

# Cracks of Consciousness



Wesley Britton

Selections from  
*Cracks of Consciousness*

By Wesley Britton  
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## Introduction

Thanks to my very good Massachusetts friend, Kevin Bochynski, I was able to self-publish an anthology of my verse, *Cracks of Consciousness*, back in Texas in 1995. What an incredible experience that was, that day of holding those treasured "Don't Panic Press" pages in my hands for the first time.

All of that verse had been published in a variety of periodicals and journals, and some seemed favorites among my Texas friends. Looking back, I remember my three most astute editors and I invoke the names of their memorable magazines here--*Café Belles Artes*, *Lynx Eye*, and *Talus and Scree*. With equal fondness, other shapers of *Cracks* were Barbara Schmidt, Leona Welch, and Cliff and Brenda Roberts. (Cliff did the cover art posted here.)

Nearly ten years later, I can't evaluate and choose "the best" of those stories and observations. So here I offer selections that seemed to please readers and listeners. At some point, I'll sort through my work written since *Cracks* came out, and I'll call that collection *homecoming*. You'll know why when it joins its older brother here.

Wes Britton  
December, 2003

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## THE VEIL

When the blindness came, so did the veil  
& few look in & those that do  
I cannot tell for certain

what I am perceiving. Not light, not dark,  
not the common colors shared by most.  
I see no body language so speak it poorly.  
I see neither smile nor frown so ignore both.  
Cannot tell friend from stranger, so the veil

swells like a smoke or fog  
around me in protection, confusion,

aleness while

interdependency grows thick and wide,  
regulated by the whims and schedules of others,  
living around the cracks of others' good will,

hearing more intentions and promises than fulfillment  
or commitment or truth  
and grasp the limitations after

the embers of rage finally subside.

And accept the moment, what is,  
what can be patiently done.

ah, patience against my worse nature,  
the energy that must be curbed,  
finally accepting calm Now after the  
Disappointment Series and feel the  
Ying of happy quiet aleness without  
the being with anyone not just to be alone  
the Yang of the female other who  
may be illusion, fantasy, nightmare  
while I casually, cautiously, distantly

touch others veiled not to be hurt  
veiled to expect assault  
veiled to be comfortable within  
and always aware of the separateness  
that lives against my belief in  
interconnections  
expecting more than is offered  
expecting more than can be given

so I create little footnotes in books  
and minds and groups and drums and  
the image of the invisible man walking  
thru the town that did not see him before  
and is not looking for him now

as I await the next step  
whether shin-cracking or  
softer, whether pain or the touch  
of my dogs & toys

so I have not answered your question. You wonder what are  
The joys of blindness?

Well, the joy of music, but I had that before.  
The joy of touch, but that has a powerful yang.  
The joy of surprising connections, the nuggets  
amongst the dross,

and the surprise of occasionally remembering a color,  
a face, place, a possible poem

but mostly I find the happiness in thinking of Buddha,  
of little accomplishments, small adventures, never minding  
the great promise of youth

and knowing how much I've improved--hell,  
I've had so far to go--and how different  
I do things now so I must call the happiness

acceptance, letting go of illusions  
becoming aware of illusions  
de-emphasizing illusions  
putting illusions into perspective  
knowing my past is my own illusion  
shared delusionally with others  
whose place in the Now is never certain  
and uncertainty has its place, especially in

a cocky man  
who came to belief and conviction very slowly,  
from the Bible to the nothing to the nothing with  
meaning

who expects all to be transitory  
as is All

and to cease craving, the source  
of suffering, and emphasize service and  
gifts, even gifts not wanted or expected,  
and see what seeds grow.

THROUGH GRANDMOTHER'S EYES

(Music of train blowing in night)

Through Grandmother's eyes were family  
of Kentucky country roads  
laned by wooden post fences needing  
occasional repair when her cows escaped.  
One woman & three children could chase them home.

She was a toymaker while  
granddad worked for short line railroad.

Through my mother's eyes were children  
family worth driving halfway cross country to see  
buying Christmas toys at Korvettes in September  
lay-away, paid for before Christmas.

