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Expressions

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1995

Expressions 1994-1995

Paul Micich

Bahria Amatullah

Mary Biesk

Greg Fordyce

Ann Presley

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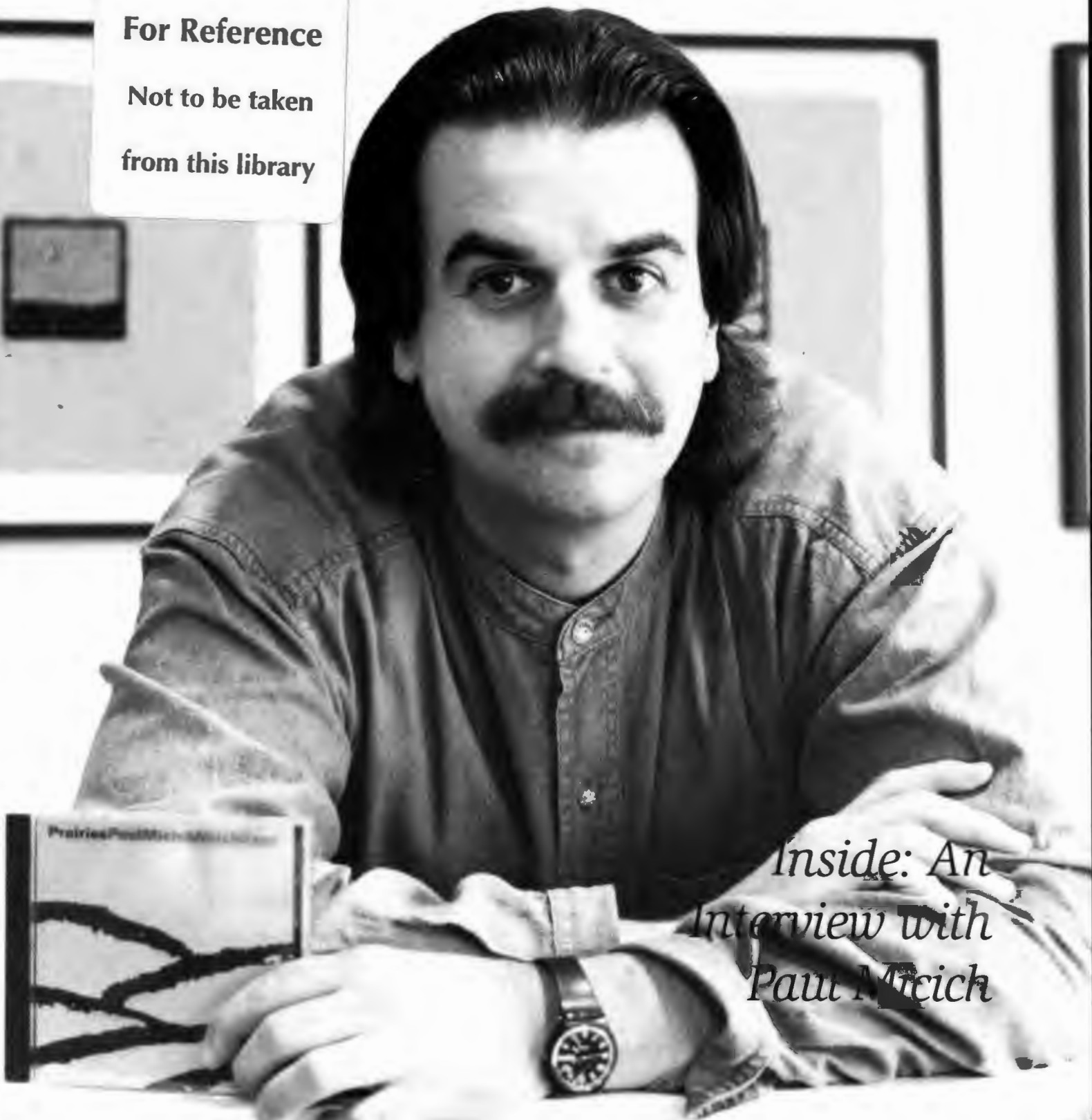
Expressions

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*Inside: An
Interview with
Paul Merich*

Prairies

We set sail on the prairie
we beat the boat like a drum
but silence closed around us
and our hands eclipsed the sun

the wind chose not to touch us
the birds fell away unheard
until we cast away the old songs
unraveled word by word

until we let go our old stories
watched them drift beyond our sight
then we listened to the grassland
and heard the moon pass through the night

now when we raise our arms to greet it
the warm wind carries us along
and we will sail another prairie
to listen for its song

Paul Micich

Cover Photo Courtesy of Paul Micich

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Contents

Poetry

Prairies by Paul Micich Inside Cover
 .38 Caliber by Bahria Amatullah 11
 Catfish by Mary Biesk 15
 Spirit Dance by Paul Micich 27
 Smoke From the Ashes by Greg Fordyce 42

Short Stories

The Gift by Ann Presley 3
 Daddy's Closet by Taiyon Coleman 6
 Town Drunk by William Durst 12
 The Fan by Grace Tripp 28
 On the Wing by William Durst 39

Feature

Interview: Paul Micich by Kitty Jacobson 17

Photography

Tera Begeest 2
 Jan Davis 5
 David Bettes 10
 Matt Van Wewick 13
 Marjean Tryon 37
 Todd Kneller 40
 Stacy Bumbaugh 43

Artwork

Joy Aunan 7
 April Walker 33



Tera Begeest

The Gift

by Ann Presley

I lie with the twisted sheets of the unkempt bed pressing into my back and watch his rhythmic excitement. He is enjoying my gift to him. A feeling of power grows in me and I revel in this ability to create excitement in another being — to know that I am desirable and uninhibited. The rhythm quickens and ex-

I'm forced to lie there, like a specimen caught in the glare of a microscope...

pends itself in me. Contentment settles over us as his heavy body rests on mine and then slides slowly off to the side. We don't say anything, but lie entangled in each other, satiated, he emptied of desire and me filled with power.

Suddenly our calm is destroyed by the noise of a door opening and closing and voices intrude from the other room. I stiffen with apprehension. He calms me, "Don't worry. They won't come in here." I can't relax again and am forced to lie there eavesdropping on their unguarded conversation. He strokes my arm but I know our ears are tuned to the other room.

"Man, did you see Tracy and Rich at the party?"

"Oh, shit! She's nothing but a dick tease. She likes to see him squirm."

"Yeah, all show and no go."

"Not like Pam, huh? She sure disappeared early. Wonder who

she's bangin' tonight? She'll take on anybody! I swear she's a nympho."

My body stiffens with the shock of hearing my name used in such a slanderous manner. He tenses next to me and I know he has heard, too.

Suddenly the voices stop and in my mind's eye I can see them gesturing and pantomiming to each other in the next room. The theatrical pointing at the bedroom door, the warning fingers placed against the lips, and the silent laughter are vivid in my mind. Blood rushes to my face, puncturing the illusion of power in my heart. I can't look at him, but I refuse to bury myself in the stinkin' covers! I'm forced to lie there like a specimen caught in the glare of a microscope — a captive to everyone's scrutiny.

Damn them! I thought this was what they wanted. From the time I was a little girl men have been sniffing around me like dogs. It must be something they smell on me because it certainly wasn't my looks. Even my uncle . . . Shit! Not now. I don't want to think of it now. They must have always been able to smell the badness in me. Why? How? What the hell do they want? They ridicule no matter what you give them.

My mind slides back to a scene in another bedroom. The

hoots of derision echo in my ears from that other attempt at understanding. "You want to wait 'til you're married? Jesus, you've got to be kidding!" That man had laughed at me, too. How did he know my worthlessness? Is there a sign that is invisible to my eye that men can read? What the hell do they want?

I lie there dry-eyed and cold. I shift my head to avoid his eyes and suddenly I'm aware that the room has changed. It is no longer snug and cozy. The smell of dirty socks mingles with the smell of sex and attacks my nose. The one bare light from the cheap lamp escapes the battered and dirty shade and slaps me in the face. My eyes travel around the small cave looking for an escape. The walls are bare except for a large poster of a half-naked girl impaled on the wall. Even this hangs mistakenly, with one corner falling forward in an attitude of subjection. Dirty clothes slung over the chair mock me from the corner of the room and the droppings of a human animal can be traced in the clutter on the floor. Old socks, dirty underwear, and remnants of food all become painfully obvious. All this filth and debris join in the assault against me. I look at the black window with its bent rod and limp curtain, but it offers no hope for escape as it can barely contain the night that pushes against it.

The dead silence in the living room is displaced by the voices again, except this time they come back exaggerated and loud.

"Well, I guess I'd better hit the sack." There is a chorus of agreement and staged yawns complete the absurdly obvious drama being created. Doors slam jarringly as the actors exit. They

slip into their lairs and a loud silence replaces them. I know they are in their rooms waiting - perhaps snickering soundlessly and punching each other with boyish glee. Damn them!

He nudges me into action and we dress quickly without speaking. He plunges his head out of the bedroom door and scans the living room to assure himself that the exit is clear. I just stand there waiting for his signal with a coldness in my soul that I know will never thaw.

I never know what they want. The desire to please gets lost in the confusion. He hurries me across the living room toward the door. I catch a glimpse of movement in the mocking, black windows, but when I turn to look he is the only one reflected there. I am not there — I am gone — lost in that laughing black night. Damn them!



"The Gift" was awarded Runner-Up Best Story for the 1993-94 DMACC Creative Writing Contest.

