

The New Amazing Grace

**Conceived, Gathered
and Sequenced by**

Edward Sanders

The New Amazing Grace

*Dedicated to the memory of Janis Joplin,
who sang Amazing Grace so beautifully*

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(individual contributors may use their verses
as they please)

Concerning public performances

We urge you to sing *The New Amazing Grace* at peace rallies, fundraisers for good causes, at church gatherings and public meetings of all kinds. It can be presented, of course, in a very secular way. Its message of always trying to keep a hopeful and upbeat outlook is needed now more than ever. And please give out lyrics to the audience so they can sing along!

See further suggestions about performances of *NAG* at the back of this collection.

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Each Day
we look to something
to lighten the Passage

& it all comes down
to a sense of
Amazing Grace

—Edward Sanders

Introduction to the New Amazing Grace

—Edward Sanders

The first time I ever heard “Amazing Grace” was when Janis Joplin sang it in the late 1960s. She sang it so beautifully! It amazed me then, and the memory of it continues to amaze, thrill, exalt and offer consolation to this day. Her mother after all had been a Sunday School teacher, though Janis would sometimes sing “Amazing Grace” standing up against the bar in rock and roll saloons, with other well known musicians joining in on harmony.

The idea for *The New Amazing Grace* came on March 1, 1992 when I attended and read poetry at a conference on Arts and Medicine in New York City. The nation had recently gone through the Reagan years, and as it turned out we were beginning the final year of Bush 1. As I observed a number of panels and presentations at the conference, which featured artists, writers and bioregional activists, there seemed a fresh spirit of hope for democratic revival in the words. Change—maybe even good change—was in the air. It was then that I thought of creating *The New Amazing Grace*, which would celebrate the grace of being alive at the close of a crazy century, the grace of poetry and the grace of the singing of poetry in harmony, and the greatest grace of all, “Amazing Grace.” And so that afternoon in New York City I began to make a list of poets to whom I would send letters asking for verses.

A few weeks after the Arts and Healing conference I sang at a Jerry Brown for president rally in Woodstock (Brown beat Clinton in the Democratic primary in Woodstock). There was a unmistakable energy and expectation in the room, and in the nation in general that spring, so during the concert I began going through my address book to compile a mailing list of poets and musicians to whom to send appeals for lyrics.

My intention had been to begin compiling the *New Amazing Grace* in the summer of '92, but work composing a two-act musical drama, *Cassandra*, and overseeing productions in the summers of '92 and '93, plus completing a new book of poems, *Hymn to the Rebel Cafe*, and much volunteer work helping my NY State Assemblyman drive organized crime out of the solid waste business in the Hudson Valley— all prevented further work on *The New Amazing Grace*. Finally, in late 1993 I mailed out about a hundred letters to friends and poets I admire, describing the project and asking for verses.

As I wrote in the letter to poets for verses, “We welcome verses on all aspects of grace. Although we are eager to receive verses in the traditional sacred mode of ‘Amazing Grace,’ the new verses can be very secular. You should feel free to write on any aspect of life and graceful celebration. The only rules are that the lines be celebratory and speak in an upbeat, poetic, inspired, and even blissful mode.”

“The text,” I continued, “and meter can be as varied as you want, with the requirement that it fit into the time-frame of a single verse of the traditional ‘Amazing Grace.’”

Right away I began receiving verses from some of the finest poets. National Public Radio aired the call for verses on its program Weekend Edition in December of 1993 which resulted in a good number of submissions from ministers and people in towns and cities across America. *Poetry Flash* in California also published the call for verses, as did station KPFA in Berkeley.

Ginsberg and Seeger

It was difficult, however, to get *New Amazing Grace* verses from several of my heroes. For instance, Pete Seeger sent me a postcard that began, “Dear Ed, Sorry— I just can’t think of anything to add...” I wrote him back to say that I couldn’t believe that one of the greatest song writers in American history— the composer of “Turn, Turn, Turn,” “Where Have All the Flowers Gone” and half of “If I Had a Hammer”— couldn’t come up with a 4-line quatrain for NAG. It worked. Seeger finally sent his verse a few weeks later.

The great bard Allen Ginsberg was another holdout. He telephoned one evening in late January 1994 to announce he’d composed a verse, and he began singing it. It was rather scatological and did not seem to fit in with the call for rhymes of “graceful celebration.” So, I broke in, “No! No!” I told him that the NPR piece had brought in a rinse of submissions from Methodist ministers and the regular folk of radio land.

On March 14 Allen sent a note: “Re Amazing Grace— I’ve just not been able to do anything— or nothing’s occurred to me— my head full of panic at unfinished CD Rhino notes now delaying release of the 4 CD’s another 2 months, my overload responsible—I’ll still try— Love Allen”

I wasn’t sure he knew the melody and meter for “Amazing Grace” so I sent him a letter urging him to keep trying, and I included the “Amazing Grace” metrical scheme:

U - U - U - U -
U - U - U -
U - U - U - U -
U - U - U -

Two weeks later he called complaining that he’d been up all night and then sang some very beautiful verses. They arrived in the mail a few days later with a note: “Your last letter with ballad meter helped clarify the form.

