

Ordinary
wonders
to
rejoice
in

A collection of poems
celebrating everyday wonders

Odes to Ordinary Things

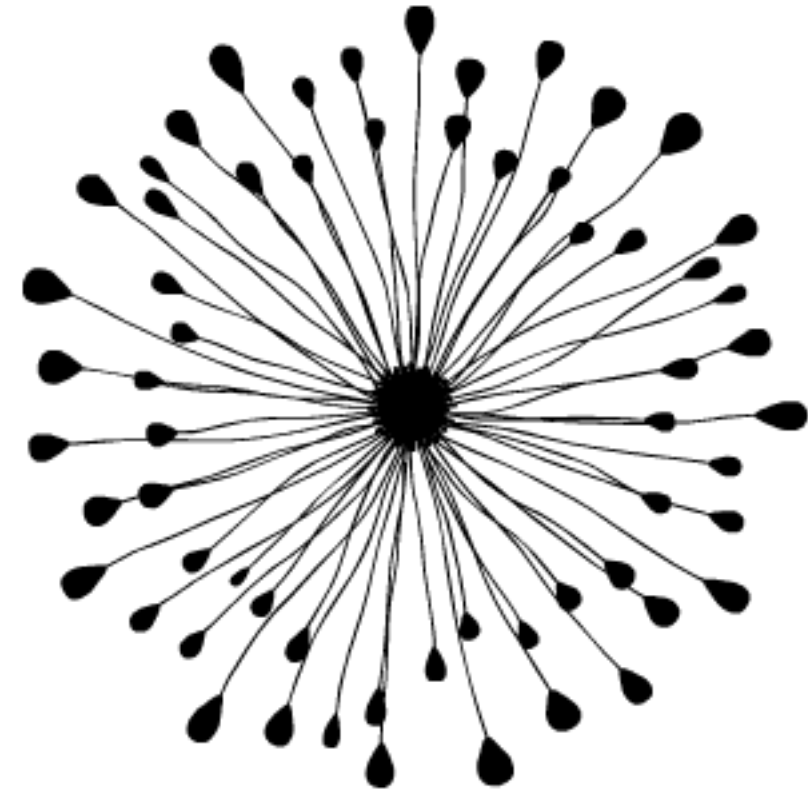
A collection of poems
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Odes to Ordinary Things
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Dedicated to the flowering of gratefulness



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Introduction

Some years ago a neighbor gave me a gift—a collection of “odes to common things” by Pablo Neruda. What I didn’t immediately realize was that she had given me, not just the gift of a book, but the gift of seeing “common” things with fresh and celebratory eyes. Neruda writes playfully and lovingly of lemons, salt, socks, a box of tea! And in doing so, he heightens our attention and appreciation for the everyday wonders which fill our days and lives. Odes (themselves miraculous) bring life, depth and wonder to all manner of things.

Inspired by this experience, we, at A Network for Grateful Living (gratefulness.org), extended an invitation to our community to submit odes to “ordinary things.” The response was happy and immediate. Our inbox steadily filled with poems celebrating weeds, streetlights, shoes and crickets. There were love letters to a blender bottle, an acorn, slippers, an iPad – even to the veins on the top of someone’s feet! This glimpse into joy elicited by simple things has been a true gift and we are grateful to each one of the authors who expressed their adoration in a buoyantly broad range of styles and focus.

In order to refine the collection for this publication, we called together a small group of authors, editors, and poets—all lovers of poetry. After much thoughtful consideration, along with discussion both playful and serious, the Grateful Ode Appreciation Team (GOAT)—in a process where the poets remained anonymous—selected the twelve odes you see here.

We hope that these odes to ordinary things enchant you, but, perhaps most importantly, we hope that they open your eyes, as ours have been opened, to the myriad wonders that surround us, waiting to be seen and celebrated.

Saoirse McClory
On behalf of A Network for Grateful Living

Ode to 5:30 AM

Only I know, only I
see
the light softly dancing over the
canopy of trees.
Falling softly across the
dew filled grass,
moving up to my window
as the minutes tick past.
Yes, only I see,
For the house yet,
it sleeps.
The dreamers dream while the
soft light caresses.
The day starts to glow
as the night, she undresses.
The cardinals call out
In sheer ecstasy
I share the same song as
They sing it to me
We give ourselves fully,
No other above her
My joy rolling down my face,
Early mornings are my lover.

