

FORUM



1994



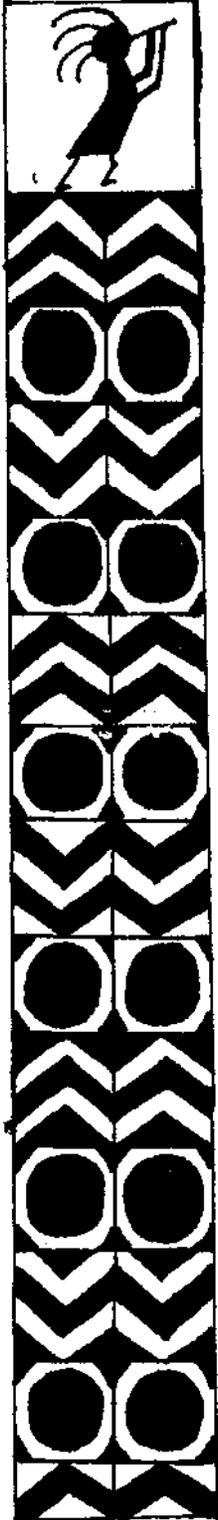
FORUM MAGAZINE

Volume 15

1994

The Kokopelli of the Native Americans bear culture through dance and music, as well as guide the faithful to the afterworld. These symbols represent our own culture as we relate it through every word, line, and step we take.

We dedicate the Forum of 1994 to people who, like the Kokopelli, nurture culture by telling their stories and recreating their visions. When so many negative forces tear at the edges of our society, the storytellers and artists bear the pain and hope we all share. In an age of growing technology and alienation, let us listen more closely to the artists' healing, the pulse of the people.



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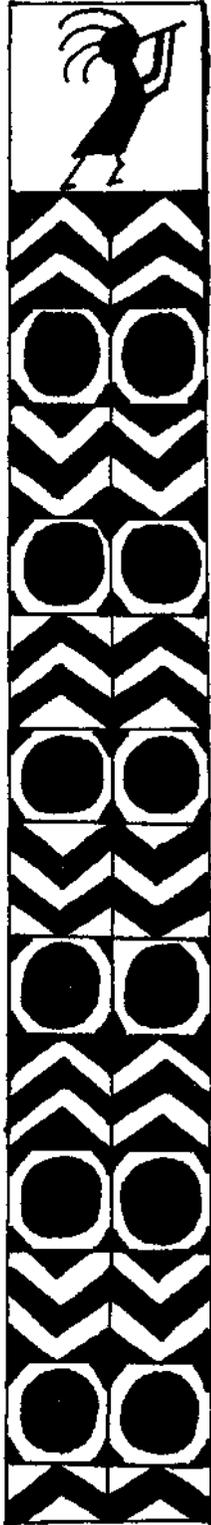
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Entries for the 1995 edition will be collected in the fall.



A Note From The Editor

Art, as an act of expression and self-revelation, heals us as one people. Putting together the Forum has taught this lesson to me repeatedly. I want to thank my staff and acknowledge their long hours spent squinting into a computer screen, thoughtfully reading countless essays, revising drawings until perfection, and brainstorming at any and all points of the day.

The Forum not only represents the diligent work of the staff, but even more vividly, the creative impulse here at Loyola. The students all submitted wonderful essays and drawings, pieces which reflected both their imagination and reflection. I consider this one of the best experiences at Loyola, the opportunity to receive such an outpouring of energy and creativity. To everyone who submitted, thank you. The quality of the work made the decisions very hard.

We want to thank Dr. McGuiness. As a moderator, he gave us the perfect balance of freedom and support we needed to put this edition together. Our gratitude also goes to all the teachers who encouraged, prodded, and pushed shy but talented students to submit essays and drawings.

Thank you so much for this opportunity. We hope you enjoy the Forum as much as we have.

Amy E. Sullivan



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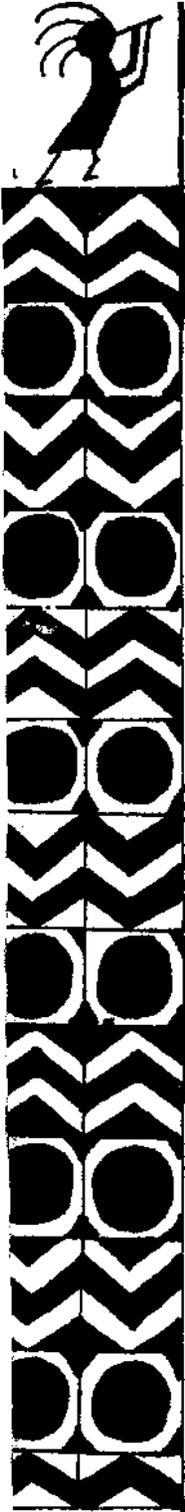
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Cover Design: Faces by Kate Walsh
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Shattering the Myths

Kathleen Burgoyne

When one mentions the name of a distant place where they have never travelled, they are bound to have various preconceived notions about the character of this destination. Early nineteenth century writer William Hazlitt wrote, "Things near us are seen the size of life; things at a distance are diminished to the size of the understanding." To me, this encompasses the fact that we create myths to compensate for people and places that are foreign to us. It is not until we become involved and confront it with an open mind that we fully understand the reality of a culture.

Take the French, for example. Americans hear daily references to French wine, cuisine, and style, while words like *rendezvous* and *ambiance* sound fashionably *chic* in everyday conversation. The French are believed to be rather pretentious and rude when dealing with Americans, thus Americans react with a similar demeanor.

I choose to focus on the French because I recently spent five months in France on a semester abroad program where I stayed in Paris and studied at the University of Paris at the Sorbonne. I studied the language throughout high school and college and spent two weeks with a family in the south-central town of Aurillac when I was 17 years old. It had been the most independent and enlightening experience of my life, and I knew that I wanted to return someday for a longer period of time.

The time came last January when I stood at the *Gare de Lyon* and heaved my three allotted bags of what seemed like only my barest essentials into the trunk of a white Mercedes cab. Upon arriving at the train station, I had been handed a paper by a woman with my program, the American Institute of Foreign Study, which had the name and address of my host: *Madame Moulin*. I gave the paper to my driver and he produced a little book that was a full guide to Paris with individual maps of the twenty districts, or *arrondissements*, in the city; I would be living in the sixteenth.

As we made our way along the streets of the city, my mind



raced along with the quick pace of the car. My previous visit to Paris had lasted only about thirty-six hours when my high school group had stopped there for one night before continuing on to Aurillac. Now, that time seemed to barely exist. It did render a vague sense of *deja vu* as I passed a few familiar sites, but, these I probably could have recognized from a tour book. This was a whole new experience. Since my first visit to Paris, I had wanted to return so that I could more fully immerse myself in the culture, explore the streets, and discover the true magic of the city.

Now, I was on my way to fulfilling this goal. A great sense of accomplishment swept over me as we weaved through Sunday evening traffic along the Seine. It was just about 6pm. It was light enough to see everything beneath a fading blue sky, but the lights of the buildings were on, too. Looking out of the car window on the right, I saw *Notre Dame*, the *Louvre*, the *Comedie Française* — it was all beautiful. I arrived at my new French home at *2 rue du Pierre Louys* and talked with Madame and her sister who welcomed me. They both seemed very kind-hearted as I talked with them (*en français bien sur*) and at 10:30pm I settled into bed, realizing that this was my new home for the next few months.

That first Sunday I used as a day of exploration. Not yet a proud owner of a *carte d'orange* (which would give me access to the public transit system), I walked as far as I could reasonably navigate from my map. Right out on my street I could see the Eiffel Tower, and that was my immediate target. From there, I headed toward the *Arc de Triomphe*, and down along the *Champs-Elysée*. Walking toward the *Place de la Concorde*, wide-eyed and anxious to take everything in, I saw a group of familiar young men who waved and stopped me. There were six of them and they were from my program. It was a comforting feeling to be walking down a Paris street and say, "Hey, I know you!" We exchanged information about our "families" and accommodations, and they invited me to walk along with them and get something to eat, or see this or that, but I kindly declined. It was time for me to investigate my surroundings on my own.

Hazlitt continues, "The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do just as one pleases." And so began my quest.

Since I often travelled alone and spoke the language, I was discreet. I was able to observe the manner in which the natives looked at groups of Americans who travelled in packs and were loud and unruly. The French appreciated the fact that I tried to communicate by their rules and I did not run into the problems that so many tourists say



they encounter, particularly in France. Many American students claimed that they did not have to speak or learn French because the French already knew English — and they say that the *French* have an attitude. We *were* in France after all. How is it that we expect people visiting the United States to speak English, yet when we go to their country — well, they should speak English there, too. Many argue that it is, and should be, the universal language. I argue that this is an ignorant American double standard. It reminds me of an ongoing dispute about the language to be taught and spoken among a subculture prevalent in American society: the Deaf community. Deaf people predominantly learn American Sign Language to communicate. This is not a written language because the syntax is completely different and does not include prepositions or articles. Many in the hearing community say that the students should learn Signed English - as well as learn how to speak orally - so that the Deaf can better communicate with the hearing world. This view disregards the pride of a culture.

The conflict in the movie "Children of a Lesser God" focuses on that conflict as the Deaf woman does not feel that she should be coerced to learn another language.

Language, however, is only one element of a culture, and there were many other traditions that I tried to embrace while in France (and Europe in general), such as wearing dark colors to blend in with all of the browns and blacks that people wore, and greeting people with two kisses on the cheeks (that's Parisian style; sometimes it is one, three, or four depending on geography). Americans find it easy to adhere to the traditionally well-known elements of a Parisian lifestyle, including the cozy *cafés*, the parks scattered throughout the bustling city as well as on its outskirts, the fresh flowers on nearly every street corner, the high quality of food in restaurants, the more affordable fruit and vegetable stands on the streets, and the weekly open-air markets.

Yet, there were so many others who insisted on remaining in their American frame of mind while there, it amazed me. I was walking on my way to class on one of the nicest days of early March. In one hand I held a brown bag containing some *orangines*, and in the other hand, a long *baguette* filled with ham and cheese with only a piece of wax paper wrapped around it. I had also grown accustomed to carrying around a little plastic Evian bottle that I kept filling with tap water, so that was in my bag, too. Standing at the corner of *Boulevard St. Michel* and *Avenue Soufflot*, with the Pantheon on my right up the road and my destination for a leisurely lunch at the *Jardin Luxembourg* to my left, I looked in the window at the corner and saw three girls from my program.



One of them caught my eye and waved. I smiled, and continued on my way. There they sat around the square table, styrofoam and trash discarded on the trays before them — at McDonalds. They later told me that they indulged there and then went across the street to get Haagen Daaz ice cream. Ah, Paris.

I used to eat dinner in university cafeterias scattered around the city. One place was recognized as one of the best buys for the money; consequently many people in our group started to go there. Soon a whole American conglomeration took up a couple of tables and noisily shared with each other their most recent stories and experiences. All heads would turn. Sometimes I sat with them, but not always. On one occasion, a young Frenchman came up and asked if he could sit with me. I said yes and we began to talk. He was anxious to know what I was studying, what I thought of Paris, and what my opinion was of America's new president. The Frenchman then made a comment about all of the Americans sitting together, "How do you get to know other people?," he asked. Good question.

Unless there is direct contact between people, there is no communication that brings the real aspects of a culture to the surface. The French people in the cafeteria looked upon the Americans as boisterous and exclusive. There were times when I sat on a metro with another American and would be regarded disdainfully from head to toe. Perhaps they did not necessarily think that we were American. With my fair hair and freckles, I was asked more than once if I was from Ireland, but once I opened my mouth, my accent tended to betray me. American women, with light hair in particular, were frequently harassed by men who would say in a broken accent, "Is it true that blonds have more fun?"

It was always this type of cliché comment that was uttered in provocative tones, like "I want your sex." The source of these lines is obvious from their content: the media; which inevitably portrays cultures in a fashion that highlights only particular aspects of its nature. Madame Moulin was a piano teacher and often had lessons in the salon of our apartment. One of her students was a boy of about sixteen years of age. Apparently he had heard that his teacher had a new exchange student and he was anxious to speak with me and ask me about "America." First, he asked me if I lived in Los Angeles, or near Beverly Hills. I said no and tried to acquaint him with the East Coast and told him I was from Philadelphia — not too far from New York. He nodded in recognition of New York so we made some progress; yet his next question inquired about whether or not I knew Cindy Crawford and Arnold Schwarzenegger — personally. No, I shook my head humbly. This, however, was not validated by him.



He wanted to believe that he had met a glamorous American; thus, when we ended the conversation his final request was for me to send him a postcard from Beverly Hills.

These are the myths that are so prevalent about the American culture. The popular series 90210 hit Europe not long ago, and that is what many Europeans think our high schools are like. They watch reruns of Dallas and Dynasty, adventure shows like *Matt Houston* and *TJ Hooker*, and even family sitcoms such as *The Cosby Show* — all dubbed in French. American films are very popular there, too, except culturally relevant ones such as *Malcolm X* or *A Few Good Men*. They love Denzel Washington and Tom Cruise, but in these contexts their characters are not easily understood.

For Americans, we enjoy the cool *mystique* of the French. We rant and rave about the magic surrounding "The City of Lights." There is no doubt that Paris is beautiful: the monuments, the architecture, and the 30 unique bridges that cross the Seine winding its way through the city dividing it into the *rive droite* and *rive gauche*, the former known for its commerce and culture, the latter for its radical intellectuals and artists. Yet, the United States has cities that boast their beauty as well, such as the winding hills of San Francisco or the white stately buildings of our nation's capital. Removed from these cities, there is a solitude to be found and listened to, as winds blow through the caverns of the Rocky Mountains or the trees of the Appalachian Trail. Outside of Paris, France, is a land of its own with its stretches of patchworked plains and hills of vineyards, rocky cliffs along the Mediterranean, and the wide haunting beaches of Normandy as the gateway in the North.

The aura of "romance in the air" in Paris is not a complete fallacy. Men walk down the street with flowers in their hands, windows of *patisseries* are filled with delectable pastries and breads, and the glamorous displays in the quaint boutiques radiate the fashion of *haute couture*. All of this became very real to me one day as I sat in a café in the *quartier* of Montparnasse and observed outside a photo session of a tall exotic woman, whose long blue and white ensemble coordinated with the blue, white and yellow of the café. Men fussed with her hair and moved her around, all the while using rolls of film. She even changed for round two inside a van parked on the corner. On another occasion, I saw a different sort of photo session at the *Place du Trocadéro*, across from the Eiffel Tower. The woman wore a white fur coat, and one of the gentlemen had on a tweed sportcoat and turtle-neck, with a charcoal grey scarf around his neck. He sat on the wall with the Tower behind him and had a bottle of wine cradled between his legs as a second man snapped some pictures. Ah, Paris.



These were ideal images that I had understood, and that one often chooses to focus on, from a distant knowledge of this place. Once I was immersed in the everyday life, I came to see some of the real life that was not as easy to swallow.

Like any major metropolitan city, Paris has its ugly side of crime and poverty. I encountered countless people sleeping in doorways and sitting on sidewalks with signs posted in front of them asking for money. Women in particular were constantly warned to hold onto their bags and purses carefully. The most frequent form of solicitation occurred on the metro when people went from car to car and pleaded for a few centimes because they were without work and needed to feed their three sick children — sometimes they even brought the children along. I gave some change at first, but time after time, I saw the same people, and gradually became hardened to the scene.

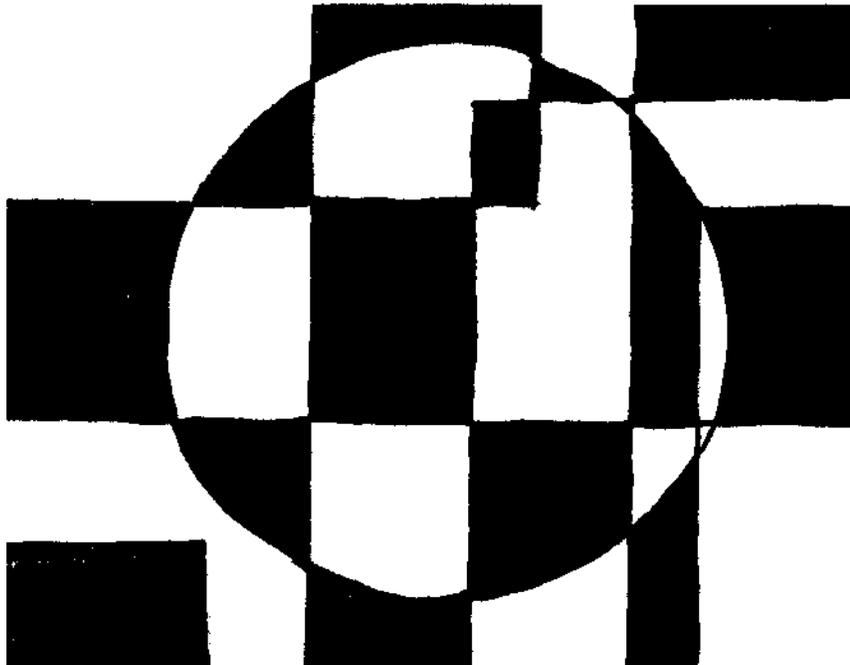
There is a unique saying that goes with the Paris métro which is "*boulot-dodo*." Essentially, this criticizes the blind pattern that Parisians go through on a daily basis: work-metro-sleep. These subways come along every few minutes, or at least it seems that way in the beginning. As I got more into my routine and schedule, I found myself standing around waiting impatiently with the rest of the rush hour traffic for my transport. Worse yet, I joined in running down the steps and to the track just as the doors were cracking shut and tried to make a desperate leap on, instead of waiting two or three minutes for the next one. When the underground railcar pulled up, the masses of people would push their way in tight as sardines in a can and stand with their noses pressed against the windows.

Funny thing about the windows, we travelled underground for the most part, yet people would stare out as the screeching of the speeding cars echoed in a high whistle through the tunnels and the lights blinked on and off. I think the windows served as a nice reflective device for people to look around them, as well, but that was when they seemed curious enough to care. Often people would cast their gaze on the small advertisements that hung over their heads or enthusiastically flip through the day's issue of *Le Figaro* or *Le Monde* — just as long as they cast their eyes anywhere except on the desperate individuals asking for money. The hat was not always passed just as an act of pure charity, but was reciprocated with entertainment in the form of music and song — often a favorite Beatles' song or the mumbled incomprehensible words of Bob Marley or Cat Stevens. People were sometimes very generous. It was always an experience; one that some might say is similar to events they have encountered here in the United States.



Outside the routine of the *boulot-dodo*, however, Parisians enjoy Sundays as a time to spend with their families and go to the country or play golf. They love the cinema and go to theater productions and concerts. They enjoy gathering in the company of friends and often sing songs as a tradition among themselves. These are sights of the French that are not so commonly portrayed here in the States. Such is the case for the many Americans who are impoverished and not as free in opportunity as many Europeans may believe. Americans, for the most part, like the French, have a great sense of values they cherish in their hearts and strive to uphold.

