

Inlet Outlet: Poetry of Ninilchik, Alaska

Sometimes I write poems about Ninilchik, Alaska, where I grew up. Or about Cook Inlet whose waters wash the beaches of Ninilchik. Here are some poems from my chapbook, [Inlet Outlet: Poetry of Ninilchik, Alaska](#), copyright 1994, by Wayne Leman:

Along the Sand

I walked upon the sands of time.
They told me tales I chose to hear,
Of storms now past
And restful calm,
Of passing ships
And sailors' dreams,
Of fishers' work from
morn till dusk,
Then rest when toil was
done.

I walked yet more
And thought of days
I spent upon the shore,
Of chasing waves
And skipping rocks,
Of carving driftwood
Left by tides.

I think of storms, within, without,
And restful calm,
Of waves that beat upon the sand,
Yet made it firm,
So footing could come easier,
Of tides that left their water marks
With motley mix of flotsam scars,



Mixed memories, left upon the shore,
Yet washed by waves,
Like life,
To be renewed,
And onward trod.

Come walk with me upon the sand,
And tell me what you hear.

Here is what a friend heard:

As I Walk Upon the Sand

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As I walk upon the sand
I hear the roar of tempests past
Of crashing waves
Of tearing winds
Of ships in trouble sore.

I hear the silence of our God
No answer in the storm.
I hear the groans of failing ships
Whose crews do nought but mourn.

And then amidst the raging storm
I hear a softer, gentler, song,
A song not driven by the wind
Nor tossed upon the shore.
A song that floats above the sand
A song that sings forevermore.

I ponder whence this song has come
It speaks not of the tempest strong
It echoes not the crashing waves
But some sweet peaceful song
Of love, of quiet joy,
A comfort born beyond the sound
Of raging storm and crashing waves.

And yes, the sand doth bear the mark
Of tempest, wind, and trouble sure.
But o'er it all the peaceful vest
Of cleansing water, quiet rest.

Waves

Some crash upon the shore
Leaving a frothy foam.

Others only tiptoe in
And smile upon the beach.

But each no matter how it comes
Goes back out again,

And what's been written on the sand
Will always be erased.

Sea Gull

Mr. Sea gull,
You're maligned,
You're called a scavenger.
It doesn't sound too noble.

I've always thought you
Rather grand,
Bright white and gray
With sleek, trim lines.

And some say you and yours
Raise a raucous sound.
But why can surf
Mixed with your cries
Sound like a symphony?

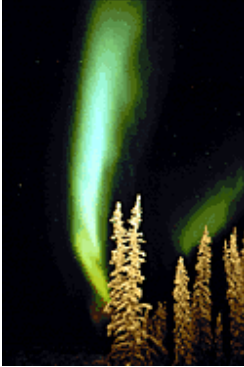
Sure,
It's melancholy key
You're singing,
Lone or massed.
But melancholy key's
Like life,
Honest beauty
All its own.

So soar along,
Keep singing, too.
I like your style,
My friend.



Palette

Shimmering,
Fluorescent
purple
pink
green



white
Waltzing
the northern sky,
Aurora Borealis.

Western sky on fire
Settling down for sleep
Upon the mountains,
Inlet sunset.

Magenta
Fields ablaze,



Fireweed.

White kites
Sailing along
The shore,
Sea gulls.

Silky
Soft
White heads,
Alaska cotton.

Fragile
Tiny
Timid



blue
forget-me-nots.

Gray
Shadowy haze
Spooky silhouettes,
Winter twilight.

Sunny turquoise,
Sullen gray,
Moody changes,
Inlet waters.

Palette free,
to enjoy and remember.

(The following poem is a
cinquain. Mt. Redoubt is one of
two volcanic mountains, each
10,000+ feet in height, which
dominate the mountain chain on
the west side of Cook Inlet.)

Sunset On Redoubt

Summer's
setting sun slides
swiftly down the slippery
sleepy silhouette of midnight
Mount
Redoubt



REDOUBT SILHOUETTE Photo by Betty Lucas

Angels Play

Sun beams gather heaven's light
and pull our gaze toward Augustine.
Rays have baked a golden afternoon.
Angels, after morning's work, meet
to slide a slanted slippery beam
and laugh the joy of cherubs, soon
cavorting at the sun beam's feet.

