

# OLD ENOUGH TO KNOW BETTER

## the WORST of Barry Louis Polisar

2 CD COLLECTOR'S EDITION

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

**Evan Nathan Polisar:** clarinet and saxophone

**Ray Tilkins:** 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 Tilkins**

Recorded and mixed by **Ray Tilkins** 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*.

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**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.

I began making 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, but realized that with a little work, those songs could be better.

Soon 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.

Musicians often do a "Greatest Hits" album. After thirty years, I thought I'd try something different; I took my worst songs and tried to turn them into something I liked. I went into the studio to record the new versions and had so much fun that I then went back to the very bottom of the well...finding 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 Tilkins, 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

### 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 a song I wrote in 1981. I loved making this parody of some of my favorite Led Zeppelin songs like *Dazed and Confused*, and Ray really 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 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 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** is a rewritten version of my 1982 song with a similar title.

**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-Appreciation Choir" out of retirement.

**A Bee Will Sting You** is slightly different from the original, recorded in 1983.

**Stanley Stole My Shoelace and Rubbed it in His Armpit** is the title song of an album I released in 1982. 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 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 Brislín'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" but saves the day with the winning catch. When I heard that song I wondered what the likely outcome would really be 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 homage to David Slavitt, one of my favorite poets.



**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

**First It Bit My Behind** was originally a four line poem on *Songs for Well Behaved Children*. I heard the group Ollabelle do a version of *Before This Time* by The Georgia Sea Island Singers and got the idea to re-do my poem as a "spiritual." I am grateful to Don Fleming of the Alan Lomax Archive for allowing the "folk process" to continue and letting me use their song to create my new piece.



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.

