



STYLUS

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THE LITERARY ANNUAL OF
MIDLANDS TECHNICAL COLLEGE

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FOREWORD

There are many who have contributed much. In the sense that Stylus has become a labor of love, I feel much the same toward those who have been responsible as I do toward those who have befriended, favored, blessed my children. They have confirmed what I know in my heart to be true — Midlands Technical College is a place where aspirations are realized.

Thank you —

Dr. James L. Hudgins, for the vision and leadership (President, M.T.C.)

Dr. Reid A. Holland, for the initial support, the trust, and the energy (V.P. Educational Affairs, M.T.C.)

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My association with Helen Kingkade and Jeff Hopkins, Judges and members of the Editorial Board, has been a delight. They care, and it's obvious.

This journal would not have been possible without the support and services of Alan Clayton and the Graphics Department, Tim Floyd and Bruce Clifton in Marketing, Bill Sanders and the staff in Production Services. My appreciation is heartfelt.

A special thanks to Bonnie Liverance in her role as typesetter extraordinaire.

If a dedication is in order — and the annual honors the contributors — then I must cite my colleagues in the English Department. It could not have been possible if their students hadn't mattered so. Maurice Duperre gave a great deal extra.

Finally it has been fun. Stylus is in the nature of a celebration. The pleasure has been all mine.

Leslie Turner, Editor



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Meredith

ONE BLACK MAN

I am one Black man
Who lets his skin
Play its role —
But doesn't let it
Deceive me.

I am one Black man
Who can achieve.
This I believe with
Every fiber of my
Being.

I am one Black man
Who remembers
The dream —
The plans —
The heartbreaks —
The past.

I am one Black man
Who knows my
Origins —
Where I'm going —
And how to get there.

I am one Black man
Who thinks no less
of himself
Than you.

I am one Black man
And because of that
I have to be
Strong
For the destiny I choose
is
my own.

Larry A. Gallman

PERCEPTION

This woman has the bee's eye, that sees
the ultraviolet landing strip to nectar,
never the petal's dusty silk.

This woman has the bat's ear.
She hears only her own squeak,
bouncing off barriers, only the edge of flight.

But this woman has the turtle's heart
that holds her homeward to the wave lost island
through all the drifts of sea.

N. M. Posselt

THE FLATROCKS

They slept too close to the campfire," my mother said to my dad as he walked though the kitchen. He was on his way out the door to work at the A&P where he had been employed since he was fifteen years old, taking time off only to fight in World War II. He looked back at the nine of us, who had just devoured an entire bottle of Alka-Seltzers and an untold number of A&P brand aspirins, shook his head slowly, rolled his eyes toward the heavens and walked out. "They all smell of smoke and are sick to their stomachs," she hollered as she waved goodbye through the kitchen door. The man in the white shirt with the black bow tie was still nodding his head, in feigned agreement with mom's diagnosis, as he slid behind the wheel of our new 1960 Chevy Bel-Air station wagon. I swear he had a kind of fiendish grin on his face. It was as though he was saying, "Sure — right — O.K."

"You're right, mom." I said as I looked around the kitchen table at my eight classmates. All of them looked as though they were disaster victims. Eyes, which twenty-four hours earlier had been sparkling, wide open and focused, were dull and lifeless. The sunlight coming through the windows seemed as blinding as the interrogator's single lamp suspended from the ceiling of a dark room.

"We must have gotten smoke poisoning," I said. I looked from one uncombed head to another. My confederates gave slow, painful and deliberate nods affirming my explanation. It was the same kitchen table where mom and her thirteen brothers and sisters had gathered in her childhood. It was the same kitchen table at which she fed her own five sons (I was the

middle child). She proceeded to scramble dozens of eggs, sear two pounds of bacon, and toast a loaf and a half of A&P bread, using the broiler in the oven instead of the four slice toaster. Everything she placed on the table vanished momentarily.

Our annual pilgrimage to the flatrocks was then a three year old tradition. Since we had turned twelve and were in the seventh grade, we had packed up on the last day of school and taken the two and a half mile hike up Bald Mountain to one of the most peaceful places on Earth. There we would set up camp on a football field size slab of pure marble which had been planed perfectly flat by glacial ice millions of years ago. It could be seen from my front porch. There, about two thirds of the way up the mountain, was a patch where no trees grew.

All of our previous trips had been fun. We always carried enough food for three days but consumed two days worth within the first twelve hours. We never carried water because the spring fed brook which meandered around the flatrocks was so clear you could see the veins of the leaves which had settled to the bottom, three feet below the surface, and was so cold that it was genuinely painful to experience. We carried several copies of *Playboy* magazine, stolen from older brothers or unmarried uncles, and cigarettes of various brands which had been snatched and stored for several weeks in preparation for our trek to the flatrocks. We toted blankets and flashlights, and some of the rich kids had store bought sleeping bags. You could always tell the "only" kid in a family because of his unpatched clothes or in some cases his hiking boots. The majority of us wore

canvas, high top Converse All Stars. We had squirreled away books and books of matches. We would use them not only to light our illicit cigarettes, but also to start our campfire. All but one of us were native Vermonters, Green Mountain boys; but none of us had ever mastered the art of rubbing two sticks together Indian style.

Some aspects of our trips had changed as we had become older. When we were fourteen, we were deemed mature enough to take our guns with us; and most of us did. That year we planned to take less food. We would "live off the land" for three days. It seemed simple enough. Most of us were experienced hunters. Most of us knew how to skin, clean, and cook game over an open fire. We had done it for years with older brothers, dads, and uncles.

Danny was new to our group, and he was a non-native. Previously, he had survived for fourteen years in the wilds of the Bronx, N.Y. He seemed much wiser than I in many ways, yet he never challenged my authority as the informal group leader. He would, however, add a new dimension to my life.

The clanking sound in his duffel bag was obviously that of glasses bumping together with each step he took coming up the mountain. I had told him not to bother bringing water. What could he be carrying? Why was he so secretive about what he had brought to the party? Later that morning two mysteries were to be solved when Danny unpacked. It became obvious what his clandestine behavior had been all about. We remembered the headlines in that week's edition of the Banner, "Mt. Anthony Country Club Burglarized, 15 Bottles of Scotch Stolen." What could possibly be better than drinking Johnny Walker mixed with pure spring water from telescoping, metal, Boy Scout cups while dining on fresh barbecued squirrel cooked over an open

fire? There could be nothing better I thought. Absolutely nothing!

However, it seemed gray squirrels were in short supply that year. I determined that my troopers would have to dine on chipmunks. After all, they were squirrels too, only smaller. I can still see them as they disappeared from the tops of tree stumps or rolled off of rotting logs as soon as I squeezed the trigger of my 22 caliber, bolt action, single shot rifle. The impact of a 22 hollow-point was devastating to these diminutive rodents. There was remarkably little blood on the ground, though, where the curled bodies came to rest. I suspect that the bullets simply demolished the entire heart muscle. I killed ten, Jimmy killed eleven, Mike killed six (but also got a cotton tail), and Ernie the Apache killed ten. We had plenty of meat for the evening meal, and the Apache had even brought a large can of A&P brand beans. His father worked as manager of non-perishable goods.

I had named Ernie the "Apache" based on an incident at these same flatrocks on our first trip. As a joke, he had thrown his hatchet at a robin perched on a limb some thirty feet from where he was. The hand axe providentially beheaded the robin and buried itself in the white birch tree. It was an amazing feat. The axe handle quivered. A small trickle of crimson seeped like sap from the wound in the bark. On the left side of the tree trunk lay the still, severed head, suitable for taxidermy, and on the right flopped the totally undamaged body, suitable for eating. Ernie said he did it on purpose but was never able to repeat the triumph.

We ate chipmunks, rabbit, and beans and washed it all down with water from the brook. Much time passed and the shadows lengthened. Shapes, which clearly had been trees an hour earlier, appeared as ominous beings with gnarled arms that groped threateningly for me.

There was still snow at the top of the mountain a mile away. We had gathered plenty of wood. We had plenty of matches and plenty of Scotch. Surely we would be warm sleeping in the open air on the feltless billiard table on the side of Bald Mountain.

I took my first slug. Danny said, "You've got to acquire a taste for it." I didn't have to. It tasted pretty good. It burned a little going down and made my eyes water a little bit. Then it had a numbing effect. It wasn't the same pain I felt when I put my hand in the brook, but more of a hot numbness.

I slept very little that night. I stayed up to tend the campfire and rifle through my favorite issue of Playboy. I gazed at the pictures which seemed even more sensuous in the flickering firelight. I snuck closer to the flames in order to better illuminate the glossy pages. I smoked a non-filtered Chesterfield, which Ricky had pinched from his chain-smoking mother's purse.

As it grew increasingly darker, we became aware of another light source. A glow seemed to seep through the trees. It highlighted the path which led from the flatrocks to a small log cabin which had been built years earlier by campers who were either not as hardy as we were or who had planned to stay a lot longer than three days. It had been abandoned but had recently been claimed by my brother Steve and his classmate Ray. I was under strict orders to stay away from the cabin. They had made some improvements, and it was really quite nice. I had asked our group not to go to the cabin. But it had gotten cold, and a few of the less stout of heart had decided to take advantage of the more comfortable accommodations. They had drifted over there and started their own campfire. I could hear them talking and singing. I could see their campfire through the trees. I guess they wanted to look at their Playboys, too.

I was starting to feel a little funny. I wasn't really dizzy, but I was having trouble focusing on the printed pages. I spat a mouthful of straight Scotch at the fire. It seemed to explode when it burst into flames, the way fuel did when I poured it on glowing charcoal briquettes. My stomach was feeling a bit uneasy. Had we not fully cooked the chipmunks? I could have sworn they were still alive in my stomach and were running on an exercise wheel like so many caged hamsters. The fire at the satellite site seemed to be getting brighter. The chipmunks had already made their escape from my cousin Jimmy, and he was trying to sleep. He moaned when his stomach cramped. Bill was wondering why there were two moons and seemed terribly amused by it all. Remi was telling Ricky something about what Mary and Miss April had in common, based on his "first hand" experience. Danny was among the several fellows missing.

The campfire at the cabin was burning ever more brightly, lighting up the flatrocks site. I was duty bound as the group leader to investigate this phenomenon. I also had to check on the missing in the interest of safety. I stumbled the four hundred yards in what seemed like hours. I was followed down the footpath by the remnants of the militia who were still physically capable of navigating in the woods at night by flashlight and the glow which seemed to have spread through the forest for hundreds of yards in all directions. It was daylight at 3 a.m. (I was not to see a comparable sight until I traveled to another part of the world and saw the flares descending on little silk parachutes swaying and hissing until they disappeared into the jungle).

