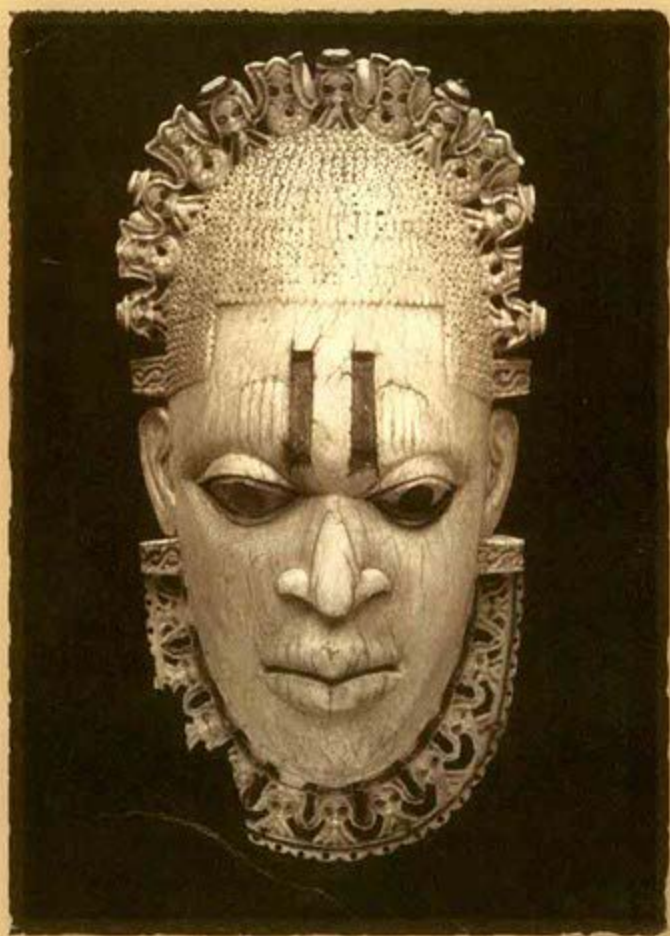




Orpheus

A Literary Journal



Orpheus

A Literary Journal
Volume XXVIII

Dr. Solomon O. Iyasere, Advisor
Diana Greenlee, 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.

Poems

	Page
<i>J. Hughes</i>	
"Rise Up"	10
<i>Jackson Wheeler</i>	
"Photograph: A Poem Written for My Mother On a Line From Dickenson"	11
"Kites"	12
"Inching Toward Iniquity"	13
"Beneath the Street Lamp"	14
<i>George Ketterl</i>	
"Ambition and Innocence"	15
"Neoprimitive"	16
"Head Wind"	18
"Border Line"	20
<i>Jane E. Granskog</i>	
"Essential Questions"	21
"Reflections"	22
"Witness"	23
"Heron"	24
"Dragonflies Dance"	25
"Speaking My Truth"	26
<i>Joanne Schmidt</i>	
"M.E."	27
"D.L.B."	28
"J.S."	29
"Paris: Remembrances of the Rain"	30
<i>Antonia Stanley</i>	
"Thankful For A Treasure"	31
"No Goodbye"	32
<i>JB Pierucci</i>	
"Childhood"	33
"Hitting the Wall"	34
"Safety"	35
"Without Knowing Me"	36
"One Last Breath"	37
"Tears for the One Missing"	38
"J . . . 1959-2002"	39
"Dear Sweet Candy"	40
"Daddy's Favorite"	41
"The Mistake"	42
"Death interrupted"	43

	Page
<i>Kafui Gbewonyo</i>	
"The Orchard Boy"	44
"Emptiness (What is this life?)"	45
<i>Dzifa Gbewonyo</i>	
"Us Sinners"	46
"I am Content"	47
<i>Barbara Jo Mitchell</i>	
"Spring"	48
"Away From Me"	49
"October Refugees"	50
"A Cold War"	51
<i>Rebecca Bryant Hewett</i>	
"Master of the Elements"	52
"The Wizard's Wish"	53
<i>Solomon Iyasere</i>	
"The Blood Burning Moon"	54
"I am still here"	55
<i>Ronald Jodo</i>	
"I'll Tell You a Story!"	56
<i>Nancy Edwards</i>	
"Meeting Your Train, Midnight"	57
"Veteran"	58
<i>Thomas Allen</i>	
"The Vigors of Passion"	60
<i>Hazel J. Jackson-Turner</i>	
"Illusion"	61
"I Am"	62
"Mirror Image"	63
"My Prayer"	64
<i>Jason Gutierrez</i>	
"Make Believe"	65
<i>Diana Greenlee</i>	
"Laundry Day"	66

Prose

	Page
<i>John Michael Cummings</i>	
"The Best Mark of a Man"	69
<i>Barbara Jo Mitchell</i>	
"Rising to the Occasion"	83
<i>April Gregerson</i>	
"The Transformation"	88
<i>Betty Hawkins</i>	
"Labor Pains"	91
<i>Cherie Payne</i>	
"Carrie"	95
<i>Mary Helen Barro</i>	
"God's Perspective and Other Views"	98
<i>Adriana Hernandez</i>	
"Open the Door"	101
<i>Karin Bousquet</i>	
"The Flood"	104
<i>Camille Gavin</i>	
"Biddy Speaks Her Mind"	109
"My Spindly Santa Claus"	112
<i>Nancy Edwards</i>	
"Reference Letter"	114



P o e m s

J. Hughes

RISE UP

Broken women, rise up,
Fallen women rise up,
Bent back woman rise up,
And smile the smile of peace,

Frightened women, rise up
And bury your fear,
Speak to your dead emotions and breathe
life into them

Women burdened with fear, rise up
And cast your fear aside
Women beaten, battered and bruised, rise up
And take back your dignity
And smile the smile of peace

Women everywhere, black, white, asian, hispanic
Rich, poor, educated, and educated by the world
Rise up, find peace in yourselves and in the lives of others
Find peace in your survival
Find peace in God
Women, women, women, woman rise up and smile the smile of peace.
Rise up, Rise up, RISE UP!

Jackson Wheeler

***Photograph: A Poem Written for My Mother
On a Line From Dickinson***

This autumnal sky is wide and pale.
You stand in your winter garden
Hoe in hand, among collards, turnips, kale,

Turning away from the camera I hold.
The shadow of your house forms a margin,
A darker metaphor perhaps. I am told.

You find work to bend to each day.
My photograph of you is a temporary pardon,
We both linger where we cannot stay.

You have grown old; I am older
And we'll soon know all there is to know of Heaven,
As the days grow shorter, the air turns colder.

KITES

For Pinky and Maxine

Pinky's son, Buddy, had been at it for over two hours. Standing in the field not yet turned for seed, the butcher paper kite aloft, a white speck against Big Stomp Mountain.

Three families from the row houses turned out into the March wind to watch his homemade acrobat spin and dido toward the growing dark. "Hold 'im Buddy, I'll git more string."

Two hundred more feet of string took the kite like a prayer, closer to Heaven. We could have all stood there, I think, forever. This kite, now the word made visible. Buddy played it out.

The string bowed out and up like some filament of Jacob's ladder. Everybody laughed and clapped their hands. When the string broke, my mother allowed that the kite just might make it to Tennessee.

Who knows where it went? Buddy cussed, cried and finally grew tired of winding string. What happiness that kite carried with it did not return and children with wind-raw ears turned back

to home, fresh cakes of cornbread, beans on the stove, and more talk of the kite that Buddy made. They would sleep warm tonight, and fashion kites in their dreams. Kites to reel back in, kites that break free.

INCHING TOWARD INIQUITY
(Auschwitz)

So much accomplished by following the rules:

348,820 men's suits

836,255 women's garments

5,525 pairs of women's shoes

38,000 pairs of men's shoes

7 tons of hair

Found this day, Saturday

January 27, 1945

In the year of our Lord

Jackson Wheeler

Beneath the Street Lamp
For Elnora McNaughton and Ed Schulz

In the late summer afternoon
Faint sounds of a car radio;
Someone parked down near the river
Lying on a blanket beside a Buick
In the shade of cottonwoods.

That's the sound I want to remember,
The story I want to tell, instead of what
Really happened - forgetting to check
The oil and ignoring for the past month
The red witness of the oil light on the dash,
And now . . .

Calamity, somewhere on a darkened street
With just enough juice to keep the radio
Playing its trade of top 40's, Margaret dancing
Underneath the street lamp because she
Doesn't know anything about cars.

And what do I know about love,
Or what it takes to keep someone
Interested long enough to say, "Hey,
You can come back anytime." Settling
Instead for all those memories

Of some place else, full of people
Who know as much or as little as I do
About such things and how little it
All matters if someone is lying close
Beneath your arm on a blanket down
By the river in one of those daydreams

From back home: Kansas or Nebraska
Or wherever; or the one person
You thought was the only one
Who could fill your empty heart
Is now out dancing in the street
Underneath the lamp late at night
Beside the stalled car

And all you can think to say
Or do is lean out the window
Pleadingly,
"Just stop, for Chrissakes, just stop.

AMBITION AND INNOCENCE:

torn between instinct and social strategy
concerned that maybe everything needed to be just a
little big bigger

SO what part does flattery play?
to fill the void

to be in the moment
what about the sunken delicate boys with skinny malnourished looks
where are they going to go when the emphasis is on the "hunks"

not puffed and bulgy like cartoons but rather more natural
sport kinda guys

what is the nature of taste and beauty?
how can we know the answer without the designers our guides

the complicity of ambition devours the aesthetic and wipes its lips
with cash

being stunning is not about making sense
the language of beauty must be dictated by the royalty of who are
meant to create and mirror
their sway over the culture THE CULTURE
VULTURE

filling the human need for transcendental principles
that can be sold like indulgences yet retain the sanctity of
the real thing

social titillation and voyeurism pose with raised eyebrows nodding to
the altruism of trash

wearing the shame of being beautiful with pride must be the motto
personality may be manifested in an ultra self

the boundaries for elegant choice and unbridled opulence will over-
come the deformity of an alien idealism

The endless treadmill
of change
will be the movie
where the hero leads the way to the mountain
with intense vision
crossing the line between insolence
and
glamour

George Ketterl

NEOPRIMITIVE:

NEW SHOES, NEW CAR, NEW BREASTS, NEW HEART,
NEW LIFE, NEW WEAPONS WHEW!!!!

In Guatemala the archaeologists are redefining Aztec society

Here we are unwrapped in bright molecular fabric covered with ash
we hunch
and murmur
and

 piss and moan through the gritted teeth of our sweet
 consciousness

the broad flat hand of disintegration reaches out from "the well
spring" and whispers "fuck you!" as it aims and swings its authoritar-
ian backhand of compliance

the children our children
 harnessed to perform as surrogate reminders of morality and
functioning as vents for
 our righteousness
 stand
 in the order of their roles
 beyond innocence

SPORTING THEIR FIXED SMILES AND THEIR
ABERCROMBIE WARDROBES SO
CUTE SO GOOD
SO CONVENIENT

They who are willing or not to perform to soothe our consciousness
and confusion

Where is the white knight when we need em? huh?

Campbell's hero is wearing a flack jacket, night vision goggles, and is
hooked up to
satellite communications
With all kinds of guns guns guns for killing
But

Do we feel secure? Are the fear vibes turning everything retrograde

IS HYSTERIA THE NEW AWARENESS?

Did the Aztec simply kill themselves off because as beautiful and
pure as the organism

can be there's always be a vein of stupidity that begins to throb when it gets scared

WHAT ABOUT THAT?
DO WE REALLY HAVE ANY CONTROL BEYOND THE
ORWELLIAN FIST?
IS COMPASSION MUTE WHEN IT STARES INTO THE EYES
OF AVARICE?

The mythological ambrosia of early twenty-first century is spoken
out in litanies of
Desire and encouragement by platitudinous functionaries who in
desperation
Preach in the dark
ominous voice of

THE NEW ETHOS

* "and I am dumb"

oblivion crouches in the corner and hisses ready to strike

he says good morning politely and then screams obscenities in
the next breath
He's on his way to vote and then to get a small pox vaccination
He feels a little worried
At the corner he picks up a pay phone and recites T.S. Eliot into
A
Dead line

As he watches two guys in a Hummer pull into valet lane and get
out with cell phones to their ears

On the street an old woman sits on a pile of rags
She thinks she's The Oracle of Delphi

The trick she says is in the I
The rhythm must come from the heart

* "How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm."

**THE FORCE THAT THROUGH THE GREEN FUSE
DRIVES THE FLOWER

Dylan Thomas

New York City • August 24, 2002

George Ketterl

HEAD WIND:

Quiet and black
barely a breeze
warm

the site of memory and blood
raising a fragile tower seven times into the blur
casting a shadow as the light thickens
hearing the beating heart

i've been here many times each one different because molecules shift
at least slightly, i think

do i really think
or

do i think i'm thinking when i'm really only there or here?

compression formed this black landscape
although it's really not entirely black at all
in fact it has many colours depending on the beating of the heart
and

molecules

there is no shine no matter what's going on in the sky or in the mind
it depends on the eye

like most things in life are dependent
the inner eye and the outer eye line up sometimes
mostly there is a discrepancy or perhaps rather simply a difference

in those moments when the heart opens
and those moments when the eyes open and those moments
when everything stops
inside the chatter the emotional shades hunger bedtime
frenzy etc. etc. etc.
when it's just the I the eye opens

here in this room in this place where a good amount of time has been
spent the black rock is
here beneath me until the intrusion strikes it's subtle blow of head
wind

ROSES ARE BLACK VIOLETS ARE METAL
CARBINES ARE BLUE AND SUGAR IS PARTICULAR
SECTIONS OF LIFE WAIT FOR THE WHALE
IDEAS GROW STALE RHYME IS NOT ALWAYS POETRY
AND POETRY IS
NOT ALWAYS RHYME

George Ketterl

SPIRITUAL BLISS REQUIRES BLOOD SACRIFICE OR AT
LEAST SOME KIND OF
GOOD INTENTIONS
SUSPENSION IS A MATTER OF SELECTING THE RIGHT
ABYSS
PRETENSION CAN BE ABOUT ANYTHING

the last quiet moment in the volcano hangs in my emptiness and will
ever so often when
there is a breeze it chimes down through my eyes into my molecules
and then into my blood

sitting in Kileuea iki volcano • November 29, 2001

George Ketterl

BORDER LINE:

edges that are sharp and dull and open and closed link together
through the

course of any journey

choice and open eyes deliver the moment

inside the delicate pulse of awareness and essential being hums in
deep primal tone

and then along comes the world and the thunderous cacophony of
past voices and fear and

unfolding events that never let up and never cease
and

then

choice

and awareness that the only way through is to believe

the old man looked into the eyes of the young boy
he watched the lithe movement and the bright shine

the boy stepped into the man and they danced

moments of choice happen in the clear

and the clear can only occur in the throws of abandon

listen for the bird, it's there, it's always there if you listen, it's here
and now and bright

Venice • June 11, 2002

Essential Questions

How should I know
that which is true
from delusions of fantasy
when yet it is all my dream?
Probabilities manifest
from choices past.

Like a bug going this way and that
skittering across the water
unknowingly knowing to
manifest destiny and yet not,
how do I now see
that which will last?

How shall I frame
the big picture close up?
Afraid in giving voice to remote
probabilities of the impossible achieved,
how do I now refrain
from replacing the mask?

To find and unfold the secret of
shapeshifting magic into ecstasy,
new probabilities from the
ground of my being.
Finding my Self in myself,
that is my task.

Jane E. Granskog

Reflections

Patterns of the past
emerge to confront me,
challenge my tranquil security and
lead me to reinvent myself
once again.

Removing dead husks of the pained past
to bring forth new greenness of
wonder at the beauty of love.
I birth myself anew
with a new found vision of all.

