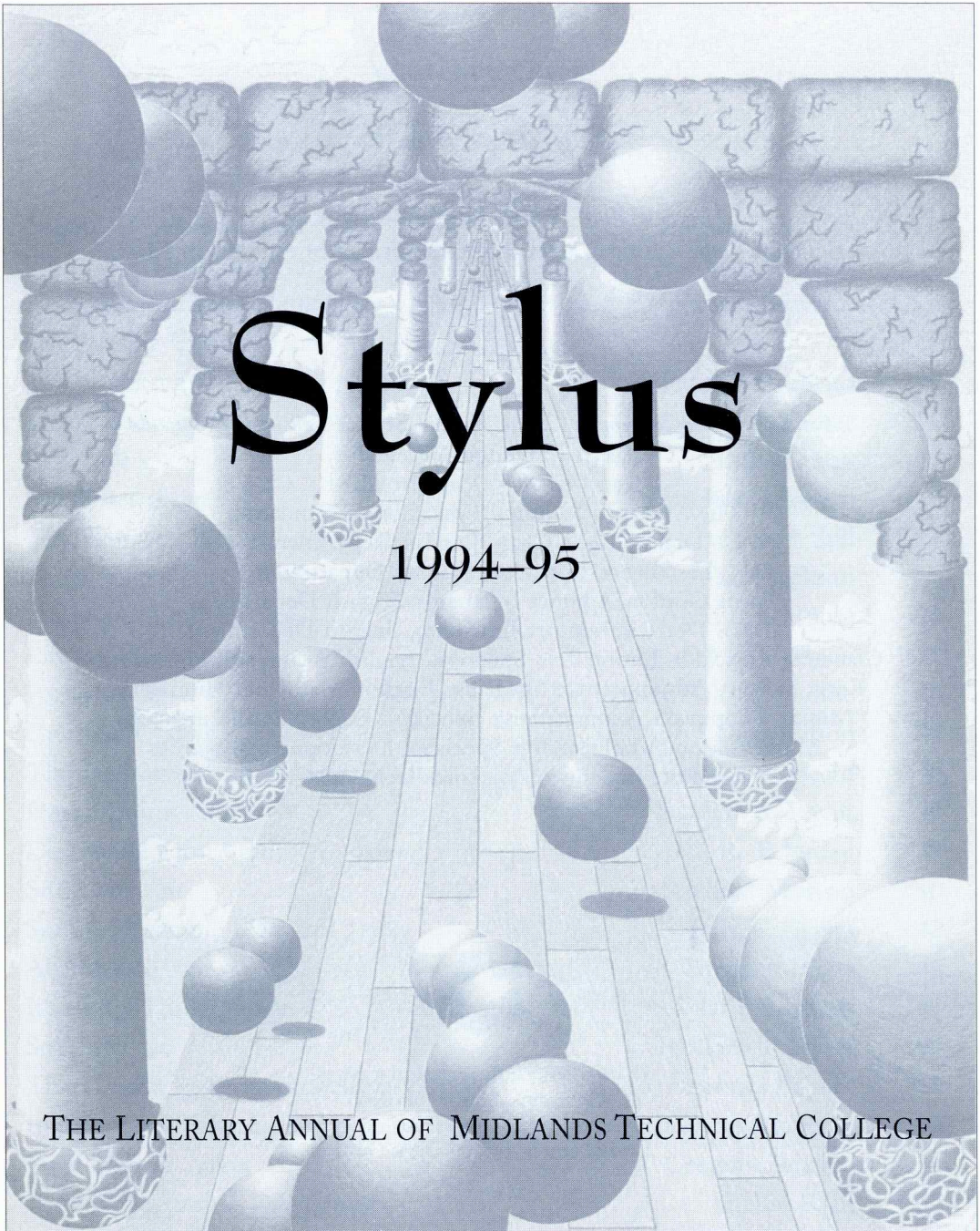




Stylus

THE LITERARY ANNUAL
OF MIDLANDS TECHNICAL COLLEGE

1994-95



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Stylus Awards

Poetry: Patricia A. Beard
Honorable mention: April Lyn House

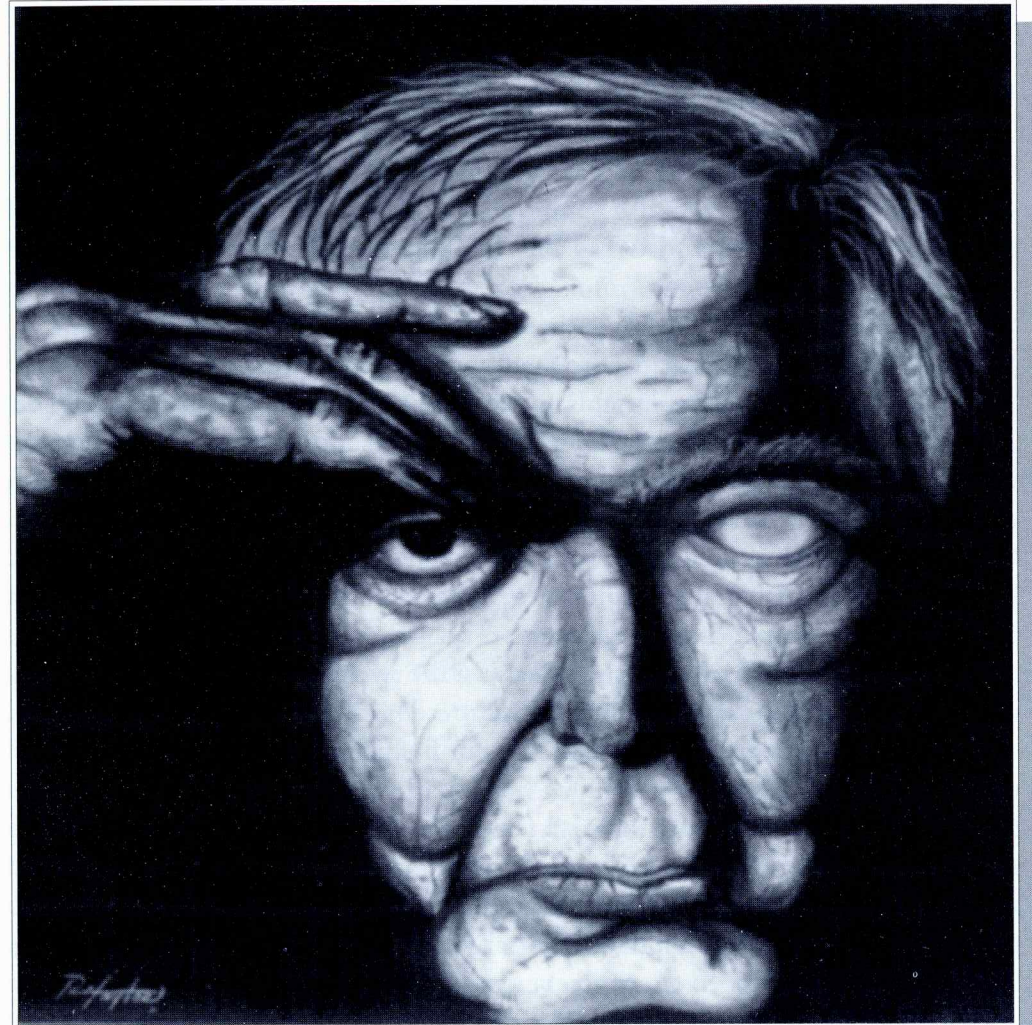
Fiction: Dan Clifton
Honorable mention: Robert J. Still

Essay: Valarie Edwards
Honorable mention: Donald Scalia

Art: Richard Morgan
Honorable mention: Rodney T. Taylor

Photography: Whitney Whelchel

STYLUS AWARDS ARE FUNDED BY
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The Tell-Tale Heart

RODNEY T. TAYLOR

A Moment in Time

I was eight and a half months pregnant with our first child when my husband and I decided to go camping at Red Rock near Santa Barbara, California. The doctor had said that it was normal for the baby to come anytime between two weeks before the due date to two weeks after the due date. On the two hour drive to Red Rock, I was thinking how crazy it was to go camping two hours away from home when the baby could come any day. I asked myself, "Why am I doing this?" But I knew why. One of the happiest experiences I ever had with my husband was our first camping trip to Lake Lopez when I was six months pregnant. I never felt closer to him than I did on that trip. It was just the two of us and nature. We could immerse ourselves in each other as if there were nothing else in life.

Our last minute trip to Red Rock was our final chance to be "just the two of us" again. In two weeks, it would be "just the three of us." I was excited to be having a baby with my husband, but I felt a certain sadness in knowing that very soon we would have to share each other with someone else. I suppose that sounds selfish, but when you wait a lifetime to find love, it is hard to give up even a small piece of it. Ironically though, when the baby was born, I felt such overwhelming love and joy that I wanted to spend every second with our new baby, and it was my husband who felt he had lost a part of me to our child.

We tried to savor those last days together as a duo, but it became more of a comedy than a romance. There were several small creeks that ran across the dirt road that meandered through the camping area, and naturally we were thrilled when we got stuck in one. We had to unpack the car and lighten the load to get out of it. I drove in reverse, and my husband pushed from the front since the

shortest route out of the creek was backwards. Needless to say, we decided the campsite just off the road behind us looked like a great place to set up camp. We had lots of shade and a beautiful view of a big white mountain nearby. After we set up camp, we went for a walk in the woods. We came across a spring where people were jumping from the side of a cliff-like rock into the water. My husband climbed up the rock and dove into the water head first to impress me. I said, "A real man would do it twice." So he did, although I noticed he didn't go quite as high, and he went in feet first the second time. When we got back to camp, we found that raccoons had stolen all of our food. The country store up the road was already closed, so we went into Santa Barbara for dinner.

My husband had been to a quaint, little place called Joe's Cafe years earlier, so we went in search of Joe's Cafe. It was a place where the locals hung out, not well-known to tourists. It was just as my husband remembered it, small and cozy, with checkered tablecloths and cafe curtains, and plenty of local flavor. We sat in a booth by a window facing the street. My husband ordered sirloin steak, medium-rare, and I ordered fried shrimp. The food was good, and the atmosphere was charming, but the best part of the meal was the waiter. I don't recall his name, and I don't recollect what he looked like, but I do remember that he treated casual dining with French elegance which my husband and I found amusing.

He brought us water, and he said, "Voilà." He delivered our iced teas, and he announced, "Voilà." He arrived with bread, and he declared, "Voilà." He came with our meals, and he proclaimed, "Voilà." After a while, we started asking him to bring us things just to hear him say "voilà." For the rest of the camping trip, every time one of us handed something to the other, we said, "Voilà." It's funny how we remember such seemingly insignificant things. We took that camping trip thirteen years ago this month, and yet, when my husband mentioned that trip as a possible memoir, we both looked at each other and exclaimed, "Voilà!" and then had a good laugh. It makes me wonder if something trivial about me has become a historic event in someone else's life. Probably so. Andy Warhol said, "Everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes."

"Voilà!"

VALARIE EDWARDS

On Writing Exercises and Thinking Too Much

The instructor suggested
that we study bread.
“Become the bread”
went through my head.

I loafed around that evening
and wondered thoroughly
about the proper bread to “be”
to give rise to perfect poetry,

“A study of wholeness?
Of crumb? Or of slice?
Pumpnickel, plain white
or Seeded Rye?”

I kneaded these important thoughts
three quarters of an hour,
recalled that I was out of bread
and wondered, then, of flour.

