

Poetry Series

**Tom J. Mariani**  
**- poems -**

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## Tom J. Mariani(January 1948)

I was born in San Francisco and have lived in Northern California all my life. My first full-time job, while working my way through college, was as an apprentice pressman for the SF 'Chronicle/Examiner.' The first year I worked there,1966, 'The Sound of Music' won the Academy Award for Best Picture. However, a more accurate indication of coming attractions was that Janis Joplin had just come back to San Francisco from Texas to join Big Brother and the Holding Company and sing at the Avalon Ballroom. Looking back it seems that I missed most of the Summer of Love. I had no time to hang out in Golden Gate Park during the day, nor in the Haight at night. I was trying to earn enough to afford to work only part time during the college year.

After college, my day jobs for eighteen years were in bank management; first with Wells Fargo than a local bank in Santa Rosa.

What do I think are some of the other influences on my writing that you should be warned about? I am a fifth generation native Californian. I have a picture of my great-grandparents, the second generation, taken in 1907 aboard a six-horse team wagon loaded with tan bark for a leather tannery. He also hauled railroad ties to complete the line north of Willits into Southern Humboldt County, and drove a mail/stage coach. She raised their four daughters and ran their ranch on her family's homestead (see my poem 'It May Not Seem Fair') .

The rest of my life? You wouldn't believe it if I had the time to tell you.

I have had a few of my poems and prose essays published. ('North Bay Bohemian 06-04-08 and 04-22-09 'OPEN MIC.')

Two of my short stories ('A Short Leap' JULY 2008 AND 'Fragments of the News, ' JANUARY 2009 in and one of my poems, 'What Stage Is He On? March 2009)

Most of my poems are fictional constructs. Some are autobiographical: e.g.'DETOUR' and 'Learning To Run Errands.' The rest? It's up to you to figure out.

# \*\*\* 08-25-09 \*\*\*the Kennedys - - - Myth Or Reality?

Ted Kennedy: February 22,1932 -  
August 25,2009 - - - 77 years  
Why we never had to  
Take him out

The way we did  
Jack and Bobby  
His two  
Irsh punk brothers

They thought  
They could double deal  
After we delivered  
For their dad -

Old man Joe  
He knew  
Who he had  
To take care of

We brought him booze  
During Prohibition  
We brought him votes  
To make his kid President

Whatda his kids do for us -  
Screwed up getting us back into Cuba  
Got Jimmy H. locked up and  
Kicked outta the Teamsters

Ted lived a long life  
'Cause he learned  
Not to screw around  
With us

[ and just who is us? The Rolling Stones answered that question in their song  
'SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL - - - 'Who shot the Kennedy's? After all it was you  
and me.']



# \*\*\*\* U.S. Election 2008 - What As Supposed To Be Cocomity And Cooperation Following Rancor

Don't get your hopes up  
There are hachets  
Buried barely below the surface  
We all know where they are

Prison guards search for hidden weapons  
Each and every day  
They know they are there  
For when the next fight breaks out

Larger political weapons  
Are easier to find  
We all watched the ceremonies  
Where we buried them

Their handles were left  
Sticking out just in case  
We'll need them again and  
Forget where we buried them

Both sides waved their's around  
With threatening gestures  
To harm or frighten others  
Trying to get them to join

Each side was frightened  
That not enough others  
Would be convinced by fact and reason  
Now that our side has won

Both sides have pretended to cooperate  
Bury their hachets - - -  
Liar Liar  
Even with our financial pants still on fire

Tom J. Mariani

# \*\*\*\*02-22-10\*\*\*\*it Wasn'T About Singing And Dancing

We wanted to watch  
Them sing and dance  
Yet no one would hire them  
Out of SF's Chinatown

So that's where we went  
To watch them  
Sing and dance  
In their nightclubs

We locals went  
Hollywood stars  
Of the 1940s and 50s  
Would be there too

Then the Chinese  
Singers and dancers  
Were recruited by Gene Kelly  
For the movie Flower Drum Song

First time they used  
Real Asians  
Rather than  
Whites in makeup

One movie and then Hollywood  
Was done with them  
It was back to Asians  
Played by whites in makeup

The Chinese/Americans  
Had to go back to Chinatown  
Where we went  
To watch them sing and dance

Tom J. Mariani

# \*\*\*\*02-22-10\*\*\*\*it's Time To Empty The Nest

'So what's there  
That's not right here?

What's this about  
Maybe a cross-country trip?

Why not buckle down  
Get a job right here?

What it it that you want  
Out there? '

'Out there  
Is not here.'

Tom J. Mariani

**\*\*\*\*03-21-2010\*\*\*\* Re Pope's Apology Letter To  
Ireland For Hiding Years Of Reports Of Child Abuse**

RETURN TO SENDER  
INSUFFICIENT POSTAGE

Tom J. Mariani



**\*\*\*\*12-10-09\* Monepic Poetry**

Oh  
No  
Sop  
Go  
Go  
Go  
OH  
BABY

Tom J. Mariani

# \*\*\*03-25=2010\*\*\* How In The Hell Are They Still Standing?

I keep seeing people who should be dead  
They're not be in the morgue yet  
I don't see why  
What is keeping them moving breathing

My most recent sighting was  
Just to the right of the front door  
Of The San Francisco  
Main Library

The Swig family and other old and new  
Monied San Franciscans  
Campaigned and fundraised  
To pay for large rooms with their names

The library's many floors have decor  
It even has a small deli  
If you can pay for self-service coffee  
Or the sandwich of the day

As you walk in off the street  
You are greeted by  
Large open space  
Friends' of the Library Book Sales

Back outside in the cold  
Just to the right of the front door  
Stood a breathing  
Dead person

There is no reason  
I can see why  
This person is still alive  
What's keeping him upright

He's wearing grey sweatpants  
Recently pissed in

Mismatched sneakers no socks  
Ankles with blue black and red running sores

He's wearing a light long-sleeved shirt  
I'm cold in my heavy sweater over my shirt  
He put down his two plastic bags  
Pulled out a bottle of vodka

Two big gulps saved some for later  
I don't expect him to have a later  
But off he walks steady on his feet  
The seat of his wet pants facing me

The seat of his wet pants  
Baffling me why is he still alive  
Where does he sleep eat get warm  
When and when in the hell will he die

Tom J. Mariani

## \*\*\*03-26-2010\*\*\* The Heart Of A Writer's Studio

What pulls me to horde  
Old pencils new pens  
Newspaper clippings  
Books magazines and my notes

My home office has  
Stacks of papers on the floor  
I have or plan to  
Go through and organize

The room scares my wife  
She tries not to look in  
She knows it'll take a shovel  
And a dumpster if I die

There are original first drafts  
Several revisions  
There's works-in-progress  
I still have to decide about

She see no progress  
Only the mess  
That continues to grow  
If they're organized it doesn't show

As long as my stuff  
Does not spill out  
To the rest of the house  
We have a truce

Kinda like North and South Korea  
Kinda like the Jews and Palisatinians  
I'm glad my window does not face the sea  
That's where she'd push my stuff and me

Tom J. Mariani

## \*\*\*05-09\*\*symptoms Of Being A Poet

What does one do  
If one finds oneself  
Suffering the symptoms  
Of being a poet?

Try to gargle aloud  
Uttering gargling sounds  
It may cleanse the contagion  
Before it enters your system

That's all you can do  
Once the rest of the symptoms start  
You feel it in your head  
It pounds in your heart

Your forehead feels warm  
You cannot sit still  
Words start coming out  
Pages and pages you fill

It's like a fever  
Compelling you to write  
It does not come out easy  
There still is a big fight

It's like a civil war  
Words want out right away  
Some content is stuck while  
The brain argues for its way

Then writer's block hits  
It's like serious constipation  
On top of feeling ill  
You can't go

You sit for a long time  
Nothing happens  
No need for paper  
You have only pain

Accompanied by the urge  
To let loose  
The more you concentrate  
Nothing happens

So you give up  
Stand up and walk away  
Take a long walk outdoors  
Deep into Frost's snowy woods

Suddenly the urge  
It's all there at once  
And it catches you  
With no paper.

Tom J. Mariani

## \*\*\*6-25-09\*\*what Soughs Through Me

If you admitted hearing voices  
In ancient times they would have calledl you  
A shaman a prophet a seer or  
Maybe even Moses

In Salem you would have been called  
A witch a warlock or  
One possessed needing to be  
Put to death

Part of the art  
Of being a poet  
Is to listen to the voices  
As they sough through you

The sounds are gentle reminders  
To pay attention to a color  
A smell a word a sight  
Then to remember it in words

As a poet I claim  
The words I write are mine  
But in truth I have heard them  
As they rustled through me

It's like hearing the nouises the wind makes  
It's not the wind we hear  
It's what the wind blows through  
And against

Tom J. Mariani

# \*\*\*aug 13-09\*\*\*for The Thousands That Have Destroyed It

It took only one  
To restore  
My faith in man

Here's what it took  
I was low on printer paper  
So I went to an office supply store

Just got out of my Jeep  
When a dirty 20 something  
Asks can help him and his old lady

I don't see an old lady  
But he unfolds an old cardboard sign  
That says so

I've got a couple of bucks  
Of loose change  
In my pocket

I dig it out  
Hand it to him  
He's profusely grateful

Just then a toothless old guy  
Rolls oujt of the store  
Asks the youngster for a smoke

As I walk away I hear  
'Don't have a smoke,  
but I will share with you

What I just got.'  
I go in the store  
As they share my two bucks

By the time I turn to go back



To give them more  
They're gone

Tom J. Mariani

## \*\*\*july 1 2009\*\*\*giving His Boots A Rest

He is resting  
In a comfortable Library chair  
With his boots and jacket on  
His backpack is nearby

He's reading today's paper  
And has three plastic covered  
Magazines stacked on the floor  
To read next

He's in from the cold and rain  
He's in where it's warm and dry  
He's been to the men's room to  
Wash himself and his socks and shorts

Wrapped in a plastic bag  
He'll dry them later  
Now he's trying to get his boots to dry  
They're damp and well worn

They are not worn out  
Just like him  
They are well worn  
They've covered many miles

He's worked in them  
He's slept in them  
To keep warm and to see  
That they are not stolen

Where do you put your shoes at night?  
Under you bed? In your closet?  
It's been a long time  
Since he's had either

How do you  
Keep your feet from freezing  
In the long hard-frost winter nights?  
How do you keep warm?

If you'd never had to worry  
You wouldn't appreciate  
The warm dry Library chair  
That gives his boots a rest

Tom J. Mariani

## **\*\*[revised 11-19-09] Getting Through October And Beyond**

What was it about October  
That made us think  
Spring would not be coming back?

The weather rattled at us,  
Leaves fell,  
Leaving us feeling

It's not going to get any better.  
No amount of experience or  
Logic will helped,

Spring last year didn't help,  
When the shorter days of  
Fall and Winter closed in.

Beyond October?

What was it about October  
That assured us  
Spring will be coming back?

The weather hinted of changes,  
Leaves brave enough  
To let go one by one,

Or be pushed in bunches by the wind  
Took momentary flight, and  
Abandoned their accustomed tree.

They made room for new buds  
Provided cover for the soil and  
Food for those below.

Lots of work to get ready  
For Spring next year and to  
Just get through Fall and Winter.

Then came November.

November brought  
What October teased.  
October warned us,  
Rushed at us,

Then seemed to pull back  
Like a gentle rolling surf.  
On a rough November day  
A wave rushed over our heads

Knocked us down and threatened  
To pull us far out to sea.  
As we floated  
We saw the shore disappear.

No one will come to help.  
They won't even know we're gone.  
'I've got to get to December! '  
We scream.

'New Year's Day! Easter!  
May Day! MAY DAY! '  
And we will  
Even if we have no idea

Why or how

Tom J. Mariani

## **\*\*04 - 2009 - Drift, Drown, Or Decide**

Do I want  
To fall in love again?  
No.

Do I want  
To work for a living?  
No.

Do I like  
To eat on a regular basis?  
Yes.

These are questions  
Not asked  
Not answered.

Just because  
I don't know  
Where this is going,

Doesn't mean  
I don't have  
To go.

Tom J. Mariani

## **\*\*07-18-09\*\* Irish Love**

I know I shouldn't of  
But I smiled yesterday  
When one of my friends  
Told me a joke

'Two Irish guys  
Are sitting in a pub.'  
How many times have I heard  
One start out like this

'One guy says to the other,  
My wife's a saint  
Just a pure saint  
My hand to God.'

The other replies,  
'Your're lucky  
Mine, bless her soul,  
Is stiill alive.'