I couldn't believe it. There was a perfectly square campfire. It had almost the exact dimensions of brother Steve's cabin. The flames were several feet higher than the walls of the

cabin would have been. It was actually an impressive display. There were small, glowing embers floating high above what had been the building, like so many fireflies. They suddenly would go dark and be lost against the black sky like exhausted fireworks on the Fourth of July. There was little smoke. I guess the wood of the cabin had dried sufficiently over the years to burn quickly and cleanly. The heat was intense. I could feel it reflected on my face; and my blue jeans were so hot that each movement of my hips made me feel as though I was leaning against the pot bellied stove I could see sitting in the midst of the inferno. The smooth, round rocks which formed the foundation exploded with the sound of the gunshots heard earlier that day.

There was nothing to do. The brook was too far away to fetch water to fight the blaze. All we could do was try to make sure the flames were confined to the clearing where my brother's former cabin had stood. It was at this point that the chipmunks I had eaten broke for freedom. I can remember that Danny was laughing and still filling his mouth with Scotch and spraying it into the flames to see them roar momentarily before subsiding.

I decided that come daylight we would survey the damages and cut our trip short by two days. I heard no objections. We were all

suffering by then. Each of us had been afflicted. It was just like the deep-sea fishing trip of the previous summer (my brother Tommy got sick and began chumming the Atlantic near Salisbury Beach. Brother Steve saw Tommy, and he started chumming also. I saw Steve, Kenny saw me, and Bryan saw Kenny. Mom saw us all. Dad must have had blinders on). On this particular night, I took special pleasure in observing Danny grasping his abdomen and retching.

I couldn't wait to reach the foot of the mountain. My steps going down hill had to be taken gingerly, though, so as to preclude further humiliation. My head was pounding. I could taste smoke, bile, and Johnny Walker Scotch. My hair and clothes smelled of smoke. I could even taste it in the film which had built up on my teeth and tongue. I was thirsty in spite of the copious amounts of spring water consumed after my last emetic episode. I wanted to take a bath and brush my teeth, throw away my clothes, get something to eat and kill Danny. When I reached my front porch, I did an about face and breathed a sigh of relief — there was no smoke billowing from the flatrocks. We were all sick and tired. We all knew the reason. We had all slept too close to the campfire.

Dennis Stemp

SPANISH GIRL / ETERNAL SUMMER

Cool lingo
Spanish girls

She leaves the scene
quietly

Unnoticed, she goes to the
deserted alley
behind the store
to be alone

Cool and shaded.

She dances barefoot
on the sand
to distant, whispered music
beneath the vast, blue sky
in her white summer dress
and blood-red sash.
Her long black braids
thrown over
her right shoulder,
pirouetting softly —

She dances out of the shadows
and smiles up at the sun

Warm mother of the eternal
summer universe.

As she dances,
she licks her lips
and daydreams
of kisses . . .

Shannon Jack Silman

MEN VS. CEREAL

Is there a clear winner when men are compared to cereal? Which "commodity" is most admirable? That is the question.

For one thing, I believe I can carry on a more intelligent conversation with my box of Fruit Loops. Men just don't have the intellectual capabilities that women of today desire.

Cereal is much sweeter than a man. How many men do you know who are sugar sweet and fortified with eight essential vitamins? I think men are more like Nutrasweet than sugar (it's all artificial).

Men don't provide coupons for freebies. No matter how much of a discount you deserve on them, they seldom assess their market value

realistically.

My cereal always has a surprise waiting for me in the morning. I love my "snap, crackle and pop" bike reflectors and my "Tony the Tiger" word decoder. I'm lucky if I can get a burger out of a man. Men are never full of surprises.

Well, I guess the truth is self evident. In the battle of Men vs. Cereal, the cereal wins! Cereal has more intelligence than the average man. Cereal has coupons and free gifts and a sweeter taste. What could be better than cereal?

Ginger Stephens



TRANSCENDENCE A DEPARTURE WITH DIGNITY

"And Job died old and satisfied with days" Job 42:1

Good morning. Give your report and hurry back. I have something to discuss with you." There seemed to be an urgency in her voice. My patient was 82 year old Lilla Kendall, proud, and dignified. She was sitting on the side of the bed dangling her legs and feet. Her white hair gleamed ephemerally in the darkened room, a proper frame for her azure eyes. She gently adjusted the oxygen tubing with her wrinkled hands. Mrs. Kendall was terminally ill. The diagnosis was a bilateral carcinoma of the lungs, and her physician had recently informed her that the oxygen was her only link to life.

When the night nurse finished her report, I returned to Lilla's room wondering what she had in store for me. As if on cue and without speaking, we joined hands. She locked her piercing blue eyes on mine. "Will I ever go home?" she asked. Without blinking I replied, "No." She was not one to be deceived. Her facial expression never changed; and then after a moment, she said, "Thank you. Thank you so much for being honest. Now there are things I must do while I have the strength." It was apparent she had given her plan considerable thought as she outlined what she wanted done to settle her affairs. "I want to settle my estate completely, or as much as I can, and you must help me. Then I will remove this oxygen and hopefully die in peace, comfort, and with dignity. I want your promise that you will stay with me until the end of my life comes. Will you do this?" What could I say? Mrs. Kendall had come to terms with the unavoidable future. She had a right to be listened to and cared for with understanding. I promised to do all in my power to carry out her wishes.

You may wish to know how I came to that point in my life. The year was 1966. I was then the mother of four young children, and private duty nursing worked well with my busy family. I could work when I wanted to and be home with a flexible schedule. Mrs. Kendall lived in my neighborhood, a stately and scrupulous woman, a widow with no children. She operated a boarding home for well-to-do, elderly women. Her business was a prototype of things to come. The ladies in her care dressed in street wear and ate at a table elegantly set with china and crystal. There was a grand piano in the parlor; and being an accomplished pianist, Mrs. Kendall often entertained her charges. She arranged other activities for them according to their tastes. There was a screened veranda across the front of her home, that extended around one side of the house, which provided an area for afternoon tea for her ladies and their families.

Mrs. Kendall was not a nurse; and in her younger days, she was employed by the Washington Post as a reporter. She covered White House events and local social galas in Washington D.C. She was an avid feminist, keen on bringing about change for women in the social hierarchy of that era. Remaining single until middle age, Mrs. Kendall married a retired medical physician twenty years her senior. As her husband became older and his health began to fail, they returned to Columbia, S.C., her birthplace, to live. As Dr. Kendall's health deteriorated and he required more care, the idea was born to open a boarding home for older ladies in the community as a source of income.

Prior to Mrs. Kendall's final hospitalization, my involvement began with a phone call early one morning about 8:30 a.m. "Mrs. Norris, my front door is unlocked; will you come to my house? I am very ill and unable to get out of bed. I returned late last night from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. The taxi driver helped me to my bed, and I asked him to leave the door unlocked in case I had to call an ambulance during the night." Encouraging her not to get out of bed alone, I quickly walked the block to her home. Entering the front door, I found her in bed, pale, dehydrated, diaphoretic, and dyspneic. Instantly I knew she needed more care than I could provide in that setting.

Convincing Mrs. Kendall to leave her home was not an easy task. After persuading her that she needed oxygen, she allowed her local physician to be notified. Then the transfer from home to the hospital was made. Arrangements were made for nurses to attend her around the clock. Intravenous fluids, oxygen and the administration of pain medication greatly improved Mrs. Kendall's condition, remarkably within 24 hours. Then on the fourth day, her condition began to deteriorate again — thus her inquiry as to whether she would return home.

Together Mrs. Kendall and I wrote a list of things she wanted done. Her lawyer was notified; he came and wrote a codicil to her will. Her trusted CPA was given power of attorney, since her only family members were two nieces in Florida whom she had not seen in decades. Her wish was that all the contents of her home were to be sold at auction at once. While the CPA was arranging this, I made a list of the people she wanted to see — nieces, friends, and neighbors. Her remaining family had never shared a close relationship with their aunt and were indeed surprised when she requested to see them, but agreed to come.

After the visit with the nieces, Mrs. Kendall stated with tears in her eyes how much she wished they had been closer over the years; but she was grateful for their visit at that time of her life. The nieces promised to return if time permitted, but unfortunately this was not to be. Then arrangements were made for her friends and neighbors to come and say final goodbyes. Some visits frequently lasted longer than the original 10 to 15 minutes scheduled, as old conflicts and ill feelings were put to rest. It was a time for tears, reminiscence, expressions of regret and forgiveness. Mrs. Kendall resisted religious 'trappings' as she expressed it, and she sought no comfort from the clergy except the Catholic Sisters in the hospital. She did not appear to experience any spiritual pain.

Within ten days the contents of Mrs. Kendall's home were auctioned off with the exception of those personal items she gave to her friends and family. Finally all the persons she wished to see had come and gone, and she seemed satisfied about the settling of her affairs. Maintaining control over decisions effecting the end of her life, she signed a legal consent, drawn up by her attorney, giving her physician permission to remove the oxygen and discontinue intravenous fluids. Relief of pain was paramount, and included in the document was a request for a narcotic analgesic to be given as needed until she ceased to breathe. The fateful day arrived, and she required from me again my promise to remain with her until the end came. How could I not honor this promise? I was committed and dedicated. My heart was filled with compassion for her; she was so alone. The nurses were her surrogate family — a privileged role. How we all admired her logic, bravery, and courage.

All was done as she requested; and during the anguish of dying, she was comforted by her nurses' voices and gentle touch. We held her

hand, bathed her body and spoke to her with the hope that she could still hear and understand our commitment as she sank deeper and deeper into unconsciousness. Within 72 hours, Mrs. Kendall died. Her body was cremated according to her request, and her ashes were buried beside her husband. Several days after her funeral, Mrs. Kendall's attorney stopped by my house with a beautiful pair of crystal compotes as a gift from her. How her gift touched my heart. However,

she had given me a greater gift — an opportunity to serve in a life enhancing role instead of a life saving role. From this experience evolved my philosophy regarding death of the aged: *Death, the finale of life, can be a final growth experience.*

Evelyn H. Norris, R.N.C.

