

Promethia



"Not all who wander are lost"

-J.R.R. Tolkien

2004-2005

Promethia

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Prometheus—a god of Greek mythology who brought fire and inspiration to man

Cover Photo by Courtney Reed
Back Cover Photo by Anna Saah

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Editor's Note

A good piece of writing has the ability to carry us, foot by foot, in the shoes of another—a mile if we wish and sometimes just a meter. It allows us to shake hands with people we know but have never met. Like a tent spike, it has the uncanny ability to pin down all of the humor, sadness, and mystery that humanity resides under. It is the only way to go home again. It cuts canals between our immortal spirit and our flesh. It shows us the flow of life. Writing reminds us that we can add to the world and that truth can be found if it is sought. This journal is a celebration of that.

The stories, poems, essays contained within are the buried treasure that each author, like a pirate of life, has brought back. None have hoarded their splendor for themselves; instead they present it to you as a gift. Each traveler has a tale to tell. I pray you listen..

Thank you so much to all the contributors for sharing your silver and gold with me. I hope the editorial staff's hard work at putting this journal together is a reflection of your hard work. Thank you to anyone who ever attended or presented at a Panera Poetry Reading. Thank you Dr. Walker, founder of Promethia, and Mr. Gogan, for giving me a swift kick in the rear, out the door, and on this journey. Your advice and encouragement has been immeasurable. Thank you Dr. Meyers and Dr. Epperson for letting your love of the written word rub off on me. The Renaissance is coming. Keep pouring the foundation and the house will get built. I hope this journal can be a cornerstone.

Steven Leyva
Editor-in-Chief
April, 2005

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A Triple for Dad

By Joshua Lacy

Dirt. Red dirt so dry
It flutters around each step.
Chalk, like lines on asphalt
Roads whose ends are seemingly
Infinite. Infinite until they run themselves
Into the deep, green wall, three-hundred feet out.
Wooden bat sways forward and back over
White, home-shaped base in the red dust—
A sandbox for big boys—outlined
With the white chalk. Dirt clods on
Cleats, cleared with the tapping
Of the bat on the sole of the shoe.
Baseman steadied for hot, shallow
Hits. Outfielders shuffle anticipating
Feet for sky-rocket shots.
A hesitant nod from the man on the mound.
Nine against one.
He takes a sturdy stance, tucks the ball
In the leathery home of the glove,
And stares cold into the zone.
The pitcher, leg kicked out, winds a
Sinister pitch and thrust the red-stitched
Sphere toward dusty plate.
Dead calm—a full swing—knuckles white
From tight grip—and ball meets bat without
A trace of vibration. Just a delicate *crack*.
Dirt-stained Rawlings ball sent screaming—out! out!
Rocketing toward the darkened deep of the sky,
Lost forever in the lustrous lights above.
And my father—fingers clenching chain-linked fence—
Shouts with mighty roar, above the whole crowd,
Ringing out over the diamond
And the neighborhood beyond the field.
All of a sudden—rounding first—
The hit, the score, the game..
Doesn't matter.

Central Park

by Jamie Chen

Somewhere mountains remove their snowy caps
Seas open their mouths and yawn
Gondolas collapse, ships capsize

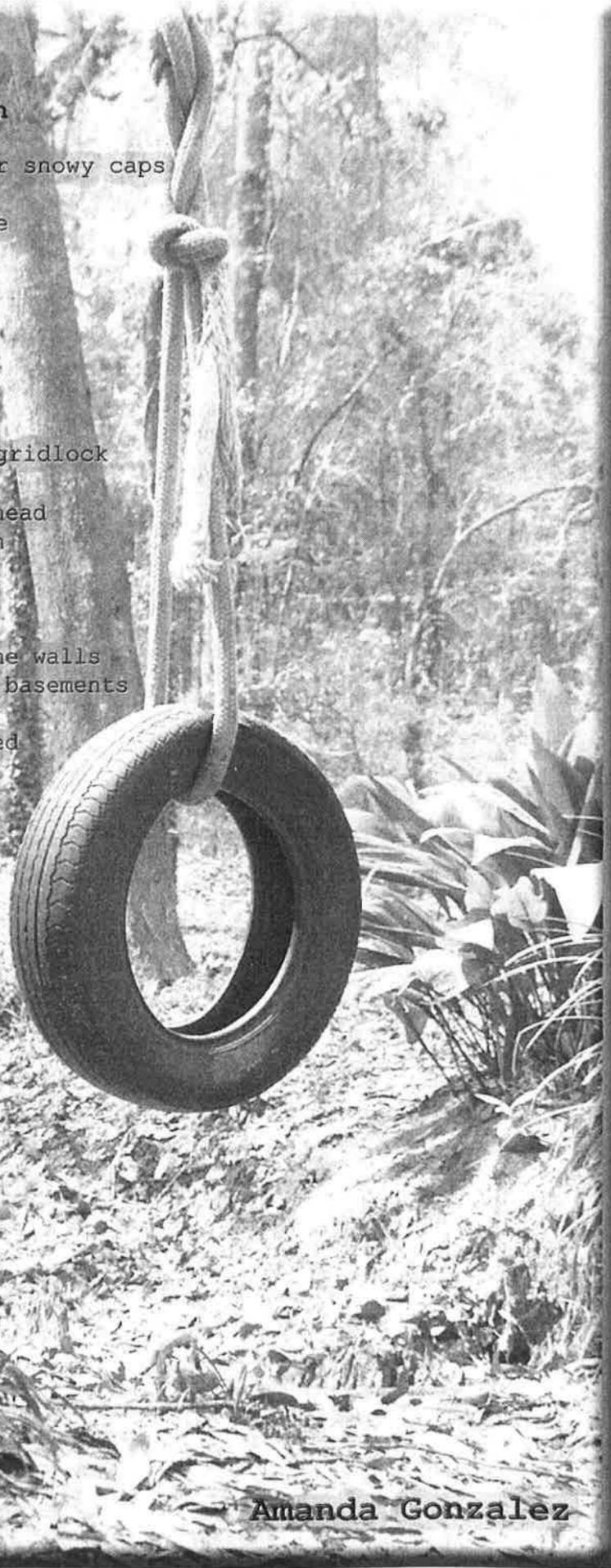
Haziness pervades
I can hear children's laughter
Swings sniveling

The world seeming to fall apart
Regulated by buzzing people
Stock transactions, automobile gridlock

A dog barks somewhere behind my head
The lilac walk unfolds to the sun
Turtle pond wrinkles

The museum utters chaos
History and art resounding off the walls
Past natural disasters locked in basements

Somewhere there is a canyon carved
Woodland carpets hillsides
A boat trawls in a quiet lake



Amanda Gonzalez



Adam Willard

Sunflowers

By Roger Buswell

Dust behind the wheels,
Rural hero returning,
Shining on the left breast, in return for dark stains on
enemies' clothes,
Then for dark stains on his own.
On the day he left, the sunflowers were bright and straight
in their summer glory,
He comes back with the same flower blurred and flying past the car,
Browned and bowing, faces down to the ground,
Their glory gone they stand in solemnity,
Welcoming back their summer golden sun,
Not so golden now.
Both enter their Autumn,
The flowers on time, the soldier early.

Windows by Chip Hubbell

These broken windows dangling from their sills,
Like witches' fingers plucking at a web
Of thin white threads of spider silk and dew,
Sing melodies of days when men were boys.
A sagging barn with peeling chips of paint
Turned grey and sad by years of snow and rain
Does not house such perfect panes of glass. No,
These windows must be smashed, beaten, crunched
By overzealous boys who find a purpose
For random heaps of smooth, eroded rocks
Stacked high like something Abraham might build.
They giggle and they gasp at splashing glass,
Till shoulders grow too sore to govern aim.

What windows that remain unsmudged and pure
Will find their end when boys grow into men,
When fuming fists punch through the windows missed
So many years before when done in jest.
These bloody ramrods pounding through with pain
Complete the job after a heartless break up
Done quickly in November's early night,
When daylight savings time is still so young,
And early sunsets only serve to sadden
Those boys whose noon-high suns once hung all day.

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by
Courtney
Reed

In these crippled tones we walk
We walk among these broken pieces
Cracking—lauging at the cracks
Lying here in dust playing among mud
As it runs all over our faces
It seems to rain upon us

And we are saved
Pulled up from the (shambles) our lives
The falling pieces
The lost or slipping through the cracks
And breaking more; widening
Growing wider and wider
And we are redeemed
Open arms grow tired
Tired and weary from crying
From trying to hold on more and more
And how do we continue to walk
To walk on and not fall
Run but not slip on the stones
But in the light of their eyes
And I have seen (in) the light
—Our souls slipping through
Lost and drowning, saved and flying out
Becoming whole

