

Stylus

1995-96

THE LITERARY ANNUAL OF MIDLANDS TECHNICAL COLLEGE



Stylus

1995-96

The Literary Annual of Midlands Technical College

Stylus 1995-96

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Stylus awards

Art: Daniel Hunt
Essay: Sharon Moody
Fiction: Lynda Stroud
Poetry: Patricia Beard



TANYA UNGER

Going Electric

He felt fuzzy
around the edges
like Schlitz-
blue neon
after liquid
bites
of Cuervo-Gold.

Startled flashes filled
and then emptied themselves
from the cold, dark
room
where he wondered
with the thunder
what it might be like
to go electric.

To surge
with uncharacteristic power.
To listen above a room
as a hot fluorescent hum.
To rage
strike
and move on.

Or would it be more
of the same?

Following the path
of least resistance.

Putting in the kilo-watt hours.
Making any
connection
on a desperate night.

Static.
For one final
over
and
out.

PATRICIA BEARD



DANIEL HUNT

Them There Eyes

You've taken me to a place
 I'm not sure existed when it did.
 Sparkling gardenias and magnolias,
 sprinkled with pink dogwood,
 render me blind to all danger
 But I am a blessed one,
 entranced in your beauty.
 Winking, knowing angels carry
 me forward, amused that this
 "amputee" actually has strong legs.
 But how can I walk in this state?
 I can see the sky breathe!
 The ground is still, yet mad
 to offer her fruit to me!
 Unseen orchestras serenade me
 with happy sad gypsy melodies.
 The sun heaves a sigh

Imagine eyes taking you to a time
 when love was eternal
 and trains were romantic.

JEFFREY L. BAKER

Small Things

Pleasure, a desire so difficult to obtain.
 Like brief streams of light breaking through storm clouds,
 dissipating as quickly as it found its place within your heart.

True happiness is vague until experienced.
 Mistaken such as a mirage appearing to a
 desperate soul lost in the desert; many times
 in our lives do we actually grasp the idea of
 completeness. Inadequate creatures crave
 material happiness to feel whole. Why?
 Objects come and they go, but the small
 things in life maintain.

Countryside on an afternoon excursion relaxes one's anxieties.
 Trees rolling against hilltops silhouetted adjacent the half-naked sky.
 Giant, moonlit cottonballs collectively, swiftly traveling through
 the cool atmosphere of obscurity. Darkness swallows all.
 Nothing clearly seen. Nighttime, a companion to the lone onlooker.
 Some may not see, but the simple man absorbs all.
 True happiness and pleasure are the nighttime
 gifts to a person who visualizes through
 the dark of the moon.

CHAD ROSE



TANYA UNGER

Aliens on the Construction Site?

WOMEN *Are From Venus, Men Are From Mars* is the title of a popular self-help book that I have noticed recently in many major bookstores. This and many other titles, as well as articles in ladies magazines and topics of T.V. talk shows all seem to deal with the differences between men and women, emphasizing issues which depict women as victims, men as monsters or buffoons. I find this attitude divisive, offensive, and damaging to the relationships between the sexes. I believe an experience I had in my youth influenced me to begin to recognize that women have more in common with men than our pop culture leads us to believe, and that men are not a different, alien species. Men are indeed human, complete with all the foibles that entails.

In 1975, when I was twenty-one years old, for a hoot, I decided to become a construction worker. It was a turbulent era in the so-called “battle of the sexes,” and the ERA amendment and the women’s movement were much in the news. But politics had nothing to do with my decision to do this. My sister-in-law and I thought it would be fun. It was, but at the same time, it was difficult, and it was a learning experience. I learned some things about men, and I learned even more about myself.

The job skills required of a “green helper” were simplistic and presented me with no great difficulty. The far more demanding aspect of the job was its requirement that these simple tasks be performed after climbing to heart-stopping heights upon a network of pipes and wires strung upon imposing metal towers. While I knew that I was afraid of climbing this sheer wall of wire, I believed at that time that my male co-workers had a completely different nature and did not feel the same fear and potential panic. Wanting to hide

what I viewed as my silly female fears I climbed the network with feigned nonchalance, fighting inwardly to overcome my fear and still maintain my facade of bravery.

My discovery that fear and loss of control are not uniquely feminine characteristics came on day while I was standing safely on the ground. On this particular occasion I heard sirens approaching and noticed a bevy of workers gathered at the bottom of one of these towers, staring upward. Following their gaze I saw a man clinging to the outside of the tower. About halfway up the sheer climb he had stopped and was clutching the wire which encircled the structure, apparently unable to move in any direction. Shaking uncontrollably, with head thrown back, he wailed a scream, of sheer terror. Naively, I inquired of the person standing next to me, "What's wrong with him? Is he hurt?" for it did not occur to me that fear could be the cause of this man's distress.

"No," came the blase reply, "he's just scared." I was shocked to learn that even burly construction workers could cry from fear, and panic attacks were not something that happened only to frightened young girls. Although I could relate to the man's predicament, for I had felt that panic, and even tears rising in me at times, I also felt a little thrill of pride because I had climbed that wall of wire on more than one occasion, and I had overcome my fear. It was then that I realized that men are not always more in control than women, and that overcoming fear depends more on the individual and the circumstances than on the gender of the person. Men are not always brave. Women are not always fearful.

On another occasion I saw a display of macho bravado that stunned me. My young sister-in-law had entered this excursion in the world of man's work with me. Bonnie was a large girl, attractive, but well-endowed and heavy. Once on the first occasion of her being requested to unbuckle her safety belt and walk several yards along an I-beam which was many feet up in the air, she balked. The young man who had been assigned to train her cajoled, begged, and offered her many reassurances of her ability to do this, but still, she clung to the upright beam her safety belt was attached to and refused, not hysterically, but steadfastly, to move from her source of security. After several

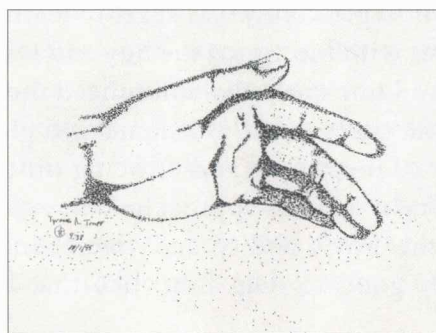
minutes, and several failed attempts to persuade her to move up, down, over, or, in fact, anywhere, the young man inquired of her what it would take to get her to walk that I-beam. She told him calmly, but firmly, that he would have to allow her to attach her safety belt to his safety belt, and hold her hand, and then they could both scoot along sideways to the place of their appointed task. Without blinking an eye, the young man hooked her to himself, took her hand, and they commenced creeping along the I-beam in a crab-like fashion. I knew, and it was obvious to all observers that if she fell, he would surely go with her. My only explanation for this foolish bravado at the time, and still, is that some men will do anything, no matter how dangerous, to impress a pretty young girl. Even though this is an extreme example, I can relate to this man's bravado, because while I've never risked my life to impress someone of the opposite sex, I have on more than one occasion made a fool of myself for that cause. Being silly or foolish is not a trait particular to either gender it seems.

But, was I ever really a construction worker? Did I ever prove myself capable? I think so. For several weeks I worked under journeymen insulators placing fiberglass on tall metal towers. Then, I was transferred to the sheet metal shop to help a sheet metal mechanic shape sheet metal to be placed over the fiberglass on the towers. I was not unhappy about this because it was indoors out of the weather, and it was a relief that it didn't require climbing. However, the sheet metal mechanic that I was assigned to help was not happy about having an inexperienced girl as his assistant, and didn't mind saying so to any who would listen. I tried to follow his instructions, but always felt inept, stupid, and most of all, unwanted in his shop. As luck would have it, one of the boys on the fiberglass crew was eager to learn about sheet metal and requested to trade places with me. Since the boy and I were lateral in position, the supervisor agreed and unexpectedly announced the change one morning. The boy was happy, the sheet metal mechanic was pleased, but this change reinforced my feelings of ineptitude and of being unwanted. However, two days later, the sheet metal mechanic approached the supervisor with a number of complaints about the boy's ability and intelligence and stated that he needed someone really good to help him, like that little girl he had been

working with. What a pleasant surprise. Since sheet metal mechanics were considered creative, and therefore entitled to be temperamental, I was immediately allowed to go back to the shop, and the boy was sent back to the fiberglass crew. I relate this incident not so much to show that men sometimes hide their true feelings, as the sheet metal mechanic did, but to illustrate that I was capable in some aspects, and even wanted in some endeavors, in this line of work. I could do it, and I could do it well enough to be a specially requested helper. Some women are capable and even talented in the fields that have traditionally been considered masculine, and some men are not.

