

# **the war diary**

poems

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William Cody Maher

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Photos by William Cody Maher

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# Contents

My Name is Hunter's Point

To Quiet a Foreign Pain

A Lost Child (photo poem)

A Lost Child

You Better Leave

The Hangin Man

See If You Can Find Me

The War Diary

The Suitcase (CD)

bio

# MY NAME IS HUNTER'S POINT

I am a child  
I am a corner in a neighborhood  
I am an empty bus everyone is afraid of  
I am a shoe shine man gone out of business  
I am a liquor store of dreams that die hard  
I see a police car left burning on the street  
I am a schoolyard being torn down  
I am a hill of weeds in the sun

My Name is Hunter's Point

I was here before you were born  
I am a small wooden church on the hill where you  
prayed  
I am a home for runaway girls with a desperate  
view of the bay  
I am a boy hiding afraid beneath my bed  
I am a mother climbing the hill home from work  
I carried your father home dead drunk in my arms

I walked with your father over the hills with our  
dogs  
I loved my next door neighbor as a brother

My Name is Hunter's Point

The word "ghetto" does not say what I am  
I am a fig tree in the front yard of my childhood  
I am being stripped everyday like a car in a  
wrecking yard  
I was the slaughterhouse that broke your father's  
back  
I was the shipyard left to rot in the sun  
I am a hillside of ice plants blooming violet in  
the spring  
I am tired of City hall's lies  
I still don't have a job  
There are no newspapers that say what I am  
There are no films made about my life  
There are no songs that sing me to sleep  
There is no river that runs through my heart  
I am a railroad going nowhere through your land

My Name is Hunter's Point

I am the last visitor to a dying merchant marine  
I am the last person who saw your father alive  
I am the last house on the hill overlooking my  
past  
I am the last eyes that saw the horses running  
free  
On the shoulders of my neighbors I was carried to  
my death  
These are the last names of people who still  
remember me  
This is the last photograph of my wife and I when  
we were happy

My Name is Hunter's Point

I remember a time  
I killed my brother for going with my girl  
I blew his head away with a shotgun from a  
speeding car  
I went mad when they destroyed my dream  
I was left hanging dead on the baseball park fence

I was killed for a nickel over a package of  
chewing gum

The police officer put a bullet through my head no  
questions asked

My Name is Hunter's Point

I'm good with a knife  
I was beat up because my husband lost his job  
I only cried when she didn't understand me  
I only killed because I didn't know who to turn to

I began to drink because I wasn't myself anymore  
Mornings brought only pain and words of hate  
against my wife and kids  
I couldn't cry anymore so I just stared into my  
life until it disappeared

My Name is Hunter's Point

I was the police officer that brought your drunk  
old man home on my back  
I was the priest that tried to lead your father to  
God in the end  
I was the doctor that discovered too late what was  
wrong



I was the son that you called a dirty yellow  
haired son of a bitch  
You hated me because I was black  
You hated me because I was white  
You hated me because I was poor  
You hated me because I was just like you  
You hated me because I wasn't young anymore  
You hated me because I couldn't stay pretty for  
you  
You hated me because you couldn't sleep  
You hated me and I hated you and we'd never even  
met  
You hated me for what you couldn't be  
I loved you for what you were  
Can you remember me  
At sunrise you always said  
There wasn't a more beautiful place in the world.

# TO QUIET A FOREIGN PAIN

Jimmy  
had one weakness in life  
everybody liked him  
from his fellow butchers  
on the killing floor  
to the priest and cops  
who carried him home  
Jimmy  
never complained  
he was a small man  
he stood about 5' 8"  
in his cowboy boots  
he couldn't have weighed  
more than 130 pounds  
soaked in cow's blood  
in the slaughterhouse  
he'd lift the carcasses  
of lambs and steers

three times his size  
Jimmy  
was an artist at heart  
he'd sit alone  
on the front porch  
carving out old cowhorns  
he'd bring home from Butchertown  
with broken glass he found  
layin on the streets  
he'd sandpaper them down  
into the likenesses of birds  
fish and sailing ships  
using leather for masts  
he'd get from the slaughterhouse  
he'd take a wood burner  
and sketch the features  
of an Indian chief  
or a hunting party  
moving across the plains  
Jimmy  
loved animals  
the greatest irony of his life  
was having to kill them  
to make a living

but jobs were scarce  
if you had no education  
so he was thankful for what he got  
after all, it wouldn't always be that way  
he was young, independent and free  
when his parents died  
they left all their property  
to the church  
left him with only a saddle  
and an open field to run his horse  
then overnight  
Pearl Harbor was attacked  
war was declared on Japan  
the wild yellow and orange poppy fields  
the rolling grassy hills and valleys  
gave way to temporary housing  
for the black families  
that came up from the south  
to work the shipyards  
the Japanese children  
he had rode on his horse disappeared  
and evenings after work  
Jimmy would walk home with his wife  
Through the darkened streets

the air-raid signals crying over their heads  
Now Johnny  
was a philosopher at heart  
he'd sit for hours talking a blue streak  
about how the world should be  
he worked side by side with Jimmy  
out on the killings floor  
the only reason Johnny left Ireland  
was to find work in America  
when he arrived they told him  
if he was willing to die for this country  
they'd left him live in it  
Johnny went off to war  
when he got back he found work  
in the slaughterhouses of Butchertown  
together they'd go to all the local bars  
The Club Long Island/ The Four Mile House/  
The Cattleman's Club  
where the drinks were free  
if you bought the booze  
Jimmy and Johnny became drinking buddies  
one morning Jimmy woke up  
he wasn't young anymore  
there were three kids to feed  
the war was over and work was slow