I CAN ENDURE WITH GOD'S LOVE

If I can endure for this minute
 whatever is happening to me,
 no matter how heavy my heart is
 or how dark the moment may be,
 If I can but keep on believing
 what I know in my heart to be true,
 that darkness will fade with the morning
 and that this will pass away, too
 Then nothing in life can defeat me,
 for as long as this knowledge remains,
 I can suffer whatever is happening,
 For faith will unlock all chains
 that are binding me tight in the darkness
 and trying to fill me with fear.
 For there is no night without God's love
 and I know that my morning is near.

David L Wiseman, Sr.

THE HOPELESS CAGE

Coming up in the decade of the sixties involved a unique challenge in respect to peer pressure. This was the decade of peace, love — and drugs. We remember it as the era of the flower child. For me, however, it was the time that the door to a terrible cage was opened; I entered a world that almost destroyed me.

In the poem “The Panther,” Rilke writes about a caged panther; he also suggests a mighty truth about human beings. For me the cage of drugs was indescribably attractive at first. Then I became hopelessly enslaved.

In the beginning, I was drawn into the drug cage by an attraction I could not resist. I would see other guys do drugs, and curiosity grew. The looks on their faces made me think they were soaring above the clouds. They seemed fulfilled. I would question them about how they felt. They would say, “It’s a feeling that cannot be explained. You will have to try it for yourself.” Because of the deep desire I had to be accepted by my peers, I took the first and almost lethal step into the drug cage. Once inside, I had to become a part of that culture. I began to talk as they talked and walk as they walked. At one point I even felt as if I belonged, until I realized that the cage which had been so seductive had enslaved me.

I became dependent on the drug that had once given me so much pleasure. I would wake

up in the morning with my stomach in so many knots, it seemed like a twisted ball of kite string that I didn’t know how to untangle. I became totally self-centered. I expected every person I came in contact with to devote his or her life to satisfying me. I can remember when I convinced my mother to give me the money she had saved for shoes, just so I could buy some heroin. I was always focused on pleasing only myself. I didn’t consider the pain and worry I put my parents through. My mother would jump every time the telephone rang wondering if she was being called by the police to come to the morgue to identify my body.

Once I had become enslaved in the cage, there was very little room for hope. Every now and then I thought I could see the shadow of hope beyond my drug master. I could almost taste the possibility of victory over the dark ruler. There was the promise of a normal life with my eight year old daughter and my beautiful wife of seven years. My heart craved it. And a voice deep inside me cried out, “We can do it!” But the cage door slammed shut, and the thought of hope was lost.

Rilke wrote about “The Panther.” But in my heart his poem is a metaphor for my past life. I couldn’t resist the open cage door. I was drawn in and enslaved and left with little hope.

Willie B. Jones

ELEGY FOR THE EARTH

I have seen the slaughter of gray giants,
for the price of a mere trinket.

I have smelled holes in the air that I breathe, for the vanity of
scented mists.

I have felt the pulp of solid life, for the
script of the fools at hand.

I have tasted decay in the liquid of home, for the movement of
mindless slaves.

I have heard the cries of homeless hearts, for their
homemade beast takes its maker.

Charles T. Goodson, Jr.

I ADORE

I have to adore the Earth.
The wind must have heard your whispered
voice just once —
Its song and echo are yours.

The soil must have tasted you once —
It is loaded with your scent.
The trees honor you in gold and blush
Whenever you pass by.

I know why the North Country is
Always frozen.
It has been trying to preserve
Precious memories of you
For a very long time . . .

I know why the desert burns with
Hot fever.
It has wept too long without you.
On hands and knees the ocean begs
Up the beach and falls at
Your feet . . .

I have to adore
The mirror that is the Earth —
Because you have taught her so well
How to be beautiful.

Nathaniel Davis, Jr.

A YEAR FOR A DAY

16 years and I haven't got time
For an oyster of world
I crush,
And take that which is mine.

17 years and I haven't got time
To wait for the sun
That only shines
When the nights are aglow.

18 years and I haven't got time
For family thoughts,
Just the Posse
and my ice-black lady
Keeping my worries less than a concern.

100 years and I haven't got time
Only to dream and to ponder
A memory so bold,
A boy for a man,
A year for a day.

Phillip Reed

WHY I PET MY DOG

When I was ten years old my parents and I moved from Laurinburg, North Carolina to Jesup, Georgia. The people my parents were to go to work for in Laurinburg were ex "carnies." They had traveled with the fairs and carnivals for years, but at that time operated a gift shop called "The House of Gifts."

Bob and Esther McCaskill ran this thriving business. Esther was an extremely thin woman with short black, graying hair and brown leathery, deeply lined skin. Her voice was a raspy, throaty, chain-saw sound that could cut into a ten year old's reverie and make daydreams evaporate. She had a *big mouth* in every sense of the term. Her vocabulary abounded with expletives; and she constantly wondered, "What will those goddamned tourists buy?" Esther owned a set of dentures, but usually she never bothered to wear the bottom plate. Her mouth, at rest, gave the impression that she was consuming her lower lip. She owned a bizarre collection of floral print dresses. Over the dresses she wore a contrasting floral print apron with gigantic pockets. Esther's three great loves were her Eskimo Spitz dog, whiskey, and unfiltered Camel cigarettes, not necessarily in that order.

Esther's husband, Bob, was a congenial, chubby guy. Bob always looked happy and extremely relaxed. This "laid-backness" might have been the result of whiskey or cannabis; but whatever the cause, Bob appeared to be a truly happy fellow. Apparently Bob's primary reason for being on this Earth was to do Esther's bidding. He bathed the dog, worked at the gift shop, shopped for groceries, cooked, and cleaned

house with an ever present, cheerful smile.

Esther and Bob always had a motley group of people working at the gift shop or renting some of the cabins that they owned. When any of their friends who were down on their luck showed up, Esther and Bob always gave them a job and a place to stay.

For some reason, Esther and Bob became my benefactors (mostly Bob) and instructors (a role Esther assumed with fervor). Although Bob gave me toys, candy, Coca-Colas, and an open invitation to punch him in the gut — as hard as I could, Esther's admonitions had a long lasting effect on me. She nagged me steadily about my grammar. I must not use the contraction "ain't." One did not say "me and her." I was not used to being corrected, and this annoyed me. It was easier just to go along with Esther, though. My grammar improved.

I was allowed to use the phone in the gift shop to call my friends. The phone was by a large display of stuffed animals; and I would sink down in the middle of those monkeys, lions, and bears to carry on my important conversations. Once, unfortunately, I was lax and did not clean my shoes properly. There was sand in the display bin, and it was my doing. Esther suspended my phone privileges. My parents had never punished me in this way, and I was by turns angry and troubled. After a couple of weeks I was allowed to use the phone again, but not from the bin of animals. Also, my calls were limited. It dawned on me that respecting property might pay off in the long run.

One day I helped Esther move some merchandise from a storage room to the gift shop. My dog, Brownie, was sitting in the path between the buildings. I wanted to hurry and finish my job. Esther noticed I was paying no attention to my dog. She then insisted that every time I passed Brownie on the return trip to the storage room, I must stoop down and pat him on the head. Although this irritated me at the time, it has since often reminded me to take time out from whatever I am doing and pay some attention to my family, my friends, and my DOG.

Esther and Bob were compassionate, caring people. They made time in their lives for other people. They never tried to impress anyone. Perhaps those were the qualities that made them so unique, rather than the fact that their appearance was a little strange and they did not always act according to custom.

Frances Brassell

ASSURANCE

I believe in the sun
 Even if it does not shine.
 I believe in love
 Even though I can not find it.
 I believe in God
 Even though I can not see Him.

Armanda K. Meens



LOVE IS . . .

My thundering heart against yours,

Trusting — but afraid . . .

Knowing all, heeding nothing.

A hazy sea of emotion

Lapping against my breast,

Trickling down my spine —

Urgently, but patiently

I surrender.

Bonnie G. Liverance

THE MONSTER IN THE POND

Growing up in a small town there was never anything to do, and a group of ten year olds was always looking for new adventures. I lived in a housing development. In this development, there was a basketball court and a small park with some things for the younger kids to play with. We often spent our days playing basketball or some other pickup sport. When we became bored, we would often find ourselves in some sort of trouble, especially in the summertime since there was no school to keep us busy. But soon we discovered that nature offered many interesting possibilities that could occupy a young boy's time. We found out that nature was more fun than getting into trouble.

Two blocks away from our development, there was a city park that had a small pond in the center of it. The pond was the terminus of a long tapering stream that ran behind the Louis Rich turkey plant. We had always heard rumors of the plant dumping its waste into the stream, so we were afraid to swim there. Although those accusations were probably just rumors, the pond was rather nasty. It always had this slimy green fungus floating on it. Often the slime would accumulate in large pockets around the edge of the pond. There was an ever present smell of dead fish.

I had two friends who were brothers, Dave and Dip. We were in the park one day at the lower end. There was a drain there, and at the bottom of a twelve foot drop the water was only around two feet deep. It was here that Dave saw the huge monster.

It was a gigantic turtle, one larger than we had

ever seen. All we could see were the contours. We threw rocks at the turtle trying to force it around to an area where the Sun would highlight it in the water. We became obsessed with finding some method of catching this monstrous turtle. Remembering that my uncle was a fisherman, we rushed back to my house to borrow some fishing line and a hook. After hearing why we wanted the line, my uncle refused, saying that there was no way we could catch the turtle. He also said that one of us would probably end up with a hook stuck in our head. Mad and determined, we left my house with one thing in mind — the turtle.

The next day we helped ourselves to an unsuspecting neighbor's clothesline. We pooled our resources and bought a package of fishhooks, and we sneaked a piece of fatback from my family's refrigerator. We went to the park that day planning to bring home that monster we had described to everyone. When we got to the park, the turtle was sunning in plain view. After seeing us, he slowly vanished into a shadowy corner. We threw rocks at the turtle the same way we did the day before trying to force it to expose itself.

