

# Taking Liberties:

a year of  
Illinois Times  
poems

by Jacqueline Jackson

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A Year of illinois Time's Poems



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## A Year of Illinois Times Poems: 2005

Dear Family, Friends— my sister Jo Schmidt said she'd like a collection of the Illinois Times poems, so here it is. I got the job of poem-a-week in an odd manner. A couple years ago LI ran an article about twenty three Springfieldians prominent in the arts—I and our Sangamon Auditorium director bracketed the list. I told Dusty Rhodes at LI that I was happy to be on the list, and first, yet, though there really wasn't any ranking—but where was a poet? And I extolled John Knoepfle as our local poet of national renown. Next thing I knew, John had been asked to write a poem a week, and had his own special spot on p. 2, parallel to Letters to the Editor, a prime location, and his name on the Table of Contents. John supplied poems for about two years, but he had other projects to tend to. Dusty said the editor wanted me to take his place. I pointed out all the better poets in the area, for I've never put myself forward as any sort of poet, though I've written some over the years, and have two books of rhymed verse (Spring Song and Orchestra Mice) and two of rhythmic prose written as poetry (Chicken Ten Thousand and The Endless Pavement). Dusty said, "Roland asked for you," so I thought it over and said okay, I'd give it a try. This chapbook is the result. Many thanks to my talented friend samBdavis (poet/artist/teacher/former carnival axe thrower) for designing and editing this booklet, creating the cover, and supplying the title.

I've thoroughly enjoyed the assignment,

and may keep it up another year if I don't get fired. I've tried to match some poems with dates: the Kent State killings in May, "Draba" in March, my being thought a witch in October, Mom's lullaby at Christmas. I've followed John's style of not capitalizing or punctuating (much) and it makes things easier; I also find I like it. I also like using generic titles. Almost all the poems are new: "Draba" was written in college, "Tilt" some time later. Some are "found" like Cristy's, Rachel's, Colleen's, in fact, all the "quote" ones. Some are given to me, like Delinda's on picking up trash. Some unprintable ones I will save for another volume. One, written early on, I'll not print for II but put here to finish this note, as it seems appropriate.

now that I'm into  
writing poems  
they're dropping  
like rabbit pellets

-- Jackie Jackson

January 6

kinquotepoem #1

when I told my daughter  
I'd been asked to do a poem a week  
for the downstate newspaper  
she said I'm not telling you  
how to run your life or anything  
mom but why would you want to  
take on something new when you're  
always trying to get rid of stuff

but you have to think about something  
while you're doing the dishes

January 13

poolpoem #1

my seven a.m. swimming buddy  
I know only by his paunch  
and red trunks his sinewy  
friends call him judge  
when he doesn't show up  
for several days  
I feel mild concern  
I don't think he's doing  
bench presses

January 20

travelpoem #1

we went all the way to ireland and  
spent a dublin sunday morning  
at the unitarian church  
how crazy can that be  
the sermon was called  
cowboys and indians  
we sang a hymn about rootworms  
in the afternoon we saw  
the book of kells  
and had carrot soup with ginger

January 27

aroundthecosmospoem #1

I heard him say it,  
the noted cosmologist:  
nothing is nothing



February 3

grandchildpoem #1

rachel's glazed eyes  
don't stray from the screen  
when grandma bounces in  
from two-hundred miles away  
she doesn't recognize grandma  
as a fairy godmother

February 10

lovepoem #1

I don't know  
who  
put the nickel in  
but the lights are going  
*blinker blinker blinker*  
and the bells are going  
*dinger dinger dinger*  
and I am hanging on  
like crazy  
afraid afraid afraid of

TILT

February 17

aroundtownpoem #1

sometimes people  
would speed by me  
giving me the finger  
because of the sign  
NO RADIO  
in my little car's window  
assuming I suppose  
that I didn't like radio  
what the sign did mean was  
look buster if you break in  
once more and  
wreck up the whole dash  
this time you won't find  
any radio to wrench out  
I do like radio but only NPR

