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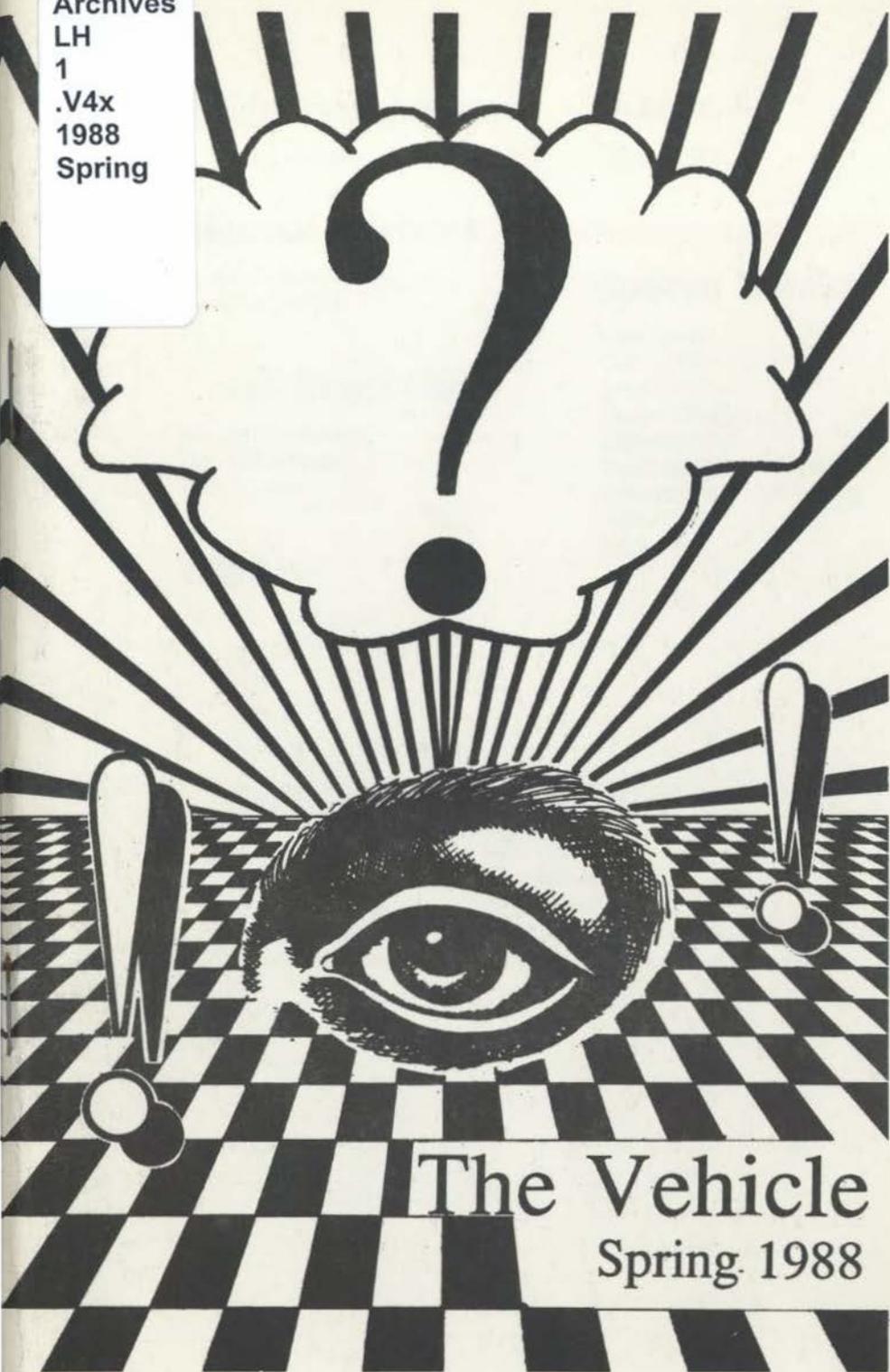
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The Vehicle  
Spring 1988

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# VEHICLE Spring 1988

## Contents

Citizen .....	Craig Tittle .....	3
Justice Distribution .....	Angie Gerald .....	4
Letter from My Mother .....	Dan Von Holten .....	6
The Fool and His Lady .....	Rodger Patience .....	7
What Big Is .....	Bob Zordani .....	8
Blind Architecture .....	Jim Reed .....	9
Ah, What a Funny Thing These Eyes .....	Craig Tittle .....	10
Farming .....	Patrick Peters .....	11
The Cow .....	Steven M. Beamer .....	13
The Enigma of My Existence .....	Angie Kath .....	14
Neon Teeth .....	Michael Salem .....	15
Zombie Poseidon .....	Michael Salem .....	16
From: Letters from the Linder Building .....	Pat Peters .....	17
	Bob Zordani	
	Dan Von Holten	
A Man of Jackson IV (City Dweller) .....	Steven M. Beamer .....	19
11:45 p.m. Friday .....	Elizabeth McMeekan .....	20
Mr. Siegel—January 1967 .....	Timothy J. McCarthy .....	21
She had a look about her...		
A bag man of Jackson pauses for a portrait .....	Steven M. Beamer .....	22
Citybed (Homeless of Chicago) .....	Steven M. Beamer .....	23
Electra and the Eighteen Wheeler .....	Tammy Veach .....	24
Order .....	Rhonda Ealy .....	28
Grave Mill I .....	Steven M. Beamer .....	29
The Party (A Social Event in 80 Words or Less) .....	Groucho Smith .....	30
Graceland and Elvis Presley Earmuffs .....	Craig Tittle .....	31
Learning to Forage .....	Dan Von Holten .....	33
One Last Peanut at Gateway Center		
Reflections of Three with DeCicco and Lady .....	Steven M. Beamer .....	34
Letter from the Midwest .....	Patrick Peters .....	35
Woodwind .....	Jim Reed .....	36
Excerpts from Notebook Australia .....	Keith Schuster .....	37
Letter from the Desert .....	Patrick Peters .....	40
Tinted Blue, Waiting for an Uptown Taxi .....	Michael Salem .....	42
Voice and Earth: A Review of .....	Dan Von Holten .....	43
<i>The Invention of the Telephone</i> by Bruce Guernsey		

## Citizen

I have a need  
to wave my arms  
from the tops of skyscrapers,  
making grand gestures  
while every  
floodlight, spotlight, flashlight,  
eye below  
illuminates me.

I have a need  
to decorate the  
magazines, televisions, movie screens,  
billboards  
proclaiming:

"I am a new kind of piper.  
If you will follow me, I will  
play what you want to hear."

I have a need  
to dance across countries  
holding my banner  
with many behind  
and few in front  
announcing  
that I am here and  
you will hear.

I have a need  
to whisper  
"Rosebud"  
at the end of the day  
down from skyscrapers,  
face unknown, dancing alone  
while the rest of the world  
waits.

**Craig Titley**

## Justice Distribution

I knew that he was stroking her thigh beneath the table – just as he had done in Buffalo and Dayton and everywhere else Amway representatives congregate. For once, though, I had been invited along to a banquet. . . . Mona usually went alone (with the exception of Bill, the district manager, who was now cruising up her skirt). I was angry that she was flaunting their affair like a pair of false eyelashes. Nobody was supposed to know it existed, but it was only too obvious. On the other hand, I was grateful that I had been included in the evening's festivities. It was rare that I got a break from the nightshift.

"Over one hundred uses. . . . swipe and wipe, that's what I always tell 'em. . . . yessirree, it's fast." Bill has always been a master of puddle-deep conversation. I rarely listen to his sales pitches – watching his blinking capped-whites usually amuses me enough to prevent me from slipping into a coma. Tonight, though, they were flashing on and off like those neon signs you see at motels. . . . cheap motels. The kinds that Mona and Bill stayed at. It stopped. Now Mona was babbling about something; she always is.

