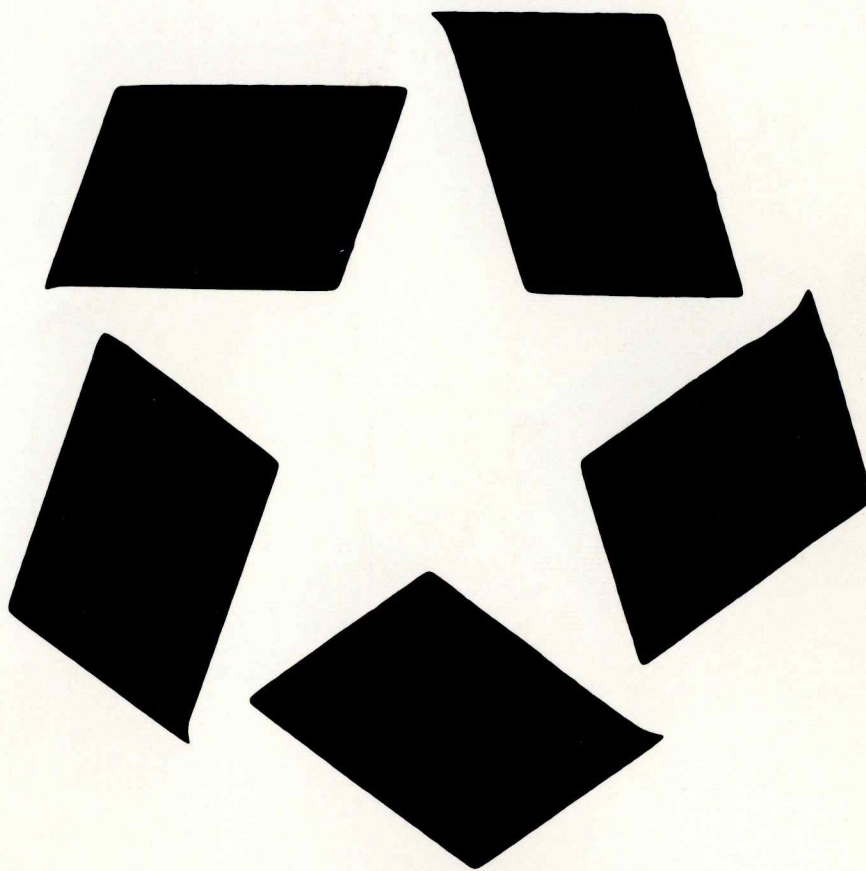


Sunshine

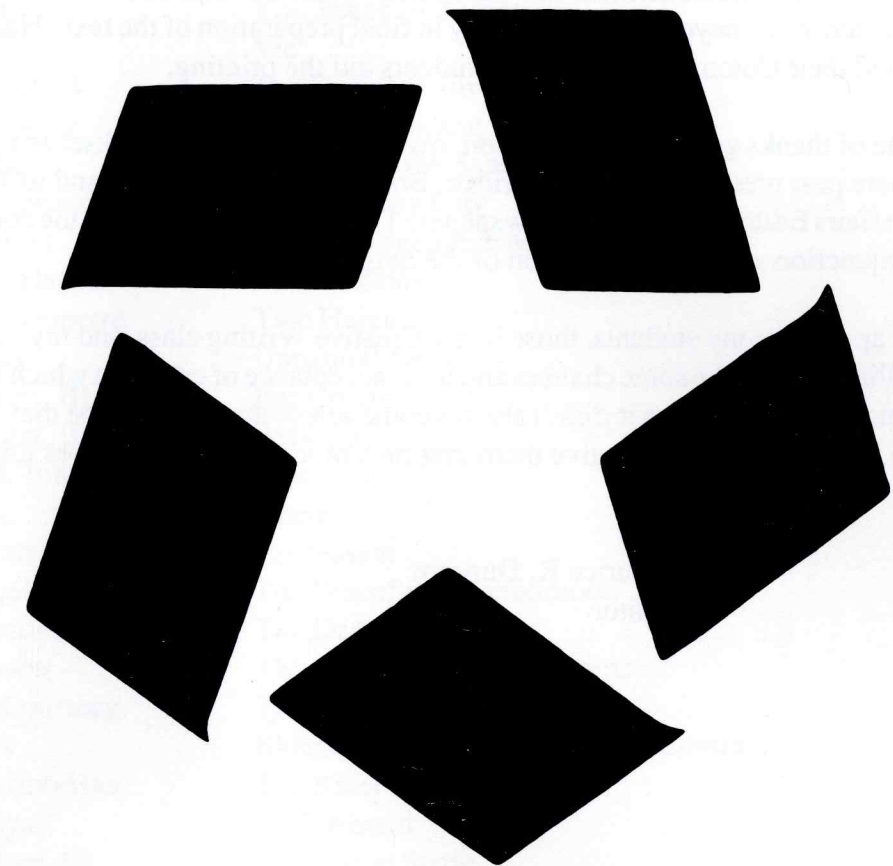
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**The Literary Annual
of
Midlands Technical College**

Starshine

88



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FOREWORD

Midlands Technical College has long been known for its excellent record in preparing students for a variety of technological careers. But fewer supporters recognize the literary talents and interests which many students possess. Some of us encourage students to attempt writing a poem or short story, rather than just analyzing the work of another writer. We have often been impressed with the results.

The College's logo features a star; some of our students' work shines. The result: *Starshine*. But this magazine didn't arise by itself. Many people have been involved. Reid Holland, Vice President for Educational Affairs, budgeted funds and was otherwise supportive and interested. Nancy Posselt, Department Head, rallied logistical support. My colleagues in the English faculty were good talent scouts, encouraging their students to write creatively. Gina Parrott keyed in manuscripts at impossible hours to meet our deadlines. Carol Nordquist, from our Information Management Center, went beyond the call of duty in final preparation of the text. Harry Hinson, Alan Clayton and their Commercial Graphics students did the printing.

A special vote of thanks goes to Rhett Jackson, owner of The Happy Bookseller in Columbia and the immediate past president of the American Booksellers Association, and to William W. Starr, Cultural Affairs Editor of The State Newspaper. They served as judges for the contest which was held in conjunction with the preparation of the magazine.

Most of all, I appreciate my students, those in my Creative Writing class and my other classes too, for their willingness to take some chances and their acceptance of criticism which was always intended constructively, even when it didn't always come across that way. I hope that seeing their bylines in print for the first time will give them that rush of identity which drives many writers to continue.

Maurice R. Duperre
Editor

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The Flight of the Annoyed Bumblebees

by
Betty Butler

Although I'd provoked nature many times, I considered her to be the calm recipient of whatever cruelty that was thrust upon her; however, when I was five years old, I was attacked by an angry mob of bumblebees in my mother's flower garden. At this early age, I realized that nature has her own protection against the harsh and nasty tricks of mankind.

As I started outside to begin another ordinary day, my mother called me and said, "Don't mash my flowers down and stay away from those bumblebees 'cause they're getting tired of you bothering them!" I gave a sneaky grin, a quick nod of my head, and I went through the door, slamming it loudly behind me. First, I ran to the sunflowers where I thumped a bumblebee to the ground and watched cheerfully as it staggered to its feet again. Next, I went over to the gladiolus; I closed the flower bud tightly, until I heard a nasty squash of the bumblebee that was trapped inside it. I jumped up and down, laughed loudly and clapped my hands. Then, I wandered over to the hydrangeas with a Coca-Cola bottle half full of water; I caught five or six bumblebees in the bottle, and I watched them slowly drown. Curiously, I followed a bumblebee as it flew to the back of the flower garden and went between the stalks of the ribbon cane. There I saw a bundle of dry, grassy weeds rolled together in a dome shape about ten or twelve inches long. Two of three more bumblebees buzzed around the grassy shape which made me scream and clap my hands with great excitement. I kicked it with my foot, poked it with a straw, and finally, I got the water hose which hung at the side of the house, turned it on with full force and flooded the bumblebee's shelter. Now I felt victorious; however, the victory didn't last long. I turned away for an instant, and when I looked back it seemed like hundreds of bumblebees attacking. At that moment, I knew my ordinary day had turned into an unexpected nightmare.

Before I had time to think there were bumblebees all over me. I screamed, "Mama, Mama, help! Mama, help me! Mama, the bees, the bees, the bumblebees!" Some of them buzzed around my head while others crawled down my body and stung me all over. I was covered with biting, stinging, buzzing bumblebees! I wanted to run, but I fell to the ground and screamed. Although things had gotten fuzzy and hazy, I saw a blurred vision of my mom run toward me. I felt it as she drenched me with cold water and tore my clothing away from me. Then everything went black.

Finally, I woke up in a hospital where I spent the next three days in agony. I tried to move, but I couldn't because my whole body was numb. I was swollen all over and covered with little knots. I had no idea why I was there until the doctor came by with a serious look and said, "You're a very lucky little girl. You're going to be fine; however, we need to keep a close watch on you for the next few days." I frowned and said, "What for?" The doctor said, "To make sure you don't have any more fights with angry bumblebees." By the end of that day my feeling had returned, and I hurt all over. The next day was even more painful, for the

nurses woke me up every two hours for a temperature check, an alcohol rub and a shot. On the third day, the pain was almost gone, so the doctor said I could go home if I promised to stay away from the bees. I vowed never to touch another bumblebee.

Thus, my usual playful afternoon of irritating the bumblebees turned into a painful disaster. I aggravated and tormented the bumblebees for several weeks, so this attack was their way of showing me that they were annoyed and wanted to be left alone. Although they had no verbal way to express their disapproval, their objections became quite clear and very noticeable to me.

Sometimes, lessons need no words.

Helicopter

by
Eric Martin

Fluttering around, the shutterbug mechanism
shaking, taking in the view
whirlybird went awol
whirling dervish ain't airborne no more

flying with the fling
things can come unglued
like untied shoes on
rambunctious feet

magnificence astounding
as whirlygirl goes bounding
profoundly sounding, roundabouting
...helicopter.

Who Are You?

by
Elaine Jackson

Who are you to help yourself
to all my private thoughts,
Who are you to care for me
when I am most distraught,
Who are you to saunter
into all my everydays,
Who are you to talk to me
in all my favorite ways,
Who are you to look at me
as if you see the best,
Who are you to say to me
"You come before the rest,"
Who are you to show yourself
in all my sweetest dreams.
Who are you, and can you be
everything you seem?

Structure a sonnet of love's passion fair

by
Elaine Jackson

Structure a sonnet of love's passion fair,
Sing me a song of healing and care,
Touch someone's heart with joy or whim--
But don't let a soul be taken in.

Perfect promise and passionate prose
Cannot sustain the life of a rose.
Sunshine and rain in proper proportion
Create the blossom of perfect emotion.

Out of the Dark

by
Robin C. Hagman

I often sit on the porch steps during the summer months to cool off in the night air.

One quiet, starry night, I sat watching the moths and other summer insects, whose shadows look like monsters in the night, dancing around the light above the door. Entertained by these insects, I wondered what strange creature would next appear.

Turning away for a brief moment, I saw a dark form moving toward me. Soon the porch light was upon this figure, and with a sigh of relief, I then could see that it was a very close friend. He was holding something in his hands as carefully as if he were holding the Crown Jewels of England. The closer he came, the more apprehensive I became. He sat down beside me with a grin on his face. Sensing my uneasiness, he slowly uncovered what he was holding. To my surprise, he held a jar; inside was a small, brown, furry bat hanging upside down from an old, dusty gardener's glove. Clinging to this mysterious creature of the night were three newborn babies protected by the multi-jointed membrane-like wing of their mother!

Now, my childhood memories of bats were very limited. They were always flying around haunted houses in movies and stories. Dracula would turn into a bat before draining the blood of life from his victim. Involuntarily, my hands went to my warm, pulsating neck. And let's not forget how afraid we all were as children that bats would fly into your hair and get tangled up somehow.

Should I sit there like a statue unable to move? Or should I do what any smart Person would and run! run for my life I decided to stay right where I was.

I was left sitting with these tiny mammals as my friend went into the house. After a few minutes, though it seemed like timeless eternity, he returned with a drinking glass and a small glass dropper.

He carefully opened the jar, filled the dropper with water, and fed the mother bat. Her tiny pink tongue licked the water from the end of the dropper like a child licking a melting ice cream cone. When she had taken all she wanted, she was carefully placed back in the jar and returned to the shed. She now would rest for the night.

After watching this gentle scene, I learned that the little brown bat had been in combat with Freckles, the spotted dog next door. Since they were unable to fly back into the dark, my friend had decided to nurse the mother and babies back to health.

For several nights following, the feeding ritual took place. In time, our mother was taken out of the jar and allowed to hang freely in the shed with the door wide open. In the morning we would check the area, and she would still be there.

By this time, the fear which once possessed me had taken flight. I no longer saw the bat as a symbol of evil or the unknown. I had taken the time to see her for what she was, one of God's creations. This soft, furry creature had put her trust in us. She knew we were there to help.