Both places (and every place, for that matter) have myths and realities that surround them. I think we enjoy living by the popularized notions — we don't want to know the truth, because it may take too much effort. Nevertheless, in order to gain any kind of understanding and real tolerance or empathy for a people, it is essential to put our ignorance aside, dismantle the myths, and embrace the other with an open mind, enriching our lives by learning for ourselves about another culture through our own eyes and experience.





Death of the Bus-Yard

Alexis Ariano

It began with a cat call. One of those "fweet-fweow" whistles from one of the nameless skateboarders in the darkened lot. My friend and I slowed our pace down to that of preying cats, waiting for a follow-up. And it came.

"How 'bout them Knicks?" The voice was low and scratchy, like a piece of taut satin pulled slowly over a cactus. We made a sorry reply, but it really didn't matter. It was an invitation and we accepted it. My introduction to the bus yard had happened.

The invitation came at the close of the summer of '89. I had spent the past two weeks cloistered by the "childhood disease" of chicken pox, which afflicted me at the unfortunate age of fifteen. Anxious to breathe the outside air, I spent my first few nights of freedom just walking the streets of my hometown, Lansdowne, Pennsylvania. On these walks I rediscovered all the small joys I missed during my two week entombment. I also found a new aspect of St. Philomena's parking lot. And it was ours.

The lot juts about three feet above the street level. A chain-link fence choked with ivy encloses it on four sides with a gap for the entrance/exit. People-sized holes break the fence in several places, allowing friends to gather with greater ease. Towards the rear right corner stands a dirty red brick wall, part of the old theater next door. It reinforces the fence, which is broken at this point. Against the dirty red brick glares the white graffiti outline of a fist with the middle finger extended. This rude, bold gesture symbolized our rebellion and spirit.

"We" were the skateboarders. Not all of us lived in Lansdowne. Sean and Kirk lived in Havertown, but they were a part of it, too. Terry and Collin had been best friends since the first grade. People who didn't know them thought they were twins, they looked so much alike. They both had denim blue eyes beneath brown bowl haircuts. They called each other "jaunski"



and laughed at the same time. Steve was nickname "Lance" and looked like a chicken. His Adam's apple moved like a small animal in his scrawny throat. Cheeko was a skinhead, but not a Nazi. He taught me to do my first "ollie." "Dirty Phil" wore a black leather jacket in the middle of summer and never washed his hair. Jason had his own plethora of girls, but I never could see why. Kirk was the smallest, but he had the biggest mouth. Ice-man was black and was said to eat little girls. Jim (Woods) had eight earrings in one ear and threw parties whenever his parents went away. Chris (Byrne) wore jeans twice his size and went to college. Drew had a half-pipe in his backyard but came to the bus yard anyway. Another Jim was twenty-nine years old, but he still skated. Lars worked at a plant store, and once smoked cat-nip to see if he would get high. I didn't mind being the only girl. The guys were really into teaching me to skate. But I don't skate anymore.

In 1989, the lot still housed the big yellow school buses which currently weren't on duty. They quietly stayed on their side of the lot, parked in a silent slumber. This left the rest of the lot to us. What a prize! The ground was cracked and riddled with potholes. It poked up in spots like blistered paint. The outrageous condition of the lot never failed to make my father curse after every mass. But the damage endowed the lot with a personality. Even the sandy colored cement was dappled with multi-colored stones unlike the traditional black top or ugly gray cement which are now so common. The entrance sloped down to the street level with edges slightly curved into a gentle crescent. This formed the main attraction to the bus yard, a built-in transition ramp for skating.

August 30, 1989 marked my first night with the skaters. I remember the date well because it was marked with a lunar eclipse. We all watched in curiosity as the moon slowly disappeared. This touch of astral magic characterized my relationship with the skaters. It was a romantic, violent, sensuous period for me, sentenced to a short life from the start. Looking back, it all seems to have lasted for only the briefest of moments. But everything began with that mysterious shadow over the moon. I became first an admirer, then a friend, and even a girlfriend to one of the skaters, Terry. We met every night in the early darkness for the ritual of skating. It was always the same faces and always the same place.

These nights were marked by familiar smells and tastes. The smell of burnt rubber from wheels hung in the air over the greasy tinge of bus fumes. As the night went on, these were overlaid by the sour smell of exertion, like milk curdled in the hot sun. Occasionally, we'd buy cherry tipped cigars at the nearby 7-Eleven and cloud the air with



their incense-like smoke. The cigars tasted normal, but the tips were coated with the slightly soured cherry juice. We discovered to our fascination that the tart flavor would remain on our lips for hours. I also recall the taste of Terry when he kissed me in the darkness by the brick wall. We shared a sweet interlocking of taste which occurs only in the moment of a kiss. He was soft oils and sour sweat and smoke and sugar and cherry Dr. Pepper.

Bus-yard rang with hard noises. The constant clicking of a pair of dog-tags around my neck died beneath the rowdy conversation of nine guys. Guys gossip too. But even their voices quieted under the heavy shattering sound of the punk music they played. The most beautiful sound in the yard, however, was the skating.

I can't explain exactly what the sound of a moving skateboard does to me, or even why it causes a response. It infused me with life just as they were infused with a purpose. It is a truly gorgeous sound to the ears. Skating sounds like stone-filled water, poured on a sheet of glass. It is a solid sound, reverberating with abrupt movements. A sudden stop would screech through the air, like a violin bow drawn hard against a taut string. Each board chimed in, creating a melody played in one chord, having rhythm, but no tune. The lack of tune never bothered us. We were each in our own way out of tune with the world.

Skating at the bus-yard was life. It allowed me to move without leaving tracks. The skaters broke free from confinements of the ground. Skating enabled us to jump into the air and lift the board beneath our feet like magic. It was passion in its purest form. I loved to watch them furrowing paths between the cracks and the holes in the lot. The mechanical movements were so simplistic, yet the boys performed them with the grace and beauty of an intricate dance. I had discovered the window to a world of sheer motion. I thrived on the fresh details I noticed each time, like the expression on a boy's face just before he caught air, or the twist of a foot a mere inch, making a trick work. They skated in and out of the street lights like ghosts, breaking into a stream of light for a sheer breath before the blackness consumed them once again. I saw them only in snapshot images pursued solely by their own shadows.

Then later, we'd all gather in a circle and talk, rocking back and forth on the boards, a motion we understood. It was something we controlled and with which we were familiar. The air filled with the silver balloons of cigarette smoke because we were young and untouchable. We were safe in the parking lot, in our small circle. We knew where



we stood as friends and had no monsters nearby. We were dependent on the lot as we were on each other and on our parents. Just as we lived at home, the lot was a second home.

Finally, the township came to repave the lot. We spoke with the men in suits before the work began. They told us they would not touch the entrance way — that beautiful scooped bowl so perfect for skating. But when we came back the next time, the canary yellow buses were replaced with orange ugly bulldozers and the transition ramp was gone. We each took a piece of the lot, small stones symbolic of a time already gone. We did not stay to watch the repaving. It hurt too much to see the bus-yard go.

The new bus-yard had a colder, harder appearance. Smooth black top with solid lines form orderly parking spaces. The tar, Halloween black, is devoid of any character. Bleached white parking blocks leave their cyanide dust on pants when sat upon. Lines of meters stand like well trained soldiers guarding against the illegalities of parking. The caustic scent of fresh tar and new paint hangs over the yard like an immovable presence. The lot is completely smoothed, curved, embanked and decorated with pretty flowers to create a pleasant scene. The transition ramp is dead. They built a wall and planted pansies as a grave site.

The destruction of the bus-yard marked the end of the "comfortable" period in my life. My circle of friends slowly fell apart. Someone stole our teenage playground and we were forced to grow up. Terry and I broke up. Collin began dating someone and spent all his time with her. Steve stopped skating. Sean and Kirk took up hockey. I moved into my senior year and decided to go away to college. After that, the decisions became even harder, and as I further move into adulthood, I know more demons await me. I realize now that the bus-yard was more than a hang-out, it symbolized a common interest, our friendship, and acted as an adhesive. The new bus-yard stills bears our symbol, the glaring white hand on the wall which represents our attitudes, our history, and our legacy. It reaches out still from the summer of '89, when illusions were everything and the only demon I knew was myself.

*"As long as one soul
remains who can tell the
story, and that by the
recounting of the tale, the
greater forces of love,
mercy, generosity, and
strength are continuously
called into being in the
world, I promise you...it will
be enough."*

-Clarissa Estes



*"What is life? It is the
flash of a firefly in the
night, it is the little
shadow which runs
across the grass and
loses itself in the
sunset."*

-Crowfoot

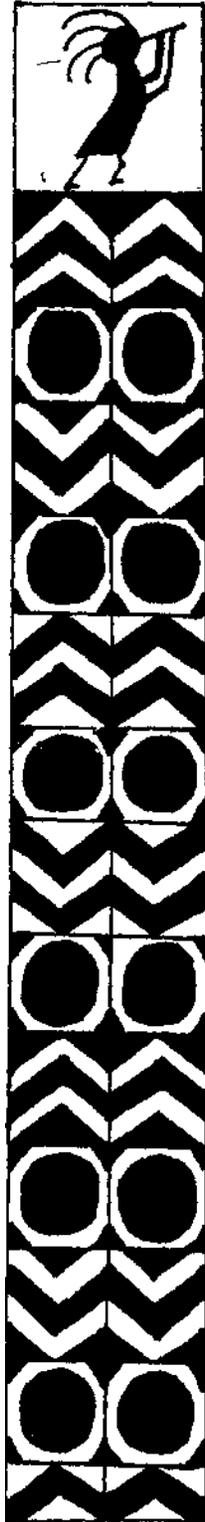


*"The grand essentials
in this life are
something to do,
something to love, and
something to hope
for."*

-Joseph Addison

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart."

-Helen Keller



Jason

Keith Thomas

*Dedicated to Jamie, Kim, Brendon
Jack, Rose, and especially Mary Lou*

I stood there, on the bright, crisp February day, peering across the river into downtown Pittsburgh. As I felt the cold blue steel of my cousin's coffin dig into my forearm, I wondered, why? As I searched for an answer my eyes discreetly settled on a spot across the river where the blast furnaces and the rolling mills had been, back when Pittsburgh was the King of Steel. Through my trials and tribulations in life I've often thought about the people, some of whom were my ancestors, who worked in those mills in the early industrial period. Those were the days of the sweatshops. The people then worked tirelessly all day with their hands and bodies just to make ends meet. They pushed forward, dealing with life directly, because that's just what they did. They had no choice. In a way, their standard, which I aspire to attain, also reminds me of Jason.

Almost four years earlier Jason found out he was terminally ill. Unlike the early industrial workers, he had a choice. He could have given up and stopped living life then, but he didn't. Why? Because he was that kind of person. In the face of losing someone who did something which I consider almost profound, I was not feeling sorrow as I had at other funerals, or even the night before. Instead I found myself struggling with feelings of emptiness and guilt. I had difficulty understanding these feelings, and they left me with a question which I was trying to answer.

Without reaching an answer, I joined the rest of the pallbearers. As we began our solemn ascent up the church steps, I inhaled the cool air swiftly through my nostrils. It felt like I was inhaling streams of ice. As the procession entered into the church I retreated into my mind, struggling to find a reason ... struggling to learn why I needed to help bear him to the final arena of his struggle. Led by Jason's little brother Brendon, we proceeded slowly, encumbered by the narrowness of the



aisle, past the linear waves of pews leading to the altar. Brendon stopped at the front of the church where we let the casket come to rest. I took my place with the rest of the pallbearers on the right side of the church, separated from the others by the casket.

The standard rituals which begin the Catholic mass are not always as helpful in dealing with death as they should be, and my familiarity with them allowed my mind to wander. Although I was only 20, I'd been to my share of funerals. I'd even been a pallbearer a year earlier at my Grandmother's. Funerals should be a time of sorrow, but also a time of finality since they also represent an ending and a time to move on. The guilt, emptiness, and uncertainty I felt instead bothered me.

I surveyed the church, observed its high altars, gold, statues, and organ pipes, and I thought how much this building resembled the era in which it must have been built: Pre-Vatican II, Catholic, industrial America. For me, it was fitting that he be buried in such a setting. My eyes gazed across the altar, slowly setting on Father Vincent. Maybe he could help with my dilemma.

What exactly was the link between Jason, my relationship with him, the example of the early working people of Pittsburg and the feelings I could not understand? What did I really have to wonder or grieve about? Why should I care? We were only second cousins, anyway, right? No, there was more. To everyone Jason was much more.

***"This was not a textbook sermon. Nor should it have been.
People are not supposed to die when they are twenty-two."***

Jason had been the cousin I'd never had. When I was growing up my family vacationed at the beach with my Aunt Jeanne's family. My aunt had two children, making them my first cousins. But they were so much older than I was, roughly the same ages as my sister and brother. During vacations and our many trips to Pittsburgh my brother and sister had instant companions. There was no one for me. I had the choice of being bored with the girls, being an encumbrance to the adults, or being tormented by the older boys. I always wished Aunt Jeanne had another child my age. Wishes like that seldom came true. Then, my aunt moved, and as time passed, my brother and sister went to college and no longer came with us to visit our grandparents. Still, there was no one my own age.

When I was in ninth grade that changed. We were on our Christmas trip to Pittsburgh, and while we were there, we were visited by my mom's cousin Mary Lou. I had met Mary Lou and her family before.



They'd made a brief stop at our house once while trekking through our area, but I really got to know Jason. He was only a year older than I. Finally, I'd met a cousin who was my own age! He and I teamed up to beat our college student/siblings in a game of Trivial Pursuit. We got to know each other a little that night. We were quite different in many ways, but he struck me as a down-to-earth person, and he had a stinging sense of humor.

That night was the beginning of a friendship. During summer and holiday visits to Pittsburgh Jason and I got to know each other better. I can still remember the smell of fresh dew coming from the grass on a cool summer night. It was the night he and I sent the undersized beach ball whizzing above the clothesline, over the heads of his little brother and our other cousin, in an unfair, lopsided game of back-lawn volleyball. Suddenly, we were the older boys enacting the familial right of tormenting the next generation.

If I remember correctly, that was the same summer our Great-Uncle Tom died. He'd had no living immediate family, leaving us to help clean 100 or so years of accumulated junk out of what used to be the family home. We spent days sifting through endless years of telephone bill receipts, odorous clothes, and dusty books. It was laborious work. Through it all I never heard Jason complain once. It wasn't because he liked it. It was because it was the way he went about doing things.

My memories of getting to know Jason were interrupted by the beginning of the sermon. Because Father Vincent, the funeral's celebrant, knew Jason and his family, he did not try to simply console everyone with a reminder that Jason was now in a better place. That is the core of the textbook funeral sermon. This was not a textbook funeral sermon. Nor should it have been. People are not supposed to die when they are twenty-two.

Fr. Vincent was a small middle-aged man. Although he was small and a priest he had a certain hard-nosed look about him. It was the kind of look one would expect on a man who has first-hand knowledge of hardship. So it was fitting that in spite of his size his voice resonated commandingly from the pulpit. He offered a few words to Mary Lou which I thought might have lent her a small measure of sympathy. If those words did, it is significant. How much sympathy can be offered to someone who has lost a son? Fr. Vincent also commented on the objects which had been laid on the casket. The image of Jason the night before at the funeral home came back to me.

The night at the funeral home had been filled with the emotions one



expects when someone dies. Being exhausted from a frivolous idle day at the airport and the effects of a raging fever, I was already on an emotional cliff before arriving there that night. Stepping out of the car amidst the salt-stained pavement, I looked toward the door. The overhang sheltering the entrance was illuminated by intensely bright lights. The glare of the lights on the glass panels in the doorway was intense enough to obscure the view of the inside. However, one figure shone through. I turned my eyes away from the entrance, trying to avoid seeing Jason's sister, Kim.

I was almost over the edge. Pausing, no, stalling, long enough to let my sister take the lead, I followed reluctantly. I knew full well I was not ready for what would come next. With great trepidation I passed through the doorway and into the lobby, taking in the heavy smell of smoke, air, and tears. I barely managed to greet Kim with a few sympathetic words under my breath. I moved further in. Passing through successive chambers and a sea of wet blood-shot eyes, I made my way to the viewing room. I went over the edge. With only a glimpse of Jason in my mind's eye, I became a sobbing mass.

Just as Father Vincent's comments about the image of Jason had taken me back to the night before, the night itself triggered memories of another event. In going back to a night a few years ago, I began to focus on an answer to the question I'd been pondering. My reaction to seeing Jason laid out in the funeral home was quite similar to my reactions to events on a far different night almost four years before.

It was April 13, 1989, the day I had my first kiss and began my first love. That night I was, in a word, elated. Then my dad came hesitatingly into my room, sat down, and said "That was Jack on the phone....Jason has AIDS." In a moment I went from being on top of the world to a sobbing mass. Life plays cruel jokes like that on you sometimes. Sitting there I began to realize that to understand those feelings of guilt and emptiness would require understanding what causes tears at other times.

What does cause tears at times like these? After all, we know death is, perhaps, the only certainty in life. Why do I cry for someone I'd known for only a few years? When my grandmother died there was an acute sense of loss; I cried. I'd known her all of my life, but she was seventy-nine. No one could say it wasn't "her time." Although the sorrow was real, the tears really seemed to mark the difficult end to a long life. She'd been sick for over a year and had no quality of life left. Conversely, I'd only known Jason for just a few years, but he was twenty-two.



Now the tears were accompanied not only with a sense of loss, but also with a sense of wonderment, a sense of rage. Why does someone fight a life long battle with hemophilia and reach his adulthood only to learn he has a fatal disease? Why do these things happen to people I know? Aren't they supposed to happen to some one else? Why does someone who doesn't "sleep around," who isn't gay, who doesn't use drugs get AIDS from a transfusion of contaminated blood? The only answers to these questions are tears. Why? because things like that happen in life. Its a fact; there's no getting around it.

The tears which cascaded so uncontrollably from my eyes on those two nights are caused by more than the anger and rage one feels after a tragedy. There was something deeper about this. The image of Jason lying there in the casket revealed, in a very real way, who Jason was. Normally one sees someone laid out in a suit and with a few flowers and prayer cards put in for good measure. Jason's casket was littered with hundreds of pictures of his youth, pictures of him and his family, pictures of him with his friends, pictures of him on vacation; but there was also more. There was chewing tobacco, a few shot glasses, an empty bottle of Jack Daniels, and the 1993 Swimsuit Edition.

It was a fitting sight. What made Jason so special was that in spite of all the tragedy that befell him, he was never a tragic figure. Realizing this increased the sense of loss and brought me closer to understanding the deeper cause of the tears. Subsequently, it also gave me a part of the answer to why I felt so empty in church that morning.