Symphony at Seven

At twenty 'til seven the players enter the stage,
Each conductor and each hired hand,
As the rumble of boom truck engines
Says it's time to start up the band.

Stretch out the single bass strings
From the winch lifts to each waiting boat.
Get in tune as those boom strings are tightened
We'll soon hear the music's first note.

The conductors move each truck with its boat
Toward the Inlet where the main movements play.
Each team is playing the same piece
That is played each fishing day.

On the water the outboards are started
And conductors' hands start to steer
Each player to his place for fishing music--
The Symphony at Seven, we're about to hear.

The first notes are ties--to a buoy
Then next comes the first rest of the show
As the final seconds are counted
And the conductor says, "Let's go!"

The musicians swing into action,
All intent on playing their parts
To have a successful performance
As this water music starts.

Staccato percussion's persistent,
As the lead weights beat out the pace--
What's become of the symphony's tempo?
To be honest, it's really a race.

There's a short rest before the next movement.
It's repeated, as the last movement, the same,
Each net in its turn, each note in its place,
Until the last tie of the net-setting game.

Yes, it's partly a game, yet it's music
If you look around on the sea
And watch each fisherman playing in concert
At Seven, the Symphony.

(Note: commercial fishing in Cook Inlet is usually
from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Mondays and Fridays.)

Company Boat

Maternally servicing
___ boats lined up
___ behind her
___ like ducklings
Hungrily gobbling
___ Inlet salmon
___ to her briny belly
Tenderly.

The Best Tasting Fish of the Year

Humpy soup is sure good,
And reds are wonderful smoked.
But the best tasting fish of the year
Is the first king shared around the town.

The winter is long, cold, and dark,
We wonder if Spring's gonna come.
But we know that it's here
When we share around the town,
That best tasting fish of the year.

Someone would get it,
That first king of the year.
Then family to family would share.
No matter how small
The pieces would be,
It would be the best fish of the year.

We salted our silvers,
And dried some dogs,
And pickled fish sure tasted good,
But nothing could beat
That best taste of all,
The first king shared around the town.

Kings always taste good,
Any time of the year,
But why, tell me, why,
Does it taste best of all,
That first one that's shared around the town?

'Cuz it tells us that Spring's here?
'Cuz it's eaten so fresh?
Maybe so--
But you know what it could be,
Why it tastes best?
'Cuz it's shared all around the town.



I'm a Gillnet

I'm a net, stretched across the water,
not the kind that drifts along with the tide,
or the limp kind that fishes in a river
eddy,
but the kind I know best,
firmly tied by ropes anchored years ago,
stretched tight by forces beyond my
control,
six hours of flood, then six of ebb,
flood, ebb, flood, ebb,
always the same,
waiting to gill the unsuspecting
swimmer,
which is like a good thought
caught while its meat is still firm.



(Note: the following poem is about digging for razor clams which are abundant on Ninilchik beaches. Here's a picture of some of my relatives, good Ninilchik clam diggers.)

The Clam and I

I walk upon the
sand
Looking for your
sign.
Your telltale dimple
Gives you away.

I'd like to get you,
Mr. Clam,
But you don't want
me to.
I plunge my shovel
in the ground--
You hurry right
away.



Sometimes I barely grab your neck
And then it's tug-o-war.
You really stick your neck out
Trying to get away.

O.K.,
I'm not sure I'd stick my neck out either
If I were in your shoes.
No shoes, you say,
But you've got a big foot
Which I'd like to put in my mouth.

Stale Mate

At the end of a long fishing day
it's sure good to call it quits.
Your muscles are sore,
there's fish scales on your arms,
and your face is sunburned some more.

Your honey has cooked a good supper,
now the sleepy feeling's coming on fast.
So by the end of the bed
you pull off your boots,
and park them far away from your head,

for the boots have the odor of fishing,
gurry, salt water, and sweat.
You crawl into bed and reach for your wife,
but there's something she hasn't said yet.

