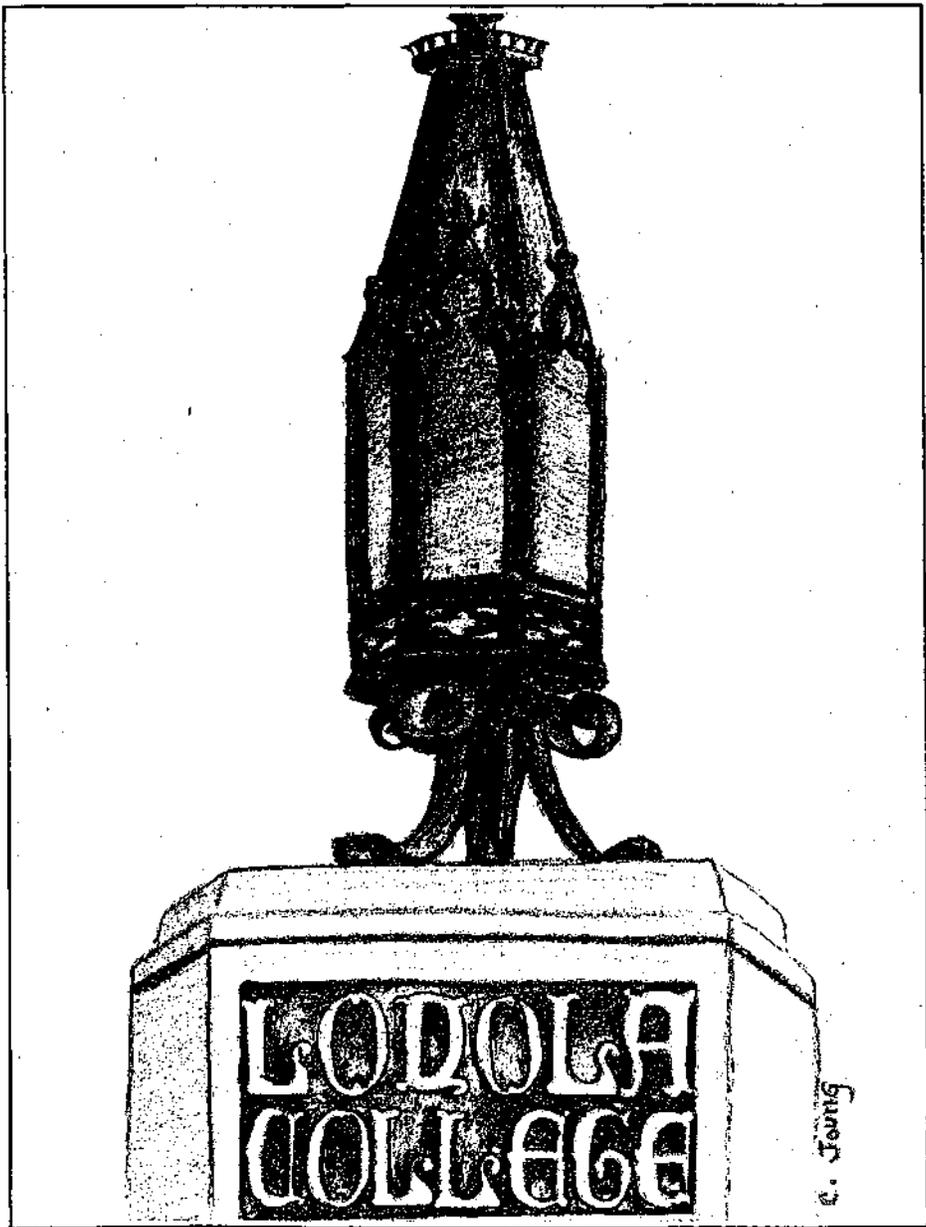


FORUM  
LOYOLA  
1987-88



e. Jeung



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The Center for the Humanities at Loyola College has funded awards for outstanding writing in the English, Foreign Languages and Literatures, History, Philosophy, and Writing Departments.

Forum is pleased to include in this issue the essays by the winners of the Writing Core Courses Essay Awards, Fall 1987: Christi Adams, Catherine Early, Victoria Elgie, and Vivek Pande.

**FORUM**

Fall 1987

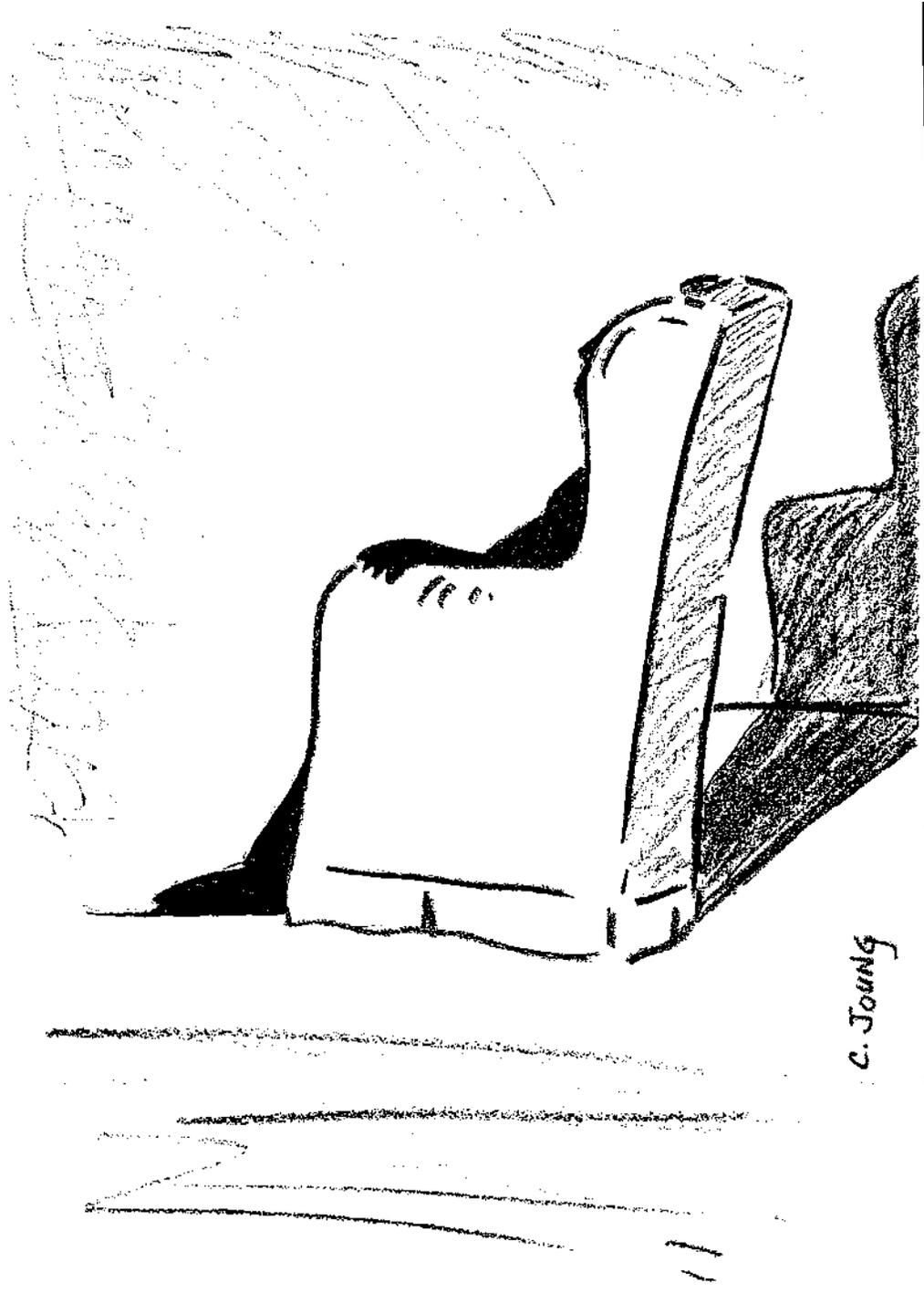
<b>LEGACY</b>	
Sandy Moser . . . . .	1
<b>BROADS WEAR BLACK LEATHER</b>	
Bob Topper . . . . .	6
<b>A TALE OF TWO VIVEKS</b>	
Vivek Pande . . . . .	9
<b>TOUCHSTONES</b>	
Stacy Tiedge . . . . .	12
<b>CITY OF LIGHTS</b>	
Ed Ashton . . . . .	17
<b>SWIMMING IN THE NEW FISHBOWL</b>	
Catherine Early . . . . .	20
<b>DISCOVERIES, DREAMS AND FEARS OF A CHILDHOOD SUMMER</b>	
James LoScalzo . . . . .	25
<b>PORTRAIT OF A DANCER</b>	
Cate Gillen . . . . .	36
<b>PROBLEM CHILD</b>	
John Farrell . . . . .	42
<b>A NIGHT TO REMEMBER</b>	
Victoria Elgie . . . . .	47
<b>MOOCHING</b>	
Frank Simms . . . . .	53
<b>MY FATHER'S HANDS</b>	
Pamela Elkins . . . . .	57
<b>ANOREXIA NERVOSA</b>	
Christi Adams . . . . .	60
<b>JUST ANOTHER SMALL TOWN</b>	
Brendan Sullivan . . . . .	65

### Dear Reader

Welcome to Forum's Fall 1987 edition. In its pages, you will find a sampling of some of the best writing that your fellow Loyola students have produced in the last semester. Some of the essays will amuse you, and others may even bore you. Some may enlighten you with keen insights or touch you with the revelation of a unique experience, while others may simply leave you cold. But that is merely a matter of personal judgement and tastes that reflects not only the quality of a particular essay and the writer's ability to reach his audience, but your own sensibilities as a reader and a critic. Regardless of your opinion, however, you will have an opportunity to appreciate and criticize the work of young writers who attend the same classes, go to the same parties, and live in the same dorms that you do. In your reading, you will not only gain a better understanding of yourself, but the talents, thoughts, opinions, and reflections of your fellow Loyola students as they pass through their college years with you. As editors, we encourage you to seize this opportunity and take a little time to enjoy the publication.

Keep in mind, however, that when you have finished reading, your various opinions and responses need not be private. What you read in this book may inspire you to write an essay of your own, or prompt you to write a letter of praise or criticism of a particular essay or of an editorial decision. Remember that this is your publication designed to be a vehicle for the free expression of your ideas and talents. It should not merely highlight the work of a few chosen writers who happen to impress a select group of editors who sit in judgement of their work and impose their sensibilities upon the publication in the selection process. The name of the publication is the **Forum** and, as its name implies, it seeks to provide an open forum for the Loyola student to express himself. As editors, we realize that in the past, **Forum** has not offered to publish your responses and criticisms and, as a result, has tended to alienate itself from the very people that it is designed to serve. For this, we humbly apologize and now commit ourselves to the opening of the **Forum** to all those who wish to contribute in the hopes of making an already fine student publication even better.

Keith Ewell, Editor      Jack McCann, Assistant Editor



C. Young

## LEGACY

The green chair stood almost like a throne at the top of the stairs. It faced a large, boxy television set in the corner of the room. The set was twenty-five years old at least, and its wooden case was heavy and dark. It no longer picked up the UHF channels; the Polaris company stopped making the long picture tubes that would unscramble the wavy lines. "So I can't watch the Phillies game," said Russell, leaning back in his chair. He didn't have to push the armrests to make the seat recline. Russell went to bed at ten o'clock, turning off the set before he left the room. The screen glowed slightly as he walked to his bedroom.

I used to sit on the floor, on a thick braided rug that made deep lines on my thighs, to watch t.v. with my grandfather. When the house got hot on the long afternoons, I laid in the corner of the room where the rug didn't meet the wall. The hardwood floor felt cool and smooth underneath my sticky stomach. In the evening I sat on the rug, and leaned against the solid chair.

The chair's back was slightly winged, the corners curling protectively around my Grandpop's shoulders. If I looked up from the hardwood floor, I couldn't see his face, only his bulging stomach and his chest, rising regularly as he slept. The hair on his chest and belly was white and slightly curly. He wore his swimming trunks and dark blue corduroy slippers. His ankles looked purple and fat. His feet twitched sometimes, side to side like an erratic metronome, on the ripply surface of the padded footrest. When Grandpop hoisted me up on his chair, my feet just barely reached the bottom of the seat.

I did not like my grandfather's stiff overstuffed chair, but I sat in it because he did. The chair was thick and hard, its green fabric almost bursting from the round fabric buttons in the center of the seat of the chair. The upholstery was rippled, rows of raised dots separated by thick yellow thread. I poked my fingers between the rows like a cat with

a scratching post. The bumpy pattern made my skin red, tattooing me with rows of indentations. "It scratches me," I complained.

"Stop wrutching around or give me the seat back," said my grandfather from the couch.

"How come it doesn't hurt you?" I asked. "You have more skin than I do."

He laughed and slapped his big hard stomach. "I'm tough" he said.

I pretended to give the chair back, then crawled into his lap. I sank into his belly and rubbed my face against what I called his scritchey cheeks. He smelled like peppermint toothpaste and hair oil. Grandpop didn't put the footrest up, and we rocked slowly until we fell asleep.

Grandmom moved the chair downstairs when my grandfather got too sick to walk up the steps. The chair looked out of place: too large, too heavy, and too green in the Victorian living room. Grandpop tired of watching television and built a long porch on the side of the house, furnished it with thick colonial furniture and cracked horse harnesses, and moved his chair in front of the picture window. "Now I can watch the neighbors," he said.

The chair still looked large and cumbersome, but Grandpop sat on it nobly.

As the cancer progressed, the chair seemed to swallow Grandpop as he shrank from almost three hundred pounds to one hundred and eighty. He covered his shrinking body with a bumpy brown afghan. When he slept, he pulled the afghan till it came underneath his chin. His legs were thin, white, and thickly veined where they poked out from the bottom of the cover.

Grandpop became weaker and spent still more time in his chair. He became bored with the neighbors and his children bought him a latchhook kit. He held the wooden handle of the "hooker" loosely in his hand, as if he didn't have the strength to make a fist. He latch-hooked thirty pillows and two wallhangings in under seven months, his hands, the fingers now boney and pointed, moving slowly but constantly. He pulled each strand of yarn tight around its netted anchor before he attached another one. The knots in a large horse pillow in my room are still secure. The pillows are finished with a large square of heavy material on the back. I sleep on the pillows, the material touching my face, my hands on the underside. I twitch my hands, moving them back and forth over the evenly cut yarn, until my palms tingle and I fall asleep.

