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The Lantern Vol. 55, No. 2, Spring 1989

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Named after the architectural structure atop Pfahler Hall, Ursinus College's literary magazine, THE LANTERN, is a collection of poetry, prose, and visual art composed by the students of Ursinus College. In its 55th year of production, THE LANTERN staff congratulates visual art contest winner Ted Manser whose winning work is featured on the cover, and poetry contest winner Holly Teti whose poem, SITTING ON A SUMMER BENCH, can be found on page 3. The staff would also like to express its sincere thanks to Dr. Penelope Austin of Lycoming College, poet and editor of THE GREAT STREAM REVIEW, for her valuable input towards the creative content of this magazine.

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Lantern staff—visual art

SITTING ON A SUMMER BENCH

By Holly Teti

Ice cream drips down their
hands
holding helium-filled balls bounce above the
people
moving quickly along the board-
walking
in and out of stores and spending
money
is exchanged for sugar fluff that sticks to children's
faces
everywhere — young, old, pale, tanned
bodies
wait in long, endless
lines
of yellow and green paint cover the lemonade
stand
-ing there my sister grinds the pulp and shakes the sugar
water
rushes back and forth behind me as I watch.

A PERFECT DAUGHTER I COULD NEVER BE

By Liz Young

A perfect daughter I could never be.
I searched the ways and tried with might
But never could I reach it and be happy.

When I was younger and things were uneasy
I tried to be the child who did what was right.
A perfect daughter I could never be.

But still I yearned to please my Daddy.
If ever mad, I'd keep out of his sight
But never could I reach it and be happy.

Thoughts of pleasing were wrapped securely
All over my brain and soul so tight.
A perfect daughter I could never be.

I was still the daughter so clumsy
Who adored and followed under his height
But never could I reach it and be happy.

Too many times with confidence empty,
I realized, as is a daughter's right,
A perfect daughter I could never be.
Never could I reach it and be happy.



ROOTS AND WINGS

By Janet Mast

The entire family agreed that the unfortunate peckerhead incident marked the emergence of "mother's problem." In sixty-five years, no one could remember hearing Miriam Morgan swear. Not even "damn!" under her breath when she stubbed her toe for the hundredth time on her husband's bowling ball which he always left just inside the porch door although the closet was less than twelve inches away. When a woman raises four children and is never heard describing them in terms stronger than "spirited," such restraint does not go unnoticed. In Franconia, Miriam was known as a woman of refinement.

So when Miriam, while passing the candied yams around a crowded Thanksgiving table, referred to her late husband, Franklin, as "that peckerhead sonofabitch" there was instant, rapt silence.

Carol was not there when it happened. She was sleeping off the flu in her apartment, but she heard about it soon after in the flurry of phone calls from concerned relatives.

"Spellbound. I would say we were spellbound." said her brother Wesley, calling from Pheasterville early next morning. His voice had a tendency to crack when he got excited. "Mom just sat there, holding the yams out. 'Course, Uncle Bud was too dumbfounded to take them so she just set them down and started to eat!"

After the call, Carol swallowed a couple Tylenol, anticipating the high-pitched frenzy of her sister-in-law, Luanne. Somehow she knew it would be Luanne, not Mason, who would call. Her middle brother was not much for talking. He was uncomfortable with displays of emotion, but Luanne more than made up for it.

"In front of the kids too! Mason and I were *disgusted!* You should be *thankful* you weren't there to see it!" Carol held the phone slightly away from her ear to give the Tylenol a fighting chance. She could still hear every word. "My *Stewart* has never heard such language, I can tell you *that!* And about his own dead *grandfather!* It makes you want to cry!"

By noon, Carol was on her third cup of tea and actually looking forward to Frank's sardonic comments. He was the oldest. "Most of the kids looked real impressed. Especially young Stewart. He was the only one with voice enough to say anything out loud," said Frank.

"What did he say?" asked Carol, imagining the ten year old's face alight with admiration.

"He said 'Geeze Louise, Gramma!'"

Carol hung up after Frank's customary "So long kid," and tried to sort out the pieces of what she had heard. Miriam's sensational comment at the table was bizarre, but her "problem" had a more troubling aspect.

After dinner, she packed two suitcases and left for the mountain cabin in Wellsboro, offering no explanation beyond, "I'm going to the cabin for a while. The mountains are beautiful this time of year." The opinion held by the family till then was that Miriam had never much liked the mountains.

The three brothers held an emergency caucus and elected Carol, in absentia, to "speak to mother." They felt she was best equipped for the job by reason of gender. She hesitated for two days, vacillating. Carol was reserved by nature and found few things more unpleasant than intrusiveness. Her mother's desire for privacy seemed implicit. Still, Saturday noon found Carol throwing an overnight bag, a thermos of coffee and Rand McNally into the front seat of her Honda. Driven by honorable concern and base curiosity, she headed northwest.

The day had started out cloudy, but by late afternoon the sun was squinting through the trees lining the narrow Allegheny roads. Their branches reached out for each other, entwining overhead. Gaudy colored leaves rained down, swirling in the wake of the tires. Carol tried to concentrate on driving. She hadn't been to the cabin in almost fifteen years. These rambling mountain roads and their scattered farmhouses all looked alike. She liked knowing where she was at all times, she always had. Thirty-four now, she could still remember the sickening feeling of uncertainty she'd felt as a child as soon as the scenery became unfamiliar.

"Daddy, are we lost?" she would ask.

"Well now that you mention it, yes Carol, we are lost. In fact, I don't think we've ever been this lost. The next town we come to, I'm going to stop and buy a house, because I don't think we'll ever find our old one. Too bad. It was a nice house."

Carol knew he was teasing, but her stomach knotted up anyway and only the sound of her brothers laughing at her from the back of the station wagon kept the tears back.

"Listen honey," her father said. "There are worse things than not knowing where you are." Even then, Carol knew her father believed this to be true.

It was dusk when Carol reached the cabin. It looked like a child left too long without its mother, dirty-faced and ragged. Her father told everyone that his cabin was "maintenance free" but like any thing of value, in reality it was not. Over the years the cedar siding had faded to grey. But Carol remembered it a warm brown and her first impression was one of decay, as though the house had died along with its owner. One of the shutters had worked loose from the hinge and hung askew. All the shutters needed paint, but the windows they framed were bright. As the car ground along the rutted driveway, Carol could see her mother standing in the doorway.

Miriam did not come out, but watched Carol from behind the screen door. Her face was in shadow, but her form was limned in light from inside the house.

There was something about her mother that felt vaguely wrong to Carol

as she approached, and she realized it was the stillness. Miriam was standing perfectly still. Carol was accustomed to Miriam in motion. When receiving visitors she would meet them on the porch and escort them into her home in the gathering darkness.

"Hello, Mom. How are you?" And what, precisely, are you doing up here?

"I'm fine. I'm glad you're here." Miriam swung open the door and stepped back to allow her daughter to enter. Carol carried two shopping bags full of groceries so their hug was awkward. They both spoke at once:

"I brought a few things," from Carol.

"You didn't need to bring anything," from her mother. Miriam took one of the bags:

"Let's put these in the kitchen and say hello properly. What is all this anyway?"

"I thought I would make supper for us tonight and while I was in the grocery store I remembered that useless little market up here where we always shopped, so I picked up a few extras."

"Tiger's Filling Station and Grocery? I guess you remembered what your dad always said about Tiger's."

"If they've got it at Tiger's, you probably don't need it. I remember."

They deposited the bags on the counter in the tiny kitchen, and faced each other.

"Tiger's was torn down about five years ago. There's a Safeway now. You can get anything."

Carol laughed and said, "Things change, don't they."

The daughter looked at her mother's face and found it beautiful, as always. She had soft white hair that waved back from her face, combed into a loose bun. Her eyes were either grey or blue. Carol could never decide. Now they were watchful. Waiting. Her eyes set her apart from the rest of the family. The four children had dark brown eyes, like their father. Miriam was a small woman. A small woman among tall men, was how Carol thought of her. Carol was tall too. Having her mother look up at her made her want to sit down.

"The boys sent you to check up on me." said Miriam.

"They're worried about you up here alone. So am I."

"You must be hungry." Miriam turned away and began unpacking the groceries. Carol moved to help her and silence stretched between them. It was not uncomfortable. There was something comforting about this kind of work. Two women in a kitchen, putting things in their places and preparing a meal, practical activities requiring few words. They were in familiar waters, more easily navigated than the conversation they were retreating from. Carol made spaghetti. Miriam made salad. Carol had brought a loaf of crusty Italian bread and a cheap bottle of red wine. They sat down at the table.

While they ate, they talked about Carol's work. She worked in an

electronics lab, making liquid crystal digital displays for cars. Monotonous work. Good pay. They talked about Mason, Wesley and Frank. Their marriages. Their children. They talked about the cabin. About Carol's father. How it didn't seem possible he'd been dead two years already. About Philip, the man Carol was dating.

"No," Carol said. "We're not what you'd call serious."

Philip had told her recently that he loved her. Carol was thinking of ways to end the relationship. She had ventured into love before and found it scary, vague territory. She preferred the familiar ground of friendship.

After two hours of talk, the bottle was empty, Carol's tongue felt furry and her lips were numb. She guessed she had finished most of it herself. Odd because she really didn't like wine. In the bathroom she splashed cold water on her face and peered critically at her reflection in the mirror. She was never completely at peace with her face. She thought her features were too regular, pleasant but uninteresting. She'd always wished for a Streisand nose. Her best friend in high school had one blue eye and one brown eye and Carol had thought this exotic and enviable. She didn't even have the distinction, like her brothers, of prematurely grey hair. Carol shook her head slightly, to clear her mind of such meritless thoughts. She reminded herself that she was too old to obsess over her appearance in bathrooms.

When Carol returned to the kitchen, the table was cleared and her mother was gone. Carol checked the bedrooms and found them empty. She was standing in the living room, wondering if Miriam had run away again when she noticed the light under the basement door. The basement steps were dusty and the air was damp and cool. It was a large basement, crowded with relics of abandoned childhood. Bikes and sleds, fishing rods and baseball bats leaned against each other in idle disarray. Her father's workbench stood against one wall, cluttered with tools and oil-stained cardboard boxes. He needed it, he had said, for repairs on the boys' collection of dirtbikes and snowmobiles. This room belonged to the men in the family. Miriam was sitting on a dirty wooden chair near a pile of large, half inflated black inner tubes, crying.

"I came down for a light bulb. The light in the kitchen burned out." Miriam spoke without looking up. "Just look at this junk. What am I supposed to do with all this?" Carol had never seen her mother cry. She tried to approach, but when Miriam spoke again, the strange strangled sound of her voice held Carol motionless.

