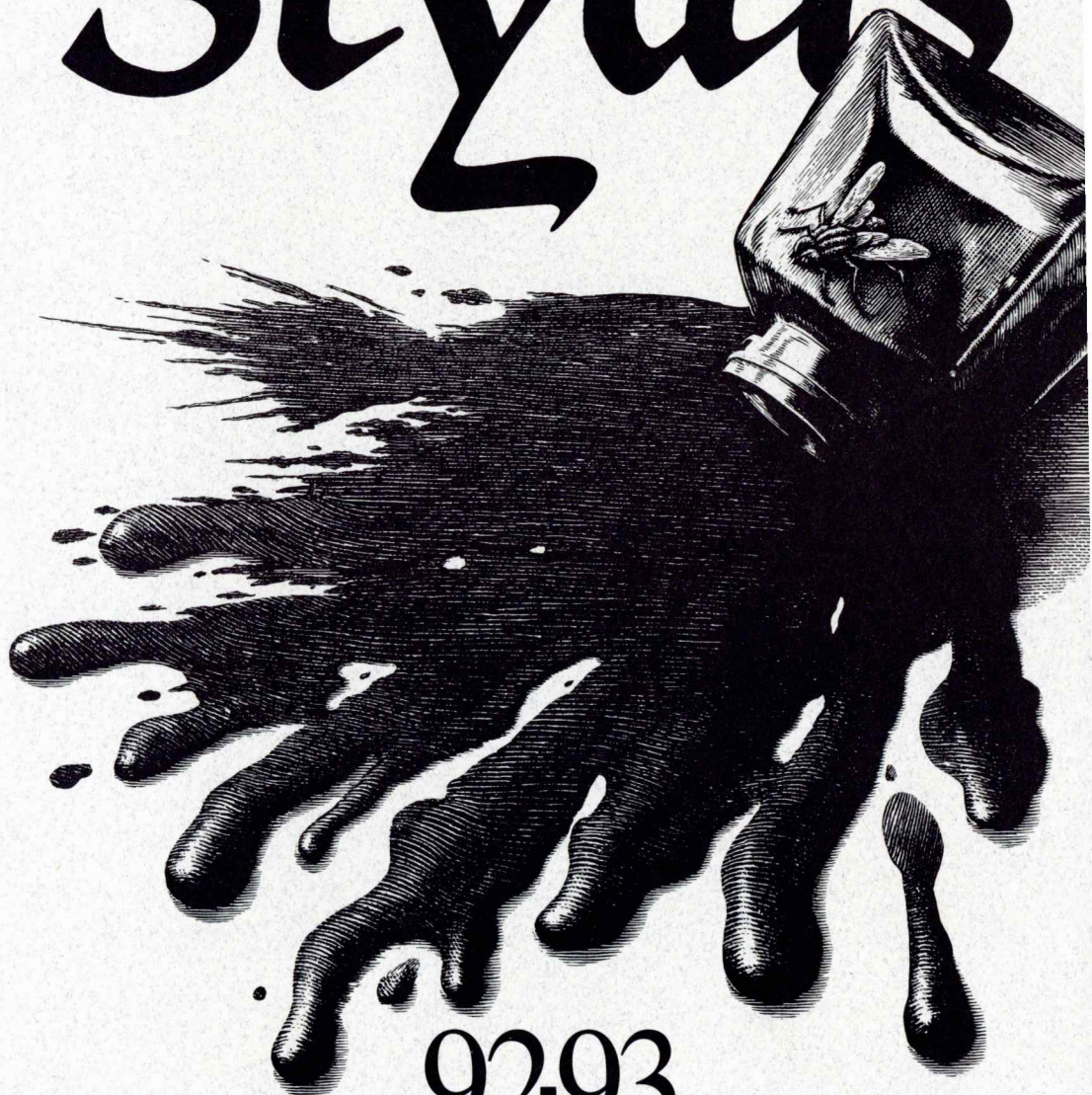


Stylus



92-93

THE LITERARY ANNUAL OF
MIDLANDS TECHNICAL
COLLEGE

Stylus

1992-93
The Literary Annual of
Midlands Technical College

STYLUS
1992-93
Editor: Curtis Derrick

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PREFACE

As this year's editor of *STYLUS*, it is my privilege to announce the award winners for the current issue. They are: poet Wanda Parnell for "Fulfillment" and "To Robinson Jeffers of the Stone Tower"; short story writer Aileen Pettigrew Clare for "Summer"; essayist Barbara Evans for "The War Within: Fury and Human Aggression"; and visual artist Dan Herbert for "Precious." Over sixty people sent submissions this year, totalling more than two hundred items of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and graphic art. The competition for our eighty pages was very keen indeed. Both the award winners and the others in our contents deserve special credit. But I would also like to salute those who received rejections this time around. Keep working. Being profoundly democratic, art is not unlike our nation. It is not our President or famous statesmen that make us great. It is the honest citizens, devoted and hard-working, who comprise the context that awakens and sustains us. The fabric of art, no matter what the medium, is woven from the aspirations of each and every one of us who work creatively.

Editing this year's edition, I felt something like a symphony conductor must feel, trying to blend a group of very individual performances into some lasting harmony. I hope that, as you read, you will experience the same sense of continuity that I have—feelings of interconnectedness and recurrence in the human condition. Our opening collection of "Imaginary Archives" is unique not only because they are exercises from Dick Durham's history class, but also because they lengthen our perspective temporally. There is gravity in time; it is one of the forces causing irony. And so, "Charlotte's Diary," a wife's chronicle from the Civil War has its companion piece in "Steve," an essay based on growing up in the Vietnam era. Both pieces dramatize, to quote another, how "innocence is the first casualty of war." Similarly, the "Dream Journal" of Sula, an Adjan warrior captured in the slave trade, echoes later in the poem "Ol' Africa," as do the voices of Langston Hughes and Vachel Lindsay. Over and over the writers of the orchestra sound familiar chords, ancient themes with modern variations. Here's to the richness of the score.

And as you read, think of next year's issue. During my term as editor, I've acquired enormous respect for the range of talent here at Midlands Tech. It is easy to imagine future issues with sections featuring: architectural drawings and models; drama scripts; a collection of essays from Allied Health students, perhaps inspired by Lewis Thomas, Oliver Sacks, or Robert Coles; mathematics treatises à la Archimedes. In such treatises, there is intricate precision and art, a kind of translation, when one turns number-sense to script. But these possibilities are only the tip of the iceberg. And eighty pages is far too small a stage for all our players. May the future bring more space, perhaps even an issue each semester. The investment is small, and the dividends increase, as always, with a rise in interest.

Lastly, I want to thank Nancy Kreml and Jean Mahaffey for giving me this opportunity to be editor; Linda Mims for steering me through the maze of purchase requisitions and paperwork; Claudette Lorick, Minnie Jones, and Katsy Stewart for their clerical support; Audrey Caine for her expertise in the purchasing department; my brother, Carl, for donating our distinctive cover; Sisi Sims for formatting and design; Stan Frick, Douglas Capps, and Dorothy Smith for their able assistance in reading manuscripts. I am immensely appreciative for all your work.

Curtis Derrick
Editor

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Angela Narang

IMAGINARY ARCHIVES

Editor's Note:

Can creative writing be an effective tool for learning in a history course? The answer is an emphatic yes, according to the students in an experimental American history course on Beltline campus during fall semester. The course was conceived by Dick Durham. The idea was for each student to create a European or African newcomer to the American colonies and weave a family history from that person's descendants. This saga was pieced together from "primary sources"—the documents left by that family and "discovered" by the students. Part of each class period was spent discussing an actual development in American history, followed by time in the Writing Center creating the family documents. Combining their knowledge of history with imagination, the students drafted letters, composed newspaper clippings and interviews, or wrote diary entries to show how events might have affected ordinary individuals. The students also served as editors of their work, writing brief introductions for each document explaining the value of its testimony. Thus, by simulating the work of historians, students gained a deeper understanding of the impact of history.

Because research indicates that students sharpen their critical thinking skills through writing, "writing across the curriculum" is a high priority of the Division of Arts and Science. The English Department sponsors partnerships funded by a Title III grant to encourage more writing in other disciplines. Dave Kellish participated as the partner for this project, and both instructors were given released time.

STYLUS is pleased to present the following selections of historical fiction and hopes to give similar exposure to innovative writing projects in the future.

AN INTERVIEW OF ANNA CHAPPAS

After Charles Chappas was discharged from the army in 1919, he returned to Baltimore and went to work again for Bethlehem Steel Corporation. As he had told his mother, he asked Anna Narutowicz to marry him. She accepted and they were married in 1920 and three children soon followed, Charles, Jr., Dorothy Eva, and Vivian. Charles, the oldest, joined the Navy, fought in the Pacific during World War II and later married, had four children and settled in California as a banker. Dorothy Eva, named after her father's aunt in Lithuania, met and married young Donald Lewis after he was also discharged from the Navy. Dot and Don settled in suburban Maryland and had three children of their own, Don, Jr., Deborah, and Deidre. And Vivian, the youngest of the children and somewhat of a free spirit, joined the Army Air Corps as a WAF just before the United States entered the war and trained as a pilot on the B-17. Despite her rebellious ways, she eventually married and had five children but was never quite the traditional housewife. Not wanting to lose any of the past knowledge that was available to me, I conducted an interview of my grandmother, Anna Chappas, just prior to her death in November, 1988. The following information is just a small portion of her legacy to me.

Nana, what was your childhood like?

"My father, Stephen Narutowicz, was a smart man. He spoke several languages, but he was also an alcoholic and beat my mother and us kids. My mom had to work in the store that they owned and never had time for us. My grandmother lived with us, and she raised us kids. I was only sixteen when I got married, but I was happy to get out of my house because of my father.

What do you remember about your wedding?

"When Pop (Charles) and I were married my grandmother made sure I had a nice wedding. She made my gown herself. The veil was from lace that she brought over from the old country. There is a picture of my wedding party in the album. It was a big wedding for back then. We had a Lithuanian reception. When it was time to dance, my grandmother tied an apron around my waist, and I held the ends up with my hands. Then she put a plate in the middle of the apron. To dance with me, a man had to through a silver dollar onto the center of the plate."

What was your marriage like?

"Pop was a real quiet person; he never raised his voice to me or our kids, but he was real strict. He knew that my father was an alcoholic. And he saw my sister, Idie, and my brother Tommy's wife, Theresa, go out dancing and partying at the speakeasies two and

three nights a week. I think he was afraid I would do the same. He would never let me go out with them, but sometimes I would sneak out. And could I dance up a storm! I think he was also afraid that I might leave him if I went out partying all the time. You know his dad deserted his mom and the kids. But Pop, he was a good husband; he always took care of us and always loved us. Pop always wanted an automobile. Even before we were married, I remember his telling me about how he was saving to buy a car. In 1924, he bought his first car, a Ford Model T for about \$250. He was real proud of his car and took good care of it."

Wasn't Pop born in Lithuania? When did he become a United States citizen?

"Pop didn't become a citizen of the United States until 1924. He even enlisted in the army and fought in France for the United States during World War I before he became a citizen. He just kept putting it off and putting it off, and I finally nagged him enough until he went down and got his naturalization papers. I think he bought the car just after that to celebrate. I was already a citizen. I was born in Poland. But I became a citizen when I was young, at the same time my parents did. I was very young when my family came here, and I don't remember anything about the old country."

Tell me more about living during those years. Didn't you live during Prohibition?

"We bought a house in Turner's Station. My entire family lived nearby. Pop still worked at Bethlehem Steel. He made about \$1000 a year. But things were getting expensive, and we wanted to give the best to our children. So, I had to go to work. Actually we bought the store from my parents, and I worked there. Pop helped when he came home and on weekends. Working wasn't too bad. A lot of women were doing it to help pay for extra things the family wanted. At least I didn't have to work in a factory like some women did. That was hard work. And usually it was the women whose husbands had abandoned them and left them with kids to support or widows with kids. Pop had off on weekends now because a lot of people only had to work five days a week. He also got off a week each year with a paid vacation. At first we would go to Ocean City, Maryland. But after awhile, he just wanted to stay home and work around the house on his vacation. He always fixed everything himself.

"In 1919 the eighteenth amendment to the Constitution was passed. Making and selling alcohol became illegal. It was called Prohibition. To make extra money, Pop also ran a still in the basement of our house. He would bottle the booze in canning jars, and we would sell it to customers out the back door of the store. Your mom and your Aunt Vivian and your Uncle Chappy would have to stand guard upstairs while Pop was running the still. If they saw the police coming down the street, they were supposed to stomp around on the floor and make lots of noise and let Pop know, so he could turn off the still. But I think the police in Turner's Station knew about the still. I think some of them were our customers."

What did you do for entertainment?

"Pop never went to the movies much, but I sure did. My sister Idie and I would take the streetcars and go downtown to the Senate Theater on Calvert Street. I watched all the greats, like Douglas Fairbanks, Gloria Swanson, and Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin's best movie was *City Lights*. I think I saw it three times. But I like Rudolph Valentino the best.

He was the handsomest. What a hunk! Pop liked baseball and would go to watch the Orioles play at the new stadium on Greene Street. He saw Babe Ruth hit a home run out of the park once.

"I remember when Charles Lindbergh flew his plane across the Atlantic Ocean by himself in 1927. That was really big news back then. Pop said flying was one thing he would never do. And even when we retired and went out to California and Disneyland, we had to drive out, because he would never fly. We drove across country with our friends, the Busters, and saw all the sights along the way. So, I guess the drive was better than flying.

"The twenties were a happy time for us. We were able to make enough money to buy the new inventions we wanted. Pop bought a radio. And the whole family would sit around in the evening and listen to the shows. Our first home had electricity and an oil furnace for heat instead of coal. Even when the Depression came, it wasn't as bad for us, because we still had the store. And after prohibition was repealed in 1933, Pop started selling booze and legal whiskey in the store. I felt bad for some of the people though. They really suffered."

What were race relations like then?

