

A CROWDED LIFE

Poems by
Robert H. Deluty



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To

David, Laura, Scott, and Ava



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 his blind date
 senryu poet
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 explaining
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 gas station men's room
 his mother balking
 a teen driver
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 Till death us do part
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A Crowded Life



The remarkable thing is that it is the crowded life that is most easily remembered. A life full of turns, achievements, disappointments, surprises, and crises is a life full of landmarks. The empty life has even its few details blurred, and cannot be remembered with certainty.

Eric Hoffer

anorectic's folks
praising their daughter
for her self-control

reunion photo . . .
one hundred three relatives
sticking out their tongues

Great-Aunt Ida
asking the euphoric bride
why she's wearing white

describing her son
as dense and snide, but willing
to start at the top

Serge P. Orr
claiming that his middle name
is Protect

Do I look heavy? . . .

her nitwit son responding

Honestly?

Do I look heavy? . . .

her deranged spouse replying

Absolutely!

wondering if,

on his income tax return,

Benedict writes *Pope*

longtime patient

demanding an invitation

to her shrink's wedding

telling the teacher

to ignore him if his hand

is not raised

a Memphis Jew
preparing for her neighbors
gefilte grits

questioning her prof
why did the Romans not name
any god *Earth*

outdoor June wedding . . .
the groom's Dad blotting his face
in a tablecloth

Grandma Sarah
mistaking his new tattoo
for melanoma

a child wondering
if the dead get more evil
in hell

dental visit eve . . .

buying floss for the first time
in twelve months

a two year-old
teaching their new pet parrot
to say *No!*

Saul Katz responding
to *What's your religion?*
with *Take a guess*

libertarian
getting the vanity plate
TAXS 2HI

octogenarian
getting the vanity plate
2SEXC4U

studying
his adopted son's face, seeking
one resemblance

describing his folks
as perpetually broke,
yet never poor

job interviewee
claiming committee meetings
give her pleasure

job interviewee
noting that he finds small talk
akin to torture

overhearing
her adored physician making
a racist remark

a Catholic teen
crossing herself approaching
the Porta-Potty

pondering
what folks in Toledo shout
when they're surprised

pondering
what Jesus Christ screamed
when he was angry

the farmer's grandsons
insisting that all their fruits
come out of cans

the fourth grader
asking her teacher how much
the universe weighs

telling the doctor
why empty calories
are her favorites

mid-tantrum . . .
the three year-old screaming
Are you watching?

asking her gay son
does he or his partner lead
when they dance

self-portrait . . .
their seven year-old drawing
herself bejeweled, crowned

self-portrait . . .
their nine year-old drawing
the back of his head

teaching his grandkids
how sports heroes differ
from war heroes

What's after death? . . .
Gramps responding, *We become*
food for the worms

on a shooting star
wishing for Middle East peace
and no more zits

his priest claiming
liberal and *brainless*
are synonymous

his prof claiming
conservative and *heartless*
are synonymous

two giant turtles,
mates for ninety years, trying
to kill each other

a boy studying
his father and two uncles
ogling a cute teen

losing the bet . . .
the teamster dressed in pink
on Gay Pride Day

losing the bet . . .
the feminist entering
a wet T contest

centenarian
preparing matzo ball soup
for her senile son

the depressed child
praying someone will destroy
my heavy black cloak

the new inpatient
explaining why Rorschach
should have used oils

history pupil
asking whether cannibals
had ketchup

wishing she could grasp
what her son, the professor,
is talking about

wishing he could tell
his daughter, the college dean,
to write plainly

her teen hoping
to win over his blind date
with geek chic

holding his newborn,
the young Dad's elation
giving way to terror

ESL student
confusing *idiom*
with *idiot*

amidst budget cuts,
the school's Teacher of the Year
reading his pink slip

a Jewish boy
feeling distress that Noah
named one son Ham

their son knocking
himself unconscious attempting
a chest bump

her brilliant doctor
asking why she snacks on cake
rather than apples

an elder
contrasting his grandson
with Mark Zuckerberg

a teenager
contrasting his Grandpa
with Paul McCartney

warning the prof
she'll give him low ratings
if he flunks her

Dollar Store owner
describing his spouse
as good and cheap

the autistic child
memorizing license plates
at the county fair

English teacher
describing the boys' locker room
as *pungent*

gym teacher
describing the boys' locker room
as *nastified*

the honest waiter
strongly recommending
they dine elsewhere

a fifteen year-old
shouting at the school janitor
Live the dream!

