

A Damn Fast 50 Years ...

...damn, this month, it's been 50 years already
since I stepped off that plane
alone, with all the others,
into a heat beyond belief
for this young, Pennsy farm boy ...
not just an uncompered warmth,
but a blasting breeze that breathed fear
and sweat,
in and out of every pore
of my body.

At the top step, a horizon of hued smoke-
at the bottom, the scents
of the war all around me-
fuel, shit, soft asphalt, sour sweat,
fear, Aqua Velva- and scorching rice.
The civilian pilot came in, sharply down,
with his un-gunned, government-leased,
sterling-hued, Boeing 707 jetliner-
and landed- hot!!
Wanted, needed- to be back in the air
and the F- out of there,
faster than ASAP ...
he said as such, in his final announcement
as we hustled down his aisle.

It never leaves you- the sliced memories
and diced fears
that come at odd times- least expected;
subtle, simple triggers drill down to a file
you'd thought/hoped was purged
on your last go-'round.
Up-dates that never seem to stick.

I've sat quietly,
many nights since then;
there and here;
behind the light- back to the wall- out of the fire lane-
ready- slow breathing- eyes moving- waiting;
even since coming "back to the world"
that didn't want us
to tell them what we'd done, seen, feared
and put down deep ...

Some nights it's better, easier-
but certainly not all the time.
Some nights it's darker- like a new-moon patrol;
alone and together
and all over the place,
waiting
for God knows what.
I will sincerely swear to you
that I can sometimes smell it-
the war around me, here
in my condo on the park; city-deep
and doorman, double-lock protected.

Unwanted, unsought anniversaries
that claw up through the veneers we've laid down,
that bring chilled, ageless ghosts with them,
eyeless & empty,
oh, too, too many times.
Faces on the Wall- we've seen them alright,
as we've quietly walked both its lengths
and back again to the apex
to stop and stare, at nothing- and at everything.

A wonderful friend reminded me, the other day,
of these last, fleeting 50 years;
of those last, cold 50 years of nights-
mostly made warmer
with the knowledge of the presence of all the fellows
of all the same kind of all the same memories
of all the same things of all the same times-
all shared ...

Well, we've all got each other; or so they tell us
in the sessions; lean on your buddies- take advantage
of those friends who've been there ...
yeah, but THEY weren't with ME; where I was,
and, on occasion, still am ...

Perhaps, there will be an end to all of this, one day,
perhaps, we'll all come home, one day,
perhaps, we won't sit up, un-asleep, watching, one day,
perhaps, one day ...

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Thanks to Robert, for the memory jog, and the enduring friendship
2-2018

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