

Southern Illinois University Carbondale OpenSIUC

Honors Theses

University Honors Program

5-1990

Living in Wayside

Amy L. Perry

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Follow this and additional works at: http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/uhp_theses

Recommended Citation

Perry, Amy L., "Living in Wayside" (1990). *Honors Theses*. Paper 313.

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the University Honors Program at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.

Living in Wayside

Amy Penny
Senior Honors Thesis

For my grandparents, Clyde and June Brewer. I love you.



Table of Contents

Quartet.....	p. 1-10
The Mayor of Wayside.....	p. 11
Hunting Season in Wayside.....	p. 12
Hurdler.....	p. 13
Two Opposums.....	p. 14
Sideshow.....	p. 15
Night Thoughts.....	p. 16
Chicken Coop.....	p. 17
Discovery.....	p. 18
Tomboy.....	p. 19
Elizabeth.....	p. 20-21
The Accidental Visit.....	p. 22
Thomas.....	p. 23
From Wayside to Marion.....	p. 24
Language Over Pool Tables.....	p. 25
First Night.....	p. 26
Leaving Wayside.....	p. 27

Quartet

One is always hit hard by the death of a friend, even if it is a fairly common occurrence in an old country church predominantly made up of old people. This death hit me particularly hard though. You see, in addition to grief over the recent loss of a dear friend, Byford Newton, and the normal empathy with the grieving family, this death carried a greater significance for me; it drove home the fact that my own grandfather too is mortal. I have to face the fact that one day, quite possibly very soon, I am going to lose him.

My grandpa was a member of an unofficial quartet of old-timers who habitually sat on the back row of the Mt. Hebron Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Est. 1865. I say "was" because the group no longer exists; it's just Grandpa now. No one could have sat by and watched how this close-knit group slowly dwindled to one without feeling, overwhelmingly, her own, and everyone else's mortality. Imagine how the lone member must feel. I have grieved with two widows; and yet, on the somber occasion of this third death, I feel guilt for I also selfishly grieve for myself. The sight of my grandpa on the back bench of our church, isolated, the empty spaces around him gradually being adapted to and filled in by younger people is almost more than I can bear. He hears a silent whisper, "I'm next." I know it; I feel it; I hear it too.

I remember all three of Grandpa's old buddies, Dick, Carl, and Byford, although it has been awhile since the first of them, Dick, passed away. I try really hard to remember the quaint

details of each of them because not that many young people knew them who weren't related to them, and because old-timers are a dying breed. I don't think anyone can argue that this isn't conceptually true, but the saddest part is their irreplaceability.

Dick was a tiny, mostly bald man, with an even tinier little wife named Jewel. Dick's real name was Hershel, but the only one who ever called him that was Jewel. She had a way of saying his name that was piercing when she was aggravated at him, although this was seldom. Usually she was busy making him the homemade raisin pies that are now so famous at the Mt. Hebron Homecoming, held the fourth Sunday, every May. I've heard that when he was a young man, despite his small size, Dick could eat a whole raisin pie, by himself, after Sunday dinner. Now that he's gone, as she did mostly when he was alive, she has a way of saying his name that gives it unspeakable dignity, yet at the same time, she savors his name as she says it, like its owner used to savor her famous raisin pie.

They were truly inseparable in a way unlike any other couple I've ever known, at least after the particular couple got past the I'm-your-little-love-pup stage. This inseparability lasted throughout a lifetime.

Jewel didn't get a driver's license until her late sixties, and then only with strong urging from children, friends, and neighbors. I don't think Dick ever did push her to get it. She didn't really need it because he always took her to town whenever she wanted to go. Unlike some of the country wives I know, she didn't look at a weekly trip to the beauty shop as an escape from farm, husband, and boredom; she did her own hair, and

when she went to town Dick was always with her. From what I have heard, it was always that way between them. More than once, my grandma has told me about when she and Grandpa first moved here, and knew no one, about her amazement at seeing Dick and Jewel riding down the road, side by side, in a wagon drawn by a team, on their way to pick corn in their little corn patch. Like everyone else did then, they pulled it by hand; unlike everyone else, if Dick went to pull corn, Jewel went to pull corn, not because Dick needed the extra pair of hands, but because she wanted to be with him, even if it was in an itchy, buggy, weedy old corn patch.

