



FORUM

Spring 1984

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This booklet continues the tradition of Forum, a cross-curricular publication of non-fiction prose by Loyola students in all classes. If a paper is too technical or specialized, we ask the author to revise it for a broader audience.

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POLTERGEIST

Padding stealthily into the impenetrable darkness as the grandfather clock chimes twelve, I enter the room. Two emeralds glitter round and deep at me, and a furry head butts against my legs. Pepper, a black Siamese octogenarian, purrs demandingly, "I want to go out." But I brush her aside, for I am a man possessed, unable to catch the meaning of her cat's tongue. Yielding to a force beyond rational control, I swing open the door. I stagger back, blinded by a brilliant flash of light, reeling from the clutching claws of cold. But that familiar dull, yearning tug in the pit of my stomach spurs me onward, and I peer into the polar light...and frown. The butt end of a tomato dressed in fashionable green fuzz and an empty jar of Hellman's. No BLT tonight. The demon in my belly stamps an angry foot and listens grimly to the echo. A glass of Hi-C Orange drowns his curses, and I return to bed.

"What...what time didya say?" I cough.

My father rubs a little lanolin in his hair and picks up his black Ace comb. "I said it's seven-thirty."

"Dammit. I set this thing to go off at seven."

"Good thing I woke you up then. But if you set your clock at seven, it rang. You must've turned it off and gone back to sleep."

There's that dull tug in my head again, and I immediately know better. Shaking my head like a wet sheepdog, my weighted lids and deadened limbs lighten, and my incubus is exorcised. I stare at the Westclox Baby Ben and hear a distant laugh.

It's Heidegger's Being grounded in Being, garnished with a sprig of Becoming, easy on the Ought, hefty fare for an 8:00 A.M. academic breakfast. I yawn for the twenty-first time,

trying to relieve the dull tug in my throat. The wight bows my head and fills my mind with evil thoughts regarding the eternal damnation of Master Heidegger's soul. Lecturing from the podium, the professor stares at me with knitted brows as my thirty-fourth yawn unconceals its Being. Embarrassed, I pack the smirking wight back in his barrow. I perkily jot down notes.

Taking Kenny Roger's advice on a sunny Saturday, I stuff the assorted bills in my wallet to be counted later. The sixth race post parade has begun and I'm already what we track folk call "winners." Content to watch a few, my eyes stray to my program, and I feel a dull, yearning tug in my heart. "More, more, " it whispers, shouting down the cries of common sense.

"You going to bet this race, Dan? I'll get it for you," my brother Tim inquires.

"Well, I don't really want..."

More, more, bet the number four...

"...shutup, willya?"

"Huh? Don't get nasty with me. Are you gonna bet or not?"

"Oh, sorry Tim, I wasn't talk..."

More, more...

"...okay, okay, I'll bet two dollars across the board on the number four, just keep quiet."

My puzzled brother makes the bet and a grinning gremlin laughs again. Six more dollars for the State Treasury.

Who says spooks and spirits play their mischief but once a year? Jack sneezes on his Prom date, and Mary spills coffee all over her 3:00 A.M.-completed tax forms. Accident? But why do they always occur at the most inopportune time and in the most unpropitious situation? Why

couldn't Jack have sneezed on his huggy-feely Aunt Mabel? Why didn't Mary knock her Brim over a newspaper, an old copy of Newsweek, a photo of Robert Young? Such phenomena is explained by the intervention of the supernatural. Your run-of-the-mill will-o'-the-wisp is always up to no good as any student of horror will attest—rattling chains, furniture, people's necks. Even your kindly Casper-like fairies and leprechauns are little more than juvenile delinquents. What (or who) impels us to search for the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow? We dash about the dewy grass, arms flailing like inpatients of Sheppard Pratt, then blush like a fool when we catch the eye of a concerned neighbor. Granted, though man does have great powers of self-ineptitude (energy crises, repressions, wars, arms races, Heaven's Gate), he must be receiving a helping hand somewhere. Did you ever wonder why you ate a Dagwood club sandwich, a prune Danish, and a Pepsi at 12:37 in the morning? What compels the average six-year-old to flush a banana? Why do millions of people continue to drink whiskey, smoke cigars, and read Ann Landers? None leave a pleasant taste in the mouth on the first try. Haunt and hobgoblins, what Shakespeare referred to in Macbeth as "a dagger of the mind," are not restricted to Halloween for their devilry. It was Friday the 12th (close enough for effect) when this stabbing victim decided to confront the wraith who'd wrung my wrath.

Rereading "International League Notes" in my latest issue of The Sporting News, I glanced at the kitchen clock which read half-past three in the morning. Sighing, I wondered, "Shouldn't I be asleep? Why must I stay up so late every Friday night?"

"Because we say so."

"Oh yeah? Well, I'm in charge here. I'll sleep when I want and I'll read when I want and..."

"You'll eat when you want and wake up when you want and yawn when you want and bet when you want, right?"

"Right!" I replied, thoroughly intimidated.



"Fool!" the voice was deep and James Earl Jonesish, "We have existed since the first man thrust his hand into fire. Who do you think made him do that?"

"Uh...one of you?"

"Precisely. Who do you think makes kids forget to take Aim against cavities, made Nixon sell out to Memorex? Still fools like you blame much of our work on your unconscionables: 'I kept saying Margaret, oh Margaret in my sleep? But you know I only love you, Gertrude!' The psychologists and marriage counsellors have a field day while we sit back and laugh. We live for villainy, we relish your misfortune and your abashment, we have a hand in your every mistake."

"Isatso? Well, it may interest you to know that you fellows really do a lot of good."

"What?" the haughty voice had disappeared, replaced by a squeal of rage and self-doubt. "What do you mean?"

"As you pointed out, how would man have learned of fire except for your intercession? Furthermore, by tempting us—be greedy, be gluttonous—you help us to build character (a ghostly moan). When we resist, we strengthen our moral fiber, and when we fail, we are reminded of our humanity and learn from our mistakes (audible wince). Hence, you remind us of our status in the hierarchy of things. Man, creator of child pornography, omnipollution, and the Ronco Hot Shaver is no go...for to err is human (groan). You add excitement and variety to our lives. Imagine the boredom of trudging along the get-up-go to work-go home course of middle-class existence without the occasional speeding ticket or fender-bender. The burnt-out fuse, the lost letter. Charred steaks, Freudian slips, sat-on hats, broken hips, false-true true-false tests, infield errors..."

"STOP IT! STOP IT AT ONCE! I COMMAND IT!"

"Yes, mankind owes you a debt of gratitude. I offer you the singed hand of a mortal, imperfect, human being, his feet

sunk deep in the earth, his head in the heavens, in happy friendship."

"NO! NOOOOOOoooooooo..." There was a tragic, ghastly wail, then silence.

So ended the tale of the devils and Dan'l Collins. Sometimes a little honey can shoo away a pesky fly. But there's a dull tug in the back of my mind that tells me they'll be back.

