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Cindy Bontrager - Sea Fossils

Second Place Fine Art

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John Lemon - Untitled

Guardian Angel

By Juanita J. Simser

My mind grows tired from the effort
Of stretching out beyond its current grasp.
Mentally I wander through the swirling mists of time
Relentlessly pursuing an illusive shadow.

Often in childhood and youth
But rarely as an adult, I have felt
Your presence — this shadow that I glimpse
Only to have you slip out of reach again.

Tonight for a time I shed the shackles of reality
And lightly trip backwards to a simpler way of life.
With each step the memories grow brighter
Until I turn and find you waiting there.

You're just as I've always imagined you to be
Though you died as a baby long before I was born.
Why should that be so? I wonder
As I gaze at this uncle I've never known and yet know so well.

Like you, I was my mother's last child,
And with brother and sister already grown,
I spent my childhood alone until
You came to be my friend and constant companion.

Somehow you were always there
To strengthen me as a child.
You became my confidant and guardian angel
As we communed spirit to spirit.

Through an inner bond I grew to know
The kind of person you are:
Full of love and joy and deep compassion,
Too good to walk this earth for long.

Even now you willingly return
To share your influence on a higher plane.
All you require of me is to take the time
To be still and reach out to you again.

The Day Cinderella Went Home

By Pamela Gilman

First Place Fiction

“Jeri?...Jeri!”

Jeri pretended not to hear.

Footsteps tapped out frantic echoes in the deserted halls outside the closed door. She stared in the door's direction, but couldn't see it yet. Not yet.

“Jeri!”

The call seemed farther away now, upstairs, maybe. Soon they would give up, go down, and go back without her. Jeri smiled her crooked smile, leaning her head against the red brick wall and staring into the shadows. The naked window across the room opened to more red bricks, red bricks and shadows, another old building.

Picking up the sapling twig she had brought with her, she drew invisible patterns on the dusty floor. She listened. The patterns would be visible, she reckoned, if she could see the floor. And the footsteps were fading. Maybe the others were trotting on downstairs now, out into the daylight, where the sun shone, the flowers bloomed and the birds sang. “It's a beautiful day for a picnic,” Susan had said, huffing and puffing, toting one of the big wicker hampers across the grass, a beautiful day, warm with spring sunlight.

A bit of it streaked across the crumbly bricks outside the window, just enough to turn her hiding place from total blackout dark to hazy charcoal shadow, just enough to try bringing spring to a cold, dark hollow of a room, in a rotting, empty apartment house.

She drew more patterns, her eyes itching, growing accustomed to the shadows. The dust lay thick upon the floor. Only shards of glass remained in the double-sashed window, and a colony of busy roaches crawled over the door.

If she inhaled deeply, she could smell the musty-sweet stench of decaying—things. She drew more patterns on the floor.

“Jeri!” Her name floated up like a whisper from below, floated like some ghost weary of haunting a dismal building like this.

“Jeri!” She bit the soft inside of her crooked smile. They wanted her out in the sunlight with the flowers, the birds, and the warmth. Didn't they care that she wanted to be inside?

Jeri tucked her thick legs under her broad seat and leaned forward to inspect her patterns. The waistband of her new jeans cut into the fleshy roll of her middle. It hurt, so she unbuttoned the first rivet. That felt immediately a little better, but not much.

She heard more calling, more distant this time, more distant and distressed, a verbal SOS, or a searchlight begging someone to come in and buy a used car. But these people were her friends, men and women she had known a long time, like Al, with his bushy dark beard and his blue eyes that danced when he laughed, and Karen, red-headed elf, her freckled hands always eager to help with the dishes or to play cat's cradle. There was Big Buddy, whose pate gleamed as shiny as the streetlamp outside her window at home. The others were calling, too—especially Susan.

Susan was beautiful: tall, slender, with dark brown hair curling around her sparkly olive eyes and waving over her shoulders. Susan had those cheekbones models covet and an elegant nose. Susan could have had a glamorous career in modeling instead of one working long hours in social service. But Susan never could have looked aloof or sultry. Susan

always looked kind, even when she was disappointed, even when she was angry, even when she was *very* angry.

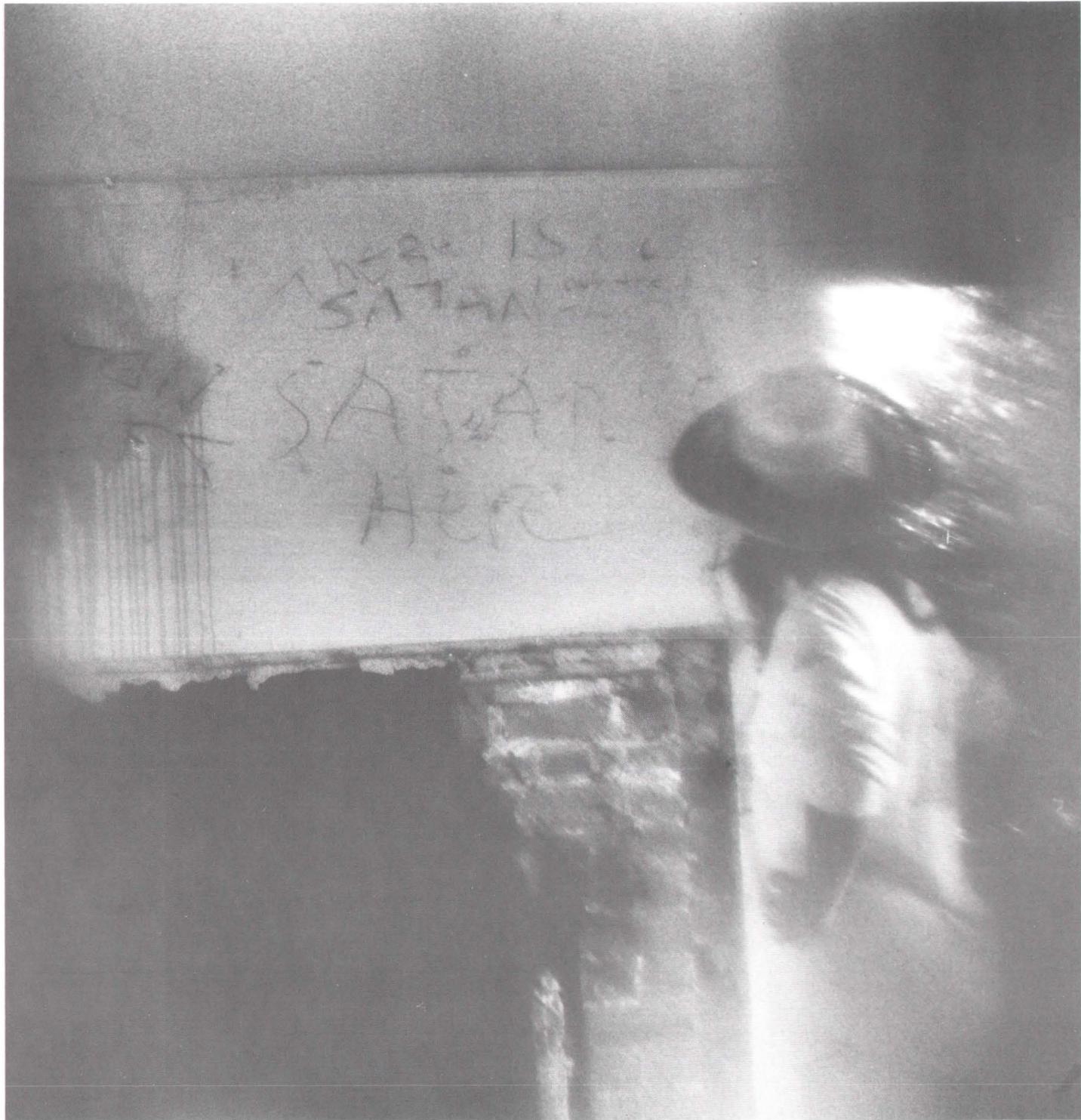
Jeri wondered if Susan was very angry now and if she was still wearing her kind face. Would Susan be more disappointed or more angry that Jeri had tired of the picnic and gone off by herself? But there wasn't any reason to be either. They were both grown women. In fact, Susan might be younger.

“Jeri!” Susan's voice called the loudest and the longest and penetrated the shadows, the dust, the rot. Jeri clapped her hands over her ears. Maybe if she couldn't hear Susan's voice, she wouldn't feel this tightness in her chest, this pounding tightness that wanted to suffocate her. She should have brought her spray with her. But it was too late for “should haves” and, besides, her asthma had never killed her anyway.

The dust lay thick upon the floor. Only shards of glass remained in the double-sashed window, and a colony of busy roaches crawled over the door.

It was just the picnic and the trees and the light. Why had they picked today, today of all days? It was the ninth day of the fourth month—the ninth day. All her friends knew how she felt about nines and fours. This wasn't hide and seek she was playing. Maybe they had forgotten. But forgetting was a hard thing to do so how could they forget the fours and the nines?

She smiled her crooked smile again



Jerry Eisenberg - Untitled

and unbuttoned the second rivet, which felt a little better, but not much more than before.

Maybe she would wait until they had all gone away, Al and Karen, Big Buddy and Susan, everyone. She would wait and then walk downtown, down those glittering streets with pieces of paper and crushed beer cans in the gutters, with the winos sleeping over the grates in the sidewalks, and the little men, lurking in the alleys in their little coats, with their dirty hats pulled low.

