

1992

Expressions 1992

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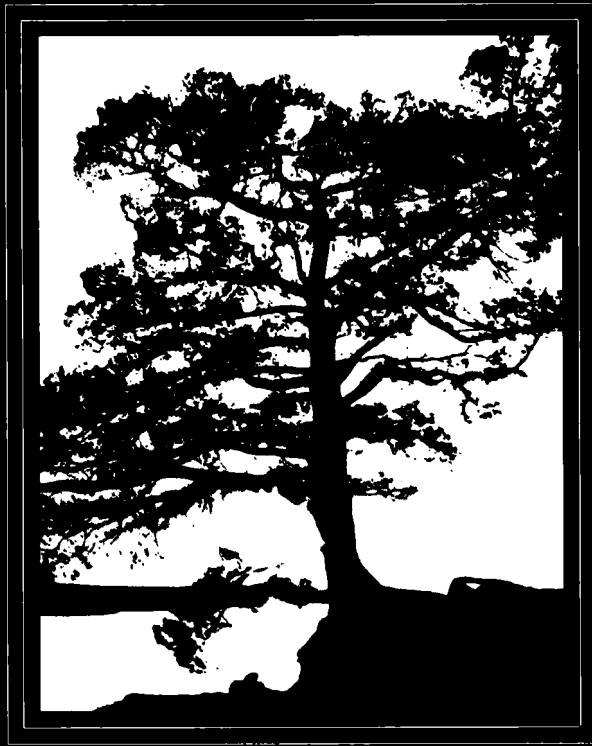
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PHOTO: MARY CHLAND



W

DURBAN

A Cool Numb

By T. A. POE

Explosions ring in my ears. Sharp edges of light flash around the artillery encampment. I look up. It is early morning, the darkest-before-the-dawn time. A single phrase runs through my thoughts again and again: "I'm going to die. I'm going to die. I'm going to die. . . ." This is crazy! The officers must know the danger. Do they have to obey every order?

I am surrounded by dark walls. I can barely see the outline of my comrades' faces, but I can sense their fear. All was calm just a short time ago. We had been eating when the orders came that an offensive would begin early in the morning. We washed down the crusty, old bread and cheese with red wine we found in an abandoned farm home; it was the best we had eaten in days—a meal fit for soldiers who know death is just a barking officer's order away.

That order now seems near, and we don't talk. I am soaked with sweat. I wonder if I should write a note and stuff it in my pocket for someone to send to my family if I should die. I want to let them know I was thinking of them.

Finally, one of my comrades breaks the silence. Only those of us close by can hear his whisper: "Why are we doing this? Why don't we just leave?" He knows we cannot. "This war is hell." He speaks the truth.

"All war is hell," comes a reply from another dark face.

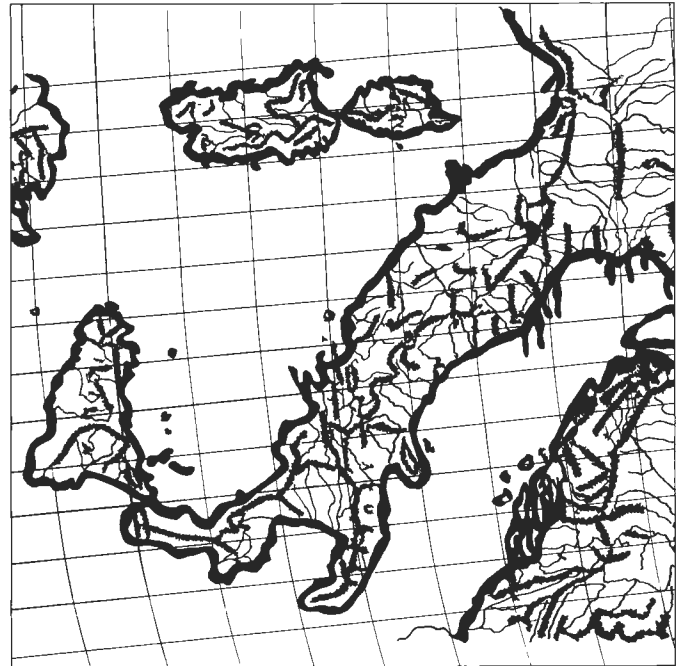
An officer crawls above the trench. He holds a clean, gleaming pistol in one hand and a bottle of grappa in the other. Bursting artillery shells illuminate him above us like a scary puppet. Suddenly, a bright flash of light . . .

. . . comes streaming into the world. The shutters of our hotel room are open. War is a dream; morning is reality. I'm in Italy, and I'm not going to die—at least not this minute. My wife is as far away from me in bed as possible; I must have tossed quite a bit in the night.

I start to move and feel pain in my back—it has been very sore lately. Our hotel beds have been a succession of lumpy mattresses and old box springs; we travel on a budget. Cheap Italian hotel beds suck.

But we didn't come to Italy for the beds. We came to experience the beautiful existence of a small Italian hill-town, with gently ringing bells, a café on every block, and people who take their time in life. The beds are a small price to pay.

We enjoy the things that many Italians take for



granted. Everyone knows of Italian food and I am no better than the next person at describing it. But, to me, an Italian meal is an *event*, everyday—a religious experience, a gastronomical mass. (The hot garlic from a meal stays with you longer than the exhortations of a priest.)

We love the wine, as well; dinner is incomplete without it. We usually buy a bottle to drink later in the evening. Just a little is enough to make me feel like a local resident, slowly strolling down the street to my home.

There is a stirring in the bed next to us; our traveling companion is awake. She likes the wine and food, too. She really likes Italian men. She is intelligent, but somehow misses my Italy. She seems to care little for the beauty of Italian towns, or their history. I lent her a copy of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* to help her understand some of Italy's history and to keep her occupied. She gave up on it after the first few chapters. I have been reading it since. *A Farewell to Arms* is a great book. Hemingway is a great writer. I wish I could write like Hemingway.

Actually, I bought the book to help me understand more about the life of my Italian grandfather—a man I barely knew. I waited too long to find out about him. I now



have only a cemetery marker to answer my direct questions, and it's not talking. So the novel helps.

•
Our traveling companion is not happy about our destination. "What's in Bassano?" she asks. I know what her next sentence will be; she will not look at me when she says it. "I want to go back to Florence."

I roll my eyes toward my wife. She shrugs and rolls her eyes back.

"I met that guy in Florence and I'd like to see him again," our companion says, in a surprisingly straightforward way. Her intention is obvious.

I inhale deeply and start my explanation: "Well, to start with, there is grappa in Bassano. That's why it's called Bassano de Grappa." I sound condescending and regret it.

"Grappa!"

That word got her; she really likes the Italian brandy. I have her full attention now—no more thoughts of dark, handsome men in Florence (she knows there are other men in Italy). It occurs to me that the only thing she remembers from *A Farewell to Arms* is a reference to drinking grappa.

"Let's go," she says, smiling.

I must admit, I, too, have grown to *appreciate* grappa—that is, I am used to the burning sensation that

travels down to my gut when I drink the clear liquid and the hint of raisin flavor that is left in my mouth when I recover my breath. Drinking grappa is like drinking rocket fuel; it's an acquired taste.

•
Why do I want to go to Bassano? I want to see evidence of hell. I have never been to hell, but I have read about it. "War is all hell," said General William T. Sherman. He would know, he created a lot of it.

The specific hell I search for is of World War I vintage. Bassano is close to where my grandfather fought. My grandmother told me of a battle field and cemetery there (At least I think she did—I don't speak Italian and she doesn't speak English—for all I know she could have said it was a great place to get drunk.)

