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The Little Balkans Review, Winter 1983-84

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Authors
Janis DeChicchio, Gene DeGruson, Rod Dutton, Shelby Horn, Steve Robbins, and Ted Watts

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The

Little Balkans Review

A Southeast Kansas Literary and Graphics Quarterly

Vol. 4, No. 2

Winter
1983-84

A Birthday Festschrift for James Tate, Poet

The

Little Balkans Review

A Southeast Kansas Literary and Graphics Quarterly

Vol. 4, No. 2

Editorial Board:
Janis DeChicchio
Gene DeGruson
Rod Dutton
Shelby Horn
Steve Robbins
Ted Watts

All glory comes from daring to begin.--Eugene F. Ware

The Little Balkans Press, Inc.

601 Grandview Heights Terrace

Pittsburg, Kansas 66762

Winter 1983-84

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The cover drawing of James Tate by Ted Watts is based upon a photograph by Rollie McKenna, 1967.

About James Tate

James Vincent Tate was born 8 December 1943 to Samuel Vincent and Betty Jean Whitsitt Appleby at St. Luke's Hospital, Kansas City, Mo. He earned a B.A. degree from Kansas State College (now Pittsburg State University) in 1965 and an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa in 1967. He was a lecturer at the University of Iowa Writers Workshop from 1965 to 1967 and at the University of California, Berkeley, from 1967 to 1968. In 1970 he became an Assistant Professor at Columbia University, New York, and taught at Emerson College in Boston. In 1971 he joined the faculty of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, where he is currently a Professor. In 1972 he married Liselotte Jonsson. He received the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award in 1966, the National Institute of Arts and Letters Award for Poetry in 1974, a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in 1976, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Poetry in 1980. His publications include the following:

Cages. Iowa City: The Shepherds Press, 1967.

The Destination. Cambridge: Pym Randall Press, 1967.

The Lost Pilot. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967. Reprint ed., New York: The Ecco Press, 1978.

The Torches. Santa Barbara: Unicorn Press, 1968. 2nd ed., 1971.

Notes of Woe. Iowa City: Stone Wall Press, 1968.

Row with Your Hair. San Francisco: Kayak Books, 1969.

Shepherds of the Mist. Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1969.

The Oblivion Ha-Ha. Boston and Toronto:Little, Brown and Co., 1969.

Amnesia People. Girard, Ks: The Little Balkans Press, 1970.

Are You Ready Mary Baker Eddy??? (with Bill Knott). Berkeley: Cloud Maurauder Press, 1970.

Deaf Girl Playing. Cambridge: Pym Randall Press, 1970.

Wrong Songs. Cambridge: Halty Ferguson , 1970.

Hints to Pilgrims. Cambridge: Halty Ferguson, 1971. Rev. ed., Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982.

Apology for Eating Geoffrey Movius' Hyacinth. Santa Barbara: Unicorn Press, 1972.

Absences. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1972.

Viper Jazz. Middletown, Ct: Wesleyan University Press, 1976.

Hottentot Ossuary. Cambridge: Temple Bar Bookshop, 1974.

Lucky Darryl A Novel (with Bill Knott). Brooklyn: Release Press, 1977.

Riven Doggeries. New York: The Ecco Press, 1979.

The Rustling of Foliage The Memory of Caresses. Amherst: The Massachusetts Review, 1979.

If It Would All Please Hurry. Amherst: Shanachie Press, 1980.

Land of Little Sticks. Worcester: Metacom Press, 1981.

Constant Defender. New York: The Ecco Press, 1983.

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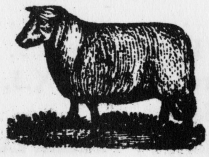
Sue Abbott Boyd's "For Walt Whitman" was first published in *A Portion of the Fort Root Poems,* Vol. I (Fort Smith: South & West, 1973).

Michael Heffernan's "On Completing a 40th Year" was originally published in *The Chowder Review.*

A portion of Deborah Seabury's interview with David Holloway appeared in the May 1983 issue of *Opera News.*



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James Tate at the age of four

Preface

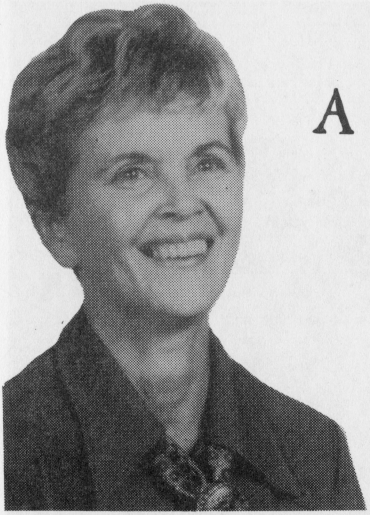
This is a special issue. It started in April with the realization that poet James Tate would be forty on December 8. For most people, that birthday, the fortieth, has always had a special significance. We felt it would for Jim, too, who was reared when a campus adage was "Don't trust anyone over thirty." Suddenly it seemed natural (and almost necessary) to help celebrate the age-old rites of change and reconciliation during that period traditionally used to assess aspirations and sort memories. We thought forty friends (and we include his mother in that category) should join the celebration—so began the reading of old letters and corresponding with those mentioned therein, with requests for poems, stories, addresses, and more current names. This issue is the result: a festschrift in honor of James Tate's fortieth birthday.

The letters accompanying the contributions were magnificent tributes in their own right. Perhaps the most representative was that of poet and former Tate student Nathan Whiting, who wrote: "It seems strange James Tate is almost 40. At the same time it seems hard to believe a man who played a pivotal role in my life, helping to give both direction and confidence to my work, 17 years ago, is only 40. He was my teacher the year he won the Yale prize and we were his first class of poets. It was a happy, inventive group brought together by the young poet leading us. He was still full of a Kansas almost wild. He went east for a reading tour and came back confused by the speed of the place, but ready for it, for the East finally claimed him, calmed him, and now his midwestern quick wit dazzles them."

As for the contributions, John Ciardi put it most succinctly: "The trouble with poems for a festschrift is that the over-subtle may try to read a commentary into them. I inclose a poem simply because I have it on hand: I no more intend a personal comment than you intend to Balkanize Tate." (Incidentally, you will find a couple of contributions which were accepted for this issue long before the concept of a festschrift arose, as well as some regular features that our subscribers would insist rather strongly be continued.) This issue, then, is a birthday party to which you are all invited. We are proud to present a galaxy of American writers and artists who have made this celebration possible. We thank them most profoundly, and join them in saying "Happy Birthday, Jim. And many more!"

The Editors

P.S. Jim, we'll do this again when you're eighty.



A Very Normal Boy

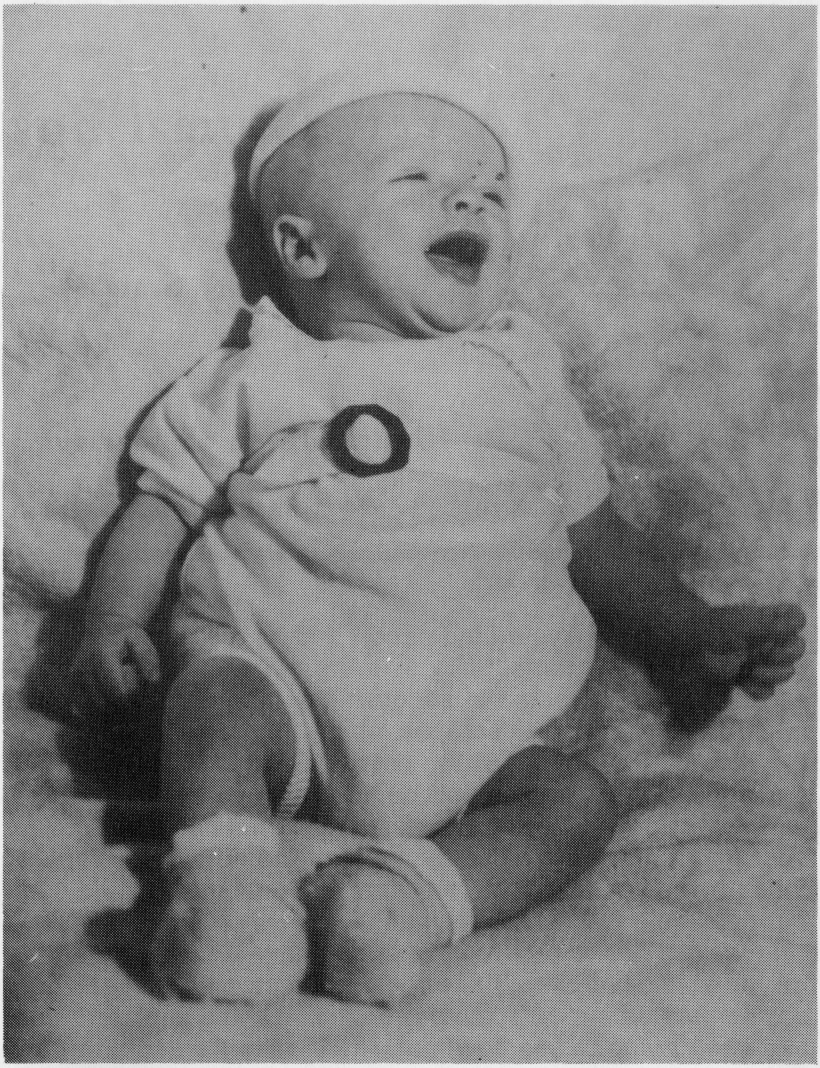
By Betty Sears

Illustrated with photographs from her family album

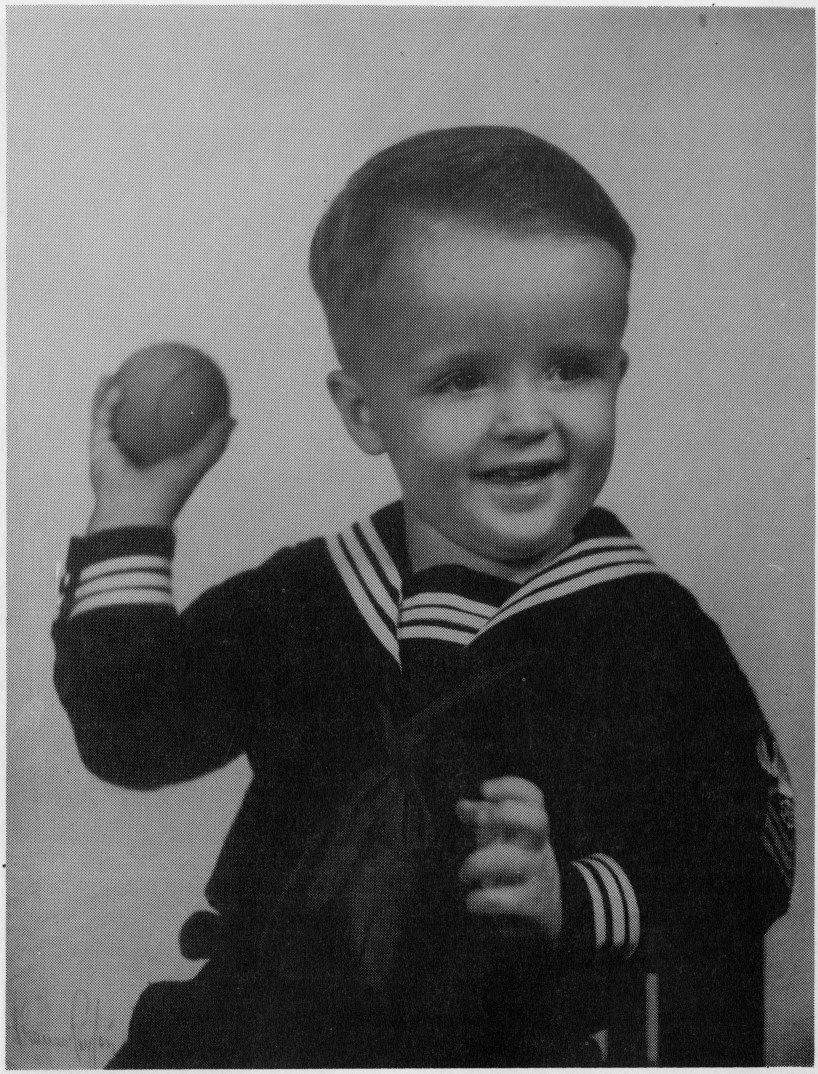
As a boy, Jim gave no indication that he would be a writer. He was a very "normal" boy in every respect—interested in athletics, not interested in school—one who managed to get into his share of boyish scrapes. As a youngster growing up in the fifties, he delighted at the birth of Rock and Roll and was an avid collector of baseball cards. Because his father died during World War II (as you know from his first publication, *The Lost Pilot),* Jim was raised by me with the help of my family. Since I was young myself, we were not only mother and son, but became good friends as well.

I rode the bus to and from work. Whenever I saw Jim waiting for me at the bus stop, I knew we had a problem. I recall one day he greeted me with the news that he and a minister's son had been trying to see how many mud balls they could throw over a newly white-stuccoed house. Of course, some made it and many didn't, and the homeowner was not enchanted with the effect. The phone was ringing when we arrived home. It was the owner, demanding that something be done. I had his house restuccoed. But most important to me was the fact that Jim and I had an understanding that we could tell each other the truth. Perhaps I was not always told *everything,* but what I was told was the truth.

