

Rhymes & Reasons



by Greg Asimakoupoulos



A PARTIAL OBSERVER BOOK

Acclaim for Greg Asimakoupoulos'
Rhymes & Reasons

"Ever since Greg wrote a poem about my experiences as a child actor in Hollywood, I have been a fan of the Awesome Rev. His simple yet poignant verse has helped me articulate my faith in God and other people."

—Karolyn Grimes, Zuzu Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*

"With a poet's pen, Greg Asimakoupoulos is able to bring clarity and poignant observations to today's headlines. There are many commentators today, but Greg is the only person I know who can use the daily news to highlight moral truths in free verse. His voice is unique among us."

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"I find great delight recommending Greg's poetry. He is a close friend and constant encourager to the ministry of CBS. We always post his thought-provoking poetry on our website. I know you will be blessed by reading his creations."

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"The poetry in this volume conquers contemporary complexity with a mixture of rhapsodic prose and an almost eerie moral clarity. It projects buoyancy and hope while reflecting, with optical precision, the spontaneous surgings of the human spirit. Well done Reverend Greg!"

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Jews and Christians

"Greg Asimakoupoulos' whimsical way with words will take your mind on a poetic journey. But, you should be warned that his paradoxical pattern of playful words will most often have your mind pondering the pressing issues of our day."

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Silent Alarm: A Parable of Hope for Busy Professionals

"For more than two decades I have appreciated Greg Asimakoupoulos' creative way of stringing words together. The denomination I serve has been enriched by his unique contributions both in the pulpit and on paper."

— Glenn R. Palmberg, President of
The Evangelical Covenant Church

"My long-time friend is a true raconteur. Greg freely takes whatever is offered up from the passing parade as fodder for poetic commentaries. His word pictures are at times deeply probing, deliberately ironic, or have a touch of the godly. The reader should expect the unexpected".

— David S. Noreen, Editor, seniorlifestyle.org

"There's no "rhyme or reason" why you would NOT want to grab this book! Pastor Greg is a gifted communicator with the ability to put into prose what you're thinking but cannot always articulate! His writings are contemporary, innovative poetry peeks into the heart of man — and God — in a world gone mad. Read him once and you'll be hooked — I am!"

— Peggie C. Bohanon, publisher of peggiesplace.com

Rhymes & Reasons



by Greg Asimakoupoulos

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FOREWARD

For over four years the unique poetry of Greg Asimakoupoulos (pronounced "AWESOME-uh-COPE-uh-less") has graced the web pages of The Partial Observer, an online opinion journal. He has provided keen insight and commentary on the news of the day with both wit and artistry in a weekly column called "Rhymes and Reasons." His endlessly inventive wordplay provokes, in turn, both laughter and thought, touching on a wide array of topics, from our preoccupations with pop culture and sports to the horror of war and natural disasters. The constant thread that runs through it all, that shapes his outlook and informs his opinion, is Greg's Christian faith.

As a poetic commentator, Greg likens himself to a political cartoonist, often employing hyperbole to make his points. But while "Rhymes and Reasons" is typically written in reaction to current events, the poems collected in this volume have a certain timelessness that extends beyond the news that inspired them. At times, Greg draws upon his own experiences, as with "Leaving Home," written upon sending his daughter off to college. Who would not be moved at this eloquent snapshot of that bittersweet moment? His ability to capture, through poetry, what so many others have felt has caused many of these poems to spread like wildfire as readers eagerly pass them on to friends and family. His creative meditations on significant holidays, many of which are included here, are among the most popular pieces in The Partial Observer's seven-year history.

As well-suited as Greg's poems are for internet publication, it is particularly gratifying to see them in a printed collection, organized by category for the first time. This is an easy-to-read book that invites you to share it with others. We have received many Letters to the Editor

and reprint requests in response to Greg's poems over the years, and it is always interesting to see how the various pieces resonate for various reasons with the Partial Observer's diverse audience. The politically-passionate will find something new to debate; baseball fans will see their game in a new light; and the faithful will find new inspiration.

Naturally, not everyone will agree with all of Greg's views, which makes The Partial Observer the perfect home for "Rhymes and Reasons." It is a place where opposing opinions are welcome and respected – where the point is not to shout to the world, but rather, to request a conversation. Whether you are new to Greg's poetry or a longtime reader, it's never too late to join the dialogue.

Mark D. Johnson
Founding Editor, partialobserver.com
January 2008

FAMILY

That Certain Someone

A father's love is a universal longing.

There is a certain someone I've longed for all my life.