"Well, there just weren't enough jobs to go around. The black people had it much harder than the whites, because they got the jobs last. Pop wouldn't let the black men come in the store to buy booze. They still had to buy it at the back door. A group of them would get their change together and come to the back door, and all they could afford to get was a one pint jar of booze to share among six of them. Their families had it harder. Black women had to work more than white women, because there were fewer jobs for the men. The women could get jobs as maids. But it was especially hard for black people, because there was so much discrimination in everything then. The blacks couldn't go to school with us. They couldn't eat in the same restaurants with the whites. And even if they did earn a good living, they couldn't move into a nicer neighborhood, if only white people lived there."

Did you speak Lithuanian or English at home?

"Remind me to give you my recipes for Golumkis, Budaki soup, Kruschikees, and the other dishes that we raised you kids on. That way you can learn to cook them for your kids. Pop and I both spoke Polish, Lithuanian, and Russian. But we never taught them to our kids. It was important to be like the other Americans, so we only spoke English at home. We were called "hunkies" by people, and the kids didn't like that. So, they never pressed us to learn other languages. I can still remember how to speak Lithuanian and Polish, but not much Russian. It would have been good if you kids could have learned another language when you were growing up. But we didn't know at the time that it was important.

"I'm getting tired and hungry, Debbie."

Okay, Nana. Thanks; I love you. Let's go eat.

CHARLOTTE'S DIARY

With Rex at war in the South, his wife, Charlotte, and children, Edward and Elizabeth, were forced to take over the roles he once assumed. Like many women in the north, Charlotte became head of the family. This is an entry in Charlotte's diary which she kept when Rex left to fight.

November 20, 1862

This damnable war will make me crazy sooner or later. I have not received a letter from Rex in two months. I pray that he is still alive, but my hope dwindles. In his last letter, he spoke of a Southern offensive. They called it the Battle of Antietam. The newspapers called it a great victory for our side. General McClellan turned back Lee's army. If Rex is dead, I feel he died in that battle. September 17 was, reportedly, the bloodiest single day of fighting to date this year.

The savings we had are almost completely exhausted. Despite my job at the factory, inflation and the increasingly higher cost of living are making it difficult to make ends meet. The only reason I have this job is because of a strike at the factory. The army needs supplies, so the factory had to have workers. I have been careful, however, to keep away from union influences to join. When the strike ends, I have no assurance that my job will be secure. If my name gets on a blacklist, I'll never get another job. This is a risk I cannot afford to take.

The army uniforms I help to assemble are very cheap. We get truckloads of old, worn-out rags and cloths every day. We produce such shoddy clothes for our army that they will probably melt off with the first rain. Meanwhile, the head of the company gets richer. If Rex is still alive, he's probably walking around half naked. Still, I refuse to give up. Every day is a new one. And every day I walk to the mailbox expecting a letter from my beloved Rex.

DREAM JOURNAL

Lately I have been having these strange dreams of what seems to be past life experiences. They are related to an ancestor called Sula. His descendants bring into their lives the strength that Sula represents as a strong forefather of their history. I have decided that seeing a hypnotist will help me to recall the experiences and events that have occurred in these historical dreams. Today I'm going to undertake my first session with the hyno-therapist. I wonder what experience I will recall. The time has arrived, and I have begun my journey into the past:

We are all here in a place filled with many people from many places. They are very confused, angry, and sad. I feel as though we are all here against our own free will, and I don't understand why this is happening to me. My name is Sula, and I am from the Kingdom of Adja, one of the small kingdoms located near Upper Guine between the Grain and Ivory Coast. I have just had my seventeenth birthday. It is the year 1616 on the European calendar.

It all started the day that my chief, Kimblu, called a meeting of all warriors. The meeting was held to discuss the attack of one of the Akan States located on the Gold Coast. We have held this state as our enemy for many years now. Kimblu made strong statements of revenge against the people of Mylala for capturing our fellow tribesmen and allowing them to be sold to the Europeans. "Our attack on the Kingdom of Mylala will begin at sunrise," he said as his fist rose to the sky in a motion of strength. The warriors rejoiced in sounds of agreement, as everyone returned to their houses made of straw and awaited the awakening of the rising sun.

I made my way back to my house where my family was awaiting my arrival. Everyone was so excited and so was I. But my heart was filled with so many emotions that the thought of ever being captured never entered my mind. The pride of my kingdom and myself kept my outlook a positive one. I finally went to bed thinking sleep would weigh heavily on my eyes, but instead I found myself tossing and turning from side to side. I knew deep down in my heart that the battle that lay ahead would be one of many losses and may be even fatal to our tribe. Then I realized that if I were to be captured, my life in Africa would be over and a most certain fate of being sold to the foreigners would prevail.

Before the sun made its way over the ridges of the valley, my fellow tribesman and I were prepared to attack the village of Mylala. As we sat and awaited the signal from King Kimblu, we were surprised by loud noises and many men rushing towards us. With no other choice but to defend ourselves, everyone began to battle the people from the Mylala village. I don't remember much after that, but awakening in a crowded room with many of my fellow tribesmen and other people from different tribes. My fate was sealed, and my destiny was to be sold—the very thing I feared most in all my life. Death shall not become my fate, but slavery my doom.

LETTER FROM CHARLES KING

This letter is to the mother of an indentured servant. The servant, Charles King, serves in the home of a wealthy Englishman. Mrs. King is now the bride of a writer in England, who is responsible for the exceptional education that Charles has received. Mrs. King is also the new mother of an infant named Richard. Charles plans to marry a woman still in England named Mari. After he is finished with his duty, he hopes to start a school and bring his bride to America.

Dear Mother,

I have been in Maryland for thirty days now. I am alive and well and currently still working in the Smith house. My voyage over here was very long and more difficult than I had imagined. The boat was congested, and the people on board behaved like the animals they shared their beds with. I had much time to read and study the manuscripts you provided me, and I anticipate the arrival of the remaining chapters.

Master John has been very generous so far. Most of the work I have done has been housework. The other servants are working in fields and are mistreated by their masters. Our household is still better than most of the other houses. I have sixty days left on my duty, and I believe I will survive.

I have also learned much about the new politics in Chesapeake Bay area from attending meetings on my days off. The citizens have much control over the decisions that the House of Burgesses makes. The few males who have survived thus far are treated with much respect, since they will be the future of this colony. I hope to make an impact on the colony when I am finished with my duty.

The women as well as the children are few. I feel very fortunate that Mari will be coming here to marry me. I am not sure I could find a wife here. Cicile from our congregation married a man from my ship. He died from typhoid two weeks after their wedding night. Cicile is rumored to be pregnant but has already begun to court another man from the Andrews' household.

I hope Richard is doing well. I will send him some of my sketches when he gets a little older. I would like for him to have a secondhand look at this beautiful land. I also hope John is doing better. I would hate for Richard to grow up in today's society without a father. It does have its benefits now, but it would have been nice to have had someone when I was growing up.

Well, I must return to work now, and thanks again for this wonderful opportunity.

Love,
Charles

ABIGAIL CHAMBERLAIN

The following is an article published in Essence magazine in December, 1992. It is a "trip down memory lane" by Abigail Chamberlain, who has been considered "a Mary McCleod Bethune" and a pioneer in Black feminism.

Abigail Chamberlain's greatest stories are those about growing up in America as a mulatto child in a time when mixed marriages were taboo. She was an active champion of the Harlem Renaissance and continues to speak out for change in race relations. She has traveled the expanse of the globe, met important and interesting people, and had a helping hand in making history. She was graduated from Hartford School for Girls in 1919 and Bryn Mawr College in 1928, having had a close friendship with actress Katharine Hepburn that spanned their school years together from childhood to college. After college, she taught grade school and then college level at Atlanta University (under W.E.B. DuBois) and Spelman College, eventually becoming a writer in the fledgling Johnson Publishing Company. Her many experiences were due to opportunities afforded her by her father, Ben Chamberlain, II, who was a contemporary and business partner of Andrew Carnegie, his former classmate at Harvard. Ms. Chamberlain credits her toughness to her father, "who would stand for no monkey business. Whenever one of us children would run about the house moaning about some ailment in pursuit of some parental attention, he would have us take an aspirin and lie down. As you can imagine, the ailment cured itself rather quickly."

The other great influence in her life was Dr. DuBois. "...I'm sure that there was a bit of elitism in DuBois' 'talented tenth,' and I told him so. My grandfather Phineas, who was friendly with Trotter (William Monroe Trotter, militant editor of the Boston Guardian), also had to contend with the Guardian on that count. Consequently, the only reply I ever received from DuBois was, 'Are you any stranger to elitism?' The conviction behind that question has spurred many black people into needless feelings of guilt because of their prosperity. I did agree with him on his belief that the educated and fortunate should help along those who are less fortunate, a bit of noblesse oblige, as it were. The problems that faced black youths in my day are not altogether different from those nowadays. As many black youths suffered from feelings of inferiority because of the law, many today suffer the same because of misrepresentations in the media, although I think that is changing fast. World War II was the beginning of the end for institutionalized racism, since returning soldiers who had risked their lives for their country and been abroad in places where racism was neither the rule nor the practice, were no longer willing to accept a role as second-class citizens. DuBois and I were alike in that we both abhorred sights of blatant racism. Neither of us often ventured outside the walls of Atlanta University during our time there. You see, I never had to contend with the problems of "where do I fit in?" In Atlanta, the question was already answered, although, once in a train station, a man came up to me and asked me why I was sitting in the "colored section." I never had the impulse nor the

inclination to do what is commonly called 'passing.' My parents opted to stress 'Chamberlainism' rather than conforming to society's categorization. They stressed the 'content of character,' as Dr. King used to say. There were black leaders during my lifetime with ideas that never worked, because their methods seemed to invalidate their projected outcome. Surely, Marcus Garvey didn't really think that he could maintain support after making what DuBois called 'an unholy alliance' with the Ku Klux Klan to transport black Americans back to Africa. How silly! As black people migrated to the North after World War II, efforts to assert themselves as equal citizens became more intense. There were men in black regiments that liberated Jews in concentration camps. These men were not going to settle for second-class lives.

"I often think the youth of today will forget two things. First, that the original goal of abolitionists, early activists, and Dr. King himself was for everyone to be able to determine their own destiny, regardless of skin color. That does not mean rioting in the streets, having more babies than one can support, and recording songs that are detrimental to all involved. These things tend to undermine our validity as a people. The second fear is that they will become so impatient with the speed of social progress that they might do something reckless and stupid. It has already happened. I have all the respect in the world for Malcolm X, but I think that much of what he advocated has been taken out of context and used to suit situations he never intended. Many white Americans during the years after World War II were so preoccupied with the spread of Communism that issues of race were all but ignored until, one by one, people began to rise up in individual cases to demand their rights. Beginning with Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education until the present, presidential hopefuls began to catch on to the idea that the black voice was an emerging one. Truman's Committee on Civil Rights in 1946, Kennedy's enforcing the integration of the University of Alabama, and subsequent civil rights legislation are all evidence. The people of today need to remember that they're standing on the rock of some very impressive trailblazers, men and women with character. The future looks hopeful for everyone from John Doe in Compton, California, to my nephew Dennis in Boston..."

A LETTER FROM JOE SMITH

This is a letter written by Joe Smith. He is hoping to organize a group to protest the taxes levied on whiskey.

Fellow Farmers:

Do you know that your financial future is being threatened? Do you know that Congress has accepted a plan to place an excise tax on whiskey?

If an excise tax is placed on whiskey, the national consumption will be greatly reduced. This, in turn, will create major problems on the farms in this area.

As you know, many farmers in this area are paying off debts accumulated from buying land and moving their families out here. Many of these farmers cannot afford the high cost of transporting the corn over the mountains. What are they going to do? Continue farming and lose money until they have to move back to the east, or just move back now?

We, the farmers, must unite! We have to let the government know how we feel about this tax! I am planning a meeting at my house June 3rd, around eight o'clock. At this meeting, we will discuss possible methods of protest. We will welcome any suggestions you might have. In the meantime, you can stop by my house and sign a petition.

Your friend,

Joe Smith

SUMMER

We all lived together just fine for a while. Then Colin got thrown in jail, and Julia sat around all the time crying on the phone asking, "Why, God, why is it always me," and getting mad at me and Kelly because our boyfriends weren't in jail. It was summer. June, I think. Anyway, it was hot. The air in our apartment didn't work. Wouldn't have done much good if it had. One little window unit for the whole place? The bedrooms would have been awful no matter what. They were way in the back, the bedrooms. I remember some days I'd wake up and the sheets would be just soaked. I mean soaked through. I'd get up and go to work three or four hours early just to get out of that place, what with Julia weeping and moaning all the time and Kelly hogging up the bathroom and dragging in strange men all hours of the day and night, drunk and screaming and playing that god-awful music as loud as it would go and me having to work the next day. Kelly didn't have time for a job. She was too busy fixing her hair.

In fact, I was the only one of us who did have a job. I was a waitress, and then sometimes I'd bus tables or wash dishes for extra cash. It wasn't bad. I didn't make a whole lot of money, but at least the place was air-conditioned. I ate there free, too, so I saved some money and I never had to eat out of our kitchen. Filthiest place on earth, I swear. I've never seen anything like it. I never ate at home. Never. Not even once.

The place I worked at was a barbecue place. A rib joint, really. It was a nice place. Great food, night or day, and the kitchen guys were just a hoot. You should have seen them. Busiest night of the year and they'd be back there laughing and joking and carrying on like life was just one big party. And they kept the place spotless. I did have some problems with my manager once in a while, which is why I quit when I did, but all-in-all it was the best job I ever had. Not to mention the only job. I remember I took my sister Alma there once. I think she had a T-bone platter with fries and a side salad. Maybe cole slaw. The line cooks fixed it up special because it was for my sister. Great guys. Back there laughing and carrying on the whole time. Anyway, she said it was a real nice place. That's a compliment, coming from Alma. Only the best for her.

So it all started when Colin got thrown in jail. Colin's daddy was a cop, some kind of big-shot in the police department with lots of other guys under him, so most times he could get Colin off the hook. Colin would have gone to jail a hundred times over if it hadn't been for his daddy. This time was different. Nobody could help him, not the chief or the sheriff or anybody. Probably not even God himself. It was that bad. You should have heard that list of charges. Forgery, stolen credit cards, larceny, grand theft auto, you name it. Some stuff he wouldn't even tell us about, it was so bad. He was a regular criminal. His daddy got him the best lawyer in town, and he still got put away. And all because of Julia. Because he loved her so much.