PATRICIA A. BEARD

Infant Bud

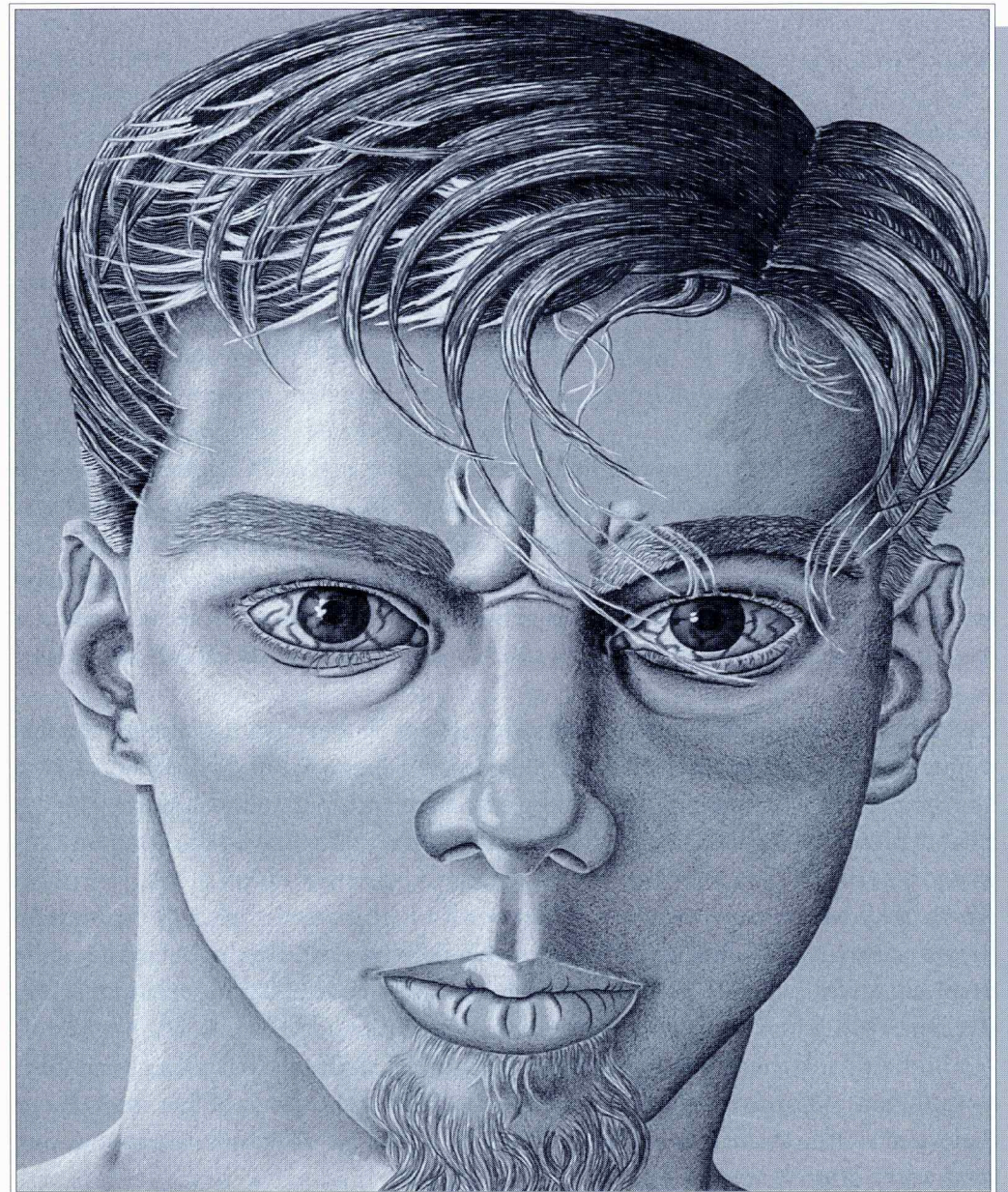
Child pines
once perfect and unique
now incomplete
sickly in color—
paled and dying
lying on the ground
pitiful and abandoned
young,
old,
tired in thought
someone, something,
burnt away
your zest for life.

NANCY E. CARTER

Ego

I know, sitting
alone
in my room
I am
everything
mankind is
out there
in the streets
with
its swarming
millions
criss-crossing
back and forth
getting
nothing
done

DAN CLIFTON



Self-Portrait

RICHARD MORGAN

The Haunted House

The temperature was freezing, rare for the last night of October in the deep south. The sky was moonless and darkness covered the valley. There was a mysterious silence in the air, dead silence that chilled the spine. The breeze made the skin clammy, and the taste of hemlock was in the air. The pungent scent pierced the nose with sharp, stinging sensations. This particular night is talked about every year by the townspeople who live high above this valley.

It was in a small cabin deep in this valley where Robert and Amy lived. On this night they lay in front of their fireplace enjoying the warmth of the blaze. Lying on the rug, they listened to the popping of the fire and watched the rainbow colors that the oak put off. Amy put her wine glass down and softly said to Robert, "It's nice to be alone. Your brother is only going to be here another week, so I don't know why he went out tonight." Then, with an erotic smile she said, "Unless he knew we wanted the house to ourselves." She placed a hand on his chest and while stroking it whispered, "What kind of games do you have planned for tonight, Mr. Robert?"

Robert took the last draw off his cigarette and with smoke trailing out of his mouth said, "You are going to have to wait till we get upstairs." He stroked her hair, and with a look of lust he said, "Or we could start down here and work our way up." Then he chuckled as he put his cigarette out.

Amy reached up and gently kissed Robert's ear, then whispered in a low sexy voice, "You know I love you very much," her hand moving down to his thigh,

"and I want you to make love to me like the roaring Mississippi river." Then she slowly reached around to give him a passionate kiss. She pulled away and asked, "Wanna go upstairs and then work our way back down here?"

Robert stood up and walked over to the fireplace picking up the poker that lay on the hearth. He spread the embers around and closed the glass doors, then pointed the poker at Amy and said, "Let's go."

Suddenly, a crashing noise came from the kitchen, causing Amy to spring to her feet. Both stood there in a state of shock, waiting for what was to come. Amy grabbed Robert's arm and nervously asked, "What was that?"

With a humming bird heart beat Robert replied, "I don't know." Then a thought ran through his mind, and as he tried to pull away from Amy's grip he said, "I bet it was that damn cat of yours."

Amy cried out, "No Robert, I let the cat outside," as she held on to him tight.

Then in the doorway of the kitchen, it appeared, a mysterious creature that let out horrid sounds. It was low frightful moans, moans that only the dead could make. Its arms flapped like a bird as it floated toward the couple.

Robert and Amy ran out the back door into the woods that were just beyond the house. There was no place to go. Robert had bought this cabin because it was isolated, more than five miles away from the nearest house. This cabin had been vacant for several years before Robert purchased it. It is said that no one wanted to buy it after hearing about the old couple that died in it. Although the coroner ruled that the old couple's death was just a gruesome murder/suicide, the townspeople who knew them claim that it was impossible for the paralytic old man to beat and cut his wife up beyond recognition. Rumors of the town also say that when the old man had the house built, he ordered that the cave behind the house be filled in with dirt and rock. The old man was concerned about bears and snakes moving in it, but was not concerned that he was sealing off a sacred Indian burial ground. Robert bought the cabin after telling the real estate agent that it was too good of a deal to pass up, because of some silly rumors.

Robert and Amy stood behind some dense bushes as terrorizing thoughts ran through their minds, thoughts of the hideous creature and thoughts of the rumors about their cabin. They were shaking with fear, standing in the cold, dark night.

Amy started crying, and with quivering lips asked, "Is it coming?" As the quivering moved down her body, she asked, "What are we going to do?" Kneeling to the ground, her cries and shaking became uncontrollable.

Robert tried to look in the direction where the house was, but could only see the light at the back door. Trying to hide his fear he answered, "It is not coming," but he was not sure because he could not see anything. He scanned the woods, but all he could see was total darkness except for the tiny light at the house. Turning back to Amy he said in a calm, soothing voice, "It will be all right, just calm down. I promise, everything is going to be fine. We need to be quiet so it does not hear us Amy." Standing there his stomach turned like a pair jeans in a dryer. He was petrified, but knew he had to stay composed in order to calm Amy down. Then he felt the steel of the poker that was still in his hand. He held it tight and wondered if it was enough to protect them.

A few minutes later Amy's cries turned into whimpers, and Robert thought about what he saw inside their house. The only light was coming off the fire, but he could see the disfigurement of the intruder's face that was encircled by black hair. The rest of its body was entombed by a dull white cloud that floated along with each step. After seeing the shiny hatchet that sparkled as the fire reflected off it, Robert turned and ran out the back door after Amy.

Then his thoughts were interrupted from the sounds of snapping limbs off in the distance. Amy stood up, and with a look of horror on her face said, "Oh my God, it found us. God help me get out of here. We are going to die."

In a harsh voice Robert said, "Shut up, it will hear you," and then seconds later he whispered, "Oh no, here it comes."

Their teeth chattered as they watched with panicky eyes at a beam of light that headed straight for them. Their bodies turned to snakes as they listened to the eerie moaning of the creature. Then Robert noticed that the creature had gone deeper into the woods than they had. He looked Amy in the eyes and said, "You need to run to the house." While putting his hands on her shoulders he continued, "then get in your car and go for help."

Wrapping her arms around Robert, she cried, "What about you? I'm not leaving without you."

After pushing her away he said in a firm voice, "Go now, get out of here." He

knew that he had to stay because if he went then they both might die. This way at least Amy would have a chance to get out alive. Watching as she ran off, he listened as his death drew near. Pressing the poker against his chest he realized what he had to do in order to live.

Seconds later, the moans of the creature turned to unintelligible words, "Jat ge kalay dwapin t fube nowe" and then it let out a deafening scream.

Robert turned around quickly, but was blinded by the creature's light. He gripped the poker with both hands and swiftly lunged toward the creature, hoping that he would hit it. The creature moaned out, "No...", as the poker ripped in and out of the its chest. It fell to the ground, taking a last gasp of air before it went lifeless.

Robert stood there shaking from the cold fear that raced through his veins. Dead silence filled the air as he slowly released his mighty grip on the poker. With the bottom of his shirt, he wiped the blood from his blinded eyes. Looking around in the dark he saw the beam of the light that the creature dropped. After picking the light up, he started to look at the ground where the creature lay and then moved the ray of light up the creature's body. When he caught a glimpse of the creature's chest, he sharply turned his head to avoid looking at the blood that spurted from the hole left by the poker. Slowly, he tried to turn back to the bloody chest, but kept shifting his eyes away. He centered his focus away from the creature, but watched it out of the corner of his eye hoping that it would not move. Standing there listening to the raindrops of blood that hit the leaves, he chanted to God, "Please, please, please let it be dead." He turned away from the creature and started to look for the poker he had dropped. Then he backed up and fell to the ground as he saw a hideous sight, the face of the creature that lay by his feet.

Instantly, he pointed the light back in the direction of the creature, then back to the face on the ground. The light started growing dim and then he noticed something—something was familiar about the creature's clothing. He stood up and walked toward the creature. The light was growing weaker, so Robert shook it to get a few more seconds out of it. Walking past the chest, he noticed the stream of blood had stopped. He turned the light toward the creature's face and let out a shrill scream that could be heard all through the valley.

About an hour later voices came from the distance as Robert stared at the full moon that now lit up the woods. As the voices drew near, Robert looked around and saw Amy and two policemen standing over him. The policemen started shining their lights around, as one of them asked, "What happened here?"

Amy screamed as the light shined on Robert. She did not scream because of Robert, but because of what was in his arms. Robert held the bloody body of his brother. Amy walked through the river of blood and knelt down by them. She put her arms around Robert and as tears rolled down her face said, "What was he trying to do?"

The sun began to peek out from behind the mountain top as Robert and Amy stood there crying in each other's arms. The coroner closed the door of his van as the police explained how a foolish prank cost the young man his life.

The young couple moved out of the cabin a week later and have never been heard from again. After ten years, the small isolated cabin remains vacant. The townspeople say that the cabin was never put on the market after the couple moved. The gossip of the town is that Robert still owns the cabin and all its surrounding property. They also claim that every year, on the last night of October, flickering lights can be seen from the cabin. The rumor is that Robert returns every year to mourn his brother's death, who is believed to be buried somewhere on that property.

ROBERT J. STILL



Youth

CAROL JACKSON

Drowning Ophelia

Drowning Ophelia

scrunch up your

many skirts

make some room

in the birdbath for me

We two would be perfect for a windstorm

for you too know the

difference between gray

and grey

and have been told

countless canterbury tales

From far away I thought

this bath was made of dishwater

but I see I was mistaken

for my hair was in my eyes

and my heart hung from a tree

APRIL LYN HOUSE

Life is Good

What in the world was I doing out there? It was cold, I was cold, and I was surely not ready to hike five miles up a mountain. Why in the world did I agree to join this group? Here I was thirty-three years old and overweight by about fifty pounds. How did I expect to live long enough to carry this thirty pound pack on my back to a spot we could set up camp and “commune with nature”?