Although construction work was not a career inspiration for me, and the experience was not one that I would want to repeat, I believe that some of the things I learned on the job and some of the behaviors I observed have allowed me to develop a different view of men than might otherwise have formed. At some point, and perhaps this was the beginning, I reneged on the "battle of the sexes." Perhaps this experience helped me outgrow the need to prove my mettle to myself or to the men in my life, and more importantly, perhaps, it helped me come to view men as individuals with much in common with myself, instead of separate entities with alien agendas. I learned that I, as a female, can do anything I have to do. I am brave and I am strong some of the time, and men are brave and strong some of the time. I am weak and afraid some of the time, and men are weak and afraid some of the time. Either gender is capable of behaving foolishly. I learned that they are fully human, and so am I.

SHARON MOODY



TYRONE A. TRAPP

Morning Dances

dawn's
wet rhapsody
that drips
and trickles from the tips
of sculpted hair

slides
down pairs
of ancient breasts
and poises
on each nipple
perpetually
prime

milk-warm
marbled statues
or alabaster-cool
who can know how deep
these rivers run
or what they hide
from antiseptic tiles

in silent echoes
flesh
moves fluidly
long pale fingers
(white robed fairies
on cocoa-buttered bel-
lies)
daylight boxed
but no less bold
approves

as if shoulders should
be morning-moist
as if statues find life
in mirrors
as if women
belong
in sets of two

PATRICIA BEARD



DANIEL HUNT

The Auction

*Lindler Family Estate Sale
Saturday, April 19, 1992
7:30 P.M., Preview begins 6:00 P.M.
George M. Atwater, Auctioneer
License number 204*

I HAVE never found a better way to spend a Saturday afternoon than rummaging through antique stores. I'm always searching for that special item that was loved and used by someone long ago. I love the musty smells, and the sound of the creaky floors. The clutter of objects stacked to the ceiling and crowded together create an ambiance that can't be explained to those who don't love the hunt. I hum softly to myself while my eyes search the discarded has-beens for a treasure of my own. I had never been to an auction sale, but felt this one listed on page two of *The Journal* would be quite interesting. I left work early, and intended to write a story on the auction and the Lindler family.

I had heard rumors and gossip about the family from the day I moved to town. Their wealth was the only fact I knew to be true. Martin Lindler built the Georgian-style mansion in the early 1950s. No one has lived on the estate since he died two years ago.

As I approached the oak lined street leading to the mansion, I could see a large crowd mingling on the grounds. I found a parking space and with anticipation, I stepped briskly towards the mansion and the crowd of people.

The sights inside the mansion were rare for people of small farming communities. There was English china with place servings for fifty, silver, oriental rugs, spode china and canton ware. The furniture rivaled any I had seen in museums. I stood awed by all the treasures that surrounded me. As I wandered in and out of rooms, I became aware of all the well-dressed

strangers that were present. I knew most of the townspeople, like me, were here out of curiosity. The strangers from out of town would be making the purchases tonight. On my way into the ballroom to take my seat, a small leather hat box caught my eye. The worn handle needed polish and the leather was discolored. My imagination bubbled as I picked up the case and felt the soft leather. I placed the hat box back on its shelf and took my seat. I leafed through the pamphlet I'd been given at the door. The hat box was listed on the last page, but there was no opening bid listed beside it. As the crowd began to take their seats, the auctioneer's voice rang across the large room: "Hear ye, Here ye, the auction floor is open."

Everyone sat straight in their chairs and leaned to see the podium and the first item coming to bid. After a while I settled into the rhythm of the auctioneer's voice and the pounding of the gavel. The smell of tobacco mingled with perfume and furniture polish. I envied the petite lady with the foreign accent when she won the bid for the English china and the exquisite dining furniture. There was a sense of sadness about seeing the treasures of the house being removed one at a time. No one else bid on the hat box, and it was mine.

As soon as I arrived at my apartment, I reached in the cabinet for the Tanner leather cleaner and the brass polish. I couldn't wait to clean my treasure, and see what was inside the hat box. I worked for awhile on the lock that was jammed, but finally the lock snapped, and the inside appeared to be filled with lace. As I pulled the beautiful baueux lace from the case, I realized it was a wedding veil. There were family pictures and letters wrapped with a worn blue satin ribbon. The paper was old and fragile. I dare not try to open the bundle for fear the pages would crumble. I somehow knew the box had belonged to Susanne Lindler. There was a wedding picture with the bride wearing the veil. The eyes of the groom were dark, and set deep into his face. The bride didn't smile. Behind that picture lay baby pictures and posed family portraits. This did not look like a happy family. I noticed the top compartment of the box bulged. The tiny brass snap that held it shut strained against the contents. I popped the snap, and there was a square velvet box. I opened the velvet box slowly, and the stones shown into the light as if they had waited a lifetime to sparkle. I reached in to touch an emerald necklace,

ruby ring, and earrings. Diamonds sat loosely on the velvet, and a huge ring filled with diamonds and emeralds filled the corner of the box. I took in a short gasp of air, and began to tremble all over. My hands shook as I clasped the necklace around my neck, and put on the rings and earrings. Suddenly, I began to giggle out loud. I was rich beyond imagination! I skipped from mirror to mirror throughout my apartment, and posed with the jewels. I stopped at the bar and poured myself a glass of wine. I toasted my new found wealth. I sat in front of the fireplace and imagined the places I would travel. With a glimmer of excitement, I decided to search every nook and cranny of the hat box. There could be more jewels hiding in other compartments. I picked up the velvet box, and saw a note folded into the top of the box. I'd been too excited to notice it earlier. I unfolded the letter and began to read.

My Dear Susan,

What I have given you, my dear, is not a treasure, but a curse. These jewels were given to me by your grandfather. I knew then, as I do now, they were confiscated from Jewish prisoners during the war. Your grandfather was an officer in Hitler's army. The new settings did not change the history of the jewels. I have lived with the suffering of those people in my dreams. I was never able to rid myself of the curse. I was never able to love your grandfather as a woman should love her husband. I could never forgive him, or forget the tragedies he was responsible for imposing on so many lives. In my day as a young lady, husbands of suitable wealth were chosen for daughters. I had no choice in the marriage. I spent most of my life in solitude. I did manage to find joy with my sons, but they were sent to boarding schools at early ages. You, sweetheart, brought sunshine into my life. Please use the wealth of the jewels to bring joy to those in need. Rid me of this curse. Do not keep the jewels.

Your loving Grandmother

I would use the wealth of the stones to travel, and do whatever I wished. This letter was not going to upset me, or make me change my mind. No one knew the jewels existed, and I liked the thought of being a wealthy woman.

I jumped as the shrill ring of the phone pierced the quiet. I reached for the receiver. The voice on the other end of the line introduced herself as Alma Peeler, the secretary of the auctioneer.

“Miss McKenny, Mr. Atwater asked me to call, and explain his situation to you.”

“Yes,” I said. “Is there a problem? I only made one small purchase at the auction tonight.”

“The leather hat box should not have been auctioned. The leather case listed in the pamphlet was a leather brief case. Mr. Atwater is willing to accept responsibility for his mistake, but was hoping perhaps you’d be willing to make an exchange.”

“I have no need of a brief case.” My voice shook and I couldn’t say more.

“He is prepared to make amends for your trouble. He will give you a Tiffany desk set in exchange for the hat box. He’ll be at the mansion at nine in the morning if you should decide to make the exchange.”

“I don’t know. I’ll think it over.” I stammered over each word as if I were a guilty murderer.

“The decision is yours, Miss McKenny. You have every right to keep the purchase.”

The polite and precise lady said goodbye. I was left staring at the receiver. The dial tone brought me back to reality.

I began to panic. The jewels were mine. I could devise a plan to keep them. I could return everything except the jewels; no one knew they existed. I could keep the wealth, and have a Tiffany desk set. I knew the lace of the wedding veil was priceless, but I could give it up. I could ignore the phone call, and keep the lace and the jewels. One way or another, I would keep the wealth that had come to me unexpectedly. I deserved to travel and write the novel I had never had time to put on paper. I poured another glass of wine and settled in front of the fire. I tried to imagine far away places and moonlit beaches, yet every time I tried, I could only see the wedding picture of the sad Susanne Lindler. I left the wine and the fire and went to bed.