He was good, too. You'd walk through a store with him, like at the mall, and he'd be stuffing his pockets full of perfume and earrings, and scarves, all kinds of stuff, and you wouldn't even see it. Even if you were standing right next to him. Kelly told me one time he stole a necklace right off a lady's neck and she never noticed. It was on the bus, too,

right there in front of everybody. I never got to see that necklace, but Kelly says it was beautiful. Genuine fourteen carat gold. Real long, too. Kelly says she could have worn it for a belt, it was so long. I don't know. For some reason Julia hated it. She said it was ugly and tacky. She even tried to flush it down the toilet. For a while she made the cat wear it, all twisted up and wrapped around its little neck. Then one day I guess she just threw it away or pawned it or something. Like I said, I never got to see it. But I was there the day Colin drove up in his stolen car. That's about the time things first started getting weird.

Talk about a fine automobile. It was a little red sports car, kind of hunched over low to the ground. Really, really bright red. It looked like somebody'd gone over the whole thing with nail polish, it was so red and shiny. And it had this great big bird painted on the hood. The bird was the best part. It was real mean looking, like a hawk, but instead of wings it had these big orange-and-yellow flames coming out of its shoulders. The wings, or flames I should say, wrapped all the way around the front part of the car and then all the way down the sides, too. Even the tailpipe was painted up like flames. It was the finest car I ever laid eyes on. I mean ever.

He drove up in the afternoon. I remember the sun was shining so I could see all the details. I was outside sitting on the stoop. It was real hot. Anyway, he drove up, and at first he acted real friendly and happy. Lord knows I would have been, driving that beauty around. We said hey, just like always. Then he asked after Julia. She wasn't home. Nothing out of the ordinary, I think she'd gone off somewhere with Kelly. To a movie or shopping or something. So I told him. And then he started crying. It was the strangest thing. Tears just started pouring down his cheeks. His face screwed up so tight I could hardly recognize him. If I hadn't known him I'd have thought he was some weird drunk guy.

I tried to be sweet. I told him what a great car he was in. I told him he was more than welcome to come inside even though Julia wasn't home. He just started shaking his head and pounding on the steering wheel. I even offered him some leftover rib-eye from work. Nothing did any good. He sat there and cried and banged his head on the dashboard and pounded the steering wheel with his fists and making these weird sounds out of his throat like he was choking. Maybe he was trying to talk. I don't know. I couldn't make any sense of it. After a while I went on inside without him. I mean, what do you say in a situation like that? What else could I do? I just left him there, bawling his eyes out in that fine car, banging his head on the dashboard. All alone. I felt real bad.

That was not quite a year ago. For a while things got better. A little better, anyway. Kelly hooked up with a guy, which helped the screaming and yelling and loud music in the middle of the night situation, not to mention the absolute strangers tramp-ing through our home, eating our food and leaving who knows what- all on the toilet seat situation. This guy was married. That was kind of bad, I guess, but I figured it was still a big step up for a tramp like Kelly. He was a pretty decent guy, too. Real smart. College educated. Some kind of engineer or something. I don't know how old he was, but he was a lot older than us. A full-grown man. I guess some people might say he was too old for her, her only being nineteen and all. Hell, I might say that myself if I didn't know her and what a tramp she was. Knowing her like I did, I'd have been happy if she'd hooked up with an ape.

Of course there was still the problem with Colin and Julia. That stirred things up a little, but it had been going on for a long time, as long as we'd known either of them. We were used to it. She wasn't ever satisfied with anything he did. She hated him stealing, but she hated when he showed up empty-handed. She hated when he didn't come over, but when he did, she'd scream and yell at him the whole time. He just couldn't win with that

girl. Damned if he did and damned if he didn't. I hate to say it, but if I had a guy who loved me so much he was willing to risk jail nearly every single day of his life just to prove it, I sure wouldn't do him dirty the way Julia did Colin.

Anyway, so that was the situation: Kelly hooked up with the married guy, Julia and Colin with all their mess, and me in the middle, trying to make a living and live a decent life and not lose my mind in between. I said before I was the only one of us with a job. That's the truth, but we all got money from our folks. We had to. What I made at the rib joint wasn't nearly enough to keep me up, much less me and two others. Kelly spent every dime as soon as she got it. She'd leave with a check and come back three or four days later, drunk, with nothing to show for it but maybe a new hot-pink thong bikini or one of those pointy hooker bras. Kelly's daddy had some money, though. We'd call him up for back rent or to pay the electric bill, and he'd always send it, no questions asked. How such a decent man could have raised up such a tramp I'll never know. Must be something wrong with her mama.

Julia hardly ever paid bills. On the other hand, she never went off and blew her whole wad in one pop the way Kelly did, either. Julia saved. She'd scrimp and squirrel away for months at a time, never going out, never paying for anything she didn't have to, hardly even eating. And then all the sudden she'd show up one day in a silk blouse from Coplon's or some place like that, some real snotty place downtown where all the rich ladies shop when they aren't playing cards or having parties or tooting around town in their Lincoln Continentals. Those silk blouses cost a fortune, too. Like hundreds of dollars. I don't know why Julia never kept Colin's presents. I always wondered. They were all real nice. Real expensive looking. I'll never figure that girl out. Not if I live to be a hundred.

So the phone calls started as soon as Colin got arrested. For some reason, his daddy couldn't bail him out, so he was stuck in county jail until his trial came up. Now, collect calls from the jail-house cost seventy-five cents apiece, even if you only say two words, which is about all Colin would say since Julia wouldn't ever speak to him. He kept calling anyway. Seven o'clock in the morning he'd call, just as soon as he finished his breakfast, and then every hour on the hour after that. Julia would be crying. She was always weeping and moaning about something. How life had treated her so cruel. How everything was so unfair. How she didn't deserve this and what had she ever done to deserve this. On and on and on. The only person she'd talk to was her mother. She'd spend hours on the phone with her mother, weeping and moaning. I hate to say it, but it got to where she was driving us crazy. And she wouldn't pay for any of Colin's calls, either. Even though they cost seventy-five cents apiece and even though they were coming in every hour from seven in the morning to midnight. The hours she wasn't on the phone with her mother, that is. So Kelly and I got stuck with the bill. That made me mad. I mean, it's not like he called to speak to me or Kelly, and it's not like those calls were free. He always charged them to us, and we always accepted them because we thought maybe Julia would finally quit being stubborn and talk to the poor boy. After a while we were all fed-up.

What happened next surprised a lot of people. All I can say is they weren't there, and they don't know. They don't know how bad it got. They don't know what it was like. And it's none of their business anyway.

Colin broke out of jail. I'm still not sure how he did it, he won't tell me, but one day he showed up at our door with a gun. I was at work at the time. Kelly answered the door. She says at first he just stood there for a few minutes and didn't say anything. Then he asked if Julia was home. He was real polite the whole time, Kelly says. Please and thank-

you and all. He even took off his cap when she answered the door. So she let him in. What else could she do? The boy had a gun. It wasn't a big gun, just a little twenty-two, but still. I don't blame her. I would have done the exact same thing. Anybody who blames Kelly just doesn't know. Anyway, so Colin went on in the apartment and shot Julia. In the leg. He didn't kill her or anything, just hurt her real bad, but there was blood everywhere. The carpet is still all stained where it happened, there in the back bedroom. Evidently she was taking a nap, or else crying on the phone to her mother. That's all she ever did anyway, sleep and cry. Kelly says there wasn't any fight, no screaming or yelling or throwing things like when Colin usually came over, just him at the door and then him walking down the hall and then the shot. She says it all happened real quick. After he shot Julia, Colin ran out the door. Straight to his daddy's. He turned himself in that night.

The rest of the story is pretty boring. I wasn't even there for the exciting part. I was at work the whole time. My name is right there on the schedule. Anybody who wants to can go see for themselves, and the kitchen boys will vouch for me too. Julia is still in the hospital. They moved her to the one over in Tremont City, where her mother is. We haven't heard from her since. We do hear from Colin, though. His trial still hasn't come up, but we talk to him on the phone a lot. Every now and then I go down to the jail-house on visitor day and take him some cigarettes or a dirty magazine or something. Having cigarettes gets you a long way, in the jail-house. I usually take him some quarters so he doesn't run our phone bill up. He makes me lists of things he needs, and I take those down, too. Poor thing. One time he even asked me to bring him some conditioner for his hair. That cracked me up. A full-grown boy, in jail, asking for hair conditioner. I let Kelly take care of it. She knows about that kind of thing.

Colin's daddy won't go visit him because there was so much publicity after it happened. Pictures in the paper and all. So I take down messages for him. They say the trial should come up sometime before Christmas. Mr. Lafitte, Colin's lawyer, says maybe me and Kelly might get to talk in court when the trial happens. Just like on T.V. Good thing Julia left us some silk blouses to wear. No, forget I said that. That was an ugly thing to say.

Kelly finally got a job. The married guy hired her to answer phones and make coffee in his office. I figure he must really like her, to drink any coffee she makes. You couldn't pay me to do it. Think about it. He pays her to make coffee you couldn't pay me to drink. And he pays her real good, too, more than the secretary even. Some people have all the luck. All the boobs, anyway. I quit the rib joint a few weeks back. No more free rib-eyes, but I left with a bunch of money in my pocket and two Visa cards, so I'm alright for now. My daddy sends me some. He's a good man. That's what this world needs more of: good men.

A MAN KIND OF THING

That things had not quite developed as Johnathon had envisioned when he planned this outing was a gross understatement of the current situation. They were in deep. Very deep. As deep as it gets. Johnathon thought they would die.

The little guys enjoyed these outings with their dad and Johnathon was trying to structure his new life so that these parts of his old one would remain foremost. They were his sons, all he had, and though he hated Carol, he called her religiously three times a week to discuss the boys' welfare and activities. The custody arrangement was the only thing they had agreed on in the past four years. She had the boys, and he had every other weekend. She was, after all, a good mother. She didn't stick it to him for alimony or child support either. She didn't need it. That was their problem. She didn't need a damn thing or anyone. Johnathon did. He needed the little guys.

Now he carried the weight of fatherhood as most never do. Their lives depended on him. Mark, at four, was too young to appreciate the peril of the situation and continued playing little-boy, throwing "boats" (sticks, trash, leaves, and anything else he could find) into the thundering torrent that, moments before, had been a gentle stream. Matthew, on the other hand, was wide-eyed and terrified. He was old enough to understand and recognized his father's anxiety. The only other time Dad had been like this was when they went on that walk through the woods and Dad told him about Fluffy. Matt didn't cry then, and he wasn't going to cry now. He would cry later, with Mom, like he did with Fluffy. Anyhow, he could swim now.

"Markie, get your butt back on the blanket like I told you and stay there!" Johnathon yelled, his voice higher than usual.

Markie did as he was told with such haste that Johnathon knew Markie sensed in his voice something unusual and frightening. Three threats and one pop were usually required to get his attention.

"Don't you move from there!" Johnathon admonished in a more normal tone. "Eat that last peanut butter and jelly sandwich and Debbie cake before we go."

Markie would be okay. Matt would be difficult. He was trembling and had his eyes fixed on the pebble-covered beach on the closest side of the sandbar, as the water trickled into, then blasted away his and Markie's footprints where they stood fishing earlier. The rock they had left their shoes on was now somewhere underneath the spray and foam it was causing, as the rising current pounded into and over it. It was the only thing not being swept down the river and over the rocky shoals now roaring unseen behind the wooded point which hid the sharp dogleg to the left.

The sandbar was their battleship, and it resembled one. Bow to stern, it measured over a hundred yards, and port to starboard was about thirty yards. But the highest part on the flat surface was only three feet above the normal water level, which was quickly rising. The bow was taking most of the force of the water and was suffering heavy damage. The torrent slammed into the point of the sandbar and melted away the sand like the waves at high tide destroyed Matt's sand castle last summer at the beach. They didn't have long.

Markie ate, and Matt trembled, while Johnathon tried to overcome his terror and decide what to do. Swimming was out of the question, though the banks of the river were only ten yards away. The current would carry them quickly to the shoals where they would be slammed against the rocks. The rock walkway that they used to get here was now underneath the river, hidden by the muddy, foam-covered torrent. Johnathon tossed a twig into the water and was startled as it shot down the river like it was rocket powered. No way they were going into the water.

"What options do I have," Johnathon wondered quietly but aloud. The little guys couldn't have heard him over the roar if he had yelled it out to the world. He cursed the power company. The bastards never gave you proper warning when they opened the gates and turned on the turbines. A hundred-thousand air-conditioning junkies needed a fix at the same time. What the hell, the bastards controlled the gas company too.

"Screw 'em!" Johnathon yelled, loud enough to be heard over the noise of the flooding water.

"Dad, are we leaving now?" Matt yelled. "I'm ready to go home."

"Yeah, we're leaving soon, son," Johnathon assured him. One way or another, he thought, this time silently. "Go sit with your brother and keep him on the blanket."

When he saw the two boys huddled safely together on the blanket, Johnathon thought again about getting off the little island. Carol was going to be livid when he brought the boys home late. He hated the thought of facing her. What the hell, he thought, better late than never, giggling like a schoolgirl at his morbid attempt at humor.

"Screw her too!" Johnathon yelled, this time louder and with more feeling than before.

He felt a weight lifting from his soul. He felt the adrenaline pumping through his body being channeled from fear to action. He knew what to do.

"Screw her!" he yelled again and smiled. He looked at the little guys holding hands with eyes wide and heads swiveling side to side, as if they could look the water away. What a wuss he had been.

He marched, really marched, back to the boys. They looked at him with puppy-dog eyes, and he felt their helplessness. They needed him. It's a man kind of thing, he thought.

"Ensign Fuller, sound general quarters. This is not a drill," he ordered Matt.

"Chief Fuller, I want full power. Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!" the Captain ordered Markie.

"Aye-aye, sir," both boys said in unison, and saluted.

"Ensign Fuller," Johnathon said to Matt, "we're surrounded by a vastly superior force. What do you suggest?"

"Fight like hell, sir!"