Maybe she would walk right into one of those dingy bars and order a bourbon, straight up. Jeri could see the bourbon glass with those round bumps on the bottom so it wouldn't make a ring on the wooden counter. And she could taste the bourbon, taste it, smell it. Or was it just the musty, rotten smell of this room and the aftertaste of the lemonade? It had been a very long time since she had been inside a bar, a long time since she had tasted bourbon, but she remembered that last drink—she had drunk it in downtown's Coachman's Lounge.

But worst of all, she could see the big ball of silver foil which she had carefully molded from bits and pieces she had dug out of the dumpsters behind restaurants and apartment houses.

Coachman's was a cool refuge from the summer heat and one could stay there all day on a five-dollar bill. But the last day had been different. The man with the big shoulders had struck up friendly conversation. She had wondered what made him talk to her. She wasn't beautiful. She wasn't even particularly young. And she was fairly well sotted, her fiver gone. But he had offered to take her home anyway, which had been an astonishing thing.

But, of course, taking her home had been impossible. So she had thanked him for the bourbon he had kindly bought her and she had picked up her bulging shopping bags and tottered out into the darkness. But the big-shouldered man followed. He pushed her down in the alley, hitting her, his breath hot and sweet and smelly, as if he'd been drinking something else besides scotch.

She couldn't remember much beyond the hitting and the breath. After daylight someone had found her bleeding, and she saw her shopping bags ripped up, all her precious things strewn about the

alley dirt. She remembered that she had felt a curious pain low down—like childbirth, almost, though she still couldn't figure why.

The alley and all her things scattered around it rose up in the hazy shadows of the red bricks and the busy roaches. Jeri squinted hard and could see everywhere the bright-patterned scraps of the fabrics and the fluttering bits of yellow paper, pink paper, white paper—though the white paper was mostly dirty, grey-brown. She could see the rolled up plastic torn and the crushed pop and beer cans that she had smashed with her blackened feet so they would fit into her shopping bags.

But worst of all, she could see the big ball of silver foil which she had carefully molded from bits and pieces she had dug out of the dumpsters behind restaurants and apartment houses. The ball had taken considerable time to make, but that was OK since it was to become a celestial radio receiver. Maybe she would hail some E.T.s and fly away—Close Encounters of the Ultimate Kind, something like the movies she now watched with Susan.

But his heavy combat boot had smashed the ball, grinding and crushing it back to silver bits against the dirt of the alley while he laughed about it. "It ain't real silver foil anymore, stupid! It's *aluminum*." And he kept grinding and crushing and laughing until there was no more silver left to see. She should never have told him about the radio receiver in the first place.

"*Jeri! Please answer me!*" Susan's desperate voice knocked aside the vision. The ball of silver was long gone. The man with the big shoulders, gone too. So were the hurried people in the hospital emergency room who had mumbled and rumbled and rushed by without looking at her twice. Susan and Al and Karen and Big Buddy, wearing kind but sad faces, had all come down to the hospital emergency room, and she had been very glad to see them after all.

"*Jeralyn!*" Susan sounded right outside the half-eaten door now. Jeralyn, it's Susan. Please, Jeralyn, come out."

Was Susan crying? Jeri huddled into herself, drawing no patterns now. She stayed as silent and as still as the rot and the dark. "Jeralyn." It evoked more visions, hazy slow-motion visions with fuzz around the edges, like in the dreams of daytime TV's story people.

There had been another man once, a man in a white suit with shiny white shoes and a pink rose in his lapel, a man with light hair, laughing eyes, and strong

arms that embraced her forever. But she had been pretty and slender and young then, with bright eyes and long silky hair the color of roasted chestnuts, and he had once upon a time become her Shining Knight.

Jeri smiled her crooked smile, but drew no patterns because she wanted to see more of the light-haired man in the white suit, holding her pretty and slender youth. They had music and flowers and he held her hand and his eyes told her how beautiful she was in her white lace gown with the pink roses in her hand—"beautiful like Cinderella at the ball," he whispered. And in their white clothes they spoke softly to each other on the green lawn. And it was the ninth day of the fourth month of yesteryear, the day of the Shining Knight and beautiful Cinderella.

And he had come to the hospital emergency room the awful night of the bourbon in the glass with the round bumps on the bottom and the man with the big shoulders and the stinky-sweet breath who had destroyed her silver ball. He had come to the hospital, and she had seen that the laughter had gone from his eyes and his light hair had got thinner and whiter. He wouldn't look at her even once before he told Susan and Big Buddy and Karen and Al, told them with hard words that almost broke his voice, told them that they should "take Jeralyn back to the farm."

With the front of her big blue t-shirt, Jeri wiped the wet from her cheeks and screamed in her loudest voice:

"Susan!"



Jerry Eisenberg - Untitled

Lack of Communication

By Virginia Brothers

I heard her crying in the night.
I was wrong—she was right.
“I need to grow,” was what she said.
“I don’t need you,” was in my head.
Married twenty years or more,
My pride was hurt—I closed the door.
And all the years she’d given me
Were nothing now—How could it be?



John Lemon - Our Love's Become a Funeral Pyre

First Place Photography

Once

By Rebecca C. Slaughter

First Place Poetry

Once
On yellow paper with green lines
He wrote a poem,
And he called it "Chops"
Because that was the name of his dog,
And that's what it was all about.
And his teacher gave him an "A"
And a gold star.
And his mother hung it on the kitchen door
And showed it to all his aunts.
That was the year his sister was born,
With tiny toenails and no hair.
And his mother and father kissed a lot.
And Father Tracy took the kids to the zoo
And let them play on the swings.
And the girl around the block sent him a
Christmas card with a row of "x's" on it.
And his father always tucked him in bed at night
And was always there to do it.

Once
On white paper with blue lines,
He wrote another poem,
And he called it "Autumn"
Because that was the name of the season,
And that's what it was all about.
His teacher gave him an "A"
And told him to write more clearly.
And his mother didn't hang it on the kitchen door
Because it had just been painted.
That was the year his sister got glasses,
With dark frames and thick lenses.
And the kids told him why his mother and father
kissed a lot.
And Father Tracy smoked cigars
And left the butts in the pews.
And the girl around the block laughed when he
went to see Santa at Macy's.
And father stopped tucking him in bed at night
And got mad when he cried for him to do so.

Once
On a piece of paper from a memo pad,
He wrote another poem,
And he called it "Why"
Because that was his question,
And that's what it was all about.
And his teacher gave him an "A"
And told him it was good.
And his mother didn't hang it on the kitchen door
Because she didn't take time to read it.
That was the year his sister took a liking to boys
And did strange things to attract them.
And the kids hardly talked to him.
And Father Tracy was in the hospital with cancer,
And the pews never had any butts in them.
And the girl around the block started to like him.
His father never tucked him in bed at night,
Not even to say "Good night, Son?"

Once
On paper torn from his notebook,
He wrote another poem,
And he called it "Question Mark Innocence"
Because that was his grief,
And that was what it was all about.
And his teacher gave him an "A"
And a strange and steady look.
And his mother didn't hang it on the kitchen door
Because he didn't let her see it.
That was the year he caught his sister necking on
the back porch steps.
And his mother and father never kissed or
even smiled.
and he forgot the Apostle's Creed,
And Father Tracy died.
And the girl around the block wore too much
makeup that made him cough when she
kissed him.
At 3 a.m. he tucked himself into bed,
His father soundly snoring.

That's Why
On the back of a pack of matches,
He tried another poem,
And he called it "Nothing"
Because that's what it was all about.
He gave himself an "A"
And a slash in each damp wrist.
And he hung it on the bathroom door
Because he couldn't reach the kitchen door.

The Old Women's Ward at Bellsdyke Mental Hospital

By Marion Ingram

Second Place Poetry

Morning rounds, with harried, starched nurses,
shoes squeaking on brown, buffed floors...
Mountains of fresh linens waiting to be soiled...
The wet bed smells are masked by lysol.
For bedsores, the alcohol rubs. Fresh gowns,
pillows plumped for fragile bodies propped like rag dolls.
Here comes the rattling trolley stacked for breakfast,
past the tall windows in drab, green walls,
barred to keep in. Who would want in?

Night rounds, with harried, starched nurses,
shoes squeaking on brown, scuffed floors.
Mountains of fresh linens wait to be soiled.
Teeth nest in glasses beside water carafes,
for parched old mouths. Bedbaths and bedpans,
suppositories and pills, rubber sheets, night blankets
and bed jackets to warm old bones...
In the dimmed light, faded glazed eyes stare, unaware.

Night sounds like chattering monkeys fill the ward.
Ancient voices talk to the past, oblivious to the now.
Veined hands pluck at the white cocoon
that contains the fragile skin and bones.
The rows of beds, not far removed from the morgue,
this dumping ground for the rich and poor,
governess, housewife, teacher or whore.
No discrimination here...only against age.



Tony Hamlin - Untitled

The Vacant Metropolis

By Robert E. Kelley, Jr.

Third Place Fiction

Thom Monterosa woke early, when the sun was just peeking over the horizon. He kept his eyes closed for a while, trying to fall back asleep, but his excitement wouldn't let him drift off again. This is it, he thought, the last day of school! And the day that I have to decide whether to accept the scholarship or stay home and go to college here. Thom was looking forward to tonight, when the 830 members of the graduating class of 2025 said their good-byes to Phoenix High. Should be fun, he mused, because the Mayor has authorized a special allotment of water to fill the pool for the graduation party! With that thought, Thom jumped out of bed and headed for the bathroom to get ready for school.