Tom J. Mariani

## **\*\*11-15-09\*\*\*- - I Miss Mirth**

I've recently taken a long hard look  
To see what's missing in this world  
Things seem to be getting worse  
What is making modern life so cold

Thinking back - - - what did we used to have  
That made us eager to get out of bed  
What did we have then  
That was bouncing around in our head

I think it was the potential for mirth  
I awoke expecting some joke to come  
I knew a friend or my uncle would dropp by  
Or I'd hear a story from an old bum

Sometimes a hobo's stories were best  
He's tell us of his travels by rail  
And for a nickel  
Of lands he'd set sail

But each story always had a good laugh  
I was expecting meriment every day  
Not just on Christmas Eve  
When did I lose this way

It was others making up stories  
Just to get my money  
Didn't create mirth  
Those stories weren't funny

Whether told by my church  
Or handed out as financial advice  
There is no smile on my face  
As I look at the resulta of the roll of modern dice

Tom J. Mariani



## **\*\*2009\*\*and The Winner Is**

For all of those in the US  
Who voted against Obama  
Take a good look now  
Who is your Mama

Tom J. Mariani

# **\*\*a Cowboy Valentine-She Opened My Eyes - - What A Surprise**

Thought I knew  
Where this was a goin'  
Sure read the signs wrong  
She was a showin'

All I could see  
Was her blue eyes a blinkin'  
'Than' I started to fall in love  
What was I a thinkin'

My horse has never  
Thrown me so hard  
I 'spected us to be forever  
'Than' she done turned her last card

Cashed in stood up and  
Just walked away  
Leaving me holding an empty bag  
Not knowing what to say

I still have my horse  
Of course  
But only half less  
Of the mess she left

Tom J. Mariani

## **\*\*bang! You'Re Dead**

Games we used to play  
With sticks and cap guns  
We made noises with our mouths  
Of shooting getting shot and dying

There was no crying over who got shot  
You could argue that you were only winged  
It was not the farm  
You bought

'I'm just grazed! '  
We could holler  
Reload and keep firing  
Ammunition was free

If you could scrounge soda bottles  
For rolls of caps - - - your saved those shots  
For close range for the noise the smoke the smell  
For the rest you'd just yelled BANG!

The battle could go on for hours  
Without losing anybody  
'Til it was time for lunch or dinner  
Or to go in for the night

Now it's a differnt game  
The word 'Bang' has been replaced  
By 'Young Gang Bangers'  
Packin' heaters drivin'old beaters

Slingin' meth crack and weed  
Watchin others bleed  
Reachin' in baggy pants with a steady hand  
No control where the bullets land

Sprayin' sayin' signs flashin' talk's trashin'  
Makin' their bones throwing caps like stones  
Landing where - - - they don't care  
The noise - - - the kick - - - the smell

Who can tell  
Who's next  
Gunpowder  
LOUDER

BANG - - - You and you and  
You and you and you  
Your'll all  
DEAD

Tom J. Mariani

# ^^^ An Idiom I Wouldn'T Have Gussed In A Month Of Sundays

Sitting in a coffee shop  
Early the other morning  
Getting started for my day  
I almost dropped my cup

I was reading the paper  
About health insurance costs  
Stock market dives  
And sub-prime credit woes

When one of the guys  
In the booth behind me  
Leaned over to his friend and quietly said  
I guess not expecting me to hear

I swear to God  
His exact words were  
And I quote  
'My dick's fallen off.'

I hadn't been  
Paying much attention  
To their conversation  
Up until then

With my hot coffee  
Almost jumping into my lap  
My ears perked up to hear  
The rest of this tragedy

Obviously his freind  
Was not as shocked  
As I was  
At this news flash

His calm reply was  
'Mine too.'

It's not that uncommon  
At our age after all.'

They were both taking it  
Far better than if  
It had happened to me  
For God's sake

His friend continued  
'My doctor tells me  
There are several things  
That can be done.

For best results He wants to  
Run some tests to see  
What may have triggered it.'

I wanted to know too  
So I could avoid doing  
Whatever these guys did  
To lose trigger and all

He went on 'They don't just  
Throw Viagra at you  
The way they used to.  
Could be nerve damage,

Or something else.'  
- - - Something else - - -  
Now the lights  
Were finally coming on

Come to think of it  
I knew lots of things  
That had fallen off lately  
Attendance in schools - - - voter turnout

Nothing had actually  
Dropped off entirely  
It was only  
A performance issue

Their use of an idiom  
Made me feel like a blockhead  
I was relieved to learn their doctors  
Had something left to work with

Tom J. Mariani

## 12-07-07 No Poem Here

Just an observation on the anniversary of the failed intelligence that led to the US being unprepared and surprised by the attack on Pearl Harbor. An estimated loss of American lives that day 3,400.

It was also on this date in 1917 that the US declared war on Austria-Hungary. I write this in light of the recent reevaluation of Iran's nuclear capability and intentions. Two articles in the London Times today reflect that we haven't come very far since 1917. 1) 'It should ceretainly not be the basis for declaring peace in our time and welcoming those nice Iranians back into the global family....(Iran's) proxies and friends in Hezbollah and Hamas and among the Iraqi Shia extremists.'

2) new threats of Balkins conflict - -Serbia made threats of war with the breakaway province of Kosovo.

I have no poems about this. I went to bed last night after watching a re-run on TV of 'I Robot' starring Will Smith. Neither this fiction nor my reflections on reality this morning give me much encouragment for positive developments in world peace.

Thanks. I just had to let someone else know.

Tom J. Mariani



# 1968 Talking About The Revolution

I took off my glasses  
that I might see  
I took off my shoes  
that I might be

The one I was in search of  
The one I never had  
The one that by finding  
I would be so glad

I took off my watch  
so I wouldn't know the time  
I took off to nature  
hoping to find the sign

The one I was in search of  
The one I never had  
The one that by finding  
I would be so glad

I started to take of my clothes  
I thought the last distraction  
Then luckily I realized - - -  
This is just a poem- - - an abstraction

Tom J. Mariani

## 2008: From 2001 - Just Enough To Win

No wasted energy here  
You have to watch closely  
Before you realize that older  
And gray to playing way

Below his level

For him  
It's a rather light half-court workout  
Winner's outs lots of youth  
He's mediator coach and

Outside go-to guy

He doesn't bang much  
In the middle anymore  
He's just where he needs to be  
When he needs to be

Slightly above inside and  
A step ahead

Tom J. Mariani

## 2008: Grandpa Will Never Be Asked To Help With Homework Again

Had the grandkids overnight  
Dinner baths and do homework  
Before TV - - - their Mom said  
Before TV

I cleared and washed dishes  
Grandma supervised baths  
Then homework - - -  
To speed things up  
I offered to help so I could see TV too

Working on silent 'e's  
Grandma came up with cut to cute  
I added butt to butte  
Never to be asked again

Tom J. Mariani

# 2008: Held In Custody

copyright 04-21-08  
for single-parent urban Moms  
Happy Mother's Day

When I was growing up  
She was like  
The large green dense bush  
That now grows in my yard

You wouldn't want to  
Brush up against it's  
Stiff spiked green leaves  
They protect not only the bush

They serve as an effective barrier  
Only allowing those in  
That are small enough to perch  
Inside and flit around

Protected from stray cats  
Roaming dogs  
Large birds  
Heavy storms

In our old neighborhood  
The shootings assaults robberies  
Drugs rapes riots - - - when we lived at home  
Her presences above and all round us

Kept us safe - gave us a place  
To grow and show we were ready  
To fly away on our own  
Into the even less friendly world

Tom J. Mariani

## 2008: Is It Worth It?

\*Tom J. Mariani - -a found poem on a Starbucks' cup  
credit to Katy Croff

People often ask  
if it is worth it  
to work at sea  
\*(or to write poetry)

isolated from the world  
far from loved ones,  
seasick, and running on  
three hours' sleep.

\*(When you can't write  
you watch the clock creep)

To lay eyes on something  
never before seen by anyone,  
to learn something new  
about our planet,

\*(Stacks of rejection slips.  
Will one make it?)

for that one moment  
of discovery -yes,  
it is  
all worth it.

Tom J. Mariani

# 2008: It Still Bugs Me It's No Longer Green

For those of you who were not reading  
The 'San Francisco Chronicle' back when  
The sports section was printed  
On green newsprint

- - - you may not see the loss as I do

They throw us old readers a bone  
They still call it 'The Sporting Green'  
Sometimes printing the heading in green  
on white newsprint - BFD

- - - if you know what I mean

They said the cost of green newsprint  
Had gotten too high  
So had the ballplayers' salaries  
But they weren't all replaced with white rookies

- - - if ya know what I mean

Every morning Mon. to Sat. - - - there it was  
Green and ready to be  
Pulled out from the other sections  
I might look at later

Regardless of how big the paper was  
How they folded it  
I could always put my hands on  
Last night's final scores and today's schedules

It tucked neatly into my back pocket  
So on my first break  
I could read about  
Some of the other games

You could tell who in the shop  
Played the ponies  
Their attention was on

Yesterday's results and payouts

Constantly checking and rechecking

Before it was time

To turn in their betting slips to Mary-the-Book

On the loading dock

No live racing on your iPhone

Not even Watch-and-Wager

At the fairgrounds back then

To get your bets down

You had write them down

Hand the slips to Mary-the-Book and wait

You knew the guys who had other bookies

You'd find them in the phone booth calling their's in

That's another thing I'm not happy about

Seeing gone - - - phone booths made calls private

Close the door you could cuss cry call your girlfriend

No one - - - not even your wife had to know

Now I have to search all through the 'Chron'

To find Sports - It's is 'wrapped around'

Want-ads Business Style or some other crap

They say that saves money too

Talk about not saving something

Bay Meadows is gone

Had it's last horse race

Gonna be condos business parks and

Apartments with the latest designs above retail

High density communal living

You can bet somebody's go'na make a buck

Environmentally green unlike how they now view horse shit

- - - if you know what I mean

Nature's noblest beast

Along with bovines and their gas

Are no longer considered

Environmentally friendly

We now live with computer wagering  
Attendance at tracks is down  
Mary is out of a job  
Circulation at the paper is down too

- - - you may not sense the loss

It's like your seventy percent  
Partially clogged artery  
It's still functioning right now but wait  
'Til the day it hits ya

- - - if ya know what I mean

Tom J. Mariani



## 2008: I've Got News For You

Words describing the  
Sharp silents sounds  
Of a single edged razor blade  
Slicing through wrist and vein - -

Blank verse summoning sights  
Of dark red blood pumping  
Into a clutterd sink - -  
Is not poetry.

Expaining the blood stains  
While cleaning up the mess  
With bandaged wrists the next day - -  
Is not poetry.

It may be cofessional.  
It may diffuse a fire  
That was buring out of control.  
If anywhere it goes in your diary.

Don't fling your bloody wrists at me  
By making up a metaphor.  
Until I see the scars,  
It is not poetry.

Tom J. Mariani

## 2008: My Writing

Sometimes I need to write  
At 3 AM  
When the house is  
Dark and quiet

Nothing  
But the LEDs  
Watching  
Me work

Often I need music  
Sometimes my mixes  
Then a single artist's CD  
Or random automated all-night FM radio

There are times  
My writing needs a boost  
From Starbucks or Peets  
Soft music and socialization

I am inspired too  
By the shouts of children  
Fighting over who got  
The best toy with their Happy Meal

I live in this world  
I draw from this world  
What I write I write  
About this world and others

Tom J. Mariani

## 2008: Nothing To Talk About

She sat down in the booth with her drink and her number  
Her lunch was cooking then they'd bring it to her  
She looked so alone elderly with washed-out color of hair  
Then he caught up and sat down across from her

Looked to be her son or about that age  
So thin with a dirty pony tail couldn't sit still  
Few words no smiles he looking left and right she down  
Her tray came nothing for him he can't sit

Tells her he's going to look for a store  
She tells him Lucky's is just across the street  
Standing he looks out the windows  
Like he doesn't know what direction to go

Then he's gone and back quickly bought nothing  
Still can't sit asks if it's OK if he goes back outside  
She looks so lonely no one to talk to  
When he's here or when he must step outside

She know what he needs and can't find  
He comes back in looking for her  
She's not in the booth he can't wait  
He's back outside by their car pacing around

She's out of the bathroom walking to her car's driver's side  
He need a ride somewhere for something he can't talk about  
I wouldn't think he'd find what he wants around here  
But I may not know where to look or who to talk to

Tom J. Mariani

## 2008: Prose Vs Poetry And Found Prose Poetry

As Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancinet Mariner'  
is not about the prevention of the cruelty of albatrosses,

Virgina Woolf's 'The Death of the Moth'  
is not about lepidopterology.

