

Songs of, by, for the RADIATION SURVIVORS or Return to the Gates of Hell

by Michael Gramlich, an Atomic test veteran.

Poetry for reading aloud~Written and inspired during the April 1989 demonstrations at the Nevada Test Site, Mercury (near Las Vegas), Nevada.

Also by Michael Gramlich, **Love Notes from Ground Zero** and other folios with a pro-planetary, Nature-ist, Great Spirit-ist, human race orientation.

Forward

In 1952, I was one of the 3,000 US marines who witnessed an atom-bomb explosion in the Nevada desert as a 'training exercise'.

When I looked into the fireball created by that explosion, I felt I was looking into the very "Gates of Hell" itself. When we were marched into the area of devastation, I saw military equipment smashed and twisted.

Then, close to ground zero (the center of the explosion), we saw the dummy dressed in a charred Marine Corps combat uniform, just like that which we were wearing. The machine gun was slagged; melted as was the dummy itself. Into the stunned silence boomed an incredulous voice, "Jesus Christ! They are going to use that bomb on people!"

I resigned from the Marine Corps that year after 7 ½ years of service. It was nearly 7 years before I could begin to face what the bomb had done in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and what it could do once it was unleashed on civilian populations.

In 1969, I returned to "the Gates of Hell" as part of the American Peace Test demonstrations: against the bomb; for return of the lands illegally taken by the U.S. government – in violation of an 1867 treaty guaranteeing the Shoshone Indians their lands; and to ask for a redress of grievances against a federal budget that spends more on war than on all the human services combined.

The poems in this folio were written at the Peace Camp near the nuclear test site, at the Site itself (at Mercury, Nevada, 64 miles from Las Vegas) and after my return to Michigan.

I lovingly dedicate this folio to all who took part in the demonstrations (there were more than 1,500 arrests at the site); to the Shoshone who issued 'permits' to trespass on their land; to all the people who have directly suffered from radiation, mentally as well as physically; to those who facilitated the demonstrations – the American Peace Test and others; and to all the world's people, including the guards who protected themselves from the terrible radiation emanating from the site – all unknowing victims of the silent, stealing killer, radiation.

Michael Gramlich
Hazel Park, Michigan
5/12/89

Song of the Survivors

Do not
 “sanitize” the Bomb;
the Bomb is a thing
 of terror:
Of the memories of charred and
 burning human flesh,
vaporized saints and sinners,
dark-scorched outlines
 on shattered walls....

It is the terror of ex-military men
who witnesses the bomb
in above-ground tests
and (who) saw the very Gates of Hell
 torn open
 in incandescent, roiling fury...

It is their quiet torment
and the agony of their families
 as their bodies wasted away
 before the cancers, leukemias,
 and suppurations of living flesh....

It is the horror of people
living “downwind”
from the Bomb’s radioactive slaving,
quietly-unknowing-dying;
of the mothers and fathers
watching the inexorable --
 and so unnecessary --
 deaths of their children;

It is compounded in the desperate hope
of grandmothers
praying
that their grandchildren
 would be born
 alive and normal...

It is the anger of those
 who trusted
 those in political and military power
and who have reconciled
their own shattered genes,
 casting their survival
 to the ash-heap-glowing
 of nuclear reality...

It is the horror of children
 and people
 burned beyond recognition
and it is the horror
 of the potential
 “reincarnation” of that grisly-ness...

It is the quiet desperation
of the homeless
and the helpless
as monies go to feed instead
the growing Horror:
 the potential annihilation-
 Of the human race.
 Of the biosphere,
 Of the planet itself....

I ask you,
“Do not sanitize the Bomb”
with cartoons and diagrams
 and models.
Rather, make
the horror of its reality
known to all the world.

~M. Gramlich, at Las Vegas, Nevada (American Peace Test headquarters) 4.7.8 9 11:50 p.m.
I dedicate this especially to the grandmother and other “down-wind-ers,” the atomic veterans” life
myself, to those who mine the deadly uranium and who pay for their jobs with their lives, to the
Hibakusha or “survivors” of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki Bombs, and to those who work at the various
sites, power and “enrichment” (of whom?) plants.....