Daniel C. Collins

GRIDIRON GRUMBLE

Here's the picture. On a brisk Saturday afternoon in early November you shuffle your way across the campus pathways, lined with fallen leaves swirling gently in the mild breeze. Your destination is Curley Field. The occasion is homecoming, that classical fall event occurring annually at colleges all over the country, releasing students from their academic pressures with a few hours of frenzied school spirit. Entering the field, you notice that something is not quite right. It's the crowd; more precisely, the lack of it. Surely all of the students had seen that magnificent sign plastered to the wall of the cafeteria advertising this sports spectacle. You take another glance at your Timex to make sure you haven't made a mistake. Sure enough it's 12:15, time for the players to take the field. Suddenly the door to the gym swings open, revealing the prepared combatants. Wait a minute! These characters are wearing shorts and carrying soccer balls. This is America, isn't it? What a disappointment! I think it is time Loyola realized how much it would profit by organizing an intercollegiate football team.

The most obvious profit turned by the organization of a football team would be monetary, even considering the cost of starting the program. Loyola has better than adequate facilities to field a team. Curley Field is the largest outdoor Astro-Turf surface in the United States and the soon-to-be-ready Student Center will hold a gymnasium and weight room that would draw the envy of area colleges as a football training center. Recently Broad Neck High School in Anne Arundel County organized a football team. The Baltimore Evening Sun interviewed Broad Neck's athletic director about the cost of starting the program. He said that it costs approximately \$200 to outfit each kid on the team. Considering the Loyola team would carry a combined Varsity and Junior Varsity squad of about seventy players, I figure the school could get a successful program off the ground with approximately \$20,000 including other necessary equipment such as blocking dummies and sleds. This is no gargantuan figure when you consider that it is less than the combined tuition of only five of Loyola's entire student enrollment, an enrollment in excess of 6,000 according to the 1983-1984 Undergraduate Catalog. I'm sure that ambitious alumni and private donors,

as evidenced by their generosity in rewarding grants, scholarships, and donations to the building fund, would easily meet this amount for such a cause. As a result, the large ticket sales, which football is known to generate, would be clear profit, turned over to the school to use as it sees fit. The school could also reap profits from television rights. Television coverage may be jumping the gun a little bit in this early stage of the organization, but the football team of another small college just down the road, Towson State, was featured on ABC's regional coverage recently. Although Loyola would not be anywhere near the scales of a Nebraska or an Alabama in making money, there is little doubt that the football team would pay for itself and turn a profit.

A football team would help Loyola by drawing quality students. That the only student drawn because of a football team is the stereotyped, dumb jock is a gross misunderstanding. High school football involves a huge number of students, many of whom are scholar-athletes. An athlete with grades high enough to go to any college he wants is certainly not going to choose Loyola if he can go someplace else equal to Loyola academically which offers him a chance to continue playing ball. I know personally that many scholar athletes reject Loyola without even looking at the school because there is no football team. Even though I valued academics much more than football, I almost ruled out Loyola when I found that the closest thing they could offer me to a real football team was an unorganized group of guys playing intramural flag football. I applied to Loyola only as a last resort (on the last day possible to apply) because I was impressed with the academic program. I still would have gone elsewhere had Loyola not given me an academic scholarship higher than any of the offers I received for playing football. Loyola has already attained its goal of improving itself academically, as proven by the sharp increase of the SAT scores of its incoming freshmen. A football team would draw a large audience that Loyola has yet to attract, the scholar-athletes.

Even above these advantages is the spirit and unity that a football team would add to the Loyola community. A football team would breathe some excitement into an athletic program that, as it currently stands, fails to grab the atten-

tion of the student body. Even though soccer is a nice sport and growing more popular, it will never captivate the American audience in the same way football does. I just can't imagine 80,000 screaming fans pouring into Southbend to watch the Fightin' Irish play soccer, or the Dallas Cowboys being replaced by the New York Cosmos as America's team. As it stands right now, there is a large rift between the commuters and residents at Loyola. The excitement caused by a winning football team would go a long way in uniting them. Just take a look at the effect of an exciting, winning baseball team on the whole city of Baltimore. A football team would open opportunities for residents and commuters to show school spirit. Marching bands, cheerleaders, and rooting sections could evolve to add color and enjoyment to the school. Loyola students would finally be able to form an identity with that American college tradition of football excitement, a tradition thrown into our face every week by nationally televised college games.

Star shooting? The nationally-ranked soccer team and the recent promotion of the basketball team to Division 1 show that Loyola has the ability to attract athletes for winning teams. The organization of a football team would be financially sound. Maybe, just maybe, a competitive inter-collegiate football team would cause some of those students striding through Maryland Hall to change the logos on their sweatshirts from "Penn State" or "Alabama" to one not so familiar, "LOYOLA." It has a nice ring to it. Saturday afternoons could become something special.

Kevin Frank

BAD NEIGHBORS. GOOD WALLS?

News Item: An organized group of Chicago property owners have initiated plans to extend part of the city's old South Wall, a structure which essentially creates a border between the Robert Taylor Homes Development and the residential district north of the Dan Ryan Expressway. The men and women who live in the Development, twenty-eight crowded buildings housing mostly blacks with the highest crime rate in the city, feel that such a wall lowers property values on their side and is a form of racial segregation. Thus far, however, the residents have failed to identify an illegality to forestall the proposed construction. Those who are in favor of the construction, which would occur only on privately-owned property, sincerely feel that they are simply trying to preserve their low crime rate, their livelihoods, and their families. The wall symbolizes an oppressive barrier to one people, a measure of security to the other.

Walls have been part of our history as long as one group of men has felt it necessary to exclude another. The Romans made such a nuisance of themselves in the early days of the empire that they found most of their neighbors erecting walls of enormous size with all possible haste. It took the old Romans and their legions a while to perfect a means of circumventing walls, but before too long it became old hat, and all of Europe feverishly brushed up on its Latin as the Romans made themselves unwelcome guests.

The warrior and historian Polybius preserved accounts of the adventures of one general at the siege of Ambracia in 190 B.C. The Romans had been successful at levelling the walls of the city by virtue of their tractor-trailor-sized catapults that were able to hurl great boulders with devastating speed, but became distressed when finding that the Ambracians had hastily constructed new walls by the time old ones were demolished. With time and big rocks scarce, the Roman general ordered his troops to burrow inconspicuously beneath the present wall. Deprived of support, the wall would collapse, and the surprised garrison be overwhelmed.

The Ambracians, however, noticed the growing moun-

tains of earth in the Roman camp and suspected foul play. They immediately dug counter tunnels and attacked the soldiers-turned-miners. A full-blown battle ensued with the Romans prevailing by virtue of superior numbers. The losers retired, shaking their heads.

A new idea soon emerged. The Ambracians filled a large earthenware jar with feathers and placed it in the tunnel with its mouth towards the Romans and all the space around it sealed up. The dauntless defenders then lit the contents of the jar and, with a blacksmith's bellows, produced a most malodorous and nauseating stink which the Romans were unable to endure, forcing them to abandon the effort.

