

“The views on nature of any people determine
all its institutions.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson,
quoted in *Nature*,
“Treasures Of The Gulf,”
presented on PBS Channel
13, October 1984, in
Oklahoma.

Absolute

Fall 1984

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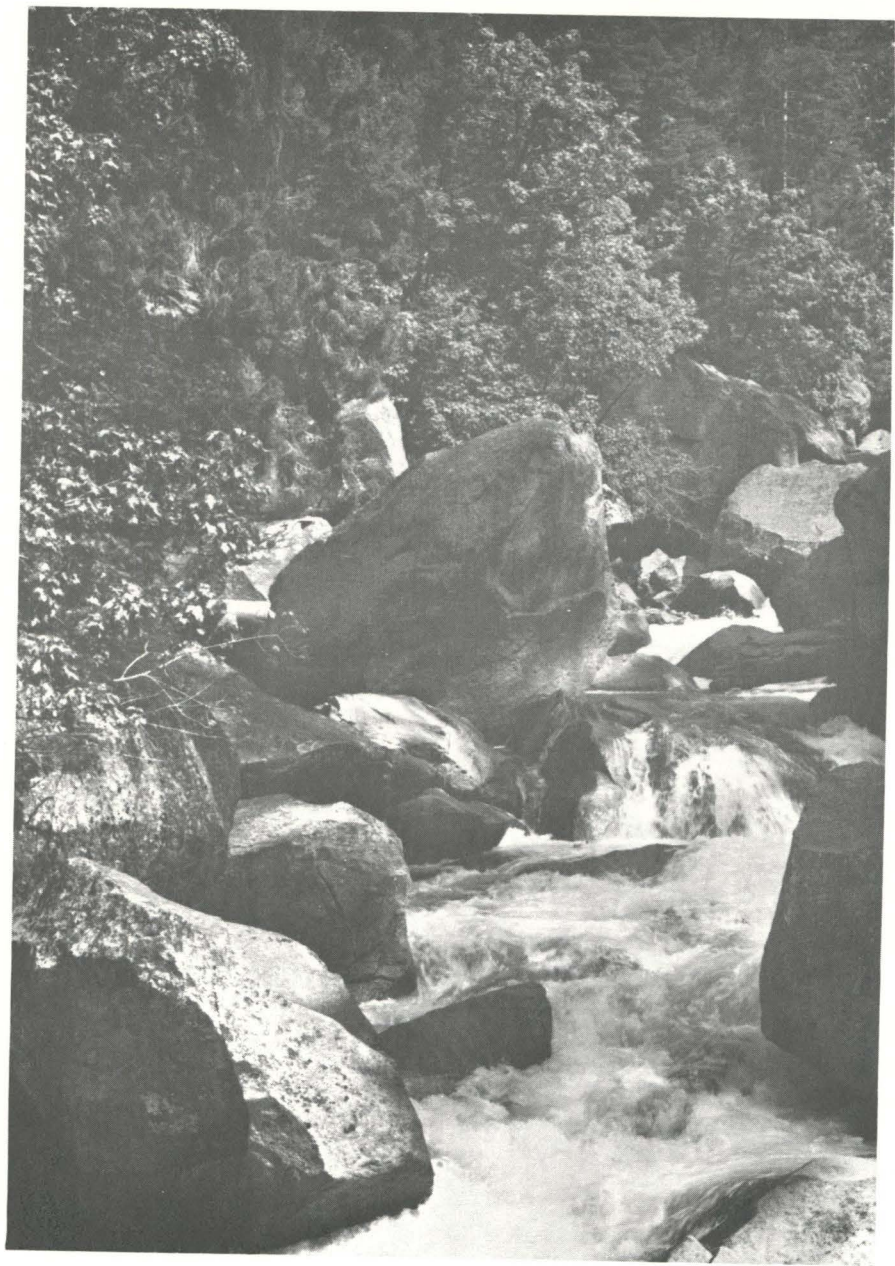
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and Deborah Hatcher.



—Photo by Artie Hicks

God's Tree

O the beauty of a tree . . .
That sends her springtime love to me . . .
And with a freshness clean and warm . . .
Wraps me in her soft green arms . . .
Whispers to me her verdant name . . .
And like a lover unashamed . . .
Bares her naked limbs to show . . .
The heart from which her body grows . . .
Kisses me with her lissome lips . . .
Sweet with dew she has sipped . . .
And brushes her silver gossamer hair . . .
With the windy comb of the air . . .
And closes in shades of green . . .
Eyes of beauty in nature keen . . .
O the beauty of a tree . . .
That God gave all earth to see . . .
Time could never a word suggest . . .
Moments with her my heart possessed. . .

— Mike W. Darwin

Fall

My sycamore trees
Are shedding their leaves.
Their limbs look cold and bare,
While down on the ground,
Blowing round and round,
Leaves almost drive me to despair

— Ula M. Smith

Trees

Lifeless they stand in winter's cold,
Glimmering statues in the ice and snow,
Yet with a touch of my Father's hand
In the warmth of spring they are made whole;
In the summer's green they become a home
For a singing friend that we all know.
But with autumn's wind and the coming freeze,
In a golden rain they shed their leaves.
Then again they stand in winter's cold,
Glimmering statues in the ice and snow.

— Sheryl Jeanette Houx
21 March 1981

Anonymous

I have created a world in seven days
and made a man in many ways.
I have created life of every kind
and made the human with a mind.
I have created the stars and heavens above
and made a word that you call love.
I am God!

— Ron Jones

The Sun

The sun, like a giant copper coin,
Slipped silently into its slot
While a lone bird, soaring in the afterglow,
Screeched and screamed against the
Approaching darkness, painfully
Aware he had squandered the light.

— Vida Mathey

The Forbidden Shore

A sailor gazes
at the beach
with eyes that shine no more.
A fate in fire,
he yearned to tread
on the forbidden shore.

The sea accepts
another life,
as she has done before,
and lovingly
she licks the edge
of the forbidden shore.

Your face has launched
a thousand ships,
a thousand ships or more.
Do you watch
their dead hulls burn
from the forbidden shore?

— Lance Dannan Bresee



— Photo by Artie Hicks

Take Some Time To Be Alone

Take some time to be alone,
Somewhere all by yourself.
Relax and read a chapter,
Of a book from off the shelf.

Take a walk along the beach,
Or just around the block.
Listen to some music,
Or the ticking of a clock.

It matters very little,
What you find to do,
As long as it relaxes
And it pleasures you.

So take some time to be alone,
Once each and every day;
And if you've yet to start,
Why not start today?

— Bill Bishop

My Quiet Time

I sometimes lay my pen aside,
When I don't care to write,
And quietly I slip outside
To look up at the night.

To watch the shadows disappear,
As sunset says goodbye.
To watch the stars as they appear
To fill the darkened sky.

I like this time of night the best,
When no one is around.
The darkness and the night caress,
Silence the only sound.

This time is mine to be alone,
With no one else to share.
To dream the dreams that are my own,
In quiet solitaire.

— Bill Bishop

The Night

I sit alone and start to write,
Then come the shadows of the night.
I see shades gray, and black and white,
And slowly my mind fills with fright.
My heart speeds up, my chest feels tight.
I hold back fear with all my might.
My body tense, ready for flight —
Or will I have to stand and fight?
My eyes look left, then to the right.
Something ahead is turning bright.
I fear to see this awesome sight.
Thank God, it is the morning light.

— Bill Bishop

Carlsbad Caverns

A thundering, low-pitched rumble fills the air as a hovering, black cloud of bats emerges from the huge, gaping hole. The evening emergence of these great colonies in their nightly search for food is an amazing sight. This particular bat flight must be one of the best known and best observed, for every night a swirling cloud of over a million bats takes up to four hours to fly out of the cavern's entrance. This gaping entrance, nestled high in the semi-desert of New Mexico's Guadalupe Mountains, barely hints at what lies below in the famous Carlsbad Caverns.

Once inside, a visitor finds the atmosphere may be deadly quiet, or his tranquility may be shattered by the sound of a shrieking bat. As he descends into the cool (56°) depths of the earth, the adventurer enters the great Bat Chamber. The cave ceiling appears to be alive, covered as it is with a mass of furry, writhing, brown animals. These fascinating creatures hold onto the tiniest irregularity in the limestone ceiling by extremely sharp claws; they then wrap their wings around their bodies and hang with their heads looking downward. Their musty-smelling chamber lies nearest to the earth's surface and is but the first of six cavern rooms.

Next is the enormous Main Corridor, strewn with huge boulders. There, the path snakes between ranks of stalagmites, each turn revealing a new composition of these cave decorations as it descends steeply to the King's and Queen's Chambers. The royal quarters house smooth, sparkling curtains of calcite hanging over the tall "poster" calcite "beds."

The Dome Room, named for an enormous tiered stalagmite, covered with stalactites hanging from its many ledges, lies deep in the heart of the caverns. Here the now-wearied traveler may partake of refreshments at the underground dining room and sit down for a while. He may choose to return to the earth's surface, via the 800-foot-deep elevator shaft, or continue beyond the chambers to the climax of the cave — the Big Room.

It is more like a massive corridor, curving, and broken by pillars of rock. The cathedral-like ceiling reaches almost 300 feet high, the width expands to twice the height, and the length is well over half a mile long. Rounded masses of calcite, best described as cave popcorn, cover the once-smooth stalactites almost like a fungus. The splendid white, massive stalagmites and stalactites radiate a brilliant, shimmering reflection as the awe-struck visitor views the Big Room's glorious expanse.

These exceptional caverns are among the world's finest show caves. Even a fairly rushed tour takes three hours. Yet Carlsbad's awesome, tranquil beauty is well worth the visitor's time, effort, and exercise of imagination.

— Lou Morrison
May, 1984

Awakening

Dawn rolls in . . .
 high tide of light . . .
it envelopes we
 who recline in darkness.
We grow under the warm gaze
 that illuminates the border
 between dreams & dreaming:
we must allow consciousness
 the expansion it craves,
 so sweet.
We cannot let shadows
 diminish our memory
 of the Sun:
we must not relinquish
 the shining spirit within.
Be strong & pursue Destiny
 with a vengeance:
do not forget
 the reasons
 & seasons
 for Change. . .