I visited my grandfather less; his grey skin and baggy cheeks made me uncomfortable, self-conscious. His bumpy chair was covered now with a long strip of latchhook. The yarn was ordered specially, a soft fuzzy angora from the crafts store in Collegeville. Grandpop designed the pattern, a large explosion of colors like a firework. "Why do you have that?" I asked. "I like it, but I why do you have it?"

"The chair's upholstery hurt my skin," he said.

My grandmother didn't want the chair when Grandpop finally died. "It's too big," she complained. "The footrest hits my legs wrong."

We moved the chair to our house. "It sure is big," said my father. "We'll need the truck to move it." Our truck was old and grey; big enough to hold silage for sixty cows. The chair slid on the truck's metal floor, hitting the sideboards with a loud thunk when we drove around the corners.

"I guess it'll go in the parlor," said my father. "It's too big to go anywhere else."

"It will be fine in front of the t.v.," said my mother. "That's what Daddy bought it for."

Dad removed the strip of latch-hook and gave it back to my grandmother. She framed it and hung it on the wall in her hallway.

The chair looked funny in our parlor, next to a flowered chaise and a maroon velvet chair. Our parlor was smoothly surfaced: the hardwood floors, the slick cherry coffee table, the matte walls. "It doesn't quite fit in," said Mom later, biting the side of her mouth. "Does it?"

"I like it," said Dad. "It's the first piece of furniture that I don't feel like I have to run upstairs and change to Sunday clothes just to sit in."

My father sank into the chair after coming inside from the barn. He left the chair rock just once then yanked the brown handle at his side. The footrest ritcheted to a straight position. Dad hooked one foot over the other, crossed his hands on his stomach, and looked over his chest to watch the weather and the sports scores. He usually fell asleep in the chair. Mom woke him up to go to bed.

My grandmother and her sister had Typhoid. fever when my father was growing up, and they never hugged or kissed him. My father still does not like to be touched.

When he sleeps, my father turns his head to the center of the room. His hat perches on top of his head, the visor askew. My brother and I would sneak into the parlor and stand near him, daring each other to kiss his bearded face. "You first," I would say. "No, you first!" He pushed me toward the chair. My father twitched in his sleep, his dry hands making whispery sounds as they brushed the cool shell of his down vest. My brother and I both would chicken out.

The chair has lost its knapp; the green surface is now covered by a slightly yellow silhouette. "There's a grease

spot where your hat sits," says my mother. "Why don't you take it off before you sit down?"

"You can have your sofa," says my father. "Let me keep my chair."

I don't like to sit in my father's chair. It is too large, and I am afraid that it will tip over while I am sleeping. Dad has made the chair his chair. When Grandpop lived, it smelled like his hair creme and the pool's chlorine. It smelled clean, and somehow new. Now the chair smells like silage, a sweet and sour smell like burnt molasses in the winter, and a sharp, acid smell in summer. I do not like the smell.

My brother doesn't mind. He feeds the heifers; he milks the cows; he spreads the manure on the pasture. When the two men come home in the evening, they race to jump in the chair. Mark usually wins. "Out of my chair" says Dad.

I deserve it," says Mark, stretching his long arms above his head and getting comfortable. "I work just as hard as you do." And sometimes, when Dad is just too tired to argue, he pulls an afghan from the corner, and lays down on the floor.

Sandy Moser

## BROADS WEAR BLACK LEATHER

"Real men do not eat quiche. Real men do not wear pink. Real men do not drink wine coolers." I am sick and tired of hearing what makes a real man and whether I qualify. Women are the primary culprits of this act of segregation. I can't help but wonder how they would feel if the tables were turned. Instead of always separating the real men from the wimps, why not try separating the real women from the broads.

Point number one. Real women do not wear black leather. Broads wear black leather. How many women have you seen in black biker's jackets who actually looked sexy? Even when they are trying to appear sexy, they actually look frightening. As the broad smiles, her bright red heavily painted lips part to reveal the grimmest set of chipped teeth ever assembled. The craggy pitted cheeks rise and eyes lined in neon green gunk squint creating crow's feet in the corners. In her right hand she holds a smoldering Lucky Strike while her left hand plays with the many chrome studs that adorn her Pagan's leather. Trying to present a coy, come-hither look, she appears more like Charles Bronson in drag.

Along with black leather, real women do not wear heavy metal concert shirts. Nothing can be less appealing than a decaying corpse silk screened across the front of a black cotton tee-shirt with the words, "Grim Reaper See You in Hell Tour" emblazoned across the back. Real women wear soft sweaters and silky blouses, not dark ominous clothes with steel rivets jutting out. A small gold or silver necklace is appealing, but an eight pound chrome towing chain is absurd. Real women want to appear soft. That doesn't necessarily mean weak or submissive, but it does mean letting a guy know they won't beat the living hell out of him if he approaches.

Enough on what real women do and do not wear. Let's look at something much more important. Cars! A woman motoring down the road in a small red sports car with the top down is sexy, a little wild, but sexy. Real women are too

civilized to ride motorcycles. A broad blasting down the road stradling a roaring Harley is a little too wild. I doubt if even the venerable Marlin Perkins of **Wild Kingdom** could keep this Harley hog in the sights of his tranquilizer gun.

Not only are real women civilized, but they are polite as well. They do not spit or shout obscenities. This is the behavior of winos or convicts named Moe, but not real women. No guy wants to see how far a girl can jettison a stream of spittle from the gap in her two front teeth. Neither does he wish to hear a woman speak words that would give an Irish sailor the willies.

Real women do not have tattoos. Guys named Spike and Slash have tattoos. Pro wrestlers have tattoos. Men like Charles Manson have tattoos. A real woman does not have tattoos. Tattoos give people a tough, bad ass image. Some men like this image for themselves, but no man wants this image for his mother or girl friend. Through observation, I found that most people with tattoos flock to tough, dirty bars such as Trucker's Inn and Hammerjacks.

Real women do not go to Hammerjacks. In fact, real humans do not go to Hammerjacks. But broads live to go to Hammerjacks. A typical Hammerjack's broad is six feet, three inches tall and weighs in at a whopping 230 pounds. Her favorite hobbies include bench pressing Buicks and shaving her forearms. She has no neck, is working on a fourth chin and has a tendency to release earth shattering belches that make dogs whimper and small children cry. Sexy? Hardly. Appealing? I don't think so. Feminine? Definitely not. Real women go to night clubs, not bars.

In a night club, a real woman can sit quietly with her friends and enjoy a few Pina Coladas while flirting with a few men. She does not shave her forearms, but she does shave her legs. She speaks on a variety of topics ranging from fashion to politics to sports. She has a cute laugh and smiles constantly while talking to a man she likes. She does not have to be June Cleaver for Jane Fonda is a real woman also. But, the one thing all real women have in common is that they do not bear the slightest resemblance to Charles Bronson.

So ladies, do you think you are "real women"? If you answered yes on the basis of this paper, I am sad to inform you that you do not qualify. Real women do not agonize over a stupid set of standards set up by some goober they don't even know. They know they are real women without having to analyze themselves. After all, who am I to say what makes a real woman? I eat quiche.

Bob Topper

## A TALE OF TWO VIVEKS

I face an unusual and vexing problem. Born of an Indian father and an American mother, I was initially brought up in America, but was later schooled in India. I now fit remarkably well into either country, but cannot decide which one I prefer. I am a virtuoso in the much maligned art of conformity. Unfortunately this penchant for adapting has led to the unsettling consequence that there now exists two of me. In other words, I have come to possess two distinct, widely disparate identities. There is the American Vivek Pande, who is perhaps as different from the Indian Vivek Pande, as Dr. Jekyll was from Mr. Hyde - the transition in my case usually, and even casually, taking place in various jets 35,000 feet above the Caucasus. If a muddle ever had a profile, an outline of these two me's might depict it.

The Indian Vivek has assimilated many traits of that country, having lived in India for seven years. He is a tall, gawky youth who lounges around in scruffy jeans and whatever clean shirt he might possess. Living in a country where people go half-naked most of the time is not conducive to fancy dressing. He speaks with the low, guttural cadences of Indian-accented English, throwing in a few choice Hindu phrases for emphasis. He shares the general Indian laissez-faire attitude towards life: one's destiny is charted in the heavens and no amount of earthly maneuvering can change this divine game-plan. This, of course, is a great excuse for endless indolence, for if the gods wanted someone to be famous, they would arrange it so. Thus, the Indian Vivek spends an inordinate amount of time supine on his bed, reading or just staring at the cracks in the ceiling. His prize possession is his larynx, and like all Indians he uses it a great deal for conversation, gossip and argument with friend, family and foe alike. He has an excellent memory which is well suited for the educational system that emphasizes rote learning and examinations, and therefore he does quite well. Indians are famous for their gregariousness and hospitality. A casual chat on a bus often leads to dinner invitations and lifelong friendship. The Indian Vivek is no exception. But he can also be rude and pushy when it comes to driving or bat-

tling for a seat on overcrowded trains. There are just too many Indians and the simplest daily chore is a chaotic struggle with countless others and the corrupt, inefficient and ubiquitous Indian bureaucracy. The Indian Vivek descends from an aristocratic Brahmin family, however, and life is quite comfortable and peaceful.

The American Vivek is a vastly different character. He is physically fit and usually well attired; his accent is unmistakably American. He lives a reasonably disciplined life and is diligent and ambitious, goaded by the American competitive spirit. He is civil and polite but worries that the genuine milk of human kindness is being eroded by the modern fend-for-yourself lifestyle. The American Vivek thrives in school as he is enthusiastic in the pursuit of knowledge, though his interests are perhaps too widespread and unfocused. He vigorously supports democracy and free enterprise, since he feels he can be successful in such an environment. This feeling is manifested in his frantic desire to work as much as possible, and he derives the greatest pleasure from checking his bank balance everyday. Life, however, is not always trouble-free, as the American Vivek sometimes doubts whether he really belongs in America. He is as American as the next man, but the fact remains that he has brown skin, and at first glance he may be regarded as an alien.

These are the two sides of the one and only me, and I am hard-put to decide which of the two I like better. Adolescence is always a protracted identity crisis, but in my case the cultural divide further complicates this dilemma. It seems as though I am yoked to the karmic wheel of India but driven by the impetuous vigor of America. Yet somehow I never feel very perturbed by this problem. The reason for this lies in the fact that the American and the Indian sides of me are almost exactly opposite in nature. There is no blurry dividing line. This makes it impossible for any confusion to occur. For example, America is a mesomorphic, hard working society. If I were to drift around aimlessly and idly as I do in India, I would soon fail out of college and lose my job. On the other hand, energetic, hard work in India would bring no re-

wards and people would consider me rather insane. Thus, perhaps, in this great disparity lies my salvation.

I have come to cherish this bicultural duality and I wish it could be perpetuated for life. However, because time is the great leveler, these two me's will merge into a single identity. I can only hope that it will be a meaningful, rich amalgam.

Vivek Pande



## TOUCHSTONES

"Don't you hurt inside?" he asked tapping his white cane rhythmically on the pavement.

"Nah," I answered, "Not much anymore. Not really at all."

"That's strange," he said leaning forward over the curb we sat upon. He gently fingered a dried-out leaf that the wind had blown off the street into his hand. "You don't feel much, do you?"

"I'm tough," I said, wrapping my arms around my legs and drawing my knees to my chest.

"Are you really just tough, or is it that you've just decided not to feel?"

I rested my chin upon my knees and slowly inhaled the fresh, autumn air before I turned to look at him. He was still fingering the ugly brown leaf, staring blankly straight ahead, but he knew I was looking at him. Without turning, he handed me the leaf. It crumbled into a million pieces when I touched it. He heard it crumble. He smiled and shook his head.

Later, we were walking through the park and he reached out to pick a branch that had brushed against his shoulder. Holding his cane in his right hand, he held the twig in his left and rolled it forward and back between his thumb and index finger.

"You don't feel well, though, do you?" he asked

"I try not to let it get to me," I answered.

"Maybe you should let it."

"I don't understand."

He tossed the branch to the side of the path and paused to listen as it crashed quietly against the brittle leaves of a small bush. "I was thinking, maybe, if you thought through your emotions, you might feel better."

"I'd rather not feel when the feelings are bad."

He held out his hand. "Try it," he said.

"I really don't need your hand. I know my way.

"I don't," he said. I took his hand quickly then, embarrassed, and I didn't say anything more for awhile.

Finally, I spoke again. I wondered how he was getting along. I watched as he made his way along the paved path by knocking his cane against the asphalt and the tree trunks, and I asked, "How does it feel?"

"Cold," he answered, squeezing my hand.

After some time had passed in silence, he asked, "Do you think you've got it all together?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

"Let's sit by the pond," he suggested.

I hadn't realized we were near the pond. It was still hidden by the trees.

We sat on the grassy bank and I watched as his hands roamed over the ground in search of stones. His white cane lay in the grass nearby. When his fingers came across a pebble or a small rock, they snatched it up, and then they held it. He would roll the stone in his palm for awhile before he threw it into the water.

He always made me stop talking when he tossed the stones. He liked to listen to them break the water's surface. He wanted me to listen, too. The plink, plink, plink of the

small stone hitting the water sounded like the short plucking of a violin's strings while the larger stones echoed against the water, deep and hollow sounding. And only when the last strains of sound had been lost deep in the surrounding woods, would he allow me to speak again.

"I don't want to think about why my father left, I've thought about it too much already."

"My father left my mother when I was five-years-old," he began after a small, grey stone had sunk below the water's surface. And then he continued, "My father couldn't deal with raising a handicapped child. My mother refused to put me in an institution, so my father divorced her. I don't know if hearing this helps you at all, but I wanted you to know, that in some small way, I can understand how you feel."

"But I hardly understand how I feel."

He took my hand then and placed in my palm, the stone he had been holding. He closed my fingers around the stone, and then held my fist in his hands. He gazed blankly into my eyes and although I knew he couldn't see my face, I wondered what he did see. I knew he saw much more than I ever did.

Suddenly, he leapt to his feet and a light seemed to glimmer in his dull and useless eyes. He clutched his cane in one hand and held the other hand out for me to take.

"I have an idea!" he said, "It's time you learned to feel again."

And then he took me running through the park and out into the street. I had no idea where he was headed, but I followed, obediently as he banged his white cane left and right against the legs of unwary passers-by.

He slowed his pace as he reached the tall doors of the art gallery. As we mounted the gallery's front steps, he drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and when we stood before the door, he tied it about my eyes.

