

# Absolute

NINETEEN NINETY-TWO

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# Poetry

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# *Just Do It*

**Sheilah Freeburg**

Jackson. Bo. Double pro.

Do ya know?

Do ya know?

**Bo knows**

Football, baseball, and

How to turn a buck in advertising.

Jordan. Michael. Six-foot-six, shining black Bull

Twisting mid-air to slam dunk another 360.

**Just do it, Jordan!**

Is it the shirt?

Is it the shoes?

Is it the hair?

... the shoes. ... the shoes ... the shoes ...

... gotta be the shoes ...

Flyin' on Air Jordans.

**Just fly, Jordan!**

Step right up, young fella!

You'll fly

Regular eighty bucks (a steal at fifty-five—a day's work for your  
mamma before Social Security, federal/state  
withholdings, health insurance deductions,  
costs of transportation and child care)

You'll slam dunk, walk on Jordan's air.

The newest junior jock in high school hallways.

Don't ask no questions, boy—

Just buy!



# *Tribute*

## **Sheilah Freeburg**

Solomon's cornpatch runs beside the dirt highway  
thirteen miles north of Broken Bow—  
seven miles north of the Beavers Bend turnoff  
if you reckon distance from where the blacktop ends.  
At twenty-one Solomon carved that highway with ax and pick and  
youth's strong arm.  
At sixty he peddles peaches and black diamond melons beside it,  
Speaking softly to tourists with money.

Solomon plants by the almanac,  
laboring in grudging partnership with Benny.  
(Benny, tough-hided, sinewy, crafty-witted;  
gray muzzled, deaf to all but Solomon, thirty-five if  
he's a day.)  
(Solomon, tough-minded, massive muscled, mountain hardened;  
gray beneath his sweat stinking Stetson,  
knowing that mule like a preacher knows his flock.)

Solomon sinks his plow into McCurtain County clay, murmurs low  
and tender:

"Ho, mule. Ho, Benny. Git up, now."

Benny trembles an ear and rumbles

(spring's song flowing from master to mule to master).

"Git up, mule!"

Traces slap the placid rump; indignant muleskin twitches.

"Ho, mule! Git!"

Benny stands in stoic silence.

Rock-hard clay thumps off Benny's butt, "Git up, you slat-sided  
sunavabitch!"

Benny gits, and the earth surrenders.

Man and mule take mastery, and their furrows run deep and  
true.

# *Pas de Deux*

**Sheilah Freeburg**

I ask you in, but  
you hesitate, reluctant to enter my world.  
I offer a midnight meal and delightful conversation;  
you feign interest in a tea rose hiding in the shadows.  
I speak of warmth and a beckoning fireside.  
Stony cold, you turn away.  
Chastened, I retreat, and you, relenting,  
follow.  
“Come in, then,” I open my door wide.  
You nip my ankle and slip into the night;  
With a wink and a twitch of the tail, you’re gone.  
You’ll regret your going soon enough, I think  
and wonder if there is truth to the rumor that cats  
are reincarnated alcoholics.

# *Hate*

**Tara Goldston**

A product of love  
Evolved from passion  
Piercing through heart and soul  
Jealousy

# *America At War*

**Dewayne Miller**

A series of explosions  
shake the Earth.

Men screaming,  
bombs exploding,  
blood splattering,  
all soldiers must die.

Children sleep  
in soft warm beds.

Parents talk,  
while sipping coffee  
and watching the nightly news.

# *Friday's Thoughts*

**Aroon Thengthongnak**

It's Friday morning,

And I'm ready for school!

Thank God, it's the last day!

First hour, I had to do Chemistry lab

"Hydrochloric and Butanol mixtures really smell,"

She assigns us reactions for tonight,

Don't worry! I got the weekend!

Second hour, I had to translate Latin to English,

"Quid a'gitis ho'die?"

Don't ask, I have no idea!

She told us to read two chapters of the Trojan War for tonight,

No problem! There's always time for the weekend!

Third hour, I had to learn how to cross-exam the client  
in law class

"What were you doing that night?"

I don't even know what the case is all about!

He advised me to study the rules of law for tonight,

What rule? Oh, I can do that on Saturday morning  
cartoon hours.

Fourth hour, I had to finish Typing my lessons,

"STPPM YJRMHYJPMHMSL"

Oops! My fingers were not on the home row keys!

She never assigns homework,

Alright! More time to spend on my weekend!

Fifth hour, I had to listen to my English teacher  
talk the whole hour,

"Thomas Paine wrote Common Sense..."

Zzzz.... Oh my! Fifth hour is over?

She suggested that we study what she discussed over the period,

Was I asleep? I can ask the nerds over the weekend.

Finally, sixth hour, I had to grade my geometry homework  
in class,

“-2 90-B”

What! I miss two and got a “B”?

She expects us to study for the test,

Test? What is that all about? I guess I’ll just look  
it over this weekend.

I had a great fried chicken dinner.

After I finish washing the dishes,

I watch TV before I go out,

Oh My God!

It’s Monday Night Football!

# *Survival of the Fittest*

**Isaiah Dukes**

Sitting on my porch.

It was late in the evening,  
many summers ago.

The air was still, all was quiet.  
I detected a small motion to  
my right.

Looking down, I perceived a  
small, black ant.

Tugging at a morsel as large  
as himself.

Omnipotently, I stared down upon  
him with mild amusement.

A red ant approached him.  
But he didn't even notice.

Without hesitating, the red ant  
leapt upon him.

The champion pulled the reward  
from the jaws of his opponent.

I put my hand over him to block  
the sun.

He looked up to see where the  
shade had come from.

And just stared as my hand  
came down.

# *Apathy*

**Amber Bailey**

Passing by the Santa at the curb,  
diligently ringing his bell.

*I'm too busy.*

Not seeing things around you  
because it is so much easier  
to live in your own little world.

*I have my own problems.*

Dropping trash  
wherever it might land.

*Why should I take the time?*

Ignoring the heart torn child  
weeping for her broken doll.

*Why should I care?*

Averting your gaze when you happen  
to see a homeless person.

*Each man's responsible for his own.*

Continuing on your way  
as you see a person being robbed.

*I don't want to get involved.*

Not caring, while thousands die  
in some foreign war torn country.

*It's not my problem.*

Each man must stop and consider  
how he can touch the face of the world.



# *Wildside*

**Angela Potts**

Dawn arrives my  
day begins  
Bang! Bang! Goes  
the guns.  
Sirens fill the  
air like a ghost.  
Outside the mother  
is calling the  
young boy's name  
Johnny, Johnny! No  
use Johnny dead  
at 15. Too young I  
say too young.

On my way to  
high school I  
pass by a girl  
of 16 years a  
baby in her hands  
and one on  
the way. As she  
walked by it  
was as if I was  
watching a walking  
statistic. Too young I  
say too young.

Across the street  
was a funeral  
of a guy  
who was well known  
and well loved. Michael  
couldn't take it any-  
more - he got out  
all right bullet  
launched in his heart  
triggered by his  
own hand. Too young,  
I said, too young.

Lunch time comes  
I'm walking  
back to school two  
rival gangs show up  
with guns in  
each hand I'm  
caught in the middle  
I say to myself  
get on the ground  
too late shot  
in the back of  
my head. Caught in  
the crossfire I  
died innocently on  
the wildside. Too  
young, I was too young.  
America the beautiful,  
huh?

# *My First Parade*

**Bryan Dougherty**

My first parade  
at the Oklahoma State Fair.

98 degrees outside,  
in full uniform.

It's hot as my grandmother's woodstove.  
The drum major whistles the combination.  
Dee-deet, de-deet dee-deet.

I pull my trumpet up  
then down.

At that moment  
my stomach felt  
ten times heavier.

The sharp sound of metal  
hitting asphalt  
pierced my ears.

My tuning slide fell out  
and hit the scorching concrete.  
As I bent down to pick it up,  
I felt the band's eyes,  
and my drum major's eyes  
as red as  
my face.

Well, it's all downhill from here!

# *I Am*

**Sarah Mollett**

I am an intelligent blonde.  
I wonder why I am here.  
I hear the winds of change.  
I see a setting sun.  
I want world peace.  
I am an intelligent blonde.

I pretend I have lots of money.  
I feel guilty about the  
environment.  
I touch the open skies.  
I worry about the future.  
I cry when I am alone.  
I am an intelligent blonde.

I understand that life is cruel.  
I say exactly what I feel.  
I dream about Kevin Costner.  
I try to be a good person.  
I hope I'll succeed.  
I am an intelligent blonde.

# *Determined*

**Jodie Fowler**

The doors unlocked  
the dressing rooms empty  
a determined child  
enters quietly  
dresses quickly  
in a sleek black suit  
grabbing her goggles  
she slinks towards  
the door.

Entering a huge room,  
the smell of chlorine  
drifting steadily through her lungs  
Her heart thundering heavily  
through her body  
the yardage is long,  
the length she has never accomplished.  
She tiptoes on cloud covered feet  
reaching the end of the inviting  
blue waters  
as the words of encouragement  
tug softly in the back of her mind  
“You can do it.”

She leaps like mercury  
and soothes into a moment  
swiftly she glides  
through the thickness of determination

a gasp of breath  
another stroke  
she begins to tire  
her hopes and dreams flash  
before her eyes  
arm stretched out  
she grasps the surface of success  
the glory engulfing her fragile body  
no cheers vibrate  
in the stands  
she walks away  
the cold wind stabbing  
at her wet body  
she reaches the door  
and for one last moment  
she looks back on the distance  
of determination.