Much of the information I have about my grandfather is from my mother. "He used to go to the café and talk with his friends all day," she once told me.

"What did they talk about?" I asked.

"The war."

I recall that Grandpa was very quiet. He liked to eat nuts, rarely meat. He loved maps and had many colorful ones with great detail, including all of Italy. Mom says Grandpa was an atheist, but Grandma has a picture of Christ on her wall.

I remember that he rolled his own cigarettes. Once, when I was a little boy, I tried to roll one for him. It was awful, there were tobacco flakes everywhere. I can't remember if Grandpa smoked it; in fact, I don't remember ever seeing him smoke.

Grandpa died in November 1982. At least he lived to see his beloved Italian soccer team win the World Cup that summer. The last time I saw him was in 1970. The Italians lost to Brazil that year 4 to 1. Grandpa was probably beside himself.

On a wall in Grandma's small two-bedroom apartment are war medals. My grandfather was an Italian knight, a *Cavalier*. In 1971, the government rounded up the survivors of some of the battles of the First World War and told them they were heroes. I understand the title passes down through the family; too bad for me, the title passes to the oldest son.

I have seen other Italian heroes. They are in the cemetery where my grandfather is buried. In Italy, graves are adorned with the most recent pictures of their occupants, and to walk among them gives me the strange feeling of being introduced to the dead. The markers read: "Died in July 1915" or "August 1915" or "May 1916" or "June 1916." The pictures on these markers show men who seem forever young. My grandfather's picture is of an old man. Young dead men probably don't have grandchildren to wonder about them. . . .

. . . I am back in hell again.

"Which will it be?" the officer screams over the exploding shells.

I can't answer, the response is stuck in my throat. I have few options. If I choose the officer's pistol, I get shot in the head. If I run away, I get shot in the back. Running away is worse. When a man shows cowardice in this army the hell travels all the way back to his family, who lose all their possessions and are shunned by everyone. I cannot run. But to choose the pistol would mean that I'll never see my family again. I have letters from them; they're worried sick about me. Drinking from the bottle of grappa means almost certain death. The drink is supposed to make you feel numb, *a cool numb*. Then you go out and fire the cannon and probably die in the enemy's return bombardment. At least the pistol is a quick death.

The men around me look at each other; each must make his own choice. The man next to me is the first to speak, "I want the pistol."

Silence.

"The rest of you should follow me," he says defiantly.

The officer looks at him and smiles, eager to discharge his duty. As he pulls the hammer of the pistol back, I hear the click . . .

. . . behind me, from the heel of a woman's shoe. I

snap out of my trance and look around to see if anyone has noticed me. I had continued to walk while daydreaming and now stand in front of a World War I monument. In its stone are carved the names of the town's civilians killed in the war—killed because they were in the way. Neatly kept and polished, the marble slab is a testament to the town's respect for its dead. The names are very clear. Some families have several members listed. It's a marker for the dead. It's a symbol for the living. War *is* hell.

Bassano de Grappa is a lovely town. Its center piece is an old wooden bridge with a roof and open sides. The bridge spans an impossibly green, cool river. Red and white flowers seem to flow from the windows of the buildings that line the river. I find little evidence of hell in Bassano.

I do find grappa, though. It's in a bar full of old men having a lunch-time shot of alcohol before going home for a nap. They don't have to go back to work until around three in the afternoon. (Italians know how to live.)

While having a drink with my wife and our traveling companion, I scan the walls of the bar. There are pictures of the old wooden bridge, destroyed. The buildings on both sides of the river lie in heaps of rubble. *So there was some hell here.* The river in these pictures is





an ugly gray; black-and-white pictures do that.

We cross the bridge to find a shop that specializes in grappa and other local liqueurs. We barely understand the directions we are given, but manage to find the shop. I sample the stock; it warms me to my feet. Our traveling companion is in heaven. She buys a bottle of the best grappa. She loves this little town. Maybe there is hope for her.

We decide to have our lunch by the river and find a beautiful spot along the bank. The flowers growing there make a colorful tablecloth. I watch crystal-clear swirls in the river while I eat a meal of bread, cheese, and red wine. Then I drink from a bottle of grappa and walk to the edge of the water. Up close, the current looks menacing. I wade into the water until it reaches my knees. The water is cold and my feet quickly become numb—a cool numb.

It's around two in the morning now; the clock keeps telling me so. My wife is asleep in the bed. My grandmother sleeps in the kitchen. Self-doubt slips into my mind only in the dark of night. *Why do I keep coming back to Italy?* I spend all of our precious money on these trips. Why?

I know. I want to find out why I am what I am. There is little physical evidence—only dreams.

My mother and grandmother both know war. My mother can describe a childhood that I can't imagine. Her war was World War II. She remembers the German soldiers who occupied her country. She and her friends loved to hit steel fences with sticks to annoy the Germans, who would yell at them to go away. She remembers seeing dead fascists lying in the street with pools of blood forming around their bodies.

My grandmother lived through both world wars. She is a tough woman. She saw the Great War right outside her childhood town of Udine. (*A Farewell to Arms* takes place nearby.) In the Second World War, after Italy surrendered to the Allies, Grandma went to the train station in Milan where the Germans were taking Italian soldiers

away to prison camps. She helped gather notes the soldiers had shoved through cracks in the train cars. These men were being sent to die, and wrote the notes to let their families know they were thinking of them.

Near the end of the war, Grandma went to see the fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini. He was just hanging around in Milan—upside down, tied by his feet. He was caught trying to escape into German territory. Few people shed tears over his death. Mussolini was a soldier in World War I; too bad he didn't become a young dead knight with his picture in a cemetery.

It's a Friday night, back home in Iowa. My television is flickering with the movie version of *A Farewell to Arms* playing on PBS. Gary Cooper plays an American volunteer on the Italian front. Badly wounded during an attack, he is taken to a hospital to recover. Helen Hayes plays the British nurse who takes care of him. The two fall in love. The movie is a mass of silly emotions; its makers decided to focus on the love story and not what brought the couple together—the war. The movie presents everything in a positive light, slipping past scenes in the book that depict the reality of war and smoothing over the couple's problems caused by war. I'm mildly surprised when Hayes' character dies during childbirth, as she did in the book. The way it was going, I thought the movie would end with Cooper and Hayes going down to the local café for coffee. *Isn't war a grand old time?* War is hell. This movie is like a cheap Italian hotel bed.

As the movie is ending, my mother calls to say hi. While she speaks, my dog walks into the room and stretches out before me. My attention is split between my mother, my dog, and the movie. I begin to stare at the . . .

. . . body of my fallen comrade. A shiver runs through me. One bullet from the officer's pistol and he was dead. As the body slowly disappears into the dark trench, the officer looks my way. I cannot hide. He moves his head to the right and looks at the bottle of grappa. Then he moves his head to the left to look at the pistol. Then he looks back at me. Now I *must* choose. I grab the bottle and drink, so does the man next to me. I look at the man. His expression is grim, yet proud, as in the picture on the tombstone of a *Cavalier*. His face is familiar, yet somehow younger than it should be. He is my grandfather.

He doesn't speak, but scrambles up the side of the trench and disappears with the others who chose to drink. I cannot follow. I can only watch. A cloudy feeling from the grappa settles over me. Its initial warmth is replaced by a pleasant . . .

. . . chill that has invaded my living room. I shiver as I sit up in my chair. It is passed two in the morning. Thunder rumbles in the distance. I hear it start to rain as I make my way to bed.



