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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jonathan Parker entitled "A Dream Walk." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.



Arthur Smith, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:



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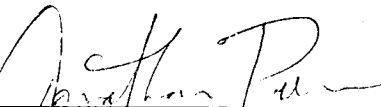
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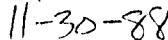
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Date



A DREAM WALK

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jonathan Parker

December 1988

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These poems are dedicated
to Bob Lanza
who made me want to write.

ABSTRACT

The following collection of my poems spans my eight years of writing. The first section of the thesis, titled "The Early Poems" is a sampling from the over one-hundred poems which I wrote between the fall of 1980 and the spring of 1985. These few selections from my earlier work show my struggle to find my own voice as a poet. Although these are written in free verse, they contain many of the conventions of traditional, formed verse, namely some internal rhyme and end rhyme as well as a strong emphasis on the rhythm of the lines.

In the second section, I have included various free verse poems along with some formed poems (terza rima, triolet, heroic couplets, and normative and accentual syllabic verse) under the title, "Revelations." In the winter of 1985, I "fathered forth myself as a poet," as I like to term it. In other words, I found my voice which is an extension of some of the tone and world view of my early poems. This voice was born on a cold winter evening in 1985 when, walking through my neighborhood, I had a waking vision which revealed to me what I consider to be the significance of the powerful beauty of this universe. As a result of this epiphany, I have come to believe that one of the chief ends of human beings (especially poets) is to affirm the beauty of this world and to, with all our strength, try to understand and help further that beauty. Ultimately I believe myself to be a voice whose purpose is to celebrate the wild power of life which flows from the most limitless, incomprehensible power,

God himself. The title of the thesis is taken from the last poem in this collection, an account of that epiphany which took place in 1985, "A Dream Walk."

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I. THE EARLY POEMS

INTRODUCTION

A line from a song which I wrote goes something like this: "Life is everything you can imagine, plus five new things." This statement sums up the effort of my poetry: to feverishly catalogue and celebrate the overwhelming, indeed incomprehensible wealth of images which day-to-day living provides. The joy which a reader will find in my poems is the joy of continual discovery of the beauty which this world is capable of unfolding. Each of the poems in this collection, especially the poems in the second section, "Revelations," is a careful yet ecstatic study of the power and nature of beauty.

Many of my poems have the characteristics of The Greater Romantic Lyric, a form which arose from the Romantic Period of literature. The impulse of this type of lyric is to investigate the speaker's loss of innocence by comparing and contrasting an experience in the present to a similar experience from the speaker's youth. Many of the Romantic Lyrics in this collection are confessional. In other words, most of the events depicted in these poems have their origins in my own experience.

In keeping with the Romantic theme, I must say that I do not believe death to be the mother of beauty. Rather I believe beauty is born through the passing of time, the changing of the seasons as they cycle through the years in a never-ending fugue of original, precious moments. Change is the catalyst of my poetry, and what I worship is beauty.

William Down the Hill

Here comes the whipcord whir,
the apple bright blur
of William down the hill,
and all the world's awry.
William's on his new bicycle
giving it a try.

A Warmer Below

Near the dogwoods
that clutch toward snow,
reaching for leaves
that were buried weeks ago,
a robin stood on the icy pond.
You know how a bird may peck
against a frozen pond
and look to be two,
above and below,
each beak at the other
in the icy mirror.
And so I watched this bird
and blew my white breath
until, done with pecking,
he flew. Then I knew
that this robin sought
a warmer place,
a warmer below.
And as he rose,
I, too, turned to go.

The Madonna

I used the backyard stump
as a table
and cut the bark from the oak.
I wanted sculpture
but my saw, drill, and sandpaper
left me nothing,
so I left it there
to sit six months
and be soaked, frozen, thawed.

But as I return
I see.
My tools are nothing.
I admit to the weather
that I could not have carved
this small, bleached figure of a woman,
arms outstretched
as if to hold me.

Clay

I surprised a pigeon
in a Georgia field
when my foot crushed grass
behind its tail.
Wings broke the air
and a brown feather
touched my face,
stroking down along the cheek
to throw away the grass
and me
and all the Georgia clay beneath my feet.