U - U - U - U -
U - U - U -

“Here’s 4 stanzas. The last stanza could go first. Use 2, 3 or 4 of the stanzas in any order you edit. Thanks for the prompting & persistence— but I lost a night’s sleep working it over!

Love
Allen”

I decided to use them all. Allen’s “New Amazing Grace” was one of the finest poems of his final years. (See the letters and cards from Seeger and Ginsberg in the back of this collection.)

Researching the Original Verses

Meanwhile I researched the history of *Amazing Grace*. Some of the facts are not clear, and the evidence, as so often in history, points this way and that. The hymn was written by an English minister named John Newton apparently in the early 1770s. It had been one of the Olney Hymns, a group of 348 Christian anthems written by Newton and the brilliant poet William Cowper.

John Newton, born in 1725, had come from a nautical family, and by the 1740s, was captain of a slave ship. In 1748, commanding the slave ship *Greyhound*, had nearly died in a storm, and while his ship was facing the churning pits of the ocean, had a profound religious conversion. Later, Newton became a minister, and active in the anti-slavery movement. William Cowper also was active in the anti-slavery movement in England, and wrote a number of poems on the subject. I’d been a fan of Cowper’s poems— his series of winter walk section in *The Task*, for instances, and his poems about his pet rabbit.

Cowper suffered periodic bouts of intense depression and in 1767, at the invitation of John

Newton, who by then was a noted evangelical preacher, moved to the small town of Olney, located about 59 miles northwest of London. Newton was the curate in Olney. It was then that the two began writing hymns.

The Olney Hymns were published in 1779. William Cowper's contributions to the Hymns, 68 in number, were indicated by "C." John Newton composed 280 of them, including "Amazing Grace." Newton's primal inspiration for "Amazing Grace" was apparently the intense religious conversion during the time that his slave ship seemed about to sink. It was not called "Amazing Grace" in the Olney Hymns. In fact, "Amazing Grace" was not very famous at the time and for generations thereafter as well. It is not, for instance, listed among Newton's most well known hymns in the 11th edition *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Pioneers in America took up the hymn, and it became a staple of rural musicality. Back in 1992, "Amazing Grace" was still not that popular, not to the level of today when it is sung many times at public events of all kinds. I was not aware when I began *The New Amazing Grace* that back in 1990 PBS had broadcast Bill Moyers' very well received documentary film on "Amazing Grace."

The Premier Performances

I spoke with my friend Ed Friedman, the poet and director of the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church during those years. We decided that the Project would sponsor the premiere performance of *The New Amazing Grace* at the Church as a benefit for the Project and for the Church. We met with the minister of St. Mark's, Lloyd Casson, who wholeheartedly supported the project. We held a number of meetings, planning the premiere, and we were able to put together an outstanding ensemble of singers and musicians.

I prepared demo tapes and mailed them out, and selected a sequence of verses. There were a number of verses, or clusters of verses submitted that seemed somewhat similar in tone and theme, so I selected those which seemed the ones with the most skillfully realized lyrics. My apologies to those whose verses are not included in this edition.

A friend, Rani Singh, acquired a tape of Leadbelly singing *Amazing Grace* in an interesting uptempo, format, which we decided to play during the concert and invite the audience to sing along. I owned a beautiful CD of Paul Robeson singing, in his deep shake-the-ocean voice, the traditional *NAG* verses, so we played that also during the evening, as part of the presentation.

The first performance on November 19, 1994 went beautifully. As many poets and contributors as I could I got to sing their verses. WBAI in NYC broadcast the entire concert. The performance was a success, well attended, and in the months thereafter I continued to send out appeals. Some of my appeals went unanswered for years. William Burroughs finally sent in his verse, written in silver magic marker on his 1995 Christmas Card, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti's came in while we were both at Naropa in 1998. Such is the truth of keeping the issues alive.

A year after the premiere, there was a second benefit performance of *The New Amazing Grace* at St. Mark's on November 19, 1995.

Publishing the New Amazing Grace

It's one thing to say, "we have to keep the issues alive," it's another actually to do it. I intended to publish *The New Amazing Grace* and to record it professionally. Things intervened—mainly book and writing projects such as *1968, a History in Verse*, the first four volumes of *America, a History in Verse*, plus publishing a newspaper for 8 years and finishing several books of short stories.

Then came the war in Iraq, an unjust, maiming, landscape-shattering, uncalled-for war that, much like Vietnam, dragged on and on, and, as in Nam, Americans planes and soldiers seemed slowly to pull back from the bloodshed, according to some kind of agonizing timetable, leaving

behind blasted structures, anguish, and brokenness.

I thought it was time to publish *The New Amazing Grace* and to urge all citizens to perform it in order to promote peace and to take a stance against the klingonization and excess militarization of a great nation.