STEVE

The only recollection I have of Steve is from the eyes and mind of a small boy. Burned into my memory is the vision of a handsome young man getting into his cherry-apple red Triumph, with his arm around a girl. He waves at me and speaks. How do you measure the pride a small boy feels inside when his hero acknowledges him? Assuredly, I was chasing tadpoles two minutes later, but that feeling and that image remained with this small boy. Steve was the image of young manhood that I held as supreme. He was my hero simply because he was older, lived next door, and he knew my name.

Steve could have been a hoodlum and remained my hero, for such is the relationship among men. He was respected by all the little people in the neighborhood as well as our parents. He chose, and had been guided well, to excel in his endeavors. To a small boy, that did not really matter. He knew me, and everyone knew it. That was enough for me.

Steve was sixteen in 1965, a tremendously popular student and athlete at the local high school. He always had friends with him, mostly girls. I did not understand why he had girlfriends, but I overlooked this flaw in his character. Heroes are not perfect. He was the quarterback on the football team and played baseball as well. The conceit which festers in most individuals of this ilk never infected Steve.

I went about my business, and he went about his. Columbia was a wonderful place to be for a young boy in the sixties. We lived near a lake and most of my adventures and misadventures centered around the water. We walked to and from school. And less than a mile away, construction crews were constantly working on the interstate with behemoth earth moving equipment that became playgrounds for the brave among us. Parents worried about what we were doing more than they worried about what others might do to us. I had sensed a change after the events of late 1962 and late 1963. But those changes had not become fully ingrained in the American psyche, certainly not in the mind of this puddle jumper.

A couple of miles away, young men, very young men, were playing at the grown-up game of soldier. They were everywhere, by the thousands. Any trip out of the neighborhood was accompanied by contact with soldiers. They were ageless, faceless, and from somewhere else. They flew over in flocks of helicopters around the clock. We could see the whites of their eyes as we shot them out of the sky with our imagined weaponry. We never missed. And we had plenty of targets constantly attacking us in low level sneak attacks, coming in just over the tops of the pines. You had to be fast, and, I guess, you had to be there. It was special, and I try to hold on to it.

There was a war somewhere in Asia, in a country called Vietnam. We did not know where it was or what it was about, only that our soldiers were going there and fighting and some did not come back. Most small children do not watch the evening news. I watched religiously, waiting for Walter to show the nightly graphic which showed the casualty figures of the opposing forces on a background of their national flag. We always kicked ass, but there were no shutouts.

Steve had a childhood that was somewhat different than mine and most others. He was born in a time and place where children were burdensome. I do not know or want to know the exact details of his birth or young childhood. No one knows with certainty anyway. I do know that sometime early in life Steve became an orphan. His parents disappeared in the turmoil of civil war. Steve was born in Korea in 1950. His parents were Korean. He never knew them. His adoptive father, a bachelor, fell in love with Steve and brought the young orphan to the United States.

I doubt that being assimilated into the American culture was difficult for this young war orphan. His appearance surely presented other children with a dilemma when they played war. He was a gook, so he was the enemy. But he was their friend, too, and should be on their side. Steve probably did not like to play war. Many can relate to being identified as the enemy simply because of the differences in appearance that they were born with. Rare indeed were Korean war orphans who played quarterback, drove convertible Triumphs, and said "y'all" in South Carolina during the fifties and sixties.

We moved away at the dawn of the wonder years, and memories fade quickly from the minds of youth. But I never forgot Steve. I found sports and went to school. Heck, I even figured out what girls were all about. I was a studly eleven-year-old in March of '69, looking forward to another season of baseball. When I got home from school one day, Mama told me that Steve was dead. My hero had returned to Asia and been killed fighting for his country.

I remember the flag-draped casket, so similar to the one I had observed in 1963 from my father's lap when we watched the television for days. I recall looking for the bugler as the beautiful sounds of taps wafted through the bright, breezy March afternoon. I remember something else. I remember crying for the first time, not from pain, or fear or mistreatment. I cried my share from those causes. These tears and the hurt inside were different and uncontrollable. I was but a moment in his life, but he had become an important part of the foundation upon which I built my character. Like a whiff of a remembered fragrance, sorrow makes me remember Steve. And the memories of the past, help me get over the sorrows of the present.

HAWAII VS. HISTORY

"...of course the President has the power to make the treaties, but any such document must be approved by two-thirds of the Senate. Texas was the first state..."

Texas. I had a friend who lived there when she was a kid. She told me that once her little brother went riding and got bit by a rattlesnake while he was out. He came home about to faint and white and puffy-lookin'. She said it was sick. I'll bet it was.

"...when a majority of the upper house utilized their constitutional authority and overrode the treaty, President Tyler endeavoured to influence..."

Now what the heck is that supposed to mean? I wish he wouldn't make it sound so complicated. He searches for those big words, I know he does, just to make it harder to understand. He simply could have said, "President Tyler tried to make..." and then whatever else.

"...finally by the process of joint resolution, the treaty was passed and Texas entered the Union as..."

Oh crap. The speech contest for the Rotary Club. I totally forgot about it. I haven't even decided on a topic yet. That's pathetic. Now I'm gonna have to stay home and write this weekend, and I already made plans to spend the night at Jen's house. Oh well...

"...resolution is a separate process that requires only a majority in both houses..."

Susie Fisher has two houses. Her family owns one here, but they also have a winter house in Tahoe. Come to think of it, she's not here today. She's probably there now skiing down the slopes in those designer ski-suits of hers. What a spoiled rotten brat...I wish I was her...

"...contrary to popular belief, the Senate does not 'ratify' treaties, it simply gives advice and consent after the President has already wrought the treaty..."

Yeah, that sounds good. I wish my mom would give a little less advice and a lot more consent. I really wanted to go to a party at Jason's house next weekend, and my mom just kept saying how there were going to be alcohol and drugs there and not enough "adult supervision." I'm sure; what does she think a party is for in the first place? Besides, she knows I don't do that stuff anyways.

“...Senate and President rarely have conflicts, but when they do, friction can be substantial. Luckily, the relationship generally remains pretty stable...”

Man, that sounds like Bobby and me. We’re “generally pretty stable,” but we have some of those substantial conflicts, period. I had a piece of paper that had my vocabulary words on it in my pocket. He got all mad, because he thought it was a note from some other guy. And he tried to snatch it. Well, I played along with him like it was something important, because he was acting so jealous. When he finally got it from me and read it, he got all huffy and said I had been teasing him. I’m sure, like it was my fault. What a dork.

“...to the original point, the treaty to annex Texas was the first to be passed by joint resolution. It occurred in December of 1845 and...”

Oh yeah, it’s December again already, isn’t it. I can hardly believe it. It’ll be Christmas before you know it. I hope vacation goes slowly, because I sure need a break. But gosh, I’m gonna be so bored. I almost forgot that Bobby’s gonna be gone to Hawaii for over a week. Man, that’s no fair. I want to go with him so bad. That would be awesome. I can totally imagine it. All that blue water and running along the hot sands, holding hands. Ah, wow. Moonlit strolls along the beach and lying together under the stars. We could go for a walk in the tropical forest somewhere really secluded and...

“Miss Dunn...MISS DUNN! Are you going to answer my question or not?” Mr. Johnson looked at me with an expression of triumph and smugness, like a cat that has just caught a bird. The rest of my classmates stared expectantly.

“Uh...uh...Hawaii...,” I blurted foolishly.

Mr. Johnson stared at me in utter confusion and disbelief.

“Why...why, that’s exactly right, Miss Dunn. Hawaii was the second state to be annexed by joint resolution.” He shook his head slowly and turned away. “As I was saying, in 1898, Hawaii...”

I laughed in relief and shrugged my shoulders. Life on the edge, I always say. Ah yes, now where was I? Oh yeah, Hawaii. And we were just about to go for that secluded little stroll...

CLEANLINESS IS NOT ALWAYS NEXT TO GODLINESS

I had been married about six years and already a mother four times over when I stumbled onto a fact that would make my life more meaningful and more fun. It involved priorities and choosing how you spend your time. You see, I had developed a routine where on this day I did laundry (correct that; with four small children, I did laundry every day), on this day I grocery shopped, on this day I visited my mother, on this day I cleaned the house, and so on. The routine had become a ritual, and I had become very inflexible.

My discovery took place in the springtime. Winter had been long and hard, and the kids—Anita age four, Terri age three, Jeanne age two, Mike age one—and I were suffering from “cabin fever.” They wanted to play outside, and I wanted them to play outside. But it was raining and still pretty chilly. It was my cleaning day, and I liked the satisfaction I got when everything was clean and put away. We lived in a four room cottage, one of those old narrow houses with one large room after another straight back in a row. I would start at one end and work to the back, saving the hardest room, the kitchen, for last. My four rowdy children had their own agenda and were methodically following me around, undoing each room as fast as I straightened it. I finally made it to the kitchen. I prided myself on my clean kitchen, and the comment had been made that my kitchen was so clean you could eat off the floor.

On this dreary, rainy day, the children were especially irritating. They were bickering and fighting and causing a ruckus. They wanted someone to entertain them—that someone was me. They had every toy they owned spread out in the living room, the room I had just finished cleaning. The phone rang. It was my best girlfriend, Nancy. Now I may have been a fanatic about clean, but she was the champ. Nancy’s mother used to joke that, when overnight guests at Nancy’s house got up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom, they returned to their room to find that Nancy had slipped in and made the bed.

Nancy and I talked for a while. She had her cleaning all done and was about to watch her favorite soap opera. Just what I needed to hear.

I hung up the phone and returned to the kitchen. I took one look, stopped dead in my tracks, and began to moan. While I was on the phone, the kids had moved to the kitchen for a little action. I could not believe what I saw. Mike had shoved a chair up to the sink, climbed in, and there he sat, fully clothed, surrounded by dishes, splashing for all he was worth. Jeanne had managed to open the refrigerator and was methodically squirting ketchup on herself and the floor. Terri was attempting to help with the floor, mopping and wickedly swinging the dripping wet mop in all directions. The bucket of scrub water was turned upside down, and standing on top of the bucket was Anita, searching the pantry shelves for cookies. It couldn’t have been any worse if someone had purposefully staged it. I stood there for a few minutes with my mouth hanging open. I didn’t know where to start, or how things had deteriorated so quickly. I was only on the phone a few minutes. My eyes rolled in my head, and I bit my tongue, trying to remain calm. “They’re only children,” I kept telling myself.

Several minutes went by before I was able to move, and then I didn't know where to start. Terri helped me out on this one. She came stomping over to me, dragging the mop and splashing water in all directions. I sent her to the bathroom to get towels, took the mop, and cleaned up the wet floor. Next, I got Anita and the cookies out of the pantry and sent them into the living room. I wiped the ketchup off Jeanne, and she quickly followed the cookies into the living room. That left Mike. By now, Terri had arrived with the towels. So, I rescued Mike from the sink, towed him off, and put him in dry clothes. I carried Mike to the living room, and the three girls came racing over clamoring for attention. "Read me a story." "Play Barbies with me." "Color with me." I looked over my shoulder at the mess in the kitchen, and I looked down at my children. There was no contest. I picked up the storybook and gathered the kids into our favorite rocking chair. We read, we played Barbies, we colored, we played hide and seek. Time passed quickly, and soon my husband was home from work. He was surprised at the mess and no dinner, but he didn't say anything. He just pitched in and soon we had food on the table and some order in the kitchen.

That evening, as I was putting the kids to bed, I noticed how much more cooperative and relaxed they were. And I was more relaxed, too. They were asking if we could play again tomorrow. Suddenly, it dawned on me that there was much more satisfaction in the smiles on the faces of my children than in having a super clean house. From that day on, I devoted more time to being with the children and accomplished the mundane cleaning, laundry, and shopping when I could. Things weren't always in the best order, but we managed. Oh, by the way, they still say you can eat off my kitchen floor, but I think they're referring to the green bean under the baby's highchair or the crust of bread halfway hidden in the corner.

My kids are all grown now, and I still have lovely memories of the shows we used to give for their friends, the monopoly games that went on for days, the time I took them skating and fell and broke both my wrists, and the art work that always adorned the refrigerator. Come to think of it, I am still enjoying these activities; only now, the players are my grandchildren. But they won't let me take them skating.

THE WAR WITHIN: FURY AND HUMAN AGGRESSION

Man is a purposeful blend of biological urges and tendencies and is the end product of centuries of social and religious molding. But he is at war. The war is global in magnitude and will continue until the last of his species loses consciousness. His battle begins early in life, and while his strategies are influenced by others, he, for the most part, struggles alone. He can, however, find comfort in the fact that every other of his kind he encounters on his crusade fights a similar war. His weapons are simple and are provided by those closest to him. He carries with him morality, cultural laws, religious doctrine, and ethical codes. Armed with these weapons, along with his natural physical ability, his varying human emotion, his endless need for justification, and his capacity for remorse, he is a mighty and formidable warrior. He thinks, he feels, he reasons. The war he wages is his personal effort to cast off the fury within himself, to conquer primitive urges which defy his sense of reason.

Human aggression, with the many forms that it takes and the various effects that it has upon our lives, is an inherent trait. It often defies reason, leaping the boundaries set by social structure and religious dogma, and can be the catalyst for both human success and social failure. Man, as a feeling, cognizant animal, struggles endlessly with his own propensity to violent and aggressive behavior. Konrad Lorenz, in his essay "The Biological Basis of Human Behavior," examines human "militant enthusiasm," the tendency in man for unreasonable aggressive behavior. In comparing man's militant behavior to that of primates, he states "human militant enthusiasm evolved out of a communal defense response of our prehuman ancestors." He suggests that this response, at one time, might have ensured man's survival (Lorenz 398). While support for his theory can certainly be found in animal study, human aggression is far more complex and potentially dangerous than animal aggression. Due to modern technological weaponry, its effect can be globally devastating. Society, with its understanding of the potential destructive force of human aggression, takes great care in providing man with the restraints necessary to master this aspect of his nature. So much of what we are as a species, our social structure, our religious beliefs, our judicial system, moral teachings, and ethical guidelines address this basic human behavior.