he had another drink just to steady his nerves  
he'd get the shakes in that iron grip of his  
his 130 pounds would be crying out for rest  
and those cattle would keep  
pourin down the chutes like blood  
from an open wound  
till Jimmy began to see his freedom  
as a thing that was past  
like the dream of America he had  
before the war  
he took another drink just to steady his nerves  
then another one  
he began to feel young  
and independent and free  
just one more he begged of Johnny  
just one more dad  
just one more he begged of his wife  
just one more son  
just one more he cried  
to quiet a foreign pain  
strangling him somewhere deep in his insides  
one evening Jimmy came home from work  
on Johnny's back  
he'd had too much to drink now

for too many years  
his wife pulled off his cowboy boots  
put him to sleep  
and went to work in the factory  
for the next 30 years  
Jimmy  
would stand in the kitchen  
drunk on his feet  
imagining he was Sitting Bull and Custer  
at the battle of The Little Bighorn  
you couldn't tell the wine  
from the blood stains  
on his fringe jacket  
he'd give the command to the Bugler  
SOUND THE CHARGE  
COMPANY...CHARGE !  
comin home from work  
his wife would have to force open the front door  
he'd be lying dead drunk behind it  
Now Johnny  
had influence down at City Hall  
that landed Jimmy a job sweeping streets  
he wouldn't have to break his back  
shakin hides and killin cows

everybody got a little hope  
thinking the worse thing he'd have to face  
was a little wind and rain  
one day Jimmy fell to the street  
too drunk to push his broom  
in his last days  
Jimmy would stand off the neighborhood kids  
with a twenty two rifle  
from the front porch he'd scream out at them  
" I'll kill you, you little black bastards "  
they'd laugh at him cause they all knew  
my mother wouldn't let him have  
any bullets for the gun  
his own kids  
were getting old enough now  
to see their old man as an embarrassment  
a thing that was past  
Jimmy always thought Johnny talked too much  
never practiced a word that he preached  
all the years he'd known him  
Johnny got the feeling that Jimmy  
didn't want him around anymore  
"he belonged out in the open plains,  
he didn't want nothin to change



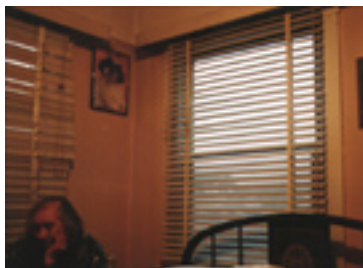
as long as he had his little shack  
his stray dogs and cats  
he was a happy man"  
but those strangling pains were getting worse  
some nights he'd yell like a cow  
being clubbed and skinned in the next room  
and he'd threaten to kill anybody  
that dumped his wine down the kitchen sink  
he'd hide them beneath the towels in the bathroom  
he'd bury them beneath the fig tree in the front  
yard  
forgetting where he'd put his bottle one time  
he needed a drink so bad  
he took a bottle of rubbing alcohol  
he began to cough up chunks of blood  
his wife thought looked like pieces of his liver  
he'd wake up with a fever  
seeing burning cats in the front yard  
with those strangling pains  
tearing their way out of his insides for air  
he'd begin to sweat and shake like a man  
who'd been cut in two beneath the wheels of a  
train  
one night Jimmy had a vision  
he was on his hands and knees

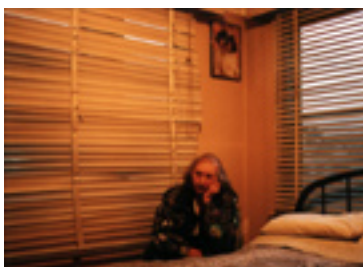
crossing the center of Third St.  
a bottle in one hand and a flag in the other  
the signal lights going from red to yellow to  
green  
the traffic backing up from the baseball park  
he was standing alone on an open field of wild  
poppies  
beneath a sky the color of a Remington painting  
he saw Crazy Horse comin over a ridge  
he smelled the flesh of a dying horse  
he felt his wife's arms around his neck  
he saw his three boys carrying him up a slope  
he heard the cries of men dying all around  
the signal lights going from red to yellow to  
green  
through a cloud of dust  
he saw horses laying dead on their sides  
he tried to rise to his feet  
BUGLER...SOUND THE CHARGE !  
his fringe jacket draped over his body like a flag  
in his silver buckle  
in his cowboy boots  
blood and wine mingling in his throat  
the dust stinging his eyes blind  
a look of disbelief on his face

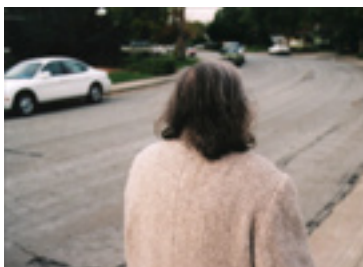
he fell again to his knees  
in his Levi jeans  
in his Stetson hat  
the signal lights going from red to yellow to  
green  
the winos at Kennedy Liquor store  
laughin on the corner  
the cars from the baseball park  
threatening to run the man down  
Jimmy rose for the last time up from his knees  
out of the blood and wine on the killing floor  
out of an open field of wild poppies  
in his home  
in his country  
every pound of his body  
strainin for air  
like it was tryin to tear itself free  
from beneath the wheels of a train  
he rose like some kind of dream  
out of a thing that was past  
that had no more use for him  
and he cried CHAAAARGE !

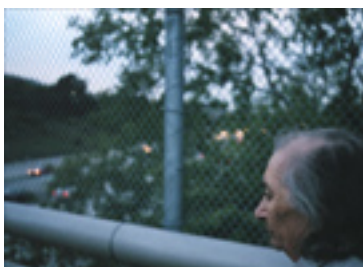
# A LOST CHILD



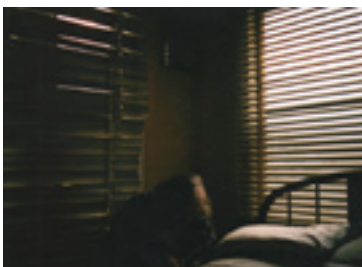
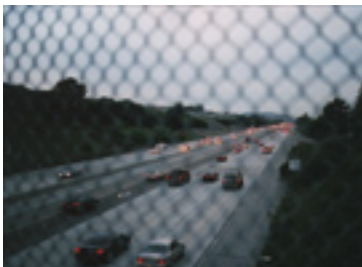














