

POEMS BY GARY SNYDER

Poet, writer and activist **Gary Snyder** was born in 1930 in San Francisco and attended Reed College and later the University of California Berkeley where he studied Oriental languages. In his early career he was associated with the Beat poets and also immersed himself in Zen Buddhism. A leading voice of environmental concern, Snyder has written widely in both poetry and prose on a variety of topics, especially ecology and preservation of the natural world.

1. AS FOR POETS

*As for poets
The Earth Poets
Who write small poems,
Need help from no man.*

*The Air Poets
Play out the swiftest gales
And sometimes loll in the eddies.
Poem after poem,
Curling back on the same thrust.*

*At fifty below
Fuel oil won't flow
And propane stays in the tank.
Fire Poets
Burn at absolute zero
Fossil love pumped back up.*

*The first
Water Poet
Stayed down six years.
He was covered with seaweed.
The life in his poem
Left millions of tiny
Different tracks
Criss-crossing through the mud.*

*With the Sun and Moon In his belly,
The Space Poet
Sleeps.
No end to the sky,
But his poems,
Like wild geese,
Fly off the edge.*

*A Mind Poet
Stays in the house.
The house is empty
And it has no walls.
The poem
Is seen from all sides,
Everywhere
At once.*

2. LONG HAIR

Hunting season:

Deer trails:

*Deer trails run on the side hills
cross county access roads
dirt ruts to bone-white
board house ranches,
tumbled down.*

*Waist high through manzanita,
Through sticky, prickly, crackling
gold dry summer grass.*

*Deer trails lead to water,
Lead sideways all ways
Narrowing down to one best path –
And split –
And fade away to nowhere.
Deer trails slide under freeways
slip into cities
swing back and forth in crops and orchards
run up the sides of schools!*

*Deer spoor and crisscross dusty tracks
Are in the house: and coming out the walls:*

And deer bound through my hair.

3. PRAYER FOR THE GREAT FAMILY

Gratitude to Mother Earth, sailing through night and day –
and to her soil: rich, rare, and sweet
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Plants, the sun-facing light-changing leaf
and fine root-hairs; standing still through wind
and rain; their dance is in the flowing spiral grain
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Air, bearing the soaring Swift and the silent
Owl at dawn. Breath of our song
clear spirit breeze
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Wild Beings, our brothers, teaching secrets,
freedoms, and ways; who share with us their milk;
self-complete, brave, and aware
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Water: clouds, lakes, rivers, glaciers;
holding or releasing; streaming through all
our bodies salty seas
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to the Sun: blinding pulsing light through
trunks of trees, through mists, warming caves where
bears and snakes sleep – he who wakes us –
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to the Great Sky
who holds billions of stars – and goes yet beyond that
–
beyond all powers, and thoughts
and yet is within us –
Grandfather Space.
The Mind is his Wife.

so be it.

4. THE WILD MUSHROOM

*Well the sunset rays are shining
Me and Kai have got our tools
A basket and a trowel
And a book with all the rules*

*Don't ever eat Boletus
If the tubemouths they are red
Stay away from the Amanitas
Or brother you are dead*

*Sometimes they're already rotten
Or the stalks are broken off
Where the deer have knocked them over
While turning up the duff*

*We set out in the forest
To seek the wild mushroom
In shapes diverse and colorful
Shining through the woodland gloom*

*If you look out under oak trees
Or around an old pine stump
You'll know a mushroom's coming
By the way the leaves are humped*

*They send out multiple fibers
Through the roots and sod
Some make you mighty sick they say
Or bring you close to God*

*So here's to the mushroom family
A far-flung friendly clan
For food, for fun, for poison
They are a help to man.*