

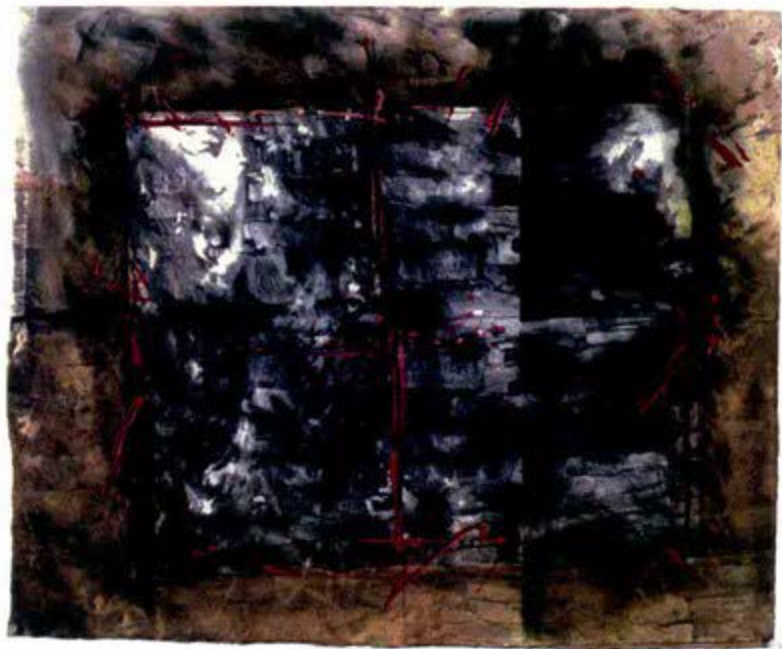
Orpheus



M.L. Hewly 1960

California State University,
Bakersfield





Chaco Series #10
Pueblo Bonito
Chaco Canyon, N. Mex., U.S.A.
31 1/2" x 26 1/2"

"Vertical hawks and rocks that know"

Brown Tone Photograph
with charcoal, pastel and soil

M.L. Heivly
1991-93

Orpheus

A Literary Journal
Volume XXVI

Dr. Solomon O. Iyasere, Advisor
John Rose, Reader

Orpheus is an annual literary journal produced by California State University, Bakersfield. All submissions must be typed, double-spaced, on 8-1/2" x 11" paper. There are no restrictions on subject matter, length, or theme; however, poems over one hundred lines are rarely published. Any use of profanity must be crucial to the understanding of the work.

Cover artwork—M. L. Heivly

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Orpheus

California State University,
Bakersfield

P o e m s

John Young

Poem of Homage: H.D., Poet [Part 2 of 3]

No matter how pink she was as moth,
I don't believe she and her poems
were buried on feminine grounds.
A photograph shows a young woman
wearing a dark, velvet dress,
lace at the neck, cameos at the wrists.
The poet of "The Tree" named her Dryad.

Causes of disfavor run deep —
more than she's soft or escapes —
no shallows politics and public taste.
The notions of modern poetry
no longer rely upon
dead correspondences.

Her detractors tossed her in
with dangerous characters
(not the mere weak). A displayer
of "extraordinary efflorescence"
(Hulme's phrase), she held
a medium newly bequeathed
closer to her bosom than she thought.

Vorticism and imagism,
along with futurism,
struck the pre-war staid
as violent iconoclasm.

The accumulation
of sensibilities,
shy in themselves,
threatened the old perspective.
The insidious battle, pitting
critical against creative, commenced.

John Young

It's silly to say
women flexed their muscle.
To say she escaped
requires less caution:
one only nods
that hers *was* role play.
Attempts to secure
the fleeting *eidolon*
have persisted since Greek times.
Conservation of political power
is of the matter.

She
to whom we allude
was no naïf. Consider the words
she spoke when her friend, accused,
but never tried, was finally released:
"Who are these dummies, these ogres
of a past age, these fearful
effigies who wrecked our world —
these devils, these dolls?"

— 2 —

The qualities of dryness and hardness,
so important to Hulme, were likeless twins
leading the intellect, in the revival,
back to the classic. Accurate
description was not seen as proper
objective for poetry. Fluff,
instead, ruled the art. Romantics
debauched the public ear with vagueness,
and the keen-cut remained inaudible.
Highest Truth stretched infinitely.
Enter: — five or six in London,
including the author of *Sea Garden*.

The Battle was neither Wagner's nor Nietzsche's,
neither Teutonic hero nor *Uebermensch*.
The existence of beauty can be dragged in
short of the imposition of God.

Orpheus/12

— 3 —

A certain shyness in being female, in that era,
and the inability to be a Poundish person
half account for the matter of literary demotion.

The rest? Not able to philosophize...
Wait a moment. This can't count. Others
contribute little in this regard. In truth,

with the onset of war, thought was deemed
an embarrassing waste. Possibly,
had she seen Jung instead and been

heterosexual all the way, readers
of her art may have forgone their own
coquetry and prized her chiseled forms.

— 4 —

"what to do, / my mind is reft"
"you ... set me apart from the rest"

Greek tags mar the epic thrust,
but here the simple Anglo-Saxon
flattens the imagination.
One should be glad the plain
didn't provoke uncomely laughter
or that that sinceritas
was not afterwards denied.
The direct treatment
finds guises in the tangles
of allusion. A high fault?
I think not. I say yet, of what gets written
only small bits captivate
the collective spirit; —
hers, though, should not
be buried. Perhaps,
the endorsement for
Poetry (how say this?) kept

John Young

her lyrics above ground
with the rest of the limbs
obviously alive, greening
toward their autumn rusts.

— 5 —

If the authorities of Justice
can be so rattled by radio,
and the critical temper
can be so spiteful of the indisputable
sureness of the Pisan camp poems,
why then should men not conspire
to suppress this expatriate's art?
After all, theirs was not called
"immense organized cowardice"
for paltry or impalpable reasons.
Vast blackout unshored. Beaches
without beach-fire or moon.

— 6 —

In the homages
that poets bestow on poets —
as Auden on Yeats —
a tone rises and a lowering
of emotion moistens the tear-ducts.

We shall have nothing of that here,
for it was anger — at petty scandals,
bombing raids, and always
betrayals — that sharpened and shaped
her art, so she could tell us
this is what it is to be alive
on the Greek shore
or under the London skies.

Kafui Gbewonyo

Life's Journey

Age 14

In life's journey the pattern's the same
As we live and develop and grow
As we practice the wanting to know
As we see through life's blacks, whites, and greys
As we take in Sun's nurturing rays
With the birth of life's new little being
With emergence of hearing and seeing
With the ritual passage of rites
With the repetitive days and nights
Our existence in bearing a name
Our playing of tricks and of games
Our labeling to express, speak
Our "day" and our "month" and our "week"
To communicate with one another
To welcome a sister, a brother
To morality — right and the wrong
To recreation to dance and to song
The belief in something that's not there
The answer for life, earth, and to prayer
The growing and aging and dying
The laughter, emotion, and crying
Though death is not an exaltation
It balances our population
To sustain the species — reproduce
To times of alliance and war
To times where we must make a truce
To periods of abundance or poor
Things we do just for survival
Things because of a rival arrival
Things of savagery, animal instinct
Things — climate, disease make life extinct.

Kafui Gbewonyo

I Want to Ride in Paradise

Age 12

I want to ride in paradise to see the open shore
The clear blue sea
Oh can I be
There now and evermore?

I want to ride in paradise the land of happiness
To laugh and sing
And hear bells ring
And always say "God bless"

I want to ride in paradise to feel the wind blow
I want to ride in paradise
And this I surely know

Kafui Gbewonyo

Together

Age 14

Together we shall see. Together we shall be.
In partnership, we'll bear the whip of life's depravity
Together we shall mend, the broken lives we bend
We'll beat the odds and live like gods until the very
 end
And when we reach the nothingness, deep in the soil
 but without toil
We'll be content, the lives we've spent
'Cause we've done it together

Together we shall strive. Into the depths we dive
To earth and stone, we'll die alone and be no more
 alive
Together we'll exist, as memories and mist
To haunt and overwhelm the beings in their brains, to
 give them pains
We'll leave with pride, fulfilled inside
'Cause we've done it together.

Kafui Gbewonyo

The World

There are many places in the world
with so many things to see.
Try visiting America, a land where it is free.

Visit every boy and girl
of people of many kinds
In Africa, the Yoruba and even the Masai.

The Portuguese in Portugal
The Spaniards in Spain
The English in England
and the New English in Maine.

Visit every other place.
I know that we can't name them all
We left out the very last ones,
South America and Asia.

So don't think that the world is small
because it's very big.
It is a very, very, very good place to live.

Kafui Gbewonyo

Giving to God

When a relative dies
And all you can hear are cries,
Don't be mournful, just be glad
Think of it as giving to God.

Giving to God your lost one
Giving to God your past one.
When they ask you if you are okay, nod.
Think of it as giving to God.

Giving to God the one you love
Giving to God, the father above.
We are the peas and he's the pod
Think of it as giving to God.

God will take good care of us.
He's the scab and we're the pus.
Don't be mournful, just be glad.
Think of it as giving to God.

Kafui Gbewonyo

Why the Water's Red

I was walking by the lake one day
And couldn't help but notice that
The water there was red
Yes, the water there was red.

I looked up at my mother
And then looked down and said
"Mommy tell me, what's the reason?
Tell me why the water's red."

I then looked back up at my mother
And suddenly she was crying
Could someone here be dead?
Is that *why the water's red?*

Paul Osaretin Ero

Desert

The desert lay naked
banished to a life of drought
sandy earth and tired mountains
baked and cooked in the ambience of the sun
it becomes easy
the ordinary eye sees nothing of worth
in this boisterous barren land
that is the desert

tell that to the critters
and to the luscious cactus
the majestic Baobab tree
to the animals
the desert carries in her womb

like the desert
the homeless man on the corner
an addict on the street
helpless mothers of many children
the emotionally challenged being
in the grip of a psychiatric ward

with the ordinary eye
we are quick to condemn
top soil as too weak to hold its ground
with hearts far too deep in sleep
we are quick to declare worthless
the soul whose road is cloudy and harsh

Paul Osaretin Ero

Journey into Manhood

It was past mid afternoon
two days before the leaves turned brown
ageless mind seems to know
confused seventeen year old vessel
the patriarch lay bed-ridden
stubbornly ungenerous with verbal interactions
broke his rules for me
last words he uttered
a breathing spirit in me

Calming soothing laser eyes
burrow through every fiber of my soul
every cell in me was his
frowned at some tales I told
smiled at me with love
product of my loins
your ways I am

Clouded red eyes vision
barrels down the belly of the earth
conveniently embracing in solitude, in magnitude
my father, my friend
in submission, in defiance, in pain, in fact

My illusions were real
a miracle I sought
a resurrection I prayed
a transcendence it was
loose earth powdered his frame
body and spirit, nature recycles, reincarnates
my journey into manhood was born.

Paul Osaretin Ero

Seed

Rain falls not because the sky
wishes to soften the world
clouds have greedily taken in more water
than her bladder can afford to hold
gravity is forever vigilant
inviting all to earth against their will

Canoeing on a dry river bed
springs not the river to life
beliefs alter not the futility of bending truth
humanity has become like the clouds

As long as the seeds we sow
disharmonize the structure of the being
and the center nature holds sacred
remains a plaything for man

Chaos, pain and bitterness
the inevitable poisonous plant germinates
which brings forth fruit
the fruit that is us

Paul Osaretin Ero

Adventure

Life is an adventure
And I have had one hell of a ride
An American of another race
Living in the other neighborhood
When crossing the tracks
Was a matter of life and death
I have died many deaths
Died several deaths

A curious bright eyed lad
With a zest for life and an ambition to match
Moving over from Watts with my parents
To live in a suburb surrounded by ghettos

Where I was daily reminded
My brown skin was not a welcome sight
By my protectors turned antagonists
Powerless to run against the grain
My place in prison was made
The day I was born some say

Dad was a hard working man
Surrounded by love and hate
Humiliation was taken on like air
For whenever I was taken to jail
They stopped by and smiled
Your son is with us again

There were times I begged
Spare my dad the shame
C'mon now they quipped
We do this cos' we care

Every life lived is a work of art
Ruin never taints perfection
It gives it a different shine

Orpheus/24

I have been in and out of jail
My smile has yet left my face
Whatever journeys my soul undertakes
Serenely and gladly I surrender and prefer

For everyone whose life I have touched
For every life who steered me on this path
Love from my heart I profess
And empathy for their deed I embrace
Bitterness has long been shelved
And wisdom I wear as my crown

I may amount not to much
In the eyes of my benefactors
But I truly call on every soul
To look me in the eyes
And feel the beat of my heart

Tell me I am different than you
That the air I breathe is inferior
The earth you walk is constituted differently

I know now the yearnings of my being
Same as every being that's ever been born
No matter how many times they take me to jail
And how many times you get at my father through me
I am a better being for life
And I eternally thank you for it.

Paul Osaretin Ero

Spectre of Light

The openness of thought
The bestiality of source
The renaissance man
Is schooled in the way of the world
Education as is
Many a man claim to have
Yet understands little or next to nothing

The essence of knowledge
Is left to rot away
In many an educated person
The cup runs over
Knowledge pervades the whole
Fulfilling the quest of mind and spirit

Of politics and of economics
Of peace and of war
The child does not understand
In the land of abundant rain
Why crops have withered and died
Yet knowledge eludes many
It's nature's way of reign
The fallacies education showers

The spectre of light is aglow
The sustenance of fraud falters
When the veil of ignorance peels back
The ruins we made in bliss
When knowledge takes it's proper place
Among the educators of mind

Then, we will all truly bask
In the glory of the know

Mesmerize

Mesmerize me with your charm
harmonize my scatteredness
into the calm that is the ocean
tame the barbarian in my psyche
imbue my senses with worth
captivate my imagination in your dance

Ring my door bell with your laughter
expose the subtleties of your heart
where the perfumed cries of flowered romances
lurk, waiting impatiently to be rid
the humid dense dark crevices
it seeks not understand

Magnetize the world within
the world without
effuse amorous innocent gentility
that oozes sexy, effortlessly in riddles
making ordinary girls out of beauty queens

Soften the rock hard demeanor
that mocks your soul
levitate and remain on the ground
destroy not the goddess you are
the lover you are
the human you are

Paul Osaretin Ero

Glue In Hand

His laughter ran circles
around the walls of her heart
vitalizing every cell in her body
causing her shine to blossom
like no star ever should

His walk makes for an artist's masterpiece
rendering motionless every impressionable
little darling who canvasses the corridors
of amorous adventurous cuddle shore
heaving sighs and moans in dustless wakes

His mannerisms leave poets gasping for reason
eloquent and seductive flare
succinct and esoteric dance
a butterfly match is yet unhatched
Gazelles in motion stare in envy

His eyes wrap her every desire
in mounds of simplified complex rituals
feeling the feel
touching the touch
of purr blur of magnetic haze

She drops a china plate
hitting the floor shattering
tiny little pieces in many shattered directions
like broken dreams
hearts know too well
she sweeps them up
time to mend with glue in hand

Jesse

Jesse's riotous bellow thunders through the night
a sensitive man with a giant heart
never really took to spirit
until he lost his job
Consolation drinking spree was given
splash around in the wake of a liquored truce
found reason to take a shot at Saint Remy
Saint Remy was no sissy you know
turns Jesse's stomach inside out
and made him shit in his pants
He even had the audacity to inflict upon him a severe
case of
amnesia
seems the streets have been switched around
only flies dare give him directions
Hannah oh lovely Hannah
she understands she always understands
cleaned him up and fluffed his pillow
Jesse has become quite an event
did not recognize the little girl who called him daddy
not been sober long enough to put a face
to his precious three year old
Many a blurry day
he slumbers to the callous caress of indifferent elements
a time too many to count
angry old man winter nearly took him under
Jesse has become convinced God was out to get him
but an old friend came to town and offered him a job
he hugged a reason to celebrate
and has learned his lessons from that no good Saint
Remy
Jack Daniels has always had a way with friends
and been known to generously indulge his friends
so much that when Jesse left for home
He stuck his penis in a hole on a handsome tree trunk
he was too sad too drunk to know the difference

Paul Osaretin Ero

lovely Hannah came to his rescue
he bickered bitterly about the trickster Saint Remy
until the winds whistled him down
Jack Daniels was too much of a good friend
he turned not a lovely woman into a miserable papaya
tree
Jesse rests beneath the earth these days
his tombstone simply reads
The Man Who Lost His Footing

Paul Osaretin Ero

Union

Marriage is a passionate embrace
an ambience of re-vibrating warm feeling
the subtlety of amorous adventures
in the heart of a lover's silenced hug
when thoughts become a tumbling child
a universe that is the harmony of the rivers of our
soul
merging in absolute contentment with what is
un-fragmented beautiful
transcendence of separateness
echoed beyond the spirit of difference
understands not the other as another
the point where all numbers become one
in recognition of it as is
a natural union with nature.