Dick always had horses, always loved horses, horses and dogs. Every year, he and Jewel went to the harness races at the Union County Fair in Anna. They went just about every afternoon the horses ran. Jewel always said it was their vacation. At least once a year, he'd hook up his team to the wagon and take Jewel, kids, and grandkids on a ride to Panther's Den. Tinker generally went too. He was their dog. I always thought Tinker was the perfect dog for Dick because he was a perfect color match for the farm buildings Dick took care of for this man from Chicago who has land and holdings down here. That was Dick's job, taking care of Mr. Kentz's stuff. Anyway, most of Mr. Kentz's buildings are painted dull gold and chocolate brown, so Tinker, white with gold and chocolate markings, looked great running around checking on things with Dick. After Dick died, Tinker just vanished, I never did hear what happened to him.

Dick's familiar church attire was overalls and a big gold pocket watch with a chain on it. His watch complimented his one gold tooth which gleamed out from among his other slightly

tobacco-stained teeth quite nicely. He had a gravelly voice that was completely disarming because of the way it unexpectedly boomed out of such a small man. His voice fit his personality though. He was a jovial man, and the proud owner of the famous Wayside sign to boot. He was as flagrant about his pride in Wayside as he was about everything else, so naturally he owned such a sign and such a voice. He was a socializer, and some say a bit of a flirt, but I never could see flirting with someone so loud, and that was really before my flirting time anyway. He was so tanned that you couldn't even say his face looked leathery because it was almost too dark. It had lots of pliable-looking folds and wrinkles too, not at all taut and smooth and stiff, as I think of leather being. His darkness created another shocking physical contrast, other than his size compared to his voice. His complexion made his surprisingly light gray eyes sparkle and flash like tinted quartz. Only the top of his head, usually covered by a cap, except in church, was lighter in color. It had freckles on it too. Now on any other man, one probably wouldn't notice, but since Dick was so short, I became aware of this fact in the sixth grade when I shot up to 5'5.

He, like most of the other people in our church, had his customary seat. He always sat on the back row, by the window facing the road, so he could see the various vehicles, tractors and implements, pleasure riders, three-wheelers, backpackers, or tally-ho fox hunters and dogs that may pass by our church on any given Sunday. It was his custom to take at least one break from church, however, to sit on the porch outside, in the shade of the huge, ancient hickory growing by the cemetery fence and shading

the gigantic bell that once was rung every Sunday, before it was invaded by wasps and someone stole the clanger, not in that order. Anyway, Dick took these little breaks to sit on the porch and roll a cigarette from a can of Prince Albert or Velvet, usually Prince Albert. He tried to show me how to roll one once, when I had left church to visit the outhouse, and sat down to chat before I went back. ↵

Mine just didn't look like his though, and was hardly smokable.

Whenever I'd slip away from home, down the gravel road and up the hill to Dick and Jewel's, usually hoping for a piece of raisin pie, Dick could usually find time to hang around and talk, if he wasn't already at work. Jewel would sit in their porch swing, and he and I would sit on the gray wooden planks of the porch, talking of horses and dogs, cows and such. I still remember pulling my first pocket knife out of my overalls pocket to show it to him. He didn't laugh at the rounded tip, ground down by my grandpa, like a lot of others did. Unfortunately, my grandpa had forgotten that I knew right where the whetstone was located and exactly how to use it from following him around so much. It wasn't much of a knife, but I had sharpened 'er up pretty good. When Dick asked me if it was sharp, I ran my finger testingly over the blade, as I'd seen Grandpa do, but unfortunately, I'd forgotten that he'd ran his thumb over the blade cross-wise, not length-wise. There was a lot of difference between Grandpa's hard fingers and mine anyway, so not suprisingly, I got cut, but Dick never told on me. He showed me how to test it without getting hurt. I've never forgotten that incident. It was a shock to us all when during a nap on the

couch, he died so unexpectedly in his sleep.