The waiter interrupted our soup (cream of celery) by bringing a bottle of the finest wine in the Holidome, Hispanola Finesta. Nearly fifteen bucks a bottle. . . . 'course it cost extra to have the cap removed in the kitchen. I let them toast each other. . . . to our health, our happiness. . . . that was a joke because while I sat there fingering the rim of my untouched glass, Bill was fondling a wine glass with his right hand and doing the same to my wife with his left.

Champagne. . . . there's something to toast with. The last time I had champagne was at my wedding. Mona didn't drink hers because she didn't like rice in her bubbly – Mona doesn't like a lot of things. That day, after the wedding, she stood in the receiving line and kissed every single man at the wedding. I noted that she was quite enthusiastic about it also. I wouldn't have been surprised if she had pulled some men off the street. I should have known then that I would have to watch out for her. . . . she could turn out to be utterly faithless. After the reception, I went looking for her so that we could leave for our honeymoon. I found her in the church choir loft with her ex-beau, Chuck. She said he was just giving her a wedding gift.

"More wine, sir?"

I let Bill nod to the boy, even though I was the one who tipped him. Acne-prone and enrolled in college, he was one boy who knew the value of a dollar – and the values you need to earn it. The Salisbury steak entree soon followed Pete the waiter's departure.

"Undercooked and overpriced. . . love this stuff. . . more gravy?" For the next ten minutes, Bill enumerated the virtues of the meat. Bill was a fine one to talk about virtue. The first time Mona had him over for dinner, he told us that all of his people rose quickly to the top. He was one of the most successful district managers. I'll just bet his people rose to the top — I only wonder what they had to do to attain such altitude. Perhaps some groveling, begging and pleading on her knees had helped Mona. Within four months she had outsold her peers and replaced her immediate boss.

Mona is not smart. I know how dumb she is, as well as whiny, irritatingly feminine and completely lacking in knowledge of how a wife should act. Therefore, I know that she could not have risen so quickly on account of her sparkling personality much less her supreme intelligence. There was one way, and one way only.

Mona tittered and touched Bill's arm. I saw the meaningful look pass between them. . . the lingering fingertips and the expression of utter devotion were not lost on me either. The waiter came back with more steak for Bill and more julienne cheese potatoes for Mona. I wondered if we would be charged for them above and beyond the \$10.95 we had already paid per plate. I also waited for some more wine.

"Yep. . . Product H. . . great stuff. . . over a hundred uses." Bill was droning on and on again. I'd like to give him a hundred uses. I hope he chokes on it. Fortunately, the wine-boy came by again — I motioned for another bottle, and when he returned, I slipped him a fifty for his trouble.

"No trouble at all sir, no trouble at all. Would you like another bottle?" Yessir, this was one boy who knew the value of a dollar.

Trouble. That's all Mona's position in the company has caused me. Like last month when she came home from the Cincinnati convention. A man's sock was in her suitcase.

"Oh honey, your sock musta stuck to my sweater. Didn't you notice it missing?" Oh baby, static cling didn't do that. Besides it was the wrong shade of blue to be my missing sock. I had just smiled though, and walked away clean. I knew that I would have my chance.

"Sold over three hundred cases to the McMurray company. . . ought to be real proud of her. . . some lady in Lansing used it to polish her dentures. . . warned her about putting them in her mouth. . . could have been fatal. . . lawsuit written all over. . ." Mona cooed and blushed over the compliment. I nearly threw up. Instead, I entertained myself by tracing the H on the wine bottle. Luckily, the cheesecake arrived — with another bottle of wine.

Cheesecake had always been my favorite dessert. I used to make Mama bake it all the time. Cherry cheesecake was the best. Once when Mama forced me to choke down my kohlrabi slices with my milk, I was rewarded with the last slice of cheesecake. My brother ate it though before I could get to the kitchen. He was always taking things from me. Mama just smiled and said, "Next time you can have a slice." I hated her for not yelling at my brother.

"More cheesecake. . . don't mind if I take this last piece?"

I envisioned them in a motel room. . . Mona standing naked on the bed and Bill rubbing that smelly Amway lotion all over her until she is covered in a greasy film. Mona would do the same for him. Then, like two slimy slugs in a mucous sac, they would mate. I bet she even liked it with him. I would burst through the door and throw Product H on them. Too bad it couldn't cleanse

their insides as well as it did the formica countertops in our kitchen. Mona would cry and big fat baby tears would wash through her mascara. Bill. He would smile. Naked and vulnerable and so very trapped, he would smile.

"Product H. . . really cuts through the grease. . . slimy countertop messes. . . quarter-sized slug will clean. . . anything." I shuddered and watched the two pick up their glasses and toast again. Long live Amway. The wine-boy cracked the fifty over their shoulders and smirked. Bill and Mona, practically making love on the table. . . now talking about Product H. . . his hand. . . her leg. . . blinking teeth. . . their lips. . . two glasses. . . clink — drink — clink — drink—.

I smoothed my trousers as I stood up and walked away. Behind me I left a pack of immoral slobs, Product H still on their lips. Mona and Bill face-down in the complimentary cheesecake.

**Angie Gerald**

## Letter from My Mother

I've just opened a part-used box  
of brown rice I had to cook for lunch  
and found worms  
floating in the boiling water.  
The high heat and humidity are  
causing worms in lots of dried stuff

so I thought I'd warn you  
to watch close so you'll see them—  
they're small and white and  
of course shaped different than the rice.  
It's better to keep stuff in glass jars  
or Tupperware in the summer, I guess

but I usually don't have a problem.  
Once in a while flour is bad—  
the eggs are there  
and hatch in warm weather.  
That's all for now. It was nice  
to have you home for a visit.

**Dan Von Holten**

Before you

## The Fool and his Lady

I can't reach you —  
But I can stop the world  
In a frozen moment  
Whirlwind of spun color  
Red and blue flashing before my eyes  
All I see is your face  
I dazzle the people  
But my heart isn't bright

You sing to the westward sun  
I juggle in evening twilight  
And think I hear  
                  yellow and blue flashing

But all I see is a  
Ring of leering faces  
Watching the fool —

Sing to the lady  
Call to her, fool  
Breathe to her in colors  
Live with her in the colors of your art

Juggling  
Is my foolish heart  
Singing clumsy songs in the morning sun  
Hands moving always moving  
                  red, blue, yellow

The sun is setting now  
I turn to the stars  
Light from my fingertips  
(it's a trick! I cry)  
And the people laugh

But I can't be magic  
Without my lady

**Rodger Patience**

## What Big Is

To show what big is I stretch out my arms  
as if they will wrap the earth in their tiny  
circle. My arms are colossal; they extend like  
highways across road maps, branch off like rural routes,  
fade into the green facade of fields. And somewhere  
nearby, an old man, maybe my grandfather, is oiling  
his combine or greasing his hair. I'm only close enough  
to sense it. My fingers reach for familiar dirt.

But the classroom reeks, I reek. I am not man  
enough to make a point, so scowl and look down.  
The floor runs into the hallway which leads  
to the door. I am outside, kicking dirt. Rock  
and my toe hurts. Leave it to me. Today impending rain,  
blanket of bleak, chug chug, coming in. And in  
I go, studying ceiling tiles. High time to do this.  
Whistle in the stairwell, hear it echo back.

Backing away, away, away, I turn and run toward  
town. Stop. Red light and I hurdle the street,  
bounce like a huge rubber ball down the hill. I am  
nothing but my sad and soiled reputation rolling  
to a halt at these four steps. A crowd roars.  
Funny as it may seem, I'm at the post office,  
mailing letters. Seventy-two cents postage and I'm  
stamped First Class, off to the great southwest.