"There never was a man so given to collecting junk. He was a packrat and this basement was his burrow. I kept order everywhere else, and no matter how he teased, he liked it that way. He needed it. I know you kids loved him best for his crazy ways. You saw me as some kind of drone, trudging along behind him. I wasn't exciting or dangerous. I knew that. But I never minded because if I hadn't been there, he couldn't have done it. I was necessary. I gave him the power. You didn't know it, but he did. He

talked about it. Roots and Wings, he said. I would give him roots, take care of him, keep him from losing himself in his dreams. And he was supposed to give me wings. Keep me from drowning in tidiness and order. Christ, that man could talk! I was his ballast, he said. His touchstone. He could go off flying in all directions because I was there to keep things in order! That was the deal, you know. We had a deal, Goddamn him! We had a deal!"

Miriam's voice bounced off musty concrete and Carol cringed at the alien fury. Her mother's body, which had been rigid through her outburst, suddenly sagged in the old chair. She covered her face with her hands.

Carol found her feet and moved to Miriam's side. Kneeling on the cold floor she rested her head on her mother's lap.

"Mama, do you remember those tubes?"

Miriam didn't answer. In the silence, Carol remembered.

It had been raining for three days at the cabin. Carol was eleven years old. The rain didn't bother her because she was lost in *The Secret Garden*, but her brothers were like caged leopards, pacing and snarling. They had long since exhausted their supply of indoor games and were beginning to turn on each other. Their mother, who viewed the rain as an opportunity to wage war on hidden dirt, was cleaning everything that didn't move. She interrupted her labors periodically to oversee the escalating war between her sons. The father surveyed the group from the couch. When tensions mounted to the point where bloodshed seemed imminent, he stood, disappeared into the basement and emerged moments later.

"Put on your rain gear. We're moving out. Carol and Miriam, you too." No one argued, but Miriam would not leave until she finished wiping off cans and replacing them in the pantry.

"I will not leave a job half-finished," she said. No one argued with Miriam, either.

Quarters were tight in the station wagon due to the presence of six large, black inner tubes in the back. The father responded to the barrage of questions about their destination with a cryptic "you'll see."

He drove through the fog, higher up the mountain and parked on the shoulder of the road, unloaded the inner tubes and stacked them next to the car. It was still raining but the trees provided some shelter and the family stood under dripping leaves looking down a steep embankment. At the bottom of the incline was meadow, blanketed in mist. The father picked up an inner tube and walked several feet until he came to a break in the treeline. A narrow path snaked downwards to the meadow. He placed his tube in the ground and sat in it. He looked at his family and said, "The trick is not to oversteer." Then he pushed off, hard, with his feet and careened wildly down the slope. The tube picked up speed and began to rotate, narrowly missing trees and rocks, finally sliding to a halt in the tall grass.

Mason, Wesley and Frank Jr. scrambled for their inner tubes and followed their father, rebel yells echoing down the mountain.

"C'mon Carol! Don't be a puss!" Wes hollered from the bottom.

Their father shouted, "How 'bout it Mim? A little mud won't hurt you!"

Miriam stood under her umbrella and answered with measured dignity. "Franklin. You may risk life and limb if you choose. I will wait in the car." She turned to Carol. "Do you want to do this, Carol?"

Carol looked down the incline and imagined the dizzying feeling of sliding crazily over wet leaves and mud, out of control. She knew that Wes would call her a puss, but her fear of that wild ride was greater than her fear of ridicule. She said, "No." Mother and daughter stayed in the car. Father and sons tubed for the remainder of the afternoon and most of the next day.

Twenty-five years later in a dusty basement, Carol put her arms around her mother and led her up the stairs into her bedroom. Miriam seemed smaller than usual. Tired and frail. She did not protest when Carol helped her undress for bed. Her cheek when Carol kissed it felt dry. "I love you," Carol whispered. "Don't be afraid." She didn't know if her mother heard her.

The bed she slept in was the same one she had slept in as a child. She dreamed of her father, flying, while a small girl ran below him. When she woke the dream faded from her mind, dissipating like smoke when she reached for it. She dressed quietly in the grey light while Miriam slept. Carol's thoughts wandered, and she made no attempt to control the direction her mind was taking. Her mother's door was slightly open and she thought briefly about going to wake her. Instead, she left a note about needing to get home and calling her later. Then she went down to the basement and sat in the chair where her mother had cried. She tried to think why she had come down, and there seemed to be no reason for it. She could think of no reason for picking up one of the dusty inner tubes either, but she did. Moments later she was leaving the cabin, closing the screen door quietly behind her. She tossed the tube in the back of her car and sat without moving for what seemed like a long time. As she put the car in gear, she glanced back at the house. Miriam stood in her nightgown at the door. Her hand was raised, palm outward, a gesture either a wave or a salute.

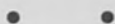
SENSAI

By True P. Benesova

We climbed twelve steps
to the upper room of an old warehouse
to meet you, Honorable Teacher
in white, strong arms clamped across
a confident chest,
your cropped red hair raising questions
of lineage and credentials.

Yet there you stand, Sensai,
Master of the Martial Arts,
your eyes invading mine with
authority and special insights
on all my secret hiding spots.

I know you know exactly
what I'm thinking, you could give
the name of my next lover,
itemize my grocery bill.
You do not see, however, that I, too, have
certain oblique faculties, and
desperada that I am, will write
a check for fifty dollars (and no more)
to lead my son by brooklets that feed
rivers of violence,
just to be rid of you.



Your will threatens. Your aim is clear.
Transparent desire is fixed upon its prey,
Sensai, but you'll fail unless your skill
captures the very tears
I cried last night,
untangles the web
of my first lie.

Even then, admit you cannot touch me
until you paint stroke by perfect stroke
the plumage of a jewelled hummingbird
lying dead on the sidewalk
with body bruised
wings broken
in flight through
glass doors of illusion.

THE LAST THREE WEEKS OF AUGUST

By **Stephanie Walker**

I see the road taped over the mountain,
The trees climb,
The mountain overlooks the lake,
 overlooks me.

I see the heat escape the water and
Headlights down a drive across the lake.
The moon lights up the sky,
Casts a long white shadow.
I see the lake reflect the sky,
Today it is blue.

I hear the loons and ducks swim by,
The water against the shore,
 against the dock and boat.

I hear the wings of a hummingbird,
The sails when I'm in irons,
A motorboat smack a whitecap,
Then skim a smoother surface.

I hear nature at night,
It is always background music.

I smell the usual,
Cool air and pine trees,
Campfires, the dock and the rubber boat.

At Palmer Rentals, I smell motor oil,
old canvas and Palmer's cigar.

Fresh coffee in the morning,
Sun screen in the afternoon,
Barbecue at night.

I feel a contrast in temperature,
Puddles on the dock,
Live bait and the catch of the day.
I feel the height and volume,
I feel insignificant and small,
Always relaxed and on a really good day,
I feel warm.
Most, I feel engulfed.

I know where I'll be,
The last three weeks of August,
In this atmosphere,
Feeling small, happy and lucky,
Every year.



GROWN UP

By **Stephen Grim**

Michael was a twenty-one year old college senior. Ever since childhood he had been told to "grow up." His kindergarten report card had read "Behavior: Unsatisfactory—Needs to develop classroom maturity." Now, as he sat in his cluttered dorm room, nestled in the reassuring brokenness of his dirty couch, he was hit square in the face with reality.

"You're absolutely sure? There's no way it could be a mixup?" He spoke weakly.

Cindy, his girlfriend of nearly two years, buried her face in her hands and shook her head. "No...I knew I was too late..." Her shoulders heaved as she started to cry.

Michael got up and paced nervously around the room. He felt like crying too, but he knew he should try to be strong for her sake. He lifted a battered acoustic guitar from a laundry pile and attempted a few chords from a silly song he'd once made up to lift her spirits after her kitten had been evicted from her dorm. He found he'd forgotten it though, and ended up picking out the beginning of "Sweet Home Alabama" before she glared at him to put it down. He moved back to the couch to hold her.

"What are we going to do?" she sobbed. "I can't graduate!...You don't even have a job yet...My dad is going to kill me!" She cried violently into his chest and pounded her fist into his thigh. Michael was at a loss for words.

He had met Cindy midway through his sophomore year when she was a freshman. Michael was instantly drawn to her soft brown hair and bright, almost turquoise, blue eyes. She had been infatuated with him from the start too, although Michael never really understood why. He'd always thought himself to be sort of ugly and lately, a little overweight from too much beer and pizza. The two had an odd relationship. Michael was, as she'd often tell him "chronically irresponsible." This trait did not mix especially well with her frequent mood swings, which Michael suspected stemmed from her unhappy childhood. Her parents, after years of fighting, had split when she was ten. She was left somewhat bitter and would often become angry or depressed for no apparent reason. This was a part of her that Michael tried to accept and ignore without taking it personally. When she had come to his room that afternoon he could see that she was in one of her blue moods, but he thought little of it and tried to cheer her up by being frisky and obnoxiously happy. This time though, she could not be made to smile and it shocked him when she exploded and told him to sit down and "shut the fuck up."

Holding her now, Michael sat dumbfounded as the news replayed in his head. "Pregnant," she told him. "Almost two months." He stared into space, unable to comprehend the magnitude of the situation.

They sat in virtually the same position for the rest of the day. She cried into his lap and Michael tried to speak, but he couldn't really say anything that mattered. He felt hollow inside, as if every thought and emotion had been flushed out of him. He was only vaguely aware of the audible churning of his stomach. Darkness closed around them in the room. He made a move for the desk lamp as dusk set in, but she stopped him, asking that they just sit in the dark where he could not see the puffiness of her face. Michael agreed and now allowed himself to cry with her.

He looked at the clock on his dresser. Its red glow provided the only light in the room. Nine-fifty-two.

"I'm getting kind of hungry," Michael spoke softly. "Do you want to go to the Diner or something?"

"No," she breathed. "I think maybe I ought to go home and sleep. Maybe when I wake up I'll find it's all been a dream."

The November air was crisp, but not bitterly cold. She shivered and Michael put his arm around her. As they walked silently along, Michael looked up at the stars and wondered if there really was a God and why would He do something like this to him. He looked at Cindy, wanting to say something but having no idea what. She walked with her head erect as if to give the illusion that nothing was wrong. In the light of the streetlamps though, the stains of her tears were obvious. Michael felt a turmoil brewing inside him. A part of him melted when he saw the broken girl. It wanted him to tell her "Cheer up! We'll be o.k.!" Another part, though, thought of lost freedom and money spent on a child he did not want. This was the part that had Michael wondering, "What the Hell do I do now? How do I get my ass out of this one?"

"Mike?" Her soft voice broke his reverie.

"Yeah?"

"Do you love me?"

"Uh...yeah...I mean, of course I do!" Her question bit at him. It was as if she had been reading his mind. "Why did you ask me that?"

"You haven't said it all day."

He was silent. Hadn't he? Should he now?

"Cindy, I do. Really. I'm sorry...I guess I was just so confused today...I love you."

She turned to him and tried to force a smile as they neared her door. They kissed goodnight and promised to see each other in the morning.

When Michael arrived back at his dorm, he was met in the hall by his friend Whitey.

"Yo, buddy! What's new?" Whitey called.