his grandson
calling the mob hit man
Huggy Bear

his granddaughter
calling the Mafia Don
Papa-Tickles

urging his students
to retain their opinions,
just give him facts

amazed and appalled
by his wife's satisfaction
with one corn chip

sweltering June day . . .

the revivalist screaming

You think it's hot now?

interrupting

his own lecture to jot down

a one-liner

the Yukon elder

wanting to visit Cuba

before he dies

husband and wife

asking their marriage counselor

who is more damaged

gay partners

asking their couples therapist

whom she adores more

the mayor trying
to appear interested
in his wife's crisis

dreaming of pitching
a no-hitter: three innings
right-handed, six left

dreaming of hitting
four home runs in one game,
all inside the park

dreaming of catching
a scorching line drive past third
with his teeth

dreaming of throwing
a runner out at home plate
from the parking lot

Granddad wondering
how he'd do at Wimbledon
with his wood racket

Father's Day dinner . . .
a single Mom cursing out
her deadbeat ex

the new employee
begging his officemates not
to join him at lunch

The basic food groups? . . .
their four year-old responding
Chips, cheese, candy, toast

The basic food groups? . . .
their six year-old responding
Cow, pig, chicken, fries

observing
her dachshund trying to snare
a hovering wasp

the cook at Bellevue
claiming his job is serving
soup to nuts

a therapist
telling her therapist
he needs therapy

correcting
her boyfriend's Dad: *It's Shirley,*
not Shrilly

correcting
his date's Mom: *It's Hannigan,*
not Hooligan

Auschwitz survivor
urging his great-granddaughter
to lighten up

a napping kitten
using a basset hound's ear
as a blanket

revered elder
teaching his grandsons how
to use a garrote

after the flood,
a Florida man shooin'
gators off his porch

asking his therapist
whether a lack of lust
is a virtue

the widow
screaming *He's not at peace,*
he's dead!

asking her son
how he can remain
faithful to his wife

dichotomizing
the staff psychiatrists as
med men or *talkers*

dichotomizing
the staff psychologists as
actives or *passives*

dichotomizing
the staff social workers as
doers or *yentas*

a girl querying
the hundred-year-old man
if he's immortal

confused fifth grader
inserting an oboe reed
in his trumpet

out with his mistress,
wearing a shirt he received
on Father's Day

nursing home elder
avowing she invented
baby butt paste

a boy inquiring
how to look hot and be cool
at the same time

aged ninety-nine,
swearing her thick, jet-black hair
is all natural

first Intro Psych exam . . .
six questions testing knowledge
of the syllabus

her spouse inspecting
baseball box scores as if
studying scripture

two flat tires . . .
missing his surprise party
with fifty-four guests

mother of eight . . .
a blue hen tattooed
on her thigh

on death row, musing
how he would have turned out
with loving parents

Joplin priest hoping
to become, in St. Louis,
a cardinal

a boy wondering
whether queens make princes
take out the trash

finding
his girlfriend's hysterics
arousing

tennis tournament . . .
Mom rooting for anyone
who doesn't grunt

the anti-Semite
claiming Kern, Gershwin, Bernstein
couldn't compose

the anti-Semite
stating Sills, Tormé, Winehouse
couldn't sing

the anti-Semite
noting Muni, Cobb, Newman
couldn't act

the anti-Semite
averring Lahr, Mostel, Radner
weren't funny

the anti-Semite
declaring Feynman, Salk, Sagan
weren't that smart

reading of the will . . .
an heir raging that he got
a watch, not a *Glock*

Wisconsin curler
envisioning herself on
a *Wheaties* box

Kansas shot putter
imagining himself as
a *Nike* spokesman

two profs debating
the question, *Bobby Fischer:*
Jewish sports hero?

her nine-year-old son
asserting he does not have
an *inside voice*



A mountain is composed of grains of earth. The ocean is made up of tiny drops of water . . . [L]ife is but an endless series of little details, actions, speeches, and thoughts. And the consequences whether good or bad of even the least of them are far-reaching.

