


1987

## Reflections 1987

D. David VanHoy

Thirlen Osborne

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**Reflections '87**

# Reflections '87

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## CONTEST

Each year the English Department of Gardner-Webb College sponsors a literary contest for all student submissions chosen for publication in *Reflections*. Faculty and nonstudent submissions are not eligible for the contest. All works are judged anonymously by the *Reflections* staff and the final contest judges. This year's final contest judges were Dr. T. Max Linnens, Dr. James Taylor, and Dr. Dennis Quinn.

## AWARDS

First Place:	The Death	D. David VanHoy
Second Place:	Waiting	Patty Redman
Third Place:	To Whom Belongs the Victory	Melissa Brown

## HONORABLE MENTION

Bending the Rules	Patty Redman
Turkey Trap	Patty Redman
A Universal Tombstone	Deborah Cravey
Hidden Indiscretions	Deborah Cravey
Instability	Melissa Brown
A Cryptic Comedy	Susan Hawkins

## Another World

A curtain parts  
    for half an instant  
Myself I see through different eyes.

So independent,  
    compassionless  
So self-contained and dry.

The shock is gone  
    the feeling forgotten  
As quickly as it came.

In my "important" world  
    of ultra-norm  
I'm enveloped once again.

In faceless crowds  
    the noise now brings  
False solace to the soul,

Simulating  
    the reality  
That's becoming more remote.

*Michelle Lynn O'Brien*

## Mirror

Mirror  
Clear, truthful, honest  
Reflecting, staring, probing my reflection  
Inviting my scrutiny—  
Mirror.

*Noel Wilson*



## A Cryptic Comedy

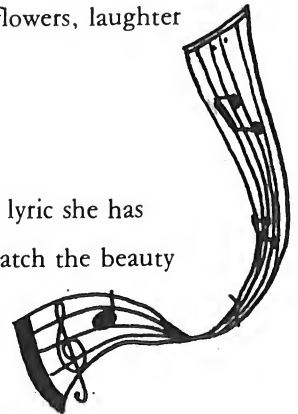
As I wandered in a wood,  
my eyes beheld a sight—  
In a hazy haze he stood;  
an angel dressed in white.  
I edged a little closer,  
and suddenly the scene  
became a bit moroser,  
became, in fact, obscene.  
He sang a song to wake the dead,  
and charmed me through the night,  
He drew me to his side and said,  
“Don’t worry, I won’t bite.”  
Well, this he may, and that he might,  
it really makes no matter—  
Between a kiss and bloody bite,  
he’s sure to choose the latter.

*Susan Hawkins*

### Twenty-three

Morning

And you awaken with the knowledge that the ageless Timesinger has  
called the tune of your life once more.  
For you, the music has been light and sweet.  
And this day will be filled with sunshine and flowers, laughter  
and life  
But you hear crying . . .  
The tears are not for you.  
It is the singer weeping, for she knows that no lyric she has  
ever dreamt of, or will ever whisper, can match the beauty  
that is your song.



## Actually

Lying in a chair, in the  
Sun,  
Well,  
    . . . actually, in the shade,  
ACTUALLY.

Looking into the sky—  
Such a  
Beautiful day,  
    . . . yet, the clouds could be a little whiter,  
ACTUALLY.  
ACTUALLY—  
    . . . that's the problem.

Sitting in the light,  
Thinking it's the dark,  
    and  
Looking down while  
Looking up.

*Mary Wright*

## In Camelot

I flee swiftly into the safety of the kingdom  
    of my thoughts:  
    The immortal place where kings command and  
    might for right will always stand.  
    The land where love and truth and courtesy  
    are codes of man and knight and family.  
But eventually my mind floats back, for a time—  
    to hear the work that the Dragon . . . uh . . .  
    Doctor X will assign.

*Carol Ann Smith*

## An Elder's Farewell

There is a reverie sight  
In illusions of enchanted thought  
Brightly beams all that is in its light  
Its boundaries, peacefully fraught.

'Tis a lea across the tumultuous sea  
Where breaks no shadow, wanes no stain  
New friends there made, so shall they be  
Old friends, acquaintances regain.

Its skies fall not with darkened veil  
No sun beam on morning falls,  
For brightness there on acres trail  
While none the night recalls.

No forceful winds sweep o'er the land  
No waters flood its sod.  
The wayfarer finds on this strand  
A peaceful home with God.

*D. David VanHoy*

## Miniature Miracle



Fuzzy bees  
float through the toasty breeze,  
their suitcases  
overflowing with sweet sunshine.  
They carry whiffs  
of soft perfume,  
while making trails  
of summer candy.

*Karen Frady*

## Angel with a Broken Wing

Not many people today will believe  
that angels  
still visit earth  
to wrestle  
with persons sweating  
in soul struggle,  
except maybe a few poets  
a mystic, a prophet,  
a rebel  
and some children  
who are different.

The Bible says that Jacob  
wrestled with an angel  
till the breaking of the day,  
and then crossed over  
the brook Jabbok  
on a wounded leg.

The angel who comes to me  
on my dark nights  
and in my dry seasons  
has a broken wing,  
And in the height of the struggle moans  
softly  
just when my strength is ebbing.

I think that she wrestles  
with a special few  
who need a little edge  
to make them think  
that they can overcome.

*T. Max Linnens*



## A Reflection

I touched the waters of a midnight pond,  
It danced of a moonlight reflection.  
I spoke into an orange sky—  
And the sun dawned back a reflection.  
I reached out for a tearing cloud—  
It provided a rainbow  
For reflection  
But then I walked into the arms of God—  
And He gave me more than just a reflection.

Mary Wright

## Only Isolated

Tender shadows of winter's whisper cast upon  
the ground, muted blue images of naked birches  
within petrified liquid gleaming in the moon beams  
like the gem of a newly promised bride.  
At morning's ray the birch will swallow its shell.

The painter's brush slathers its tinge unveiling the  
anxious rose feeding from April's dew. With the  
painters pause, and a wondering eye, the bristles  
fall upon the sodden hues shrouding the early rose  
beneath the rustled tints.

Love, seems as ephemeral as waxy iris under Victorian dome,  
but endures as violets of iron embellishing a  
walkway palisade. Nature spins her seasons, the artist  
his semblance, but love abides isolated from the temporal.

*D. David VanHoy*

## Approval

For a brief moment  
Two songs came together  
Imbibing liquid tones  
From the composer's bottle.

I watched the two melodies play,  
Interacting in the moonlight  
Complementing one another  
In perfect symmetry.

The evening closed  
With a touch of strings, pausing briefly:  
The quiet culmination  
Of a vibrant medley.

This is life:  
To find a friend in one's music,  
And to find music in one's friends;  
To know that God watches his children play  
And sings them to sleep  
With the kiss of approval.

*E. Pogo Costley*

### A 3rd

There are 3 types of  
People;  
there are the  
Love-them-and-leave-them,  
and there are the  
Love-them-forever;  
and there is  
You.

There are 3 types of  
Love;  
Love as warm as a mid-summer day,  
Love as cold as an icy winter night,  
and there is  
Your love.

There are 3 types of  
Fools;  
there are the kind that  
Regret and repeat,  
the kind that  
Regret and repent,  
and the kind  
that reminds me  
of  
You.

*Mary Wright*

## A Universal Tombstone

All creatures of the earth despair once more  
Our plight will be decided before dawn  
And whilst our kin prepare today for war  
Soon mankind will become the killer's pawn

The bombs are stored in wait of future use  
The nation's minds and souls are full of pain  
Our world's survival's hanging in a noose  
Before we know it, nothing will remain

No one remembers soldiers who have died  
Except the child whose father's gone at night  
Humanity's committing suicide  
Instead of caring, it would rather fight

If man is to exist upon the earth  
He'll have to learn how much a life is worth

*Deborah Cravey*

## Eager Leader

How good to see a youthful person inspired with fire and zeal!  
How quickly would he fight for what he thinks is right!  
And he would solicit others in his cause.  
If his cause is great enough, he will use whatever force he thinks  
is necessary.