– Nicki Hayes

Ode to My Bedroom Slippers

They wait patiently beside my bed
Agreeable twin sentries, ready for duty.

They know me so well—the darkened imprint of heels
and each toe worn into the
balding fleece.

They are the first thing my feet search for in the
morning,
Grounding and protection for my midnight shuffles to the
loo.

They are the comfort I seek when I return from the day's
labors,
The ones I turn to as I cast off heels, polished leather,
buckles and laces.

They carry the stains and flaws of familiarity—a splash of
iced coffee, a drip of
toothpaste,
The teething marks of a puppy now grown.
They have logged hundreds of miles but rarely leave
home, these slippers of mine.
Once I forgot and wore them to choir practice.

I sang well that night

– Margaret Faeth

To My Sonic Toothbrush

The caress of his soft bristles,
scalloped for deep, pleasurable, cleaning,

sonic waves pulsating,
thirty-one thousand strokes per minute,

regulator rendering blissful equality
to awaiting molars, bicuspid, incisors.

Magnanimous rechargeable batteries,
enduring up to 2 weeks—alone.

His comely recharger light,
indicating imminent insertion into base.

The stimulation of his handsome non-slip ergonomic grip,
with automatic shutoff timer, singular of purpose,

pleasantly removing plaque, whitening teeth,
improving oral soundness and salubrious checkups,
thwarting disease, saving money,

my sonic toothbrush has enraptured me—
happy hygienist.

– Laura LeHew

Cheese

Whenever I feel ill at ease
I gain great solace eating cheese.
Its flavor, either mild or sharp
Revives the soul and mends the heart.
A slice of Swiss upon my plate
With holes to sit and contemplate
Can stimulate my intellect
And make me feel less circumspect.
A cheddar with a sharpened taste,
May raise sat-fat and thicken waist,
But it can make me feel most fit
When warmed with beer and called Rarebit.
A heated Brie may help control
The dark malaise within my soul,
(But I make sure it comes from France
to never leave the cure to chance.)
To find my way as artisan
I may partake of parmesan,
If grated or cut in a sliver
My Muse creates and I deliver!
But not until I reach my dotage
Will I ingest the cheese called Cottage!

– Joyce Holmes McAllister

An Ode to Silent Poets

You see
the precious gift
of ordinary things
as Pablo Neruda did,
but need no words,
pen or paper,
to bow
to olive oil
to the great night sleep
to the mossy rocks
to the blooming ocotillo
to the perfectly ripe avocado
to everyday heroes
to handwritten letters
to spontaneous laughter
to fresh farm eggs
to the smiling stranger
to the desert's wildflowers
to the world wide web
to bittersweet moments
to afternoon naps
to grey clouds
to slowing down
to stinging nettles
to soft blankets
to strange dreams
to the garbage man
to the graceful death

The simple gifts
your devotional being sees
as you move through life
fills you with that deep warmth
you silently beam out.

And that
is the gift
you are.

– Tesa Silvestre

Ode to the Onion

I open the front door and walk headlong into
the oh so heavenly scent
of onions sautéing on the stove.
Of course, growing up we would have said “frying”
but onions speak all languages.
The aroma is the same
and the groundedness is the same.
It is the subfloor
upon which the precious hardwood is laid,
the canvas
on which the masterpiece is painted,
the staff
on which the opera is charted,
the ink
with which the poem is written,
the bass note
in the broth.

— Susan Whelehan

Ode to the Despised

Praise the shit-eaters,
the revelers in rot,
the chewers of soft wood,
the gorgers of old meat.
Laud the scarab, the fruit fly,
the termite, even the maggot,
reusers and recyclers,
free of revulsion.
Value the vulture, the coyote,
the connoisseurs of carrion,
removers of road kill,
ignorant of arrogance.
Bow to the denizens of destruction,
the jaws and guts of our Earth,
rejoice in their magnificent
selfish service.

– Brigitte Goetze

Tea Break

Take the water, flowing
up a tap from the earth—
old aquifer, luscious remnant
of prehistoric streams, refreshed by rain.

Take the teapot—heavy,
curvaceous—a potter's spin on old clay,
drawing upright the soft mud
into cone then vessel, fired carefully
to stoneware—azure glaze flows
speckling on black; aurora frozen
on night's round bowl. The cup
as small affirmation.

