

THE MAGICAL INFUSION OF *TWO MILES WEST*

by Susan Elliott Entsminger

“What’s striking is the freshness, lyricism, and originality of the voice which is sustained from the first page to the last—no one else could have conceived the voice, music, or subject matter.”

—Michael Miller, author of *Lifelines*; 2014 1st Place Yeats Poetry Prize Winner

How did this magical infusion of voices, characters, and scenes find roots? The poems in *Two Miles West* started steeping in the late 1960s when our troubadour musician writer friend started composing from grassy hilltops. Young love, wild Virginia characters, eager philosophical questioning, and the seriousness of war inspired poems like “Music at Three,” “Home Place,” “Communiqué,” “Hazing,” and the McQ series, including “These Days”:

***Handpick I’s gettin’ to thinkin’ what / you is imaginin’ them doing visiting those /
relics you been treasurin’ for some time / ‘bout some old time civil-I-zation, which / we
is all goin’ to be one of these days***

“Long distance runner, what you standing there for? Get up, get off, get out of the door,” sang Garcia. Lyrics like these kept Gary’s pace steady on many a long distance run through rainy Cascades, towering redwoods, sunny farm fields, and mountain passes. Gary’s poetry is as strong in sound as in sense.

“Visions of Johansson”: ***Gait of Power into the night / knees up back straight / relax at
home / dig the earth / dig it yes yes***

“It”: ***in a dark / seedy side / what he doesn’t know / shivers in a blanket***

“Steps”: ***from bedstraw and old traditions / she wakes where blue grama blooms***

“‘Ah boy. Yes sir. This is the life. It’s about time.’ // Only to be set in motion again by the first young wildeye able to sucker the old man into listening to his dreams. Admit; you knew that look even then; by the first frog-voiced young foot-itcher able to get Pop to believing that they could outdo this sticker patch by moving farther west.” (Kesity). Classic and contemporary literature inspired this English major turned land surveyor, bookstore informant, and computer programmer. He continued writing: from the Blue Ridge to the Rockies, the Cascades, the Coast Range and the Sierra, the Greens, always looping back to the Rockies and the Southwest canyon country, where during this last decade he has, with ink and paper, revived voices from his past and conjured new ones, composing messages to a world he loves, a humanity whose future he cares about, a human potential he believes in.

"The Trappers": *two faces stood in the wood / cracks lengthened where / the grain gave way / the faces the years the bodies / once smooth like glass / distinct in every expression*

"Dreamers": *circle / the sky wet / with chances // tapping / into the belly / spirit*

"Old Bach": *rubbed his eyelids until / edges and pipes // converged into an image / of wind chests trackers and bellows // saw himself playing the most / complex machine of the 17th century // saw his final score open / above the keyboards*

"The ancient virgin / picking mushrooms / in the damp forest / gloom," Snyder invoked to Nature. As Gary, listening to his father's advice to keep to higher ground for cleaner air and water, called on Wittgenstein & Kant, Joyce & Faulkner, Stravinsky, Bach & Beethoven. With bookshelf and music collection close at hand, Gary's wondering wanderings fell into rhythm with the wind, wingbeats, porch chimes, drumming summer rains.

"Traces": *wind sweeping / slick rock / how far does it wend*

"Carisha": *hay rolled into wheels / blue sky tawny fields / stretch as far as she / sees into the mystic*

"Fugue": *great horned owl hoots / cock crows first light / come close caress / the breast where dreams / dwell within our hearts / before good / and evil starts*

"Reading Rilke": *I make a note / as the cottonwood crackles / where are the angels*

Was it his parents' country guitars that first vibrated at a frequency which awakened in Gary that silver thread of Jungian collective memory, that Castenadaian glimmering energy web, that Graham blood memory, all of that which frees us from ourselves so that we might glimpse the true essence of the Platonian shadows on the cave wall and hear the songs of our ancestors?

Gary's vivan't imagination and passionate quest for truth is alive in his sculpted prose, his guitar improvisations, and very much so in this exceptional collection of poems.

The troubadour sings a love song.