Big is the tawdry night, full of stars.  
Big is the sunswept moon at which I swoon.  
Big is the open mouth of my unborn son, howling  
down the desert plain, and plain is the big scythe  
of death which laid down the day from which I came.  
Big is the butt of all my jokes, me. And big are  
the smooth arcs of my arms, hardy acres just now coming back  
into sight, recoiling and shortening, yearning for sleep.

**Bob Zordani**

# Blind Architecture

Before you

I looked  
wide-eyed every night  
my bedroom walls  
imitation pine, knotted, bruised  
and dreamt—  
snarling warhorses, thundering  
chariots, laughing elves,  
treed and hidden  
a goddess came and went  
with the wind in silver leaves  
beasts  
so hideous, dark  
only felt  
frost on the neck—  
never seen  
steel  
cold as moonlight bled  
blood  
black as a beggar's tooth.

In you

soft braille  
my dreams  
rough cut panels  
bleached  
to a sickly white stucco  
breathing your memories—  
a woman, a time  
when day was light  
night  
only a dream  
your cold bones hang  
silent eyes  
on the walls  
my walls  
curtains kept closed  
cold  
moonlight would  
dance upon your eyes  
I  
sleep—  
imitation pine, knotted, bruised  
wanting her, the silver leaves  
lines, grain  
wither and fade  
and night beams  
black  
as a beggar's tooth.

Jim Reed

# Ah, What a Funny Thing These Eyes

Peeping Toms—  
They sneak around, place to place,  
Hoping for the Perfect View,  
The ultimate thrill.

Then, like good church kids,  
They won't lie  
When the rest of me  
Is perfectly willing.

Saying too much —  
a tear, a stare, a wink —  
They leave it up to me  
To make excuses,  
Save my good name.

The only way to  
Shut them up,  
Control them —  
Sleep.

Not so.  
They were up all night  
Showing porn flicks  
On the back of my mind.

**Craig Titley**

## Farming

I started in a warehouse last November, decent money, and Elsie and I had talked about a house. She would say, while we sat cramped in our trailer, "Let's move onto a farm where we don't see these crackerboxes day and night."

I would tell her then, "Things are good now, Elsie. I'm full-time, might get moved to first shift soon. We're saving lots staying here."

"In a crackerbox," she would say.

That always put me in a bad humor. "I'm not a farmer, understand? And farms are damned expensive," I'd say, "especially on six an hour." All the talk would die then for awhile.

Late, when we were supposed to be asleep, she would say, "I'm sorry, Earl. I just want some things. I don't want to get old with nothing. Living off nothing." And she would pull up close to me, like she was bitter cold, and say that.

I admit, once we were out there, I took to it. At dusk we would sometimes see a deer feeding along the fields. Two stray cats kept the house free of mice. Dogs came and went. I remember Jake and Barney, another with dark brown spots on a shaggy white coat, part beagle, part collie. Its name escapes me.

George and I hunted together when the mornings were clear, and he wasn't busy. We didn't shoot much, mostly just walked the land around his farm, our guns safetied, sometimes unloaded, under our arms. A sudden burst of quail out of a thicket would make us shout, and one of us would maybe shoot much too late, when the quail had flown their complicated patterns and almost touched down again. The quiet after the ring of the shotgun faded would make me think of how the birds exploded out of the brush, and I would try to hold that picture long enough for it to stick in my mind exactly as it happened.

That first spring I started the garden. When George saw it taking over most of the back yard he laughed, pushing up his cap, and said, "I don't know how in hell you're going to eat so many vegetables. Does Elsie can?"

Elsie waited up for me to come home from work at midnight. I would accuse her then of digging in the garden while I was gone, saying, "How else could it have it gotten that size?" She would pull me at the waist, saying right into my eyes, "Earl, I love you." Those words and her eyes were like the palm of a big hand pushing all my worries from work down through my legs, through the wooden floors of the house, and into the ground.

George, or his wife Bev, would sometimes bring us fresh eggs, telling us how pleased they were we kept the place up so fine. The rent was cut almost in half on a bargain George gave me for painting one of the barns.

One morning, near the start of summer, George brought some eggs. As we talked in the sunlight between the house and the barn, I noticed Elsie holding the screen door open, staring into the box of uncolored eggs. Finally she went inside, holding the eggs in front of her, still looking into the box.

George left to do some work on a lawn mower, and when I went inside Elsie was standing in the living room. The eggs sat on a table near the win-

dow.

"Els, what's wrong?"

"I had forgotten eggs were animals and not vegetables, until I saw them in the box, brown like that," she said, and handed me an egg. It was warm as I rolled it back and forth from palm to palm, feeling its fragility.

Later in June, when the mornings warmed, I began hoeing and weeding barefoot in the garden. My feet would be dark with dirt, and Elsie pumped well water over them, splashing us both. But it was summer, and the water was pleasing on the feet and legs and had an iron taste that made it more than water somehow when we drank it there in the mornings. Elsie had to talk me into going to work each afternoon.

Once a bull snake crossed the lane and slid into the shed where we kept our car. Elsie stopped washing my feet and held her bucket still, watching the snake.

"I figure there's a nest in there," I said, but nothing was ever done about it.

Elsie came into our bedroom and woke me early one morning. I didn't smell anything cooking, and the old radio we had set on the kitchen window-sill hummed something with a lot of strings. Elsie knelt beside the bed, laid her head on my legs.

"Bev Starwalt came this morning," she said. "George died last night. In his sleep." She began to cry. "She was sleeping right next to him, Earl! She didn't even know he was dead until she went to wake him, like I just woke you! She slept alongside him all night while he was dead, or dying, and never knew it!"

To put it straight, I didn't have anything to say. I felt George's death like a heavy sad blanket thrown over me, but the blanket seemed to gag me, too. I didn't know what to tell Elsie about George, or about dying, or about anything, really. Tell her about the quail exploding in a mass of wings, and George and I just watching? I pulled her into bed, and lying next to me she shook herself eventually to sleep. I lay there thinking of George, about everyone I had known who had died. I fell asleep thinking of grandparents, a friend who had hung himself, and my father.

Later in the morning I walked down to George and Bev's place. It was Saturday. I took my time because I had no place to be, and because I felt lousy about all of this.

Relatives had already gathered. Bev was composed, almost pretty in a dark blue dress. I saw her hair winding in a tight bun on the back of her head when she lowered it, telling me the funeral was Monday. I was awkward among the relatives drinking coffee and passing muffins. I was talking to one of George's nephews who had worked with one of my brothers in Salina a few years back, when Bev interrupted us, asking if she could talk to me.

I followed her into their bedroom. Boxes of George's clothes and shoes, jackets and hunting gear stood stacked around the room. Leaning against the high bed I couldn't help thinking of what Elsie had said. I could have reached out and touched the spot where he reached, dying, for Bev, and she never felt him in her sleep.

"Earl, if you want any of these things, have them. None of George's people will be interested in it."

"Thank you, Bev," I said, "but not right now. Tomorrow I'll look it over. I'd feel bad now, with the relatives and everything."

"O.K." she said. "It'll be here."

I wanted to stand still to say something, but I could feel myself fidgeting. "Bev," I said, "I'm sorry. I'll miss him."

"I'll miss him, too," she said. "Earl, he wanted you and Elsie to stay in the house. I'd like it too. If you will. I know you and George made a deal on the rent, and I'll honor that."

"Of course. We're happy." I looked at the bed, at the floor. Bev had tears on her face when I looked at her. "Sure," I said.

On the way to the door Bev picked up a sack of muffins in the kitchen.

"Take these to Elsie," she said, "There's so much food."

I walked the half-mile home wanting to tell Elsie how perfect we were out here, just explain away a lot of things. "Elsie," I would say, "Look at the garden. See how the willows hang in the yard?"