In the animal kingdom, we often view aggression as an acceptable means to an end, a necessary evil, a way to ensure the survival of the species. In judging this necessity of behavior in animals, we justify the aggressive attacks of parent birds as they react to our nearness to their fledgling offspring. Who would find fault with the warning charge of a mare, separated from the safety of the herd and responsible for the protection of her just-born young? These are justifiable forms of aggression, behavior with a responsible meaning. However, as it often does with mankind, animal aggressive behavior frequently runs astray. Stallions, fighting for control over a band of mares, will sometimes inflict mortal injury. The fury that carries them into battle continues well beyond the point which would have proven one stronger than the other. In the feeding frenzies of sharks, we see another example of animal aggression gone awry. Actions beginning with a purpose as

simple as a group of sharks satiating hunger are transformed into behavior which defies all reason. Their feeding develops into a manic behavior that often finds members of their own species added haplessly to the menu.

Just as one can find both reasonable and unreasonable aggressive behavior in animals, it is a constant visitor in human relations. We see it first in a child's interaction with his peers. We watch the vicious battles over possession of toys and, as parents, begin to arm the child with the many weapons he will use to combat his primal instincts. We teach him right from wrong, good from bad, acceptable from unacceptable, reasonable from unreasonable. All the lessons are passed to him in the same form that we, as children, were taught. He is educated according to the doctrine of social and religious culture to which he belongs. His many lessons on acceptable and unacceptable aggression will, hopefully, accompany him for a lifetime and aid him with his inner struggle. He may at sometime be asked to go to war. This he will do within the guidelines of his own culture. In the settling of our own country, we view the Sioux Indians as vicious warriors. The taking of scalps became an accepted practice among their people and brought prestige to those warriors accomplishing it (Utley/Washburn 165). This practice, along with their natural warring instinct, was viewed as appalling by early settlers. The study of their social structure and religious beliefs, however, reveals that the Sioux were not savage, as was once believed, but members of a complex, morally structured society not unlike our own. When examining man as a social animal, Charles Darwin offers insight into the varying cultural differences found in man's own acceptance of aggression. He states, "If, for instance, to take an extreme case, men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive-bees, there can hardly be any doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers; and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters; and no one would think of interfering (473)."

Regardless of what man is taught concerning social and morally acceptable behavior, human aggression can sometimes mushroom into what, sadly, resembles the feeding frenzy of the shark. Man's aggression can, under certain circumstances involving mass release of constraints, cause a situation to escalate from a socially acceptable protest into behavior which defies all reason. In Los Angeles, California, the spring of 1992 riots gave America, and most likely the world, the opportunity to witness such an event. Men and women, outraged by what they viewed as an unjust judicial decision, began to react in a primitive, unreasonable manner. Innocent, unsuspecting people were dragged from their vehicles and beaten without mercy. Life was lost, injuries sustained, and property damaged without just cause. In horror, we watched as our own primitive capabilities were unleashed. The fury was unrestrained, and those of us who wished to believe we had risen above such behavior were reminded of the primal man lurking within.

And so, the war within wages on. If we are ever mindful of the weapons we possess and the importance each of them holds, perhaps we will never personally face the fury. But if we should, the very weapons that aid us in our personal battles can begin to heal our interpersonal wounds. Natural traits, morality, social and cultural beliefs, religious doctrine, and experience combine to form the warrior-individual in each of us. Our battlefield is conscious thought. I pray for our success.

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VEGETARIAN FEVER

"Meat's meat, and a man's got to eat!" That's from *Motel Hell*. Gentle reader, it is with a serpent's tongue that a man would say such a thing. However, that is the movies, and this is real life. I had the pleasure of visiting a friend, Joey, at his new place of employment the other day. Joey works in the meat room of a local grocery store. My visit was an experience I will not soon forget. In fact, it has changed my life, or at least the way I eat. Everything about it, from employees to the room, and most of all the meat, had an awfully gruesome impact.

Personal hygiene does not seem a major concern for any of the workers. One might wonder where all the ex-bikers go when their riding days are over. They take up jobs as butchers I am certain. Fat men with thick hairy necks and long greasy hair stand at their tables. A huge tattooed arm raises a cleaver and plunges it downward into the dead flesh. The thug releases the blade's handle long enough to drag a large, swollen finger under his running nose. I even witnessed an individual leaving the restroom without washing his hands. These things seem quite sick to me, but it was the attitudes that got really vulgar. Joey, either to impress or disgust me, thought it funny to start a meat fight. He submerged his hand in a bucket of blood and discarded guts, then hurled a handful of the dripping, oozing mess at a co-worker! The outbreak that ensued was more than unpleasant, and I had to take leave.

Another aspect, no less repulsive than the employees, was the shop. The walls were tile, cold and probably white, but at this moment they are splattered with bloody debris. Down the center of the slightly concave floor runs a gutter, the purpose of which is to capture the run-off. The gutter is covered with a steel grate, and each rectangle of the grid is filled with jelled fat. The smell is strange, like death yet somewhat sweet. Strategically placed waste bins stand near work stations filled with undesirable renderings. On the wall in front of the room is a thick magnetic strip which holds a group of crusty knives. The whole scene is ominous.

Worst of all, more so than workers or the room, is the product. On giant hooks hang dead carcasses. A side of beef is just that, a lifeless cow split at the backbone. There are pigs stripped of their skins, and some with their heads still attached. The animals still make noises, the snapping of bones, the crackling-popping sound of joints being torn apart. The grinder squeals as a piece of bone makes its labor difficult. Ground meat flows forth while still more is crammed in the top. Common practice is to regrind the old beef and add fresh blood. Joey scrapes skulls and mixes the product with gelatin, and the result is headcheese.

Upon departing, I had seen enough. Today, I am a different man. After seeing the process firsthand, I will probably never laugh at another vegetarian. The workers, the shop, and the meat were too much! I have seen the sausage made. I don't crave it anymore.

JACKHAMMERS AND THUNDER

This is absurd. It's absolutely ridiculous. My heart is beating so hard I'm sure it will, at any moment, break out and land in my lap. But why such anxiety? After all, I haven't been asked to cut off my arm. I only need to write a story. Yet I feel the pounding. It's like the jackhammer pounding the concrete. The palms of my hands are drenched. I dare not touch my paper for the few words I have written will be smeared to nothingness. I need to get a grip. I'll just kick my feet up here on the couch. Breathe. Concentrate. It's working. The plug has been pulled. The tension is draining. Keep it up. Eyes closed, breathe, relax, breathe, relax...

I run down the alley that leads to the schoolground. It's Monday, and Mondays in Miss Palmer's first grade class are my favorite days.

I love Miss Palmer. She teaches me how letters form words and words build sentences. Sentences create beautiful stories to be read out loud. That's why Mondays are so special. At the beginning of the year, Miss Palmer divided the class into five groups. Each group was assigned a day to go to the reading circle. I'm in the Monday group. Today is my day.

This Monday's reading circle is going to be very special. We have worked for days on compound words. What a wonderful thing! Now the characters in my reader, Kim, his sister Wendy, and their dog Tyke will have a place to go besides their yard. They can now go to their playhouse.

The time has come. Miss Palmer calls us to the circle. I sit quietly as the first student stands to read. My lips move as I follow the words, but I dare not let a sound escape. Kim and Wendy are playing catch behind their playhouse. Kim throws the ball, but Wendy does not catch it. It goes into the bushes at the edge of the yard. Miss Palmer suddenly says, "Stop." Her eyes move to me. It's finally my turn. I stand and smooth the creases from my skirt. As I balance my reader on my left hand, I place my right hand on the open page. The glorious words pour out as I continue the story. Kim and Wendy search for their ball. Suddenly I hesitate, "The ball is _____." I hear Miss Palmer telling me to take my time and sound it out. I look again at the letters, n-o-w-h-e-r-e. I smile. I know the word. With the confidence of an opera star, I sing out in my clearest voice, "The ball is now here." Miss Palmer's voice pierces the air. "That's wrong. Look at it again. Think about the story." How can I be wrong? Kim and Wendy have lost their ball. They look and look. They must have found it, because it's now here.

I feel the eyes of the circle members staring at me. Even worse, I hear their muffled giggles. The page of my reader wrinkles as the sweat pours from my hand. I silently beg Miss Palmer to tell me what's wrong. Instead, she instructs me to take my seat and study the word. The rest of the students take their turn reading. I steal a glance at the clock. One minute and the recess bell will ring. One more minute and I'll be free from these seven letters that have ruined my day. One more minute and I'll be able to whollop the tar out of those who dared to stare and giggle.

I can't believe this is happening to me. All my classmates are outside playing. I have been condemned to sit in the circle alone. I can't look at the reader for the seven letters lie there waiting. Waiting to pounce on my eyes as the lion pounces on its prey. I turn and look at Miss Palmer as she sits at her desk. She is no longer the wonderful woman who opened my world to words. She has turned into a monster on a mission to destroy. She slowly rises from her chair. In a fiery voice she bellows, "What is the word?" I square my shoulders and glare into her eyes. Why is she doing this to me? I have told her the word, but she says I am wrong. I have nothing more to say to Miss Monster. She shakes her head and walks into the hall with the rest of her kind.

I can feel the tears building as I listen to the kids on the playground. My dad will understand when I tell him about "the word." He'll console me when I tell him I was deprived of my revenge during recess. But, crying is not permitted. I'm the oldest in the family. It's my job to look after my sisters. Dad says I can't do that if my eyes are all puffy and red. He is always telling me to be "stoic." I'm not sure what that means. But, I know it's important to dad, so I choke back the tears.

The bell rings again. Recess is over. I look out the window and see the kids lining up. Soon they will return to the classroom. They will see me still locked in my circle prison. I can't stand it. I hear thunder. It can't be. The sun is shining, and the sky is blue. But, the sound is pounding in my ears. Now I feel it. My chest is going to explode.

Miss Monster walks into the room. She's coming towards me. I want to run, but something holds me in the chair. My only escape is to close my eyes. Close them so tight they can't be pried open. I'm captured! I feel the hand press against my arm. I hear the voice calling my name...

My eyes jerk open. It's not the hand or face of Miss Palmer I see, but the hand and face of my husband. I stretch out my arms, and he pulls me off the couch. I walk into the bathroom and splash cold water on my face. It feels good. The nap felt good, but the problem remains. I still have to write the story. I haven't decided what to write about. My memories are mine. They are the only thing I have total control over. I just can't bring myself to put them on paper for all to see. I pick up the towel and dry my face. I stare at the reflection in the mirror and suddenly feel the wet beads on my palms. I feel the vibration. Once again, the jackhammer begins to pound the concrete.

A MALE PHENOMENON

It's true! There are long stretches of the German Autobahn where there is indeed no speed limit. Most American men, at one time or another, have dreamt of experiencing one of these Autobahns since the time they first started driving. Though they never actually make this a life goal, they usually allow the thought to reside somewhere in the back of their minds. "Someday, I would love to experience the thrill of the German Autobahn!" Legally attaining speeds of 100 mph plus carries a strange attraction for many American men. My opportunity for this unspoken fantasy came several years ago during a short visit in Germany.

I was chosen to drive a small red Mazda which belonged to my friend, Hergen. He didn't particularly enjoy driving, so he elected me to be his designated driver. The eight hour journey from Mosbach, in southern Germany, to Berlin would take us on long stretches of this most coveted (at least in my mind) German Autobahn. It appeared my chances of achieving my unspoken goal were dramatically improving.

We set out early and were immediately encumbered by morning rush hour traffic. "How can this be? We are on the German Autobahn! Speed is the name of the game!"

Not now. We found ourselves in a gridlock of cars moving only inches at a time. After realizing that we were not going anywhere too soon, I decided to let patience take over and to calmly wait this thing out. To my surprise it wasn't long before the traffic broke, and we were soon moving at an adequate cruising speed. I felt comfortable to level off at about 130 kilometers per hour, about 80 miles per hour. I glanced at Hergen to check his approval, and he exhibited no concern at all. "I'm actually doing it! I'm on the Autobahn and already cruising at a speed which is not legal anywhere on U.S. highways! If only my friends could see me now!" My mental musing was abruptly shattered by the blur of a Mercedes exploding past me in the left lane. I never even saw him coming. I had been contemplating changing lanes to overtake a tiny car full of kids, when he appeared. I had checked my mirrors only moments before, and all was clear. He was followed by one after another going at what I guessed to be about 150 mph. I began to feel that perhaps I was out of my league here. I decided it would be in my best interest to just stay in my lane, drop this silly notion of speed, and get us to Berlin safely and in one piece. For all I knew, this little red bucket of bolts we were riding in wasn't capable of going much faster than we were without completely disintegrating under us. I figured it was best to leave the supersonic daredevil stunts to the guys with the proper equipment.

After arriving in Berlin, I soon realized that the challenge of European city driving brings excitement all its own. Being unfamiliar with many of the road signs and the general etiquette of driving in a foreign city required me to be extremely cautious. One particular aspect of Berlin driving was brought to my attention by my young German friend, Arwed, during a day of sightseeing. Bicycles seem to be as common as cars in Berlin, and they carry the same status as pedestrians. I was always taught to yield to pedestrians when making right hand turns, and I had no problem continuing this practice

during my time in Berlin. But because I was unfamiliar with the bicycle factor, I would continually neglect to check for bicycles before executing my turn. Though the pedestrians had all cleared, a bicycle could suddenly be in my path before I knew it. Arwed, who was at that time doing his driver training, was faithful in reminding me again and again to check over my right shoulder for this potential disaster. Both our friendship and the bicyclists of Berlin remain intact to this day.

The streets of Berlin provided me with no opportunities to fulfill my "Mario Andretti" ambitions. Even though I did travel on the Autobahn while in the city, I had to restrain myself. Speed limits are posted and enforced when the Autobahn goes through urban areas. My three week driving experience in Berlin was basically limited to fighting stop-and-go rush hour traffic and discovering alternate routes to get me where I was going. I figured that three weeks of this would be enough time for me to forget about becoming a member of my own little "100 Club." I was even beginning to consider how nice it would be to be a lowly passenger on the trip back home. The stress of this type of driving was really wearing on me, and I was becoming more than willing to give up my driving duties altogether. However, in retrospect, I now realize that this stress caused me to long for the open road once again. Long stretches of highway with no stopping was a most inviting thought. It seemed that my previously suppressed desires were showing their ugly head once again.