"Now you will have to learn how to feel," he said. "Your entire world will be only those things that you can feel, that you can touch. I will guide you, and you will be blind like me."

I pushed open the door, and immediately he asked me what I felt. The cool, smoothness of the gallery door was all I could recall feeling at the moment.

Beyond that, I felt nothing. I swung my arms in front of me and to each side, searching for something to hold onto, but there was nothing. I was suspended in nothingness. I was lost, completely lost, until, my hands met his.

He asked me what I felt now, and I realized his hands, held tightly in mine. His palms were supple, and smooth like fine leather, but his knuckles felt like sandpaper where my fingertips touched them. As my fingertips wandered over his hands, I began to see again.

He led me through the gallery display, placing my hands on each piece, and asking me each time what I felt. He told me that I needed to be more observant. He told me each time that I needed to feel more. I needed to see more.

Then he took me to his favorite sculpture. At first, I could only feel its hardness and coldness as it fell into curves beneath my touch. He made me feel it again.

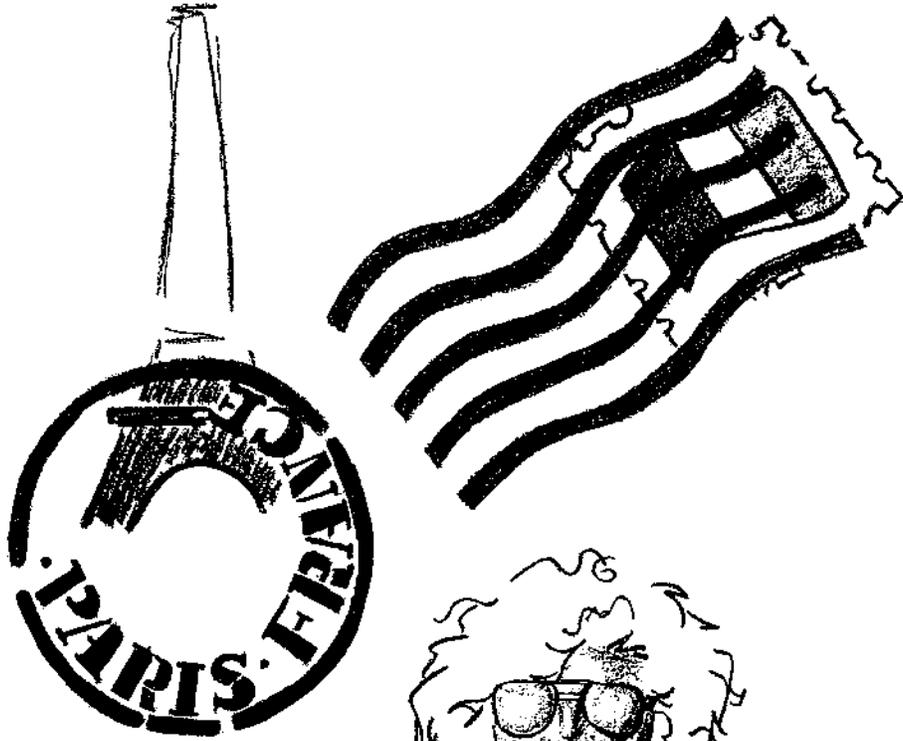
My fingertips fell into its curves. My hands traced the outline of the form. I could feel the smoothness of its rounded bends and turns. But I still couldn't identify the form. I felt its rocky hardness, its toughness. It defied my touch. It dared me to harm it. It was capable of protecting itself while I was still lost and helpless in my dark world.

And I envied it. I envied what it knew. I envied how it could stand there, hard, cold, and alone, while I groped helplessly in my darkness.

I thought it must take the form of an animal, a tiger, a puma, something evil, something dangerous. I longed to have its power, its confidence, its strength. And as my hands fell into and out of its unidentified curves, curiosity and frustration overcame me. I felt as though the heavy, stone form had some power over me. It could see while I was blind. It was laughing at me as I struggled to identify it. It was strong while I was weak.

And finally, my insensitive, unfeeling hands, unable to identify the sculpture, I gave up, frustrated. I tore the blindfold from my eyes, and I saw, carved in a block of limestone, the form of a helpless, crying baby.

Stacy Tiedge



## The City of Lights?

Paris is a beautiful city from twenty thousand feet. The only clearly distinguishable features are the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower, and the urban sprawl forming a pleasing geometric pattern around them. As your plane spirals lower the oppressive crowding of buildings in the old city becomes more apparent, and the impression changes from abstract beauty to a sort of old-world quaintness. At this point you may be either horrified or amused to see cars and buses circling the Arc twelve abreast without the benefit of marked lanes while a few brave souls on bicycles weave through the traffic, in constant peril of falling under someone's wheels. A moment later Charles de Gaulle airport comes into view, and soon after that you are on the ground. You are now a foreigner, or worse yet, a tourist, and you will soon learn that Paris is not a kind city to foreigners and tourists.

The first difficulty you are likely to encounter, assuming that you are able to navigate the miles of tunnels and conveyor belts from the landing gate to the outside world, will be in finding something to eat. You should have no trouble finding a Freetime Burger Restaurant, but ordering something edible will be more difficult. "Give me a burger" will sometimes get results, but under no circumstances ask for French fries. This will earn a puzzled look at best, and more probably an incomprehensible, malicious remark.

Purchasing enough nutritious, palatable food to prevent scurvy, anemia, starvation and the like will continue to be one of your greatest challenges for the duration of your stay. You will find it is possible, but only if you follow these three simple rules. First, those charming pastry shops you will find on every corner are to be used for snacking purposes only. Under no circumstances should you attempt to purchase a meal in one of these establishments. You will pay twice what you can afford, and may well walk away with a bag full of Spam streudel. Second, you must always keep in mind that despite appearances, you are not spending Monopoly money. When the last of those ten-franc notes is gone, you will not be able to cash in a hotel for more. Third, and most important,

you must always keep in mind that in coming to a foreign country you have placed yourself at the mercy of the natives. If a shopkeeper should happen to put mustard on your sandwich when you clearly requested mayonnaise or give you Pepsi when you really prefer Coke, you have no choice but to smile and walk away. Asking for an exchange or refund will only earn you derision.

Derision, of course, may be earned in Paris in any number of ways. Ask someone, in English, for directions back to your hotel. Even better, go to some public place, and when a Parisian tries to strike up a conversation with you, reply, "Je ne sais pas parler francais" in your best Arkansas accent. Your new acquaintance will most likely shoot you a look fit to stun a musk ox, and thereafter avoid you as if you were a musk ox. An even easier road to ridicule is to walk around with a large, expensive camera dangling from your neck taking pictures of your family in front of the great monuments and landmarks. This stereotypical tourist act, despised by city dwellers the world over, in Paris is certain to draw comments from passers-by which would steam your glasses, if only you could understand them.

This is not to say, however, that all Parisians are unfriendly. If you doubt this, put on your most expensive outfit and take a walk alone along the Champs Elysees. Before you've covered half its length you will meet half a dozen street people eager to make your acquaintance. Many speak English, and will call themselves struggling artists, writers, or poets. Despite all appearances these gentlemen can be quite charming, and you may well find yourself drawn into a brief conversation with one. He will explain his misfortunes, you will express deepest sympathy, and he will thank you and melt away into the anonymity of the crowd. At this point you will either thank God you had the sense to buy traveller's checks or curse yourself for failing to do so, because when you reach for your wallet you will find it gone.

If your appetite for abuse is still unsatisfied, the Paris Metro will accomodate your tastes for anything from harassment to assault and battery. This subway system, while rela-

tively clean and well maintained, is inhabited by bands of punkers with a bad attitude towards everyone, especially Americans. They may be identified by spiked, dyed hair, makeup, and leather jackets decorated with obscenities written in electrician's tape. All you have to do is say something in English within earshot: of a group of these people, and they will happily add a bit of adventure to your vacation. If you are a female you may get away with having your face licked and the buttons torn from your shirt. If you are instead a male trying to prevent a friend from having her face licked and buttons removed, you are likely to find yourself in a fistfight with a possibly homicidal, probably armed, and certainly disturbed individual.

Of course, if you time your visit properly you may be partially compensated for your myriad inconveniences by the city's many undeniable wonders. The blooming of the gardens at Versailles is a sight to inspire even the most downtrodden tourist, as is the snow-dusted Champs Elysees. The tomb of Napoleon is an architectural marvel, and to the artistic the Louvre alone is well worth the trip. Take note of these moments and remember them well. Thinking of them will ease the pain of watching every cent you've saved over the last ten years disappear down the Seine.

So now you've seen Paris. As you board the plane for the flight home you can look over your collection of souvenirs: a lingering case of indigestion, a sweatshirt you could have had silkscreened at home for half the price, a pile of slides useful for boring unwelcome visitors for years to come, and possibly a painfully swollen black eye. The last two weeks have been among the most trying of your life, and as you debark at Dulles International you will have an intense urge to bend down and kiss your native soil. Of course, that is not what you will tell your friends. When they ask how Paris was you will expound at great length on the majesty of the Eiffel Tower, or the beauty of the Champs Elysees at night, then nod politely when they explain that they are planning to go next month.

As they walk away, you will laugh. Ed Ashton

### Swimming in the New Fishbowl

It's too long a story to tell about how I ended up going back to school after an absence of a dozen years. Suffice to say that I was thirtyish, a successful career woman, line manager at the most successful, innovative and competitive telecommunications firm in the world. I earned closer to forty thousand dollars than to thirty, had nearly a hundred employees reporting directly to me and had a solid reputation as a dynamic manager who had recruited and hired about two hundred recent college graduates in a couple years time. But a growing ambition to complete an unfinished goal finally led me to close the door on my business career and return to undergraduate school to earn the degree that I had always wanted.

I spent hours researching schools and many more hours waiting anxiously to hear from Loyola regarding admission. Just minutes after the excitement of the acceptance letter had subsided, I began to agonize over how to fit in on campus. What would I wear (after ten years of Brooks Brothers suits, black pumps and little bow ties)? What kind of slang would be popular (foreign language to this child of the sixties who never managed to stop responding to most inquiries with "Yeah, man")? Would the students laugh at me? Think me silly, overweight, old? Worse still, would they just plain ignore me? Anxious imaginings followed each other in vivid sequences where hostile young people sneered and jeered at me for any number of trivial reasons.

I imagined my professors, many of whom would be in my age group, as my mentors, my resources for confidence bolsters and my shoulders to cry on when things got tough. Professors that I had met socially before the school term started seemed friendly and I was encouraged by the pleasant conversations. I envisioned a world in which a sea of youthful faces overpowered and threatened me and in which mature persons who happened to be my teachers gave me pats of encouragement and little talks to boost my confidence. The older population of the college would show compassion for the returnee engaged in a struggle to adapt to an entirely new

environment full of new rules, new language and new skills. It took me but a few short weeks to realize that I had met the enemy of my self-confidence and he was not that energetic mass of youth, but the slower, more insidious cynic of middle age. The same flexibility that allows young people to bounce back from heartbreak allows them to take in stride the presence of someone different in the classroom. There were some signs of curiosity, but with the naivete of youth that accepts all differences as positive, they accepted me, and made friends with me in the same cautious manner that they made overtures to new young people in their midst.

No, it has not been the other undergraduates who have been judgmental, reserved, skeptical, and indifferent to my reasons, my abilities and my sincerity. It has been the professors who have consistently singled me out for my differences and whose comments consistently accentuate my alien status to the group. I have one professor who not infrequently mentions events that occurred when I was a small child (sometimes even before my existence) and then refers to herself and me as the only people in the class who will remember the event. I realize that she may be trying to extend a small piece of familiarity to me but instead the comment serves to further highlight the difference between myself and the others in the class. It is the moment following one of those comments that I do catch the wisp of a hostile glance from a fellow student. Although the young can accept a different sort of person in their midst, they do understandably have trouble accepting that someone else may share something special with the professor that they are not a part of also. Anyway, as I am about a dozen years older than most of the students and probably about the same amount of years younger than the professor, I fail to see that I belong more to the professors's generation than to the students'.

Another professor said to me early in the semester that I had better realize that I would be judged by different standards than the others would be. Later, I realized that she was talking about herself - she had set up more difficult standards for me than for the others in the class. In the business world, when I hired a forty year old housewife or a

recent college graduate, both with no experience, my expectations that one would learn the job faster than the other were nonexistent. It would have been unfair and discriminatory. I would have expected more behavioral maturity from the older person, but I learned from years of hiring experience that age does not guarantee competency or learning ability.

The professor who commented about standards reminds me of a bitter remark made to me by my friend Eleanor, a woman in her thirties who returned to school and recently graduated from a local college. "You know", she said to me, "One day one of my teachers told me that he could be more critical of me, harder on me because at my age, he said, I can take it, I can handle it. Handle it? I am thirty five years old, I haven't read a textbook or done a math problem since I was seventeen. I've never used a computer and I don't recognize any popular book title published after 1975 and he has the nerve to tell me that I can take it. I need more encouragement than they do, not less!" How much empathy I feel for Eleanor and how I understand her well-intentioned professor. I'm sure he was trying to tell her that by her maturity she has outgrown the sensitivity of youth and will be able to move quickly past harsh criticism without being bogged down by self pity. But what he chose not to recognize is that the effort and the ability to understand the subject matter was just as difficult for her as for anyone else. I am also reminded of Ron, a former coworker of mine who has been attending college on Saturdays for nine uninterrupted years. He is trying to attain his degree while working a fifty hour week, maintaining home and family life and good grades. Every year, Ron tells me, at least one professor will begin the semester by letting him know that he is expected to shine in the class because of his age and maturity level. Ron shakes his head in frustration, "Shine? It's all I can do to get myself here every Saturday, study until the wee hours and then force myself out of bed at five o'clock every morning to get ready for work. Sometimes, it really gets to me to hear that tired phrase about expectations because of my advanced age." I can understand that Ron and Eleanor, like myself, want to be judged by the same standards as their classroom peers, nothing more and nothing less.

"Less" makes me think of a professor I have who won't call on me too often in class, because, as he puts it "my superior knowledge might embarrass the other students and intimidate them into not responding when called upon." I don't know that I agree with him that a dozen extra years of life have given me much extra knowledge of a specialized subject like the one he teaches. However, my interest in the subject during this semester keeps me reading and researching it intently. Interestingly enough, it's the younger students who intuitively understand that my intense interest and hunger for knowledge reflect my decision to return to school. They view my determination to succeed in each class as evidence that I have an established goal to achieve. Some of them have said to me how much they envy me for being past the point in my life where I wondered what to study, what to do with my life, and wondered also if I would be at school if my parents hadn't made me go there. Yes, I agree, I am so glad to know what it is that I want to accomplish and I know how hard I'm willing to work to accomplish it well. I ponder the logic behind that statement of my professor's and I wonder if it isn't easier sometimes to silence the questions of the challenging student than to have to face the task of keeping one step ahead of an energetic mind.