She was up and dressed when I got home. I told her Bev wanted us to stay. I gave her the muffins.

"Blueberry are my favorite," she said, and took one from the sack. "I'll put some coffee on."

She went to the coffee maker. It sat on the window-sill next to the radio. Elsie leaned her elbows on the sill and watched something in the yard. With the morning light I could almost see through her blond hair. She was that beautiful girl again, pumping water over my black feet. She took a small bite from the muffin, and looking into the yard, said "Mm" as she chewed.

**Patrick Peters**



Photo by Steven M. Beamer

## The Enigma of My Existence

I am the Cheese, standing alone

in Bogie's holding 3 gin and tonics

and a London Fog trench coat.

I am the Cheese, walking alone

to find the car I drove to

this place 5 hours ago.

I am the cheese, watching VH-1

in the damp basement

on the brown, tweed couch.

The Cheese Stands Alone. . . .

**Angie Kath**

## Neon Teeth

White stinging streetlight  
protects the women  
in a loving crush.

Dries to a husk  
its sleek-legged babe  
with split tomato lips.

A black leather ostrich  
steps up and grazes her  
cherry nails over. . . my zipper.

I slowly implode, sweating,  
her mouth slides apart  
glistening wax seals over me.

Probing orange-slice tongue  
massages my gums and distracts  
from the ambush of limbs.

Velvet talon locks our faces  
and manacled by glass thighs  
she lifts the bills from my wallet.

**Michael Salem**

## The Zombie Poseidon

Awakening in his wet sheets, I watch him stumble. Disoriented.  
To return. So many years forgotten. Weakened.  
Now in corrupted flesh – alone. Deserted.

Standing upright, the bum's eyes  
glow madly. Insanely. Lifts his  
pocked brow to the tiny droplets.  
Filling holes, his flesh flush.

Yellowed eyes focus. Rows of smooth steel, glass. Behemoths.  
Cavernous towers spitting gruel at Olympus. Blasphemy.  
City folds over – crushing fingers. Powerless.

The bum is blind to me – his mottled  
carcass rising on high. Lightening.  
Stands grandly in the dead street, laughs  
a bitter hack in the static drizzle.

Lifting crooked arms to Uranus, long since gone. Spectres.  
Absorbing the dew that was his, but lost. Sieve.  
Rains again through his caked motes. Alone.

Bum collapses in a puddle, oil and grease  
collecting on his knees. Discovers me.  
Intruder. Scoops the liquid in his claws:

“This. . . this was my gift to you.”

**Michael Salem**

## **From: Letters from the Linder Building**

### **I. Letter to Bob**

Dear Bob, these things are on my mind:  
Love, Booze, Missoula, Montana,  
My brother's new child, Rocks, and stars,  
though not necessarily in that order.  
My life runs together like fence posts  
strung, wired tightly with black birds.  
I forgot to mention basketball. Is it wrong  
that I still love the plush swish  
of a soft hook? And you. I forgot you.  
Tonight I'll see you, and we'll talk.  
You'll tell me about Little League,  
and over beer we'll knock pool balls around,  
follow them from corner to corner  
as if they will never stop bouncing.

### **II. Report from the Front**

Clear comes the damp scent  
of where I have moved, smooth  
tracts my fingers have traced  
and concealed. Of this

I am guilty, Patrick. I have seduced  
the young, brought their fresh panties  
to my face and inhaled. This is the game  
I love. I have watched them

pull me into a frenzy, had them  
slow, waited for their sighs  
thin as the scant smoke from a candle.  
I have left them to the night, walked home

with the brisk February wind  
working its way to a gale.

## The Zombie Poseidon

### III. What I Need

Pat, I'm wishing for something  
and telling you what it is so softly  
it will still come true.

Lean yourself off balance to listen.  
Yes, there is something: I'm saying  
the name of a waitress, the waitress  
downstairs. I have talked to her

all I can, giving loud and senseless drink orders.  
Each time she brings my gin and tonic  
I wave her the change. Now  
she has all my quarters—tell Bob  
I won't be shooting pool.

I need her closer than this,  
so close my eyes brim wide in her glasses.

**Patrick Peters**

**Bob Zordani**

**Dan Von Holten**



Photo by Steven M. Beamer

## 11:45 p.m. Friday

Dialogue of a movie  
that never made it  
is the background  
to

This person was chasing me  
and it was dark and I couldn't  
see his face and. . .

*So I always sleep with the light on.*

It's not that I've denounced God.  
I'm just not practicing religion  
right now.

Did you know that college  
students are the most religious  
group in America today?

I never have bad dreams.  
And I don't dream about people  
I know.  
(I'm alienated.)

*She had an abortion, just like that.*  
I heard it through the grapevine.  
She finally told me herself one night  
after everyone was asleep and  
the only sound was  
the dialogue of a movie  
that  
never  
made  
it.

Elizabeth McMeekan



## Mr. Siegel – January, 1967

Worn winter newspaper  
stuffed in sweater  
of Old Mr. Siegel.

He sits on the  
Mayson Park bench  
in the dead of winter.

What does he wait for?  
April afternoons  
Blossoming balloons  
Mrs. Siegel

I can only see the  
frost leave his mouth  
as he tosses popcorn  
to the pigeons.

**Timothy J. McCarthy**

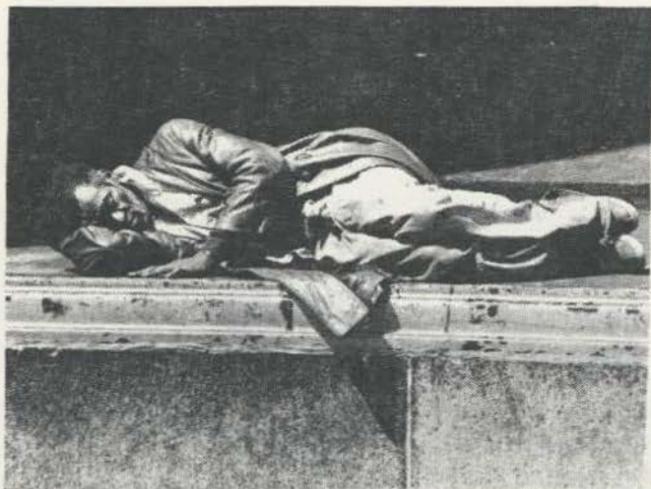


Photo by Steven M. Beamer

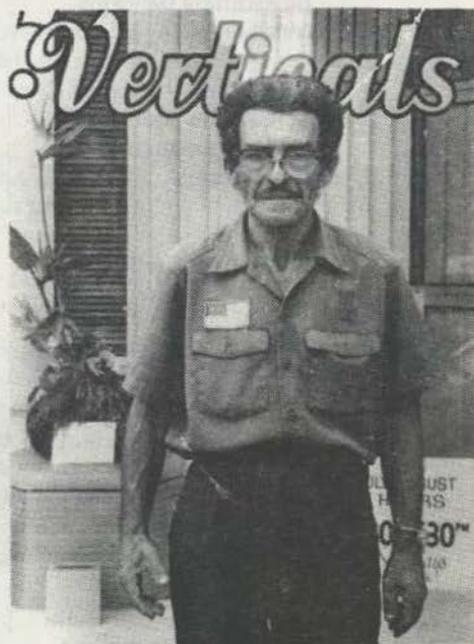


Photo by Steven M. Beamer





## Electra and the Eighteen Wheeler

The white lines just roll on forever, never ending, twisting, merging at some new town where the coffee tastes like diesel fuel, the waitresses have dyed hair and are twenty pounds overweight, and balding men sit at counters dunking donuts and waxing poetical over the good old days when men were men, cigars were a nickel, and the flag was waving strong. They talk about their wives back home, show pictures of the kids they never see, and climb back into their rigs to go their separate ways, never to meet again. Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's easy to get philosophical when you're "looking at the world through a windshield," to quote the lyrics from one of those horrible songs that truckers are supposed to go for.

