

OLD ENOUGH TO
KNOW BETTER

the
WORST
of
Barry
Louis
Polisar

2 CD COLLECTOR'S EDITION

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I began recording music for children in 1975, ultimately writing and recording over one hundred songs for kids. Some years ago I had the chance to re-record some of my favorite songs from those prehistoric days on a series of newer CDs, but there were many songs I didn't like anymore and these were left off my newer recordings.

Not long ago, my daughter was listening to my original albums and asked why I had rejected so many funny songs. As we listened together, I explained what I didn't like about each, and realized that with a little work, those songs could be better.

The next thing I knew I was on the floor with my guitar--the same guitar I learned how to play on--with scraps of paper and song lyrics all around me, rewriting lyrics and changing melodies. I tinkered with many of the older songs and poems as my daughter read them, made comments, and effectively became my editor. Sometimes I kept to the spirit of the original; other times I

just used the opening line to write a totally new song.

Most people do a "Greatest Hits" album after thirty years but I thought I'd try something different. I took the worst songs I had written and tried to turn them into something I liked. I went into the studio to record what I had written and had so much fun that I then went back to the very bottom of the well... finding even more songs I had left behind for a second disc!

In the studio, my son added clarinet and saxophone to a few songs, and Ray Tilkens, my sound engineer and friend, contributed an amazing array of musical embellishments.

So here they are...my worst songs...and with forty different poems and songs, there's something for everyone to dislike!

Barry Louis Polisar
2005

Barry Louis Polisar: all vocals, guitar, foot stomps, bass drum, tambourine, maracas, hand claps, percussion

Evan Nathan Polisar: clarinet and saxophone

Ray Tilkens: bass guitar, fretless bass, rhythm and lead guitar, slide guitar, dulcimer, mandolin, slide mandolin, electric lead guitar, electric slide guitar, baritone guitar, recorders, and additional percussion

Produced by **Barry Louis Polisar** and **Ray Tilkens**

Recorded and mixed by **Ray Tilkens** at **Ambient Studios**

Photography by **Michael G. Stewart**

Graphic design by **Chris Abshire**, **InTune Graphics**

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All songs © © by **Barry Louis Polisar**. All Songs BMI. *I Don't Believe You're Going to the Bathroom* and *Shut Up in the Library* are based on traditional tunes. *First it Bit my Behind* is based on *Before this Time* © by Bessie Jones and Alan Lomax and *I Can't Tie My Shoe* is a parody based on Led Zeppelin's *Dazed and Confused*.

All songs published by **Rainbow Morning Music**
2121 Fairland Road,
Silver Spring, Maryland 20904

Thanks to Ray for again being so "instrumental" in making my songs sound so good; to my son Evan for his jazzy influences and creative work; and to the usual suspects who helped in editing: my wife Roni, daughter Sierra, and Cousin Shelby.

Disc One

When Suzie Sneezed was originally recorded on my first album in 1975. With some minor editing, I think it became a better song.

I Can't Tie My Shoe was first recorded in 1981. I recorded a new version in 2000 when I released *A Little Different* but it didn't seem to fit that CD. I loved being able to reference so many of Led Zeppelin's signatures and Jake Holme's classic bass line from *Dazed and Confused* and it was great letting Ray cut loose on the music.

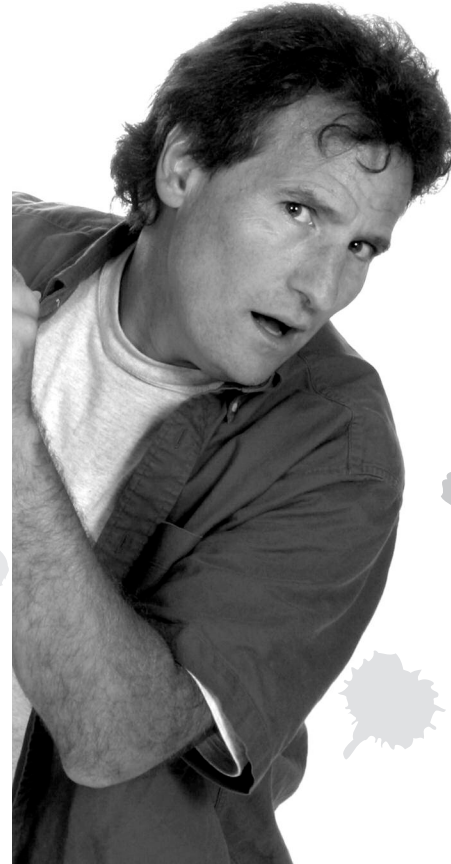
I Used To Have a Sister was written and recorded on my second LP in 1977. I revised the song for my TV show but never used it. I liked the rewritten lyrics and am glad I got a chance to record it again this way.

