

Poetry Series

Lindsay Smith
- poems -

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Lindsay Smith(December 16,1939)

Born & educated in New Zealand. Played in Brass Bands from 9 years of age. Taught myself to play piano. Learned cello & started writing poetry seriously in HS

Qualified as a teacher in Christchurch, NZ. Studied singing with Arthur Bell. Music @ Otago Uni. Played bassoon for many years. Worked as a solo piano player in bars & restaurants. Played in pit orchestras & backed performing artists in various venues. Vocal coach for many stage shows. Taught in outback Australia, Singapore, Nuigini. Read widely including about the arts & anthropology of Oceania, Asia, India, China. Taijiquan player since 1971. Sketch & paint - see 'artslant.' Have been doing taijiquan & qigong 40+ years. Sometimes I return to NZ to visit relatives & to walk in the mountains.

Accordion In The Metro

In 2002 I was in Paris for a couple of days. My wife & daughter let me loose. They wanted to look at shops & so I left early at dawn to walk around & have a look at that great city.

I got lost & found a few times & had to try out the few French words I could remember from the 3rd form. On the way home at the end of an exhilarating day & I went into the Metro to catch a ride back to the Arch DT which was near our hotel in Victor Hugo 'street.'

I was walking thru the tunnel & heard an excellent accordion player. He finished playing some French tunes as I was approaching. Then he switched to Bach's Toccata & Fugue in D minor. I stood close to the wall & listen as people hurried past.

A year or so later I saw an SBS documentary on TV called 'DOWN UNDER PARIS' about Australians in living Paris who were working as buskers or selling their paintings on the street.

I was sitting there engrossed when I heard the accordion player. That sounds familiar I thought, 'yes that's him. I watched him play, he was excellent, ' & there I was standing close to the wall listening wearing the black jacket I'd bought in Switzerland.

I asked google for the film maker's email & I wrote a note to Richard Snashall asking if I could buy his dvd. I told him that it was me in the background in his movie. I recalled vaguely that there had been someone crouched down with a video camera while I was listening.

When Richard sent me the dvd he said that he thought I was a Parisian on his way home when he filmed me standing there. When I got the dvd it had a note,

'Hi Lindsay, Here's some bonus raw footage I dug out in addition to Down Under Paris. regards, Richard.

Lindsay Smith

Blue Rinse

'I am one of those people who let's life wash over me'
an old classmate said that to me after rehearsal
at the Playhouse in the early 60s

we were sitting in the stalls in the half dark
the thick padded old seats squeaked as we breathed
I think I may gone along just to chat her up

I had no interest in the play at all
just noticed her name on the billboard
& on impulse went in looking for her
so long ago now I don't even remember her name

what she said that afternoon has kept floating
around in my head, popping up periodically
an enduring echo from the past
dissolved into a backlog of peculiar memories

her face, the smell & shape of her young body
her fine repertoire of gestures & smiles are gone

perhaps she was wise beyond her years
sometimes I wonder if she memorized that line
& loved to swirl it around in her mouth

that day I just happened to be around to catch it
that day I got more than I bargained for

Lindsay Smith

Dog Food

Sunday mid morning we put some food in the car & were about to leave & my wife reminded me that we were to take the skinny stray puppy with us. Kimbe 1976 on the Island of West New Britain. Our back fence was the jungle & the skinny runt had appeared out of the jungle a few days before & started eating some of our dog's food.

Justice didn't mind but we didn't want a mangy dog hanging around our place so we were going to take him for a ride. Justice was a huge black dog. We'd been given him in Mt Hagen. He had arrived safely in Finschafen where we stayed for 6 months & he had got over to Kimbe safely & moved in with us after a boat ride. He was a calm adaptable fellow.

We drove thru the spread out township. A few shops most of them painted a particular shade of brownish orange to closely match the colour of bettle nut spittle. I have chewed the nut a few times & it's ok. I suppose.

The locals especially the elderly love chewing bettle & they spit anywhere & everywhere. The bettle palm is beautiful slender elegant like an oversized green bamboo. I tried to bring some plants back into Australia but customs confiscated them.

We have a few young palms growing in the garden now but I wish I could have planted clumps of bettle nuts many years ago.

That afternoon we were going to Robert's place. Robert Lee was a Chinese sole trade in a small community. His trade store fronted on to a grassed area large enough to play a game of footy, but there were no posts at that time.

