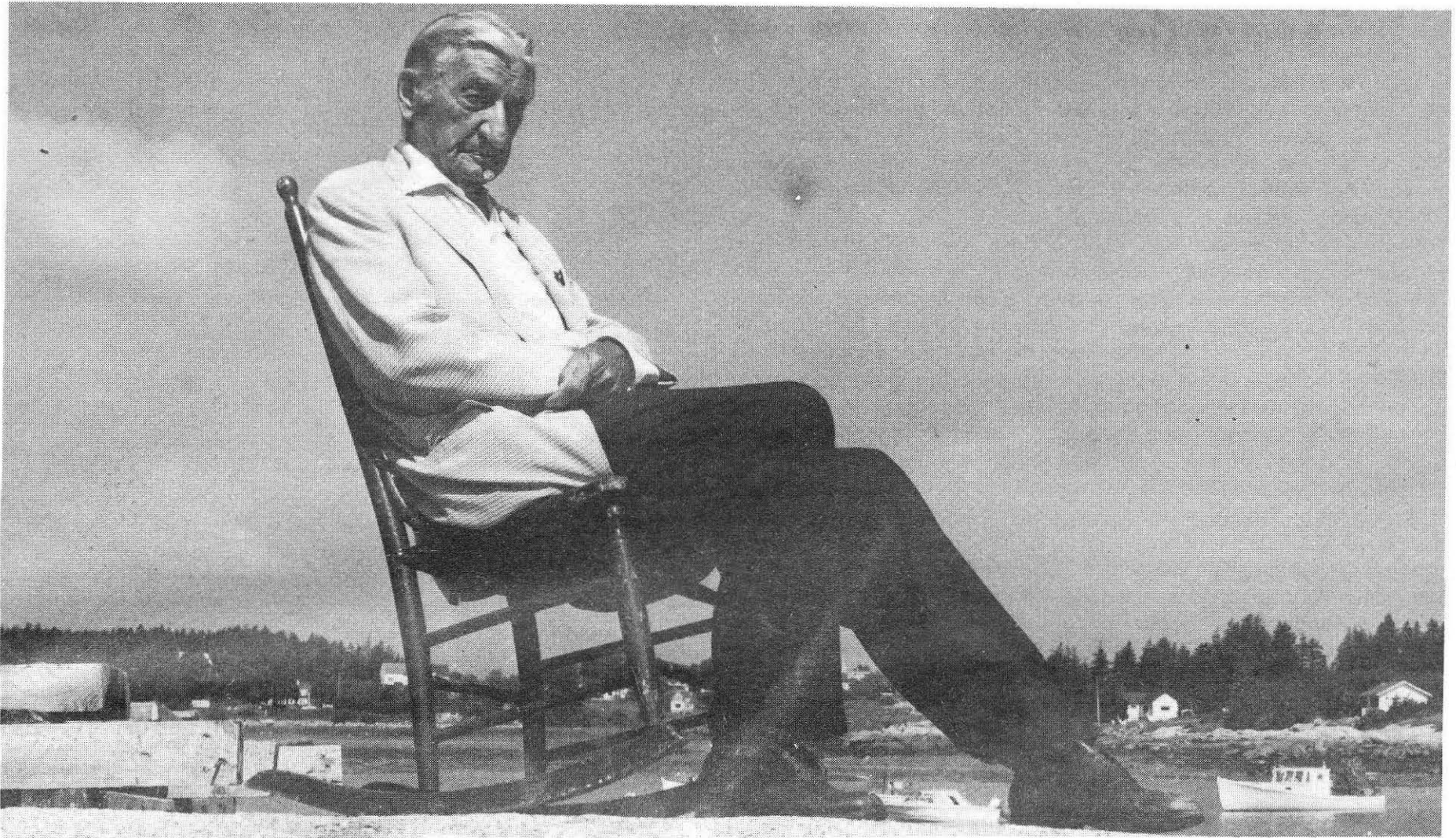


# KENNEBEC:



Wilbert Snow (1884-1977)

## *Bequest to my Sons*

*To you I will the lean-yearred heritage  
My fathers willed to me — granite land  
Fringing a coast whose northern winters stand  
Defying all attempts to soothe their rage;  
To you I will my own lean equipage,  
Scorned as a horse-and-buggy dowry — banned  
In our swift day — yet ready at command  
To teach the patience of a friendlier age.*

*I will you hope to face the perilous day  
On which the world has fallen: crude machines,  
Unreckoned with, smite people hard and gray  
As boulders in New England's parched ravines;  
Tame them, and taming, win the strength to slay  
New dragons coming on to blight new scenes.*

Wilbert Snow

## A PORTFOLIO OF MAINE WRITING Vol XII — 1988

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## *Recalling Wilbert*

Yesterday, as I was leaning on a long-handled shovel, pausing for rest in my once-a-year job of shoveling out the outhouse, I got to thinking how my father managed this archaic chore for the "library" at our summer camp on Spruce Head island. At summer's end, his discourse turned to the village of his youth, to awesome descriptions of how men cloaked in anonymity by dark of the moon and by stealth performed this nasty but necessary task.

The day for sanitation activity came, the stage set (stout planks paved the root-snarled way proceeding to a smooth granite slope to the sea), we tied bandanas over our faces to conceal our identity. We skulked and scurried about, and shoveled, ducking behind trees whenever a car passed by, shoveling and wheeling until the game had been played out.

Yesterday, I worked alone. And I was tired, tired in an adult way, tired as I never was as an actor in one of Wilbert's games. He was ringmaster par excellence and the center of attention wherever he went. His repertory of stories drawn from his broad experience "in this vast world and wide" never failed to hold his audience. There were times when we children chafed at the exposure to which we were put as spear-carriers and clowns in his one-ring circus. On the other hand, we never lacked for entertainment and games. These included morning examinations (What's two and two? What's four and four?) Or later. "Who wrote 'I wandered lonely as a cloud?'" The correct answers permitted immediate entree to the bathroom when Wilbert was shaving, and on to the lively conversations, debates and merriment at mealtime, and the readings (*Pilgrim's Progress*; his friend Vachel Lindsay's poems and incantations; Wilbert poems—) after we were in bed and the lights out.

Wilbert was a lifelong radical. Yet, looking at the university campuses today, it is hard to imagine how this man's behaviour on campus and outside could

have turned the trustees of his day ugly, demanding the resignation of this free spirit forthwith . . . or else. But I do remember something of campus faculty life before WWII: it bore little resemblance to the campus today. The faculty was uniformly dressed in dark fuzzy vested suits and walked with the knees close together. Their wives were either Eastern College munchkins or, occasionally, Minerva-scaled salon directors. (The latter type sometimes kept their husbands tenured in spite of otherwise conspicuous shortcomings. Should one of these marriages produce offspring, these could not number more than two, or one might be considered a sex maniac.) Wilbert, with his five ragamuffins, made no effort to mix us up with the Little Lord Fauntleroy. He relished our associations with the brickyard worker's children (we lived well into the country), the blacks, the immigrant Poles, the Italians. As an expression of Wilbert's went, we didn't fit. And, in the university prior to WWII, neither did he.

Much of the texture and detail of life in the house of Wilbert was infused with history and legend, be it grand and heroic, or trivial but memorable. Should an artifact as simple as an axe survive a camping circuit of the Gaspé peninsula it became henceforth and ever after "the Gaspé axe." Furthermore, OUR HEROES were the men and women of literary or artistic vocation (Frost, Sandburg, Lindsay) who slept in our bedrooms and joined in talk at our table. They were understood to be living embodiments of the Sacred Way, as well as life-long friends. It was a given in the Snow household that the only life worth living was that given over whole-heartedly to art, literature, politics or teaching. Nothing else need apply.

Wilbert, in his long career, was more to us than mere Master of Revels. A pater familias in Republican Rome worked no harder than Wilbert at the task of impressing his family's minds with the *gravitas*, mores and *gloria* of life in service to a Muse, no matter how thankless. We learned early on that the large envelopes addressed to Wilbert in his own hand were rejections of his work. Nevertheless, "only the artists are immortal" was a phrase often repeated and seriously intended.

And it mattered not at all what guests had come to dinner as far as conversation was concerned. We all talked: a chorus of cherubic squeakers holding forth on every imaginable subject at the permission . . . nay, at the behest, of the debating coach ensconced at the head of the table. I was to learn some time later and often to my regret that tolerance for young voices and youthful opinion was not universal. Not even common. But Wilbert loved talk. Food was a secondary consideration when we sat down to table.

Maine, and the sound of the rote on ledges, was essential to Wilbert's system, the eternal conflict of sea and rock-bound coast. But I think it must be remembered that though the bulk of Wilbert's poetry finds its strongest imagery in the coast and people who endure there, he spent the largest part of an active academic and political career in other places. Through great and individual effort, he had escaped the village to a world of universities, state and national politics, to friendships and alliances. Yet, in spirit, he was forever the product of the rich coloration of the seacoast village of his youth. This ambivalence was part of the heritage he passed on to his sons: eternal motion of an inter-tidal zone, and, at the same time, a need to spread out on the larger canvas, engage with a larger *polis*. "Maine is 'the land of the Lotus Eaters,'" Wilbert would warn us, ". . . for charging the batteries," but not for staying. Through work, and a willingness to seek out people who could help him, Wilbert escaped from the lobster trap. But he never forgot those in the company-owned stone cutting village of his youth, the men and women who had inherited the wrong end of the stick, his father included. "These were people who deserved better than they got." A good deal of the anger of his youth persisted into old age. It gives a cutting edge to the Georgics and Eclogues of his poetical estate.

Nicholas Snow  
Spruce Head  
is a painter and lobsterman

#### Conflict

*The sea is forever quivering,  
The shore forever still;  
And the boy who is born in a seacoast town  
Is born with a dual will:  
The sunburned rocks and beaches  
Inveigle him to stay;  
While every wave that breaches  
Is a nudge to be up and away.*

**The Collected Poems/Wilbert Snow**  
(Wesleyan U. Press, Middletown, Ct. 1957, out-of-print. Available in libraries.)

**Wilbert Snow: Maine Poet/phonodisc**  
(Marshall Dodge jacket notes, essay by former student, Charles Olson. Bert and I, Inc., Mill Rd, Ipswich, MA, C. 1961)

**Fish and potatoes, the fat of the land,  
If you can't eat that,  
You can starve and be damned.**

When Wilbert Snow was a little boy isolated on the island of White Head at the mouth of Penobscot Bay, this coastal folk rhyme was the first poetry he ever heard. In the poet's later peregrinations, he sometimes came near starving whenever he strayed too long from his beloved coast. But that did not stop him. As a young man, an "academic tramp," as he said, he traveled to or taught in far-flung places like Alaska, France, Reed College in Oregon, Utah, Indiana and NYU, before settling, somewhat bumpily, at Wesleyan U. in Middletown, CT as a Professor of English. Once, he was elected Lt. Governor, and even served briefly as Governor of Connecticut. Always, he was "plain folks" among the pedants, a role he relished, and oddly, a liberal barb among conservatives — which was just the way he liked it. He had gone a long way from Thomaston Academy and Bowdoin. But he returned every summer and in his retirement years to the family home he established on Spruce Head, near Rockland. In a way, his imagination never left.

His poetry, a life's work, is mostly Maine, full of "fish and potatoes." In 1988 — even in 1948 — he seems as resolutely old-fashioned as the fish jingle, a poet who addresses his reader directly, lucidly, as if standing with hands on hips, teasing the cosmic out of the commonplace. He works in familiar rhythms, fine rhymes, using the old forms confidently — sonnets, ballads, narratives, folk yarns. In his autobiography, *Codline's Child* (Codline Foster was his island midwife), he observes that when Eliot and Pound, with their allusiveness, broken rhythms and obscurity bedazzled the professors, "American poetry began heading for a long dark night." But not if he could help it. Readers are more likely to find an ironing board than irony in these poems, a bathtub not bathos, popple stones on a beach, not paradox. His qualities are best summed up in an encounter with Wallace Stevens, his neighbor in nearby Hartford. Bruised by a bad review, Stevens asked him: "Snow, am I as dull as that?" Snow: "No, but you make no concessions to the common reader." The relentless Stevens said, "Why should I?" then added, ". . . you are more interested in verse than you are in poetry." Snow, in a riposte altogether typical of him, responded: "Yes, but a verse-writer becomes a poet after he is dead, just as a politician becomes a statesman after he is dead."

Snow has been dead for eleven years now. Sadly, *The Collected Poems* (Wesleyan U. Press, Middletown, CT) are out-of-print and his fascinating autobiography largely unread. Today, it is clear Snow was indeed a poet and wrote poems, in-verse. No one "gets" the coast better, the rocks, bights, eelgrass and rockweed, "a sort of no-man's land for loafing in." He is not taut and anorexic like the moderns, not stingy with his impressions, but garrulous, lush. Hear him describe digging clams "where mud-enameled sand/looks like a colander whose holes emit/Little salt-water geysers when you step." He describes a flat with "rancid mud clams whose white shells betray/A worthlessness within, like beggar's gold,/Or empty conch shells farther up the beach;/The iridescent clamworms blue and green/with escalating red and yellow fringes,/Like Chinese dragons whose soft tentacles/Expand, contract, and writhe in oozy slime." An opening clam "will lay white buttocks bare before your eyes." This is Snow at his best. Around him, walking a beach, "rockweed blobs explode."

His gift is in length, in narrative, not the short lyric. A people's poet like Gardiner's E.A. Robinson, he too creates quirky local characters, like Lem Baker, Jane Wiley, Malachi Bascom and George McGoon; one could say he "Masters'd" the genre. And like his drinking buddy Robert Frost, he can agonize with the best of them, asking "Did he love earth too much?" He is a



philosopher, in an agnostic sort of way; life is mysterious and escapes explanation.

*The heart of life defies exactitude;  
No measure yet devised can square the circle,  
Or multiply diameters by rules  
Precise enough to tell what circles are  
Beyond dispute or cavil.*

(*"Tides"*)

And a romantic. He cries out for what **"Can heal this great longing in me,/This vagabond longing in me."**

Snow's diction, a trove of arresting coastal expressions (often Irish), caused him to append glossaries to his volumes: **gurry** (slime on lobster pots), **moithered** (disturbed or bothered), **whisht** (keep still), **thraneen** (what's left over after the table is cleared). Wonderful stuff. We learn that a **hooker** is a vessel whose sails are carried on gaffs and booms. And Snow makes these obscurities work in the poems: **touche'** T.S. and Ezra.

Admittedly, he sometimes writes poorly: **"Pound, waves, and beat against the shore;/Lunge along the cliffs, and twist their brown hair/with your clean white fingers."** Bad Tennyson. And he shows the stress of poetic warfare. Consider this fine brash opening, so like Browning or Pound: **"I would not kiss the stupid lips of sleep/And miss the earliest notes of morning birds."** Fine. Yet four lines later, as the sun rises out of the ocean, he **"hails the pink sun radiant from his bath."** The 20s-30s-40s — a hard time for poetry.

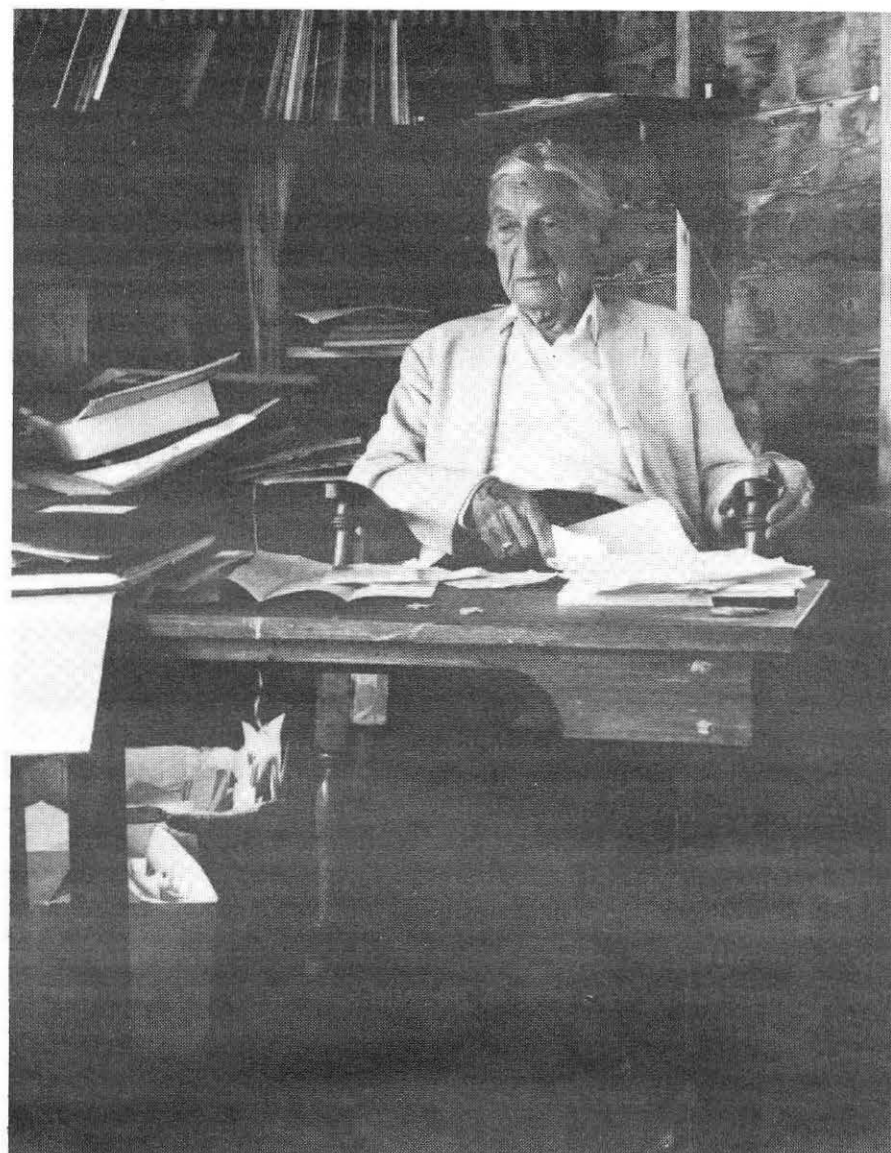
When Snow stuck to his best subject, he was as good a poet as he could be, and probably better than we deserve for ignoring him. When he writes of "Torching Herring" illegally at night in a remote cove, or of the hope for Spring causing people to remove too early the banking around a house, no one can touch him. When he gives his abundant humor full play, as he frequently does, you know you're in sure and hearty hands. It makes you want to load up the car with fish and potatoes, and drive to Hartford to locate the ghost of Wallace Stevens. **Whisht**, you would say. Then you would check for **gurry** on Steven's grave and see whether anyone is **moithered**. And with the potatoes rotting and the fish beginning to stink, you would swing over to Middletown to the Press to see about reissuing for us what is ours. **Whisht** now, everyone is dead; let us praise the **thraneen**.

Terry Plunkett  
Hallowell  
*teaches at UMA*

## Sailor Philosophy

*Life is a coil of rope:  
Let it lie on the shore  
In the sun of too much idleness,  
It twists so full of kinks  
That no one can straighten it out;  
Mildew and rot creep in,  
And grass shoots up through its decay  
  
But if we stretch it out  
On boats and hauling lines,  
Giving it little rest,  
It frays and unravels,  
And when our need is greatest,  
Breaks in a northeast gale,  
Tearing our boats from their moorings,  
Strewing them over the sea.  
Is there never a way to use wisely  
This Gordian-knotted rope-coil of life?*

Wilbert Snow



## Taking away the Banking

*When March winds carried prophecies of June,  
And gray days were no longer winter-killed,  
We all went out and worked till afternoon  
To take the spruce-limb banking off, and filled  
The air with shouts, heaping what soon would be  
A bonfire blazing by the willow tree.*

*We tugged at big ends of the bottom brush,  
The small ends as reluctant to let go  
As winter was himself, although the rush  
Of warmth, once started, was an overflow  
Of sunny days, bluebirds, and brooklets racing  
Like children from worn mothers, tired of chasing.*

*We found that spring already underneath  
Had started on his work; the light-brown grasses  
Were flaunting spots of green, the little teeth  
Of mice and snouts of worms and chiseled passes —  
Worms we sent wiggling as a tempting cud  
For hungry flounders coming out of mud.*

*O there were ugly days enough to come,  
With rain and sleet and April flurries of snow,  
Big winds that moaned and made the wires hum,  
And neighbors calling out, "We told you so";  
But looking on it now I think the days  
We coaxed the spring along, and felt the rays*

*Of March intensify the balsam smell  
In those green boughs, and saw the underpinning  
Exposed once more, and children run pellmell  
To hunt for crocuses, set fancies spinning  
More rapidly than blooming hours of May  
When all the hills of God kept holiday.*

Wilbert Snow

## Hoot, Wise-Ass and Me (excerpt)

It's been a little over forty years since my mom put the name Bryan Miller on my birth certificate. Well, maybe more than a little. But what-the-hell, age don't matter when you got my looks. Most people seem surprised when I tell them my twenty-two year old kid ain't my brother. Of course, to hear him tell it, it's because his rough life with me has taken an early toll on his face, and I only look good by comparison.

When he starts singin' that song, I know he's rubbin' it in that I work him too hard. See, I got me my own wood business, and I don't want to brag, but I'm one of those self-made walkin' success stories you read about in the Wall Street Journal, and my kid works for me in my logging operation. He'd probably say he works *with* me, but sometimes that kid has an attitude problem. Can't blame him, you know. It's hard when your dad's a super power.

Nothin' better than startin' each mornin' with my kid sittin' beside me as we head out to the woods with Marilyn. She's my pickup. Thought she was my girl there for a minute, didn't ya? No, Marilyn is much more reliable, dependable and better lookin', I might add, than my girl, but that's another story.

We strike out each day to do real man's work — sawing those trees down and bringin' 'em to roadside with our Bug. That's short for Jitterbug, the rig we made from an ol' tractor we found and some spare junkyard parts we managed to salvage. My kid's a real talent when it comes to Project Management, I call it. Takes a little project and manages to turn it into something mega-size. Take the Bug, for instance. My kid finds this ol' rusty tractor somebody left under a bush, and before you knows it, he turns that bush buggy into a real-life rusty hunk of pure Business Asset. That hunk is movin' and a hummin', but my kid still isn't satisfied. "Needs a bit 'a polish," he says.

I loaded Marilyn up with a full load of Commodity and while I was gone deliverin' it to the woodyard, that kid got some paint — industrial strength blue, it was called. Turned out to be electric neon blue. But it's sort of catchy, once you get used to it. He wanted to surprise me and painted Flying Tiger teeth down its sides.

"Lookin' good, John" I tell him. John. That's my kid's name. No sissy name for him. What in hell was my mom thinkin' of back them forty and some years ago, when she named me Bryan Tobias Miller — and with a "y," yet? It wasn't too bad when I was little. Most of my friends couldn't spell, but when the army drafted me and sent me to Ford Dix, well, that's when I found out how easier my life would've been if my name was John or Tom. Hell, nobody'd believe the toughest part of Basic was Rollcall.

Been different if I brought him up when he was young. But John lived with his mother after the divorce, and I only got him on weekends. Sometimes. When I was in Maine. It was hard for a while, especially when I got back from Nam. But that's another story. It's taken me a while, but I've got my act together, and John lives with me. Not 'cause he has to, but 'cause he wants to.

We pooled our money and bought a little trailer. Mobile home, the real estate man called it. Got it for a great price 'cause it was used, and there's no-used like "Maine used," you know. Needed a few repairs, so me and my Project Manager gets together and decides how we're goin' to fix it up. Just took a few trips to the junkyard with Marilyn, and we loaded her up with some salvage parts, and in no time we had it like new. Luckily we had the neon blue paint left over from the Bug that finished the job, nicely. John wanted to paint those tiger teeth on the sides like he did the Bug, but I didn't think the mailman would deliver, if he did.

Wished I could've been there, being his role model, so growin' up would've been easier for him. But he turned out better than most. It's all in them genes, that DNA and all. Thank god he took after me when it came to looks, and not his mother. Looks the spittin' image of me. Maybe not so bald in front. Damn, he's got my Ex's manner of walkin'. If I've told John to stand up straight, I've told him a thousand times. He'd be taller than me, for sure, if he ever did, but no danger of his findin' that out. He walks like he's duckin' tree limbs, just like his mother. If figured my ex-wife and her family were part of the missing link . . . you know, linkin' those monkeys to that there revolvin' theory of man? The poor kid comes by it naturally. But I remind him the Army will take that out of him, not as fast as if his name was Bryan Tobias, but they will, just the the same. He just gives me that slow, quiet grin of his, and pokes me in my beer belly. Camaraderie. That's what me and my kid got. Back slappin', good-timin' camaraderie.

"Commodities," is what I tell John. "You're in Commodities, boy." Yes sir, even a woodcutter has to have the right packaging. When my boy and me hits a single's bar and I show him how to pick up girls, well, that's "Numero uno," I

tell my kid. "Impress 'em with the Commodities."

Of course, Wise-ass — that's my son's nickname. He'll remind me my own track record ain't so hot. But I tell him, I've been around the track a few more times than he has. I got a handicap.

When we come up to a couple of girls at a bar, that's where I shine. John can witness the smoothest delivery, just by watchin' the Master. "It's step one for them to play hard-to-get," I tell John. John says they ain't playin'. But I remind him that it's all part of the game. They act that way only to let us know they're not part of that new female movement. You know, them types that think they don't need men. Who pump iron. Their idea of a good time is to arm wrestle, right in public, with the crowds placin' bets out loud. And most of them bettin' on the women.

I call our little experiences at meeting women "adventures," but the little Wise-ass, he call them strike-outs.

"Look," I tell my kid, "you can't expect the course of true love to be smooth sailing all the time, right?"

"Yeah, but with you as my skipper," he tells me, "I'm never goin' to get off shore."

Ingratitude. He's not always like that. Like when he lets me wear his shirts. We're about the same shirt size. I have no trouble with his tee shirts, but those damn tight western shirts he likes to wear with the snap buttons. Damn, those snap buttons can be embarrassing.

I borrowed one of his bright plain western shirts, once, and was talking to a real cute young thing up at the bar. There I was, explaining to her what a Commodity was, and before I could even get to the good part about High Leverage, Hedging and Short Selling, the damn snap button covering the fruit of my loom starts to pop and the next and the next, and there's Wise-ass, starting to laugh, and before you know it, everybody at the bar's laughing, and there goes Wise-ass and the sweet young thing I am talking to, headin' out the door toward Marilyn.

"That's okay, sweetcheeks," says the female bartender standing behind the bar, "You wanna arm-wrestle?"

Hoot, my old buddy, says, "Later, honey, he's leavin' with me." Just what I needed right then. I was some embarrassed, but here he was, my perfect excuse.

"What kept you, Hoot?" I answer, trying to act natural. I follow him, tryin' to ignore the whistlin' and laughin'.

Once outside in the parking lot, I see Marilyn right where I'd parked her, only now, Marilyn's windows are so steamed up, I just hope all that moisture don't shrink the new imitation sheepskin upholstery. Damn that Wise-ass. He waits until I get that girl all fired up with Commodity talk, then he steps in for the closing round.

"Forget it, Bryan." Hoot grins at me and motions toward his parked truck. "Get in. What you need is a change of scene."

He tells me he knows a perfect place for a real man to stop in, down a few drafts and get away from the cares of the world. "Happened by it accidentally," Hoot says. "The sign outside is so tiny, it don't even hint at the big-time glamour inside."

I am gettin' some excited, 'cause Hoot was one guy who'd been around, and if he could recommend a place, well, it must be some great. Said it was run by a guy named Bear and his missus. Seems Bear used to be in the lumber business, back when, and he had a real hankerin' for Maine woodsmen, knew and respected the breed.

Now, Hoot and me go back a way. In fact, we got drafted at the same time, and after Basic, we were over in Nam together. There's nobody better or safer in the woods than Hoot. Got his own way of cutting that should be patented. But when it came to women . . . well, he's noted for not being too — fussy.

