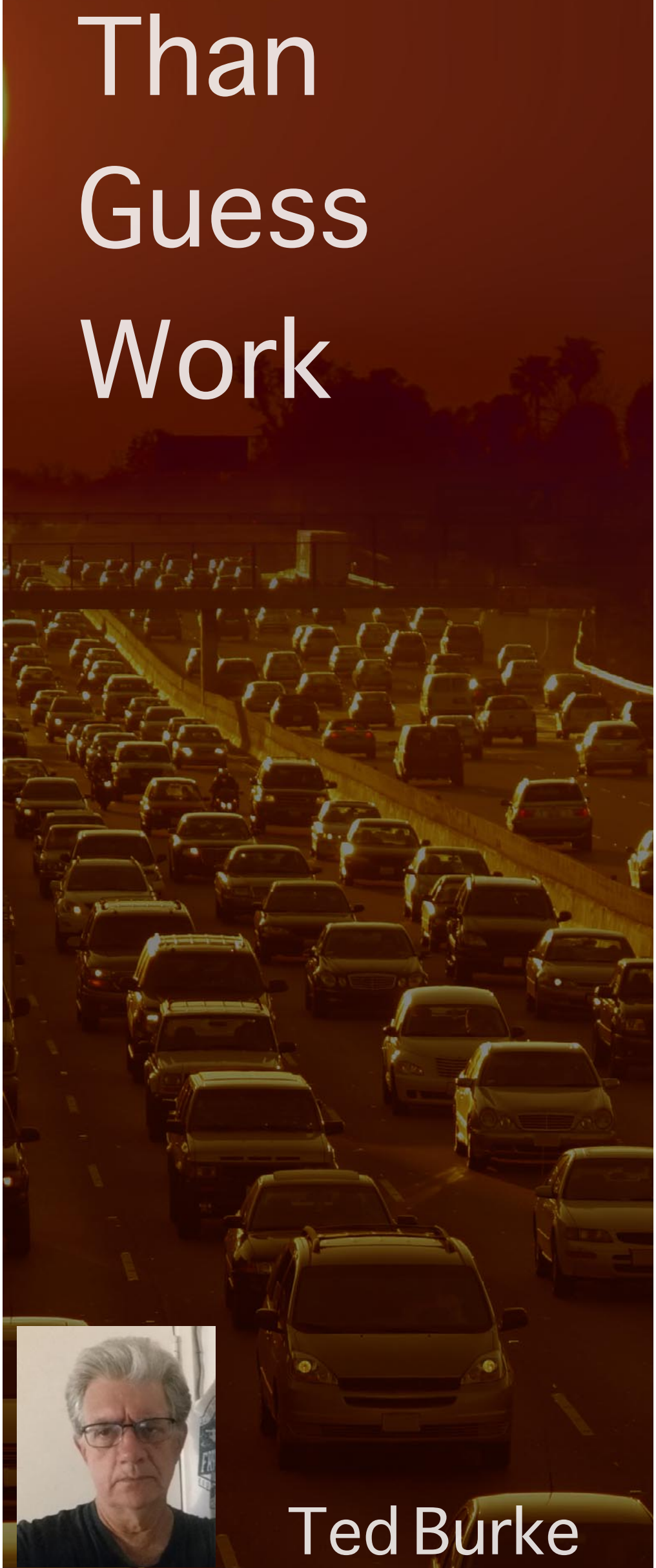
Sadder Than Guess Work



Ted Burke

Ted Burke was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1952 and moved to San Diego, California in 1969, where he still lives and works as a bookseller, free-lance music journalist, blues musician, and street photographer. His writing has appeared in the *San Diego Reader, Oyster Boy Review, Kicks, San Diego Door* and the *UCSD Guardian*. His poetry has appeared in *Revolt in Style*, *Pacific Review, Crawl Out Your Window, Diagram,* and other journals. Burke has authored several poetry chapbooks including *Sitting in the Dark, No One Home* and *Open Every Window,* from Old House Books. He was a finalist in the 2021 Kowit Poetry Award contest. Grammy winning composer Libby Larsen selected several of his poems to adapt for a trio of art songs, pieces that had a world premiere at the Aspen Music Festival in Aspen, Colorado in August of 2021. He now writes for the San Diego Troubadour and is the literature and poetry buyer for D.G. Wills Books in La Jolla, California.

Sitting through the argument with the day,
I still hear the scraping
of celluloid picks
against the strings,
electric guitars hysterical
at the afternoon traffic
that feeds the habits of a nation
cursed with a million dreams of desire.

What happens
when I dial numbers
expecting you to be there,
staring at magazines
through magnifying glasses,
talk radio filling the kitchen,
the list of your medicines
taped to the refrigerator door,
your handwriting
large like loops of
loose thread?

The phone rings and,
in the emptiness,
I imagine the dining room
you'd walk through to get it.

I let it ring for minutes
on end, to make sure you' re not home.

Coming and going
on the streets
of scattered small towns
are desires driving themselves
insane, drivers behind wheels
at traffic lights
arguing against the fact
that there is no place
they have to be
when the sun sets,
a destination is
removed from their lives.

We talk back to
the radio,
snarl at dial tones,
all our phones keep
ringing forever in the orbits of atoms
threading together the fabric
and excuse of our material world.

I can't even smoke
in my own car because
nothing burns in a vacuum,

you'll never be home again,
the fact itches like insect bites
in the seams of my shirt,
night is like a closing of eyes
when what's out there is
sadder than guess work.