Diary of a Downtown Cat

Poems By: Ronald Kimber

Taken from his Collection
"Eccentric City"

Section I

Migration From Mars To Downtown

Dear Childhood

Never a worry
never a care
always someone loving
to comfort me there
If it wasn't my Grandmother
It was Aunt Bea, if not her
It was Charles E
Oh, but love was around
Hey! I grew up downtown

The winter's were cold
sometimes it snowed
but a warm feeling
seemed to follow me
wherever I'd go

The summers were downsouth hot
that didn't bother me a lot
I had it made in the shade
drinking purple kool aid

My imagination
was vivid as could be
I even believed my Grandfather
would buy a pony for me

Dear Childhood
I had it so good
Trade that for a million
"Tell you I never would"

(I Do Remember) Childhood

I do Remember
The intricate, intense, intoxication
Known as childhood
Vividly, clearly, profoundly

I do Remember
Initial Spring
Summer at Sweetie's playground
Fall… county fair, anticipation
Coal heaters of Winter

I do Remember
Consecutive days of euphoria
In my childhood
Intrinsically, absolutely, explicitly

I do Remember
Grandmother's love
Eli, Uncle Jesse
Aunt Bea
and Charles E

I do Remember
Childhood effortless high

"Aunt Stella"

Stella, my star
never, ever distant
never too far from my heart
always a kind word
always a helping hand
bending over backwards
forever sacrificing
to help me become a man
a Grandmother's love
shines like a star from above

"Downtown Kids"

Downtown Kids
Having fun is what we did
Rode stick ponies
Fed no pigs
Skated funky
Dreamed real big
Explored the intricate
Canyons of alleyways
Bum rushed Dieners Bakery
For day old doughnuts and cream puffs
Wrestled and boxed
Till we became tuff
Rode tricked out bicycles crazy
Till we resembled some motorcycle gang
Got the most out of a childhood
Thru every season change
Waited for the marching Bulldogs Band
Not Santa, at the Christmas parade
Looked on with horror
As some kid fell into the river not saved
Invaded plum trees
Till they were bare
Exchanged cold leftovers
Till we learn how to share
Mingled with country folks in town
Who came to shop and hang around
Said yes ma'am to neighbors
Who'd tell our parents if we were bad
(I won't swear but)
I honestly don't remember ever being sad
I was a downtown kid
Having fun is what we did

Eli

Ole Eli
Never made me cry
Ole Eli
wiped the tears
from my eyes
When he came home

His drinking buddies
called him "Benny Goodman"
I don't know if he knew jazz
but he was a great man
and he was good
gave us food
cut the wood
brought in the coal
Ole Eli was a good ole soul
never had too many clothes
just so my shoes
wouldn't have any holes

"Across the River"
(This is Dedicated to the Music I Love)

I lay in bed
my little skinny legs in perpetual motion.
You see I'm mentally
subconsciously riding my bicycle
Can't stop
even when it's time to go to sleep
The little room
is dark 'cept for
The crimson flicker of the
red hot coal heater
Intermittently, between thoughts
of putting two tail pipes
and a cut off fender on my bike.
(Like Tommy Lynch's eldorado
bike with the white tires and fox tail).
I hear the sound of rock-n-roll music
Rhythm and blues
Man, it's telling the news.
Coming from across the river
drifting in the air, thru the window,
the hole in the wall
and the crack in the roof.
Yea, a little Everly Brothers,
Roy Orbison's "Only the Lonely"
I know right,
but I really heard
The Four Tops, "Just Ask the Lonely"
and the Shirelles, James Brown,
Little Stevie, The Temptations.
They all had a story to tell
and forty-fives to sell.
Hypnotized by sounds
coming from across the river,
at the little hamburger drive-in
next to the Parkers Barbecue Place,
where black folks had to go in the back.
I wasn't that crazy 'bout barbecue,
I like the cole slaw and cornsticks.
Anyway…I'm gonna
get me some highrise handlebars,
just like that motorcycle cat,
we call "Flash".
Now this is dedicated to
All That I Love.

"Town Clock"

Little town clock
Ole town clock
Not far from my door
Just about two blocks

Small town clock
You're not Big Ben
I guess you could say
You're my friend

You are so familiar
Always around
I've come to anticipate, appreciate
The way you speak… your sound

Striking precisely, prudently at 5 a.m.
As my Grandmother rises
To begin a twelve hour shift
At Imperial Tobacco Factory

You exploded like seven cherry bombs at seven
As my feet hit the linoleum floor
Time to make my way to the Catholic school door

Ahhhhh, magical is the sound
Especially when light'en bugs come around
Yes, you made summer special too
Maybe not quite as special as the cling clang bell
On the Mr. Softee's truck
But who could be that special
I'm talkin' banana floats, shucks