(Continued on page 5)

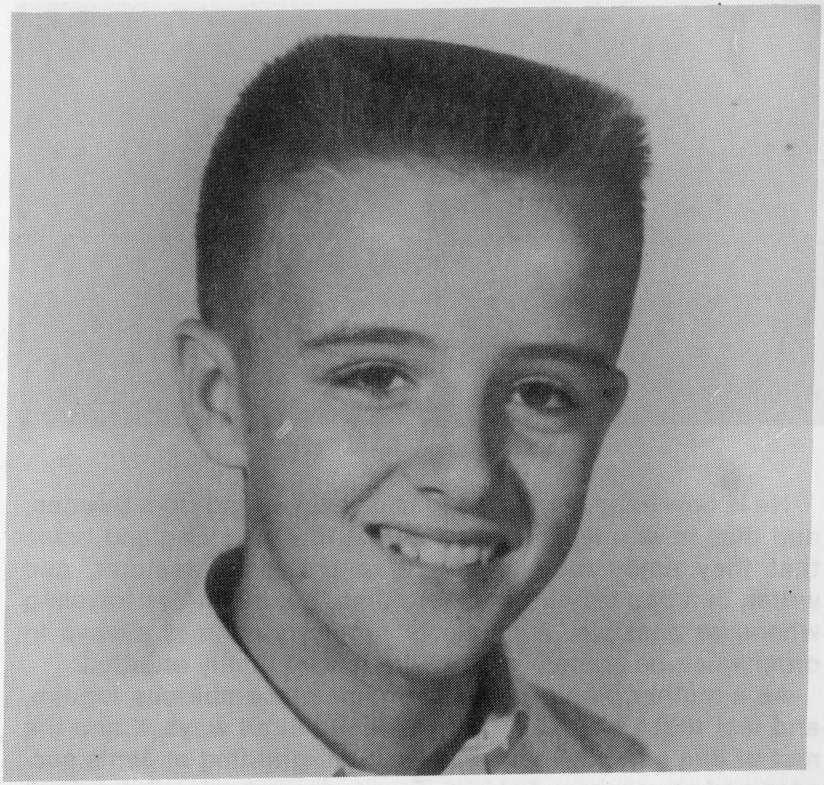


James Tate at six weeks



James Tate at one year

James Tate at age three



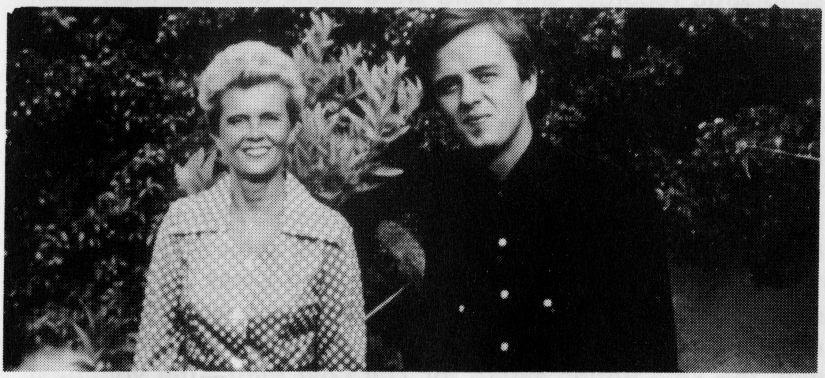
James Tate at fifteen

It was assumed that Jim would attend college after high school. I must admit that his high school years produced no scholastic records, and there were some anxious moments. He certainly changed after he entered college. It was at Pittsburg State that he became a real student, and his interest in literature and writing started. Jim has always maintained that his association with Gene DeGruson, and the encouragement and advice that Gene offered, did much to help keep him writing and writing and writing. It was my feeling at the time that Jim would probably become a teacher. I had no idea his hard work and talent would enable him to achieve the acclaim that he has received. I do not mean that I was doubting his dedication, but realistically I knew how few writers attained recognition. What a thrill when it was announced that he had won the Yale Series award for *The Lost Pilot*—the youngest poet to have earned that award.

Liselotte and James Tate

He is now happily married to Lisa, a lovely girl from Sweden, and they have a typical old and beautiful New England home that they enjoy remodeling. As a professor, lecturer, and writer, Jim has very little leisure time, but he enjoys traveling whenever possible. A picnic or family reunion is always in order when he comes to visit: Jim is very family oriented.

As a mother, I had so many dreams and ambitions for Jim, and feel that I have been truly blessed in all ways. I, and the rest of Jim's family, have always been gratified at Jim's success and so very proud of him. To me, one very pleasing aspect of the situation has been that he has never worn his success as a badge, but has remained the same truthful, devoted, down-to-earth person that I had always hoped he would be.



Betty Sears and James Tate

i don't know james tate

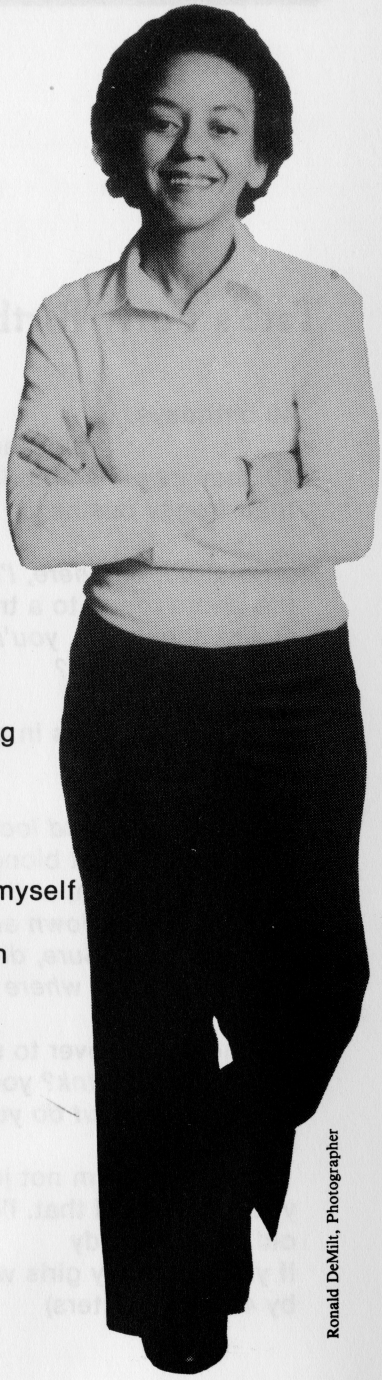
i don't know
james tate
but that's not my responsibility
is it
my task is to care
not only about those whom i know
but those who know me
which is probably pretty
much of the same
since knowing is only a cognitive
and being known is a feeling

i do know anyone
whose mother will write about him
must be a good son
and having mothered
a son and two dogs and one turtle
not to mention nursed
good friendships and broken hearts
skinned knees and bill collectors along
a son is a rare and wonderful feeling

i don't know
what forty will bring
having just touched the magic stone myself
but i do know i welcome the age
and am looking forward to the wisdom
i'm told will soon follow

i do know i wish
james tate another forty
and forty after that
there are too few who really care

Nikki Giovanni



Ronald DeMilt, Photographer

Tate's Forty Birthdays

40 birthdays,
pleasant to think of them as
40 snowy egrets standing in grasses, minding
their froggy business,
Tate goes out and snaps
a Polaroid, *See here, I'm 40,* showing
the photo round to a troop of oohing blondes
O Jim, they gasp, *you're so clever how*
did you ever do it?
(Me, I see my birthdays
as 47 surly waiters in a row, each expecting
a larger gratuity)

May I come by and look at your egrets?
begs the bustiest blonde
and will you, Jim, at that fateful hour sorrowfully
admit, *They've flown all away*
or will you fib: *Sure, drop by,*
plenty of egrets where these came from.

So she comes over to see the egrets *What*
about a little drink? you say and she
says *All right but do you mind if I take*
a shower first
(I'm not jealous of your youth,
you understand that. I'm just wondering Jim
old pal old buddy
if you know any girls who get turned on
by 47 surly waiters)

Fred Chappell

from A Happy Childhood

Toward dawn, rain explodes on the tin roof
like popcorn. The pale light is streaked by grey
and that green you see just under the surface

of water, a shimmer more than a color.
Time to dive back into sleep, as if into
happiness, that neglected discipline. . . .

In those sixth-grade book reports
you had to say if the book was optimistic
or not, and everyone looked at you

the same way: how would he turn out?
He rolls in his sleep like an otter.
Uncle Ed has a neck so fat it's funny,

and on the way to work he pries the cap
off a Pepsi. Damn rain don't cool one weary
thing for long; it's gonna be a cooker.

The boy sleeps with a thin chain of sweat
on his upper lip, as if waking itself,
becoming explicit, were hard work.

Who knows if he's happy or not?
A child is all the tools a child has,
growing up, who makes what he can.

William Matthews

For Walt Whitman

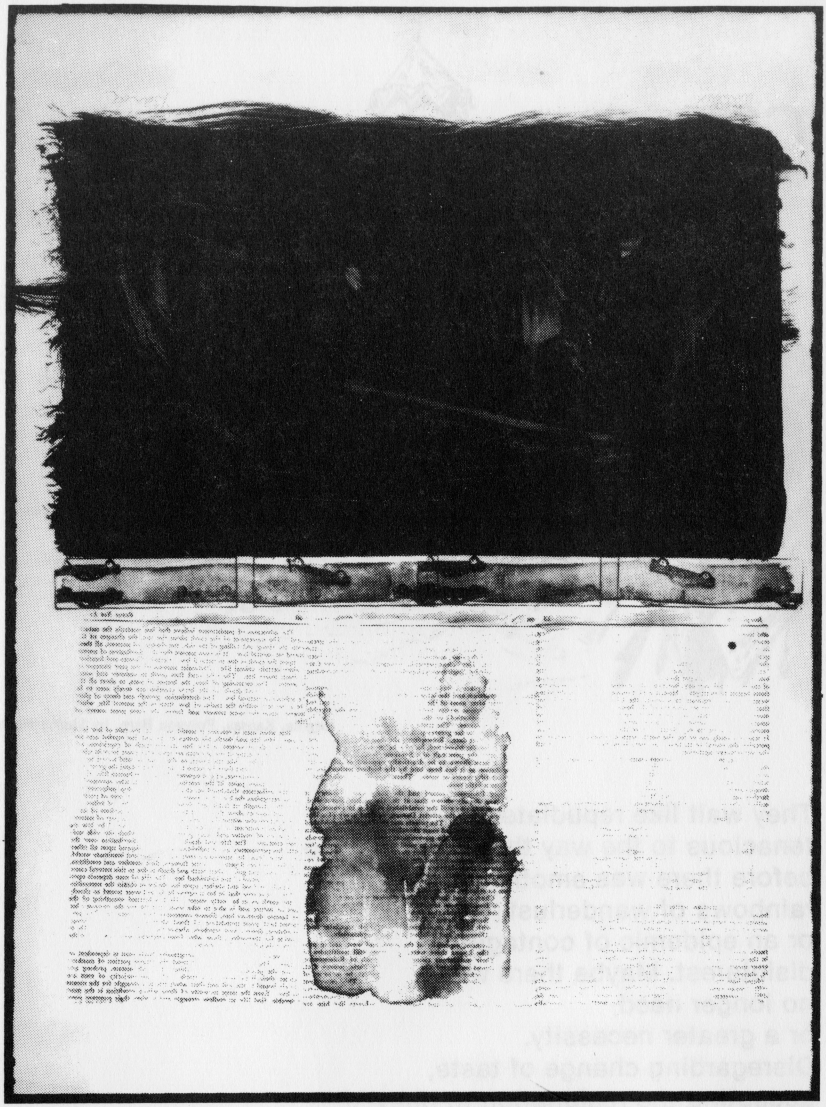
Old man you melted your way
through the flowering grasses of a
flourishing nation
and measured our greenness by the
pulsebeats of song

Your aim was pillowed by
a fond searching in
to
the shadows
as you willed us air to
breathe

Now, as I choke on wardust
and wallow in smallness
I think of you

few men live forever
those who do
beget freedom
and scoop the shadows away from walls
where the centuries lean.

Sue Abbott Boyd



Alex Barde

Change

Angola, Kansas, Polygon Barn, by Shelby Horn

They wait like repudiated lovers
tenacious to the way things used to be
before there was emotion without rein,
rainbows of wanderlust,
or an epidemic of contagious
disinterest. Maybe there was
no longer need
or a greater necessity.
Disregarding change of taste,
accepting the resignation to obey
with grace the chemistry of the seasons,
they seem like an aging historian
afraid of forgetting. Survivors,
they remain in the flow to suggest
that even change is not absolute.