## A LOST CHILD

My mother decides to leave the apartment to find the house of my older brother. He lives only five minutes away by car. Though she has lived in the neighborhood now nearly ten years she still is not certain where he lives. She has attempted on many occasions to find his house. She forgot which winding road and which dead end street. They all appear the same. There was the house with the American flag hanging from the roof but now there is a second house with a flag. There was the apple trees in the front of one house but now she forgets the street...and the dog guarding a house on the corner...but which corner...she was certain that when she went out the door and turned right onto the footpath that led to the laundry room and past the swimming pool into the back parking lot and out the gate and then right... with the roar of the freeway on her right she should follow the

sun but at which hour she forgets now and the sun is blinding her but she knows she has to turn right at the first corner after the long winding road and there are the palm trees but where is the flag and what about the green pickup truck that was laying without wheels in the front of the garage...she thinks she should turn back but though her forehead is sweating and her legs trembling she continues...she has tried before and once she made it to his door but that was years ago and he wasn't home only the wife was home and had appeared behind the screen door and said that her son was still at work and though it was a hot day and she was exhausted the woman had not offered to let her in.. so she turned back and now can't remember how she made it back home...maybe she should go back now...but the apartment is so dark..and nobody will phone now...its dead of the afternoon...its too dark... i shouldn't be out here at this hour but i can't stand the walls..i can't stand the plants .. they're not real... the ones that were real i got rid of ...too much trouble to feed them...the stuffed bears are easier to take care of...the humming birds...i

forgot the sugar...its too much trouble...let them go somewhere else...why did she decide to go out...she can't breathe...the girdle is too tight...if she loosens it her stomach will fall out...she looks hideous in the mirror she thinks she looks disfigured...she threw away her silk and rayon Chinese dresses a long time ago..her son in Moscow now came back once and wanted them for the girl he had met but it was too late she had thrown them all away and she was tired of fighting off moths ...she can't fit into anything anymore except a grave she thinks too herself...she will just curl into it like a crib she thinks to herself... she will just curl up like one of her children and sleep in the crib...sweat pouring down her face now...her stray wisps of grey hair not protecting her from the sun... how did she forget the baseball cap...why did she leave the apartment..but it was so dark..then into the blinding sun..the tree standing outside in front of the kitchen...if she had the strength she would cut it down..it has prevented the sun from coming into her apartment all these years...and now she hates the sun..a man washing his car smiles and

says hello...she says hello back and hopes he does not see how desperate she is...he probably wonders what she is doing because no one walks in this neighborhood...she has rarely seen anyone walking except with dogs and then only at certain hours...hours she is afraid to walk...when she goes to the shopping mall there is no one on the streets...the lights are dangerous...they go from green to red before she can get across...now she can't go to the shopping malls anymore...because of the lights...because of the fear that the light will change while she is still crossing and the fear that her legs will give out on her...why did she leave the dark apartment just now... because there was nothing on the tv and the phone hadn't rang and it was a Sunday and maybe he would be home and it would be a surprise and she would try to act normal... but how can you act normal when you are sweating blood... well not really blood but that was how it felt to her and now she was at the end of the one street and still had not seen the flag hanging from the roof but then guessed that maybe the people had removed it but why would someone remove the flag from the roof...what would

they be thinking...there had been a storm some days ago but even if it had blown the flag down the people certainly would have had the pride to put it back up...that would be the meaning of having a flag on the roof...she had never thought much about flags or about countries or about the meanings of these things...she cried like everyone when the songs were sung...but that was before..not now..the crying was over now...the burying of tears happened along time ago and tears don't need to be buried in earth like bodies...tears are easily forgotten..vanish down your cheeks...the years sweep them away...now she sees a basketball hoop...now she is confused...she would asked the man but she has already past him and what should she say...could you tell me where my son lives...she neglected to take out the address...because she never was able to read it and because she thought to herself at the time she would remember where it was...but that seemed like years ago and now it was too far to turn back...she looked down into the street and saw a golf ball... normally she would have picked it up...she had a whole basket full of them...since

the golf course was not far away...but now because of the stomach operation and the gurdle it was impossible to pick up the golf ball but what could the golf ball be doing here since the golf course was in the other direction or was it and now she was confused because if she was near the golf course that meant she had gone in the wrong direction... well not really the wrong direction but she was never able to remember when she got to the golf course because it was an impenetrable body of grass and there was a long dirt road and you couldn't go right or left but had to stay on the path and go on which seems like forever and when you got to the other end it was as though you were in another town so she walked back to where she started and would have sat on a bench but there was always the danger that a golf ball would hit you so she would then cross the street to the shopping mall and then of course she knew that if she continued down that street she would make her way back to the housing complex where she lived...but what was the golf ball doing here...it was impossible that someone had hit a ball that far over the rooftops of the houses...maybe she



should turn back...but turn back to what she thought...there is nothing to turn back to...the apartment will only be darker as the sun is more blinding... the apartment only retreats into the darkness...now she looks right and see a dead end street...she is excited for a moment...she thinks she is there...but it's too soon...she hesitates...and continues...now she sees a corner house with a single pine tree..she remembers this tree...from the last time..the last time she found his house...now she goes left...no doubt in her mind...take the winding road now for about five minutes and she will come to a crossroad and there she will remember...the sweat on her forehead has evaporated and now her legs seem to find new strength and she presses tight the metal of the keys in her pocket and prepares a smile for when her son opens the screen door...she won't act desperate...she won't say she can't continue anymore...she will smile and ask how he is and when he invites her in she will say that it's okay that she was just going out for a walk and passed his way and just wanted to say hi and that she had to get back because Dolly her friend was coming