Only through potential loss
of all that brings meaning and joy
can we travel to the other side
coming through the fire of transformation
whole once more,
by keeping our essence clear
through the entangling shadows
of what we thought to be real,
straining to find the truth
behind the structures hiding our self from our Self.

And being transformed
brings me the clarity of knowing.
My passion and love of life
reemerges stronger and deeper
than ever before.

Like the jaguar running silently through the forest,
strong, contained and oh so powerful,
this surging ecstasy of feeling
the energy of the oneness of all
reaches in to my deepest core.

I am that I am,
No less, no more.

Witness

Owl peers out from
Her cottonwood branch
Overlooking the river with
Quiet waters flowing.
Silent witnesses
To my unspoken thoughts,
Posing the questions within.
Listen carefully and you will hear
The thundering of the universe
In the murmuring of water
Smooth flowing over rock,
Letting no barrier
Impede its passage.
Oh that I may find my answers in
The quiet strength of river rocks
Feeling the gliding rush of water
Flowing forever free
Through and over me.

And you too are my witness,
Standing there quietly with
That lovingly alive look.
Observing, clarifying
With a minimum of words,
Mirroring to me
That which I need to see,
Sketches of an inner design,
The scapes of my Being.
Getting me to listen to
The touch of my heart.
Reaching out to all around
And fully feeling
The bliss of Love.
Only in the thunder of silence
Do I truly knowingly feel
The dancing of my Soul
In sacred rhythm with you and all.

So teach me, my love
To dance forever free
And thus to feel and be
Fully authentically me.

Jane E. Granskog

Heron

Beautiful blue gray heron
Perching on one leg
Bridging earth and sky
Centered and still
As life waters flow by.
Help me to stay so
Balanced and true,
To follow my heart
As I know I must do
With focused awareness
On that which is really here.
My path shall unfold
And all will be clear.

Dragonflies Dance

Sitting on my favorite rock
on a very special day in June
down by the river flooded full
from spring mountain rains.
Pondering beginnings and endings
of that which needed letting go,
events of present now past,
lessons learned of love and loss.
Contemplating the mystery of now
while not really thinking at all.
Deadwood flotsam bumps along
past new green cattail stalks
as snowy egrets rise startled
touching me with their graceful flight.
My thoughts are like that,
bumping away until startled awake.

And I am caught by the dance of dragonflies
Cavorting right in front of me
They delight in flight, here and there,
bright red lace webbed wings outstretched,
pausing on slender cattail blades,
begging my attention they tantalize
my awareness now keenly alert
for provocative meanings.
What is it that I do now know?
What truly is or what may be?
That hope may ride on fickle winds
while faith endures dark
storms of doubt and fear?
And it must be that to You I turn
for in hands of the Mistress Divine
fate spins webs star flung fine.

Trust in the power of light and love
the dragonflies dance for me
I've done the work and now it is
indeed my time to shine.

Jane E. Granskog

Speaking My Truth

In searching for myself
I have struggled to speak
myself into existence
fearing that those that I love
will disappear once again
if I don't say who I am
over and over and over
until I, too, believe it to be true.
But when I get past all that,
realizing it is indeed
my own story I create,
that all the rest are
only secondary characters
in my fable of the truth that is,
and finally connect with the
beautiful Being I truly am
there will be no more
need for words for
I will know without doubt
I am one with all.

M.E.

Motion towards your inner studio sanctum of inviting the body
Inherent positive doses of fierce independence
Chill my heart in a pleasant bondage of special love
Holding a balanced, smart posture in a finely sculpted torso
Exquisite body, slender legs in perfect refinement
Lushly exuding passion from a generous heart
Excellent imaginings of you fire up my heart and soul.

Equal reckonings fuse your blue flame passion for love
Rituals practiced and emanating from spiritual centeredness
Intuitive thresholds of serious intensity and depth
Closely embracing the rhythms of Mother Earth
Knowing your comfort is a welcoming pattern
Sensing your teachings come from profound inner voices
Opening my senses to the fragrance of your being
Nestling in this sweet place, you offer me your comfort and
friendship.

Joanne Schmidt

D.L.B.

Day breaks in your cool, lucid blue eyes
Answered with kisses from your heart-cushioned lips
Vivid impressions dance on your silk-lightened skin
Inklings of your silvery, rich lapidary voice
Deep in tones of a river rushing through passionate land

Lend your ear to the wind calling
Ease your heart; let the land speak
Extolling all the landtenders in your lineage.

Be kind to the child firmly set in your heart
Insist that he be nurtured and loved
Send him love notes in your precise letters
Shaped with determination of your strong will
Exist and express among Nature's striking redolence
Take the herbs that heal and welcome each day.

J.S.

Just as the light settles
Oiling the lamps about to swing
And casing the ashes in silence
Not as the breast rises in breath
Nor in the movement with the amber ring
Except in the 19 carat pentip

Searching in brown pools of laughter
Changing in rhythm with billowing fabrics
Holding a key chain to your finger
Melting the gold rings into paperweights
Inhaling the incense from your thoughts
Desiring the calm blue of robin's eggs
Tasting the pleasure of fine sand.

Joanne Schmidt

Paris: Remembrances of the Rain

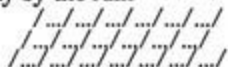
I am here, inside, cold and wet
from the rain
and I think of Paris and you
and you and Paris
and your arms
keeping me warm in the rain.

The snuggling moments
when cold was warm
and love was the reason
for our embrace
and I think of Paris and you
and you and Paris
and your arms
keeping me warm in the rain.

Yet know I am alone
and the sunny taste
of your kisses
is a memory.
How cold I feel
how sad I am
when I think of Paris and you
and you and Paris
and your arms
keeping me warm in the rain.

The rain no longer
means private hugs
and loving glances
shared in rooms
some strange, some familiar
rooms haunted with our boisterous laughter
rooms filled with our sacred whispers
now all gone...

washed away by the rain



Thankful For A Treasure

Thankful for a baby boy born August 7, 91
who taught my family love and patience.

Thankful for this little one's needs

July 26, 92 the night my youngest daughter
was killed by a drunk driver.

Thankful for hugs, warm brown eyes, and
a 2 1/2 year old's words: "It will be all right,
Mom," after my husband's death May 4, 94.

Thankful for this precious treasure of life,
who The Lord uses everyday to remind me
of the blessings in today.

Antonia Stanley

NO GOODBYE

I told him it was all right to go.

"Do what God wants you to do," I said.

I didn't mean I wanted him to go.

I was hoping he'd say no.

He left early the next morning.

No goodbye, no caress, just a quiet cold
emptiness.

It is his gain, no more pain.

He did his tasks, walked his path.

"I hurt too," I cried,

wondering if I had released him too soon.

Childhood

If I had known you then
We would have been best friends
We would have played hopscotch and jacks
We would have pushed each other
On the swings in the park and
Played for hours on the teeter-totter

We would have exchanged
Giggles and secrets
In a fort made of card tables
And old white sheets
That smelled of bleach

If I had known you then
We would have had afternoon tea parties
With our dolls and stuffed bears
We in our mothers' cast away dress-up clothes
Prancing around pretending to be rich
In high-heels and gloves and hats

We would have gone to the movies
On Saturday mornings for a quarter
To watch Bugs Bunny and Porky Pig
And the latest "Happy trails to you"
We would have had Neccos and Milk Duds

We would have had sleep-overs at my house
On Saturday nights and played "Kick the Can"
With the kids in the neighborhood in the
Soft summer twilight

If I had known you then
I could have held your hand
And dried your tears
When your father . . .

JB Pierucci

Hitting The Wall

How do you help
Not hitting the wall
When your child dies

The telephone rings through
The comforting layers of sleep
And rips your illusion of safety

As you listen to the voice
Strangely connected to you
Through the wire of indifference

You attempt to make sense
Of what is being said as you think
They have the wrong number

As if still in a dream
You struggle to comprehend the
Strange words of devastation

And with each breath held
And gasp released
You feel as if it is you

Slamming against the wall

Safety

The specter of my
Differences has been present
Since I was nine

The growing awareness
Deep in my being
Warned me to hide
This new knowledge from others

Moving as if a visitor
Among my peers
To search silently
For others like me

Would I know them
I wondered inside
Afraid to move freely

Confusion reigned terror
And was the master
I felt I could never be

I watched myself closely
To make more like normal
That which seemed easy for others

I began to see the
Eyes lingering in recognition
And hope for connection

Yet skeptical unsure
Afraid to inquire
About self same construction

I kept quiet and still
And withdrew in shame
And fear of rejection

And then I turned ten.

JB Pierucci

Without Knowing Me

News flash! *Beautiful day in May*
Turns ugly when warring factions
Clash on the Berkeley campus.

The headlines were wrong!
There was only one warring faction.
And it wasn't us.

We were only a minority faction
Trapped under the flags of Israel
And the picture of Cesar Chavez.

The Plaza was supposed to be
A place of peace,
Not posters of threat and warning.

We sang and spoke of peace
To the shouts and curses of
The crazed anti-Semitic mob.

Safety comes in the armed
Police guard as they escort us
Away from the echoes of hatred.

How can hate travel halfway
Around the world and end up
On the doorstep of Hillel House?

My friend says through her tears,
"How can they hate me
without knowing me. Hate me
Just because I am a Jew."

One who survived the Shoah
Walks beside us.
She turns and reaches out her hand.

One Last Breath

The needles on the pine tree
Dance
In rhythmic synchronicity

Patiently awaiting the gentle
Caress of the summer's
Soft breeze

The sunlight reflects on each bough
As it joins in the lively play
Of the forest

The branches gently move
With the beat of
Mother Nature's symphony

The roots draw sustenance
From the loam
Of a thousand years

Allowing this magnificent tree
To breath life
Back into the air

The logger reaches
For her
Saw

JB Pierucci

Tears for the One Missing

She sits in my office
With just one breast
Under her brightly colored blouse

She came seeking solace
To make some sense
Of this wretched curse
That tried to devour her body
And still the rapid rhythms of her life

The lovely lace bras
The seductive silk nightgowns
Lie flat and unused
How does one fill just half

She cries without sound
Just warm, salty tears
Making tracks down her
Carefully made up face

Tears weeping for
What's missing
Falling straight down
On one side landing on her lap

On the other
Caressing the one remaining

J . . .

1959-2002

What happened to you J?
You were there and then
You took your life

Did despair cloud your sight
As you watched
Your children play?

Did hopelessness invade
Your mind as you lay down
Beside your wife?

What did you hear that
Reverberated inside your head
As you sat and drank your coffee?

Did the self-same man
Who climbed to the corporate top
Not believe he would rise again?

Neuro-chemical transmitters awry
Changed your sunny self
Into one of the doomed

Who lie awake at night struggling
To find a reason to live
You found nothing but reasons

To die

JB Pierucci

Dear Sweet Candy

How can she keep going back
Time after time
To face yet another barrage of

Insults and hurled accusations
That numb her spirit
And cripple her confidence?

Their vows once strong
Now show the erosion of time
And broken promises

The children suffer most
Yet she knows deep inside
She must protect them

She stays for security
And tries to convince herself that
Two parents are better than one

As she leans down to pick up
The pieces of her mother's
Cherished candy dish

Which shattered
As it crashed
Against the wall

Daddy's Favorite

She sat on the couch
Across from me crying
I don't want to do it again

She was small and slight
With a delicate mouth
Just barely out of her teens

She had shown me her pictures
Of a fairytale wedding
All fluffy white and pristine

The trouble began when
The honeymoon ended and
She was back in a routine

He wants to make love to me
Every night Oh Dear God
I just want to cry and scream

I didn't know it would be like this
I love him and he loves me
But when night approaches it seems

I vaguely remember
Something bad happening
Or was it just one of my dreams

No Daddy No don't make me do it
I just want to go back to sleep

She looked at me shocked
Now we both knew
The secret her mind couldn't keep

JB Pierucci

The Mistake

I fantasize that you loved me
As you prepared for my birth
And planned adoption

I want to believe that
You were young and beautiful
And were caught unaware

A mistake committed
In the passion of youth
Without means of support

I yearn to believe that
You struggled to keep me
Yet bought into the dream

That two strangers
Could give me the good life
You could not see

So you relinquished me
And trusted they would
Know what to do

I dream that you said
You did the right thing
Without ever knowing

I would have loved you

Death interrupted

Her mother intended
To take her own life
In a quiet way

She wanted to escape the
Cruelty of the Cancer's
Impingement on her independence

She kept the hoarded pills
In a secret place
Wrestling with her decision

Her goal was not
To cause pain to others but
To free herself from its cruel grasp

Her daughter found her
In her chair with her mouth open
Silently protesting life's force

With vacant awareness
The daughter's grief turned to regret
That her mother still breathed

She had wanted to die
A good death
In control as always

Now public shame
Not the peace of death
Awaited to claim her soul

Her journey not ended
But stalled
The mother sighed

And turned her head to the wall

The Orchard Boy

Round the orchard I would wander on the weekends of my youth
A young man there would also saunter, kind and gracious, not uncouth

For some years he did pursue me
Trying desperately to woo me
So I'd smile and beguile disguising my love my ruth

Sometimes he would only gaze and sometimes he would approach
He would often give me gifts, but never my privacy encroach
And he wrote me a love letter
So my thoughts of him grew better
But my mother did discover, and my father did reproach

He said he'd have to leave me for some work out on the sea
But he made a faithful promise to come back and marry me
And around me he would rove
Weaving through the leafy grove
Telling stories of the glories of the life that was to be

When he left, he said goodbye to me and then for hours he cried
I just thought of him occasionally and doing so I sighed
To love another, I halted ever
In keeping my vow, I faltered never
He never returned, and for him I yearned, till I learned that at sea
he died.

Emptiness (What is this life?)

What is this madness, this sadness galore?
Bone-chilling, fulfilling, and thrilling score
Of vicious and monstrous and fictitious acts
Of thoughtless, emotionless, dead books and facts

What is this falsehood, what is this pretense?
Lack of skills and knowledge, Lack of common sense
Cheating and fleeting our relationships
Careless and stupid what comes from our lips

What is this wild, anarchic feast?
Vice, immorality to say the least
Children are raised who are not raised at all
Achievements are scantily thin, but are tall

What is this structureless society?
Grandeur and splendor but all are lonely
Prejudice, injustice, death and corruption
No enjoyment; stress, work, overconsumption

What is this ironic juxtaposition?
Extreme wealth and poverty, no worthy tradition
Violence, hypocrisy, command, demand
Selfishness, laziness govern the land

What is this place, what is this mess?
Blind arrogance, power, and no finesse
Violence, excuses, depression, distress
What is this life, but sheer Emptiness? . . .

Us Sinners

"Hail Mary, full of grace, The Lord is with Thee . . ."
I walk down the center aisle and bow on bent knee
My footsteps echo in the church
The baptismal font trickles; reminds me of birth
"Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name . . ."
I sit in the third pew to the left—it has always been the same
My rosary beads shift one by one
"Glory be to the Father and to the Son . . ."
It's been ages since last here, but I had to come
For I was the one who was involved
One of those whose problems went unsolved
One of those whose temper was high
One of those who never saw the light
One of those whose lives had been rebuilt
I had to come, to free me from guilt
To ask the Lord for forgiveness
To have life after death
I had to, for I was a loser—not a winner
"Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts . . ." I pray right before
dinner
"Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners . . ."

I am Content

I am content.

Despite the lack of friends to share
Despite the lack of clean, fresh air
Despite the lack of money there
And all the troubles with my hair
Despite the lack of time to spare
I am content.

Although things didn't go as planned
Although I washed dishes by hand
Although the stress was far too much
Although I lived my life as such
Although I lost quite a great deal
And hardly ate a fancy meal
Although some friendships were not real
I know I feel content.

Because of just those caring few
Because I had so much to do
Because I saw that lovely view
Because I cried when plans fell through
And laughed when I no longer grew
Because I never had much pain
And always had a lot to gain
To this day I still remain content.