"Nothing good, that's for sure," Michael mumbled. "Hey, did you eat yet?"

"Yeah, but I could eat again."

"Let's go to The Mug and get a burger and a pitcher," Michael suggested.

Michael could only stomach half of his three-dollar cheeseburger and it was apparent to Whitey that something was wrong.

"Mike, you alright?"

"Yeah...I'm fine." He filled his empty mug and took a sip. "I'm o.k." he told Whitey.

"Are you going to eat the rest of that burger?"

Michael shoved the plate across the table and went to the bar to get a fresh pitcher. Whitey gnawed on the now-cold burger and then dropped it on the plate as Michael returned.

"Drink up buddy. The beer's better than that burger ever was." Michael cracked a grin that Whitey knew was a front. They began to make small talk, sports mostly, and Michael dominated the conversation.

"...so he goes up for this three-pointer and...Holy shit, who is that?" He pointed to the other side of the room. Whitey glanced over his shoulder and noticed a heavily made up blonde in a tight sweater near the bar.

"She's some local bimbo. She's always in here."

"She's outrageous!...I'm going over there." He stood up and Whitey noticed he was somewhat unsteady.

"Mike, c'mon. Hey, why don't we get out of here?"

"Not yet..." He made his way over to the bar and Whitey watched him attempt to start a conversation. Christ, he thought, she's gotta be thirty-five years old. What the fuck's he up to?

Whitey could see that the woman was disinterested and after about ten minutes, Michael got the hint too. He came back to the table.

"Well?" Whitey asked flatly.

"She blew me off. She's got a boyfriend." He poured himself another beer.

"Alright Mike, what is it?"

"What do you mean?"

"I know something's wrong, now what is it?"

"Nothing's wrong, o.k.? Mind your own damn business!" Michael shouted. Several heads turned and Whitey knew they had better be cool. They sat in silence for several minutes before Whitey spoke.

"You had another fight with Cindy, didn't you?" he asked calmly.

Michael stared down into his beer and breathed deeply. After a minute he looked up into Whitey's eyes. He slowly raised his glass of beer between them.

"Here's to fatherhood," he whispered. He drained the glass and dropped his head.

"Mike...oh shit," Whitey was stunned. "Dude, I'm sorry...What are you going to do?"

Michael looked up at him. "I wish the fuck I knew."

Whitey went to the bar and bought them each fresh beers. There was little that either could say. They watched a basketball game on the

television above the corner of the bar and drank some more. At one-thirty Michael threw up on the bar. Whitey received a punch in the mouth from one of the locals for being with him and the two were ushered outside, where it was made very clear to them that they were not welcome to come back.

At eight o'clock the next morning, someone pounded on Michael's door informing him that he had a phone call. He nearly threw up again when he tried to get out of bed, but he figured it was probably Cindy on the phone and he knew he had to get up. It was a full five minutes before he picked up the dangling receiver of the hall pay phone.

"Lo?" he mumbled.

"Mike, it's me."

"What's up?"

"I need you to come over."

"Now?" Michael's head throbbed and he wished he was still in bed.

"I've been thinking...all night...We've got to tell my Dad. You've got to be there with me." She began to cry again.

Michael wanted to forget everything. He wished he was back at The Mug. Or in bed. Or in the bathroom right now throwing up. After a brief pause he told her, "I'll be right over."

Michael agreed that their parents should be told, but made the suggestion that they go to his own first. He had become aware, through comparison of his own birthday and their wedding anniversary, that he had been conceived out of wedlock. He had kept it as his secret for years, but now he hoped that his parents would understand the situation and have some compassion. As he explained to Cindy, he also thought it would be a nice warm-up before they made the eight hour drive to her home in Buffalo to break the news to people who weren't overly fond of him to begin with. Cindy agreed to the idea, though she complained that an hour's drive left too little time to plan their confession. Michael called his parents at work and asked them to be home at noon. He refused to tell them why. He felt nauseously dizzy as he hung up the phone—only slightly better than he had the night before at the bar.

An hour's drive had never seemed to pass so quickly as it did that day. Though he drove well under the speed limit, Michael felt the continual urge to slow down. Cindy, silently brooding beside him, seemed shocked when he announced that they would be home in five minutes.

"Already!" she gasped.

"Just try to relax when we get there hon. I'll tell them."

Minutes later they sat in the living room of Michael's ranch style home.

"What is it Mike?" his father asked. "Is school going o.k.?"

"Yeah, fine..."

"You didn't have an accident with the car, did you!" his mother suddenly blurted out.

"No.. look..." Michael began to pace the floor but the anticipation became too much for him. "She's pregnant," he blurted out. "That's the

problem...I'm sorry, but...she's pregnant. That's all there is to it."

Michael's mother flushed white and began to cry. His father quavered and murmured a quiet "Oh my God."

"Dad, we...tried to be careful. We..."

"No! I don't want to hear it!...Stupid! You're just plain stupid!" His father roared at the two of them. Cindy began to cry.

"Dad, it wasn't our fault!" Michael yelled back at him. "The condom broke..." He was cut short by the sudden scream of his mother.

"Stop it! Just stop it!" she told them, then turning on Michael, "Is this what we've taught you? Is this the 'responsibility' and 'independence' that you've learned in college? Go away. Just get out of here!" She collapsed hysterically on the couch.

"Mom..."

"Go away!"

Michael was crushed. He felt betrayed by his family. He looked at Cindy crying on the couch and something snapped.

"You fucking hypocrites!...You did the same thing didn't you?"

"Get out!" his mother said through her teeth.

"What are we supposed to do?...You oughta know! You've been through it! Or is this what you did? Did you get thrown out too?"

Michael grabbed Cindy by the wrist and pulled her to the door.

"Get back here! Where do you think you're going?" his father yelled after them. Michael didn't answer though. They got in his car and left.

"Where do we go from here?" Cindy asked quietly.

"I guess we go have the same conversation at your house, right?"

"I guess so..." She gazed out the window at nothing. "I don't want to do this..."

"I don't either, but right now, I don't think we really have a choice."

Michael stopped for gas a mile or so before the on-ramp to Route 80 North. In seven hours they would be in Buffalo.

Eight-thirty; Nine o'clock, he thought. That's a hell of a long way to go to get punched out.

Cindy fell asleep just north of Scranton, Pa. Michael was relieved to see her sleep because he knew she probably hadn't the night before. Her heavy breathing made him weary though, and he fought to stay awake. It grew dark around five-thirty that evening. Michael watched the stars come out above as the highway stretched out behind him. He began to rethink the topic of God's plan for him. He looked at Cindy sleeping beside him. She was slumped down in the fetal position and from time to time moved her mouth as if she might be speaking in her dreams. Then Michael saw her break into a broad smile. At that moment Michael abandoned all thoughts of ever leaving her alone. She needs me, he thought. No matter what happens, she needs me. As he counted off the miles to her home, he had a brief flash of hope that they would be rejected there too, so that they might start their own life somewhere together.

"A boy," he almost said aloud, "I hope it's a boy."

WHAT SIZE?

By Matthew Noll

(.....oh christ, it's the fat woman again
i wonder if she'll fall and crack the ice
and use her head to dent the wall
like one of those medieval battering rams
with demon heads, in a floral housecoat)

yes ma'am, five and a half, of course i
remember
(when that new chick at
the concession stand, waved at me
jeez, if only there wasn't about a
million feet of deadly ice between me and her
and hockey players who go about a million miles an hour
doing ballet on razor blades, blasting clouds of dust
into the faces of those poor little girls
14 year old aspiring figure
skaters, while mom digs the varnish off the ends
of the bleachers)

• - •

black reeboks, one white lace
yes sir, right back
(and forth every day to school
and then to this frozen dump, twenty degrees in
may it's so goddamn cold and the goddamn
grey ceiling, looks like snow ready to come down
already dirty
i wish that one chick would come back,
with her black spandex, i always
had hers ready, laces tucked in
real neat, and the ice chipped out of the
speed laces hah! hockey player got a little
out of control, had to dodge that falling ice queen
and put your face into the plexiglass, makes ya look
like play-doh, serves ya right show-off
shit, got a cramp, i'll probably have
arthritis when i'm twenty-five
hey! new concessions girl, maybe
i'm gettin hungry, no she probably
digs hockey players, and can stay up on the ice

HIDDEN COLORS

By Kathy Bowers

My childhood home of Liberia is a country of colors and of the natural earth. I spent all of my first eight years in West Africa as the child of missionary parents, except for two brief home-leaves to the United States. It was not until the day my family left Liberia for good that I first began to recognize the unique beauties of each country. In Liberia; I did not have the common luxuries, such as telephones or grocery stores, that Americans cannot live without, but I did not know them and could not miss them. I did know, and now appreciate, the glorious natural life of Liberia which Americans cannot imagine.

Living in Liberia, I saw the growing fields of emerald green rice, deep green jungles, pale brown dirt roads, dark mud huts, and darker people. After eight years, even my pale skin took on an African bushland tan. The Liberian air is clear, the sky bright blue, and the sunsets are ever-changing waves of scarlet, orange, violet. Liberian bananas proudly show their intense ripe yellow, and the hibiscus come in a variety of warm reds and pinks. Even the people shine next to pastel Americans, their dark skin set off by richly colorful clothes in bright designs and patterns. These were the beauties I knew as a child.

On the evening before my family's final departure for the U.S., I stepped into our familiar dirt and rust-stained bathtub, put the yellow rubber plug in the drain, and turned the water on. I watched as the water level slowly rose. I also watched for the tadpoles that occasionally got in the pipes coming up from the pond. As the water gradually got a few inches deep, it became less transparent, more the color of the dusty roads. I turned it off and waited for Mom to bring a pot of boiling water from the kitchen to warm the bath.

As I sat in the bathtub, my clearest and most recent memories of the U.S. were of a winter spent in central Michigan when I was in kindergarten. I could see myself walking to school with my sister. The ground, bushes, cars, and sidewalk were covered with white snow and slush. The street was a salty grey, the sky steel blue. I also remembered the school's gym, a large, hollow, cement-floored room where we played games with an old, washed-out, blue-grey parachute. But even these images were dim in the last minute activity and wonder of leaving home forever.