The paradox here is that although I perceive inconsistencies and biases in the manner in which we returnees are treated and judged by our professors, I am trapped into understanding and forgiving them for their attitudes by my own maturity and empathy for them. The same characteristic that I don't want them to notice and take advantage of is the very essence of my personality that gives tolerance for their human foibles. My age and experience will not let me forget that my teachers are people first and professors second. I do wish, though, that the professors who are role models of social behavior on campus, might reflect on the manner in which they handle an unusual student. Not just an older one, but perhaps also their manner with a handicapped or foreign student. Human nature is what it is, not to notice the frailties or peculiarities of others is impossible. However, it is possible to recognize these differences and idiosyncracies of the accept them without public reference.

I reflect on this subject occasionally and realize that my own maturity allows me to view this subjectivity amongst the teaching staff at the college I attend as just a small portion of the new experience. I am no longer at the age where I need be influenced or intimidated by the inconsistencies of others. On the occasional "off" day, when my morale fades and my middle aged body drags behind my ageless intellect, I replay a sweet daydream in which the positions are reversed. It is my professors (most of whom have never done anything professionally but teach) who have been placed in my old job. I imagine them in the mad, crazy world of high technology, managing affairs for a hundred people; creating a budget of millions of dollars that never lasts as long as it should; listening to endless consumer complaints, employee complaints, coworker complaints; reading trade journals at night to keep up with an industry that changes weekly, a company that changes daily, and a department that changes hourly. Gradually, my ego begins to raise it's battered head, because here I am, swimming in my new fishbowl with all the other fish in all our different colors, shapes and sizes. I'm not sure that some of my learned professors wouldn't be found floating at the top of the pool.

Catherine Early

## **The Discoveries, Dreams and Fears of a Childhood Summer**

There is a time in everyone's life, a vigorously magical time, that is looked upon with esteem and envy. In my case it was a childhood summer, the last summer before the onset of maturity smothered all that is innocent about childhood. The summer before the realization that life is more than spending time with your friends, the realization that life is full of commitments and hard work, depression and death. I've been thinking a lot about it lately during this mid-spring swelter. My tenacious memories lie as monuments to what was but is no more. Even though these memories flourish in every word spoken and vivify on every breath taken, they can never be re-attained. Our childhoods have chiseled our shapes and inscribed our names at the bottom, we can never re-live something so permanent. That is unless we look at our memories in a way we never thought possible.

You see, a memory is similar to the tip of a single iceberg, poking above the waterline as elegant as a beautiful woman's face. At this sighting you must dive deeper for a peek under her aquatic dress if you want to discover the entire meaning and reason, the body and soul of the memory. The dangerous part is that down here, deep in your mind's ocean, you can get lost in a murky haze of lost beliefs, unfulfilled intentions and stolen promises. These opaque depths of divine seductivity manifest no up or down, no right or wrong, no mercy. It is there that I shall either drown or surface a victor, reliving my own childhood subconscious. The decision shall be yours.

As I said before, I've been thinking a lot about that summer lately. I would give anything to go back to my three best friends, Peter, Kim and Lonnie and all the fun we had. God, I need it now. I can almost smell the hamburgers and hotdogs grilling in my backyard amongst .....

The smell of hamburgers and hotdogs began to fill my backyard. Grease was spitting off the grill as smoke oozed its way through the branches that brought the blessed summer shade. "You're making the stick bend," Lonnie cried. "I am

not! Look, I'll even let Pete do it," I replied. Lonnie's lips began quivering with anger as his eyes squinted behind his "bottle bottom" glasses. "Why don't you let me do it?" Lonnie screamed. "Because," my mind searched for a reason, "because you're Jewish, and besides, you gotta have faith." I gave the sacred branch of applewood to Peter, the same branch Peter, Kim and I had used to fake out Lonnie all spring. Peter was the largest of the four though his lisp occasionally brought him back down to our size. He just stood there, moving only his eyes as if he were a pirate ready to take ten paces towards a buried treasure. He held the dowsing-rod in front of him and began imputing the ability to the stick. "Here!" Peter cried, "Jim was right, there's water right here where I stand." "Stand" came out "thand". Lonnie was on the verge of tears, "Liars" he screamed, "you're all liars!" I could tell Kim was about to give into the truth and ruin our fun, when my dad called us to the picnic table for dinner. What timing I thought, if Kim would have given in to telling Lonnie the truth about the dowsing-rod she wouldn't have stopped there. Next it would have been that I wasn't really adopted, then that his tongue wasn't really gonna fall out like the Ouiji board told us. My three best friends and I ate dinner as fast as we could, then ran across the street to Lonnie's backyard for some tag, or maybe even to catch lightning bugs if we were allowed to stay out that late. Four hours earlier my three best friends and I finished our last day of the third grade.

June is always gone by the time you realize you've been living in it for thirty days. I can't remember anything particular about it, just that Peter, Kim, Lonnie and I were anxious to see the bicentennial firework celebration on the Mall in D.C. I almost missed it though thanks to my beloved curiosity. I, like many children, was always fascinated with fire though I am ignorant to the reason. One fine Friday, Peter and I were playing wiffleball on his frontyard. Peter's mother interrupted the game to tell him that she was leaving to pick up his sister from summer school. This left the house empty. As soon as she pulled out of the driveway we began lighting dried leaves on fire in his backyard. Being the safety mongrel that I was, I suggested that we bring a pile of leaves

into, the carless garage and light them in there so as not to create a major fire. We closed the garage door, lit up a fresh pile of leaves and began dancing over the smoke pretending to be rock singers. Then the phone rang. It was my mother, she wanted me home to try on a pair of freshly hemmed pants. I was no sooner in my front door than being dragged up the street by my ear. "Let go Mom, it hurts! I don't know why I smell like smoke! I swear we didn't do nothin'." When we reached Peter's front door I gave my usual knock accompanied by a not so usual command for him to hurry. I was answered by a distant "I'm in the garage Jim." My mother and I walked over to it and I gave it a kick, "open the garage door," I cried. When the moan of the electronic door opener kicked in, a menacing cloud of smoke slugged out searching for freedom from the confinement of the garage. As the door raised high enough we saw Peter standing over the burning pile of leaves with his shirt tied around his head, he was strumming his air guitar, jumping, twisting and turning every which way and screaming ... YEAH!. .YEAH! ..YEAH! Slowly, the smoke began to clear, allowing Peter to see more than one person in the audience. Though I didn't hear him say it, I read the words "ahh shit" off of his quivering lips.

Then, as if I wasn't in enough trouble, two fire trucks pulled up (followed by some of the neighborhood kids on their banana seat bikes), hoses armed and ready. Apparently Peter's neighbor saw the smoke pouring out of the garage window and called the fire station. This time I heard Peter say it.

When Peter's mom came home my mother told her the entire story. Peter whipped up more than a few tears and begged his mother for mercy. She fell for it and told him it was okay. When she gave him a hug to alleviate his balling, Peter gave me a wink over his mother's shoulder. I, on the other hand, was grounded for a week but able to see the fireworks with Kim's father and the gang on the following Saturday.

After the fireworks we went back to Kim's house to spend the night just like we did every Saturday night. You

see, at 11:30 on channel 20, Creature Feature was on and Mr. Hornsby was a big, burly, home-grown Texan, accent and all. He wore the biggest, baddest boots east of the Rockies. Every now and then he'd give us a beer on the condition that we'd have to drink the whole thing. He'd always let out a deafening southern laugh when our faces would cringe after just one sip. Sometimes I wondered if Mr. Hornsby looked forward to those Saturday nights more than we did. He'd turn out the lights, Kim would snuggle up in his huge arms and we'd gather round side of him, preparing ourselves for the horrors to come. The image of Kim in her father's arms on those endless summer nights is forever in my mind. You could feel how happy it made them.

Mrs. Hornsby had died of natural causes soon after Kim's birth, leaving Mr. Hornsby to bring up Kim alone. His result was nothing less than brilliant. Kim was a pure joy to be around. She was dark skinned and her hair was black, well at least until you looked into her eyes, there you'd find the true meaning of the color. Her eyes were so indelibly black you couldn't even see her pupils. Though she never let her tiny size get in the way of her toughness, required to be one of the guys, you could tell there was a feminine young girl waiting to burst out of her hibernation. Every now and then, when the breeze was blowing right, I would catch a scent of her flowing hair, a scent so utterly vibrant and powerful that it could only be feminine. One time it was so overwhelming I couldn't help but stare at her. The sun was setting behind her, swelled from a hard days work, igniting an outline on the top of her head and illuminating her cheek bones golden. Her black eyes swam into mine knowing full well why I was staring at her. She cracked a smile and gave me a wink, a wink that was her deposit on the beautiful woman to come. Little did I know, it was mine for the keeping. I never told the guys about that day, and to my knowledge neither did she, they wouldn't have understood how you can express such emotion without saying a word.

I think, in a pure and innocent way, I loved her.

Across the street from Peter lived Mrs. Ritter. She lived alone except for her dead daughter that she kept upstairs. If you put one foot on her yard she'll no sooner have it cut off, marinated and on her dinner table. Peter, Lonnie, Kim and I were playing wiffleball on a steamy July afternoon when I smacked one out of Peter's yard, across the street and into Old Lady Ritter's culvert. Since I hit it I was unanimously volunteered into risking my life for a thirty-five cent wiffleball. You see, the only time we had seen Mrs. Ritter was a snowy day the previous November.

It was the first snowfall of the long awaited season. As a child the seasons always go too slow. If it's summer, you wish it was Christman Eve, snow fluttering silently to the ground, the Christman tree twinkling with lights of love, joy and of course gifts. If it's winter, you wish you were at the beach listening to a big Jamaican guy playing the marimba and nibbling on sweet funnel cake as you watch the most spectacular sunset God has ever given. Anyway, since it was the first snowfall of the season Kim and I were having a snowball battle against Peter and Lonnie on the way home from school, which let us out with half a day's knowlegde. Peter switched sides and the three of us combined our efforts to bombard Lonnie, the weakest of the four. In a valiant effort of retaliation Lonnie hurled an iceball with blind faith and definite anger. The iceball seemed to float to the old lady's window, almost as if it were being pulled by some evil magnet that wanted to take its anger out on four young children. As evil fate would have it, the window shattered. At the sound of the crash the four of us did a quick shiver as if we didn't expect the noise. I tried to swallow but the frog in my throat rejected it. From out of the murky depths of the only house on the block that we'd never been in, emerged a hideous monstrosity, the ugliest craeture Satan ever gave us. It was Mrs. Ritter. Only her ghostly white face was visible, her eyes were yellow and her lips were cringing with age and hatred. I tried to run but my legs were cramped, frozen to the slush and ice. "You!" she cried, outstretching one bony finger and pointing it at Lonnie, "Come...heeeeree.." The words crackled out of her mouth, and through her window's new air-vent, like a stuttering engine, almost as if

years of smoking and seclusion had taken away tiny portions of her voice. Lonnie was trepid, steam was rising off his hair, his face was red and puffy, dripping with icy water and tears. I remember wishing I was back in school making screeching noises on the top of my desk with the palms of my hands, I would be bored but warm, dry and safe. The ice under our feet suddenly thawed and in perfect synch the four of us fled down the street using the adrenalin that had so magically built up. As we ran, the sound of wet sneakers meeting the slush was drowned out by Mrs. Ritter's horrid laughter. Even after I was in the safety of my house, I thought I could still hear it, faint but evil, echoing through her lonely house and up and down the empty street.

That was eight months prior, now it was hazy, hot and humid, the crickets and cicada were singing their summer songs, and the wiffleball was somewhere in her culvert under the un-used driveway. "Go on," Peter and Lonnie were encouraging while little Kim gazed on. My muscles were tight and my hands were trembling and somewhere in the shadowy depths of that old house before me, Old Lady Ritter was preparing herself for a succulent meal of a small boy. I took a deep breath and began towards the culvert, the dry grass was cracking under my feet reminding me of Mrs. Ritter's voice eight months prior. I took each step cautiously just in case she had some kind of trap hidden in the grass awaiting my foot. I made it to the culvert and looked back at my partners in crime, Lonnie was giving me the okay sign with his fingers while Peter and Kim stared into the empty windows. I knelt down and peered into the culvert, it was dark and damp and full of cobwebs, the bright yellow of the wiffleball cried back at me for help. Without hesitation I got on all fours and crawled in, moving as fast as I could; my hair was absorbing spider webs along with unseen insects. I was about two feet away when I heard something shuffling in front of me, I froze in my tracks. The cold wet metal of the gutter was piercing my hands and knees. Oh God, I thought, it's Mrs. Ritter, she's crawled in from the other end and is waiting somewhere in the darkness. I tried to turn around and get out but that yellow in all that sludge was so out of place, I almost felt sorry for it. I began to inch forward when my

blood turned cold, something was hissing and it was getting louder. "Jim?" Lonnie called, "are you O.K.? Jim?" I tried to yell but I was horrified, like in a dream when you try to scream and nothing comes out. Two yellow eyes peered out at me through the darkness. "My God,.... IT'S MRS. RITTER!" "Jim, get out of there!" Lonnie cried. My eyes were wide, hypnotised by the hissing pair in front of me. "Reoww! Mrs. Ritter exclaimed as she shot forward at me. I jerked back and hit my head on the metal that surrounded me. I lost all my self control, screaming and scrambling out of the slippery culvert. The cat flew out behind me, I'm not sure how many kittens followed her. I ran back to where my friends had been standing. They were now banging on Peter's door, "Let us in! She's got Jimmy!" Peter's mother opened the door just as I got there. Peter and Lonnie jumped in, Kim and I followed. Peter's mother looked at me wide-eyed and began screaming in Greek, that meant she was angry, real angry, and why not, I just got mud all over the place. We were no sooner out of Peter's house than running down the street to mine. Over our heavy panting we could hear Mrs. Ritter' s redoubtable evil laughter. Mrs.Ritter - 2, Neighborhood Kids - 0.

