

*In the Realm
of the
Gossamer Veil*



F. Nelson Stover

The drawing on the cover was done by Ellen Howie. It is entitled “The Way My Father Died” and was created in response to the monograph of the same name. That paper is included in this collection.

Additional copies of this document are available for download at <https://emergingecology.org/fns/>. Contact Nelson Stover with questions or comments at StoverN@Bellsouth.net.

Dedication

With special thanks to the following individuals who have allowed me to be privy to their personal journey in the Realm of the Gossamer Veil.

Alex Stoesen
Annette Patton Bingham
Beulah Copley Stover
Dennis Ray Hands
Helen Lee
Kenneth Edwin Williams
Lois Roberta Kite
Nelson Turner Stover
Nina May Smith
Robert L. "Doc" Powell, Sr.
Robert N. Stover
Shakuntala Belge Jadhav
Thomas Berry

... and Perdu who, on a February Friday morning, walked out the door of our house and followed his own path through the gossamer veil to the house atop the crystal mountain.



Introduction

The first Saturday of August 1987 began like most Saturdays of the previous month. I was in Egypt working in the village of El Bayad on the western bank of the Nile River about an hour south of Cairo. The next seven days would be like none that I had ever experienced before. By the end of the day, my wife and I were on a TWA flight to Knoxville, TN where my father was close to death. The monographs and poems in this collection grew out of this experience.

I had the privilege of being with my father during the last two days of his life. The combination of jet lag, grief and burgeoning lucidity, however, combined to overwhelm my body and psyche. I was in the emergency room of a hospital during my father's funeral and spent several months recovering my physical and emotional strength. The first three monographs that follow were written later in the month while visiting my in-laws in Florida.

Seven years later, when my mother approached the end of her life, I went to Detroit to be with her. I vowed at that time to take better care of myself during this process than I had in Knoxville. The cinquain poems and the image of the Death Angel weaving a gossamer veil came to me while I was at her bedside. Mother passed peacefully in the company of her daughter-in-law shortly after my brother, sister and I had gone out of the hospice facility where she lay.

Over the years since mother died, I have had the opportunity to meet others at this phase of their life's journey. The other pieces of this collection have come in response to those occasions.

This collection of prose and poetry is made available to anyone to whom the perspectives contained herein may be helpful in their own journey.

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The Way My Father Died

Every day the sun goes down in the evening and night follows day. Sometimes storm clouds cover the western horizon and the beauty of the sunset goes unnoticed. Some days, work or pleasure consumes the evening hours and awareness of the sunset only comes after darkness has prevailed. Some evenings a person gets to see a beautiful sunset. This rare sight becomes a lifetime treasure.

Pre-Retirement

Robert Nelson Stover (often called Bob or Smokey) was born in the Ohio Oil Company's home office town of Findlay, Ohio just after Washington's Birthday in 1920. The first son of Nelson Turner Stover and Beulah Copley Stover, Bob grew up in Robinson, Illinois, an oil refining town in southern Illinois. Like everyone, his dying began as soon as he was born; but the joys of childhood, of playing with his sister Pat and his brother Jim, concealed the darkness.

At the age of 12, while playing basketball with his friends, Bob accidentally hit another boy in the mouth with his elbow and the resulting infection put him in St. Luke's hospital in Chicago for many months. Overriding some suggestions to amputate, Bob and his mother elected to try to save the arm although no movement of the elbow would ever again be possible. Only decades later would he realize the devastating affect that the prolonged infection would have on his kidneys. In the hospital, and during the years that followed, Bob learned to care for himself even with the limited use of his right arm with its elbow permanently bent 90 degrees.

He learned to play ping pong with his rigid right elbow and when his opponent tried to take advantage of his limitation by hitting to the far-left corner, beyond the right arm's reach, Bob would throw the paddle to his left hand and masterfully return the volley. No one was ever able to time the speed with which Bob's paddle changed hands -- and I never saw him drop the paddle. Bob never complained about his affliction and his decision to move ahead, despite obvious limitations, served as an inspiration to his brother and sister, friends and family.

Bob met and married Nina May Smith while attending Miami University at Oxford, Ohio. Their three children -- Frederick Nelson, Robert Brooks and Martha Jane (called Marty) -- were born in Robinson, Illinois, where Bob was working for the same company as his father. The family moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana, and later to East Lansing and Farmington, Michigan. Bob and his family were members of churches in every community and Bob served a variety of roles including: Usher, Trustee and Chairman of the Finance and Property Committees. After his early retirement from Marathon Oil Company -- and upon receiving a pension and full medical coverage -- Bob and Nina moved their residence to Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Both became members of Our Savior's Lutheran Church and took part-time jobs in a shopping center called "The Village".