4

Tomorrow Sweetheart I Promise

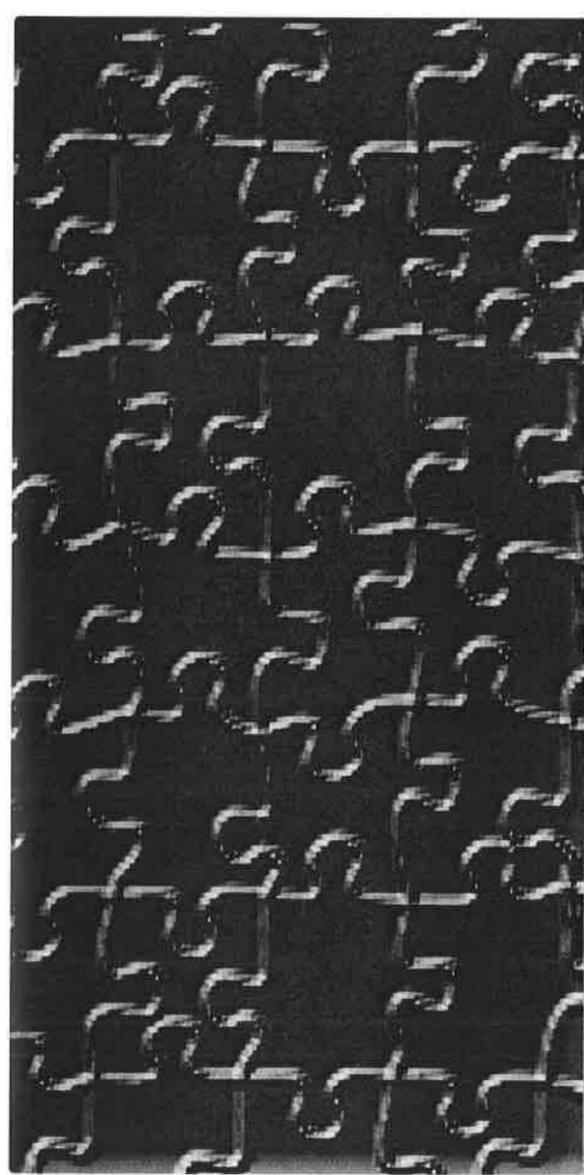
by Kingston Jones

The girl is giving out halfhearted
hellos
She is your wife
She is a knife sometimes
Getting older as you get older
Father away from the golden age tele-
vision

It was a short detour after work
Drowning out dinner plans in cigarette
smoke
The drive towards home is always heavy
The bedroom conversation is feedback
from her amp
You send out that same response
"Tomorrow sweetheart, I promise"

Technicolor moonlight watched before
sleep
A dry kiss
Screaming in the distance
The neighbors are fighting again
"Thank God we'll never be like them"

Daniel Folkers



Suede Jacket

by Roger Buswell

I want your suede jacket to rest on the chair,
A disheveled pile of clothes,
Gray light through closed blinds,
The smell of steam and a crack of light from the bathroom
door,
You are up early and I almost feel guilty for staying in bed,
Almost,
I open my eyes to your face,
Three inches from mine.
Out of proportion,
Your features like a reflection on the rounded side of a
spoon,
I smell your breath; toothpaste mint and your lips are on my
cheek.
You drive away in the car, suede jacket on your back,
I want your suede jacket to rest on the chair.

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Nicki Cooper

Barefeet

By: Steven Leyva

"I'm telling you for the last time, nobody wins six games of spades in a row unless they're cheating" Jackson said as he folded his arms in disgust. I can't help but laugh whenever I see Jackson lose at anything. Its like he goes through a turbo session of the six stages of grief. Denial is always the funiest.

"It was inevitable, Jackson," I replied "Cora and I, we don't know how to lose." Normally I wouldn't mess with him so much, but tonight he was making it so easy. Plus, I had backup.

"Don't feel, bad Jackson; it isn't you. All we do is win games." Cora's words were just fuel for the fire.

"I know it ain't me!" Jackson shot back, "It's you and your cheating friend over there. This is the last time I play anything with you two." I had known Jackson for a few years now and I could always tell when he was on the verge of a string of expletives. His nostrils would flare, and he would curl his lips in and a snake-like vein would creep across his forehead. That vein had been throbbing since the first hand of spades, so I figured I would limit my teasing to a knowing smile and a few small chuckles. Jackson let out a heavy sigh and got up to buy a cup of coffee. I told him to grab me a muffin while he was up.

Cora and I had made it a habit of playing games, or cards, or just hanging out at the Lighthouse Coffee shop. To this day, I don't know how I was tricked into liking this place. I am still not exactly sure what a chai is. Cora used to work here and had become a sort of legend in her post-adolescence. She was best known for tackling a teenage boy who had decided to run stark naked through the coffee shop and making him stand behind the counter with her until his mother came and picked him up. Of course, this story, like most, had been exaggerated over time. The first version I heard involved knocking the boy out with a whipped cream can. Anyway, this place had become a second home to her. She would always bounce her blue eyes over to me and try to convince me to come. I held out for a solid month, stating reasons such as an obvious lack of minorities, a personal dislike for coffee, and the fact that mood lighting always put me in a bad mood. She kept after me though, and

somehow she was able to be relentlessly sweet about it. The worst is when she would say things like, "Man, a cup of coffee would be wonderful right now." I always had to be on my toes to make sure I wasn't the one who suggested going to the Lighthouse, because then there would be no hope of getting out of it. All it took was one slip up for her to say, "Oh you had a great time last time and you will again this time." She should have been a professional hit man; nobody would have seen her coming. It wasn't long until I was there almost every night. I even had a favorite chair right across from where they made the Italian sodas.

Jackson returned with a cup of coffee, probably something dark and strong, and a muffin for me. He plopped down in his seat and slid the muffin across the table to me. Jackson had invited a curly-haired blonde to play games with us tonight. She seemed nice enough but for the life of me I couldn't remember her name. She hardly said two words during the six games of spades. Jackson didn't seem to mind, though; he definitely did enough talking for two. Mostly she just smiled and took small sips from the drink she had ordered. I think it might have been a chai.

"Why do you always get those blueberry muffins? What are you, a girl scout or something?" Jackson said tipping his chair back and throwing his arm around his curly haired friend.

"Girl scouts sell cookies," I replied, stuffing down a grin.

"Cookies, muffins, whatever. The blueberry kind sucks. You should have gotten a cream cheese one."

"I don't know," I said taking a good sized bite, "I like blueberry." I looked over at Cora for a moment. She seemed far off, and when she noticed I was looking at her she turned away a bit startled. She coughed a deep, throaty cough into her napkin. "Everything all right?" I asked as she wiped her mouth.

"Yeah, I am fine." She was lying. I could always tell when she was lying. She turned to Jackson and his date and smiled. "My mother used to make blueberry muffins on Saturday mornings." Suddenly, the blonde spoke up. Her voice was lower than I expected and didn't seem to fit her petite frame.

"That so wonderful, maybe your Mom



Courtney Reed

will make you some this weekend." Simultaneously, Jackson and I cringed. Cora, however, was cool and just replied, "I don't think so."

Cora's mother had passed away earlier that year from a long battle with brain cancer. There were a lot of prayers that went forth for her while she was sick and a lot of hope for her recovery. I'm not much of a religious man. On Christmas I enjoy the carols, but that's about it. In spite of this, I stumbled through a few simple prayers that she would get better. I had only met Mrs. Riley once, but somehow that's all it took for people to fall in love with her. She decided to play basketball on her daughter's intramural team at our school. Cora mentioned it in passing one day, and her face was glowing and full. She couldn't help smiling at the fact that her mom was going to play on her team. Mrs. Riley was good, too. She had those same deep blue eyes and curly brown hair that Cora carried around. And it was easy to see how Cora got to be so fearless. She made scoring look so easy, you would have thought it was just a matter of throwing the ball in the air towards the basket. When Cora introduced me to her after the game, I didn't say much. I told her my major was English and that I was from Maryland. She seemed to smile at me so genuinely that I think I missed the next three things she said. Anyway, that was the only time I ever met Mrs. Riley. Within the

year, I was sitting in a church, wearing a black suit and feeling guilty being there, seeing as how I only had one memory of her, and everyone else had so many.

Cora was good at keeping the topic of conversation changing so nobody felt uncomfortable. I wasn't sure if she did that for Jackson and me, or for herself. We were all in the middle of deciding whether *Kid A* or *OK Computer* was the best Radiohead album, which of course kept me as quiet as the little blonde, since I hate Radiohead, when Cora tapped me on the shoulder.

"Isn't that Monica Meeks buying an Italian Soda?" Cora said, pointing towards the counter.

"Where?" I muttered a little to quickly to hide how I felt. Cora pointed again at the counter, and I whipped around to see and almost tumbled out of my chair. Monica had the three things that I loved most about women: long hair, a quick smile, and a voice that never quite came to rest. When I looked to find her, however, all I saw was an elderly woman wearing a white shawl cleaning her glasses.

"I don't see Monica. What are you talking about?" I said turning back to my friends. I noticed that Cora was trying to hide a laugh and a face full of the rest of my blueberry muffin. She was failing miserably. "You sneaky little..." I said as Jackson broke out in howl of a laugh. He slapped Cora on the back to congratulate her. This sent small bits of muffin that she had

packed in her cheeks and hadn't finished swallowing flying across the table into the lap of Jackson's date. For the first time tonight, the curly-haired blonde wasn't smiling.

"Jackson, this has been a magical night. I never had a date where I had the pleasure of being spit on. And by the way, cream cheese muffins are for middle aged gay men!" Shortly after Jackson left with Maria, I remembered her name just as they were leaving. I'd never seen Jackson make such a humble and silent exit and as they pulled away in Jackson's car I wondered what stage of grief Jackson was in now.

We sat there for a time, watching the kids finish their conversations and games. One couple on the other side of the room was having a quiet break up, and the young man was hiding his tear-streaked face with a Cubs hat. His extremely recent ex-girlfriend seemed to carry a wonderment in her eyes. She would stretch her hands a little towards him and then pull them back. She reminded me of a mother comforting her child and a wild, cornered animal. Another group of kids were playing some games that involved grabbing stacks of spoons from one another. One little black boy was the last to grab a spoon, and he raised it high, as if it could have been Excalibur. His laughter was a battle cry of sorts that only springs from the lips of near defeat. I was a mirror for that little boy; I reflected that smile back to him even if he never saw it.

Cora kicked her feet up on to the table and let her head flap back so she could stare at a ceiling fan. She had been slipping into that far-off place more and more in recent weeks. I never knew quite how to bring her back, so I would just laugh a lot and hope that she would come back on her own. Tonight, though, I was drifting myself. I started thinking about life after school, how I missed my father, when Cora piped up.