Through father's eyes were family  
the brother he found dead  
his son he found dead  
with other brother, sat in grandmother's  
house waiting for her to slip away

in the quiet far away from trains they loved.

An iron spike rests  
on the mantle, uprooted  
from the tracks. The train does  
not notice but sings in the night  
like songs of whales.

The last time I saw Grandmother we stepped off her porch  
& I saw us through her eyes  
as we left for the last time.  
I was behind her eyes one moment  
& all she saw was us.

## ROSA PARKS AT THE AIRPORT

"I stepped back into the closet," the woman said,  
"Too much room, not comfortable."

& the Traveler's Aide sat me by her in the waiting chair  
& I asked what all the commotion was about.

"Rosa Parks is coming through," the aide said beaming.  
"Do you know who she is?"

"Sure. The lady who refused to give up  
her bus seat for a white man, helped spark  
the civil rights movement."

"Yea," he said, surprised, walking away,  
thrilled to the bone.

& young blacks gather by the departure gate making plans.  
"On behalf of all black citizens," one girl rehearses.

"No," her companion said, "on behalf of the  
entire human race."

We all wait, the blind man by the lesbian  
across from the young blacks.

Then Rosa Parks is whisked through on her wheelchair  
accompanied by her small entourage  
not stopping for any of us.

THE CONDOM STORM OF '72

Well, Paul broke into the rubber machines last night  
looking for quarters but failed and  
showed up at our poker game dumping  
a foot-high pile of

individually shrink-wrapped little boxes  
of rubbers of all sizes 'n colors  
on my single bed

'n we drunken boys blew up our balloons and  
tossed them out the boarding house window  
'n we must of made a major dent in that pile

cause the next morning I set out  
to walk my hangover to the breakfast deli  
but stopped on a dime seeing  
the sticky balloons on

cars

'n windows

'n parking meters

'n poles

'n grass, the sidewalk,  
'n the street.

'n my landlady's front porch

where she stood with arms folded  
'n tapping foot 'n  
wishing to laugh admonition--

"I know who's behind this one, Britton."

'n I walked into the deli where the condom storm  
replaced all other news 'n I stayed mute not wanting  
to let on we hadn't planned the whole thing  
to start with.

You should have seen it,  
it was a wonderful sight.  
More colorful than Christmas  
bathed in prophylactic lights.

## BIRDS IN THE ATTIC

By the way, the old hotel only used three floors  
rising on the basement tombs,  
fourth shut down for decades.

A floor of ghost town rooms  
cobwebbed, bare furniture.  
Trevor's kingdom, where he  
contemplated his crow's feet prematurely  
etched in prison

with the only key to the  
forgotton elevator button,

he had one room full of his maintenance tools  
Another room was his

marijuana farm.

No one knew where it was.  
No one knew it was there.

He sold pot in the Waters hotel  
confident a room by room search  
wouldn't reveal  
the thriving, sun-nourished vegetables  
of calm and patience in the bare wood halls.

But

One day Trevor discovered his vault  
full of pigeons  
wall to wall high pigeons  
eating pot, little  
baggies poked full of beak holes  
pot dust on everything.

He dived in to chase them out  
stuttering with anger  
but they were stoned

& flew into walls  
other rooms  
& out broken windows.

The pot was gone.  
Damn pigeons.

Walden

an ordinary pond, a lake  
sanctified by words  
skimmed across the water

girded by  
walking, the feet another sense  
a cornucopia of earth and man.

Henry's words across the water  
breathing, nature is not a dead language.

Speak words  
aloud, breathe life anew--

the higher you fly, the higher you soar  
the less company.

Leave  
civilized man toiling  
for what he cannot keep.

Henry Looks down  
seeing stones under trees

for Kerouac, human radio tuned to India,  
his grave a landfill of offered  
bottles and packs and poems

books on the stones  
going and coming.

Stones in Henry's cairn  
free tokens returned from earth and man  
brought to holy waters

while Whitman's home drowns in  
crack houses miles from sleep,  
miles from Vedas, a broken  
connection, like the striptease  
bar where Joyce flowed Ulysses.

Words and a place  
breathe from the other.

