



POEMS REFLECTING
GOD'S HAND
THROUGH THE HARD

EVEN
SO

PUBLISHED BY
ERICKA CLAY

Even So

Poems Reflecting God's Hand Through the Hard

Even So

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Dedication

To anyone who has ever known the loving hand of God in their personal struggle.

Even so, He's there.

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Psalm 147:3

From the Editor

When I first opened submissions for this anthology, I didn't have a set theme in mind. But as I've read and absorbed each one of the poems in this work, I feel the words "even so" written on my heart.

Childhood is rough, but even so, our God is good.

Raising kids and loving a spouse comes with a myriad of troubles, but even so, God works through them all.

Watching loved ones suffer is the worst kind of evil, but even so, God gives us the hope of an eternity with Him.

Hopefully, you, too, can see the "even so" lined within each one of these pieces, remembering always that no matter how hard this life may get, even so, He'll never leave your side.

The Detour

The screech and pulse of stopping tires,
The screams of grown children.
The blue lines on the dashboard,
The stretch of my brother's neck.
The rain thumping on the hood of the car,
The words left hanging in the air.
The fallen phone on the pavement,
The three single tears on my cheek.
The awful sound of my mother's cry,
The terrible realization of its genuineness.
The failure of a careful balancing act,
The silence of shaking open mouths.
The unanswered apology in his hand,
The angry shout of a little girl.
The drips of rain from my sister's hair,
The black lines down our faces.
The speechlessness on our tongues,
The eventual return to the road.

Mary Belle Burg is an aspiring young author from Northeast Mississippi. She is currently working on her debut YA novel. Additionally, she has written three complete, unpublished novels. Mary Belle has won an English award and tutoring award at Itawamba College, and she has two short works published with The Gold Moose Talent.

Sunday Morning

I cannot imagine what day of the week
that God gave you the weight of his thoughts,
and made you a whole spectrum of beauty;
you pluck the night's eyes with your eyelashes,
and kick the day in the teeth with your boots.
I believe that it was on a Sunday morning,
when the daylight jostled into a hurry
to open to the sky before brushing her teeth
and freshening up like a pole in the rain,
to wear her stilettos and look gorgeous
so that no bird could flutter over her
without stopping to stand and stare.
It was on a peaceful Sunday morning
when dews that hung on slanting leaves,
trickle to the edges, thick like honey
and poised to drop on scorched heads
that dared shake down the hanging leaves.
On a Sunday morning when the air was oil
in an alabaster filled with blessings
for those who found trouble breathing
when the sky ordered a thunderstorm
or the moon gripped a ploughing spear
to move through the breast of the silent sea.
It was this bluster Sunday morning,
when God extended the winter hours,
to have more time for modelling you,
that you would eat the God in the wind,
and have feet tapering like a goddess,
with a heart swinging in a pendulum,
a fire-eater, a guzzler of flesh and bones,

a replica of excellence, a semblance of decay.

It Will End in Praise

I left you a note behind,
a little wrap, which I hid away,
in the rafters of my kitchen,
black, worn, weak and warm.
I told you I drew milk from a rock,
honey from the webs of wasps;
I stitched my body together with water,
which I stole from the desert;
now, the desert is dry with no oasis.
I have become the oasis,
drink me to survive the thirst.
desire is dust with an eyesore;
but you can be the nemesis of want,
the slaughter of your longing;
you can be the forest without trees
when you are the tree;
stitch up the universe with your spittle
and it's an ocean, a sea, a river, a pond,
anywhere with a pool of water
crystallising into the crisis of your heart.
The universe is a made-up
like a patchwork of clothes
with potholes, spaces between rivers,
between oceans and seas,
spaces unassailable to desire.
I left you a note for the emptying
to say I hate the rock in my room,
the mountain of stones in my kitchen,
the heaps of gravel in my bedroom,
the octopus and cactus in my eyes,

though I know that's what gives meaning
and substance to my little life,
my connection with the universe,
after I become a mountain,
a hill and a road within the clouds.
I meant to tell you not to weep
when summer goes away in a whisper,
or when winter returns with a pistol
and shoots the sun on the foot.
You're my summer, not a jungle
the sun will not go limping.
The sun will never stutter.
But if you stop your sun from shining,
your stomach must be full of stars.
Or, you chop off the world like cucumber,
dredge the bed of the sea with your tongue,
my song will end in praise.