After I found out Jason had AIDS, our relationship was never quite the same. In my own way, I treated him with "kid gloves," fearing to mention the obvious. I was always a little tentative. Perhaps I was afraid of getting too close. He was accepted into an experimental drug testing program at NIH; that gave him almost four more years of life. Trying to understand that will and spirit which compelled him is almost impossible. Why do people continue on when the odds are against them? What gives them the power to continue on even when there is no hope for survival? When confronted with these questions I cannot help but be reminded of sweatshop workers. They did nothing to deserve their plight. For them it was just a fact. They, like Jason, moved ahead anyway.

Although he encountered physical setbacks, Jason never let them affect his soul or his spirit. Even though he was kept up all night coughing, even though he spent many days each month in the hospital, Jason never let these things stop him from living life. His spirit



and humor were always the same. He completed two years of college and went out drinking with his friends whenever he could. We all struggle to live as fully as possible. Although his body had placed certain limitations on him, Jason, in a very real sense, lived life more fully than most people ever do.

Perhaps the most fundamental part of life is getting a grip on one's problems and then dealing with them. I, like many others, spend too much time going in circles, struggling merely to get a grip on problems, let alone dealing with them. Jason stared life's worst possible problem in the face and moved forward. He even commented once that others in the same situation were going to be beaten because they didn't have a positive attitude. He didn't need to remind us about his.

In light of this I can only say, in our relationship Jason's AIDS affected me more than it did him. My avoidance continued up until his death. With the lingering illness which afflicted my grandmother, whenever the phone rang I expected bad news. With Jason I knew the inevitable, but refused to accept it. He was always going to die the next time he was in the hospital, not this time. I avoided the issue; he dealt with it head on.

Between Father Vincent's sermon and the eulogy my father delivered, I began to piece an answer to the feelings I'd been trying to understand. The simple fact was that in numerous ways, Jason went about living life and embodying the values which I strive to emulate. As someone who has a learning disability, I've had to climb a few hills myself. I know the value of hard work. Through all of my trials and tribulations I sometime romanticized about those same working men of Pittsburgh in the city's industrial heyday. These were people who knew what it was like to labor hard during the day so that when they came home at night they truly knew what a hard day's work was. They were people who persevered through terrible and unfortunate conditions. I often use their example as personal motivation. I try to believe that for me, like them, that's just the way things are.

"We all struggle to live as fully as possible."

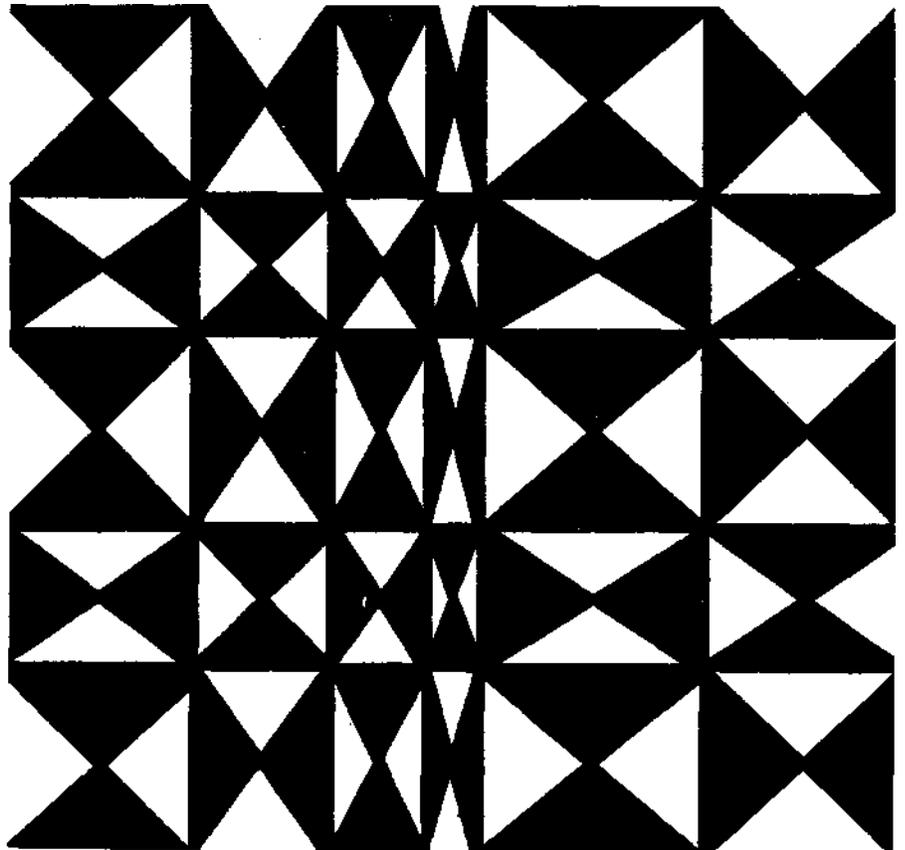
What I romanticized about, Jason lived. He was what perseverance is all about. I can remember seeing him during some of his sicker moments, before he started coming to NIH. I can remember him sitting there at our kitchen table, looking haggard, weak, frazzled, and yes, a little green. I remember mumbling something which made an allusion to how tough wrestling was, and then thinking, those words must sound awfully hollow to him. He was the one who should have

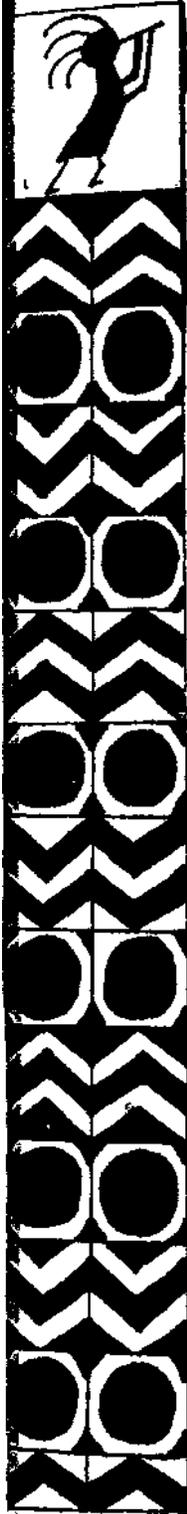


been talking about toughness. Jason set his mind early on that AIDS was not going to beat him. He decided to persevere. Inside, I pride myself on my ability to persevere, imagining that I can do it as well as those early industrial workers. But when it comes to perseverance, next to Jason, I am no match.

I slowly came to realize these things during the eulogy, even though it took a few minutes. As I did, the sorrow, which had been missing before, arrived. A terrible loss had indeed been suffered. Someone special had been lost long before "his time." However tragic his death I realized there was something to be gained from his life.

I knew a little about the purpose of the tears. It was not just because someone had been taken from us so young. It was because someone who had lived life so fully, someone who had been so much of what we all hope to be, was stopped. No, that's not quite what happened. I finally understood the feelings I'd been trying to resolve. The disease might have overcome Jason's body, but it never, overcame his spirit, his soul, his essence. It never will.





Excerpts from
Progressing the Female Language:
Annie Dillard's Use of the Abstraction
Ladder

Celeste Hoyt

"The interesting writer, the informative speaker, the accurate thinker, and the sane individual, operate on all levels of the abstraction ladder moving from higher to lower, from lower to higher—with minds as lithe and deft and beautiful as monkeys in a tree."

S.I. Hayakawa

Sr. Maureen, my second grade teacher at Holy Family, decided one rainy afternoon during our Purple Puzzle Tree religion lecture to ask how we thought we got to heaven. One classmate replied, "By tow-truck". Of course, it was required of our infallible teacher to correct her, going into chapter and verse on how it is not as simple as picking up the telephone and calling for a pickup. There are codes of conduct, prerequisites set by God, that we must attend to in order to get to our final resting place. I found myself, however, twirling and twisting my hair, braiding it tight like corn rows, wondering if Sister had hair underneath her veil, what was the perfume that drifted and wafted from her everytime she walked by.

Unfortunately, and unknowingly, in the midst of my inattentiveness, Sr. Maureen had ceased her discussion. It seemed she was very distracted by my disinterestedness. She reprimanded me, telling me such behavior as this is precisely why so much sin in the world exists. Continuing to make an example of me, she pointed out that if I were to continue at this rate, I would never get to heaven. But while she ranted and raved, I kept imagining the tow-truck honking outside, waiting to pick me up.

In situations like this, I want to shrink and slip in through the ear canal, dodging the sound waves and slipping through each tunnel until I get to the brain to inspect its machinery. The nuts and bolts and wheels crank slowly, its rust hindering a smooth transition.



The chapters and verse possessing the mind runs rampant, echoing over and over like a yodel reflected and refracted in the crisp autumn air of a cascading valley, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult I put an end to my childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face," according to St. Paul.

But hidden behind the bends and turns, another voice, greatly stifled, tries to speak. It whistles across the timeless vacuum in a whisper, reminding the aged extension of itself, "Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, will never enter it". When the ability of an adult to speak to a child is hindered by the mind struggling between the adult rationalization and an innocent acceptance of the world, an adult needs to call back all levels of abstraction within their imagination and find the images that are able to comfort and cradle the child who stands at the mercy of the miracles of life.

Children seem to have an indelible effect on adults. They break down the walls of complex, abstract thinking, chewing it up and spitting it out as a ball of gibberish. So, in order to relate with a child, an adult must rediscover that whispering voice, that innocent blank slate where trees are just trees, the moon is a ball of cheese, and heaven is in the cotton-balled clouds where the tow-truck has a reserved parking space.

When any developed function endures such a change for an extended duration, it's hard to decipher the world in which one lives. The shifting back and forth between the levels of thought becomes an inconceivably vexing battle in the communication struggle. I'd like to think it resembles flipping back and forth between the sung and the instrumental versions of the same record. When this shift occurs—when the kids grow up and leave their parents behind—adults surprisingly discover they miss the rediscovered happiness for a simple image so energized with life, and almost regret having to put it back on the shelves of the imagination.

It's a strange thing when you discover the child in you has gone into hiding. It is heart wrenching almost to think about it. In our society, we take pride in being able to perpetually show the "kid in us", as if we're always in touch with ourselves—always in touch with just ourselves as the center of the universe, separated from restrictions of adulthood and its responsibilities. Some believe they are like oil in water, and everyone else is just a secondary ingredient in the recipe. However, by the age of ten, when Mom and Dad have made "NO" the operative word of choice, this universe dissolves. The "Dawn" of



the dish cleaners of life begins to foam and make its suds, streaking the face in the plate. A bigger world of choice and responsibilities surfaces like sweat on skin, drenching all of you.

This all leads to the infatuation with scrubbing our identities clean, becoming what others want us to be, and what "others" we would like to become. Children are taught, even encouraged, to stab at every chance to play mom, firefighter, nurse. I find it extremely ironic, almost laughable, that when we have really become those players, we always want to go back to "the good ol' days", reliving childhood as if it were a dream and we were really born at the age of twelve, beginning life at the hellish experience of puberty. Basically, we don't pay enough attention to what we were as children, the directors of our films, rather than being the screen writers who fill in unknown scenarios with a plot created by someone else.

And yet, when that kid does disappear and you finally realize it, I know that at least for myself, I feel sticky, dirty perhaps, like a child hand feeding itself pancakes drowned in syrup but missing the mouth. Our inner-mirror dims, and faces are no longer sharp or clarified reflections. The mirror only reflect grays, shadows of shadows, until it mutates into a television screen of static. Why does the adult world allow their prodigies to fall from grace? Is it out of revenge to make all others suffer the same fate? Is it part of some plan of an unseen observer, so he or she can later shock us with the real meaning of life? Perhaps the real question is whether we believe in reincarnation, not for ourselves, but for the world of images, for the imagination which is the reincarnation of sight and perception. And if we do believe in the "reincarnation," how will we know that the promise has been fulfilled, and the images will fall from the skies revealing the path to enlightenment?

It seems that poets have thrived on this "need to know" the world. Poets have this uncanny sixth sense of how to arrange words, inevitably constructing a fantastic world with rhythm and music. I once read some poems and letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins. He had a deep need for being part of the poetic community, and was clear about what he wanted his poems to say and do for the world at large. And yet, he was an incredibly isolated man, limited by his religious obligations as a Jesuit. It has been said that he was and still is a misunderstood poet, wandering between modernity and the Victorian era. Basically, no one understood his eccentric experiments with language and meter. In one letter to R.W. Dixon he writes, "the life must be conveyed into the work and be displayed there, not suggested as having been in the artist's mind." But how does one do this? How did he know or any poet, for that matter, know whether his work



conveyed "life" as they defined it. It becomes a case of simultaneously being the omniscient editor and creator—an occupation every aspiring writer can only dream to achieve. But in a letter to Alexander Bailie, Hopkins explains how inspirational poetry comes to be. He writes that such works require, "great, abnormal in fact, mental acuteness," and "seem generated by a stress and action of the brain..."

When I was a child looking out that car window, bulldozers and gravel mounds never were a part of my tapestry stitching together the swatches of an imagined existence and the reality through which I was moving. I remember the sunlight weaving through and in between cars, reflecting off them as though they were fish swimming upstream, caught by the ray illuminating their svelte motions and iridescent skin. But now, as an adult, the light is only an obstacle which bounces off steel that is unable to absorb the warmth; it blurs everything ahead of me. Just thinking about it evokes pangs of apprehension.

I once read the legend of Lao Tsu, a Chinese philosopher before Confucius' time, who went off into the desert to die alone, despairing over the ways of mankind. But it was on leaving that he was convinced by a gatekeeper to record lessons for future generations so they would not suffer from the same mistakes. He recorded eighty-one chapters of how to live virtuously, prescribing a holistic approach of letting nature take its due course and gaining overwhelming sense of serenity and contentment, in spite of it. At that moment, I wished that someone in this day and age would embark on such a challenge, as it became impossible for me to avert my attention from the cold structures ripping and ravaging the earth to the water trickling over the rocks in the river under the highway, to the sunlight sifting through the trees, highlighting each branch and each leaf falling lightly to the ground behind the chain-link fence.

A faint twinkle of hope arrived when I was introduced to Annie Dillard through excerpts from her two collections of essays, Teaching a Stone to Talk and Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. This creek and most of the streams she runs into, traipse about the world, kneading grace with miraculously natural violence, filled with muted and sharp shadows, energy and complacency, all of which is painful but also invigorating for the reader-observer.

However, prior to finding the collections, I started to read another of Dillard's books, The Living. This was not a positive experience. I didn't understand the language, nor did I relate to the storyline. I was unable to follow my narrator. I could not be the child chasing the shadow of a parent, around this Northwestern settlement. It describes the rustic world which I always dreamed of knowing when



I was a child, and still wish to discover, however it never coagulated into familiar faces, or rolling acres of farms, or horse trodden forest paths, even after one-hundred and fifty pages. In comparison, violence was present but I believed that the essential ingredient of grace had been forgotten. However, I found myself following her, like a child chasing butterflies, to all the exploration ruins in "An Expedition to the Pole". After reading "Living Like Weasels", I felt an urge to take up this challenge. As I began to read through Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, I became her eyes, "Seeing" and knowing intimately the flowing stream, the breathing animals, the growing and shrinking colors of the sky hovering over us. And yet it was all experienced by improvised watching.

Watching and waiting has profound effects on people. It gets the mind reeling with expectation, exasperation and encumbered with scrupulousness. Dillard's vision pans across the landscape, catching every texture and stitch of its pattern. Much like Hopkins, Dillard portrays the cosmos with poetical touch, but her devotion to the spiritual experience of nature helps to provide a range of vivid sensations, a teleological view for the infinitesimal occurrences that most of humanity does not hook into or embrace with an uncensored and indiscriminate eye. And much like Lao Tsu, she surrenders to the cosmos' power by going out into a desert of color patches and letting them rub and tangle and construe themselves while still able to survive happily as a passive element, the one being acted upon.

But I have discovered there is an odd negativity connected to the passive intellectual. No one is allowed to just sit back and let things happen. A person is accused and found guilty, sequestered to solitary social confinement if others find out they like to feel the grass in between their toes or to hear the leaves shuffling in the wind. In this world of modernity, the rule of thumb is "the one who has the most toys wins." Rather than stepping on leaves, we step on each other, trying to move up the social ladder as quickly as possible in this dog-eat-dog world. To accept anything less than the top of the line is failure. Passivity goes against modern philosophy of progress. But for centuries it is the social class of women who have been deemed the passive element in society.

The Feminist Movement made this clear to all of us. But there were others before and after this movement who were happy and quite successful by living according to a philosophy of letting things take their course. Lao Tsu and Hopkins and now Dillard, although they are all from ages with different values and separate centuries, all seem to link into this growing chain of thought. However, there is a difference. Lao Tsu and Hopkins are like the narrator of The Living



because I cannot follow them. There is a schism within the congregation. The difference is in the message. Hopkins and Lao Tsu have a male message. It's like a girl trying to walk in her mother's high heel shoes—she stumbles more than she steps.

Virginia Woolf once said "The beauty of the world, which is soon to perish, has two edges: one of laughter and one of anguish, cutting the heart asunder." She, too, like the other literary scientists, repeats this pattern of calling for passivity. There is also a recurring haunting pattern in the fact that these writers were all isolated in some sense of the word, hibernating in warmer thoughts about the world, from the greater society. But it is a different passivity and a different isolation.

Women writers were victims of isolation, not men; these men chose to be alone. Lao Tsu and Hopkins wrote for "man" kind not humankind. It is only in the past century that women began to discover that they needed a different message with a different tone. However, the message is multi-faceted. Both Virginia Woolf, a forerunner of female writers, Annie Dillard and other women writers expose a pain as they acknowledge the laughter and anguish, the violence and grace but perhaps it is exactly this ability, ironically, which allows them to be at peace with themselves and comforted by the two worlds while the rest of existence is left wandering in ambiguity.

For this reason, I think I have discovered their secret to surviving. Like children, these female writers keep away from adults, especially when they write. They play in a world of their own. Tobias Wolfe says that a kid "doesn't want to be reached...secrecy is very important to children. It is one of the only powers they can wield over grownups." There is a hidden and secret message within the naturalness, especially in the writings of Anne Dillard. And where this message of pointing out naturalness was for men, I discover a pretension of an overly constructed world of imagination. Dillard's language blossoms with a playful wit full of wisdom only discovered and accepted by those like herself.

Recently, I have found myself becoming more secretive. I secluded myself on the beach this summer, a hermit crab building a shell made of impressions within pages of a journal. I believe this secrecy—this incredible sickness—all began on a drive to New Hampshire. No one else really knew how lost and frantic I was or what was going through my head. I had separated myself from the grown-up world and allowed my imagination to run away with itself. It seems, now, that whenever I am traveling on the road, thoughts sequester my rationale and replace it with animated insights. The question is whether or not these insights have stumbled into its rerecorded moments—the imagination reincarnate.



"The state of mind only a poet can put onto paper" This quote keeps popping into my head. Hopkins said that this state of mind is created by stress or action in the brain. But I believe that he said this state of mind was created—stricken with power—after a dinner had disagreed with him. However, for a modern poet, it is not so simple, especially for a poet of the female persuasion. The stress is definitely there as Virginia Woolf noted with her story about Shakespeare's sister. And yet times have progressed.