over and they were going to go out for a bus ride though Dolly was now in the hospital...and maybe would never get out and fell in the bathtub and broken her hip and then they found a lump on her head and that she had suffered a concussion or something worse and didn't remember who she was...Dolly who would have been eighty this week who she met on one of her bus rides and was the only friend she had in the world...now she reaches the crossroads...a terrible fear comes over her...she doesn't recognize anything...there are roads going off in every direction...all of the houses look the same...there are front yards and sprinklers and roses and trucks and cars and even the few people look the same and the newspapers thrown on the pavement and the blinding sun and now all of the rooftops have flags and she does not understand what they mean and a dog is barking and barking and now it is moving toward her and the pavement is rushing toward her and her legs drop out from underneath her ...she wakes up in the dark apartment...but no not this time...its just a fever...she won't fall...she just needs to rest...but she can't just sit on the curb...on the

sidewalk...what will people think...she looks terrible...an old lady sweating on the sidewalk...but there's no bench...she sees some grass and a tree but she can't just lay under the tree...she thinks she'll be arrested...but they don't arrest people for laying under trees...not older people...not old ladies..she thinks to herself..that's what i am...an old lady...but i don't have the face of an old lady..more the face of a child...of a lost child..that's how i feel..a lost child looking for it's son..i'll just sit on the grass anyway...let them arrest me..

# YOU BETTER LEAVE

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR ?

I've come back to look for my past

GO AWAY, IT AIN'T HERE NO MORE

IT'S BEEN TORN DOWN

IT'S BEEN SOLD

IT'S NOT YOURS ANYMORE

NEVER DID BELONG TO YOU

GO ON, GET OUT OF HERE

You look like some kids I grew up with

I'M IN JAIL

I'M DEAD

I NEVER SAW YOU BEFORE

YOU BETTER LEAVE

You slammed my head against a school locker

IT WASN'T ME, IT WAS SOMEBODY ELSE

I listened to records in your house

MAN, I NEVER SAW YOU BEFORE

We had rock fights down the street

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKIN ABOUT

I was born here

YOU BETTER LEAVE

I came back to look for the home run I hit

YOU NEVER HIT NO HOME RUN

Remember that girl I was in love with ?

SHE AIN'T HERE NO MORE

NEVER WAS IN LOVE WITH YOU

I got a scar on my face to prove who I am

THAT DON'T PROVE NOTHIN MAN

You stole my sandwich at lunch time

IT WASN'T ME, IT WAS SOMEBODY ELSE

He said you attacked him with a knife

HE WAS SO DRUNK HE PROBABLY ATTACKED HIMSELF

I'm not afraid of you

YOU MUST BE AFRAID OF SOMETHING

THOSE ARE GIRLS SHOES YOU GOT ON

YOUR MAMA PAINTED BLACK

That's a lie

I SAW YOUR OLD MAN LAYING ON HIS BACK DOWN ON  
THIRD ST.

That's a lie

I SAW HIM PASSED OUT IN A POLICE CAR

That's a lie

I have a right to be here

WHO SAYS ?

My father died here

HE AIN'T THE ONLY ONE

That was my house over there

I NEVER SAW YOU BEFORE

I was born here

YOU BETTER LEAVE !



# THE HANGIN MAN

I was walkin down the streets of New York City  
When I walked into my old buddy...The Fall Guy  
He asked me once again if I'd take the fall for  
him  
How much is it gonna cost me this time I thought  
Just follow me he said and I did  
Up a dead end street where the alleyways all meet  
To a manhole cover that looked like a garbage can  
lid  
Now here's what I want you to do he said  
Take the lid off slow and easy  
Sometimes they put a trip wire on it  
You could get your ass blown to kingdom come  
I grabbed hold of the lid  
Like I was holdin on to my mothers hand  
Everything was as silent as All Quiet on The  
Western Front  
This must be what it feels like before the attack

at dawn  
I stared into what looked like a bottomless pit  
Is this some kind of barbecue or wishing well I  
asked  
It's a mining operation he said and handed me a  
hard hat  
But before I had a chance to put it on  
I got a kick in the ass that sent me head first  
Then I heard his last word growin fainter as I  
fell  
And the word I heard was...SUCKER...And I guess I  
was  
If this hole had a bottom it couldn't be long now  
Then somethin funny broke my fall  
I blacked out but when I came to  
I heard a voice say ...STRIP...  
is this a game show I asked  
Where you get what's behind the curtain or in the  
box  
I heard wild applause so I took a bow  
But I guess it was canned cause I felt so alone  
Then I recognized the game show host...It was The  
Fall Guy  
Now it's time to play back he said

Play back what I asked  
THIS IS YOUR LIFE...  
And the wild applause began again  
Anybody I know out there I cried  
I heard some soft sobbin in the back  
It must be some lost loved one that came too late  
Then the wild applause got even wilder  
I was afraid of a riot  
That I'd be torn limb from limb  
I took a bow just in case I did something wrong  
Then I heard a scratchy voice with the last name  
Gore  
"It's my party, I'll cry if I want to, cry if I  
want to  
cry if I want to, you would cry too if it happened  
to you"  
I was a jukebox in the hands of the enemy  
I was a criminal without a long playing record  
I must be a beach boy or a beached whale  
Or a bleached blond in a fairy tale  
Or a frightened ghost in a shadow play  
Or a moonwalk between field goals  
Or a battle hymn without a republic  
Or a face without a nation

Then I had something injected into my arm  
Have a nice flight the doctor said  
If I'm losin my mind I thought  
I at least would like a seat with a view  
I must be on a Concord  
Before I had the chance to wipe the egg from my  
face  
I had to wipe off the blood  
We made an emergency landing in the middle of a  
swamp  
Worms were grabbin at straws  
Ducks were duckin behind ducks  
But the bullets were flyin faster than they had  
wings  
Valentine hearts were lookin for donors  
I saw scum at the end of the rainbow  
The prayer left to go bad on the dinner plate  
Rabbits playin chicken on the highway  
Buzzards were posin as eagles  
Snakes were mis-quoting passages from the Bible  
Front porches were swayin on rockers  
Mosquitoes were waitin on tables  
Crackers were bein tossed in the soup  
Drums were poundin out a steady beat