At Peace Camp, Mercury, Nevada

Sun rises magnificent
 on the desert horizon,
Through narrowed eyelids
I gaze at its fierceness,
While paying homage to the giver
 (and taker) of life,
I recall the “second sun”
I witnessed
in the 1952 above-ground test
realizing how apt is that name;
nowhere on earth,
 the very Gates of Hell themselves,
that “second sun” I saw then.

Eyes watering from my gazing
 at the “Ruler of Heaven”
I turn and walk away.
I note with delight that low, gray-white
 desert scrub --
like myself, “radiation survivors”
is tinged with glorious patched of
cerise and lambent pale green.

Ah, but the patched are
wherever I direct my gaze.
I close my eyes and there,
 behind my eyelids
are those magnificent colors :
‘tis I who has become
a painter of the desert.

I walk along, musing;
curious – but content not to find out --
what visions those Sufis,
deliberately self-blinded by the
fierce desert son
saw within their heads;
but, this tingling of the
 mundane with translucent colors
is sufficient for my sensitivities.

Two Poems Near Ground Zero, Mercury, Nevada

I address the class;
cacti gathered around
 my tent;
sharp students!
“Class,” I question,
“What do you think
 of all this nuclear radiation
 around here,”
and they reply,
“Yucc(a), yucc(a), yucc(a)”
disgustedly.

--M.Gramlich at Peace Camp 4.14.89

I walk along the line
 of security guards --
 several nuclear plant sites
 represented.
“Too bad you cannot protect all of us
from the radiation at this place
as well as you can protect
 this site
 from “desperate characters”
 like we are,
 we who abjure violence in all its forms.
The young men strong
The women guards
 also nice persons,
Then anger:
Do such as these know of the radiation
sleeting through their loins
on this site where many, many
 “test” have been conducted.
Perhaps only when their foetuses
 abort “spontaneously”
 or their children are born
 deformed,
 products of gene plasma
 shattered by radiation
-- perhaps only then shall they listen
of the price they pay for their “secure jobs.”
Damned are those in power
whod do not tell these human beings
of the “security risks” involved:
life, perhaps, itself!

M.Gramlich, at the Mercury Nevada Test Site gate, 4.15.89

Song of the Survivors - II

(To Jamie S.)

Still in your mother's womb~
not ever her love
could shield you! ~
You were ravaged by radiation.
Born with disabilities,
with muscular damage...
a "Down-wind-er"...

With my arms linked with yours
and with the proud "Veteran for Peace"
we approached the cattle crossing
to stand upon that dread barrier.

"Do you know what you are doing?"
the sheriff asks,
meeting my eyes with difficulty.
I do not, need not ask, the same
of him; I see that he is aware:
protecting at the cost of our freedom
that nuclear hell from which there can be
no protection.

"If you take one more step,"
this compassionate human-being
tells us,
"I will have to arrest you."

Behind him throng the security guards,
nearly outnumbering the peaceful demonstrators
who stand behind us.

In unison, you and I and our comrade-in-life
step forward.
From outside the gate come the cheers and
prayers of those who witness
our 'crime.'
The drumbeats of the Buddhist priests,
the Amerinds – white and red alike --
form a threnody
as we
and those who 'trespass' with us
are handcuffed in plastic
and are led away.

In my mind's eye I see you,
recognizing your human strength and "failings",
your humanity,
Part of me rejoices
and part of me is saddened gently
by the remembrance
of the singing sweetness of your soul
and of those who shared that day with us.

After the 'Arrest'

In the 'cattle pen'
two young men
race from one end of the enclosure to another,
crashing against the fence,
A young guard calls out to those
 plastic-handcuffing them
to tie the hands behind them.

I protest
"They will have no way
 to defend themselves against the wall."
The young man then says,
"when they crash against it once,
 they will stop."

"Ah, you do not understand," I tell him,
my eyes upon his;
"it will only make them
more determined,
Didn't you ever get whipped
 by your daddy
and become even more determined
 to do
 what you felt
 to be right?"

And he turned away from me,
musing, no longer meeting my eyes.