In the bathroom, Thom relieved himself into the dry toilet, then entered his personal code into the Watercomp, unlocking the metered valves on the toilet and the sink. He flushed the toilet and, using the heavily chlorinated, recycled water sparingly, took a sponge bath. The Watercomp chimed just as he finished, indicating that he had used his morning allotment of one quart. Returning to his room, Thom began to dress, taking his clothes from the sonic cleaning cabinet and shaking them before he put them on. As he dressed, Thom wondered what it would be like to live somewhere else besides Phoenix. To wear different, *freshly washed* clothes every day. To be able to take a shower *every* day, instead of once a week. His father sometimes told stories about when he had been a kid, and water had seemed plentiful. Back then, Phoenix had over 3 million people living within the city limits and the suburbs had over 2 million more. Thom couldn't picture that many people living in this dry, desolate, desert town. Thom finished dressing, then headed out of his room.

"Thom, is that you? What are you doing up so early?" His mother spoke from the kitchen; it was her turn to make breakfast, so Thom stuck his head in the doorway before answering her.

"Yeah, it's me mom. I couldn't sleep anymore."

"Excited about tonight, dear?" she asked. "Well, I'm glad you're up. Would you go down to the corner and get our water so I can make some juice for breakfast?"

"Sure, mom, no prob." Thom crossed the room to where the water jug was kept. He grabbed the jug and the ration card that hung next to it and headed out the door. Cutting across the artificial lawn, he stopped for a moment to observe a cactus wren fluttering puzzledly around the plastic tree that shaded the front of the house. One did not see too many birds in town anymore, or too many living things at all, except people. Since the ration laws went into effect, there wasn't anything growing around anybody's house, not even the plants that had once been native to this area. For that matter, you had to travel clear outside the old boundaries of settlement before you could see plants growing. Only where the desert had remained undisturbed did the native plants flourish. The rest of the land was either covered with abandoned remains of old subdivisions or burned out from the farms that used to surround the metropolitan area. Imagine, *farms* in a *desert*, Thom thought. Nothing grew on the farms now except an occasional weed during the short rainy season.

When he reached the corner, Thom saw that he was not the only one who was getting the day's water ration this early. Mrs. Hernandez, the lady who lived two houses down from the Monterosas, was waiting in line behind three other people. Thom recognized them as the fathers of some of the kids he went to school with. Tommy Jones' father was at the outlet, the Walsh kids' father was behind him, and Samantha Herbold's father was just in front of Mrs. Hernandez.

"Hi, Thommy," Mrs. Hernandez greeted him as he took his place in line. "I don't usually see you here. Is your mother sick?"

"No ma'am, she's fine," Thom answered. "I was up early, so she asked me to come and get the water while she started breakfast." Thom hesitated, then went on. "Please don't call me Thommy,

Mrs. Hernandez. I'm not a little boy anymore."

"Oh! I'm sorry, Thom," she replied with a smile. It doesn't seem that long since your parents brought you home from the hospital."

"I know, Mrs. Hernandez, I know. You've told me often enough." To himself, Thom wondered if she would ever quit calling him Thommy. Probably not.

When his turn came, Thom moved up to the water station. After waving goodbye to Mrs. Hernandez, he placed the five gallon jug under the outlet and stuck the ration card into the reader. The computer read the code on the card and lowered the nozzle to dispense the three gallons of drinking water that was allotted to a family of three for each day.

When he got back home with the water, Thom found his father sitting at the table, waiting for his breakfast. Thom put the jug on the counter and sat down next to his father. "Morning, Dad."

"Good morning, son," his father answered. "You haven't been up this early since the day we left for our vacation in San Diego, three years ago. Excited about graduation?"

"Yeah, some, Dad." Thom hesitated, then went on in a rush. "What was it like to live in Phoenix when there was plenty of water?"

Mr. Monterosa gazed at his son for a moment, then spoke. "Well, for one thing Thom, there never really was plenty of water. People thought that there was and so they tried to live the same lifestyle that they knew back home, wherever back home was. If the government had..." Letting his voice trail off, Mr. Monterosa stared out the window for a moment or two, wondering what he could say to his son to give him a picture of Phoenix in the days when it was attracting people from all over the world to the Valley of the Sun. While he was thinking, his wife took up the conversation.

"When we were kids, back in the 1980's, Phoenix was a thriving, growing metropolis. It was the 9th largest city in the country and getting larger every day.



Marquita Porter - Untitled

Even then, there were people who spoke out against the growth, like Edward Abbey, who warned that the water supply wouldn't last."

"Then why didn't they *do* something?" Thom looked up questioningly, first at his mother, then his father.

"Because they weren't in charge, and the people who *were* in charge thought that the growth was good for the economy," Mr. Monterosa answered flatly.

"It *was* good for the economy!" Thom's mother interjected, darting a glance at her husband.

"Yes, it was. But it wasn't good for Phoenix. At that time, less than 15 percent of the people who lived in Phoenix were natives, who cared more about Phoenix as a place to live than just a place to make a living," Mr. Monterosa retorted.

"So the people who moved here tried to make Phoenix just like the places they came from?" Thom inquired.

When we were kids, back in the 1980's, Phoenix was a thriving, growing metropolis. It was the 9th largest city in the country and getting larger every day.

"Exactly, Thom," Mr. Monterosa answered, then got up to toss his empty paper cup into the recycler. He leaned against the counter before continuing the conversation. "But still, even with all the growth, things didn't get too bad all at once. It wasn't until we had 10 years of extremely wet weather that the trouble began."

"Wet weather, Dad?" Thom didn't understand how wet weather could cause a water shortage.

"That's right, wet weather. The lakes on the Salt River were filled to overflowing every year, which delayed necessary repair

work on the dams." Mr. Monterosa paused, remembering his father, who had been fishing on Apache Lake the day that Roosevelt Dam gave way. Mrs. Monterosa, guessing his thoughts, reached over and patted her husband's hand, then got up and headed for the bedroom to get ready for work. Thom's father watched her go, then resumed speaking. "In May, or maybe it was June, I don't remember for sure, anyway it was in 1995, a small plane crashed into Roosevelt Dam. Some people thought it was a terrorist attack; others said it was just an accident. Whichever it was, the plane exploded on impact, cracking the dam. Water pressure did the rest. As the wall of water reached the dams downriver, they each failed in turn, increasing the flood." Momentarily overcome with the memory of the cataclysm that had cost him his father, Mr. Monterosa stopped speaking and turned to stare blankly out the window. Thom recognized his father's grief and sat

quietly, waiting for the moment of sorrow to pass.

A hour later, when , when Thom left for school, he was deep in thought about the

An hour later, when Thom left for school, he was deep in thought about the last part of his conversation with his father. Thom had seen the remains of the business district in what used to be downtown Phoenix, but he had never thought about the horror that the sinkholes which had destroyed it must have caused when they were occurring. Nobody had been prepared for *that* result from the overpump-ing of ground-water in the 60's, 70's, and 80's. His father's description of what had happened when the section of land that lay underneath the building that housed the headquarters of the largest bank in Arizona had suddenly subsided, leaving a sinkhole a hundred feet deep, filled with the twisted remains of the skyscraper, was almost enough to take him out of the ebullient mood he had been in since he awoke this morning. Thinking about the fate that befell the thousands of people who had been at work when the building collapsed made Thom feel very strange, so he put it out of his mind. Instead, he started thinking about the decision he had to make today concerning which scholarship offer he would accept. He had almost decided to stay at home and attend the community college and ASU south, but he began to wonder if he should accept the scholarship to CalTech instead. He was so preoccupied with his thoughts that he almost bumped into one of his fellow seniors when he reached the bus stop.

"Hey! Watch where you're going, Brain!"

Startled out of his reverie, Thom stopped walking and looked around. He was surprised to see that he had reached the bus stop and that the other kids were all looking at him. Directly in front of him was Eddie Walsh, one of his best friends from school. Eddie, with a smirk on his face, was looking at Thom.

"What—?" Thom started to ask, only to be interrupted by Eddie.

"You were walking down the sidewalk looking like you were in a trance," Eddie said. "When you almost bumped into me, I thought I'd better wake you up."

"Oh. Sorry, Eddie, and thanks."

"Hey, no prob." Eddie glanced around, as if he was looking for someone, then continued. "What's the matter with you this morning, Brain? Samantha give you such a workout last night that your mind is still spinning?" Ever since Thom had started dating Samantha Herbold, Eddie had given him a hard time about it. Thom figured Eddie was a little jealous, having dated Samantha for a few months last year, until she dumped him at the end of the school year.

"No, Eddie. Nothin' like that. I didn't

even see her last night," Thom retorted. "Actually, I was thinking about college."

"College! What's the prob, Brain, can't wait to get over to California, away from your parents, close to the ocean with all that beautiful water and all those lovely girls in skimpy bathing suits?" Eddie was headed for San Diego State, mostly for the social opportunities he thought he would find there. Eddie's idea of a good school, as he often informed Thom, was one where the girls outnumbered the boys.

"No, Eddie, not at all. To tell the truth, I was wondering just where I *should* go to school." Thom had not told Eddie that he had been considering staying in Phoenix and attending the community college. As far as Eddie knew, Thom was headed for California just as he was. Thom looked at his friend for a moment, then continued. "Maybe I'll just stay here and go to the community college for a while."