And when my life's come to an end
And there's no time to make amends
And when I take my one last breath
And speak last words before my death
And when I tire and lose life's fire
I will expire content.

Barbara Jo Mitchell

Spring

Cold is split by an impish breeze vying for attention
Twisting my long auburn hair, this mischievous playmate en-
tangles it spaghetti-like

smarting the ends across my neck and eyes;
only teasing.

Away From Me

Thoughts drizzle like a gentle rain, soft at first, then stark, unforgiving till I have replayed each precious encounter in my memory's cinema. Over and over I recapture in stereo your breath intermixed with mine,

the feel of your warm parted lips and knowledgeable hands.
Reality jolts rudely.

Cold empty air reminds me you're not here.

Barbara Jo Mitchell

October Refugees

Withered, abandoned, relinquished, forgotten, they surrender to
the robber cold only to be grabbed, shoved, kicked and splintered
across the Earth's visage.

Spread like a patchwork quilt, these homeless hunker down in
any dank, dark, dingy alleyway, or sprawl fetus-like across city
grates seeking warmth
for one more day.

A Cold War

Perhaps we were unfair at the start of us.
Should have mapped out in careful strategy the conditions and
progress of our love.
The campaign we waged was sloppy for our hearts plundered and
sabotaged free will.
Nothing was fortified against the onslaught of unoccupied
promises.
Once indoctrinated, we never balked, but let our senses guide the
way.
Positive reinforcement conditioned us.
Enthusiasm waned as reason eventually revolted in defiance of
infatuation's giddy tyrant.
Rescue lies just beyond the starry-eyed mist.
If only we can touch then let go.

Rebecca Bryant Hewett

Master of the Elements

At ten months old, he took a step
and ran within a week.

Soon he could jump and hop and dance
and chase and hide-and-seek.

At two years old, he learned to swim
and hold his breath and float.

At three years old, he saw the lake
and dove from Daddy's boat

So having mastered land and sea,
'twas time to conquer sky.

At four, I taught him how to read,
and, reading, he could fly.

The Wizard's Wish

Here stand a lass who longs to see her aunt,
A scarecrow wishing for the power to think,
A man of tin who would be tickled pink
If he could feel emotions he now can't,
And then the King of Beasts who fears a mouse
And comes to get the guts a lion needs
To roar so every jungle creature heeds.
I'd rather grant a new car, boat, or house.

These foolish folk have come to me to find
The things they have already but don't see.
(And even this young girl and dog could be
Back home if she'd wake up!) If choice was mine,
I'd ask for one friend true through joy and pain—
More constant than my heart, home, nerve, or brain.

Salomon Iyasere

The Blood Burning Moon

The discordant music rose to the fifth
movement;
As empty rattling saucepans crashed
from the
Withered hands of the Night Sleepers—
That's the hitch—
Rhythmically, halting footsteps broke
the longish silence
To police their lives.

The old men, women, children in grey
overalls,
Hugged their belongings overflowing
the borrowed
Supermarket carts,
Wheeled into the shining marble
floor,
Shuffled to the dark deserted street
to face
The blood burning Moon
To return again to Beethoven's
Heaven's Gate.

"Honey, they made a mess of the
evening for us."

i am still here

I am a solitary Ant on a mysterious journey home
Crawling on the side walk of concrete
Hemmed in by two stubborn
invisible lines
Drawn from the shady lanes of their concrete
Minds:
Untouched by time.
i am still here

I'll Tell You a Story!

I'll tell you a story
Not of fame, not of riches, nor of glory,
In the countryside leisurely did I play
By the old tracks watching the trains all day
Tis silent now for the trains have long gone away
Not a creature stirs for lack of words to say
Such gruesome an act did innocent eyes see
Tortured by the past I now return to this scene
One fateful afternoon in this place of appeal
I stood on the tracks my feet glued to the steel
In the horizon, the train shuffled in approach
Make haste off the track! I told myself in reproach
Try and try as I did, it could not be helped
My feet would not contravene this fate I was dealt
Whistling furiously as its horns blared
Sirens cruel as its red lights glared
Off the track off the track, but my feet like concrete
Hairs tout on my back, my heart sunk in defeat
Whom did I offend that thus comes my demise?
Tell me my friend shall this phoenix ever rise?
Such queries too grand for my conscience to grasp
Perhaps now I'll be free, is that too much to ask?
I'll tell you a story,
Not of fame, not of riches, nor of glory,
In the countryside by the old tracks I used to play.

MEETING YOUR TRAIN, MIDNIGHT

I come to get you
Midnight Amtrak
Pulling into F Street,
July summer in Bakersfield
Ninety degrees on the bottoms
Of my feet
Empty station, locked down,
Part of town nobody walks after dark
I sit alone in our car, usually
With you, now you are heading
Home to me,
What if your train passes by
Not stopping, what if you
Forgot and missed
This long midnight run,
I would go home without you,
Steaks I bought for us
Uneaten, your side of my life
Empty
I refused to think of that,
But it settles in my stomach anyway,
Afraid to walk by the tracks
In the night,
I park facing the edge of the rail,
Finally, I see lights,

Your train slowing down,
Sliding in carefully,
Everyone dismounting looking outward,
And then you,
Your round bouncing baseball cap
Floating on your head,
Coming down the walkway,
Your arms out wide,
Home.

Nancy Edwards

VETERAN

Who stopped the bullet
Who let the sun shine in
Who sucked air
While needles poised
About his once smooth flesh
And let his blood
And let his blood,
Who stands at the window
Of despair
Of hope
Of no other
Visible means of support
And cannot carry
Children on his back anymore
Broken by the war
His spirit
Broken by the war
His dreams
Broken by the war
Who stopped the bullet
And bit the danger
In torrid fields
And fiery foxholes
Who stopped his life
Like a record needle—
Lifted off,
Just for the moment,
Sure he would return
And play it again,
Just the way it was before,
He told them so
Back home

Ages ago
Until he stopped the bullet
And bit the dust
And saw the cradles fall
And saw the stars sink
And smelled Death stench
Who let his blood
Nourish a foreign field
Who rises to the music
Who marks the graves
Who carries the honor
Who bore the horror
Who is the glory
Who is the country.

Thomas Allen

The Vigors of Passion

A tinkle in the eye
Is a secret request
For your lover to lie
To satisfy each need
Not knowing where it may lead

What lies behind the eyes?
Why such a distance
After licentious cries?
What exactly do I sense?

They end the rendezvous
With a sour and callous manner
What lies next in your menu?
Who will next carry your banner?
Certainly not I
Who condones your departure without a sigh

ILLUSION

Can you see me
In me
Within me
Therein hides tomorrow

Do you see me?
In me
Within me
Therein hides the hurt

If you see me
In me
Within me
Turn away
For you are me.

I AM

I am a reflection of the past
My past
I encompass all that was and is.

I am a genetic defect
A clone of parental oneness
I am tied to reality
My reality

Escape is not an option.

Dreamers are beings of the night
My dreams are everlasting nightmares.

I am a soul lost.
Please!
Find Me!

MIRROR IMAGE

I am a figment of imagination.
I live in the yesterdays.
I worship the tomorrows.
I survive in the today.
I am you, searching for the forever.

Hazel J. Jackson-Turner

My Prayer

Goddess of Spirit
Enlighten me.
Set me free.
Speak the word.
I await your knowledge,
The knowing within that I too possess
but have since lost.
Bring back the me.
I am here, Somewhere.

"Make Believe"

Sometimes this was a slice of bliss
Sometimes it was just way too heavy
I know we know how to cause each other pain
But no one else makes me smile like you

It would be easier to pack up and run away
Because you went to the first friendliest hello
It broke down my beautiful blue world
It hurt my feelings; it stole my everything

Where did all those feelings get cast aside
All the things that made me want to stay for so long
Now I can't dream even when I go to sleep
I can't even find my place in a world of make believe

We had the worst times and the best times
I just know that they were our times
And how quickly we let them slip away
Say good-bye to our lost adventures in paradise

I guess I didn't understand back then
Well, at least not like I understand now
Something in you sparked something in me
And my life has never been the same since

Diana Greenlee

Laundry Day

I speak of never ending toil
Of rags and shirts and pants
The piles and hampers laced with soil
My homework does not stand a chance

The grass and oil I can't get out
The ruined Hilfiger jeans
I guess I have to buy some "Shout"
And hope I don't ruin these rented machines

The hours of folding I'll pursue
After sudsing and drying the lot
My formalist paper is long over due
And I still can't get out that ink spot

And after I fret with mountains of socks
All mismatched—I'll separate each
I still have three baskets of unsightly frocks
And I've used nearly all of the bleach

Looking down at his verse I can't help but admire
Precision in rhythm and rhyme
Shakespeare's gifts are my curse
Although I have the fire
I obviously don't have the time

His sonnets were perfect—as is my desire
With life's demands he found the way
I'm not sure—in truth—*what* he did to inspire
But it sure wasn't on laundry day

P r o s e

The Best Mark of a Man

On my way to see Mom at work, I stopped in the liquor store and found Grandma doing something I never expected. She was in the storeroom, scraping the black paint off the little window. She was using one of those little paint scrapers made for narrow places. She said the room could use a little daylight, even though we were talking about the storeroom, which was always dark.

"Don't you want to keep the drunks from seeing in?" I asked.

She looked at me. She seemed to have forgotten ever saying anything like this to me.

Meanwhile, the paint was coming off easily. I looked out. With half the window scraped clean, the other side of town was visible now. You could see everyone at the fire hall, along with cars pulling into the post office.

I offered to finish scraping the window, and Grandma said all right and stood back and watched for a while. The black paint flaked off easily enough, as if it had never been made to stick to glass at all.

Grandma went up front, and I continued working, careful not to scratch the glass, although that was nearly impossible. I stopped and looked out the window. Somehow, everything and everyone looked smaller with the window cleared.

All of a sudden a car pulled up outside, and someone was walking right toward me.

Lonny Dunn!

Lonny Dunn was the toughest, meanest boy up on the mountain. He was a few grades ahead of my oldest brother Jerry, but because of his size and rough way, he seemed much older. Jerry talked a lot about him, not just because Dunn was always being expelled from school for fighting, but because he had a glass eye. Most people wanted to look at him, but we were afraid, because his glass eye always looked back at you as if it could see.

John Michael Cummings

He never wore a shirt, had tattoos all over his body, and stringy blonde hair.

He lunged at me to try to scare me. Then he leaned down and rapped on the glass so hard I thought he would break it.

I often wondered why I wasn't as scared of him as I should have been, despite the trouble that he was.

While I struggled to open the painted-over window latch, he rapped on the glass again, tried to pull the window up himself, then made a pig nose against the glass.

"Ssh! My grandma," I said, when the window came up. I pointed to the front of the store.

"Mrs. Jennings's your grandma?" he said.

He knew her, he said. He stopped by here all the time. She had the best price around on JD. Plus, she was a real nice woman. He didn't know she was my grandmother. Hell, that made us family, he said. He started to climb through the small window, just to see my reaction.

"Shoot me, I'm a tourist, shoot me," he said, his face all goofy.

He backed out of the window that was too small for him to fit through and went around the front way. I ran to the storeroom door. I knew I was in for some questions from Grandma for knowing him.

He came in and said hello to Grandma by name, and she said his name back. She did know him after all. She was even smiling at him.

I wandered out, trying to act casual, and Lonny walked up and slapped me on the shoulder. Grandma was all eyes.

"You know my grandson, Lonny?"

"Sure I know him. Me and him rob banks together."

Grandma was showing a thin smile to this. The best I could read it, it said everyone was amusing to her, even Lonny Dunn. The fact was, all different types, including tourists from the city, came through her store. No one surprised her.

Mom would have said it a little differently. Grandma was a good Christian. She would never judge anybody.

Lonny was being careful not to cuss. He asked me why I hadn't been on the mountain in a while. Ordinarily, he would have let out a few hundred foul words asking that. Grandma answered for me, saying I had been busy at home.

"Yeah I heard about poor Jerry," he said.

"You know Jerry, too?" Grandma asked. There was less of that grin on her face now.

Lonny said that him and Jerry were in the same grade for a while.

Grandma said nothing to this. Instead, she asked him if he was still working up on Kathy Dobson's roof. He was, and she told him to watch his ladder in the heat. Remember what happened to Bobby Crumb, she said. Bobby Crumb was a boy who died when his ladder touched an electrical wire and electrocuted him. His bucket of red paint spilled down on the street, and after that, everybody said that it was his blood.

I was beginning to figure Grandma out. She could talk to just about anybody.

Wiping his sweaty face, Lonny said he would be looking for more work, if she knew of any.

Grandma looked at me.

"Your mother needs help with the house, doesn't she?"

I nodded.

"Maybe since you all know one another . . ."

"Whoa," said Lonny, putting up his hands, "his old man don't like me none."

Grandma said there was no need to worry about that.

That night, Mom was unsure of the whole thing. Lonny Dunn! Lonny Dunn helping out around *our* house? After what he did, or was suspected of doing, to Dad's precious cabin on the mountain? She and Dad were sure it was Dunn who had busted into the cabin and stolen Dad's sophisticated brass scales for weighing gunpowder, along with a whole assortment of fine tools. They always thought that Jerry had been involved in some way, too, but could never prove anything.

Mom had no idea that her mother knew Lonny Dunn. "Imagine my mother," she said, "knowing him." Sometimes her mother was too trusting, she said. He must have been all smiles with her. She would have to think about this, she said.

"He's who Mrs. Hall was talking about," I put in.

Mom tried to remember back to what Mrs. Hall had said about the fellow who worked around town.

According to Grandma, Lonny had done good work on a number of houses around town—the Lewis' house, Genevieve Russell's place. Grandma even said he had cut Dick Keith's yard for a month when he and his family were away.

"Maybe he does good work . . . and if Stella Hall recommends him," Mom said. "But if your father ever finds out."

I promised Mom that neither Dad nor my brothers would ever find out, not if Lonny came during the day, when they were at the mountain. And so what if Dad found out? It was *our* house now.

She looked at me. She didn't quite agree with my attitude. But the fact remained, we did need help, and I couldn't do the work by myself, and she wasn't involving my brothers, not with my father the way he was. And if Grandma had already suggested it . . .

The bottom line was, she knew of no one else. Plus, Grandma did say that Lonny didn't charge much, and that alone might be enough of a reason. But she would sure have to watch him every step of the way, and under no circumstances was he to be allowed in the house.

"The way things turn out," she said, shaking her head.

That night, I was so excited I hardly slept. Thinking of Lonny Dunn at our house brought to mind a goofy cartoon I had seen in Dad's Pogo books of fancy ladies and gentlemen looking horrified at the sight of a man walking his pet alligator. The way I saw it, nobody in town approved of us anyway. Since it was hopeless getting them to accept us, why not upset them as much as possible and have a laugh about it? I would've never thought that way if I hadn't met Lonny.

It had been arranged that he should come by after eleven the next day. That would give plenty of time for Jerry and my other brother Robbie to be off with Dad on the mountain. Mom had arranged to get the morning off so that she could make sure he got started right. Some time after eleven, but before half past, we could hear a car backfiring on the hill. Mom peeked out through the blind. "My lands, look at that, in front of our house," she said.

Lonny was making a parking spot for his filthy Pinto, and that caused Mr. Barnes and a few other shopkeepers to look on as he pulled halfway up onto the sidewalk. Mom said he would get a ticket.

I ran outside, and the first thing Lonny did was throw an empty soda cup up at me. I kicked it off the front porch and ran down the steps and stood there grinning. It was the strangest feeling, standing out in the front of the house with him, in front of practically the whole town. It was the first time I had really stood in front of the house without trying to hide myself, without looking down. And who was I standing with? Not Tim Richmond or Deedee or Ernesto or somebody classy-looking, but Lonny Dunn from the mountain.

I looked across the street at Mr. Barnes and gave him a mean look. Having Lonny Dunn around was like having your own

monster to protect from all the people who pretended not to be monsters, but really were.

