

## Ninety Seconds To Midnight

by: Don Miller

## Walking Widdershins: An Ode to Joy

Jenny Ward Angyal & Autumn Noelle Hall  
Illustrations by Denver Kennedy Hall

Windy Knoll Press, 2024  
ISBN 9798333118172

134 pages, 8.5 x 8.5 inches. Paperback  
\$20 plus postage from Amazon

### Quoted Material Credits

Title - *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists'*  
Sanford Goldstein - The review author's class notes from Fall of 1982  
David Rice - Afterword of *Walking Widdershins: An Ode to Joy*  
Fall and Winter symbolism phrases - Google generative AI

## Ninety Seconds To Midnight

*"When the earth is sick, the animals will begin to disappear. When that happens, the Warriors of the Rainbow will come to save them."*

—Native American Proverb

"A snapshot of me in this moment" is the simple definition of tanka that Sanford Goldstein gave to his creative writing class in the Fall of 1982. While a tanka is much more than a snapshot, this brief definition provides the writer direction on focusing one's mind when writing a tanka. However, the "snapshot" is but one of an infinite possible tanka existing within the sphere surrounding each of us at any given moment. If one could experience the "moment" with an all-seeing, all-encompassing eye, they would realize there is a multitude of interactivity between the human and natural elements. How one interacts with and focuses on those moments will largely determine what they write.

In *Walking Widdershins: An Ode to Joy*, Jenny Ward Angyal and Autumn Noelle Hall have focused on a year-long seasonal dialogue from mid-June to mid-June. Their genre of choice is tanka, and their focus is on the natural element, which, of course, includes the human element. Over the year, their conversations have resulted in this book of 108 collaborative sets of tanka, each one numbered. David Rice writes of this collaboration in the book's Afterward as, "Two poets co-writing nature poetry . . ."

While the individual human element is evident with the use of pronouns such as "I", "my" and "me", or with the assumed "I", In *Walking Widdershins: An Ode to Joy*, one also reads of the interrelatedness, the well crafted intertwining of natural and human elements within a book of seasonal tanka (or "nature poems", as Rice says) with the use of personification such as is written in the following two tanka.

*a runnel of water  
from under the bank  
joining  
its song of the Earth  
to the river's plashing hymn*

—Jenny Ward Angyal; Set 24/Tanka 1

and

*. . . soon, cascades  
of rose-tinged arpeggios  
from Cassin's Finch  
but for now, a tacet  
of crystallized silence*

—Autumn Noelle Hall; Set 54/T4

However, upon delving deeper into each set, each tanka, another path (or tangent as I prefer) opens up where the seasons are a metaphor for the climate crisis our planet has plunged into.

Starting in late Spring, *Widdershins* begins in equilibrium with the intertwined coexistence of the natural and human elements interwoven by a poetic dialogue between *Angyal* and Hall. Even if *Angyal* had not made reference to "June" in the Preface, we still would have known the Book starts in late Spring by the use of the following season words and phrases in the tanka of the first couple sets: *garden, Killdeer/skim over the fields, Great Horned Owllet, Turtles rise/from muddy depths, Variegated Iris*. *Angyal's* final tanka in Set 2 establishes the synchronicity of the Human element being part of the Natural element, not apart from it.

*raising me up  
this solstice morning—  
the dawn chorus  
and our ancient inclination  
toward the sun*

This tanka provides us with an answer that the "planetary crises" (a phrase from the book *2040* by Jorie Graham and cited by David in his Afterward) can

be reversed if we can bring ourselves to once again embrace the natural element of Allkind and return to our “ancient inclinations”. This tanka also provides the transition into the Summer season.

Hall's first tanka in Set 3 pairs well with *Angyal's* last tanka in S2 by reinforcing the Summer season while providing a path, a widdershins to a possible reversing of the climate crises by returning to our Native roots.

rooting me  
in indigenous wisdom  
Scallop Squash looks up  
to her Sisters: Hopi Blue Corn  
and Golden Wax Beans

As seen in the following tanka, this seemingly harmonious climate in Hall's T3 of S2 is quickly broken by the foreshadowing of the crisis written in *Angyal's* T4 of S3, with T5 of S3 again providing an answer.

though wingless  
the sunset-stained Hawkweed  
finds a way to sky  
as one Painted Lady  
alights to quench her thirst

*dancing  
over the Milkweed meadow  
only  
a single Monarch  
under a waning moon*

investing  
in the future  
I deposit  
two Ladybug larvae  
onto Moon-glow Yarrow

S3/T3 and S3/T4 also provide an excellent shift and turn for the climate crisis that continues to build throughout the Summer, as the following two tanka hint.

the heady scent  
of Vanilla Orchids  
vines through sultry air—  
oh, for a glass pavilion  
to cradle the rainforest

—S20/T2

*the out breath  
of each Lady Fern  
sustains me—  
and this blue geodesic dome  
wheeling through space*