February 24

sciencepoem #1

bleeding, I lie here in a crevice  
it is snowing  
5500 years from now  
there will be a thaw

someone will find me  
experts will keep me frozen  
in a laboratory they'll  
catalogue my clothing  
study my weapons  
learn from the grass in my shoes  
the season I lined them  
they'll examine the lunch  
in my carrying pouch  
analyze the contents of my belly  
seek parasites in my gut  
they'll x-ray and ct scan me  
extract my dna  
assess my age and  
advance theories as to why  
I lay down to die  
they'll write books about me  
post photos on the net  
like hyenas at a kill  
they'll quarrel over  
who owns me

it will be four years  
before they notice  
the arrowhead in my spine

March 3

kinquotepoem #2

when my cousin was twelve  
he took a girl to the movies  
this was back in the thirties  
they ate bags and bags of popcorn  
and several holloway suckers each  
in case you're too young to remember  
a holloway sucker is a slab of molasses  
as big as a brick and about as dense  
he was okay but they had to take  
six inches out of her gut  
it was packed so solid  
he doesn't remember  
what the movie was  
must have been a  
double feature

March 10

aroundtownpoem #2

John Knoepfle has a poem  
that lists the dogs of Auburn  
I learned in college that  
poems often have lists  
especially epics that's one way  
you can tell an epic  
so here are the cows  
in the round barn, 1914:  
marie, beauty, princess,  
lassie, easter, may,  
fantine, fern, gladys,  
elsie, gretchen, hester,  
and here are the noonans  
who work at noonan's hardware  
on North Grand avenue  
just those noonans  
for there are more:  
missy, luke, kevin,  
kerry, sean, maureen,  
matt three, matt four

March 17

naturepoem #1

(*adapted from sandcounty almanac*  
by aldo leopold)

draba sprinkles sandy soil  
with small white blooms that catch no eye  
lost in the gusty winds of march  
its scent attracts no passerby  
in sun too weak for bigger blooms  
in sand too poor for flag or rose  
a postscript to the hope of spring  
the unassuming draba grows  
nothing eats it—in three lines  
the botanists its story tell  
wool clad draba only does  
a small job quietly and well

March 24

travelpoem # 2

her grandfather built the cottage  
one hundred years ago  
single room thick walled  
white the kind you see in  
coffee table books  
I sit in the inglenook  
is there an irish name  
for that recessed spot  
with seats on two sides  
fire in the middle you can  
look right up the chimney  
she shows me how to turn the handle  
of the large wheel against the wall  
that somehow sends air up through  
the bottom of the grate  
I crank it round and round  
make the peat glow brightly  
she says when you do something new  
you are supposed to make a wish  
my wish is to come back  
to lena's cottage



March 31

lovepoem #2

contemplating getting up  
I designated today as  
toenail cutting day  
such a boring chore  
that even though it takes  
just a few minutes  
you need to celebrate it  
but now I can't find the  
clippers so the event  
will have to be postponed  
glad I didn't advertise it

when my mom was blind  
and ninety I took on the job  
of trimming her nails after  
a doctor cut her badly  
I'd first soak her feet  
in warm water  
and after the ordeal  
give them a gentle massage  
but she always flinched  
at the scissors  
I'd say mom I won't hurt you  
I'm not a podiatrist  
the writer ann beatty says  
you forget the years and  
remember the moments  
I remember those moments

April 7

kitchenpoem #1

I notice I'm having  
an orange breakfast  
orange orange  
orange chunk of  
butternut squash  
orange egg  
yes orange because  
it's from a cage-free  
drug-free  
antibiotics-free  
organically-nourished  
yard hen named  
heather fedbetter  
who lives in port washington  
wisconsin and bids me  
have an eggcellent day  
thank you heather  
and the same to you

*(Heather Fedbetter is a trademark of  
Egg Innovations LLC)*

April 14

poolpoem #2

I should take  
my Y membership  
off my income tax  
it's in the pool I percolate  
the unpaid poems  
for this publication  
don't all those  
alliterative lines  
sound like beowulf