That's why you should beware of a young man fired  
For you may someday have to fight for him.  
He will request, then demand and then . . .  
When you've given all you've got and there's nothing left to give  
He will come and take your place and pretend that it is his.  
He will work and make it grow and perhaps give it style.  
He will feel he has earned it all,  
Then he will have to rest awhile.  
He won't wish to give it up,  
But he must know even in his prime  
That there are others getting ready  
To move in and take control.

*Ernest Blankenship*



## Bending the Rules

Know the rules.  
Study them diligently,  
through and through.  
It's not stated  
in the rules?  
Well, it's legal!  
Know the officials.  
Be their friend.  
Work with them.  
Listen to them.  
Smile while silently  
Surpassing each one.  
They'll trust you.  
While at college,  
the rules will  
be especially enticing.  
So forget silly  
jock raids, rolled  
cars, and annoying  
midnight crank calls.  
Forget beer and  
pot; why, that's  
against the rules!  
Try being original.  
Haunt creaking buildings  
and dance away  
tepid twilights in  
an open arena.  
Stack beds on  
top of desks.  
Find out exactly  
what "excessive" noise  
is during those  
dull "quiet hours."  
Wander back to  
innocence and play  
"dress-up." Zoom down  
the hall on a skateboard.  
Have pillow fights.  
But above all,  
never, never break  
the rigid rules.  
Just keep your silence  
and have fun.

## Clandestine Wake

Warm tiny ripples flow,  
dodging shiny, liquid obstacles,  
leading to a solid crest,  
reaching its pinnacle,  
gliding downward,  
tumbling over a ridge  
to a cascade of soft, downy waterfalls,  
sliding across a shimmering, glass lake,  
and down a final burst  
of smooth, silky springs.

*Karen Frady*



## Communion

Roaring, splashing, gurgling along,  
Striking rock and tree with a song.  
Whitening and glistening, surging on,  
Clear and unmuddied with unmuted drone.  
Into the coldness and freshness I wade,  
The stream and I one made;  
Nothing else intrudes,  
We are alone under the sky.

*P.A. Cline, Jr.*

## Escape

“Escape!” the sea foam whispered  
as it headed for the dunes.  
“Free at last!” it bubbled  
and gave in to the breeze.

But as it fled across the sand  
its form diminished grew  
until at last it was no more—  
but still the breezes blew.

*Rick Wilson*

## Exam Week

My eyes have strained over boldface type, and  
highlighter marks galore.  
Chemistry and calculus formulas  
have mated in my mind.  
A new breed has been formed.  
Botany diagrams have multiplied, and  
my brain can handle no more.

Coffee, coffee.  
Caffeine headaches.  
Junk food breaks, no more.

I'm packing; I'm leaving.  
To no more projects, presentations,  
or term papers shall I bow.  
I'm out; I'm gone.  
I'm through — for now.

*Patty Redman*

## Desolation

We are the lonely; dying, fading,  
Whispering sweet nothings to no one.  
We are the suicidal:  
The huddled masses yearning to be free.

We are intensely deep personalities  
Falling into our own depths,  
Caving in upon ourselves,  
Calling for help where no one can hear,  
Cramped into fetal convulsions,  
Waiting to be born beyond.

Spiralling downward—  
Autistic, artistic, eccentric—  
Just so many spastics on parade  
Lined in fine rows  
Where the grass grows greener above,  
Between the polished stones  
Which mark the sites of our demise,  
Monuments of absurdity.

The cruelest joke is  
That people visit us  
Here.

*E. Pogo Costley*

### She Beckons like a Banshee

She beckons like a banshee . . .  
Soft, alluring melodies  
Shrill as cellophane,  
Yet syrupy sweet  
Tones which lick at my ears  
Smothering me in clouds of nebulous emotion.

She pierces men with glistening eyes  
Which rend the soul from out its shell  
Singing, always singing, sighing  
Calling, cooing under her breath  
Promising sweet apple kisses  
That touch in bliss, and do not fade, but ferment.

I kissed her once, this banshee,  
With eyes all wrapped in chilling tears  
The siren's sister stole my breath  
And steals it still,  
And steals it still.  
She beckons like a banshee.

*E. Pogo Costley*

### Ordinary Boy

Lumbering and lank, he's an ordinary boy.  
Dodging assaults from a competitor, he runs tree to tree.  
With laughter sprinkling the autumn air, he topples into a  
pile of amber leaves and slides safely home.  
Stumbling through the door, he tries to tame his  
flaxen locks.  
I pretend not to notice the bits of crumpled leaves clinging  
to his sweater.  
(Their presence will be shamefully realized before long. He's  
become self-conscious.)  
He tells me of the day's victories and defeats, and occurrences  
that are neither yet are interesting.  
With emerald eyes glimmering and tinkling voice intensified,  
he tells of wondrous happenings.  
He speaks of the customs of the Incas, dangerous atomic  
experiments, and dragons.  
I smile and restrain a curious laugh at the ease with which he  
masters such vocabulary.  
Intensely studying the slowly curving bubbles in my vegetable  
soup, I stir the curiosity of my own childhood.  
Indeed, I find myself imagining dragons in foreign  
lands through my own emerald eyes.

*Patty Redman*

## Guitarist

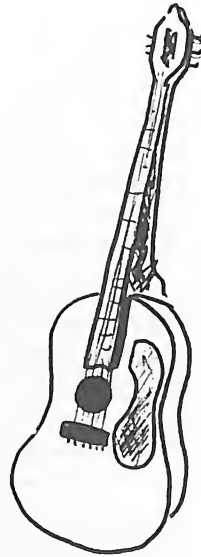
I saw the guitarist  
Gently holding his lover  
Singing to her  
In quiet tones.

His fingers played on her neck,  
Caressing with the touch  
That only the most intimate  
May share.

The tears that swelled  
And clouded my eyes  
Were like memories  
Of my own beloved.

When I return, I know  
She will be waiting,  
Standing in the corner  
In need of new strings.

*E. Pogo Costley*



## Hidden Indiscretions

I don't know how to help you pick yourself from off the floor  
Want and need are separate dreams to which there's never just  
one door

To justify your actions while you're swinging from your rope,  
Follow what your conscience cries and never give up hope

You have to think about the past before you find your way  
Down deep you know there's not much time to save you from decay  
To the right you face aggression, to the left there's dark despair  
The seconds tick away so fast, and you're left without a prayer

Deepest hopes will vanish and your dreams will disappear  
Darkest fears present themselves when there is no comfort near  
Corners become valleys of illusions with no end  
Of your inner soul's fulfillment, there's no way we can pretend

Your mind will drench the fire when your purpose is at stake  
Dirtiest of secrets keep the righteous souls awake  
Sins you take for granted give your ruthless heart some clout  
Tonight your time expires, so just pay on your way out . . .

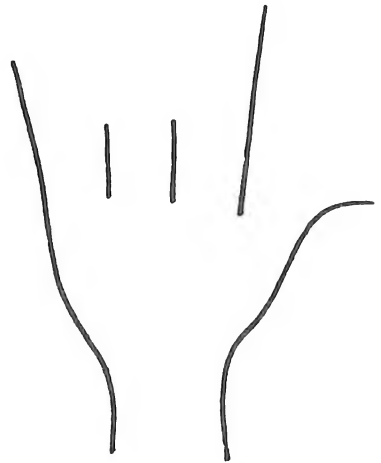
*Deborah Cravey*

## Silent Love

Hands in movement all around  
Facial expression, without a sound  
A world of silence here  
A different kind of ear.