Figure it's because he's so damn nice, and don't want to hurt anybody's feelings. but that guy can attract dogs like chopped sirloin. I never saw such ugly beasts as some of the dates Hoot gets collared with. So I try to ask the next question delicate.

"Hoot, what are the girls like?"

He turns to me and gives me a slow smile. "Would I lie to you, Man?"

I am still feeling ornery about what happened in the bar and about all the laughin' and all, and I don't think the cure to my bad mood is to spend the night with the lead dog of Hoot's team.

"No, really Hoot. I want to know. What do they look like?"

Hoot took a deep drag of his hand-rolled cigarette. "They're all a vision of loveliness, Bryan. They know how to treat a man. Not an arm wrestler among 'em."

"Hoot, how old are they?"

"Young. They're young."



"Twenty? Thirty? Over forty?" I try not to sound anxious.

"Yeah."

"Yeah, what?"

"That's about right."

I start to wonder how long it will take me to hitch a ride back to the bar, and wonder if John will still be in the truck, but then I decide it's too early to go back home, so what-the-hell, the evening can only get better.

"Don't worry, Bryan. If you don't like 'em, we'll go right away. You know I've always been lucky with the ladies."

That remark really worried me. But maybe he was right. He never came down with rabies, that I knew of. "How much farther?" I ask, trying to sound hopeful.

"Just up the road. See? Look at the crowd in that parking lot. You're in for a fun time, pal."

Something about the place seemed kind of homey. It looked like an old barn. Someone had recently covered it with new cedar shingles. Instead of driving each nail into the previous shake, whoever did the job hammered the nail in the center of each shingle, givin' the building a sort of determined look, like it had been shot with an M-60 machine gun.

Yeah, before I got out of the truck, I had a good feeling about the place.

"And listen to that band, Bryan. You can even hear it out here. Good speakers."

"Yeah, I like it loud."

As we walked toward the well-lit entrance, I noticed a little sign pushed behind the DRINK BUDWEISER art sculpture hanging over the door. THE BEAR'S LAIR.

I opened the rough-hewn hemlock swinging doors and what happened next nearly took my breath away. Hoot was comin' right behind me fast, and he pushed me right into the waiting arms of Brenda, the Lair's number-one cocktail waitress.

Well, it wasn't exactly the waiting arms — actually, Brenda was leaving her shift and was on her way out when we sort of collided. Pushed, she called it, in fact, she was some mad, and threatened to call the bouncer, a mean mother named Mungo, but Hoot winked at me, and said it was probably just Brenda's way of getting attention. I could tell she liked me, right off. Women do that, you know.

I wanted to go over and check her out, I mean, check out her injuries. But Hoot pulled me down towards the bar. The place was fillin' up, fast. I did look back and tried to wave to Brenda, but she just kept pointing her middle finger in the air at me. Checkin' her hand to see if it was broke, Hoot figured.

"Come on, Bryan, there's more where that came from." He kept leadin' me in between the crowd. Hoot motions for me to notice how slick the new padded bar is. "Bear and his missus did it themselves. Real genuine Naugahide. No expense spared for their patrons. That's what they call us, 'patrons.'" Hoot pointed to several signs taped on the painted walls. PATRONS WILL NOT SPIT ON THE FLOOR. And PATRONS MUST WEAR SHOES AT ALL TIMES. Hoot winked at me. "What'll you have — Patron?"

My spirits started to soar. I knew I was in love with that Brenda. Those bright red curls and those pouty red lips — why, she was the most beautiful woman I ever saw, and I know the sparks of true love when I see them. Just wait till John hears about this place. In fact, this place is too good for him.

My eyes are having trouble getting used to the light, or lack of it. The Bear's Lair is some dark and smells of Bull Durham, booze and woodsmen. I like it.

The walls and ceiling are painted black and little red Christmas tree lights dangle down from the ceiling, "New York Style," Hoot says. I notice a small dance floor over in the corner, roped off.

"No, that's where the band plays," Hoot said. "Keeps the crowd — I mean, patrons, away from the boys when they're playin'."

Hoot orders a couple of Buds, and I start to look around at the girls. After just running into the love of my life, they all look like beagles. But there's Hoot, laughin' and jokin' with several cute young pups. He always starts them with a trick question. Always asks them if they know who Gerald Ford is. If they say, no, he grins, winks at me and I know she has just passed 'the test.'

If anything turns Hoot off quick, it's a girl that knows more than he does. He's been conductin' tests ever since I knowed him. Back a few years, it was Lyndon Johnson, then Nixon, and now Ford. Only once did I see it bomb. That was when he asked a girl who Gerald Ford was. She hit him over the head with her bar bottle. Seems she was left high and dry by G.F. (no similarity to the test question) and she thought Hoot knew it and was rubbing it in.

He got lucky on that one, if I remember. G.F.'s girlfriend ended up telling

Hoot how her heart was breakin' and Hoot told her how he was a doctor and knew just the cure. But what a dog. I think Hoot should have told her he was a vet.

I watch the crowd in the wide reflection of this Paul Bunyon-size mirror up against the whole length of wall behind the bar. Flanking the center is a big assortment of booze bottles on shelves that line each side of an old-fashion silver cash register. It sits in the middle, like a big fat Buddha. The Buddha. The Budweiser Lights, they look like little wagon lanterns, hang from each side. Real plastic ivy streams down in colorful garlands on both sides. Well, it reminded me of this picture of an altar in a temple. I'd seen it somewhere in People's magazine.

I watched Hoot in the mirror. He waved to the bartender to hurry with the Buds. The girl standing next to Hoot introduces herself as "Blossom." I could tell by the smile on Hoot's face that she passed her exam, top of her class. She told us the crowd tonight usually isn't this noisy. It was too early for them to be feeling good yet. But this was a good place to bring your girl, because Mungo, the bouncer, was number one with Crowd Control.

I asked her to point out Mungo. Blossom just looked around and said Mungo must be practicin' out back. I was hopin' some action might break out. I wanted to see this Mungo guy. Then I remembered John, and I just thought of a way to get back at the little Wise-ass. Yeah, I might tell him about the Lair, after all.

Our Buds finally came. A small sparrow of a woman shot into the space next to me at the bar. "Wanna dance, cutie?" she said in a bird-like voice. I looked around. Hoot was busy with Blossom, giving her what sounded like his "flying air cargo into Alaska" story.

"I like your shirt," said sparrow. No doubt about it, she was talkin' to me.

"My shirt?" She didn't mean my damn shirt, that wasn't my shirt, but damn Wise-ass' shirt, and if I moved too quick, it would split open on me again.

"Yeah," said sparrow. "But if you'd . . ." and she rips my shirt open with one solid yank. "And get rid of . . . this." She pulls at my tee-shirt and rips the front clean off. Must admit, it wasn't one of John's most sturdy, but that bird snatched me bare in one fell swoop.

"That's more like it, Sweetpie." She pulls up the collar of my western shirt, and rubs her hands down the front of my burly, hairy, muscular, brawny chest.

"Way to go," yelled Hoot. "What does she do for an encore?"

"There . . . That's sexy," says this woman, who's startin' to look not too bad, after all. She's tucked my shirt back into my jeans quicker than a hot-wire ignition start-up. "Cool. That's really cool," she says.

She leads me out onto the dance floor. The chick start to fly. The dance floor is crowded. I never saw a body jump so high, up and down so quick, that wasn't hooked to a live wire at the other end.

I look over and see Hoot and Blossom, already on the floor. Hoot's teaching her the Backlash Boogie, and I'm glad they don't see this chick's unique moves. I'm not sure how to tell Hoot what I had done. I didn't know, myself. But I knew I'd never wear a tee-shirt again.

The band takes a break, and the chick makes a landing, needing a drink, she says. We work our way slowly off the dance floor. Hoot and Blossom motion us to join them at one of the little round tables.

Blossom and the chick, who has introduced herself as Trixie and a Gemini, leave to powder their noses.

"Well, Bryan, didn't I tell you this was some place?"

"Hoot, I've got to hand it to you, this is just what I needed."

"And what do you think about Blossom? She's no dog, now is she?"

"Woof."

"Well, Trixie will never stop trucks, you know. By the way, what did you do to her out on the dance floor?"

"Nothin'." I took a long draw from my bottle. "She likes my chest."

"You're lucky. She know who Gerald Ford is?"

"I'm afraid to ask. With her track record, she probably has gone out with him."

"They told me they have a hot band here Saturday nights," Hoot said. "Chainsaw Five plus Two." Hoot drew a long drag from his cigarette. "Tell you what, Bryan. This Saturday, you and me'll come down here and check out the action, what do ya say?"

Rememberin' that beautiful redhead, I ask, "Think Brenda will be workin'?"

"What the hell, we'll go, anyway," he said.

"It's a deal," I says to Hoot. "Can't break that poor girl's heart."

Jackie Manning  
Oakland

## CODA

*The hamster and guinea pig and cat and two bricks went into a burlap bag, which she tied with strong twine and submerged in the full bathtub. Then she took her rifle down from its rack in the barn and shot the dog, then the horse, one bullet between the eyes for each. She remembered how proud her father had been when she had wanted to learn to shoot, when she had excelled and had begun to win trophies and ribbons.*

Joan stretched her long legs, kicked off her sandals, and accepted the cup of tea with inordinate gratitude. "I'm so glad you called," she said. "You can't imagine how much I needed to get out of that house."

Sally brushed aside an errant strand of long dark hair and grinned. "Kids on the warpath again?"

"I think it's a miracle either one of them has lived past the age of five. All I've heard today is, 'Ma, can't we please get a guinea pig? Please, please, can't we, huh? We'll take care of it, Ma, promise!'"

"Guinea pig? I don't get it."

Joan looked sheepish. "Well . . . the babysitter backed out at the last minute and I had to get to class because we were having an exam and I couldn't think of anyone else . . ."

"You called **Deborah**?"

"I should hang my head in shame. I only call her when I want something."

"And she came right over . . ."

"And she brought that glorified rodent with her. 'The kids will have fun with it,' she said. You should have seen her — all smiles and giggles and bouncy. When I left she and the kids and the guinea pig were sitting in the middle of the rug, really whooping it up."

Sally rolled her eyes. "Well, that's a switch. When I saw her last weekend she was so depressed she made **me** depressed. I didn't know whether to turn and run or to give her a big hug and tell her she was really important to me. She is — but if things don't improve soon I'm going to cut her off. She's driving me whackonuts."

"We could take a ride out there so you could see this miraculous turnaround." She grinned. "I could get pointers on raising guinea pigs."

"Bitch."

*Next, she got on the telephone. Yes, she said to the electric company and the oil company and the cable TV company and the water company and the telephone company, yes, she said, she was leaving the area, going far away, yes, she said, she would like all accounts closed, everything turned off, today, today was the last day she would be here. When she hung up the phone for the last time she was smiling.*

"Maybe her new shrink is helping her deal with all the problems she thinks she has."

Sally shook her head. "I don't know. She wants her life figured out **for** her. He wants her to do that herself."

"She has to someday. I admit it's rotten that her father was a drunk who beat up on her mother and that mother ran off and left her alone with daddy, who turned around and started beating on her, but dammit, that all happened 20 years ago."

"She has the self-esteem of a turnip."

"Nobody loves me, everybody hates me, I'm going out and eat worms," Joan chanted.

"Not nice."

"Why should I be? You do enough for both of us. You try and try to help her and all she says is, 'Oh, I'm so dumb, I'm such a bad person, I don't deserve anything . . .' Jesus! She should have some of **my** problems, dammit. The city's going to dig up my septic tank and expect me to pay for it, Lloyd's decided to fight for custody of the kids, my new boss at work is an obnoxious twit and the car's got to have a valve job. I'd be glad to donate one or two to Deborah so she'd have something to **really** worry about."

*She pulled the stopper from the bathtub and reached for the sodden, inert bundle. It was heavy and hard to handle. She wrapped a towel around it so water wouldn't drip all over the rug, then walked briskly down the hall and into the mud room and gently laid both bag and towel in the trash can. She did not like leaving her friends in that ugly, dented aluminum thing, but there was nothing better, nicer, neater for them to lie in, and anyway, she was running out of time.*



Photo by Michael Howland

"I'm being a bitch," Joan said. "Deborah was fun last night."

"She **is** that way sometimes."

Joan grimaced. "And if I paid attention to her, I'd know that. Right?"

"You said it, I didn't."

"Make me feel guilty. Go right ahead, make me feel like a real shit. I can't stop you."

"That's not what I'm saying."

Joan sipped her now lukewarm tea. "You do it all. Talk to her. Give her your time. Listen. Empathize. I do zilch."

"You **could** go see her once in a while," Sally said.

*Back in the bathroom, she replaced the stopper and turned on the "Hot" faucet, let it run full force, filling the room with steam. She closed the door, opened the medicine cabinet and took out a small box of razor blades. She laid the box on top of the soap dish and began to remove her clothes, folding them neatly and placing them on top of the toilet seat. When she was naked she turned off the faucet, dipped a finger into the water. It was very hot. That was good.*

*She climbed into the tub, gasping as she lowered her body into the water. Her heart was racing, pounding inside her chest.*

*She stretched to her left and reached for a towel, tugged it off the rack and dried her hands carefully. She closed her eyes, sighed, gathered stillness in her mind, opened her eyes again, reached for the little box. She was glad she'd remembered to buy single-edge.*

*She'd decided on three vertical cuts for each wrist. She knew they had to be deep, and she hoped it wouldn't hurt too much.*

*The first cut barely hurt at all. She made the second with less hesitation, feeling only a small, sharp sting. With the third it had become easy, a quick, firm cut deep into her flesh.*

*She smiled and began working on the other wrist.*

"Ok, ok, I can't stand your guilt trip anymore," Sally said. "If we leave now we can be there in half an hour and you can check out the guinea pig situation. I just hope to hell she isn't depressed."

**Janet C. Beaulieu**  
Bangor  
writes book reviews for BDN



# Looking Back

What the hell did you know at twenty-two, Gene thought, really know about life and about what might be going to follow you around for the rest of it, like a shadow, making things dark wherever you went? Because you couldn't see it just then, you were young and the sun was in your face, how could you know about a darkness, behind you, about to follow you, into your old age?

Gene was frightened, at twenty-two, but he didn't know he was frightened. What he was frightened of was being the only one left, alone, without anyone to kick around with. It seemed to him at twenty-two that a man of twenty-two should be ready to live a man's life and, if he were not, then being ready might come with doing the things men did who were ready.

His father had, after all, gotten married at twenty-two. But Gene still had guys around. He was not away yet, not lonely in a barrack, barren and ugly, not thinking of Sunday meals and of visiting his father's parents with the whole family and everywhere people speaking the French that warmed him like the comforter on his bed at home on a cold night. He wanted to be part of that, but he did not know what it meant, what it would cost in dreams. How could you, at twenty-two, he thought now, how could you have known?

He had grown lonely, away. He had missed his mother and father. He had thought, as if he were setting things up for himself, that he would marry Muriel. It had seemed a good idea to be a man, to be what a man was, to do every day, every year, what a man did, to "work towards something." He was tired of being unsure. He wanted to be sure, to be happy.

"Oh, Eugene," she said when he finally reached her over the phone — a big deal in those days. He had had to have an operator make an appointment with Muriel. How impatiently, Muriel said later, she had waited for two o'clock to roll around to hear what she wanted to hear.

"Oh, Gene, yes, yes." And shouldn't they be married on his very next furlough, and oh yes August was so pretty, and oh three days isn't very long but if it's all he had, and don't say that — a lot of men return from overseas ok, on their feet, but you're right just the same. We shouldn't put anything off.

Their day in August, the day that was to make him a man, that day had been hot and steamy and he had stood, nervous, apprehensive, and hopefully handsome, in his uniform and had felt the perspiration trickle down his side. Even now, sitting in the kitchen, watching TV and thinking of all of this, he could remember having been hot and uncomfortable and having thought: I'm married. At last, I'm a man.

He was happy then because he had done something he had thought about all his life and he had wondered what it would be like and he had known that being married was not the same as making love and he had thought about that all his life too and had wondered what that would be like and that night they would do it and perhaps they'd have a baby and if something happened to him there would be a child to follow.

In those days when they were young and there was no way to know that they would not have everything they wanted, they had said to each other that the children, whoever they would be, would finish high school. High school was special. It was called the best years of your life, but it had not been for them.

Muriel and he had left school, school which was home to les americains but not to them, for what seemed good reasons then, at the time, but seemed like less good reasons to their children who did not understand what it was like to be laughed at by the Yankee teachers when you said "I like that, me," said it just like you breathed the air.

After quitting school, he had gone to Connecticut with his cousin Jacques. There he worked in a White Tower Restaurant, washing dishes, and then he apprenticed at Pratt-Whitney. His father had said proudly to everyone that Eugene had a good job. But, later Gene moved

to the shipyards in New Jersey where the money was very good before the war. You could earn \$2.00 an hour. His father had worked all his life and was not earning \$2.00 an hour. It didn't seem to Gene in New Jersey that a high school diploma was going to make any difference to a person who was doing as well as he was.

Then one morning, when he sat listening to the morning radio, savoring a cigarette before heading for Mass with his roommate, his cousin Jacques, it shot through him like a torpedo, the news about Hawaii. He and Jacques had talked about it and they had enlisted. They were young and could do anything. And Muriel was always there. Not quite his sweetheart but someone special back home.

Later, it seemed like a radio drama, that period when he bought a diamond and called her up to ask her to marry him and then they had gotten married one weekend. Afterwards she had come with him and worked in a munitions factory not far from the base. It didn't take long before he was shipped from there to overseas and she stayed to work and had put away money to buy their first house. Selling it much later hadn't brought back to them all they had invested. There were three children by that time.

Muriel spent all those years alone before they were married and afterwards, later, when he was gone so much, working at night after his regular job, working on Saturdays, Muriel worked between pregnancies and quit when the children cried every day and the lady next door who was paid to babysit locked them out all morning and all afternoon and he had said Muriel was to stay home: a mother should be with her children: they would manage somehow without her working outside. She gave "parties" and they got plastic dishes and clothes and housecleaning detergents cheaper than at the store.

When they finally emerged from the house parties and the sixty-hour weeks, this mean life that he hadn't known he'd have when he set off to make big money in Connecticut before the war, he had no more hair on top of his head; his temples were salted with white; his children were grown-up and the whole world had changed.

It was so long ago; he really couldn't remember what he had known then about the time that was to become now. Had he really thought that Muriel would not want the farm that he had dreamed of? Could he have known that they would not feel the same way about furniture and home and clothes for the kids? Feel together so that they would sound a resonance like a new motor in fine tune and not clang and bang so that things would wear down between them?

When they had had the children, five in all, strewn across the years of their youth, so that, when it was all over, when they finally emerged, they were very tired and he no longer felt like beginning. He had simply thought that that was the way things were. Working nights, when he was tired, working Saturdays, when he was thinking of the garden, its soil dark and friable now, waiting for him. What else could he have done during those years when they needed to buy shoes and dental care and flour? He was a man like his father and he did things a man did. It was easy in those days to know, as he did not know now, what a man did. Later, it was not so easy because people like his children did things he did not understand.

His children spoke like other people's children, certainly not like his own. They had gotten loans and scholarships and college diplomas. They had become like houses with massive facelifts, houses that you couldn't recognize anymore.

His own life seemed like a ranch house that had been built without the right plans, the plans he had provided, once.

What if? he thought. What if I had bought the farm I wanted back in '47 instead of the house Muriel preferred? Or what if I had stayed in the service as a careerman? Or what if I had finished the apprenticeship at Pratt-Whitney instead of going for the higher paying job in New Jersey?

Ah! but he hadn't known.

Denis Ledoux  
Lisbon Falls  
is writing about four  
generations of a  
Franco-American family



Photo by Brenda Lee

## Whitey Herzog and Me

(October, '87)

You know how it is  
when the day begins with the ball kicking  
sideways,  
a hidden seam in the carpet  
twisting it past you for a hit.  
Little worries become windblown  
or lost against a metrodome roof.  
You know you're licked.

So, even though your coach  
flashes signs:  
go for a run  
write about it  
tune that car  
clean that chimney  
mount those doors  
correct those papers  
look someone in the eye and tell  
her how you feel,  
you let the moment slide  
untagged.

Maybe tomorrow relief —  
a lucky call under blue sky,  
a good bounce on natural turf;  
but for now glove the mood;  
reel easy in the rain with the stock market,  
roll with the rounds of hyper students,  
and in the evening go ahead;  
cholesterol up with red meat  
and oreos,  
slouch into an easy chair  
and veg out on a Magnum rerun.  
This day has stolen you.

Chris Prickitt  
Cambridge, Maine  
*teaches in Dexter*

## Little League

My son is pitching, his team is losing,  
heart gumming like the wad in his jaw,  
jamming the sobs I know so well into his glove.  
He watches the bases load up, just missing  
the fifth grade "man" on second steal third.  
Beyond the diamond, facets of cool wind turn;

twilight's on deck as the breeze picks up  
and the defeated sun slides into home in the west.  
Most parents sit in their cars. I kick the fence,  
bat around the idea of calling **time out**,  
wanting to stop the game and bring him his jacket —  
yet knowing the score of the pre-adolescent,  
I bite my lip, ground my instinct.

Now the guys on the bench,  
overconfident with their ten run lead,  
begin jeering his name. Their voices lob  
the two syllables into the clouds like pop flies.  
I remember pronouncing his name for the first time —  
spread-eagled in stirrups, awaiting the placenta.

Eleven years later he stomps his new cleats into the mound  
of his self-control, squints and winds into a throw  
so wild, I look away. His next pitch is slow-motion,  
frame-by-painful-frame  
until the midget at the plate  
socks it into a line drive.

The short stop fumbles; his hat, two sizes too big,  
falls into his eyes. He sits on the ball,  
then, as an afterthought, knocks it over to first.

But the kid on the bag is a spaceman  
tracing the plane overhead with his finger.  
The fat centerfielder wants dinner,  
cries out in hunger, then promptly lies down  
I sense the coach senses trouble  
as my son knuckles under and frowns,  
shooting a well-rehearsed glare  
into the mirror of crowd.

The ball at his side, he leagues with the catcher,  
pretending the leather they love will do what they want.  
I want the bottom of the ninth, a bath, and a nightcap.  
The streetlights of our suburb spotlight  
the handicap of my loving. I want my heart  
to loosen its hold on the huge field  
of Mother. The backstop squaring my view,  
I see all the angles of watching him suffer.

Tonight, from my dugout of poems,  
I'll pull Casey in Mudville.  
I'll massage his blacks and his blues,  
allow him his curses, snap a towel, give him five —

In between verses I'll nurture  
the full count of his pride,  
while I still can —  
I'll make it alright.

Deborah Ward  
So. Portland



## Autumn Song

When I was four years old, I broke a leg. The left one. There were three of us on that sled — a big Snow Flyer — a neighbor girl at the front, me in the middle, the babysitter in the rear, and we shot an embankment and collided with a wall, one of those old farm walls of piled stones. The neighbor girl, who's name was Paula, and who didn't suffer a scratch, said "Wow!" The babysitter, also a neighbor, about fourteen and already beautiful, said, "Oh, shit!" I said, "Ow! Ow! Ow!" Not a single stone was moved.

I'm forty-years older, now, balding, a two-pack-a-day smoker; my wife walked out a few years ago, taking her two children, who used to be our two children, with her, and that leg doesn't bother me a bit. Never has. The horror of it is, it all matters. It's all part of the big recollective puzzle winking at you from warped shards, like the broken mirrors of a fun house, when Death confronts you with two faces.

You have to be careful with a memory. It will give back the lies you so carelessly gave to it. I'd carried the kernel of that idea all through my father's house, every room, adding to it with touch and smell, gazing at walls and furniture; things, his things, coming down to me by way of his passing. In the attic, I uncovered proof of my existence, those things that wouldn't allow for denial of a broken leg.

Hard evidence is a tangible truth and I held it in my hands, reverently, the tiny leg cast, yellowed, still holding the scrawl of family and neighbors in ink grown coppery. I'd found it inside a thick wool sock in the attic. My immortality had been insured, preserved in a blanket chest. Now what?

Each generation seems to leave us more mortal. My daughters are thirteen and fifteen and last year's school photos are the oldest ones I've got. Why are we so reluctant to give the past storage room? It's because we don't have blanket chests, anymore. We don't have attics anymore, either, which is probably why we have no blanket chests. I'd wanted a house with an attic, a nice big Victorian or, at the very least, a Colonial. My wife thought otherwise. A modern woman. We didn't have a blanket chest, or an attic. We had garage sales, the marketplace of family heirlooms, fifty cents to ten bucks. "I can't believe it," she once said. "We made a hundred and thirty-seven dollars on that junk. People will buy anything."

The one thing about memories, though, even those loaded-down with embellishments; you can sell them, or give them away, but no one ever really owns them but you. Harpo Szowyki belongs to me.

Every town, regardless of size, or geographic place, has its complement of strange citizens. Not the street-corner mendicant, or the cracked evangelist raging at humanity from his peculiar crossroads, but the genuine oddball, who simply cannot, or is not allowed, to plug-in anywhere. Harpo Szowyki was my town's number one guy.

Harpo didn't care squat for Saturday mornings, so it came as no surprise that it was on a Saturday morning he made his leap to freedom. "Whoop-de-do, so long to you, ass-over-landbox into the blue." Hangovers were the problem. Not that Harpo didn't suffer them on other days of the week, but those of a Saturday morning seemed to hammer him especially.

I gave Harpo a ride into the shopping district, on that Saturday morning. I'd left town several years before, a few months after my wife'd made her escape. I was back to bear final witness, along with my four brothers, to the completion of my father's life-cycle. I was a bit hung over myself.

I met Harpo at the traffic rotary; he was awaiting a break in the stream of vehicles to cross to the sidewalk that would take him over the river to downtown. Hands in the pockets of his baggy chinos, New York Times under one arm, the pockets of his Hawaiian shirt — the red one with yellow and green pineapples — bulging with smokes and eyeglasses, a cigarette at the corner of his fat mouth, looking mostly at the ground, so's not to make eye-contact with anyone. One-Ton Szowyki was his handle. In the light of that bright September morning, he looked like a foreign flag.

"Well, well," he said as he climbed in, "it's been quite a while," in a natural basso-profundo that would've earned him a fortune in radio.

We rode over the river on the high, concrete-arch bridge, named in memory of something, most likely one of the wars. I'm always conscious of the bridge, which looks, from upriver, like a Roman aqueduct. It always gives me a warm, welcome home, feeling. The spring truculence of the Androscoggin River is safer to view from this bridge, than from the steel-span farther up. I have only distrust for the steel-span.

Harpo said, "Mother's still hanging on and the bills are astronomical."

"Back up a little, Harpo. What are you talking about?"

"The nursing home. She's been there a year. Since her last heart attack. The house is gone and all of her savings. Now, they want me to pay the deductible

on her medicare. With what?"

I hadn't known his old mother was still alive. She was forty four when Harpo was born and, as his father'd caught a bunch of machine gun bullets on some Pacific island two years later, she was all there was. She'd loved Harpo in a way that'd made me feel neglected.

I said, "Yeah, it's tough." Somehow, I didn't dare tell him I'd seen my father off only the day before. Pop had expired in the hospital, under the Travelers Umbrella. I felt guilt at having escaped Harpo's burden. It was nothing new. Just the sight of the guy shot me with remorse, sometimes anger, not a little of which was self-directed. That I didn't carry a full share in Harpo's contretemps was my only consolation.

Harpo and I were born two months apart. He the younger. He and his mother and sister lived across the street, three houses down. The sister, Tamara, was eighteen years older than Harpo. She got pregnant on a three-day church retreat, gave the child up for adoption, and was discovered several months later, early on a Sunday morning, hanging by her neck in the vestibule of Saint Dominic's. They also found four empty bottles, once filled with sacramental hooch, and it's assumed she went to her maker soused. Amen.