Contributors to The New Amazing Grace

I am very very grateful to those whose verses are part of *The New Amazing Grace*, listed below in the order of their appearance in the text:

Frank O'Hara, Peter Schickele, Jerome Rothenberg, Faerin naFior, Robert Creeley, Ron Padgett, Jane Wodening, John Newton (with one verse, "When we've been here 10,000 years..." written by another), Allen Ginsberg, Pete Seeger, Miriam Meisler, Robert Bly, Irene Haupel Genco, Peter Leshak, Millicent Allen, Patricia D'Allesandro, Dragon of Ava, Missouri, Suzette Haden Elj, Anselm Hollo, Velma J. Bennett, Robert Hadcock, Anne Waldman, Pauline Oliveros, Jack Collom, Edward Sanders, Mykel D. Myles, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Diane Di Prima, Helen Diacomichal Turley, R. "Dutch" Niendorff, Leadbelly, William Burroughs, Jim Carroll, Diane Wakoski, Amy Gerstler, Tuli Kupferberg, Lee Ann Brown, Vincent Ferrini, Ed Friedman, Jacqueline Scott, Bob Holman, Peggy Haines, Alfred Rabow, T.L. Noe, Karen Edwards, Dan De Vries, Fielding Dawson, Douglas A. Szper, Andrei Codrescu, Joanne Kyger, Maureen Owen, Michael McClure, Lewis MacAdams, Janine Vega, Daniel C. Strizek, Roy Hartry, Jack Collom, Carl Rakosi, Gerrit Lansing, Utah Phillips, Tom Clark, Clayton Eshleman, David Childers, Eileen Myles, Julie Christianson Stivers, Michael Kittell, Renée Girard, Robert Hunter, Vicki Johns, Judy Hussie, Walter Royal Jones, Jr., Jan Kelley, Gretchen L. Woods, Judy Fasone, Gary Salvers, Susan K. Pate, Douglas Udell, Mikhail Horowitz, Beth Borrus

The New Amazing Grace

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Grace
to be born and live as variously as possible...

—Frank O'Hara
"In Memory of My Feelings"

I know not why my life is charmed,
Nor how I earn Thy grace;
But this I know: without Thy arm
I'd fall flat on my face.

—Peter Schickele

With Harry Watt, old Indian friend,
we sang Amazing Grace,
while we watched a new Allegheny flow
by his old ancestral place.

And his ghosts rose up like pale blue lights,
but found no abiding place,
except where he sang to guide them home,
with the sound of Amazing Grace

(Harry Watt's old house, saved from
the Kinzua Dam floodwaters above
the Allegheny River)

—Jerome Rothenberg

Great Mother, how your light breaks forth —
How clearly may it shine!
Before our eyes your daughters rise,
and know themselves divine.

—Faerin naFior

I dreamed I dwelled in a homeless place
 Where I was lost alone
 Folk looked right through me into space
 And passed with eyes of stone

O homeless hand on many a street
 Accept this change from me
 A friendly smile or word is sweet
 As fearless charity

Woe workingman who hears the cry
 And cannot spare a dime
 Nor look into a homeless eye
 Afraid to give the time

So rich or poor no gold to talk
 A smile on your face
 The homeless poor where you may walk
 Receive amazing grace

I dreamed I dwelled in a homeless place
 Where I was lost alone
 Folk looked right through me into space
 And passed with eyes of stone

—Allen Ginsberg

From quarks to stars, there's grace we know
 The grace of M-C-square
 And endless more, above, below
 We feel the grace is there

—Pete Seeger

With knowledge gleaned from D N A
 Old woes can now be cured,
 Where once was pain and tragic loss
 We now are reassured

Long days and nights of labor deep
 These secrets did reveal,

'Twas first CF*, then Huntington's,
Now D N A will heal.

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—Miriam Meisler
*Cystic Fibrosis
(She's a Professor of Human Genetics)

WILL WE FIND HEAVEN HERE ON EARTH?
IS THIS HEAVEN ALL THERE WILL BE?
O NO, WE'LL SWIM RIGHT PAST OUR BIRTH
LIKE SALMON TO THE SEA!

—Robert Bly

Amazing grace extends to space,
Where pioneers have flown;
It lifts my heart, it fuels my faith:
No place unknown to grace

— Irene Haupel Genco

Baptized by fire of distant stars
Still beckoning the race,
How ceaselessly we yearn for realms
Where borders have no place.

—Peter M. Leshak

The cosmic streams that flow converge,
We sail now seas of space --
So let us vow that our tomorrows
Reflect his stellar grace!

—Millicent Allen

I walked within a wood one day
and thought I was alone
but Grace was there
I felt her touch
and I was saved from stone.

