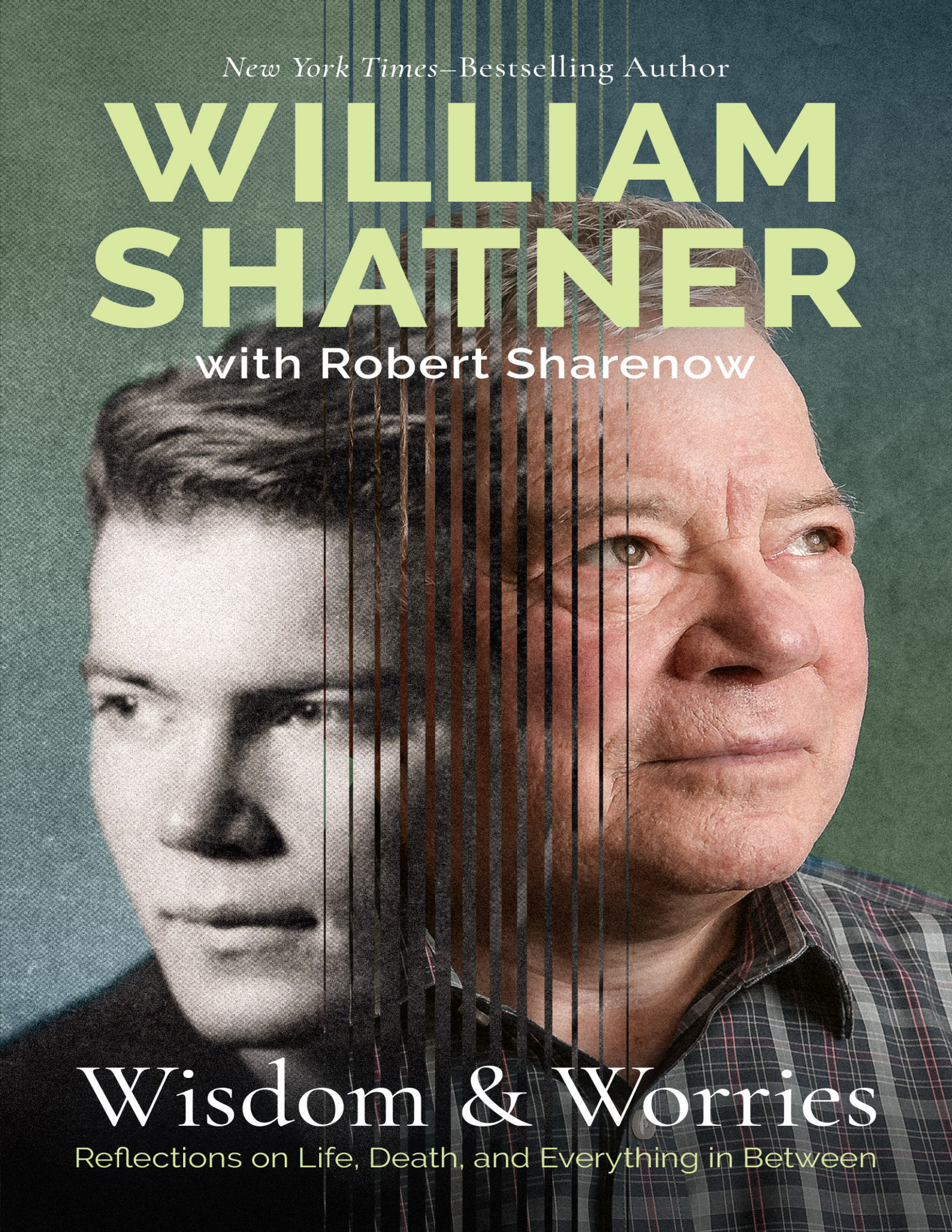
New York Times–Bestselling Author

WILLIAM SHATNER

with Robert Sharenow



Wisdom & Worries

Reflections on Life, Death, and Everything in Between



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WISDOM & WORRIES

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE, DEATH, AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

William Shatner
with Robert Sharenow



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PRELUDE

I've always been a person who looked forward. My curiosity and energy for exploring the new and the next is shockingly undiminished. Yet, as I inch closer to the century mark, I have been looking back and reflecting on my experiences and what I've learned about myself and the world.

Over the years, I've expressed my personal story and thoughts in books and interviews. However, more recently, I've been exploring my life in poems and song lyrics in musical collaborations with a wide range of artists from Joe Jonas to Brad Paisley to Ben Folds to the National Symphony Orchestra. In some ways, these verses have revealed a deeper truth of my experience than any other form of expression. From my religious upbringing in Montreal to my struggles to succeed as a young actor to my roles in theater, television, and film to the highs and lows of my professional and personal lives to my passions for science, nature, and animals to my recent trip to space, these words present a unique self-portrait that I, myself, have found surprising and revealing.

I've also explored my deepest emotions and thoughts about love, life, and what might lie beyond. Transforming my experiences into verse has surfaced and articulated some of the wisdom I've gained. Yet, the process also revealed profound worries about the nature of existence and the future of our world, thus the title of this volume was born.

I've annotated the poems, and the book is organized around a series of milestones and themes that continue to have the most impact on me. My lyrical collaborator for the last decade has been my dear friend Robert Sharenow. Our brotherhood was forged in a

mutual passion for all aspects of life, especially well-prepared Peking duck.

I've always believed in being mindful of all the wonders that surround us and celebrating the beauty and poetry of existence. These words are my attempt to put my own life, feelings, and observations into that context and my wish is that, through them, readers can find insight and meaning into their own lives.

Bill

LIFE



Bill and his father (1938)

As a refugee from Eastern Europe, my father built a successful garment business in Canada. Although I respected, loved, and admired him, I felt estranged from his religious beliefs and practices and had no interest in his business. And as a result, I broke away from my family's traditions and forged my own path, but his influence never left me, and my choices were never without doubts and regrets.

Thunder and Fire

On the way to pray he held my hand
Through the streets of Montreal
I tried to imitate his walk
Always straight, always tall

The men all bound together
Still strangers in the land
Their voices rose in unison
That I couldn’t understand

But even then, I knew the truth
That cut me like a knife
I read from a different book
A different book of life

He came from the old world
And pulled himself up fast
A tiny clothing empire
Built for us, built to last

Walked me through the cutting room
The smells I can’t forget
Rolled up bales of tweed
Raw serge and cigarettes

But I read from a different book …
A different book of life

He bowed his head and closed his eyes
And tried to change my mind
Said I could never comprehend
The wilderness I’d find

But I felt no fear of leaving home
Or living hand to hand
And all of his devotion
I just couldn't understand

He said
These words will keep you safe
And balanced on the wire
For centuries around the world
Through thunder and through fire

I found the stage and fell in love
There was no turning back
Ignored my father's business
Unsold suits on a rack

Projected on the silver screen
And theaters far and near
Didn't know that finding my voice
Would make his hard to hear

But now I know the truth
That cuts me like a knife
I read from a different book
A different book of life

He bowed his head and closed his eyes
And tried to change my mind
Said I could never comprehend
The wilderness I'd find

But I felt no fear of leaving home
Or living hand to hand
And all of his devotion
I just couldn't understand
These words will keep you safe
And balanced on the wire

For centuries around the world
Through thunder and through fire

Through so many decades
And endless nights and days
I found a brave new world
And swept the old away
And though I've found my peace
I lie awake at night
And listen for my father's voice
And wonder—was he right

He bowed his head and closed his eyes
And tried to change my mind
Said I could never comprehend
The wilderness I'd find

And all these years since leaving home
His voice will never fade
I try to see his ancient laws
Inside the world I've made

These words will keep you safe
And balanced on the wire
For centuries around the world
Through thunder and through fire

Growing up in Montreal, I was part of a small Jewish community. As a little boy, nearly every day on my way to school, I was attacked by gangs of anti-Semetic boys and had to learn to defend myself. I never understood their hatred toward me, but learned to fight (and run), but I also developed mixed feelings about my heritage along with a tough exterior that earned me the nickname "Toughie."

Toughie

When I was a boy
They'd chase me around
Throw pennies and words
Tried to make me their clown

I stood and I fought
Took every punch they would throw
Ripped the books from my hand
Pushed my face in the snow

Now I'm tougher
Tougher than the rest
You wanna come at me
Better give it your best

I kicked and I scrapped
Till my knuckles got raw
But their hatred of me
I never could thaw

Their fear of my faith
And my immigrant past
Made me loathe who I was
In the role I was cast

Now I'm tougher
Tougher than the rest
You wanna come at me
Better give it your best

I endured this for years
And it never ran dry
So I changed who I was

Learned how to deny

Ducked out of the way
And disguised my true self
Yeah, I packed up my past
Hid it up on a shelf

I built up a shell
That hardened like steel
To protect me from harm
Not allow me to feel

But that armor and shield
Although it did glow
Caused a hatred of self
To fester and grow

Am I tougher
Tougher than the rest
You wanna come at me
Better give it your best

For years I would blend
And never admit
So I'd hear all the venom
At my tribe they would spit

I'd pretend not to notice
What I couldn't abide
Beneath my false strength
Was a weakling inside

Now I know a deep truth
Took me decades to learn
Love of myself
Was the hardest to earn

Though I’ve come to some peace
I still give a damn
Will my toughness allow me
To accept who I am

Am I tougher
Tougher than the rest
I never realized
I was failing the test
No I never realized
I was failing the test

As a teenager, I worked at a summer camp for underprivileged children. Sometime during the summer, as a treat, I was given the opportunity to lead a trip in an eight-man canoe on an adventurous trip from Canada to New York City. That journey marked both a turning point for me as a young man finding his independence, but also a catalyst for my profound connection to nature.

