

Elmira Bussey

Though Walt Whitman had not yet died when I was born, I hardly had a personal acquaintance with him. I used to read him every morning on the subway on the way to work--spread out in front of me, reading a page every morning, and in that way I absorbed him.

But I only had a casual interest in Whitman until several years ago when, in Harold Bond's poetry workshop at the Cambridge Center, I one day won second prize in the class, and the prize was an anthology of Whitman. Then his beauty and wonder really took hold of me. The second and third "Whitman" poems were inspired a year ago by a young artist friend reading Whitman to me.

#### WALT WHITMAN ON THE SUBWAY

He would be glad I read him on the cars  
And shared in reverence for a blade of grass,  
Went out to stand beside him when the stars  
Proclaimed more meaning than the Science Class.  
Saw them file forth, the kingdoms of the sky,  
And knew myself not less, save in degree,  
Announced my kinship with the Reason Why  
of all Existence, shaped and still to be,

Then he might say, "Now close the poetry book  
And love your comrades that surround and press,  
It was a common, star strewn path I took  
Chanting my songs of far-flung tenderness.  
To meditate, to fathom, to inquire,  
That was my inspiration and desire."

#### BROTHERS OF THE ROLLING EARTH

I alone am the brother.  
I am weighed in a judgment of stars  
in a sixty-two-office building.  
I am weighed by impeccable gentlemen  
with a world of stars at their elbow,  
leaning with faultless sleeves  
on a faultless breakfast table,  
looking up to a handmade sky  
to the faultless rims of creation.

How are you brother this morning?  
Where are you going Walt Whitman  
forever and ever and ever?  
I am going no place you can think of.  
I belong to the moon and the stars.

#### THE OPEN ROAD

Walt Whitman whistled through the open road,  
A knapsack laid lightly on his back.  
Singing and song were his and the blue sky.  
If you had spoken to the tired man,  
You would have grown bewildered by his song.  
Bugles and cymbals, violins and drums  
Jangled together in a symphony.  
They spent their music down the distant hills.  
The chords lay useless and the sagging strings.  
When the room darkened and the night grew cold  
A man emerged with half his greatness gone.  
I am Walt Whitman living down the road  
I need a room and shelter for the night.