

**Poems
of
Sarasota
and
Florida**

Justin Spring

A SOULSPEAK/KINDLE E-BOOK

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Introduction: Poems of Florida and Sarasota

This collection was originally published in quantity one as a singular gift to a decidedly singular Debra Jacobs upon her departure from the Selby Foundation in 2008. After some thought, however, I decided to also publish a version of it as a *Sarasota Poetry Theatre Press* Chapbook because the poems reflected the unique colors of my home town, Sarasota, as well as Florida itself. You might call it a collection of poetic postcards.

Unfortunately, for cost reasons, the book had to be printed in black and white and not the full color of the original, so I was not able to include the gorgeous paintings and photographs created by my partner Scylla Liscombe, which were an integral part of the original. I should also mention that I have added a few poems that should have been included in the original collection but for some reason never made it to the press on time.

Finally, I thought it only fitting that I quote part of the original introduction, which was addressed to Debra:

“[This book] is our way of thanking you for seeing beyond the surface of things. It is a rare gift. Because of your constant and remarkable insight into the nature of our efforts, we have been able to establish SOULSPEAK/SOULMOVES as a unique non-profit whose programs continue to allow the ordinary citizens of

Sarasota to creatively express themselves in extraordinary ways. I don't believe we could have achieved this without your support and belief that true, meaningful art can enrich the lives of people on the most profound and intimate of levels. Good luck on your next journey and for helping us on ours.... Justin Spring and Scylla Liscombe."

Justin Spring

About the Author

Justin Spring was educated at Columbia College. He is a prize-winning poet, writer, and video maker. He and poet/dancer/artist Scylla Liscombe are the founders of *SOULSPEAK/SOULMOVES*, a unique organization dedicated to bringing poetry, dance and art back into the everyday lives of everyday people.

Mr. Spring's written poetry has been published in such distinguished periodicals as *American Poetry Review* as well as in numerous quarterlies and anthologies. He is one of a handful of poets who work not only in the written mode of composition but also in the ancient mode of spontaneous oral composition. He is the author of seven collections of written poetry and seven recorded collections (CDs) of oral poetry.

Mr. Spring is also the author of two non-poetry books, *SOULSPEAK: The Outward Journey of the Soul* and *Alice Hickey: Between Worlds*. Both books are in-depth journeys into the nature of oral poetry as well as the nature of pre-literate poetry and the cultures that gave birth to it.

Mr. Spring is an eclectic video maker. His videos range from travel diaries to documentaries on the therapeutic use of oral and written poetry to groundbreaking art videos that combine oral, written and musical poetry in a new, fluid form he calls *Dreamstories*. At the current time,

over 150 *Dreamstories* can be seen on VIDEO SOULSPEAK. In addition to the free web video station, VIDEO SOULSPEAK, Mr. Spring has also created a free web radio station, called RADIO SOULSPEAK, which has a highly eclectic format. Both stations run 365/24 and offer cutting edge selections of what is happening today in music, spoken/sung poetry, and video art.

He is also the creator of over twenty (20) Broadcast quality DVDs which are available to educational and public access stations free of charge. Six of the DVDs are documentaries on the therapeutic use of written and oral poetry with the remainder being collections of his award-winning *Dreamstories*.

Mr. Spring has been married twice to good women but never quite figured out how to make it work. In addition, he has three highly successful children who sometimes pay attention to his poetry. He currently divides his time between Florida and Mexico. All, or portions, of his Books, CDs, DVDs, Videos and Visual Art are available for free downloading at WWW.SOULSPEAK.ORG.

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RETURNING TO PORT: MANATEE RIVER

It's only morning, yet so hot
the incandescence hurts your eyes.
You drift in toward the vaporous wharf.
You hear yourself: *A bar. Somewhere dark, quiet.*
The dog-still town outside turns white:
you're somewhere in the back of town,
outside the white-framed boarding house.
You hear a voice: *Upstairs, Above.* You scan the building's
white-washed sides. The clapboard planks
have dove-tailed ends. You rise up as by
light, or air, see them in their separate rooms,
sitting there, waiting for you. Your mother.
Your father. The lover that you never knew.
They seem so still. So self-absorbed.
They seem so unaware of you.