In 215 B.C., the Romans laid siege to Syracuse and again met with stiff resistance. Polybius narrates, "On their approach to the city's wall they were subjected to a withering rain of stones and arrows shot from the walls. Adroit use was also made of cranes with chains and iron hands, inflicting great damage on the enemy, for they lifted up men, armor and all, and then let them drop." The attacking army was repulsed with grievous casualties.

Three years later, the Romans took the city by cleverness, rather than by force. On this occasion, the Romans discovered that Syracuse had been celebrating the festival of Artemis (imagine Georgetown after the Redskins' Superbowl win). The Roman general ordered an immediate assault, which quickly subdued the drunken and befuddled garrison.

The tables were turned some years later when the Romans ran headlong into the uncivilized and obnoxious Scots in northern England. The Scots were so aggressively unruly that Agricola built a wall that stretched completely across the island's width. Hadrian's wall measures seventy-three miles long and still remains at its original height of ten feet in places.

In the district courts of Illinois yet another battle is being waged to tear down yet another wall. In Chicago, north of the Dan Ryan Expressway, families cower behind locked doors, awaiting the Hun. The root of all this devisiveness is plainly that age-old curse, poverty, as distinct a barrier

between peoples as any rampart. And the shop-owners and small businessmen north of the wall see poverty's blood brother, crime, advancing at dusk like a legion over the plains. So they must, will be allowed to build their wall until it comes to pass that they have nothing to fear.

Judging by history, that day may be a long time coming.

Richard Mason

THE PROM

Socially, it is supposed to be the biggest event of the year. Everyone talks about it months beforehand, and the excitement of "the night" builds as each day passes. The excitement is a result of how the prom is publicized. The six-foot posters in front of the cafeteria never fail to have "PROM" written in ominous black letters with a picture of a dancing couple in formal attire. Because of its romantic and enchanting portrayal, students feel obligated to attend the prom, as it is not only a tradition, but a form of social acceptance as well. I felt obligated to go three times without realizing it. I took it for granted that everyone in the entire world goes to the prom. It was also my understanding that everyone has so much fun at the prom that memories last forever.

My memories of the prom will last for much different reasons than those which I had originally intended. I had such a terrible time at my first prom that I tried desperately, but to no avail, to forget it. The realities of the prom were not what the posters, the bulletin, and even my older sister said about dreamy dances and starlight kisses. The whole prom ordeal began when I was coached by my older sister, Cathy, to accept the invitation of Jim, the pitcher for our school baseball team. Even though I barely knew Jim, I was anxious to get caught up in the prom rituals such as buying a dress, deciding on shoes, and picking out a hair style. Besides accepting the invitation, picking a hairstyle was my biggest mistake. On June 5, an hour before the prom, I walked out of the beauty salon with my hair piled three feet above my head. My father was speechless. My brothers weren't. I don't think I ever want to hear the word "beehive" again in my life. In my preparations for the dance, I soon recovered from the hairstyle. I tried to be objective, thinking that my hair would be the only problem, but when my date sat in the front with the chauffeur, I realized that my evening was not going to go as planned.

I began to wonder where my planning had failed. Maybe I had set my expectations too high. But this theory proved invalid when half of the prom slipped by and he hadn't asked

me to dance once. It seemed reasonable, then, to assume that he wouldn't get upset if I danced with my friends that did ask me. Strike two. He did get upset, and decided to ignore me. By this time, my head was spinning, trying to figure out why this tradition has lasted.

Even my mother talked about her prom, which was at least thirty years ago. And my mother said the same things as my sister, who had been to two proms already. They said the prom was "a fabulous time," and "it is like being in a fairy tale with everyone so dressed up." Proms have basically remained unchanged, representing an enjoyable evening with some romance on the side. My mom went through the same troubles of getting a dress and getting ready for the big night. She got together with her friends and talked about who was going. She also planned her evening and made expectations. But her evening ended with no problems. Why, then, was it my misfortune to be stuck with a boy who was confusing me by getting upset one minute, while appearing nonchalant the next? I finally understood what my problem was when my date asked me to dance, about two songs before the last dance of the evening.

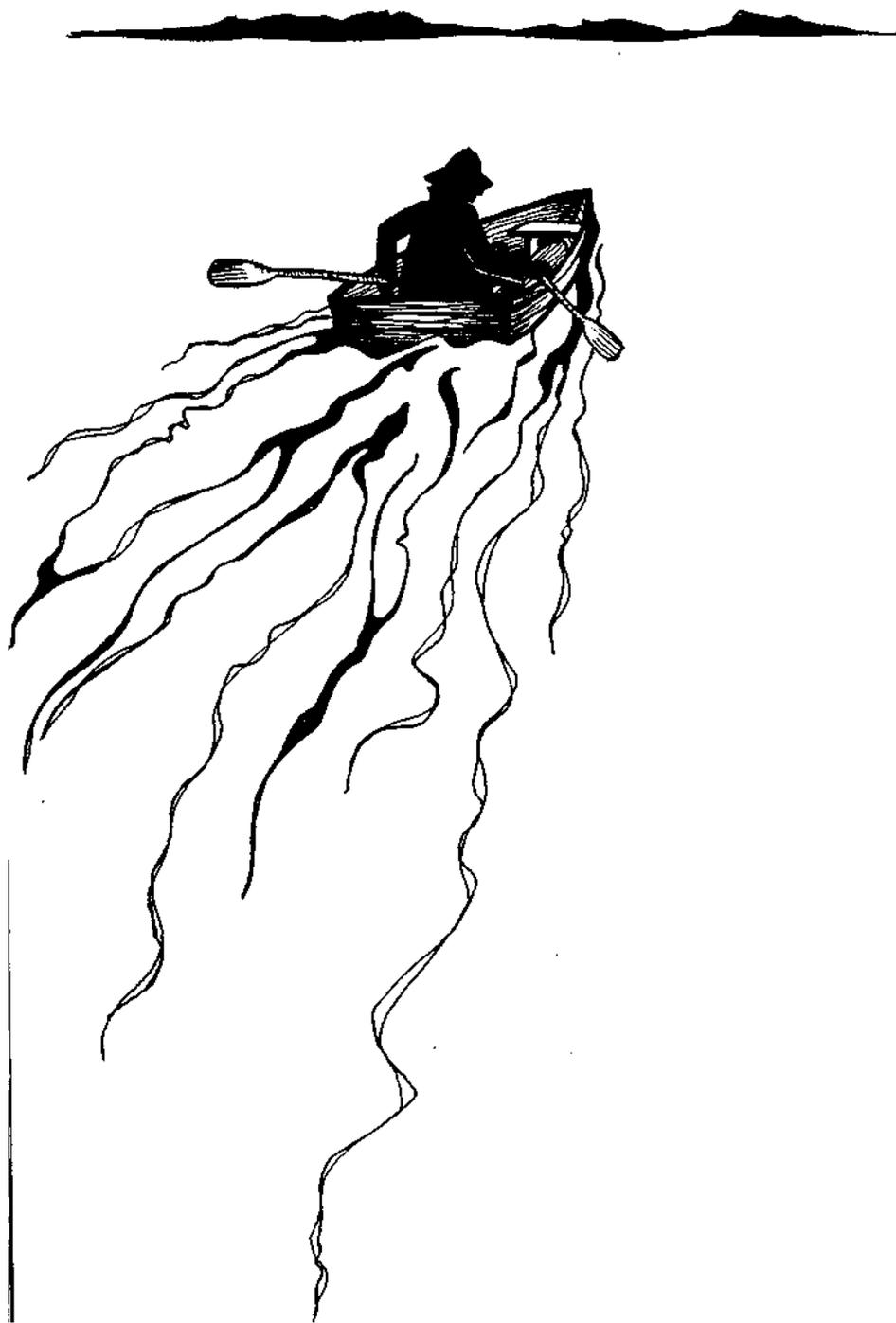
I give him credit for asking me to dance, but when we got on the dance floor, I realized I didn't know him well at all. He climbed up on the camera ladder, which was there for the filming of the prom, and started fooling around with it. I was shocked. Then he swung the camera around and was playing with the lenses while I was pretending to have a good time dancing. I couldn't tell if this was his idea of humor. I had not expected this, or anything he did that evening. It was then that the answer came to me, with a question: Why did I go to the prom with a boy I hardly knew?