Tom J. Mariani

## 2008: Things I Don'T Want To Leave Behind

Didn't want to leave you  
With a bad impression  
Didn't want to take you  
In the wrong direction

Didn't want to fool you  
About my affection  
Didn't want to leave you  
With my last confession

I didn't want to end up  
Without a reflection  
Didn't want to accept fate  
In the end there's no deception

Tom J. Mariani

## 2008: We Don'T Have All The Answers

He's been to Sunday School  
He's had a chance to read the Bible  
He's see pictures of The Garden  
Colored Noah the animals and the Ark

Now he's home and ready to play  
Wants to draw a dinosaur  
Asks me what colors to use  
How big to make the teeth and eyes

I wasn't sure how to tell him  
All we have are impressions  
On rocks fossilized gray dusty bones  
I admitted I wasn't sure

What colors or how big  
Science - I did tell him - isn't sure  
And the Bible  
Just doesn't say

Tom J. Mariani

# 2008: When You Let Sunlight Work On Your First Draft

We know why the old piece of paper is yellow  
It's not because of overuse  
With very little written on it  
It's been set aside for so long

Not that anyone expected this page  
To do anything by itself  
He may have had high hopes  
When he added a few black lines on white

If he had valued his work  
Safely put it away  
But it was left exposed  
In a corner of the room

Right where the bright morning sun  
Not slowed down by the thin glass  
Did what he didn' t do  
Finished turning the color of the paper

copyright 05-02-08

Tom J. Mariani

# A Friend Passing

Resting by the road  
Open to the sky  
Watching for the birds  
And whatever else goes by

Resting by the road  
Listening for the rain  
Would have made better time  
Except for needing the cane

It helps me to get along  
Sometimes gets in my way  
Just like my friend  
With whom I used to share the day

Tom J. Mariani



# A Poet's Work Is Never Done

What's keepng me  
From writing better poetry  
(Beyond not finding a word  
That rhymes with orange)

I don't see myself as a poet  
No one has granted me a license  
I have however somehow  
Learned how to wheedle words

Out of my head  
Onto a blank page  
I'll admit I have had to  
Kick them around a bit

After they have landed  
Some had to be kicked out  
I was sad to see them go  
It was like having to fire

Your cousin who just  
Wasn't carrng his weight  
My additional problem is  
That whenever I pick up a page

Of even my revised poetry  
The words are still moving  
Some are embarrassed  
Asking to be replaced

By better more appropriate ones  
Some adamately think that  
They should remain  
Just as they are

Some are trying to jump  
From here  
To there  
For clarity

So what's holding me back  
From better words and arrangements  
What's preventing a coup  
What's keeping them

From breaking through the lines  
And taking over  
They know how much work  
It was to put them there

They know I am reluctant  
To call them back  
Without having stronger replacements  
That's all that's holding me back

Tom J. Mariani

# A Short Leap (You Would Think For A Mature Audience)

Summer of 1966 I was  
Just out of high school  
Newspaper web press apprentice  
For the San Francisco Chronicle

Working one night I overheard  
Several journeymen  
Talking about  
If they could

Get up enough money  
Get the bets up high enough  
Buy him a couple of drinks  
See if he really could do it

They wanted to talk  
This other journeyman into  
Proving what  
He'd been bragging about

Up until this point  
It had only been a rumor  
No one had seen him do it  
No one believed it could be done

The proper amount of cash  
Was quickly raised  
Even guys from the third floor  
Newsroom white shirts and ties got involved

They put in their share of money  
Once the word got around  
Posted their bets  
I put up my two bucks

We gathered in the basement  
Where the one-ton rolls

Of blank newsprint are hoisted  
Like fat spindles

Spinning  
At a maximum speed  
Of thirty-thousand  
Continuous copies an hour

When the audience had gathered  
The lights in the basement were turned off  
Only for a moment  
So we could all see the electricity

This journeyman's claim to fame  
So he had bragged was  
He could put one hand  
On a spinning newsprint roll

Build up enough static electricity  
To be able at the proper moment  
To reach into his pants  
With his other hand and

Get an arc of electricity to leap  
From the frame  
Of the metal press  
To the tip of his dick

I was too far back in the crowd  
To be an actual eyewitness  
It still cost me two bucks  
I bet he couldn't do it

Some said it was a trick  
He must have had a screwdriver  
Or a piece of metal  
In his pocket

Some swore it was the real thing  
They saw the flash of light  
The arc leapt - - - that's tall that counted  
There was a little arguing over the bets

He ending up collecting his share of the money  
Couldn't be convinced  
To do it again for double or nothing  
Once was more than enough for me too

Tom J. Mariani

# A Single Rose

She wants a poem  
Read to her by candlelight  
While she sits at a small table  
This would be sheer delight

She would like live music too  
In the background I suppose  
A stark white tablecloth with  
A single rose

Don't forget the wine  
A white wine '03 or '02  
Slightly chilled  
Will do

This should be a special poem  
One she could say is mine  
If she only knew a poet  
Regardless of the rhyme

Who will read it to her  
Does he need special clothes  
Or just a sincere voice and a wine glass  
To go with the single rose

Tom J. Mariani

# A Striking Pose

There is a a distinct difference  
Between her moderately made-up face  
Glancing away and her stark white ankles  
Flashing at me

Sock-less  
Above black canvas shoes  
And just below  
Fashionable black pant cuffs

It's like that face  
Does not match the person  
That is using those ankles  
To stand near my table

I realize that the sun's rays  
Are partly to blame for the difference  
The ankles have avoided exposure  
To untra-violet rays and attempted remedies

Of makeup  
Moisturizers  
Modern exfoliation  
Waxing and peels

To what end  
What drew my attention  
Her face or her ankles  
Or the contrast

Addmittedly her face is attractive  
What caught my eye  
The difference  
Striking

Tom J. Mariani

# About Bush? They Don'T Really Want To Know

Now the #^<\*&~> pop-ups  
At poemhunter  
Are asking me  
Do I like President Bush

However they do not  
Give me enough room  
To respond completely  
YES/NO is not near enough

Do I like him to do what  
Not close to enough room  
For my recommendations  
None of which

Poemhunter would print  
Anyway

Tom J. Mariani



# And Then He Just Fell Down

'Former boxing world champion  
Johnny Tapia was in critical condition  
at a Los Vega hospital  
after apparently falling at his home

and losing consciousness  
early Saturday, hours after  
he was charged with  
possessing drug paraphernalia.

Tapia, a five -time world chanpion  
with a history of problems with the law and drugs  
had returned to his home in Las Vegas  
after the confrontation with poilce

and was with his wife, Teresa,  
when he fell  
according to Trayce Zimmerman,  
Tapia's publicist.

'(Teresa) said he felt depressed,  
and then he just fell down  
and lost consciousness.'  
Zimmerman said.

Tapia,35 was placed  
on a respirator and was  
being treated for head trama  
Zimmerman said. - Assiciated Press

Tom J. Mariani

# At The Speed Of Light, What Word Pops Up?

It's not now called evesdropping.  
No one is right outside,  
Standing under your eyes.  
Not right now.

Where are they standing,  
Standing by, while software  
Scans, listens, but does not record,  
Until that word is recognized?

Who knows what that word is?  
In the fictional movie,  
'The Bourne Ultimatum, '  
The word was 'Blackbrier.'

That's what popped up the red flags  
On all our spies computer screens:  
Like someone looked the Old Testament God  
In the eye and shouted His name.

That was fiction, right?  
One word can't trigger all that?  
Excuse me.  
There's a knock on my door.

Tom J. Mariani

# Barbara's Been A Bad Girl

Barbara's been a bad girl  
Someone should have said  
Then taken away her candy  
And sent her straight to bed

Barbara grew up with people  
Who would never scold  
Who were always within reach  
Without even being told

She starting meeting friends  
Just to keep the blues away  
Soom they moved in  
And were there to stay

We never really knew little Barbara  
When we met she'd already been sold  
To friends who didn't care  
She only wanted more and not to get old

Barbara had a bad time  
Always trying to get more  
For Barbara's friends came in bottles  
From a prescription drug store

Barbara's been a bad girl  
Someone shouold have said  
Then taken away her pills  
And pulled her out of bed

Tom J. Mariani

# Barry Bonds Indicted-More News At 11 And Ad. Inf.

OJ and Barry what else can I say  
Court TV has been waiting for this day  
Their ratings in 2008 will soar  
I can see the crowd hear the roar

Both just trying to get their 'stuff' back  
And if you believe that 'Jack'  
Do you think Bond's value won't drop  
Even if his friends to a plea never cop

Giants picked a good time to let him go  
He was no longer the national show  
Put on hold the Hall of Fame  
Indicted what a shame

Tom J. Mariani

# Birds Fly

A little too tall for me  
Beautiful flowing hair  
Over a tailored jacket

Purse and matching - - - - -

Those long legs  
Then she turned  
I saw the face with

The same sharp crisp lines  
The rest of her had promised

She went walking by - - - - -  
Not for me  
Just to get by

The strides

The way her jacket swung  
Draping her as she walked

It was like watching a bird  
Through your shaded window  
As it pauses on your lawn

Unless something makes a noise  
Then birds fly

Tom J. Mariani

# Burdened

I grew to feel  
Burdened by holding hands  
While we walked  
Burdened by your touch

Your hand on my shoulder  
Or around my waist  
Became a weight  
I could no longer bear

Tom J. Mariani

# Can You Hook Me Up?

Addiction to fossil fuels  
Global warming  
Just don't get me started

Tom J. Mariani

# Christmas Lesson 2008

Years ago I opened a special Christmas present.  
It was from my uncle, sort of a surprise.  
All that was inside was a deck of playing cards.  
Maybe he hadn't seen my list or knew my size.

When I thanked him anyway he said,  
'Do you know how to play  
Cards for pushups? '  
As he smiled in his way.

Cards for pushups?  
It can get pretty hard.  
You shuffle, turn one over.  
Do what's in the card.

Ace, do 15. Face card, do 10.  
Others by the numbers count.  
Takes a lot of work for two  
As the discards start to mount.

It's not like poker.  
No bluff to call.  
When it's your turn,  
You have to do them all.

Who wins doesn't matter,  
As I now explain to my grandson,  
'The object is just don't quit  
Until the deck is done.'

Tom J. Mariani



# Coffee Choices Taken For Granted

Sitting, sipping, at a table outside  
Under an awning in a cold light steady rain  
Lets more stuff  
Happen in my brain

Than if I were warm inside  
In a nicer chair;  
Acting like  
I didn't really care

If others outside  
Can't afford to come in.  
They're also banned from the bathroom.  
Seems like a sin.

I can see the practical side of  
Where to sit as I choose.  
Guess I should be glad of  
A privilege I have yet to lose.

Tom J. Mariani

# Crowded

Here I am  
My turn to  
sit at the  
table

I've seen it  
happening long  
ago when  
Perry Mason

was still in  
black and white  
Who knew he was  
gay

I've visualized it  
as I've read  
books about famous  
trials

Waiting for  
the moment  
Listening for  
the moment

But there are  
No attorneys  
leaping to their  
feet here

There's barely  
enough room  
at the table  
for me

Attorney takes up part  
My investigator takes up part  
Then there's our notes  
evidence and such

Not much room left  
even for the water  
the cups the napkins or  
me

Tom J. Mariani

# Dance, Dance, Dance, 'Til You Can Dance No More

As I drove 'cross town today  
To get my Holiday shopping under way  
With my car radio tuned in  
Classic Rock - - let the dance begin

On comes a Don Henley from 1985  
- -'All She Wants to Do Is Dance'- -  
Up comes the volume  
Down comes all four car windows

Take that you hip-hoppers  
Wish I had my old speakers  
From my '66 Malibu  
Then the lyrics struck me

Maybe I've been watchin'  
Too many presidential debates  
Maybe just too much CNN  
Twenty-four hours a day

I have no idea if this is what  
Henley was trying to say  
But given the state of America's  
Foreign and energy policies

Our refusal to sign  
The Kyoto Protocol  
Ratified by 170 other countries  
To reduce greenhouse gases

And our nonplused reaction to that  
And the six-year Iraq War

THE IRAQ WAR - -? ? ?

It's our war  
Bought and  
Paid for

Its cost to date in U.S. dollars

If relevant to you \$469,509,480,910  
U.S. troops dead  
A very relevant 3,865

I said I'm no sure who Henley  
Had on his mind  
When he wrote and sang  
'All she wants to do is dance'

All I could see in my minds eye  
As I drove on  
Was my Uncle Sam in a dress  
Dancing and wantin' to party

Thats' what Don's song was saying to me  
War's in a Surge mode  
Demos first 100 days  
Are long gone

'And all she wants to do is dance  
Rebels being rebels  
Since I don't know when  
And all she wants to do is dance

Molotov cocktails the local drink  
They make 'em up right  
In the kitchen sink  
Carzy people walkin' 'round with blood in their eyes

And all she wants to do  
is dance, dance, dance'

We're busy getting ready  
To dance through the Holidays  
Macy's and Wall Mart  
Already playing Siren's song

And all we want to do is dance  
'Never mind the heat  
Comin' off the street'  
All we want to do is dance

And make romance  
We want to party  
How did Don know  
He'd make me pull over

Park my car and listen  
To his refrian  
And suddenly  
Not feel like dancing

**\*\*November 17,2007\*\***

Tom J. Mariani

# Detour

Where would they have gone  
If they had not driven off that day  
Down the Redwood Highway

As far as where, until that morning,  
The two southbound lanes  
Had been supported by a bridge?