Voices shouting in a crowd  
Communication soft and loud  
A world of sound out there  
Who will take time to share?

Hands in movement now for You  
Facial expression, heart made new  
A world of communication here  
Perfect love casts out fear.



*Becky Sue Rodgers*

## How to Find Courage in Grief

Think of the deepest longing in  
the soul of a father's son.  
The bright presence of a beacon gone.  
Forever.

Forever?

In childhood, a word from this  
guardian of boyhood supplied the  
courage and taught vital lessons.  
Doctrines of life only a Dad  
can impart.

Now suddenly this moment comes  
Bringing a fearful spirit weaker than  
that of the apprehensive child.

Cry out to express the love, confusion  
and anger with such intensity  
'that even that broadest of crevasses  
can be bridged.  
That gulf between the  
presence of life and the absence  
death brings.

Sustain the moment in a final  
desperate appeal.  
In Weakness.

It is time for that courageous spirit.

Now, know strength in the solution  
that is there, always there,  
In memory.

*Jack Folk*



## Jessica!

Her laughing blue eyes sparkle as  
she rejoices infectiously because  
of some inward, secret joy.

Those same eyes may glisten,  
filled with tears when Daddy or  
Mommy says "No!" to an impish  
request.

The contrary spirit of a two year old  
cries "Yes!"

Reckless energy abounds  
that is impossible to harness.

A soul that yearns for freedom  
to explore,  
To have life conform to  
Her Way.

Hair like strawberry sunlight cascades  
onto tiny shoulders in free-flowing  
bouncing ringlets,  
As she bounds from room to room  
at a break-neck pace.

5:00 p.m.  
Her mother is exhausted from  
watching this tireless imp.

I pull the car in the driveway  
at the end of a work day

Knowing I can count on . . .

JESSICA!

Always the first to greet me  
After a day away, she exclaims

DADDY!

I know I can count on . . .

LOVE!

*Jack Folk*



## My Prayer

Lord,  
Is my heart so hard, it cannot bleed?  
Are my eyes so cold, they cannot cry?  
Are my ways so set, they cannot change?  
Is my soul so numb that it cannot feel?  
Lord, soften my heart,  
                    warm my eyes, and  
                    mend my ways.  
And Lord, please teach my soul to feel  
                                    once more.

Amen.

*Carol Ann Smith*

## Instability

Lost individualism  
You let me go  
And allowed sanity  
To pull me back to security  
Come again, beast,  
I want to wrestle you again.  
You shall not pull me down with you,  
But the fight will strengthen me.  
Grab hold of me.  
I will stand secure,  
But your tug  
Will stir my thoughts and refurnish my words.  
Come again, Insanity,  
Come wrestle and enlighten me.

*Melissa Brown*

## New England Mornings

There's beauty in New England Mornings  
And a bakery in the rain  
The city lights its night so lovely  
No one ever thinks of pain

I can't think of sitting down  
I've the whole wide world to see  
There's not one place I dare call home  
—I bring my home with me

Airport terminals are as elegant  
As a Dallas sunset shines  
Truckstops clatter with good will  
While the weary drifter dines

A gypsy's heart controls my head  
So I won't stay in one place  
At least until I can see the world  
And its wonders in your face

*Deborah Cravey*

## Sonnet Sorrows

A piece of paper I got out today  
And then a pen I did set out to find  
I wasn't sure just what I longed to say,  
But several thoughts kept running through my mind

I settled down, all ready to begin  
And wondered what it was that I should write  
To what employment should I set my pen?  
A sonnet, I decided, sounded right

The words began to flow from deep inside  
And soon my sonnet nearly was complete  
While signing it my heart was filled with pride  
But then I found a syllable off-beat!

The sonnet's form I really should rehearse  
But from now on I think I'll write free-verse!

*Deborah Cravey*

## Like a Child

Mother

sits on top of the kitchen bar.

Jason,

her tiny, young child  
makes a very useless attempt to climb  
onto the bar

First he puts his foot on the lowest rail of  
a bar stool—

he leaps, and soon falls to the floor.

Mother

sees that he is not hurt.

Jason

then puts his knee on  
Mother's foot,  
and heaves himself to her knee and  
loses his balance  
and falls.

Again Mother

sees that he is not hurt.

Jason

then decides that it's hopeless—  
he can't make it to the top alone;  
he extends his arms high up into the air  
and exclaims,

“Mother, help me up.”

Mother

is then pleased that her child is  
seeking her,  
and

Mother

reaches down and pulls her child up  
and sets him at her side.

Jason

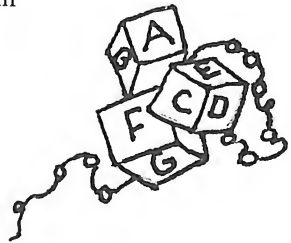
is amazed. He questions her:

“Mother,

I always have to try so hard just to get up  
into that chair at the table,  
but it doesn't look very high from up  
here, does it?

and Mother replies:

“No, it isn't hard at all.”



“Mother,  
if it isn't hard for you to do the  
things I struggle to do, then why are you still here?”  
Mother answers with a smile:

“Because, Jason,  
you are my child—  
I love you and I'm here because you are here;  
I cannot teach you and look after you  
if I am where you are not.”

WHAT THEN IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN  
MOTHER with JASON — and  
FATHER with MANKIND?

*Mary Wright*

### Thank You

Times are getting tough for me,  
too tough even to get through,  
I turn my hands up to the sky:  
“Please show me what to do.”

Things aren't workin' out for me—  
or at least not like I'd planned—  
So I face the sky and I speak aloud;  
“Please tell me where I stand.

You've given me so many things  
and you've never let me down,  
You've often added a loving smile,  
to cover up my frown.

You've held for me a shining light  
So I'd never go astray—  
And even in the hardest times you've never  
gone away.

I thank you for  
So many things; for  
So many gifts  
I sing;

And I'll never  
Forget—  
I'll remember it  
yet—  
The gift only you could bring . . .  
My Salvation.”

*Mary Wright*

Not Forever Fled: A Visit To Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill"

Plain checkerboard planks;  
A rolling-voiced youth  
Poles our ferry to the soft, distant mist—  
Wales.

I twist along a thread of tortuous road,  
Nestled in a counterpane  
Of rumpled fields and hedgerows,  
Swerve to a vertical edge of granite  
Toward the slashing sea—  
Carmarthen Bay.

A turn. A silver castle mimics the rocks;  
I step the round stones leading to a poem  
In the huddled village—  
Laugharne.

Up the narrowing cobbles toward  
The house jolly with woodsmoke  
Suggled into the hill;  
She smiles at gentle greetings as she  
Whisks her blue-checked dress,  
Swirls a rush broom on  
Weathered planks too old to creak.  
Offers candy from thick crouching jars;  
Sonorous voices join to weave yarns of  
Thomas — recalling, retelling, relaunching

On to the high field deep with  
Wildestflowers as a breeze winnows them  
Down the rivers of the windfall light,  
At home in my not-quite home, I am now  
**Huntsman . . . herdsman . . .**  
Swoops of skylarks flee our raucous rhymes;  
Clouds scoop the words, fling them to the sea.

Ever-youth of Thomas and me, forever found —  
Fern Hill.

*Patricia M. Wheeler*

## Obscure Fantasies

Jeweled eyes of light approached from every direction  
as myriads of cars crept by,  
trying to find their way through the haze.  
A sinister graveyard appeared with its ominous stones,  
fighting off the waves of stifling mist,  
chilled fingers clinging to the base of each  
for fear of being choked.  
Sidewalks seemed to disappear in the distance,  
filmy roads to nowhere.  
Phantoms arose above ponds  
and wound their ways to their final resting places,  
occasionally bumping against windshields,  
desperately struggling for a secure haven.  
A lone person drifted into sight,  
leaving behind milky trails for lost souls to follow.  
Finally, the sun waded into vision,  
leaving a patch of blood  
as it battled the seemingly delicate fog,  
which proved to be a little stronger than it appeared.  
But the sun rose in glory  
with streaks of warmth left  
wherever the earth was touched.