—Patricia D'Alessandro

Amazing grays amazing browns
 Amazing blacks and reds
 Amazing whites and pinks and greens
 Amazing un-naméd

—Dragon of Ava, Missouri

I am a child of galaxies
 of planets all unknown
 a child of One Whose majesties
 require nor sword nor throne

—Suzette Haden Elj

I praise each day dawns on our bed
 to light your human form
 here next to mine when night has fled
 and we are here once more

together in this raging world
 this human universe
 together in this human world
 this raging universe

—Anselm Hollo

Amazing Grace,
 How soft that sounds,
 'Gainst the noise,
 All the traffic makes,
 Grace was here,
 'Fore there was
 Airie-a car,
 You cain't drive cars
 Past stars

—Velma J. Bennett

My Spirit soared one night in Dream
 And passed through the Gates of Time...
 Where I watched our Earth give wondrous birth
 To a world changed and sublime

There was no crime, no strife, or greed
 There Peace and Love were found
 I saw no want, no lack, no need
 And sweet music echoed 'round

I stood spellbound in that golden sound
 As tears streamed down my face...
 For the words of war were heard no more
 In that Time of Amazing Grace

Now I walk the street in the city's heat
 Through 'hood, ghetto, and slum
 But I know the hour of hate is past
 And the Time of Peace shall come

—Robert Hadcock

The grace of all the bards who pen
 Their words do transport me
 Sweet vowels & consonants strengthen
 Goddess Poesy's legacy

Sappho's bite & Shakespeare's wit
 & Dante's mystical climb
 Dickinson's rhyme, bearded Whitman's breath
 Are etched in genetic spine

O I bow down to Christ's thorny crown
 All sacraments meant to heal
 The Buddha's smile, old Yaweh's frown
 And Allah's consummate zeal

But poetry's a Goddess sent
 To save a wretch like me
 She strums the strings of life's desperate edge
 With her haunting melody

—Anne Waldman

A roaring sound I found a tone
 and sang till I could hear
 a round of tunes that played my mind
 and changes came so near

—Pauline Oliveros

The western bluebird
 sang among
 The February sage

Its warbles sweet were roundly flung
 Howe'er the snow did rage

—Jack Collom

(play tape or CD of howling storm during next verses)

The *Greyhound* whirled in the violent sea
 Wrapped in a pitiless wave
 The captain and his hold were doomed
 Till the hands of Grace did save

Plato says we follow Form
 Through every human storm
 But Gnostic Inwit sets us Free
 With Gracious Graceful Glee

—Edward Sanders

We failed
 to see
 such grace
 that Ye
 did send
 to free
 our souls.

When Mar-
 tin Lu-
 ther King
 was born
 Lord your
 bright light
 did show.

—Mykel D. Myles

Sing along with Leadbelly:

Let it shine on me Let it shine on me
 Let your light from the lighthouse shine on me
 Let it shine on me Let it shine on me
 Let your light from the lighthouse shine on me

Amazing Grace how sweet it sounds
 That saved a wretch like me
 I once was lost but now am found
 Was blind but now I see

Let it shine on me Let it shine on me
 Let your light from the lighthouse shine on me
 Let it shine on me Let it shine on me
 Let your light from the lighthouse shine on me
 (see recording of Leadbelly's version of the hymn)

Amazing Grace
 Save my face

—William Burroughs

A grazing space
 cows greet my hound
 cats rave and kvetch
 'neath trees
 My lunch was lost
 but Joe, my hound,
 in time finds chow for me

This bovine life
 was made for me
 I till until
 I'm done
 There's no discos
 no wrapped Christos
 when lonely eat a bun

The town dispersed
 all desert bound
 to find the tree
 of love

which grows from sand
 as grace demands
 its leaves like wings of truth

A barefoot boy
 ran far ahead
 and stopped atop
 a dune
 and at that site
 heard from the light
 yes soon my child, yes soon

—Jim Carroll

Amazing grace, the morning sun
 That shines like champagne ice,
 that glitters when we've just begun
 to lose our luck at dice

No gambler ever saw the light,
 No loser ever lost
 The desperate hope of setting right
 The price his folly cost.

The pattern can be altered once;
 not every gambler's stuck.
 Just believe the morning sun's
 A sign of grace, not luck.

Amazing grace, the morning sun
 That shines like champagne ice,
 Don't trade the radiance night has spun,
 For hope at any price.

—Diane Wakoski

The dog yawns grace; grace spurs fleas' leaps,
 the baby's grace is drool.
 Until I learn to imitate
 them, I remain a fool.

Wake up, wake up with lighter heart,
 and drink some lemon tea,

I told you I would soon get well—
this snail on the door agrees.