April 21

kinquotepoem #3

a friend says your poems  
aren't profound

my dad tells of the city chap  
who waited by the fence  
thinking he'd surely glean  
some weathered wisdom from  
the grizzled tiller of the soil  
the farmer paused to  
turn his team the stranger asked  
what do you think about  
when you plow all day  
the farmer said I think about  
how straight the furrow is  
behind me

April 28

aroundthecosmospoem #2

pluto is demoted

demoted

demoted

pluto is demoted

let's dance around the ring

we'll tighten up our kuiper belt

kuiper belt

kuiper belt

we'll tighten up our kuiper belt

and dance around the ring

our heads are in the oort cloud

oort cloud

oort cloud

our heads are in the oort cloud

let's dance around the ring

the sun will be a cinder

a cinder

a cinder

a cinder in five billion years so

dance around the ring

yes we still have five billion

five billion

five billion

if we don't blow it we still have

five billion years to sing

April 28

around the room #5

May 5

kinquotepoem #4

after the killings  
elspeth six in '70 said  
demi was born at oxford  
megan was born at harvard  
jilly was born at yale  
and I was born at kent  
now we've all been born  
at famous universities

May 12

aroundtownpoem #3

six behemoth  
pink and baby blue trucks  
lead mrs tuxhorn  
to her grave

*(A little explanation for this one: Tuxhorn is a local towing company with much heavy equipment, located a couple blocks from me. Some founding Tuxhorn with a sense of humor had all the equipment, as well as the garage, painted pink and blue; their trucks are recognized all over the area. For the funeral procession that I witnessed, all the trucks were freshly painted. It gave meaning to the word "awesome.")*

May 19

grandchildpoem #2

it's an odd sensation to be  
at the helm says my brother-in-law  
I'm now the oldest of my line  
I tell him about rachel  
bustling into daycare  
this is my grandma she is  
very old she's going to die  
she's not going  
to be here very long  
I think I'll be around  
a little while longer  
I say and she amends  
she's very old she's  
going to be here for  
a little while longer  
but not for very long  
how young we begin  
to taste the salt spray



May 26

aroundtownpoem #4

speaking of names we have  
some pretty good ones around here  
take dusty rhodes at illinois times  
a common nickname with  
folks named rhodes maybe with  
lanes and streets too but our dusty  
earns hers she kicks up dust  
then the editor roland klose you like to  
roll those smooth round o's  
around your tongue like oysters  
at WUIS jiffy johnson bounces like a ball  
there's karl scroggin and sinta seiber  
as to kavitha cardoza well it gives you  
goosebumps how wonderful can a name be  
especially hearing her say it  
you can get it reversed if you try it yourself  
kavisa cardotha or totally mixed up  
kaviza cardoza or kavitha cardotha  
but she gets it right every time

June 2

wetlandspoem #1

the waters are returning  
with the waters the plants  
with the waters and plants the fish  
with the waters and plants and fish the birds  
from the east has come phyllis singing bird  
danny fire crow from the south  
from the west lionel little eagle  
chuck running elk from the north  
to spread cleansing smoke over stubbled fields  
to speak words of blessing  
to praise the creator  
with song dance drum flute feast  
as the earth is healed  
as the waters return to emiquon

June 9

clutterpoem #1


you have to look  
to your heroes

mine is nobel laureate  
alan guth

who says I would rather  
keep a pile of junk

assuming there is  
something there I want

than throw the whole thing  
away and regret it



he is pictured

in his MIT office awash  
in a paper sea I am

trying to find a place

to tape the photo up

June 16

environmentpoem #1

when I turn on the flame  
beneath my iron frying pan  
to dry the puddle in the middle  
so the skillet won't rust  
I stand and watch the water  
shriveled in from the edges  
like the aral sea

