

# The Great Book of Bob

by Bob (aka Robert Nichols)



Stories and rants  
and impassioned  
blessings for the soul:  
the wild-eyed,  
bliss-bludgeoned decades  
of an American poet . . . and all in a book about you,  
Dear Reader.  
YOU!

## Read This First... Please

Come with me for a while.

Journey a bit through my days and learn something of who I am.

Whatever age, gender, formal or informal educational level you may bring to these words means nothing to me. I'm speaking to any of you who are willing to dare the allure of my art. These words were written for you, my friend, in hope that as you discover me, you might discover something of the soulful art hovering in the shadows of your own life.

Believe me; in reaction, harmony, empathy and ire, you may learn a great deal about yourself in the process.

I'll begin by telling you about *the edge* and the wind and the January morning of a naked poet.

In those times—twelve, maybe fifteen years ago, I lived in a tipi ten thousand feet up in the Rockies near the Continental Divide. I cherished the richness and challenge of those days, but rarely did I sleep without listening.

In the long months of winter it was usually zero or below when I awakened. I slept on a cot next to the wood stove and at first light would brave briefly the ache of the cold just enough to reach the cast iron door and toss in kindling and a log. Then, retreating back to the womb of my old polar-guard sleeping bag, I would wait. Sometimes an ember would take, the kindling would give a heartening crack and the stove would rumble with the rush of hot air. Sometimes nothing but silent cold would break my day.

No matter. I loved it.

Often, I dreamt of warmth. Yes, I dreamt of warmth and listened for the step of large animals passing and to the high-tree roar of sweeping winds. And, in stillness, I sensed the tactile void of sable silence. I awoke most mornings knowing poems to say, prayers to feel, life to live.

It was the dawn of a January morning maybe three or four years into the five-year epoch of the tipi when... WHUMP!

With the startling sound, I awoke but didn't dare move. You see, to move would be to rustle the fabric. No. Starkly alert, I listened. I didn't breathe or move. I listened.

WHUMP!

What could it be? Some insomniac bear crabbily craving a mid-hibernation snack? A winter-starved cougar hungrily contemplating the scent of a seldom-bathed mountain man just beyond the rip of old canvas?

No. Bears don't whump, they crunch; and mountain lions don't even touch the earth as they stealthily glide the wilds.

But people slam car doors with a *whump*.

Now, that was scary.

Six miles up a dirt road, iced and blown over. A quarter of a mile up the hillside nestled in an aspen grove and right outside the flimsy flap of my cloth-cone home there was a terrible *whump!* What could it be?

I listened... in absolute silence, I strained to hear... I waited and listened and... aw, to hell with it! In a violent flutter of nylon and swish of wool blanket, I erupted and in sprawling dash, crammed feet into boots, grabbed 12 gauge shotgun, chambered a shell and roared past portal and into the steel-still suspension of frigid dawn.

Nothing.

Nothing lurked or stirred or scattered. Just the quiet and the cold and the falling slope; the rising forest across the way; the ice-spilled meadow below aglow in the pink-sky blush of rising day. Then, from high in the spruce tree, my friend and spirit guide, Raven, with mocking caw flew from snow-filled bough and away and *whump* went the dislodged snow as it hit.

With wonderful laugh I shouted, "Crow! Crow! You son of a bitch."

And Crow, which is Raven's real name, just circled and laughed and there I was.

You'd have to see it—or maybe not. Big winter boots agape, unlaced; stocking cap askew atop grizzled gray head of mat and whisker; black shotgun foolishly a-dangle from right hand; and all the rest, all the fleshy acreage from neck to knee bone, from nape to ankle, from ass to elbow—just as pink and naked as birth itself. Yes, my dear reader, yours truly, mountain lad and banjo boy, art-

man and singer of prayer, was a buff sleeper.

It was during a short-lived, soon-abandoned experiment in the efficient use of body heat. 'Birthday jammies' proved warmer in the sleeping bag but made it dreadfully difficult to get up in the morning.

Hey, I never said any of this was going to be pretty. You see, there is no one so naked as a fool—even a laughing fool who relishes the dawn. So, there I was all flesh and shiver and, by call of departing Crow, proud to be the designated fool of a wild winter's morning.

