

Beard Limericks – Joseph G. Rosenstein

I didn't always have a beard.
One day it suddenly appeared.
I had a clean-shaven face,
No hair any place.
In those days I really looked weird.

When did my beard come alive?
At what moment did it arrive?
A razor last touched my cheek,
Forty years ago this week. {fifty}
It was December nineteen sixty five.

I was working on my Ph.D.,
Writing a thesis on recursive degrees.
A job for me they were saving,
So I had no time for shaving,
I had to finish it ASAP.

Exactly forty years ago this week {fifty}
I was up to my ears in Greek,
Typing symbols like beta and rho
And banging out on the piano
Beethoven's Sonata Pathetique.

That's the only piece I knew how to play
I played it again and again, every day
On one keyboard I typed math
On another the Sonata Path
etique – and my beard went its own merry way.

This happened in a different age
before word processors became all the rage
If an error you made
A big price you paid
They made you retype the whole page.

By the time I finished my thesis
and developed the entire exegesis
my beard was well-grown
bushy and full-blown
But it hadn't yet reached my kneeses.

The impression I just gave you was wrong.
My beard never grew very long
But it has been quite full
You can give it a pull
And you'll see that it's also quite strong.

It was very dark and thick way back when
It once served as a nest for a wren
That's the story I told
to my nephew – five years old.
He believed it until he was ten.

My mother was not pleased with my hair
She said it obscured my face, so fair,
That may have been true,
I will leave that to you,
But my father had other reasons to care.

He wanted me up on his barber's seat
to make my hair exceedingly neat.
My appearance he knew
Was very similar to
A cobbler's son with rags on his feet.

Why then did I let my beard grow on
After the doctoral pressure was gone?
Was it a statement political
Of the Vietnam war critical
Or was it simply parental rebellion?

My memory about this is somewhat hazy,
But looking for ulterior motives is rather crazy.
Weeks of not having to shave
Not being to the razor a slave
Was great – in other words, I liked being lazy.

But if a beard in sixty-five you wore
It conveyed opposition to the war
It insulted the average voter
In Minneapolis Minnesota
One of them drove at me with a car.

I have a picture of my beard age one
That appeared in the Minneapolis Sun
I'm high up on a ladder that day,
with a hostile crowd, condemning LBJ
I was lucky to escape when I was done.

My beard has been with me since that day,
No one here has seen me clean-shaved
I can't imagine it not being there
Although slowly, hair by hair
It's progressed from black to gray.

These limericks I wrote ten years back
When my beard still had a tinge of black
It's now no longer grey
Its hair is white all the way
I guess there's just no turning back. (Added December 12, 2015)

Hip-hip-hurrah for my beard's forty years
It's stuck to me through smiles and tears,
May it thrive many years more
Perhaps even another two score
So please all stand and give it three cheers.

{fifty}

December 11, 2005