Swami Sivananda

Beware of the person who can't be bothered by details.

William Feather

trying to debate
a man who thinks Obama
is the antichrist

post-hurricane . . .
elders praying, weeping where
their church once stood

marrying Roy Witt,
Amanda Hoff deciding
not to hyphenate

finding
her boyfriend's self-centeredness
endearing

a child grieving
his hermit crab's passing
more than Grandma's

ER doctor
trying to open a mouth
super-glued shut

dining in Paris,
the dieting tourist
battling misery

sex ed student
inquiring who invented
fellatio

sex ed student
asking if any countries
prohibit foreplay

her child researching
whether Lincoln really was
a vampire hunter

aged forty, her son
regarding fatherhood
as the *f-word*

in Greece, a Bronx boy
begging for some souvlaki,
no more ruins

in Spain, a Bronx teen
begging for some bullfights,
no more museums

the old prof reading
from the yellowed, curled pages
of his lecture notes

Manhattan Marxists,
about to wed, registering
at Bergdorf Goodman

his mother-in-law
fearing public speaking more
than black mambas

a boy trying
to compute how many bubbles
would make a ton

appreciating
the old car's bumper sticker,
Wag More, Bark Less

her student, Jon Wood,
using zeroes, not o's, when
typing his name

hospital hallway . . .
pushing a mop, daydreaming
he's saving a life

Yankee fan noting
she's been apologizing
her entire life

the weatherman
forecasting a tornado
on her wedding day

a minor leaguer,
with the bases loaded,
trying to steal third

in-laws connecting
over their shared loathing
of congressmen

death row convict
requesting for his last meal
braised antelope

post-wedding . . .
opening the gifts, bemoaning
their relatives' taste

history student
confusing Balaklava
with baklava

the elderly dean
screaming at the young prof
who said *more unique*

twenty-third birthday . . .
the prof giving his RA
a ball and chain

sixtieth birthday . . .
the RA giving her prof
a cat o' nine tails

Dachau survivor
watching *The Producers*, feeling
guilt for laughing

Annapolis grad
asserting he would have made
a splendid pirate

their twelve year-old
rubbing on his trombone slide
Wesson oil

the enraged wife
cutting a large, heart-shaped hole
in each of his shirts

six-year-old batter
running around the bases
clockwise

the jury foreman
announcing the verdict:
Guilty as sin

his grandmother
describing her hair
as *unforgiving*

Zurich boy dreaming
of becoming a captain
in the Swiss navy

visiting Vermont,
a scared Cambridge girl screaming
That truck has gun racks!