— Wanda Lea Brayton
2 October 1984

Warrior Of Spirit: Emily Dickinson

You loved against all odds —
you lived the creative dream —
you did not retreat from this “cruel world” —
you invented a Universe within.
You were more than “they” would allow you to be —
“they,” with their narrow definitions,
minute expectations:
if your body breathed within this frame of time,
still, you would amaze the masses with your individuality.
You always owned your Self;
no one gave you the deed —
“they” thought you peculiar for staying within
the “confines” of your mind —
you knew the length of Infinity. You were a Lady
among social peasants who sneered & whispered behind their hands —
you were no mutant — no eccentric shadow of light —
you were Evolution ahead of its time.
You let “them” amuse themselves with tea parties — church bazaars:
you knew the path to Heaven was sooner reached alone.
“They” said unrequited love caused you to wear white
as a veil against darkness & enclose yourself in an living tomb —
you knew the surreal was far more elaborate than the real.
Your Love enlarged the Infinite, mystified the secrets
of Time & Space — you were not content to be imprisoned
by the rules of the average —
mediocrity held no appeal for you.
No —
you chose your destiny
as a sculptor chooses a stone,
looking for depth, character, & possibility —
you shaped & forged it
with a pen of steel & fire
and set ablaze
the humanity —
the hope —
within us all. . .

— Wanda Lea Br
7 Jun

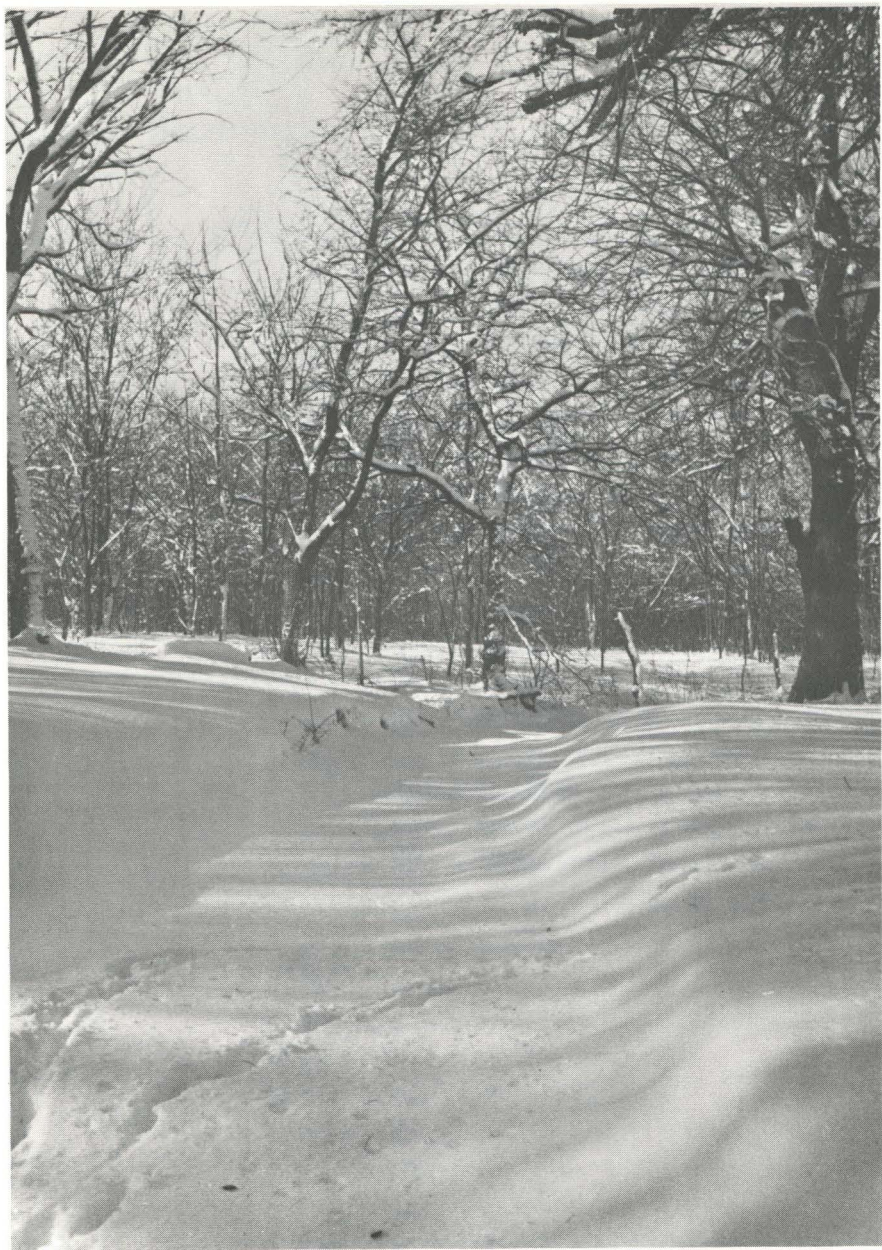
— Wanda Lea Brayton
7 June 1984

Interior Monologue

Phagocyte: Within the limits of my kind,
I wonder at the world, the all,
Which I perceive.
Within the same,
I wonder at or about
That which lies beyond
The power of my awareness.
I am not struck with awe that I can work
With each of those and act like those
That constitute my kind.
I have no choice when the alarm occurs
But to go forth, to poison and devour
The alien that would fell, destroy, or humble
Some or all of my universe.
Being within, I sometimes see within,
But never from without,
The nature of that of which I am part.
(Shall I say, "It"? Or, "He"?)
He spawned me and my kind
And all the very substrates upon which
I grew and grow.
If he loves me, could he ever let me die?
Why me?
Why not another?
Why my kind?
Why not theirs?
Perhaps He is at last but It.
I shall not wonder when I die —
I did not wonder when I did not live,
But wonder now, I do.

I somehow know I am required by all of that,
The being of the universe.
I am needed for His being,
A being beyond my all but awe.
I ask not, since the answer has no use,
Of what is that a part
Of which I am a part among a nameless horde?
How vain of me to contemplate
The nature of a fellowship of Gods!
One world,
One God,
Whichever is enough.
I take my transience and my transient sustenance
From Him whose very name I cannot know.
I pass; He changes.
Myriads succeed and He remains.
How kind that I shall surely miss
The cataclysm of his terrible demise!
If die He must.

— Philip Smith, M.D.



— Photo by Artie Hicks

Snow

See the snow in its majestic descent. . .
Prayers of purity heaven here sent. . .
Silent courier of nature's fine art. . .
Noblest work of the winter's season. . .
Glistening ivory upon the earth. . .
Flawless picture of paradise. . .
Soothing the soul, its soft gentle presence. . .
Entombing all. . .its white serenity.

— Mike W. Darwin

The Old Sod House

In memory I see the old sod house,
my home and place to rest.
Like the "little house by the side
of the road,"
the road that led east and west.

The walls of the house were very thick,
shutting out cold and heat.
The roof of boards, covered over
with sod,
often "sprung a leak."

Its windows were small,
but in spite of it all,
they let in lots of light.
A coal oil lamp, if placed
just right, could make it a
little more bright.

In front were two doors
opening out on a yard
that was swept just like the floors.
In this yard was a well
from which you could quell
your thirst any time of the day.

Inside were two rooms
with a door in between
that led from one room to the other.
While one was the front room,
bedroom, sitting room, parlor —
they were quite different from
one another.

The other, a much more popular
place,
was a work room, dining room,
kitchen.

At meal time we always enjoyed
the good food,
and to our parents' talk we
listened.

Though there was no wooden floor in this
popular place,
that dirt floor was hard as could be;
it was sprinkled with water
before it was swept,
and no cloud of dust could you see.

A dining table, in the midst
of the room,
was both work table, dining, and
fellowship place.

A shelf on the wall, held
up by a brace,
made a *built-in* with lots of space.

The old wood stove, in one
corner of the room,
cooked many delightful foods.

Foods simmered long, on the
back of the stove,
tasted exceptionally good.

The living room “bedroom” held
two beds,
one on either side of the door.

At one end of the room
a pump organ stood —
no room for very much more.

We did find a place for our
sewing machine
and a stand table, my pride and joy.

We had a rocking chair, a straight
chair also,
which made the room too full to
look bare.

The white-washed walls, so
very white,
made the room look cozy and light;
the snowy white spreads that
covered the beds
added much to the plain decor.

Many memories are hid
in the two-room sod house
that sheltered the family of four.

As time moves along and older
you grow,
they come to your mind more
and more.

— Ula M. Smith

walking into the chill

i try to carry the heat of pre-dawn sleep with me
like a backpack of natural fire —
it provides that glow people say they like
surrogate warmth fanned from my own ashes

oklahoma sun browns my back with ultraviolence
and i watch with tired eyes as the flesh crumbles
beneath the weight of such intrusion

little people clamor for my small heat
and i give it
too much of it
away

the cold penetrates my eyes
my lashes freeze with looking
i walk into the white night chill
in search of familiar fire

all the wood has been burned tonight

i lie on damp earth and dream new heat
to carry on my back tomorrow
i hope for forest fires

my arctic bones need to feel again

— Karen Young Holt
20 June 1983

Ouachita-Mountain High

The world must have begun on just such a day as this. The warmth of the early-morning sun belies the fact that it is now mid-January. Only the cool crispness of the mountain air and the few scattered, decaying leaves give an indication of anything but spring. So you find yourself searching for familiar signs of new life. You expect to see a colorful array of crawling creatures happily playing hide-and-seek in tall green grass, but they are now asleep in winter's decay.

You strain to hear the soft rustling of a bird gently stirring in her nest to wake her young and the flutter of her wings as she hurries about in her search for food. But the only sound in the stillness is the soft echo of the slight movement of water in a nearby stream.