The stress is not quite the same, but it is still painfully strong. I find that female writers can no longer force onto paper a canvas of words and expect one brushstroke of imagination to be a work of art. It requires a seclusion of the mind, separate from daily distractions. It requires going out alone into the world, repeatedly letting experience hit, taking into consideration each leaf, bug, road sign and animal as they are in the landscape—in their natural habitat, in natural form. I believe this is where passivity has gotten its bad reputation.

Woolf writes at one point a very important statement: "For it seems to show that to be passive is to be active; those also serve who remain outside. By making absence felt their presence becomes desirable." Perhaps the further we go into natural settings, the more people will need to know what we think about, how the world can be seen from a different perspective, all of which will allow them to be comforted by this world that is wrapped in violence and grace. And after generations and generations of women going outside so many times, maybe an image from someone else's previous experience fits well with the image I had last week and the two brushstrokes, put together, somehow make better sense of the world—like fitting together a 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle, it slowly takes form with lifetimes of effort.

If we consider the life of a female writer, it is an account of a history unknown to many. The social, economic and psychological elements of a male world do not fit into hers. And although there are similar thoughts, it is the language within the message that differs. Here is where the chord strikes. I was told the female mind works in ways unimaginable to men. But this doesn't mean either mind is more superior than the other. It just means that how it gets to the finish line is different.

But Woolf tells us that women have not been heard; basically they've been silenced. So how can a mind reeling with great images put it on paper cohesively and still make it sensible if it has been suppressed for so long?

How can their art operate on all levels of abstraction, hold the audience's attention and keep it interesting?



There is a song I heard while I was trying to write this piece. It was late at night, the only time it is quiet in my dorm room—which is as unusual as the Pope being Jewish. I had put on the stereo to get relaxed but suddenly the song bounced through the airwaves. But not the entire song, just snippets, as if it were a secret decoded message from that unknown character—my mysterious d.j—turning up the volume at specific times. The words came at me as if cannonballing down through the sky. It had echoes of Woolf's voice, but it was a new rendition of an earlier soundtrack:

*"A vision's just a vision if it's only in your head,
If no one gets to hear it, it's as good as dead,
It has to come to life!"*

Coming to life is just what Dillard and so many other female writers are now doing. Dillard progresses the female language, allowing the reader to see, hear and feel life—the natural specimens living and growing right in our literary world of abstractions. She, for us, is reconstructing a world beginning with the train of thought once successful for writers communicating with the male world. If Hopkins and Lao Tsu could do it in this fashion, so can she but, with a couple of alterations. Rather than just pointing out the living things, she wants us to live with these creatures, and rebuild the world which we are slowly pulling apart at the seams, like a fraying blanket.

Bit by bit female writers are putting it together, piece by piece. Dillard has helped us come to realize it is the only way to make a world of art—every moment makes a contribution, every little detail plays the part. However, this is the change in message. We cannot just appreciate nature for what it is, but we must live with that message every day. It is seeing with open eyes a world that is not stationary but always shifting and evolving. Having just the vision's no solution, everything depends on execution.

And now I am learning to put my world together, seeing reflections in roadside ponds, looking under the trees and being excited at the brightness of a rose. I let my vision blur into patches of color, and allow my imagination to find the sparks, the connections between myself, female writers, and male and female audiences. The art of making art is changing. It's learning to trust intuition rather than remaining chained to tradition. Women writers, despite their long absence and hard struggle to be accepted in the literary mainstream, are sane speakers and thinkers who have extended what was once only a scale of language into a ladder of communication.

*"For me, there are
only two legitimate
uses for art: the relief
of pain and the
worship of beauty."*

*-Louise Bourgeois
American Sculptor*

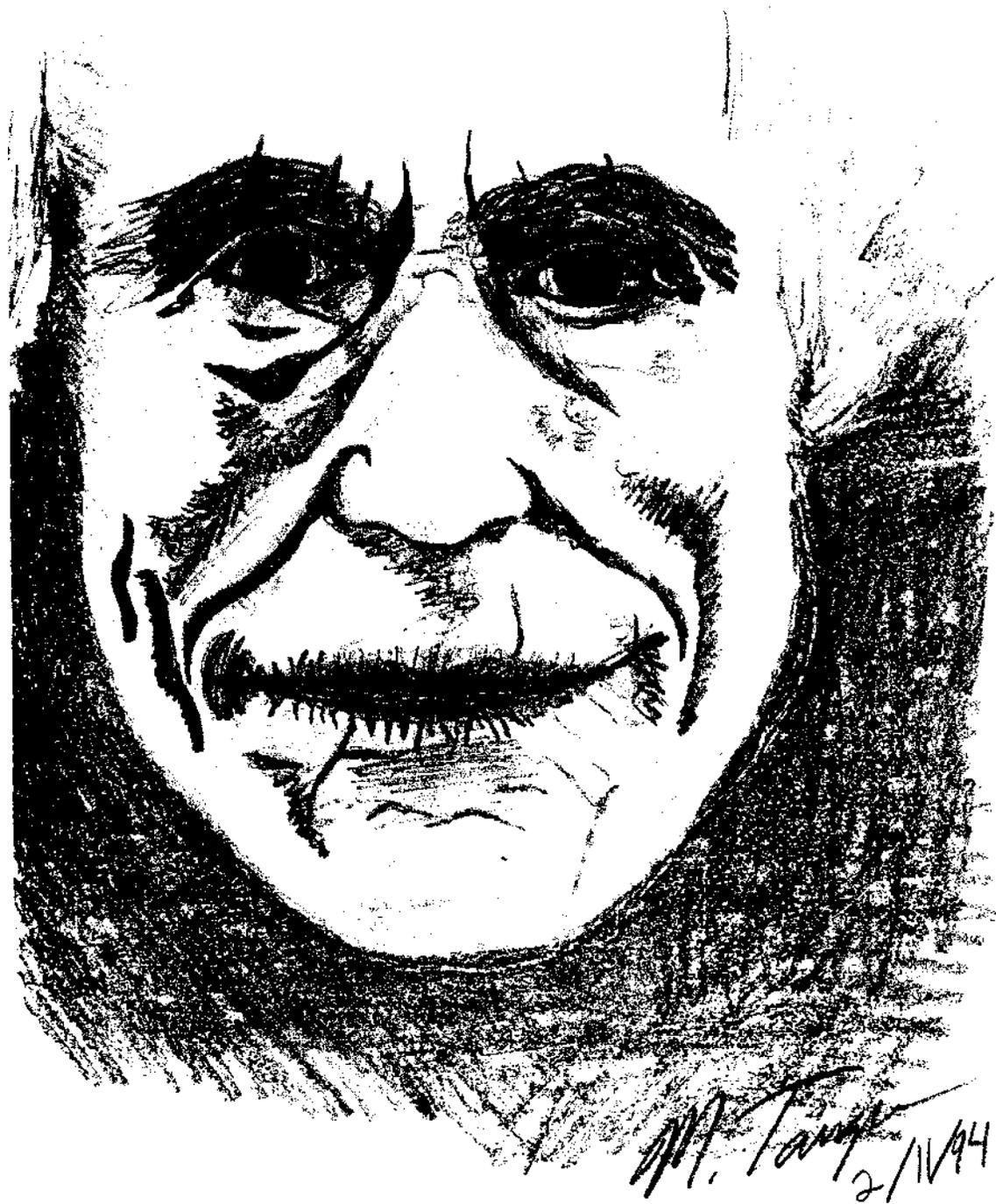
*"A dreamer lives for
an eternity."*

-Anonymous

*"Anonymous was a
woman."*

-Virginia Woolf





*"I have made myself
what I am."*

-Tecumseh, 1810

The Pusillanimous Cat

Ramon Guevara

Cat. Stout-hearted, proud, magnificent, mighty, hungry, ferocious lion! Or quiet, impassioned, slinky, sleepy, soft little feline. Those are the extremities of the wide range of cats. But imagine a brawny, mangy, carnal lion, proudest of all cats. Such is my friend. No—such was my friend.

What is he now? No longer loud, no longer fierce. A bit more humble, but still arrogant. Traces of his old self pop up now and then, but he surely has changed. Nay, TRANSFORMED! The wild cat of anger, lust, and self centeredness no longer lashes out at the world. He has shrunk to a playful, cute, cuddly kitten. "Meow, meow," says the pussy.

So what was he before? Just imagine a jungle cat, perhaps a panther, unlike other jungle cats—black, dark, dark with anger! and solitary, eager to pounce on any one of the puny prey surrounding him. Jungle cat. Wild jungle cat—UGH! It pains me to remember. I cannot describe how he was. But, what he is now is a kitty cat, a house cat.

I am ashamed. Deep down in my gut the chagrin flies around like gay little butterflies in a flowery field. If I could cut it out...But how? Should I tell him not to be himself? Should I ruin his relationship? NO. I cannot. He still is my friend, and perhaps he was meant to be like this. Perhaps this is who he truly is, or this is the part of him that must be expressed since it never was or could have been before. But my not communicating my feelings to him may make me a pusillanimous cat. ARRR! HATE! This Must Not Be So. I cannot decide to tell him. If I do, I will bind to his love a burdensome self-consciousness that will restrain the expression of his affections. He will no longer feel the freedom to let his words fly from his heart. But, if I remain silent, he will remain a love sap and I must endure this lovey-dovey, foodely-fool,poo-poo.

"Hi, baby!" He pauses. "Hey , sweetie. (Smooch, smooch)." He kisses into the phone receiver. In an exhausted whisper he says, "O my gorgeous." Pause. Sympathetically (or pathetically), he says, "Aw, okay. Aww, baby. Aww, poor baby!" He kisses into the phone an average of three times a minute. Every so often he says, "Ah, B-A-Y-B-E-E," or "O my love!" How



sickening! Yet I remain as Montaigne. First, I am indecisive, and therefore, I write. Second, I am afflicted.

But I must tell him. He is too busy licking himself—too caught up in the sensation of being feminine—to notice how soggy he looks. When I first met him he aspired to be like Thor. He had a heavy hook on an immense amalgamation of keys on a key chain made of three key chains. He called this junk hanging on the side of his pants Mjolner, after the hammer of Thor.

He used to joke with me about killing all the people he hated in his class (just about everyone) with his mighty key chain. Whenever we went to a restaurant or ordered pizza, one of us would say, "Come, come. Let us feast." And when we reached satiation, we would pull the imaginary rope of an imaginary bell that would summon forth the Valkyries to lift us off of our seats and carry us to Valhalla where we would bed them. But no more Mjolner, no more feasting, and no more wenching. He has supposedly found his One, and Thor has become Mr. Sensitive.

I do not blame him for softening up. He is happier and I sometimes joke with him that he has become a smiling mo-fo. But he has gone too far. He has allowed himself to be emasculated. I know that many men have fallen in such a way and I know how love turns a man soft. But I have survived it. How come my friend has not? He was one of the proudest of his manhood. There is some subliminal philosophy that exists in men's minds: to catch a pussy, you must be a pussy.

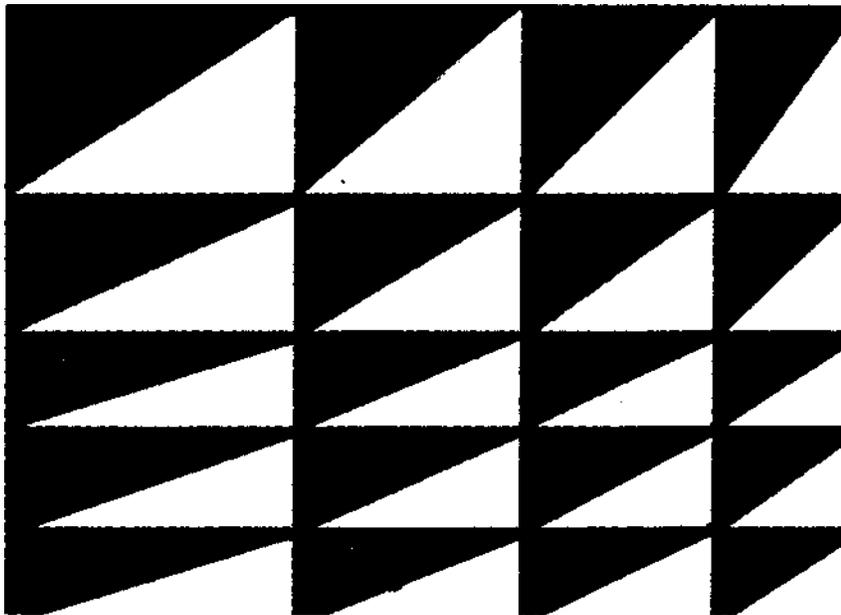
Now, women do not leave because what I have to say is for you, too. What I have to say is for our entire human race. We are endangered of becoming a single sex species. Not physically, but spiritually. Manhood, the rough, tough sturdiness that aches for conquest and discovery, that yearns for adventure and exploration, that stands to endure and persist without the disheartening revelation of pain and displeasure, that casts away timidity and asserts itself, is being given up. Concerning the philosophy just mentioned, there is a certain stopping point that must be heeded. Sure, men should express their emotions and expose their gentle side. But they must not get carried away. When femininity becomes their regular mode during interaction with their female loves, men cease to be men. I waited for my friend to turn back, but after he secured his relationship with his girlfriend, he continued with his "pusillanimity."

It is not the fault of women. If there is one thing man cannot defy, it is attraction to a woman. If there is one thing that can bring a man to his knees, if there is one thing that has total power over him, it is



Woman. But, as I said, it is not her fault. Man emasculates himself. I have met women possessing more manhood than many men I know and this is not because these women are brutes. In fact, they are the most gracious ladies. But they endure and persist without complaint, and they assert themselves at opportune times to achieve their ambitions. My worry is that men will forget how to be men as I see more and more men with less manhood. Men may have to look at women as role models for maleness. Obviously, this can never work out since a woman is not a man.

So, women, demand that your man owns enough manhood to support himself, you, and any possible sons. If you prefer the feminine type, you might as well get involved with another woman, who has more femininity than any male could hope to have, unless, of course, he's a homosexual. Men, always take an occasional look in the mirror. Measure your manhood. If you over-indulge your feminine side, you will be outcast from your sex and marked "pussy." So beware! because we will fuck you. If I have offended anyone, so be it. But, as I said before, I am afflicted and I seek to cure.





Mother's Milk

John Neary

One of our first experiences in this world is the taste of milk from our mother's breast. A sweet intoxicant, accompanied by her gentle stroking, a sense of physical and emotional safety - it is our first intense experience of pleasure. This feeling will survive with us through our lives. It is the blessing of our mother's milk, or so goes the wives' tale, filling us, like the child's rhyme, with sugar and spice and everything nice and all the ingredients of an inherently happy life. And yet, regardless of how we are weaned, we all return to her later. Driven suspiciously, jealously back to our mothers, on the brink of that age when we are too old for such affections (and too young for others).

I don't think of myself so much as a crack psychologist as a scientist, observing and struggling for explanations. But even more like an alchemist, with a penchant for collecting a few leading thoughts, snippets of conversation and trivia, and distorting their base qualities into viable substance. Myths are absorbing like that.

I am drawn back to the subject of my mother now with the acute awareness of how little I know about her. I am inclined to deny it, at first. It is startling. And in the end I am left with the difficult task of explaining my blindness.

She is not an introvert. Nor is she a secretive person; there is no resemblance to any of the characters I have read about in Arthur Conan Doyle or Agatha Christie. They are all of a deliberate complexity that we call mysterious. Mary Ann is puzzling, but her mystery is accidental like having read her monologue out of context. And there is the problem of drawing a comparison to any fictional figure: they lack the quality of being temporal, while she has known little of permanence. There has always been a jump to make, from one lifestyle to another, from one age to the next. Together we have coexisted in a fast moving, transient household where the front door clicks on its hinges like a turnstile. I would create her instead, as the only informed character of a dramatic irony, standing always in the background with the keys in her pocket, while I toil laboriously to break the lock.



Her eyes are a cool and golden green, like the undersides of sycamore leaves at dusk. Beautiful, but deceptively two-dimensional like the sky behind them, so that even when the stars appear we forget their depth and the distance between them and ourselves. It was said that a mythic Gaia poured milk from her breasts and they became the galaxies. From this perspective the beauty of the stars is not their aesthetic quality, but in knowing that they are alive with energy, with a future of their own and a past as mysterious as you'll allow.

It seems funny to look at the pictures of my mother when she was my age. The black and white prints hold the light and shadow on her skin with a fine china reticence. Her youthfulness radiates more spirit than flesh. Even when she married at the age of twenty-four she still appeared adolescent - like a mini-bosom trapped in eternal puberty.

But driving in her convertible Corvair, fancifully musing over horses, artists and The Fourth of July at the shore, she could have played any one of the gamine roles in the haute couture movies of the 50s and 60s. Even at fifty she tools around with that tom-boy spunk that makes me imagine she was one like Holly Golightly in "Breakfast at Tiffany's." But she was still just Mary Ann Ayers, and not Audrey Hepburn.

Her father had been a successful artist. He was a big fan of jazz, too - they had practically grown up together, he used to say. Together, the whole world seems possible. He had begun in the South, moving Northeast, as had long become the popular course; and found work in the industrial cities: Chicago, New York, Philadelphia. That's when he finally turned to commercial advertising. Artistic drive led him through the Twenties, economics taught him a lesson in the Thirties, and the combination delivered him to a man's success in a man's world: a wife, two children and a house on the Main Line. The 1940s were a quixotic period of history like this, a time when one could forgive America for anything.

When he retired from his position in the art-world, he left behind only the mule work. The creative spirit remained like a seed, and he set about ambitiously planting a garden. Harry had a knack for productivity. When he set his hands into the earth, countless blossoms rose out of it. From the back porch his flowers took on a thousand shades of light and degree of color, blending together like they were threads of a tapestry, so that if you plucked even one all the rest might unravel in turn.



There is something peculiar about art that has always interested me.

The artist, no matter what his model, can produce either a long study or a short study. That is, a given object takes no particular amount of time to paint. Instead, the artist takes the time (or doesn't take it) at his pleasure. And similarly, no objects possess a fixed or intrinsic amount of interest. Instead, things are as long as you have the attention to give them - as long as you search for them, there will always be new and interesting features in any object.

I originally thought I would be an artist. That is, until a few years ago. Somewhere along the line the milk soured; it had been diluted over time, more dream than ambition. With Mary Ann it had been different. She left college for art school; packed her portfolio under her arm, hopped a train and waltzed through the city proud and confident. It was serious business then. She sold her first piece by the time she was twenty-one, my age now. The taste was sweet.

The day before my parents' twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, in the spring before I entered college, I found five old calendars, dusty and arid hidden in the basement. They ran from 1960-1964. In February 1960 my parents met for the first time. In December 1964 they were engaged. In a few boxes of the monthly grids Mary Ann had written tiny messages of posterity: Jack called today; Went to the movies with Jack; Stayed in with Jack. Their simplicity and arrangement gave each month the ordered appearance of a game board. And from month to month the blank and marked blocks moved positions - properly playful and elusive - so that if you flipped all the pages quickly past your thumb it was like watching the transcription to a checkers match.