"You know I love fans. They always seem so complete, just spinning round and round, but their just broken fragments twirling by." Why did she always start talking crazy like that? If she was quiet more than about five minutes, it would happen. It was starting to worry me, but I just let it ride. I just chalked it up to the stress of school, or that women don't need to make sense in order to communicate.

"Oh bud, you're just tired, that's all." I said poking her in the side. That bugged her something terrible. Get off me! I am not tired. I am wide ... awake." A yawn had slipped in the middle of that comment. She laughed at herself and her mock bravado and

that set her heart back at ease.

"Well, the night is young," I said sarcastically, " It's only 12:30 on a Friday night."

"What time did you say?"

"Well actually, I guess it's 12:35."

"I think that we better start walking back." I had that cooped up feeling, and I loved the walk back to school, so I didn't mind leaving. We gathered up the few things that we had brought. I stuffed my journal and a few poetry books into my black shoulder-strap bag. This bag had been my older brother Samuel's bag. I took it a few months after he got married and managed to plaster it with any sticker I could find. It still said "Exxon" on it somewhere under the peace symbols and Dave Matthews Band logos. Cora really didn't have much. A small box with a ribbon she slipped in my black bag and told me to remind her that I had it. We headed out the door, and the black bag bounced on my hip in a steady rhythm as I walked. Some friend of Cora's drove up in a green van. She ran over to say hello, which she never said without a hug, and I stood looking back at the coffee shop. The Lighthouse was holding true to its name tonight. All of the other shops that shared this strip were long since dark and closed for the evening, but the long glow cast through the broad windows of the coffee shop showed no signs of subsiding. It stood, calling all the weary ships in through the darkness. The girl in the green van offered us a ride, but Cora shook her head and whispered something in her ear, which caused them both to giggle just a bit, and then she waved goodbye. We kept walking towards home.

The night had all the calm of a child asleep in its bed. The moon was full and bright, or at least it seemed so. It was a darker night than most, so maybe the moon just stood out to me more. I don't mind dark nights so much in the summer. Somehow the wind through the trees is less nervous. Although a new school year had come creeping up, this night still had some of that magic that says the summer is immortal. I caught myself staring at the sky more than once during the walk back. I had to keep jogging a bit to catch up to Cora. I wondered if she had noticed the moon tonight.

"Hey bud, you have to slow down... take a look at that moon."

"I hate full moons," she snapped playfully.

"Yeah you and the rest of the werewolves." A quick grin sped across her face, and she punched me right in the arm. You can always tell when you have won a small victory against Cora; her white flag is a sock in

the arm.

There is only one street to cross on the way back to the dorms. Two nights earlier, a pack of sixteen year-olds nearly ran me over at this intersection that we were about to cross. Hardly anyone was on the road tonight though and we crossed the streets with ease. Cora wasn't trying to hide her worried look anymore. She began biting at her nails ever few steps, and she just kept humming some song I had never heard before. She always danced a bit when she walked, mostly in small awkward gestures and steps that reminded me of a butterfly. When she was nervous, she did it even more. I don't know if anyone ever told her how funny she looks.

We climbed on to the curb and started walking through the parking lot of the Orca Building where the basketball team played its games. It was a desert of black asphalt with a large electronic marquee rose like an oasis from the sands. The marquee was all neon lights and announcements, but it also had the time. 12:45 A.M. Cora turned to me nervously still biting her nails and then turned back to the marquee.

"Do you think we'll make it back before 1:00 am?" She asked.

"I don't know. Why do you have to be back at 1:00?" We could see the dorms in the distance but they were still a ways off.

"I just...there is something I need to take care of," she said obviously flustered. It been almost six months since Cora's mother passed on. I had learned the signs, and most of the time I just let her be. She would probably cry herself to sleep tonight and tomorrow tell me she fell asleep studying.

"Well, we're not gonna make it walking," I said. As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I realized what I was wearing. Uncharacteristically, I had worn flip-flops today, and I wasn't wearing a belt, which meant that my favorite blue jeans were riding low. Cora wasn't much better off. She was wearing that quintessential little black dress. You know, the kind that's durable and comfortable enough to stay loose in. She had on flip-flops as well. Though she was still nervous, she shared a laugh with me as we both kicked off our shoes and steadied ourselves to make the mad dash back to the dorms. She tied her hair back in a sloppy bun, and I flung my black bag on my back and slipped my thumb through a belt loop to hold up my jeans. Then we started running.

We both started with such a suddenness that some nearby birds jumped into the air startled. I was so out of shape it was sad. I ran

as if at any moment she would just break out and leave me in the dust. I was doing my best to hold my pants up and keep my bag from flying off my shoulder, so I ran in a low-hunched manner. I was suddenly reminded of the movie *Last of the Mohicans*. Something about the way I was running all bent over with a bag across my back made me think of Daniel Day-Lewis running through the battlefield. Cora ran more upright. Her upper body didn't seem to bend or lean forward at all. The little black dress flowed easily with the rhythm of her legs. She reminded me of a deer or some other animal that doesn't run, but gallops.

We stopped for a minute so Cora could catch her breath. We were more than half way back and weren't sure how much more time we had left. There was only about a block or so left until we were back at the school dorms. Near the dorms the school had a group of well kept gardens. All of the flowers were still in bloom, and you could see a few lightening bugs out and about. We walked a little bit through the gardens and started running again. All of the garden paths have a track of pebbles that line both sides of the sidewalk. I took a bad step into those pebbles and slid a bit before regaining my balance. We didn't stop. I had to run hard to catch back up to Cora as we rounded the corner and headed straight for the dorm doors. Cora got there first and flung open one of the glass doors. I followed her inside. My side was hurting, and I threw my bag on the floor so I could catch my breath.

"12:50..." Cora said, leaning on the counter of the front desk.

"We still had some time."

"Yeah, maybe we could have made it walking?"

"Looks that way doesn't it." I replied. She socked me right on the shoulder, and I just laughed.

"Are you sure everything is okay?" I asked as I picked up my bag and got ready to leave.

"Yep....Look, tell Jackson not to wonder about Maria. She isn't really anything special."

"Sure" I said, as an older lady sitting at the front desk announced that the lobby would be closing soon. Cora said good-bye and ran into the elevator. As the doors were closing, I remembered the little box she told me to remind her about. I turned to call out her name but she was gone, and I wouldn't see her until tomorrow. I held the little box in my hands and decided to open it. Inside was a picture of Mrs. Riley in a basketball uniform. She was young and tall and smiled

even brighter than Cora smiled. I took the picture out of the box to look at it better, and I noticed something small and shiny under it. It was a single sharp razor blade.

In My Neighborhood

by Keith Gogan

In my neighborhood
The sun slants in at 8:00 p.m.
About to go to bed and
Leave this apart
Ment community in the dark once again
But not before the rolling bling
Of low-rider black Mercedes slithers in
Stranger to this neighborhood
Up to no good
Maybe some cash
For chemicals
But not before white van
Music tinkling from horn on its head
Crawls in
Not for exchange of cash for chemicals
but
Ice cream
Ice cream
For young, bronzed innocents
Whose only vice, for now, is
Sugar

Give me the white van
A buck for a fudgesicle
And a millstone
For the necks
Of the chemists
In my neighborhood

Haiku

By Lindsay Goodier

Crisping leaves morphing
Autumn breeze inviting change
Another falls down.

Merlot

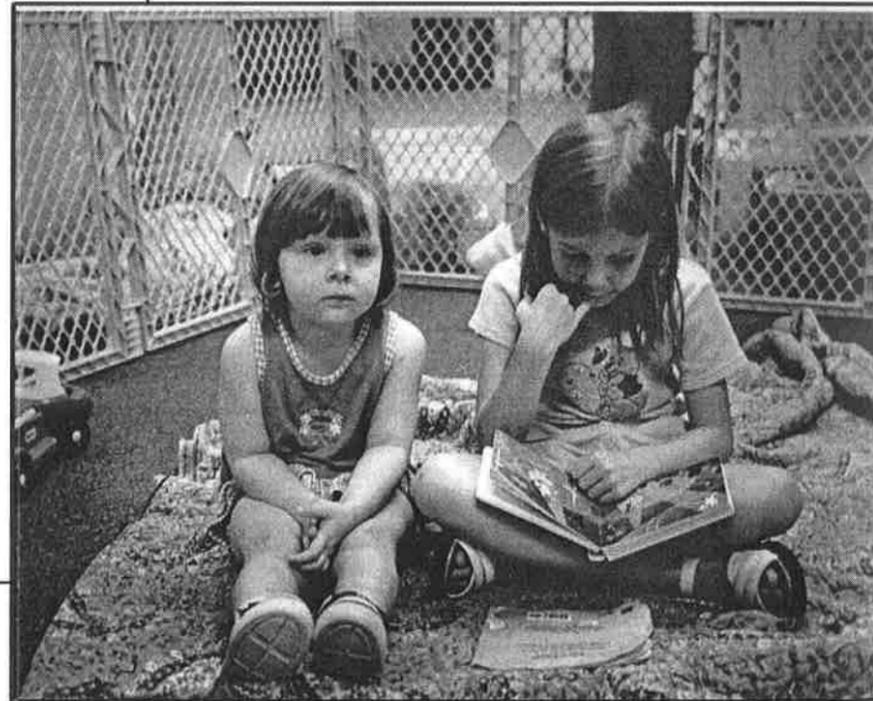
By Steven Leyva

Like crushed grapes
Bleeding their deep love
Rich purple crimson
Her eyes water and wine
Longing for life on the vine

Wrapped up that way is home
Leaves or hands
Arms or limbs
Twist me up in them

She is more than the fragrance
That rises specter-like
After she is pressed

She is more
Than a way to fill my glass
Half full



Anna Saah

A Love Poem for Your Scars

by Karen Lacy

You came to me
Dazed
Bruised
and full of desire
One more time
reaching out to the cruelty of spring
Alone
Always alone

I noticed them
right away
The ghost tracks of a train
that went nowhere
The puckered skin landscape
That would not darken
In the heat of the August sun
You told me it was a map
Leading back to a former self
I said I've got my own crooked grin
Just below the right knee
It's still red-in-the-face angry
And purple with disbelief
A monument to distraction

I know you worry them
Every morning in the shower
Wipe the fog from the bathroom mirror
And trace their image
With you finger
The pink-recessed line
of the valley
Etched into your hip
Where they took the bone
To build your left arm a new mate
Its first companion
Smashed to powder
Your eyes follow the turns of
Another jagged road
Winding down your leg
All those imperfections
You work so hard to hide
Never understanding that
It's not the beautiful things about you
That I love
They are too ordinary
I love the accidental joy
The wrecked miracle you are

11

-for Michael

Forefathers

by Chip Hubbell

I once told an older man that
I'm 14th generation American.
He wagged his grey head

And chortled back cynically,
"Don't take it too hard, Mac,
You'll get over it."

