

ON MY WAY TO BECOMING A MAN

A. D. Winans

NY
Q Books™

The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.
New York, New York

NYQ Books™ is an imprint of The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.

The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.
P. O. Box 2015
Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10113

www.nyq.org

Copyright © 2014 by A. D. Winans

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

First Edition

Set in New Baskerville

Layout by Joseph Hamersly
Cover Design by Raymond P. Hammond

Cover art: "The Grand Review"; 48" X 96"; oil on canvas; 1990-1991
by Frank Wright; used with kind permission of the artist

Digital cover image graciously provided by Mark Gulezian

Author photo by Alexsey Dayen

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014934950

ISBN: 978-1-935520-25-2

Contents

ON MY WAY TO BECOMING A MAN	/ 11
LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE	/ 13
LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE TWO	/ 14
LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE THREE	/ 16
LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE FOUR	/ 18
PANAMA I	/ 19
PANAMA II	/ 20
PANAMA III	/ 21
PANAMA IV	/ 22
RETURNING HOME FROM PAMAMA	/ 23
AMERICA	/ 24
GROWING UP IN AMERICA	/ 28
THE SYSTEM	/ 30
THE BALLAD OF GENERAL YAMASHITA	/ 32
VIETNAM ERA POEM	/ 34
POLITICS	/ 35
POEM FOR RONALD REAGAN	/ 36
REAGANITES	/ 38
DIAL 890 REMEMBERING THE GOOD OLD SIXTIES	/ 41
FOR CHARLES OLCOTT	/ 43
LIES	/ 45
DURING THE DEBATE BETWEEN CLINTON AND DOLE	/ 47
THEY'RE AT IT AGAIN	/ 49
CHINATOWN SWEAT SHOP	/ 51
FACTORY WORKER	/ 52
LOSS OF INNOCENCE	/ 53
ON THE BOMBING OF YUGOSLAVIA	/ 54
I WILL NOT PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE	/ 55
WE THE PEOPLE	/ 56

BILL	/57
OLD JOE	/58
FOLSOM PRISON	/59
SAN QUENTIN PRISON	/60
UNTITLED	/61
POEM FOR HIS HOLINESS	/62
SITTING BULL	/63
POEM FOR THE GOVERNOR OF ARIZONA	/64
222 EDDY STREET	/65
4 A.M. INSOMNIA POEM	/66
SAN FRANCISCO BLUES	/68
LOOKING FOR AN ANSWER	/70
ON WHY I WRITE POLITICAL POEMS	/73
POEM FOR ALLEN GINSBERG	/75
HOSPITAL POEM	/77
THE OLD POETS	/80
THE SHOW MUST GO ON	/82
POEM FOR A POET FRIEND	/92
DANCING WITH WORDS	/96
FOURTH OF JULY POEM	/98
POEM FOR ROBERTO VARGAS AND THE NICARAGUAN FREEDOM FIGHTERS	/101
I AM SAN FRANCISCO	/104

ON MY WAY TO BECOMING A MAN

on my way to Lackland Air Force Base
the train stopped to take on passengers
giving me the chance to get off
stretch my legs and relieve myself

on returning from the men's room
an elderly black man approached me
wanting to know where the bathroom was
and when I pointed in the direction
of where I had just come from
he nervously shuffled his feet
and said: "No, the colored room"
and being naive and from the North
I had no idea what he was talking about
when suddenly a woman came running
out from behind a concession stand
her face red with anger
yelling for the old man
to leave me alone
as I tried in vain to calm her down
telling her it was all right
he was only looking for the men's room

"that boy knows where
the colored room is"
she said, shooing the old man away
as I boarded the train
turning to see him bent over
"a colored only" water fountain
as the train picked up steam
sparks flying from the tracks
taking me on my way
to becoming a man
where I would have my serial number

PANAMA I

in Panama City
the day they killed
the President
a group of us were given rifles
and a loaded clip
and told to assist
the Panama National Guard
in whatever manner we could
like rousting civilians
who might be possible assassins

we split off from
the rest of them
six of us
four half-drunk
and one stoned on grass
and dumb ass me wanting
to be anywhere but there
when we came across this woman
working in the fields

and what started off as questioning
turned out to be a strip search
eager hands violating
every part of her body
and when I protested
I was told to shut up
or get with it

they laughed
they were only looking
for concealed weapons
wrestling her to the ground
as I walked away in shame
not wanting to be part of what
I had no chance of stopping

PAMAMA II

1955
the President of Panama
gunned down at the racetrack
for having the courage
to build schools and roads
for thinking of the people

elite unit troops issued guns
and sent to town
to roust civilians
in the street
and keep order

two hours into forced insanity
I sneak off to the Amigo Bar
to smoke a joint in silence
trying to shut out the madness
until I'm oblivious
to what is happening outside
half the men looking
for an assassin
the other half too stoned to care

the sweet smell of Mary Jane
floats through the air
filling the bar
as I put on the safety
and lay my rifle to one side
smiling at the bar girl
on the other side of the bar
not knowing whether
she would like
to make love to me
or put a bullet
in my head

LOSS OF INNOCENCE

I lost whatever innocence
I had back in '68
Robert Kennedy murdered
Mai Lai a month later
the Chicago 7
storm troopers wielding clubs
like cavemen of old
Richard Nixon signaling
the beginning of the end
those eyes
those wide eyes digging
holes in my heart
napalm fire kissing that
child's innocent body
black smoke hugging her skin
as television pundits played
their spin
this war that we could never
win