Someone to watch me catch the ball.
Someone to help me when I fall.
Someone to say "I know you tried."
Someone to listen to my whys.
Someone to pay when I just can't.
Someone to see things from my slant.
Someone to hold me when I'm scared.
Someone to make sure I'm prepared.

Someone who loves me yet says "no"
and when I protest lets me go.
Someone who waits till I return
and then inquires "Whaddya learn?"
Someone who knows me totally
and overlooks the worst in me.
Someone who takes me at my word
and doesn't judge me as absurd.

Someone whose dealings are quite fair.
He arbitrates to clear the air.
Someone whose hugs aren't always earned.
He never hoards the things he's learned.
Someone whose friendship is for keeps.
He prays for me before he sleeps.
Someone whose patience won't run dry.
He aches with me each time I cry.

This certain someone has a name
and though he'll never dance with fame,

today I'm feeling mighty glad
that God gave me this one called dad.

Leaving Home

The hidden costs of college have little to do with tuition.

When your kid leaves home for college,
your emotions fall apart.
You can picture him in diapers.
You can see her tracing hearts.
You remember when he started
kindergarten, then first grade.
You could swear it was a week ago
she sold you lemonade.
There were Cub Scouts, ballet lessons,
Little League and soccer games.
There were sleepovers and campouts
roasting hot dogs on the flames.
There were Barbies, trucks and braces,
family trips to Disneyland.
It seems like only yesterday
you held that little hand.
Now that hand grasps a diploma
as that grown-up voice says "Bye...
I'll be home for sure Thanksgiving.
What's that leaking from your eye?"
It's a bittersweet occasion.
You're so proud this day has come.
But to see that empty bedroom
leaves you nauseous and half-numb.
It's a heartache felt by millions

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who have watched their children leave.
When you let go of the ones you love
you cannot help but grieve.

A Tribute to a Lifelong Coach

Lessons my dad taught me.

Some say there is no perfect dad.
But they don't know the one I've had.
For more than fifty years this man
has modeled life for me.

Since I first joined the human race,
my father showed tough love and grace.
He knew I needed discipline
so coached me how to run.

But more than law and leniency,
my loving dad gave time to me.
Although he had a stressful job,
he sought me out at home.

When I was just a little tyke
he taught me how to ride a bike.
He made the time to throw the ball
and took great pride in me.

He kissed my cheek and hugged my neck
and very often wrote a check.
He helped me see that love can be
expressed in varied ways.

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With that in mind my dad taught me
to treat my wife like royalty.
And so I learned to love my wife
the way he loves my mom.

He also showed me men can weep
and pray with kids before they sleep.
The cues he gave me as a kid
have helped me raise my girls.

My dad remains a proud Marine.
And while he's not as strong or lean
as when he fought back in the war,
he's taught me freedom's price.

And though my dad is growing old,
he still is prone to be quite bold.
He's quick to chide me when he thinks
I'm holding out on God.

He warns me not to work too much.
He offers tips on stocks and such.
He never fails to stop and pray
when he knows I'm confused.

But I don't mind. I trust his heart.
This one who's coached me from the start
will train me 'til the day he dies.
That's just what coaches do.

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Paw Prints in My Heart

A final conversation with my dog the day that Kandi died.

As I look in your trusting eyes
to say my tearful last goodbyes,
I find it hard to let you go.
You're such a part of me.

The years we shared are now a blur
since you were but a ball of fur.
I still can see you in my mind
unleashed and running free.

But now you're sick and not yourself.
I grieve to know you've lost your health.
Yet you brought boundless joy to me.
I hope somehow you know.

And as I stroke your shiny coat,
a lump grows large within my throat.
I wonder if you understand
this really is farewell.

You look at me as if to say,
"Just stay with me. Don't go away."
And so I will, my little one,
as you lay down to sleep.

And though the time has come to part,
you've left your paw prints in my heart.
A heart that breaks imagining
my life when you are gone.

*This poem is dedicated to the memory of Kandi Kisses
Asimakoupoulos who passed away in the poet's arms on
Wednesday, June 28, 2006 one week shy of her 15th*

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birthday. It was written a couple hours before the mobile vet arrived to facilitate the necessary procedure.

Mother Knows Best

A tribute to the poet's mom who turned 80 this week.

Robert Young
starred on TV
before my mom was old.
He played a father who knew best.
At least that's what I'm told.

Those were the days
when dads were king.
Like Beaver Cleaver's dad
or Ozzie Nelson...
or Ben Cartwright...
Their sons were lucky lads.

But what about
The Beaver's mom?
Or Ricky's?
Hoss's too?
While dads are great,
there are some things
that only moms can do.