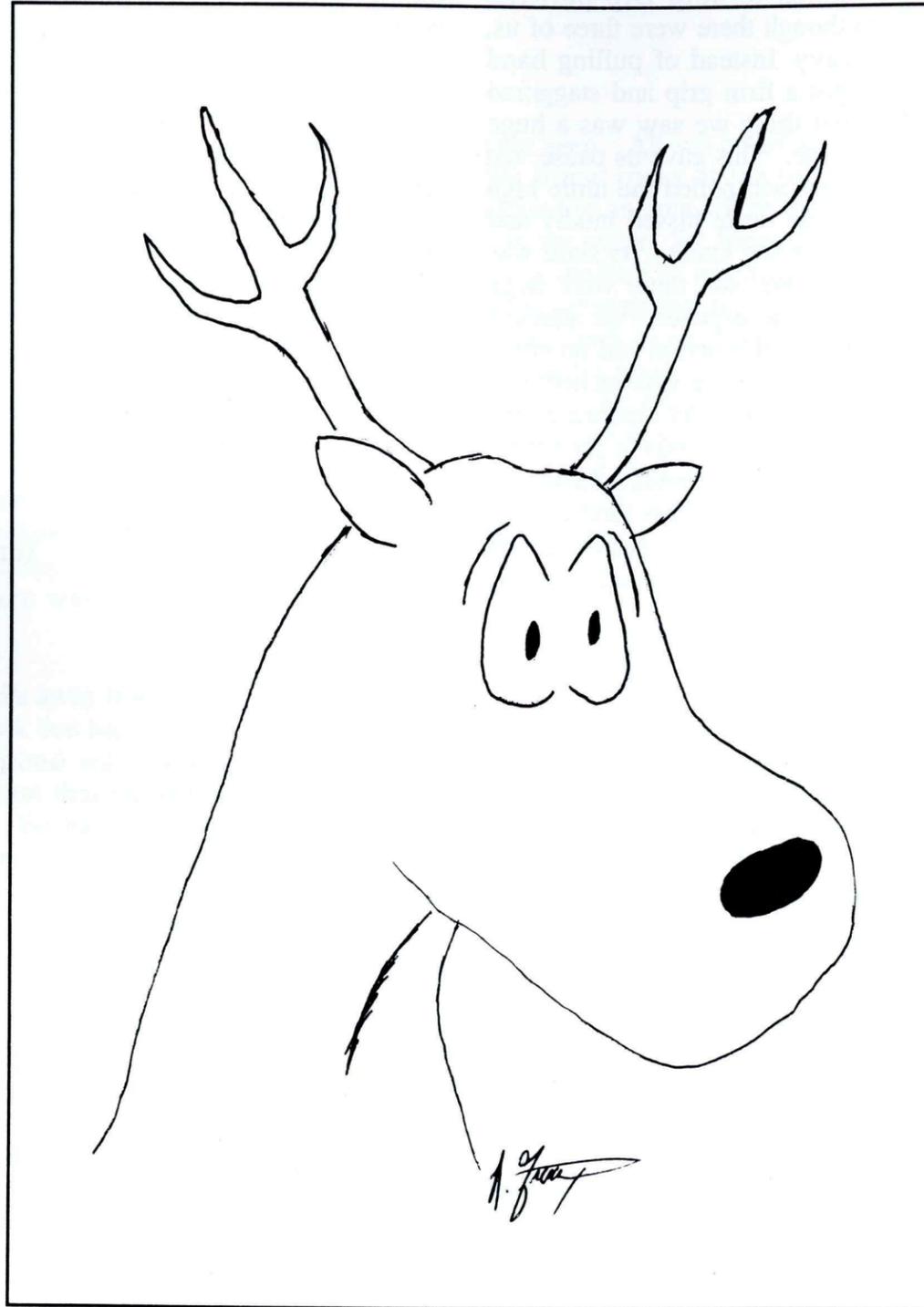
Inside the plastic coated clothes line, there was a braid of about twelve wires. We put a hook on each wire and sank them all into a piece of fatback. We then lowered the bait over the edge directly in front of the creature's face. This made him draw his head into his shell. So we quickly devised a new plan of attack. We made a miniature lasso on the other end of the line and took turns holding it in place at the front of the turtle's shell. We were waiting for the head to emerge. Dip was on duty when the head finally snaked out, and sure enough the creature was caught. The line drew tight around its neck.

Dave and I rushed to help Dip pull the monster up. Even though there were three of us, it was still very heavy. Instead of pulling hand over hand, we all got a firm grip and staggered backwards. The first thing we saw was a huge claw flail over the edge. This gave us pause, but we renewed our efforts and pulled the turtle high and dry. Once out, the turtle hissed loudly and snapped at every move we made. Its shell was covered with green algae, and there were large leeches where the skin was exposed. We attacked the turtle with sticks, but this action had no effect on him. After a while, we were approached by a white gentleman. The man was amazed at the size of the turtle and wanted to buy it for fifteen dollars, but we refused. Our adventure demanded greater compensation. The guy was kind enough to give us a lift home anyway. Dip and Dave kept the turtle at their house until their father came

home. Once he arrived, he killed, cleaned, and cooked the turtle.

For the next week or so, we went back to the park every day in hopes of catching another monster, but to no avail. We never forgot this adventure. When we found ourselves bored, we would often visit the "water park" as we called it. We spent hours catching cray fish, tadpoles, or whatever else we might come across. In the back of our minds we always hoped that another monster lurked just below the fetid green surface. One thing is for sure; we had discovered a unique outlet for the energy that usually gets a ten year old into trouble.

Tony Cooper



THE BLACK KNIGHT

The black knight finishes his bacon and eggs and rides out to stalk and kill the enemy.

Green dungarees are the only armour he needs. He is confidently aware of all the tactics the enemy uses. **NO PRISONERS!**

Up into a tree the black knight climbs. He finds a well rounded limb to cushion his plump thighs.

By and by, the enemy comes daintily sauntering along. His rich summer tan has faded to a fall gray. There is exquisite grace in every movement. He stops right in front of the tree and stands majestically frozen. His luminous black eyes stare into the woods as if he's straining to hear some distant call. The black knight can almost feel the enemy breathing as it tests the vagaries of the breeze wafting through the whispering pines and lofty hardwoods.

With snail like movements, the black knight prepares his weapon. He carefully aims at the heart, the prime target. He knows that a bullet in the head would only leave an ugly, gaping wound and cause the enemy's head to be useless. Perhaps even the precious rack — the true measure of the knight's worth — would be unsalvageable.

As he squeezes the trigger, his mind races with excitement. Once the creature is decapitated, the head will be proudly displayed next to the great master of the air, who now remains in perpetual flight.

Squeeze . . . squeeze . . . slowly . . . **BANG!**

There is a moment of consternation. The black knight roars with impotence. He looks down; the enemy has vanished. He checks his weapon; it never fired. A distant knight has fought a courageous battle and won.

The black knight curses his hesitation and mutters a blood oath for next time. Down the tree he shimmies and heads off home for some pizza, beer, and, of course, the old war stories.

Lesley King



CHURCH

Church is off-white
 It sounds like one of your father's lectures
 It tastes like plain white bread
 and smells of liniment
 Church looks like an MGM production
 and makes you feel undeserving.

Lesley King

PASSION

Passion is fiery Red
 It sounds like rustling sheets
 It tastes of salty tears
 and smells like a light sweat
 Passion looks like naked shoulders
 and makes you feel hungry

Lesley King

LOVE IS:

Being honest enough with yourself
 To know when to lie for your own good.

Lesley King



A mother is . . .

An unlocked door. She is there
and she knows.
My tears are hers, and my dreams
are her desire for me.
Always my conscience, she keeps her silence.
She has lived where I have yet to go —
If I fall, she will help me get up and try again.

She is home, she is truth —
she knows I am an adult . . . yet a child
And holds it not against me.
She encourages me to be different — and she
believes in me and respects me — amazing woman.
She allows me to go home again and again
The distance doesn't matter.

We have travelled far together.

My father

Oak against the storm
A reassuring voice, twinkling blue eyes,
the balding head nodding,
questioning,
righteous.

His dignified bearing unnerved me, but
his hand in mine — the unspoken love
he could never express . . .

In memory of Alexander Robert MacGregor

Bonnie G. Liverance

SHINY RED APPLES IN A SILVER BOWL

I'll always remember smells of cinnamon, fresh-baked apple pies, visions of pink applesauce strained to a smooth, consistent texture, baskets of polished red apples decked with checked gingham bows — gifts to the neighbors and newcomers to our town. Momma's trademark, symbol of her place in the community.

Our apples were not just any apples. My mother's "treasures" were organic, pure, having been grown on the very trees Grandma's Papa planted. They were a variety that embodied family pride. They were a tradition — a little tart, yet the best for cooking and canning, and other such practical purposes. This unblemished fruit reflected the identity of the family. There was virtually no spotting or imperfections. Prosperity and abundance were reflected. Those years that had been lean for the family were said to have coincided with lean harvests. The orchard and the family endured, however, even in the sparsest of times. These ancient fruit-bearing apple trees, marked family milestones.

The year Papa died, the blossoms were skimpy and not their usual brilliant pink. The blooms reflected the coffin-mask white of his complexion, and the drooping branches mirrored the family's state of mourning. No one could recall a larger bumper crop than the year the twins were born to Sister and Uncle Earle. Nature has her way of providing for new mouths to feed.

Momma was known county-wide for her mile-high crusts on apple pies and sugar-coated, deep fat fried turnovers. All her baked goods

had won accolades and blue ribbons at the state fair. There was also apple butter, the kind slow-cooked in a copper kettle over an open fire in the yard. The 'butter' was stirred constantly with a long-handled wooden paddle. Once it arrived at the peak of readiness, it was ladled into half-pint jars, sealed with paraffin or capped with rings and lids. Labels bearing the name of the creator (Mom) were affixed to each jar. Jars were then lined up on a clean linen towel for cooling and then checked to insure each jar had properly sealed before being carted to the cellar for storage.

The highlight of the canning season came when the jars of applesauce, canned apple pie filling, and apple butter were arranged on the shelves. They gleamed with the pride and dedication with which they had been prepared and were placed front and center. They were the envy of all privileged to view the rows of well-stocked shelves, with their burdens of picked beans and corn, pickled okra, julienne-stripped beets and onion rings, prickly pear-halves in thick syrup, and peach preserves the color of honey.

The jars of apples would be used sparingly for Sunday dinners prepared for the preacher and deacons invited home after church. Other occasions which brought out the best of Momma's efforts were the traditional church "dinner-on-the-ground" picnics, meals for mourning families during times of sickness and death, and holiday meals at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. These apples were special — not to be used for run-of-the-mill dining — they were saved for times when outsiders were invited to participate.

No one could duplicate Momma's apple butter spread on biscuits hot from the oven or apple pies topped with freshly-whipped cream. I had tried to learn her secret, seeing her combine some unknown ingredients along with lemon, cinnamon, and cream of tarter; yet I had failed to discover the jealously guarded formula. Momma was not about to share with anyone until her demise, keeping her carefully-guarded secrets locked away in her cedar chest along with other memorabilia and items of importance. She had long ago issued the edict these were not to be disturbed until she had departed this life. Only then would she relinquish control. She viewed the attempts of others to duplicate her efforts as puny. Yet she had neatly printed each recipe for posterity to enjoy.

