

2000

Expressions 2000

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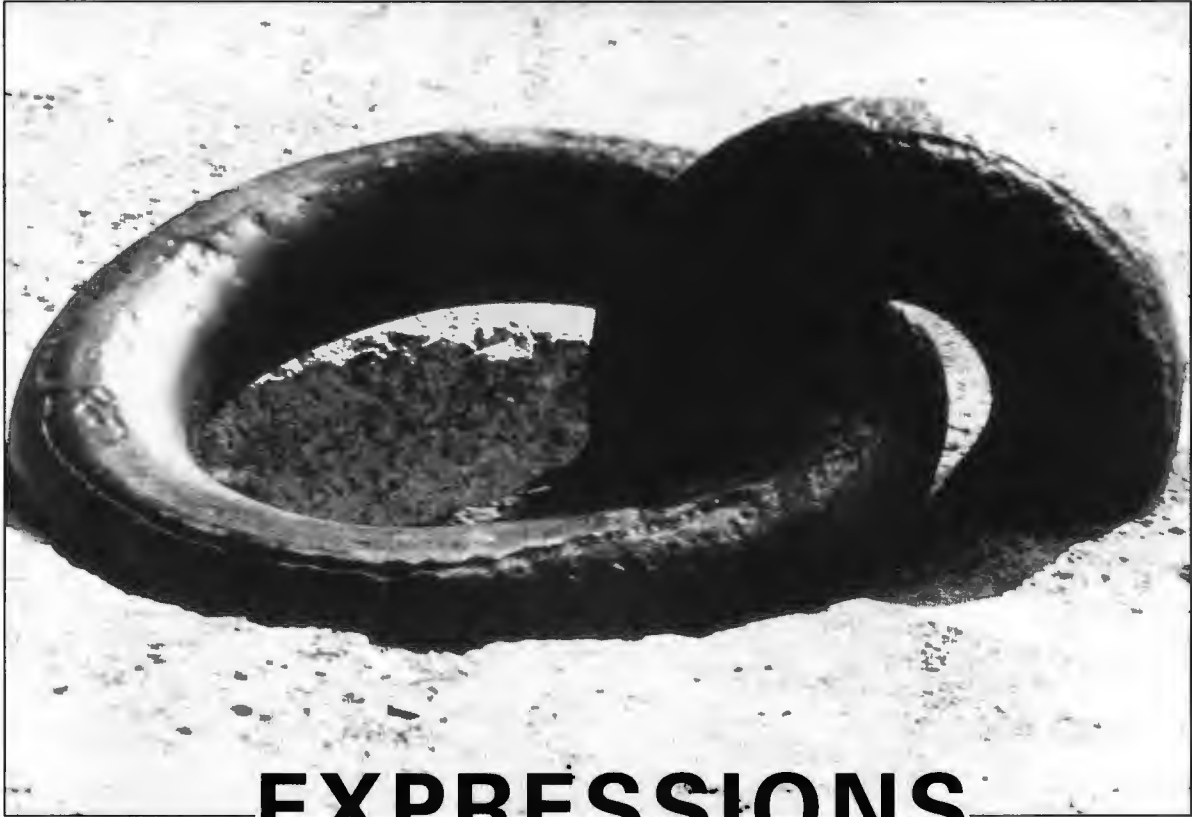


On The Cover: A creative collaboration by John Jentsch, Tim Hintz, Laurie Mullen, Arianne Robinson and Amy Jo Clark. (Kodak EIR at 200 ISO; Cross Processed)

The above photographers/artists pieced together a visual collage of parts of Curt Stahr's life using actual books, posters, paint brushes, album covers and much more. Included in this collage are t-shirt designs, published books, his mother and father, important events that shaped his life and a country's, the family Bible, cameras, cars, candles, time and much, much more. See what you can find.

Kool Cigarettes, Photo in a Photo, The World, Rocked, Walking Stick, Compass, Apple, American Flag, Lasansky Cover, *Who's Who* Book, Eagle, Photography Book, Canoeing with the Cree, Baez, Arabian Horses, Ginsberg, Swans, Dylan, Money, On the Road, Crown Royal, Garcia, Saab, Mt. Dew, Ochs, Hurst.

Laura Winkler, B&W Photograph



EXPRESSIONS

is an annual student literary/art publication of Des Moines Area Community College in Ankeny, Iowa. Its purpose is to showcase and celebrate the talents of its students.

Each issue also features an Iowa artist as a source of inspiration for students, and as a way of sharing with our communities the gifted contributors to our state and national culture.

A special thanks to Curt Stahr for his cooperation with providing materials for this year's publication.



Arianne Robinson, B&W Photograph

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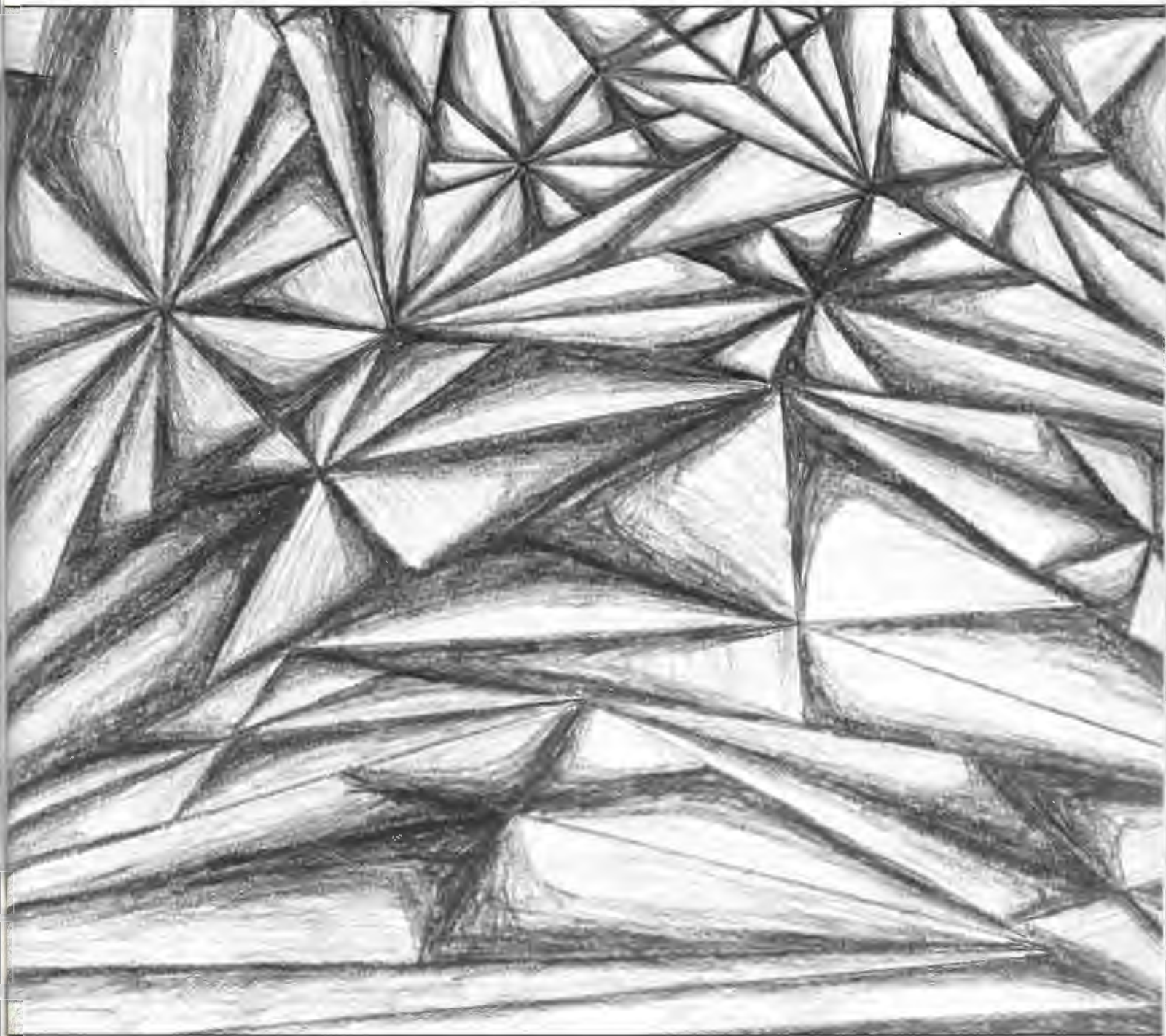
Reflections on the Poetry Affair

A poetry reading-
three poets shuffling to the podium,
distinguished
yet hip,
their words floating out over the
audience
as they muttered and shouted
and caressed
and obsessed and embraced
the crowd with their words.

And the words
billowed over the heads
of the enraptured audience
as they laughed and groaned and
writhed
and moaned,
clutching
at the words
in a frantic spasm.

Frigid and detached,
I was a voyeur
sandwiched between the applause
and the sighs.
Wondering,
were they going to light up
and turn to one another
and ask,
was it good for you?

written by Lynn Walters
runner-up best poem



Michael Miller, *Pencil Drawing*

Statues

by Julie Rouse

best story

My mother's ancient porch swing is the only refuge from the heat of the season. Nestled in a grove of scrub oak in the backyard, it perches on the last of the high ground before the dry yellow land sinks into a sullen ravine. From this vantage, I can piece the archeology of our neighborhood. Years of refuse fill the bottom of that crack of land. Rusting shells of historic farm machines from the days when this was still outlying farm land, the tires of innumerable automobiles, fragile ceramic-seeming skeletons of birds and dogs that still both frighten and excite my imagination. The wind from the river escapes this place, or changes as it rushes through the ravine and charges up here, carrying on it the scent of dry rust and leaves. I pick chipping eggshell pieces of paint off of the ashy wood of the seat and swing out over the ravine and back, my feet passing from land to air in aborted flight. I want to paint this scene, this feeling, and take it back into my life to keep. My vacation has to end soon.

It's not officially a vacation. My boss is understanding up to a point, but when I went to her two weeks after returning from a trip to Europe and asked for another week off to visit my dad in Mississippi, she'd had enough.

"Darlin', you know I like you, and you do good work, when you're here. I can't afford to keep employees that don't show. If you want to work, I'm glad to have you. If you want to travel, clear out your desk and send me a postcard."

She really does like me. She drove me to the airport, gave me a clipped quick hug at the gate, and managed to look both worried and waved me off. No one seems to understand this sudden change in me. After four years of slaving to get an art degree, the job I'd landed at Greenwomon Graphics seemed a worthy prize. And I did like it until my return, until I heard from my sister, until my travels tangled in my brain and left me cloudy. I never react to anything immediately,

when I do it never does me any good. Whatever hits me has to ferment awhile before I move in any direction. This time, I'm not sure where to go next. This homecoming hasn't pushed me as I'd hoped, and I'm down to the dregs of my savings, with barely enough for a bus ride back to the city.

Dad calls to me from the house, his voice thin over the drowning rush of the wind through the ravine. He looks thin himself, aging fast since mom died. At only sixty-seven, the years appear to have wrung him out. He's a thread-bare towel.

"Coming, Dad!"

Something stops me still. As my feet fall into space again, on my mother's porch swing, I begin to remember.

We stood in the museum courtyard in Rome, side by side, contemplative and still as marble. We were striking, I think. Young Americans burying ourselves in the city of the ancients. Old women had cooed at us all day, hiding their teeth behind spidery hands and giggling, offering us roses as blushes to buy. A small man with fierce eyebrows asked us if we wanted our pictures taken. "Two dollars only, sir. Only two." I was faced with the fear some cultures have of the great intrusive bug eye of the camera lens. Standing among the great stones of civilization, I was sure my soul was weightless, that it was hanging from me by a thread like a child's balloon, that part of me would be taken into that technological God's eye, and I'd join the freeze-tag white and bronze prisoners of statuary I measured through my tourist's sunglasses.

Paul told the scheming photographer to get lost, waved his hand at him for his dismissal, and the man sulked off carrying his injured Italian pride.

Paul and I were fighting. Not fighting as

impassioned lovers do, hurling tears and hollering, because we were far too classy to share our problems with all of Rome. Controlled. Tight. That's how I would describe us in all things. We'd picked each other up on a bus tour in Paris, two American students deciding to see the sights together, each wanting the company. I figured I wouldn't have to worry about getting mugged or raped, he wouldn't have to worry about getting gonorrhea screwing hookers and bar girls. I looked clean. So we had a silent but agreed on bargain. We didn't like each other and didn't have to. It was a business transaction and we both knew it. Sex for safety, safety for sex. Clean. Controlled.

He was asking me, "How can you not like the Aphrodite?" So cool, he was. Standing before me like a Roman soldier interrogating.

Our guide book stated with authority, right there in untouchable, unalterable print, that this Greek figure was the sculptural ideal of feminine beauty. Paul held the book before my face, his brown finger pointing to the description. I gazed blindly at the ground wishing he'd fall through it and take his arrogance with him; seeing nothing, especially not the book shoved up my nose nor his accusing finger. But I saw Aphrodite. She posed before us, one knee bent coyly. She was small and dead, translucent in the searing Mediterranean sun. A feminine ideal, smooth plump legs of marble, dimpled knees, a cunt clean and hairless carved of Ivory soap. Round belly and breasts that must give trembling art critics wet dreams. Her serene beauty stopped there. She was raped and ruined by the silent scream of broken stumps of arms and neck.