Our group of hikers consisted of seventeen young women between the ages of sixteen and eighteen years old, and five adult chaperones. Of the seventeen, five had prior camp experience. Two still squealed at ear piercing ranges at the sight of a spider, and ten were still trying to figure out how they got there too. We had planned this trip for about a month and now we were there. It was time to prove something. Prove something to whom, you may ask. When we set out I probably would have said, to our contemporaries. Now, however, I knew it was to myself. It was time to put action where words were. Granted, my vast experience of camping came from a much earlier time in life, but hey, camping is camping. Or so I thought when this trip was in the planning stages.

My dad and mom would pack up my brothers, sisters and me and take us to state parks on nice summer weekends. We would drive to our campsite and set up camp and take a swim or whatever. Meals were not that different—grilled burgers and hot dogs. Really about the only change was sleeping on the ground. Now, for me, that was a challenge. My toenails really hated scraping along that cold metal zipper as I tried to get comfortable. Every move I made seemed to cause the

toenails to rake along the zipper. It was a feeling akin to scraping fingernails on a chalk board. It really made the skin crawl. We went camping many times, and I helped cook and set up. I was confident that I could do any chore necessary to take these young ladies camping.

I was not prepared. I had never had to carry every item I would need to the site I would clear to set up camp. We, the adult leaders of this excursion, had decided the girls needed to experience the joy of being self-sufficient. Right. I wasn't even ready for all this self-sufficiency. Each of us packed our own supplies, everything from food to our shelter. We knew to bring warm clothing and sleeping supplies because we were going to "pack it" into the mountains of the Blue Ridge and it was early April. Spring Break as a matter of fact, only problem was mother nature did not seem to want to put Spring in the air. It was cold, and getting colder as we climbed ever upward into the mountains.

We drove for what seemed an eternity. Up into the mountains we climbed. The elevation changes caused my ears to pop and then clog up and pop again and again. It was getting quite painful. I thought by the time we reached our point for hiking in, there could not possibly be much more elevation to conquer. I was wrong of course. We arrived at our departure site at about two in the afternoon. Where is the site you may wonder. I can only say hours away from home and up. I have no idea where we were because I closed my eyes several times to avoid peering down the sides of the mountains. Sides, they were more like cliffs! I must say that were far too close to what was supposed to be the road. We knew this was the point to hike from because the road quit. I had forgotten how heavy my back pack was, and as I heaved it up and on I thought, "Good God, I'll never make it." The air was thin and cold and at first it was hard to breathe. I suppose my habit of sucking in nicotine and tar may have had something to do with my discomfort. My lungs were not prepared for clean air, much less cold, crisp air that felt like it had edges. Jack Frost was definitely working in the mountains. You could feel the ice crystals in the air as you inhaled. This was not what I had in mind when I thought of camping.

We walked for about an hour and finally decided we were "there." "There" was a semi-flat, semi-cleared area. There were trees that reached high into the heavens and a clear mountain stream that curved around the clearing. Silly me, I

actually thought, "Finally, now we can rest." Rest, huh? Now we had to set up tents, dig a latrine, find an area for a fire circle and gather firewood. Before I could even set up my tent I had to clear out the twigs and pine cones and make a nest. I planned on being comfortable. I raked pine needles and piled them to make a cushion, and then set up my tent. After setup I was starved. My priorities were to get wood for a fire, then get a fire going so I could cook something to eat. I started walking and looking. It came to me quickly, I forgot to pack an ax. How in the world was I ever going to get the wood into manageable lengths? My pocket knife was not the best tool for the job, but it worked. As long as I worked it, it worked. I would cut in a sawing fashion, stop and resharpen the knife, and cut some more. Finally, on the verge of exhaustion and starvation, I had an ample supply of wood. I quickly prepared my meager meal of Beanie Weenies, and scarfed it down with great joy. I passed the night in busy activity and was very grateful when bedtime finally arrived.

We all went to our respective tents and settled in to sleep. You would think sleep would come quickly and easily after all the activity and physical exertion. Not so; I listened and thought for hours. The stream that bordered our sight talked all night in changing tones, at times quietly flowing over the rocks and out-cropping, other times as if something really exciting were happening, gurgling, and bubbling. The trees that reached high into the heavens were also talking all night. The wind caused the branches to rustle and scrape against each other. I could hear sighs and groans alternating overhead. The crickets were chirping and carrying on their cricket conversations. I imagined they were trying to figure out who the interlopers were. Sleep did come. I don't really know how long it took. It came gradually.

I had decided before going to sleep that I was going to steal the sunrise the next morning. The trees must have somehow read my thoughts, because I was awakened by the sound of the branches swaying. I thought I heard my name in the wind. In my mind I was receiving a wake-up call. I did not have a clue as to the time. I only knew I was awake and I was in an area I had never been before and I had to get up and out. Since I didn't want to share the moment with anybody else, I slipped out of my sleeping bag as quietly as I could. I had to get out of the

tent and see whatever I could. I eased the zipper up and slipped out into the night. It had been so long since I was away from "civilization" that the total darkness and natural noise was overwhelming. I was engulfed by the immensity of nature.

I took my flashlight and, with its light slicing through the darkness, made my way to a high reach I had noticed as we walked in the previous day. I did not know why this area caught my attention the day before. It was, however, the place I found myself heading when I set out in the blackness. I climbed up and settled on a nice flat boulder and faced what I figured was the eastern sky. I sat in the cold and tried to figure out what the heck I was doing out there with my fanny freezing to that boulder and my teeth chattering like castanets, when the answer came screaming to me. The sky that had been black started taking on a purple hue. The purple gave way to lavender, then a shade of magenta. Right before my eyes the sky was being painted. When the first rays of true light cleared the side of the mountain, I realized my heart was racing and my breath coming in gasps. The beauty of the sunrise was taking me out of myself.

In that moment it became so clear to me where I fit in the great scheme of things. I was but a minuscule part of the world around me. I had the choice to live in conjunction with my surroundings or I could continue to fight against nature and never be completely at peace with my surroundings. It was then that I started to look around. I was not alone. I had more company than I ever thought I would at that time of the morning. Not far from where I sat I spotted a chipmunk. He was standing on his hind legs, facing the same direction as I. In his forepaws he was clutching an acorn. The chipmunk's compact little body was so proud looking, he stood erect and his fur gleamed in the first rays of sunshine. His mate joined him from behind the outcropping of rocks where he was standing. I watched as they scampered off to get on with their day. The birds, which had been overhead in the trees, were chattering greetings to each other and to me. A deer, that until this time had slipped my attention, decided it was time to move on and with graceful springing leaps disappeared from my sight.

I reluctantly uncoiled myself from my perch and headed back to camp. I arrived quietly and started the fire and water for cocoa. It was a beautiful morning and I felt like there was nothing I could not do. I vowed to myself that, like that chipmunk, I too would greet every day erect and proud to be alive. No more

groaning and complaining about the cold, or earliness of the hour, or inconvenience of being awakened.

Life is great and seeing each day renewed in the first rays of dawn is an awesome experience. Like the birds, chipmunk, and deer, I will take the time to see. No more trudging along with blinders on. I will witness the color and glory of the day. I will experience a rebirth with each new dawn. I will make the most of each day I am awarded and I will greet others in a friendly open manner, as did all of nature that frosty morning years ago.

JUDITH L. GODWIN



Pegasus

JUANITA DALE CASTERLINE

Graceland

In my father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you . — JOHN 14:2

There's a place you can go where there is no pain or fear. A place inside you without love or the need for love. A place without lust. A place beyond trust and betrayal. It requires no faith, it demands nothing. It's a place where you're never unwanted. A place without hurt or sorrow, where nothing bleeds and no one can come after you. No one can touch you there or make you feel bad or afraid. It's a safe place. A perfect place. Just like Graceland.

Aaron's stepfather began molesting him when he was nine. He remembered his hands. He had big hands, covered in calluses. He remembered the smell of his cologne, Old Spice. For years the smell of it made him shake, unable to control himself.

He remembered his hands over his mouth. His hands all over his body. He remembered the pain so bad he thought he would split in two. It made him have to go to the bathroom. It was like a thief had broken into the house, only instead of being in the house, it was in his body. An intruder inside him.

It made him bleed. He bled all night long. After lying there in pain and blood for a few hours, he stole one of his mom's maxi pads out of the bathroom and put it in his underwear. He hid his underwear in the bottom of the garbage the next day. When his mom saw his sheets he told her he had a bloody nose in the middle of the night.

He didn't sleep at all that night. The pain, emotional and physical, kept him awake till morning. He made himself stop crying when he heard his mom up and around and knew she would be coming to get him up for school. He could hardly walk.

He didn't think it could happen to a boy. Aaron had learned about it in school but he thought it only happened to girls. He hadn't thought he had anything to worry about.

He didn't know what to think. He was confused and there was no one he could talk to. He felt like a girl. He felt robbed. He felt vandalized. He didn't think he would ever be safe again. He felt ashamed.

His stepfather, Henry, said if he told his mom she wouldn't believe him. He said, even if she did, she would just get mad at him and leave and never come back. Henry said if he ever told anyone they would come and take him away and lock him up in a boys' home.

After the first time it was two months before it happened again. He started crying as soon as his stepfather came into the room.

"Hush up that crying now. We don't want to wake your mother. Hear me, boy?" Henry said.

"Y-Y-Yes sir," Aaron managed to snuffle.

It began happening every month. Then every week, sometimes twice a week. Always late at night when his mom was asleep at the other end of the trailer. He was alone with Henry and there was nothing he could do. He was too scared and confused to try to fight or yell out. Sometimes he could hear his parents' bed slamming against the wall. He could hear Henry's grunts. He always knew Henry would be in his room within an hour. The longest hour. Henry was quieter with him.

It got to where Aaron would roll over and bury his head in his pillow as soon as he heard his door open at night. Sometimes, he knew, Henry and his mom couldn't have sex. He would overhear them arguing about it. He never had that problem with Aaron.

It usually didn't last very long. For that he was thankful. Henry would get up and leave as soon as it was over, never having said a word. Aaron was always left crying and aching, with a mess to clean up.

* * *

When he was eleven he told his mom what was going on. A police officer had been to his school that day to talk about sexual abuse. He said you should always tell someone no matter what. Aaron realized that day he was wrong.

He told her what Henry had been doing for the last two years. She didn't want to hear about it.

"You're father is a good man," she said.

"He's not my father, he's a pervert."

"No, he's not. Your STEP father is a good man. I don't know why you want to tell such lies about him. I know ya'll haven't always got along, but that's no excuse for this."

"They're not lies, mom. It's true," he pleaded.

"No, it's not," she insisted, her voice becoming stern with denial. "It's filthy, vulgar lying and I ought to wash your mouth out with soap."

"But, mom..."

"Why do you want to do this?" she snapped. "Do you want Hank to leave? He will if you keep saying these things. Who would put food on the table then, huh? Or a roof over our heads or clothes on your back?"

"I wish he would leave," he mumbled, starting to cry.

"Don't you say that. Don't say that, Aaron. Hank's a good man, he's not mean. Certainly not capable of the sick things you say he does. He's a good man. He doesn't sleep around. He doesn't hit me, he doesn't stay out all night. Do you know how hard it is to find a man like that? Do you? Do you want me to be alone? Is that what you want?"

"No," Aaron whimpered.

"Just go to your room. I don't ever want to talk about this again, hear me?"

"Yes."

"God, I need a drink," he heard her say as he went down the hall. Later she came into his room carrying a bowl of ice cream, her breath smelling like whiskey, a familiar smell.

"Ice cream makes the tears go away," she said, sitting on the bed next to Aaron. "Look, I'm sorry I yelled earlier. I've had a really bad day." She petted his head as he pushed the ice cream around the bowl with his spoon.

“I meant what I said though,” she went on, “I don’t want you to ever mention this again. I’ve worked all my life to have what I have now and I don’t want to lose it. I want you to try and forget we ever had this conversation and I’ll do the same, okay? Now why don’t you go get cleaned up before your stepfather gets home.”

Aaron didn’t know if she ever told Henry what he had told her. Henry never said anything about it to him and his late night visits continued as before.

Eventually Aaron learned to disconnect himself from what was happening when Henry was in his bed. He would curl up inside himself and go somewhere else in his head. Somewhere far away where Henry couldn’t go. Somewhere he couldn’t just open the door and come in and hurt him. Somewhere he was safe. He would go to Graceland.

