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Coming to Terms & Goodbye

(An atheist faces his own death)

Michael Lee Johnson

Poet

Chicagoland area, IL, USA

Wait until I have to say goodbye,
don't rush; I'm a philosophical professor
facing my own death on my own time.
It takes longer to rise to kick the blankets back.
I take my pills with water and slowly lift
myself out of bed to the edge of my walker.
Living to age 97 is an experience I share
with my caretaker and so hard to accept.
It's hard for youngsters who have not experienced
old age to know the psychology of pain
that you can't put your socks on or pull
your own pants up without help anymore—
thank God for suspenders.
“At a certain point, there's no reason
to be concerned about death, when you die,
no problem, there's nothing.”
But why in my loneliness, teeth stuck
in with denture glue, my daily pillbox complete,
and my wife, Leslie Josephine, gone for years,
why does it haunt me?



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I can't orchestrate, play Ph.D. anymore,
my song lyrics is running out, my personality
framed in a gentler state of mind.
I still think it necessary to figure out
the patterns of death; I just don't know why.
"There must be something missing
from this argument; I wish I knew.
Don't push me, please wait; soon
is enough to say goodbye.
My theater life, now shared, my last play,
coming to this final curtain, I give you
grace, "the king of swing," the voice of
Benny Goodman is silent now,
an act of humanity passes, no applause.

*Dedicated to the memory of Herbert Fingarette, November 2, 2018 (aged 97). Berkeley, California, U.S.A. Video credit and photo credits: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qX6NztnPU-4>.



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