

SONGS
by
Charley John Greasybear



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Introduction

The main occupation of the modern American is shuffling papers. We shuffle bills, bank transcripts, wills, ownership papers, credit cards, checks, and every kind of form imaginable. All the events of our lives are enacted, transacted, and verified by paper. Consequently, we consider our lives complicated, civilized, and sophisticated.

Next to this, the Indian concept of life seems simplistic, even primitive. But if we look at it closely, we see a very different structure than we are used to. To the American Indian, as well as to people of other cultures, such as East Indian and Zen, nothing but a poem can actually take place on paper. And then the paper is only the vehicle, not the life. The Indian approach to life is simplistic in that every event, person, tree, rock, season, human action, and thought is an entity unto itself. Every thing perceived by any of the senses is alive, and is treated with the same respect as a human body. This requires that the set of symbols used to live by be different and far more extensive than our own system of numerical digits and legal jargon. Which is to say, quite simply, that the Indian language of life is undoubtedly more complicated, more sophisticated than our own.

The nature of oral poetry, as we know it, has traditionally been viewed as verbal structuring. What sets this collection apart is its deep roots in myth and the universal symbols of life. For the sake of historical significance, I will mention the circumstances of the origins of this book, but they are only secondarily important. Charlie John Greasybear was Judson Crews' therapy client, a part-Navajo Indian immersed in the omens and life style that the American culture, for the major part, has chosen to define as primitive. Some of the poems speak clearly of his bonds to his native community, bonds which most of us will never have the good fortune to experience. Some of them cry of his violent and confused efforts to blend in with a homogenized America. But that is the point: Charlie John sings openly of his view of wonderful and terrifying multiple worlds.

This is where Judson Crews comes in. He is an established poet with a complete symbology of his own. But it is only his years of work on paper that give us the trust in his knowledge of the translation of these symbols. In this collection of poems, Charlie John Greasybear orates in a language of awareness both different and more extensively interwoven than our own. And Judson records and renders it with precision.

When we understand this view, and can incorporate it into our lives, we may at last call ourselves Indians at least in spirit. Or, as I prefer, citizens of the world. What we call ourselves is of no significance. But the act of naming is all important.

Here, translated to paper, are two citizens of the world, Mr. Judson Crews and Mr. Charlie John Greasybear. Here are the songs of the stars and the mountains, of the seasons and passions of the heart and soul, of the symbols of humanity and destiny, and of the strength of the ever-growing community of citizens of the world. And Charlie John and Judson sing well, with voices like the peal of birds in silent air, swift and communicative. And like the rivers, the trees, the cities and streets, and the man who walks upright among them all, we hear and listen. And when we hear, we mark their passing in our lives with a new symbol in our own language for an old truth.

J. Whitebird
Houston
January, 1979

SONGS

Woman Song

The bosom of my Grandmother
was soft, was soft
though its milk
was gone, was gone

She nursed me there
but did not suckle me
I never saw
her bosom's brown warm skin

Your bosom is soft, soft
and there is
no milk there yet
no milk there yet

You would feel shame
if I looked
on its brown softness
on its brown softness

But the stars
are faraway lights

Open your blouse

Only my cheek
will know the soft
warmness of your skin
the soft warmness
of your skin

Ghost Song

That music that is not dead
always in my ears

Where does it
come from
where does it come from

Do you hear it
I ask Feathered Owl

I have always heard it
he answered
I heard it in the South Pacific
when I was there
and I hear it now

We hear it everywhere
we hear it everywhere
but once our people
danced
when they heard it
and believed a vision

We hear it still
yet I am not dancing now
and Feathered Owl
has one arm
and no legs

Jesus Song

I heard the tom-tom
around the mountain
in the clear air

I kept on going
through the dark night
through sand and thistles
to where it was

It was in a tent
like a carnival
some white dude was shouting
Jesus
and my people
were praying

And the tom-tom
beat on
dun-dun dun-dun dun-dun

I shouted dumbly
in my heart
my people. my people

And I turned back
to the mountain
fighting through the deep sand
and the spiked thistles

Love Song

I slept by the river
and it sang to me
it sang to me softly

In the night I was
wide awake suddenly
and I knew it was your song
singing to me
softly singing to me

But you are far away
and you did not
sing of your love of me

When I watched you
bathing at the waterfall
bathing quietly there

You pretended
you did not
know that I was there

Is it true
you did not know
that I was there
though a hawk circled twice
above the place
where I was