I tried countin sheep  
But they were all cut down  
Before they could reach the fence  
Whatever I was injected with wasn't wearin off  
I saw a lobster burnin on its back  
An old black man on the front steps of my house  
Was hangin clothes from some rusted guitar strings

GONE WITH THE WIND was playin on the TV  
Across the street at J.F.K. memorial liquor store  
They were watchin a re-run  
I followed the river down to what looked like

#### A HANGIN TREE

I remembered the game I played as a kid  
You had to guess the word  
Or the man would hang dead  
Every time you said the wrong letter  
The other kid would add a limb  
I was afraid to look up  
J...I cried  
A mans head hung from a rope  
E...I cried  
Nothing happened  
K...I cried

The mans head hung from his shoulders  
Y...I cried  
His chest was heavin for air  
E...I cried  
Nothing happened  
The head and the shoulders and the chest and  
X...I yelled  
And the mans arms began to swingin wild in the air

R...I cried  
Blood started comin out of the mans mouth  
M...I cried  
The mans legs were danglin from his struggling  
frame  
F...I yelled  
The only thing still missin was his feet  
If I made one more mistake he was a hanged man  
A strong wind started kickin up the dust  
What blows in the wind I thought  
Then it came to me  
It ran like a shiver up my spine  
Chokin my throat I heard his cry  
Then I caught a slap on my face that hung me in  
mid air

Then everything I owned was slid beneath the door  
All I had left was a mouthful of blood  
I heard elevator music  
And a woman's mournful voice say...GOIN DOWN...  
Bargain basement she said  
That button about to fall off  
That flesh stuck on a piece of zipper  
Pant cuffs that look like the tide goin out  
Mis-matched socks for two left feet  
Shirt sleeves used to wipe the nose only once  
Dirty books with the dirty pages torn out of them  
Stretch marks time will not erase  
Prayer books written in languages not even God  
would understand  
Electric appliances that run only on batteries  
Astronaut parts lost in space  
Buffalo meat cured while you're being scalped  
Hope chests complete with the flies  
Dream vacations in tiny time capsules  
Roulette wheels on monthly installment plans  
Surgery while you wait for missing loved ones  
Love in a bright selection of fading colors  
Silk when you wish you could afford satin  
Lace when you've been stripped down to cotton

Woolen knee pads for easy penetration  
Wall to wall carpeting to absorb cries for justice

Overhead lighting to keep you in proper  
perspective

Then I heard the woman's voice say...GOING UP...

Fifth floor...Toy Department

When I stepped off the elevator a tank was roaring  
down on me

I raced into a sandlot

Risin out of the sand was a giant crab

I tried to fight my way back

Into a plastic bag of soldiers but they were  
sealed

There was a train circling madly on the tracks

I had a head full of marbles

Suddenly a spike split me in two

I was a red top layin splintered in a schoolyard

A little girl defied me to chase her into the  
bathroom

In court I claimed that never happened

Then I heard a needle scratchin a record

"Soldier boy, O my little soldier boy"

It's playin at the wrong speed



Then a security guard caught me with my pants down

Lucky for me the price tag was still on them

Ladies wear...the voice said

I felt a strange pain in my crotch

The sales lady had a deep soothing voice

You'll grow out of them she said

I grabbed a full length mirror and covered my back

I made a run for the elevator

I felt eyes in the back of my head

Checkin my ass for prices

I looked up from a sun filled porch

My jeans were hanging on a line to dry

I heard Gene Pitney singing Liberty Valance

I knew somebody was about to be shot

Hunters Point the bus driver said

Place where you were born

And then the wild applause began again

Finish him off somebody cried from the back row

HANG THE MAN DEAD

The first thing that entered me came out the back

Don't bullets do that I thought...and friends...

I was fallin at what felt like the speed of light

This must be one of those black holes I thought

Where everything I did passes before my eyes  
I saw my face light up on a billboard on the way  
down  
I hope I'm not the product of any ones imagination  
but my own  
I heard dogs barkin or it could have been men  
I felt sick to death of being chased  
I must be in some kind of time machine  
Then I hit something that knocked me to my knees  
I landed on a steamy kitchen floor  
A voice yelled at me to get to those pots and pans

I put on some rubber gloves  
When I stuck them into the suds my hands melted  
off  
The cook poured cold water on the stumps  
I heard that wild applause again  
KILL THE MAN  
HANG THE MAN DEAD  
Then I blacked out  
But when I came to  
I was layin in what looked like a parking lot  
Then I blacked out  
But when I came to

A white cop with a butchers face  
Was standin over me  
You can't sleep here he said  
There was a river at my back  
You're on State property he said  
So I headed for the Freeway  
But before I had a chance to stick out my thumb  
A highway patrol officer pulled up  
He said to go back the way I came  
Then I heard that wild applause again  
FINISH HIM OFF  
KILL THE MAN DEAD  
Then I blacked out  
But when I came to  
I was pushin a nut cart up Fifth Avenue  
And pushin on in years  
I looked up at a blood stained badge  
You got a license he asked  
You can't sell nuts without a license  
At less you are a nut  
You look like a nut  
I'm afraid I'm gonna have to run you in  
He threatened to dump my nuts into the street  
When we got to Central Station

I was starrin' at the wall  
It looked like Black Pride Month  
Cause every face on that wall was black  
I saw a young black man pacin' behind bars  
What kind of nuts you got he asked  
I got walnuts  
I got cashews  
I got pistachios  
I got brazil nuts  
I got hazelnuts  
I got pecan nuts  
You got salt peanuts he asked  
I sure do and handed him some  
What you do when you ain't sellin' nuts he asked  
I'm a writer I said  
What kind of shit you write  
Mostly crime I said  
You mean shit like who done it  
No man, I said  
More like man against his fellow man  
In that direction  
Does it sell he asked  
If it did I wouldn't be pushin' nuts  
Less you was one he laughed