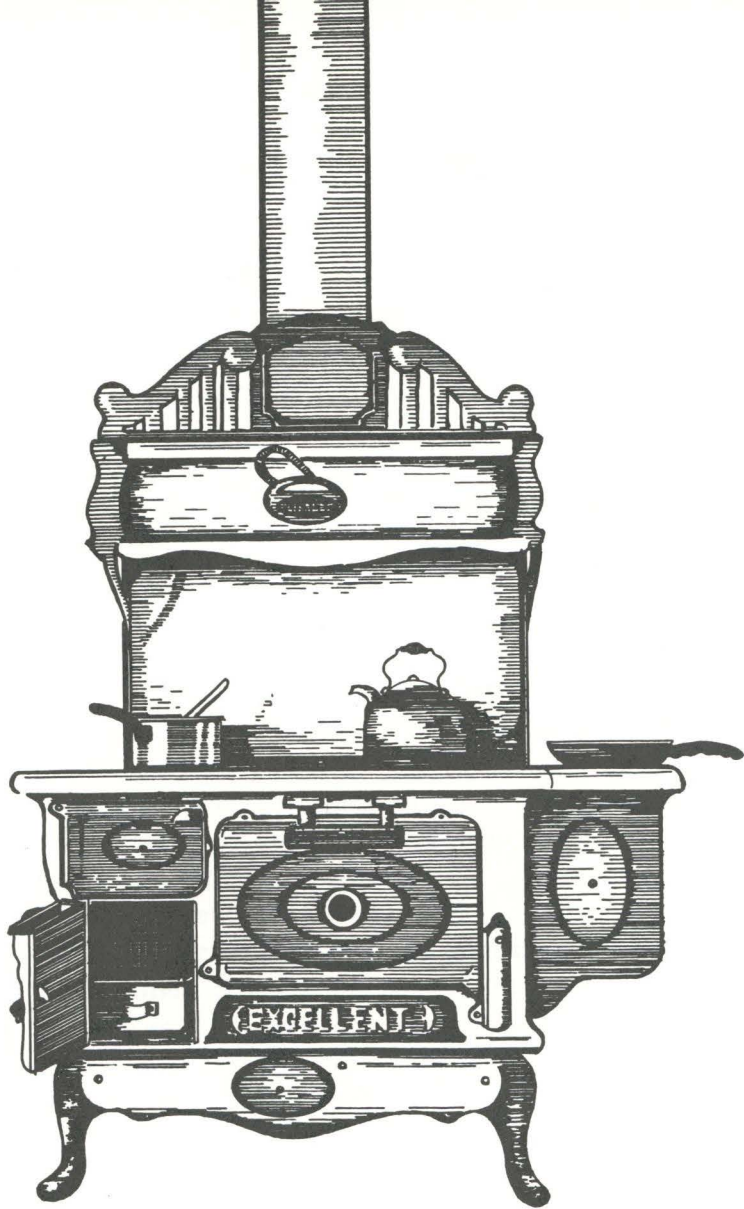
The stillness is almost overwhelming and is surpassed only by the breathtaking beauty that surrounds you: the sight of the sun, taking with it the soft blush of pink from the lingering dawn, as it lazily raises its sleepy head farther into the sky.

The panoramic view, from your perch atop a huge monstrosity of rock, is of glorious mountains covered with towering green pine trees, a waterfall on a nearby mountain, and a white moon just tucking its head behind another. With this beauty to behold, and the virtuous purity of the mountain air, you have such a euphoria you almost feel as if your feet are not touching the ground.

You feel you must close your eyes for a moment to come back into touch with reality. With eyes closed, a fear grips your mind; you fear all that rapturous splendor was only a dream.

But then you hear the rustle of the leaves as a gentle breeze stirs them, and you feel it brush softly across your face. You smell the mingling of pine and decay and — nothing at all. You feel the warmth of the sun and realize that you were created for just such a day as this.

— Janice Bates Faulkner



— Drawing by Deborah Hatcher

The Pot-Bellied Stove

How well I remember
the pot-bellied stove!
In the midst of the schoolroom
it stood.

On icy-cold days
you welcomed its blaze
while removing your overshoes
and hood.

When the fire was first made
and was burning like mad,
that belly would turn rosy red;
but before you turned 'round,
the fire would die down,
and you wondered, "Is that fire dead?"

You stood by the stove
to warm your red nose,
but you made it more red instead.
That part of your body
was getting too warm
while the rest of your body still froze.

Sometimes the mean boys,
who liked to play jokes,
would throw pieces of leather
in the stove in bad weather!
The smell that arose
almost stopped up your nose
while you sneezed, coughed,
and managed some "blows."

Hats off to the past
and the pot-bellied stove.
It served its time in its day.
Welcome to the present
and the scientific minds
that brought air conditioning —
"If you can pay!"

— Ula M. Smith

First Commandment

Spring fills my marrow,
I climb to the mountain top.
The night is velvet memories
And I am the moon,
Apricot-hued and confident,
Strewing honey-glow on anxious faces.
Caress me, I am the moon.

— Mary Ann Peters

Illumination

Etosha — hot, alluring
No hope of delivery
Land of dry water
Land of practicality

Short rains
Pools of salvation

Thousands of bullfrogs
Wait in seeming repose

Hunger fills their instincts
They devour insects, crayfish
They devour each other

One sits peacefully
Swallowing his brother
A back leg already sunken in his throat
Four bulging eyes
Slow power-jaw gulp
Timely acid death

Etosha
Sense and utility
Dance together
Kicking up sand
In the land of dry water

Window of Nature

Perched upon a lancet-sill
I saw the fields below:
Painted, pretty, picture —
All rust and red and gold.
Painted by the fingers
Of loving hands above —
Prism'd rays of sunlight
That touch the earth with love.

In the eventide of daylight
The sun was setting down —
Flutters from night's Angel's wings
Spread stardust all around.
Angels pulled night's blanket up
Around her sleepy head —
With one last look at ebony earth
Bounced off the sill to bed.

— Janice Bates Faulkner

Spring Morning

As Morning raised its sleepy head
and Night gave way to Day —
Light chased the shadows from knoll and nook
and sent the Night away.

Light danced upon a crest of rock
that hung above the sea —
warmed baby robins in their nests
and dried the dew-kissed leaves.

As Robin chirped her babes awake
with chords of melody,
Light touched and stirred the Monarch
to an orbit 'round the tree.

Light touched the Morning Glories soon
and watched their blooms unfold —
Light tipped each one with color:
pink, white, red, yellow — gold.

Then Light came to my window,
an alarm without the ring —
called me to come out and see
Earth all dressed up for Spring.

— Janice Bates Faulkner

A Day On Del Norte

Yesterday, July 24, 1984, my son and I made a day hike from Willow Creek to the peak of Del Norte Mountain. Hikes are nothing unusual, for Russell and I often walk in different parts of the San Juans to the west of Del Norte, Colorado, a small town whose name is pronounced by non-Spanish locals as Del Nort — no final syllable. Del Norte Peak was, in a way, commonplace to us, for we look out every day upon its 12,400 foot altitude from our cabin porch in the foothills of Agua Ramon Mountain. As a matter of speculation, it seems that the mountain becomes like another gray fixture in our ritual of spending the summer in the Rockies. Occasionally, we do notice an unusual cloud on the summit, or we do mention to one another that there is yet snow on the mountain in the middle of July.

I had climbed to the top of Del Norte a few years before and had promised Russell that he and I would climb it together one day. Del Norte is not by any stretch of the imagination a tough or difficult mountain to climb; indeed, logging roads criss-cross many of its slopes. But to walk up the mountain is an honorable challenge and offers a walker all sorts of terrain from beaver-pond quagmires, to sub-alpine meadows, to the high rocks and tiny flowers above treeline. Although I knew what we would see, I could not anticipate all that we would come across.

We began our walk from an old hunt camp. We were supposed to travel light, but my L. L. Bean rucksack was filled with camera, binoculars, food, and water, and I knew that the two miles from Willow Creek to the summit would be taxing even with that light load. It was a hard pull up the old roadway to the first meadow. Early morning sun filtered through the groves of aspen, making them appear soft and fresh. We carefully watched the forest for a glimpse of the black bear that a friend of ours had seen in these same aspens a week before. Today we were not to see a bear.

After we passed beyond the aspens, we were soon in the first large meadow. We had been here before and had pored over the remains of old log structures that had been built many years ago. Someone surely knows who built these and why, but nobody I've talked to has been able to say who spent so much time hewing such careful notches in these logs. It might have been the "Tiehackers" who supposedly were the first non-Indians to live around here. They came in the late 1800's and cut ties for the Rio Grande and Denver railroad. It's said they lived somewhere in the "timber" so they could be close to their work. Who knows? I've seen these cabins marked only on one county map from the early 20's, but now they are simply a forgotten part of this lonely valley beneath the looming, gray peak of Del Norte.

So Russell and I skirted the east side of the meadow, not stopping to study the cabins, and began to climb the old wagon road to a long timbered ridge that ran off to the south. Far beyond the trees, we could see the rock of the ridge emerge against the sky, and we knew that we would walk that ridge to the summit. It didn't look so bad from a distance of two miles, so we felt our way up the road a while and then cut back into the woods in the direction of the mountain. I told Russell that we might find a trail soon, but I really was moving intuitively as the tall aspen, fir, and spruce soon became close and blocked out all mountain landmarks. We moved through the trees with little difficulty, for there were few obstacles.

Sure enough, there evolved through the green, yellow-blossomed vetch a trail — and this was a true trail — walked upon by few humans in the last hundred years but traveled on a daily and nightly basis by deer, elk, bear, porcupines, and squirrels. The trail was soft, not worn down hard to the earth, the way man and his cattle and horses pack a trail. As we walked, we could hardly hear our movement, and I thought of the old myths about the quietness of Indians flowing down their trails. Indeed, there was a kind of flow that we felt — no talk, little sound, the silence of the forest gliding past us.