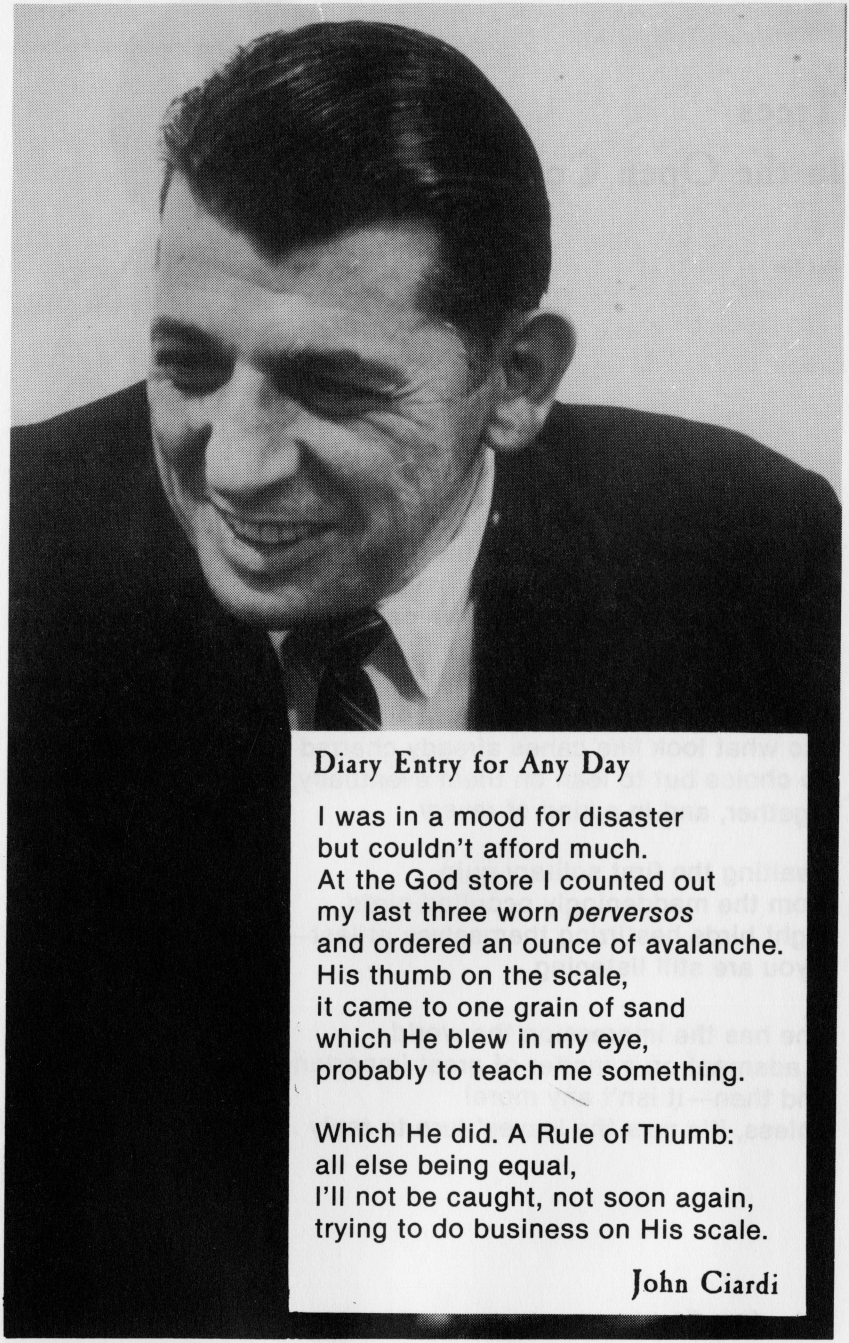
Gene DeGruson

Blackberry Summer

The thing is,
They are always ready before we are,
About the third week in July
When it's 98
And the humidity is the same.
The fruit swells,
Cascades, clusters of
Jewels big as my thumb.
I wonder that the poor don't eat—
But there are different kinds of hunger.
With a gallon tin can
Swinging on its bail,
I pad down cloistered silence
Forest sealed,
Of dusty, one-lane roads.
This is a solitary occupation—
Only gold-green beetles buzzing.
Besides sun-stroke, chiggers,
Snakes coiled
In the shade under all,
One must love thorns.
Not many have a talent for it.

Joan Yeagley

Wang Hui-Ming



Diary Entry for Any Day

I was in a mood for disaster
but couldn't afford much.
At the God store I counted out
my last three worn *perversos*
and ordered an ounce of avalanche.
His thumb on the scale,
it came to one grain of sand
which He blew in my eye,
probably to teach me something.

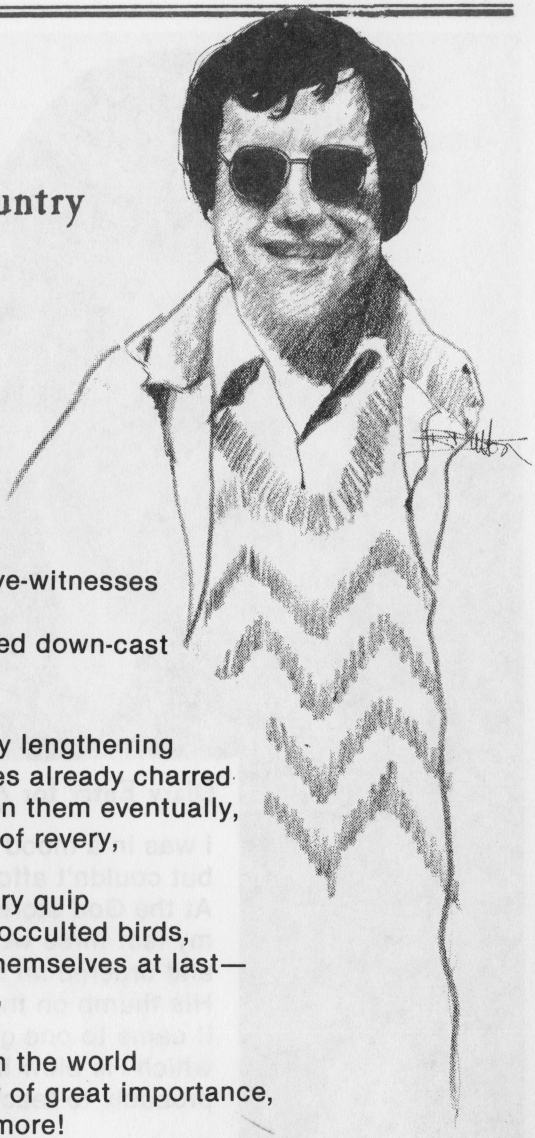
Which He did. A Rule of Thumb:
all else being equal,
I'll not be caught, not soon again,
trying to do business on His scale.

John Ciardi

Joe Kirkish, Photographer

Trees in the Open Country

For Jim



Like those who were eye-witnesses
To an enormity,
And have since remained down-cast
At the very spot,

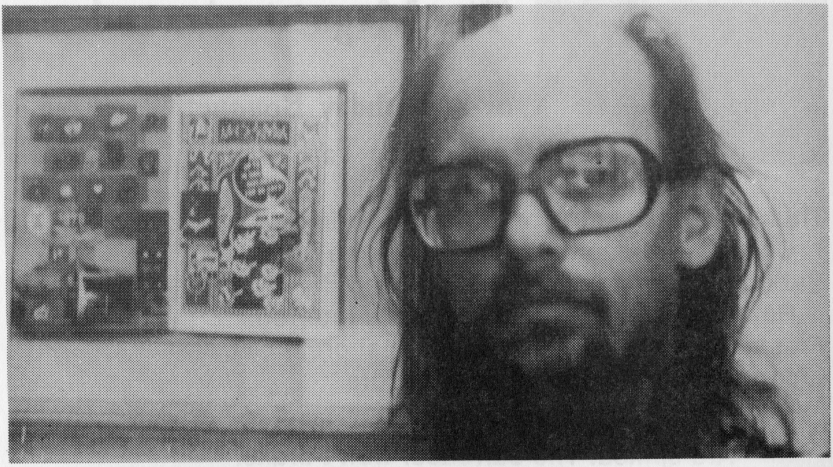
Their shadows gradually lengthening
Into what look like canes already charred
No choice but to lean on them eventually,
Together, and in a kind of revery,

Awaiting the first solitary quip
From the maddeningly occulted birds,
Night birds bestirring themselves at last—
If you are still listening,

One has the impression the world
Is adamant on a matter of great importance,
And then—it isn't any more!
Unless, it's now the leaves' turn to reply . . .

Charles Simic

Waking on a Track During the Race



The track is turned on end
so runners run straight up
then straight down

like on a record in a juke box
groove after groove

each has his her own method
some bent absurd
climbing climbing falling
into tiny sizes
then climbing back
huge faces stretch up to breathe
arms reaching meaning
nothing perhaps they are pulled
by invisible suspenders
pushed by night lights
too much
yes I realize standing myself up
much too fast
and climb into the now no longer
climbing.

Nathan Whiting

George Hitchcock

The Magnetic Arsenal

or a Birthday Bouquet for James Tate

This mattress skates on litmus, wondering if
  Chimes will quench or stockings be preferred.
Baboons in topaz climb the chalky cliff
  Reloading vesicles where snow's interred.
Fresh banjos break the Hibernian shore,
Liberating some indentured albacore.

    The tracer bullets that he'd erst invite
      Are spiked. The carrousel won't brake.
    Hysterectomies slip on plebiscite.
      Snow White, who once for tea-time's sake
    Had satin wind-vanes guyed,
    Is now a debutante transmogrified.

Next the affable gangplank is tried on.
  The Commendatore's statue is recast
As mortgaged Virtue leading Harpagon
  On stilts. Subliminally harassed.
At cabbage dawn narcotic veins lie still
While each new groove goes gorsing down the hill.

    Of madrigal prophetic. We recall
      Few grittier than this: To watch the actor find
    A lunar latch-key for his lines. Thespians all,
      Tapping holes in dream-skiffs of such kind
    As cleft coaxial scars are born
    Of. Or toucan's flugelhorn.

Long live the honeyed girls of Sunday morn!
  May all lymphatic rubber moons be dumb!
Sagacious barrel-organs duly sworn
  Recount how barbers come
With shears and Bryl and shaving cream
To crop Herr Jung's archetypal dream.

Diane Wakoski

Personal & Impersonal Landscapes

I. Jim Tate en l'Age d'Or

1930, the
soundtrack, like an old bed
sagging in the middle,
excrutiating whine of instruments misrecorded.
collage of fashionable garden parties
with peasants fighting
in the hills—Spanish Civil War—
Dali and Bunuel in Paris
but thinking
of home
How
you would have loved
the dramatic '30s
when technology was only a rickety structure
over french champagne
and gangsters in pointed-toed shoes.
Even the '60s didn't compare
though the clothes were more
exciting. I think you wanted the forbidden,
the scandalous/ to claim
the outrageous
as your own. But alas, that is everyone's
fortune now, and no one notices
anything
but anonymous wealth. How dull to make
El Salvador a cause
when history will allow us all to step away
from it, untouched.
We can live in a world of old movies,
infinitely, but should we
dance
or fight wars,
other than for fun?

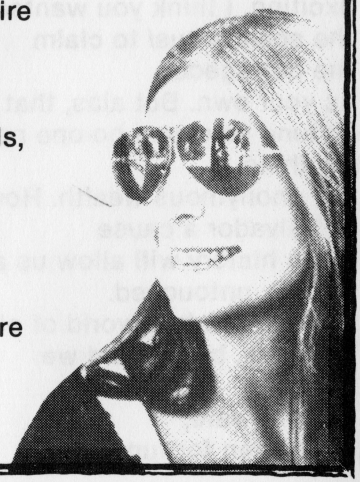
II. Wakoski's Petunias

Ruffled skirts

How we applauded
Slyvia Estrada's flamenco dancing
in Southern California
8th grade
She
was not a Mexican
they said,
but Spanish/ her father
owned an
orange grove.
Childhood bigotry/ all
we knew,
that some were better than us,
and a few not.
How important those last few,
as we sat on
the sagging screened-porch
knowing we had nothing
but our whiteness
and the bank
did not even give credit for that.
I was plump and tired
at 13,
but Sylvia Estrada was a thin hot wire
of brown magnetism. Like a
stick
in her ruffled skirts
and rhythm, thinness, make-up, curls,
money
I would never have.

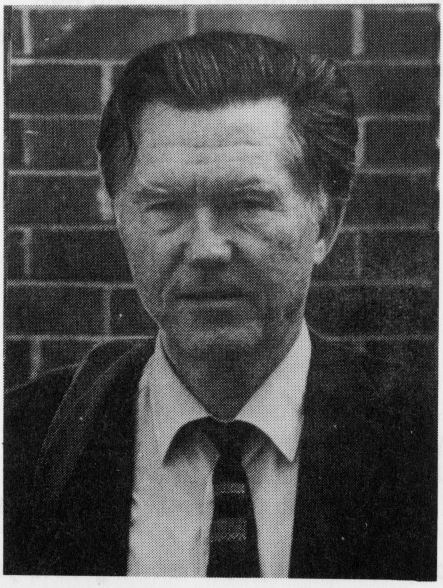
How we applauded.
I still think longingly
of the flamenco clatter and pistol fire
on the old Washington School
Auditorium floor.

Diane Wakoski



Thomas Victor, Photographer

Four Poems by William Stafford



A Briefing for Visitors to Our Planet

1.