I envisioned them pulling her out of the ground like this, dirt falling from her form, a goddess ravaged by time, a used goddess, a damaged woman, a broken china plate—the feminine ideal.

Arianne Robinson, B&W Photograph



I looked up at the man standing before me, and wondered how I measured up to Aphrodite. I could talk back, I could push him away. Was there a scale for such things as beauty, I asked him silently. I would be low on it, whole and dirty. I would stand somewhere below bound feet, sliced off tongues, the silent, the dead. I was nothing standing at the feet of this sculptural idea. Her porcelain perfection cowed me.

I left Paul standing there in that courtyard built by conquerors and despots, the sun shining right through his empty eyes. I stayed in Europe for another month, cherishing the risk of traveling alone. This trip was my consolation prize for surviving high school, an experience burned into my brain by the brand of each moment I lived with my thoughts and actions controlled by teachers and peers. Suddenly, I relished the danger of independent thought.

I saw a woman in Edinburgh, Scotland. She reminded me of my sister back in Philadelphia; not for any obvious reason, maybe just for the Rubix Cube puzzle of her smile. My tour was on a bus headed for another castle, and I was trapped, surrounded on all sides by who I was trying so hard not to be. Frustrated yuppie parents herding their monstrous sticky candy spit children, old women traveling together in flocks like birds for safety, twittering at the sights.

A plastic young thug of a man sat next to me, and his eyes bounced back and forth between my breasts and my pocketbook like he was deciding which treasure to steal first. I avoided his thieving gaze by staring out the thick window of the bus and holding on to the edge of my seat to keep myself from rising up like an angry prophet, screaming, cursing God, humanity, sticky children, and all of Europe.

The woman stood out on the street below me, shuffled among the busy camera-toting crowds; a lost sheep. She caught my eye with a stare my grandma would call "touched." The shops and cobblestones came at her like teeth, and she looked swallowed. The rags of her clothes whipped in the gray wind of the spewing busses, and she held me in the embrace of those crazy eyes and smiled like she knew me, like she was wondering where I'd been. I don't remember what color her eyes were, only her pale, pock-

marked face and her smile. She had teeth like tombstones. As my bus pulled away, she started waving. She kept waving, her thin hand fluttering, until she was lost to me, consumed finally by the street. I wonder who she was, what she thought when she saw me.

What I think of most when I remember her is that somehow, that torn rag of a woman in Edinburgh, Scotland had found the broken pieces of Aphrodite. All the way home from Europe I nursed a love of ruined women and a fear of marble.

Back on my mother's swing, I return to the present. My dad is still calling, and I realize that only moments have passed while I was reliving my time in Europe. All of these visions remain trapped in my memory, calling from somewhere in the back of my head and teasing me to figure out the big reason. Why can't I forget? I endlessly compare myself to the women I see. I remember from my adolescence the breaks between high school classes that I spent before the altar of the girl's bathroom mirror, catching furtive glimpses of the girls lined up beside me. My sister teased me when I cried over a botched haircut or ruined complexion, calling me vain. She was one of those rare teenagers who never had more than one zit at one time, and managed to go through those years with her sights set on the far future, blinded to the relentless whirlwind of dates and dances and the rejections of her peers. She called me last night at dad's house, long after he'd gone to bed. I stumbled to the phone out in the hallway, catching sight of myself in the hall mirror with my tangled red hair and slight framed in one of my mother's white cotton nightgowns. I never do wake up anything less than a mess, and I've always longed for the cool looks of old movie heroines, waking to answer the door in the dark with not a hair out of place. Lovers see me in the morning and wince.

When I picked up the phone, she was crying, and I could see her there in her cheap Philadelphia apartment clutching the baby to her big breast and blowing her nose.

"Bethy," I pleaded into the receiver, "leave him. Just pack up the kids and come stay with me."

She pulled herself together like she always did when it comes down to me saying that. "Oh, honey, it'll be okay. Don't overreact. He was just a little pissed about those classes I've been taking, that's all. Says he doesn't like his wife out of the house so much. He's right, you know. I really am taking too much time away from him and the kids."

Beth had been a junior in college when she'd met her husband. She was a philosophy major, brilliant and beautiful, the golden girl my parents bragged about to their friends.

"Our Beth," my father would say, puffing up with paternal pride. "She's always been the smart one." And I idolized her until one day when she called home and asked to speak to Mom.

"What's up?"

"Claire, I'm getting married!"

Some guy she'd been dating off and on for a year had proposed out of the blue. We didn't know him.

"But what about school?" I asked. I was a senior in high school that year, a plain girl with solid goals and a strict moral code. I couldn't imagine my big sister, the idol of my adolescence and keeper of my sticky secrets, married.

"Oh, I'll drop out this semester and take night classes next year to finish up. Claire, honey, I'm pregnant."

I handed the phone to my mother and ran upstairs to sit speechless. We didn't speak again until after the wedding. I was too embarrassed for her, clutching his hand like a child and blinking wide-eyed behind the white veil. I was a judgmental girl, and she was giving up too much.

It's been two years since the wedding, and now she says she does her best thinking at the Laundromat. Our philosopher.

I went there with her the last time I'd visited, and I remember what she said. We sat in those chipped plastic chairs, not talking much, weary

after three days of trying to be kids again despite her life and my bitter anger.

She said watching the clothes tumble dry is like watching fire. Your eyes get drawn to it, you stare, enthralled, as if the meaning of life were in there somewhere, about to be revealed. The word of God in the wheeling dryer. She watches like that every week, I guess. Trying not to think about her problems or missed chances. She laughed when she told me.

"Sometimes I watch an entire load go pink before I snap out of it long enough to stop the damn dryer and pull the red sock out of the white load."

"Maybe you've got it," I told her.

"Got what?"

"The meaning of life. You bleed, you shrink and stretch, you fade, and sometimes, like a sock, you disappear, never to be found."

She smiled and told me I should read more philosophy, and turned to look out the window. Then I studied her face, still beautiful, but hardened somehow. I thought of carbon, of soft coal crushed under pressure and turned to diamond. The setting sun lit on her black eye, swollen, split, red-veined like over-ripe fruit. Beth winced away from the light and looked back at me. "Honey, don't ever get married."

Bethy left me back there, and I wondered when she called me where she was. The Beth on the phone stole that shining woman and left a paper doll in her place. A "Sixty Minutes" kind of battered wife who always knows the right thing to say through all those tears and bruises. I hung up the phone after her call and missed my sister. Missed being a kid, when everything was discovery, and every action glowed, and no tragedy lasted forever.

When I was 14 years old, I fell madly in love with a girl. She was my best friend's cousin, Meredith, who I saw every summer when her family came to visit. The summer of my crush was one of the hottest on record, and we stuck to the shade, to the fountain in the middle of town,



Laura Winkler, *B&W Photograph*



John Jentsch, *B&W Photograph*

lying like dogs and fanning ourselves and each other. We made fans from sheets of construction paper, folding them this way and that, getting them just right until they looked elegant and we felt like southern belles. We had read somewhere about how women used to court gentlemen with fans, holding them in a certain way to indicate favor or disdain. We fanned furiously at the neighborhood boys, trying our hand at attraction.

I said it felt like we were waving in airplanes, and we dissolved in laughter at the idea of squadrons of skinny, pimpled boys flying in for a landing and us coolly fanning below to direct their descent.

We went swimming at the river beaches at every opportunity. The three of us had to beat the rush to find a good spot to lay down our towels and claim our own small stake. Our terry-cloth island in a sea of other islands, each inhabited by its own population of sunburned beachgoers.

We would lay there on our towels, our skin turning first pink and then brown. Then, when the sun beat down on our hair until the heat rose in waves, we would run to the cool brown river as if we were on fire.

The kids in my town were swimmers, had grown up river rats and could pull stunts in the water that the fish envied, but Meredith was a city kid and I had a strange and alien aversion to the cloudy depths of the river. Whenever I spent my time in that water, I spent it picturing every creature born of mud or my imagination crunching on my toes like popcorn. Meredith and I hung close to the shore, our feet firmly planted in the silty sand of the river bottom, dunking our heads and trailing our hands on the rippling surface.

Meredith was a tall dark girl, with her hair cut sensibly short and deep dimples in her cheek when she smiled. Her parents were poor, and Meredith always looked undernourished, her

ribs and wrists and elbows sharp points protruding from her tanned summer skin.

I found myself watching her more and more often, looking at the way the water dripped into her eyes, the way the sun glinted off her thin arms or where her swimsuit tightened across her small breasts. There was nothing unnatural in the way I watched Meredith. She seemed to return my attention, flashing me huge dimpled smiles and catching me when I tripped over the rocks in the riverbed. We shrieked together and held each other when the fat fish lost their way and swam up near the beach, brushing against our legs with serpentine sliminess. Our smooth thighs touched underwater, and we let go of each other and ran back to shore.

Meredith seemed perfect, untouched by the trauma of my adolescence. She came every summer to my town, bringing clarity into my life, until the summer of my sixteenth year. Meredith seemed like an island to me. I've wondered where she landed. I want to go back there. I want to be let go.

I found a letter on my father's kitchen table the other day buried among the bills and ads that were forwarded to him during my three month vacation to Europe. It was from Paul, still back there. A "just-writing-to-let-you-know" kind of letter, telling me he was back in Paris, living with a woman he'd met in a café somewhere.

"She's great."

I don't know why he told me that. Spite, maybe

"I don't understand why you got so angry" it read.

"Why did you leave me, Claire?"

Tomorrow I go back to my interrupted life. Maybe the pieces will be back together. I close my eyes and see myself, whiter than God's hand, decapitated in a courtyard in Rome.

Laurie Mullen, Photograph/Color Slide



Black Shoes Under the Spotlight

With his eyes on the floor, he
sings tales
of blues and grays and of
loneliness
inside contemplation,
even on early summer
evenings.

His voice holds the moon and
long thin fingers,
slow with expertise, move
guitar strings
like soft ocean waves.

There is a pleading in the
sounds of the dreams
that lay a path to the places
in his mind,
and time stands still as we
listen;
and eyes that pull heavy from
the floor
hold the moon.

written by Tyrone J. Tyler

Fathers and Daughters

by Kelly Mullen

I was working on a Tuesday night—which is usually my day off—but Linda had come up to me a few days earlier saying, “Hey, Lynn, why don’t you fill in for me on Tuesday, and I’ll work for you on Friday?” So I said, “Yeah, do that.”

Tuesday nights are always slow at the bookstore. The rest of the week it is almost always packed, and those are the times I prefer to work. If I want quiet time, I can get it at home, in my little apartment. When I come to work, I have all these people to look at and talk to. I see the popularity of our store as an opportunity (and an excuse) to interact with other minds—something I find hard to accomplish on my own time.

Actually, I guess I don’t always talk to the customers; I try, coming in with a standard, “Can I help you?” Then I continue with any sort of comment that may link their literary interests to my own. (“Ah, Maplethorpe, have you ever read Anne Rice’s interpretation of *Sleeping Beauty*?”)

But people don’t seem to care too much about socializing with me. They tend to bury their heads further into their books and nod their heads slightly, which basically says, “Leave me be.” Or else they completely ignore me altogether and walk off.

My fellow employees have warned me against this sort of interference. They believe it is our duty as employees of this establishment to ask, answer, and exit the domain which the customer has set him or herself into impermanently occupy for the duration of their visit. One co-worker, for instance, told me some people were intimidated by friendly employees because pleasant people, in general, are a rarity these days. As a result, they mistake my sincerity for mockery, therefore refusing my kindness and becoming assholes themselves.

Personally, I just think people are afraid of using any shred of their analytical intellect to

form an opinion that would, ultimately, have no influence on their day-to-day lives—excepting the return of an honest-to-god, understanding, appreciative smile by little ol’ me. But hey, maybe people just aren’t interested in brotherhood anymore.

So anyway, I’m working on a Tuesday night. And, like I said, the bookstore was pretty empty. A local duo consisting of an alto-saxophone player and a bassist were playing lazily in the cafe. Their only audience was a fifty year old man in a green army jacket reading *Guns and Ammo* and downing cup after cup of black coffee.

I was shelving some books in the computer programming section of the store. I took my time since there was nothing else for me to do.

The stillness of the store was interrupted by the front door opening and the flood of street sounds seeping in as the door slowly closed. In walked a tall, handsome middle-aged man with salt-and-pepper hair, combed neatly and meticulously behind his ears. He wore a conservative and expensive gray suit and black tie, with black Florsheim dress shoes. As soon as he entered the vicinity of the entryway, he stood boldly for a moment with squinted eyes, and then continued his entrance into the store.

There was a young girl next to him—I assumed, and rightly so, that she was the man’s daughter due to the shared square, set jaw and razor-sharp, well-proportioned nose. She was quite tall herself, but thin and bird-boned, causing her to look somewhat insignificant next to her older, sturdier companion. She had find dark brown hair swept back into a clip at the base of her neck. Her arms were folded as if she were trying to insulate her lithe body from the night’s chill. And she had these huge liquid brown eyes that were extremely innocent looking. As her father stood soaking in the situation from where

he had stopped, she marched languidly in, taking in her surroundings as she moved.