I never know what they want. The desire to please gets lost in the confusion.



Jan Davis

Daddy's Closet

by Taiyon Coleman

Our house was a large, rectangular box. The living room was in the front. The dining room was to the left, the bathrooms and bedrooms to the right, the kitchen at the end, and the basement on the bottom as if it had no other place to go, so it landed and grew a house.

My sister Cheron and I would pretend we were in the circus. Using the living room and the kitchen as a stage and the blue-shag carpet on the floors as our safety net, we pretended we were in the circus performing flip-flops. Our acrobatic feats only hurt when we performed our circus shows on the hard, yellow tile floor of the kitchen.

The kitchen was red brick and yellow. Momma and Daddy would go there to hug and kiss. Giggling, Cheron and I would catch them: Daddy gently nudging Momma for more and Momma responding with effortless resistance. Cabinets grew from the ceiling and worked their way down the wall, leaving a little space above the counter that ran directly underneath them. The wooden-topped dishwasher began where the cabinets stopped. Momma often used the wooden countertop to cut and prepare food for dinner.

Next to the dishwasher was a sink with a small-ledged window above it. A cabinet sat below the sink quietly, as if absorbing the kitchen atmosphere. The window looked out upon the gangway separating the neighbor's house

from ours. Cheron and I would sit on the window ledge and spy on our figure-less neighbors as they moved through the gangway. Orange curtains with black embroidery framed the window. I loved the soft, bumpy feeling they created against my hands and face. Momma would say "It isn't polite to look at people through the window — even through the curtains." After scolding us, she would then show us how to do it correctly.

Across the linoleum stood the white gas stove Cheron and I would climb to reach the forbidden mysteries within the wooden cabinets above and put them in our mouths. The stove was easy to climb because we would pull open the oven door and use it as a step to reach the cabinet. The burner covers would scratch our knees on the way up. It would aggravate us, but the reward greatly outweighed the sacrifice.

The far back wall of the kitchen was covered with a large picture window surrounded by brick wallpaper. The wallpaper puffed out and looked real, but comparison with the bricks on the outside of the house made us realize that our wallpaper bricks were imitations. I was devastated! I always got in trouble for touching the wallpaper bricks, especially after I had been eating. My parents (mostly Daddy) were afraid I would pull them off the wall. So I touched the fake

"It isn't polite to look at people through the window, even through the curtains."



Joy Aunax

bricks when they weren't looking. Touching them felt so good. Cheron didn't share my obsession.

Along the left wall of the kitchen was the door to the basement. My sister and I never went there alone, unless all of the lights were on, even when it was day. The toothless vampire lived in the basement and only came out in the dark. I never could see him from the steps, but my sister and I knew he was down there. Our bedroom was next to the basement steps, and we constantly heard the sounds of the toothless vampire at night. He would walk up the stairs, reach the door, and pause as if he was contemplating the ideal . . . then, on second thought, he would descend them to the darkness that engulfed the basement.

The yellow refrigerator lived next to the basement door. Pushed back into an indentation, it looked like part of the wall. The refrigerator and I had a hate/love relationship. I hated the refrigerator because I could not climb it to reach the cabinets above it, yet I loved it because I envied its camouflage ability — something I could never do.

Try as we did, Cheron and I would open the refrigerator and stand inside it for height, but we were unable to reach the cabinets above it. They remained a mystery to us, calling our names every time we would walk past them. Daily, we would watch Momma putting things into the cabinets above the refrigerator. They were bottomless pits! Cheron and I lived to experience what was behind those ever-elusive cabinet doors. At our age, discovering the cabinets' secrets was equivalent to being handed the keys to the universe.

On the other side of the refrigerator was my father's closet.

Daddy's closet was off-limits to everyone — even Momma. The kitchen closet was his "space." Daddy would often instruct us to fetch objects for him from his closet, but there was never enough time for us to meddle during our quests for him. The only time my sister and I had any opportunity to explore in there was while he was getting ready to go to work. My father would move from the bathroom to the closet, back and forth, until he was ready to leave. I would stand in the doorway across from the kitchen counter, watching him prepare for work. I loved him so. The radio would be playing and Momma would be in the kitchen, cooking, cleaning, or waiting for me to leave the room so she could be alone with my father.

"Daddy, where are you going?" I would ask.

"To work," he would reply, never glancing away from his personalized mirror.

"When are you coming back?" I would ask.

"Around midnight. You will be asleep in your bed," he would sigh for the millionth time. He and I went through this ritual every day. Cheron seemed to care less about if and when Daddy left for work, or even if he came back.

Daddy had a fluorescent light in his closet, along with a mirror he could use to look at his reflection without having to go into the bathroom. His closet was not large, but it was big enough for one person to stand in and do normal things such as combing his hair, brushing his teeth, shining his shoes, etc. It was just big enough for Daddy.

A very neat person, Daddy kept all of his clothes on hangers, arranged by the length of each item,

He would walk up the stairs, reach the door, and pause as if he was contemplating the ideal...

"Why don't you clean this mess up?" he would scream, sneering at us.

and he had all of his cologne and after-shave bottles in order by size. Each shoe had a shoe tree in it to maintain its store-bought condition. His clothing was obsessively folded as neatly as could be. My father always knew if anything in his closet was out of place or order. He loved, lived, and demanded neatness. In him, perfection

was, in every way, innate. Even as a child, I knew I was not neat, and this fact annoyed him. The way he would look at our room when Cheron and I would leave dolls and other toys out after playing conveyed his disgust.

"Why don't you clean this mess up?" he would scream, sneering at us.

"Yes, Daddy," we would respond. Once he had left the room, we would throw everything in our closet or under the bed, then pinky-swear each other to secrecy.

For my father, dressing for work was a ritual. He would come out of the bathroom, wearing white boxer shorts. He would then go to his closet and put on black socks and those things that hold men's socks up. Next, he would put on his navy blue-striped pants which had to be ironed to perfection — not a crease or seam out of order. After putting on a clean shirt, he would splash Brut ever-so-lightly on his face. As he performed this daily ritual, I would stand in the closet door frame, praising his every move.

"Can I marry Daddy when I grow up?" I would ask my mother with total seriousness. I did not want my mother to be offended that I wanted her husband for my own. There was no doubt that he would choose me over her; I was Daddy's little girl. My question was an attempt to prepare my mother

for her eventual let-down and to assure her that I wanted and expected her to still be my mother once I married her husband — my father.

"Yes, Taiyon. When you are older, you can marry your father," Momma would answer for the umpteenth time. She loved me dearly, something which Daddy's little girls don't often realize until later in life. Even in the face of absurdity, a mother's maternal instincts are constant.

Once Daddy was ready to leave for work, I would try to fight back my daily ritualistic tears, watching him go to work. Before he left, Daddy would kiss Momma, me, and Cheron one at a time and tell us he would see us later. Through teary eyes I would watch my father leave the house, not understanding or recognizing the speed at which he descended the front concrete stairs to join the rest of the world and escape from being a twenty-three year old father with two kids and a third on the way.



For "Daddy's Closet", Taiyon Coleman was awarded Runner-Up Best Overall Writer in the 1993-94 DMACC Creative Writing Contest.



David Bettes

.38 Caliber

By Bahria Amatullah

Cradling a loaded gun
is like cradling a man

Sleek, smooth-to run
desperate hands over

Built strong and solid
as impenetrable as steel

An element of risk
constantly hovers

I'd rather cradle a gun
than a man

At least a loaded gun
won't give you AIDS
won't get you pregnant
won't walk away

I'd rather cradle a loaded gun
than a man

Best Poem 1993-94 DMACC Creative Writing Contest

Town Drunk

by William Durst

The weather had been showing signs of the coming winter. The days were getting shorter, and the sky was more gray than blue. The late fall wind was strong enough to be annoying. The farmers were absent from the pool hall, making sure everything was ready for when conditions were dry enough for the safe storage of grain. Housing construction was still in full swing, but there were no new starts. With winter just around the corner, a contractor didn't need a cement hole in the ground filled with snow for six months.

But the surest sign of winter was John's presence on the end bar stool, next to the cash register. It was the first week in October and this would be his home until April. Dressed for the occasion, John was having his first hibernation drink. His white Hathaway shirt was neatly starched. His suit was a Kuppenheimer, sold to him by "Flannel Mouth" Kelly. It had less than seven months wear and was still sharply creased from its recent cleaning and pressing. The suit would last another six months, but by then no one would want it. His shoes were French Shriners and they were as shiny as they were comfortable. His coat was the right weight for the fall weather, but inadequate for the coming cold. John was prepared to make do with a little discomfort. A new coat was not in his budget plans.

His wife had left him 10 years ago. John only drank once a year,

but his binge lasted all winter, and after 6 years his wife just left and no one knew where she had gone. His son, now a junior in high school, did not need him, but Chuck did see his dad occasionally.

Sometimes when he was at his best, but mostly when he was at his worst. When John was home he was not much of a husband or father, and even less of a provider. He was a great salesman and was the company's number one seller of doors and windows, even though the selling period was seasonal. The company sold other products, but John was only interested in doors and windows.

Before John took his position on the end bar stool, he handed the tavern owner \$500.00 cash. "Save this for me," he said. "I'll need it next spring." It was a ritual John had performed every year for the last 10 years. His ready cash, which was all the money he had after giving the bartender the \$500.00, would be spent in equal amounts each day, rationed only by the number of days from John's annual retirement until his spring resurrection. John did not want to be a burden to anyone, knowing full well that he was not always welcome, and usually a nuisance.