There were no 'DETOUR AHEAD' signs  
Except for the slight shaking and  
The rhythmic rocking of their car.

'What's that? she asked.  
'I think we're getting a flat, '  
Was his response until

He realized his headlights  
Had stopped seeing  
The reflectors and road lines.

Then they both saw  
The other side  
With only darkness in between.

At 60 mph there seemed nothing  
Between where they were and  
Where the road began again.

Instantly, she was attempting  
To get in the back seat  
To protect their children.

He was slamming both feet on the pedals,  
Gripping the wheel, fighting for control  
Of their VW Bug that was already airborne.

Through his windshield  
He saw  
What an earthquake can do

To a highway engineer's assumptions of  
Friction coefficients and  
The constant force of gravity.

Page ones across the world  
Sunday morning had pictures  
Of where they had landed;

Upside down  
Thirty feet below  
Where the bridge deck had been.

Front driver's side  
Mag wheel  
Ripped off.

Re-bar slices  
Can-opener like tears  
On a grey car door.

The papers tell of little more  
About him, his wife  
And their three children:

'Twin boys age nine  
And a girl  
Age four.'

Except that  
'They were packed  
For a three-day holiday.

Now instead taken  
To two local hospitals.  
Expected to recover

From various injuries sustained...'  
What did that reporter know?  
He wasn't there.

If not for this detour,



Where would  
The road of life taken them?

Because of it,  
Where are they now?  
Such is life.

Tom J. Mariani

# Discovers' Day October 8,2007

Who?

Just who  
authorized

the printer of my  
wall calender  
to remove Columbus

replacing him with  
Discovers' Day?  
Who, just who?

When I bought the calender  
sure I did not read the fine print.  
Didn't think I needed to.

Is it because he and his men  
may have brought  
smallpox and syphilis

and based on where they landed  
didn't really  
discover America?

In fact they missed  
what they were  
sailing for.

It was a shorter route  
to the East Indies;  
missed by several thousand miles.

We've know this for a long time.  
Why take him off  
my calender now?

What about the parades-  
The Columbus Day Sales-  
Am I still going to get 20% off?

No mail today.  
Federal employees  
Got the day off.

Maybe it's not  
Such a big thing?  
Do only I miss Columbus?

Tom J. Mariani

# 'Don'T You Listen To Him Dan...'\*

\*an old Country Western Tune  
sung by Son of the Pioneers

'...he spreads the burying sands  
with water-cool-clear-water.'\*

Chris Antley: age 34, jockey, dead, O.D.,  
Xanax, meth, alcohol, Pasadena, California.

Who hasn't been to the edge of a pool-  
Somehow found their back?  
How to hang on without hope?  
Someone else may know the rule;

Without drugs to help up and down,  
Without a record nine 1st place wins in a day  
And two Derby wins hanging on him  
Like a heavy crown.

Cell phone in hand pacing 'round his pool  
Nothing on the surface draws a smile.  
Racing endless laps 'round the edge.  
Thoroughbred going nowhere all the while.

Tom J. Mariani

# Drew Another Blank

California Super Lotto Drawing  
October 27 '07

13

20

24

27

33 and

26 for the Mega

I got one stinking number.

Story of my life.

UPDATE 11-10-07

Got two numbers

Still the square root of zilch

Gotta pay

If ya wanna play

I'd still keep writing

If I won

I'd just be able

To afford a more skilled

Editor and proofreader!

Tom J. Mariani

# Einstein Before His Was Einstein

a found poem in

'The Life and Times of Einstein' by Ronald Clark: page 51

'In Berne,

Einstein was another...  
unobtrusively trotting  
from Gerechtigkeits Square to  
the patent office each morning,  
usually lunching at his desk,  
returning to his lodgings  
each evening with  
the orthodoxy of the city clerk,  
then setting himself down  
in a quiet corner to  
discover the laws of nature.'

Tom J. Mariani

# Evel Knievel' S Last Ride

Not since P.T. Barnum  
Was someone able to  
Capture our attention  
Get us excited about the egress

Now he emerges  
Like a heavenly body  
From a distant staring point  
Listen to the roar of his bike

As he cranks the handle  
One last time  
I can see him coming  
To reach critical speed

In mid-air - - then clearing the last object  
I can't see his landing  
He shoots in semi-control  
Towards the egress

Whatever he had  
We all could use a little in our lives  
I hope he left some for us  
In the sparks of his trail

Tom J. Mariani

# Faith In The System

'Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories and criticism. The fore-going generations beheld God and nature face to face; we through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy the original relation to the universe? Why should we not have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs...

Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable. We must trust in the perfection of the creation so far as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy.'

Ralph Waldo Emerson

-----

Now that we know  
For certain two main ways  
Of getting exposed

Coetaneous

By merely personally  
Coming into contact  
With it

Inhalational

Breathing it individually  
Into your  
Very being

What else  
Is there to know

I know we're  
All going someday

I choose to go with my faith  
And nature coming into direct contact  
With my daily life

Breathing deeply



All the days  
Of my life

Tom J. Mariani

# First Light

First light is not seen  
By many these days  
Either they're still asleep  
Covers over thier head or

On the train or  
In cars with all their lights on  
Or already  
In imporant meetings

Then there are buildings  
In the way with other lights on  
So it is hard to tell  
When dawn first breaks

For those out walking or  
Sitting on a bench overlooking the lake  
It is a sight that restores  
The wonder you had as a child

Makes you believe that you can help  
Make it right in this world  
For some it's only at this time  
With dawn just coming up

Before it gets too bright  
And the rest of the town  
Is awake going  
Their separate ways

In daylight there are winners and losers  
People keep score  
The light gets brighter  
People more intense

And then it is dark again

Tom J. Mariani

# First Trip To The Ranch

I had a lot of questions  
Duriing my first trip  
I'd seen picutres  
Heard stories

I had never been

My uncle's car was loaded down  
I'm not sure how many he was expecting  
We were carrying enough food  
To feed them all

First time I had ever been

Off the main highway  
Off the last paved county road  
It'd been a while since  
The last stretch had been graveled

Slow bumps last leg of the trip

The first to meet us  
When we got close  
Were the staggering pigs  
My uncle was smiling big

For the rest of my first trip

He turned to my aunt  
In the front seat  
I was in the back  
Between lots of beer and boxes of cut meat

We were almost there

'Looks like Delbert's been cookin"  
Was all he said  
I had no idea 'til years later  
Not something they discussed

In front of us kids

Ranch had original wood stove  
Recent indoor plumbing  
Outhouse still stood at the ready  
If needed

For the overflow crowd

Found out years later  
Why the pigs were as happy  
As the rest of the crowd  
They - -pigs that is

Were fed the remaing corn mash

Used to cook the shine  
Had enough kick left  
For them to greet my uncle  
With the good news

On my first trip

Turned out to be  
A great weekend  
Family reunion  
Good times

Had by all

Tom J. Mariani

## For Members Only -The Ducks Had Better Duck

I know someone has to pay  
for all the time we members spend  
posting on but  
when will it ever end?

Whenever I log off  
I still have to click and click  
to rid my screen of ducks.  
What's the trick?

Pretty soon I know  
I'll blow a fuse;  
use a word that rhymes with duck  
and then my privileges I'll lose.

I've tried shooting them in the tail.  
To no avail.  
Then I went for the head;  
hoping for better luck, instead

they just keep coming round the bend.  
When will it ever end?  
What are they trying to sell me?  
Spam blocker? Who can ever tell?  
I need help shooting enough ducks  
to insure their death knell.

Tom J. Mariani

# Frost

Frost covers fallen bridges,  
As it does the ones that stand.  
The whiteness settles everywhere.  
It's gone when I touch your hand.

The morning is when we see the frost,  
Yet we know it came the night before.  
I've been awake, still it has come;  
Quiet and cold to our locked door.

We have watched frost go.  
Have you ever seen it start,  
As it wanders up the gulch  
And slinks into our hearts?

Then there's always morninig,  
Or you suppose ther'll always be.  
The sun the frost is melting  
As we go on, you and me.

We need to talk more when it's forming,  
Not just be glad when it's gone,  
For, unlike flowers, we seen to wither,  
Warmed only by the dawn.

Tom J. Mariani

# Generations Apart

She was the only  
Person I know  
Who painted  
Interior window trim  
In high heels

Helping us now  
Get our house ready  
For renters  
She has always seemed  
Dressed up

Even in an apron

Back when I was five  
She pretended to count  
The chocolate chips  
Warning me that there  
Wouldn't be enough

To finish the last batch  
If I kept sneaking them  
I was there to help  
Get her the waxed paper  
Grease the cookies sheets

And lick the beaters

I just wish  
She hadn't  
Scraped the bowl  
So very hard  
With her wooden spoon

There was hardly  
Anything left  
For me  
When she finally  
Handed the bowl over

I could barely  
See over the counter back then  
To know what she was doing  
Buzzing around her kitchen  
Her high heels clicking

Tom J. Mariani



# God's Gifts

God has many gifts  
For us to take when we can  
Or like God's first couple  
Will we have to say we ran

Out of the Garden  
It was too much to take  
For the love of wisdom  
Dont blame it all on the snake

To know from right and wrong  
Or to let go and pray  
How do you think you'll answer  
When you get asked some day

It won't be easy  
No clear wrong or right  
You might get asked at morning  
Or very late at night

Some of God's gifts come quietly  
Like just opening you eyes  
Some go thump and  
Are really a surprise

Whatever kind it is  
It's as kind as it can be  
Not all gifts fit or are the  
Right color you see

Tom J. Mariani

# Great Plans

Overheard a teacher  
the other day  
Having coffee  
Telling a friend

Gave this assignment  
to my second graders  
You're shipwrecked  
on an island

Draw me a picture  
then tell me a story  
of what you would do  
to save yourself

Boys: 'With my sword  
I would do this  
With my gun  
I would do that'

Girls: 'I'd explore  
Get some food and flowers  
Build a house and  
wait to get rescued'

Lots of men around here  
Doing this and that  
Lots of women too  
Waiting to get rescued

Tom J. Mariani

# Ho! Ho! Ho!

Dolce & Gabbana  
Juicy Couture  
True Religion  
Seven For All Mankind  
Apple Bottoms  
Air Force 1  
Louis Vuitton

If this was on  
my ganddaughter's  
Christmas list  
I would have headed  
for a music store

Thrown myself at the mercy  
At something with metal fragments  
Sticking out of body parts  
Me not knowing the differnce between  
Blue ray and I-Pod.

I checked twice  
Good news none of this stuff  
Is on her list  
Pays me right for half-listening  
To TV's Inside Edition

Or what ever version of a  
Fashion new-flash was on  
I got the names right  
Just the wrong product line  
I'd need her sizes for all the above

Santa's even older than me  
How does he figure all this stuff out  
And still manage to say  
As he pulls out of sight  
HO! HO! HO! ? ? ? ? ? ?



# I Feel So Sub-Prime

My next-door neighbor is gone  
Two small U-haul trucks  
Were parked in their driveway  
When I got home Friday

The guy that owned the house  
Before them  
Was an ass  
First thing he did

When he and his wife  
Moved in was to convert  
Their two car garage to  
A kick-boxing studio

Our garage faces the street  
Their's faces our property  
One day I got home from work  
Walking up to my door

I glanced to my left  
It seemed as if someone else  
Was walking too  
At just about my pace

Then like Lucy and Harpo  
If you remember that TV scene  
From 'I Love...' we both  
Stopped and stared at each other

The entire back wall of his garage  
Was a glass mirror  
Like a ballet studio Glass!  
Without the class

His studio had been downtown  
In a commercial building  
I had read the magnetic signs  
On the sides of his SUV

Now his studio faced my front yard  
Heavy bag hanging there  
All the space was needed  
Washer and dryer? ? ?