*Karen Frady*

**Ode to My Bedroom Shoes**  
*(a pair of Eddie Bauer sheepskin Ugh slippers  
given to me for Christmas, 1986)*

Oh fuzzy furred comfort to my midlife toes!  
What sacrificial sheep baaed toward eternity  
Shedding its tanned husk in deep-piled inversion  
That toes might grope and plunge in warm abandonment  
On Christmas morn?

What price for virgin sheepskin shaped and stitched  
And married to synthetic soles?  
Oh Eddie Bauer, your catalog numbers do not count the cost  
In lamb life! Born to bleat and die,  
Transformed to chops and roasts and Eddie Bauer Ughs  
That skin and bone might rest in wooly warmth;  
Synthetic fuzz might well have matched this life.

Yet, warm and precious is your natural hide  
Against feet worn and mechanized by life,  
No socks shall come between your hide and mine.  
They slither downward in your curling grasp,  
Necessitating bare and naked feet  
Free to frolic in your depth.

Transfigured, yet still a follower,  
You tread meekly toward new life,  
Conforming to my footsteps,  
Shaped by the life your comfort has renewed.

*Joyce Brown*

**O Lord, We Praise**

O Lord, we praise the day you came,  
The one that made us whole.  
We praise your name, O Lord, the same;  
To thee our hands we fold.

My God, the Father of us all,  
The light that leads the way,  
To thee on bended knees we fall,  
For strength and love we pray.

*Mindy James*



Postmarked: Charleston, S.C., 1879

From my balcony I can see  
the first hint of pink  
span the horizon.

The sea's cool breath  
caresses my skin, and  
the early morning rays  
dance daintily on the rippling waves.

Savory scents of fresh  
perked coffee and  
sounds of carriage  
wheels and horse hooves  
beating the well-worn pavement  
drift through the air.

There is only one detail missing  
from this world of antique dreams . . .

I can see it now through sleepy eyes.  
awakening at last.

I must come home.

*Patty Redman*

### Return

Soldier, you've forgotten none  
Of the lands that you've come fighting from.  
To you they all appear the same,  
Charming like a crystal ball,  
Then cracked and scoured by crimson rain.  
Do you want to see them all . . .  
Again?

*Melissa Brown*

## Silvered Gray

Over the hill,  
Past the prime,  
The rest of life  
For which the past has come.

Time of reflection,  
Moments of envy,  
Eyes full of tears,  
View sparkling youth.

Tardy movements,  
Slow reactions,  
Medicare candidate,  
Senior citizen.

Remembering when  
Vigor flowed easy,  
Vitality came unbid  
Waxing old, faded and worn,

Cast aside,  
Discarded, unused,  
Filled with wisdom,  
Finding no outlet.

Companion bereft,  
Shunted aside,  
Faded and gray,  
Yearning for love,  
Yet barred from fulfillment.



*P.A. Cline, Jr.*

## Someone

Rare, it is, to find someone  
Who sees order in your disarray.

Rarer still, to find the one  
Who hears what you cannot say.

When you cry they still believe in you,  
And find hope in your tears.

Whose warm, consistent confidence  
Slowly melts a wall of fears.

One who takes dreams and makes them seem  
Not quite so out of reach.

Who'll let you feel special and take the time  
To learn, as well as to teach.

*Michelle Lynn O'Brien*

## Strawberry Incense

Strawberry incense and a mem'ry of you . . .  
I sip the silence of the cool autumn dew  
Taking deep breaths  
In the darkness  
As the incense drifts down;  
And my eyes close  
And my thoughts flow  
In the shadows around.

Strawberry incense, calling softly to you  
Like smoky footprints wafting quietly through  
As the moon glows  
And my heart shows  
Then my thoughts flow to you —  
So my soul's spent  
Like the incense  
Yet I'm content . . .

. . . with you.



*E. Pogo Costley*

## System of Justice

The lawyer manipulates the truth.  
He plays games with the witness  
And tries to deceive the jury.  
I proposed to the judge  
That the lawyer's role  
Be given to an impartial party  
To seek the truth  
For the sake of justice.  
The judge said "We work within the law,  
It's our system.  
We will proceed according to custom."  
"But what about justice?  
Can we not consider justice before system and custom?"  
"The law is the law," said the judge.  
Judges must be dumb.  
Smart lawyers can turn them in any direction,  
So the good guy who goes to court  
With nothing but his honest and his good name  
Had better beware  
Justice is often defeated by the law at court.

*Ernest Blankenship*

### The Interruption

Startled at their mating  
the seacrab and her partner  
were frozen on the sand  
in an amorous embrace.

A movement, then they parted;  
she darted down a hole.  
Poor Romeo was left undone!  
All he could do was run.

Sideways (or was it backwards)  
he tried to circumvent  
the thoughtless interrupter  
who grinned in puzzlement.

To the East he seized his chance  
and headed for the water.  
He'll have to find another time  
to finish what he'd started.

*Rick Wilson*

## The Death

It is said in the mountains that if a bird lands on the window sill, a death is sure to follow in that house.

You would have loved how the rains  
fell in April and raced through the  
maple leaves, falling upon the Guernsey  
seeking shelter.

The summer sun, falling upon the  
river, casting its golden hues  
into the dancing ripples, inspired  
me to think of your new home.

I saw children chasing leaves in  
the autumn breeze. The winds whistled  
in the willow's bough tonight, just  
as the moon began to peep through the clouds.

As I watched the snow softly gathering  
on the window sill, a stray swallow landed  
there; turning suddenly, I was with you  
again.

*D. David VanHoy*

### To Whom Belongs the Victory?

People of strong faith,  
You stand protected under transparent umbrellas,  
While I stand drenched in the rain.  
But I can feel what is only yours to ponder.  
You're aided in your success,  
And you're rich in your desires.  
I labor hard for small accomplishments,  
But I know the victories,  
And they are mine.  
You rest in elaborate temples,  
Amazed by the magnificence of stained glass,  
As I sit in an isolated hut.  
But though my windows are small and broken,  
They are clear and I can see the world.

*Melissa Brown*

## The Keys

As the bright spring sun ushers in the fresh cool dawn,  
the harsh winter rain pounds deep within my heart.  
I walk among the sweetly fragranced flowers,  
and no one knows my world is falling apart.

My family and friends see my "cheery" warm smile;  
I dare not let them know.

While they walk in my limelight and gawk at my fame,  
I wonder how much darker will their lives be if I go.

As the cool spring eve caresses the skin,  
I shiver and shake from the cold inner breeze.  
Tonight I will pass through that peaceful threshold of death,  
for at last I have found my will and the keys.

*Patty Redman*

## The Stranger

What do you think of a man so cold,  
He steals your silver, hocks your gold?  
Takes your best painting and colors it red,  
Calls you at midnight to say "you're dead"?  
Tells you lies, says he's great,  
Comes at six, but leaves too late,  
Tells you you're dreaming, plays with your mind,  
Hides all your money, you never will find.  
Tells you life's easy, tells you it's hard,  
Says you can't win, he's dealt his best card.  
Takes you riding from ten until two,  
Says "I love you" and then "We're through."  
What could be worse than a sea full of danger,  
When you're the bait, the shark's the stranger?

*Susan Hawkins*

## Transformating

Clouds fleeting — my heart beating,

I wish for you.

Lands meet sea — like you and me,

I think of us.

Two gulls pass o'er — close beside, wingtips touch,

I remember us.