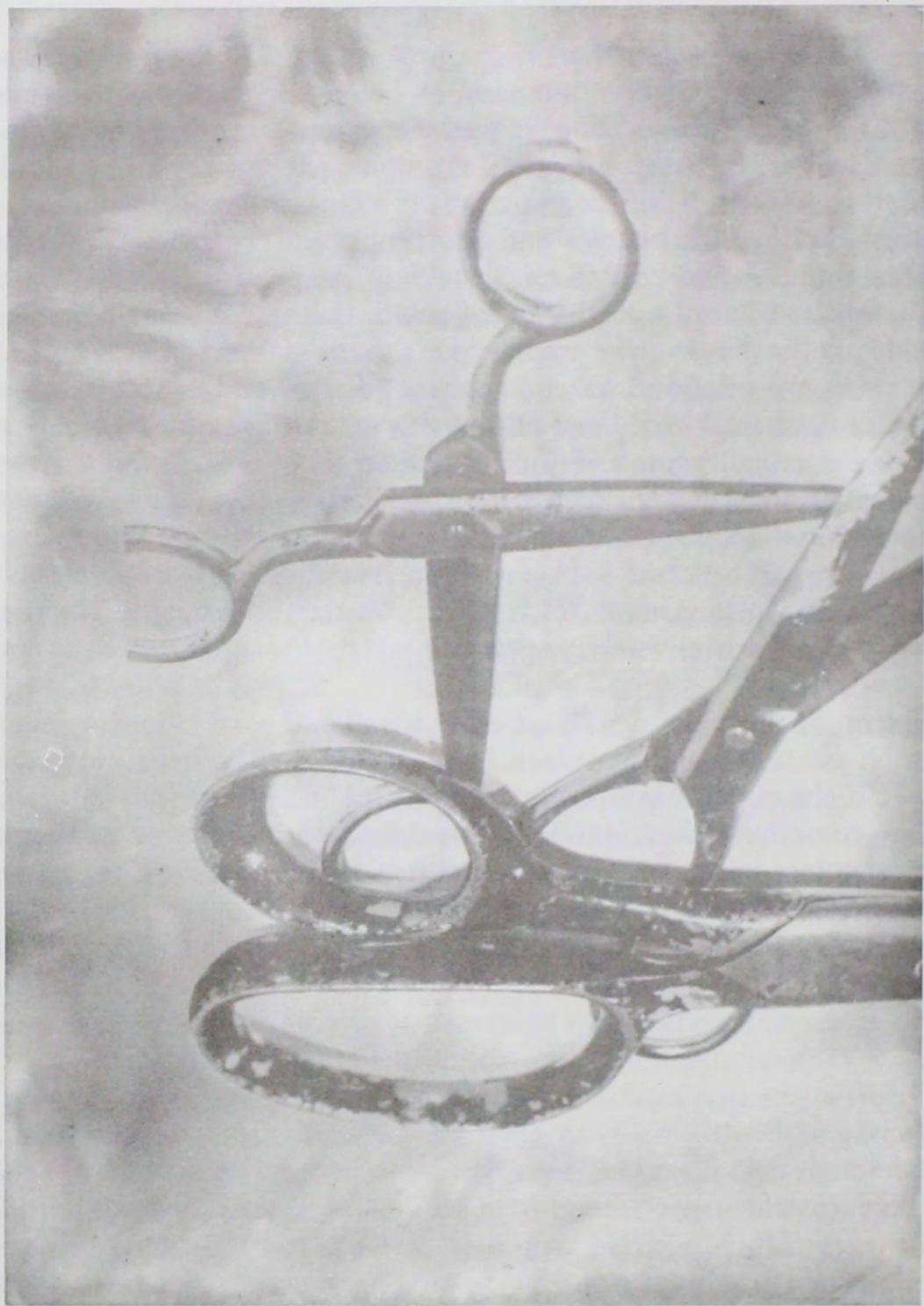
After a long and exhausting trip, my family arrived in grey New York City. We made it through the dark, dingy streets to the hotel, and my parents immediately began to get ready for bed. I was too excited. I was fascinated by the exotic lighting in the hotel, especially in the bathroom where a whole row of bulbs lit up a huge, perfect mirror. Not one single

spot of rust came through that mirror, not even on the corners. I could see a beautiful, clear reflection of myself, and stood on my toes to see more over the edge of the sink. The sink itself was one smooth, uninterrupted sheet of white. The bathtub was just as stunning. It took the entire width of the bathroom—probably long enough for even Dad to lie down in.

I turned one of the handles and a torrent of water gushed out so hard and fast that I felt a few drops splash back on my arm. And then I saw that this was no ordinary water! It was lighted, clear, gloriously beautiful. I quickly put the plug in so as not to waste any more than I already had, and then sat by the edge and watched as it got deeper and deeper and more beautiful because I could see all the way to the bottom. It shone and sparkled everywhere, in every dip between the waves. It was light and movement and perfectly clear all at once. I had never seen such exquisite perfection in all my life. I touched it and knew it must be smoother than any water I had ever touched. I splashed it and watched each drop burst with light. I stood in amazement, transfixed by this new beauty when the absence of color is a dazzling spectacle.

Like many other people, I have often wondered what heaven is like, or even if it exists as a physical place. I have heard that the streets are paved with gold, the most treasured metal on earth. I believe God has something better, something like clean water and light to a Liberian or bursting tropical colors to an American; new colors, a new pure light beyond my finite imagination.

HIDDEN COLORS



VICTIMS

By True P. Benesova

What interested Emily the most about Priscilla was the way her head flopped back and forth from shoulder to shoulder when you shook her. This was because she had a thin neck without much stuffing in it—understandable, but very silly looking and sometimes even a little scary. Priscilla was the product of the loving, busy hands of Emily's grandmother, who had crocheted the doll seated before the TV with her feet propped up on a brown leatherette footstool, watching the afternoon soap operas, "my stories," as she called them. The aging woman's handiwork belied the fantasies seducing her mind, because Priscilla was designed to be a matter-of-fact, down to earth creature, definitely homely looking. Every bit of her—skin, hair, eyes, nose, mouth, shoes, and clothing (including her green skirt, three petticoats, and quaint, old fashioned underdrawers)—was made from yarn by thrusting, looping, and pulling a cold steel crochet hook thousands of times in the proper pattern to produce a human-like figure. Despite her stupid, vacant smile and tuft of wild, tangled blond yarn hair on the top of her head, there was something appealing about Priscilla which made Emily forget her common, unkempt appearance: maybe it was the limp, loose way the doll responded to every touch or movement.

Yesterday morning Emily was playing while she waited for Mom to call her from her room to leave for school. She loved making the doll dance crazily, throwing her bulky yarn skirt up over her soft shoulders cradling that bobbing head. When she heard that final summons, "Emily, time for school, or you'll be late!" she laid Priscilla down carefully on her bed, covered her with a small quilt that Grandma had also made from left over scraps of materials and worn garments, and obediently reached for her heavy winter coat. She slid her arms reluctantly into the sleeves, and slowly pulled the coat over her shoulders, counting the buttons, scrutinizing each before closing it. Heaving her shoulders up in a tight little shrug, she sighed and walked quietly out of the house to meet the gray morning shivering in spite of her warm, well-buttoned coat.

It was a cool, misty November morning. Emily peered anxiously across the church parking lot facing the short line of houses along Union Road. Just behind the church's tool shed at the far corner of the lot was where she usually spotted the dogs. There were three of them, all big: a Great Dane, a German Shepherd, and the third not any particular breed except mean. Last week one day they noticed her walking as quietly as a deer in hunting season down Union Road toward the bus stop, and they came bounding after her, barking in such a threatening way that Emily took off, running as fast as her legs would carry her, all the way to the stop. But

today she saw no sign of the dogs, so she started off quickly down the road, glancing nervously over her shoulder every few seconds. Sure enough, just as she was nearing the parking lot of the machine shop that served as the bus stop, the dogs came loping across one of the fields that lay between Emily and her house. This time they were not barking, but busily following their noses, tracking the tiny animals that lived and played in the field. Emily felt safe now because she was at the bus stop, and the dogs never crossed this last street; she could forget about them until she had to walk home after school.

The other kids at the bus stop were already in line, looking to the crest of the next hill on Seven Valleys Road. Except for Terry, the bully, who was pinching Donna and Carol, and throwing gravel at the bare legs of the girls. Every now and then, he tripped or punched one of the smaller boys, perhaps for variety. Emily never challenged Terry and even laughed at his jokes, which were the stupidest ones in the world, just to humor him, so he rarely picked on her. Even so, she sometimes got caught in the crossfire and side effects of the husky boy's onslaughts. She winced as a spray of gravel hit her knees.

When the bus arrived the children crowded on it, eager to escape the chill of the morning and the pain inflicted by the bully. Emily had been at the end of the line at her bus stop, which was next to last on the route. The bus was already full, two children in every seat, but you had to sit down, growled the bus driver. At this point, the children still standing were expected to ask the seated children (who had better be your friends) for permission to sit sideways on the aisle edge of the seat. "May I sit in?" asked Emily timidly at three different seats before Linda and Kathy reluctantly moved over to expose six inches of green plastic seat cover; Emily plopped upon it in relief.

Now she could practice the poem she had memorized for school; they were going to recite it individually during English class, first thing this morning. "A smile is like a golden key," (Emily hated this poem), "that opens any door." It seemed disgusting to Emily that you were supposed to go around smiling at people to get them to do things for you. She laughed at Terry's jokes, it was true, but that was different: it was to prevent him from doing things to her. "It lightens every burden, and eases every chore," continued Emily. It was becoming very clear to her that the poems that you learned to recite for Mrs. Wechsler's fifth grade class were really just something to say for the teacher, and they didn't really mean anything.

By the time bus number 29 arrived at Creekside Elementary School, Emily had rehearsed the twenty lines of the poem flawlessly and silently in her head at least a dozen times. But this didn't stop the little shivers raising the hairs on her forearms, and her stomach was churning as she entered Mrs. Wechsler's room. This was not unusual, it happened almost every day.

Ethel Wechsler was a matron of about sixty who had been teaching school for almost forty years. She had black hair, sallow skin, and vaguely brown watery eyes. The first day Emily saw the teacher, she noticed the tiny size of the hole in the middle of her eye (the pupil, the health book called it) and the many little red lines crossing the white part of her eye in strange twisted patterns. Emily didn't like the way Mrs. Wechsler's lips, coated with bright red smeary lipstick, never seemed to fit together right when they were closed. In short, the teacher was one of those people a child's instinct identifies as cruel from the first sight and sound. Ethel Wechsler adored quiet little careful Emily, so bright, so obedient and facile: this was evidenced by the special privileges she showered on the child, from placing her in the front row seat right before the teacher's desk, to publicly declaring Emily Braun the "Smartest Girl in the Class" on several occasions. To the other children in the class "Smartest Girl in the Class" translated to mean "Teacher's Pet." Emily hated Mrs. Wechsler deep down in her guts, and she cringed whenever the woman in charge of her days uttered her name.

The lunch money had already been collected and sent to the office, and the daily announcements made. Mrs. Wechsler read the Bible passage for the day, a Psalm. "Lift up your heads, oh ye gates. . .;" the whole time Emily's eyes were fixed on the black leather cover of the Bible in Mrs. Wechsler's hands, while she mentally practiced the poem for today. The class rose for the Pledge of Allegiance. Looking at Mrs. Wechsler and reciting the pledge, Emily wondered why the teacher always held her hand cupped under her pendulous breast as if she were testing the firmness of a large pear, instead of putting her hand flat across her chest and covering her heart.

