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# Poetry

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# Alive!

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*Poems from the OPICA Brain Train*  
*2016 - 2017*

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# Poetry Alive!

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Led by Sarah Jacobus, LCSW, MFA, Poetry Alive! is based on the model developed by the Alzheimer's Poetry Project. Drawing on research showing that reciting poetry aloud has the added benefit of regulating breath

and pulse, each session begins with a lively call and response chanting of lines from classic or contemporary poems. These poems serve as inspiration for the communal, improvisational creation of an original poem. Sarah uses movement, sound and props to encourage a sensory engagement with poetry.

As the first Adult Day Program and Counseling Center in Los Angeles, OPICA (Optimistic People In a Caring Atmosphere) has been serving adults



challenged with memory loss and their families in the West Los Angeles area for more than 35 years. OPICA provides comprehensive programming specifically focused on all stages of memory loss in a nurturing environment. Offerings include cognitive stimulation activities, such as therapeutic art and music, brain fitness, counseling, education, and The OPICA Brain Train early memory loss program. Through on-site and select satellite programs, OPICA fills a critical need as one of the leading not-for-profit community-based organizations focused solely on memory loss.

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*Thanks to OPICA staff and interns for their support of this project  
and to all the Brain Train members for their adventurous creative spirits.*

## THE ARROW AND THE SONG

*by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

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I shot an arrow into the air,  
It fell to earth, I knew not where;  
For, so swiftly it flew, the sight  
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,  
It fell to earth, I knew not where;  
For who has sight so keen and strong,  
That it can follow the flight of song?

Long, long afterward, in an oak  
I found the arrow, still unbroke;  
And the song, from beginning to end,  
I found again in the heart of a friend.

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*You bring up various ways of creating poetry. That's a challenge  
that causes us to think and to be creative, and that's good.*

— Irv

## **A WAY TO LOVE**

*inspired by "The Arrow and the Song"*

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*by David, Fred, Irv, Jim, Ora & Ron*

*April 5, 2016*

I think of my life  
coming to a different country  
I was happy, I felt challenged  
to become a different person.  
The memories we share, we share to this day  
even as we get older.  
Someone saw something in me  
and challenged me to explore it further  
and embellish it

It takes courage to probe the heart  
You never say good-bye  
to what's in your heart  
As you grow older, you think  
of all the things you left behind  
and you wonder what's coming

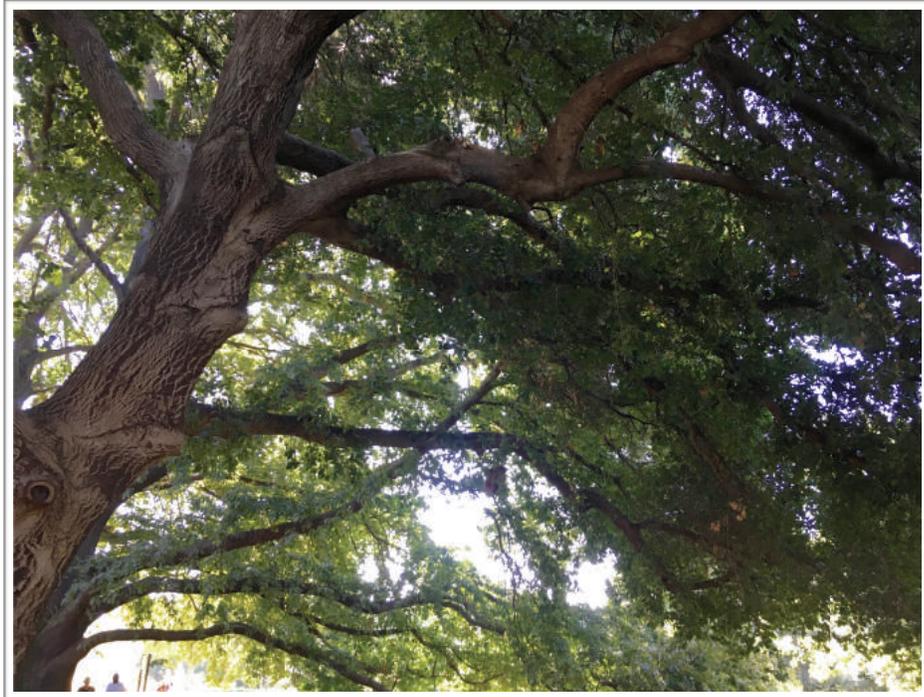
I lost my sweetheart  
I thought she'd never return  
But then again, someone  
returned in her place.  
Then you know you cannot lose  
because it's buried in your heart forever.  
Life will send us hurts  
It's up to us to heal them.