I do not remember what happened then,
perhaps will not remember then;
events moved.
I do not think the two young men
were handcuffed behind their backs;
I seem to recall them still racing
 to and fro
while the drums outside the gates
continued
their beat of encouragement
 to Freedom's march in the world !

Peace Camper's Song

(To the American Peace Test)

Peace Camp....bliss;
peace campers.....bliss;
Philip's cooking.....bliss;
desert sunrises, desert sunsets,
 desert night skies....bliss;
APT's personnel....bliss;
Buddhist Buddha's birthday ceremony....bliss;
Shoshone actions....bliss;
walking across the cattle guard with
 lovely friends....bliss;
hugs, hugs, and more hugs....bliss;
my poor feet....bliss-tered!

-- M. Gramlich, Hazel Park, Michigan 4.14.89

Rainbow Medicine Hoop Song

You can claim me
but you cannot
own
me.

-- M. Gramlich, Sedona, Arizona 4.4.89

To Paraphrase an Old Poem

"Sir," said the man to the mountain,
"I exist."
"However," replied the mountain
"that does not create within me
a sense of obligation."

"On the other hand,"
coldly said the man,
"I possess atom, hydrogen, and
 cobalt bombs;
I could vaporize you into nothingness."

"Oh," replied the mountain
and lapsed into silence
for: the next 10,000 years
or until humanity grows up,
whichever comes first.

-- M. Gramlich, at San Rafael Valley, Utah 4.11.89

Residual Radiation (A play on words)

From the ridge above the Peace Camp
I see pennants flying bravely;
The tents of whose who
 despite warnings
 of residual radiation
 in the low-lying areas
 have pitched their tents
inside the orange cordons.

(Plutonium? Strontium?
No one knows
what so excites
the geiger counters.)

From my vantage height
I wonder:
 defiance (no one can tell me
 what to do, what not to do)?
 Bravado? Insouciance?
 Ignorance of the physical devastation
 wrought by man-made radiation?
 Plain stupidity?

But those are young persons;
their bodies may,
given enough time,
slough off the Cesium 137 (or whatever?)

Perhaps it is I
yet remembering their action,
so indelibly impressed upon my memory
days later, 2,000 miles away,
who is wrong.
Still the sorrow for them
unbidden
wells to within !

-- M. Gramlich at VA Hospital, Allen Park, Michigan 4.14.89 #1

No Way to Treat a Dog

Despite warnings --
no children, no pets, no
 pregnant women,
these show up in camp.

I see the dog,
plumed tail wagging friendship
for all.

Dogs, like children,
do not know of radiation
 in the low-lying areas:
but, unlike children – warned
in the gamboling
do not heed
the orange warning cordons.

I remember the downwind sheep
felled by the Bomb's radiation
nearly 100 miles away
and I vision this lovely dog
lying down, tail feebly wagging
as his life too soon
ebbs.

I do not know at whom I am more angry --
at whomever defied the recommendations
and brought the dog here? --
-- at those who did not make clear
the reasons for caution --
-- or the authorities
who created this radioactive horror
and who have maintained
stony, culpable silence
of the truth of their madness !

-- M. Gramlich VA Hospital, Allen Park, Michigan 4.14.89 #2

Of Betrayal and Anger

When my father's anger
descended on child-me,
I felt betrayed,
 unloved,
 Unlovable:
what had I done
to merit his rage?

(And the painful memory
of my two-year-old son's
 expression of shocked dismay
when I, pressured, angry,
 annoyed at his prattling
slapped him!
Ah!, the guilt I feel now,
Twenty-two years later
at my betrayal of his trust!)

I know somewhat
what the Native Americans must have felt
when treaty after treaty --
for as long as the sun will shine,
 and the grass shall grow --
was broken
and the death marches
to the reservations
ensued !

And I sense, somewhat,
the rage, the apathy
 of the homeless
 the bankrupt
 stripped of their homes, their farms,
 the sick and the poor
betrayed by a "government of the people"
who did not help them in their time of need
but in smug righteousness
watched time suffer.