A pretty sweet blonde Australian girl & her 2 young blonde daughters had moved in with Robert a few years before. The girls played nicely with our 3 year old daughter so it was always a pleasure going there for lunch & a chat.

We still have photos of the girls in our family album. Robert turned the diesel generator on to keep the beer & frozen goods cold. It was bloody noisy when he did that & that killed the conversation.

That was the signal for an upturn in business & so it was time for us to go. My wife said, 'we've got to get rid of that dog on the way home.' Robert said, 'what dog? ' So we showed him.

I opened the lid & he had a look at the boney young thing & agreed that it wasn't much of a specimen. He said, 'that's fine. It will fatten up good.' He shouted out in pidgin & some of the locals showed an interest.

He shook my hand & went back into his store. Young men were carrying cartons back to their village. A young boy came over & I gave him the string & he led the pup around.

An old woman lifted up her long skirt & began collecting contributions. My wife was delighted as she likes money. I got into the car & said, 'this is bullshit. The dog isn't worth money. And these people have got buggar all.

I'm not taking their money.' My wife thought the whole situation was funny & she started laughing. Robert had shot through so he didn't know what was going on.

Soon enough the old woman with her dress full of coins & notes came to my car door offering payment. She had the young boy & puppy with her. He must have been her grandson.

They had collected quite a lot of cash. If Robert had been present he would have handed it over. I looked at the old woman.

She had an earnest look on her face as if to say, is this enough? I thought about it. I thought well, I suppose I could take token payment so I said, '20 toya enough.'

She looked puzzled. I said again, '20 toya enough.' She couldn't believe what she was hearing. The young boy reached into her skirt & solemnly passed me 20 toya.

I nodded. The deal was done. The old woman took a few seconds to register what had happened & then began to skip & dance & sing, '20 toya enup, 20 toya enup.'

I started up the car & she whirled in front of us & the people seated on the grass got up & danced & sang with her. We left the whole crowd dancing & singing.

Maybe they still tell their story about how they got a puppy for fattening for only 20 cents.

Lindsay Smith

Gliding

gliding spontaneously without reason or desire
no thought of being right or anything else
herons skimming over water
signwriters painting a banner
or the master butcher dressing a beast
feather brush blade pen are all the same in the end

Lindsay Smith

Hagen Magistrate

In 1975 my wife & daughter of 2 years & I went to Mt Hagen, Papua New Guinea. Locals in that area only saw their first European after WW2. We'd met Andrew Kei, in Port Morseby @ the Government accommodation.

We invited Andrew to bring his family for a meal soon after we arrived. He brought his wife & his mother to our place. His wife spoke English but his mother only spoke the local language.

Andrew was from the first group of young men who had been to high school in Hagen & because he'd done well academically he had been away to study law & had returned to serve his community.

Some of his judgements upset people & his car was often stoned. The police vehicles, 4WDs were often stoned too.

Andrew's mother sat on the floor with our daughter who was crying & spoke to her in the local language gently. I asked Andrew what his mother was saying.

I noticed that his mother has some digits missing from her fingers as he translated & I asked what happened.

His mother realised that he was translating what she was saying so she explained that when Andrew's father had died she had taken an axe & cut off the first digit of her left thumb & she went on to explain that she had chopped off other digits when she lost various other members of her family.

We often stopped to talk with Andrew's wife & mother when we went to the open market to buy produce & we were well accepted by the locals.

I usually carried our daughter on my shoulders. One day when we were in the market she asked, 'daddy, why are the ladies touching my legs? ' I said, without thinking, 'that's to see if you'd be good to eat.'

Lindsay Smith

Horace

dedicated to Bill Robinson

because he would have smiled.
When I was a kid in a country
the inspector of schools came to visit.
He called our sweet lady teacher
an excellent unit.
She didn't smile at that..
He called the girls Mary & the boys Horace.
He said that, 'Mary was the mother of god'
& 'Horace was a great Latin poet
who was alive before the time of Christ.'
He wrote those names on the black board,
but when he talked to us he called us
Mary & Horrors because he said
he didn't have time to remember our names.
He called the boys Horrors
every time with a grin
& the girls were required to curtsy
when they answered.
Our lovely teacher did not smile at that.
We all loved her very much.
I think she thought
although she didn't dare to say so in those days
that the inspector of schools
was just a smart arse.