All through the night, I tossed and turned. Every time I closed my eyes to sleep, images of Nazi soldiers and war flashed through my head. When I did sleep, I had fitful dreams of frail starving people, and the screams were so real.

When at last I heard the grandfather clock in the entry chime eight, I put everything back into the hat box exactly as I had found it the night before. I dressed, and hurried to my car with the sound of the ninth chime still ringing in my ear. I prayed that all the traffic lights would be green, and I weaved in and out of cars and trucks. I couldn’t seem to reach the oak-lined street fast enough. As I swerved my car into the drive-way of the mansion, Mr. Atwater was unlocking the front door. I stepped from my car carrying the hat box, and he waved with a friendly smile.

“I sure am glad to see you, young lady,” he said. “I really hated to tell Susan that the hat box had been accidentally sold. She is keeping so few of her grandmother’s belongings. Seems she and her grandmother abhorred all this opulence. Mr. Lindler thrived on it. Did you know any of the family, my dear?”

“No sir. I moved to Morganville only a few months ago. I work for Mr. Turner at *The Journal*.”

“I didn’t think your name sounded familiar. I’ve lived here all my life. A lot of families come and go, girls marry, and names change. Hard for an old man like me to keep up.”

I followed Mr. Atwater down the hall as he continued to talk. His voice had a nice Southern drawl that amused me.

“Mr. Lindler did a lot of good for this community, but there was a dark side that fed the local gossip. Seems their youngest son was a rebel of sorts; he did whatever he could to stay in trouble. It made Martin furious. Susanne Lindler rarely appeared in public. No one knew where the family came from, and everyone speculated on Martin’s past.”

We entered the great ballroom. The chairs from the night before were gone. A large crystal chandelier had been lowered to the center of the floor. Mr. Atwater’s podium and a small desk sat at one end of the room. Boxes were stacked along the walls.

“Now Miss McKenny, let’s look at what we have here. Did Mrs. Peeler explain the exchange?”

Mr. Atwater pushed his glasses down on his nose, and gazed at me over the rims.

“Yes sir, she said you would exchange the hat box for a Tiffany desk set, that box. Did you see it?”

“Yes, I did. It is beautiful. I hope the granddaughter never has to know I had possession of the hat box. There are some letters and photographs in the box. I wouldn’t want her to know I had gone through such personal items. After all, I had no way of knowing the hat box was never meant to be sold.”

“Rest assured, Miss McKenny, my reputation as an auctioneer would be on the block. This mix-up will never leave this room.”

He handed me a box, and we walked down the hall to the front door.

“This is a fine writing set. I don’t understand why Susan doesn’t keep it in the family. Rumor has it Susanne used to write ghost stories of demons and devils using this set at her personal desk. Of course, it was only rumored, and I guess Susan didn’t take many of the rumors about her grandmother too seriously. Well, you have a nice day, my dear, and thanks again for returning the hat box.”

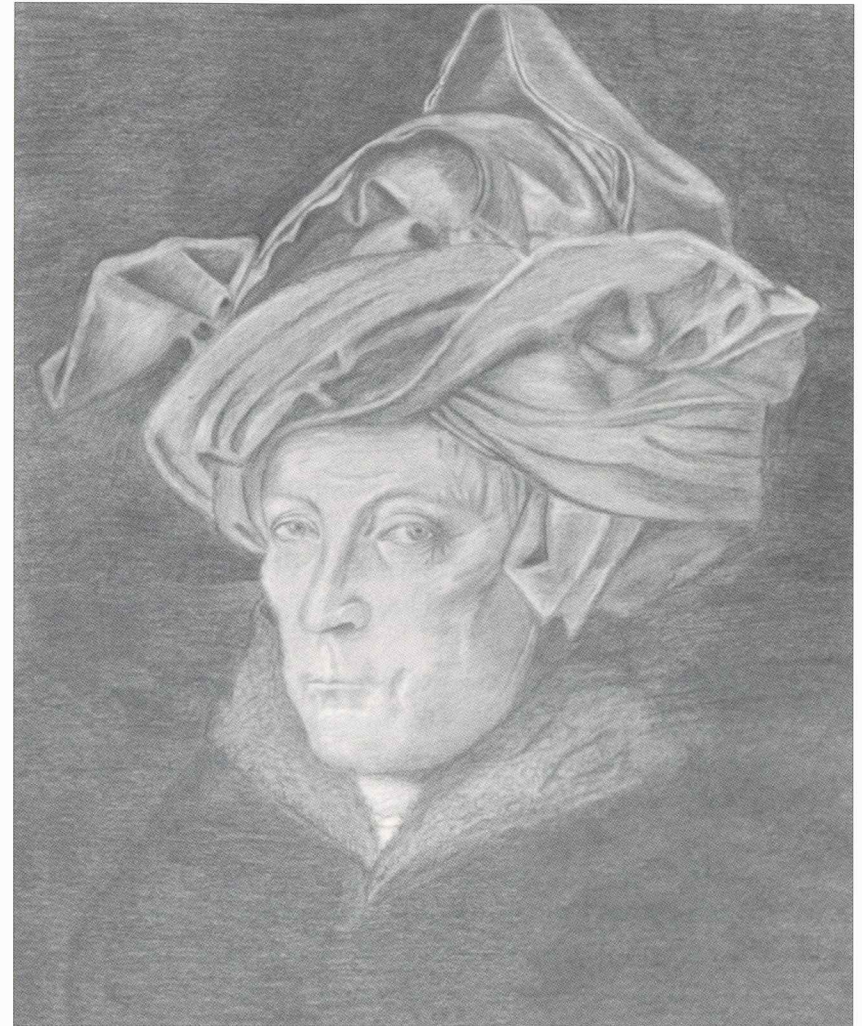
I shook hands with Mr. Atwater and walked to my car. I drove to the nearest Shoney’s and ate my fill of the breakfast bar. After my ordeal the night before, I was starving and exhausted and glad to be free of the hat box. I went back to my apartment and slept the rest of the day.

I’ve since moved from Morganville. I finally got a break into a larger newspaper. Months after my move, I read an article in a society magazine about Susan Lindler donating money to build a children’s hospital. I kept the article with a picture of Susan featured at the top. I often think about her and her grandmother, and the family secrets they strive to keep hidden.

I keep the desk set on my personal desk in my home. I do not use it. It serves as a reminder of the secrets I keep from friends and family, the secret of the greed that I allowed to encompass my soul on a night in April, 1992.

I will never meet Susan Lindler or any of her relatives, but I do share a demon filled night with Susanne Lindler.

LYNDA STROUD



JOCELYN VIET

Talking Christian Coalition Blues

Note: this actually is a talking blues song, but since I can't write music, I will simply point out that a progression of the chords G, C and D7 (in that order) runs throughout each rhyming couplet. Beyond that, improvise.

It's Christmastime and I'm unemployed,
but don't weep for me 'cos I'm overjoyed!
I just sit all day watchin' my television
and because of that fact, I got me religion!

Y' see, I saw a show with a guy named Pat,
some squeaky clean lady and a white-haired cat,
who told me this country's awful condition
is gonna be solved by The Christian Coalition.

Now it seems all the problems in the world
are the fault of them Godless liberals.
Pat said they got 'em a conspiracy
to force their agenda on you 'n' me.

They said the media's behind it all,
determined to see God's Country fall.
It's Jennings 'n' Brokaw, *The Washington Times*,
and we all know about Dan Rather's crimes.

So Pat and company gave it to me straight,
they got ordained reporters to investigate
the truth behind all them media lies.
Gotta tell ya folks, they really opened my eyes!

Ya see, them liberals in that government
wanna break into yer home or yer apartment
'n' make ya watch obscenity on yer t.v.,
then force abortions on ya with taxpayers' money.

Then they seized our schools to promote their way
'n' wanna teach our children how to be gay.
Then they're pushin' those lies 'bout evolution!
Pat said it's time for a Holy Revolution.

Then Pat said the President's a liberal scum,
a skirt-chasin', pot-smokin' backwoods bum,
'n' his wife's gonna make us all socialists!
What we gonna do to put a stop to all this?

Well, Pat gave the answer to that there question;
the country'll be saved by the Christian Coalition!
Ya just send 'em in yer money and God won't die,
Pat's gonna make sure we save the ol' guy.

First we gotta get rid of that Clean Water Act,
more government intrusion, we know that's a fact,
to make things more difficult for free enterprise.
Besides, what's it matter if yer water has flies?