"STAY HERE!!" Eddie blurted. "You've got to be kidding! You don't want to spend the rest of your life in this dry, desolate, backwater of a town, do you?"

"I don't know, Eddie, I just don't know. At first I was going to CalTech, then I thought about staying here. Now, I just don't know what I should do. You know that if we leave Phoenix, it will be difficult to get permission from the Water Board to move back. So I guess I have to decide where I want to spend the rest of my life, here or elsewhere."

Eddie started to reply, but he was cut off by the arrival of the school bus. He and Thom followed the other kids onto the bus and found seats near the rear. Eddie again started to say something to Thom, but his attention was caught by another of the seniors, who wanted to know something about the party that Eddie was having that night, after the pool party at the school.

Eddie spent the entire bus ride talking to the other seniors on the bus about his party and never did tell Thom whatever it was that he had started to say.

After going to his homeroom for the last time, and then to the final practice for the ceremony, Thom made his way across campus to the administration building, arriving there a few minutes before his 11:00 a.m. appointment with his counselor. He checked in with the secretary, then stood, staring moodily out the window, until he heard his name called.

"Thomas Monterosa," the secretary called.

"Yes?" Thom answered over his shoulder.

"You can go in now."

"Thank you," Thom replied, then turned and walked across the lobby to his counselor's office. He knocked once, then went in and shut the door behind him.

"Thom! How are you today?" His

counselor greeted him with a smile. "Ready to sign the papers for CalTech?"

"I'm fine, Mr. G., but I'm not sure that I'm going to go to CalTech."

"Not going to CalTech! Why?" Mr. Gennaco inquired, looking across his desk at Thom.

"I'm not sure that I'm ready to leave Phoenix," Thom answered. "I've been trying to decide if the education that I'd get at CalTech would be worth leaving home for. I like it here and I think I want to make Phoenix my home after I get my degree."

"That's commendable, Thom. Phoenix needs more of its bright young people to stay here, instead of running off to a wetter place as soon as they finish high school. But what does that have to do with your attending, or not attending CalTech?" Mr. Gennaco look inquiringly at Thom, waiting for his reply.

"It's the Water Board, Mr. G.," Thom blurted. "If I leave, they might not let me come back. I've heard how hard it is to get your ration card reinstated if you move away and then want to come back."

Mr. Gennaco leaned back in his chair and smiled. "That's correct, Thom, as far as it goes, but you've evidently misunderstood the regulations."

Thom leaned forward, his expression eager. "Misunderstood? How?"

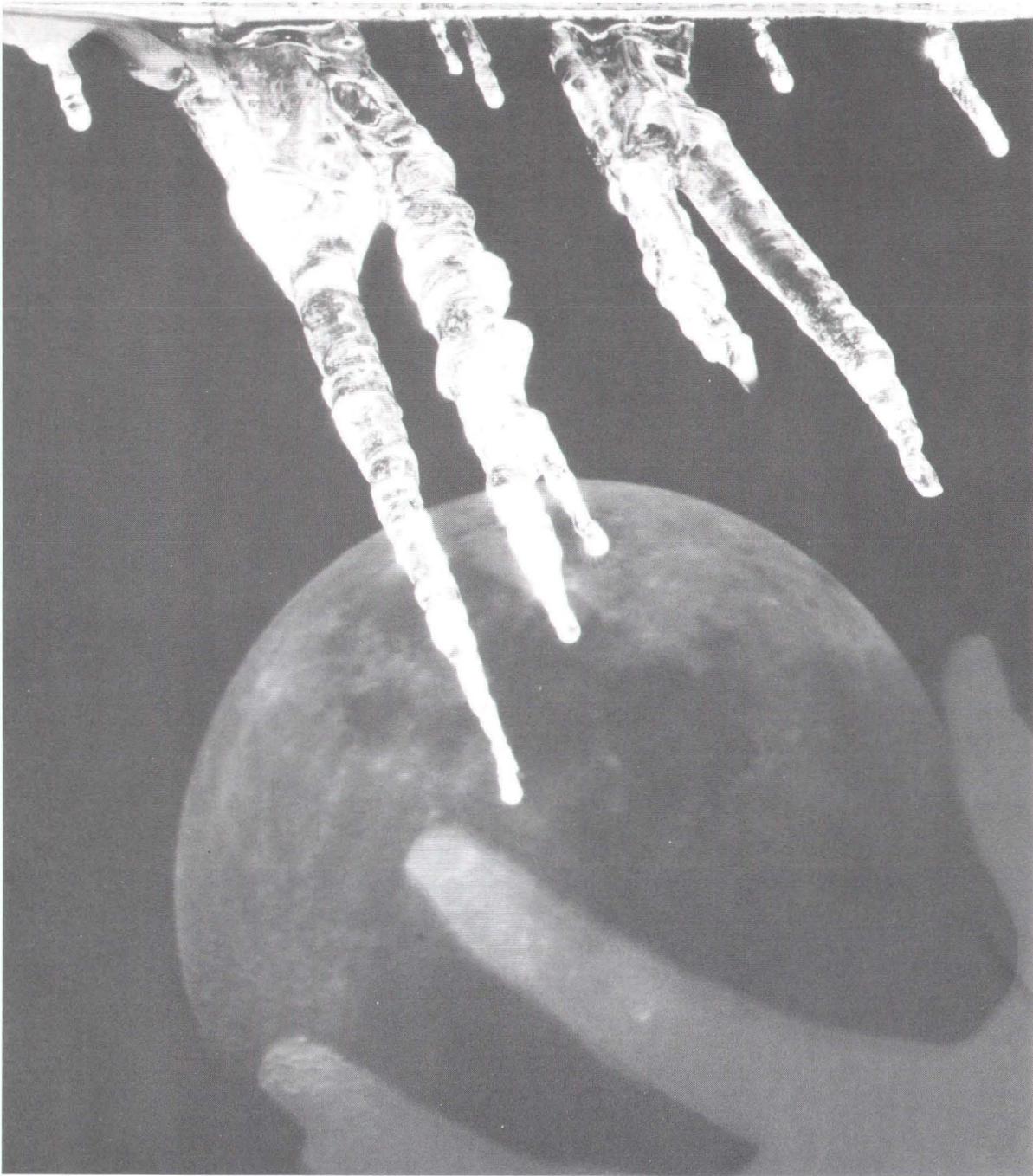
"It is true that if you move away from Phoenix the Water Board can be quite reluctant to reinstate your ration card, but leaving the Valley to attend college isn't considered moving."

"It's not moving? Why not?" Thom was curious, but the news that he would be allowed to return home after college had already made him feel a lot better.

"Because, if the Water Board did not guarantee to allow college students to return home after they get their degrees," Mr. Gennaco replied, "then the brightest seniors would either have to stay home and get an inferior education, or choose to leave Phoenix for good so that they could attend one of the better universities."

"Gee, I never thought of that, Mr. G.," Thom said. "I guess we'd better get my paperwork filled out, because I'm going to CalTech. I was only hesitating because I didn't want to leave home for good."

Thom left the administration building and headed across campus, towards the auditorium, where the award ceremony was to be held. He was back in the ebullient mood that he had been in when he woke up and was looking forward to the assembly, to the rest of the day, and to the rest of his life.