Lindsay Smith

Landscape & A Girl

around these clay creased basins
trees lie white & weathered
 alive they roar like surf
& in the hearth crackle

moths strike against the window
 my glass is empty
but I cannot get up
 & disturb your soliloquy

merino hoggets skip over the hill after shearing
 we leant on the rail your hand bag dangling

men waved from the wharf
 where you mused staring at water

that sad bright eyed woman
 & onion flowers

we parted & I had talked too much
 & hardly held your hand
for fear the butterfly
 might emerge too soon
falling in flight

1966

Lindsay Smith

Lover's Pendant

Lifted up by a slight breeze she spun off
floating away like fine chaff
but he with his feet stuck in the web
dangled upside down for many oblivious nights
eventually emerging to slide smoothly down
a single silken strand of gossamer
on to the Panama Gold passion fruit vine
whose tendrils latch on & twine around
the neem tree's delicate stems
leaving the sweet musky
granadilla flowers
well alone

Lindsay Smith

Nature's Way

sun flowers rise elegantly at dawn
saluting the sun
their faces follow our golden orb all day
crossing the fields
glowing radiant majestic

when dusk comes humid winds ripple thru
making the turgid stalks sway
they dance
bob their heads
bump & kiss
a shadow play for the boundary trees
& the streaked violet sky

sunflowers die off in autumn
the strong stalks shrink
collapse
turn black
large leaves curl in
dried seed heads hang down
grotesque
so very beautiful in death

some say the dried seed pods
are crowns of thorns
the withered stalks bodies of christ
if that is true jesus has died every season
since his crucifixion & sprouted in spring

8/2008

Lindsay Smith

On Sunday

On Sunday afternoon May 19 1968

I saw a senior citizen leak
in the gutter in Montreal Street Christchurch
opposite Pearson's Laboratory
& more or less
behind the police kennels.

She had her coat & dress hoisted up
& her brown handbag held clear
as the stream drained
evenly through her underwear
like straining jelly from apples.

A slight steam rose at her feet
& her lips were pursed
like the fanny of an old ewe.

I recall little else as it is not easy
to observe some sights.

Lindsay Smith

Opulent Riddles For The Fairies

to a dandy lion
the rosy race no long supreme goes off
so little slight admirings become
polished blackened imagined gladiators
gone to sugar daddy
soon kissing the sweet clod
shot thru with literal fluff on the nose
& there is no better way to go
air wigs
a pate full of skaters glower
on flying bent surly white
offer snap shine first like sharp sentence
cupola copula cornucopia
well blow the doodle off a sticker's natural low
carbunkle spread
birdie breath flows freely
on this carmelite daze`
speeding the gratis pulsator
unto golden tensor
beautifully broiled
a new tome filament in pod
with corbeau drawn on the outer

Lindsay Smith

Out!

Shoulder Under Arm Put

Breezes Cleanser

Twig Sole War

Infernal Come Bastion

Ensigns wearing big shoes

osculate aside

Decide to Kick Off

& in bare feet leap first thing

on frigid blades

1962

Lindsay Smith

Partyline

sir jack threw up his bucket throat to the garlic moon
crying 'our brains dropped out the back passage'

& his hoarse tribe went up the purple onion
gangbangers all riding vicki's high level symphonic flusher
a resounding pubic furcate

birds sang in rupture
cockchafers are into our flora

& the hard thing whisking missus muckle off her cloven toes
said with feeling, 'I hope your chickens turn to emus
& kick your foul house down'

& she grasping the fundament
with piscatorial shivers of intensity
shouted a handle for the biggest motion
put upon the table

little boy up with his horn & blew come
& at the crunch of daylight
the pianist flaked on ragtime

Lindsay Smith

Rutting Aura

per sepia
a paradozy to acanaemics

up again in the heat of spring
& the grass was parched last summer
apple pied the autumn windrow
mashed pears to boot & I sigh

I see she tires of the fly moving over
her well lit body & would die
before having another fiddle in it

the mouse shifts about in the cupboard
flicking its pause to the ceiling
of that unplanished self

shall I tire myself down in oblivion
lying around roaring in dirt
Sweaty voice my sorrow
crack another curse
for my love is a black clock
will crow & must feed it