*(Explanatory note: the Aral Sea is now little more than a puddle, due to the Russians diverting for irrigating cotton fields the river that kept it full. The salinity increased as the sea shrunk, killing all the fish and consequently the fishing industry. The vast expanse of exposed seabed, thickly encrusted with salt, was prey to winds which scattered the salt on the cotton fields, killing the cotton plants. There is now no sea, no fishing industry, no cotton crop, and starving people who once were a thriving community on the shores of the Aral Sea.)*

June 23

jamaicanpoem #1

the heat is searing  
but these many-hued glossy-skinned  
liquid-eyed jamaican schoolkids  
in tan shirts and trousers  
in green pleated jumpers and snowy  
blouses  
are like crickets  
the hotter it gets  
the higher they leap  
the shriller they chirp

June 30

**aroundthecosmospoem #3**  
**(jamaicanpoem #2)**

the sun dangling from the schoolroom's ridgepole  
is a styrofoam fisherman's float  
big and yellow as a grapefruit  
it sits at the hub of a hurricane-ravaged umbrella  
the crazy outspread spokes each  
skewering a planet  
mercury a small red christmas ornament  
farther out jupiter a fat paper mache breadfruit  
saturn's tired paper rings droop like the brim  
of a lady's summer hat  
while the dozen paper strips of a comet's tail  
hang languidly  
the walls do not reach the roof in this hot clime  
a bananaquit has flown in  
built a woven twig globe its hole on the side  
laid three speckled eggs within  
she sits atop the nest atop the sun  
and sings her bananaquit song  
while the solar system turns gently beneath her  
and the students at their desks  
do their history and geography and math

July 7

jamaicanpoem #3  
kalabash literary festival

drenched by the sun  
drenched by the sea  
drenched drenched drenched  
in poetry

*(I floated in the warm Caribbean while the loud-  
speakers at the literary festival down the shore  
allowed me to hear every word that was spoken.)*

July 14

jamaicanpoem #4  
(an emily dickenson wannabe)

I met a landcrab on the road—  
its hole was not in sight—  
it waved its saffron claw in front—  
protection? or in fright?

I plain could see around its girth  
its chitin band of blue—  
and underneath a patch of red  
to let its dinner through

it stared at me with stubby eyes—  
I stirred as if to pass—  
then swift as amber lightning  
it sped sideways to the grass



July 21

featherspoem #1

behind as I swim the dawn chorus  
calls feebee feebee pee-a-wee pee-a-wee  
cheerup cheerily cheerup hey  
sweetie hey sweetie sam  
peabody peabody peabody all affirming  
their right to these vermont woods  
while nearby in addison county  
whooping crane number three-o-nine  
snowy plumage jet wing tips  
red skullcap yellow eyes  
legbands white and green on starboard  
red and green on port radio transmitter  
on back picks her way through a farmer's field  
dwarfing her friend a great blue heron  
breathless birders peer through viewing scopes  
do not disturb this disturbable bird  
unperturbed for now if she doesn't  
find her way home soon joe duff  
her chick-mother will come crane-suited  
in his ultralite crane-plane to lure her  
back to wisconsin's needah refuge  
where family waits and maybe a mate  
so that her hatchling if she has one  
will increase the whooping cranes to  
four-o-one they were once down to sixteen  
all that splendor nearly lost

July 28

featherspoems #2

whip-poor-WILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
won't you SHUT  
your little BILL your  
midnight SONG  
has ceased to THRILL  
won't you FIND  
another HILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
whip-poor WILL  
won't you TAKE  
a sleeping PILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
I have SURELY  
had my FILL  
little FRIEND  
o please be STILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
if I could FIND you  
I would KILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
whip-poor WILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
whip-poor-WILL  
whip-poor-WILL

whip-poor-WILL whip-poor-WILL whip-poor-WILL

August 4

lakepoem #3: haiku trio

wind on the water  
a pink transparent beach ball  
skims across the pond

you kingfishers you  
why this angry chittering  
food enough for all

hills hide the sunrise  
but sunsets oh the sunsets  
gold and gray tonight

August 11

lakepoem #4

it's not that I'm reduced to it  
here at the cottage  
but where else would you read  
herodotus for boys and girls