Right now we're about ten miles out of Houston. Houston is what Dante must have had in mind when he described the seventh circle of hell, or whatever, but it's better than the ice-covered corn stubble of home. Sometimes I wonder why my family settled there. The wagon must've broke, I'm sure. That's what I always wanted to go back and say to my bulldog-faced fourth grade teacher, who was president of the local chapter of the DAR. I always wanted to tell her, it's only because the goddamned wagon broke down that they stayed here, your family, too. It never ceases to amaze me that the DAR is so proud. I mean, I wasn't there, but if what they say is right, well then we spring from a pretty motley stock, the ones they gave the 40 acres of prairie grass to just to be rid of. But I never said none of this in the fourth grade, or thought it even, because I guess I spring from the motliest of that stock, and in the fourth grade that just bugged the pure hell out of me.

My dad's been a trucker ever since he was 20, started right after he got back from serving in Japan in World War II. And I have to admit the life appeals to me. For a while I was gonna truck myself, and I was almost convinced of it till I

went with my dad on a run to Little Rock when I was twelve years old. It was then that I discovered that all female truckers have gaps in their teeth, wear wallets with chains on them, t-shirts that say "Make a mouse happy, eat a pussy," and sport tattoos of Merle Haggard on their forearms. Pretty glamorous, but I knew I didn't fit the bill. So, like everybody else with no useable skills and no idea of what they want to do, I headed off to college. Adolescence extension. The four year coma.

When we rolled out of Houston, we headed straight into the densest fog I've ever seen. Everything was airy white, too white my dad said, like the face of a corpse. Those of you who are well-read will catch the symbolism and will probably find that odd—white instead of black being associated with death. But for a trucker black is good, black is night when there's nothing but you and your own headlights shining down the open road, lighting up the yellow center stripe that goes blip-blip-blip-blip-blip right by like an endless accelerated string of hyphens. But to a trucker white means three things, fog, snow, and ice, and it's hard to tell which one they hate worse. Snow and ice are pretty bad, 'cause as Dad says, you never know when your trailer lights are gonna end up sliding around and kissing your door smack on the lips, the kiss of death, sure. Fog's bad too, though, 'cause you never know when some dim-witted bastard's gonna drive up from behind you with his brights on and blind ya.

So I never said to Dad that I like the fog, with its bright mysteriousness and its dancing confusion and all better than I like the night. At least in the fog you're waiting for something to come up from behind, but sometimes in the black of night it seems they never will, that there's nothing but you and truck and yellow stripe, rolling along, never touching, forever. But he'd just get mad if I said it, anyway, and would say that I'd best leave the trucking to him and just climb on up in the sleeper and shut up if I couldn't say something reasonable. Houston to home goes by much more pleasant when a person can't think of anything reasonable to say.

Up in the sleeper I hear the hum of rubber on asphalt, a hum building to a roar as Dad gets a fire going good in the Kadywhopper, which is truckerese for Kenworth. It's pretty nice in here—there's a fan, which I don't need seeing as it's January, a TV that gets remarkable reception considering it has a bent coat hanger for rabbit ears, a radio, which right now only seems to be pulling stations that have that certain unmistakable truckstop twang, and a dim and dusty reading light. My dad told me to help myself to his Zane Greys, but I've started reading Faulkner. And somehow in this bunk I get the feel of the Bunden wagon as they move toward Jefferson with Addie and her coffin bouncing around in the back and god-damn-it! I just hit my head on a box of Charlie Daniels tapes and I sure don't think that Texans even know what road maintenance means.

But anyway, in some ways this sleeper feels like a tomb, probably because Dad pointed out this morning that this damn box sits on top of 250 gallons of diesel, bubbling through the guts of this rig, belching us down the highway. Dad likes to do that—instill a little paranoia in me and see how I handle it. Tells me that this is what separates the men from the boys, or in this case the men from the girlies. It's just like when he was a paratrooper in jump school

and the older guys had this little song like "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" that they'd sing to the new boys right before they had to make their first jump:

There was blood upon his riser;  
there was brains upon his chute.  
His intestines was a-dangling from  
his paratrooper boots.  
Something, something, something,  
da-da-da-dada(Dad had somehow  
forgotten these lines since the war).

And he ain't gonna jump no more.

And the chorus went something like "Gory, gory, what a helluva way to die." And it would put a lump in his seventeen-year-old throat, but by god he did it, he'd say, one-hundred-and-thirteen times, and I would've done it more if the Japs hadn't surrendered. To this day no one in my family drives a Toyota or eats rice. My dad won't allow it.

To go trucking with my dad you need two things, ear plugs and good kidneys. With the roar of the engine, the blare of Hank Williams and the shouts of my dad (not because he's mad or something, just because this is his normal tone of voice—ever since I was a little girl he talked above the grind of gears shifting even after the engine was shut off), anyway, with all of this going on a person would probably wind up in the looney bin if they didn't have their handy dandy Acme industrial-strength ear corks. And good kidneys because when my dad has a run to make he only stops for fuel, cat naps, and flashing lights. Oh, and to "check the tires" every now and then, but me and my sisters even learned when we were little and were just taking car trips that we had to stay put and look straight ahead when Dad and my brother made their road-side pitstops. The females had to wait until the car was about to run out of gas or Mom threatened that her bladder was going to explode. But finally my dad says his thermos of coffee is about to run dry, so we'll stop at the Union 76 in Texarkana.

I would like to retract my statement about Houston. Texarkana is definitely the cesspool of the universe. The signs on the johns should have said "Cows" and "Cowprodders" 'cause that was what happened. I got pinched four times between the entrance and the bathroom, and one of those by a woman who sounded a lot like Elvis when she said "Ah luv ya baby." I looked all around the joint for the old man, and where do I find him, but playing pool with these two guys who must have the dream of someday being carnies at the county fair. Over the pool table, so help me God, is a sign that says "You can't play pool unless you got hard balls." A waitress named Betty laughs every time one of the new arrivals makes it over to the table and points at the sign. Her teeth are little bitty flat yellow squares. I stand around and wait for the old man to finish, but he's racking them up all over again, so I step over to one of the booths and sit down. I know better, having been a road veteran of almost four days now, than to order a cup of truckstop coffee unless I want to stay awake for the next two days, so I order a coke instead.

While Betty's gone to get it, this guy with a "Peterbilt" belt buckle and his sidekick head towards my booth, and before I can get up the sophisticated one slithers beside me, puts his arm around me and with all smoothness

whispers I think yer real cute. Why don't you and me spend the next half an hour rolling around in my sleeper. Somehow even my dad manages to hear this and jerks the guy out of the booth. Hey, sorry, I didn't know this was your woman. It ain't like she's wearing no "occupied" sign. My dad says, she's my daughter, you weasel, and grabbing my arm too hard, storms out of the dive, pulling me along behind him. I hear Betty murmuring something about my coke as the door swings shut behind me.

I slept most of the way from Texarkana through Missouri, but Dad woke me up in time to point out the Gateway Arch, which I have probably seen a million times since I was a kid. I actually had hopes of seeing some sights in St. Louis, though, because we were supposed to have a long wait at the warehouse. But when we rolled in, the loading dock was completely empty and two guys with a forklift had us out of there inside of an hour. We made it home before dark, and Dad told everyone over supper about how much country I'd seen in less than a week. Myself, he said, I've been down every highway in these United States, for in Dad's eyes Alaska and Hawaii are just for oil and pineapples and don't really count. And I didn't let on to the others that I thought any different, and I actually went back to school telling everyone how I had been to Houston over the break, in an eighteen wheeler with my dad, watching the white lines whiz by as we rolled along free and easy.