Sure enough, as we embarked on our journey back to Mosbach, I found those thoughts of speed again entering my mind. Though I had previously decided to forget about it and just play it safe, I realized I would soon be leaving Germany without attaining my silly goal. I began to hear friends back home questioning me with disgust: "You mean you drove sixteen hours on the German Autobahn and never once broke 100 mph?" As it turned out, not one of them even asked, but I imagined hearing them nonetheless. We were driving in then East Germany when I first began to seriously consider changing my mind about this little fantasy of mine. My courage continued building, but I decided to wait till we crossed into West Germany. If we did encounter any problems as a result of my little experiment, I certainly didn't want to add to the trouble by being stranded in a communist country.

We were about 30 miles from Mosbach, and I was beginning to really feel the pressure. I had passed up several opportunities earlier, and I knew I was quickly running out of time. Hergen had no idea of my intentions, and I had no intention of asking him for his opinion. As I came to the crest of a long difficult hill, an equally long descent appeared before me. I glanced at Hergen again and found him to be asleep. If ever the perfect opportunity for speed presented itself, this was the one. I gradually increased pressure on the accelerator and the speedometer began to rise, 135...140...145...150 kilometers per hour. I had to change lanes to pass a Volkswagen, and I think I even passed a BMW. I had arrived! I was now an elite member of that high speed lane. The Mazda, to my surprise, continued to respond to my requests for more speed. A quick calculation told me that in order to break 100 miles per hour I needed to attain just over 160 kph. 155...160. The poor little Mazda started to vibrate and make sounds I had not previously heard, but it seemed to be holding up! 161! I did it! One hundred good old American miles per hour! I went to 165 kph just to remove any doubt and basked in the thrill of the moment for about thirty seconds. Thirty seconds was all I needed. I had accomplished my goal! I drifted back into the ranks of the "slow lane" drivers and stayed there for the remainder of our journey.

Back in Mosbach, Hergen commented that he thought we were going a bit fast at

one point. I only smiled as I thought about my recent accomplishment. Though my fantasy had been realized, it wasn't as big a thrill as I had expected. I don't imagine that this need for speed will be calling my name again anytime in the near future. I will not again fall under the spell brought on by that little red Mazda. It's only a car, and speed is only a fleeting feeling which I vow never to pursue again.

I wonder how fast one of those Mercedes can go?

A SNOW JOB

As the car topped the hill, it hit an ice patch in the road and started skidding down the mile-long hill. I tried to brake, gear down, and steer without over-steering. Nothing worked. The car skidded down the hill, went airborne, and all I could do was watch helplessly as the ponds and trees kept coming at me at an alarming speed. When the car finally smashed into the tree, everything was quiet except for the sounds of the swirling snow and of the tree, twenty feet tall, cracking and breaking. I remember thinking, "Oh, great. I've lived through the crash, and now I'm going to be crushed by a falling pine tree." So, still dazed, I crawled hurriedly across the console and out the passenger side of the car, and what was left of the car.

I tried not to think of the car as I walked the half mile to the nearest house. I kept thinking instead of how glad I was that there was no traffic in the opposing lane and that the tree wasn't as big as the trees on either side of it. It wasn't until later that I thought of my seat belt.

I consider myself a careful driver. I don't drink anything stronger than Pepsi, and I use turn signals and try to obey all traffic laws. But I am one of the estimated twenty per cent of South Carolina's population who doesn't always follow the law of buckling seat belts before driving or riding in a motor vehicle.

I know all of the excuses. Hey, I used them all: Seat belts aren't comfortable; Seat belts are a hassle; I can't remember to fasten it. The fact is that, if I'd made it a habit to wear my seat belt, none of those excuses would have entered into the argument. After I started wearing my seat belt after the accident, I hardly noticed I was wearing it. In fact, I would sometimes try to get out of the car without remembering to unbuckle myself. I've used the excuse that I'm a safe and careful driver. I still believe I am, but now I realize I'm not in control of every driving situation, like the road conditions or the ability of other drivers. I've occasionally used the excuse that I'm only riding a few miles up the road. But I was only a mile from home when I hit that pine tree. The excuse that really seems pointless, though, is the excuse: "It's my business whether I want to wear the blasted contraption, and it's not for some self-important lawmaker to decide."

According to the South Carolina Highway Department's Director of Highway Safety, statistics show that in 1990, 983 people were killed in traffic accidents on South Carolina's streets and highways. Of the reported 45,358 unrestrained occupants involved in these accidents, one in 1,184 was killed, and one out of 88 sustained incapacitating injuries. For restrained occupants, only one out of 87 was killed, and one in seventeen sustained an incapacitating injury. In other words, a person who wears his or her seat belt has five times fewer chances to sustain an incapacitating injury and has better than 13.5 times a chance to even survive.

There are people who argue that they know someone who would have been killed if they had been wearing their seat belt. My brother was driving his new truck when an overloaded eighteen-wheel log truck ran a red light and hit his truck broadside. My brother's four-wheel-drive was turned on its side and crushed from the passenger side to

nearly a foot from the driver's door. He was lucky. He wasn't wearing his seat belt. But his only injuries were a few bruises and a cut on his hand as he crawled out the window after his truck had been pulled out from under the logging truck. The non-believers of the seat belt law told him that he would have been crushed if he'd been wearing his seat belt. It's funny. He never wore his seat belt before that wreck, but now he wears his and insists that his wife and son also wear theirs.

I was very lucky too. Even though I wasn't wearing my seat belt, I was only bruised up a bit. Two weeks after the accident, I still have huge bruises. The windshield was shattered by my head. My throat was caught by the steering wheel, and I lost my voice for a few days. I totalled my car, and I lost a week at work. But it could have been a lot worse; I could have lost my life. I missed running the car into several ponds coming down that hill, and I missed the two bigger trees on either side of the one I hit.

I firmly believe in guardian angels, and now I firmly believe in the wearing of seat belts. The people who oppose the seat belt law obviously haven't been in a wreck in which the car was totalled. If you're lucky enough to walk away, the vision of all that twisted metal makes you want to make sure you give your guardian angels all the help you can.

A BLIGHT OF NATURE

A few weeks ago I was watching a television news report about wildlife poaching. As the camera crew captured scenes of flame-colored foxes who had chewed their own legs off to escape vicious traps and once-regal deer who stared sightlessly toward heaven, my heart sank to my knees.

Have you ever wondered what it is about animals that touches the inner core of our being? Those peaceful, majestic animals deserved much better than to be reduced to no more than a pelt or a carcass, and yet we humans had to make laws to prevent such blasphemy. Are we touched by animals because they represent a self-governed world free of corruption? Are we jealous of a world that we, as humans, know we could never achieve?

Nature is a world of unity. In order to survive, several species of animals depend upon one another. It's a world of mutual respect. Animals don't have a worry about locking doors or barring windows. Animals don't have to be taught the Golden Rule to treat others as they would like to be treated themselves. It is entirely instinctive for them. A good example of this are the animals which travel in groups, clans, or herds. They stick together and offer each other food, protection, and even babysitting services.

Elephants, penguins, wolves, and tigers are prime examples. These animals accept members of their own species and have no distinctions such as race or religion which could cause rifts among them. Their leaders are chosen for leadership abilities, and they have no need for politics. The laws of nature are the only laws animals need to live by. Animals don't need governing bodies to discipline their actions. As long as they have food and water, all they have to fight are weather and natural enemies. Although each species may have natural enemies, those enemies are known and expected. In the human world, a "friend" may actually be an adversary. What might your friend say about you behind your back?

We humans have evolved in a world so full of greed and dishonesty that we can't be as open and trusting. Therefore, we have built barriers amongst ourselves. We build fences to separate our property. We use locks for windows and doors. We have to take precautions like these, because we don't know whom we can trust. There are no such barriers in the animals' world.

Man controls his own destiny, and often that of the animals which surround him. With all the environmental issues being examined today, the animals cannot be faulted. Man does not confer with the animals who live in the area when he decides to build a chemical processing plant which will invite toxic hazards.

The animal world is enviable in many ways. Humans have cornered the market on such dishonesty as betrayal and deceit. And have you ever heard of such vices as vandalism, jealousy, torture, rape, or murder in the animals' world? Because of basic human nature, man cannot live by the same rules which apply in the animals' world. In order to survive in the human world, he must constantly strive to stay ahead of the others. Therefore, even if he doesn't naturally possess deceitful traits, he must eventually modify his own thinking patterns in order to second-guess the next fellow. Man has to envy the animals' world, because he knows that, sadly enough, he can never achieve nor survive in a world of such innocence and freedom.

ON FLATTERY AND TEMPTATION

[Patterned after the style of Francis Bacon, essayist.]

Flattery feeds on the vanity of man, our excessive pride in ourselves, our conceit. It is insincere praise that we use to pump up our egos and our own self-importance. We are only human and subject to the whims of the world. In so being, others can use our weakness against us by the use of a few pretty words. They lead us to temptation. Like Eve and the serpent, we are enticed into making or committing unwise or immoral acts.

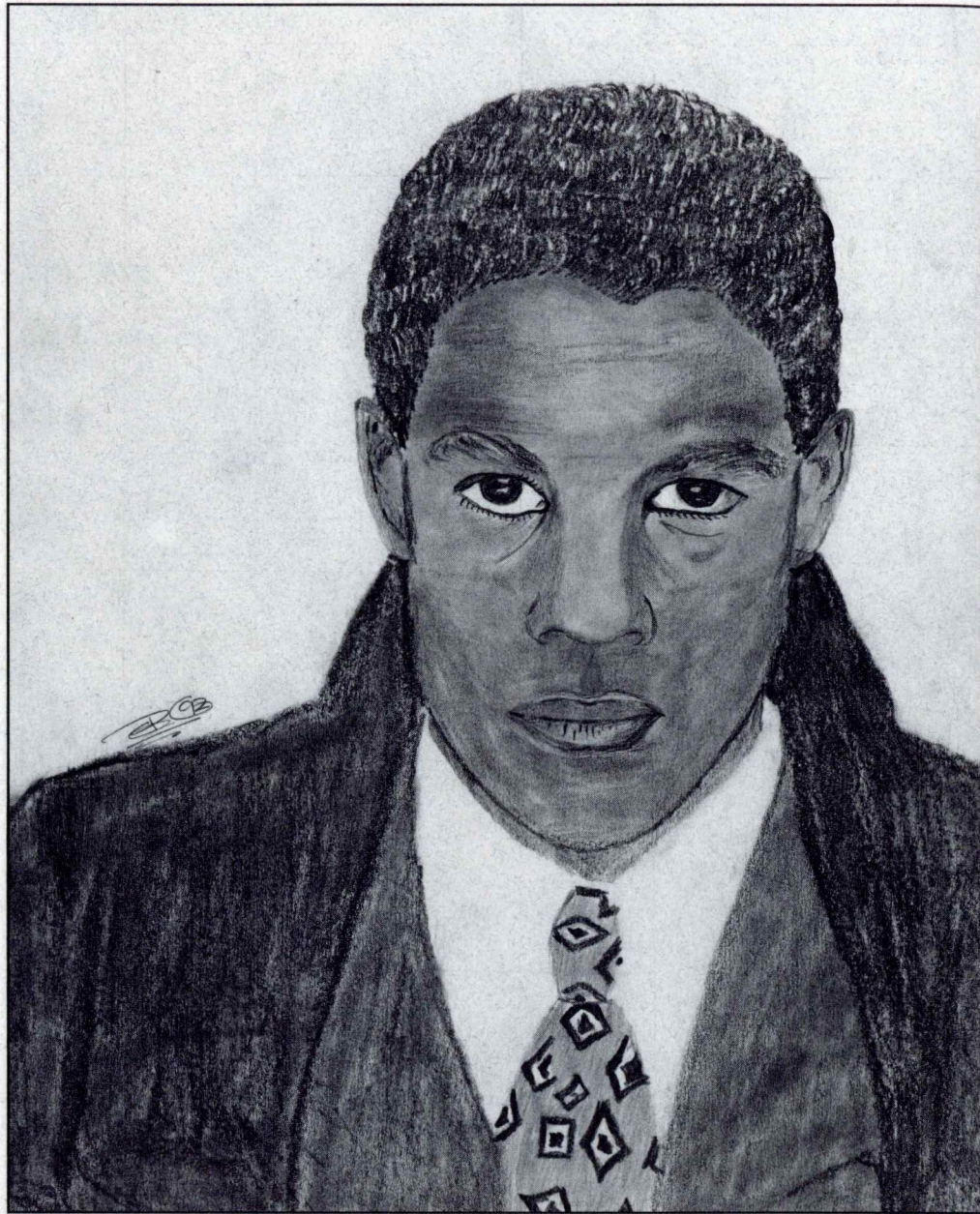
Hand in hand, these two evils, flattery and temptation, can lay many a man low and destroy those thought indestructible. Some men can accept flattery for what it is and avoid the pitfalls of temptation, while others take it as their due and judge temptation wholly by their rules. Still there are others who take to heart all that is said and are easily lead down the path of temptation.

Do not allow yourself to be caught in the web of pride and vanity that has trapped many a man like the spider catches the fly. Shun the lies of men, and live in the knowledge of oneself. No one will be able to lead you along the wrong path unless you tread there yourself.