spring break ~ their son
developing a new language
without nouns

Great-Grandma
claiming she was, at eighteen,
unfairly stunning

homeless man hoping
that, in heaven, he'll be rich,
handsome, beloved

salmon curer
referring to himself
as a *loxsmith*

a woman from Queens
hating all non-New Yorkers
who root for the Mets

a man from Queens
hating all folks in Brooklyn
who root for the Mets

thinking ahead . . .
studying the wrinkles
of his wife's Mom

her teen answering
What do you want to be? with
An antihero

arousing himself
viewing bikini bottoms
as panties

two historians
debating who was crazier:
Patton or Custer

avowing
he saw Queen Elizabeth
at Wrestlemania

Grandma Alice
smiling at the waiter
as she leaves no tip

watching her spouse dunk
his *Hugo Boss* jacket sleeve
in mushroom gravy

tourists in Maine
awed by lobsters cheaper
than bologna

summer school teacher
in west Texas daydreaming
of skiing in Vail

the burn victim
praying for twenty-four hours
without stares, abuse

a young fan wishing
his favorite Saints could be
heroes off the field

Mexican border . . .
Grandma's pacemaker, temper
causing detainment

Quebec border . . .
Grandpa's Canuck remark
causing detainment

his girlfriend trying
to say with a straight face
Size doesn't matter

Newark, late July . . .
the bride ruing her choice of
a rooftop wedding

envisioning
his novel, not the bible,
in each hotel room

the astrologer
thrilled Planck and Shakespeare
had the same birthday

the astrologer
puzzled Gandhi and Groucho
had the same birthday

the astrologer
distressed Earp and Eichmann
had the same birthday

on her deathbed
their six year-old whispering
Don't forget me

a girl wondering
if safety pins could be used
for acupuncture

a boy wondering
if jackhammers could be used
for amputations

old Physics prof
fearing that he will die
alone in his lab

July heat wave . . .
T.V. weatherman suggesting
we wear lightweight clothes

August heat wave . . .
T.V. weatherman warning
don't get too much sun

the rich man's child
noting she'd like to be poor
for one hour

for his ninth birthday
their grandson requesting
a detonator

offering her spouse
fifteen dollars to watch
the romcom with her

offering his spouse
sixteen dollars to watch
the romcom alone

a Baptist girl
asking her Jewish classmate
Am I a goy?

on a park bench
the homeless man perusing
Good Housekeeping

tennis match . . . musing
should he root for his countryman
who's a boorish lout

the retired Marine
hoping he'll have amnesia
in the hereafter

the old bagpiper
teaching his great-granddaughter
Amazing Grace

the old cellist
teaching his great-grandson
Stairway to Heaven

Sartorial Advice

In the bridal shop,
The Methodist mother of
The bride-to-be inquires
Whether there is any dress
That will hide the tattoos
On her daughter's neck,
Arms, legs, breasts and back.
Yes, replies the store owner.
A burqa.

Cognitive Psych test . . .
a freshman trying to recall
what's a mnemonic

Abnormal Psych test . . .
a junior trying to recall
what's a fugue

one hour pre-wedding . . .
choosing not to tell the bride
Grandpa has chest pains

his six year-old
wanting to play the tambourine
professionally

X Game athletes
comparing how many times
they have flatlined

a Goth artist
studying the paintings
of Norman Rockwell

in Washington
the fan of Peter Lorre
living on M Street

in Washington
the young apiologist
living on B Street

in Washington
the flaming narcissist
living on I Street

their Mom offering
to write a personal check
to the street mugger

Kansas dowager
scolding a girl for saying
shiitake

Kansas dowager
scolding a boy for saying
titillate

on the tennis court,
mistaking the old man's smash
for a lob

Dad teaching her how,
sloshed or stoned, to climb stairs
without falling

their Grandpa beaming
opening the new phone book
and seeing his name

a girl fearing
the neighbor who mentioned
he's a head-hunter

Goddess of beauty? . . .

a twelfth grader answering

Hermaphrodite

a child querying
the artist if he's ever
tattooed an eyeball

Uncle Walter
preferring a stale sermon
to small talk

Aunt Ethel
preferring an obscene rant
to silence

an optimist
named Jill Morrow christening
her first son, Tom

Nana showing off
the rolling pin she used
to foil the robber

a chemist
computing the calories cut
by blotting her fries

to Rorschach Card I
her new patient responding
Lubbock, Texas

to Rorschach Card IV
his new patient responding
Gramps on a stick

the surgeon finding
steel barbecue brush bristles
in Pop's intestine

their first session . . .
the young patient asking if
he's too much for her

telling the nephews
his running away from home
was a brilliant choice

a second grader
asking if porcupine meat
is called porc

a child wishing
she could play *Ode to Joy*
on the triangle



My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind.

