

And We Sang to the Darkness

by Sheri Leidig

The fire was hot
 with coals that popped
 and would land on our shoes
 or on the ground
 where we would watch them turn to black.
 The smell of burnt sugar
 as the marshmallows roasted
 and the warmth we felt
 as we put them in our mouths
 went all through us
 and the sugar made our cold fingers sticky.
 The light played games
 on laughing faces
 as we sang to the darkness
 to the fire
 and the night.
 It was a peaceful union,
 though I can't place the day or year
 I can still see the faces
 and I can still hear the song.

Untitled Essay

by Mary Hill

The monstrous grey clouds of smoke belch up from the factories and fill the air. The wind takes hold of the smoke and spreads it out, so it falls in thin layers upon the city. There are no colors in Beloit, Wisconsin, only shades of grey. And the people who live in Beloit can't see beyond the smoke. As far as they know, the world consists of nothing more than a house, a factory, and a grey road which connects the two. Beloit is stagnant.

My daughter was born in Beloit, Wisconsin. On October 3, 1979, my colorful baby girl was born into a grey world. Her shining eyes were dulled by the smoke, her cries and her laughter were muffled by the heavy cloud which lay upon the city. I knew she didn't fit in. I knew I didn't fit in. Everything was wrong.

My daughter was sleeping upstairs in her room, lost in unconsciousness, trusting me to keep her safe. She was six months old. My husband and I were downstairs. Finally free from his grip, my neck throbbed as I cried. He held a 25 automatic to his head. Behind him I could see the hole he had punched into the wall, with a blow that was intended for me. All I could say to him was, "Go outside and do it. I don't want to watch." He left.

The sound of the band starting to play brought me back to the present. Their break was over, and I was drunk again. Every time I went to the Rhodexo Lounge I got drunk. And every time I got drunk I thought about all the things I

had been through the past few years. I shouldn't go there. I shouldn't drink. As the band continued to play, the din of the bar pushed all the thoughts out of my head. I poured myself another beer.

I looked around the bar; everyone was drunk. At least I wasn't alone. People were screaming at each other so they could be heard over the music, screaming conversations about nothing at all. Women were sitting with men they didn't even know, men they didn't want to know. Their solution to loneliness: drinks, dancing, and a ride home. And, if they were lucky, they wouldn't be sleeping alone. But in the morning it all looks the same, cold and ugly, and they'll still be alone. It's not a good solution, I know.

Loneliness can't be cured in a night. In fact I don't believe there's a solution to loneliness. Acceptance, that's the only way to deal with loneliness: live with it. That's how I feel now.

I had hoped for awhile. It had been the best eight months of my life. The trip to Bloomington, Illinois, every Friday was my reason to live. He lived in a nice, clean, upper-class complex. He had a two bedroom apartment, one bedroom for my daughter, and one for us. He and I would sit and look at each other for hours. We didn't have to talk. I would let myself get lost in his eyes, and I knew that he loved me. And I loved him. We would put my daughter to bed and light candles. We would lie together, hold each other and watch the shadows dance on the walls. I was content.

It was my daughter. She was the reason that it all ended, for he didn't love her. I could tell he would never love her. He knew it, too. We talked about it, and he said that he didn't want to raise someone else's child. I didn't blame him; I just cried. I still loved him.

I felt a hand rest itself upon my shoulder. I turned my head to see a pair of drowsy, drunken eyes staring at me. He was obviously a G.I. His hair was very short and his mustache was trimmed to perfection. "Would you like to dance?" he asked.

I looked to the dance floor, the blue lights were on and the band was playing a slow song. I looked at the guy and shook my head, "No thanks, I'd rather be alone."

