

Poetry Series

**Michael Lee Johnson**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2014

**Publisher:**

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

# Michael Lee Johnson(1947)

## About the Poet

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era: now known as the Illinois poet, from Itasca, IL. Today he is a poet, freelance writer, photographer who experiments with poetography (blending poetry with photography) , and small business owner in Itasca, Illinois, who has been published in more than 880 small press magazines in 27 countries, he edits 10 poetry sites. Michael Lee Johnson has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize award for poetry 2015. Michael is the author of *The Lost American: From Exile to Freedom* (136 pages book) , several chapbooks of poetry, including *From Which Place the Morning Rises* and *Challenge of Night and Day*, and *Chicago Poems*. He also has over 78 poetry videos on YouTube.

Links:

Follow Michael Lee Johnson On:

Facebook:

Twitter:

:

# Carl Sandburg, Idols In The Sand, And Galesburg Shacks: By Michael Lee Johnson

Idols are what idols appear to be.  
Idols are men that idols are.  
They are the sleepwalkers,  
the self-styled hobos,  
saints in small villages people living alone.  
Birthright of saviors, railroad men, famous poets.  
Birthright of little places, big hearts,  
speakers of cold skillets and dainty bedrooms.  
Folk songs fall, black and white,  
divided cracks celebrated brick streets.  
They form modest communities,  
quiet spaces, momentous churches  
named my denominations and breed?  
rail tracks divide their ideologies, brands  
of beer, run down shacks divide their lives.  
Property vultures, ex Maytag mongrels'  
Maytag treason, traders of trade, traitors to Mexico,  
walk simple steps away.  
Jobbers walk and jobs move away.  
Streets quiet lights, slate deserted  
house shacks of many races abandoned, colors  
form rows PMS color charts leading to his birthplace,  
folk songs, Swedish heritage, Remembrance Rock,  
savior of a poetic dream born in a slum.  
Just a roadside museum,  
mile and a half walk from downtown,  
summer sweat, drenching summer heat,  
Galesburg railroad days June 2010, ending?  
beginning humidity, snippets of beer bottles  
tossed around, Saturday night drunks  
lie in flush-untailored grass.  
A three-room shack, half-pint bedroom,  
curtains merge the window with sunrays,  
more summer heat.  
Idols grow as children, their ambitions?  
toss them away.  
Idols are what idols appear to be.

Idols are men that idols are.

Michael Lee Johnson is a poet and freelance writer and small business owner of custom imprinted promotional products and apparel: , from Itasca, Illinois. He is heavily influenced by: Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, and Allen Ginsberg. This poem was inspired by a love of Carl Sandburg's poetry and life. The poem is based on a real travel experience to Galesburg, IL in June 2010, 'Railroad Days, ' and developed from the vivid pictures and images taken by Carol Marcus, a devoted friend of many years. This poem won 2nd place in the 2011 Big Write, Galesburg, IL. adult poetry contest, sponsored by Galesburg Public Library.

Michael Lee Johnson

# Charley Plays A Tune (V5)

Charley Plays a Tune (V5)

By Michael Lee Johnson

Crippled, in Chicago,  
with arthritis  
and Alzheimer's,  
in a dark rented room,  
Charley plays  
melancholic melodies  
on a dust-filled  
harmonica he  
found abandoned  
on a playground of sand years ago,  
by a handful of children playing on monkey bars.  
He hears bedlam when he buys fish at the local market  
and the skeleton bones of the fish show through.  
He lies on his back, riddled with pain,  
pinecones fill his pillows and mattress,  
praying to Jesus and rubbing his rosary beads  
Charley blows tunes out his  
celestial instrument  
notes float through the open window  
touch the nose of summer clouds.  
Charley overtakes himself with grief  
and is ecstatically alone.  
Charley plays a solo tune.

-2010-

(R-2014)

Michael Lee Johnson

# Dead Grey Wolf Skins (V2)

Introduction: Aldo Leopold (January 11,1887 -April 21,1948) was an American author, scientist, ecologist, forester, environmentalist, and conservationist. In the 1920-1930 eras, he moved to the Baraboo, Wisconsin area. The grey wolf was viewed as a predator, to be killed and sold for their skins. Even then, the grey wolf population was diminishing. Leopold help restore the value and dignity of the grey wolf to Wisconsin farmers and residents.

1935.

Dead grey wolf skins hang  
on white clotheslines across Baraboo, Wisconsin  
the dark surface, dirty old shack, side of the moon,  
that only exists in memories hung high, long before.  
Hunters in the past did their job well,  
sold skins, collected a few bucks,  
increased deer for hunting, saved cattle,  
decreased fear, told tales, short stories, adventures.