I went to the prom with Jim because I knew that those who didn't attend were the people without any social incentive. Those that didn't go were the nobodies, the wallflowers, the students who just blend in for the entire four years of high school. In the tenth grade, I was determined not to be a wallflower, and so I accepted Jim's invitation just for the sake of going to the prom. I didn't care what he was like. I just wanted to be a part of the excitement. I wanted to be a part of the posters, a part of the way my sister described it,

and a part of what I thought it would be like. But the excitement I had anticipated turned out to be boredom. We didn't dance, we didn't talk, and we certainly didn't have fun. Before we even got to know each other, we started to feel a slight dislike for each other. We realized our problem at the height of prom night, but we were stuck with each other until 7:00 a.m. the next morning.

Imagine being with an unlikeable person for six hours. That is the price I paid for attending the prom. Neither of us could leave because we were double-dating with a happy couple. That disgusted me. They were having a good time, and I wasn't. At 7:00 a.m., when it was a unanimous decision to go home, I thanked Jim and told him it was fun. He knew I was lying through my teeth and said, "Yeah, I bet it was." So much for an enchanting evening. So much for a good time. So much for the prom.

Margaret Gower



TAKE PRIDE IN THE JOURNEYS YOU KEEP

A sweaty Greek herald runs up to the guy in charge. "You have," he pants, "to sacrifice your daughter so that the winds will blow and our thousand ships can sail." The ancient Greeks embarked on their journeys with a bit more melodrama than twentieth-century man, but we still embark on journeys. The bride fixes her veil before she journeys down the aisle, and Mother adjusts Katie's overalls before she kisses her off to kindergarten. A hippie with a backpack going to California to "find herself" is on as much of a journey as Moses leading the chosen people to the promised land. The literal journeys of the past are the symbolic journeys of the present.

When I was in high school and first learned the fundamentals of geometry, my teacher said the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Only lately have I considered what this means. It means that when you are hungry you take a trip from home (point A) to the supermarket (point B). It means that when Chevy Chase takes his stationwagon full of family on a "Vacation" he has a destination in mind, accounting for distractions like Christy Brinkley. It means that when Chaucer set his motley crew out on a pilgrimage, they knew they had a destination no matter who told the best story. But it also means that my teacher was preoccupied with the beginning and ending points and forgot the line in between. Only trips, vacations, and pilgrimages stay true to the geometric theorem. A journey loses its magnitude if start and finish are the only highlights.

We look with awe on the mythical journeys presented to us by the ancients, but we too go on journeys and care that we go on them. The path taken is seldom the shortest, and the destination is not always clear. If finding the center of the earth had been Jules Verne's goal, he might have named his novel What the Center of the Earth is Really Like, or Being There: An Experience in Subterranean Bliss. He was concerned with the journey and told us so. Joseph Conrad had the main character of Heart of Darkness literally journey through the rivers of Africa. Only at the end of a symbolic journey of enlightenment did he say, "The Horror, the horror."

It would be a tad reductionist to limit all this journey talk to literature. Popping open a beer and sitting in front of the tube, no red, white, and blue-blooded sports fan considers Monday Night Football a simple matter of win or lose, good season, bad season. There are teams that sweat through season after season in a meaningful journey towards bringing their city pride. Don't let Robert Irsay tell you any different. When we dreamily gaze up at the misty sky, we don't see a pot of gold, we see a rainbow, and don't let Dorothy tell you any different. The slap on the bottom and the slam of the coffin aren't life.

The journey isn't always successful or wonderful. Sometimes it can be sailing to pandemonium. Zoom camera shots of long dark hallways in a "60 Minutes" documentary about retirement homes throw bricks at youthful idealism. Zen Buddhists might paint colorful pictures of the very old and very wise monk enlightening the young Buddhist under a jade tree, but the long process of living must precede wisdom. The little ones glued to the tube at Christmas know "putting one foot in front of the other to find Chris Kringle" is a little description of a big journey.

In June the Pride sails out of Baltimore harbor to embark on another journey of "friendship and goodwill." She has been appointed as the welcome wagon to go door to door in a large neighborhood. She is a contemporary symbol of what it means to set out on a journey. She fluffs her sails and smiles in each harbor she visits. She explains to everyone that she is from a city which nobody used to know. She spends six months going from Baltimore to Baltimore. A face may launch a thousand ships, a crowd at Inner Harbor may launch the Pride, a trust fund launch Junior off to college. It doesn't really matter. That we embark and journey at all is the point.

Susan Winter

PLAYING SOLITAIRE

Old Hermit Cranberry from my old neighborhood rarely emerged from his nineteenth-century home with its decaying, once-yellow shutters. And when he did come out, it was just to walk his fox terrier, Toby, to pick up the morning paper off his green and yellow doormat, or to charge up his '67 Dodge to get a few groceries. Though the older kids were scared of him, I felt sorry for the grey-bearded gentleman. Once when he was walking Toby, although he towered far above my six years' worth of height, I asked "Why don't you want to be with 'other people?'" He replied, in a surprisingly kind voice, "Little girl, I have no desire to be with others since Mrs. Cranberry died." My only encounter with this man was cut short as he said there was housework to do, but from the few words he uttered and the sad expression on his face, I knew he was a very lonely person. Although he's been long dead, I still think of him and his need to be alone. There are many reasons for solitude, and the reason determines the kind of experience it will be.

Choosing to be alone can lead to a needed and delightful experience. At times you need to leave the hectic world of time schedules, deadlines, mobs at the checkout counter, Jane Fonda workouts, and "no parking between 7 and 9" signs. You have to search out a specific, solitary place. On campus, people study under the cool shade of oaks or relax on park-side benches. One lone person crouches amidst piles of crumpled papers and empty Heath bar wrappers in the cafeteria. People purposely remove themselves to accomplish something, to relax, to sort out problems or options. You can seclude yourself to accomplish personal projects too. Start that miniature boat kit that's been fermenting in your closet or get Mrs. Wilson to teach you to knit (like you've been asking her to every time you see her!). You could even pick up your "never-been-used" tennis racket and hit a few balls off a wall.