As mountain-looking as he was, he made our house look better than it was. I felt almost well-off standing beside him. And any tourist looking at me would see him as worse off. I thought all of this would be good for Mom. As the shiest, most ashamed woman in town, she finally had someone to look down on and pity.

She spoke to him through the door, looking as if I had brought home a wet dog from the river. She tried to be polite.

"My son knows what you all are supposed to do," she said, backing inside.

The first job was to cover the sewer pipes out front. That required hauling dirt from the backyard. To do this, I had to take him through the workshop. It was the strangest feeling, going through the workshop with him, knowing his eyes were seeing what no one outside our family ever had—insulation falling down, junk everywhere, dog hair everywhere, as if there had been ten years of chicken fights back here.

Funny, of all the people in the world I would want to see this mess, Lonny Dunn was the only one. The way I saw it, he was from the worst place on earth, Pipertown, and Dad's workshop was the second worst place on earth, so he was the only one who wouldn't look down on us. Being from the worst place on earth, there was no one or nowhere he could look down on. I felt that made us close, me being from the next to the worst place, he from the worst. Close in a way no one else would ever understand. Closer even than brothers.

He could carry two 5-gallon buckets of dirt at one time. When she found an excuse to come out, he was on his best behavior and didn't say much except "Yes, ma'am" and "No, ma'am." But when she wasn't around, he went into his sneaky mode, glancing into the kitchen window to make sure she wasn't looking before he started looking behind boards and under things for something to take, usually some of Dad's worst old tools that he had left behind, so I didn't care.

At lunch, when I went inside to eat, Mom wondered whether she should offer him something, and that afternoon she did bring out two lemonades and say, "Lonny, would you like some watermelon?"

He was as polite as he could be.

The second job was to shore up the rock wall out front, but Mom thought that was something I should leave to Lonny. She went on keeping an eye on him, peering through the Venetian blinds the way Dad used to. When a tourist stopped in front of our house and asked him directions, Mom said, "Oh, Lord, he won't know." Lonny pointed this way, then that way, and Mom groaned and snickered at the same time, as if she couldn't make up her mind whether it was sad or funny. Imagine, she said, a boy from the mountain giving directions to tourists in Harper's Ferry.

I was looking out, too, and to me, Lonny didn't see himself as a boy from the mountain or that there was anything wrong with what he was doing. He was just there, working, and afraid of no one.

Mom was still peering through the blinds when nosy Mr. Barnes wandered over and started talking to Lonny. Lonny looked friendly enough, and Mr. Barnes smiled and looked like a fat man half his age. Mom muttered something about that. She muttered something else when a park ranger came along on his horse and Lonny gave it a long pat on the nose.

"Oh, who's he talking to now?" she said with that giggle.

I went to the window for the umpteenth time. There was Lonny down by the rock wall, in front of our house, talking to a tourist girl. That made me say something. Lonny in his dirty tank top, tattoos showing, glass eye half popping out, talking to a pretty tourist girl?

"Well she sure seems to like him," Mom said.

The girl stood there, looking the way a girl does when she does like a boy.

"That boy," Mom said. "I can see why my mother likes him."

I had to shake my head, too. Mom wouldn't say it, but we could learn a lot from Lonny Dunn.

As soon as Mom left for work, I waved Lonny up. I led him into the workshop again, then up the back steps.

"Man, your old man sure was a hoarder," he said, looking around at the bamboo poles, the rolls of roofing paper, and the old bricks Dad had us stack up because he thought they might be worth something someday.

He touched the top of the freezer kept against the back of the house and asked if it worked. He looked up over the bank, at the two logs lying side-by-side and half-buried in the dirt, with rungs across them. He asked what it was, and I told him that was how we got up into the backyard. He said it looked like something in boot camp. He glanced at the high wall of bamboo growing around the house, which Dad kept planted to keep eyes from looking in. I waited for him to ask what kind of plant it was, but he just squinted at it as if it was magical to him, like a kaleidoscope.

As I led him up the back steps, he looked down at the creosote planks as if thinking they might break through. He saw the old gutters overhead, the dead wasp's nests, the water pipe left above ground and covered with heat tape, the screen door falling off the back door. I waited for him to say we lived like mountain people.

I took him inside the house through my bedroom door on the third floor landing. When his eyes adjusted to the dim light, he looked around at the unpainted, hand-troweled walls. He looked down at the unpolished floorboards and overhead at the cracked ceiling. I thought I saw him nod, as if he was thinking about what needed to be done.

I listened to my voice saying which rooms were my brothers'. It was as if I was trying to sound like a tour guide, but we were really in a kind of cave, exploring. He looked in Robbie's room and asked why there was writing all over the walls. He asked, too, if there were any lights on this floor. He kept his head ducked. He had never seen ceilings so low, he said.

We went down to the second floor. The walls down here were painted, but there were empty spaces around the room from where Dad had taken things. Left in the middle of the room was a spinning wheel. Against the wall was a push-pedal sewing machine.

"The bathroom's real bad," I said, leading the way.

He looked at the rotted plasterboard around the bathtub. He even leaned forward and looked down through the hole clean through the floor behind the tub. Then he jumped up and down a little, testing the boards. The floor was still solid, he said. He turned and saw the rotted floorboards around the commode. I expected him to say it was gross. I expected him to say our house was falling down.

We went downstairs, where the shop would be. It was full of paintings, knickknacks, and Mom's furniture projects. We had pretty much finished the walls down here. At least there were no ghosts of Dad's guns to see or think about. I was surprised Lonny hadn't asked about them yet or about where Jerry had shot the tourist.

He went into the kitchen on his own. That was bad, too, I said, waiting outside the door.

He came back out and looked around. "Man, this place just needs some work," he said. He actually said we had a nice house. It just needed some work.

We went down to his car and got some tools out of the back. In the bathroom, I crouched down beside him as he measured the area of plasterboard that needed replacing. I noticed the veins in his arms. When he stood up, I stood up, too, and saw the two of us in the mirror together. The room was all around us. I had to smile. He was the first person outside our family to ever set foot in here. It was like having someone know the worst part of you and feeling better for it.

By the time Mom came home, Lonny and I had nailed the new plasterboard in, then gone back outside and covered the sewer pipes and patted down the ground with shovels. She was glad

John Michael Cummings

those unsightly white pipes were finally underground, she said as she came in. She just hoped the stink would stay there, too.

I was nervous as she went upstairs. A few minutes later, she called out my name in that tone and stood at the top of the stairs, her face all twisted up like Dad's.

"You let him in our house, Josh?"

I thought she was foolish for acting this way. The tub was about to fall through the ceiling.

"Somebody's got to do something!" I said, almost yelling.

She gave me her "That's ridiculous" look, but said nothing else.

That night, Jerry and Robbie were home. Eventually Jerry spotted the plasterboard patch in the bathroom. He flew downstairs like Dad, wanting to know what was going on, who had been in the house and done the work.

"Jerry, never you mind," Mom said, standing up from the table.

"Who is it?" he said, being as demanding as he could be.

Mom picked up and slammed down the fruit bowl on the table. The house was half hers, she reminded him. She didn't have to answer to anybody about that. Was that clear?

The next morning, she had a different attitude toward me. I could tell she felt sorry for how she had acted. I knew she was scared. So was I. At the kitchen table, she told Jerry and Robbie not to mention the work to their father. It was for the better right now. Jerry sat there, looking as belligerent as he could be.

When Lonny arrived later that morning, Mom invited him inside. They started walking through the house. On the way up the steps, she apologized for the lack of lighting. He said he could fix that, too. Upstairs, she asked if he knew how to get the armchair out of the house without lowering it over the second story porch. He said he could hammer it apart and take it out in bags. She looked at him as she couldn't believe how everything

too him had a simple answer. He also said it would be no problem moving the fold-away bed upstairs.

In the bathroom, he ran his hands over the plasterboard around the back of the tub and said the spackling needed a little more sanding. Mom volunteered to do that. She said she could also take down the old wallpaper herself and prepare that surface for painting, too, as long as he thought that was okay.

The next step, he said, was to work on the floor around the tub from below, from the kitchen. He went out to his car and came back with a hammer and drop cloth. He threw the drop cloth over the kitchen table, stood up on a step ladder that was already there, and started hacking away at the rotted ceiling with the claw of the hammer. Chunks of plaster plopped down. Mom stood back, looking horrified, as if the heavens were falling. It was a good feeling exciting seeing the ugliness of our house being cut away.

That night, Dad dropped Jerry off at the house and returned to the mountain with Robbie. The only reason he was letting Jerry stay in town without being under his eagle-eye was because Jerry has an early morning appointment with his counselor.

Jerry looked around right away, noticed the patch on the kitchen ceiling, then started sniffing around everywhere else. I couldn't believe how much like Dad he was becoming. He went outside and stood under the porch light, looking at all the dirt that had been put in the flower bed and around the maple tree. He snooped around out the workshop, too, turning on lights and following the muddy tracks from the backyard where Lonny and I had hauled the dirt. Mom looked at me with that face she made whenever he was impossible to deal with.

Some time later he came in the kitchen door. Mom was reading a magazine at the table. I was sitting beside her, drawing something.

"Mom, he's been smoking out back, whoever he is," he said. He held up a cigarette butt for her to see.

"Jerry, are you still harping on that?"

"I can do the work, Mom," he said, his voice full of whining.

"No, Jerry, you can't. You're on the mountain now with your father, and that's that. We've talked about this."

He flounced out of the room and stomped up the stairs. But the sound of his big boots stopped, so I knew he was just standing there, waiting for Mom to call him back down. But she had given up doing that years ago.

After some time, he shuffled back down on his own and started acting sorry for how he had behaved. He had his head down and was moping around the kitchen door. He finally came in and stood against the pie safe.

"Oh, Jerry, now go on," she said, not even looking up.

"I'm sorry I shot that man and messed everything up."

I looked over at Mom.

"Well, Jerry, you should be sorry," she said. "I don't know what ever got into you that day." She said this last part more as a question.

He said he didn't know, either, but that only made her say that not knowing was no excuse.

"I wanna stay here, Mom," he said.

I hated to see him begging in front of me.

Mom started turning the pages of her Family Circle magazine, turning them automatically, not really reading anything, barely glancing. "Jerry, your father and I have discussed it." She stopped and pretended to read something in the magazine. "Remember all that trouble you gave us over the car? And that Penwell girl." She put down the magazine and looked squarely at him. "Why did you get into it with Lonny Dunn? Tell me that?"

Jerry looked down at the floor as if he didn't have an answer.

"I wanna know, Jerry," she said, getting that hard look, "did you tell somebody what was in your father's cabin?"

She blamed Jerry for so much in her life. Treated him like a little version of Dad. I felt sorry for him. He wasn't always a bad brother. He was just the oldest, and the oldest always got the worst.

"I did it," I blurted out.

Mom turned to me. "You told *him*? You told Lonny Dunn?" The look on her face was out of this world. The look on Jerry's was about as bad.

She started flipping the pages of the magazine. You could hear them practically ripping. At first, she wouldn't look at me. Then she made me tell her the whole story, from the start. I told her about sneaking off the property, but I didn't tell her why. I told her about running into Dunn at Pam Riley's. I lied a little more and said we didn't plan on stealing anything from Dad's cabin. The whole time, she just sat there. So did Jerry, but he almost looked as if he had known this already, even what I was leaving out.

"The disappointment you boys put me through," she finally said. "All of you, against your father."

I looked at Jerry. All the belligerence was out of him. There was a lot of something out of me, too.

It was then Mom said, "Jerry you might as well know." She told him Lonny Dunn was working on the house, thanks to Grandma. She told him how he came recommended. Jerry sat there, looking socked in the stomach.

Mom went back to flipping pages. "I swear. The way things come out."

Lonny Dunn working on our house? That was all Jerry could say over and over.

"Now, Jerry, if you wanna help out around here, I guess you can paint your own room." She looked at me. "You all can."

The three of us sat there for a moment. You could hear the tick-tock of the last old clock in the living room.

Jerry wanted to take a light up on the third floor tonight and look at the walls and ceilings, and Mom, to our surprise, said it was a good idea. We could help her move some boxes around while we were up there.

Up the third floor stairs we filed, Jerry holding an old metal desk lamp on the end of an extension cord unraveling behind him. There was already an extension cord running up the stairs, but it was old and stapled down, and rather than mess with the arrangement of old plugs already up there, Mom thought it was better to take up a separate light.

As we went up, light from the desk lamp Jerry carried cast up around the plastered-up walls as if inside a cave. Dad had started work up here before we were born, but never finished. The walls were a swirl of gray and white patches of plaster.

I found a flashlight on the top step and started shining it around. I wanted to paint my room blue, I said. So did Jerry. Mom said a neutral shade would be better for one of the rooms. Eggshell white or beige. Our brother Robbie would want to pick a color, too, she reminded us, so we all should decide together, to be fair.

The three of us stood there, in the light of the lamp.

"Is *he* coming tomorrow?" Jerry asked.

He was Lonny Dunn.

"Yes, Jerry, *he* is," Mom said right back.

Then Jerry laughed, and it was not his usual cruel laugh, either. It was the laugh of something funny.

"He's been helpful so far," Mom said. "*He* gets the job done."

RIISING TO THE OCCASION

Settling into his seat, Dearl glanced out the window and watched as passengers climbed the stairwell and disappeared into the aircraft. Fastening his seatbelt, Dearl Deeks looked forward to his trip to Las Vegas. Gambling and fucking . . . a perfect combo. Just thinking about the whores he'd take up to his hotel room and punch around just for kicks before fucking them gave him a hard-on. Afterwards, he'd give 'em fifty bucks then boot their ass out the door. "Don't get much better than that," he thought with a smile.

Dearl enjoyed hurting women. His technique of well-placed hidden bruises was honed from childhood watching his old man beat up on his ma. From sixteen on he'd been practicing, first on his mother, then on his sister.

Cindy, his most recent girlfriend, was so plain it hurt . . . and desperate, why he could have wiped his feet on her and she would have just laid there like a doormat. Before Dearl rescued her she belonged to this stupid book club; she was always going off to meetings with her four-eyed friends. Really made him mad that she always had her nose in a book every time he came around. Well, he put a stop to that real fast by telling her he didn't want to share her with anyone, not even a paperback novel. She bought it . . . for a while.

One day he had her in a headlock trying to keep her from going out with her girl friends. He was just kidding around when he heard something crack. Next thing he knew she collapsed on the floor . . . couldn't move. Doctor said she'd be all right in a few months after physical therapy, but once therapy ended she had one excuse after another. He said he was sorry . . . promised it wouldn't happen again, but she refused to see him, damn bitch. Most women liked to be roughed up . . . least the ones he had. Dearl consoled himself that there were plenty of other women in the world just panting to cozy up to him.

In sensible, sturdy shoes Betty Jean Swift made her way cautiously down the aisle past the first class passengers. The stewardess had said the flight was full so please sit where assigned. Getting there was another matter though, as the line crawled along. Seemed every second passenger in front of her

had to stop and put his carry-on luggage in the overhead compartment. Her only carry-on was an oversize handbag that contained her medication, toiletries, a change of underwear, and a paperback. Why can't people be more like her?

Betty Jean preferred to travel by car . . . that way you can see more of the country. And you don't have to listen courteously to some lonely stranger tell her life story. Flying makes her nervous, even more so after 9-11. Seems she's been traveling by air alot more since that attack on the World Trade Center. Who knows, maybe there's a terrorist on this very flight. What if the engine catches fire? What if the wing breaks off? What if there's a bomb in the luggage? *Stop it! Besides, flight problems aren't always mechanical.*

Arriving finally at her assigned row she found a slight but compactly built young man in a tight black tee shirt and blue jeans sitting in her designated seat. "Must be some mix-up," she thought. "Maybe the airlines goofed and gave us both the same seat. Wouldn't be the first time."