# *Slippery if Ice*

**Lisa Simpson**

The bitter wind  
hit my face  
like a slap  
The sun blazed  
on the smooth ice

I prepared to fall  
Baby steps  
as if  
first learning to walk

Wind  
as a strong arm  
held me  
Unbearably difficult  
to balance

I collapse  
into  
a roly-poly  
ball  
for  
protection  
and  
I finally  
uncurled  
slowly

Pain surged  
bones achy  
Difficult  
to  
proceed

I now crawl  
in reverse  
sliding down  
the path  
toward  
home

On all fours  
in pain  
holding out  
for victory

Achieved at  
the end  
warm path  
shag carpet  
to rub against  
mother  
coming  
with open arms



# *Drunk*

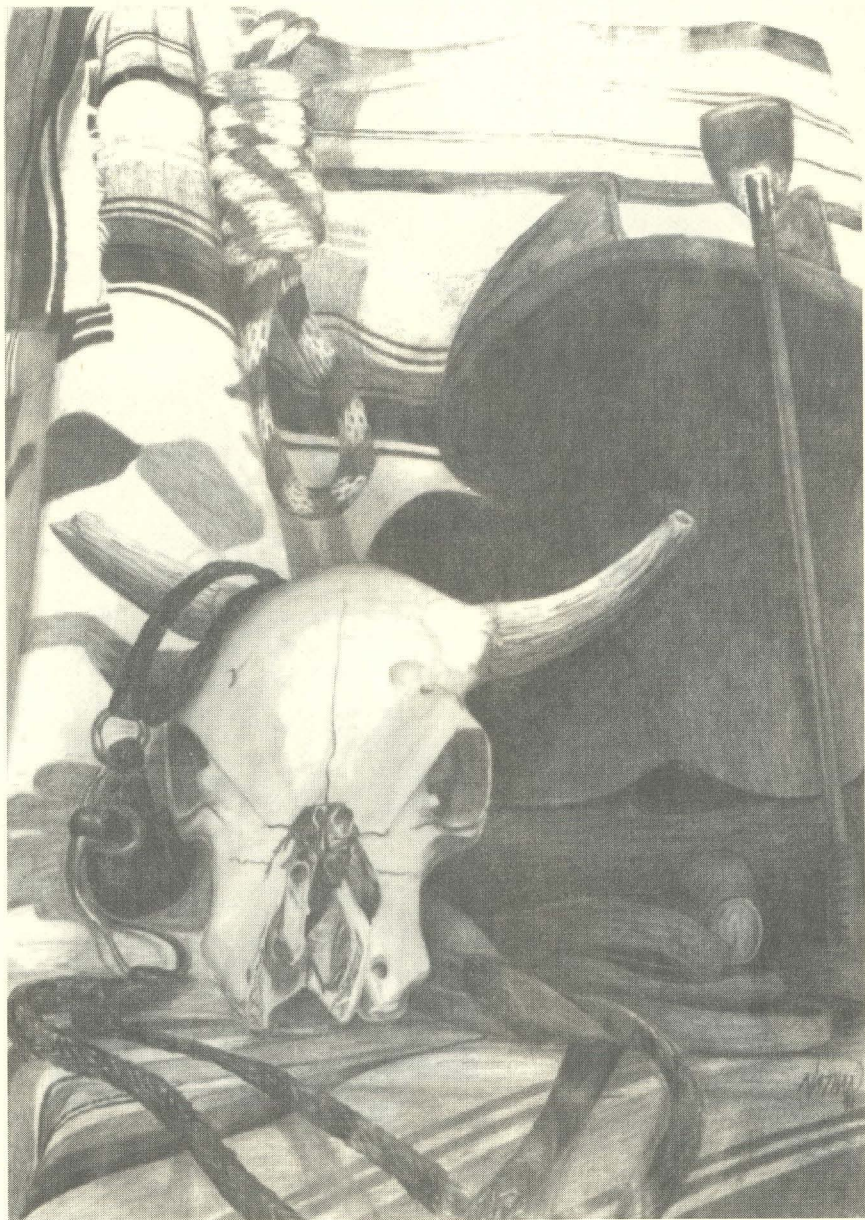
**Debi Sanders**

Just when  
I've sobered my senses  
I think of you  
and now and then  
just when  
I fancy  
the memories dimmed  
I'm drunk again  
on them  
and you  
anew.

Bottled them  
but can't get the lid on tight.  
Always leaking out  
around the edges.  
But I guess I can't live  
without them  
or you.

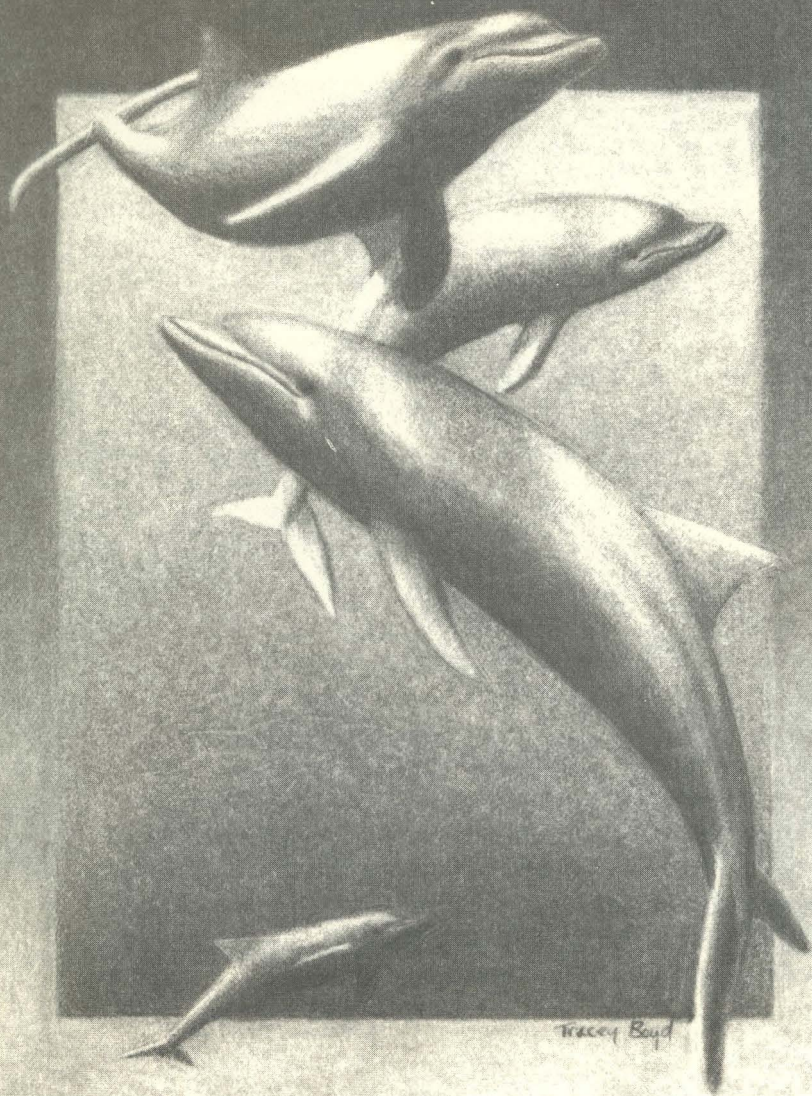


*Nature's Delight*, Nathan Edwards

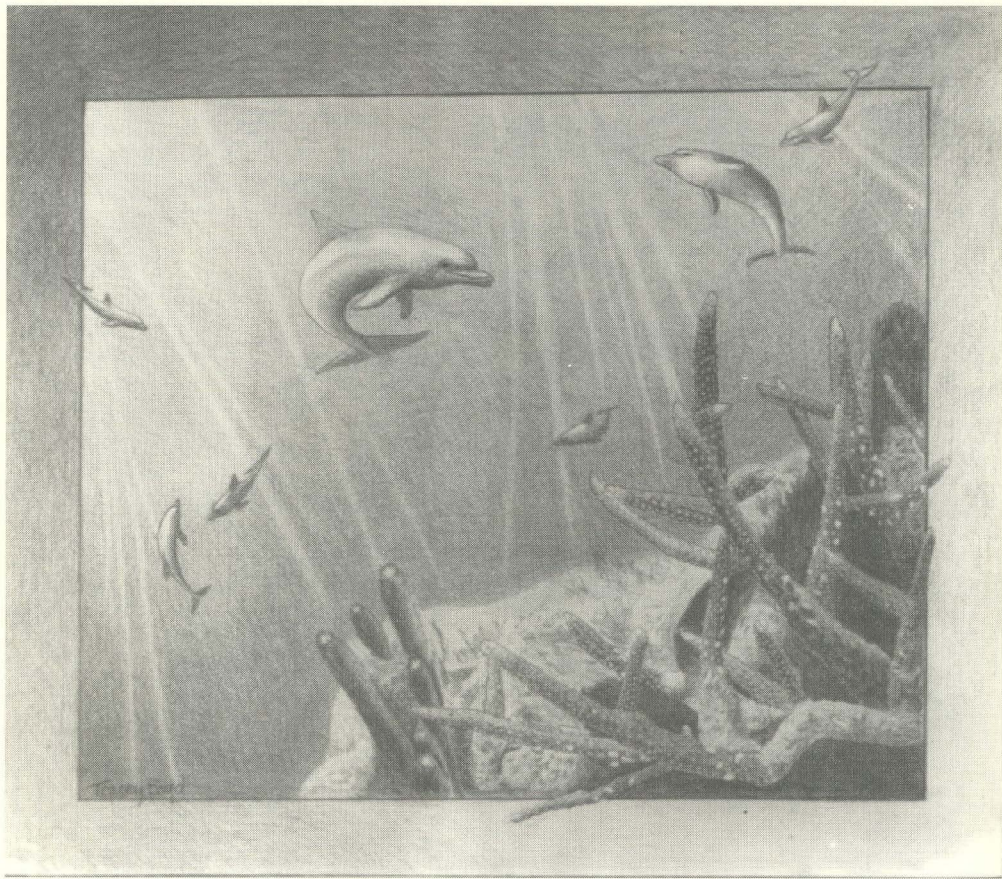


*Skull*, Nathan Edwards





*Deep Thoughts, Tracy C. Boyd*



*Deep Reflections, Tracy C. Boyd*

# **Short Stories**

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# *Bud and the Big Muskeeters*

Sheilah Freeburg

"**T**ell me about the big muskeeters, Bud," I leaned against my grandfather's shoulder and peered out our pickup's open window. My grandfather and I were on our way home after a summer's Saturday morning in town. I was five-going-on-six, and in the long-ago days before seatbelts I traveled standing in the seat beside him so as to monitor everything we passed.

"Muskeeters," he mused, leaning out the window just far enough to spit, but not so far as to let the wind snatch away his Stetson hat. "That was a long time ago, when I was a young man. I cain't rightly remember, now, just how it happened."

"It was when you were in the army, Bud, remember?" I prompted, wriggling my bare toes in anticipation. "You were sleeping in the barracks."

He considered for a moment, then nodded.

"I slept on a cot," he remembered, "and had to make my own bed. Sorry life for a man."

"Muskeeters," I urged him.

"We had marched all day in the rain, and I was beat—plum tuckered out. That night, when we got back to the barracks, we had to clean our gear and polish our rifles. I was up half the night oiling and polishing mine.

"Last thing I did when I hit my cot was drop the muskeeter net. Muskeeters was terrible in that camp, so close to the swamps. Stories was they'd carry you off, if you didn't watch 'em."

He grew silent, remembering his long ago days as an infantryman in World War I.

I dug my sharp, child's elbow into his shoulder to bring him back to the present—Southeastern Oklahoma in 1949.

"Then what happened?"