It didn't take long before one warm morning, we looked into the opened shed only to find that our new family had regained their freedom.

That night as I sat on the porch steps watching the moths dance around the light, I looked up at the shadowy moon. I knew I had a friend out there in the dark of the night.

whimsy

by
Eric Martin

whiplashing whippoorwills interflopping
commentary their beaks solidifying concepts of
what one should wear to a tupperware
gang bang chitty chitty wham bam thank-you
pow snap crackle rock

damned damsels in distress dresses
drenched in party punch lunch
undressing silhouetted by the shade of the silvery
moon sooner or later kaleidoscopes
collide vision collision divorce
court jester jumping bail

everything under the sun is
up in the air and the sky is falling somewhere
wearing worn and torn smiles wearing
a little thin around the edges puttin' it
on too thick spreading yourself too
thin through the thin and

A Narrow Escape

by
Lisco D. Thomas

Fear gripped me as my mother said, "You better get ready; they are coming for you." It was the summer of 1959 and I was only ten years old. This was the tender age of superstition and guilty conscience. At first, I thought my mother was referring to the police because earlier that day some friends and I had taken some sweet rolls from a bakery truck when the driver was not looking. But to my surprise, she was telling me that it was time to visit my grandparents down the country.

My grandparents lived in a small town, Wagener, which has a population of about five hundred people, about thirty miles from Columbia. Grandpa owned a small farm just on the edge of town. They had chickens, cows, pigs, and a horse called Blackie, though he wasn't even black. They also had a small pond with plenty of fish and frogs. Farm life was the greatest at that time. I didn't have to do any chores because my grandfather had me spoiled. I could play all day or just tag along with my grandpa. But all that was about to change very soon.

My first day at the farm, while playing alone in some high weeds, I came upon a large rotten log and sat down to plan my next adventure. After sitting a while I felt movement between my legs. When I looked down I saw three or four large snakes crawling around between my legs. I didn't know what to do. I wanted to die; I wanted my world to end. I didn't panic on the outside but I was dying on the inside. I remained still for about twenty minutes, I suppose. After getting up enough courage to look down, I saw that the snakes were going about their business. For some unknown reason they did not bite me. In time the snakes left, but I was still scared. After composing myself I realized that I had wet my pants. I was scared and ashamed at the same time. I was a very large ten year old and to wet my pants was unthinkable. I could live with the snakes, but the wetness in my pants threatened my manhood. I decided to stop and consider my fate. I was still scared from the episode with the snakes, plus I had to face my grandparents with wet pants. I finally decided that I would lie about my pants; I would say that I fell in some muddy water. After putting dirt all over my pants I went straight to my grandpa with my tale of falling into mud. The lie I told wasn't a good one because my grandparents asked me all kinds of questions. I came up with some cock and bull answer. The next day I refused to leave the yard; I wanted to stay near home where it was safe. I did not want to ever go near that field again. I could not sleep or eat because I thought the snakes would return. I was ready to go back home to Columbia. We might have cops and tough truckdrivers, but I had never met a snake there. I lived in fear for the rest of the summer and tagged after Grandpa a lot of the time.

The confrontation with the snakes worried me long after I left Wagener. I was reluctant to tell anyone because I knew that they would laugh, and I couldn't have that. After a few months I told my story and sure enough, they did laugh at me, even though I left out the part about the wet pants to protect myself from further embarrassment and disgrace.

Is it any wonder that to this day I try to avoid all rural settings or that I have never looked into the reptile house at our fine zoo? And now you also know why I prefer dark trousers.

Sitting people pretty in an airplane

by
Eric Cooke

Sitting people pretty in an airplane,
An axe as it slowly flashes by.
Short scene, people in the airplane,
The axe as it is raised against the sky.
People on the ground begin to wonder,
The axe begins to fly.
People on the plane can hear no thunder.
People on the ground don't know why.

Hero

by
Suzie Reamy

Alexander Jacob Kennington loosened his tie and relaxed a little as he watched the American diplomat shake hands with the terrorist. He and the other passengers had been through a fearful forty-eight hours of uncertainty. He had seen a crippled man shot by his captors, a terrified teenager beaten when he tried to fight back, and two small boys pulled from the arms of their pleading mother. He knew now, though, that the ordeal was almost over.

Most of the other passengers had fallen into an uneasy sleep before the arrival of the American diplomat, but he had forced himself to stay awake and listen. The diplomat and the terrorists had argued for over two hours, speaking in a mixture of French and some other language he didn't know. His one year of high school French helped him understand a little of what they were saying. He was certain sick people would be allowed to get off the plane. He had to be one of those people.

Alexander began to think of ways to gain his freedom. Who would they choose? Probably women with screaming brats, no doubt, or some useless old person who'd already had his life? It must be he. Slowly, he reached inside his jacket for his wallet. He let his fingers touch the bills inside and he smiled to himself. That much money could get him out of anything.

Just then, one of the highjackers stomped his feet loudly and began to curse in broken English at the passengers. Startled people awoke from their sleep. The highjackers exchanged a few comments and the one with the machine gun eyed passengers. Another highjacker walked past a crying pregnant woman and roughly jerked a Marine officer from the seat behind her. A small child was crying. At that moment, still another highjacker half kicked two other men toward the Marine. The three were pushed out into the night.

"Strange," Alex mumbled aloud to no one in particular, "you'd think the men would be kept on the plane for hostages, not freed." It didn't matter, though; he was determined to be the next one chosen.

Alex felt panic. There was no time to waste. He ran toward his captors, just as they were about to pick another man, whose wife was crying and holding on to her husband's arm.

"Take me! he screamed. "I have money! I am a very wealthy man! Please! Just let me live..." He shoved the bulging wallet into the face of his captor. The man did not seem impressed.

Alex felt terror run through his body. He pulled his expensive watch from his left arm and handed it to the terrorists. Tears began to pour down Alex's cheeks. He feared he would be sick.

The man with the machine gun pointed to Alex, turned to another captor and made a comment. The other man laughed and pointed to Alex's diamond ring. Alex quickly thrust it into his hand. The terrorist shoved the young husband back into his seat and motioned, laughing, for Alex to come.

Alex felt relief as the fresh night air rushed over him. He followed the men down the steps from the plane. He knew he was safe. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the darkness. Just as he saw the other three men blindfolded, he heard the engines of the plane rumble to life. Alex was confused. He looked into the face of the saddened diplomat standing with the highjackers. The diplomat turned to Alex and quietly said, "I'm sorry. Four for one hundred. It was the only way. You are a very brave man."

On January 27, 1988, Alexander Jacob Kennington, III, died. to be remembered forever by the American people. In the last thirty seconds of his life, he heard mocking laughter, the rustle of new American bills, and the blast of the machine gun.

Who knows the difference between a hero and a coward?

Courage Afloat

by
Jack Bumgarner

Out of the mist comes a mass of gray,
Doing thirty knots and leaving salt spray.
Three hundred and fifty this metal,
When it gets hot it's like a kettle.
This class of ship is a DDG,
It cuts through swells with dignity.
They are separate from society,
They sail on the deep blue sea.
They have to work, not play,
On their ship painted gray.
With forty-five upon her keel,
If war breaks out, blood will spill.
In the back of each man's mind,
Are the loved ones far behind.
God be with them who sail the sea,
And sometimes die to keep us free.

Dreamscape

by
Doris Dunsmore

And there he was,
With eyes of liquid brown.
He had fine hair.
The likes of which I'd
Never seen.
He wore his hair
Unusually
In a wild peacock
Style.
I was drawn
Because,
Of the fire radiating.
And it consumed my mind,
My body.
I wanted him.
So I dreamt
Of passion;
Curious
This word was not a part
Of me.
But,
I wanted it to be.
And when I saw him,
There were so many thing#
I wanted to say,
But I was afraid.
He was my ultimate
And the illusion
Was oh so
Fierce.
Inside my soul
We had met.
And we conversed on it
All,
Until he knew everything
There was to know.
And I was moved,
Because after the talk
We met on a voyage
Of new discoveries.
And it was painful

Yet beautiful.
He said that he loved
Me

But when the voyage
Was over,
I realized,
As I said before,
That again I had
Ventured into
Dreamscape
And I was alone.
But it was
So real.

Inevitable

by

R. B. Herbert, III

Pen on paper
Leaves its mark;
Sword on shield.

An oboe sounds
A melancholy note;
Hawk screams to teal.

A painter's craft
The canvas shows;
A poet's what he feels.

Ideas change
A paradigm;
Philosophy, what is real.

Looney Tune

by
Eric Martin

the wind twisted abruptly
behind a willow tree
she thought I didn't see her
in our game of hide and seek

I am an illusion
hallucinating on the frozen sun
four shadows foreshadowing
the shape of things to come

your face is but a memory
filed away on blistered shelves
through the reflection in your eyes
we recognize ourselves

acid rain on my hit parade
time upon the sand
leave the birds to their serenade
in my one night grand stand

across the floor I notice
the ceiling of the moon
those are pictures rarely seen
or heard in looney tunes

You Speak of Things

by
Eric Martin

You speak of things
I've never heard
words trip on my tongue
I slip on a rung
In a dung heap, so perturbed
teetering toward disturbed
on the outskirts of
the astral plane of love

Corner me with
tongue in sheath
and largely looms
impending doom
cool heads prevail
at a caterwaul wail
connect the dots in
the habitual ritual of life

Vic

by
Pam Milles

I had never been faced with Death before, and I was now looking this awful dark, sullen creature right in the face. I was frozen in a nightmare with no way out. The news had come by telephone. My neighbors' little boy, Victor Allen Brown, was dying. Dying? This I did not understand. You see, Vic, as we called him, wasn't just my neighbors' son, he was closer than that. He was like my own son. I had lived next door to these people for the past six years. I had babysat their three children, Wally Jr., Vic, and Gerida, for so long that I had earned the title "Auntie Tammy." I loved these children. My home was their home, and they came and went as if it were so. They ate, slept, and played, side by side, with my own children. Of course I had been aware of Vic's heart problem. Vic, ten years old, had had rheumatic fever as a baby. The fever had left him with a heart murmur which had to be watched closely. His mother, Vicky, and I would take him to the doctor once a month for a shot; this shot would stimulate the heart muscle and allow Vic to live a comparatively normal life until the time he was old enough for a heart valve transplant. We all knew the schedule for Vic's life. One operation at ten years old, another while in his teens and a couple more when he reached his adult years. The operations would replace the valves in his heart to meet the needs of his growing body.

The weeks before his first operation had been full of visits to the hospital for Vic. The doctors were preparing for the operation, running medical tests on every part of his body. Vic, not understanding the seriousness of this event, was in good spirits. He would laugh and joke with all the doctors and nurses. He was a good-natured boy, warm and friendly. He always wanted to do the right thing to please others and make them happy. Goodness was deep seeded in Vic and anybody could read this by his outward glow. The tests were completed and the operation date set. Vic went into the hospital the morning of August 16, a day before the operation. There had been nothing to warn us of the tragedy to follow.

The nightmare started with the loud ringing of the phone. A weird feeling came over me, and I didn't want to answer it, but I did. It was Vic's mother crying hysterically: "Tammy, you have to come quickly--Vic's dying!"

"Dying? How could he be dying?" I asked myself. We had just taken him to the hospital a few hours before. He was fine then, even happy. My God--what could have gone wrong? At that moment I realized what emotions just the hint of Death could evoke. My head was a whirlpool, spinning around and around, not knowing which emotion to handle first, the frustration, the hatred, or the sympathy of a situation I had never experienced before in my life--the dying of a loved one, and a child at that.

Frustration was the first sensation to engulf me as I drove to the hospital. I had so many questions with no answers. Damn! Why was everybody driving so slow? I've got to hurry! What was I going to say or do for Vic, or his mom and dad? What have the doctors done wrong? I finally reached the hospital and went straight to the waiting room where Vic's parents were. His mother, Vicky, had been given a sedative and was sitting quietly in a chair

by the window just staring into space. Wally, Vic's father, was pacing the floor systematically as if with every step he was conquering, subduing, or fighting something. I had thought that he might be fighting the same frustration I was. Wally stopped as soon as he saw me. The look on his face was so strange. I was trying to interpret his thoughts from the look on his face, and I couldn't do it. Wally sat me down and told me what had happened.

After Vic had been admitted to the hospital, he was taken to his room on the fourth floor. The nurses had checked his vital signs. He was fine, up and moving around. There had been nothing to alert them to any immediate danger. Then, as Vic was walking to the nurses' station to pick out some magazines to read, he collapsed in the hallway. The hospital staff was able to revive him after five minutes, but he was in a coma. Vic's doctor decided to perform the surgery right away. Wally and Vicky were still waiting for some word on how it was going. Now some of my questions were answered, but my frustration did not subside. Wasn't there something I could do?

The waiting seemed endless. I kept looking at the clock hoping and praying with every passing moment that some good news of Vic's condition would come.