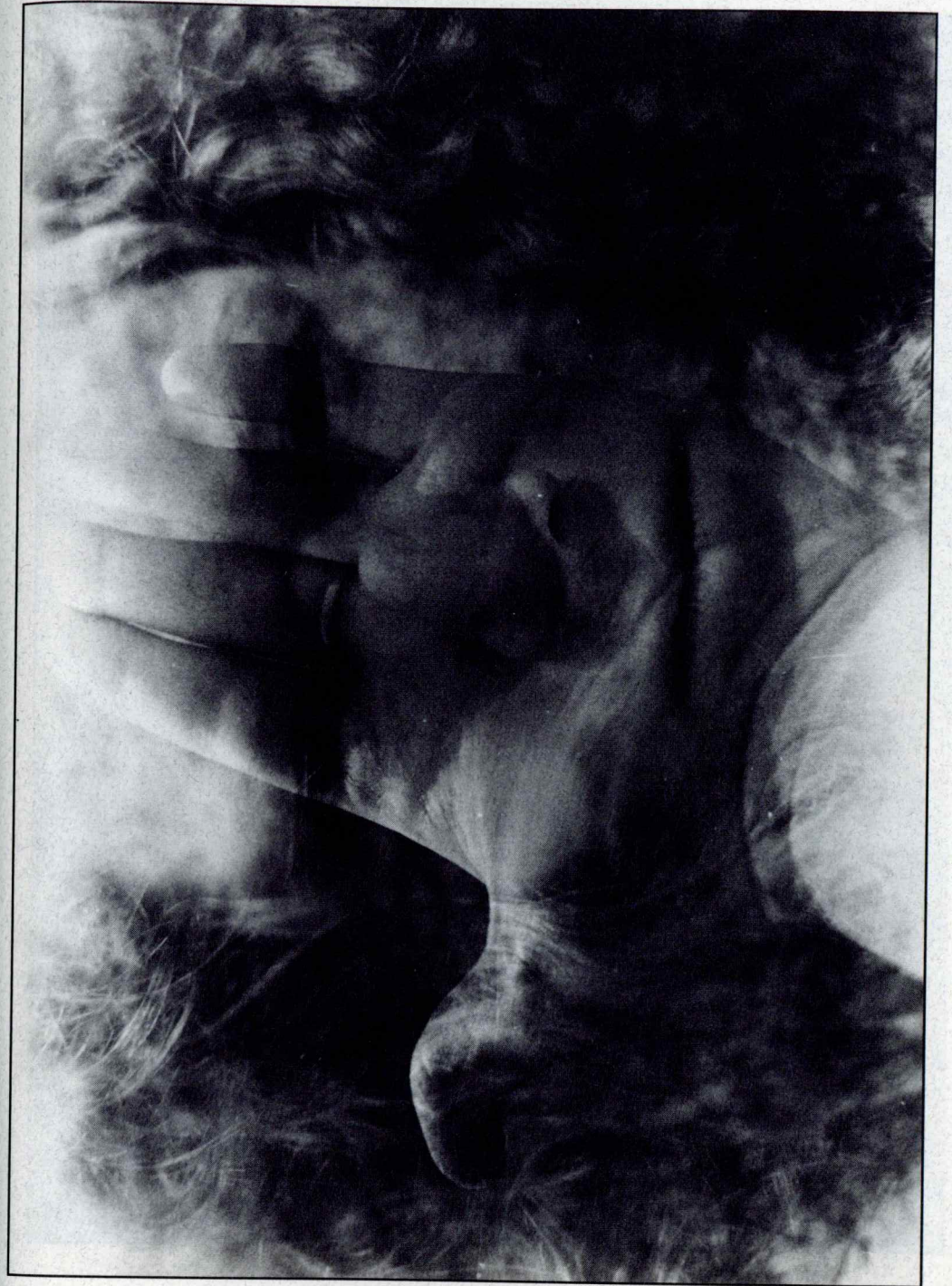
Dan Herbert

Precious



Cassandra DeVeaux

Denzel Washington



April House



Lauren Aull

Black Widow



Johnny Mills

Madonna



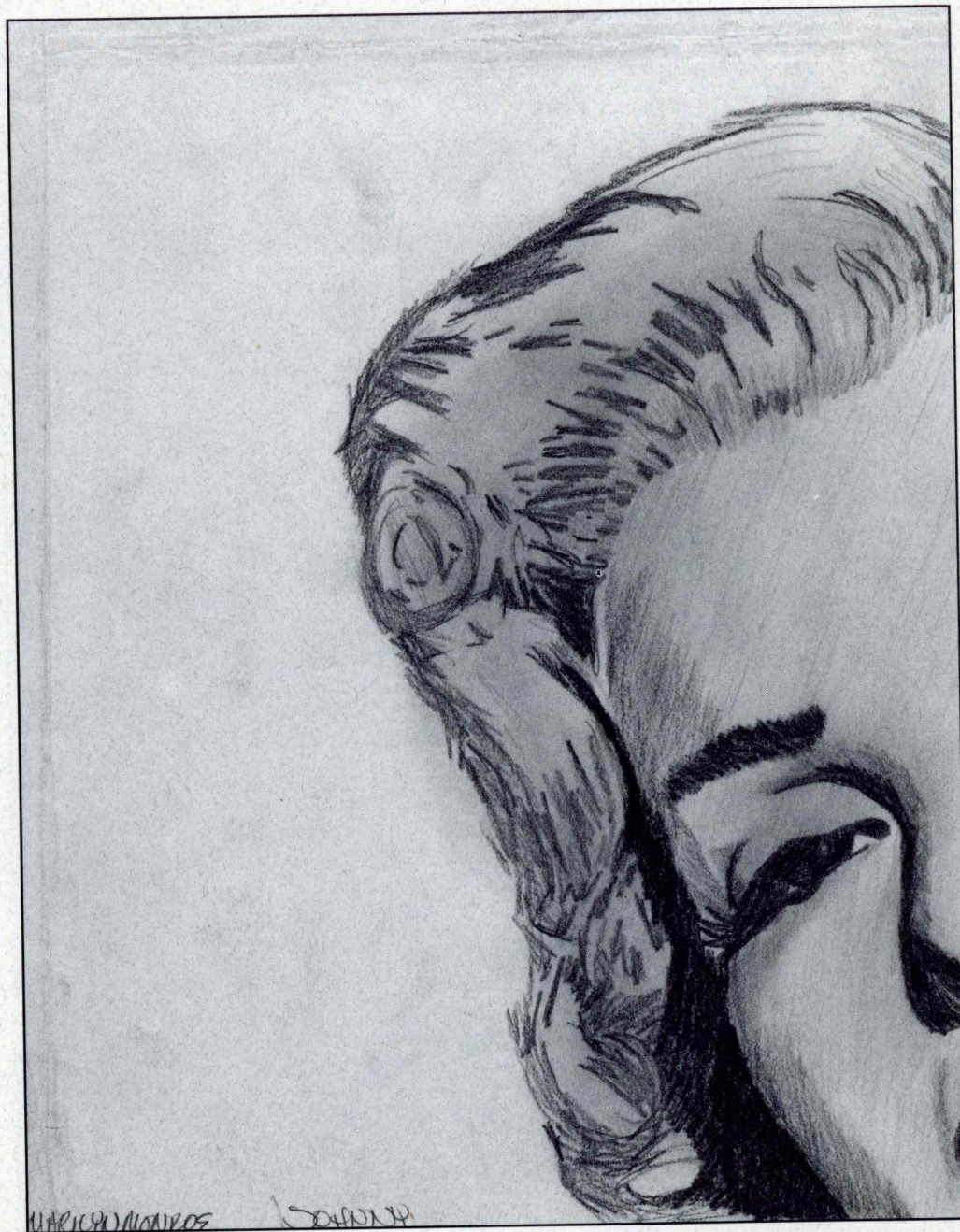
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Untitled



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Marilyn

OFTEN I AM A HUNCHBACK

Often I am a hunchback,
A club-footed monster:
My right hand is gnarled like a lily.
My left hand is as big as my father's.
I play one I play two I play
Knicknack; I have a cane
And a pipe;
I walk down the alleys of ancient cities
Where the grass grows up between the ruts,
Smiling weakly. I am only here to
Observe, really.
Hunchbacks are marvelous sources of inspiration. Often I am
a hunchback.
Less often,
I am a pelican:
I have a beak like a basket.
Transportation is not a problem
Although I am certain to meet my
Death in a storm and be found
That way,
Broken on the shore in the morning,
Hiding my face
My twisted, oily feathers,
Wings bent unnaturally overhead in the sand,
My catch yet in the basket, what
Would have been
Breakfast...
All of which leads to the question:
What's really needless?
All of which leads me to wonder:
Why should I think twice?

THE PRESENCE OF GOD (A Love Poem)

In my mind's eye,
Your feet: the c-curve
Of your ankle-bone,
Long slim converging
Bones like Japanese fans,

Your toes lined up
Like fat pearls,
Like soldiers at attention,
the skin
On them surreal, metallic,
Reflecting

Skin over blood over
Open soul:
The body that to me confirms the trembling
Presence of God;

That,
And I want nothing.
Nothing more...

Yet, still, your eyes
Slid down, fix on a shadow;
Mesmerized,
daunted because
It moves when you move,
Because it is ugly
Distorted and dark,
And without substance,
And fleeting,

Because it looks like, to you...
Afraid that it is...it
seems to be
The shadow of a bear.

I see myself
In your skin.
Your toenails are like
Seashells...

THIS PAIN IN MY CHEST

Might as well be centuries.
Ages. Might as well be a thousand miles
For what it's worth,
This pain in my chest.

Can't work on it like a broken motor;
Can't blow it out
And make it better;
The Voice doesn't help, it's as
Hollow as a stranger's,
The Voice
Stumbling through space like
A blind child
With sticky fists,
With grey holes for eyes,
Whose fingers explore her empty sockets
Curiously
Incapable of tears. No,
It is not a comfort, this great
Omnipotent Thing:

I want to twist it into One.
I want to pound it like a pillow.
I want to warm it in the toaster till
It's soft as mashed potatoes.
I want to season it to taste.

Right, It says. Fat
Chance.
Might as well be nowhere.
Might as well be never.

ONCE MY HEART MELTED

Once my heart melted.
It ran down my legs like
A bloody embarrassment;
Not as pleasant as it seemed
At first. I am thankful
My other organs stayed in place.

And now I guess I can call you
Master Chef. And now what
Remains of my heart I call
Soup de Jour. And now,
When I dial the phone
Or read the paper
Or tie my shoes in double knots
Or blow my nose
Or bite my tongue
It feels
Like a new brand of Japanese torture:
I could catch it in a bucket.
I could drip it on your forehead
Until you confessed.
Or I did.

Erik McKelvey

waiting...and time

waiting like the kid on Christmas morning.
waiting for everyone to get up.
feeling like that kid;

I'm waiting for the phone to ring.
when it does, it's picked up on the first ring.
eager to talk
there's mention of coming over.
thus a new saga begins.

waiting
at the window.
my watch reminds me of Dali.
time becomes my enemy.
it travels backwards.
the longest twenty-five minutes.
eventually, it's two hours before
the phone first rang.

with every door slam and drive-by,
my heart leaps up.
not to be denied, the car arrives.
a sudden smile on the face.
the parents are up,
and the hug and kiss can be unwrapped.

BLACK INK

paper, once white now drips with ink.
the ink tells the story of my soul.
mostly depressed, the ink is black.
i am writing about myself.
i work diligently, because i have

NOTHING ELSE!

THE LONELIEST MAN IN THE WORLD
the simple and working title.
it's a story of many heartbreaks.
the first section is of misery.

as the second part starts,
the ink has turned to red.
symbolizing love
the tone is much happier, and it
appears to be four months later.

MOTHER

My sun has faded with you
set behind your lids
pulled closed.
Yesterdays' flowers
wither, like memories of you—
drooping
your lullabies echo still
though I can only hear
twisted verse.
Days done, gone by
and nights I would dare
as a dreamer
to dream for you,
to dream of you.

WISH

I'll not look deeper than your smiles
Will allow Just bleed
No bandage can cover the sin
Triggering No hope for discourse
Repentance Being the parity
You see yourself the same
In the shadow Hung
Over my crib where the silver fish
Swim This rustic anthem
Lasted longer than the blizzards
Out on the window sill.

VERONICA

She stood by the door
with her bruises
and your shotgun.
She was sure that you
would not get back into this house
ever again
the locks were changed
you did not have
the key
this was the same woman
that nursed me at her breast
clothed and fed me.

THE MEETING

Along life's road, I met up with Envy.
A force with thoughts so brightly green and fraught.
He began to force me his policy.
Was I to take this? But of course, for naught!
I simply told him, "To hell with that rot!"
He answered, "Maybe, but you never know!"
"I have not the mind. I shan't be so caught."
"You must never doubt me, oh human foe,
For many times have I dealt man a savage blow."

Martha B. Cranford

FADED HEARTS

When love's first bloom appeared and smelled so sweet,
and every kiss from thy sweet lips, like honey,
filled my very soul, I gave no thoughts to deceit,
that killing frost, upon our perfect spring. 'Tis funny,
that fate, that destiny filled with desire, can steer
the heart astray. Was love not meant to last
for all eternity? What lies entwined made appear
that she could love thee more than I. So fast
the faded blooms begin to fall, to die, to be
forgotten. Faded hearts discarded, then tread upon.
Surprised was I, that love so swiftly flees
in autumn, to search anew for spring. Was she a paragon?
Oh, what mystery answers love's own sweet death
that I should mourn thee, till angels weep o'er my last breath.

PONY RIDE

"Sit up straight in the saddle,"
He said.
"Here I'll show you how."
He placed his cupped hand,
Rough between my legs,
And rocked me backwards
And forwards
Till he was happy
With my position.
"Ride 'em, cowgirl!"
"Ride 'em hard!"
Was all he said,
Till I got control
Of the wild pony;
Then he came
And rubbed my back
And told me what a
Beautiful girl I was—
And special too.

"It's hard work," he said,
"Being an old cowboy,
Trying to teach a young girl
How to sit in the saddle."
So I rode away
And never said
That I was scared.

THE WITCHES' ZONE

Like a cauldron
On the horizon lays
The orange glow of the sun.
And shadows slither like black cats
Trying silently to slip away.

The moon is masked by the murky night,
As storm clouds skid through the sky.
And goblins and ghouls
Grin greedily,
While they watch with evil eyes.

They know the innocent will come tonight,
In pairs, in groups, and alone,
To taste of the potable potions
To be mixed and measured, shaken and stirred,
All in the witches' zone.

The beat of the music is a deadly pulse
Pushing them further in.
They don't understand the Sign of Five
Or the danger and darkness
Within.

Till one lone man in uniform
Politely offers a ride,
And one more soul is whisked away
To the horrors
Of the other side.

Nightmares tear at the edge of our minds
And whisper to us all,
"Just be wary of the witches' zone—
Or you'll be the next
To fall."

Five Points, has the Pentagram,
And warlocks practice there,
Acquiring a taste for innocent blood,
Disguised
As those who care.

POETRY

Poetry.
Words with rhythm,
or without.
Words with rhyme,
or without.
Everyday words,
but used differently.

Poetry.
Skipping, crawling,
Punctuation wherever.
Painting a picture,
Telling a story,
Sharing emotion.
Whimsical, joyful,
Sad or sorrowful.

Poetry.
An oil painting,
A watercolor,
A tapestry,
Or a photograph.
Made by an artist,
With heart and soul
For a palette.