At the nuclear weapon test site
anger more strongly wells:
I, and the others poisoned by
 the man-made "fires of hell" --
 the 'atomic veterans' ;
 the 'down-wind-ers' ;
 those who mine the uranium;
 those who work at the refining plants;

those who work at the atomic power plants;
the 'security guards' and personnel here;...
have been betrayed by – at best, governmental
silence; at worst, deliberate exploitation
lies and
covering up:
c.r.i.m.i.n.a.l.i.t.y. !!!!

Aaiieeaaa! We have been betrayed
by those entrusted with power,
with authority:
foster-parents to the people!

And, with betrayal,
the punishment of innocence,
comes disillusionment,
anger,
frustrated and misdirected love !

Anger mounts.
Those of us who know
the truth
become steeled in our determination
to end this
murderousness;
we shall --
especially in our love for humanity
even for the betrayers --
we will
triumph !

-- M. Gramlich VA Hospital, Allen Park, Michigan 4.14.89 #3

Song For, By, and Of the Down-wind-ers

(Especially to Jaimie S., Janet G., et alz)

We are "down-wind-ers --
all of us,
each and every one of us
 alive in these United States,
 alive anywhere in the entire world.
Prevailing wind patterns,
innocent streams and rivers,
the ocean itself (once ruler, now
 servant !)
carry lethal radiation
across continents:
Chernobyl underscored that fact !
With reindeer dying
1,000 miles away.

The radiation beasties,
some of which are
hellishly long lived
(Plutonium, half life of 30,000 years,
 perhaps 300,000 before the last deadly
 particle is emitted !)
Cesium 137, ravager of the thyroid,
 others savaging the bone marrow --
leukemia, canbers, malfunctioning
 immune systems, etc., etc., and etc. !!)
are not content to stay in one place;
they are borne upon the once-healing winds;
the heavier particles lay in wait
for unsuspecting feet
to stir them up
and then wind-devil-whipped
carry them into the lungs of man
 and beast alike....

Above ground testing....
Nuclear power plants leakages...
natural radiation, cosmic and of the
 uranium-bearing Mother Earth...
'below ground' testing
(like the 1973 blast that
 broke through the surface
 to send its deadly plume
 skywards --
 which way did the wind blow
 that time?
Rivers run underground

and if the radioactive demon
get into the water table, into those rivers...
who knows where they will run !
what unsuspecting humans they will poison !
Insanity! Madness!
Ultimately, murderousness!

Underground 'storage' ! --
Subject to earthquake's whim,
barrels into the unsuspecting, welcoming ocean
-- ah, God, how long before they rust
 or break
 to release their deadly contents
 into the food chain!

No way to deal with these residues,
the radioactive "waste-ing" of the Earth Mother
 herself
except time and the passing
 of untold generations --
perhaps a million years...
only time will tell;
even were we to stop the testing,
even were we to stop the mining,
even were we to stop the refining,
even were we to stop the plants:
 power and up-grading...
it may well be
t.o.o.....l.a.t.e. for humankind !

The bombs may never be 'released in anger'
but their horrifying costs
 in monies that would be otherwise,
 more humanely, spent;
 in lives stolen by cancers
 and radiation sicknesses
 --the toll of dead and dying and
 wasting away....
Mount !

We are, all of us,
every one of us alive,
we are down-wind-ers,
radiation survivors.

It....must....end....NOW!

-- M.Gramlich Wyandott, Michigan (en hospital) 4.18.89

Song of the Sailor and the Sea

I sail the solar seas,
my spirit blown
from galaxy to galaxy
across the trackless depths
 of space:
via the solar winds
of the Cosmic God,
my spirit wafts;
a life span here,
 a life span there....
Form, formless, silicon,
 carbon, flesh, metal,
 crystal...
all these have I, will I,
 be
in my journey
among the stars,
through the dimensions...
ife time after life time,
wonders have I, will I,
 yet see!

Blown by the solar winds
upon the Cosmic tides
am I....
beyond this-world comprehension,
 only dimly glimpsed,
It is beyond measure
and beyond
 joy...!

-- M.Gramlich Hazel Park, Michigan 2.10.90

(written during meditation with a group sharing the tape Solar Winds by the Harmonic Choir)