To a Dove With a Broken Wing

BY STEPHEN ENGEL

I

sit under the clock
tower
And the bells chime
Over and over
again

As I get up to leave
I can't help but notice
a dove
With a broken wing

It screams and moans
a painful cry
As it tries ever so hard
to fly
away

Only to fall to the ground
in mortal pain

So I do the only thing
that a civilized man could do:
I smash its head with my boot!



From A Journal

BY BILL McNICHOLS

O

October 3, 1991, Foreword

On its journey south—from International Falls, Minnesota, near the U.S.-Canadian border, to Krotz Springs, Louisiana, just outside Baton

Rouge—U.S. Highway 71 passes a number of curious sites: Adam-Ondi-Ahman, which the Mormons believe is the site of the Garden of Eden; the birthplace of Frank and Jesse James, the most notorious of the old-West outlaws; the birthplace of Harry S. Truman, the 33rd President of the United States; the birthplace of George Washington Carver, the 1894 Iowa State University graduate who invented more than four hundred products from peanuts and sweet potatoes; and the home office of Wal-Mart, the fastest growing retail empire in America.

The little town of Mansfield, Arkansas, also sits

along U.S. 71. It takes its place among these other sites in its own way: according to *Ripley's*, the Cooper Prairie Cemetery in Mansfield is the only cemetery in the United States that is split in half by a major highway.

6:49 A.M., Cooper Prairie Cemetery, Mansfield, Arkansas

A cold breeze blows in from the west. An orange-red dawn is just beginning to break. A freshly-dug hole lies waiting.

11:31 A.M., First Baptist Church, Mansfield

The meeting room has been converted into a temporary dining room. Eight 16-foot-long tables, each covered with



a white cloth and set with fourteen place settings, stand in reverent attention over the white linoleum floor. Large plate glass windows in the room face north and south. At the east end of the room, three women stand ready—waiting to serve iced tea or soda in disposable (unecological) styrofoam cups.

In groups of threes, fours, and sixes, the family slowly enters through the door on the west side of the room. Most are Martins, but there are Hartsells, Humphreys, Wootens, Hopes, Mitchells, and McNichols as well.

Jim Wooten blesses the food. The family slowly passes along the food line, picking up pieces of Arkansas fried chicken and helping themselves to chicken 'n' dumplings, chicken stuffing, boiled ham, boiled cabbage, lima beans, pinto beans, green beans, turnip greens, black-eyed peas, sweet potatoes, potato sticks, carrot sticks, celery, and rolls. There is orange Jello, banana cake, raisin cake, chocolate cake, chocolate pie, apple pie, and pecan pie. All are staples of a pre-funeral church meal.

Four-year-old Tommy Hartsell sees his cousins from Dallas through the window and rushes outside to play with them. Billy Humphrey helps himself to a second piece of pecan pie; Virginia Wooten, to a second piece of chicken; Linda Hope, to a third. Grace Martin, wearing widow's black, is not eating.

2:00 P.M., First Baptist Church

Reverend Joel Faircloth, dressed in a navy-blue pinstripe suit and brown Florsheims, stands behind the pulpit with his head bowed. In front of him, covered with a blanket of white and red roses, is the closed, carved-walnut coffin. He raises his head as eighty-three family members enter the sanctuary and sit in the seven center pews reserved in the front of the church. Friends of the deceased fill all the other pews.

The organ is playing. Along the front of the church are twenty-three large floral arrangements of all shapes and varieties, each overflowing with brilliant colors: white, blue, purple, red, orange, and yellow. The choir stands and sings "One Million Years of Amazing Grace."

Faircloth speaks: "We are gathered together this day to honor William Martin; his family; and Christ, his savior. . . . Bill is survived by four sisters, two brothers, a wife, three daughters, one son, eighteen grandchildren, and numerous great-grandchildren. . . . Do not seek Bill among the dead, he is among the living. . . . At 9:30 this past Monday evening, as Grace told him a final good-bye, Bill breathed out his last mortal breath on earth and breathed in his first immortal breath in heaven. . . . Today his mortal body, an empty tent, lies before us. . . . Bill has a new forwarding address, called heaven. Let us pray."



As the reverend says his last "amen," the organist begins playing "Oh What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Two pall bearers come to the front of the church, remove the mantle of roses from the coffin, and raise its lid. Faircloth comes forward and stands at the head of the coffin, waiting.

The mourners are guided, single file, past the coffin; some pause for a silent moment before moving on, some wipe a tear from their eyes, some slightly tremble as they look for the last time upon William Martin—born 1907, died 1991.

Grace Martin holds a black lace handkerchief in front of her face, covering her eyes. She sits as the mourners walk slowly past the coffin. She remains seated as the lid is lowered and fastened shut—*forever*. She remains seated as her husband is wheeled past her, out of the church to the waiting hearse.

2:54 P.M., Cooper Prairie Cemetery

The breeze, now warm, still blows steadily from the west. Cotton-white clouds drift slowly across a Mediterranean-blue sea of sky.

In the center of the northern half of the cemetery stands an open-canopy tent—a blue tent with white lettering: *Martin Funeral Home*. Under the tent, the walnut box is suspended above its hole, surrounded by carpets of artificial grass.



Grace sits on a folding chair a few feet from the coffin. Her three children and four grandchildren sit with her while other mourners crowd into and around the tent. The friends and family of Bill Martin, ages 2 to 97, listen quietly at his grave to the reverend.

Faircloth finishes and shakes hands with the seated family members. Grace slowly rises; a crumpled blue tissue falls unnoticed from her lap. She gets into the lead funeral car with her daughters and is driven away. The other mourners slowly wander to their cars and leave.

No airplanes fly overhead in military salute. No flags fly gallantly in the warm breeze. The reverend picks up a discarded blue tissue that the wind has blown to his feet; he throws it in the trash.

Four cemetery workers in jeans and white T-shirts stand beside a big yellow backhoe and silently watch the mourners depart then hastily begin dismantling the tent and rolling up the fake grass. Nearby, a group of black worker ants, with food in their jaws, scurry along the red Arkansas dirt. Neither group of workers takes notice of the other.

6:38 P.M., Cooper Prairie Cemetery

A cold, solitary puff of breeze moves casually through this place. The sky is a dark mixture of purple, gray, and pink.


Under a blanket of wilting flowers—white, blue, purple, pink, red, orange, and yellow—a fresh mound of Arkansas dirt fills the hole that is Bill Martin's grave. Deep backhoe tracks crisscross through clods of dirt. Like the clouds of the afternoon sky, the blue tent is gone—along with the artificial grass, the funeral cars, and the living. Just Hartsells, Walkers, Drews, Stricklands, Humphreys, Bells, Langwells, Gerwicks, Boyds, Hopes, and Martins—the permanent residents of Cooper Prairie Cemetery—remain.

There are no sounds, except the evening song of birds and cicadas and the occasional car that speeds by on U.S. Highway 71.

6:47 P.M., In the car, headed for the Martin house

The sound of switching stations on the radio mutes thoughts of the funeral: M.C. Hammer raps with the Adams family. . . . Rush Limbaugh gives his "Femi-Nazi Update." . . . A newsman reports on a 5-year-old black girl's accidental murder in a drive-by gang shooting. . . . A country singer laments over his lost love. . . . Forty passengers die in a plane crash. . . . The University of Arkansas football coach predicts victory. . . . People are slaughtering each other in Yugoslavia. . . . Mozart's Requiem.

If there is a meaning to life in all of this, I do not know what it is. But Bill Martin does. . .



DIENA MIERĀ
AIZGĀJUSIEM LATVIEŠIEM

CELI IZSTAIGĀTI,
SMILTĪM KLĀTI,
SIRDS - TĀ ZIN TIK VIENU,
JAUNO DIENU.