It was time for English class, time for twenty-nine children to painfully grope their way past the recitation of the smile poem. Emily was very cold, but the palms of her hands were sweaty, and her stomach felt like there were little animals with big teeth inside trying to gnaw their way out. All twenty-nine renditions would be painful for Emily because every time one of the children stumbled over a word or forgot, Mrs. Wechsler would begin her habitual mocking and strutting, like a nasty old crow. Sometimes she even got mad at the smaller boys when they got so scared they forgot the whole poem: she'd reach over and slap their faces or pull their hair. When this happened Emily felt terrible, the gnawing in her stomach got worse, she bit her lip, and she stared away at the wall, feeling that what was happening was somehow her fault—after all, she was the good one, the smart one. She knew that when it was time for her to perform, she would deliver the whole poem that didn't mean anything about anything with precision and absolute perfect diction, and of course, she would emphasize the words printed in italics.

Mrs. Wechsler surveyed her class with dim but experienced eyes. "Who wants to go first?" she asked. No volunteers. "I think we need a good example of the correct way to recite this poem," she continued, simulating pleasantness. "Emily Braun will lead us off."

Emily wished she could disappear into a little sparkle of silver like Tinkerbelle always did, but she knew she had to get up and walk to the designated spot facing the class. She worried that one of the buttons on her blouse might be unbuttoned or her socks might be sagging, but she didn't dare check. Standing squarely on her feet to stop the trembling in her knees, arms at her sides with thumbs and forefingers squeezing desperately the slightest fold on either side of her pleated skirt, Emily looked just over everyone's head to the coats hanging silently on the back wall of the classroom. If the recess bell would ring right now it would be a miracle. The air in the classroom seemed heavy and evil-scented. Emily took a deep breath and began, "A smile is like a golden key that opens any door..." Before she knew it, she was done with another flawless recitation. She started back to her seat.

"Wait a minute, Emily!" snapped Mrs. Wechsler. "This poem is about smiles. You have to smile when you recite it. Go back and repeat it with a smile."

Emily walked back to the recitation spot and began again.

"No!" interrupted the teacher. "You're not smiling at all. Now put a big smile on your face and keep it there!"

Emily tried to force a smile. It was almost excruciating to make the corners of her mouth go up by will alone; her lips felt big and bulging and ugly, she imagined her face must look like a leering mask. The corners of her mouth were suspended up there alone with nothing natural to support them. She began the poem again, losing the smile, hastening Mrs. Wechsler's orders to repeat the poem over and over again "with feeling." Finally after about eight repetitions of the piece, the teacher was satisfied, and allowed Emily to return to her place. The star of the class sank into her seat exhausted by fear, anger, and confusion. She hardly noticed the other children going through their trial by ordeal; she didn't even blink when Mrs. Wechsler snapped the ruler against the back of Danny's head.

When she got off the bus that afternoon, Emily's first thought was of the dogs. She looked carefully across the few hundred yards of the field that offered a short cut to her own back yard, the same field where she had last seen them. They were gone, and Emily scampered across the field not even thinking of the mud clinging to the shoes or the field's stalks and stubble scratching her legs. Breathless, she flew through the kitchen door, safe at last. Wiping the mud from her shoes with a paper towel, she noticed the note Mom and Dad left her on the kitchen table: "Went for groceries. Back at five."

Emily opened the door to her room and immediately spied Priscilla lying under her quilt, right where she had been left that morning, her expressionless face resembling that of a sheep. Grabbing the doll, the girl wandered back to the kitchen and fished a long piece of twine out of the drawer where Mom kept such odds and ends. She tied one end into a sort of noose, shoved Priscilla's head through it, and fastened the other end to the lamp suspended over the kitchen table.

As she watched Priscilla hanging there, her silly head flopped over to the side, Emily felt the corners of her mouth begin to twitch and slowly jerk upwards into a now familiar posture. Soon the words seemed to float out of her own mouth, "A smile is like a golden key that opens any door." Emily slammed the kitchen door behind her as she ran out behind the garage to play with her hula hoop, planning to rush into the garage's shelter if the dogs came.

After Emily had twirled the hoop around her body until she felt like she had dents all over her, she went back into the house. Mom and Dad were home. "How was school?" asked Mom.

"O.K." said Emily.

"What did you learn today?" asked Dad. It was his customary question.

"Nothing." Her usual reply.

Emily glanced furtively at the kitchen lamp. Priscilla was gone. Emily slid past her parents and hurried into her room. There was Priscilla, lying in a heap on the bed, the noose still around her neck. Dad must have cut her down and tossed her there. Emily pulled the string from her doll's neck and rearranged her into a more dignified looking position on the bed. Then she got out her arithmetic book, her two sharp pencils, and her yellow school tablet, sat down at her desk, and began her homework.

When she was finished with the arithmetic problems, Emily tore a fresh piece of paper from her tablet. She sat for a long, long time drawing pictures of little boxes inside of boxes inside of boxes.

I LISTEN FOR YOUR VOICE,

By Peter Henty

I listen for your voice,
in every sound I hear,
and I await,
a rap upon my door.

The silence in my room,
grows louder without you.

Whose are the footsteps in the corridor?
It's drafty in here.

I'm listening and waiting.

THOUGHTS

By Laura Sassaman

The soul is like bubblegum...
It slowly expands,
Advancing,
But when pricked,
It quickly folds back in upon itself.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF GRANDPA

By Joe Repko

Every Friday night, my Grandpa
stumbled over the front porch step
with a bag of goodies
in one hand and a
brown bag of his own. My mom
greeted him with a bittersweet kiss
and then took the white paper bag out of his hand.
That was for me later.

I usually found
Kit Kats, Peanut Chews, Good 'N Plenty in that little bag,
But not this Friday evening—
Grandpa,
in his regular, happy mood,
pulled out a line of colors,
wafers with a sweet, white coating.
Dancing toward me,
Grandpa playfully took me under the arms and
placed me comfortably on his sagging lap.
Holding the first wafer, white, in his hands,
He said to me,
“Now, this color reminds me of dirty, old socks
your mother leaves on the rotting radiator downstairs,
Or the hundred-year old moth balls you’ve been smelling
for the last eight years.”
“Dad, watch yourself,” Mom calls from the kitchen,

But Grandpa continued,
“The pink ones,
taste like the Teaberry ice cream and gum
that Mommy never buys for you
on those sweaty summer days.”
“You’re pushing it, Dad,” Mom retaliates.
With a cunning smile,
Grandpa looked at me and said,
“The black ones, though,
Remind me of your mother and
the kiss she just gave me.”
“That’s enough! Stop it!
Get off his lap this instant,
and eat your candy over there,”
as Mom glared at Grandpa,
and turned her head abruptly away.

These colors were different when I tasted them.
Grandpa just sunk in his creaky rocking chair,
Silent, and swallowed another swig while staring at the wall.
Each wafer seemed round,
Like his fat belly,
And as white as his slicked back hair.
But, when I ate them
I felt how thin and fragile,
How easily they crumbled in my mouth
like brittle bones.



JESUS CHRIST, TERRY

By **Matthew Pecic**

“More peas? ... Bread? ... Mashed potatoes?”
no more food, cheeks over-
loaded. can't swal-
low.

“Chew up your roast beef.
Now be a good boy Terry.”
no teeth only gums no
boy, forty-three.

“Don't give me that look!”
help! gonna gag gotta
spit. napkin ... please. need
drink before choke. help!

“Jesus Christ, Terry! What the
hell's your problem. Look
what you did to my shirt!
Christ, you know better than that!”

couldn't help it needed wa-
ter couldn't swal-
low couldn't breathe.
sorry.

“No dessert for you! No
snack tonight. Terry bad
boy. Do you understand ...
bad boy!”

sometimes wish food stick
like cement in throat
choke choke hard
no breathe please! what
life.

PENANCE

By Carol Jennings

A penance, but not quite as
holy, where the weekend
becomes a ritual, a
rite of passage. The
only commandment is
get ye drunker,
faster
and listen to the chant
of a hand-me-down stereo
baptised with beer.
Then pair off
two-by-two
like remnants from Noah's Ark
for an empty catharsis,
washing away the sins
of the week.



THE GUYS ARE DRIVING HIGH

By **Tim Percarpio**

I grit my teeth and safely close my eyes
While lights of red and white flash streaming past.
My paranoia leaps, intensified

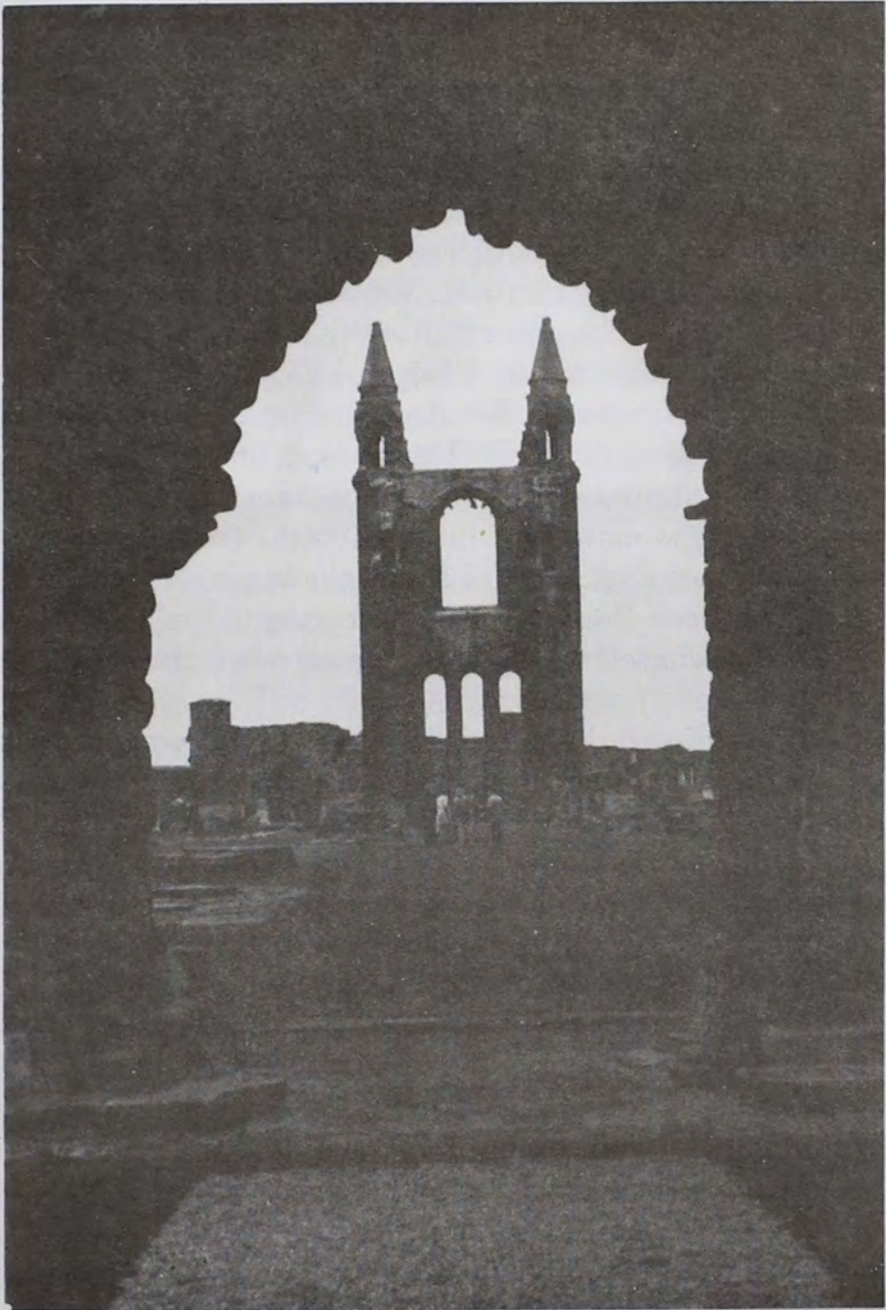
The others laugh I smile and cringe inside.
Reactions slow, acceleration fast
I grit my teeth and safely close my eyes.