The had been hooked up  
Outside for Christ's sake  
Under a tacked-on lean-to  
To keep the rain out

This was only the start  
Of a rocky relationship  
Street parking was taken  
By his clients 4 to 11 PM daily

Thursdays were better  
That was youth night  
Parents dropped them off  
Picked them up

But not the wrappings  
Plastic bottles aluminum cans  
And all the other garbage  
The left behind

Planning Board Zoning enforcement  
Building Inspector Code enforcement  
Public Safety Sanitation Department  
All equally useless

So when they sold the house  
I was thrilled to say the least  
No more cars and ski-boat trailers  
Parked on his lawn

I never noticed when  
Our new neighbors  
Moved in  
They were very quiet

Never talked to or even saw him

Saw she and their child  
Once or twice and waved  
Then came the cars

Five or six parked regularly  
Didn't take me long to figure out  
This new building code violation  
The studio had become a dorm

Their sudden move out  
After about two years  
Was a foreclosure  
I checked the county records

The teaser rate non-verif' loan  
Got them in got them out  
Even with renters they couldn't  
Cover the bump in rate + taxes insurnace

It makes me feel sad  
I never got to know them  
To talk about plans to remove  
My two large old maples

That I knew dropped  
As many leaves  
On ther side  
As it did ours

I have no control over  
Negative amortization loans  
Falling real estate values  
I could have helped with the leaves

Tom J. Mariani

# I Find Us Between The Lines

I find myself between the lines  
Of Marvin Bell's poem  
'Prodigal?' in his book  
Of poems 'Mars Being Red'

It's like he's welcoming me  
Back unconditionally  
I'll put his words in brackets  
So you can follow along

[I'm off to the front lines in the war to preserve  
the privilege of myth-making]  
That's me whenever I write  
My poetic license tucked in my pants

I have [...the nerve to think  
the future and remember the past...]  
How does Marvin know how poems  
Come to me and want to get back out

I still think he is talking about me  
In the last lines of the poem  
[...They lived among the heroic  
who did not want another life, and if

they erred in creating bigger-than-life characters,  
they broke bread with the unspeakable,  
and that is worth something.]  
In case you are wondering

I think you too the other writers  
Are the [heroic/who] also [did not  
want another life, ...]  
[and that is worth something.]

Tom J. Mariani



# In His Day

I don't recall what I saw first  
His face of his boots  
Both were old and battered  
State-issued brown high-tops

One held together  
By a thin torn strip  
Of bed sheet wrapped and tied  
Around the sole and top of the toe

It showed more  
Signs of wear  
Than the other boot  
That seemd much newer

Leading me to believe  
They had been acquired  
At different times  
How did they get mismatched

His face had deep creases  
Or age and wear too  
Black tight short weave  
Receding and graying

This morning he was  
Standing in line  
Waiting to use one of the two  
Open cell common sinks and toilets

They had to serve one-hundred and ten  
Prisoners housed on Broadway  
The open bunk area for the overflow  
In San Quentin's West Block

Standing there in his  
Baggy pajama style  
Orange top and elastic banded pants  
His body was ill defined

As he turned his head  
I could see he was missing  
A couple of teeth and  
His left eye

There was a dark socket  
Where his eye once was  
The rest of his face  
Just looked tired

It was pretty early  
Watchinig from my lower bunk  
On the ground floor  
Of the five tiers of West Block

I had the luxury  
In a two-man five foot by  
Nine foot cell of  
Our own toilet and sink

We didn't have to  
Line up early  
Before breakfast  
To use the common heads

I had forgotten  
About the old guy  
Until I saw him  
Later that day

We were in the exercise yard  
He had his orange top off  
This old dude still had  
Strong muscle definition

No excess steriod  
Metal pushing bulk  
Like some of the  
Younger guys were strutting

In his day

My guess was  
He went up to 155  
Welter-weight or light heavy

After watching his workout  
Of finger-tip inclined push-ups  
And shadow boxing  
I could imagine

As he walked across the yard  
In his mismatched shoes  
He could still go  
Deep into a ten round match

With most of these guys

Tom J. Mariani

# Is It Only In California?

Is it only in California  
That on November 24th  
You need sunglasses and  
Can wear shorts and a T-shirt

To scrape the frost off  
Your car windshield like I did  
This morning  
Before I went to get coffee

Tom J. Mariani

# It May Not Seem Fair

She was part  
Of what held  
This family together

When it didn't want or  
Didn't think it needed  
To be held

Now she tells me  
Of growing up on the ranch  
In the early nineteen hundreds

Why their father left  
Coming by with money  
Putting in a couple days of work

Then heading back out  
As the held together  
Four young girls and their mother

On a ranch  
Needing at least  
Two strong men

Just to hold the horses  
Horses that were halter broke  
Yet still needed to learn

To repond  
To the bridles  
Givin instructions

They needed  
To be taught  
But never question way

They would turn  
Trot canter pause  
Cut gallop or stop short

When they felt  
The pull in their mouths  
The slap on their flanks

Expected to be saddled  
Carry pull  
And be ridden

For the rest of  
Their lives  
Working a ranch

Herding a small  
String of beef cattle  
And milk cows

Guess he was not ready for that  
He drove his six horse team  
Trained to haul heavy loads

Logs - railroad ties - or  
With high sideboards  
Loads of tanbark

The girls had turkeys and pigs  
To raise  
Cows to milk

Chickens to feed  
Kill pluck and clean  
Eggs to collect candle and sell

Deer they shot  
Needed to be dressed out  
Venison jerky seasoned hung to dry

Tall green stalks of corn to grow  
Apples to pick and put up  
Pots to clean

A garden to tend

Vegetables to sell or barter  
For flour salt coffee fabric

Lanterns to trim and light  
Clothes to mend and wash by hand  
And then hang to dry

All by hand  
Without his  
He was in town or

Out of town on the road  
In the winter he drove  
The mail coach

Three day drive north to Eureka  
Overnight stops for supper  
Fresh horses

After meals for passengers and locals  
Playing his fiddle for dancing  
Drinks for the driver

The trip in a car now takes  
Only about an hour  
Up the Redwood Highway

Not a fair race  
We don't go by the way of  
Briceland Ettersburg

Redway Garberville  
Out Bells Springs Road  
To pick up and deliver mail

On to Harris Alderpoint Fort Steward  
And in between  
Laying up overnight

Back to Phillipsville  
Through Miranda Meyers Flat  
Shively Pepperwood

Stafford Scotia Rio Dell  
and Alton before again  
Overnight in Fortuna

I have been shown where the coach stop was  
Fresh horses more dancing  
An early start on to Eureka

She has told me  
More stories  
As I listened this morning

She tells me of things  
From my parents to her grandparents  
Living on the South Fork of the Eel River

She has outlived  
Her three sisters  
She is the last

Now giving me  
An explanation of why  
Their father left

A wife to run a ranch and raise  
Four young daughters by herself  
On her mother's family homestead

Tom J. Mariani



# Just A Few Things I Don'T Like About Writing Poetry

Why do some of my best ideas  
Wake me out of a sound sleep  
At 2: 06 somtimes 3: 28 AM  
Damn green digital numbers

Then I can't find  
My beside notebook until  
I bump into something  
That wakes my wife

By the time I've assured her  
There has not been  
An attempted break-in  
Found the notebook where's the pen

Finally quiet as I can  
Get to the bathroom  
Turn on the light  
Get comfortably seatd

I am sure I have  
Forgotten most of the good parts  
The ones that remain make little sense  
Now that I am fully awake

Another thing

Why is most of the heavy lifting  
Done at my end of the process  
If you don't think so  
You're not the one

Who carries my full wastebasket  
Of drafts to our blue recycling can  
It's only the paper worth saving  
Not what's on them I assure you

Fridays that blue sucker  
Has to be rolled to the curb

Later I hear the automated arms  
Of the truck straining to lift

Some of my best first tries  
As they are unceremoniously  
Carted away to be recycled  
For someone else's next attempts

(Note to self: Learn to write and revise  
Live on the computer  
'Do not save' will save trips  
To the unvirtual garbage can

I'll find other ways  
To get my exercise  
Gathering material  
To write about

As long as I can get  
Enough rest before  
Another great idea  
Rudely wakes me up)

Tom J. Mariani

# Just When I Thought I'D Seen It All

OK I know it's a liitle early  
For Christmas poems  
But the catalogues have been coming  
By mail for weeks

So I'll keep this short  
For those of you or  
People on your shopping list  
Who still have self-winding watches

Wrist that is  
That need help getting wound  
It's hard to believe  
But they have come up with a cure

This machine \$100 to \$200  
Holds one or up to four  
Wrist watches - - - at last count  
I only needed one

If you haven't had enough activity  
During the day  
To get your watch wound  
It will do it for you while you rest

However if you can't get your watch to go  
I can't see why you'd need more rest  
I cut the advertisement out  
So I can look at it

From time to time  
And remember when  
At 11: 02 - - mail was early that day  
I saw it all

Tom J. Mariani

# Lady At The Desk Wouldn'T Understand

And it comes to this  
Him putting back in his teeth  
with one hand

Standing back to me  
stall door open in the men's  
bathroom at the Central Library

This rainy cold morning  
he's just bathed  
washed his clothes  
repacked all he has

This rainy cold morning  
I've been trying my hand  
updating my resume  
preparing for a job interview

I was able to  
sleep in a little  
shower shave at home  
breakfast with my wife

He 's been tring to  
keep warm  
stay awake and  
not get thrown out

Right now he  
in the stall  
me at a urinal  
we're just two guys  
taking a piss

Tom J. Mariani

# Legs

Long lean luscious  
And all those  
Lovely 'L' words

While a little too tall for me  
I can see why it would be  
A lot to measure up to

Tom J. Mariani

# Life Is Truly A Ride

We're all strapped in.  
When the doctor slaps your behind,  
he's ripping your ticket and  
away you go.

As you make each passage  
from youth to maturity,  
sometimes you put your arms up  
and just scream.

Sometimes all you can do is hang on  
to the bar in front of you.  
It is the ride  
that is the thing.

I think the most you can hope for  
at the end of life is that  
your hair's messed up,  
you have a smile on your face,

that only you know how it got there,  
you've used up all you had,  
you're out of breath and  
you didn't throw up on yourself.

Tom J. Mariani

# Like Shooting Stars

I heard him say,  
When asked  
What it felt like when love was lost  
When depression overcame,

'Like no love was left in my heart  
I checked other parts of my body  
It's no longer there either  
I'm not sure when it burned out

It was there once  
Felt by the rest of my body  
Intensified by proximity  
To its intended target

Love generated its own light  
Created its own heat  
I looked for words to describe it  
Landed on shooting stars

A thrill to see  
Something special  
While flying by  
But where do they go

That's the problem  
I found out  
They aren't going  
Indefinitely anywhere

For a short time  
We see a visible light  
Created by them  
Then the light is gone

Small pieces of dust rock ice  
Debris from the tail of a passing comet  
Ignited by friction visible part a meteor  
Just passing through our atmosphere

We only see the light  
Meteoroids are what causes it  
Not as romantic sounding  
As Shooting Stars

If by chance one's unusually large  
Over a few kilograms  
Some parts will  
Survive the burning

What's left  
That falls to earth  
Some say is  
Just a piece of cold rock

What was on the outside  
Heated up  
Burned up  
And is gone

What hits earth  
Is now called a meteorite  
Different names  
For the different stages

Actually the term  
Falling in love  
Is a pretty accurate metaphor  
When compared to shooting stars

Made up of dust rock and ice  
Made visible when heated by friction  
Then either slams to earth leaving a scar  
Or is vaporized and is gone.'

That's what he said,  
In so many words.

Tom J. Mariani



# Looking Back

Her hair is short now  
Ted had always liked it long  
They had shared so much  
Even her name was in their favorite song

She frosted it too  
'Grey already?' he tried to smile  
It caught in his throat  
She was changing more than style

They both were so young  
Writing their names in ink  
On schoolbook covers seemed permanent.  
What did they think - - -

That all the songs of the '60s were true  
It seems that The Four Seasons  
At 45 rpm  
Was the extent of what they knew.

Once they had parted  
They tried several times to restart  
No matter who he met  
A piece of her was in his heart

So much has happened  
Over all these years  
Does it make any difference  
That there once were tears

We've stayed friends  
Once she'd found another  
It was so different  
Being like a brother

His life could only be lived  
He would eventually find  
If she was out of sight  
Surprise - - - she's still on his mind

Tom J. Mariani

# Looking For Encouragement In Icu

He's gone  
I never saw him go  
Surprised that he fell

I thought he would get up  
At first he looked like he'd be OK  
He was upset that he'd slipped

Confused that the legs hadn't held  
The strength that steadied  
The foot and braced the legs

Held at the smoker in 1932  
When three solid lefts  
Couldn't take him down

Held when the Hammond trim saw kicked  
Held on the wet rocks of Redwood Creek  
When the salmon jumped and were on

Held splitting a second cord of wood  
While after loading the first  
I thought I needed a break

Now when he needed it most  
They didn't hold they gave  
Yet he somehow still held on

Over the ledge I could see him there  
He was pulling himself up  
Or at least I wanted him to

I tried to talk to him  
I got his attention  
He silently shook his head

The same as when we hunted  
When I thought I had a clear shot  
And he knew I didn't

He always challenged me  
No matter what I did  
To be a better shot

'We're not out here to wound  
Chase down a revine then  
Drag bloodshoot venison through the brush.

We're out here to put meat on the table.'  
He also knew when to fish  
And where the quail hid

He always encouraged me  
To know what I was doing  
Before I did it

'Its real important you learn  
The difference between your ass  
And a hole in the ground.'

