

SONGS  
by  
Charley John Greasybear



Ahsahta Press  
Boise State University  
Boise, Idaho

Some of these poems have appeared in the periodicals: ***The Black Bear Review, Dacotah Territory, Folk/Frog, Holy Doors, New Mexico Magazine, Paintbrush, Prairie Schooner, Scree, South Dakota Review, Zahir***, and in the anthology, ***Poets West***.

Poems selected and edited by Judson Crews  
Editor for Ahsahta Press: Tom Trusky

© 1979 by Ahsahta Press

Second Printing  
June 1988

ISBN 0-916272-10-9

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number:  
78-58484

# Contents

Introduction by <i>J. Whitebird</i>	iii
Woman Song	1
Ghost Song	2
Jesus Song	3
Love Song	4
Stone Song	5
Song of Water Crashing	6
Seed Song	7
Travel Song	8
Wedding Song	9
Song of Denial	10
Saturday Song	11
Hoop Song	12
Song of Pima Mesa	13
Swan Song	14
Song of Shedding	15
Talk Song	16
Song of Ending	17
Serpent Song	18
A Devil Kachina Song	19
Bear Song	20
Song of Bleeding	21
Death Song	22
Suicide Song	23
Song of Rising	24
Song of Drawing Up Water	25
Song of Short Praise	26
Fire-Side Song	27
Song of Certain Dreaming	28
Song of Tom Howdy	29
Song of Time Passing	30
Song of Silences	31
Song of Pure Finding	32



# 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.



# Ahsahta Press

POETRY OF THE WEST

## MODERN

- \*Norman Macleod, *Selected Poems*
- Gwendolen Haste, *Selected Poems*
- \*Peggy Pond Church, *New & Selected Poems*
- Haniel Long, *My Seasons*
- H. L. Davis, *Selected Poems*
- \*Hildegard Flanner, *The Harkening Eye*
- Genevieve Taggard, *To the Natural World*
- Hazel Hall, *Selected Poems*
- Women Poems of the West: An Anthology*
- \*Thomas Hornsby Ferril, *Anvil of Roses*
- \*Judson Crews, *The Clock of Moss*
- Thomas Hornsby Ferril, *Westering*

## CONTEMPORARY

- \*Marnie Walsh, *A Taste of the Knife*
- \*Robert Krieger, *Headlands, Rising*
- Richard Blessing, *Winter Constellations*
- \*Carolyn Wright, *Stealing the Children*
- Charley John Greasybear, *Songs*
- \*Conger Beasley, Jr. *Over DeSoto's Bones*
- \*Susan Strayer Deal, *No Moving Parts*
- \*Gretel Ehrlich, *To Touch the Water*
- \*Leo Romero, *Agua Negra*
- \*David Baker, *Laws of the Land*
- \*Richard Speakes, *Hannah's Travel*
- Dixie Partridge, *Deer in the Haystacks*
- Philip St. Clair, *At the Tent of Heaven*
- Susan Strayer Deal, *The Dark Is a Door*
- Linda Bierds, *Flights of the Harvest-Mare*
- Philip St. Clair, *Little-Dog-Of-Iron*
- Corrinne Hales, *Underground*
- Howard W. Robertson, *to the fierce guard in the Assyrian Saloon*
- Wyn Cooper, *The Country of Here Below*
- George Perreault, *Curved Like An Eye*
- Donald Schenker, *Up Here*

\*Selections from these volumes, read by their authors, are available on *The Ahsahta Cassette Sampler*.