Preparation

During the Christmas season of 1977, Bob became very ill and had to be hospitalized. Unbeknownst to him, his mother was also taken to a hospital in Findlay, Ohio, at about the same time. She was to die before the snow melted. Bob, however, was only beginning 10 years of dialysis. During that Christmas of '77, the doctors diagnosed his problem as complete failure of the kidneys -- likely precipitated by the long infection during the recuperation from his childhood basketball accident. Bob and Nina decided to initiate a program of machine dialysis which entailed making 3 trips each week to a clinic in Knoxville, about an hour from their home in Gatlinburg. A shunt was placed in Bob's arm to which the dialysis machine was attached, and a new style of life began.

For several years they adjusted their schedule around the need to go to the dialysis clinic. Employers, friends and family, too, accommodated them realizing that life, even on dialysis, is more precious than death. One day they heard about a new system of dialysis called Continuous Ambulatory Peritoneal Dialysis (CAPD). This could be done in their own home, without expensive machinery and did not involve the risks of blood contamination. Although the doctors in Knoxville were sceptical of the new methods, Bob and Nina went to Vanderbilt University in Nashville to be trained in the new "at home" method. They returned to teach the dialysis clinic staff some of the finer points of C.A.P.D.

Four times each day, Bob would sit at his kitchen counter to change the fluids which performed the functions of his kidneys. In between exchanges, Bob kept up a full schedule of church activities, home repairs and worked at The Village as long as possible.

During these 10 years of dialysis, Bob knew that he was terminally ill and used the time to prepare, both spiritually and practically, for the death which was to come. He drafted and signed a "Living Will" authorizing doctors to discontinue using artificial life support systems when recovery was no longer possible. He pre-arranged his funeral and began a time-payment plan to cover the expenses of cremation and internment. He included Nina and the children in the discussions and built a consensus about the way he wanted to die.

Timing

By the beginning of 1987, Bob's physical condition was deteriorating rapidly. He fell several times breaking his left arm and cutting himself in several places. In April, he resigned from the church's Property Committee of which he had been the chairman. He fell again in May and cut his head. Brooks and Marty visited him several times during the spring and they, too, recognized the rapid deterioration rate of his physical condition.

Bob had always handled all the financial matters for his family but when the time came to pay the July bills he sat down with his wife and carefully explained the procedures for handling each of the necessary forms and files. He then watched as she wrote out all the checks for the month of August, in advance. During the month, also, they discussed with the doctor the implications of discontinuing dialysis.

One Wednesday morning at the end of July Bob woke early and prayed. When Nina awoke, he told her that he had decided that the time had come to discontinue dialysis. She knew this was his true decision and they proceeded to try to decide when. His brother was on vacation during the last week of July,

Bob's younger son was planning a family vacation beginning August 15th, and Marty was going on vacation in September. Bob didn't want his death to interfere with anybody's living and didn't think he could make it until October; so, they decided he should go into the hospital on July 31st with the instructions to his doctor to discontinue dialysis.

On the morning of Friday the 31st, he awoke early as usual, cleaned off all the papers on his side of the kitchen counter and walked out of his house knowing he would never ever return.

Dying

Doctors gave various estimates, up to three weeks, for the amount of time the Bob could survive after his final dialysis. Brooks and Marty drove from Detroit to the hospital in Knoxville on Saturday after Dad had called them to announce his decision. (Prior to leaving their homes in Michigan, they had a brief conversation with Brook's minister regarding what to expect; he basically told them to let Dad control the situation, which he did.) On Saturday, Dad was able to sit in his chair to have his evening "happy hour" drink. He requested, and had, individual conversations with his two younger children. During this quality time together, he made five requests to each of them -- later they realized that he had given, nearly word for word, the same instructions to each. These requests involved things he wanted them to do after he died, including making sure that Mom went back to church.

My wife, Elaine, and I arrived at the Knoxville airport from Cairo, Egypt, at 9:30 Sunday evening. Brooks and Marty met us at the terminal and briefed us on Dad's condition. We joked about the difficulties they had had getting in touch with us including "car to camel" phone calls initiated from the phone in Brook's G.M. car to my house in Egypt. We soberly affirmed the wisdom of Dad's decision to discontinue dialysis and our eyes dampened at the thought of his impending death. His sister arrived at the airport 30 minutes later and we all went to visit Daddy in the hospital where Mom was staying with him.