Four children looking for excitement during the daily routines of late July usually meant trouble. We'd go from one house to the next; spilling lemonade mix on the floor and spreading it around with our feet so that it would blend in with the kitchen table, making imitation braces for our teeth with aluminum foil or crank calling grocery stores asking for Prince Albert in a can or Muriel in a box. Come late afternoon our adventures would be put on hold for Ultraman followed by Speed Racer, then by Kimba the White Lion, and of course, climaxing with the Banana Splits.

Those are the days I have since fallen in love with. Back when you could be friends with a pretty girl without the slightest natural predilection for a relationship, sex, or both. Back before my brother and three sisters moved out, forever dividing my family. Back before I was haunted by the questions: Who am I? or Will I be successful? Back when I had no bills or schedules, or for that matter, not a care in the world. Back when you could be with your friends every minute of the day.

The dog days of August meant three words to Peter,..- Birthday's a comin'. About four days before his birthday Peter convinced Lonnie to help him on his quest to discover, and sneek a peek at, any hidden gifts they could find. I was in the basement with Peter's hamster Tiffany. The previous Christmas, whenever Peter wasn't around, Lonnie and I would stick Tiffany on top of the star on the Christmas tree. It would look around for a few seconds, its puny brain incapable of comprehending the situation. Then it would fall off the star, tumble through the branches and land on the nativity scene in an entanglement of ornaments and tinsel. Every time we let the hamster that Peter worshipped so much roll down the tree Lonnie and I would cry out a laugh of retribution since neither of our parents would let us have one. Anyway, I was playing with Tiffany, turning it upside down and on its head when Peter and Lonnie flew down the steps, they were ecstatic. They hadn't found any hidden birthday gifts, they'd found something better, something that an eight year old boy's dreams are made of. Peter dropped the stack of Penthouse magazines at his feet over-exaggerating their weight by rubbing his arms and making a slight "oohhh" sound. "Tah-Dah" Lonnie sang to me, outstretching his arms like some great opera star at the end of a play, Peter was already well into the first issue. I took three giant steps, crouched down on my knees and slid across the tile floor to meet the truth to my late night curiosity. Peter extended his arm to hand me an issue when he let out a scream, "Tiffany!" I looked down and saw the twisted remains of Peter's beloved hamster under my right knee. In my exhilarated hurry to see bare breasts and buttocks, I had crushed Tiffany under my knee and slid him a good five feet, leaving a trail of blood and orange hair. It took my mom two hours to get the stain out of my jeans and Peter two weeks to forgive me. We went to Trolley Car Pizza for his birthday party, I had an awful time. Kim got him a little plastic log with holes in it for Tiffany to play with. To this day he thinks I squashed the damn thing with malicious intent.

My last summer of innocence was all but over. School was only a weekend away. On my last Friday night my three best friends and I played wiffleball. It began to storm. Kim

had to go home anyway since her father, thanks to a summer of whining and begging, was taking her on her first hunting trip of the season the following morning. That was the last time I ever saw her. I went to bed early that night. Outside the thunder was rumbling, I lay in bed scared, not of the storm or Mrs. Ritter but of the death of the summer I had fallen in love with.

The following afternoon, Peter, Lonnie and I went to the creek for some pretend hunting of our own. I was afraid to go home since I put my foot in the mud jumping across the rocks that were still slippery from last night's downpour. If my mother ever found out that I was down there she'd lose her head, so I washed my sneaker in the creek and had to wait for it to dry. When I got home and walked in the kitchen I saw my mother sitting at the table by herself, she looked over at me and began to cry. "Where have you been?" she asked. Before I could answer she knelt down beside me, the tears had a steady flow to them now. "You won't be going over to Kim's tonight." Just by the sight of my mother crying my lower lip began to tremble. "Why?" I blurted out, wondering if Peter and Lonnie were presently in the same situation. My mother fumbled with the words, "She's gone, baby. There . . . .was a hunting accident." I didn't want to hear anymore, I didn't need to. Death was something I couldn't understand and definitely couldn't swallow. I ran back outside, the screen door slammed the wall behind me. I joined Peter and Lonnie who were sitting on the cul-de-sac. The three of us sat there and whimpered for a good hour, contemplating a visit to see Mr. Hornsby, just as we got up enough courage it began to storm. We went home.

I went straight to bed and layed there for a few hours before giving up. Outside the rain sounded like T.V. static as it pelted my window, pushing it to the breaking point. I crawled out of bed and walked softly to the door of my parent's room that was slightly ajar. I knelt down and peered in to see an unfamiliar man on the television publicizing this morning's tragedy. I listened to the entire story while my mother sat on the edge of the bed with her hand over her mouth and my father lay silent, shaking his head with his back

propped up by two pillows. The man on the T.V. said that Nicholas Hornsby was found knelt over his daughter's body, clutching her in his arms and petting her hair.

I snuck back down the hallway, careful to avoid the creaky spots, and crawled into bed. The image of Mr.Hornsby standing over Kim's lifeless body made me cry. The rain on the window reflected images of water that looked like giant tears dripping down my walls. Death was no longer Mrs. Ritter or any other childish fantasy, it wasn't even when you smeared your friend's hamster on his tile floor, death was when your father dropped a loaded rifle, death was real.

Most children deal with their fears quite well. The fear of what might be lurking under the bed or in the closet will vanish in time. Kim's tragic death was the invitation for reason and rationality to take over my fears and fantasies. Ten years later the task is all but complete. Dreams of marrying my third grade teacher have extinguished themselves. Dreams of becoming the second baseman for the Baltimore Orioles have turned into dreams of becoming a photojournalist. Fears of thunderstorms, Mrs. Ritter's evil laughter, or even Jody (the devil-pig from the Amityville Horror) have turned into fears that rarely go beyond the empirical realm of natural science. Don't get me wrong, I accept an integrated approach to psychic phenomena, but I do not accept it as justification for a sometimes unreasonable approach to life. As a child you inject senseless preconceived notions, irrational fears or explanations into situations like that with Mrs. Ritter . When I was eight I really truly believed that Mrs. Ritter was after my friends, ten years later I realize that I, along with most of the children,used irrationality as an explanation for what I didn't know.

My clock read 11:28, outside the rain continued to pelt my window. Though I couldn't hear them, I'm sure the crickets and cicada were making their summer sounds. I remember thinking to myself, right now Mr. Hornsby would turn out the lights, we'd gather around him and Kim would be wrapped in those big burly arms, ready for another installment of "Creature Feature." I also remember thinking,

knowing, that one block down, in a dark and lonely house,  
Mr.Hornsby was thinking the same thing.

Four minutes later Mr. Hornsby joined his wife and  
daughter, the shot echoed up and down the empty streets of  
Rockville,Maryland, searching for a listener. Just one.

I grabbed my hair, pulled my head back, and screamed.

"I wish I didn't know now what I didn't know then."  
-Bob Segar

James J.LoScalzo



C. Young

## Portrait of a Dancer

Strains of Tchaikovsky's **Swan Lake** fill the Washington Ballet company's rehearsal room and in the corners, dust swirls in diffused light. Frail figures clad in leotards balance effortlessly on point shoes, holding onto the practice barre on the mirrored wall. The soft wooden floor squeaks under pressure as the dancers move, lovely and liquid as the music.

Rehearsal ends and the dancers disperse, towels around their necks. One of them makes her way back stage and plops in an enormous chair. She takes off her point shoes with half-closed eyes and a sigh, hands at the ready to massage her swollen feet.

Maureen Gillen is no stranger to bruised feet, swollen ankles, aches and pains. Like morning rush hour for most people, they go with the territory for her.

Still flushed and breathing hard from her rehearsal workout, Maureen is nevertheless eager to discuss her life-long passion.

"Performing on stage. It's scary, nerve-racking; it's torture. But it's compelling and exciting, and once that feeling's in your blood, you just can't shake it," she says enthusiastically.

Soft spoken and a little shy at first, Maureen is a mere five foot two, a slight 97 pounds. With a far-away look in her huge brown eyes, she tries to explain what it is to be a dancer. Her hands flit helplessly in the air as she searches for words.

"Classical dance is such an expressive, beautiful art. But there's a lot of pain involved, too. Not just the physical pain- the swollen, bleeding feet, the strained ligaments- there's emotional stress and strain, too. You've really got to love it to stick with it. And I do; I love it." She smiles shyly and shrugs her slight shoulders as if even she doesn't quite understand the allure that dance holds for her.

She leans back in the chair and looks thoughtful. "I can't remember a time I wasn't dancing. It's always been one of the most important things in my life."

Maureen vividly remembers the first Nutcracker Ballet she performed in at age six. Each year she danced a different part in the classic Christmas Ballet until, at 12, she danced Dora, the Children's lead. Since then she has danced the fairy queen, the adults lead numerous times.

"I feel like I grew up around the Nutcracker," says Maureen. "My Christmases have centered around it for the last 22 years."

Maureen started dancing at age five, continuing lessons in grammar school and junior high.

"Most kids just went to class because their moms forced them. Not me; I loved it. I would drive my family crazy because I was constantly performing for them, doing spins and leaps in the living room," she giggles at the memory.

Maureen decided to train as a professional dancer when she was a freshman in high school. She trained at the Metropolitan Academy of Dance in Bethesda on a time release program, taking high school classes in the mornings and dancing four hours, seven days a week in the afternoons.

She completed the Metropolitan Academy's program with honors and won a scholarship at New York's Jeffrey School.

"This was a big adventure for me. My first time away from home, and in New York City, no Jess" Maureen rolls her eyes and smiles a little as if reliving the memory. She pulls her legs in closer, battered toes curled over the rim of the chair.

It was in the Jeffrey School's intensely competitive atmosphere that Maureen learned of the pressures and frequent rejections of the professional dance world.

"So many people just see the glamour in dance, and yeah, there's a lot. But you'd be surprised at what a cut-throat, political industry it is. A lot of back-stabbing goes on," she says.

She speaks softly, reflectively, as she describes the crash course in self-confidence she was forced to learn at the Geoffrey school. After seeing many friends buckle under the incredible pressure of competition and resort to alcohol and drugs, she was determined to keep her career goals in perspective.

"Of course I was very competitive too, but I took the audition rejections as learning experiences rather than convincing myself that I was no good. Too many young dancers became anorexic or even committed suicide because they expected too much from themselves. One friend..." she looks away and tucks a stray strand of thick black hair behind one ear.

A moment later she looks up and says briskly, "There were a lot of downs those years, but the ups were so high. I really fell in love with dance."

Maureen studied with the Geoffrey School for a year and a half and then "got lucky," landing a job with the Zurich Opera Ballet. After two years there she moved to Italy and danced with the Balletto Classico, which toured Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia.

Maureen's eyes became animated and her hands paint invisible pictures in the air as she enthusiastically describes her overseas dancing experiences.

"That was fun; fast-paced and exciting. I was only 20 then, but I was comfortable on my own. You grow up fast when you're a dancer," she says.

Although the Swiss country side was breath-taking, there wasn't "much room for individuality" in the Zurich Opera company, and Maureen was "miserably homesick" for much of her stay.

She pauses and her voice becomes louder, eyes brighter. "Now, Italy was a totally different picture. What a passion those people have for dance! Our directors and choreographers made dancing an adventure. I couldn't wait to go to work in the mornings."

Maureen shifts and lets one leg dangle from the chair. Suddenly her eyes become far-away and her brows knit over them. "Things were going great for a while, and then everything went downhill. I developed a bad case of tendonitis in both knees and had to stop dancing. It was so hard." She trails off and stares at her hands in her lap, then looks up again.

Because of her tendonitis, Maureen was forced to leave the Balletto Classico and return to her hometown of Rockville, Maryland. She lived in her parents home and worked in a photo lab for six months.

"My family was very supportive, but having to live with my parents was a blow to my independence." Maureen speaks of this difficult time in her life calmly, hands on the chair's wicker rims. "I made life miserable for myself and everyone around me because I thought I'd never dance again." She could hardly walk on her swollen knees, and gained 20 pounds due to depression.

When her knees improved, she returned to Italy to finish her contract, but was forced to return to the U.S. after a month because her condition worsened.

"Talk about hard times. I was only 22 but felt like I was washed out for good. Not a sausage in the bank; broke and limping!" Maureen shakes her head and sighs in mock despair.

She returned to Rockville where she worked as a cocktail waitress and part-time secretary. Determined to dance again in spite of unfavorable odds, she took ballet classes when her knees could stand it.

Maureen gets up from the chair in a single fluid motion-hard to imagine her limping now- and walks over to the steaming espresso machine on a coffee trolley near the dressing rooms. "Want some? I make a mean espresso from my waitress days. That's one good thing that came out of my tendonitis, anyway." She smiles, brown eyes crinkling at the corners, and pours the foamy brew in a giant mug. She settles herself in the wicker chair again, curling her knees into her chest, sipping from the mug.

Looking back with "20/20 hindsight vision," Maureen says that espresso making wasn't the only thing she learned in the year she was not able to dance. "Little by little, I realized that I counted as a person and not just a dancer. I became a much stronger person." She shrugs her shoulders. "You've just got to take things as they come, I guess. But it's tough to take and I wasn't happy not dancing."

She sips her espresso reflectively as other dancers, choreographers, and stage hands bustle about, preparing to transport sets, props, and costumes to the Lisner Auditorium for tonight's performance. The noise and chaos doesn't seem to bother her a bit; she seems utterly at peace with herself and her surroundings. She continues her story.

After a year of daily therapy Maureen's tendonitis improved and she got a job with the Baltimore Ballet Company.

Her eyes light up and she pushes an unruly strand of hair behind her ear impatiently. "My confidence and outlook on life sky-rocketed: I was dancing again!" Her voice becomes softer, "But then three years later, just as it was gaining some respect, the company folded because of financial problems. I was left without a job once again, and my left knee was in bad shape."

By this time Maureen was engaged to another dancer who had been with Baltimore Ballet when it folded. "Thank God for Billy (her husband.) He and I went through it together and we pulled each other through."

Wedding plans occupied her time for the eight months Maureen wasn't dancing. Billy decided to stop dancing professionally and became involved in real estate. They were married last May in Washington. Maureen displays a gold wedding band on her left ring finger, eyes sparkling and voice warm as she talks of married life.

"Billy is my sounding board and advisor. He understands my moods and anxieties because he went through all the rigamarole when he danced professionally. Good thing, because I can be a bear," she admits, eyes wide and amused.

During her time "in limbo," Maureen also took classes with the Washington Ballet Company. Two days after the wedding she was offered a much competed for job with the company; the only spot open for the current season.