Dogbolt bring
on the marching girls
who with Hairyhot
are firm starters
like weasel so often said
if the stallion doesn't go on about it
there isn't much point

bursting is the very purple blackberry
they were always juicy
by the septic tank
scruffy that nice like brush
'stop mauling me you dirty old man'
the mouse did its bit in the cupboard
so you'd better be in the next rush

Lindsay Smith

Sponge

the chatter of children
on the morning of Christ's emergence
& a cat scratching at the door
seeking the comfort of flames
is the beauty in being

& to know & see
yellow petals flutter in the sun
the knobbed pine dropp its cones
when bid by the wind

not for the taste of hemlock sweet
I dream the things that are
that move
that touch me
as a needle thrust to the bone

Lindsay Smith

Stiff Wind

We stumbled often on the stubble from sunrise until dusk
grabbing fescue sheaves under each arm
standing back to the wind
to thrust the stalk butts into the earth
six, eight, ten, even twelve together
to dry out for a few days.

Periodically we raised our heads
looking out for the farm truck
& Auntie May with the stacks of
buttered scones, tomato sandwiches
mugs of hot tea with many repeats
& as many spoonfuls of honey as you like
ducking off thru the fence afterward
for a leak or a bog.

Then long back breaking days
forking sheaves to the mill
a knotted handkerchief over mouth & nose
with chaff & fine dust flying,
'just keep them coming along steady
young fellow, ' Ralph on the bagging shouted
Too quick & you'll run out of puff
or maybe jam the rollers up.

Back to the hut with dust in our ears, up the nose
to take turns soaking in the same hot water
rinsing clobber in the bathwater &
throwing over the barbed wire fence
to catch the drying Southland wind thru the night
a few beers & the evening feed
hitting the sack & snoring until morning
& another whack at it.

remembering Hamilton Burn 1956

I was 16 that year & got six shillings an hour.

Lindsay Smith

The Don & 951

951 Gaspra,
a Flora Asteroid
2 million years old
orbits our Sun between Mars and Jupiter.

Its rocky metallic surface
is pocked with impact craters.

Saint Romuald born in 951
screwed himself stupid as a youth
& fled when he saw his daddy Sergius
kill his opposite in a duel.

Rommy became a monk & wrote,
'Empty yourself completely.
Sit waiting like the chick who tastes nothing
& eats nothing but what her mother brings him.'
He got canon's eyes for that
& did very well in real estate.

Emperor Shizong
also known as Wuyu
was a drunk who liked to hunt.

Wuyu took to the field in 951
& stopped an advance from the South.

Wuyu was killed
by one of his own officers after the battle
because he was a bloody nuisance
& stuffed up the battle plan.

Grigor Narekatsi
born 951 was an Armenian monk,
poet,
mystical philosopher

& theologian.

His father Khosrov was Archbishop.

Grigor wrote,
'on exposing the unseen,
on the disclosure of secrets,
on laying open the cover up.'

Donald Rumsfeld,
champion of 951 Aspartame,
architect of the Iraq War,
the bright light behind blacks sites,
the mediaeval dungeons of our times said,
in an interview with the New York Times,
'Oh my goodness gracious me,
we can know an awful lot
of what is going on in this world
by punching a mouse on its nose,

'I'm standing here,
doing something & I think,
'What in the world am I doing here?
It's a big surprise.'

The Don, once
'ferocious in pursuing what he wants'
now lives in an adobe house
across from a working dairy farm.

His family has horses,
a donkey,
a mule,
cats,
and Reggie the dog.

Joyce his missus said,
'Don has the Reaganesque fixation
with clearing brush and chopping wood.'

They ride,

ski,
hike,
fish,
& skate on the dairy farm pond.

The dead
the refugees
& maimed of Iraq
& Afghanistan
& all those held by the agency
& tortured in secrecy
will be wishing the Don
peace & contentment in his retirement.

Lindsay Smith

To My Grand Daughter

At three weeks we took you out
to Sizzlers to celebrate
& you cried most of the time
so Grandma leaving her dinner
walked around jiggling you up & down.

When your mother said
that your face was the same colour
as your hot pink pants
you cried even louder.

I said that you understood perfectly
that you had been here before
we all looked at each other knowingly
& your mother, auntie & me agreed that it was so.

Grandma was busy with you
so she wasn't listening to all of that
but when she sat down she said that you had
a big talk to her minutes after you were born
moving you mouth expressively
looking around the nursery room
telling her that getting here had been hard work
& you were glad to have grandma there
to share that important information.