Michael D. Gohr - Mooncicles

Third Place Photography

How Sad The Young Poet

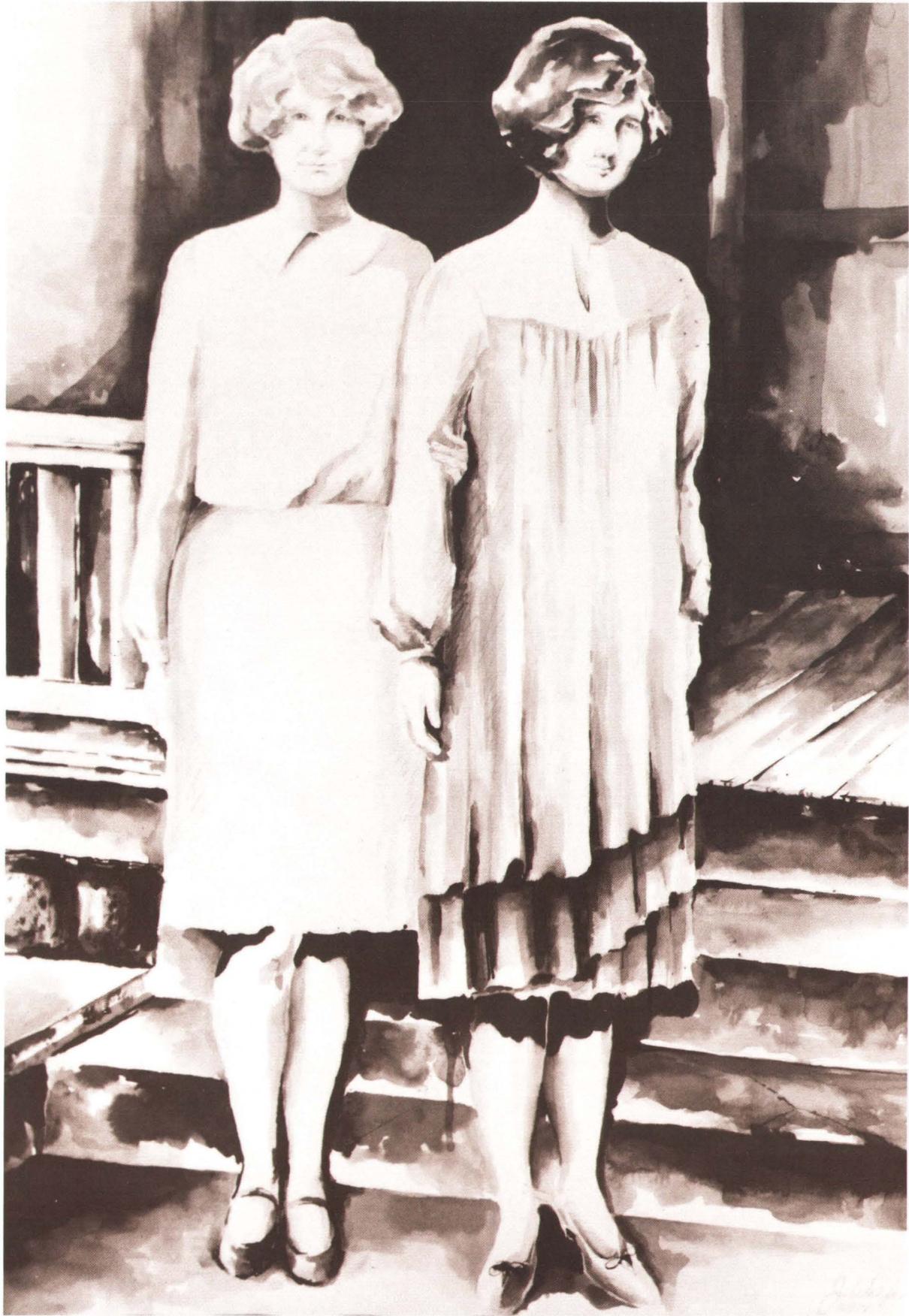
By Sharon Hrebicek

How sad the young poet
That is forced
To look at the moon
With an angle
Of reality.



Sandra Cesena - Morning Stretch

First Place Fine Art



Joann Wolfe - Friends Forever

Mary

By Virginia Brotherton

Third Place Non-Fiction

Looking out the window, not really observing the scene below but reflecting, I am able to leave reality for a moment. The antiseptic, caustic smell of the hospital with its bland white walls and *pervasive quiet* was getting to me—no more than it would have gotten to her, really, if she were conscious or cognizant of what was going on.

A slight stir redirected my attention back to the bed. The cancer has *taken its toll*. It has *decimated* what was one of the strongest, most vital people ever created and left a mere shadow of a human being, hardly enough to make an impression in the engulfing bed.

Mary was the essence of life, and she lived it to its fullest. Every day was an adventure; everyone she met was special. “Optimistic” would be a mild word to describe Mary. She was all the “good” and “positive” in the world and she cared, really cared, about people. She once said that anyone who might steal her wallet would probably need it more than she.

That’s what makes it so hard to see her now, lying there lifeless, a living skeleton. There is no expression left to her face...that face that always held a smile. The tubes and machines have taken away all the humanness, leaving a creature which both attracts and repels me at the same time.

Ah, the guilt. That also infuriates me. How could one feel repulsion for such a wonderful person? Perhaps it started when she lost control of her body functions. Perhaps it was the loss of recognition of me after all the ministering and caring I had given to her. Perhaps it happened when that proud spirit was crushed into a whiney, crying fetal being. Perhaps it happened when all the turmoil of grief and guilt became

my constant companion. It’s not relevant, I guess, except for my own stability.

Mary was only given two weeks, four at the most, to live. Well, she had done it in her own inimitable way, and she had made it six weeks. Even though the quality of this existence was questionable, the relevance for it was not. She was making a statement to the end: “I’m a survivor, and life is not going to beat me!” Mary was not arrogant, because she truly believed in her omnipotent God; but she also wanted to show Him that she really appreciated her gift of life and wanted to use it fully.

Perseverance, love, appreciation, a zest for life—all these qualities she possessed, yet they were insignificant compared to her gift of humor, which she generously passed on to all she came in contact with. Anyone can laugh when things are easy and going smoothly, but Mary was the “one in the million” who could laugh when she was hurt, and life was kicking her in the teeth. I recall the time she had been a waitress and her wig had fallen into a customer’s dinner. With great control and dignity, she merely picked it up, shook it off, put it back on her head and told the man she would bring him another meal. And when she was first battling the cancer which threatened her existence, she accepted that challenge with a sense of humor too: the chemotherapy had caused a loss of hair—not a calamity because Mary wore a wig anyway, but the loss of eyelashes and eyebrows was another matter. She spent hours petulantly working and laughing while she tried to glue unattachable eyelashes to her skin. I smile when I think of how undaunted she was.

The distractions of the lung machine whirring and sucking return me to the

horrors of the present. Her arms are black and blue from the nurses’ unsuccessful attempts to begin intravenous feedings. “Sheer will,” that’s what the professionals attribute her breathing to. They are dumbfounded by it, yet it seems to disturb them. Oh, the anger. The so-called “professionals” seem heartless. Mary could teach them a lot about humanity; that is, she could have taught them a lot about humanity.

Pray, Pray. She believed in prayer. Good, bad, or indifferent, she believed. And when the prayers weren’t answered, what then? She never told me that. Were all her prayers answered, or did she just accept all the answers she got? The answer for me now is the *dichotomy* of wanting her alive/well for me, and realizing that death would really be the kindest answer for her. Maybe that’s it! Even now she has found a way to transcend life and complete my final lesson. She has hung on only until I was ready. My wanting her alive has been selfish but based on the human emotion of love. She is ready for the next step now, and I must be too. She just sighed. I will too, for that was her last breath. Good-bye, Mother, you always had such patience with me.

Mary was the essence of life, and she lived it to the fullest. Every day was an adventure; everyone she met was special. “Optimistic” would be a mild word to describe Mary.



WE HANG ON WITH OUR TOES...

GRAVITY DON'T HOLD US DOWN...

Russ Ludwig - She's Like Methadone to Me

Second Place Photography

Prisms

By Norma Lee Roudebush

Falling from the sky
Bits of rainbows
Prisms reflecting light
Sparkling dancing
Dashing madly

Falling to the ground
Clouds rolling overhead
Reflecting in mirrors
Lying in puddles
On the ground

Liquid rainbows
Mirrors
Broken by the
Steps
Of the crowd.

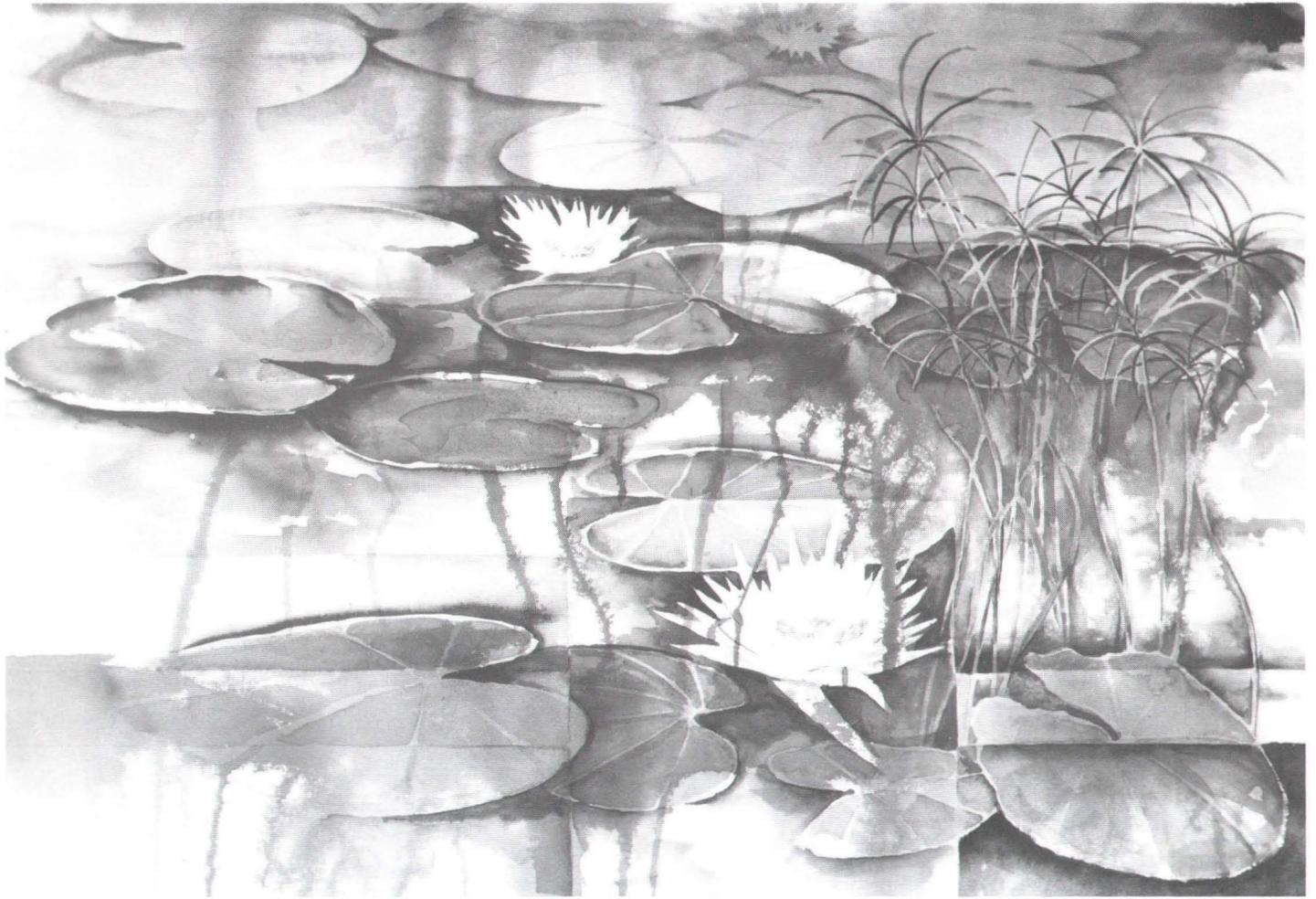
What Did You Say?