## Tammy Veach

## Order

In his room  
the uncurtained windows were covered  
with sheets of thick plastic  
"to cut down on heating bills," he explained.  
I secretly thought that he liked the effect,  
that it put the world in order for him,  
made it sterile  
like dry-cleaning  
or individually wrapped tampons.

That night in his bed  
I dreamed I was a barbie doll  
in my little cardboard coffin  
with the clear plastic lid.  
Suddenly I was alive,  
but still plastic-coated.  
I mouthed silent screams to a mirror  
while my face blued  
my eyes bulging like Carol Channing's

Lying there in the darkness,  
trying to catch from the street  
a glimpse of light  
through the dull plastic,  
I began to sweat,  
my stomach to knot,  
my mouth to water.  
At the toilet  
I choked out my revulsion.

I dressed quickly,  
not waking him,  
leaving him  
to his packaged life  
like seventy-nine-cents-a-pound hamburger  
at the I.G.A.  
or men's button-down shirts,  
neatly folded and sealed,  
to a sterile life  
in his oxygen tent—  
his body bag.

**Rhonda Ealy**



Photo by Steven M. Beamer

**The Party  
(A Social Event Less)  
in 80 Words or**

Away from the crowd  
Her Party dress  
Ripped from stern to aft

Progressing nicely  
With Quirky Joe on the nose-whistle

Sister Stella  
Danced the jerk  
Beads wildly swinging

The fiendish footwear  
Crippling Miss Weatherbee

Mort enjoyed cancer  
The Surgeon General fucked things up

Pants dropping quietly  
Not wanting to draw attention

Marvel at the feelings of  
Muted violence

Stalked the pompous bastard  
And stuffed his poetry  
Down his bleeding throat

**Groucho Smith**

## Graceland and Elvis Presley Earmuffs

Bruce and I had been talking about a great weekend getaway for three years. Unfortunately, mutual weekends off from our lives in the money-making mainstream were few and far between. Actually they were non-existent except for one weekend late in August. Bruce noticed that this weekend – the weekend of August 16th – just happened to be the tenth anniversary of Elvis' death. Now Bruce is one of those major, major Elvis-is-the-King, music-hasn't-been-the-same-since kind of fanatics. I, however, thought the "King" was fat. After he informed me that our weekend was *the* weekend, I began to get a bit frightened. Great, I thought. We'll pack up some Elvis cassettes, head to the beach, and play "Love Me Tender" until sunset. Maybe we can hang the volleyball net at half mast. Maybe we can grow our sideburns for such an occasion. And just maybe we'll frighten off all hopes of weekend companionship. Unless, of course, we happen to find a 200 lb. Elvisette who senses a cosmic link to our festivities. I should have been so lucky because Bruce had other plans. He wanted to go to Graceland. Now being in Memphis with the much publicized 100,000 side-burned Elvis fanatics had not been my idea of the great weekend getaway, but I could tell that Bruce had heard his calling and would have preferred crucifixion to missing this most sacred happening; so, with forced enthusiasm, I gave him the thumbs up.

Elvis fans are people that I never quite understood. Their dedication, and almost worship of such a large human being, I found bordering on insanity. When He died He had been on the last leg of a failing career, and besides that He looked ridiculous. It was as if Wayne Newton and Evel Knievel had somehow wound up at the same time in the same gene-splicer and – PRESTO – out popped Elvis Las Vegas. His fans didn't care, or even notice. Something else that bothered me about the fans was their backwardness. You know, rednecks. The kind who are particularly fond of such words as *heck*, *shoot*, *galdurnit* and *whelp*, such phrases as *ain't that sumphthin*, *okee dokee*, and *get me another beer*, *woman* as well as mannerisms such as spitting and farting. Anti-intellectual I called it. Bruce, of course, said, "They can't be too bad – they're Elvis fans!" Still, I was sure that bushy sideburns were out. And so were big belt buckles. But the fans didn't care, or notice. Also, they called him the King of Rock and Roll, yet they listen to country music (after all, country stations seem to be the only ones who play Elvis songs). Maybe, as Bruce suggested, these fans were just provoking my hidden prejudices, but regardless of what I thought of them, they were still going to pay respect to their King.

Perhaps what now intrigues me the most is that in the two days that I spent in Memphis, I could see the whole phenomenon through their eyes. I had discovered that, like the redneck, side-burned, die-hard fanatics, there was a little Elvis in me. Scary thought, but let me explain.

We arrived at our hotel via stationwagon on Saturday afternoon (the 15th) amidst an army of King worshippers. I felt out of place in my pink shirt, plaid shorts, and wayfarer shades, and I was embarrassed when Bruce rolled down the window and screamed, "Elvis lives." The fans looked up and acknowledged the Truth with an "He's always with us, man," while they unloaded their luggage (most of the suitcases were empty so that they could bring home souvenirs). That evening, after dinner with all the sideburns, Bruce and I went to Graceland.

The shops across from Graceland represented the epitome of tourism. Anything that could possibly have Elvis' name or picture on it did. There were mugs, posters, cards, calendars, ink pens, music boxes, t-shirts, bells, ashtrays, earrings, buttons, candles, and flags. I myself was fond of the earmuffs which were shaped like His face. After browsing for a while (Bruce had already bought two buttons, a poster, and an Elvis Presley Boulevard sign), we went across the street to the gates of Graceland. When I looked up after surveying the flattering graffiti on the walls connected to the gates, I noticed that there was a crowd of people surrounding us. I thought they were after my pink shirt and was relieved when one of the sideburns said that everyone was gathered for the candlelight vigil. In twenty minutes I was surrounded by 75,000 Elvis fans. I was completely overwhelmed when I looked out over the crowd. I was even more overwhelmed that I didn't get beat senseless because of my attire. Why would so many people wait for six hours (the ceremony lasted from 9 p.m. to 3 a.m.) to walk up the driveway of Graceland and pay their respects at the man's grave? A cool breeze broke my thought and relieved the 90 degree Memphis heat. One of the sideburns said that Elvis must be watching over us.

Bruce and I were two of the first people to be let through the gate that evening. Slowly, in a single-file line, we walked past his grave. I noticed a tear in Bruce's eye, and in the lady's next to him, and in her husband's. . . . Why are they crying, I thought. I mean c'mon, it's been ten years. "You people never even knew him," I wanted to shout.

As the evening faded into morning, I realized that it was not Elvis they had traveled as far as from Japan to see. It was something much greater than that. It was to get a good look at a dream. Elvis was the original nobody from nowhere who, whether I like it or not, became the biggest legend and personality in entertainment history. Getting close to his home and his grave somehow magically gives people the right to dream. It gives them the right to live in a place where there are no sideburns and no pink shirts. It's a place where they know they will be accepted and where people like me have to accept them.

Sunday morning, as we prepared to leave, I bugged Bruce about being such a fanatic and spending so much money on souvenirs. Then I asked him to run back by Graceland. When he pulled up in front of one of the shops, I told him to keep the car running and that I'd be back in a minute. When I returned he asked me what I had in the sack. "Something for a friend." And we headed home.

To this day I don't know what I'm going to do with those damn earmuffs.

## Learning to Forage (for J.D.M.)

First, change the way you think.  
Dream of things to pick under.  
To forage is to remember  
an idea older than killing.  
Holding a tongue-sized lobe's  
clipped edge to the wall,  
see how mushrooms jut like eaves  
from trees. How others,  
still muddy on top,  
sprout like a zombie's slow fist  
from shaded earth.