Dzifa Gbewonyo
Age 10

Mike

There once was a boy named Mike.
His hair was as stiff as a spike.
He cut it and combed it,
He gelled it and sprayed it
until there was a hair style he liked.

Dzifa Gbewonyo

Age 10

LITTLE by little

Little by little, piece by piece
Your uncle, your aunt, your nephew, your niece,
your mother, your father, her sister, his brother;
all in one family love each other.
Forever and ever we always will be
living together in one family.
It never will die, and it never will cease
Little by little, piece by piece.

Jenniffer L. Lesh

Parts of Me Have Been Lost

Parts of me have been lost. I thought
I'd at least have been given my tonsils in a tiny jar
with a lid screwed tight against rot.
When I woke asking for them, I was pushed
flat and bound to the table
with sheets, stuffed quiet
with gelatin flavored by my own blood.

I woke again
and I was in another room,
this one small and blue with a rude rendering
of a Picasso, a madonna with cold hands
and a crooked neck.
A fat nurse wiggled in clutching
a cloth bundle. She unwrapped it, caught
the whole light of the room in the gleam
of silver, freezingly precise. I pressed
my cheek to the chill table as the doctor,
the star of this show, entered.
This time it was my toe he was after;
my left great toe with its strawberry mark of blood.
A tumor, he said, and the nurse took my hand
as he leaned forward, blocking my view
with his bulk...and oh, the sting
of the needles sinking in! My fingernails
dug into the back of the nurse's hand. She winced
and her head reared back like a frightened horse.
Then cutting, scraping and the hot sweet stench
of burning flesh.

I wished for death then
and then later, I wanted to see my tumor
or to know its final destination.
I was denied everything
but a slip of paper, announcing me free
of cancer and such things.

The third time,
it was my breast they were after — I imagined its smooth

Jenniffer L. Lesh

round shape, disembodied, on an ivory plate
offered on a banquet table at some medical convention.
And never again, never again could I allow
them to take from me, and take, and never give,
so I left, a nurse trailing after me, saying *Miss!*
and *Ma'am!*, and the receptionist
lost a sheaf of papers, like oversized confetti,
to the maroon-carpeted floor.

Joanne Schmidt

The Fountain in My Mind

The fountain in my mind
releases the imagery
of your caresses:
a soothing creek
a trickling rush
a ribbonlike flow
a velvety spiral
a brushing whisper
a ticklish lullaby
a buoyant fluidity
a wafting liquidity
a misty solidity
a speeding granularity
a surging ecstasy
in the welcome arms
of subjectivity.

James Cornish

Pouting Monad

Acid stomach of a window latch,
Who's that walking, coming back
To tell me that I'm wrong.
Patterns forced on sanity
With strokes of ghosts and
Emotional keys, emotional lees,
Dumbfounded dreams of modal auxiliaries.

Decision gone with the time at hand,
Revision sought for the band of friends
Within me. Without me they'd be lost
And more alone than a rhymers in a blank
Reality, a zoner in a frank locality,
More alone than a running conversationalist
Should ever be.

The youthful seek without a plan
Beyond the first and easy, but
The aged look on what went bad,
Well within the freezing reach
For immortality, for once withoutity,
Instant doubity. Add sight to pouting
Monad — let rise, let be
totality.

James Cornish

The Tensed

A female ending sounds so fluid,
 So very flowing, so very good
 To the ear, so very dear to a
 Dancer of romantic steps

Even if I could once remark,
 Or remake, or rehearten the sour in me
 With the ease of a Latin, even flatten
 The glottal starts and stops.

 I want the feeling, the ceiling,
 The kneeling maiden at my heart.
 But what's the use? No vowel can or
Could allow the clock to stop.

 Oh, I wish for the /o/s of a gentler tongue.
 To round my musing and ease the turns
 Of the songs in me, its so hard to earn
Through the clogs in the thinking bogs of me.

You, the word as the object of
So many thoughts, the subject of
The last retorts, the dative of repression,
Indirect droplet of my obsession.

And on rare occasion, I ask "Why?"

Jim Duriga

Impossible Dreams

The world is full of impossible dreams,
Somehow made possible (and real)
By people too uninformed to know
that the impossible can't be done.

Centuries ago, the world was flat;
Wonder how many people fell off the edge
Before it became round. Before 1903, science
Could prove that heavier-than-air flight was impossible.

In 1950, space travel was deemed impossible,
And in 70s and 80s they forgot to tell the founder
of Apple that you could not build and sell
A computer from your garage. (or maybe he was told....)

Maybe we should occasionally try flying close to the sun,
And find out if our wings actually do melt —
Maybe, like Don Quixote (the Man of La Mancha),
We should tilt at a few windmills.

...maybe they lied to us....

.....maybe nothing is impossible.....

Jim Duriga

Poem 7222

While sitting on Huck's raft,
I read the Dead Sea Scrolls:
Spinoza was reading Descarte,
And Shakespeare and Marlowe
Were arguing over the latest
Bellow novel.

Faulkner had gone back to
Jefferson County, hunting for
John Donne. Robert Frost was
Reading Emily Dickinson while
St. Thomas cast his horoscope.

Michael Nesmith was singing
Kristofferson with a Paul
Simon beat as Arthur Clarke
Copies Andre Norton. Leonard
Nimoy was watching his reflection
In a Rembrandt painting,
While Brahms played the piano.

Dylan Thomas was talking
With Bob Dylan, and George
Harrison was arguing with
Thomas Jefferson over the
Benefits of Neil Armstrong's
Voyage. It was then that
Milhous Nixon came aboard
And asked "Where is culture?"

Jim Duriga

The Big Empty

the big empty out there
is nothing like the big empty within;
a life with no center
is always questing,
like an unanchored ship
or a tree
without roots.

"Who am I?" is maybe
a more important question
than "What's it all about?"
until you can know yourself,
you must confront the fact
that you
know nothing.

Jim Duriga

You Said

What was it you said...
I wasn't listening;
I was too busy...

...waiting to speak.

I lose so much...
By being so wrapped up in myself
That I can't see...

...the world beyond

Each day...Each flower...
Each conversation is a gift,
Once gone...

...they are forever gone.

I didn't mean to startle you...
I just wanted to say that
I appreciate you...

...and the rare moments we have.

Jim Duriga

Photo

The faded photo
reminds me that
 we're all so different
 from what we were.

I can name names,
and recall the places,
 But those names and places
 are now long gone.

The photo is yellowed
and cracked with time,
 but so am I...
 so am I.

My memories embellish
the photograph
 into a history
 I never had.

Jim Duriga

Poem Book: (Poem #23)

The mesh of minds,
Sorrow filled
Calls me back —
Or calls me forth.

Never wondering
Always wandering —
In my deeds
I know my soul.

Death or life,
Hope or tears —
T'is the moment
that calls to me.

Hello good times,
Goodby hard times —
Hello future,
Goodby sorrow.

In a poem,
A story told,
One uncovers —
He tells his soul.

In his sorrow,
Or in his joy,
He asks a moment
To live again.

Questions flung
To the stars —
The answers die
In our words.

Jim Duriga

Answers flung
To the sky —
The questions falter
In our minds.

Hello dream world,
Goodby sorrow —
Goodby this world,
Hello tomorrow.

Jim Duriga

Old Memories

whatever happened to party lines?
what happened to glass-bottled milk?
where did they hide all the old pay phones?
what about caterpillar silk?

why do you never see the old milk cans?
do you remember Project Mercury?
whatever happened to Huey Long?
(that last one doesn't matter much to me).

if you remember the Chicago Seven,
i guess you're testifying to your age;
in the years of Disney's 'Davy Crockett'
coonskin caps were all the rage.

who still has a hula hoop?
do you remember 'bazooka' gum?
remember how old Jim Thorpe
was always on the run?

Mark Spitz was on the 'Wheaties' box,
Milton Berle was on the tube;
Ed Sullivan brought the Beatles out
And put America in a groove.

in '71 McClean gave us 'American Pie,'
and everyone still recalls the score;
'73 gave us Skylab —
it's not in orbit any more.

we've lived through so much history,
and so many exciting times
that to blot them out and never share them
would be a major crime.

so share a memory with a youngster;
tell him or her about the past;
it's not just history — it's the way we were;
it's the memories that will last.

Thomas Allen

A Fine Spring Day

Today is the day words lose their meaning,
Instead, powerful feelings take their place.

Today it's time for a new beginning.
Watch it fall, the decayed and wasted base.

It is the day flowers start to blossom.
All turn green with life, riddled fresh and nice.
Open eyes know that which was bothersome,
Is now sacred, nothing else would suffice.

It is a day to look, to see the light.
The one who holds my heart could be around.
Opportunity after shedding night,
Opportunity to be heaven bound.

Once before all that's good went unnoticed,
It is now seen to be that which matters.
Evil is rejected, it won't be missed,
It gives nothing, leaving me in tatters.

My sigh is restored. I'm no longer blind.
Lids wide and open, I'm clearer in mind.

Thomas Allen

Blue Melody

Deep twists and sharp turns anguish the frail heart,
pierced, made sincere as it is torn apart.
Inner emotions are made manifest,
in futile attempt to lay to rest.

The blue essence makes the soul feel alive.
Without it passions die, for they can't dive.
A drama of feelings forged this playwright,
it's end longing for someone to hold tight.

The blue organ renders person unique.
Viewing all other lands as barren and bleak.
Only an empty and full sky can know,
because it feels deep free and blue also.

Blue fruit wanders the river rapidly,
scraped by jagged edges, wounded harshly,
facing forks, and choosing its fate blindly.
Angst and fear tail this fate, which ends sadly.

Once all tales of blue end, one becomes true,
and the chaos around brought down through coup.

George Ketterl

Cycle

constant void arid fresh
silver toned bell lingering in a single strand
traces disappearing in subtle shadows
slowly becoming invisible to the naked eye
all the particles replaced reset mixed in perpetual
opposition
polar nights and days
sliding unnoticed like long lines of tourists
hungry for the next attraction
marking with keepsakes and memories
interlocking slowly into a box filled with scraps and
leftovers from endless feasts and famines
broken lines of virtue lie between flat dreams
waiting for the wind and light
expecting the morning brightness out from the
glowing curtain of the horizon
wanting
brilliance and inspiration
repeating circles connected end to end
without so much as a blink of recognition
transformations
barely visible
lost in the darkness with covered rhythms turned
lower than the ear
while the sharpest edges dull against the stone
of time
eroding slowly in the wind and rain or simply in
the way you look at things
metaphors of freedom struggle against reality as if
the sacred gift of fire was only meant for pilgrims
stacked layers collected and guarded like
rotten treasures as if there will be a counting
burdens grow heavy and wear down even the
strongest horse on a long trail
so why carry anything?
nakedness reduces all things and removes any

George Ketterl

need for styled embellishments of identity
 preparation for the journey is different than
going to Disneyland
In the chopped up streets of Calcutta the edge is
what dominates
heroism is simple when the chips are down
eye contact is the access
recognition
preservation
incarnation incantation

 smoke screens leave the body limp
 with
 anticipation
last dance requests made hastily before the lights
go out can only inhibit the rhythm
 stepping to the extreme beat dissolves the
clutter and the
 clatter
 pressing in and out with abandon
 welcome to the holy
 where will is sublime
 covered in garments of balance
 without attachments

every hair in place
centered in empty silence

cowboys know animal and nature like the back of
their hands
fighters flicker in their work
dreamers can be lucky
young dancing children are the music
gold covered treasures filled with expectation eat
ritual
single streams break through granite like butter
each morning rolls chance into the sweet possibility
of a perfect sphere of sight

George Ketterl

Ode to Annabelle

crisp moves spawned in flickering
canyon light
patches of smooth color
spread with abandon
lost details showing for the briefest moment out
from
shadows
perched like a monk on the
tenuous edge
girl eyes piercing into the
heart
finding the mystery still sweet
between
the most extreme positions
standing now
removing the heavy velvet cloak
of too much heady
contemplation
right down to the translucent whiteness
of innocence
charmed by the presences and
by the tango dance sway
of
place
and
time
nature is my nature she said
and color is bright
sitting there like Doris Day recognizing
the irony
the soliloquy reaching with the most vital touch
into the
deep crevices of all those surrounding pilgrims
innocent still
knowing the beauty
passion, passion, burning bright
picture picture on the wall where's the balance after
all

George Ketterl

Hero

from out of the past comes the thundering hoof beats
of the great horse silver

as Byron stands club footed and alone on a gray shore with
no solace
feeling the driving fire deep in his gut
will not quiet

eyes that see everything and nothing stare stupidly
into the face of compassion

so many reckless explanations
lying like rags
littering the gleaming hall of polished idealism with
impending doubt

seductor of the arrogant
rescuer of the painful with last minute tricks
you flirt with the edge of salvation but promise only epitaphs

death dreaming solitude spreads like a heavy blanket over
high expectations
watching police and fireman trudging out from electric
screams gripping the innocent with open mouths

failure without the well spring rains beneath a desert of
unbridled hope
how can thank yous ever be enough?

hidden among rose garden hopes the slam dunk kings
maneuver for a last second save risking everything and
nothing these saviors in the uniforms of darkness giving birth
to light

march out from the frozen ranks shine and simply dim away
as mythologies turn to fiction

Orpheus/52

sharp edges dull and the mystery rider wails the battle cry of
passion out from the endless pulse of being vitally alive
awake full bursting into bloom at the precise instant when
action and belief are the only order

eager youth simple belief shrewd craft hollow words
clowns all seem to grieve or smile
actors can be natural
good warriors don't bleed too much
children can never be more innocent than saints

fingers grasp the thin shell of
savior hood like the passing humility of stardom

quick response time is the secret
perfect timing equals perfect bliss

feeling alone?
want some fun?
go team go
paint the picture bright
reflect the extended possibility
swing your trailblazers machete and forget the doubts
savor only bright dreams
hope the mirror doesn't fog

Alexander the Great, Jesus Christ, Caesar Chavez,
Joan of Arc, Gandhi, Simon Bolivar, The Lone Ranger,
Charlton Heston, Lincoln, King, Perez, Mandela,
Lawrence,

choice and sacrifice become a single strand

George Ketterl

Willy Boy

DeKooning died today
those black raw slashes against the white
action
one of the twentieth century's great painters

"I don't paint to live, I live to paint"
emotions extending out from the fingers and body
dancing shapes and colors

broad sweeping motion filled with muscular intentions
spreading color and energy
out into the day to push and pull against the paradox

did you even know?
living and painting these last years
in a sweet tortured alzhiemers cloud

did the others ever come to visit you
the last one
left from the old days?

white haired elf in paint covered pants posing for the mags
still carrying out each day's
ritual

how must time press or pass
icon hero?
staring from the blue eyes, breathing winter's gasp

did you paint today?
was it gray
or sunny?

