

Inside Out Woman

THE COLLECTED POETRY OF
DORIS M. ROSS
(1927-1986)

Phillip A. Ross, Editor



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*For
Family & Friends*

*I am standing upon the seashore. A ship at my side
spreads her whit sails to the morning breeze and
starts for the blue ocean I stand and watch her,
until at length she hangs like a speck in a white
cloud that has come down to mingle with others.
Then someone at my said says, "There, she's gone!"*

*Gone where? Gone from my sight, that is all. She
is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she
was when she left my side*

*Her diminished size is in my—not in her! And
just at the moment when someone at my side says,
"There, she's gone," there are other eyes watching
her coming, and other voices ready t take up the
glad shout, "There she come!"*

—Anonymous

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	i
Happiness.....	1
Free Gift Wrapping.....	2
New, Father.....	3
Bus Ride.....	4
Lost.....	5
Nine To Five.....	6
Hot Coals And Bare Feet.....	7
No Thank You, Please.....	8
The Zoo.....	9
(Untitled).....	10
Pussycat.....	11
Forty.....	12
Order.....	13
Now And Then.....	14
All Is God Is Love.....	15
I Am.....	19
To My Child.....	21
To Style Or Not To Style.....	23
Hope.....	24
Waiting.....	25
Fool.....	27
Coward.....	28
I Remember.....	29
Incommunicado.....	30
Pillow Talk.....	34
Why.....	35
Puzzle.....	36
Ballad.....	39
Flip.....	41
Composite.....	42
Conference.....	43

Celebration Of Life.....	44
Office Move.....	45
Conjugation Of Love.....	46
Dance With Me.....	51
Turn On.....	53
Gratification.....	55
Empathy.....	56
Reinforcement.....	57
Together-Me.....	58
You.....	59
Me.....	60
Leap Of Faith.....	63
Projection.....	64
Hell And Damnation.....	65
Surgery.....	66
Dilemma.....	67
Vanity.....	68
Revelation.....	70
Fraud.....	71
Wind-up.....	73
Discovery.....	74
Trap Door.....	76
Street Child.....	77
Indulgence.....	79
Identity.....	80
Contentment.....	83
Rationale.....	84
Cherish Me.....	85
Defiance.....	86
Outer Limits.....	87
Warning!.....	88
Need.....	89
Instant Empathy.....	90
I Can't Wait.....	91
Hindsight.....	92
Mourn Not.....	94
Never Done.....	97
Close Call.....	98
Wish.....	99
Status Unknown.....	100

Shehe.....	101
Move Over.....	103
Counter Weapon.....	104
Work It Out.....	105
(Paint Me.....	106
Chained.....	107
Sexsolution.....	109
Exploration.....	110
Moving Up.....	112
Mask.....	113
The Giver.....	114
The Receiver.....	115
Confidant.....	116
Martyrdom.....	117
Insecurity.....	118
Split!.....	119
Inside Track.....	120
Spit It Out!.....	122
Coverup.....	123
Forced Wisdom.....	124
Cool It.....	126
Jetrip.....	128
Does It Matter?.....	129
The Price.....	130
A Matter Of Life.....	131
Vacation.....	132
Telephone Operator.....	133
School Finance.....	135
Unmanned.....	136
My Friend.....	137
Is Anyone Listening.....	138
What If It Works?.....	140
Spilled.....	141
Hands.....	142
Tickle Me.....	143
A Hundred Years Ago.....	144
One To One.....	146
Never Goodbye.....	148
Doggerel.....	149
Plunge.....	150

(Leg Review).....	152
(Sometime).....	153
Share.....	154
September's Aspen.....	155
From A Controlled Lover.....	156
Handle With Care.....	158
Prayer For Remembrance.....	160
Here And/or There.....	162
Why Cry?.....	163
To My Unnecessary Friend.....	165
No More.....	166
The Middle Of The Bed.....	168
(Untitled).....	170
(Untitled).....	171
(Untitled).....	173
Baby Doll.....	174
Yo Yo.....	176
Time Out For Me.....	177
(Untitled).....	178
Finished.....	179
Epilogue.....	180

INTRODUCTION

To introduce one's mother is necessarily a subjective and emotional process, and it should be. Mothers are always involved in our experience of love. To a significant extent mothers shape our earliest experience of love. My task here is made more difficult because as I write this, Doris lies on her death bed; at 59 years old she contracted brain cancer. My relationship with my mother has undergone several processes of change—all of them good, all of them enriching my understanding of her as a person. I offer my words here that your appreciation of her work may be increased.

Doris always intended to publish this volume of poetry. No one ever imagined that she would be denied the completion of that process herself. I, then, have taken it upon myself to tidy up her working manuscript and finish her project. I have endeavor to leave her work as I found it, making only small corrections here and there.

I have some questions about the dates that are attached to many of her poems. I do not believe that the dates assigned by her to many of these poems indicate the date that she wrote a particular piece, but rather indicate the date that she last edited a particular poem. When we see several poems with the same date, then,

we can understand that to be a period of deep reflection when she reworked some of her poetry.

I have worked from a nearly complete manuscript and have only corrected punctuation and capitalization here and there—as I expect she would have done, and have otherwise edited her work as she indicated in her own hand.