Solitude can be a learning experience. For example, how many of us have experienced the "thrill" of having the whole house to ourselves? Kids first think of freedom and rugby parties and doing as you please and keg parties and leaving your room dirty and "days-ending-with-y" parties!

But when parents have left home for an extended period of time, you learn independence and responsibility. For instance, Mom's not going to be there to do the spaghetti-stained dishes or the crusty pizza tray. Dad won't wake you up for your 8:15 class on his way to the office. As a successful bachelor or bachelorette, you must take it upon yourself to act responsibly with your newly-acquired independence. More often than not, the "morning after" you are the clean-up committee. You soon learn that heavy wool sweaters are not meant for the heavy-high cycle on your Maytag. And when Fido comes looking for you with his tongue hanging out, you realize there's more than one feeding on alternate Tuesdays. Yes, living on your own or without your parents can be tough, but the independence is well worth your trouble.

Admittedly, being by yourself isn't always so satisfying. Being a commuter in a primarily residential college can make you feel alienated and lonely. Living off campus doesn't give me much time to make friends. Acquaintances, yes...real friends, no. As soon as my last class is over and done with, I crank up my Datsun and head for the hectic world of waitressing or the slow pain of writing about "The World of Gophers" or reading about binocular depth cues or even learning the nineteen "easy" steps to writing a term paper. For me, there is neither a roommate nor a quad. There is no time to join the "Friends of Plato" club or the "He-man Woman Haters" club. My mother keeps reminding me, "Don't worry. You'll make friends. You're a very outgoing person!" Mrs. McDonald, next door, suggested that I go up to people (some poor unsuspecting freshmen, I suppose) and say, "Hi! My name is Noel. What's yours? Want to be friends?" Next thing I thought she would prescribe was to invite them to the ice cream shop for a malted! I cannot picture myself walking up to a group of people munching out in the cafeteria, and saying, "Hey, gang! How are we today? Is it O.K. if I plop my Spanish books down on this overcrowded table, listen in on your conversation and be best buddies with you?"

Just imagine yourself going to school alone every day, only knowing a handful of people you went to Immaculate Conception grade school with or ones you talked to three years ago at some bullroast. You walk to classes alone. You sit alone. You study alone. You eat alone. You turn around

to say, "Did you hear the one about the..." and then realize there's no one there to listen to you. You walk through silent hallways and the stairways echo... with only one set of shiny, black shoes clicking against the tiles. You become very aware of your Bic pen rolling across the paper...the paper that once was a note to a friend telling her about your weekend with Bill, which is now an essay on "Puritanism in America" due in an hour for history class. People's eyes are unkind, cold orbs that glare at yours and tear you apart with their judgments and silent remarks. You soon master the art of being alone and learn to cope with the empty days, hours and minutes. And....you become very good at playing solitaire.

Of course, no one will ever know why old Hermit Cranberry spent the rest of his life alone. No one will ever know why some people like to be by themselves more than others. There will always be those silent hallways and cool stares that turn aloneness into loneliness. No one will ever discover the cure for loneliness. But being alone can also have its advantages. Why you are alone determines whether solitude is enjoyable or unpleasant.

Noel Harris

ST. MARY'S

The five of us slid through the tall wet grass in the darkness. We didn't want passing car lights to reveal us. Owls shrieked in protest, their cries cutting through the starry black sky. It was a long and tedious way across the field to the sign. We stretched and crawled with our bodies in the dirt, our hands grabbing at the tough grass to pull us along. Brambles and thorns snagged at our legs and arms, trying to grip us and push us back. When we finally reached the sign, we giggled in relief. So far, so good.

It took fifteen minutes to get the sign down. It hung by two hooks from a horizontal beam supported by six-foot wooden poles. The hooks were thick metal loops pounded deep into the beam. Two of us climbed the splintery poles and pushed down on the sign while the others hung on it and pulled. The wooden structure groaned and squeaked and swayed. Finally the hooks came free, and there was an avalanche of people and wood as the sign crashed to the ground.

ST. MARY'S RYKEN HIGH SCHOOL

Two twelve-foot long pieces of wood, painted painstakingly in green and white, were ours. We lugged this heavy prize into the back of an old beat-up station wagon and made our getaway. We had stolen it because there was really nothing better to do that night.

St. Mary's County, Maryland, is the most boring place in the world for fifteen- to nineteen-year-olds. This makes it a breeding ground for trouble and juvenile delinquency. As Friday approached, my friends and I were always faced with the same problem: **WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO THIS WEEKEND?** In our underpopulated, desolate county there are three theatres which are always playing something obsolete or X-rated. As the rest of America was enjoying The Return of the Jedi, my fellow countians and I were standing in lines three blocks long to get expensive tickets to Star Wars I. The nearest roller skating rink, ice skating rink and shopping mall are an hour away. We love to dance, but the bands only play in bars where you have to be twenty-one to enter, whether

you plan on drinking or not. The small population creates low school enrollments, so funds are limited and high school social functions are few and far between.

In rural areas everyone plays sports. Little League kids swarm the fields and basketball courts. Local high schools engage in bitter struggles for the championship titles in every sport from golf to football and soccer. Small county businesses sponsor an over-abundance of adult softball teams. In nice weather, people fight over the lighted tennis courts at Brenton Bay Country Club in order to get a little late-night entertainment. There are also plenty of beaches and piers to walk along.

Unfortunately, there are usually two-month gaps between sports seasons, the weather isn't always nice, and you can only walk so far so much. So as Friday grows even nearer we reword our question: **WHAT LAW ARE WE GOING TO BREAK THIS WEEKEND?** I cannot count the number of mailbox and trashcan destructions I have witnessed. We have shaving creamed enough cars to fill the Capitol Center's parking lot. We have broken into swimming pools for middle-of-the-night swims. The walls of my room shout at me with stolen orders. **NO PARKING! BUS STOP. PRIVATE PROPERTY! NO TRESPASSING!** If we don't feel like actually stealing the stop signs, we pull them up and cut a few feet off the ends before replacing them. Midget stop signs are flourishing in our county.

This is all considered lightweight vandalism. No one ever worries about getting caught or suffering any repercussions. We normally strike people that we know because it is "all in good fun," and we don't inflict any "costly" damage. We also figure that we pay the taxes that buy the road signs, so they are ours in a sense. Right?

Most of our parents are well aware of our illegal escapades. At home, the signs and stocks of shaving cream stand in the open, unashamed. My parents helped me load my six-foot piece of St. Mary's Ryken into the car to bring to school. They only wanted to know if I had gotten it last Friday or last Saturday. My dad smirks and says, "Kids will be kids."

