



Photo by Joanna M. Burkhardt

To the Watch Hill Lighthouse

O Thou strong tower of warning
and protection,
We pause to give thanks
or your unwearying function,
Remembering the long finger
from your height,
Sweeping your bright sword
through the shadow of night.
When we were young
“without a crack in the heart”,
Softly, we sat near you,
wide eyed to see the dark
Stabbed awake by
your command above these rocks.
The night world of stars and sky
wake from its box,
illuminated, obedient to your imperious cry,
birds, wheeling and white
from the pounding sea flew by.
Long ships far beyond this point
and this shore,
Fishermen, caught in the water’s wind
and roar saw your light.

They heard your voice. They sighed relief,
In gratitude for deliverance from this reef.
Anchors feel into the deep,
sails flapped unfurled
The moon staggered watching if ships
were hurled ‘gainst this rocky shore.
The sea rolls on and on.
Your beam flows across its bosom
from dusk to dawn.
God’s voice sounds in the buoy bell,
lifted by the tides,
calling the drowned ones home,
while the lighthouse bides its time,
content to shine either by machine or man,
begging that its eye be unshut
as long as it can,
permitting its light in the high
windowed room,
to bless this place and
all who from these shores do roam.

This poem hangs in the Watch Hill Lighthouse museum, penned by the Reverend Joseph P. Bishop, D.D., as the Invocation for the decommissioning of the Lighthouse in 1986.