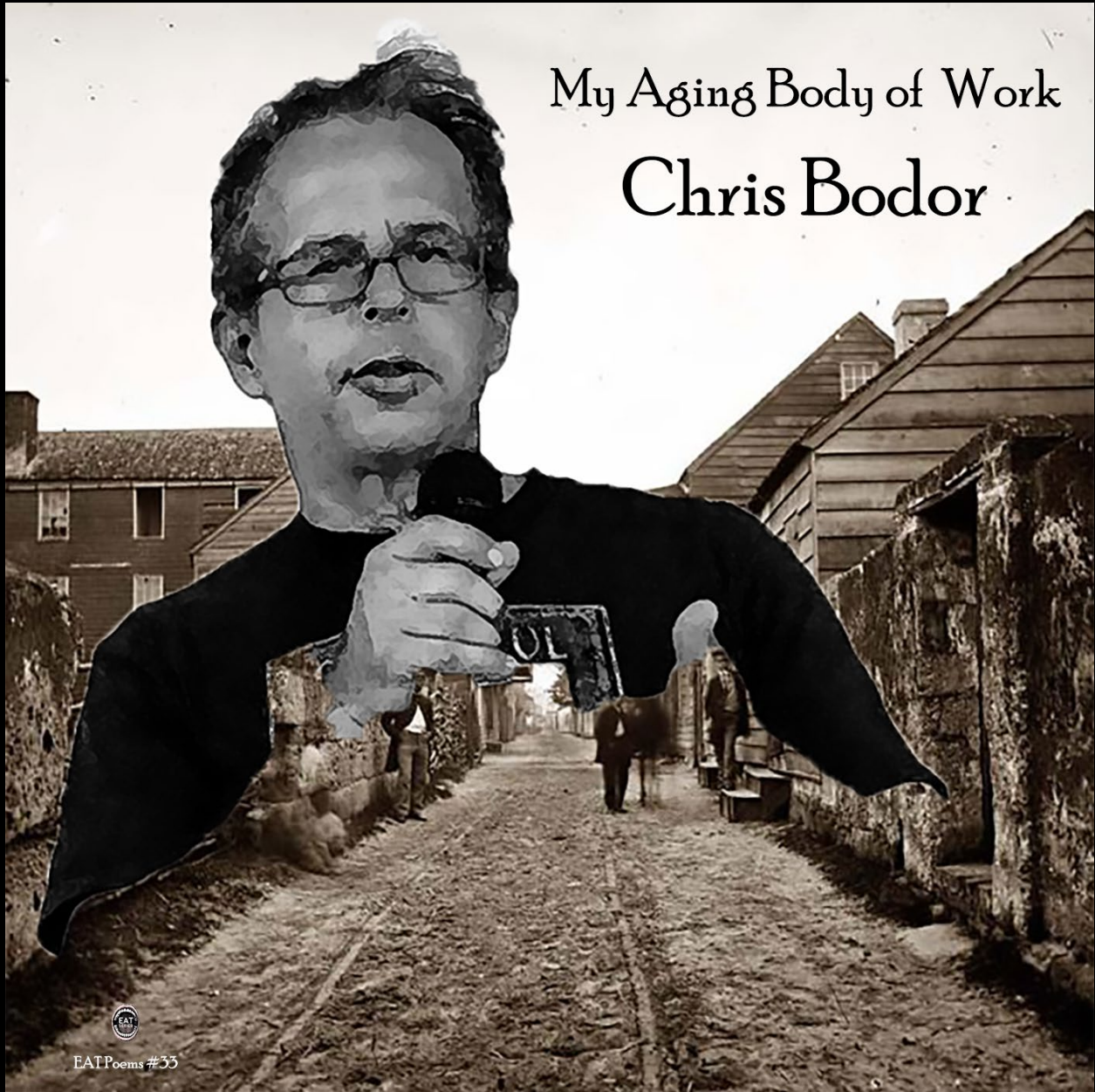


My Aging Body of Work

Chris Bodor



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This collection of 12 poems is the first attempt to collect and present words that I have written after the age of forty. That was around the time I gave up a ten-year career in New York City and moved to St. Augustine, Florida. These poems were all recited in May of 2024. For context, the series starts with “Body of Work”, written when I was 23 years old. It was a magically year, 1994, when I started writing poems during my three-hour round-trip train ride from Beacon, NY in the Hudson Valley to New York City’s Grand Central Station. I became known as the Train of Thought Commuter and hosted an open mic on Avenue A, in Manhattan’s Lower East Side. The result of my early work became my first book, a collection of 60 poems called **Railroad Ties** (Visual Arts Press, 1997).