New Year's Eve

Fireworks on New Year's eve
always seem out of place,
but I still stand outside,
my red ears numb,
and hold roman candles into the wind.
They light my squinting face
with flares of red and blue.
I guess I hope they'll keep me warm,
but all I get is light and smoke
while sparks fly back around me and die.

Birds on the Sears Sign

Birds settle on the Sears sign.
They can't read, but the light
of the letters is warm
as they face the easterlies
and a cold sun's scorn.

Pocket Change

That warm afternoon, she and I
brought pennies to the tracks.
We laid our money in the middle of a rail
and waited.

The train came, and wheels shot
white sparks out of the coins
so each penny was different:
hot copper blobs like stars,
copper cut into bright crescent moons.

We walked home on the warm rails
losing our balance.

The change in our pockets
bounced and jingled
when we stepped hard.

La Lluvia Vinidera

Estaba dormitando
cuando el agua se derramó
del viento
a la mesa
por los antepechos abiertos.

Es que soñaba
con la lluvia vinidera
atrapado en la sombra de las nubes
y por miedo de la mancha de las gotitas
soñe con ventanas cerraderas.

trans.

The Coming Rain

I was dozing
when water spilled
from the wind
onto the table
through the open sills.

I was dreaming
of the coming rain
caught in the clouds' shadow
and for fear of the droplets' stain,
I dreamed of closing windows.

A Few Peaches

I smell peaches
and think of the day
at the market
when you overturned a bucketfull
and bruised a few,
so we had to buy them
for 20¢ each
before they turned brown.
It was hot,
and for a dollar we ate peaches
all the way home
in the chevrolet
with the windows down.

Purpose

I found a silver rabbit in the woods,
and he did not move after I had seen him
breathing, still in brown leaves, young in silver fur
as if God had seen me with my saw
among the quiet trees,
had picked off a piece of cloud
and threw it into that clump of leaves
to stop me in all my purpose.

The Blackberry Pie

There were the blackberries
and there were we,
scarce within our property stakes
with two or three baskets between us.
In boots for the briars I stepped
and waited for Mother's "watch for snakes."
But I was all blackberries and blackberry pie
and gave no caution to snakes,
since we would leave enough
for their sakes low to the ground.
And so for blackberry pie
Mother and I raced
until we weighed out by each aching arm
a pound.
Then as I turned to leave,
there was Mother's snake
wrapped around a tree
with the sun in his eye.
He gave a glint at the tallest bush nearby,
and, in a rush, took a berry
as if he had no need
for the ones left low.
Now, as for me, a snake with tree ingenuity
could have his berries high or low.
I told him so as mother had me by the collar
with her berry load,
and we walked back up the road
toward the night
and our starry windowed kitchen,
the ways of snakes not for us to reason why.
And I was all blackberries
and blackberry pie.

II. REVELATIONS

Old Music

The poetry started autumn eight years ago
in a basement classroom
of the dormitory where my friends lived.
I sat on the brick steps there that fall,
loving the doom of my writing fire,
crying at the trees, at the poems I read.
I was burning, and it was my soul, like the saying, aflame,
with the sad shaping I could make
of those early words, each one
a pain I'd feel between my lungs
as the leaves seemed to burn, too, and the trees were black
behind all that yellow and red.
Even today at 7:00 A.M.,
the autumn wind took half the yellow leaves
off the tree by my apartment
and plumed them above my upturned face in the parking lot,
rained them down around me, turning and dipping,
black against the sky
and taught me again how the verse must come pouring to be poetry,
must come crying from my hand.
Yes, I cried this morning,
and it's an old music that I'm singing, the first music,
keening and weeping. I'll spend my life
catching my breath at the way
yellow leaves tumble and turn black
against the deep blue of the starry morning sky
before they bless me with their touches of benediction
as they fall around me, lighting in my hair, on my shoulder,
brushing against my fingers to land on my untied shoes.

Tuesday, March 11, 1985

silence

and then a bird
flutters,
props above a sign
 Antiques
and cries.

Trestle God

The train trestle was a breezy cathedral
rusting above the great river,
a dark architecture in the summer night,
a way of looking at the stars.

I'd wait there
smelling oil and tar on the black rails,
would drink the warming beer
for quiet drunkenness,
would stare at the river,
piss at the river,
listen.

The diesel came like a god:
brute angel horn
piston tornado
utter wall of train.