Albert Einstein

*I prefer to explore the most intimate moments,
the smaller, crystallized details we all hinge our lives on.*

Rita Dove



newly named *Provost*,
fretting he'll need to purchase
a second suit

newly named *Dean*,
fretting he'll need to purchase
a second tie

drunk groundskeeper
trying to flee the police
in a golf cart

Yom Kippur, midday . . .
her Uncle Mort smelling
of salami

Yom Kippur, midday . . .
her Aunt Sheila smelling
of *Listerine*

pre-wedding, giving
his ultimatum: *Best man*
or I don't show

a Baptist cook
wishing cinnamon had
a different name

How are you punished? . . .
his preteen patient replying,
Forced to talk to Mom

How are you punished? . . .
his teenaged patient replying,
Forced to talk to you

at the barbecue
elbowing his wife to stop
being so dainty

Together but Unequal

Grandma Bertha

Expressing deep dismay that

Goebbels and Goethe,

Hitler and Hitchens,

Attila and Auden,

Lenin and Lennon,

Pol Pot and Pollock,

Torquemada and Toscanini,

Mussolini and Musial,

Himmler and Hillel,

Mao and Mantle,

Brooklyn and the Bronx

Appear side-by-side

In her encyclopedia

two dons debating
which *Godfather* character
was most heroic

two cons debating
which *Goodfellas* actor
was least convincing

his great-niece
proudly showing off two rows
of tooth gaps

a mother searching
her child's face for a tell
that he's lying

a wife searching
her husband's face for a tell
he's being sincere

forgetful elder
addressing each older male
as Chief

forgetful elder
addressing each younger male
as Sport

forgetful elder
addressing every female
as Sweets

Thanksgiving dinner . . .
her young nephew inquiring
What's a douchebag?

the Great Dane's owners
buying their one-year-old twins
cowboy hats, lassoes

Beijing zoo . . .

a Shar-Pei mother nursing
orphaned tiger cubs

an Arab noting

it is pronounced *Oh-MAAN*,

not *Oh, man*

a twelve year-old

describing himself to girls

as an acquired taste

Why rhinoplasty? . . .

the L.A. doc responding

Job security

Why psychiatry? . . .

the New York doc replying

Job security

Grandpa wishing
to be buried holding
a peep toe pump

a seven year-old
telling his younger brother
No guts, no glory

June wedding . . . his date
outhustling bridesmaids to snag
the tossed bouquet

old photographer
editing out the glare caused
by the teen's piercings

a law student
asking if judges can be called
for jury duty

Al Jones begging
his bride, Mary Chevalier,
to take his last name

Jane Rousseau begging
her new husband, Ed Smith,
to take her last name

dinner theater . . .
watching his wife handling
her first artichoke

dinner theater . . .
watching her husband eating
his first escargot

dinner theater . . .
watching their toddler tasting
her first green olive

rigged carnival . . .

NBA forward missing

his fifth free throw

rigged carnival . . .

Army sharpshooter missing

his sixth target

the cashier asking

the rich man's daughter why

she's using food stamps

Penn State athlete

feeling shame overwhelm

swagger

Penn State alum

feeling rage overwhelm

hero worship

her child counting
the number of times *fly*
is said in *Dumbo*

her teen counting
the number of times $f^{**}k$
is said in *Scarface*

Duke juniors standing
in a row: one face-pierced Goth,
three Hasidic Jews

Brown seniors sitting
in a row: two Zambians,
one Maine albino

an ad agent
trying to write a jingle
for urologists

the boy replying
he was not cogitating,
just thinking

Xmas eve ~ Grandma
offering the policeman
a heartfelt hug

kosher deli . . .
explaining to the young nun
what she can't order

third grader Jesus
telling his new classmate Fred
it's not *Hey, Zeus*

questioning
his spouse why her sponge cakes
look, taste like loafahs

renaming
the Psych faculty lounge
the Odditorium

her blind date
inquiring how she feels
about clown art

his blind date
inquiring if he has read
Mein Kampf

senryu poet
drops *meteorologist*
for *weatherman*

TAs offering
to purchase a *Whack-A-Mole*
for their stressed prof

two old dons planning
to tell God they were soldiers,
not murderers

the herpetophobe
slowly approaching Aunt Mae
and her snake tattoo

Uncle Mort
persuading his young nephews
Aunt Fern's a vampire

Aunt Fern
convincing her young nieces
Uncle Mort's Satan

the groom noting
her pause before responding,
For poorer

equestrian Mom
believing a woman's place
is on a horse

each highway driver,
spotting the dead deer, having
the same thought: *Bambi*

Black Muslim athlete
attributing his groin pull
to a pork sandwich

9-1-1 caller
asking if the end of days
will be hot or cold

racked with guilt,
the six-year-old shoplifter
seeking redemption

The perfect food? . . .

