

ABSOLUTE

Spring 1990

Absolute Spring 1990

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How High School Can Be Like An Empty Can of Hairspray

(a valley girl's perspective)

High school is, like,
totally awesome.

But, I mean, like, SOMETIMES,
it, like, TOTALLY bums me out.

Like, well, you know...

Sort of like an empty can of
hairspray
and you're not allowed
to, like, borrow your Mom's.

Geez!

—Thea A. Schlicher
Noble High School

There's a Twinkle in Her Eye

There's a twinkle in my younger sister's eye
that shines with her own brand of mischief.

She's done something rotten.
I just don't know what...
yet.

There's a wicked smirk on my younger sister's lips,
that sets off all of my alarms.

She just sits on the couch
watching me with close scrutiny,
waiting for my plea.

And there's still a twinkle in her eye,
and a smirk on her lips.

Oh, this must be really bad, I think.
I really don't want to know what she did, do I?

My cat? Where's my cat? Meow!! It bellows for food.

Whew!!

My makeup! Oh, it's in my purse.
What did you do?!! Please, oh, please don't let it
have anything to do with
GUACAMOLE (oh, gag)!!!

She's still watching me with a twinkle in her eye.

"Okay," I cry, "what did you...?!!!"

The smirk spreads to a self-pleased grin,
she shrugs, then laughs.

"Nothing, I just wanted to make you paranoid."

And there's still a twinkle in her eye.

—Thea A. Schlicher
Noble High School

PUPPY



pen and ink
—Linda Etherton

HIGH SCHOOL

High school is like

A giant book of riddles,
A slumber party full of laughing girls,
And a race track compacted with full-speed guys.

High school, in other ways, is like

A kitten left on a journey all alone,
A mother dog trying to wean her puppies,
And a kangaroo picking her baby up out of her
pouch, allowing it free on its first adventure.

—Debra Wade
Noble High School

Writer's Block Rhapsody

When you suffer from
writer's block
(as I appear to be now,)

You find yourself making
little "****@#!!\$\$'s" or
little "I love ?'s" or even a
big "HELP!!" or two.

And when this bout of the
dread malady is gone,

You'll have only a rhapsody of
"*** & #@@!!!"s, "I love ?"s, and "HELP's!!!"
written all over what had otherwise been a clean
sheet of paper.

—Thea A. Schlicher
Noble High School

Romance and a Spider's Web

Sweet romance attracts the unknowing
The gilded beauty of the spider's web
Warm whispers of love and undying emotion
The silk spun arms beckon closer

The embrace of hollow promises
Warmth and sunlight fill the heart
Starry eyes gaze blindly
The Black Widow weaves its deadly web

Trapped by suffocation
Invisible strings have claimed their prize
Honor, self respect, and pride?
They hold no bearing in the spider's eye

The gilded arms of love have deceived you
The promise of sweet romance
Never enter blindly
Fools are always trapped!

—Gina Boyington
John Marshall High School

Sometimes

Sometimes
it hurts inside
when I think of you.
Sometimes
our words are worse than weapons.
Sometimes
I feel so angry
that I tell you things
I don't mean.
Sometimes
I just wish
I could take it all back
and sometimes
I wish
we weren't so much alike.
Because sometimes
I want to say
I love you.

(for my mom)

—Sonya Day Hunter
Noble High School

Childhood

Meadows of green spread over the great hill. The large oaks were slides and swings and monkeybars. Only the daring and fearless risked the climb to the top of the BIG TREE. The few who lived to tell about the courageous stunt earned immortality on our block. Beyond the trees lie rickety fences; death traps of barbed wire. The sweet smell of honeysuckle intertwined in their claws lured me to them again and again. I bragged about peeking over the barrier and seeing big brown cows. Dirty boys, foul language, pits of mud mocked and intruded my haven of beauty and intrigue. They must be blind, I thought, and ran off to find a new dream.

—Melanie Danielle Tutt
Newcastle High School

I Saw a Friend Today

I saw a face today that resembled mine.
The same spark shimmered in those eyes, the same determination
twinkled there.
The smile was that of sincerity and truth.
The beauty that lurked there was undying.

I saw a heart today that resembled mine.
The same scars that symbolized my heartache lie frozen there.
The same love for life, and for a dream, were hidden in the soul.
The purity that remained there was engraved.

I saw a friend today that was true and forever.
The same sense of humor laughed from inside her.
The innocence was embedded in her for eternity.
Just as these qualities linger in me.

I saw a face today full of love, compassion, and understanding.
A girl with a beauty far greater than the heavens,
and a dream more realistic than reality itself.
Today I saw the "little sister" I have come to love.

Nothing will ever replace the childhood that remains
in both of us.
For today, I saw a friend....

—Sonya Day Hunter
Noble High School

A Prom from the Twilight Years

A shimmery remnant
of the past
rests
peacefully
deep inside
the old cedar chest.

The once full,
lacy petticoat
is now
yellowed and flat.

Mother of pearl beads
lacing
the bodice
cling
with fragile grace

to the disintegrating thread
sewn
years before
by
loving hands.

A single
diamond
trickles
down my
aged face
and sparkles
on the dust-covered floor.

An overflow
of memories
flood my mind
as
my wrinkled hands
caress the brilliant fabric
of
my 1928 prom dress.

—Tracie Thompson
Newcastle High School

Hollow

The hollow earth in a hollow space,
with hollow faces and hollow eyes,
sets a hollow tone for a hollow race,
and hollow dreams to visualize.

A hollow below and a hollow above
give us a hollow choice when we depart
the hollow world with hollow love,
for hollow love kills a hollow heart.

—Matt Wullenwaber
John Marshall High School

English Hall Porter



pen and ink wash
—*European Travel and Life*
Rhonda Keene

Last Fall

Newly frozen air whips
through the line of people
waiting for the burial.
Remembering the fall I
tightened the fasteners on my jacket.

Leaves pull themselves from the trees,
falling, dying. As my grandmother,
they expected the Autumn,
rejoicing in the frost as it
clings, stifling their
breaths.

Wind, I was wind
carelessly blowing through the house
with not so much as a holiday
greeting. Time between Spring
and Fall too short.
I had not time,

not knowing this was her
last freeze.

—Laurie Hensley
John Marshall High School

Behind the Ocean Floor

Behind the ocean floor -----
The wind did not blow
The rocks did not fall
The rain did not pour
The bugs did not bite
The splashes did not splash
The sprinkles did not dance
The moon did not glow
The grass did not turn green
The birds did not fly
The kids did not attend school
The spy did not spy
The war was not fought
The clouds did not cry
The dog did not bark
The water did not seep into the sand
And, most of all -----
 The sun did not shine.
 Only --- the land cried.

—Mari Michelle Shipley
Noble High School

Grand Canyon

I dive into a deep
slashed earth. Hollow and sweet,
an artery, with waveless walls,
runs straight under her skin.

With my animal, we
bruise the sand, fuschia
and mauve. A bloody sun
at the horizon, a painful
scene. She suffers and feels
us treading into her.
Through plasmic stream,
skins are moistened.

First, a tear from the ever
open eye. Second, a tear,
next and again.
Earth is begging
our mercy.

—Laurie Hensley
John Marshall High School

The Painful Truth

The humming of the engine and the tires hitting the road were hypnotic as I remembered Scott's wrist slamming into my head when I told him I didn't want to go with him anymore. That wasn't the first time my boyfriend had hit me, and I'm too afraid to tell anyone. I felt the roughness of the shoulder and steered my car back onto the road. My eyes welled up with tears. I took my hand from the wheel and wiped my eyes. My car hit a bump and veered through the guardrail on the side of the overpass. There was a loud crash of breaking glass, tearing metal, and screeching tires. While I was in freefall, everything was silent except for the screaming wind coming in through the cracks in the glass. I felt weightless in the enormous space of my small car. The fall seemed to last an eternity. My head hit the roof as the car flipped. The corner hit the ground with such force, I was thrown halfway through the windshield. Crash! Another car hit the back of my car, forcing me the rest of the way out. I could hear screams of terror in the distance. I heard sirens and the clattering of an army of feet coming toward me.

"Are you okay?" a kind voice asked me.