Stone Song

The sun is a stone
the mountain is a stone

My heart is a stone

It is burning
and it is standing

It is moving
and it is not displaced

Its fire is greater
the longer the fire
is burning

The mountain has not
moved
in the sun's rising
nor in its setting

Song of Water Crashing

I was with my mother and I
was very young, and near
my mother a stream of water
rose up from the sand
with some sand in it

But the sand fell back
and the water moved away clear
and sparkling, and I followed where
the sparkling water was going

But my mother called after me
saying it went far and far
to the far ocean

What is the far ocean, I asked
and my mother said
the far ocean is where all the water
is greater than all the land
and the water crashes upon the land

I ran to mother and grabbed
her skirts to bury my ears
against all the loud crashing

Seed Song

Some soldier got a sour peach
and he gave it to
the Captain's horse

Which he ate whole
and the pit hung in
his ass
and he died

But a tree grew up there
when they had left—
a gnarled tree
with sour peaches

This is another strange way
that the earth
always
renews the earth

Travel Song

Go go
I left last night

I am half way now
to the other side
of the first mountain

Now I am walking
from one side to the other side
all the way around
a dry chamisa bush

I made water twice
without going on

My feet do not seem
to understand
where it is
I want very bad to

Go go go

Wedding Song

Touch
touch lightly
touch-touch lightly

Soon my hands
will touch her
bosoms lightly
lightly

My body lightly
ride her
rolling thighs

Lightly
ride her

Her dark mane
ripping
upon my cheek

Song of Denial

My cock is hard in my hand
but I hate
its aching hardness

It is my heart aching
it is my heart aching
it is my heart aching

I want it to be
my heart aching

My heart aching
for my beautiful
and my
forsaken people

Saturday Song

An old woman
squats by Foodway
beneath her broad skirts

She rises staunchly
and moves on

A grateful dog
quickly
devours the warm dung

Thus the earth
still
renews the earth

Hoop Song

Jumping through it
leg and all
ass and all

It was magic then
and all together

It is broken now
and scattered

It is suicide now

Though it was magic then
it was all over
agile as a deer

Even in brambles
over deep ravines

Song of Pima Mesa

As I slept
Pima Mesa
was covered
with fog

I awoke with
oblivion
all around me

I awoke with
a sobbing
in my throat

I awoke wondering
if anyone knows
where I am

Swan Song

I see this great dark
heavy bird
strangely powerful

It is not a season
to be sighting geese

Its wings slow
and heavy
strangely powerful

Its crook neck
heavy as snow somehow
smothering

Smothering

This spot of light somehow
in my eye only
it seems

And going out

Song of Shedding

The fish scale
that has failed
and the serpent glide

Red wine dribbling down
my shirt sleeve
the button torn and
the cuff hanging

My hand implores
the night sky

The lightning is flaking
his scales
the skin is inside out

I am born new
tender in the new sun

Talk Song

Cowarding under the ignorance
of my own tongue
knowing only the tongue
of forked tongue

How will I speak
how will my voice
be known as my voice

I will begin
with a bold act

I will have a voice
when the voiceless begin
to speak
all with the same voice

The bold act
is the voice
none will not hear

Song of Ending

Theresa with a bouquet
there in the old church
shattered with a rifle shot

Her wires are sticking out
and shards of chalk
are scattered
on the embroidered scarf

She was gentle enough

I was baptised there
to a love that will not die
to a death
that will live forever

Serpent Song

His tongue has no speech
and the wind covers
his track in the sand

The jewels of his skin
are bright as sunlight
on laughing water

His magic leap
is swift as sound
certain as silence

He is not eradicated
in landscapes of yucca
tumbleweeds and stone

A Devil Kachina Song

He is fierce
and brave in his beauty
striped
and bare-assed
and naked

He is fierce
in the blaze of his beauty
his cods aglow with the fire
his staff standing
outright
in front of him

It is afire with
the thrust
of his beauty

Bear Song

A hunter
from the North
told me this
story

My grandfather's name
was
Willie Grey Leanbear

He never saw a bear
until twenty-three
winters
a soldier in the Army
at the San Diego Zoo

A great white bear
knowing no hunger
and no cold
his coat bright
and glistening
with his own grease

He is no Leanbear
my grandfather
said

My grandson's name
will be
Greasybear

His coat will glisten
knowing no cold
and no hunger

Song of Bleeding

They said
I was scared
like
girls are scared

Scared girls
do not
have balls

They said
what do I need
with any balls

They cut off
my balls
and fucked me
from behind

I was bleeding
like weeping
for many
many days

Death Song

Must we march
toward that region of mystery
as if tired or worn out

Is there not some glory
even a celebration
that the Giver of Life
did not put life on us
too thick

