

Inaugural poem 8/9/17

### **Birth of a Bridge**

“Dare to reach out your hand into the darkness to pull another hand into the light.”

-Norman B. Rice

If I were a painter...  
I'd paint a bridge  
that dared the sky to listen  
so deeply  
with such tenderness,  
such mystical compassion  
that all who crossed the bridge  
felt instantly healed and whole,  
swept into eternal sunset bliss,  
their life missions becoming  
to unreservedly, wholeheartedly welcome  
every other being  
in the universe.

I have always loved bridges—  
Seeing them, crossing them, looking out from them.  
When a certain sentence about the Park St. Bridge  
caught me, pulled me in,  
I had to know more.  
So I put on my Sherlock cap, made a bee-line for the library,  
and found myself knee-deep in microfilm.  
There it was: Alameda Times-Star, evening of Oct. 4, 1935.  
The news blazed across the front page,  
bold and bright, bringing new light, new hope,  
each letter tall, each word glittering, daring me to read on,  
promising a story of epic proportions.  
In 1935 Alameda was as draped in the darkness of the Great Depression  
as any city, and yet—  
here it was--the new deal, the real deal,  
the deal everyone was waiting for.  
The headlines read, “Alameda Dedicates New Bridge—  
Gala Events for Opening of Big Span.”  
But the line that had caught me was this:  
“Symbolic Wedding Rites Will Unite Couple at Span Opening.”

I had to blink twice. A wedding on the bridge?

The Times-Star promised: A new day is dawning.  
After two years of waiting,  
the new bridge will connect Oakland and Alameda.  
Everyone is invited to Alameda's party, 2:30pm  
till 2:30am—"the most gigantic celebration in its history."  
As pennants, banners, flags, colored lights bedeck Park St. and 29<sup>th</sup> Ave.;  
marathon runners from Oakland bear good wishes to Alameda;  
stunt planes make thrilling aerial maneuvers;  
boats race and yachts from every East Bay city form  
the "Night-in-Venice" regatta; aquatic stars  
swim and dive in the estuary; a mammoth two-city parade  
seven thousand strong crosses the bridge;  
guests dine and dance in the Alameda Hotel ball-room for \$1.25;  
others join the 14-piece orchestra for a street dance on Park Street  
and midnight vaudeville stage show in the New Alameda Theatre.

At 2:30's opening dedication, from either side of the bridge  
two figures approach each other.  
Mayor McCracken strides out from Oakland  
Mayor Roebke strides out from Alameda.  
They arrive in the exact center  
where the two arms of the bascule bridge meet;  
clasp hands connecting city to city; sister cities.  
Speeches abound, dedications are made.  
Then, amidst cheers and applause,  
Miss Edith Bird of Alameda and Mr. Edward Drotleff of Oakland  
exchange wedding vows there on the very center of the bridge.  
Their nuptial kiss graces the front page of the *Oakland Trib*,  
and they become poster children for the true meaning  
of community: come unity,  
reminding us to reach out across the waters,  
across whatever lines we think we see; that  
human beings alone can self-reflect  
can choose understanding, compassion, respect;  
we are not just an island alone and apart  
we can open our minds and the doors to our heart.  
When you stand on the bridge of your final goodbye  
what truly matters as your time draws nigh?

You may have needs that are different than mine  
Yet if we look deeper, can we align?  
We drink the same water, breathe the same air  
We are here on the same earth, can we not share?  
We find out that *together* is when we are strong  
We reach out to embrace; know that we all belong.  
The bridge can inspire us: "Reach out in the dark,  
bring forth your magnificent, most brilliant spark.  
When you pull someone's hand into the light  
Your heart becomes larger, your spark ever bright."  
Sanctuary city yet to this day  
Alameda, shining, still lights the way.

--Cathy Dana