Harpo's mother, Elsie, smoked long, slender Honduran cigars and was a squirrel in her own right. Her hair was already gray when Harpo was born, at least I can't recall seeing it another shade, tightly braided and rolled into a knot at the back, like a Bavarian milkmaid. Her own screwiness, not to mention the cigars, discouraged easy friendships, but those few never wavered in their affection for her. She bore the loss of husband and daughter with serene finality, along with her normal tics, twitches and off-the-wall exclamations, continued her incomparable baking, and absolutely doted on Harpo, who thought the world of her and inherited every weird gene she possessed, in spades.

Elsie was an only child. She was nine when her mother died, which left her upbringing to her father, a decent sort, who spent his whole life operating a pig farm and slaughterhouse; twelve, or fourteen hours a day, sticking pigs and crushing the skulls of cows with a sledgehammer. He'd come home each evening, hose the blood off his high rubber boots, and sit down to supper like a normal human being. But, all night long, he suffered terrific nightmares. It got so Elsie would sleep right through the yelps and screams and it's hard to say if any of that contributed to her queer nature. As an adult, though, she was big in the animal rights leagues. She'd say, "You see an abused animal and you can bet there's a screaming asshole in the near vicinity."

My earliest recollections of Harpo, from age five, or so, is that of a slightly cracked kid. Alvy Butler, another neighbor, thought Harpo just plain looney and that's what Alvy tagged him with, a few years later. Loon Szowyki. That's a laugh, coming from Alvy, who I knew, even then, was insane. Alvy became a fag, in later life, and died, two years ago, in San Bernadino, from AIDS. He wasn't a fag growing up, though; he was a well-dressed hoodlum and chief needle of Loon Szowyki, at least till he went off to college in California, which was probably where he went homo. Alvy showed up six years ago, for our twenty-year high school reunion, calling everyone baby and sweetie, except for Harpo, who'd put on a considerable amount of weight, and who Alvy labeled "One-Ton," before leaving town. By that time, I'd become extremely sensitive to Harpo and winced when I heard the name. Two years ago, hearing of Alvy's demise, I figured he'd finally got his due.

But Harpo took it, in his self-deprecating way, and used it to identify himself to the CB radio crowd. Being an insomniac, he'd switch-on about four in the morning and bellow, "All is well this side of hell! One-Ton here. Anybody got their ears on?" He'd drink beer and keep that up until someone responded. Usually it was the cops, first, telling him to get the hell off channel nine. By eight o'clock he'd be half smashed and the truckers and commuters would hear him singing, "If I had a hammer, if I had a bell, if I had a song to sing, I'd sing it like hell."

He was named Harrison Porter by his crazy mother, who thought he'd be better served in life with an Anglo-Saxon tag. His father'd insisted he be named Jurek, after his paternal grandfather, but Elsie hung fire and the father, after threatening at least once to shoot her and the kid, gave up. He took revenge on Elsie by calling his son Harpo. It would've been unconscionable and unforgivable, had it been someone else, but the name fit Szowyki like a taylor-made suit. Though, in a way, that made his old man even more corrupt.

Harpo had a long, bony face, in those days, and he smiled a lot, which bent his mouth entirely to the right and downward, like a stroke victim. His laugh

was a deep, strangled sound that always brought his hand to his mouth. He walked like a metronome, on boneless legs, each of which had a limp. Eyes like a crazed horse, blue and bright and open wide, always on the move, except in the morning for an hour or two after waking, or later in life when drunk, when his eyes didn't seem to focus on anything. And, while fire-red hair is burden enough for any kid, no one is entitled to more than two cowlicks. Harpo got into hats early on.

Thinking him a little cracked, at age five, was incorrect. When my vocabulary'd expanded a bit, I realized oddball was the proper label. I also came to realize that his IQ was somewhere in the stratosphere and he was in possession of a penis the size of a zucchini.

By age ten, the brain-power was evident. His house had a hi-fi component system unlike anything in town. There were air-suspension speakers in the living room, dining room, den, and Harpo's bedroom, the wiring for which was internal. Harpo'd built the whole thing from a kit, designing his own power booster and equalizer, and even snaked the speaker wiring through the walls. He knew not simply what RMS power and signal oscillation were, but understood what they were. It was also discovered he was trying to decypher calculus and was reading shit like Plato's **Republic**, **The Sound and The Fury**, and **Winesburg, Ohio**. "Hey, Egghead!" Alvy yelled. So long, Loon.

Alvy Butler noticed, about then, that Harpo and I were somewhat friendly and began referring to Harpo as Mike's monkey. There wasn't a day of the week I couldn't kick Alvy's ass, but Lewis Bates, my chief pal, advised that I should lose Harpo. So, I did.

When, at age fourteen, we finally got a look at Harpo naked, after gym class, no one would shower with him. Alvy Butler said, to grow a joint that big, he must be jerking off in his sleep, and we all secretly started pulling our pricks

about four times a day. Egghead became Mule. He was doomed.

Harpo threw the butt of his smoked cigarette out the window and lit another. He went into a coughing fit.

"Maybe it's time to give those up."

"Can't," he replied. "It would ruin my plans for long-term suicide." He started his crazy laugh and broke into coughing.

I dropped him at Queen's Diner, where he would drown his hangover in coffee and read the Times front page to back.

He struggled out of the car. "They don't make 'em like they used to," he muttered. "Listen," he said, poking his face through the open window, "you have a CB installed in this thing and I'll give you a holler, sometime. My handle is One-Ton."

"I just might do that, Harpo." I watched him shuffle into the place, then drove off to a restaurant where I was meeting my brothers for breakfast.

Smoking, he'd said, was his plan for long-term suicide. Cute. Harpo'd started smoking in ninth grade, a year or two after I took up the habit. Then, it was his plan for acceptability, but he'd managed to make even smoking look weird. He began to swear, which for him meant an occasional "shit," or "gosh damn," and, to prove what a good sport he was, he laughed at the jokes and pranks of which he was most often the butt. He could turn his hat sideways on his head and jam his cigarette up his nose and he would piss his pants. Snapping his ass with a towel, or crushing his balls, by seizing his belt and yanking his pants up to his armpits, was always good for a few resonant guffaws.

I was last to arrive. None of my brothers looked any better than I. After Pop died, I'd gone to his house, which had once been my house, too, for all the reasons people do those sorts of things, and they showed up looking for me. With a quart of bourbon. We'd wandered through the place, wondering what to do with forty years of memories, and ended on the porch drinking toasts to



Photo by Brenda Lee

Suicide Bridge Fence in Augusta



childhood.

"You guys look like hell," I said. One of them flipped me the bird. "I gave Harpo Szowyki a ride downtown," I continued. "I didn't know his old mother is still alive."

"I didn't know Harpo was still alive. I thought he was killed in the service years ago. An accident of some kind."

"No," said the brother who'd never left town. "The foolish bastard joined the Marines, of all things. He had a nervous breakdown and he's been screwed up ever since."

Foolish? Maybe not. Of Harpo's schemes to find a fit, that was the one most promising. Had it worked, he would've earned a place in the societal puzzle. Who would dare exclude a Marine vet? The AmVets, American Legion, and VFW would've gone to war for the guy. He could have marched in parades and attended college on the G.I. Bill . . .

The Marines discharged Harpo and gave him a disability check each month. Social Security gave him a check each month, too, and he grew fat and old and walked slowly, with his eyes to the ground. Occasionally, he went to a V.A. hospital some place, for a little emotional sprucing-up.

"A few months ago, the poor slob was in a world of trouble," said the local brother.

"I don't think I want to hear this," I said.

"Coffee all around?" asked the waitress.

"You bet. You'd better leave the pot."

"No can do, honey. But I'll keep it comin'. You want food?"

Everyone ordered. The youngest brother said, "Now, what's this problem Harpo's got?"

I lit a smoke and sucked it in and cold fingers scrabbled up my back.

"Well, it was back in June, a Friday night, I think. Harpo was in the Eagle Cafe drinking beer with Benny Pulsifer and Jack Fitzmorris. Those two are pure trouble when they're sound asleep, but you know Harpo, everybody's buddy. They'd been there quite a while and were pretty juiced when old Alice Rodale walked in. Staggered in, most likely; the old gal'd been making the rounds and was three sheets when she got to the Eagle. Benny invites her over and spends the next hour buying her booze and talking her into giving them all a blow job for two bucks apiece."

"Lord! Give me a break. My stomach is threatening me with all kinds of shit, as it is."

"Go ahead," I said.

"Well, Alice wants five and Benny finally agrees, but Alice says she wants another drink, first, and, while they're waiting for it, the old gal passes-out on the table. The joint is closing, so Benny gives Harpo his keys and tells Harpo to bring his car around to the side-door so they won't have to drag the old lady across the parking-lot. See, Benny figures they can drive someplace and revive the old bat and get the blow-jobs."

"Jesus, this is sickening!"

"Wait, wait, it gets better. So Harpo goes for the car — the bartender still can't figure-out how he even found the damn thing — and Benny and Fitz drag Alice out the door. Harpo found the car, alright. He's never had a driver's license and I don't believe he's ever driven a car, but he got it started and here he comes, around the corner of the building, doing about forty, in reverse. Benny and Fitz drop Alice and jump for cover and Harpo runs over the old lady, clean over, with both tires, and collides with the bartender's car. A helluva wreck."

"Whoa! This isn't funny."

"You're telling me? Harpo's got whiplash like you wouldn't believe and he's holding his neck and still apologizing to the bartender when the cops arrive. Benny and Fitz are hiding out across the street and nobody knows old Alice is hooked up under the front of Benny's car. They found her, when the tow truck lifted the car, and all hell broke loose. The cops charged Harpo with negligent homicide, and Benny and Fitz with some lesser felony. They wanted to slap Harpo with a long list of motor vehicle violations as well, but the whole thing happened on private property."

"He didn't mention any of that," I said. "Only the troubles with his mother and how broke he is. Who went his bail?"

"No one. He finally got a piece of luck. You see, when old Alice crapped-out on the table, she hadn't passed out, she died. The autopsy found a massive coronary."

"I wonder how long those idiots would've tried to revive her, before they

figured it out?"

"Harpo's no idiot," I said.

"Maybe not," said the local brother, "but he's pretty far down river. Even further, since running over the old lady. His brain started sending him funny messages, one of which was to take off all his clothes and sit on the park bench in front of the fire station. The cops drove him down to Togus. He was released only a week or so ago. He didn't mention it, probably because he doesn't remember it."

The waitress started dropping plates of eggs and muffins and danish on the table. "You guys talking about Harpo Szowyki?"

"Yeah. You know Harpo?"

"Not really. But someone came in a minute ago, said Harpo just jumped off the bridge."

There's only one bridge worth jumping from. A fire engine, police car, and rescue unit were parked on the apron when we arrived. Gawkers were strung out along the rail, two-deep, the entire length of the bridge. Vultures on the ramparts. They were looking down and pointing to the water-worn granite, a hundred-feet below. I wished Alvy Bulter hadn't died of AIDS. I wished he was there, standing at the rail, so I could've thrown him over.

Marcel Fontaine was giving the story to a cop. If Harpo was the Town's resident oddball, Marcel is poet laureate and chief witness to all that's relevant. He's also considered the most successful man in town, because he's never worked more than thirty days a year his entire life and is now collecting social security and living in a new elderly housing project.

"He climbed up on the balustrade, there" said Marcel, "which is a wonder in itself, and started singing in that deep, rich voice of his. Then, he spread his arms and pushed off like an olympic diver. I knew he'd landed, when the song stopped. I'll not soon forget the tune."

"You didn't try to stop him?"

Marcel gave that some thought. Then: "Now, just how in hell would I've done that?"

We buried Pop on Friday. Harpo and his mother — Elsie got the news about Harpo a few hours after he'd jumped and decided it was time to join her family — went into the ground on Saturday. There was barely time enough to have my suit pressed. It'd been pretty cozy at the funeral home; Pop and Harpo had opposite viewing rooms, so I could keep an eye on Harpo's action. It was pretty heavy, till word got out that his casket was closed.

Charlie was there each day, for hours at a stretch. Charlie is a bit odd; he had a nervous breakdown about ten years ago. He was Harpo's good friend. The government sends Charlie social security checks.

At graveside, on Friday, an Irish Catholic, McCann, had given my hand a firm shake. "Your father," he said, "I'll miss the man till I'm gone myself."

"He was a good man," I replied.

"He was the best man you'll ever know."

He'd said that with a quiet matter-of-fact sincerity even a total stranger wouldn't have doubted. There was still a little strawberry amid the gray of his head, and the blue of his eyes was bright, though a bit watered-down. I wondered where his children's memories were stored, if he owned a blanket chest, or an old steamer trunk that'd rode the Atlantic to Nova Scotia with his grandfather.

"Mac," I said, "who's going to remember us when there are no more blanket chests, or attics?"

"What the hell's that got to do with anything?"

"I dunno," I shrugged. "Just thought I'd mention it."

Harpo and Elsie were buried half a cemetery away from Pop, close by the high granite wall that shut out the street. Ivy over grew the wall, going crimson with the autumn. Not that Pop would've minded having them for neighbors. He'd always had an immense pity and concern for Harpo and, in the nearly twenty years since Mother'd passed on, he and Elsie could often be seen, in the twilight of soft evenings, standing at the edge of his or her front yard enjoying a cigar and talking. I'd never known him to enter her house, or she his, but his cupboards were always stuffed with her pies, breads, and other goodies.

Charlie was at graveside, apparently cried-out. "He was mentally ill, you know," said Charlie. "But he never took it out on anyone." He started blinking rapidly.

A group of kids were moving along the street. Their song came over the wall. "Whoop-de-do, so long to you, ass-over-branch into the blue."

"For what it's worth, Charlie," I said, "he'll be remembered."

**Robert P. Bourassa**

**Livermore Falls**

writes about "screwballs, oddballs,  
drunks and the disenfranchised"



## Power Takes a Holiday

*"Power never takes two weeks off.*

*Power takes long weekends.*

*And power goes skiing. (One never asks where. One simply inquires, 'Here or Gstaad?' Here means the house in Vail; there means Gstaad the week 'everybody' is there. Everybody, in this case, is the best of Europe's power people as well as a few select Americans.)*

*As you can see, power does not vacation like ordinary mortals.*

*Power holidays.*

*... Power is fond of referring to time as money, and power is fond of thinking this is an original thought ... Power does not give presents for promotions, birthdays, and special occasions.*

*Power gives gifts."*

Lois Wyse

Company Manners

I was holidaying, or rather, pre-holidaying aboard a jumbo jet with Spouse and little Powerpersons (offspring) en route to Gstaad when I discovered my counterfeit autobiography thinly disguised as an executive self-help book, something I picked up at the airport for in-flight diversion. Upon reading it, I very nearly became irritated until I remembered that such a behavioral response could jeopardize the quality Spouse Time I had programmed to coincide with the weekend in Gstaad, and there I would have parties to work, places where it would be essential that I have a good (meaning profitable) time. I knew that I could ill afford an emotional indulgence while holidaying so I squelched an urge to become miffed or even vaguely perturbed.

When it comes to cold, calculating ruthlessness, emotions just get in the way. Still, I could almost sense myself straining to become peeved at the blatant opportunism of my literary imposter. Power does not take an invasion of territory lightly. I knew she'd be at Gstaad (everybody would be), and I mentally drafted a confrontation of manners, a duel of protocol. As she had written in her bogus book, "Work is a twenty-four-hour-a-day event," (How could any intelligent person believe Power wrote such a sentence? I would never structure a sentence with so many hyphens leaning on each other!), and I intended to work overtime despite the fact that the Powers were holidaying.



Photo by Michael Howland



When you are Power, the lines of work and play tend to blur; it's the price of achievement. That's why I always say that all work and no play makes Power weak and vice versa, even though I see it confuses everyone, but that's part of what Power is all about. If I were understood, if I were unwaveringly clear and sincere, I would not be Power. That's why her book threatened me. She was plagiarizing my very sense of identity, making a buck by claiming to help just *anyone* understand how I accumulated power until I *became* Power. How do you stop someone determined to seize Power?

I told the stewardess to bring me a powerful drink, and my request telegraphed to Spouse that I was once again immersed in big-time machinations, my metier as well as my bailiwick, thank goodness. As I pondered possible strategies I heard Offspring practicing small talk, laughing at each other's bon mots even when they didn't know what they were laughing at (a little trick I taught them early.) Soon they would be Power, but not if this former advertising icon turned literary criminal kept encouraging the hoipoloi to become Power. Something had to be done. I could tell by the way the adrenalin made my toes work against the stiff leather of my new Johnston & Murphys.

After touchdown, during limo to destination, Spouse was informed by me of a probable postponement of pre-programmed Enjoyable Spouse Time of a conjugal nature. "Something's come up, I said.

"Not lately," she quipped in reference to our intimate life, so I slapped her silly, but as you may have already gathered, she didn't have far to go. "Couldn't you just put out a memo?"

I told Spouse that I wanted nothing on paper. Spouse then knew that I meant business, which, of course, is part of my nature. "No problem," Spouse responded in the corporate vernacular I made so popular. "I'll just ski." A brief and affectionate peck was in order, which I provided Spouse before my pre-planned tie adjustment, a little something I perform as an indication of spontaneity.

The Power family settled into comfortably luxurious digs offering all the gracious amenities we've come to expect from a world-class resort and proceeded to initiate holiday procedures. I gave Spouse some plastic and advised a somewhat bifurcated schedule whereby Spouse and Offspring would indulge in the usual vacation events while Head-Of-Family carried on vital business activities of a manipulative and conniving nature. Spouse asked if I had my briefcase.

"You mean my lucky briefcase?" I asked to test Spouse.

"Yes, the one that flaunts no designer's emblem and is worn of service so that it bears the dignity of a case that might have carried the documents for the treaty of Versailles."

"I have it, yes, but I may need something stronger." Spouse then knew I really meant business, which, of course, is part of my nature. This was a matter of Power pitted against a brash, greedy, unsolicited challenger. I knew she (target), too, would have a briefcase that looked as if it might have carried the documents for the treaty of Versailles. Flexibility is part of Power. That's why I knew I needed a briefcase that looked as if it had carried the documents for the Japanese surrender of World War II — to one-up her. I called Minion and ordered one Express Mail. After all, time is money, and I was betting my money on vanquishing this renegade Power broker before heading back to Power Central and the tranquil domesticity of Powerhouse. I wanted her licking her wounds, but most of all I didn't want competition. There is only one Power (unless you count Spouse and Offspring). Anything else is just Nuisance, and you can quote me on that as long as you have it approved through my attorneys.

The weather was grand, the slopes topped with fine powder and noble genetics, but still I holidayed fitfully, knowing that the woman who contrived to interlope on Power was well-versed in the attitudes and techniques that got me where I was that day: in a fine pickle. Yet, I reasoned, pickling is just another method of preservation. Perhaps I was in a fine state of preservation. I reviewed my weaknesses and found that they were strengths. Revelling in the revelation, I once again affirmed why I was Power. I Powered, therefore I was Power, to paraphrase some ancient geek who thought he could make a living just sitting around thinking.

Thus inspired, I set out on the slopes with confidence and vigor, searching for Power's Pretender. Finding her wasn't difficult. She had a certain, how should I put it, *style* about her, for who except possibly Jacqueline Onassis would dare show up on the trendiest slope in the world wearing simple black trousers and a black sweater? Most women

need a little more Hollandaise on the asparagus of life. This woman wasn't Jacqueline, but she wasn't asparagus either. She was a sultry dish, and her overall presentation excited renewed hormonal production within me. Too bad she was my nemesis.

With minor difficulty I followed her down the mountain, parallel turn for parallel turn, keeping just far enough back to guarantee me a spot in the chair behind her on the lift back up. She was with a companion, a minion of her own, a man who wore pattern on pattern without shame — a bold, chalk-striped flannel suit with bar-striped shirt and polka dot tie. His Head skis were straight off the rack. He might as well have worn a sign that read "Corporate Gigolo." The gears of the lift hadn't been lubricated recently so it was difficult to eavesdrop through all the squeaking. I did, however, catch Target say, "I'll access that party and work the hell out of it."

"Jes. Jou weel nail heem," her companion offered encouragingly. I assumed that the party to which she referred was that evening's soiree at the Esterhauses, and knowing how Bob Esterhaus loved a little social friction at his parties, I plotted accordingly.

At the lodge I watched my prey sip apres-ski refreshment with her companion (named Sven as I overheard) and considered a Power Plan. I sent several drinks their way, anonymously, of course. Within the hour she was running her hand over Sven's stomach ripples. By the time she hit the Esterhauses, she would be primed for the Power Move, weak from her own excesses and passions.

I arrived fashionably late but not unreasonably so. My pretender was already in party stride, as I had ordained. I had the evening so well choreographed that Spouse's only assignment was to hold down the fort at our hotel suite and order something dynamite from room service. Offspring busied themselves playing computer monopoly via modem with the POWERCRAY 4000.

Bob Esterhaus greeted me perfunctorily (a gambit we worked out years ago to disguise the potency of our business alliance) as I entered the arena of confrontation. I carried a briefcase (received earlier at the hotel) that actually *had* carried the documents for the Japanese surrender of World War II. Naturally, Target's briefcase being no match for a case that served duty to end WW Deuce, the Big (and I hope *last*) One. I made a mental note to send Minion a gift from Group A this year at Christmas or promotion time, maybe both.

Predictably, Target chose to ignore the superior firepower of my accessory, adopting a casual demeanor I found repulsively transparent. She approached with starched shoulder pads and asked, "Who are you, and what are you doing here?" (Pg. 248 of her blasted book)

"I am Power," I said. "I put my feet behind my head and turn my torso upside down."

Target stared at me in disbelief, unable to respond to what she could only perceive as a non sequitur, though she knew she should have known better. She was speechless, as was Sven, but I had the impression that Sven generally found speech taxing. I looked through her as she struggled to remain cool and aloof. Finally her left eyebrow twitched, a physiological symptom of stress I anticipated and used against her to great effect.

"I can tell by that quizzical expression on your face that you do not believe me," Power challenged. Target merely sputtered unintelligible phonetics. I cleared off the catered table with one bold swipe, put feet behind head, and executed a flawless inverted torso with feet behind head. Everyone in the room waited for my words. As I eyeballed Target, her face disfigured by confusion, defeat, and humiliation, I said, "You are looking at Power. Perhaps you've noticed that I do not vacation like ordinary mortals. Work is a twenty-four-hour-a-day event, and if you don't pull your bogus book off the market, my attorney will see to it that twenty-four hours aren't nearly enough to accommodate the agony and humiliation that will be heaped on your life and plastered across the front pages." With jaw swinging she accepted my attorney's card. Is it any wonder the Esterhauses love to have Power as a guest? Spouse thinks not.

Perhaps Power chose a rather cruel way to make a point, but that is neither here nor there, for we are now over the Atlantic. Powerhouse is mere hours away. Offspring are deftly plying one another, and the presses that once mass produced my alleged autobiography are silent. Sometimes Power must demand a little peace and quiet.

Fred Leo  
Brunswick

*is a free-lance writer and cartoonist*



Photo by Martin Nerber

## **Analogically Unique**

*If all the poems I have loved  
were tattooed on my uncovered skin  
... and me in bed with a woman  
who could not read, but  
loved words.*

## **Poem To A Friend**

*Look  
it's a  
camera,  
I said  
as we looked in the  
window. No she said  
it's a room filled with pictures  
But why aren't the pictures  
of us.  
No she said  
I think you're right  
it's only a camera.*

**Pat Murphy**  
**Portland**  
*runs out-of-print books*



## To Josh Turning Six

- (1.)  
The loon fishing  
quietly swallows itself  
into the lake
- (2.)  
going simple  
you have now  
more than you will  
ever need to use
- (3.)  
the morning rain  
gathers  
onto the apple bud  
only to fall  
of its own weight
- (4.)  
going clear  
knowing you gain  
exactly what you need  
to lose

**Doug Rawlings**  
**Mt. Vernon**  
*teaches at UMF*

## The Potter

I work at my wheel, hunched  
like a snail, ignoring  
the cobwebs and mouse pellets,  
sloppy to the elbows with warm sticky slip  
or covered with curliques trimmings.  
The twelve small panes  
of wavy glass give the cloistered  
greens of the pines, the tamarac,  
and the ferns out back an underwater  
shimmer.

Time stops here, becomes  
the cardinal's whistle, an unremembered stream  
of radio montage, a stiffening back,  
a knotted neckbone. Life  
simplifies — I make  
one tick, one tock, another  
rack of glistening pots.

**Terrell Hunter**  
**Garland**  
*Teaches in a Gifted  
and Talented program*

## Sirens

You hear their voices, high  
at first, each voice itself,  
collectively yours. You hold years  
of voices in your hands, they  
spill through your fingers, inevitably  
falling into voices of children,  
teenaged boys, a suddenly  
unknown woman, and finally  
voices of strangely similar adults,  
people unutterably loved

while south of your village  
a woman at the edge of the lake  
fills her pockets with white stones,  
also singing.

**Alison Baker**  
**Mt. Desert**  
*is a librarian.*

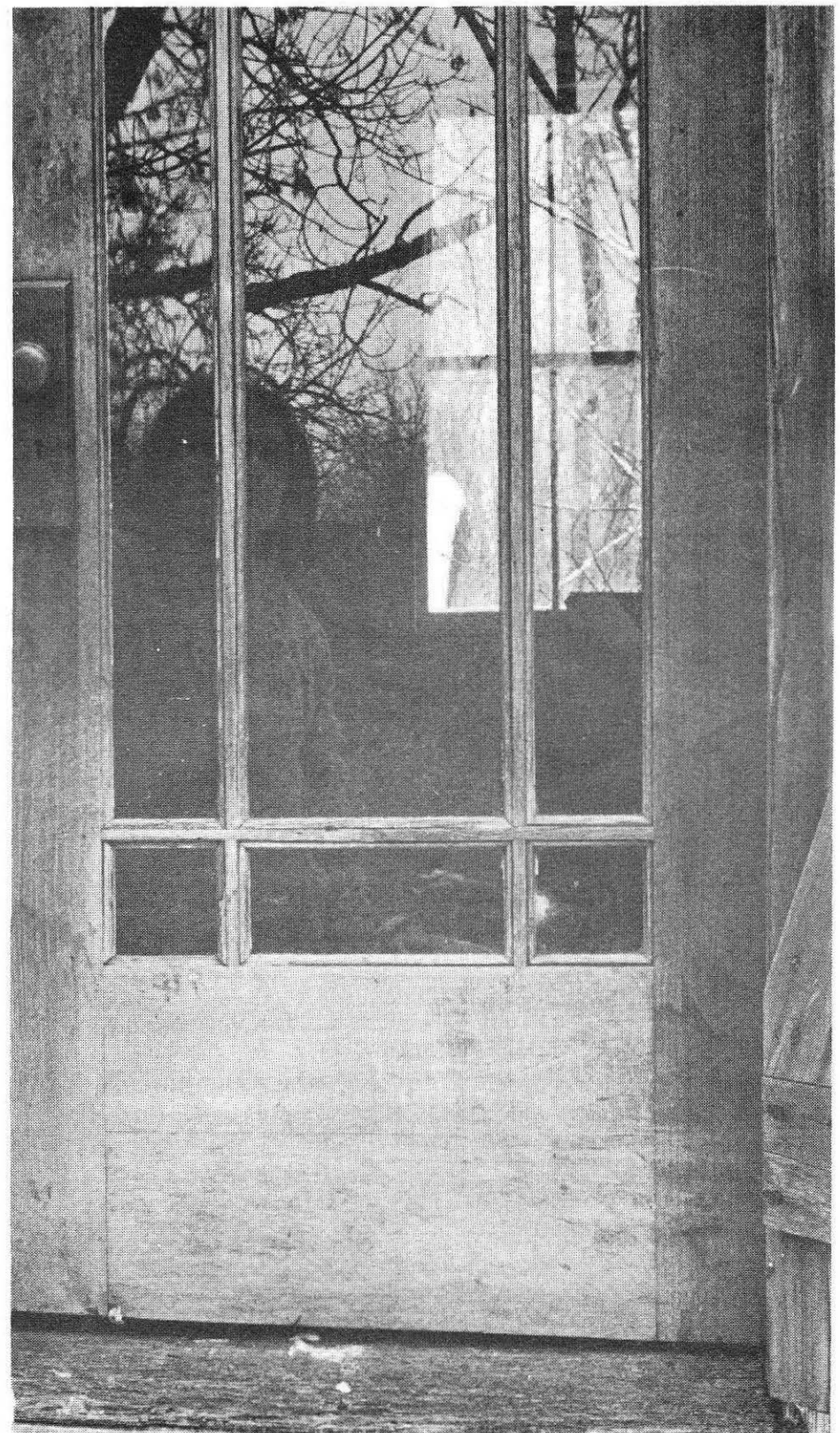


Photo by Michael Howland

## The Transitional Object

Michelle walked into the house with her canvas tote bag in one arm and Elizabeth in the other. Elizabeth was screaming and crying. Her face was red, and she held out both arms like little wings. From the level of noise she was making it would have been impossible to know she was only three years old.

