

*On
Living
in the
Township
of
Heaven*

*by
Gary B. Puckett*

Published by
Owl Mountain Muses
a division of



Fort Collins,
Colorado

Cover photos by Kathleen Burkheimer

*Cover design by Rini Twait, Graphical Jazz Design Studio,
1010 E. Fifth Ave, Longmont, CO 80501-5206*

On Living in the Town of Heaven Copyright ©2002 by Gary B. Puckett.
All Rights Reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in
any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of
brief quotations in critical articles and reviews.

For information address: Owl Mountain Muses, the poetry
division of Owl Mountain Music, 1015-M S. Taft Hill RD, #144, Fort
Collins, Colorado 80521. www.owlmntnmusic.com

It is unethical to use someone else's gifts without permission
and attribution. In order to protect and encourage the sharing of these
gifts, please do not make illegal copies.

First printing 2002.

ISBN 0-9639663-7-5

Library of Congress Card Catalog Number: 97-69929

Printed by BookMasters
in the United States of America.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
MUSTARD SEEDS AND DANDELION WEEDS	
AT THE HOSPITAL	10
PREMEDITATION	12
3/4 TIME	14
NEW CHURCH	19
BRINGING UP CHRISTIANS	20
PARISH PASTOR	21
RIGHTEOUSNESS	24
LOOSE CANON	25
CONTROL	29
ADVENT—GOD THE EXPECTANT FATHER	31
GOOD NEWS	32
12/31/87	34
SPRING FEVER	35
CONFIRMATION: YOUR FINAL EXAM	37
MUSTARD SEEDS AND DANDELION WEEDS... ..	38
A HOT AUGUST NIGHT IN SAGINAW, MICHIGAN	39
BEGINNING	41
IN MEMORY OF RICHARD ROBERT LACY	43
ON THEIR RESPECTIVE TRANSFORMATIONS	45
IT WAS A COLD WINTER'S NIGHT	48
REFLECTIONS OFF THE REAR VIEW MIRROR	50
ON HOW SIGN-UP SHEETS A CHURCH WILL NEVER MAKE	52
CREED	54
RUTHLESS MERCY, SAVAGE GRACE	
SENECA FALLS	56
FROST WINS	58
ON LIVING IN THE TOWNSHIP OF HEAVEN	60
STEWARDSHIP	62
GIVE YOURSELF AWAY	65
VARIETIES OF FAITH	66
GUT CHECK	68
DOWNSTREAM OF EPIPHANY	70
BETTING ON A SURE THING	71
AFTER THE FALL	72
SALT	74
LIVING BREAD	79

FEBRUARY 12, 1990	80
RESTRAINT	83
FRICTION	85
DANDELIONS	87
APPRENTICE	89
FAMILY KNOTS	91
WISDOM GROWS SMALLER AS IT INCREASES	93
“NO”	95
AURORA BOREALIS	101
FORESHADOW	104
LINE OF SIGHT	105
DARK STARS	107
SUFFER THE CHILDREN	109
ANTICIPATION	112
NEW YEAR	114
NAVIGATIONS	115
ELLUSSIONS	117
WINTERTHAW	120
HANDS	121
TO BUILD A PLAYHOUSE	122
RESULTS	124
TEXT: EPHESIANS 4:30-5:2	125
NO-CATCHING TIME	132
GOOD FALL	133
END TIMES	134
ALL SAINTS	135
CHRISTMAS EVE MEDITATIONS	140
OVENATIONS	146
READING SIGN	147
MERCY ME	149
ARTISTRY	154
NO MESSAGE TODAY	155
SING A NEW SONG	156
BAIT	157
SATURATION	159
AMORAL	160
VOCATION	162
BACK AT THE HATCHERY	164
CHANGE	165
GRACE	167
LOST & FOUND	168
UNEXPECTED	170

LAME DUCKS	174
SAVAGE GRACE	175
ANONYMOUS	177
TAKE TWO	178
ELIPSIS	179
OFF THE RESERVATION	
NATHAN	182
ZEKE	183
PROGRESS	184
INSTRUCTION	185
POSTSCRIPTS	
TODAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF THE SCHOOL	188
JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES, M.DIV.	192
ADESTE FIASCO	195
ROOM	197
CALL PROCESS BLUES	200
WORKING THE ANGLES	202
SUBVERSION	203
FALSE START—2000	205
ACTUALLY SENT—2000	208
THE USUAL ENIGMATIC CHRISTMAS POEM	210
INDEX	213

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1981, I began studies for a Master of Divinity degree at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, in Columbus, Ohio. I went to seminary out of a passion for the Gospel and an aptitude for doing theology, while at the same time being dead set against becoming a parish pastor. So much for good intentions.

The question of what I would do upon leaving seminary persisted through four years of arguing with faculty, friends, and family. I graduated in the spring of 1985, still firm in the conviction that parish ministry was not the place for me. Yet, having completed a program of training for just such ministry, I found it hard not to give the parish a chance. A few months after graduation, I moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, to become the pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church.

One of the things I took with me was an unpublished manuscript by Carl Skrade, a professor of mine from college days at Capital University, and a mentor through my time in seminary. The book was about the role of poetry in the formation and expression of theology. Inspired by its rationale, I began to use poetry as a part of my ministry, first in my journal reflections, later in the form of my monthly newsletter articles, and finally as an occasional format for preaching. These poetic expressions of parish ministry went on for three and a half years at Prince of Peace, four and a half years at Tilleda, Wisconsin, co-pastoring Peace-Elias Lutheran Parish with my wife, Kathy Burkheimer, and the better part of a year doing interim ministry at Church of the Wilderness, near Tilleda. Those nine years of being a parish pastor never managed to change my disposition toward parish ministry, so I finally stopped doing it. The poetry stopped for a while, too, but occasionally re-emerges, usually for our annual Christmas letter.

So, I have retired to the adjunct position of pastor's spouse, but what about all those poems? Left to my own devices, I would never have moved beyond daydreams of publication,

but I have not been left to my own devices. For the last six years or so, Steve Eulberg, a roommate of mine from seminary, has quietly pushed forward the physical project of publication. That these poems have now taken book form is entirely to his credit. Don Luck, a seminary professor of mine, has regularly included selections of my poetry in the *Trinity Seminary Review*, which has kept my work in circulation. Kathy Burkheimer, my wife these last fifteen years, has always insisted that I take my poetry seriously, no small thing, in an era when poetry is so marginalized. These three have been joined by a host of others, too many to name, who have continued to ask when “the book” will be available. To them, I can finally answer “Now.” and to all of these supporters I offer my deepest thanks.

March 1, 2002
Milledgeville, Illinois

To Kathy