Like wipe your tears
when you fall down
and scrape your chubby knees
or say "God bless you" meaning it
each time you had to sneeze.

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My mother
nursed me back to health
whenever I was sick.
She brought me juice
and comic books
and popsicles to lick.

She told me
that I was the best
when I was just okay.
But in her mind I really was
Her praises made my day.

She taught me
all about the Lord
and helped me understand
the pressures I would feel at school.
She helped me take a stand.

My mom has heart,
but also brains.
She helped me cram for tests.
And when I needed love advice,
it's true, my mom knew best.

When I left home
and took a wife
She felt somehow replaced.
I know that it was hard for her.
I saw it in her face.

But bless her heart,
in time she saw
she had no need to fear.
I needed both. A wife and mom.
She smiled from ear to ear.

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She's one
creative grandmother.
My brother's kids
and mine
love spending time
at Nana's house
They think she's quite divine.

When Dad got sick
and nearly died,
my mother made me proud.
She mustered courage,
modeled faith
and prayed for him out loud.

As time went by
and she slowed down,
my mom refused to stop.
This fashion plate
can still turn heads
and loves to thrift store shop.

At eighty,
this one who gave me birth
embraces each new day.
She journals what she did
each night
before she hits the hay.

Her name is Star.
Uncommon, yes?
That's fine.
My mom's unique.
She sparkles like
the jewels she wears
while cuddled with her Greek.

And so this tribute
to the Star
I proudly
call my mom.
Keep twinkling
and light my night
until God brings
your dawn.

The Father of the Bride

Advice to Coach Holmgren from his pastor.

When you stand beside your daughter
and you hear the Wedding March,
I am guessing you'll feel something
like a sliver in your heart.

Though you're thrilled beyond description
that your baby's now a bride
you will have a strange sensation
like an itch deep down inside.

It's a bittersweetish splinter
that you cannot tweezer out
cause it's wedged and twisted sideways.
It's what good grief's all about.

It's a shard that's caused by memories
of those precious years you had
planting seeds of faith and wisdom
as her mentor, as her dad.

It's a sliver that you'll live with.
You'll thank God that it is there
for it's just one more reminder
what you've shared is really rare.

Adoption Has a Face

Celebrating the amazing story of an unwanted baby.

Adoption is special.
It serves a great need.
But not all adoptions work out.
Sometimes those adopted
are prisoners of sorts
imprisoned by questions and doubts.

"I do not belong here.
I'm not quite sure why.
I just know I feel so alone."
Though clothed, fed and sheltered,
Hugh longed to be loved.
He wanted much more than a home.

Like others adopted,
he pondered his past
imagining who gave him birth.
"How could she reject me?"
"Am I damaged goods?"
He struggled embracing his worth.
Unwanted, mistreated
quite tragic, and yet
Hugh's story was not fully told.
The Lord had a purpose

FAMILY

that would not be known
until the young boy had grown old.

A beauty named Norma
would capture his heart.
He'd marry and become a dad.
With four precious children
and one faithful mate,
he thanked God his life wasn't bad.

The wounds of his childhood
began to be healed.
The Father he'd longed for, he found.
A Savior, a Shepherd,
a mother-like Friend
had freed him from memories that bound.

Then Hugh found his calling.
He started to write.
This tall lanky lad had a gift.
He traveled, found stories,
kept journals of notes
and then through his research he'd sift.

The publishers loved him.
One book became two
and soon Hugh had found his career.
The boy once adopted
discovered his voice.
His purpose in life became clear.

"Each life is a novel
and needs to be told.
A story of joy, sweat and pain.
I want to write chapters

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that help others see
how grace transforms losses to gains."

His life an example
of that very thing,
Hugh wrote countless books, but what's more.
The best one by far
is the last one he wrote.
It's a book you've been long hoping for.

It's a book about writing.
It's a primer of sorts.
It's the volume you need so you can
put pencil to paper and memories to print
for your children, the good, bad and grand.

** Hugh Steven's success as a writer is validated by the more than 30 books he has written as a missionary biographer with Wycliffe Bible Translators. His most recent book is actually a textbook for those who would like to write their own story. It is called "The Nature of Story and Creativity." In its pages, Hugh shares insights and suggestions for capturing your unique life experiences on paper to be enjoyed by your family, friends and colleagues and for the generations to come. "The Nature of Story and Creativity" can be ordered on Amazon.com.*

As you might have guessed, I know Hugh Steven personally. As a matter of fact, I married his oldest daughter twenty-five years ago.

Summertime at Grandma's House

Longing for the good old days and a great old lady.