She sets her mug in her lap and clasps her hands in the air. "I was so glad for the chance to dance again. I felt I hadn't reached my full potential, and I really wanted to do that."

"Now I'm dancing full-time with the company. We do a lot of touring- California in fall, and Europe coming up in the summer. I love that fast-paced lifestyle even though it drives me crazy." She holds up her hands and displays her long, lean fingers. "See, I don't even have any nails left- I've chewed them all off."

Maureen says she is happy to be traveling with the company although it takes a lot of time away from her husband and friends.

"There are pros and cons, I guess. I know it will all end sometime. But I feel that I'm doing now what I've waited so long to do - finding my niche and dancing still." She stretches her legs in front of her, agilely circling her ankles, and says drowsily, "Maybe I'll be able to rest easy some time soon." She looks up quickly, "But not too soon, there's some life in this old girl yet." Her animated brown eyes smile.

Cate Gillen

## PROBLEM CHILD

"Stop!  
I want to go home,  
Take off this uniform and  
Leave the show.  
I'm waiting in this cell because  
I have to know,  
Have I been guilty all this time?"  
-Roger Waters-

"I'm sorry, Mom...I was out of my mind on mescaline when I did it." The words fell short of an apology, and they didn't even come close to an explanation, but they were the last words Ricky Kasso ever spoke. Seven hours later, a guard found him hanging from his belt in his cell, sparking one of the most controversial cases in Long Island history. The police called at 5:17 p.m.; Ricky was in jail again. Outside the Northport Police Station, a small crowd of thirty or so "followers" had already gathered with handpainted signs saying "WE LOVE YOU RICKY" in large, drippy red letters. A girl wearing an AC/DC t-shirt and tight faded Levi's drew a large pentagram on the sidewalk in front of the station house, scribbling the words, "SATAN LIVES" beneath one of its points. Nancy Kasso hung up the phone and stepped into the living room, informing her husband that their "son" had been arrested again. Inside the tiny Northport holding cell, Ricky sat silently on a bunk. He had just been arrested for murder.

In many ways, the death of Ricky Kasso was inevitable. He was a bad kid, gone worse, with no hope of getting better. His teen years were marked by violence, anger, frustration, and fear. By the time he was sixteen, he had run away from home eight times, occasionally returning on his own, but usually accompanied by police. When he did return, he would fight constantly with his parents, staying only long enough to re-pack a bag. Finally, on May 19, 1982, two days before Ricky's seventeenth birthday, Frank Kasso, his father,

threw him out, telling him to never set foot in the house again. Ricky never did. By that time he had grown into his own kind of world, a world which savagely rejected the rigidity of any family's lifestyle. Born into a life in middle-class suburbia, with a large house, quiet streets, and BMW's in most of the driveways, Ricky died distraught and abandoned, leaving a message that few could accept and none could understand. This is the death of Ricky Kasso. On July 16, 1982 at 10:19 a.m., Ricky popped three hits of Red Brick Haze and boarded the L.I.R.R. for Huntington. Having spent the night getting "dusted" with Julie Harte, a friend in Greenwich Village, Ricky was dazed, but looking forward to getting-off again. From the Huntington station, he hopped a bus to Northport and got off at Reed Street. Crossing over to the Wonderland Arcade, he took a quick look around, then headed for the park. He was looking for Robert Wilson, an old friend and recent business associate; Wilson had been supplying him with first-rate PCP for the last nine months. It was a simple operation, but profitable. Ricky would buy the "dust" from Wilson at a reasonable price, cut it several times and sell it to kids around Northport, who didn't know any better, for nearly double its actual worth. The relationship was, for the most part, strictly business, complicated only slightly by the fact that Robert Wilson was one of the original Knights of the Black Circle.

Sean McLaughlin, Vince Esposito and Joe Troiano were sitting on the low end of the stone wall bordering Gateway State Park when Ricky appeared. His face was pale, his eyes bloodshot and his hair was a greasy blonde mess; he was also "tripping" heavily. The three greeted him, wondering what he had been up to, and what drugs he might possibly have to share. Searching his pockets, Ricky discovered half a quaalude, certainly not enough for four, and returned it to his shirt pocket. "I got some stashed..." he said finally, leading the way into the woods, "Near the altar." The "altar," as he called it, was actually built from a bunch of cinderblocks that he and Joe Troiano had stolen from a nearby construction site one night. The two had been obsessed with the occult since early adolescence, and anxiously seized the opportunity to put

their warped beliefs into practice. Building the altar was Joe's idea, but Ricky took all credit; after all, he made it happen. He chose the location, built the altar, and performed the first sacrifice, a healthy three year old Doberman Pinscher named Max. By the end of the night, Ricky had appointed himself High Priest in the Knights of the Black Circle. By the end of the week, the Knights of the Black Circle had a congregation of thirty-three. By the end of the month, Ricky Kasso was infamous; a living tribute to the underworld, who walked the streets of Northport quoting phrases from the Satanic Bible, and thrived on the love and respect of his followers, who, by this time, had begun to walk the streets of Northport quoting him. The congregation would gather on a semi-regular basis, choosing Saturday nights as the usual day of sacrifice. Meetings in the woods were rigidly structured, appearing in every sense to be "religious" ceremonies of some kind. Needless to say, Ricky's drug sales were exceptionally high during this time; members of the congregation had increased their own consumption, especially of Angel Dust, as well as selling drugs to non-members for the good of the Circle.

Then it happened. The four of them reached the altar somewhere around noon; Ricky was still "tripping" and spoke in rapid, nervous circles. Laura Ambery and Dave Caputo sat in the grass watching Ricky frantically tear away at a pile of rocks beneath a nearby tree. Word was sent out that a meeting would come to order immediately; someone had stolen a gram of Angel Dust from the High Priest.

Followers gathered within the hour as Ricky prepared the altar. "A sacrifice is in order," he had repeated several times, "blood will get blood." The meeting was unlike any before; Ricky was furious and demanding an immediate sacrifice, the members were silent at first, unsure of what had happened to infuriate their leader. It soon became obvious as Ricky continued his monologue. The decision was made.

Laura Ambery had seen Stephen Eckert remove the "dust" earlier that day. Steve was a new member, still on

probation in a sense, with a history of kleptomania; Laura was a loyal follower from the start of the Circle with no reason to lie; Ricky was an enraged leader with a bloodlust and various drugs in his system. The ceremony began, no objections. The High Priest had been robbed; blood will get blood.

Stephen Eckert was punching and screaming as three of the followers stretched him over the altar. He was terrified. Ricky's face calmed to a grimace as he produced a shiny steel dagger from a small black box behind the altar. The dagger had caught his eye in an antique shop not far from Northport about six months earlier and Ricky appropriately deemed it the Sacrificial Blade. Holding it high above his head, Ricky muttered something in Latin and faced the congregation. "This ram has strayed," he boomed, "he must choose his master." The followers responded readily, eager to prove their loyalty. "Choose." they crooned. Ricky lowered the blade slowly, stopping the dagger's point at Stephen's throat. Staring into his eye's, Ricky ordered him to say "I love you, Satan." Stephen struggled, but was restrained by the three assisting the High Priest. "Choose now," the congregation continued, "choose your master." Ricky raised the blade high again and Stephen screamed, "I love you, Satan!" at the top of his lungs. The blade tore sharply into Stephen's Adam's Apple, splattering thick, warm blood across the surface of the altar.

When it was over, Ricky had removed Stephen Eckert's eyes, heart and tongue, wrapping them in a black bandana which was later burned as a separate offering. The body was carried less than fifty feet from the altar and placed in a shallow grave, which was then covered by fistfuls of dirt and a blanket of dried leaves.

Officers Douglas Trauer and William Tate found Ricky in the Wonderland Arcade at 4:33 p.m.; one of the "followers" had apparently made an anonymous phone call to the police, naming Ricky Kasso as the one who killed Stephen Eckert. A follow-up check in the park confirmed the call and the police proceeded to bring Ricky in for questioning. Ricky said little

during the interrogation, and what he did say made little sense. "Did you kill Stephen Eckert?" the police would say, and Ricky would stare at them blankly. "He was straying," Ricky would begin, "I brought him back to the fold...We are legion, we are many..." The arrest was finally made when Ricky mentioned the sacrifice; the drugs were wearing off.

Outside the Northport Police station, thirty of Ricky's followers were chanting in Latin, letting their leader know that they were his loyal followers who would never desert him in his hour of need. Within an hour, police had broken up the crowd and sent them scattering towards the park. Two days later, the District Attorney would negotiate with each of these "followers," making it possible for all of them to go uncharged in exchange for their testimonies against Ricky. Ricky sat silently in his cell as the reality of the day's events sank in. His mother appeared at the station house at 6:25 p.m., contrary to her husband's order's; when she arrived, she wished she had listened to him. Ricky was sitting cross-legged on a bunk in the cell, staring into space. His face was as dumb and vacuous as the day he left home forever. His voice was dry and tired. "I had to see if it was true..." Mrs. Kasso told New York Post reporters later, "that my son was a killer..." She left the police station in tears, disregarding Ricky's apology without saying a word. The coroner later confirmed Ricky's death as suicide, noting that he died at approximately 1:01 a.m., July 17, 1982.

John Farrell

## A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

Even though it was only a few days before Christmas and the temperature was well below freezing, the line of people waiting to enter the funeral home reached halfway around the building. Mr. Rezac had touched a lot of people in his life and it didn't look like too many had forgotten. Hushed conversations were blanketed by the heavy air that promised snow. The funeral home was one of the few buildings in town that wasn't decorated with cheery Christmas lights, which made it seem even more ominous.

Looking around I could see that most, if not all of my high school had come to the viewing, not to mention dozens of alumni. Mr. Rezac had two sons in my high school at the time, Joe, who was a senior like I was, and Mike, a freshman. My high school was a very small one, which created a special kind of closeness among everyone associated with it. When Mr. Rezac died most of us felt like a member of our own family had died, which in a way he was. I looked at the somber faces of my friends and classmates and wondered how they could be the same people who had engaged in a last-day-of-school-before-Christmas-vacation snowball massacre just a few days earlier. I couldn't imagine those solemn faces frolicking in the snow, laughing until they were out of breath and red in the face.

After standing outside for 45 minutes and inside for another 30 I was finally next to enter the viewing room. Since this was the first viewing I had ever been to I was fairly calm when I arrived, not really knowing what to expect. During my hour or so wait I had seen my lively, mischievous friends become silent and reserved. I watched my friends' parents almost stumble by me, their mothers sobbing as their fathers helped them along. I saw people leaving the funeral home, eyes down and shoulders hunched over, hurrying to the sanctity of their cars. Each new occurrence churned in my mind until my calmness was replaced by visible anxiety. I wiped my now sweaty hands on my skirt, took a deep, quivering breath, and stepped through the doorway.

The first rooms were dim but my eyes took a moment to adjust to the even darker viewing room. There was still a line ahead of me so I couldn't see too much, but nothing seemed very unusual. Chairs were set up in neat rows, leaving an aisle down the middle. People were sitting in the chairs crying and praying. Everyone wore dark shades of navy, burgundy, and black. Even the walls and curtains were a deep rose. The whole atmosphere of the room was heavy and depressing. A woman walked by me wearing a dark coat with a bright "Merry Christmas!" pin on the lapel that stuck out like a scarlet "A".

As the line moved along I could see Mrs. Rezac and her children lined up on either side of the aisle at the front of the room. I watched as they hugged and kissed people, one after another, stepping back occasionally to take a deep breath, sip some water, or just be alone for a minute. I got a little closer and caught my first glimpse of the casket. The majority of light in the room came from two lights that shone down onto it. The casket was open and raised on a platform like some kind of bizarre exhibit. Mr. Rezac lay on white satin pillows in a neat gray suit with skin that looked much too dark for December. I grabbed one of the chairs for support as my knees buckled. My heart sank to my stomach as I realized I would have to go up to the casket. I decided that the best thing to do would be to slip out quietly now, while I still had a chance. Looking around frantically for the nearest exit I saw Joe in the receiving line look up at me with relief and I knew I would have to stay. My feet plodded along with a mind of their own. Although I tried to steady myself my legs still shook uncontrollably. I felt like a seven-year old playing dress up in Mommy's heels as I tried to order my ankles to stop wobbling and be still.

At the head of the receiving line Mrs. Rezac hugged me and fresh tears came to her eyes as she told me how much it meant to her for all of us to be there. She is a short, slightly plump woman, very cheerful and friendly. She always reminds me of a dark haired Mrs. Claus, very motherly and caring but lively and fun-loving. Glancing at her pale, tired-

looking face I realized that this night must be pure torture for her. She couldn't possibly have recovered from the shock of her husband's death yet and now she had to stand for hours and greet, literally, hundreds of people. By the time the funeral was over she was sure to be completely exhausted, both mentally and physically.

I moved on in the line to the older children. I don't know most of them very well, except for Brian. Brian is a green beret in the Army, but doesn't have the rugged personality you'd expect from one. I used to go and visit him for hours when he was a recruitment officer in the mall just because he was so funny and entertaining. He wasn't joking that night though. In fact, I had never seen him so quiet and calm. I moved on quickly in order to escape the uncomfortable silence and realized I was next to go to the coffin. Just as I was about to move forward Mike, Mr. Rezac's youngest son, stepped out of line and went to the casket. He stood leaning over it for several minutes, just staring at his father's face. I overheard someone behind me say, "That's good. It will make it reality for him." Reality? He was certainly getting plenty of that, but how could it be good? He would eventually come to accept his father's death on his own, he didn't need it thrown at him. The memories of his father's life would get him through his pain, not the memory of how he looked after death.

When Mike moved back into line I followed the example of the people in front of me and knelt before the coffin. Although his death had been sudden and wasn't disfiguring Mr. Rezac's face had been heavily caked with makeup. His hands were placed over his chest and a rosary was neatly entwined in his fingers. I tried to pray for him, but my eyes kept stealing back to his face. I felt like I was praying for a stranger. I prayed instead for his family, they needed all the strength they could get tonight. I turned and started to go through the rest of the receiving line. Mike, usually a typical gawky and slightly immature freshman, seemed much older and more reserved as he mechanically thanked me for coming.

When I got to Joe I could see how hard this night had been on the family, on everyone. He hugged me for a long time, as if he needed something familiar to hold onto through this strange ordeal. When I finally stepped back I saw that his eyes had filled with tears. He's the kind of person that can make even a frustrated teacher laugh with his antics, but he was serious tonight. He glanced at his father and, shaking his head, said, "I don't know how I'll be able to go through all this again at the funeral." I searched for the right words to say but found myself uncomfortably looking at the floor and stuttering in front of someone who had been a good friend for four years. Giving him a quick hug I left the room before he could see that I was crying, too. I hurried out of the funeral home, past the line of people, which now extended beyond the building, and sat in my car until I stopped shaking enough to drive home.