THESE ARE THE LATVIANS
WHO HAVE FOUND THEIR REST
WITH GOD

CEMETERY
OPEN
8 AM TO
SUNDOWN
VIOLATORS
PROSECUTED

Isn't It Exhausting

BY CHILAN (FERRY) MARTES

Isn't it exhausting
how death
finds
even the tiniest
hole
in the soul
and widens it
so that
all
the pain
the fear
the salt water
spills
onto
the tile?







DAVE

B

rian Duffy loves Ross Perot. His affection stems from what the Texas billionaire provides him: a wealth of material and a face that suggests even God likes caricature.

Take, for example, Duffy's *Des Moines Register* cartoon from July 21, 1992, six days after Perot withdrew from the presidential race. Top frame: A farmer looks up from working in his corn field. He sees a vision of a big-eared, buzz-topped, bulbous-nosed Perot and hears *the voice*, "Build it . . . and I will come." Bottom frame: In a major-league-size stadium ("Perot Field") packed with anxious fans, the farmer stands in a dugout shouting into a telephone in anger and disbelief, "What do you mean you're not coming?!"

It was a cartoon everyone could like—except, perhaps, Ross Perot. For voters who supported the independent candidate, the cartoon succinctly depicted feelings of betrayal, anger, and hopelessness. For Republicans and Democrats who saw Perot's campaign as a dangerous and unpredictable electoral force, the cartoon roused a smile to follow their bipartisan sigh of relief. And for those who never took Perot seriously (or at least claimed not to), the cartoon cried out a long-awaited *we-told-you-so*.

Duffy draws six such cartoons per week for the *Register*. They're not all political, nor are they all funny. Sometimes they entertain us; sometimes they inform us; sometimes they provoke us. Often, they do all three.

The *Register* is the last major daily in the nation to run a front-page editorial cartoon, and "Duffy's View" is an important, if not integral, part of the page. It can be our emotional mirror, reflecting our national anxiety over war, AIDS, drugs or whatever else is in the headlines. Or it can, through humor, focus our attention on a subject and serve as our jumping-off place into the paper, giving us a last chance to smile before trudging through the news.

Duffy is isolated in a corner of the editorial room behind partitions that give him a relatively large and quiet working space. His office is cluttered; on his desk are scattered the few tools of his trade: pencils, pen tips, brushes, and black india ink—the same tools Thomas Nast used over a century ago.

The man himself is serious and calm; he sometimes seems humorless. But his cartoons and an occasional laugh and smile tell otherwise. He is quiet, yet not reserved—after all, giving his opinion is his job.

Opinion is the meat of an editorial cartoon; it is the message, and the image is the medium. "You have to know how to draw," Duffy says, "but you have to have an interest

Up

Front

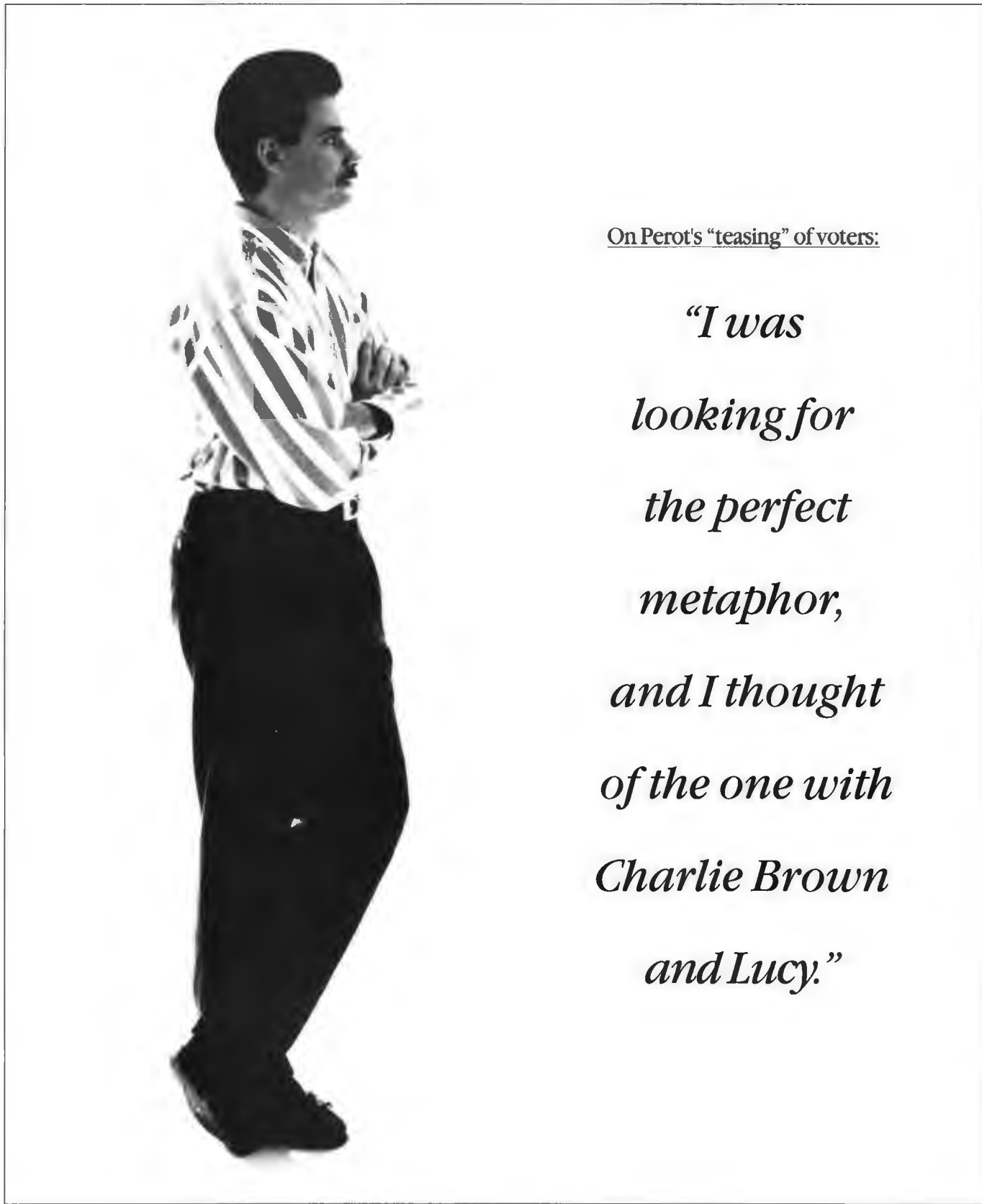
With His

Opinion

STORY AND LAYOUT BY:
PHILLIP MORGAN

DEEV THE DE'S MONIES FIGGERS
© 11 28 85





On Perot's "teasing" of voters:

*"I was
looking for
the perfect
metaphor,
and I thought
of the one with
Charlie Brown
and Lucy."*

in political science and history, and you have to have an interest in stating an opinion."

That philosophy echoes Bill Sanders, whom Duffy regards as his mentor. Sanders was the editorial cartoonist for the *Milwaukee Journal* until he retired from the paper in 1991. In 1973, Duffy—then a high school senior—showed Sanders some of his cartoons. Sanders recognized Duffy's talent and worked with him over the next few years. Although he concentrated mainly on technique, Sanders instilled in his pupil the belief that a cartoon must have something to say. Editorial cartooning, Sanders says, is "driven by opinion."

