play tricks upon the sand
coyotes talking in the
distance
with still over a mile to go
i see a campfire burning at
the trailhead so i hasten
the cadence of this walk.

10.14.2022



high plains drifter

forced to drink pepsicola
fox news blaring from seven screens
flight to dallas delayed
will miss my connection in houston
fifteen dollars for a cheeseburger
tastes worse than a big mac
sometimes you can't always get
what you want
hell, i can't even get what i need
but regardless, i ride on.

10.13.2022



a house is a home

there's cash in the coffee can
upon a corner shelf of the
closet collecting dust
tarnished coins
crinkled dollar bills
saved over decades
lean years, long days
high hopes
no adjusting for inflation
generations come
generations go
she saves nonetheless.

06.07.2022

the golden years

belgian war bride
veteran husband of three wars
two lazy boy recliners
lamp stand between them
oxygen tank, sunday paper
judge judy and jeopardy
wheel of fortune
evening news
son in el paso hardly calls
holding hands
hanging on
the sun is falling
below the east texas pines
one last time.

06.16.2022

"My Road Less Travelled"

It is often said that life is but a series of decisions. To that I would add that there are micro-decisions and macro-decisions. Each with a unique set of resulting ripples that might take days, weeks or years to become evident. One such micro-decision that I made today was making up my mind not to listen to the body (which was saying "Chris, Chris, just take it easy, lay on this nice hotel bed and watch TV."). Instead, I listened to my soul that was begging me to get up off my ass and drive down from Amarillo to Palo Duro Canyon to have about 3 or 4 hours of isolation time away from the digital universe. And I'm so glad I gave in to my soul on this one. Took one of the greatest walks of my life-about six miles through the canyon starting about 90 minutes before sunset and finishing up about 45 minutes into the darkness. I'll never forget about that walk and I will often go there in my mind even if I don't make it back up to the North Texas for a long time.

10.12.2022

beneath a harvest moon

cardboard box in the attic
gathering dust and time
bring it down again and
lay everything on the line
see if there's still room
for it in this heart of mine.

10.02.2022

vespers

flowers wither
plastic fades
paper vanishes with
the rain
but a rock...
a rock never dies.

06.20.2022



goose creek blues

the geese are long gone
but the world's largest
exxon refinery sits just
beyond mirrored in
morning ripples
they say hometown boy
gary busey once pissed
from the bridge into it's
gentle currents and then
promptly split for hollywood
years later, all parties still agree
that it was a mutually
agreeable separation.

06.23.2022



"A Ranger Never Forgets"

Patricia "Pat" Blackburn crossed my mind today. If ever there were a person who was there for me and seemed to be placed into my life at the right time and place it was Pat. She was the senior trumpet section leader when I was a freshman. I might not have made it through that first year without her. She was always there with the right advice. One time she even stormed into the boy's bathroom and rescued me from having my head flushed into the toilet as I was being held upside down by two upper classmen (Norman, Paul...no hard feelings). She tore them an asshole for torturing me. She gave me countless rides back and forth to band practice. She taught me how to sew a button back onto my uniform (a skill you had to have with those old tattered wool coats). She even introduced me to The Beatles Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. And to top that off, she was one hell of a good trumpet player too. May the god of her choice and all the other gods bless her wherever she is.

09.17.2022

of things to come

three sisters
humming hymns
in harmony
cutting threading measuring
scraps of material
gathering on the floor
the red north east texas
dust drifting beneath
a squeaky screen door.

09.11.2022



"When Brinson Met Bukowski"

About 1994, I crossed paths with this guy named Winter Calvert. He was about 10 years older than me and was looking for a garage band to be part of. Luckily for him, I had a garage and knew 2 other people who wanted to do that garage band thing. Winter turned out to be one of the more odd and memorable persons I have crossed paths with in my life. In some respects, he was a genius (PhD from Stanford University). He had invented some kind of new "steam turbine". But in other respects, he was a bit of a flake. He went to have weekly sessions with this "medium" who supposedly channeled an ancient Egyptian God that would tell him (Winter) what he needed to do with his life. (Some people get advice from their bartender, preacher or therapist, Winter, had his "medium"). Winter tried to get me to tag along and get spiritual advice from his medium but I told him that was all B.S. He had a wife about 10 years older than him and a three year old daughter. His marriage was on very shaky grounds. And after about a year, Winter and I parted ways, but the lasting legacy of our partnership was that he gave me a book of poetry called "You Get So Alone at Times It Just Makes Sense" by Charles Bukowski. I still have that book.