"Well, I musta fell asleep, and sometime before daylight I heard fellas talkin' at the foot of my bed. There was three of 'em, by the sound of their voices. I didn't open my eyes, just laid there real still an' listened. At first I thought it was men talkin', but the longer I listened, I knew it was muskeeters. Big, mean muskeeters. It's a good thing I didn't let 'em know I was awake, 'cause I'd a been a goner if they'd a' known I heard 'em.

"They was talkin' about me, wonderin' how they was gonna get to me, seein' as how I was covered by that net. The biggest one allowed as how there wasn't no problem, he could just slit through that net with his stinger, like slicing through butter with a hot knife. Then the two little ones could hold me down while he finished me off.

"I was scairt to death, I tell you. Too scairt to move. Too scairt to holler. I squinched my eye open just enough to peek out 'n look at 'em. They was bigger'n any muskeeter I ever saw—big as half-grown hound pups. Their stingers was bigger'n a huntin' knife, and twice as sharp."

"What about their eyes, Bud?" I persisted, enjoying the delicious prickle of goosebumps rising on my arms.

"Their eyes glowed red, like burnin' coals," he continued, then fell silent again.

"Did you see 'em fly?" In my excitement, I took the story away from him. "You did, didn't you? You saw 'em fly around the room!"

"Every so often one of 'em would take off from the foot of my bed an' circle the room. Its wings made a fearsome, rattling noise—sorta like a helicopter woulda made, only helicopters hadn't been thought of yet. Then it would land again on the foot of my bed.

"Finally, they got to arguin'. They couldn't decide whether to eat me right there in my bed, or take me out to the swamp. Directly, the big one said, 'We'll just have to eat him here. If we take him to the swamp, the BIG muskeeters will take him away from us!'"

I squealed with delight, adding my high-pitched giggles to his deep chuckle, and we debated the probable size of the BIG muskeeters as the pickup wound its way home through the Eastern Oklahoma foothills.



# *The Deliverance*

Tom Blakey

"S trive in the way that you pray."

The words snatched Patrick from a dreamless slumber and propelled him straight up in the narrow prison bed.

Glancing at his cell partner who lay sleeping with a pillow held over his head — a habit ingrained in the clamorous slammer — Patrick kicked off the rough blanket and put his feet on the stone-cold floor. He reached for a cigarette and an explanation of the voice he'd heard.

Must be my nerves, he thought. I knew I was going home this morning but not that I'd left a wake-up call.

Strive in the way that you pray. In what deep and dark diamond mine of his subconsciousness had he unearthed that little gem, he wondered.

And still the strange, yet familiar; separate, yet personal sound of the voice echoed in his mind.

All right, so he'd broken weak and prayed last night, he remembered. Wouldn't you pray too if you were fixing to hit the bricks of a world that had convicted and rejected you? So I'm a little freaked out, he thought. Ten calendar years is a long time. A drink of whiskey and a shot of dope and I'll be all right.

He'd said a simple prayer the night before, one he remembered from his childhood: "Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..."

The cell door racked open and it was time to go.

"David," he said, lifting the pillow. "I'm gone, brother."

"All right, man. Take good care of yourself."

"Give that shirt back to Pablo for me. The rest of this stuff is yours."

"All right," David said, standing up. "I'll miss you, brother."

"Yeah," looking him in the eyes. "I'll miss you too."

"Get out of here before we both start slinging snot," David smiled. They shook hands, embraced, and he was gone.

"Here's your bus ticket and a check for fifty bucks," the guard told him. "You can cash it at the bus station."

"Give us this day our daily bread..."

"What?"

"Nothing," Patrick said. "Just thinking."

By prison van, he rode to the bus station. The sights, sounds and smells overwhelmed him. Here was movement with purpose. Here were colors and children and life. Even the carbon monoxide smelled good to him. He breathed deeply and stole a smile.

Boarding the bus to his hometown, Patrick sank back in the cushioned seat and closed his eyes.

Strive in the way that you pray, he thought.

"...and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

That made him sit up. For ten years he'd plotted revenge against the rat who'd set him up. Not only had the punk trespassed against him, he'd testified to boot. How could he forgive that? At times his yen for retaliation was all that had kept him going. But he'd never considered this God thing before—or his own part in the human passion play.

I don't know if I can forgive that Judas bastard, he thought, but if God can forgive me for the evil things I've done, I'll do my best to let it slide.

When he opened his eyes again, the bus had reached its destination. Not willing to believe he'd fallen asleep on such an occasion, he put it out of his mind and hurried to the nearest telephone.

\* \* \*

If he hadn't known Carlos was driving a Porsche, he wouldn't have recognized him. He looked like the ghost of a ghost; pale and haunted with eyes of chemical fire in dark gray sockets.

"You caught me at a bad time," Carlos said. "My ol' lady split and left me with the rug-rat. I've been shootin' dope and changing shitty diapers for ten days running."

"You've got a kid? Where's he at?"

"She. I dropped her off down the street on my way to pick you up. What are neighbors for? Besides, we've got some catching up to do."

By the time they arrived at the house, Carlos had filled him in on a couple of easy scores and had reached into the glove box and handed him a pistol.

Patrick waited in the living room while Carlos went to break out the stash. Something tugged at his conscience, but he pulled away from it. Standing up, he began pacing back and forth.

Damn, he thought, this is what I used to do in my prison cell. And then it hit him:

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

"Strive in the way that we pray. Right, God?"

"What?" said Carlos, entering the room.

"Nothing, man. Look, I've got to get out of here." He laid the pistol down on the table. "I didn't even tell my family I was coming home today. I haven't seen my mother in ten long years."

The walk home felt good. He retraced the footsteps of his youth and befriended a dog along the way.

Rounding the corner of his street, Patrick paused a moment before picking up the pace.

"For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory," he said. "Forever and ever...."

Amen

# *Path of Light*

Tom Blakey

**A**fter an eternity of darkness, a man and woman met together upon a path of light. They traveled together for many years. Their vision was enhanced and they could see for many miles.

But soon they began to complain about the quality of the road they were on. Looking down, they missed the signs and began to take wrong turns. Their vision started to fade and the light seemed to grow darker. Vipers crossed their path.

Ahead, they saw a fork in the road. There was room for only one of them upon each path. They considered returning the way they had come, but, looking back, the road was darker still.

They considered walking one in front of the other down one of the paths ahead. It seemed a good idea until they realized that they would be out of step; one making the decision where to turn, the other following behind. Having always walked alone or together, they could not make the compromise.

The night had grown cold and a decision had to be made.

Oh, how it hurt. In parting, they wanted to make promises to meet again along the path. But, they knew not what lay before them and that in fact they must say good-bye.

The man fell down the path. He was cold, bruised and weary. He had no bread to eat or water to drink, and was tempted to quit the path. But he had traveled in pain before and had become accustomed to it. Resigned, he stumbled forward.

He met a guide upon the path. He'd passed by many before, but had never asked directions. Confident in his own ability to find the way, he, too, had seen the light in



the distance and knew he was headed toward it.

But the guide recognized his bruises, and, stopping him, administered to his wounds.

They shared water and bread together and drank of a very fine wine.

The man learned new directions; of shortcuts that were of the same distance, of paths to be avoided. He learned to look for an eagle that flew high above the clouds and deep within his heart.

The light brightened and new vistas were revealed. His path widened. He recognized other travelers upon the path and found the time to stop and share water and bread; and, sometimes, a very fine wine.

He began to see how all the paths were interconnected in great and small circles and that those whom he faced in passing were actually going the same way. This knowledge allowed him to slow down; be still.

He could no longer see the light in the distance. It had fallen all around him.

He was empty and filled, broken and new, separate and together. He could look back and see the course of his life.

Laughing and crying, living and dying, he danced on the path that was not.

# *The Other Side of the Fence*

Tom Blakey

**T**he whistle blast pierced the clamor of the prison garment factory, signaling the close of another working day.

Dispassionate ranks of khaki-clad men arose, and, in broken file, made their exodus into the waning light of a warm August evening.

The last man to leave, Junior found his way through the gate and down the sidewalk; always to the right. Only a new fish swam to and fro. A man like Junior wouldn't budge an inch, not to an oncoming, wrong-way fish. Junior would square his shoulders for impact and hope somebody didn't like it. New fish would have to be schooled.

Junior was angry and tired and it wasn't from overwork. All he did was sit on his ass drinking coffee and smoking Camels all day long. He'd worked at the garment factory for ten years and was the shop boss. He'd reached his level of incompetence and laid claim to its throne: a caster swivel chair with a foam rubber cushion behind a greasy, paint-chipped desk. Its drawers were filled with girlie magazines and thumbed promises never kept.

He walked down the sidewalk and hoped a fish to cross his path.

It was an hour before dinnertime and Junior decided to walk the circumference of the prison fence before going home. He knew that he was crazy and needed fresh air to clear his head.

He was middle-aged and graying before his time. The musculature of his youth had turned to flab and even his tattoos were sagged and faded.

Stumbling on the gravel path, he made a conscious effort to not drag his feet.

Around the wide span of the prison ballfield, Junior peered through the fence and contemplated his life. A broken marriage, rebellious children, years wasted in prison. His drunkenness had brought him here, and here he'd accepted his fate.

Once, after getting into a scrape, he'd been forced to see a shrink. The smug bastard told Junior he'd have to hit bottom before he could help him. Well, he'd been bumping his butt ever since and it was familiar to him. God, how he hated authority. But, then, he'd grown to hate everyone. Why couldn't he live like normal people live? Looking through the fence he saw people laughing and carrying on with their lives. The chaplain had told him to love his neighbors as he loved himself, but, God, how he despised them. It was their fault he was here, the politicians, judges and taxpayers. And those scumbags on the other side of the fence. Shoot 'em all and let God sort out the mess.

Finishing his circuitous route, one of his runnin' buddies approached him.

"Junior, let's make Rosie's for a couple a beers. I know a blonde who can change our luck."

The two guards walked back into the prison, punched the clock and went to town.

# *Boredom*

Janet McComas

She was afraid of falling. She never knew why. Was it the idea of pain and possible death? Was it vanity? How would she look when she landed? What if she landed in an unflattering position? She was developing a strong urge to push someone off something with enough height to enable her to learn what was actually seen on the impact of landing. Would she turn as she fell? Would she swoop down and crash or go down in moving picture slow motion? She would have to remember to wear slacks more often in case her skirt flew up when she fell and exposed her lower half to curious onlookers. People were too easily entertained by another person's misfortune. She refused to allow herself to be ridiculed. She would definitely begin wearing slacks each time she left her apartment. She had no idea when this fear had become so dominant. There had been no traumatic falls in infancy. She had received no serious injuries that she could recall. There were no scars, at least no physical ones. She remembered skinning her knees frequently while roller skating, but these mishaps had only annoyed her at the time. They had never frightened her. Perhaps the birth of the fear had occurred during those years, and had matured along with her until adulthood.