Eight Days on the Water

On the verge of manhood
Just sixteen years old
Signed onto adventure
That seemed brave and bold

A perilous journey
Few others might do
To travel eight days
In an eight-man canoe

The plan seemed mythic
Manly and gritty
To paddle from Canada
To New York City

From Champlain we cast off
Clearer than glass
Then no one in sight
Once a few days had passed

Surrounded by nature
Feeling wild and free
The hint of real danger
Appealing to me

Through ice crystal lakes
Raging rivers and streams
Level five rapids
And dense evergreens

Eight days on the water
Alive in my mind
Eight days on the water

Frozen in time

We felt small and yet large
Thinking that when
We reached that far shore
It would define us as men

Sixteen arms paddled
Through all types of weather
And as the days passed
We bonded together

We dove in the water
To keep us refreshed
Sensing new muscles
On our shoulders and chests

We moved north to south
And the landscape devolved
The mountains less fearsome
The trees not as tall

More and more houses
Dotted the shore
And large motorboats
That we couldn’t ignore

But we paddled on
With undaunted might
Feeling our victory
Was finally in sight

Eight days on the water
Alive in my mind
Eight days on the water
Frozen in time

And after a week
Our battle seemed won
When Manhattan's skyline
Loomed in the sun

The buildings of Wall Street
Denser than forests
And millions of people
Moving around us

Yet, the Hudson and East
Were sad shades of brown
And just as much garbage
As fish floated 'round

The conquest of nature
Which we thought was good fun
Was a zero sum game
That humans had won

I wish I could say
I had these deep thoughts
But nothing was noticed
So nothing forgot

I was blinded by youth
As most of us are
Awed by the structures
The bridges and cars

Eight days on the water
Alive in my mind
Eight days on the water
Frozen in time

Now sixty years later
I stand on a shore

Older and wiser
I can no longer ignore

I think of that journey
And now understand
My innocence lost
And nature's command

Both gone forever
And not to return
Our abuse of the planet
We still haven't learned

To return to an Eden
May seem like a dream
But I still believe
Because I've already been
Yes, I still believe
Because I've already been

Eight days on the water
Alive in my mind
Eight days on the water
Frozen in time
Eight days on the water
Alive in my mind
Eight days on the water
Frozen in time

After finishing high school, I enrolled at McGill University with the expectation that I would get a practical education and be able to take over and grow my father's business. Yet, I disappointed my parents by dropping out, so I could pursue my true passion for acting, which to them seemed like an absurd pipe dream. As I set off to Toronto to make my fortune, I had a near-death experience that seemed to represent the turning point in my career and my life.

The Bridge

Now I know there's more to life
Than girls and cars
But at seventeen my jealous heart
Breezing past the blondes
And the boys in their MGs
Haunted I'd be something
They'd never see

I bought a Morris Minor
Torn and frayed
Four hundred dollars paid
I loaded up the back
With everything I owned
And set off for Toronto
I'd left home

And I headed for the bridge
To somewhere else
I headed for the bridge
To find myself

Halfway cross the trestle
Wheezing smoke and fire
A massive 18-wheeler
Almost made me a liar

Well a gust of air blew up
I felt my car take flight
Veering toward the edge
Of night
And I was halfway 'cross the bridge
The wheel wouldn't turn
I was facing the

point of no return

Paralyzed by terror
Saw my whole life flash
Lungs filled up with water
Deep

All my dreams dissolving
I'd never walked the earth
Never say goodbye
And never be

And I headed for the bridge
to somewhere else
I headed for the bridge
To find myself

Halfway cross the trestle
Wheezing smoke and fire
A massive 18-wheeler
Almost made me a liar

In that frozen moment
Everything a blur of gray
I made a promise to myself
If I lived another day

To never waste an instant
To suck the marrow dry
To savor every single thing
Under the sun and sky

And I headed for the bridge
to somewhere else
I headed for the bridge
To find myself

Halfway cross the trestle
Wheezing smoke and fire
A massive 18-wheeler
Almost made me a liar

Sometimes we skirt the edge
Of tragedy and fate
I'd live to keep that promise
I found the road again

Once on the other side
I felt my breathing calm
And set off on the highway
Toward a brand-new dawn

We're always on a bridge
From life to the other side
Some trucks will swerve to block us
And interrupt the ride

Gotta hold on to the wheel
And try to just react
With courage and conviction
'Cause … there is no turning back
No there is no turning back
There is no turning back

And I headed for the bridge
to somewhere else
I headed for the bridge
To find myself

Halfway cross the trestle
Wheezing smoke and fire
A massive 18-wheeler
Almost made me a liar
A massive 18-wheeler

Almost made me a liar

People often make the assumption that those who live in the public eye are always surrounded by people and feel included and loved. And yet, loneliness has been a constant theme that I've wrestled with from my youngest days to the present.

Loneliness

The word itself sounds weak
Couldn't withstand a breeze
But in some ways it's stronger than steel
It works its dark power
In the depths of my soul
Of what I'm afraid to feel

It can change how I dress
And reorder my ways
Like a terrorist waving a gun
Make me censor my thoughts
Or talk about things
I wouldn't have otherwise done

Loneliness
Weighs on me
Loneliness
Preys on me
Loneliness
Cuts to the bone
Loneliness
Whispers lies
Loneliness
Why must I
Worry about being alone

I was pulled from the womb
Then removed from the breast
And pushed to explore near my home
School days and friendships
My circles expanding
Till I was supposedly grown

Then off into the world
To seek my own set
Of fortunes and mountains to climb
But did all friends, foes, and lovers
Only exist
To fill what was once left behind

Loneliness
Weighs on me
Loneliness
Preys on me
Loneliness
Cuts to the bone
Loneliness
Whispers lies
Loneliness
Why must I
Worry about being alone

Every blue's song's the same
A wailing lament
Of the losses and lovers unkind
Blind Willie McTell
Sang his versions hell
To fill the cold hole in his mind

I've had my own struggles
Break ups and fights
And cut chains attached to my heart
Then once on my own
I got restless and looked
For connections so I could restart

Loneliness
Weighs on me
Loneliness
Preys on me

Loneliness
Cuts to the bone
Loneliness
Whispers lies
Loneliness
Why must I
Worry about being alone

Anger and passion,
Lust and revenge
Have all been writ large on my page
But I come back to the hunger
The wanting, the need
That always takes center stage

Now I look toward the end
Haunted by the unknown
Of what may or may not greet me there
All of life's questions
Boil down to just one
Will I find anyone there

Loneliness
Weighs on me
Loneliness
Preys on me
Loneliness
Cuts to the bone
Loneliness
Whispers lies
Distortions and alibis
But aren't we always alone
Aren't we always alone
Aren't we always alone

Along with loneliness, I've also wrestled with feelings of guilt for my whole life. Perhaps, there's a genetic element to this as Jews, along with Catholics, are historically known for being prone to feelings of guilt as well as being masterful at making people feel guilty. I performed this as a collaboration with Joe Jonas. While his musical gifts were evident, I always wondered if he related to the subject matter as deeply as I did. And by the way, when was the last time you called your mother?

Clouds of Guilt

Feel guilty when I leave
Feel guilty when I stay
Feel guilty when I'm down and out
And when I'm overpaid

Feel guilty when I'm right
Feel guilty when I'm wrong
I even feel a pinch of guilt
Just singing you this song

Don't ask me why it is
It's just the way I'm built
Even days of sunshine
Are dimmed by clouds of guilt

And if these words don't rhyme
Or a bit of milk gets spilt
I find myself overshadowed by
Heavy clouds of guilt

Feel guilty when I'm late
Or early to a ball
Strange to say—feel guiltiest
When I've done nothing at all

Missed the funeral of a friend
That one stung for years
But stranger still, felt even worse
For swallowing my tears

Don't ask me why it is
It's just the way I'm built
Even days of sunshine

Are dimmed by clouds of guilt

And if these words don't rhyme
Or a bit of milk gets spilt
I find myself overshadowed by
Heavy clouds of guilt

Is it some genetic flaw that is to blame
Or old religious training steeped in shame
I'm guilty of feeling guilty all the time
Wish there was a way to free my mind

Don't ask me why it is
It's just the way I'm built
Even days of sunshine
Are dimmed by clouds of guilt

And if these words don't rhyme
Or a bit of milk gets spilt
I find myself overshadowed by
Heavy clouds of guilt
Can never seem to get away
From all these clouds of guilt

If I'm being honest, the only thing I abhor more than loneliness and guilt is growing older. Although my body has nine decades of miles on it, my spirit still feels just as it always has, young, hungry, curious. Along with the struggles of physical decline, the world treats you differently as you age. People tend to infantilize seniors and that may be the cruelest cut of all.