"Excuse me, sir, but I believe you're in my seat," said Betty Jean graciously to the young fellow. Glancing at her ticket she double checked the seat number to make sure she wasn't mistaken.

"Wait a minute," said Deeks in mock surprise fumbling for his ticket stub. "I'm in 19C. What seat is this?" he asked deliberately stalling.

Pointing to the aisle seat, Betty Jean politely said, "I believe *this* is your seat." *Nice try, jerk.*

Dearl looked at his ticket stub then looked at the number on the arm rest. He took his sweet time unbuckling his seat belt before getting to his feet hoping she'd offer to switch seats. He's used this tactic before on old ladies . . . usually works, if he delays long enough.

Betty Jean waited. After all, she'd requested a window seat because in the aisle seat passengers, the food and beverage carts were constantly bumping you, not to mention getting up every time someone in your row has to use the toilet. Bad enough coach

class is squeezed in like anchovies. At least a window seat makes the flight a little more bearable.

Dearl took his time as Betty Jean did a slow burn. At last out of patience she said, "Sir, you're really holding up the line."

Just the incentive Dearl needed to pounce on her, blue eyes bulging. He gave her one of his famous blazing Dearl stares guaranteed to scare the shit out of most dames . . . at least it's worked in the past.

"Just a damn minute, Miss," he bellowed angrily.

Betty Jean wasn't a "Miss" . . . hadn't been for over forty-five years. She knew she looked grandmotherly in her short gray hair and frumpy outfit, but she stood her ground refusing to be intimidated and fixed him with a similarly fierce look. There in mid-aisle the two were locked in an old fashioned stare down halting traffic in either direction when the stewardess intervened and asked if there was a problem.

"Thanks, but I prefer the aisle seat anyway," announced Deeks loudly plopping reluctantly into 19C deliberately leaving the middle seat empty between them. Betty Jean had to crawl awkwardly over him to get to her window seat as he refused to budge. She may have even stepped on his foot trying to maneuver into her seat.

Adjusting her safety belt she heard the young man mutter aloud for only Betty Jean's ears, "Nobody wants to sit next to her anyway." A few seconds later he said, "She's gonna die soon anyways."

"Keep it up," thought Betty Jean, "you probably have to take off your shoes to count to twenty, so shut the fuck up." She ignored him by sticking her nose into a copy of *Great Expectations* she'd dug out of her handbag. Once the plane is airborne it'll be difficult to hear his grumbling, which is lucky for him.

An hour after take off, the beverage cart made its way down the aisle towards Dearl as he excavated a twenty out of his pocket. Tossing it at the steward he ordered a couple of beers to help him relax for the six hour flight. If he had to sit in the same

row as that old battle ax, he'd have to get *really* shit faced. With any luck he'll sleep all the way to Vegas.

"Darlin'," he said snapping his fingers at the stewardess, "git ol' Dearl a coupla refills. An . . . an a whiskey chaser," he said eyeing Betty Jean belligerently. When the food service came around Dearl waved away his meal saying that maybe "granny" here should take it since she wasn't long for this world. Then he dozed off.

The silence was a blessing. For the next four and a half hours Deeks snored loudly. Every now and then he shouted to someone in his dreams to "hold still, goddamn it." Betty Jean leased a set of headphones and tuned into a classical station rather than listen to his obscenities.

Dearl's bladder woke him urgently. A little hung over, he should have eaten something before downing all those beers, but that old bitch took his appetite away. "It's all her fault," he thought glowering at her spotting her headphones. He could really let rip with some nasty insults; she'd never know.

Warming up, he started with her wardrobe making fun of her Herman Munster-like shoes and her tightly permed granny hairdo then moved on to her liver spots saying you could play connect the dots there were so many . . . sure sign of imminent death. He then speculated on her lifestyle by saying that she probably had to *pay* BIG BUCKS just to spend time with her family. Finally, he never saw sideburns on a broad before . . . must be one of those lessbeans he's heard about.

Vindicated, Dearl scrambled out of his seat and down the aisle towards the restrooms. Spotting the VACANCY sign on one of the two doors he pushed it open and kicked it shut. Boy, he *really* had to take a leak. Suddenly, the door slammed open knocking him into the toilet before it banged shut.

"What the hell . . . can't you read the damn sign, moron," he shouted unzipping his fly. Turning clumsily in the small space Dearl Deeks came nose to nose with Betty Jean Swift.

Grabbing the neck of his tee shirt, Betty Jean's deep sultry voice said as she pressed the small-caliber pistol against his

sweating temple, "Listen, asshole, I heard every word you said back there and if you so much as breath in my direction, I'll be waiting for you at your hotel. Got it?"

Terrified, Dearl nodded nervously. *Shit . . . she's a he . . . or, one of those transvestments.* "Sure . . . sure thing. No . . . no problem. Please don't hurt me, please," he begged releasing his bladder suddenly.

"Good," said Betty Jean. "Now, you dry yourself off and get your butt back into your seat. By the way, don't bother reporting me," she said flashing her federal marshal's badge. "I'm licensed to carry." With that Betty Jean stealthily tucked the .38 into the cleavage of her push-up bra and exited the stall. "How *do* women wear these things," she wondered making her way back to her seat.

A shaky Dearl Deeks frantically blotted the growing wet stain on the front of his jeans with a wad of paper towels thinking that the old broad sure sounded like a cross between Kathleen Turner and Harrison Ford. Maybe he should rethink bringing some bimbo back to his Las Vegas hotel room. He could end up smacking around the wrong . . . girl.

The Transformation

The steady quarter note chords began the piece. The excess sounds of programs being turned and whispering adults dissipated as though the room had a universal mute button that had been activated by an unseen force. She had heard the piece and knew it well. The calmness that seized Ali's twenty-four year old body was one that she had not experienced in years.

The pulse of the piano filled her body with heat putting her in a trance of thought and emotion that could only be penetrated by the silence of the piano, rather than the music it was producing. She closed her eyes and suddenly, like a leaf falling from a tall tree, the cello entered the exclusive world of the song once inhabited by only her and the piano. As the cello descended the scale, her soaring emotions followed. She began to see incidences from her life. It was as though she began a journey where she could view her life from the vantage point of the music she was hearing.

She had only heard Faure's "Elegy" in a live setting one time before, but she could remember the sound of the cello's bow across the strings and the unique way the pianist, Mrs. Fong was her name, held her hands on the piano keys. She held her thumbs out in the air while her four main fingers worked the piano with the precision of an intricate machine.

This performance of "Elegy" was a bit unusual, for Ali was asked by a close friend Sam to turn the pages of his music while he accompanied for a student performer. Ali found the request rather odd considering there were many individuals that would be present at the event that could do just as sufficient job as she, but excited at the opportunity to spend the weekend time with this sparkly-eyed boy, she leapt at the opportunity to assist him in this musical event.

With her focus on the beauty of the piece rather than her assigned task, she nearly missed the first page turn. With her hand resting next to Sam's leg on the tan piano bench, her heart and ears absorbed the developing music.

As the piece progressed, the serenity ended and confusion began. The cello began a certain theme in a minor, sad sounding

tone, and the piano answered as though they were having a musical conversation that only the most intense listener would understand. Anger suddenly began to race through her body like a roaring flame of heat and despair. She looked down from her new vantage point and in horror noticed an event she hadn't thought of in eight years.

What could the significance be of removing such a fantastic individual from the earth at such a young age and in such a ridiculous manner? It was a sledding accident that took Ryan from her life at sixteen years of age. It happened so long ago, but as the harmonies became more evident in the piece, so did the knowledge that existed in her mind. The rage of eight years filled every crevice of her body, rage that should have consumed her in 1992.

Ali became almost robotic turning the pages of the music, for what was on the written page and what her eyes were viewing did not match. Closely she began to watch the movement of Sam's body as he performed. He began to nod his head so she would be more consistent with her page turns.

Suddenly she remembered how Ryan's mom winked at her as she played "Clair de lune" at his funeral and how she could hardly see the music because of the foggy mist that filled her eyes. How she viewed his lifeless body in the rose colored casket at the mortuary, but despite her view, still expected him to sit up and give her tips on how to play the Debussy because he had already learned and she was just beginning it. How it never crossed her mind that she was learning the piece to play at his funeral.

Ali was suddenly startled by a familiar smell that was present in the tiny audition room. "Eternity" cologne by Calvin Klein permeated the room as if filtered through the air conditioning ducts. She suddenly became a participant in the real and she began to quietly weep. The realization had come that for eight years she had expected to one day pass him in the hallway at school or run into him at the frozen food section at Vons. Bit by bit, the exquisitely constructed emotional brick wall she had dwelled behind for so long began to crumble as though an earthquake in an unprepared city.

Uncontrollable emotion rushed through her body and the weeping she had been trying to control escalated into an open sob. As the music stopped, her tears continued. Sam observed her display of emotion and thinking it was because she was touched by the sound of the piece, put his right arm around her shoulder to provide some sense of comfort. With her glistening eyes she walked into the bright, fluorescent, lit hallway.

No words were spoken, but the music resounded loudly within the walls of her soul.

Labor Pains

The house is hushed and dark. As they slumber, the family is letting out the stress of the day with their slow, rhythmic breathing, giving the home an audible pulse. All is still, peaceful, and they are all in a state of renewal; except for one. Green rays of light drift off the blank computer screen and into the darkened room, illuminating Jeanne's tired and aging face. She squints her eyes, hoping that by using the muscles in her face she would somehow stimulate her brain to produce profound and scholarly thoughts, but the exercise is all in vain. The computer screen stays blank and the hour continues to grow late.

Labor, for that is what Jeanne calls it, has begun. It is an emotional, demeaning, defeating, time consuming, exhausting, and takes her to places in her mind that she would like to avoid. For each painful contraction of her mind, for each passing hour, one small paragraph will be produced then deleted, revised, edited and with reluctance (and sometimes apathy), accepted. Jeanne knows it all too well; it happens every time she has to write a letter, a report, or a paper for school.

Jeanne concludes that the problem could really be summed up in one word: WORDS. They have caused her problems since her childhood. Which one do you choose? How do you spell it? How do you punctuate? What is the correct pronunciation of the word? It is really a love/hate relationship for Jeanne because, while writing causes her the most anxiety, there is nothing that soothes her anxiety and fears, or gives her such an escape, or education, as reading. When she reads Steinbeck she can actually hear the train meandering through the Salinas Valley, or taste the dust of the San Joaquin Valley in her mouth. She can be transformed by the heavy, rich similes and metaphors of Maya Angelou into a black child in Stamps, Arkansas, experiencing the sting of prejudice. Her admiration for Jane Austen has elevated the author to super-star status. Jeanne has always wished that she was more like the articulate Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*, but is reluctant to admit that she has much more in common with her mother, Mrs. Bennett, who is always plagued by her "delicate nerves."

More contractions, more deep sighs, a glance at her watch, and still a blank computer screen. Her husband is probably in a deep sleep now and will not even notice when she comes to bed, whenever that will be. It's not as if she left this assignment to the last minute. She has thought about it since she saw it on the syllabus and contemplated how she would do her research, the main points she would like to make about her topic, and has even worked out the bugs of the thesis statement she came up with. But that was then, in her head, where grammar, punctuation and spelling did not matter. Now that it is time to commit her brilliant ideas to paper, her mind has gone numb. The notes she has made to herself, on the backs of envelopes, corners of lecture notes, or whatever was handy when the brilliant thought occurred, presently seem to be cryptic, disjointed, and shallow.

The little girl appears now. Jeanne wants to immediately dismiss her from her thoughts, but experience has proven that she is part of the labor process. Part of Jeanne is almost relieved to see her because it gives her the chance to nurture the little girl and remind her that she is loved and valued. The little girl is in the first-grade now and has speech problems. She cannot pronounce her "R's" and people have a hard time understanding her. A cruel twist of fate has placed her in Mrs. Roar Ark's first-grade class, and her fellow students love to imitate her saying the teacher's name. Spelling is a puzzle to her too. One day she approaches the teacher to ask her how to spell the word "floor." The teacher responded, "F.L.O.W." The little girl knew this was not right; her actual question should have been, "Does the word 'floor' have one or two o's?" The little girl stamped her foot on the floor for emphasis and said "floor." The teacher spelled "flow" once again. The frustrated little girl stamped her foot on the floor even harder and said "floor"; the teacher responded by scolding her for throwing a fit and sentenced her to the ultimate humiliation—standing, face to the classroom door, during the next recess.

A car with a loud muffler can be heard three blocks away on Ming Avenue, and interrupts Jeanne's reverie for the misunderstood child. Children . . . that is why she is putting herself through all this misery, to be with children, to be an elementary school teacher. Her own children are almost grown and out of the house and she longs for the days when they were young and in her arms, on her lap, and at the center of her

universe. Jeanne reminds herself that she will have a fresh group of children in her life every year if she will just get her brain in gear and get this stupid paper written. She types a few sentences and begins to feel a sense of relief. When she proofreads her first paragraph she is discouraged. It is just shoddy paraphrasing, there is no passion or conviction in the words she has written.

Passion, she had so much of it as a child but had a hard time finding the appropriate way to express it. Her sisters all funnelled their passion into their writings and poetry to the delight of their mother, but Jeanne could never find the words that matched what she thought and felt. In the second grade, a small poem was discovered in her reading book that contained several of the newly discovered "exclamation points." Jeanne loved exclamation points! They expressed how she felt at times—like she was just going to burst with excitement, or explode with laughter. She spent all her recesses memorizing the poem. She would recite the poem for her family, just as her sisters did, and her mother's face would redden with emotion and tears would run down her cheeks. After dinner that evening Jeanne loudly recited her poem that started, "Hark, hark, the bugles blow!" Jeanne saw her mother's face redden . . . a good sign. The whole family had red faces . . . and they were laughing. At the end of the well-performed poem, lines with exclamation points spoken loudly, the mother said, "The 'u' in bugles is long, not short." For years the family like to re-tell this story much to Jeanne's dismay. Words—they caused her so much grief.

The words start to slowly yet steadily form themselves in Jeanne's mind now and find their way through the ends of her fingers and on to the keyboard. Accompanied by an occasional lonely bark of a neighbor's dog, and the protesting creak of her chair, Jeanne types into the night. She resents all of the interruptions her body creates when she has to go use the bathroom. In Congolese, the word "kakakaka" means having to go to the bathroom a thousand times a day, and refers to an ailment caused by inadequate sanitation and diet during the relentless rainy season. In Jeanne's comfortable home with ample food, multiple flush toilets, and temperature controls, she comes down with the very same symptoms, just because she has to write a paper.

The fingers are getting clumsy and striking the wrong keys; the mind is slowing down and her sleepy eyes are burning. The paper is almost finished. Several times, as Jeanne proofreads the text, she has to fight the urge to hit the delete button. She tells herself that it was the best she could do and to be glad that it is over. The paper will get her one step closer to the children, the ones she will meet in her classroom someday.

As she prints out her paper, Jeanne allows herself to imagine the tempo of her sleeping husband's breathing and matches her own breathing to his. She wants to slow down her heart, her breathing, and her mind, and press her own body against her husband's and let sleep envelope her. In the comfort of her sleep, and the depths of her dreams, the spelling, structure, and pronunciations are laid to rest.

Carrie

I flicked the lighter, and inhaled deeply. The cigarette burned a bright red. I sucked again and then ashed the cigarette into the small tray on the counter. The smoke circled around my head and then disappeared into the air. The reflection in the mirror was me, but a small part of me—the physical me. I had worn my makeup the same for years, but now, tonight, it was different. My face was painted with natural beige then accented with rose-colored cheeks. My green eyes were enhanced by a dark eye shadow and then outlined in a rich black. I wore fake eyelashes that were also coated in black. My pouty lips decorated in ruby red.