John is one of our town's drunks. He only works at it for about half a year, but for that six months, he is a full time drunk. He

But the surest sign of winter was John's presence on the end bar stool, next to the cash register.



Matt Van Wewick

has a room at a local hotel that does not serve meals. He begins his tenure by getting up early, showering, shaving, and dressing. He reports to his office in the bar and goes to work being our town drunk.

He drinks only beer. In October he pours the beer into a glass, adding a little salt, watching the bubbles rise. By January, he skips the salt ritual, and in February he senses an urgency to drink directly from the bottle.

For the first few weeks, John will occasionally shower and shave. By Thanksgiving cleanliness is abandoned. By Christmas, the bar stool second from the end is empty — it's best to give John a certain amount of space.

Eating is no longer a habit. He must be reminded that it would be prudent to see if his body would accept nourishment. If you get close enough to look at his shirt you would guess that eggs are among his favorites, probably with some ketchup.

John's bar stool is 22 steps from the men's room. During October and November he can find his way there and back. At some point in December, he no longer bothers with zipping his fly. The suit no longer looks crisp and new, but like it has been slept in for a month or so.

By February, he no longer sees the necessity of stumbling the 22 steps to relieve himself. John does not recognize you, but he always smiles and says hello. If John would look in a mirror, he would not recognize John.

In early March, John does not appear at his designated bar stool. On the second day of his absence, it is decided that someone should go to the hotel to check on him. John is not well. There is little left of his ready cash, but enough to

deliver a couple of meals a day to his room. The recovery is slow, but John proves to have remarkable recovery powers.

John's winter clothes are burned. He is confined to his room until a new \$500.00 wardrobe arrives. "Flannel Mouth" Kelly knows his sizes and the door and window company is anxious to put their top salesman back on the road. The first of the April showers will bring an end to winter's decay. The world, and John, are ready for a fresh start.



"Town Drunk" was submitted during open call for manuscripts for the Expressions 1994-95 issue.

At some point in December, he no longer bothers with zipping his fly.

Catfish
Mary Biesk

“ They serve really good catfish in Grafton, Illinois.
And buffalo, too.”

My husband and his father have told me so often
as we drive through
pausing only for stop signs.

The sherbet-colored inns, hinting at the past, the white
cottages, built on stilts
stand against the whims of the river. Stone bookshops
sell the tale, how they’ve endured earthquakes, fire and flood.

The summer bicycle riders, stroll in the streets
carrying their helmets
stopping for hot shrimp sandwiches,
unaware that the river tries
to swallow up the town, although
they serve really good catfish in Grafton, Illinois
and buffalo, too.

Juried for 1994-95 Expressions



*Illustration by Paul Micich for
RCA Records. Featured on the
compact disk New Breed.*

An Interview with Paul Micich

by Kitty Jacobson

Artist — One who creates works of art; especially a painter or sculptor: anyone whose work shows skill, imagination.

Author — One who writes original literary pieces; i.e. books, poetry, essays.

Musician — one who composes or performs music.

Paul Micich — artist, author, musician.

Paul Micich is being celebrated. He is a multi-talented man whose achievements in art and music have recently thrust him into public view. He has been featured on radio and television and in many of the area's current publications. Amazed by his

diversity, admirers have referred to him as a "Renaissance Man."

Micich works in a large, brightly lit studio located on the main level of his Des Moines home. His art supplies, books, papers and musical equipment are everywhere, strongly communicating a sense of ongoing creativity.

A large canvas stands to one side on which Micich is working at a realistic-looking painting

of what one would assume, at first glance, to be a family at a train station, a child held in a father's arms, the mother standing nearby. This is for his latest commission — The Wonderful Whistle Stop, a book

based on the Public Television children's show "The Shining Time Station." An array of various sized paint brushes and oil paints are within easy reach of the stool on which Micich half-sits, half-stands while working.

Directly across the room is an amplifier, speakers and the other portable equipment he uses when writing and playing music on his wind synthesizer. The arrangement gives the immediate impression that when he needs a break from one project, he can turn around and easily take up another.

Micich (pronounced Mi-shick) is a soft spoken man, in his mid 40's. He, wife Anita and their son Ari live in the house next to the one that Micich's family had moved to from Charles City, Iowa when he was eleven years old. For Micich, it sometimes feels very odd to be living next to his boyhood home and to be walking down the same alleys and pathways he used as a child. But his life has not always followed the direction he thought it would. It has taken unexpected turns over the years, the most important being when he discovered that he had a talent for drawing and painting which led him from a commitment to music to a career in art.

For a time Micich studied music at Drake University and went on to teach and perform the trumpet, his



specialty and his love. It is often assumed that in order to play and understand music you have to grow up with it. But, Micich confesses, the only phonograph album he remembers being in the house was one his father had bought of Lorne Green singing "The Ballad of Ringo." However, as a young grade schooler, Micich was encouraged to take music lessons and it was the trumpet that found its way into the family's home. "I remember my mother making me practice, but it was not until high school that I really became excited about it — or over excited depending on whom you asked. I became obsessed with it. We never had a vacation where I didn't take the trumpet nor did I ever have a vacation from the trumpet. It was my life."

That is until about twelve years ago when Micich read Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, by Betty Edwards.

"I had done stick figures and really hadn't considered drawing up to that point. It was a great book for teaching music and thinking about performing music. It had drawing exercises and I did those and discovered I could draw and that was a whole revelation to me and it has now become very important to my life."

Micich had "not an inkling" that his career would make the change from music to art. He simply says that he really wasn't involved at all in art and drawing, but that with the discovery of possibly being able to express himself in another medium, he became very excited and decided to enroll in an art class at the Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC). His first course was a drawing class taught by instructor Sharon Hann.

Afterwards he had to consider his options. "The Commercial Art Department (at DMACC) has a competition in which you show your portfolio in order to be accepted to

the program. So after the art class with Sharon Hann, I put together a portfolio and showed it to them and I was picked as the best of the incoming group and it was a real indication to me because I didn't really know how I compared to other art students."

In 1984, after about a year and a half of working on his art, he and Anita sold their favorite house in Des Moines, and Micich accepted a job in Kansas City, Missouri, as Art Director and Designer at Godbold Graphics and later in 1986 at Gregg and Associates. From there they made a move to Nashville where Anita received her doctorate in Educational Leadership at Vanderbilt and he started his own freelance business.

Due to the demands of a new art studio, there was not much time for his music and it was to become a "quiet time" for his instrument. "Considering when we moved, I had already spent a lot of time in the music world. It was good to make a change and to do something completely different. It was good to get away from it (music) for a while."

While in Nashville, Micich was contracted to do a series of 30 book covers and posters for the Perfection Learning Publishing Company in Des Moines. The books were a collection of various young adult classics and Newbery winners such as Where the Red Fern Grows and Ben and Me.



In 1989, the Micichs returned to Des Moines where he was to finish the captivating paintings of the stories' main characters which identifies each book.



The work was painted in rich, dark hues, each illustration inviting the viewer to go inside the book to see what Benjamin Franklin was doing with such a little mouse, or to know where Billy was going with his two dogs Little Ann and Old Dan and only a lantern to light their way in the night.

This first major book commission launched Micich's young art career into the direction of distinctive art awards and meritorious acknowledgment, among them Gold and Silver Awards from the Los Angeles Society of Illustrators in 1991 and 1992. However, his greatest public recognition as a major illustrator was to be revealed in 1991 with a new edition of Charles Tazewell's The Littlest Angel.

The Littlest Angel was written in 1946 and since then only two other renditions have been published. With his son Ari, who was then four and a half years old (the same age as the story's main character) as his model, Micich decided to approach the project with a combination of realism and surrealism.

"The Littlest Angel has very much a kind of magical quality, a sense of wonder, but I wanted the characters to be realistic. I felt that if I could bring something to the work, it would be an approach that

was through realism and not a kind of 'cutesy' figures.

"I had the story read to me when I was a kid and I remember that there was a sensibility about the story that is very universal. It's about death and it's also an analogy about someone who doesn't fit in, someone who is different and the feelings you have about that. You can see the parallel in other writings, in other stories. The two previous versions were more cartoon-like and I took the realistic approach and tried to reflect that sense of reality partly because I was going to be doing paintings of my little boy and his figure is very expressive."

"The second character in the book was heaven and I had to ask, how would I portray that? I wanted it to have a sense of mystery, a certain quality of the fantastic, a sense of awe about it and so I knew that the tool I wanted to use was surrealism. However, in order to establish surrealism it helps to establish realism in the first place — in order to propose things that seem striking, that take us off guard. I didn't want to have someone else's sensibility of it."

Due to predominantly soft curving lines and warm rich hues, the many faces in the book present themselves as being friendly and at times someone perhaps recognizable. In this version the Gatekeeper looks down upon the Littlest Angel with warm brown eyes of compassion, his head and face sprouting white fluffy hair. The Understanding Angel in his robes and wings of royal blue holds onto the child's hands while they are conversing. And there are other "child angels" for him to fly with through the heaven of many moons, sparkling confetti stars, silhouetted animals and clouds the color of raspberry sherbet. It is much a place of fantasy which heaven can only be.