06.28.2022

the cosmic snowball

there it is in the
northwestern sky
just a little smear
between two oak trees
not moving but moving
all the same on a crash
course death race
with the sun where she
will be remembered as
merely another victim
of gravity.

06.29.2022

the time traveler's toolkit

compass
protractor
plumb bob
scales
ruler
square
sun
moon
stars
paper
pencil
patience
curiosity
heart
soul
sobriety
truth.

09.04.2022

my father's junior varsity jacket

it was the nineteen-fifties
they didn't suit of for games
but scrimmaged the state champ
varsity team every thursday on
a field called "hell's half acre"
they wore hand me down leather
helmets as the older boys drew
blood and pummeled their faces
into the south east texas sod
nevertheless, they proudly called
themselves "the suicide squad"
and wore maroon jackets emblazoned
with a skull and crossbones-
the old man is now eighty-three
years old and that jacket still hangs
neatly in his hallway closet.

08.31.2022



the companion

upon the san jacinto river banks
an off screen hour glass
disappearing time
endless dust
settling on a stack
of dishes in the cupboard
earth rotates
galaxy revolves
but nobody knows on
what day this house
will fall.

07.17.2022



unfinished symphony

find the memory
find the year
find the day
find the river
find the rock
find the courage
find the coldness
find the deep
find the bottom
find me there.

07.21.2022

"That Night I Fit Right In"

March 2017. We finally made a trip to New York City to see all those famous landmarks we've only seen in movies up to that point. It was about a two-hour taxi ride from the airport to the hotel. It was a shared taxi with several other parties. We made it to our hotel about midnight. Anna, Thomas and I stepped onto the escalator. I am doing all the normal mental checks that I do in these situations-making sure I have my keys, my luggage, my wallet, my phone. And that quick mental checklist yielded a missing item. As soon as I realized this, I knew where it was. I left Anna, Thomas and my luggage on the escalator, turned around, ran "down" the escalator without giving Anna an explanation. I dashed out the hotel, turned left and ran like hell down Broadway, in the freezing night. After a few blocks, I stepped off the sidewalk, and began running down the middle of the road, looking for the taxi. After another few blocks, I caught up with the taxi at a light. I knocked on his window and told him I had left my wallet on the back seat when I paid my fare. Sure enough, it was there on the backseat. I grabbed it, walked back to the hotel and had to tell Anna this story. I think she thought it was pretty hilarious.

08.25.2022

the kindred

we were waiting for hours
well into the thick of night
checking watches and clocks
becoming aquatinted with
the sounds of darkness
and just as we thought all
hope was lost, came headlights
through the forest reflecting
off freshly fallen fog.

08.24.2022

everything but the amen

painted cotton clouds. upon
a blue western sky
growing heavier
getting darker around
the edges
hanging there with
indecision
longing to kiss the dry earth
below
never quite mustering
enough courage to
consummate their love.

07.29.2022

"The Dark House"

One of the strangest things you can experience in life is to stand in the middle of the road in the cold early morning darkness on a late December morning and watch the house you grew up in going up in flames. The only thing you can do is wait for the local volunteer fire department to arrive. Stranger still, is to make the snap decision to run into that burning house and rescue Christmas presents and other various important "boxes". Throwing these presents and boxes safe of the incoming flames upon the lawn as the Christmas tree burns to cinders. It feels like a dream, that although you are participating, you feel more like you are just watching a movie that somebody else in. Stranger still to know, you will never eat, nor sleep, nor have Christmas in that house again. And then you sit and watch that house, over the next fifteen years as the new owner (of the charred remains) works to restore it. You know he will never finish this restoration project. Only in my dreams does a warm light still glow there in the darkness of night.

07.31.2022

everyone was redeemed

the rains finally arrived
trees stretched their arms
upwards
fissures in the earth
were sealed
the world momentarily
paused
there was no breaking news
blood washed off the streets
into the side drains
raging fires were extinguished
but old simmering flames were
re-ignited.

08.10.2022