Behind me, in the mirror, I can see the other girls. They are not like me. At least I don't think that I am like them. They walk around with their big hair and even bigger boobs. One of the girls, wearing a sheer pink dress, stands in front of the mirror admiring her reflection. She is making sure that every bit of her is in place. Suddenly, she turns around and bends over. Next she does something that at first I was very shocked to see but have now become familiar with—slides her panties over and again and makes sure that every bit of her is in place. She stands up again, and with one last glance in the mirror she walks out the swinging door.

"Carrie!" A girl in purple called to me. Carrie wasn't my name, but I looked at her.

"Ya?" I answered.

"You're up," she replied. I took one last drag of my cigarette and then put it out.

I walked out the swinging door into another smoke filled room. This room was dark. I sauntered past many people. I could feel them staring at me with their dirty eyes. I took two steps up onto the stage. The bright lights shined down on me. Then the familiar song came on. I started to move slowly. I knew what to do. I had done this routine many times. I can remember clearly the conversation I had with a customer who told me just how to do it:

"Pretend like you're having an orgasm," he said

"Like I'm having an orgasm?" I don't think that this gentleman realized that the real me had never even had an orgasm. So how was I supposed to pretend? So, I just did what the other girls did.

At the end of my performance I swept by the front of the stage and then down the two steps over to the next stage. I then began to do the same routine again. "The audience would never know," I told myself. The vapor from the fog machine produced an even dreamier atmosphere. The song ended. One more sweep past the stage and I found myself back in my dressing room. I knew I couldn't hide in here for long. After all you can't make money by just sitting here. This was the worst part about the job.

I walked through the swinging doors. I scoped the room for any familiar faces. It was Thursday night. My favorite night. John and his friend Scott had been coming in here for years. But for a while now I was their favorite.

"Hi John. Hi Scott." I smiled as I approached them.

"Hi Carrie." They smiled eagerly at me. They offered me a chair and I sat down next to the two of them. John and I sat and talked for about an hour. He told me about his company, his car, his money and anything else to impress me. I'm not sure why he paid me so much just to talk. I walked away happily with \$300 in my hand.

Scott was also generous, but unfortunately he expected me to work for it. So, for the next twenty minutes I would work as hard as I could. Literally putting my back into it. But in the end I held an additional \$120. Not bad for a few hours work.

"See you next week," I called back. I needed a drink.

Back in the dressing room the girls sat around talking about work, exercise, money, men, and sex. That's all they ever talked about. At eighteen years old I was one of the youngest girls in the business. I didn't feel young.

I slipped off my dress and put on another. I wore a short, tight, red dress. I put on white 6-inch high heels with white panties to match. I too bent over in front of the mirror.

"Carrie. It's your turn again." I heard a voice holler into the dressing room. I knew it was my turn.

Again, I stride past the crowd of boys. My song begins to play, "Lady in Red." I love the way this song sounds. It was towards the end of the night so the atmosphere was beginning to wind down. I stepped up twice and then grabbed the pole. I swung around it slowly. Bit by bit moving my back up and down against it. I see some of the boys from the crowd move to sit around the stage. They want to watch me work, and I let them. Besides it wasn't really me up here, it was Carrie.

The rest of my night was steady. I hustled from table to table gathering money. I worked the floor hard throughout the night. I may as well make the most of it. The night was finally over. The owner came in to collect our dues. I gave him \$35. On the way out I tipped the DJ \$20 and thanked him. The bouncer came over and grabbed my things. He walked me out to the car and put my things on the seat next to me. I gave him another \$10. He closed my door and I started the engine.

"Bye Carrie!" he shouted. I waved goodbye and began the drive home. I reached into my bag to grab cigarettes. Pulled out one of the long white sticks and lit it. I inhaled deeply as the smoke filled my lungs. I let it all out. A sense of peace began to fill my body as I drove home on the deserted road. I looked over onto the seat next to me to see my earnings for the night—seven hundred fifty dollars. It was a pretty good night. I pulled my hair back into a ponytail with the hair tie I wore earlier. The breeze coming through the window hit my face. The coolness began to sober me up from the dreamy state I had been in all evening. It was 3 a.m. and I had school in the morning. I would only get a few hours of sleep. How would I look by morning? I glanced at my reflection in the rearview mirror. Who was this girl staring back at me? I tasted the nasty film in my mouth and glimpsed at the cigarette. I threw almost the whole cigarette out the window. I didn't smoke.

God's Perspective and Other Views

What a beautiful, sunny, Playa Del Rey day! The deep green waves lapped at the shore, almond colored sand stretching as far as the eye could see, and children, young and old alike, swimming and splashing happily. The Alvarez clan, all 50 of them, had pitched in, and gathered to share a yummy barbecue of pork loin, jumbo shrimp, juicy corn and giant potatoes oozing with butter. Nicky and Louie, a couple of the cousins, had driven to the Valley to pick up the family matriarch, a chubby, cuddly imp of '87 with a twinkle in her eyes that telegraphed her joy and lust for life. Quintina was the ramrod of this hardworking, fun-loving tribe that operated La Cubanita, one of the most popular restaurants in nearby Culver City. She would supervise the cooking, as always, delegating chores to sons, daughters-in-law, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Gazing down at the beach from her perch, Elena squinted, searching for her grandma. Dinner time was approaching, and she relished the fanfare of Quintina's final flourish beside the deep rock pits. The family always met at Playa Del Rey, because the Los Angeles County Park Service maintained a neat row of giant barbecue pits for public use each summer. Reservations had to be made months in advance, and the Alvarezes had reserved two pits in early April.

Suddenly, Elena's eyes riveted on a crowd gathered below her, near the shore. It was *her* family, nearly in hysterics, clinging to one another for comfort. Someone was sprawled face down, lifeless, paramedics frantically trying to revive her. A head moved and Elena recognized the bikini. Amazed, she grabbed her arms and breasts for reassurance. Then, shrugging her shoulders, she calmly watched for any sign of movement.

Moments earlier, she had been swimming about 100 yards off shore, when a swirling mass of water swallowed her into what seemed like a giant bowl of soft, cool, lime Jell-O. As the waves gently tumbled her, the sunlight peering through the water, she mused to herself, "Now I know how laundry feels in a washing machine." Only an occasional scrape on the sandy bottom reminded her of where she was. The window of light drew

closer and brighter, as peaceful relaxation enveloped her soul, lifting it skyward, in a cozy, tender caress.

Then a warm, circling breeze brushed against her cheeks and tussled her long, dark, wavy hair, like a giant fan. The sky seemed bluer here, the clouds puffier, the sun much nearer and still brighter. It was a comfortable, nurturing space, safe from the grit of sand that works its way into the lining of your bathing suit, safe from the jelly fish that sometimes pestered determined swimmers and surfers, and safe from the guys who would stare until you were ill at ease with your body. Elena had been working on her tan for about three weeks—long enough to get that nice Coppertone glow in all the right places. It was just right for the upcoming senior prom. She had been careful to wear her smallest bikini—her favorite—the chocolate brown one with light purple dots that reflected the sunlight.

In her peaceful state, she continued to reminisce about her oneness with the beach, the ocean, and the sky. Elena's favorite time at the beach was just before sunset. She swam there nearly every evening, strolled along the surf, listened to the waves, an occasional seagull, and the haunting melodies played by a lone piper who lived near the end of the pier. Occasionally, a stereo shared Simon and Garfunkel, another favorite. It was a surfside ritual for them both, Elena and the piper she had yet to meet.

Swimming in the ocean was her most satisfying way to keep in shape. She wasn't active in school sports. In fact, she wasn't a terrific swimmer—but she was good enough to tackle the two-mile round-trip swim to the pier. Her other love was sailing, and she often crewed for a family friend during the Marina Del Rey day races on weekends. As long as Elena was on, in, or near the ocean, she was happy.

Somehow, her ease with the sea had masked the danger—as it sucked her into its depths. Elena sensed no threat to her well-being, any imminent demise or reason to struggle against the loss of air. The muffled echoes of voices and waves merely enhanced the euphoria underwater, and still enraptured her as she precociously peered down from sixty feet above it all. Then, the now-familiar sucking sensation returned, gently returning her to the lifeless frame on the sand. She sat up, gasping for air, coughing up salt water, and pushed away the hulk of the paramedic crouched over her.

That poor paramedic got another wallop from Quintina, as she rushed to fling her arms around Elena, her bright eyes glistening in ecstatic relief. The paramedic's urgings to go to the hospital were drowned in the family's screams of joy and calls for a cup of water, juice, or maybe wine. Elena took a sip, then slowly poured the refreshing Chardonnay over her hair and face, stood up, shook the sand off, adjusted the straps of her chocolate bikini, and headed for her beach towel, smothered by a shower of hugs and kisses.

After a short nap, she joined the family for dinner, relaxed until the meal settled, then eased herself up and headed for the surf. She couldn't leave the beach that day without returning to the ocean. She refused to be intimidated, or haunted by any fear of drowning. Her mother's anguished pleadings to stay out of the water ignored, Elena calmly returned to her sanctuary, drifted with the ebb and flow of the waves a bit, then swam to the pier and back. Elena's mother had always been afraid, as long as Elena could remember—afraid of the dark, afraid to speak Spanish in public, afraid to fly, and afraid of death. Those fears had never haunted her, except for one—the fear of dying. Now she would never fear death again. It was an incredible relief to know how it feels—what a peaceful, effortless transition one makes from life to eternity. She kept these treasured passages to herself, save for her dear friend, Lois, whom she pledged to secrecy.

Years later, she was at the bedside of her dying friend. It was hard to lose her. They had been close friends since high school—a devout Roman Catholic and an Orthodox Jew. At 43, Lois had smoked for over 20 years—except when Elena hassled her. She had given it up, but it was too late. For two weeks, Elena drove eighty miles each night to reminisce with Lois about their good, and tough times together. Mercifully, the end came quickly. Lois had a psychic talent that amazed all who knew her, so it surprised Elena when she confided at the end, that she was afraid to die. Lois spoke of her fear in the third person—"She's afraid to die." The pain was already unbearable. As she had done so many times before, Elena eased her friend's departure by whispering gently in her ear, reminding her of that long-ago day on the beach. Her transition would be painless, and incredibly beautiful. Lois remembered, smiled faintly at Elena, and calmly let go.

"Open the Door"

Cling-cling. Moving bodies and hushed voices stir behind the wooden barrier. A rectangle outline of light shines dimly from the direction of the clinging and clanking. Water rushes, while the aroma of coffee escapes from the kitchen into the pitch-black room. Pop-pop. Percolating coffee excitedly reveals its completion. More hush, but excited voices continue to interrupt peaceful sleep, as they converge into the kitchen. A low mesmerizing hum sings behind the wall. Whirl-whoosh. A loud gush of water flushes through the pipes, then the low hum ceases its song. Creak-creak. Wood panels pop and crack as woolly socks shuffle from the bathroom to the hallway. Hiss-boom. Announcing the heating pump is on, there is a loud thud shaking the walls. Warmth spills through from one room to the next. Hiss-hiss. A salty whirl of bacon and eggs linger as they bubble and dance on-top the stove. Crash-bang. Dishes and cups cling and clatter onto the wooden tabletops, as breakfast commences. Deep voices mingle with soft hushed ones. Urgency is apparent in the hushed voices, as a discussion ensues. Heavy steps leave the kitchen heading towards the front door. Quietly gushing, wind enters the hallways and lightly bangs against the closed wooden barrier. Creak-creak. Frost mingled with warmth lingers as the gush of air ceases. All the sounds of morning become overwhelming; a new day is finally here.

Time had been slowly creeping away from the night. Blackness escapes, carefully revealing the previous false identities in the room. From dark to gray, the room is no longer shadowed inconspicuously. A low whistling tune escapes from the vent, while the brightness of dawn attempts to enter through the window. Dark shades of gray delicately vanish, as the clock lightly ticks moments away. Brightly, dawn stretches its reach carefully through the shades, as a pine finger scratches the glass. Scratch-scratch. With the help of the pine's branch, the light demands attention by revealing the secrets the darkness had been hiding all night long. New shadows form against the wall and the wooden barrier. New forms are being created.

Hard steps moving closer towards the door are suddenly stopped short by another set of footsteps. Voices are no longer hushed, but remain incoherent, while shadows distort the shape of the rectangular light outline. Dancing shadows move quickly,

as a duet ensues between a calm, yet strong and steady voice with a higher, more agitated one. Popping wood panels indicate a third set of hard steps emerging, but nothing is said. Hesitation prevails for long moments. Uncertainty has arisen once again. Indecisiveness interferes with action. Suddenly all bodies move away quickly, yet quietly revealing once again in the dim rectangle outline.

Initially, the sudden stillness is unnerving, but inviting as it entices a retreat for an extended slumber. Exhaustion provides a desire for continuous sleep, but heavy thoughts and strong anticipation prevents its ease. Aching eyelids attempt to seduce its will to remain closed. Rub-rub. Quick flashes of red and white lights can be seen while attempting to rid the comforting sleep away. Hiding under layers of flannel, cotton, and goose-down help induce a well-deserved unconsciousness, but dawn continues to wrestle with the dark shades of gray and begins to overcome it by bringing the room to life. Blurry eyes prevent lucidity, but as dawn causes the darkness to vanish, it uncovers what it had been hiding all night long. Tightly closed eyes struggle to fight against the light, but it is apparent sleep should not be this difficult to accomplish. Eyelids are unsuccessful in convincing its desire to stay shut and return to fantastic dreams. The mind wanders back to possible paths the fantasy was alluding to. Determination becomes intense. Flop-puff-fluff. Newly arranged pillows are also unsuccessful in escaping back to the dream-world. A slow realization overcomes all sleepy intentions and dream-like ponders, but a slight hesitation prevents to body to move, thus making it easy to ignore the dawn. Whoop. The comforting covers rush over the bed causing a great whirl of crisp wind. Frigid air becomes convincing as its overwhelming power causes refuge to be sought once again.

Cling-cling. Bang! Ferocious wispy air shudders through the vent. Racing heart jumps causing retreat for comfort and security under layers of warm and cozy goose-down and flannel. Unidentifiable voices grow audible, as heavy slippers come closer to the disappearing light outline. Aggressive fingernails slowly scrap the wood, as a hand searches to apply pressure to turn the knob. Click-click. Jingle-jingle. A turned button quashes entry, while hushed voices confer. Hurried footsteps are followed by more incoherent, yet booming voices, as the quartet looms behind the locked barrier. Hiding under layers of security, the end of

refuge begins to appear inevitable. Indecisiveness will no longer be a hindrance for the still bodies; they will finally have a purpose to their early rising and the day will finally begin. Brush-scratch. A sliding hand hesitates against the wooden barrier while pressure is finally applied into a fist, then a knock. Softly, delicately, a tiny sound breaks the silence. Knock-knock. It is time to get up.

Time to surrender to the crisp December morning, to surrender to anxiety and unanswered questions. Time to embrace all the clarifications and meticulous details that have been engulfing me for months. Time to embrace a much anticipated new beginning and share my life with my soul-mate. Clues that the morning is finally here will not be ignored. All the butterflies have flown from the mind and the tummy; they can no longer paralyze me with fear or uncertainty. Not only has there been all the people who had been waiting behind the closed barrier, anxiously anticipating the activity of this day, but also those who have travelled long and far to be nearer. All the bodies moving quickly and quietly throughout the house have been waiting patiently and diligently for me to initiate the day, to set forth the detailed schedule, cushioned for alterations or delays. Helping hearts and hands converge from room to room searching for the next task to fulfill. Yet, at the moment, all that can be done has been accomplished, but there is much to still do. There is no hesitation in my heart, but an overwhelming satisfaction and closure that a quest is almost accomplished. After months of anticipation, a small feeling of sadness pinches a nerve. All the preparation will be done today. Immense happiness and unhinged joy overcomes me. Turning flush, I feel my face hot, then cool. Heavy tension leaves my shoulders, as the weight of demands and tasks fall away. All the planning, all the struggling has meaning today. I have been waiting for this day for practically an eternity and now it is finally here; now there has to be a new dream to wish for, a new goal to desire.

