

GRIST

Diocese of New Ulm Social Concerns Office January, 2010

from } *Every War Has Two Losers:*
 On Peace & War
 by William Stafford
 Milkwood Editions, 2003

[*One of our nation's finest poets, Stafford served as a conscientious objector during World War II.*]

One must learn to waver.

“I would have killed Hitler,” they say, meaning, “I believe in assassination under some circumstances.” A question: “What person would you assassinate now?” And if their principle is pushed to the further extreme they can be made remiss if they are not killing a succession of (retrospectively certain) troublemakers. But of course in actual life killing is not practiced or believed in by balanced people who realize the difficulties of judging consequences.

Children of heroes have glory for breakfast.

Beat your megaphones into ear trumpets.

Why does demonstration, assertiveness, parading, etc., disquiet me? Partly because democratic choice implies not only freedom for the individual but *value* from what the individual brings to the consensus. If public action creates turbulence, intimidation, distortion of the frequency and distribution of more quietly held views, then *individual* thought is damaged both in its occurrence and in its expression. I think that quiet individual decision should count: public conduct should encourage it, not put it in hazard.

“Some people are idealists: they keep leaning to make the world different. They should face up to the way things are, and accept them.” “Well, my leg is broken – I guess I’ll just like the strange angle my leg has as it lies there.”

In the center of human life are those who hold it together. They make home what it is. They listen to “leaders,” receive, decide. Whatever country is, whatever a profession, a town – they establish that.

Stafford’s Gettysburg Address:
These dead people were brave.

Living traditionally, the country life, we cultivate the ground. We know the seed will produce after its kind. Why then do we sow suspicion and hatred in some places?

Save the world
by torturing one innocent child?
Which innocent child?

The Militarist’s Farewell:
Goodbye, Boomerang, see you later.

Being wrong is easy.
How to be when wrong is harder.

The bitter knowledge
that you have been stupidly winning.

Winners can lose what winning was for.

If I resent someone’s arrogance,
is it because I have that competitive quality
from which arrogance comes?

Some questions you would ask of God
prove you unfit for God's company.

The root and the flower
have to trust each other.

All the while,
back of the apparent scenario
there is the real scenario;
and our fears and appetites
are serving some cause.

My plan is, to be scared.

My belief is what my whole life says.

Intentions have side effects.

It dawns on us, the last people,
that the world will survive us.

Because you cheered when the moon rose,
you have received secret absolution:
when they march you away
someone will look back.
In this world, that's redemption.

Taking a position; observing; remarking –
that's a way to be. Another way is not
taking a position; following; changing.
Some people live by the first. Mostly I think
I favor the second, maybe (the maybe puts
me into the second person, I think). The
first tends to be an adversary, using the
scales not balanced.

The wars we haven't had
saved many lives.

Nietzsche saw that the life preservers
the righteous clutched were made of lead.

You like the moon
but you wouldn't want it
in your house or any bigger.

Everyone is a conscientious objector to
something. Are there things you wouldn't
do? Well.

Why do tears come to the eyes? We think
about these people, the center. When they
go, the center is weakened. It needs a
certain quality to fill it, strengthen it.
No use saying, "Let's take their place."
We know we can't do that. Their going is
absolute. It is a loss. Time did this to us.
It erased them. And it isn't making people
like them anymore.

When people get excited
they get more sure of their opinions.

My preference for lies,
isn't just for my own –
I like other people's lies too.
History is the lies people have agreed on?

Blaming others:
I do my evil in different ways.

Fascination with things as they are
becomes addictive; stronger and stronger
shocks become necessary. People want
even their entertainments to satisfy their
lust for fear, cynicism, and disgust.

You choose your oppressor
and call it government.

Sanctuary. Sanctuary.
What lives needs sanctuary.

The truth is,
every day brings a different possibility –
and a doubt about yesterday.

It's a constant struggle
for a human being to attain anything
close to the dignity and cleanness
of a rock or a piece of wood.