Grandad Planted Trees ©2004 by R.A. Gramann

Raking leaves they rustle,
They crackle and they crunch
All this color, a cool grey sky,
I'll get 'em piled by lunch.
I love these trees like life itself
They're living histories.
They remind me of my grandad
Cause Grandad planted trees

You could say it with flowers.
You could scream it from the rooftops
Or you could beg from your knees.
You could say "I'm sorry."
 Or "Darling, I love you."
Granddad planted trees.

Grandad came when the town was new.
The square was flat and clear.
In his vision, he saw shade.
He planted this poplar here.
Over there he planted an oak
When he married my Grandma
And he grew the maple in his front yard
The one I climbed upon.

When you plant trees
It's not for tomorrow.
No shade tomorrow
From them itty bitty seeds.
It's your children's children
Who'll look up and feel the wonder.
It's like loving some person
You might never get to meet.

It's not politics, it's murder
Too hard to comprehend.
Nothing to imagine
Could make us whole again
Then I remembered how to hope
Like Grandad taught to me
It's gonna take a little while
To plant 3,000 trees.

Rappahannock Running Free © 1993, 2004 by R. A.
Gramann

Again, the eagle beats his wings
To climb above the trees
Over the locks on the Rappahannock
What's left of history.
Where the Council and the contractors
Over quality disagreed.
Where the present meets the past
And some things never change.

For a man can only hold
A piece of earth
For a lifetime.
Water leaks through fingers

You can't hold it at all.
I love the Rappahannock
And its water running free.
In the rapids of this river,
That's where I want to be.

From Carter's Run at Waterloo
It drops three hundred feet.
Forty-seven locks in fifty miles
1849 complete.
With first year's drought and railroads
So quickly obsolete.
A canal system for just four years
And history ever since.

An aqueduct and wood crib dam
Fed power to the mills,
And factories and tanneries
The foundations are there still.
The concrete dam in 1910
Electric generators until
Only forty years ago
And now a poor man's home.

Poison ivy coats the bank
Where we climbed around the dam.
A century and a half of portages
Canoes across the land.
The damn dam blocked the spawning fish
Flooded rapids behind the span.
In 2004, we blew it up
We didn't need for that dam.

The government and the spawning fish
Conspired to blow the dam.
When the whole town came together
The concrete couldn't stand.
Now the Rappahannock
Will forever run so free
All the way from Chester Gap
No boundaries to the sea.

Because I Can ©2003 by R.A. Gramann

Why make up songs and play the banjo?
It's obnoxious, crude, and loud.
And, think of my poor mother:
You can bet she's not too proud.
And if talent were humility
I would stand here head unbowed.
It's not the money,
I just do it cause I can.
Cause I can,
There's no reason
I just do it cause I can.

Because I can, because I can
I don't have to have a reason, I just do it cause I can.
It might be for the greater good
Or the betterment of man.
But it's not! I just do it cause I can.
Because I can,
There's no reason
I just do it cause I can.

Sometimes it's not a genius
But a thought whose time has come.
Was there a patent on the cartwheel?
Who invented bubble gum?
Why did Edward Teller build the bomb?
Why grow a mouse to say "Hi Mom!"?
Sometimes the only reason is
It happens cause it can.
There's no reason
It just happens cause it can.

All night I dream of greatness.
All day I'm making plans.
It's great to be a corporate president
The whole company in my hands
Selling stocks to the investors
While I loot the pension fund.
It's not the money,
I just do it cause I can.
Cause I can,
There's no reason
I just do it cause I can.

Why look out for the future?
We can make a buck today.
There's oil beneath the tundra
Make the wildlife move away.
Don't worry 'bout the smoke
We'll clean up another day.
It's not the money,
I just do it cause I can.
Cause I can,
There's no reason
I just do it cause I can.

The Man Who Fixes Trains © 1992 by R. A. Gramann

He chose a home by the tracks
And he listens through the night
As the trains go by.
He makes a note of a shudder
Where he knows
There ought to be a hum.
Every squeal, every rasp,
Each vibration stokes concern
For the engines he loves.