A Touch of Heaven

I was born a year too soon,
but my father said that my chi was awake,
though I failed at being a worthy child;
I took care to mould my God in my image,
the picture of rain and clouds in the sky,
my likeness was like the sun and the moon,
the rain that falls at night, the hour ticking,
where time was a tumour of the earth;
a copy of my selfishness, a memoir of my ego,
a love letter to my bloated waistline,
a savage, a monster, a killer of the perfect,
of those in whose heads there's no mercy.
After my God was resurrected, after ascension,
I felt the same as when he lived and died,
as though his death made no difference
between one ending epoch and another,
between one beginning life and the other.
How often have I gone with licking blood
and asked my God to clean up the mess;
after all, my father said if I agreed to do a thing,
my God had no choice but to fall into line.
Was it not the duty of my God to follow me around,
chaperoning me like a baby or a disabled,
after I claimed that I was an adult?
I walk around with the effigy of my God
slotted in my palms, head and heart,
wherever I must consult to meet my needs;
I have come to believe the miracles
which soak my body like a downpour,
that each step I take, each thought I think,

every foolish dream I have in the afternoon,
is a touch made in the Heaven I create,
even those little dreams where I shed blood.

Jonathan Chibuiké Ukah lives in the United Kingdom. His poems have been featured in Lucky Jefferson Literary Magazine, The Pierian, Propel Magazine, Atticus Review, The Journal of Undiscovered Poets and elsewhere. He won the Alexander Pope Poetry Award in 2023. He was the Editor's Choice Prize Winner of Unleash Lit in 2024, the Second Poetry Prize Winner at the Streetlights Poetry Prize in 2024 and the Winner of the Poet of the Month December-January 2025 at the Literary Shark Poetry Contest. His Chapbook, A is for Anfang, is forthcoming from Island of Wak Wak.

Hermetic

My back against the door—bolted shut. Though light still pours from
the space at the bottom.

Yet that radiance too pale.

The hallway in front of me prolonged, doors on each side. Perhaps
locked.

I am sixteen, part child, part woman.

I tremble to move from this weak luminescence.

Trauma is what I know, my identity clothed in shame, loathing who
I am.

I sweat and pant.

I have no keys.

I have no lantern.

I spot a figure in the distance holding a flickering candle.

Ambivalence screams in my chest.

I step away from the vacuum-sealed door, the feeble light.

I draw near the holy presence.

An old hymn sifts through my mind. All those years in church.

Great is thy faithfulness, O God My Father.

A blue door opens.

Isn't blue symbolic for grace?

And isn't this brilliance spilling forth something like mercy?

Priscilla enjoys discovering divine inklings contained in life mysteries and uncertainties this side of the Kingdom. She is the author of four books. On A Clear Blue Day, a collection of reflective essays, won an Enduring Light medal in the 2017 Illumination Book Awards. She lives with her Italian husband near a tidal creek on the southeast coast. Find her at priscillakgaratti.com¹ and on [Instagram](#)², [LinkedIn](#)³, and [x](#)⁴.

1. <http://priscillakgaratti.com/>

2. <https://www.instagram.com/priscillakgaratti13/>

3. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/priscillakgaratti>

4. <https://x.com/PKGaratti>

Be a Helper

Reflections sit and then enter encounters.

Corners are of no concern when people

pass poverty regularly.

Class seems to be only suitable for the
wealthy folks who wear it. Poetry is my

pen to pick up problems.

The poor either scoop or dump doubt.

Remember, the impoverished carry

more than what is trashed.

Take faith by the hand and hang on
tight. Lack waits in line to be served,|

but it gets passed over instead.

Step into what the homeless go through.

Leave old lies alone. Make a formation,

so those suffering can move forward.

Hearts are heavy as violence runs

rampant throughout the lands. Assist others

for goodness' sake.

Give grace by the gallons. Love is

everlasting. The needy will have their

burdens bandaged with blessings.

We are the sowers to salvage souls.

