

# Donald Emblen

## Selected Poems



# Donald Emblen

October 5, 1918 [Los Angeles, California] –

April 24, 2009 [Santa Rosa, California]

Emblen was born in Imperial, Los Angeles County. He married Betty Jane Mitchell, an artist born in New Mexico who moved to Los Angeles before 1935 (they divorced in 1971; Emblen married two more times). In Los Angeles, he worked for the Los Angeles City News Service. Emblen served as a sonar man in the Navy during World War II; he returned to college afterwards on the GI Bill. Emblen joined the English department of Santa Rosa Junior College in 1959, retiring in 1988, and became Sonoma County's first poet laureate in 1999. He also wrote the first biography of Peter Mark Roget, the thesaurus editor, published in 1969. He co-wrote with his first wife, Betty, *The Palomino Boy*, a young people's novel about a Mexican-American child, published by Viking Press, New York, in 1948. *There Are Seagulls on Our Lawn* (1947), illustrated by Betty, reflects his training as a botanist. Lifelong friends included Donald Hall, Robert Bly, and William Stafford.

*There Are Sea Gulls On Our Lawn*. San Diego: North Shores Publishing Company, 1947

*The Crow Tree, and Other Oregon Poems*. Eagle Creek: The Projection Press, 1949

# Livestock

All manner of creeping, crawling, scuttling things  
celebrate the morning in their own fashion.

Sow-bugs, antlered worms, moths and ants and sand-crickets and pincher-  
armed termites

pause in the first fall of sunlight on their patch of ground,  
and suck the clods for one last taste of moisture.

The dew-cooled surface dirt crumbles dry,

scorpions grope with rigid claws

and jade green centipedes tumble down the shiny shovel-blade.

The brown earth moves with multitudes,

unknown hordes of barbarians and sophists,

that leave broad, silvered trails, narrow trenches, like wheel-ruts; funnels

and delta-fans of masticated soil.

This is the way the beach land grows,

changing hourly,

in every vacant lot, between the rows of every garden patch, under the sod,

in dust piles by the roadsides,

innumerable unnamed beings

turning soil in million mouthful lots,

inheriting the earth.

# Low Tide from Crystal Pier

Flat as a dish, the sand hard-packed and shining  
extends from shore to surf-edge,  
further and wider with each half-hour of retreating tide,  
until the bathers look like dolls bobbing about in the mounds and sheets of  
moving water.

The lifeguard stares and squints into the sun,  
it is hard to tell a lump of kelp from a swimmer's head,  
and there in the black-tarred piling of the pier,  
many a small life might scream for help.

How would it sound, here in this warm, concave afternoon,  
with the sea-air filled with the barking of dogs, shouting of children,  
squealing of girls, blare of a radio, and the long, continuous thunder  
of the sea?

Would a single frightened cry pierce this complex haze of sun and running  
bodies, splashes and flapping towels,  
or would the lifeguard listen once  
and put it down for the querulous voice of a seagull passing by?

## Lovers' Leap

The crumbling lip of cliff—  
sandy loam, white-flecked with bits of shells  
held together loosely by a threadbare mat of wild grasses—  
tips seaward brokenly,  
sagging on a limestone hinge.  
Nettles grow like lost and ragged flowers  
on a sifting ledge  
that trickles crumbs of earth deep into a concave vault of sea-mist.  
Here is a resting place for gulls  
who stand on wide-webbed feet  
and listen solemnly to wind and trickling sand and hissing spray.  
Here is a place for lovers' last long argument,  
a narrow place for pacing,  
a half-round stone for resting on,  
a dark and grinning crevice, widening to draw the hot dry eyes,  
and a yielding sod  
that frightens tragic youths  
who trod too near the edge.































































































































































