My father always told me
That we go back to 1638
And a ship called The Lion.

My mother crows our
Ancestry; Mather, Franklin,
And the Adams boys.

Sometimes I talk to those
Men, ask them for advice,
Request a little maxim

From a brilliant British mind.
It's more or less my way
Of praying to the saints.

But I suppose if I want to carve
My own minute piece of history
I'll have to talk to my neighbor,

Because Cotton, Ben,
Samuel and John
Are all dead and gone.

A Better Resurrection

By Grady Walker

Skimming on the runway—skimming!
Gaining momentum, until the tug, the lift,
Like a great bird, until you look down at the wing
And see rivets and feel the wall vibrate
Against your chair-arm.
Rising above the autumned city,
Celebrating its new colors, dressed for fall,
Right out of Saks Fifth Avenue.
Green river fork, patch-work earth-face,
Receding, touched up with cumulo-nimbi
—But then that ominous brown gray roll
Hangs over the city, and you know
All is not well—not all is well!
Mother "N" keeps trying, fighting to be gorgeous
In Her seasonal garb.
But man does Her in: Kicks Her in the stomach,
Shoots Her in the head!
He says he loves Her—liar!
Why does he cover Her with that ugly veil?
Hide Her beauty, belittle her dignity?
But I still see Her, still love Her,
Though I look at Her through a "glass darkly."
I know she's there, and I'll rise with Her
In a green shoot, when Her friend/enemy
Has blasted himself off into another
Sphere, to start gorging away at Her Vitals



Dave McCarty

Power

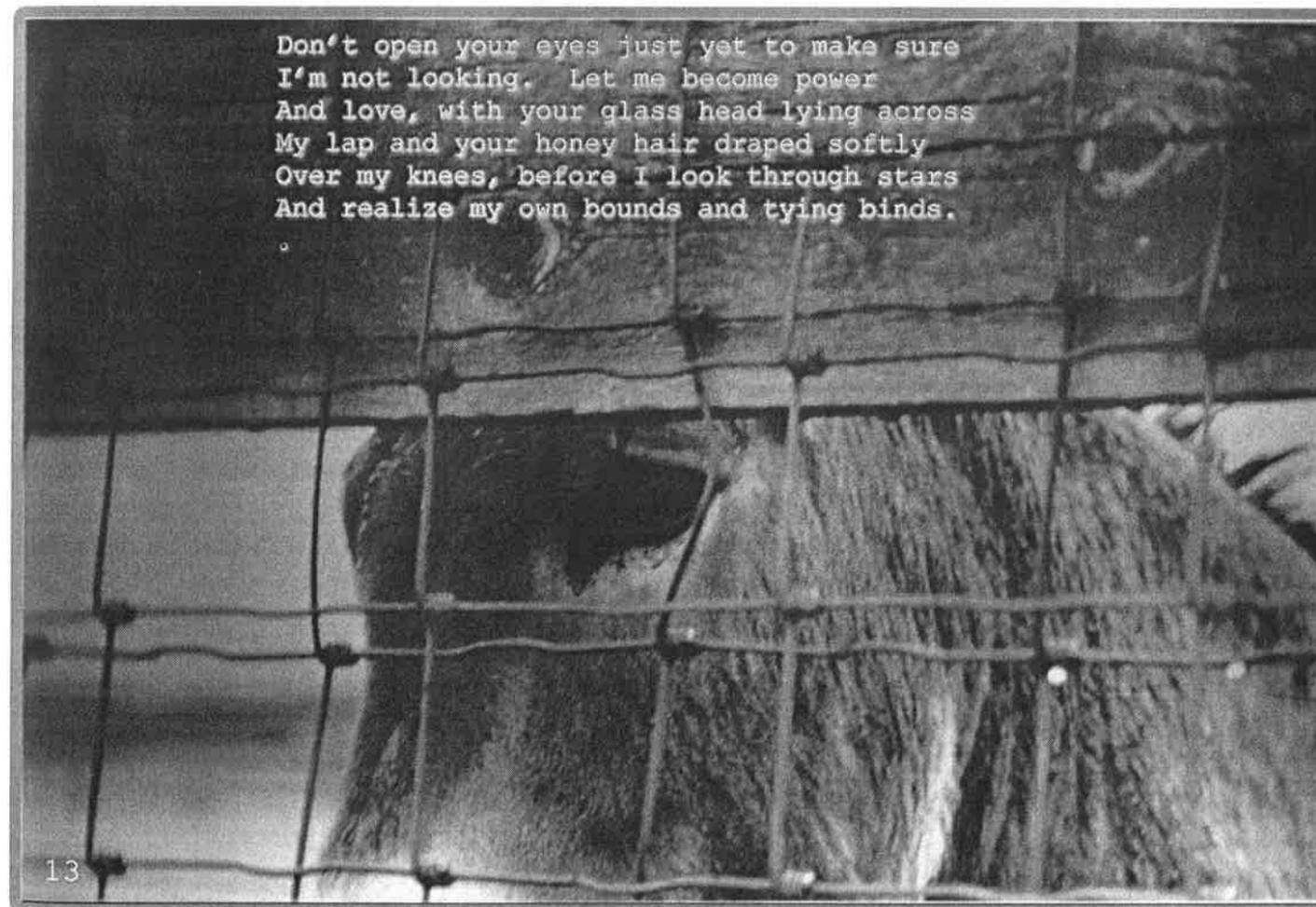
by Chip Hubbell

Beneath these stars that spear sparkling heavens,
And open the night like a speckled peacock,
And filter lustful dreams and selfish prayers,
Acting as thousands of tiny apertures
For the creator to look on all he owns,
I sit on a blanket in a soft field
Where I am the only creature that draws
A conscious breath and exhales tired thoughts.

And with your head on my lap, your eyes closed,
I gaze down at your face and I become
That which looks down upon us, which owns us,
Like a colony of busy black ants,
Like a flightless ladybug in one's palm,
Paralyzed both by a fear and by trust.

Anna Saah

Don't open your eyes just yet to make sure
I'm not looking. Let me become power
And love, with your glass head lying across
My lap and your honey hair draped softly
Over my knees, before I look through stars
And realize my own bounds and tying binds.



Earthworm Conjuring

by Karen Lacy

Late summer rain
Washed earthworms up
On to the driveway
Where they fried for a week
In the afternoon sun
On a bird-splattered concrete griddle
Until they were crisp
Curly
Alphabet shapes
These fragments of dehydrated flesh
Were the letters
On Mother Nature's Ouija board
I placed my big toe
On the ground
And its pink-painted nail
Began to tingle
Moved by forces unseen
A gullible guest at a cosmic slumber party
It spelled out backwards question mark
Then twitched to the right
Resting on an L
Collapsing on itself
And then a few feet away
An O whose ends were waiting to rendezvous
A perfectly formed V
Composing its melody at 6 o'clock
Wait
I thought
It could be love
But the e was upside down
And its half-moon tail
Unraveling



Amanda Gonzalez

The Collection Plate

The gray silver thickness by Steven Leyva
Of the fog
Grates against the buildings
Like tin foil
And wraps them
Like young lunch box sandwiches

The Big Apple
Capone's Home
The glistening beams of the Golden Gate

Or any other city
Where the fog is sure to gather
Like little gray coins in the collection plate
Cast from the solid breaths
Of regret
Eased out by Bob and Sue
And Harry and Jim and you
And you and me.

Traffic signal fate brings your car next to
mine.

You sit straight-laced face forward,
Beautiful in unchosen silence.
Attached or un-doesn't matter here;
In this part of busybody city life
We are the only two
For a moment.

I take you as you are,
As long as you stay put,
At a safe distance

Not knowing me not knowing you, but trying.

The vixen turns green,
Jealous of mind flings through glass
And you dear Romeo, choose home
Not me

And drive away our hypothetical
Suicide pact love.

But knee-deep memory holds me and
I adore you still

Until

The next red light

And a my new driver-side window love affair.

Another Day in Creede, Colorado

Eight thousand, eight hundred, fifty-eight
feet

And a silver past

Prop up this place above the Rio Grande
Wedged into the mountains like a doorstep

Where sleepy shops prepare for

Another too-slow day

Where a dog takes its man for a walk

Where a teen crawls his stereo, windows rolled
down, past and

Past again

Where wisps of white cloud belie inevitable

Smoky clouds and indifferent lightning

Of late-afternoon meteorological metamorphosis

Sending flip-flopped Texans scuffling for

Expansive SUV's lined

Up on the streets while

Others, the majority, it seems, cruise

Up the tilted street, back down and

On to more cosmopolitan places offering movies
and

"Everyday low prices"

Leaving this miner's town

And its precious mettle

Played out for

Another day

Fling Through Glass

by Julie Ann Seals

Denver Memories

And there I felt its cold brush,—
The death of love.
What I thought lived forever was—
Frozen—in eternity.