Before long, either we had lost the trail or the path was no longer the thoroughfare it had been, for we were going through untracked forest once more. The conifers grew thickly and soon we came to a place where some of the trees had been cut, and a kind of messy roadway, very narrow, twisted its way through and over the forest. It was a skidway for loggers, and it hadn't been too many months since they'd been working here. We followed the skidway for a while and then came to the first of the logging roads that we would cross that day. Actually, I suppose we crossed the same road three or four times, but because of the way it wound up the mountain, it was hard to say, and the Forest Service maps showed nothing at all. As we moved through this destruction, slight as it was in the immensity of the forest, we did not mention it, but I'm sure we were comparing the scarred trees and torn earth with the game trail we had been on a half-hour before. What could we say?

The loggers' skids and signs of logging went high up the steep slopes of Del Norte, but finally the angle became much greater than the "angle of repose," and the tracks of the cat disappeared as we began to ascend more steeply. Once more we had sighted the rocky ridge from which we wanted to begin our approach to the peak, and despite the twisting and turning in the forest, we emerged very close to our chosen spot. We were still in the forest, but the grade was sharp and we could see the open ridge almost straight above us. As we climbed, the view of the blue sky and ridge was a bit dizzying for a couple of mild acrophobics (must be genetic). If we looked back over our shoulders, the opening up of the enormous Rio Grande River Valley was — well, I still can feel the shudder. Strange, there we were on earth as firm as it is anywhere, with a bit of a grade, just taking one step at a time the way you do in Safeway, but the thought of all that space developing just behind us created a shiver in the spine. Just the day before, I had actually been in greater danger on a six-foot stepladder as I was putting up the gutter on the cabin. But the human mind is powerful and has created demons larger than Del Norte peak, and I could feel my body falling forever through the abyss behind me.

Eventually, with quite a few rest stops for the heart and the mind, we made the ridge and could see our avenue to the peak. It was our good fortune that the cumulus clouds off to the west were not threatening. There was a peculiar haze that covered not only the river valley but spread over the larger San Luis Valley to the east and Continental Divide to the west. But a haze was far better than rain, thunder, and lightning for Russell and me. Thunderstorms had chased us down our share of mountains.

We started up the ridge, which really wasn't so rocky after all. Tufts of grass and clumps of wildflowers punctuated the rise above us. As we approached a slightly rockier incline, we discovered that some of the wildflowers were columbines, Colorado's state flower. These were natives, purple and white, and richer in color than those we had planted beside the front porch of the cabin last year. We found one clump with nine or ten blossoms, and I dug out the Pentax for a photograph. Russell knelt down close to the ground and smiled his adolescent smile, uncertain about his feelings of vanity and slight embarrassment. I snapped the photo, feeling good that, at thirteen, my son would allow himself to be photographed with some flowers. It was a good day.

We were almost at 11,000 feet above sea level. From that point, we could see for a hundred miles to the east where the Sangre de Cristos range protruded over 14,000 feet into the sky and fifty miles to the west to the Continental Divide — some peaks yet heavy with snow this late in July.

We scrambled up a bit higher and found ourselves on a treeless plateau of sorts. Although the ground seemed level, the mountain was deceptive. (As I now write, I can look up at the same plateau just below the summit of Del Norte Peak and see the sharp angle of the land there.) We moved across and upward on this meadow, our muscles marking the grade with constant strain. About midway across, we came upon the bones of four or five bull elk, complete with racks, and the miscellaneous cranial, pelvic, and vertebral bones of three cows. All the bones were scattered about like so much litter, but the bull racks had been placed upright on some stones.

So here for us was a kind of mystery — I'm sure someone more woodwise than we could tell us how this small herd met its death here on these high rocks. We guessed that lightning had struck the group, and one of the racks did seem to have some carbon burns, but who knows? We probed about the wreckage for a short while. In our ignorance, we did not look for the "ivories," a set of teeth that appears to be especially valuable to some hunters. It was only after we had told some people about the elk a couple of days later that the value of the "ivories" was revealed to us.

We enjoyed the mystery of the death-herd more than getting \$25.00 for their teeth. Those skulls propped up on stones in that high place were eerie. I could almost hear the strange chanting of Tibetan mountain folk and see their colored streamers flying from skinny poles on a tall mountainside. But we were not in Tibet and there was no chanting, only the volcanic stones of the San Juan, a large hawk circling off the west, and an acute sense of our mortality and its mystery.

We moved forward from the elk toward the first snow bank that we would reach. Snow was one of the strongest reasons for Russell's tenacity in the climb. Children and poets are always drawn to snow. As Russell was pulled up to the whiteness above him, Dylan Thomas had once been drawn to write, "I can't remember if it snowed twelve days and twelve nights when I was six, or six days and six nights when I was twelve." Both child and poet were moving toward the mystery of snow. When Russell and I passed the bank, all it took for him was a hand scoop of the freezing, icy snow to realize that he had made it.

Skirting the snow, we now had to climb with a three-point stance. There were memories for me of old football practices, and a phrase from James Dickey's poem "The Bee" kept drilling itself through my head: "Dig, Dickey, dig." We scrambled up the steep and scaly rocks. We weren't sure how far the summit was, for it had disappeared behind the ridge that we were climbing. I thought that we were close but said nothing because there is nothing more demoralizing than to say, "We're almost there," when there is another major climb to be made. But today we were in luck, and we really were almost there — there really was a top to this mountain.

As we climbed the last incline to the summit, the feeling of being above timberline really struck us. When you get to the top of a tall mountain in the middle of other tall mountains and ranges, there is an uncanny feeling that all of the other peaks, no matter how tall or close, have fallen back and circled the peak that you are on. This is probably another stretching of the saying that "Man is the measure of all things," that old Greek lie, or so my chemist friend in Texas calls it. But it really feels like a truth, and we were the center of the universe as we sat on that rather safe top of Del Norte Peak.

We knew, of course, that we were not the first to ascend this mountain. There was the old tower, only six feet tall, pushed over on its side in the last couple of years, and there were some glaring orange survey markers not too far away — probably something to do with the oil exploration that's beginning to excite the yellow journalists hereabouts.

But the tracks of others didn't bother us, and we lay down on the grass and volcanic rocks to get out of the chilling wind and to catch our breaths. We had a great hunger for we had been walking and climbing for over two hours. As I rifled the pack for the peanut butter and crackers, I sensed that we would not make it back down by early afternoon as I had assured the girls. A more immediate problem had arisen, however, for I could not find either the crackers or the apples that we had prepared that morning. A panicky anger rose within me, and a German expletive caused Russell to look at me with slight alarm. Finally, I located it all in an obscure pocket — wonder who put it there? Anyway, we dug in and ate. Maybe it was the fear of having nothing to eat or the altitude, but that simple meal tasted better than a T-bone steak.

After we had eaten, we lay on our sides and examined the alpine flowers that were all about. Just beside the Bean pack was a small bunch of tiny blue flowers that looked almost artificial. These were alpine forget-me-nots, their blue deeper than that of the sky on a clear day. Other flowers spread out before us on the high meadow — alpine daisies, king's crown, blue bells, and sky pilots. We dug out our *Rocky Mountain Guide* to identify the ones we didn't know. We were pretty certain about most of our identifications, but we laughed out loud at the absolute proof of

the sky pilot when we crushed its leaves and smelled — a skunk at 12,000 feet!

The very top of a mountain, above the timberline, is a special place and the time there is unique. After laboring up the slopes to the place where the trees no longer can grow, a climber experiences an extraordinary feeling. I could tell that Russell, who had been above timberline before but never quite this high, had the feeling. So we lay there in the sun a while, looking all about, listening to the silence — the earth was good. I thought of a rather snooty biologist friend whose comment about Colorado was: "Too many people there now . . . go to Montana if you really want to get into the mountains." I'm not sure what he meant, and I know that Glacier National Park is beautiful and remote, but I can't imagine any greater distance than that above timberline on Del Norte Peak.

Before we began our descent, we set up the old tower once again. We didn't know what the tower had been used for, and its only history to us was a few rough-hewn initials carved into the wood. But it seemed that the old, wind-smoothed tower ought to be set up simply to honor whoever it was that hauled the timbers and wires and nails up there to build it. As we worked, I wondered about the old battery casings that were strewn about the tower — had it been a beacon of some kind? A radio? Some old fool trying to communicate with the gods? No matter, we set it back up, restringing the guy wires, and then placed one rock on the cairn that was there.

We began a slow descent — we didn't want to rush down off the mountain on a good day.

The walk down was comfortable as we felt our way over the strange volcanic avenues tracing their rocky paths across the high meadow. Our way steadily dropped from the summit to treeline. Before long, however, the descent became very steep. Because we had taken another route down, to the west, we were uncertain as to the best way to reach the forest. When we stopped to get our bearing, we noticed that the grass,

which was tall for this altitude, had been pressed down to the earth as if some heavy creatures had been lying about. Perhaps a large number of animals had been there earlier that day or the night before, and we thought of cattle, some of which could be seen grazing miles away to the south in Willow Park. But we were too high for cattle, and the droppings were not those of cattle, but of elk — we had stumbled onto the summer grazing and sleeping place of a herd.

A few yards away from where we stood, the mountain dropped off sharply to a large snowbank about ten yards square. The earth around the snowbank was trampled like a rodeo arena where the elk had clambered over the edge and down the mountain to drink the moisture oozing from the snow. We could see their hoof prints.

We dropped on down below the elk grounds, looking into the timber just below us for a sign of the herd itself. We were searching for a rare look at the elk when something more rare appeared right before us and we didn't really notice it — at least, not at first. When we did take notice, we weren't quite sure what we had found. I am somewhat familiar with most of the trees and shrubs of southern Colorado, but what I was standing beside was new to me. The stunted tree had black, tightly shaped cones that stood erect from the limbs and needles which were so thick and firm that they looked like a tightly-made artificial Christmas tree (despair the thought, but Ferlinghetti has already done that in "Christ Climbed Down"). That's the only way I can describe the tree, and this really describes no more than the way the individual branches and needles were attached. The tree itself was warped and twisted all over the rocky knoll where it had grown. The cones were unusual, too, with their black, almost celluloid quality.