Phil was sitting at the kitchen table reading a magazine. He looked over, but didn't get up. "What on earth is wrong now?" he asked.

Michelle seemed very tired. "We've had a little crisis," she said. "We were halfway home when Elizabeth realized she had left her blankie at school. It was too far to go back, so she's been like this for a half hour."

Michelle put Elizabeth down inside the door and hung the bag on a hook on the wall. Then squeezing between Elizabeth and the wall, she went straight to the kitchen pantry. There she took out the gin bottle and began mixing a drink.

Elizabeth seemed unable to move. Standing where Michelle had left her, she bawled steadily and loudly. Her eyes were shut and she still wore her coat. With the hood pulled over her head and drawn tight around her red face, she seemed totally helpless, as though encased in a shell.

Watching the child cry, for a moment Phil felt only pure pity for her. At that moment it didn't matter how obnoxious she was being.

Then the moment passed. "See," he said, turning to Michelle, "this is what always happens. Now we've got to spend the rest of the night going through another god damn blankie emergency."

He watched from the table as Elizabeth walked slowly into the kitchen. She seemed to be struggling, managing only a single small step between screams. At one point she nearly fell over but caught herself with a few jerks of her arms.

Closing the magazine, Phil slowly shook his head. "I'm so sick of that blankie I don't know what to do," he said. "When are you going to take that thing away from her?"

"I've explained it to you a thousand times," said Michelle. "It's her transitional object. It's a familiar friend. It helps her feel good about herself. Now that her life is changing in so many ways it's very important to her. Do you think you'll ever understand that?"

"What a crock!" said Phil. "Just listen to her. She's about to have a stroke over a ragged piece of blanket."

Elizabeth now stood trembling in the middle of the room. She had calmed down a little now and was no longer screaming. Instead, she made rapid little sucking noises. Her eyes were open, but behind the tears they seemed not to be focused on anything there in the room.

"I've told you it's not just a ragged piece of blanket," said Michelle. "Why can't you see she needs it to feel in touch with her old self?"

Michelle sipped some of her drink, then walked over and began unzipping Elizabeth's coat. "Besides, I think she's just mad at herself for leaving it at school," she said.

Michelle untied the hood and took off the coat. Then she took the bottom of Elizabeth's sweater and pulled it straight up. For a moment the sweater caught on the child's head. As Michelle tugged to free it, Elizabeth's face seemed to twist.

"I'd hate for her to be mad at herself," said Phil.

The next afternoon Michelle left a message for Phil at his office. The message was that after picking up Elizabeth she'd be stopping by to visit her parents. When he heard this, Phil quickly made some plans of his own. He called Myra, his girl friend. "Why don't we get together?" he said. "I need to unwind a little."

"What do you have in mind?" said Myra.

"Anything, it doesn't matter," said Phil. "Let's just get together."

Thirty minutes later he was in Walt's Tap House. While waiting for Myra he had ordered two beers, one for Myra, and one for himself. First he drank his beer, then he drank the beer he had ordered for her.

When Myra arrived Phil slid in to the center of the booth. Then he held up two fingers until the waitress saw him and nodded back. Taking down his hand, he rested it on the top of Myra's leg.

For a long time he had understood that he ran around with this woman not because he loved her, or because he even particularly enjoyed being with her all that much. Instead, he had come to accept that what he saw in her was the

simple fact she was even tempered. This was a thin endorsement, he realized, but then Michelle had become such a pain in the ass with her issues and concerns and with her endless child raising crises. Sometimes it was all too much. At those times he needed a little relief, which was where Myra came into the picture. He often reminded himself that all he wanted from Myra was the absence of emergencies, something which he was sure Myra had never had in her entire life. This was a fact which he had found endeared her to him.

"Sometimes I think I'm going crazy," he said, taking a sip from his third beer. "It's just one thing after another, all the time. Like last night. Elizabeth left her blanket at school and raised hell all night. Just what I needed! But every time I said something about it, Michelle gave me some kind of psychological mumbo jumbo."

Myra put down her glass and smiled very intelligently. "What's so psychological about it?" she asked. "It sounds to me like it's nothing but a security blanket."

Phil considered the wisdom of this observation. "But Myra," he said, "you know how Michelle is. Everything has to have some deeper meaning. Nothing can ever be simple."

He paused for Myra to agree, but instead of saying anything she only traced the rim of her glass with a fingertip and looked down at the bar.

"If I called it a security blanket," he went on, "she'd kick me the hell out of the house. She says it's a transitional object."

"What's a transitional object?" said Myra, turning back to look at him.

"I think it's something which helps a person get through their changes," said Phil. "It makes them feel good. Or at least it makes them feel better."

"You mean like a security blanket?" said Myra.

"Yeah, I guess so," he said. "A security blanket."

They had another quick round, then Myra made ready to leave. "I guess I should go too," said Phil. "I just hope that damn blankie is home when I get there. I'd hate for poor Mr. Blankie to spend another night all alone someplace."

He thought of what he had just said and laughed a short, dry laugh. He liked the sound of the name: Mr. Blankie, his newest dependent.

Myra made a hollow sound as she swallowed the last of her beer. It seemed the glass somehow made her sound like an old singer with a megaphone. He looked at her through the stringy foam on the glass and wondered if she had noticed the peculiar way the glass had made her sound.

"It's strange," she said, putting down the glass. "It's strange how kids don't get attached to those blankets until there's almost nothing left but shreds."

"Shreds? You sound like you've seen this one," he said. "It looks as though someone used it to tie up Houdini."

"You know how to take care of that, don't you?" she said.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"I mean how to get rid of an old security blanket when it gets so ragged and worn out. It's easy. All you do is take a new blanket and sew it to one end of the old rag. Then over time you cut the old part away in little strips and throw them out. Soon you'll have nothing left but the new blanket and the kid'll never know the difference. It'll seem like magic."

"Where'd you learn that?" said Phil.

"It's just an old trick someone told me about," she said. "But I think it has a psychological name too. I think it's called transferral."

The next morning Michelle took Elizabeth into the bathroom and shut the door. Once she came out to get a sweater, but for nearly half an hour she and Elizabeth were alone. Phil listened from the hall and heard them discussing Mr. Blankie.

When Michelle and Elizabeth came out of the bathroom breakfast was waiting on the table. It took only a minute or two for Elizabeth to finish. Then Phil helped her down from her chair. "Get your coat, Elizabeth," said Michelle. "It's time to go."

Elizabeth ran into the hall and dug her coat from the closet. As Phil zipped her up, Michelle put their lunches in her canvas bag along with two apples from the bowl on top of the refrigerator.

As Michelle finished packing, Elizabeth stood waiting in the center of the room. "Where's blankie, Mama?" she said.

"I think I saw him in the living room," said Michelle.



As Elizabeth ran to the living room, Phil and Michelle looked at one another. Michelle seemed very concerned and serious minded, as though she might be confronting an issue which threatened to explode from her control. She listened expectantly for sounds from the living room, then frowned at Phil when he laughed. "I think we'd better go in there," she said.

Elizabeth met them in the hall with Mr. Blankie draped across her outstretched arms. "What's wrong with blankie?" she asked, handing the armful to her mother.

"There's nothing wrong, Elizabeth," said Michelle. "Blankie got big, that's all. See, now blankie's big, like you are."

Michelle held Mr. Blankie out for her to see. He seemed like something which had been salvaged from a fire. On one end was a yellow square of strings, tangles, and shreds. Sewn to this mess was a shiny square of black polyester.

"It's okay," said Michelle. "Blankie's okay. Now we'd better leave or you and blankie will be late for school."

Michelle handed the blanket back to Elizabeth, who took it with a long, slow look. As she followed her mother to the door one corner of the blanket trailed from her arms to the floor behind.

"I'm not sure about this idea," said Michelle as she looked through the kitchen drawers for the scissors. "I think she had a rough day. On the way home tonight it seemed all she could do was ask why blankie had turned black. I didn't know what to say."

"I think you said the right thing," said Phil, as he took the scissors and started to trim a narrow strip from Mr. Blankie's ragged end. When he had finished, he waved the strip in front of Michelle like a yellow ribbon. "Do you really think she'll miss this?" he asked.

Michelle took the strip and balled it up. Then she pushed it far to the bottom of the trash bag under the sink. For a moment she stood looking at the bag. Then she took the bag outside and put it in the garbage can on the back porch.

Phil waited for her at the table. "Do you want me to explain it again?" he asked, as she put a new bag under the sink.

"Explain what?" she said.

"The concept. The concept of transferral," he said.

"Spare me, please," she said.

A few nights later after Elizabeth was in bed, Phil asked if it might be time to trim a second strip from Mr. Blankie.

"I suppose we can," said Michelle. "Elizabeth seems to be adjusting. She hardly ever asks now about blankie turning black."

"I'll get Blankie," she said, taking a quick look around the room. "You get the scissors."

Phil fished out the scissors out of the junk drawer and waited at the table. Michelle went into Elizabeth's room, then went into the garage. There he heard her opening and closing the car doors. After a few minutes she came back into the kitchen.

"I can't find it," she said. "I looked in her room and she didn't have it, so I checked the car. It's not out there either. I don't know where it could be."

Phil realized this might be very bad news for everyone. "Did she ask for it when she went to bed?" he said.

"No," said Michelle. "As a matter of fact she didn't. In fact, now I don't remember her having it when we got home."

"Did she say anything about it on the way home?" said Phil.

"No," said Michelle. "First she talked about crocodiles and frogs and why they were different. Then she wanted some pizza. I don't remember her saying a single word about blankie."

Michelle put her hands to her head and shuddered. She seemed stricken by a great fear.

Phil understood the problem perfectly. It was indeed a serious matter, because what was calm now, and what had been calm both on the way home and during dinner, might be pure hell in the morning. "Let's check the house," he said, hopping up from his chair.

They looked in every room but did not find Mr. Blankie.

"Do you suppose it's at school?" he asked, once they had finally given up looking through closets and under chairs.

Michelle appeared not to hear. "Do you think she's lost it?" she said.

"Don't say that," he said. "Don't even think it."

The next morning at work there was a note waiting on his desk. The note said to call Michelle at her office as soon as he came in.

"Michelle," he said. "What is it?"

"It's blankie!" said Michelle.

"Blankie? What do you mean? Did you find him?"

"Yes," she said. "He was at school the entire time."

"Thank God!" said Phil.

"We went in and there he was," she said. "He was lying right in the middle of the floor. But I don't think Elizabeth even noticed him, because I actually had to pick him up and hand him to her."

Michelle started to say something more but Phil interrupted. "Please Michelle, please!" he said. "I'll say it again. Please! Whatever you do, don't let her forget him again. Another night like last night and my nerves will go right down the toilet."

After they hung up, Phil gave the matter a few minutes of thought. It was obvious if they were to pull off this transferral trick they's have to be both more attentive. Otherwise they'd simply find themselves back at square one. Luckily, all that morning they had been able to keep Elizabeth's attention away from the missing blankie, but it had been a great effort. He couldn't imagine having to make the effort several mornings each week.

That night he and Michelle cut another strip from Mr. Blankie as soon as Elizabeth had gone to sleep.

The phone on his desk buzzed and Phil picked it up. It was Myra. "Where have you been?" she asked. "I haven't seen you in almost three weeks."

"I've been right here," he said. "At work, at home, where I always am."

"I've been wondering," she said. "I don't want to bother you, if you're busy."

"Hey, no bother at all," he said. "I'm just sitting here trying to decide what to do next."

On the desk in front of him was a stack of files waiting for his review. The stack was probably ten inches high. As he waited for her to say something he closed the file in his hand and placed it on a second, smaller stack. "Why don't we get together," he asked, when the line remained silent. "When's a good time for you?"

"Oh, I guess anytime," she said.

"Then how about tomorrow night? At the Tap Room, say eight o'clock."

"Sure," she said.

"Good. I'll see you then."

"Sure," she said.

The next night Phil took Elizabeth to her room and tucked her in. He kissed her on the cheek, put on the night light, and shut the door.

When he got back to the kitchen Michelle was waiting by the table. "Why don't we take care of Mr. Blankie before I leave?" he said.

"Okay," she said. "I'll get him and be back in a minute."

Looking through the drawer by the sink, he dug out the scissors, they waited at the table for Michelle to bring Mr. Blanket.

Before long she was back in the kitchen. "Guess what," she said. "I can't find him."

"What do you mean?" he said.

"I mean I can't find him. I don't know where he is."

"Did you check the car?" he said.

"No," she said. "I didn't think of that."

"I'll look in the car," he said. "You look around in here some more."

Getting up from the table, he started toward the door but stopped after a step or two. "Why don't we take care of him tomorrow night?" he said. "I shouldn't keep this client waiting while I look for Mr. Blanket."

A few minutes later he was in his car, backing out the driveway.

Myra was sitting at the bar when he arrived. Before sitting down beside her he carefully looked around the room. "Good to see you," he said, again looking around the bar. "I don't think I've ever seen this place so crowded."

Myra put down her glass. "Order me a beer, please," she said.

He held up two fingers to the woman behind the bar. "How have you been?" he asked.

"I've been good. Really, I've been very good."

"That's good," he said.

The bartender brought the beers, then picked up Myra's empty glass and walked away. Myra positioned her new glass directly in front of her but didn't drink. "What's new with you?" she asked.

"Nothing much," he said. "It's been mostly work. Just work, work, work."

"How are Michelle and the kid?" said Myra.

"They're both fine," he said. "And guess what! You remember that trick you told me about? Well, it's working like a charm. Another few days and the damn thing will be gone."

"What damn thing are you talking about?" said Myra.

"That blanket Elizabeth carried around. We did what you suggested. We sewed a new blanket to the old one and started cutting away the old part a little

bit at a time. It's become the number one event around the house. Now maybe two or three more snips and that old rag will be gone forever."

"Really makes you feel good, doesn't it?" said Myra.

"I haven't told you the craziest part," he said. "Now that we've nearly gotten rid of the old rag, Elizabeth doesn't seem to care one way or the other about even having a blankie. I think she might be just about ready to give up her transitional object, or whatever it is that Michelle calls it."

"I'm glad I've been able to help," said Myra. "I can see how important it is."

"You'll never know," said Phil.

"I'm sure," said Myra.

The next morning Phil found another note on his desk to call Michelle. This time the note said urgent. He dialed the number and waited for the switchboard operator to put him through. He had one thought on his mind.

Michelle didn't bother to say hello. "I couldn't find it," she said.

"You're kidding!" he said.

"I wish I were, but I looked everywhere. I went into all the classrooms. I went through every corner of the playroom. I walked around in the yard. I even went into the bathrooms. I looked everywhere, but it wasn't there. Not anywhere."

"Jesus Christ," said Phil. "This sounds bad. Did she say anything about it?"

"She just wanted to know why I was hanging around. She followed me the entire time, but I didn't mention blankie. I was careful not to say anything to remind her."

"She never mentioned him?" he said.

"No, not a single time," she said.

"Do you have any more ideas where to look?" he said.

"No, I'm totally stumped."

"Well, Michelle, if you think of anything, call me right away."

"Is there anything we can do?" she said.

"All we can do is hope it turns up someplace," he said. "Or that she forgets about it for once and for all. If she doesn't miss it, then she won't need it."

"I hope this doesn't traumatize her," said Michelle. "You remember the importance of transitional objects, don't you?"

"How could I ever forget?" said Phil.

By the time Michelle and Elizabeth got home Phil had searched from one end of the house to the other. He had looked in the garbage. He had opened the glass doors of the fireplace. He had even crawled on top of the washer and dryer and looked into the tangle of cobwebs behind them.

Finally he gave up and decided to make himself a drink. Then he decided to make two drinks and have one waiting for Michelle when she arrived. He hoped she wouldn't need it, that the ride home would have no sudden blankie emergency, but he knew it was the sort of thing about which one couldn't ever tell with a kid.

When Phil heard the rumble of the garage door he went outside to meet them. Opening the car door, he took Elizabeth from her car seat as she waved in his face a drawing of something orange and green. As he listened to Elizabeth he looked around the back seat. He didn't see Mr. Blankie. Then hauling the child out of the car, he kissed Michelle and shook his head a single time. When he shut the car door he did so a little harder than he really had to.

Elizabeth made no mention of blankie all evening. Both Phil and Michelle listened closely to everything she said. Since they were paying such close attention they often finished her sentences for her. A few times they even anticipated her questions. Elizabeth loved all the attention, and when it was finally time for her to go to bed she cried a while. Both Phil and Michelle took her into her room.

When Elizabeth was tucked away, Michelle made some tea. Phil started doing the dishes. Michelle set Phil's cup by the sink and leaned against the counter beside him. "What do you think this means?" she asked.

"I'd be afraid to say just yet," he said.

"I never thought I'd see the day when she wouldn't care about her blankie. It's just amazing."

"Yes," he replied, unsure of what else to say. "Just simply amazing."

The next day, Phil gave Myra a call. Behind her voice he could hear the faint sounds of someone singing on the TV. Was she watching Merv Griffin again after she'd told him she'd stopped doing that sort of thing, he

wondered. "Why don't we get together," he said, as he listened to the music.

"What do you have in mind?"

"Dinner," he said. "Why don't we have dinner?"

"Tonight?" she said.

"Why not?" he said. "I'll have to go home first, but then I can come by and pick you up. Say around eight?"

The singing in the background had stopped. Now he heard what sounded like the popping of little sparks.

"Whatever you say," she said.

At five, he went home. Two hours passed, the routine as usual. Dinner, bedtime. The clock ticked.

He checked Elizabeth and saw she was asleep, then went to the kitchen. Michelle was at the table. "I shouldn't be too late with this client," he said. "But I'll give you a call around ten anyway."

"Okay," said Michelle, looking up from some work on the table.

"You're positive you checked all over the school?" he asked, taking his top coat from the closet.

"Yes," she said. "I even asked some of the teachers. Blankie has just vanished."

"And she didn't mention him today either?" he said.

"No, not a peep. I think she's forgotten all about him."

"It makes you wonder how badly she needed him all along."

"Don't start into that," said Michelle. "She needed him once, now she doesn't. She's just moved past him, that's all."

"Moved past him?" he said, as he checked himself in the mirror in the hall.

"Yes," said Michelle. "She's comfortable now without him. Now she doesn't need anything to remind her of who she is."

He started to say how little he thought of her psychological theories, then decided not to start an argument. "What do we do if she pops a fit tomorrow morning?" he said, stopping at the door.

"If you're worried we could search the house again," said Michelle. "You never know; it might still turn up."

For a moment he thought of calling off his evening with Myra to look once more for the missing Mr. Blankie. But the plans were set; changing them now would probably cause more grief than a morning without blankie.

"You're right," he said. "She's past him."

In the driveway he found Michelle had parked her car behind his. After first making sure the keys were in his car, he got into her car and backed out the drive.

As he parked in front of Myra's condo he saw her watching from a window. It seemed just a second or two later she was pulling at the passenger door.

He leaned over in the seat and unlocked the door. At that moment a car backed out of a driveway across the street and hit another car sitting at the curb. Phil turned his head toward the sound of the accident and watched for a few moments. When he turned back Myra was still outside the car, standing at the open door and peering in at him. She seemed to be smoothing out something in the side of her coat.

"I'm sorry, Myra," he said. "But no one ever uses that door and I forgot it was locked."

"Did you see that wreck over there?" he added.

"See what?" asked Myra.

While waiting for a table they sat in the lounge. After ordering her drink, Myra left the table and went to the ladies room. Phil watched behind a row of huge house plants at . She seemed to be walking a little stiffly, and for some reason she was still wearing her coat.

Inside the ladies room she went into a stall and locked the door. For a moment she stood there listening, but all she heard was recorded music from a speaker hidden in the ceiling.

Then from her coat pocket she took out a shiny piece of black cloth. The cloth had fallen out of the car at her feet when she had first opened the door. For reasons she could not understand she had quickly stuffed it in her pocket. Standing there in the stall, she now looked at it. Along one side of the cloth was sewn a narrow strip of yellow rag. She had never seen such a strange thing. Could it be some sort of flag? she wondered.

Then she had an idea. Holding the strange cloth in one hand, she opened her purse and took out the small black pistol in the cloth and stuffed the bundle into her coat pocket. With the coat so thick and heavy, she was sure this way



the pistol would not be seen, unlike her purse, where it had made a small bulge.

Standing with her hands in her pockets, she closed her eyes for a single instant. In that instant she was at the edge of a peaceful valley. It was a valley much the same as where she had lived as a child. Before her were children playing in a meadow. Sheep grazed in the tall grass, while to one side a farmer gathered bales of hay and placed them on a wagon. In the distance were white farm houses surrounded by maples and oaks. Beyond the farm houses the smooth surface of a broad river shone like a slice from the dawn sky.

From her place at the edge of this valley she watched the children playing. They were playing a game she had never seen, one she was unable to even follow. She watched closely, but the game remained only a strange mix of frantic dashes and abrupt stops.

Then suddenly she realized she knew these children. Waving to them, she called their names. When the nearest child smiled and waved back, Myra left the place where she had been standing and took a single step forward. With this step she felt herself begin to fall. Suddenly she pitched to one side, and bumped hard against the side of the stall.

For a moment she froze, and waited in the spinning stall to see if anyone had heard the noise she had made. When after a few more moments she heard nothing she relaxed a bit, although the stall still seemed to rock slightly back and forth.

To stop the motion she rested her forehead against the stall's cold door. She took several deep breaths. Again she held her eyes softly closed. Her hands rested in her coat pockets.

She felt much better already.

**Ronald Welton**  
**Portland**

## *Three Tao Tales*

(1)

My Dad smokes cigarettes.

I remember when I was a kid and lived at home, I would wake up in the morning and he'd be in the bathroom coughing. It sounded like a car on a cold morning that wouldn't start.

One day he came out of the bathroom and said, "That's it. I can't take this coughing anymore."

He didn't stop smoking. He stopped coughing.

(2)

Several years ago, Dad had a stroke. It didn't leave noticeable scars. He says his memory's not so hot, but I can't tell the difference

"It's a funny thing," he says. "I can be reading a good book, one minute — really enjoying it. Then I put it down. When I pick it up again, I've forgotten everything I read. Guess I only need one book."

(3)

Still, he reads all the time. Books. Magazines.

Mom works at a shop. Magazines that don't sell — instead of returning them, they tear off the covers and get credit. She brings these home and Dad reads them all.

They get two papers a day too. He reads both, cover to cover.

And he watches the news on television — two local newscasts starting at 4:30 and two national news casts starting at 6. Then, he watches the news at 11 and late-night news talk show.

"Dad," I say. "You never go out. No one ever comes over. Why do you pay attention to all this stuff?"

"You never know," he says. "Someday, I might have a conversation."

**Bob Gottlieb**  
**Bar Harbor**  
is a free-lance writer



### ***Aesthetic***

(1963)

*I would build  
word by word  
in my brief days  
a cathedral of analects  
in praise*

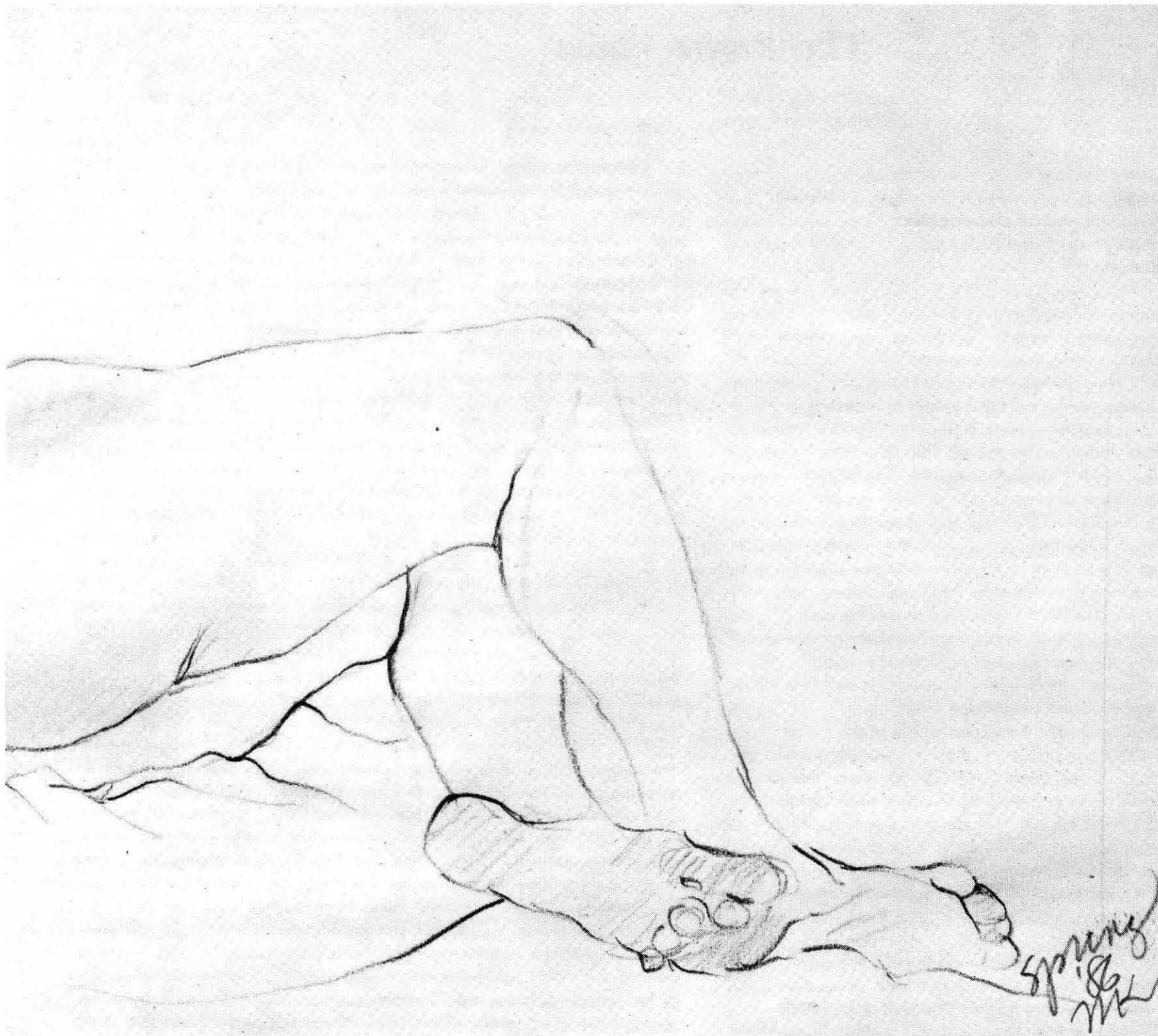
*have it filled with singing  
that it might be heard  
and have you enter there  
naked, perhaps a flower  
in your hair*

(1978)

*Muses too are easily bored  
and sometimes prefer a tickle  
to a grand assault.  
You have filled the cathedral with flowers;  
organist and choirmaster poised  
you stand there expectant  
dressed in your best suit.  
You may find that  
yawning, somnolent with incense,  
she has slipped away  
around the corner to a restaurant  
where a painter  
having sketched the  
waiter on a paper napkin  
uses it to blot the marinara sauce  
from his blue silk tie.*

**Sylvester Pollet**  
**E. Holden**  
*teaches at UM*





Pencil drawing by Majo Kelesian

### Sonnets

The skin of your shoulder, flecked with sweat,  
a beige bra strap, the long sweep of your arm,  
the swell of a hip, your back to me, you read  
to the child, curled to the curve of you, of Laura,

Pa, building the new house on the hill, the ribs  
rising against the blue Minnesota sky —  
an attic for Laura to play in, and her sisters,  
the child whispering the words after you:

And I lie, my hand on your hip, thinking of  
the joy your body gives me, even now, just  
here, the rise and fall of your breathing,

reading a book, me wanting to tell  
you how I take comfort of you (fr. com, with +  
fort, strong). How I am strong with you.