Brooks also reported that during the day before, while they were all talking, he alone was watching Dad's face. A beatific smile seemed to come across his face as though he were profoundly satisfied with life. This contentment would remain with him for the rest of his time.

Mom met us at the door to his room and asked me if I thought they had made the right decision -- to discontinue dialysis. "Yes", I replied. She was reassured; and smiled saying, "We had ten years to get ready for this, I'll have an easier time than you will." Brooks went into the room to tell Dad that we had arrived.

I went into the room by myself, Dad was no longer able to get out of bed. He just held my hand and we both cried without tears; he said finally, "It's O.K." Elaine and Pat, Dad's sister, each spent a few minutes with him and I went back in to say goodbye. He asked how long my trip had been and assured me that he would see me in the morning. Everyone, except Mom who had a bed beside his, left Dad in the hospital to spend the night in Gatlinburg. Having seen all of his family, Dad's condition slipped rapidly, and he finally got to sleep about 3 a.m.

When Dad awoke in the morning, an oxygen tube was affixed to his nose to improve his breathing; he was having increasing difficulty moving even his hands but remained alert. Brooks, Elaine and I arrived back at the hospital about 9:30 and Dad asked if any mail had arrived. Mom assured him that we had

left before the mail had come and he seemed relaxed. Marty and Pat arrived from Gatlinburg about 10:15 and Dad realized that the entire family was gathered. He seemed happy, content and prepared to face his death which was less than 2 hours away.

While some conversations went on among the family, we all listened for Dad whose words became increasingly quiet and simple. He asked for a cigarette, but Mom told him "No" explaining the danger of the oxygen. He asked for additional pain pills once and we finally decided to have an injection administered. About 11 he said it was time to do an exchange but we reminded him that such was no longer necessary; he relaxed even further. When he said "radishes", Mom knew he was thinking about lunch -- sandwiches with radishes.

Elaine and I remained with him while the others stepped out for coffee. Looking around the room, Dad asked if the others had gone for lunch. We assured him they had, and he seemed satisfied. When everyone had returned he asked for the light over his head to be turned on. We continued a quiet conversation while his breathing became obviously slower and more difficult. Several times he tried with all his strength to fold his hands over his chest, but Mom and I usually had to help him.

Three times he quietly called, "Come on", as though beckoning death. His eyes rolled heavenward as if he was looking at that which human eyes cannot see. Finally, he asked for the light over his bed to be turned out. Mom wet his lips with water from a drinking glass and Dad journeyed into his final rest in peace.

Mother held his still hands and said a brief prayer of thanksgiving for his life and his death. We all said our final goodbyes, then the tears began. Alone, and holding each other, we cried the tears of sorrow, for his passing, mixed with joy, for his courage even unto death.

In his death, as in his life, Dad taught not by what he said but by what he did. As Brooks and I carried Mom's luggage out to the car, we asked each other which would have such courage and strength to face death self-consciously. Upon returning to Gatlinburg, we had the chance to tell others -- who stopped by or phoned -- of the greatness of his death. Among ourselves, we had to admit that we had learned much in the past two days and had had the opportunity to see peace and tranquillity in a part of life (death) which few people ever witness.

As he had requested, Dad's body was cremated, and the ashes interned near his home in Gatlinburg, TN. His spirit has gone to where his eyes were looking and the memories of his life and death remain in the hearts and minds of those who knew him.

Naples, Florida
August 1987

Lessons My Father Taught Me

*A wise old owl
Sat in an oak.*

*The more he saw
The less he spoke.*

*The less he spoke
The more he heard.*

*Why can't we be
More like that wise old bird?*

-- a birthday gift from my Mother, author unknown

My father, Robert Nelson Stover, decided to die at the age of 67. On the occasion of his death, I had time to reflect on what he had taught me through his life and death. Dad didn't talk much but rather taught through his actions. Those who watched him learned; those who weren't paying attention missed out, and he didn't really care one way or the other.

I have summarized the 42 years of lessons which he gave to me into six simple reminders:

1. Get up in the morning.
2. Create quality time.
3. Make decisions and act.
4. Treat everyone as equal.
5. Pay the mission pledge first.
6. Take time to smell the roses.

These never came as sermons or demands, they were just what he did. Anyone wishing to join him on the road he trod was welcome and would receive encouragement and guidance; others, on other roads, would have to fend for themselves.