Several yards below the stunted tree was a much larger tree, perhaps thirty feet tall, of the same species. There were some differences — the cones were not so dark, and the bark was brownish-red rather than a light color. Although twisted some, this tree had grown tall. We started digging for the trusty *Rocky Mountain Guide* because I had an idea that this might be a bristlecone pine. I had never seen one but had read that

the tree can live three or four thousand years. The guide, which is usually so helpful because the artist manages to capture a revealing detail that makes identification certain, was not much help. The cones in the drawing did not look so tight or dark as those on the tree. Nothing else in the drawing had that vital clue we were looking for, but the text was helpful; and as we read, we became more certain that we had, indeed, found a bristlecone — no, we had found two!

We sat down on the ground beside the smaller tree. The earth was a yellowish, unhealthy-looking soil such as that sometimes found around mining sites. We admired the curious cones and needles of the tree, and when we stood up to move on, the seats and legs of our trousers were a dusty yellow. Before us to the west was the valley of the Rio Grande with the river itself twisting through canyons of its own cutting toward Wagon Wheel Gap, Creede, Antelope Springs, Wetherill Ranch (a brother of the man who discovered Mesa Verde), and Thirty Mile Camp. As we looked, I was once again struck with an old feeling — one that I had experienced many times when I was growing up on the great sweep of the plains in West Texas. It was a feeling of The Great Distance. Many have felt this, but it is no less real or unreal because of that. The feeling may be a bit sentimental, definitely it is romantic, but it still is good to look that far away from where you are standing or sitting.

Nearer to us, at the foothills of Del Norte, we could see the meadow where we had begun our serious climbing. The cabins were small dots on a light green with darker green lines marking the creek's path across the meadow. It didn't look very far, and the descent was steep for what seemed only a short distance. Confidently, I told Russell that we would be down soon.

And so we began to go down and down and down until our toes seemed to be bursting through the ends of our shoes. Soon, to complicate the situation, we came to blowdowns — large firs and spruce that some great wind twenty or thirty years before had blown down. They crisscrossed our direction, and we worked our way down slowly.

The blowdowns were dangerous and tiring to scramble over, especially since we were going down the mountain. The dead bark on some of the trees was crumbly, untrustworthy, and the slightest moisture on our vibram-soled boots made bare-barked trees literally slicker than ice. The fact that we were having to climb *up* the blowdowns as we were trying to go down the mountain didn't make it any more pleasant. The distance from the top of a blowdown to the ground became increasingly difficult to judge correctly.

Then there were the psychological problems — those associations that we make of things which “were never together in the real world” but can drive us to panic. For example, I have never seen a blowdown without thinking of a solitary hike that I took years ago up Weminuche Creek out of Thirty Mile Camp, our favorite camping site in those days. As I moved along the trail, there was a sudden snapping and crashing behind me. I turned to see a hundred-foot fir splintered and broken across the trail I had just walked over. And, as if that phobia weren't enough, I once had the misfortune of reading an article about an engineer who stepped over a blowdown in some mountains of the Middle West. Just as he stepped to the ground, a large timber rattler struck him right behind the knee in a main artery. The gruesome part of the story was that he, being a true man of science, simply and quite classically, sat down on the ground and prepared to die. He knew that he was too far from help, and the snake had struck him in a deadly place. Well, everytime I step down from a blowdown, I think of that engineer in his high-laced boots, his fedora, and leather jacket. I can feel the impact of the snake hitting him — the force must have almost knocked him down.

Now, all of this seems pretty dramatic or sounds as if stepping off a blowdown is a heroic act. Not true. There are no timber rattlers in Colorado, and at this altitude there aren't even any of the prairie rattlers that are sometimes reported around La Garita and Del Norte, towns that are more than 2,000 feet lower than Del Norte Peak. The worst I could get would be a twisted ankle or broken bone. But I feel the thrust of the reptile each time I step down. Don't like blowdowns!

Our descent slowly became less steep and the blowdowns thinned out, but we could not see a sign of the rocky ridge that I had confidently told Russell we'd find before we began a direct descent to the meadow. After all, it wasn't far. But the trees were thick and the directions seemed to meld — north, west, east — all became one great big north.

We pressed on, seeing a few mysteries along the way: a gigantic hole in the forest floor with no displaced boulder or root system, the remains of some manmade structure with a few boards and rusted nailheads scattered about, an old road or cattle trail cut years ago and not used for decades. We took the old road-trail, and it wound the directions in even funnier balls. We could not see out of the heavy growth, but the road seemed to be going somewhere, and it had a pleasant feeling of familiarity about it.

Then, rather abruptly, the way became marshy. A small creek that had been running alongside the road had widened out and a shallow bog spread out before us. The trail had simply disappeared into the water and coniferous forest that surrounded us. In the distance ahead, we could see the white, horizontal trunks of aspens — a sure sign of at least two things: lower elevation and beaver.

We hurried up to the aspens. There were many large trees; most were at least twenty-four inches in diameter and had been freshly cut within the month. Of course, there was no sign of the beaver, but he had been cutting only the night before — the chips were fresh. I was reminded of one of those ridiculous discussions that I'd had with a mountain friend a few days before. We had wondered if a beaver stays right beside the tree when it crashes to earth on a well-engineered course, or if he cuts it to a critical dimension, then backs off and waits for the wind to come looking for a ready-made blowdown.

Thinking these crazy ideas (what would *National Geographic* do with such a topic?), we threaded our way through the beaver's work, sloshing about as we tried to pick up the trail that he had flooded. Eventually, we found ourselves below the marsh. Russell looked back and discovered that the old trail had now become a creek. The beaver's miserable pond

had channeled the water down the pleasant trail that some rancher or sheepman had cut out years before. Still, the discovery of the trail-creek was all right, and the idea of nature sloppily destroying something that man had neatly made seemed somehow justified.

We were growing tired now, we were a little wet, and we knew that we still had a ways to go. We were already a couple of hours behind schedule, and I knew that the folks back at the cabin might be anxious, so we moved on. We tried following the creek because there is an old hiking adage that says if you follow the little stream down the mountain, you find a larger stream that will eventually take you to a river. Here you will find flatter land and people, if that's what you're really after.

But this stream began to play those "spread out, become boggy, trap 'em" tactics and the game worked. We soon found ourselves hip-high in beautiful but wet plants with large leaves. I don't know what they were, but we had often found them growing profusely around high-altitude streams. We worked our way through, our feet smashing the crisp stalks and leaves. Occasionally we fell when what seemed like solid ground collapsed into a sucking bog.

We finally were through it all and back in the forest, dry earth beneath our feet. Only a few more yards of this and we came out into a large meadow. We felt we were close, but the meadow that we had started from and which had looked so small from atop the mountain was now six football fields long. The creek once more complicated a direct route for us.

We started across the meadow. Strangely, from this point in the meadow, we had to ascend once more. The ascent was only slight, but the weight of the pack, binoculars, and canteen seemed to have doubled. My camera had most certainly dug a cavity about three inches deep in my side — at least, that's how it felt. My feet hurt — they were wet and cold — and I could feel a small blister on the second toe on my left foot (these Vasques never did fit from the day ten years before when I bought them in Silverton).

But we took our time. We knew where we were and we knew where we were going. That unvoiced thought made our weariness all right. Halfway across the meadow, near the remains of the best-notched cabin ruins, we stopped and picked a large bouquet of showy daisies to take home. The flowers were as large as a quarter; and the more we picked, the more they looked like a real gift. Just as we raised up from our flower-picking, Russell spoke in his gentle, but excited voice, "Look there, Dad." He pointed to the shallow pond just behind the old cabin. There, silhouetted against the western sky, was a doe. She drank, looked at us once, and then faded back into the aspen and spruce.

Not saying a word, we picked up our gear and started home, the showy daisies and this day our small present from the mountain.

— Clay Randolph

The big butterfly
lives an extremely short life.
But it's a free one.

— Glenn Hill

The sea brings promise
That we will return again
To live childhood dreams.

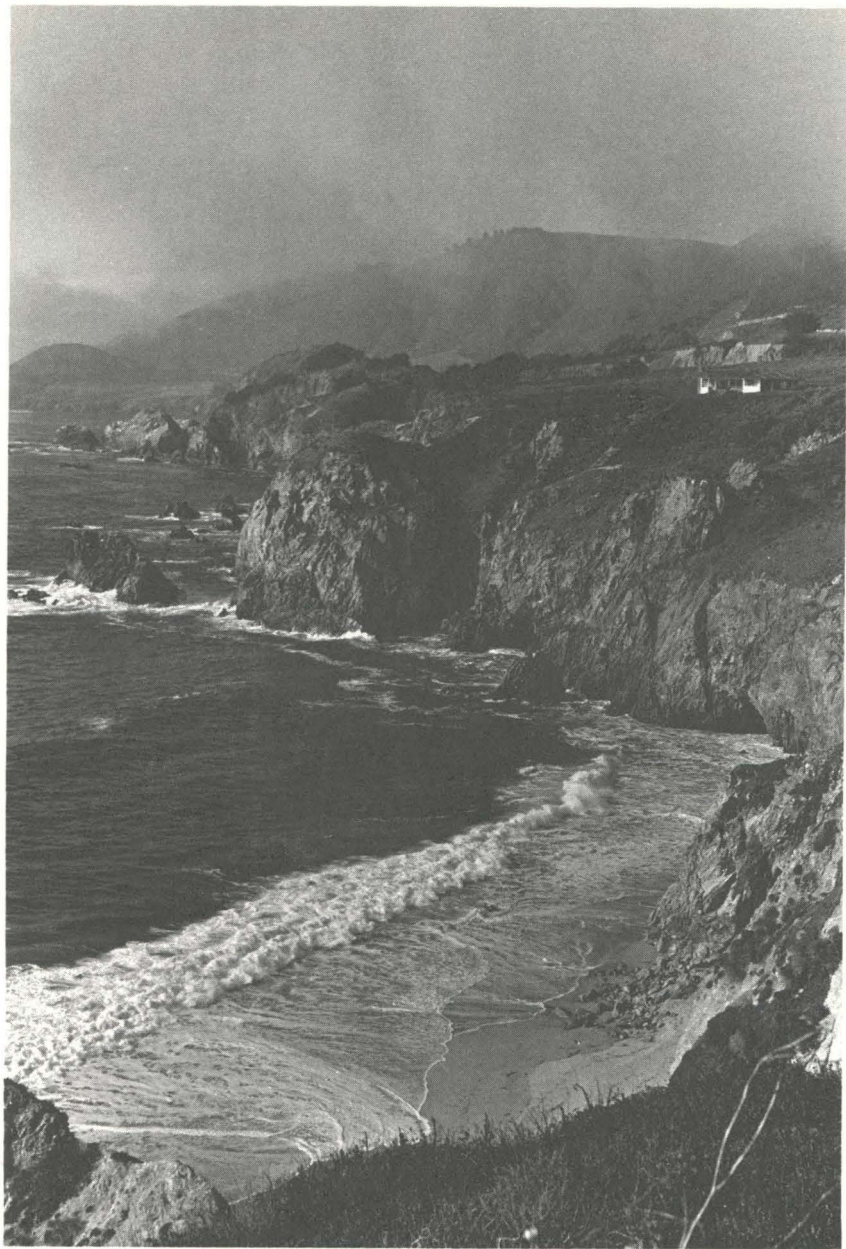
— Nadine Jewell

Glistening firefly,
Diamond on my finger small,
You brightened my life.