Because learning to love you is a little  
like trying to write a poem. How I must  
each day start again, hunting for the right  
words, the small tendernesses that will

touch you here and here. I can say love  
but the word lies lumpish on my lips.  
I'd rather watch how you lick the tip  
of your finger, before you turn the page.

So, when I want to be a poet, I jerk,  
spin and spin, asking this one and that  
to tell me who I am. But there is another

thing I can do, most simple, most difficult:  
like getting up at six thirty A.M.  
today to start the coffee, write this poem.

**Burton Hatlen**

**Orono**

chmn. of English dept., UM

## The Right Voice

(an excerpt from a comedy in progress)

—The story from the police was that Cathy was driving alone, that she had made contact at an unseemly rate of speed with the concrete abutment of a railroad overpass, that blood and urine analyses yielded a recipe so rich there was some jocular doctor talk to the effect that Cathy was probably comatose before she hit the abutment.—

Daddy and Mummy were winging their way toward Cathy's freeze-frame world, the long flight (counting waiting time, taxiing time, getting both engines going) from Nutley . . . well, let's be accurate here, from Newark to Burlington, Vermont, the closest landing field to Old Goreham College short of Montreal. And they might better have chosen a flight to Montreal or almost anywhere else, boys and girls, because their airplane, one of the best aircraft in the fleet of Place Your Bets Airlines: The Airline That Says Who Needs Air Traffic Controllers — Fire Their Asses, Mr. President — this very aircraft was experiencing a sinking feeling, and so were Mr. and Mrs. Catalano, whom we may henceforward address as Flo and Sam respectively, since we seem to be getting to know them pretty well here watching them dive into the pocket of the seat in front of them for the mal de prop bag. No, we're not mixed up a bit: Florenz and Samantha Catalano, a genuinely fun couple straight from the exciting world of insurance investing and corporate merging and north Jersey trend-setting, Wow! Flo works within candlepower distance of where Ivan Boesky used to smile, and Sam does whatever she has to do to keep Flo up there fighting the good arbitrage fight in The City because Sam has an investment or two down here in Nutley that we're not going to pay any attention to, except maybe a little bit after a while.

My, you are restless back there! OK. Sam Catalano is heavily invested just now in the fellow who drives the frozen food delivery truck through the residential areas of Nutley. Custom brought Peter Scarlatti to Peregrine Drive every Thursday. But Sam's desire for, her growing obsession with, frozen food soon obliged Peter to begin making special weekly trips up Peregrine Drive. Then it became every third or fourth day and Sam was buying frozen foods like some demented survivalist convinced the Sandinistas had landed at Asbury Park and were coming up the Garden State Parkway toward Nutley right now!

Oh, my! Turkey Rolls . . . Polish Sausage . . . Sirloin Ball Tip Steak . . . Corn Dogs — the very words made her moist — Chicken Breast Strips, Blue Hake Loins, Orange Roughy, Fantail Shrimp, Stuffed Scrod, Pork Egg Rolls . . . Peter would pull the truck up behind the house so that it couldn't be seen from the road. He would ring at the back door and Sam would appear, wrapped in a blue wrapper that did the very best possible thing for her full-figured self. There would be an exchange of greetings and Peter would come inside. Then, leaning back against the refrigerator, Sam would say, for example . . . "Corn Dogs." It's not easy to say . . . "Corn Dogs" . . . seductively, but Sam was good. You can try it in the privacy of your own home. Say "Blue Hake Loins. Stuffed Scrod." Hey, pretty good! A little deeper register, a little more breathiness . . . uh **huh!**

Well, there's no turning back when passion reaches these heights. Peter didn't like to think of himself as easy, but frozen foods were his life. When Sam put her hands behind her back, leaned toward him a little so that the blue wrapper buckled out, and said, huskily, "Orange Roughy," Peter was a made man.

Happy now? Prurient interest satisfied for the moment? We'll just save the story of Sam and The Dry Cleaner Man for a little later except to report that besides a freezer jam-packed with every imaginable frozen thing, Flo and Sam also had a closet of absolutely spotless garments lined up row upon row with their little cellophane bags like so many soldiers in rain gear.

Now, that's enough! All this while we've been poking into the Catalano freezer and the Catalano closet, these really presentable and well-stocked folks and some others have been trying to adjust to the fact that their aircraft has determined to nose down quietly but rather more quickly and certainly earlier than anyone had in mind.

North Central Vermont does not provide much solace to a pilot who needs pretty badly right now to find a strip about a half mile long and substantially free from stumps and glacial erratics. Once a person gets up there beyond Brattleboro and considerably short of Burlington, well, even Interstate 91 has a certain appeal, but they passed over that about twenty minutes ago and there

can't (Whoa!) be another twenty minutes left in this little beauty. So, our man can be excused by all aboard with their noses in their little brown bags for choosing a patch of ground that had the fewest trees one could hope for in the Green Mountains, never mind that the landing was rough enough to make a person invoke the name of the deity more than once, in fear, in supplication, and if you're Sam, in breaking off all the fake fingernails on your right hand. When the plane stopped, oh so abruptly, and everybody went quickly forward and then quickly backward and then felt all over himself and herself to discover that no bones were broken, the pilot was not only excused for the early landing but cheered as a Deliverer. And him with his license only these few days! He was all ablush with humility.

The residents, on the other hand, were less robust in their applause. In fact, color them testy. The reason this particular patch of Vermont was free of trees was that a small number of earnest and intense agronomists had selected the area for an experiment in the cultivation of a particular botanical, a shy and gangly fellow that simply didn't do well at all in more public locations. It seemed to require remote sites reached by rough roads as well as other alliterative conditions like regular rainfall and sufficient sunshine but most of all, perfect privacy, not easily preserved when the Cargo Gods send the silver bird bouncing through the whole experimental patch including the precious little sensamilla yearlings at the south end. Lord **knows** it was a chancy thing for those youngsters anyway here in Vermont when their big old Mom & Dad Sensamilla spent all their days in sunny California protected by heavily armed honchos who had a way of firing on hikers and bikers and neighbors with a high energy Hey nonny nonny!

Several of the agronomists lived on the very edge of their experiment and were engaged in a lunch-break that included some of the harvest and was now stretching out into the afternoon in a way to underscore the beauty of autumn in Vermont. There were five of these scientists, three men and two women, and they had come out under the poplars and spread some blankets and were playing a sweaty game of Odd Man Out, the whole configuration of folks looking just now like Mayday! at the macaroni factory when suddenly there was this awful prop-jet whine right down at the end of the patch and this goddamned AIRPLANE galumphed along through the tall green peacefully waving experiments and came to a stop in the yearlings. Sonuvabitch! Don't talk to these scientists about the odd broken beaker and the bunsen burner on the fritz. A whole growing season was lying in ruins here because some chickenshit pilot chose Life instead of an honorable death another hundred yards up the hill. Damn!

A certain scrambling for clothes ensued and the hearty yeoman and yeowomen moved on over to the wrecked plane, thinking thoughts that were not at all charitable because there had been not only some awful destruction just now but also the shattering of a very mellow mood, not to mention the inflicting of several forms and degrees of coitus interruptus. These were not Happy Scientists as they made their way to the downed silver bird. Still, entrepreneurship was not the all in all to these people. No one could accuse them of exploiting the masses, not even a single mass. They sought a fair price for their commodity and had come to depend upon this income to a degree that had made them forget to plant some other stuff to help them get through the long winters. The original plan, hatched when they were giddy youngsters in the happy sixties, was to commune with nature and one another up here in Vermont and let the grasping, greedy, terminally ill world go into its final throes without their contribution.

As the years went on and the world, it is true, threw up a lot but didn't die of it, the pioneers did what pioneers have ever done, namely, they got tired of the smell in the outhouse and decided to acquire (OH! oh!) some piping and some porcelain and put it smack in the lodge, which had to have an addition for the purpose . . . and there you are, right in the midst of Growth and Expansion so why not do the expeditious thing and scratch around for some scratch to finance still further Growth and Expansion so everybody doesn't have to sleep in the same bed in the summertime, and before you know it, you're solidly in the middle of the American Way except it's harder to get to your particular location in it.

Where you are pretty much determines what commodity your raise, as any mega-farmer in Minnesota will tell you, except that mega-farmers in Minnesota have a whole rail system at their disposal to get their megas to market while our



hearty tho' aging hippies have a pickup truck with a lid to cover the potential lids. So, where ARE they after all? Well, they're a day's drive from the Athens of America, that's where they are, kilo for kilo the most concentrated center of pot-users in the northern hemisphere, the Boss Town of smokers and sniffers in the whole of Yankee Land. What's more, between our humble Outpost and The Hub, there are several stops, several little let's call them Market Towns — not forgetting Old Goreham itself, which is a lot closer to our silver bird than the agreed-upon conventions of air travel dictate, and therefore, you follow, pretty close to the Outpost, see — which brings us back to the fundamentals of manufacturing and distribution and practically FORCES our folks to grow these formerly lovely, straight and tall, wonderfully leafy plants there under the goddamned AIRplane.

Never mind. These folks carried on some of the basic good and naive feelings about other people that a lot of folks felt back in the happy and goony sixties. They thought, for example, that some people were almost as worthwhile as a cool, clean spring of water; that once in a while you found somebody you admired nearly the way you admired how a hawk found an updraft over the Connecticut River and soared on to all afternoon; that the occasional person was as good to see as the snowshoe rabbits' playground over yonder where the haircap moss was so thick your foot almost disappeared in it . . . and like that.

So their anger was tempered with sympathy and not just a little curiosity about whether anybody in the silver bird was still alive. And of course, thanks to Junior Birdman's site selection, everybody was alive and suffering only various degrees of shock and, if you're Sam, broken fake fingernails, which smarts some, no need to overlook it, but falls short by quite a distance of some serious experiences with femurs and tibias and the odd vertebra.

What happens, though, when your kid has been missing long enough to get you panicky and then the kid shows up? Where you been, you little snot? Don't you know you had us worried about SICK? You better have a good story or you're gonna catch it and don't you forget it! Now. Let's hear it. Come on.

"Well, there was this whirring sound right over my head and before I knew what was happening, this big saucer-like thing landed right in the playground, see, and . . ."

Same mood swing here. As our scientists got close to the silver bird, a door opened and a chute-slide kind of a thing unrolled down the twelve feet or so to the ground and Whee! down the slide came this flight attendant right out onto a tarmac of marijuana stalks. She was all un-coiffed and the slide hiked her skirt to about her bra line, but up she got, all business, smoothed herself out real fast, put on this extraordinary First Class and not your grundgy Tourist Class Superapex smile and hollered to the plane to send down somebody, she was ready. Pretty soon, one after another of twelve passengers, the co-pilot, and Junior Birdman came whistling down the slide out onto the marijuana, not forgetting the objects of our affection, Flo and Sam Catalano, looking spiffy in their clean travel garments and Flo especially looking like a lawsuit about to explode all over the front pages of the nation's newspapers. Mad? You bet!

But so were our scientist friends now they had ascertained the everyone was OK and not in need of medical attention and not a bit of sympathy. Even mid-age hippies have their limits, so let's meet the leader of the Science Group and watch how he handles anger and frustration. Whoops! Not too well in every instance. He grabbed Junior Birdman's 40-mission crush cap and gave it a real crush, putting his boot heel right through it and grinding it down into the mashed Mary Jane. "God damn it, man!" quoth he. "I mean, Jesus H. Christ, man!" he explicated. "Sumner Bitch!" he expanded.

Unusual pique for our leader, who could usually accept coitus interruptus and airplane-destroyed crops as well as the next person, for this particular mid-age hippie was renowned for Cool hither and yon. Meet the Lord, guy called Lord by his friends and fellow agriculturalists. He's not the well-known Lord of Hosts, although he resembles somewhat the Jesus you see on those calendars in Protestant churches, not the ones in Roman Catholic churches with his heart hanging right out of his tunic there but the Methodist type that looks like he grew up in a suburb of San Francisco, graduated from Walnut Creek High School and already had a little fringe of whiskers back then and just kind of let it go after that and went to work in the wine cellars of Ernest & Julio Gallo in Modesto shovelling spent skins and seeds and married a third-generation Okie-Mex girl named Estelle and had two kids and a semi-cannabalized Plymouth Goldduster in his front yard in Oakdale. Looked like him, a little.

Anyway, he called himself Lord Geoffrey Amherst in honor and derision of the 18th century Indian killer and college honoree of that name and title. He had attended that college himself for a little while, Geoffrey College in

Pennsylvania, until one day his English prof. read aloud the first few pages of HOWL, the poem by Allan Ginsburg and Lord about puked, he'd never heard anything so raunched-out in his whole eighteen years. That and calculus in the same semester was about eight degrees beyond Too Much, Man! And Lord left college and never returned, although in a couple of years of being On the Road, he learned that only the best poetry makes you puke but there are some other things in life that can put a hot fist in your gorge and make it stick there. Things can be so rotten and festering and maggot-ridden, Lord discovered, that a person who grew up in Old Goreham, Vermont (Good Grief! There's a biographical tidbit we'll certainly look into when we have some time!) might begin to wonder if something can't be done about such things as racism, war, and movies that cost four fucking dollars to get into.

Well, sir, Lord grew up around that hot fist in his throat, kept it from driving him crazy by getting together with some other folks and doing some genuinely wiggled-out things like levitating the Pentagon — don't tell HIM it didn't rise! — lying down in front of nuke trains and trying to stay straight enough to remember to move when THEY moved; very important tactic there. He got a nasty little welt behind the ear from an acquaintance of Mayor Daley in Chicago, big mother with a blue helmet and a SHIELD, and was ill for a few days from inhaling more teargas than nutritionists recommend. That was in 1968, and by 1972 he and some others had just decided Fuck It and moved to Vermont, back to Vermont for him, quiet fertile Vermont, peaceful Vermont — until people come flying into your crops, and THEN what?

**Richard Flanagan**

**Fairfield**

*is an editor & teacher*

*To moderate the effects of story interruptus, readers may wish to know that the author, sleepless in Fairfield, contemplates some of the following questions:*

*— What happens when a big-time money guy like Flo Catalano sees merger possibilities for the pot farm: leveraged buy-out? insider trading schemes? A green parachute for Lord Geoffrey Amherst?*

*— When Lord is revealed to be the scion of the founding family of nearby Old Goreham College, will the college fall off the hill? What does it mean that the pot-drying shed has Town of Old Goreham stencilled on it in an obscure place?*

*— Poor Cathy Catalano stirs in her coma. What do her dreams portend, should she recover? Hare krishna? Anti-nuke activist? The notions department at Bloomingdale's? She mumbles the word 'Trident', but does she mean the submarine or the chewing gum?*

## Refrigerator Theology

My father patiently explains  
to us children about the invisible little man  
who lives in the darkness of our Westinghouse.  
His name is Mr. Yahoodi.  
He is in charge of making the light go  
on and off. He never sleeps.  
I sneak up, softly, and rip open the door:  
*light*, always *light*.  
Then I close it, ever so slowly,  
peering in as the crack narrows: never darkness.  
Over and over my father explains Mr. Yahoodi's quickness,  
every time making light happen, never getting caught.  
Father leads us to the far reaches of astral physics,  
tells about Time and Speed and Light  
and how we must believe  
because nothing else explains it.  
*But how do we know*, I insist,  
*that it goes off?* "Time," he answers,  
"and Speed, pure Speed."  
"If you can see light,  
"then you must also believe in the darkness."

Today, I kneel before the refrigerator.  
Darkened Yahoodi is my God.  
"Our Yahoodi . . .," I pray,  
"Who art invisible and refrigerated,  
"Give us this day our daily light . . ."

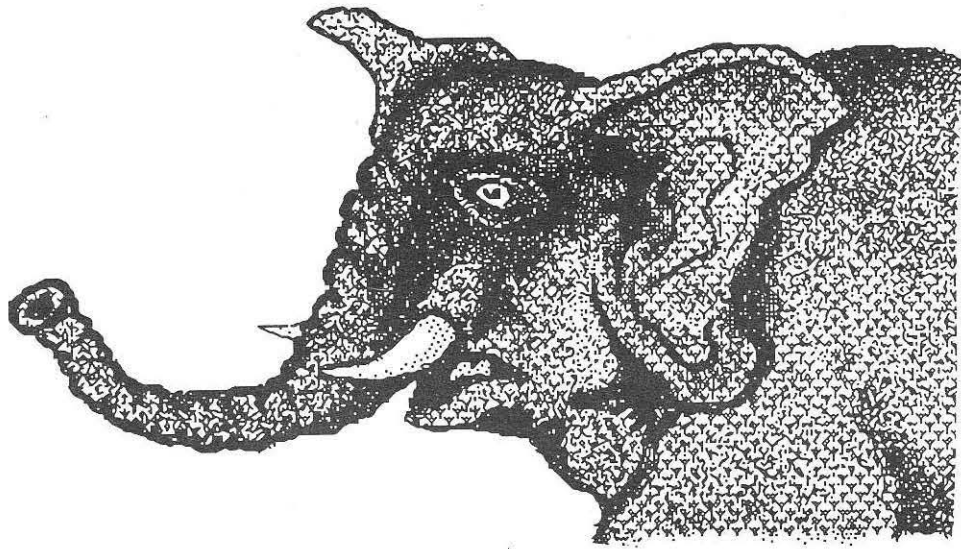
I believe.

**Terry Plunkett**

**Hallowell**

*is completing  
75 meditations on Time*

## Keeper Of The Tusk



*Elephants computer-generated by Conor Plunkett*

The Keeper reached across his seat for the canvas-wrapped pole that had jammed down by the passenger door. In his anxious grip the contraption brought a sinister gleam to his eyes. He was proud of his work. Putting it together had been an all night affair. This was no common twelve volt cattle prod — this was his elephant tamer, a hot-stick that fried with one hundred and twenty volts of unbridled electric current straight from the wall socket. Zeus would not make a fool of him in front of the supervisor after today.

He scanned through the rear window for signs of occupancy in the guard shack. The night light was barely discernible in the full moon radiance. It was safe to go. It would be hours before other keepers punched in, even longer before a security guard came snooping up to the elephant area. For the next hour or so the zoo was all his.

He withdrew the electric harpoon, locked the car and huffed up the path. It snaked to the elephant compound; only boots scuffing on stone and his labored breath disturbed the serenity.

It had been two weeks since the old keeper died, and no one, regardless of their rapport with animals, was able to do much with Zeus. The old man had raised the thirteen foot, seven ton mammoth since the day he arrived off the boat from Africa. He was the only elephant in the zoo that had been born in the wild; a four year old Disney-like character whose timidity won the hearts of caretakers and visitors alike. Now almost sixteen years later, Zeus was in magnificent prime. But the combination of mature instinct, intelligence, size and incredible power was lethal to all except the old man. A lifelong bond enabled him to maneuver Zeus with just a few commands of his voice and an occasional whack of the elephant hook. Yet even the old man used extreme caution and warned of the bull's dangerous, unpredictable behavior since Zeus came into musk that first week of August.

Among certain keepers, there had always been a secret envy of the old man's rapport, and at least one still seethed with resentment, a sense of bitter ineffectiveness when working with Zeus.

The path curved up the hill to an esplanade. It overlooked the pachyderm compound. The Keeper leaned over the fifteen foot cement wall that enclosed the area and stealthily viewed the small herd in the yard below; a greenless acre of mud and manure. At the far side of the wall loomed the cement and steel structure, the elephant barn. It appeared like a prison. Except for the Kong-sized steel doors. They were purposely left open to avoid unnecessary labors during the summer months.

"You're gonna learn to listen to me today boy," the Keeper threatened in a whisper. He extended the tamer and aimed it like a rifle at the elephants huddled in the center. "I got a real surprise for you Zeus," he intoned, and snickered.

The great bull had been mounting one of the females but now stood solitary and tense, luminous in the moon glow like a marble statue. His tusks and his trunk periscoped the summer air for the direction of the hateful scent he knew so well.

In the year since the Keeper had entered his domain, Zeus' indifference to all men had altered only toward the one who emitted that scent. It had become a joke, "through the vine," the way Zeus had singled him out with a vengeance,

challenged him at every point, slung manure at him, as African bull elephants do, but more so at this Keeper. Excessive "abuse" was rumored to be the reason.

Now the Keeper rested his elbows on the wall, his attention on his pockets, digging for a cigarette. It was the familiar swishing sound of elephant's padded feet in motion that alerted him an instant before Zeus crashed like a locomotive into the wall. His tusks gouged the cement with a heart-stopping thud that sent the man scrambling up the grassy incline. He had no time to assess his twisted ankle in the narrow escape. But it throbbed now while he swore down at the rubbery proboscis that was snorting and grappling over the ledge for a part of him. The Keeper knew well the speed and near-silence with which these deceptively light-footed beasts could cover a distance from a dead start, but he had not slept and had been drinking the whole time he worked on his device.

Pure luck saved the tamer-stick from being snatched down into the pit and dashed to smithers. It had caught on his belt and he dragged it to safety with him.

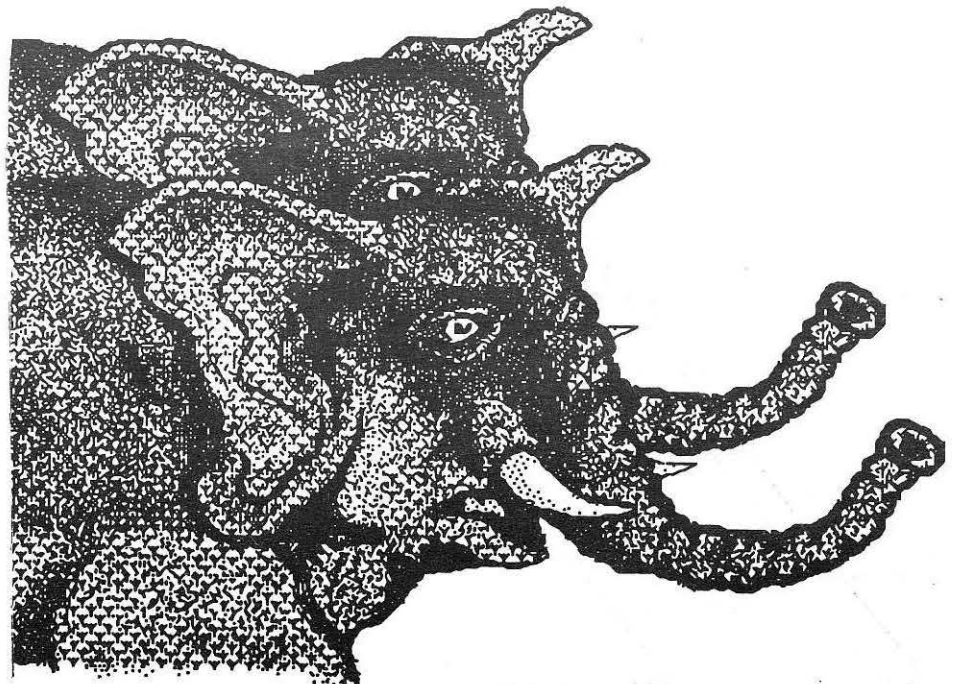
"...I'll have your tusks on my mantle," he screamed breathlessly. He tore the canvas from his tamer and pointed it at Zeus. "You want to kill me!!! You're gonna get your chance right now you bastard!" With that he climbed to the path, catching a flash of pain from his ankle, and hobbled down the hill toward the barn. He had long since become oblivious to the scents in the air; as this morning, laden with honeysuckle and manure.

The Keeper slammed open the barn door, marked, DANGER — EMPLOYEES ONLY. Rodents scattered in the alfalfa bales and birds that nested thirty feet up in the ceiling girders, took flight. With the tamer under one arm he yanked a hook from the wall and made his way through the dingy building to the darker corridor that ran behind the length of the stalls. It was from this narrow passage, safe behind a steel curtain that hung from the ceiling, that the keepers were able to chain the elephant's front foot through a work space below.

The man yelled out to the yard, calling in the female elephants by name. Zeus was always a problem to chain in the mornings and was saved for last, though today, the Keeper could barely restrain the impulse to shackle him first and begin the session. They had business to settle.

The gaping, arched yardway suddenly filled with the enormous grey presence of a female whose silhouette eclipsed the moon light. She was half way to her stall when suddenly she was slammed against the cement wall. She slid down on her rear knees emitting a strident trumpet of pain. From the side of the partition the Keeper could make out her efforts to recover; he saw Zeus backing out to the yard. She had paid the price of bucking the dominant male in line. There was nothing he could do but wait for her to recover and get into the stall. Zeus was tender to the female he was mating but went off on murderous tantrums with the others, sometimes chasing them around the yard for hours at a time, bloodying their rumps with his tusks.

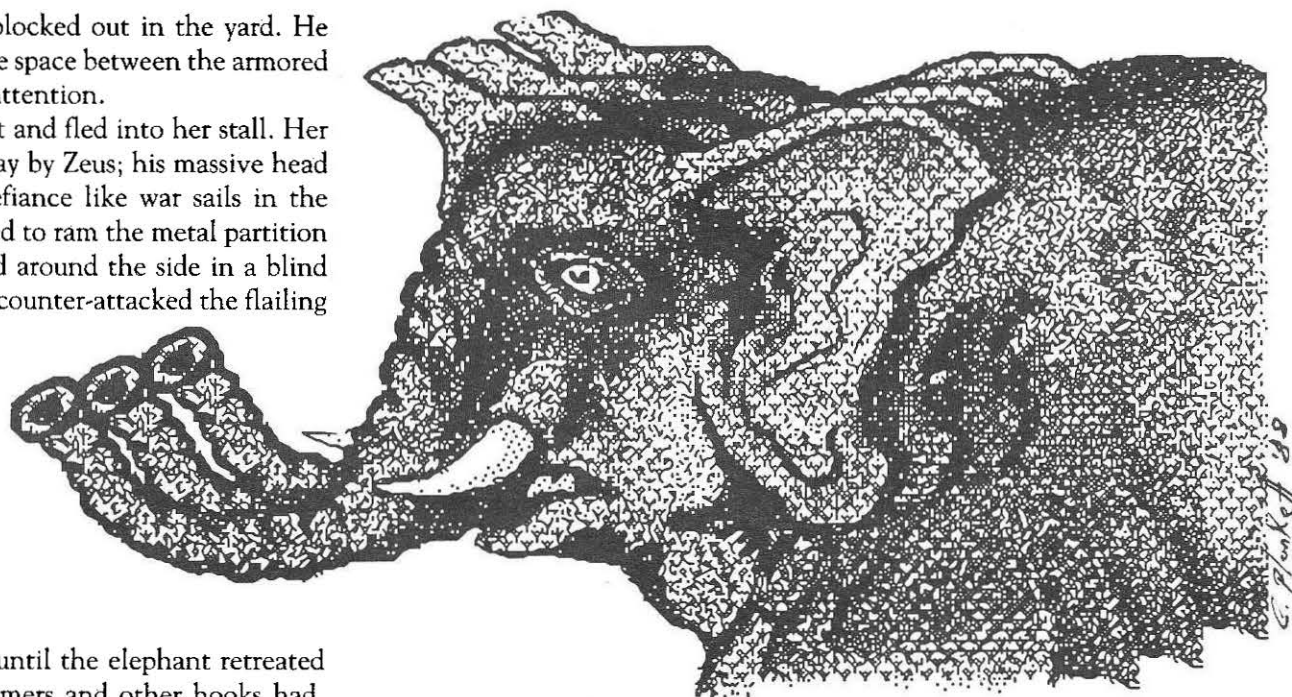
Vigorously, the Keeper began his routine of emptying fifty pound bags of sweet-feed in front of each cell. They knew the schedule and the females needed no coaxing to come in the barn; there were no treats until they were chained. But now, because of the incident at the doorway, he thought he might try to entice Zeus into his end stall; get him out of the way for the others to pass, and maybe succeed in chaining him early. He began pouring the feed in the work space and shouting for the bull to come in. There





was no response, and the other elephants were blocked out in the yard. He grabbed the double-pronged gaf and leaned into the space between the armored curtain and the wall, yelling, to get the rogue's attention.

