

## On watching the death of your father

It took him four hours  
From the time I got there  
Or almost 91 years  
From the time he got here  
Or about five years  
From the time he got to the home  
Or about six years and eight months  
From the time Mom died

And while I waited those four hours  
Or five years, or six years and eight months  
Or God, however long  
I counted his breaths  
And waited for them to stop  
And then start again  
And watched his chest heave  
And his diaphragm struggle  
And his color change  
And his body cool  
And then go cold

And the relatives came and went  
And the nurses came,  
Touching and loving  
And the madness swirled around  
And the call bells rang incessantly  
And some other patients screamed  
And the med carts came and went  
And the lunch wagons  
And the laundry wagons  
Roamed the halls  
Like giants, gone amuk

And in all of this  
My father  
Slipped slowly  
And silently  
Away

Finally drugged by the natural high of dehydration  
The gentle comfort  
Of some Morphine  
And just a few days  
Of non responsiveness

He struggled as he died  
As he struggled  
While he lived

He was a hard man  
Made harder  
By the hardness  
Of his own father  
And the struggles  
Of understanding  
Of a life from farm  
To city  
And the change in values  
From the solidity of certainty  
To the open frailties  
Of life

But he stood his ground  
As often as he could  
And he argued  
And he fought  
And he never said I love you  
Just  
How's your car running  
And he did the best he could

And when he died  
I didn't say I love you either  
I just turned  
And walked away

RGT, 5 August 2001