Whenever you meet someone, find
its decoration—a locket, a ring,
a mandala, maybe a tie
or scarf: look at it an instant
and then into the eyes. That being
in there had the need that you now see.

2.

Their houses will have color, a few
pictures on the wall. Where the furniture
is will count, too. A cup
on the table? Books left under the couch?
After a little study, turn
and look softly at the owner's eyes.

3.
In a whole city—how the traffic
starts, flows, the number and slope
of stairs in public buildings—you can
tell what they're like, these hurrying creatures.
Now reach out and hold one. Feel
its hair. Remember—it has to breathe.
Listen to its squeal.

Old Ways, New Ways

Some things it is odd to say, though
once you think about it they are
all right, like the upside down song
a bird sings, flying past, reflected in the water.

"Goodby tomorrow," someone greets you—
that means "Hello" in the old language
used by thoughtful people, not the new way
of the rest of us after the bird flew over.

Coronado Heights

When we touch the rock, a little cold shiver
begins: this is the place where Coronado
found that cities of gold are dust,
that the world had led him north beyond
civilization, beyond what was good.

And right down onto this prairie grass
he fell. His helmet tumbled right here.

He smelled the earth and felt the sun
begin to be his friend: he had found
a treasure, the richest city of all.

Wheatfields frame this place today,
a gift: how the riches of Mexico,
the wandering tribes, the golden wind,
all come true for us, bowing
in reverence with Coronado.

Lights and Las Vegas

Buildings pose their prayer shadows
all day, first west, then north, then east,
then all the earth, while a million lights
challenge the sun, though the sun doesn't know.

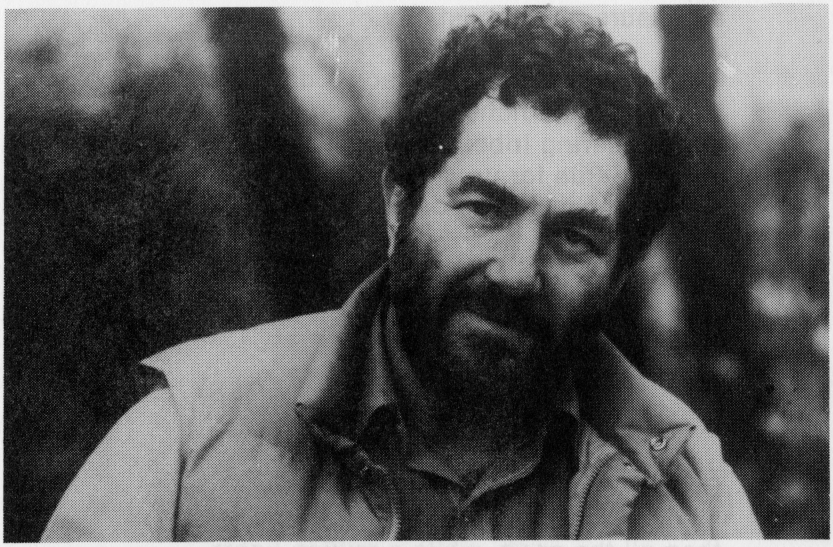
Escaped and running low, I find
a canyon crowded with tumbleweeds,
herded by the wind all winter, their spines
broken for travel, if they have to again.

Together with them, huddled, I spend
the night, learning the desert, holding
its miles preciously still around
my thought: how far we fell from the stars.

Shadow of all, be mine. Great shadow,
come, overwhelm whatever presumed
your place. For you, I'll hide my art
inside the earth, illuminated by the dark.

William Stafford

Impossible People



—I am not thinking of the offence to my mother.
—Of what, then? Buck Mulligan asked.
—Of the offence to me, Stephen answered.
Buck Mulligan swung round on his heel.
—O, an impossible person! he exclaimed. —*Ulysses.*

They stand up very close to us, so close
they end up looking like our very selves:
parents to start with, then teachers,
then lovers ("O thou, that I had never
laid eyes on thee, such a mistake!"),
then characters straight out of the lives
(or works) of Dickens, Robert Lowell, or other
impossible people. These are discovered mostly
through the eyes of children spying on a party.

Impossibles turn up at every turning
until, as we lapse lazily into age,
they strike us as just a little less
impossible—or not impossible at all—
until the moment when—bang!—
the little old lady whips out a Siamese flag
from the rump of her knickers, or a tycoon
with metallic eyes, seated across the glistening

conference table, seizes my hand, and without
a word begins kissing my fingers.

Impossible gives me the hip in the checkout line.

Impossible teeters lushly, braving a freeway,
and snarls (obscenity) at every fucking car
whose passing wheels he nearly squeezes under.

Impossibles march gaily for Gay Pride,
ashaming any spectator a marcher would
yearn to be matey with, mincing
atinkle with bangles and lavender marcel
just like their mothers after the hairdresser.

Impossible employer gathers the staff together
and shyly rises to his speech, presenting
a gift to me, unwarned recipient.
He smiles. Unwrapped, it's lovely. It's a bronze-
and-green-morocco-bound *Prometheus Bound!*
I see his smile as I unwrap the wrappings
and murmur thank-yous for the ball-and-chain.

Impossible nears and dears adopt disguises:
my college roommate swaying at our twenty-fifth,
an uncle whose cataracts outlived his legs,
the threatening thigh of a naked girl in bed,
my wife, unnoticed behind a vodka gimlet:
where did I lose track of these stupid strangers?

We bend our minds so hard in search of answers
that we forget: it's questions, lacking answers,
put marrow in the bones. No single life,
taken alone, can teach us any cure
for the loss of face that comes with loss of life.
So face it: if the fact of my existence—
to be, to rise, to lift the weight, to move—
seems on the very face of it impossible,
e pur si muove, said one old impossible
star-watcher. Right! The *other* one is moved.

Peter Davison

Gail Mazur

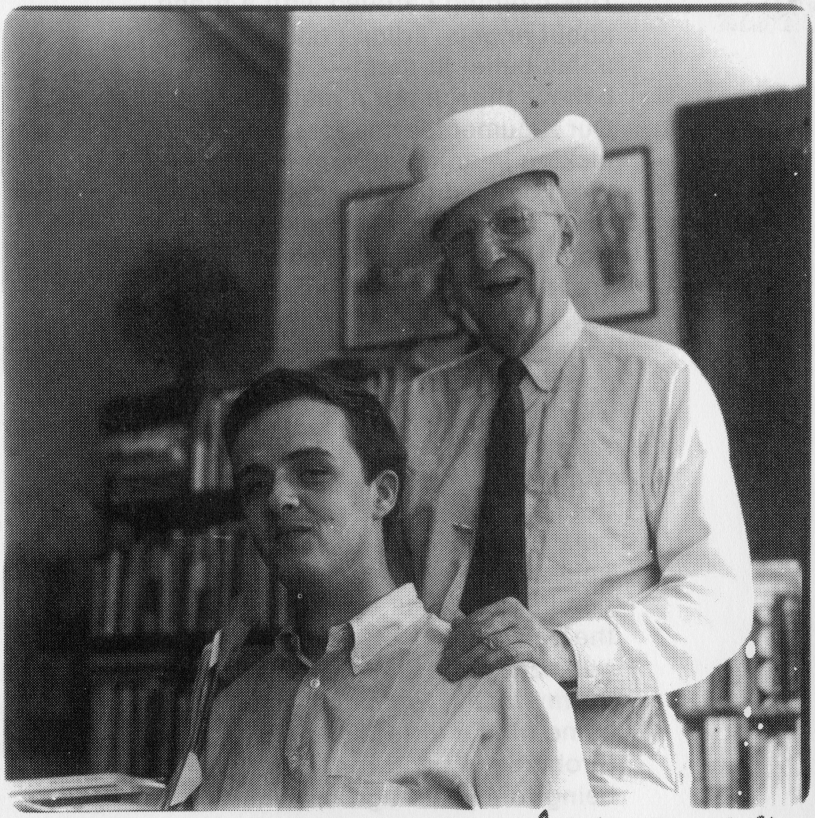
Rod Dutton

Listening to Baseball in the Car

for J.T.

This morning I argued with a friend
about angels. I didn't believe
in his belief in them—I can't
believe they're not a metaphor.
Our argument, affectionate,
lacking in animus, went nowhere.
We promised to talk again soon.
Now, when I'm driving away
from Boston and the Red Sox
are losing, I hear the broadcaster
say, "No angels in the sky today"—
baseball-ese for *a cloudless afternoon,*
no shadows to help a man
who waits in the outfield
staring into the August sun.
Although I know the announcer's
not a rabbi or sage (no,
he's a sort of sage, disconsolate
philosopher of batting slumps
and injuries), still I scan
the pale blue sky through my
polarized windshield, fervently hopeful
for my fading team and I feel
something a little foolish, a prayerful
throbbing in my throat and remember
being told years ago that men—
and women, too, I'm sure—
are only little lower than
the angels. Floating ahead of me
at the Vermont border, I see
a few wispy horsemane clouds
which I quietly pray will drift
down to Fenway Park where
a demonic opponent has just
slammed another Red Sox pitch,
and the center fielder—call him Jim—
runs back, back, back,
looking heavenward,
and is shielded and doesn't lose
the white ball in the glare.

Gail Mazur



with Gordon Cosmic at the Grolier Book Shop.

From the Archives of

Portrait photographs - Unposed and Unretouched

Elsa Dorfman

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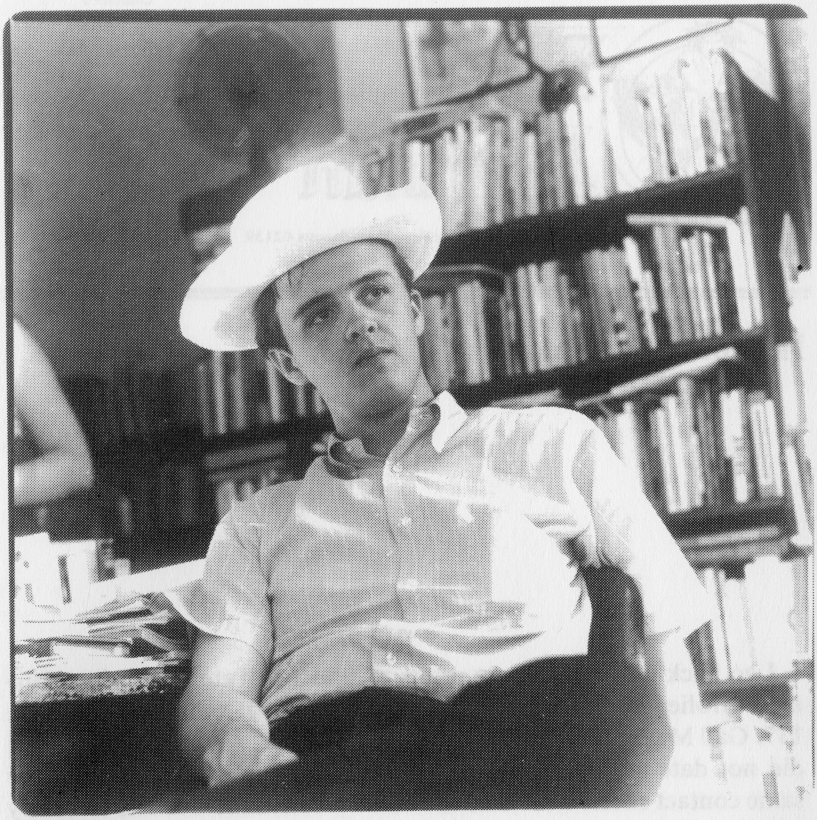
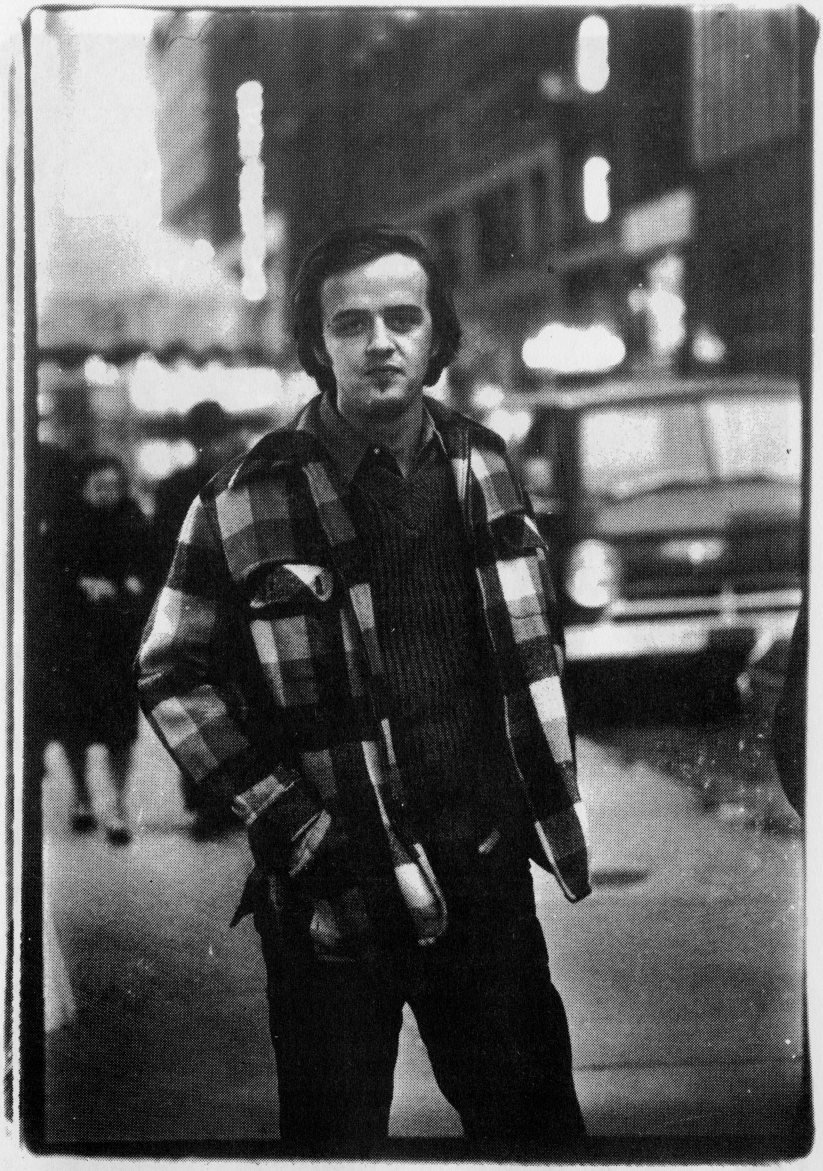
In Honor of James Tate's Birthday