With that poem, written when I was twenty-something, we start a spoken word journey where I examine life through over forty eyes. I have shared many of these poems at open mic events that I have hosted, as well as events that I have been asked to participate in over the years. I love the way these words roll off my tongue. I hope that you enjoy these mature poems. Like my earlier work, they are tales of the everyman. However, now that man is a little more aged. —Chris Bodor

Author Bio: Chris Bodor is a first generation American. He was born in Connecticut to an English mother and a Hungarian father. Chris became interested in storytelling, as a young boy, while watching a daily television program called "The Uncle Floyd Show", The program was a low budget comedy variety show produced in a television studio in Newark, New Jersey, which inspired Chris to make a studio in his parent's basement, where he made funny movies starring his two younger brothers.

When he was working on his film, video, and television degree at college in New Haven, Chris saw the movie "Barfly". He knew that he had to learn more about the poet who wrote the screenplay: Charles Bukowski. That is when Chris got interested in telling his story through poetry.

During the past three decades, his poems have appeared in many independent, small, and micro-press publications, such as **the LummoX Journal**, **Live Nude Poems**, and **New Generation Beats Anthology**. He is currently serving a two-year term as the Florida State Beat Poet Laureate (2023–2025) and he is the Coordinator of the St. Augustine PoetFest. Bodor is the Editor-In-Chief of the international literary journal A.C. PAPA, which stands for Ancient City Poets, Authors, Photographers, and Artists.

Body of Work

No one can ever crush me
because when circumstances steal
away all my possessions
I stand strong
I stand strong with my body of work
My words
My thoughts
My feelings and my fears
My poem
I always have my poems
Those rhyme less
pointless
precious
poems.

So,
Give away my pen
Throw out my notebook
Remove my fur
Take my food
Starve me
and leave me naked
Divorce me
Marry off my daughters
Burn down my house
Take away all my earnings
I will always have my poems.

Castaway

During the summer of 2003
when we moved to Florida
I felt like the Tom Hanks character
in the film Castaway
after his plane crashed,
he continued to sort boxes.
When my life in New York crashed
I stuck to old behaviors and rituals.
New York hustle and bustle
did not translate to towns
south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

At the farmers market
they invited me
to take off my necktie
and try a different way of life.

I had come to drink
the way I always wanted to,
instead the locals invited me to drink
from Ponce de Leon's fountain.

Like a conquistador searching for a new land
I discovered a place
where the question "How are you doing?"
should be followed by a truthful answer
instead of a rushed New York response.

Sandpipers at the gates of dawn
and the morning songs of snowbirds
remind me that I am not in New York anymore.

Half-staff Forever

With my body here in Florida
Short sleeves and pants cut off
With my mind there in Connecticut
Feeling distant and cut off
I yearn to be able to make snow angels
in Mother's front yard.

Meanwhile teenage rage explodes
making real angels
out of innocent children
in the school yard of Sandy Hook.

Granted,
I had my share of scrapes at school
A broken collar bone and blows to the head,
but my parents never got a phone call
to say that their son had been shot dead.

Innocence,
snuffed out like a bedside candle
makes no sense
how much heartache do you expect us to handle?

The president wants the flag
to fly a half-staff until Tuesday.
Why don't we just fly it that way,
forever?
It seems I have been lowering the flag
every month or so for a day or two.
Half-staff forever.
In memory of my Connecticut memories of snow angels
In memory of twenty-six Sandy Hook angels
In memory of the death of home town innocence.

Poem for Otto: Empty Chair

My father goes through great pain
Watching news broadcasts about
the war in Ukraine
while sitting in his overstuffed armchair
in his Florida living room because
each news story is a flashback of 1956.

One of Father's brothers was a pig farmer in Kisvárdá
another was a poet in Budapest
who wrote words that made my father cry
a poem about a chair at the kitchen table
a chair made empty because little Otto was not there.

My father had four brothers and two sisters
he was the youngest
and the only one in his family
who said goodbye to Hungary
in October of 1956.

My father gets tears in his eyes
his proud voice becomes scratchy
when he tells friends and strangers
his story of the Hungarian Revolution
when he was twenty years old
leaving in the middle of the night
without saying goodbye to his family
disappearing over the border to freedom in Austria
moving past searchlights and barbwire fences.

I walk around my kitchen at night
Past the table and each chair
Naked
Haunted
by the ghosts of my father's past.

My Dead Friends are Like Half Written Poems

This poem is for my friend
Dying in a hospital bed.

This poem is for my other friend
who put a gun to his head.

Words written for souls
who know more than me,
because they have knowledge
of what exists
beyond the grave and the cemetery plot.

I have lived
Through the winter of my heart,
through the summer of my soul
and I know
that my damage
no longer defines me.

A lifetime of poem ideas
are scattered on my apartment floor,
I sweep the words into a dustpan
and then I place each word where they belong
creating poems short and long
because when I die,
I do not want to leave behind
Half written poems.

Irrelevant

It's irrelevant!

It does not apply.

It's irrelevant!

Can, or can't, join me in this chant:

"It's irrelevant. It's irrelevant. It's irrelevant."

It's an elephant.