He pictured it in his mind the way he had seen it in books and on T.V. The musical notes on the gates, the white pillars. The wallpaper, the carpet, the furniture. The lamps and tables and chairs, the pictures and gold records on the wall. He imagined it all just as if he was there. The jungle room was his favorite. He would lie down on the zebra-striped couch and go to sleep, not having to worry about Henry coming in in the middle of the night and waking him up. The jungle room was the only place he could sleep peacefully. It was a place where nothing could harm him. He never wanted to leave. He didn’t want to come back to what Henry was doing to him, to the fact that his mom didn’t care as long as it didn’t upset the facts of her life.

When Aaron was five, when it was just him and his mom, before Henry moved in, when he was still happy, his mother told him his father was Elvis Presley, the king of rock ‘n’ roll. She was drunk. She was playing her old Elvis albums on the stereo.

“That’s why I named you after him,” she said. “Aaron was his middle name. He was a real good looking man. Real nice too. He was the only man I ever loved. Lots of people loved him, but I loved him best.” She was dancing around the room, glass in hand.

Aaron had no reason to doubt her. Why would any five year old doubt what his mom said? He knew who Elvis was, she played his records all the time, but he didn’t understand the significance of what she was saying. He was simply happy to know the name of his father, a man he had never met.

Over the years he asked her several times to tell him about his dad, about Elvis. She never would say any more about him. She said she didn’t want to talk about it. When he was older, he asked her if it was true, if Elvis Presley really was his dad, but she wouldn’t confirm or deny it. She didn’t have to though. He knew in his heart it was true. He knew Elvis was his real father and that he had been named Aaron after him and that he had died when he was just a baby. He knew it as simply and completely as he knew day from night.

He started reading every book he could find about Elvis. He listened to all his records over and over; the ones his mom didn’t have he bought with his allowance. He watched all his movies, all the documentaries made about him. He had posters, pictures torn out of magazines pinned up all over his room. Bookshelves lined with magazines and albums and memorabilia. He was the only Elvis expert and fanatic in his school. He went as his dad for Halloween three years in a row.

The whole time he was growing up he only told one person his secret, who his real father was. The school bully who used to tease him because his mom worked at the Waffle House across the street from the school.

“Hey, trailer trash,” the bully taunted, “tell your mom I like my eggs over easy.”

“I ain’t no trailer trash. My dad’s a millionaire.” After what he had to go through at home, he wasn’t afraid of anyone at school.

“Oh, yeah? Who’s your dad?”

“Elvis Presley,” Aaron stared him in the eye.

He laughed. His friends laughed. Guys like that always travel with friends.

“Elvis Presley, ha, ha, ha. That’s a good one, Trash.”

Before he even realized what he was doing, Aaron reached back into yesterday and punched him dead in the eye. The next thing he knew they were both on the ground, rolling in the dirt, each trying to get in their fair share of shots before a teacher pulled them apart.

The principal called his parents and made them come down to the school to pick him up. He was suspended for three days. All the eyewitnesses had said he started it.

That evening all Henry could say was, "Jesus Christ! The kid's a nut case, thinks his daddy's Elvis. Shit. We oughtta take him to a shrink."

"Shut up, Hank," his mom said. "We ain't taking him to no psychiatrist."

"I don't see why not," Henry said. "That's the craziest thing I ever heard of."

"Aaron, please go to your room while your stepfather and I discuss this," she said.

He ran away that night. He was only ten, so he didn't get far. Henry found him hiding in some weeds a few streets over. He was clutching a copy of "Aloha from Hawaii." He froze like a rabbit when the headlights shined on him. Henry hadn't called the police. He was afraid of what Aaron might tell them.

Henry didn't come to his room that night; he waited a couple of nights until things had cooled down. Then it was back to his usual routine. Aaron grew less and less aware of Henry on top of him. Graceland was becoming more real than what he did. It became more vibrant as he faded away. Aaron knew his dad would protect him, that if he were there he would kill Henry. He started slipping away to Graceland in his head even when Henry wasn't around. He would sit for hours in a daze, dead to the world, as his soul walked the halls and grounds of Graceland. He slept in the jungle room, he ate peanut butter and banana sandwiches with his dad, they rode around together in his Cadillac, they sang songs at the piano. It was just the two of them, father and son, the way he had always wanted it to be. He spent all his free time there, withdrawing more and more from the real world. But it didn't matter, to him Graceland was the real world. The real world the way it should have been.

* * *

Aaron was sixteen when he left home for good. It started out over him wanting to take the car to go out with some friends.

"Hell, no!" Henry said. "God knows where he'll take it or what he'll do."

"Hank, just let him take the car," his mom said from her semi-passive position on the couch. "He'll be careful with it."

"I don't trust anyone crazy enough to think they're Elvis's son. He'll probably go out doing drugs or something. You know what they say, like father like son, ha, ha."

"I am his son, you lousy bastard!" Aaron screamed at him. "And he wasn't no drug addict!"

"You ain't related to Elvis," he said. "You're just screwed up in the head. You wanna know who your real dad was? Go ahead, Faye, tell him. Tell him who his daddy was. If you don't, I will."

"I don't want to talk about this right now," she said.

"You better tell him, Faye. You better tell him the truth. This shit's gone on too long."

She looked Henry at long time without saying anything. She looked at him carefully, trying to see who he really was. He glared back at her.

"Your dad was a truck driver," she finally sighed. "Christ, let me get a drink."

"He fell asleep driving one night and drove off a bridge," she said when she returned, glass in hand. "We were never married. I didn't even know I was pregnant when he died."

"That's a lie!" Aaron yelled. "You told me yourself Elvis was my dad."

"I said that because I wished it was true. I was always a big Elvis fan. Your real dad used to hit me when he was drunk. He was a mean man."

"Bullshit, you're lying. You're just saying that because Henry wants you to. You know it's not true. I know what the truth is whether you want to admit it or not. I know Elvis is my dad." He ran down the hall and slammed the door to his room.

Aaron knew it didn't matter what she said. She and Henry had probably made up the whole story together. There was nothing she could say to convince him Elvis wasn't his dad. If he wasn't, Aaron rationalized, she would have said something sooner. She wouldn't have let him grow up believing a lie. It wasn't a lie was it? He started crying. Oh my God, he thought, what if it isn't true? He couldn't even consider the possibility. He wouldn't let himself consider it.

He knew what he had to do, where he had to go. A place where all the answers could be found. He had to see if it was the way he had imagined it, if it was like all the pictures he had seen. It was the only place in the world he had to go to. It was the only thing that made sense to do.

* * *

He packed a gym bag with a few changes of clothes and threw in a torn copy of "Elvis and Me." It was all the luggage he needed. He had fifty dollars he figured would get him there if he ate cheap. Getting there was the only thing to worry about. He knew everything would take care of itself once he was there.

He wanted to get as far away by morning as possible. He wasn't afraid of anything that could happen hitchhiking; he didn't figure it could be any worse than what he was leaving behind.

It took him three days to reach Memphis. He made good time catching rides with truck drivers, hiding when a cop or state trooper passed by. He wasn't sure if they would be looking for him or not, but he didn't want to take any chances.

Occasionally he got a ride with a traveling salesman or a car full of college kids. He told everyone he was going to Graceland. They all wished him luck.

He didn't mind sleeping outside. He slept better than he had in years. It was like being in the boy scouts. He lived off bologna and crackers. It was a good time. He was on his way and he was free. He could put all his nightmares behind him.

Outside Memphis, he met a truck driver who said he was going right through town and he could drop him off outside Graceland.

* * *

He stood outside the gates a long time transfixed with awe, simply amazed that he was there after all the years, all the pain, that it was actually real and not just in his head. He stared at the house unable to move. It was more beautiful than he had ever imagined. More beautiful than any picture he had ever seen. He studied each note on the gate, mesmerized by every little detail. It was the most glorious sight he had ever beheld.

Finally, he managed to walk through the gate and start up the driveway to the house. It grew larger and larger with each step bringing him closer to paradise. He felt like Dorothy approaching the Emerald City. It felt right. More right than anything before in his life. It felt like the moment he was born for. It felt like coming home. He knew he was where he belonged.

He walked up to the door and rang the doorbell. He couldn't believe he was actually ringing the doorbell at Graceland. It was like a dream. The greatest dream

he knew how to dream, only it was real, it was true. Elvis, the king himself, his dad, opened the door. He wasn't the way the world remembered him, he was young and thin, like his "Jailhouse Rock" days. Aaron didn't say anything. He didn't know what to say. He didn't even know if Elvis knew who he was. He couldn't think at all.

"Well, hello, son," Elvis said in his sleepy drawl. "C'mon in." He held the door open.

He walked through the door and Elvis pulled him to him and hugged him. He started crying. Tears of joy and relief burst out uncontrollably. Tears that had been inside him his whole life. He had made it at last.

* * *

Aaron's mother found him dead in his room, overdosed on sleeping pills. He lay on his bed, peacefully asleep forever, his head resting on his "Love Me Tender" pillow case. There was a note beside him, barely legible; it read only three words: "Viva Las Vegas."

Faye stayed drunk for two weeks after his death. When she finally sobered up she left Henry and never had another drink again. She never remarried or had any more children. *The National Enquirer* once interviewed her as the lady who claimed to have had Elvis's illegitimate son.

DAN CLIFTON

The Reluctant Gypsy

Moist air hung
like stolen silk
around her.

A stingy crescent dangled
in the full-moon-
feeling sky.

She knew her heart
too heavy
...for a gypsy.

Pieced together
from borrowed feelings,

puffed at the seams
by wasted
sighs.

Tossed on top
her newest
dreams—already fading;

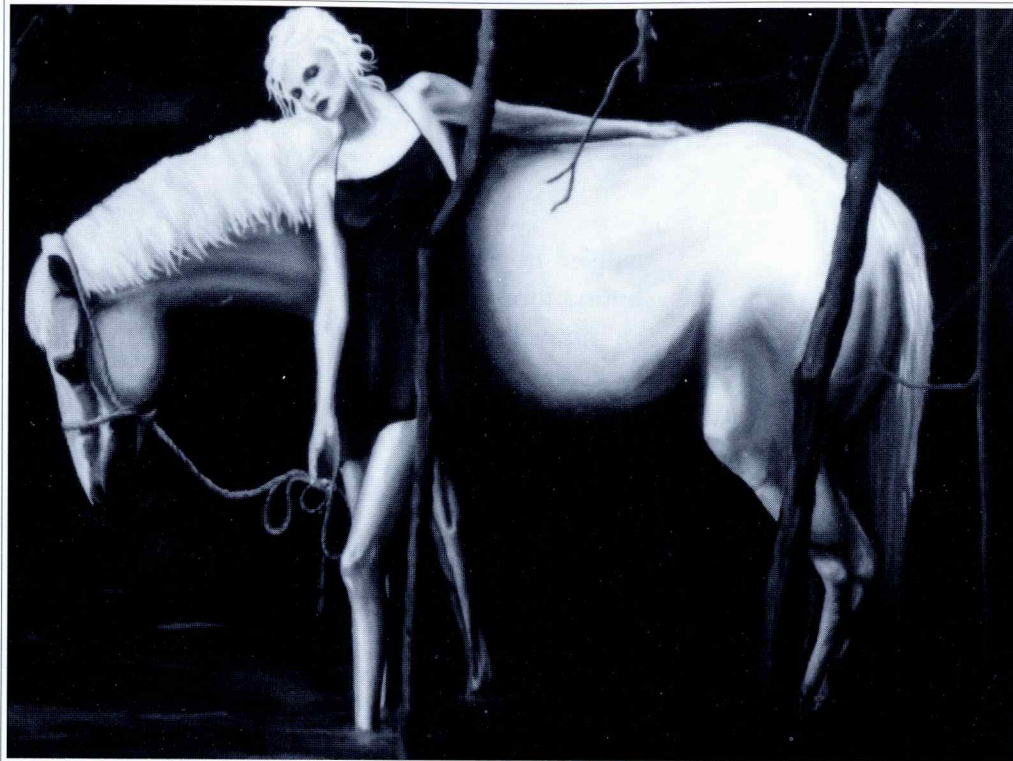
tangled hopes
bound loosely
an unraveled love,

(Why had she
kept
this thing?)

Memories scattered
on the bottom
like misprinted cards

of fate: missing faces,
absent hearts,
too many spades.