Getting Up

I don't ever remember getting up before Dad. For many years, he had an automatic coffee pot which would produce a pot of hot coffee by 6 a.m. He would get up before anyone else, sit in the kitchen with his cup of hot coffee and a cigarette and brood. Sometimes he would make notes to himself but mostly he was just quiet.

The second quiet time of the day he called "happy hour". At the end of the day's work or at 5:00, whichever came last, he would make a martini for himself and whoever wished to join him. This time was understood to be for sitting, not discussing, announcing or reporting. Even in the busy days while Regional Manager for Marathon Oil, when he came home late, he made time for quiet before eating dinner and getting into the affairs of the evening. As kids, we learned to respect this time.

I really didn't understand why he set this discipline for himself until I returned from spending four years with the Institute of Cultural Affairs in Australia. By then, I too had become a busy manager of sorts; spending days on the road and keeping a full schedule of appointments. I spent 10 days with Mom and Dad in their mountain home in Gatlinburg, Tn. Dad did what he always did; and while he didn't tell me

ow I should organize my time, he did let me live a day as he did. In 10 days, I picked up a rhythm which he had perfected over fifty years. Since then, I, too, have found myself sustained by time.

Making Quality Time

In the final days of my father's life, my brother named for me one of the important realities about which my father knew -- "Quality Time". Everybody gets 24 hours each day, but for many this just passes with meaninglessness; Dad knew how to fill time with quality so that moments were filled with importance. In conversations, Dad did a lot of listening, asking questions which elicited responses requiring thoughtfulness. When he spoke, he told stories which pointed to the heart of the matter. "Gossip" came lowest on his priority level.

While working at the "The Village" as the gardener, he had conversations with shop owners, clerks and maintenance staff. Even in the hospital during his final days, he had conversations with the nurses and cleaning staff. After he died, those he had talked to came to us in the family to thank us for the opportunity they had had of being with and learning from Bob. While he thought he was just being friendly, people who met him counted their meetings as rare gifts.

When we were growing up, Dad would try to find at least one day each year when each one of us could "go to work" with him. We would get up early on a school vacation day and go with him on the various appointments and travels which the particular day held. Sometimes we would get to help load tanker trucks, sometimes we would watch mechanics fix cars and other times we would just sit while grown-ups talked. During the day's interludes we were one-on-one with Dad; a valuable opportunity and an indirect lesson in making Quality Time.

Decide and Act

In his life, marriage and death, Dad understood the need to make decisions about what to do, to act on these decisions and then to take responsibility for the consequences of what he did. He lived this style and expected no less from others. His doing came not as frantic activity but as deliberated action; and his thinking led not to abstraction but to involvement.

Soon after I got my drivers' license, I went on a fishing trip with Dad, his work associates and their sons. One man had a big fiberglass boat which he pulled on a trailer behind his car. Since I was the youngest driver, I was allowed to bring the car and boat down from the campsite to the lake while the rest of the group walked to the boat launch. I had never before driven a car with a trailer and misjudged how much room I needed to allow to make the turn. I drove the car too close to the tree growing near the bend in the road when making a right-hand turn and knocked the boat off the trailer. I didn't know how much damage I had done and couldn't decide whether to run away, cry or admit what I did. Finally, I realized that I had no alternative but to walk to the lake and seek the help of the others. Admitting what I had done, I got no beating or lecture; just the affirmation that I alone am responsible for my actions.

Treat Everyone as Equals

In his work and community activities, Dad had to deal with people on all levels of the social hierarchy from corporation executives to service station pump attendants. When I visited any of these people with Dad, or when he talked about them, I never got the sense that he thought himself above, or below, anyone. He could look anyone in the eye, listen to anyone and heed their advice.

This applied to social groupings as well as to individuals. In the early 1970's, while he was in the real estate department of Marathon in Detroit, Dad was designated as the company's representative to the Black Businessmen's Association. He considered it an honor for he and Mother to attend the group's functions at a time when many of his associates would have considered the task well beneath their dignity.

Mission Pledge First

Mostly Dad taught by his actions but one conversation, in particular, stayed with me for years. Early one morning while Dad had his coffee and I my tea, we were discussing Dad's activities in his church and in particular the finances, for which he was responsible. He was telling me that although they had income a little less than their budget, at least the congregation's allotment to the foreign mission budget of the denomination was current and up to date. This, he informed me, was a principle to which he always urged the churches on whose boards he sat, "Pay the mission pledge first."