I died each night,
balanced in rigging off the side,
eye level with the rails.
I died when the god would take my soul
like a letter from a post box
and carry me tunnelling through mountains,
breaking the time zones,
smashing cattle,
cutting sleeping old men in two,
outhouses flying apart in a reek of dung,
bearing down on barns and churches
only to run back around the world
and return me,
a windblown letter to myself,
crisp, sealed,
dangling from the trestle,
alive.

Stricken

I found a box of matches
on the sidewalk,
so I opened the box
and struck them one after another,
listening to the scratch and flash,
watching the flames
go yellow,
go blue
as they dwindled down
to little black curls.

Nest of the Blackbird

Life magazine: "If the United States were flat as a pancake and every citizen weighed the same, this country would balance perfectly on the bird eggs at the edge of Lynn Merrill's catfish pond - five soon-to-be hatched red-winged blackbirds."

The five eggs in random nested cluster
are innocent of their position.
The photograph shows the nest
made in a green clump of reeds,
and this silly calculation
about pancakes, weights, citizens
serves no purpose other than the finding
of these small, white, speckled eggs
holding blackbirds.
At this moment there are nests
all through the countryside
containing six eggs or two,
cardinals or wrens,
quiet in some tree or patch of reeds,
all equally unimportant.
Perhaps the five eggs by the catfish pond
have hatched by now,
and the heart of America
is a dry, empty nest
made by the blackbird.

The Waiting Dream

"And they said to one another,
behold, this dreamer cometh."

-Genesis 38:19

Joseph, diviner of dreams will dream tonight.
His brothers, tall and proud
with hands like hide
and eyes of onyx
will bow down before him.

The dream waits.

Now he stands alone with his sheep,
dwarfed by a plain of grass
as big as the waiting dream.
Joseph brings up his arm
to wipe the sweat from his unwhiskered face.
The sleeve, woven
in blue, yellow, purple, green
darkens with the shepherd's sweat
as the herd moves near a shade tree.
Passing from the light to the shade of the tree
his coat fades,
and Joseph,
sitting,
his knees drawn up,
drinks from a leather pouch.
He could be any tender of sheep, anywhere,
but his name is Joseph,
and tonight

the sun

the moon

eleven stars

will bow down before him to light his face
and coat of many colors.

Joseph leaves the shade,
his coat bursting in the sun.
His worn sandals scuff a little,
and the sheep give their noise
as he prods them
innocent to the spangled treasure
waiting in his head
that will explode tonight
and throw him from his sheep.

Becoming a Fisherman

The ideal lake would only be troubled by me,
a boat, and some fish.
See my line underwater, undulating slowly
in the green sunlight.
No hook, a sinker would weigh the filament down.
Not to catch or eat,
but to sit rocking alone, head bowed to the water,
beer on ice as I
think about fish floating like dreams through the mind of the lake.

I'll be a soft source of ripples in their sky,
the dark cloud above them,
a mild disturbance in a gently rocking boat,
becoming drunk without a word,
just enough there to become nothing at all.

Juice

We used to come home, our shirts loaded with honeysuckle.
We'd climb to the roof and sit
like kings of summer
choosing the flower fruits
from the juice stained hammocks
of shirt cloth.
We collected warm beads of juice on our tongues,
and when each flower's treasure
had slipped down our throats
we would stand above our summer town
and bless it with a flap of shirts
sending honeysuckle around the world
on a wind.

That wind has found me now,
has dropped a honeysuckle blossom
through the window of my car.
I had forgotten what they looked like.
The yellow flower lies in my lap,
withered by hot August wind.
I bring the blossom to my mouth,
but the juice is gone
so I eat the dry thing,
searching with my tongue,
chewing to remember
the taste of honeysuckle.

The Constellated Thicket

"And Abraham lifted up his
eyes, and looked, and behold
behind him a ram caught in
a thicket by his horns..."
-Genesis 23:13

The stars began to wink like witnessing eyes
and peeped through the olive trees
to find the ram grazing through the brush.

Sun by sun, God put the Milky Way
into the mind of the ram.

His head shook with burning gyroscopes,
and he foamed at the mouth.
Every shining world turned in the ram
as he charged, hit tree trunks, lunging from one to another,
eyes rolling up to space,
and beheld the intricate brambles
so like the heavens
that he snorted out a deep moan
and charged the constellated thicket.