I’d seen both of them in here before, but never together. The girl came in quite often, in fact. Usually she was alone, just looking around, going from one section to the next, never buying anything. The first time I ever saw her come in, I had taken an immediate interest in her. Not only because of her elfin grace, but because of her age. She didn’t look a day over fourteen; however, her attraction to certain literary genres intrigued me, and showed me an age beyond what her physique implied.

Quincy Jones’ trumpet was sliding and thrusting itself around as the background instruments soaked the notes up and released George Gershwin’s “Summertime” throughout the store the first time she visited the store while I was on the clock. The girl had walked in casually, arms folded, her clipped hair plastered to her head from the rain which fell in torrents outside. She strode back to the U.S. personalities bookshelf, but deserted it after having picked up and leafed through a few biographies.

She sauntered over to a chair in the literature section with a book that consisted of twenty or thirty some odd years of letters written to friends and family of F. Scott Fitzgerald. There she stayed, legs crossed, head bowed, arms resting on the wooden chair’s sides, very still except for those huge eyes that went steadily from left to right, soaking in the contents of the pages. I situated myself at the information counter so I could keep an eye on her and still look like I was doing my job.

Finally, after a half an hour, she closed the heavy volume with care and replaced it in its respective spot on the shelf. I moved from behind the counter after directing a woman who was searching for a book on Mata Hari (a per-

sonal favorite) to the current biography section. I had decided to approach the girl and strike up a conversation with her.

I followed her to the music section. She was skimming the titles with her hands on her hips when I rounded a tall bookshelf to come in full view of her. She looked up at me and then returned her gaze to the books in front of her. I got the impression that she had figured something was a little odd about me being less than ten feet away from her wherever she had settled. Her eyebrow had raised when she acknowledged my presence a moment before. I felt a little guilty, being so intrusive on such a young being. The shame quickly passed, though, as it always does.

"Can I help you with something?" I spoke up.

"Uhhhh," she bit her lip and glanced at me again. "No, I'm just looking around, thanks." She gave me a small smile and stepped back to view the books at the bottom of the shelf.

Obviously, the girl didn't want to talk. But I wasn't offended with her reaction, as I usually am with most customers. I received the idea that her refusal to chat had more to do with her quiet manner rather than a lack of intelligence or respect. So I let her be, and began to walk aimlessly, weaving in and out of the different sections of the store and different people's space. I periodically scanned the store to check up on the girl. Soon, I began to notice that she was floating around as I had been doing, her features relaxed and her mouth slightly parted, arriving wherever the spirit brought her. Only her movements seemed to be driven more by the subconscious awe she had for the rows and rows of books, whereas my mind's trip—I'm not ashamed to admit—was the result of the desperate craving for human interaction.

These statements I make about the personalities of individuals may be bold for a complete stranger to declare after only having observed someone for an hour and a half. But I tell you: even the most indifferent of spectators can pick up certain details about a person if one looks closely enough. With the child's wide searching eyes and prejudice fully absent from her demeanor, it was quite impossible not to pick up on her unique sense of wonder.

Her companion on that Tuesday evening didn't frequent the bookstore as often as she did. He popped up every once in a rare while, only staying for short periods of time. My first experience with him came about one lazy Sunday afternoon. Beethoven's "Für Elise" swayed throughout the store as he came in. He stopped and looked around, just as mentioned previously, and took in the scene. He had his hands halfway in the pockets of his crisp Levi's, his ironed Polo shirt resting loosely over his torso. It wasn't a working day for him, I figured, but he still looked pristine.

There happened to be something of a crowd in the store that day. A low hum drifted from the cafe and the cash registers constantly processed receipts. The man marched his long legs through the many people who were milling around to the current biography section after he finished his pre-entry observation.

I followed him from my position at the edge of the cafe to where he was leafing through a book about Nixon. I looked up at his face and began to say, "Can I help you find something?" But I hesitated. He had a pleasant enough face, but it was made entirely too solemn due to the stern composure of his features. His jaw muscle was clenched and his eyes were a piercing steel gray and interrogative. He had snapped his head



Laurie Mullen, Magazine Collage



Laura Winkler, B&W Photograph

to look directly at me when I stood before him, and I found myself—possibly for the first time in ages—at a complete loss for words.

My first reaction was to turn around and lose myself in the crowd. However, I found my voice again after telling myself it was my job to ask the man if he needed assistance, and continued as steadily as I could with the question.

And surprise, surprise. He spoke in a low, soothing voice—a total contrast with his presence—and politely murmured, “No thank you, I’m just checking things out.” He gave me an almost imperceptible smile (but a smile, nonetheless), and returned to the book in his hands.

I decided, at this point, to leave him alone. It wasn’t because of the intimidating air he had going for him. The reasoning behind my surrender was similar to that of why I had left the girl to herself. He was deep in thought, as she had been, and I would have made myself a hypocrite had I interrupted him.

So, on that quiet Tuesday night, the fact that they came in together was more of a confirmation that they had some sort of relation than a surprise. This understanding deepened my interests in the couple—my mind began to race as adrenaline was released in waves. It simply amazes me to see the connections people have to one another. To be the one watching from a state of ignorance and catching the clues concerning the extent of these relationships as they are released is the most exhilarating thing in the world for me. It’s like a giant cosmic jigsaw puzzle that I, alone, am assembling.

I immediately left my stack of books to follow the girl as she returned to the U.S. personalities section once again. She picked up a biography about Abbie Hoffman off the shelf as her eyes lit

up and a small smile played on her slender face. She stood, hips forward and shoulders back, poring over the book’s pictures. I stayed on the other side of the bookcase so I could figure out my next move without being noticed. I had the feeling she would remember me from our other meetings before, and I didn’t want to give myself away.

I looked about and saw the man watching the live show in the café from a distance. His face still had the monotone stoniness as the other times he had appeared at the store. He watched for a few minutes as the bassist plucked his instrument with a spidery hand and the saxophone player’s cheeks puffed out as he blasted velvety jazz with each length of breath he could muster. Then he turned on his heel and walked toward the girl.

“I found it,” she looked up at him in anticipation.

“Mm, this is it?” He took the book from her hands and read the back cover. The girl continued to watch his face as his eyes read the book description in a steady pattern.

The man handed the book back and replied, “Hm.” He turned his attention to a book sitting somewhere on the shelf to his lower left.

The girl lifted her eyebrow as her face lost its smooth sense of innocence and took on a bizarre shadow of aggravation. For a moment, I saw her eyes flash in discontent and dart from the man’s face, to the book, and then restlessly about the store in irritation. She then sighed, closed her eyes, scratched her nose, and impatiently questioned, “So what do you think?”

The man looked down, and, for the first time since I had observed him, he cracked a full-fledged smile. His face took on a younger look;

youthful and bright, devoid of its usual solemn state. "Well, hon, that," he pointed to the biography in her hand, "is not exactly what I had in mind when I said I'd buy you a book. What was that other book you wanted?"

She smiled—not happily, but knowingly, as if she had somehow known he would react the way he did to her literary selection—and put the book back in its place on the shelf. "Over here," she replied.

The two walked to the literature section and disappeared from view. I rushed to the cash registers and slid to an empty machine at the edge of the counter. A customer approached the counter with a purchase. As I absently rang up the books on the cash machine, I played the scene that had occurred only moments before. Such a transformation; it was as if the two had switched roles. She had leaped through years, becoming the straight-edged, high-strung adult. He had descended time's infinite spiral, becoming an optimistic, laid-back young man.

The father and daughter walked out from the bookcases after a few minutes, interrupting my thoughts, and approached the counter, she with a book in hand. She placed it on the countertop and smiled at me. I began to ring up the selection—William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*—as the man whipped out a leather wallet and waited patiently for me to announce the price.

"That'll be nine eighty-six. Will this be all for you today?" I looked at the man as he nodded his head, and then at the girl, who was peering at the street life through the window behind me with a far-off look.

He handed me a ten dollar bill. I counted out his change, sacked the book, tore the receipt from the register, placed it in the bag, and threw out a "Thank you, and have a nice day."

The man murmured a thanks in return and the girl smiled a good bye. Off they walked together, the girl grabbing the sack, swinging it as they moved. They conversed briefly before veering away from the doors and toward the cafe, probably for some beverages and small talk—though I wondered what the two would talk about, seeing as how they seemed to be in direct opposition with one another in practically every event they had, so far, displayed. After a brief interlude with the coffee bar worker, the man and the girl turned around and exited the store. All signs of previous hostility from moments before had vanished as they quietly exchanged nods and watered-down smiles.

I went over to the cafe employee to see what had just gone on. She was new to the staff, very timid, and incredibly sensitive. The look on her face indicated that she had, once again, made a mistake.

"Sara, what's the deal?" I asked, watching the pair walk to their car in the dark parking lot.

She lowered her eyes and her face flushed a deep scarlet. "I-I ran out of coffee. They didn't want to wait—those two, the one's that just left," she jerked her head in the direction of the doorway. "They just looked at each other, like they thought I was an idiot, and walked off."

"Don't worry about it," I assured her. To myself, I smiled, shaking my head. Fathers and daughters. What strange pieces of the puzzle.



Arianne Robinson, *B&W Photograph*

The River's Dream

The bridges smile up at their
own reflections
On the illusionary surface.
Images of people walking past
undulate
And transform into a Matisse
dream.
Soft ancient trees waver and
ripple,
Colors of sunset dribble across
the river.
Streetlights invade upon the
river's portrait,
Breaking the tender images to
small streaks.

written by Jacalyn Kelly Hopp
best poem



John Jentsch, *B&W Photograph*

Solitude in Moment, Cibachrome 16x20 Velvia ASA 50 @ 40; Original in the Private Collection of Mr. David Bromberg



Curt Stahr

Based on a True Story?

Writers often wax poetic about life experiences weaving together to create a uniquely ornate tapestry. If anyone's life experiences are worthy of such, it's Curt Stahr. But "tapestry" implies something regal and staid—one of those rare, stay-within-the-lines pieces of art that should be admired across a room, or at least at arm's length, rather than inspected up close. Curt Stahr's life experiences would be more aptly represented through a collage, with multiple layers overlapping, colliding and breaking all those tidy boundaries while begging the viewer to peer a little more closely, welcoming all "seers" into the scene. Only a collage could begin to capture the essence and energy of Curt Stahr—illustrator, photographer, successful business man, educator, world traveller and storyteller.

Physically, Curt is easily recognizable as a whirl of motion in black—black slacks, black shirt and shaded glasses. He maintains a muscular physique by regular workouts at the gym, concentrating on weight stretching, but nothing heavy. As Curt says, "If I still want to go to extreme places and do physical things, and have access to them, I have to be in good shape to do it. Another thing that factors into it, is that most people my age don't do it anymore. So that leaves me in touch with younger people, and I have to keep up with them, otherwise they'll leave me behind."

Part of his workout regimen includes running 10 miles daily with weights on his wrists and ankles. "By the time you get to the end of the 10th mile, you can really feel it. But then I float around the school all day like nothing. It's amazing," says Curt.

The storyteller in him continues, "Just when you think you're the best, there's a guy down the street who runs 15 miles a day. It's just like the tale of the fastest gun in the West. Just when you think you're the fastest, a faster gunslinger comes along and outdraws you."

His shoulder-length sandy blond hair is stylishly disheveled—lending an air of one who has more pressing matters to attend to than fussing with his appearance. Curt's mustache and goatee are equally long and unkempt creating an overall appearance of the typical artist — however, Curt Stahr is anything but typical. He has exhibited in 56 invited/juried art shows and 18 one-man art shows. He has received 15 purchase awards. Additionally, he has been listed in: *American Artists of Renown*, *Marquis Who's Who in America*, *Marquis Who's Who in the World*, and *Who's Who in Photography*.

Mickey Wright, a former student and close friend wrote, 'For some there are heroes, and then for the elite there are real heroes. For some he is Andy Griffith or Richie Cunningham: suitable for family viewing. For others, our ideal is a cross between the Marlboro man and Malcom Forbes: rough-edged, independent, smart, always on the edge, the guy your mother warned you about. That is more the Curt Stahr style. He has been educated, but still drives motorcycles that sound like the Hounds of the Moors. He has flaunted notions of the establishment, built his own programs, gone up against major universities and corporate giants who disagreed with his "unorthodox" ideas, and he has won. He has already proved himself an iconoclast to the highest order.'

He was born Curtis Brent Stahr in West Union, located in the northeast corner of Iowa. When asked the year of his birth, Curt impishly quips, "Sometime in the 40s. That'll give them (the readers) ten years to play with." That vague reference sets the tone for any attempt at an exacting biography of Curt's life.

Curt has, and is extensively studying, everything from Fine Art to Industrial Art, English to music history. Most recently, Curt received a degree in travel photography from a college in New Hampshire and not surprisingly, there's an interesting story behind this latest academic endeavor. "They wanted to start the program, they had an instructor, but they needed people to take it, and they needed guidelines to follow, so basically, he and I wrote it, and he had the facility but he couldn't take the course, so I took the course, and I got the degree from it."