And then came the chilling drift of wind that told my mortal being. With ice caress, the wind touched my naked flesh and perhaps for the first time in all the decades of my life I knew the exact perimeter of a bub named Bob. With freezing burn and goose-bump chill, more so than the revelation of any full-length mirror, I knew the edges of my body. I knew my vulnerable shape by the pain and blessing of the cold. Slowly turning all faces to the scrutiny, the aching clarity of bitter-cold air, sensing breath frosting in moustache, near giddy in the thrill of it all, I knew *the edge*.

This is *the edge* about which I speak. It's a place I will take you often—figuratively, of course (don't worry; we'll all stay fully clothed).

And yes, at times there will be a coarseness to my truth, like a harsh wind's touch upon flesh, intended to tell the edges of your being. Don't take it as insult to your identity; take it as definition of your dimension. Take this journey with me and by encounter with ideas, emotions, blathering philosophy and poetic hilarity; perhaps you will discover crucial aspects of your own *Edge*.

Somewhere in the turn of these pages, this telling of the great though deeply ordinary love story that is my life, I ardently hope that you, dear reader, realize you are a significant participant in that love story.

Without you there is no poet, no poem, no place for a story to be told.

I just hope that as you read you can sense what you cannot see—the smile in my heart as I speak to you.

Here's the way it is, my friend:

*If I offend you; I have failed.*

*If I jar your psyche a bit;*

*I have begun to communicate.*

*If my words prove to be a gift to your spirit,*

*an encouragement to your life,*

*a respite from the tedium of your days;*

*I have succeeded.*



*"This is a book about me. So What?"*

*It is the art of the day, not the art of a lifetime about which I marvel. The distant destination is a secondary excuse for traveling the mile. The joy is in each turn of the road. This is why we take the journey: the side trips, the rich digressions from staunch purpose, the spontaneity of an un-plotted yet determined course.*

### **What It's About**

This is a book about me. So what?

It's also a book about you. Now do I have your attention?

Okay, the 'you' part is pretty much up to you to come up with. What I've done here is dignify certain descriptors of my individuality as being worthy of ink and, hence, I have justified the ego of each of us. Shameless in our conceit? Perhaps. But, the fact is, all any of us has that separates us from the swarm is our own story, our own perceptions, our own life-earned identity.

However, this work is not entitled *The Great Book of Everyman (Person)*. It is named for one of the alter egos I claim: *Bob*. I am not the least bit normal, nor do I aspire to be so. Sometimes it seems I am a strange, perhaps even alien life-form dwelling among a population of Muzak-sedated dull people. Sometimes it seems I'm but a clueless fool mumbling along behind the rest of the rabble who blithely sing all the words and have the whole matter of existence figured out.

Perhaps you know what I mean.

But, in any case, I am nothing like you.

It's not that I'm claiming to be more interesting than you or your circle of buds. Well... this is a possibility. The fact that so many of you consider George W. Bush witty and ice hockey emotionally fulfilling, I have to wonder if you've lived at all. I'm not a boastful sort, but I have done some traveling off the main roads, some reading off the bestseller list, some laughing off the laugh track. Yeah, I just might be more interesting than you—at least as of today.

And if you don't believe me then prove it. Write your own book— and, by the Muses, it better be a good book filled with the profundity of gut-splitting humor, tear-wrenching sorrow, and tales that tell a rich journey from womb to now. If you don't have such a book to write or song to sing or picture to paint or tale to tell your world, your children, yourself; then just what the hell have you been doing with all these years?

But wait. Don't despair. As I wrote in my novel, *God of the Poets*, life is a series of phases through which we pass. Unless you are within moments of the Big Transition, or chronically rigid, or an Enlightened One just hanging around the Earthly plane for compassionate laughs, there is always the next stage of your life that will be starting any day now.

It's not too late. Take this quick quiz and we'll determine the status of your personal evolution as of today.

*Elan-a-gram: A Test of Joie d' Vivre When was the last time you:*

1. *Goosed anybody?*
2. *Wept with the aching beauty of a sunset sky?*
3. *Laughed so hard you didn't worry about snorting?*
4. *Touched the shoulder of someone who was lost?*
5. *Gargled a great song?*
6. *Relished an afternoon of love?*
7. *Quit a job?*
8. *Woke up in the morning excited to be alive?*

If you answered most of these items with, "Jeez, Mr. Bob. I don't remember." then you'd better call the Mayo Brothers and have them check you out for vital signs, you might be dead.