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A pepper grace, a champagne grace
grace swirled with marzipan
onion smells remind this sinner
to taste grace while she can

—Amy Gerstler

Amazing race that came from apes
And roamed the whole world wide
You learned to sweet the sour grapes
And tame the roaring tide

—Tuli Kupferberg

Amazing Grits! How sweet the redevye
That flavored my livermush!
Fried okra, collard greens and chicken fried
Ice tea, lots of lemon, with mint crushed

—Lee Ann Brown

The red fingernails of one hand
amazing the black fingernails of the other
how amazing to be & not be be
& amazing amazing itself

—Vincent Ferrini

I dreamed I heard Amazing Grace
Inside my folks' garage
From the dark a glowing radio
Within the family Dodge

As stations change
the tune remains
On every band a choir
Like a truth that's spoken every day
In thought as pure desire

—Ed Friedman

Amazing Grace
 to rise from bed
 and make your daily way
 and not go down
 on th' killing fields
 to earn your daily bread

—Karen Edwards

Cats race in a space
 of speed and grace
 How fast they seem to leap
 But when they're done
 They've had their fun
 They lie on their sides and sleep

—Dan De Vries

every
 thing
 the total
 from
 the beginning
 is a poem

one
 and all

 everybody

 every
 thing

 all
 to
 gether

 or
 a
 part any

where any

day

or

night

forever

—Fielding Dawson

Our Jewish Faith, our Torah scroll,
Retained in spite of strife,
Have served us from the days of old,
And brought us into life.

The only God, our Torah too,
Foundations of our faith
Sustain us in adversity
And lead us in our way.

—Douglas A. Szper

(His daughter's Jewish Day School wdn't
let her sing the traditional Amazing Grace
at school talent show, so dad wrote this)

WHO TOUCHED
THE HEART
WITHIN THE EAR

—Andrei Codrescu

And now I'm here, where sounds abound
More Welcome than the sea's
That started all this dreadful quest
And still is mystery

—Joanne Kyger

Jane Bowles' divan's left in Tangiers
 Her menu sinks at sea
 She tied her scarf in a hotel lobby
 "Time is gold, Honey." Sans litany.

—Maureen Owen

There's nothing but the Blackness there
 Graceful as the grace to see
 I send my eye beams sailing out
 They bring back Grace to me

—Michael McClure

Amazing Grace
 How sweet the flood
 that rises with
 the sun.
 My eyes are offered
 ecstasies.
 My work-days's
 almost done.

—Lewis MacAdams

Amazing beauty of the earth
 despite what man has done,
 Two thousand years, what are they worth,
 without the grace of home

—Janine Vega

On wint'ry trail the Grace appears;
 A clearing in the snow
 allows me to return to Love
 'twas there for me to know

—Daniel C. Strizek

The grace that lifted up my life
 Is free to every soul
 It's waiting in the garden green,
 In Earth's creation whole.

—Roy Hartry

Eight hundred kinds of birds delight
The North American air

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But forests're felled in a money-fight
There'll be no nesting there

—Jack Collom

Meditation,
be my finch

—Carl Rakosi

When all the malls go up in flame,
and jails the mighty built,
then we the newly free proclaim
the Law: Do What Thou Wilt!

—Gerrit Lansing

Amazing Grass, how sweet the smell
That stoned a wretch like me.
I once was straight but now I'm swell,
Could see but now I'm blind.

—Utah Phillips

(Of course, you can find meaning to the verse above also by
looking at Isaiah 40:7, "surely the people is grass")

Feed mother earth our bad debris,
Despoil her sacred groves,
Deplete her once amazing grace
With puppet power shows!

Once more let Bios thunder forth
And energy be hurled
To spread its voice of wonder across
Endless cycling worlds!

—Tom Clark

Amazing Grace, Lascaux be found
 in earth on which Dachau;
 a womb beyond repair,
 imagination spans despair.

—Clayton Eshleman

My heart grows sore
 to see the pain
 That oppresséd men must bear
 But then I see your kindness shine
 in acts of those who care

—David Childers

O present day I am undone
 I'm neither day nor free
 I step into an empty year
 alarming arms for me

—Eileen Myles

Amazing Grace
 I've found my self
 A gift no coin can buy
 The search for life that's rich inside
 Has set me free to fly

—Julie Christianson Stivers

Amazing Grace the sutra says
 Compassion fills the void
 Bodhisattvas leave no trace
 Yet tarry 'til all are saved

—Michael Kittell
 (in memory of Allen Ginsberg)

As life endures unending time
 Our precious world gives birth
 To grace, a child who leads the way
 to peace on all the earth

—Renée Girard

I dread no more
 the desperate hour
 That rends the flesh
 from soul
 Forsaken by this
 Earthly Power
 That Grace will make
 me whole

—Robert Hunter

Amazing Grace, how bright the birds
 That wing their way toward thee,
 They spread the seeds of thy sweet peace
 O'er field and wood and sea

—Vicki Johns

Cries from the grave while still I live
 I hear a distant voice
 Grace to be born and grave to give
 Amazing is thy choice

—Judy Hussie

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
 From ancient chains set free,
 A long-lost hope once more I've found
 For light and liberty

For we can live with one-time foes
 As sisters, brothers, true.
 And share our triumphs and our pain,
 Enfolding as we do.

—Walter Royal Jones, Jr.

I've never played the patriot game
 My man came back from 'Nam
 My daughter now has gone to war,
 She wears his good luck charm.

The flag is ready just in case,
 To drape her coffin bare.
 Why do we keep on saving face?
 Korea does not care.