She was thirty-three years old and alone, but that was all right. She took what came her way. She had adjusted to it by watching television, reading a little, and taking walks which were becoming less frequent as she noticed the alarming number of places where a person could fall. Even to trip on a curb could be disastrous. Why didn't more people notice these things? It always amazed her to see how rapidly people walked



down streets and in and out of stores with such confidence. How could they be so ignorant? She had learned to walk slowly in order to check for possible tripping places. She bet that doctors made fortunes just by patching up victims of falls, the ones who managed to survive, anyway. She, of course, avoided stairs as much as possible and would never fly. She had flown twice as a teenager and once while in college to her father's funeral. She was never comfortable about it and hated the cooped up feeling and the closeness of the other passengers. She would never leave her seat to fumble awkwardly to the restroom no matter how desperate she was. She might bump into someone, and then the others might look up at her as she went by. She hated being looked at. Not that she was unattractive. When she took time with her makeup and hair, she looked pretty good, but this could be destroyed with a fall, especially if she landed on her face.

She hated and liked her job. She worked as one of several people who edited articles submitted to a really dull educational magazine. The stuff was pretty dry, and fixing other people's grammatical errors was boring, but they left her alone. She sat at a desk in a cubicle in the back of a large room. She always brought her lunch which she ate in her cubicle in order not to have to make a trip outside to eat or downstairs to a lunchroom in the basement. Everyone managed to return without injury which was a puzzle to her. By her own set of statistics, at least one of them should have been injured or killed by a fall within a two month period. She knew the solution to this puzzle. She was the one destined for a fall. "Destined for a fall." How often the word "fall" was used in a cliché: fall off a log, fall in love, fall off the wagon.

Now it was her turn. She was intelligent enough to recognize an obsession and to know that with help it was possible to lose it. But why lose it? It had become the one thing in her life to rely on. It never left or disappointed her. Her best friend. It would be with her all the way. She had watched it develop and grow and had nurtured it as a mother would a child. She couldn't let it go. She would let the natural conclusion come. She almost looked forward to it.

When she did fall, she was actually surprised and relieved as fear gave way to a strange relaxation and acceptance of the end. She fell from the top of six cement steps leading to her apartment house front door. She was juggling a sackful of groceries while trying to insert her key in the lock. She had remembered to wear slacks and had tried to protect her groceries instead of her head.

Of course, the most amazing thing was her survival. No broken neck or skull fracture since her head was cushioned by the arm not hugging the groceries. She had fallen on her side, and her arm had flown up probably by instinct to try to reestablish balance. Her arm was in a cast, and she had a few skinned spots and bruises, but that was all. She was still here. The fall had not killed her. How foolish she felt. She could go home tomorrow.

As she looked around the hospital room, she was alarmed to see how many sharp edges and objects there were: corners of cabinets, furniture, pencils, and at meal times, knives and forks. Why hadn't she noticed this at home? Didn't the doctors and nurses know that they could fall on the scissors or instruments they frequently carried while walking on slick tiled floors? This could happen in your own kitchen.

# Testa

Moe R. Habibi

She called herself Testa. No one in the neighborhood knew why, until July fourth 1977 when a young soldier came home to visit his family.

Testa was beautiful to many eyes and just right to many others. She had no family. Nothing from her past existed in her present. Nothing about the future ever was a wonder for her. "I live for the moment." She said it often.

Beautiful, as most men thought, she never accepted invitations for dinner.

"I am a mate, not a date." A famous phrase of hers.

Testa stood five feet and five inches tall. A lovely medium length brown hair and hazel eyes made her noticeable. She never had outgrown her clothes, and she wore the same clothes for many years.

"Two pounds for every inch of my height. That is my weight." She said it to the young soldier.

"Why do they call you Testa?" the young soldier asked.

"Because I am hard, strong, mean, yet sensitive," she replied.

Strong as a bull, soft as overnight-grown flower, and smart as today's newspaper! She was the hub of information.

"I know history, from past to present. I know things."

She never worked for one family only, but always for everyone. She didn't want to become a prisoner in anyone's house. "I will do anything, any work for everyone but never everything for just one."

No one knew where she lived. She always left the neighborhood at sunset and

came back at sunrise. Her work schedule was always made in advance, well-organized, and well-explained.

People of the neighborhood had to seek her the day before to fit her into their schedule. She could do it all: baking, cooking, cleaning and everything else, in that nature.

When the young soldier left the neighborhood again, his father became so lonely that often he would hire her just for company. Just to talk to. Mr. Atkinson, that is what he called himself, was a sixty-year-old, retired business man with loads of money. He was a great man, helping everyone as much as he could. So eager to help and so resistant to ask for help. Mr. Atkinson truly was respected. He would often call on neighbors to be sure that they were doing fine. And anytime a new family member arrived, Mr. Atkinson invited the new comer for dinner at his house. He was a great, lonely guy! He never kept a dog or a cat, but only an imported talking bird, something new to him and the neighborhood. No one knew where the bird was kept.

Testa often said that Mr. Atkinson spent all his morning talking to the bird in his own room, a large room upstairs totally devoted to him.

Testa, now thirty-eight years old, told one neighbor that the bird knew only six words, that was what Mr. Atkinson had taught him, and that was what Mr. Atkinson told her. She never saw the bird until one morning when the news of Mr. Atkinson's sudden death captured everyone by surprise.

After the funeral, Mr. Atkinson's lawyer asked the neighbors for Testa. He said that Mr. Atkinson had left the bird for her and no one else but her can see or have the bird. Testa took the bird away from the neighborhood to her residence. No one knew where she lived.

Three years went by. During all this time Testa kept working as usual and never answered any question about the bird except that "he only knows six words, and he can't repeat any new words. I like the bird but he is beyond learning new words."

It was spring of 1980, when some stranger entered the neighborhood and asked if anyone knew Testa. Everyone said, yes.

"Testa is dead," the stranger said.

"How?" everyone asked.

"No one knows yet, she never woke up. There was a note by her bed, it said to



take the bird to this neighborhood. I have him in my car.” The stranger then walked to his car and returned with Mr. Atkinson’s old bird.

“Here he is,” the stranger said.

“Can he talk?” everyone asked.

“I don’t know. He hasn’t said anything to me,” the stranger said.

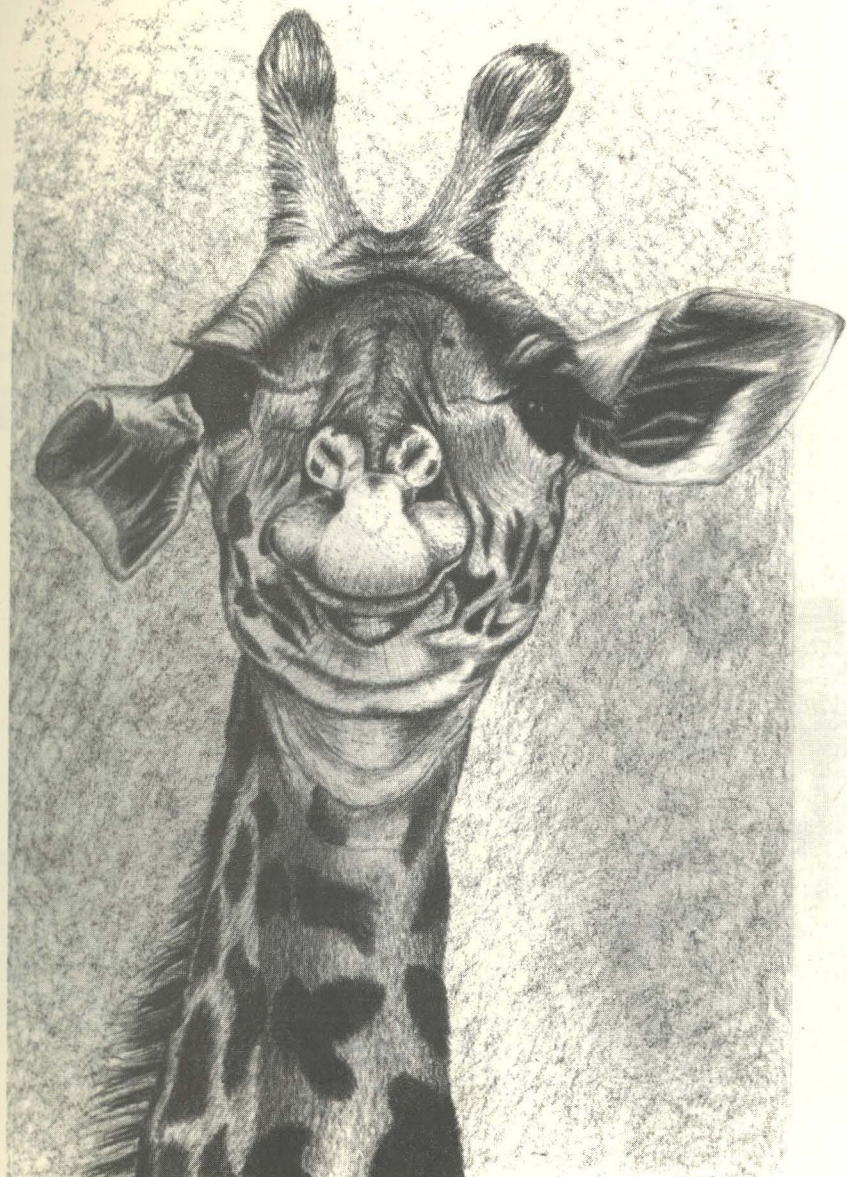
“He should know six words,” everyone said.

“I don’t know,” the stranger said.

Next morning everyone in neighborhood gathered in Mr. Atkinson’s old house which was occupied by the young soldier now. They all cried and talked, until one neighbor arrived with Testa’s old and only picture she left for the neighborhood. They all cried and talked. A sudden sound captured everyone’s attention. The bird was singing. He was singing the only six words he knew. “I died of your love, Testa.” A sudden silence filled the room.