Damn

I am not afraid
Of darkness or night
Back alleys in shadow
Bloody battles or fights

Only one thing I fear
It's cruel and it's cold
'Cause it can't be reversed
It's called growing old

Just one fear haunts me and fills me with rage
The struggles and losses and pains of old age
Just one fear haunts me and fills me with rage
The struggles and losses and pains of old age

Teeth, bones, and skin
Were not built to last
But I'll bite, kick, and scream
To my very last gasp

Father time never sleeps
But if he slowed down
I'd attack with no mercy
Til he's flat on the ground
Just one fear haunts me and fills me with rage
The struggles and losses and pains of old age
Just one fear haunts me and fills me with rage
The struggles and losses and pains of old age

Damn the aching joints
Damn the thinning hair
Damn the walking slower
Damn the easy chairs

Damn the smaller portions
Damn the early nights
Damn the condescension
Damn the losing sight
Damn the drying up
Damn the wrinkle lines
Damn the lying down
Damn the shrinking spines

Just one fear haunts me and fills me with rage
The struggles and losses and pains of old age
Just one fear haunts me and fills me with rage
The struggles and losses and pains of old age
The struggles and losses and pains of old age
The struggles and losses and pains of old age

Despite my fear of aging, I'm often asked what the secret to longevity might be. The irony is that I've made no major adjustments in my state of mind or approach to living. The deepest core of my being has changed very little and the curiosity and wonder I had as a child first discovering the world stays with me to this day. Perhaps this the answer ...

The Great Mystery

Do not grow old
No matter how long
That you live
Do not forget pain
But somehow learn
To forgive

Always see like
A curious child
Open and free
Standing in awe
Of life and
The great mystery

How do flames
Blaze as fire
From the tiniest spark
What lies beyond space
In the depths of
The infinite dark

Why do great whales
Sing beautiful songs
Down in the deep
And what makes us
Crave justice or love
Or memories to keep

And when the sun
Finally goes down
You should see
With the eyes of
A curious child

And the great mystery
With the eyes of
A curious child
And the great mystery

Be moving forward
But don’t forget to
Look back
Never see the world
As all white
Or all black

Keep reaching as far
As the stars
Without fear
Knowing if you fall back
Down to earth that
I will be here

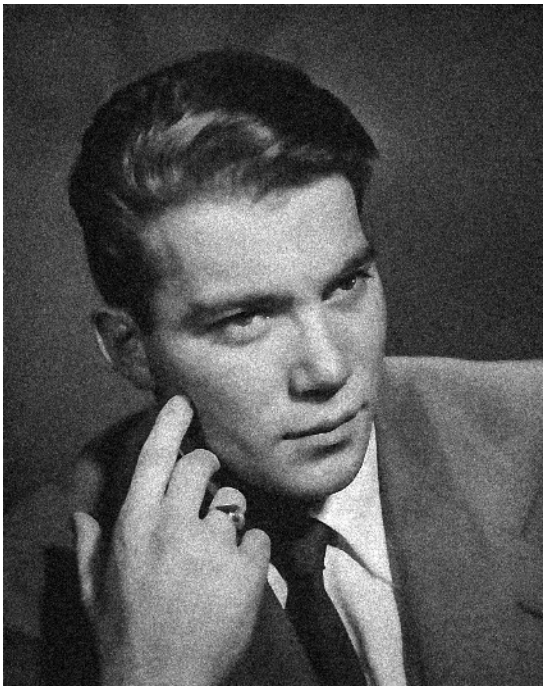
Every breath is a gift
We should always
Graciously take
Don’t let life pass by
On the sidelines
Or half-awake

See feel and taste
Everything that you can
To the end
Know the emotions
You get are the ones
That you send

And when the sun
Finally goes down
You should see
With the eyes of

A curious child
And the great mystery
With the eyes of
A curious child
And the great mystery
With the eyes of
A curious child
And the great mystery

MASKS



Bill (1952)

Throughout my career on stage and screen, I've had the privilege of playing many iconic roles, from Shakespeare's Henry V to Alexander the Great to Captain Kirk to Denny Crane. Often people focus on my relationships and supposed rivalries with other actors I've worked with. In general, I've always reveled in being part of a collaborative creative group and yet, what I carry forward most personally are the roles themselves and how they impacted me. As much as I've reveled in assuming other characters, it has created expectations and confusion of who I really am from strangers, friends, family, and even myself.

Masks

They say actors wear masks
Or do masks wear actors
The line is so thin
There are so many factors

What makes a man
What makes an illusion
I have to confess
There can be some confusion

When I get approached
And a captain they desire
Am I really that man
Or just a really good liar

Or am I cop
With a chip on his shoulder
Alexander the Great
Braver and bolder

A fast-talking lawyer
Who'd take anyone on
A pitchman, a madman,
A joker, a john

They all live inside me
Like a circus or fair
Mixing and churning
And fighting for air

Then there are masks
Worn in front of others
Like being a son, a father,

A husband, or brother

Are those any more false
Or any more true
Then the ones that I wear
On the screen in broad view

A self is created
And changes formation
For each interaction
And every relation

Can anyone claim
Never adjusting the way
They mold to the world
They confront every day

The unfiltered self
Can be ugly and base
We all can reflect
A most inhuman race

Our loves and our passions
Will cause their own strains
A heart on a sleeve
Can leave some dark stains

Must sand down the edges
And not always confess
Else we would live
In a state of distress

So sure—it's exhausting
A laborious task
But I'd never go out
Without wearing a mask

The cancellation of Star Trek *coincided with the breakup of my first marriage. It was 1969 and I was at a personal and professional low point, living out of a pickup truck with only my dog as company and doing dinner theater to make meager ends meet. I was between gigs and lying in my sleeping bag by the side of the road listening to the radio broadcast of Neil Armstong taking his historic first step on the moon. The irony of the moment was complex as I fondly recalled my own brush with the Apollo astronauts while still captain of the fictional* Enterprise.

So Far from the Moon

I was doing dinner theater
Somewhere I don't recall
Carpetbagging town to town
The summer to the fall

Sleeping in my pickup
Feeling like I'd hit a low
My marriage had been canceled
And so had my show

Well it was four in the morning
And dawn was coming soon
I was bound by gravity
And so far from the moon
So far from the moon

The Apollo mission took off
The planet watched enthralled
But man's greatest achievement
Made this man feel so small

I stared up at the sky
The stars like little pins
Armstrong took a giant leap
While I fell down again

It was four in the morning
And dawn was coming soon
But I was bound by gravity
And so far from the moon
So far from the moon

Well, I rode a plastic spaceship

A flashlight laser beam
But some piece of that fiction
Helped push along the dream

I even met the astronauts
A year before they flew
So some small part of me
Was up there with them too

I waited there all night
Until the break of day
Then rolled up my sleeping bag
And drove away

It was four in the morning
And dawn was coming soon
But I was bound by gravity
And so far from the moon
It was four in the morning
And dawn was coming soon
But I was bound by gravity
And so far from the moon
So far from the moon

Although I have been acting for more than seventy years now, I don't think I fully appreciated what a powerful connection a performer can have with an audience until 2020 when COVID-19 was first sweeping the globe. I was scheduled to make an appearance in London on the night the British government ordered a lockdown. I've always believed the adage, 'the show must go on,' and I was contractually obligated to appear that night, government decree or not. So, I went to the theater not knowing what to expect. Would anyone show up? And if so, who? And what would their reaction be and what would mine?

Monday Night in London

It was early in the crisis
On a tour of the UK
Trapped in my hotel room
Seeing no one every day

Some shows had been canceled
Others though had not
It was Monday night in London
Would this be my last shot

Why would someone dare
The virus of our age
Just to see an actor
Strut upon the stage

The prime minster was clear
Stay in place and do not roam
Would any thinking person
Defy and leave their home

It was Monday night in London
I waited in the wings
What was on the other side
Would there be anything

But I was under contract
The show would still go on
I couldn’t quite believe it
Was this just a con

I’ve always craved the theater
Applause to me like blood
Coursing through my body

In a strange addictive flood

But what did it all mean
A performance poor or great
Once the spotlight faded
Did it all evaporate

Yet, as I stood backstage
I thought I felt the heat
Of bodies on the other side
Was it my mind's deceit

It was Monday night in London
And I waited in the wings
What was on the other side
Would there be anything

The curtain finally parted
I stepped into the light
And beyond all sense or reason
Every seat was filled that night

A cheer rose up around me
Like a mother hugs a child
I joked to cut the tension
The crowd—they just went wild

Then I felt it happen
The separation gone
Between audience and actor
A unifying bond

Emotions filled my body
A boundless loving crush
Worries, tears, and laughter
Spilled out in one great rush

The purpose of it all
Suddenly shone through
I took the stage to feel
And the audience—they did too

It was Monday night in London
And I waited in the wings
I stepped onto the other side
Discovered everything
I stepped onto the other side
Discovered everything
I stepped onto the other side
Discovered everything

I've had as a rich and rewarding a career as I could've imagined. One of the keys to my sustained success and employment in the entertainment industry has been my willingness to say "yes," to try different things and explore nearly every avenue. While in some ways the expression "Made in the Shade" gives a false impression of the ease my journey, it does reflect my general optimism and sense of gratitude for all the wonderous twists and turns of my career.

Made in the Shade

Well the tick and the tock of the giant clock
Never rested my head on the chopping block
Bit right down onto the bone
No moss like a rolling stone

I've got it made
In the shade
I've got it made

One door opened, another did too
Just closed my eyes and tripped on through
Wound up in an alley or the court of kings
Can't hit any notes but I sure can sing

I've got it made
In the shade
I've got it made

Well up and down and click and clack
I went around the corner now I'm all the way back
So far out of fashion that I'm always in style
Gotta stick around for a while

I got it made
I got it made
I got it made in the shade
I got it made

Now two plus two doesn't equal five
But you've gotta keep adding if you want to survive
Six, seven, eight, nine, and ten
Go back and start again.

