

# A Few Words

from Jan Carroll

Autumn 2021

## Up

It was a nondescript day sometime in November,  
most of us despondent at the edge of winter.

I was walking with little determination on  
an all-too-familiar trail by the river. And though

the way was not yet mined with sinister ice  
and I did not need to watch where I was going, my gaze,

if you could call it that, was cast down to what was  
more or less below me. I was not in any way scouring

the higher branches for signs of the thrust  
of great wings suddenly lifting.

My eyes must have wandered over toward the source  
of a passing noise, and when, dismal, I got back to looking

at what was right in front of me, there was  
on the asphalt one red feather. So red it seemed improbable,

and I glanced around, wondering if someone was playing a joke,  
having left it there and run to the cover of surrounding brush

to see what I, or anyone, would do. But there was no one,  
and so I thought maybe it might be a broken off part

of a child's toy or possibly had fluttered off and strayed  
from a bright boa worn over the shoulder

of a party-loving woman, or someone putting that on  
like an outfit representative of wilder times. But there was no

red anywhere else all around, so I put it in the pocket of my hold  
and took it home. And there, where I didn't feel any other eyes on me,

and with both the guidebook and Internet images confirming,  
the truth of it being

one real cardinal's feather fell  
upon me like that feather itself

must have—moving from one reason  
to another—coming loose from the tail

and gracefully alighting on the blacktop  
just moments before

I got there, bent, and picked it  
up.

“Look, around us the meantime  
has begun overflowing.  
In every direction its own  
almost-invisibility  
streams and sparkles  
over everything.”

—Galway Kinnell,  
“A Milk Bottle”



## Harvest



One day soon—I don't know when—that one sweet bell pepper will be ready to pluck from the succor of its steadfast vine, watched over by two marigolds, one on either side. Because it's the only one I've been given, how much more divine it will taste when I sit down to eat it. I may have to bring candles to the table for that meal, use the nice silverware. The beans, however, zenith over and over, needing to be picked two or three times a week. They too are worth savoring, steamed and set out with a dollop of butter, a sprinkling of salt, enough to toss one or two to the good dog sitting so nicely, not begging—a treat. Ripeness is a point reached rhythmically throughout the growing season, not just one apex, not the mountaintop scaled after much trudging and climbing, sometimes searching desperately for that one foothold, everything after that downhill, kind of a let-down, a denouement. Sure, the potatoes might all be ready underground by now, their tops yellowed and bent over, but they're fine if you don't dig them up all in one fell swoop. They will wait, protected in the depths, till the air gets crisp. Ditto the carrots. On the other hand, leafy greens, choice stalks cut out here and there, keep filling salad plates day by day by day. You and I, our attempts, our tries, our failings, picking ourselves up, each of us with our own unique timings, ripen our offerings, reach new heights, when it's right, when that living thing has reached its own fruition. Harvest, in this way, is a state of mind, an ongoing part of the life cycle, a way of gradually gathering in what we've grown and using it to keep going.

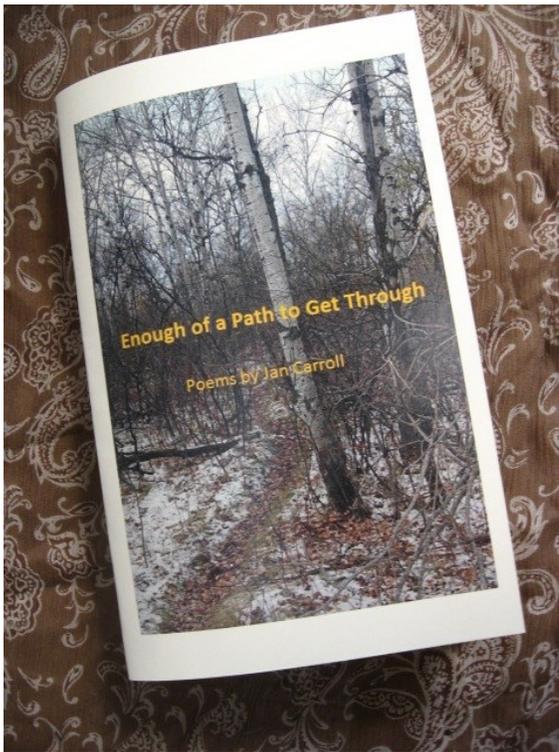


In memory of Ellie the Beagle,  
2003—2021

## Dog Zen

I don't know why  
I talk to the dog as I did  
to my toddlers, hoping  
to lay the groundwork  
for language and logic, like when  
every day around one, she sits, true devotee,  
before the Cupboard That Holds Good Things, emitting  
only enough of a whimper to keep me mindful  
that It Is Time, but I tell her, "You have to go out first  
and then, when you come in you can have  
wet dog food, a chew stick, and a fresh drink of water."  
But she only hears key words, magical phrases, coming to  
attention at the sound of them, those signposts  
that point to what she must do to get  
what the gut, at any given moment, says it needs.

"Give me juicy autumnal fruit, ripe and red from the orchard." —Walt Whitman



## ***Enough of a Path to Get Through***

My collection of nature-inspired poems with accompanying color images.