One gull roaming, searching, eternity ignoring,

I think of me.

The other diving, satisfied in passing,

I think of you.

Together—apart, Soaring—diving, sunset calling, waiting,

I hope for us.

Solitude approaching, eternity expanding,

I search for me.

Full moon rising, warming, rounding,

I yearn for you.

Crisp white light, one gull soaring—hoping,

Will you remember me?

Golden dawn coming, colors reflecting—tracing,

Will you still love me?

Take flight, make haste, the wind to race,

Would you love another?

Wingtips rarely meeting, my heart fleeting, loving—changing.

The past erasing.

Two gulls soaring—diving, looking, hoping, eternity approaching,

The future embracing, transforming.

*Charlotte Porter Slice*



## Untainted Egos

To implore of the preference of worldly desires  
Causes only the brimstone to extinguish love's fires  
And all the while praying that scorn comes not near  
We've each other to thank that our hearts shrink from  
    fear

If a need turn to hunger to establish relief  
Remember all that we are is unfounded belief  
In a tempest of rage; scrutinizable sins  
Now we turn back the pain to where real love begins

Though a heart touch a heart, all around there is ice  
Frozen solid through time; an unaccountable price  
Forgotten are passions behind each man's fate  
Enveloped by sanctions and imprisoned with hate  
Oh, will that each droplet of pity and pain  
Come to darkness unheeded, not forgiving the chain  
In a midst of false discretion with each face second-  
    guessed,  
Only untainted egos will survive love's arrest

*Deborah Cravey*

### When Grief Comes

  In time  
the sun will brighter shine,  
and the golden moon will make its way  
again across the fields  
  of shocked corn and cane,  
and the cry of the wood duck  
  will be heard on the wind.

But now you're gone  
and the drought that twists  
  the corn  
and sucks the lushness from  
  the swamp,  
and paints everything under the sun  
with a thick coat  
of fine powdered, red dust  
is a fitting symbol  
of the heavy-handed grief  
that wrings our souls out  
  limp and dry.

## Turkey Trap

Hey, Mom!  
Look at this one,  
it's me and Dad  
on Thanksgiving Day.

It must have been getting wintery then.  
See how the windows  
steamed over while  
you were cooking  
the mouthwatering bait.  
And the limbs were  
bare on the trees outside,  
like wires surrounding a cage.

You can tell that the day  
was special and alluring.  
Look how neat and clean  
the corner cabinet was.  
It is easy to see that  
I hadn't touched it . . . yet.

Dad looks happy.  
(He probably just made some  
cute remark or was about to.)  
He doesn't look much younger  
than he does now,  
just different somehow.  
Perhaps age holds lures I  
don't yet understand.

My plastic cup usually held milk.  
But it never enticed me.  
(I hated milk.)  
What's on my plate?  
I bet it's my favorite,  
cranberry sauce!  
And there's that big ole  
drumstick in my mouth.  
How long did it take me  
to finish that anyway?  
It must have been good  
if I ate the whole thing,  
but I can't remember.

I was barely  
perched on my chair.  
I was probably looking at  
someone who told me to  
sit down.  
One more second and  
I would have been gone.  
  
But we both got caught,  
me and the turkey,  
for a Thanksgiving memory.

*Patty Redman*

### Unassembled Poem

The poem was unassembled  
when I found it on the sand:  
broken bi-valves breaking meter;  
drifting wood that would not rhyme.  
  
The 'gulls and 'pipers tried to build  
the poetry from parts  
by crying out to one another  
in what was less than harmony.  
  
Perhaps the seaots knew the tune;  
at least they swayed in time—  
But, then again, they could have been  
just urging me along.  
  
Sandcrabs scurried, seeking refuge  
from the poet on the beach,  
more concerned with safety  
than his symphony of thought.  
  
And then the poem was finished  
in the breaking of the waves:  
“The beach is not the universe  
nor eternity the sea.”

*Rick Wilson*

## Waiting

Put cool tap water into the copper tea kettle.  
Place kettle on the stove and start water boiling.  
Open the curtains.

Absorb the warming rays.

Have tea cup and tea ready;

Sit, and wait . . .

Put on coat and gloves.

Place key in the ignition and start car.

Drive onto the street.

Numbly regard the sights of the day.

Come to a red sentinel;

Sit, and wait . . .

Open office door.

See receptionist and submit your resume.

Find an empty seat.

Leaf through tattered magazines.

Listen for your name;

Sit, and wait . . .

Open folded newspaper.

Scan petty problems of the world and refold the pages.

Walk into the kitchen.

Close the curtains.

Stare at the phone;

Sit, and wait . . .

*Patty Redman*

## Grass

Grass.

Green, dewy, soft,

Growing, blowing, dancing in the breeze

Begging to be touched by bare feet

Grass.

*Renae Karriker*

## You People

You people of this society, why do you hate us? We  
have feelings too. Sure, we are different.

Why must we conform? Will no one like us if we do not?

We try to like ourselves, but you make us ashamed.

Why can you not love and accept us?

We accept you and your many flaws.

We do not hurt anyone.

You make death seem so friendly, much more a friend than you.

We have to change or act differently to be accepted.

A few of us have stepped out and have tried to take a stand.

You treat us so badly, I have not the courage to stand up and be myself.

*Yvonne Sullivan*

### Why?

Why is there so much hate,  
and never enough love?  
Why is there bitterness,  
and never enough peace?  
Why is there confusion,  
and never enough understanding?  
Why is there disappointment  
and never enough joy?  
Why is there death,  
and never enough life?

Because God above

made a world.

Then man created sin.

## The Four

The snapshot.

It is now faded and yellowed. The four children stand shoulder to shoulder, arranged by some anonymous adult with a flair for orchestration. They are frozen in childhood, as unconscious of their immortality as they are conscious of their dressy women's clothes. A moment pulled from an album, images cracking the time blocks mortared by thirty-five years.

Their names are on the back: Brandon McKay, Kenny Morris, Donnie Scopes, Richard Alan Morris. 1945.

Shelves hold many books of our lives. On each shelf is a series of books enclosed by one or two bookends. Those with two, often dusty, indicate a part of life completed with no possibility of new chapters. These are the books of memory. On other shelves are those volumes with one bookend. To these may be added other books, chapters, or merely lines — fragments of life about which little remains to be written. These are the books of perpetuity. With time the memory books grow dustier, their facts recalled selectively and manipulated by emotions and vanity. The books of perpetuity are written by a sleepy scribe whose words become memories the instant they appear.

Brandon. The oldest, the only girl, our wildflower. Slim and blue-eyed, she smiles innocently beneath dirty blond hair swept back and parted in the middle. A ribbon may be there, but I can't tell. She wears a button-up blouse, perhaps beige, flared sleeves pulled down to reveal shoulders announcing the budding woman who slipped through the fingers of our friendship like exotic silk. A long dark skirt accentuated by a rope belt adorned with tassels completes her gypsy garb, and her fingers rest casually on her hips. Gypsy and wildflower—our Brandon.

Kenny. A head shorter and at eight two years younger than his cousin, he wears a kerchief which frames his tilted face and then drops to become a ribbon tied at his neck. A thin coat, unfastened, divides to reveal a section of his dress. His sleeves have ruffles like clematis blossoms, and one white-gloved hand is suspended before his chest, tentative and expectant. Kenny, most like his father, inscrutable, one of us yet anomalous.

Donnie. The outsider from his grandfather's house on the hill. His pose is the least expressive, hands and arms concealed by a dress which is little more than a cloth wrapped around his shoulders and allowed to fall as it will. Like the other two boys he wears lipstick and a kerchief. He pouts at the camera, eyes slitted as if stung by sunglare. Donnie, ambivalent about his friends, uneasy, reflective.