Duffy has nearly total freedom to express his opinion at the *Register*. While he sometimes bounces ideas off editorial writers, he answers only to the paper's editor and vice president, Geneva Overholser. She says this is a practical arrangement to keep Duffy from answering to both the editorial editor and the news page editor. More important, it's a conscious effort to ensure that "Duffy's View" is really Duffy's view, not the *Register's*.

Although Overholser could function as a gatekeeper, she chooses to limit her editorial role to being an objective viewer, looking for elements that seem unclear or that readers could misunderstand. She says even that role is limited because Duffy has a good sense of what works and what doesn't, what will offend and what won't.

Of course, merely offending people is no crime for a cartoonist. Duffy expects to offend people, it's the nature of the business: "Editorial cartooning is a negative art form to begin with."

Overholser says it's easier to say what a cartoon shouldn't be than what it should. She believes a cartoon shouldn't be bigoted. "It shouldn't appeal to the worst instincts of people," she says. But it isn't always possible to predict what will offend people. "We've had the Jewish community and the Arab community and the Greek community and feminists, blacks, and all sorts of groups mad at us."

A cartoon shouldn't be "gratuitously mean or gratuitously offensive," Overholser says. But she admits those terms are subjective. "It could easily amount to, 'Be nice now Brian,' in which case no cartoon would be worth a hoot."

Overholser sees Duffy using humor, tragedy, and powerful drawing rather than prejudice. "He manages to use more positive tools," she says. "But obviously, if you were Terry Branstad and you were continually drawn as a little guy with sneakers on, you might not agree with that."

Duffy probably wouldn't be surprised if the governor takes umbrage at his caricature. He is occasionally surprised, however, by readers' reactions to some of his cartoons. One he sees as "rather innocuous" may get a lot of





*"If people know a
cliche, and
you use it
in a new format,
you're half way there."*





letters and calls, while another that seems to have “bite,” may get no response at all.

Reader response—positive or negative—is the purpose of his cartoons. Duffy knows he’s covering the right subjects if he provokes response. He believes cartoons need to address issues that people care about—or, as in the case of world hunger, issues that people should care about.

Issues must also be current, so keeping up with the news is vital to Duffy’s trade. The first thing he does when he gets to work is read the newspaper, sometimes spending up to two hours searching for an idea. Any issue is fair game—local, national, or global. But his cartoons must deal with subjects he feels strongly about; they must take a definite position in order to be quickly and easily understood.

Richard Doak, deputy editorial editor for the *Register*, is one of the people on whom Duffy tries out ideas. “You think of a cartoonist as just this guy who sits around and draws funny pictures,” Doak says, “but Brian is extremely well-read.”

Although Duffy is not officially an editorial staff member, he attends editorial meetings to find out what issues the writers will cover. “He comes to our conferences easily as well informed as we editorial writers,” Doak says. “His ideas don’t just come out of thin air; he really does his homework.”

Duffy credits his high school teachers with encouraging him to look at all sides of an issue before forming an opinion. In Asian history classes, for example, his teachers talked extensively about Russia and China to give their cold-war-era students a historical understanding of communism. Duffy remembers a political-science instructor telling him, “I want to make sure you understand, so if you’re out there doing cartoons you know what you’re talking about.”

While in high school, Duffy considered himself a liberal. When he got to college, however, he found he was much more moderate than he had thought. Now, he approaches issues individually rather than ideologically and doesn’t believe it’s accurate to define him as conservative or liberal, Republican or Democrat.

Duffy sees those labels as being inaccurate for the general public as well. He says it was once possible to divine someone’s position on an issue based on his or her political affiliation, but that that’s no longer the case. He says people don’t automatically fall in line with their parties any more. The advantage of this is that people are forced to think about their opinions instead of hiding behind party loyalty. People must decide for themselves what they believe.

Cartoonist Pat Oliphant said deciding what to believe is the exhausting part of cartooning. But Duffy shows no



Duffy's daughter Alissa, 4. Duffys says his four daughters often end up in his cartoons. They serve as an inspiration for his "slice-of-life" cartoons, which usually run on Sundays.

sign of exhaustion. With a space to fill on the front page almost every day of the week, he has no room for indecision or cartoonist's block. "You can't just say, 'I don't feel creative today,' or else you won't have a job," Duffy says. "You have to really work and find a subject you have an opinion on and a subject people are going to recognize, and draw it."

The opinion may be the meat of a cartoon, but we can't eat it if it's served with an uncooked image. Good illustration skills are essential to cartoonists, but it takes dedication to learn them. "It's not something you go to college for and take Cartooning 101 and come out with a bachelor of arts degree in drawing George Bush," Duffy says.

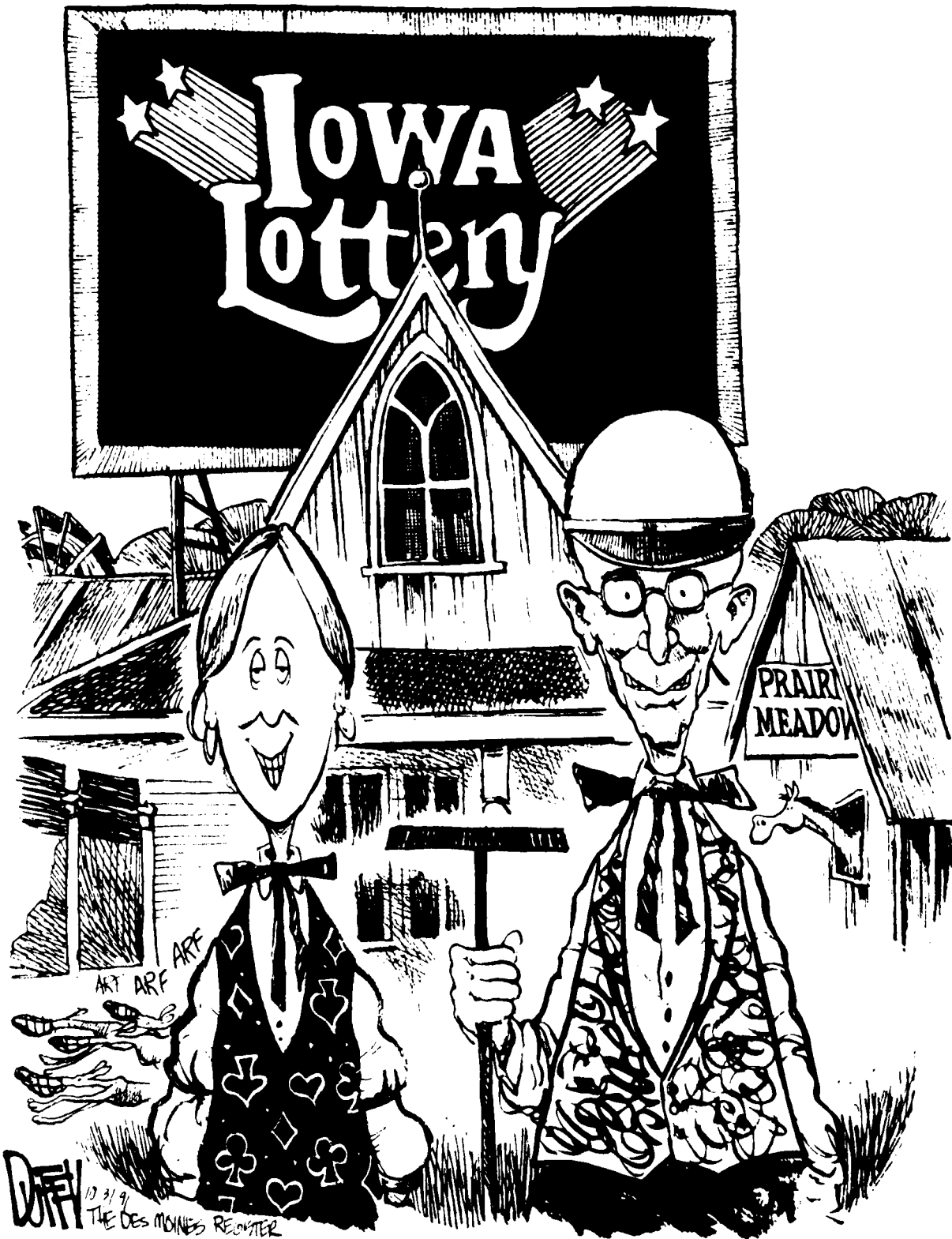
He started copying cartoons in second grade. In high school, his own cartoons took on a political edge, and his work has been primarily editorial ever since. That's due in part to Sanders' tutelage. Duffy showed talent when he went to Sanders, but his drawing needed work. Yet, he was different from most of the would-be cartoonists who sought Sanders' advice. "He really had the hunger to be a political cartoonist," Sanders says. "He worked at it, and every time he would come back you could see that work."