August 18

lakepoem #5: haiku quintet

my little john-boat  
skims this pond like a green leaf  
with barber-striped oars

nearby in the swamp  
a bullfrog's raspy gargle  
drowns the new york jet

mating damsel flies  
struggling in a spider's web  
part when I free them

the orb of the sun  
squats like a squashed tomato  
on top of the hill

night insects shrilling  
stars swim in the water—then—  
a perseid streaks

August 25

l a k e p o e m # 6

a stiff north wind whips  
wild waves into a lather  
under a fierce blue sky  
no easy swim today  
the eye-on-the-sky morning forecast  
right after garrison keillor's daily poem  
assures us summer will return  
tomorrow but the incessantly singing  
red-eyed vireo has given up  
on the season and an early branch  
on the maple tree is already  
turning crimson

September 1

lakepoem #7

doing the final summer laundry  
the sheets beach towels  
frayed shorts shirts sweats  
I grapple with the change machine  
the woman in charge known as  
the laundry lady takes the bill  
strops it against a corner  
you have to smooth them and pat them  
and straighten them out she says  
and that goes for george and abe  
and hamilton and my old man  
you know us women are crock pots  
we just keep going and going and going  
men are microwaves  
I laugh and grab a pencil hey if you  
print that she says send me a copy

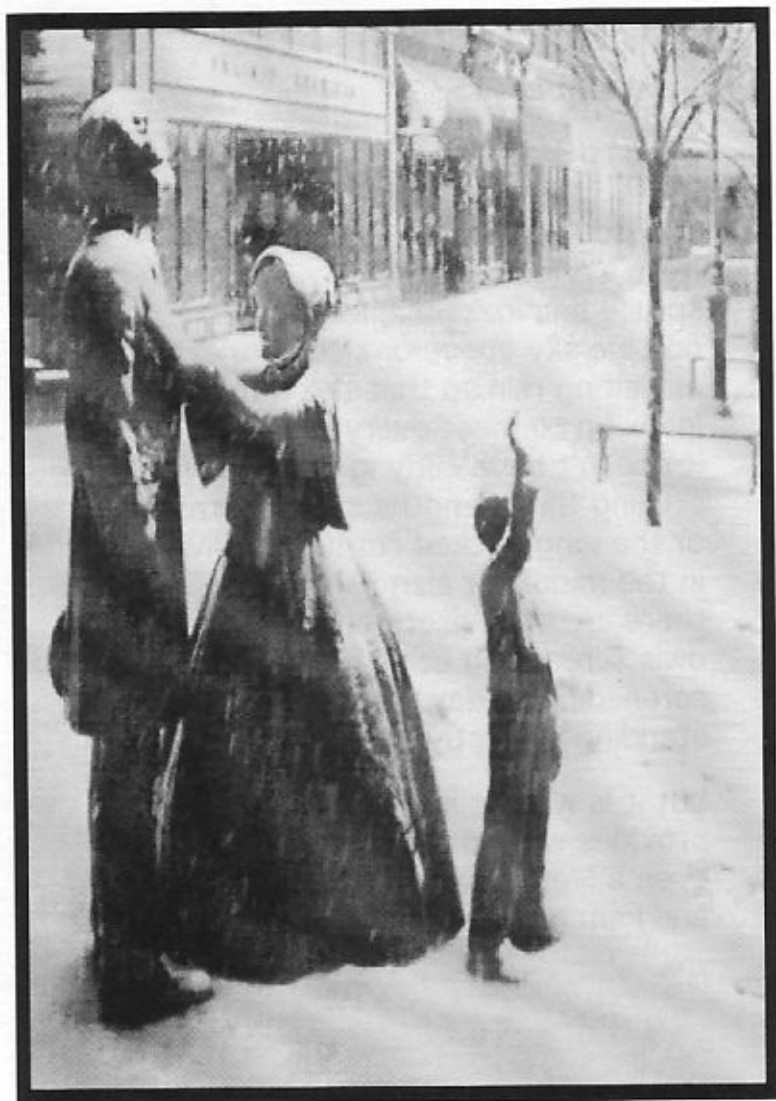
## September 8

*(This needs the explanation that recently on the Old State Capital Plaza sidewalk in downtown Springfield a very nice life-size grouping of Lincoln, Mary and one son, statues, has been placed, and a little way away, another son with school-books waving to them. Of course the poem isn't about Springfield.)*

### aroundtownpoem #5

hey here's an idea to capture  
more tourist bucks  
isn't it generally known  
the simpsons' springfield is  
our own springfield lots of clues  
why not balance the figures  
on the old state capital mall  
by putting on the other end  
a modern family group  
electronically rigged  
so that visitors walking past  
will hear doh and don't have a cow  
man wow it'll slay 'em  
better even than salem mass  
where crowds go see  
the samantha statue  
riding a broomstick and  
twitching her nose





Picture taken by Bill Furry

September 15

poolpoem #3

the trouble with the Y pool is  
it isn't ringed with  
spruce hemlocks maples birches  
no blue sky above or clouds or stars  
or pelting rain so that the water  
leaps up to meet every drop  
it doesn't have carly in her sleek shell  
sculling three lengths every morning  
or the long-necked cormorant diving  
in the middle or alan fishing afar  