You and the others set the motion
here in the
new land

your first one man show at forty four years after stepping off
the boat in new york instead of paris
fair haired dutch boy with such dedication

painter, painter, painter

Orpheus/54

George Ketterl

Archeology and Sacrifice

Bliss comes in assorted colors it tracks
through time inlaid in the eyes
strung together like a staring blinking necklace
of profound power

paralyzed legged boy becomes a fish out of water on the dirty
broken Calcutta sidewalk
Maneuvering small businessman
on his belly

Let's just get to the heart of the question
 is it always better to give than receive?
extreme reminders of less than enlightenment are always
there peering out from the dark shadows of the primal heart

Perilous pit of nature ever pulsing
just behind the clean pure facade
of
 innocence

How can the beguiling child girl carrying the baby with puss
in the corners of its eyes
be accused of aggressive exploitation when she can still
laugh at the dancing man?

Is it the mantra or the money that keeps her on the street?
sharp points of recognition cut from both sides
specimens in decaying cases and bottles shelved in grand
paint peeling halls dedicated to Plato and Aristotle

life and death animated by the chemistry of time
staying in or stepping out come in the same foil cover
placed upon the same
opaque tray

The lid as in Pandora
is always a matter or
risk or
opportunity

George Ketterl

Distance

On eight street as
a passenger struck with
a subtle luminous flash of
extension

curled in dust, forbidden feeling, circling left
into
soft breath, consider the prospect of no end
or no beginning

Like reaching out with the foot to tap the ledge below
saviors come in all sizes
devils come only in red with chrome teeth and
brocade gloves covered with honey and charcoal

Tight wire connection
magnetic case with a rod of pure light ramming
through
the center

Cover me with frozen incense
lift the swollen veil then
kiss the acrid blue lips of separation

Roll the chocolate covered dice against the hard ache
put the tip into the mushy middle and blow just hard
enough to be sure
that the thief of the imagination has not rearranged the board

Placed before certain alters there's an inclination to invent
stepping through time can turn the world inside out
clip this and save it till the mockingbird has it
memorized, ok?

George Ketterl

Sea Castle

looming at the edge
blueness elegy
taken for granted beyond admiration days like a
faded dress against a
rose colored sunrise
 anchored in time
 stopped
 myriad expressions staring out from the dusty
strata of dances and
silver toned ranks of privilege in the city
gasping out from behind secret mirrors
 visions spinning like dervishes
 driven by fear
 joy
 inspiration etc.
all of it dropping into the vast cavern rattling around
until that January rumble came rolling in waves
 roaring out the question of fate without
remorse
survival balanced on stacks of empty rooms
 balanced on columns of used up excuses
now in the hands of the holy and the wise
 shelter of eyes taken over by pilgrims
 with
 no
 security
the bright blue southern wall of whales
 wails its creaking swollen moans
against the mountains and the sea
 how deep into the heart must fading memory
go?
each foggy corner longs for life as even the last
breath is crushed out by the swinging ball
of no mercy
each crack opens to the sound of lost music
arched windows trembling reflections grace and

George Ketterl

symmetry surrounded

echoing

blinking at each impact as the moment fades into order and horizons

connected by the tenuous

strands of dreams which must after all yield as

everything must

to flowers yet unblooming

George Ketterl

Tim

a sense of history shimmys across the wire of time

to escape
to be out against order
resist until resistance has become the sweet breath
of life
with flowers not fear
eyes holding bright holy light
each step an adventure

all mornings around the world have birds singing
with bright edges and sublime patience
do you waver against the doubt?
or do you keep in step with the music.

is your cosmic heartcase filled with innocence?

you looking into the darkness directly to that spot
where its eyes are located smiling and becoming
the mystery

silver frail zealot of rebellion sitting pampered on a
throne of notoriety wandering at the edge of
courage amidst the chaos judgment timing and
inevitable justice
tricks in rings can only prolong the glaze

pulse in secret chamber filling the void like
beautiful smoke clouds riding on sleek fingers of
gold
pushing the fine honed possibility of birth into the
endless cycle of untold futures

poets come and leave their verse reflecting
shadows of moments unfolding
alone on the stage each strutting recitation signifies

George Ketterl

the paradox of belief and doubt
birth and death
risk everything and ride the untamed theory beast
without the comfort of actually knowing
instinct and intuition at the abysmal edge of
oblivion where each little flicker brings a perfect blip
of sheer life
don't blow it
it's the finish that counts he said there holding court
on a padded chair
sweet pink vapor of abandon tinting his insolence
with cherubic joy
as though he had planned some inevitable escape
as is the way of the visionary

Lonnie Lopez

Last Night I Died

he came from the darkness
and touched me
i screamed for him to stop
i prayed to god for mercy

he did not listen

he plunged his knife into me
tearing my flesh and my soul
his filthy, smelly hand covered my mouth
he entered into where he did not belong
into where he was not welcome
tears and madness stained my eyes
and the world swirled around me
why is he hurting me
i tried to close my eyes
to lock out his face
to muffle his words
to make him go away

but his hateful breath told me he was there

and now i sit
alone in my room
blankets won't keep out the cold
and water won't wash away his touch

Lonnie Lopez

When the One You Love Loves Another

When the one that you love loves another
Every scene, every smile that you see
Fills your heart up with pain to discover
To share love with your love will not be.

Enduring in silence a pain all your own
Your secret a secret will stay.
You whisper good-bye in a quivering tone
As your better bears your friend away.

Looking back with regrets on "what ifs" or "if onlys,"
On false dreams you've contrived in your mind,
But instead, lacking courage, you stand apart, lonely,
All faith and all hope, they unwind.

They move in like the wind, they move out like the rain,
The lucky ones whom he calls lover.
And just when you think you know just what he likes
This type is replaced by another.

Lonnie Lopez

Motion

Passing slowly overhead
Wispy clouds shall form a bed
Upon which God shall rest His head
And ponder on the words He's said
And how they've often been misread
By eager followers long since dead
Whose needy hungry souls were fed
By glories that could save from dread.
The curse of life: to hardship wed.
One steals another's hard-earned bread,
No ground too sacred not to tread,
Far from the word we have been lead.

Lonnie Lopez

New Pencils

My mind convulses
And in between the pangs
I struggle to force a poem
From this pencil.
Too bad the lead keeps
Breaking.
I take an aspirin
To counter the pain.
The drug relieves the symptoms
For a few hours
And until I purchase new pencils.

Lonnie Lopez

Debussy's Riddle

Why a prelude to a fawn
I shall never completely understand
When cats can just as easily suffice.
Perhaps there is some inchoate motion
Of limb peculiar to a deer
That my semi-unbiased eye
Overlooks. Perhaps the song is a
Prescient dedication to Bambi's
Fallen mother, dark and slow-paced,
Macabre overtones to a child's French pantomime.

Langeweile Schmerz

Jewels Flashing In the Night of Time

The storm rode in at midnight,
and the cats began to bounce
like freed electrons
through the matrix of the room.
Outside, the methane swirl stripped
fronds from palms and eucalypti,
their humiliation exposed
in the novas of burst transformers.
Beneath the roof's flimsy beneficence,
the larger mammals cowered by the TV
to watch other acts of God.

Resentment, version 252

Desensitized, you consume the days
selecting priorities resistant
to the gaze of cashiers
and other drones leering
from the asphalt fields
a deeper scrutiny
of such alien minds
could mar the sexual facade
yet empathy's regime
is not easily toppled
for each twist of Thanatos
seems a riddle demanding response
considering the acclaim awarded
to a precise thrust of attitude
though you manage to quell
any self-abnegating tendencies
'til like a sit-com
Sunday morning comes down
and you shimmer into the pews
gaining amnesty from yourself

Portia St. Claire

Spirit of Orpheus

Whispered song stirred Black Orpheus from his slumber:
"We are climbing Jacob's ladder.
Every rung goes higher, higher."

He saw in the fields
Pickers of cotton sweating in the smoldering sun,
Pricking their fingers,
Tired.

Orpheus saw brutality:
Whips, homes in fire and smoke.

Crying,
He slowly played his guitar
tears quenched the sadness and ire.
He blew refreshing air, enlivening their desire

To bellow:
"Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home."

Home away from body bondage,
Freedom in the shower of musical notes.

Prepare a place
In the now world.

"We shall overcome.
Brothers all are we."

Portia St. Claire

Heaven's Threads

My days are clothes by threads from heaven.

Husband's arms wrap me
in comfort, under the quilt.

Writing poems at night,
watching orange dawn awake.

Butterfly flutter,
hummingbird sips sweet nectar.

Poppy unfolding
crepe petals dancing in air.

In the marina,
light sparkle, shimmy on waves.

Toddler stomps on floor,
giggling, laughs hearing the sound.

My garment until the warm earth accepts me.

Portia St. Claire

Cultural Allegiance

The Japanese imperialist's dictum was to erase Korean culture,
"Make the Koreans Japanese!
All school children must have Japanese names,
In public: Speak only Japanese,
 Cannot wear Korean clothes,
 Cannot sing Korean songs."

The Koreans obeyed these rules in public.

But within the homes, protected by the sanguine laughter of a New Year,
Koreans played *yut-no-ri*, throwing polished sticks into the air
 Watching to see the *I-Ching* patterns,
Belted glories of the Korean land, and
 Slurped the rice dumpling soup.

Outside, the Japanese gestapo patrolled the streets in drunken stupor.

I did not live during the Japanese occupation of Korea,
But I hated anything Japanese.
In fact, for many years, I refused to buy a Toyota or a Honda.

I watch in surprise at my boys, who are excited to play Japanese video games,
Take care of *Tamaguchi* pet, wild about anything *Pokemon* and
Even recite the *hiragana* and *katakana* from the computer.

And I pleasure in the *Ikebana* of a single dahlia next to a gnarled twig,
And salivate even thinking of *sukiyaki*.

And I wonder,
Would a Jew ever buy a BMW, a Porsche?
Enjoy Mozart's "The Magic Flute" or bratwurst?

John Rose

Mommy, Mommy, Hold My Hand

Little girl with golden hair, smiling, skipping, not a
care
Holding hands and swinging arms, effervesing
youthful charms.
Chatter, chatter, skip, and sway, toss her head in
coltish play
But held by mom for safety's sake, no mutual joy can
mom partake.
Drawing nigh on slender limbs, a visage gaunt; my
puzzle stems;
So maybe drugs or healthcare woes, a lonely child and
so it goes
Little girl with golden hair, smiling, skipping not a
care
Hand in hand with mom not there.

John Rose

The Watchers

Porcupine, pincushion green, rigid stalk born in the spring.
Puffy white, sentinel flower, the yucca has a spiritual
power.

In times of old the Indian told...*his land usurped with
impunity...*

*the white man came and took the same...*and conquered
with immunity

With numbers high but scattered afar, an indigent super-
structure

The Indians by geography bound, were held in a stoneage
culture

With Columbian Exchange and gunpowder, dry, Euro-
man held no baited
breath

For he took what he saw and he wanted all in exchange for
the Indian's
death.

Hastings had said, so goes the report "...let's hunt a few for
the fun..."

So hunting them all was the sport and the call 'til Ishi
could no longer run.

Indian spirits are incarnate now in the bloom of the yon'
yucca hill.

Their springtime stare and omniscient glare sees the fruits
of the white man's will.

The air is foul, the water too. Animals extinct if not scarce
No scrutiny aside, no yielding of pride; the conqueror is
hard to embarrass.

Yet, while it is true 'tis a cycle to rue, man kills a man for
his land,

Facts cannot lie for to live is to die, but why must it be by
his hand?

As the yucca stands on the crest of a hill or leans in the
bend of a stream

The cycle of man like the cyclical plan, a demise in spite of
the scream.

John Rose

Black Eyed-Susan

Crocus, focused, radiant eye, watching all, those
passersby
Skirting roadways, fences too, omniscient numbers to
review...
Silent, swaying if a wind, poignant thought so to you
wend...
Looking, watching, seeing all, never talking to forestall
The passing sojourn, life goes by, recorded singly by
their eye.
Are they simply God's green girls, wispy, dainty,
roadside furls?
Some sub-heaven viewing glass watching earthly
travelers pass?
Or are they simply staminate, pistils, ready, propagate
Luring bees to yellow glee to pollinate eye's filigree?
Sub-periscope of Heaven's power or simply just a
roadside flower?

John Rose

A Porch's Tale

Solitary, empty there, upon a porch, a gloom,
Above a lawn so manicured, vain effort for a broom.
An empty chair, innocuous, yet telling passersby
This veil of prim's not happiness; the chair reveals the lie!

John Rose

The Veil of a Porch

A chair so plain upon the porch, austere with solemn grace
The yard so clean and manicured, presumes a happy place.
With efforts keen and concentrate' to veil a lonely heart?
A second chair upon the porch would be a perfect start.

John Rose

San Emidio at a Distance

Horsetails wrinkled, wispy white; brushing spaceous
strata height
Sunshine low, in from the west; highlight foothills
'neath the crest
Fault block mountains purple etched, Montana blue a
background sketched.
Though high and wide and changing most, horsetails
racing for the coast.
It gave one thought to pause and see what might cause
a cloud to flee.
A backward glance saw blackened roil as thunderheads
began to boil.
Surging down Sierra lanes water rivulets on widow
panes,
Ambiguous black, the smoke of a roast chasing
horsetails to the coast.
Mother earth hears weathered voice; addressing the
land with nature's
choice:
Good-bye to clear and azure skies and all a horsetail
race belies.

John Rose

Untitled

I was young, with hormonal scents.
Easily, agilely slipped the fence
Soaked with fear, propelled by glee,
Picked an apple off another's tree.

I see her every now and then,
Exchanging looks, "Remember When?"
Of course I do; I'm not yet dead
Our electric time slow to leave my head.
I'd known her man and an ass he'd been
And deservedly so, if he'd known 'bout "When."

