My fiction and poetry are related to my dreams in several ways. Sometimes an entire story comes to me just before falling asleep, vivid and entire from start to finish. I used to write it down immediately, then try to work with it later only to find, in many cases, that there wasn't quite enough there to make a finished product. So I would store the fragment in a file and wait for it to gel. The catalyst for the gelling process was often provided by another dream or pre-dream experience. Now I use a different method, allowing my unconscious, actually dreaming mind to make the important revisions. When a story or poem comes before I fall asleep, I don't write it down. If it's not there, I figure it wasn't ready to emerge yet and will stay where it went until the time is right. I never regret losing it because I don't believe it's lost; over the years I've learned to trust my unconscious mind to work the story out more than I trust my conscious mind to contrive an ending or a plot that wasn't there in the first place. And the first place is that moment of vision that comes in or around dreams, when the blinders of what we call waking consciousness are down or about to come down.

Another way, represented in "Down Under," is the poem taken from the dream record. I've printed the record of the dream here to show how little I used of it in the poem. The dream occurred during a year spent in Bologna when my dreams were typically exotic and multilingual. Michele, referred to at the end, is a friend who visited me when I lived in Florence (a previous visit to Italy). The metallic purple poster came from the libretto of my choral symphony, In Praise of Love (premiered at Lincoln Center in 1974); I hated the way the librettos looked, including the metallic color. The Australian writer Machax is a punned version of Machaut, the medieval French vision poet whose work I know because it influenced Chaucer's Booke of the Duchesse, one of my favorite dream poems. But the joyousness of the dream was the guiding force in stripping away all the parts of it I didn't need for the poem. The poem itself is from a series I call tricycle poems because the narrator usually rides through my dreams on a tricycle. "Coming Down for Louie" is an earlier tricycle poem, from a dream I had the night Louie Armstrong died (I was visiting Kansas City at the time—explaining the geography of the poem's trip). I look for a format that mirrors the mood of the dream and allows that mood to be communicated to the reader who dreams in his contact with the poem. Poetry is one way we dream together.
DREAM REPORT

Going into a little town in Australia, around the turn of the century, driving a ’54 white chevrolet. Came to a park with grizzly bears. Hippie girl said I could feed them bananas, obvious that she was hungry. Talked me into it and accompanied me to the little man who sold them. We bought 4, 2 for the big patient bear standing up in his cage, 2 for her, which she agreed to accept because it would take a while to have the zookeeper check out the bear’s teeth before he was allowed to eat the bananas. The zookeeper did that, while the girl ate her bananas and the bear patiently submitted to the inspection. Then he told us that before giving the bear the bananas I had to go downtown to the department of Conservation to have the bear given a physical before eating bananas. The bear very patiently got into the back seat and I drove downtown. At the Conservation office they told me the inspector wouldn’t be back for 3 hours. The bear was still patient but I was getting a little impatient since I had just meant to pass through town in the first place. So I got on my tricycle and rode around the block with the bear lumbering good-naturedly after me. Discretely I dropped one of the bananas. On the return trip, I discovered it had been eaten, with only the peels remaining on the street. A jolly little man was picking up the peels and invited us into his house. While the bear waited patiently in the parlor the man led me up to his attic to show me his fantastic collection of old little books, first showing me a metallic purple printed poster he’d made for some literary revival. Then he told me that he was personally supervising the resurrection of Henri Marchax’s reputation, an Australian writer who wrote in French. I admitted I’d never heard of Henri Machax and promised to look him up immediately when I got back home. He insisted that I take a copy of Machax’s major work, a little brown-crumbling leather book that was obviously stolen from a library (because the numbers were still vaguely discernible)—and return it to him either directly or c/o AX. I told him I’d return it directly because I knew his address was 171. Then we looked at the book. The first half of it was the work translated into English, the second half in French, beginning, “Il y avait, on dit.” The most striking thing in the little book (about 3” square) was the fact that the o’s were filled in with abalone—although many of them had fallen out leaving craters in the weathered old paper. At this point the little man, the bear, and I left in the car—they in the front seat, I in the back. The man was driving, and gave the bear the other banana. When the bear was finished with it, the man started grumbling that the bear’s paws were all sticky and wet (because he’d licked them). I told him that I knew they would be, because they were that way the first time, and handed him a yellow napkin I had ready for the occasion. Then there was a scuffle in the front seat as the man tried to wipe the bear’s paws while the bear good-naturedly kept whopping the man upside the head. Next thing I knew I was driving and looking around for the little man and the bear. They weren’t there. I saw only, in the back seat, a crumpled up coat. As I turned my head I swerved into the left lane, nearly side-swiping a pinkred mustang convertible driven by a thin, surly-lipped young man with a child to match, hanging over the edge of the other front seat window. The child said, “Chicken shit, horse shit, bear shit,” and I immediately concluded that my car must be dirty so I drove directly into the carwash that happened to be immediately there. As I got out of the car and walked inside, I saw Michele, leaning on his crutches, looking through the glass window at his car. “Ciao, Ken, come stai, vieni di parlare con me.” The end.
DOWN UNDER

‘Cycling into Sydney
passed the grizzly
bears,

stopped to buy bananas
for one eyeing
me

earnestly standing high.
Prım zookeeper
checked

condition of bear’s teeth
directing me
down—

town to the Inspector—
who wasn’t in.
Though

the bear was patient I
was in a rush
so

pedalled round the block &
discreetly dropped
one

banana on the street
as he lumbered
good—

naturally in my wake.
When I circled
back

only the peel remained.
Our communion
made

I bade him step aboard.
His gooey
paws

around my shoulders, we
headed out to
sea,

two bizarre banditos
terrifying
law.

Kenneth John Atchity
COMING DOWN FOR LOUIE

When we left Missouri
our paint was
gleaming
the rusting fender.
Once we tried
to sing
but the notes stuck
in our throats
when we
remembered we
were heading
for New Orleans to
put away
a friend.

blue. Samuel stood
behind me
pushing
with his left foot
as we climbed
down through
the Ozarks. Most
of the time
we could
coast. He held an orange
umbrella
over

my head & whispered gay
obscenities
in my

ear to distract
me from the
hard work

of pedalling all
hunched up
above