

# JOURNAL



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John DesCamp

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Journal  
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## Colophon





## Acknowledgements

Once again (he says it will be the last time) my editor and good friend Dennis Stovall has given me his constructive advice and patient wisdom in helping me shape the poems in this book and in shaping the book itself. This book has been a partnership between the two of us and wouldn't have come together without him.

Jim Halliday's photography makes visible the feelings that underly the writing. Ten years ago, at the insistence of a mutual friend, I called and introduced myself to Jim. My friend promised me that Jim was an extraordinary person who would enrich my life. He was right. And for the last 10 years I have had the great pleasure to be one of Jim's friends and to be able to include his photographs in my books.

Not long after we met, Jim contracted a difficult form of cancer. His response was to double down on the joyful life he was living—his love of his wife Karen and his family, his music, his small but exquisite vineyard and wines, photography, gardening, good food, acting, community service and, every day, passing along his joy and wisdom to everyone he met.

Jim left us early this year, and the world seems a lesser place without him. But he will always live in the hearts of his friends.

This book is dedicated to Dennis and Jim: for me, and for this book, *conditii sine qua non*.



In the beginning.



# Spring Again

Spring arrives. with it  
a seasonal disregard  
for the worst-case scenario  
as days unwind and my blessings  
always outweigh my burdens.

Astarte's crescent arcs across  
the April night  
Cherry trees shiver, shake themselves  
petals floating past on Easter air  
Surviving winter pansies  
glare at the world  
from their altar on my terrace.

It's a new world again  
right here, right now, every second  
flooded with God's green beauty  
There's just no time to worry  
about tomorrow.

# Balch Creek Canyon

You can't step  
into the same river twice  
That goes for creeks in canyons, too  
the water moves on and moves away.

Nor can you step  
into the same canyon twice  
though no Greek philosopher said so.  
The canyon goes on living, moves on and moves away.

All things dissolve and disappear  
trees, plants and rocks departing into time  
flowing like water but too slowly  
for our mayfly lives to time their going.

Stripped of their green, bare-branched  
the maples on the canyon bank wear moss,  
Gray fur coats to warm them  
till summer comes and brings their leaves again.

Laughing liquidly, slipping over stones  
the creek chatters, grumbles over  
the basalt bones of the canyon  
It's come this way, been here before

knows the path to the ocean,  
to the sky, and back again.  
The canyon and its creek keep time  
to many different drummers.

Things look the same each day,  
But never are.

# Dog Zen

Warm sun and brown dog  
pull me outside  
under spring skies and gray gravid clouds  
not a day for indoor meditation.

Eager ferns, spring nettles  
pale shoots of elderberry line the trail  
gray basalt wears its rose-green lichen coat  
crumbles in time with the centuries.

Snow, rain and sun fall all at once  
the trail black with water, white on the verge  
Cloud shavings slip from bare maples  
just awakening, buds urgent.

No need for meditation if you're Sadie  
brown Buddha sniffing snow and mud  
Enlightenment is your nose,  
your tongue the universe.

It's all here;  
It's all now!

# Old Fish

I've lived long in these waters  
grown fearsome in my solitude  
feeding on what floats by  
Sweet and bitter; in the end  
it's all just food.

Each year more wary;  
not that I haven't taken a hook before,  
hidden inside the false promise  
of nourishment.

But I shook it off  
returned to my pool under the bridge  
between the two kingdoms.

This time I may be caught  
the barbed hook sinks deep  
as I pull on the patient line.

What could it be like  
to leave these waters?



# Wine and Bread

That first night we met,  
and for some time after,  
if asked to describe you  
in a poetic manner  
I'd have said I saw you  
as a rare wine; your  
deep serious self hiding  
aspects that would only show  
as time passes  
and you open up  
well structured, racy, complex  
warm and full bodied on the palate  
hints of lemon, strawberries, tar  
asperity and fire balanced with  
solid seriousness—a long finish.

If asked again, now  
it's much simpler  
you're my daily bread.

# Angry Child

I love you  
like Jesus loved Judas  
not with affection  
but with the deeper love we hold  
for one to whom we're bound  
in sacred contract.

Before I was  
before any of us were  
we stood before the gods  
I swore with you I could live a life  
in which forgiveness was stronger  
than my need  
for perfection in others.

So far, it's not going well  
each night in the Garden I pray  
for the bitter cup of my need  
to be taken from me.  
Each morning they bring me  
my crown and cross  
I am not God.  
I can't forgive you  
for turning your face from me.

My altar is crowded with tokens of myself.  
It must be swept clean  
before an offering of love  
can be placed on it.

# Artist's Model

She never looked beautiful  
She looked like art.

Anyway  
art isn't supposed to look beautiful  
it's supposed to make you feel  
something.

## Crows II

Wheeling sharp-beaked shadows  
an oil spill on the sunset  
the raucous mob  
mocks the colors of evening  
over the hills.

Their rude and ragged calls  
God's droll counterpart  
to the infinite opalescence  
she is busy giving birth to  
in the western sky.

Nature's sense of irony  
is seen best in Her contrasts  
Maybe the sunset wouldn't be as beautiful  
without the crows.

Sometimes, I wonder  
where She puts us in the picture.