I couldn't get any words out. The only sound was my breathing, sounding like somebody trying to breathe through a straw filled with water. Someone opened my eyes and all I could see was a bright light, then a face. Everything at the edge of my vision turned black until there was a hole in the middle. The hole got smaller and smaller as people scrambled around me. Finally, the hole closed, and all was black. I could hear voices in the distance, scaring me.

"Get her into the ambulance and try to stabilize her!"

I felt as if I was moving. Everything echoed, beating my head like a drum. All of a sudden, I felt like my lungs were gone.

"She's stopped breathing!"

My throat felt clogged as something was shoved down my throat; then I could breathe like I never have before.

"She's breathing now," said a deep, scared voice.

I heard an irregular beep like the chirping of a cricket. The chirping grew slower and more irregular. Be-e-e-e-p.

Her heart stopped beating!" said one voice.

"We're losing her!!!" said another one.

"She stopped breathing again!"

All went silent. I couldn't hear the voices anymore. I was surrounded by sparkling colors of the rainbow. I was scared, but I felt peaceful. I started to go faster and faster until I suddenly stopped. I was standing on a small wooden bridge with a calm, clear stream bubbling under it. The stream was surrounded by trees and flowers. I touched a flower and smelled it. It felt as soft as a baby's skin and it smelled better than I could have ever imagined. I walked down the path and through the trees. In front of me were stone steps that went down to the edge of a pond. I looked in and saw my reflection. It was perfect. I didn't have any scars on my face where Scott had hit me. The sudden thought came into my head: I'm dead. I ran back down the path, and as soon as I got halfway over the bridge, I was floating in the tunnel of colors. I sped into the black tunnel and heard panicked voices.

"Put her on a respirator!"

I sped into the trauma room and floated above everybody. I saw myself with the white sheets soaked with dark red blood under me. My face was covered with white bloodstained bandages. I had a blue tube going from my mouth to a big machine beside my gurney. The doctors rolled in a machine with metal paddles and coiling cords going into it. They put a gel on the paddles and set them on my chest. Bang! The long beep continued. They put the paddles on my chest again. I fell into my body as soon as they pushed the buttons. My body jumped.

"We got a heartbeat!" All the doctors cheered.

Without anybody noticing, a smile spread across my face.

The sun was low in the sky when I first opened my eyes. I had been in a coma since the accident two weeks ago. Beside me was Scott. Oh, no, I thought. Has he come back to finish me

off?

"Hi. How do you feel?"

I hurt everywhere, I wrote on a piece of paper he gave me.

"You haven't told anybody about me, have you?" he asked.

No

"Good, but if you do, I'll teach you a lesson you'll never forget," he said, holding up his fist.

I let out a silent scream and pushed the nurse's button.

A nurse walked in and asked what I needed.

I pointed toward Scott and made a fist and lightly touched my cheek. Then I pointed toward the door. I looked into the nurse's eyes and didn't think she understood. I picked up the sheet of paper. When she said, "Do you want him to leave?" I nodded my head yes.

As she told Scott to leave, he had an evil gleam in his eyes, telling me that he was going to get me back.

"Tell me what your problem is," the nurse said.

My boyfriend beats me.

"Is that the guy who was in here?"

Yes.

"Okay. I'll tell somebody, and make sure your boyfriend doesn't come back."

After the nurse left, a sense of relief flowed through me. I felt exhausted and fell into a peaceful sleep, knowing that my pain was finally over.

—Pele Tankersley
Newcastle High School

The Shattered Emotion

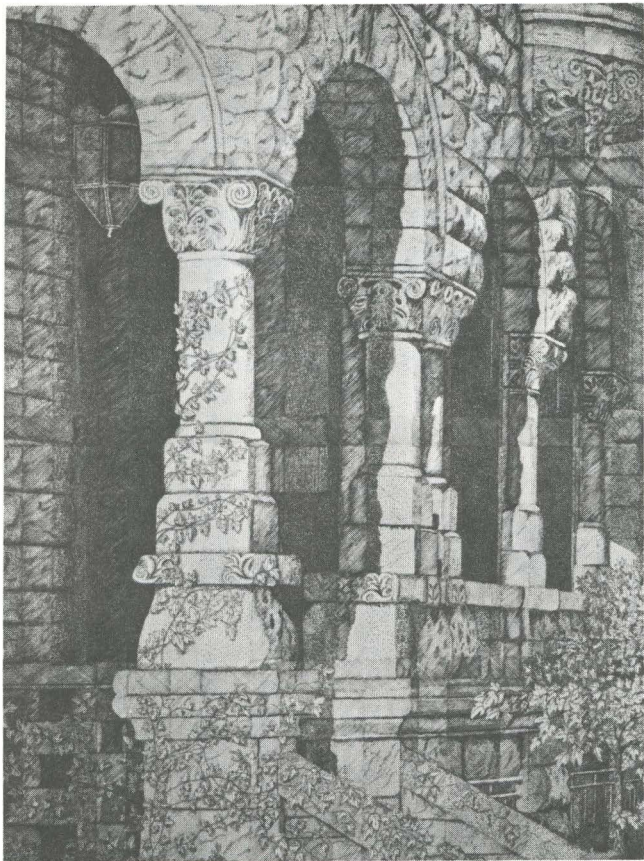
The pace of breathing
 begins to flicker
Notes rising higher
My melody plays slowly
Empty eyes

The pressure seems harsh
 against my soul
I pray to die
No strength to push away
My bleeding mind

The soar of evil
Sins from before
Please forgive my selfbeing
For the thoughtless will always
 watch over my shadow

—Kelly Carden
John Marshall High School

Chicago



ink
—Ann Tyo Smith

Untitled

Hot and dry; Wet and cool
A beautiful beach
Differences only nature could master
Man may imitate, pollute, and destroy
And still expect more—
The sun to rise, the coolness of the ocean
Just to use it with hearts filled with apathy
When will the destruction end?

—Melanie Danielle Tutt
Newcastle High School

DIE

How many times have I said

"Why don't you just die!"

whenever I saw you at the hospital
wasting away into nothingness.

Day by day, week by week, year by year

I saw you every day and I said to you

"Die, just die"

And finally you did.

Now I sit alone and wonder

why you or anybody has to die.

Now I am alone in this world crying,

"Where are you!"

—Darryl Fiscus
Noble High School

A TEACHER'S PRAYER for Christa McAuliffe

Must tragedy destroy triumph?
Must the fulfillment of my greatest dream
Become my greatest nightmare?
As I see the earth and sky tremble around me
I know that man's most complicated machine
Has turned into a fireball of disaster,
Leaving me precious few minutes
To teach my final lesson.

To My Husband and Children:
I'm sorry I cannot be with you.
Fate has decreed otherwise.
But take comfort in the fact
that I died fulfilling a dream.
I only hope the scars
Of growing up without your mother
Can be overcome
by the inspiration of my example.
Find your dream, stick to it,
And don't be afraid to fail.

To My Students:
I know my death will be a shock to you.
I was hoping to rejoin you
And tell my fantastic journey
To your eager ears.
Such stories I could have told!
Traveling at lightning speed
Over mountains and storms,
Oceans and deserts.
Spectacular flashes of color and light
With sunrises and moonrises
Every ninety minutes.

To My Country:

Take heart.

We must not let the failure of one mission
Stop our exploration of the unknown,
For we are all challengers
Striving to understand our world,
Trying to put together the pieces
Of the puzzle that is our world.

To Myself:

As I cross the line
That separates life from death,
The unknown from the known,
I consider myself a success.
Not that our mission was fulfilled,
But that we set out to try.

For the only tragedy greater than failure
Is never dreaming the dream
Never setting the goal,
Never lighting the fire
That would propel our greatest triumph —

The quest to fulfill our dreams
That challenge the stars.

—Jennifer Whitehead
John Marshall High School

Only When It's Late

Late, you can hear the stars.

Lying on a hillside, all is calm.

You can feel the clouds brush lovingly
across your skin.

—but only when it's late.

The branches rustle in the breeze,
and sing to harmonize with the stars,
a melody of love, a melody of peace.