Carl was the next to leave the group. He was quite a character, one of the few republicans my family ever truly embraced. He was a dirty old man, but that statement is too blunt to express the tenderness of that phrase in this case. He was an old flirt, a delight, and he enjoyed his old age quite thoroughly. I never thought about him as much as Dick. I was really closer to Carl, but it hurt too much to think of my old friend when I still had to sit on the back pew at church, alone, with no ally to help disrupt or distract the little kids. I don't think I've disrupted a service since we lost Carl, somehow it just wasn't much fun without him.

And Byford. Grief is pretty fresh to try to think of him too much. He was the most reserved member of the bunch, although none of them were really very reserved. I didn't get a chance to know him as well as Dick and Carl, because unlike them, he wasn't my neighbor. I remember his courage and good humor when he had to have his leg amputated though. He got an artificial one, a three-wheeler to check his cows, some tennis shoes in place of his customary work boots (he had nice, clean Nikes for Sunday), and had some special equipment put in his truck. Afterwards, unless someone told you, you'd never have known anything he'd endured and still endured. He was always so cheerful. He'd greet me at church with a handshake and a "How art thou?" When I replied and asked him how he was doing, he'd make some sunny, humorous remark like, "Oh, I'm still hoppin' around."

During the Sunday morning "specials," he continued to tap his feet with Grandpa on the back row, although the music they

made with their feet was only a shadow of the wonderful rhythms executed when all four members of the quartet were alive and someone would sing something like Dick's old favorite, "Touring That City." Byford himself often played specials on his harmonica, or harp as he always called it.

His widow, Verla, is a lovely woman who has a chubby face that looks as if it were made from bread dough that had risen slightly, and her hair has a beautiful, totally becoming, blue-rinse tinge to it. Now Byford was a big storyteller, and I still can remember a story about he and Verla that somehow always seemed to get told at Homecoming each year. Byford, although not as little as Dick, was a small man, and Verla was a lot bigger than he was. Byford was quick though. They were out in the garden one day, and she got mad at him and threatened him with the hoe. He took off running and she chased him with that hoe. Someone always asked, "Well Byford, do you think she really would have hit you with it?" to which he replied, "'Course she woulda. She was madder'n hops." Byford was quaint and spry as I've found so many people from the old school to be. I feel really sorry for all the young people who can't see beyond graying hair, wrinkled skin, and overly large ears and noses.

I have searched for solace in my old friend Carl, wonderful dirty old man that he was, and probably still is. I can see him flirting with golden-haired angels, asking them if the mini-robe is ever in fashion up there. Even in death, he still has the gift he brought others in life, to make them laugh and forget their troubles for awhile, even when the laughter is tinged with the pain of remembered loss. As I said before, I tried to

avoid thinking of Carl until recently, but perhaps it is good that I did save such charming, distracting thoughts for a time when distraction is welcome.

Carl. He had a hee-hee-hee laugh that was a reflection of his jolly disposition. He loved young ladies; yet his enjoyment of our company, of talking with us and flirting with us and looking at us, never dimmed his deep love for his wife or his family. I am quite certain of that. It's a shame his children couldn't have been (they worried constantly over his antics); he was; we ladies were; I think even God was. Every girl was a granddaughter of sorts to Carl, in an endearing, lecherous kind of way. I'm sure he's chuckling down at me right now, trying to catch him on paper, glad to be any help, as he always was (as if I could hope to capture a leprachaun by drawing a line around him). He was always so supportive, and he bought me wind-up, musical teddy bears after everyone else thought I'd outgrown them.