PATRICIA A. BEARD



Eve of Equus

RODNEY T. TAYLOR

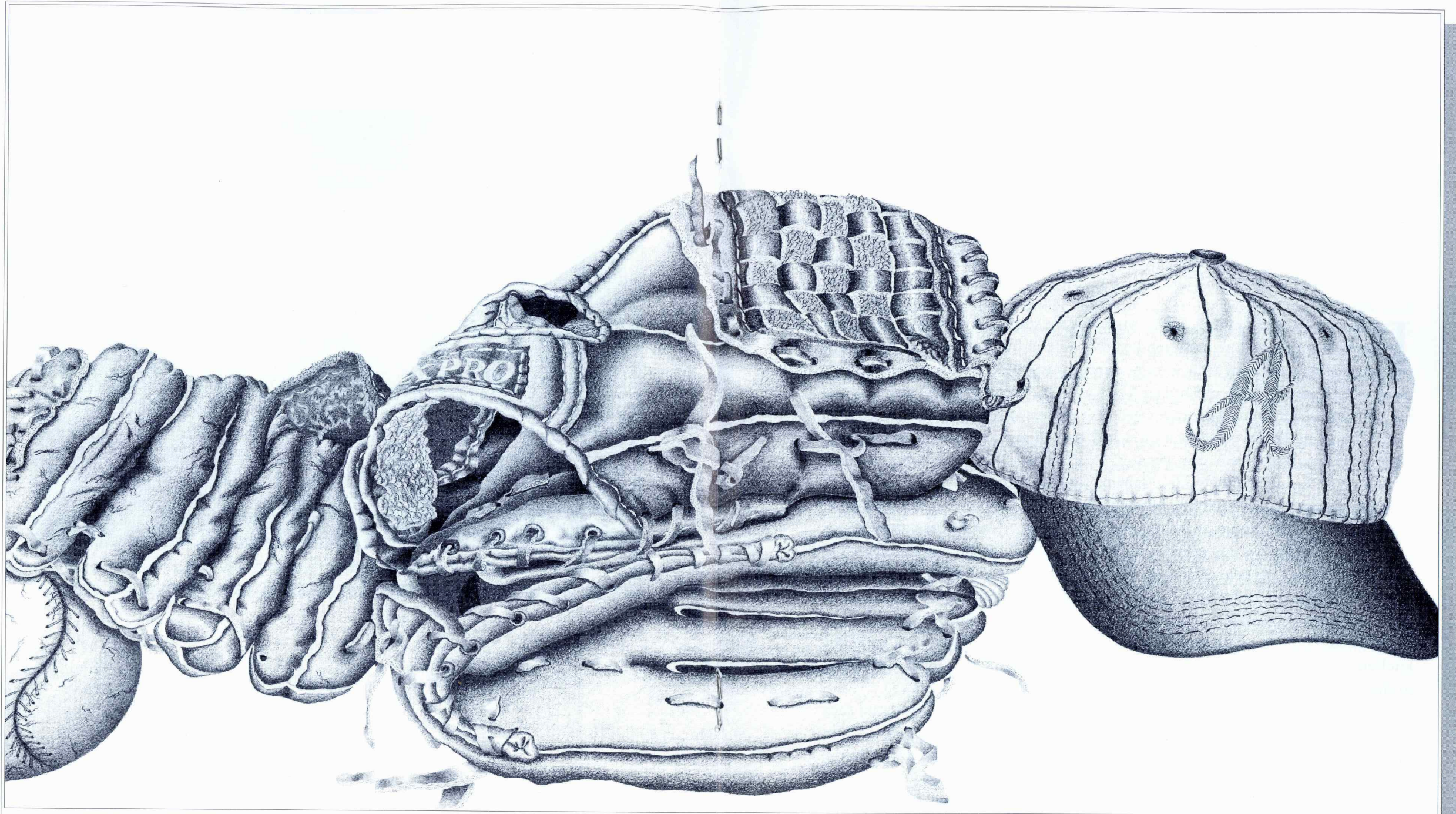
De Donde, Don Quixote?

De donde, Don Quixote?
 with eyes of light, bright blue
 seeing maidens and giants
 adventures and quests
 in ordinary earthbound things.

Still, you saw grand visions
 inner beauty, outward majesty
 and the world was a place of wonder
 with ideals more manna than bread
 replacing mere royalty with brave nobility
 as long lost Camelot once did.

But once the fog was gone
 and your steed turned fast toward home
 your wild, wild heart
 with its broken wings
 could not find the will to go on.

R. F. JORDAN



Still Life

RICHARD MORGAN

Summer's Simple Pleasures

It was a summer day in July, 1962, much like the summers we have now except for the fact that no one had even heard of air conditioning, at least not in our family. We were poor as far as money and possessions were concerned, but we were rich in family love and unity. My dad, a shoe cobbler, and my mom, a homemaker, struggled to take care of my two sisters and me.

Our long awaited week of vacation had arrived and we loaded up the 1948 Chevy and embarked on our version of vacation. We were going to our grandparents' home in Ethelsville, Alabama for a week of farm living. Twelve to fourteen glorious hours of "How much further?" and "Momma, she's looking at me, again!" and we would arrive, provided the old car had no breakdowns.

When we arrived it was every man, woman, and child for himself. We were so happy to have arrived; it was truly vacation just to get out of that car. The old home place was a sight for sore eyes, with its rusty tin roof and old screen door. The small house had lap board siding and was a very weathered, dark brown color. There were five rooms, three used as bedrooms, one as a living room and the kitchen. I almost forgot to mention the bathroom which was out the back door, to the left and about twenty yards behind the corn crib.

The bedrooms had wrought iron head and foot boards on each bed and they were raised high off the floor, the most excellent place to hide and play. There was only a narrow place to walk in the bedrooms because of the chiffoniers and hump back trunks. Clothes hung on the backs of the bedroom doors and the smell of cedar and moth balls burned an indelible smell that takes me back in time when

I smell them today. Sleeping in these rooms, where you could see daylight through the cracks in the walls and sometimes rain leaked through the tin roof, gave me some of my richest memories. We were lulled to sleep by the sounds of passing cars and trucks out on the highway, their faint hum gradually growing louder and louder until their climatic roaring past the house. Then you could hear them fading ever so quietly until the only sound you heard was the crickets outside or Paw Paw snoring.

At first daylight, and with the crowing of the rooster, I could hear Paw Paw's and Maw Maw's feet hit the floor ready for a hard day's work. Soon the smell of biscuits baking and streak of lean frying proved too irresistible to stay in our goose down featherbeds. After a hearty breakfast of grits, eggs, ham and biscuits with homemade jam, or fig preserves, I eagerly joined in to help with the chores of the day.

There were the pigs to slop and the mule to feed along with a cow eagerly awaiting us to milk her. We would go to the old corn crib, careful not to disturb Paw Paw's king snake, and run dried ears of corn through an old rusty corn sheller that would strip the kernels of corn off the cob. The chickens clucked with anticipation to receive their reward for having produced for us the finest double-yoke, brown eggs you've ever tasted.

After the early morning chores were done, we had a little free time to explore this wonderful place. Everything was a curious mystery to me, like why were there old forks and knives sticking out from between the slats on the corn crib? I later learned that this was a popular shady place to gather when it was hot and enjoy a cool watermelon. Another burning question in my mind was, did the mule really gnaw the top of the barn door down until it looked like a mouth with a big grin? My Uncle Sam informed me that the stubborn mule would chew almost anything and could be worse than a goat at times.

My older Sister, Carol, and I found ourselves that first morning during our free time with a mission that had to be undertaken. It seems that we had found a batch of new kittens that were obviously in a backslidden condition and were in desperate need of redemption. After a good holiness preaching service, we were going to baptize those kittens! We didn't go for that sissy sprinkle business; we believed in total immersion to be properly saved. We loaded those cats up in the

well bucket and lowered them down into the dark abyss of that well and what a fuss they made.

When we finished cranking with all our might to retrieve them, the bucket was still full of cats eager to be dry and free from us. We managed to hold on to two of them and promptly diapered them in swaddling clothes made from a paper towel. The last we saw of them, they were heading under the mule sled with their little tails protruding from their diapers. We never got caught but the burden of unconfessed mischief was too much for me to handle, so I told Maw Maw and braced for the worst. When they found out the kittens survived and the initial tension passed, we were told to never do it again or the next several meals would be eaten from a standing position.

After lunch that same day, we found our free time was a bit more structured than it had been earlier. We helped Paw Paw and Uncle Sam hitch up the mule to the sled. The smell of the leather mule collar and harness along with the pungent odor of the mule himself was enough to keep me from getting too close. He was a temperamental beast with a mind of his own and a definite dislike for anyone other than Paw Paw. The sled was loaded with wash tubs and burlap bags and, of course, my sisters and me. We all went to the fields and picked purple hull peas, butter beans, corn, cucumbers, and squash. When the wash tubs were full and running over we proceeded back to the house for some cold sweet lemonade to quench our thirst. The whole family sat around talking, laughing and shelling beans until it was time to start cooking this feast for supper.

After the evening meal my mom would plunk me into a wash tub on the back porch and I had my bath. The dirt between my toes and the dirt bead necklace from around my neck turned the water a chocolate brown color.

The next day my father and Paw Paw were walking toward the barn so I decided to tag along. They stopped by an old wagon like the ones you see in the western movies with a small bench seat and flat wooden bed. I climbed up to the seat and was pretending to be a cowboy picking up a load of supplies from the general store. Then I noticed on the tree limbs, now within easy reaching distance, a small piece of fruit, which Paw Paw said was a persimmon. I asked him if they were good and he said, "Yes,..." I promptly plucked one from the tree and took a big bite and mercy what a terrible taste. As I ran to the house with my mouth

puckered up I heard Paw Paw finish his answer to me, "...when they are ripe."

With our week packed with the exciting simple pleasure of farm life, it came to an end all too soon. I watched Paw Paw and Maw Maw wave good-bye through the back glass of that old Chevy and tried hard to remember every detail of the farm that I loved to visit.

As I grew older the innocence and charm of the farm faded and we began to go camping at the beach or the mountains. Twenty years passed without me setting foot on that farm and in 1990 we had our first family reunion. As we turned off the highway and into the yard, I looked down at my three-month-old son and wondered if I could ever give him the rich memories like those stored as precious treasures in my mind.

I videotaped the old house with the "baptismal well" right where it always was by the back door. I turned toward the old corn crib now covered with so much kudzu that you could barely tell a structure was under the tangled web of vines. The old barn was gone but the persimmon tree stood as majestically as it had for many decades. I could not help but stand quietly and reverently there, transfixed, with wave after wave of nostalgic memories flooding my mind and tears coursing down my cheeks. I know that with the ebb and flow of fate all things change and my only sadness is not for myself but for the generations to come who will never be able to experience, in quite the same measure, the pleasure that simple things can offer.

BILLY S. GRIGGS



Abandoned

TIMOTHY HYERS

It's a Guy Thing

What does the remote control have that I don't have? That little black box gets fondled more than I do. There is no doubt in my mind that it was invented by a man. I just know some man was lying around on his couch one day, probably after watching three hours of football, and he said to himself, "What can I do to be even lazier than this? I know. I'll invent something to change the channels for me, so I won't have to get up until my beer intake exceeds my bladder intake capacity." And you know, now a man won't even get up to get the remote control. If he forgets to pick it up before he lies down, he'll call you away from the cooking and cleaning in a voice loud enough to rattle the windows like it's some kind of an emergency. And when you come running into the room, he'll whine, in his most pathetically helpless voice, "Honey, will you hand me the remote?"

Speaking of helpless, have you ever noticed that a man is incapable of operating the television without the remote control? If it is misplaced, do you think he'll just walk over and turn the TV on manually? No, of course not. He will spend an hour looking for the clicker and swearing you must have done something with it. And if the batteries go dead, he'll shake the channel changer and mash the buttons repeatedly as he slowly moves closer and closer to the TV, one step at a time. Yet, when he finally reaches the TV, still jiggling and clicking the remote, he could simply lift his hand and push the buttons on the TV, but he won't. He'll put the control right up against the sensor and keep on pressing.