Let us strive to be a helper.

Hatred hurts us all.

Layer the Avenue of Hearts

Worrying is when we cannot wait. We wonder
what will happen next. What evil will be my
next nemesis? Life is pressure preordained.
Circumstances are a circumference
unforeseen. We learn the location for
light and beauty. Bless the souls who use
healing as socks to keep them warm.
Bitterness is a cold blizzard attempting to
override happiness with hate. The mind
liberates lives once we forgive the past
and push away fear. Joy is a baby. Delight
in its energy. A pure bundle, bunches,
moments to share from smiles. Chaos has
many chatterers, but chase freedom. Ride its
saddle on horseback. Make a tent for it, too.
Be intentional. Share ideas and formulate new
things. Create a speaking space for languages.
Love layers the avenue of hearts.
It is all about the approach.

Traci Neal is a neurodivergent poet residing in Columbia, South Carolina. She has shared her personal story of being a late-diagnosed black woman in the Thinking Person's Guide To Autism, Newsweek, Good News Post- UK, and Autism Digest, to name a few. Her poetry has been featured in Poetry Potion – Poem A Day, Moonstone Arts Center, Spillwords Press, Autism Digest, and Spirit Fire Review for 2025, as well as in several other publications since 2021. Neal utilizes poetry as a tool to advocate for those in need

*and to raise awareness for non-profits worldwide. Learn more at **tracineal-speakerpoet.com**¹.*

1. <https://www.tracinealspeakerpoet.com/>

Is It Wrong to Cry on Fourth of July?

My husband is working

My kids are playing with their friends

I'm alone in a chair watching

Is it wrong to cry on the fourth of July?

My kids are laughing and running

My husband is making a living

My life is fine, but my eyes want to cry

Is it wrong to cry on the fourth of July?

The seats next to me are empty

My heart is sad, the days of together are ending.

My kids don't remember me through their joy

It's okay though, to cry on the fourth of July.

My family is happy as they run and play and work and survive

My life is complete and since that is true I will cry as I sit and watch
the sky cry its colors too.

It's a good thing the sky and I cry on the fourth of July.

*Rhea Fontenot is a mom and photographer and owner of **Storyteller Photography**¹. She's recently released her first book, **Glass House of Nightmares**².*

1. <https://www.facebook.com/storyteller93/>

2. <https://www.lulu.com/shop/fancy-rhea-fontenot-and-ericka-clay/glass-house-of-nightmares/paperback/product-zmyqwmp.html?page=1&pageSize=4>

Playground Fun

Sunny days

Childhood play

Least of cares

Outside air

Group games

No claim to fame

Should be fun, rules given

Understanding, then you will be living

But if you don't get it

How could that be

The teacher expected full compliance

On your processing, she had total reliance

So you should be shaken

Your thoughts taken

But instead of order

Your self-esteem in complete disorder

Your care is now in

God the Father

L:isa Clay is a retired child and family therapist and psychological examiner of adults. She's presently an exhibiting visual artist and art therapist.

The Stand

I don't want to do this anymore
the sorrow
the pain
the tears.

I don't want to do this anymore
explaining away the actions of others
apologizing for wrongs
I did not commit.

I don't want to do this anymore
being the rope
in the tug-of-war
of friendship,
of who's right
who's wrong
of who did what
to whom.

I don't want to do this anyone
ignoring
a sarcastic jab
or a sharp-edged glare
which
drives a spike into my heart
into my very soul.

I will not do this anymore,
being torn between battles
that are
childish bickering
but cause
adult wars.

So,

If I must take
a stand
and choose between
one friend or another
my choice is this-
not to choose.

I stand
between
but not alone

I stand
on grace.

Freeway Exit

“Homeless and dying of Aids”
the stained cardboard read;
propped up against a
tattered
shriveled
body
on the crowded freeway exit.
“please help” it begged
and
“God Bless.”
Like a nursery rhyme
gone awry,
the chant echoed
over and
over
in my mind.
“Homeless and dying...”
“Dying of Aids...”
So, this time I reached
into my wallet
to give
this man
or
woman
(I didn’t know which)
a small token for
a hamburger
cup of coffee
whatever.
Slowing my car

I swerved to the curb,
holding out
a few crumpled dollars.
Trembling hands clutched the bills
A leathery finger brushed against mine,
The person's head raised cautiously.
And I was met with,
a grateful glance
a slight smile
a "Thank you."
As horns honked behind me, and
the driver next to me swore,
I merged again into the traffic
haunted...
humbled.

