



Robert Rice

December 14, 1936 - August 2, 2008



White Bowl



Denizen



The Swimmer

The three paintings selected here have been chosen because I think of them as self-portraits. I didn't set out to paint them as such (except, perhaps, The Swimmer) but when finished had such a strong connection with them that I wanted to keep them for my own private collection and never sell them.



Autobiography of Robert Rice

April 6, 2007

I am an artist and a dancer. It took me until the latter half of my life before I felt comfortable making this claim. It seemed that my years of dance training, begun at age three to correct a birth defect in my feet, and my art school studies had prepared me for fields that were impossible to actually make a living. I am a full time painter now and sell my work regularly. It is a lifelong dream to live every day as an artist. I still dance. But at age 70 I keep my feet closer to the floor and leap less.

By my late twenties I was out of graduate school in fine art, married with two children. I was working hard to be the father I didn't have. Teaching became the alternative to doing my art full time. Along with putting off my desire to live as an artist I had lots of inner turmoil that was bigger than I was able to sublimate in my

***July 2008:** I wrote this autobiography in April 2007. I share it with you here because you may not know what has shaped my life.*

my paintings. But I never totally put down my paintbrush.

Then my life began. I moved with abandon through space, propelled by a combination of joy and anger. I had been introduced to dance therapy. Through this rigorous form of therapy I resolved many mysteries of my childhood. In my early thirties I began to heal. I was full of emotions that were being given form for the first time. The dance therapist was an Argentine woman who combined Jungian with shamanic approaches. My work with her continued for 8 years while I was teaching in the art education and dance departments at the University of Minnesota.

What discoveries I was making! I decided to enroll in graduate studies at the Institute of the Expressive Therapies, University of

of Louisville, Kentucky, to train to be an art and dance therapist. It was difficult concentrating on such intense material away from my home in Minnesota, but the training was so extremely interesting to me I was sure it was the very thing that would enable me to find a new and meaningful direction to my life's work, which it did.

After finishing the two year program and intern placements, I began to connect with people that wanted what I could offer. Ironically the first such person was an oncology nurse who had designed a cancer education program for individuals called *I Can Cope*, and now wanted to extend this program by inventing a multidisciplinary cancer care program where entire families would retreat for the weekend to work on communication. The nonverbal art and movement approaches I was able to offer

extended communication possibilities for the adults as well as the children. Working with a team of health professionals eager to have my input was extremely gratifying. Unfortunately, the work was very part-time. I would need to find or invent more.

I designed a consulting service that drew upon my early work in art museum education. Using my expressive therapies background I provided a service for art museums that taught curators and docents how to adapt exhibitions and tours to better serve the needs of disabled people. The first museums to respond, and that continued to respond, were in California. Winter consulting trips from Minnesota to California to such places as Santa Barbara and San Francisco led me to believe I had landed work in paradise,

especially when the wind-chill factor in Minnesota was 40 below zero when I returned.

On one of my trips to California I met the theologian Matthew Fox. When I told Matt some of my ideas of using expressive therapies for spiritual direction he offered me a job teaching a class at the institute. In three months I had moved from Minnesota to California. I worked with Matt Fox for 21 of the 23 years I have lived in northern California.

My work in spirituality opened many opportunities to conduct workshops abroad and throughout the United States. It also meant that sometimes I would have much more work and travel than was comfortable. Other times were not very fertile.

During one of the dry periods I accepted a position at Mount Zion Medical Center in San Francisco. I directed a program of musicians, visual artists, poets and actors who went into the homes of confined elderly persons and to the bedside of AIDS patients to work creatively.

This too was a marvelous program full of opportunities for innovation (and grant writing!) that I stayed with for 5 years. But there came a point that it was clear I was trying to do too much. Sometimes I found myself crossing the Bay Bridge several times a day to juggle teaching, hospital staff meetings, and all the administration and preparations that go with holding two responsible jobs.

It was time to drop out, to reorder my life once again. What had happened to the artist

I always wanted to be? With savings in hand I headed north to Mendocino County. I was suffering from enormous stress and knew I needed to find quiet in nature. By this time my children were on their own, and I was divorced and unattached. I had been working with hundreds of people. I wanted solitude.

With a stroke of good luck I found a tiny cabin to rent deep in the woods by a creek. It was so isolated that even the forest service had trouble finding me. I had no telephone, plumbing or electricity. I went with the intention of staying 3 months and stayed nearly 3 years. The animals, the storms, the overwhelming heat of August, the flooding creek, the living by natural light, the smells of earth, the sounds at night, the surprise meeting of a mountain lion – all gave me life and renewed energy.

Being alone in the wilderness meant I could give my full attention to my painting. Of course living wasn't easy. A certain amount of time needed to be spent hauling water, cutting wood, etc. But my dream had gone full circle. I took pride in calling myself an artist. I found a gallery in the village of Mendocino that represented (and sold!) my work.