After he retired from his government job at the rest stop on Interstate 57, Carl began to take a long walk every morning and then would proceed to the Longhorn for coffee, gossip, and flirtation. He timed these morning walks to coincide with my flight along that road to school. No matter how late I was, and this was a regular occurrence, I almost always stopped to talk to Carl and stock up on Bubble Yum and sugarfree, spearmint Certs. He kept me and the rest of the softball team supplied with a stockpile of Bubble Yum. My grandma warned me, "Don't stop and talk to him. I don't think he has clean thoughts." I knew he had slightly soiled thoughts, but it didn't bother me much. I just didn't tell her I stopped.

The supply of gum he kept in his glove compartment was like the Biblical woman's supply of meal; she scraped the bottom of her barrel, but never ran out. I never knew him not to have a pack of gum, quite often one of those plastic ten-packs, for any child he met. I still have the last pack of gum he gave me, although oddly enough it is Doublemint instead of Bubble Yum. I keep it in a jar in my bedroom. Sometimes I open it and the evocative scent of Doublemint drifts out, bringing to mind a vivid picture of my old friend. He reminded me of a big pet pig in a way--large, round belly; little, skinny, white legs; a pink face with a round chin, backed up by a double- or maybe a triple-chin; heavy jowls; a steel-gray, butch hair cut; and small, good humored, but slightly wicked eyes, pudgily set into his round face.

He was quite the patriot. He fought in World War II, like my grandpa, and was proud of it. After his retirement, he had a full-sized flag pole erected in his front yard, and could be found there most evenings, sitting under it, trying the dubious strength of a rickety lawnchair, with the little terriers he raised bouncing around him. Many times I have thoroughly dusted him as I, forever late, took that shifty curve in front of his house. He always smiled and waved expansively with his cigar, as I took my eyes from the unstable gravel long enough to honk and wave briefly.

He was a special breed, even for the old school. He never took offense when I lovingly called him a dirty old man. He always grinned; he knew it was true. I know Dick and Byford are in heaven. I'm sure Carl's there too, most likely happily

tormenting prim angels at this moment. I'm certain that God has His special place in Heaven for such a special kind of dirty old man.

He died while I was on a 4-H trip to Washington, D.C. The flag I brought back now flies in his front yard. He sent me off with numerous packs of Bubble Yum and a whiskery kiss from a mouth dotted with scattered flakes of cigar tobacco. Sometimes, while driving out to the old high school, I see in my rear view mirror, a cackling, dirty old man, walking the road in the morning light, waving to me expansively with his walking stick raised high in the air in one hand and his cigar raised in the other. I miss those impudent cigar ashes, long swept from the old hardwood floors of Mt. Hebron Church.

The Mayor of Wayside

They took you back to the hospital today;
Recurrent dread nibbles at my stomach wall.
Joints grow stiffer as age claims another fragment
of flesh. Our chair springs sag to the carpeting,

Weary as your bones of hefting awkward bulk.
When I'm cross, you cry like a rain-soaked willow.
At these times, I remember toting water
to fat sows in Holly Hobby sand buckets,

And recall your strong smell in your overalls and your bedroom.
Again I lie on your pliers, lost in the couch cushions;
I step on your scattered toothpicks with bare feet,
or get one from the holder that is flavored with earwax.

I feel the cooling of saliva-wet Camel tobacco
on wasp stings from angry fall nappers, wakened
by the Sunday firing of the church furnace,
feel the weight of pocket knives, ground to a safe, rounded tip,
once faithfully carried in my Osh Koshes.

I envision my jar of antique marbles, found one-by-one,
as you tilled our garden, once an old coal dump.
I think of wild, fighting dreams of World War II,
and you sleep-singing "I'll Fly Away" some nights.

I inherited your itchy back,
but not your rigid, labor-curved fingers
that would scratch my back 'til it burned,
and balance you against the doorframe as you rubbed yours cow-style.