Some news did come but along with it a feeling of hatred. I saw the doctor enter the room, slowly. He showed no expression on his face; his attitude seemed indifferent. I instantly took a dislike to him; if he were to be the bearer of news it did not look good. As he walked across the room to Wally and Vicky, I felt the tension rise. He sat down next to Vicky, a robot, mechanical, as if this were routine to him. I listened to the words that came out of his mouth. They chilled like an Arctic wind. "The operation went well," he said, "but Victor Allen's heart wasn't strong enough. He has only about a ten per cent chance to live." How dare he deliver a message--a lie--like that to us! Who in the hell did he think he was!? Did the people in this hospital know what they were doing? I sat there looking at this harsh, frigid man, hating him now. Vicky and Wally's reaction was something I didn't understand either. Vicky seized Wally in a vice grip; "Oh, God no! Please God, no!," she was crying. Wally was trying to comfort her but she just kept crying. How could they just accept what this awful man had just told them? What were their questions about what this hospital staff had done or was doing about this situation? Didn't Wally and Vicky care if the treatment their son had received was the right treatment? Were they willing to let go that easy? Then to my horror, Wally asked the doctor how long Vic had to live. I couldn't believe my ears! The doctor's answer was vague; he wasn't sure.

"It could be a couple of hours or a couple of days," he said. Didn't these people have any feelings? "If he does pull through," the doctor continued, "he will be an invalid the rest of his life." These words echoed in my head like banging off the walls of a blind canyon. Wally then asked if there was anything that could be done. Ha! What did he care? He wasn't dying.

I heard the doctor say, "Just wait. That's all any of us can do is just wait." My hatred had grown. I now not only hated the doctor, I hated everybody, the doctors, the nurses, the hospital, and Wally and Vicky! I wasn't going to take this doctor's word, either. I wanted to see Vic. I wanted to see what was being done for Vic. So I asked the doctor if we could go in and see him. I got a baffled look from him and realized he didn't know who I was, but he

answered. "No, we can't let anyone in to see him. He is in the intensive care unit, ICU." The doctor stood up. "Mr. and Mrs. Brown, I am sorry I couldn't bring you better news about your son." This cold, brutal man was now showing sympathy. All my emotions were now totally confused. The doctor then looked over at me and said, "You can call intensive care from that phone on the wall; it's a direct line." I glanced over to the wall, saw the phone and looked back at the doctor. He had already turned toward the door and was leaving. Wally, in a weak tone of voice said "Thank you." The doctor didn't turn around. He just continued to walk slowly and steadily to the door and out of the room. I was glad he had gone.

Vicky cried for what seemed like hours. Finally, a nurse came in and gave her another sedative. She passed out a short time later.

A few hours had passed since the nightmare had taken hold of my life. My husband, Bobby, had shown up at the hospital to give moral support. He and Wally had said something about coffee as they were walking out the door. But my attention was on the phone that was hanging on the wall. How was Vic doing? Was it too soon for me to call? Would they even talk to me? After all, I wasn't a parent. I was just an "Auntie." I couldn't wait any longer. I had to know something, anything. I called. The head nurse of the ICU floor told me that Victor Allen's condition hadn't changed and then asked if I was a relative or the mother. I was puzzled by this question, but given the two choices, I picked relative. "I'm Vic's Auntie and I would like to come up and sit with him for a while. I want him to know we're here." I was hoping for a chance to see him. She asked if Mrs. Brown was still sleeping. I said she was, and asked why? She explained to me that hospital policy didn't allow for emotionally distraught family members to see their loved one in ICU unless there is progress in the patient's condition. So I told her that if she would let me come up I would leave the room if I felt that seeing him was too much for me to bear. I wanted to see exactly what they were doing to Vic. She finally agreed. I went to the third floor, running up the stairs because the elevator took too long. Room 315 was what she had said. I was to knock lightly and wait for an answer. A nurse came to the door and led me in. In all my life I had never seen such a sight. Any frustration and hatred I had felt earlier had dissipated. I now was overwhelmed with grief. What I saw was so pitiful that I began to cry immediately. Tears streamed from my eyes and my knees went weak. I began to stagger a little, but the nurse grabbed my arm and walked me out. "Are you all right?" she asked.

I nodded yes. "Just give me a minute." She asked me if I wanted to go back in after I gained my composure. Again I nodded yes. "I just need a minute, please." I could see the compassion in her eyes as she spoke.

"Seeing a loved one this way is not easy, even for those who are strong." I sensed she had been through this before with other families. She handed me a tissue. I wiped my eyes and blew my nose. Now, I was ready. I walked back into the room.

Vic lay on a hospital bed surrounded by machines, each machine speaking its own language of peeps, clicks, gurgles, and swishes. I remember him looking so small and helpless among all those mechanical devices, with tubes running everywhere. These devices were

keeping him alive. They were pumping for his heart, breathing for his lungs, and flushing for his kidneys. God, I wanted so badly to do something for him, but what? What could I do? Then, a question came to mind that startled me. What if he were to live? Would he be hooked up to these machines for the rest of his life or would his body be able to function on its own? The words the doctor had spoken earlier echoed in my head--"If he does pull through he will be an invalid the rest of his life." Is this what he meant by invalid? I was now tormented. I didn't know if I wanted Vic to live or die. I motioned to the nurse to come closer, and I asked her if this is what the doctor had meant. She hesitated and then looked me straight in the eye.

Her voice was calm, almost soothing. "I have come to think of Death as relief for suffering in situations where we are helpless." I felt as though she had read my mind. I looked back at Vic with all those devices and tubes and realized she probably was right. If Vic lived, not only would he suffer, but so would those who loved him. I stayed with him for a little while longer. I wasn't sure if he could hear me, but I told him how much he was loved and I said a prayer. I prayed for Vic's suffering to be relieved.

Vic died the next morning.

We will always grieve over the loss of Victor Allen but I at least no longer look at Death as the enemy. Death can heal as well as hurt, and this realization was Vic's last gift to Auntie.

The Fight for Survival

by
John W. Bechtel

The drought had kept the temperature in Columbia above 100 all week long, but it was Friday and I looked forward to the air conditioned weekend approaching. That afternoon, my boss called me into the office to let me know that I was officially laid off. This shock replaced the heat with questions like, where would I get the money to pay food bills and rent? I sat in my car with my gas gauge near empty wondering where I should start looking for another job. Feeling scared, rejected, and insecure, my hands shook as I reached for the ignition key. Over and over again the question resounded, "What do I do next?" On the way home I drove in shock until I realized that I had to stop for gas.

In my worried state, I became extremely concerned with the price of gas. That's when my revelation hit me. "Start looking for the inexpensive routes in everything." I could subsist on cheap foods like potatoes, lettuce, and dried beans to cut expenses. I turned off the air conditioner in my car and rolled down the window. Food was a must, but the rent could wait. The phone was a priority, as I needed that to look for another job.

I took it easy that weekend and tried to compose myself for the job search to begin Monday morning. My resume was updated and I was ready to treat the coming week as though I was still working. Eight hours a day is my normal professional lifestyle, and I planned to keep it that way. Unemployment compensation would keep me in bare essentials, so I planned that as my first step. But, as I thought about the next step, the job interviews, my hands began to shake again. How could I face a prospective employer after I had lost my last job?

It would be a frightening time but I had to bolster my confidence. I reread my resume and saw that I had a lot of experience in my field. I had to be worth something to someone. and I had to find him to survive. "Survival" became my key word. With my only two choices being run or fight, my attitude leaned solidly toward fighting to survive.

Eventually I found a new job that paid much more than my previous one, and my lifestyle started to improve as, one by one, the backed up bills were paid off. Then I realized I would never again worry about the loss of a job. I've been through it once and I learned I was worth something to someone. I also found that I had learned how to cut corners in spending. I discovered I could keep a professional attitude in the face of a crisis. It could all be summed up with the simple phrase, "I'm a survivor."

Man's Expanding Playground

by
Peggy I. Proctor

Once, when we looked upon nature, we saw it in fields freshly plowed awaiting the planting of new crops or in an old oak tree weathered and aged by the many seasons of its life. Now more often than not, we see it implanted into our concrete sidewalks like the trees we see with the little white fences around them. It is even more evident in our modern zoos where man keeps wildlife caged in an artificially created natural environment. It is not difficult to understand why E. B. White tells us that "Our approach to nature is to beat it into submission."

In the beginning, civilization was like a child in its infancy, only wanting to survive, taking from nature only what it needed. The reasons for this were that, being primitive, man possessed little in the way of tools, and those were of the crudest kinds. The American Indian, for example, possessed neither gun with which to kill wild game nor plow with which to work the land. There was very little he could do to alter nature. Also his world was very small, consisting almost entirely of his immediate surroundings. He was not concerned with anything beyond this world. And it was within this that he hunted, trapped and took from the land what was necessary for food, clothing and shelter.

As time passed, civilization, like a child, began to grow, and man's needs grew with it. His world was beginning to expand, and he was developing new technology every day, reaching out with it in many directions. Man began developing new means of transportation. He laid railroad tracks across the land to connect the east and west coasts, altering entire landscapes. He invented the automobile, which quickly became popular, and roads had to be built to accommodate this new mode of transportation. To make room for the roads and railroads, man began cutting swaths in whole forests. Wilderness gave way to new and expanding cities. Factories were built, supplying steel to the railroads. Coal mining began in earnest to keep the factories going. It was a time of progress, and civilization was coming of age.

Now twentieth century civilization is no longer a child. Man has matured into an adult, but like a child, he remains greedy. He continues to dominate nature, no longer limiting himself only to his basic needs. He now has developed an abundance of tools and has the sophisticated technology to use them. He also has broadened his horizons to include the whole universe. He had laid pipe across entire ocean floors, reached into the skies and cluttered them with satellites. He builds nuclear power plants capable of destroying our whole planet and then buries the waste in the soil, destroying the land and leaving it unfit to support life for centuries.

In the name of progress man has changed his entire world. He continues to take from this universe with seemingly little thought to the future. Everything we know about man's history makes it logical or us to predict that, in the future, man will seek to colonize and conquer new planets as he continues in his destruction of this one. It's as though he is convinced that this universe is his personal playground put here solely for his pleasure, and that

there is no end to what he can take from it. Isn't it time we grew up and began paying attention to White's advice that "we would stand a better chance of survival if we accommodated ourselves to this planet and viewed it appreciatively instead of skeptically and dictatorially"?

When a child is greedy, parents will sometimes punish him in an effort to teach a lesson that must be learned. I wonder--what will our punishment be?

Clay Pot in the Sand

by
Nancy Posselt

Her square short fingers turned the
clay she marked and burned it
hoped for fish
sang to her baby
watched the egret fly
scratched chiggers and ate crab.

And now her molecules climb the vines
and wash in tides. She leaves no word
of unreturning summers
of water gone dark and mad.

The Birthday Gift

By
Flora Ann Johnson

Today was my husband Joe's birthday, but I am the one who received the gift. I hit the clock and hurriedly dressed for another English Class at Midlands Tech. Boy! What a time I had been having trying to decipher "The Polis"! I eagerly ran to class hoping someone would be there to help me with the thesis before our quiz started. Several students were already there discussing the stories and Lordy, I discovered I had read the wrong three pieces. "Oh well," I thought, "I'll just read the correct stories before class starts. I have plenty of time, or at least ten minutes." The students were so noisy that I stepped out into the hall to read. I was finishing my first page when Mrs. McAninch arrived. She stopped, and I explained how I had read the wrong stories and asked if I could take the test later. She gave a crooked little smile and said, "I'm sorry, but no!" She explained about the English 101 syllabus, and I knew that it was my own fault and my own problem so, since I am the mature college woman that I am, I said to her, "No problem then. What's a zero or two occasionally?" She smiled and we proceeded into the classroom.

After the roll call, we had our first quiz. "Oh, I know that answer. After all, I read one page," I thought to myself. The second question, however, threw me. How did I know why they shot the elephant in "Shooting an Elephant"? Goodness, I couldn't even guess at the answers. The test was soon over, and we began a class discussion of "The Way to Rainy Mountain."

About five minutes into the story of his visit to his grandmother's grave, I fell apart. A hot, white, burning flash crept up my back and neck. My hands turned ice cold. My heart developed an aching throb. My entire being seemed to cease, and my shaking insides seemed to move into another world. Hot tears streamed down my face. I couldn't move. I seemed to be somewhere else. From a distance, I seemed to hear the instructor and students talking, but I never made out a word that was spoken. I was feeling despair, heartache, and most of all loneliness. I was the person at the grave, experiencing the sensations the writer was telling us about. I was the one person there missing the closeness of the lost loved one.

Eventually, the class took a break. Blindly I walked out of the room scarcely realizing where I was. At that moment in the hall a strong and safe arm came around my shoulders. It was so sudden that I came back to life as I heard a quiet and calming voice say, "It's gonna be all right. This has been a rough class here lately, but you are going to make it. I may just have to take you fishing. Didn't you say you liked to fish?"

