

Sample poems from Closer to Dying (forthcoming from WordTech Editions)

Sight-Reading

My mother said watch one measure ahead
but that seemed a hard musical life
always straining to the right
eyes time-traveling alone
staring at a measure which clashed
with what the rest of me was doing right then.

Anne Frank's Older Sister

She was quieter, more studious, so they always thought she would be the one. But she kept her diary in a corner more sunken, or else she took it with her into the holocaust. So hers wasn't the one they found.

Besides, Anne got the boy, the only boy in the house, and it's always easier to get a book published when it has some love interest. Yes Anne got the boy. The man atheist always falls for the nun. The man revolutionary always falls for the boss's daughter. Robin Hood chose a lady of the court. And the tall boys dated the pixies. And the science whizzes went for the cheerleaders. Yes, monsters love humans, instead of other monsters.

And so Anne got the boy and Anne got the book. Anne's secret was sweet so they told it. Anne's message was faith so they spread it. And she – the beautiful, sad, older sister with the long dark hair pulled back and the story that was not bittersweet but only bitter – she was left to putter at her mother's side.

No, she wasn't the one, after all. She didn't even get that.

Math

I am not willing to let
anything else remind me
that I am one of many
and that there are too many.

I am not willing to listen
to the music of the spheres.
I am able to listen only
to the humming of the lines.

Nothing else can make me say it.
Nothing else can make me do it.
Nothing else can lead me gently
into that good night.

Sixty-Five

This is the age I want to be always, free rides everywhere, six-dollar movies, book just released, book forthcoming, book in progress, brand new marriage, nice new marriage, and still running into people who didn't know. And lots of firsts, first summer teaching, first course-developing, first math-collaborating, and no lasts, not yet.

I want to remain forever sixty-five, it's a good age, hair still naturally sun-brown, legs still running across streets and along sidewalks, body still enjoyable in at least two ways.

I'm the youngest senior, just like at one Bret was the teeniest toddler. I don't want to turn sixty-six, the next youngest senior, the end of the beginning, the beginning of the end.

After a Whole Day Typing

I don't think in words.
I think in letters.
Each sails out of my head
in some parabolic arc
towards its correct key.
Meanwhile another has begun.
The paths intertwine
wires and circuits
'til the keyboard has become another brain.
I'm slowly transferring my thinking
to another brain.