## THE UNFORTUNATE FUNERAL

In the quiet breeze through her hair  
the thin wife stood over her husband's grave  
framed by her girls & the camera box  
aimed square on her  
peculiar moment in the sun  
fifteen years after  
the battle of divorce  
sent their children  
spiraling into disconnected paths.  
& she tried not to look  
into the open hole  
or into the camera's eye  
knowing she didn't belong there  
knowing how he would cringe  
knowing she stood there passively  
for the camera shot  
by his survivors  
in the green field  
below the canopy  
& she thought of the other men,  
man after man after him  
Well, Charlie worked out o.k.  
sitting at home waiting for her  
dinner.

& the cameras did their work  
like the smiles of her  
black and white wedding  
not a pretty day like this  
not a colorful day like this  
with all the flowers.  
Weren't there flowers at the wedding?  
She couldn't remember.  
There must have been flowers.  
But the pictures of gray  
were what held her memory.

WHERE IS OUR SISTER?

"Where is our sister?" they asked,  
the three girls and Tommy  
circling about their sitting mother  
not looking like their mother anymore  
not like the sardonic girl in Betty Grable hair  
of the black & white wedding photo  
but more a mini-skirted girl  
out of time.

"Where is our sister?"  
When she didn't answer,  
Denise slapped her  
& slapped her again.

"Where is our sister?" they  
asked again in chorus.

"At the hospital." Tommy  
& Denise drove there  
looking for the infant whose mother  
walked out after delivery  
without a name.

Denise raised the baby as her own  
her mother never acknowledging her  
Tommy's in-laws took the retarded girl in  
until a jealous girl killed her  
one boyfriend.  
& in her adult turmoil  
her mother, two blocks away,  
never came to see her but sat with  
her bare chested new husband  
drinking coffee & talking  
about his rights.

NORMAL INTELLIGENCE

The blind man stood by the pool gate  
in the dark after hours  
tapping the red point

while the cop berated his friends  
for sneaking into the pool in the dark  
to flirt and swim  
and the cop kept pointing to  
the sign of rules

"Anyone with normal intelligence," he said  
"could read this sign."

& the blind man tapped and said  
"They're getting out,  
no big deal."

But the red-faced cop insisted,  
pointing again at the sign

"Anyone with normal intelligence  
could read this sign."

But the man with the cane  
clearly wasn't looking at the sign  
so the cop raised his voice again  
"I keep telling you,  
anyone with normal intelligence  
can read this sign."

He waited for an answer.

And the blind man tapped  
and the cop tapped  
until his partner whispered  
into his ear

what the white cane meant

while the friends walked out  
laughing  
& the cop yelled at their backs

"If I see you drunks driving, I'll take you in!"

& the blind man thought

"Anyone with normal intelligence  
would know

I'm not driving anywhere."

## HEADACHE

"I have a headache," she said,  
her face turned away on the pillow.

"I think," he said  
"Slow hand loving on your favorite places  
would cure your headache & make you  
feel wonderful."

"I have a headache," she said,  
"Please don't touch me."

He nodded & went to the bathroom  
& left the seat up.

## FRECKLES

In Indian scripture  
the holy king  
came to heaven  
his mother & four brothers dead  
because they were not holy  
enough in their earthly bodies

but he stood with his dog  
whom the gatekeepers  
refused to admit

arguing with the holy king  
who said he would wait  
with his dog  
who offered nothing  
but protection & devotion

so they let the dog in  
who proved to be a god himself

so, dad, the dog stays in the house  
despite the hair &  
the occasional accident.

FUZZ

"You know in the sixties  
in my home township,  
we had one cop, one constable for our whole county.  
Judge Beamer. Old guy, daughter in my class.  
I leaned over her huddled against the school hall wall  
in fallout drills  
as we practiced for Russian invasion.  
Called him once on a dog bite.

Then, we got to junior high and they hired  
a police chief & built a cop station  
by the Skat Oil gas station  
& then hired two cops  
& put in two traffic lights  
& a new gas station opened up across  
the highway & people  
  
started dying  
crossing the highway.

"Chief was divorced, left his second wife down the street.  
Step & step family new center of township  
Like Stephens' jar in Tennessee.