—Jan Kelley

What grace is this that moves in me,
 And makes my spirit glow?
 As powerful as the endless sea,
 And delicate as the foam.

—Gretchen L. Woods

O Great Spirit, renew our soul
 Connect us to the earth
 It takes all parts to make one whole
 Breathe through us life and mirth

—Judy Fasone

As a child in Bible school
 many years ago
 I prayed to be God's tool—
 To till the fields of men
 guided by God's hand
 And follow the Golden Rule

—Gary Salvors

Those angels sent by God above
 Wore faces of my friends
 Who loved me just as He has loved
 and proved grace never ends

—Susan K. Pate

Should I come to know my final hour
 My strength with peace replaced
 May it temper then my will to live
 And help to bring me grace

—Douglas Udell

When peace our hearts and hands employ
 Beyond all greed or guise
 We'll no more bind ourselves to Joy
 But kiss it as it flies

—Mikhail Horowitz

(The original verses once more):

Amazing Grace how sweet the sound
 that saved a wretch like me!
 I once was lost but now am found,
 Was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
 And grace my fears relieved
 How precious did that grace appear
 The hour I first believed

The Lord has promised good to me
 His word my hope secures
 He will my shield and portion be
 As long as life endures

Through many dangers, toils and snares
 I have already come
 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far
 And grace will lead me home

When we've been there 10,000 years
 Bright shining as the sun
 We've no less days to sing God's praise
 Than when we'd first begun.

—John Newton (except for the final verse)

I searched for Grace
And found the place
By leaning toward the light
In darkest night
The stars shine bright
Say goodnight, Grace, goodnight

—Beth Borrus

(conclude *The New Amazing Grace* with
the ensemble and audience humming a verse)

Suggestions for Performing of the New Amazing Grace

A good idea is to change keys and the musical moods for various verses. In the two performances at St. Mark's, we had gospel settings, folk settings, rock and roll settings, some plainsong and hymnlike settings, and a few dixieland and Intergalactic Space-Time settings, all of which gave the performance a more beautiful and engrossing flow. Some verses can be sung with a single voice, or duets, trios, and some with full chorus. The meters can be varied as you choose, 2/4, 3/4, 4/4.... The essence is to conduct the concert with joy and hope. It would be good to give song sheets to the audience and urge them to join in!

Performers for the Premier Performances

November 20, 1994, St. Mark's Church

Singers: Tyrone Aikon, Derrick Alton, Coby Batty, Deborah Griffen Bly, Lloyd Casson, Amy Fradon, Ed Friedman, Allen Ginsberg, Anna Hernandez, Leadbelly, Larry Marshall, Jeannine Otis, Leslie Ritter, Paul Robeson, Stephen Said, Edward Sanders, Steven Taylor

Musicians: Coby Batty, Deborah Griffen Bly, Ana Hernandez,, Joseph Joubert, Stephen Said, Edward Sanders, Steven Taylor.

Plus the audience

November 19, 1995, St. Mark's Church

Singers: Tyrone Aikon, Coby Batty, Jim Carroll, Lloyd Casson, Diana Feldman, Ed Friedman, Allen Ginsberg, Mikhail Horowitz, Leadbelly, Rebecca Moore, Jeannine Otis, Leslie Ritter, Paul Robeson, Stephen Said, Steven Taylor

Musicians: Coby Batty, Gary Lucas, Stephen Said, Edward Sanders, Jim Scheffler, Steven Taylor.

And of course the audience

Sample Letters and Manuscripts

Here are some sample manuscripts for *The New Amazing Grace*. It wasn't so easy getting verses from some of my favorite poets and songwriters. As we have noted, one of my "problems" was Allen Ginsberg:

ALLEN GINSBERG
P.O.B. 592 - STUYVESANT STATION
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10009 U.S.A.

3/14/94

Dear Ed -

N.B. from an Atlas newspaper.

Re Amazing Grace - I've just
not been able to do anything - or
nothing occurred to me - my head full
of panic at unfinished CD Rhin's notes now
delaying release of the 4 CDs another
2 months, my overload responsible -

I'll still try -

Love Allen

I'm playing your sapho CD for
Bbllyn + N.Y.C. Poetry workshops -
useful!

Finally Allen sent in his beautiful & amazing verses:

Stamps for Amazing Grace

O homeless hand on many a street
Accept this change from me
A friendly smile or word is sweet
As fearless charity

Woe workman who hears the cry
And cannot spare a dime
Nor look into a homeless eye
Afraid to give the time

So rich or poor no gold to talk
A smile on your face
The homeless poor where you may walk
Receive amazing grace

I dreamed I dwelled in a homeless place
Where I was lost alone
Folk looked right through me into space
~~And~~ passed with eyes of stone

Allen Ginsberg
4/2/94

Card from Pete Seeger early 1994:

Dear Ed - sorry - I
just can't think
of anything to add.
You should get the
"Amazing ways" - verse
I once quoted in S.O.
with a verse "we've been
near 10,000 years"

Hastily

Pete

Box 731
Beacon,
NY 12506



Ed Sanders
Box 729
Woodstock

NY

12498

We replied to Pete, to nudge him,
and he came through!