Life is messy, and never dull  
Things happen  
we never would have expected: serendipity!  
But we are always challenged  
to go on living  
and find a way to love.

# TREES

*by Joyce Kilmer*

---



I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in Summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;  
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.

## TREES

*inspired by "Trees" by Joyce Kilmer*

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*by Bob & Jeanette*

*May 3, 2017*

I am a ginkgo tree  
I love to spread my leaves out  
and drop them down.  
Yellow and rust-colored when they drop  
I make a sound, soft and light  
like drifting snow  
The pitter patter of rain cleans my leaves  
My smell is delicate, like raindrops  
falling on the leaves.  
My name is Frankenspice.  
Come and enjoy me.



I am tall and prefer my leaves  
with their autumn look  
A little bit of red, little bit of pink, little bit of yellow  
With a little bit of music  
you could make a song out of it.  
I stand tall and let the wind  
blow through me  
I howl like the wind  
to keep lumberjacks away  
If they approach, the scraping of my branches  
causes them to run away.  
People look at me as Protector of the Forest.  
I hope I last forever.

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*You make us dig deeper.  
— David*

# HOPE

*inspired by "Hope' is the Thing with Feathers" by Emily Dickinson*

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*by David, Fred, Jim, Ora, Ron & Shirley*

*June 2, 2016*

***"Hope" is the thing with feathers -  
That perches in the soul -  
And sings the tune without the words -  
And never stops - at all -***

Hope is looking forward.  
Hope is just plain trying to get it okay.  
Hope is wishful thinking we wish would come true  
Hope is a feather flying through the air  
Hope is everywhere,  
we just have to go along with it.  
I would pluck the sky if I could  
and call it my future.

Hope is green.  
Hope is yellow, or gray at times  
We take it as it comes.  
I thought I had it here, but it took off.  
Hope is blue, like the sky before the rain comes.  
Hope is sky blue and portrays things to come.  
Hope is golden, as are your wishes.  
Hope is pink, like baby stuff.

Hope feels like comfort and love and embracing.  
Like a beautiful woman getting ready to go to bed  
Hope says, Close the door,  
Hope is on the way.  
My dreams are on the way.  
Hope the lottery comes my way!  
Hope says, Don't despair, keep plugging along,  
the future will show up before too long.

# DREAMS

*inspired by "Dreams" by Langston Hughes*

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*by David, Gideon, Irv, Jim, Margaret, Richard & Rose*

*January 5, 2017*

*Hold fast to dreams  
For if dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird  
That cannot fly.  
Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams go  
Life is a barren field  
Frozen with snow.*

Without dreams, where can we go?

Life is an empty sky

A mirage that cannot survive

A puff of smoke

A floating cloud that does not stop

A bleak and empty space without your face

Kaput

A long night without a pause

A place without a space

A vacuum

Without reward

A party without a dance

A dance without dancers

---

*It opened my mind to this kind of poetry, when I  
was really stuck on rhyming. That was very helpful.*

*— Jim*

## A RED, RED ROSE

*by Robert Burns*

---

Oh my love is like a red, red rose  
That blooms again in June;  
Oh my love is like the melody  
That's sweetly played in tune.

And you're so fair, my lovely lass,  
And so deep in love am I;  
That I will love you still, my dear,  
Till all the seas run dry.

Till all the seas run dry, my dear.  
And the rocks melt with the sun;  
I will love you still, my dear,  
While the sands of life shall run.

And fare you well, my only love!  
And fare you well awhile!  
And I will come again, my love,  
Across ten thousand miles.



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*You've had us rise to a higher level of awareness when it comes to poetry, including creating our own.*

*— Daniel*

## LOVE

*inspired by "A Red, Red Rose"*

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*by Giovanna, Hugh, Irwin, Mike, Quentin, Rowena & Yvonne*

*January 30, 2017*

My love is like a flower, chocolate pudding, a red rose  
My love is a kitten, a will o' the wisp, a baby  
    a waterfall running toward the stream  
My love blooms in spring  
It's like the moonlight that never seems to fade  
My love enjoys eating every night  
It's sadness at your being gone  
Like my dogs in the morning greeting me  
My love lasts until tomorrow  
    but tomorrow never comes

My love is red, blue, orange, white, black with one yellow  
It's water that turns into ice and steams  
Tastes like sweet marshmallow  
Like a baby, honey, tears, pomegranate  
Smells like tangerine, sweetness, a warm wonderful aroma  
A Russian dacha in the winter

My love tells me I am a wonderful person  
Tells me, I need a lot of patience  
Take care of yourself  
Come closer and closer  
Touching a pillow in the night  
My love cares that I am loving  
Tells me, I love you—as love should.