And it won't be easy to learn it
since she doesn't want to tell;
She appreciates your work for the family,
but the secret is you smell.

You try to hug your honey,
but she moves away from your grasp.
You wonder what's wrong--
Have you lost wooing power?
No, but what she hasn't yet said
as you lie on the bed
is that you clearly need a shower.

Finally you ask, "What's the matter?"
She hesitates a little then sighs,
"I do love you, honey,
But, yes, there is something:
Right now there's a fishy aroma
and you smell just like a king
(salmon, of course)."

"So sorry," you mutter as you're drifting
off to sleep, not on the sea,
"I couldn't smell my own fishing odor--
I guess it's a part of me.

Just be glad I'm a man of the ocean
when you're contemplating my smell,
fish scales on my arm,
my boots by the bed,
I could be employed on a farm."

Guitar Man

The
notes
throb
with
in
your
leath
ered
case,
beg
ging to be re
leased by calloused
fingers, and closed
eyes,..... and a
face.....contor
ted in..... the ec
stasy of music in
the bones of centu
ries, churches, and
cowboys, and ripple
to our ears from the
strings of your
guitar.



[Note: Anyone who has ever watched my father, Nick Leman, play the guitar is struck by the intensity with which he involves himself in his music, an intensity especially shown in his facial expressions. Let no one ever say that music is only music. It can move the soul (and, often the sole), the face, and more.]

Family

There's something warm
and safe
and comfortable
About family,
The way our Heavenly Father
intended it to be.

He loves His children,
cares for them,
and shelters everyone.
They each belong,
He throws none out,
Nor tells them,

"Out! Be gone!"

We fathers, mothers,
Here on earth,
Do fail at times, we know.
Not always do we give the best soil
For family to grow.

Sometimes there's even children
Who are cast away to cry,
Not knowing who their family is,
They feel just like they die.

Or others know who family is,
Yet still rejected are,
Because of shame,
 or pride,
 or power--
It leaves an awful scar.

Oh, would that we
Like God could be,
A loving Father, yes,
Accepting each who comes to Him,
Even if in a mess.
He asks not our pedigree,
 our color,
 talents,
 worth.

He simply puts His arms around
Each who fits by birth.

It may be hard,
But may we try,
A family to be,
To tell each one
That does belong,
"Welcome, sit with me!"

Love

Love,
was it bad?

It might have been,
it was not to be spoken.

And those who showed
their love
were laughed at.
Culture broken!

Broken,
unspoken
love.

Broken?
Break out!
It need not stay the same
forever.
I'll risk the word,
though heard,
and act
the fact,
I love.

Island

Protected by water moat
Accessible by boat
Isolated from the mainland,
alone.



If large enough for habitation
Island attracts a population
which chooses
isolation.

Separate from mainland humanity
With its ritual profanity
and other human foibles
Island provides escape,
and loneliness.

Easter Bread

Every Easter Grandma made
Easter bread
She called it [Kulich](#)
In her Russian language
And Kulich is
What we still call it.

Easter was a special time
And Grandma shared her Kulich
Special bread
Recipe handed down for
Hundreds of years.

Grandma's Kulich had
Different shapes and sizes
Baked in coffee cans
Or other kinds of cans.
Some Kulich had raisins
Some did not
But it was always so good,
Heavy bread,
Special Easter taste,
Good frosting,
Candies on top.

Why do we eat Kulich?
For 1000 years of
Russian history
We have known of One
Who called Himself
The Living Bread.

For 1000 years we have said
At Easter,
Xristos vo skres!
Christ has risen!
For 1000 years we have responded,

Vayestinu vo skres!
Indeed, He has risen!

The Living Bread died
At Easter time
But He came alive again
And for 1000 years
We have said those words
Shared by millions
Around the world,
Christ has risen!
Indeed, He has risen!

Our Easter bread has risen, too,
And we eat it joyfully
As we celebrate
The Living Bread.

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(Visit Bobbie Oskolkoff's site for a
[pretty version of this Easter Bread poem](#),
with background music.)

Kulich recipes

- [a standard recipe](#)
- [a breadmaker recipe](#)