I am now living in Sebastopol, still love teaching, and spend entire days in my studio which is a converted chicken coop on a friend's ranch. This studio time is almost as good as spending time in the woods. At home I have a carefully maintained garden where I can smell the earth. I no longer live in solitude; my son's family, including two grandchildren, is nearby. And I am married to a bright,

playful and gifted woman who is an advocate for ageless sexuality. She has recently published a straight talking book about sex after sixty. We met on the dance floor.

It has been a wonderful life so far. Much of what I have discussed here centers on work. This is undoubtedly because I love to work and have almost always loved my work. The diagnosis of cancer came as an enormous shock. I had lived well, eaten well, and done good work. I felt betrayed at first, but now look at how to make the most of this part of my journey.

July 2008:

I journey with aggressive cancer. Although I no longer can do the joyful activities I described, I have the memories. I cherish the many delightful evenings line dancing with lovely people, laughing and trying to get the air conditioning turned down. I'm grateful to my artist and gallery friends who have supported and encouraged me in my working process.

How special it has been to spend so much of my life with dancers and artists.

Most of all I embrace my family and close friends who have stayed beside me during these challenging days, particularly my wife Joan, who – while not able to create miracles – has somehow managed to be a miracle in my life.



During my time in the woods of Mendocino I kept a journal. The entries were not limited to thoughts on nature but were wide ranging. Since I was leading a simple life I wanted to see if the thoughts I wrote could be kept to one line or two if needed. I offer the thoughts that follow in this little book to you as a gift of appreciation for your friendship and love.

Robert J. Price

One Liners from the Woods

Every moment is everlasting life; each breath gives meaning to forever.

Any person with a great love for nature will never outgrow being a child.

We cannot heal the earth by treating its surface.

The woodpecker knocks at the door of our dullness and awakens us into life through our ears.

Stillness can be radical action.

That which takes no space has no need for boundaries.

One place in life important to watch is when one gives up a life long aspiration, for what remains may be the key to fulfillment.

Home is the interconnected arrangement of valued qualities, regardless of location.

Matters of the spirit take time.

Compassion may be one of the most unencumbered forms of independence.

Material greed leads to poverty.

Spiritual greed leads there too.

In all real learning we must be able to trade something for nothing.

Tears are wet truth.

Tears connect us to our beginning and sanctify our losses.

The power of movement is in its ephemeral nature.

Dance improvisation is a found object as immediate as Duchamp's ready-mades.

Movement is closer to music than to word.

Dance is heard as well as seen.

It is frightening to realize one may occupy space yet not be present.

One of the ways we are losing a sense of cosmology is by limiting the range of motion of the hands.

The spirit of the hands affirms equally the surgeon and the basket maker.

One of the clearest affirmations of life is to see one's breath on a frosty morning.

One defines the path by walking it.

The rabbit, the snake and I walk the same path.

When I was a child my parents told me that if I wanted to learn the truth I had to keep my eyes open. Years later I realized there are many truths to be learned with eyes closed.

I waited for so many years to be heard that I almost forgot what it was I wanted to say.

The early light of dawn gently penetrates vestiges of night.

It seems audiences at symphony concerts often enjoy applauding more than they enjoy the music.

There are few things worse than a cheap garden hose.

One of the greatest mistakes that holds back our culture's development of higher consciousness is to ignore our intuition.

Eating spaghetti is such an obvious act of consumption.

Light has such a commitment to its own fulfillment that in addition to manifesting itself, it creates shadow.

There is no point in trying to teach someone something in which they have no interest. It's like trying to teach a squirrel to gather marbles instead of acorns.

Quiet and stillness are loving companions.

The hummingbird explores the flower with extraordinary directness.

The robin is like a bird dog.

The spirit knows no moment greater than that of emergence.

The great holdout for truth is to challenge established ways through creative acts.

The abused child may live in the dark unable to reach the light of innocence.

After preparation and anticipation there is a great feeling of aloneness that happens minutes before a guest arrives.

One must be both courageous and audacious to live in the first person singular.

The straight and towering redwood tree is a phallus full of nature's dynamic fertile energy.
(Could it be that timber industry moguls direct the stripping of the world's forests motivated by their personal fear of impotence?)

Young tree or ancient, it makes no difference to the chain saw.

The feeling of oneness with all living beings transcends all known means of measurement.

Pay attention to life as it is happening.

Some people enter the dark only enough to be unable to see clearly.

The idea that only highly trained dancers can be graceful ignores the fact that all persons have the potential for grace simply by being embodied.

Grace is the act of stepping respectfully into the providence of one's own body.

Breathing determines that a person is not dead but does not indicate a person is alive.

When I think about my losses, I realize one of the greatest is when I've had the opportunity to say what I truly believed but did not.

I believe there is nothing that stirs the soul more than the full moon.

I would never want to do it all again. But if I did start over the one thing I would want to be different is that this time I would like to be born into a world where there is acceptance of boys who love to dance.

It is not about what we accomplish before dying but about where we are at any given moment and how our actions there affect those around us.



July 29, 2008:

“Remember just yesterday we walked and walked,
and I knew the names of all the flowers”