So, the looking  
doesn't start as mushrooms,  
but as places. Speak of knowing  
a *place*. Matted leaves around stumps.  
Turn the fern fronds, remember  
their rows of spores,  
and after a rain, the water they hold.  
Your pants will sag.  
At last, which stalks to part  
to find the soft log, a tree so dead  
by the time it drops  
it's almost dirt.

Even after stooping to take them  
with your knife, it's here  
where you leave some part behind.  
Carry them off in your bag,  
but something stays,  
snipped at the base of the stem  
like plastic soldiers cut off at the knees,  
pulled by their helmets  
from their boots and little patches of ground.

Dan Von Holten



Photo by Steven M. Beamer

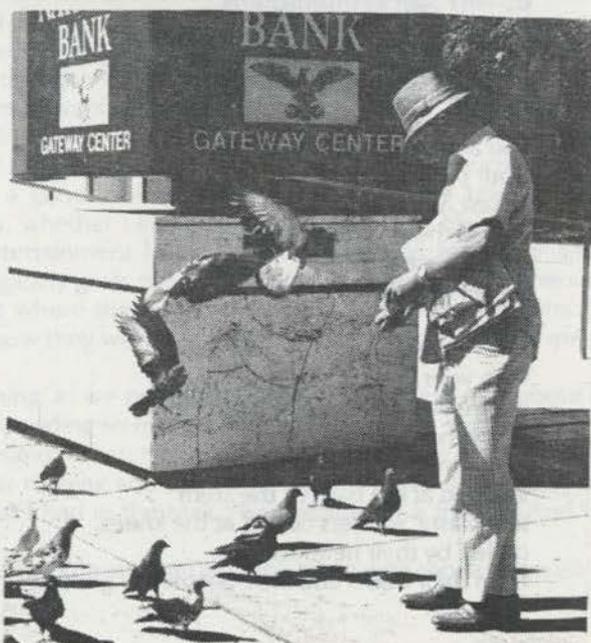


Photo by Steven M. Beamer

Excerpts from Notebook for Anna

**Letter from the Midwest, News to My Brother**

This small town reaches to farms,  
the farms to fields, and if no barns

broke the fields they would stretch beyond us,  
West, nine-hundred miles to the lift of hills.

A low ceiling of snow presses the treetops.  
By morning it will turn bad: Ice thick

as bank windows. Frozen wind picking up, spinning  
everything we don't own. Check your map;

over Illinois, dense grey. I wave  
from along a blue line of river.

Geese angling off a pond round the hard air  
into flight. In a month look north;

you may spot them, holding a high "V"  
from this sky to that.

**Patrick Peters**

## Wood-Wind

I close the door, pull blinds  
She —  
Under covers shuts my eyes  
She smiles —  
At my feet, sweaty hands pull  
Fluid filled shackles  
Muddied puddles of low tide rising  
With singing eyes and fingers,  
She slices the salty mist,  
Carresses the mad rabid waves  
Lovingly  
Frothing at her feet.  
I ride the riddled text  
for a moment  
for a touch  
Specks of yellow wink  
To crowd shadows: sailors bathed in salt.  
My throat burns.  
Empty hands knead the yielding flesh,  
Upon the breakers  
flaccid, limp  
Coral skeletons with charged cudgels  
Rake smooth my form  
sinewy bones glistening  
I embrace the cruel backwash,  
Uncurl under the warmth and lie motionless  
driftwood  
Worn flat, faceless;  
Licked clean and hollow  
with silent smile she kisses  
Amid her bladed reef  
Born crimson canine teeth  
a wood-wind  
Flute, coarse, hardened reed  
for a moment  
for a touch  
I sing the Siren's song.

**Jim Reed**

## Excerpts from Notebook Australia

Monday, Aug. 1

My father has driven me and my fifty pound backpack to O'Hare airport to catch a plane to Arizona to see my buddy Dan. My dad is aware of my plans to continue to Australia with my other friend, Cain, but is misinformed about the length of my stay. As he bids me farewell he prods me about my plans for senior year of college. I don't feel this is the time to tell him I'm staying for a year in Australia, so I hug him goodbye.

Friday, Aug. 5, "Arrival"

Baggage claim. Oh! Baggage claim! I don't believe there is anything as torturous as the anticipation of your bag that contains almost all your money, almost all your clothes, your only passport, and the assorted keepsakes, like your original driver's license.

Behind a young girl making eyes at me I spied a man wearing a large blue backpack with an expression of pain and patience on his face. It was Cain. I immediately let out the universal meeting call of two friends: the cocked head scream. Upon recognition Cain returns the message and joins me in the wait and torture.

After picking up the Torture packs, (T-Packs), at the airport, we hitched a ride to the ocean. The T-Packs were functioning perfectly as we walked down the beach: they were torturing us like crazy, when I suddenly spied the most outrageous lust. It was attached to a girl named Hella, and her sister Nana didn't look too bad either. To make a long story short, they put us up for the night. On their porch.

Monday, Aug. 15, "Mez's House"

I awoke the first full day at Mez's house alone. Well, Cain was there. I bumbled around a little, had a cup of coffee, got hungry, and hacked off Barney the sleepy lizard's head with a machete. We built a gallows out of a log, tied his hands behind his back, blindfolded him, and with one clean chop, lopped his

head off. Cain built a big fire on Mez's barbecue, and chucked him in. His decapitated body wiggled and twisted in spasms from the heat of the fire. We found this morbidly interesting, so we chucked his head in. The head opened its mouth and the tongue jumped out and in. For fear of damaging the skin on the head, I pulled out the head, skinned it, and threw it back into the fire for cremation.

The sleepy lizard tastes like an iguana, but there is only about half a mouthful of meat on the bastard. After gutting him he resembled a hollowed tube of toothpaste. Conclusions: Sleepy lizards are better alive in your pocket than dead in your gut.

Saturday, Aug. 20, "Mother Ride to Ayres Rock"

We decided to bed down for the night when a tan stationwagon stopped to pick us up. There were seven passengers: a woman named Veronica, who was married to a man named Mike, the driver, Ivan, Lance and his wife, and two older gents wearing cowboy hats. The latter four sat in the back seat, and Cain and I sat in the very back. All passengers were Aborigines from Urula (Ayres Rock). The ride went smoothly for 20k or so. We discussed our origins and I began to believe that these people were very civilized companions to the urban Abos that we had met. Their country was remarkable, their conversation was semi-coherent and their speech was good. This lasted for 20k when suddenly Mike started bugging us for cash to get a six-pack. We were not about to be conned. He explained to us that everyone in the Abo community shares everything with each other and that we should buy them a six-pack in exchange for the ride. Meanwhile Veronica, you remember Veronica, was beaming big smiles at Cain and me while leaning as far as possible over the front seat in an attempt to make us vomit from the ghastly stink that radiated from every pore and orifice of her body. She had the combined smells of the twenty most stinking human stenches combined in a way that made their added effect greater than their parts.

Suddenly Mike said, "You know John Lennon 'Mind Games?'" and jumped out of the car and ran away. The car screeched to a halt, and everyone jumped out except Cain and me. Veronica was screaming and throwing rocks at the car while the other women were trying to subdue her with blows to the neck and head. Ivan kept picking up a bar that was concealed next to the driver's seat in a threatening manner when some called him a bad name. Occasionally, one by one they would break away from the fight and approach us very calmly, asking, "You all right?" We would say yes, and then the questioner would jump back into the thick of things.

After a brief search for Mike, we returned without him to the spot where we left Veronica throwing up and convulsing on the side of the road. After much rock throwing and fighting we got the wild cat Veronica into the car with the remaining passengers. Veronica had only four things to say, which she said rapid-fire, and in no particular order. They were: "I don't care," "To you two face bitch," "We've been married too long," and "I want to kill myself, kill myself." Lance and his wife were holding her down in the front seat while Ivan did the best he could driving in his drunken state. Suddenly Veronica grabbed hold of the steering wheel and the car was sliding out of control. Ivan slammed on the brakes, and the car slid off the road to a stop. This was

followed by more pounding on Veronica and several checks to see if Cain and I were "all right."