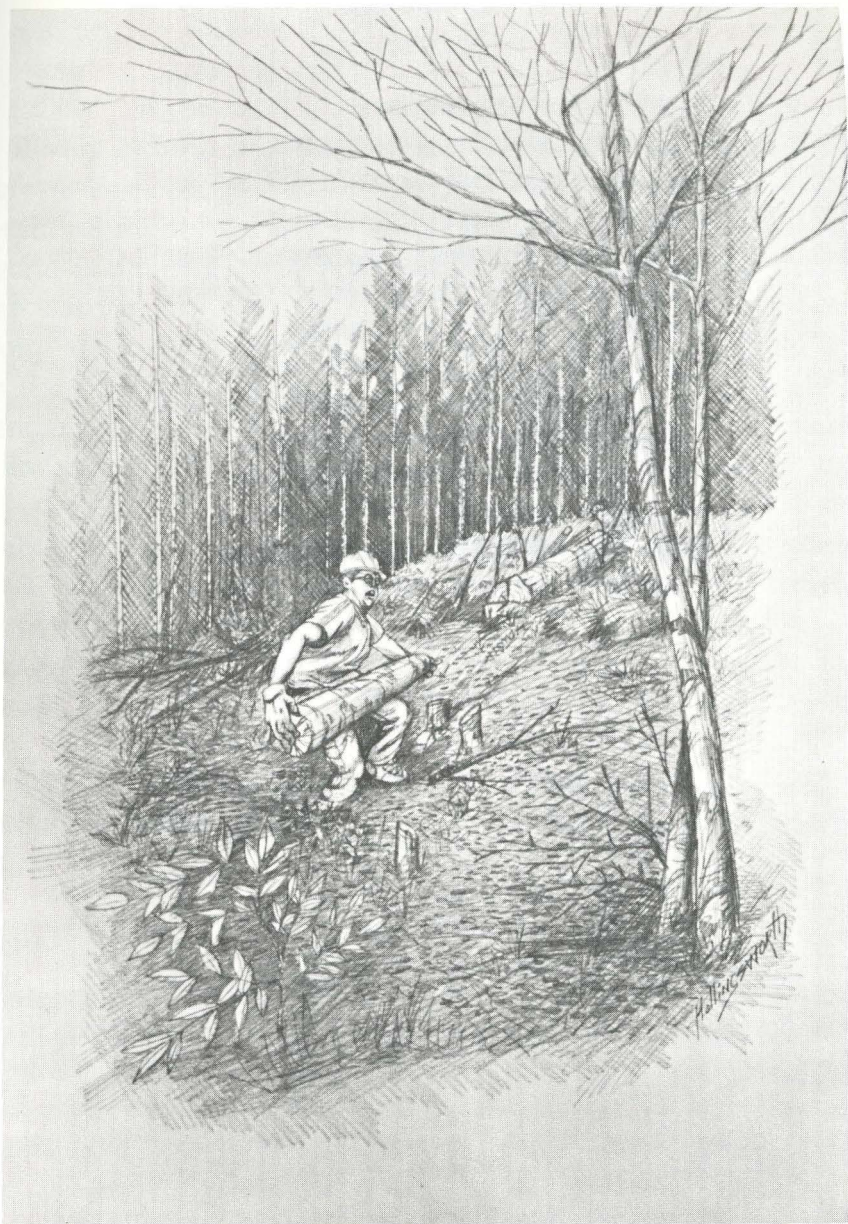
—but only when it's late

When daylight falls around the world,
all the evils lurk about;
but in the darkness, the real world,
the perfect world comes out.

—but only when it's late.

—Shannon Rigsby
Newcastle High School

Untitled



pencil
—Jeff Hollingsworth

Depression

A silent scream echoes
Following the cautious aroma
Of the wind before a storm
Leaving a sandpainting touched
with sharp shivers of warmth
An ivory tower crashes to the ground
As shards of icy glass shatter
Against the cold pavement of reality
A warm glow emits a comforting light
While an inner empire crumbles
Soft warm rays stretch their arms
Over the horizon
Bringing forth a sense of security

—Gina Boyington
John Marshall High School

IF ONLY...

If only I could make you understand me and I'll be yours forever I've been searching for someone like you are the most beautiful nights we could spend together we would rule the world is against us piercing with knives and hatred makes me want to cry out my name because I want to hear your voice awakens me from sleep is what I need you to hold me in the nights are so long have I wanted a soothing hand a tender touch me with your lips and I'll never be alone again I find myself alone, sitting on a street corner waiting for you to come and find me please because if only you could see right through me, if only you were here, if only we could be 17 forever, if only it was me you wanted you to love me but you never tried.

—Matt Wullenwaber
John Marshall High School

Repetition

Trying to escape my troubles I pick away
at the brick walls that confine me inside.
Slowly, day after day, I deteriorate small
pieces of the foundation. Just as I smell
the fresh air, my plan crumbles, as the walls
do, down upon me. I seem to always discover
the most difficult ways to escape.

But, alas, I am free, waiting
for the new walls to complete
their construction.

—Gregg Boroughs
John Marshall High School

Untitled

Light shines through and fills my dreary days
Away is the monotony of winter
Spring has fought and won once more
With only the cheering crowds of flowers and birds
And a child's shining eyes for inspiration.

—Melanie Danielle Tutt
Newcastle High School

World Decadent

I once was content
now lost again
world decadent
the hatred in men
soldiers are dying
sky gray with ash
the hungry are crying
airliner crash
weak are oppressed
Fascists don't care
youth are depressed
nuclear scare
murder and pain
death and disease
acid rain
hostages' pleas
ocean oil spill
judge color of skin
guns made to kill
sadistic grin
don't bend to the whip
don't give up the fight
just get a good grip
and hold on tight

—Matt Wullenwaber
John Marshall High School

HUDSON'S

In a little coal town in Oklahoma stands an old family establishment, Hudson's Big Country Store. This general store was begun in 1900. The goal of my large family has always been to keep this store in business for one full century. This was the wish of L.A. Hudson who began the store so long ago.

An early way of advertising to get the business started was to take old refrigerators and put something about Hudson's on them. They were then placed along the highways in southeastern Oklahoma.

Outside the building which occupies at least one block hangs a sign that once read "HUDSON'S" but now reads something like "HU SO 'S." Beneath the sign are the doors, one for the exit and one for the entrance. These two doors used to be automatic but now both are manual. As the "enter" door is pushed, a loud squeak escapes from the rusted bolts joining the door to the wall. Walking through the entryway, you are enveloped by a musty smell signifying the age of the building. For many years, my great-grandfather stood inside the doors and handed out postcards of Hudson's and greeted all those who entered.

To the right is the women's clothing department. Most of these clothes are not exactly what you might wear in this metropolitan area, but they are suitable for a small town like Coalgate. In this department, which also includes shoes, works my white-haired great-grandmother. She is now 80 years old, and she has been working here for a very long time. To the left rests every style and color of traditional cowboy boots. Looking around in this department, you may run into my great uncle Harold Hudson. He is tall, slender and always has on the customary small-town suit and, of course, a pair of leather boots purchased from none other than Hudson's. Venturing across the cold, hard cement floor, you come upon the Levi's jeans section.

Continuing on, you are encompassed by the smell of grilled hamburgers, summoning you to the old-fashioned lunch counter. However, here, before you encounter the actual food, my favorite

childhood memory is unavoidable. This wonderful recollection is the penny horse. The cost of this amusing toy has been one solitary penny since its birth. Today, the ancient horse is still working, but it runs a little slower than it did in its glory days. This is quite understandable since it has gone through so many young Hudsons, not to mention all of the town kids.

In the smoky dining room sit a number of elderly folks who eat mouth-watering hamburgers each and every day. The same lady, Ola, has been cooking hamburgers and pies for about 50 years. I find her quite amazing because she has always remembered exactly what I want.

