

The Farmer

By W.D. Ehrhart

Each day I go into the fields

to see what is growing

and what remains to be done.

It is always the same thing: nothing

is growing, everything needs to be done.

Plow, harrow, disc, water, pray

till my bones ache and hands rub

blood-raw with honest labor—

all that grows is the slow

intransigent intensity of need.

I have sown my seed on soil

guaranteed by poverty to fail.

But I don't complain—except

to passersby who ask me why

I work such barren earth.

They would not understand me

if I stooped to lift a rock

and hold it like a child, or laughed,

or told them it is their poverty

I labor to relieve. For them,

I complain. A farmer of dreams

knows how to pretend. A farmer of dreams

knows what it means to be patient.

Each day I go into the fields.

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W.D. (William Daniel) Ehrhart was born and raised in Pennsylvania. He joined the US Marine Corps in 1966 after graduating from high school and served until 1969; he spent 13 months of his service in Vietnam. Ehrhart then went on to earn bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. He has since worked as a high school teacher, merchant seaman, reporter, and legal aide for the Pennsylvania Department of Justice. An active lecturer and speaker, he has published memoirs and essays about Vietnam.

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