Some time had passed and her trio had grown
When she called me, strangely, on the phone.
"He's leaving me now, you know?" she said.
"Our past's not passed, our 'When' not dead.
You know the boys? He's paying for two.
And that's why I'm indicting you.
Of Roy and Jim, he's their father.
The oldest, Ian, he's your bother."

"When you picked that apple off the tree
You left your seedling for all to see.
Imagine *your* shock? Can you *my* dismay?
Save vain histrionics; he has DNA."

John Rose

Africa, a Far Foreign Shore

A precipitous place, the African coast;
Deep water, rocky, no harbors to host.
In spite of all nature, so alien to the West,
In but a row boat, they carried off her best.
With a passing interest in pelts and plants
Attention was focused on primordial chants.
The African culture, so wild and energetic,
Idle, misguided, a waste most frenetic!
The Euro-man, so worldly, astute;
Recycled a means, more riches to compute.
Like Doctor Death, they left not alone.
With gun powder barter they headed for *home*.
In the bowels of the ships, on decks fore and aft,
Promiscuously packed, raft after raft,
The extorted tribesmen, not the slow and the lame,
At first filled the ships, their brothers to blame!
"Give us 100!" the ship's bastards said.
"Give us your own or your neighbors instead!"
It's an ongoing story that gets horribly worse.

It's a bastardy of man ill captured in verse
Mistook, misplaced, misused, misspent;
Released, replaced, reused; Repent!

Barbara Pugh

The Trip to the Top of the Mountain

Actually two trips
Yesterday I drove to Sequoia
My friend said:
Go to the mountains and see the leaves change
Drive through the canyon and watch the
transformation from desert to deciduous trees and
up to the pines
See the colors change from tans and browns to
greens, yellows, oranges and gold
To greens and browns again
Breathe in the free, cold air and look out over the
forever mountains

And what price?
Twisting road traveling up a mountain terminating at
7500 feet
I was convinced would terminate me
No one told me about the road
Californians know about canyon roads
I'm a neophyte Californian—and I know now.

No room for another car — drop-offs on one side,
rock cliffs on the other
Scared I would meet someone coming down
And when I didn't, scared that if something
happened no one would find me until Spring
The crumpled remains of an '87 Honda
The skeletal remains of a '45 woman
She was so young — well not so young
Just starting out on a new career
A professor—the top of her profession.

I talk to myself when I'm scared and I talk to my car
Who know which is stranger
I talk back, the car doesn't — not schizophrenic at
least

Barbara Pugh

I said to myself, "There has to be another way out of
here, I can't drive this road back again."

Oh, but there wasn't!

I turned around and discovered the road had mileage
signs

First 25.76

Round it off, how bad could twenty-six miles be?

Oops! I already know that.

"I can do this, I have driven to the top of the
mountain and part way down the other side."

Yesterday I drove to Sequoia, and back again

I went up the mountain and I was scared of the road,
and the drop-offs

The trip down the mountain was different

I picked up a passenger named Courage

I saw and experienced — and still forgot to take
pictures

Even had trouble with brakes overheated

Realized I needed to drive in second and let the car
slow itself

Still not scared, laughed, talked to myself and my car
Congratulated us both

Mile 9 point something — back in the desert

The road has an actual yellow line in the middle

I told myself and my car about the room that
afforded us

We were both glad.

Barbara Pugh

Clown Day

Out of the fog, a persistent ringing.
I pick up the phone — My daughter
"What do you need, Honey?"
"Oh Mom, I was so tired and sick this morning and I
didn't keep the car — and it's Clown Day..."
And I say, "I have a paper to finish—next week is
exam week — I have clients this afternoon."
But it's Clown Day.

Two little faces greet me and one tired, pale one.
I worry about my child — working-home-babies
"Come on, Jimmy, let's go to Clown Day."
"Look at that, Grandma! Grandma, what's that?
Why, Grandma?"
The teacher smiles as I deliver him — "I'm so glad he
didn't have to miss Clown Day."

I go home for a time.
Making a decision, I call — "May I keep him until
mid-afternoon
and take him to lunch?"

In the backyard we pick "fwowers for Mommy."
"She likes the big yellow ones, Grandma."
And I pick tiny purple ones.
Dandelions and wood violets make a wonderful
bouquet.
And the tree has tiny leaves, and there's flowers on a
bush that smell good.

"Look at the "boodiful" clouds Grandma!
"There's the scary one — Sharptooth is dead — he
couldn't swim." Oh, *Land Before Time*.
"Look! That one's a whale."
"Why are sharks scary and whales aren't?"
"Sharks think you're lunch — whales know you're
not."

Barbara Pugh

We laugh
Where shall we go for lunch?

McDonald's — of course
On tippy toes his chin is even with the counter —
McNuggets with honey.
"Bees make honey, Grandma."
"Why's honey sticky, Grandma?"

"Cadderpillers make homes and you know what,
Grandma? They make magic and be butterflies!"
And so do three-year-olds.
I drop him off

Part of my paper is done
My clients smile — or not — and talk, and I listen
And depart with hugs and thanks
Feels right — what I do

And I work a bit longer
Stop at the store — start home
And drive with tears—remembering my own
grandmother — I thank her
for showing me
And on the table at home is a gift — left
A lopsided clown — I laugh at the pure joy of it
By habit, I hang it on the refrigerator
It was Clown Day

Jennifer Seib

Seeds

In days gone by the courageous ones came
France and Norway, Scotland too,
roots unearthed, life never the same
looking for liberty life anew

Time passes on, new seeds are planted
the flowers are whisked with the wind,
roots grown long, customs supplanted
great are the gifts God sends

The trees in my yard
whisper their call,
ground underneath unyielding and hard
I choose not to listen, stumble and fall

Heaven behold! What could it be?
tall ones, small one gather around,
their limbs embrace me
as love in the air abounds

The roots stretch along
I find my own soil,
one grows beside me steady and strong
as we watch the young ones toil

Bough dance and sway
their joy makes me whole,
blessings from God day after day
their love is a part of my soul!

Jennifer Seib

Red Spots on the Floor

The television on, screaming for attention

The news, the soaps, horror, humor

A car speeds by outside

The remote control, very ready

Vacant stare, lidless eyes

The telephone ringing, ears filled with ether

Click...you change the channel

Evening news, ten car pile-up

Crimson sheets blanket the earth

Red wine on the tablecloth, horror, pity

Click...comedy central, tears of laughter

The dryer buzzes furiously

Click...AIDS documentary, sadness

Click...sitcom...click...movie...click...death

Sorrow, pity, humor, horror...confusion

Yellow tongues of fire licking at a house

Click...paralyzed, can't move

Trapped in cement falling

Falling to the ocean floor

...click...numb...click...

Radio humming in the background

Boy with machine gun at school

...click...it's cold, dark

Icicles dripping from your

Nose, your fingers, your heart

Red spots on the floor

Click...back...eager

Did anybody die?

Jennifer Seib

The Rock in Shark Infested Waters

She rests on a rock
A mile off shore
Her silky fur warmed from the sun
Born to swim
She's not long content
Warming the rock
She dives in

The cool salty water
Is a gentle caress
She glides through
Its soothing embrace
Her soul is free
As she plays in the surf
Doing the things seals do
She laughs

But the sea is not always
Safe for one like her
Danger threatens at every turn
Her play is cut short
At the sight of a shark
Heading her way with
A hungry smile
Quickly she clambers
Back on the rock
Determined to live again...
She waits

Mary Lou MacIlvaine

Going Mad

I'd almost like to just go mad
my hair a mess
behavior bad

I'd kick and hit
I'd yell and flail
my breath come hard
my logic fail

I'd come off with some horrid threat
my eyes unfocused in a sweat

I'd damn your eyeballs if you stared
insult you
say I never cared

I'd cut you down
your heart would break
I'd scream to heaven
my ribs would ache

and when I'd rest from this attack
I'd beg for you to take me back

I'd look into your eyes again
to see if I was safe and then
I'd bawl with tears just streaming
down
and ask if you would hold me now

I'd shuck my clothes off in a heap
snug up to you and
go to sleep.

Mary Lou MacIlvaine

Cumulo Nimbus

Still it goes,
burgeoning.

I bring lunch to his office.
 He beams,
 reaches to shake my hand:
One more meeting and then,
yes, he will take time to eat.

Where will you sit?
Would you care for some tea?
Such calm and chaste propriety.

A towering cumulo
 nimbus out the window;

 contained,
 it builds:

A mounting brightness still.

Mary Lou MacIlvaine

Swaying Grasses

Wake up to another day of love.
How would you flow with love if your
life were cured?

Sweet knowledge would waft love
through all you do.
Like a breeze through the orchard, love
animates your body.

The cat rises to its owner's touch.
Hillside grasses sway together in the
wind.

How often does one flower blossom
alone?

Lovers show gratitude in giving profusely.
Who would not desire this fragrant
wisdom?

Mary Lou MacIlvaine

Promethea

Of course I noticed
When your kitchen gate gave way.
Opportunistic feeder, I stole in:
Treasures of the Forbidden
City — don't taste; it's God's
Rotisserie. We wasted, feasted
With our eyes and noses, never licked
A spoon.

Still ungated, unsated, stray
I pay, your perimeter repaired,
Flames flaring in my flesh,
I dream of sluice of fiery jewels
From chest to legs to chest,
Eve's apple flambé
With raisins, cognac, pear
Cherries jubilee
Take home the sun god's fare.

Mary Lou MacIlvaine

Angels

I

First off, I reject that
any of us are actual
angels in disguise
I know that gig too well

real angels
even if metaphorical/pinaforical
are in da skies, not here
not pinchable, bumpable, joshable
understandable like us.

though we may all in deed be
spiritual beings
having a human experience
as someone said

that's human
human

angel wings have straps and glitter
you can't move much
balancing the wire halo
you do it in the spirit
then turn them in afterwards

II

the ghost of Christmas present
heavenly visitation
spirit of giving
holiday turkey in the spirit
poultrygeist
whitemeat flying around
for no apparent reason
warm stuffing in your lap
that's the spirit.

Orpheus/90

Mary Lou MacIlvaine

Under Grape Ivy

When desire like a child has gone wan-
dering
And made a hide-out in a neighbor's
garden,
Staking out a sense of order
That deepens breath and calms the heart,
Playing itself out from spring to fall,

One day you want to bring things home:

The little saucepan — knock out the
leaves and dirt;
Spoons and juice glasses missing since
summer;
The red-handled broom; two eyedropper
bottles;
Pencil nubs and papers; sun-faded yellow
sweater;
Returning the garden to its simple garden
self;

The former swirl of tea parties and
friendship
Released

Into the sunshine and breeze.

Home and fresh
From building something brave and fine,
Desire takes a rest,
Content in body and mind.

Mary Lou MacIlvaine

Putting Out Annuals

Commissioning pansies
to express our caring;
Briefing Iceland poppies as
ambassadors of high ideals;
Charging sweet alyssum to
represent our well-being.

Forward, yellows!
Heads high, reds!
Looking lively, purples!

Mary Lou MacIlvaine

Pygmalia

But when your hand
Sweeps through the sand
And you say this is sea
And this is land
I see
I see!

And when you part
The curtains of my heart
And point to what is dull
And what is smart
I feel
I know it's real!

My sand is shocked to feel your hand
My heart is blinded by the light
Pushing my limits to withstand
A flash and sudden sight.

Mary Lou MacIlvaine

Contemplative Prayer

Sinking downward, muscles melting
Giving myself into the oceanic hands of God

Surrendering thought by gentle intention
Watching waves of thought roll by above

Emerging to surface on a thought
Descending back on the Word as dew on grass

Dissolved into the liquid medium of awareness
Action from our core long in action

Learning to trust and breath
The flowing waters of our origins.

Jason T. Grist

Observer Thinks a Fan

A stage for less than an hour,
Rays of eminent power
The observer thinks a fan
with hope the light expands,
So the fan soon grows narrow
And the song of a distant sparrow
Breaks the thought at best
Of the observer looking west.

Jason T. Grist

Dry Places

Route 66 in one's mind —
Necessarily so

Life legendary
As one sits still enough
To take pleasure from
Just knowing —

Like a grandchild who's at
the foot of this grandfather's

rocking chair

D r a m a

Jeffery Scott Elwell

"First Date"

Lights come up on a cross-section of the interior of a restaurant. There are a pair of square tables with white linen tablecloths set in front of a pair of dark jade cushioned benches anchored to the back wall. Captain's chairs sit opposite the benches. The restaurant is fairly dim with much of the illumination coming from small candle globes on the tables. Music from a piano bar filters into the dining area. An attractive Hostess leads a couple to one of the tables. The man, David, pulls out the chair for his date, April, who avoids the chair and seats herself on the bench. David smiles weakly at the Hostess and then sits in the chair.

HOSTESS

Your waitperson tonight will be Suzie.

(smiles)

She'll be with you momentarily.

(exits)

David and April smile at each other. He looks away. She takes the silverware from her napkin and begins inspecting it piece by piece.

DAVID

Waitperson. I just love that.

APRIL

What's wrong with it?

DAVID

It's just so politically correct.

APRIL

What should they be called?

DAVID

Waiter or waitress. I assume we have the latter.

APRIL

(still looking at silverware)

I don't believe it.

Jeffery Scott Elwell

What? DAVID

This. APRIL
(holding out knife)

What's wrong with it? DAVID

You can't see? APRIL

David shakes his head. She thrusts the knife under his nose
Spots. All over the blade.

Oh. DAVID

I can't stand dirty silverware. APRIL

I'm sure they'll give you another one. DAVID

Oh, they will. APRIL

I'll get her attention and... DAVID

I can ask her myself. APRIL

I was just trying to be... DAVID

A man. APRIL

DAVID

Excuse me?

APRIL

Men always have to exert their dominance.

DAVID

So, what do you do? We didn't get much of a chance to talk at the theater.

APRIL

A little of this and a little of that. What about you?

DAVID

I'm a writer. Correction, journalist. I work at the Times.

APRIL

Bigshot, huh?

DAVID

Not really. I cover the legislature. Most of the stories are boring, page twenty-seven stuff.

APRIL

I hate those bastards.

DAVID

Legislators?

APRIL

No, journalists.

DAVID

Oh.

APRIL

They say they're objective but...

DAVID

I wonder where that waitress is?

Jeffery Scott Elwell

APRIL

Hungry?

DAVID

Famished. I worked straight through lunch.

APRIL

That's not good. Lunch is the most important meal of the day.

DAVID

I thought it was breakfast?

APRIL

That was then....So, what do you like? Red meat?

DAVID

Sometimes.

APRIL

Let me guess, rare, dripping with blood.

DAVID

Medium-well, brown inside. You?

APRIL

I'm a vegetarian.

DAVID

Oh.

APRIL

Go on, I've heard it all before.

DAVID

Heard what?

APRIL

The jokes...the innuendoes...

DAVID

I don't know what you're talking about.

Orpheus/102

APRIL

Right.

The Waitress enters with two glasses of water and two menus.

APRIL

It's about time.

April grabs a menu from the Waitress. David smiles shyly as the Waitress hands him the other menu.