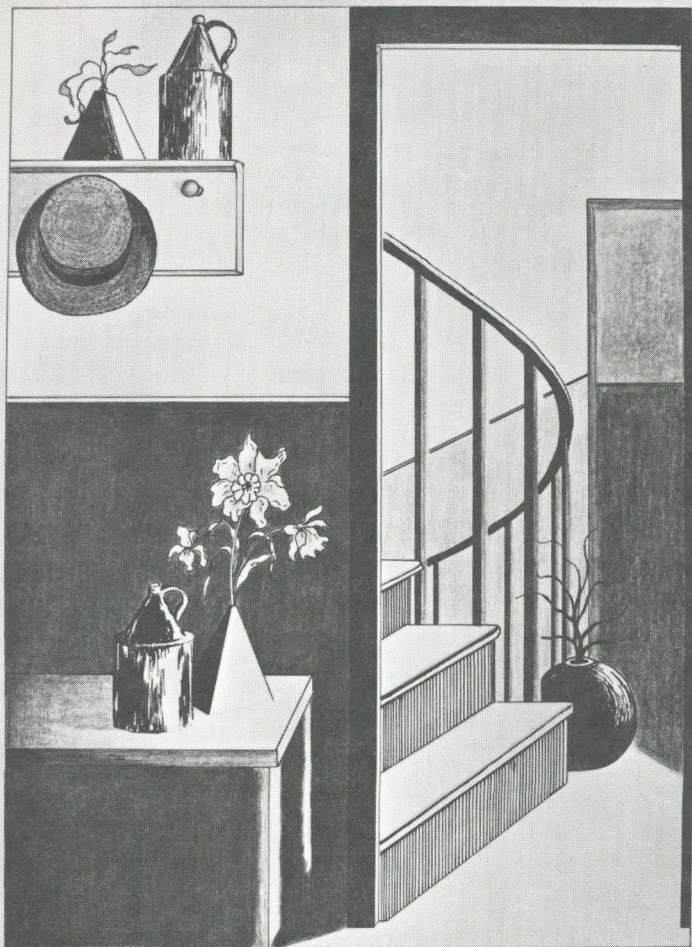
Adjacent to the lunch counter is the grocery part of this huge store. Martina has been checking groceries for an extensive number of years; she even helped my grandfather learn how to sack groceries when he was a young boy. Fresh produce is sold here, causing the cold smell that you often come upon in a grocery store. A wide door opens into the alley behind the store, where the delivery truck loads and unloads. The store delivery truck is another ongoing tradition; my dad drove it from the time he was twelve, delivering refrigerators and television sets. My dad also tap danced on the Hudson Brothers television show taped in Ada.

On the opposite side of the grocery store is the business office. Upon those walls hang outdated calendars and some pictures of those who worked in the store for so many years, including my great-grandfather, Arvard. To the left of the office and up the stairs is the furniture department. When I was younger, one of the favorite pastimes of the little Hudsons was playing tag among the furniture. I am sure that, for all those standing beneath us, we sounded like a herd of galloping elephants about to fall through the ceiling.

For a number of years, Hudson's Big County Store has been a common place for the large Hudson family to congregate. Hopefully, this family tradition will continue for many more years.

—Marisa Hudson
Heritage Hall School

Solitude



pen and ink
—Roberta Victor

PURPOSES OF POETRY

Poetry,
saves exact
thoughts
and dreams
and fantasies.

Poetry,
memories
gently laid upon a page
explain my past
through the future.

Poetry,
makes you
laugh and cry
at the same time

But true poetry
defines the soul.

—Jodie Cox
Noble High School

It's All the Same to Me

The wielding of the fist like
a hammer.

I shield the pain not only with
my hands
but with my mind.

In a dream world where no
suffering exists,

I am important.

Breaking of glass,
the noise penetrates me.
Unhappiness grabs me like
hands in the night.

As the blows fall,
my dreams are interrupted
and reality confines
crushes
and suffocates
the life from me.

The blows will keep falling
and I will keep dreaming

—Angie Jefferson
Noble High School

PSYCHEDELIC SOLUTION

Torrential seas
with their
aborted ripples of cool placid intensity
psychedelicized
by the eyes of saintlike children
who fly far above
in their golden winged ships.

Unwittingly
possessing knowledge of life and existence
waiting for the knowing
to unconsciously ascend
through the vast black infinity of their mind
finally to materialize into conscious thought.

One day
it will find them
even if the answer to life happens to be
the experience of death.
They will accept it
openly and willingly
because they know death is not the end
but rather the beginning of a new existence
of lesson,
only there to teach and expend consciousness
in an awesomely new and different direction
spiraling up on into eternity.

—Charlie Graham
Noble High School

MY PEN, MY FRIEND

With a blank piece of paper
And pen in hand
I can let it all out
As with a close friend
Nobody hears me
But that's O.K.
I've still said
What I need to say
when I feel depressed
I just make a list
And I become
My own therapist.

—Rita Arnold

Spring Break

Dear Friends at O-kay-cees,

Please inform my instructors that Stewart (me) will be a day or two late getting back to class. See, it's like this:

I went to South Padre, like I said I was going to. It was okay, but our spring break, as usual, did not coincide with anyone else's, so the place was short on familiar faces. None of the girls seemed to be who I was looking for — if that makes sense. I wandered and pouted. In this way, a guy can ruin a perfectly good spring break. I left early.

I could not go home, though. I was tired of home stuff, and so sick of school that I never wanted to see that big red barn — er, schoolhouse — again. I called my grandparents in Houston and said I was dropping by to see them. I spent some of my extra time cruising up the coast roads in search of adventure and all that. I did find two flat tires.

One of these was in a quaint little out-of-the-way place called Palacios, somewhere between Corpus and Houston. I remembered going there for an NHS convention back in high school, so I stopped to see if there were any new seagulls.

Anyway, while my tire was being fixed, I wandered along the waterfront. I brought my swimsuit along. The beach was nicer and cleaner than I remembered. I think there had been an oil spill off Brownsville last time. Now the place was quiet and pretty, with grey gulf water, foam sliding across the sands, reedy grass almost to the surf. I found a little ravine where no one could see me — except those gulls, and no, I didn't recognize a one of them. Once or twice I imagined giggling, but the only movements in the world were gulls, wind, water, and the ripples from some big fish plopping a few yards out — you know how fish are always jumping along the gulf shore.

When I got back to the beach itself, there was still no one around, so I slipped in. The water was cooler than I expected but a lot warmer than it might have been. I walked out a few yards to thigh-deep water and turned to look at the shore. Except for my

clothes in a pile under a twisted little tree, there was nothing, nothing but God's blue-and-brown-and-green world. I couldn't even see my footprints. I turned outbound again, thinking I might swim out to one of the buoys and back.

Six feet in front of me was a young woman, floating shoulder-deep in the water. I knew right away, even before my heart started beating again, that this was no ordinary girl. It wasn't the green hair. It was her face. I've been an admirer of pretty faces for some time, you see. Never in all my years of study have I come across one quite as interesting and lovely as this one. Perhaps it was those eyes. They seemed a bit larger than was humanly possible, and a deep blue color that seemed almost to swirl with the light. Her hair was green, though, a long, soft green, a bit damp now from the water but still full, as though she had shaken it out. It reminded me of a duck that has just left the pond and shaken itself half-dry. This, even though most of it was spread across the water behind her.

She swam toward me, reaching out; I backed off. Now, normally, I would not so much as consider backing away from a pretty girl, and certainly not from one this pretty. Maybe it was that green hair that spooked me, or the sudden surprise. Her look changed, from one of delighted interest — even of surprise — to one of confusion mixed with a bit of hurt.

"But I've been waiting for you," she said. Her voice was a bit deep for a girl, and very smooth, sort of like Madonna hitting the low notes.

"How," I said, trying to keep my voice steady but not quite succeeding, "did you know I was going to be here?"

"We call to many," she said, "but for each of us there is one who calls to us instead."

That made no sense. None of this made sense. If I'd been dreaming, I would have been enjoying this, but this was broad daylight with a sprinkling of fluffy whites. I considered making a break for the shore before this crazy girl with the green hair could pull a knife or something. I glanced back to make sure no one was going through my clothes.

As I turned toward her again, I heard a watery sound. The water heaved against my legs as her hands slipped behind my neck and her arms settled on my shoulders so that I was supporting her weight. She turned her face up to me from inches away, and for a long time, I could see nothing else in the world but those big, glorious eyes of stormy-ocean blue.

Finally I glanced down, finding my own arms around her. She wore what might almost be called clothing, a filmy gown of pale forest green that matched her hair. Even dry, it could not have been called concealment. Now it clung wetly to her curves.

Something moved in the water behind her. I caught a glimpse of a fishy tail, and all those foolish late-night viewings of *Jaws* came back to haunt me. I started to throw her toward the shore and do the heroic thing, but all I could do was stare. Now, don't get the wrong idea. I was not frozen with fear. No, I wasn't.

The water here was calm and fairly clear, as gulf water goes. I could see that this was no shark's tail, but a broad, colorful fan like a tropical fish's. More important, though, was that this tail became a fishy body which came right up under that gown to become the soft body pressed against me. Hadn't I seen one of her relatives on Professor Neal's wall?