With tears still running down my face I looked up at a grin that would have made a drill instructor smile. He was a "Danny" I recalled from the introductions on the first class day. "Hey, kid. You definitely have the right stuff. Thanks." I replied. I wiped my face and smiled at him. As we returned to the room, Mrs. McAninch called me aside and explained again why I hadn't been excused to take the test at a later date. It was at that moment that I realized she thought I had gotten upset over the test. A few moments later, she then told the

class gently that she would give us a chance to earn extra points if we wanted to read an extra essay and take a quiz on it. I could feel that she was bending over backwards to help us...to help me.

I looked at the young man who was sitting next to me. He was so gentle and kind, and oh so mature for a teenager. I knew in my heart that age difference sensitivity had been bypassed and that he was a loving man. I then looked at Mrs. McAninch and knew without a doubt that no matter how small she thought my problem was at that moment that she, too, cared enough to make a difference, to go an extra mile. In just ten minutes, my life had been given back to me by a touch, a smile, and a lot of care and concern. My dark day turned into a sunny one because of Danny's and a teacher's kindness. For you see, today was Joe's birthday, and it had been nine months since I, too, sat at a grave--his grave--and experienced that same terrible loneliness we had just read about in the story. But I was the one who had received a gift on this birthday, the gift of love.

That Unforgettable Moment

by
Patricia Hucks

The love in your heart
Wasn't put there to stay;
Love isn't love
'Til you give it away!

I had a heart
But with it he fled.
He punched a hole in it
And now I'm dead.

Four Seasons

by
D. Andrew Hardin

Snowflakes dancing down.
Winter's moon shining on me.
Illuminating.

Warm breeze hums to me.
Crickets chirping late at night,
Spring arrives at last.

Sun's beating shafts burn;
Bather's dripping bodies yearn:
Summer holidays.

Morning frost glistens;
By noon the burning leaves smart:
Autumn burial.

Two Haiku

by
Maurice R. Duperre

Stubborn Autumn leaves.
Dry husks clinging to their branch.
Mean meager new growth.

Ripples on the pond:
Summer bodies do not feel
The breeze before rain.

Unnatural Snow

by
Sally Aaron

The last day dawned
Bright and clear;
I looked at the sky
And was afraid,
For a cloud was moving,
Covering the land
With an unnatural snow.
Drifting from the west,
Left to right,
Deadly drifts
Of silent snow
Which caused the counter
To chatter wildly,
The needle off the gauge.
Forest animals
Fled before it,
And domestic creatures
Simply shuddered and died.
I turned on the television
But found only snow
(unnatural snow)
On the screen.
On the radio,
An announcer spoke.
The land was dying
In the aftermath of
A mistake in forecast.
No one knew
What had happened,
But it no longer mattered,
For explanations
Cannot be heard
By the dead.

Bar Crossed

by
R.B. Herbert, III

From sunset and evening star,
To one clear call for time!
May there be no moaning at the bar,
When she puts out the closing sign.

But such a crowd for moving seems asleep,
Too full of sounds and foam,
When who drew draughts from out the boundless keep
Turns them again home.

Midnight plus and the leaving bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When we depart;

For though from out our favorite drinking place
The suds may bear me far,
I hope to see my Bar-maid face to face
When next I cross the bar.

(with apologies to Alfred, Lord Tennyson)

Barkeep

by
R. B. Herbert, III

Friend
To every friendless face
Slave
Who serves with quiet grace
Cop
Who keeps the peace
Manager
To the belly of the beast
Arbiter
Of opposing views
Crier
Of local news
Actor
Playing the central role
Shrink
Spackling psychic holes
Humorist
Make us laugh
Artist
Draw me a draft

Discipline

by
Richard M. Bird

“When--I--say--attention--I--mean attention!” Virgil Sheridan winced at the sergeant’s words and his nose smarted from the blows of the pith helmet. He dragged his right foot slowly across the wet sand until he felt it touch his left. The sergeant made a crisp about-face and paced back to a position in front of the rows of recruits. A corporal appeared from behind a quonset hut and took a position next to the sergeant.

The sergeant began to speak: “My name is Gunnery Sergeant Victor Tracey, United States Marine Corps. This is Corporal Marcus Waldron. You people will address us as ‘Sir.’ We will own you for the next twelve weeks. You will do exactly as we say. If you think you need to see us for something when we are in our quarters, you will proceed to the door, knock three times, give your name, and request to speak to the drill instructor, ‘Sir’. You’d better make sure it is important first, however, because we do not wish to speak with you. We do not even like to look at you people. You are repugnant to us. You disgust us. We are supposed to make Marines but we are given no raw material. We have to make do with you people. Is it any wonder we are repulsed? Speak up!”

“No, sir,” murmured seventy-two voices.

“Oh, you people are vile. I said speak up!”

“No, SIR!”

“LOUDER!”

“NO, SIR!!”

“When either of us enters your area the first one to become aware of our presence will call ‘Attention.’ The others will carry out this order immediately. Is that understood?”

“YES, SIR!!”

“You people do not like my orders. You do not obey my orders. I say speak up and you squeak.” The sergeant did not remove his eyes from the platoon. “Corporal, these people need to learn to obey orders. Rack drill them tonight.” The corporal’s lips curled back as if to smile but there was no humor in them. He nodded.

A dull ache spread through Virgil’s legs. He wanted to sneak a look at his watch, but the sergeant’s word held him motionless. The second shift at the aircraft plant next to the recruit depot was putting a B-52 bomber through its final ground tests and the ground shook as if with rage at this disturbance. Virgil wondered at the sergeant’s steadiness of voice. The B-52 suddenly became silent and the ground ceased its movement, but the chill of the wet Cali-

fornia night air had soaked into Virgil and he continued to tremble. He thought the sergeant was watching him and shame flowed through him, flushing his cheeks, but then he saw that the sergeant was looking at the other end of the rows of recruits. His shame turned to self-disgust for his mind playing this trick on him and he wanted to run away from here, away from the sergeant. He didn't belong here, anyway. He shouldn't have let Andy talk him into it. He pictured the workers climbing from the belly of the B-52 and preparing to go home. He wished he were with them.

He hadn't felt that way a week before when he and Andy Benedict were grinding burrs from a never-ending supply of steel sheets back at the auto plant in Kenosha. Virgil had worked that damned routine with Andy for three years and he had hated the foreman every day of those three years, sitting there like God's gift to the world while Virgil sweated. Oh, he could have quit and maybe have gotten another job. He didn't have to join the Marines. But what kind of decent paying job is a guy going to get who just has shop experience, unless it's in another damned shop. And another damned shop has another damned foreman. He knew. His father had rotted in the shop, and what did he have to show for it, except for a pair of gnarled hands and some kind of senseless respect for authority. He could take that respect for authority and a quarter and get himself a cup of coffee, that's how much that was worth. Andy didn't have any respect for anything and he seemed to be doing all right. He was all the time calling the foreman over and giving him some story about there being a sliver in his hand and that he needed to go to the infirmary. The foreman would always put another worker on the machine with Virgil, and Andy would sneak outside and have a smoke. He hadn't been caught once. He was twice the man that Virgil's dad was and less than half his age. No, it hadn't taken much for Andy to talk Virgil into enlisting. Virgil thought it would be different. What a laugh!

Virgil and Andy had been sitting at their usual stools in the Motor Bar and Virgil, as usual, had expected to pay for the drinks. He had been paying for them since they had started this routine of having a nightcap after the shop let out, but Virgil didn't mind. He was glad for Andy's company and proud to have him as a friend.

This night was different, though. Virgil hadn't even drained his first glass when Andy nudged him.

"You ready for another, Virg?"

Virgil looked surprised. "What the hell are you so generous about tonight?"

"Well, this is my last time in here for a while. I quit the shop tonight. Joined the Marines."

"Oh, c'mon. What about Nancy?"

"She's the reason."

Virgil let this penetrate for a moment. "Why don't you marry her," he finally said.

Andy snorted. "Man, you crazy? I've only got a three year contract this way. I don't want a life-time one."

"You're rotten," Virgil said affectionately. "But I should have signed up, too. That shop's driving me nutty."

"Why don't you?" Andy said.

"I hear it's pretty tough," Virgil said.

"Aw, hell," Andy said. "There's nothing to it. All you have to do is play soldier awhile and then they give you liberty and you can go into town, and those girls really go for that uniform. Here, look at this." Andy pulled several crumpled pamphlets that the Marine recruiter had given him out of his pocket. He selected one and handed it to Virgil. There was a picture on the cover of three young Marines in dress blues sitting at an outdoor cafe in Paris with their dates.

Virgil felt giddy. He thought of the foreman and about how he could tell him to shove his job. "You know, Andy," he said. "If I had about one more beer in me, I'd say yes."

"Hey, bartender!"

Virgil was surprised at the first-class accommodation that the Wisconsin volunteers received on the train to California, and at the lack of restrictions. He could thank Andy for the lack of restrictions. Someone had to be put in charge of the group until it reached San Diego, and the officer in charge picked Andy. Virgil thought it was a good choice. First Andy cultivated the group's friendship with a story. ". . . and you know, we went to a hotel and she wanted twenty bucks. Man, when I saw what she had," he paused to illustrate--"I figured it would be twenty bucks well spent. But then it was my turn to show her. She told me to come back anytime free of charge."

Virgil knew without looking the expressions of awe that the other members of the group carried during the moment of silence that followed. He thought Andy was a born leader. The trip was three days of poker games, and plans for hustling girls during free time on the base, and Andy's stories.

But then the train reached San Diego and the enlistees were unloaded and herded into a drab-grey bus which took them through a gate where a creased Marine lance corporal, with a billy-club hanging on one side of the white belt balancing a .45 caliber pistol on the other, edged stiffly through the bus checking orders. Virgil should have known that the lance corporal had not acquired his military bearing sitting in the first-class section of a train playing poker. The awakening didn't come, however, for another twenty minutes, when the bus stopped in front of a blocked out section of shiny quonsets, with a red and gold sign protruding

from the freshly raked dirt in front which informed passersby that this was a restricted area for Recruit Training Platoon 420, and Andy's brief command came to an end.

At midnight Corporal Waldron kicked open the door of Quonset 9 and yelled, "Hit the deck!" Virgil shook the sleep from his head and lay still, wondering if he were having a nightmare. Then he remembered Sergeant Tracey's words and he rolled from his upper bunk, just in time to step on the shoulder of Andy, who was emerging slowly from the bunk below. They both sprawled on the cement floor, then quickly picked themselves up and came to a semblance of attention.

Corporal Waldron worked his face as if fighting to contain his rage. "You people are slow," he said in a measured tone. "Get back into those racks!" The ensuing scramble raised a cloud of dust and Virgil muffled a sneeze in his coarse blanket as soon as he landed. He yanked the blanket over himself and feigned sleep as the corporal skulked back and forth. He waited for the sound of the door opening and closing which would signal him to open his eyes. It didn't come.

"Hit the deck!"

This time Virgil missed Andy but the pads of his feet stung when they slammed into the cement.

The corporal's voice was now genial. "Would you people like some sleep tonight?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir."

The menacing tone came back. "I can't hear you."

"YES, Sir."

"I still can't hear you!"

"YES, SIR!"

"Then why don't you go to bed? You know reveille is at 0430 which gives you only four hours and fifteen minutes to sleep. You people need your sleep. We want you to sleep. We have regulations, too. We are required to see that you get an hour's sleep during each twenty-four period. You wouldn't want to get us into trouble, would you? Well, would you?"

"NO, SIR."

This time Virgil was ready. When the order came to "Hit the rack!" he grasped the side rail in one motion and vaulted. . . .

"Hit the deck!"

Virgil's knees banged the side rail and he dropped to his feet. The corporal's eyes leaped from man to man. "You people will find to your dismay that Sergeant Tracey does not like sleepy people," he said. "But you don't seem to want to learn. Now hit that rack!"

One hour to the minute after he entered Quonset 9, Corporal Waldron slammed the door and left Platoon 420 in darkness.

"The sonofabitch." Virgil hissed the words slowly, wanting them to last.

"Hell, he's only a flunky," Andy said. "That goddam Tracey put him up to it."

In his sleep, Virgil felt a hand brutally gripping his arm and he was pulled bodily from the bunk. He twisted catlike in a vain effort to right himself, but it was too late and when he hit the floor the pain shot up his spine and banged abruptly into the base of his skull causing silver specks to swirl and dance before his eyes. He shook his head and tried to focus. His eyes stared back at him from a mahogany mirror of shoe polish, then followed the even crease of forest-green upward over the impeccably centered brass belt buckle, rested momentarily on the parti-colored rows of campaign ribbons, shifted to take in the three scarlet chevrons, then jumped to the cold, grey eyes.

"Get on your feet, boot!" barked Sergeant Tracey. "I'm going to teach you some discipline."