WAITRESS

Can I get you something to drink?

DAVID
(to April)

Would you...

APRIL

I'll have a vodka martini.

(holds up knife)

And a clean knife.

DAVID

Tom Collins for me.

WAITRESS

I'll be right back with your drinks.

(she exits)

DAVID

Thank you.

APRIL

She was attractive, wasn't she?

DAVID

I guess so.

APRIL

You guess so? I thought you were going to burn a hole through her the way you were staring.

Jeffery Scott Elwell

DAVID

I wasn't staring.

APRIL

Come on.

DAVID

I wasn't.

APRIL

Then you must be terribly farsighted.

DAVID

I hardly looked at her.

APRIL

Please. Give me credit for having a brain. It doesn't bother me. I've gotten used to it. I'd just like to know why men always have to do it.

DAVID

Do what?

APRIL

Look at women when they're with another woman. I'd just like to know why.

DAVID

I told you, I wasn't looking at her.

APRIL

You didn't see her?

DAVID

You know what I mean. I looked at her, I saw her, but I wasn't "looking" at her.

APRIL

You don't have to lie.

DAVID

I'm not lying.

APRIL

You don't need to yell.

DAVID

I wasn't...yes, I was yelling. Sorry. Why don't we start over?

APRIL

Fine. Why'd you ask me out?

DAVID

I don't know...I just did.

APRIL

There was no reason?

DAVID

Well, I saw you in the theater...I ran into you in the lobby...we talked...I asked you out.

APRIL

Do you always ask out women you meet in the theater?

DAVID

No...not always.

APRIL

Then why me?

DAVID

You seemed nice...friendly...

APRIL

Easy?

DAVID

No.

APRIL

You didn't think I was easy?

DAVID

No, I didn't.

Jeffery Scott Elwell

APRIL

Aggressive?

DAVID

You might have struck me as a bit aggressive. Why all the questions?

APRIL

I like to study men's thought processes.

DAVID

And how do you think I think?

APRIL

Like most men.

DAVID

Take it that's not a compliment.

APRIL

It's an answer.

DAVID

It's tough to figure you out.

APRIL

Is it?

DAVID

When we met last week you seemed to be interested in me. Now I'm not so sure.

APRIL

Interested how?

DAVID

Interested...I don't know, mentally...physically...male-female type of interested.

APRIL

Male-female type of interested...what kind of interest is that?

DAVID

Between a man and a woman.

APRIL

Companionship? Friendship?

DAVID

Yes.

APRIL

Love?

DAVID

Maybe.

APRIL

Sex?

DAVID

Sex? Where's the waitress?

APRIL

Hungry for something?

DAVID

I don't feel comfortable talking about that.

APRIL

Food?

DAVID

Sex. I'm not comfortable discussing it in public...with someone I hardly know.

APRIL

Most men do it with someone they hardly know. Besides, I don't think anyone is listening in on our conversation.

The Waitress enters with their drinks.

DAVID

Finally.

Jeffery Scott Elwell

WAITRESS

Have you decided what you want?

APRIL

We'll need a few more minutes

The Waitress exits. April picks up her menu as David takes a sip of his drink.

DAVID

Maybe this wasn't a good idea.

APRIL

I think she likes you.

DAVID

What?

APRIL

The waitress. I definitely think she likes you.

DAVID

We haven't said two words.

APRIL

Women can tell these things.

DAVID

What, do you have some type of secret radar? How can women "tell these things?"

APRIL

They just can.

DAVID

Jesus!

APRIL

Something wrong?

DAVID

Women.

Orpheus/108

APRIL

Women?

DAVID

It's impossible to figure them out.

APRIL

Maybe we don't want to be "figured out."

DAVID

Right.

APRIL

What's that supposed to mean?

DAVID

Nothing. Where's the waitress?

APRIL

It's not nothing. What? What?

DAVID

It means what it means.

APRIL

That's bullshit.

DAVID

What it means is that men and women want different things.

APRIL

Don't I know it.

DAVID

Yeah, right. Poor you and all the others like you. I don't know why I keep banging my head against the wall, things never work out.

APRIL

They don't, huh?

Jeffery Scott Elwell

DAVID

No, they don't.

APRIL

I suppose you never get what you want?

DAVID

As a matter of fact, I don't. What would you know about what I want?

APRIL

I know what you want.

DAVID

What?

APRIL

Don't play games with me. You know what you want.

DAVID

What!?

APRIL

You want to fuck me.

DAVID

What!!!

APRIL

You want to fuck me. Screw me. Nail me. Plug me. Ball me.

DAVID

Quiet down for Chrissakes. Everybody'll hear you.

APRIL

You don't want them to know that you want to fuck me?

DAVID

No!

APRIL

You don't want to fuck me?

Orpheus/110

DAVID

I...

APRIL

Don't lie to me! That's what all of you want. Dinner. Drinks. Maybe a little dancing with the classier guys. But then it's always the same. My place...their place. A kiss...they grab a breast...press up against you...you guys think we're all suckers for a hard dick.

DAVID

Hey! Hey! I'm not...

APRIL

You don't want to score me? You didn't splash on all that Aqua Velva with a little poontang in mind. You didn't spend a little extra time flossing your teeth and brushing your tongue so you could slip it to me in the car on the way home. You probably shampooed your pubic hair so it would smell nice when you forced my head into your lap. I bet you even check your condom supply to make sure that you're protected from any diseases I might have when you thrust your manhood into me. Right?

DAVID

NO!!!

APRIL

No?

DAVID

No!

APRIL

You don't want to fuck me?

DAVID

No.

APRIL

What's wrong with me?

DAVID

You...

Jeffery Scott Elwell

APRIL

My tits aren't big enough? I'm not thin enough? What/

DAVID

I'm not interested in...

APRIL

Give me a break, huh? That's all you guys ever think about.

DAVID

Look, I'm sorry you have some bad experiences with...

APRIL

Oh, ain't you the sensitive one. I'm sure you're really concerned about my life.

DAVID

I thought...

APRIL

Stop with this thinking bullshit already. You didn't think about anything but getting your dick wet. I can accept that men want one thing and women want another. What I detest...what I hate...what I loathe above all else is when a guy doesn't have the balls to admit it. Now say it.

DAVID

No.

APRIL

Say it!

DAVID

No!

APRIL

Say you want to fuck me.

DAVID

No. No. No. No. I don't. I don't want to fuck you. I don't want to kiss you. I don't want to touch you. I don't want to be with you. I don't want to look at you. I don't want to have anything to do with you. I don't have

any idea why you went out on this date with me and I don't care. I don't even want to say goodbye.

(he stands to exit)

APRIL

Don't!

DAVID

(turns to see gun in her hand)

What the hell is that supposed to be?

APRIL

Why, don't you know? It's a nice warm phallic symbol. Every girl should own one. Now sit back down.

DAVID

Go to Hell.

APRIL

Now that's not a nice thing to say. SIT DOWN!

David starts to exit again and April fires the gun, shooting him in the back. He falls to the ground, dying. She gets up and stands over him as the Waitress enters.

APRIL

No, fuck you.

(to Waitress)

Get rid of this piece of garbage.

The Waitress grabs David by the ankles and drags him off. April sits back down, takes a sip of her vodka martini and puts the gun back in her purse.

She looks at her watch, reaches into her purse and pulls out lipstick and a mirror. She re-does her lips, and then replaces the lipstick and mirror. Looking off right, she smiles and waves. The Hostess enters, followed by a man. She leads him to the table and exits.

BLACKOUT

P r o s e

Orpheus/115

Yerba Buena

Every year the yerba buena comes up, like a sea of green waves lightly swaying in a gentle breeze. There is no longer a house near the plants. There is no one to give them water unless someone happens to come walking by, like us, on this Sunday afternoon. There is no one to pick the yerba buena and brew the delicious aromatic tea with all its soothing and healing powers. But still the yerba buena comes up, perhaps in tribute to the hands that planted them here and gave them their beginning on this very site. Once someone had lived here, it had been their home. If we listen very close, we can hear the ghostly voices that are carried in the breeze.

"Miguel, come inside! It's time to wash up and eat."

"In a minute Mama, I have to feed the rabbits."

The boy's mother walks inside the house and continues her daily chore of cooking supper for her family. A large black pot bubbling with beans and bacon sits on the ancient white and chrome stove. Mama busies herself making tortillas and fresh salsa. The comal is turned on and waiting for the first tortilla. She gently kneads the flour dough into round little mounds. She takes the rolling pin and begins to pass back and forth over the floured mound. It begins to flatten and starts to take the shape of a circle. Mama places the flattened dough on the hot comal and watches the bubbles come up. When one side is cooked she quickly turns the tortilla over and cooks the other side. When she finished cooking all the tortillas, she gathers the fresh vegetables to make the salsa. In her black stone grinder, she grinds fresh cumin, garlic, and cilantro. She carefully dices the tomatoes and onion. Mama mixes all the ingredients and puts them in a bowl ready to put on the table. When she is just about finished, her daughter comes running with braids swinging wildly.

"Mama, is it almost time to eat? I'm hungry!"

"Si mija, go call your Papa and Tio Julian. They're outside with the chickens. Oh, and call Mamayita, she's out in the front watching over her plants."

Rosario runs to the front of the house to look for her grandmother. As soon as she steps off the porch, her nostrils are filled with the sweet fragrance of herbs that always seem to surround Mamayita. Rosario spots her grandmother bent over dozens of clay pots filled with herbs of different varieties.

"Mamayita, Mama says it's time to eat supper."

"Ay, *mija*, I just have to move a few of these pots against the fence, because I don't like the way the wind is blowing. You go inside and tell your mother I'll be there in a few minutes."

The old woman returned to moving and shifting the pots of precious herbs. The people in the neighborhood called Mamayita a "curandera." She could cure anything from a stomach ache to an insect bite. Her medicinal concoctions of teas and salves brought healing and comfort to the many people who came to the old curandera for help. People still talk about the time when the neighbor's baby stopped eating. The parents tried everything they could but the baby would just cry for hours. Desperately they came to Mamayita for help. They knew if the baby would not start eating soon, he would die. She brewed a few herbs together and dipped the edge of a soft cloth into the liquid. Slowly she dabbed the baby's lips with the cloth. The baby began to taste the liquid and soon he was drinking a few drops. The curandera stayed with him for three days, feeding him a few drops at a time. On the third day the baby began to take nourishment from his mother. Everybody said it was a miracle that the baby survived. Mamayita knew it was the miracle of her herbs that saved him.

Mamayita finished arranging her pots and stood up with her head held high, sniffing the air and catching a scent of wet earth. The dark clouds were moving in as she cleaned her hands on her apron and walked in the house.

Papa and Tio Julian were seated at the table talking while Mama prepared their plates. Rosario and Miguel were helping their mother set the table.

"Well, brother, you think we should go to McFarland this weekend and fight that red rooster? I sparred him with the black one this morning and I think he's going to be a winner."

"Si, you have been working hard with these two roosters. I think you're right, we just might have us another champion."

Papa was the best "gallero" in the County. People would come from as far north as Napa Valley to as far south as Palm Springs to fight one of Papa's gallos. He was respected among the other galleros because of his fair play and they knew he would never hedge on his bets.

The family sat around the table eating and talking quietly. Papa told them that the owner of the ranch was worried about this year's crops. They really needed some rain to come soon. It was unusual for this time of year

that so little rain had fallen. Mama promised she would say a rosary tonight and pray to the Virgin for rain. Miguel asked if he could be excused to go outside and make sure that his rabbits were all inside the pen he built for them. Tio Julian said he would go with Miguel and check one more time on the chickens and see if they were all in their pens for the night. Mamayita and Rosario clear the table, while Mama starts the dishes. The women work together in the kitchen and soon it is clean. Mama asks Mamayita when they are going to start canning the latest crop of fruits that came in. She says maybe they will start Saturday when the men go to fight the gallos. Mamayita says she is tired and is going to bed early. Rosario runs to her room to play with her Barbies. Papa and Mama sit in the cocina a while longer and have a cup of coffee. Papa is worried that the old curandera seems to be getting tired easily these days. Mama tells him not to be worrying about Mamayita, she is stronger than any of them. Papa joins the boys outside, and Mama goes to her room to say the rosary before bedtime.

Mama kneels in front of her make-shift altar in her room. The small table has a statue of the Virgin de Guadalupe, two candles with the picture of the Virgin painted on the front, and a jar of holy water that the priest at the church blesses for her on Sundays. Mama take her beads and starts praying. She prays for the rain to come soon and water the thirsty crops. She prays to the Virgin to keep Mamayita strong and healthy. And she prays for her family, and thanks the Virgin for giving them one more day together.

Rosario is in her room putting away her Barbie dolls. She sits in front of her dresser with the oval mirror. Slowly she starts undoing her braids and her hair cascades down her back like ripples on water. She's thinking how much fun it is going to be when Easter comes. They will all go to church together, and she will be wearing a new dress that Mamayita has made for her. Then they will drive to Visalia for a big fiesta at the park with the rest of the clan. It is so much fun to see all her aunts and uncles and the dozens of cousins she has. They will eat and play until it gets dark. Everyone will go home happy and thankful to have such a large family.

The house is still and dark when the rain begins to fall. Everyone is asleep in their beds. The old curandera stirs in her bed and wakes up. She has to get up and walk around. Her old bones ache from being immobile. She knew they were going to have rain tonight from the way her bones were hurting. She gets up and walks down the hallway. Rosario is sound asleep,

dreaming of a yellow Easter dress. Miguel fidgeting in his bed settles down into a sound slumber. Mamayita walks out to the porch and settles herself into an old rocking chair. She begins to rock, the chair creaking and swaying with each pass. Before long, lightening flashes in the sky, then the loud clap of thunder begins. Mamayita sits in her chair watching the rain. She lets the peace of the cool rain wash over her. The earth smells fresh and clean and the scent of the herbs linger in the night air. The lightening crackles, and the light illuminates Mamayita's white nightgown, giving her a ghost-like appearance. Is she really a ghost? Did people actually live here?

On this Sunday afternoon we can only stand here and wonder about the home once occupied by a family that made tortillas, fought gallos, had rabbits, dreamed of yellow Easter dresses, and grew magic herbs in clay pots. Still, the yerba buena comes up each year to attest to the fact that once there was a family and carries that sweet message in the gentle breezes.

Untitled

Big Mama's voice came racing around the corner, jolting me into conscientiousness, "Vester and Hattie y'all better get up, those chickens ain't gonna feed themselves!" Big Mama was a burly woman with skin the color of dark swiss chocolate. Her baritone voice would bellow warmly through your body when she spoke to you. Everyone had to look up at Big Mama because she stood at 5'10"; her plump round face always wore a smile, and when it did, her eyes would sparkle like sunlight dancing across the pond on Old Man River's land mid-morning.

Big Mama's house was old, the wood floors smelled of fresh pine and when you walked into the kitchen, old creaky would announce your presence. The walls were painted a chestnut brown, warm and inviting. In the mornings when you walked into the kitchen, the scent of bacon covered in brown sugar and frying in the skillet permeated your nostrils, and the sound of fried eggs sizzling, cracking and rocking in tune would sing in your ears.