Snow day in Denver,

White-out my

Denver Memories.

And how implausible
The thought that I'd ever harbored
love

And felt safe

By the—now icicled—charity.

Snow day in Denver,

White-out my

Denver Memories.

This persistent blizzard
Bombards my bleak, weakened heart,
Blacked by the lack
Of this love's efficacy.

Snow day in Denver,

White-out my

Denver Memories.

Thick white snow,
Never-ending night,
Ice-bitten windshield, and
Love-sickened plight
Challenges my clarity.

Snowy night in Denver

Release my misery.

by Joshua Lacy

A Weary Tourist Spot

by Linda Raynes

Weirs Beach was a name that had always floated in and out of conversations in my seacoast New Hampshire town ever since I was young. It was spoken of with both a fondness and disdain that, as I recall, confused me. For the longest time I thought it was along the coast of Maine. Along the Atlantic, at any rate. I was surprised to learn, however, that the Beach rests about 500 feet above sea level, on the outskirts of a forest.

It was summer when I decided to visit the area. A friend, Natalie, from Alabama, had come to visit and I wanted to show her around my home state. Weirs had some tourist-type things (a drive-in, a beach, etc.) that I had heard about. So, we decided to spend a day there before we headed further north into the White Mountains.

The three of us, Natalie, Jenn (my sister), and I, started out from the seacoast. To get to Weirs, we followed route-something-or-other north toward Lake Winnepesaukee. Eventually, we hit the road that would take us, according to our creased map, right to the Beach. The road was winding and narrow, escorting us past summer cottages with weeded front lawns and flagpoles bordered by unnaturally white rocks. Every third house, it seemed, had decided to empty its attics into tired side barns and start an antique business. At last, after passing through a small town with brick shops and a few convenience stores, we arrived. It was the utterly inorganic neon sign that marked our arrival: "Weirs Beach," in tomato-red letters against a blue background, all wrapped by a well-lit red arrow pointing down the boardwalk. Our destination. The beach itself was disappointing. Of the nearly 183-miles of Winnepesaukee shoreline,

only about 250 feet comprise the "beach" section of the area, a patch of gritty dirt-sand kissing warm lake water, hugged by pines on one side and a railroad track on the other. The whole scene was redeemed only by a lovely view (what visitors had come to refer to as "quaint") of a large lake, skirted by wooded mountains. We brought bathing suits but decided to pass on swimming.

The area of Weirs Beach is really a half-mile strip, which we hesitantly began to investigate. The lake and the train tracks run on one side of the strip. It was this side that was not so unlike the other resort towns in the area. A wide boardwalk with tubs of flowers anchored a series of small docks littered with colorful kayaks and small boats, purchased with tax returns or holiday bonuses. The other side of the street was strictly commercial: Weirs Pizza, Basketworld, and the Half Moon Penny Arcade, where you can still play select games for a dime. Inside, they were all darker than they needed to be. A hodgepodge of gift shops selling bandanas and crystal unicorns under dirty glass display cases. The kind of shops that will never be renovated.

Volcano Miniature Golf was the most prominent feature on the strip. A youthful blemish on the sagging face of the area. The brown fiberglass volcano, overflowing with neon orange lava, rested on a hill behind the tomato red sign and loomed another thirty feet into the air. The course at the volcano's base was dated but entertaining in the way that slow-moving bumper cars or old ski ball machines are. It was a harsh departure from modern courses, with a synthetic green worn to a dark rubber skin and with no landscaping to speak of. But it was amusing enough to continue through, and we did, even

though any ball that was putted in an upward angle would roll back to our toes on the worn, slick green.

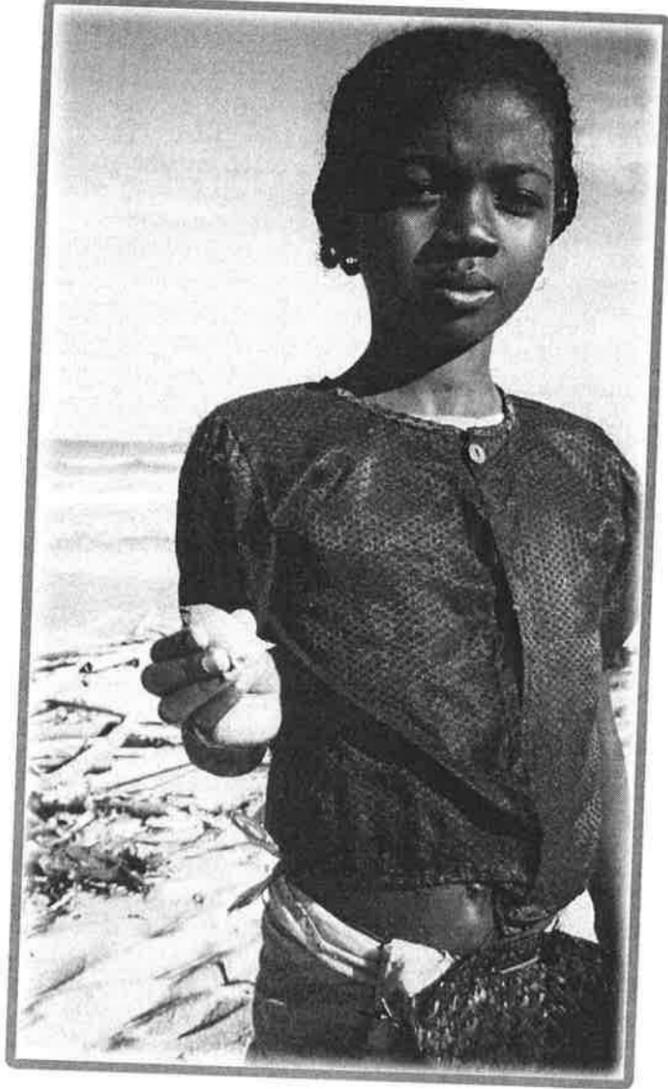
We had decided before we left for the mountains that we wanted to go on a train ride of some sort. Ideally, it would have been on the Cog Railway, which creeps up Mt. Washington for fifty-dollars a person. As college students, the kind that would spend several minutes debating between a dollar hotdog and the extravagant \$1.65 pizza slice, we opted for the aptly named Hobo Railroad, which runs right along the beach. The ten-dollar excursion would suck up two hours of our day with its "scenic ride along the shores of beautiful Lake Winnepesaukee." Well, what was advertised as a picturesque ride on the shores of the lake turned out to be a tour of aging lake cottages and their respective backyards, dotted with molding Adirondack chairs and abandoned water vehicles. Occasionally, when the shoreline brush had a big enough gap in it, all of the train passengers would pipe up so that no one would miss seeing the lake.

It was actually the railroad that had helped build this resort town. Service from Boston started in 1848 and continued into the 1960s. By that time, tourists from the city had passed up Weirs for subtler lakeside destinations. Not that the town is seldom visited. Every June, 400,000 bikers roll into Weirs and Laconia to celebrate all things motorcycle. Bike Week—New England's answer to Sturgis and Daytona. A few leather-clad individuals still loitered along the strip, like a forsaken residue from the activities, even in late July, though most bikers had long since returned home.

At dusk we walked to the Drive-In, Weirs' favorite budget novelty where a person could catch a double feature for seven dollars. Here, the projection house sat in the center of a large pavement disc, around which four white screens stood upright awaiting the first flicker of film. The projection house was painted like a giant American flag. A few red and white stripped walls and one big blue surface with white stars. Overstated Americana (not that it was needed). Cars bloomed outward from this building, facing their chosen screen, along uneven pavement that people tried to navigate in the dimming light, balancing popcorn and sodas.

I sat in front of my white Toyota with my friend from Alabama and my sister. People around us started popping trunks and stretching themselves out on hoods. A few stragglers came in off the street. Couples with their arms slunk around each other's waists walked conspicuously through the woods behind the screen and sat right on the ground. The lights from the boardwalk were still glowing, but the movie had started, and the lights faded too easily out of the corner of my eye.

A few hours later, we stole away into the bewitching mountains and valleys of the north, remembering with only the slightest fondness the day that we spent on that tired, little tourist town next to the lake that we never swam in.