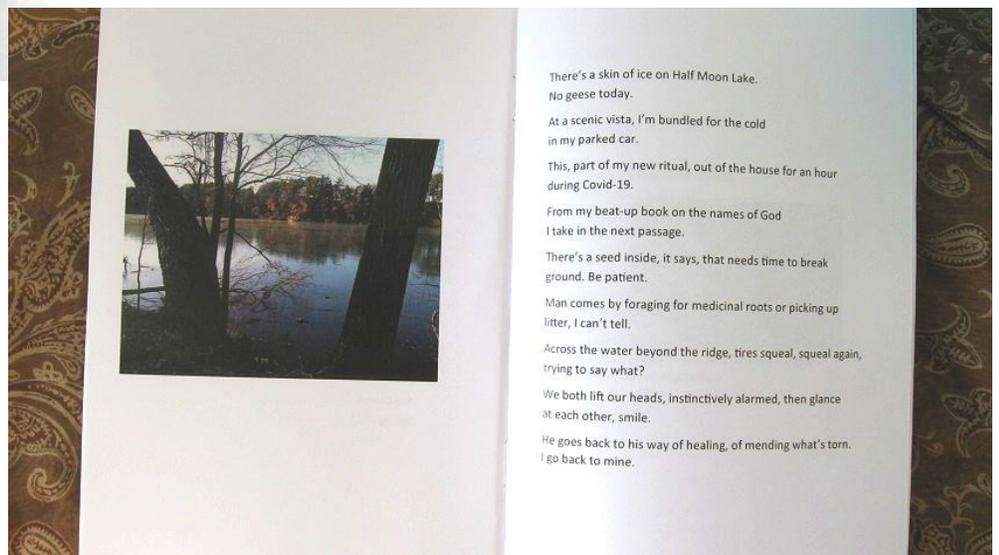
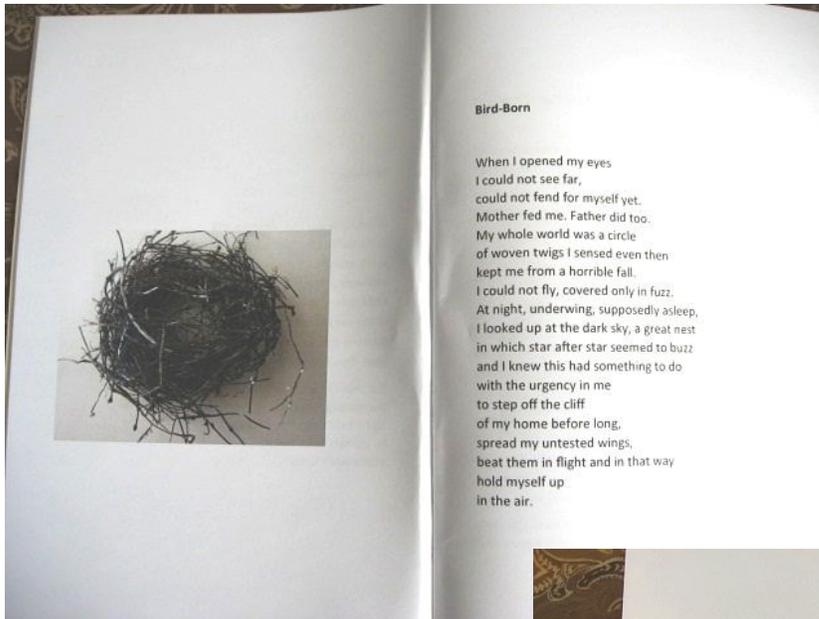
To order, email or Facebook message me.

\$8 each plus shipping (Cash, Check, or Paypal).

They are also available through The Local Store ([www.thelocalstore.org/enough-of-a-path-to-get-through.html](http://www.thelocalstore.org/enough-of-a-path-to-get-through.html)).

For each book sold, I will donate \$1 to local organizations that work with those experiencing homelessness.

Thank you!





Fog lingers over the bay,  
a homesick visitor  
wanting to say  
to someone far away,  
"I miss you—the air, the lake,  
the mist like this  
make it seem—for fleeting minutes—  
you are near."

Not knowing for sure, the answer unclear,  
has its own kind of light, its own panoramic vision.  
As you frame the question, what comes to you is  
another kind of gift nudging you to envision  
an array of what's possible, what's true, what's best—  
ponder all these maybes and then make your decision.  
But first sit with uncertainty, with its opaque cloud.  
The fog isn't a barrier or a punishment, it's a provision.



Fog, don't lift yet, I like you here,  
hovering above the river like a chimera,  
a phantom, a jinn. I like you shimmering,  
shapeshifting, taking in the scenery,  
fiddling with it, then letting it be,  
making the seen more as you make it less clear.

Today the fog is like a joy that's moved in  
taking up temporary residence.

A grown-up cotton candy-ish,  
fairytale-like resonance.

I'll breathe it in as, even damp, it kind of sizzles,  
welcome it without the slightest hesitance.



From where I was then, standing  
at the Half Moon Lake boat landing  
I couldn't see you across on the other side.  
The fog had settled in, making us play hide  
and seek with each others' figures and faces,  
our voices, though, clearer, sharper in the spaces.

Fog said to me, "Wait a minute,  
wait a minute more" as it held  
presence, held mystery, just above  
the water all along the shore.

"Be, here, awhile as if  
you were a conjuring, the spore cloud  
of a miracle borne by a newly whispered  
legend, a newly lofted lore."

## The Fog Series Greeting Cards

To the left above are the six covers of the 5.5 X 4.25-inch cards. To the right are the poems found inside. Each poem is in the same position as its matching photograph. Shown below is a set of six cards before and after packaging.

Cards with the same photographs but blank inside are also available.

I'm using as much recycled and re-used materials as I can source, and the cards are printed locally.

\$12 per set of six, plus shipping. To order, email or Facebook message me.

For every set sold, I'll donate \$1 to Feed My People Food Bank.

Thanks so much!