"As far as the notion of death, it didn't really occur to me how a book



*Illustration by Paul Micich for
The Littlest Angel
Ideals Publishing*

takes on its own life and how once you get a book out in the world, people come to talk with you about it and ask you to sign a copy. Several people came up to me and said that their child had died and wanted me to dedicate the signing to this child. That is the kind of thing you just never could imagine. I never imagined it and it's so amazing to me to know that I'm part of somebody's life in that way. It gives me a little bit of a sense of peace, of hope."

Micich knew what he wanted to accomplish with this book, what techniques he wanted to use when he started the project and judging by the over half million copies sold, he was successful.



It had taken nearly a year for Micich to negotiate the contract and to reach an agreement on how the business part of his work would be handled. Then, with Ari, he set about what would be a six month job of doing thumbnails and drawings for the publishers to approve. By this time Micich was down to three months in which

to complete all the paintings for the book. "I said to myself that I either eat, sleep or paint and I spent a lot of time at it. I was in a different stage of development at that time and it was a lot of work." Despite the pressure Micich felt quite exhilarated and decided to accept another commission.

Micich's next work of art was for the book [She Taught Me To Eat Artichokes](#). Written by West Des Moines author Mary Kay Shanley, it is the

story of a growing friendship between two women.

This book was to have an entirely different sensibility to it. Micich even became involved with the format of the book. How would it feel? What would be a good size to hold? And what would the end papers be? Working with designer Sally Cooper Smith, the first thing decided was that the best way to accommodate the text was to give the feeling of a scrapbook that would be the result of the characters' relationship.

In order to achieve this effect Micich chose to do his paintings on a very rough textured canvas closely resembling burlap and for some pictures to work with three dimensional pieces that suggested a collage.

Using pastels and then painting back into them with a fast drying oil paint, he intentionally let the canvas background show to give the art a more tactile quality. The desired effect is of someone placing or putting things by hand into a scrapbook.

Inspired by a section of the text where the women are sharing childhood memories concerning Christmas and black velvet dresses, Micich purchased a white lace collar from a fabric store and included it in a painting. Carrying the theme of textures and touch farther, he used a white lace tablecloth as his canvas for several painting of bowls holding artichokes. Also incorporated into the art work were photographs and grocery lists and other miscellaneous pieces of what life was about for the story's women.

Micich also intended for the book to symbolize other things, be them even mundane, that are done day after day by women's hands with care and a sense of family. Micich admits that he sometimes finds the lives of women and their friendships to be an almost different culture, one that he has never participated in and was therefore intent on being respectful of.

Interspersed among the art that was created on the highly textured, coarse canvas and the collaged shopping lists are more traditional paintings such as a tree covered with snow and neighbors out caroling on a holiday night. When he had completed the work for She Taught Me to Eat Artichokes, Micich was concerned that he had perhaps “stretched” his concept of mixed styles a little too far and was not sure whether or not it was cohesive enough for one book. This, he says, will be determined by the consumer response to a second publication he is currently working on with author Shanley which, as of this time, has been titled The Memory Box.

Once again the genre of the book will be the relationship between women. It will focus on the passing of memories from one generation to the next. For Shanley’s first book Micich had been contacted by the publisher after the manuscript was completed; however, for The Memory Box he has been involved from the very beginning. “In this new book I’ve done some paintings and she’s (Shanley) done several revisions of the manuscript. We kind of work in parallel which is good.” Because of what Micich refers to as a “marketing choice,” the format and size of this new book have been predetermined by the first one, the idea being to have a “family feeling” between the two pieces, a sense of familiarity for readers.

Each June the American Book Sellers Association has their big “kick off.” New publications are introduced to the market and book sellers prepare to place their fall and pre-holiday stock orders. Therefore deadlines become a major issue and because the artist is the last one on the list of those who work to put together a book, Micich’s time is often cut short and critically close to the targeted date. As with The Littlest Angel, Micich has had to maintain a very strenuous schedule

often times working seven days a week, from 8:00 in the morning well into the night.

With some discomfort he confesses that he does not consider himself to be a very good neighbor and citizen when he is working so much, but he is quick to interject, that he does try to take time out for other obligations. He does not always return phone calls, though he would prefer to, and there is hardly much time for gathering with friends. “Hopefully,” Micich states, “there is some kind of balance — though that kind of time doesn’t always happen. I have learned to recognize the periods where I’m very involved with work and just cannot do other things.” Nevertheless, between gainfully commissioned works, Micich is not idle.

Micich defines his art in terms of languages. His paintings for The Littlest Angel is one. The highly textual work in She Taught Me To Eat Artichokes is another and his art and music in his recent compact disc titled Prairies, is yet another of these creative voices. For the CD Micich had created a series of drawings, one for each of the songs, with titles such as “Spirit Dance,” “Horizon Home,” “Black Earth Islands” and “The Green.” The imagery and style of this art is new — original.

Printed on handmade Sugikawashi paper, each sheet approximately 12 inches square, they consist of thick black curving lines, each a simple drawing using little color, with a thought-provoking message about the theme of discovering beauty and peace right here on the prairie.

For “The Green” Micich drew a person whose arms wrap around the earth and for “Black Earth Islands” profiled faces represent the soft rolling landscape of black soil we see on the horizon of the Iowa countryside. This thematic style is continued throughout his drawings, the text Micich wrote to accompany



Horizon Home



Black Earth Islands



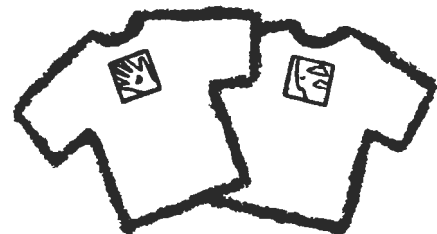
The Green

Paul Micich and Mitch Espe have released CDs and cassettes of Micich's original music that reflects their roots in the Midwest. The music is instrumental New Age in style with jazz and world influences. Micich says, "The Midwest is a kind of crossroads. If you listen carefully, you will hear the sounds of other places. They become part of what moves you."

*To receive a copy of Paul Micich's CD
or cassette Prairies, write to:*

*Paul Micich
PO Box G
Des Moines, IA 50311*

Also Available:
*Prairies Prints
Prairies Pins
Prairies T's*



them, and the instrumental New Age music, with jazz and world influences, which he composed, and is performed by him and guitar talent Mitch Espe.

Prairies appears to be the coming together of Micich's talents, a joining of his creative spirits. For each musical track Micich also expressed himself with words that are suggestive of free verse. Printed on the jacket insert underneath the series of drawings for the CD, the listener is able to understand what the music represents and the message the artist, author and musician is conveying.

To accompany the music and drawing for "The Green," Micich wrote the simple but concerning ecological phrase "Love it, or leave it." However, for the three song set titled "Pampas: Dream, Dancing with the Moon, Is This A Tango?" he has expressed the importance of memory in relationship to where we are and, in a sense, how it influences what we might do with our lives.

"Music is memory. The absolute moment is meaningless without the context of rhythm, of time. The memory of a place, even a place we haven't been, often reveals itself like a mosaic, images placed like tiles, hard edge to hard edge. We may have collected the images directly ourselves, or have been shown them by others, like the photos taken by our two-year-old son with an automatic camera. He captured an amazing world we had lived in every day, but had never seen, never seen the same way. And like a mosaic, the larger forms of our memory aren't revealed until we step back, perhaps squint our eyes to blur the details, maybe employ the sideways glance, misdirect our attention or find ourselves in that daydream flowing between wakefulness and sleep. In the same way we present the memory of a memory of a place we have only seen through other eyes, heard through other ears."

And so the theme of our relationship with this space, the surrounding landscape in which we live, and our reactions to it continues to repeat itself on Micich's compact disc.

The Prairie series drawing are of a style that Micich would like to use more often because, as he explained, it is fairly intense to produce a painting as for The Littlest Angel and The Wonderful Whistle Stop and that it is extremely technique laden. "The drawings for Prairies are very simple, which is the point of it. I'm fascinated by the ability to develop a language and this is one that I have worked on since I was in school. I would like to develop a full range of expression using this language."

Micich reveals that these drawings (Prairies) are much more concept than actual execution, a creative thinking technique from his days as an art director. "It is a great opportunity to discover how to approach concept and how to approach thinking visually and what the creative process can bring to it." By being forced to spend days doing thumbnails of ideas and to come up with imagery for something, he discovered that creativity is an endless process, a "sort of bottomless pit" and that commercial art has been a great background to have. "I think a lot of people are concerned that they are going to run out of ideas and yet for me I feel very akin to that process — I like to swim in that ocean. The blank page is a place I want to spend time and when I'm doing these types of drawings (Prairies) it is that space I like to be in."

When Micich started his professional art career he had put his music "away" for awhile. He had gone into art feeling that it would fulfill his ability to express himself and he had already been involved with music in one capacity or another for most of his life.

In art he found something that totally fascinated him and in January of 1984 Micich played his last



Pampas: Dream,



Shadow Hunter

gig on a Sunday night and drove to Kansas City to start his new career in art on Monday morning. He admits that at first it was good to get away from music, but that after a time, he started to be curious about playing it again. In the past he had devoted most of his energy to playing the trumpet but then decided to take up the flute which eventually led him to the wind synthesizer.

This instrument is approximately the size of a fat box of aluminum foil with electrical cords coming out of it and a reed mouth piece taped to one end. Officially called an Akai EVI Wind Synthesizer, Micich has modified it slightly to fit his own playing style and needs.