Abruptly the downed female scuffled to her feet and fled into her stall. Her silhouette was immediately replaced in the archway by Zeus; his massive head gorging the entrance with ears flung open in defiance like war sails in the moonlight. In a breath, he rushed in and proceeded to ram the metal partition with ear splitting clangs, while his trunk thrashed around the side in a blind assault on the man. But the Keeper was ready. He counter-attacked the flailing



snout with his gaf, hacking it in a vicious frenzy until the elephant retreated and the handle splintered, as so many bats, hammers and other hooks had. There'd be no chaining him now but the diversion had worked. The others had come in from the yard and were in their stalls. When he caught his breath, he could go about anchoring and feeding them.

Now, all the females were secured and he returned for another try at Zeus who was lazily rubbing his back against the wall. But the instant the elephant sensed the man was behind the partition he became alert.

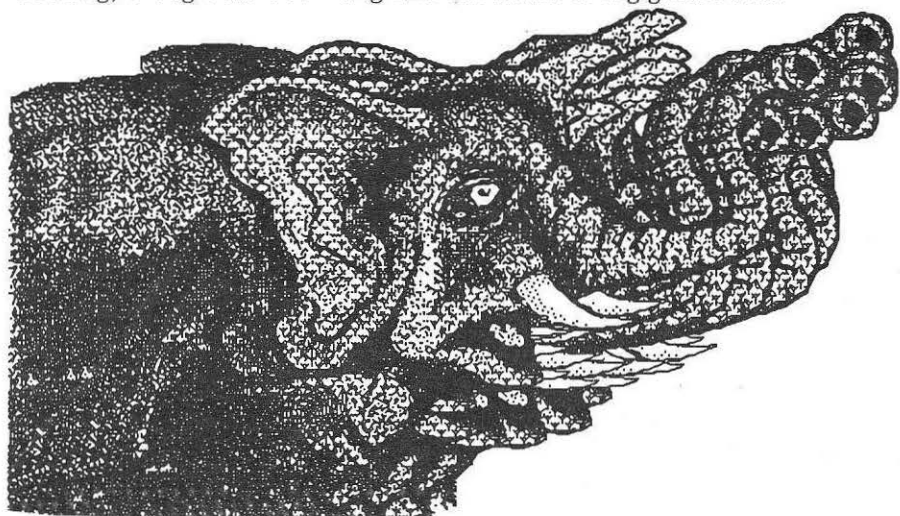
The Keeper ached to use his hot-stick now, but there was no way until he had at least secured a front foot. He didn't dare go in that stall until he had. But then neither had anyone else since the old man. Just the thought of the old keeper's magic with Zeus fired his blood. He held the anchor chain up off the cement block, and the clevis and pliers in the other hand, ready. He had to be quick. Get the chain around the grimy foot and the wing nut tight.

"FOOT! FOOT UP!!," he barked, issuing the basic command that every elephant in this zoo had responded to thousands of times over the years. Yet when Zeus put his foot up on the block, the Keeper knew it was only game time. Each attempt at securing the foot bracelet to the anchor chain ended up with the elephant waiting until the hurrying fingers were just about to secure the links, then he'd jerk his foot back, snapping or bending the clevis, endangering the man's fingers. There was no doubt in the Keeper's mind that it was deliberate. In frustration, he became careless. After losing a few clevises to the wall, his patience became twisted. Just as he finally made the connection good, the elephant snapped his tree stump foot back with uncanny timing and caught the man's index finger in the sawing knot of chains.

The Keeper dropped back against the wall and shook his hand feverishly, somehow trying to fling out the pain. When he recovered enough to examine his hand in a faint shaft of light he realized he was fortunate. A strip of skin had been peeled off the finger and the smashed nail was already purple; but his hand was intact.

Never in his life had he experienced a rage of such combustion as swelled in him now. It did not rise to his mouth in blasphemous curses or manifest in violent reaction — it receded at first into his bowels. Then tingled up through the spine into his head, unfolding from some ancient cave of the brain, a serpent of vengeance. With flicking tongue it uncoiled and its fangs spat venom across synapses. It was time for Zeus' lesson.

The barn clanged with a morose rhythmic tolling as Zeus' colossal head continued to ram the metal shield. In shock, the Keeper's ears registered nothing, though the barn rang like the inside of a gigantic bell.



Calmly, he picked his tamer from the corner and exited the dark corridor in a mental state that numbed the afflictions to his ankle and hand. He went through the abandoned cobwebbed office, around the vacant side of the barn, and from behind, entered the stalls where the elephants were shuffling nervously. Now void of moonlight, their mudcaked skin had transformed into dull tents of wrinkled canvas.

For a short while the Keeper lingered in an angry daze, just outside the steel columns of Zeus' stall and observed the rogue. His game over, the great African had settled. He leaned against the wall with rear feet crossed, dipping moodily into the pile of sweet-feed. For the moment, unconcerned with the man. A tense peace grogged the barn.

The Keeper leaned on his contraption and gazed out the archway. It was the still-time, when the daily change-of-guard took place in the heavens. Over the far wall, dawn kindled in a rose-glow strip. Above, the moon was retreating in sapphire wraps. The only sounds in the barn were the elephant chains shifting on the cement floor. Then came the muted tap of each coil of cable as the Keeper unwound the long extension cord from the butt of his tamer. When the cable lay ready for unfettered movement he gripped the rubber handle and shoved the plug into the wall socket. Instantly the hot stick came alive, crackling and biting the air around the electrified tip. A peacock in the yard let loose its eerie cat-call.

Without hesitation the Keeper moved carefully between the thick steel poles and stood at the rear of Zeus' cell. The first sun rays shot through the archway and curved around the man's back, dividing the stall into shadow and light. Zeus swung around abruptly, sensing. His trunk reared in defense, fully exposing the lethal tusks, tremendous like a pair of curved stalactites. His ears flapped out with a crack, signaling a charge; but instead the beast hesitated, as though he sensed danger emanating from the unfamiliar object poking toward him. Then he fell on the man like a grey avalanche. The elephant's trunk swiped down with deadly force, but it missed the Keeper, who anticipated the direct attack and had stepped back just enough to bait the animal, straining at its tether.

"Oh . . . you want me bad big fella . . . don't you?" the man taunted Zeus in hoarse whispers.

A devious gleam spawned in the Keeper's eyes as he prodded and teased. He checked quickly behind himself for snares in the cable, then moved in cautiously over the floors of slippery excrement. Teeth grinding, he poked the hot stick, jab, weave, fake; and when he got the reaction he wanted he advanced, timing the whipping trunk. Again it snapped at his face. It breezed past the side of his head, too close; he had misjudged. But when the elephant cocked his thick snout again, the Keeper saw the opening, lunged in and stabbed with the electric harpoon. In rapid succession, he saw blue sparks flash, heard the tender dermis searing; the air sundered with accelerating trumpet blasts of agony that startled the man back and terrified the other elephants into commotion. Man and beast were repelled from the shock. Zeus recoiled and slipped down on this rear; trunk meekly suspended, the sensitive finger-like appendages at the tip quivered and seemed to be testing the air to decipher the species of the strange pain-thing the man hurt him with.

The scent of burnt flesh invaded the Keeper's nostrils, unfamiliar but definite. He eyed the pink wound at the base of the trunk and delighted at the submissive mass huddled so unbelievably in the corner. This was more like it.



But the elephant had not yet proved he would obey him. The Keeper felt a grating irritation in his gut. He had to be sure that when the supervisor's criticizing voice arrived later, the great bull would work for him. He must teach the rogue to "Come Around"; the single command could be augmented with a few swear words to produce the greatest variety of responses from the animal. How briskly the elephant obeyed minimum instructions determined the keeper's rating with his peers.

Intoxicated with his initial success, the Keeper advanced again, now from sunlight into the shadows of the stall. He grinned. "I'll bet you forgot about that Old Daddy of yours already, didn't you big fella?" Now he moved with confidence around the animal's side to probe at his rear.

"You're just a big baby ain't ya? You know who your papa is now," he taunted. Zeus followed the man's movement with flinching eyes. His ears were sealed back in submission and his proboscis tested the air hesitantly.

The man eyed his target. The grin dropped. His voice rose, "Now I want you to COME AROUND! COME AROUND HERE YOU BIG . . ." His voice imitated the drill sergeant bark he had heard the old man deliver so many times. Zeus jerked up his tonnage unexpectedly on all fours but remained defensive in the corner, shaking his head in confusion. The Keeper's target was now out of reach.

Having the upper hand, the man's wrath, at first, had been appeased. Now he stepped brashly and closed in, violating the animal's instinctive private space. It was too late when he realized his error. Cornered, the terrified animal panicked and swung his head around to defend himself. The Keeper reacted without thought and attempted to deflect the bashing trunk. He shoved the hot stick forward as the rubber weapon lashed at him. The harpoon tip lanced down the elephant's trunk, opening a searing wound, and at the fleshy base, the electrified metal prong slipped into the pink mouth, sizzling.

There was an explosion of high, razor pain sounds and vibrations from the seven ton mammoth that flung the man back and shook the barn. The other elephants, trumpeting fear, pounded the stalls frantically, straining the chains.

The Keeper back-peddled for balance but slipped on the slimy drain and went down on his back. In all the clangor and confusion his ears picked out the sound of Zeus' chain snapping loose; a ping delivered to his stomach the sickening message.

He scudded backwards on his elbows into the shaft of sun; Zeus' foot was pressing down on his leg. It was an agonizing flash that riddled every nerve, then there was sky, yard, trees, barn — he was spinning in the air but he could not feel by which part of his body he was gripped.

He realized he had been out. Breath was scarce; there was no body feeling.

Almost euphoria. He was beyond fear now.

Flat on his back on the cement floor, his eyes focused on the surreal scene that was performing high above him. In the dark sky of the barn, Zeus hovered, a terrifying, phantom elephant, poised on hind legs at the edge of eternity. The tamer stick twirled in his trunk; it flashed just once like a bolt of lightning and lit the heavens.

That instant, in the flash of light, their eyes connected in a direct beam. From the elephant's wild red eye, the man sensed a strange alliance of hurt. Then Zeus vanished from his vision and the ceiling went black. The Keeper recognized the sound of his tamer splintering. It was the last sound. His ears were sealed forever.

The final moment of life had arrived and the man recognized it. Strange, there was no terror, but rather a mad sense of pride warmed him; that he was dying by such royal might, and not in any of the common ways he had imagined. And there was the sun; he felt it on his cheek.

Later, after a maintenance crew had put out the small electrical fire, a crowd gathered at the elephant wall in the heat and flies. Some visitors, familiar with the zoo animals, called to Zeus by name. And typically he ignored them. He was leaning against the far wall, in habit, with his rear legs crossed and trunk extended over the top, probing for tender grass. To patrons, nothing appeared out of the ordinary about his lazy mid-day manner, or the moody eyes beneath "cute," long wirey lashes.

"... we'll be running test data on the computer to check for the possibility of one of the females being pregnant," a vet addressed the group of students on the esplanade.

Down on the path, supervisors and keepers were gathered in a bravado discussion, "...damn shame, Zeus breaking a tusk like that." A supervisor spoke, "...well, I still say that guy should have known better — Zeus was just being what he is — a full blown African elephant in heat. And I thought that guy was kiddin' once, about using a contraption like that on an animal." A round of nervous chuckling followed.

"I wish that big son-of-a-bitch would try something like that on me boy. . . I got a magnum home that'll blow that sucker to kingdom come!" a keeper drawled, silencing the others.

The coroner's van pulled up near the barn door and a hush descended on the spectators.

What remained of the Keeper was a deep, maroon stained rug of mud and straw, except for one area of the chest which had not been flattened. It was host to the tusk.

**C. L. Fox  
Bridgeton**

*is a musician*





## Veteran's Day

I guess sometimes I'd trade all of this airy bullshit for one good handful of grease in an old biker's garage; like today, jointly cursing French technology (contradiction in terms), as I assist with wisecracks, the occasional hand and critical observation, adjusting the valves on my Renault.

The old biker, full beard and leather jacket, first regales me with a tale of his '53 Ford with an old flat head motor, stroked and bored and ported "so you could put 4 fingers in there," multi-carburetted, Lincoln valves and suspension, blue and white tuck 'n' roll interior, Mercedes buckets. I come back with my '57 Ford pickup, original V-8 and rear end all redone, cross country shuffler, front end feels like its got power steering. Kerosene heater warming up the little garage, we've already built a serious trust between us. He tells me how everybody thinks bikers wear all those chains (he points out his on his wallet and keys) to look bad, but he says it's just 'cause they all get "light" and tend to lose stuff. Four or five rose nipples pin-ups in motorcycle theme make the place perfect.

My car's a bitch to start in the cold, and when he pops the air cleaner we both see why — the last guy to muck around with the carb has left half my choke plate out, and I curse the guy and all his criminal ancestors and tell the biker "I'm glad I never sent him another bottle of wine for Christmas." He starts "the mining operation" to get at those godforsaken valves, and he says how the French could never win at war after it became a matter not of art but of engineering. "If you'd told me this boy was air-conditioned I'd have never touched it." He stated and I say "I guess I'm getting smarter in my old age." "What you need is something good, like that '50 Chrysler I've got in front," he says straight faced, and I laugh and tell him "That's just what I need; Christ, I've got to get the body work on my '57 all done up this winter back home."

Time for a smoke, his wheels are turning on a business deal now, 'cause I've mentioned I'd love to put an overdrive in my old Ford, how once a mechanic in Taylorville, Illinois had offered me one all rebuilt for only \$235 and I hadn't had the spare change. He knows this guy with a '59 that's got an overdrive and a bunch of brand new body panels, thinks we can get it for two or three hundred if he's still got it. The biker's got a '61 and needs the motor and front end — his are "goffed" he says — so if I buy it he'll tow it over, strip it out for me, keep the motor and front end for himself, even help me crate my shit up and send it to Illinois, so I say "Check it out and give me a buzz."

I pump him for info on gear ratios, setting the timing in relation to octane, all that good motorhead stuff that only a few, like my man here, have an integrated overview of. He's telling me my Renault 5 is like a Pinto — there're real good ones and there're real bad ones. I tell him the only time mine wouldn't start was when I almost had it sold to my girlfriend's mother, and the deal fell through and the car's never failed me since. "Perfect mother-in-law car, just like a Pinto," he says. I say that's what she drove, a Pinto, at 85 miles an hour for 120,000 miles. He asks "Was she divorced?" and I say yeah, and he tells me "Every Pinto is, or was at one time, driven by a divorced woman."

He's reaching way back on the valve train now, rapping about how if they ever get good at genetic engineering they'll make mechanics with three arms (two elbows each), wrists and fingers fully double jointed. We get on a government jag and he says how Casey, a Catholic, was cremated, a mortal sin; he figures Casey's got a new face and is hanging around the Bahamas. I tell him my brother and I are thinking maybe Nixon wasn't so bad after all, and he says yeah, "Gorbachev would be all right . . . even Ortega." We're hitting around on cars and he tells me the old Saab's V-4 was German Ford, originally designed as a fork lift motor. I tell him about a Saab Sonnet for sale down the road from me but it's got a bad paint job (sign of worse things) and I looked underneath it and it's cashed; he tells me of another one for sale and how they first had the 3 cylinder motor, oil injection, triple carburetion: "They'd go into orbit when you dropped the hammer, between the times they blew up."

He checks his watch and tells me he's gonna flat-rate me at \$40 for the gig 'cause he's taking his time, smoking a lot of Marlboros. "This is a

hell of a thing you've got me doing, and on Veteran's Day." I'd already noticed his large black enameled belt buckle with the map of Indochina on it, the dates 1968-1973 and the words "War Games".

We insult the French some more as I help him get the valve cover back on by holding all the spaghetti as out of the way as I can. He hooks up all the linkage and makes a slight adjustment on the idle speed. I say "I'm gonna give you a couple of extra skins 'cause it's such a shitty job and you've been at it quite awhile," and give him \$45, and he says "No, the job's only \$40, so the five's a tip," and I say "All right — that's cool with me."

I'm centered metal heavy now, feeling fire light, and my car meditates quietly down the road. The old biker returns to warring against a couple of fully loaded six-packs, which don't stand a chance.

Tom Goodwin

Bar Harbor  
is a COA student  
& former carpenter

## Slaughterhouse 65

*The year more people died  
In traffic than were born,  
They closed all the highways.  
Our town celebrated  
by sweeping, mopping, and  
Finally whitewashing  
the stained and dusty road.  
And then we held a ball,  
Dancing till some trucker  
Who hadn't heard the word  
Came blasting through in  
An eighteen-wheel reefer  
And stained our whitewash with  
The blood of half our tribe.*

Thomas A. Easton  
Belfast  
teaches at Thomas College

## Women's Dorm at the Riverview Resthome

*for sixty-one years they slept in one bed*

*now she chews her vacant gums  
and won't be comforted  
by weaving or making baskets*

*at dusk she is led to a sterile mattress  
where she knits the damp air between her fingers  
he lies along two floors below  
because this arrangement is policy*

*and each night he calls Angela, Angela  
until the yellow pills bring mercy  
and he sleeps without her  
without memory of his calling*

*but she remembers  
even what she hasn't heard  
she lies awake and longs to rest  
her face against the warmth  
of his still-beating heart.*

A. Manette Ansay  
Saco

## Letting in the Flies

Swack. Tanner swatted another fly. Chris looked at the green mesh of the fly swatter and its waffled victim.

"Tanner, at least flick the carcass away," she said.

"Vegetarians. No guts for the real stuff," Tanner commented.

"Please flick it away. It's hardly a question of diet."

"No," Tanner insisted, "if you leave the carcasses around, it will keep the other flies away." He poured a healthy gulp of Carlo Rossi into her cup. "Some sneaky Pete?" he asked, too late for her refusal.

"But the flies keep coming in," Chris objected. "See?" She pointed at a dragon fly dancing, iridescent, in the kitchen sun around his new refrigerator.

"They like the baby oil on your legs," Tanner said, drawing the tip of an index finger slowly down her calf.

Chris recrossed her legs. "But where do the flies keep coming from?"

"No screens, see?" Tanner grinned, squinting at her, rotating his arm in the gaping window.

Chris felt a need to withdraw from the teasing blue of his slanted eyes. "Have you a deadline for the completion of construction?" she asked.

Tanner laughed at the sudden formality of her speech. "Yes, teacher, yes, when my money runs out."

"Have you much money from . . ." she paused. "The sale of Aunt Rachel's house?"

"Yup," Tanner said, "Grandmother left enough to start all this — *'Dump Winds'*," he laughed, gesturing expansively.

Chris looked around at the huge, white rooms, unfinished and unfilled. She shuddered against their emptiness, hearing Tanner's voice resonate unnaturally against the dry wall in this home that still seemed so uninhabited. She took a sip of wine from her cup, an old Captain Kangaroo mug with the jiggly eyes of stuffed animals.

"When is the memorial service?" she asked.

\* \* \*

Chris had been a summer person to the island for twenty-five, no, twenty-seven years now. And, before her, her mother, her grandmother. She loved the continuity, the habituation that she could not find during the academic year in Boston. Tanner had settled permanently on the island right after college. They had fallen in love when she was twenty-one, but that love had dwindled miserably, undramatically, over her wintry first year at Medford Academy. She felt it still unresolved and sometimes annoyingly unresumed. Why hadn't its finality been clarified? But she had never asked; she was afraid of the answer.

She was grateful for the solitude of her own cottage. A chance to reflect, to unfold memories from mothballs, to open the house and re-enter through the ritual a connection with her parents, now dead, her grandmother, never met except in a sepia daguerreotype: a dark-haired woman in a high-necked white dress.

Chris threw open the windows to a stiff, salty southwesterly. The curtains billowed. She set and wound the wooden clock with the radiating spokes poorly imitating a ship's wheel. Dear clock. Her eyes caressed each object: in the corner cabinet, the loud 1930's china splattered with red poinsettias, the apple sorter her grandfather had converted into a coffee table, the brass inclinometer from an old schooner, a gift from Aunt Rachel.

Chris passed from room to room, carefully lifting the paper plates of D-con left against the onslaught of mice. Candles and soap appeared from their tins. Bedding and mattresses sighed out of their plastic cases. Linens were resurrected from the seamen's chests exhaling mothballs and dry paper. Ant cups vanished into overflowing garbage cans. Floors shone under broom and mop. At last the tea-kettle whistled, and Chris readied herself for the consummating moment of the annual ritual. She washed her face, rinsed out a tea cup and took a moment to relax in the big armchair before the large paned window looking out on the bay. The window imposed a gridwork on the view. In one square a gull murmured lowly as he curved away. In another the old ash tree bristled. Chris noted with satisfaction the cement bag on the lawn. Perry Dowdy, then, had remembered to come and reset the flagstones in the terrace. He could be so slow about getting to things. The lupine curled up pink and purple just above the sill. Some houseflies buzzed pleasantly against the panes. The clock ticked.

Chris rose and went to the blanket chest and gingerly lifted out the quilt. She spread it fondly over the love seat by the wood stove to study it. Even

as a child, she had loved the quilt, recognizing in it scraps of upholstery, rags, so she'd learned, of her mother's old dresses, and scraps of bedroom curtains unwoven by the busy fingers of sun and time. But the quilt remained. Square touching square as generation touched generation, grandmother to mother to daughter. How often had she pretended that the squares were countries. The green calicos were the farmlands. The children chasing hoops with sticks were city parks, that odd geometric pattern, an urban skyline, the solid blue, the ocean, forever at high tide. Her fingers picked out their landscapes as they had when she was a child — the preferences of regionalism — each finger becoming a character for its setting. She thought briefly of her grandmother's fingers, never seen, stitching carefully, tirelessly, June evening after June evening, the close, sweet scent of the raspberry suckers flirting with the salty air rolling off the clam flats as she connected, piece by piece, this quilt through days and months and summers.

\* \* \*

Tanner's blue Falcon rattled into the lower left square of the paned window. His tall body stood as if in imitation of the ash tree beside him, arm raised like a strong branch in greeting.

"Tan, come in," she called.

"House all open?" he asked. He banged the screen door as he entered.

"Yes," she smiled, sure of herself in her home.

"Any mice signs?"

"A few. But the house has weathered well."

"Nice house." He grinned. "But old, too old. Too small. You need a sturdy foundation. Reliable well. New plumbing."

She only smiled in response. They both knew the argument too well, having rehearsed it many times. But Chris acknowledged to herself Tanner's tall frame did look displaced — cramped by the cozy confines of the room.

"I wondered if I might borrow a shovelful of cement to set Rachel's headstone?" Tanner asked, certain already he would not be refused.

"Of course," Chris mumbled, awed by his ease, his frankness with death.

"Will you help me close Rachel's house tomorrow?" Tanner asked. "Awful lot of stuff there. Got to be cleared out before the Thompsons move in. I'll pick you up."

"I'll walk," Chris said.

\* \* \*

Before leaving, Chris scrutinized herself in the mirror, taking inventory. A dust of freckles over her nose and cheeks. Some grey, premature, in her brow and at her temples. Her large, surprised brown eyes. A few new wrinkles, laugh wrinkles at least. She slid some rouge over her cheeks, slightly ashamed at the vanity, and rinsed her fingers. Leave no clues, she thought, and set off.

As she walked she was surprised by each sight, a crack in the road, too insignificant for memory but startlingly familiar. The uprooted pine from the northeasterly blow last summer. Fred Hamilton's porch sagging more in the middle each year like a work horse who's had to bear up that one year too many under the weight of its work. But some changes too: a new house going up near the Division Point Road, a smart coat of whitewash on Beldens' picket fence, Tanner's new house on the old dump road, and, of course, Aunt Rachel's death.

Aunt Rachel was not really an aunt. She was not really Tanner's grandmother either, but a distant cousin of Tanner's. Rachel had adopted Tanner soon after Hartley, Tanner's father, had completed his eventful flight. While Hartley was in the service, he and Kirsten had a trans-Atlantic, transnational flight with marriage; it crashed pretty quickly. Rachel called the affair mad-cap. Tanner, now anyway, called it insane. Its appropriate adjective had ceased to matter. Tanner saw little to nothing of either parent. His mother lived alone in Needham, his father, in retirement from flying, in New Haven. Tanner had been raised by Rachel, with his mother and father alighting only periodically for visits. But Rachel and John raised him through the visits and had financed his education, private school and college, with the income from the small sailing camp they'd operated. Chris, younger than Tanner by eight years, could only dimly remember John as a quiet man carving his duck decoys in a corner of the porch, heaps of shavings curled up around a pair of heavy, cracked leather boots. But Rachel still vibrated for her, a lively woman with quick, blue eyes, cooking for the camp and thrashing around competently in the garden. Always



moving.

Since college, Tanner always seemed to be moving too, but with an almost deliberate aimlessness. She clicked through the series of jobs: house painter, nurse, newspaper writer, ferry man, lobster man, always a new scheme. He was writing the column when they had begun dating, wonderful features with a Down East hominess, local lore. But now Rachel, the source of so much of that lore, was dead. Cremated. Tanner had sprinkled her ashes at Halfway Rock, watching them sift slowly over the swells, sinking out of sight. Only a headstone in a graveyard to commemorate an empty grave.

Chris squinted at the horizon. A northeaster was nosing in a storm. Her skirt luffed about her legs in the freshening breeze; she quickened her pace.

She arrived at Rachel's just as the first drops started to fall. She lifted the heavy brass knocker and let it clunk. Tanner appeared in the frame. He looked beautiful — stripped to the waist, his dark arms knotted like hemp rope.

"Chris," he scooped her into quick hug, "come in out of the rain."

Chris blinked into the dark room. It was as she remembered, the stained wood walls, brass glinting from the mantel, the fireplace, the tables. But the floor was littered with boxes, counterfeiting the tired joy of moving day. Albums of photographs, Rachel's china, a box of John's mallard decoys. Rain thrummed on the roof.

"How will you ever get all this up to your house?" Chris asked.

"I won't," Tanner smiled. "Most of it sold in the tag sale."

"The decoys . . ." Chris trailed off elliptically.

"The decoys," Tanner affirmed. "Here, come give me a hand with these frames, will you," Tanner demanded.

Chris paused. "Was there . . . enough cement?"

"Close enough for government work," Tanner responded. "Good, solid foundation. Now give me a hand."

They packed silently, Tanner, business-like, fastidious, packing each box to its capacity, Chris, haltingly, ran her hands over surfaces: the leather book bindings with Emily Dickinson, Robert Service in chipped gilt, the cool, smooth brass bowls, John's rough carved sandpipers, the wooden checkerboard — wondering how much care, how much character had been invested in each object.

"So much junk always following you around," Tanner commented. He surveyed the stack of liquor boxes filled, labeled, and taped for storage. "Gawd, you can become owned by your own belongings." He dropped a scrapbook into the garbage bag crumpled against the fireplace.