Although a definitive timeline of Curt's life is difficult to chronicle, the stages of his life will produce the most insight into this Iowa artist. Even as a young child, Curt knew he was going to be an artist. He has always been able to draw and recalls one of his school teachers who would let

him get up and draw on the chalkboard. "At the time I thought she was just a nice old lady, but the way I look at it now, she actually changed my life forever."

For an artist, the ability to see is even more important than the ability to draw. Curt recalls, "I could always see better than other people. I didn't know what it was until I was in college and I had an instructor who is, in fact, a nationally famous painter. His name is Donald Roller Wilson. All those years I was running around, doing what I was doing, I didn't really know what I was doing. It wasn't until he told me that I had a good wrist and I could draw and paint. But he said that above all, what I really am is a seer."

So how does one segue from a gifted artistic seer and illustrator to a celebrated photographer? "As time went on, I was told by a professor, Dr. Shelly, that I could make a living with my hands, but no one could ever make a good living with their hands. He had a thousand good examples, like Henry Ford, who could make one good car, but you've got to make more than one good car to make money, so he came up with his system of mass producing automobiles.

"I persisted to be an illustrator anyway, and I did well at it, but I finally realized what he said was pretty much true. I could make one good illustration, which takes about 40 hours to do, and sell it for \$500 on the street corner in L.A. or San Francisco. A whole week worth for \$500. But if you can mass produce it or if you had ten people working for you and they all did the same amount of work, then you could start making money. That developed into the realization that I could produce photographs faster than I could produce a single drawing.

"A lot of people take photographs, and there are obviously millions of them out there compared to a small number of good illustrations, so to be a successful photographer, not only do you



Irish Eyes, Berol Colored Pencil on Aparche Goat Skin



First Morning Light, Ontario, Canada; Cibachrome 11x14 Kodak E 100 SW



*Fire in the Sky/Sunset in the Quetico, Cibachrome 16x20, Velvia ISO 50 @ 40;
Original in the Private Collection of Mr. Robert Zimmerman*

"He evokes an incredible respect merely by his presence. Students simmer down when he enters the studio or a room, indicating they are waiting for his direction and/or recognition. I have never before used the word charisma in describing a teacher, but I certainly can and do with Curt Stahr. He loves his subject, he loves teaching and he loves learners. The combination has an irresistible impact on the students."

Chat Ghourmley - Counselor, Artist

have to know the technique, but you also have to have that special eye and good design. One thing led to another."

Curt explains that there are three important parts of the photographic process. First, you must have the technical expertise to be able to execute a shot. Second, you must be creative, and third you must be able to capture light. He continues, "That's what photography is all about, capturing light. If you don't have the technical expertise and creativity to capture light, then you just end up with an ordinary photograph."

What of all the technological advances with the computer era and the ease with which mediocre photos can be digitally corrected? Curt counters, "Photography is about 160 years old and I've finally found the true difference between "real" photo and "imaging". Real photography is now called traditional photography, the immediate capture of light and form in the camera. The new digital imaging can now take on photojournalism and the bulk of commercial photography, leaving real photography to the pure, authentic, creative capture of light in the camera. A noble pursuit of value, beauty, expertise and energy!"

All major technological advances are initially thought to be the 'end of an era'. Curt cites the 1850s as an example and explains that when photography was first invented and implemented in people's lives everyone started questioning why people would continue to paint. "If there was a camera, why paint anymore?" Curt muses. He continues, explaining that nothing could be further from the truth. "As we know, there is a place for TV next to radio, photography next to painting, and so forth."

After years of honing his skills and expertise as a photographer, what continues to inspire his photographic impulses? Curt responds, "In my subconscious, it's hearing that shutter click, click, click. Finding new things or seeing new things. To show people that I saw something they did not

notice or took for granted. Also seeing something that happens every day, like a sunset for example and one day you just see the most beautiful one of all. People keep asking my why I keep going to the same places over and over again and photographing them. I think its because every time I go somewhere, I see something different... That's the great thing about photography, because you can show people, in a different way, what they see every day."

Perhaps a fourth skill necessary to be a successful photographer is patience. "So far I've been fortunate, a lot of the things that I do rely on my health, I go places other people don't go to, and I've got a tremendous amount of patience, and so I can go someplace that I know nobody else is going to go, maybe only a handful of people over a decade. Once I get there I have the patience and time to wait for that one unique photograph to capture. Fortunately, a lot of my images and work are still in demand. I've just been damn lucky."

Curt's peers might disagree. A retired Associate Director of Photography for *National Geographic Magazine*, in a letter of recommendation wrote about Curt, "From my viewpoint, Curtis seeks balance and an eclectic blend of interests, abilities and visual styles in the visual communication he utilizes. Curtis is driven by a desire and curiosity to share what he knows, experiences and discovers with others. He is able to work comfortably and intimately with people in a variety of situations. He is a versatile, gifted communicator who can produce images revealing external truths or fresh insights with equal dexterity. He can see images with clarity and power, using light and composition as creative tools to amplify the basic content of design. He possesses the ability to work comfortably in color, producing images of the highest technical quality on the most consistent, professional basis. Curtis is an investigator of the human condition and a natural storyteller who conveys his message through the medium of the visual

image. He is constantly analyzing the world around him and finding the important stories of our times. Additionally, Curtis shows things about mankind and nature that might otherwise go unseen and unappreciated by others."

Curt Stahr has touched many peoples lives—either through his travels, photographic foot journeys, freelance design commissions, or as a successful businessman. In 1972, Curt founded Stahrland Design, based in Phoenix, Arizona. During the 25 years of operation, Stahrland Design grew from a staff of three with annual billings of \$150,000 to a staff of 27 and annual billings in seven figures. Stahrland Design represented a wide variety of clients including, Shirley McClaine, former Texas Governor John Connely, Wayne Newton, Mike Nichols, Walt Disney and Harley Davidson. The following information was provided by a personal interview with Curt conducted in 1987 for a Southwestern magazine.

"One day I just announced that I was a specialist in visual communication, and there it was. I had cut out a niche for myself that no one else in the Phoenix area seemed to be really interested in. From my point of view, I was filling a vacuum." That seems to be one of the reasons for the great success of Stahrland Design. Curt explains, "That's just what a lot of the companies in the Phoenix area were waiting for. In fact, I would have to say that in terms of being a specialist, I was a lot more unique than I am now. Today there are plenty of excellent designers all over the country and even in my own backyard who are trying to position themselves as visual communication specialists. We have to work a lot harder to pull ourselves away from the pack, to stay on the cutting edge, which is where you have to be in order to keep the interest of the people who hire visual communication designers."

Another factor leading to the success of Curt's design company was his unique hands-off approach to management. "I had it in my mind

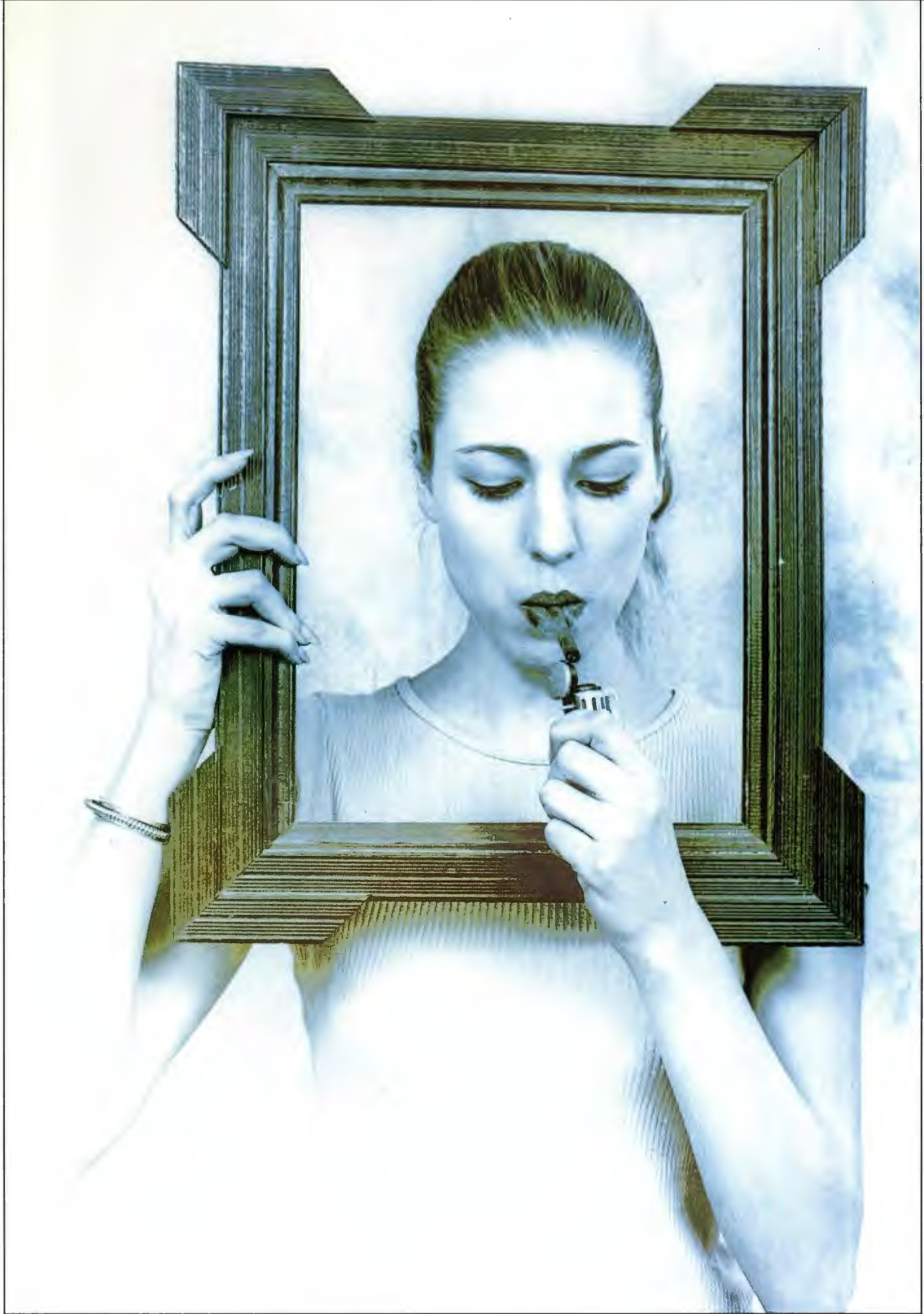
that I really didn't want to end up as a kind of administrator, milking the design talents of those who work for me. I preferred to see myself as a kind of creative force, setting the direction and the tone for the other designers, but letting them pretty much run their own show. Right from the start, I was quality control and let the designers run themselves."

Curt's business philosophy was eerily astute, "I have the feeling that businesses are a lot like people. They have a life cycle. They are born. They mature. They grow old. They die." Curt entrusted Stahrland Design to three partners and within three years of his leaving the day-to-day business management to others, Stahrland Design closed-up-shop; however, Curt continues to freelance under the name Stahrland Design.

So, how does one evolve from a specialist in visual communication, running a highly successful company, to an educator? One activity doesn't necessarily exclude the other, and as our collage indicates, many functions are concurrent and overlapping.

While working for a company in Milwaukee, Curt discovered that DMACC was looking for a photography specialist to oversee and guide the photography program. He filled out an application, visited the school and liked the challenge. "They showed me that the photography labs were set up, but the classes weren't centralized. DMACC needed somebody to pull it all together. They had different instructors who were all going different ways, nobody knew for sure what the other person was teaching. So they basically said that besides teaching, they would like to have the program put together—that was the exciting part about it," Curt explains.

In his current role as professor of photography at DMACC, Curt was awarded the distinguished Teacher Award for 1999. When asked for his reaction to the nomination and award Curt says, "I have been teacher of the year seven



No Boundaries, Tone Zone B&W Print

Jasper Johns, Tone Zone B&W Print



"In a short time, he (Curt) has changed a moribund group of classes into a vibrant, healthy program. Curt is hard-working, dedicated and very professional in his approach to education. He shows great concern for student growth and potential. In short, Curt Stahr is one of the best instructors we have."

Tom Nelson ~ Dean of Industry & Technology at DMACC

times in other schools, but this one meant the most. A couple of people who nominated me told me why they had voted for me. The caliber of people they are and what they wrote was emotionally overwhelming...this was a neat one."

Mauricio Lasansky, a celebrated artist who was awarded the Iowa Award in 1999, worked with Curt in 1993 during photo shoots for that year's edition of *Expressions*. Mr. Lasansky witnessed the close working relationship between Curt and his students during the shooting and has this to say about Curt, "He's a real teacher—very dedicated, with great dignity and a passion for photography. It's wonderful how his students respond to him."

A handful of the accolades of Curt's peers are as follows:

'Curt is a teacher that stands humbly as an example for all teachers. Not as an outspoken diplomatic leader, but as a humble, caring, enthusiastic and energetic example of how to give students the education and support they need.'

'His love of his discipline, his enjoyment of teaching, and his ability to inspire his student are well known.'

'Curt is not the kind of person to stand at a podium and lecture about how things should be done. He rolls up his sleeves and quietly makes things happen.'