My Dentist is An Awfully Nice Man was on my first album but as a longer song. Sometimes less is more. I love that simple slide guitar Ray plays.

Reptile World was written for a friend of mine who does a reptile show in the schools. I've always wondered what it would be like to visit him at home with all those "pets."

The Accident was originally recorded as a poem on *Songs for Well Behaved Children*. I asked Ray to play his fretless bass while I recited this piece as if we were in a jazz club. The song is part of a long tradition of cautionary verses for children.

The Witch grew from my song *Ugly Elvin and the Witch*. Originally, an answer to Pete Seeger's *Abi Yoyo*, it was about a kid who is an outcast and ends up in an alliance with the only person who will talk to him—a mean and evil witch who is also disliked by everyone. The song was seven verses long and rambled, but I liked the last verse and wondered how I could reconstruct a story around it. I ended up with a whole new song that I like much more than the original.



That's What Makes the World Go 'Round was originally called *Inequality Makes the World Go 'Round* but the title didn't fit what I wanted to say.

The Warning is another in a series of cautionary verses I wrote in 1979. The references are to Ogden Nash, Hilaire Belloc and Shel Silverstein.

Don't Leave Me in the House Alone is an updated version of my 1979 song from *Songs for Well Behaved Children*.

The Dinosaur Song was written after watching a teacher scream at one of her students to the point of making him cry in front of the entire class. I had already written a song about a mean teacher in 1975, so I wanted to approach this one in a different way.

Ellen Grew a Beard is another jazzy experiment at beat poetry, though I often have a problem keeping the beat.

The Town of Round was first recorded on *Off Color Songs for Kids* and explores one of my favorite themes: how the nonconformist affects those around him.

Me and You was a song I wrote before I began singing for kids but I included it on my first album because it sounded “kid-like”. I still like the song, but rewrote some of the lyrics and Ray added that wonderful baritone guitar. Apologies to Martin Buber.

I Looked Into the Mirror; What Did the Mirror Say? is a new version of my old song. After singing all the different voices, I realized how much fun it was bringing the “Barry Louis Polisar Self-Aggrandizement Choir” out of retirement.

A Bee Will Sting You is slightly different from the original, recorded in 1982.

Stanley Stole My Shoelace and Rubbed it in His Armpit is the title song of an album I released in 1981. I like the pacing of this version more.

Sally Eats Shoelaces, Straw and String is shorter than the original version, but again, less is often more.

Everywhere You Go is a rewrite of *Mommy, Mommy I Gotta Get a Record* from my 1979 recording. Most of the things I list in this song now weren’t even around when I wrote the original.

Shut Up in the Library was on my first recording from 1975. When I heard Jody Stecher and Kate Brislin’s moving version of the coal mining disaster song, *Shut Up in the Mines at Coal Creek*, I thought it would be interesting to re-do my song with the traditional tune that Jody and Kate used - and a totally different meaning for the words “shut up”.



Disc Two

The Ant and the Grasshopper (What They Didn't Tell You) was a piece I had written twenty years ago and never recorded. I've always liked the story and was happy to finally record it here.

Not So Good At Baseball was written as a response to the baseball song *Left Field* about a kid who is "not so good at baseball" who saves the day with the winning catch. When I heard that song I wondered what the most likely outcome would really be in a situation like that and this song grew from there.

Poor Orville Thlapp is a mess, isn't he?