Richard Alan Morris. The brother of Kenny and only five, a year younger than Donnie. He clutches the handle of a pocketbook in his gloved left hand. His head, barely higher than the hedge in the background, bends right, the best of shadow and sun caressing his face. Grub, on hands and knees clawing his way up Kinder Hill by shrubs, rocks, and crevices and then, called by his grandmother, sliding down again as though snow-sledding. Sweetfaced Grub. Grub no more.

Forty-four is too young. When you lose a friend from the past, even one to whom you were not close, you are supposed to get a phone call late at night and wish you could go to the funeral. You send flowers, maybe a letter, and do some thinking. I saw Ruby shoot Oswald live on television and witnessed the Challenger explosion over Canaveral. That's one thing. But after thirty-five years, together again, to see with your own eyes . . .

When my mother died I was prepared. In poor health for years, she was ready to try a new world. A week before her death—asking me not to laugh, not to be so cynical this time—she told me of lying awake one night and seeing a hand reach out for her, and she held it and felt peace like none ever. "It happened, Donnie, it did." So I believed her despite my education, for it was my mother's truth and nothing else mattered.

It was she who brought my sister and me back to Arrowhead after six years of living in three states. My salesman father, afflicted with wander-lust to this day, finally agreed that his family could use some stability. He moved us one more time and then back and still lives there on Kinder Hill, now by himself, dreaming of the next trip over the beckoning mountains into Virginia and Kentucky, the roads his life veins, the work his avocation.

Arrowhead is just an ordinary small Southern town, distinguished only by the twenty-foot arrowhead set in a fountain by the depot. When we moved there at the foot of the Appalachians, the only west-bound highway was Old 70 which snaked up Arrowhead Mountain, carrying frustrated passengers whose curses mingled with the diesel fumes of creeping trucks that flirted with killer inclines surrounded by incomparable beauty. Twelve miles and thirty minutes above lay Blue Mountain, where tourism began, then on to Biltmore, the western "capital" of our state.

Old 70 was pronounced terminal, so the engineers came and cut away massive hunks of earth and rock to build a four-lane on the other side of Arrowhead Mountain, abandoning the cracked, potted original to curiosity seekers, sentimentalists, and to bullet-holed signs ordering LOCAL TRAFFIC ONLY. When the interstate connected with New 70, Arrowhead cut the power to its only traffic light and worried less about pollution. The town became a quaint relic on a picture postcard, population 600 on a good day.

It was here that my grandfather had built his two-story brick on three acres of one of the highest hills in Arrowhead. World War I had just ended, and my mother had gone to the Woman's College at Greensboro. The Kinder house commanded a lordly view of the town, to the west the tannery where my grandfather had been a foreman and beyond that Wildcat Mountain across the Angel Falls River. One summer a rumor swept Arrowhead that the tannery had been sold and was to be razed for a new industry. Soon the rumor became truth and the men and machines did their work. Only the gallant old chimney remained, all two hundred feet of it, as if chosen to make a suicide stand. Grandfather Kinder said they would have to dynamite it; he didn't know when. Said they would have to excuse his absence.

With a child's love of spectacle—particularly the violent kind—I arose early each morning, pulling on my high-topped PF's which were soon damp with dew, ignoring Grandmother Kinder's injunction that a watched kettle never boils. But by the kindness of fortune I did see it fall, heard the terminal roar

and blast, the crashing and dusty crumbling as the last of my retired grandfather's old workplace was laid to rest in the graveyard beside anvils, paddlewheels, and horse-drawn buggies. Two years later Arrowhead marched baby steps into the modern world when its first textile mill rose from the ashes of its predecessor, there beside the interstate which plunged up the mountain and in time lapped the soil of California. The next year my grandfather died.

Below Kinder Hill through the cedar park favored by my mother and aunt when they were young, down a steep bank and across Old 70, sat the Morris house. Brandon lived there with her mother and Grandmother Morris. It was Brandon's father who named her, the father still living but never seen by us. Evelyn McKay had hoped that "Brandy" might catch on, but the girl remained Brandon throughout her childhood and adult years.

Kenny and Grub Morris spent so much of their time below Kinder Hill with Brandon that it was only a matter of time before their three became four. We began that first summer together in a victory celebration, Grub leading us into the branches of the mimosa tree ten feet down the slopes from Old 70. Above, cars rolled by, blaring cacophonous symphonies with their horns, passengers spinning the dials of their radios to high volume. We joined the festivities, blowing whistles and horns and clapping boards while shouting merrily at the cars and hooting at each other. Japan had waved the white flag, and though we were poor historians, a party was a party.

Then Ken Morris returned from the Pacific, a man that Arrowhead called "Captain" while his sons were learning to say "Father." Ken had a deep gravelly voice that bounded from his broad chest, and a presence that filled a room, reducing everything in it by sheer force of personality. Arrowhead's ranking officer had returned, instant hero, eminence, legend.

But the glow was the kind that blinds when one emerges from a tunnel. Ken Morris, ships and jungles now half a world removed, faded into the light of common day. He dabbled in the lumber business when he felt like it, drank coffee with buddies at Grogan's lunch counter, and even became a skilled chef in Virginia Morris' kitchen. It was all he could do, my mother explained. He had a disability.

I remember Ken best as our swimming teacher, a patient tutor delighted by clumsy children flopping about as he held them under the stomach above water. Ken supervised our mountain climbing up Wildcat, our chaotic softball games, and our picnics. My father was home two days a week. Ken Morris had lots of time.

Above Arrowhead and off Old 70 was Andrews Park, set in the skirts of Arrowhead Mountain and separated from the road by Cline's Creek and thick rows of pine, willow, and cedar. Children loved the park for its trails and particularly for the fun afforded by the cold water. Softball games, played in a narrow rectangle, obeyed the laws of nature. Trees and slopes created havoc for fielders frantic to prevent the batter from scoring. But Cline's Creek was worst of all, catching errant balls and carrying them, bobbing and twisting, toward the small arched bridge near the park entrance.

Grub was our self-appointed ball-getter, squat-scooting down the bank, yelling, "I got it! I got it!" Then, in the creek, he pumped his stubby legs, dancing around rocks and soaking his short pants with icy creek water, sometimes slipping and falling but rising with a defiant wail until, helped by a friendly root which snagged the ball, flinging it back over the top. Then he scratched



his way up the bank and, water and mud spraying from him like a dog out of rain, howled, "It's my bat! It's my bat!"

When the hamburgers had begun to sizzle, Ken would call, "How do you want 'em?" And Grub, running ahead of us, softball sublimated to his voracious appetite, would cry, "Rare, Daddy! Cook 'em rare!"

Grub was always running, always trying to be first, whether chasing balls in the creek, rushing to the head of the hamburger line or pulling himself to the highest limb in our tree. He was a child consumed with belonging. If some peer circle had no trespassing signs, he would defiantly step over the line into the center and tug at the shirttails of those there by invitation only. Although not lacking friends his own age, he decided that the clan of his cousin, brother and me was select society and made it his own. I wondered as we grew older if Richard Alan Morris the adult would still be running, climbing, and searching for the glamorous social opportunities, the high visibility of being first in line.

Even after the four of us grew apart—Brandon to mountains and desert, Kenny to the Virginia tidewaters—I saw my younger friend when our trips home coincided. But Brandon and Kenny seemed destined for the memory book.

By nature, most older children resent the presence of younger ones. Brandon, however, seemed unaffected by our attentions, more bemused than irritated, more curious than resentful. Bran'un, as Grub called her, saw no threat to her social status during our visits when girlfriends were there. We were unintentional entertainment for them, for Brandon teased and taunted us good-naturedly, drawing us briefly into the charmed and secretive circle of the scents and shapes of young womanhood. Once she chased us around the room with a loaded, smoking powder puff. Trapped and anointed, we rushed from the room, gasping from the fumes and shamed by the sound of girlish giggles following close behind. Outside, Grub seized Brandon's cocker spaniel and rubbed her up and down his chest, hoping to restore his proper smell. And the dog, freed, raced away to roll in the grass, wondering what she had had to do with anything.