He went on to assure me that, in his experience, if at the end of the month or year the congregation had a few bills due for utilities or parsonage repair someone could always be found to make a special contribution. However, he continued, if the mission pledge hadn't been met, then donors both rich and poor would feel that the congregation as a whole was shirking its duty. They would be reluctant to make a special contribution and would, furthermore, lose some of their confidence in the congregation as a whole.

I've tried to remember this tested wisdom both in making my own family budgets and when designing the budgets and financial strategies of the organization for which I work.

Stop and Smell the Roses

Dad lived life as a businessman, as a professional salesman and manager; but he also took time to stop and smell the roses. In our houses in East Lansing and Farmington, Dad started and cultivated sizeable rose gardens. During the summer, these flowers decorated our house and were available for us boys to take to our girlfriends. After his retirement, Dad took a job as maintenance man and gardener for The Village, a shopping center in Gatlinburg, Tn.

Dad never said much about his roses, he just cared for them. As I grew older I came to understand that in the hustle and bustle of life and business in the Twentieth Century a person has to find ways to stop and smell the roses.

A corollary to smelling the roses involved taking care of the femininity of one's wife. During my later years in high school, Dad made a point of taking me with him while doing his Christmas shopping for Mom. In particular, he wanted me to go with him into the lingerie department of the women's clothing store to buy a womanly surprise for Mom. As usual, no lectures just "come along you might learn something worthwhile". I did.

Naples, Florida
August 1987

The House Atop the Crystal Mountain

At the center of the universe stands a crystal mountain. Since the beginning of time it has stood, unmoving and unchanging; simple and stark and shimmering. On the top of the crystal mountain lies a pentagonal building. Its walls and the mountain cannot be distinguished. In each wall one portal allows creatures to enter one at a time; nothing ever comes out, though some have seen in without entering. The structure has no covering, and some enter by breaking through its floor. All that is inside is nothingness -- light and dark cannot be distinguished within its boundaries. All that is, finally, comes to his house atop the crystal mountain.

From the moment of creation each entity has the opportunity of glimpsing the crystal mountain. More or less consciously each creature journeys toward this house. Seven pathways lead to the mountain:

1. The path through the desert,
2. The river through reality,
3. The village of human settlement,
4. The forest of matter,
5. The city-state of society,
6. The tunnel through complications, and
7. The air which creates no impediments.

No way contains less dangers or more benefits, all lead to the same place, and inside the building on the top of the crystal mountain all is as one.

On the path through the desert, each individual lives in solitude. Whatever happens in the world around occurs as if on a distant planet. Motivation, desire and rewards swell from within; the individual draws strength from an invisible well. To those not on the path through the desert, this way seems strange and anti-social, even futile. Yet those on this way find a richness in solitude, find nourishment in the simple and gain sustenance from nothingness. Often those on this path seem, to others, lost and many even doubt that the path leads to the crystal mountain. Doubt, however, disappears early for those on the path through the desert and the internal joy which comes to them rarely can be shared with others.

The river through reality mostly meanders like a wide, ancient river through meadows and plains, but some points on its course contain dangerous rapids and at other places lie docks for passengers to enter and disembark. Like the desert pathway, this route mostly bears individuals, though often pairs of people and even small groups also travel on it to the crystal mountain. Wonder, fascination and amazement await travellers on this course. Sometimes the opening of a rose evokes awe, at other times the face of social injustice appears to raise indignation and bears the call to action. Whereas this river begins from many sources, it carries its load toward increasing oneness. Those on the river through reality often pass unnoticed through the social structures and practical systems of normalcy. However,

they bear -- from the early part of their journey on the river -- marks which are recognized by others on this path to the crystal mountain. The river route cannot be navigated by the cowardly and though often beautiful, this way contains many hardships. Nonetheless, excitement and wonder become the life blood of those who, with eyes open wide to the world around them, follow the river through reality to the house atop the crystal mountain.

Around the mountain lie innumerable villages in which people can live. While people can move from place to place, from village to village, nonetheless life in the villages of human settlement remains life in the human villages. To varying degrees, structures and conventions emerge within the villages. Life in the villages is filled with celebrations and collegiality as well as with suffering and boredom. Life and death fill the consciousness of those in the villages. By their own labor they are sustained. Many difficult skills are required of those who live in the human settlements and increasing pools of wisdom are emerging to equip their inhabitants. The crystal mountain can always be seen from each village. Though the way from these villages to the house atop the crystal mountain comes uniquely to each individual, often the journey occurs quickly and smoothly and those in the final stages of the trip are able to prepare those who follow.