Curt's students are equally enthusiastic when espousing his talents, as evidenced by previous years' student evaluations:

'When Stahr goes I go—I'll follow him anywhere. (He's) an honest, inspirational instructor, very caring, thoughtful, patient and gives me freedom to learn—gives me time to learn—gives me opportunity to learn. Does he ever sleep?

Fantastic, wild, fun, hard, fast paced, he can do it all.'

'If he told me that I could walk on water—I probably could—you know he can. The best.'

'The thing that is so great about Mr. Stahr is the way he teaches and motivates and makes you feel about your accomplishments. He is not only an excellent teacher but a world class photographer and illustrator. He has been an inspiration to the whole department...'

Curt's feelings toward teaching are simple, "It's a lot of fun. It helps to keep you current, you get to share ideas and thoughts, and now, after decades, it's nice to share experiences; finally at an age where you know what you're talking about. It's nice to be around people that are full of energy, thirsty for knowledge, and looking for challenges."

With regard to his students, he continues, "It's a reciprocal situation. Everyone thinks the instructor is giving all the information out, but the students are the ones who are giving everything. Usually I give a little, and I get a lot back. It is amazing the information students bring to an instructor's life. Ideas, motivation, energy, new thoughts."

Curt has had many years to fine tune his teaching skills, and Des Moines, Iowa is as far geographically from his first teaching assignment in East L.A. as DMACC students are from his first classroom of tough, ethnically mixed kids.

"My first teaching assignment was in the summer in East L.A. They couldn't get anybody to teach there, and I didn't really have my degree, but I was close enough in the way the job description was written: good experience towards your teaching degree.

"Curt Stahr is a generous, thoughtful, caring human being. He has a beautiful pride in doing the right thing in the best way possible. He is practical and understands tight budgets; his imagination and resourcefulness makes up for lack of money. He is a very private man: one who can be trusted with confidences; one who is discreet. For all his talents and for all the adulation Curt Stahr receives from students and faculty, he is a very humble and modest man. I have an immense respect and deep personal affection for him."

Hugh M. Slattery - Headmaster Judson School in Paradise Valley

"It was an art class, and I was the only white guy within six-hundred blocks. I had 487 students from eight in the morning until three in the afternoon, nonstop. These kids came out of the street with blades in their pockets, chains on their belts. It was a hell of a thing! Most of them were black and Mexican and they fought amongst themselves. The school didn't have an art room, so they placed us outside in the playground. That's where I was supposed to teach them to do something with a budget of \$100. Draw with chalk, or do something," Curt explains. The dropout rate for this class was about 80%, however, at the end of the ten-week period, Curt's class was larger than when it began—students were bringing their brothers and sisters along for the unique experience.

With buses furnished by the Salvation Army, students were taken to the ocean every day, where treasures like seashells, bottle-caps, glass bottles and interesting rocks were collected, then taken back to the schoolyard playground, and deposited in a pile. Curt describes the result, "It took weeks to stack this, by that time I was going around and asking people to help me with a little bit of money to get mortar. What we did was build a wall around that school; a four-foot wall out of all the colored glass, the beautiful shells, caps, and rocks. The wall is still there today."

And so it began that Curt Stahr became the pied-piper of unorthodox teaching techniques and while some in academics might raise an eyebrow, his approach motivates and passes along an enthusiasm for knowledge that few teachers can match. On his unique approach to teaching, Curt relays this story, "One of my degrees is in English; for a couple of years I taught English at different places. One location was an Indian reservation in Colorado, and I was teaching 7th and 8th graders, and they didn't want to learn English, they wanted to learn about girls and boys. So every time we would go over a story, everybody knew in advance that they had to

come in dressed as a character in that story. We read stories all semester, and I introduced them to American literature." The 'Last of the Mohicans' was especially vivid for students that semester. Curt's class moved all their chairs into the school's hallway making way for the construction of a huge Indian teepee inside the classroom. "The principal was mad, he was just furious with me." Class was conducted from inside the teepee, and students experienced what their ancestors used to do—how to hunt and make leather, soak and tan.

Later in the semester students read about John Wesley Powell and his trip down the Grand Canyon. Curt explains, "We built great big plaster hills in the classroom so as we sat in our chairs we could look up as if we were in boats on the bottom of the Grand Canyon."

Not every teaching challenge involved creating mock plaster props to successfully convey a lesson—some lessons required absolute thinking-outside-the-box solutions. "One school I taught at, in Paradise Valley, Arizona, was very poor. The facilities and buildings were old. There was just no way they could finance a photography lab, they didn't have a building for it. The best solution for the problem was to use an old water tower that stood on campus."

Water towers were built so that the bottom was empty and the water was placed on the top. In Paradise Valley, a hole was cut in the top portion of the empty water tower and students climbed a ladder to reach this area, which acted as the darkroom. The bottom portion of the water tower was used to cut out mats, sleeve film, and strip photos. "On the upper part it was just pitch black. That's where we did all of our developing. It was the neatest darkroom I have ever been in! It was the most unique photography lab for miles and miles around, we had a waiting list to get into that class from four states," Curt adds.



All Time Favorite, Tone Zone B&W Print; Original in the Private Collection of Shanie Lynn Wilson



Pinto Pony Siebel, Tone Zone B&W Collage

DMACC has been fortunate to have Curt Stahr for as long as it has. Before DMACC, he never taught for more than five years at one school. The reason being that Curt returned to the industry to restock his photographs, enthusiasm and ideas. "Here it has worked out well. I can teach as long as I budget my time and set out a really good schedule between travel and classroom. I often take students along on these trips so they can enjoy the philosophy that, learning by doing is better than learning by reading. There is nothing wrong with reading, people must read and learn things. It's one thing though, to say I have read the chapter and I know I can do it, and it's another thing to say I read that chapter and I just did it."

Curt shares one experience that occurred with his students last year while travelling north of the Quetico in Ontario. "We encountered an old Sioux camp, we came across two recent graves...The settlement that used to be there was gone, but there were about 60 or 70 graves up there." He continues, "We were walking, laughing, joking, commenting. I could hear cameras clicking. When we came across this graveyard, it was like the inside of a morgue. Nobody said a word—it was sacred."

How does an experience like that affect the student teacher relationship? "In every trip people bond, and get together afterwards, but there are some who form an incredible bond, and, whether they see each other again or not, they will be attached forever," Curt answers.

Another layer of this collage of Curt Stahr's life must include his travels. "I always thought the desire to explore would stop one day, but it will never end," observes Curt. Some of us want to travel, some of us dream about traveling, some of us even go so far as to plan to travel. However, few of us just wake up one morning, pack a bag, kiss the dogs goodbye and begin a journey—a foot trip walking across the top of

most of the Continental Divide to Fairbanks, Alaska.

Travelling to other countries provides a unique perspective of home. Curt continues, "I walked from San Diego, California, to Bogota, Columbia, one summer. It took me six months. The poverty and misuse of human beings is just incredible. I think everybody should go to one of those places once so they know how wonderful America is. I think if people went to those countries, there would be a lot less complaining, a lot more appreciation, and a new perspective that would point creativity and energy in the right direction. It makes me so happy, grateful and thankful that I was born and raised in America. A lot of the places I have chosen to go, for example India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and China, made me cry every day of every visit." In addition to South and Central America and China, Curt has travelled all of Canada, Antarctica, the Northwest Territory, magnetic North Pole, Japan, Taiwan, and Mongolia, to name a few.

In fact, Curt's professional resumé could just as easily be called Stahr's map to the world. Beginning with an educational trip to China from Beijing to Xian. "It seems like I always end up in Beijing," observes Curt. One of his first trips to China involved travelling with fellow DMACC instructors, Dolores Johnson and John Ward, department chairs of Commercial Art and Graphic Arts, respectively. That first trip focused primarily on Beijing, the Forbidden City, and the Great Wall of China.

The three travellers went to Xian and saw the Terra Cotta Warriors for the first time. Historically, these warriors were created to accompany the first Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang, off to eternity. The Terra Cotta Warriors were buried in an earthquake, where they remained until 1974. Quite accidentally, the Warriors were discovered by a farmer digging a well on his land. Since then, excavation has

unearthed over 700 soldiers, approximately 600 clay horses and numerous bronze weapons.

"It was more than interesting. When we were there we couldn't actually go down inside. In fact, when you get out to the big gate, they take everything, even purses, and set them aside. They don't want photographs getting out of the country. We were guests of the communist government, and I became really good friends with some influential Communist Party members, so they invited me back.

"The next time I went back they took me to Xian again. The whole place was closed. They let me walk down inside. All the slides I have from the second trip, I am standing eye-to-eye with the little terra cotta guys and all their horses. It's really something to experience."

If the locations for Curt's travels are unique, so too are the reasons behind each journey. One trip included a field study in the Arctic Circle which documented the transformation of the changing seasons from summer to winter, and included a study of the Arctic Wolf. A trip to the Columbia Ice Fields of Canada involved photographing the natural beauty of the Canadian Rocky Mountains.

As part of an educational project across the United States, Curt photographed the winter migration of the American Bald Eagle from Chilkat Valley, Alaska, to Spring Lake, Florida. This information was presented to junior high school students in relaying the plight of the American Bald Eagle.

Curt's work has been used in a four-state tourism campaign promoting river cities, and involved photographing the eastern border of Iowa from Minnesota to Missouri along the Mississippi River.

The habitat of the Northern Wolf was documented on a foot journey across the Yukon and Northwest Territories from Dawson to Eskimo Point on Hudson Bay.

Additionally, Curt photographed the peaceful, co-existence of the American Bald Eagle with humans during the four different seasons of the year from St. Louis, Missouri to Grand Portage, Minnesota.

Nature figures prominently in Curt's work, whether he's photographing a sunset or showcasing the Arctic Wolf. When asked how nature affects his work, Curt responds, "I never knew I was even connected to it until 1975—then I realized no matter what I was doing, it all came from nature. Every color, every shape, every move. It's hard to paint silence, but the greatest place to paint silence is in nature. If I didn't want to like nature, I couldn't help it—I have no control over it. I wasn't born into it or raised in it, it just became what it is. So powerful, yet it's calm and gentle too. It's an overwhelming factor. It's too bad that the world has come to a point where everybody goes to work and sits in a cubicle. They pull a sunset on the (computer) screen and think they are experiencing something—they have no idea."

These are just a handful of entries in Curt Stahr's travel log, and while all of the previous examples focused on nature, at least one trip was the result of a quirky piece of information.

Authors of a book about Iowa's courthouses bemoaned the fact that gathering photos for the book took an extraordinary amount of time. From that simple observation, Curt and two of his photography students devised a plan to shoot pictures of Iowa's 99 county courthouses in one long weekend. Stahr was quoted as saying, "The trip was endless," beginning on a Thursday morning and ending Sunday evening, successfully, with shots of all 99 county courthouses.

With all of his accomplishments, Curt modestly admits that there are two things he feels he's successful at. "I'm a successful traveler and a successful storyteller. These make a great formula for a good instructor. Teaching is a connection with the future."



China Lion, Cibachrome 16x20, Velvia ISO 50 @ 40; Original in the Private Collection of Mr. Tadashi Masuda



Curt Falls (BWCAW) Named after Curt Stahr, Cibachrome 16x20, Velvia ISO 50 @ 40

"He's a real teacher—very dedicated, with great dignity and a passion for photography. It's wonderful how his students respond to him."

Mauricio Lasansky - Artist

And what of the past? With at least half of his life completed, how would Curt view his life thus far? Who influenced him to become the man that he has become? Has he accomplished everything he dreamed of?

As for influences, Curt is quick to acknowledge his parents, saying they were quite inspirational. "I've been lucky to have two great parents. My God, without great parents, you don't have a good beginning," he says.

Curt has escaped the strings of fatherhood himself, and readily admits that his options are left open. "Fortunately, or unfortunately, I did not have children. I was always afraid that I couldn't have been a good enough father. I was gone too much. I am/was selfish. *I have a fear of bringing children into an unstable world,*" Curt says.

If he had been a father, though, Curt says his kids would have been raised Catholic. He continues, "I like the children they raise, the tightness of the family structure. There is something they get from the value system of the family that's different from other religions." Curt is quick to point out that he could never be a Catholic—it would be impossible. "*I always figured I got myself on top of the mountain, and I'll get myself off. I would never ask God for help. We have a unique understanding. It's between him and me. It's my responsibility*"

Additional influences on Curt's life have come from the creative world. "Pablo Picasso started it. Then from Picasso it was a transition, one person after another. It went from Picasso to Braque, to Dali, to Mauricio Lasansky, to Frank Lloyd Wright, to Paolo Solari. It was endless. I don't only like Picasso for his work, but also for his attitude. His lifestyle, his energy, his drive," notes Curt.

While the creative world is responsible for influencing part of Curt's essence, an equally important factor must be the travelling—not so much the action of travelling—but the people met while travelling. The simple, unadorned, and unplanned connection with people of all backgrounds from all walks of life. These are the experiences that offer fodder for the storytelling—the final layer of this collage exploring Curt Stahr's life.

