

We Tie Our Wings to the Trees

The artist's work is to show us ourselves as we really are. Our minds are nothing but this knowledge of ourselves; and he who adds a jot to such knowledge creates new mind as surely as any woman creates new men. -George Bernard Shaw

Foreword

I wrote and lived as a poet of the heart for many years. I've written several books of love poems, but this one chronicles a transformation. I was a hungry romantic, and desire was my meat and my mead, but there's always been a stubborn awareness of the reality behind and beyond the romance of my life. I was a romantic of my own life, and I was a romantic of life itself. This book began in that same temper but with the awareness of the reality that saw through the romantic to the core.

For twenty years, after letting go of my addiction to alcohol, I shed other addictions, and the last to go was the addiction to desire. This book chronicles the lifting of that obsession. I imagine most people reading this will say, "What's the problem? What is life without desire? Why would I even want to read about someone breaking the addiction to desire? Isn't that like breaking the addiction to breathing?" This is not about breathing, but I can imagine someone overly concerned with taking the next breath, unable to breathe freely, without first catering to their concern. This is about the addiction to a way of perception that colors the reality, the way all addictions gradually take away more than they give.

For anyone whose life is dependent on living in a romantic reality, I can only say that letting go of romance leaves one's reality intact. Reality has been a deeper pull on my spirit than any romantic sense I've ever had. In the East, the attachment to desire is spoken of as the great Satan of consciousness. Westerners have nodded sympathetically at those Zen saints who seem to have gone a bridge too far for the rest of us. I was pulled by these two inclinations, to live in the brightly colored world of romantic attachment, and to want to know the clearest reality for myself.

After an extraordinary time in India, almost by accident, I became even more determined to let go of the attachments of the mind. This has not been easy, especially for one whose mind of thought and feeling is rich and fertile. I used to say that when you have a brain that won't quit,

it's exhausting. Finally, I have a mind that won't quit, but I know how to quit the mind. The romance of reality takes nothing away from reality, and romance has become less appealing to me, as a way of life, and more appealing as a way of play.

I made the break. I was in a loose relationship with a good woman, and we talked about these things, freely and openly, laughing about being in a non-relationship, where the love that remains is more important than the love that attaches to the other. We never became lovers, but I couldn't shake the desire to be her lover and a lover with her. It became obvious that my convictions were at odds with my attachment to desire. Awareness was clouded by a romantic consciousness, which was still affected by old habits of thought and feeling. Desire was running the show, when the show was about living beyond attachments.

These prose poems, **We Tie Our Wings to the Trees**, is not the story of living alone. It is the story of recognizing desire, moving beyond desire, living beyond desire, and finally living free of desire. There is an arc to this letting go. The early poems are a mix of joyful passion and calm consideration, of mind and feeling and heart living in the open reality of contemplation and serene awareness. Then there is a darker period of loss and emptiness that contradicts the joyful emptiness of Being Itself. Slowly, the passion beneath passionate behavior emerges, not the same as being passionate the way any articulate poet can be, but living in the essence of passion.

In living dispassionately, I sought not the end of passion, but the revelation of the roots of passion, where passion doesn't come and go, doesn't rise and fall on the occasion of its object. That had been my goal and my expectation all along, even when I didn't believe it, even when I was living in the passion of my poetic nature. I have let go of my passionate profession, and I have found the reality of my being. This being does not come and go. It is not dependent on another. My reality is identical to itself. I don't have to match my words to a passionate profession, or vice versa. I am what I am, and it is good.

After these poems were written, I still had to make a break from the woman of the poems, not because of anything she did or didn't do, but because I had kept her close in my romantic mind. She had been a loving supporter of my work, and she obliged me by cutting the last imaginary ties to any romance with her. My mind of thoughts and feelings is remarkably slow, compared to my poet self, i.e., the self of awareness. Finally, there's no difference between them. It's now been years since I felt the obsession lift. I know from my time letting go of alcohol, and the years after, in living in the freedom of non-attachment, that this freedom is real. -Steve Brooks