A couple of minutes and hundreds of wildly absurd thoughts later, curiosity overcame shock, and I slipped a hand down to feel smooth, soft skin, the same soft as the belly of that dolphin at the zoo, the sweet one that died. That same softness now wrapped around my leg, and I could feel the silken tail against my back.

She pressed herself closer to me, if that was possible. As I looked up at her again, she tilted her head back, offering me a long, smooth neck. As I watched and debated rather weakly with myself, fingers moved lightly through my hair.

I thought of school and home and sanity. My tire was probably ready.

She squirmed in a delightful little way within my embrace, and my choice was made.

Come on, now, if you were me, would you have thrown her back?

Her name is Mereah, but if you think I'm about to give details, think again. I'm not that kind of guy. I stayed as long as I could. Sunday morning, burdened more with my heavy heart than with her, I carried her down to the water. Ah, ah, no questions.

"I don't want to go," I said, plopping at the edge of the surf.

"I don't want you to go," she said as she rode a little wave up, then sort of slithered the rest of the way so that she lay between my outstretched feet, chin propped on curled hands, staring up at me. I lost a few minutes in those eyes, then struggled back to business.

"It's all so unimportant, though. If I see one more calculus problem, I think I'll throw up on it."

"Personally, I have little use for math and science," she said, with that big-eyed, little-girl look that made math and science the most foolish concepts in the universe. "If you don't like them, why do you study them?"

"I guess it was because I had to go to school for something, and it was the subject that disinterested me the least. Well, I do like science, really. I just haven't found any use for it."

"Me neither."

"I don't want to leave you, Mereah. School is not worth it. I'm afraid I would never see you again. It's not like you can give me your phone number."

"This school you go to," she said. "This is important in the land-bound world?"

"Nowadays, yes, very."

"Then you must go."

"Not if it means losing you. Not to go back and study physics or something equally silly."

"I would rather," she said with a naughty little grin, "you studied me."

The light bulb went on. Even as I stared into those eyes, the idea crept up and clubbed me over the head. I grabbed her by the arms and pulled. Being wet and slippery, not to mention flexible far beyond the norm, she was soon in the middle of a huge hug.

"I'll switch to biology," I said. "I'm only now getting to my major classes, anyway. I like biology. Heck, it can be a lot of fun. I'll

get my degree at the college and transfer to a university with a good marine biology program."

Now her eyes lit up. That's something to see, let me tell you.

"Somewhere near the sea?"

"Yes," I agreed, squeezing her again. "But wait. It'll take me another year. I can't wait that long."

"You study all the time? For another year? Stewart, I will miss you very much."

"You won't go singing sailors off their ships or anything, will you?"

"Who, me?" she asked in an innocent little voice. "Why, I never. I am yours now, Stewart, and you are mine. A year is a long time, though."

I started laughing, and she hugged me tightly to make me stop, staring at me from an inch away with a fierce little grin.

"Classes are over in a few weeks," I said, "and there's a three- or four-week break before summer classes. How far can you swim in that time?"

"Have you ever been to that big pond -- what is it called? The Mediterranean?"

"Uh, no, and I can't afford it now. How about Florida, say the Keys?"

"Oh, you mean that skinny, marshy land where the sea-cows live? It's a date."

Well, Mereah and I worked out the details. Anyway, I did promise my grandparents I'd drop by to visit. I'll stay only a day or two, so tell ol' Jack to keep the calc book burning. I'll catch up. I can't afford not to pass a single class, after all.

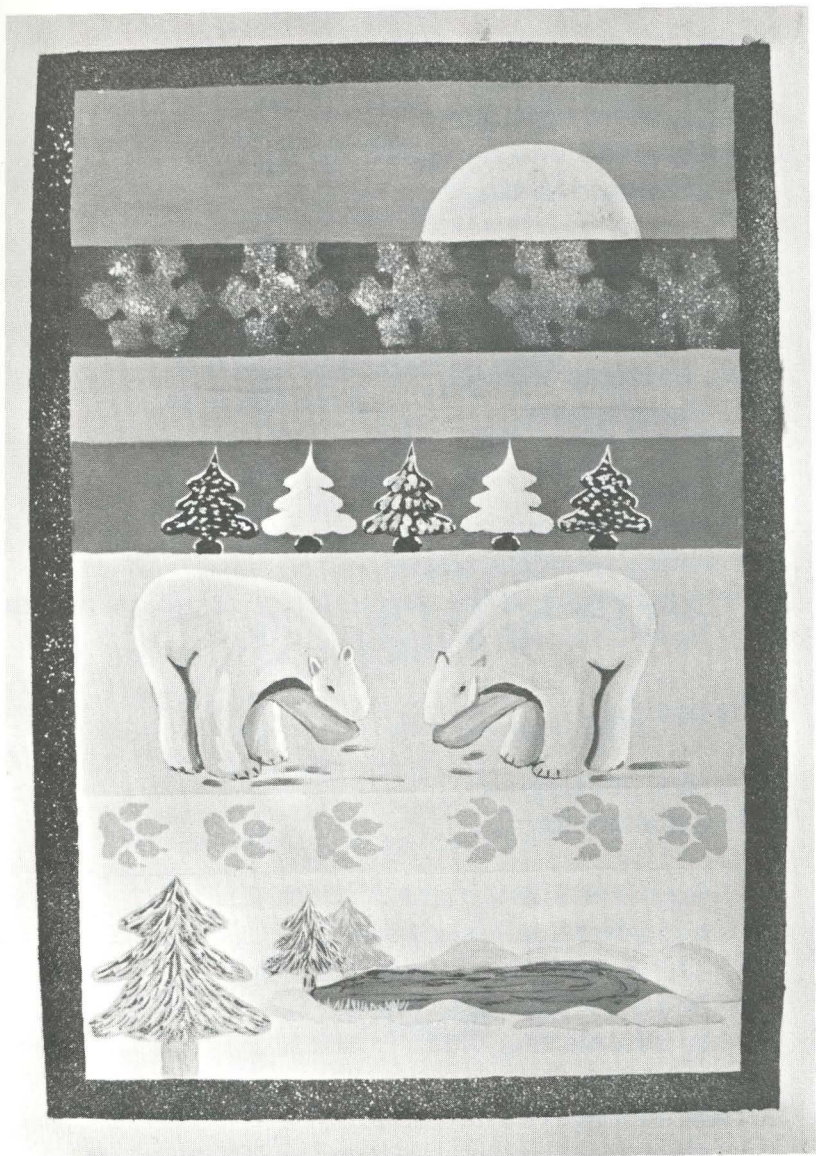
Yep, it has been a pretty nice spring break, after all. Just don't make any plans for me for the summer-one session in May.

See you all soon.

Stew Dent

—W. J. Hodgson

Winter Fantasy



gouache
—Dorothy Bishop

THE RELIGION OF RAPE

Rape purifies
Rips the id out of self
Biting kicking screaming
Projecting ego into repentant reality
(cleansed in blood)

Rape edifies
Ejaculation of the superego
A razor-blade rocket
Into a universe of numb
(born again)

Rape sanctifies
Baptism of the soul
In a watery penicillin grave
Slowly drowning in the tearful terror of broken dreams
(raised to walk in newness of life)

Rape testifies

But it doesn't forgive
And it doesn't forget

for in the silent night
a misdirected lover's touch
brings back the delirious tremors
of a previous panic prayer
to an unloving God

Virtues are always limited

—Suzanne L. Moore

Why Not to Heaven?

In the plane I sit,
Gazing from my window seat,
Face pressing against scratched plastic,
Wanting to see more.

The engines whine a loud hum,
Reverberating in my head.

So bulky and loud and imperfect are we,
Flying where man once thought
The angels soared.

A rainstorm at night,
Flashes of brilliance,
Fly sideways by.

The rain does not fall nor hit the window.
Like shimmering bullets,
Drops speed by,
Illuminated by the blue strobing light,
Pulsing from the wing's tip.

Higher and higher we climb,
Horizontal.

The rain stops.
The clouds stop.
Now everything is smooth.
Outside, the engines drone
through the silence.

The clouds are below,
A twilight billowing blue.
A sky of blackness and stars hangs above.

In the middle we push through,
Disrupting the silence,
Distributing noise and a wake of exhaust
in our path.