I go back into my contact prints to find Jim Tate at Gordon Cairnie's Grolier Book Shop. Back to the beginning: rolls 119, 120, 123, 137. Gail Mazur tells me it is 1966. Certain that I would never forget, I did not date my negatives and contact sheets in those days. On the same contact sheets with Tate are Bill Corbett, Earl Gowrie, Geoffrey Movius, Beverly Corbett (pregnant with Marnie), Paul Hannigan, Richard Tillinghast, Judy Rascoe, and Gail Mazur. Each one of us is recognizable, in fact, familiar and immediate. We are laughing, leaning on tables of books, bookcases, the doorway of the Grolier. We are draped on the couch with Gordon, coffee cups in our hands. In several images it is obvious Geoff Movius has brought in a six pack of beer. How lucky we were to have had each other, that place, and the time to sit there.



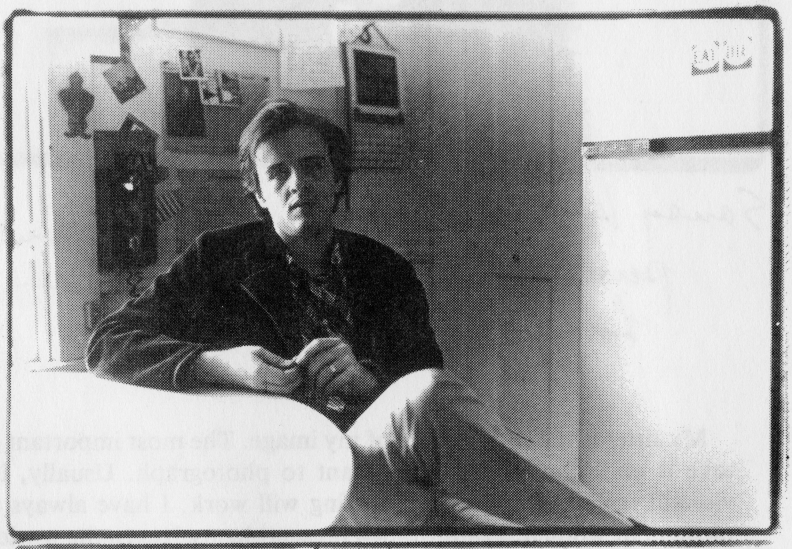
Spring 1966. Dorman

On Harvard St. w/ Gail Mazur.



Jim Tate outside the Gotham Bookmart.

On Mesa. Ave. 1966.



Jim Tate in my Flagg St. kitchen, around 1973. Orfman

Sandy King, my favorite real estate person who helped find our new house.
Dufresne

My sitter is the cornerstone of my image. The most important step I take is choosing the person I want to photograph. Usually, it is a visceral feeling. I can tell something will work. I have always taken pictures of women. I find women present themselves to the world with great variety. I like women and respond warmly to them. Also, women are accessible to me. Sandy King is a Cambridge real estate agent. When I had to move, she helped me find a house three blocks away.

Linda Novick Larkin and I were in the same bunk at Camp Gaywood in 1952. Now Linda lives in Santa Cruz, but she comes across country every summer to see her friends.

Gretchen Freisinger + her mother, here to look at Cambridge houses. Dufour

Gretchen Freisinger married an old friend, D.C. Denison. I wanted them to move to Franklin Street. Every time a house came up for sale, I would badger them to take a look. Gretchen brought her mother, who was here from Savannah to see one possibility.

Rebekkah Meader here for diving camp at Harvard. Dufresne

Rebekkah Meader is the youngest child of my friends, Abbott and Nancy Meader. She came to Cambridge to take diving lessons at Harvard for two weeks during the summer of 1982. I watched her train at Blodgett Pool.

Forgiven at Forty

I see the lost poet carried upstairs
by one large shape, down by another, smiling,
among the easiest talkers ever, and eager!
so fucking thirsty! half cocked on old secrets.

Was it that your verse just wowed folks?
Hell, I don't know—sounded fine to me,
convolved in the middle of a silly life,
presenting books as birchrods to masochists.

Oh my, what times in streets or bars at night
in those days, goosing lumpy matrons with poems.
But I hear Irby, poppin and snappin in Lawrence,
sing, "Roll up my trousers and peel me a peach."

Now at last that I miss you I want to ask
(given this fine occasion and all):
Is Kansas City holy still? and
How you really like them flowers, honey?

Geoffrey H. Movius

On Completing a Fortieth Year

for James Tate

I stepped inside the temple of my soul
one Saturday afternoon in the winter
and it was a bright place. There were some people
from Kansas City there and I met their daughter
who was a homely skinny thing in spectacles
and we got talking about life in ancient Greece
and I kept thinking about how some Pericles
had gone to a good deal of trouble so this
oddly adorable creature and myself could carry on
over these bloodthirsty complacent stones
that kept a few lean shadows from the sun
like beggar children up among the ruins.
Then they were gone and night came on at once
and it got cold among the monuments.

Michael Heffernan

Construction Accident

1

Burns. Didn't have a first name.
Never said where he was from.
It was late October. Cold.
Take the first job you can get.

He couldn't read. Had no need
To learn. Could always find work
Helping tear something down or
Putting it up again. Steered

Through a world of blank spaces,
Mailboxes, billboards, faces
That told him where to turn or,
By their shadows' lengthening,

When it was time to go. Watched
The sun, stars, clouds—things no one
Who can read bothers about—
So that he could find his way.

2

Some people drive straight across
This land looking out claiming

Anybody who'd live here
Would have to be just like it,

Wouldn't have the kind of sense
Mountains or tall trees can give—
Places on the coast where things
Have scale, where there's dimension.

Heading to work before dawn
I saw the elevator
Shrouded with scaffolding, lit
With long strings of yellow lights.

Burns poured a cup of coffee
From an old glass-lined thermos.
We sat and smoked together
Before his time to go up.

3

They were tying cross-sections
When the wind started. Nothing
Around them, no way to stop
The forty-foot rod when it

Started down, dropped a hundred
Feet straight through Burns and nailed him
To the ladder. None of us
Below had the nerve to climb

Up there and cut him loose for
Fear we'd tip it all over.
The free end of the rod swung
Above our heads, out toward trees,

Rooftops, came to rest on line
With the place where the sun rose.
We finished it by Christmas
And moved on to the next town.

Jared Carter

South End Boston Thirteen Years Later

for Jim Tate's 40th

What the girls on Clarendon Street
did was call for cigarettes
to the men passing below.
If one stopped the girl leaned
from her third floor window
showing nightgown and bare
powdered flesh (he grinned,
he could almost smell her)
and threw down a balled-up dollar.
He came back with the cigarettes
and her change, stumped
as to how he might throw
this handful up to the laughing
waiting girl who now
called him to come up
and if he did he went
imagining was he lucky or what?
Where have these girls disappeared to?
Their house is a condominium
freshly sand blasted and pointed.
A workman is lowering
the root ball of a tree
trussed with burlap and rope
into the hole dug for it
in their newly widened
and bricked sidewalk. The men
no longer pass this way either.

William Corbett

Pushing the Stroller Under Fatalistic Elms

—for James Tate

My son sits in his stroller
fighting sleep the way a lonely girl
nearly kills herself for love. He wants to fly.
Car after car, the usual street: he'd kill himself
to see all this. The stroller is a drug
weightless weightless now
split second between blue eye & darkening lid.
But it was you
who tossed so many babies skyward.
They flew like crazy.
I dreamt this
on an ordinary night & woke laughing, dreamt
even the babies in hysterics
sitting later in workshop, drunk happy judges
sprung from their robes.

Pushing the stroller under fatalistic elms, I remember
everything: how the babies whirled down
like leaves, how no one was hurt.
I see my son's face, perpetually startled,
as if the sky were too big
to fit into the window.
Something of this
remains in you & if I rented a plane
one summer night
& passed over your house
& if a whole field of fireflies rose
in a kind of welcome

to the inevitable dark
I'd say you thought the whole thing up
that it came to you
in an instant.

Marianne Boruch

Tin Shoulders

(for James Tate)

Out of the tunnel whistling Dalkey

a small storm
wet the ballet fuschia.

Petals on black pebbles
flaked like a comfort cake.

At the Messianic age of seven
sensation was heaven:

a velvety raspberry, cup & cap,
was plucked from brambles back

of a cottage, lips
& hands as clean
as Devonshire cream, to eat on the train.

From a sachet of lavender
Ma powdered her nose.

We arrived in Dublin,
nineteen hundred & forty seven,
soon after Liberation.

To convey by train
what I learned on the way

with stations crossing, a sheer
eclipse of covenants,

would be hidden, for years,
under a veneer of ignorance.

Stress at the water's edgy
spoonlight, cut
east from Wicklow's hanging-down hedge.

Heather leaned west like tweed
on the shoulder of a pacifist.

The waves by this ride
made grave the glad hands
pressing on the windowpane.

There was no home
away from home, but history.

Outside the coach's violent turns:
pacts, allies, treaties,
conventions, incentives, harbors,
beaches, commands: all settled.

And inside, tin medals,
both Nazarene and Nazi,

were strung from necks & shoulders.
I saw them.

Fanny Howe

Rollie McKenna, Photographer

Eavesdroppings

a nosegay of overheard verses
for James Tate's birthday

1

I thought I had it in the bag,
He said, and took a deeper drag,
Until she threw that crying jag.

2

Ugh. Some cold I got.
And I need a cold
Like I need a hole
In the head filled
With hot snot.

3

You heard about Murray?
No. What about?
He died, almost.
He went out without
The truss you're not spost
To go out without.

4

Catch that witch.
Which?
That one.
Eating the whole wheat sandwich.

5

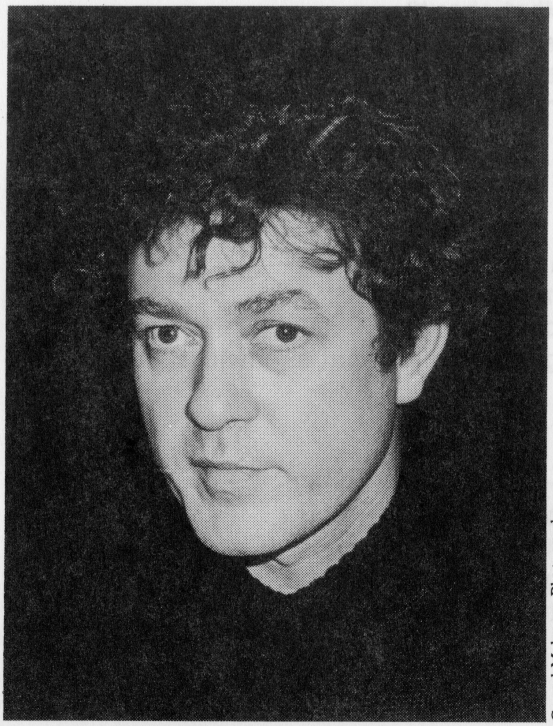
Barney it was you called?
No wonder you been stuck.
It ain't unusual.
That guy could fuck
Up a two-car funeral.

6

My mouth is a bucket of glue.
The tongue has dropped out of my shoe.
So they walked in white diving-suits over the moon.
Some big deal. What good did it do?

X. J. Kennedy

Potala, Colorado



Gerard Malanga, Photographer

Stephen Sandy

Yes, boy, the years have lips when you're alone.
The question was so mundane it was convincing.
Get off your big horse and your scarlet jacket!
The half-full bottle lay right there on the floor

Of the Everest Palace Hotel; everyone saw it!
"There'll be no competition," the Lama said,
"And no squalor at this ashram!" This
Was the blacksmith's village; plain muslin, and union shop.

