

Grateful

By Glenn Currier

I am young, naïve, and scared of my own shadow
working to carve a small path in this unfamiliar universe.
I feel like an alien, unformed in this new world
a small animal in a jungle of skyscrapers
vulnerable, gentle, and without sophistication.

And here is this man, confident, mild of manner
inviting me to join him for a beer.
We cross three intersections
the loud and boisterous pulse of the city
beating against my alert but suburban senses.

We open the door to the darkness.
I feel the cool rush of beer soaked air
see the bright rectangle of green
and hear the crack of the pool cue,
the juke box playing the Age of Aquarius.

I was entering the culture of the city
with a man so charming and kind
my defenses relaxed and my mind began to open slowly.
Maybe this was no jungle at all but an oasis.

I know now this was a watershed for me,
begun with this magnificent teacher
I would come to know, admire, and love.
Here, at the center of a burgeoning city
I was baptized in beer
by this most urbane of men.

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And so here we are, Rudy, again drinking beer
again in your gentle presence,
this time *grateful* for all the years, for all the lessons of how to be:
 compassionate but wise
 tolerant but firm in truth
 open minded but open hearted
 enthusiastic but intelligent.

Grateful to have flown with you to the heights:
 of inquiry and reflection
 of joyous appreciation of mankind's creations

of raucous laughter
of thrilling success
and exciting ideals.

Grateful to have dived with you to the depths:
of personal angst
of sadness and regret
of conflict and forgiveness
of pain and tears
of ethical questioning
and spiritual awareness.

Here we are – later in life – and again I find myself *grateful*
that you are my friend
my fellow traveler
my brother on the journey.

And still you teach me:
how to persevere in a calling
how to be a faithful husband and father
how to endure pain and illness
how to laugh at yourself
and make light of your predicaments.

But above all, my friend, you have taught me
how to be human.

Thank you, Rudy, and happy birthday.

Author's Note: Written on the occasion of my old friend and colleague, Rudy Rountree's, birthday. Rudy was a kind of mentor especially in my early years of teaching at El Centro College, downtown Dallas. Nearby was Belle's Green Glass, a popular watering hole for faculty, students, and a multiplicity of people from different walks of life, from the night editor of the nearby Dallas Times Herald to carnies who visited there when the carnival was in town.

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