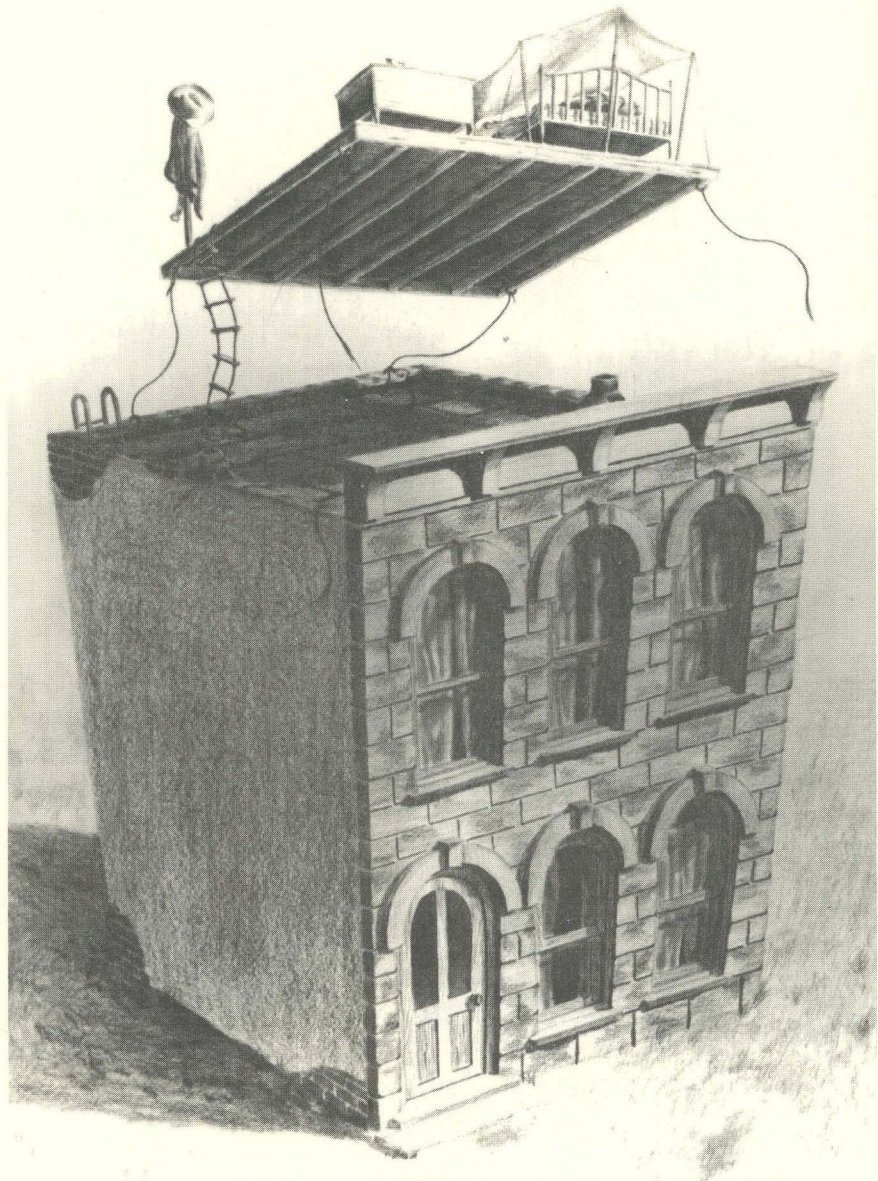


*Josh, Shelley Clark*



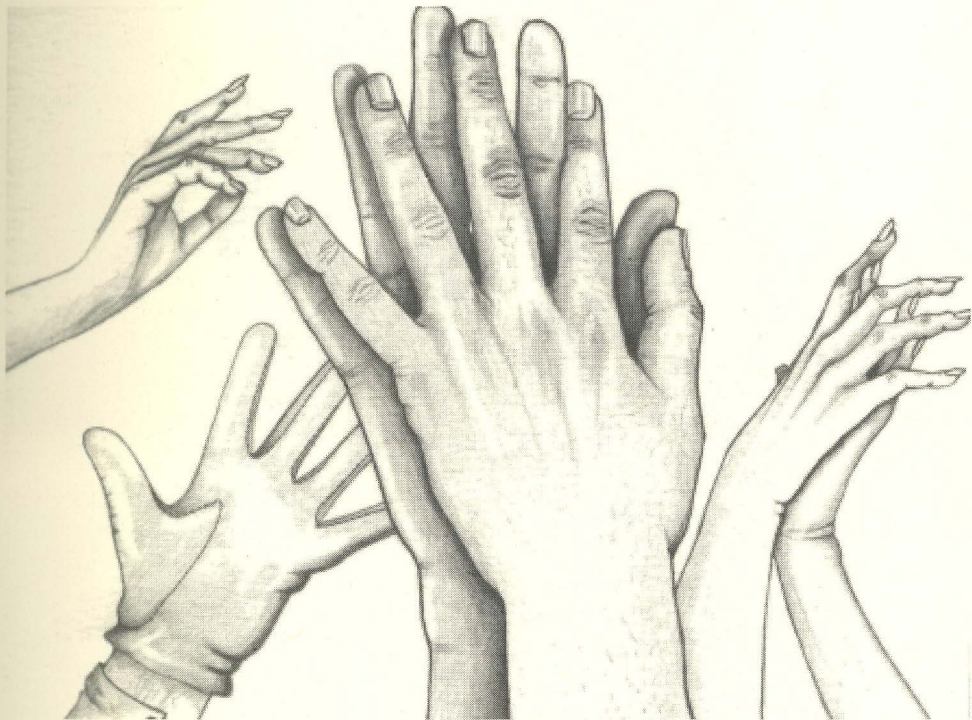
*Mr. G, Shelley Clark*





*Elk Creek Hotel, Thad Ferguson*





*Maneuvers, Scott C. Butler*

# Essays

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# *I, Aspasia*

Arte Martin

I, Aspasia, consort of the great Athenian statesman Pericles, patroness of the Arts, Greek adventurer, offer reflection on my life with him and do mourn his untimely death. It is indeed material for one of Sophocles' tragic plays.

I was born in Miletus, one of the most prosperous of all Greek cities on the Ionian Coast, found between Ephesus and Halicarnassus near the mouth of the Maeander River. We have four excellent harbors and have developed an outstanding trade, famous for our fine textiles, especially the woolen cloth. Miletus is also known throughout the civilized world as being a city of impressive intellectuals, including my family. I am no stranger to academic and cultural education.

I am a courtesan of the "hetairai," a distinguished group of professional courtesans and concubines, who knows if a woman is to be trained as such, she must possess great beauty, intelligence, culture, wit, and genius to be able to understand, amuse, and even influence great men and their politics, as I do with Pericles. Being Milesian and a mistress, it was particularly shocking to Athenian society when Pericles put away his former Athenian wife to live with me, a Milesian foreigner. Divorce is permitted in Athens and he could have married me on second notice if I had been Athenian born or from a town to which Athens had granted rights of "epegamia," intermarriage between the states of Greece. Unfortunately, this right was not enjoyed by the town of my origins.

Pericles carried a law confining Athenian citizenship to those of Athenian parentage on both sides before we met, which states that no Athenian citizen can

contract anything but a morganatic marriage with a foreigner—a form of legitimate marriage between a member of Athenian heritage to one of lower rank, so we quite simply lived together. Because of this law making a marriage impossible between us, our son was long excluded from civic participation, eventually becoming a citizen by special enactment and later a general, like his father, but not until after the death of his two sons by his first wife.

Our society would not have been surprised to see Pericles sleep with young boys, as does Socrates, or to treat his first wife so shabbily with contempt, but are hateful and shocked at him for treating me like a human being on terms of great intimacy. I remember Pericles would never leave me in the morning or upon his return home without affectionately kissing me. He told others as well as myself that he found greater solace and recreation in my brilliant conversation than in men's wine parties or the excesses by which he had falsely been charged. He also treated me as a human being by the fact that he lived with me instead of relegating me to the "gynaikeion," the so-called protected second story area for the upper class and aristocratic women to which all female members of the household must stay out of sight of all males of the household including those who visit. A most revolting notion is that women are not even considered worthy of love: the highest form of love is only of the spirit and only between men; relations between men and women are tolerated only for the purpose of bearing children.

It has been said of me that I am so brilliant that I could not possibly be respectable. I was irresponsibly accused of urging Pericles to crush the island of Samos, an old rival of Miletus, and to provoke war with Sparta. The comic poets, especially Hermippus, have vehemently attacked me, going so far as to portray me as a prostitute and brothel-keeper. Others have openly accused me of having pursued the vilest of professions—that of promoting vice in others. An action in open court charged me with the impiety of making my house a place of assignation for Athenian ladies of position. All of these charges and accusations were proved false; Pericles successfully defended me in court although they brought similar charges against him as well—all false. The philosopher Aeschines has treated me more kindly in a dialogue bearing my name.

When Pericles was alive, we had many gatherings in our home that filled the air with life and freedom. Some citizens of Athens are very jealous of the position this foreigner holds, a position they feel one of their daughters by right should have held,

thus the conversations at my home were considered dangerous innovations. Because of Sparta's discouragement from cultural exchange, Pericles and I were free to draw on the finest minds and artisans all over Greece to make Athens the cultural and artistic center of the world. Our circle of friends included Socrates—philosopher, midwife to ideas, a free thinker as I; Sophocles—the dramatist; Herodotus—the original historian, a native of Halicarnassus, neighboring city of Miletus; Phidias—the sculptor, who molded the bronze figure of Minerva that stands in front of the Parthenon as well as the gold and ivory statue of Athena inside; Protagoras—the first thinker to call himself a Sophist who also teaches pupils for large sums of money.

A fatal plague claimed the life of Pericles in the third year of the Peloponnesian war. Great cultures, literature, artistic achievements, and, most of all, noble ideas inspired by men and women will never die; this is how Pericles and Aspasia will live together throughout time.



# *Glory Days*

**Michael M. Hustad**

... **T**here was a wild scramble at mid-court. I managed to come up with the ball. Bobbing and juking, I easily broke away in a crazed dribble towards the basket and stardom! The Bluejay players were left behind as that sudden surge of enthusiasm and all-consuming excitement gripped me. The fans were on their feet in the bleachers; a frenzy of cheers encouraged me to dribble faster! I could hear the coaches calling out their encouragement and approval from the sidelines....

Memories, it's funny how they will stay with us over the years as if it were only yesterday. That was 1973, and I was playing for the eighth grade basketball team. With only two games left in the regular season, we were in a must win situation. The final two victories would clinch the conference championship. I wasn't really that good as a basketball player, but I tried hard. I was always having trouble remembering the plays and maintaining proper coverages on defense. I had been working hard though, and the coach had told me that I might play in the second half of the game we had coming up Saturday in Jackson.