**MIDNIGHT SWIM,
LONGBOAT KEY HILTON**

I'm trying not to look at the young couple
kissing in the shallow water across from me.
They're trying not to look at me either,
but more out of a kind of embarrassment
for the way I've stumbled into their lives,
but I can't
stop looking at the girl, her breasts made beautiful
by the moon and the restless, white reflections
of the water, and then I see her face, how open
it is, how happy she is to be here, to be away
from the kids, or maybe they're not even married, but
there's that tenderness, and though
I didn't care for him at first,
what with the long, blonde curls
and the muscles and the Gold's Gym swim suit,
there's a certain innocence about him too,
about the happy, almost embarrassed way
he keeps looking up at her,
because
he is already remembering that other place,
that place that is theirs alone,

continued,

MIDNIGHT SWIM, LONGBOAT KEY HILTON, cont.

that he is hungering for like salt,
that will open up inside him
like a stain
when he swims out to find her
on the darkness of the waters, and she
comes floating up to meet him
through the surface of her body.

**THE UNFINISHED SUSPENSION BRIDGE:
TAMPA BAY, MORNING FOG**

The bay is so white. Peaceable. Everything is
lost in light. Even the normally boisterous
steel-workers are perched on cables,
walk-ways, hoops,

like angels,
gazing at the flowering light,
thinking what they'll tell their wives,
later, over beers. When the juke-box slows:
Eternity. I saw it. Really.

Even
the homosexual construction boss
far below them on the caisson dock
is lost in thought. Occasionally, out of habit,
or maybe the hell of it, he'll look up at the hazy bridge
as though he could see it. He knows the boys
are goofing off. He doesn't care.
He loves the fog, the way the light
disguises things:

continued,

THE UNFINISHED SUSPENSION BRIDGE, cont.

He's five or six,
standing in a neighbor's yard.
Yellow boots, yellow coat.
He loves it here: no school, no rules.
The morning is so soft and white
he can barely see the house he left.
For the first time in his life
he is happy.
He smiles,
seeing himself again. A yellow finch.
Strutting about. Aglow inside.

MORNING WALK

I keep finding myself wandering through
these old St. Pete apartment sprawls.
Everything is parched, quiet. No paper boy,
no kids. No hippies underneath their cars.

From the back, the rooms look uninhabited.
Like drained aquariums. I keep thinking:
No one must be up inside,
then, Everyone is dying here.
I can't stop looking at their lives.

Somebody's up: that elderly couple
over there, flickering off and on
in front of the television.
Their faces are so expressionless
they could be talking about anything:
that yellow bowl upon the shelf, a noisy dog,
their daughter's call.

Whatever it is,
their minds are fixed on something else,
something in the light outside
seeping through the sand-cracked walls,
bleeding through the half-closed blinds
like a dark, unshareable secret.

SARASOTA FASHION REPORT

Fashions change daily now. We like it that way.
They are printed nightly, like newspapers.
It's not unusual to see the dead
unfashionably dressed, unable
to get to the mall, embarrassing the family.

Every once in a while,
a hollow ball of light explodes
over Alachua or Clearwater.
Those who have been there
say people are just standing around,
looking vaguely annoyed,
like loan officers.

The chameleons
have begun climbing the walls
by the hundreds. They love the pink sky,
have adjusted to it, matching its color.
From a distance, they look like fingers,
or tubers, twitching, pushing their way upward.

A soft, isotopic rain
has begun to fall on the whitewashed building
where writings are kept. Sometimes
you'll see us there, down on all fours,
humming and swaying, blurting out phrases.

STORIES

I'm shopping at *Publix*, checking
the prices. Why not bananas,
I'm asking myself, nice little
fat ones, 39 cents. But that
never happens: somehow or other
I manage to lose it: Wise up,
I'm shouting, these are BANANAS,
they're 39 cents not 44,
next to the grocer who asks
what's the matter.
Back off, I tell him,
Don't be so pushy,
to which he barks, Shove it.
A scuffle ensues
in which I get throttled.

Oh,
one thing more: the checkerboard
floor. The blonde by the apples.

TAMPA SUNDOME

I'm watching MTV, reading this little strip
running across the bottom saying
MC HAMMER SUNDOME MC HAMMER
but before it can come around again
I'm hustling through the door of the *Sundome*
into the throbbing sound
of four young black singers
slowly exploding out of their bodies,
“Troop,” the thin black girl next to me says
by way of explanation, and I'm remembering
the concerts I went to as a kid, how dazzling
the black groups were, how I'd never seen
anything like them, the voices, and those spare,
beautiful moves that made my vertebrae float,
how I wanted to reach out, become them,
like the kids here are doing,
but this is different, this is
black on black, the kind of communion
that makes everything stop, swell
to one breath like it's doing now,
and then *Troop* is suddenly gone
and the house lights come on and then
they go off again and there's this
beautiful roar, “*After Seven*,”

continued,

TAMPA SUNDOME, *cont.*

the same black girl says to me,
as if she were naming
another bend in the river,
a river she knows like no other,
because this is the beautiful river,
this is one you steal for,
get beaten for, called Nigger for,
this is the one you die for.

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