By Nicola Jurkovich

There are many ways to say nothing,
And many ways not to say something.
Some ways mean nothing,
While none mean something.
But all in all, and one in one,
The same is the same, in the end,
They all stand for the same—that is:
For nothing!
So you see, to say something
is really to mean nothing.



Carol Kong - Bus Stop



Ethel Caldwell - Waterlilies

Third Place Fine Art

Called To Commitment

By Delores Hanney

With his bushy, grey streaked, shoulder length hair, he looks, at first glance, a little like a mad scientist, but his joyful sense of color marks him for the artist he is. In what must seem at times another incarnation, Randy Gorbette was an architect. If this were a more perfect world, he would probably still be cheerfully designing sleek, neo-deco diners furnished with shiny chrome and atmospheric neon instead of testifying before legislative and professional groups, comforting bereaved parents and friends, or listening to one stricken cry for answers. Though he clings yet to his snappy—if frequently unreliable—

Traveler/22

vintage T-Bird, most vestiges of his earlier, more comfortable and amusing life have long since fallen away.

Two years ago, appalled by the ignorance and insensitivity they met as he shuttled a friend with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) around from hospital to office to agency, he vowed to devote his time, his talents and his resources to educating the Phoenix community to the myths—and the realities—of AIDS, so that other PWA's (people with AIDS) would not have to endure the callous attitudes and thoughtless behaviors his friend had repeatedly encountered just when he was

most in need of loving concern. Sustained in the endeavor by Bob Minor, his unselfish design firm partner who, like himself, was willing to cast off worldly comfort and join the crusade, Randy now functions as the Executive Director of the Phoenix Shanti Group, a non-profit, volunteer organization patterned after the San Francisco group and dedicated to the twin objectives of emotional support for PWA's and enriched understanding for the Valley of the Sun.

His exalted position in this organization is entirely devoid of fringes, perks and salary, but offers 12-14 hour

days, six or seven days a week, and plenty of exposure. Relentlessly driven and selflessly committed, Randy parlays what sane folk would view as lousy conditions into opportunities: opportunities he is equipped to utilize to maximum effect. Raised in an environment where it was unacceptable to be a Jew, his family lived a secularized lifestyle, if not overtly as pseudo-gentiles. He is, nevertheless, blessed (or cursed) with a well-honed Jewish sense of tragedy and high drama, which color, and contribute to, an awesome charisma that has facilitated the gathering of a band of disciples to share in the work, and in earning for Randy a reputation as the foremost expert here on the human dimensions of AIDS.

Randy's "message," if he has one, steadfastly revolves around the concept of unconditional love. It is hardly shocking, therefore, that Shanti operates under the motto "affection without rejection" towards the PWA; nor is one surprised to discover that he insists it is the role of the Shani volunteer to accompany the PWA on his journey, not to interject a personal agenda. He believes that AIDS and the individuals living with it are here to teach, showing the way to compassion and a sense of connection to our fellow sojourners in this life. Though AIDS is a disease for which traditional medicine offers little optimism regarding a cure, and a disease that has taken first one friend and

then another with a monstrous, boring regularity, Randy still considers people with AIDS to be people with alternatives. His aim is to surround each one who desires it with loving people to support and empower him in making whatever choices the PWA sees as right for himself and his experience of this syndrome with many faces.

Quietly tucking the pain of countless and continuing personal losses into his heart to grieve at a later date (when there is time), he goes forth each morning—sometimes to the music of accolades for his very real gift to Phoenix, often in frustration over setbacks or indifferences that greet him, always to the nagging difficulty of finances—to better the lot of those who are so special to him: People with AIDS. If asked why he does it, he might respond by sharing part of a letter from Virginia Anders, who works at Red Cross to attain many of the selfsame goals. Two brief, poignant paragraphs clearly explain and illustrate both reason and motivation:

This morning when I got up in my nice warm house to begin my day, I found a note on my kitchen table from a friend who has been living with me. This is what it said: "VA—Thank you for the info. I won't need it at all. The friend who did need it died tonight at around eight p.m. He took his own life. He was only 24. Thank you. Pat."

Pat's friend had found out recently

that he was HIV+ (had tested positive for AIDS antibodies in his blood, but did not necessarily have the AIDS virus). He did not have AIDS. He had no symptoms. But he had been scared to death by the media, the constant misinformation, the silence, the prejudice, the unknown. I can do nothing to bring him back. His friends and family are going to have to sort through their own emotions—probably in silence for fear of what other people would think of them.

Randy is making a difference in the attitudes about and treatment of PWA's, but for all his sacrifice he is no saint. Congenitally theatrical and volatile, he is fully capable of pitching severe snit-fits, of being stubborn, shrill and snotty—occasionally all at once. Indeed, it is perhaps not so much the urgency and fidelity to commitment he exhibits but the humanity he brings to it that renders his example such a touching, compelling inspiration.

Who Am I?

By Lisa Marie Wesley

Third Place Poetry

Who am I?
Tell me if you know.
I am lost inside myself.
I know not where to go.
I know not who I really am.
I don't know what to feel,
And when I do set feelings free,
I know not if they're real.
I've spent my life just pleasing you
And being who you want.
I've done this for so long
I know not what I want.
I am just your puppet
Dancing on a rope.

I've lost all chance of finding me,
And, yes, I've lost all hope.
That's the way it's meant to be:
Me living through your eyes,
Never knowing what the truth is,
Believing only lies.
When I gaze into your face
And stare into your eyes,
I see just what created me,
And it I do despise.
I'll never know just who I am.
You'll never set me free.
I'll always be just what you want
And never will be me.

The Abandoned Farm

By Grace Melody

First Place Non-Fiction

I can still see the silhouette of that dilapidated three-room shack and its tired, disintegrating out-buildings, scattered forlornly on the rise of a small hill in the backwoods of Oregon. The image, much like a Rorschach ink blot, sometimes looms as a skeletal spectre of the past; on other occasions it appears as a symbol of fantasy-filled childhood days. It was "home" to me for the sensitive years between six and nine. The experiences of my life during those years were as mixed as the features of that neglected forty-acre farm. The habitat had both drawbacks and benefits which it dealt out in equal amounts to those who live there. The duality seems to be an apt analogy of my life at that time.

My family, which consisted of an overworked, distraught mother, an ailing father, and four lively children, was as lacking in material possessions as the house and grounds were in structural substance and upkeep. Due to my father's illness, work and paycheck were sporadic at best. The increasing number of doctor appointments and the ensuing surgery completely overwhelmed the fragile in-flow of funds.

At the time of his death, we were deficient in many of the essentials of life. Our clothing was always second-hand, usually left-over church bazaar items my mother had made over to fit us. Providing proper food for four growing children was an impossible task without a refrigerator for storing perishables. Bread, freshly baked in the oven or fried in a cast-iron skillet on the wood-burning cookstove, became the mainstay of our diet.

The house, too, was in need. The wind whistled through the tattered tar-paper

siding, raising the worn linoleum off the kitchen floor. The other two rooms were void of linoleum, offering splinters to those who risked crossing them with bare feet. The tiny attic, accessed by narrow wooden stairs which led up to a trap-door, completed the crowded living space. During the day, it was delightful to rummage through the boxes of old clothes stored up there, trying on rummage-sale dresses which were awaiting my mother's handiwork. Sunlight streaming through the dusty broken window pane, gave a wash of golden fantasy to everything in the room. Once, I ventured up after dark and was terrified of the transformation created by moonlight casting eerie shadows about.

The house had never been plumbed and the well connected to the towering windmill would only grudgingly cough out spurts of brackish water after much tedious priming. We transported our water from the neighbor's well, located a mile from us, in two tall metal milk cans. My brothers hated the chore of packing water. I would go with them on the quest, but was of no help since even the empty cannisters were too heavy for me to lift. I would skip ahead of them on the path through the woods, picking wildflowers and enjoying the chatter of the squirrels and birds, while they grumbled and struggled with their load. In the winter, we melted snow in a big double-boiler placed on top of the cookstove, thus cutting down on the number of trips made to the neighbor's well.

The winters were terribly cold, and the water-packing chore was replaced with one I could not escape, that of continually cutting and stacking wood for the stoves. Blisters and splinters were

daily events. At bedtime I would stand close to the pot-bellied iron stove in the main room until the skin on my arms and legs under my flannel nightie turned red and mottled. Then I would rush to the bed I shared with my sister, jump between the chilly sheets and let the heat I had stored up radiate and warm the covers. In the mornings, we children would feign sleep for as long as possible; no one wanted to be the first one up, to brave the cold and kindle the fires.

The ancient, leaning barns and the orchard of gnarled old apple trees, though useless for their intended purposes, provided wonderful places to play. My brothers placed a long board between the haylofts of the two barns and would walk across it, pretending to be circus stars. Being too timid to stand upright and traverse it, I scooted across, chafing holes in my precious underwear. I spent hours climbing in the apple trees. Sometimes I would take a book from school with me and let the sturdy arm of an old tree cradle me while I carefully ate wormy green apples and read, transported by the book to another world.