Long before each canning season it was my assignment to core and peel apples for the batches of applesauce and butter. Peels were left on some of the apples, which also required coring and paring into quarters in making the pinkish variety of sauce. The skins produced a delicate pink blush that only Nature could impart. Momma wanted peels left on certain apples she sorted and placed in large dishpans. Seeds and peels were removed after cooking by careful straining through a sieve, all done under Momma's ever watchful eye.

On one memorable day I was enjoying filling the dishpan as directed. She had singled out quite a few apples to be left unpeeled, cored, and quartered. Having gathered my apples and favorite paring knife, I sat in the front yard under one of several shady limbs and began to prepare the apples for cooking.

Then it began — the words familiar — "You're peeling too deep, leaving too much of the flesh with the peel . . . you're wasting the best of the apple . . . we'll surely have to pick

more at this rate . . . be careful, now, not too close to the core . . ." Momma had a way of knowing without looking into the pan, sure I was out to wreck her canning project. Momma was never good at delegating work, preferring to do all independently. She was certain to dictate the outcome of any job. Years later, I reflect on the lost opportunities for communication and effective parenting that the inevitable mistakes represented. There was never room for error with Momma. She stubbornly resisted any way other than her old familiar one.

It was this contention that led to the break — the last year I lived at home and the last canning season I helped with the preparation of the apples. It was a familiar pattern, the ill timed remarks, implied incompetence on my part, and slurs on my character and abilities. Before I realized what was happening, I had flung pan, paring knife, and apples over the split-rail fence, down the side of the mountain. I had listened to the criticism and accusations for the last time.

Momma came at a trot from the woodpile where she had witnessed the scene out of the corner of her eye. She had been selecting kindling for the fire which would cook the apple butter. She rounded the corner just in time to witness the last of the apples rolling down the hillside. Shock, dismay, then finally disbelief registered on her features. It was worse than insubordination. It was heresy, treachery, and blasphemy reflected in one scowl.

Following the outburst it was a long time before I returned. As we gathered around the dinner table, I was thinking that it had been too long since I had visited Momma for a family gathering. But it was tradition to celebrate with the folks when each of us had a birthday. It was my special day. Momma busied herself in the kitchen, putting finishing touches on my cake — a five-layer concoction with Dutch chocolate

icing, my favorite. I was encouraged to open the gifts family members proffered. Having come to the last of the stack, I noticed one wrapped in sterling silver-embossed paper, tied with a bright red ribbon. Untying the ribbon and opening the box, I discovered sample-sized jars packed in paper shaving, containing carefully-labeled applesauce, apple butter, and apple pie filling seasoned with cinnamon, lemon, cream of tartar, and other sacred ingredients. In the bottom of the box was a neatly-printed card with "Recipes From the Kitchen of . . ." tied with a gingham-checked bow. No other gift from Momma, just the box of shiny apple products prepared with "love and understanding."

I retrieved my car keys from my purse silently. I started the engine and rolled down the driveway, careful not to speed, as I had been reminded not to "rut-out" the gravel driveway.

As I made my way home, I took the long way around the mountain. When I reached my favorite overlook, I pulled to the side, opened the car door and fought the urge to fling bright red ribbon, silver-embossed wrapping paper, and jars of home-canned apples down the mountainside. Instead, I re-arranged the box on the back-seat, so as to avoid any breakage, and continued on my way back down the mountain.

Standing in the supermarket check-out, I wonder why I continue to buy shiny red apples, the kind best for cooking, with their just-right tartness. I take them home and place them in a shiny, silver Revere bowl. I watch them wither and shrivel in the center of my dining table.

Ann Moorer

FALSE PRIDE

Pride is beet red.
It sounds like a pretentious laugh
and tastes like sour lemons sprinkled with salt.

Pride — of the false variety — smells
like imitation designer perfume.
It looks like an aging blond with darkening roots.

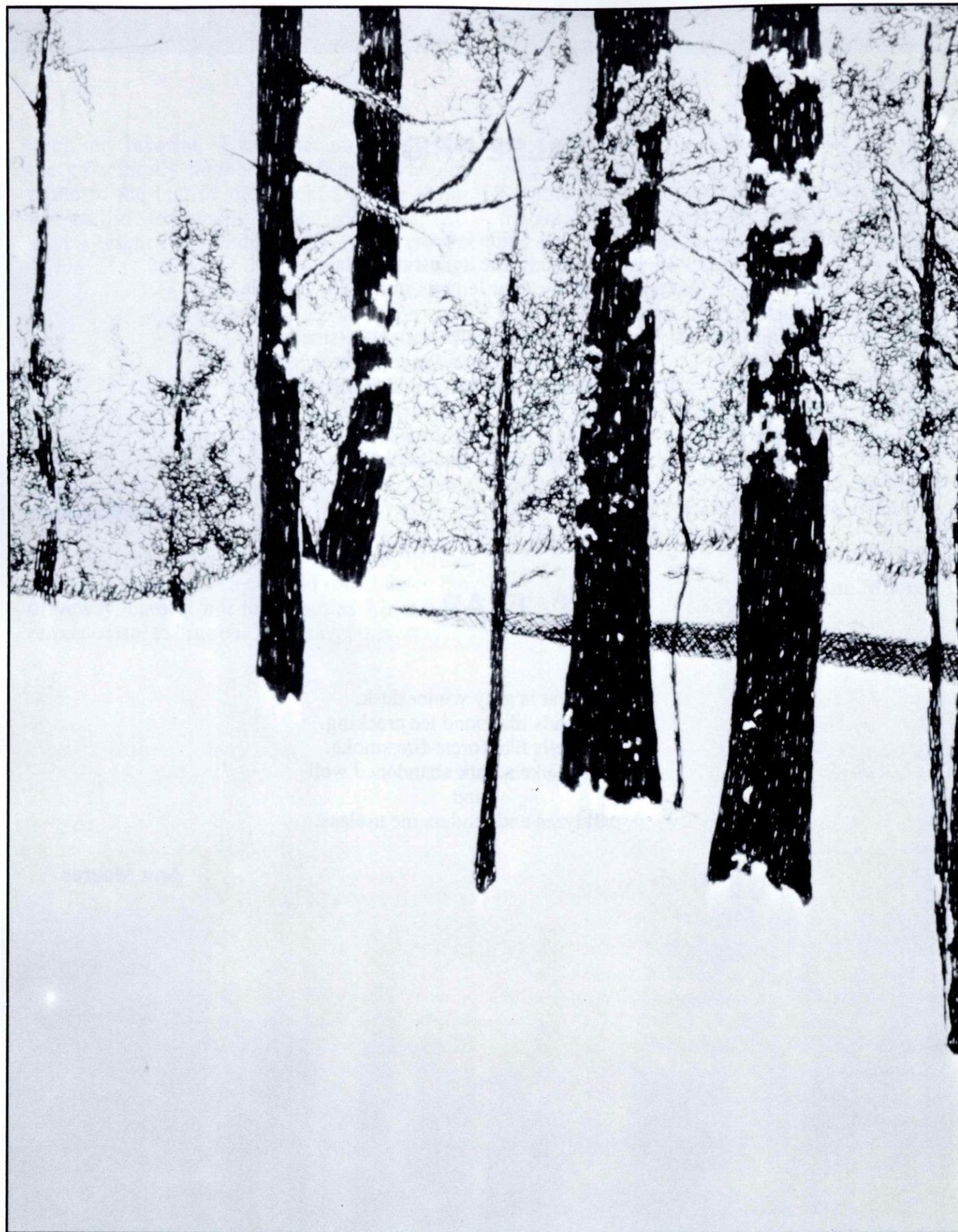
Pride makes me feel
deceitful and deceived.

Ann Moorer

FEAR

Fear is gray winter dusk.
It sounds like pond ice cracking.
It smells like forest-fire smoke.
It looks like a dark abandoned well
and
paralyzes and renders me useless.

Ann Moorer



SNOW IS MONEY

When I was a small child, living in the New England state of Rhode Island, there was something that fell from the sky. It was — snow. Rhode Island has a lot of snow in the winter; and when it snowed, my father always told us he was going out to get some money. I think my father meant “to make” some money. But, then, I thought there actually was money hidden in the snow.

Well, I would go outside a lot during the day and look for money in the snow. I would dig and shovel all day long, but I never found any

coins. My father soon realized what I was doing. He sat me down with a smile on his face and said, “Son, there’s money in the snow but not the way you think.” He said, “Son, you have got to clean drive ways, shovel snow from sidewalks, and you get paid money for it.” That was a revelation. I decided from there on out that I would just take out my sled, have some fun, and let my father go looking for money in the snow.

Franklin Wahl

RIPPLES

The lotus eaters scream
 For something fresh and green.
 The tooters and tokers are
 Looking mighty lean.
 Money's no object,
 There's need to be filled.
 Why just showing off,
 Someone else got killed.
 And Renaldo just
 nods and smiles for miles.
 Megabuck miles.

Billy-Bob lands his plane,
 A Dakota in a field.
 Talks with the High Sheriff,
 Arrangements, deals.
 The devil has come to Georgia,
 And no one plays the violin.
 They just pay the piper.
 And Renaldo just
 nods and smiles for miles.
 Megabuck miles.

Jo-Bo on the corner
 Pedals all his wares.
 Like Philippino "Cowboys"
 He's good at snatch and run,
 But, man, you gotta watch him,
 'Cause now he's got a gun.
 Killing in the neighborhood's
 The classic L. A. game
 For Crips and Bloods and anyone
 Who wants to be insane.
 And Renaldo just
 nods and smiles for miles.
 Megabuck miles.

Mercedes from the Valley
 Arrives in her big new Benz
 A silver spoon around her neck
 Makes sure she has some friends.
 They all find God on Friday,
 Hell by Saturday noon.
 But don't feel sorry for them,
 They'll all be gone real soon.
 And Renaldo just
 nods and smiles for miles.
 Megabuck miles.

The children in the schoolyard
 Mimic all they see.
 Don't look for Ralph this year
 Since his bullet in the knee.
 Foxy Betty's on the make,
 And Freddy's on the take,
 And Counselor Bill, well,
 He just says to wait.
 High School starts next year.
 And Renaldo just
 nods and smiles for miles.
 Megabuck miles.

