

[Home](#)

[Spring 2010](#)

[Winter 2010](#)

[Autumn 2009](#)

[Summer 2009](#)

[Spring 2009](#)

[Autumn 2008](#)

[Summer 2008](#)

[Spring/Summer 2008](#)

[Winter/Spring 2008](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[Contact](#)

# Poems

*by Mike Berger, Ph.D.*

## Roughneck

The plane was full.  
I stared at the man across the aisle.  
He was dressed in blue coveralls.  
His hands were massive and  
he had dirt under his fingernails.  
He wore a shaggy beard.

I struck up a conversation with him.  
He was a roughneck from  
the oilfields. He operated the huge  
drilling machine.

He was leaving the oilfields and  
flying home. He had been laid off.  
He said that he would have to wait it out  
but he thought he'd be to work  
in a few months.

## Rehab

The bed was Spartan but it  
had clean sheets. My stomach  
was full with a hot meal for the  
first time in weeks.

I showered weeks of grime from  
my body. The facility had a barber  
who cut my shoulder length hair and  
he trimmed it my flowing beard.

After eight weeks, I'd be dried out  
I might even put on a few pounds.  
I'll tell my story in group therapy  
because that's what they want to hear.

Then I'll go back to the streets and  
I'll hold it together for six months.  
Then the drink demons will pour  
gasoline on the smoldering flames.

The fire inside will burst scorching raw  
flesh. The searing will grow into  
a wildfire; body shaking as agony descends.  
The only thing on your mind is wine.

You deed your soul to the winery. Their precious liquid is the only way to dampen the raging fire. The bottle caresses your lips and the white muscatel puts out the the torrent of flames at least for a little while

---

## Cookie Lady

Traffic was fierce. I was running late; the Bell hop gave me a wink as I took the elevator. I had the usual room, paid by the company.

The john was a squatty aerospace engineer. The service had checked him out. He was a negotiator on a multimillion dollar contract.

He was shy even embarrassed. He was unconscious of his wedding ring. He twisted it a dozen times. I must admit he wasn't much of a lover. Out of the room I put on my wedding band.

This was my Thursday ritual; leaving the kids with my husband and heading the pay was great.

I stopped in the bar for a drink. I needed to unwind. Then I was hit on by a good looking guy. What is this world coming to; he could easily see I was wearing a wedding ring?

---

## Tangled

The ground shook.  
Old brick buildings came crashing down.  
Walls turned into gray powder.  
Odd steel beams jettied to the sky.

A hawk above cried out a message.  
Nature is laughing at man's impotence.

Hands tore at the rubble. Below was a mother and her child. The baby's cry tore at the rescuer's hearts.

The tangled mess yielded slowly. More hands joined the search as the baby's cries became more frantic.

A giant of a man who worked the mines

---

---

lifted the ceiling. The rescuers found them.  
The mother had a severed artery and had  
to bled to death.

With the baby safe, the burly rescuer  
shook his fist at the hawk and snarled  
"The baby is still alive

---

## **Sinister Specters**

Sterile dark walls stare at me.  
The prints of Monet and vanished.  
The old recliner offers no comfort;  
the abyss in my stomach makes me  
nauseas. My thoughts are hollow.

The fight was brutal and ugly. She  
had every reason to leave. What  
sinister specters hide in the minds  
dark corners that drive you to  
say that cruelest things?

There were so many good times.  
Two kids riding life's merry-go-round.  
Laughing and loving, where did it  
all come unraveled.

I wipe a single tear from my cheek.  
My eyes close and my lower lip  
trembles. Visions of her face  
flood my mind. I'll pour myself  
another stiff one. I'll kill the pain  
by hiding in that bottle.

---

**Mike Berger**, who has a doctorate in clinical and research psychology and who worked with children for 30 years, has written two books of short stories, and three humor pieces have won awards. His work will appear in 35 journals, such as *AIM*, *Still Crazy*, *First Edition*, *Stray Branch*, and *Mid West Quarterly*, *Evergreen*, and *Krax*.

---

**Copyright 2010, Mike Berger.** © This work is protected under the U.S. copyright laws. It may not be reproduced, reprinted, reused, or altered without the expressed written permission of the author.