Technically, it is played like a horn with the sound being manipulated with the breath and hand control. The soft, electronic sounds are controlled and created through the Akai's own internal analog synthesizer. For Micich, playing the instrument is very pleasing. Working to expand and realize the creative capabilities, he describes his involvement with it as developmental. For Micich this growth is essential, and his wind synthesizer has made it possible.

Micich started working on the music for Prairies about two years before it was recorded. The music is New Age. The titles of the various pieces, as mentioned previously, foreshadow Micich's feelings about living on this prairie land where the horizon has a definite reality. He and Anita had been gone for quite awhile and when they would come back to visit one of the things he was acutely aware of was the difference in the horizon. "In Nashville it is very hilly — it's beautiful country which is mostly woodlands so it was interesting to come back here and to realize that this place (Iowa) felt like home. Up until we moved away I don't think I really saw it in the same way. There is a kind of stark quality to our surroundings that has

its own kind of beauty." Such was the inspiration which propelled the Prairies project.

One of the first tunes that Micich wrote for the CD, called "Horizon Home," had to do with their moving back here and the discovery that living here means something to him. He is encouraged by the idea that the source of his creativity comes from his surroundings and he asks, "If it doesn't come from where you are, where is it going to come from?" On the CD insert he wrote, "Each place has its own horizon, its own proportion of sky to earth. I think it's all right to know your place."

Growing confident in this space and the position that Micich has started to create for himself as a major contributor to the cultural art scene of Des Moines and beyond, he has allowed himself the privilege of taking some risks with the promotion of his Prairies theme.

Recently, he has produced a second pressing of Espe's and his Prairies CD and is venturing into two more musical editions. One of which will again be original compositions by Micich and the other one classical music. Micich describes himself as "a risk taker" with a tendency to jump right into a new project. "I have to keep myself from not jumping in too many times. I forget to parachute. I'm very much driven by what I want to see or hear and that's what counts. It (risk taking) follows along the lines of the feelings about the creative art life — that you go ahead and do things, you don't wait for somebody to give you permission because I know for a fact that you'll never get permission to do anything. You just do it because you think to yourself that this is what is important and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. I feel that since I've been in art, it's been positive growth."

This "growth" is often perceived as being self-centered or egocentric by a culture that Micich sometimes

feels is “homogenizing” itself; that there is a uniformity to behavior and thought that does not encourage or reward personal and artistic discovery of the self. After an art class in the 7th grade Micich felt that he had no artistic talent and never explored the possibilities of drawing and painting until he was an adult.

Now as that adult and artist, he better understands why many people do not encourage or search out the creative side of themselves. “The sea we swim in is a visual world. Obviously, music has a big impact, but all the arts or creative side of what we are doing is where we are, but yet it somehow seems to be less valued or respected. I have had to shed those preconceptions.”

Micich has a strong philosophy about creativity, one that he has been developing with each step and change in his life as a visual and musical artist. He has always felt that he really doesn’t have anything to offer or to bring to anyone unless he has a certain kind of strength within himself: “I seek to express those things that are within myself. Unless I don’t I’m kind of living a false life and perhaps not discovering who I am and therefore not having much to offer. My life centers a great deal around my family and my work. If I’ve had anything to give, it’s basically been through my family and through my work. If I have anything to give, this is what it is.”

Because of his recent commitments, Micich finds that he has had to turn down many desirable commissions. A couple of years ago he did a painting of Duke Ellington for Sony that was used as a cover for one of their musical releases. Since then they have asked him several times to do more, including Louis Armstrong, but time combined with his current obligations have forced Micich to decline their offers. It is unfortunate, for he enjoys expressing himself in all of the languages that are his art.

So Micich moves on, painting pictures for books, making music and writing free verse. He reminisces about when he first made the decision to study art — to let his music take on a less important role, that he would get up in the morning and ask himself those haunting adult questions — “What am I doing? What is going to happen to me?” Every one of these self-searching inquiries is justifiably full of trepidation, for to change in mid-journey, in the prime of any one direction, has proven for Paul Micich to be nothing less than courageous success.





Spirit Dance

In our culture we don't find spirits in objects. We see that as primitive or pagan, or we don't think about it at all. Yet much of my work is really done to imbue objects with a kind of life of their own, to breathe life into painting, drawing or music performance. I feel great admiration and kinship with the native artisan who carefully embellishes some everyday object with an artful design. Although from different worlds, our hands move over the work the same, we breathe the same to make our instruments speak. In *Spirit Dance*, I have written a kind of folk tune for those of us who express ourselves with objects made by hand and aspire to music by heart.

Paul Micich

The Fan

by Grace Tripp

I knew this wasn't my world before I got here, and I'm feeling very awkward, out of place among this crowd. I had won this backstage pass, so I came in an effort to see her. But she isn't here. Now I feel like a fool. I want to get out of here. Why didn't she come? This party was for her. Where is the door? There are too many people. They are everywhere. The air is thick with smoke and noise. I thought smoking was "out." I guess no one told these guys. I can't breathe in here. The noise is even crowding me. There are voices all around me, but I don't hear what they are saying. It's like an orchestra warming up: all of the sounds without the order. Finally, there is the damn door. This isn't the way I came in, but that's all right—I just have to get out of here. The sound stops abruptly as the heavy door slams behind me. Oh shit! Where am I now? I can't believe she wasn't there. I'll probably never get this chance again.

I'm in this long, concrete hallway with a high ceiling and bright fluorescent lights glaring down at me. I have no idea how to get out. Left or right? I pick left. There are no doors off this hallway. Up ahead it turns to the left again. Damn—why did I do this? Where the hell am I? I just want to get out of here. This whole night is getting fucked up. The show was incredible. I really wanted to meet her. I wonder where she went.

As I round the corner, there she is. I can't believe it! And I was being so negative! She is at the end of the hall, next to the pay phone. She hasn't changed from the show. She still has

on the same faded, tattered blue jeans and a T-shirt that used to be black but is faded gray with age. She's got on her black boots, she always does, and there's a towel draped around her neck. She's smoking too— I didn't know she did. That's a shocker and a bit disappointing. She is squatting down, back against the wall, her knees poking out of the holes in her jeans. She's dangling the cigarette between her legs, watching through her ash-blond hair as the smoke drifts upward. I don't think she knows that I'm staring at her. I can't believe it's her...I thought she was gone!

There's so many things I want to say. I've played this whole scene over and over in my head. But now it's all gone. I can't think of anything! I just clear my throat and squeak, "Hey, Amy...I really like your music." God, that was profound! I'm an idiot! I can't believe I just said that! That's not what I wanted to say at all. She turns her head almost imperceptibly toward me and with a weary glance through her hair, puts her hand out. What? What does she want? Oh, shit! She thinks I came here for her autograph. Not knowing what else to do, I give her my ticket stub. She pulls a pen out from somewhere.

"What's your name?" she mumbles. I tell her, she scribbles something I can't read and hands it back to me. I want to say something, but my mind is still blank. I clear my throat again and try to come up with something, anything.

"Uh...Amy...I..."

She blows out another drag and, without so much as a glance, speaks.

"Hey, listen," she says sullenly. "You shouldn't even be back here. The way out's over there." She nods her head toward a door across the hall. Dropping her cigarette, she stands, crushes it out under her heel, turns and walks away.

My face is on fire. I feel like that cigarette she just put out. I look at the door she said was the way out, then at the shape walking down the hall. She looks smaller now as she walks away, her boots echoing on the gray concrete floor. It wasn't supposed to go this way. She barely even looked at me. I had been waiting for this — dreaming of this — for years. I was standing right beside her and she hardly glanced up. This sucks! This whole damn night sucks! God! Who the hell does she think she is? Shit! I'm getting out of here. Numbly I go through the door into the cool Chicago night.

This night sure wasn't what I thought it would be, though her performance was all I'd dreamt. She sang with a passion that was uncomfortable to watch. After one particularly intense song about the pain of loving the wrong person, the crowd sat motionless, waiting for her to look up, wondering if she would be able to go on. Slowly she raised her head and gave a half

smile, breaking the spell and sending the crowd into a frenzy.

She would slowly envelope us and let us share her desire and her pain. It was as though it helped her to release them and it helped us to take them from her. I had hoped to tell her all of this. I wanted her to know. I wonder if she will ever mean as much to me after last night. I wonder if I will ever be the same.

I cooled down in the car on the way home. I thought back over the whole thing and realized that I had built her up into this great person that I wanted her to be. Instead, she is

one of those typical 'Hollywood' types: a self-centered, self-congratulatory egoist! Why would I even dare to believe she'd be any different? I had set myself up for a fall. Now the best thing I could do was forget her.



I kept busy at work today, so it was easier not to think about her. When I get home it's a little harder. I fumble with the ticket stub. She invades my thoughts. I try to watch TV and she is every face. I try to read and she is every character. I try to paint and she is in every brush stroke. I cannot escape these thoughts of her. It's making me crazy — to be so angry at her and still think of her. I don't understand these thoughts and I don't understand why I'm having them. I can't get her out of my head.

I haven't been to the "Basement" for years. I came here often during college to get away from the books and the crowds. It's like hundreds of other neighborhood bars in Chicago, designed for shooting pool and drinking beer. The walls are adorned with neon beer lights and dart boards. There are two pool tables lit only by the dim flickering florescent lights hanging low over them. Strains of Patsy Cline's "Crazy" fill the air, accentuated by laughter from the booths along the wall and the click of pool balls striking each other.