On cold dark winter evenings
(nose running, hands freezing)
your chimes reminded me
that it was time
to take my bicycle in
and say so long to Jimmy my friend

Little town clock
Ole town clock
Not far from my door
Only just about two blocks

"Sunday at Aunt Bea's"

Sundays at Aunt Bea's
mean
pork chops, rice
home made biscuits, scramble eggs
and fried apples for breakfast

Sundays at Aunt Bea's
mean
church at St. Mary's
or Sycamore
I go in the door, sit for a while
come out the door, to sit in the car
it's not that I'm not interested
I just don't understand what they stay so long for

Sundays at Aunt Bea's
is unlike Saturdays
Saturdays, Vauline and I
wash the car to go to town
Maybe, Uncle Jesse will buy us a treat,
milkshake and a hamburger, ooh wee

Sundays at Aunt Bea's
is unlike Mondays
Mondays the tobacco we took in last week
has to come out this week
on Mondays it's alright to be a child
but, you still have to work
hand that tobacco or chop something

Sundays at Aunt Bea's
mean
I have a real Allis-Chalmers tractor
to get on, sit on and dream on
all to myself (well I share it with Uncle Jesse)
Farming is seven days of reality

Sundays at Aunt Bea's
means
I'm so happy and free
I haven't given a thought about the city
the part of me, I thought was all of me
Until come
Sundays at Aunt Bea's

"Charlie Chan"

Charlie Chan
was an everyday junkman
A every Sunday go to the beach man
A Chevrolet truck driving man
Charlie Chan
was a trunk full of money man
He called me Daddy
Funny, he was a father figure
All children loved Charlie Chan
He began to understand
When he became so ill
On his feet he could not stand
Charlie put it all in God's hands
In a dream…I saw him on his knees
Asking Gods forgiveness and mercy please

"Little Hotrod"

Little Hotrod was no car… but
He could ride
That palomino stick pony far
Through the woods, near the river
Up the playground hills
Downtown in the alley, across First Street
That little Hotrod cowboy couldn't be beat

Going barefooted across broken wine bottles
And hard coal ashes to climb plum trees
Swinging from limb to limb
Yea, like a monkey, disfigured face
Cruel kids would pick on him
Knock him down
He'd jump up off the ground

Little Hotrod
Where'd he get that name?
Well old Doc Graves gave him that name
You can say what you wanna 'bout Doc
Big time gambler, womanizer
Cadillac driving, cool dressin' king of sin
It's not what's without; it's what's within
Old Doc loved little Hotrod
Took him in… bought him clothes
A Boy Scout uniform, canteen and tent
Off to the Boy Scout camporee he went

Little Hotrod overcame all obstacles
Grew up to be a man
Drives a big old Lincoln
Smokes a big cigar
I tell you if you know how
To ride a stick pony
You can go far
Little Hotrod's like kin
Little Hotrod's my friend

"Asta Lavista (Five Sons)

Jimmy, Jay, Jeffery, and Jace
That's four sons
Ronnie makes five
Off to Little Washington we ride
In a four door 57 Catalina
To splash in the dirty water
Some call the beach
With it's broken bottles on the floor
Deep fried crabs and fish sandwiches

We'd leave before night
Cause people get drunk and people fight
Sweetie and Pete in the front seat
I think little Jace in the middle
Jimmy, Jay, Jeffery… that's three sons
Plus little Jace that's four sons
Ronnie makes five in the back seat
Head full of water, belly full of fish, we sleep
They drop me off at my door
Like many and every time before
It's not goodnight but… asta lavista for sure

"Geronimo"

Every time I go in Strollo Store
Equilla say, "Hey Geronimo"
I say give me five penny cookies
And an orange crush soda, an Almond Joy
No… a Hershey Bar
It's cold out here
Ain't even no fools out here
I got my toboggan down over my ears
Stick my head in the poolroom
Its empty like a room full of gloom
Run back home
To get close to the fire
Wonder if Charles and Fannie are home
Guess not… the light ain't on, but
Every time I go in Strollo Store
Equilla says, "Hey Geronimo"

"Blood Hyman"

You know
I liked Blood Hyman
Thought a lot of Blood Hyman
I don't know why
guess he was my kinda guy
Wasn't my father or nothing
but he was my baby sister's dad.
You could say he went with my mother
I can't speak on what they had
(Bernice Barnes use to tease me)
(He'd call me "Youngblood")
Blood was dark as coal
had a lot of soul.
Loved to have a good time
Go out and have friends over.
He wore nice clothes
Sharp suits, shined shoes
always had some watch
or ring around that he'd
Won in a poker game.
A polite man, whom everybody
seemed to like
You could say he knew how
to treat people,
easy to smile,
Blood had a lot of style
Very creative, good with his hands.
My mom would send me to his house
to take a plate of food
Most of the time he'd be asleep
after playing poker all night.
I was fascinated
by the things he made.
He would make small jukeboxes
and stereo consoles,
with mirrors and colorful lights.
Some of my early introduction to music
(thinking back), probably came from
my visits to Blood's house.
He had stacks and stacks of records
I would get lost in the collection.
Lloyd Price, Sam Cooke
Hank Ballard & the Midnighters