Brightly, dawn reveals the contents of the open closet. Carefully and delicately balanced on a satin hanger, hangs layers of white tulle and organdy, with tiny beaded pearls covered by clear plastic. I hear the tap on the window and a final knock at the door. "Are you awake, yet?" calls out Melanie, "It's time to get up for the big day." Time to be awoken by the new possibilities and to harbor new dreams. Time to finally open the door; time to get up and get married. Time for my new life to begin.

"The Flood"

Mary hoisted a soggy pant leg out of the murky waves that spread thick across the asphalt of the UNLV parking lot. This abundance of water, arriving from a torrential mid-July downpour, muddled the confusion already swimming in her head. What a strange week she had endured. Since Monday, four days before summer school would be finished, drama and metaphor had saturated Mary's days; she had been utterly prepared for finals. In four weeks, she'd memorized and presented 225 lines of Shakespeare, learned twelve of the Bard's plays, received A's on every test, and read almost the entire Bible, absorbing the parables while appreciating the prose as a poetic literary achievement. As the uncanny seasonal storm erupted from the heavens, Mary considered her beginning of summer a fantastic success.

Shielding a damp head from the barrage of raindrops, she positioned a warped PeeChee above her eyes and gleefully splashed her way to a newly rinsed white Plymouth Breeze. Had she anticipated the mildewed stench that would linger, even after months of airing out the interior, she would have opted to wait out the wetness in the shelter of some sterile, fluorescent classroom. Instead, she flung her supplies on the passenger seat and dove into the car, rescued.

Mary put the car in reverse and merged cautiously into the seat before her. Generally, after reaching the light at the intersection, she would have sped to the left and darted between traffic to make it back to the Sunrise Springs apartment complex in record time. The weather, however, dictated that she must take care. Already, autos that could not tolerate the swim were littering the margins of Tropicana Avenue. She did not want to get stuck. There was no danger of her exceeding the speed limit today; it was all she could do to find the road between the wiper blades and sheets of descending water.

"Nothing's fine, I'm torn," cooed Natalie Imbruglia over the Mix 96.5 FM station. Mary joined the vocals at the chorus in a faulty soprano. "I'm all outta faith, this is how I feel. I'm cold and I'm ashamed, lying naked on the floor . . ."

Her snail-like pace prompted a welcome lucidity for her previously cluttered sensibilities. A feeling of elation permeated her being; she'd conquered a situation that at one time appeared too difficult a challenge, according to her parents, anyway, who initially disapproved of her shacking up with Justin. Now they would squeal their pride over the wires when they heard the news about her grades. She'd lived in Las Vegas with her boyfriend for two years and had maintained a four-point-zero, a tidy apartment, and her sanity thus far. Mary herself was even impressed at her competence, but she usually accomplished whatever she was after with hard work and whole-hearted dedication. When the atmosphere at U.C. Santa Barbara had proven to be too much of a negative influence on her social behavior, forcing her to move home, Mary had dealt with the consequences maturely. She made sure it took only four months to establish a responsible persona and save enough money to move in with Justin. Las Vegas, ironically, was where she had regained her morals, ambition, and rosy outlook on the future.

Feeling supremely self-assured and magnanimous due to the empowering electricity of the morning's events, Mary devised a plan. She quickly constructed a mental grocery list: avocados, soy cheese, salsa, Mexican rice. Preoccupied with her lunch fantasy, she maneuvered clumsily into the Vons shopping center, sending a swell that rose over the curb and onto the sidewalk, nearly soaking a group of children who were huddled under an eave. She envisioned Justin with raised eyebrows and a wide grin as he unlocked the door to their happy little dwelling. He would rush to her and kiss her and tell her how thoughtful she was. They loved rewarding each other by secretly having meals ready after a long day of classes or work. Mary and Justin had spent countless romantic episodes provoked by the flavor of surprise.

Guiding the chrome basket around to Aisle Four, marked Pasta, Rice, Canned Soup, and Spaghetti Sauce, Mary recalled one memorable repast from earlier that year. She had rocketed back from a sitting job (she worked for Nannies of Las Vegas), intending to demonstrate her love and appreciation for Justin in the last remaining hours of Valentine's Day. Armed with flowers, his favorite cinnamon candy, and a small white bear covered in hearts, she had bolted through the door to discover a complete Italian dinner appropriately laid out on a candlelit table. He had jolted her then, by peering so ferociously into her pupils as he

served her a healthy portion of steamed vegetables and rigatoni. His manner had been so seductive that she only slightly winced as he poured the heavy alfredo cream sauce over her food. He knew she was a vegan, but the ecstasy with which he enriched her life frequently moved her to abandon petty principles like her refusal to eat dairy products.

Mary glowed at this recollection as she reached for the Farmhouse box with the orange label. Justin was so sensitive, so secure in his affection for her, that she often puzzled over whether she deserved a guy so wonderful. She hoped he felt the same intense emotions reciprocated in her small gestures. Her chest expanded as she inhaled deeply; there was something inexplicably satisfying about grocery shopping by herself. Perhaps it was because she was in control of the cart, she decided which nourishing items to place in it, and she directed its course. The whole experience made her strong.

"Guess it's a blind kind of love, oh—oooh—oh . . ." Realizing she recognized the tune overheard in the distance, she softly provided words to the Muzak version of U2's "Sweetest Thing." In her best imitation of Bono's unwavering falsetto, she crooned, "Baby's got blue skies up ahead, but in this old rain cloud . . . Ours is a stormy kind of love . . ."

Checking for the third time to see what was missing from her list, Mary headed towards produce. She felt the back wheel of her shopping cart snag on something as she left the aisle. The spine-chilling squeak of metal on metal that followed accompanied an unpleasant rattle. The cart stuttered and refused to roll in the direction she pushed it. Meandering awkwardly toward the cash register, Mary reached up to toy with the silvery charm around her neck. Sliding it back and forth across the chain, she resembled a dissatisfied film director, repeatedly indicating "Cut!" This nervous gesture resulted from a subconscious need to let her fellow shoppers know that the errant and rickety basket really didn't bother her at all. She was above such minor disturbances. She would rather strangers consider her oblivious, not uncomfortable the way she normally felt in public. Tugging on the heart that hung around her neck, Justin's love in white gold, usually calmed her anxiety in these situations. A matching ring of the same precious metal, anchored permanently on her

left hand, was the assurance that she would always be in Justin's heart. She'd never be alone.

The drive home was perhaps more eventful than she would have preferred. The rain hadn't ceased in nearly three hours, and by now, most roads were completely under water. Abandoned cars lined every shoulder, and from the distraught expressions of drivers around her, Mary was suddenly aware of the formidable possibilities confronting her. Nervous that the river might carry her away, she chose an alternative entrance to the apartment complex, one that required her to leave the car in the Bank of America parking lot next to their building. A moat surrounded the Sunrise Spring's property. She figured she'd scale the wall separating the two buildings and enter the complex that way. After quite a struggle, Mary reached the top, school bag and groceries in tow, and she realized she'd have to heave her sopping belongings over a five-foot wide lake that hugged the wall on her apartment's side. She hopped down into the pool.

Back in their shared space, Mary whisked the perishables into the refrigerator, then exited the kitchen and inhaled deeply. A musty, herbal scent, mingled with the subtlety of fresh painted walls, overpowered the fragrance of the precipitation from outside. She felt a degree of regret, having allowed him to "expand his mind" inside their brand new apartment; it had only been six days since they had moved in, and the living room carpet was already stained with bong water. She posed, motionless for a moment, with one hand on the back of the chair and the other next to a stack of freshly laundered boxers that she had folded the afternoon before. She hurried to change and prepare their tasty ethnic lunch.

Hours later, when she'd given up simmering the rice any longer and the guacamole had paled to an unappetizing gray, Mary grew unbearably weary. She turned off the lights and twisted tight all of the venetians. Her skin, because of the humidity of the day and their air conditioning not working, maintained a sticky film of perspiration. She stripped; her nudity gave way to an immediate rush of cool. Curled beneath their Jim Morrison quilt on the brown corduroy sofa, Mary slipped into partial slumber. Her dreams were patterns of colorful puddles and figures. When something screamed, jerking back to the

present, she stretched to yank the cordless from its base. Her vision blurry, forehead dripping, Mary closed her lids and whispered an annoyed,

"Hello."

"Mary? Hi, it's Justin." She wasn't sure if she was angry from being awakened or because she hadn't heard from him when he was supposed to be home. She didn't respond, but he continued, skipping over the usual niceties or inquiries about how her finals had gone. "Mary, I don't think I'm gonna come home tonight—I'm gonna work the overnight for Sherri." Justin worked at a group home for developmentally disabled children and often had to stay later than he expected. But he never volunteered to work a double shift.

"Okay . . ." she answered, hesitating.

"Mary, I can't do this anymore." His voice cracked as he whined. She knew he'd been looking for a different job, but—

"What do you mean, Justin?"

"I don't love you anymore," he wailed, separating the words like he was shouting to someone at a great distance.

The dam had broken. She was flooded with incomprehension—what the hell was he saying? Why? What did he mean? What was going on? She couldn't understand and began hyperventilating. Her blanket fell to the floor.

Crouched on the ground and rocking, she choked at the tears that wouldn't come. She was drained, dehydrated. Too weak to cry. There was nothing. Nothing. From the phone lying face down in the carpet a few feet away, the operator's voice repeated instructions to "hang up and try again." Shaking and shrieking in her quiet little cave, she looked out through a crack in the blinds and cursed the sun that peaked out from behind the scattering clouds.

She owns land.



Biddy Speaks Her Mind

Biddy ached to find a way to tell the judge that Robert Smith was a liar. But how could she when she was not allowed to speak in open court?

Weary after spending a sleepless night in the Los Angeles County jail, along with her three children and ten other slaves, Biddy struggled to remain alert as she seated herself on a wooden bench at the rear of the courtroom this brisk January morning in 1856.

She knew this might be her only chance for freedom. But California law stated that "Negroes, Mulattoes and Indians" could not testify in court. Biddy was of African descent, so that ruling applied to her.

But Biddy, whose faith had guided her through many hardships during her thirty-eight years of life, was not one to give up easily. A look of determination began to build in her dark, wide-set eyes, a look that bored into Judge Benjamin Hayes willing him to dig further for the truth. Her desire to be heard grew even stronger upon learning that she had been abandoned by the lawyer hired to represent her. To reach California she had walked two thousand miles from Mississippi in the choking dust at the rear of her owner's wagon train. If the judge refused to hear her side of the story, Robert Smith, her owner, could leave the state as he had planned. Selling slaves in California was illegal, but in Texas and other southern states there was a ready market.

Fortunately, the judge sensed that something was amiss and asked his bailiff to investigate. The officer discovered that Robert Smith had offered the slaves' attorney \$100 to quit the case. The lawyer took the bribe, leaving the slaves to fend for themselves.

Judge Hayes, whose circuit ranged south to San Diego and west to San Bernardino, had a reputation for liberally interpreting the law. He was known for his fairness. It troubled him that these slaves who sat before him could not speak on their own behalf.

In answer to the judge's questions, Robert Smith said he considered his slaves "family," and that they wanted to go with

him to Texas. (This was partially true since he had fathered several of the children.) Smith admitted, however, that he had only \$500 in his pocket, plus a wagon and a few head of livestock, hardly enough to sustain his white family—a wife and six children—much less fourteen slaves on the long trek to Texas. The judge felt that there could be only one reason that Smith wanted to take the blacks to Texas, namely to sell them.

The judge seemed to sense that the other Smith slaves respected Biddy and looked to her for guidance. And indeed, they did. Biddy, a woman of great physical strength who had endured years of hardship, refused to be intimidated by her so-called master.

Judge Hayes asked Biddy to step into his office, away from the courtroom. He invited two Los Angeles citizens to act as witnesses to her testimony. Both were white men. Once everyone was seated in his chambers, the judge asked Biddy if she wanted to stay in California.

"I have always done what I was told to do," she replied. Then, indicating her desire to stay in California, she added, "I always feared this trip to Texas since I first heard of it. Mr. Smith told me I would be just as free in Texas as here."

That was all Judge Hayes needed to hear. He issued his decision on January 19, 1856, declaring that "All of the said persons are entitled to their freedom and are free forever." He told the former slaves "to become settled and go to work for themselves—in peace and without fear." Biddy, already skilled in nursing and midwifery, took his advice and immediately got a job assisting John Strother Griffin, the county doctor. Her pay was \$2.50 a day, a very good salary in 1856.

Shortly after winning her freedom she took another important step, one that gave her a true identity. Like other slaves, she had never had a surname. Freed slaves often took the names of their former masters. But not Biddy. She chose Mason as hers. No one knows why she picked that name. One historian suggests that she took the name from Amasa Mason Lyman, a Mormon trail guide. Whatever her reasons, "mason" is a fitting name. The word means builder, a person who strengthens things. During the next thirty-five years, Biddy proved her merit in building many things,

establishing a school for African-Americans, and founding the First African Methodist Episcopal Church.

She saved her money and gave a lot of it to others in need. In 1866 she purchased her first piece of real estate for \$250. A shrewd investor, she was a wealthy woman at the time of her death in 1891.

For nearly a century she was all but forgotten. Then in 1989 the city, then led by Mayor Tom Bradley, honored her by establishing a tree-shaded park and memorial wall on the site of her original homestead on Spring Street in downtown Los Angeles.

At the dedication ceremony one civic official said, "Thank God for Biddy Mason . . . when she won her freedom, I won mine. She stood up straight and said, 'I ain't going to take it no more.'"

*Note: This is an excerpt from the author's unpublished full-length manuscript, *Biddy Mason: A Place of Her Own*.

My Spindly Santa Claus

Many, perhaps most, American parents go to great lengths to convince their children that there really is a Santa Claus. The myth gathers credence as the holiday approaches, bolstered by multiple appearances of the merry, red-suited elf—leading the annual holiday parade, enthroned at the local shopping mall, or “ho-ho-ho-ing” his way through a blizzard of television commercials.

Customarily on Christmas Eve, after the little ones are snug in their beds, mom and dad pull from the dark depths of a closet a plethora of toys that have lain hidden from curious eyes for months. These treasures then are frantically assembled around the sparkling tree. Often a plate of cookies reposes on the mantle above the fireplace; a treat for the jolly gentleman to enjoy during his whirlwind visit. (On Christmas morning only crumbs will remain, one more proof of his existence.)

Some parents dread the day when the kids realize that Santa’s a myth, fearing that the youngsters will feel betrayed by their elders. Such fears are groundless, in my view, and I offer my own awakening as a case in point.

While most adults recall the Santa Claus of their childhood as a rotund, bearded fellow, reminiscent of the figure described in Clement Moore’s famous poem, my recollection is quite different. Thanks to my Uncle Mac, who spilled the beans on my seventh Christmas.

Short in stature, splindly legged, smooth-shaven and nearly bald, my uncle bore no resemblance to the traditional Saint Nick. Unpredictability was his hallmark; I suspect that some of my adult relatives considered his often bizarre behavior an embarrassment, but as a child of seven, I found him entertaining.

Uncle Mac served in the Navy during wartime, and twenty years later could still fit into his bell bottoms. At least once during the holiday season he could be counted upon to take his uniform out of mothballs and dance his version of the sailor’s hornpipe. He generally performed his routine when he was, as my Aunt Claire delicately described his condition, “in his cups.”

On this particular Christmas Eve, however, he forsook the sailor suit and performed in a less encumbered manner. It was well after midnight when I was awakened by a commotion in the hallway outside the second-story bedroom my sister and I shared. I rose from my bed, tiptoed to the door, and opened it a crack. And whom did I spy? Not Santa, but my uncle who chortled with glee as he pranced about in the wide hallway—barefooted and clad only in a pair of white Jockey shorts.

I spotted my aunt who stood in the doorway opposite. "Mac," she said in a stage whisper, "what in the world are you doing running around out there in your underwear? Get back in here this instant."