The Department of Education's just gotta go,
'cos it's infested with them liberals, ya know,
to turn all our kids into lesbians and fags
who'd question their elders while burnin' the flag!

Them liberals gotta have their government fat,
 so they fill it with their bureaucrats.
 So Pat's gonna give it all back to the states:
 When it comes to efficiency, we know they're just great!

And finally, Halloween's gotta be banned,
 A satanic ritual that them liberals planned,
 to expose our kids to the devils riches.
 Maybe it's time we burned us some witches!

Then he switched subjects and he gave testimony
 'bout how God wants us to handle our money.
 Talkin' stocks 'n' bonds 'n' what economists see
 (don't forget that number flashing on yer t.v.!).

Shiftin' gears again, they all squinted their eyes
 'n' prayed to the Almighty above the skies.
 It seems there was a fella out livin' in Vail,
 Pat miraculously cured his ingrown toenail!

Around this time it was occurin' to me
 they didn't speak much of Christianity.
 Instead of offerin' some spirituality,
 they're just pushin' political philosophy.

Now I ain't one to tell ya what to do,
 use God for yer gain, that's all up to you.
 'Cos I ain't no Saint (I was born that way),
 but I'd hate to be them on that dreadful day.

JEFFREY L. BAKER

Has Anyone Seen Our Individuality?

IN America, everyone is born an individual. We are born with free-thinking minds, each mind being different from all others. It is with these minds that we develop into who we are, our likes and dislikes, our individuality, or uniqueness. But from birth, our parent(s) compare us with other babies. When we go to school, the same thing happens with our teachers and fellow classmates. In getting older, non-conformity has a high price to pay. People can feel left out for trying to do what is right or what feels right for themselves as individuals, rather than conforming to what everyone else is doing. Even our government caters to and operates according to the majority. Parents, teachers, and friends all pressure us to be like everyone else, or to conform. We begin to think (very early in life) that conforming is the thing to do, because it makes our lives easier. It's easier to fit in, easier to make friends, find a job, go through life conforming to the norm rather than branching out as an individual. We begin to think that conformity is "normal." Since everyone around us pressures us to fit in, we give in. What, then, has happened to our individuality?

The loss of individuality begins at birth. When children are born, mothers and fathers "ooh" and "aah" at them. They wonder to themselves and to each other, "Who will the baby look like when she gets older? Will she be an executive, like Daddy? Artistically or musically inclined, like Mommy?" These statements dictate the fact that, this early in life, parents are wondering who the baby will be like. What should be understood instead is that babies

need to grow up to be themselves, to be individuals. “What needs to be emphasized is not only the admitted fact that we are to some extent created by each other but also our capacity to experience, and create ourselves” (May 131). May also says:

Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing.
(133)

Children want to dress like other kids, and do what other kids do because the self of the child has been pushed aside so that she will fit into the “norm.” This conformity is enforced by parents, who enroll their children in piano lessons because so and so’s kid is taking them. Rather than hearing of a child taking ballet lessons because he or she wants to, we usually hear about the child who is taking the lessons because his or her sister, or the neighbor’s child, is taking them. By the time children reach school age, the need for conformity has not only been introduced, but instilled.

By the time we enter school, it has already begun to feel natural to try to be like everyone else. As a child, writer Joseph H. Suina was a Native American attending an all white school. Although his essay “And Then I Went To School” is written about the importance of keeping one’s culture alive, it also applies to the loss of individuality that continues throughout the school years and throughout life. This is a statement from that essay which describes young Native American boys playing: “Everyone preferred being a cowboy rather than an Indian because cowboys were always victorious” (198). This statement denotes the desire of young children to be like, or be, someone else. By the time children get to be teenagers, the inner struggle becomes so great, so evident, so pronounced, that these crises (among others) have actually been given a name. This period is, of course, adolescence. The older a child gets, the more his or her individuality is pressed into conformity. Parents take their teenagers out “school shopping” so their kids will be wearing the same clothes that all the other teens wear. Teens start smoking,

drinking, or doing other drugs because their friends are doing it. By the time most American teenagers graduate from high school, they’ve read “Julius Caesar,” and they can recite their timetables and elements charts, but they haven’t got a clue as to who they really are when they go out into the world as young adults.

Finally, the system which governs this country overlooks the individual and works(?) according to the majority. Henry David Thoreau, an 1800’s writer and poet, went to jail for nonconformity (340). He refused to pay his state taxes to a government which upheld slavery and war as the beliefs which every American living in Massachusetts should support. If the importance of individuality and strong moral beliefs of right and wrong had been upheld instead, then Thoreau could have stood up for what he believed in without being jailed. If the importance were placed on the individual, then he probably wouldn’t have been the only one. Today, the system which governs our country still caters to the clone and overlooks the individual.

In American society today, one is thought to be an “oddball” if she doesn’t quite have that “off-the-rack-look” to her clothes, or if she wears her hair a bit differently than other people. People even purchase their pets according to the latest trend. In America today, the importance is not of the individual but of how well people conform and mold into this society.

Being a person in America should mean being one’s own person, but it does not. Other people, even the government, place more importance on the majority and on conforming to the norm of society rather than the rights and needs of the individual. But this should not be. America is made up of millions of individuals, is it not?

MONICA BOUCHER

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GAIL STRICKLAND



GAIL STRICKLAND

In Memory Of Yitzhak Rabin

I despised you, even delighted
 in calling you "bastard."
 Old hard-liner breaking bones
 of oppressed children throwing stones.
 Did your small heart swell with pride
 as you watched the death toll rise?
 Single-minded old soldier:
 Kill, kill, kill all foes! You had no doubt forgotten
 why you took up arms
 so long ago.

And then

You shook hands with your adversary,
 reminding a rash young man
 that we make peace with our enemies.
 My sin was not in misjudging you.
 My fault was in judging you.
 Forgive me, I've known no war,
 have never fought for my freedom;
 I've never had people who hate me
 and want to kill me because of my faith.

And then

There you were, full of faith,
 proclaiming to both friend and foe
 that a dream thought dead was at hand!
 I knew I loved the man I despised.
 In wisdom he rejected the hate
 that could well have consumed him.
 Amidst the peace he preached to the people,
 that same hatred stole a star of David.
 Your legacy is now our duty:
 If we fail to make peace with our enemies,
 we have failed humanity.

As for you, sir:
 At ease, soldier.

JEFFREY L. BAKER

I Sit in Corners

plucking
sugar-drunken plums
from stolen pies

sticky-fisted and scowling
that they
may be satisfied

but underneath
a smile drips sweet
from a taste acquired

even at this price

I lick from my wrists
purple syrup
veins

greedy
for another
slice

PATRICIA BEARD



TANYA UNGER

Badges, Pins, and Wings
 (A Vietnam Veteran's Dream About "The Wall")

Behemoth the gaze of Lincoln,
 Majestic atop his throne
 I stand in crowds of people,
 But yet I'm all alone.

I search with tear-blurred vision,
 Unable to touch or feel
 While down my cheeks roll years and years,
 Of wounds that just won't heal.

A gentle hand from nowhere,
 Brought me from that war-torn place
 I turned around and stared into,
 A battle-weary face.