Other paths to the top of the crystal mountain go through the forest of material things. Travellers on these paths can gather, collect and make all varieties of items, comforts and symbols. From this direction, groups can convene and work together to fashion wonders beyond the capabilities of any individual. Likewise, wars, disagreements and strife can emerge as groups stake out claims for various parts of the forest or try to compete with each other to accomplish ever and ever more complex tasks. These paths provide numerous opportunities for sensing accomplishment and, in fact, those on these routes change the structures of the universe in which they live. The starkness of the house atop the crystal mountain often surprises those who approach from this way; all that is gathered in the forest must be left in the forest to travel to the crystal mountain of its own accord. From the midst of the forest, some see the starkness of the crystal mountain and are prepared when they arrive at the shimmering portals, others arrive quite unprepared.

As the conscious mass of the universe increases and the complexity of the social fabric grows accordingly, some people have chosen to live in the city-state of society. Relationships have replaced property as the source of significance. Diverse and imaginative forms of power have evolved beyond the mere interacting of things. While this path to the crystal mountain has been forged most recently, it nonetheless draws ever increasing numbers of travellers. In many ways, the travel-guides for this path have barely been written, yet wide-spread enthusiasm is emerging for this road which sometimes seems like a modern super-highway, sometimes like an urban traffic jam and other times like a maze of winding suburban lanes and cul de sacs. From many points in the city-state of society the top of the crystal mountain can be clearly seen; however, many inhabitants either never see it or mistake it for part of their own creation. One way or the other, every resident of every city-state arrives at the portal of the house on the crystal mountain. Those who have seen it and affirmed it arrive calm and serene; those who have seen it and sought to deny it, not only arrive tense and angry but these conditions affect their every breath; those who have not seen or have ignored the crystal mountain on the horizon usually have a lot of quick decisions to make as the portals near -- as quick decisions quite often fill the lives of residents of the city-state -- many are well prepared for their final requirement.

For millions, the struggle to get to the house atop the crystal mountain requires seemingly unsurmountable complexities, and endless work often carried out in the darkness of unknowing and without perceivable reward. This tunnel, dug inch by centimeter as the journey progresses, goes through the hard rock of the crystal mountain itself. Little can be taught or learned except to keep digging, urged or beckoned by a light which cannot be seen. This tunnel emerges through the floor of the house atop the crystal mountain. In many ways, from this pathway, the inside and the outside of the house seem indistinguishable; just the digging stops.

The top of the house on the top of the crystal mountain has no covering; the entire universe -- past, present and future -- and the inside of the house are one and the same. Sometimes life emerges, starts on one of the various pathways and then, as it were, simply leaps into the house on the top of the crystal mountain. To those watching from the outside, this may be called an accident, a tragedy or a blessing; often, too, the passing may go unnoticed or unheeded. No preparation can be made for this route; it cannot be chosen.

Consider carefully these pathways.
Prepare yourself as well as you can for the way you choose.
Enjoy your journey.
Enable others on their own journeys.
Listen for the sound which cannot be heard.

The Cinquain that appear in the *Notes of a Faithful Watcher* (the next pages) are a specific form of poetry. In the type of Cinquain used here, the first line contains a single noun. The second line contains two words that describe the noun. The third line has three gerunds – words that end in “-ing”. In the fourth line, a four-word phrase describes the noun. The final line contains a synonym for the original word.

Writing poetry in this format can be a useful exercise for people sitting in the Realm of the Gossamer Veil.

Notes of a Faithful Watcher

Death

Final eventfulness

Breathing, Bye-ing, one-ing

One life completes itself

Sleep

Humor

Spiritual rebalancing

Acknowledging, accepting, internalizing

Universal paradox becomes embodied

Healing

Grief

Healing disjuncture

Crying, remembering, affirming

Relationship turns into memory

Solace

Silence

Profundity space

Deepening, understanding, illuminating

Mystery moves in vastness

Unification

Home
No-wrong place
Sleeping, being, loving
The place I belong
Warmth

Soul
Interior universe
Communicating, growing, stabilizing
Place eternal truth resides
Peace

Tears
Extruded compassion
Sobbing, weeping, drying
My heart's emotions emerge
Cleansing

This
Watchfulness's fruits
Heeding, annotating, publishing
Dying advises forthcoming deaths
Gratitude

April 1994

Moon Shadow

The Death Angel moves
 Like the moon shadow,
Slowly and inexorably
 Over
The landscape of Life.

The Death Angel sits
 On its new friend's eyelids
With each passing day
 Shut eyes
Become more comfortable.