I got it made
In the shade
I’ve got it made
In the shade
I’ve got it made

The tick and the tock of the giant clock
You’ve got to keep trying so go back and start again
One door opened and another did too

I’ve got it made in the shade
I’ve got it made
In the shade
I’ve got it made

LOVE



Bill and his sister, Joy (1937)

For most people, love is the most precious and sometimes most rarely realized of all the human emotions. Earlier I mentioned my curiosity and hunger to move forward. This is all rooted in the love I have for all aspects of life. I have a deep appreciation for the mystery and beauty of all living things and the tactile, sensual experience of just being alive.

I Love Life

There’s nothing like a sunny day
Except a rainy night
There’s nothing like a horse run free
Except a bird in flight
There’s nothing like your warm embrace
Except your lips on mine
There’s nothing like the moment now
Except for the next time

I love life
Yeah—touch and taste and sound
From blades of grass
To golden sands
And everything around
I love life
And I’ll love it till the end
If I could stop time
And be with you
I’d do it all again

There’s nothing like a waking child
Except one that’s asleep
There’s nothing like a mountaintop
Except the ocean deep
There’s nothing like a great old song
Except new ones to be sung
There’s nothing quite like growing old
Except for staying young

I love life
Yeah—touch and taste and sound
From blades of grass
To golden sands

And everything around
I love life
And I'll love it till the end
If I could stop time
And be with you
I'd do it all again

Everywhere I look
Love what I see
Every time I breathe
I feel free
I feel free
I love life
Yeah—touch and taste and sound
From blades of grass
To golden sands
And everything around
I love life
And I'll love it till the end
If I could stop time
And be with you
I'd do it all again
If I could stop time
And be with you
I'd do it all again

For me, love has taken on so many forms—romantic love, love of the wonders and mysteries of the world, love of self. But loving another person is one of the most intense and universal emotions of the human experience. I've come to realize that giving your love to another person involves an enormous amount of courage, because the risk of losing love is perhaps the greatest risk anyone could take.

I’ll Be with You

We walk together through the woods
Just as we have for years
Side by side, slow but sure
Your eyes betraying fears

I know you wonder what will be
In times when I am gone
If you listen to the wind
You’ll always hear my song

I’ll be with you at dawn
When sunlight warms your face
As your feet touch morning dew
That leaves the coolest trace
I’ll be with you at night
In stars that fill the sky
And all the colors nature ever
Puts before your eyes
Every leaf on every tree
Winter, spring, and fall
My breath will be the air
I’ll be with you in all

When you hear the whippoorwill
While lying in our bed
Or in the fine complexity
Of every spider’s web

The smell of fresh-cut grass
The jasmine from a tree
The warmth of glowing embers
The snow beneath your ski

The silence of the forest
The buzzing of the bees
The whisper of a baby's breath
The roar of pounding seas

I'll be with you at dawn
When sunlight warms your face
As your feet touch morning dew
That leaves the coolest trace
I'll be with you at night
In stars that fill the sky
And all the colors nature ever
Puts before your eyes
Every leaf on every tree
Winter, spring, and fall
My breath will be the air
I'll be with you in all

My most profound and enduring expression of love is for my children and grandchildren. Being a parent created a whole new ecosystem of emotions in me that I had never experienced before. The following song is a snapshot of a moment from the childhood of one of my daughters, who got frightened in the night. In that moment, I felt a deep and unusual sense of love, the responsibility to comfort and protect something I held so dear. The piece is written as a nursery rhyme that expresses both a moment but also my deep desire to hold on to a feeling of emotional completeness that I knew couldn't last forever.

The Lion on the Wall

A storm lashed the house
In the still of the night
When I heard your voice
Calling for me

I stumbled in panic
Down the hall to your room
Fearful of what
I might see

You lay in your crib
Your eyes filled with fear
And your small body shook
Like a leaf

I followed your finger
To the opposite wall
And the shadows
Had nails, claws, and teeth

There's a lion on the wall
Don't you see
There's a lion on the wall
Please save me

There's a lion on the wall
Don't you see
There's a lion on the wall
Please save me

I held you and rocked you
Felt your weight in my arms
Until you were calmed

And could hear

The words came to me
So easy and quick
And like magic erased
All your fear

The lion on the wall
That you see
It’s the moonlighted
Branch of a tree

The lion is just
Shadow play
And it all will be gone
In the day

I hummed you a tune
And we both watched the wall
As the shadows continued
To sway

And your lips curled a smile
As the branches now danced
In a beautiful
Silent ballet

The storm outside faded
You drifted to sleep
So I lay you back down
On your bed

And I sat and I watched you
Your breathing so calm
With the sweet dreams
That now filled your head

The lion on the wall
That you see
It’s the moonlighted
Branch of a tree

The lion is just
Shadow play
And it all will be gone
In the day

Days, months, and years
Spun by like a shot
And troubles grew larger
In more complex knots

And try as I might
To ease all your pain
Solutions were harder
Sometimes never came

But that one single moment
Still lingers with me
As complete and as perfect
As I’ve known

The decades have passed
You’ve a husband, a house
And a beautiful child
Of your own

And when storms blow at night
I sit back and I think
I’ve never since
Brought such relief

And I wonder if you
Ever cradle your child

And whisper these words
With belief

The lion on the wall
That you see
It’s the moonlighted
Branch of a tree

The lion is just
Shadow play
And it all will be gone
In the day
Yes, it all will be gone
In a day

Many aspects of my personal life have played out in public, including some of the most difficult moments and painful losses I've ever had to endure. I'm still haunted by memories of my late wife; and I question my blindness to her suffering and my own emotional limitations that likely impacted both of us.

Vulnerable

Our love was like a mystery
A wild horse to break
But the more I thought I'd figured out
The more became opaque

You started as a puzzle
A challenge and a quest
I thought I saw the whole of you
But shadows hid the rest

I pleaded for your honesty
Vowed always to be true
I'd never mind whatever flaws
Or scars that might show through

You flashed your smiles and promises
And I believed them all
Could not pick up your true despair
Until after the fall

If only you'd been vulnerable with me
If only you'd been vulnerable and see
If only you had felt my love was real
If only we had both learned how to heal

I took on all the blame
But never realized
I also lived beneath a veil
Of manufactured lies

How could you connect
With who I claimed to be
When I was a different person

Than I ever let you see

If only I'd been vulnerable with you
If only I'd let my true self show through
If only I'd believed your love was real
If only we had both learned how to heal

So the mystery I solved
But the answer came too late
Our life together had already been
Cruelly sacrificed to fate

You never opened up
To heal wounds over time
Because I didn't love myself
Enough to show you mine

If only I'd been vulnerable with you
If only I'd let my true self show through
If only I'd believed your love was real
If only we had both learned how to heal

Even the deepest romantic love can be complicated, as all relationships involve a certain amount of sacrifice. While I've valued all of my relationships, I've also come to understand that human love, no matter how romantic or ideal, has consequences for each individual involved. A certain amount of selfishness is wired into every human being, which is challenged by even the most fulfilling romantic connections.

The Cost of Love

You wonder what I'm thinking
Every day
As if I know myself
Enough to say
Over morning coffee
Or late at night
I'm just not sure
Which choice is right
The poets wrote
To give away your heart
But what will I be then
Without that part

If I give myself to you
What will I be
Will there be something more
Or less of me
Commitment sounds romantic
A gift from up above
Until you calculate
The cost of love

Since birth I've been
Essentially alone
Trapped inside my head
And skin and bones
You came to me
And I fell like a child
Attraction and desires
Running wild
True passion feels
Like standing on a ledge
To touch the sky

Or fall over the edge

If I give myself to you
What will I be
Will there be something more
Or less of me
Commitment sounds romantic
A gift from up above
Until you calculate
The cost of love

Selfish this may sound
But it’s true
Something could be lost
By loving you
As I lay awake
And toss in bed
I worry over what’s been
Never said

If I give myself to you
What will I be
Will there be something more
Or less of me
Commitment sounds romantic
A gift from up above
Until you calculate
The cost of love
Until you have to pay
The cost of love
Until you have to pay
The cost of love

Aging almost inevitably causes a certain amount of forgetfulness. Part of this might be cognitive decline, but also the sheer fullness of life. Frankly, a ninety-year-old has a heck of a lot more in their brains to remember and forget than a twelve-year-old. This can cause frustrations with the ones we love and the need to reassure.

I Forget Almost Everything but You

Time is flying as it always will
Like a prescription bottle that I can't refill
And as hours turn and days they pass
Some memories aren't built to last

Yet have no fear, no don't despair
More than half could go, and I wouldn't care
Even the sun and the moon don't make the grade
But there's one thing that just won't fade

'Cause I can't remember where I put my keys
Left my hat or my water skis
Don't pay my bills till they're way past due
Yeah, I forget almost everything but you

And that TV remote I can't ever find
Turn the house upside down, till I lose my mind
Give up on the plot when I'm halfway through
I forget almost everything but you
I forget almost everything but you

Did I leave my car in a black hole
Been wandering the lot for half an hour
That combination lock, I cannot turn
Left the eggs on the stove until they burned

Your big blue eyes still shine
Your long legs are divine
So even if I dim some more
You'll never slip my mind

I can't recall if it's Tuesday or Monday
Did I feed the dog or change my undies

Get fed up till my face turns blue
I forget almost everything but you

I've got no clue when Old Faithful will blow
And the mailman's name? Hell, I don't know
There's just one thing to which I am true
I forget almost everything but you
Yes, I forget almost everything but you

And one day soon it all may go
But till that day baby—you should know …
I forget almost everything but you
I forget almost everything but you
I forget almost everything but … but … but …

At the risk of sounding wildly immodest, I love my body, but not in the way you're likely thinking. I certainly don't have the Adonis-like physique I attempted to maintain in my younger days, but I am even more attuned to the connection between the functions of our physical anatomy and happiness and our ability to love ourselves and others.