The rain had stopped. "Fairing up," Tanner said. He peered between the wooden shutters of the southwestern window. "Well, bedroom next." He turned to Chris. "We need a little music to pack by. The King," he said, putting Elvis on the turntable. The throbbing of Mystery Train struck Chris as out of place, locomotive in the still and timeless room.

They fingered through the hangers in the bedroom closet, piling the old clothes on the guest room bed, a leering old Victorian with a headboard resembling a grainy, weatherbeaten face. Tanner found a felt hat. "Here, put this on." He tossed it to Chris. He looked at her. "Great. How about this?" He snatched a tie from the tie rack. "Can't believe Rachel kept all this stuff." He stood over Chris, knotting a Windsor around her neck. The tie had sailboats scudding against a blue background. "I can only do this from behind," Tanner said, resting his arms on her shoulders.

"But Tanner," she protested.

He ferreted through the heap on the bed and tossed her a MacGregor flannel shirt. "Put that on," he suggested, amused.

Chris laughed in spite of herself. She felt the liberation of dressing up, remembering the trunks in her grandmother's attic she'd ransacked as a child. The flannel shirt fell hugely from her shoulders. She pulled some worn hip boots up to the hem of her skirt and clumped around. Tanner watched her, encouraged her, laughing. Chris took a pipe from a rack, tasting the stem, a trace of tobacco, Flying Dutchmen. She postured dramatically, trying to mug an old tar.

Tanner found a flowered duster on the bed and pulled it on over his jeans. One of Rachel's old house dresses? He pulled on a straw gardening hat. "I'm ever so obliged to you for requesting this dance." Tanner curtsied and grabbed Chris, rocking her to Elvis as she flapped impossibly in the boots, laughing. They fell back onto the bed into the rumpled clothes. The record clicked off. Chris felt Tanner's huge hand fan out, warm over her stomach. She smelled the shirt sleeve crooked beneath her cheek. Was it still a trace of John, she thought, or only mildew from the closet?

"Chris?" Tanner started.

"Yes?" she asked, motionless, afraid to move.

"We've got to get back to work," he said suddenly. He sat up, hatless, removed the duster and wadded it up, tossing it to the bed. Chris heard him clattering pots and pans into a box in the kitchen. She stared at the empty hat on the bed next to her, then rose slowly, confronting herself in the time-marbled glass of the high Victorian dresser. She looked lost in the oversized clothes. A fly buzzed lazily in the afternoon gloom of the room. "I heard a fly buzz when I died," she recited aloud. She knew she must not cry. She did not know why she was.

\* \* \*

Tanner shuffled the few boxes retrieved from Rachel's, selecting some for storage in the cellar, others for the attic. Chris crossed to the bulletin board where Tanner tacked postcards and recent mail. She recognized the series of return addresses: Patrice, Martha, Sadie, the pale names of Tanner's summer romances. He kept in touch with them all. A wedding invitation, Patrice was now married. An article on Sadie, now co-ordinator of a program for the developmentally disabled. She recognized the Elvis postcard she had mailed to Tanner in January, signed Deke Rivers, one of the personae she assumed in their game of letter-writing roles. A New Yorker cartoon. One of those George Price cartoons with the living room crammed with an unlikely assortment of anachronistic junk. A picture of Clark Gable — smirking, self-assured in his provocative side-glance. One of Tanner's old articles on Stone Sloops, and a picture of Rachel, a very young Rachel, in the turnabout she'd used to instruct hopeful young sailors.

She returned to the table and studied the rectangles and squares tacked to the bulletin board. She tried to picture Tanner arranging and rearranging them, finding their connections like her grandmother patiently piecing together the old quilt. Chris looked at Tanner fussing with the boxes, his face in shadow beneath the visor. He always wore a hat. This one, yellow with small silver wings spread for flight on either side, reminded her of the picture of Mercury in Edith Hamilton's Mythology.

The objects on the table were a still life: the mug, some unopened letters, Tanner's Swiss Army knife with the blade open to slice through packing tape. The flies had been swept away. Tanner had put the new screens in the windows yesterday. Chris pressed a finger against the fiberglass screen, wondering, if she could stand outside, would her finger appear waffled — a fly in the mesh of the swatter.

"Tanner, why did you sell Rachel's house?" she demanded suddenly.

"It's too small, wicked small. And dark."

"But it was Rachel's. The memories," Chris persisted. "And this house," she indicated the room deprecatingly.

Tanner stared at her. "Chris," he said, "it's a hardship tour. Rachel's gone. I loved her; she loved me. She had a good life, but she's gone. Things change."

Chris stood up. She had to be sure he was watching. She needed to feel his eyes fixed upon her like the plastic stare of the mug. Carefully, deliberately, she picked up the knife, placed the point in a corner of the screen, drew it down in a long slit, turned the corner, slicing mercilessly along the square until it flapped and fell sloppily on the sill.

She heard Tanner's question beat in the air. "Jesus Chris, what the hell are you doing? Chris?" and again "Chris?"

"Letting in the flies," she said, "I'm letting in the flies."

Joan Connor  
Chebeague Island  
*is a former teacher*

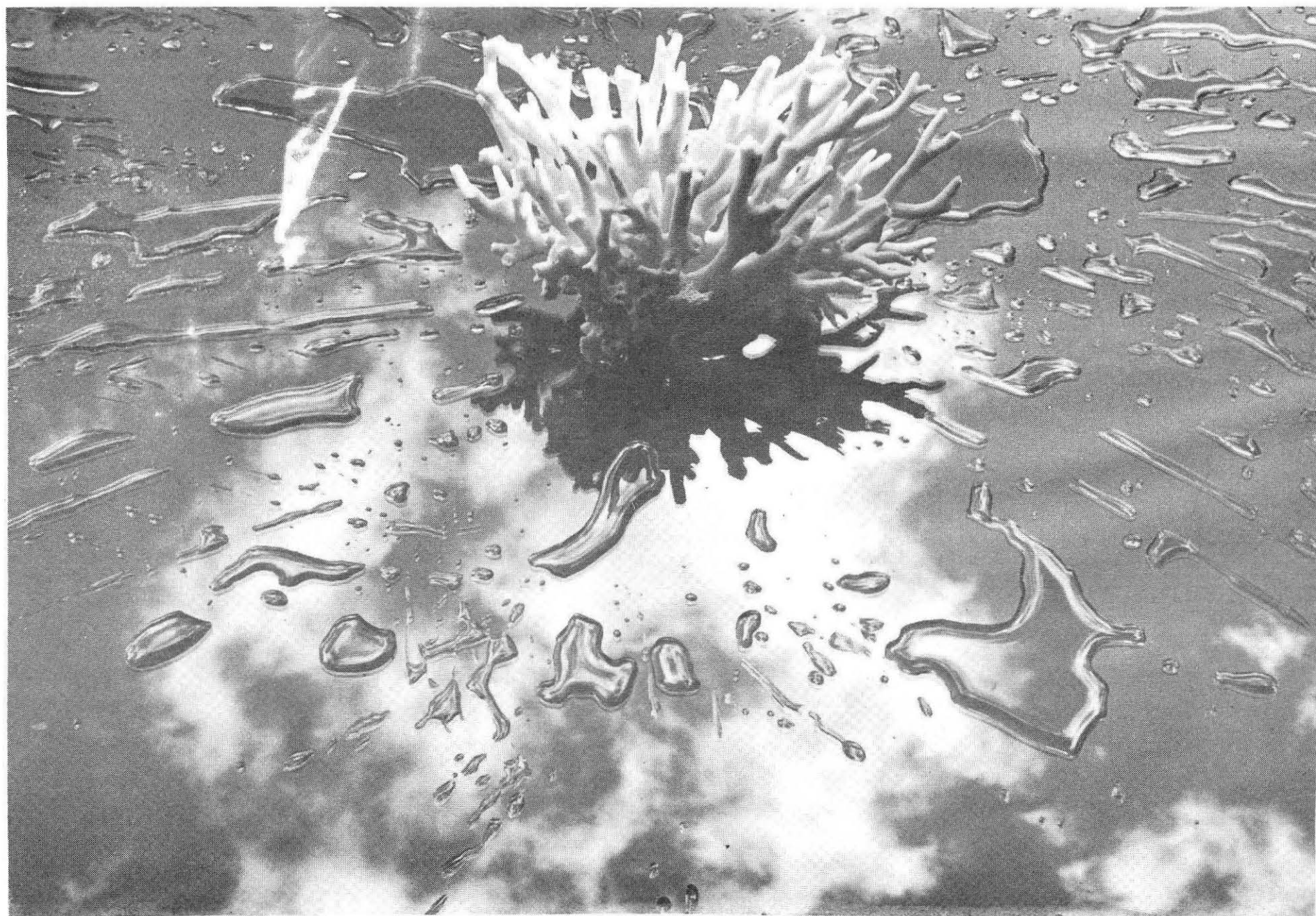
## Threshold

*Planets swing through space,  
snow covers over footsteps,  
things occur by themselves.  
When ideas of ourselves  
are superfluous,  
our ideas are corpses.  
the comparison is  
obvious, because death is . . .  
remember the shock it was  
to see the world would still go  
on when we were gone as it had  
done before we were born,  
world would not miss a beat.  
Imagine mind not tied down  
talking to itself,  
the unfamiliar silence  
no more death than sleep is  
when mind instead of asking  
what about me, what about **me**  
listens to planets swinging,  
the softly hissing snow.*

**John Castlebury**  
**Boulder, CO**  
*recently moved from Maine*

*This fat handled screwdriver,  
which fits my hand so well,  
belonged to your father.  
And when he died  
it came to me,  
the son-in-law.  
and now, instead of you,  
I have pictures,  
newspaper clippings  
of our wedding  
and the little lists  
of all the plans we had  
and never got to do.  
And now  
this fat handled screwdriver,  
that does its work  
so well,  
reminds me  
of the many times  
I didn't.*

**Douglas Scribner**  
**Newburyport, MA**  
*seeks a contemplative life*



*Photo by Michael Howland*



# Signatures

(1.)  
*My daughter presses on me like some primitive thing  
some slug on an exposed rock  
some beast on its milky mother.  
I walk with her arms and legs  
coiled around me, listening to bright touch,  
trusting it as gulls on sea cliffs  
trust the updrafts: as the tide trusts  
tugs of the moon: there is no stopping this  
my child. We are holding each other as stars  
are knitting the sky together with constellations.*

(2.)  
*We visit my father, now seventy-five,  
who ponders twenty good ways to swing  
the golf club back the perfect way  
so he can hit that one true shot  
that lands like a projectile guided  
by mission control into the hole.  
He tells us about his pacemaker,  
the way his heart beats 60 times  
a minute, obeying its command  
as if it had no choice. He holds on  
as I hold on, as my daughter holds on.*

(3.)  
*The slug slithers into shade.  
The sun accepts the waiting sky.*

**Bruce Spang**  
**Readfield**  
*educates adolescents  
about substance abuse*

## Flameout: McGuire, 1951

*My forearm flexes the stick before I  
hear the silence of my engine falling  
back into the vapors of the runway.  
Fort Dix below, Atlantic to my left,  
nudging at the sweep-back of a wing that  
cradles no glide-ratio underneath.  
I can punch out, I think, even as I  
press the air-start button. Recruits below,  
hearing the sucking-in turbines, raise  
faces from fatigue in spite of orders  
otherwise. Dark eyes look up at the still  
and molten shape, fluttering a shadow  
between dawn and the company street, no  
field. But compressors roar again, and  
the arm hauls back, leaving the watch of those  
white faces, looking up, down there in Dix.*

**H. R. Coursen**  
**Brunswick**  
*teaches at Bowdoin*

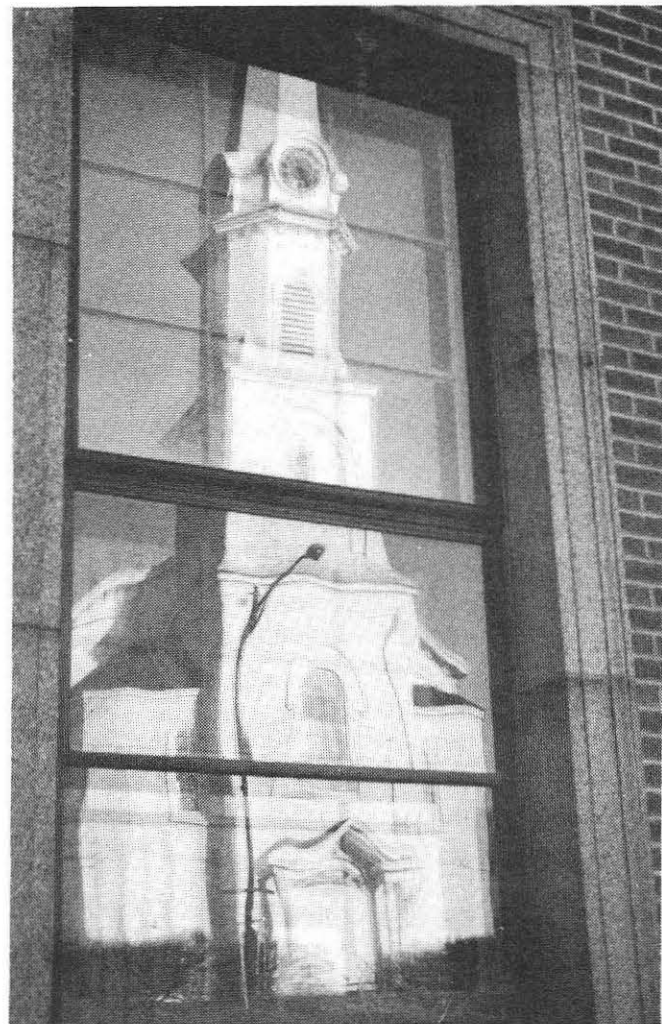


Photo by Martin Nerber

## Honking It Up For God

*The little boy across the street  
who honks the horn  
is pink.  
His Sunday clothes are new,  
his mind's not his own.  
what he doesn't understand  
is mystery.*

*Inside the church  
his parents know the process;  
can conjure God  
with practiced scenes.  
They know nothing holds a man like fear:  
a horn blown against shadows.*

**T. L. Moser**  
**So. Freeport**  
*works & sails from Spar Cove*

## Adventures in a Promised Land

Harley Newt was a man smaller than life. He was 39; he lived with his mother but she was away at work most of the time, so he was pretty much a latchkey adult. Left to his own devices, he spent his days praying and drooling over pornography.

He looked like Laurel and Hardy, both. While somewhat short, he was immense from the neck down, so big he was like a walking group portrait, but his face was one long silly grin. He had a moustache, of course, but it appeared removeable, although it wasn't. He referred to this strange little growth, always in danger of falling off in the night, as his cookie-duster; acquaintances (for he had no friends), noting its dandruffy disposition, privately called it his crop-duster. He was never invited to two buffets in a row.

Early one autumn morning he awoke at 2 a.m., his alarm ringing like a banshee on the nightstand. He smiled, heaved a flatulent sigh of relief. He turned his clock back an hour — the world was on standard time once more, job well done. When it came to jaywalking, mattress tags, women and the end of daylight savings, Harley Newt was an innocent.

An hour later his alarm went off again.

\* \* \*

That morning he crawled from bed one eye at a time. As he stood at the bathroom sink, applying Head & Shoulders to his upper lip with a cotton swab, he yawned and reflected upon the meaninglessness of his existence. He desperately wanted to communicate his despair to his mother, but she was spending her vacation at a spam-fest in downtown Toledo. "That lucky dog," he said to himself, to no one in particular. He was so blue he could have slashed her wrists. He spent the day praying and drooling over pornography.

The decision to become a famous fundamentalist preacher was made, and practically accomplished, overnight. He was well on his way to graduating from a mail-order divinity school by the time his mother reluctantly returned from Toledo. She brought her son an Elvis Presley table lamp, for his bedroom, some of those paintings of little children with big eyes bought at an Ohio lawn sale, and a splatter film on video cassette.

The night was full of kisses and excited talk, on her part; he waited until the next morning, over spam and eggs, to tell her of his newfound calling, give her a Richard Nixon candle with a wick atop the head as a welcome-home present, and suggest she henceforth call him son-of-God if that was not too awkward or inconvenient. She went to work at the inflatable-woman factory wondering if it had really been a good idea, after all, to have had his afterskin removed, at birth, instead of his foreskin. It never pays to go to a quack obstetrician, and she finally realized this.

The Rev. Harley Newt's career took off. He mimeographed letters to all of the newspapers, on subjects that lent themselves to sage cliché. Arms Control: "Bombs don't kill people, people kill people." Global Pollution: "Remember one must break an egg to make an omelet." AIDS: "Just say no." But mostly he wrote about pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex.

He even launched an anti-pornography campaign, which made him really famous. He hit the rubber-crucifix circuit, speaking of the evils of firm breasts and downy genitals and soft pink bottoms and flushed bodies so hotly tossed together they were practically seamless — and

afterwards alone late at night at a cheap motel he often found himself panting like a puppy until dawn saying yes o my god yes I will yes yes to his pillow or, once, to a naugahyde chair.

\* \* \*

The Rev. Newt was a virgin until Muffy came along. They met in the petting zoo of a Christian theme park, where he was attempting to recover from nervous exhaustion. She was rich as a sheik and half as pretty, but he was high on bean dip and didn't notice. They spent their honeymoon hang-gliding at a fundamentalist fat farm. She held out until six nights after their wedding ceremony, then he discovered she was such a cold woman her ample breasts were merely frost heaves. Nevertheless they concocted twin girls, Polly and Esther, and that was the end of that.

Harley Newt found himself a virgin only once-removed, living as if in a cheap motel in Muffy's mansion — a separate bedroom, lonesome, confused, depressed in the darkness. His mother was hired as a mother's helper, at below minimum wage, and she soon took his rightful place in Muffy's bed. He again spent his days praying and drooling over pornography, often at the same time. He felt something was missing in his marriage.

Like writers need whiskey, like hookers need heroin, a man of God needs a woman of Satan to make him feel so destroyed, so completely and pleasantly destroyed. Early one morning the Rev. Harley Newt woke to realize he needed to seduce a wiggly blonde choirgirl in order to become really renowned in his profession. Existence was full of purpose once more. He had a bounce to his step as he went past Mother and Muffy's bedroom, heard their fine sighs, then padded out into the sunlight to begin his day.

While walking along, he refined his plan. As most males eventually discover, usually somewhat earlier on in life, lithe blonde choirgirls are not always readily available, although he suddenly felt this was unfair. He cautiously decided to make a pass at most any other female entity that should come his way: a belly dancer, a torch singer, a vestal virgin, a whirling dervish.

Strolling through the lush park that abutted Muffy's mansion, he noted there were no dervishes to be had that morning; in fact, the park seemed like an empty green bed, which he could empathize with for various reasons, not the least of which was that he never bothered to change his sheets.

Rev. Newt had to further refine his plan. He decided that it was God's will that he make a cheap pass at the very first female he encountered. With this in mind, he nervously considered possible cool openings: Haven't we met before? What's a girl like you doing in a nice place like this? Your perfume — it reminds me of somebody dead — what is it? Would you like to come over to my place to see some pictures of little children with big eyes?

As it happened, when Rev. Newt turned a corner of the park footpath he came upon an aging lady mumbling on a bench. She had torn stockings, dishevelled hair, a rash about the mouth, lice so huge and healthy he could see them from a distance. She clutched a rusting shopping cart through a tipless glove. Thought Newt: let's make it two out of three, Lord.

With no reprieve from the heavens, he approached the park bench. He observed she had a glass eye in one of her ears. Nice touch.



Doubtless he was put on this planet to ravish this poor miserable wretch into happiness. He made his pass.

"What's your sign?" he asked.

She stared at him through disbelieving wild eyes. "Get lost you creep."

She then proceeded to hit him twice atop the head with a dead squirrel.

\* \* \*

The Rev. Newt was devastated. As he retreated to the mansion, he tried to find comfort in the distinction of being probably the first fundamentalist to ever made a pass at a bag lady.

Suddenly he was empowered with a new determination. He decided

to confront Muffy, prove himself a man, or at least not a mouse, and live happily ever after, or at least for a week or two. He marched into the mansion like a rock. He bounded up the stairway like a rolling stone.

Outside Mother and Muffy's bedroom, he politely decided to wait until they were up and about. He sat down on the carpet. Through the closed door came wondrous double moans, so sweet and rich he could hear the honey dripping. He decided to make a pass at himself. For the second time that morning, he was rejected.

**Frank Johnson**  
**Tenants Harbor**  
*is a free lance writer*



*Photo by Martin Nerber*

## Review

### *The Collected Poems*/Marsden Hartley

(1904-1943) (Ed. Gail R. Scott. Foreword by Robert Creeley. Black Sparrow Press, Santa Rosa, CA, 1987. \$12.50 softcover.)

A photograph of a Roman-beaked Hartley himself, ca. 1941, decorates the cover of this well-designed book. Gail Scott of Presque Isle gives us 240 of the over 600 possible poems, plus 31 pages of notes — a “collected” poetry, and also a tantalizing, tangential bio-autobiography. We want to know more of the poet as person. Perhaps a definitive biography will come soon, to supplement this and Barbara Haskell’s *MH* (NYU Press, 1980), which includes a chronology, bibliography, more photographs, and reproductions of drawings and paintings.

“His habit,” Scott says, “established over a lifetime, was to divide his working day between the two arts: writing in the mornings and painting in the afternoon . . .” Hartley himself said, in 1919:

*Poets cannot, as aspiring poets, depend it seems to me  
ever upon the possible natural “flow” that exists in  
themselves. Poets have work to do for the precision  
of simplicity . . . Real art comes from the brain, as we know,  
not from the soul.*

(“The Business of Poetry”)

Yet Hartley also said, “All my poems are written first draft and left.” Of course, we don’t have to believe that. Poets are not the most trustworthy sources of information about their own methods. Hartley disliked much of the overwrought poetry of his time. As Scott says, “He had little patience for the airless poetic erudition of Pound, Eliot, Stevens . . .” But clearly, he worked as hard as anyone.

Hartley was born in Lewiston 1877 and died in Ellsworth in 1943. In between, he lived in many places in the world, vigorous and productive, but he always seemed to be moving. He returned to Maine again and again to live — in Bangor, Georgetown, Bridgton, Lovell, Lewiston, Corea. He wished to declare himself the poet from Maine, and we accept that declaration. Many of Gail Scott’s selections confirm that wish. But don’t let your library discard Hartley’s earlier collections, if it is lucky enough to hold them. Only 21 of the 45 poems in *Androscoggin*, and 16 of 43 in *Sea Burial* make this larger collection. However, many from the period before these early books have been rescued from obscurity, and many not included in the 1945 *Selected Poems* (ed. Henry Wells) have been selected by Scott. I miss certain poems from the early collections, but Scott’s large selection is representative — a more cosmopolitan, if less familiar, Hartley.

William Carlos Williams has written:

*Hartley was in addition to a poet, a writer with a  
delightful prose style which fascinated me. Besides I had  
a father of the same remotely English blood who looked  
like Hartley, at least at the length of the nose . . .*

So did I. Scott’s volume contains a photograph of Hartley, 33, sitting in profile on the banks of the Androscoggin. It could have come from my family album, my father being born seven years before Hartley in nearby Naples. For 25 years I have taught in, walked and driven through, shopped, in Lewiston, Hartley’s home until age fifteen. Recently I drove up Howe Street and stopped by the Grammar School mentioned by him.

*I used to go, in my earliest school days, into a  
little strip of woodland not far from the great  
ominous red brick building in a small manufacturing  
town, on the edge of a wonderful great river . . . and  
listen . . . to the running water over stones, and watch . . .  
new green leaves pushing out of the mould . . . I care more  
for these in themselves than I did for any legendary  
presences.*

Three stories of dirt-dulled brick, across from the great gray stone church of St. Peter and St. Paul. This building would have been a forbidding, prison-like structure, even if not deserted and surrounded by chain-link fence and a rubble strewn asphalt playground. I attended a less forbidding one-room school, but like Hartley, sought the woods as escape from even that minimum security establishment.

Those formative fifteen years in Lewiston indelibly marked Hartley as a Maine poet, not a visitor. Through all his zig-zag travels, he repeatedly returned. “I admire my native city,” he wrote, “because it is part of the secret sacred rite of love of place” (“Lewiston is a Pleasant Place”). And in 1937, he wrote:

*. . . So I say to my native continent of Maine,  
be patient and forgiving, I will soon put my  
cheek to your cheek, expecting the welcome of  
the prodigal, and be glad of it, listening all  
the while to the slow, rich, solemn music of  
the Androscoggin, as it flows along.*

His work pleases me most when he avoids studied effects, as in the free-wheeling surrealism of some of the early poems, such as “The Woman Distorts, With Hunger” (excerpt):

*She saw, or thought she inevitably saw  
among the high, sweet hills of home,  
as in the nature of a welcome judgment come,  
Herself, the old, wild road resume —  
there being sense, proportions, sensibility  
in “tree”  
brave homeliness of perspicacity,  
to cover with a glance so damascene  
this clipped, curbed hedgerow of her men,  
conferring on their much too diffident brows .*

If you surrender the unreasonable demand for immediate common sense, the words flow as irresistibly as his river. I also like the prosaic primitivism of later, frankly autobiographical poems. In “Family Album in Red Plush,” he says of his parents:

*They were excessively human — they  
had an almost unnatural sense of bounden duty.  
I have spent my life looking through their windows: I send  
them flowers tied with severe ribbons in cosmic shades.*

And Death, like the sea, is a common theme in these poems — Hartley was, perhaps, always drowning. It is not difficult to find a eulogy he can deliver for himself. Look at “Robin Hood Cove.”

Robert M. Chute  
Poland Spring  
teaches biology at Bates

#### *Robin Hood Cove — Georgetown, Maine*

*When evening comes to its gentle arias  
along the dusky cove,  
and the blue heron flies like a slow arrow  
along the selvages of the cove,  
as if to give its signal for fine music,  
and the little birds who have been so warm  
all day have gone in among the pine-spills  
for their tithe of rest —  
the white bridge joining bank to bank of the tidal river  
takes the hushed tones of evening to it ingratiatingly;  
the gulls having nothing more to say  
to each other — fold wings as pure hands are  
folded for silent thought.  
I stand with them all in high salute,  
saying to myself: “thanks — well done — beautiful things —  
I receive my width of grace from you  
and am put to rest with evening singing.”*



"On his 58th birthday, in January 1935, Hartley went to the storage room and destroyed over 100 paintings and drawings."  
(Barbara Haskell — Whitney Museum, Hartley Catalogue)



Photo courtesy Gail Scott

Breaking Wave, by Marsden Hartley,  
1942, oil on board, 8x11"

#### from Storm Clouds, Maine Scene (1906-1907)

I have seen the death of the sea gull  
the coming of the storm  
the heavy weight of  
the breaking wave  
and the lost swimmer off the rocky shore . . .

M.H.

#### Breaking Wave

on the painting  
by Marsden Hartley

Two potato clouds.  
The sea, pea soup  
gone cold. Waves  
a wet wall between  
life-death, land-sea,  
lifeless hedge of spray,  
Lines converge  
on a dark ledge,  
the black breast  
of corpse cast up,  
not yet found.

Robert H. Chute

My poem grew out of an exhibit/reading/lecture presented by Gail Scott in 1983. It is as much a response to what I learned of Hartley's life (his fixation on the sea, his empathy with drowned and undrowned fisherfolk) as to the painting itself, which by itself, I might have viewed unmoved. Besides, I had unknowingly worn Hartley's beads. In 1962, in a corner of a storeroom, I found roughly-shaped beads of Baltic amber, the largest an inch in diameter. Since it was "the sixties" and fashionable to gently outrage "the Establishment," I strung the beads and wore them from time to time. I had never heard of Marsden Hartley. This part of his memorabilia collected during his travels had somehow become separated from other items donated to the Bates collection. There were no insects fossilized in the amber, but the possibility of this may explain how they ended up in the biology department. They held only a few bubbles, air from the age of myths and monsters, brought back by the odyssean Hartley. R.C.