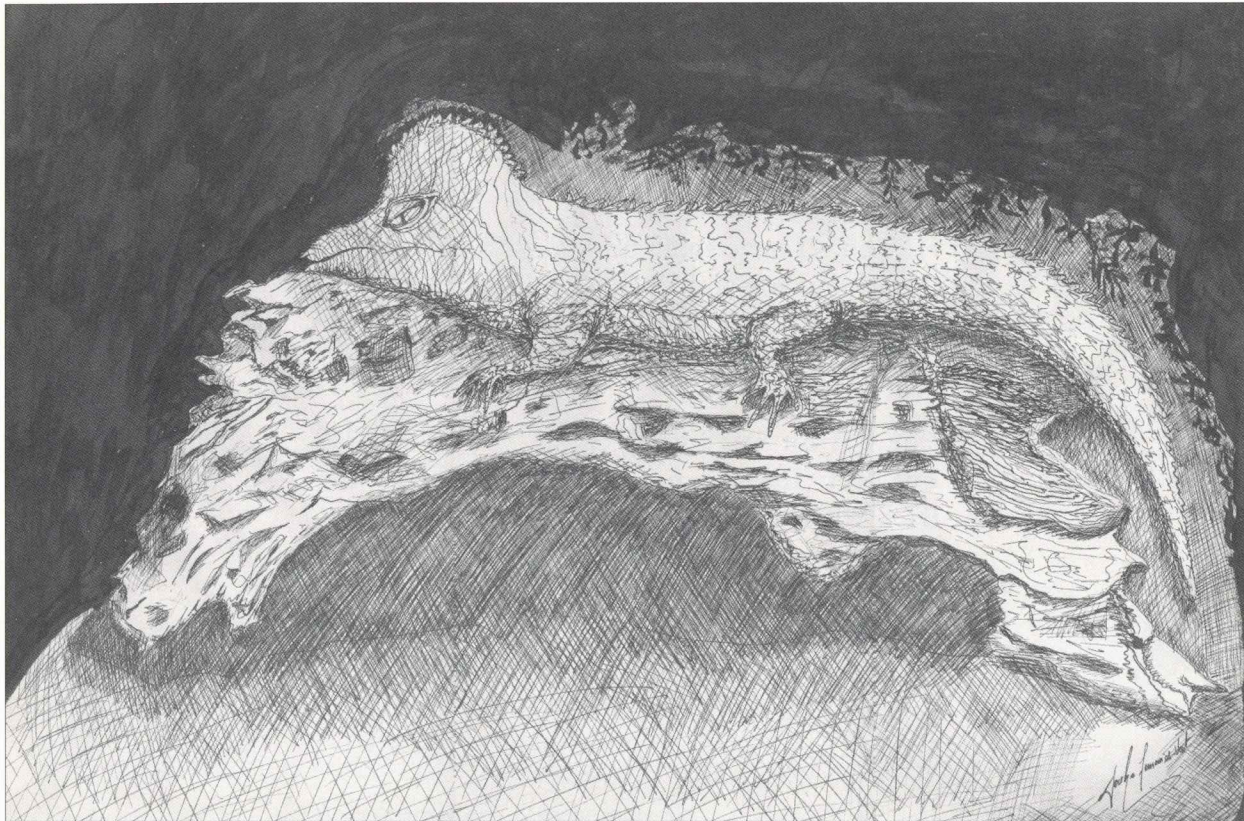
A young man, maybe twenty,
 In muddy battle gear
 With "short" drawn on his helmet,
 He wiped away a tear.

He said, "I have some questions,
 'Bout your hat and all those things,
 About the things you're proud of,
 'Bout your badges, pins, and wings."

The warrior was a stranger,
 But I'd heard his voice before
 Back when duty had me locked out,
 On the wrong side of the door.

He said, "Your tour is over,
 Please leave the battle zone.
 And are you here to find my name,
 Or find your very own?"

WALLY MILES



JOCELYN VEIT

A Cultural Encounter With Time

UPON my entrance into Spartanburg, South Carolina, I felt as if I were in a time warp. I always wondered what my mother's childhood was like in nineteen-sixties South Carolina. It was a time of change and revolution; the fight for equality and civil rights stood strong. I, having been born into the beginning of integration, have nothing left to view upon but the remnant of an era past, but not dead.

The sight of Confederate flags was not new to me, being born in the South, but to see what seemed to be thousands of them in such a concentrated area produced an unmovable lump in my throat, perhaps the same lump my great grandfather felt as he saw men in white hoods and sheets ride across his fields in the light of a full moon. I remember in detail this long and lanky figure slowly rocking in a wicker chair, chewing chew or smokeless tobacco with a ring of children including me around his feet. His feeble voice murmuring, "There was no rhyme or reason, they do it outta fear cuz we different." "Human nature to kill what we fear." "Just keep your eyes on God and everything gonna be allright." Just then I'm abruptly spun back to my reality by the pungent smell of chaw somewhat similar to my great-grandfather. The smell grew more intent as I stepped away from the coolness of the Trailways bus into the sweltering heat. Hearing a disgusting "splat" to ground below, I look up to see an old gray haired gentlemen who greeted me with a "mornin'" and a smile.

My apprehension about this small town eased a bit, only to be heightened again by a pug nosed old hag who seemed to sneer not at me myself, but at my husband Karl, who is more Caucasian than Afro-American because of his mixed ancestry, showering my forehead with kisses. My mind searched for a reason of why we were being judged. Were we already breaking a sacred code of the South?

Karl and I began pushing our way through the crowded terminal. All I wanted was to see my mother's face. You see, my mother was always the fuel of righteous indignation in our family. She was the one always protesting, from walking in a march to sitting down at a lunch counter marked "Whites Only." These actions only made me want to be more like her. I heard her voice call me high above the noise. As we ran to embrace her, there! Out the corner of my eye I caught it again! An old wrinkled man, beet red and dusty looking, staring at the scene in disapproval. Maybe he thinks my husband is a mongrel or mixed-breed or any of the terms spouted by the Ku Klux Klan, words I'm sure were heard throughout all the generations of my family.

Today things are a little different, I hope, from fifty years ago. Interracial marriages are somewhat more acceptable now and for that I am thankful. For if it were not so neither my marriage nor my children would be in existence. I thank people such as my mother for the fight for civil rights, for they give me the conviction to walk through that sea of confederate flags and good ole' boy humor. I still remember one day walking along the shops of downtown Spartanburg looking through the windows singing to myself, when an elderly woman came up to me and said, "I once had a colored girl that sang as beautifully as you do." Now the term "colored girl" ran through me like a sword. Then I quickly realized that this woman was also a remnant of an era past but not dead. Looking at her smiling eyes, I could only mutter a "yes ma'am" and continue my walk along the town square.

NATASHA ANDERSON

Untitled

Although it is well known to man and beast,
That this affliction pains more than all ills,
I seek it always out, and look to feast,
On that fine anguish that so slowly kills
The remnants of the soul within my heart,
Those last few shards that were not yet consumed,
And though I suffer I will gladly part,
And give them to the raven, darkly plumed,
To wolf them down like carrion that they are,
The last remains of a once living thing,
That I had hoped would take us two so far,
And over which I now in mourning sing.

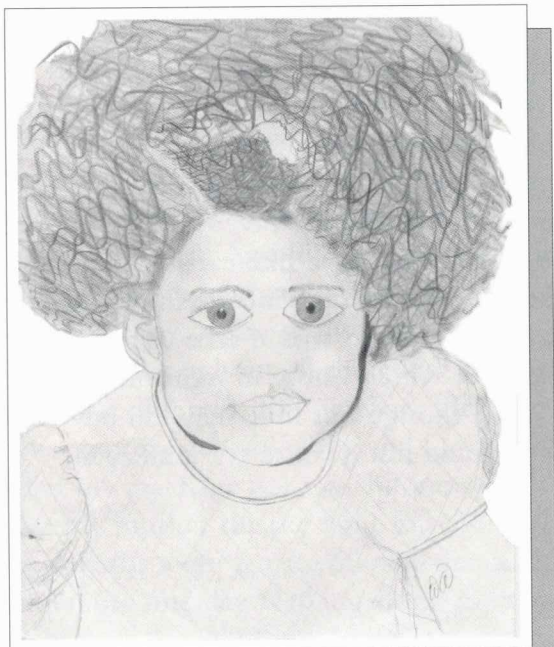
And though our love may kill me from within,
I would not quail to try it all again.

STEFAN JOHNS

How Does it Feel?

I see you in fur,
hunted down as
you hunted
down.

JEFFREY L. BAKER



WANDA WHETSTONE

The Rock

Slate-flat
and slanted
to dip into the river
with its sole occupants
young and omnipotent
one-half
alone.

From this grey
rugged throne
our toes
became comical puppet-fish
minnows in bright red caps
practicing curious kisses
and silly nibbles
on the rock
the water
themselves.

Cool and hot
that summer
like the menthols

that we smoked there
as we flicked our adolescent ashes
just so.
You sang Marilyn to me
your pale lips
close enough
to coax
the words from mine.

You played the part
so sexy,
like a real woman would
and you were good.
I'd smiled
confused that you broke the rules
that you'd broken through
with this sudden
closeness
even more confused
that you'd pulled away.

PATRICIA BEARD

Confusion

All is so bright

It was half dark.

The little boat will not return.

It is the same and yet—it isn't.

No one is around

Yet it is crowded.

The rock is a rock. The rock ceases being a rock. The rock becomes a rock again. It is always like that, nothing remains unchanged.

What existed is—and isn't—and is...

Few can grasp this.