The grey wolf face now emergent,  
opens his mouth wide in the safety  
open in blue sky.  
Shows his white teeth against  
background of black sky, shadow,  
hears thunder again, releases  
fireflies at night, monarch butterflies  
during the day, guts down pine tree spikes.  
He walks once again over landscapes of turquoises.  
He consumes dirt road dust, tracks trails,  
114.4 miles from Milwaukee to Baraboo.  
His keen eyes are sharp for growth  
of skyscraper, Pabst brewery building.  
Traveling side roads over many years brings him to the present.  
No more violators, hunters with guns, fake Jesus people  
slender in His bathrobe Christ repeats two fishes,5 loaves  
and the wolf survives.

Aldo Leopold feeding inmate in small jail cells,  
only kills a few wolves for research.  
Aldo a Saint of conservation a consumer of cigarettes and butts,  
heart wings of doves attached, broken, stroke fire, a neighbor field

heart stroke drops into history.

Michael Lee Johnson

# Gingerbread Lady (V5)

Gingerbread Lady (V5)

By Michael Lee Johnson

Gingerbread lady,  
no sugar or cinnamon spice;  
years ago, arthritis and senility took their toll.  
Crippled mind moves in then out, like an old sexual adventure  
blurred in an imagination of fingertip thoughts.  
Who remembers the characters?  
There was George, her lover, near the bridge at the Chicago River:  
she missed his funeral; her friends were there.  
She always made feather-light of people dwelling on death,  
but black and white she remembers well.  
The past is the present; the present is forgotten.  
Who remembers Gingerbread Lady, the way it is, the way it was?  
Sometimes lazy-time tea with a twist of lime-  
sometimes drunk-time screwdriver with a twist of clarity.  
She walks in scandals.  
Her live-in house cleaner smirks as Gingerbread Lady gums her food,  
false teeth forgotten in a custom-imprinted cup  
with water, vinegar, and ginger.  
Years ago, arthritis and senility took their toll.  
Ginger forgot to rise out of bed today no sugar or cinnamon toast.  
No, no more Ginger.

-2010-

(R-2014)

Michael Lee Johnson



# Harvest Time (V8)

Harvest Time (V8)

By Michael Lee Johnson

A Métis lady, drunk?  
hands folded, blanketed as in prayer  
over a large brown fruit basket  
naked of fruit, no vine, no vineyard  
inside? approaches the Edmonton,  
Alberta adoption agency.  
There are only spirit gods  
inside her empty purse.

Inside the basket, an infant,  
restrained from life,  
with a fruity winesap apple  
wedged like a teaspoon  
of autumn sun  
inside its mouth.

A shallow pool of tears mounts  
in his native baby blue eyes.  
Snuffling, the mother offers  
a slim smile, turns away.  
She slithers voyeuristically  
through near slum streets  
and alleyways  
looking for drinking buddies  
to share a hefty pint  
of applejack wine.

-2007-

(R-2014)

Michael Lee Johnson

# I Know From My Bed (V4)

I Know From My Bed

By Michael Lee Johnson (Version 4)

(Photo available, originally from Tan Hinh Thuc)

Sometimes I feel  
like a worn out old man  
with clown facial wrinkles.  
When I stare out my window  
at the snow falling  
near our bed,  
my back to yours,  
reflecting on my pain.  
ignoring yours. I know  
I isolate your love.

-2013-

Michael Lee Johnson

# If I Were Young Again (V3)

If I Were Young Again (V3)

By Michael Lee Johnson

Piecemeal summer dies:  
long winter spreads its blanket again.

For ten years I have lived in exile,  
locked in this rickety cabin, shoulders  
jostled up against open Alberta sky.

If I were young again, I'd sing of coolness of high  
mountain snow flowers, sprinkle of night glow-blue meadows;  
I would dream and stretch slim fingers into distant nowhere,  
yawn slowly over endless prairie miles.

The grassland is where in summer silence grows;  
in evening eagles spread their wings  
dripping feathers like warm honey.

If I were young again, I'd eat pine cones, food of birds,  
share meals with wild wolves;  
I'd have as much dessert as I wanted,  
reach out into blue sky, lick the clouds off my fingertips.

But I'm not young anymore and my thoughts tormented  
are raw, overworked, sharpened with misery  
from torture of war and childhood.  
For ten years now I've lived locked in this unstable cabin,

inside rush of summer winds,  
outside air beaten dim with snow.