My hopes were, of course, spontaneously elevated during that week's practice sessions. I worked extra hard to learn the plays and coverages that were going to be used in the upcoming game. That entire week I was so nervous that I could hardly sit still. I can't imagine that going to the electric chair could have caused any more anxiety in my life! I was very unsure of myself, and had to wonder if I could play up to my coach's expectations. My personal doubts as to whether or not I could be effective in a game where the pressure was on, haunted me. The week and its practice sessions passed, but

the fear that had gripped me all week was still present. Finally, we boarded the bus for Jackson and our meeting with the Bluejays. Bus rides are a jolting and miserable experience anyway, and the fear and anxiety I was feeling did little to make the trip a more pleasant pre-game ritual.

Two hours and a bumpy bus ride later, the much anticipated game finally got under way. I had the opportunity to play four minutes in the first half of the game and did fairly well, “Thank you very much.” I scored four points and didn’t even hurt myself doing it! At that point I was able to get a grip on my emotions and settled down some. I knew, or rather had the feeling, that I could play in this league and up to my coach’s expectations. My coach’s promise of getting some playing time in the second half still loomed at the forefront of my consciousness. I was eager to get on the floor and strut my stuff.

The coaches, however, were not as impressed with my first half performance as I was. Once again, as the second half of play got under way, I was destined to “pick splinters.” The third quarter dragged on lazily and seemed like an eternity. Only fifteen minutes long, but it might just as well have been fifteen years! I began to get just slightly aggravated and vowed to myself that I would show them just what I was made of; that is, if I ever got the chance. As the seconds waned in the third quarter, my aggravation went with them. Aggravation was replaced by my old friends—fear and desperation. I realized that I might not get the chance to play, and had the even scarier thought, maybe I was just not meant to play my beloved game of basketball.

Finally, I could take no more! In the team huddle before the start of the fourth quarter, I asked the coach if I would still have the opportunity to play. He said, “We’ll see what happens.” Yeah, and “no” has four syllables, right? I was once again relegated to the bench and my sliver picking pastime. My basketball talents were being wasted, couldn’t anyone see that? I had been working very hard and thought at least I had earned the opportunity to show what I had learned. The powers that be were of a different opinion, however, and their decisions were what I had to live with. Unlike the third quarter, time in the fourth had wings. With every tick of the scoreboard clock, my heart and soul sank to lower and lower levels of desperation.

Then, with four and a half minutes left to play and a six point advantage, my miracle came! The center sprained his left ankle and had to come out of the game. The

coach called me over and told me, “just relax.” He could see the excitement and eagerness bubbling out of me! “Don’t worry about scoring, just try your best to maintain coverage” were his final words to me as I bolted onto the hardwood floor. I was picturing in my mind what it was going to be like when I scored the game-winning basket! This was a dream that kept returning whenever I picked up a basketball.

I took my place on the court with four and a half minutes left on the clock. My excitement had returned, borne out of my love for the game. The jump ball was tipped and all seemed to go fairly well for the first two and a half minutes I was in the game. I didn’t goof anything up and we even managed to extend our lead to eight points. All indications were, at this point, that we would cruise on to victory. I got my hands on the ball once, and in my excitement to score the winning point, got careless and had the ball slapped out of my dribble by one of the Bluejay players. He dribbled down the court, expertly I might add, and scored two points easily. I didn’t let that minor setback deter me from my mission. I was going to score the game winning basket, and that’s all there was to the matter. I shook it off and came back more determined than ever to play heads up ball. And then it happened! One of our forwards slapped the ball away from a Bluejay player and there was a wild scramble at mid-court. I managed to come up with the ball. Bobbing and juking, I easily broke away in a crazed dribble towards the basket and stardom! The Bluejay players were left behind as that sudden surge of enthusiasm and all-consuming excitement gripped me. The fans were on their feet in the bleachers; a frenzy of cheers encouraged me to dribble faster! I could hear the coaches calling out their encouragement and approval from the sidelines! My teammates were cheering and hollering from behind me as they expertly set up a defense that protected the fast break I was so meticulously executing. I came into the basket and laid the ball in with a feather touch.

“Swish,” two points! As I turned with my arms raised in victory, I saw my coach with his head held firmly in his hands. My teammates were walking away from me shaking their heads in disgust. The Bluejay players came up and thanked me. They said I was the best player on their team! My heart sank deep in my chest. What had I done?

With less than two minutes left to play in the game, I had single-handedly cut our lead to just four points. I had executed the picture perfect lay-up, IN THE WRONG BASKET! My basketball career had ended and my innermost fears had been realized.



I couldn't even play for the eighth grade basketball team. I would never recover my love for the game, nor would I ever forget my humiliation. My stardom never came that day, and my glory days had certainly come to an end.

# *The Life and Near Death of a Horn*

**Michael Ray Reeves**

I'm really kind of laid back. I don't make a lot of noise. Sometimes when Kim takes my car out for a spin, I go hog wild and really go "hoooooonk." This is especially true when some idiot pulls out in front of us. Kim really lets people know when they make a mistake. She pushes the middle of that steering wheel and it's my turn to say, "Hey buddy, you idiot; get out of the @#\*%@ way!" Boy, that's the reason I live. You see, if you haven't figured it out yet, I'm a horn.

At night, when I'm parked in the driveway, I get bored. All I do is sit there waiting for daylight to come so I can get some action. During the dark hours, Shy, Kim's dog, gets to play horn. Anytime anything comes by the house, Shy goes crazy. Man, she barks and barks for what seems like hours on end. It sure makes me jealous. Why does she get to bark all the time when the only time I get to honk is when Kim lets me? Oh well, I guess I shouldn't complain. Any time Kim takes me out, I know I will get to throw my voice around.

I'm a pretty ordinary horn; you know, the kind on almost every car built in America. I really hate those loud mouth horns that think they're better than I, like those that sing "Boomer Sooner" or some other song that is equally stupid when their master pushes the button on the steering wheel. But, I think that some horns are really neat. Like the ones put on Model A's. They have a sound that is all their own, one that takes you back almost a century when those horns, like me, were on almost every car built in America.

I would rather Kim drive the car instead of Mike (Kim's husband), because Mike is as boring as elevator music. When he drives, I never get to sound off. He lets anyone

or anything get in his way and never uses me unless Kim is in the car. She'll sure tell him to use me. Or she'll reach over and blow me herself. I love it when she does that. She knows what my purpose is: I'm for raising hell, not being quiet.

Last week, Kim was on the way to school when a big truck pulled out in front of her. It was great; I got to tell the "professional" driver what I thought of his driving. I honked when he pulled in front of us, and I honked when we passed him. Next, a fancy limo pulled in front of us and almost hit us. Kim pushed the button, and I went to town. This time I really wanted to be heard, so I stuck. I honked all the way across town. It was great; everyone thought I was honking at them. When Kim got to school, I was still honking. Kim didn't know what to do. A police officer came by and asked her what the trouble was. She explained the problem while I was making some serious noise. I heard him tell her that I could be unplugged. Well, I didn't want to be unplugged, so when they popped the hood, I decided it was time to be quiet. I turned myself off. Boy, I felt good about myself. Everyone knew I was there.

I wish now I hadn't done that sticking trick. When Kim told Mike what I had done, he thought I had to be fixed. He thinks he's so great at fixing everything; he should know I was only having fun. He took me out of the car and put me in the trash. Whew, did it ever stink! Next, I was put to the curb with the common trash. I tried and tried to honk, but, without the car and the battery, I couldn't.

The next morning, the big green truck picked me up and took me to a landfill. When the truck dumped me out, I couldn't believe what happened. I fell against a little 9-volt battery, the kind that is used in transistor radios, and whamo, I came to life. I sounded as if I were brand new; it felt so good to honk. It was as if I had just come off the assembly line with a new coat of paint and new insides. Suddenly, a scummy-looking man picked me up and said, "I should be able to sell this horn; it sounds like a good one."

The man who picked me up took me home, cleaned me up, and painted me. He was going to have a garage sale the next day. The Horn God must have been looking after me because he knew that I loved to speak for Kim while she was driving. There were Mike and Kim, looking at all of the usual junk that you find at a garage sale when all of a sudden, he looked at me. I was on my best behavior. I really did want to go home with them, but I figured that Mike had already replaced me. Then, out of the blue, he asked the man if I worked. So the man came over, hooked me up to a battery, and pushed a button. I honked with all the glory of a flag popping in a crisp spring wind.

Mike bought me, took me home, and put me into Kim's car. Less than five minutes later, Kim came and took me for a spin. The first corner that we came to, some idiot pulled out in front of us. Kim did her thing, and I honked like crazy.

Boy, it sure feels good to be home.

# *The Driver*

Greg Daubenspeck

**T**he day is warm and calm. I am dressed in a clown outfit and am driving a two person bicycle in a homecoming parade at Tuttle High School. It is early afternoon, Friday, October 13, 1989. Tom, one of my friends, is also dressed as a clown; he is at the rear of the bike. This is an exciting day for me. I enjoy parades, especially when I am taking part in one.

I listen to the cheers from all around and glance back at Tom occasionally; he is laughing at my terrible driving. The sun is hot against my thick cake of clown make-up, but I only ignore it. I notice Tom's bright, red lipstick as it smears across his face, a little like blood against a white wall.

My teacher who has asked me to be in this parade is a grouch. She is constantly complaining about something. She singles out a few students from each class and focuses her hate on them. I just happen to be one of the unlucky or lucky ones this year.

Soon the parade is over and we ride around town; we push the bike to ever increasing speeds. We stop at a soda shop and have an ice cream. The spoon is cold against my lips but I welcome its refreshment.

"Do you need a ride home?" I ask.

"Yeah sure, if it's not too much trouble," he says.

"No, I don't mind."



I had just gotten my driver's license only about a month ago and am proud to be a member of the road. We go back to school, return the bike, and climb into my blue, seventy-eight Cutlass. I am immortal behind the wheel or so I believe. We jolt onto the highway heading out of town. Lately, I have been experimenting with high speed driving and decide to show Tom what eighty-five really is.

There is a piercing glare from the sun against the car hood, but I pay it little notice and focus my attention on the road.

"Guess I better put my seat belt on," says Tom. I have never forgotten those words and am certain I never will.

Soaring over hills like a bird in flight we are alive and free. Free of school, free of parents, most of all free of ourselves, as we head into the awaiting universe that is our future.

"Pull in at this next left, at Cemetery Road, would you?" says Tom, "I want to find a short cut to Stony's house."

I slow the car to a crawl and make a left at the sign that reads "Cemetery Road." It is a dark road of gravel, tapered on both sides and surrounded by deep ravines. I turn up the radio; it blares "Born to Be Wild." I am intoxicated with the song and my problems are momentarily dead. The car begins to shake as I accelerate, but I am a young and inexperienced driver and feel I am in constant control.