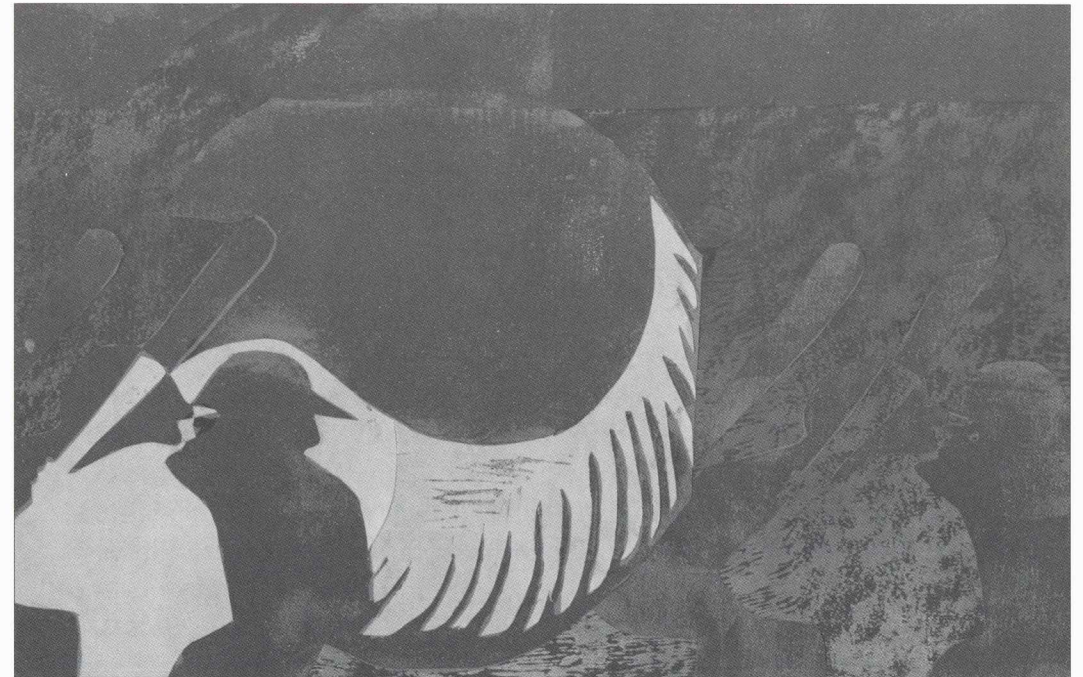
That which existed last night

Will exist tomorrow

In a different form.

I know one thing—I'm confused.

PATRICIA RAPP BOLINS



DANIEL HUNT

Seashells and Treasured Friends

As I sat on the front steps of Mrs. Peeler's Boarding school, my tie was crooked, and my knee socks were around my ankles. Suitcases were stacked on the bottom step. I fiddled with my hat as Mrs. Peeler paced on the porch and patted her wrist with her handkerchief.

"You would think that one summer your Aunt Tilly could manage to get here on time. Every year I have to wait with you after everyone else has left for summer break."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Peeler. I'm sure Aunt Tilly will be here soon. I hope nothing has happened to her."

"Oh, don't worry, dear. I'm sure she just lost track of time. Artists don't seem to keep schedules the way we do at school. Why don't I make us a glass of lemonade?"

"That would be nice, Mrs. Peeler," I answered quietly.

I always spent summer break on the seashore with Aunt Tilly. It was the only time of the year I felt at ease. The girls at school were civil to me, but they rarely invited me to their gatherings. Being left out made me feel different and a little ashamed.

I looked toward the drive to see a red convertible coming toward the front steps. At the same time, Mrs. Peeler came out the door carrying a tray with glasses and a pitcher of lemonade.

"She's here, she's here!" I waved with both hands and ran down the steps to greet Aunt Tilly.

"Hi, sweetie," shouted Aunt Tilly as she removed her sunglasses and untied the scarf from around her long red hair.

"I'm sorry to be late. The bridge was out on the shortcut, and I had to back track for twenty miles." She gave me a big hug and a kiss. "Hello, Mrs. Peeler, I'm sorry you had to wait with Emily, but I'm here now. We can all be on our way."

"I made lemonade. Why don't we enjoy a glass before the two of you start your trip? I know you must be hot in that car with the sun shining on you all the way here."

"Lemonade would be nice, but I enjoy the sunshine almost as much as I enjoy the ocean. How did Emily do in her classes this semester?"

Mrs. Peeler began to fill the glasses. "Emily is improving a great deal, but she needs to learn to speak up. She will never learn to be a proper lady until she learns to carry conversations. Isn't that correct, Emily?"

"Yes, Mrs. Peeler," I answered shyly as Aunt Tilly came to my rescue.

"Oh, I think Emily knows how to speak her mind when it's important. She doesn't like to babble the way so many young girls do. As long as her marks are good enough to get her into the college of her choice, she'll make us all proud one day."

Aunt Tilly and I drank our lemonade in a hurry, and said our good-bye to Mrs. Peeler. We loaded the car quickly, and waved as the convertible pulled away from the curb. I could hear the gravel crackling under the tires, and was so glad to be leaving school.

"You relax, sweetie, and enjoy the ride. We will be at the ocean in two hours." She turned up the radio, and I leaned back in my seat to enjoy the sun on my face. Aunt Tilly knew that being at the seashore was everything to me. I loved collecting seashells, riding the waves, and playing skeeball at the pavilion. I felt a special connection to the ocean, and to my favorite aunt.

Early the next morning, I was out on the beach before Aunt Tilly was up. I searched for seashells, and breathed the salt air. There was no one else on the beach and that was the way I liked it. I sat for a long time digging my toes in the sand, and watching the sea gulls dive for fish. I said a little prayer that one day I would be able to spend every day of my life at the beach, then I headed over the dunes to the beach house.

“Good morning, sweetie. I knew you would be in for breakfast. I’m making blueberry pancakes, and there’s juice in the ‘frig.”

“Good morning Aunt Tilly,” I said as I reached for the juice. “It sure is a beautiful day, and I’m glad to be home.”

Aunt Tilly gave me a nudge with her hip. “It’s good to have you back. What are your plans for the summer?”

“I’m going to hang out and relax. I have a lot of reading to catch up on for school,” I answered as I sat down in front of a plate of pancakes, and began pouring syrup.

“Sounds good to me. The season goes so fast, but I did get a letter from your mother. She wants you to come to the city for a month. I told her you would give her a call when you got settled.”

I ate my breakfast in silence. I didn’t want to go to the city. After cleaning the dishes, we headed down to the ocean.

“Why don’t we have a picnic on the beach tonight? I have some people coming over, and we can go to the pavilion for a while. Would you like that?”

I could tell Aunt Tilly was as sorry as I was that I would have to cut my stay short. “That will be great,” I said with a shy smile.

Aunt Tilly was an elegant hostess. Her uniform of the day was a T-shirt over her swimsuit, but in the evenings she wore silk pajamas with gold sandals. Her arms would be filled with gold bangle bracelets, and she tied her beautiful wavy hair with a long scarf that would hang down her back.

I loved helping her get ready for people to come. She never referred to her gatherings as parties. Aunt Tilly said parties were a lot of people who didn’t know each other trying to make business connections. “People Over” meant friends were joining you for an evening of dinner and good conversation. We always used the real china and crystal. She would serve my sparkling water in a crystal wine glass. She believed nice things should be used every day because every day of life was special. She had a way of making everyone feel special. Being around Aunt Tilly made me love life.

“Bring the crabs, sweetie, and don’t forget the cheese dip.” Aunt Tilly backed out the screened door with her hands full.

I put the crabs on a tray along with the dip and crackers, and followed her to the tent we had set up on the beach. The sand felt warm from the day of hot sun, and a cool breeze blew in from the sea. The sun sat on the horizon as if it didn’t want to say good-night. A crest of a moon smiled from high in the sky because it would get to stay for Aunt Tilly’s gathering.

During the next hours I ate my fill of crabs, and other delicious foods and listened to Aunt Tilly’s friends talk and laugh. I never felt like an outsider here. I just loved listening.

After a while someone suggested we head down the beach to the pavilion. We all grabbed our drinks and took off shoes and sandals. We were a happy crowd laughing and strolling towards the lights of the carnival rides.

We entered the pavilion, and I headed straight to the skeeball machines. Mark, a friend of Aunt Tilly’s, handed me a handful of quarters and I started rolling balls toward the numbered circles.

“Are you going to play skeeball all night, Emily, or would you like to come with us on the ferris-wheel?”

“I’ll stay here for a while, and meet you at ten o’clock. Is that all right?”

“Sure, that will be fine, little person,” said Mark. He put his arm around Aunt Tilly, and they walked towards the door. She waved at me over her shoulder.