Maybe I am I thought  
You ever heard of The Invisible Man he asked  
It was a movie wasn't it  
And a book he said  
Then I heard that wild applause again  
FINISH HIM OFF  
HANG THE MAN DEAD  
I turned to the cop  
Asked him what the kid was in for  
Comin north  
You arrested him for that  
He was takin our jobs  
You arrested him for that  
He was messin with our women  
You arrested him for that  
He was eatin in our restaurants  
You arrested him for that  
He was tryin to get educated  
You arrested him for that  
He was tryin to move into our neighborhood  
You arrested him for that  
He tried to get the vote  
You arrested him for that  
He was actin proud

You arrested him for that  
Look boy, it was a long time ago  
Then what in the hell is he still doin here I said

Then I felt a rumblin in my bones  
You feelin it too said the kid  
Then the earth began to shake beneath our feet  
It's the big one he cried  
Then we heard wild applause  
And the cell door busted open and he was free  
We stepped into what looked like downtown L.A..  
Which way you headed he asked  
I'm goin home I said soon as I find out which way  
it is  
And you ?  
Just away from here he said  
Then we shook hands  
Then I blacked out  
But when I came to  
I was gaspin for air  
I reached the front gate  
The sky was full of smoke  
I didn't know where I was  
My mother was in the front yard

Pickin figs off a tree  
My father was sittin on the front porch  
Strummin his five string guitar  
I heard a tune faintly in the wind  
It sounded like something  
I was supposed to cry to  
But I didn't feel like cryin anymore  
Cause I knew I was home  
Then I heard the wild applause again  
FINISH HIM OFF  
HANG THE MAN DEAD  
Then I felt a cold chill run up my spine  
I was still searchin for the word  
If I didn't find it fast  
That man would hang  
Hey Kid...Just follow me he said  
Then I felt a kick  
And I was swingin free  
FREEDOM I CRIED  
IT'S FREEDOM  
Then I heard that wild applause  
And the word grew fainter as I fell  
SUCKER .....HE CRIED.....AND I GUESS I WAS.

# SEE IF YOU CAN FIND ME

I was born in a shack on a dead end street  
I was born on the day The Soviet Union fell  
I was born on the day the Berlin wall came down  
I was born on the day Manson was arrested  
I was born on the day our government changed hands

I was born on the first day of spring  
I was born in the coldest year of this century  
I was born in the year of the dragon  
I was born in the middle of an airraid  
I was born on the day the first man landed on the  
moon  
I was born in the back of a truck on a mountain  
pass  
I was born with a weapon at my back  
I was born with a weapon in my hands  
I was born with you by my side  
I was born when they took away my freedom



I was born when the century was knee deep in blood

I was born out of a desperate need

I was born into a tragic era

I was born after a violent assault

I was born dead

I was born to take a beating

I was born with a gift for words

I was born on the day we met

I was born with my hands stained with blood

I was born to be a leader

I was born with a gift of song

I was born to do what I was told

I was born to accept whatever was thrown at me

I was born to turn the other cheek

I was born into slavery

I was born out of love

I was born by mistake

I was born in a small village

I was born in the back of a cab

I was born on a river boat

I was born in chains

I was born to look down on people like you

I was born without a prayer in the world

I was born just in time to step into a uniform  
I was born to be wined and dined  
I was born to be discovered in a ditch  
I was born to be looked at wherever I went  
I was born to be cut down before I reached voting  
age  
I was born to lead my people to the promised land  
I was born to lead my people around in circles  
I was born to chase my own tail  
I was born against the current  
I was born on the wrong side of the tracks  
I was born with a window facing a wall  
I was born to seek revenge  
I was born to sell flowers  
I was born to direct films  
I was born on the day Monroe died  
I was born and before I had a chance to scream I  
died  
I was born with a yellow streak climbing up my  
back  
I was born raising a white flag  
I was born and died and then was born again  
I was born on the day war was declared  
I was born on the day you walked out on me

I was born to a Russian princess  
I was born on a hillside in San Tropez  
I was born in a wooden shack in Hunter's Point  
I was born the day Russian tanks entered Prague  
I was born the day Nelson Mandela was set free  
I was born on the stage  
I was born to be a great writer  
I died realizing none of my dreams  
I died after having achieved all of my aims  
I died to a packed house every night  
I died to keep a family of five alive  
I died without raising my head in protest  
I died protecting my own skin  
I died in the presence of a witness  
I died at the expense of the State  
I died to make it easy for you  
I died and went to Heaven  
I died and went to Hell  
I died and was thrown in a hole  
I died and they dug me back up  
I died and life goes on  
I died to keep my word  
I died to keep the peace  
I died to keep what was mine from getting into the

wrong hands  
I died at the height of my powers  
I died at the peak of my game  
I died for a handful of investors  
I died to keep you in silk  
I died of my own free will  
I died when it was taken away  
I died out of respect for those that came before  
me  
I died to keep something living  
I died to lay something to rest  
I died to get your blessing  
I died because of a curse  
I died at the mention of your name  
I died at the sound of your voice  
I died to teach you a lesson  
I died to protect your good name  
I died on a lonely road  
I died on a crowded street  
I died on a railroad crossing  
I died in my bed  
I died after a wave swept me away  
I died close to home  
I died in space

I died everytime I looked in your eyes  
and saw nothing there  
I died as part of the agreement  
I died to pay off a debt  
I died with a handful of promises  
I died with even less than that  
I died and the world stood still  
I died and the crowd tore me to pieces  
I died and was raised on their shoulders  
I'm alive in these words  
See if you can find me...