Was his way  
Of putting it  
I knew what he meant

Shaking his head I recognized his signal  
I still wanted to help even though  
I couldn't have gotten to him anyway

Then he stopped trying  
The strength and gruffness were gone  
I was mad at him

For the tears in his eyes  
For not trying  
For knowing more than me

He knew there was no way up  
The others calling to him  
Were of no use

I knew then what he wanted

To push away from the side  
To be over and done with it

He was caught tangled held back  
He couldn't even let go  
When he wanted to

I looked and he was there  
I couldn't help  
I didn't want to watch

I looked again  
He was gone  
I never saw him go

Tom J. Mariani

# Lovers Leap

Love is a leap  
No matter what they say  
Whether it is forever  
A season or just a day

For we don't fall in love  
Rather we leap at each other  
Once we recognize the spark  
We think it will never smother

Only after we have leapt  
Can we see where we have landed  
For some life is more than fair  
For others seemingly underhanded

Tom J. Mariani

# Made To Feel Welcome

I'm sure Sandra M. Gilbert  
The author of her collection  
Of poems titled  
'ghost volcano'

Had no idea what her poem  
'Kissing the Bread'  
Would remind me of  
When she wrote about

Her mother's habit of  
Kissing old bread  
Before she threw it away  
Sandra found out

'Her mother the Sicilian midwife  
taught her, taught all nine, '...

'Non so. You kiss it like  
crossing yourself before a crisis, before  
the train leaves the station,  
before the baby falls,  
startled, into a sudden  
scorch of air.'

What a description of birth  
- -a baby falling startled  
into a sudden  
scorch of air

My grandmother  
Who is now 103  
Has told me of her mother  
Who was a midwife in Maui

They grew up in the Hawaiian islands  
After their parents came  
From Puerto Rico speaking  
Spanish learning pidgin-Hawaiian

My great-grandmother Vegas  
Had other skills too  
In addition to being a mid-wife  
She could heal the sick and injured

Her blessings combined with  
Her homemade remedies  
Brought comfort and restoration  
Of health and well being

Both were more fragile back then  
From childhood mortality  
To a variety of fevers boils  
Farming injuries violent digestive ailments

She was also with them  
When they could no longer fight back  
She blessed them and assured them  
They would be welcome

They were exposed to much of what  
We are now insulated from by  
Vaccinations hospitals real doctors  
Refrigeration indoor plumbing

However as far as I know  
Babies still fall startled  
Into a sudden scorch or air  
Hopefully into warm welcoming arms

Tom J. Mariani



# Malcontent Debris

Why do you think they wear goggles?  
To keep their eyeballs in?  
The two orbs are not trying to escape.  
All they want is a little protection  
From the stuff flying at you as you pick up speed.

You don't need the goggles  
Quietly sitting writing a poem.  
You need them,  
Firmly strapped on,  
When you're out there;

Collecting the stuff  
You'll need to write a poem.

Tom J. Mariani

# News -You Don'T Want To Get Stopped Up

My morning newspaper's late again  
If I were desperate for news  
Which I am not  
I could the internet cruise

From CNN to the London Times  
I could click here and there  
Get second hand more news  
Than I could bear

I want my newspaper in my hands  
That is the point you see  
To check high school sports  
Working on my first cup of coffee

Make sure I'm not listed as an obit'  
See what businesses have decided to quit  
That's all the news that will fit  
'Cause it's time for my AM s\_\_\_\_!

Tom J. Mariani

# Nighttime Traffic Jam - Un Callejon Sin Salida

I pass my father  
In the hall  
Several times a night  
When I get up to take a piss

I run into my Uncle Mike  
Waiting in line  
With Grandpa Bill and  
My Great-Grandfather Jim Boots

I'm no sooner back in bed  
Than I hear them  
Lining up again  
Crowding my dark hallway

I guess even in death  
Your prostrate won't  
Let you get  
Uninterrupted rest

Tom J. Mariani

# No Mandatory Rhymes Or Reason

Homer to  
Chaucer to  
Whitman to  
Bukowski et al. to  
Me to  
You

A poem is where I find it,  
Not just what was written  
In a different time.

Pieces of a poem are everywhere.  
Pick them up, pull them together, write them down  
And they call you a poet.

Ignore the pieces you see in person, read or hear;  
You've wasted your sight and hearing  
And they don't call you at all.

Tom J. Mariani

# Norman Mailer 1-31-23 To 11-10-07

I have't had time  
To read much  
Of his stuff

How did he  
Find the time  
To write it all

Tom J. Mariani

# Not A Pretty Sight

A poem should be a pretty thing  
Or that is what I once thought  
Really a poem touches you  
Where you are and where you are not

As there's different types of touching  
There's different types of poems  
Some metered some rhymed  
Some just a cry

As there's touching when you  
Politely just want to get by  
Then there's touching when you're  
Afraid and think you're going to cry

Of course there's back slapping  
Hand holding and warm embrace  
Then there's that last touch  
Just before the color leaves you face

Tom J. Mariani

# Not Designed To Wait In Line At Starbucks

Black hair mane-like  
Black shoes socks  
Strapped in a vest-like

Over long  
Warm dark  
Sleeves

Where have I seen  
Something like this before  
Sensing so much desire to move

Not designed to wait in line  
So much more to do  
Straining at the ropes

That couldn't hold her  
Even if  
They wanted to

Where have I seen  
Something like this before  
Seems barely halter-broke

Next I would expect  
To hear  
Whinnying

Then the sounds of  
A jostled bridal  
Metal clicks of a bit

Stamping of polished hooves  
Pawing and testing  
Of the ground

I'm waiting to see  
A subtle shiver  
In the shoulders

A quick toss of the head  
Flick of an ear  
Just before she bolts

Tom J. Mariani



# Off Track

He never took me to the track

The sport of kings my ass  
It filled up part of his life  
That we pretended wasn't there

All that time spent  
On the phone  
With the racing sheet  
His little book

Whatever he thought was coming  
Down the final stretch  
Never made him a king  
Left him uncovered several times  
And broke him in the end

What is that magic out there  
That makes them stand and yell  
Waving their tickets  
Grasped firmly in their hands  
As the horses make the final turn

Maybe if I had been out there  
Standing at the rail  
As then ran by - - - -  
Close enough to catch  
The fire in their eyes - - - -

However he seldom went and  
He never did take me to the track

Tom J. Mariani

# Oh Aluminum Christmas Tree

Tree? - Schmee

You cant' fool me.

It can clearly be seen!

The damn thing's not even green! !

Tom J. Mariani

# One Way In - No Way Out

Why they could not  
Let me out with the rest -  
I had mistakenly  
Stepped on their nest

The more I tried  
To get away  
The more they attempted  
To in my way

All they knew  
Was to swarm me  
To give me no rest  
They would not let me be

Bee and detectrives  
Must go to the school  
They justify themselves  
And follow no rules

Tom J. Mariani

# Out Of The Blue A Patch Of Green

-\*\*\*\*Rousseau alleged to have used  
a palette of a hundred and some-odd  
different greens  
in one painting\*\*\*\*\*  
-----

There was an empty table  
Next to mine  
She walked by dressed in green  
Holding her coffee she took a spare chair  
Then sat down her back to me

She got my attention  
My guess was  
She was not  
Encouraging nor  
Expecting company

After the green hit me  
Came the pleasant smell  
Over the roasting coffee  
It was like in the cartoons  
When the drawing of the scent

Comes under the guy's nose  
Lifts him off his seat  
He floats across the room  
Led by his nose  
By the visible wafts

Who knows what scent it was  
I suppose there are some  
Who can tell and know its name  
All I knew  
It was pulling on me

Back to the green in the chair  
Darker green at the seams  
Slacks lighter green

Leather jacket and  
Shoes both different green

Tail of a sweater  
Below back of the jacket  
Damn another darker green  
I wish I had names  
for all these greens

Ankles are barely showing  
A light tan do they still call it hose  
A beige I guess  
Probably has a better  
Brand name I also don't know

I'm writing this down  
As fast as I can  
I was working on other stuff  
But this is too good to forget  
Living in the moment observing

I was thinking  
This green is going  
To be gone soon  
I'm almost out of writing paper  
To describe anything more

My coffee's getting cold  
What's she here for  
To be seen  
To just drink coffee  
Pass the time until

I look up the green is gone  
All I'm left with is  
A cold cup of coffee  
And this  
For you to read

Tom J. Mariani

# Playing Hurt

Personally I never had  
To play that hard  
Flag football  
Did not require

Taping of wrists ankles ribs  
Mouth-pieces knee braces  
Post game ice packs  
Help getting up

And out of bed  
The next morning  
Shake it off  
Back to practice

Our daughter played basketball  
First co-ed Boys/Girls club then  
Through her second year  
At the local junior college

Class scheduling wasn't easy  
Away games post season play-offs  
San Francisco Sacramento  
Berkeley Modesto

Not easy to get in the classes  
Needed for her major  
Add twenty-two hours a week  
As a grocery store clerk

Now you got  
A tough schedule  
Playing hurt  
No big deal

So she told me  
Taped up  
Mouth piece in  
Ready to play

Now married  
Buying their first home  
Teaching sixth graders  
Still a tough schedule

I remember a phone call  
From her from Sac State  
A month into  
Her junior year

Except for intermurals  
She decided not to play  
To fit in the classes she needed  
Laughing she admitted

'Dad, I never realized  
How good it would feel  
To wake up without  
Something hurting.'

Tom J. Mariani

# Possible Suspect

When the police name  
A possible or prime suspect  
They have a purpose  
To get a confession or

Beat the bushes or  
Shake the tree  
To see what flies  
Or falls to their feet

Once named what  
Can an innocent person do -  
Claim to be an impossible suspect -  
The media did not want to hear from you

Tom J. Mariani



# Rain

I love the rain  
It causes smells to change

Washing as I walk  
Urine off the sidewalk

Tom J. Mariani

# Recrudesce

Here we go again  
We've been here before  
No one asked for this  
No one requested more

So here we go again  
Feels like sliding on ice  
No traction No balance  
Sure doesn't feel nice

Try to grab on  
Looking for something stable  
We reach We try to grip  
Wer're not able

There's noting to tie on to  
There's nothing to hold  
Once we had each other  
No surprise Ice is cold

Tom J. Mariani

# Selected To Be So Full Of Life

Frisky rare white boxer pup  
They use to  
Put them down

Tom J. Mariani

# Send In The Clowns

That's what they do  
In a three-ring circus  
When something goes wrong  
They send in the clowns

It's to distract the audience  
From the ring with a problem  
Sometimes a net breaks  
Sometimes an animal balks

A political example  
Of sending in the clowns  
Is Ms. Clinton being sent  
To the Mideast to broker peace

The resulting cease fire  
In a fragile tent  
That may catch fire  
Then it's back to weasons for hire

Tom J. Mariani

# Sense Of Smell

Doesn't matter  
if you were hiding  
from chores  
back at the ranch  
in the middle of the orchard

or years later

raking leaves and  
the dead ones  
from the single tree  
in your backyard  
after a rain

the smell of apples  
is still the same

Tom J. Mariani

# Sights And Sounds Of Christmas

How do I know  
Christmas is near  
Signs around our house  
Make it very clear

Advent paper windows  
Get opened each day  
Twenty-five to count  
Teaching grandkids to pray

They're more excited by  
The piece of candy they find  
Such a small prize makes big eyes  
It's a joy of a special kind

Each window has a little prayer  
To remind why we count each day  
There's other things that tell me  
Santa too is on his way

When the tree goes up  
Home-made decorations are best  
Ornaments bought for special days  
Make up the rest

Special lights for the Manger  
Ceramics fired by great-great-great aunt Vie  
Ornaments made in pre-school  
Thirty years gone by

Then what they've all waited for  
A cloth Snowman my wife made  
His bulging belly's a pouch  
Filled with candy starts a parade

He hangs by Grandma's chair  
Right there on the wall  
As soon as they can reach  
They want to be this tall

One by one day by day  
A piece here a piece there  
Some too short figutre out  
To stand on Grandma's chair

Pretty soon the Snowman's belly  
Starts to go flat  
No one knows for sure but  
Someone always takes care of that

Finally a noise that I hear  
A sort of occasional clink  
Someone secretly checking for  
Christmas cookies in the jar by the sink

Tom J. Mariani

# Soccer: My Best Foot Too Far Forward

I have to go back a bit  
To tell this story  
Freshman year of college  
PE classes were mandatory

Somehow each semester  
You had to fit one in  
To the burden of other classes  
You had to carry gym

It was only for an hour  
Twice or so a week  
Cut too often and  
You were up a creek

Hours in registration lines  
No on-line to be on yet  
Dennis and I checked our schedules  
For an open slot that met

Friends for a long time  
We were looking for a sport  
We could both sign up for  
Open field or indoor court

We both had jobs  
That made it harder  
Had to pay my own way  
Parents provided room and board in the barter

We found a day and time  
We figured we could meet  
A sport we never tried  
Soccer to teach us to use our feet

We got all signed up  
Then headed to get some eats  
'Hey Dennis said, 'Ya know  
We're gona need some cleats.'