## HAIKU

*by classic haiku master Basho & 20th century poets*

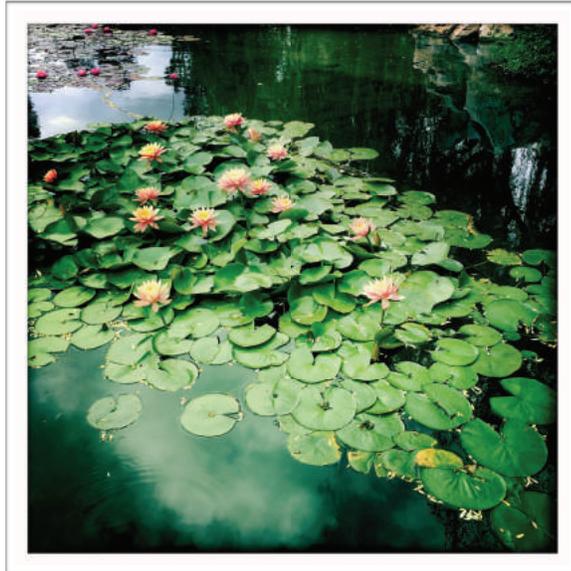
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An old silent pond...  
A frog jumps into the pond,  
splash! Silence again.

Autumn moonlight—  
a worm digs silently  
into the chestnut.

In the twilight rain  
these brilliant-hued hibiscus -  
A lovely sunset.

— Matsuo Basho  
1644-1694



From across the lake,  
Past the black winter trees,  
Faint sounds of a flute.  
- Richard Wright

ground squirrel  
balancing its tomato  
on the garden fence  
- Don Eulert

Nightfall,  
Too dark to read the page  
Too cold.  
- Jack Kerouac

## HAIKU

*inspired by Basho and 20th century poets*

---

*by Bob, David, Daniel, Hugh, Jeanette, Jerry, Jim, Mark, Mike, Nora  
Richard & Rowena  
June - July, 2017*

**Bob:**

Flakes of some sort  
Soft ripe strawberries  
A bowl of cold milk

**Daniel:**

Firecracker explodes on my front lawn  
I wish to hell  
They'd leave me alone

**Hugh:**

Everything starts in the kitchen  
Dinner, culmination of the day  
A long time 'till breakfast

**Jerry:**

The phone rings out  
Can't get to the phone  
I turn around and go back to bed

**Jim:**

Roses past their prime  
Melaleuca dropping its leaves  
Garden awakening to meet the day

**Mark:**

It's a gray day  
If the sun was out  
I'd feel better.

**Mike:**

Diving on the inlet of Rangaroa  
Surrounded by sharks  
Wonderful time with my wife

**Nora:**

Morning meets the sun  
on the hilltop  
bright light, bright light

**Richard:**

Mollie sings "Blue Skies"  
As the men pass by her house  
She dances to her tune

**Rowena:**

Morning over, afternoon not here yet  
The beginning of the rest of the day  
Anticipating dinner

## **SONNET 18: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?** *by William Shakespeare*

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Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;  
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:  
    So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
    So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

---

*I felt that it would take a little bit more for me to enjoy this. Strange as it may be, it didn't take that long at all. I showed these poems to my wife, and she was very interested to see what we're doing. It was good for me. I always knew I could get something out of it to lighten my day and give it some meaning.*

– Paul

**A SUMMER'S DAY**  
*inspired by "Sonnet 18"*

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*by David, Irv, Jim, Ora, Ron & Shirley*  
*August 4, 2016*

A summer's day...

the breath of my wife as she kisses me  
the heat is like a house without air-conditioning  
swimming in a cold river in Mendocino  
seeing your daughter lying in the grass as she thinks of someone  
driving my car, just anyplace  
a little girl high on a windy hill  
gathering flowers as she rolls down the hill