Befriending the Death Angel
 Involves affirming
Life's joys and sorrows.
 When the "Yes" has been said,
The past becomes history.

The Death Angel seeks help
 From those with strong eyelids
To care for details,
 To keep options open and
 To describe reality.

April 1994

Roving

It's important to watch out for the roving
Death Angel.

Often it is busy
At other places and times;
So, one only need acknowledge
Its real role in Life.

The Death Angel watches all aspects of
The social fabric;

And communicates with those who will
About the time, place and circumstances
For passage through the veil.

Sometimes you see it
Walking on your particular pathway;

Then, welcome the Death Angel,
Organize your remaining days
And let others know that you are passing through the veil.

Other times, the Death Angel
Is seen first by a friend, relative or colleague;

Then, make peace with the Death Angel,
Negotiate if you will;
But use wisely your last energy
And prepare to be on the other side.

Those overly preoccupied with the business of living
Often fail to notice the Death Angel roving.

Their life ends, nonetheless,
In a bang, crash or sigh;
And a great opportunity for consciousness
Is lost forever.

April 1994

Breath Space, Three Space One Space, Death Space

From the infinitesimal invisible,
After two individuals have become one in love,
Some creatures pass through the gossamer veil
At the opening
Of Breath Space.

Nutrients from food and drink expand the Exterior Form
surrounding community develops Social Skills.
Universal winds kindle Interior Fires
Filling the vastness
Of Three Space.

In the comings and goings of three space living,
It sometimes happens that boundaries dissolve between This and That
And the curtain of illusion disappears
Revealing the Presence
Of One Space.

Irrespective of the pathways taken
In the journey through three space and one space,
All creatures in breath space will eventually
Pass again through the veil
To Death Space.

Death Space

Death space surrounds the gossamer veil
Which shrouds the passageway between
Living and dying.

Clock time doesn't apply to existence in death space;
Only qualities of care and compassion
Fill the realm of life-death.

Ghosts from previous generations evoke memories of filled-full moments
While visiting those wandering in the territory
Where eternity becomes manifest.

Everyone in death space shares a special kind of harmony
Where energy and matter, money and position, solitude and companionship
Become blurred in a relativistic haze.

Only a single breath – one's first or one's last –
Measures the distance to the opposite side
Of the wispy curtain which billows gently in and out.

When the mysterious aura dissolves like the morning mist,
Some inhabitants of death space
Never return to ...

Breath Space.

Preparing for the Dark Days

Awaking in darkness,
Retiring in darkness --
Such is the rhythm for the
Next 70 days.

An end is coming
To the Year that has been.
Eternity is receiving
The glory of this passing.

The new will be birthed
In fear, chaos and unknowing;
And each creature will decide
How to emerge from the darkness.

Life's attention now turns to the Nothingness,
To whole-heartedly enjoying the blackness.
Glorious brightness promotes a deception,
Deep truth awaits, patiently, in darkness.

The Darkness Befriends

Darkness covers the land,
The trees stand stark and barren,
The animals sleep, and
A calm hush fills time and space.

Darkness has a reality of its own.
The future lies obscured and hidden.
The next minute, the next step forward,
Often seem uncertain, unimaginable and impossible.

Fools run and play in the darkness.
Cowards try to escape from the darkness.
Machos eliminate the quiet darkness with
their quadraphonic speakers and their halogen flood lights.
The deluded say a light shines in the darkness just as the
wanderers see oasis mirages in the desert.

But the darkness has a reality of its own.
The owl, the cougar and the bat with no eyes have made
their peace with the darkness.
Embrace the chaos, uncertainty and awe.
The darkness befriends.

Guardians of The Gossamer Veil

Noonday sun and midnight moon
 Usually obscure the gossamer veil
 Which covers the ever-present portal
 To the realm beyond the living.
Yet the portal remains.

Near each person's private portal
 Stand five watchful guardians.
 Each has a special role
 Enabling the spirit's passage through the veil.
The five guardians attend to both body and spirit.

The *Caring Friend* affirms both past and present
 While sitting with the voyager approaching the veil.
 With calming voice, the friend brings peace;
 With loving hands, the friend brings tender calm.
Friend and voyager share precious moments together.

The *Wise Doctor* attends to bodily functions,
 Managing pain and prolonging vital processes where possible.
 Years of training and special skills provide assistance
 With complex biological technologies.
But, the doctor cannot stop the journey through the veil.