Rolling balls and feeding quarters in the machine, I was unaware of anyone around me. A cheerful voice broke my concentration.

“You want to combine our tickets, and get some really neat souvenirs?”

I looked up to see sparkling blue eyes smiling at me. The girl looked to be my age, and she was holding a handful of skeeball tickets. I flashed my biggest smile and said, “Sure, that would be fun.”

I was trying so hard to mimic Aunt Tilly, and be outgoing and friendly. We walked over to the counter in silence, and I surveyed the shelf of souvenirs. I didn’t see anything that appealed to me, but my companion knew exactly what to ask for.

“Sam, we want two seashell dolls. Don’t you like those the best?”

“I love seashells,” I answered.

“Well, Amy,” said the man behind the counter, “you don’t have that many tickets, but I’ll give it to you this time.”

He took two dolls from under the counter, and laid them in front of us.

“Thanks a lot, Sam. See you next week,” said the girl with the sparkling eyes, and she handed me a doll with a blue ribbon tied around her neck. I looked at the doll, and smiled shyly to myself.

“My name is Amy. I’ve lived here for a while, and Sam is my friend. I play skeeball every week. What is your name?”

“My name is Emily. I’m visiting with my aunt.”

“Come on Emily, let’s go ride the roller coaster.”

I followed Amy across the street to the fun park, and we got in line to ride the roller coaster. For the rest of the evening I followed Amy from ride to ride. We didn’t talk much, but we laughed and screamed on the rides. It was the first time I had ridden carnival rides with anyone other than Aunt Tilly and her friends. At ten o’clock we said good-bye, and promised to meet under the pier the next morning.

Arriving home I talked endlessly about my new found friend, and the rides. Aunt Tilly hugged me close to her, and said, “Friends are like seashells we pick up throughout our lives. Some get broken, and some get lost along the way, but some turn out to be treasures we keep for a lifetime. I’m glad you’ve made a friend your own age, sweetie. Life was meant to be shared with people. I don’t want you to go through life being alone all the time.”

I fell asleep with the windows opened. The curtains in my room that puddled on the floor during the day, blew softly in the sea breeze. The smell of the ocean lingered over me.

The next morning I slipped into my swimsuit, covered it with a T-shirt, and went to the kitchen.

“Good-morning, sweetie; I’ve fixed a large picnic basket for you and your friend.”

“Oh, Aunt Tilly, that’s great. I’ll see you later this afternoon.” I hugged her tight, and grabbed the basket.

“Have fun,” Aunt Tilly yelled out the door as I reached the dunes. I waved over my shoulder.

Amy was waiting by the pier when I arrived.

“Hi, Emily, I got here early, and brought a kite.”

“I love kites. Aunt Tilly and I fly them all the time.”

“Today we are going to do a lot of fun things, and have a day to remember. Ask me why.”

“Why?”

“Today is my birthday. Happy birthday to me.

“Really, I can’t believe this. My birthday is next week.”

“We are practically sisters, Emily. This is great!” said Amy as she took off running with the kite.

We took turns with the kite for hours, and then ran into the surf. We were hot, and the cool salty water felt good. We sat under the pier, and ate the lunch Aunt Tilly had fixed.

“This is the best egg-salad I’ve ever eaten,” Amy mumbled with her mouth full.

“I know. My aunt is the best cook. Want some chips?”

“Yeah, chips would be great. You got any brothers or sisters?”

“No, just me. What about you?”

“Yeah, I got two brothers. My dad thinks they’re the greatest. They play baseball, and my dad is always coaching them. He didn’t even remember today is my birthday. That’s why I’m glad I got you to be my friend, and spend the day with me.

No one had ever called me friend before. I liked the way it sounded.

★ ★ ★

Fifteen years have passed since I met Amy at the skeeball machine. We’ve been best friends since. She and Aunt Tilly taught me to laugh at life, and not take it so seriously. I’ve always admired Amy’s go-to-hell attitude towards anyone who treated her with indifference.

Aunt Tilly passed away last month. She left the beach house to me. I haven’t been able to face going into the house knowing she wouldn’t be there

to greet me, but I knew she wanted me to always be in this place we both loved so much.

As I approached the front walk, I saw a shadow sitting on the porch. I smiled to myself knowing it was Amy.

“Why are you sitting in the dark?” I said with a smirk.

“I’m waiting for you to turn on the lights and fix me a drink.”

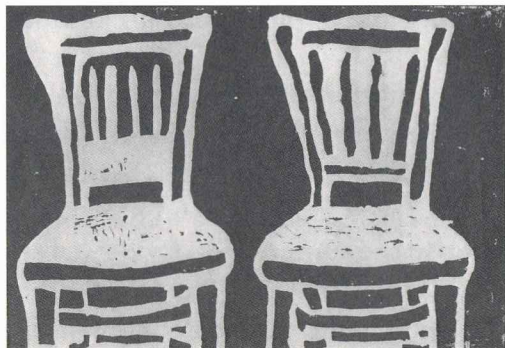
“Oh Amy, thank you for being here. I miss her so much. I didn’t think I could face walking in there alone for the first time.”

Amy hugged me tight. “Emily, you know Tilly wouldn’t like it if she knew you hadn’t even started preparing food when guests had already arrived. You better get busy.”

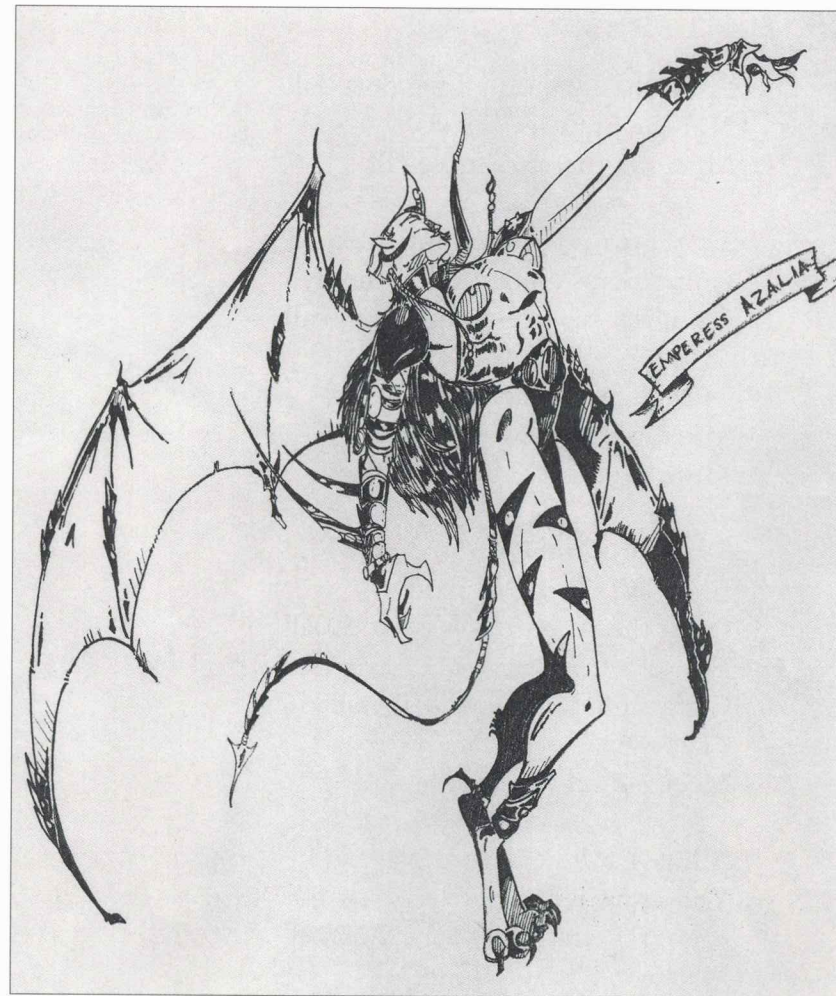
We smiled at each other and stepped into the dark house. As I went around cutting on lights and taking covers from the furniture, Amy took the crystal wine glasses from the china cabinet. Pulling a bottle of wine from her bag, she poured two glasses. She handed me a glass, and clinked her glass against mine. “Let’s toast to the elegance of Tilly, and the laughter she shared with us. She was a special lady.”

Amy and I spent the night boiling and eating shrimp and talking the night away. Most of the night we remembered Aunt Tilly, and what she taught us about life, seashells, and treasured friends.