Mr. Rezac was a well known man in my community. He was active in the armed forces, was a devout Catholic, and was involved in many aspects of my high school. With all eight of his children either graduated from or attending my school he was as regular there as the teachers. He attended not only the fun things, like games and parties, but also sat through the long, tiring meetings trying to find a way to save the school from being closed. He was a proud Irishman and their family always had fabulous St. Patrick's Day celebrations, no matter what day of the week it fell on. Joe told me that a man had shown up at their door at 9:00 A.M. on the morning of the funeral, Christmas Eve. He had been in the service with Mr. Rezac and, when he heard of his death, had driven all night to get to the funeral. He said that Ed (Mr. Rezac) had been a good friend to him and he couldn't forget Ed's family now that he was gone. That's the kind of sentiment that Mr. Rezac inspired.

When I think of Mr. Rezac the same images always come to my mind. I can see him sitting on the bleachers in our gym, wearing his ever-present "Holy Cross Crusaders" jacket and yelling for our team. He used to get so excited during the games, standing up, sitting down, shaking his fist,

yelling instructions, and scolding the referees, that he could sometimes outdo the coach. This vision is always immediately followed by another: that of Mr. Rezac laying in his casket, still and quiet, hair neatly combed, wearing a three-piece suit. Sometimes I smile as I remember a picture Joe carries of his father in his wallet. In the picture Mr. Rezac is wearing plastic "punk rocker" glasses and attempting to breakdance on their kitchen floor. Again my mind flashes back to the night of the viewing. That one night destroyed my memories from four years of knowing this spirited, funny man. I've tried to block out that whole night, but just can't shake the memories of the viewing from my mind. I think how sad it would be if that's all his family remembers also. What if Mike's dose of reality robbed him of all the happy memories he should have of his father? Maybe Joe carries that picture to remind him of how his father used to be, instead of more unpleasant memories which may be stronger. People should be remembered as they were in life, not how they looked after death. The viewing destroyed my memories of Mr. Rezac and left me with images of someone I didn't even feel I knew.

When I reflect on that night I always come down to the same question: why are viewings held in the first place? The only reason I have found is custom, and it seems an almost pagan one to me. The funeral was reassuring and hopeful but the viewing only added salt to an open wound. The Rezac's opened their home to well-wishers and last respects were paid at the funeral, so why put everyone through the agony of the viewing? Nobody had recovered from the shock of Mr. Rezac's death, let alone was anyone prepared for a formal affair. Why not save the formality for the funeral and give the family a little time to recover before facing the public? I think the viewing just added more pain to an already painful situation.

Mr. Rezac's involvment touched us even after his death. Instead of flowers or gifts the family asked that donations be made to my school in his name. They said Mr. Rezac would have wanted it that way - and I know he would have. That's the person I want to remember and know I will always try to, but the memories built up over the years have been scarred forever by one night of senseless pain.

Victoria Elgie

## MOOCHING

Never a Borrower or Lender be.  
-Shakespeare

There is not one among us who has not done it at least once. Most of us come into contact with it on a daily basis. I refer of course to the ancient practice of mooching. If I were to define it I would call it the act of borrowing something for convenience's sake with no real intention of returning the item or acknowledging the service rendered. Many view it as a loathsome habit, common among cheapskates and misers. I argue that mooching is a highly sophisticated form of art involving skills of deceit and shrewdness.

As with all professions, there are tricks of the trade that all good moochers must be familiar with. First and foremost, it is crucial to master the facial expressions of begging and pleading. The eyes should assume that puppydog look, drooping and moist as if you are near the brink of tears. The mouth should bear the suggestion of a pout, bottom lip protruding slightly. Above all, the face should bear that innocent look of a three year old whose ice cream has just fallen to the ground: strive for sympathy. This is vital if you are to convince someone that you are truly in need.

The primary objective of the borrower is to make the lender feel guilty about not giving into his request. When asking the favor, the voice should be humbly lowered, bordering on the apologetic. My sister is notorious for her opening line "I hate to ask, but...". It almost always preceeds a request for a favor which is seldom returned. Once the victim has agreed to comply with your wishes, take great pains to assure them that you will gladly compensate them for their trouble; in other words, lead them to believe that you genuinely appreciate their generosity and have every intention of repaying them. Although this is generally for show, in most cases the person will be embarrassed and say

something to the effect of "Nevermind" or "Forget it." Indeed, they may even be flattered and like the idea of you coming to them for help. This is a key basic principle that the moocher must prey on.

Once the moocher has practiced these basics, there is no telling just how far he can go with his skill. Many turn on the charm only when they need homework assignments, old tests and quizzes, or other academic paraphernalia. I refer to these as the rookie moochers. It is the seasoned, veteran moocher who will try for larger contraband such as clothing, tape cassettes, albums, small change, or free beer. My sister, who I would definitely classify as a veteran moocher, has managed to acquire a considerable portion of my wardrobe from her continuous "borrowing". Articles of clothing mysteriously vanish from my closet, only to appear on her body. To this day she still has the art of mooching down to a science. What she and all moochers must realize, though, is that there are hidden dangers of becoming a frequent moocher.

We all have that saturation point where we just can't give anymore. I had a friend who had an uncanny knack of always coming up short when the check arrived at a restaurant. He would sheepishly pull out an empty wallet and make a show of reprimanding himself for not having sufficient funds. In his most apologetic voice he would offer to make up the difference later. Later seldom came. Not wanting to cause a scene in public, I usually paid the bill, waving off his apologies as if it were a joke. But after several repeat performances of his fraudulent practice, I caught on to his scheme. And I got even. We had just finished a delicious seafood meal in a reputable beachfront restaurant: this time he had conveniently misplaced his wallet. His face had that surprised, embarrassed look I had grown too much accustomed to. Not about to be duped again, I excused myself, claiming I had to use the bathroom. Instead, I headed straight for the car, leaving him behind with nothing but a check and a waiter without a sense of humor. Hours later my friend showed up at our beachhouse, angry but temporarily cured of his "problem".

Never again did he pull a similar stunt on me, but I'm sure he moved on to new victims.

Still another friend of mine used to show up at my door the night before our Spanish homework assignments were due. He stood there, whining about how much work he had to do. This whining was often punctuated by heavy, guilt-filled sighs. For a while I foolishly gave in to his mooching, and it was only when he got a better grade on a quiz that I realized the "borrowing" had to stop. So one night I purposely prepared an answer sheet full of wrong answers and misspelled words. He took the bait, and much to his dismay did quite poorly on the next assignment.

Thus we see that there are a few drawbacks as well as dangers in the art of mooching. There is always the risk that people will catch on to your ploy after a while. The larger the clientele, though, the greater the odds of the moocher successfully scoring. It is not a glamorous profession - being called a "sponge" or a "leech" does little for the self-image, and the moocher must be prepared to swallow a little pride now and then.

Despite these dangers, moochers seem to have no trouble finding new victims. Is there really an inexhaustible supply of Good Samaritans? Or are we, the ones being mooched, simply comfortable with the parasite/host relationship?

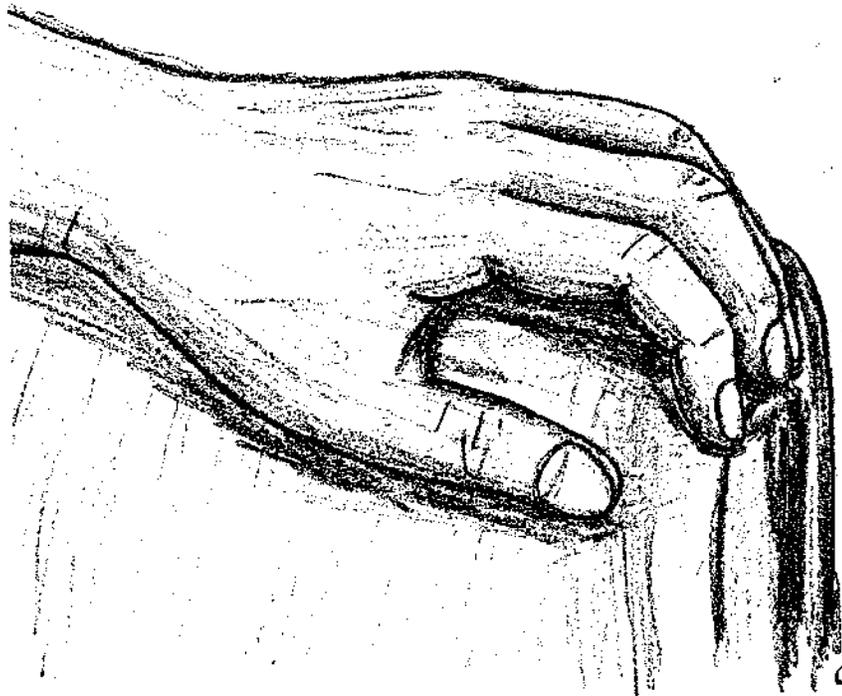
Perhaps in giving in to the moocher we are so preoccupied with feeling good about ourselves for being generous that we overlook the sacrifice involved. If this is true, then it would appear that the parasitic moocher is living in a condition of what I will call parasitic amnesty: the moocher gets what he wants while at the same time allowing the host to feel as though he is a charitable, likeable fellow.

It is when the moocher becomes more of a burden that problems arise. Then the host feels as though he is being taken advantage of: the relationship is no longer 50/50. It is

the veteran moocher who will carefully select his hosts, choosing selfish individuals who like to be thought of as "nice guys". These hosts are so blinded by their own selfishness that they don't realize the amount of sacrifice they are putting out, and how little they are getting in return.

In truth then we have no one to blame but ourselves if we let moochers get the better of us. We have to put aside our egos and think less of our reputation as a good Samaritan and more of whether we are being taken advantage of. My best advice to potential victims of moochers? The next time someone begins with "I hate to ask, but...", think twice before giving in. And always keep one eye on your sister.

Frank Simms



C. JOUNG

### My Father's Hands

I compared them to hot dogs, all thick and round, and short enough to hold in my little hand. My father's fingers moved across the coffee table between us, dodging the putting golfer, who, in his hunched-over stance, made a handle on his coffee cup. Narrowly missing the matching green ashtray that was a golf course in miniature, his warm hand landed in my lap. We sat in twin recliners, his kicked back, supporting his crossed legs, mine grounded, evenly distributing the weight of my body. I was eight. However, age didn't matter as I still paid his price for sitting next to him. A nominal fee and non-negotiable, his price was love, paid in full at time of exchange. In two ways I settled my bill. I rubbed his head, if he needed me close, or held his hand, if he just needed me nearby. So I paid my price, and we sat and watched the news.

Attentively, I held his hand, rubbing, tickling, scratching, playing all the games two people play when they are hand-in-hand. I looked, felt, and dreamed about the hand I was holding, and dreamed about the "C.E. loves L.P." tattooed on top of his dark veiny forehead. I wondered who L.P. was (my mother's name is Doreen). when he tattooed his initials, and who was with him the day he got them. Somehow I learned the story I think Mom told me. He went crazy one day (perhaps, she said, his friends pushed him) and he tattooed himself. A ball point pen was heated like a cattle rancher's poker, and the markings were etched into his skin, the black ink staining. The tattoo remained when the skin healed. I recognized his handwriting and thought about L.P.

My fingers are rubbing the top of his hand and I am still thinking about L.P. I am older though it seems time has not passed. We are together in the same light green recliners and a larger coffee table is between us. I am feeling his knuckles, a ride through an open hilly country. Like the charred remains of a brush fire, the burnt black initials deface the landscape of his hand. I outline slowly the markings, recreating the act of making them. I trace each letter; with

each stroke every letter becomes a living blackness. Blackness is all that I see until my father turns his head and pulls his hand away quickly.

I am home from work early and my father is happy to see me. His smile moves across his face, filling in grooves and jagged lines. I go to him, hugging his hard boney body while he still occupies the old recliner. I sit and we talk, the evening news resounding in the background. He grabs my hand and plays, strumming his fingers lightly across mine like a harpist would his instrument. With my other hand, I pick up the newspaper and I try to read, sifting through its weighty package, while thick inserts slip onto my lap and slide down to the floor. I feel his fingers running up and down mine. He explores, going under and over my nails like a woodworker. Unlike a fine finished cherry, the surfaces of my fingers are not smooth, but rough and uneven. Torn pieces of nail jut out like a branch of a tree. My nails are chewed. He pulls back some gnawed skin and pain shoots up my arm. I pull my hand away, ashamed.

I know the toughness of his hands, their callouses and their scars. I know their stories like I know my own. Though I realize holding a golf club too long and too tight made his hands rough, I know too that hard work is equally responsible.

He is fun to watch at work. He uses his hands to check oil instead of a rag. Barehanded, he strips paint from walls with concentrated chemicals, runs steel wool down wood, pulls fiberglass from ceilings, and cuts bushes from fences. He pays no attention to warning labels and thinks rubber gloves are silly. After his day of rebuilding a kitchen counter and insulating the attic, I spend hours painstakingly removing splinters, fiberglass, and steel slithers from his hands, picking carefully at his hard skin with a clean sewing needle. My father thrives in the attention I give him, never once cursing the pain. He licks a cut when it bleeds or wipes it, like he does motor oil, across the seat of his pants. He extinguishes matches with his fingers and turns a live fire with his hands, most certainly for the pleasure of having an audience.

One winter night, I remember, we were warming ourselves by the heat of the wood stove. I was home from school for Christmas. Together we sat, catching up on news of the family and of ourselves, when he passed me his hand, still cold and hard though the stove was burning profusely. Even in the firelight, I could see it. White, almost yellow, his hand resembled the underbelly of a frog or a fish. I felt its coldness even before. I laid my hand on top, like the cool air I feel before a fountain or a falls. He said that blood wasn't reaching his hands or feet and he pinched his skin to show me. I remembered then his trouble walking up stairs. I used to laugh when he climbed them on all fours.

Later, in winter, he had his operation. We were standing in the parking lot of the hospital. Christmas was three days away. The rain was turning into ice. We were saying our goodbyes when I slipped beside the car. Helping me up, my father said, "Get your Mom home quick."