But what about those not-so-harm less offenses committed in fits of boredom? Condoning small crimes has led to the large. St. Mary's kids are not always kids. Under-age drinking is of epidemic proportions. A survey by the Maryland Drug Abuse Administration found that 41% of St. Mary's County's high school seniors drink frequently. This percentage is higher than that in Baltimore City or any of the other seventeen counties that participated in the study. No wonder. County parties are three-ring circuses, and in the center ring is an abundant beer supply available to anyone still capable of swallowing. A mass of bodies and noise spills from the party scene. Furniture is abused, broken, and flattened. Parties don't end until the police have made it clear on their third visit that someone is going to have to pay for this disturbance of the peace.

Neighborhoods have been forced to organize crime watches to guard against the serious vandalism that has struck their homes. Many teenagers use paint instead of shaving cream for a more permanent effect. Lawns have been intentionally ripped up by the tires of cars driven by sixteen-year-olds. Windows are broken and outdoor lights smashed. Pat Smith has had thirty gallons of gas and a battery stolen from the school bus that she drives. Last spring someone attacked her bus with spray paint, causing at least \$750 worth of damage. In a newspaper interview she said, "I guess that kids don't have much to do besides paint buses."

Last weekend a co-worker informed me that it is possible to confuse a Coke machine. If a thick solution of salt and water is poured into the coin slot, the machine will promptly drop every one of its one hundred sodas into your hands. The damage to the machine is irreparable. I don't know how he found this out, but there will not be a single Coke machine left untouched in the county. He has already taken over three-hundred sodas home with him. When I voiced my disapproval, he shrugged. "There was," he said, "really nothing else to do!"

Caren Brown

DIOXIN DILEMMA

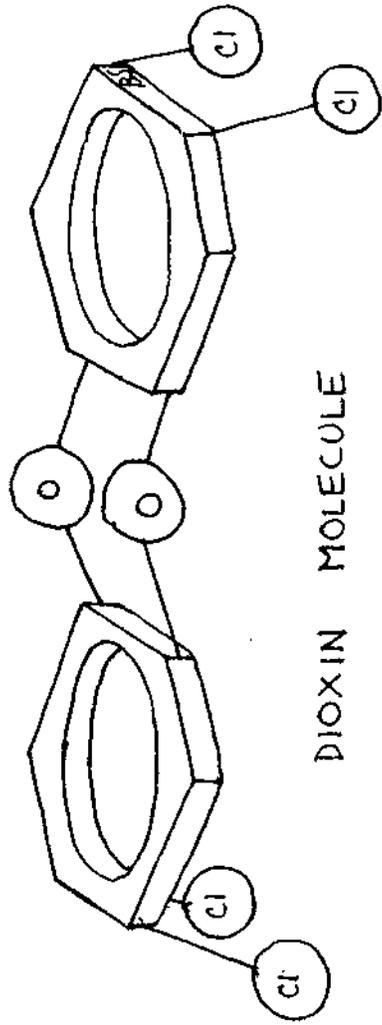
Combating toxic waste is a problem that faces mankind here and now. There are no easy solutions, and there seems to be no one to blame. But the dioxin dilemma gets worse every year, and the programs to clean it up have too many loopholes to help.

The problem that most people are aware of is the one that has plagued Times Beach, Missouri. In May of 1971, Russell Bliss was hired by a closing hexachlorophene plant to dispose of their wastes. He mixed it with oil and sprayed it on roads to control dust. In one incident Bliss sprayed Judy Piatt's stables in Moscow Mills, Missouri. The effects were evident the next day and were phenomenal. Hundreds of birds nesting in the rafters were found dead. Twenty cats and sixty-two horses went bald and died. But the dioxins did not only affect the animals in the barn. Judy Piatt developed serious headaches, chest pains, and diarrhea, and one of her daughters began hemorrhaging as a result of the spraying.

Even though the problem was detectable soon after it occurred, cleanup did not begin until nearly twelve years later. Missouri officials in 1974 traced the contamination to dioxins. But at the time it was investigated, dioxin was thought to decompose quickly. It was not until 1982 that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reinstated its investigation because high levels of dioxin were found in the soil of Times Beach. Levels of more than one-hundred parts per billion were reported, one-hundred times the level necessary to give long-term effects.

Because bacteria have very little appetite for this type of dioxin and incineration is impractical for such a large quantity of dirt, the prospects for Times Beach are not good. The EPA has only one real choice—to purchase Times Beach. This one-square mile area on the Meramec River with 2500 residents, 800 homes, and thirty businesses was purchased by the government for 36.7 million dollars. But the problem is too widespread to be bought away.

According to the ex-EPA administrator Anne Burford, "the potential dangers toxic wastes pose to the country's land,



water, air, public health and economy are second only to the threat of nuclear war." Toxic waste can be found in as many as 50,000 dumps across the United States. There are also 180,000 open pits, ponds, and lagoons at industrial parks that are contaminated. As few as 14,000 of these sites pose fire hazards, threatening ground water, or noxious fumes. American businesses and industries generate an estimated 88,000 pounds of toxic wastes a year. Of this amount ninety percent is improperly disposed of. Even though tough air and water pollution acts were instituted in the seventies, they may have made the problem worse. No one thought to ask where the toxics were going to go if they were not put into the air or water.

Because of the amount of waste around the country, the United States government drafted the Resources Conservation and Recovery Act, directing the EPA to establish safety regulations for landfills and penalties for violators. There were many loopholes in this act. Businesses that generate less than one ton of waste a year, for example, were completely exempt from such regulations. Since the cost of cleaning up the dumps is so large (260 billion dollars), a 1.6 billion dollar superfund program was set up to clean up sites first and collect later. States that wanted this help, however, had to contribute ten percent to this fund. Most states could not afford this, and the Superfund turned out to be not so super.

The former residents of Times Beach are not the only ones worried about the effects of dioxins. Scientists are terrified of the problem. The effects of direct exposure can be severe. The disorders also seem to disappear after exposure has discontinued. The signs show up in the form of chloracne, a severe and extensive form of acne which causes the skin to darken and thicken. In some cases the lesions clear up in a few months, but in others they persist for years after exposure to the chemicals. Other effects include insomnia, irritability, nerve damage, liver disorders, loss of appetite and weight, and the loss of the sex drive.

Who is to blame for toxic wastes? Many blame the companies that produce them. The Dow Company is now locked in litigation over their production of Agent Orange

(2,4,5-T) used in Vietnam. Defendants in a suit filed by 20,000 Vietnam veterans, Dow insists that they are not to blame. Dow's president said that dioxin had "only mild effects on humans." Jeremy Main in "Dow vs. the Dioxin Monster" in Fortune, May 30, 1983, argues Dow "tends to pooh-pooh the danger of dioxin" as if "chloracne were little more than a bout of poison ivy and the human implications of dioxin's effects on animals were barely worth worrying about." Dow argues that they are hardly criminals when it comes to dioxin. Dow puts only five percent of their wastes in landfills in comparison to eighty percent put in landfills by the United States as a whole. Dow also contends that dioxins are produced by everyday combustion like that of automobile engines, and the EPA agrees nobody really knows all the sources of dioxin or how prevalent it may be.