"Can't," Uncle Mac replied. "I've got to go downstairs and help Pete play Santy Claus." Pete was my father.

Perhaps I should have been disappointed upon learning the truth about Santa Claus. But I'd had my suspicions for some time; my screwball uncle merely confirmed them. Besides, Uncle Mac's antics always made me smile—still do, for that matter.

I played my part on Christmas Day, "oohing" and "ahhing" over the gifts "Santa" brought during the night. But before the next December rolled around, I found a way to let my folks know that I had seen the *real* saint and his name was Mac.

REFERENCE LETTER

In July, the California sun is deep in to the socket of the sky, and the inland smog shields against the most intense burns. I don't care how much emission gas I breathe in, I want to stay in San Jose. I cannot imagine my life another way. I need a job to do this.

I have needed a real job for months and I have not been facing it, they said. They consist of my parents Ronald and Elizabeth. I love the edginess of living on the outer limits of the Silicon Valley. I think that I can have and keep everything that I want. I see it all, the lavish homes in Los Gatos, the plush green hills far up into Berkeley and Oakland, the vineyards of Napa-Sonoma. I gorge my senses when I visit campuses like Santa Clara University and Stanford which are built like precision models of southwestern taste, red tile roofs, elegant symmetry in the Spanish style. I can reach San Francisco in an hour and the Napa Valley in two or three, as traffic chooses. The countryside is wide open and touchable—if you want artichokes in Salinas or garlic in Gilroy, you can pull your car to the side of the road and breath it and touch it. If someone calls this God's country, I won't dispute it.

My parents are right. I need to pay for myself. They are tired of supplementing me. I need to finish my master's degree at San Jose State University and find a teaching job. I have spent part of the summer finishing a paper on Ford Maddox Ford. I am closing in on my last classes. I can feel the degree on my fingertips and know it will be mine in another year.

My father cannot conceal his anger at my studying literature and the arts. I cannot tell him about my poetry being published. He is a scientist and feels there is too much uncertainty in the newness of creating works in literature. He deplores the fact that I have left my fate in the hands of others. His voice hollows out and sounds strange and old when talks with me. I am careful not to speak too much of taking time away from studying. He is from Old-World parents and believes you should work every chance you have available. I cannot say that other graduate students and various friends entice me to take in the enormous appeal of this land. I will not speak to him about playing tennis far after midnight in the lighted public courts.

And my visits to Santa Cruz and Carmel. I try to tell only my mother of a day trip of some seventy-five miles to Carmel and walking with a friend through the narrow streets and side paths of delicious shops and art galleries. I do not need for my father to know of the unspeakably beautiful cypress along the almost white beaches of the Monterey Peninsula. I could not convince him with stories of Jack London writing while living in the Santa Cruz hills and Robinson Jeffers having his Tor House to write while in Carmel.

"You are studying, aren't you Kaye? You know we can't afford for you to go to college forever!"

"Yes, Father . . . But it's summer and I'm working. I have a job that pays really well."

I did not tell him that it was part-time and for only six weeks, but he did not ask. I tell him about the school library and how I put labels on books to help to bind them and repair them if they are damaged. I truth, the job helps to pay my part of the rent in a house with three other women my age.

But this job was better than some I had taken before, and I worked for Andrea McConnell who had been with the school district all of her adult life, over thirty years. She loved having someone to talk to and I was 24. I felt as though I could be one of her own daughters. She liked knowing about my friends, dates, clothes, even the little dog that lived with us.

When my father called, he kept his focus straight ahead. "You know your brother is close to his doctorate and your sister starts college this fall. I am working full-time and we have only so much to go around for all of you."

I had been lying on my bed talking on the phone to him long distance. These last words made my face burn with embarrassment. I remembered his sudden serious illness when I was 16 and a junior in high school. He had a heart attack in the middle of the night. . . If he had died, I was sure I would not have had the chance to go to college at all. I remembered him as he lay in the Rose Dominican hospital bed, too weak to even breath for himself. I felt my voice break with shame. I sat on the floor and put my

face against the bedspread. I didn't want him to know I was crying.

"Father?"

"Yes?"

"Do you want me to come home before classes start?"

"What about your job? You should not quit a good job. Maybe they can work out the hours for your classes."

He could not stand for any of his children to be seen as quitters. We all struggled against disappointing him, but tried not to tell him.

"It will end in two weeks for the teachers to come back and train." I told the truth.

"Your mother would like to see you. She says she misses you."

I had to push the point every time, otherwise he might think I didn't notice. He certainly never said outright that he loved me. Never.

"And you?"

"She wants you to come, Kaye."

"Do you, too, Father?"

"Of course, Kaye. You are our daughter. Don't be sarcastic. You're almost 25 now. It's time for you to think of people differently."

I wanted to ask him how, how I should think differently. I wanted to hear some mushy fatherly comment he would never say to me. I felt more like a girl than a woman.

"All right" I said. "I'll drive over next weekend."

"I'll send you a check for your gas money."

I thanked him. I told him it meant a lot to me to have him help me. I told him I would graduate in a year and I wanted him and my mother to be there. If he would not say it, I could. I told him I loved both of them.

His tone softened and he said "I want to see them put the drape over your graduation gown for the master's. We'll come to San Jose when you graduate."

"Hood, Father. It will be the colors representing English." I felt good that he really thought about being proud of me. I could feel the cap and gown now, the strands of the tassel against my cheek.

"You will be the first woman with a master's degree in the family." I could almost hear him thinking, so don't mess it up. Don't fail. You know it's up to you.

I did know. I made up my mind to find something better for the fall that would pay more and leave enough time for my courses. I felt I had let him down. My mother always wanted to see me and I missed them both. And my sister. I needed to see her and to be a better example as the big sister. I was determined to change.

The women in the house scattered on weekends; Laurie drove down to a jazz concert in Monterey; Pace went to Ventura to see her brother; and Judy went to the city to stay with Ted, her boyfriend that none of us could stand. I had the house to myself and spent much of the weekend reconstituting my resumé. I knew how to put some key phrases down to get someone's attention. But I had to look through all my courses, jobs, transcripts first. I was glad to be alone and have both Jody and Eli call when the stress and coffee ate through to my inner core.

Eli and I met at one of the Thai restaurants for lunch on Saturday near the university. He was nearly finished with his master's in Computer Studies and planned to land a good job in the bay area. He was already working part-time for a firm, but had to finish his thesis. He was 28 and had to pay child support from a marriage he had at 19. He was like those large beautiful yellow, red, or green bell peppers. I told him that. No matter how you cut them or cook them, they are still sweet and delicious. He

could adapt to anything and did not care about the flaws. I loved him for all of these traits. I could see marrying him—I wanted to. I drove down to Fourth Street and met him at one of our favorite places.

I told Eli what my father said and what my plans were. I told him about needing a job. We both remembered friends at the university who had taken jobs in the canning plants, like the Del Monte plant on the outskirts of town. I remembered driving out there thinking that I would take a cannery job and earn money for college. Other San Jose State students had said they had worked in the canneries and earned enough for college. The acrid smell of ripe tomatoes being processed in the plant caught my nostrils. I started down the road to find the employment office and felt unsure of myself. Suddenly, I felt out of place. I wondered if they would hire me or think that I could carry my weight among the workers and if I would embarrass myself with my lack of knowledge about this kind of work. I felt like I would be intruding.

I decided to substitute teach in high school in the San Jose area. I could take my last classes in the late afternoons and evenings, so it was perfect.

By the time Laurie and Pace got home on Sunday, I had gone through my clothes to find outfits that fit the part of a high school teacher. They teased me about my new direction. I confided in them I was nervous about my plans. I did not have an authoritarian air like some of my friends. I was not tall and blond like my roommates. I wondered if the high school boys would call me "Ma'am" like they did my mother.

When I went to work at the library on Monday, I told Andrea about deciding to substitute in high school. She was excited about the idea and made it all sound possible. She knew exactly what to do and where I filed my papers.

"You should talk with Dr. Bill Kensington. He could do a letter for you! You'll really love him! He's the head of the whole district. He is such a wonderful man. And smart, too!" I was impressed.

Andrea spoke with reverence about Dr. Kensington. He saved her from being let go when her own job had been reclassified to require a college degree.

Dr. Kensington's secretary was very friendly when I called. When I told her my name, she asked about my students. I told her that I needed to talk with Dr. Kensington about getting a job, but I didn't have a credential yet. There was another Kaye Jansen and she had confused us.

We made an appointment for Friday. All week I dressed better. I stopped wearing my jeans to work. I took off my tennis shoes and left them in the car and wore dressy shoes. I decided to look as professional as possible. Andrea liked the new look. Others noticed and she took credit for the improvement. I told her she deserved it. She checked the outfits I wore and discussed coordinating colors and make-up with me. I called Jody Haines, my best friend, who already taught at one of the local community colleges and asked her to read over my curriculum vita.

She agreed only if I would promise one full Saturday devoted to eating clam chowder and hot sourdough bread and drinking cold white wine at a place on the Santa Cruz Pier. We had a favorite place, and we had to leave San Jose at 8:00 a.m. to be the first ones there. Then one night, I had to promise to have dinner at her house to discuss the resumé and she would choose the meal. I knew I had to prepare myself for her Caesar salad made with raw eggs and far too much anchovy paste and a rich banana cream cake for dessert. We laughed with and at each other and our fears about our futures until we could no longer talk to complain. I began to feel that I had a team of friends and family pulling for me.

Friday was the day to see Dr. Kensington. His office was in the most lavish part of the building. I had dressed up and wore heels. I carried a leather portfolio with my resumé inside. It had been a gift from my family when I received my bachelor's degree. I used it only on special occasions. I sat in a waiting room and felt like I was in a medical office once I told the secretary my name. It was very businesslike.

Nancy Edwards

When she called me into the superintendent's suite, a very striking man was standing by her desk and asked how I liked teaching at the new high school.

"How do you like Dr. Maxwell as your principal—isn't he great? Welcome to the district, Kaye."

He had already put out his hand and I took it. His secretary interrupted him by correcting the mistake.

She said, "No, Dr. Kensington, that's a different Kaye Jansen. This Kaye works with Andrea McConnell in the district library on the summer grant."

We all smiled and Dr. Kensington invited me into his private office. I was reminded of the luxury suites in expensive hotels. The carpeting was thick and plush. His desk was made of a fine dark wood. He had incredibly expensive bookshelves and lovely paintings. There were awards on his walls and pictures of people I had seen in the San Jose Mercury newspaper. A family portrait was over on a table.

He resembled a work of art himself. He had thick wavy hair, perfectly set dark eyes, the squared jaw and sculpted cheekbones of a man from a classical statue. He was fit and muscular like a racquet ball champion. I could see why Andrea and the other women in the library found him "nice." He was a beautiful man to look at.

He asked about my work with Andrea and what my plans were. He seemed really interested in me. It was the first time I felt important and that I was being seen as valuable among someone of his status. My voice sounded confident and strong. I wanted to go and get Andrea and Jody and tell them how their work with me had paid off. As he talked with me, he leaned over to his side and pulled up a classical guitar and put it on his lap and began strumming with a guitar pick. His hands were soft and white and impeccable. You could tell that they were manicured by a professional.

I felt like hiding my own hands. I had bitten nails, chewed at my fingers, dropped a dictionary on my right small finger at work

and had paper cuts from handling the books every day for the last four weeks. I tried not to look down at my own hands.

He listened and continued to strum and closed his eyes as I talked about my classes at the university. I pulled out my resumé and went through some of the highlights with him. I told him the writers I had been studying in my graduate classes.

"British novelists like Huxley, E.M. Forester, Virginia Woolf. I just finished a paper on Ford Maddox Ford's tetralogy, *Parade's End*, *A Man Could Stand Up*, *No More Parades*, and *The Good Soldier*. I plan to pick tragedy as a qualifying area, especially Shakespeare and Sophocles."

"Who do you think is the greatest?"

"Probably Sophocles."

He had amazingly white teeth and full lips. "No, I mean of the guitarists I was playing just now. Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, or Jimmy Page?"

He played them all again, this time identifying each guitarist. I had not listened before when I talked. He was not interested in anything I said. I tried not to let him see my disappointment. I put my resumé on his desk. My part of the interview was over.

"Jimi Hendrix?"

"Oh, left-handed?"

Maybe he *was* paying attention. "Yes, I am left-handed." I had pulled out my resumé and put it on his desk with my left hand.

"Oh, you too?" Jimi was the greatest of the left-handed guitarists. In fact, he had guitars specifically made for him. I would love to own one, but he destroyed some on stage. I would have given anything to be there!" He played a riff from some Hendrix songs. His fingers were strong and you could tell he had real talent.

I said, "Oh."

"Who else do you like?"

"Do you mean poets, novelists, or dramatists?"

"Guitarists—who would you pick among the top ten?"

This was not what was supposed to happen. I didn't buy many CD's. I had put the money I had into books. Laurie had bought something by Guns and Roses. I remembered it. I could see the CD cover. It was a song about death and November and rain. It was based on a literary piece. I was moved by the lyrics.

"Guns and Roses. I would pick them." I could not remember the name of the guitarists, but I knew he had a black top hat and black curly hair. I could see his face.

"Slash. You like Slash? Well done!" He gave me a Tom Cruise smile.

He played some other songs for me. I complimented him on his playing, his guitar, his attractive wife and children. There was nothing more for me to say. I wanted to head home across town before the traffic gnarled.

"Dr. Kensington, I wondered if you could write a letter of reference I could put in my file to apply for a teaching credential for substituting this fall? I would really appreciate it."

"Glad to," he said. "I'll have Betty get it ready for you at the first of the week. Which schools are you planning to teach in?"

"I thought maybe you might suggest certain ones or some in other districts. I am not from this area, so I don't really know them at all."

"Absolutely, glad to. Betty will get you a list of our schools. Of course, we want you on board with our district. We think we are the best and offer the most!" He definitely had great sales skills.

"Thank you very much." I smiled with a sort of half laugh. Betty appeared promptly with a list of at least 200 schools. He was in charge of all of them.

He looked at me as if I were a cute little dog, not a woman. I thanked him for his time and indicated I would drop by later next week for the letter of reference. He promised to call Andrea McConnell to discuss my merits. I knew that he wouldn't bother.

As I got up to leave, he looked at me fully, frontally, and I could see that he liked what he saw. I was fit and tan—there was no dispute about that.

"Kaye, we're going to have some openings in our facilities, if you want to check with us in the fall."

"Really? That might be something to consider. As an administrative intern or assist?" Maybe I had misjudged him.

"Our cafeteria staff. We have several openings coming up as some of the girls are leaving or retiring. I could introduce you to our personnel director when you come back for the letter."

I could not dislike this man. I just could not understand how he could be only ten years older than I was. To be angry at him would be like having anger at the most beautiful bird you have ever seen. It was not possible.

We shook hands in parting and he wished me well on my master's degree and my teaching goals. He looked directly at me when he spoke.

As a last friendly gesture he said, "How are the San Jose Trojans doing at the college? Are they having a good year?"

For a moment, I had to think what he had meant.

"Spartans," I smiled. "You mean the San Jose State Spartans. They are having a great year."

Betty called on Wednesday to tell me that "Dr. Kensington had done the letter himself before he and his wife left on their vacation to Halekulani, Honolulu. It's all ready."

I went over the next day to pick it up. Betty called me "honey" and gave me another list of schools that Dr. Kensington wanted me to have.

Nancy Edwards

I waited until I got home to read the letter. I didn't want anyone from that office to see my face. The letter was written on very official and stately letterhead. The stationary had several colors of ink and a striking gold embossing. Dr. Kensington said that I had a wonderful smile and was very neat and attractive in my appearance—and well-spoken. He recommended me very highly as a teacher. There was no mention of my degrees or academic work.

That came as no surprise.

I put the letter away in a safe place.

California State University, Bakersfield
Volume XXVIII