LYNDA STROUD



STUART ASHBY LEE



TYRONE A. TRAPP

The Outdoorsman

From the wood my love does call
Not she but thee big sky
Meet me there, coming fall

To the wood come gentlemen all
Come hunt, come fish, come fly
From the wood my love does call

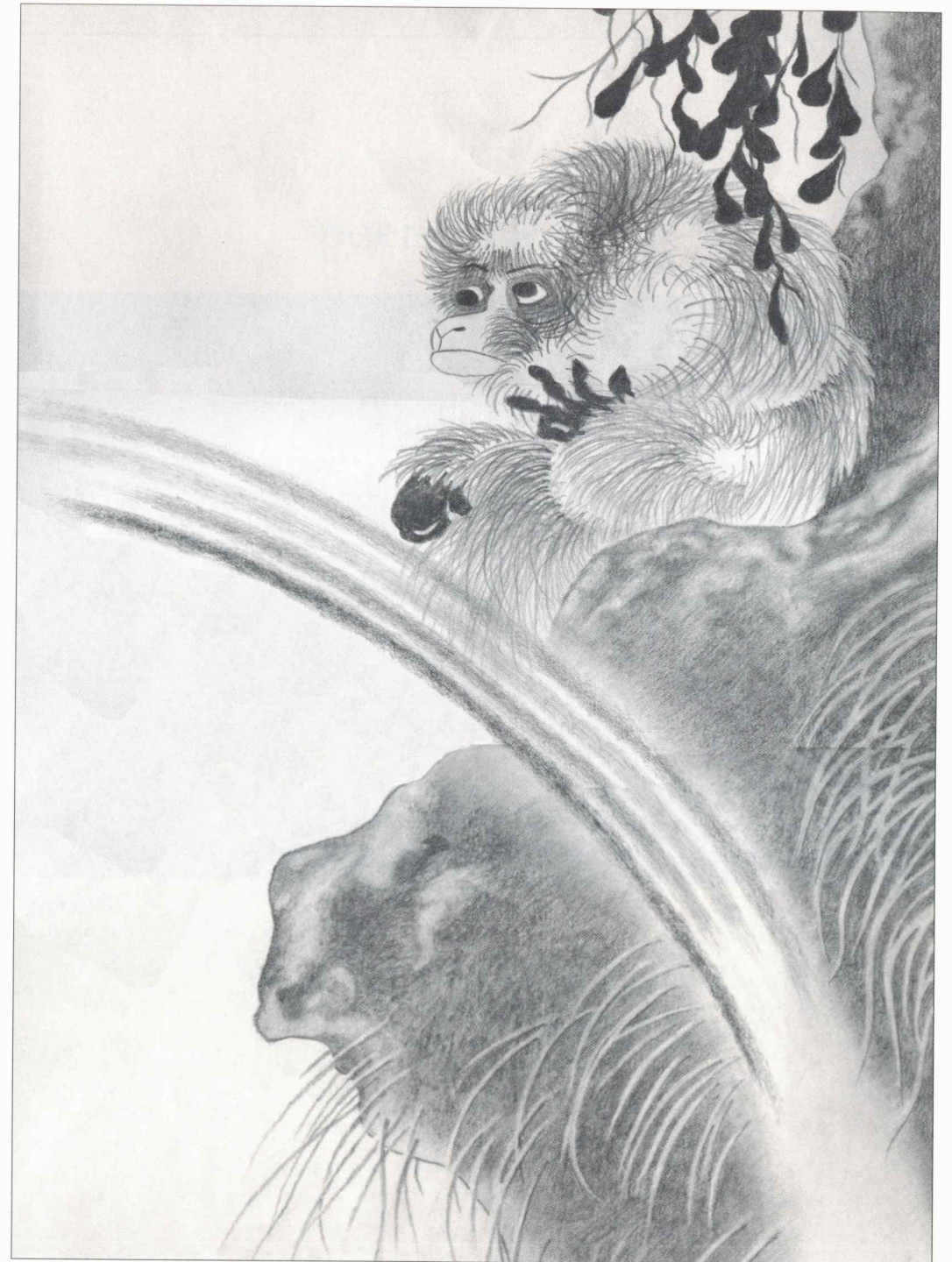
Turkey in the sassafras tall
Mock purr, so sweet the lie
Meet me there, coming fall

Shotguns do the earlobe crawl
Keen eyes quickly classify
From the wood my love does call

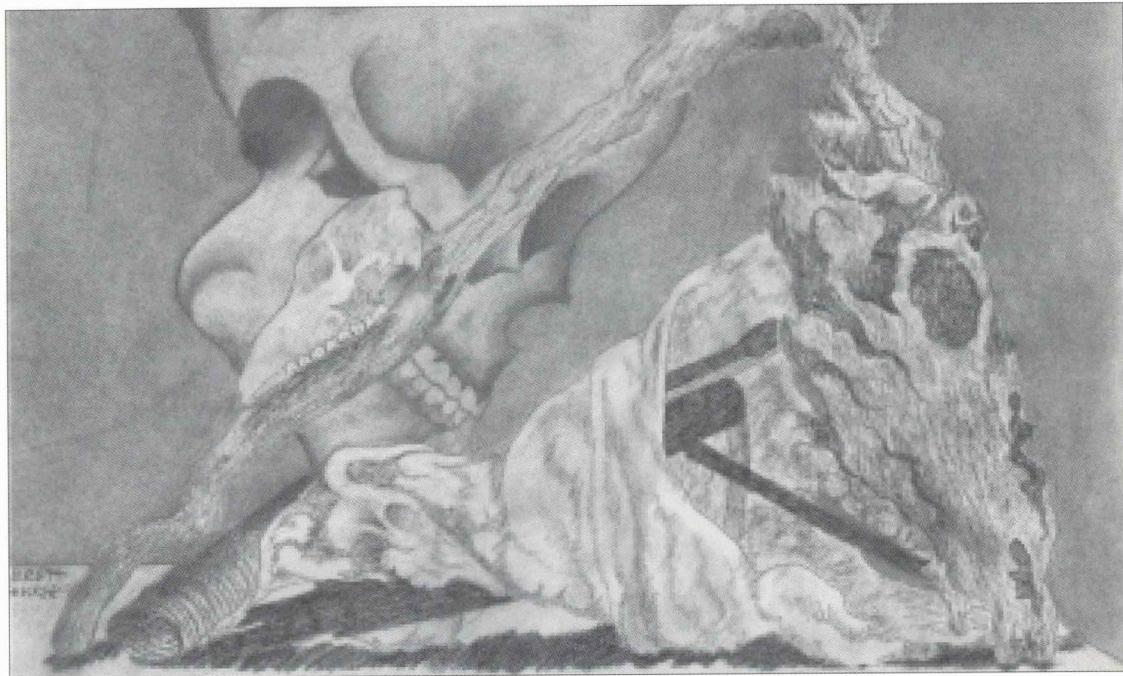
Geese and duck in midair stall
"Take'em" the pit man's cry
Meet me there, coming fall

Allure I can not justify
Yet desire I shan't deny
From the wood my love does call
Meet me there, coming fall

NANCY MCPHERSON



BRETT WICKER



BRETT WICKER

poets in love

run with me
(live death with me)
in your darkness

as words pour
slowly over us
like liquid silk

thin images
drip as poisoned ink
from a clear dream sky

and all fears
fall behind us
to puddle into a laughter

as you run with me
from your darkness
into mine

PATRICIA BEARD

The Sunset

AN old man sat on a park bench enjoying a sunset. He spent most of his evenings there. It was for him as ordinary a sunset as any he had ever experienced; yet it carried in it the wonder that may be hidden in any ordinary occurrence. As he listened to the sounds of the sunset, the chirping of the birds became steadily more drowsy, while the rustling of the leaves became more pronounced, and the uneasy sounds of the first stirring of the night creatures slowly drowned out the distant hum of traffic. The old man felt the last rays of the sun and basked in the warm glow of the end of the day. He felt the shadow of the lamp post fall across the skin of his hands, making them feel slightly cooler than his face. He tasted the fresh flavor of young grass and old trees in the air. As the sun finally dipped beneath the horizon, he felt the air around him cool, making him shiver, and compelling him to seek the warmth and security of his apartment. As he got up to leave, he shifted the position of his cane and started tapping his rhythmic tattoo. A single tear lay in the dust at the foot of the bench, for even sightless eyes may weep at the beauty of the world.

STEFAN JOHNS



STUART ASHBY LEE

Stylus, 1995-96 is dedicated to the memory of
Gene Gatlin,
our colleague and friend.

