



May
we
learn
from
the
earth

NATURE POEMS
and **REFLECTIONS**
on the **ENVIRONMENT**
by **ROBERT J. TIESS**
*Author of **The Humbling and Other Poems***

AN EXCERPT FROM

May We Learn from the Earth

*Nature Poems and Reflections
on the Environment*

by

Robert J. Tiess

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Dedication

*for
Sandra,

my world*

Welcome

Welcome, friend. I'm deeply grateful for this opportunity to offer my words and thoughts for your consideration.

With the wellness of Earth and the wonders of existence in mind, I have attempted to create an ambitious yet accessible book that could be engaged and appreciated by many different readers, from budding poetry lovers to future nature enthusiasts, environmental advocates, and others. Everyone is welcome and respected here.

Poems in the following pages reflect on nature from a variety of perspectives. I'm always amazed and inspired by our beautiful planet and the natural realm. In any direction, at any distance, something awaits discovery or motivates a journey of thought toward further understanding and clarity.

I believe we can gain much wisdom by observing nature. Earth, as a university, remains forever open, extending its lessons to anyone who would attend. From the sermons of the sky to the lectures of the lands and beyond, I've been a student of nature over the decades, regarding Earth with curiosity, joy, and awe, all while being thoroughly humbled by nearly everything I see and try to comprehend.

This book is firmly rooted in those ongoing experiences and educations. My poems can be read in any order. Most of them can be

called “nature poems” (poems about nature). Other poems—those engaging environmental issues and topics more directly—approach what might be considered ecopoems or ecopoetry (ecologically-minded poems).

After the poems, I’ve included a bonus “Reflections and Suggestions” section that explores Earth, ecopoetry, and related subjects. I also include a brief and friendly glossary of environmental terms I hope some readers find helpful.

I provide this entirely optional content for anyone who might like to travel further into these critical concepts and questions concerning our natural world.

If you’re only here for the poems, that’s perfectly fine, my friend. I’m just glad you’re here. I welcome your company on this vital voyage from words toward truth, especially as we find ourselves amid one of Earth’s most challenging times.

I hope you enjoy this book. Above all, I pray my words can do the Earth some justice and perhaps have the potential of inspiring someone to contemplate nature with a bit more consciousness, creativity, and compassion.

Wishing you, and our planet,
a lasting peace and wellness
and so much love,

Robert

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Part I: The Poems

Chapter 1: Return of an Earth Learner

To Earth, Old Friend

Earth of my youth, my long-lost friend,
whose meadows broke my reckless falls,
you brought me boulders, pine to climb,
smooth stones to skip across your ponds.

How much I miss those heedless years,
when we could play for days on end,
exploring fields with widened eyes,
inquisitively searching dirt
for earthworms, ants—such spiderwebs
and garden snakes and noontime quests
between the forest and the fence.
So few things seemed impossible.

I've not forgotten how it feels
to roll down hills or lunge from limbs,
plunge into puddles, mud, or snow,
or scan your nights for shooting stars

—bright memories as I reflect
on how you shaped my nature since.
It's been too long. I'm by your door
with many questions. Teach me more.

From Carefree to Caring

There was a time I didn't care.
For years I never sensed the dread
our planet might be ruined due
to human greed and negligence.

Then, Earth was backyard, playground, field,
a grassy hill to tumble down,
the space to frolic, trees to climb,
smooth stones to skip, a sky like clay
where I'd make shapes of every cloud
and watch them, dream, imagine, breathe
with all the freedom, peace, and ease
a child might enjoy, removed
from any fears this perfect world
was never indestructible
and could be broken easily.

But something changed:
I read. I wondered, heard the news.
Reluctantly, I understood
the world was not well everywhere.
In fact, it suffered silently
beneath a blitz of drills, machines,
the sawblades, waste, and wrecking balls.

Pollution. Logging. Creatures forced
to flee their lands and go extinct.
Then oil spills, the Ozone Hole,
entire lands erased to make
a way for “progress,” “humankind.”

As all this thundered through my mind,
I felt defeated, overrun
by every revelation met.
Who let this happen? Was it true?
How could it be? What should be done?

With knowledge comes the weight of worlds,
their gravity of questioning
and answers landing with a thud,
especially near one so young.

I had read some mythology,
of Atlas and the Titans who
rebelled against Olympians,
including Zeus, who punished him
to bear the heavens on his back.

I felt like Atlas since those days,
unable to shirk off the load
of everything I’ve seen and learned,
still shouldering the misery
of someone else’s past misdeeds,
which keep me from relaxing much,

because it's now my burden, too

—and yours, because it's been bequeathed,
and no one throws this task away
as if it were a ball to catch
by yet another innocent
with little time to live carefree.

If Only

If only you would feel the wheat
cascade around your sleeveless arms,
or find the river drowns out time
with currents purged of memory,
or recognize the ants at work
between the broken bits of earth,
or eavesdrop on a swamp at night.

If only you should ask the valley,
"Swallow all my suffering,"
or have the mountains mentor you,
or learn the language of the woods
and listen to their histories,
or watch the robin weave its nest.

If only you could let this wind
disperse concerns like seeds across
a field no one's paved or paced
and then return with spring to see
which ones burst into lavender.

If only you lived like the deer
that sleep beneath an evergreen
and wake to graze the dewy grass

that only knows to overgrow.

If only you became the rock
accepting every weathering
with stamina of centuries.

If only you flew like the eagle,
encircling the world with ease.

If only you lived naturally.

Earth Education

No school bells ring or busses run
to move us toward those institutes
of natural phenomena,
whose lessons might enlighten life

—if we'd be students just for once,
admit we're not quite teachers here,
between these heaps of plastic scraps
and deserts dead of negligence.

The lands forever lecture us.
This sediment's a syllabus,
as is the wind, the seismic waves
that shake us from indifference,

the beached whale and the arid hills,
attesting no one graduates
where errors never memorized
confer degrees of ignorance
whenever we have failed to learn.

Alumni of oblivion,
examine your calamities:

deforestation, toxic spills,

depleted sources, scarcity,
disrupted orders, species lost
with disappearing habitats
endangering the whole
unbalanced and unraveling.

Yet, education courses onward,
past our rampant truancy:

thick textbooks wait in riverbeds.
The ocean's deep with scholarship,
the coral calmly counseling.
The icebergs can instruct us, too.

Old impact craters still impart,
and fossil records will forewarn
of futures humans could avert.

See seasons as semesters now,
matriculation through the mountains,
forests of our furthering:

all earth's our university.

Among Wild Things

Within the woods, I'm lost and found,
a tamed heart among wild things
which thrive and drive where life compels.

My science—any structured thought—
seems stiff before organic branches
following no written path.

The urge of nature spurs the birth
of mushrooms, moss, the yawning fawn,
each rising vine and tuft of grass.

All boughs climb unrehearsed through air,
embracing sky, that vital light
without one lesson, map, or rule.

Yet order also flourishes:
there's balance, pattern, symmetry,
a course from seed toward canopy.

Past measurement and inquiry,
I sense collective, fine designs
of genius beyond intellect.

I'm of this rough earth, just as free

to study numbers, theories, schemes
—or let my teacher be this tree.

~ END OF EXCERPT ~