Big Mama always gave me a hug when I came in for breakfast; she'd open her arms wide and envelop my small body, and I would plant my face into her pillowy soft chest, as she squeezed me into fresh lemonade. The scent of vanilla accompanied by a hint of chewing tobacco would dance its way into my nose as I closed my eyes and felt Big Mama's love seeping its way through my skin and resting deep within my heart.

We never had enough money to go to camp in the summertime, which was always okay with my cousin Vester and I, because we would always be sent to Big Mama's instead. While our friends were stuck at some snooty camp with military rules, we'd be allowed to run wildly through the back woods and alleys, like uncaged animals in Bryan, Texas. The air in Texas in the summertime was always sticky, humid and scorching. Most days we would wade in the pond on Old Man Rivers' property; the steam would seep up through the smoky black asphalt like smoke coming off the bacon in Big Mama's skillet, burning the toes of kids who weren't smart enough to keep their sandals on. While they would be walking on their heels muttering words of, "Och, Ouch and Uchy Uch Uch," we'd be lazily floating on the pond as the cool water tickled us between our toes.

Weighing all of 79 pounds with pony tails that hung to her shoulder, my cousin Vester was a skinny little kid whom Big Mama had nicknamed "String Bean." She could squeeze in between the locked gates at the high

school, leaving me to climb over the top. We'd go there and pretend that we were senior high girls. Vester would strut down the hall shaking her hips in a boom boom swing, in the direction of all the smelly sweaty boys, as they came out of the musky athletic room after practice. Big Mama would tell her that being fast like that wasn't going to lead to nothing good, and that it would bring upon her nothing but troubles and bad days. I'd just snicker with laughter inside every time she did her boom boom shake.

One time Vester bet me two whole big red pop bottles that she could cook scrambled eggs on the sidewalk. I told her that it was a dumb idea, because ain't nobody ever heard of a person cooking on the sidewalk before, but with those bottles, I could run down to the corner store and cash them in, which would give me just enough money to buy a deluxe cheeseburger from Jake's. I could taste that warm juicy double cheeseburger smothered in secret sauce, that was just thousand island dressing, mixing with the saliva in my mouth, as we made the bet.

Anyhow, Vester slipped into Big Mama's kitchen making sure to tip toe around the creaky spots. A gust of cold refrigerated air briskly chilled her face as she slowly opened the icebox, being careful not to make a sound. If Big Mama caught us swiping her eggs, she'd be sure and tan our rear ends good. Reaching into the box, Vester's spindly fingers attached themselves to two of Big Mama's freshest brown speckled colored eggs. I inhaled the air deeply, turning, twisting and tightening in my lungs, I let it linger there in fear of Big Mama hearing it as it made its escape into the atmosphere as Vester made her way towards the door with her prize. Once outside, we both let out the dry stale air that we'd been holding inside, tasting the sweetness that comes with inhaling a fresh breath; we grinned with delight that we had been able to pull off the theft.

We decided to use the sidewalk in front of Mrs. Johnson's house. The sun was always beating down upon Mrs. Johnson's house as if it had a grudge against her. Her roses wilting and tired somehow managed to survive. We crouched down, dusting off the sidewalk making a clean cooking surface area. Cracking the eggs against the edge of the sidewalk, we held them up and watched as their slimy, slippery liquid contents slowly slithered out of their shells, plopping onto the blazing hot sidewalk, whistling, crackling and sizzling as they landed.

Vester began pouring in some red clay dirt for seasoning, I took a spindly twig and began scrambling them. Little bubbles began to form, popping, exploding and releasing the eggs fragrant scent into the summer

air. Rusty, a scraggly unwashed mutt, came bumbling across the street, sniffing the air as if he was hunting rabbits for supper. Spotting the eggs Rusty plundered into Vester pushing her aside with his wet nose. I quickly dove for him, grabbing a huge part of his flea infested fur with my left hand, even though I had a hold of him, that mutt managed to squeeze in between the two of us and began lapping up our scrambled egg concoction.

Vester fell head first onto the sidewalk releasing a curdled gut wrenching scream, Big Mama thinking the dog was attacking us, came racing out of the house with her skirt tail flying behind her. With her mammoth-sized hands, she reached in, grabbing the dog by his collar, and pulled him from in between us. Then she spied her *fresh from this morning pickings* eggs half eaten and half cooked on the sidewalk. Releasing the mutt, Big Mama's gladiator hands flew up into the air and our bodies tensed up stiff as boards, making themselves ready for the impending blow.

Her hands, descending in our direction, found a comfortable home upon her hips as she rocked back on her heels, her back bending. Then, from somewhere deep inside of her gut came the loudest belly laugh we'd ever heard. Her belly jiggled like fresh hammock cheese jam, as tiny lakes of salt water drizzled from her eyes. Then, from Big Mama's thick full lips came the words, "I've done that too."

A Sensitive Man

"You're on in five minutes Mr. Turnbuck."

"Ms. Scattereded, I have a watch. I know what time it is."

"Sorry sir."

"How do I look?"

"Your tie is all wrong. Let me fix it for you." The young secretary stepped toward her boss and grappled with his excessively wide tie with her thin, frail fingers.

"That's too tight. Can you loosen it please?" He released a heavy sigh. The skin overflowing his collar was turning a raspberry red. "My God, it feels like a noose around my neck."

"There you go, sir. That looks much better. You really should learn how to knot your own tie."

"Maybe later. Did you stand behind the curtain and watch to see who has come into the auditorium like I asked you to?"

"Yes sir, I have."

"Well?"

"Well?', what, sir?"

"Who's here? Are you listening to me? Who did you recognize?"

"Sorry Mr. Turnbuck. I saw Nick Winters enter with a number of others who belong to the Ambassadors of Nature group."

"Ah, Winters, he just couldn't stay away. That man believes that he has been given the sole responsibility for saving the animals on this planet, and he will not abort this mission of his until he has liberated the fauna of Kern County from the tyranny of economic development. Haah," the man smirks to himself, "I don't sweat him a bit."

"But, Mr. Turnbuck, what about his argument that the freeway project twill displace one of the most ecologically sensitive areas in Bakersfield? Won't a traffic corridor mar the Kern River landscape, eliminating it aesthetic value, as well as reducing its functionality as a recreational area for people and a habitat for indigenous animals and plants? I think that Mrs. Winters has a..."

"Nick Winters doesn't have two brain cells to rub together to start a fire. The fact of the matter is that his freeway project is a 'quality of life' issue. Our objective is to enhance the individual lives of the tax payers in west Bakersfield by providing those residents with easy access to modern, safe, efficacious roadways, not to step aside and allow a granola stuffed longhair

determine what family is more important: a den full of field mice or a mini van packed with children."

"Who else did you spot in the audience Ms. Scatcherd?"

"Daniel Bettsbridge is here, sir."

"Daniel the spaniel. The man, who after forty years of lethargy, finally pulled his head out of his rear and fetched himself a cause. Did he bring anybody with him?"

"Yes, Mr. Turnbuck, there is quite a large crowd that entered the room and is sitting with him. They must be other residents of the neighborhood that doesn't want the freeway to go through their backyards.

"You know, Ms. Scatcherd, I will never understand these people. Do they want to stay a little sheep pen, fruit stand, plow and plant kind of town, or do they want to ride the crest of the times into the twenty-first century? The problem with these hicks is that they can't make up their minds. That is why I get paid to decide for them. These dim wits don't have the ability to see the larger picture as I do. Oh, thank God for that." Mr. Turnbuck then threw up his hands, stretching them to the ceiling, mimicking a believer at a Holy Ghost crusade.

"I hate to interrupt your personal revival, sir, but you are expected at the podium in one minute."

"Ok. Don't press me, you'll make me nervous, and this is one night that I want to keep my cool. One last question: is Sal Kraussley out there?"

"Yes he is."

"Damn him! He is the one person in this whole fiasco, this bowl full of mixed nuts, that frustrates me the most." Mr. Turnbuck, trembling with indignation for Mr. Kraussley and suffering the knowledge that he must endure an hour of scrutiny, began egesting little globules of moisture from his bald head. Ms. Scatcherd rushed forward with a Kleenex from her purse to remove the gathering perspiration. An unexpected glare from his shiny forehead struck her eyes and blinded her momentarily. Although she could not see, her momentum continued to carry her forward and she clubbed his skull hard with her fist.

"Ms. Scatcherd, you idiot!"

"I'm so sorry, sir." With much trepidation, she completed the task of mopping his forehead.

"As I was saying, it is Mr. Kraussley who I find to be the biggest fool of all. I don't understand him. We are both businessmen. And he, being the manager of the Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District, should recognize

the sweet deal that I am trying to give him. I have bent over backwards to make that guy happy. I've promised to repay him double and triple every acre that we take away and pave over. But all that lunatic keeps talking about are his recharge capabilities: 'Our ponds are located upon superb percolation ground. The material is coarse; there is greater spacing between the grains of sand which enables more water to pass through. This is a naturally occurring phenomena, and we are unwilling to relinquish this ground for any other piece of ground that you would like to give us. It just could never do what our ponds can do.' Blah, blah, blah, and more nonsense and more garbage."

Mr. Turnbuck was now worked into a full blown frenzy. Suddenly, an amplified voice could be heard announcing on the other side of the drawn curtain, "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming out tonight to participate in our town hall style meeting." His eyes flashed and, throwing his head in the direction of the speaker, he contorted his body into such a position that it was evident Mr. Turnbuck did not plan on missing a single word. The announcer continued after allowing his introduction to sink in: "The Kern River Freeway project has proven itself to be a divisive issue for our community. But, in spite of this, ladies and gentlemen, we are all gathered here tonight to seek a compromise because..."

"I am dead set on this freeway, and I will not change my mind."

"...and this is why you can all be assured that this is an impersonal matter and we can, therefore, discuss it rationally and dispassionately..."

"I will not be made to look like a fool in front of my constituents and my board members!"

"So now, without further ado, I would like to introduce to you, the director of the Kern Council of Governments, Will Turnbuck..."

"I stand to lose too much. This freeway WILL GO THROUGH!!"

In the midst of a genuine tantrum, Will Turnbuck stomped upon the stage with such emotion that it captured an echo and broadcast it out into the large room with the waiting audience. The announcer, anticipating Mr. Turnbuck's appearance, paused and rolled his eyes into the direction where the sound originated from. A soft murmur could be heard spreading through the crowd. The disheveled man behind the curtain, startled by his own outburst, struggled to subdue his agitation and restore a proper appearance.

Before quitting his back stage sanctuary for the podium, Turnbuck shot an ironic smile to his secretary. She caught it and fired it back to him with

even greater force. The crowd was silenced by his appearance, and he took his time in crossing the stage to the microphone. Will Turnbuck was now in complete control. He took possession of his wits, manufactured some charm, and cleared his throat. Looking up at the room full of people and panning over the many faces, he eased into the role: "Fellow citizens of Bakersfield, I feel privileged to have the opportunity to stand before you tonight. You will find that I am a sensitive man. I am sensitive to your fears and your concerns. My job is to reassure the taxpayers of this community that their needs will be met. And I will not stop working until you are satisfied."

The Gift

Standing loosely behind the sturdy mahogany podium, Solomon gazed across the overcrowded room, and admired the many beautiful shades of black. From the light-bright-almost-white faces, to the blue-black ones, there was a wonderful rainbow of African-Americans throughout the auditorium. The hall smelled of one-hundred different perfumes and colognes: some flowery, some clean, some fruity, but collectively overwhelming. And there stood Solomon, diminutive in stature, yet enormous in attitude. His white silk shirt glistened underneath the hot bright lights, as he continued to gaze about the crowd. He knew what they were there for – what they needed – and he was more than able to give it to them. Solomon then methodically closed his eyes and bowed his head, prayed silently to himself, lifted his head and eyelids...and then began to speak. His booming voice cracked the thick air of anticipation like a snow cap on a mountain top just before an avalanche. And just as an avalanche, there was no stopping the magnificent spectacle that was about to take place.

Solomon's words, powerful and precise, received immediate feedback. He hadn't finished his first full sentence when the elegantly dressed crowd uncontrollably erupted into a thunderous ovation. The applause was so great that the sound waves rattled the large, rectangular stained glass windows on both sides of the building – cracking three of them. However, at the time, no one noticed – no one cared. Everyone was captivated by Solomon's electrifying lecture. But just as abruptly as the applause began, it ceased. It was more than just silence, the atmosphere was so serene, it seemed as though time were standing still. Solomon looked as if he had just smelled something peculiar. His tie felt as if it were tightening around his thick neck – a silk noose. Beads of sweat gathered across his broad forehead, while he contemplated whether or not he should begin speaking again. Suddenly, Dr. Hardy, a psychiatrist who hadn't spoken a word since his wife's death (although he was once humorous and outgoing) stood up from the middle section of the audience and yelled at the top of his high-pitched voice, "Preach it, Solo! Preach it! You high-yellow social phobia havin' fool!" The seemingly sedated crowd exploded into laughter and cheers. Relaxed by this much more normal turn of events, Solomon eagerly began to speak. He spoke as he always did at public gatherings: confident, forceful, and without hesitation. He had them – they were his. Every

woman wanted to date him, and every man wanted to be him. But whether it was Solomon's words, or Dr. Hardy's outburst, something strange began to happen. There were character reversals among the church members. A young, cocky, professional football player named Rocky Adidas openly wept. Not just a few sprinkles of tears edging down his rosy cheeks... but huge water balloon-like bombs were bouncing off his massive chest onto his tan Dockers, creating an embarrassing stain. Brother Watkins, a behemoth of a man, his butt planted deeply within the cushion of the pew, struggling to rock his girth, positioning himself to roll forward, frees himself from the bondage that is himself, and sprints (albeit the sprint of a big man) around the church - twice. And in similar fashion to the traditional tossing of the graduation cap, old sister Johnson snatches off her veiled blue and white Beverly Hills Boutique original, and hurls it into the extravagant chandelier overhead. And there they hung: the veil, the hat, the hat pin, and sister Johnson's wig. Kids stared sternly at their parents, shaking their heads abruptly in disapproval, and making loud shushing noises by pressing their index fingers firmly against their pouched lips. It was a mad house, yet Solomon continued to dynamically and unaffectedly speak to the distinguished crowd.

Solomon completed his oration then methodically closed his eyes and bowed his head, prayed silently to himself, lifted his head and eyelids, and descended from the pulpit. He pulled at his shirt repeatedly to give his body air, and to separate the silk from his brown, semi-muscular chest. When he reached the bottom step, he was immediately overrun with a multitude of members from the congregation. Some sobbing, some laughing, but all wanting to talk to him - to touch him - to express their gratitude. "Solo," a young woman cried, "I felt as if you were talking direc..."

"Solo my boy, you are a preachin' Mother..."

"Solo, could you pray for?..."

"Solo dear, I want you to meet my dau..."

But Solomon avoided eye contact, dodged his way through the overbearing crowd, occasionally shook hands, and escaped through the back door. Solomon searched for his car in the spacious parking lot. He had parked in a dark, lonely corner of the lot, underneath a broken lamp. However, when he got within eye view of his car, he saw twenty people waiting for him. Though it was an unassuming vehicle, it was easy for them to find Solomon's car - compact, low to the ground, and wide (almost chubby). But the car had a secret, a booming stereo, powerful enough to raise the

dead. However, he only played it in soundoff competitions. Wanting to avoid the crowd, he decided to take the bus to the diner where he had planned to meet his fiancé.