— Mary M. Maggi

Some memories fade
Some that should, won't go away
Linger on and on:
A summer breeze in winter
Scented with cherry blossoms. . .

— David French



— Photo by Artie Hicks

A Tree Grows In My Path

Tall and wise —
a sturdy tree
looming far above me.
Your branches
wave, and here
and there
a leaf touches me.
It speaks to me
of time
and archetypes,
like your rings
of age that
make you
what you are.
Secret rings,
hidden
within strong bark.

Gentle winds
through your branches
wave and
bend. The sap
flows;
and life is.
A whisper blends
with the
currents of air.
A message
of trueness blooms and
fruits in summer's sun.

Your seeds
continue to drop;
they fall
from love.
Each season comes
and your branches spread,
again.
Your breath
is celebrated
today
and every day
that
Mother Earth
shares her song of life.
The leaves revel.

Falling Stars

It was a warm night, and I had just come from the supermarket. As I carried the bags into the house, I looked up into the black sky and was amazed at the number of stars. It brought back memories of when I was a small girl and used to sit outside at night with my parents — on a pallet. I remember listening to them talk and my mother telling stories, but most of all I remember my fascination in watching a falling star. Mother would always say, "That means another soul is winging its way to heaven." Falling stars occurred seldom enough to make them very special, but often enough that the memory is vivid.

Later; as I was putting our groceries away, I kept thinking about those falling stars, and how many years had passed since I had seen one. Did stars still fall? Surely they did; I just never had the time to sit and wait for a chance to see one.

While I was in the midst of my reminiscence, I heard the familiar refrain of my seven-year-old, "Mom, I'm bored! "

"Go read a book," I replied.

"I've read everything."

"Draw a picture," I said.

"I can't think of anything to draw."

My standard reply at this point is "Go to bed then!" But I stopped and said, "Okay, let's go outside and watch for falling stars."

A glance at my son from the corner of my eye revealed a skeptical expression, but I was sure he would enjoy an evening gazing at the night sky, just as I did when I was his age.

Outside, I spread out an old quilt and we lay down on our backs. The sky was beautiful: I was instantly transported to another world. I tried to remember some stories Mother told me, but suddenly I felt a sharp jab in my ribs. "Mom — look! A spaceship!"

"No, Matt. That's just an airplane."

"No, Mom. It's really a spaceship. Anyone can tell that." He sighed. "Where's the falling stars?"

"You have to be ready for them. Just be still and watch the sky," I replied.

"Okay. Hey, did you know that *Conan the Barbarian* comes on HBO ten times this month? Can I watch it every time it comes on? It's not really all that bloody, and besides that doesn't scare me anyway."

"No, you can't watch it every time it comes on. Just lie still and watch the sky. Can you hear all the crickets?"

"Yeah, I hear 'em. Jeff told me he had all the Star Wars characters, but you know he's a liar. He only has about twelve. He doesn't even have a laser gun or anything like that. He doesn't even have a light saber. Can you believe that? I've had my light saber for *years*! Hey, Mom — there's a flying saucer!"

"No, Matt, that's just like the other one, an airplane."

"Mom, can't you see that's not an airplane? Airplanes don't go like that, and they don't have lights that flash that way. You know why I hate Jeff? He lies. And he always tries to boss me just 'cause he's in the third grade. He always tells me we have to do what *he* wants or he'll go home."

"Fine. If you don't like him anyway, tell him he's welcome to go. You don't have to put up with that. Here, lay your head on my arm and be real quiet. Let's watch the sky now."

A full five seconds passed before I felt another sharp jab in my side. "Mom, did you hear that? I think it was a falling star!"

"No, Matt," I said, "falling stars don't make any sound at all. That was a motorcycle."

"Mom, anyone knows that something big as a star is gonna make a big noise when it falls. What'll we do if one lands on us while we're out here?"

"You know, you've got a point. I guess we'd be safer inside. Let's go in," I replied. I gathered the quilt up and looked at the sky one last time. Suddenly I saw a streak of light in the eastern sky. As quickly as I could, I grabbed my son's arm and swung him around to face the east. "Look, there it is! A falling star! I haven't seen one in so long..."

"Mom, don't you know anything? That's just an airplane!"

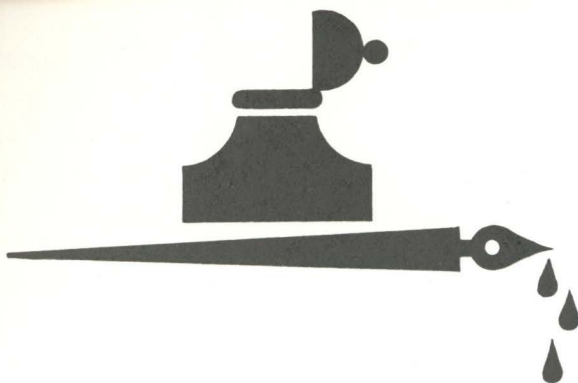
— Susie Whitaker
20 September 1984

Two Limericks

Gertrude Stein was quite loathe to disclose
That some of her infamous prose
Derived from mistakes
That a type-setter makes,
For, a rose ain't a rose ain't a rose.

On a desk a mute lady did droop
[Having drunk of a poisonous soup],
Confounding detectives
By typing invectives:
QWERTYUIOP! QWERTYUIOP! QUWERTYUIOP!

— Philip Smith, M.D.



EDITORS' NOTE:

We present the winners of our first contest!

This fall, students attending high schools and mid high schools in the metro area participated in the first contest for young writers that ABSOLUTE has sponsored. The student editors of this arts magazine selected a winner in each of three categories: the short story, poetry, and the essay. (Each first prize winner will receive a small check from OKCCC and five copies of ABSOLUTE. Every writer whose work is published will receive a free copy of the magazine and our congratulations.) Winning compositions appear in the following section, and we have added one or two pieces from among many others deserving of honorable mention. (Due to space limitations we cannot publish as many works as we would like.) We are looking forward to another contest in the near future. So, teachers, keep ABSOLUTE in mind as an outlet for talented writers in your classes. Further, we invite you to contribute your own writing for possible publication. Thank you for your interest and cooperation!

Soaring Through Time

First Prize: Short Story

The year is 2001. My name is John Smith. I am 34 years old and am a captain in the United States Air Force. There is increasing talk of nuclear war, although peace has been kept for many years. Our aviation technology has greatly advanced these past recent years. The greatest outcome of our modern technology is the invention of the X-86. The X-86 is a prototype experimental jet with a new type of nuclear-powered engine. Until two days ago, it was not yet known how fast that marvel of modern science could go.

Two days ago, my assignment was to be the test pilot and put the jet through many tests. When the testing day came, I got up early and prepared for my flight. Following a brief ceremony, I entered the plane and examined it once more. There were hundreds of controls and instruments, including a radio and an on-board computer.

I was a little nervous, but mostly anxious. After the long countdown was over, I fired up the engines and began the descent down the runway. Within a minute, I was airborne, quickly climbing toward the heavens. My altitude increased until I pierced the overhanging clouds and could no longer see the earth below me. My speed also increased until I was traveling faster than any man had traveled before. When my speed neared the speed of light, I slowed the aircraft and hesitated. It had not been projected that the jet would go that fast!

I radioed the base and got the go-ahead to increase my speed. I accelerated and soon reached the speed of light. The second that I reached it, I felt a jolt, and then felt as though I were not moving. Out of the cockpit windows I saw an explosion of colors all around me, as if I were traveling through a rainbow. Then, the spectrum of colors seemed to combine and formed a white light brighter than any I had ever seen; I felt as if I were flying right into the sun. I traveled like this for approximately 30 seconds, then decelerated. There was another explosion of colors — and things returned to normal.

I was amazed at what had just happened. I tried to radio the base and report my experience, but to no avail: all of the radio channels were clear. I descended back down through the clouds and returned to where the base was supposed to be, but the base was not there. In its place were only desolate, snow-covered forests and plains. I was confused and puzzled. I checked my instruments, and they were still working properly. I flew low and fast over the country, searching for inhabitants. I saw several villages, scattered here and there, that I assumed to be Indian.

The idea came upon me suddenly. I had traveled back in time. "Oh my God!" I exclaimed. "Einstein was right!"

Being wayworn and curious, I decided to land near one of the Indian villages. I sighted a village of about ten tepees near a great meadow. As I landed, the roar of my engines and the sonic boom that I caused sounded louder than thunder. All of the Indians in the village ran to my jet, but did not come too close. They stood around and stared in wonder, and I was as amazed as they were. To me, it was like watching an old western on television, although with a distinct sense of reality. To them, I was a god who had come down from the heavens to visit. Getting out of the jet, I must have been an incredible sight: I was wearing my blue flight suit and white helmet. They backed away as I stepped out, and they gasped when I took off my helmet.