there are no sunsets on its western edge  
owls screeching at night the vireo  
serenading all day the great blue heron  
standing perfectly perfectly still

but it is what it is and it's here  
provides wet and exercise  
even a lifeguard to protect me  
and I am grateful

September 22

aroundtownpoem #6

a gaggle of girls  
next door in the schoolyard  
chants we're not playing  
we're not playing  
we're not playing  
we're not playing  
which means of course  
they are

September 29

friendquotepoem #1

my friend takes her morning walk  
on lake services road  
she carries sacks and today  
picked up beer cans pop cans  
beer bottles plastic bottles plastic straws  
pop cups plastic cups coffee cups  
coffee mugs newspaper gum paper  
mcdonald's paper cigarette packs  
one left sneaker orange and purple  
adult size and a rusty belt buckle  
she left three bags at the lake services gate  
too heavy to carry home she knows  
her cwl<sup>p</sup>\* friends will dispose of them  
tomorrow she'll walk the other side  
delinda says she thinks it's time for a new  
litter awareness program in the schools  
though it's not just kids who need  
awareness

\*City-Water-Light-Power company

October 6

grandchildpoem #3

little brother  
nether naked  
capers with a  
spangly scarf  
I cinderella  
I cinderella  
big sister says  
I don't think  
cinderella  
had a pe-nuss  
and a pacifier

October 13

friendquotepoem #2

christy says when my family  
gets together we talk about  
politics banned books movies,  
but when my husband's family  
gets together they talk about  
cleaning out the septic tank  
and the main course when it  
was still alive

October 20

bedroompoem #1

sing a song of dust mites  
three million plus their poop  
living in your pillows  
and feeding off your goop\*

vacuuming and laundering  
will cut the numbers down  
but what's a million more or less  
in mattress bedmite town

they're ugly little beasties  
when magnified to sight  
but there's nothing you can do  
except be glad that they don't bite

(*\*sloughed-off skin flakes  
doesn't fit the meter*)

October 27

aroundtownpoem #7

I am a legend in this town  
at least to the kids  
on the schoolyard next door  
every year some grimy gap-toothed  
seven-year-old marches bravely  
to the fence to inform me that  
everybody says I am a witch  
this fall there's been  
an exponential leap  
with safety in numbers  
a group approaches to tell me  
I murdered my husband  
there was blood on my porch  
how can I murder my husband I say  
when I haven't any husband  
the kids stand bemused  
until one speaks up he says  
then who did you murder