On his notoriety for storytelling Curt says, "I tell stories when they are applicable to the situation. A lot of the stories are embellished, but they are based on something true. Those who can think for themselves can figure it out, those who can't, get caught up in it a little bit. *Events and eventually history are in the mind of the storyteller, however, remember the truth is in the telling.*"

One of Curt's favorite stories concern a man he met while travelling west. As the story goes, Curt's new friend was originally from Austria, but since he was the youngest of 12, his family sent him to America to avoid Hitler's atrocities. Before leaving Austria in 1936, this man had set the world's record for downhill skiing. Once in America he did all kinds of odd jobs—he was a cook, a waiter, and he worked on a road crew—all the while moving closer to Colorado.

According to the story, when he saw these three peaks in Colorado he knew he had to stay and teach skiing in that location. After acquiring the funding for his project, this man's dream was realized, and what started as a little town grew into what we know as one of the premier ski resorts in Colorado—Aspen.

That's not the end of the story, though. In 1954 this same man decided to leave Aspen, it was too

crowded and what he really wanted was a small skiing area. So, he left and travelled to Idaho, Arizona, and Montana.

Curt learned all of this while sitting and talking with this man at a bar. Curt continues with the story, "One night we were sitting at this bar in Ketchum, Idaho, and we closed the bar at two or three in the morning. We had been sitting at these two stools all night long. As we got up to leave, he told me that the last time he was at that particular bar, he was accompanied by the two men he admired most, and both had died. The last time the three of them were in the bar they carved their names on a post. The post was the one which supported the building, and as I looked closer I saw my friend's name, Ernest Hemingway, and Gary Cooper."

As if the story itself isn't fascinating enough, the surprising part of the story is Curt's reaction to what his friend told him. "Those three guys sat there *just like kids* and carved their names on that post," he says, almost mystified.

Finally, the question must be asked: Are you happy with your life and satisfied with the paths you've taken? Quite honestly Curt answers, "I don't know—but I don't have *any regrets*. There are times when it seems like you're alone. Late at night sometimes, right in the middle of that loneliness you think of something, somewhere, or some time of your life, that brings me happiness. You also know that you're one of the few people who have experienced that, and you actually brought back photographs to share with others in the world—photographs which have inspired people to go someplace and do something—then, it's worth it."

With regard to happiness, Curt simply states that happiness is awful elusive and hard to find. But when asked about his feelings regarding his recognition as an artist Curt says that he's still amazed that people think what he does is that good. "I know that what is good today might not be good tomorrow. There are a lot of people around the world who are tremendously talented, and for somebody to want to buy what I create is amazing. As far as the recognition, I try to stay away from it as often as possible, I have my own world," says Curt.

This article could stretch into infinity, discussing all of Curt's travels, relaying all of his adventures, featuring his great stories, and highlighting his extensive list of clients. Perhaps it's time to back away from the individual peices of the collage and take in the overall image, as Curt makes the following observation:

"I've been lucky. I just had a hell of a life. I had it all. I have things people dream of, and they just want one of those dreams, and I've had 100 of them. It's phenomenal. To come out of it the way I do, without having the phone ring a million times, and having people chasing me. I can't believe how it's worked out. *A lot of it came from a feeling or thought of our time that we were part of a misunderstood, but elite, special group of creative seers. We were incorporated into a different town, a town not on the map. This feeling traveled across America, and even to Europe. If you knew where to look, or who to look for, they were there—like-minded seers. I teach many who are looking again, and many who know it is too late to look. I hope what once was, has not been destroyed. For me, I still get to live there—a member of the secret town of seers.*"



Eyes of the Cross, Tone Zone B&W Collage; Original in the Private Collection of Mr. Hiroki Nogami

Speculation, Berol Colored Pencil on Apache Goat Skin





The Ancients, Pictographs in Cache Bay, Cibachrome 16x20 Kodak E 200



The Early Duck, Cibachrome 16x20 Velvia ISO 50 @40

Top Right: *Winter Cold*, Cibachrome 11x14 Kodak E 200
Bottom Right: *Soft Eyes*, Cibachrome 11x14, Velvia ISO 50 @ 40;
Original in the Private Collection of Linda Bisignano





The Kids, Berol Colored Pencil on White Goat Skin



Black Angel Protects All, DMACC Photo Fieldtrip, Tone Zone B&W Print;
Original in the Private Collection of Mr. John Jentsch

The Auction Piece

by Jeanne Martz

best overall writer

DMACC creative writing contest.

The activity planned for the day was not the usual routine for Mrs. Willaby. Good Friday was the day to plant potatoes but a lingering frost in the ground prevented her from starting a garden. The soap operas that normally filled her time each day had been preempted for the Iowa basketball championships. All things considered, Mrs. Willaby dressed and took the local transit across town to the Auction Place.

A woolen bandanna tied under her chin drew it further upward for lack of support from the top denture she left behind on the sink, giving her the look of a Slavic peasant. The thick soled shoes balanced the weight of her large arthritic body as she lumbered, slightly hunched forward across the parking lot toward the main entrance to the auction. She could see from the license plates on the cars that the buyers were mostly local people and a few were from out of state. This is the place she liked to come whenever she needed a change of scenery to ward off boredom. She liked to come here and get caught up in the commotion, but she seldom made a purchase for herself. It just intrigued her to see what people bought, and the prices they paid for other people's castoffs.

As she entered through the narrow dimly lit hallway lined with flyers advertising upcoming events she could see the buyers inspecting the merchandise. Everything in the auction house was always neat and orderly, but that unmistakable smell of relics that had rested too long in dusty attics and the odor of mold growing in the corners of drawers and behind cupboards was always present.

Mrs. Willaby quickly marked her seat for good viewing and made her way to the tables for her own inspection of the sale items. There was the usual array of discarded merchandise but today there was some very nice old glassware. Her eyes came to rest on a magnificent blue glass swan, an exact replica in size and color of the

one that decorated her grandmother's mantel so many years ago. What wonderful memories came flooding back to a time when she was a small girl resting in grandma's arms, rocking back and forth as she listened to fairytales of castles with ponds supporting beautiful swans like the one she fixed her eyes on as they rocked. The swan had long ago been passed on to aunts, then cousins and by now was probably in the home of some shirttail relation.

Startled back to reality by an arm that reached in front of her and took hold of the very item of her transfixion, Mrs. Willaby recognized Mrs. Winston Dupont III, a lady she worked for years ago as a housemaid. Mrs. Dupont's family commanded a lot of money in the community and the old Victorian house on the other side of town that she inherited from her parents was overflowing with antique collections of the finest quality. She was a nice lady although a bit frugal, as Mrs. Willaby recalled, and she always carried herself as if she were descended from royalty. Her dress and mannerisms were prim and proper and she did all things according to protocol.

"Excuse me Mrs. Willaby, I must have a closer look at this swan. I believe it's the only one I need to complete the set I have exhibited in my dining room cabinet. You remember the cabinet in the corner by the table? There are six pieces in all and this is the one I have searched for and not been able to come by all these years." Her eager hands stroked and clutched the swan as she noted the perfection and opalescence of its slender neck and delicate beak brilliantly illuminated by the dull light above them.

Mrs. Willaby saw the excitement that came across her face as she reluctantly released the piece back to the table. "I have some fond memories of my own regarding that piece," said Mrs. Willaby as she related the story of her grandmother and her own childhood connection with

the piece. "I'm thinking I wouldn't mind owning it myself. I have the perfect spot for it and it would bring me much enjoyment in the days that are left to me."

"I must say Mrs. Willaby, it's a rare, valuable piece and I doubt that you can afford it," said Mrs. Dupont, not feeling threatened as she sized up the purchasing power of Mrs. Willaby; and she turned to take her seat as the auction began.

"We'll just see about that Mrs. Winston Dupont III," shouted Mrs. Willaby amazed at the sound and tone of her own voice as she spit out each syllable of Mrs. Dupont's name; and she too retreated to her seat ready for battle.


The auction went on for several hours while the two women exchanged ugly glances, and if looks could kill, both ladies would have been lifeless heaps on the floor at that moment. The both snapped to attention when the auctioneer picked up the swan for the next item up for bidding.

Mrs. Dupont braced herself for the encounter. She began to breathe heavily as her demeanor changed drastically and the sharp features of her face became even more pronounced. The vein in her temple was visibly throbbing, her nostrils flared, and her pale skin became even paler. The auctioneer got a bid of two hundred and fifty dollars from her and Mrs. Willaby made it three hundred.

"Three hundred twenty five," shouted Mrs. Dupont.

"Make that four hundred," Mrs. Willaby countered.

"Four hundred twenty five," screamed Mrs. Dupont who literally seemed to be coming apart as the severe hairdo that ended in a knot at the nape of her neck showed signs of escaping hairs



straggling around her shoulders. She unbuttoned her collar and began fanning herself with the auction card to get ventilation to her perspiring body.

"Five hundred," came from Mrs. Willaby as she glanced at the balance of her bank book, and the bid was getting closer to the figure that stared back at her. Suddenly she remembered the credit card that had been sent to her several months ago. Reaching further into her bag she found it and began waving it at Mrs. Dupont. She never intended to use the card but had never bothered to send it back. There was no stopping her now. She was prepared to go the limit

The bid went past one thousand dollars, well beyond the value of the swan. The spectators were both awed and amused at the same time because the ladies were now bidding on their own without any help from the auctioneer

Mrs. Dupont was beginning to have an inner struggle with her frugal upbringing at this point in the bidding and as much as she wanted the swan for her collection she was having trouble justifying such an exorbitant price. Her shoulders slumped almost in defeat as she retrieved her gloves from the floor and she offered her final bid of twelve hundred and fifty dollars. Her only hope was that Mrs. Willaby would come to her senses and drop out.

"Thirteen hundred" said Mrs. Willaby and the bidding was over.

The auctioneer handed Mrs. Willaby the treasured swan and the smile on her round pudgy face almost made her eyes disappear into the folds of her skin. She wrapped it carefully in her headscarf and put it in her bag for the trip home on the transit.

She found the perfect place to display the treasure where it could be seen from every room in the small house. It was only hidden away when the grandchildren came for fear it might get broken in a moment of horseplay. She loved to tell anyone who would listen about the exciting day at the Auction Palace, but she never told anyone the amount she paid for the object of the battle for fear they would think of her as foolish. It gave her so much pleasure to invite people into view the auction piece. There's no doubt about the change it brought to Mrs. Willaby's dull life before she passed away several years later.

Her children were not of a sentimental nature and did not care for the secondhand décor of her furnishings, so they disposed of her belongings in a well advertised tag sale. And now Mrs. Winston Dupont III's collection, that set minus the blue swan for so many years, in the corner cupboard of her dining room, is now complete.



Amy Jo Clark, Watercolor Collage

Whoopi Goldberg

At the beginning of the year
when rosters determined their fate,
did teachers say prayers before
scanning their lists?

Did they promise to be good,
did they swear to be perfect,
did they make resolutions
if
the patron saint of teachers
would grant one small favor,
well, a big one really,
please
don't let HER name be on their lists?

After searching but not finding,
did those teachers
fall to their knees, sing praises
or
did they snicker at those
who had not prayed long enough,
had not begged hard enough,
those poor souls whose lists
chained them to HER?

And the condemned—
did they curse and wail,
grind teeth and pull hair,
wonder where they had gone so wrong,
what had they ever done
to deserve
HER in their rooms?

Did those panic-stricken teachers
march to the office,
ask for mercy,
threaten to resign,
agree to bus duty,
cafeteria surveillance,
anything, anything to get HER off their lists?





Laurie Mullen, Block Print

"Put HER in drama, put HER in chorus,
put HER in band, anywhere
but not in my room."

But did some of the teachers
with HER name on their rolls
rejoice,
count blessings,
thank the saint,
that HER presence, HER magic
would make it possible
to survive another year
as teacher?

For here was a child
who made teaching fun
who woke up a class with
HER wit and HER smarts,
Her winks and Her brows,
HER glances and HER grins.

Did some teachers know,
did some of them feel
this child would succeed,
this child would make good?
Did they help HER?
praise HER?
push HER?
Or

did some teachers know
SHE could do it alone?
Did they see HER talents?
admire HER strengths?
revel in the glory of a
comet in the making?

What was it like to have
HER in the classroom?

by Ann Weisgarber

Wolf Spiders

By Mary Ellen Oberender

Clarisse Shandelea's thin flats scraped across the gravel, but she heard nothing of it over the racket of the freeway overhead. Visions and voices crowded her mind. That's why she'd come to the seedier side of Claigsville. Milltown they called it.

Milltown was where the most prosperous timber mills had been set up to receive the thousands of logs floated down river in the old days. Now logs came by truck. But still they came, and still gigantic jagged blades squealed to secure a grip against them before splitting them through.

Clarisse had ridden a Greyhound long hours to flee St. Louis, and had taken the first likely road that led away from the bus station. She hastened to be swallowed up into anonymity now at the intersection of Maplewood and Cotton. She turned toward the fog that edged the river and imagined herself a part of it.

Behind the smeared windows of the corner cafe, two diners watched her slender figure. She gripped the handle of a tan suitcase, kneeling it forward. A tapestry purse rode precariously over her one shoulder, swept by sweaty dark strands that teased her sharp boned face and the mouth that appeared tightly set.