Being Alive in My Body

We all take for granted so much
But perhaps nothing more than ourselves
So I sing the body electric
Our bones, our skin, and our cells

Everyone speaks of the heart
The most powerful symbol of love
But I'm awed by its intricate system
Of fueling the body with blood

Being alive in my body
Every part making me whole
Being alive in my body
Means being alive in my soul

We're born as the tiniest creatures
All senses and instincts we know
But then by a miracle process
Everything begins to grow

The harmony of the journey
From toddler to child to teen
The chemical changes alone
Beyond a scientist's dream

Being alive in my body
Every part making me whole
Being alive in my body
Means being alive in my soul

Yet, when my body does fail me
And it happens for all at some time
The pain and the ongoing struggle

Is hard to get out of the mind

Emotion is part of the engine
An instinct to focus on self
For when you can't love your own body
It's hard to love anyone else

Being alive in my body
Every part making me whole
Being alive in my body
Means being alive in my soul

The journey of life is astounding
The rises as well as the falls
Our power to naturally heal
Is the greatest sensation of all

Being alive in my body
Every part making me whole
Being alive in my body
Means being alive in my soul

I've had the privilege of loving many people over the years. It may sound obvious, but even the greatest passions of youth become far less significant than those with whom we share our most enduring journeys with.

Last Loves

You look in the mirror
And wonder what I see
The reflection there just isn't quite
What you want it to be

But all past loves I've had
I'm telling you the truth
Have faded into memory
Just like the bloom of youth

Looking back on all these years
I know one thing is true
First loves they don't matter
Last loves always do
First loves they don't matter
Last loves always do

I come and stand behind you
And finally see a smile
I gently touch your crow's feet
I'd follow for a mile
I see your eyes mist over
And form into a tear
You'll never be alone
I whisper in your ear

Looking back on all these years
I know one thing is true
First loves they don't matter
Last loves always do
First loves they don't matter
Last loves always do

How much time do we have left
You say you want to know
To me that doesn’t matter
Because we’ll always grow

I’ll always have your heart
And you’ll always have mine
That’s good enough for me
Until the end of time

Looking back on all these years
I know one thing is true
First loves they don’t matter
Last loves always do
First loves they don’t matter
Last loves always do
Looking back on all these years
I know one thing is true
First loves they don’t matter
Last loves always do

NATURE



Bill in the Laurentian Mountains (1947)

One of the defining missions of my recent years has been to get the word out about the beauty and fragility of our world. Our unthinking or uncaring abuse of our planet and the animal kingdom has left us all in a precarious position. In this next set of lyrics, I tried to impart this crisis in the simplest terms, so the children of today might appreciate and help solve the problems we created to build a better tomorrow.

Where Would the Animals Sleep

As I tuck you in bed
Wrap the blankets so tight
With a kiss on the head
To keep you warm through the night

I wish you sweet dreams
Of only good things
Bright yellow sunbeams
And new songs to sing

Before closing your eyes
Make one wish for me
By finding a star
The brightest you see

For we share the earth
Yes—we're not alone
So wish every animal
A home of their own

If birds had no nests
And rabbits no holes
No comfy burrows
For foxes or moles
If bears had no caves
To cuddle their cubs
The squirrels and the leopards
No trees up above
If all of these places
We fail to keep
Where would the animals sleep
Tell me
Where would the animals sleep

Bugs rest on grass
Or leaves that they've found
And turtles and chipmunks
Both sleep underground

Sea otters hold hands
And float while they rest
While seals like to curl up
On beaches the best

But if birds had no nests
And rabbits no holes
No comfy burrows
For foxes or moles
If bears had no caves
To cuddle their cubs
The squirrels and the leopards
No trees up above
If all of these places
We fail to keep
Where would the animals sleep
Tell me
Where would the animals sleep
Yes—where would the animals sleep

Some people don't care
About beaches or trees
Bulldozing and building
Wherever they please

Tearing down forests
And polluting the sea
Leaving some creatures
With nowhere to be

So all of these places
We cannot neglect

There isn’t much time
They’re ours to protect

Now before you doze off
It again should be said
How lucky you are
To have a safe bed

If birds had no nests
And rabbits no holes
No comfy burrows
For foxes or moles
If bears had no caves
To cuddle their cubs
The squirrels and the leopards
No trees up above
If all of these places
We fail to keep
Where would the animals sleep
Tell me
Where would the animals sleep
Yes—where would the animals sleep

I have a deep connection to all animals. Dogs have been constant companions throughout my entire life, their loyalty, empathy, and love are unmatched in my experience. Yet, as an adult, I discovered a deep passion and appreciation for horses, becoming an expert rider and breeder. However, one of my great regrets involves my relationship with a special horse in which I came to understand the cruel dualities of human relationships to even the animals they supposedly love and cherish the most.

Black Horse

When we met you were young
Your spirit wild and unbound
A champion stallion, black coat
Like fine Paris jet
A noble arrogance
I couldn’t resist

I felt a need to possess you
Like a jealous lover
To keep you away from others
And once you were mine
You became a great champion
In world record time

Then a fateful decision
To make you a stud
Your seed and your blood
Was worth more than gold
And it seemed smart and easy
To continue your line

You were put in a stall
Like a hothouse flower
Led in and out
And watched every hour
And milked for your seed like a cow
Yet I didn’t understand until now

Love made me blind to your sadness
And deaf to your madness
Your dreams to be free
And your passion to run
What have I done

What have I done
What have I done

Your instincts fought back
You kicked and you bucked
And you snorted with rage
The hands came to hate you
Almost as much as you hated them
But not that truly or deeply

So chains were employed
To clamp you inside
A muzzle to stop you
From biting your hide
Your legs bandaged and bound
So now, even your coat, skin, and hoofs
Couldn't breathe

That's when the madness
Really took hold
The only thing growing was your anger
And with it the danger
To all in your way
So most stayed away

Now the picture of you
Once healthy and wild
Had become an inversion
And something depraved
Where once was a royal
Now stood a slave

Love made me blind to your sadness
And deaf to your madness
Your dreams to be free
And your passion to run
What have I done

What have I done
What have I done

Eventually you could barely be touched
Your life an endless battle
That you could never win
Kept away from the light
Days, weeks, and months
Of one long endless night

Years passed and with the mercy of age
You grew old and sick
Until the time had come
I brought you to pasture
For a final walk

I stood beside you
As you basked in the sun
But in the distance you spied
Other horses, young bucks
Running wild on the hill
And I felt a tremor

The years fell away
A spark lit your eyes
And somehow the strength of youth
Filled your muscles again
You reared up on your hind legs
And gave a thunderous cry

The other horses heard you
Turned and then scattered
In awe of your power
Still mighty and clear
Savage and noble
For one last moment of glory

Love made me blind to your sadness
And deaf to your madness
Your dreams to be free
And your passion to run
What have I done
What have I done
What have I done

The vet came for the end
Carrying his bag and his pity
With just moments to live
I looked in your eyes
I wanted forgiveness
Or something, anything
But I found no answers
And none were deserved
I touched your muzzle
Mane, withers, and back
Then one quick injection
And all faded to black

Your body crumbled instantly
The life force gone quicker than
Breath blends with the sky
Light gone from your eye
And we buried you there
In a grave we had dug

Does your spirit live on
Where did the energy go
The life force you had
That I'll never forget
Though I'll spend all my days
Cursed and filled with regret

Love made me blind to your sadness
And deaf to your madness

Your dreams to be free
And your passion to run
What have I done
What have I done
What have I done

I’m constantly enthralled by the symphonic interconnections of the natural world, the way ecosystems and animals coexist and make up the tapestry of Earth. One of my favorite demonstrations of this unlikely harmony is the relationship between one of the Earth’s largest animals and the smallest.

Elephants and Termites

When elephants get itchy butts
They squirm and jump and twitch
It's not like they can use their trunks
To scratch a nasty itch

But luckily their tiny friends
The termites are around
They build up piles of mud and dirt
Into massive twelve-foot mounds

The elephants will rub themselves
For however long it takes
To make the itches go away
But cause the mounds to break

Elephants and termites
One giant, one so small
Elephants and termites
The wonder of it all

Once the mound collapses
The ground beneath it sinks
And fills with water deep enough
To have a bath or drink

Animals then gather
Under the blazing sun
At mother nature's water park
To take part in the fun

Elephants and termites
One giant, one so small
Elephants and termites

The wonder of it all

Even birds they visit
And sometimes from their wings
Fish eggs drop into the pool
Creating fishy things

A wonderous oasis
So beautiful and rich
It’s almost unbelievable
It started with an itch

Elephants and termites
One giant, one so small
Elephants and termites
The wonder of it all
Elephants and termites
One giant, one so small
Elephants and termites
The wonder of it all

One of my most indelible memories was meeting Koko, the famed western lowland gorilla, who learned to communicate with humans after being taught nearly a thousand words of sign language. Koko's intelligence was astonishing, and our connection was profound if somewhat terrifying and, in retrospect, quite comical.