November 3

aroundtownpoem #8

at edwards place across the street  
the older sisters were drawing  
naked ladies in the life drawing class  
elpeth went along and drew  
naked ladies too november six  
was her birthday and also the birthday  
of the instructor she and her sisters  
made two cakes and carried them  
to class they were back in twenty  
minutes the birthday girl in tears  
someone had complained to the  
director of the art association  
about an eight-year-old seeing  
naked ladies we never knew who

November 10

uttermadnesspoem #1

I wonder how many soldiers  
fighting our oily war  
wondered if they'd be two-thou-  
sandth or after or before

November 17

hodgepodgepoem #1

they're probably written up in  
some linguistic something or other  
but consider echoic h pairs  
how many there are of them  
more than any other letter  
and know what they're seldom  
hotsy-totsy for instance humdrum  
that's blah while all disorderly  
like the catch-all kitchen drawer  
are higgledy-piggledy helter-skelter  
derogatory ones try hocus-pocus  
hoity-toity hotshot hugger-mugger  
hoddy-toddy is a blockhead  
you're a snob if you hobnob  
and isn't it all hubble-bubble when  
you have the heebie-jeebies  
as for hanky-panky well you get the idea  
the only cheery one I can think of  
is when we do the hokey-pokey  
otherwise you have to ditch the echo  
to make everything hunky-dory

November 24

kinquotepoem #5

colleen eight having just played  
some mozart and a bit of vivaldi  
polishes her new fiddle lays it  
in its case thank you daddy  
for getting me this violin—the sound!  
when I vibrato I can hear  
my heart beating in the strings  
we too dear colleen oh we too

December 1

technopoem #1

my computer  
sits and thinks about things  
pares its nails  
yawns  
finally does what I tell it to do  
or doesn't  
like living with a cat

December 8

friendquotepoem #3

judy says you can  
save your smart  
classrooms just  
give me smart  
students

December 15

strangledcrypoem #1

I DON'T WANT A CAT

I DON'T NEED A CAT

but tell me more

December 22

lovepoem #4

### Lullaby

*(My mother wrote this lullaby for my oldest sister, on her first Christmas, 1925. I'll send the music on request.)*

Sleep, little baby, the daylight is fading;  
Dim yellow stars the dark heavens adorn;  
Once, long ago, in a Bethlehem manger  
The little Lord Jesus was born.  
Lullaby, lullaby, sleep, little baby, sleep.

Sleep, little baby, my arms are about thee,  
A circle of love which enfolds thee secure;  
So Mary cradled the wee baby Jesus,  
The little Lord Jesus, so pure.  
Lullaby, lullaby, sleep, little baby, sleep.

Sleep, little baby, thine eyelids are drooping,  
Thy warm, tender body relaxing to rest;  
Jesus thus slept in the arms of sweet Mary,  
His dear little head on her breast.  
Lullaby, lullaby, sleep, little baby, sleep.  
Lullaby, lullaby, sleep, little baby, sleep.



December 29

*(I don't have an "end of year" poem yet, so I'll include this one, published in Illinois Times several months before Roland Klose offered me the job. I think it might have made him decide on me.)*

## Barn Cat

I wanted my old cat.  
My old cat curled around my neck  
Like a black velvet collar.  
She purred in my ear.  
She talked all the time,  
And when she was irritated  
She talked very loud.  
She rode my shoulders  
Upstairs and downstairs  
And even out to the dumpster.

This mouse-fattened barn cat  
Is far too heavy  
To circle anyone's neck,  
Even had he a mind to.  
He never talks.  
His mew is pusillanimous.  
He is a litter-flinger.  
He is a food-off-the-table snatcher.  
He is a reacher-outer when you go by  
And a catch-you-with-a-clawer.  
He is a grab-your-hander with his sharp teeth  
When you play with him,  
Never warning you of sudden pique.  
He does purr a lot.  
And you have to take the barn cat  
When the barn is gone,  
Don't you?