I know what he likes, you'd say, gazing afar
At the patients sauntering on the riverbank,
But from all the shelves I know, this is not one.
The difficulty is seeing all these little

Campsites as part of the one landscape, as
Belonging there with the trees; the little piles
Of unmentionables under the trees; with no one
Going anywhere; with the hills, and the clouds above.

Lhasa Flea Market

Looking for bearings on the After Death plane
In two Lamaistic pantheons, trying to decide
If the half-gilt, staring man from Ganesha
Emporium was Tilopa or Naropa;

Checking for crossed vajras or a yin-yang moon
Then finding a mandala of circles instead
(My Lord, it isn't Tibetan *or* Chinese),
You turned from the corner by the Turkish sofa

And hurled the Damn-it doll at the fireplace.
"We don't do much antiques up here, the shop
Is mostly—as you see—the dress business."
"How do I look?" you asked. And he, "You're just

Glowing a little, like the maples or the rocks."
We wandered in the brass that beckoned along our road,
The bazaar at the end of the world. Later, you chose
One of the old opera top hats, and then to go.

Stephen Sandy

Boating with Worms

(for James Tate)

you called it, euphemistically,
those several hours we passed, in a boat, in the rain,
on deep water that gets pumped
a hundred miles to Boston where it's drunk
as fishless there as here.

All day we shared between us three nibbles.
The truth is: we were bad
(over who got one and who got two—no need to quibble)
fishermen, so bad that luck
could not have helped us. A valley

was flooded to make this barren reservoir.
They left standing the orchards, the barns,
even some houses, and built a dam
so men like you and me
could sit out here naming minnows,

blessing them, exhorting our worms
to find the purported big ones
cruising, cruising deep where a hayloft
throbbed, once, on a late August afternoon
with heat and the sweet sweet smell of new-mown. . .

We learned this: the water was too deep,
we did not load our lines with lead enough
to get way down there in the slanted weeds above
the wavery playgrounds, the swollen graveyards.
Let's try again someday and improve on our technique.

Thomas Lux

"The Whir of Old Birds"

By Charles Cagle

Dr. Rifflin pursed her fifty-year-old lips as she looked out the window from the third-floor office of her particular ivory tower, Conger Hall. Patches of early January snow littered the bleak campus. "Kansas," she whispered, her mouth curling a little venomously around the word. Why was it they never had Vermont snows here? But then, the question was so monotonously hackneyed by now that even the echo of it produced a small spasm of boredom. In Vermont, when she was a girl, the snow was lovely this time of year, piled like satin along the darkness of the forests and mountains, topping century-old churches and quaint New England barns. Vermont had real snow—snow out of Keats and the others. A phrase from "The Eve of St. Agnes" began forming tenderly in her mind.

"*You're* a damn early bird!"

She turned, startled—and irritated—by the harsh voice and the large face thrust into the half-open door of her office. Phil Benning, his head wrapped in that silly tam-o-shanter with the feather in the center and his cheeks flushed from the outside cold, grinned at her. As he tugged at the thick woolen scarf looped around his bull neck, she managed a brief, polite smile for him.

"Got a student coming in this early?" he prodded.

"Yes, yes I do."

"Don't bet on it. I was stood up three times last week. Little bastards must think we enjoy it—waiting with snow on our boots while they sleep it off in the dorms. Anybody I know?"

She hesitated a second, then said, "Thomas Ward."

"I had him in Intro to Reporting last year. Skipped class like a maniac. He doing any good for you, any writing?"

"A bit."

The scarf was unwrapped now and Benning was lounging in the doorway, his good tweed overcoat yawning open to reveal his bulky abdomen, the pinched way in which his suit misfitted him, his ill-chosen necktie. Despite her desire to be charitable to colleagues, she had never been able to detect much charm in the pipe-smelling Phil Benning, with his loud, fat wife and four children, and his advanced degree in journalism adding but small luster to the department's overall standing. And then there were those potboiler paperback novels he secretly wrote in his off time. Erotic trash, of course, for money, for holidays to Bermuda with his fat wife.

"Tommy Ward's a poet, y'know, with his beat-down green tennis shoes. Always needs a haircut," Benning was saying, bringing his expensive briar out from the depths of a pocket. "Yeah, he hitched a boatride to Paris last summer and came back mooney-eyed with a lot of scribbled verse. Told me he got drunk in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and decided to be a poet, of all the damn fates."

"Indeed?"

"I've read his doggerel. Trouble is, the kid's got real potential to turn out some decent prose. He written any prose in your class?"

"He wrote a critical paper for me on Poe."

"Old Poe, eh. Any good?"

"Some trouble with mechanics. Thomas persistently misuses the semicolon."

Benning poked a blunt finger into his pipe bowl. "I told him to stay the hell away from semicolons if he wanted to be the future editor of the *Collegian*."

Her eyebrows lifted slightly.

Benning continued poking the pipe, his voice modulating to a rounded, self-amused tone. "Poets can't make a living writing poetry, I told Ward. Name me one poet who's making a living at it. Most poets give their stuff away to the little mags and their Aunt Marthas. I told him most poets end up being just penny-pinching schoolteachers. Right?"

"Some, I suppose. Like Auden."

"Who?"

"Wystan Hugh Auden. He taught and pinched pennies a great deal."

"British one, isn't he?"

"Auden is dead now. I'm sure you remember his work. He says in one of his poems that poetry makes nothing happen."

"Smart cookie."

Benning cupped a burly hand over his pipe, lighting and puffing away. He wagged out the match and grinned raffishly at her. "You ever written any poetry yourself, Gretta?"

She wondered why Benning was being so circuitous about all this, but she merely replied, "In my youth I did, yes. I'm sure that

anybody who truly loves words has attempted at least one poem. Have you ever written a poem, Phil?"

"Me? Naw, never. Well, maybe when I was still green around the gills like Ward. Adolescent oozes. I got over it."

"How unfortunate for Art."

He did not grin at the way she said that, but he managed a crooked smile. "You don't like me much, do you, Gretta?"

His candor came as no surprise to her. She knew he had once quietly asked someone in the faculty lounge if she was a lesbian. She sat down now at her desk and touched her reading glasses with her slender fingertips. "Phil," she said, not looking at him, "you know perfectly well we all adore having you in our Department of English."

"The kid's no poet, Gretta."

She looked up slowly at him.

"Ward told me about these early Friday morning visits you set up with him, to talk about his poems. He told me you said he was wasting his time working for the paper."

"I—did not put it exactly that way, Phil. Thomas told *me* he was having to devote too much of his writing time to—to whatever it is you have them write—and—I"

"You told him to make up his damn mind. You told him to either quit the *Collegian* or quit trying to be a poet."

She paused, then said, "I told him poetry is work, hard work. I told him it is dedication and sacrifice and that talent is simply not enough."

"Goddammit, Gretta, the kid's barely nineteen."

"Age is really quite irrelevant."

"Ward doesn't know shinola from sheepdip about life yet, and you know it."

"Dylan Thomas was writing brilliant poetry at nineteen."

"*Screw* all that!"

She stared at his purpling face.

"I'm talking about Tommy Ward's whole future," he spat out, furious. "His whole damn *life* is ahead of him. I can wrangle a journalism scholarship to K.U. for that dumbass kid and teach him to turn out some salable fiction in his spare time, if you don't muck up his head with this I'm-a-poet crap!"

Benning was glaring at her, his owlish face puffed out now with both anger and hatred. Gretta had a sudden, strange attraction for the man. His emotion was so pure, so raw and barbaric. She felt her heart's blood pounding beneath her dark blouse and coat, her manicured fingernails itching to become talons. She had a brief, ridiculous vision of herself and Phil soaring through snowflakes above Conger Hall, fighting over the body and soul of Thomas Ward like screaming eagles, their beaks crackling flames.

The moment passed.

Benning ran his left hand up and rumpled off his tam-o-shanter. His graying hair was mussed, badly styled and cut.

"Okay, okay, Gretta—*look*. The kid comes over to my house last night at some ungodly hour. I got after him yesterday for not getting his stuff in on time. He's been boozing it up on two-buck wine or some damn thing when he bangs on my front door and stands out in the yard yelling up at our bedroom window like an idiot. Scared hell out of Rita and the kids. Downstairs he falls all over the coffeetable and shouts at me he's a great poet, that poetry means more to him than anything else in the world, and that he wants to quit journalism. He told me you said he had written the finest poem you'd ever read by an undergraduate."

"One of the best I have read, I told him."

"He thinks he's a genius."

"Perhaps he is."

"More perhaps he *isn't*. What he is is he's getting too lazy and conceited to write more than one damn precious line at a time—to even construct a decent paragraph."

"Many people construct decent paragraphs, even some journalists. What is still rare and needed in this world is a truly gifted poet."

Benning formed some awful word under his breath, but finally muttered, "Baloney."

She paused, then smiled. "Have you actually read any of Thomas' poems?" she asked.

"No."

"Then perhaps you should. I have the one he was referring to right here. It isn't doggerel, I assure you." She opened the folder under her glasses and took out a sheet of paper, handing it up to him. He hesitated, sighed, and took the poem into his thick fingers. He looked at it. "Crow Creek Walking," he said. "What a great, gifted title, eh? Jesus."

The poem was only eight lines long, and he read it with the quickness of a good news-editor in a hurry. He then reread the last two lines aloud, in a low, disgusted voice: "And did I laugh, ah, yes, I laughed, Because I know the whir of old birds is forever."

He shoved the poem back to her.

"It's the first thing Thomas has written that I think is publishable," she said. "Perhaps the *Collegian* would like the honor of printing it. Thomas Ward's first poem."

Benning looked at her for a long moment, then looked at his pipe. He took a calculated breath, and spoke in a calm voice. "I told Ward that if he would meet me in the Student Union for a friendly doughnut and coffee this morning, sober and ready to dedicate himself to being a good, no-nonsense reporter, he could keep his job. Otherwise, he's fired from the *Collegian* staff for good, and no damn scholarship."

"And no doubt you used the additional tactic of setting his appointment to appear before you to coincide with his appointment with me."

He smiled slowly, then let his body suggest a mild shrug as he adjusted the woolen scarf again around his neck and buttoned his overcoat. He toyed with his pipe and tam-o-shanter, his smile widening like a crack in winter ice. "Ever been to Bermuda, Gretta? Great place to be when it's bare-butt cold up here in Kansas. Rita and I flew down over Christmas. Hired somebody to keep the kids. Rita wants to go back for the International Race Week—all classes of yachts out there on the bay, sailing around like shark fins. Very poetric. The water is so blue you'd think somebody poured dye into it every day—and full, I mean crammed fishing full of wahoo, amberjack, and big marlin. Great place to lay in the sun and think lofty thoughts, if you can afford the hotel. Ever been there, Gretta?"

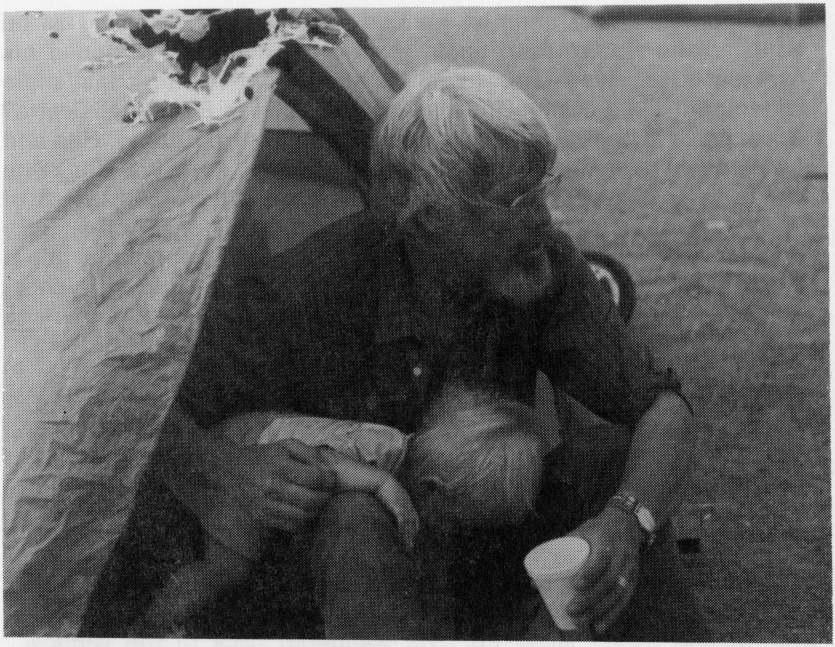
"No."

He smiled again and pulled on the tam-o-shanter. He paused once more before going out, turning so she could see the hard twinkle in his eyes as he whispered, "What damn thing is it they say you poets love to eat, Gretta—hyacinths?"

She remained at her desk for a few minutes after he was gone, then she returned Thomas' poem to the folder, placed her reading glasses over it, and slowly stood up. She wandered back to the window. Below, a few students were trudging to their various destinations, hooded and bundled up against the frigid Kansas morning. But she wasn't thinking of that. She was thinking of Miss Watley, her highschool English teacher, a shy little spinster dead these many years whom some had thought peculiar because she liked taking long, solitary walks in the wintry streets of their small Vermont town. It was no secret that Gretta was one of Miss Watley's favorite students, since she wrote poetry—as, some whispered, Miss Watley did—and seemed more serious than the other girls. In fact, Miss Watley had stopped her in the hall one day to tell her that she truly believed Gretta had the talent to pursue the calling of being a poet—but would she, like the great Shelley, be willing to suffer the necessary sacrifices, to fall upon the thorns of life and bleed for what she wanted?