Evening's Watch

(For "Bo" 1962-1996)

Rain drizzling

I sit

in the failing light

staring up

at the graying ceiling

waiting for you to die,

or is it,

to live?

You are on the edge.

For you'll be the one

to step out of time and space

into eternity;

and you'll be the one

embraced by God,

his child:

Running

unshackled from pain,

free from AIDS

Running

through the lush green meadows of

the Kingdom of Joy.

And I wonder,

as I sit here, already missing you, if

I might not be envious

of all you will soon be able

to see and do.

Ann Garrett is a published author of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry for children and adults. Her work has appeared in numerous literary journals, anthologies, and magazines. In the children's market, she is the author of the picture book Keeper of the Swamp, and co-author (with the late Gene-Michael Higney) of the picture books What's for Lunch?, What's for Dinner?, Tales of Tails, Fins and Flippers / Scales and Nippers, and Stardusters. Together they also wrote the middle grade Kindle books Peanut Butter BBQ, Miss Hiss is Missing, and Practical Yoke, and the young adult novel War of the Dark God.

Ann's poetry has been widely published in both adult and children's publications, including *Acumen, The Paradox, Time of Singing, Poetry Motel, Celebration, Short Editions, The Brave New Tick*, and many others. Her children's poetry has appeared in *Boy's Quest, Dirigible Balloon, Kwil Kids Publishing*, and *Poem Train*.

With degrees in Social Work and Sociology from the University of Utah, Ann spent over four decades working with severely disturbed children who had experienced trauma. Now retired from that field, she lives and writes in Southern California.

Learn more at www.anngarrettauthor.com¹ .com².

1. <http://www.anngarrettauthor.com/>

2. <http://www.anngarrettauthor.com/>

Sticks and Stones and Sorry

Carl, tall as his 6th grade teachers, hard
as the rocks he's throwing while we wait for the bus.
Us fourth graders in a frightened huddle
out of the line of fire.
Nervous laughter from the other 6th-grade boys
with each rock they toss back at Carl.
He sneers, taunts, laughs at the—
A yelp! I turn in time to see daylight vanish
from my right eye as a rock slams my orb.
Buzzing in my eye socket,
blood on my toes,
orange and pink flashes
speckling my vision.
Vertigo.
A shadow from the left closes in, strong arms hold me up.
“I’m sorry, are you alright?” It’s Carl.
I can’t speak past the buzzing.
“I’m sorry,” he says again. “Okay?”
I nod through my pain, happy.
Truly happy, for I learned a repentant heart
can be buried under a hardened stone.

*Priscilla Bettis is an avid reader and a joyful writer. Priscilla lives in small-town Texas with her two-legged and four-legged family members. She enjoys writing short stories and poems inspired by her awe of God and love for fellow human beings. Priscilla is a reviewer at **The Well Read Fish**¹, a Chris-*

1. <https://thewellreadfish.com/>

tian fiction review blog. She chats about life and writing on X at [@PriscillaBettis](https://x.com/PriscillaBettis)².

2. <https://x.com/PriscillaBettis>

Down the Drain

I had to learn
how to unspool
the thread of lies
playing tug-of-war
as I pull them
from my throat
like the plug from
the drain
I stare unabashed
unafraid
of the
dark, murky water
a whirlpool of
things I used to drink
oh, how much
went down
the drain
and how freely
Your water
now flows

*Jhen Guevara is just a gal with a catastrophic love for writing. You can find more of her work at **Yeng Cee Writes**¹.*