A marriage and six kids later, my mother has long since sacrificed the creative drive for mule work. It is all folly now. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if she had pursued a career. But she had been born too early to reap the autonomy of a sexual revolution, and was the busy mother of four children before the women's movement gained popularity. Her course had been set and she was clear of both crags without even the temptation of hearing the sirens sing.

Today there are an increasing number of women choosing careers, and they have achieved both success and notoriety. The age of which she had been accustomed may soon be snuffed out like a candle. She will be the final wisp that rises from the wick. And she will ride out its heat without choice.



Her favorite story is of how she fooled the old, learned critic. She was displaying a canvas painted in the drip-drop splatter style of Jackson Pollock, and he complimented her attention to form to create content, and the rhythm of colors to create mood, and what a successful statement that it made on the mind of a young artist. The truth was, however, she had merely scraped a weeks worth of residue from her pallet and flung it on the canvas, with as much care as if it were a trash can or sink. From the artist's perspective, this was not art at all.

"The flight of time's arrow is a spiral."

Looking back now, I'd have to credit her with an unwitting stroke of genius. Even according to the movement of abstract expressionist, such as Pollock, their work is defined as "against interpretation." Since there is no content, there can be no interpretation. It is simply paint on canvas; colors arranged to evoke an aesthetic appreciation, but not to have meaning. Thus, as audience, appreciator, or critic, we are left helpless.

Take me for example. I have learned the lingo, but the words are my own, not hers. This is my illusion. History displaces us. But time does not give us all 20/20 vision. The flight of time's arrow is a spiral. It refers to those periods when the spiral shrinks tighter in its coils and the pace of experience accelerates well beyond the fastest sprints of aging and maturity. And when this happens experience twists in the pit of our stomach and gathers strength like a cork screw. We can forge on and only hope to make sense of it later.

The art work of the ancient Greek and Romans display a peculiar fascination with motherhood much like some of our modern psychology. The Venus figures, with their buxom frames, symbolize the female life force. The earth itself was considered a goddess: round and fertile, mother to crops and humans.

My mother gardens now, too, as if the hobby were coded in the genes like the physical resemblance, the years spent in art school, and mortality. Some mornings she is already at work before I wake; kneeling and breathing life into handfuls of dirt. I imagine her flowers will spring like a painting. Like a Georges Seurat: a countless number of individuals, creating rhythm, movement, depth, and finally, by accident more than design, beauty. Perhaps after a long life of producing works to secede you, the quality of ephemera takes precedence over fecundity.

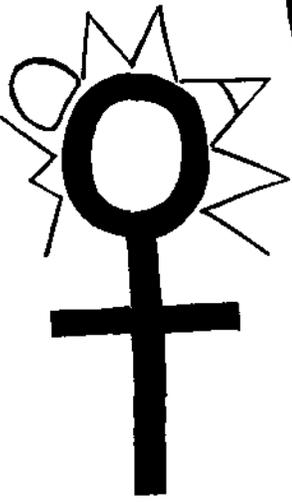
*"All things are
connected like the
blood that unites us.
We did not weave the
web of life, we are
merely a strand in it.
Whatever we do to the
web, we do to
ourselves."*

-Chief Seattle



*"I have plowed and
planted and gathered
into barns no man
could head me! And
ain't I a woman? I
could work as much
and eat as much as a
man-when I could
get it- and hear the
lash as well! I have
borne thirteen children
and seen most all sold
into slavery, and when
I cried out with my
mother's grief, none
but Jesus heard me!
And ain't I a woman?"*

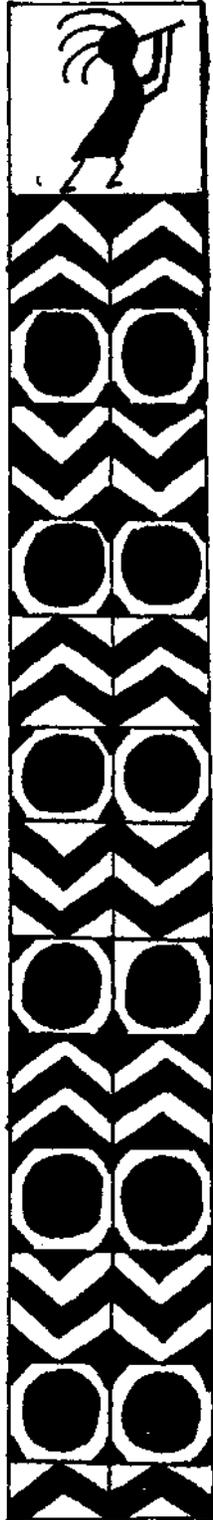
*-Sojourner Truth 1851,
Ohio*



"I believe that there will ultimately be a clash between the oppressed and those who do the oppressing. I believe that there will be a clash between those who want freedom, justice, and equality for everyone and those who want to continue the system of exploitation. I believe that there will be that kind of clash, but I don't think it will be based on the color of the skin."

*"When I give food to
the poor, they call me
a saint. When I ask
why the poor have no
food, they call me a
communist."*

-Dom Helder Camara



In the Sandbox

Karen Dwyer

I am not a black man.

I am not an oriental man.

I am not a hispanic man.

I am not a white man.

I am not a woman.

I am not a man.

I am a person. I am an ethereal combination of spirit and personality. I am the capacity to reason combined with the passion of a free soul. I am one who has loved and hated, laughed and cried, dreamed, and failed. I am no different from the person who reads this. We are one in the family of homo sapiens.

I have felt the same pain and laughed at the same shortcomings in myself. I aspire to success and ache in the wake of failure. I have been called ugly, dumb, wrong, and evil. I cry at movies and television shows and at the McDonald's commercials. I cry when justice fails and wrong prevails. I am you and you are me, and we are intrinsically connected.

My world is one caught in a horrible limbo. I am trapped by the ambition of the eighties and chased by the social conscience of the nineties. I am corporate lawyer and tree-hugger at once. I am educated sophisticate and granola-loving hippie. I am without identity, as is our entire generation, and that is where our new-found problems stem, for each of us is striving for individual identity and ignoring our relationship.

For the first time in the history of modern civilization, we are on the threshold of a revolution, for prejudice is finally no longer a bad word. We can finally recognize that we are each a minority in some way, shape, or form, and not be ashamed of it. Until we do so, this current stalemate of misunderstanding will pervade. We have the capacity to change years of misunderstanding and pain, but we need to unite and concentrate on the common ground of progress, instead of the icon of cultural identity.



I will never understand or fully empathize with the prejudice and injustice in America. I wish I did know the pain intimately, just so I could truly know. I want to know how much it hurts to have people turn away and walk faster on a street because of my color. I want to know the humiliation of having people lock their car doors when I walk by because I am different. I want to know the anger and frustration of being underestimated in school because I am poor. I want to know the anger that burns still when one reads history books about the blatant exploitation of men and women during the American slave trade. I can sympathize with all of these situations. I can feel anger at my government, past and present, and its lack of initiative to change what is obviously wrong. I can feel ashamed at times to be part of a society so apathetic to such problems. I sympathize to the point where my eyes tear in frustration and my heart aches in burden, but I can never truly empathize, for I will never be in the same situation.

I want to tell a story now about myself as a sheltered child raised in a predominately white area, naive, yet accepting. I walk down the street on my way to the local playground where I meet my friends at the jungle gym. We laugh and shout and play, as all small children are entitled to do, when we are approached by two black children of the same height and presumably the same age as us.

One punches me, not hard enough to draw blood, barely enough to bruise my small shoulder, but hard enough to reveal the bitterness that only eight short years of rearing has incurred. The tears that I shed are of rage and disappointment. My mother coos, "They are children, they meant no harm. Kids just do mean things sometimes." But my mom doesn't know the laughter and taunts that the children shouted as I ran from the playground, scared, embarrassed, and angry. She doesn't know the sting of rejection that I felt as this child hit me, simply because I was white.

"I challenge you to be the one person who does not feel angry towards those that hate you."

More frightening is the acknowledgement that maybe the boy did know what it was like to be rejected on the basis of his skin color. After my tears had ceased and my hiccuping had been repressed by the healing factor of Kool-Aid, I asked my mom what made people hate. I don't recall her answer. I remember silence, the awkward kind that pervades even the cacophony of the most hectic households. My mother, in all of her infinite wisdom, could offer no answer, and I knew instantly I had touched on a problem beyond that of a random kid hitting me on the playground.



But like all good mothers, she did not dwell on the incident; she sent me off to play again. Like all good children, I obeyed and played the rest of my childhood ceremoniously, reflecting on this incident seldomly. For somewhere, somehow, my anger ceased and my sympathy conquered. I felt bad for the little boy who had been hurt so badly by someone that he hated me for it and I vowed never to hate like that in my life. This was my very first experience with black people. I offer it only as further evidence that we need to stop hitting, kicking, and killing people because of the color of their skin.

Thus, I offer a challenge to each and every person that may read this, for within these pages are years of accumulated material about the nature of prejudice. I challenge you to be the one person that does not feel angry toward those who hate you. I challenge you not to hit, flinch, or scream angry phrases. I challenge you not to kill with the anger that stirs the soul. The human soul has so much passion, but if we keep acting on it, we are going to kill each other, and we will have nothing left.

Here is my plea for humanity. Black pride can no longer be black pride, for no one group can isolate itself from another in such a distinct manner. The Irish will have to surrender their tempers. The Italians must sacrifice their tradition. The Jews must end their homogeneity. The Catholics must learn tolerance. And all of us must learn patience.

"So we'll keep our heroes, but we must choose them wisely."

Martin Luther King Jr. preached love, hope, patience, and integration. He stood as an embodiment of unadulterated peace. Malcolm X, often considered King's antithesis, stood for aggressive action, often in the form of self-defense through violence if necessary. Though none of these men is entirely right, the need for such men is more than obvious. King's followers loved him for his pure commitment to the movement for desegregation, and his opponents respected him for his equanimity. People loved Malcolm X for his promise of radical, immediate change, while his rivals admired him for his charismatic ability to convince even the most stringent of his adversaries that change was indeed needed. When people are weak or weary or oppressed, they need someone, something in which to put their faith. We need such men and women now, and I'd rather see a man with the capacity to reason have this faith than some idolatric god. So we'll keep our heroes, but we must choose them wisely.

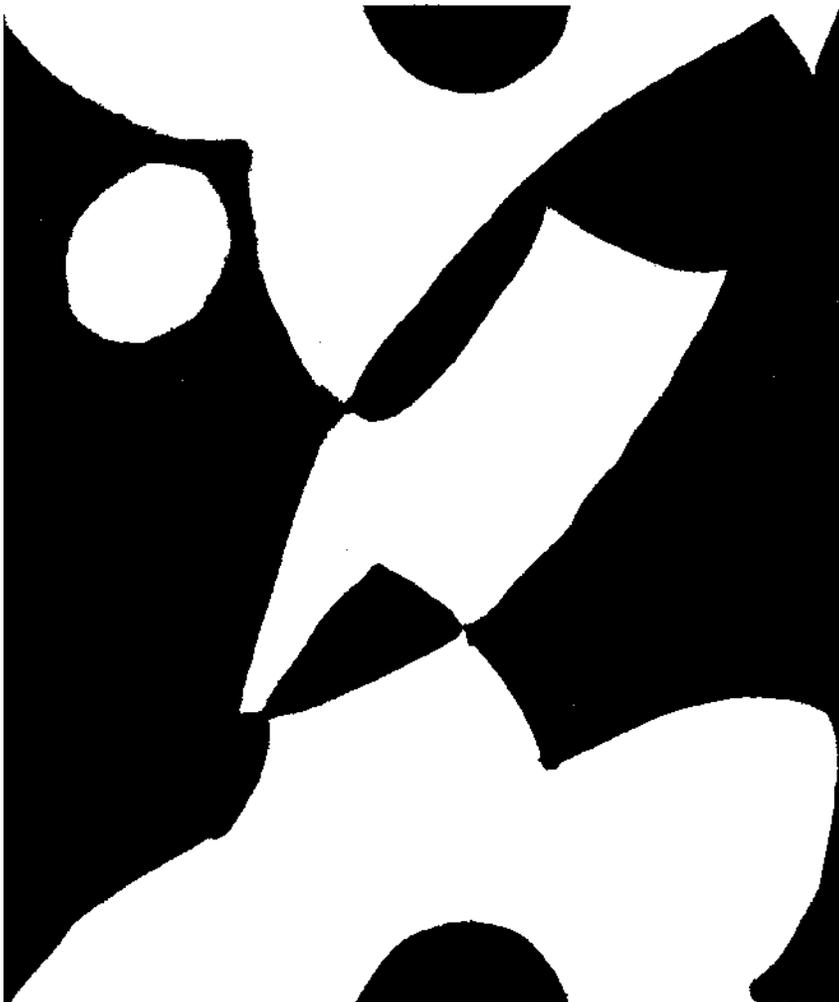
Langston Hughes once wrote, "What happens to a dream deferred/ does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?/ or does it explode?" I hope it

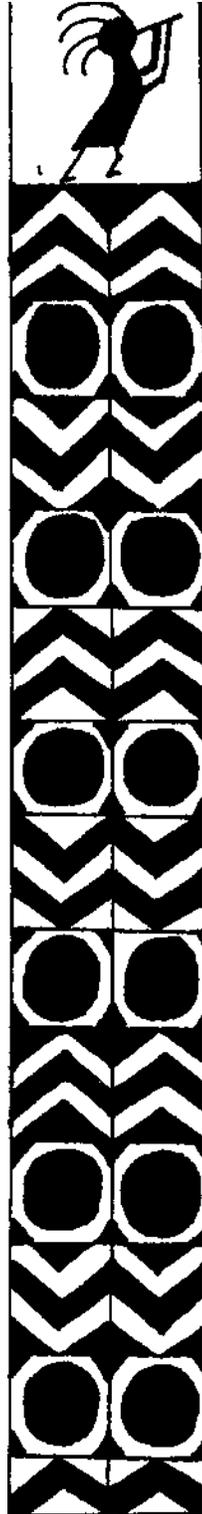


explodes, for after a hundred years of neglect on this continent, we are ready to confront this and move as the united people we are. I challenge you to surrender your cherished identity so that we can all create a new one together.

Down with white pride. Down with black pride. Down with the pride of the Irish, the Italian, and the German. Down with Catholic pride and Jewish pride. Down with Asian pride and Indian pride. Down with feminist pride and homosexual pride. Down with pride. Down with being better than everyone else or even being right. Stand up for humanity. It's about time, after centuries of mistakes, that we are people first.

I challenge you to die for this, but do not kill for this. We are one. We must learn to play together.





An Everyday Occurrence

Lavinia "Missy" Jackson

Understanding racism is like livin' out a play. It's not just that we're all on stage and are players. Some roles are not chosen, but assigned. There is no 'Big Brother' watching over us.

Black woman, Black man. Still defined by the labels updated and inapplicable to the full experience of pigmentation and difference. Still mocked, beaten, enslaved, and taken for granted. Still giving selflessly to a cause that will ultimately destroy his/her own people. Still embodying the American Dream with Martin's vision and Malcom's solutions. Still mistrusting each other. Can't truly see beyond the basic substances of personhood. Can't get anywhere without running into the same word, although white-washed with political correctness, that every generation of black people has fought to destroy - the meaning of racism.

Racism is not just an explicator, but a definition of the foundation of our society. No one needs to question anything but the implications. What does it mean to be its victim or its unknown perpetrator? Ask yourself how you define it, then see how realistic that definition becomes or how inept. Racism is prejudice plus power. It is the ability to grant universal opportunity to a slight few. It is the migration to the suburbs under false pretenses. It is letting "others" have natural rights and the means to survive but not to compete. It is favoritism to the extent. It is wrong.

Understanding racism goes beyond delving into the libraries in search of every black historical figure. It supersedes recognizing the bias of every historian. It extends further than any one's upbringing and subsequent environment. Understanding any concept implies that the user can out the term in context of its true meaning or application. Most of us can only do this in terms of extremes. Racism is so sublime, so indoctrinated within us that our intellect can only place Neo-Nazi's as an example. We don't need to participate in an occult to be racist. Just participating in this society makes everyone susceptible, especially "white" people.

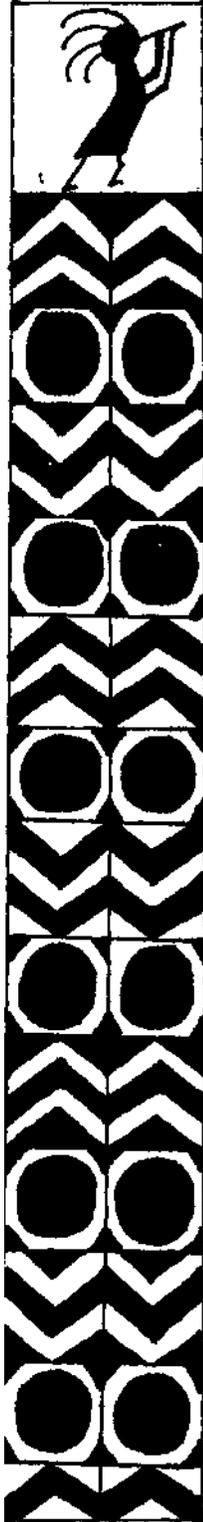


"Minorities," or people of color, contrary to popular belief, can not be racists because they did not create the system, nor was it created for them. Although we do have our model Japanese or African-American person, no matter how hard they try, they can never be white. No amount of education can erase ethnicity, in spite of our trend toward a cultureless creature. Time magazine proved that, even with morphing a representative from every ethnic group together, the individual is still a person of color. To be specific, she looks like a fair-skinned African-American. She wasn't. She was just a computer generation.

European-Americans are faced with the challenge of accepting their status as minorities on this planet. If any people hold power and that power is threatened, they will logically defend themselves. Multiculturalism is a defense mechanism, a smoke screen or a comfort zone. Euro-Americans have cleverly disguised their fears with the development of programs and departments. Adhering saves their own skins. Not all are insincere, but there's only so much one can learn. Racism is an experience. It can not be duplicated.

It is amazing to hear the simulations between an experience of racism and that of sexism, ageism, or any other "ism". "Isms" classify behavioral patterns into which most of us fit. Most of us however are unwilling to label ourselves according to these categories. Any "ism" can be an "ism" anywhere, but our stories and their interpretations can never be the same. Thus being a victim of an "ism" has different degrees of detriment. The largest gap between racism and all the other "isms" falls at the time of our first experiences. Most African-Americans can cite a racist experience by the age of ten. In spite of our efforts to let our children be children and colors, many African-American parents now know that our society is a far cry from being blind to skin color.

Racism has divided a people. It has divided a country. It has caused us to lose the prosperity of business in the form of integration. It has turned us against one another, figuring that hiring practices are still based on being light skinned. It has increased our insanity, driving us to crack and 9mm automatic weapons as sought after pleasures. It has destroyed our self-esteem by expecting years of deprivation to be made up in a generation. It is killing us at our own hands. It has even made us accountable for a system which fails us.