# THE WAR DIARY

first day of the war  
I wake up afraid  
I prepare tea  
it is cold and raining  
I turn on the TV  
all of our planes returned

second day of the war  
I wake up afraid  
I prepare tea  
it is cold with grey skies  
I turn on the TV  
all of our planes returned

third day of the war  
I wake up frightened  
I prepare tea

the sky has cleared  
I turn on the TV  
all of our planes returned

fourth day of the war  
I wake up in a sweat  
I prepare tea  
the sky a hazy blue  
I turn on the TV  
one of our planes down

fifth day of the war  
last night no erection  
I prepare tea  
rain and cold  
I turn on the TV  
all of our planes returned

sixth day of the war  
erection last night  
this morning I had coffee

warmer than yesterday  
I turn on the radio  
a bridge is hit

seventh day of the war  
bad stomach last night  
I have mineral water  
lovely spring like morning  
I turn on the TV

eight day of the war  
at peace with myself  
loss of appetite  
I had a soft boiled egg  
weather continued good  
read the sports page

ninth day of the war  
obsessive erotic thoughts  
return of appetite  
I had cheese and toast



cold grey skies  
turn on the TV  
all of our planes returned

tenth day of the war  
wake with pain in lower back  
fix myself coffee  
prepare to follow orders  
turn on the TV  
wake fully rested

eleventh day of the war  
first look at the enemy  
blood on face from razor  
phone ringing in hallway  
unconscious  
I walk through a ruin  
following the people in front of me

twelfth day of the war  
called my mother

no improvement  
all of our planes returned

thirteenth day of the war  
lost contact with my mother  
severe stomach pain  
woke to siren screaming  
leak in the roof  
in a panic which tie  
I should wear for the camera

fourteenth day of the war  
explosions in my head  
took two aspirin  
called my mother  
my voice went dead  
I said I love you mom

fifteenth day of the war  
I went out for tea  
I spent my last coins  
I counted the friends

I had lost this past year  
and the ones I still had  
I still had 3  
possibly 2  
if I were honest

sixteenth day of the war  
turned on the TV  
late evening  
watched erotic film  
then caught  
last image  
of dust and a road  
people laying on the road  
called my mother  
left a message

seventeenth day of the war  
stared at the trees  
in front of my balcony  
then went in  
to stare at the wall

eighteenth day of the war  
phone call from my mother  
where are you she said  
why didn't you call  
are you okay  
I erased the message  
and went back  
onto the balcony

nineteenth day of the war  
nothing happened  
I listened on the radio  
a tank apparently hit  
nobody inside it  
the face of the enemy  
I thought  
I want to see it

twentieth day of the war  
warm sunny day  
people at Reichstag building  
lined up like ants

I thought of purchasing  
a weapon  
I didn't know why

twenty first day of the war  
I am a poet  
a poet does nothing  
when there is a war  
he cleans out the barracks

twenty second day of the war  
I'm tired  
I go back to sleep  
my mothers health  
continues to fail

twenty third day of the war  
I wake in the middle  
of the night  
an orgasm  
I can't remember why

twenty fourth day of the war  
49 years old today  
17 marks  
one loaf of stale Turkish bread  
a prayer on my lips

twenty fifth day of the war  
nothing to report

twenty sixth day of the war  
I turn off the TV

twenty seventh day of the war  
I have what I always wanted  
a war  
in the background

twenty eight day of the war  
I lay in deep grass  
I hear the enemies footsteps  
I wake up

twenty ninth day of the war  
I'm losing my will to fight  
I have been there every day  
I rise at dawn  
the radio my bugle call  
I wait with the troops  
for the ground offensive

thirtieth day of the war  
spent the afternoon  
in the cinema  
the Normandy landing  
I will go again tomorrow

thirty first day of the war  
back on Normandy beach  
battered popcorn  
coke and ice cream  
I make a lot of noise eating  
I thought nobody  
would hear it  
during the invasion

a man told me to keep quiet  
I had a mouthful  
of popcorn

thirty second day of the war  
rain expected  
poor visibility  
you can see  
nothing from the air

thirty third day of the war  
at last  
the city is being bombed  
real buildings  
no people yet  
in any of them  
I don't believe it  
till I see people moving  
maybe the buildings are fake



thirty fourth day of the war  
went again to the cinema  
this time  
a Japanese island  
soldiers take the hill  
I expected more action  
the Japanese soldiers  
acted afraid  
maybe they weren't  
being well paid

thirty fifth day of the war  
collected signatures  
to prevent  
cardinals from Rome  
from occupying Berlin

thirty sixth day of the war  
slept all day  
after sleepless night  
the house I was born in  
suffered a direct hit

woke up  
threw cold water  
on my face  
turned the TV on  
saw a naked woman  
on a telephone  
the number flashing  
in front of my face  
turned if off  
opened the window  
stared into the distance

thirty seventh day of the war  
house in Sofia  
hit by mistake  
nobody hurt  
had some coffee

thirty eight day of the war  
a dream  
I sit in front of the TV  
there is a slot machine

in front of it  
the war comes on  
if I want to continue  
I have to put more coins in  
there is a momentary  
flashing red light  
indicating that  
not enough viewers  
are watching  
and the coverage  
will be turned off  
I grab a handful of coins  
and put them in the slot  
I see a close up  
of one of our planes  
I sit back against the pillow  
safe for at least the next hour

thirty ninth day of the war  
took off my clothes  
for the first time  
in front of the TV  
felt nothing

put them back on  
still felt nothing  
turned off the TV  
still felt nothing  
fell asleep

fortieth day of the war  
bus suffers direct hit  
I write the names  
of 70 people  
I will never know  
on a piece of paper  
throw it into the river  
I made the names up  
the faces  
will be filled in later  
with dirt

forty first day of the war  
my life comes back to me  
in a sequence  
of slow fade ins

and fade outs  
a young man  
is discussing  
on the TV  
how to make  
exciting  
film titles

forty second day of the war  
I look out the window  
the sky rises  
full of black smoke  
a dampness  
between my legs  
a hand  
presses  
an orgasm  
out of my stomach

forty third day of the war  
I am anxious  
for new developments

nothing moving  
all of our planes returned  
forty fourth day of the war  
Chinese Embassy hit  
I see the dead face  
of a young woman journalist

forty fifth day of the war  
I am with my mother  
my young brother  
says it is time to go  
I ask if we can stay with him  
he says no  
my mother leaves  
I follow her  
I can't find her  
I wake up