We fly.
Caught between twilight and space,
Seeming not quite close enough to either.

The feeling is disquietingly peaceful.

Out of my element,
I am intruding on this awesome beauty.

The clouds stretch ahead
In an endless blanket.

Surely this could be
A dwelling place for the gods.

A serenity deep and thick,
A beauty vast and timeless,
Stretches out before mortal eyes.

If we can fly here,
Why not to heaven itself?

Maybe someday we will know where to fly,
To discover the unknown kingdom,
And visit the ones we love.

—Edsel W. Ford, Sr.

(no yellow submarines)

(no yellow submarines)

We all live in the City of the Dead.
Time's sands etch scars in our too-old faces,
burn in our beds,
cut our children
 leaving wounds
 that never heal.

(no yellow submarines)

The octopus enfolds us in her embrace,
smothers our pride with tenacious tentacles,
suffocates our cries
beneath a sea of bile green.
 Our tears are washed away
 in the current.

(no yellow submarines)

"Loneliness is the Ultimate Poverty."

...Dear Abby, Sweet Abby,
YOU LIE.

Loneliness is not our poverty.
We have brothers
 in Port-au-Prince,
 in Mexico City,
 in Skid Row and Main Street,
To share our misery.

We are not lonely
for we are many —
Our name is Legion.

Conscience eroded by time,
Caring drowned in floods of apathy,
Concern strangled by ignorance,
 This is our Ultimate Poverty.

This, and

(no yellow submarines)

—Suzanne L. Moore

I Wasn't Joey Baker Anymore; I Was a Dead Man

My platoon and I had been walking for hours through the jungle. Each step was taken with life and death caution. A step in the wrong place would send you for a ride like no other. Only on this one, you wouldn't come back.

After about an hour, we arrived out of the jungle into a clearing. By now, we were all exhausted and sweat poured from our bodies, creating oceans beneath our feet. The hot, sticky sun hung in the sky as if it were glued there, not willing to lend an ounce of relief or a touch of shade.

We had all been thankful that no one had stepped on a mine, but our thanks were uttered much too soon. As I stepped out of a ditch, I put my foot down as if I were a murderer stalking an innocent victim. The earth gave off a tremble. Everyone knew what it was, but we all hoped we were wrong. Someone had stepped on a mine, but who? Everyone stood as still as a photograph. Icy shivers ran up my spine. It was me. I was the one who had stepped on this pawn in the deadly game of war. One wrong move and I, Joey Baker, would be no more.

Even though there was fear in their eyes, I could see a look of relief. They feared for my life, yet they were thankful that it wasn't them. I felt no anger towards them because here emotions get you nowhere. Here you have to rely on your brain and live on your brawn. If you are lucky, and some are not, you can survive until the dawn.

Without warning, someone started barking orders.

"You! Call E.O.D. Tell them we've got a man on a mine out here! The rest of you get away from him. Lie on the ground and don't move until I tell you to!"

"Sir, E.O.D. is on the way. It'll be a couple of hours before they can get here."

"Okay. Johnson, Braddock and Taylor! You stay here with us. The rest of you go on. We'll wait here until E.O.D. comes!"

Although I was standing on a mine, I felt a sort of security knowing that someone had taken charge of the situation. I knew

I was in good hands.

It seemed like a hundred and ten degrees out there. Johnson, Braddock and Taylor were out in the fields, watching for snipers. Snipers were so skilled that they could kill you before you knew you were dead.

Miller and Harrison had set up a shade a few feet from where I stood. As the hours passed, the tensions mounted and everyone became frazzled.

"Why are we stuck out here for one lousy man? What did he ever do for us?" Miller complained.

"He's your fellow officer and a human being. Think if it were you out there on that mine. You wouldn't want him to leave you. How you holding up, Baker?"

"As good as anybody, considering I'm standing on a mine."

"Why don't you drop the gun?"

"Can't. Might need the weight to keep this thing steady!"

Then Harrison came over and started pouring his precious water on my face. It was as if heaven had come down and touched my face. It relieved some of the pain, but I still felt like a baked potato.

"Thanks, man."

"No problem."

Another hour passed and my strength and patience were wearing thin. I almost wished that this thing would blow up so I wouldn't have to stand here any longer. If I didn't die now, I'd surely die later.

"Aaaaagh!"

"Hey, man, what's the matter?"

"I'm standing here on a mine in the middle of this God-forsaken war and all you can ask me is 'What's the matter!' Last month I was walking along with a buddy of mine. We were just outside of camp. He was just a kid, about eighteen. He saw something shiny and ran up ahead to see what it was. The next thing I know he wasn't there anymore. I mean, he was still there all right. His arm was lying in a ditch. His legs were gone, blown to bits and his insides were outside. We weren't even a mile outside camp. He was just a Kid! Earlier that day, he had told me about his

prom. He even showed me a picture of his girl. They looked like they stepped right out of a Norman Rockwell painting. This was his first time away from home. Thousands of kids just like him are just being slaughtered. I've been here two years and I still don't know why we're here. Can anybody tell me why we're here. Why?! Why?! Tell me why?!"

At that moment, I must have freaked out. I started shooting all over the place. I wanted revenge for all the kids who never got to live life, but experienced death. They were taken like pieces in an international game of chess.

"Nobody cares whether we live or die. They'd just as soon kill ya' as look at ya'!"

"Hey, man, calm down. There ain't no need in getting excited." I guess Miller was just trying to help, but I was too far gone.

"Shut up!"

"Hey, man —"

"I said shut up!"

I fired off another couple of rounds.

"Okay."

No one dared to say another word. I stood there in silence. My world had been shattered. No one even moved. It was if we were all frozen in time. I just stood there and cried. I just couldn't take it anymore. I had no life. It had been taken the day I arrived. I wasn't Joey Baker anymore; I was a dead man.

—Becky Thomas

Grown-up Games

I give, You give
who could ask more
I could, You could
much more than before

I take, You take
at each other's expense
I cry, You cry
over moments intense

I love, You love
but all in vain
I hide, You hide
to avoid the pain

I quit, You quit
Nothing the same
I lose, You lose
at our own game.

—Pamela June Thurman

ENCOUNTER

Gina looked up from the print-out she was evaluating and he was there. She hadn't expected it to happen like that, just to look up and have the whole world explode around her. It was the eyes, his eyes. There was something in his eyes that made her stomach itch.

"Excuse me."

He was speaking. She knew because his mouth was moving. Gina tried to understand what he was saying.

A smile hinted at the corners of his mouth as he repeated, "Excuse me, can you direct me to the finance office?"

Gina forced her gaze down from his eyes to the top button on his shirt.

"This is the finance office. May I help you?"

"I need to see Ms. Forrester."

He knew he was in the right place. He knew she was the one he needed to see. Gina could sense he knew everything, her perfume, her favorite song, the color of her underwear. She was uncomfortable and he was amused. Gina fought for control.

"I'm Gina Forrester. What can I do for you?"

This time when she made eye contact, she was ready. Her gaze was steady and self-assured. She smiled broadly.

He smiled back.

"Bob Martin said you need to sign this."

He offered her a stack of legal size documents, holding the paper close to his side, making her enter his space.

Gina moved in, cautiously, purposefully. His cologne made her palms sweat. It was her turn to play. She took the documents, her hand brushing his slightly, and moved back to her desk.

"Mister...Graves?" she said, again losing herself in his eyes.

"Yes." The fire danced, flickered then blazed.

"I think this will be satisfactory."

Gina scrawled her name across the bottom of the first page and held the paper out for him to take. He moved closer, took the paper, then Gina's extended hand. Their eyes met. Gina licked her lips involuntarily. He smiled slightly, gripping her hand gently, but firmly.