The sergeant was already stalking through the front door, and Virgil stumbled along trying to keep up.

"Look there, boot." Virgil followed the pointed finger to a yellow star-like point on the horizon. Then they were running, and the sound of the cool night air swishing past Virgil's ears mingled with their labored breathing and drumming feet. The point was larger and Virgil could see the flames clearly and hear the cracking and hissing of the pine boughs. He wondered what pine boughs were doing in San Diego when all he had seen were orange and palm trees. The sergeant yelled "Jump!" but Virgil hesitated.

"Boy, you'd better obey my order." The sergeant's voice was like the burning pitch.

Now they were almost on the inferno and Virgil closed his eyes tightly against the heat and all was black but then the white penetrated in again and he snapped his eyes open and the overhead lights blinded him.

"Reveille, Reveille, hit the deck." Sergeant Tracey accented his words by clanging his swagger stick against the metal rails of the bunks. Virgil slowly became conscious of his sweat-soaked skivvies clinging to his body and he shivered.

The weeks dragged by for Virgil. Every day he was in training, the shop job seemed better. At least after eight hours of it, he had been able to call his time his own. There wasn't this senseless regimentation twenty-four hours a day. But there was no way out. Whenever he thought there might be, all he had to do was look at the sturdy mesh fencing with the four strands of barbed wire at the top which encircled the depot to change his mind about that. So he tried to bolster himself as the other recruits did, by laughing too hard and swearing too much and bragging loudly about how he didn't "sweat the sergeant." But then Malcolm Nadeau passed out in ranks.

Platoon 420 had been at attention under the hot sky so long that Virgil wanted to scream and jump up and down, just to be moving. He snickered wryly to himself when he thought that if he did, the rest of the platoon would join in. He could feel it. The weaving figure in front of him snapped him out of his daydream. He watched, fascinated, as Malcolm folded onto the cement and pushed his belly high into the air and made animal gurgling sounds and white foam spewed from his mouth and ran down his cheek and wetted his hair. Someone yelled, "Get the tongue," and Virgil squatted and reached two fingers into the churning mouth and caught the slimy appendage and held it until someone got a stick. But something was wrong. He pulled his hand back and looked at the froth on it, and wondered why it didn't sicken him or something. It was abnormal. But he knew Sergeant Tracey had caused it.

He wasn't going to say anything, though. He would just sweat out these last three weeks and then be away from the sergeant. He remembered how Bruce Morely had griped about the sergeant's treatment and had been sent to a special platoon for his trouble. The platoon was supposedly for the recruits that didn't respond to training, so the drill instructors wouldn't have to give so much individual attention, and would have more free time to themselves. That was really quite funny. Virgil was sure that all the sergeant used his free time for was to harass the troops some more. But, anyway, it was going to be a longer training period for Bruce, and Virgil wasn't going to let that happen to him. He would just keep his mouth shut and wait.

But he wasn't as good at hiding his feelings as he thought. For a few days his resolution worked, but then Clifford Sigismund noticed that something was wrong. Virgil was leaning back against the corrugated steel hut watching absently as Andy entertained a group of recruits with one of his abundant supply of stories. The group leaned forward in anticipation as the punch-line neared, only to have Sergeant Tracey cut the story short with the harsh command, "Field strip those butts and fall in!" As Virgil walked toward the forming area, Clifford fell in step beside him. Clifford was the right guide of the platoon and was older than the rest of the recruits, and many of them look to him for advice. He was flattered by the role and played it to the hilt, even sometimes seeking out those who did not ask his advice, as he was doing now.

"What's eating you, Sheridan?" he inquired. "Since that fit Nadeau's you've been moody as hell."

"What the hell do you think?" snapped Virgil savagely. He hesitated, then it rolled out.

"How long are we going to sit around and let a goddam crazy man drive us crazy one by one?"

"You mean the sergeant?"

"Who the hell else? He's a goddam sadist. He must have been in combat too long."

"You'd better pull out of it, Sheridan, or you're going to be in trouble, thinking that way. Nadeau had a fit, you know, epilepsy. The sergeant didn't cause that."

"Yeh, tell me he didn't aggravate it. And did Andy tell you why Skully isn't with us anymore? The good sergeant threw a blanket over his head and made him smoke almost a pack of cigarettes under it. He's in sick bay."

"You know that for a fact?"

"That's what Andy said."

"You'd better start listening a little less to Andy and a little more to the sergeant. You'll be better off. Look, Sheridan, none of us like this training, but the sergeant's got a good reason for it."

Virgil looked incredulous. "To make everyone hate his guts?" "If that's what you want to call it."

"Crap," Virgil spat.

"Hey, Virg, what'd you get?" The recruit training graduation ceremony was over and the new Marines stood around Quonset 9 talking vigorously about their various plans for the ten day recruit leave and venturing opinions on their new duty stations. The question had come from Clifford Sigismund, who Virgil had not particularly liked after the Malcolm Nadeau incident, but today was the day the recruits had looked forward to for twelve weeks, and everyone was friendly. Virgil pulled the stack of papers from the brown envelope and read the top one: "To Private Virgil Sheridan, 1356737, USMC . . ." He thumbed through the pages of official material looking for his assignment. He found it on the last page. ". . . Upon the expiration of your recruit leave you will proceed to Camp Pendleton, Oceanside, California, where you will join Company C, 5th Marines. After being issued cold weather gear, you will be transported to Pickel Meadows, California, for cold weather combat training."

Clifford guffawed. "Well, tough luck," he said. "I'll be thinking about you when I'm lying on some warm beach in Hawaii with a beautiful hula dancer."

Virgil looked at him enviously. "Did you get Hawaii?"

You lucky dog. Well, you and Andy can have a ball for yourselves. That's the assign-

ment he put in for. Wait until I tell him about mine. Will he ever get a laugh.”

But Andy didn't laugh when Virgil told him. “You, too, huh?” he said drily.

Virgil broke into a broad grin. He was glad Andy would be with him and he could joke now. “Well, we ought to feel right at home up there. And I hear it gets down to 25 or 30 below, just like back in good old Wisconsin.”

“Go ahead and laugh it up,” Andy said. “You know who's going to be our platoon leader?”

Virgil felt his breath catch in his throat. He stared at Andy.

“Yeh, that's right, his tour's over here, too,” Andy said. “You get your kicks now, because you won't be laughing when Tracey gets his hooks into you again.”

“You won't be, either,” Virgil said.

“Hell, he doesn't bother me,” Andy said. “I've got his number and he knows it.”

“Like the foreman in the shop, huh, Andy,” Virgil said. “Yeh,” Virgil said.

Virgil opened his eyes. The truck had stopped. It was cold now and some of the troops packed with the supplies in the back of the 6x6 were shivering in their sleep. Virgil looked at his watch. They had been on the road almost ten hours. That would give them about twenty-five miles to go. He wondered why they had stopped here. The rest of the platoon would have the camp set up by now and would be waiting for these supplies. It was just his luck to get stuck on this detail. Andy, as usual, had gotten a good detail. He had been assigned to the motor pool at Pendleton and all he had to do was go around with a plastic check sheet and see that the vehicles were ready for the trip. Then his work was done and he had gone ahead to Pickel Meadows with the rest. Virgil's detail had had to stay over an extra day at Pendleton to load the truck. They had worked well into the night before Sergeant Tracey had finally secured the job.

“All right, everybody out in there. Hurry it up!” Sergeant Tracey's voice was strained. Virgil crawled quickly to the back of the truck, nudging several sleeping troops awake as he went, and jumped to the ground. The snow was only ankle deep on the narrow road, but a plow had made piles higher than the truck on either side.

Sergeant Tracey waited until all the troops had gotten down from the truck. His face was contorted with anger but his voice was controlled. “We are going to have to walk the rest of the way,” he said. “This truck is frozen up.” Virgil turned and saw the steam rising steadily from the truck's hood. The sergeant's eyes narrowed. “Whoever was supposed to check the vehicles did a very poor job on this one,” he said. “But he will be taken care of.” For the first time since he had known him, Virgil felt sorry for Andy.

They were only an hour from the truck when the storm set in. The air had been crisp and clear and the sunlight glittering on the snow had made Virgil squint and look down as he walked. But then the sun was gone as if the bully wind had chased it from the sky and all was ashen gray like a corpse and the snow swirled around the troops as it fell.

Sergeant Tracey raised his hand Indian-fashion and the troops straggled to a halt. “Get into a single column,” he commanded. “Dress up with the man in front of you and keep him in sight. We're going on.”

It was as if Sergeant Tracey could read his thoughts. “Or maybe some of you want to turn back to the truck so you can get under the canopy and huddle together like a bunch of cattle until the storm's over,” the sergeant said. “That would be nice and cozy, wouldn't it. If we were in a combat situation we could just go back to the truck to wait out the storm and hope the enemy wouldn't find us, couldn't we? Would any of you like to do that?” Virgil looked at the other troops. They were forming quietly into a single column.

Virgil thought a moment of Andy. He felt he had lost something, something he couldn't quite define. But then he had no more time to think of Andy. The wind became a juggernaut, streaming the snow through the ranks. Virgil had all he could do to keep his balance and the man in front of him in sight. The snow stung his face, and he kept his mouth shut and tried to breathe through his nose, but the mucus froze and the hairs would tear painfully when he sniffed. He opened his mouth and tried to take breaths but the snow rushed in and choked him, so he finally buried his face in his field jacket and found he could breathe through the harsh wool of his sweater. He didn't see the sharp rock jutting from the ground in front of him and he tripped and fell on his face. He felt some snow slide into his boot and he yanked off his mitten and wiped frantically at it, but he knew he couldn't get it all and some would turn to water and run down between his toes and freeze there and that he couldn't do anything about it.

He felt the collected sweat inside his clothes begin to freeze. He cursed his stupidity for not having loosened his collar before starting out. As darkness set in the wind became even stronger, searching with icy fingers for gaps in his clothing as if it, too, did not like the winter, and wanted to crawl inside and take his body heat for its own.

Then his pack dropped in the snow. He had been carrying it gripped in his hand to give his and shoulders a rest and now it was in the snow. He realized that he would have walked on and left it had he not lurched off balance when it dropped. He jerked the frozen mitten off his hand and sank his teeth into his knuckle. He felt nothing and frantically bit harder. Still nothing. He looked dumbly at the teeth marks in his skin and remembered a book he had once read about a whale that his teacher had said might represent a universe consciously malicious toward humans, and he wanted to sit right down and let it do its damndest.

He looked up and saw the dim outline of Sergeant Tracey through the snow and thought of the sneer on his face when he had said “Or maybe some of you want to turn back to

the truck. . . .” “Goddam him,” Virgil said. But then he understood. Slowly, painfully, he hooked his pack onto his shoulders and pulled himself erect.

Grave

by
Eric Cooke

Walk the path of broken bodies,
look and see what has been done:
their life escapes through open wounds
and spirit spirals upward for the sun.

Leave behind in shattered form
what once were strong and stalwart men.
Now “Bring them home” their women cry;
but they will not be back again.

Captains and their kings
upon the crimson carpeting
receive their hallowed crowns,
their retinue in line,
each to die in time
in laurel wreath and purple gown.

Ten thousand bold and brave
are marching toward the grave
beating shields and raising voice in song,
carried by the wind, a sign
like news, announcing them.
And patiently the whore lies vawning in the sun.

Confession

by
Donnie Watts

Joshua awakens in an uncontrollable sweat with the screech of despair still echoing through his room. Wiping a hand across his face, the exhausted man slips on a robe and makes his way toward the kitchen. Passing the liquor cabinet, he almost stops for another drink, but then realizes his need and hurries to the coffee maker that has just finished brewing. “Right on time,” he says, as the nightly ritual continues to keep its pace. Josh lifts a pen to mark the calendar and mutters grimly, “Twenty-four days. The same damned nightmare for three and a half weeks.”

With table and coffee now in front of him, Josh begins to analyze the dream that has become his reality.

I’m being chased through a dark eerie tunnel, filled with curves and slopes. Only, the ground surface is not earth, but seems to be asphalt. The winding road seems to never end. In the distance, I can hear the footsteps of my predator catching up to me. Then, a light appears at the end of the tunnel, and reaching that opening becomes my only goal. There I’ll find peace of mind. Now, if I can just get there in time. The light becomes larger, but too gradually...

The race continues: as I near the end, my attacker is heavily closing in on me. Luckily, the hole is just within my reach, so I lunge for the other side, leaving the jogger behind. Everything freezes for an instant, and I start to scream in triumph upon my escape. But that scream of joy turns to one of despair when I fall short of the border, and the entity seeking vengeance drags me into the depths of Guilt.

Joshua sips his coffee, contemplating the choices which will either allow him rest peacefully or terrorize his dreams forever. Would confessing to the hit and run incident, which took a young jogger’s life nearly a month ago, ease him of his torment? He could only hope so, as he picked up the receiver to give the police his confession.