I gave up, long ago, trying to watch TV with my husband, my grandfather, or my thirteen-year-old son. Why? Because they don't actually watch TV; they skim

it. My husband calls it “channel surfing.” They will leave it on a channel only minutes, just long enough for me to get interested in the program. Then suddenly, as the man with the axe sneaks up behind his victim, -BEEP- the channel changes. So, I’ll get into the next show, but right when the car is about to go over the cliff, -BEEP- the channel changes again. Irritated, I’ll take in the new series; however, at the moment the woman is about to reveal who the father of her child is, yes, you guessed it, -BEEP- the station changes once again. Sometimes they don’t even give me enough time to see what the shows are about. It becomes thirty minutes of -BEEP-pause-BEEP-pause-BEEP- with pauses that last only seconds.

Besides the fact that I do not appreciate this game of “television roulette,” I also see a notable inequity in this practice. I would never go to my grandfather’s house and commandeer his remote control. I would never go to my estranged husband’s house and play “queen of the remote.” And I would not enter my son’s room and take over his clicker (well, maybe I would, but only to aggravate him because thirteen-year-old boys are so obnoxious). Now I ask you this: is it too much to request a little controller courtesy in my own house? Apparently it is, because when I asked my husband this question, he said, “Well if you feel that way, I’ll just take my whole paycheck home with me today, and you can just keep your remote control.”

Here’s a fun tip for you ladies. Next time you are in a room full of men, reach for the remote control and watch the expressions on their faces. Even their breathing patterns will change. They will literally gasp for air. When a woman picks up the remote control, men react as though she has just picked up a bomb. “Hand it here, honey, slow and easy, and nobody will get hurt.”

I like the convenience of a remote control, but if I can’t find the remote, I can logically see that walking up to the TV and changing the channels myself will take less total time and energy than spending an hour looking for the channel changer. If I press the clicker a few times, and it doesn’t work, I can guess that the batteries might be dead, and I know how to use the buttons that actually came on the television set.

I think part of men’s fascination with the remote control is that it does afford them a certain luxury of laziness, but I believe it goes much deeper than that. I surmise the answer lies in the name itself. Think about it, REMOTE

CONTROL. Men love control. And what could be better than remote control, control you can have from any remote place in the room without fighting a battle to gain it? Of course, when the batteries fail or the remote is lost or a woman picks it up, then the man loses the control, and thus, the battle to retain control begins.

A man is truly happy when he is holding a remote control. It is kind of like a security blanket. I guess if a woman really wanted to compete with it, she could always paint herself black with little white buttons in all the right places.

Hmm, come to think of it, I do look good in black.

VALARIE EDWARDS



Still Life

RODNEY T. TAYLOR

The Treason of Emotional Slavery

It is time for the treason of emotional slavery to pass.
Weeping land that holds the essence of our greatness,
ignite for the purpose of creation, the flame of darkness
that lights the path of memory.

It is a dream that flows with the thoughts of yesterday
through the halls of recollection, taking the broken pieces of the past
where dark faces dance to the rhythm of their souls.

Let nature, through the miracle of birth, bring back the skies of change
where the tribes of Africa lay distant to watch the light of sunshine.

The sound of the black spirit creeps into the doorways of time
to find the spell of creation bringing the hope of tomorrow's promise.
This land, instilled with the notion that black kings own the crown of eternity,
shall not fade before the day when black hands hold within the reaches
of the earth the land and all the graces of our time.

Speak to me through the miracle which translates the sound of sorrow
into a smile that brings home the smell of gentleness and spreads the flame of
hope into the souls of the dreamless.

Through the origins of our past we will change the undying face of silence
that takes the voices of the long-braided children of the African dream
who cast out their songs
for freedom.

BROOKS PALMER

Imagination

Imagination. One minute, I'm sitting in my room; the next minute, I'm a policeman chasing a couple of criminals down the street. My partner and I chase them down a dark alley. Suddenly, they turn around and start shooting. My partner and I jump behind some garbage cans, I shoot one of them, the other one shoots back. I look to the side and my partner is covered in blood.

One minute, I'm holding my partner's dead body in my arms; the next minute, I'm having dinner with a beautiful woman. She has long, brown, sweet as sugar legs. Her lips are full and juicy. She has a smile that could render a man helpless. She has on a sexy dress; it's ruby red, low cut all the way down to the edges of her voluptuous breast. She literally takes my breath away.

One minute, she's telling me she loves me; the next minute, I'm a lawyer for the defense in a murder case. My client has been accused of stabbing her husband to death.

One minute, I'm listening to the prosecution's witness; the next minute, I'm going to tell my partner's wife her husband is dead. It seems as though it takes me hours to walk from the car to the front door. Slowly she opens the door; I look into those big beautiful brown eyes. It's as though she already knows. Before I can say a word, those beautiful brown eyes start filling up with tears.

One minute, I'm consoling my partner's wife; the next minute I'm giving the beautiful woman an engagement ring. We kiss, her lips are soft and warm. Her breasts are pressed against my body, I can feel the fire illuminating between us. She lightly moves her hand down my chest across my stomach to my crotch. She starts

nibbling my ear and whispering how she's going to take me to the brink of ecstasy.

One minute, I'm carrying her to my bedroom; the next minute, I'm in the courtroom. My client says her husband was physically abusing her. She says it was self defense. A doctor, who testified for the prosecution, stated: when he examined her, he could find no physical evidence that would suggest she was ever abused. My client says her husband was abusive, but there's no evidence to support her accusation.

One minute, I'm calling my first witness to the stand; the next minute, I'm standing over my partner's grave. His wife and two children are standing beside me. I can't bear the thought of my partner's body in a grave while the guys who killed him are still walking around. If it's the last thing I do, I'll get revenge.

One minute, I'm holding my partner's crying children; the next minute, I'm in the courtroom questioning my client's daughter. She witnessed the whole incident. She's thirteen years old and on the verge of losing both her parents. Her story backed up her mother's story, but the doctor's testimony still discredited both women. I know my client cannot be telling me the whole story.

One minute, I'm noticing a bruise on my client's daughter; the next minute, I'm dancing with the beautiful woman. We're doing the tango; I've never done this dance before but the beautiful woman and I move good together, the whole room stops to look at us. I hear someone say "wow," as I back flip on to the table and start to tap dance. The beautiful woman jumps up on the table, and we dirty dance back down to the floor. I flip her over my shoulder, spin around, and dip the beautiful woman to the crowd's amazement.

One minute, I'm feeling sore from the dancing; the next minute, I'm in a hospital. I shot one of the bastards. I get a tip which leads me straight to the hospital he's in, I'm amused at the look on his face as I walk into his room.

One minute, the creep is looking at me with terror in his eyes; the next minute, I'm questioning my client's daughter on her bruise. She says she fell, but I don't think she could have gotten that bruise from falling. I look at my client. My client has been nervous since the trial began, but now more than ever.

One minute, I'm asking the judge for a five minute recess; the next minute, I'm in the criminal's hospital room. It's taking all my self control to keep from killing him, but I must find out where his partner is first. With all my might, I

punch his bullet wound. He wants to yell for help but he knows if he does I'll shoot him. I ask him where his partner is, but he won't say anything. I take out my stick and start beating his wound until it starts to bleed. Looking at this guy cry in pain gives me some satisfaction of revenge, but it's not enough. Finally he tells me where his partner is.

One minute, I'm standing in the hospital room watching the scum bleed to death; the next minute, I'm making love to the beautiful woman. Our bodies are dripping with sweat; her nails are clawing my back but it feels good. She's amazing, she's doing things I can only dream of. We're like animals, as she wraps her legs and arms around my body. It feels so good I can hardly breathe.

One minute, I'm at the height of ecstasy; the next minute, I'm outside the door of my partner's killer. I kick down the door; it doesn't take me long to get the wimp down. His body starts dripping with blood as I beat him. I enjoy the sounds of his screams as I cut up his back with my belt. I throw him up against the wall and start to kick him. He's not going to die fast; he's going to suffer.

One minute, I'm tightening a phone cord around the bastard's neck; the next minute, I'm back in the courtroom looking over some of my papers. My client's husband had been fired from his job six months earlier, so he was home all the time. I found a coroner's report that said the guy died at 3:35 p.m. My client gets off work at 3:30 p.m. My client's daughter gets out of school at 2:45 p.m. From where my client's job is located, it must take her about twenty minutes to get home. I ask my client if I were to get her time card from work, what time would it say she got off. She doesn't answer; she doesn't have to answer.

The judge instructs me to continue my questioning. I question my client's daughter on her relationship with her father. I can see tears forming in her eyes, but I'm not about to back down.

One minute, My client's yelling at me to stop; the next minute, I'm standing over the dead body of the bastard who killed my partner. I'm shaking; hundreds of things are going through my mind. Is this the satisfaction I was looking for.

One minute, I'm walking down the street; the next minute, I'm in the courtroom. I ask my client's daughter how long did her father physically abuse her. The district attorney stands up and objects to this line of questioning because it has nothing to do with this case. My client's screaming at me to stop. The judge starts

yelling for order in the court. The judge warns me about my questioning and threatens he'll charge me with contempt if I keep it up. The court room settles down. Again, I ask my client's daughter how long her father has been abusing her. The court room explodes in chaos; my client, the district attorney, and the judge are all yelling at me, and I'm yelling at my client's daughter to tell me the truth, I must know the truth. Bailiffs grab my client to keep her from jumping on me, the district attorney loses his voice from yelling, I'm being charged with contempt, and finally my client's daughter yells out, "Six years." He had been abusing her for six years.

One minute, I'm standing in the middle of the courtroom; the next minute, I'm standing over my partner's grave again crying. The cops cover up what I did; in fact, a few of them congratulate me for killing those guys. They say justice was served.

One minute, I'm looking at my partner's picture; the next minute, I'm talking to the district attorney. My client never knew what was happening to her daughter. My client's daughter just couldn't take it anymore. My client blamed herself for what happened and convinced her daughter to let her take the blame. The district attorney doesn't think either woman will spend any time in jail. He says this day justice was served.

One minute, I'm standing in the middle of the court room ; the next minute, I'm standing in front of the altar. The beautiful woman is as beautiful as ever as she walks toward me dressed in white. As we look at each other it's as though we are in our own world.

One minute, I'm looking at my new wife; the next minute I'm back in my room. Imagination.

IRA BRABHAM

Field of Pain

Saturating my body,
sweat streams through my vision,
scrambling and shaking my brain
like a ride at the state fair.
This muddy pigskin propels me into motion,
and I become one piston
in this fine-tuned machine
which moves across
a stretching field of pain.

Eyes burn with intensity,
behind my iron cage
providing me protection
from this pounding, pounding, pounding,
while my heart beats in rhythms with the band.
My cleats bite into the soft earth,
ripping, ripping, ripping,
colliding with our bodies
in a medieval joust.

Faces have no meaning
in expressions of body motion guiding all my actions
as a taste of blood
fuels my desire.
Consumed in soaring pain,
my muscles ignite to the occasion,
engulfing opposition
on this hostile field of glory.

GREGORY RHAME



A New Beginning

SHELBY RIALS

At Play in the Supermarket

In Johan Huizinga's "The Nature and Significance of Play," Huizinga analyses the function of play in human behavior. Huizinga's thesis is that play performs an important and universal service in human interaction. Huizinga relates seven qualities of play in his essay. Applying his criteria to different activities and processes in our culture, play—or aspects of play—will be found in unlikely places. Societal functions ranging from national elections to the educational system can be shown to be play, or to have playful activity. Even something as mundane as grocery shopping can be shown to be play.

Huizinga's first criterion for play is voluntary participation in an activity. People rather enjoy grocery shopping, whether they realize it or not. A shopper enters the store, and assuming he's not broke, he's ready for some instant gratification. People have departments they prefer, a particular area where they find fulfillment (children seem to be drawn consistently to the candy and breakfast cereal aisles, which should tell you something about the nutritional habits of Americans). The shopper tends to linger in these areas while he ponders the pros and cons of a purchase. Sometimes the shopper seems to derive entirely too much pleasure from this, but to each his own. There are unpleasant aspects to shopping: screaming children, the long lines, and the stench of the meat department. Despite these factors, the world of the supermarket has appeal for those who find themselves there.

This brings us to Huizinga's second feature of play: its separateness from ordinary or "real" life. A well stocked supermarket is certainly a world apart.

Unless a person is in the specific situation of shopping in a supermarket, he can't rationally expect to find food stuffs and Leggs' pantyhose at the tips of the fingers. The grocery store is a world of choice and consumption. It's a place purposefully designed to display nearly any type of food a customer might need, or might think he needs. The only limitations are patience and available cash.