As kids each summer we would go
to Grandma's house in Idaho.
In Nez Perce country near Lapwai
we had a five-star place to stay.

With cousins we'd play by the hour
within the barn where hay bales towered.
We'd ride the horses, milk the cows
and toss old corn cobs to the sows.

We all found shade on her front porch.
The summer sun could really scorch.
And side-by-side on Grandma's swing
we'd listen to the robins sing.

At night we heard the crickets chirp,
while watermelon we would slurp.
We'd fall bone-tired on our beds
and dream of how we'd soon be fed.

The frying bacon woke us up.
The fresh-squeezed orange juice filled our cups.
Her eggs and spuds adorned our plates.
First Grandma prayed and then we ate.

We kids ate much but she ate more.
Her height and width were 5 feet four.
But we weren't bothered by her weight.
It was good proof her food was great.

And there we'd sit when we were done.
Those table times were lots of fun.

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Our Grandma spoke of childhood
back in the Blue Ridge Mountains wood.

She told us how she met "The Greek"
who coaxed a smile when he would speak.
His accent made his English fun.
And soon enough, her heart he'd won.

She'd arch her eyebrows and she'd wink
which caused us kids to sort of think
that maybe some of what she'd said
was bull that was baloney fed.

I miss those days at Grandma's place.
I miss her girth and godly face.
I miss how simple life was then.
I wish it was like that again.

Graduation Joys and Woes

Calculating the cost of a college education.

Just last week my firstborn daughter
(clad in tasseled cap and gown)
proudly clutched her college sheepskin
in a small Midwestern town.

I could see her back in preschool
as she walked across the stage.
But then when she turned and smiled,
my young princess came of age.

FAMILY

In my head I started adding
just how much her B.A. cost.
But those exponential numbers
avalanched and I got lost.

There is more than just tuition.
You've got books and room and board.
Then there's clothes and spring vacation
(and insurance for the Ford).

That diploma's worth a fortune.
So it makes sense (don't you think)
that my daughter's name be printed
with pure gold and not black ink?

Yes, I mined the bank but never
found the hidden Mother Lode.
It's the price a father pays while
traveling down the Parent Road.

You spend all that you've been saving
to invest in your kids' lives
and then pray they finish their degree
in four years not in five.

Still and all I can't help wonder
now that Kristin's finally through,
having majored in psychology
what can she really do?

Did I hear someone say grad school?
Are you kidding? Don't you know?
I have other bills that beckon
and have two more girls to go.

About the Author

Greg Asimakoupoulos is the senior pastor of Mercer Island Covenant Church in suburban Seattle. Over the past three decades, he has served congregations in California, Illinois and Washington State. In addition to his weekly preaching ministry, Greg has earned a reputation as a prolific writer. He is the author of ten books and more than three hundred magazine articles. In addition, he has written countless poems about current events and the human experience for numerous websites. He has been a regular contributor to the Partial Observer since 2004.

Greg was raised in Wenatchee, Washington, graduated from Seattle Pacific University and received a Masters of Divinity from North Park Theological Seminary. He and his wife Wendy were married in 1982 and have three daughters.



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"My friend Greg Asimakoupoulos communicates timeless truths through timely rhymes. His little poems pay big dividends – in wit, insight and inspiration."

– **Michael Medved** *Nationally Syndicated Talk Radio Host*

"Rarely does a game go by without my pastor and friend Greg Asimakoupoulos penning a poem that captures what occurred on the field in a fun and creative way. It always brings a smile to my face when I read his weekly Rhymes and Reasons."

– **Mike Holmgren** *Head Coach of the Seattle Seahawks*

"Greg is able to use his special gifts to share truth, compassion, faith, humor and God's love. When life's trials were at a peak for our family, his poetic and sensitive words brought comfort."

– **Peggy Beamer** *Mother of September 11th patriot Todd Beamer*

"Greg Asimakoupoulos is truly gifted. I don't know of anyone who can reveal an insight related to a current event or moral value with more creativity and wisdom than Greg. He's amazing. He's clever. He's quick. And on top of all his creativity he's thoroughly grounded. Read Rhymes and Reasons and prepare to be inspired."

– **Les Parrott, Ph.D.** *Author of Love Talk*

"Greg Asimakoupoulos' *Rhymes & Reasons* beat is truly 'poetry in motion.' As the latest news headlines break, Greg is already planting and nurturing seeds to harvest a wry, witty and always thought provoking editorial from his own garden of verse. His rhymes provide lively family conversation starters anytime and anywhere."

– **Donna Erickson** *host of "Donna's Day" on public television, syndicated newspaper columnist, speaker, and author of Fabulous Funstuff for Families*

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