

Jack Foley

For Adelle

Spoken at Adelle's funeral (July 17, 2016):

grief
like a leaf

fallen on me

For Adelle

The one who looked after me has gone
The one I looked after has gone
—Bertolt Brecht, *Love Songs*

How do you mourn the absence of someone you've seen almost every day of your life and whose daily presence was always a comfort to you? We've all seen children in the midst of what seems to us to be some more or less trivial setback begin to howl and weep in utter despair and anguish. We learn to contain that childish impulse as we grow, but in an event like this, the child returns with a vengeance, and you experience what seems to be endless and bottomless sorrow.

Adelle and me. People came and went, but from the beginning there was love and a commitment to one another—a desire to promote each other, to help each other. That deep commitment was understood and held to by both of us, no matter what else happened. When I entered the poetry world, I never presented myself as “Jack Foley”: it was always “Jack and Adelle Foley”—though organizers often had trouble with that billing. My first book was called *Letters/ Lights—Words for Adelle*. It was accompanied by a cassette tape on which she performed.

Adelle was diagnosed with cancer on June 4; she died on June 27. During that short time I tried to be her caregiver, cooking, comforting, helping in any way I could. I was rather overwhelmed with things to do—things for Adelle (many trips to Kaiser), household things, things for the radio show. I wrote when I could but Adelle was the center of everything.

We often felt very close to one another even in the midst of this ordeal. At one point she apologized for being “grumpy” and asked whether I forgave her. I forgave her. She was in fact wonderful throughout: intelligent, brave, and loving. At times we spoke or interacted and she was just as she always was: momentarily it was as if this crisis wasn't real. But there were other times when she was sick: “queasy,” unable to eat, fatigued. We kept up our rituals as well as we could.

I know she's dead, but I also know that as long as I am alive, she will be alive. And if my work lives, she will live in it. And I know that her own work will be intertwined with mine. I am putting together another book of her haiku; it is tentatively titled, *Early the Next Day*. There are many beautiful poems that have not yet seen the light. I had hoped to edit the book with her, but that wasn't possible. She writes in “Peaceful Walk,”

The water lapping
Against the stone barrier
The sun on my face

I wrote, “how can there be sunlight, and you not in it.”

...

I’d like to conclude these opening remarks with a poem. I’ve written several poems to Adelle over the years. This one was written for our 40th wedding anniversary, fifteen years ago. She told me she kept it with her at AC Transit and looked at it from time to time.

**FORTY TIMES FOR FORTY YEARS:
AN ANNIVERSARY POEM FOR MY WIFE,
ADELLE**

each line a speaking of her name

Forty years? what are they? dust
memories
“I think I’ll get married,” someone said
when I was young, “it’d be a cool way to spend a year”
It wasn’t, for her.
Forty years. Who is married that long
except someone’s parents?—
a couple cordial enough
but hardly real.
If I remember,
you are always there
except for my very earliest life
I have a friend
with no marital history
no history of “relationships”:
he remains in rapt wonder before his childhood
My own history
is a violent severance
of the child—
and then you
You held your hands out to me before I knew the need
Without knowing, you kept my imagination
clear and in the world
You gave me a son
who has grown
into a loving intelligent man
No one can tell my life
without telling yours
No one can say my name
without adding yours as well
What are the throbbing intricate ways of love?
We barely know, nor should we
It flings us here and there
It opens us.
In all this clamor,
in the rubble of my affections and my grief
I say your name, “Adelle”
and say it
forty times
for forty years.

VIRIDITAS

Viriditas—
the dream
of a green
world

It is not
enough
to say
“the life around us”—
we are
“the life around us”

it is not possible
to *be*
apart
from
nature
(“*natura naturans*”)

the conditions
in which
consciousness—
“this”
consciousness—
happens
are serious, tentative, and limited
this dream
of green

I *am* that flower
you hold
in your
hand

we are
light
coming to consciousness
of
itself
men & women

of light

what is mind
but light?
what is body?

“Make LIGHT of it,”
writes my friend
James
Broughton—

Walking,
I vanish into light—

Kora—the seed—
above ground—under—
the need
to follow her—down the rabbit hole
following the
idea
of resurrection—
seed-

time vanishes/returns we grow
in branch and root
in winged or finny stuff
or cloven hoof
in bird-
sound, animal alarm or
pleasure
(describe a scene—
scene vanishes—
mind appears—)

Kore woman
under
ground

No need

that is not satisfied
of food
or sex—

...

greenness, love:
as you lie in this moment
of danger,
as you sleep
wondering if the next sleep
will be death,
“this greeny flower,”
this green
comes to you
the power of life
Viriditas

for Adelle

Matthew Fox writes, “One of the most wonderful concepts that Hildegard [von Bingen] gifts us with is a term that I have never found in any other theologian...the word *viriditas* or greening power” (*Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*). The word suggests “veritas,” truth, as well as “veridicus,” speaking the truth. *Wikipedia*: “The definition of *viriditas* or ‘greenness’ is an earthly expression of the heavenly in an integrity that overcomes dualisms. This greenness or power of life appears frequently in Hildegard’s works.”

Joyce Jenkins challenged me to “write a nature poem” for her Watershed event. I found my mind returning to Kore / Persephone, especially to her aspect as seed, thrust underground but emerging to flower. I remembered as well W.C. Williams’ poem, “Of Asphodel, That Greeny Flower” and Denise Levertov’s book of nature poems, *The Life Around Us*. My dear wife Adelle was diagnosed with cancer on Saturday, June 4, 2016. She was intelligent and brave and loving throughout the struggle. I told her doctor, “We want to keep her.” Adelle chimed in, “I want to be kept.” In 1960—we were both twenty—she sang an ancient French song, “A la Claire Fontaine,” to me. It was a sweet gesture of young love. The refrain of the song is “Il y a longtemps que je t’aime / Jamais je ne t’oublierai” (“I have loved you for a long time / I will never forget you”). Over the years we often sang the song together. In 2016 I sang the song to her as she lay dying in the hospital: “I have loved you for a long time / I will never forget you.” She died June 27, 2016. I wrote many years ago:

It’s not a dream
We lose those we love
but we love
anyway

My Wife Adelle’s Death

What you discover in such a situation
is what Rousseau called
le néant des choses humaines
the nothingness of human affairs
Adelle’s concerns—the laundry, our finances,
her plants, dinner, people at AC Transit, people
in the local community, poetry people, whether

I parked the car close enough to the curb,
her VISA card, the Toyota, her haiku, the goldfish, me,
the light in the leaves as she passed by in the morning,
credit cards, *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*, the egrets at Lake Merritt,
her son and daughter in law,
hundreds of others
in a complex web of caring—
all disappeared poof in a few moments
on the afternoon of June 25, 2016
in a Kaiser hospital room
when she fainted in “septic shock” and her dear heart stopped.
Suddenly, all of that was gone
as if it never existed
le néant des choses humaines
I remember it, some of it—even most of it—but for her
it's a spider web someone brushed off a window—
gone.
It is this that we make poems and stories and beautiful lies
to avoid:
this sudden view
when a long-loved, long-known, long-accepted person dies
& we see it
deep and clear

Jack Foley has published thirteen books of poetry, five books of criticism, and a chronoencyclopedia, *Visions & Affiliations: California Poetry 1940–2005*. In 2010, Foley was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Berkeley Poetry Festival. His radio show, *Cover to Cover*, airs every Wednesday on KPFA-FM in California. With his late wife Adelle, he performed his work frequently in the San Francisco Bay Area.