Limitations of time and space is Huizinga's third criterion for play. Supermarkets today, though often huge, do have obvious spatial limitations. The time limitation is dependent on the shopper, however, and can get a bit tricky. The shopper enters the store with a list of items he intends to purchase, and an assumed time period required to accomplish this, say a half an hour. There is the time limitation. Despite the best of intentions, however, the shopping experience usually goes into overtime. The shopper can easily find himself wandering the aisles for hours, guided more by instinct than some silly list. He's just certain he'll need something from this or that aisle. After all, it's only 6:00 P.M., there's plenty of time, and since he only does this once a week . . . Suddenly it's midnight, he just got home, and he's wondering what the hell possessed him to buy four boxes of Captain Crunch with Crunchberries, even if they were on sale.

Huizinga's fourth feature of play is the imposition of order. Supermarkets are models of order. Aisle upon aisle of products are carefully categorized and labeled for the shopper's convenience. When a customer enters the store he finds carts available which allow him to arrange his purchases in an orderly manner. The cart has a main compartment, an area underneath for large items, and a space near the handle, either for smaller purchases, or for one of those screaming children. After the intended purchases have been selected, the shopper takes his cart to an orderly line (twelve items or less if applicable) to be checked out. A place for everything, and everything in its place.

The fifth criterion Huizinga stipulates is the deliberate introduction and resolution of tension. Tension is introduced as soon as a customer enters those doors. He immediately notices the lines, the crowded aisles, and begins to wonder if and when he'll ever get out of there. Anyone who has witnessed a mother shopping with three small children has seen one of nature's more perfect examples of tension. Another source of tension for shoppers is the nagging suspicion that half of the store's customers are going to finish shopping and head for the checkout

lines two minutes before they are. The resolution of this tension is, of course, whooshing out the electric doors with the purchases, and into the relative peace of the outside world.

The rules of play is Huizinga's sixth characteristic of play. The main and overriding rule of the supermarket is "Thou Shalt Pay." Oh, there are a few other rules—for example, twelve-items-or-less checkout lines, and don't leave your cart in the parking lot. These rules are routinely and flagrantly broken. The store makes some effort to enforce these rules, with the odd sign here and there. But the store doesn't install cameras and hire security guards to count the number of items in your basket in an express checkout line. These security measures are there to enforce the first commandment of retail, which is "Please pay for your purchases before leaving the store, or we'll call the police and have you arrested." Have a nice day.

The seventh and final aspect of play, as defined by Huizinga, is separateness and secrecy. In this respect grocery shopping doesn't really live up to Huizinga's criteria. Supermarkets want anything but secrecy, or differentness. They want the shopper to feel welcome, and as comfortable as possible. True, the staff wear uniforms, and they have their little UPC codes on everything. Prices, however, are usually clearly marked, and the friendly staff is eager to answer any question a customer might have. From the standpoint of the customer/player there is very little secrecy involved in the shopping experience.

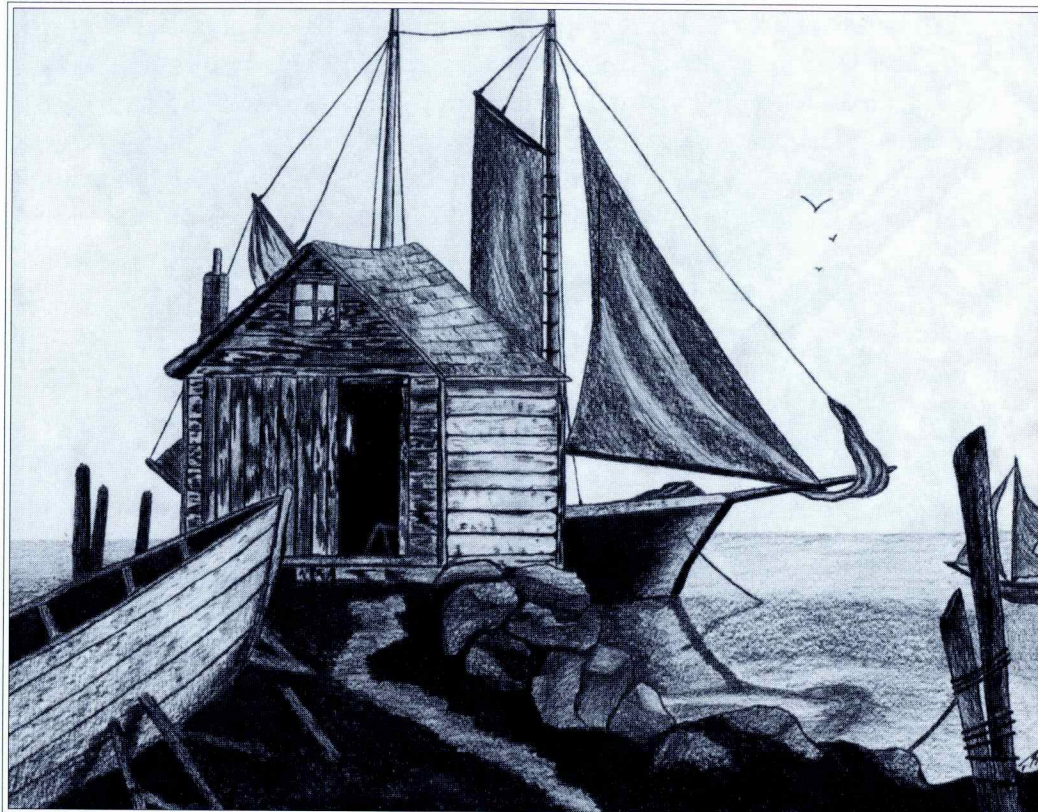
Huizinga's thesis is thought provoking. People don't typically think of criteria akin to Huizinga's when they think of play. They think of the random activity associated with playgrounds, if they think of play at all. Huizinga shows us that play is an important function of society that creates order, however artificial, out of the chaos of "real" life. It's probably safe to say Huizinga would consider grocery shopping a form of play. The shopping experience takes place in its own world, with its own rules and structure. It's a voluntary activity that imposes order, and introduces and resolves tension. Shopping fulfills nearly every one of Huizinga's criteria perfectly. If something as simple and basic as grocery shopping can be proven to be play, then obviously this a more playful world than most people would think.

DONALD SCALIA



Self-Portrait

JUANITA DALE CASTERLINE



Old Boathouse

TIMOTHY HYERS

Quick Wishes

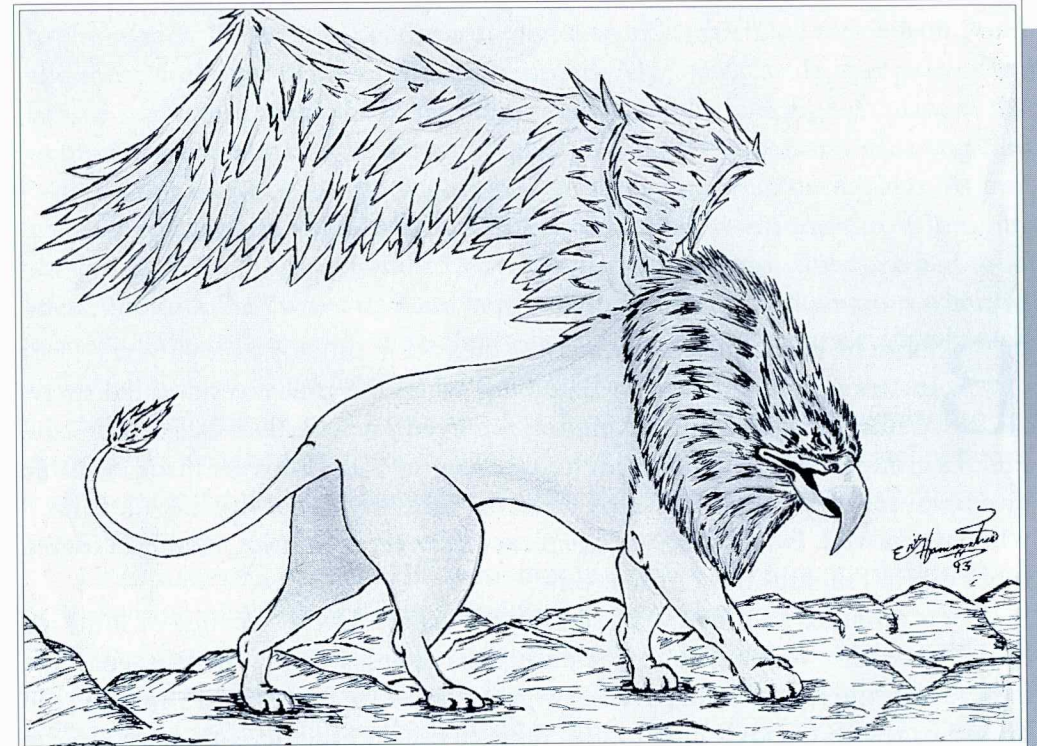
A marshmallowiscious sundae,
a sin-sticky chocolate bar
sweet abandon every Monday
a dripping red sports car
a haven for blissful seclusion
(but a life with splendicular view)
a stage to act out my delusions
and a me-blanket wrapping up you.

PATRICIA A. BEARD

Zack

We talk of life, my man and I.
 We see such sorrow every day.
 Some homeless, hungry, those who die,
 for them we kneel each night and pray.
 We talk of work (we work too much)!
 We rise each morning with the sun.
 When nighttime comes, my man's sweet touch
 reminds me we can still have fun.
 We talk of problems, sometimes fight,
 we yell and argue, make amends,
 but somehow everything gets right,
 and still today we're best of friends.
 This man means much to me and more.
 It's strange to think . . . he's only four!

DIANNE L. COOK



Griffin

ERIC HAMMONTREE

Mill Hill Kid

Before he retired, Daddy worked at the cotton mill for over 45 years—first in Lexington and then in Batesburg when the mill was relocated there. While he worked in Lexington, we lived on what was called the “Mill Hill,” a group of about 15 low-rent houses near the mill that were made available to employees of the mill. We lived there the first 13 years of my life, until 1960 when we moved. Even though I have plenty of sweet memories, I sensed a stigma toward Mill Hill kids most of that time.

I was no more than five years old when I carried Daddy’s coffee or lunch to him. I remember walking down the dusty dirt road to the sidewalk that led to the mill, feeling the hot dirt and pavement on my bare feet, and carefully holding the brown bag with Daddy’s lunch in it. When I reached the open doorway to the section of the mill where my father worked, I waited until one of the men spotted me and sent my father out to meet me. The noise from the machinery was deafening, and daddy always went over to a bench away from the door so we could hear each other better. Usually there were co-workers outside who tried to give “Joe’s cute little girl” a dime or a bag of boiled peanuts, but I was too shy to speak to them or accept any gift, so Daddy usually put it in my pocket.

All the families who lived on the Mill Hill worked in the mill, so we all shared that common bond. My best friend was Janice, a chubby little girl with blonde curls and dimples who was one year younger than I and who lived next door. We

played with our dolls together, rode our bikes together, and often just walked up and down the road near our homes. Summertime was the best time on the Mill Hill.

We lived in the house farthest from the entrance to the Mill Hill and closest to the woods. There was a path through the woods which led to the Mill Pond, and there we spend many summer afternoons. My sister Carole, our parents and I made our way through the bushes and weeds, carefully looking for creatures that might have been lurking in the wilderness. We always took our Collie dog Rex with us, not so much for protection, but to let him enjoy an outing also. At first, we used to take him all the way to the area where we swam and throw him into the pond, to cool him off and to watch him swim around. But Rex had other ideas, and soon he “wised up” and kept walking deeper into the woods when we turned off the path towards the swimming area. He’d always come back when we called him when it was time to head home.

Saturday afternoons, Carole and I walked about a half mile uptown to the theatre. We watched serial cowboy movies, ate giant Tootsie-Rolls and popcorn, and were left with a cliff-hanger ending to the movie that would continue the next Saturday.

Christmases on the Mill Hill were simple, but we were too excited to know it at the time. Carole and I anticipated Santa’s arrival for weeks before Christmas Eve, wondering if he would indeed bring us our hearts’ desires. We learned early on the true meaning of Christmas, but we were little girls, and we dreamed of what we would find under the Christmas tree.

