

# New Business Isn't Always Good Business

*Poems by David Haskell*

## The Day Sacramento Was Brought to Its Knees

I remember the day Sacramento was brought to its knees.  
The day State Employees learned to say "Please".

The River People saved their bottles for a week,  
then broke them in the middle of 12<sup>th</sup> street.  
Gleaning gallo green covered the concrete,  
and the early morning commuters made a hasty retreat.

And those five-dollars a day shopping-cart men,  
wearing blue collared, "we're gonna win" union grins.  
Stood on the freeway exits with their protest signs,  
and the Teamsters honored their "wildcat" picket lines.

On the day Sacramento was brought to its knees.  
The nine to five citizens discovered common courtesy.

Ten bagladies panhandled nuts from an almond recall,  
and lured the Park Squirrels down to Capital Mall.  
Where a riot of rodentious rage erupted in the street,  
and there was tire slashing with angry rodent teeth.

And the downtown Winos with "Night Train" roaring in their veins,  
surrounded the Capital building with a drunken human chain.  
The Capital steps at sunrise were a frightening sight.  
Hundreds of bums snoring in the early morning light.

Half-moon and the Drooler shared a common vision,  
and joined the freeway traffic, to preach to everyone.  
Making foreign speeches, speaking in tongues,  
the K-Street prophets for all religions.

On the day Sacramento was held for ransom,  
donations were given to every transient, wino and bum.

City folks say the unrest started before election day,  
when Ronald Reagan stopped over for an hour stay,  
And the street people prospered for a single day,  
gathering all the paper, cans and political hay.

## New Business Isn't Always Good Business

Now the pesticide salesman, he has a "tough row to hoe".

To reckon a farmers financial worth,  
when even his wife may not know.

The color of his machinery,  
could be a handy clue.  
If there's rust dnipping off it,  
his pockets might be filled with it too.

And those tires with that deep rubber,  
attached to that shiny yellow and green.  
Might only mean his cousin's a tractor dealer,  
who can't say "NO" to someone whose family.

And that 80 acres of sandy loam,  
he fondly calls the Home Ranch. Well,  
Mama moved out 10 years ago.  
He might have lost it in a refinance.

If that new account reaches five figures,  
And the last payment is 60 days past due.  
And the branch manager starts to wonder,  
about what he is gonna due with you.

Well, a man's clothes can be indication,  
of what's really going on inside.  
And the belt is what I focus on,  
the best barometer of a working man's pride.

If that leather stays up, high and tight,  
and the tongue doesn't start to hang out.  
Well, I have learned from past experience.  
The money will come, without a doubt!

But my brow begins to furrow,  
if gravity gets a hold of those pants.  
And the tongue starts to hangin,  
Like a dog's chasing a summer romance.

A diet of coffee and donuts,  
can only carry a man so far.  
And when the days start to grow shorter,  
he can't out run the calendar.

So if a moon always starts rising,  
before he finally grabs a hold of his pants.  
Then it's "Cash Only on Delivery",  
with prior approval from Finance.

You better stop thinkin about your commission,  
with an account that's C.O.D.  
And start planning for your future meeting,  
with the president of the company.

So when you're out crunching new gravel.  
Sometimes it's better to hit the brake.  
Because there's a risk in doing business,  
with only a smile and a handshake.

## Cut Them All Down

Let the bankers, the wood cutters come,  
and fight over the crumbs.  
Taxes are the only thing these trees can grow.

Because I tired of pruning from dangerous heights.  
And cutting fire blight, to save the trees from the bacterial ooze.

Knowing a fatal accident could wait,  
behind every tired mistake,  
when you are working in the orchard alone.

And my body still carries the residue,  
from every pesticide brew, I  
sprayed to keep the codling moths away.

I can't sign another canner's contract,  
knowing the fact,  
they still haven't paid me from last year.

And my ears can't stand to hear,  
another, "Maybe next year",  
from their un-sympathetic fieldman.

My son doesn't care,  
anything about pears.  
He likes living in a cyber world.

So let the weeds come and grow,  
and I won't have to mow,  
with equipment I borrowed last year.

And put these tired trees,  
out of misery.  
Make room for the pavement to grow.

Because I don't want to see,  
a single tree.  
I'm ready for the rocking chair.

## Amerco's Shovel

I meet Amerco at the airport.  
We were smoking squirrels on public land.  
All day we worked next to the bean fields.  
A young buck and this old ranch hand.

Amerco was an irrigator.  
And the shovel was the tool of his trade.  
Milled by the earth's resistance,  
from a spade into a two-leafed blade.

The shovel was his constant companion.  
They held each other on the long hot days.  
And together they watched the mystery of gravity,  
leading water on it's search for the Bay.

The unsure water moved with baby steps,  
stepping around clods that stood in the way.  
And they watched it with a mother's patience,  
to keep it from going astray.

But the ranch foreman gave me his shovel.  
A rude and disrespectful man.  
And Amerco struggled with a new one,  
that was rough and heavy in his hands.

His worried eyes watched my boots,  
jam his companion into the ground.  
But a life spent following orders.  
He protested without making a sound.

The handle felt like braided hair,  
almost weightless in my hands.  
And it sliced the earth like chocolate cake,  
reacting to my slightest demands.

All day he pouted for his shovel.  
His face carried a deep furrowed frown.  
He was jealous it would respond to my hands,  
like a whore from the bad side of town.

When I lit the final smoke bomb,  
and shoved it down the last squirrel hole.  
I relinquished the precious shovel,  
and returned that vacant part of his soul.

Life had given him this shovel to carry.  
And his hands held on to it still,  
with a love of tools that marks us,  
that unique human expression of skill.

## Guillermo

Now Guillermo was a cowboy,  
And of this there was no doubt.  
But with a new bride by his side,  
he could no longer knockabout.

So he left his home in the high country,  
where a man has room to roam.  
And traded it all for a vinyl chair,  
with a three-lined telephone.

Now his paycheck has four figures,  
with a pre-paid dental plan.  
and baby skin filled in the cuts,  
the wires left in his hands.

He drinks coffee everyday till ten.  
Answers nature's call at noon.  
And when the secretaries all turn their heads,  
Uses the trash can for his private spittoon.

He has a mustache black as charcoal,  
with a perfect Indian nose.  
And legs like strips of bacon,  
stretched tight in his Levi clothes.

He had the fastest draw in the hallway,  
fingers blazin in sex-gun style.  
And he broke the meanest secretary,  
with his ten-gallon cowboy smile.

But his boots were always shiny,  
as he paced the office hall.  
Gone completely "barn sour",  
trapped in his office stall.

He could no longer smell the west wind,  
nor watch those tumbleweeds blow.  
Staring at the power lines,  
outside of his office window.

Now a cowboy needs fresh air to live,  
and a mountain range within his reach.  
So why did you take that warden's job,  
guarding grunion spawning on the beach.

L.A. is a poacher's town.  
So we wish you the best of luck.  
But after three years of pushing paper,  
Are you still, "One Son of a Buck"?

I don't need no stinking saddle!  
I don't need no stinking horse!  
All I need is a stinking badge.  
And my 357, of course!