Swollen Veronica was tossed in the back with us. We were supposed to keep her from jumping out the window, but she smelled so bad I was seriously thinking of letting her, and as Cain confesses now, he was thinking along the same lines. Our next stop was at the tavern "on the way" to pick up some more beer. After the Abos realized we weren't going to give them money for beer, they produced twenty dollars with which we purchased ten cans of V.B.

Tuesday, Aug. 23, "Vern"

The next night was spent at home with Verna. We drank most of a case of V.B. and started on the Moselli.

Cain and I were both being very friendly towards Vern, and we were both hoping the other would pass out before Vern. Unfortunately, Vern passed out first, so Cain and I made a pact that either we would both "F" her, or neither of us would "F" her.

We kept drinking, and looking at Vern, who looked hotter and hotter every minute. Finally, Cain passed out. I realized Vern had to be up for work in a few hours, so I carried her to her room. I may have fallen asleep, maybe not. It was blurry, but I remember Vern waking up, and her skirt coming down and her top coming off. When Cain knocked on the door looking for a piece of the action, I was naked. The conversation went like this:

Cain: You guys awake?

Keith: Maybe.

Cain: You want me to come in?

Keith: Maybe.

Cain: Did you break the bargain?

Keith:

Cain: Did you break the bargain?

Keith:

Cain: Come on, give me one more maybe.

Keith: Maybe.

Friday, Aug. 25, "Bat Hunting"

Cain and I went bat hunting today. The giant Fruit bats are easily detected by their overwhelming stink! We busted them while they sat in the palm trees with rocks and clubs. We hit a few of them, but none seriously enough to bring them down. We will have to find another sleepy lizard, maybe. The chore was strenuous and costly in cuts and slices from the razor sharp palm leaves and spiked stems.

**Keith Schuster**

## Letter From the Desert —for Rob Brown

Albuquerque is next. Back up to Santa Fe  
through Glorieta Pass, eventually Los Lunas.

You wouldn't think, lifting the blinds,  
any hills would rise out of this trip.

The churches are crumbling, no humidity,  
yet each morning cracks wide with bells.

This picture says at home I will pull myself together,  
the sky outside saying rain, flood, saying like *that*

sand is erased and broomed, parted, and pulled  
a few feet further east. The boys out here are tempted

to walk in, bend away, and become old men. They don't.  
You have to admire them for that. Fitting themselves

instead with part-time jobs, to hunt, to drink, give themselves outright to  
weather, or the rebuilding

of front-yard jalopies. We should have their lives.  
Learn to wear our hair long in the heat, re-teach ourselves;

soil is dust when turned, shake your clothes for scorpions.  
Those who leave come back. That is the point.

# Voice and Earth: A Review of *The Invention of the Telephone* by Bruce Gernsbein

## Tinted Blue, Waiting for an Uptown Taxi

Traffic on route 25 is cattle. Watch the cows,  
because there are no fences

and water would not cure what a cow  
could twist into an engine.

I tried to read. What kept coming to me  
were brown bears eating garbage in the mountains,

spiders like opening fists on the road. One had a bird.  
Believe me. I threw the book out the window,

it blossomed, then disappeared. I wonder about the boys,  
about you in St. Louis. Anyday now I may leave the car

baking on the side of the road and walk,  
tapping into my hand, over and over,

like the sound of soft pebbles:  
Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Los Lunas.

**Patrick Peters**

## Tinted Blue, Waiting for an Uptown Taxi

I tickle her anorexic ribs, beneath which somewhere two bites of rubber spaghetti dissolve.

Lips seal. Tupperware. Keeps laughs fresh without refrigeration.

Hates me for touching her ribs in public, but the night people have been rinsed away from an early rain—while reaching for the buzzing streetlights.

"Stop it!" Beeswax. Keeps out what she doesn't mean, from behind her broken grin.

Her nose is off-center, right.

Mine leans slightly left.

We bump now and then.

I lunge forward to kiss.

Smack her forehead.

I'm no William Tell.

She playfully hits me below the belt, although I'm not actually wearing a belt, or even suspenders.

Down for the count.

My kidneys want to explode, the all too familiar twist of intestines under my navel.

"Did I hurt you?"

What the hell did she think?

"No."

Standing straight, biting the wet leather inside my cheek, aching void in my bowels.

Pat her on the back and smile through locked teeth.

"I'm okay."

I stand, arm clutching her, cab creeping up on us from behind.

A tear fogs my night.

My testicles bite me.

They blame me bitterly.

Oil loosens my knees,

and I think:

this must mean I'm in love.

**Michael Salem**

## Voice and Earth: A Review of *The Invention of the Telephone* by Bruce Guernsey

This is a book about and silence and isolation. These twelve poems from *The Invention of the Telephone* by Bruce Guernsey, recently released by Stormline Press, suggest as a group what comes from things that are left alone. The book is a very unified piece in this respect; a pattern begins before we ever reach the poems — on the cover. There we see one telephone pole in a field, black against a white sky. Turning the pages, we see a similar shape: in the same way, Guernsey's thin lines are stacked long.

The progression of poems also works with the telephone pole, as well as the place where the poles are planted. Without the poles there is only soil, the uninterrupted, flat Midwestern ground which the poet identifies with silence, something which must be understood before going on to anything else. In the first six poems, Guernsey seems to be exploring what the silence is, implying the art there not easily perceived. This is a skill to be learned, as we read from the last from the last stanza of "This Bank Protected by Silent Alarm:"

The wisest  
keeps himself in shape:  
all day, eyes closed,  
listening for the moon.

Once we feel the surface of the ground, we know where to place the pole: it juts, sudden avenue of speech. Just so, once we have studied the absence of sound, we can make a controlled break while saving it from shattering. The silence is important to the poet; it is part of our environment — it's where we stand. But at the same time, the voices in the poems feel the need to communicate, to use words, so Guernsey creates a language for the terrain. The words must cut, pierce neatly, rather than lie flat and cover. Speech is something done very carefully as we read from the third stanza of "The Invention of the Telephone:

The other night  
the farmer down the road,  
his truck moored in snow,  
asked to call home—  
a quiet man, earnest,  
with hands thick as granite  
trembling as he took  
the phone from its cradle,  
closing his eyes as he spoke.

The tension between silence and speech is resolved very well in the last poem perhaps the strongest in the collection. The persona finds the solution by the side of the road, a phone booth. Little is said, but it is said, and the rest of the poem focuses on the silent fields; the three words interrupt only brief-

ly. In this way, the phone booth works as well as a metaphor and medium for speech in the Midwest, and even the shape of the poem conveys this: the short lines are broken into individual phrases thin enough to send through wires. The telephone is a way of covering miles without screaming. With it we speak softly through distances.

### The Phone Booth

Today

by a one pump station  
in some cornfield town  
I said I love you  
on the phone, words  
I haven't said  
to anyone for years  
or written down  
but had to stop  
in a dry wind,  
in a flat place  
to say, to say  
I love you,  
clear and sure  
out of the wind  
in the rattling glass  
of a phone booth,  
perhaps to start again  
where gray the wings whirl  
above the bins,  
hollow, hollow,  
and the tall grass bends.

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**Dan Von Holten**

A road logs my night  
My road is not my  
They blame me easily  
Of leaving my heart  
and I think  
of in my heart

Michael Sauter

The tension between silence and speech is resolved very well in the last poem perhaps the strongest in the collection. The person finds the solution by the side of the road, a phone booth. This is said, but it is said, and the rest of the poem focuses on the silent field; the three words interrupt only brief-

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