The EPA is also being blamed for dioxins, but the EPA argues they have seen a forty-eight percent decline in real dollars since Ronald Reagan took office. They lack the manpower to review 60,000 large hazardous waste generators and 15,000 haulers. The residents of Times Beach do not, however, accept these excuses. They feel that there was enough evidence in 1974 to warrant a full-fledged investigation, but none was initiated. The residents were only compensated for property. No one knows the health complications that could occur in the future nor who will pay for such disabilities. "The residents of Times Beach were lucky to live in a small town," commented a reporter for Discover. "The supply of such kindness may soon not be able to keep up with the demand."

Dioxin is here to stay, but there may be ways to prevent such disasters as Times Beach. The Dow company has used a Fiery Furnace to get rid of toxic wastes. This furnace burns the wastes at a temperature of around 2400°. Solid particles fall to the bottom while carbon dioxide, water, and air escape to the atmosphere. Complete destruction of the wastes depends on getting the right temperatures and burning times for specific wastes. Toxic waste dumps seem to be the most feasible solution to the problem. While no dump can be perfect, the EPA has set rules for dumps that may come close.

There are seventy-five types of dioxin, distinguished by the number of chlorine atoms and their arrangement. 2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenz-p-dioxin is the most toxic member of the family. There are no easy solutions to the problems of toxic waste. Since Times Beach hit the front pages of every local newspaper, people have been aware of the dilemma. With further education of citizens, we may see President Reagan shift his attention to the problem. We must address the situation. We sit on a powder keg.

Dan Scieszka

PET PEEVE

On one ominous day in prehistoric times a sadistic caveman decided to domesticate a dog. This neolithic accomplishment has developed into a plague we call pets. Although this Neanderthal intended no malice by his actions, it's nice to have someone to blame. After all, pets have evolved into one of man's greatest afflictions.

Somewhere along the evolutionary line, domesticated dogs ceased to be useful to man and started to annoy him. But dogs alone weren't enough. In order to make sure that no one slipped by without being stricken by the pet infestation, man had to adopt a wide range of creatures to serve as pets. Now there are so many different kinds of pets and in such great number, that no one can escape their dreaded wrath.

Of all the types of pets, dogs are still the most popular. Dogs are one of the most annoying creatures on the face of the earth. I draw this conclusion from my experiences with our family dogs. They can be described in this manner: two oafs, two killers, and one harlot. And all were constant barkers. Dogs are not only obnoxious but they're also stupid. What other animal chases cars, not to mention its own tail, for excitement? Cats are another one of man's favorite pets. I hate cats. Cats always seem to be scheming. Cats have kittens. Kittens grow up to be cats. Yes, I hate cats. So much for cats. Fish are also popular pets. Fish have personalities, bad ones like dogs and cats. Lately there seems to be a growing trend in keeping rodents in the house. By rodents I mean hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, small cats, etc. Why do we enjoy owning these pests? They're all just mutated versions of mice, and that's why God created mouse-traps.

By now you're probably trying to think of some clever reasons for man's attachment to pets. "Man needs the secur

ity and affection that pets give him," you're thinking. I'm not convinced. I have to come to the conclusion that animals do not become attached to their owners. After all, pets aren't capable of feeling emotions. They just rely on man for affection and flea collars and things like that. Pet owners are wasting their time trying to please their ungrateful pets. Has your pet ever shown any appreciation for anything you've done for it? The only sign of gratitude that our cats have given us for all the "love and affection" that we pour on them is an occasional half-eaten bird on our front porch. Now what kind of thanks is that? That's pretty rude if you ask me.

Many great minds have been drained for the sole purpose of pleasing these uncaring animals. Because of pets, mankind has unknowingly sacrificed the genius of many people whose brain power could have been used more productively. Men and women have needlessly devoted their lives to the creation of such products as dog toys and gerbil cages. I'd like to know who the guy was who invented that little wheel that hamsters run around in to make it go around in a circle. Why doesn't this technological genius step up and accept credit where credit is due? Or how about the one who created the reflecting dog collars? Do you realize the countless dog lives that have been saved because of this ingenious creation? It's sad to think that such brilliant minds have been wasted on ungrateful pets.

You probably weren't aware of the threat that pets pose to your mental health but I have proof. My father, who was once a fellow fervent pet hater, now has one-sided conversations with the family mutt. I have personally witnessed a grown man calmly inform the barking dog that if he didn't start behaving himself properly, he was just going to have to be chained up outside. I promptly told him that dogs don't understand long complex sentences and that short catchy phrases had to be used, like "Shut the hell up!" Unfortunately, my father is not the only one who has lost his mind because of our Doberman. My little sister has taken up the common practice of talking to the dog in a ridiculous

tone. In an attempt to bring her back to reality I warned her that if she didn't stop talking to Ludwig like that, he was going to grow up talking like a baby.

Thankfully, I am strong and will resist this pet pestilence. But beware pet owners. And while you're shaking hands with your dog or scooping that dead fish out of its tank or shoveling up that mess in your front lawn, just think what a nicer place the world would be if humans were the only creatures living in our houses.

Tim O'Brien

A LEGACY OF LOVE

She was very beautiful. Large expressive eyes, that sparkled as though sunshine had been imprisoned in them, lit up her fine-boned face, framed by a thick curtain of satiny black hair, which hung down to her knees in glorious abundance. Her smile, pure joy, made you stop and exclaim at such perfection. She was my grandmother.

Her life began like a fairy tale. She was born to wealth and luxury. When her mother died, loving relatives took over, satisfying her every whim before she could even express it. She made the perfect match when she married the brilliant young surgeon. Together they had four children. The future was hers.

Her children grew up and left home. Her figure thickened, tiny wrinkles appeared around her eyes, and tinges of grey flecked her hair, but her face retained its animation, her laughter continued to echo around the house, and she still embraced life with the impetuous trust of youth.

As a child I spent practically all my weekends with her. All through the week I used to wait eagerly for the moment when she would come and pick me up, growing impatient while she chatted with my mother, selfishly wanting her all to myself. Vividly I recall the impish twinkle in her warm loving eyes as she proposed exciting escapades to fill those two precious days. At night, when all the world was asleep, my grandmother and I would creep into the garden, spread a mat on the grass, and breathe in the fresh night air, delicately scented with the smell of wild flowers. There I used to lie in her arms, and she would tell me stories, and teach me hymns, her soprano voice, gentle with love, echoing in the hush of the still night.

Yes, she influenced me greatly, those first eight years of my life, and I treasured each moment we spent together. Hand in hand we would roam the garden, my face adoringly upturned to her loving kindly one as she taught me to find beauty in the sunbeams that sparkled on the early morning dew, in the warm summer breeze that tugged at the bows in my hair, in the music of the bees and in the glorious shades of

pink and orange that blazed in the summer sky at dawn.

Never was she too busy to stop and listen to my childish woes. Whenever I ran to her, tears streaming down my face, she would gather me in her lap, rest my head on her shoulder and smooth my hair with an infinitely gentle touch. Love and laughter seemed to be her motto in life, and anyone who knew her was invariably touched by her own special brand of love. She deserved a future of peace and contentment, of laughter and enjoyment of the simple pleasures in life that she so delighted in. But there would be no fairytale endings for her. She became a victim of the dreaded Alzheimer's disease, for which there is no cure.