Ripples

by Steven Leyva

I cut the silence
With her name

But she was flowing
Like a river to her bed
Where she would sleep
And dream
And wake upon some new morning

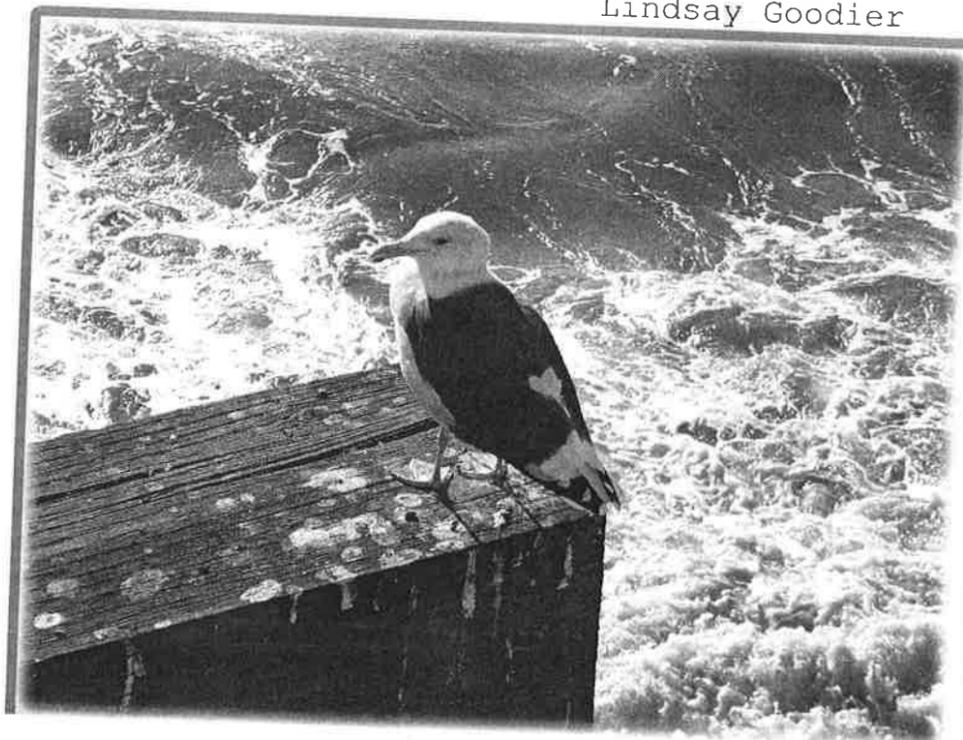
I was all tangled with the earth
Like some young tree
Drilling its roots through the dirt

I could not chase her
I could not think
Beyond my own reflection
In her water

I sent her whispered name
Skipping across
Like some smooth rock
And watched it sink and fade

Leaving only ripples

Lindsay Goodier



Sharks

by Mercy Gallagher

I will pierce my helix soon.
I will be a glitter maze.

Sarah & I, friends till the end,
Stroll the aquarium
And pretend we are twelve.
She found a sitter for the baby,
Though he would love it here because
The flat coin fish mass & move
In sparkle walls.
And he, little boy, would be cooing & ooing.
We, prissy at nineteen, are unimpressed.

She says she will pierce her eyebrow soon
For the boy that never pays child support;
(He can't help loving all that
Suave & sexy mutilation).
She wants to force movement & change,
Buy love in silver barbells.

An alligator turtle here, big as a recliner, looks on.

She will pierce her eyebrow, soon, & I will
Pierce my helix
(The cartilage pop-cracks
Like peanut-brittle bubblegum)
For that oh-so-sexy mutilation.
I can force movement & change.
And maybe I will quit my job
And maybe I will cut my hair...

We prattle and the turtle
Looks on, a thousand year king
Who's seen it all before.
In the dark of the aquarium,
We check our pockets for pennies,
For the cranking machine that flattens them
Into kitschy copper souvenirs;
She pulls out nothing, and I have spent my last on
The gas that brought us here,
So we go empty handed.
Her hands are winter-chapped,
And though she is young
There are upside-down devil horns under her eyes because

The baby will not sleep, she says,
"It seems like he never sleeps," and
Will I be like this, over-wrought and
All the comfort I want ot speak dissolves and
I'm so sorry Sarah.
Will I continue worthless?
Silence stretches between us,
Empty clotheslines

I wish we could go backward.

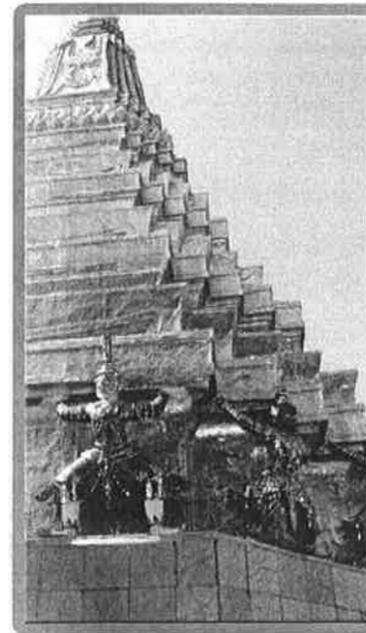
But for the happy times before the pause,
And this eternal fruitless loop,
(Topping childhood, I know now, are these years of fearful pause)
I will pierce my right helix,
Left nostril, in memorium,
Rook, daith, labret,
All ladder strands of DNA,
'Till I am endless, interlocking hoops.
For whatever future comes for me
I will be a glitter maze,
Forcing movement & change in iron.

But I wish instead we could go backward.

Short our penny souvenirs
We have wandered aquatic walk-a-ways & here at their end
The sharks loom above us.
"Look," she muses "don't they seem sure?"
And they are

Sure & powerful.
Twisting & pulling through the blue
Like steady, soaring birds, with streamline abdominals
That make a slowly shifting *s* of knowing.
They look down on us from ever-flight
And the wet light from their sky is playing
Murals on our faces,
So it looks like we are in the sea, the bright & endless sea.

We look up from the bottom.



Henry Applewarmer

by Chris King

Henry Applewarmer is sliding.
His frail, withered fingers are fumbling
Around in his pockets,
Knowing that they are empty
But searching just the same.
He's almost forgotten why he came
To this place of petty exchange,
A crumbling thrift of antiques
(Some of which are nearly as old as he).
And down in the lighted case of jewelery
And trinkets, he stops and stares hard,
Remembering the ring, and the love,
And the life now charred by fire of death and regret

Henry Applewarmer is sinking.
His eyes, nearly shut by the creases around them,
See dimly in the present but sharp into the past.
Distracted frustration at the world moving too fast,
He tugs on his ear for the moment to last.
A dull band of gold seems all that is left
Of his joy and his hate and his innocent state.
For regrets there are many, but for hopes there is one.
As he turns for the door he stops
And looks curiously at his shoelace, undone.
And as he bends down to retie the knot
He remembers what is undone and what is not
Yet finished.

He stands up straighter than he has in a year
Henry Applewarmer is smiling and still smiles here

Ann Clas

Sonnet IV

by Adam Willard

Comment je peux écrire un bon sonnet,
Qui décrit de tout ce qui est le meilleur,
Si c'est pas compris par ma bien-aimée?
C'est elle qui m'a gagné tout ma faveur,

Elle qui est de tout le monde la plus belle.
Qui d'autre possède un si fin esprit?
Ou bien de charme? Sans doute, il n'y aucun
qu'elle!
Elle qui me fait brille quand elle me sourit.

Il me reste une seule chose qui m'a trompé:
Comment je peux decrire ma belle chérie
Dans un sonnet entièrement en français,
Quand elle comprend rien de ce que j'écris?

L'amour n'a pas besoin d'un tel langage
Par d'autres manières il parle bien



Anna Saah

Chicago (from the sky)

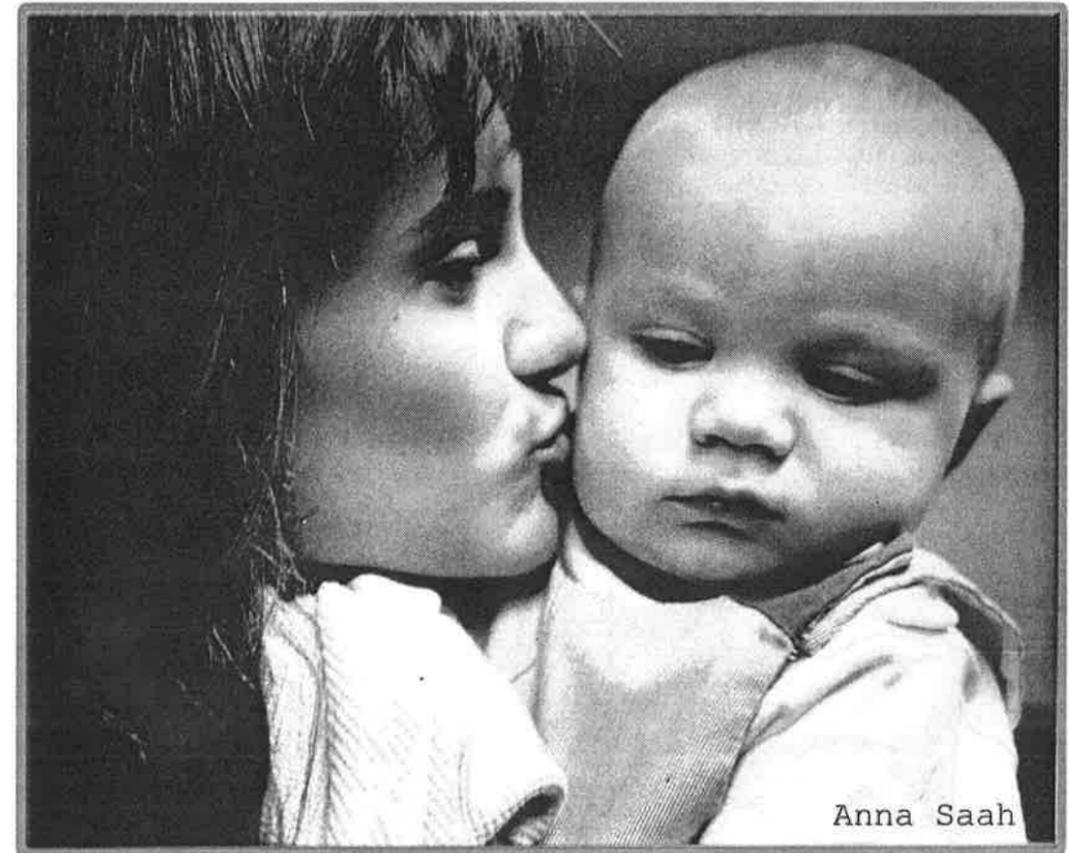
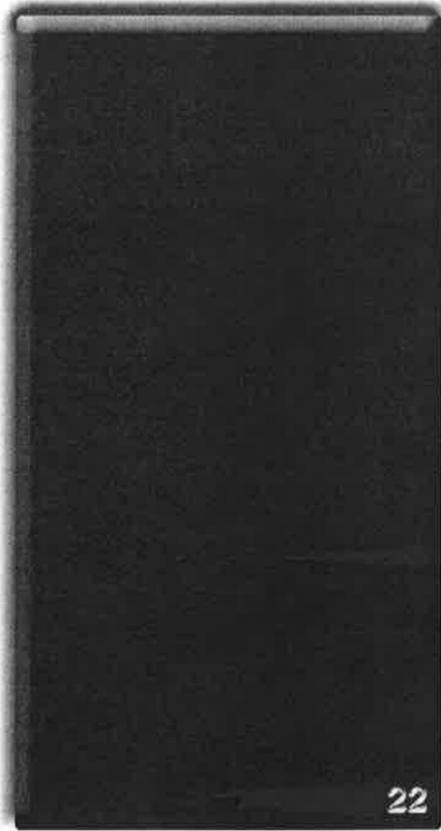
by Chip Hubbell

Hog butcher for the World,
I feel as though I could butcher you myself.
Ten thousand feet above your big shoulders,
They look so weak to me now,
Tickled by bright red and baby blue
Blocks of trucks creeping
Through your grey veins like millions
Of blood cells slowly warming the body.

