

TURTLE POETRY

Editorial Introduction. — This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material. We encourage our readers to submit poetry or songs for consideration, either their own material or work by other authors. Poems may be submitted to Wallace J. Nichols, 2103 Vallejo, San Francisco, CA 94123 or Anders G.J. Rhodin, Chelonian Research Foundation, 168 Goodrich Street, Lunenburg, MA 01462.

Our desire is to share with our readers the beauty and wonder of turtles as expressed through the art of the poem or song. In the sense that the relationship between man and turtles is multifaceted, so too is turtle poetry. The poems we publish here will reflect that complexity, from poems of pure admiration for the creatures themselves to others reflecting the utilization of turtles and their products. Some poems will reflect man's use of the turtle for sustenance, others will stress man's need to preserve and protect turtles. Some will deal with our emotional interactions with turtles, others will treat turtles light-heartedly or with seeming disrespect, but all will hopefully help us to better understand both the human and the chelonian condition, and remind us that the turtle holds a sacred place in all our hearts.

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Tragedy of the Road

DON BLANDING¹

I pulled my car aside today, to watch a trailer pass,
The neatest little trailer job, compact in line and mass,
Without an inch of wasted space within its nifty frame.
It had no car to pull it but it got there just the same.
So perfectly designed it was, to fit the driver's need,
It didn't lack a single thing except it hadn't speed.

The driver was an awful dub, he didn't seem to know
The traffic rules or when to stop or where he ought to go.
He went right through a Stop-sign on the wrong side of the road.
He didn't see the great big truck with overburdened load
Come whamming down the highway like a fearful juggernaut.
He heard the roar but not in time to keep from getting caught.

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These dotted lines are kinder than some vivid words to show
What happened to the trailer, compact and neat . . . but slow.
Some mangled flesh, some bits of shell were wreckage to explain
Why this dusty little *turtle* will not cross a road again.

Editorial Comment. — For this special focus issue I had hoped to find a poem on the subject of Blanding's turtles, but searched in vain. Instead, by good fortune, I came across this light little piece authored by Don Blanding in 1946. One wonders whether this modern nature observer might not be a relative or direct descendant of William Blanding, the original collector and first observer of Blanding's turtle back in 1838. What better way, perhaps, to honor the turtle than to present a poem by a bearer of the patronym's name. The temporal continuity from one Blanding in 1838 to another in 1946 brings a certain sense of circularity to man's observations of turtles over time. Our observations of turtles lead to an ever-increasing body of knowledge, concern, passion, and hope for the future, as those observations lead to levels of knowledge on several planes, both scientific and personal, tied together into the fabric of human chelonian experience.

¹Published 1946 in:
BLANDING, DON. *Florida*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., p. 35.
Submitted by Lora L. Smith