It took you years to teach me to whistle,
but you can never remember to empty pockets full of fence staples,
left for Mom's washer, never had tolerance for the bright town teeth
that would end up outlined on you Sunday shirt's front pocket,
or forgotten on a fence post in the Wayside cold.

I remember how those scrawny legs under that pot-belly
have stomped as you haracked into the bathroom
to lean dirty hands on a dirty wall-spot
and pee like a mule, waking the whole house up.

Amy Perry

Hunting Season in Wayside

The big he-man hunter is going out
to club a fawn to feed his family,
Only his family has a deep-freezer
full of t.v. dinners and Lean Cuisine.
When I run over a rabbit, I cry;
Yet I laugh at an image of you,
blue hands and feet tied together
over a pole, camouflage clothes dark-stained
with your own blood, streaming from a slit throat,
Swaying as you're carried heavy from home,
Vacation place for pampered trespassers
who take you as their vacation trophy,
to stare with glassy eyes at spoiled children
from a family room wall. If you're lucky,
you may sometimes smell of Endust. If not,
it's attic mothballs and the weight of
mouse bits in your open, taxidermied mouth.

Amy Perry

Hurdler

Arms extended,
Poised to leap,
Hands turned up at your wrists,
Pads of fingers
Meeting base of palm.
Eyes of heart,
Cheekbones slant,
Show you were bred
To slice through thick wind.
One leg drawn back
Like a bowstring,
One suspended in front of you.
The flat of your foot in my face,
As if you'd burst your boundaries
And impale my adoring eyes on sharp spikes,
Grinding the smell
Of track-worn rubber in my nose.

Amy Perry

Two Opossums

They were still cool and looked asleep.
The sun hadn't yet heated the pavement.
I looked back in my mirror, saw fur
move slightly in my passing breeze.

One lay near a water puddle,
she'd come like a child, looking
for a drink in the night.
Her worried lover found wet grief,
and the common, blinding lights
of a quick death.

Two opossums died on the highway,
not more than a yard apart,
Pyramus and Thisbe of Route 37,
blacktop Romeo and Juliet.

Amy Perry

Sideshow

Two fat women with moustaches
lean against the corrugated tin
of a temporary building on the midway,
showing tobacco-stained teeth,
worn nearly to nubs.

The narrow shiny pig-eyes
and scratch red, galded patches
that spread like poison ivy between
rolls of fat, under heavy breasts.
They rubbed the blotches with
elderberry leaves, but it doesn't help.

Tomorrow, they'll watch their men,
tanned and thin, load equipment
into the old semi's. They'll all
move on to the next town, mindless
of the creaking of the ferris wheel,
the paint chipping from the carousel
that the children love.

Amy Perry

Night Thoughts

My pulse seems to scratch
the pillowcase as it beats
out my ear. In the East Woods,
I hear the tormented baying
of blueticks who are destined
to forever chase their prey,
but never eat it. I'm conscious
of all the places in my body
where I can feel my heart beat.
I want to unbutton my father's
old shirt and spread it
between my thumb and fingers,
letting you lick the place
between my breasts that feels
so private and perfect
when I touch it through ~~the~~ shirt
with the backs of my fingers,
having no thoughts of what lovers do
when they're too old
to make love in cars anymore.

Amy Perry

Chicken Coop

Caligula and Tiberius companionably
masturbate in a corner of the palace
over ancient Egyptian porno scrolls.

Like an old rooster, Tiberius admires
his own feathers, ragged and separating,
but others see crusty feet, bloody spurs.

He doesn't realize that Caligula,
the scrawny-headed, cross-bred banty,
is waiting to jump his molty back,

grab him by a scabby, faded comb,
and yank the feathers from his head,
as if he were merely a spring hen.

Tiberius gloats, thinking of how
he'll leave Caligula for Rome
like a wad of phlegm, hacked
from the throat of an old man,
and spewed onto the May grass.

