

My Father, Dr. Alfred James Cook, served with the Canadian Forces in
England and France 1914 - 1917.
He re-mustered as a cadet in the fledgling Royal Flying Corps in 1917,
earning his wings in 1918 just
as the RFC became the RAF.

He saw a lot of combat and returned to Canada suffering from shell-
shock, as it was then called.

It is not a pleasant poem.

It was not a pleasant war

ALFRED WENT TO WAR

this man
shrugged casually
with all the other
smooth young men

who yawned their
eager eyes to war
then died in
bloodsoaked
snow and mud
witnessed
by frozen blank-eyed horses
used
the day before
to haul their bone racks
to the clapboard and tin
field hospitals

for
rehabilitation

after millions
slaughtered,
the generals met
declared a winner
cellared their fine wines and trophies
told the remaining young men

to go home

important old men

bellies and Medals
regretted the inconvenience
but none said
'Thank You'
to those remaining

this man came home as casually as he left
the town threw a parade
with balloons and a band
cheerleaders and speeches
and sally wilson did him standing up
behind City Hall
under a huge
orange harvest moon

all he remembered was the balloons

he tried to grasp
why he'd gone away
they told him it was for
 freedom
 country
 honour

all he remembered was
the blood-bite of razor wire
 the swirl of metallic bile
 in his mouth
the dulling weight
of his own skin
dragging him into
the constant ooze
 below

This man went away a casual boy
came back a broken casual toy
in a man's body
dreaming through the parade
the speeches
d r e a m I n g
mostly about
balloons
drifting in magic and laughter
rippling like slow-dragged silk across the
shattered fields and broken hopes
lying
on the brocade couch

in the General's
planning room

by Clark cook