The spiral horns writhed like galactic arms,
entangled in the dry branches
until Abraham moved with his knife
and set the night sky free.

What the Rock Said

Looking off the roof,
I see a couple walking.
He shoots up
Diane says,
and looking back
as if he heard us
he stumbles,
kicks a rock
that goes
tic tic tac
across the sidewalk
and

ting

meets a lamppost.

Special

I drive a bus downtown.

Tonight there's some black singer
on the radio - a bass as deep
as the sky above the buildings.
I turn him down.

No voice could sing like this little city.
No voice could sing
what I hear now in my glass bus:
nothing
but the breath through my nose,
imagine I can hear the cold electricity
of the bank clock
flashing
a hundred feet high,
giving me the real blues.
How late,
how cold
I am.

Some random voice breaks in
over the two way radio,
says, "The people in the chapel are cold."
That's all, and it repeats,
not even speaking to me:
"The people
in the chapel
are cold."

The radio announcer tells me
that our great radio telescopes
are listening to the stars,
trying to find a station,
but the stars sound like static.

I roll down my window,
and I think I hear the stars
as the cold wind pours into the bus
above the steady backbeat of the bank clock:
33 9:01 32 9:02.
But what I really hear is the light rain
falling, beginning to freeze.

The J.F.G. sign
across the river
blinks:
"special."

Shiva Comes to Maple St.

Sprinklers fan out along Maple street
in the early summer morning
and the neighborhood flutters
as each liquid bead breaks light.

ecstasy of waving plumages spin,
fan the morning,
make wet wind pour down the street,
tear at the stripes of the flag
that adorns a calm brown house,
flap the cloth to rip loose the stars
and spangle a new sky above Maple
where night and smoke of sweetmeats and spice
turn the white skins of these neighbors
to rich brown, exchange the dull streetlamp
for a flaming torch,
hot pavement for cool night earth.
And through all this the sprinklers
shush shush shush.

They have called forth the moon,
and it floats in a clear sky,
waxing fat above Maple street.
It is the empty dish
of a visiting god who left sated
singing
shush shush shush.

A Pear for Carol

Under the pear tree
her right arm rises
and caresses fruit

the shape of the pear,
speckle, russet, round,
curving to her palm

she turns, her hair shakes
she asks, "Is it ripe?"

Already she bends
the slim branch, disturbs
the dark, trembling leaves

the tree must answer
"yes"

The Red Balloon

The oil truck sat alone by the interstate
until someone noticed smudges
on the truck's side
which looked like the face of Christ.

Traffic was jammed for miles
just to see Jesus.
People got out, took pictures,
drew the face,
wrote their names on the truck.
"Rust and seepage,"
said the oil company.
But traffic was jammed
until one angry man came to the truck at night.

He drove up with cold hands.
Two white balloons
full of red paint
quivered in the passenger seat.
His left leg bounced uncontrollably
against the floor board.
When he threw the balloons,
he was far from the truck, and
he grunted softly
with each effort.

One landed squarely on the face
with an obscene, wet
smack.
The other missed,
kept going,
over the truck
and into the dark.

In dreams he finds that balloon,
quivering, fat,
full of something
other than paint.

Secret Tribe

I found a dewy tribe of mushrooms, white
and moonish in the uncut grassy night
of my apartment yard. Such secrets grown
from rain. And for a moment there, alone,
our cool and whitened flesh stood quiet, daft
and round in vegetable prayer. My sadness left
me. In that swaying dream they seemed to part
the grasses and reveal themselves. A pale
one hundred more than I had guessed, standing
around me in the fertile yard: the staring
vegetable faces that breezes rustled through,
the breath of wind which filled my shirt, the dew.

Cello
(from a photograph)

In the picture the fireman holds it high
at the bottom of the ladder,
and the wood catches light:
dark with darker wood winding through
like the smoke in the night air.

He took the cello from a hot window,
made a cradle of his arms
and climbed slowly down the ladder's heated rungs.
The crowd below could not make out what it was:
"An old woman, see how he has wrapped the blanket...
No, it's a baby, see the elbow crook
where the head is resting...
I know, silver...
a little girl...
explosives...
a priceless vase...
It must be a strongbox of jewels."