25

TOSHI & PETER SEEGER
BOX 431, BEACON, N. Y. 12508

Dear Ed - if it's not
too late, here's one

From quarks to stars, there's grace we know
The grace of $M-C$ -square
And endless more, above, below
We feel the grace is there

stay well!

Pete

Apr. 17 '94

x

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

Carl Rakosi:

Carl Rakosi 1456 17th Avenue
San Francisco, California 94122

Nov. 1, 1994

Dear Ed:

I was about to say no, I couldn't do it, I had nothing to send you...besides, the whole idea of such a thing as Grace, which if it really existed outside the human being, would indeed be Amazing..no, mind-busting...~~was repellant to me, when I spotted the enclosed, which will appear in an upcoming number of The American Poetry Review. My poem does not express amazement but if it did, it would be amazement at the nature of meditation.~~

I wish I could have been at The Poetry Center for the symposium on revolutionary poetry. Somebody ^{very young} must have been reading The New Masses and made what he/she thought was a discovery. Anyhow, greater disarray and angry, rejecting disconnectedness, as reported in The Poetry Flash The Poetry Project Newsletter, I can't imagine. I would have liked to hear what you had to say.

Oops! I just looked at your letter again and noticed that what you needed was a single line or ~~xxxx~~ stanza and I have nothing at hand that short, and could not, in any case, get into gear for one in time. Sorry, Ed.

Cordially,



P.S. Note my new address above.

Son of a gun! I did think of a couple of lines, after all, for Amazing Grace. Try this on your bazooka:

Meditation,
be my finch.

Robert Creeley

26

64 Amherst Street
Buffalo, NY 14207

November 15, 1993

Dear Ed,

Just got your terrific invitation and wrote the enclosed on the envelope. See if it works. Here's another copy for sake of clarity. Onward!

Love to you both,



*Particularity obtains
where'er the earth grows green.
Myself's an echoing ancient frame
for all that once was seen...*

and:

for Ed's Amazing Grace.



Particularly obtain

Who is the earth green green.

Myself's an echo in my mind from

for all that might have been.
one was seen.

~~Particularly obtain~~

~~Who is the earth green green,~~

~~and consequently the mind from~~

~~for all that was once seen...~~

11/15/93

NEW AMAZING GRACE VERSES
 BOX 729
 WOODSTOCK, N.Y.
 12498



As your addition to this old standard aims to bring it more up to date in terms of changes in the lives of mankind over the centuries, I think the addition of the following will serve to do that just fine. They concern an American who changed the lives of mankind - uplifting them and freeing them from the bondages of communism, racism, fear, and hatred - the world over. The enclosed verse fit perfectly into the rhythm of the song, just as he fit perfectly into the time that he was sent.

THE VERSE:

We failed
 to see
 such grace
 that Ye
 did send
 to free
 our souls;

When Mar-
 tin Lu-
 ther King
 was born
 Lord Your
 bright light
 did show.

From
 Mykel D. Myles

Robert Bly

Minneapolis, MN 55403

October 26, 1994

Dear Ed,

I've had a wonderful delirious time staggering around the house singing new stanzas and then getting hopelessly stuck in the middle. Here's the one that I got all the way through to the end:

WILL WE FIND HEAVEN HERE ON EARTH?
 IS THIS HEAVEN ALL THERE WILL BE?
 OH NO, WE'LL SWIM RIGHT PAST OUR BIRTH
 LIKE SALMON TO THE SEA!

Your singin' buddy, as ever,

"Surely the People is Grass," Isaiah 40:7

SHOESHINE PARLOR IN CITY - APPROX. 1910
8 - June 1977

POST CARD

"GLIMPSE OF TIME" - RT. 1, Box 426, Brandon, Or., 97411
Not New Books - Old Postcards - Photographs - Papercraft

"AMAZING GRASS, HOW SWEET THE SMELL
THAT STONED A WRETCH LIKE ME.
I ONCE WAS STRAIGHT BUT NOW I'M SWELL,
COULD SEE BUT NOW I'M BLIND."

Utah Phillips

P.S. I CAN LIVE WITH HYMNS, AND I CAN
LIVE WITH BAG-PIPES BUT NOT BOTH
AT THE SAME TIME. SEE TO IT. U.

Ron Padgett. We selected quatrain 5

342 East 13th St., Apt. 6
New York, NY 10003-5811
3 December 1993

Dear Ed,

Thanks for your letter. I didn't mean to suggest that Joe's illness prevents me from taking any pleasure in life. On the contrary, it requires that I take some pleasure, so that I can have energy and strength that he can share, if he wants, when I'm with him. The last thing he wants to do is be around gloomy, depressed people. I guess what I did mean was that--although I've always found the notion of Christian grace very attractive, and even speculated that perhaps at one point in human history it was even experienced--I can't convince myself that it's a possibility now. Life is utterly miraculous, every second of it, but grace? Naw.