See what I mean. I really like people and think, rather than the mythic epics of kings, conquerors, holy zealots and other murderers, our every-day stories are what should pack the cornerstone of humanity's purpose. I believe in the marvel of human potential at the core of each of us. It saddens, enrages, irks the holy hives out of me when that potential is wasted in the creation of a mean, a common denominator of media-benumbed banality.

So I'll take a few pages and tell my story. If your story is worth telling then you need to do so. If it isn't worth telling, then it's time to make some changes. Wake up! You're a human being and if you fit the bimbo demographic so crassly targeted by the advertising industry (i.e. if you are a 24-year-old male you are consumed by a scream-and-drum driven primal urge to hop in a \$40,000 car and make it skid; if you are a 55-year-old male when you are not gripped by indigestion, constipation or stiff joints, you are fixated on dashing around the house swinging your chemically-induced, all-day boner; and if you are a woman of any age, when not chronically depressed, all you care about is being skinny and serving your kids the best brand of frozen French fries—"To hell with you, Mom, I'm gunna eat at the Bizbee's tonight. They're havin' Stove Top Stuffin'!"), then the Gods ought to sweep down with their magic wands and turn you into koala bears so you can spend your lives sucking the drugs out of eucalyptus leaves and sleeping away the precious gift of sentient time.

I am nothing like you. I'm not a school teacher or a truck driver or a Maytag Man—though, proudly, I have been a school teacher, a truck driver, and a Maytag Man. What I really am at the heart of it all is a poet. You know—*roses are red violets are blue, I've got a cuter tushy than you.* A poet. I am a man of Art and words.

And, if you give a rat's hiney about life or the Earth or the people who love you, respect you, rely upon you for their sense of worth, then you'll figure out the riddle of your times and realize you are an artist, too. You'll let Art flow and—beyond the paintings, songs, poems, crafts, vocations of your chosen mode of expression (it's all art—even flipping burgers or digging sewer trenches—when you put your heart into it), you'll become the promise of your species. You'll become an actualized human being.

And, just like me, you'll be nothing like anyone else. Bless us all, we are sacred in the gifts of mind and soul that make us unique.

NOTE: On public radio, I heard Terri Gross doing an interview with a lady who is a writer for NBC's *Saturday Night Live*. Commenting on the skits she creates for this show which for decades has been the epitome of media cynicism, hubris, and bad taste, she said she writes to "... harangue Americans for their ignorance..."

Such condescension. Man, does that pull my rare hairs out by the roots. I might berate you, bludgeon you with playful assaults of sarcasm and mock scorn, but I do so as a caring friend—you know, an equal—not some down-the-nose, New York know-it-all font of arrogance.

(I find it interesting that for generations now, media has been the aristocracy's most effective tool in dimming the blessings of mind and awareness in our civilization by battering our unblinking attention with a plethora of mediocrity currently culminating in such stellar gems of entertainment and enlightenment as *Jerry Springer* and 13 weeks' worth of *Who's Gonna Marry Homely Ted?: a reality series about a dull-witted, overweight, butt-ugly couch potato guy and a mansion filled with lusty young gold-digger wenches.* And then, when they aren't parading 'America's Funniest Fools'

across the tube, they are wickedly patting one another's backsides and high-fiving over the marvel of their masterful parodies of 'the ignorant.' And 'why?' you might ask, do the Big Guys who run the world have a vested interest in dumbing down the masses? Easy. Wielders of wealth and might are terrified by free-thinking, loose-cannon citizens—you know who you are, you've got original thoughts, creative ideas, a memory... a real threat to those who profit from mass gimmickry and blind allegiance to whatever greed-driven path they prescribe—and prefer armies of worker ants to do their dirty toil for them.)

On some level, art must respect its audience—otherwise it is but self-righteous mockery.

The jokesters at *Saturday Night Live* think we're a bunch of stupid people and get their jollies out of making fun of us. Be careful, while you're gathered about the TV on a Saturday night with your fellow spuds and spudesses and you think the buffoons and airheads they satirize are the lowly other folks. Think again, Dude. Like wow, Girl. The awesome truth of the whole matter is they're talking about you.

So, as I head toward the fringes of geezer-dom, having for the most part avoided the smugness of youth and the apathy of middle age, let me not falter in my optimism and joy and become a bitter old man—with neither love nor respect for his world.

I'll do my part; how about you?