Twenty years
I've been working on these trains.
Twenty years lining brakes,
Filing gears,
Honing cylinders to pump so smooth,
I love to make them run smooth.

Scar-crossed hands record the history
Of the slips of the wrenches
When he cursed at his love.
Grease lines his knuckles,
Smudges mark
His fingertips and face.
And he'd labor several days
Tweak injectors, tune the ports,
To make a motor sing pure.

But the railroad has more engines
To repair than
He can tune in a week.
Clean men in suits
Have no feel for the beauty
Of the chorus of the rails.
To keep his job he'd have to change
Just fix the trains, keep them running,
Forget how they sound.

Separated, uneven strokes
Mark the cadence, show the parting
Of man and machine.
Heart and diesel
Throbbed together all their lives
Now must work apart.
Like many lovers, the fading whistle
Of a train leaving town
Brings a tear to his eye.

Written in admiration of "The Broken Brain" by Keith Russel Ablow,
writer and chief resident in psychiatry at New England Medical Center in
Boston, as seen in The Washington Post 2/25/92.

Sara Sing © 2002 by R.A. Gramann

Sara, sing about the mountains
About the beauty of each day.
Play us tunes of love and fortunes.
Sing of places far away.

I don't know why I stopped that morning.
Yard sales aren't my kind of thing.
Accumulations of a lifetime,
Displayed to sell for what they'd bring.

Pots and pans and plates and glasses.
They said, "He's gone. He won't need those."
Shirts and books, old vinyl records,
Shoes and pants, and winter clothes.

Leaning there against the table
Cracked and scarred, it's neck askew.
On the peghead it said, "Sara."
A strange guitar, not one I knew.

I surely didn't need another.
Eight guitars might be enough.
Impulsively, I gave her twenty.
Number nine looked pretty rough.

I examined Sara on my workbench.
She was once a fine guitar.
I cleaned the joints, reglued the braces.
Fixed the neck, touched up the scars.

Scarcely were the strings upon her,
An unfamiliar tune sang out.
It drew my fingers to the fretboard.
What the hell was this about?

First, we played an Irish jig
Though no Irish songs I knew.
Then my fingers plucked a hornpipe.
Then we played some blues.

I recognized a theme from Bach
As the notes when flying by.
Tunes I'd never played before
From my fingers they did fly.

Sara played the most beautiful music
Astounding words sang in my voice.
All the songs I sang before
Compared to this, they seemed like noise.

It's hard to claim a yard sale box
Could make me what I am today.
Unless you'd heard me sing before,
You won't believe me anyway.

All my life, I've notcooked much.
No great meals came from my hands.
Now, whene'er I think of Sara,
I wish I'd bought those pots and pans.

Traffic Light © 1993 R.A. Gramann

Gotta go get me some groceries,
Gotta go get me some beer,
Gotta go 'cross town for a meeting,
Gotta get away from here.
Gotta drive to work each morning,
Gotta drive home every night.
Gotta go, gotta go, gotta go,
Gotta STOP:

It's a traffic light,
Sit and count the stores,
Deer and the cattle,
Ain't roamin' here no more.
This used to be a place,
You could so quickly drive by,
But now you sit in traffic,
And watch the time fly.

Farmers planted houses
It's the best paid crop by far.
Come heres came to Fredericksburg
Brought along an extra car.
Now, they're all in front of me,
As we sit here breathing fumes.
Gotta go, gotta go, gotta go,
Gotta STOP:

It's a traffic light,
They've built a shopping mall
Where the hawks used to soar
And the snakes used to crawl.
This used to be a place,
You could so quickly drive by,
But now you sit in traffic,
And watch the time fly.

Ninety-five's become Main Street
In Boston-Richmond town.
No place anymore called wilderness.
The pavement's been put down.
Gotta go get me some headphones
To listen to pastoral sounds.
Gotta go, gotta go, gotta go,
Gotta STOP!