Despite my skepticism, I've fiddled around with some verses, trying to come up with something that might be useful for you and still true for me. But please feel absolutely free to chuck any and all of these aside, or make suggestions for changes. Mainly I just wanted you to know I tried.

In no particular order:

1.
They say it's like a light this grace
That comes from deep inside,
And quietly shoots its sparkling face
Onto those who've died.

2.
It's graceful to be born at all?
And graceful then to die?
Angels whose idea of tall
Obliterates the sky?

3.
Standing just above the ground
Or flying through the air
Whose disappearing whizzing sound
Tells you you're not there.

4.
I wish I were a little saint,
Siennese primitive sweet,
Whose radiant swooping swoon and faint
Detonates his feet.

5.
I wish I were a little saint
Up in the Tuscan air
And swooning in a sparkling faint
Spreading everywhere.

Love,

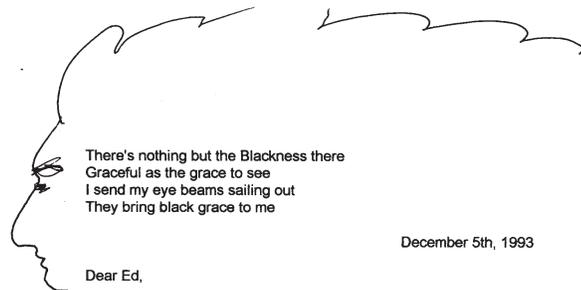


Joanne Kyger's elegant signature

And now I'm here, where sounds abound
 More Welcome than the sea's
 That started all this dreadful quest
 And still is mystery

- Joanne Kyger

Michael McClure



There's nothing but the Blackness there
 Graceful as the grace to see
 I send my eye beams sailing out
 They bring black grace to me

December 5th, 1993

Dear Ed,

What a great project! I opened your letter and without a thought wrote the above on the envelope after reading your note. Then I added three verses the next day, and it has been sitting here while I realized that there was only *spiritus* in the first, immediately written, verse. I'm pleased with it and I hope you are.

Ray and I toured, I was teaching full time, then I came back and developed a cold in the chest, then a couple of gigs then back to full time teaching again, then a short trip, then teaching, then bronchitis. I've been sick for almost eight weeks. I'm not deadly sick or anything like that but what I want most is to go walking in the forest, up the hill in Redwood Park, and to get out at night and see stars. Since Amy and I moved here I have been relating more and more strongly to the great horned owls that we hear and see, and the deer, and especially the stars and the crickets.

Love to you and yours, dear friend and poet singer,

Michael

Actually that sounds a little lugubrious, I did take a walk today in the forest.

Merry Solstice!

Harry Watts, Amazing Grace, the Lights

Jerome Rothenberg
1026 San Abella Drive
Encinitas, CA 92024
Phone & fax: (619) 436-9923

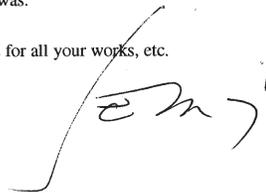
December 13, 1993

Dear Ed,

I appreciate the call & hope that the enclosed is of some use to you. The incident is specific: at Harry Watt's old house, saved from the Kinzua Dam floodwaters & perched above the Allegany River, Diane found Harry (who was one of the Longhouse chiefs) sitting by himself, while a picnic or barbecue was going on outside, & playing a recording of Amazing Grace. He had been a preacher for some number of years, before coming back to the Longhouse religion, so there were echoes of that taking place as well. It was all in all a very disrupted period, with people still badly unsettled by the forced move out of their old places a few years before. The blue lights (of the dead Indians whose graves had been moved out of the way of the flood waters) were often spoken about &, as far as our friends would tell it, were largely, unarguably, confirmed.

I think I'll enclose with this a copy of Diane's book, the first piece of which gives a sweet and very accurate picture of who Harry Watt was.

With all best wishes for the project & for all your works, etc.



Thanks

My gratitude to the many people who helped in this project— to Ed Friedman for setting up the performances at St. Mark's, to Reverend Canon Lloyd Casson, Rani Singh for the tape of Leadbelly and helping with the performances, Bill Belmont for trying to get funding for recording NAG, to sound technicians John Fisk and David Nolan at the Poetry Project, to Joanne Wasserman, Brenda Coultas, and other volunteers,

and of course gratitude to the musicians and singers, including Tyrone Aikon, Derrick Alton, Deborah Griffen Bly, Coby Batty, Diane Feldman, Amy Fradon, Ana Hernandez, Joseph Joubert, Gary Lucas, Larry Marshall, Rebecca Moore, Jeannine Otis, Scott Petito, Leslie Ritter, Stephan Said, Jim Scheffler, and Steven Taylor

and to the poets who sang their verses at the performances: Allen Ginsberg, Ed Friedman, Lee Ann Brown, Jim Carroll, and Mikhail Horowitz.

—Edward Sanders
Woodstock, New York