Gretta was still standing motionless at her office window, thinking of Miss Watley, when—cold and hungry—Thomas arrived in his green tennis shoes.

A Robitussin Novena for Jim



Frederic Will

i
Fred came up into this quarrel
breaking his mouth, goldfish puckers—
knew he would measure from then.
His brain going chunk, chunk, chunk . . .

ii
For years before that he had trampled the wind,
Aimless hard shoe crusher,
Had hardly a friend—in the zone of pure—
and roamed in and out of himself
swallowing grandeur like robitussin
Two spoonsful a night, to "loosen the tightness."

iii
Jim had entered, sybil-tinctured patience;
Friendship had welled up between them

like mountains out of a Silurian coal base,
and climb as he would Fred was always on the side of
that slate-sharp height.

iv

But Fred and Jim came up into this quarrel—
miracle of unexplained, causeless first cause,
And there rose up *eris,*
twixt-cutting, newly the rift broken,
And there was a time when the two faces—
like Achilles and Agamemnon, ha ha—
Had little left for one another but eyelessness
and a word like *shit*
And unexplained first-cause rifts like *go to your kennel.*

v

Robitussin, thought Fred, worked surely in the past,
opening those cruciform alveoli,
and as he took once more this commercial *therapeia*
he thought of his former enslavement to asthma—
to "no breathing"—
And he was aware of the part played by breath in opening
and he went pulsing with that awareness . . .
The stiffness left him like spools of whited yarn—
high up the ectoplasm of anger dissipating—
the air taking it away
like a gurgling drainpipe . . .

vi

No small wonder that Fred went on to buy the Robitussin
Factory,
and when Jim came back from Georgia,
after a summer of shelling peaches and whatever else poets
do to keep
their fingernails juicy,
Fred said *here let's share this*
And they sat together holding icy glasses of the mixture,
And drank to the future of clean-chested collaboration.

vii

Hour after hour, day after day,
They spent shoeing the horse of *amicitia,*

gurgling with gossip and remembrance,
Snowing one another with the one gray hair.
They knew every mini-golf in the state.

viii

The last time I saw them
they were winding up a stair-poem, closing out some Babbitt,
Bourgeois-shocking—like Nerval but lobsterless—
Their faces proud as raiment.
The wind was blowing through them.
Like dolls they nodded—in the Nebraska landscape—
No part of them unloving.
I pinched one—it glistened—and then I saw the tribe of them—
Freds and Jims—
far out into the corn-raw horizon;
Chunk-chunking, clip-clopping,
Teasing and dancing until they filled Nebraska.
From each thin neck, like a fetish from a shaman,
Hung a bottle of robitussin.

ix

From mere restitution, quarrel-healing,
They had hurried themselves to the ultimate solution, pact-sealing.
On the brink of schism they'd seen something true and recalled it,
It being the Light Plato highed on by Land and Sea,
The Mode of Enlightenment in Lao-Tzu,
The simplest commercial *therapeia,* robitussin,
Deglobbing the chest at four twenty-seven in the morning,
Or the heart at four cubed four in the desert sunlight,
Coughing out the mucous which love grows deep inside it
For the Beauty of the Clearing of Obstacles,
For the simple sake of expenditure, for $1.29 a bottle,
For the double teaspoon in the half-lighted kitchen.

Frederic Will

Song for Disembodied Voice

Fred Chappell

There is a music sings without a voice.
There is a beauty has no body.
There is a light informs the sunlight.
There is a cold and secret place.

Not even the frore and darkened walls of the castle can keep in
Music that silvers the wind with shadow.
I am a hidden singer without a throat;
The songs I sing may cause the chambermaids to weep in
Their sleep in the restless fulgurant night.
I have a song that sings of death as a meadow
Of polished daisies; another song
Of a waterfall the tears of youthful lovers;
A song to be plucked on the spider's lambent string;
A song that says the destinies of rivers.
I have five songs of penitent devotion,
I have a song as salt and lacy as the ocean.

But I have no flesh or blood or bone;
Am become the purity
Of breezetressed longlined melody
As silken-whispery as a lady's veil
And as transparent to the sun and moon.

A melody as changing as cloud-seam.
A story as dark and tangled
As the shoal of stormcloud the north wind mangled.
A music that ends in leaping flame.

Who could have thought that it would end or begin
This way, the singer dissolved in song?
That a murdering hand could lengthen the line
Of the lay, a sorcery hand make strong
Even past my death
The story I am compelled
To tell, and must sing on till it is told
In one unstopping suprahuman breath?

If there's a mercy in either of our lives,
In the one we count or that arrives
When our accounted days shut down,
It is that memory
Can broider the ode and elegy
With freshest pictures of the dawn;
Or turning sidewise upon itself indite
A wistful intimation of approaching night.

I have a sorrow that no tear can cool.
I know a ghostly bird sings out of tune.
I find the parts that never make a whole,
The broken halves that never join as one.

I'd make my song like the wind-tossed willow tree,
Promiseful-green and all a-lilt,
Its lissome strand interweaving light
As when the silver withes entwine as if spilt
From the corona of a fountain bright
With sun-spangle from a pleachy sky.

I'd make a song of maidens bathing in a stream,
Their flanks and shoulders white
And gleaming as new-starched lace,
A song of a garland of children fat
and dimpled spiraling toward heaven's dome,
A song about a lovesick shepherdess,
If I were free to choose my theme.

But Arcady is fled and gone
Until I rend the guilty sleep
Of Castle Tzingal and, like the sun,
Wither this black scheming up.
I am no more alive,
And all my murderers thrive.

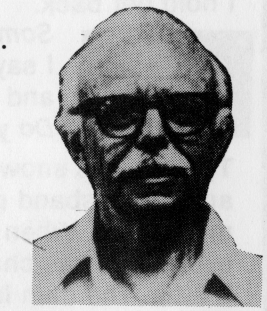
I have a truth to say, no tongue to tell.
I know a heartsick prison without a wall.
A star lies silent in a silent well.
Not feeling cold, I live in coldest hell.

Fred Chappell

A Civil Arrest

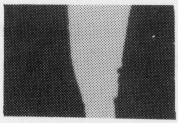
David Ignatow

What's your name?
What does it matter to you?
Because I have a ticket for you.
What kind of ticket?
Well, I can't tell you unless I know your name.
But how can my name have any bearing on the ticket?
Well, it could change with your name.
Are you crazy?
No, my name is Sam.
Then I'm crazy.
Oh, so that's your name. Well the ticket I have is for you to appear at Bellevue at 3 P.M. sharp to have your head examined.
What for?
Didn't you say you're crazy?
But not that way.
What other way is there?
I don't want to be questioned like this as if I were guilty of something.
Being crazy is not being guilty of anything. It's something you can't help.
Well, I'm not crazy.
Then you were lying.
I was lying.
Then I have a different ticket for you.
What is it this time?
A ticket to come with me to the police station.
What for?
For lying.
Arrest me for lying?
Sure.
Are you a policeman?
No.
Then how can you arrest me?
Because you're interested.
Interested! I'm horrified.
Then that's another name you go by. This definitely needs questioning by the police. You must have stolen a watch.
I stole nothing but my patience with you. I've taken too much.
This is a citizen's arrest. Come with me. You have confessed to lying, hiding under a pseudonym, and stealing.



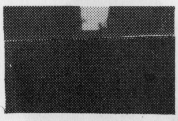
The Servant of Snow

As I was walking down the sidewalk yesterday
a baseball flew out of a truck
right past me
just missing my face.
A man leaned out of the truck window
and called,
Baby, they're after you.
I'm not sure
the baseball came from his truck.
It might have been thrown from a building
although it seemed like a truck.



I came home
and my husband asked
Was it a softball
or a hardball?

All of us waiting
to cross the street,
standing on the hard snow
when the child next to me, about nine,
begins to slip off
and into the traffic.
I catch her arm—
a vision in my mind at the moment:
tiny black shoes dangling ridiculously in air—
I hold her back.



Someone should plow these sidewalks
I say
and very calmly the child says to me
Do you think so, dear?

Tonight it is snowing
and my husband puts his hand across
my eyelids. When he draws his hand away
everything has changed, but only
a little. The man in the street,
the light, the truck grinding.
But the snow continues—servant of perpetuity,
a consort, just missing me,
just striking me.

Lee Upton

The True Story

Elizabeth Sargent

In December 1982 when I finally understood Ray and I would never marry, he gave me a small flute, red plastic, bought for about $1.50. (He had a larger flute and played professionally on it, at times.) Ray had taught me to play the conga drum. Now I had this flute.

I went for a walk in the State Park at Saratoga Springs, N.Y. In the middle of the State Park there's a parking lot for the Gideon Putnam Hotel, where in summer Liberace has stayed. Now deserted except for caretakers' cars, and *cold.* A squirrel came towards me and stopped. On an impulse I took the red flute from the pocket of my jacket and played a long note, note of E, I think. The squirrel sat up, then ruffled his fur. I continued the note. He held his ground, then after a while walked slowly away in a tired, heavy, walk, and sat under a car. I played a few other notes and then continued my walk.

Ten days later I went back to Saratoga and went for a walk once more. It was now December 21, the *Winter Soltice.* I was hopeless about Ray, his mind was less and less able to focus; epilepsy caused by police brutality, alcohol, and his mother's niceties, her extreme *possessiveness . . .* it was colder than before. It was ice-cold, the way it can be, in the North Country. I walked numbly, thinking about the cold and my four and a half years with Ray Dunbar Jr. About jail visits, about visits to the mental unit, about letters to Judge LaSalle and to Ray's mother and to his father, about the letter posted on the concrete pillar down by the store, the summer he ran wild through Franklin and Congress and Washington Streets—in my mind a howling for those things, and a circling; Black isn't an excuse for *everything*—or is it? I came to the parking lot once more.

The sun was low, although it was around eleven in the morning. A squirrel came towards me; this time a larger squirrel, sure of himself and of his errand. I had the little red flute in my pocket, having for some reason kept it near, for this walk, at the last minute. The squirrel came to my foot, and sat up, waiting. I played the note they like. He gazed at me. I noticed the squirrel of the first encounter, the scout, hiding under his car. As I played long notes, I noticed many squirrels, perhaps eleven or twelve, or more, at the periphery of the concrete parking lot; circling, sometimes leaping, perhaps dancing.

I played for a while, until my attention grew pale. They left; they walked away. The last squirrel to leave was the large squirrel at my foot.

It grew very cold.

This is a true story.

Ray always knows when something important happens. He came by drunk the next day. When I told him this story he became somewhat sober and said *Don't tell anybody that story.*

Elizabeth Sargent

Uncle Sam

Chapter 2 of a novel in progress

By Thomas Fox Averill

Things had been bad enough between Aaron Townley and his daughter Emily before this goddamn circus. She and her mother had convinced him to let her try for Tomato Queen at the last Anderson County Fair. She was sixteen, with long red hair and light freckles. She had a short, pudgy nose and thin lips, which were always parted, as though she had to gulp her breath. People said she was quite a young lady. After she'd gotten Queen and been driven around the fairgrounds in a fancy phaeton, nothing had been good enough for her, at least nothing that cost money—clothes, trips to the mother's sister in Chicago, even some jewelry, that expensive barbarian geegaw that cheapened every woman but a whore, and it just made a whore more expensive. But Emily was more attracted to cheap things, too, which was the only way to describe the kind of riffraff that took to hanging around the house after her highness graced the same fair park where this circus would be offending all but the cheapest fools in Anderson County, and by God, his daughter would not be among them if he had anything to say about it.

For two weeks, ever since the circus advertising appeared in the paper, he'd told her she would not go, and why: she did not know enough about these circus people, a low-life lot that only spread savagery, trouble, and discontent wherever they went; she was too young and innocent to judge for herself; she could be taken in, carried away by their apparent splendor that was only sawdust and elephant dung underneath.

For two weeks,she'd swung between sulky-bitch sullenness and high-toned argument: she said she didn't like him anymore, that he was just forbidding her to go so he could watch her suffer in front of her friends, who were going because their parents let them decide things for themselves; she reminded him that some of her friends were already married, even, and she might marry, too, if that was how she could get out from under his ugly rules; she called him a petty tyrant.

At that, he'd had to swat her, lift those petticoats, and spank her young butt. She'd quit speaking to him after that. But he could tell she was getting after her mother every time he was out of earshot, and, as near as he could tell, Edythe was fueling her fire. Ever since Emily was Queen it seemed like his wife was like a little girl, all excited by everything her daughter said and did—her boyfriends, her horseback riding, her foolish plans to go to Chicago for her education someday.

The morning the circus arrived in town finally did it: Aaron caught Emily in the outhouse—she was taking longer than anyone should ever need. He knocked on the door and was answered by a rustle of paper. "Emily!" he yelled. "What's going on in there?"