He never said don't touch this

don't touch that, easygoing guy.
Man, he built a little wading pool
in his backyard, a concrete pool,
not big enough to swim in
but I could float toy boats in it.
In one room there was this
Imposing, upright Baldwin piano
I'd go in and entertain myself
Banging away on the keys
Especially the bass keys.
He always had a custom made bar
with crystal and little shot glasses.
Only place I'd seen shot glasses
were in the saloon in cowboy pictures.
I'd pour myself shots of ginger ale.
I was trying to get my funk on way back then.
He even gave me a nickname,
Called me "Head".
Soon Blood and his brothers,
Thump, Lightening and another one
(All of them had these nicknames),
moved to Alexandria, Virginia, where
they worked together in masonry.
After I grew up, became an adult,
I visited Blood in Alexandria.
Blood still had the stereos and
custom made bars, still
had stacks of albums,
hundreds of pictures in photo books.
Always trying to give me something
He said, "Man I got some alligator shoes
from the flea market, you can have'em"
I was like "Blood, I can't wear them".
Years later he was in the hospital
I just happened to be in D.C.
I said I'm going to see Blood
I went over to Alexandria,
found the hospital, went into his room
I think he was really glad to see me
I surprised him by showing up.
He said, "Man, you don't need any money do you"?
If you need anything let me know
I said, "I don't need nothing man".
He said, "Ronald, when I get out
I'm gonna buy me a Cadillac
And I'm gonna just ride".
The nurse
came in to take a blood sample
I said, "Man, I gotta go", he laughed at me.

You know
I really liked Blood Hyman

"Yardbroom Mama"

Look! Here she comes
So we better run
Yardbroom Mama

You know she'll curse you
If she thinks you're making fun
Yardbroom Mama

Where does she sleep?
What does she eat?
She pushes that grocery basket
Her dead baby… is that where she hides it?

Yardbroom Mama

Been a bag lady a long time
I heard she was a teacher once
Lost her little baby
Wound up loosing her mind

Anyway, here she comes
So we better run
Yardbroom Mama

I'm crossing the street
If by chance I meet
Yardbroom Mama

"A Bridge"

Not with concrete and brick
Nor girds of steel
Not with a gangling crane
Nor bulldozers or large trucks
with big wheels
Not with two shifts
Lunch buckets and an army corp of engineers
Nor rolls of blueprints
To the untrained eye seem complex and unclear

Still a bridge has been constructed
A connection from me to you
A passage way for life's highs
An emergency route to share life's lows
We will name that bridge friendship
That way the whole world will know

Not a place of departure
For some poor tormented suicider
Nor a platform of performance
For the brooding saxophonist
Not a man made marvel
That spans bodies of water
And elevates (sometimes to the sky)
Not an impediment
To large vessels
That willingly opens to let them pass by

Still a bridge has been constructed
A connection from me to you
May you always be my friend
And if ever in need
I will cross to get to you
May our bond continue to be true
May I remain worthy, ever worthy
That you will forever
Call me a friend too

"Happiness (All That I Need)"

I've never lived
In a house on a hill
Never dined on what you might call
A fancy meal
But thank God for Grandmother
Mary Dee, Aunt Bee
Who made sure my belly was filled
And the only happiness
I've known
Is from the love they've shown

I've never owned
A luxury car
Never personally knew
A real what you might say… star
But thank God for brothers and sisters
Who never let me get out there too far
And the only happiness
I've ever known
Is from the love they've shown

I've had the opportunity
But never put on a wedding ring
Never ate anniversary cake and
Those types of things
But thank God I've known love in my life
Though sometimes it seems like a dream
And the only happiness
I've ever known
Is from the love life has shown

I have all that I need
I've had all that I needed
Don't need to repeat it
But I will
I have all that I need
The love of God
The love of family
The love of friends
Even the love of strangers
(I've seen it in my time)
Sometimes some love puts your
Heart in danger
From the love of God
To the love of a stranger

"Poor Little Poet"

What happen to your notebook
little poet
Did you drop it
in a puddle of water,
got mud on it
or did you simply forget
your lines.
If so
it's not the first time
Don't even try it,
nothings wrong with your mind

Poor little poet
Though they don't know it,
all your verses don't show
This is your therapy
More than that
it sets you free,
like sailing a ship at sea

Little poet
You've turned your soul
inside out
The world thinks they know
what you're all about
They wait for your turn at bat,
hoping that you'll strike out

Poor little poet
You stay strong
and make them wrong
Write a few more happy songs
Keep searching,
follow your dreams
and you will find
just where you belong