The Christmas tree itself was enough to make the whole living room beautiful, and the distinctive aroma of cedar filled the air. Daddy would search the woods near Grandma’s house for the best shaped tree he could find. He’d cut it and bring it home and leave it outside in a bucket of water until several days before Christmas, when we finally were allowed to bring the tree in the house and decorate it. We had strands of brightly colored lights—the big ones that were hot to the touch—with scalloped foil covers around them for protection. Each year we had new ornaments that we had made in school, and the old ornaments that we used year after year, like the red plastic Santa’s boot that I had been given in Sunday School and which still has a place on my parents’ Christmas tree. The final

touch to the tree was putting on the tinsel. I liked to place each strand in the perfect place, but Carole believed in throwing wads of it to see where it would land.

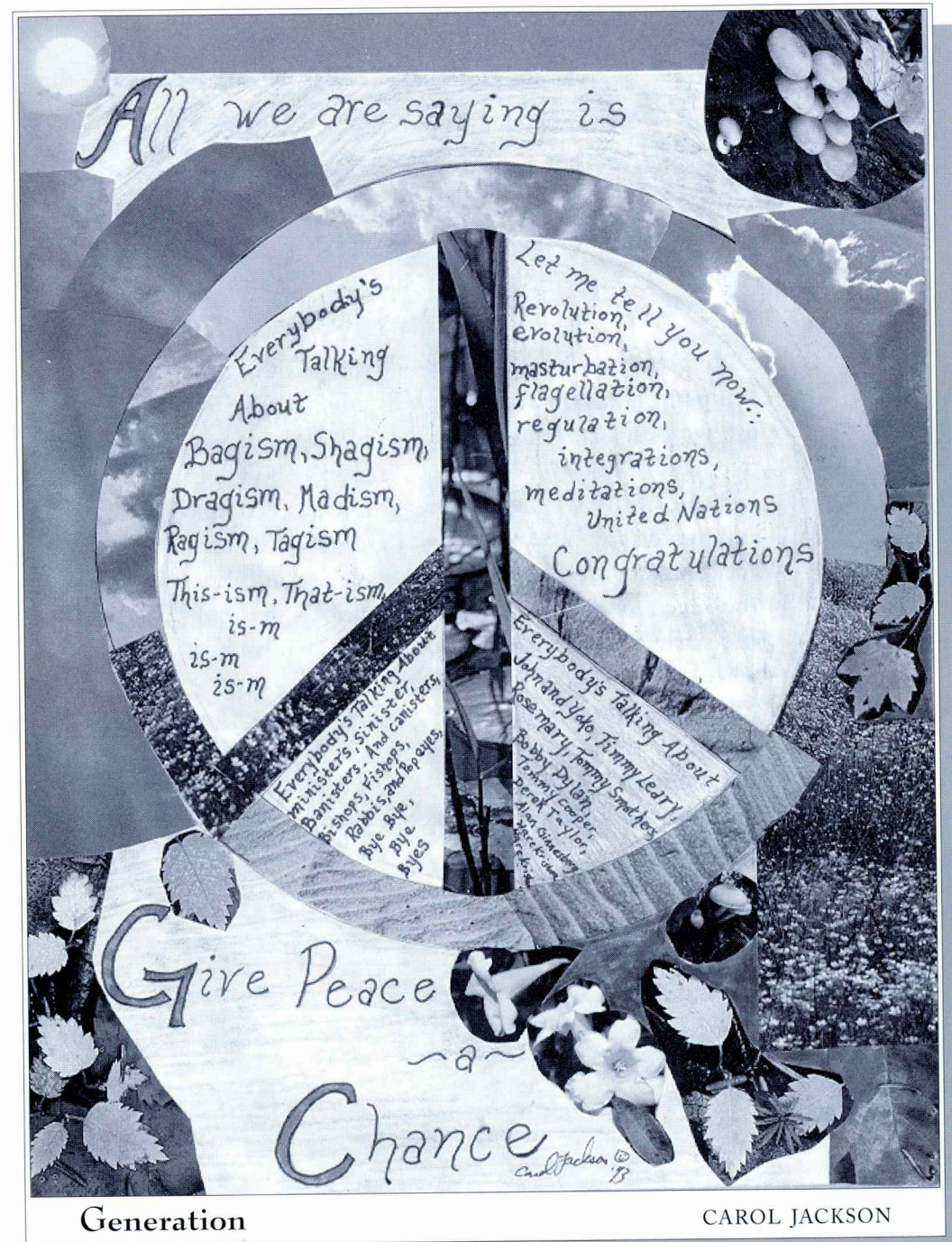
As I grew older, I began to realize that Mill Hill property was not choice real estate. I seldom told my schoolmates exactly where I lived. Unless they were coming to my house, I didn't think they needed to know I lived on the Mill Hill. I remember an assignment in the fourth grade was to stand before the class and give explicit directions—either how to get to your house, or how to prepare a favorite food. I immediately memorized my mother's recipe for brownies.

I know I shouldn't be ashamed of where I lived. I know we were decent people, we lived a respectable family life, and we loved each other. We had plenty of everything, except money. As a child, however, it bothered me a little that I didn't have the latest fashion in clothes, like Madras shirts and wrap-around skirts. I didn't "belong" to the popular group of students, and I didn't go to the same hangouts, like the pre-teen dances at the recreation center. There was a certain attitude about kids who lived on the Mill Hill.

We did move to another part of town when I was 13, and I was ecstatic! Janice was still my best friend, I still wore the same clothes, and did the same things. Nothing had changed except my address. But I felt better about everything!

I know now, of course, it's not really where you live that matters, but who you are. My parents provided me with everything I really needed and much of what I wanted as well. My childhood was happy, and as a Mill Hill kid it was no different from many others. Possibly the stigma I felt was, for the most part, my own. I have driven through the same streets on the Mill Hill recently. The roads are paved now and most of the houses are still there. Somehow they seem smaller, closer together. It's the same, and it's different. I'm not there anymore. Janice isn't there. The stigma is gone, too.

JEANNE F. HAGER



Generation

CAROL JACKSON

Seventeen Cents

with seventeen cents in my pocket,
I'm perfectly content to watch
the women go by and count the clouds
overhead
and smoke my last cigarette
and scratch my head
and think about what she said
and read a book
and smile at the birds on the telephone
wire
and plan a revolution
and think about getting drunk or
making love
and think about Camus, and coffee, and
clowns

and think about the weather
and think about new love that waits ahead
and think about my brothers across
the globe doing the same as me
and feel the warm sunshine
and smell the trees
and think about Bob Dylan
and sing a song in my head
and think about cotton candy

with seventeen cents and my heart and mind
what else do I need?

DAN CLIFTON



Untitled

WHITNEY WHELCHER

Wood

He stood with his hand resting lightly on the shiny surface. The finish of the mahogany was as deep as his skilled hands could make it, so deep that it seemed to shine from beneath. It was his business to work with wood but it had always been his love too. The old man detailed this project and at the age of eighty the gnarled, twisted appendages that passed for hands still possessed enough skill to mold the wood, to carve the surface in intricate forms. The project was at an end and it had taken much longer than he had ever expected. Almost too long.

Taking a cigarette from the almost empty pack, he plucked at it with the thick nails of this right hand and inserted it between cracked lips. He reached into his left pants pocket for the lighter that had resided there for seventy years. His first wife had chided him for wearing holes in the front of all of his pants just where the lighter lay. He had outlived her and wasn't that fortunate? A few more years of her and he might have taken the matter into his own hands. As he smoked, the cigarette left more dirty brown stain on the second and third fingers of the right hand. He took no notice, only thinking about his second wife.

She had been a wonderful woman, sweet and very kind. They had met through mutual friends at a party. They had known that night that he would marry her. Walking and talking through the night, they held hands and kissed farewell. In those days that was about as much as he dared to do. Three months later they had wed, to the shock and consternation of both families. As husband and wife

they had lived for a solid quarter of a century. Then in nineteen seventy eight, she had come home crying. She had always been gay and smiling with never a cross word, not even for his poker buddies that deposited him home in a drunken stupor or for the in-laws who still shunned her, so he knew something was terribly wrong.

It had all come out then, she never could keep anything from him, the bleeding that wouldn't stop and the final, inevitable trip to the doctor. It had been cancer. He had always wondered how a simple, six-letter word could have such enormous meaning.

During his years he had heard men say how good it was when it took you quickly. At first he had gotten angry about that, how could he have ever wanted his wife to be gone any quicker? He had loved her so much, but as the years wore on and he got older, he began to see friends die one after the other. Death was no stranger to him, he had made a business out of it for many years, but the manner in which these long time friends had died left him shaken. His wife's death had come quickly because the cancer had spread so fast. Metastasizing is what the doctors had called it. His best friend Joe had contracted the disease and lasted for nearly two years. During that time Joe had turned into something from a Nazi death camp, a walking skeleton. After that he didn't get mad when old farts, as Joe used to say, "with one foot in the grave and the other on a goddamned banana peel" would begin a tirade on the evils of dying of one cause or another and what they thought was the best way to "go."

For forty years now he had built only the best coffins that money could buy. As he stood looking at what he believed to be the best piece of work he has ever done, the pain hits him. The pain radiated down his arm and felt like someone clamping his chest with a vise. For many minutes the pain persisted. He had to wonder if this was it, if this was where it ended, but the stabbing in his chest subsided only to leave him feeling too weak to move. The box sat beside him waiting patiently; after all, it has all the time in the world.

Months had been spent here, in his workshop working on this creation. If one must lie down for the rest of eternity in the thing, then it must be a work of love. With a certain nervousness he had gone to the doctor six months ago with a variety of pains.

As usual the doctor had begun many tests and in the end, as he knew it must, the pronouncement was that he had come down with cancer. The doctor had been very pleasant to him and wanted to start some sort of therapy as soon as possible, but he had said no. Not with a shout or a whisper but firmly and resolutely, no. After all this time spent with others' final resting place, the time had at last come round for him. That had been when he started making his own coffin.

Working with wood had been what he wanted to do since the age of ten. In his father's workshop he had watched as tables, chairs, beds and a host of other beautiful objects had come together piece by piece. To him it was a sort of magic blending the smell of fresh cut wood with the skill of an artist. When he looked back, his father had really had very little talent at wood working but a great enjoyment which became the heritage he left for his son. That young man might have become a great artist but for the need to eat. So he set to work for the local mortuary at a very reasonable rate of pay, but as his talent for carving grew, so too did his paycheck. One day the undertakers became his own best customer and he bought the establishment from the boss's widow. His reputation grew as a skilled casket maker. Then the world changed. Factories began to make coffins that were almost up to his quality. Because he was a good businessman he quit making caskets for his customers and started buying them, but his love of wood working remained. After his second wife died he began making toys for the local children and they all loved them but he was unsatisfied. Until now.

This casket he had built for himself with such love and devotion that it was a thing of splendor. Eight feet long polished mahogany with solid brass rails. The top inlaid with rosewood and maple in the image of Christ and angels carved over every square inch of the sides. The interior was lined with expensive silk and well padded, of course. His daughter had complained about the expense, called him morbid for doing this and then asked him in her most plaintive puppy dog tone of voice, wouldn't he just come down to the hospital and take some treatments?

His answer had been the same for her as for the doctor, I have lived my life; leave me be. Now the pain was coming back worse than before. His heart, paper thin from millions of beats, was going to fail before the cancer got him. That caused a thin chuckle that turned to a grimace. So much for the cancer treatments. Here in the workshop no one would hear him if he called. That's all right, he

thought, if I could just lie down, I'd get a little rest and feel better. So he climbed into the casket, his hands slipping over the polished wood. And as the pain hit him for the last time he thought, The wood is so smooth but if I give it another coat

DEAN ALAN MORGAN, SR.

Yesterday

I don't mind the cloudy days.
The sunless sky and misty haze.
The rain it moves in funny ways.

Timeless thoughts of me and you,
floods my mind in countless ways.
I don't mind the cloudy days.

The memories that I file away
come back when I go out to play.
The rain it moves in funny ways.

The cruelty of my childhood ways
haunts the thoughts that never stray.
I don't mind the cloudy days.

The feelings kept unto yourself
the things you'll never get to say.
The rain it moves in funny ways.

The one we thought was here to stay,
the pain he could no longer take.
I don't mind the cloudy days.
The rain it moves in funny ways.

GAIL GIBSON



Back in Time

TIMOTHY HYERS

A brave goodbye

A brave goodbye
without a tear
A love filled heart
Now filled with fear
A love disappears
to miles away
Sweet memories
Lasting day to day.

LARRYSA MARTIN