Gabriel and Muhammad

When Gabriel came to Muhammad,
the prophet had just tried to catch a bird
which had danced and sung
in the desert before him,
interrupting his prayers.

It had feathers like the sea,
tufted blues and greens.
Muhammad wanted to catch it
just to let it go
and see it against the sky.

But as he moved
the bird bloomed into air,
a fountain of sand.
Muhammad watched it go,
and then Gabriel was behind him,
smiling
and said:
"I'm sorry
such a beautiful bird
escaped you."

Tiger at 3:00

At 3 A.M. I look out the window and see a tiger
with orange and black stripes, jaws open,
about to spring.
And though it's really just an orange VW
that through a trick of the streetlight looks like a tiger,
at 3 A.M. it is a tiger!
It does have claws.
Its eyes are black
and look for me.
A long tail curves up into a black, cloudless Sunday morning.

April Snow

White sheets draped against the freeze
over tree and flower
fill the yards with ghosts
that billow and hoot in the wind chill.
When spring returns the air will smell like earth,
and we will throw off the sheets
without respect for the brown blossoms
the warm wind will lift
and let fall.

Night Rhythm

It is night.
I go in and take
one heavy blue chain
in my left hand,
one in my right

Who is coming up the street?
Who is looking out a door?
No one.

So I seat myself,
legs pointing,
erect,
taut,

and for the first time
in fifteen years,

swing,
relearning the rhythm of dipping my back,
of pulling against the chain.
Swing higher
until all I see is night sky
and earth a blur.

And when my arms grow tired
and legs ache in the leather strap
I just jump.

Naming the River

The cool water of the Itchetuchmee had carried me
miles through the hot Florida glades.
I rolled off my inner tube into deep

water and drank a cold mouthful as trees laid
mossy shadows across the river. I flowed
head first on my back, left the tube behind and waved,

my arms thrusting out of the slower
current. As water filled my ears, my breathing
became all sound and fell into rhythm with the rowing

of the branches above. The clouds moved with me,
none falling back, and I stretched my hands
above my head, became slim in the water, released

my clenched fingers and flowed faster
through Florida. What was the river's name?
Could it be Lethe, the coursing water

of forgetfulness? I didn't know and couldn't say
who I would have seen there. Such silence.
Was this not the underworld: the branches swaying,

river sweeter than tap water lapping my cheek, a fragrance?
My outstretched fingers touched something afloat, cool,
and I slowly turned. Beside me in the middle current

was a white waterlily, fat and in bloom.
It spun. The colors burst as it passed into the light.
And what was the river I was floating through?

Lethe? I didn't know. Sweet lily filled my nose as I
looked back up, and the sky was trees and quiet.

2249 Hillsboro

Today I saw the house we lived in
still empty and leaves are covering the uncut grass.
I sat in my car with the old key and didn't go in.
I'd always remembered that lived-in
place of ours, couldn't hear it again
as it was the last night I moved out alone and asked
myself, "Got everything?" and the sound was not lived-in.
It's still empty and leaves are burying the uncut grass.

A Mystical Religion

What could be more mystical
than the bush in the desert
between firm, dull outcroppings of rock,
burning without dissolving,
brightening the face
of Moses?

A spiritual heat his fingers cannot feel,
a spiritual color not seen with the eye,
a spiritual sound of flames
licking
in Moses' ears,
whispering pictures
of a parting sea.

Toasting the Soltice

The sun is a golden note
on the shining brass of a xylophone,
flashing with a beat between the buildings
as I drive round the city.
A wino balances atop the next hill.
The sun is behind him,
and his silhouette tips the bottle
in sidereal toast to the jazzy star.
I see them an instant before I make my turn,
weaving, almost reeling in the heat waves,
two old friends
about to tumble into the evening.