Marge, the owner of the place, is behind the bar as usual. She's a hard woman who took her last drink years ago. She never takes any shit off anyone, but is quick with a joke. Her laugh is deep and raspy from years of cigarettes. Marge's idea of an exotic drink is a paper umbrella and cherry stuck in the top of the beer bottle, but she does make a smooth gin and tonic and that's what I'm here for.

I'm finishing my first drink when an oddly familiar voice asks if the seat next to me is taken. I shake my head and turn my body slightly, pulling my drink closer to me. I hope that my

She would slowly envelope us and let us share her desire and her pain.

body language will be enough to deter conversation. She clears her throat as though she is going to speak. "Shit," I think, "just leave me alone." I shift uncomfortably and she stays silent. When Marge comes to take her order, I glance up and realize it's her. Damn, damn, damn...what are the odds of this happening!?! Chicago is a big town and she picks this place! I quickly down my drink, hoping to leave before she recognizes me, but as I stand to go, she gently lays her hand on my forearm.

"Listen," she says, "I know I was a real ass last night, and I'd like to apologize. Why don't you let me buy you another drink?" I search her face for some sign of sarcasm, but I see none. There is only sincerity. So, I sit back down. "What are you drinking?"

"Tanq and tonic," I manage to stutter. She orders two of them and gives me a smile. My mind is racing as fast as my heart. I feel as though I should say something, anything, to keep up the conversation, but what? I look up at her, then quickly back down at my drink. We sit this way for quite some time, both of us waiting for the other to start the conversation. Finally, she speaks.

"I know you told me last night, but what's your name again?"

"It's Nicole," I tell her.

She gives me a long look, smiles and announces, "Well, I think you look like 'Nic'. What are you doing sitting here alone, Nic?"

I want to say "trying to get over you." Instead I smile nervously and say, "I could ask the same. I figured you'd be long gone by now. What are you still doing here in the 'Windy City'?"

"I just finished a video this afternoon and I feel like I could use a few days to clear my head. There's a lot of shit going down in my life right now that I'm just not prepared to deal with. So, I'm doing the mature thing — running away from it." She laughs a short

bitter laugh.

Before I can ask her what she means, a large, meaty-looking woman jumps in between us and grabs Amy up into a big hug. Amy looks at me helplessly over her shoulder.

"I think it's great that you finally did it!" the woman bellows. "I always knew you were, but it helps that you can say it." She steps back and her eyes rake over me quickly. Then she takes a wheezing breath and continues to yammer on about what a big fan she is and she saw the show last night and it was great and what is Amy going to do now. Amy shifts on her stool and smiles uncomfortably at me. When the woman finally stops long enough to take another breath, I interrupt.

"We'd better be going," I look at my watch and say as officially as I can, "or you'll miss your flight." Amy immediately picks up my cue, signs a quick autograph, and we make a hasty exit.

Once outside, we double over laughing and she thanks me for the great exit. "I really wasn't up for that tonight," she says. "For once I'd like to be able to just kick back and have a drink without being interrupted. Do you know another place nearby?" I decide to go out on a limb.

"Well...I only live a few blocks from here. It isn't much, but I've got a good stereo and a full bottle of Tanqueray..."

She hesitates for a few seconds, probably trying to decide whether or not I am the axe murdering type.

"Sure, okay, what the hell," she says finally. "Sounds great. Lead the way."

During the brief walk to my apartment we talk about the city and my life here. I tell her about my job at Brookfield Zoo. She thinks that it must be an exciting job. I tell her it couldn't be nearly as exciting as hers. She says she doesn't want to talk

My mind is racing as fast as my heart. I feel as though I should say something, anything...

about herself. "My life is so fucked up right now, I don't even want to think about it!" She says this with such vehemence that I can't help but wonder what is going on, but it's not my business so I don't push it. Instead, I talk about the Cubs and their chances this year.

Later, in my apartment and on our second T & T, we are laughing about some of the crazier things that have happened to her on the road. She tells me about the time her guitar shocked her so bad that the ends of her fingers turned black. But there was a big agent in the crowd so she willed herself to keep playing. She tells me about the weirdo that snuck backstage into her dressing room and hid in the closet. He told the police he meant no harm, he just had to talk to her. That spooked her a little though, so her agent tightened security. That's why she was a little surprised to see me last night. She loves her fans though, she says. When she looks into the crowd and see them singing her songs, it gives her chills. She says there's nothing like it in the world.

"That's why I feel so bad about last night," she says. "I am really glad I decided to stop in that bar and that you happened to be there, otherwise I never would have felt right about it. Talk about a weird coincidence, huh?" She laughs.

"Why the Basement?" I ask her. There are thousands of bars in this town.

She laughs again and says, "God only knows. I was out walking and there it was. I looked in the door and it wasn't too crowded, so I figured the odds of someone recognizing me were slim. As I got up to the bar, I saw you and almost turned away."

"But you didn't..."

"Yeah, well, I felt guilty about last night and you did look kind of pitiful there." She elbows me in the ribs and gives me a grin. "I was afraid that I might be responsible for that too." Her eyes are searching mine, looking for

something. I give her very little. I look away quickly before she can see anything. I bring up the woman from the bar.

"What did she mean, 'It's great what you did'?" I ask her, thinking it must be another great story. "What did you do?"

Amy looks at her hands, quiet. After gathering her thoughts, she looks up at me. There is something in her eyes I can't read. They are smoldering with anger or pain.

"You haven't heard?" she says.

"Heard what?"

"Well, it's not something I did, it's more like something that was done to me," she begins. "The local gay community paper decided that since I'm popular and have a national following that it was important for me to 'come out' publicly. Since I declined, they took it upon themselves to do it for me. It was their cover story two weeks ago. That in and of itself wasn't too bad— most of the people in the community already assumed I was.

"It got sticky when Rolling Stone magazine got wind of it. They are putting it in next month's issue. They had the decency to call my agent and warn him. But despite his protest and the fact that they have no direct quotes from him or me, they will print. Last night, when I was such a bitch to you I had just gotten off the phone with my parents. They were upset. Mostly because I didn't tell them before this."

"I also had to smooth things over with the record label. They're only worried about the bottom line, as usual." She drains the glass in her hand, then gets up to fix herself another. "Anyway, that's why I'm taking a few days off. I've got to get myself mentally strong for all the rhetoric." She comes back into the living room and drops into the chair across from me.

I am speechless, stunned by this revelation. Very quietly I say, "Is it true?"

"Am I gay?" she says. "Who cares?"

It's nobody's business, and it has nothing to do with my music."

I repeat myself. "Is it true? Are you?" Finally she looks up and meets my eye.

"Yes, I am. God, Nic, does it matter to you too?" she says defiantly.

I don't know if it matters to me. Hell, I don't know what to think about all this. In an instant, my life flashed through my mind clear and unclouded. Then just as quickly it faded again.

"Yes...I mean, no...I mean...I don't know," I stammer. "I never gave it much thought before now."

The silence hangs over us like a cloud threatening rain. We sit this way for a while, then Amy gets up and begins pacing the room. Suddenly, she turns to me accusingly.

"I'm not ashamed of who I am or who I fall in love with! If that makes me less of a person in your eyes, then fuck you? Man, what's the big deal anyway? Who are you to judge me and who I love?!" There is a fire in her eyes now: sparking and flaring up. I feel their heat, it burns me, and I look away.

I sit stunned, trying to think about what she has said and how I feel about this sudden turn of events. Amy looks at me for a response. When I don't give her one, she shakes her head in disappointment.

"I thought you might be different, Nicole. I thought we were hitting it off. I was really having a good time here with you." She looks long at me, then adds quietly. "I thought you were too." Still, I do not answer. I can't think or speak clearly. She turns quickly on her heel and slams into the bathroom.

Thoughts are swimming in my head. I can't slow things down enough to put them in any coherent order. I begin to wonder about my own feelings toward her, and what that means now. Hell, I never understood them in the first place, and now they have taken on a different dimension. One that I am not entirely comfortable

with. I start to think back over my own life and things look different. Faces and past relationships flash swiftly in my mind's eye. I don't know how to handle this. I don't want to.

It's awfully quiet in there, so I step over to the door and knock softly.

"Are you OK?" I ask her. She pulls the door open and our faces are inches apart — mine confused and disconcerted, hers angry and determined. I can't hold the power of that stare. I look away quickly.

"I should go," Amy says. She brushes past me and heads for the door. I follow numbly.

"I'm sorry," I tell her. "I didn't mean for it to sound like it did. I don't know what else to say."

"Neither do I," she says, as she opens the door and leaves.

I spend the next few days in a stupor, trying to figure out my feelings. I go on about my business like there's nothing wrong, but inside me everything is wrong. I don't know why it bothers me so much, finding out that Amy is gay. It's not a fear of Amy. I think I'm afraid of how she makes me feel. Do I want to be with her because I like her and I think we have a lot of things in common? Or do I want to be with her for some other, deeper reason that I don't understand? All this thinking is making me crazy! The phone rings and breaks my reverie. I pick it up.

"Is this Nicole?" the voice on the other end asks. It's Amy. I'm dumbfounded. "Hello? Nic, are you there?" I wake myself and answer.

"Yes, I'm here," I say.

"I've been thinking about the other night," she tells me. "I don't like the way we left things, and I'd really like to get together and talk. Will you meet me somewhere?"

"All right," I say, trying to think of someplace we can meet. "Why don't you come here? Do you remember the place?"

"Yeah," she laughs, "I'm at the diner on the corner. Can I come up



April Walker

now?" I tell her yes and within minutes she's at the door.