the Hopkins doc responding

Peanut M&M's

in Pakistan,

making a profit selling

U.S. flags for burning

a young boy trying

to cheer up a grieving man

with a knock-knock joke

poetry reading . . .

her boyfriend muttering,

Can't write or recite

on his resume

the young film actor noting

he's played four corpses

freshman psych major
inquiring whether puppies
can be hypnotized

freshman psych major
asking if the term *whackjob*
is acceptable

freshman psych major
questioning why rats, not birds,
were used in mazes

senile Aunt Martha
ordering the nursing staff
to call her Zsa Zsa

emergency room . . .
short of breath, his heart racing,
approached for payment

Phoenix, mid-July . . .
worrying his toupee glue
may be melting

summer sky . . . her child
describing the northern lights
as *God's pink curtains*

nine years post-wedding,
still raging at the best man
for his lewd toast

twelve-year-old fullback
lying about his neck ache
to stay in the game

on his birthday
asking Great-Gramps to tone down
the sex appeal

her spouse rooting
only for teams whose owners
are likeable

his wife rooting
only for teams whose cities
are desperate

the dying elder
whispers in her grandson's ear
Stop being stupid

her seven year-old
inquiring how many ants
are in Asia

her eight year-old
asking how many roaches
are in the Bronx

glaring at the man
in a suit berating his wife
in a niqab

the priest avowing
God wants full custody,
not weekend visits

explaining
to their Great-Aunt Esther why
South Park is funny

a kindergartner
trying to measure how long
an eye blink lasts

her son's apartment . . .
no paintings on the walls,
only food stains

In the Community of Scholars

Where shall we eat?

How about Italian?

No, I'm tired of that. Is anyone up for Thai?

Too spicy for me. Shall we go with TGIF?

Not again! What about that new Korean place?

The dissertation committee

Continues to question and

Deliberate as the Ph.D. student

Paces outside, worrying whether

She has passed her defense.

Dad hanging photos
of Nobel Prize winners
in the baby's room

the Rothschild giraffe
snuggling her day-old daughter
standing six feet tall

gas station men's room . . .
the young germaphobe fighting
a panic attack

his mother balking
at naming the baby, Bree . . .
That's for a hooker

a teen driver,
trying to save gas, turns down
her car's radio

the new employee
claiming he's not paid enough
to be honest

Olympic swimmer
noting she owns thirty pairs
of pink flip-flops

Olympic swimmer
noting he's never owned
an umbrella

the Navy SEAL
explaining why Rush Limbaugh
is a coward

Till death us do part . . .
the young groom responding,
Pardon me?

a Muslim student
reminding Professor Klein
it's Rosh Hashanah

bride-to-be asking
the florist for centerpieces
that go with prime rib

eve of chemo . . .
Gramps returning to the store
the *Just for Men*

eve of chemo . . .
Grandma returning from *Saks*
with three *Gucci* hats

obese math prof
daydreaming of pi
without end



Author's Note

Dr. Robert H. Deluty is the Associate Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. He has been a psychology professor at UMBC since 1980, and was named Presidential Teaching Professor in 2002. He and his wife, Barbara (a clinical psychologist), live in Ellicott City, Maryland and have two children, Laura and David, and a granddaughter, Ava. Dr. Deluty's poems and essays have been published in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Pegasus Review*, *Modern Haiku*, *Voices: The Art and Science of Psychotherapy*, *Psychiatric Times*, *Jewish Currents*, the *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, *Welcome Home*, *Muse of Fire*, *Maryland Family Magazine*, *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, and many other newspapers, journals, and anthologies. *A Crowded Life* is his thirty-eighth book.