Amy Perry

Discovery

Face
in a state
of suspended animation,
I retreat
into the inversion
of my thoughts,
Tentatively
tasting each
before slowly,
carefully,
parting my lips
to let the thought
drip
off their wet edges.
I watch you swallow.
The swelling
of your throat
reminds me of
how my body
swells
when I'm with you.
The bump
in your
throat
is fleeting,
fragile.
Is it so unlike
when you were inside
me, and I slid
my hand down
low
on my abdomen
to feel you there
through my skin?
Amazed, I reached
for your hand,
guided it
to where mine
had been, let you
share my discovery,
as we shared our
bodies on
the carpeted floor.

Amy Perry

Tomboy

I remember the sour smell
of the feedmill,
powdery in my nose,
And the hollow pat
of my bare feet
on the scarred wooden floor,
a soft echo
of Grandpa's heavy workboots.

My short legs
couldn't keep up with him;
I had to run
to recapture
the comforting rhythm,
But my cap was loosened
from my forehead,
leaving my secret braids
to tumble
to the faded hip pockets
of my Osh Koshes.

Male laughter floated
heavily around me.
Gleaming in the sunlight
flooding the openness
of P&S Grain,
my braids gave me away,
as the feed dust settled
slowly around me.

Amy Perry

Elizabeth

The ambulance
took Matthew away
in the afternoon.
That night, I left
with PawPaw and MawMaw
in their pick-up,
but we went back
to get Elizabeth.

Her hair had been washed until
the plastic strands matted,
making her ponytail
a permanent fixture
on the top of her head,
even when it wasn't held
by a band or ribbon.

Her cloth body lumpy and stained,
her plastic arms and legs
discolored, bruised
like Matthew, she held her head
proudly somehow, despite
its infant-like wobbling
caused not by youth,
but by age.

I tried to make up
for sticking a pencil in her mouth
in place of a lost baby bottle
by painting on lipstick,
but the pink nail polish wasn't lipstick.
The crooked smear I made
couldn't cover the graphite stains
inside the edges
of her pursed, plastic lips.

Half the lashes are missing
from one open-and-close eye,
lending her the look
of a half-winking accomplice.
But they say I'm the one
who scribbled black marker
bruises on her butt.
I don't remember doing it,
don't remember a reason for it.

I wish I could have kept her
pretty and perfect,
undefaced, unmarked,
like a porcelain collectible.
But plastic dolls can't live

in safe, glass houses.

Amy Perry

The Accidental Visit

Drunkenly, we rounded the curve,
topped the hill. I saw the stone walls
and the red geraniums of Makanda Cemetery.
I hadn't been there in three years,
not since the Memorial Day I cried
and heard the whispers of the two widows
who'd come to put silk flowers in the vases
of their husbands. They spoke of newspaper
articles and the custody battle--
caused by a woman too scared to leave
the man who'd killed her son.

But that day, the cemetery was empty
and I told Troy to stop the car.
I walked to the gray baby stone
with the teddy bear and the banner
that says, "We miss you,"
the one I'd chosen at the age of three.
I was ashamed of my drunkenness
and the length of my absence. Mostly though,
I was ashamed of the flowers,
the solitary basket hanging from rusty iron,
its contents faded to the color of mud.
The ravelings from the petals blew in the wind
like weeds in an abandoned garden.

Amy Perry

Thomas

Tonight I lay my head on your belly,
Lightly, for many times in the past
I have held your paw in my hand,
fingered bird-fragile bones,
and shuddered at the thought of cars
crushing something so soft.
I lay my head, but lightly,
on the softness of your side,
knowing that underneath are organs,
making you animate. Listening
to your stomach function,
I closed my eyes against long winter hairs,
tangling with eyelashes.

^
my

Amy Perry

From Wayside to Marion

I'm kept from speeding up I-57
by two fifty-dollar tickets in as many months;
both times I was coming to meet you.