-1985-  
(R-11-12)

Michael Lee Johnson

## If You Find No Poem (V3)

If you find  
no poem on  
your doorstep  
in the morning,  
no paper, no knock on your door,  
your life poorly edited  
but no broken dashes  
or injured meter-

if you do not wear white  
satin dresses late in life  
embroidered with violet  
flowers on the collar;  
nor do you have  
burials daily  
across main street-

if no one whispers  
in your ear, Emily Dickinson-  
you feel alone-  
but not reclusive-  
the sand child  
still sleeping in your eyes-  
wiping your tears away-

if you find  
no poem on  
your doorstep-  
you know  
you are not from New England.

Michael Lee Johnson

# Missing Of The Birds

Missing of the Birds

By Michael Lee Johnson

Keep my journal short.

Just review January through March.

Life is a dig deep snow on my sorrow.

Bare bones of naked sparrows,

beneath my balcony, lie lifeless.

The few survivors huddle in bushes.

Gone, gone is kitchen bowl that holds the seeds.

Sparrows cannot get inside my refrigerator door

nor shop late at Wal-Mart during winter hours-

get away with it.

I drink dated milk. I host rehearsals of childhood.

Sip Mogen David Concord Wine with Diet 7Up.

Down sweet molasses and pancake butter.

I give in to condominium Polish demands.

My neighbor's parties, loud blast language.

I am weak in the Jesus feeding of the poor.

I now merge day with night and sleep

avoid my shame and guilt.

I try clean, my thoughts of shell spotted snow.

I see fragments, no more feeding of the birds.

-2014-

Michael Lee Johnson

# Rod-Strokes Survival, With A Deadly Hammer (V3)

Rod-Strokes Survival, With a Deadly Hammer (V3)

By Michael Lee Johnson

Rebecca fantasizes that life is a lottery ticket or a pull of a lever,  
that one of the gambling chips in her pocket is a winner or the slot machines a redeemer,  
but life itself is not real that is strictly for the mentally insane at the Elgin Mental Institution.

She gambles her savings away on a riverboat  
stuck in mud on a riverbank, the Grand Victoria, in Elgin, Illinois.

Her bare feet are always propped up on wooden chair,  
a cigarette droops from her lips like morning fog.

She always dreams of traveling, not nightmares.

But she cannot overcome, overcome  
the terrorist ordeal of the German siege of Leningrad.

She is a foreigner now; she is a foreigner for good.

Her first husband died after spending a lifetime in prison  
with stinging nettles in his toes and feet; the second  
husband died of hunger when there were no more rats  
to feed on, after many fights in prison for the last remains.

What does a poet know of suffering?

Rebecca rod strokes survival with a deadly mallet.

She gambles nickels, dimes, quarters, tokens toss away,  
living a penniless life for grandchildren who hardly know her name.

Rebecca fantasizes that life is a lottery ticket or the pull of a lever.

-2007-

(R- 2014)

Michael Lee Johnson

# Schizophrenia Night

Schizophrenia Night

Devoted to John Nash, A Beautiful Mind Movie,2001)

By Michael Lee Johnson

I am a chalkboard computer brain.  
I have updated drawn raw  
images even the classroom  
students cannot see, hear, nor understand.  
They sit quietly in Disneyland  
wondering about my eccentricities  
I capture there stillness, then I speak.  
I am the professor, special agent of government  
dream tracer of crossroad puzzles.  
Photographic memory in private rooms,  
did I hear a critic, erase  
destroy dissociative thoughts.  
I walk out unsteady in disbelief.  
Is there a shadow of storybooks following me?

I am a genius; I know who I am.  
I spend nights in formula construction  
drawing full color images of my brain,  
percentages of gray matter lost.

I stick my ego to the eagle of the sky.

When on a high on an airplane, self-love,  
full bloom, I keep my enemies at bay.  
I shelter the skeletons of thought.

I trust Jesus because His image is stable,  
every group I have ever known says 'The Lord's Prayer.'  
Even then, new members leave, disappear, I hear what they said.  
I had an MRI to trace all my youthful abuses.  
There were no images there but voices I remember.  
I cast there shadows, audio, visual for show, in the background.  
In time, they quiet their voices. I walk beyond their images.  
I pass on, they still screenplay.

You have to stretch lean, refer to sanity,  
drink Asian tea, smooth out hallucinated sounds  
before that stage, I took that Nobel prize,  
even before, I forgave you.

I am weak at this end.

-2014-

Michael Lee Johnson