The pimps on the strip
 Selling cases of aids,
 Worship God in an alley,
 Their sacrament cooked,
 Fed through a needle,
 Vowing never to be hooked.
 Their Beverly Hilton is
 Just that they'll be booked.
 And Renaldo just
 nods and smiles for miles.
 Megabuck miles.

Mike Reed

SPARE ME

Name droppers, doters.
 Formal, "high-churchy" people.
 People who respond, "Oh really," and stare vacantly at me.
 Zealots who knock on the door to hand out religious tracts,
 assuming I need them.
 Arguments that inevitably end with my giving in before I am
 ready to concede.
 Non-spontaneous, planned "romantic" interludes.
 Art, that is "appreciated" with "getting some culture" as a
 motivation.
 Talking about calorie content at a family gathering round the dinner
 table.
 Waitresses or waiters who slyly glance in my direction when asking
 whether we want "sweetened or unsweetened."
 People who assume overweight means stupid, dull, and weak in mind
 and spirit.
 Fakes . . . jewelry, furs, people. . . .
 Old cars that are driven typically by single-parent women.
 Child abuse . . . child abusers . . . intolerance of the disabled. . .
 ignorance of the contributions made to society by the
 handicapped.
 Self-righteous indignation from any source.

Ann Moorer

THE NIGHT ELVIS DIED

Elvis died on August 7, 1977. I remember that date well, not because I'm an Elvis fan, I'd rather listen to the Rolling Stones, but because I saw something I haven't seen before or since Elvis's death. The night that Elvis died, I saw my dad cry for the first and only time in my life.

You might think this is really insignificant, but I thought it was a very special moment in my life at that particular time. For you to understand this story, you must realize that I looked upon my father as a man of stone, solid as a rock and cold as granite. I have never seen him show much emotion at all. I used to think there was something wrong with me because he didn't. That's not to say he didn't have his moments . . . but that's all they were — just moments. He never was in the military, but his bearing was that of a rigid officer. Because of this we were never close. I used to fear him and even hate him, but I also loved him.

I can still remember my sister saying, "I wonder what his band is going to do now?" For some weird reason, I knew the band my sister was talking about was Elvis's band and that, so called, great god of Rock and Roll was dead. It didn't stun me, shock me, or even sadden me. I didn't care for Elvis, nor did I care for people who praised his work. My dad happened to be one of those people. Elvis was from a time that I looked upon as the prehistoric age of Rock and Roll. I wasn't interested in that era. If it wasn't Kiss or Styx or Fleetwood Mac or Elton John, I didn't want to hear it.

I remember sitting in the living room watching the evening news and seeing all these

crazy, stupid people filling the streets in front of Graceland in Memphis, Tennessee. They were crying and screaming and yelling and crying and fainting and moaning and crying. "Those people are idiots." I said. My dad glanced at me, then turned his head back to stare at the T.V. . . . with no reaction what so ever. I knew he loved Elvis's music, but he showed no remorse or feeling or even the slightest bit of emotion about his death. The quintessential man of stone, my dad, just sat in his chair and rocked and looked, and looked and rocked.

Every now and then I would look at him, during the late broadcast, in the hope that the "tragedy" would have prompted a reaction. At least I expected a simple remark like, "There will never be another like him," or, "The end of an era." but he was silent and quiet . . . and now that I think about it — distant.

Now that I'm older I realize that my dad could have been thinking a lot about all those Elvis songs that were associated with moments in his life. The senior prom, dates, good times, bad times, I don't know. Now I know that old Elvis songs had a kind of nostalgic religious quality for him. They represented his dreams, his youth, his innocence . . . his life, not mine, but something personal and private to him . . . his memories. I understand and realize this now, but back then it was a different story.

After the late broadcast went off, I went back to my room and stretched out on the bed. After ten minutes or so my dad walked in with a handful of Elvis 8-track tapes. He asked if he could use my tape player. I nodded my head. He didn't seem the same, physically the same

perhaps, but yet different. My dad stuck in the first tape and lay back on the floor. I hated Elvis, but I put up with him. I guess. I listened to the songs. They weren't particularly good, but yet Elvis sang with so much passion that the songs became listenable, and a few were even catchy. Now, I can't tell you I became an Elvis fan that night, because in all honesty I didn't; but I came to look upon him in a different light. Elvis wasn't just another beat up dinosaur of a rock star. I respected him as an artist and as a performer, but still I was not a fan of his . . . just an observer, but not a fan.

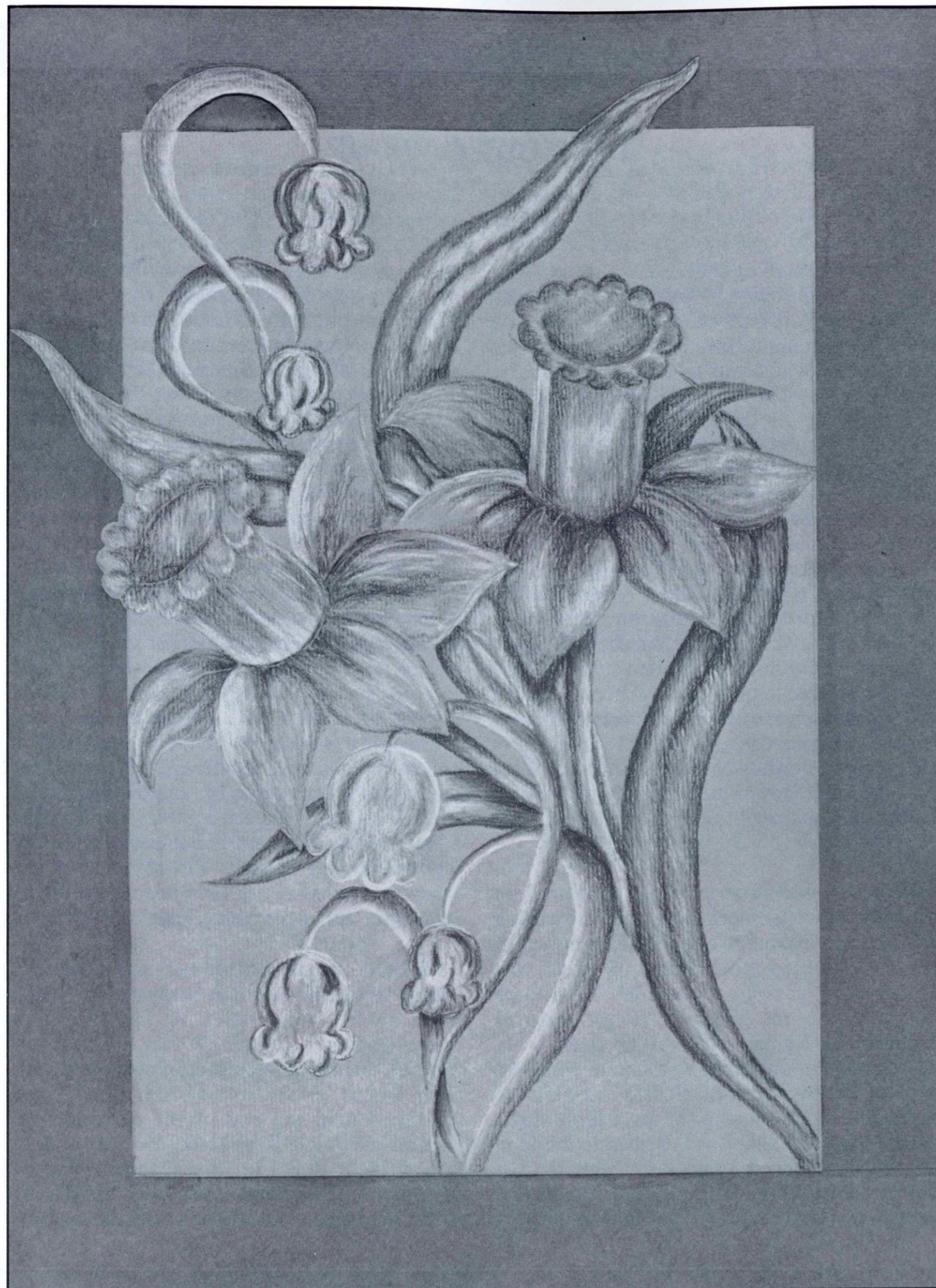
After awhile I moved around to get in a better position on the bed. I looked at my dad and noticed he hadn't moved since he first lay down on the floor an hour or so ago. In fact, he looked like he was in a different world. He had a solemn expression on his face, and his eyes looked far away. My dad didn't even notice me looking at him. Then . . . it happened. It was undeniable, but I still couldn't believe it was happening, and I was witnessing it. Somewhere between "I'll Remember You" and "The American Trilogy" my dad began . . . to cry. I caught the light reflected in his tears as they fell down his cheek. My dad's face was somber and sad. There — emotion, reaction, expression, a response. My dad was actually crying. I saw more feeling in that one short moment than I had in my whole life — or have since.

I can only guess what my dad was feeling as he lay on the floor lost in the deep baritone of

Elvis Presley. The man of stone had cracked, and I saw it. I knew this couldn't happen often, perhaps never would again. I savored the moment. I would like to think that Elvis's death moved my dad to tears. I would like to think that Elvis represented something to my dad, maybe innocence, youth, vigor, happiness . . . life? Could it have been a moment of reckoning, of forced awareness? My dad was forty something. Maybe it was the beginning of a mid-life crisis. Could it have been the harsh reminder of regrets? Was my dad discontent? Was he happy? I don't know. And I've never asked him about that particular incident, so I'll never know; but I really don't think I want to.

That moment will live with me forever. It changed me, my perspective, and my life. It brought me closer to my dad even though he didn't know it. I looked upon him as a person, not a rock or a caricature of some General Patton clone. I can't tell you that my dad and I became fast friends, because we didn't. But that one experience carried me through a lot of hard, and downright, rough times with my dad. I keep that image of him laying on the floor with tears rolling down his cheek forever in my mind. It reminds me that he is human and has his own set of dreams, desires, needs, . . . and memories. It's a shame someone had to die for me to experience such a moment . . . and for that I thank you, Elvis.