In the first phase the symptoms of the disease were so subtle, that no one was even aware of them. Then she began forgetting familiar names and places. She would drive along a road on which she had been countless times before and suddenly forget where she was going and why. This made her very anxious. She sensed that something was wrong with her; she couldn't figure what. She began to stay indoors, to withdraw within herself, her smile artificial and her laughter forced.

My grandfather was at the peak of his career, having received top honors from the President for his outstanding contributions to the medical profession. He was feted and acclaimed all over the nation and looked forward to a flourishing private practice in a big city. Yet he sensed his wife's need to get away from the taxing demands of city life and the cruel ways of society, and he moved instead to a mission hospital in a remote village.

Emergency Medicine charts Alzheimer's Disease in chilling terms: "As the disease progresses, the patient becomes severely disoriented and restless and behavior problems crop up. The patient may wander from the house at all hours of the day and night. Psychotic symptoms such as delusions, hallucinations, and paranoid ideations become apparent. The patient may mistake people for objects and vice-versa."

My darling grandmother now roamed the house, singing

to herself those very same hymns she had taught me to love.

Before she reached the stage of total oblivion, she went through a very violent stage. She would run into the yard and rip her clothes off, tearing them into shreds. She had to be confined to her room, and very often locked in, tied to the bed. One night my aunt awoke from her sleep to find her mother gazing down at her. The doctors said that it was dangerous to let a thing like that happen. I believe that in a particularly lucid moment, she simply wanted to assure herself that all was well with her precious child.

Her condition deteriorated. Totally oblivious to everything that went on around her, she needed professional help twenty-four hours a day. She could not even recognize her husband of thirty-eight years.

For seven long years, she lay bedridden, uncomprehending, her beautiful eyes dull and lifeless. When her youngest son, her baby, brought his lovely new bride to her bedside, mutely imploring her for some sign of recognition, she gazed at the radiant couple with vacant, unblinking eyes. Shortly afterward she died.

People speak now of my grandmother in hushed voices, behind closed doors. Not I. I am proud of her. Very proud. More important than the fact that she left me a 4.3% chance of inheriting this terrible disease is the fact that she left me a legacy of laughter, of love.

Anisya Thomas

OAR WAR

Futilely fighting like the waves against our eight-woman crew boat, my pride slaps up against the sides of my better judgment. Better Judgment chides, "You haven't rowed in over a semester's time, while the other girls have been rowing faithfully for the past three weeks. Naturally you deserve the second-lowest seat on the boat." Pride pouts in reply, "But I know how to row. How dare the coach place these novices above me?"

With the very first stroke I am humbled. My oar trips into the water and jerks itself back out with all the control and grace of a choking man. So unfamiliar and uncomfortable is the required motion that I wonder if I have completely forgotten how to row. My oar is sadly out of sync with the other seven, though if truth be told, the other seven are also out of sync with each other. We plod along harbor waters, each obstinately maintaining our own rhythms of rowing, splashing water recklessly. From my perspective at the back of the boat, we move more erratically than drunken slaves in a galley ship. "What a motley crew," the seagulls must be laughing as they glide freely above our disjointed wake.

Little by little my hands remember to turn the oar handle, my feet remember to pull the slide up gently, my arms remember to reach out over the boat, and my back remembers to stretch forward from its lowest vertebrae. The basics of rowing have come back to me, though not with the flawless ease I had expected. Feather, drop, pull, lift—yes, it is getting smoother. Yet, I notice I feather my oar a second after the stroking pair. Does it matter? Must I submit myself to their metronome-like rhythm? No, I think their strokes are too short and their reach too long for me. My way is the best way. A second, a single second's difference of time shouldn't matter, should it? I stick to my rhythm.

But there is a new rhythm now that I can no longer ignore. It is the rhythm of my muscles throbbing in near-agony from this unexpected workout. "Stop!" they beg. And yet I stroke again. It is the same feeling I had when I was seven and tried to jump off the high-diving board. My cowardly body said, "Don't Jump!," but some power of will

made me jump anyway. My body, then, is a timid instrument, subject to the dictates of my mind. Yet the searing pain is getting hard to ignore. My shoulders and arms pound pitifully as they lift the increasingly heavy oar. My calves and thighs feel as though someone is pelting stones at them. My back suffers from a stabbing pain, unrelenting as the coxswain's drills. Could I stop? Why should I let this oar, this weather-beaten piece of wood, force me into aching exhaustion? But if I stop rowing, even for an instant, the forward force of the boat will push my resting oar up against my neck, pinning me flat on my back. The single oarsmen behind me will get trapped, too, and the whole boat will have to stop.

I go on, in spite of my wincing tissues. The decision, however, is as painful as the process. With no Simon to help me pull the oar through these indifferent waters and no means of quitting without stifling the progress of the boat, I know I am doomed to row continuously for the next half-hour. I look up at the seagulls, again mocking me in their effortless flight. Pain or no pain, I shut my eyes and continue.

I feel as though I am a modern-day martyr, wrestling with this boat till death, under the amused eye of the pagan coxswain. I will groan and the boat will creak and the coxswain will smile because she doesn't know that I will win the battle. In twenty-five minutes we will lay the conquered boat to rest on wooden racks in the hollow warehouse, only to raise it above our heads tomorrow for another fight. Fighting, fighting, why must I always be fighting?

"Number two man, you're not in time!" shouts the coxswain. Mortified, I open my eyes to the oarlocks of the stroking pair, and indeed I am out of time, a half a stroke behind almost. I feel like a flapping horse's tail, wagging stupidly behind the animal's charged and orchestrated body. So what? So I am not in their time, I think. I think again: It is their time and only their time matters right now. My time, my will, and my pain must be heaved into the harbor to sink. I see that I am nothing more than a drop of water in a fountain, undistinguishable except in relation to the others.

And as I resign my will to the will of the boat, the pain

of my body becomes rhythmic power, insensible and soulless. In and out I pull the oar with #11 my strength. But still, despite my prostrated will, my oar lies in the water just as the stroking pair pulls theirs out. I am thinking too much and I am looking at my own oar too often. I focus all my concentration, like a prism compressing light waves, on the oarlocks of the stroking pair. Eyes straight ahead, I order, shoulders squared, elbows in. I pull and I pull and I pull harder.

It is very strange. I forget who I am, where I am, even what I am. I am the boat. The oar is only an extension of my obedient arm. In and out, in and out. Rhythm is all. I am nothing. And then, for six glorious strokes, the boat is one harmonious vessel, soaring through the water with magnificent grace and speed. For an instant we glide faster than the seagulls.

As soon as I am aware of my selflessness, concentration slips away like a greased snake. The rhythm is gone, but so too is the half-hour. I remember the six strokes of total surrender and total perfection with a strange thrill. As I step out of the boat, I am sad those six strokes had to end so quickly. Still, I am glad to be walking on my own two feet, at my own speed, in my own style and with my own thoughts once again. I trip on a loose board and laugh with the seagulls.

Maggie Hathway