It's a traffic light,
Sit and watch our town grow
Remember how it used to be
Hear those horns blow.
This used to be a place,
You could so quickly drive by,
But now you sit in traffic,
And watch the time fly.

What we need's a stinking factory,
Drive these people all away.
That smell'd give us our town back,
Remove all this delay.
All these folks won't pay your taxes,

Growth won't keep the prices down,
Gotta go, gotta grow, gotta go,
Gotta grow, gotta go, gotta grow,
Gotta STOP!

Turn Out the Lights ©2001 by R.A. Gramann

Fear of the unknown,
Fear of the sounds at night.
When I was a child,
I slept better with a light.
Until that night the lights went out
When I really saw the stars
Now I long for the darkest nights
To lay out in the yard.

Turn out the lights.
Turn out the lights.
Let the darkness fill the night sky
Let the stars shine out so bright.
Peer into the universe
Feel humble and small.
May the starlight and the wonder
Shine down on us all.

First Pleiades, then Orion
Creep across the sky at night.
There's still time to get Sirius
See Pollux shine so bright.
In summer there's the teapot
Million worlds in that steam.
Whose inhabitants watch the Milky Way
And wonder what it means.

Lights of the city cloak
The mystery and wonder.
More a ceiling than a universe
That's the sky we're under.
That brightness makes your world so close
Does it really banish fright?
See farther in the darkness
Than with the brightest light.

A fuzzy spot, a thousand stars
The telescope reveals.
And look into the blackness
Where the planets dust congeals.
Ride our planet through the history
Of all that was and is
While crickets chirp and bullfrogs burp
And meteors downward whiz.

Music Was My Mom ©2003 by R.A. Gramann

When I was just a baby
Music was my mom
Lullabies and shortnin' bread
And the waltzes she would hum.
Life was pretty simple then
At least it was for me.
I love to hear her sing again

Take me back to what used to be.

Sometimes it's a children's song
Or, it happens when I hear a waltz
But mostly when the ladies sing
I remember my mom.

Warm like eggs in a robin's nest
Flowers named "yellow" and "red."
The ghastly crimes of a nursery rhyme.
The odors of baking bread.
Childhood's like Eden
A long way and a long time from here.
The melodies in a woman's voice
Make the path seem lighted and clear.

So mothers, sing to your children.
It's a gift their whole life long.
And if we ever find peace on earth
We know it started with mothers' songs.

Life is Too Short © 2003 by Zoe Mulford
http://www.wingedseedmusic.com/

Holy Now © 1999 by Peter Mayer
http://www.blueboat.net/

Generations © 2001 by R.A. Gramann

Sailing ships and horses formed
The shape of this old river town.
It's what it is 'cause of what it was,
And the roads still wind around.
A crooked smile, a wink, a nod
From grand-dad through my son.
Gestures, stories, skills, and hopes,
Some habits passed along.

And a love so strong
I feel like I've earned it.
Linking generations with
Old stories and names.
I'll have to pass it on
That's how to return it.
The magic of a family's love
Warmer than the brightest flames.

"Get your elbows off the table!"
Mom yelled day after day.
We tried hard not to listen
All we wanted was to play.
"Take the time to do it right"
She'd say again and again.
Things you want your kids to know
Just take time to sink in.

And a love so strong
They'll feel like they've earned it.
Linking generations with
Old stories and names.
They'll have to pass it on

That's how to return it.
The magic of a family's love
Warmer than the brightest flames.

I've got my granddad's violin
She's got her father's nose.
It might be hard to recognize
What's left of long agos.
Overlap of generations
That's all the time we get
To know our kids or parents
Let's not waste it on regret.

We need a love so strong
We feel like we've earned it.
Linking generations with
Old stories and names.
We'll have to pass it on
That's how to return it.
The magic of a family's love
Warmer than the brightest flames.

I've thought it over carefully
There's this lesson I can tell:
No matter what else you do,
Pick your parents well.