The V-8 screams as we go shooting by
The car appearing to be out of gas.
My paranoia leaps, intensified.

All reason and sane thoughts have been defied
While mine are of my life, I hope it lasts.
I grit my teeth and close my eyes.

In chase of speed we're racing with the sky.
I fear my fate has been unjustly cast.
My paranoia leaps, intensified

Spinning round the turn, intent to fly
A tree will be the party we will crash.
Is that my mom or are those siren cries?
I grit my teeth and safely close my eyes.



YOU AND ME AND BIG GINKO

By Jerry VanKanan

The circus as I knew it was a thing of the past. I've seen many a circus parade strutting and blaring down Main Street. I used to gaze in awe at the huge four-colored posters pasted on roadside billboards and barns, stuck in store windows, tacked on poles or any place it might catch a person's eye. I even plastered one on my grandmother's outhouse.

I dreamed of running away with the circus when I was young and then it happened. This was fifty years ago and every word I speak is the truth.

I was sixteen with the unbelievable name of Phinius T. Rabbitfoot III. I lived with my grandmother, Lizzie K. Rabbitfoot, after my mother died in childbirth. My father, a Bible salesman with a roving eye, had left town the year before with a minister's wife. Granny, a God-fearing follower of John the Baptist, had not missed a Sunday service for fifty years. She was known as The-Avenging-Angel-Of-The-Lord.

I remember the summer of 1935. School was out and I was looking forward to a happy summer vacation when the blast went off. Granny announced she was going away for six weeks to an old time, holy rolling, rip snorting, *Southern Baptist Revival Meeting* to make peace with her Lord. I wondered where I was going. I hoped not with her; I soon found out.

"Phinius!" she roared. "You're going to Reverend Casper T. Shortfellow's Bible Camp for the summer."

This was worse. I'd rather go south with Granny. "No!" I said. "I won't go."

"What!" thundered Granny. "Watta you mean you won't go? You'll burn in hell, boy."

I didn't dare wait to hear anymore so I dashed from the house. I knew she wouldn't chase me, as I had hid her white sneakers, but she did. Six blocks in her bare feet.

How could I get out of going with Pastor Shortfellow? My mind began to work overtime and then I saw a way out. Steelville was papered with eye-catching colored posters. The circus was coming to town, Downie Brothers' three ringer. It would arrive the day after Granny left to keep her date with God and destiny. I'd do what any normal red-blooded American boy always wanted to do. When the circus left town, I'd be with it. A stowaway.

Sunday rolled around and I was at the train station to see Granny off for the revival. Lizzie K. and about a dozen of her compatriots were there, including Reverend Shortfellow.

The long train pulled into the station, screeched, and stopped. I kissed my grandmother good-bye and she slipped me a dollar bill.

"Phinius, there's a circus in town tomorrow. Go see it."

"Thanks Granny."

The train squealed, spun its wheels, belched thunderheads of black smoke, and pulled out. The last I saw of The-Avenging-Angel-of-the-Lord was her standing on the rear platform of the observation car, holding on with one hand, waving good-bye. I hoped she didn't fall off.

Monday evening I attended the evening performance of the circus. I don't remember what I saw; I was too excited. I hid in the shadows while they tore down the show. Then I crawled into a loaded canvas truck and soon fell fast asleep. We hit a pothole which woke me up. The smell of unwashed bodies hovered in the air. I could hear snoring and somebody breaking wind. The truck was filled with sleeping roustabouts and I fell asleep again.

When I woke up it was morning. We had stopped and it was cold and damp. "Reveille! Hit the deck. Reveille!" It was the chief canvas-man. The roustabouts began to stir, so I crawled from the truck.

"Who the hell are you, kid? Another runaway?"

"I guess you could call me that."

"Go over to the dining tent and tell Cookie, Kelly sent you. After chow go see Abe Downie. He may give you a job."

I followed the smell of frying bacon to its source, explained myself to Cookie and sat down. The circus ate cafeteria style and the food was good—bacon, eggs, home fries, and the best coffee I ever drank.

"You new here?"

I looked around and saw a big man sitting at the table. He looked like the reincarnation of Long John Silver. He wore a beard, a gold ear ring, an eye patch, and a wooden leg. The tapping sound of the wooden member would haunt me the rest of my days.

"Yes," I gulped. "I'm looking for Abe Downie."

"You're looking at him, son. I'm the sole owner since Mortimer and Morton passed on to the other side. Don't tell me. You ran away. You looking for a job? Soon as you're done eating, tell Cookie I hired you as a mess-attendant."

"Thank you, Sir."

"Don't thank me. It's hard work."

I reported to the cook and he told me my duties: I would take enameled pitchers of steaming coffee into the mess tent and pour the coffee as wanted. Keep the tables supplied with cream, sugar, salt, pepper, catsup and other staples. Peel mountains of potatoes, husk corn, shell beans and peas, help make salads and a million other jobs. I was lucky; I didn't have to wash dishes.

I was out by the elephants next morning. Downie Brothers had four, two rode in each elephant truck. Somebody spoke to me. It was a boy who looked about my age.

The red headed boy said, "My name's Tommy Windsprockett. I noticed you working in the chow house. That's not a bad job. I did it a couple of years myself."

"My name's Phinius T. Rabbitfoot III," I answered. "How old are you? I'm sixteen."

"Same age as you," answered Tommy.

Tommy seemed older, in fact he'd been with a circus all of his life. He was born with the big one, Ringling Brothers. Tommy may not have had schooling, but he sure was street smart.

"You had a shower yet, Phinius?"

"No. The shower tent was too crowded. A fat lady was most of the crowd."

"That was Gertie," said Tommy. "She's in the freak-show. All 698 pounds of her."

"There was a well built lady with her. When she turned around I saw she had a long red beard."

"That's Madam Elizabeth, the bearded-lady."

"She can't be real," I said. "The beard must be false. I'd like to pull it and find out."

Tommy said, "Grab a towel and follow me. I have my own private shower." The circus boy grabbed two buckets of hot water and went between the two trucks. Shucking his clothes he soaped up, so I followed his example and got myself well lathered.

"Here it comes now." Around the corner came the biggest pachyderm I'd ever seen. The elephant walked over to a bathtub-sized container of water and inhaled deeply.

"This'll be cold," Tommy warned, "but you'll get used to it. This is Big Ginko." Tommy patted the elephant. "He's my friend."

"Spray Ginko, spray," said Tommy. A stream of cool water hit my back. I was soap free in seconds.

"It's too cold," I answered.

"You're a baby," said Tommy. "You don't expect Big Ginko to take in hot water."

That night Tommy and I visited the side show. When we got there people were already milling around the entrance. The sideshow opened long before the main ticket booth to give the early opening freak show the opportunity to separate the rubes from any loose change carried in their pockets.

A hoochy-koochy dancer was doing her stuff on a platform in front of the brilliant colored banners while a barker was urging the people into buying tickets for the show. We slipped inside the big tent.

"Hi, Tommy," said the hoochy-koochy girl. She winked at me and asked, "Who's your cute friend, Tommy?"

I blushed and answered, "Phinius."

"What a cute name," said hoochy-koochy.

Tommy and I visited most of the freaks. We saw Gertie the fat-lady, Mable the tattooed-lady, Hong-Wong the Chinese illusionist who levitated the hoochy-koochy dancer, the snake charmer, the pyrotechnical of the Human Volcano, and the Wild Man of Borneo who for an hour, twice a day, made unintelligible sounds in his cage.

I looked around, my curiosity aroused. I was looking for someone. Then I saw her. Madam Elizabeth the bearded-lady. I hurried over to her platform. A large crowd stood around her tiny stage and the Madam was giving out autographed pictures of herself. You were supposed to drop a donation in the box.

"Here's one for you, Phinius," said the bearded-lady. "It's on the house."

I thanked her and headed for the exit looking for Tommy. I still thought the Madam was a fake. There was only one way to find out; I had to see the Madam in the buff. Outside the tent I spotted Tommy talking to the hoochy-koochy dancer.

"You're in luck, Phinius. We're in Tuttle town. Tonight's the big show."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I asked.

"Just be out at Gertie's trailer at ten o'clock."

"Tommy," I added. "The bearded lady is no freak. She's a fraud."

"Will you get off that subject? She's real."

"How do you know?"

"I just know. I gotta go now. See you at ten o'clock."

What was he so touchy about? I looked at my watch; it was 9:00 p.m., one hour to go, so I returned to the freak show. I slipped inside the tent; it was quiet except for two voices. Most of the lights were off, but I could see two dim figures by the bearded lady's place of employment. One was her and the other looked like Tommy. I wasn't sure so I slipped out of the tent.

Tommy picked me up at ten and we made our way back to Gertie's trailer. You could hear the band playing in the big top. The show wouldn't be over till around ten-thirty.

Everybody not on duty was hidden in the shadows. Waiting. Waiting for what? I didn't know.

Then I heard a faint tapping on Gertie's wooden boardwalk. Somebody was coming and then a little leprechaun came into view. In one hand he carried a cane, on his head he wore a high silk hat and clutched in the other hand was a bouquet of white roses.

"Who is it?" I whispered.

"Gertie's boyfriend. Keep quiet."

He tapped timidly on the door.

Then a soft voice called out, "Come in Charles."

The door opened a crack and a sliver of light shone out like a beacon for a ship headed onto the rocks. Then all went black.

For a few minutes not a sound was heard. Then slowly and rhythmically the trailer began to shiver like a cat on a water bed. This lasted for twenty minutes, and not another sound could be heard. The shaking stopped and the silence began. The door opened showing a glow of light. Once again the leprechaun appeared. The little man stepped jauntily from the trailer, slapped his topper on his head, twirled his cane like a drum major and set off into the fog.

The small crowd applauded vigorously and gave the little fellow a standing ovation.

"Bravo! Bravo!"

I swear he doffed his topper, bowed low, and disappeared into a Limehouse fog.