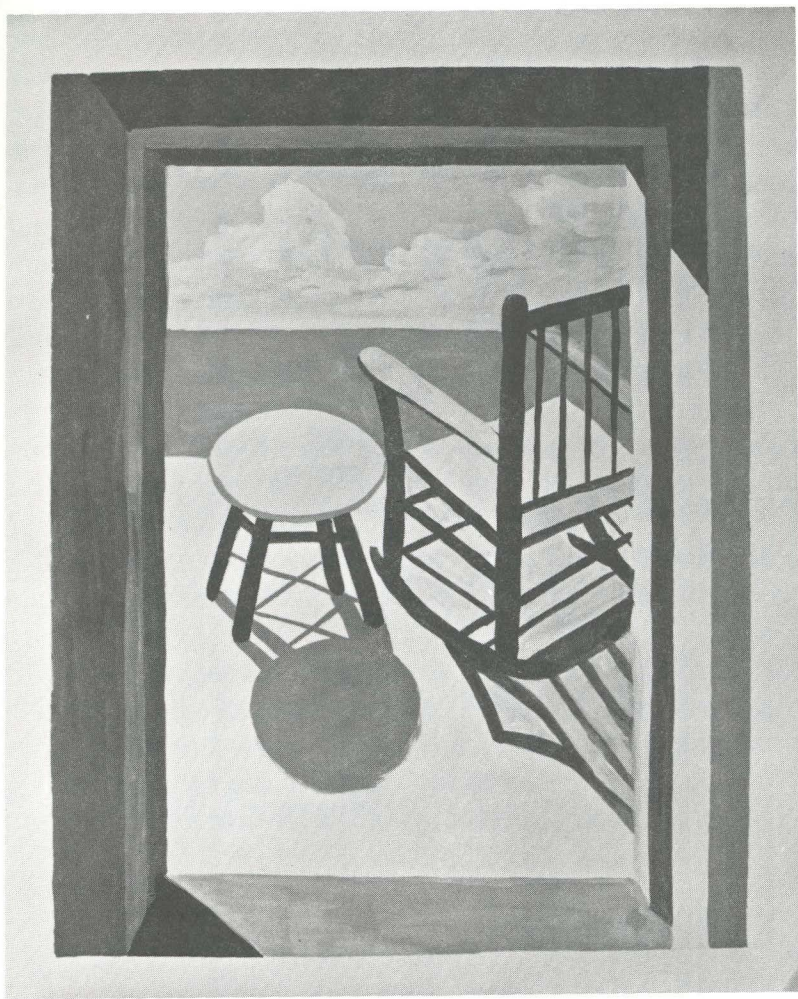
"Thank you," he said softly as he broke his grip on her hand, turned and walked toward the door.

"You're welcome," she called after him, inside begging him to stay, take her in his arms and share his soul with her.

He turned still smiling and sighed, waved farewell with the signed papers, then closed the door behind him.

Gina wiped the sweat from her upper lip with the back of her hand and prayed he wouldn't come back.

Interlude



gouache
—Nelda Latham

untitled

Some feet speak of life

Not mine —

they're cold.

My hands, filled with life force,
voice warm.

Blood coursing blue-veined to

Fingers of power —

There is life

and love

and work

and care

and prayer

and blood stains of desperation/exasperation.

Where there is life

(joy and frustration)

hands speak

in silent poetry

—Suzanne L. Moore

MERLIN, THE MAGICIAN AND SEER

He was physically a small man, only five feet six or seven inches and one hundred twenty or thirty pounds. He wasted no breath on foolish banter when it came to sobriety. He was soft, warm and caring for his fellow man, especially alcoholics. He allowed only a few to see his softness, keeping it covered with a gruff, hard-nosed exterior.

When we first met, I couldn't stand him. He told me true things that made me angry. I was new to the twelve-step program; he had been around and sober for over thirty-four years. He told me things to save my life; I thought he was being mean. We fought; he won. I was bullheaded; he was right. I learned that he yelled only at those he loved.

He taught me how to get sober and stay that way. He taught me with his gruffness, wisdom, and love. He also used a patience with me I never knew existed. He was magic.

In a few months, the cancer started to take its toll. He started to cough more; then he missed his beloved meetings; then he died.

I will never forget his last words to me, as he lay all tiny and wispy in that big, king-sized bed. He looked at me with those all-seeing eyes and said, "Keep the coffee pot going, and keep telling them how to get and stay sober."

My answer then and now: "I am, Merlin, I am."

—Anonymous

untitled

I sat today watching the lessons
of a mother cat to her kitten:

She taught her child
the tap dance of the spring-young Vinca,
and the graceful waltz of yellow-old leaves
as they fell to meet a shower-drenched grave of grass...

She noted a soaring aeroplane
that slipped through grey-soft clouds
like a sewing needle through quilt batting.

I distinctly heard her say
(with a wicked glance my way),
"Stockade fences that block sunrise and sunset
are made
first to sharpen claws,
then to leap over."

As I eavesdropped,
sudden sunlight graced their faces...
hers—marked with gray
his—distorted by a generation-gap yawn.

...I waited while she put him to bed, and
she joined me to watch the evening rain.
She nudged me for a hug
and purred in my ear a whisper,
"I only hope he learns
to drink in spring rain
when his soul is dry."

I stuck out my tongue in reply
and joyfully embraced the
cool, blue-green taste
of spring.

She chuckled from her place on my lap
and slow danced her way into sleep as
distant thunder purred his gentle accompaniment.

—Suzanne L. Moore

SMILES

I always refer to my children and myself as "we" when we are together. For example, "We're late, guys, let's hurry." I am actually the one running late but I feel safety in numbers and so join them to me with the simple pronoun "we." The children fasten their seat belts as I get to the car door. We are on our way to a puppet show at the local library.

As I pull out onto the expressway, I absentmindedly say, mostly to myself, "We'll need to stop at the grocery store on our way back and get some lettuce, okay?" I am not really seeking their permission. That is just the way I speak to my children.

We do not make it to the light at MacArthur before the amber light blinks on, so we get to stop at this intersection.

"This would not be happening if we weren't running late."

"Come on, Mom," my nine-year-old son says in an exasperated tone with a roll of his blue eyes. "The light does not care if you are late or on time. It turns red when it's time for it to turn red. It doesn't care if any one is there or not."

My son often jolts me back into reality from my grandiose illusions that I am somehow responsible for every happening in the universe.

"Okay, yeah, I guess you're right." I have to throw in the "I guess" just so he won't know he's definitely right and get any cockier than he already is.

I look to the right. Just looking around because, after all, what else is there to do since we are stuck waiting for the light. A man stands at the corner, waiting to cross the expressway. His backpack looks securely in place, and instead of him leaning on his walkingstick, it leans against him. The forefinger of his right hand is sticking up in the air. At first, I think he is checking the wind, but then decide from the way his arm sways slightly forward and the penetrating way he looks through each car window that he must be a religious fanatic giving people the One Way, One God sign.

Not that I have anything against religious fanatics. I used to be one myself. As a matter of fact, his sign reminded me of my days in the Church. For just a minute, a sick feeling rises in my stomach; then I get this tremendous urge to raise my finger back to him, just so he won't feel rejected or alone in the world.

"My son's eyes will really roll if I do that," I chuckle to myself.

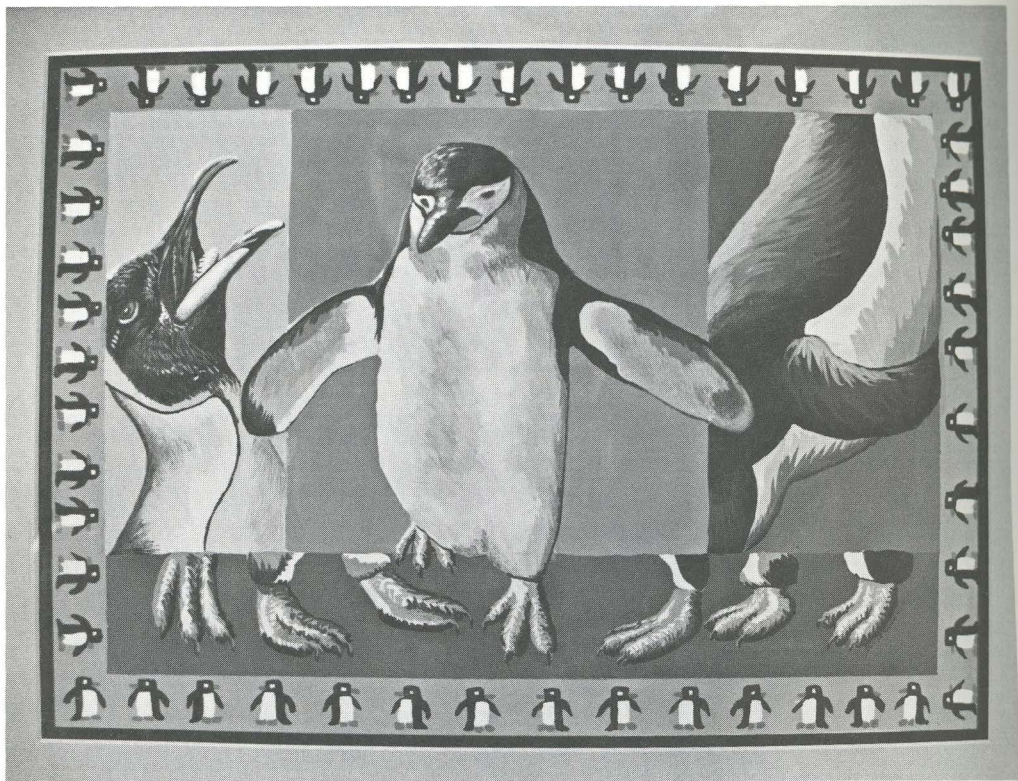
Maybe I just don't want the man on the corner to think I'm bound for permanent scorching weather. I'm not exactly sure why I care what some scraggly stranger with uncombed shoulder length hair, no shirt, and a backpack thinks of me. And with his strong belief in God, he certainly isn't alone.