Jason watched Clarisse lurch across heat tumbled bricks. "Only one road into Milltown," he said. "It's paved with good intentions, but there's a hell tax to pay gettin' out."

James, his companion, did not reply.

Jason might have droned on, but his thoughts were interrupted by a scratchy radio broadcast that sputtered in the background. He slowly stroked his bushy red beard, and spat out a dry bit of cigarette to the side of the table.

"This is a special news bulletin from KCBJ Radio. Police have just released information on

a fifth body found floating in the river between Milltown and Donnersville..."

Jason shook his head before he wiped his mouth with the tattered remains of a paper napkin. He watched Clarisse hit the opposite corner, then take the sidewalk down Cotton. So predictable.

He smiled, remembered other women who came from the direction of the bus station, the expendable bit players in his bug eat bug world. He threw a five on the table, a measly two bits for a tip. "Time I was leavin'," he said. He lifted an eyebrow in answer to James' crooked smile.

Clarisse felt a presence, but saw no one watching her from the shadows, assessing her to be a woman nearly thirty, in less than prime condition. She ignored her intuition, another chill across the shoulders to be forgotten.

Jason stuck to obscurity, hidden behind the concrete supports of the freeway, while she followed the sidewalk across the street. The freeway wrapped within its large curve the east side of the city and the industrial area on the hills above the river.

Hazy skies draped the cool May morning, yet Clarisse did not think of sunshine. She was finally rid of Bill, a man who beat her, the reason she'd lost her baby a month or so before. She'd taken only essential belongings when she'd run, the money he'd stashed in his wallet, and the cold piece of steel he'd kept at his bedside.

"What the hell do you mean you're pregnant? I ain't havin' no fuckin' kids. I told you that when you came here. 'Sure, stay if you want,' I said, 'but I ain't havin' no fuckin' kids.'"

"But I thought you loved me."

"Yeah, yeah,. So I said what you wanted to

hear. What makes you think I'd believe it's mine? You've been more places than here, Baby, don't deny it."

"But..."

Clarisse recalled it all so clearly now as she fled, engulfed by wafts of diesel exhaust spewed out of the logging trucks that rumbled past. A clean start was all she needed, and someone to treat her right.

On Cotton a row of old buildings had been converted to apartments. Large tin signs reading 'For Rent By The Week' clapped against worn siding. Several possibilities looked likely to go cheap enough, but she found them unappealing and moved on.

At the bottom of the hill, next to an alley, a trim brownstone boasted an arched stone entry delicately wrapped in a vine of clinging ivy. As she approached, Clarisse spied a wiry-muscled black man who stood on a ladder, his arms stretched high. He painted a beautifully framed door with great deliberation. Clarisse hesitated when she saw the "Apt. For Rent" sign leaned against the archway.

"Excuse me, Sir," she said. She cleared her throat and gave her purse a hike over her shoulder. "Is this apartment taken?"

The old man looked down at Clarisse from his perch. He liked what he saw. A promising young white woman, obviously down on her luck. Beyond her, across the street, he noticed a large man sporting a red beard who had emerged from the shadows of the freeway. He gave the man a silent nod.

"Well, I tell ya, Missy, this here apartment's been recently vacated. Didn't take all her belongings, she didn't, so it comes mostly furnished now. Could let you have it this morning



Laura Winkler, B&W Photograph

if you don't mind the mess," he said. He extended his paint speckled hand. "Name's Spec, Spec Wilson, I'm the super."

Spec might have elaborated, but didn't. He'd bought the place a dozen years before with his savings after working years at the slaughter yard. He liked the noises from the freeway just yonder, and the heavy truck traffic on the street out front. They were his companions. Milltown's noise and grime suited him just fine. Besides, the three story building had an ornate private entry opening into a cheap apartment single girls preferred. He preferred it, too. He would keep a watchful eye on them, so long as they wanted. His apartment was under that one, entering down a long stretch of steps fenced off by wrought iron. A side exit opened out into the alleyway.

Clarisse gratefully settled into the apartment that morning, relieved the furniture sat comfortably if it looked a little shabby, and that the white iron bed had been made up in freshly laundered sheets of white percale.

A few dresses and a jacket, all size six, hung in the closet, flashy but inexpensive. Beyond that, nothing remained to personalize the woman who had lived there previously, aside from the toiletries left in the bathroom, and a few pieces of old junk jewelry.

Clarisse sat in an over-stuffed chair. For hours on end, she blindly stared at the wall where the afternoon's light danced to the play of the breeze on the tree beyond the window. The slender leaves darted, silhouette daggers. She gripped the steel she held in her hand and wondered at the nerve it took to use it. Come early evening, when a knock sounded, she dropped it in her pocket.

She peered out the window cautiously, then opened the door. Spec stood with a TV tray tightly grasped. It held a glass of milk, a chicken

breast sandwich on white bread with mayo, and sugar cookies, store bought.

"I like to take care of my girls," he said. His husky voice sounded tentative as he apologized for going beyond boundaries. "Didn't figure you'd had a chance to do no shoppin' though."

"No. Thank you. I'm sure they all appreciate it, Spec, the girls I mean."

Clarisse responded in a soft voice which warmed when he lifted his gaze. His were tired eyes, watery and brown. They looked beyond drooping red-rimmed lids and a broad flat nose. His matted hair looked the texture of metal grindings slowly spiraled off a lathe. His wrinkles were chiseled deep and covered in patches of short shimmering bristles. He appeared all of one color in the waning light, a dull steel gray. His clothes were gray, too, grease and paint stained. She wondered at the life he lived, poor man.

"Won't you step inside, Spec?"

"Oh, that wouldn't be proper, Missy. 'Sides, I was just gettin' ready to be goin' out," he said. He lowered his gaze.

"But,..." she began, unable to finish with how nice it might be to have company before he stepped back wordlessly and turned around to descend to the sidewalk running along in front of the wrought iron fence.

"Thank you," she called after him. She watched his nimble fingers grasp the narrow post at the far side of the stairwell. He quickly disappeared beneath her entryway steps.

She flicked the switch for the outdoor light. A silken strand, stretched from the underside of the ivy, widened to a luminous maze across the corner of the archway. In its center sat a broad

hairy spider with a row of protrusions strung across the middle of his back. His legs plucked the gossamer strands while he lumbered across the web. Chilled, Clarisse buttoned the top of her sweater and pulled the door shut tight.

Thoughts of the spider stuck with her while she leaned against the edge of the iron bed and devoured every morsel on the TV tray. She tried to work up the nerve to rip apart the web with a swipe of her broom, but sat immobile. She envisioned the spider speeding along the underside of the handle and up her arm to sink teeth in her neck. She decided she'd ask Spec to do it the following day, only to lay awake torturous hours brushing away imagined spiders.

She tried to put a name to disturbances that seemed to come up between the floor boards. In the twisted half-sleep of phobia, she detected the smell of bleach, rattling pipes, weird clanging. Unidentifiable odors were followed by the spider intermittently dropping a lid.

"Oh, no, Missy," Spec told her the next afternoon. "He's a wolf spider, them's good luck." Then he handed her a treat of white chocolate smothered vanilla ice cream. "You'll want to leave 'im. Good at catching millers and June bugs, he is. They're drawn to that there lamp light in the evening'. He won't hurt you, long as you leave 'im alone. You'll see."

Clarisse felt suddenly ashamed, the way Spec looked at the wolf spider with such admiration. Almost wished she could do the same.

They sat on the steps in front of her entry to talk about the people passing on Cotton then, and the unseasonably hot, humid weather. For moments at a time they'd say nothing, lost in their own thoughts. All the while Clarisse felt an awareness of the spider, hidden among the ivy, and feared the lightning speed with which it could drop behind her on a silvery strand.

She imagined him caught in her hair, climbing slowly, but was afraid to lift her hand. The spider might cling to her fingers. Her hands went weak at the tingled thought of it. She fought to settle her mind, too ashamed of her fear now to ask Spec to check the web for her, or see if it was the spider that ruffled her hair.

"Whad'ya do for a living, Missy?"

"Been a waitress mostly," she said, her words drowned out by the sharp cry of a blade against a tree trunk a ways beyond them, near the river. She listened to the bang and clatter of a logging truck that rolled by on Cotton moving in the direction of the mills against a backdrop of train whistles and tug boat horns, diesel exhaust, and the dusty singed smell of fast cut lumber.

"What did you do before you were the super?"

"Worked the meat plant. I was a lugger," he said.

"What's that?"

"Oh, well, Missy, I just carried slabs of meat into the cooler and hung 'em up, that's all," he said. He pictured the great silver hooks in his mind. He dropped his arms to his sides and braced his body as he lifted himself just slightly, testing for the power it took to heft those sides of beef across a cold floor all day long, and to hang them.

His eyes glazed at the squeal he heard come again from down yonder, from the timber mill. The squealing sounds put him in mind of the kill floor where he'd worked most of his time in the meat plant. He cleaned up when the floor got too messy. Until then he'd hang around waiting, watching the men dispatch the animals, however they preferred to do it. Over the years lots of men came and went. Most left before the kill



Rob Wisniewski, *Ball Point Pen Drawing*



had become a part of them, before they were deadened to it. Some waited too long.

He had to leave the kill floor, too. He'd come to enjoy the show of old Guy Gripper. Guy was ruthless, built like a gorilla, short and thick legged, with a huge chest and arms. He'd bend half over to where he could look a steer square in the eye to wait for that moment of recognition when a terrified bellow would rise out of its throat, destined to become a rattle. Guy'd yowl to summon all his strength, then bludgeon it to death with the heavy brass end of a long handled rail spike hammer.

Spec's chest tightened around his quickened heart, just as it had when Guy worked the kill floor. Spec had participated by directing his own energy into the blows Guy struck, waiting for the surprised recognition to cross the animal's face when Guy timed it right. "Ah, yes. Guy knew how to play 'em."

Clarisse looked at Spec, his face beaded with sweat. She'd heard his mumble, almost breathless. "You didn't dare cross those guys," he'd said.

It put the finishing touch on her own thoughts as well, visions of the three men she'd loved, their faces when they beat her, the last one nearly choking her to death. She winced back the painful thoughts of the child he stole from her; pondered the reason she hadn't used that piece of steel on him as he threatened to do to her so many times. She had her chance when he lay in that drunken stupor.

Clarisse planned to drown her sorrows that evening at a crowded dive. Taverns were where she'd always found her men. She switched on her entry light before leaving, secure with Spec's promise to keep the yard lights on until he heard her come home. She'd gone through the closet of size six dresses, and chosen the hot pink num-

ber sparkling with sequins, the tight one with the matching jacket. She felt inside the pockets with idle curiosity, pulled out a cleaning slip, the name June scrawled across it in a poor hand. She thought how nice it would feel to be someone else just for an evening.

She noticed the web glisten in the archway as she stepped to go under. A writhing chalky wad caught her eye. She stepped back, riveted, while the wolf spider wound slowly with his fuzzy legs to create a shining shroud. A tan beetle, freshly caught, struggled to push the sticky web to one side. He would be next.

Clarisse shuddered, then was gone into the cool quiet night toward familiar flashes of blue neon in the distance. She paid no attention to a pickup truck that passed her from behind, then pulled into a drive to turn around and pass her again on the other side of Cotton.

The bar was dark and smoky, filled with droning voices and peals of raucous laughter, the noise of the city gone inside. After a time, a bearded man sat down beside her and offered her a drink that led to several. He had a deliberate way about him, smiled broadly between drags on the many cigarettes he put out well before he hit filter.

"Got a steady job up at the saw mill," he said.

Clarisse smoked, too, as she always did when she drank, caught up in the rhythm of sip, drag, drag, sip, drag, drag. To Clarisse, cigarettes went well with liquor, they helped ease the fears that often assailed her.

Jason had watched her from across the crowded room for a few moments, smiling inwardly with satisfaction. He'd spent long hours in his truck these past two evenings while he waited for her to emerge from her apartment. He sat quietly next to her now, assessing.

She was one of those women destined to be forever shy of lovely, with a little too much gum shining above a line of imperfect teeth. Her small moist mouth had been painted a loud shade of pink. She was slightly bug-eyed, with narrow brows arched to a sharp point, and false eyelashes that afforded a needed balance. She nervously adjusted her jacket.

He figured her for a girl with Elvis-Presley-on-velvet tastes, playing the part of classy. His gaze swept over the dingy bangle bracelets, the strand of white fake pearls. She caught his gaze. One of obvious admiration.

"Want another drink?" he motioned to James, the bartender. For a time he made small talk. When he spoke she answered in a pinched near-whine, but she didn't say too much, mostly listened. Probably had an understanding of her mental limitations, he'd guess. Men lost interest when they knew too much about a girl like her.

Still, Jason knew what she wanted. It was her eyes that gave her away, they had a haunted look over the smile, dipped in desperation. The smile faded every now and then only to be plastered quickly back in place. He'd known when he'd first seen her, he'd see her in this dump later if he waited long enough. Her kind always slipped into bars quietly, dressed like a centerpiece, pretending to be part of the background. How could someone not notice her as she sat there all alone and take pity, ply her with attention? He could see she craved that. She'd worn that pink sequin dress, and he knew just how to give her everything she'd ever wanted.