1. <https://yengwrites.wordpress.com/>

Lost Ocean

The sun spreads golden music over grey,
Eddying, chopping ripples and small seas.
Cold, sleeping waters' changing melodies
And hills' high, waking shadows farewell day.
Who that has heard the sounding ocean's long,
Interwoven and intermingled song
Could harm another soul
Knowingly, while the tides and currents roll?
But all are drowning in a puzzlement
Of empty arguments and vain debate.
And some believe that murder, rape and hate
Are marks of glory and enlightenment.
Witness the mobs haranguing through the streets.
Others, forgiving, choose quiet retreats
Where days arrive and sing,
Or in hospitals help the suffering.
The beach contracts and fades. Shall I pretend,
With Bertrand Russell once, that nothing more
Than feelings makes me welcome or deplore
Murder or a self-sacrificing friend?
There could be no reason, test or insight
Whether your feelings or my own were right
If this account were true.
The waves find rougher, fresher depths of blue,
Mounted by whitecaps rising in moonlight,
Dancing and disappearing, shy as thought.
These are the truths experience has taught,
How warm words can redeem the savage night,
And how lost ocean gathers secret flame
And man-made plagues put their founders to shame.

Nightfall touches high trees
With soft black air and quiet sanctities.
Now undiscovered lives pursue the wracked
And harried gardens, rocks and sandy caves
And shaking fields under the sharp, torn waves.
Love is the quintessential, growing fact.
We that look out from the vehement shores
Depend each on another. Neither wars
Nor plagues can break the light,
Or end the harried soul's uncertain flight.
Headlights send brief beams toward the sky,
Then fall away. What can I know? I find
There is an imperative to be kind,
And others are immediate as I,
Before the drifting, swirling, damaged sea.
If I should speak to you, or you to me,
Truth is a shared hope found
While dark, beleaguered floods and deep storms pound.

Intensive Care

The moment wakes when I must leave aside
Hills wreathed in cloud, low mountains, green sea-scapes
Ruffled and scattered by the wind and tide
Streaming under the sun, fresh tang of grapes,
The savour of warm lips. Then I shall say
Farewell to days in all their varied shapes,
Nightfalls when stars transcend the Milky Way,
Tasks uncompleted, visions unfulfilled,
To small achievements, failures and the grey
Shoals of disappointment. Angels will build
A light through final dark. I shall not cease
To miss you more than life, your garden, tilled
And breathing, all your love and fire, your trees,
Young children, friends, our joy in dappled shade.
There is for us a path to further peace,
For there is one who knows, since he has made
And summoned out of silence all true things,
An infant's cry, wet sand, bright pebbles laid
Under the streaming water, ravens' wings,
The honeyeater's flutter, knows the sound
Of enmity and bitterness that sings
A dreary chant of guilt. He makes the ground
I rest upon and wait in this last room
Of time. He grants his mercies. They astound,
Beyond the halls of suffering that loom.
And harmonies of endless wisdom bloom.

Michael Robinson lives in Western Australia. His poems have appeared in numerous print and on-line journals. He has published three books of poetry and has won the Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize and the Tom Collins Poetry Prize. His most recent book, The Wounds of Faith, was published in 2023.

Specious Interspecies Psychonaut Cape/r?

...And Madonna, she still has not showed

We see this empty cage now corrode
Where her cape of the stage once had flowed
The fiddler, he now steps to the road...
—Bob Dylan, Visions of Johanna

Rule of your road
silento meditation
rather than a retro
club scene surfeit
with molly rollers
+ kitty flipperinos
we all gather 'round
virginal wild oak wood
meadow's Bodhi tree.
My M.D. 125 pounds
now fit as proverbial
fiddle but nada J.Lo
cagier disco steps
here, I am able to
assess risks from
cardiovascular
diseases—plus
obtain directly
from chemists
unadulterated
goodies uncut
with fentanyl

or strychnine.
Bud offers, *Ger*
you know what
to do. It is time
just walk away.
It don't matter
how smart or
experienced.
Said as friend
not as parent.