On Race: A Moderate White

Owen C. Thomas : WR 113 Prize Winner

I talk almost strictly in terms of black and white, for this is where I see the most segregation, the most anxiety, the most violence.

I have set my mind upon this subject, let it run through little anecdotes and experiences, and this is what I have. I wince all the time. The subject of race is one with which I am uncomfortable. Ideologically, I would like to say, "What is Race?" and dismiss the subject, the questions, but the subject and the questions arise out of the rarity which bring race to the forefront of our psyche.

"I follow the path of today's lightly-conscious segregation."

Oh, ideologically I would claim to be sound, protected from the ignorance and fear that are at the root of racism. But I have fallen victim to the racism of the smug and the educated, the liberal and the cynical. I follow the path of today's lightly-conscious segregation; my fear of urban crime is a thinly disguised fear of the reckless, criminal black man, and my actions within my immediate environment are dictated by this fear. I have set boundaries for myself, and I feel choked by those restrictions which I have accepted on the basis of race and would have rejected elsewhere.

I am embarrassed by words with racial meanings or connotations. I consciously try to keep my use of the words black and race to a minimum, not to mention slang or anachronisms such as nigger, honkey, colored, cracker, or porchmonkey. This embarrassment is symptomatic of my high class white racism.

It is not that I do not make broad associations on the basis of race, but rather that I am terribly fearful of those associations which I make being known. I can well imagine when the standards of etiquette and political correctness were different and a group of white men would talk about "them niggers" who "don't give a shit about anything." Today, talk



might reach the issue of crime circuitously (via a newspaper clipping), and conclusions might be reached about that unsavory element in the city (niggers) which terrorizes the remainder of the population who have their feet rooted in solid values.

I do concede that I believe that attitudes have changed somewhat, on a percentage basis perhaps. I don't believe that many people any longer hold fast to the notion that race is the essential factor in determining who a person is; I do believe, however, that many, in attempting to explain certain social circumstances, in the end rely upon race as the undermining factor in an otherwise equitable society. If it is not evident in segregation, then it is evident unconsciously in the tense faces of white people walking or even driving through predominantly black neighborhoods.

Race is the undermining factor because of those radical values and behaviors understood to be exhibited by a race; these values and behaviors are consciously attributed to "culture" rather than "nature"; however, the deep association being made is that these behaviors (stealing, shouting, playing basketball, eating fried chicken) are indicative of the race of the actors, rather than their "urban street culture" background.

"It is easy to slip into unconsciousness."

Race is no longer the essential factor because that same differentiation, though often semantic, allows for a certain amount of racial mobility, that mobility which comes with being culturally removed from, though physically of, a particular race. And it is a percentage change because those individuals who have seeped through the cracks of our predominantly white structure of managers, teachers, and brokers, who have forced a new division to occur in our understanding of race, are an absurd minority of a minority, a comfortable number. These people are black by coincidence, not by choice or nature. It could be said that they are barely black. In description they will be referred to as "ethnic"; white people will sometimes flock to them for friendship, holding them up as an example of their own enlightenment. However, when deviance occurs, as it does with all people, that deviance, whether it is momentary incompetence or apparent dishonesty, will be labeled as a statistically probable heartbreak.

"My perspectives illustrate the growth of a racist, and the growth of racism within me."

It is easy to slip into unconsciousness. There are enough cozy little integrated neighborhoods and work places to mask larger attitudes of anxiety and frustration, but I need only to look at a single inci-



dent to evidence the pervasive quality of racism. An incident can quickly become a story, and a story carries with it a point, either implied or stated. The implications of this story, this incident, have changed with my growth, my growth being the variable which alters the respective meanings, make incidents into stories, and shrinks stories back to their incidental roots. My perspectives illustrate the growth of a racist, and the growth of racism within me.

I came to Baltimore when I was four, and the first time I took an MTA bus was the first time that I saw a black person. As more entered the bus (there was only one on board when I hopped on), I began counting them and soon found them too numerable to count. That was probably the last day for a long time that I made a conscious note of race, and for most of my childhood "them" referred to bad guys in the tradition of TV westerns.

I imitated my friend Nicky once in saying the word nigger, and when my mother heard me say it, she gave me the worst scolding that I believe I had ever received up to that point. It was, in reality, a lesson in etiquette, for I had an understanding of the word as a bad word, and it was in no way more powerful to me than other profanity. In retrospect, I have given the people of my early childhood racial identities. An unfortunate result of this identification is a memory in which almost all of the names of black girls who either attended or befriended me through the sixth grade no longer exist.

My family didn't have access to a car until I was around nine years old, and even then a great proportion of our travelling was done via the bus. The bus is full of black people. This is a fact. I take the bus to the present day, and I have noticed that, for the most part, white people don't take the bus. If they do take the bus, they tend not to sit in the back, and they group together.

On one occasion when I was very young and taking the bus with my parents, a couple was having sex. On the bus, a couple was having sex. Right behind me, in the middle of the aisle, (or so I envisioned; it could have happened in a seat), a couple on the bus was having sex. It was hot and there were a million people on the bus, and none of them were white but us, and people in the back of the bus were having sex. Men were cheering them on, they sounded a whole lot like my parents, or so it seemed to a five-year-old who'd never seen but only heard.

What is important about this event is how it has changed in meaning over the years. At the time, I was just a little disappointed that I hadn't turned around and looked. I must have run the scene through my head a hundred times. I wanted to see; it excited me. In truth, it was not yet a story, but still an incident, and I would no



more willingly tell of it than I would tell of peeping at a naked neighbor or at a text of skin diseases.

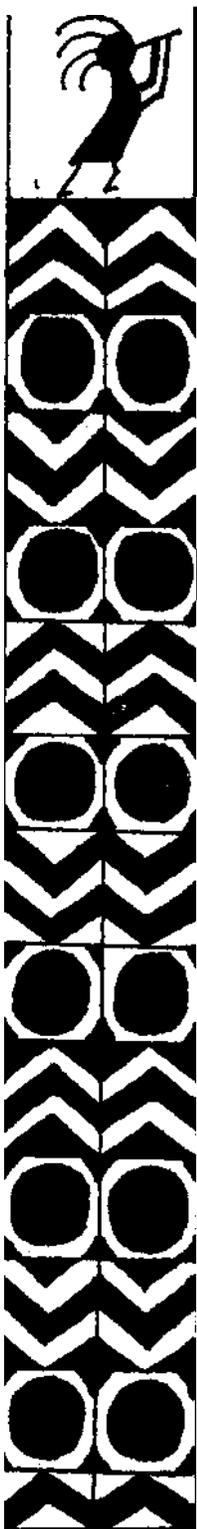
Later, as I became more detached from the incident, it became a humorous anecdote, a story told to affirm already solid understandings. The implication was understood among my friends that, "Man, that would never happen with white people." It brought me a certain pride; I had witnessed firsthand the undesirable, I was an adventurer, a speaker who need not look to the almanac or newspaper to look for his stories or facts.

The story then lost power. It shrank and became a memorized newspaper clipping to be mentioned with nonchalance in the context of a discussion on evils. "Oh this stuff happens, I've seen it, I've read about it, I've been told..." all the same. The sex necessarily became a rape, or at least the action of coke addicts. It was part of that huge body of evidence of an inferior code of ethics. It no longer made me an adventurer, but rather a random and appropriate witness, one who had the education and values to recognize the appalling.

Now, in evaluating the incident, and what it became, I am once again embarrassed, not by the blushing little boy inside of me who returns to the first-person present and still wants to turn around and see, but of the detached, secure adult who deems certain behavior within the context of that incident despicable and yet finds acceptable that same behavior in situations which he is slow to compare. I think of bachelor parties, pornography, and regretted sex in the context of a mutually understood and obtained state of intoxication. I see the parallels, but I am dead in the middle of the latter circumstances. In them, I am comfortable. I long for my youth, when I could feel comfortable on that bus, or wrestling with other boys behind a backstop, our skin dirtied by sand, not thinking about the incongruence of one of us being white.

I have allowed my racism to grow. I have surrounded myself with token evidence of an egalitarian society, and eliminated-prospective confrontation by hiding in alcoves of tokenism and *faux* integration which have allowed me to remain a liberal without becoming a radical or activist. I live in the embarrassment that perhaps all of my stories have become white stories.

*Oooooohh baby, I feel that fear.
I can't look many in the eye.
I can't call a man nigger and laugh,
it is not absurdist humor.
I can't hardly say the word,
I am so stilted and correct.
I unfortunately know where I belong.
That is sad.*



Fairytales: Witches in my Life

Helenia Walker: WM 280 Prize Winner

Helenia + Anthony, A, E, I, O, U, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Two A's, two E's, one I, one O, and no U's, 33445.

Wonderful, the numbers predict that we are a perfect match for one another, how scientific! Exactly how 34455 can determine the likelihood of two people having a successful relationship is amazing.

To actually be playing such a childish game is beyond me, but I keep on playing, using every possible combination of each and every one of our names to try to get another "perfect match." I don't literally believe that Anthony and I will be together until our clothes smell like sterilized moth balls. It's just a stupid number game that invades my thoughts whenever there is a prospective boyfriend added to my fan club.

It's instinctive, almost addictive. Remember middle school, your assigned, uneven legged, fake-me-out, wooden desk that reeked with petrified chewing gum; taking careful notes in scribble-scrabble, and playing the perfect couple vowel-number game with every male that acknowledged your existence, just to see if he would be "the one." I remember a lot of things that happened in middle school and high school, but many of my earlier childhood years have either been deleted or saved in a far away subdirectory in my memory processor.

Though many of my memories seem to have permeated the bone structure protecting my thoughts, my second grade year will never be forgotten. Playing kickball and dodgeball, which are now both practically extinct, jumping double-dutch, wearing bell-bottomed pants, which have now been removed from the endangered species list, tight-pressed ponytails, and hard-bottomed Doctor Scholl's was my lifeline. Getting my first spelling book and math book marked my career as an "A" student.

There was my middle-aged, Tom Selleck look-alike gym teacher; the forever smiling, well-mannered



cafeteria ladies with cob webs on their heads; my always overly cheerful music teacher; the old, dusty custodians who reminded me of my grandfather in his garnished, white, work-of-art-in-itself, painter's jumper; and the long, curve-nailed, high-pitched shriek, gold tooth trimmed, "Save the Sixties," costume ball dressing, high beaked, notorious pie making, pilot killer on America's Most Wanted list, so-called second grade teacher of mine, Mrs. Barron.

All day, every day, with no apparent need for carbon dioxide, she gossiped with Mrs. Yancy, wrote words on the board like "mathematics," and practiced her "command voice," at a constant. She had an attitude that could make Mother Theresa herself have a nervous breakdown.

One day, when my patience meter was almost out of time and my pockets were void of a dime, her annoying spoof of a voice bellowed out my name incessantly, "Helenia, stop talking," but no words were even attempting to break through the obdurate walls of my jaws. As a child, forming words had never been my forte, to hear me say more than three words in a sentence was a treat; that day she was in for a treat.

I responded to her outlandish accusation and questioned her authenticity as a psychic. She was almost too shocked to shrill back. At that solitary moment in time, pride, anger, courage, and self-assurance flushed through my body faster than a tablespoon of cod liver oil. Anger had not been a new concept to me, but expressing it was. She was now on trial, and it was my job as the prosecutor to present the evidence. She was a hypocritical, absent-minded witch, who needed to get some business and to tell her so was my pleasure! The concrete bubbles had finally burst, freedom had finally touched my soul! I had found my voice.

Minus Mrs. Barron, elementary school wasn't all bad, it definitely had it's perks. When spring rolled around, my poor heart could barely wait for "Field Day," the Hillcrest Heights Elementary School Outdoor Olympics. A few days a year for six years, I played in this wonderful fantasy of competition and loved it.

Crossing the finish line first, hearing the roar of the crowd, and feeling the ribbon of courage and sweat against my breast was most invigorating. Hurdling the earth, moon, and sun with just three kick-jump-step movements, clearing the great bar to No Man's Land and landing on a cushion of skill, determination, and a million memories of crossed fingers. Feeling the thump and bump, treble and bass, rope and foot momentum grace the earth with its harmonious sym-



phony of sound brought up within me a sense of awe and oneness with all mankind (as with all elementary school aged girls who played jump rope on the tar at recess time).

To cast away all of my fears, insecurities and broken promises into a barren field of emptiness and leave them at the marker line just plain-out felt good. Hitting, kicking, throwing, and dodging my problems on the court, grass or concrete instead of at home was my pleasure. Once a year I was Jackie Joyner Kersee, Florence Griffith Joyner, Michael Jordan, Reggie Jackson, and Double-Dutch Dodging Pentathlon Queen all rolled into one.

Once a year I was just as important as everyone else, until fifth grade. Heidi Hickman was the Wicked Witch of the East, had long, black hair, sky-high cheek bones, a high yellow complexion, small, squint eyes, and a high knotted hook beak like Mrs. Barron's (all she needed was a black cat and a straw broom). Kaprina, the Wicked Witch of the West, was a different story. She had an innocent, rat-like face. Her complexion was golden brown, her eyes were wide and brown, and her dimples were as bottomless as a spring water well, but don't let her pristine looks fool you. Together, they had ghastly brews and spells that could deflate even the most egotistical, confident and determined immortal souls. Even Mars would not be able to handle those two, they would give war a good name.

Those brutal witches teased and taunted me from "miserable" morning bell to "thank God" time to go home bell. They called me black as night, and names like black girl, charcoal, oreo, tar baby, jig-a-boo, Buckwheat, and African booty-scratcher. They even spoke to me in Oogli-Boogli, a fictional African tongue, and told me to go back to Africa.

It was Field Day 1986. The sun was hot, the concrete was worn, the crowd was thick, and my rump was ready to feel the red mat under the high jump bar cry in its defeat. Mental, physical and emotional readiness was all in sync, until I was rudely interrupted by a chorus of wailing witches. They began pointing and laughing at me and calling me all kinds of names. My heart began to beat like a set of drums at a Sheila E. concert, the skin on my face began to turn a deep shade of violet, my shoulders began sneaking up to meet my ears, and my pupils looked for a place to hide, but to no avail.

My intuition turned my body around, just to identify my already known accusers. They were standing behind me, side by side like a two man lynch mob, armed with words more fearful than kryptonite. All of a sudden, a voice came out of nowhere. It said for them to



leave me alone. Of course they didn't take it seriously, but then it happened again, "I said, leave me alone!" It was me! My mouth had said those words, and I had meant every utterance. Well, that was all it took for the wicked witch of the east to back off. Boom! The house has now fallen, and her feet are stuck to the concrete in their eternal resting place. What a sucker! The wicked witch of the west was not so easily scared off. She, known for her notorious stonings (amongst other things), walks towards me.

It's high noon. We step up to each other, close enough to feel the hair on each other's noses. She snarls at me. My forehead begins to moisten, my bowels become weak, and my heart is playing leap frog with my rib cage. It is the last hand in the most important poker game of my life. Should I fold and keep my face? Should I call her and see if she's bluffing? There is a serious moment of silence and everything seems to be moving in slow motion. Somehow my lips force out a stern, "So what are you gonna do?"

She said nothing. She just stood there with a mean look on her face for some time. Then her counterpart came behind her, took her arm, and pulled her away, and she started talking trash again. I had called her. She had bluffed. Splash! She melted like I desperately wanted; like the bottom of a bag of Werther's Original in my mouth after being on a "no sweets" diet for six months. Peace on earth, merry Christmas, no more hunger, money grows on trees! One small step for the victims of the "Gruesome Twosome." One massive vault for me. Victory at last!

I never thought that my mind and my lips would ever make peace enough to put words together and speak. My mom could tell you stories about me not talking, laughing, or listening to much of anything that anyone said (sometimes I'm still like that). Whenever there is a family dinner gathering and talk of old times, she always tells stories about how I would fall asleep at the dinner table and end up with my face in my plate. I was a dreamer. I never had a lot of friends as a child. I was different and knew it. My thoughts were alone, my eyes observed, and my mind contemplated.

My eyes had seen how miscommunication could ruin lives, how it was ruining my family life. I had seen how people could contaminate other people and I didn't want to be poisoned. I watched a lot of television, especially soap operas. After Luke and Laura broke up because Scotty told Laura the wrong story, I stopped watching *General Hospital*. My mother taught me to speak only when spoken to. and not when spoken of because it only causes problems and



never ended arguments. People like Scotty talk too much about things they know nothing about and it irks the hell out of me. Some people today still don't get it. They don't know that ignorance and a mouth don't go together.

Words are mightier than people reason. The less that is said, the more that is meant, the more that is heard. Witches try to take away your self-esteem, confidence, dignity, and voice. They don't tempt you, they test you and your "self." They use their power of intimidation to ruin you and take over your thoughts. They want to get into your mind and take over. They want you to fear them. They want control.

Witches take your voice and use it to strengthen theirs and the less that you say, the more power you bestow upon them. Witches are powerless without a voice, your voice. Their mighty spells and potions have no effect on a strong-willed individual. They prey on the meek and weak, whatever can enhance their power. The vultures of the human species are always on the prowl for prey. I was once easy prey, but not anymore. I have a voice, and I use it fiercely and fearlessly.

Even though these torturous people are part of my past, I am glad to have met them. Mrs. Barron ended up sending me to the principal's office. He called my mother. She came to school, laid Mrs. Barron out for yelling at and lying on her innocent and almost mute child, took me home and gave me a pat on the back for standing up for myself. Mrs. Barron learned to keep her distance after that. Heidi and Kaprina despised me, but left me alone. Every once in a while, when I'm in my hometown, I'll see one of them. They either look at me or ignore me. Sometimes they even speak to me. Everyone has had or will have witches in their life. Mine gave me inner strength and courage.