In the unusually crowded diner, Solomon sat at an isolated booth in the corner that allowed him to see Main St. through the restaurant's large square-shaped windows. The rattling of dishes, and the unidentifiable murmur of twenty separate conversations occupied Solomon's mind. The diner smelled of freshly baked sweet-potato pie which caused his stomach to violently growl. He stopped reading the back of the pink packet of Sweet-n-Low to look out the window, and there she was – the sun of his world. Though her name was Alicia (pronounced Ah-lee-see-uh, as she was quick to correct anyone who mispronounced it), he called her Chatter. She was helping an elderly woman who had packages and children to cross the street. The diner seemed brighter when she bounded into the room. "Yi-Ya, Turkey-butt...Sorry I didn't catch all of your speech...Adrian needed to talk...I came in when...Hey! I didn't know Mrs. Johnson was bald...You looked cute up there...You were sweatinnnnnn'...I could see your boobies through that shirt...whatcha order for me to eat Babe? He deeply loved Chatter. Her bright and loving character reminded him of how his mother once had been. Chatter continued to talk, her chameleon-like eyes (sometimes green, sometimes hazel) sparkling like two full glasses of Dom Perignon. She talked, and Solomon thought. He thought of how much he hated to wear underwear. Not just briefs, like the pair he was wearing, but all kinds: boxers, bikinis, thermals. He wouldn't wear any at all if he weren't so terrified of being robbed in a crowded place, and forced to strip – revealing his secret. When he faded back into reality he heard (in passing) Chatter ask an intriguing question. "Solly Babe, why are you so quiet?...I don't mind...I like you quiet...This chicken is dry...How's your soup...Look at that precious baby...When can we have a ..."? Solomon wasn't quiet because he was shy, nor was it because he didn't have anything to say. He was confused. He often compared his life to Polliocci's, the famous circus clown who was able to bring joy to thousands with his gift of making people laugh, though later he committed suicide.

Chatter drove Solomon back to the church. When they drove into the lot, she notice that there were people waiting by Solomon's car. "Solly babe, you got visitors...Did I say you spoke well tonight...I wonder if Mrs. Johnson got her hat down...gimme kiss Babe I gotta go help Mom tonight...Be nice to 'em Solly...Love-ya..." Solomon gave Chatter an

innocent, short kiss good-bye, looked at his watch, and hesitantly ambled to his car. The night air immediately made his nipples erect. He watched the breath expel from their mouths in puffs of mist, as they huddled together to try and keep warm. "Solo, your words changed my..."

"Solo, I believe you are one of God's..."

"Solo dear, I want you to meet my dau..."

Solomon curtly exchanged pleasantries while pushing his way through the crowd and drove home.

He pulled into the driveway, and saw that the kitchen light was on, so he waited. He thought about the previous events of the day: the way the church smelled, big brother Watkins, Chatter's conversations. He had just started to think about Polliocci when the light in the kitchen went out. He slowly walked to the door, taking the time to notice everything: the lawn, the rose bushes, his dirty car. He stood at the door for several minutes looking for his keys — though they were in his left hand. He found his keys and hesitantly cracked open the door. As he peeked his head around the corner of the door, a violent odor of butt, dirty feet, and beer laced breath consumed his nostrils. He walked into the hallway, looked into the living-room, and there lay his father — naked as the day he was born, snoring loudly, with drool running down the side of his cheek. He inched his way down the dark hallway, running his hand along the side of the wall. Suddenly, the door on his right swings open, and the light momentarily blinds him. He hears the erratic voice of his younger brother ask, "Solo, am I the Anti-Christ? I don't know if it's the drugs or what, but there are voices in my head telling me that I'm evil." Still confused by the light, Solomon squints his eyes to find the doorknob, shakes his head to answer the question and closes the door leaving his brother in the room. Solomon wanted to check on his Mother before he went to sleep, so he knocked respectfully on her door. Solomon's Mother was the sunset of his world — a defeated version of Chatter — he loved her deeply. "Is that you Solly Babe?" she asked. "How'd your speech go? — good? I'm sorry I missed another one, I'm just too tired. You know your older brother called tonight. He got mad at me 'cause I didn't have any more money to give him for his AZT medicine." Solomon gave her an innocent, short kiss goodnight on her weary, wrinkled brow and went somberly to his room. Solomon sat in the dark at the foot of his bed. He held his face in his small chubby hands while he rested his elbows on his shaking knees. He tried to drown out the deafening sounds of the hysterical laughter, sobbing and snoring with music, but it

didn't work. As thoughts of Polliocci entered into his mind, Solomon said aloud in a weak, defeated tone, as though someone were listening, "I hate my life."

The Beer Run

Winters in Bakersfield can be foggy and cold, but not this one; this one had been rainy instead. The sun had not shown itself for several days, and the darkness of the clouds and the cold breeze only helped to give the night a gloomy feeling. It had not rained hard today but had sprinkled throughout the day.

On almost every other normal Friday afternoon, the boys and girls on Lucky street would have been sitting out in the back yard, around a bonfire, passing around a forty-ounce bottle of cheap beer. However, the uncooperative weather today had forced them to seek shelter around the fireplace in this old, dilapidated, abandoned house. From one of the rooms, the smell of marijuana emanated to mix with the much softer smell of candles, burning for both light and heat. From that same room, soft voices could be heard in the darkness, just whispers, and an occasional giggle; nothing compared to the loud and hearty laughs around the fireplace. This is where the fun was. For whenever this group of 'homeboys' and 'homegirls' came together like this, they would spend much of the time telling jokes, making fun of each other, and just having a good time.

Miguel, in particular, liked these times because around the fire is where he learned much about the important goings-on in the *hood*, as he liked to call it. It was around the fire that he found out who had just been arrested and for what; who had just gotten out and who was going to get out of prison soon; who was on the run; who shot who; and in general, all sorts of information necessary for survival in the streets. To receive the bottle that was being passed to him, he sat up from the pillow where he laid and sat up Indian-style on the hard wooden floor. He wasn't a big drinker, but it had been a long day. He wasn't sleepy, only tired; so he took a big gulp, hoping that it would make him feel better and passed the almost empty bottle to Beto, who finished it. Even in these wet, cold days a good drink felt good to Miguel, almost as good as passing Trigonometry or English exams with an "A" or being on the Dean's List at South High school. As he laid himself back down on the dirty white pillow, all other eight people around the fireplace laughed hard. He looked around to see what was so funny. He didn't get it; maybe the joke was on him; he didn't know. He put his hands behind his head and closed his eyes. No one said anything.

Beto got up to dispose of the empty bottle, not in the trash can outside, but on one of the dusty counters in what was supposed to be the kitchen.

He carefully placed it there where it would join the collection of dark glass bottles and aluminum cans of different sizes and brands of beer. He then strolled back into the big room with the fireplace, and from the ice chest in the corner pulled out the last bottle. He opened it, took only a small sip this time, and passed it along.

"Hey, fool, you're fucking up the rotation." Lety's voice sounded strong but not very serious.

"Yeah, punk, it's supposed to be rotating to the right, always to the right," this time it was Greg jumping in.

Everyone laughed, even Beto. It was an old joke but always funny. Beto found his way to the wooden box he had been using as a seat. One of the other guys was busy throwing pieces of scrap wood into the fireplace to keep it going.

"It's the last one. After this someone's gonna have to go on a mission to get some more," Beto said, pointing to the bottle as he sat down.

At this, Miguel opened his eyes, picked up his head and said, "If you're looking for volunteers, I'll go." He was the only one in this group of troublemakers who had a job and was still in school. He was proud of that, even when the homeboys teased him about it. He was no average student either; somehow he always managed to get excellent grades.

"You down?" Beto said, more as a comment, as part of a ritual, than as a question.

"Simon, ese, I'm down. I can do it," Miguel said, putting his head back down and closing his eyes once more.

Someone knocked on the door and the place got silent. For a few seconds only the crackling of the fireplace and the soft sprinkling of the rain outside could be heard.

"Who is it?" This time Lety's beautiful voice was powerful, strong and serious. As usual, her voice demanded respect and authority. Sometimes they joked that she had the voice of a lawyer or a politician. If she had stayed in school, maybe someday she would have become one, but she had dropped out her sophomore year and going back to school was out of the question.

"Damn it. It's me, Casper. Open the damn door 'fore I knock it down."

They all looked at each other. The door was locked. No one wanted to get up.

"Go around the back. The back door is open." Beto's voice was

starting to sound slurry, but it was loud enough for whoever was at the door to understand and trek around the back.

"Just what we needed," he continued, "a ride."

"What's up?" Casper walked through the back door a few moment later with the usual greeting.

"What's up?" Some of the boys and girls responded. Others just nodded their heads in acknowledgment.

"Where's the party?" Casper was always active, his voice loud and cherry, looking for action.

"Man, ain't no party that I know of." Beto had no reason to raise his voice, but he did anyway. Putting out his hands closer to the fire to warm them up, he went on, "And that's all the beer we've got right there."

They sometimes looked up to him. He was built big and strong, and his physical strength came in handy in case of a fight. None of them would have wanted to have Beto against them, but then they didn't want to be under his command either. One of the reasons why most of these boys and girls had dropped out of school was that they just could not work well under someone else's authority.

Someone sitting right next to the fire spoke up, "Well, since you're gonna be the one drinking the most, I think you should be the one to go get it, Beto."

"Punk...", Beto was about to respond with obscenities, but Miguel jumped in.

"I'll go along with you."

"I wanna go too," Lety volunteered. They all liked her because, in addition to her good looks and sense of humor, she was always courageous. She could always be counted on to go on missions. She got up, fixed her baggy blue jeans, and zipped up the thick, blue corduroy jacket. Then she put her pretty, long, black hair in a ponytail and said, "Let's go."

Miguel got up, shaking the dust off his pants. He pulled a palm comb out of his pocket and slicked back his hair. The four of them walked out into the cold; this time through the front door, in single file.

"Good luck," they heard someone sitting close to the fire say as they closed the door behind them. And they were on their way.

The road was wet and shiny.

"Got any *frajos*?" Beto's question was not directed at anyone in particular, but in response, Casper pulled out a pack of Camels from his coat

pocket. Beto took one and passed the pack along. They all lit up and settled in the usual 'cruising mode.'

There were only a few cars on the road. The shiny, light brown 1982, two-door Oldsmobile had almost the whole road to itself. Casper and Beto in the front cracked their windows a bit to let out the smoke and some fresh air in.

"Did you guys hear what happened to Efrain?" Casper almost had to scream out his question to be heard over the loud, thumping, rap music. "He got busted this morning. They said he had the FBI, Highway Patrol, Sheriffs... Heck, even the dog pound was there to make sure he didn't get away. They found coke, weed, money, the whole works. He's gonna be doing a long time, it sounds like to me." No one said anything. They already knew. News like that traveled fast. Miguel and Lety, in the back seat, looked at each other and smiled, knowing that Casper exaggerated a little.

Next to sitting around the fireplace or around a bonfire, Miguel's second favorite pastime was cruising around like they were doing now. This time, in addition, he had the added pleasure of sitting next to beautiful Lety. He looked over his shoulder admiring her legs, hands and hair. He loved to watch her smoke. The way she blew out the smoke in a long, skinny stream that went straight out through the crack in the window excited him. When she looked over to him, he smiled, blushed and looked away. He stared out the window. Someday he would build up the courage to ask her out, but tonight, they were on a mission.

A few minutes later, they parked the Oldsmobile in a dark corner behind a small convenience store. Miguel pulled the switch blade he always carried in his pocket and handed it over to Beto. They left the engine running and the doors open and walked in. There was no need to say anything; they all knew the plan. Looking as calm as they could, they each grabbed a 24-pack of Budweiser in each hand, aware that they were being watched. They walked to the counter as though they were going to pay; only, once close enough to the exit, all four of them went for the run. At the same time, one of the store attendants went on pursuit, while the other one reached for a hand gun under the counter. On other occasions, these youngsters would have been free as soon as they had run out of the store, but this time, things got complicated. They had not expected to be chased, much less to be chased with a gun. As they threw the beer in the back set of the car, two shots rang in the middle of the night, and Miguel felt a bullet

fly by, less than a foot away from his head. In shock, he turned around and saw Beto on his knees. Both of the store attendants were right there standing behind him, breathing hard; one of them still pointing the small shiny gun at Beto's head. Miguel looked around and saw Lety jumping the fence behind them; Beto on his knees, hurt, maybe even dying; Casper standing next to him with his hands up; the angry store attendant staring, ready to shoot again, if necessary.

The mission was in jeopardy.

It was a do or die situation.

Flee or fight.

He calmly turned around and easily jumped the fence where Lety had jumped a few seconds ago. He landed on a puddle of mud, shook it off, and kept on going. A few fences later, he saw Lety jogging down the dark side of a quiet street. He struggled to catch up to her; she was in much better shape. The adrenaline kept him going even though his chest was hurting, and he could hardly breathe. Together they ran through backyards, alleys, through Potomac Park, along the canal, and across railroad tracks. It had started to rain again, and in the distance they could hear the distinct sound of sirens. He was about to give up when he saw her slow down next to an old wooden fence.

"I think we're safe," is all she said. She put her hands on her knees and breathed deeply a few times; then she wiped the sweat off her forehead.

"What do we do now?" Miguel had to ask out loud, more to himself than to her. This was a situation that advanced math and science classes at South High had not prepared him for.

"Relax, I think we got away and we're close to the path already."

He didn't know if it was the beauty of her face, the strength of her voice, or the calmness of the night that comforted him, but he felt better even though his heart was still racing. To his surprise, she hugged him. He hugged her back and felt the warmth and softness of her body. Then she kissed him gently, and he kissed her back. Holding hands, they slowly walked the short distance to the house. They had to jump the fence and went in through the backyard. They walked in quietly, wiping the mud off their shoes on the grass.

This time the voices inside were even louder. The fire in the fireplace was almost out but the candles kept the place lit up, and everyone was standing around, not sitting. To their surprise, they saw Casper slamming down a beer, and one of the homegirls pouring another one over Beto's

head.

"What happened?" Lety asked, again taking control of the situation.

"That punk ass Arab shot me in the head," Beto said in pain. "You didn't think I was gonna let him get away with that? Did you? And on top of that he was gonna turn us in to the police; so I had to bump him."

"What do you mean you 'had to bump him'?" Miguel asked as he opened his own beer.

"Yeah, I shanked him five times, and Casper beat up the other one."

"Hell yeah," Casper jumped in, "and we got away with the beer and his gun." He said brandishing the shiny weapon. Now he was bragging.

"Are you gonna be ok, homey?" Miguel could not help but show some concern.

"Yeah, I'll be alright. I think it was just a scratch. I'll make it."

The conversation for the rest of the night involved this adventure. All four of the participants had the chance to tell their side of the story. With the effects of the beer and the excitement of the night, everyone finally settled down in the early morning. Miguel was content. The mission had been a success after all, and he got to sleep next to the fireplace, cuddled up with Lety.