—S20/T3

The crisis comes to a head in the Fall. This season “makes us more aware of the cycle of life, that the highs cannot exist without the lows, and highlights the impermanence of all things, and reminds us to appreciate the moment . . . the promises of spring” but first continuing to fall into the seemingly unstoppable crisis, and yet again the “resilience” of nature . . .

a grieving heart  
cleaved geode-like asunder  
may reveal  
the deeper fractals  
of compassion's gleam

—S30/T4

*Pomegranates split,  
spilling promises  
of spring—  
ruby-lipped Persephone  
begins her long descent*

—S32/T3

Elk-gnawed scars  
blacken pearl-white bark—  
how resilient  
the wounded Aspen stands  
how they rise above

—S33/T5

amber flames  
that licked the hillsides clean  
now folia-flicker  
on Narrow-leaf Cottonwoods  
magicked from the ashes

—S34/T4

This assurance and reassurance that Nature will prevail runs throughout the book, as too do the hints of the climate crisis as the seasons go from late fall and into winter, with winter “symbolizing the cycle of life, sadness, sorrow and hardship, the death and resurrection of the sun, hope and resilience in the face of adversity, a time for thinking, reflections, a period of introspection and growth.”

mountain mist  
obscuring the world beyond  
and yet  
this single droplet reflects  
complete clarity

—S43/T1

*stumped,  
I burrow deep to find  
the root  
of radicle perplexity—  
the fool's-gold glint of words*

—S45/T4

carnival glass  
opalescing on the shelf  
vases now empty  
except for the way  
they hold my Mother's light

—S47/T3

Christmas tree cutting →  
reads a trailhead sign . . .  
no room in the inn  
to plant a substitute sapling  
—so how can I atone?

—S49/T3

my Daughter and I  
follow the Osprey  
to the limits  
of our vision, conscious  
of how far we still must go

—S59/T5

*the gift  
of a single origami Crane  
on my windowsill—  
in my heart ten thousand wings  
rising from the marsh*

—S60/T5

Then, from out of the long, cold darkness of winter, a glimmer of hope . . . a hope that through the long winter, change will come,

held but a moment  
in Buddha's own hand  
that fleeting flower . . .  
each of us, in turn,  
a sermon in the field

—S69/T5

but to be dashed again by a crisis "of our own making,"

hoofprints stamping  
muddy stomping grounds . . .  
circling toe-to-toe  
with this winter of our making  
we join in the Old Gods' dance

—S71/T5

*Grandmother Ocean  
gave us salt  
in our veins—  
five trillion bits of garbage  
our plastic thanks*

—S76/T1

but still, clinging to hope

our actions teach  
the Wordless Ones  
*fear, flight, hide*  
is it to late to change  
this monstrous name we've earned

—S77/T5

*still winter  
yet a green flush spreads  
across the hills . . .  
just early spring or a symptom  
of Gaia's rising fever?*

S78/T5

and one final plea to forgive us of our crisis sin . . .

unhooked  
I release a thrashing Trout  
into the stream  
of Tao  
—just so, forgiveness

—S81/T5

For one more season, spring returns,

my border friend's hail  
to say they are coming  
*Tzintzuntzan—*  
1 part sugar, 4 parts water  
bubbling in my cauldron

—S93/T3

*the shadow  
of dark wings  
sweeps over me  
even a Meadowlark  
sings of morning*

—S96/T1

but for how many more Springs if we do not curb our destructive habits . . .

*Gaia weaves  
a ribbon of Sweetgrass  
into her hair—  
she knows how life will blossom  
when Humankind is gone*

—S98/T5

continuance or extinction, a teetering balance yet to be resolved.

whether risking,  
or outwitting, extinction  
Miner Bees  
and Mountain Death Camas  
locked in there co-dependent dance

—S104/T4

In *Walking Widdershins: An Ode to Joy*, Angyal & Hall have not written "anger" or "rage-filled" tanka on the causes of climate change and the ensuing devastation to our environment. Rather, the tanka they have written mostly speak to a positive, healthy, healing interconnectedness between humans and the nature we are part of, a healthy and healing the Warriors of the Rainbow are to/will bring:

*a tiny Spider  
tickling my arm  
I brush it away . . .  
how much we need  
the world's forgiveness*

—Jenny Ward Angyal; Set 98/Tanka 3

and

above the pond  
a Heron pair scythes day from night  
landing  
only to dance . . . we rejoice  
in this collaboration

—Autumn Noelle Hall; Set 108/Tanka 4

Whether this book, *Walking Widdershins: An Ode to Joy*, and its authors, *Jenny Ward Angyal* & Autumn Noelle Hall are the Warriors of the Rainbow, mentioned in the Native American Proverb, here to heal our ailing planet, or they are "one as a crier in the wilderness" foretelling of the coming of the Warriors of the Rainbow, Hall's final tanka, cited above, says it all. Not only is it a celebration of the year-long journey these two poets traveled, it is a statement that nature and humankind alike can follow a path together and someday rejoice in the healing collaboration of Allkind!

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