My love gives life to me

and my creative soul  
a golden ray of sun  
the rippling stream by the bank  
a young maiden in blossom  
a floweret called a forget-me-knot  
a beautiful day  
the unconditional love of a dog  
my little granddaughter, who just came to life,  
    small and sweet and wants to meet me next week  
the devotion of a life-long companion who is loyal and true

## A SUMMER'S DAY

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*by Bob, Jeanette & Mel*

*July 5, 2017*

Beach, water, soft breezes  
good weather  
a day to relax with friends

Watching fireworks at Coney Island  
as a kid in Brooklyn  
exhilarating  
an awakening of the senses in me  
a multitude of awakenings

I think of my wife  
that's what she is to me

I'm a mountain person  
There's something beautiful about the mountains  
So much there to offer us  
They're reaching out to us,  
saying, come, come, come

---

*I find poetry to be very relaxing. The words can be so beautiful. They don't have to be rhyming. I like it. It's been very helpful to relax the mind.*

*— Jeanette*

## **SENSING THE DAY**

*inspired by "Dusk in June" by Sara Teasdale*

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*by Elaine & Rowena*

*July 31, 2017*

***Evening, and all the birds  
In a chorus of shimmering sound  
Are easing their hearts of joy  
For miles around.***

***The air is blue and sweet,  
The few first stars are white,  
Oh let me like the birds  
Sing before night.***

Morning. Beginning of the day

Anything is possible

The air is blue and tastes

like blueberries

Midday

The air red and tastes like strawberries

The air is gray and tastes like sparkles

Twilight

My favorite time of day

Things slowing down

Beautiful stars talk to me

I feel peaceful, I feel quiet

All the stuff of the day comes together

The air is yellow and tastes like mangoes.

Nightfall wraps around me like quiet

The air a soft blue that tastes like noodles

Everything calms down and

You're finished.

# I WANDERED LONELY AS A CLOUD

*by William Wordsworth*

---

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:  
A poet could not but be gay,  
In such a jocund company:  
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

**BEYOND LONELINESS, PLEASURE**  
*inspired by "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud"*

---

*by David, Giovanna, Hugh, Leroy & Yvonne*  
*March 27, 2017*

Lonely as a clown when I lost my baby  
A cotillion dance at 12 years old  
    and no one asked me to dance  
    lonely as a big-footed oaf  
A death in my family, lonely as a backpacker on a mountaintop.  
In the service, overseas  
    lonely as a one-armed baseball player  
    wishing I was home  
On a little atoll in the South Pacific called Bikini  
I didn't want to get drunk (the beer was free, anyway)  
Instead, lonely as a goony bird,  
I explored the environment.

Yet my heart fills with pleasure  
When the dog welcomes me home, jumping  
Waking up and seeing my wife beside me  
When I see my children, my grandchildren  
A celebratory family event  
    everybody comes and brings something for the dinner  
The anticipation of a pleasurable afternoon  
A Spring field of different-colored flowers  
A forest adjacent to a stream, with deer and rabbits  
On a mountain, looking down into the valley  
    figuring out which way I'll go next.  
A walk with a good friend through the Sonoma hills  
    familiar places, sad and happy  
    I knew I was coming home.

# AUTUMN IN NEW YORK

*music & lyrics by Vernon Duke*

---

Autumn in New York  
Why does it seem so inviting?  
Autumn in New York  
It spells the thrill of first-knighting

Glittering crowds and shimmering clouds  
In canyons of steel  
They're making me feel  
I'm home

It's autumn in New York  
That brings the promise of new love  
Autumn in New York  
Is often mingled with pain

Dreamers with empty hands  
May sigh for exotic lands  
It's autumn in New York  
It's good to live it again

Autumn in New York  
You need no castles in Spain  
Lovers that bless the dark  
On benches in Central Park  
Greet autumn in New York  
It's good to live it again

---

*This group has been very accepting. You were great about us sharing. It's obvious in what we've put together. There are so many things in here.*

— Nora

## AUTUMN IN LA

*inspired by the song "Autumn in New York"*

---

*by Bill, David, Gideon, Jim, Richard & Rose*

*October 20, 2016*

Autumn in LA doesn't make sense,  
shouldn't even be a song.  
I wouldn't give it a second thought  
It starts on Christmas day  
You know what I mean.  
Autumn in Brooklyn, leaves falling.  
They do.  
Autumn in Vermont, a slight mist,  
tramping through the forest  
Autumn in LA sounds like laughter  
A cacophony of horns on the 405  
Smells like smog  
The kids go off to school  
And we're free!  
Leaves change colors in autumn, in New York,  
weather cooling down.  
We don't have that here  
But the coloring of my liquid amber trees,  
And there's a fragrance to it. Autumn.  
There's a street that has a tunnel of trees  
They all turn, it's a very pretty street.  
Nobody can afford to live on it  
but it's a very pretty street.  
Autumn in New York makes sense.  
Autumn in LA doesn't make sense.