We moved into a larger house, closer to town, about a year after my father died and I was torn between excitement over having so much room and apprehension at leaving all my secure, "favorite places" on the farm. When I reflect on that place today, it still has the power to evoke mixed emotions. The memories of harsh, cold reality are tightly interwoven with those of warm, childhood enchantment.



Marquita Porter - Untitled

The Joys of Reading

By Vada Bowers

Reading is my joy, my pleasure, my entertainment, my passport to the world and an undeniable compulsion. If nothing else is at hand, I've been known to read telephone books or the newspaper liners from dresser drawers.

Perhaps growing up an only child who lived two blocks from a small town library helped to foster this love of books. When I was seven years old, a baby sitter took me to get my first library card. Our library was a very old two-story house. It had wood floors that creaked and book shelves that lined the walls of the various sized rooms. Most rooms had their own fireplaces. The second story was all storage for newspapers and magazines and served as a work area for book mending. The front yard was covered with a huge old chestnut tree. In the fall the multi-colored leaves seemed to reach a small child's knees, and all the little boys delighted in throwing chestnuts at everything and everybody. That wonderful old library is gone now, replaced by a modern building of brick and glass. I'm sure it is more efficient and certainly less of a fire hazard, but it can't hope to have the character, warmth and memories of that old house. I wonder also if small children feel as much at home. My first check-out was "*Water Babies Circus*." I no longer remember the text, but can clearly recall the beautiful illustrations. My first book was read several times in the first twenty-four hours. My mother felt that daily trips to the library were a little excessive, so I had to settle for three books a week for the next several years. By the time I reached junior high the books were longer and so were the school assignments, so I had to cut back to three books every two to three weeks. College took such a toll! There was so much assigned reading that little time was left for pleasure reading. Occasionally school work was put aside for a day while I sped through a trashy

novel. What a luxury! Summer would roll around, and it was back to the library for a three-month reading binge.

Marriage and small children curtailed my reading again, but soon the children were being read to, and then they were reading themselves. My daughter can still recite whole Dr. Zeuss books from memory. Then we graduated to some of my remembered favorites, and *Secret Garden*, *Snow Treasure*, and *Winnie the Pooh* were read aloud. We always read only one chapter a night no matter how sweet the plea for "Please just one chapter tonight."

As the children grew, I tried to read some of what they read to keep abreast of their interests and thoughts. When my son went through a "Conan" phase, he nearly lost me. They are gone from home now and are on their own, but we still exchange books and love to review and discuss our favorites.

I calculate that I have read somewhere between three and four thousand books. Some have been trash and some boring but all were completed because I always had the hope that the boring ones would improve. I have never read a book without learning something.

Sometimes the knowledge is of doubtful value, but it is knowledge. The James Bond series was pure escapist adventure, but it also provided marvelous travelogues and discourses on food, wine, cars and little-known games of chance such as baccarat. There are also those magic moments when one of life's mysteries is solved. For years I had heard the word "vichyssoise" and knew it was cold soup. I had also encountered a really strange word in print that I couldn't pronounce, but I knew it was soup also. Can you imagine my delight when one day I discovered that they were the same word?

When I want to learn a new skill, I first read a book. I became interested in quilting before its current renaissance.

After reading several books, I began quilting and have been at it for several years. An interest in miniature room settings led to more books and a fascinating new hobby. I had a rudimentary knowledge of embroidery and crochet; again, books sharpened those skills. We don't have to attend a class or wait for someone to show us when 'how to do it' books abound.

One of my fantasies is to order all the books written by my favorite authors. What fun it would be to unpack, catalog, shelve and then read. Just think of all the adventures of Gann or Mac'Lean, the politics of Drury, the intrigue of Follette, Ludlum or Cussler, the purple prose of Michaels or Rogers, the recent history of Uris and the varied subjects of Haley or Wallace. How can anyone not read when there is that smorgasbord just waiting to be devoured? How is it possible to ever be bored?

I have a terrific collection of books just waiting for grandchildren so we can read aloud and I can delight once again to *Mother Goose*, *Grimm* and the *Heidi*, *Little House*, or *Big Red* series. Maybe I'd better read them over once again so I don't get rusty while waiting.

That wonderful old library is gone now, replaced by a modern building of brick and glass. I'm sure it is more efficient and certainly less of a fire hazard, but it can't hope to have the character, warmth and memories of that old house.



Jim Wilson - Kelley



Pat Jones Hunt - Distortion Figure

The Fight To Be Light

By Barbara Hunt

If you have never had to battle the bulges, read no further. If, however, your bathroom scale rises and falls like a barometer, you may find my dietology useful. Having lost hundreds of pounds over the past twenty years, I consider myself an authority on weight loss. I have discovered three major categories: the miraculous diet, the wondrous diet, and the realistic diet. There are so many that I could never cover all the diets in each category; therefore, I will cover a few in each category.

Your class reunion is only two weeks away and you have got to lose twenty pounds. It will take a miracle. To your surprise, there it is—a scientific breakthrough, and just in time—the miraculous diet. This one uses amino acids in tablet form. Four of these babies on an empty stomach at bedtime, and you can sleep those pounds away—with no diet or exercise program needed. Imagine it, fat falling off, while you sleep.

In this same category you will find enzymes, spirulina, guarana, or the famous vinegar, B-6, and lecithin diet tablets. All of these methods promise astonishing results, with no sacrifices.

Now, on a lesser plateau, is the

wondrous diet. This will do wonders for your figure and with minimal exertion. In just thirty to sixty days you will no longer be the Crisco Kid.

Take the rotation diet—all you do is eat bananas one day, only apples the next day, only green beans the next day and by day number seven you can no longer risk being more than thirty steps from the bathroom.

Also in this range is the Dr. Atkins' Diet Revolution, a high protein, low carbohydrate diet. You eat all the meat you want, and still lose weight without hunger, but your breath is atrocious, you suffer liver damage, and muscle tissue breaks down.

Or you might see the Fat Doctor who offers diet pills and vitamin B shots once a week. The pills give you the jitters and shots are a real pain in the derriere.

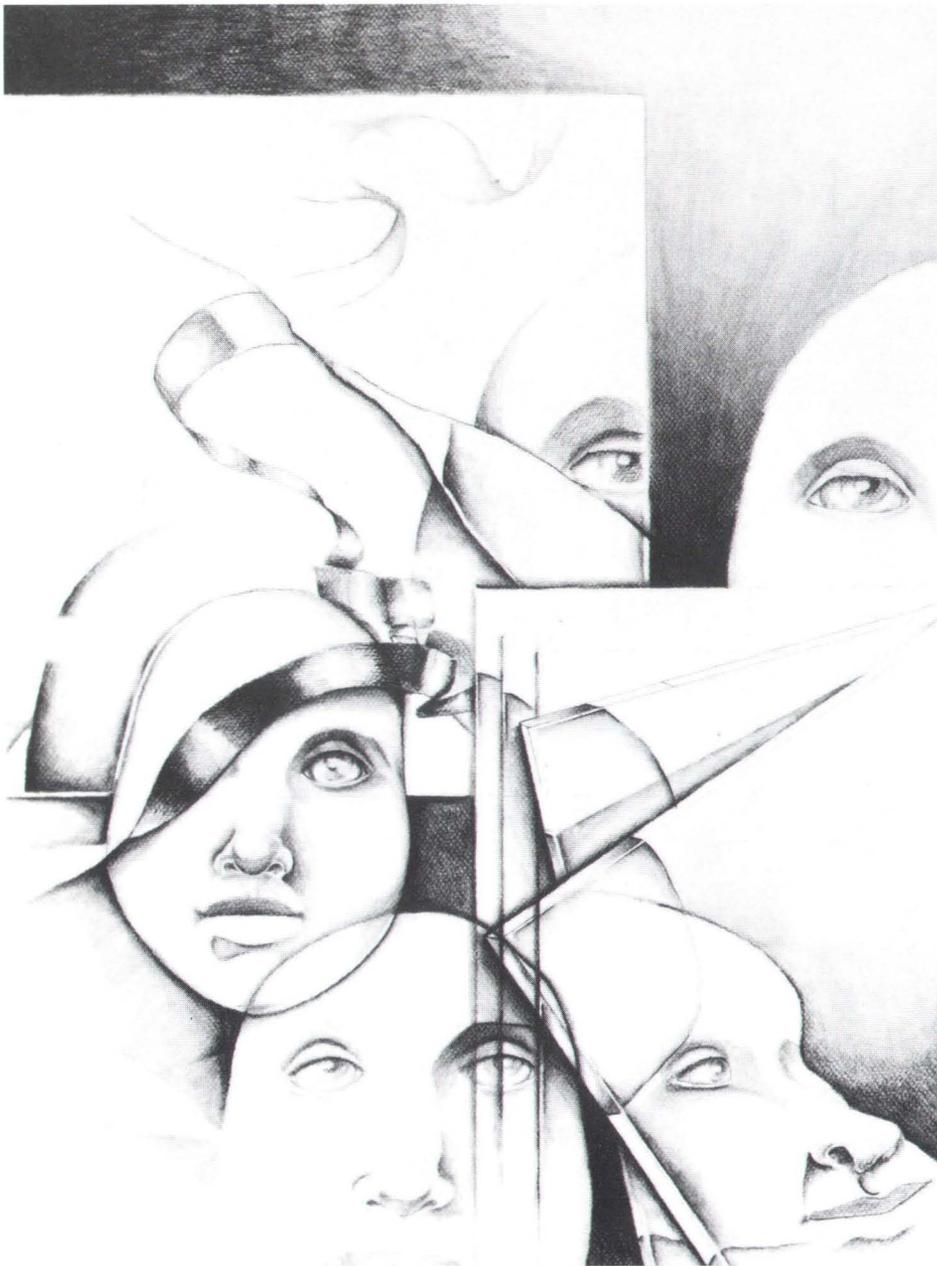
Perhaps you were considering the famous Cambridge Diet, so you can drink shakes three times a day instead of eating meals. The side effects of this protein drink diet can be nausea and severe headaches.