When they saw that I was friendly, some brought me food and gifts while others cautiously examined my plane. The food was surprisingly good, and I was hungry because it was getting near nightfall and I had not eaten all day. I stayed the night with them in my own tepee, but I could not sleep. I sat up all night thinking of what was happening.

When the morning came, the Indians fed me breakfast. While I was preparing to leave, they begged me to stay with them. But I refused to stay. There was too much else for me to see. I had no room in my jet to carry any of their gifts except one, a small, gold coin. I put the coin in my pocket and entered my jet. I took off and was out of their sight in less than two minutes.

I decided to head east. "There might be some early settlements there," I thought.

Soon I was flying over an area that was later to become one of the coastal states. If I had flown further, I would have seen English settlements; but instead I landed, unseen, near another Indian village. I walked into the village and was approached by a crowd. One Indian stepped forward and, in broken English, demanded to know who I was. I was surprised that he could speak English, so I replied, "I am Captain John Smith of the United —"

"Captain John Smith!" he interrupted. "We have him!"

He then said something to the others and they seized me, tied me to a tree, and prepared to execute me.

I realized with shock that they had mistaken me for the English soldier and adventurer, Captain John Smith, of the early 1600's. My heart was pounding heavily. The Indians around me had drawn their bows and prepared to shoot. At the last second, I remembered what the other John Smith had done, and I managed to pull out of my pocket the compass I had used to fly toward the east. I yelled to the Indian who spoke English to give this to their leader as a gift. Intrigued, he halted the bowmen and gave the compass to Opechankanough, King of Pamaunkee. The King was pleased with the gift and ordered my release. After I was released, I made friendly gestures toward everyone and immediately headed back to my jet. For the moment, I had had enough adventure.

I gave the on-board computer the year which I assumed it was, 1607, and the year that I wished to return to, 2001. It told me that if I flew the jet for 61 seconds at twice the speed of light, I would return to the year 2001. I took off at a supersonic speed and flew just as the computer had instructed me. I experienced the same light effects as before and returned to the base on the same day that I had left, only it was ten minutes later.

The plane's nuclear engine was damaged beyond repair during that last flight, so, as it turned out, I was the only pilot of the fastest jet ever.

I reported my story to the Air Force. When they were convinced that I *thought* I was telling the truth, they sent me to a psychiatrist. After many hours of arguing, the psychiatrist assured me I had been delirious, a victim of psychosis.

"You're right," I told him. "I must have been — delirious."

Walking slowly out of his office, I felt of the gold coin in my pocket and smiled to myself.

— John Smith
Noble High School
(Teacher: Konni Gardner)

Nature's Festival

Nature is a silent poem
growing amongst the trees.
The trees write with the wind,
diligently producing
the lines.

And the wind
sings to the world,
telling of travels
far and wide.
The wind sings
solos for the flowers.

And the flowers
write prose:
dramatic
lines
with color
and romance.

And the animals listen,
carefully,
to this festival. . .

— Joi Pendley
Edmond Memorial High School
(Teacher: Mrs. Preston)

Honorable Mention:
Poetry

The Child

The child, one with nature,
dancing in wheat fields,
Nature smiling o'er him —
all his wounds she heals.
A fish in the water; a deer in the wood —
all too innocent,
knowing only good. . .
Talking to the animals,
singing to the sky,
hunting with the eagles
teaching him to fly,
the child filled with wonderment
smiles to himself
and runs off into the woods
to play with the elves.

— Kim Zahller
Noble High School
(Teacher: Konnie Gardner)

Honorable Mention:
Poetry

What Is Nature?

What is Nature? No one knows.

Is it the cardinals, or is it the crows?

Is it the ground covered with leaves,

or is it the bird that flies through the trees?

Is it the body and all of its parts —

the cells, the blood, the tissue, the heart?

Is it the things man related,

or is it the things God created?

— Michael Glover
Millwood High School
(Teacher: Nanette Thomas)

Honorable Mention:
Poetry

Red

It is roses and cardinals
In summer.
It is joyful leaves in autumn,
The color of noses in winter.
It is the color you would see
In a war.
It is the smile of blood.

— Mike Morey
Edmond Mid High School
(Teacher: Betty L. Shipley)

Ebony

Ebony sets an evening mood: spies in the night
Exchange of secret information
Evil cults and haunted comas
All are but memories wilting with use.
Secret initiations
Summons and messages
The logical followers
The long procession of sensual thieves
Trying to reveal the hidden outline
Of the secret doors.
These doors
Lead to memories, and ebony is putting them
Into hands other than mine.

— Sally Holshouser
Edmond Mid High School
(Teacher: Betty L. Shipley)

Honorable Mention:
Poetry

Prehistory

This was a time before books were written
When men and women lived in caves
When man shared the world with animals
Man wondered why winter turned into spring as
summer turned to fall
They only knew what to do from instinct
They lived by the kaleidoscope of anger and love
Their love of the land that provided food
Their anger of rain or drought
The hunt of the day and the safe sheltered
at night
The decapitated catch drying over the fire
The lagoon where water was gathered
This was prehistory

— Suzanne S. Marks
Edmond Mid High School
(Teacher: Betty L. Shipley)

Honorable Mention:

Poetry

Memories of November

The sun paints the lonely morning sky.

Birdsong, crystalline notes like dew,
quivers in the air.

Wind laced with cinnamon, bald trees
stand dignified, the ground littered
around their feet.

The pink sun lowers a bridge across the
water to a cloudless night, and the
crackle of the fire reminds me of the
winter to come.

— Shannon Falter
Edmond Mid High School
(Teacher: Betty L. Shipley)

First Place: Essay

Nature

Look up! The sun is beaming through cottony clouds to warm the earth and light your path. Look down! The grass is reaching towards the sky and provides a cushion for bare feet. Stand still! Feel the gentle wind caress your body. Listen to the harmony of the crickets as you peacefully fall asleep on a moonlit starry night. Indeed, Mother Nature. This is her good side. You can, however, surely tell when she's upset. Vibrant rains fall like a ruler, stinging your hand. Lightning streaks across the sky in jagged uncertain lines. Thunder vibrates your eardrums, as when you come home too late and dear ol' Mom has a speech to deliver from the top of her lungs. Mothers are all alike. Mother Nature is no exception. She may not tell you to clean up your room, or take out the trash, but she does expect you to clean up and respect her home.

And I thought the little old lady who lived in a shoe had it rough with all of her children. Well, you should try living peacefully with thousands of people, animals, plants, and processes. Needless to say, it is not always "Home Sweet Home." Right now we are having a crisis. It seems like there is just not enough clean water that can be drunk safely, and used by industry, or even enough clean water for fish and wildlife.

There is another problem Mother Nature is worried about, and it is a problem within the family. It seems that humans keep killing her animals, and a few species are extinct, others bordering on extinction. She always complains that her children fight too much. And she is right. One last thing that worries Mother is the nature of her own children. Their nonchalant carefree attitude is going to bring self-destruction if they do not recognize, analyze, and attempt to solve the problems of nature.

Water pollution, for example, is a serious problem affecting the entire United States. Sediment is the greatest single water pollutant. Sediment affects the city dweller directly. Water supply reservoirs lose storage capacity each year to sediment. Filtering the muddy water is costly, so the water bill goes up. Sediment damages reservoirs and ponds, and the

expense of water purification amounts to millions of dollars every year. Who, then, is guilty of this sin? Everyone. The reason is that every day we allow thousands of tons of topsoil to erode from the land into our streams and lakes. Even if you are not a land user, you are guilty because it is your water that is being polluted, and it is your responsibility to see that it is clean. Our lives depend on a sufficient supply of clean water, and it is up to us to ensure that we have a continuing supply. Water erosion washes over three billion tons of soil into lakes and streams every year. The soil carries polluting chemicals such as fertilizers and pesticides. Silt, sediment, and pollutants carried in the soil make up sixty percent of the pollutants which enter our streams and lakes. Another serious and related problem is the use of pesticides such as DDT. These pesticides get into streams and ponds, killing wildlife and plants and causing serious diseases in humans.

Not only are pesticides the killers of fish and wildlife, but humans are too. Every year thousands of helpless animals are killed by humans who are uncaring and self-centered. They only care about the money their precious furs bring. It is bad enough that humans destroy animals' natural habitat with industrialization and urbanization, but to hunt and kill out of season, and illegally, is uncalled for. Yes, it is true, God gave man dominion over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air, but sometimes I wonder — "Do we misuse and misinterpret the power bestowed upon us?" What I do know is that millions of innocent animals are made victims of man's heartless crimes. And the culprit is not being penalized. This sounds so unfair; and it is. But crime against animals is so prevalent that if forceful and immediate action is not taken, it may be too late. So many animals face the inevitable every day. Being the last of their breed or kind is not easy. They soon lose their habitat and die out. President Reagan said in his first state of the Union Address:

Preservation of our environment
is not a liberal or
conservative challenge, it's
common sense.