Abruptly a mail box jumps out in front of me and I jerk the wheel to avoid it. I apply the brake softly in a rhythmic pump. I am laughing because I believe we will make it out okay, as it always happens in life and in the movies. When I become aware that I no longer have control over the car, I begin to think we are going to take a quick ride through the field that lies to the left of the road. Nothing major, just a simple jump and in the field we will be safe and laughing. Only moments later I learn that this is not the case, and we will be far from laughing.

Like a runner sliding home, my car hits the ditch and rolls. It happens in slow motion as if I am watching it through some worn out projector. Glass flies within the car; I am not laughing.



Moments pass and I wait. My mind is overrun with horrible thoughts of death. I am uncertain of Tom's condition because the ceiling is tight against the top of the seat and the car is upside down. I will never in all my life forget this feeling of uncertainty.

Slowly Tom's foot comes over to my side of the car and kicks the horn. I am relieved. I turn the key and engine off and hold down the horn so help will come. The radio is dead.

"Are you all right?" I ask.

"I hate you," he says.

I am so happy and relieved he is alive. This accident will change my life in many ways. I will never be the same person again. Guilt will surround me in a web forever, a web I can never escape. I will not forget the person whom I leave behind in the rubble of car as a new me is born out of the accident. A person who is far from immortal and glad he has lived to tell of it.

# *The Hunt for Rural Gold*

Shirley Owens

As soon as I top the hill after leaving Carnegie, Oklahoma, I see the wheat and cotton fields of my childhood. The old blacktop and winding dirt roads remind me of the days when I would fight to sit at the back of the bus so that I could have a carnival ride through the country on the way to school. I just knew that bus driver aimed for every pothole in the road to reward my bloody fight to be in the winner's seat.

I make a left at the first dirt road between Carnegie and Mt. View. I go only about a half a mile before turning right and into my Grandpa James and Grandma Frances' property. I haven't been here since the year that Grandma died. I remember sitting at the dining table for Christmas dinner that year with the family. Grandma said the prayer in Kiowa, as she always did. But I was 23 and fancied myself a woman of the world. My Grandma cried during her prayer. No one seemed to notice and I, Woman of the World, peeked at her through slitted eyes and bowed head, feeling embarrassingly uncomfortable. Suddenly, she said the English word "Amen," Grandpa gave her a wink, and said, "Let's eat," and everything was right again. Soon after my Grandma died, my Grandpa suffered a stroke and now lives in a nursing home in Mt. View.

I park in front of the house and look around. The house is a small three-bedroom wood structure with a screened-in porch and a garage. It sits on four acres of mostly wheat fields with a patch of corn growing close to the house. The front yard has thick green grass and pretty wild flowers growing in contrast to the red earth and gravel of the back yard. I think my brothers and I had something to do with that sparsity of

vegetation, since grass cannot compete with years of ballgames, Cowboys and Indians, Army, or other childhood conquests.

I almost expect to see my Grandma waddling out of the house, using her cane. (My Grandma weighed close to 300 pounds and waddle is what she did.) I cannot remember feeling more comforted than when I was swallowed in her huge arms and suffocated against her enormous pillowy breasts. Instead of Grandma, a man of Spanish descent comes up to greet me. He is the renter. I explain that I wish to look around and poke into the old woodshed that still holds some remnants of my Grandma and Grandpa's past.

He doesn't think I'm daffy, but runs to the woodshed to make sure it hasn't been invaded by snakes. We pull out boxes and old lockers and chests full of dented pots and pans, blankets, old clothes, ropes, tools now rusted, and other various odds and ends. I dig in. He quietly leaves me. All of this stuff is useless and I admit I don't recognize most of it. But I keep digging.

After a while, I find, stuffed in one box and half-eaten by rats, an album filled with old pictures. Eureka! I flip through the pages. Here is one picture of Grandma drinking a cup of coffee and I remember Grandpa said that she looked like a prairie dog. Here is one of me on my 14th birthday. I have on a brand new fake-fur coat that I had longed for and somehow received, since we were poor. Here is one of my sister and Grandpa laughing; I'm sure at some corny old joke my Grandpa dredged up only for us kids. The album is full of pictures just like these. It seems to have been waiting here for the day that I would come topping the hill after leaving Carnegie, Oklahoma, looking for Grandpa and Grandma and finding them.

# *The Bridge: A Favorite Meeting Place*

Virginia Lyn McGrath

**I**t was a meeting place, a hang-out that I would frequent between the ages of twelve and sixteen along with many of my friends. It was a special place, one that I will never forget. We called it "The Bridge." Not a very original name, but for a group of kids in Greenville, North Carolina, in 1974, the name didn't matter. The twenty-five to thirty young teens who were from the nearby Eastbrook Apartments and Eastwood neighborhood knew exactly where and what it was.

I lived with my mom and younger sister in the Eastbrook apartment complex. Trees lined the south and east sides of the complex, continuing back for several acres. The woods were pretty and filled with trees such as elm, maple, and birch. On the south side of the apartments through the trees there was a small one acre pond. Running parallel with the pond was a creek, roughly three feet wide and six inches deep with a sandy bottom. The bridge started in front of apartment 104 and continued on through the weeds and high grass where it crossed the creek, stopping eight feet from the pond.

The bridge was built in 1974 by a maintenance man from our apartment complex. It was rustic, made of wooden two-by-fours. These boards were nailed to longer boards that supported the structure. Although the bridge was some thirty feet in length, its railings were only four feet long and were centered over the creek bed. It was a sturdy, well-made bridge that saw as much foot and motorcycle traffic as it could handle.

Over the bridge and through the woods no more than a quarter mile was the Eastwood neighborhood. The bridge became the link between Eastbrook and Eastwood. Upon its completion in the spring, trails were blazed from neighborhood to neighborhood. The bridge proved to be strategically located. Parents' voices could be heard



from either neighborhood when calling for one to come home, but the trees blocked all sight. Privacy was very important to us teenagers back then and the bridge gave us all we needed.

We did at the bridge what all other American kids our age were doing at the same time elsewhere. We met after school, in the evenings and on weekends. We smoked cigarettes, shared sodas, beer, wine and snacks. We complained about our parents. We told lies and secrets. We fell in love, cried, laughed, made some friends and lost a few. We rode our bikes and shared motorcycle rides. We took long walks in the woods and climbed trees. We acted just like the kids that we were. All of our parents knew what we were doing there at the bridge. They stayed away, either out of respect for our privacy or fear of what they might find if they took a look. Either way, things worked out for the best. As the years passed on and we grew older, the bridge became less important in our lives.

By 1980 our wonderful meeting place was starting to show serious wear and tear. Boards were missing and the railings were long gone. The bridge had served its purpose. It was soon neglected totally as we acquired drivers' licenses. There was little need to meet at the bridge anymore. We could now use the family vehicle and meet at new exciting places like McDonalds, Pizza Hut, or at a friend's house whose parents were out of town.

I often wonder about the bridge. I was in North Carolina recently, but didn't bother to see if it was still there. I will make a point of doing so the next time I'm home. "The Bridge" will forever foster fond memories of my youth in North Carolina, and I'd love the chance to re-live some of them.

# *The Hunter*

Regina Cooper

**T**he past six months of unemployment have apparently put more of a strain on my husband than I realized. Darryl has always had a flair for putting fun into the most menial task, but lately the search for adventure has become an obsession. I must admit that I had my doubts about his sanity when he began his latest excursion.

Last Thursday night, as I was getting ready for work, my husband came into the bathroom where I was rolling my hair. "Got any crickets in here?" he whispered. He was wearing his usual attire, which consists of a pair of Levi's, a tee-shirt, cowboy boots, and a baseball cap, but he also had his blowgun slung over his right shoulder. His dark brown eyes twinkled with mischief.

"Over there, in the corner," I answered. Crickets have made quite a nuisance of themselves around our house for the past few weeks. They congregate near the door, waiting to leap inside at the first opportunity. This one had made it.

I watched as my husband edged toward the cricket. He began sizing up his prey as one would on a safari. He imagined himself in Africa, hunting the tigers that threatened his family's safety. The trees were so thick he could barely see the baneful black beast. He inched closer.

The cricket seemed to be oblivious to his impending doom. He sat there indifferently, rubbing his wings together, making that irritating chirping sound that only the male cricket makes.



The hunter put his blowgun to his lips and aimed cautiously. Poof! He wounded his victim in the leg. He was disappointed in his aim, but I consoled him with a reminder that it had been a long time since his last jungle adventure.

The cricket tried to run, to find shelter from his tormentor, but the dart in his leg had him pinned. He could not move.

After concluding that he needed a better vantage point, the Great White Husband perched himself precariously on the edge of the bathtub. He was determined that only one of them would leave this bathroom alive.

He reloaded his blowgun and aimed again. Poof! I heard the crackle of the cricket's shell. The hunter's conquest was over; his family was safe once again.

As Darryl flushed the cricket down the toilet, he began to whistle "Taps." A fitting burial, I thought to myself, for a worthy opponent.

# *Mister Joe*

**Fred Kellow**

**I** made Hartford (Joe) Pyle's acquaintance on July 20, 1976, at Rose's Cafe in Chunchula, Alabama. There was little indication that morning that we were beginning a long and mutually rewarding experience, for he was to be my mentor and I was to be his student for the next thirteen years.

Our relationship as friends took several years to develop and was never the type of friendship that peers enjoy. Joe was much older and more reserved than the youthful group he supervised. There were many of us young men that benefitted from his tutelage. All we had to do was meet him halfway; no subservient behavior was required. He earned everyone's respect; in fact, many of the men from the South showed their respect by calling him Mr. Joe. The man did not have a lot of patience, but he used every bit of what he had when supervising us, spending countless hours teaching us our jobs and catching our mistakes before they became catastrophes.

After four years in his service, I was transferred to another state. We remained in touch through phone calls, and occasional visits at his home in East Texas, which were always an experience. If it was summertime, he would get me up at 6:00 A.M.; of course, he had already been up for an hour. We would eat breakfast and then head to the fields where the hay was bound to need cutting, baling, or hauling. After we quit for the day and had supper, it would not be long and the yawning would start and everyone was expected to be in bed by 9:00 P.M. Should the visit be in the winter, I would sleep under approximately seven quilts. While my teeth chattered and my feet froze on the ice cold kitchen floor the next morning, Joe would be bragging about how

the furnace did not kick on until 4:30 that morning. Of course, I always maintained that if he had set the thermostat somewhere north of 40 degrees, it would have run much more. Having eaten, we would head out to feed the cows. This involved removing the hay from the barn and spreading it in front of the stupid beasts, the same hay Joe had spent all of the summer putting in the barn.