The Peaceful Neighborhood

by
Sandra Scialabba

As I walk through the well-taken-care-of neighborhood. I see and feel valuable love. This neighborhood, once sparsely populated, is now overcrowded; everybody here has at last found a home. No one ever moves out of this neighborhood, some visit, and others come to pick out a home.

It is full of happiness and peace here, and everyone is welcome. Precious babies and little children, unwanted in some neighborhoods, who experienced pain and knew nothing of love and affection have a place here. Teenagers aren't turned away because they are "bad", or looked down upon for something they did in their past. Old people aren't laughed at because of their feebleness or turned away because of their ignorance; we have a lot of older people here. All of them are treated equally. No one looks at color, or religion, or certain abilities or handicaps; they are all accepted here, no questions asked.

I take short, slow steps so I won't disturb their peacefulness. I am quiet so I can hear the games and songs of all around. Taking my time, I look to both sides, careful not to harm the garden they worked so hard to get. On both sides I see friends, relatives, a few people with whom I fought, and people I never had the chance to meet yet.

Families seem to be grouped together in their own sections of the neighborhood. Reading the names of their unique mailboxes, I stop and chat, but mostly I just smile. I pause to see those whom I missed on my last visit and to meet some new people who have just moved in. I find myself enjoying the interesting talks, for I learn a lot. There are so many types of people here. Some have been soldiers in Vietnam and in other wars, too. There are dedicated parents; there are school age children who have been in all sorts of trouble. I see them all, and I share my love with them.

Every now and then I stop along the way to pick a flower or pull up weeds around a bush. Then I smile, and dream of the day when I can live in this neighborhood. The sun is warm on my back, and when I eventually come to my parents' home I sit in the shade. I think back on my long day, back to the faces I have seen. I gossip with my mother a while, telling her about the things she likes to hear. I talk to my dad about the latest in sports. I tell them good-bye, and that I love them, and that I'll be back soon. I get up slowly to leave. The sun, low on the horizon now gives me a feeling of security, and I look back for just a moment. I reminisce on both good and bad times. As I look towards my home I know I don't have far to go, because each step I take, the closer I get, and the closer I get, the quicker I walk. Some day I know I will reach my destination, and when I finally do my life will be complete. I will at last rest in peace with all these others. I take one last look into the cemetery where my home will be; then I walk away.

The Death of Nobody

by
Olin Ballentine

I met Nobody in the Jacksonville Naval Brig one year ago. We both were transferred to Charleston a short time after this. Nobody died in Charleston, and that's what this is about--the death of Nobody.

I call him Nobody because that is what he was. When he died, he was just another statistic. He was serving a year and-a-half sentence for distribution of a quarter ounce of marijuana and five hits of LSD. Aside from this, though, he was a really good guy. This would come as a surprise to most people because there aren't supposed to be any good guys in prison. A Florida country boy is what he was, and from what I could tell he lived life to the fullest on the outside. We would sit and talk for hours, while smoking a joint, about air boating in the Everglades.

Nobody was my workout partner for lifting weights. He helped me get started soon after I got in. I was bench pressing eighty-five pounds at first, but with his help for six months I was up to one hundred eighty-four pounds. We used to work out six days a week. This was the best way to pass free time. We were friends, but not close friends. I learned not to really care about anyone in there and so did he. I guess that is good, though, because of how everything happened.

We were on our way to work out one day. This was a beautiful, warm day with the breeze just barely blowing and a blue sky above. I guess Nobody had really pissed someone off--he had a way of speaking his mind and sticking to it--because out of the blue came Somebody. He had a lead pipe in his hand, and with about five or six blows to Nobody's head, my friend was dead.

I was sitting up in bed with a young lady one night about three months ago. I told her about Nobody, and she called me a cold son-of-a-bitch. I told her she didn't know what cold was. I was really upset the day Nobody died. I didn't have a workout partner any more and I had to wash blood out of my clothes. I can't believe how mad I was about that. So yes...I may be cold, but so is everybody else. Remember: this wasn't Anybody, this was Nobody.

Thorns Among the Blossoms

by
Gaye Johnson

Can your love cut me as a thorn bush would?
The thorns among the blossoms always hide.
The sharpness of the thorns you send me could
Destroy the love I have for you inside.
Can your love like this blossom be untrue?
The petals of the thorn bush fall in cold.
And then reveal the teeth of greyish blue
Which snag and tear upon the love I hold.
Can your love like a thorn bird fly away?
Leaving behind a fading melody
Which some like me do hope to find one day.
And capture in the heart and not let free.
Your love may be deceiving and untrue
But still my love will fasten keen to you.

The Pick-up Artist, '84

by
Chapman Courtney

They say my fire's a bit too cold,
I say I'm not quite old enough.
They say I'm jaded, I've been told;
I say life's been a little rough.
The mirror stares, a furrowed face,
The battle scars of endless nights.
It's not that life has been a waste,
Beneath the smoke and flashing lights.
I have a drink and stand alone,
Below the pounding, bounding lilt.
Then take a perfect stranger home,
To give my world a chance to tilt.
"Come home with me," I do implore.
As one, we stagger out the door.

Enforcing Surrogate Parenting Contracts:

A Focus On the Child

by
Brad Baber

"Should surrogate parenting contracts be enforceable?" The national debate over this question was recently launched by the media during the "Baby M" custody case in New Jersey. In this case, Mary Beth Whitehead-Gould agreed to serve as a surrogate mother for William Stern and his wife, who for medical reasons were unable to have children. A contract was formed stating that Whitehead-Gould agreed to be artificially inseminated by Stern, carry the child and, at birth, hand over the baby to Stern and his wife for adoption. In consideration for Whitehead-Gould's services, the Sterns agreed to pay medical and legal expenses related to the procedure, plus a fee of \$10,000. When "Baby M" was born, however, Whitehead-Gould changed her mind and decided she wanted to keep the child. After a much publicized legal battle, a New Jersey Superior Court awarded custody of the child to the Sterns and denied the parental claims of Whitehead-Gould. On appeal to the New Jersey Supreme Court, Whitehead-Gould was granted visitation rights, but the custody decision was upheld and "Baby M" remained with the Sterns.

Surrogate parenting is one manifestation of the new "baby-making" biotechnologies, ranging from artificial insemination to test-tube conception. These new technologies have come to the rescue of people who are unable or unwilling to have children in the conventional manner, and who do not consider adoption an attractive alternative. The motivation to proceed with surrogate parenting is the sincere, loving desire to have children, especially genetically related children.

Although variations exist, surrogate parenting may commonly be described as the artificial insemination of a surrogate mother who, upon conception, carries the child to term and, at birth, surrenders the child to the natural father to raise. While the laws of nature, assisted by technology, provide the method for surrogate parenting, the laws of man provide the means via a legal contract. Typically, the adoptive parent(s) promise to pay all medical and legal expenses incurred in the process and, in many cases, a fee of approximately \$10,000. In return, the surrogate mother agrees to the insemination and pregnancy, to refrain from activities which may harm the fetus (smoking, drinking, drugs, etc.), and to relinquish all parental claims to the newborn child. The incentive to become a surrogate mother is, most often, the satisfaction derived from being pregnant, and the desire to provide a child to a deserving couple. The fee, when part of the agreement, is not usually the surrogate's main purpose in accepting the responsibility of surrogate motherhood since it is not excessive in light of her duties.

The surrogate parenting contract is entered into with good intentions by informed, consenting adults. In a majority of cases, the arrangement works satisfactorily. However, emotion plays a large role in any baby-making enterprises and, for this reason, the surrogate parenting contract is not an ordinary contract for services. Where there is a contract, there is the possibility of breach, and the surrogate parent-

ing contract may result in legal conflict and emotional distress for all parties concerned. Suppose the surrogate mother breaches the contract and uses drugs excessively, or, as in the "Baby M" case, changes her mind and wants to keep the child. Suppose the adoptive parent(s) request an abortion, or refuse the child after it is born because of a physical handicap. Most people keep their promises, and most surrogate parenting contracts are discharged when both parties fulfill their obligations in good faith. It is the function of law, however, to resolve the disputes which occur in the minority of situations. Should surrogate parenting contracts be enforceable when disputes occur? To answer this question, we must identify a legal standard, or law, which may be enforced.

The supreme law of the land, the United States Constitution, is understood to guarantee individual liberties such as freedom to contract, reproductive right and privacy, but it does not offer guidelines for resolving citizen's disputes as they exercise these fundamental rights. There are no statutes or administrative laws in our federal or state governments pertaining specifically to surrogate parenting arrangements, and common law has failed to establish clear precedents. When working with surrogate parenting arrangements, lawyers and judges have navigated legal waters by applying the three areas of law which most closely relate to surrogate parenting: contract, custody and adoption. This approach is not appropriate, however, because the surrogate parenting contract is not a typical contract for goods or services; and determining custody after the natural mother has legally promised to surrender the child to its natural father is not the usual custody and adoption case. Lawmakers do not anticipate social quandaries, but instead react to them. The laws of contract, custody and adoption cannot legitimately be applied to the peculiarities of surrogate parenting because they were structured as a response to distinctly different issues and facts.

In the absence of law pertaining to the particularities of the surrogate parenting contract, what legal standard may courts use to evaluate their enforceability? In Anglo-American legal thought, "public policy" is the relevant standard in court decisions when precedents and statutes fail. Public policy may be defined as the consensus of a society on which ideas and behaviors are beneficial to that society. It is the moral conscience of law guided by intuitive value judgments from current moral or religious principles. That which furthers the advancement of society is good or right. Public policy, however, is not centrally planned morality because its nature is responsive, changing with society's enlightenment from technology and the social sciences. In this way, public policy serves society as proxy for written law. It is through policy analysis that we may identify the standard(s) for determining if and when the surrogate parenting contract should be enforceable.

Public policy clearly favors freedom from restrictions on trade, trade agreements, and contracts. However, a contract which seeks to accomplish a goal which violates a law or which is contrary to public policy is not valid. A contract to assassinate the president of the United States, for example, would not be enforceable since it serves an illegal purpose; nor would a will which required that a devisee not marry to receive property because to restrict the institution of marriage violates public policy. Since there are no laws which ban the practice of surrogate parenting we may assume the practice is not illegal, but does it conflict with principles of public policy in the area of children and family?

Three central principles have traditionally guided policy decisions in the area of children and family.

1)The natural (biological) family unit, society's foundation, must be preserved. The family provides the psychological ingredients for healthy socialization. A healthy society depends on the healthy socialization of its members.

2)The natural parent-child bond must be maintained unless there is obvious incompetence or abuse. Our culture acknowledges an obligation for a parent to care for his/her natural children. If this obligation is diminished, then the status of the family would be in jeopardy.

3)The state is the ultimate guardian of the child. The state reserves the right to take a child into custody when, according to state standards, the parent(s) fail, and removal is in the best interest of the child. Therefore, the traditional family and natural parent-child bonding are of lesser importance than serving the best interests of the child.

It is not difficult to see how surrogate parenting challenges the institution of the traditional, biological family since it separates the functions of conception, gestation and child rearing. One might conclude that surrogate parenting contracts should not be enforceable because they conflict with current policy. However, since public policy changes with the evolving needs of society, we must examine society, identify its needs, and then construct a policy which serves those needs. Therefore, a re-evaluation of the three central principles of family policy is necessary.

The traditional family is an institution in transition. The changing roles of men and women in the home and workplace have created new demands in society in the area of childbirth and child-care. Surrogate parenting is a technological response to those demands. Public policy must also respond if it is to continue to serve society's needs. A contract for surrogate parenting should not be unenforceable merely because it conflicts with our traditional understanding of what a family, or parent-child relationship should be. The fact is, surrogate parenting contracts have benefitted hundreds of couples and surrogate mothers whose primary motivation was to create a family, albeit in a non-traditional manner. The first and second principles of family policy, above, should be updated in light of new values in society.

It is the third principle which must function as the standard in resolving contract disputes in surrogate parenting arrangements: serving the best interests of the child. The surrogate parenting contract actually involves three parties: the adoptive parent(s), the surrogate mother, and the potential child. If the purpose of the surrogate arrangement is to create another human life, then the interest of that life must be considered. The adult parties to the agreement, assumed to be informed and having consented to the contract terms, are representing their own best interests and desires. If the surrogate mother wishes to use her body to provide a child for someone else, then

it is her right to do so. Likewise, it is the legitimate right of the adoptive parent(s) to spend a life's savings on the procedure. However, since the potential child lacks the ability to define and defend its own interests, the state must act on its behalf.

Although policy is unclear on the rights of children, especially unborn children, common sense may be our guide in many situations where a surrogate parenting contract dispute exists. For instance, in a custody dispute where there is a considerable differential in the "fitness" of the parties as parents, then the child must be placed with the party best suited to parent, regardless of the contract terms. If the surrogate mother engages in activities which may jeopardize the well-being of the unborn child, then she must be reprimanded or taken into custody, depending on the severity of circumstances. It is not within the scope of this paper to devise a bill of rights for children, or to provide a solution to all potential problems with surrogate parenting contracts. Those are matters for legislators and judges. The purpose here is to simply suggest that the state owes of duty of care to the "brave new baby" which technology has deposited on society's doorstep.