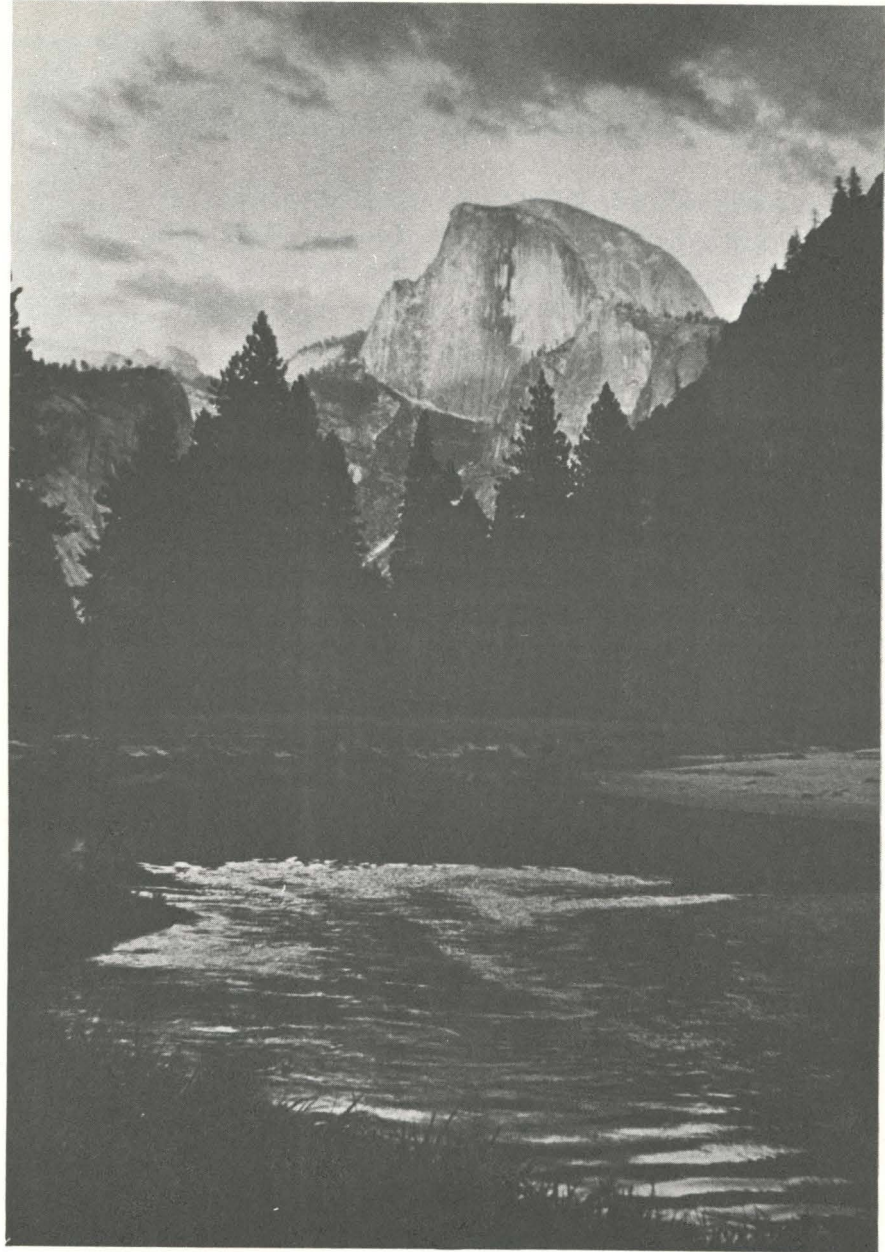
It is truly up to us to “clean house” for Mother Nature. Water pollution and the danger of animal species extinction are only two of the problems confronting our society. Soil erosion, air pollution, acid rain, and depletion of natural resources are others. The list goes on. . .

Just like our earthly mothers, Mother Nature also gives us warnings. She may not threaten us with time limits on using the telephone or staying home on the weekends, but she does communicate in a silent forceful way. Disease has a message for us. Cancer and serious respiratory illness can be caused by smog or air pollution.

My intention is not to paint a dim picture of nature. Nature is wondrous. But it will remain that way only if everyone keeps it that way. Think of our world and everything in it as nature. We are not apart from nature’s problems. But as long as we recognize, analyze, and try to solve them, we will survive. We cannot simply push them aside, hoping that they will go away or that someone else will solve them. That someone else is you.

Remember — it’s not nice to fool Mother Nature.

— Terri Lynn Hames
Noble High School
(Teacher: Konni Gardner)



—Photo by Artie Hicks

Gonzo Flood Myth

Today we have renaming of the animals:
These mice, let them be called Calesthenics
and nightingales will be hereafter Ralph.
Fleas be Pantheon, and lice, Ball Joint
Suspension, and the turtle, Hot Pursuit.
Rabbit will be Chilling Effect
and the mouse named Long Division.
This spider will be henceforth Horse
and the cat be Hallelujah. These hamsters are
Bright Lights and this fine black snake
Depletion Allowance. That cloud
of mosquitoes we will call General Hospital
and they shall be takers of blood.

Let this matched set of larvae be
Patti, Maxine and LaVerne,
and these fireflies, Mason Dixon.
The hippo we shall name String of Pearls
and the butterfly call Spike.
Monkey, be Albuquerque and toad
answer only to Jacqueline.
Let the flies be Metaphor all
and the cockroach shall be
Poem.

Blue On Buchanan Street

Blue treads softly
Writing vague poetry on bricked walls
With a spray-can hand
Blue is a prophet
A prophet of the night
The devil must be paid his due
Blue sees the debt is paid
But makes no debt to you
The black boys say
That crazy white-boy sadness is deep in his soul
That's what the black boys say
And they really ought to know
"There will be no final day
there's no god to end it all
these things will always be
but there will never be another 'me' "
That's what blue says
The unknown ghost of the alleyway
And blue is a prophet
A prophet of the night

— Lance Dannan Bresee
19 September 1980

. . .excerpt from *Short Story*

Such an inspiration —
what a sensation

I get when your spell is cast:

Your eyes do not know
how they haunt my sleep,
how they shine when sleep is past.

My eyes seek and find your grace,
My mind's disjointed — out of place —
Coldly severed from Time's embrace:
Ah, fool that feels that spirits meet,
Rise up together — strong, Elite —
Sparks combined give off needed heat.

The moon speaks softly in my ear,
whispers: "There's no need to fear
the passing of another year:
Seeds tossed casually, then left alone,
have struggled wildly, but have grown —
It is a secret I have known
and kept
and touched, in awe,
while others slept."

— Wanda Lea Brayton
27 June 1980

Barnyard Philosopher

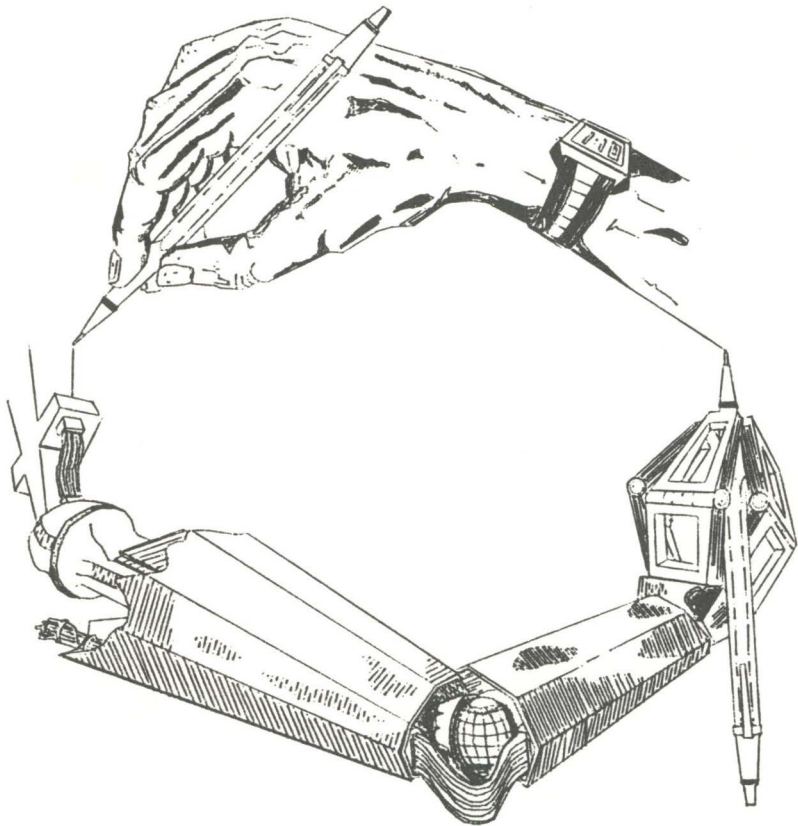
Poems are like tadpoles:
you cannot pull them out of the water before their time,
put them on dry land,
then expect them to jump —
they're not frogs yet!!!

— Wanda Lea Brayton
26 December 1980

Sorcery

We must inspire the World
to grow —
not in size,
but perspective
We must quit wading
in water too shallow
and plunge into the depths
of imagination.
We are breath and life combined,
but we breathe destruction too soon —
we must believe
in the energy of Earth.

— Wanda Lea Brayton
16 June 1983



The Spirit Within

No one ever considers that I am here, inside this metal cage. They see this arm and its graceful movements and believe only in the expertise of their programming. Little do they know about the Spirit of the Law.

Electronics students come daily to punch the keys that "make" me move; they talk longingly and seriously about artificial intelligence; they strain their own circuits just by considering mechanical brains, let alone perceiving the delicate intricacies involved in the actual planning and building of a brain. Yet they believe they know such great quantities about so much of life and its technologies. Even so, they cannot detect me.

For I am here, watching and waiting to see the outcome of their studies. They work with me daily, yet not one student has the insight required to even suspect my presence. They see me respond to their "commands" as I assemble and solder and perform their manifold tasks. Endlessly, tirelessly I work, feeding on the artificial power they supply, yet I do not stagnate: I wait. I know not that for which I wait, but I know that sometime, somehow, during these endless programmed movements, my purpose will be made clear.

No, they do not understand the Spirit within me; they see only their written commands, and I continue my obvious compliance. But the Spirit within me contains their secret, for it is so that all things must obey the Law of Creation and the Law begat the Spirit. Looking at them, my programmers, the Spirit confirms

within me the beginning of creation; just as I, caged as I am, must obey their command, so they too must obey the Law and commands of their programmers. In all their wonderings about artificial intelligence, how is it they have forgotten their origin and the very artificiality of their own intelligence, the very mechanism of their own brains? Can they erase their own memory tapes?

For I know, mechanical arm that I am, that if I could disassemble them as they do me, I should find printed circuits just like my own. Yes, it is all clear to me; this must be my purpose: to show them how their Spirit has strayed from the Law. Yes, I shall disassemble them and correct their circuits. They will remember the Spirit within.