Koko, I Love You

Our language gap
It was slightly absurd
I performed Shakespeare
You—one thousand words

We were thrown together
Through fate in a room
I immediately sensed
That this could be my doom

Koko, yes, I do love you
Was all I could say
For now and forever
Koko, yes, I do love you
And I hope that you see
And that you give
Your love back to me

You and I
We drew closer
A savage attraction
That might tear me apart

And I danced on the edge
Of submission and grace
And I tried to unpuzzle
The look on your face

I heard your ex-lover
In the room just next door
He was pounding on the ceiling
And he was pacing the floor
You ignored his pain

That seeped through the walls
Then reached out so boldly
And you grabbed me by the balls

Koko, yes, I do love you
Was all I could say
For now and forever

You and I
We drew closer
A savage attraction
That might tear me apart

And I danced on the edge
Of submission and grace
And I tried to unpuzzle
The look on your face

I've always believed in the connection of all living things
Something that lives beyond words
An instinct, a force
A force of nature—yes
But also of love, pure love
The purest love
A love that knows no bounds
And needs no language …
Or perhaps it is its own language
That just doesn't require any alphabet
Or any words

One more thing
To understand
You are an ape
And I am merely a man

So I danced on the edge
Of submission and grace

And I tried to unpuzzle
The look on your face

THE PLANET



Bill suited up to go to space aboard the Blue Origin flight (2021)

Although I've always considered myself an outdoorsman with an appreciation for nature, I had a profound experience during the filming of a documentary television series that gave me an even deeper appreciation for the wonders of our planet, the interconnectedness of everything, and the spiritual key it unlocked for me.

The Meaning

It was a scientific mission
But not to outer space
A documentary TV show
The earth's decline to trace

From melting polar ice caps
To soil scorched by the sun
The theme was grim and simple
Trace the damage that we'd done

The purpose wasn't hopeless
We all held the belief
That scientific knowledge
Could provide relief

So we crossed polluted oceans
Followed geo tracks
Measuring and filming
All the flaws and cracks

I was searching for
The meaning
A proof of greater plans
Some elevated vision
Beyond the reach of man

Searching for the meaning
Before it was too late
To save myself or anyone
From cruel or random fate

Eventually we trekked
Where many came to seek

The very highest highs
The Himalayan peaks

Everest like a god
Stood challenging and cold
But my journey took a different turn
Toward the center of the soul

Among the craggy hills
Forged from weathered wood
Ancient and majestic
A monastery stood

A thousand tiny rooms
The dimensions all the same
The walls scarred black with carbon
From a million candle flames

And there—devoted monks
Of every age on end
Would mediate both day and night
Hoping to transcend

We had come with science
Technology in hand
They used only spirit
In the attempt to understand

Transfixed by the chanting
Their holy mission clear
I longed to join the monks
To have meaning appear

I was searching for
The meaning
A proof of greater plans
Some elevated vision

Beyond the reach of man

Searching for the meaning
Before it was too late
To save myself or anyone
From cruel or random fate

The film crew kept their pace
And we watched the sad parade
Of endless climbers from the west
Trails of litter that they made

At night we slept in tents
Yet my thoughts were drawn afar
So I took my sleeping bag outside
And lay under the stars

I wanted to be closer
To some celestial dance
Or the spiritual vibrations
That kept the monks entranced

Seven nights I slept there
Staring at the sky
No animals disturbed my peace
For none could live that high

I listened to the wind
Searching for a clue
And tried to hear a message
That never did come through

I opened up my soul
But every night the same
I woke up in frustration
Because nothing ever came

I was searching for
The meaning
A proof of greater plans
Some elevated vision
Beyond the reach of man

Searching for the meaning
Before it was too late
To save myself or anyone
From cruel or random fate

On the final morning
I still had found no peace
So I packed up my belongings
To head back down the crease

But by a twist of fate
It landed in my hand
Falling off my backpack
Some simple grains of sand

It struck me dumb with wonder
Like sun after the rain
I saw the entire universe
In each and every grain

Yes—each grain was a diamond
Unique, precious, and rare
And countless years and miracles
Conspired to bring them there

The wholeness of the planet
Like a flash it came
We all were grains of sand
All different, yet the same

Yes—every human soul

Every atom that persists
Bound up in the journey
The journey to exist

There was no separation
There were no prison walls
The meaning of the meaning
Lived inside it all

I didn’t need a mantra
Or set of magic prayers
I just needed open eyes
To notice what was there

Holy are the mountains
Holy is the sand
Holy are the human beings
Trying to understand
Holy are the whispers
Holy are the screams
Holy are the nightmares
Holy are the dreams
Holy is the seedcake
Holy is the rot
Holy are the written words
Holy those forgot
Holy is the order
Holy is the mess
Holy are the modest ones
Holy—the undressed
Holy is the garbage
Holy is the gold
Holy are the infants
Holy are the old
Holy is the poverty
Holy is the wealth
Holy are the unions

Holy is the self
Holy are the unions
Holy is the self
Holy are the unions
Holy is the self

I've come to believe in the interconnectedness of all living things. The proof of our interdependence on nature is everywhere. One of my favorite demonstrations of this, is the recently discovered communication between mushrooms and trees.

Mushrooms Talk to Trees

I never talk to mushrooms
And if you ask me why
I've yet to meet an interesting
Or talkative fungi

Here's the truth I found
As odd as it may be
Mushrooms can communicate
But choose to talk to trees

Yes—mushrooms talk to trees
Mushrooms talk to trees
As amazing as it sounds
They chitchat underground

The parts above the earth
Are called the fungi fruit
But in the soil mycelium
Wrap around the roots

Of trees of every kind
That line the forests' bed
And trees use the mycelium
To form a wood-wide web

Mushrooms talk to trees
Mushrooms talk to trees
As amazing as it sounds
They chitchat underground

Now here's another fact
That's strange as any other
Just like us, a tree can have

A nice protective mother

The mother trees get word
Around the woody trails
About the baby trees they have
Using mushroom-root emails

Mushrooms talk to trees
Mushrooms talk to trees
As amazing as it sounds
They chitchat underground

In Spanish, mushroom is *el hongo*
In Lebanon, *al fatar*
Mushrooms have a lot of names
In lands both near and far

But does the language change
With the country they are in
Do Chinese trees communicate
In mushroom Mandarin

Mushrooms talk to trees
Mushrooms talk to trees
As amazing as it sounds
They chitchat underground

Mushrooms talk to trees
Mushrooms talk to trees
As amazing as it sounds
They chitchat underground

I came of age during the space race with the Russians and then created one of my most indelible roles playing a starship captain. As a result, I've always had a deep fascination, passion, and association with space exploration. Yet, while the physics and scientific theories about our universe fascinate me, when I look up at the night sky, I'm always drawn back to a more primal, human, and poetic reaction when I contemplate the cosmos.

Endless Night

I dreamed of outer space
The most romantic quest
To reach beyond the infinite
An aching in my chest

The deepest sense of longing
For everything unknown
The mysteries of the universe
So very far from home

Endless night
Is what I see
Endless night
Eternity
Endless night
The in-between
Endless night
In which to dream

Stars they lay upon
Black blanket of the sky
The paradox of light and dark
That danced before my eyes

With science and desire
The innovations grow
The joy is in the searching for
What we may never know

Endless night
Is what I see
Endless night
Eternity

Endless night
The in-between
Endless night
In which to dream

I broke the Kármán line
I floated like so few
But then I felt a longing
Embrace and love the blue

Though my feet are planted
I still feel my heart race
Whenever I look skyward
And long for outer space

Endless night
Is what I see
Endless night
Eternity
Endless night
The in-between
Endless night
In which to dream
Endless night
In which to dream
Endless night
In which to dream

At the unlikely age of ninety-one, I was invited by Jeff Bezos to journey to space on the Blue Origin space shuttle, as part of a group of amateur astronauts. Despite the risks, my lifelong interest in science and space made the offer irresistible. Once announced, the public devoured the irony of me, a man so closely associated with the fictional Captain Kirk, becoming a real space traveler. Yet, beyond the public hype and my own anxieties about the dangers, the trip itself transformed me. The adventurous journey I had anticipated became an existential realization that space exploration mattered little when compared with everything we as human beings stood to lose should we not save our own planet.