No clue of the need for shin-guards yet  
We'd never seen a game before  
Only rule we knew was no hands  
Running and kicking was there more

We bought a book on how to play  
Split the cost just bought one  
Read it all before first class  
We were ready to practice and run

That we did ran drills and hills  
It's all he'd let us do  
'Don't play to get in shape  
Get in shape to play on my crew.'

Weeks went by and still no game  
We didn't sign up for that  
We kicked so many practice balls  
I was sure they'd all go flat

Then the day finally came  
Pick sides to play and score  
I asked for center forward  
I was ready for war

Whistle blew I kicked the ball  
As far and hard as I could  
I mentioned I'd never seen a game  
Coach screamed, 'Is your head made of wood? '

Instead of 'pitching it to a mate'  
I played it the American way  
He had me running extra hills  
Before he'd again let me play

He figured the offside rule  
Also didn't register with me  
I was now a fullback  
'How you screw this up we'll see.'

Dennis tells this story

Like it was yesterday  
Reminds me I hold the school record  
Distance in a kick off to my dismay

Tom J. Mariani

# Something Between Us

It was something  
Between us  
That first pulled  
Us together

Then I noticed  
She zigged  
When I wanted  
To zag

Each time we hugged  
When I was done  
Holding on  
She still clung

We were pulled apart  
By something  
That got  
Between us

Tom J. Mariani

# Spent My Youth In An Alley

Went back this weekend out of town  
For a family birthday party  
To where I spent  
Some of my youth

Backing my sister in-law's car  
Out of her garage  
Into the alley behind her house  
Brought back some memories

Drove slowly as I bumped along  
Over old potholes  
Who's supposed to fill them now  
Heavy brush and blackberries on both sides

Ahead of me was a young boy on his bike  
He had a bouncing empty wagon forced to follow  
Tied with a frayed piece of scrap rope  
To the seat post of the bike

Another boy was following  
As fast as he could on foot  
This was only a couple of blocks  
From the alley where I used to play

Alleys are great  
Protected from traffic and parent's eyes  
Old man Mitchell's dogs would warn us  
If anyone was coming

Back then my alley  
Had fresh oil and gravel  
If the city truck didn't come in time  
My grandfather kept the potholes filled

Brought the fill home from work  
In the bed of his pickup  
Sometimes I'd get to help him shovel  
I asked him why he did it

'I'm not paying to get  
Your grandmother's car realigned again  
How in the hell  
Does she find every new pothole? '

Once we were done  
I'd get to wash his truck  
Sit behind the steering wheel  
And pretend

Nothing disappointing when the alley was young  
Fresh oil and gravel  
All the wild blackberries you could eat  
What more could you want

When I took my sister in-law's car back  
The boys were gone  
Without them playing in the alley  
It's just a dusty shadow-ridden place

Tom J. Mariani

# Steroids Era And The Mitchell Report

American baseball fans  
Did not want to know  
How the sausage was being made  
How the chicken was choked  
How the pig was stuck or  
How the lamb was slaughtered  
They just wanted a tailgate party

Tom J. Mariani

## Striking [now Trying To Be Haiku Too]

Striking is the difference  
In the color of her made-up face  
And her stark white ankles  
That are flashing at me

[original above, below attempt at Haiku with same title as original]

Striking

The difference between  
Made up face stark white  
Ankles flashing at me

[So, how did I do with Haiku? ]

Tom J. Mariani

# Surprise Before Christmas

was a couple of days before Christmas  
And all through our house  
Wrapping supplies were still scattered  
When my wife first saw the mouse

I was dozing watching TV  
When I hear her query  
'What's that running across the floor? '  
Her eyes showing signs of fear and fury

Then I saw it too and hoped it was  
Heading out on his way back  
It was a mouse for sure  
Furry light brown with eyes coal black

I jumped to my feet  
To see what to do  
Could I be fast enough to catch him  
Or just hit him with my shoe

I scared him all right  
He again ran across the floor  
Hid behind our presents  
Instead of going out the door

Help was on the way  
My son handed me a broom  
My wife standing in her chair  
Watching from the other room

Our daughter on her cell phone  
Also seemed full of fright  
I heard her asking a friend  
If she could go there to spend the night

Then the mouse was gone  
Fast as a shot  
At least that's what I told my wife  
I showed her the spot



'See the bottom of the new door  
where the the rug used to be  
That's where he went out.'  
Sounded convincing to me

She made me check all the rooms  
Even close up the chimney flue blockikng any crack  
I thought better and didn't ask  
How Santa was going to get in with his sack

Finally she went to bed  
I was soon to follow  
I'm sure she knew my promise of  
'No mouse for Christmas.' was hollow

Tom J. Mariani

# Thank God For Horses That Talk To Me

My wife takes most words literally where they fall  
She does not understand my poems at all  
She tolerates the time I spend with them  
'Long as I don't ask her what she thinks of 'em

She is more like our daughter  
Who at age ten indignantly  
Handed me back 'Black Beauty'  
'I'm not reading this.

Horses don't talk.'  
Thank God for my poetic license  
And all the horses that  
Keep talking to me

Tom J. Mariani

# Thank God You Don'T Have To Be An Ophthalmologist To Write Poetry

It doesn't fall apart  
just because  
I don't know.

Yellow doesn't stop  
being yellow just because  
I'm not sure I know

anything about  
why the eye sees  
different colors.

Anononymous

Tom J. Mariani

# The Cheese Stands Alone

How do you  
Deal with  
Having fallen  
Into the hole

You have dug?

When is it  
Going to be  
The First Day in  
The Rest Of Your Life?

When are all  
Your chances  
Used up  
And gone?

How do you exit  
Gracefully, while  
Taking the blame  
For all this mess?

And it is a mess.  
Unrecoverable, unimaginable,  
Dark shallow breathing,  
Despair that does not end.

Look around:  
For friends and the  
Laughter of family,  
Occasions for joy,

Where are they now?

Driven away?  
Ignored.? Neglected?  
Did you expect  
Them to stay?

Un-nurtured then faded.  
Time took some away,  
Even before  
You noticed the loss.

You made a circle  
To protect yourself:  
Careful who you let in,  
Careless who you let out.

Now alone,  
The circle shakes,  
Not able to support itself,  
It blows away.

The Cheese  
stands  
Alone.

Tom J. Mariani

# The Lamp

Writing poetry is like rubbing an old lamp.

At first all you're trying to do is get  
the dust off, see what you've got a hold of and  
what the lamp is made of.

Once the smoke starts to rise and the Genie  
begins to appear, you sense the magic  
without knowing what direction it will take you,  
or the reader.

Tom J. Mariani

# The Rest Of Our Vacation In La And San Diego

You know I didn't want to be  
The cause for our need for Imodeum D  
Since I displayed the symptoms first  
I'll tak the blame for finding the curse

I could have brought it with me  
Or caught it after we landed  
Months planning our vacation  
Getting sick seemed underhanded

We didn't take the Tijuana shopping tour  
Montezuma found us anyway  
Just because Cortez kicked his butt  
Is no reason to ruin our day

Even with the unwanted wake-up call  
We survived with medication the Saturday mobs  
Venice Beach and Hollwood made us glad  
We knew we could go home to real jobs

Beverly Hill and La Jolla made us envious  
The airline flight from SF made you panic  
The Del Coronado made us want to return without Montezuma  
For a vacation more romantic

Looking back our vacation was fun  
But restful not  
Half our time sight-seeing  
The rest sitting on the pot

Tom J. Mariani

# Theresienstadt

If you search there  
With today's high-tech tools  
You will find the effects there  
In ovens there that were his final stop

Somewhere there  
Is enough of a sample  
To test with modern equipment  
For proof he with others ended there

From a sample of dust in pile there  
Maybe still buried in a trench  
Maybe blown away by now  
Since 1943 is a long time

Long enough to forget George Pick ended there  
The man who in 1912 caused Eienstein  
To consider absolute differential calculus  
Which got General Relativity unstuck

Eienstein - a Jew was welcomed  
In England Germany America  
George Pick - a Jew too  
Got stuffed into a freight rail car to Theresienstadt

We've left him there  
We allowed the cause that took him there  
We should never forget the effect  
We should never forget George Pick

Tom J. Mariani



# Things I Find When I Clean

Halloween has marked the day  
-rest of The Holidays are on the way  
Clear some room it's been requested  
For out-of-towners to be nested

They only stay over night  
Then as soon as it's bright  
We'll be off to The City by The Bay  
Favorite spot of mine I'll say

Things I find when I clean  
Things for years I haven't seen  
Stacks of books to move  
I can get rid of some I'll prove

I throw thoughts onto what I can find  
Written on scraps the contents of my mind  
Then folded between pages  
Of books I havn't seen in ages

Things that came out of my head  
Written while sitting on a rented bed  
In The City late at night  
Under a single light

On guest letterhead envelopes my notes  
Of things that matterd important quotes  
Also maps and an old resturant ad  
Reminds me of being very glad

As do the books I have to clear  
Going to a book sale I fear  
No room for anything new  
Unless I'm brave enough to recycle a few

It's like-  
Parting with friends  
Even ones heavy with dust  
-back to my notes

Folded maps stolen menus  
A parking ticket paid I hope  
Even a room key/card  
A borrowed bookmark I forget to return

All now in a small pile  
After the old books are cleaned  
Of stuff that that would only confuse  
New owners that will have to  
Cope with my margin notes  
My guides of where to look  
For related stuff my reactions

-But I digress-

My book shelves were sagging  
No room for the books on the floor  
Soon overnight guests will be coming  
Thanksgiving and shopping trips  
From friends and family up North  
Looking for a place to stay  
Overnight

When the traffic is light  
We're forty-five minutes  
To the Golden Gate Bridge  
Waive at walkers stretch our necks  
Gawk at all the sailboats  
Sliding across The Bay  
They're day-tripping too

Our car has it's own crew  
Each ready to unfurl  
Catch whatever wind is up  
It's hard to hold our vessel  
On the Waldo Grade approach  
They're so anxious to join the fleet  
Anxious to throw anchor at shops diners  
In their favorite spot

Staying on course takes all I got

I've also thought of being 746 feet up  
Above the water in a tower of the bridge  
I can feel the pull on my keel  
Wanting to join the boats  
Out on the water looking up  
That's also where I want to be

On my way out to sea  
Wind pulling or pushing  
I don't care  
Along for the ride  
I would like that view too  
Instead of looking down at them  
To be able to look up at the Bridge-

Taking time to find reasons  
To make new notes  
Find new books to refill  
I'll be seeing things  
To write about-

Tourists at the railing  
Looking down at all the boats  
From the deck of The Bridge  
While it carries their weight  
Supporting too our rolling vessel  
Letting us cruise on  
Imagining  
While on our way  
To The City

Tom J. Mariani

# This Is No Fish Story

We had been up and down Redwood Creek  
For what seemed to me to be all day  
Watching my grandfather fish for salmon  
We started at the mouth of the river

Hiked over sand rocks and slippery green moss  
The only reason I was there was  
The fried chicken and potato salad  
My grandmother made the night before

Lunch seemed so far away  
My grandfather was out of sight  
He had worked his way upstream  
When we heard him yell 'FISH ON! '

My grandmother who had been hanging back with me  
Left me in the sand  
I had to move fast to catch up  
Moving around large pieces of driftwood

He had certainly hooked something  
His rod bending if half then straightening  
As he let line out  
With the reel's drag on

I knew how to fish  
I just didn't like to  
I had no patience  
I wasn't like bird hunting

If I got bored bird hunting  
When I was by myself  
With just my dog  
I could take a shot anyway

Just for practice  
To get the dog used to the noise  
Because I had no patience  
At the age of twelve

I had never seen so much line out before  
He kept backing further up the wide beach  
It looked to me as if the fish knew the way  
And was headed back to the ocean

Hook in his mouth  
My guess was he was no longer  
In the mood for spawning  
He had my grandfather on

Nothing personal on either side  
My grandfather wanted to land the salmon  
The salmon it appeared wanted  
My grandfather in the water

This primal tug of war  
Went on for some time  
The salmon tried everything  
It tried going behind submerged trees

It would take a run  
Straight at the beach  
My grandfather reeling in the slack  
As fast as he could

The salmon would then jump high  
Doubling back away yanking on the line  
Trying to dislodge the hook  
Or snap the line (he'd been on before)

They were both getting tired  
My grandfather timed the next  
Pull on his fishing rod  
With the jump of the salmon

Too close to shore this time  
The beast was on the beach in front of me  
My grandfather was still reeling in line  
He knew it wasn't landed yet

He was hollering for my grandmother

To grab a piece of driftwood  
To club the monster  
Who was glaring at me with one eye

His other eye was in the sand  
My grandfather's shining metal lure  
Stuck out of a bloody mouth  
Gills were grasping for oxygen in dry air