Next day we set up in the town of Whistle Glen, I was off duty for about an hour and I was aimlessly walking around. I

passed the freak show and I looked inside. Madam Elizabeth was sitting in a chair on her platform. She seemed to be meditating. Her legs were spread. Maybe she didn't have pants on. I had to know; she seemed asleep. I crept up on the stage and dropped a half dollar as an excuse to bend over and have a look. The noise of the coin woke her and she stood up, as the coin disappeared down a crack.

"Phinius, what are you doing here?"

"N...N...Nothing," I stuttered.

My face turned red as the Madam's beard and I fled the freak show tent. I rushed out into the sunlight. Spotting Jake the head ticket seller sitting in front of the ticket window, I went over and joined him.

"See that dog, Phinius. Ruffles is the dumbest dog in the world. Every day I give him a bone and every day he buries it under the ticket wagon. Every morning he starts digging for his bone. He never finds it, it's the same wagon but a different lot."

The dog returned worn out and panting so Jake tossed him a new bone. Ruffles took it and went under the wagon and buried it.

"See what I mean."

Next morning I woke up in Freeport. I was peeling spuds and I noticed a pile of bones in front of me. It was then that inspiration hit me, so I told Tommy my idea. We grabbed shovels, picked up the bones, and off we went.

A few hours later I called out to Tommy, "We better go. It's show time."

We went over to the ticket wagon and a strange sight greeted us. Ruffles was digging under the ticket wagon and he had struck it rich. Every few minutes he'd rush out with a bone and deposit it in front of Jake's chair.

Jake saw us and yelled, "It's goofiness. Look, Ruffles struck a bone mine."

Two days later found us set up in Wellington. Tommy and I had just showered and I brought up the subject of the bearded-lady.

"Will you get off that kick?" said Tommy. "She's a woman, I know."

"How the hell do you know?" I waited for the answer, but I didn't get any as Tommy was gone.

For some reason Tommy didn't want to talk about the bearded-lady. I wondered why and this made me more determined to find out the answer to the riddle. What sex was she? I wanted to prove Tommy was wrong, as Madam Elizabeth had to be a man.

That night I made my move. I, Secret Agent Phinius T. Rabbitfoot III, borrowed a ladder from the carpenter truck and waited till the last performance in the freak show ended. Then I made my way to Madam Elizabeth's mobile home. I waited in the wings; I heard her coming. She opened her door and stepped inside but not before I got a view of the light reflecting off of her exquisite silky beard.

There was a window about eight foot up along one side. A light flashed on and I got a glimpse of her. Maybe this would be my lucky day. I moved my ladder into position and up I went, cautiously looked in the window. Her back was to me but she was taking off her clothes. Now she was down to panties and bra.

Then I heard the tapping. Someone was approaching. Please stay away I pleaded. Just let me have a look. Throwing caution to the wind, I gazed in the window. She stood naked in front of me. I was not a very good judge of women's asses, having seen very few in my sixteen years, but this one looked all right to me. She started to turn around just as the ladder was jerked from the window. I tumbled onto the ground.

"Playing peeping Tom, boy? You know what curiosity did to the cat? Scram."

It was Long John Silver and believe me I did scam. In fact I fell down rounding a parked truck. I picked myself up skinned knee and all. I don't know what made me do it but I peeped around the corner. I heard three raps on a door. Big Abe Downie was standing on the top step of the Madam's mobile home. The door opened and Abe went inside. I didn't know what this meant, but it certainly put a new light on the situation.

Next morning I hopped out of the canvas truck and found myself standing on the outskirts of Cortland City. After breakfast I was summoned to Abe Downie's office. I mounted his steps and was ushered into the great man's presence, expecting to hear more about the peeping Tom incident.

"Kid, do you know a Lizzie K. Rabbitfoot?"

"Yes, she's my grandmother."

"She'll be here to pick you up Saturday."

This was worse than the peeping Tom mess. I'd be leaving my friends forever and besides I'd never solve the mystery of Madam Elizabeth.

I was determined to make one last try. Sherlock Holmes never left a case unsolved. I knew there was a knot hole in the floor of her stage. I would crawl under the stage with a flashlight and lie in wait, hoping against hope she'd wear no panties.

That night I struck. The day was hot. It was a perfect no-panties day. She stopped right above the hole, so I turned on the light. The beam went up her well developed legs and it seemed she had no undies on. I zeroed in for home plate. Suddenly. Darkness. The flashlight had failed me. I jiggled it, pounded on it, cursed it, but it would not go on. Next day the hole had a piece of wood nailed over it, so I had failed again. I gave up, the case was closed.

Next day I looked for Tommy to tell him the bad news. I found him with Big Ginko. He was giving the elephant a manicure. Twice a year they have to have their toe nails cut.

"Tommy, I have bad news. I'm going to be leaving the show Saturday. Granny found out where I'm at and she's coming for me."

"I'm sorry Phinius. It won't be the same without you. You know it's always been—You and Me and Big Ginko."

I passed the ticket wagon and noticed Ruffles digging. The hole was almost big enough for the wagon to drop in. I promised myself to salt the bone-field one more time before I left.

Jake came out the door and I told him I'd be leaving. Then I asked him, "Jake, was the bearded lady always with this circus?"

"No, she was with Ringlings. Never could figure why she left them. Abe can't pay her the salary John Ringling paid her. She's the prettiest bearded lady I've ever seen."

I left Jake and not looking where I was going ran smack-dab into Tommy. We both fell down.

"Thomas Windsprockett, I'm really going to miss you. I love you like a brother."

"Phinius T. Rabbitfoot III, the same goes for me."

We both had tears in our eyes.

"Big Ginko will miss you too, Phinius."

"By the way, Tommy, I'll keep in touch. I'll write you once a week."

It started to rain at tear-down time. There was an ominous feeling in the air and the sky was low and eerie. The winds picked up and were gusting up to seventy miles an hour, as we headed for our next port of call. Motor City.

I fell asleep, I woke up, something was wrong. We weren't moving. The wind was howling, so I put on my poncho and poked my head out the door. The rain had quit.

"What happened?" I asked.

"There's been a horrible accident," said Cookie. "One of the elephant trailer's been hit by an oil truck and knocked down the embankment. One elephant's dead, crushed under the truck and they're going to have to shoot Big Ginko. He has a broken back."

"Where's Tommy?" I screamed.

"He's stuck under the truck and they can't get him out."

I saw lanterns and torches flashing down below and I heard voices so I slid down the bank into a scene I'd never forget.

Big Ginko lay quiet and still except for an occasional flick of a leather-like ear or a twitch of his trunk. His eyes were opened but glazed. The other elephant lay bloodied and dead under the truck.

A group of men clustered around the rear wheel. Talking quietly. I went over and got my first look at Tommy. He was lying on the grass but his mangled foot was clutched by the overturned pachyderm carrier. Mercifully, Tommy was unconscious and could not feel the pain.

How to get him out seemed to be the problem. They had no elephants to help. The other two were fifty miles away in Motor City.

Suddenly, Tommy woke up. The boy screamed, "Help me, Big Ginko. Help me."

Then came the miracle, the act that caused Big Ginko to become a legend in the world of the circus.

Big Ginko moaned, grunted and pushed himself erect. The big bull wobbled over to the rear wheel and looked down at Thomas Wind-sprocket with a look of tender love in his pain filled gray eyes.

The trunk darted out like a striking cobra and wrapped itself around the wheel. The pachyderm moaning and grunting lifted the carrier high off the ground. Tommy was pulled free.

The trumpet-like sound of a bull elephant roared out. Big Ginko like a melting snowman sank to his knees, fell over on his side and didn't move.

The ambulance crew rushed down the bank to pick up Tommy. A tall stately woman, crying softly, was with them. She bent over and kissed Tommy, her red silky beard glowing from the lights of the torches.

Now I knew, and it didn't matter anymore.

THE GOOD OLE DAYS OF SEVENTH GRADE

By **Andy Rogers**

Michelle Morgan was FLAT,
And Rick and I were not afraid to tell her;
Although she usually took it fairly well.

While waiting to get into Mrs. Parrish's class,
who, due to her red, frizzy hair
was known to our little clique as *the match*,
Rick and I began with the usual comments.
The sun, shining through the door at the end of the hall,
seemed particularly bright on this fateful day.
If this were day one-hundred of school,
There were at least ninety-eight that we had mentioned
Michelle's lack of physical maturity.

For some unknown reason, today was different:
Michelle wasn't her usual, jovial self.
Rick had obviously already reached this conclusion,
So he proceeded to goad me on.

A popular sign of the times was clogs,
Those wooden shoes...

Michelle is well endowed today;
Rick and I are still friends,
'Tho that wasn't the only time he set me up;
And my right shin has made me wonder if the days of seventh grade
were really that good.



CYCLES

By **Tim Percarpio**

At the peak of a hill on a clouded, sunny day
Four frail figures push a motorcycle
Down the rocky weeds.
A wiry blonde jumps
His shorts onto the frayed leather seat.
The heaving engine jolts

Starts

The machine lunges
Spinning a trail of soot and soil.
Revolutions increase
As the hill pulls him down its bumpy course
The engine screams
Like a wounded horse
While he clenches the steel reins.

The machine and its boy
Bouncing and bucking until they meet
The mound of dirt moulded by granddaddy groundhog
Separately flying
He skids with the ground
Leaving trenches of pain
Feeling nothing but sound.

LEATHER UPHOLSTERY

By Denise Marino

Closing her eyes for a few seconds to escape reality for a moment, Marge thought to herself, "I can't believe I actually agreed to come here. I just don't know how a roommate you've trusted for almost four years could decide to pull something like this? God, what would happen if she really did decide to tell my parents?"

Opening her eyes to find them focusing on the magazines in front of her, she thought, that sure is stupid, how could anyone be interested in *National Geographic* or *Field and Stream* at a time like this?

"Why don't you read a magazine or something," offered Jenny.

"No thanks!" Marge spat.

"I'm only trying to help."

"Well do me a favor and STOP. Don't you think you've helped me enough for one friendship?!"

Before Jenny could answer, the doctor opened the door to the waiting room. "Margaret Fieldings?" he said.

Slowly rising to her feet, Marge let out a rather loud, overly exaggerated sigh of disgust. Waiting until she had walked more than halfway across the room she answered, "Yes, that's me."

"Hi, my name is Dr. Frank Peterson. How are you doing this afternoon—won't you come into my office and make yourself comfortable."

How am I doing, thought Margie. That's even stupider than filling the waiting room with ten out-dated subscriptions of *Field and Stream*! "Fine," she answered.

"Please, have a seat. Well, as I'm sure you know, this is just a preliminary consultation. There's nothing obligating you to come back for any additional meetings. We simply offer this introductory meeting as a public health service for those people who think they may benefit from this type of therapy, but aren't really sure they'd feel comfortable with it."

"Good," she murmured sarcastically.

"I know a little bit about you from the information sheet you filled out this afternoon, but just what exactly prompted you to get in contact with us?" the doctor asked.