He watched Clarisse use every advantage her amply curved body had to offer. She subtly worked herself to the music until he finally asked her to the dance floor. He held her just close enough she could lay her head on his shoulder and play the feigner game. "Work it, Baby, work it," he murmured.

She moved in closer, brushed her breasts against him, thrilled, he knew, when she felt him pressed against her thigh. She pretended not to notice. All the while they danced slower.

Clarisse tossed away caution, glad that last drink had finally gone to her head, more and more intoxicated, convinced this time the guy would be Mr. Right.

"Hey, you guys, listen to this."

Someone had yelled out from amidst the crowd of obvious old timers. Clarisse felt protected there, especially now that she'd found Jason. He must have been a regular, too, accustomed to James, the bartender, who was skilled at plunking that next drink down a sip before you were ready. They sat at an empty table.

"This is a special news bulletin just in from the wire services. A body has been found outside of Milltown, another in a string of vicious murders. A female, approximately 30 years old, five feet six inches, blonde to light brown hair, 110 pounds. Police have tried to match her description with those of missing persons, but have yet to come up with any leads. The identity of the male found two days ago is being withheld pending notification of family. This has been a special news bulletin from Storm Torell for KNBPTV."

When James clicked off the news a silent darkness overtook the smoky room. Then the bar sounds grew suddenly intense. An ashen Clarisse looked across the table toward Jason who was eerily illuminated by a candle.

"Hey, calm down now, Clarisse. I'm sittin' here, and I ain't no serial killer. I'll make sure you get home safe enough. Wouldn't want my little friend pushin' up daisies, now would I?"



Rob Wisniewski, *Stipple Dot Ink*

Laurie Mullen, Photograph Collage



He snickered. A brief puzzling look crossed his eyes while he lit her cigarette.

"My god, when did all this start," Clarisse asked. She threw down a too large swallow of CC & Seven, coughing and sputtering to set things right. Then she braced herself with another deep drag on her smoke, and hoped her brain would get a little closer to numb before she heard the morbid details. She thrust her hand inside her pocket, felt the shaft of steel.

"Sixth one this year," Jason said. He shook his head while he stared at the short glass James had set down. "Some maniac choked 'em with piano wire. Cops call it the G string murders. Some humor, heh? Uses the middle of three strings that get struck together. Vibrate in sympathy. Ironic, ain't it? Sympathy? It's all top secret. A cop stops by here now 'n again, lets stuff out on the side when he's had one too many.

"The guy's a real kook. Bleeds 'em and pops their eyeballs out, with a soup spoon near as they can figure; then he cuts off their eyelids and other, shall we say, tender parts and pieces... One fella was a good friend of mine."

Clarisse choked on her smoke, then looked to see if he were smiling. She didn't really know him and it could all be gallows humor. Still, it seemed odd the bartender would know precisely when such horrid news was coming on.

But Jason didn't smile. His eyes assumed a savage intensity. It might have been just the lack of light, but the folks at the tables beyond them appeared anything but jovial when she braved a look around.

Jason shook his head and wiped his broad face with a strong hand, then ran it down and around his red beard as if he were in deep thought. He slugged down another swallow,

smashed his cigarette, and looked off to one side as he lit another. His voice dropped to a lower tone when he spoke again.

"Cops found 'em floatin' along the river, with golden binder twine wound around and around 'em. Not a damn drop of blood left in any one of 'em."

"Good god, Jason, that's enough, really," Clarisse whispered. She pulled the short jacket closer with trembling fingers. "Really, I must go home now. Will you take me?"

"Sure, Clarisse, whatever you want, anything you say." He gave the bartender a wink. "I'm parked down the block."

Jason helped Clarisse walk to his truck, past the blue neon pulsating in the window. Beyond them traffic swept by on the freeway, and the halo glow of street lamps hovered over fog shrouded hills, down to where it might have been faintly reflected on the smooth, silent river. They couldn't see that far. He stretched a protective arm around her shoulders, guided her one step at a time into and out of the short eerie light the street lamps flung around them, and through the mist hung on the cool night air.

The effects of that last drink heated Clarisse, drew her toward Jason's warm strength. She leaned into him, smiled when she stumbled and he caught her.

Spec had been true to his word, but though the yard lights still burned bright when Clarisse and Jason reached the apartment, they found the door pried open. It stood slightly ajar. Clarisse shrieked.

"My god, my apartment's been broken into." She stumbled over the threshold, stricken with the same waves of fear that had so recently assailed her in the tavern. She blindly clutched

at Jason until he held her secure in a circle of compassion. She sobbed a melodramatic misery against his heavy chest. He waited for her next line.

"What should I do? Whatever should I do?" she cried in a little girl tone.

"See if anything's missin', Clarisse."

Jason made a great show of concern while Clarisse fought a fuzzy memory to determine if anything had been taken from her pitiful possessions. She found nothing missing.

"I'll stay if it'll make you feel any better," Jason offered. "I'll sleep in this chair, if you like," he said. He pointed to the familiar overstuffed mess in the corner, with a smile.

When Clarisse strung the chain across the front door she noticed the yard lights had been turned off. She prayed the slender chain would be enough for their safety and hung the short pink jacket over the arm of the chair.

She turned slowly, then wrapped her arms around Jason in submissive gratitude. She crushed the hot pink sequins of the dress against his heavy chest. He gripped her, held her against him close and tight. He felt for the zipper sewn into the side seam of the dress. Pushed her toward the bed he knew to be only steps away.

Jason slowly stripped Clarisse in the unlit bedroom, opposite an open window. He casually dropped the dress at the foot of the iron bed. She lost herself to his fondling through a haze of drunken darkness, her nipples raised and tightened. Her fears dissolved in the lust of that first moment. She reveled with abandon at his manly strength, the agile movement of his body, and the hands that swept over her, she imagined, in caressing exploration.

She welcomed his searching tongue and the trembling tension of his lips upon her mouth. She responded with staccato gasps burst out in wonder at the power he put to every thrust he gave. Then she wrapped her legs around him to pull him even deeper, hoping sex would somehow bind them if only for a time.

The old iron bed squeaked, scraped gouges into the floor, pounded against the wall. The sounds could be heard throughout the quiet building, though they never reached the conscious side of Clarisse's mind. They hid beside the visions she had abandoned in favor of the wild passion she played out.

Clarisse slept deeply, and dreamt of Jason who held her effortlessly over his head and spun with her, as if she were a child. As she dreamt, during the small hours of the morning, Jason arose. He dressed quietly to return to the woman who waited for him on the far side of the river. Before he left, he turned for one last look at the forever shy of lovely face. He dropped a twenty on the night stand alongside a small tin picture frame.

A struggle ensued in foggy Milltown a short time later.

An unseen killer jumped a drunken man from behind and pinned his elbows to his sides while he was pissing in the foggy darkness of an alleyway. The victim was strangled with a G string from a baby grand piano. His red beard caught against his neck as the encircling silver strand was pulled tighter and tighter. The strength of the legs locked around him offered no chance for escape. His face bulged red when blackness overcame his choked off squeal.

His lifeless body was pulled down a narrow stairway into the bowels of a brownstone build-



Rob Wisniewski, *Charcoal Drawing*



Amy Jo Clark, Block Print

ing. In a sadistic ceremony he was drained of all his life blood, and swiftly stripped of tender parts and pieces. Then he was hung from a giant swivel hook and spun up neatly in golden twine.

Clarisse thought the previous night had gone well. A little escape never hurt anyone. She carefully scrubbed make-up from her eyes and peeled off the eyelashes, then decided to walk to the cafe and take a job as waitress. Bill would not be looking for her there, anyway. She'd make something of her life. She searched out a bottle of foundation, one left by the previous tenant.

At first offended by the twenty she'd discovered on the night stand, she found herself grudgingly grateful. She realized the picture that had been in the tin frame was missing. Jason had naturally taken it to remind himself of her. He'd be back again soon. She'd repay him then.

She dressed in a mental fog, but on her way out the door the broken latch tripped her memory. She searched the pink jacket while fears' chill filled her then closed the door and began the descent to the basement to find Spec Wilson. She must ask him to fix it while she went out.

Her footsteps had just hit the second flight when Spec lunged around the corner. He stumbled against the bottom step, pitched forward, then righted himself somehow as he scrambled on hands and feet. She tried to sound composed.

"Spec, I've come to find you. Someone broke into my apartment last night. I need you to fix the door."

"Well, Missy, you've come to the right place. Wouldn't want no one to hurt you, now, would I? Good thing you wasn't home at the time. Find anything missin' you think should be reported?"

"Well, no, I didn't," she said, calming at the reassurance in his voice. Jason had obviously taken the picture. "I just don't want to have to feel afraid any more," she muttered.

"Now, Missy," he said. He stretched out his wiry arms to gently place his slender fingers on her shoulders. "Don't you worry. Nobody's gunna lay a hand on you. I'll see to that." Pools of wet gathered at the bottom of his drooping tired eyes. "Why, you're the sunshine in my day and my lamplight in the night." The creases in his forehead compressed with the spread of his strangely disappointed smile.

Clarisse eyed his pitiful face and forced a look of gratitude for the kindness he seemed so desperate to give her. She climbed up out of the stairwell and hurried down Cotton in the direction of the cafe.

All motion around her ceased the instant she asked the owner about a job.

"This is a special news bulletin just in to the KCBJ news desk. The identity of the most recent murder victim, one June Bowers, has recently been determined. Her disappearance had been reported three weeks ago by an acquaintance in Chicago, Illinois, where she was a known prostitute. It was confirmed early this morning through dental records. This has been a special news bulletin..."

Clarisse shuddered to think Jason really knew what he was talking about. Piano wires and eye gouging, now girls named June. It was all too chilling to contemplate. Clarisse shook herself, then concentrated on the questions put to her by the cafe owner. He smiled while he heard her list of previous experiences and hired her on the spot.

Clarisse returned to her apartment determined to be in better spirits, but the news of the

killings stuck with her. She'd spent part of her twenty on two pieces of apple pie in an effort to let Spec know she appreciated all he'd done for her. As she walked down the street she belatedly thought he might have preferred the pie a la mode.

She found her door locked tight when she got to the apartment, so she reached into her pocket to hunt for her key. Strangely, the key no longer worked. The tall ladder Spec had stood on three days before leaned against the building to one side of her door. She thought it odd, certain she remembered he'd put it away.

Clarisse slowly descended the stairwell to the cool, shadowed bend Spec's entry took back into the building. A clinging dampness rose around her as she made her way. His door stood open. Ahead she could see a shaft of light.

"Spec, Spec," she called out, but heard no answer. "Spec, Spec."

She called softly, stepped cautiously into the musty basement, the cool air chilled her. She scuffed forward in the dim light, the shuffle of her feet echoed against the distant walls. Two ominous passageways tunneled black on her left, the murky darkness broken only by a pile of sheets that lay next to a paint can with a brush rested across its lid.

Light reflected ahead off an ancient mirror hung opposite a grated window that set back above the high ledge running the length the room. She noticed a small picture, vaguely familiar as she passed it, stuck alongside the mirror frame. She continued through a narrow corridor beyond which she could barely see into a kitchen.

"Spec, Spec," she called again, her voice a whisper. Clarisse went in uninvited thinking to put the pie away to surprise Spec later. Was it

her heart she heard, or the echo of footsteps, the shuffling twice when she moved her small feet, as though someone were now behind her?

A small enamel pan sat on the stove over a low flame. As she passed by she lifted the lid on a dark pudding that smelled of unfamiliar animal. The lid slipped from her fingers, clattered back onto the pan. Whispered pieces of memory suddenly underscored everything around her with jagged black lines. June bugs and millers. June bugs and millers, millers, millers.

A chill grasped her shoulders then radiated in thin icy spines down her back. She tried to shake it off. Still, she crept toward the refrigerator.

On the kitchen floor was a frayed twist of twine. She didn't see where it led, where it wound around itself, forming a huge golden bale. A silver swivel hook hung overhead. It protruded from the ceiling in the corner, beyond the water pipes, but she didn't see it, either.

When she opened the refrigerator door, a brilliant light spilled out, illuminating the space around her. She tossed the pie on the top shelf.

From below, nestled in a tray, fourteen lifeless eyeballs stared up at her. Next to them, a jar of tender parts and pieces, and three pints of blood pressed against the sides of plastic containers. A shriek she never uttered circled in her head. She spun around to catch the glint that sparked from the silver swivel hook. Suddenly, she knew.

Clarisse struggled against herself, scrambled slow motion back through the corridor till she reached the last room, drawn toward dusty beams of light. She was seconds from the outer doorway when she heard a quiet click.



Rob Wisniewski, *Oil Painting*

She stood frozen, reflected in the ancient mirror now, her own wild eyes looking back at her. Slowly, the picture of her family came into focus, their stupid sheepish smiles. They stood there complacently watching her stiffen in her instant of recognition.

A scream arose from the depths of her throat. She had seen, in the shadows of the mirror, a

giant gray spider as it sprang toward her from above the doorway, looming, swooping down across the space between them as if suspended on a thin silver thread, arms and legs spread wide in fearless naked flight. She fumbled in her pocket for the switch-blade as she turned to face him, praying for the nerve she needed to kill him with one upward stroke.

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