I swear I saw in that eye the reflection  
Of my grandmother running  
A hunk of driftwood in hand  
The eye saw it too

With one last flop like a large wrestler  
Just before the count of three  
He went up into the air  
Snapped the line hit the water and was gone

I'm not sure what pound test the line was  
Whatever it was it wasn't enough  
My grandfather's favorite lure  
With his hand-tied leader

Were following their catch  
As fast as they could  
Not knowing it was they  
That had been caught

Tom J. Mariani

# This One Got Selected- - -So Full Of Life

Frisky rare white boxer  
They use to  
Put them down

Tom J. Mariani

# Thought Frost Could Not Surprise Me

Robert Frost is one of the ones  
That got me started  
When the only poems I would read  
Had to be assigned

'Read pages 21 to 28 and  
on Monday be prepared  
to discuss compare and contrast.'  
Yeah - yeah more homework

Thank God Robert was in there  
Somewhere between  
Pages 21 to 28  
I don't recall which one grabbed me

But he had me looking for more  
On my own nothing due by Friday  
We talked about doubt and  
Dealing with death 'OUT, OUT-'

This was before I met Macbeth  
Robert was talking to me  
Not down at me  
I thought I knew him

I've invited him to family funerals  
'Reluctance' got him a ticket  
To my great-grandmother's  
'Bravado' to her daughter's

'Devotion' for my father  
'Never Again Would Bird's  
Song Be The Same' shared  
With my mother aunts in chorus

Today he surprised me  
Found some humor in there  
That I had read over before  
I tripped over his cow



'...IN APPLE TIME

As a very young youngster  
I was at our family ranch  
When it had cattle and apples

Part of my job  
Was to keep them apart  
Robert shows in this poem  
He knew why better than I

While she the cow  
May scorn 'a pasture  
withering to the root.'  
He knows what happens

When as he describes  
'Her face is flecked with pomace and she drools  
A cider syrup. Having tasted fruit.'  
Don't look for Adam and Eve

Although they may have been on his mind  
Get out of the way when 'She leaves'  
the apples 'bitten when she has to fly.'  
AKA The green apple dirties

That's what my great-grandmother  
Called the affliction when I had eaten  
Too many free apples off the trees  
AKA The back door trots

Quickest way to the outhouse  
It was more important  
And not as funny when  
A cow would get into the orchard

As Robert ends his poem  
'She bellows on a knoll against the sky.  
Her udder shrivels and the milk goes dry'  
If it's taken me this long to get this

What hope is there for generations hence

Whoes apples all have bar codes on each one  
In season they are not free  
They are going to overthink this poem

Tom J. Mariani

# Time For Thanks And Giving

Big bouncy boobs  
How I wish to fondle  
Under her sweater  
That would be the end all

I would give them  
The attention they deserve  
I would hold  
Nothing in severve

Tom J. Mariani

## Two Found Poems In 'For Whom The Bell Tolls'

'I believe  
that I could walk up  
to the mill and  
knock on the door and

I would be welcome  
except that they have orders  
to challenge all travelers  
and ask to see their papers.

It is only orders  
that come between us.  
Those men  
are not fascists.

I call them so, but  
they are not.  
They are poor men,  
as we are.'

-----

'...he is finished  
and as ended  
as a boar  
that has been altered.

...when the altering  
has been accomplished  
and the squealing  
is over

you cast  
the two stones away  
and the boar,  
that is a boar no longer,

goes snouting  
and rooting

up to them  
and eats them.'

Tom J. Mariani

# Understanding Prison Signs

One long loud signal bell  
Or several short sharp whistle blasts  
Tell you to stay sitting if your are.  
Standing, sit on the floor 'til

Your hear the signal that it's over.  
The signs on the walls make it clear;  
'Warning Shoits Will Not  
Be Fired' in here.

Tom J. Mariani

# Veteran's Day Usa 2007

At age 18  
My Dad was somewhere  
In the South Pacific  
Flying in the darkness  
As a tailgunner in WW II

At age 18  
I was in college  
Working part-time  
At a job  
He got me

Saving some money  
For my first car  
Borrowing his  
To date girls  
And think about what's next

Thanks Dad

Tom J. Mariani

# Vox Clara

This here's his assignment  
Solitary confinement  
He doesn't feel great  
Being ward of the State  
In his cell  
Ya know he's mad as hell  
But he ain't goin' down  
For bein' no clown  
He's a soldier  
State says he's a holder  
Ward of the State  
'Les he takes the bait  
Givin' up no one  
It'll never be done  
He's a soldier  
May never get older  
Say he's full of hate  
Got that straight  
Used a gun  
Made a short run  
He's a soldier  
Couldn't be bolder  
If he popped a cap in you  
They'd put dirt top you  
As a soldier  
Couldn't be colder  
Still ward of the State  
Don't feel great  
He is a soldier

Tom J. Mariani



# What Have They Done To The San Francisco Bay?

What have they done to my Bay  
It's yours too you should know  
What's been done didn't all happen  
Wednesday November 7,2007

The Bay has been shrinking for years  
The edges keep getting filled and built on  
There's parts best not to get too close to  
During low tides - - it stinks

What stinks could be  
The effluent that's flowed and flowed in - -  
Could be thousands of car tires  
And larger machine parts

Know someone gone missing - -  
They could be stuck there too  
Along with  
God knows what

Incoming and outgoing tides  
Can clean up just so much  
What has been allowed  
To be added is a crime

Tides were not intended to flush  
Unlimited human waste  
Add to that heavy fog  
A heavily loaded container ship

A single walled hull  
Built for weight and fuel economy  
Now that is just too ironic  
I hoped they saved enough

To pay for all this  
The Cosco Busan has only added  
Fifty-eight thousand gallons of bunker oil  
To a much larger problem

Tom J. Mariani

# What I Miss

While I miss you  
So very much  
I'm lucky to keep  
Memories of our first times

The first time  
We danced - kissed -  
Held each other tight  
The night we watched stars move

We were parked  
Near the beach  
Talking for hours  
Watching the stars

Before that night stars  
Just seemed fixed  
With you I realized  
They moved

Science tells me  
It's the earth that moves  
That night for us  
I'm sure the stars moved

Tom J. Mariani

# Where Are They Now?

Where are the bunkhouses  
Where they once washed up - ate - slept  
Where is the work we used to have for them  
Where is the next freight train out of town

Where are the freight trains  
They used to jump on and off  
To get to the next work camp  
The next job -the next hobo camp -

The last train pulled out  
Of our abandoned station long ago  
They're stuck in our town with  
No jobs - homeless under a bridge

Tom J. Mariani

# Who's To Say?

Read in the paper today  
That it's genetic  
If either of your parents  
Suffered from  
Depression and/or addiction

You are also likely

It's not always only the environment  
Can no longer blame it on just that  
It's in the blood  
As they used to say

Actually it's in the brain  
Messages misfiring  
Serotonin levels  
Out of balance

They think

They don't know  
They're trying to be  
More current and  
Scientifically correct

But what does science know  
Nothing except what a bunch  
Of people sitting around  
In white lab coats say

They probably had parents  
Depressed and addicted too

footnote: William Styron 'Darkness Visible A Memoir of Madness  
'I shall never learn what 'caused' my depression, as no one will ever learn about  
their own. To be able to do so will likely forever prove to be an impossibility, so  
complex are the intermingled factors of abnormal chemistry, behavior and  
genetics.'



# Why Does The Summer Of 1939 Sound Like Now?

The World's Fair  
from the Great White Way-  
where rides  
and the freaks  
and the Aquacade were-  
to the grand  
temples to American industry,  
promised a future  
no one belived in.  
The buildings were,  
in the words  
and fashion of the time,  
streamlined.  
Their exteriors were  
softened  
into graceful curves  
as if they were  
in a high wind,  
taking off into  
some promised land,  
and those of us  
who knew  
it wasn't true  
tended to  
huddle together.

The interiors  
of those temporary buildings  
that looked so solid  
were in constant movement-  
mechanical marching  
of cows and railroads  
cars and electronic promises,  
pioneers and robots and  
tumbles, falls, veils of  
water rushed toward  
that overused,  
ephemeral tomorrow.  
And we knew it,

we all knew it.

Tom J. Mariani



# Why There's Three Chairs

The first question  
You're asked  
When you arrive is

What do you declare  
It's not like customs  
About what you are carrying

The guards have other ways  
For checking for that  
Without asking

The guards want to know  
For your protection  
And theirs

What race do you declare  
What are your gang affiliations  
Do you need protective custody

Your race decides a lot for you  
Decides who they'll house you with  
Determines when

You'll be locked down  
Allowed on the Yard  
If you need an escort

It all depends  
On your answer  
To that first question

Yes they'll get around  
To asking you if you want to harm yourself  
Or others

What meds you're on  
Do you hear voices  
But above all race matters

For your protection  
To minimize the potential  
Of fights in a two man cell

The guards try  
To match you up  
The best they can

With someone you can tolerate  
Locked in a five by nine-foot cell  
Twenty-two hours a day

Outside the cells  
By the guards' station  
You can see the three chairs

Behind each chair  
Bolted to the wall  
Is a locked metal box

They all contain identical  
Hair-cutting supplies  
Seperate but equal

The first box is painted black  
The second box red  
The third white

The contents and the corresponding  
Barber chairs are for Blacks  
Hispanics/Others and Whites

And only for Black  
Hispanic/Other and White  
Barbers

Make no mistakes  
The inmates enforce the rules  
The unwritten rules



# Working Out Of A Corner Office

I thought I started out strong  
After taking many body blows  
My guard began to drop

It felt like - -my head being snapped back  
I keep moving while holding on  
Waiting for the bell

Once seated in my corner  
My cut man  
Goes to work

Cotton swabs and alum  
Attempting to stem the red flow  
From above my right eye

He presses on my face  
With a piece of ice-cold steel  
Trying to keep the swelling down

My manager is moving around  
In front of me waving an ice-bag  
Replaying his advice from all my fights

The crowd has their opinions too  
If I could turn and challenge them  
To step inside the ring

That would get them  
To back off  
That and standing up and spitting

Water and blood in their direction  
Into a bucket that sits on the apron  
Near the ringside seats

Instead my mouthpiece is slid back in  
Past swollen lips while I wait in my corner  
For the bell that will start the next round

=====  
=====

[I don't usually make comments on my poems. That's up to the readers to do. However, I've heard from so many readers that can't get past the controlling image of this poem; boxing. I wrote this poem long ago. Long before I saw the movie, 'Michael Clayton.' For some of the other facets to work for the reader of this poem, I have two suggestions: 1) it's out on DVD now so you can rent the movie 'Michael Clayton.' Think about the character Arthur working out of a corner office, and 2) like any poem, my title is trying to give you a hint of what direction the poem is going to take. a) metaphor of 'working out' - - trying to take care of yourself and b) the stress, grind and responsibility of working in middle or upper business management.

I put this after the end of my poem. I don't want to spoil it for a first time reader. I hope they got, on their own; that this poem is not just about boxing. The same way that Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is not about the cruelty to an Albatross, nor is Virginia Woolf's 'The Death of the Moth' about lepidopterology.]

Tom J. Mariani

# World War II Lessons That We're Still Fighting

Summer of 1966  
I had been working  
Since I turned eighteen  
As an apprentice pressman

It was summertime in San Francisco  
I got to work full time so in the Fall  
I could afford to work part-time  
And go to college

My dad had been  
A newspaper pressman  
Since he returned home  
From WW II in the Pacific

He got me my job at the Chronicle  
That was how you got union jobs  
You had to know someone  
Who was already working there

That's why no Blacks were in our union  
None worked upstairs either  
To report there were none  
Working on the presses downstairs

My dad was only seventeen  
When he and his buddies  
Signed up for the Navy  
Right after Pearl Harbor

His graduation was in North Carolina  
Learning how to be a tail-gunner  
Getting ready to ship out and find out  
What the wide white line was for

Painted down the middle of the floor  
Of the hall where the band played loud  
While young men danced with women  
Most would never see again

The local civilians thought  
Concessions were being made  
By even allowing them  
In the building

But my dad saw firsthand  
They knew their place  
One side of the dance floor  
Restrooms bar and buffet tables

Where for Whites Only  
Sailors Waves nurses and  
Local white females  
Waiting to dance and be held

The other side of the line  
Not to be crossed  
Its restrooms bar and separate buffet  
Were for the Blacks

They all danced  
To the same music  
Only careful not to cross  
That wide white painted line

Summer of 1966  
We danced in Golden Gate Park  
Silly us - - - Did we think we had erased  
That wide white dividing line

Tom J. Mariani

# You Can'T Hide It All

The hair can be dyed  
Textured and cut  
The face can be made up  
The rest nipped and tucked

However worn dry slightly  
Cracked heels of feet stricking  
Out of the back of  
Fashionable sling- back sandals

Do not lie

Tom J. Mariani