She looks good. Why does she have to look so damn beautiful? She's got on those faded jeans and a white blouse. She can make the simplest outfit elegant.

"Hi," is all I can manage. I move slightly to the side and let her in. She brushes against me as she walks in. I feel her heat and it's disturbing.

"I hoped you would let me talk to you again," she says.

"Why wouldn't I?" I smile uneasily. "Do you want something to drink? I've got some juice or coffee."

"Some coffee would be great, thanks." She smiles back and follows me into the kitchen.

She watches me intently as I make the coffee. I think she's waiting for me to say something about the other night, but hell, I don't know where to start. I busy myself trying to avoid those eyes. Finally, I turn around.

"Look, about the other night..." We both start talking at once, stop, then laugh, relieving some of the tension.

"You go first," Amy says to me.

"Okay," I start. "I'm not really sure where to begin or even what to say to you." I wish she would quit looking at me like that, so intently. Her eyes are spun gold and cinnamon. It seems as though they are seeing right through me. "It wasn't what you thought. I don't think less of you, or bad of you or anything like that. If anything it makes me think of you more." Oh shit! What am I saying? Frustrated, I run my fingers through my hair, searching for the right words. "I've had... these thoughts...no, feelings... for you..." She could blink, or something. I look around helplessly, as if something in the room will come to my aid, afraid of what I might say. "How do you take your coffee?" is all that comes out.

"Black is fine," she says quietly, her eyes not leaving my face. My hands are shaking and my mind is

reeling. I carefully pour and hand her one, then pour my own. I stare into the mug at my own reflection when she speaks again. "I don't know what to say to you, Nic. Do you want me to say it's okay to have these thoughts and feelings? Well, it is. Do you want me to assure you that you aren't crazy? You're not." She takes a sip of her coffee, she says softly, "What do you want from me?"

"I...would like to go sit in the living room." That's the best I can do. Amy nods and leads the way. I sit on the sofa, trying to form an answer to her last question. She's wandering around the room, sipping from her mug and looking at my paintings.

"I like your work" she says. "Do you have any on display?"

"Thanks," I tell her. "I guess I should take them around, but I'm afraid no one will like them as much as I do. My favorite is this one here." I rise and go to the painting. "I painted it from a weird dream I had a few weeks ago. I have no idea what the dream meant, but it has been haunting me so I painted it." It's a bright morning on a road in the middle of a vast desert. There's a figure of an old woman waving to a younger woman walking away from her. They are both crying, but also smiling at the same time. Amy comes over to where I am standing. She is right here, next to me, in my living room, staring at my work. Except now she is staring at me. Shit!! Suddenly, it is too unbearable. Impulsively, I step forward and kiss her. She doesn't respond at first, and just as I am pulling away I feel her lips begin to move.

"What was that for?" she asks breathlessly.

"I wanted to see if I would like it. A part of me was hoping that I wouldn't. I thought that if I kissed you and it was wrong, I would know it." I hope this makes sense to her. It sure doesn't make any sense to me.

*Suddenly, it is too unbearable.
Impulsively, I step forward and kiss her.*

"Okay...so, what do you think?" she asks. "Was it wrong?"

"Well...no, it didn't feel wrong. In fact it felt more right than anything I've done in my life!" Then why am I so scared, I ask myself.

Slowly, with her finger under my chin, she turns my face to hers.

"It scares the hell out of you, doesn't it?" I know now that she can read my mind. I try to swallow the emotion that has lodged in my throat and I nod. She lets go of my chin and her hand cups my cheek softly. "I can't take away your fears," she continues, "only time can do that. What I can tell you is that you are not alone. I know it feels like it most of the time, but you're not." Her eyes hold mine and won't let go. I feel something deep inside me let go and I begin to weep. Gently, she pulls me into her arms and holds me while I cry.

It takes awhile to get myself together again. Amy is sympathetic and caring. She sits me down on the couch and tells me to stay put while she goes into the bathroom to get a warm washcloth.

"I'm really sorry about that," I begin as she returns, "but I..."

"Shh..." she interrupts. "It's all right. You have nothing to be sorry about." She sits down next to me and begins to wipe the tears from my face. "The hardest part is 'coming out' to yourself. Once you get past that, the rest is all downhill. It really will be

okay. You really will make it through this." Amy finishes wiping my face and gets up to return the towel. I think about her words and I want to believe that she is right. It all seems too much to handle. I fall over on the couch, pulling my knees up to my chest, trying not to cry again. I don't think I'm strong enough for this.

It's dark when I wake up. It takes me a while to remember where I am and how I got here. It suddenly comes back to me in a rush. I sit up abruptly,

looking around to see if she's still here. There's a note on the table in front of me. I turn on the lamp and read:

"N,

Thought you needed the rest. Made coffee, just turn the pot on. I looked in the TV guide and there's a good movie on ch. 8 so just kick back, relax and watch the tube tonight. I'll call you in the morning. Remember, too much thinking can be hazardous to you health. Ha ha ha! Call if you need anything. I'm at the downtown Hilton, rm 216.

A.

PS You really will make it through this. Trust me!"

I try to take her advice, but I can't clear my mind enough to follow the plot of the movie. Instead I take a long, hot shower and fall into my bed.

I wake in the morning to the sound of someone pounding on my door. I roll over and look at the clock—it's already after noon! I grab my robe and shuffle to the door mumbling, "I'm coming, I'm coming already." Through the peephole I see that it's Amy. She's got her eye up to the other side. Laughing, I open the door for her.

"Hey," she says with a grin and saunters in. "What are you going to do, sleep your life away? Here, these are for you. I hope you aren't allergic." She hands me a huge bouquet of flowers. "Thought about chocolates, but grabbed these..." She pulls a bag from behind her back. Bagels from the deli...what more could a woman ask? "I'll get a couple of these ready while you take a shower." With that she gives me a push toward the bathroom and heads to the kitchen.

During breakfast she tells me she is leaving for New York in a few hours. "My agent called and they want me to do an interview for Newsweek. They are doing an article on mainstream gay and lesbian artists called 'The Edge of the Closet,' and the record company

It's all right...The hardest part is "coming out" to yourself.

thinks it will look better if it looks like I planned it. I think it's a great idea just so Rolling Stone doesn't get the scoop. You know what I mean?" She seems quite excited by this turn of events, so I smile and tell her it's great news. I had hoped to spend more time with her. I don't want to be alone. But I know she has to go.

"Hey, I'll only be gone a few days and then I'd like to come back and stay with you for awhile." She pauses, searching my face. "Is that all right with you?"

"Yes," I tell her. "I'd really like that."

There is a knock at the door.

"That is probably my driver." She says regretfully. She walks over, sticks her head out the door and tells him she'll be right down. "Here," she says to me. She digs around in her pocket and pulls out a piece of paper and hands it to me. "This is where I can be reached. If you need to talk or something, please don't hesitate to call."

We stand in awkward silence for a few moments. Finally, Amy reaches out her arm and pulls me to her. I go willingly into her embrace. I inhale deeply, burying my face into the hollow on the side of her neck. I fill up with the scent of her, hoping that everything will be okay. She starts to pull away, but my arms tighten around her neck and pull her back. I don't want this moment to end. I turn my face up to her and she moves that last inch to connect. Her arms, around my waist, pull me closer still. My heart is soaring. She moans deep in her throat and ends the kiss. She gives me a small squeeze and whispers in my ear.

"I really have to go. I'll call you tonight and tell you when I'll be back. I want to say the perfect thing to make you know that everything will work out. But there isn't a perfect answer. Just don't push it in your mind. There are no absolutes and in time you will understand. Give yourself time, Nic."

She sets me away from her and goes out the door.

I woke early this morning. I am feeling very good about the past few days and better about myself and my life than I have in a long time. I think I'll just relax, read the paper and then go to work.

There is a small article about Amy in the "People" section. It says she is flying out today for a benefit in L.A....I thought she said New York?...after her concert here last night. What? Concert last night? She left yesterday for New York?! What the hell is this about? Quickly, I glance up to the date of the paper. Saturday, September 19, 1993!! No! Today is Thursday! I just spent the last couple of days with her. I know she didn't leave on Saturday. The paper must have printed the wrong date. I sift through the rest of the newspaper looking at the date on all the pages. Saturday! Weird, that's what it is. I walk over to the table to get the card Amy left me. I want to call her and find out what is going on. I thought she was going to New York? The card isn't on the table. Thinking

I must have left it in my pants yesterday, I rush to the bedroom to check them. Damn! It's not there either. Suddenly, I feel strange. I know she was here! I know I got a card from her with her phone number on it. Where is that card? It has to be here! I tear through my apartment searching for it. Shit! It isn't here anywhere. Frantically, I call the Hilton. She had stayed there. They tell me she left for the airport a few minutes ago. I can feel the blood rushing through my head. This isn't right! She left yesterday, she went to New York and she left me her card. I have to talk to her! Everything is getting fucked up! I grab up the phone and hurriedly call a cab. I've got to get to the airport. I've got to see her. She gave me her card and

*I glance up to the date
of the paper. Saturday...
No! Today is Thursday!*



Marjean Tryon

now I've lost it. She said I could call her. I have to get her number again!

The airport is a mess. There are people and baggage everywhere. My heart is pounding! I can feel the blood rushing through my veins! I have no idea where to find her. Suddenly, I see a Red-cap. I grab him by the arm.

"Do you know which airline has a flight to Los Angeles in the next hour?" I breathily ask.

