

# Bill Hickok

Distinguished Kansas Poet



**Bill Hickok** (deceased, 2014) began writing humor several years ago as a defense against his children's tyranny. His articles have appeared on the Op-Ed pages of The Kansas City Star, Kansas City Times, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Newsday, Philadelphia Enquirer, and others, as well as in periodicals, notably Uncle (the magazine for those who have given up).

In addition to being a cousin of Wild Bill Hickok, he is an ornithologist, wildlife photographer, environmentalist, and a poet. He was a founder of the Kansas Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, a founder of Kansas City's first Hospice; chair and board member for ten years of Johnson County Parks and Recreation, and co-founder with his wife, Gloria Vando, of The Writers Place, a literary center in the heart of Kansas City.

## Prairie Fire

A screech and plaintive cry  
dive after dive as they  
circle the pre-dawn light.  
Two thousand feet above  
the tall grass they lock.  
Wings, feathers, talons  
interlocked like silken bands  
of barbed wire. Now  
the free fall begins  
past clouds, fog, and  
swift currents rising  
from the prairie below.  
Holding fast, yet soft, as  
they begin the journey  
through the clutch of  
stars, sperm and egg  
invoking the chance of breath.  
Avian acrobats exhale  
the murmur of life in their  
primordial embrace.  
Six feet above the turf  
they break with a fierce  
suddenness that sweeps  
the prairie like a dust-devil.  
They soar again above  
the clouds screaming at  
the disconnect  
that connects us all.

## No Help Wanted

This morning between  
the honey dew and the Bartletts:  
What can I do for you, young man?  
At lunch between  
the water and the silverware:  
What can I do for you, young man?  
At the gas pump between  
Slide your card and remove nozzle:  
What can I do for you, young man?  
At the bank between  
PIN number and ENTER:  
What can I do for you, young man?  
At dinner between a squeezed  
silent prayer and Pinot Noir:  
What can I do for you, young man?  
I am not young.  
I sag like a bag of Great Northerns.  
I'm not vigorous, although I once  
ran the ball back for a touchdown.  
My youth follows me  
with the wisp of time. So here's  
what you can do for me, dear boy:  
Know that your silly sarcasm  
is not well taken and  
shut the hell up.

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## Sunflower

Prisoner of the prairie,  
pride of the Helios:  
tilt your head toward the red ball of fire  
that nurtures us all.  
The strength of your colors—  
yellow brown and green—  
waves across the sunspots of the world.

A field of gold sustains colors  
to salute the seeds that feed  
our voracious hunger.  
Your oil fuels a thousand human engines,  
beauty to turn an artist's head.

Stay forever, princess of the plain.  
The bees may forsake you  
but never my unerring eye.

## Mahler And Me

Listening to Mahler  
I hear the summer's rolling  
thunder. My old man  
used to say thunder was  
angels bowling.  
Mahler was a great composer  
and I wouldn't mind having  
him on my bowling team.  
Ball at eye level he would  
knock down the piccolos  
with their chirps of cheer,  
next the flutes and their  
high-pitched reverie.  
Down go the violins,  
so spicy sweet.  
Tall stand the bassoons  
and oboes of woe.  
Bass fiddles, French horns,  
keep the ball rolling  
with the dirge of shallow  
thunder. The lane echoes  
the maple tree's heart,  
somber notes cling  
to the sadness  
of the chilling winds.  
The cymbals come crashing  
as lightning startles the air.  
At last the tiny triangle  
pings of salvation. And now  
comes the rain, harsh.

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