Your suburbs are just little play things,
Delicate doll houses with tiny windows,
Standing near white thumb nail cars
Waiting passively on thin, black streets.
I want to press my fingers down
Upon the roofs like a devilish little boy,
Plugging up an ant hill with all of his
Bragging, belligerent, childish might.

Downtown is a precarious sand castle
With Lake Michigan lapping close by.
I wish I were some temperamental brat,
Stomping in the bay with ambiguous vigor,
Sending a wave to wash this city,
Erode this city into nothing more
Than a stump of soaking sand
Dripping with brown sadness.

But I can hear O'Hare laughing now,
A stormy, husky, brawling laughter,
Not of youth, but of cynicism and age,
Like an enormous old man guffawing at death.
I will soon be small again,
Miniscule in the midst of countless faces
And a colossal city that knows
No better than to butcher me.



Anna Saah

Some Fathers Fly by

by Roone Acree

I played with the hot flame from a candle—the wax underneath the blaze melted into lave as I placed my thin long thumb into the molten liquid, lifted it, and watched as the wax dried onto the curves of my finger. The scorching pain was well worth the sight of melted hardness sculpted to my flesh and then peeled off into its bowed shape. My mom cried in the living room. Sunlight passed through the prism of the window and melted on her, thick and milky like the wax on my fingers. She glowed and wept in the hour of lost thoughts, absent of words in the middle of the day; I could see her through the flame: her eye lids closed, her fragments wilted in the chair and her youthfulness disappeared as she waited for my father to die. Near the touch, the muscadine vines outside trembled, bare and unleafed, lifted of fragrance by the wind. Into the driveway, the cars came up—people coming to the door dropping off food for the family. Our uncle marshaled the gates. After some hours in the living room gather her courage, my mother assembled us again to go back into the room where our father lay. Moving in whispers back to the death room, we floated above

the carpet as if each foot dealt its hammer-strength upon the floor. I was frightened the most, not just of losing my father but of Death's head so pronounced in the afternoon; painful in this peak time, prominent as a lone oak tree on a hill, full of its ragged branches. As we walked, the hallway seemed to shake, dismembered and crooked leading up to the room. And through the entrance of gauze, we entered together.

"My guys." My father was awake enough to manage these whispers.

"We love you Dad; please get better," my sister said almost inaudibly. But my father knew our sentiment. He sensed we were scared and horrified to see him this way, steadied on this specimen glass as if he were the prime object of our lesson concerning death and the unknown. That now we were here to observe how common and how natural death is to life and how each of us faces it in our own time. "There's nothing to dying; the hard part is living a life that counts for something," he would often say. But at this moment, I couldn't believe how eternally idle the room seemed to be, saturated in unmoving shadows on the walls and floor: as if this

personal rupture failed to touch the world I knew. It seems that after the rolling and choking of life, beyond the images that we have of death as the grand finale, before our final breath invites our exile or ignites cosmic fireworks, death has a way of bring us sobriety, forcing us in that final moment of flesh to ponder frilly curtains above our heads, dry dust upon the furniture, the dullness of a room mixed in mediocrity, stripped of ornament, of monument. Somehow, life ekes out through the doorway or some vent in the room unceremoniously, plain and simple, without any grand gesture or fan-fare, ugly and ordinary like buzzing flies in the windowsill, common and unobtrusive as if Death himself were a familiar friend who passes by often enough and yet, on this one occasion remembers to retrieve that one thing we owe him, our breath, our moments in all their lack and unevenness seeping from our lungs and out our mouths for the final time.

My father would breathe clumsily a few more hours before he died. My mother tended to him patiently and lovingly stroking his head, rubbing salve on his dry lips, positioning covers and wayward limbs. My sister fell asleep on the floor, as I also fell unconscious on the carpet until I heard the stirring of voices overhead. Lifting myself up, I didn't know that I would look upon the coming moments then and for years to come. The process was a meticulous craft. I saw my father's breath joining that laborious rhythm associated with dying, like the beginning short-out of a breaker throwing everything into darkness. His expression was of stale bread, wooden and solemn against a cup of light that glanced his face and his forehead and circled in steam and dust above his temple, leaving the sense of a halo lifting from a disavowed angel. Through his slowing breath, everything was coming to a close; the raw moment of cancer like the light above passed over while cold wind moved fingerless branches against the windows. Hunger was suspended; long sleep was initiated by the grinding stall of organs within his body. Everything passed, nothing mystical or magical, just stillness, as if my father finally accepted the ivy-covered wall, that this time he had no choice but to accept its dominion, that partition built in disobedience by the ones who thought they knew better. I know that he would like to have died better,

perhaps underneath a tree or outside in a different season, clothed in the humid embrace of summer. But he died with all of us cluttered about, awkward and sad. He died in the company of loved ones, but journeyed from that still room alone.

As Woolly Mammoths Lie

by Adam Willard

Gray asphalt and yellow lines rush below
As a winding river
Would if only tar could flow
Distant gray, black slivers
Splash and gleam in the sun's glow
As cars, like ancient dragonflies, fly by

By this modern river-bank, this roadside
An eighteen-wheeler sank
As a mastodon would lie
Its great limbs are lank
It cools down and waits to die
It breathes its last, belly out, as it lay

Lays now, an oracle to its proud race
And with its death comes stink
A sign of inward decay
To the rest, soon extinct
And every dog has its day
I thought, as a truck by the roadside lay



Andrew Saliga



Adam Willard

By The Numbers

by Keith Gogan

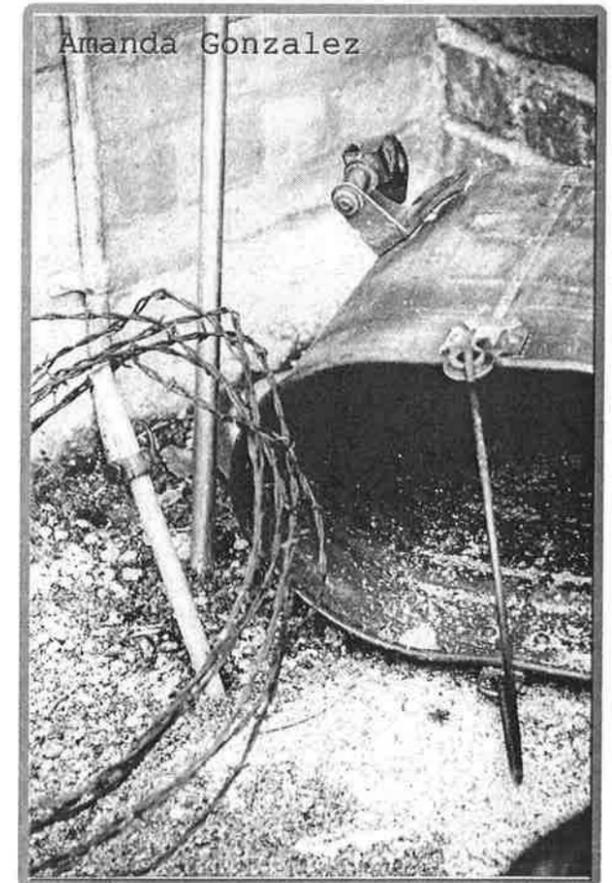
O.R.U English department chair William Epperson rarely misses an opportunity to rib me about my obsession with numbers. After all, I do keep a daily record of my intake of calories, fat, and dietary fiber, and I keep track of the miles I put on each of my three pairs of hiking boots. You probably don't want to know what else I count, measure, and record. So, when my friend Delton Gantt came to Creede, Colorado (where I was working for the summer), to climb a few of Colorado's famed fourteen-thousand-foot peaks with me, I couldn't help but ponder the allure of these peaks so fortunate to exceed 13,999 feet.