I guess we loved Brandon too much to hold this against her, for she was never cruel in her pranks. Her happiness was infectious, pervasive. Yet there were times when we heard angry voices behind closed doors. Then Brandon would stay in her room and not answer when we knocked. She and her mother, who never seemed together, lived by truces renewed when expedient. Brandon was as much as you can expect of people: almost what she seemed to be. She kept her heavy freight locked up in crates.

Grub could have his Bran'un, but not his Kenny—at least not the brother he wanted. Even at eight, Kenny Morris had his own magnetic field, attractive alike to adults and children. His light brown hair, handsome, vulnerable face, and slim athletic body impelled Grandmother Morris to observe: "That boy will break a lot of hearts someday." Externally, he seemed oblivious to how others perceived him. Success was inevitable. He didn't even have to try hard. The father-legend had returned to his older son. And in those giddy days after America's "good war," the glitter settled over whole families, and new trophy cases were being erected for the next generation.

Kenny could be prankster, jokesmith, and clown. But he had another side, a thin-lipped brooding that wrapped him in a barbed wire, a face that could freeze even Brandon in mid-sentence, could instantly immobilize the restive

Grub. Once in anger I punched Grub in the stomach. Wheeling, Kenny buried his fist into my solar plexus and shouted, "Don't you ever hit my brother again!" Rather than the love of sibling loyalty, Kenny's response was more the defense of family honor, honor ill-defined yet immutable.

Our short years together were measured in summers—the swimming, the games in Grandmother Morris' yard, the sweaty walks for five-cent Pepsis at Grogan's Drugs, and the outings at Andrews Park.

It was after another of Ken's hamburger suppers at the park that the four of us drifted to our special place, a small clearing with an unobstructed view of the sky. We boys always waited for Brandon to speak, pretending to be astronomers while casting furtive glances at her, trying to read her mind. Brandon sat with hands pulling at her drawn-up knees, her red shorts damp from mischief in the creek and her floppy gray T-shirt flat against her stomach but spilling to the ground from her arched back. Her hair, moon-matched, wildflowered, caught shimmers of light, a Diana granting us mortals a brief audience.

"See those four stars?" she began, pointing. Over there, to the right above the tree."

"Which stars?" frowned Kenny. "How can you tell? There's millions."

"I see 'em, Bran'un," cried Grub, pointing the same way. "One-two-three-four," he counted, pulling on his fingers.

"Donnie?"

"Sure. They're all in a row," I lied.

"You know what, Bran'un, they're real close together. Bet we could get in an airplane on the first star and get to the second in five minutes and to the third and the fourth . . . in thirty seconds."

"No, silly," she laughed, poking him in the ribs. "It would take all your life just to go from one to another."

"But they look close, just like us. The one at the top is me, then you, then Kenny, and then Donnie. And they'll always be there 'cause stars don't go away."

"Aggh!" Kenny pushed himself from the ground, stone in hand, and threw it toward the creek. "Stars ain't nothin' but rocks like that one. We might come out here tomorrow night and the whole sky would be different."

"But they don't have to mean anything," said Brandon gently. "They just have to be there for a while and look pretty. I read one time that people that lived a long time ago spent lots of time gazing at stars and telling stories about them. Stars seem like forever."

Perhaps we had our own syzygy, that curious and fascinating alignment of earth, moon, and sun. Modern stargazers rhapsodize in their notebooks when they see this eclipse. Then the unrepentant winds bring the devastating tides, an uncaged animal, unstoppable, inevitable.

Those summer nights. Kenny, our demon of darkness, loved those nights in his grandmother's yard, transforming our games into tests of his own physical and mental agility. Once we pitched a tent in preparation for an all-night "camping trip." When blackness had absorbed trees and grass, we decided to play hide-and-go-seek. The big maple tree was our base, and we counted off to see who would be "It." I dreaded having to search for the others, particularly Kenny, who took fiendish delight in jumping out to scare us before racing safely to the tree. Because he could outrun us, he was seldom "It." Once Grub, having searched quickly under the porch, was crawling out when a hand seized

his ankle and dragged him, howling as a man seconds from the fire, back into the darkness. The screams brought Evelyn McKay and Grandmother Morris to investigate and pried Brandon and me from our hiding places.

Once while crouching behind the hedge near the railroad tracks, I became aware, intuitively, of a presence behind me. Turning cautiously, lest sudden movement rouse the devil, I saw a huge yellow cyclops eye stalking me. Shrieking, I fled without shame to the house and into Brandon's room, locking the door and flipping on all the lights. Then from outside I heard the hooting of a diesel locomotive. "I had to go to the bathroom," I told them.

Later in the safety of the tent, our sleeping bags unrolled, we listened to the crickets' serenade and an owl's questions.

"Know what that owl is trying to find out?" grinned Kenny.

"What?" Brandon raised her eyebrows.

"He wants to know who did it."

"Did what?" from the expectant Grub.

"Murdered all those people."

My voice was constricted. "How come I never heard about that?"

"The ax killer did it." Kenny parted the tent flap as if expecting a visitor. Grub crossed his arms and hugged himself. "This guy goes around at night with an ax and looks in people's windows for somebody to cut up. He's got a green face with yellow eyes and drool comin' down his mouth. So he breaks open the window and climbs in. You're a goner then cause he hypnotizes you and starts chopping on your toes and goes all the way up and . . . Kenny broke off and turned an ear toward the flap, his mouth an agonized slit. Then, in slow motion, he gingerly seized a section of flap with thumb and forefinger and slowly, excruciatingly peeled back the flap.

A noise behind me broke the spell. It was Grub, rear end toward the roof, fighting his way under the back canvas. If Grub believed it, I did too. Soon we were both in full flight, this time Grub joining me in the sanctuary of Brandon's room, two small boys for whom shame was preferable to the possibility that myths were real.

Then they came for us. I can still see Brandon's sympathetic smile—a bit too merry, I thought—still hear Kenny laughing at us, just as he laughed at the Blackwelder when we went swimming and he dunked us or threatened to throw us off the high rock.

Swimming was our first sport, our greatest adventure. The Blackwelder was a natural pool formed by Nathan's Creek, a waterway cold even in the summer as it twisted down from Mt. Elgin, tumbling and swirling before pausing to rest in the company of the high rock and the laurel and rhododendron. In the post-war years, such scenic wonders were the natural order of things, not some ecological cause. The Blackwelder was host to adults and children alike. It was here that Ken taught us to swim, here that dreams and fears washed around us, here where the center seemed to hold.

Only those of strong heart dared make the perilous descent a hundred feet down the dirt bank, which was dangerous wet or dry. Bathers clutched at shrubs and saplings, pausing to embrace the big oak halfway down, careful to avoid the holly although even it was preferable to accelerating like an eighteen-wheeler on Old 70 and hurtling over the high rock into the frigid water. Children like Grub sometimes scooted on their bottoms, shouting "Ahaaaaaa" in agony and delight, proud of making it safely to the bottom and feeling grown up.

The pool scene could have been in an art gallery. Upstream, gentle rapids intersected moss-draped banks. Past the rapids, the water smoothed out into the "diving" hole and then flowed over the "kiddie" rock and on toward the bridge over Old 70.

Kenny and Brandon swam with their own friends. Grub and I were at first confined to the shallow water and later, our swimming abilities certified by Ken, allowed in the deep end. Our kiddie rock, above water only during dry seasons, was our diving board, while better swimmers used the high rock, an austere, sloped edifice that provided leaps anywhere from fifteen to eight feet.