Blackmail she thought! Nervously stroking the soft nap of her black skirt with her index finger, Marge sat staring down at her chair. "I feel like I'm in a movie or something," she answered.

"Pardon me?" the doctor said.

"A movie. You know, those great big motion pictures you usually see in a place people call a theatre."

"What makes you feel like that?" he asked.

"Your desk. It reminds me of one of those films where the psychiatrist

sits behind his big, mahogany desk thinking about his 1:30 lunch date, while he pretends to be listening to his patient who is busy pouring out his or her life story and blubbing into a tissue or something."

"Do you expect to be crying into a tissue?"

"Of course not! Not me! I didn't mean me! I don't cry—I just mean that's what you see in the movies."

"I see."

"Good." Trying to regain control of the conversation, she added, "Yeah, most of your office is decorated real nice."

"I'm glad you like it."

"Except for this leather chair."

"It doesn't remind you of a movie, or you don't like it?"

"I don't like it. I mean, who would?" she answered.

"Why wouldn't anyone like the chair?"

"Well, leather upholstery is probably the dumbest thing man has ever made. No matter what season it is, leather is always uncomfortable. If it's cold outside, then the seats are too cold to sit on. But then again, it's probably one of those things you notice if you're a girl, of course, men don't wear skirts. Well, they're not supposed to anyway—so maybe you haven't experienced it. Believe me, it's not pleasant. But the summer can be even worse. Even if it's nice and warm outside, there's a chance the place where you're going has over air-conditioned the room, so when you sit down in a pair of shorts or something, it's such a temperature shock that you get shivers or goose-bumps right away. Or worse yet, the room inside is actually hotter than the heat outside, and sitting on leather upholstery feels worse than sitting on fly paper or something. You know, at first you stick to it, kind of without even realizing it. Then you try and get up, and it's painful as hell to peel the back of your legs off the seat. And trying to avoid sticking doesn't help either, because after a few times of getting up and down, your legs get so hot and sweaty that you slip and slide all over the place and you can't stay seated. It's really gross."

"You know, I never realized that. I guess I'll have to pay particular attention to my thermostat from now on."

"Oh don't worry, leather's not one hundred percent bad."

"Oh really?"

"Well, it's good for easy clean up. Like if you spill Coke on it or something. It wipes right up, but then again, if you accidentally miss an ashtray and flick a cigarette ash on it, forget it. The whole chair is ruined."

"Why the entire chair, wouldn't a cigarette ash leave only a tiny burn mark?"

"Sure, but the chair just isn't the same anymore. It isn't perfect, it has an imperfection. You know, sort of like Brooke Shields."

"I'm sorry, I don't quite follow."

"Well, just think about it. She's rich, she's beautiful, and she's popular. At twenty some years old, however old she is, she's also had a pretty successful acting career. Yet, when people talk about her, the first thing they say is...yeah, isn't she the one with the bushy eyebrows? Don't you think that's awful? They talk about her eyebrows?!!"

"I guess it is."

Continuing with her train of thought, she added, "Appearances are very important. People never forget the bad points in someone, only the good points."

As the doctor quickly jotted a note on a small, white piece of paper stapled to the inside of a manila folder on his desk, Margie enjoyed the few seconds of silence. As he closed it and pushed it aside, she continued, "Boy, I remember when Mom found a burn hole on one of her new barstool chairs downstairs in the rec room. Was there hell to pay! She was so pissed! You never heard so much screaming and yelling. I could hear her all night, crying about how the whole set was ruined. The next day my Dad went out and bought five new chairs just to calm her down. All I kept thinking about was how glad I was that I wasn't blamed for doing it!"

"What makes you say that, do you smoke?"

"No. Well, actually, every once in a while I do. But never when I was younger and living at home. Now, I'm probably one of those, oh, what do you call it...a social smoker. But I've never wrecked a chair, although I have seen my grandmother do it."

"I see. So you only smoke only when you are with other people. Say during a party at college or something?"

"No. Actually I only smoke when I'm totally by myself. I'd be embarrassed if all my friends knew I smoked."

"So why do you smoke at all? Especially if you don't want anyone to see you?"

"I don't know. It makes me feel better, more relaxed, I guess."

"So you smoke when you're upset?"

"Absolutely if I'm by myself *and* upset, but sometimes just when I'm by myself."

"Then you're not really a social smoker at all. You only smoke when no one else is around?"

"Yeah, but not a lot. I've had the same pack for about two months now, so it's no big deal or anything. I only smoke about once or twice a week. Actually, last night I was thinking I should just buy a new pack. I never realized it before, but I think cigarettes can go stale. They didn't taste too good."

"So you were smoking last night?"

"Of course I was. Didn't I just tell you I smoke when I'm alone and upset?"

"I take it you were upset because you had an appointment here today."

"Obviously."

"Why were you so upset?"

"God! Anyone would be."

"Well, yes, many people might be nervous, but why were you upset?"

"I don't know."

"Did you think that coming here would get you so upset that you might cry?"

"No!"

"Well, is being here now worse than you thought it would be?"

"I don't know. I just don't want people to think I'm a weak person, that's all."

"Who's going to think you're a weak person?"

"My parents will if they find out! And well, I'm sure Jenny, my roommate, already does!"

"Why do you say that?"

"She made me come here. I can't believe it either. She actually threatened to tell my parents herself if I didn't make an appointment. She obviously doesn't think I can handle my own life."

Glancing down and opening the folder again, he said, "Your whole life, or just your eating disorder?"

This time the silence was choking, and finding herself unable to make the words for an answer, Marge finally lifted her eyes to look at the doctor's face. His face was rather large, but not at all overbearing. His features were soft, and looking into his eyes was not difficult. It was like looking at someone you could tell had already seen most of what life had to offer. Consequently, being the object of his present scrutiny did not make her feel as uncomfortable as she had expected.

The doctor continued, "Don't worry," he said. "You're not alone. Some people just need a little help getting control of their lives again."

Still without answering him, Marge began to rub the soft nap of her black shirt.

Seeing her uneasiness the doctor said, "You seem like a wonderful, strong, young lady. And coming here this afternoon was probably one of the hardest steps you'll wind up taking if you continue trying to beat this problem. But coming back has to be your own personal decision. I know it's a difficult thing to commit to, so go ahead and take a few days to think about it. If you want to come back for more sessions, then just make an appointment with my receptionist."

Marge looked up and saw the doctor rising to his feet. Reaching out to shake her hand, he said warmly, "It was a pleasure meeting you, Margaret Fieldings."

"It was nice meeting you too," she said softly. Marge turned and stepped out of the office. Almost out of habit she glanced at her watch. Had an hour really gone by? It had hardly seemed like fifteen minutes. As soon as she came out, Jenny walked over to meet her.

Marge knew Jenny would be anxious to find out how things went. She was always trying to get Marge to talk about her problems. "Let them all out, you'll feel better," Jenny always said. The two of them seemed to be perfect roommates. It was a rare night when the two of them would fall asleep without talking for at least an hour or two about Marge's childhood, or her parents, or now her bulimia.

This time Jenny was being patient. She didn't say a word. After walking about halfway back to the car, in a very quiet voice Jenny finally asked, "So, what do you think?"

"I'm not sure."

"Did you like the doctor?"

"He was okay, as far as talking with complete strangers goes."

"Are you coming back?"

"Dr. Peterson told me to think about it."

"So what do you think you'll do?"

"I don't know, I guess I'll think about it."

"Yeah, maybe you should just sleep on it for a few days."

"Sure, to give you the opportunity to convince me to come back?"

The two of them looked at each other for a moment, and both let out a few, small giggles. Suddenly Marge stopped.

"What's wrong?" Jenny asked.

"God, Jen. What am I going to do?" Marge cried.

As quickly as she could, Jenny opened her purse and pulled out a kleenex. For the first time in their four year friendship, Jenny gently reached over and wiped away a dark smudge of mascara from Marge's cheek.

CHICAGO KRIS IN CAIRO

By Brad Greenwood

Her nineteen year old confident
breasts jutt out from fluorescent
pink polyester
thanking the man in the tall white turban
next to her for the Stella beer —
as her blue sparkled *Lee Press On* nails
fling ashes on the polished bar
and marble floor.

While twirling her frizzy
Toni home perm — Miss Clairol
Sandy Beach #9 blond hair,
her smoke turned husky voice barks—
“Hey Sheek, Cheers as we say it in America—
To the Pyramids!”

The dark man stares intently at pink peaks
looking up only in between pauses
of her foreign words.
Knowing only the fluent language
of her eyes, waist and thighs —
he keeps her glass full — waiting for either
the alcohol or her to take him home.

• •

“You know, this place kinda reminds me
of my honeymoon night in Vegas
'cept there wasn't these chan-de-leers or
anything just real classy disco lights and balls.
They were real nice.

Oh, don't worry though, it was just for the weekend
for the hell of it kicks ya know —
I looked really hot in my gold strapless dress.
Got it on V.H.S.

“Believe me I'm young —
I'm not gettin hitched for a while.
No I've still got more travellin' to do,
Because I'm going to be worldly you know—
Though I don't care about old buildings, museums
or whatever. I mean — who the fuck was
Rembrant really — you know?
It's the people I like — the excitement
You like to travel?”

He nods his head enthusiastically —
hoping it was the question
he's been waiting for.

“I'm sure you do,” crushing the butt
of her Virginia Slims Menthol 100's
in her empty, lipstick smeared glass,
“Let's have another round, it's on me,
I've got bucks up the ass.”

LEMONADE AND MEDICINE

By Robin Lentz

In your

Out of style

Plaid skirt

Lemonade soothing

Down my throat.

In my

Wonderwoman pajamas, defeated by

Gigantic germs, my

Body turned in circles from summer to winter.

In my

Calvin Klein underwear and gray t-shirt,

Awaking with the smell of tequila

Shots in my mouth, smoke in my

Hair, an unclear remembrance of a

Fishtank of beer, and a

Rattling headache from chugging contests

Warm words and cold lemon-

Ade rescue

Me.

• •

With oversized pink
Curlers in your grayish-brown
Hair spooning out cough medicine with an angry
Aftertaste, or worse, aspirin I couldn't
Swallow whole
I chewed quick
Quicker
Like forcing down grass colored
Vegetables at the
Dinner table
One brusselsprout; one gulp of milk;
Makes you happy and
Me grow.

I don't know
If I believe
In these remedies
Or not, but
It certainly works when
One is
Ill, or hung-
Over or innocent and
Young.



MY LAST 7:15 COMMUNION

By Erika Rohrbach

the lemon chiffon fairy troupe
shimmies about the altar of my parents'
golden God shaking the last ambrosial
drops from their glowing chalices

(His plaster loin cloth is slipping-)

stocking's caught in the kneeler,
p(s)alms sweating into dead wood, all
around Evangeline Germuga's perfume is mar-
tyring me in the pew(!) behind her

praying

(-a-squeegee-my-eyes-shut-solemnis)

Praying that the thickening wafer
will peel itthelf off

the thkin

on the dark thide of my tongue.

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