Poetry.
Long lines, short lines,
Uneven lines here and there.
Symbols hiding everywhere.
English instructor's dream.
English student's nightmare.

THE GARDEN IN MY MIND

The garden in my mind blooms all year long,
The birds that live there sing their sweet songs.
I walk along the garden's path with idle ease,
I feel the warm sun and summer breeze.
Shadows may fall but are chased away by the sun,
And I lay my body down to rest when the day is done.
As I sleep upon beds of flowers,
The petals of roses cover me in showers.
I awake to the scent of fresh morning dew,
And the view of brightly colored flowers of yellow, red,
and blue.
In times of loneliness and need,
I look upon the sight of birds as they feed.
The days are long and bright,
The sun is always shining its light.
And when I die some day soon,
I will lay to rest here beneath my garden's moon.

SHADOW

A shadow has fallen upon my garden.
No sun shines upon my roses.
The morning dew falls no more.
I no longer sleep upon beds of flowers,
For the flowers have wilted,
And thorns have gathered.
Yet, upon one corner where the vines have not reached,
A beam of light shines through the darkness.
One single rose thrives from one beam of light.
Its power awakens life,
And I can see, I can see...

THE ROSE

One morning as I wandered along unformal paths
I came across a regal lady in the green and common mass.
Her face was turned skyward to the life-giving sun
Her softness showered in dewdrops
I could see them shimmer one by one.
I stood in awe of her innocent and unspoiled beauty.
I reached out and touched her softness
Smooth like silk, rich like satin.
I inhaled her fragrance,
Rich, heady and alluring, and after doing so,
I turned and left the way I came
Leaving the lady for another day.

OL' AFRICA

In Africa, ol' Africa
The sun shines high and burns the desert floor,
My native land.
The forests of the west
Grow tall and green in Africa, ol' Africa.
Savannah grass grows so thick and brown
Where gazelles and lion cubs play.
The coast is so sweet with sea in Africa, ol' Africa,
The place where I began,
Where life began so very long ago, so sheltered by the sea.
Where my people were chained and shipped away,
Their heads bowed and hearts so gray.
Whipped and beaten on great ships.
Stripped of belonging and beliefs,
Across the ocean their new home will be.
Slaves they will become
Their hardships are just begun.
Even though these centuries now that we've been free,
I feel a funny calling from the land across the sea.
That old place called Africa sings her songs to me.

THE STILLNESS OF A SONG

In the stillness of a song,
A baby no longer weeps,
For the softness of the melody,
Makes him fall to sleep.

In the stillness of a song,
A child's sadness is turned to joy,
And a teenager no longer is withdrawn,
He has made friends and enjoys a new dawn.

In the stillness of a song,
The young man is not alone,
He has a wife and a son of their own.

Together they'll raise him,
In the stillness of a song,
So he will live a life that is happy and long.

TREASURE FORGOTTEN

Rainy river, climbing out
of bed,
In misshapen forms
of freedom,
Where the earth sits waiting.
Mellow moonmists
fall on water,
Wind sonnets are lost
in lonely murmurings
Of pines, held in a cradle
of nature love.
When will man find
the truth
Of real beauty.
They see so well,
they can't see
What has been given
to the meaning
of life.

TIME PASSAGE

What happened?
I slept like R.V.W.,
under a copse of pines,
And, awakened
on a cement mattress.

TO ROBINSON JEFFERS OF THE STONE TOWER

On the mountain
 he sits alone.
Storms of yesterday
 in his mind,
And today
 in his heart.
The wind
 in his nostrils
Carries the delicate
 scent of pine.
And he has no desire
 to move.
Tomorrow is a million
 years away,
And so undreamable.
He has accomplished
 the impossible,
For he is a part
 of the wind
That moves forever.

FULFILLMENT

Summer slips away,
 Autumn touches our bed
We drink the wine
 and run, laughing,
into that forest
My lips still taste the memory
 of your words
As you kissed me
When the wine was still
 sweet to us
Now the bottle
 is empty
And the memory full
And the flavor
 of our desires
Is still with me.

FELLOW TRAVELER

He dreamed in silence
 beside the blue lake.
Rain fell softly around him,
 dancing on the water.
Wind embraced
 his lean shoulders,
Clawing through
 his ragged jacket.
He felt the touch
 of life
In the branch
 of a pine
That occasionally
 brushed his head.
Silver dew
 crowned his hair,
Like so many
 sparkling jewels.
He looked at me
 for an answer.
It was one
 of eternal understanding.

ONE OF THE LUCKY

Feel it
Crave it
Smell it
Caress it
Hear it
Can't you?
I can
...I am lucky.

Country wind.
The tang of
Horse bodies.
Old barns,
Plunging emotions,
Musky beads of sweat
On sultry summer nights.
Whispering secrets
To the moon.
It's all there,
Rainbows.
...I am lucky.

Old lady Jackson
Sweeping her sidewalk.
Pecan groves, and
Tree lined drives.
Ladybugs,
Turtles.
Cherry trees,
Apple blossoms—angel's cologne.
Red wine
Puppies breath
Pregnant women.
I love them all.
...I am lucky.

Freedom—to be.
Billowing skirts
On windy beaches.
Shades of gray,
Lows,
Highs,
Completed Spectrums.
...I am lucky.

PARENTAL SINS

Dash-em, crash-em,
Crush-em, smash-em,
Pulvarize-em,
Grind-em to smithereens.
Mom's mortar
Dad's pestle
Billy's dreams

Billy don't talk back.
Billy you're no good.
Billy don't cry.
Billy be a man.
Billy be,
Billy do,
Billy don't, don't, don't.

...Billy won't.

DADDY'S LITTLE BOY

NOW THAT MY DADDY IS GONE
I cry for my mother's sorrow
Always wondering about a fatherless tomorrow

NOW THAT MY DADDY IS GONE
Where does my family stand
What good is money in a house without a man

NOW THAT MY DADDY IS GONE
Who gathers the chips and chops the wood
How can I play baseball with kids in the neighborhood

NOW THAT MY DADDY IS GONE
Who will watch me grow
My trophies and my grades who do I show

NOW THAT MY DADDY IS GONE
Who will teach me about the birds and the bees
Or tell me how God created the flowers and the trees

NOW THAT MY DADDY IS GONE
The memories of him I will enjoy
Because I will always be Daddy's Little Boy!

he beats his ass without mercy

a shady figure stands alone on earth's fertility
enduring pain a thousand times
crusted religion thoughtless tradition
ready to be sown in earth's fertility

he beats his ass without mercy
the sun in anger burns him
his land becomes infected by his thoughtless tradition
ready to be sown in earth's fertility

his fathers told him not the way of society
broken backs and bloody hands become his fancy
he beats his ass without mercy
and the son in anger burns him

YOURS NOT YOURS

AN OLD MAN EMERGED FROM THE CROWD
LOOKING FEEBLE AS HIS BODY
HE PUT HIS HAND ON A STATUE AND SAID THIS IS MINE

THEN HE PUT HIS HAND ON A PERSON
AND WITH A SUBTLE VOICE HE SAID THIS IS MINE

SO HE PLACED HIS HAND ON THE ENTIRE COUNTRY
AND WITH A QUIRK IN HIS VOICE SAID THIS IS MINE

AND THEN HE PLACED HIS HAND ON THE WHOLE WORLD
AND ROARED WHEN HE SAID THIS IS MINE

HE LOST IT ALL AND CRAZY A NEW OLD MAN TOOK HIS PLACE

THE OLD MAN DIDN'T NEED THE POWER THAT WAS GIVEN TO HIM
BUT HE WENT AHEAD AND PUT HIS HAND ON ALL THE MONEY
AND SAID THIS IS MINE

THEN HE PUT HIS HAND ON A THIRD WORLD COUNTRY
AND WITH THE CALMEST VOICE HE SAID THIS IS MINE

SOON AFTER HE PLACED HIS HAND ON THE MOST SOPHISTICATED
WEAPONRY KNOWN TO MAN
AND WITH A SNARL IN HIS VOICE HE SAID
THIS IS MINE

EVENTUALLY HE PUT HIS HAND ON THE BIG RED BUTTON
AND SHOUTED THIS IS MINE

HE LOST IT ALL AND CRAZY THERE WERE NO MORE OLD MEN
TO TAKE HIS PLACE...ONLY ME

I REACHED DOWN AND PUT MY HAND ON THE CHARRED REMAINS
OF EARTH
AND WITH A SURENESS IN MY VOICE I SAID THIS IS MINE

Deborah Lewis Ireton

THE MAGICIAN

I stayed twenty years at home
rearing my three children.
I prayed to my God daily,
the christ god, for wisdom
and patience. I nursed my
babies at my breast, no
manufactured milk for them.
I washed cloth diapers and
ground fresh cooked carrots,
potatoes and peas as first
foods on tiny silver spoons
in Mother Goose bowls.

My prayers were heard
I'm sure,
they were among the din of
bless me bless me voices.
My life consistent as the
endless loads of laundry from
hamper to washer to dryer, all
joy, fear and anger neatly
compartmentalized like the
stacks of white tube socks
paired and stitched
with an X in each toe,
green for Ben,
red for Josh,
and blue for Lee.

Then one kindergarten afternoon
I met a strange man,
part magician and mentor.
From dark smokey halls he
emerged with red and gold
banners streaming from his
pockets and words written
in script for me to dissect,
words like abortion,
moon, North and nada.

Our socks now reside
in a large sock box
searching
for a mate, a possible matching
thread. Frozen microwave
lasagna is a family favorite.
I changed
the sheets on my bed
four weeks ago.

What was my prayer
I ask
each day as I travel the
labyrinth of questions,
confusion drifting round
like morning mist rising
from the river under
the Gervais Street Bridge?
Fear
appears from nowhere,
like pinholes in my waterbed
mattress. Who is my god?
Frustration
over my inability to do
the magic tricks keeps me
searching
for the secrets.

April House

A PLACE TO LIVE

A place
where people
true people
have sunflower eyes
butterfly souls.

A place
to hug a tree from a
child's coloring book
to spout Whitman.

A place
to DREAM OUT LOUD

A place
of watercolor washes.

A place
of can and will
of yes.

A place
where rainforests
grow in fishbowls.
To live.

Leigh Ann Hite

SELF-DEFENSE

Anger boils inside of me like a simmering
volcano about to erupt! You always think
you're right and I'm wrong. I make my
stand—My only defense, Sworded words roll
off my tongue, But your sword is sharper and
Now I am dead.

HALLIE'S DELIGHT

From her fingertips fall rainbow
drops of red yellow green and pink
upon a twirling white mountain,
she carries it swiftly back to her
soft leather seat
takes the slender silver tool
and carefully sculpts a peak,
through waiting lips a generous portion
goes as it blossoms into a smile
that encircles Hallie's nose.

ROOTS

Standing over the kitchen sink
gazing out the window
I see you walking proudly
through the green grassy field
Your footsteps continue to blend
into the ground as your vision
wanders through the air
admiring—your territory
You look like you belong

Confident, Independent
frequently you travel
Chicago Orlando Birmingham
But you always come back home
to till the earth
and grow fat plump tomatoes
raise white and black speckled cattle
and gather with your family
around the large cherry wood table

AFTER THE STORM

The trees now stretch across the grass.
Now nature's wrath is gone
and all the mountains shining bright
look down upon the lawn.
Full-fledged nature in repose now bursting
fully bright.
Yellow flowers match the sun and rise
to praise and match the day; for nature's
wrath is gone.

A HOME

There is a blue sky shining in my baby's eyes
and at night I see the same twinkle in them as I would in looking
up.

His little fingers are equivalent to long, green, earthy vines
stretching, grasping for something to cling to,
something warm and bright.

"Will you be my mother," his little eyes seemed to cry, and I
know not how, when, or why but this baby—rejected because of
uncertainty, economy, or lack of love, I dare say—is the apple
of my eye.

So take my hand little brown-haired boy. Though I did not make
your countenance, I will commence to make it shine. To your
fragile heart, I will employ hands to keep warm and dry and, dare
say I, to mend its little cracks, lest your heart should lose
some of its innocent youth.

And in doing so, you will warm my heart and soul.
See, look how my face glows! Do you know, little one; you have
a home. Come now. Let's go.

THE BOY

I saw the sun come up today
at Oceanside along the way

I was riding swiftly to Darby School
when out of the misty blue a yellow flash appeared

I paused there on the sandy road
as the morning mist dissolved, falling like particles
in the warm, golden rays

Out on the waters I did spy a single ship
'twas only he and I

Some strange greeting in the light
I saw it again reflect off the piece he held against my eye
A wave he presented to me was that of a strong, dark, bold
adventurer, sailing wide to foreign shores—
sailing wide across the sea

And as I stood rooted to the spot,
I dropped my books wishing I was on the floor of his deck;
standing in his spot
Such adventure there'd surely be,
if I was a captain o'er the sea

I raised my hand in broad salute:
a promise that one day soon I'll do the same to the next lad
and give him a hearty wave from my mighty ship upon the sea
Oh, what a sailor I aim to be!

THE MAN

I stand now o' me deck
captain o' me ship
stand'n in me spot

Been fifty year I sailed the sea
she's still the same; like a mother ta me
been my teacher too
since that sunny day long ago when I dropped outta school

Oh, me spirits runnin' low
in both me heart and in the galley below

'Tis no boy to greet me and receive the dream
as I did long ago

The wind she be a friend o' mine, but now she be too slow
new times brung new ways—
the end is all I know

I sailed ya far and wide, ye mighty ship,
ye brought me glory, bronzed me skin,
and made me strong and tough

I seen the foreign lands, the sunset at her best
I came close to God when in the storms I thought meself
a watery grave...but, oh, how I been blessed!

I cannot think me another way I'd spent these fifty years
but now me body grows weary...I could do it all again—
if only I was the boy on Oceanside road once again!

ROMANCE

flowers in the vase
chocolates on the plate
handsome debonair waiting at the gate

pearls and lace
perfume floating in the air
debonair dandy bachelor combing his hair

red lips smiling
cool breeze in the night

tapping, knocking at the door
soft silk flying down the stairs

blushing cheeks; roguish smiles
out into the night
romance is in the air
in the breeze, under the trees
to steal a kiss