Duffy continued to work on cartooning after high school, but it wasn't until 1976 that he started drawing regularly for a newspaper—first the *Daily Cardinal* at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, then the *UWM Post* at the Milwaukee campus. In 1981, Duffy began freelancing for the *Waukesha Freeman*, focusing on state and local issues. By 1982 he was working for both the *Freeman* and *Milwaukee Magazine*.

The big break came in 1983. He was selected over more than 100 applicants to fill the opening created by the death of the *Des Moines Register's* long-time cartoonist, Frank Miller. Since then, as a full-time cartoonist, Duffy has refined his style and sharpened his wit. "When you sit here and draw 290 of these a year," he says, "you're bound to get better at it."

The economy with which Duffy communicates is what makes his cartoons work. He doesn't belabor his message with detail; rather, he strips it down to its simplest form for all to understand. In the "Perot Field" cartoon, Duffy made his point in two frames, using fifteen words and a concept he borrowed from a movie. The image was so concise and the message so clear, a reader could have looked at it, laughed, looked at it again, laughed again, and moved on to the day's major headlines (still laughing) all in about the same time it takes to read this paragraph.

Simplicity is the rule. Duffy's approach to drawing a cartoon is to make it a "quick read," using an image we can easily understand with as few words as possible. The easiest images to understand are those we see the most. They





become visual clichés. While the conscientious writer tries hard to avoid clichés, an editorial cartoonist relies on them. “We use them all,” Duffy says with a laugh. “You use clichés and metaphors to get your ideas across.”

With a very limited amount of time to relay those ideas, Duffy says it’s important to enable his audience to move quickly from the image to the idea. “If people know a cliché and you use it in a new format, you’re half way there.”

To comment on our society’s increasing dependence on consumer credit, Duffy used the cliché of a house of cards falling under its own weight. Instead of playing cards, he drew credit cards.

Exaggeration is a cartoonist’s mainstay. Duffy says it allows him to get closer to the meaning of a subject than he could otherwise. Accuracy is a journalistic pursuit that carries less weight with cartoonists than it does with reporters or columnists. “We all kind of tread on the line of libel,” Duffy says of cartoonists. “That’s what ticks off a lot of columnists and reporters, because they feel we’re kind of the jokers of the political spectrum.”

He says he’s free to rely less on evidence and more on gut feeling. That’s not to say that Duffy disregards the truth, rather, he seeks to express the truth as he sees it, and he believes he’s less hindered in doing so than a writer would be.

Duffy sees himself as having more latitude than some

other cartoonists, as well. Gary Trudeau’s “Doonesbury” often has a decidedly editorial tone, but Duffy says Trudeau is bound to humor and thus limited in how he can address an issue. “You’re not going to see Trudeau draw a picture of a Serbian as Hitler with the Angel of Death.” Duffy can draw such a picture without having to worry about making it funny: “I can use the gamut of emotions.”

There’s nothing funny about his 1985 image of an emaciated Ethiopian child, whose distended belly is the shape of the globe. His powerful use of pathos in that cartoon and one in 1986, also on famine in Ethiopia, earned him two first-place World Hunger Media Awards.

Like humor, criticism isn’t always the purpose of Duffy’s cartoons either. When Muppet Creator Jim Henson died in 1990, Duffy drew a cartoon in his honor. The teary-eyed Muppets of “Sesame Street” look on as Henson exits the stage for good. Duffy also draws what he calls “slice-of-life” cartoons, commenting on the weather or a family trip to the state fair—light-hearted images of daily life meant only to entertain.

Caricature is a favorite Duffy tool. It’s where his style is most evident, and his wit is its sharpest. “I usually go on the basis that all politicians are funny-looking people,” Duffy says, “and I proceed from there.”

He relies on photographs and videos to draw his caricatures. He also likes to see his subjects in person, but avoids meeting them—fearing that might compromise his ability to criticize.

When developing a caricature, Duffy stretches out the face to see what “pops out.” “All of a sudden, the ears start to seem bigger than anybody else’s,” he says, “and the nose grows.”

Duffy says his caricatures evolve in many different ways, and the more he draws them, the more he exaggerates their features. Ronald Reagan and George Bush are examples. Reagan’s wrinkles multiplied throughout his second term, and Bush’s chin continues to grow.

Terry Branstad and Dan Quayle, however, are exceptions. Their caricatures remain little boys, just as Duffy has always drawn them. He says that Quayle has never matured in the mind of the public, hence the wide eyes and boyish grin Duffy attributes to him. Cartooning can be a mirror of public opinion, he says. “You’ve got to pick up on that and use it.”

Whether he is reflecting public opinion or projecting his own, Duffy takes satisfaction in being able to say what he feels is important. He isn’t preoccupied with advancing his career. As a full-time cartoonist at a major daily, with a job market of about 150 such positions nationwide, Duffy is topped-out. That’s OK, he’s content. “If you’re reaching people with your cartoons,” he says, “that’s the most important thing.”



JIM HENSON: 1936-1990

Brian Duffy

PERSONAL/FAMILY:

Brian Duffy was born on May 9, 1955. He and his wife, Sharon, were married in 1975. They live in West Des Moines with their four daughters: Tara, 17; Shanna, 10; Tiffin, 7; and Alissa, 4.

EDUCATION:

After graduating in 1973 from Wauwatosa West High School in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, Duffy attended the University of Wisconsin at the Oshkosh and Milwaukee campuses. In 1980 he transferred to the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Duffy drew cartoons for his high school newspaper and two college newspapers. He freelanced for his first commercial publication, the *Waukesha Freeman*, as an editorial cartoonist from 1981 to 1983. In 1982 he started drawing for *Milwaukee Magazine* as well. His cartoons for the *Freeman* dealt with local and state issues, while those for *Milwaukee Magazine* focused on issues mainly affecting Milwaukee County. He also illustrated feature stories for the magazine.

Duffy was selected over more than 100 applicants for an opening at the *Des Moines Register* in 1983 following the death of the paper's long-time cartoonist, Frank Miller. Duffy's cartoons are now nationally syndicated and have run in hundreds of newspapers. He has drawn posters for the Iowa State Fair and produced a 1992 calendar with the Science Center of Iowa.

AWARDS:

Duffy won first place in the World Hunger Media Awards in both 1985 and 1986 for cartoons based on the famine in Ethiopia. Also in 1986, he was a finalist for the Fischetti Award. The award is given by the *Chicago Sun-Times* and Columbia College in Chicago in honor of cartoonist John Fischetti, who died in 1980. In the Best of Gannett Contests of 1986 and 1987—sponsored by the Gannett Company, which owns the *Register*—Duffy took second and third place awards, respectively, for editorial cartooning.