Scott Waters



I ALMOST GAVE UP

Returning to college after being away from school for many years was very rewarding, but at the same time extremely frustrating. Time passes too quickly when you're busy with family, classes, a job, and studying. Suddenly, it was two weeks before the end of the first quarter, and the pressure of completing class projects and studying for the upcoming final exams was causing me severe anxiety. The enthusiasm and exuberance I had at the beginning of the quarter had been displaced by fear bordering on terror — there was so much to accomplish and not enough time. In addition, I was exhausted. The more I studied the situation, the more impossible it looked. Finally, I made a decision. I couldn't continue. I had tried and failed. I would just have to drop out of school. After all the work and all of the encouragement I received from friends and family, I was going to let everyone down — especially myself. What would I say? How would I explain? I was a failure, no doubt about it. "But," I thought, "I at least tried."

When it was time to return to school on Monday, after the weekend of soul searching and decision making, I couldn't force myself to leave the house; so I didn't. Since I was dropping out anyway, there didn't seem to be much point in going through painful explanations. By the middle of the week, I was getting used to my status as a failure when the head of the department called to inquire as to my whereabouts during the past three days. After I explained that I had decided to drop out of school and why, he said, "You were the last one of my students I worried about completing the courses successfully." I was astounded. I

was sure that everyone else was way ahead of me. "Not so," he explained, "Everyone gets anxious near the end of the quarter. Please come back and try the final exams. I'm sure you can pass them. You have nothing to lose." He went on. "I want you to do one other thing. I would like you to talk to a counselor in Career Services." I thought this was a strange request, but I agreed to take the exams and talk to a counselor. "What can it hurt?" I reasoned, "Nothing can make me feel any worse than I feel now."

The following week I took the exams and found them not as difficult as I had anticipated; I even passed them with decent grades. I was starting to feel better. I then made arrangements to complete the unfinished projects. I still felt unsure of myself and a little shaky about continuing with school, so I met with a counselor in Career Services. I still remember the day. It was my birthday and the last day of the Fall Quarter. I expected a lecture and maybe a few rules regarding study habits in the form of well intentioned booklets. Or maybe he or she would recommend a shrink. "Just what I need." I thought, "Another expense I can't afford."

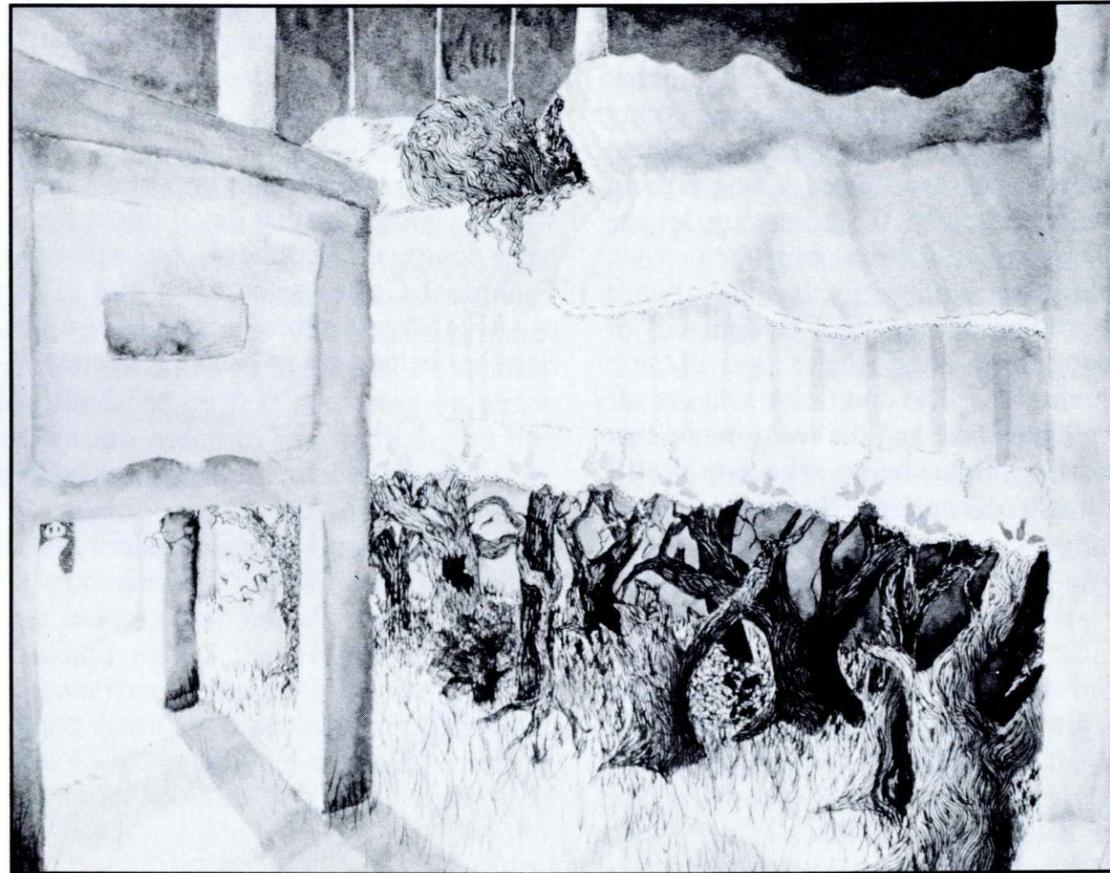
Instead, I found a friend — a warm, friendly human being who was truly interested in me and made me feel comfortable. At first we didn't even talk about school. We talked about our families, friends, goals and disappointments. We then talked about school and why I had panicked near the end of the quarter. The counselor let me talk and talk; and very soon it was evident that I let the accumulation of school, family, and everyday problems overwhelm me. It was explained to me that this

is a pretty common occurrence. All I had done was retreat — but only temporarily. Of course I had other problems gnawing at me in respect to financial assistance and assessment tests. After a few quick calls the counselor put me in touch with the people I needed to talk with. It was so easy I couldn't believe it. We also talked about scheduling time and the importance of taking time out for myself. It felt so good to talk to someone who understood what I was talking about. More importantly, the counselor let me know that it was okay for me not to be perfect. My pre-occupation with perfection has always been a real problem in my life. The demands of perfection become roadblocks that dictate failure in themselves. The counselor sent me off with a warm handshake and the reassurance that I was a normal human being who could still realize the dream of a college education.

As I drove home that night, I felt a tremendous sense of relief, as if an enormous burden had been magically lifted from my shoulders. How very fortunate for me that there was a place where I could turn for help right at the college, and someone trained to help me sort out all the crazy problems that were so overwhelming to me.

If I had not kept that important appointment with the counselor that day, I doubt that I would have continued in school. Attending Midlands Technical College has been one of the most positive experiences in my life, and Career Services helped me to "make it happen."

Bonnie G. Liverance



“IT”

I remembered “It” just last week. Twenty-four years had gone by, and I remembered that “It” had terrorized me as a child. I can cope as long as I’m safe. “It” remains a vivid memory, though, locked on the dark side of the wall of my consciousness. The memories are not walled away by repression so much as just dimmed by time.

“It” lived in the hallway just outside my bedroom door. I assumed “It” lived there because I was the one “It” wanted. “It” never showed “Itself,” that I am aware of, to anyone else in my family. That is, no one else ever mentioned “It.” Oh, I am quite sure that I was the one that “It” wanted.

So cautious was I when leaving my bedroom. First, I peered through an ever-so-slightly cracked door, pausing to catch the slightest sound or any indication of “Its” wakened state. Only when I felt no doubt that “It” slept did I leave the room, making myself a layer of wall paper, sliding into the hallway, shuffling one foot before the other until I was well past the slumbering beast!

Several times I stared down into “Its” dark, ominous mouth — only leaning over, though! Never would I have stood directly over “It!” That mouth was filled with infinite darkness. There was no bottom. “It had no limits. There was only the infernal, mesmerizing blackness. “It” was mammoth and could have easily eaten me whole! I would never look for more than a second as the sickening odor that emanated from between “Its” teeth was dizzying to me!

I always knew when “It” was awake. A ferocious roar pierced my ears; then the low

growl was constant as “It” patiently awaited prey — me — to pass by to be devoured by powerful iron jaws. Many nights a violent roar awakened me from sleep, forcing me to spend the remainder of those sleepless nights straining my eyes in the darkness to catch a glimpse of movement or any sign that “It” may have come for me. “It” even managed to haunt me in my sleep!

Once as I was gazing down between blackened teeth into the endless emptiness of “Its” mouth, “It” abruptly awoke. Actually, I’m now unsure whether “It” was really sleeping or had only lured me into a false sense of security. The sudden roar took control of my bladder from me. I felt the blistering heat from flaming breath sear my face! Shocked, I recoiled back, slamming my head against the wall! In a panic, knowing I would never make it safely past, I dove back into my bedroom, rolled over, and kicked the door shut! Sitting on the floor, I braced myself with my back against the door, unsure whether I could hold “It” out or not, but too helpless to do anything else! I could still hear “It” growling; I could smell the nauseating reek, and the intense heat assailed my door. I waited for what seemed like days, until at last “It” drifted back to sleep!

It wasn’t long after that when “It” went into a long state of hibernation. We moved from that house the following summer, and I can’t recall ever seeing “It” awake again. After we moved, I thought about “It” less and less until eventually I forgot about “It” completely.

Last week the cold winter weather sent a chill through the thin, aging walls of the almost

antique house that I now reside in. I went to the thermostat and turned on our furnace to try and run the chill out. It was then that I saw my little boy, who was playing ball in the hall, discover his first monster — the same gaping, blackmouthed, heat breathing monster that had haunted my childhood! At that instant I was

paralyzed with fear, as the childhood memory scaled the wall of my consciousness and suddenly "It" came back to me!

James Baxter

ODE TO A HORSE

Oh horse you are a wondrous thing
 No horns to honk, no bells to ring
 No license buying every year
 No plates to go in front or rear
 No gas to buy to make you go
 No brakes to stop you, just a "whoa"
 You may be slower than a Vette
 But you' ll last longer, that I'll bet!

Tammy Timmons

LONELINESS

Loneliness is pale blue.

It sounds like

a house creaking and settling

Loneliness tastes like unsalted broth.

And smells like

decayed rose petals pressed between the pages.

It looks like an untended graveyard

and feels like

deserted New York streets at 3 a.m.

Ann Moorer



“My Sloppy Son” — A Mother’s Story

Although my son is a bright, responsible and industrious person, he is the sloppiest individual I know and shows no signs of changing. Early this morning I entered the kitchen eager for my usual glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. I opened the refrigerator only to find the carton bone dry beside yet another empty Pepsi carton. When I attempted to toss the containers into the trash can, there was no room; it was overflowing with discarded soda cans. As I cast a quick glance around the once neat kitchen, I discovered open drawers, gaping cupboard doors, a scrunched up potato chip bag and several dirty dishes and glasses which had never made it to the sink. I became suspicious about what awaited me in the living room. You guessed it — another mess!