Chestnut Burs

Someone left a chestnut on the stairs
of a building downtown.
I stop and sit there
rubbing the shining shell with my thumb.
How had they tasted in sixty-six,
the last time I ate them
in the cool autumn
of October when I was walking
through my Granny's yard without my shoes?
I shouldn't have been there,
barefoot and alone,
but I had kicked off my shoes, laughing,
imitating Grandad who'd kick leaves,
send his houseshoes flying
and let out a whoop.
I got too close to the chestnut tree
and to the fallen nuts
enclosed in their burs,
and I came down on the dry prickles
with my right foot, and then
down hard with my left.
Now, sitting on this concrete downtown,
I remember my screaming
as the doctor pulled
bur after bur from my swollen feet.
Grandad had died that day
and he'd been angry
at Mom for letting a two-year old
walk among chestnut burs.
I can recall how
Mom had roasted them for me that night
and brought them to my bed,
brought the warm, soft taste.

Now I stand, late for an appointment
and pocket the chestnut.
I'm sore from drinking
and squint at the shriek of a low jet
that bounces off the bricks.
Hard rain begins to fall
and there are no leaves left on the trees
as I run to my car
reaching for my keys,
only to grab the chestnut instead
and, without thought, toss it
into the gutter.
I am well into the slick traffic
before I think of it
again. A driver
behind me lays on the horn. It drones,
then it echoes between the buildings,
a howl in the rain I can't even hear.

Learning to Swim

In the neighborhood pool I hugged my knees,
sank, and became
a tight ball of breath.
Soon I felt the luxury of my hair
waving above me in the water,
and I softened,
let out some air,
sank a bit more
and floated there
between the white surface
and blue bottom.

I opened my eyes
and felt
my heart
beating.

The Gentle Sign

Gregorian chants came from monks
who lit candles at devotional time.
Between prayers, they would gaze
at the candles in trio:
 the Father
 the Holy Ghost
 the Son.

Once, perhaps, while a monk was praying,
a brother monk was humming
in another room.
The praying man
heard the singing man
and awoke from prayer
to see a burning candle.
And so the monk sang with his brother,
a single note, quavering
and then, smooth,
unmoving.

The Coat of Night

"Hell," she said, for we felt the sable thickness
of that summer night like the heavy coat
of some big breathing animal.
"Yeah," I said, and the word rasped from my lungs.
I thought I could see my breath hang and tremble
in the air before us. We sat on the roof
and watched the cars ripple up the street
like shifting borealis curtains of light
as traffic signals winked from yellow to red.
"Look," she said, "at the thunderheads
coming from the north. And, sure, the break
of heat was coming in clouds, in northern wind.
As rainclouds blotted each hot star
and the quarter moon, we collapsed against the roof,
felt the shingles warm against our backs,
and a helicopter flew over low,
rotors thrumming at the thick air.
The traffic lights shimmered down to green
and a breeze swept round the house, lifting the treelimb,
our hair, a flag next door, some laundry on the lines
in the yard, and gently she turned
under the dwindling stars and said, "Wait,
feel this heavy coat of night moving."

Bud's Gift

I put away the things you gave me
when you died.
But a month ago
I took the cold telescope
out of my closet
and began looking through it
in daytime,
in nighttime.
Last week the moon was
a horn.
Tonight
it is a slight smile
aimed at Venus
which is
full.

A Dream Walk

It is time to reaffirm the sober beauty of the stars.

I picked a path of smooth sidewalk
and looked up.
God, you made them so well.
The cold wind roared in my ears
as I walked,
and silent empty trees
passed overhead,
waving their limbs to draw my attention.

Drifting high in the night,
trails of jets were silver in the starlight.
Slowly the frozen silent trails
veiled the stars
like mesh dangling across the face of some sweet bride.

But they shine without sex.

It is time to reaffirm the sober beauty of the stars,
silent only through the distance.
Past the tree limb height
and the drifting crystal exhaust,
they are holding worlds.
At the end of the spanning silence,
they roar.

VITA

Jonathan Jacobs Parker was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee on February 14, 1964. Following a miserable grammar school, junior high, and high school existence, he entered Baylor High School in his junior year and bloomed into a student of the fine arts. Under the influence of Dr. Robert Lanza, an English teacher at Baylor, Jonathan began writing. He graduated from the Baylor School in Chattanooga in May 1982. A month later he entered the University of Tennessee at Knoxville and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in writing in June 1986.

After six months he again entered The University of Tennessee on an associateship for a Master of Arts degree in English in January 1987. He received the Master of Arts degree with a major in English (creative writing) in December 1988.

The author is an accomplished singer/songwriter and is currently employed at Whittle Communications in downtown Knoxville.