The solution to the problem lies in government monitoring of the terms and process of the surrogate parenting contract, as the advocate for the child. This is best achieved through court approval of surrogate parenting contracts before they are undertaken, or the establishment of state-level, non-profit "surrogacy boards" which would function in a manner similar to adoption agencies by screening, matching and educating applicants, and overseeing the process. In this way, potential problems would be minimized and the parties would be informed of the legal risks involved with a contract dispute. Most important, the child's best interests and rights would not be overlooked in the process.

In conclusion, surrogate parenting serves a useful and beneficial purpose in our society by fulfilling the desires of people to have children when other options are not possible or appealing. Public policy must be revised to accommodate surrogate parenting contracts if it is to serve the changing needs of our society. However, policy and/or law must serve the rights and interests of the silent party in the surrogate parenting arrangement: the child. It is the rights and interests of the child that should serve as the standard against which surrogate parenting contracts should be evaluated. Therefore, surrogate parenting contracts should be enforceable when the terms protect the rights and interests of the potential child. This is best insured by establishing a court or agency authority to approve all surrogate parenting arrangements and monitor the surrogate parenting process.

The Rider

by
Dwayne Armbrister

Wet and tired with no place to sleep
For once in his life he has tasted defeat.
The Rider rides on, his heart pounds in his chest
Only moments ago, he gave it his best.
The night seems so still, there is only one sound
The clippity-clop as the hoofs touch the ground.
He has never known fear, but now it's at hand
He has welcomed the test to prove he's a man.
The rider is tired and feeling disgust
He continues to ride; he knows it's a must.
The rider rides on.

And as he reflected, only moments before
He rode with his men, determined to gore.
The leader of many, he now rides alone
With fear in his heart and chills in his bone.
He knows they're behind him, his death they do seek
The test he had welcomed has proved him too weak.
The rider shed tears for all those poor souls
Who followed him blindly straight to a hole.
The rider continues, determined to ride
Yet knowing full well he has no place to hide,
The rider rides on.

Widowhood

by
La Vona Hyatt

Widowhood is a stage of life many women have to face at some time. Interestingly, in a society where women generally outlive men, we don't adequately cover the issues of widowhood. Other than insurance policies, our culture shuns the topic. Although women need to know what to expect, useful information of what happens during the transition from dependent to provider is hard to find.

"And what relationship are you to the deceased?" the mortician inquires.

"His wife," the bereaved solemnly intones.

"Widow," he writes.

A girl dreams of becoming a woman, and then a wife and mother, and then a grandmother. Her dreams don't include plans for widowhood, yet with her husband's last breath, a woman's world is crushed. Few women are prepared for the momentous changes brought by his death.

Shock and deep pain make life's daily events appear artificial. The widow is numb with emotional paralysis; it usually takes a while before the aching surfaces. A stranger wearing her husband's brand of after-shave passes by in the mall. A disc jockey plays a song that meant so much during their courtship. She sets her husband's place at the table--or she rushes to tell him of an event and then realizes ...! These and other experiences bring frequent weeping. It's best to allow the tears to flow; they are essential in helping her, until she can adjust to her loss.

Death is hard on all of us, but the widow has lost her most intimate confidant. She often will be excluded from activities she and her husband shared. The mate, who would know how to comfort her in such a situation, is gone. Widows need to talk with people who understand their loss; therefore, it is recommended they join a support group sponsored by the church or community.

If children are involved, a way must be found to explain why mommy is crying. This early demand on the widow is difficult. She has to try to explain death without engulfing the children in her own sorrow.

The widow is now, in a sense, both mother and father. She must see to her children's spiritual, physical, mental, and social development. If monetarily possible, it is best to stay put, keeping the rest of the children's life the same as when their father was alive.

Besides emotional turmoil, the widow must face financial questions. She may need to return to the work force or, in some cases, enter it for the first time. Usually she will earn a much lower wage than her late husband. Valuable assistance can be provided by the Social Security office or the Veterans Administration. Workshops that can help with career planning and preparation are offered by the Displaced Homemaker Program.

What can a woman learn from reading this--that is, if she's had the courage to read this far? She should learn to prepare for life in her formative years. This can be done by choosing an occupation and becoming skilled. If she later decides to become a full-time housewife, she should periodically update her skills.

Accepting the realities of death may be difficult. Losing a mate is a subject people don't like to think about, but they need to be ready for all of life's unexpected challenges, turns, and trials, no matter how difficult to foresee.

A Pressing Strife

by
R. B. Herbert, III

I'm in real trouble
And I don't know what to do:
I press the horn of plenty to my lips,
It sucks my marrow out;
I press a hand, glad of its friendship,
It steals my fingers from me
And reviles me that I have given,
And that I have no more;
I press my heart to ferment love's sweet wines,
Yet vinegar from each cask in turn,
Shows there is no cellar here.
If barren and bereft,
I would be better
Than in this entropic flow.

Goin' Home

by
Lee McAllum

It all started on our way home from Sturgis. There were just the two of us on our bikes, myself and Rip, making our way home from the tremendous partying Sturgis provides. We had decided to leave the old ladies at home this year. We needed to get away with the bro's. About halfway home, Rip's 47 Pan started throwing fuel from the carburetor. I noticed it first and gave Rip the thumb to pull into the next town.

BENSVILLE, KENTUCKY,
ONE MILE,

the sign read. We pulled over immediately after coming off the exit ramp and had a look. Not knowing too much about carburetors, we decided to ask around for the nearest Harley-Davidson shop.

As luck would have it there was a shop in town and we found it without too much difficulty. An old barn with "Jim's H" painted across the top, the H being the only letter left of Harley-Davidson, and what looked like a bro sitting out front is what we pulled up to.

"What can I do for you two sights for sore eyes?" the bro out front asked us.

"Name's Outlaw and you can have a look at my partner's bike," I replied. "It's throwing fuel from the carburetor."

He told me his name was Big Jim and we wheeled Rip's bike into the shop. Jim confirmed the need for a new carburetor. He also told us he didn't stock carburetors and would have to order one.

"Don't have much use for a carb around here," Jim remarked. "Don't get enough business to stock too many parts."

"I figured as much," I replied, "by the look of the place." "Yea, well, it's just a place I picked up to sit around and collect my check from the government for a bullet I caught in Nam," Jim told me.

"You sure picked a place away from everyone," I told him. "You couldn't have expected too much company out here."

"Nope, it's just the way I like it. I had enough of people for a while. The townspeople didn't like it at first. Used to give me a lot of trouble, but now they just leave me alone. Only ones liked me was the judge and women. The judge lost his son in Nam and I can't figure the women, but then I never could," Jim explained while he removed the carb from Rip's bike. "People sure can be stupid. Why do you suppose that is?"

"Don't know," I said as I #it a joint. "Some people figure because we believe in being free we're bad."

"Anyway, I'll put the carb on special order," Jim said while toking on the joint I had handed him. "Should be here in a couple of days."

"How much will it run us?" I asked.

"About three bills after I put it on," he told me.

After counting our funds, two grand between us, we decided we could afford the carb and told Jim to go ahead and order it. Big Jim turned out to be a real bro and after we finished smoking a few more joints we asked him for directions to a cheap place to stay. Jim told us about a Howard Johnson's just down the road and warned us to stay clear of the townspeople as much as possible. With the directions and advice we headed out on my '82 Wide Glide leaving Rip's bike behind.

The Howard Johnson's Jim told us about was easy to find. After getting a room we decided to go down to the diner, grab a couple of burgers, and think about what to do next.

"Let's find the local tavern and have a few drafts," Rip suggested.

"Sounds like a righteous idea to me," I replied. "We could use a couple of cold ones." So we finished our burgers, paid the bills, and walked outside to climb on my hog. As Rip climbed on behind me, I could hear him grumbling.

"I hate riding behind someone like some damned old lady," he growled.

"Shut up and settle down," I yelled back to him as we pulled out into the street. I got my hog at 35 m.p.h. and leveled off so we could read the store signs in search of a bar. About two miles away from the Howard Johnson's we passed a cop headed in the other direction. As soon as he spotted us he spun his cruiser around in a fashion you only see on TV. He came speeding after us and didn't ease up until he was on us and flashing his red and blue lights.

"What the hell is this jerk's problem?" Rip asked as we slowed to pull over.

"Can I help you two find your way to the highway?" the copped asked as he stepped out of the cruiser. As Rip started to climb off the bike to answer I grabbed his arm and gave him a stern look. We didn't need the added trouble. I explained our dilemma and told the cop we would be leaving when Rip's bike was repaired.

"Just thought we would find a bar and have a drink," I explained.

"Make sure that's all you do," he replied with a sarcastic tone in his voice. "We don't need your kind in Bensville." It took a lot, but I was able to keep Rip from opening his mouth, at least until the cop was on his way.

"Who the hell does he think he is!" Rip barked.

"Calm down," I told him. "You should be used to that kind. Besides, remember what Jim told us."

"Filthy pig!" Rip yelled as the cop pulled off, his words drowned out by the roar from the powerful engine in the cruiser.

Arriving at the tavern, I parked the bike and we looked the place over. It was an old red brick building with a steel door and "Bensville Bar" painted across the top in big white letters.

"What the hell are we waiting for?" Rip asked. "Let's go in and suck down a few brews."

"Yeah, right," I replied as we climbed off the bike and started for the door. We stopped just inside to let our eyes adjust to the dim lighting.

"Shit! It's dark in here," Rip said. "Someone musta forgotten to pay the light bill." We walked over to the bar and grabbed two of the high stools.

"How about a couple Buds," Rip yelled to the bartender.

"Where you boys from?" came a question as the bartender set the beers down in front of us.

"Florida," I burped out between gulps.

"Just passin' through then?" the bartender questioned. "Bike broke and there's no part in this hick town," Rip sneered.

"Who the hell are the dirt ba#s, Joe?" a guy yelled across the room to the bartender.

"Just slow down, Jimmy Lee," Joe told him, "these guys are leaving when they finish their beer."

"The hell we are," Rip roared, "and who the hell are you calling dirt bags, asshole!" That's all it took for Jimmy Lee and his two friends to decide to come over and take a look at us. As they drew closer I began to see the size of them. I'm not a shrimp and Rip outweighs me by at least 100 pounds, but these guys were BIG. You know, the kind of country boys with short hair, clean shaven, and muscles that stand out like they've been lifting cows all their lives. Your typical red neck if I ever saw one.

"I'm calling you dirt bags," Jimmy Lee sneered as he drew up in Rip's face.

"Look, asshole, the best thing you could do is find your seat and shut the hell up," Rip growled back. As soon as Jimmy Lee opened his mouth to say something else, Rip hit him in the head with his half full beer bottle. Jimmy Lee hit the floor with a thud and Rip went for the guy standing next to him. All I could hear was grunts and groans as I dove in to help, hoping Rip could stand up to his reputation one more time. Just as I was getting the best of my guy, Rip yelled, "Cops!" and ran for the back door. The cops came busting through as I was getting up to follow Rip.

"What the hell's going on here?" the cop yelled as his hand went to his hip.

"Oh, shit!" I groaned when a huge .357 came out and was leveled at my head.

"You call for us, Joe?" the cop with the gun asked.

"Sure as hell did, Ed!" Joe whined. "Your boy, Jimmy Lee, has been at it again and..."

"Shut up, Joe!" Ed snapped, cutting Joe off. "My boy's the one been assaulted here."

"You have Jimmy Lee checked out, Ed. We'll just take this guy in and charge him, and he can tell us what happened," the other cop offered as he handcuffed me.

"Thanks, John, I'll meet you at the station," Ed replied.

"I thought I told you to stay out of trouble," our not-so-friendly cop laughed as he took me outside to the cruiser, Ed close behind, helping his son.

"You come by and sign the charge papers, Joe, ya hear," John said in a tone I knew would make sure Joe would do as he was told.

The cops made good on what they said. I was locked up, and when Jimmy Lee showed up to tell his "unbiased" story, I was charged with three counts of assault and battery, damaging private property, resisting arrest, and disturbing the peace.

"What kind of bullshit is this?" I yelled out from my cell. "You can't do me like this!"

"Say what you want, son," the jailer told me, "we do things a little different around here."

"Oh shit," I moaned in disgust, "when's my bond hearing?"

"Don't set bond for out-of-state prisoners," the jailer told me. "They might run off."

"So what the hell am I supposed to do? Leave Outlaw in some shithole to be railroaded on trumped up charges?" Rip stormed.

"No, but you can't bust him out, now can you? We have to convince the judge that Outlaw is innocent," Jim said calmly. "Besides the judge is a friend of mine, remember?"

"Well now, that's a start," Rip replied, "so let's get going."

"What do you say we talk to Jimmy Lee's friends first," Jim suggested.