The couch was piled high with blankets and a pillow left in disarray — obviously someone had fallen asleep there the previous night. The coffee table was covered with newspapers, cups, and tell-tale signs of McDonald’s cuisine. A pair of dingy, grey sneakers looked mockingly at me with their tongues hanging out, socks in a ball at their heels. Meanwhile, M-TV droned in the background oblivious to the nonexistent

audience. Reluctantly I walked on into the hallway to the first bedroom on the left. At the threshold I was greeted by towels hanging on the door (at least they were hung up), and a tipped over laundry basket which had spilled out jeans and T-shirts — were these clean or dirty I wondered? How could you tell? Dresser drawers were open, loose change was on the floor, piles of clothes were scattered around, and empty soda cans were everywhere. I looked suspiciously at a cold french fry on the carpet. It seemed like it was moving.

What a mess! To complete this scenario, there in the bed, blissfully sleeping, was the creator of all this disorder, my son. Beside him rested a red guitar, and at the bottom of the bed sat an empty clothes hamper. I remember thinking, “This bright, responsible, industrious person is just a mess. He looks so happy, and I feel so miserable about his sloppy habits.” It didn’t seem fair. “He is just going to have to change his ways and tidy up his act . . .” I vowed. “And this time I really mean it!”

Bonnie G. Liverance



THE CRY

I am frightened standing here. The skies are blackening. I can feel the thunder under my feet. Lightning strikes vividly before me. I wonder what *am* I doing here? Is there a reason, a purpose? Am I supposed to save someones life as I struggle to save my own? Am I to be a teacher and fill my head to exploding with knowledge? Maybe my lot is to raise a child, take him under my wing and introduce him to this precious world. That sets me thinking.

You know as well as I, the world can be a very cold place, turn its back on you and run like a thief in the night. Is there a brighter day dawning? Can we unite as one? We hate one another because of the color of our skin, yet we know all along we are all the same on the inside.

When will the foolish games we play end? We are only fooling ourselves. Can't we open our hearts and minds and act like human beings, not wild animals driven by fear and hysteria? We must create a brighter future for the ones who are too innocent and too young to understand. They must have somewhere to turn, somewhere to go. We can stop feeling our way in the dark and open our eyes to see. This is our world, and it is what we make it. The wrongs must be righted — before it is too late. There are no places left to hide, or even to cry. Soon we will be left even without hope. We will be left with death.

Darlene Highfill Hill

SHIVERS

Leave me alone! Stop starrng at me. Haven't you ever seen a lady sitting on a curb before? Just go on, go about your business. I am all right, you know; so just leave me alone.

No. There is no need for a doctor. In fact, I'm hardly shaking any more, see? No I don't need your sweater because it's not that kind of shiver. It's more like an escalating fear that grips me because I know I am about to see it all over again, and I don't want to go through it anymore. I'm terrified of these shivers. I can't control them when they start.

Yes. Yes, I remember how this time happened. I was waiting to cross this street, when a thin, lanky gentleman standing next to me struck a match to light a cigarette. The flame was so close to my face that I could feel the heat, for just an instant, on my cheek. When he stepped off the curb, he tossed his match at my feet. That was all it took. After twenty years of living with these shivers I can tell when one is coming on. I sat down and braced myself against this telephone pole. I can't always remember why they happen, but this time I do.

I can never tell when I'll lose it the way I did recently when the city dump caught on fire. Do you remember how the air was filled with thick smoke? Sirens were wailing night and day. The time before that was when I decided to cut through Lionel Park to get home before curfew at 7 o'clock. It was in late winter, and it had gotten dark early. When each of the lamp posts that line the drive around the park came on, I thought they looked like torches. A police officer helped me get home that night.

Are you a doctor? No, of course not. You listen too well to be a doctor. I can't tell you how many doctors I have seen over the years, and not one of them was worth a flip in helping me.

I figured you were like everyone else. You know, you've seen them all looking at me like I'm some kind of side-show freak. People stare at me; and I've heard the names I'm called, too. They think I'm a quart low, but none of them knows anything about me. I'm as sane as the next person would be who has seen what I have seen. I want you to know I've been living in this town, with all these people, and nobody has ever stopped to talk with me like you have. My name is Kathy, by the way. No. I haven't been close to anybody since I was a child. But since I've told you about my shivers, I should go ahead and tell you why I have them.

My dear friend from my gradeschool days died a tragic death on the front lawn of my parents' house. It was a lawn as plush as thick piled carpet, etched and trimmed around the shrubs and trees. We loved to stretch out and daydream there. The marshmallow clouds took on the shapes of wondrous creatures overhead. There, on my organic comforter, I could pretend the angels were putting on a show for us.

Robin was her name, and she shared my love for adventure. Slipping out of the house in the middle of the night was our favorite thing to do together. On chilly December evenings the heavens were especially seductive and because the lawn had turned brown and stiff, we used the blanket from my bed to lie on. That night Robin, who was nine, and I, a couple of years older,

met on my front lawn to lose ourselves in the stars. Orion was directly over my house, and the Big Dipper was over hers. We knew the visibility would be breathtaking because the night was clear and there was no moon.

The neighborhood should have been pitch-black, but it wasn't. Up the street, on the top of the hill, there was a faint but definite glow. I grabbed Robin by the shirt and pulled her close. "We gotta go see it, Rob. But if we go inside to ask somebody, they'll know we slipped out. Come on!"

We stole away in the darkness. The glow was our beacon. We stuck to the streets, careful to avoid startling the neighborhood dogs, and reached the top of the hill. Down below us the Trumbles' house was engulfed in flames that were licking at the top branches of the pines surrounding it.

We stood there for a moment or two, not longer, considering how this could have happened. Behind us we heard the sound of a match being stuck on the side of a box. We spun around startled half to death. I didn't know him. He was dressed all wrong for the cold winter night. His shoulders were bare and he wore jeans. He stood with the width of the street between us. He didn't act as if he knew we were there. He was transfixed by the single flame he held in his hand.

From the expression on Robin's face, I could tell she didn't know him, either. She had a death grip on my arm. It felt like her nails were cutting through the layers of my clothing. The man held his flickering torch before him as I asked, "Do you know if anyone has called the fire department?" The match went out, so he nervously fumbled to light another. "Do you know how it happened?" I inquired.

It occurred to me how neat it would be to be the first, to get the scoop on the story. I was shivering though, partly because of the December air and partly because he hadn't replied to either question. He just stood there on the opposite curb, concentrating on the flame he held. The breeze came up, and his match flickered and went out prematurely. When he looked down to light another, I did too; and for the first time I noticed the container that rested beside him. The man's face was momentarily illuminated by his next match; and when he looked up, our eyes met. I wanted to get another look at the container because it resembled the kind I used when I mowed the lawn. But no one in his right mind would mow his lawn in the middle of the night.

I began to feel sick inside as I realized what this man had done to the house behind us. I could feel the heat from the blaze below radiate to warm my backside. I was only barely aware of Robin violently tugging at my waist. "We gotta go!" she cried. But I didn't want to go just then. I was going to give that man a piece of my mind for being so destructive. As I drew a breath to let him have it, he struck another match and flicked it across the street at my feet.

Robin had practically undressed me with all her tugging, but we both froze in horror as the man stepped down off the curb and bent over to pick up his can. We knew then we had more to fear than just having our parents find out we had disobeyed them. We ran, at least we tried to, back the way we had come so silently. Only this time we were screaming our lungs out. The sound of sirens could be heard responding to the housefire, but no one was yet aware of our terror.

The man had been closer to Robin than to me, and my legs were longer. I was almost to the safety of my yard. I could see the front door

when Robin screamed. It was a scream that could only have been made by a little child. I turned and saw that he had her. He was dousing her and dousing her, and his chuckles of insane delight could be heard over her desperate cries for help. Then he struck a match. "No! No! Robin. No!" I screamed; but nobody came in time to help her. The cool night air fed the flames; and to the man's delight, Robin ran in heat blinded circles. When I found I could move again, I picked up the blanket that I had brought out with me and ran over to where she lay still on my lawn. I smothered the last lingering flames.

I don't know how much time passed before all the people were there. I was lifted up and checked for burns and injuries. I had none. I looked on as the sheet was drawn carefully over her face. When the vinyl bag was zippered and secured, the stretcher was lifted into the ambulance. Where she had been on my lawn was a neatly outlined, charred area. The ambulance slipped silently away in the early dawn hours, and it was winter for a long time thereafter.

School was soon in session, but it had to go on without me. Eventually, I missed so much school I was informed I would have to take the sixth grade over again. In my permanent record I was identified as "Emotionally Handicapped."

I realize we have just met, but do I still appear emotionally handicapped? "Permanent" means something is fixed that way forever. Because it's printed in my records, I'm treated as if it's still true. I'll always feel the anguish of loss for my friend, but no one seems to realize

I've gotten so much better over the years. I can't find a job, because when they look in my file they won't hire me. I had a tragic experience as a child that left me a basket case for a few years, but that was over twenty years ago. At one point I was so depressed I wanted to die, too. I tried to imagine how Robin must have felt in a sheet of flames. I ran in wild circles trying to retrace her dance. When I reached the point where she had spun like a dervish, I collapsed on the spot where she had died,

The day my shivers began my mother found me on my lawn rocking back and forth on my knees. She told me she couldn't help me anymore. I needed to be with people who knew how to make me better. She said living in the same house where it all happened was no good. It was time that I left to get well. So I was sent away, and I did get better; but I give the passing of time the credit for that. Apart from my occasional flash-backs, I'm in pretty good shape. Your taking time with me today was a very kind thing for you to do. I do feel better now; so if you'd like, you can go about your business. Thank you for caring enough to stop and help. I guess with the traffic the way it is, I'd have been a grease spot on the road now if it weren't for you. Let me tell you something. Sometimes just having someone in your life who will take the time to listen can do more for someone like me than years of therapy.

Well, yes; I'd like to go shopping with you and have lunch together. For the remainder of the afternoon, though, I want to hear about you.

Linda L. Waller

1989-90 FIRST PRIZE WINNERS

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Larry A. Gallman
"One Black Man"
page one

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Dennis Stemp
"The Flatrocks"
page three

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Lesley King (Tie)
"The Black Knight"
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Art:

Meredith Moore
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SPECIAL MENTION

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Kellison Dooley
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Wendy McMinn
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