The "I Never Did Like You Anyhow" Stomp was also on my first album and was originally influenced by the early folk songs of Mark Spoelstra. This time I decided to rewrite the song and do it as a "stomp" or street rhyme.

There's No Substitute For a Cat was recorded in 1979. I like the tune of the original but wanted to make the lyrics more subtle this time around, exploring all the wonderful things a cat does. Like sleep. And rest. And nap. I love Ray's guitar work and Evan's sax, too.

Caterpillar was recorded on *Off Color Songs* and also appears as a poem in my book *Insect Soup*. It is another in a long-line of my David Slavitt homages. He has a wonderful poem about a young calf taunting an ox for working so hard. As the calf is later led away by a farmer with a large knife, Slavitt writes, "Nobody gets to choose which yoke to wear."



First It Bit My Behind never stood out to me on *Songs for Well Behaved Children*. But the poet Jack Prelutsky liked the simplicity of my poem and anthologized it in one of his poetry collections. After hearing the song *Before This Time*, I thought it would be fun to give it a "spiritual" sound. I threw out all the initial re-recordings and had a blast recording it this way. It was inspired by Ollabelle's recording of the Georgia Sea Island Singers

version of the song and copyrighted by Bessie Jones and Alan Lomax. I am grateful to Don Fleming of the Alan Lomax archive for allowing the "folk process" to continue and letting me use this song to create a new piece.



Barnyard Stomp was another old song written in 1974 before I began writing for kids. The song appeared on my second album in 1977 and the title referred to Led Zeppelin's song *Bron-Y-Aur Stomp* -- a song they wrote about their dog. My original song was just a string of unrelated images and I kept rewriting it for this recording to give it more focus. I tried to keep some of my original lyrics and then came full circle -- as a song about our dog!

I'm Bored was another song from 1979, but done here as a jazzy piece with Evan's saxophone and Ray's swirling bass. Apologies to John Berryman and his *Dream Song #14*.

I'm Late was originally recorded in 1982. After I recorded this new version, I asked Ray to play the guitar riff you hear which adds to the manic feel.

The Craster was originally just a fun tongue twister. Here, it's more of a beat piece.

I Forgot ...I had something I wanted to say about this song but...

The "I Eat Kids" Klezmer Polka is admittedly a strange song. *I Eat Kids* was the title of my first album and originally wasn't even a song for children. I thought it would be even stranger to do it as a polka. I brought my son Evan into the studio to add clarinet and saxophone. All those Klezmer lessons must have had an effect because the sound is definitely unique.

Siamese Twins was originally an homage to my cousin Sheldon who has a series of *Siamese Twins* poems. Clocking in at about 12 seconds, there wasn't much to change.

Get Your Hand Off of My Leg and Your Foot Out of My Shoe was recorded on another one of my early albums. I like this version so much more because of Ray's spacey guitar sound and Evan's moody sax.

One Big Happy Family is a combination of two old songs I had written with a similar message. *To Mommy* and *I've Got a Little Sister* were both songs about parents who let their kids run reckless, but the lyrics have often been taken out of context and criticized for advocating bad behavior. I thought I'd try one more time to make my point.

Five More Minutes was another song I wrote over twenty-five years ago -- before I had kids. I thought it really needed an update and I love Ray's open tuned slide guitar work.

Fred was the monster on my first album who couldn't command respect because of his name, and despite the bedrock blues roots beat, he's still not very scary. Ray is a guitar master. Here he plays acoustic slide, electric lead and rhythm.

If You Have A Kid Who Complains All the Time was written in 1979. The "veiled" reference to women's rights in

Iran was unfortunately too prophetic when I first wrote the song.

I Don't Believe You're Going to the Bathroom was written in 1975 after I discovered a kid "hiding" in an elementary school bathroom to avoid going back to class. It was on my first album and I tried recording it several times for this CD, but never got it right. On the way to the studio I was listening to Jonathan Byrd's wonderful recording of the traditional song, *The Fiddle and the Bow* and played it for Ray. He picked up his guitar and began playing along as I sang and stomped my foot. I thought it would be a nice way to end the second disc.