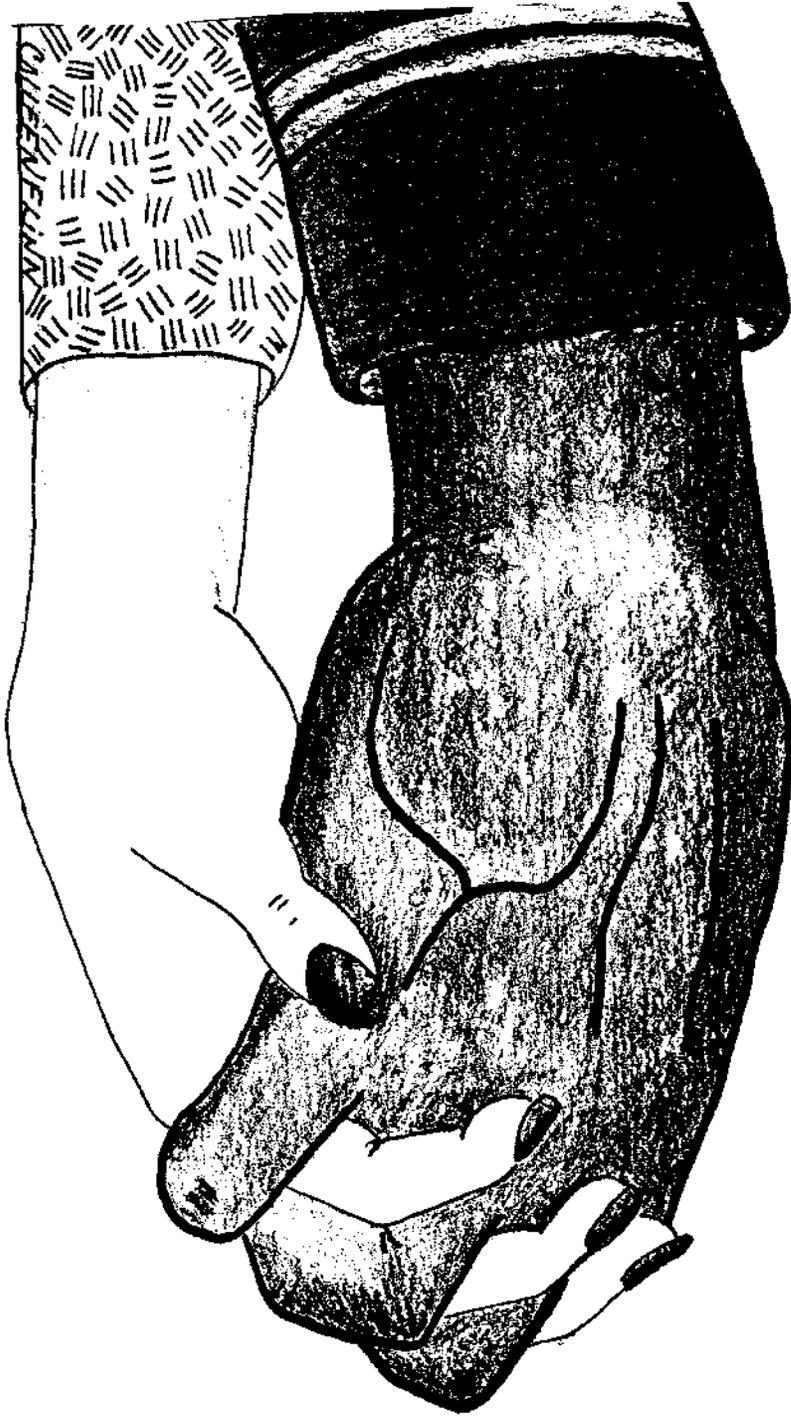
There is beauty in individualism and the power of "voice." Reflections that at one time only caressed my thoughts, have now found a beacon to guide them. I have found its outlet, a voice that can set free the thoughts that swirl in conflicting patterns in my head. Ever since my soul began to embrace the concept of freedom of expression, the freedom of voice, I have begun to utilize its power, to repel any witch that comes in my path. I faithfully, just as P.M. Dawn said, "Tear down my thoughts with my own sarcastically, piercing blade," but, "what's amusing is I like the way that it looks." "Distorted isn't it? But it's beautiful, exceptionally beautiful. Damn!"

*"If I can't dance, I
don't want to be part
of your revolution."*

-Emma Goldman

*"The real voyage of
discovery is not
finding new
landscapes, but finding
new eyes."*

-Bobby Austin



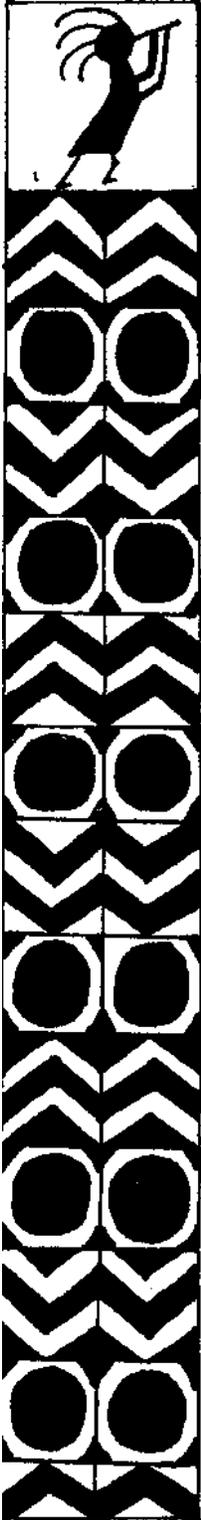
*"Do not wish to be
anything but what you
are, and try to be that
perfectly."*

*-Saint Francis de
Sales*



*"Sometimes a moment
is greater than an
eternity-that moment
when every living
thing becomes a part
of life-when life is
truly shared by every
living thing."*

-Winston O. Abbott



Two Toughs in Big Albert's Gang

John McMurray : WM 280 Prize Winner

Two toughs, intriguing and menacing in black and white, not big, not tall, medium. But with a gaze or a stare. The first one, mean and angry looking, yet boyish and juvenile. Hat tilted to one side over matted, greased back hair, probably brown in color. Eyebrows tilted up in a cruel fashion, eyes sloping downward towards a pushed in nose, obviously broken several times. Lines crinkle in sequence on his forehead above his slanted eyebrows, declining towards a point but never meeting. Different, less distinct creases slope by his nose at a little less than 90 degrees. Big ears seem to be creeping toward the back of his head slightly covered by tufts of sideburn hair. His head tilts somewhat downward and his eyes look slightly up.

A short, solid neck travels down to expose a hairless chest in between his collarless, white button down cotton shirt. Medium shoulders surround his neck, expanding with the pants in his jacket: a sport jacket, wrinkled and worn but still expensive looking. Hands seem to shift to his pocket in a desperate attempt to pose. His shirt hangs slightly untucked like a child's. Dark slacks seem to swallow up his hands and further drape down his thin legs in a tired, old, shapeless fashion. Black wing-tips cover his calloused feet. Shadowy socks slightly cover up to his pants with a small fragment of skin showing through.

"He is unique, brutally savage, yet in a way almost innocent."

We can only see half of his sidekick. He stares from behind a wall at the camera trying his best to look threatening, almost as if competing with the first boy. But he does not have the same young, tough, rebellious features as him. We can still see, however, his strength, his brutishness, his amoral power. His hair is also covered by a 1930's "gangster" hat. His eyebrows, like the



first thug's, are jutting down in a violent, tough manner. His nose is jagged and sharp and his face a little chubby, devoid of the profane lines on the first boy. He still has that awful stare that lets you know what he can do, and what he has on the other young thugs. He sports a black jacket and slacks, expensive but less worn looking. Definitely not as distinct looking as his companion. This is probably why the photographer seems to be focusing on the first boy. He almost jumps out at us, almost radiates.

He is unique, brutally savage, yet in a way almost innocent. His youthful face gives away something he doesn't want us to see, yet it is there, almost as if his efforts to be terrifying cannot transcend his youthful features, no matter how hard he tries. His demeanor invites exploration into his being, his life, his destiny. His stance, his style, his expressive originality provokes us to think further than just the picture. He is brilliant and artistic in a way that is hard to understand or explain. And we love that. We love his blooming innocence and danger combined, a look that is very original.

The two dominate their setting as they pose in an aggressive, sinister way. They stand on the red segmented brick of an alleyway, and try to look as tough as they possibly can. What they do is appalling. They cause pain and suffering. They kill and break bones but somehow we still like them. Kind of like how we all like the gangsters in movies. They lie, cheat, steal, kill and ruin other lives, but we are still kind of sad when they are caught. These fascinating people become larger than life on the screen, they become cultural heroes to whom everyone can relate. We fear for Henry Hill in Good Fellas when he is being followed by the helicopter everywhere he goes, we sympathize for the sinister Sonny of The Godfather when he is brutally shot at a toll booth, and we feel sad when the old decrepid Marlin Brando, playing the Godfather, finally passes on after a life of brutality and killing. They are awesome, they are hedonistic, brutish and cruel. You can see it in the eyes of these two boys and that is what draws us toward them.

"Looking at them makes you almost wish you were as tough as them, to live a life completely on the edge..."

They don't think twice about killing, and I would guess that these two thugs have killed more than once. Yet we still find ourselves attracted to them, wanting to be like them. Why? It's really hard to explain. I think it has something to do with machismo. They are the complete and utter expression of ultimate unbridled manhood. They



are tough as humanly possible, and I know it's wrong, but I like them for that, I admire them, almost to the point of wanting to be in their shoes. But that doesn't make me a sinister person does it? I don't think so. I think that's why there are so many gangster movies, (Good Fellas, The Godfather, Millers's Crossing, just to name a few).

They are terribly fascinating, (the two thugs in the picture, I mean). We have to wonder where they came from, how they were brought up and what could have possibly desensitized them to the brutal life they lead. Was it their parents' fault? Were they abused? Is it because they were brought up in the streets, having to fight to survive? Looking at them makes you almost wish you were as tough as them, to live a life completely on the edge and have no qualms about doing people in.

Brassai, the photographer, was drawn to these people in the same way we are. He called the culture of their thugs the "city's unconscious." He was interested in the "urban night and those who inhabited its shadows." Brassai was drawn to older, Parisian districts where this vital, popular culture still flourished. The mythic city of the night in which these two thugs existed was mysterious and alien to the upper crust of France. This dark underworld proved to be a privileged look for the social fantastic. This nocturnal world fascinated everybody. Brassai wrote, "I started photography because I was, quite simply, obsessed with nighttime in Paris." This picture takes an unsentimental look at this vanishing underworld, a world in which these two boys were a part of, one containing a exotic milieu of sex and violence.

"The artist, like a canary in a coal mine, is more sensitive than we are."

Brassai had not previously been a photographer. He became a photographer because of this fascinating world. He said, "And even before, I was inspired to become a photographer by my desire to translate all the things that enchanted me in the nocturnal Paris I was experiencing." During his first years in Paris, Brassai lived at night, going to bed at sunrise, getting up at sunset, wandering about the city from Montparnasse to Montmartre.

Brassai revealed the art and "beauty of sinister things," as he used to call the pleasure those "deserted quays, those desolate streets, that district of outcasts, crawling with tarts, full of warehouses and docks," gave us. Brassai said he was "impelled by an inexplicable



desire:" the same desire that lives in all of us. The artist, like a canary in a coal mine, is more sensitive than we are. Therefore, Brassai inevitably felt the need to express this passion for the bad, the sinister like any artist expresses his or her passions and feelings.

This picture came about when Brassai became linked one day with a gang from the *Place d'Italie* — "Big Albert's gang." He described, "A huge strapping fellow , a gang leader, surrounded by six more or less colorless figures, lieutenants who worshipped him unreservedly and obeyed him without scruple." Big Al had three whores working for him. Brassai accompanied them on some of their nighttime rambles. Although he succeeded in taking photographs of these toughs, one day they managed to lift his wallet, even though he had already paid them generously for their favors. He didn't lodge a complaint, however. "Thievery for them, photographs for me," he said. "What they did was in character, to each his own."

Brassai believed night in a large city brought out of its den an entire population that lives its life completely under the cover of darkness: the streetcar track repairers, the cesspool cleaners, the porters, the market gardeners, the agents, and the butchers of *La Villette*. But the real night people live at night, not out of necessity, but because they enjoy it. They belong to the world of pleasure, love, vice, crime, and drugs — a world to which we are desperately attracted.

So this kind of life is attractive, yeah, but do we really want to be like that? Of course not. Well, maybe we do. I once thought we just like to fantasize about it, not wanting to ever actually step into their shoes. But the more I think about it, I believe we do.

To live according to our passions, to create our own laws, seems horribly attractive. These criminals cast out by society become, in a way, our mentors. Their doctrine of life, although never really brought up to our consciousness, becomes our ideal. We might never really admit it, even to ourselves for that matter, but it's undoubtedly there; it's real, one of the few things I really know is real in my mind. By real I mean not learned, not taught, but inherent to our souls. Why else do we pay what is a high price nowadays to go see them in movies, to in a sense become them for two hours?

We love these despicable thugs. I think we really fantasize and consider being them. We just don't have the balls to do it. We are not willing to take the risk or pay the price, but these men are. And that's what makes them so great and so powerfully intriguing. We are com-



pletely enthralled by these outlaws living outside the conventions, the rules. We admire their pride, their strength, their courage, their disdain for death.

"Extraordinary men," wrote Dostoyevsky in The House of the Dead, are "perhaps the most richly endowed, the strongest of all our people..." This admiration expressed by Dostoyevsky in Crime and Punishment was not for revolutionary intellectuals or political prisoners, but for real hard-core criminals — thieves, murderers, convicts. See, I'm not the only one who thinks this. I'm not just an inherently evil person. These notable intellectuals see it, know it and believe it too. Nietzsche's hedonistic, self-serving "Overman," seems to linger in all of our souls however deep and hidden it may be.

More than a quarter of a century before Nietzsche, Raskolnikov had already removed himself from the "good and evil" motif. Dostoyevsky admired these criminals so much that during his prison term he put up with their contempt for him. "How is it," he wondered, "that they seemed men, they still seem, right to have despised me, and why is it that against my will I feel so weak, so insignificant, so — how terrible it is to say it — ordinary — compared to them?"

This infatuation for shady places and shady young men is undoubtedly revealing about human nature. We want to rule our own world, do whatever the hell we like, not follow any rules, any order, I know, at least for me, being ordinary, unoriginal, average is comparable to death. If we aren't growing, moving, experiencing, living, then we die. Maybe not physically die but more of a symbolic death; the death of passion, the soul, the living driving force in us. This force is not practical or smart, but it is there and it is important — maybe the most important thing we possess. Without it we are dead, inhuman. Ordinary is convention; extraordinary is art.

"Their sin is our pleasure."

That is why we are fascinated with this world. It is passionate, fresh, exhilarating, full of sin and debauchery. Something we know we can't experience in our life, so we feel the need to experience it through their life, the life of a derelict. The toughness and lack of concern in these boys is attractive to us, attractive enough for us to fantasize about them. We step inside their shoes for a while as we gaze at them, we become them and experience all their glory and passion. Their sin is our pleasure. We ponder about their life and pretend we know what it is like; yet, we actually have no idea. That is why this



life of darkness pulls us in, attracts us like a moth to a lamp, spinning circles around it, but never actually touching, getting inside. We are intent upon invading their lives, but never willing to accept the consequences that come with it. That is what separates us from them. That is what makes us human and them slightly inhuman, or is it the other way around?

The more I think about it, the more I am convinced that it is the other way around. Maybe they are more human than us, more worldly, more experienced, more dynamic. Conscience we have. They seem to have none, desensitized, cut off from the morality that we are inherently taught and live with when we are growing up - some even say we are born with it. Somehow or another, sometime in their life it was cut off, severed from their new innocent minds, or did they choose this way of life through their own free will, knowing what is right and wrong and just living fantastic, intriguing yet painful lives? Are they just more courageous than we are to choose this way of life? They decided to just cast off their conscience. In effect they are free, free from their conscience, and that seems genuinely attractive.

It's not sad, only the fact that they live short lives and die tragic deaths seems sad, but only at first glance, or maybe to someone who has never really thought about it. But their lives, though they may be short, are lives that contain far more than the average Joe's who lives about 80 uneventful years. We don't just see the glory of their lives, we see the pain, suffering and death. And we admire this. Yes, we even admire pain and suffering. I know that sounds completely weird, and I guess a little stupid, but I honestly think it's true. This is a very hard concept to explain, but it does exist in us. I can't really draw any parallel to explain this, but let me try.

When speaking at Loyola on sexual violence, Susan Bryson, a professor at an Ivy League school, said she would never be the same, but she would be better. What she meant was that the experience, though terrible and destructive, allowed her to reflect, rebuild and learn from experience. She is fuller now. A new dimension has been added to her soul. She is smarter although she might not be as happy. Happiness has nothing to do with what I'm trying to get at here. Please don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to say that rape is a good thing for a person to go through, not at all. Nevertheless, an intense, living experience like that expands and enlightens your soul - just as the experiences these people of the night live every day of their lives broadens and enlightens their souls, though painful as it might be for them.



I think now what she really meant was that once her life was shattered she had the chance to pick up the pieces and sort through them. She could pick out the ones she wanted and throw away the ones she didn't. But it still applies. These criminals' lives were shattered the first time they stole, hurt or killed somebody. And at these times they were able to sort through the pieces of their lives and decide what they wanted to keep and what they wanted to throw out. And they decided to keep this immorality, or more accurately amorality. They had the chance to experience and explore an alternative way of living and thinking, and they chose this way.

"The desires that are inherent and real in all human beings, however deep, we bury them."

We don't get this, we don't choose this, we live the straight and narrow, never knowing what it is like, never exploring our appetites and intensities. We follow our conscience blindly and never concede to our real innermost passionate desires. The desires that are inherent and real in all human beings, however deep, are buried. And this is good, it keeps us out of trouble. But are we less human because of this, are we part of the flock, conformists, followers, void of the innermost living force?

Let me try explaining myself another way. Say I ask you, if you would rather be a completely satisfied, happy farm animal, let's say a pig who gets fed full meals every day, gets to have sex whenever it wants, gets to sleep whenever it wants, etc... just a really, happy stupid pig? Or would you rather be a complex, thrill seeking, experiencing, thinking, yet tremendously suffering and painful intellectual human being? What would be your choice? You would probably choose to be a human being; although I know many who would choose the pig. And these people's lives do in fact bear striking resemblances to a pig's life. These underworld inhabitants are the pristine form of humanity; humanity in its purest form. They live and experience life in every sense of the word. Their pain and pleasure is intense and their soul is deep.

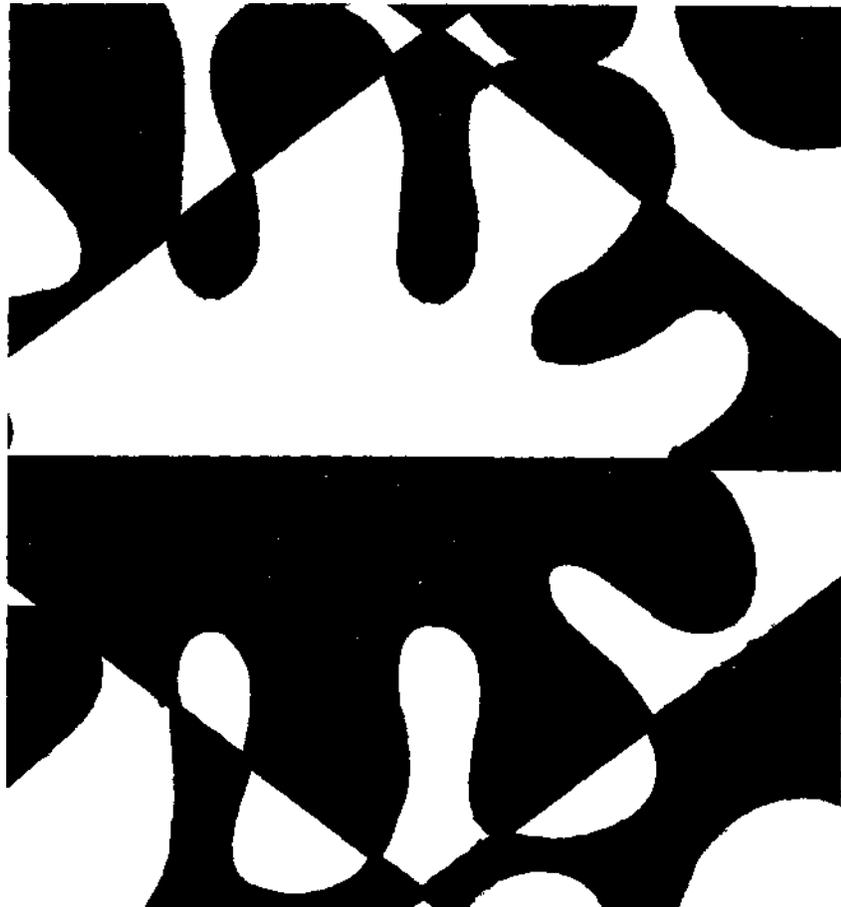
"These underworld inhabitants are the pristine form of humanity; humanity at its purest form."