Take the tea – dried orange peel,
anise, ginseng; African rooibos
and chicory, and mint—
Silk Road treasures,
Far-flung fields and groves becoming
Market Spice—the blackened tendrils'
mysterious wanderings
arriving in an ordinary kitchen.

Take a brief block of morning—
sun highlighting the pot and cup;
the kettle, red on a white stove—
take the boiling water
flashing as it fills the pot, the fragrant steam.

Before the tea touches your lips, take a moment
to feel the eons, the miles come together
into your hands—your hands!

Those soft wrinkled cups enfolding
fired clay, holding the steam beneath your nose—
those hands sheened with age, eloquent
of journeys and mornings and years—all of it
coming together.

– Catherine McGuire

The Artichoke

The artichoke sits on my plate
A vegetable that begs debate
The novice may but sit and bristle
when asked to eat the ugly thistle.
The uninformed defy all taste
And call the bud a terrible waste.
But others, like the connoisseur
Or grand gourmand, will all concur
The artichoke of lovely green
Is not a veggie to demean.
To scrape the teeth against its leaf
Brings utter joy, however brief,
And when one bites into the heart
Gastronomy is set apart!
Now, as for me and this debate
I find it wise to abdicate

– Joyce Holmes McAllister

Licorice Amen

My grandmother gave me licorice
as sacrament, a rite of passage
when I was five. She was Kansas Baptist,
no charismatic praiser
subject to froth and ramble
from chancel to pew—for her,
a trace of licorice on the palate
was spiritual as singing
all verses of “Rock of Ages.”
The anise stalks she grew next to the sunflowers
back of her Wichita clapboard
were surety of God’s munificence.
“It’ll clean you out, child,
and it ain’t too sweet.
A little black licorice every day
keeps the Devil’s hounds at bay.”
I believed her then, and now,
no hellhounds on my trail,
the Lord with me, and Sen-Sen
sufficient unto days of brimstone smoke,
I am assured of the good and the plenty
inside each day, Amen.

– Gary Thomas

Ode to My Sleeping Lions Bookends

Fearsome former Kings of Jungle,
Recumbent now in peace you slumber,
your toothless duty: guarding Shakespeare's mighty
works.

Past deeds of kill and plunder
for protection of your lair
now long forgotten, unaware.

Your loins and manly manes in soft repose
as you uphold aright a shelf of prose...
No piercing growls release to warn, defend,
Even Kings fall silent at the end.

— Betty B. Brown

This Moment

I'm smiling because
a million possible alternatives
which would have precluded
this moment we're sharing
didn't happen.
Safe passage through countless intersections
this week;
The absence of calamity
since breakfast;
a thousand breaths received in the last hour,
delivered right on time.
The tapestry of the present moment is,
complete and continuously refreshed
courageous, wholehearted, raw & alive.
Look—here it is, again!

– Howard Olivier

Grateful Acknowledgments

We offer our deep appreciation to the poets featured in this book along with their muses—we are so grateful for the gifts revealed and shared within these pages.

Our thanks go out to Pablo Neruda whose collection of “Odes to Common Things” inspired this project and we offer our heartfelt gratitude to members of the Grateful Ode Appreciation Team (GOAT) for generously sharing their experience, discernment, humor and kindness. Here is the team:

Christi Cox is a writer and editor. Her work has been selected for Penguin’s Best Spiritual Writing of 2010 and has been published in national magazines, journals, and university publications. Her editorial work includes books by the Dalai Lama and other notables.

Jeff Cox retired from nearly 30 years as the head of Snow Lion Publications (now part of Shambhala Publications). He is on the Board of the Paul Brunton Philosophic Foundation and helps with their publications and the paulbrunton.org website.

Jack Hopper, writer and editor, served twice as Tompkins County Poet Laureate, and is presently raking through post-2012 work to bring out a new collection of poetry. It is not yet a garden, but may be by the end of 2017, when the metaphor will take real shape. He is busy, too, with work for Cayuga Lake Books, of which he is a founding member and editor.

After many years as the director of human service agencies, Nina Miller retired in 2007. She published her first novel in 2016, and is now writing short fiction and poetry. She is on the Boards of Cinemapolis, Tompkins County Public Library and Small Comforts; and is a member of the Development Committee of Hospicare and Palliative Care Services.

With grateful hearts,
Saoirse McClory and Margaret Wakeley
On behalf of A Network for Grateful Living