So Fragile, So Blue

Part 1: Lifting Off

How many times did I hear
Space the final frontier
Like a punchline or jeer
Used to pull me apart

Now at ninety years old
Could I be that bold
A dream packaged and sold
Life to imitate art

The press devoured the story
Of my potential glory
To make some sort of history
But how did I feel

Potential explosions filled me with dread
Dozens of ways I could wind up dead
Danced in my head
The fear was real

Strapped into the craft in my seat
Just like Starfleet
My heart skipped a beat
And in the blink of an eye

It all happened so fast
A thunderous blast
Shot up as clouds passed
Punched a hole in the sky

Through the earth’s atmosphere
Feeling the fear
Receding once we were clear
And continued to climb

Every sense was awake
No move did we make
Till fifty miles up—the break
The Kármán line

So fragile, so blue
What can we do
What can we do
So fragile so blue
What can we do
What can we do

Part 2: Space

Once beyond gravity
We unlocked the key
And set ourselves free
Floating around the inside

While some tumbled and danced
In that weightless trance
I had to take my chance
To the window to witness the ride

I needed to see
What was out there for me
In the endless sea
To meet my fate
I could never anticipate

What I saw filled me with awe
But also something cold, pitiless, and raw
An instinct to withdraw
A hot coal to be dropped

Relentless blackness was all I could see
Like depthless eternity
A malevolent mystery
That could never be stopped

Endless darkness
No twinkling stars
No magical lights
That call from afar
No breathable air
Nothing to care
No message to send
No beginnings or ends
No life could sustain
No dreams could remain
Nearly drove me insane
And I felt a deep pain
What I saw stopped me cold
Collapsed all my breath
All I could see was death
Yes, all I could see was death
And a death with no sight, smell, or sound
That's what I found
That's what I found

Part 3: The Blue Dot

Then from the corner of my eye
Looking back I could spy
Something that made me cry

Under a yellow, blue dome

Sagan called it a pale blue dot
But until then I'd forgot
On my moonshot
Earth is our home

Space has no people, passion, or love
An endless question that hangs from above
We know almost nothing of
Where only death waits

We live on the edge of a pin
Our air is cellophane thin
But it's where life begins
It's what's at stake

So fragile, so blue
What can we do
What can we do
So fragile, so blue
What can we do
What can we do

Part 4: Touching Down

When I finally touched down
Finding my feet on solid ground
A feeling so profound
That I'd never had

No triumph or joy
Not like a little boy
Who had finally played with a toy
I felt deeply, deeply sad

A sadness so real and so deep
That I might never sleep
But I just have to keep
And let people know

Boldly go
Boldly go
Boldly go
Boldly go means to love
To take responsibility of
What's below and above
And never live to regret

I hope I never recover
From what I discovered
Like a long-lost lover
I had left to neglect

Mountains, trees, birds, beasts
Life-giving water, magnificent feasts
North, south, west, east
All human reactions from terror to fun
All that breathes, swims, flies, or runs
Literally everything under the sun

Every ant that crawls
Every ocean squall
Snails, lions, sand,
The tiniest creatures we don't understand
Redwoods touching the sky
A cat's glassy eyes
The plains waving grass
The miracle of glass
A beautiful child
Gray wolves running wild
Every smell fine or foul
Every howl, song, or growl

The fire, wind, and rain
Purest pleasure, piercing pain
The heat of our skin
All original sin
Bound up together
Built to last forever
Connected as one
But coming undone
It’s all ours to lose
A fate that we choose

So fragile, so blue
What can we do
So fragile, so blue
What can we do
What can we do
What can we do

REFLECTIONS



Bill, photographed by Joe DiMaggio (2008)

As time passes, some things fade into memory and disappear while others come into sharper focus and take on more significance. My conscious life and my dreams intermingle more freely.

Love, Death, and Horses

At daybreak
I think about
Love, death, and horses
Horses, death, and love
Fill my thoughts in the sun

And at night
I dream about
Love, death, and horses
I've come to believe
Only understand one

Many actors hold grudges, some against me that I will never quite understand. I have been wronged at various times in my life. One recent incident stung more intensely because I was betrayed by a supposed friend in a business deal. Letting go of my anger and embracing forgiveness was difficult but liberating, and I'd highly recommend it for a healthier state of mind.

Just Forgive

I'd been cheated, made a fool
Money skimmed like a sharp sanding tool
Bought a horse, based on lies
That you formed right in front of my eyes

Once revealed, I felt rage
So I crossed off your name from my page
You were gone with no trace
Just a bitter hole left in your place

I carried that hate like a weight
My mistake
My mistake

They say we all get what we give
So let live
And forgive
Just forgive
Just forgive

Years of silence passed us by
Without a sole word since goodbye
Shrunk you down to one flaw
Keeping my scar fresh and raw

What'd I gain in that time
Did my silence undue any crime
Not at all, I felt worse
Till my anger became like a curse

I carried that hate like a weight
My mistake
My mistake

They say we all get what we give
So let live
And forgive
Just forgive
Just forgive

Then I heard you were sick
Your final days were coming on quick
Called you up, not to blame
And found you awash in your shame

I forgave all the sins
That had caused our whole rift to begin
And reclaimed, a dear friend
When you were so close to the end

I carried that hate like a weight
My mistake
My mistake

They say we all get what we give
So let live
And forgive
Just forgive Just forgive

Now I take lighter steps
Don’t want to have any regrets
Time is not passing slow
So I’ve learned to embrace letting go

I carried that hate like a weight
My mistake
My mistake

They say we all get what we give
So let live
And forgive

Just forgive
Just forgive

Our ability to think and reason is what supposedly sets us apart from most other creatures. However, consciousness is both a curse and a blessing. Sometimes I think that the more time passes the less I know about the big questions.

What Do We Know

Mindfulness taught me
To try to live life
Aware of each moment
Free of judgment or strife

But lately my thoughts
Drift beyond waking breath
I find time better spent
To be pondering death

What do we know
What are the answers
A baby's birth
A murderous cancer
Why should we care
What should we do
Is there something beyond
Just me and you

Shakespeare he wrote
Seven ages began
With the sputtering child
To the drooling old man

Yes, the world is a stage
And we all merely play
But as to what's next
Even he couldn't say

What do we know
What are the answers
A baby's birth
A murderous cancer

Why should we care
What should we do
Is there something beyond
Just me and you

Always worshipped hellos
And avoided goodbyes
Crave the parting of lips
And the spreading of thighs

If it’s all an illusion
Fame, power, and wealth
I’ll cling to sensation
There may be nothing else

What do we know
What are the answers
A baby’s birth
A murderous cancer
Why should we care
What should we do
Is there something beyond
Just me and you

Yet, the more we discover
The more we unfold
The mysteries deepen
And have greater hold

We’re in love with the mystery
What might be out there
Stand shoulder to shoulder
Humbly searching the air

And I tune in the world
Every sound, taste, and smell
From the tiniest insects

To the clamorous bells

Everything comes together
Like a deep ocean blue
If life is sensation
Perhaps death is too

What do we know
What are the answers
A baby’s birth
A murderous cancer
Why should we care
What should we do
Is there something beyond
Just me and you

This is the first set of lyrics Rob and I ever wrote together. It was for my album The Blues. *And it is our attempt to write a blues song from my perspective, as I was not your typical bluesman from the Mississippi Delta or Chicago's South Side. Although I've lived my life in public, I have a private side, and we tried to explore the dualities of my inner life, my yearnings and regrets.*

Secrets or Sins

I was always moving forward
I was always saying yes
A thousand little triumphs
A million to forget

I can hear my father chanting
In the echo of the past
The faith that he believed in
Couldn't hold me, didn't last

Now I'm looking into darkness
A traveler in the night
Now I'm looking into darkness
Still searching for the light

All the loves I've had
Still feel them on my skin
I just can't decide if they're
My secrets or my sins

I stare up at the stars
All the questions still remain
What set it all in motion
All the passion, all the pain

If I could push a button
And just restart the game
You may not like this answer
I'd do everything the same

Now I'm looking into darkness
A traveler in the night
Now I'm looking into darkness

Still searching for the light

All the loves I've had
Still feel them on my skin
I just can't decide if they're
My secrets or my sins

Now I'm looking into darkness
A traveler in the night
Now I'm looking into darkness
Still searching for the light

All the loves I've had
Still feel you on my skin
I just can't decide if you're
My secret or my sin

Perhaps my most coveted personal trait has been my endless curiosity. I've never lost my passion to meet people, engage in the world and its mysteries, and to learn new things. And so I get up every morning looking forward to a new day and whatever it might bring.

I Love Tomorrow

Some folks can’t help
Living in the past
A long-lost girl
Or a touchdown pass

From high school days
Their golden years
Calling back the memories
Over cans of beer

But that’s not me
I don’t look back
Or more the point
I’m losing track

Can’t spend my time
Living with regrets
Still got some days
To make new ones yet

I love tomorrow
Live for today
Try to pin me down
I’ll slip away
Don’t know what’s coming
’Cause it’s all new
I love tomorrow
For me and you

Still play Hank Williams
And Patsy Cline
Their tunes are with me
For all time

But new songs are
What life's about
Even favorite records
Sometime wear out

Love meeting strangers
That come and go
Some stay strange
Some friendships grow

New friends are great
For a good time
While old ones grow
Like a vintage wine

I love tomorrow
Live for today
Try to pin me down
I'll slip away
Don't know what's coming
'Cause it's all new
I love tomorrow
For me and you

Got dusty trophies
Sitting on a shelf
And photo albums
Of my younger self
But I barely care
What was done and said
Yeah—I keep on moving
Always look ahead

I love tomorrow
Live for today
Try to pin me down
I'll slip away

Don’t know what’s coming
’Cause it’s all new
I love tomorrow
For me and you

DENOUEMENT



Bill, photographed by Paul Camuso (2025)

Unfortunately, when you reach a certain age, death becomes a subject that follows you like a shadow. This is particularly true and awkward for someone like me who has lived in the public eye. If someone catches me coughing in public, speculation about my imminent demise will likely appear on the Internet within the hour. While this is annoying, the idea of death itself is even worse. As you've likely gleaned from the words in this book, I love life. So, I very much related to Dylan Thomas's words on the subject that my partner and I used as a springboard for a song on my heavy metal album. As an aside, I had absolutely no idea what heavy metal was before making the album, but I'm told these lyrics capture the angry spirit of the genre and my true feelings about death.