We can break through
this thin gauze
with a feeling of wonder

From now
we can see only
a little
of the other side

Suicide Song

It is leaping
through
the hoop's bow
but not coming out of
the other side

We have leapt through
a five hundred year hoop
and the other side
is without grass
and without game

This hoop is empty
into its nothingness
vanishes
all of the wonder

Song of Rising

Where no horizon is
there is no sunrise
the day is sure forever
and night does not descend

We slept one short moment
in a dark shade
and woke up startled

We are on our feet now
our quiet tread sounding
to the end of the earth

Some horizon yet
will give us a moment's peace
when the day is over

Song of Drawing Up Water

These are the horns of the moon
and these are the spokes of the sun
water-drawing is kept low

There is much dust
and there are the sounds of insects
winds turn and blow
and whoom against the flat cheek
of the high cliff

I am returning to where my sister is buried
I confess to her I have loved many women
but she is my only sister

I have drunk water of many springs
but I return here each year for two decades
and plant a flower at her headstone
she would be twenty-nine today

Song of Short Praise

At thirteen I fucked
with my best girl

Raymond Sam knighted me
for the courage of the cutter

They all called me
the piss cutter cow herder

But I was sorry
that I told them

When my girl would never
talk to me any more

And she never smiled
at me again

Fire-Side Song

She said my name twice
looking into my eyes
straight and unblinking

I was sure of this
though the coals were dim
and this starless night
was black and thick

Suddenly the flames
were dancing high

But she did not say
my name again
and her lids were lowered
as she looked intently
into the fire beyond
the two tips of her mocassins

Song of Certain Dreaming

This man spoke to my mother
in harsh words
yet she remained meek

He took money from her small purse
and spat upon my sister
saying the coins were few

He left my mother weeping
walking in the shadows
down the dark side of the street

My Papa, my Papa, my sister
whispered to me excitedly
wiping the spittle from her face

Song of Tom Howdy

Tom Howdy is shorter than
I am and he doubled up his fist
and whammed it into the plywood

It sounded loud but there was
no splintering and his knuckles
came away bloody and torn

Tom, I said, I know a better
way to get booze than that
You tell me, he said blankly

There is this girl I know, I said
Booze. Tom Howdy said, booze
you said booze—not pussy

Tom Howdy had sat down now
and he was staring at
his bloody and torn knuckles

Booze you said—not pussy
he said again, and I could not
make him get back on his feet

Song of Time Passing

I let it go on
we let it go on
they let it go on

Here is where it is now
right now
and when I get back from
looking at the clock
it is here, still here

I am not going to do
much more about it
than I did yesterday

And they are not either
today or tomorrow

Song of Silences

I talk too much when I
am doubting what I am saying
when I am saying it with words
not genuinely my words
but the only words I have

My mother betrayed me when she
taught me a single tongue only
despising the words of my father's speaking
could I say it with less talking
some day I may stand in a tall rock
in the open light of the full sky

Some day I may say it
with no words upon my tongue
I will know who are my friends
for they will be listening
and they will know what I have been saying
though I have ceased in all
of my talking and I am only there
standing silent in that tall rock

Song of Pure Finding

It was the place where no path was
and the sky was a sudden
confusion of strange stars
there was no large pinnacle
and no large tree
and there was not the sound
of any water moving

It was here I stood intently
looking into the distance
and listening with an intensity
more pure than my ears
had ever known before

This was not when I realized
that I was lost, this was
when I realized for the first time
that I had found myself
and I knew who I was
and I knew who I would be
wherever I was and whatever
would happen after that

Professionally, Judson Crews is a sociologist and psychologist. His vocation, however, includes literature. He began writing poetry and editing, publishing, and helping to print and distribute "little" magazines while completing a B.A. in Sociology and English (1941) and an M.A. in Sociology and Psychology (1944) at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, his birthplace (1917).

Crews left Texas soon after completing his degrees and serving in the Army Medical Corps (1942-1944), residing for varying lengths of time in settings as diverse as Big Sur and New York City. In these years, he added the visual arts to his literary interests, becoming known in avant-garde circles for his accomplishments in both areas.

With a major exception being his residence in Zambia, Africa, in 1974-1978, Judson Crews has spent most of the last three decades in New Mexico, Taos in particular. The literary magazines that he has edited, printed, and published during his residence there, including **The Naked Ear**, are seen as significant examples of that kind of periodical. His own writing has appeared in numerous publications. Collections of his work can be found in the archives at Yale, the University of Texas, and UCLA.

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