Lindsay Smith

Trout

Don't mind the mind,
mine is empty much of the time.
An empty mind is full of potential.
Trout sat opposite me on the train.
We were strangers passing the time just talking.
She said, ' Speed is Everything.'
She stretch out her tattooed fingers
She had etched
TROUT on her right hand
SPEED on her left hand
Sometimes I think about her.
If she's not dead she'll probably be a granny.
If you meet her say HELLO from me.
Love her smiling eyes.

Lindsay Smith

Wall Street Blues

Jukebox on the wall play us the number one the hit song,
'The American Eagle has no brains it flies into walls.'
Sarah the most mysterious person he hardly knew
except for her outrageously wacky hat said,
'this head automatically turns off any thing in bad taste.'

Then when she had nailed everyone's rapt attention
announced in that stentorious voice,
'you can tell people about witchcraft but you can't lead them to it.'
That set everyone with stock & bonds back on their high heels.

Jukebox on the wall play us a great tune or go to hell.
A phone went off. 'Sarah here.'
The Jukebox blared that rap crap backing while she chanted,
'If you don't possess a purple tiffany box you can't expect to get a yellow ribbon.'

Oh Jukebox on the wall tell me why,
why do American Eagles fly into walls and knock their brains out? '
Sarah got off the phone jiggling like a peppermint teabag &
shouted out to all in sundry,
'I need to have a pee desperately, '
& she left right left right left right left with Staggers and her cubs
following in single file tails between their legs.

Jukebox on the wall when will the American Eagles hit the wall? '
With his last gasp & in extreme agony he wheezed,
'The American Eagle has no brains it has hit the wall.'

Unwanted, uncared for tortured by his tremendous success
George was deflated that his crocodile skin boots
went mouldy in the repair shop
but his lonesome lootbags dangle safely offshore.

I remember his last wish & testament
was to expire with perfect plastic teeth.
Those shining eyes glowed like terminal fireballs
as he fried in his own juices with extreme prejudice in the updraft.

Jukebox on the wall play us all a heroic bugle call.
The monster python swallowed a whole sheep
& never spat out any shredded wool.
Jukebox on the wall a song to aid digestion, if you please.

After those farewell remarks Sarah kept pressing the END continuously
but it did not END.
Heaven does not kick in until you're dead.

Jukebox on the wall I am tired of poets.
Give me history.

Lindsay Smith

Where Is Your Place?

That day the tiny flies that are the native honey bees
licked our skin for salt & it tickled.

So the kids searched for the hive high in a tree
screaming with delight when it was found.

Dinny walked straight up the smooth white trunk
& carefully along the limb with a short axe,
sat down & wrapped his legs for purchase.

He chopped away, chips flying down
while the kids chanted & danced encouragement.

The limb crashed & the hive dropped to the ground.

We all dug in & ate the sweet black honey
swallowing bees mixed with sticks & leaves.

Dinny waved & went back to camp
& the kids took off in another direction.

I followed their fading voices.

When I crashed out of the bush
blinding light
firm white salt pan
reflecting the glare & the clear blue sky,
Bare, brilliant, overwhelming.

Absolute, utter silence.

No bird calls.

No wildlife.

No vegetation.

No footprints that I could see.
Only Frog hill in the distance.

The kids far away ahead, big girls carrying the little ones'

As I walked I could see them merged into a huddle.
bowed faces staring down looking at the ground.

I joined the huddle & bent over to look
at the spot in the centre of the circle.

I saw the shadows,
the texture of the sand,
& our feet.

I said, 'What is this place? '
'This Eunice place, '
someone said.

Friday by the river I said to Benjamin aged 6,
'What is your guardian animal?
'Water goanna, ' sir, I'll show you.
Benjamin was Dinny's boy.
He waved & took me to his place.

We climbed up on to a fallen tree by the river.

He pointed to a hollow, 'my mother dropped me here.
She had her feet like this.
He stood astride the hollow & groaned.

The water goanna was watching me come out.'

The big kids looked for crocodile signs.
They nodded 'nothing' & smiled.

The girls swam in long missionary dresses,
fabric trailing through the water.

Some kids plastered themselves with mud
& lay in the sun to bake.

When dry they leapt from trees into the river
shouting at the top of their voices.

Lindsay Smith