The next afternoon we saw him. My mother and I clenched the cold metal bars of his bed. My father was thinner than I'd ever seen him. His nose and face shot straight up in the air and his mouth hung open, haphazard. There was no distinction between his lips and his face, his skin a sickly sallow yellow. The nurse wouldn't let us closer.

Almost three years have passed since my father's operation and I am holding his hands again. I run my fingers over "C.E. loves L.P.," then curl them under his warm heavy hand, slipping them between his. I squeeze tight.

Pamela Elkins

## ANOREXIA NERVOSA

You may not recognize her. She's too preoccupied to socialize in class and too busy to go out with friends--too busy being hungry. She spends her days planning when and how much she will eat, counting every single calorie she swallows, prolonging the meals she does eat, and devising ways in which to secretly get rid of them. The list goes on. However, most people don't see all that; all they see is a girl who doesn't like to eat. There's a lot more to it. Anorexia Nervosa not only starves the body, it consumes the mind.

Giving in to the pressures of today's society to be thin, she decides to lose five or ten pounds. It starts out as an innocent diet, but somewhere along the line it takes control of her life. It becomes the answer to all her problems and a compulsion she can't seem to stop. Now, when dinner is served and her parents pressure her to eat, her mind begins to race as she panics. It's no longer a matter of choice as to whether or not she should eat; she knows in her head she can't, because she has got to lose weight, no matter how hungry she is.

She scans the plate and quickly calculates the number of calories before her. Her mind goes off for a moment, "Four bites of meatloaf-100; a serving of carrots -100; one dinner roll with Weight Watcher's lowfat margarine -150; and apple-sauce -100; altogether - 450, plus fifty equals 500." The extra fifty calories are her "just in case" calories, lest she underestimate something. She'll do this at every meal, even though she purposely overestimates the caloric content of each item, again, just to be sure.

To avoid a confrontation she decides to give in. She begins cutting up her food. She cuts and recuts everything, even the roll, until it is a fine mush. When asked why she insists on doing that she explains that this way it won't make her as fat. Then to make it seem as though she has eaten a lot she eats extremely slow and she plays with her food as she convinces herself that she really isn't hungry. She draws the line at

beverages. They weigh her down, and besides, she feels that if she has less water in her system she'll have less blood to carry the calories to her fat cells. She has also discovered an added plus to dehydration--loss of appetite.

Sometimes after dinner she panics and feels she must expel what she has just eaten. She quietly slips off to the bathroom. Although anorexic, she still hates to vomit as much as anyone else does; she finds it disgusting. At the same time she is desperate to do it and she knows that if she couldn't get into the bathroom to do it she'd resort to a plastic bag or a wastepaper basket. The fear in her gut guides her every move. When she is done she swallows a few laxatives and a couple of diuretics just in case she missed anything. Only then, and an exercise routine later, does she rest easy.

Her methods do produce results and she succeeds in losing weight. Because of this positive reinforcement she easily becomes addicted to these behaviors. She fears that discontinuing any one of them will cause her to somehow regain everything she's already lost, and more, overnight. She is terrified at the thought of gaining even so much as an ounce.

The anorexic's energies are solely focused on the elimination of any and all fat from her body, real or imaginary. For her, fat takes on a whole new meaning. In concrete terms it is equivalent to water weight, food in the process of digestion, muscle, and even loose skin. In short, it amounts to anything which covers her bones. In more abstract terms fat equals failure and weakness due to lack of self-discipline. It means she is gluttonous, obese, lazy and unattractive. In her opinion, normal weight is both fat and undesirable.

She exhausts herself physically and mentally. Fighting what is supposed to be natural demands hard work. She knows she can't trust her body; that it is resisting the "necessary" changes. She feels she must always be one step ahead of it. She must always be in control. After all, she can't control her

feelings of insecurity, inadequacy and emptiness. And, she literally has no control over the fact that she is growing up and entering adulthood. At least she can control her weight. Such rigidity is very stressful, however, she easily gets caught up in an unending whirl of unstoppable obsessive thoughts. Everyone's had days when in the morning you hear a song that you don't particularly like and then all day long you hear it play over and over again in your head. It drives you crazy and irritates the hell out of you. No matter how you try you can't seem to make it go away. What an anorexic goes through is similar, but she hears a different set of lyrics. It's her own voice saying such things as, "Everyone is staring at my fat," "Okay, now how many calories did you eat again?", "I wonder what I weigh," "These clothes make me look fat," "There are bulges on my thighs," "I hate my body," "How can they all say I'm thin?", "You 're a pig," "My wrists are fat," and I must be gaining weight," to name a few. I don't exaggerate when I say the torment is almost nonstop. The sicker she gets, the more constant the thoughts become until they take over her dreams.

The thoughts even appear to come to life as they seem to control her eyes in subtle ways. They dart in the direction of every thin girl who crosses her path and begin making comparisons. She can't help but stare at the really thin one's. This is a very embarrassing habit since it is the boys she should be watching. Her eyes also automatically size up her own figure in anything and everything that will show her image. That includes windows of cars, stores and buildings, shadows, television screens and even someone's sunglasses. To avoid coming off as conceited she has mastered the art of quick glancing. It's imperative that she be reassured that she hasn't somehow gained twenty pounds within the last ten minutes.

At home she relies on the mirror and the scale. Not only are these two objects fuel for the obsession, but they are also the only means by which she defines herself. She is looking for perfection--the perfect body and the perfect weight. She looks long and hard in the mirror. Thin is perfect; they are

inseparable ideals. She is either perfect or she's not. For her there's no in between.

Before she knows it, the anorexic is standing alone with her mirror and scale. She has built her life around her desire to achieve the "ideal" body. She is so caught up in it that her relationships with others have deteriorated, her social life has dwindled, and she is falling behind in school. She is isolated and feels very alone. Her illness becomes her identity because it is all she has. Recovery will mean starting all over again.

The recovery process, being an uphill battle, demands almost as much energy as the illness itself. It requires extreme courage to face her overwhelming fear, to tolerate a body she hates, and especially to trust the doctors when they tell her that what she sees in the mirror is really a distortion. Have you ever had someone telling you that you were imagining what you saw? It's a hard pill to swallow! Perhaps this, one of the hardest things to accept while trying to get better. When she looks in the mirror she sees an obese girl staring back at her. It's hard to describe: and this is precisely what sets her apart from others; they just can't see her side. It can leave one feeling pretty alienated. The closest some (I tend to believe non-anorexics) have come is comparing it to the experience of looking in a funhouse mirror, but even that falls short of a true understanding. A funhouse mirror clearly shows an exaggerated distortion which is not the same as seeing a proportioned fat person looking down at one's leg and seeing dimples that aren't there.

Most often the anorexic must hit rock bottom, whatever point that may be for her, before she will begin to accept what others say about how she sees herself. Unfortunately, she first needs to learn that her way isn't working. She will not get better until she is ready. It is usually not until she seeks professional help and begins to look at what's behind her illness that she can learn to build a life for herself and leave the scale behind. Indeed, there is much more to this illness than a thin body and she will discover that her greatest enemy is not the food, nor is it the fat: it is herself and herself alone

Christi Adams

## Just Another Small Town

Someone once said of Front Royal, Virginia, "That road is a nice little town." Half of the residents share the same last name, another quarter are in-laws, and everybody else is just passing through." But we have family there, so every summer around late August, Dad carts us south, with his reason being Front Royal's annual bull roast and town fair. The real reason for our visits, however, was to see Grandpa "one last time," ever since the doctor gave him, at age eighty three, no more than six months to live. He will be ninety three upon this visit, and will have outlived his doctor by over four years. Every year he is the same. In the Craftmatic adjustable bed which we bought him for his eighty seventh birthday, flipping ashes from a smouldering Lucky Strike into a bedpan beside him, he is armed with a highball in one hand, remote control in the other. When we arrive, he nods a casual, but acknowledging "hello," and plants a pasty peck on each of our cheeks. Beyond that, he hollers or buzzes his hand buzzer to eat, have his bedpan emptied, or to have his Johnny Walker Red freshened with new ice. Other than what we observe on our visits, Lou - our uncle and Grandpa's "nurse"--says Grandpa colors, takes out his teeth to sleep, and watches the Nashville network with the sound all the way up.

Actually, Lou had a chance to "escape" Front Royal some years back. About eight years ago, a plastics company in nearby Fairfax offered him a foreman position in their shipping department, because they had liked some of the work he had done in computerizing the operations of the area Jaycees' accounting records. The offer was for him to start at \$26,000, with many opportunities for advancement. Lou asked that they put the offer on hold for awhile so that he could see Grandpa through his last few months. Grandpa hung on, and eventually outlived the offer. So now Lou's days are spent as a nursemaid, a drawbridge operator, a volunteer fireman, and as chairman of the Harrisonburg Jaycees. He also sings and plays bass guitar at one of the two local bars for a band called the "Yokels."

When we arrived for our perennial visit in August of 1981, things were typically halcyon. We pulled in to an enthusiastic reception, said our hellos, wiped off our cheeks. We tossed down our sleeping bags and our pillows, and Mom and Dad, Mom was tired from the drive, and Dad had a pretty fierce migraine, forewent socializing, claimed their old room, and went to sleep. We unpacked, cracked a few Old Milwaukees, and regrouped in the town activity center: Lou's screened-in front porch. "Well, Dennis," I queried, what's the electric Front Royal night life have in store for us tonight?" Dennis was a friend of Lou's and of the family's who had a rare facial disorder. His face, from birth, had been completely distorted, and his growth had been stunted as well. We knew next to nothing, really, about his ailment, but knew that it called for bimonthly visits to Johns Hopkins for treatment, at which times we always insisted that he stay with us. "Well," he replied with full Front Royal accent, "we just watched Church let out, missed that. A.A. Meetin's at seven in the basement. Ssalways fun to put a few away and whip the cans at the alkies." "What time's the fun start tomorrow? I asked. "Ribbon cuttin's at eleven, we'll probably head over' boat one or so. Howza brews lookin?" I walked over to Lou 's cooler, lifted the lid, and told him "About three sixes." This visibly worried him, as he wrinkled up his bushy brow in thought. "Let's go on a run. I'll drive. "Sure," I replied. Dennis was the proud owner of a two-headed pickup truck, a "push-me, pull-me," so I jumped in, and we chugged on down the street.

We returned to Lou's bearing two more cases of Old Mil. For most of the night, we melted into spring-ridden sofas and electric tape-covered chairs, waved to passers-by, and threw empty cans at the Alcoholics Anonymous bus across the street. Around eleven, Lou suggested that we head to Mutz tavern for a bite to eat, and a couple of long necks. "You comin', Pete" he asked. He always called my brother and me Pete and Repeat, since we were twins. "Sure," I said, "What the hell?" Mom, Dad, and my older sister, Elvie were ready upstairs, fast asleep. So we all loaded into Dennis' truck. Lou, as always, had to sit on top of the cooler on

account of his back, so off we went, sporting a nice buzz, and a few bucks, to the fabulous Mutz tavern.

Mutz tavern, when we pulled in, was the epitome of a small-town drinking hole. "Family Tradition," a Hank Williams, Jr. number, made its way out onto the gravelly parking lot as Dennis, unable to find a spot, improvised by pulling up onto a lawn right next door. "Ole Willie won't care. Sleeps like a rock til dawn, anyhow," he laughed, as he grinded into "park." Lou began rolling off names as we walked towards the entrance, as he spotted familiar cars. "Lori's here, 'n John, there's Glenn's piece 'o shit Rambler. Thought she was outa commission. There's Lenny's pickup, and Duke's here. Probably with the old lady." "Ain't no doubt," Dennis chortled, "never leaves her side 'cause he can't trust her long enough." Some of these names sounded familiar to me from my visits, and I chuckled along with Lou's "roll call" of whose cars were here, and whose weren't, as we walked in the door.

"Lou!" the crowd seemed to utter in unison, as we walked in. Dennis made a beeline towards the men's room, and Lou walked up to the bartender, who had three long necked Budweisers pointed our way. "Howdy, there, Cal." Lou said. "member my nephews." "Sure I do. Hey, boys." We found a table, and Lou ordered us up some food, and stuck a quarter in the jukebox and played another Hank Williams, Jr. tune entitled "Country Boy Will Survive." We sat and talked, and drank quite a bit, as old friends, and new alike came up to say hi to Lou, and see if they could buy a drink for the "strangers." The ones who recognized us said the same things, more or less, like "Come on around more often," or kidded about grandpa with jokes like "Yeah, saw Grandad the other day, lookin' good as ever. He was joggin' I think." It didn't offend us, because Grandpa was family to the whole town, in a way. He was like their symbol, a symbol that, despite the modern advancements in medicine, pacemakers, respirators, and all of the things that it was predicted that the doctors said he would need to live, a big ole country heart will always prove stronger than anything contemporary advancements may have to offer.

It was really a great time, rehashing the events of our past visits with these folks. "Goldurn, boy, remember how drunk you was at the raft race, last year?" or "Howza bout that fat chick you drug in after the fair last year, lordy, that girl could handle a knife and spoon. "Yeah," someone else would add in, "She didn't miss too many meals, that's no lie." It was like a second family here, people just were like that. But I could never live here, I thought to myself. I need space. I've gotta see different people, now and then. I need outdoor plumbing.

So closing time fell upon the smoky Mutz tavern, and, after debating whether to go out cow-tipping tonight or tomorrow night, we decided that tomorrow would be best. So after our night of greasy crabcakes, chewy pretzels, cold long necks, and good chatter, off we went.

As we threaded our way home through the narrow roads which cut the cornfields, we were struck by an eerie kind of terrified sobriety by the red and white lights slicing the starlit sky, ahead in town. Our fears were confirmed as we pulled up to the crowd gathered around the ambulance in front of Lou's. Lou silently hopped out and walked towards the house, muttering in drunken mourning. I gathered myself, feeling as sober as ever, and walked in, only to see Elvie on Lou's porch, sitting on his sofa with head in hands, bawling hysterically. I sat down beside her, rubbed her back, and imparted some of my drunken wisdom as two paramedics wheeled a blanket-covered form through the front porch, loaded it into the ambulance, turned off the warning lights, and drove off. "He was old, he lived a good life, and died happy," I reassured. Her head only shook harder, back and forth, and the only words she could produce were "No! No! No! God, no!!" I walked inside, feeling that my comforting had failed, and was jolted by the sight that I saw. In the room was my grandfather, alert as ever, holding my whimpering mother in his arms. "Mom?" cracked my voice, sheepish and

terrified. She lifted her head, and a lump the size of a tennis ball found its way into my throat as I looked into her teary, widowed eyes.

Brendan Sullivan