Sharing

BY KATHY FITZSIMMONS

I have opened
my every petal

to you,

yet I feel

Something (more)

softly pulling me,

tantalizing

as that night's

golden moon beam touch,

bending way

for the sun to crest.



Frog Song

By JENNA PROCYK

B

R R A A U U G G H H T

Upon the muddy banks,
Beneath the dimming sky.

B R R A A U U G G H H T

Somewhere in the reeds,
An amphibious reply.

B R R A A U U G G H H T

Melodiously I bellow,
Beneath the rising moon.

B R R A A U U G G H H T

Comes the love's answer,
A rhythmic throaty croon.

B R R A A U U G G H H T

Beside the rippling river,
Deep melodies are made.

B R R A A U U G G H H T

Evening shadows lengthen,
To our baritone serenade.

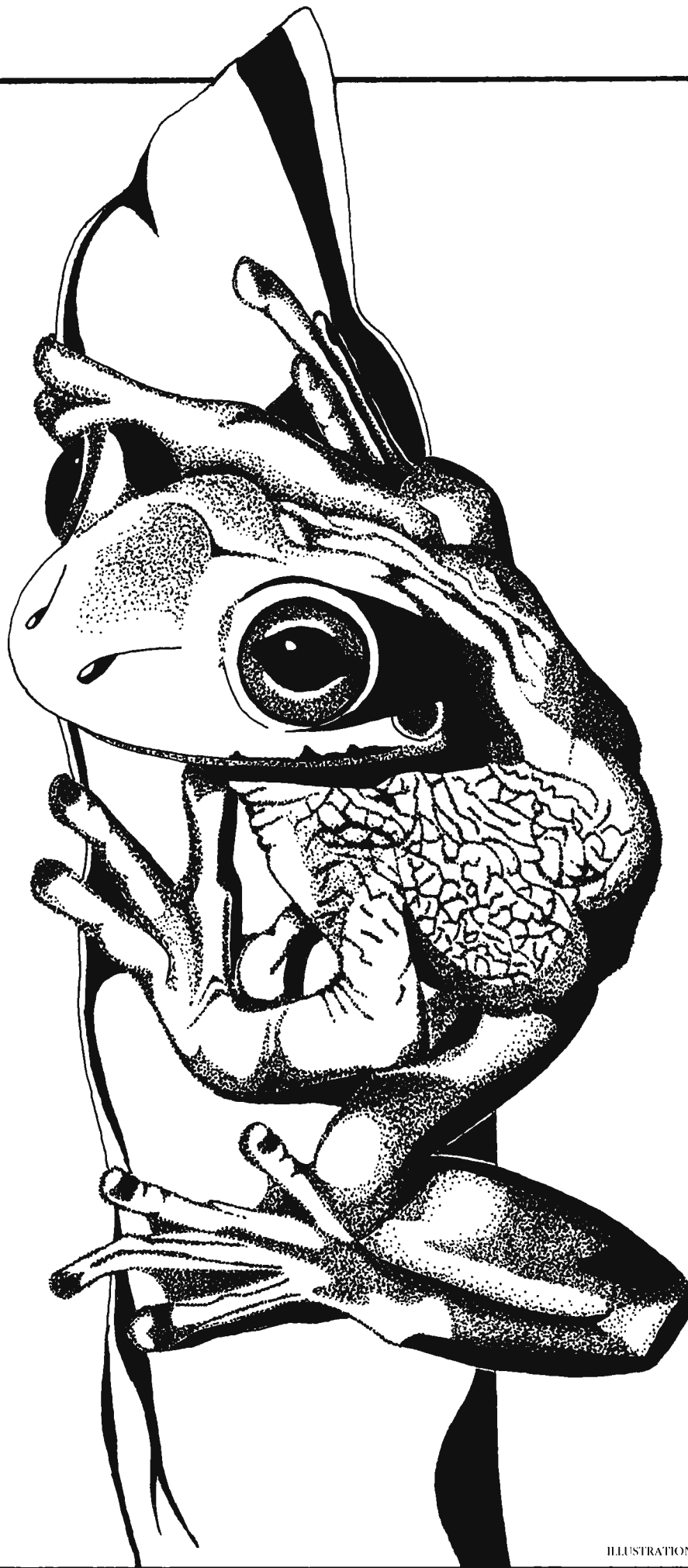


ILLUSTRATION: PAMELA KEENAN

The Magnificent Peace

By SUZIE GARNETT

From the watery womb we are born ;

To the water, we return.

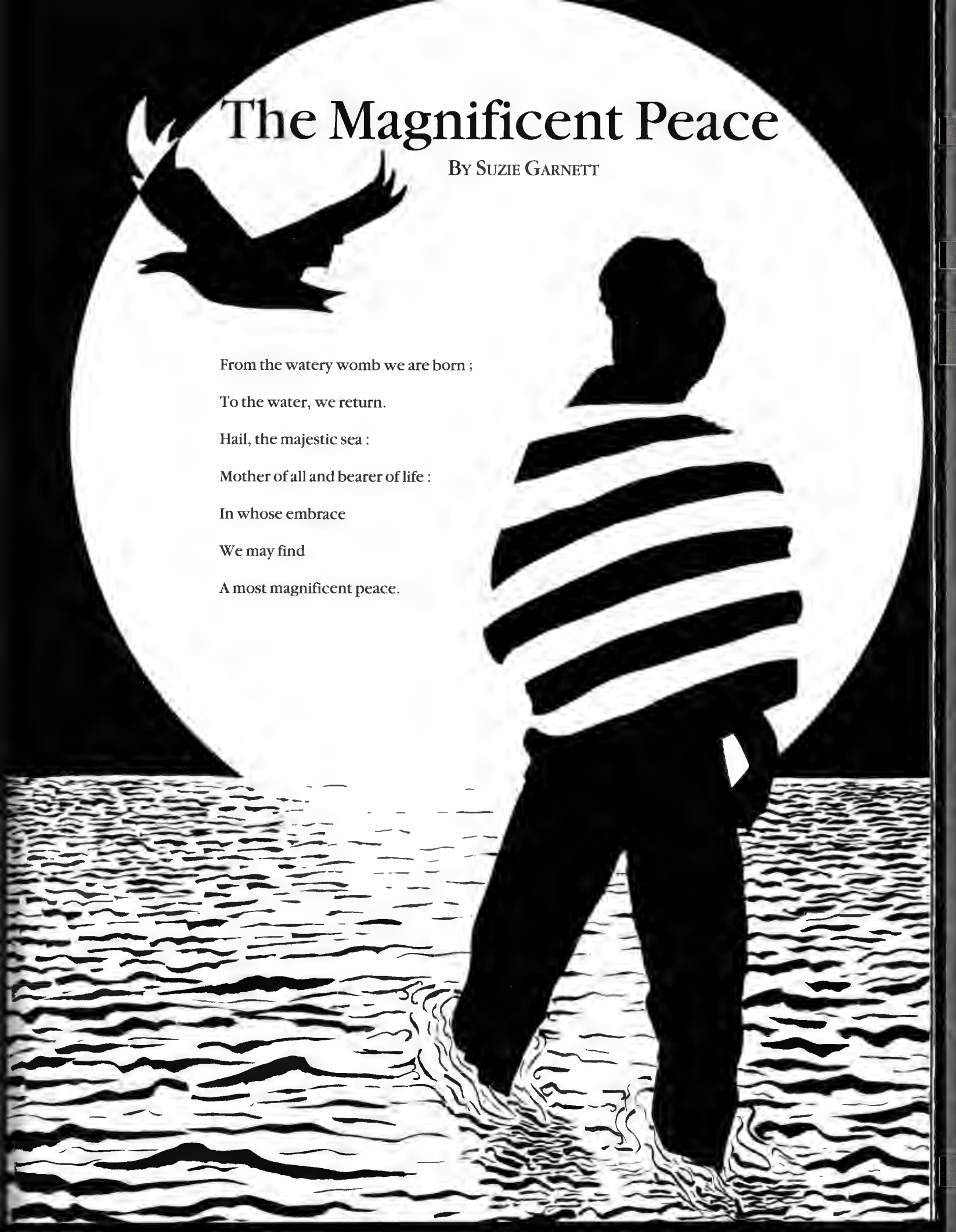
Hail, the majestic sea :

Mother of all and bearer of life :

In whose embrace

We may find

A most magnificent peace.