The one in July. That was the day we hopped the fence
to the McKinney Chapel Private Beach, but it was occupied.
We hid in a cove. You couldn't swim for shit; your long legs

tangled in the lake-weed. I had to pull you in;
you said I saved you and I laughed
as the water dripped from our shivering bodies.

After that, you lost all motivation to swim.
We sat in the waist-deep water, on the radish-sized rocks,
I sitting between your legs, leaning back on your chest,

my fingers curled around the mound behind your bony knee,
You tall enough to bend over my shoulder,
your stubbled face grazing my neck, disturbing wet, stuck hair

as you looked at my wet breasts,
unfamiliar in the unnaturally bright sunlight,
balanced across your tanned, appraising fingers.

I remember how you lay your head back in the water
as I held it off the bottom in my hands;
I remember your hair, drifting under the water,

curling around my spread fingers,
like the tongue of a coaxing lover,
a living earthworm in warm milk.

In August, I came to have it out with you,
since you kept hanging up the phone.
The cop was unsympathetic.

It's September. I want to leave sixty-five
at least two inches behind
my red speedometer needle.

I thought the weigh station was closer.
My hands a^ddamp, my feet sockless and slick.
Worn tires ka-dub over tar ridges on the highway.

Trying to coordinate my foot to the speed signs,
I envy the uninhibited passing cars,
the woman on the back of the blue motorcycle.

Amy Perry

Language Over Pool Tables

I love the language
you hear over pool tables.
The scotch on Norman's breath
meets me before his greeting
as he bums a smoke.

I follow him up the brass-railed stairs
to the pool table. They're waiting for him
to take his shot. Unhurried, he rubs the tip
of a house cue carefully with blue chalk.

He bends over the green, legs spread, head low,
cue held delicately parallel with the table
in his rough hands. He's shooting solids,
lines up carefully on the purple four-ball.

His jeans hang on him like a pair
pulled from the dirty clothes pile.
He always wears the same jeans.
I burned his ass with a lighter one night,
not knowing they were the only pair he had.

A Blues fan who jumped Dave last Saturday
while we watched the 'Hawks game on satellite
whistles, and it cuts my pounding head
like the crack of the cue ball after it hurtles
across the green to meet the object ball
of a tight rack; someone breaks another game--
"Straight eight, Busch league rules,
fifty-cents a game, but free 'til seven."

Amy Perry

First Night

We wake at one
and make love again.
Afterwards, lying close
together, close to sleep,
I tell you I like the way
you smell. You don't believe me.
I try to explain, but can't.
It's not sweat; it's too cold out
in November, the room's too nice.
The sheets feel good; they're cool
where we don't touch them.
Your murmurs before sleep
are the same as the sounds you made
when you were inside me, but softer.
The feel of the soft hair on your legs
against mine makes me forget the room bill,
that it's on my credit card.

Amy Perry

Leaving Wayside

The sloshing of the waterlilies
in the still pond sounded like
my grandmother bathing.
The morocca voices of frogs
mocked our work in the hot garden
from the cool of the dank water.

Grandpa forced the iron blade
of the antique push-plow
through the damp soil, burying
weeds sprouting around fledgling
vegetables. His bowlegged stride
left slanted workboot footprints
and I walked like a duck
to place my smaller bare feet
in the prints he made.

Now Wayside is miles away.
The landlord doesn't allow pets.
When I take a walk in the rain,
I smell damp parking lots and
warm garbage dumpsters.
Dave complains that the yard
stinks when it's wet because
it smells like dirt.

Grandpa sleeps away the hours
he used to spend maintaining the farm.
Grandma bought him a La-Z-Boy and new
box springs because his body aches.
The laundry must be done every two days
instead of once a week because he can't
control his bladder.

Last week, he shut himself inside our car
and couldn't get out, but the doors
weren't locked. He couldn't find the handles,
but we've had that car five years.
And every night he asks Grandma
when I'll be home, although I've been gone
for months, leaving only my workboots.

Amy Perry