"That sounds real enjoyable. I'd like to finish what they started at that bar, anyway," Rip commented as they got up to leave.

Jim was good; he knew right where to find them. They were at the pool hall not far from Bensville Bar. The minute Rip and Jim walked into the place it got quiet, like everyone knew what they were there for. When the two boys looked up from their game to see what was up, they saw Rip and Jim. When Jim started walking over toward them, they broke for the back door. But as big as Jim is, he moved with incredible speed; by the time Rip made it out back, Jim had both boys pinned in a corner pleading for mercy.

"Please, Jim, I didn't know they were friends of yours," one boy whined. "Besides it was Jimmy Lee who started it."

"Well then, if it's like that you should have no problem talking with Judge Smith," Jim replied calmly.

"We can't do that, Jim. Ed Nard will have our ass," the other boy complained.

"The way I see it, you can either tell the judge what really happened or you can explain to my friend over there why you don't want to help get his partner out of jail," Jim told the boy while lifting him off the ground by his shirt. "What'll it be, son?"

After the boys told Judge Smith what went down, the judge took Rip and Jim to spring me.

"Ed, what the hell are you trying to prove now?" the judge demanded as he went though the office door.

"Just doing my job, Judge," Ed replied while coming around the desk to greet him.

"Bull! What have you got on that boy you arrested at Bensville Bar this afternoon?" the judge asked as if he already knew the answer.

"I've got three signed statements saying the guy we have and that other one we've been looking for came into the bar, started tearing things up, and attacked three boys, one of them being my son," Ed snapped back.

"More bull, Ed. I've had two of those boys tell me it was Jimmy Lee started the whole thing," the judge replied.

"Well, whatcha think I should do, Judge?" Ed asked, like he was used to being caught.

"I want you to let the boy go, Ed, what else? I'm getting tired of Jimmy Lee causing trouble everywhere, and your protecting him with that badge, Ed," the judge lectured. "If you can't do anything with Jimmy Lee, someday I may have to."

"It's about time you two showed up. I was getting awful damned lonely in there," I remarked as I came through the door.

"Things take a little time around here," Jim responded. "Besides, you're out, so shut the hell up and come on."

"Can you believe those red necks?" I asked Jim after we thanked the judge and walked outside to leave.

"More good news, guys: that carb came in on the Greyhound while Outlaw was in the slam, and I can have you on the road in under an hour."

Jim was as good as his word and had Rip's bike running like new. There was nothing left to do except polish off a last Budweiser and say our farewells. We gave Jim our address and told him to stop in; our house was always open. Jim had picked up my bike from behind Bensville Bar, so we were on our way home. Finally headed south on Highway 35, we passed the sign marking the city limits. As we rode by it, it mocked,

LEAVING BENSVILLE, KENTUCKY,
THE HOME OF SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY

Honest Incident

by
R. E. Riddle

I try to be honest with people in every aspect of a relationship. This has not always been the case. I learned through a childhood incident that honesty is the best policy.

It all started on a bright June morning in the mountains of North Carolina. I received the ultimate birthday gift for an eight-year-old boy. It was a single shot, pump action, Daisy BB gun, and that morning I was out to find new targets. Tin cans, paper targets, and old broken mason jars were just not exciting enough for a superior marksman like me. Out in the pasture behind the barn was a line of old, junk cars that Daddy used for spare parts in his used car business. The dew-glazed red tail lights sparkled in the sun like the fiery eyes of the wild bison of the old west. The brave Indian hunter had found his prey. I shot out twelve sets of tail lights that blood-soaked morning. The day flew by and the BBs ran out.

About a half hour after Daddy came home that evening, we sat down to dinner. There was very little conversation over the black-eyed peas and cornbread until Daddy turned to me and asked, "What did you do today, son?" I swallowed hard and replied, "Oh nothing much, sir." He began to tell me how he had walked out to the pasture and noticed that someone had knocked out every one of the tail lights on his old junkers. "Amazing," I said, "I didn't see a soul all day." He took a little gold BB out of his shirt pocket and dropped it in front of my plate. He told me there was at least one in every well of every tail light in that field. "Alan Freeman has a BB gun Daddy," was my reply. My father said "O.K." and nothing else was said about it.

That night I slowly climbed up the stairs to my room and to bed. In my bed I found no rest. I closed my eyes only to see the loving eyes of my Daddy. I had lied to my Daddy. How could I have done such a thing? That simple realization ate at me. I was guilty of the damage to the cars, not Alan Freeman. His family was too poor to even buy him the BBs I had shot. I had lied about the lights, and then blamed it on my best friend. I got out of my bed, with tears rolling down my cheeks, went down stairs to my parents bedroom door and knocked. Daddy told me to come on in, and I did. Daddy was lying in bed reading a True Detective magazine by the glow of a reading lamp that had yellowed with age and seen its better days. "Daddy, I shot out every one of those tail lights," I blubbered. Daddy looked at me and said, "I know, son. Go on back to bed." I never lied to my father again after that night.

Now as a father with a son of my own, I realize the understanding, compassion, and true love my father had for me. It's the same love I have for my son, Jason. I've told this story to him and I feel that we have the same bond of honesty and trust that my father and I formed so many years ago in our sweet mountain home.

The Death of a Cat

by
Janet Taggart Saldana

The windshield wipers squeaked on the broad expanse of the bus's windshield as the two girls gazed morosely out at the wet, grey afternoon. As their stop grew near, the two gathered up their books and stood, preparing to depart. Suddenly, their eyes riveted on a black smear lying on the soggy pavement ahead. Their faces registered shock and dismay simultaneously, and the tears sprang unbidden to their eyes.

"Our cat!" exclaimed Gloria. "Someone's hit him!"

"Please, stop the bus," implored Gwen, as they both rushed to the bus driver and beseeched him. Since the girls' stop was only a block away, and they were obviously upset about their dead cat, the driver grudgingly swung the door open and let the girls out. Some of the other children on the school bus stuck their heads out of the windows despite the rain and called out to the pair, but neither Gwen nor Gloria heeded their cries. They were rushing over to the still, mangled cat sprawled in the middle of the road. Thankfully, the bus laboriously swerved around it and lumbered down the street.

"Oh, he's dead, Glory, really dead," Gwen observed sadly. Neither seemed to remember at that moment that he was not their cat. Their concern for him was genuine, and they didn't think about the fact that they had only seen him for the first time the day before.

The stray cat had shown up at Gloria's house while the girls were out climbing in the huge maple tree in the back yard.

"Look, there's a cat I've never seen before," remarked Gwen. Of course, they knew every animal in the neighborhood. "He looks pretty skinny, too. I bet he's hungry. Let's get him some food." The girls had lithely climbed down the tree and run inside the house to get some food. But while the cat was eating, the girls had petted it, and the cat had deftly twisted around and bitten Gloria in the finger. They had looked at the cat rather diffidently after that, deciding that the eyes had a sinister look about them, and the cat was probably evil, too. Gloria's mother had said to keep an eye on the cat, so they could watch it for any sign of rabies. This fascinated the girls, so they had followed it around the neighborhood for a couple of hours that afternoon. Later, from behind the cover of a huge gardenia bush, they observed it sleeping on Gloria's front porch. They finally grew tired of the game and went off to Gwen's house to play some records.

But now, all this was forgotten and forgiven in the grim reality of death. This was no mean, stray black cat. This was their beloved pet, senselessly murdered in the prime of his life. The girls decided to take turns to go home and change out of their school clothes. This way one of them could stay with the cat and make sure that no one ran him over any more. Gloria ran home first, since her house was the closest. Gwen stood guard in the drizzle, tears mixing with the rain on her cheeks. When a car came down the street, she waved it to go

around the cat, and the driver did so, looking curiously at her. The road was a rural route, so there were not many cars traveling it. When Gloria returned, she dragged a rake, and a big, black, plastic trash bag billowed behind her.

"We can put him in here to bury him," she informed Gwen. She took her turn watching for cars while Gwen raced to her house, jumping over the big, brown, mud puddles along her way. Within minutes, Gwen was back at Gloria's side as they contemplated how to get the cat into the trash bag.

"I'll scoop him up with the rake and you hold the bag while I drop him in it," decided Gwen. So, rake in hand, she touched the cat's body with the rake. It was so stiff, like a rock, that a shudder swept through Gwen's body when she moved it. The cat's skull was crushed, and the sight unnerved them both.

"I can't do it, Glory," said Gwen. "You try it." So the bag and rake switched hands and the same maneuvers attempted again. But neither could Gloria seem to get the cat into the trash bag. The girls began crying again, and the gloom of the rainy day seeped through to their bones and into their hearts. Their hair hung in lank strands, plastered to the side of their faces, and their eyes were bright with tears.

"What can we do? We can't just leave him here. We have to get him off the road," Gwen choked. So, again and again, they nudged the stiff body of the dead cat, but succeeded only slightly in moving it along the wet road. All the while, the girls conferred on the earlier life of the cat. They wondered where he had come from and if someone was missing him.

"Oh, I bet they'd be so sad if they knew what happened to him," sighed Gloria. She had the more compassionate nature, while Gwen had the more adventurous one.

As the afternoon wore on, the traffic became slightly heavier as people returned home from work. The girls had given up on moving the cat by now, and were primarily concerned with directing traffic around it. Soon, a familiar car came into their view and proceeded to stop in front of the cat. Gloria's mother emerged and took in the entire scene in an instant.

"I can't believe you two," was all she said as she grasped the dead cat by the tail and flung it into the garbage bag. She thrust the bag at Gloria and said, "I expect to see you home in half an hour." With that, her trim raincoat and high heels disappeared into the interior of the big car, and it whisked off down the street and rounded the turn into the driveway. Gloria's and Gwen's eyes met in astonished disbelief, for Gloria's mother was always so feminine. They shared a secret smile and set off down the road, each with a hand grasping their precious cargo.

They had already decided that the location of the grave was to be in an empty lot just down the road in between their two houses. As they approached the lot, they both spotted the dogwood tree amidst the scrub pines, and looked at each other in mutual agreement. If they buried it beneath the dogwood tree, then most likely whoever built on the lot would leave the

dogwood and the grave could always easily be found. They talked while they dug the hole with the rake and an old tin can they found. The ground was wet and therefore soft to dig.

"He's got to have a name, you know," remarked Gwen matter-of-factly. "He can't very well be buried without one." So they decided on the name Glen, which was a combination of their two names. After the cat was buried deep enough to satisfy them that no neighborhood dog could smell it and dig it up, they covered the cat up, knelt side by side, and prayed.

The tears freely rolled down their young cheeks as they held hands and grieved for the dead cat. But their tears were not only for this one lone cat, but for all the unwanted and homeless who have no one to care for them, for the unloved who die each day without anyone to mourn their passing. The girls felt that their hearts were so full they would burst, and they rose to their feet and hugged each other.

"I'm so glad I have you," sobbed Gloria.

"I'd die if I didn't have you. I love you so much," came the muffled reply from the head nestled on Gloria's shoulder.

The two girls gave one last lingering look at the pine twig cross standing regally among the weeds and walked down the road. The rain was beginning to let up some now, and the sun looked like it might come out from behind the dark clouds and show itself before its final goodbye of the day.

"You look like a mess."

"You don't look so terrific yourself!"

"See ya in the morning."

"Bye."

They both headed down the road in different directions, but their thoughts were as one. It was wonderful to have a best friend.

Elm Epitaph

by
Maurice R. Duperre

The English elms are gone along Elm Street;
Only mild eruptions mar brick sidewalks
To mark where once they soared, susceptible
To beetles, funguses, and other blights.

Dead wood was carefully excised at first
And trucked away. When that technique had failed,
The dying trees were all destroyed by hardhat crews.
Pyres billowed black for weeks.

Can we see more clearly than down shady aisles?
When we, uprooted, fall to some disease,
Can stone or memory keep us green?
Let us hew to truth, not counting cost.

I Tried to Write a Poem

by
Joel Wessinger

I tried to write a poem, but it wasn't very funny.
It really mattered to me, though I did it not for money.

I tried to write a poem, but it was really short.
The teacher gave it back to me-and with a strong retort.

I tried to write a poem, it had no scheme or rhyme.
I'd used it twice before, so why not one more time?

I tried to write a poem that's sure to go nowhere.
I spent my best already, with my story on the hare.

I have to write a poem, it's very hard to do;
My words and thoughts confused, my grammar needs a glue.

I have to write a poem though the poet surely knows.
When he reads it for a grade, he'll say that's worse than prose.

I have to write a poem; I need a better grade.
But I can't tell a damned anapest at the point of a blade.

I've tried to write this poem; you may say it's just cute,
You may not even like it, or really give a hoot.

I've tried to write this poem, it wasn't very easy.
When you read and mark it up, please don't call it sleazy.

I've tried to write a poem, I hope that this will work.
It's hard to write a poem, for a literary jerk.

Fresh

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by
R. B. Herbert, III

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