Backward Glances

BY NANCY DOWNEY

Drinking my tea in the morning
I try not to think of all that I left.

Fog-shrouded shores
Gray ghosts gliding on the ocean
Gulls fighting over scraps of bread.

A house of my own
Friends who come calling
Neighbors to greet and gossip with.

Faces that bring a smile to my heart
Cars almost as exotic as their drivers
Children hustling in the streets.

Drinking my tea in the morning
I try not to think of all that is left—
A man-child who is a sometime stranger,
A cat's face with loving blue eyes,
A cracked image of broken memories.





PHOTO: MARY OHLAND

To My Poem Mentor

BY JENNA PROCYK

I

've unleashed another array
of characters upon the page
arranged in some abstract manner
to find meaning where
none previously existed.

Maybe tonight, finally,
I shall be overcome
by sleep, exhausted
by the words
Driven from me.

I am troubled by the meter,
sloppy as it was
spewed forth in an
unrestrained
unorganized
Purging of my thoughts.

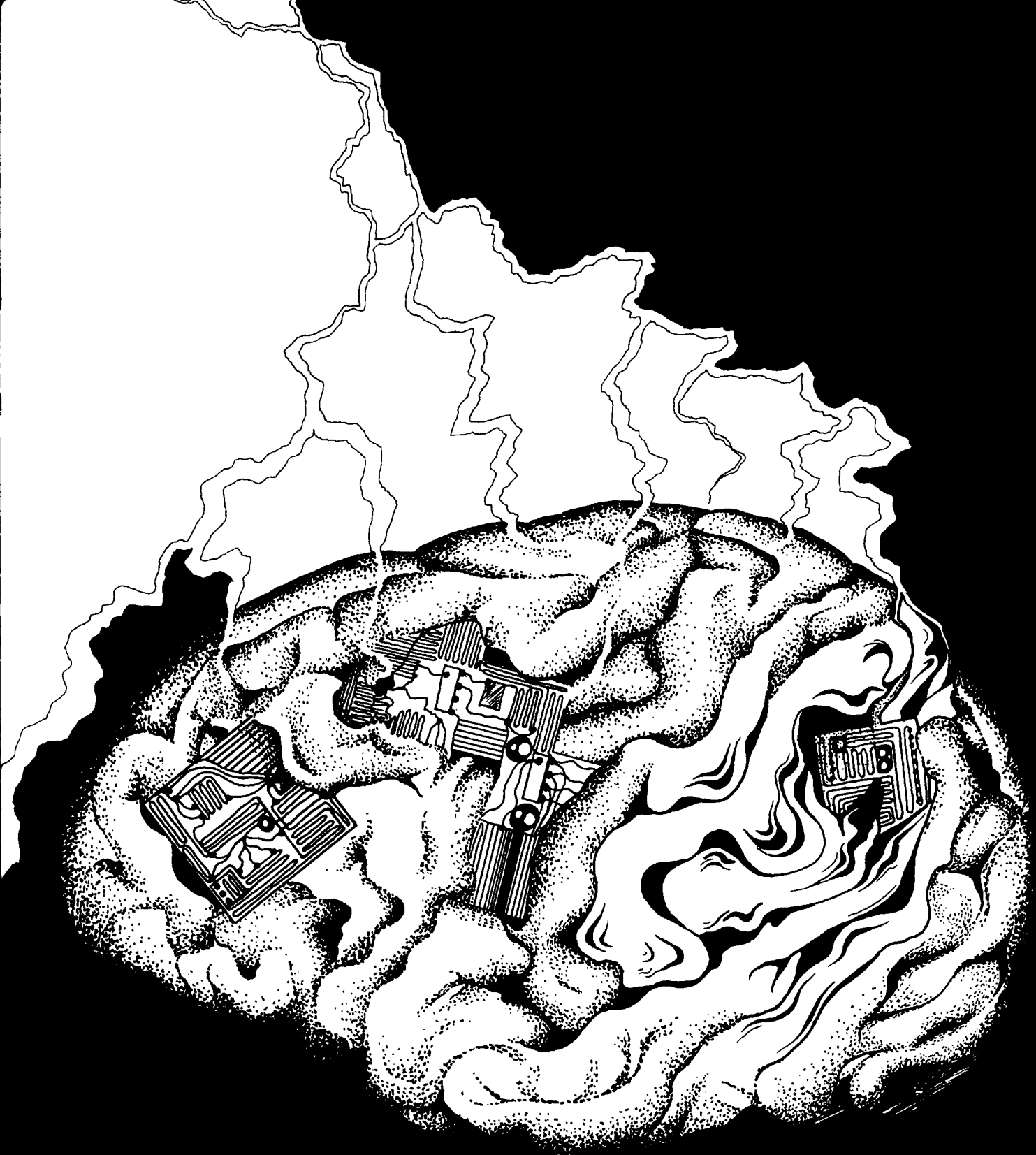
This is how it happens
with me, you know
I am plagued by these
whirling entities that swirl
dancing in my mind until
The thing is Borne.

I have let it go untouched too long they
have stockpiled and as one
gets out the others become
impatient unable to wait for the
proper form the
metered rhyme and then . . .

They're born deformed, somehow
lacking something
premature sometimes
Though never fragile.

Too anxious to sit upon the pulpous throne
too eager to be propped on the mantled page
These idea embryos of mine that wish
They could be poems.

—from the poem-tormented



Dance of the Dead

BY SUZIE GARNETT

T

hey come upon
The gathering place each night.

The ritual is the same.

They dance;
They drink;
And with languid tongues
That lap in the night
Do they spin stories
Of soft silver hooves
Upon burnished sands.

And when the Den
Of the Dead has retired,
In Unison they scatter
With their coaches of
Weary, wobblesome legs
To bear them home.

Wherein they are hidden
In the drunken slumber of silence
And wait
For the sun to set
Upon their lives.

Evening visits again,
As is ordered among things.
The lonely little lanterns
Placed carefully upon the sills
Burn feverishly against the night.

It is time—once more—
For the slumbering coaches
To awaken.
For hasten they must
To the festive dance
Of the dead.





PHOTO: KAY EWALD



Slick as a snake

or so I thought

until that day

that I got caught.

She punished me

for my lie

even after I apologized

and began to cry.

However, as the tears

ran down my face,

I knew that

the next time

I lied

I would not

leave a trace.

Why I Don't Shave

BY JIM MINER

I

gaze upon my shaggy reflection

I have no responsibility

I have no job to make appearance at

I have no people to impress in social places

I have no women I wish to woo

All I have is the freedom of this beard.



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