#### Excerpts from Marsden Hartley Notebook by John Tagliabue

Hartley's scenes of Maine or New Mexico or France are not so much scenes of **places** (that after all he didn't really "belong" to) but **scenes of states of mind** that possessed him. As in the work of other symbolists — Poe, Baudelaire — they are **landscapes of the psyche**. So actually Marsden "the Man from Maine" . . . is not so much giving us "local color" (Schoodic Point, etc.) but it's more like the "dark night of the soul" or the cold and turbulent "sea of troubles" of the psyche . . .

Wanting personal love that could nourish him and wanting fuller appreciation from official critics, he suffered . . . from the land of the cold rocks and the cold shoulder . . . He wrote of the world of ice and isolationism — "This scene tightens and tightens and there is no human stimulus at all . . . and just nature is not enough."

John Tagliabue  
Lewiston  
teaches literature at Bates

#### Phrases from various Hartley Letters:

"Painting is a medium for passion." (1920 to Georgia O'Keeffe)  
"If you want to create origins of experience for yourself you have necessarily to face the holocaust and the typhoon." (1920, to Stieglitz)  
"Painting is essentially a paroxysm of intelligence coupled with organic deliverance." (1920, to Kenneth Miller)  
"The main struggle is to keep from having hardening of the spiritual arteries." (1929, to Rebecca Strand)

## The Cub Reporter's First Dream

from *Growing Pains*, a novel

### Serial: concluding episode #5

This is the fifth episode in an on-going series over the last few years, and the last chapter of the novel.

*Summary: Ted Wharton, a 42 year old high school English teacher, has an affair with one of his senior students, Joy Dollinger. When he refuses to divorce his wife and marry Joy, she tells her father, Armand, that Ted raped her. Armand threatens Ted with court action unless he supports a movement to remove "offensive" books from the school library. Trying to save his skin, Ted goes along with Armand, doublecrossing one of his best friends, school librarian Dora Rosen. But since he still won't marry Joy, she tells all to the high school superintendent, and Ted is forced to resign. Ted can't find another job, and his wife, June, and children, Brad and Kim, move out. Armand Dollinger is elected school board chairman, and Dora Rosen is fired for not removing the offending books. Ted apologizes to her for betraying her, and the two of them drive to Albuquerque, where Dora's sister owns a boutique and has given her a job. While there, Ted applies for a teaching job through a former colleague, and confidently goes back East by himself to wrap up unfinished business. Alone in his house he receives a call — and is told that he's been turned down for the teaching job. The Albuquerque school has learned about his affair . . .*

With shaking hands he poured two shots of scotch and tossed them down. His heart was huge and aching and the hurt behind his eyes splintered into his ears.

He would have to call Frank. He would call his brother Frank, the plumber, and ask for a job. Surely there was something he could do for him, some way he could help him until — Until what?

He looked for the number in the little blue book, his fingers dead on the pages. Sickness struck the center of his head. He dropped the book. He stared at it there on the floor.

He was going insane. He was, he was going insane. He had to talk to somebody, now, he had to, this minute, before he was totally paralyzed. He picked up the phone again and found the number in his wallet; dialed.

It was Richie who answered. Was Dora there? She was, hold on. He did, space ringing in his ears. A shuffle and then her voice. "Hello?" His heart contracted hard.

"Hi, Dora? It's me, it's Ted."

"Ted, hi!"

His face felt weak. "Dora, listen — I won't be coming out to Albuquerque."

"You won't?"

"No . . . I won't. But I'll send you the money I owe you, don't worry about it, as soon as I get a job."

"Oh Ted."

He told her everything then: about June, Joe Bishop, Dan Jefferson. "That's how it goes, I guess." He was dizzy from fighting the river of fear and pain, from holding back tears.

She said again, "Oh Ted. What a shame. What a **shame**. But listen, I know about something else that you might consider. I didn't want to dampen your spirits while you were here by bringing up the possibility things might fall through, but just in case, I looked into something else."

He swallowed. "You did?"

"Al knows some people at the ALBUQUERQUE RECORD. The news editor just resigned. They're moving a reporter into her slot, so there's going to be a reporter's job available. He thinks you'd have a good shot at it. He's already told them about you, and they're interested."

Astonished, he said, "Your kidding. You did that for me?"

"Hey, what's a friend for?"

"And you really think I'd have a chance?"

"A **good** chance, Ted. And if it doesn't work out, there's always printing. — or ladies' fashions."

"Oh no, no, Dora, I couldn't do that. Work for your sister or brother-in-law? That wouldn't be fair."

"Till something else came along."

"Dan told me about a bartending job. I guess I could always take that."

"Whatever. But I'm sure the newspaper thing will work out — if you don't take forever to get here." She paused. "So when are you going to come?"

"But Dora . . ."

"Ted, listen, I've found an apartment. It's very nice, in a perfect location, it's cheerful as hell, but it does have a problem."

"What's that?" He wanted to keep the conversation going, to never hang up.

"It has two bedrooms. All the smaller apartments were rented. Now what am I going to do with that extra space?"

"You're asking me?"

Another pause. "What I'm getting at, Ted, if I must spell it out, is you'll need a place to stay, and with all the room I have . . . I mean, since we're both such decadents, since I know the soles of your feet so well, and since you only **really** snored one night . . ."

"You really mean that, Dora?"

A pause. "I kind of like you, Ted."

"Well I kind of like you, too."

"And I promise never to poke your eye again. — So what do you say?"

"Will I have to eat Jewish food?"

She laughed. "No, but you can't make fun of me while I'm eating it, either."

"I won't, I won't."

"Then you'll come?"

"I'll come. I have a bunch of stuff to take care of here, but I'll come."

"I'm happy to hear that, Ted."

His chest felt tons lighter. "And look — I'm really interested in that job."

"I'll tell Al. But don't wait too long to get out here."

"I won't. Believe me I won't."

"Oh — before you hang up — Madge Nader called me to see how I was, the dear soul, and told me Armand Dollinger's in big, big trouble."

"No kidding."

"It seems the Media Review Committee — bless its heart — refused to ban THE DAIRY OF ANNE FRANK."

"THE DIARY OF ANNE **FRANK**?"

"That's right. So Dollinger got his son to check it out of the library — and burned it."

"Wow."

"And Terry Blaustein — remember him? — found out and got the ACLU after him."

"Incredible!"

"Needless to say, he's finished as school board chairman."

"Fantastic!"

"I thought you'd be pleased."

He laughed. "It's wonderful!"

The line's high hum as she said, "Well, Ted, I'll see you soon. Are you driving or flying or what?"

"I guess I'll drive. I have a few things to bring."

"Okay, I'll look for you. And listen, relax, it's going to be all right."

"I hope so, Dora."

"It will be, Ted."

A pause. "Well, goodnight, Ted — and take care of yourself."

"Goodnight. You take care of yourself too, Dora."

"Goodnight."

He poured himself another scotch, a small one this time, with water, and went to the family room. The TV's dead eye stared at him. Tomorrow the lawyer, the mover, the realtor. Eighteen years of marriage down the tube. Feeling a sudden need for air, he went outside.

Mr. Seven-Eleven was out there under his spotlight, smoking his pipe and setting out bags of trash. Invisible in the darkness, Ted watched.

The air was wet, and held the scent of spring. In the dark Ted saw the row of crocuses against the house — the crocuses that June had planted when Brad and Kim were small. Soon the house would be somebody else's house. He stood in the cool March damp and thought of Albuquerque sun.

What a fool he had been. What a perfect suburban fool. And if it had never happened? Would things have gotten better with June and him? He shrugged and sipped his scotch and thought of Dora. Mr. Seven-Eleven looked up at the sky, and then he went back inside.

Dora and Albuquerque. Another American trap — the New Life. Well sometimes it actually worked. Ted Wharton, cub reporter? Maybe so. He liked



Dora Rosen, and damn it, he'd give it a shot. He'd give it a damn good shot, the best he had.

He held up his glass and toasted the Seven-Elevens' spotlight. Good luck Mr. Seven-Eleven. Good luck, June. Good luck, Brad and Kim. And even — hell yes — good luck to Joy. Life was full of terrific detours and U-turns, you needed every ounce of luck you could get, so good luck to everybody.

The spotlight went out. Ted tilted his head back and swallowed the last of his scotch: then went into the house that belonged to his past and climbed the stairs; used the bathroom; crawled into the chilly king-size bed.

He was tired, completely wiped out, at peace, and fell asleep right away — and dreamed of the time Brad caught that five pound bass.

Christopher Fahy  
Thomaston  
works with the blind

## Review

### *One Day in the Short Happy Life of Anna Banana*/Christopher Fahy

(Winner of the 1987 Chapbook Competition sponsored by the Maine State Commission on the Arts and Humanities) The Word Association, Thomaston, 1988. Available soon through MWPA.

In 1983 MSCAH established a chapbook competition to bring before the public in alternating years a poet and a fiction writer. Other winners have been Ruth Mendelsohn, Rebecca Cummings, and Robert Chute. This year hundreds of manuscripts submitted anonymously were judged by Mary McCarthy, novelist and memoirist, of Castine and Paris, France. Christopher Fahy, this year's winner, has published two novels in the horror genre, *Nightflyer* and *Dream Child* (on the racks currently); *Compost Heap*, a novel; *Greengroundtown*, short stories; and *The End Beginning*, poems. Sections of *Growing Pains*, a novel have been appearing in serial form over the last few years in *Kennebec*. Its last chapter (see left page) concludes the serial this year.

The title story of Christopher Fahy's fine collection of four, with its echo of Hemingway's "The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber," suggests the wit and whimsy of this prize-winning author. They come from his looking hard at the world we live in, harder than most. And with a wry eye. He creates his Maine by amassing detail after detail that make the reader smile and nod in recognition. When he shows us without comment a cement driveway, we realize it is neither mud or macadam and what that means. He knows how in an old pickup truck the driver's window "wobbles and creaks" as it is rolled down. He knows that astrachans are apples that are "keepers" for the winter, and that dead elms are marked for removal with a red "X". Fahy is great at getting the texture of life here in such little things. Also the author of a book on home repairs, he lets a local observe that a yuppie's door-entrance is paved with "new" bricks, not recycled chimney bricks, and that his barn was shingled with cedar — "They looked like selects — or first clears at least. First clears or selects on a barn!" One character, fumbling for the word *rhododendron* to describe the fancy landscaping around a doctor's house, settles for "roto-something." And when his title character, the aging Anna Banana, muses, "You can't get good corned beef in Maine," the reader thinks, **that's right, that's exactly right.**

Fahy's world is the "old" Maine undergoing change. His metaphor for metamorphosis is real estate. In story after story old houses or summer camps are threatened, or sold and transformed. Speculators try to snatch up what they call FISBO's, houses "For Sale By Owner." New people "from away" cut down apple trees, build garages over the "good dirt" of a garden generations old, put copper roofs on their houses, and live under sky-lights. Fahy's satire is merciless and cutting. When Anna sits down to eat with her daughter's family she notes that the rice is brown and "hopes they won't have that big scrambled egg in a bowl, sooflay or whatever they call it. Why didn't they ever eat meat? A

butcher's daughter who doesn't eat meat, whoever heard of such a thing?" Fahy's New People tend to have cats, not kids. They have names like Markson, Melanie, Samantha, and godhelpus, Cackie (Catherine); Fahy's Mainers have names like Joe Perley, Harlan Trout, and Hattie Slocum. The former drive Volvos and Saabs; the latter, Pintos and big old Dodges. The former speak of a task being "too labor-intensive"; the latter translate, "too much work." The New males seem to hold no jobs, and are tinkers or "house-husbands"; Maine males are gofers at Holcomb's Lumber, or work at Shop 'n Save or Star Rope, in deadend or insecure roles, or agonize over pulling out for Massachusetts. In the background, Mainers die of infected teeth because they can't afford doctors; in the foreground, are characters like the aforementioned Cackie's husband, he of the copper roof, who explains his materialism: "I guess we're pretty much thingy people." It makes you want to weep.

But make no mistake, Fahy is no neo-primitive, no rusticated Rousseau, getting off cheap shots at the modern, at the outsider. His view is unsentimental and unpredictable, balanced, like all good writers'. He knows the "old" Maine means mud roads, cars that don't work, bad diet, bad teeth, worse education, and helpless survival masquerading as Endurance. His "modern" children may be consistently monstrous, and their parents knee-jerk liberals, but there is at least a grain of truth in the words of a callous "modern" realtor: "You're probably thinking, 'It's different in Maine, Maine isn't New Jersey. Well it isn't — not yet. But it will be, just give it some time. Jersey's ahead of Maine in everything, and real estate's no exception. The people prepared to change right now are the people who'll lead the pack.'" For Fahy, romantic provincialism is no panacea. In fact, one of Fahy's nastiest characters, Billy Lawlor, is a drunken, earthy Maine boy, who has returned from seven years "away" in San Diego with "Messicans" to find his parents forced to sell their house. After a genuinely nice New couple in a Saab go to great lengths to save him from a snowstorm, this brute raves at them, clicking into the usual mindless-Maine-automatic: "You never had traps," he says. "You never went swimming and sliding here. You don't even clam. You don't use cinnamon in your pies." So much for authenticity and purity of feeling — cinnamon. Both kinds of people are often numb, "on automatic."

Under most pages, comic or not, is **worry**, usually about health or money. Too, characters worry about losing their minds. But through all of the stories runs a naturalistic belief in **luck**. Aging Anna Banana may or may not have cancer; Hattie Slocum's pickup may or may not start. Wind may or may not shift and save a house from fire. When the world around you is beyond your understanding, and therefore certainly beyond your control, you wait for the surprise opening, the slight shift of wind or fate, the **break**. For Fahy, luck is connected with maintaining some honest relation to the land, a kind of unpretentious purity. In the best story of the four, "The Rock," a desperate local boy decides not to sell a camp on a pond to people from NYC. Hidden under the surface of the water (appropriately) is his large, secret, lucky rock. It once saved him from drowning. He thinks of swimming toward it, "the water's sharp cold on the length of his body, its dark secret taste." The rock is Maine, and it is lucky, and it is hidden. The boy strips naked (perfect!) and *jogged down the short narrow path. When he reached the dock he broke into a run. The boards thumped hollowly under his feet and then he was flying. The cold hit him hard, with a rush, was silver and painful along his sides as he counted, One, two, three . . . He made it to twelve before reaching the rock and burst up gasping for air, his heart loud in his ears.* Now notice how delicately Fahy handles the boy's ambivalence about life in Maine, how he lets the symbolism of division and luck emerge from the action.

*He looked across at Hatchet Mountain, the condos ringing its base . . . Out loud he said, "I don't want to work in Massachusetts" . . . The trees were almost black in the dying light. He shouted: "I don't want to work at goddamn Star Rope either!" His words made a hollow thin echo, dissolved in the trees.*

*Freezing now, his teeth clicking hard, he leaned into the rock with both hands and counted to eight. Then he planted his feet on the slimy surface, pushed off, and swam back to the dock.*

Rock, dock. Under a mountain called "hatchet." Take your pick, Fahy seems to be saying. The rock is lucky, solid, but slimy and cold. The dock is dry, man-made, but "thumps hollowly." Pick both? Neither? Upon reflection, however, and in light of the other stories, there is no pick to be made. This is what is.

—Terry Plunkett  
Hallowell  
teaches at UMA



## Review

### **Maine: A Guide "Down East"/FWP** (*American Guide Series*. Houghton Mifflin, 1937)

The first significant patronage afforded American writers was the Federal Writers' Project during the Great Depression. FWP produced among a wide range of literary, reference, and works of art, State Guides, for 48 states and Alaska and guides to our major cities. There were more than four thousand self-proclaimed writers employed between 1935-1939 preparing the guides. One was produced for Maine, and copies can still be found in second-hand bookstores and libraries. For whatever reason — literary merit or plain curiosity — the California Guide has recently been reprinted.

One does not expect a guide to have literary merit, although that was a Project goal. Consider Fodor, Michelin, and Frommer and their vapidities; **every** place "is a charming blend of old and new." Looking at the **Maine Guide** one does not find a lack of style. Indeed, it is better reading than the section on Maine in the 1909 edition of **Baedeker, "USA."**

Intended as a traveler's guide, it also provides a short political history and an account of the state's social, cultural and economic past. It is larded with a hundred photographs, a number of maps and is completely devoid of typical Chamber of Commerce boosterism.

The FWP was part of the larger Works Progress Administration (WPA), Roosevelt's New Deal program to provide work for the huge swathe of unemployed. Writers had no immunity from the effects of the Depression and in some ways were more defenseless than others with common and garden skills and experience. (Parenthetically, there is the story of a Maine editor who had

hopes of an old age pension, only to be denied when the Legislature allocated its last \$50,000 to assist potato farmers.)

One is struck by the cloak of anonymity which surrounds the writers who actually produced this rather handsome, complete and readable volume. One asks, what happened to the writers? Did any of them achieve later fame? Did they return to similar employment? Was federal patronage a boon or an impediment to them?

Who were these people? Although no reason is given for not listing the several authors, it may well be that for a number of reasons the writers preferred not to be named, thus avoiding the possible stigma of receiving public assistance. During the life of the project, it was estimated there were twenty-nine acknowledged creative writers employed nationally and three Guggenheim award winners. It is also conceivable some or all of the writers, though eligible for employment on the project, may have been writers in name only. FWP encountered considerable difficulty in certain parts of the country finding qualified writers of any calibre. According to one observer, the greatest concentration was to be found in the mid-Atlantic and northeastern states. To correct this imbalance or maldistribution of talent, FWP extended eligibility to editors, historians, researchers, art critics, architects, archeologists, map-draftsmen and geologists.

So one wonders who the Maine contributors were, and whether any ever achieved public recognition for their later writings. Was the experience an apprenticeship or a deadend? A career turning-point or just a meal ticket in a time of scarcity? Whatever the answers, the Guide is a job well done.

**Hilton Power**

**Lewiston**

*is a UMA administrator & vice  
chmn of the Maine Committee  
on Aging*

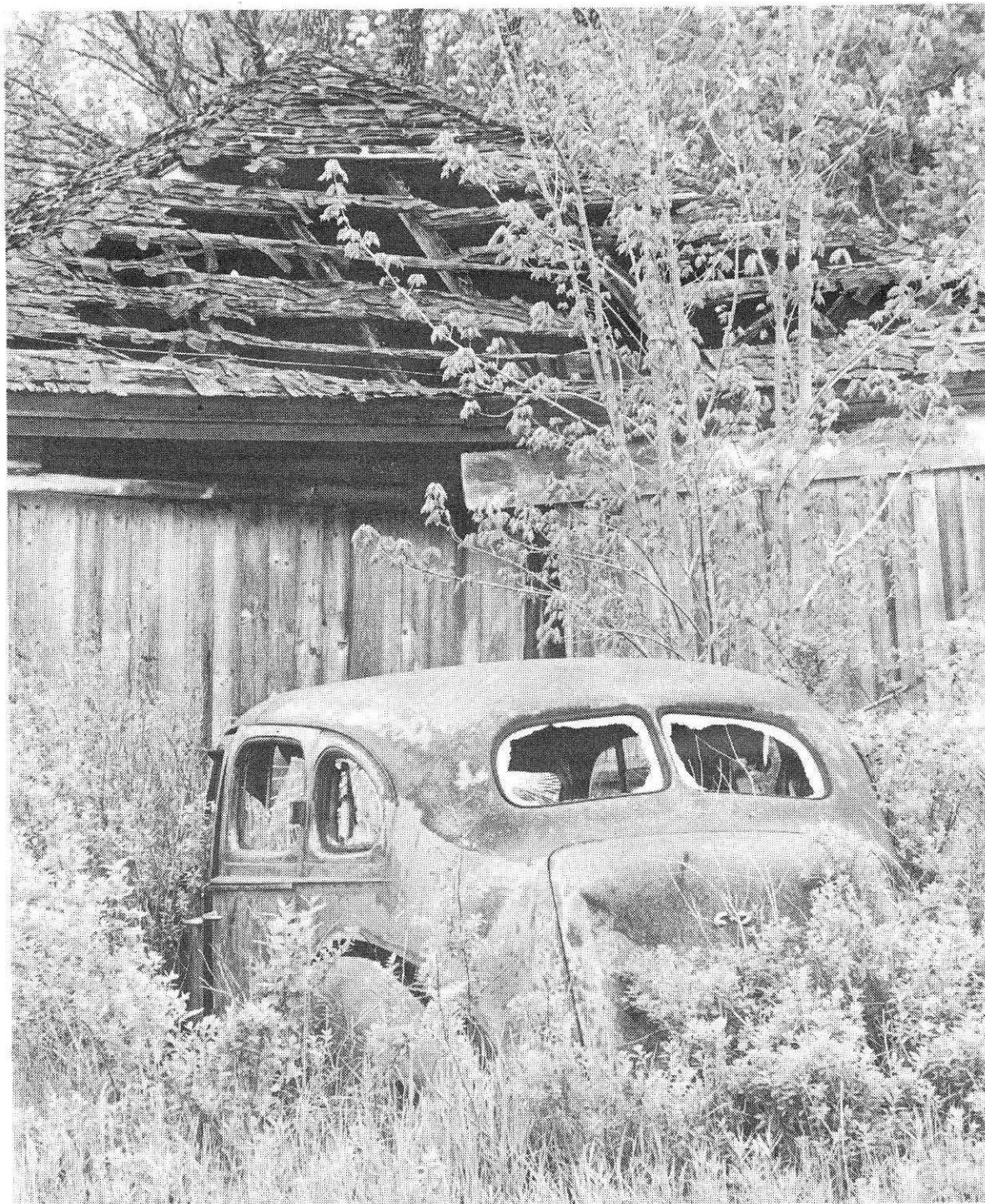


Photo by Martin Nerber



# To the Quick/Heather McHugh

(Wesleyan U. Press, Middletown CT, 1987)

Heather McHugh lives half the year of the edge on the Atlantic Ocean in the rural island community of Eastport, and the other half of the year in Seattle, Washington, where she is Milliman Writer-in-Residence at the University of Washington. An enviable life for a poet — ingesting the best of both urban and rural experience, this bicoastal existence has given her what she has called an “amniotic attraction to salt water.”<sup>1</sup>

The author of *Dangers* (1977) and *A World of Difference* (1981), both from Houghton-Mifflin, McHugh’s latest volume of poems is *To the Quick*, published in 1987 by Wesleyan University Press. She has also translated the work of French poet Jean Follain in *D’Apres Tout: Poems by Jean Follain* (Princeton University Press, 1981).

There is a sense of urgency and immediacy in all of McHugh’s writing, and even more so in her live readings. Although she admits to being tongue-tied when young, mortified at being seen, “gifted with words but unable to speak,” she says that her early influences on her writing were water and fire. As well as God, and rhythm-and-blues! Tongue-tied, but aching to speak out, formed by the most mercurial of the elements — fire and water, and moved by the spiritual as much as by the seductive beat of rhythm-and-blues — McHugh is the hedonist, the enchantress, the impulsive and energetic voice always tempting life itself to the edge.

According to McHugh, “My urgent attraction to the material (poetry) was toward its limits, toward its own immateriality and toward where innermost or outermost make mosts disappear; to drive through means as if to ends and so find ends transparent — I mean either constant or always beyond the means of motive.” For McHugh, poetry is part of the pleasure of being in a body, of paying attention to life lived to the limit, of striking out into the amazement of the world.

The poet’s growing knowledge of the full implications of what it means to be human in the animal world are evident in her latest book, *To the Quick*. Influenced perhaps by an editor’s decision, she changed from her original working title, *Animal*, a more concrete, apt, and vital connector to her material, in my opinion. However, the term ‘to the quick’ comes up several times in the book both as a poem title and as a phrase in “After You Left,” in which the poet, exploring around the kelp by a piling, finds a starfish with its “*thousands of minute transparent/ footlets, feelers, stems,/ all waving to the quick.*”

Salty as her salt water connections through her mother who packed fish in a cannery in British Columbia and studied English literature, and a marine biologist father who moved his family from coast to coast, McHugh’s language and impetus in her work grounds itself in everyday, earthy experience — that animal world — and reaches for that place where

*... Perhaps we shall recall  
the language in which we were intimate — before we called  
the creature names. We’d have to talk with it, remembering  
animal comes from soul, and not  
its opposite.*

(“Animal Song”)

McHugh also says, “I love street.” What she loves about cities is their diversity and demographic energies and mixture of crosscultures and “heat of change.” She looks for the same kind of transcendent spirit in the street that she finds in the animal world at the shore. For McHugh, “Most people are crippled, not extended, by their work. But one can sense transcendent relations in glimpses everywhere — more often in the street than in the church, I think, more often in the garden than the lecture — in the wink of an electron trace, or someone’s way with poured concrete. . .”

In another poem, “*I Knew I’d Sing*” (printed below), McHugh is charged and defiant, poking her tongue at the world, living on the edge. “I tell you this/ is what I love about America—” she says, “the words it puts in my mouth.” She goes on to say the taboo-ed word, cunt. The word is spoken. Bad word. Bad girl. No longer tongue-tied, McHugh knows “nothing but nothing would be beneath me.”

<sup>1</sup> The quotations are taken from an interview with Heather McHugh compiled by Clara McLean, which appeared in *Poetry Flash*, May, 1987.

—Kathleen Lignell  
Orono  
is a writer/editor at UM

## I Knew I’d Sing

*A few sashay, a few finagle.  
Some make whoopee, some  
make good. But most make  
diddly-squat. I tell you this*

*is what I love about  
America — the words it puts  
in my mouth, the mouth where once  
my mother rubbed*

*a word away with soap. The word  
was cunt. She stuck that bar  
of family-size in there  
until there was no hole to speak of, so*

*she hoped. But still  
I’m full of it — the cunt,  
the prick, short u, short i,  
the words that stood*

*for her and him. I loved  
the thing they must have done,  
the love they must have made, to make  
an example of me. After my lunch of Ivory I said*

*vagina for a day or two, but knew  
from that day forth which word struck home  
the more like sex itself.  
I knew when I was big I’d sing*

*a song in praise of cunt — I’d want  
to keep my word, the one with teeth in it.  
Even after I was raised, I swore  
nothing but nothing would be beneath me.*

Heather McHugh  
Eastport  
teaches at U. Washington

## Do What You're Doing

*You put the wind behind you  
and let sails fly wing on wing*

*You find yourself  
rocking forward and back*

*You're reaching until  
you can't quite reach anymore*

*You let sail's silk slide  
as it catches and loses itself*

*You're feeling free because  
there's nowhere else to be*

*There's nowhere else to be  
when you no longer desire  
to be where you're not*

*So you must be free  
when you no longer desire*

*You think  
that sounds like  
a Puritanical freedom*

*Oh no — no, no, no —  
I don't mean  
don't do what you want to do*

*I mean do what you want to do so well  
that you don't want  
to do whatever you're not doing*

**Nancy Devine**  
**So. Casco**  
*is a poet*

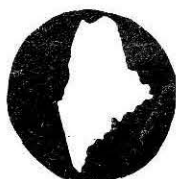
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## Halfway through a Big Book

*It's then that I'll falter:  
The initial thrill is gone; momentum is waning;*

*I can set it down and rest content, almost,  
Januslike, looking two ways at once.*

*The next move belongs to the book, which  
deliberately catches my eye each time I pass it,  
knowing itself rooted within me by now,  
seeking completion,*

*sure that once I've begun the second half  
it will be downhill all the way.*

**Deborah Nicklas**  
**Falmouth**

*I would wish for verse  
As crisp as a single  
Sheet against white sky,  
  
As rich as the green  
Equatorial sea and the blue  
Boat that with black hands  
  
Glides to a sand shore,  
As clean as the needlenose  
Gar and silver flying fish,  
  
Side by side, fresh  
From nets, weighed  
And scaled, as true  
  
As the boys who wear  
From their necks,  
The long fish home,  
  
As subtle as a flat  
Sun in a pink pool  
and time longer than twine.*

**Michael H. Walsh**  
**Brunswick**  
*is a realtor*