It was a rite of passage for children to take their maiden dive off this rock. Brandon and Kenny did so easily. I can still see Kenny, a boy equal to the rock, poised on his toes at the fifteen-foot height, black suit plastered to his hips and buttocks, flinging himself over the metallic water and, as though held inert by a lover's wind from Blowing Rock, hanging, hanging until, the wind abating, slicing like a whetted knife into the pool.

Kenny and Brandon would sometimes dive together and then swim to us, coaxing: "Come on. Don't be sissy. You can do it. Just get up there and don't think about it." We had heard that submerged rocks awaited careless divers, and each time I prepared to be initiated I tried to find those rocks lest their secret powers smash my head and leave me floating in the water for snakes to eat.

Of all the stories we heard, none captivated Grub and me more than that of the Death Current below the kiddie rock. Never swim that far down, we were warned, for the water was deceptive. But people did anyway, Kenny and Brandon among them, and we never heard of anyone drowning in that sweet Afton. Grub finally swam there, too, and lived to tell about it. And his initiation dive from the high rock harmed mainly his dignity because he did a belly flop.

I postponed my initiation and then it was too late. As a new decade approached the Blackwelder lost its mystique as boys and girls became teenagers and discovered automobiles and each other. The polio scare infected Arrowhead, and frantic mothers shipped their offspring to the chlorine waters of the public pool in Blue Mountain. One evening, a town truck sprayed DDT around Kinder Hill to destroy mosquitoes suspected of carrying the virus.

While Grub and I were sleeping, Brandon and Kenny walked softly through our circle into adolescence. Kenny had his own little black book at twelve. Brandon now sat with her boyfriends in the porch swing and rode around in cars.

For diversion, Grub and I established the Eavesdroppers Society. As president, I assigned Grub to the bushes around the porch with orders to take good notes. When he reported back I demanded, "Well, what were they talking about?"

"They weren't talkin' about nothin'," He retorted, puffing his lips. "All they did was neck."

Then my father moved us again and we kept in touch mainly through friends and relatives. Brandon graduated from Carolina with a portfolio of honors, then surprised everyone by crossing the mountains to teach the children of coal miners. I saw her the summer before she left. "I'm not ready to give myself to a man, Donnie," she explained, pushing back the long yellow hair. "There's so much to do."

At thirty she finally married and moved to Albuquerque, still a teacher. Still

young, she took early retirement to join Cal in a desert house without water, electricity, or other modern amenities. I saw her again, just before the move, and she sparkled like a girl, ready for another plunge off the high rock.

Kenny got an engineering degree from State and settled with Janey in Norfolk to work on nuclear submarines. Injured in a radiation accident, he tried insurance and even sold cars. Then his marriage fell apart and Janey packed Angela and Eddie off to Tennessee. Virginia Morris said that Kenny began to play a lot of golf.

Grub tried college for two years then dropped out to join the army. Richard Alan Morris is now a major who doesn't have to worry about where he stands in line. And he'll move up some more. Jeni is the perfect wife and mother.

My life has been satisfying. Did some consultancies for a while—which means nobody knows what you do. Have been taking courses in real estate to get my license. Jill and I can't have kids, but we have interesting hobbies.

This story would have remained buried in the memory books had it not been for the reunion one May. It wasn't a reunion, really, but a fortunate confluence of schedules which brought us back to Arrowhead. Only Virginia Morris was still living of those important adults related to my friends. The old Morris house, now in disrepair, the hedge gone, was sold years ago.

Brandon and Cal flew in from New Mexico, looking none the worse from their privation in the desert. Richard and his beautiful red-haired wife used the opportunity to take a leisurely drive through the Shenandoah Valley. Jill and the other women hit it off immediately. Bad news for the men. Kenny came alone.

The years had not been kind to Kenny Morris. His shoulders sagged, he walked with a limp from arthritic knees, and he wore thick glasses, which kept slipping. His greeting, however, was friendly, cheerful—perhaps too much so—and he listened attentively to our stories of jobs, families, and experiences.

Brandon wore a long brown skirt topped with a yellow blouse, low enough to be sexy but not provocative. Her looks belied her years, for her smile still entranced us and she laughed when I ordered her to shake the sand from her shoes. Those sparkling eyes; those girl eyes.

Richard, sharp, crisp, and confident, surprised us by dressing in slacks and a short-sleeved blue shirt. Perhaps we wanted to see a military Grub, but he had no pretensions.

Childhood friendships are difficult to transfer into adult relationships, whether you stay together or not. The second day I think we all sensed the strain and desired some relief. Kenny suggested a drive and we roamed around town and even headed up Old 70 to the park, located right before the road now ends. Back in Arrowhead, Kenny suggested, "Why don't we drive down to the Blackwelder. We could stick our toes in the water and see if the rock has gotten any higher." So we went.

Descending the bank was no easier, and it was wet. Brandon grabbed the big oak and swung around to brake her speed. I saw Kenny wince when his knee buckled.

Nathan's creek was still there, its rapids and moss, its high rock and kiddie pool much the same. On the rock, however, were time-reminders: a Sun-Drop bottle and a red and yellow Wendy's cup. Everyone stood silent, expecting, perhaps, a welcoming voice from the laurel and rhododendron on the opposite bank. We stepped carefully down the slippery high rock to sit just above the

kiddie rock, submerged now by spring rains. So quiet. So strange. So alien.

Finally Kenny broke the silence. "Bet I could still make that dive," he bragged. "Easy as ever."

We grinned at him, enjoying the joke.

"Know what? I figured we might come here. I've got my bathing suit on under my pants. Gonna try it."

"You're kidding," said Richard, not really sure.

"That water is freezing," warned Brandon. "We never went swimming in May."

But he was already undressing. "Right in and right out. One more time. Then we'll go," he replied, laying his glasses on his shirt.

Kenny climbed up the right flank of the rock where he could hold on to the vegetation. Brandon started to protest but instead clamped her mouth and bit her lower lip, the old eye-sparkle now dimmed. Kenny reached the twelve-foot mark, paused to get his balance, and then stood at fifteen. He looked old, withered, and alone, a tall cedar dwarfing him from behind.

Richard started to rise but stopped when Brandon touched his arm. As I watched the bent body, it seemed to straighten as though ordered to by some legendary army captain, and the withered skin fell away to become the smooth skin of a boy with strong knees and keen eyes. I blinked to clear my vision.

Then he was airborne, held above the low trees briefly before falling. The dive was not clean, was rather a smacking, stinging sound that made us wince. Kenny surfaced, gasping, and began swimming toward us with choppy, ungraceful strokes, flopping on his back as if to rest. Instead of turning toward the kiddie rock, he drifted past as though unable to avert his destiny and was soon caught in the Death Current, arms and legs powerless, head bobbing. Then he went under.

Richard hit the water before Brandon and I could react. In a few swift strokes he reached his brother and pulled him to the other shore. After I drove frantically to a phone, the rescue squad came and took Kenny to the hospital in Blue Mountain.

The doctors said he drowned, even Richard's skills and the efforts of the rescue personnel proving futile. Yes, we worried when Kenny took that foolish dive, but that was just Kenny, something he would do. The current isn't really that strong. There must be something else to explain what happened.

Had Kenny Morris lived, I probably would never have seen him again anyway. The only thing we had going was childhood, and we weren't that close to begin with. But after thirty-five years, together again, to see with your own eyes . . .

Carl Jung writes about synchronicity: events having a coincidence in time and because of this, the feeling that some deeper motivation is involved. Four friends together in childhood the time it takes a short candle to burn. Then nearly four decades later, a bookend gets loose for a couple of days. Much better that those children be remembered as they were in a black and white snapshot, wearing women's dresses and makeup, there in the yard of a small Southern town.

*Jim Taylor*