

A Need**DONALD LEVERING¹**

From the dark waters she emerges
at night heavy with eggs

Breathing hard,
she drags her seven hundred pounds
up the beach
flippers churning the sand
inching her way uphill

* * *

We who witness

her massive apparition of the deep come to land
her dogged struggle her need
stand amidst a hatchery of stars
each blip an egg of possibility
borne of nuclear fire storms
red dwarf spiral nebulae
white giant asteroid gassy planet
or by remote chances
carbon
water
life

* * *

A wide track of darkened sand leads to the zenith of her climb
where she digs her body pit
flailing sand in all directions
to disguise the site of her nesting chamber
which she now scoops out with her back flippers
precise flippersful of wet sand lifted and placed to the side
of the meter deep chamber

where the future of her species will incubate

* * *

Might this be the last beach
where this ancient turtle lays her eggs?
Will she who cannot live in captivity,
she who has survived
earthquakes and tsunamis,
meteorites and ice ages,
be extinguished by the big-brained ape

stealing her eggs
drowning her in fishing nets
turning her dark nesting beaches
into bright playgrounds
frightening her back to sea

* * *

There is a need to maintain dark beaches
of imagination
to harbor dark pits of potential

A need to know that somewhere in the Gulf of Papagayo
or the deep Pacific,
in the Atlantic or Indian oceans
large reptiles are swimming
feeding mating migrating

A need to believe that generations hence
leatherbacks will still be grazing on jellyfish
that the largest sea turtle in the world
rife with eggs
will still be swimming toward dark beaches

* * *

Which of the eighty-one eggs
she has just laid in the chamber
will hatch?
Which hatchlings will escape
raccoons crabs gulls dogs humans
and skitter into the sea?

The mother covers up the answers
and, wheeling her enormous bulk
back toward the dark water,
she edges down the slope
into the intertidal zone
finally reaching wet sand
where she rests
waiting for a wave to lift her
and then pushes on deeper
afloat at last
she paddles
disappears.

Editorial Comment. — After having picked the previous poem about leatherbacks to be included in this special leatherback focus issue, I received this wonderful poem by Donald Levering, submitted by Hal Avery. It was too good to resist, so we are adding this second poem to the poetry page. Donald was a volunteer at the Leatherback Earthwatch project in Costa Rica in January 2005 and was inspired to write this poem from his experience at Playa Grande. Donald is an accomplished and often-published poet and author, and we are especially honored to publish this poem here for the first time.

¹ Composed January 2005 at Playa Grande, Costa Rica.
Submitted by Harold Avery.