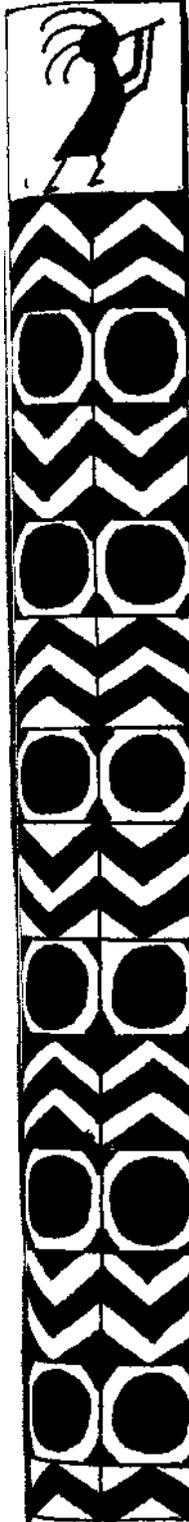
But is their soul deep or am I just getting out of hand? Any rational person would not choose to express his or her passions due to the severe consequences of his or her actions. The people who do, in a way, just seem really stupid. And it is true, the majority of criminals



are just plain stupid. But regardless of whether these criminals are stupid, we still admire them for their ability to lead passionate, conscious, free lives. And although the point that the only reason these criminals are like that is because they are just stupid has merit, it is in fact insignificant. Because these criminals we are talking about are not really the main point. We are the main point, our desires and our passions, our fantasies and our outlooks regarding these toughs. What is important is what we think of these individuals and how we fantasize about them, not the toughs themselves.

Just looking into the eyes of the first brutal young man seems to explain far more than I could in 100 pages. A look into his cold, yet passionate eyes is incredibly revealing. The feelings I get are real and intense, and I don't think anybody can really explain all that there is behind this picture and our human desires. This picture is powerful, and the feeling is universal. That is what makes Brassai's work so beautifully artistic and complex. That is what makes this picture an excellent expression of humanity, and that is what attracts us to it.





Reflections on Big Gull

Robert Hennessy: WM 280 Prize Winner

There is a lake outside of Arden, Ontario, where the Great Blue Heron still allows itself to be seen up close by man. The waters of the lake are cool and clean and needle-toothed Northern Pike school in abundance under its placid surface. Into this remote haven of natural beauty, my four older brothers and I ask for admittance each summer, not to "find" ourselves as some attempt to accomplish in nature, but conversely, to lose ourselves in its peaceful surroundings. Two blessed weeks a year out of our busy lives are spent here at Big Gull Lake, two weeks that soothe our minds, nourish our bodies, and replenish our souls from the deficiencies caused by the troubles of society.

The first evening at the lake each summer is like the initial conversation between two old friends who have been separated by all means of communication for a substantial period of time, and then reunited after months of intense and impatient waiting.

Pleasantries are exchanged, memories recalled, and the relationship between myself and the lake is, in a way consummated again, all without a spoken word. Sitting on the picnic table outside our cabin, quietly, my brothers and I soak in the scent of still water and the summer evening each in our own way, while the lake reflects, as it always does, true to its subject. Charlie lounges in a hammock, while George and Kevin re-string their spools with fresh line. Tom is reading a best seller and I am whittling quietly. The silence is only in our minds though. Insects of unknown variety and number fling their ample voices at the approaching night. Bullfrogs answer their calls with throat-stretching gurgles of glee; their volume is only outdone by the insects' consistency and persistence.

Fishing is the external reason that brings us to this spot every year, but what is more satisfying is the overall sensory experience of being "in" a natural scene such as this. Big Gull isn't the only secluded lake in the world. It's probably not even the best fishing in central Ontario. It is the sense of familiarity that my brothers and I receive from residing here, for just a fraction of our lives. We thrive on the acceptance that we feel as a part of this untouched Canadian wilderness. It's not like the feeling of acceptance that comes to a new member of a social club or mem-



bership on an athletic team; spending time here is like being the only outsider allowed to witness a sacred native ritual, or the first time a favorite uncle allows you to question his colorful and mysterious past.

The sight of a raccoon's litter scampering across the shore, or the call of a loon compliments the aura of a fisherman's lazy afternoon outing like a rainbow compliments the sky after a spring shower. Fishing is only the disguise, an elaborate mask that we use to enter into his special atmosphere. My brothers and I are eager students once immersed in this setting, carefully absorbing every bit of sensory information that lies before us. Tomorrow, we have another lesson.

Mist coats the lake's surface at dawn like strewn cotton swabs, but by seven, clear sky meets water halfway, distinctly at the horizon of pines on the opposite side. We board our Whaler clumsily, although each of us strives to act the part of the Heron, fluidly slipping into his birch bark canoe so as not to disturb the water. The act is a failure, but the goal of boarding is nevertheless successful. Rods on the sides, tackle boxes and cooler at our feet, we unhitch the protective cord and glide out, away from the land that steadies us.

The engine is set at a low speed - we aren't in a hurry and disturbing the placid setting is unheard of ...yet. Upon our arrival at our first planned stop, we lift our rods and bait our hooks. Each of us looks for possible hot spots, traditionally located at a rocky walls' entrance, or maybe under a fallen log. All of us maneuver at our chosen spots in the boat and glance at the water in expectation. Then, without a more proper ceremony, the rods are jerked, then cranks spin wildly, and the filament line springs into life.

Each shot is aimed carefully and deliberately at an imaginary point. The hooks and lures fly through the air eagerly, briefly free of both land and water, only to fall back through into gravity's yank with a splash and a slight ripple. The weight hits the bottom of the lake, or at least they hit something, are pulled taut, and each participant exhales in his seat. Some choose to slowly reel in, others use patience as a device. Kevin opens a beer, it crackles and echoes in the still air left by the extinguished motor.

The moist, mid-morning air is like silk on my skin. A few gulls fly overhead as the sun rises close to its noon-time zenith. The boat gently counters each of our moves, leveling itself on the water's



surface with only a few ripples and a hushed creak from someone's seat. It's always the quietest before the first catch.

After several spots are attempted and a few small fish are thrown back, we find the hot spot - - each of us has caught a few "keepers." A couple of bass and a fair sized pike later, I'm anxious. It seems for a good reason. The tip of my rod bobs up and down in an almost mechanical manner. Invisible nibbles tease my line to a tension that can only mean one thing. I repeat the process: pull back, aim, jerk and relax, only to come up empty-handed. Reeling in, I feel my line tense slightly and my hands grasp the smooth graphite ever so tightly, so as not to alarm my quarry.

Dancing away like a crazed, animated needle on glass, the filament jerks toward the boat, and then under. Salivating with excitement, I yank upward, creating a massive arch out of the pole in pure reflex to the insane movements of the rod's tip. Resistance. I've hooked him. Tom offers encouragement with a shuffle to find the net, while George swears at the dumb luck of the youngest. I taste salt as the struggle continues; feverish reeling, interspersed with tugs at the rod, takes my attention and causes my teeth to unconsciously bite my tongue. Pain or injury are not issues now.

Just a little more...there! Flashing its silver belly the fish wriggles within sight. The water breaks violently like the sputtering of a flat rock being skipped across the lake in anger. I draw the writhing, slashing fish toward me with a force it has never encountered before. With my left hand I reach down and grab the line just above the hook, and Tom gets the net underneath. "Got him," someone shouts. My muscles relax, as well as everyone else's — the hunted is taken.

It's a Walleye about two feet in length. Trophy size. I hold it up with both hands in a tight grip. The smiles of victory are all around me in the boat. Slippery to the touch the fish swishes its tail and fins in the air defiantly, but my hold is one of experience and it can neither break free nor harm me. A picture is snapped and I release the captive, free to grow into someone else's dreams. The rush of the kill is not what I needed, the feeling of exhilaration and a snap shot will be sufficient for my memories. Looking back at the photograph, the drop of blood on my lips serves as a memorial, a small price for the experience. It seems like I can still almost smell the fish and feel its slimy scales undulating under the firm but delicate grip of my fingers. Respectfully, we move on to another location.



Toward the end of the day, our party heads back to our end of the lake. The last stop is at the diving dock, where my fellow outdoorsmen and I endeavor to leap from the lofty cliffs of the shoreline, trying to land in between the massive, jutting rocks at the base. Rising twenty feet out of the water with a slight hang, like the eaves on a roof, the rock stands out from the cliff wall impressively. The water is cold and dark in the setting sun, and our skin, previously warmed by the day's heat, tightens to the body. Like weighted lures, our bodies climb up the rock, pause at the highest point and leap into the air, temporarily free. Through this act of adolescence, we become further united with the lake. It provides for us, entertains us and soothes us, and now it is under and all around us. The sounds of laughter and splashing roll across the lake, but the sounds are welcomed — we are like family here — and returned with the echo of approval and acceptance.

Back at the cabin we unload and unwind. George, Charlie, and I board our other boat, a handsome wood strip canoe, for a ride into the last evening hours of daylight. My brother Kevin constructed the canoe from cherry wood and fiberglass over a period of several years for the sole purpose of quiet exploration. Evening on Big Gull was the inspiration for this craft. At sunset, swamps and secluded covers beckon for respectful viewers to come and explore.

The glassy, orange colored lake surface is a perfect proving ground for our wandering canoe. It glides over the water like a child's hand-made sailboat, drifting across a pond in a steady wind. The hull has been battered and scraped from more taxing journeys in white waters, yet it retains the texture of porcelain when stroked by a naked hand. In this vehicle, we get the closest to the water without bringing along our clumsy, purely human disturbances. In silent motion we propel ourselves on towards the last rays of the sun.

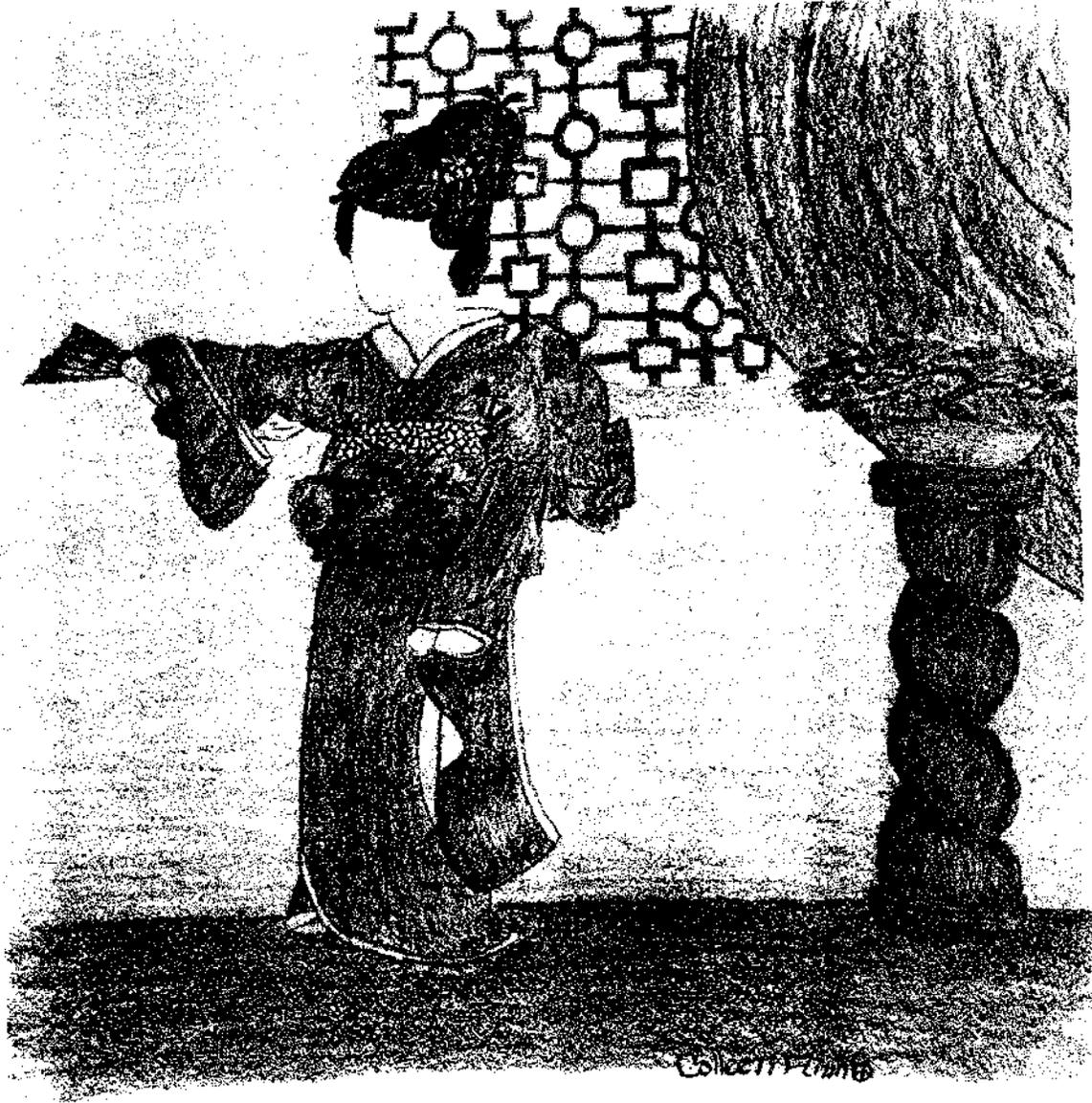
Again, we say nothing — awe has retained hold. Loons giggle in the distance signaling the chorus of nocturnal crooners to begin, but they have already chimed in their intro. Friction tries, but craftsmanship and the laws of motion carry us far and as gently as we can go. Destination isn't important. The vessel just continues on, above water, under sky, leaving a wake of marbled ripples just for a moment, and then, they vanish into the uniformity of the lake. As light fades from the horizon, our thoughts go with the ripples, merging with the surface.

*"Imagination is more
important than
knowledge."*

-Albert Einstein

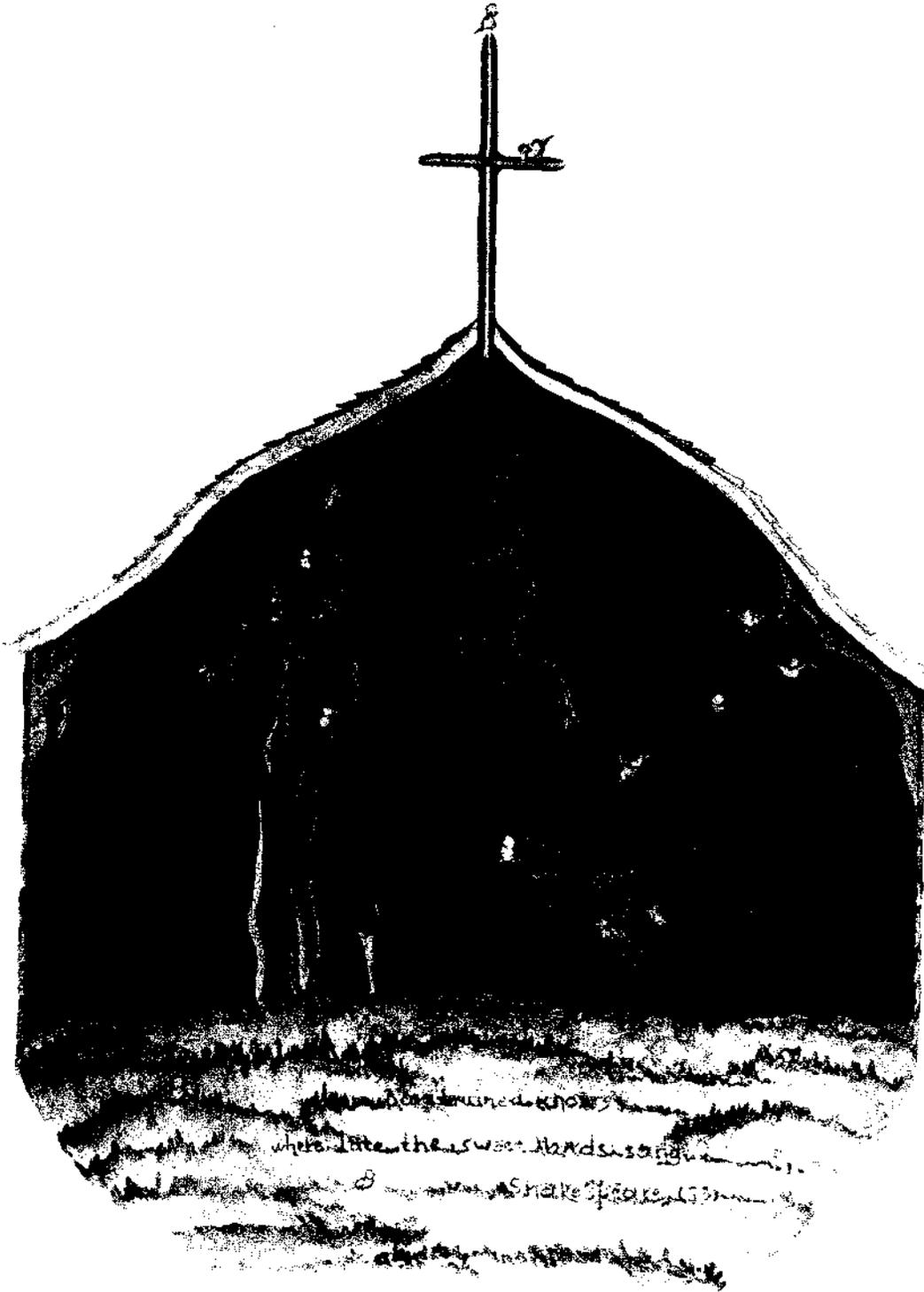
*"Beauty is not a need
but an ecstasy."*

-Kabril H.G.



*"Pray for the dead and
fight like hell for the
living."*

-Mother Jones



...long trained choir
...the sweet hands as a sign
...Shake spears as a sign

*"I honor the place in
you in which your
entire universe dwells.*

*I honor the place in
you in which is of love,
of truth, of light, and
of peace. When you
are in that place in
you, and I am in that
place in me, we are
One."*

*-Namasté -the highest
form of tribute in
Nepal and India*