There are endless fad diets in this category and none of them offer balanced meals. A trip to Ethiopia would be a good alternative.

In the realistic diet category, we find the sensible diets, starting with Weight Watchers and ending with the twelve hundred calorie exchange diet. These diets offer balanced, sensible meals, and make no outrageous promises. Support groups and exercise are used along with the diet. You are taught how to use exercise as an effective appetite suppressant and calorie burner. Here you can start a successful fight to be light.

Having evaluated each category, I would make some changes. Instead of miraculous, "ludicrous" might be a more appropriate label. We all know that losing weight in our sleep is ludicrous, not miraculous. Perhaps the wondrous diet is better called "foolish." These diets are not wonderful; they are foolhardy. If our realistic diets were renamed "meritorious" they might be more tempting, like a fine dessert.

Any experienced dieter knows that taking off the lard can be hard, but with vigorous exercise, strong will power, common sense and perseverance, we *can* beat the bulges.



Michele Weiss - Untitled

Paper Relationships

By Jill Walterbach

Writing is my voice,
Poetry my hands,
Reaching where I can't,
Creating for me
Paper relationships.

Words are safer when written,
Each carefully thought-out
And weighed,
Before being set free
To be judged.

Hiding in pen and paper,
Afraid to speak out-loud,
I am lost in a world of words,
Silence and
Paper relationships.

I need those words
Reaching for me.
To those I need
Yet fear,
Paper relationships are safer.



Ross Anania - Windows

A Logical Ending

By Tim Ward

Second Place Fiction

Mick Twomey was a brilliant man, perhaps the most brilliant in the country. He could run circles around the good Father Laughlin, who was Jesuit trained, until the priest was dizzy with the intellectual complexity of it all and his nose would start to spurt and ooze blood. So who was I to stand up to Mick Twomey and tell him that his logic was faulty? Like telling the bishop his fly was down! Still, I did it. I stood up to Mick's six foot frame and I pushed my finger against his chest and, tapping it, I told him that I'd have no part of it.

You see, the problem was that Riley wasn't dead and he was supposed to be.

Even the priest wouldn't have spoken so nicely of him if he had been anything short of dead. But there we were, leaning against the box and smoking our pipes, and the old bastard Riley beside us. We were talking about the Cork-Kerry match when I heard a noise from inside the wet pine box.

"What's that?" said I, having a queer feeling in the pit of my stomach that we had just dug a six-foot hole for nothing.

Twomey raised his eyes to the gray sky and, after a puff on his pipe, commented on the poor weather.

"Did you hear that noise?" I asked.

"No, what noise?" said he.

"From the box."

"Ach," said he, "I hear nothing but the sound of the wind in the trees, the rain on that box and you gabbing away."

"Are you both deaf?" asked a muffled voice from the box. "Let me out of this box you ijits!"

"Quiet you!" shouted Twomey in a rare outburst. "I had enough of your sour disposition while you were alive, but now you are dead and in no position to be making demands. No, not after we've dug your hole and the worms have said their grace."

"Don't torment me, Twomey!" cried Riley. "I'm using up the air in here!"

With that, Twomey commanded him to keep silent and, digging deeply into the mound of mud beside us, tossed it on top of the pine box as a warning to the man inside. Riley moaned.

I looked to Twomey, now leaning against the box. "You've had your fun with the old man," said I. "Now let him out!"

Looking off into the hills, Twomey said he wished it was all that simple but that there were many things to consider and that burying Riley might be the most merciful thing.

"How so?" I asked.

"Well," began Twomey in a long, pensive sigh, "you see there is the matter of the Last Rites. A man cannot receive the Last Rites for the same illness more than once. Riley's problem, or illness, being the weakness for the creature (alcohol) means that if we release him and he dies, he will die without the ability to receive the Last Rites again."

I asked Twomey what it mattered, still having no idea where this path would take us.

Twomey looked at me as though I was some strange, little, furry animal from another galaxy. "Do you not know your catechism? Riley is bound to commit a

mortal sin between now and that last pint that'll put him over. If we don't bury him now, he'll surely go to Hell. I'll not have it on my conscience."

I told him that it was against the law to bury a man who was still alive, but he said that there were legal documents that said he was dead and that such documents were binding.

"Besides," said he, "the widow's after making the necessary claims on the insurance. Sure didn't I see her with O'Sullivan the agent this very morning?"

"That means nothing," said I weakly, seeing his point.

Twomey continued, "What? Would you have her give the money back? Would you deny her the much needed rest she's planning to take in Florida? And what of the house? Surely old Riley would lose it for them if..."

"I would not!" shouted Riley from the box. "I haven't missed a payment yet!"

"Come off it, Riley," said I with a yawn. "You know she's the one been making the payments while you recovered your health between all of those jobs you lost."

Riley grumbled something that I couldn't make out and then fell silent.

Twomey and I looked at each other and then at the box. Then, with his ear cupped to the box, Twomey listened for movement. There was none. Twomey stood up straight and stretched his arms. "There's no bringing him back now," he said very seriously, his bloodhound eyes searching mine for an answer to some unspoken question.

"Tis a terrible thing," said I, blessing myself.

"Indeed, indeed it is."

"And not a *very* old man either," said I

"No, not really?"

With that Twomey lifted one end and I the other. And standing at both ends of the hole, we looked with hesitancy into the blackness beneath. I looked to Twomey. He gave the nod and down went Riley with a thud to his final resting place.

I had no sooner said "poor man" than up from the hole resounded the words, "Holy shit!"

"Lord, Mother of Mercy, help me!" I screamed, suddenly feeling quite queasy.

"Forget them!" cried Twomey. "Grab the shovel. Quick, lad. Quick!"

This Bird Our Parrot Polly

(Two roommates and guest sitting down at a dinner table.)

By Nikola Jurkovich

1st Roommate: Aw, Tsk, Tsk, Tsk, It's really not that bad.

2nd Roommate: O.K. O.K., so what, you're feeling down and a little sad.

1st Roommate: Well, here I go. This is what I say:

I think it's fine, you asked for it, and besides, it's all we have today!

Listen, this is our story, it's really not so bad, listen while we dine.

Ya, this old girl here, she downed 8 or 9, while perched upon her parrot pad ever so fine.

And to my roommate I did warn—"Hey don't do it. Parrots, beer they should not drink,

and I think not either fancy, light, white wine."

And back to me he stately replied: "Aw come on, let's open this bottle—here—look.

Imported direct from the Rhine!"

"Oh no!" were his words, "this bird, our parrot, Polly, why she's fine. A winning wager it would seem, to bet on her motor abilities."

1st Roommate: So, to say, it seemed quite inevitable, (at least to me) that this bird, our parrot Polly would simply stretch out and fail to be. From my point of view, this bird, what she managed to do, was truly beyond compare.

First as it would seem, she attempted to fly, but soon gave up after the 4th or 5th try!

Then quickly looking me right in the eye, she squawked "I will now fly, but first, open me a tall cold brew, lest I refuse to try!"

And with this, these, her final words, this bird, our parrot Polly, flew over many an empty can and straight, as an arrow, into the oscillating fan.

Ah! so now you ask, what is it that we did do?

Well, my friend, I ask you—"would you happen to like a helping of our Potato-Parrot Stew? Of course, it was simmered in Polly's own favorite—Tall Cold Brew."

The General Store

By Nancy C. Webb

The general store is a happy place for me on Saturdays
when I come to spend my hard-earned quarter.
For the first time, my mama did not quote to me,
“The laborer is worthy of his hire,”
as I go skipping down the dusty farm lane.

The screen door of the store swings open,
then slams with a Bang... Bang... Bang.
I love the cool dark cavern with its oily floors.
A fly buzzes through a sunbeam filled with dust
then disappears into the dimness of the high ceiling.

Someone is shuffling around behind the mailboxes.
It must be Norma Smith putting up today's mail.
The same old men are sitting around the pot-bellied stove
in their flannel shirts and galoshes, as if it were cold.
They are swapping yarns — which get Bigger... Bigger... Bigger
as they pass the jug, slap their knees and dispute one another.

“Here comes the Pritchard woman in for her mail,” hisses one.
With downcast eyes, she passes by the now-silent old men.
“Neither Jack Pritchard nor young Joe Elkis have been seen
in these parts since that night,” whispers another.

Ellie Pritchard, still looking at the floor,
hurries back past the stony-faced men.
“Shoulda been her what got shot,” says old man Crenshaw.
His voice is loud enough for all inside to hear.
He spits on the floor near Ellie's hurrying feet.

Quickly and quietly I creep out of the store,
the quarter forgotten in my sweaty hand.
The general store no longer is a happy place,
for Ellie Pritchard is my mother.