*Late-phase often graphic poet arrived in seventh decade, aphorist, humorist or sometimes meanderist; Gerard Sarnat's a multiple Pushcart/Best of Net Award nominee who also has been invited to serve as judge for competitions. **Activism Through Poetry: How Gerard Sarnat Uses Verse as a Form of Protest**¹ is a 2025 retrospective. His words have been widely published in four collections; by Rattle, London Arts-Based Research Centre, Israel Association of Writers in English, The Nature of Our Times/Poets For Science, Gravity of the Thing, Poetry Center of San Jose, Brooklyn Review, Tokyo Poetry Journal, Gargoyle, Deronda Review, New Delta Review, Buddhist Review, New York Times, Mount Saint Mary's University/LA, Oberlin, St. John's University, Northwestern, Yale, Pomona, Harvard, Missouri Baptist, Stanford, Dartmouth, Penn, Columbia, Grinnell, Johns Hopkins, NYU, Brown, North Dakota, CUNY, McMaster, Maine, British Columbia/Toronto/Chicago, Virginia and Alabama university presses — and more. He's a Harvard Medical School-trained physician, Stanford professor, healthcare CEO. Currently, he's devoting energy and resources to dealing with climate justice, serving on Climate Action Now's board. Sarnat's belonged to the longest-running U.S. Jewish-Palestinian Dialogue Group. Gerry's been married since 1969 and has three kids, seven grandsons — and looks forward to future granddaughters. Learn more at gerardsarnat.com.²*

1. <https://culterate.blog/2025/02/20/activism-through-poetry-how-gerard-sarnat-uses-verse-as-a-form-of-protest/>

2. <http://gerardsarnat.com/>

Alcoholic Notebook

her notebook is full of letters.

the more letters she writes,
the stronger alcohol her blood vessels accept.

her notebook is full of loneliness.

the more loneliness she writes,
the more fatal alcohol her blood vessels accept.

unless she stops writing letters and remembering loneliness,
she can't exit from a cocoon of alcohol.

Love Like Caffeine

instead of your love,
caffeine fills my body.
the stronger i crave you,
the deeper my body sinks to the sea of caffeine.
probably,
i can't escape from
caffeine,
and
your love like caffeine.

*Yuu Ikeda is a Japan based poet and writer. She loves mystery novels, western art, sugary coffee, and japanese animation “◆◆◆◆ (Jujutsu Kaisen)” and “◆◆◆◆◆◆ (Blue Lock)”. She writes poetry on **her website**¹. One of her big dreams is to write while traveling around the world. Her Twitter and Instagram : @yuunnnn77.*

1. <https://poetryandcoffeedays.wordpress.com/>

Dreams are Dust

Dreams

Are old
hat,
hard
and unforgiving,
But I dream
them anyway
Because
Like Paul,
I can feel it—
The old me
suffering
to strangle
The new.
But in every
Instance,
There's
the renewing
Of my tired
mind
and a remembering
That death
Is done,
Dreams
Are dust,
And the
Feel of fingers
on my throat
Is a phantom
Itch

at best.

The Softest Scream

The “why” is the softest scream
I’ve ever spoke into existence.
I liken it in my mind’s eye
To Your Word, the Christ,
whispered into the void,
the “tohu vavohu” as it were,
The Hebrew ringing
And weaving
It’s way through
My heart
Like my
own noise
coiling
through
my
soul.

Surely This is Heaven Too

If everything is out of time,
this hurt is nothing more
than one small blip
made one day,
outside of heaven,
Inside this hell.
But the moment
You had burst
Through the nebulous
Of ungrateful hearts
And desolate darkness,
You restructured
All we've grappled
To construct,
Renaming,
Reworking
The mess of all these
things,
Only to bring our hurt
forward,
bright-like and shining,
so the blessed
shall always say,
"Surely, this is heaven too."

Ericka Clay is a published novelist and poet. As a former atheist turned believer, she seeks to write raw, real, relatable literature with a heart for Jesus. She's been awarded several times by Writer's Digest for her short fiction

pieces and released her latest novel, A Bird Alone, in January of 2024. She lives in Northwest Arkansas with her husband, daughter, two rats (yes, you read that correctly), and an insatiable need to push buttons, both figuratively and literally. You can learn more about Ericka and her books at ericka-clay.com¹.

1. <https://wp.titan.email/mail/erickaclay.com>

Thank You

Thank you for reading. May God bless you and keep you.

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Romans 5:3-4¹

1. <https://dailyverses.net/romans/5/3-4>

For more free books, please subscribe at erickaclay.com².

2. <http://erickaclay.com>