In Doris' poetry you will catch a glimpse of her deepest struggles and joys. You will have an opportunity to see a side of her that you may not know. She was by her own admission a “strong, silent, sufferer.” It was not part of her constitution to complain, and at times she even chose to withhold her feelings. If you know her history—her story—your appreciation of her poetry will be deeper. Much of her personal life is reflected in the pages that follow.

Doris was both a mother and a career woman. Her first marriage ended in divorce (and a child—me) within its first year. She remarried several years later and raised five children. Her brood acquainted her with all the highs and lows of motherhood. She returned to work when her youngest children were in high school.

Her working career was marked with a series of rapid promotions. Beginning as a secretary, she climbed the ladder of success in the field of her deepest interest and concern: education. Though her own formal education ended after only one year of college, she was self-educated through her voracious reading habit. Some say that she read in order to maintain sanity as she raised her brood. She soon became an Administrative Editor with The Education Commission Of The States (ECS) in Denver, Colorado, a position that usually required a Master's Degree. Doris had a brilliant mind and was fortunate enough to be in a position in which

her talents were recognized by her employer. Doris' poetry attests to the fact that intellectual acumen and emotional sensitivity often go hand in hand.

The cross that she bore, as you will see in her poetry, was ultimately staked in the soil of her emotional life, or more precisely, her love life. Her second marriage ended in divorce after some twenty-five years. Yet because of children and circumstance that relationship was never completely severed. In the pages that follow you will come to understand a little of her sensitivity and emotional struggles with her self, her job, and her love.

You will also note a decidedly religious flavor in much of her poetry. Doris was a committed Christian and a dedicated church woman. Yet her faith was not blind, but rather was won through her struggles with this life and its injustices, both personally and socially. Her's was a faith that had made friends with doubt, and her doubt served to sharpen the intellectual edge of her faith.

Doris was a person who was fully engaged in being a person. Always active in her community and church, she also went on in her work to "hobnob" with intellectuals and politicians, networking with such unlikely yokefellows. She had a way of assisting people to express themselves more fully and more clearly, whether she was working with them as an editor or relating with them just as a friend, in conversation as well as in print.

She would not allow anyone to put her on any kind of pedestal. She always maintained with the utmost integrity that she was an ordinary person. She sought no special accolades, though to her public dissatisfaction (but I think to her private satisfaction) she received some awards and recognition through her work and

through her church.

When she began to write poetry in earnest hope of publishing, she adopted the pen name, “dross.” In her papers I found a copy of the hymn, “How Firm A Foundation,” with the last stanzas of the fourth verse underlined. It reads,

*Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine;
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.*

Dross is, according to Webster, “waste or foreign matter.” She liked the name. It kept her humble

But one of her associates at ECS felt differently about her new name. He thought it was unnecessarily unflattering. He writes:

DROSS

dross? No way.

Abbreviations, acronyms, logos—all are
useful and understandable
but not if,
in their final form,
they present a meaning that is
inaccurate
unflattering or
unacceptable.

dross? Not so.

Not for a colleague
who sparkles with life
meets adversity with courage
who is gracious to all

writes with consummate skill
 and passion;
 learns and
 knows and
 can tell.

dross?

Not for me.

Gold is where you find it
 Not just the hard metal from earth
 But I people, exemplified in though qualities
 of ability
 compassion
 humor
 judgment and
 belief

That allow men and women to
 work together
 to respect each other
 to accomplish much
 and enjoy each day
 as it comes.

dross?

Let it end.

Doris will do. And all
 will know
 whom is meant and
 what she represents!

—Warren G. Hill

I cannot bracket my own subjectivity as I try to evaluate her poetry. But in my best judgment, I believe that her work is genuinely good. Her love of language and appreciation for its economical and creative use result in a style that is at once eloquent, yet unencumbered, even wisely innocent. As she bears her soul, note how both her sense of humor and the acuteness of her

sensitivity—her pain, play against one another. I commend it to you for your enjoyment and edification

Phillip A. Ross
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HAPPINESS

Happiness—what is this thing?
Is it something that men can bring?
Or is it something just for the heart
To cherish until it will stay, or depart?

Is happiness a mental state?
A thing of science, or does it relate
To the Spirit? Is perfection of soul
Needed for this, the whole world's goal?

Happiness—what is this thing?
Something to make all humanity sing?
Who knows what it is? Who can define
Happiness is a word or a line?

It must be ecstasy—a bliss to desire
Something to seek with all of the fire
Of a neglected self. My God will define
Happiness when he makes it mine.

1945

FREE GIFT WRAPPING

Time:

- the measured package in which the gift of life arrives;
- discarded, carelessly spent, penuriously hoarded;
- thoughtfully given, callously received;
- bought and sold for a pittance;
- shepherded;
- priceless.

Time:

- to be without it is to render ability useless;
- to use it unwisely is to avoid living's essence.

Time:

- to sell it all is to reject love;
- to give it all is impractically admirable;
- to keep it all is selfish heresy;
- precious.

Time:

- divided, spent;
- bought, sold;
- given, taken;
- wasted, used.

Time:

- God's exclusive gift wrapper;
- Limit One.

NEW, FATHER

Stop, world!
I have a miracle here.
He wants to get on.

Look, world!
I am filled with him.
He is beautifully unsurpassed.

Listen, world!
God has given me a son.
Unique, fabulous!

Flesh of my flesh
Bone of my bone
Bearer of my name.

Accept him, world!
Love him, nurture him.
Help him grow.

This miracle of mine
Is not mine.
He is yours.