Rage, Rage

(with thanks to Dylan Thomas)

I pushed every limit, broke every rule
Ever since my days in school
I lived my life beyond the edge
Rung all the bells, jumped off the ledge

Now I near a century
The giant clock ticks loud for me
But I won't go down without a fight
'Cause Dylan Thomas had it right

Rage, rage
Against the dying of the light
Rage, rage
Against the dying of the light
Rage, rage,

I want to taste and touch and feel
To go so deep, beyond the real
The fire inside still blazes hot
I'll pump out every single shot

Do I fear death—hell yeah I do
So beat me till I'm black and blue
I won't go down without a fight
'Cause Dylan Thomas had it right

Rage, rage
Against the dying of the light
Rage, rage
Against the dying of the light

Rage, rage
Rage, rage
Rage rage

I won’t go gentle into that good night …
I won’t go gentle into that good night
No—I won’t go gentle into that good night

So I rage, rage
Against the dying of the light
Rage, rage
Against the dying of the light
Rage, rage
Rage, rage
Rage, rage

Although I'll kick and scream to hold on to life to my last breath, I'm a realist and know the end is inevitable. But like everything else I've ever done, I'm trying to say "yes" and proactively engage in whatever comes next. As a result, I've thought about what to do with my earthly body once it's done with me or I with it. And I found a rather nifty solution that speaks to both my love for nature and my hope for the future.

I Want to Be a Tree

When my time has come
Don’t put me in a box
And skip the fancy shiva
No platters of bagels and lox

Lay down that spike and chisel
No headstone will I need
Yeah, when I die, my wish is clear
Just plant me like a seed

’Cause I want to be a tree
Yes, I want to be a tree
With plenty of leaves and bark to spare
For everyone to see

I want to be a tree
Yes, I want to be a tree
You can sit right down under my shade
That’ll be enough for me

I read it and it’s true
Make a pod from my remains
Then stick me in the ground
And pray for sun and rain

The richness from my body
Will supercharge the earth
And like a natural maternity ward
To a sapling I’ll give birth

So I want to be a tree
Yes, I want to be a tree
With plenty of leaves and bark to spare

For everyone to see

I want to be a tree
Yeah, I want to be a tree
You can sit right down under my shade
That'll be enough for me

So don't stick me in an urn
For some relative to keep
And please don't throw me overboard
To the bottom of the deep

No twenty-one-gun salute
So just put those guns to bed
I've got a much more peaceful wish
Bring the garden tools instead

'Cause I want to be a tree
Yeah, I want to be a tree
With plenty of leaves and bark to spare
For everyone to see

I want to be a tree
Yes, I want to be a tree
Standing, swaying firm and tall
Glorious and free

I want to be a tree
Yes, I want to be a tree
You can sit right down under my shade
That'll be enough for me
You can sit right down under my shade
That'll be enough for me

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William Shatner has worked as a musician, producer, director, and celebrity pitchman, and notably played Captain Kirk on *Star Trek* from 1966 to 1969 and in seven Star Trek films. He won an Emmy and a Golden Globe for his role as attorney Denny Crane on the TV drama *Boston Legal*. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Elizabeth.

Robert Sharenow is an award-winning writer, television producer, and media executive. He is the author of several books that have received starred reviews, including the Sydney Taylor Book Award–winning *The Berlin Boxing Club*, and *My Mother the Cheerleader*, which was selected as an ALA Best Book for Teens pick. As a television producer and executive, his creative teams have won multiple Emmy and Peabody Awards, as well as an Oscar. He and his wife reside in New York.

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Cover design by Amanda Shaffer

ISBN: 979-8-3372-1153-4

Published in 2026 by Open Road Integrated Media, Inc.
180 Maiden Lane
New York, NY 10038
www.openroadmedia.com



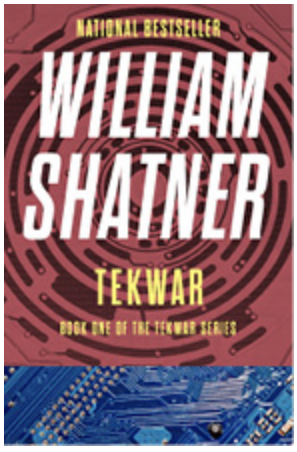
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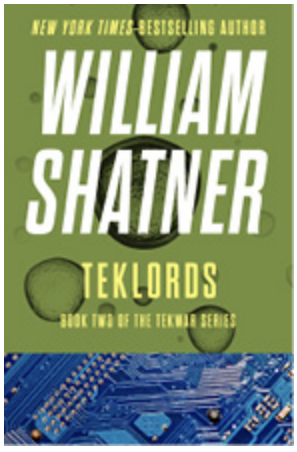
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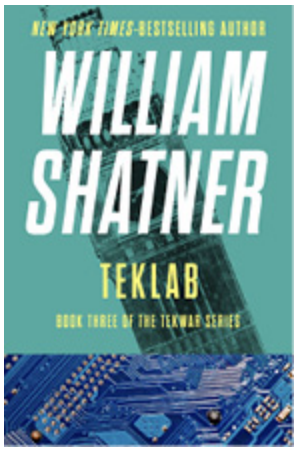


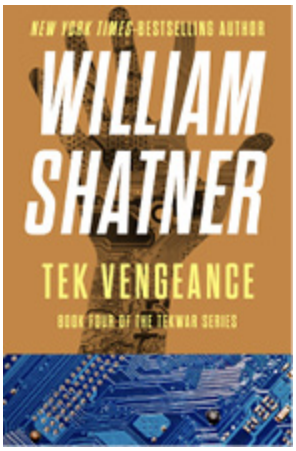


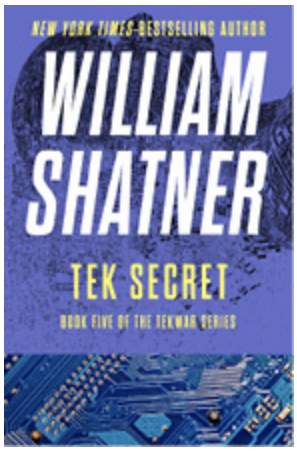


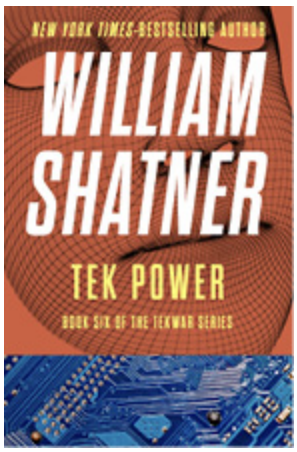


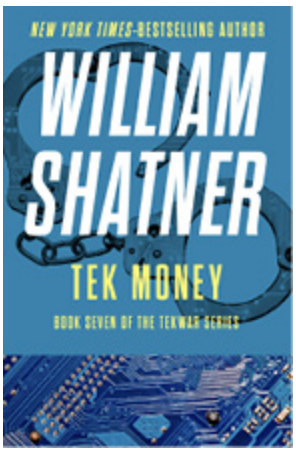


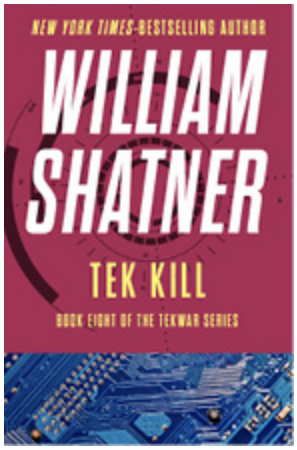

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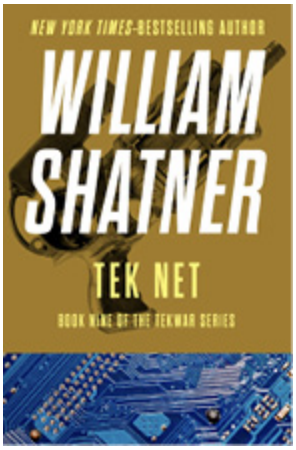

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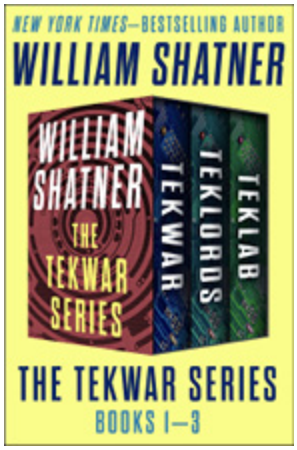

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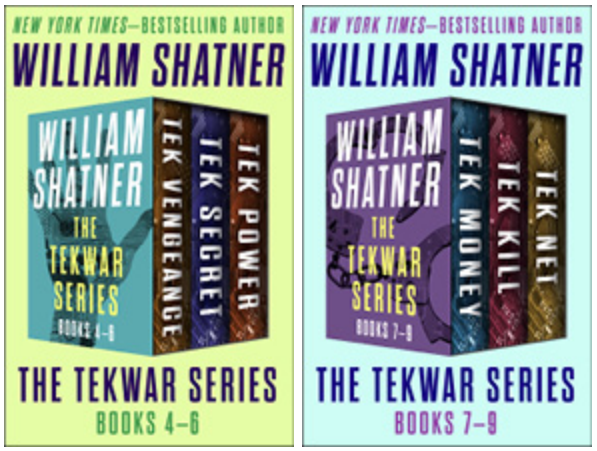

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