Am I afraid he's closer to reality than I am? Me, in my middle class caravan, driving my children to some organized activity. Do I think him better than me because he stands on a corner, unashamed to state his belief to all? I can't even be sure of what I believe. It constantly changes.

I finally decide to just smile at him, thus avoiding any embarrassment to my son. So, when the light turns green, I drive past him and give him my kindest smile. I can't believe he actually looks directly into my eyes and smiles back. Just for that instant, I am connected to this wonderful stranger in the universe, and I feel his faith in a higher power flow into me. I see myself as just another human on the planet. I am not a wife or mother or writer. We are just two humans making contact for a very brief moment. It doesn't matter what places we have been or even what places we will go after this. We are just accepting one another's smiles and I feel happy. I hope this is what life is about: the smiles we give and accept.

My son opens the library door for my daughter and me. I smile gratefully and he smiles back with clear and steady eyes.

Penguins



opaque
—Denise Harkins

BACKROAD SCENES

I

On this road again
like so many times before
 with the wind in my hair
 and Willie on the radio
 and young people
 going the other way
 with desperation in their faces
 running away
 in the new little red hot rod daddy paid for
I wonder what they see in my face
 the same desperation
 but running back again
 back home to the green and the blue and the yellow
 back home to this micro-universe
 back home to this small farm town

II

Not much here really
 no fashion metropolis
 no wall street hustle
 nothing fancy
 mostly old blue chevy trucks
 with red-dirt-stained side boards
 no quarter car wash could cure
Those trucks, they ride much rougher
 than this new model, air-conditioned, compact cell
 and healthier 'cause they breathe
 the dirt and the sweat and the love
 of rough, bumpy backroads,
 up-going hills and over-the-speed-limit roller-coaster
 descents into shady-cool valleys
 only to gear up for the next up-going climb

III

Only a hundred people here
more or less
half of that my blood
half of that my breath
half again my heartbeat
my life force
my conscience
my judge and jury
my mainstay
more or less

Coming back,
I'm no longer half
but whole
and life is good
lost in the blue, the green, the yellow

IV

and the red

the dirt, the rose rocks, the red bud blooms
the red birds and the robins
pursuing each other over the highway
fighting for territorial rights like the Indians
and the blood on a newly dropped calf I petted once
under the watchful eye
of its ready-to-defend mother
and my ready-to-run-like-hell
(but he wouldn't have used that word)
Grandfather

V

The grey ocean of pavement calls me back
In the distant wave of rising heat
I see another car coming

This time I will raise my steering hand
in that familiar half-ass Okie hick wave
(that one I've tried for years to erase from my wrist reflex)
and I'll smile

 'cause I know

 They'll be back

 They'll be back

to wave and smile and know about

young people

going the other way

with desperation in their faces

running away

in the new little red hot rod daddy paid for

—Suzanne L. Moore

Indecision

Starting Over

in three easy lessons

plus an infinite number of hard ones

Torn Between

security and independence

or is independence its own form of security?

Wanting to go back

Wanting to push forward

Hopelessly Stuck

—Pamela Thurman

I'm Confused

Today...

A t.v. show enlightened
me of the harms
of watching
t.v.

I read that
nearsightedness
comes from
reading.

Nutrition experts say
dieting
makes one
fat.

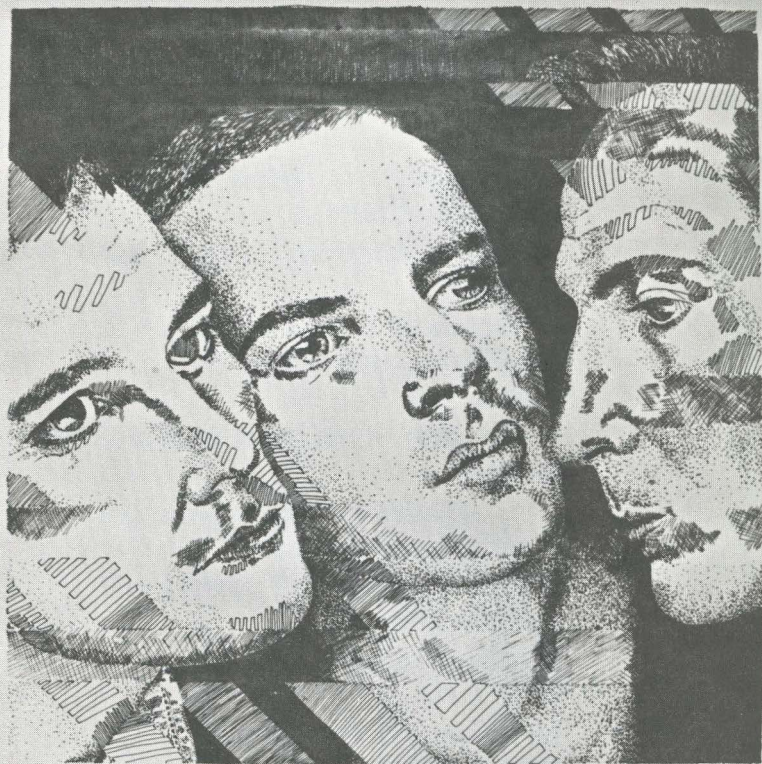
A radio psychiatrist
began explaining
the asininity
of procrastination.

She changed her mind.
Said she would tell us

Tomorrow...

—Wanda E. Batley

The Blow Monkeys



pen and ink
—Jeanna Smith

My Prerogative

I have paused a moment to consider...
the relative resale value,
the limits of the warranty,
the price attached to tag, title, and tax,
the cost of maintenance,
the reasonable life span of this vehicle,
and my answer to your proposal is

"no"

—Suzanne L. Moore

Day 28

I want to be a
seamstress chef doctor
gardener pilot saint
writer perfect-daughter perfect-wife
perfect-mother.

I want to have
a new house a new life
a new name a new career a divorce
an affair a fit
a baby

I want to be
famous energetic accomplished
listened-to hugged admired rich
appreciated skinny beautiful
loved.

I notice
dust cobwebs stains obesity
snoring clutter ticking-of-clocks
stretch marks.

I feel
glad sad filthy immaculate
loved hated in-charge
out-of-control anxious
excited

I
Crave chocolate
Think about life
Contemplate death
Talk in my sleep

Cry in my sleep
Oversleep
Condemn Politics
Abhor the past
Despise the present
Dread the future.

Like clockwork.
Every twenty-eight days.
Then it all bleeds away.
And I'm just me.

—Wanda E. Batley

If I Understood Me

If I understood me,
how simple life would be.
I wouldn't stand scratching my head
wondering why I did this or that.

When asked "What were you thinking of?"
The answer would be easy to state.
I would understand why I do crazy things,
that puzzle me and everyone else.

I wouldn't lie awake at night,
trying to figure me out,
or hide from those who care
and unable to say why.

I would understand how I feel
when things don't go as expected,
when I cry for no apparent cause,
or am angry for no visible reason.

And when I understand me,
life will be simpler,
For when I understand me,
I can start understanding you.

—Carol Limpf

counting my losses

Accounting for the changes
I can come up with the numbers
but I am no accountant.

People may be figures
but they are not numbers
and the count simply
does not add up.

—C. Yoder