

On Hayden Carruth  
Robert S. Griffin  
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Hayden Carruth was best known as a major poet, but he was also a critic, essayist, novelist, and autobiographer. He died at 87 on September 29th, 2008.

The following is drawn from *Reluctantly*, Carruth's collection of autobiographical essays. At times, he spoke of himself in the third person.

Carruth couldn't tell at what point he had moved into unmistakable old age, but he knew he had.

At seventy-five he felt stupid much of the time, physically stupid, a dull sensation in the front of his brain, a heave and gasp at the nothing where words had once been.

In the morning he would say to himself: "Well, it is a sunny day. This afternoon I'll drive over to Syracuse [to the university where he had taught] and see if I can find someone to talk with." But when the afternoon came he didn't go. He realized he hadn't been there for more than six months, and now was not likely to go again. To the people he had known in Syracuse, he had become a creature of oblivion, an unknown presence in the hills. No one knew what he was feeling. No one, as far as he could tell, cared.

My wife is younger than I, a very beautiful woman. I'm lucky. I'm not alone, not standing in the checkout line at the supermarket like so many others with my can of tuna.

My body has given out, and in some measure my mind too. Yet I am happier than I've ever been.

He gaped and gawked upward at the brilliant stars in their millions, absolutely spellbound, overwhelmed, until he fell asleep and slept more soundly than he had for years, in peace.

From his poem to his wife, "Prepare":

Experience reduces itself to platitudes always,

Including the one that says I'll be with you forever in your memories and dreams.

I will. And also in hundreds of keepsakes, such as this scrap of a poem you are reading now.