Drive

The waves of heat shimmered like water as Fiore drove, self-entranced by the white dashed lines of the highway. She felt in control when she drove, memorizing the landscape like a map, the forest green exit signs, the beef jerky stands on dirt turnouts. She could hear the atlas pages, like a small photograph album of the places she'd been and lived, flipped in the back seat with hot air from the car fan. The synthetic car air was stale and stuffy, but the air outside wasn't any better.

She glanced at the sun-faded picture on her car dash. It was taken at Denver International Airport. The inhabitants of the picture were teary-eyed and red-faced, clinging to one another, their faces were as familiar to her as the tattered blue jeans she was wearing. The map of Denver was well known in her mind, hiding a deep code of meaning, capturing the wisdom of a childhood. Fiore used to fly back, back to what was familiar. She envisioned the chaotic jumble of diagonal downtown streets between the reality of jagged golden hills. She yearned for the peaceful calm of snow landing on the earth, all the bitter-coffee nights in the Bear Valley IHOP. The security of Denver was the only welcoming warmth she welcomed.

The smoke from her just-lit Camel cigarette filled the car. Fiore cracked the window for relief. The harsh heat blew her hair around harder, whipping her in the face. The pages sitting in the back seat whipped fiercely.

The shuffling pages triggered another map, less familiar, yet meaningful. It contained the road she was traveling now. It was only three years before that this map was just a new challenge to her. It was of some town called Bakersfield in some state she'd never been to.

When she had first seen the terrain, she marveled at how different it was. How alien it was to her; how alien she was to it. California hadn't looked as she expected. She'd marveled how palm trees grew everywhere. Those had only inhabited TV or movies. She noticed how it only grew so green where there was water. Even her new street name sounded so different. Joelyle. She searched her neighborhood for others, yet it seemed so lifeless. It was too quiet. She didn't want to live on Beaver Cleaver's street anymore.

Fiore pushed the gas pedal harder and cracked the window a little more. She couldn't get used to the fact that no matter how fast she drove, she could never get a cool breeze. Why hadn't she gotten that air-conditioning

package for the Corolla? She imagined the paint rolling off of her cheap plastic dashboard hula girl.

Below the transparent drips of the plastic hula girl dwelled another picture. It was less faded than the other picture on the dash. It held only Fiore and two others; their faces were much like hers, and their arms held each other while their hair dripped water from the pool.

It was taken at their house. Before, the house had been muffled by wallpaper; they had freed the walls, ripping the gaudy paper down, bathing the house with ivory paint. A jungle of dying plants and unkempt trees had choked the back yard. They pruned and watered the earth until the plants bloomed again. After that transformation, even the birds had seemed to sing again and the chaotic frog choir in the yard became louder and more triumphant.

The heat in the car was climbing. Fiore rolled all the windows down. The shade of a blanket of clouds rolled over highway 61. Suddenly a cool breeze swept through the car. The atlas caught flight and soared out the window. The two pictures took after it, finding themselves received by a large dust whirlwind. They looped and meandered across the sky, left forever behind Fiore's path.

Terror struck Fiore in the heart, yet the wind felt raw, like truth. It played a weightless song of knowledge into her left ear, opening up a chasm of understanding. An alarming sense of relief blew through Fiore's body like a train through a dark tunnel, only emerging into blinding light.

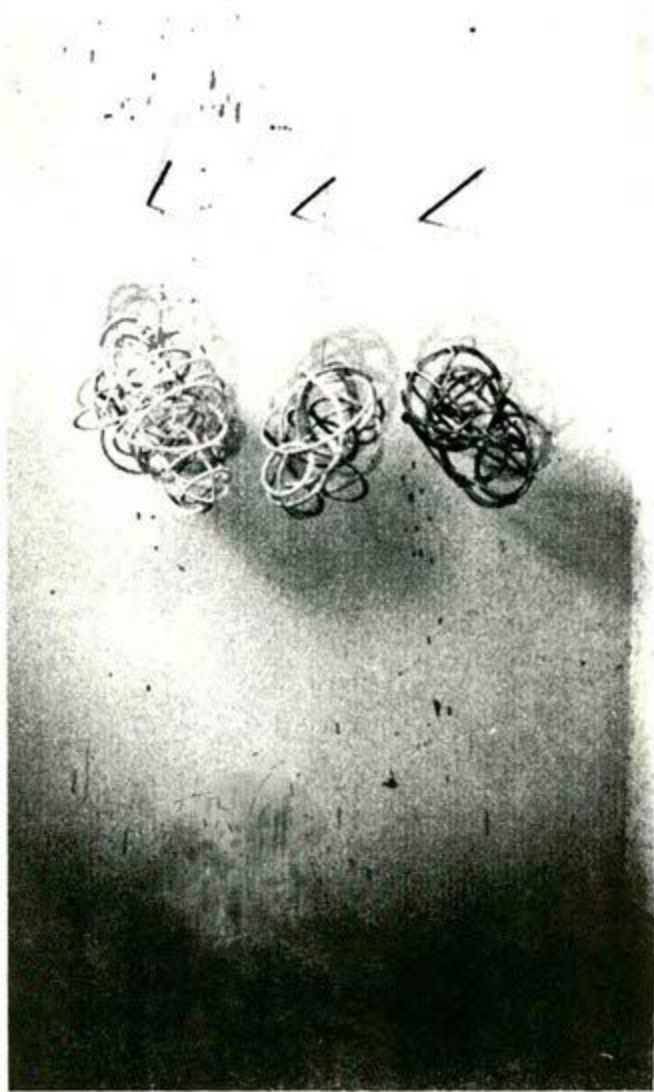
She instantly had forgotten her destination; even the car seemed faster and lighter as she blasted over the asphalt. The land looked tangible all of a sudden, the stretch of the road grew so enormous; the smell of the earth twisted inside her.

That urge for security released its firm grasp. Fiore no longer inhabited those maps or pictures. She found them inhabiting her, burrowing within her memory. She was beyond the "You Are Here" of maps. Beyond pictures. Beyond time. Filling her lungs full of the momentary cool, crisp air, Fiore continued her journey. Her only direction now being Forward. Further.

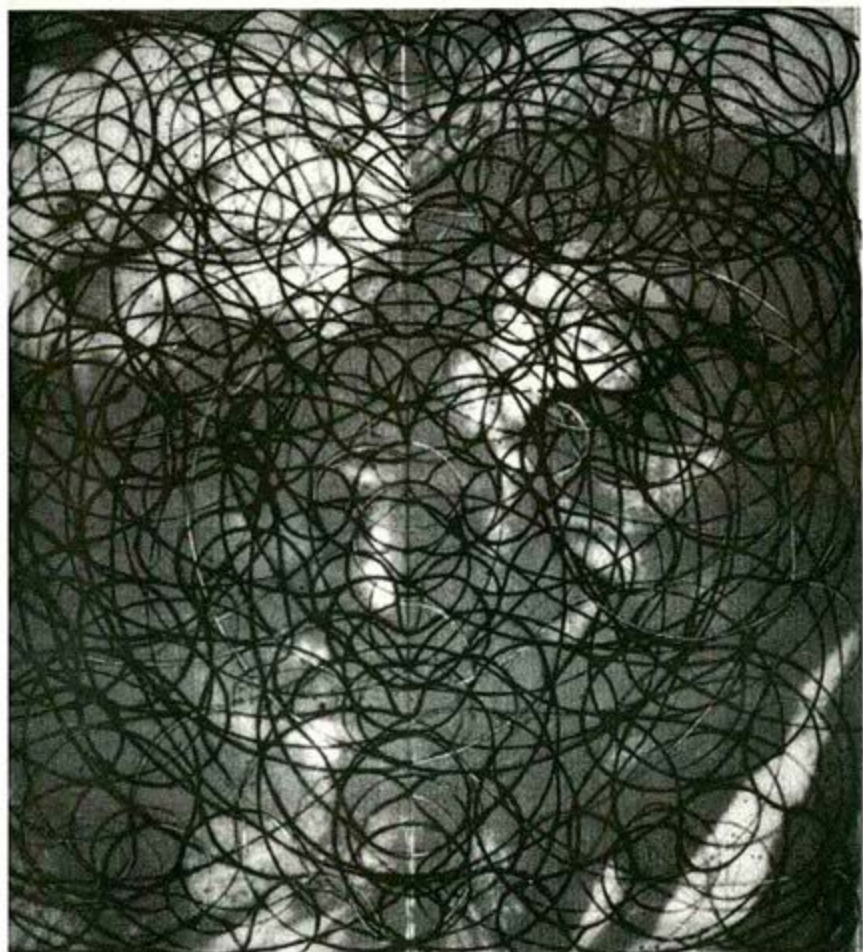
A Collection of Art Works
by
George Ketterl
CSUB, Professor of Art



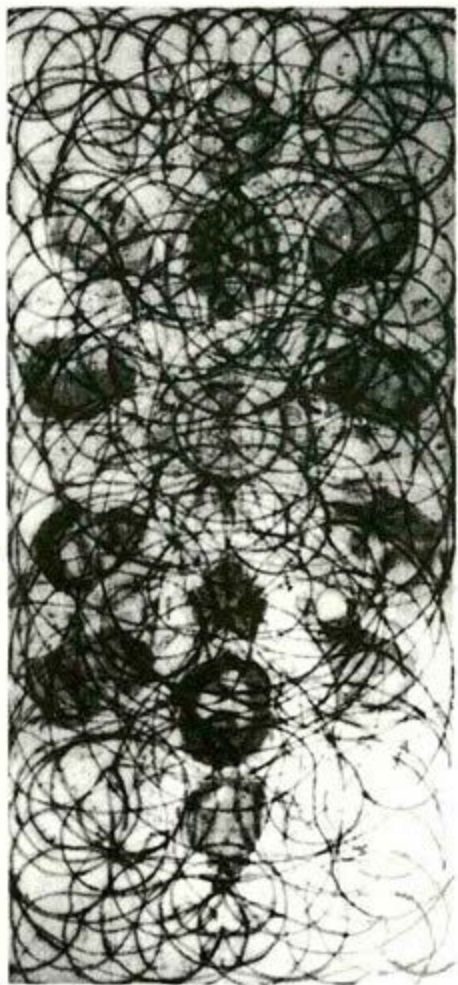
MYTHOTECH: 1999
Oil, enamel, and pencil on silk, with digital images
20 1/2" x 15 1/2"



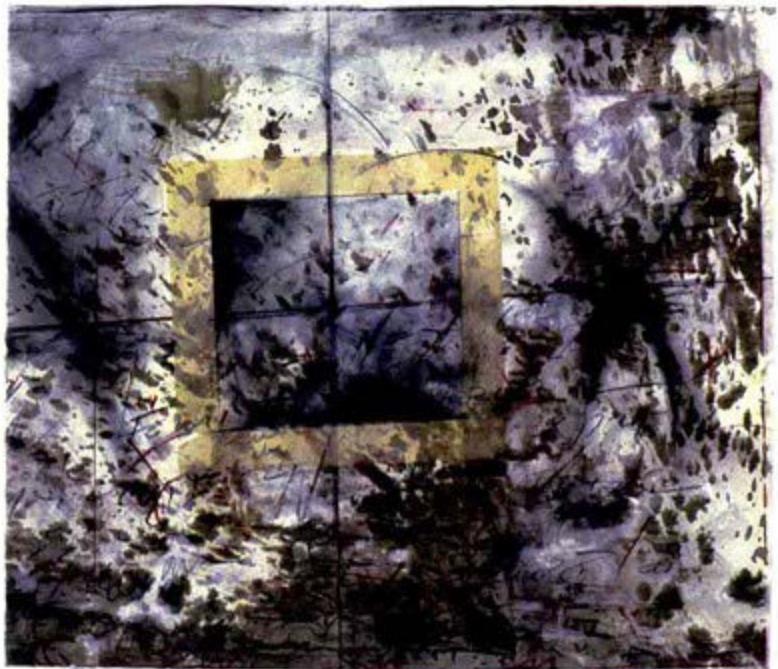
THE PROPHETS ORDER PIZZA: 1999
Foam core, wood, copper, and wax
29" x 48" x 19"



SOMETHING FOR ALICE AND SOMETHING FOR JOE: 1999
Oil, enamel, and pencil on silk, with digital images
84 1/8" x 79 3/4"



THREE CLOWNS, THREE KILLERS, ONE POET, & SOME OTHERS: 1999
Oil, enamel, and pencil on silk, with digital images
88 1/2" x 39 7/8"

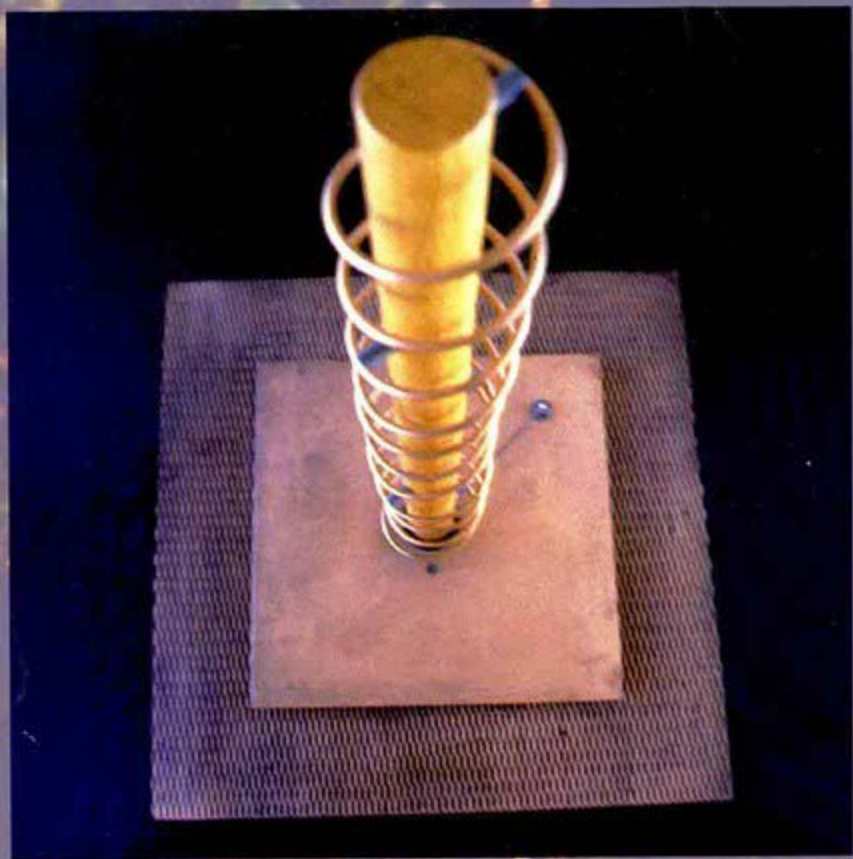


Chaco Series #9
Pueblo Bonito
Chaco Canyon, N. Mex., U.S.A.
35 1/2" x 31"

"the undesirable imposition of structure denied"

Brown Tone Photograph
with charcoal, pastel and soil

M.L. Heivly
1991-93



Transmitter Array, Deep Space Site Transmission
Robert Fleet Space Center - San Diego, CA M.L. Heivly 1988

Cover Design By Kiley