"Yeah." He answers slowly. "American has one leaving in a half hour. You'll have to hurry if you want to make it. It's on the other side of the airport. Concourse D, gate 26." He indicated the right direction and I take off.

I have got to get there before she leaves! She gave me her card. She said I could call her anytime! These people are pissing me off. Everywhere I turn there is somebody slowing me down. Get the hell out of my way! I have to get there on time! I can hear the flight being announced above the din of all these people. At last, there is the gate!

A crowd of fans surrounds the gate area. Security has it roped off but people are straining to see her. I push my way up to the front. The rope presses into my stomach as the crowd surges behind me. Finally, I see her! She has on jeans, a white tee shirt and a leather jacket. There's a cigarette hanging from her mouth and she's squinting from the smoke drifting into her eyes. She turns my way. I wave to her, but she doesn't see me. She turns flashing eyes to the man on her left.

"Jack, what the fuck is all this? Goddamn it, how the fuck did all these people know I was going to be here? What the fuck do I pay you for? Get me the hell away from this!"

Jack looks away quickly from her anger and guides her toward the gate. In one move, I quickly slip under the rope and rush toward her. I know she will be happy to see me. I frantically

slide around the men surrounding her until I'm right in front of her. I grin broadly.

"Amy, I lost your number. I need you to give it to me again. What's going on? I thought you were going to New York?"

Amy looks angrily at me. "Who the hell are you? Jack! Get this woman away from me! How the fuck did she get past the rope? Some fuckin' security!" She pushes past me. I reach out and grab her arm.

"Amy, it's me! Nicole. Remember? I lost the card you gave me..." I implore her. My eyes searching for recognition find only hostility. Suddenly, two large hands close around my upper arms and force me away from her. I wrench myself free and grab Amy by the shoulders. "Amy!? It's me, Nicole! Amy? What's going on?!"

"Goddamn it!" She says as she shoves me roughly away from her. "You're the girl from last night! Aren't you? I signed your ticket, what else do you want?! Get a life and leave me alone, okay?" In a flurry of motion, I am jerked away again as Amy turns and heads up the entryway.

People are staring at me now. I try to avoid their eyes as I walk slowly toward the exit. They don't understand. She was just under a lot of pressure and couldn't stop to talk to me. She probably said those things so the fans wouldn't bother me after she left. If she had acknowledged that she knew me, they would have swarmed all over me as I left. She was worried about me, that's what that was all about. She'll probably call me as soon as she gets to New York, or L.A., wherever it is that she is going. I'm sure she'll call to explain it all when she gets there. I'm sure she will.



*Best Story 1993-94 DMACC
Creative Writing Contest.*

On the Wing

by William Durst

Allen was alone in the dark. Sitting in the pilot's seat of an airplane ready to take off from an aircraft carrier leaves you alone, at least in your thoughts. Especially at night.

When the war started on December 7th, Allen was a Junior at the University. His father was right when he told him the war would wait until he graduated. He would not get a chance to use his degree until the war was over, but by staying at the University, Allen was able to complete his course in Civilian Pilot Training, earning a Commercial Pilot's License and a Flight Instructor's Certificate. He was accepted as an Ensign in the Naval Air Forces as soon as he graduated.

Thinking back he remembered the anticipation of flying combat. Primary training was at Olathe, Kansas, a strange place for a Naval Officer, but a great place for a boy from the Midwest. His previous flying experience accelerated his training. He remembered his posting to Corpus Christi, Texas for Advanced. The only hurdle after that would have been Gunnery School and then off to the Pacific.

He recalled his initial disappointment at being selected as a flight instructor, training new pilots in the F4U Corsair. That is why Allen is now sitting on the downwind end of an aircraft carrier in the Gulf of Mexico, strapped to one of the Navy's most powerful single engine fighters. The Corsair is a pleasure to fly. A stable gun platform, fast and highly maneuverable. In the early part of the war, the Corsair was not an acceptable carrier based plane. It's inverted gull

wings, huge engine, and the pilot's cockpit located well back of the nose did not allow the pilot enough visibility to make a safe landing. Al could look around and see some of the changes that had been made. They had improved the pilot's visibility, and the carriers had gotten much larger. The Landing Ship Officer's position was shifted and the pilot could now see him throughout the final approach for landing.

Al remembered his first carrier take off and landing. The take off is about the same as on land. The ship may pitch and roll but the biggest difference is when you come to the end of the runway. You fly or you splash. Landing is another matter. His first final approach was textbook quality and he can still see the deck rolling and pitching. He was startled to actually see how narrow and short the landing area appeared. He knew the landing area was much shorter. So short in fact that each aircraft is fitted with a tail-hook that drops down to catch an arresting wire on the deck, stopping the aircraft quickly. You touch down with full power because if your tail hook fails, you must go around and try again.

He thinks daylight carrier operations are an exciting challenge. Al is thankful that his skill and confidence in himself and his plane make his first eight landings look like a clinic. And now, here he is looking into the night.

His thoughts are current now. He can no longer review past flights, but must return to basic flying skills and transfer them to a take off, a short flight around the ship, and return to a landing pattern to make a couple of approaches to the ship, touching down on the deck, going around and finally

The ship may pitch and roll, but the biggest difference is when you come to the end of the runway. You fly or splash.



Todd Kneller

dropping the tail hook. It should be a pleasant night for flying.

Al is now in take off position. The canopy is open, his engine is at full power, with a full rich gas mixture. His feet are on the brake pedals pushing with all his strength. The Corsair is ready to go. The Flight Deck Officer gives him the signal to release

...he is running his fingers and hand back and forth across his throat...a signal to cut power.

his brakes. His eyes go immediately to his flight instruments. In the dark there is no horizon to tell him when he is flying straight and level, so he must rely on artificial horizons. The plane no longer surges and bounces under the restriction of his wheel brakes. Al sees that his wings are level and glances quickly at the airspeed indicator. The plane flies at 80 miles per hour. A landing approach starts at 100 miles per hour. Anything less than 100 and the plane does not fly well, but if your maneuvers are done in a smooth and gentle manner you will stay in the sky.

Al can't believe what he sees. The airspeed is still registering zero. He knows he is flying because he is not in the water. In his excitement he must have forgotten to remove the Pitot tube cover in the pre-flight inspection. This little protrusion on the front of the plane accepts ram air, transferring it to an airspeed indicator telling the pilot how fast the outside air is hitting the plane. In 2000 hours of flying he has never forgotten to take this cover off and now he is in the dark with a very critical instrument inoperative.

He quickly glances at the altimeter to see if he has enough altitude to look outside and orient himself and make a land or bail-out decision. The altimeter is still showing sea level! A slight back pressure on the stick will change this, but not enough to reduce the airspeed below stalling speed. Another quick look and still no altitude or airspeed. Al can understand no airspeed, but the altimeter is controlled by barometric pressure and a poor pre-flight inspection would not control this instrument.

It is time to risk a quick glance out of the cockpit to figure out how to get this thing down or get out of it. He snaps his head to the right when he feels a sharp tap on his shoulder. Al sees his crew chief standing on the wing, hanging onto the canopy rail. His hair and clothes being blown wildly by the slip stream. He is holding on for dear life with his left hand while with his right, he is running his fingers and hand back and forth across his throat...a signal to cut power.

It is time to panic. How in hell did a pilot with his experience forget something so simple as removing the Pitot cover in a preflight inspection? Then manage to take off with the crew chief standing on the wing, and now that silly son-of-a-bitch is out there telling him to cut power. Al takes a quick look over his left shoulder to see if he can see something friendly or at least familiar. What he sees are hands on the left canopy rail trying to pull someone up on the wing! As if from a distance, Al watches the progress of the hands up the canopy railing and eventually reaching into the cockpit to grab the throttle and pull it back into the idle position. It is now very quiet. The plane is no longer bouncing and buffeting. But this is all. The plane did not stall, roll or tumble. It is just sitting there idling.

He now realizes that when he taxied into position for take off, his tail hook dropped and caught the arresting wire, preventing take-off. Even though Al was convinced he was in serious trouble, he had never left the flight deck. If he can get over his embarrassment, there will be another try tomorrow night.



"On the Wing" was submitted during open call for manuscripts for the Expressions 1994-95 issue.

Smoke From the Ashes

by Greg Fordyce

Across a barren space the locomotive
Runs a bleak course toward a ruby
Twilight sun; the fire of its engines
Are burning its breath into night air—
My heart burns into your mind and
Your heart and your lungs; you exhale
My smoky breath through the
Spaces of your own soul.,
You breathe my tears like a
Cigarette between your lips . . .
Wisps of me are in the air tonight,
Plumes of my substance are on the wind and they
Scatter on the summer's breath while the frogs
Croak their song to sunset skies . . .
Why the sad face tonight, my dear?
Why the long tears streaking your
Painted, pretty face?
Do shards of midnight cut your
Hands like mine, and the
Prickly pears of my desert soil
Slice your skin?
Or do you simply dream of
Eden and the places where sleek horses run?
The locomotive is running the steel
Across the barren spaces; it
Coughs black soot into night skies . . .
Where will you run, my dear?
Tonight, in your pretty, painted desert,
Where will you run?
The smoke of me still floats
From you, the smog of my presence
Still wafts from your lips . . .
And I shall float to the
Heavens and embrace the sun.

Runner-Up Best Poem, 1993-94 DMACC Creative Writing Contest.



Stacy Bumbaugh

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