The *Attentive Clergy* loves both body and spirit
Affirming their interrelationship and their separation.
The clergy tends to the needs of all
Whether passing through or remaining on Earth.
Words and actions appropriately meet the needs of each.

The *Estate Executor* handles the material goods and legal decisions
Left behind as the voyager enters the portal to beyond.
Since no accounts, possessions or properties pass through the veil,
The executor takes responsibility for all the remaining matters.
Last wishes guide the distribution of mementos and keepsakes.

The *Quiet Undertaker* handles the lifeless body
Left behind when the spirit crosses to another realm.
Practical arrangements and ceremonial goodbyes
Insure that the remains respectfully return to Earth.
The cycle of material continuity dances in the undertaker's care.

No one escapes the passage through the gossamer veil,
Yet the time and place remain elusive and unpredictable.
The five guardians always show up;
Sometimes well prepared, sometimes in confused haste.
Welcome and befriend them.

June 13, 2018

The Gossamer Veil

In the Realm of Oneness

No otherness can be found.
The Realm of Oneness encompasses all and
Is sometimes visited by saints and sages.

... but/and/yet ...

When the cosmogenetic urges of autopoiesis, differentiation and communion begin their dance,
Pairs of properties unfold and
One becomes two.
But Oneness does not go away
And the two polar opposites seem to embody among them the ever-present wholeness,
Yet they remain separated by a gossamer veil.

Time and space each have their own distinct characteristics.
Time moves only onward – now follows then,
No return journey can be made.
In moving from here to there, both places remain accessible while
Warping and changing fill space,
And the gossamer veil flutters across the delicate boundary between.

Energy and matter play special parts in the unfolding of Oneness.
Energy jumps and enlivens all that it encounters,
Perpetually resisting form and containment.
Matter embodies particular aspects in each manifestation
Combining and changing as it journeys along,
But no formula can precisely predict the journey through the gossamer veil between.

Life and death intertwine on the stage set by time, space, matter and energy.
Life provides creativity and consciousness
With a vehicle for expressing the diverse majesty of ever present Oneness.
Death receives, without question, the residue and remains of each living entity
Preserving them in memory and accomplishment for the eternal whole,
Yet the journey through the gossamer veil remains a mysterious trek.

The gossamer veil pervades all that is not One.
Woven of wildness and abundance, power and possibility
It separates the inseparable and illumines the darkness through which
Now passes into then,
Nothing passes into something and
Life passes into death.

This poem is dedicated to Thomas Berry and Bob Powell, Sr. who had the calm courage to stare at the gossamer veil combined with the august presence to open the eyes of others to its awesome beauty.

September 5, 2014

About the Author



F. Nelson Stover: Mr. Stover completed his BSc. in Computer Science at Purdue University and received his BDiv. from Chicago Theological Seminary. His dissertation was entitled “New Directions for Religious Communities”; it focused on the church’s role in social change. In 1970, he was ordained by the United Church of Christ and assigned to a social ministry. For the next two decades, Nelson conducted human development training programs for individuals at all levels of society. During this time, he spent five years in India and extensive periods in Australia, Belgium and Egypt.

For another two decades, he designed and implemented computer software solutions for professional associations in North Carolina. In 2012, along with his wife, Nelson received the Greensboro Public Library’s Thomas Berry Award for their work in giving practical form to Thomas’ work. Nelson is now President of Emerging Ecology (www.EmergingEcology.org), a non-profit organization committed to *promoting a worldview for the next generations’ solutions.*

Nelson has published two books. The most recent, *Through Three Portals, a systematic approach to theology in the 21st Century*, provides practical clues to seeing the depth significance of self, society and the natural world. During 2017 and 2018, he has preached regularly at the Unitarian Universalists in Covenant church in downtown Greensboro. His lectures and writings focus on foundational principles and practical actions relevant for developing a mutually enhancing relationship between the human and non-human worlds.

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Pink Peony Patch

When Elaine's mother, Roberta, decided that the time had come for her to move from her single-family dwelling into an apartment at the tiered care facility, we moved the peony plants from the yard before selling the house. Roberta had brought some of the plants from her mother's home in Oaktown, Indiana.

The pink peonies now flourish in our front yard garden (see photo, back cover). About Mother's Day each year they burst forth in glorious abundance. Some adorn our dining table for several weeks.

Each time they bloom, we remember all the women (and men) who have cared for peonies and for their families. When Elaine was young, her family would go to Oaktown for Memorial Day each year. Her grandmother would always pick peonies to take to the cemetery to adorn the graves of the family's ancestors.