Let's address the elephant in the room:

"Hello Elephant", wrinkled and gray

"Hello Elephant", you had your day

White Elephant sale, pull up the anchor and set sail,

one day I shot an elephant in my pajamas,

so I put down the gun, and stopped wearing pajamas,

now I sleep in the nude. Food for thought. Food of the gods.

This is unacceptable!

I raise my voice another decibel.

Hounded by the birds of prey, when all I want to do is pray.

Being so guarded with my words. I feel discarded.

It's irrelevant!

It's an elephant, and it is departing soon. It is leaving the room.

Say goodbye to the donkey, too. Let's address the donkey in the room.

Christmas Morning: Eating Fear for Breakfast

Lying in bed on Christmas morning
conducting inventory:
when has fear been my guide
and when have I been guided by love?

The complimentary breakfast begins serving at six
With make-your-own-misery waffles
and humility smoked sausages
smothered with regret, resentment, and remorse.
Don't forget to get
a plate of eggs over-not-so-easy.

Fear of the unknown
Hard, cold stone
Alone in a crowd
silence hurts my ears
stuck in a hole
for days, and months, and years.

I wait is more than I can endure
I know the cure
cast off the weight
as heavy as a sewer grate.

The Battle

Could not stand another sleepless night
drinking in secret against my will
lying wake in a four-post bed
invaded by delusion of
the four horsemen or the apocalypse
galloping across my forehead.

In purgatory searching for providence
I wanted to stop
When the money on my back
Grew into a gorilla.

Every day in the trenches
I fight a guerilla war
to stay away from a drink
while my jet-black hair turns gray.

Rooming house walls were closing in
until a room full of faith restored.

Inflicted with a dangerous disease
that tells me if I drink,
poems will pour out of me
and I will write like Bukowski.

Beer bottles sometime scream:
“drink me”
and sobriety unfolds slowly
like a Sunday.

Reading my Own Obituary

Woke up this morning on a tired Tuesday,
made a cup of coffee, and braved the elements
to retrieve the weathered newspaper
from the doorstep.

At my well-worn chair I sit,
Unfolding the newspaper,
To discover my own obit.

Driven to extinction, like the Dodo
Extinct, like the Smooth Handfish
Extinct, like the Northern White Rhinoceros
Extinct, like the Passenger Pigeon
Extinct, like the Golden Toad.

Gaining enough insight
to incite a riot.
Wrap up this fish in newspaper,
I'll buy it.

Soon I will sink into a pit.
Admit defeat and quit.
I do not deserve to be treated like this.
I have been pushed into the abyss.

Poets are just people
who take notes on the universe.

Kerouac in Florida: 1957 to 1969

It can be said
that Kerouac came to Florida to die,
but an Orlando reporter believes otherwise.

Kerouac came to live.

Alive in Sunshine State sunsets,
Far away from his Massachusetts hometown,
always by his mother's side.

He was a masterful manuscript maker,
Who was committed to be his mother's caregiver.

The King of the Beat Generation
took a detour and moved to Florida
to live in a small two room College Park cottage,
with his mother in the other room
he wrote "The Dharma Bums"
while sitting in bathtubs full of ice water
and then died twelve years later,
hemorrhaging in a St. Petersburg hospital.

A shot of Jack across the armadillo landscape
on the roadkill
his spirit alive
in the aroma of orange blossoms,
in the sounds of pounding typewriter keys,
in the humidity of last call humiliation.

Returning each night,
to the drawing board
of a writer's roll-top desk.

Pain is the Spark

What kind of poem will I recite?
One that gives love and refuses to fight,
My words are born in the dark
igniting fire from a creative spark.

Writer's block
sidewalk chalk
do not choose words for me
do not write my poetry.

I am tired of feeling pain alone in the dark
I am like a marksman missing his mark
pain is the spark, it lights the fire
pain is the spark, it lights the fire.

Pain for every atrocity
pain for the blood flowing in the sea
pain is flowing out of me
pain is the spark, it sets my words free.

This is not the time for killing jokes
rumbling round my brain like wagon wheel spokes
my desire to light a fire is surely primitive
I will dig down deep into my heart and give.

A spark is the heat, it leads to a change
new thoughts and behaviors can rearrange
let's gather together in a glorious slam dance
people can change if only given a chance.

If pain is the spark
let love be the fire
say I am wrong
prove I am a liar.

My Last Poem

My cold oatmeal heart
Is starting to congeal.
If you have a message for me,
please reveal.

I cannot digest a diet
Of hurricanes, protests, and prison riots.
I admit my transgressions
I admit my intentions.

I count my blessings
while you start undressing
with black magic markers,
I write words on your back
I plead for protection
from a Blitzkrieg attack.

Exhale a final breath
I move closer to my death
We kiss each other through a mask
I have just one more question to ask.

Suddenly a bomb blast
I am bleeding out fast
This unfinished poem
is my last.



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Editor and sound production, Mark Ari

Assistant Editor, Natasha Kane

Cover design by Mark Ari, based on photo of the poet by Per Hans Romnes

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