## WHAT WORK IS

*by Philip Levine*

---

We stand in the rain in a long line  
waiting at Ford Highland Park. For work.  
You know what work is—if you're  
old enough to read this you know what  
work is, although you may not do it.  
Forget you. This is about waiting,  
shifting from one foot to another.  
Feeling the light rain falling like mist  
into your hair, blurring your vision  
until you think you see your own brother  
ahead of you, maybe ten places.  
You rub your glasses with your fingers,  
and of course it's someone else's brother,  
narrower across the shoulders than  
yours but with the same sad slouch, the grin  
that does not hide the stubbornness,  
the sad refusal to give in to  
rain, to the hours of wasted waiting,  
to the knowledge that somewhere ahead  
a man is waiting who will say, "No,  
we're not hiring today," for any  
reason he wants. You love your brother,  
now suddenly you can hardly stand  
the love flooding you for your brother,  
who's not beside you or behind or

ahead because he's home trying to  
sleep off a miserable night shift  
at Cadillac so he can get up  
before noon to study his German.  
Works eight hours a night so he can sing  
Wagner, the opera you hate most,  
the worst music ever invented.  
How long has it been since you told him  
you loved him, held his wide shoulders,  
opened your eyes wide and said those words,  
and maybe kissed his cheek? You've never  
done something so simple, so obvious,  
not because you're too young or too dumb,  
not because you're jealous or even mean  
or incapable of crying in  
the presence of another man, no,  
just because you don't know what work is.

---

*My sense of poetry was the way it's taught in school and that I've really never cared for. I'm much more easily accepting of the type of poetry we've read and constructed here than what I've been exposed to in the past.*

— Bob

## WORK

*inspired by "What Work Is"*

---

*by Bill, Bob, Jeanette, Mark & Mel*

*October 11, 2017*

I was raised you work for a buck  
My father worked as a machinist  
at the New York Central Railroad  
I peddled papers  
Worked in a kitchen scraping off dishes  
I worked at Mirro Aluminum Company  
pots and pans, coffee pots  
The tedium could wear you down  
Absolutely wear you down  
You have to shut off the work day  
Spend the rest of the day at a bar  
I worked on a golf course at a country club  
Found out how other people lived  
I learned that you could light someone's lighter  
and make a buck  
I wanted to wear a tie  
To be a good provider  
I worked hard to get where I am  
I accomplished it  
It's been a great life that way.

---

*I was quite skeptical when I came in,  
but I got into it. I really enjoyed this.  
I'm very glad that you've been here.*

*— Mark*

# **I WORRIED**

*by Mary Oliver*

---

I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers  
flow in the right direction, will the earth turn  
as it was taught, and if not how shall  
I correct it?

Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven,  
can I do better?

Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows  
can do it and I am, well,  
hopeless.

Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it,  
am I going to get rheumatism,  
lockjaw, dementia?

Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing.  
And gave it up. And took my old body  
and went out into the morning,  
and sang.

---

*I enjoy the mutual communion of people enjoying and responding together.*

*— Richard*

# **I USED TO WORRY**

*inspired by "I Worried"*

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*by Elaine, Hugh, Mel, Paul & Rowena*

*November 27, 2017*

I used to worry about my cat--

the cat will catch a mouse

what are you going to do with the goddam mouse?

the cat will bring the mouse in the house

Are you kidding me?

A mouse in the house? Not happening!

But now, the cat can just go do what it's going to do,

I'm going to eat my breakfast.

I used to worry about lots of things

But now I'm confident that the future will take care of itself.

A dilemma would come down the road

that really threw me for a loop,

and it's going to ruin my entire day?

I give that very little chance of happening at this point.

I used to worry about getting injured

But now I've found that my body doesn't injure easily.

I used to worry that this disease I have

would take over my body and leave me debilitated

But I've found hope that with proper medication

Things will work out fine.

I used to worry about everything

But now I try to relax with whatever comes my way

Hoping I can be ready and able to do it.