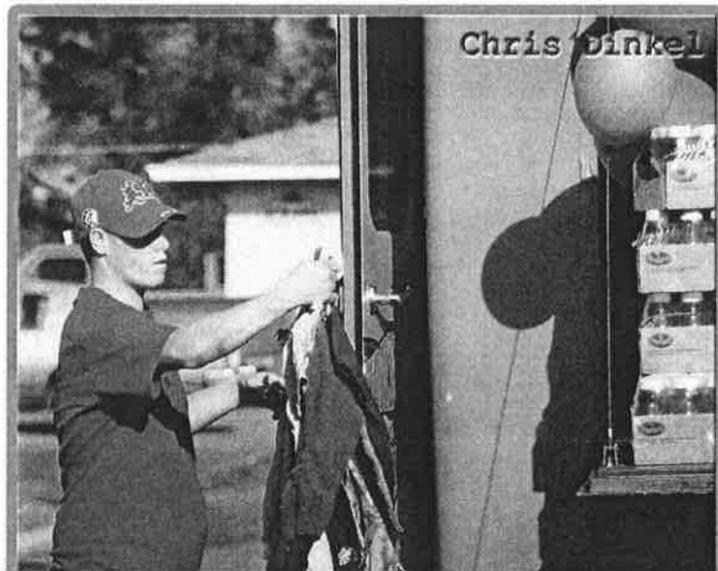
"Bagging fourteeners," that is, attaining, by foot, the summits of Colorado's 55 fourteen-thousand-foot peaks, is a popular pastime for Coloradans and flatlanders alike. It brings much revenue to mountain towns and pulls everyone from children to senior citizens out of the anesthesia of modern life and into the realm of rock, sky, and personal challenge. Some become downright obsessive about it, bagging several peaks in a short week of vacation or literally running up one after another clad in only t-shirt, shorts, and running shoes. As I was climbing a particularly striking peak named Uncompahgre with Delton, I recalled a conversation with my friend Amy, who has completed the Appalachian Trail, the Pacific Crest Trail, and the Colorado Trail, a total of about 5,000 miles of backpacking. She asked me if I thought I would climb all of Colorado's fourteeners. I told her that I might and I might not. I explained that the fact that a

particular mountain peak reaches or exceeds fourteen-thousand feet is irrelevant; what matters most is the beauty of the place, the quality of the trip, and the memories made on the trip. I simply do not have enough time to spend solely on pursuing experiences dictated by an arbitrary number. Elegant, snow-smothered meadows; dark canyons; and pounding rivers await my exploration, as do peaks of 13,000, 12,000 and even 3,000 feet. I guess, for me, being outside is mostly about beauty, about aesthetics, not numbers.

Personal goals are commendable; mine, at least in reference to the natural world, are dictated by the sense of wonder, the transcendence, found only outside, out there, in all seasons. I will continue to climb fourteeners, but causally, with no sense of competition or urgency.

The tendency to value things quantitatively rather than qualitatively is standard practice in modern America. Men judge women by their physical measurements; women judge men by their incomes; children judge sports idols by their statistics. Indeed, we see this tendency in the most inappropriate places. I remember hearing a preacher boast, "I pray for an hour every day!" Well, good for him. Good for him.





The Brady Mansion Experience

by Grady Walker

Early on a clear, chilly Oklahoma Saturday Morning, several months ago, a couple friends, my favorite real estate agent, and I pulled cautiously into the semi-circle drive and around the now dilapidated fountain in front of the Brady Mansion, the first place on my list of possible bed-and-breakfast houses. I was wild with excitement and somewhat impatient with the listing realtor, who was hell-bent on giving us her pseudo-history spiel. After what seemed endless, we were finally admitted past the gigantic columns, that stood like intimidating armed guards before the mammoth entrance, a door wide enough for all of us to walk through abreast. As great houses go, its exterior gave the impression of neglect and abuse, so that it was a magnificent monarch, fallen and dishonored, but the outside was nothing compared to the devastation that hit us as we entered the foyer and stood in shock as we show how marble floors and oak-paneled wall and carved stair-rails had been painted a dull black with the oak stairs themselves covered with orange, matted, outdated, filthy shag carpet. Despair is the best word to describe my feelings as I learned that the great edifice whose very name meant Tulsa "royalty" had been transformed into ten shabby apartments, with intricately-carved marble (and some sandstone) fireplace mantles taller than any of us popping up in dingy kitchens or in grungy make-shift bathrooms or even in closets with cheap feed-sack print curtains serving as doors.

The basement was most dismal of all, as it revealed open windows and weeds draping over, where rainwater had been allowed to gush in and settle everywhere, causing, during years of neglect, the American "castle" to crack from the weakened foundation and even causing one of the great columns to split, warning of possible collapse. Before we could leave the grand old wreck, we explored the attic (now a cheaply thrown together, temporary-looking apartment), walked out on the once-lovely balconies, and, later, on the first floor climbed over a mountainous warp in the beautifully-grained, golden-yellow hardwood floor. As we left the sad old place, my distress and gloom were mitigated only by my sheer lust to devise and utilize eternal torture of the most hideous and painful mode on those darkened souls responsible for this unforgivable sacrilege, those agents of evil whose worst sin is bad taste.

Mickey

By David Choi

I met Mickey half way through the twelfth grade, working at a small private school for \$5.75 an hour. Mr. Sam, my boss and the school's owner, told me one day that he had hired a painter whom I would be assisting. When Mickey arrived later that morning in his old white pick up truck, I didn't realize that I was beginning a relationship that would last for eight months.

I didn't know what to make of Mickey, but I also didn't try hard to make anything of him, because I thought our relationship would have its start and end in the course of one or two days of painting. We started work by scraping the outside walls of the second-grade hut. I was working on a windowsill or something, using a chair from the classroom. I left my station once, and when I returned, I found Mickey using my chair, his bulging body balancing on the second-grade apparatus in a miracle, or maybe defiance, of balance. "You think someone who steals your chair's an *****?" I hesitated for a moment, surprised. "Nah, that's fine." Mickey was incredulous and looked at me as if I had just said something ridiculously foolish. "You telling me when you're in a movie theater and some guy steals your seat, you don't think he's an *****?" After that, Mickey was constantly throwing expletives when trying to boss me around, referring to me with what I learned to be endearing profanity. He also regularly insulted me—he was always asking when I would get a decent haircut, saying that what I had on my head looked like an animal's nest. That was just the way Mickey was.

Mickey was tall, fat, and somewhat ugly. The thing that first struck you about him was his width—Mickey was a wide man, and his typical wide-legged stance accentuated it. He wore glasses, which he continually took off to wipe the sweat from, and his hair—short, thin wisps of blonde that stuck straight up out of his head—was barely visible. He

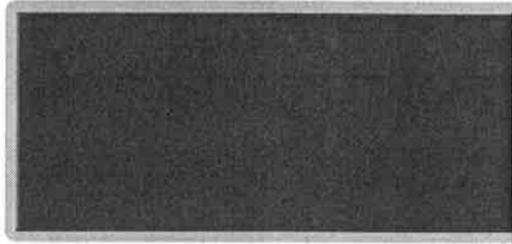
appeared to be a bald man with a miniature, mowed-down patch of wheat growing out of his head. His ugliness was due mostly to the bad proportions of his face: his features were all where they should have been, but the rest of his head had kept growing over the decades, and now he had enough face for two people. He had big floppy jowls, a large nose, massive cheeks that caved in on his mouth, and no neck, just flesh hanging loose under his jaw. Since he moved with his stomach sticking out, it seemed that his gut was drawing him along deliberately and that he was resisting it. He wore the same blue work pants every day, alternating between two bluish plaid shirts. Usually a package of chewing tobacco was stuffed into his chest pocket, and whenever I could, I stole this from him and said I was going to take up a new habit.

Mickey lived off his social security checks. He was sixty years old, and I think he had fought in a war. He had been married twice and lived with a woman after that, or maybe married once and lived with two women. I always felt bad that Mickey had not experienced success in his marriages. In all the ways I knew him, he was dependable and responsible. Maybe his ex-wives did not appreciate swearing or chewing tobacco. Otherwise, Mickey was hardworking and fiercely loyal, and on top of that, genuine. There was never pretense in Mickey. When he didn't like a person, he said so. One of Mr. Sam's sisters or sisters-in-law visited the school on occasion, and Mickey always stayed away from her because she was stuck up. He didn't like her because she wore money like a badge, and he insisted she wasn't any better than him just because she paid more taxes.

Apparently, Mickey was working at Guy School with me because hunting season was over, and he had nothing else better to do. Mr. Sam had only asked Mickey to help do some painting, but Mickey kept coming back, day after day, doing with me whatever work Mr. Sam had assigned for the day. Mickey wasn't being paid—his grandson was enrolled in Day Care at the school, and since Mr. Sam didn't make the family pay for that, Mickey wouldn't take any money for his work. But he showed up dependably every morning about the same time, and

although I was the one being paid and thus the only actual employee, Mickey somehow got me to believe he was one of my bosses. We spent most of the summer painting—painting in the hot and sticky days of a North Carolina summer, when the sunlight presses itself against flesh with an almost material weight. At least half way through our day, Mickey and I would take a soda break. Mickey always determined the timing of the break by when he felt he had exhausted himself. I'll give him credit—he always worked up a good sweat. Mickey would pull several coins out of his pocket, dump them in my hands, and tell me what type of soda he wanted. He favored Dr. Pepper. Eventually, I began to offer to buy the drinks on occasion, and by the time I left for college, I think we had made it to the point where we each paid for drinks every other day. I don't know why we didn't just each buy our own sodas.

Mickey told me every day when I left school, "Work hard, save your money, and marry a doctor." He also reminded me several times a week to go to college so I wouldn't have to do work like this for the rest of my life. I did go to college, quitting work around the beginning of August. By that time, Mickey and I had become buddies, and the vast discrepancy of age and backgrounds had only produced more substance for friendship. I returned to Guy School during my first break from college to visit Mickey. He asked how school was and how classes were, and asked how many girlfriends I had (before I left I bet him I would have twenty girlfriends at school), and he didn't seem quite sure what psychology was but didn't really seem to care, either. I bought us each Dr. Peppers, and we sat at a small marble and talked, and he was the same as he had always had been—funny and insulting and cussing and wearing the same dirty blue pants and blue plaid shirts he would put on the next day before driving to Guy School. And I knew that although he was not employed there, Mickey would be at school by half past nine the next morning, his big gut dragging him everywhere, profanities coming from his mouth, and his bad habit tucked into his left chest in a way that said he was perfectly comfortable and honest with himself. That was just the way Mickey was.



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