He's gone, a series of fuzz come through now  
Like football players in helmets  
whose faces you never see or know or forget.  
Wish I'd married Judge Beamer's daughter."

2ND DANSWER'S AFTERHOURS SONG

Seeing herself look down  
from the thin stage, a  
corridor of light & heat  
like astral death

knowing they love the dancer,  
not the dance

the source of her anger, she said  
was that her only power is

her legs, lathed long by a gifted artisan

best when clear-white in red heels  
best on stage, one leg long and glistening  
one leg bent in motion,  
better when sitting not dancing  
bent, crossed one over the other,  
perfectly arranged, sculpted high knee  
doubling the power with feet pointed  
demurely down or angled to heaven in red heels  
her feet held wide by martyr's arms  
her legs, translucent to the warm, adoring touch that drained

her power. Or so she felt.

Sitting in the booth with red taxi driver  
he stroked circles in her palm  
talking softly of tracing her thighs  
with gentle tips  
leaning towards her, talking  
of focusing on her, beaming on her,  
playing with her sensitive ears,  
the irresistible neglected nerves

she physically melting asks him to

speak of something else.

He pulls back & says, "I must get control of  
myself" & she

takes him home up  
the thin elevator

in her third floor room he does as  
he promised, playing with her until she  
says no more, but he says yes.

Her face half drains, blanches white  
half flushes with brilliant blood red  
like her stage heels

the ying & yang of flesh

& comes again

& then he is gone

& she rages in the dark alone  
unfocused anger,  
wanting her power back  
& the tenuous, useless power  
of saying what her daddy called  
the world's ugliest word

No.

RED LETTERS

You want to talk about Christ?

Alright.

If you will do this.

Get thee a New Testament,  
red letter edition, forget the black words  
& with a pen of any color

scratch out the commandments you haven't followed,  
the words you question or interpret in self-justification,  
with honesty cut  
the things you will not do.

I want to see what's left.

I'm especially interested in what you do  
about feeding the poor, visiting prisons,  
giving up your worldly goods--

He commands this

Four Times in those red letters.

Can you name four sacrifices?

for it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom  
than

those you condemn with your votes  
as prayers without works are dead  
like warfare prayers  
like opposing health care for all  
like discussion groups about hunger  
or whining about rendering unto ceaser  
or damning welfare mothers you ask to suffer  
without medicine, clothes, juice for the babies  
you insist be born in neglected mangers  
creating nativities of despair

In The Name of the Deficit God.

Christ, get off the protest lines & go in buses to  
adoption centers, do your work there.

& gays--the old testament sin (as is males sitting where  
women have menstruated, when it was legal to stone your son  
for disobedience), like the world's oldest sin--and somehow

I recall your Christ preached Buddha compassion,  
Mary was not boycotted --

you don't behave with his class.

Might he say

Cease demonizing those you persecute with the same  
mouths you pray with &  
Open your hearts to the many ways to worship  
or be as Muslims chanting Jihad--Holy War?

Holy War--I have heard your trumpets for years.

Will ye not instead breathe

love compassion trust sympathy  
maybe a little simple neighborliness?

which is what I thought the Red Letters said.

if you will not do these things ordained  
by Hymns Most High

Shut Up.

& stop being surprised when  
we don't take you seriously  
or worse  
With Fear.

## AFTERMATH

In renewed uncertainty  
I watch you leave  
with your limping dog on his fragile leg  
your anatomical silhouette quickly  
disguised in the shadows beyond  
my reach.

Your friend's hurt very like  
mine, always a reminder of weakness,  
a strange unearned difficult paw  
happy for the comfort of leaving his  
crate, grateful to play if only for  
a short visit, daydreaming of better  
days of unrationed, unmeasured affection  
not tied to the couch, then released, then  
leashed again, following your search  
for new summer shadows.

Occasionally, hands reach in the dark,  
forms rise in hard clay confined  
in sheltering condoms disguising the orgasm  
tossed in a basket by the crate

before the long, too long  
denouement of leaving  
ending uncertainty  
as your car exhaust breathes  
goodbye.