Joe was old-fashioned in some ways, but in most he was very modern. At work, any new tool, machine, paperwork or procedure was to be adapted immediately, and mastered quickly, with a minimum of griping. His technical knowledge was encyclopedic and he was a whiz at mathematics. Most people half his age are not nearly as flexible or adaptable.

Joe Pyle was truly fearless—no man, machine, animal, or hazardous duty ever caused so much as an eye-blink. He once went under a burning drilling rig to hook up some fire-fighting equipment and had his plastic hardhat melted. When asked later about the incident his only comment was, “It took the company fifteen years to buy me another hat.”

He had been an insulin-dependent diabetic before I met him, and had suffered a heart attack in 1975. He had occasional health problems during the years that I knew him; however, he never displayed self-pity nor did he dwell on his problems. After he retired in 1985, he had another heart attack, and the diagnosis was congestive heart failure. The doctor told Joe, “Sell those cows and quit all of that farm labor.” Well, Joe sold most of his cows, but he kept about fifty head and continued to do his own haying and feeding. Here was a man not afraid of death and he was not going to be frightened into a Barcolounger to sit and wait for it. Joe would go meet death, doing what he wanted to do and accepting the consequences.

His wife said that in the last few months he could not even bend over and tie his own shoes, but he continued to care for his farm. She knew the time was close, and began accompanying him on his morning rounds. One morning they were unloading the truck when he fell. As he got back up he answered his wife’s worried inquiry with his last words, “Give me another sack of feed.”

Joe Pyle was not perfect, but he was awfully good. He was as thrifty with the company’s money as he was with his own. He could say no and not make apologies for it, and his honesty and integrity were unimpeachable.

He taught me a lot about life, but three years after his passing what I think about most is his lesson on dying. The courage he mustered during his last years has given me a new outlook on life and death. I believe that I have a better understanding of what it means to be mortal. Joe set many admirable examples over the years, but his last was truly his best.

# *Sweets for the Sweet...*

Jason D. Widener

**M**erely the mention of the word “Hamlet” conjures up images of murder, revenge, feigned or real madness, vengeful ghosts, poison, duels and unrequited love. This tragedy written by William Shakespeare and set in the castle of Elsinore on the coast of Denmark during the fifteenth century is perhaps one of the best known of Shakespeare’s plays. Several screenplays have been made of it, thousands of actors have yearned to speak the words “To be or not to be...,” and the concept of revenge at all costs has been used countless times in fiction, film, and songs. This tale is the story of Prince Hamlet, son of the late murdered King, and the poison of grief—madness, hate and revenge—that eventually destroys him as well as everyone around him. Perhaps the most tragic of those he destroys in his quest for vengeance is the young, virtuous, innocent, and beautiful Ophelia. Ophelia represents a negative force in Prince Hamlet’s life because Hamlet feels that to love her would be to forsake his devotion to the revenge of his dead father’s murder; this negative force represents how the poison of revenge, hate, or extreme devotion to duty may kill the passion of human love in all of us.

Ophelia displays all of the good qualities which Hamlet would want in a future wife and Queen of Denmark. She is described as loving, virtuous, sensitive, spirited, and obedient to her father. Hamlet had wooed Ophelia in the past and had enchanted her with the “honey of his music vows,” but since the death of his father, he had drifted away from her in his melancholy. In all of the scenes after the first scene of Act Two, where a frightening and unkempt Hamlet appears to her in her chamber and raises “a sigh so piteous and profound,” she suffers for Hamlet’s interest in her. In this scene,



she tells her father Polonius that she “fears it” when asked by him if Hamlet was “mad” for her love. This is where Hamlet begins using Ophelia as a prop in his play of madness.

In their next meeting in Act Three, the famous “nunnery” scene, Hamlet tells her to go to a “nunnery,” but with the bitterness and resentment spoken in the words, it seems he is actually telling her to go to a brothel, for later in the scene he tells of women who “jig...amble...lisp” and make themselves another face, referring to the putting on of cosmetics. These are characteristics of prostitutes, but Hamlet has no evidence that these characteristics can be found in Ophelia. He further tells her in this scene that she has made him “mad,” thereby making her feel as if she is the cause of his madness. This is Hamlet’s farewell to his love for Ophelia so he may devote himself completely to the task of revenge. In his berating of Ophelia, Hamlet has already put her into the same category he reserves for his mother, that of the “smiling, damned villains.”

After the death of Polonius, Ophelia descends into the maelstrom of madness and melancholia. Hamlet’s earlier rejection of her in the “nunnery” scene is undoubtedly a major contributing factor to this madness. At the performance of “The Mousetrap,” Ophelia is the butt of all of Hamlet’s bawdy witticisms. In this very sexually suggestive exchange, Ophelia tells him that his wit is “still better, and worse...,” and Hamlet snaps back to her that this is how she “takes” her husband. With these words, Hamlet kills whatever dim hope Ophelia may have had for reconciliation between them. These are the final words spoken between Hamlet and Ophelia before her death. When Ophelia is found wandering the castle, singing her mad songs of sexual frustration, rejection, abandonment, and grief, Hamlet is nowhere to be found. After killing her father, and in her greatest hour of need, Hamlet has abandoned her to the fates.

After the death of Ophelia, at the graveyard Hamlet confesses his love for Ophelia, telling Laertes, “Forty thousand brothers could not with all their quantity of love make up my sum.” This is the great love scene of *Hamlet*, but it occurs when Ophelia is already beyond the reach of human love. Hamlet had stifled his passions for love in order to be the avenger, but at Ophelia’s grave they come to the surface. Hamlet believed that to yield to his love for Ophelia would be to enter the world of passionate love in which Gertrude and Claudius wallowed as if in a pigsty. Hamlet saw Ophelia as a threat to his memory and his dedication to the task of revenge. When she is dead he realizes he was mistaken. Ophelia’s death signifies the death of hope for the future for those of Elsinore.

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# Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall

Chris Burnett

(in memory of Gene Rodenberry, who had the courage to let Captain Picard baldly go where no one has gone before)

**T**he search for Truth isn't always easy, especially when you ask men about how they feel. I must be touching upon an extremely sensitive issue because every time I ask them about It, I get the feeling that they're lying. It feels like I'm trying to find the secret formula for making Coca-Cola. All I want to know is why do men go nuts when they start losing their hair? It's not a matter of life or death, so what's the big deal?

Most men deny that It bothers them. They swear that they accept It or that they don't worry about It. Paul Chance's article in *Psychology Today* disputes this. In this article, his interview with psychologist Thomas F. Cash reveals that half of men in their 50s and about one-third of men in their 30s are losing their hair. Cash said that "balding is a stressful event. Men begin to worry about their appearance and become preoccupied with ways of fighting a losing battle." During his studies, Cash discovered that women and men felt that bald men looked older and rated them "less attractive, less confident, less successful, and less likable than hairier men" (16).

Women openly admit their feelings about hair loss. That's probably why we live longer. One woman said that it was devastating when she lost clumps of hair due to stress. She worried about what people would think of her.



Eileen Baum describes her feelings in an article for *Health*.

I have asked myself whether I'm not being unduly disturbed—some might say hysterical—about a condition that's not in the least life-threatening. Hair exerts an almost primordial power over our psyches, making its loss a painful, emotional experience. It is...a visible sign of a woman's femininity. Men and women seem to regard women's hair as a primary sexual characteristic.... (76)

Somehow, I knew I'd have to rely on women in my search for Truth.

My quest only leads to more questions. What does baldness have to do with success or likeability? Who or what shapes these types of attitudes? The trail leads to the media. They claim "sex sells" and force their ideas of what we should look like down our throats daily. Apparently, I live in a monastery because I never see real people that look like the models in ads. The only bald men in ads are selling products for hair loss.

The media can be as cruel as children. In one breath, critics praise the merits of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, one of prime-time's highest rated series. In the next breath, they loudly complain about the star of the show, Captain Picard (played by Patrick Stewart). They say he should not be bald. There should be a cure for baldness in the twenty-fourth century. They believe his sexuality and ability to traverse the galaxy are hindered by his shiny pate.

I'm not alone in believing this attitude is execrable. The show's popularity and longevity speak for themselves. Women of all ages think Stewart is extremely attractive. They extol his virtues on talk shows and in magazine contests. Stewart is more successful and more in demand than ever. Besides starring in and occasionally directing the weekly series, he does commercials (voice only), documentaries, plays, and TV mini-series.

Media moguls should pay more attention to real women. We're smart. We know a good man when we see him. They would probably sell more cars if they showed Stewart in person instead of only using his incredibly sexy voice.

Men can only blame themselves for perpetuating the myths of what beauty is. According to Professor Dana Glencross of Oklahoma City Community College, 98%

of top positions in all forms of media are held by men. They push unrealistic expectations on society and then deny their vanity. They deny that going bald upsets them, yet they frantically try new (and often stupid) hairstyles and rush to buy vitamins, toupees, hair replacement therapies, and ointments—all to hide a little skin. They will try almost anything if someone claims that it replaces hair or prevents hair loss.

Men swear that looks don't matter, that the most they do to prepare for dates is to find the least stained t-shirt in the dirty clothes pile and, if they remember, to make sure it doesn't smell too sweaty. They claim their only interest in working out and dieting is to lower cholesterol, reduce the risk of cancer and relieve stress. (They can't fool me. I've watched men work out. They spend almost as much time pumping iron as they spend flexing and admiring their muscles.)

I quit interviewing men to find my answer when it became obvious that they were lying. Every one of them vehemently denies that going bald bothers them. My own father claims to accept it completely. (My mom, sisters and I know that's not true.)

One man blamed the fragility of men's egos on women. I never knew that women were that powerful. Until he said that, I wondered why the men I talked to, who had a full head of hair, cut the conversation short. I now realize that vanity began whispering *in their ears*. They were hurrying to their mirrors to make sure that their hairlines hadn't begun to recede since they had checked earlier that day. I think I scared those men half to death by simply saying the dreaded "B" word.

Women admit they are vain. Women see nothing wrong with enhancing where nature stopped short. Women accept themselves and others as they are. We improve what we can, accept what we can't, and get on with life. This attitude gives us the freedom to tackle real issues and makes us healthier than men. Sure, we love running our fingers through men's hair, but when the men we love don't have hair, we simply accept it and find something else to do with our hands.

There lies the Truth; at last I had found my answer. Men are vain. There is a solution to the problem. It's not complicated. Accept it. Accept yourselves. Don't sweat the small stuff. There's a world full of big stuff waiting to be taken care of. And remember this: God made only a few perfect heads; the rest He covered with hair.

Now that my quest for the Truth is over, I can go to the store. I have to buy some mirrors. My ex-husband got all the mirrors in the house in the divorce settlement.



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