forty sixth day of the war  
I suffer a direct hit  
my plane is on fire  
I prepare

to give the enemy  
my name  
letters dance  
in my head  
I have  
forgotten  
their meaning

forty seventh day of the war  
I decide to not sleep  
phantom erections  
now trample  
over the troops

forty eight day of the war  
I am a Russian conceptualist  
making my life up  
under a brutal regime

forty ninth day of the war  
I lie outside a tent

with Ernest Hemmingway  
staring up  
at a snow covered peak  
and a plane  
descending out of the clouds

fiftieth day of the war  
I am awarded  
the distinguished flying medal  
it comes in the mail  
in a see through plastic bag  
my name engraved  
on a piece of tin  
it costs two dollars  
I ask my mother  
if I can have it

fifty first day of the war  
my mother  
wakes from a coma  
she says  
the eggs are ready



fifty second day of the war  
I wake up  
My mother  
has placed my clothes  
on the edge of my bed  
it is my first time  
in a war  
the uniform  
belongs  
to my older brother

fifty third day of the war  
I come out  
of the earth  
with my hands up

fifty fourth day of the war  
I come out of an oven  
like burnt bread

fifty fifth day of the war  
I call all of my doctors  
and put them on alert

fifty sixth day of the war  
I decide  
to be a war correspondent  
I wake up in a feather bed  
high in the clouds  
in a distant land

fifty seventh day of the war  
I am with Walt Whitman  
on a battlefield  
I am a leaf of grass  
inspecting the fallen troops

fifty eight day of the war  
I am becoming excited  
about what uses  
I can put it to

fifty ninth day of the war  
I receive a call  
from someone  
who wants  
to start a business  
helping to rebuild  
a war torn country

sixtieth day of the war  
the target is obscured by fog  
I get a day off

sixty first day of the war  
my imagination  
draws blood  
for the first time

sixty second day of the war  
I feel new hope  
the Church gets involved

sixty third day of the war  
at last  
I am ready  
to profit  
from the war  
as a writer  
how did I miss  
the last one

sixty fourth day of the war  
I discover  
my country  
for the first time

sixty fifth day of the war  
my mother  
has developed complications  
she expects  
visitors from outer space  
is worried how she looks  
putting on too much weight

sixty sixth day of the war  
i realize it is better  
to be committed  
to a madhouse  
than a war

sixty seventh day of the war  
I am reminded of great wars  
that lasted a lifetime

sixty eight day of the war  
a direct hit  
on my coffee cup  
no collateral damage

sixty ninth day of the war  
I buy my first  
plastic bag of soldiers  
for my holy communion  
in a dream  
I see they are

sealed in dust  
you have to shake  
the bag first  
before opening it  
and then  
you set them  
on the road  
and wait  
for an enemy plane

seventieth day of the war  
I pretend  
to be grown up  
and writing  
an anti war poem

seventy first day of the war  
I am sniffing airplane glue  
after the explosion  
my groin  
in a lustful cramp

seventy second day of the war  
god mirrors  
my growing indifference

seventy third day of the war  
I refuse to stop breathing  
despite the fact  
that the plastic bag  
is sealed

seventy fourth day of the war  
I have invented  
a new weapon  
to use against myself

seventy fifth day of the war  
I fall silent  
in the egg  
hoping  
the explosions  
won't hear me

ninety first day of the war  
I fold a napkin  
as a flag  
and try to think  
what I should call it

ninety second day of the war  
I am a citizen  
in the greatest  
and most powerful  
country in the world  
and then i woke up

456th day of the war  
a child is born  
I run out of bandages

5,600th day of the war  
My mother agrees  
to the operation



8800th day of the war  
I am finally beginning  
to understand my place in it

10,000th day of the war  
I am fortunate enough  
to pass it on  
to my children

21,000th  
Last day of the war  
a naked woman  
appears on the screen  
a telephone number  
darkness  
a dial tone  
a cracked egg  
bloody footprints...

# THE SUITCASE

If you've enjoyed this book, you'll love the CD *The Suitcase*, also by William Cody Maher (site includes free MP3 samples).

## *About the Suitcase:*

What happens if poet-performance artist William Cody Maher, from San Francisco, teams up with musician-producer Frank Pyne from Ireland, and Pyne's Heidelberg CD label The Campfire? *The Suitcase* is the result. Poems by Maher with sound tracks from Move D, B Ton, Sad Rockets, Alan Pyne, Ovi M.V.P., Jochen Seiterle, Alex Cortex, Rawell, Frank Pyne, Billy Goodman, Oliver Kuka, Sequenced Soul and Elfish Echo.

The drive of William Cody Maher's poetic stories is reminiscent of the best work of the Beat Generation. His performed poetry offers an ideal material for experimental musicians to convert and interpret into a dozen brilliant directions, all the while conforming to the contents of the narratives, and to the rhythms of Maher's musical verse. The results of the project include works ranging from the melancholy, to the humorous, to mystical "mini radio plays".

## William Cody Maher

William Cody Maher studied acting in Paris in the late seventies, where he met beat poet Ted Joans, whom he credits with playing a large role in his becoming a writer. In the late seventies and early eighties he made films with Alexandre Rockwell, in the features *Lenz* and *Hero* he played a lead acting role and co-wrote the screenplays. During the mid-eighties he collaborated with the photographer Susan Schwartzberg and they produced on a documentary photo installation project called *My Name is Hunter's Point*. The principle outcome was an exhibit at Camera Works in San Francisco, at the Brecht Centrum and in the DAI in Heidelberg, and a smaller version in Berlin. City Lights published a mini book comprised of two poems at this time.

Recently, William Cody Maher has collaborated with a leading member of the Frankfurt Ballet, Tony Rizzi. They've co-written the work, *Judy is Angry*, which was staged in Frankfurt and Vienna. A new program is in the works for June, 2003.

Originally from San Francisco, William Cody Maher has lived in Paris, Berlin, Moscow, and he currently resides in Heidelberg.