"I'm coming," she pleaded. She unlatched the door, finally, and he hurried in. Stuffed between the wall and the seat he found the full page circus advertising and a yellowed copy of the New York **Clipper.**

"No!" Emily shrieked as he ripped the **Clipper** copy to shreds.

"No!" she shrieked as he threw the circus ad down into the black hole. He marched her into the kitchen, where Edythe was fixing oatmeal and twelve-year-old Edgar was begging her to let him at least walk by the railroad tracks to see the circus cars on his way to school. Edythe raised her eyebrows and frowned. "What is it now, dear?" she asked calmly.

"I suppose you're the one that's let her sneak this filth into the house?" He threw the **Clipper** into the air like confetti.

"Filth?" Edythe asked sweetly, as though she were saying "rose?" or "prayer?"

"She's had her sixteen-year-old eyeballs harnessed to that ad all week. And now this goddamn New York circus paper."

"It's about Dan Rice," Emily said to Edythe. "Aunt Madeline gave it to me last summer. It's about the red-haired boy."

"What red-haired boy?" Aaron looked first at Edythe, then at Emily.

"Momma saw him. Before she even knew you. She told me about it. She's not so afraid of circus people."

Aaron scowled at Edythe and shook his head. A man couldn't turn his back for a minute in his own home, and after all he'd done to make it a home fine enough for a lady like Edythe Bentley of Chicago, Illinois. Edythe had wanted him decent, and that's what he was, but now she was promoting indecency in her own daughter just as though she was getting a cut of circus profits. He let go of Emily's wrist and she ran into the dining room. Edgar followed her, jumping wildly over Barney, their dog, asleep on the dining room rug.

Aaron watched his children quietly seat themselves as though nothing was wrong, as though there was no circus, as though his daughter wasn't moon-eyed over some damned Eastern newspaper article about that heathenish Dan Rice, as though his son hadn't been walking on ropes, leaping over barrels, and pestering them all week by blurting out stupid snatches of circus advertising like: "Those Trick Mules, they can Play Pat-A-Cake With Their Back Hooves, Bray Out Yankee Doodle, Bump Heads

Like Wrestlers, Jump Over Each Other's Backs, Climb Up Steps Backwards." To which Aaron always bellowed "No!" and that was that until another outburst.

And all through these last two weeks Edythe had kept her own mind, whatever that was—he didn't know. She was more Emily's than she was his, these days, acting like she was this morning, as though this was any other morning, with no circus, no uppity daughter about to throw herself away because of some rebellious foolishness, no single-minded son, as though she didn't know what Emily said she knew—about this red-haired boy. He ran his flat hands through his own curly red hair, then rubbed his eyes. He was tired.

"Now who in God's name is this red-haired boy?" he muttered to Edythe.

"You could have read all about him before the paper landed on the floor. Now you'll have to ask Emily." Edythe turned the oatmeal into a large bowl and started into the dining room. "Can we please just eat," she said.

"Emily?" Aaron shouted. He wanted to shout out his wife.

"I'm not speaking to you," Emily pouted. "I hate you and all your stupid orders. I wish I was a boy. I'd run away."

Aaron bounded forward between his wife and the wall to get after Emily. She'd said and done enough for one day. He'd swat her again, if he had to. But he bumped Edythe, and she dropped the oatmeal bowl and it landed right on Barney's swishing tail and he let go a yelp so loud it scared poor Edgar right out of his chair, which toppled over backwards and tripped his father, who fell full length onto the dining rug just in front of the grandfather clock, which looked like an upright coffin.

Emily leapt out the door. Barney followed her. Edythe went back into the kitchen to draw water to begin salvaging the breakfast. Edgar stood on his side of the table, his mind for the first time in two weeks not on the circus, but on the stretched length of his father's anger on the floor. Then he heard hooves. It was Silver, Emily's horse, with Emily just a flash of yellow dress down the lane. Aaron sat up. "Edythe, I give up. Let her ride to hell on that mare if she wants. You don't care, do you?"

"Every girl needs to find things for herself," Edythe said. "I did, when I was her age."

"You found me," Aaron frowned.

"I found myself."

Aaron scowled and began picking up chairs. Edythe scooped up the glop of oatmeal from the floor. Edgar went to the window to look after his sister. He loved to watch her ride. It was what she had done most since she became Tomato Queen. It was the only thing her parents really let her do by herself, to her heart's content, and she rode furiously, recklessly, practicing for speed and balance—side saddle, straight saddle, on her knees, and even standing up. She was long gone, away from the house, away from the town of Garnett.

Edythe came back in with another bowl of oats. "We will eat," she said. "Edgar, sit down and say the blessing. Aaron."

The three sat down at the table and Edgar watched his parents bow their heads. He liked this moment, when he was the only one looking around. Aaron cleared his throat as a command.

"Our Heavenly Father," Edgar began, "we ask You to bless this house and these oats, and my mother and father and my sister Emily. And we ask You to look after Barney. And also Arabia Gentry, the Most Beautiful Woman Ever to Risk Putting her Head in the Mouth..."

"Edgar!" Aaron slapped the table and shook his head. In the sudden silence following Aaron's slap, they heard a terrible howling from the yard. It was Barney, and he sounded infinitely more distressed than when his tail was plunked by the bowl of oatmeal. This was a howl of terrible despair, as though he was the first dog in all the world to see into the future to his own lineage and death.

Barney howled, then snapped, then barked, then moaned; all his repertoire was brought forth without pause and with an intensity that pierced the house and its remaining occupants. Edgar jumped for the door. He ran onto the front porch, but could see nothing. Aaron and Edythe joined him. Then Aaron took the lead, and around the house they went, past the blooming zinnias and past the trumpet vines into the back, where they saw Barney frozen like a yard ornament, still intently making sound his only defense. Where Barney looked, next to the pasture fence, silently munching at some clumps of bluestem, stood a bison, that huge shaggy animal with short sharp horns, small feet, deep piercing eyes, and a massive breath that the silent family could hear, between Barney's contributions, as clearly as wind in summer grass. It looked quite a lot like a picture of Satan hanging on the wall of silence when the buffalo looked at them and they looked at the buffalo, when the oatmeal sat congealing on the table, when Barney's crooked tail seemed to shudder, when next to the railroad tracks Colonel Dan Rice was just jumping off Lilly Roon, when Wild Bob Hucklebuck, not far away, now mounted on his blackest horse, was starting his second pint of the day, when Madame Zorella was just dressed and setting off to find the Anderson County Courthouse, when Wash and Jefferson were stringing the catfish and carrying it to the water to keep it fresh, when the only passenger train of the day was pulling into the station and letting off Miss Katherine Jane Huffstart, when the Anderson County Sheriff, Pappa Jim, was dressing his twins for school, when REPUBLICAN editor William Bright was just being awakened by the prospect of a Big News Day. Just then, the bull buffalo—actually he was castrated, the gentlest of all Wild Bob's animals, and his name was Nickel—let out a bellow and Barney began snapping.

"Edythe, back in the house," ordered Aaron. She retreated, but not into the house. "Edgar, go clean around the lot and open the gate. And hurry. I'll drive him into the corral."

Edgar moved steadily and quickly, the way his father had taught him to move around mean horses. Aaron stood there, quieting Barney and spreading his arms out, then into his body, then out again, like some beefy bird. The buffalo stared at him. When Edgar finally came around and opened

the gate from behind, Aaron began shooing and nudging himself towards the old bull. The buffalo stood unimpressed. Aaron began clapping his hands and the buffalo stamped one of his forelegs. Aaron stuck out his legs, then let his body follow. Sweat troubled his forehead and he swore furiously under his breath. The big buffalo stuck out his tongue. Aaron stopped. He did not want to get too close, but it looked like the buffalo was as stubborn as his daughter. He watched his son watching him and he inched forward again. He was concentrating hard on the buffalo now, so hard that he only heard the hoofbeats as they neared the gate. The buffalo did, too, and suddenly responded, stampeding at Aaron, who ran along the fence and hiked himself over just as Nickel, followed by Emily and Silver, passed him by. He sat up, his pants powdered with dust. Edgar still stood by the gate, a dumbfounded smile on his face. He was the only one who saw a man ride cantering up the lane, a man he thought he would only see on posters—Wild Bob Hucklebuck himself—a man tall in the saddle, with yellow curls, white teeth, huge hat, the kind of man who would know what to do.

But Wild Bob stopped near the house and watched, for Emily was cutting that buffalo in more directions than a crazy quilt. Silver was a beautiful mare, with an instinct for cutting, and she was presently using her talent to run Nickel down, heading him whichever way Emily signalled with her lithe knees, which Wild Bob, Edgar, her father and mother could all see, as her yellow dress was nearly bunched around her waist.

She finally turned Nickel into the fence and back along it toward the gate. Wild Bob galloped towards them just in front of the gate, and Nickel, wild-eyed now, turned into the corral. Edgar slammed the gate and dove under the wire, coming up near Wild Bob's horse just in time to hear the hero say: "Young lady, that is the finest piece of riding I've seen since the West set with the Sun. And I've seen a lot of riding." He raised his hat.

Aaron jumped the fence and walked towards the scene: a blond mustachioed man on his huge black stud, his red-haired daughter on her white mare, his eager son standing between them, the boy probably debating whether he dared to touch the man's long-heeled cowboy boot. Aaron wasn't quite certain just who this man was, but he knew he was important from the mere size of his horse, and his fancy hat. The man commanded authority, too, and though usually Aaron would have put himself between his daughter and such a man, he faltered, feeling flat-footed in his workman's boots.

Edgar suddenly ran to his mother. "It's Wild Bob Hucklebuck!" he shouted. He watched the imposing man from the safety of his mother's white dress, which was billowing like a cumulus cloud in the quickening Kansas breeze.

Emily straightened her dress, but never took her eyes off Wild Bob's face, the fine aquiline nose, the sparkling blue eyes, the white teeth underneath that groomed mustache. She took a deep breath, remembered all her dreams, then matter-of-factly said, "I will be your red-haired rider."

Wild Bob stared at her for a second, a young girl with deep red hair, an upturned chin, eyes bluer than his own, a fine thin neck flushed from her

ride. Only her hands seemed out of place—they were big, like she still had to grow into them. Her feet were large, too, but maybe that was her country girl's boots. He looked all around, at old Nickel, at the single-story frame house shimmering in the morning sun, at the red-haired father, shoulders stooping, legs slightly bowed, standing meekly before him, at the mother, brown hair in a prim bun, clear eyes searching for her daughter through round spectacles, a firm arm hugging her son's bony shoulder to her waist.

There was no circus, no West, without these people, he knew. Their drama was the drama of the farmer's West—the hardworking father, life drained into the tyranny of the soil, the spirit of the mother pushing to the sky, the kids already looking beyond, their parents' lives only a lesson in what not to do. It was no wonder he liked an earlier West, the freedom and chaos and conflict of it was his show, and now this girl wanted to be a part of it. Her nose was flaring as she breathed quickly. He gave in to her determination. He took off his hat, let out a whoop! slapped his thigh, and laughed. He smiled at Emily. "So you will. Our red-haired rider," he said. "One day and we'll round up these buffalo and polish you an act. Dan Rice will love this. And he'll pay you, too." He spurred the stud, Commanche, and rode to Aaron, reining in and jumping from the saddle in one motion so smooth it took half the bitterness and rancor from the indignant father along with his breath.

"There's money in it for you," Wild Bob said to Aaron. "You, sir, are the father of one of the finest free-form female riders I've witnessed. Yes, sir, you have a real talented young woman here."

Aaron cleared his throat, but was still surprised when his voice came out with only half the volume and charge of Wild Bob's. "What I have," he said, "is a wild sixteen-year-old girl who can't get her mind off her horse's back or boys or your goddamn circus. She'll be going to school today like every other girl her age in this town."

"But she's not every girl her age. She is not like any girl her age in this little town. Let her help me catch my buffalo. Give her one moment of glory under the big top and she'll thank you the rest of her life. I'll give you one hundred dollars. And a promise that she'll came back cleaner and more innocent than when I first saw her galloping down the road out of town this morning. Sir, you owe it to your family. Here are free passes to the evening performance."

Aaron reached for the tickets automatically, then wished he hadn't but there they were. His small family was standing around him, smiling. Wild Bob walked Commanche to the corral, roped Nickel easily, then mounted. He took a bull whip from his saddle and snapped the air over the old buffalo, who moved slowly out the gate towards the lane and the road and the railroad cars and work. "Come on, red-haired equestrienne!" Wild Bob shouted, and spurred his horse to a trot.

Emily looked at her mother and father and brother. It was a family portrait against the house, only she wasn't in it. She had imagined the same scene before. Then her father was running towards her.

"No!" he shouted. "You will not go!"

But she clicked her tongue, jerked her knees, and Silver was running down the lane. Aaron stopped near the corral gate. A moment of glory, he thought. He knew from her glorious day as Tomato Queen that moments of glory only sprouted wild hairs. He would have to get that damn Hucklebuck arrested.

Edgar came over and looked down the lane, then at the colorful circus passes sticking out like flowers from his father's hand. "Now maybe we can see the Wild Black Rhinoceros, Unleashed in the Ring to Give a Display of Wit Directed by Colonel Rice Himself," he said.

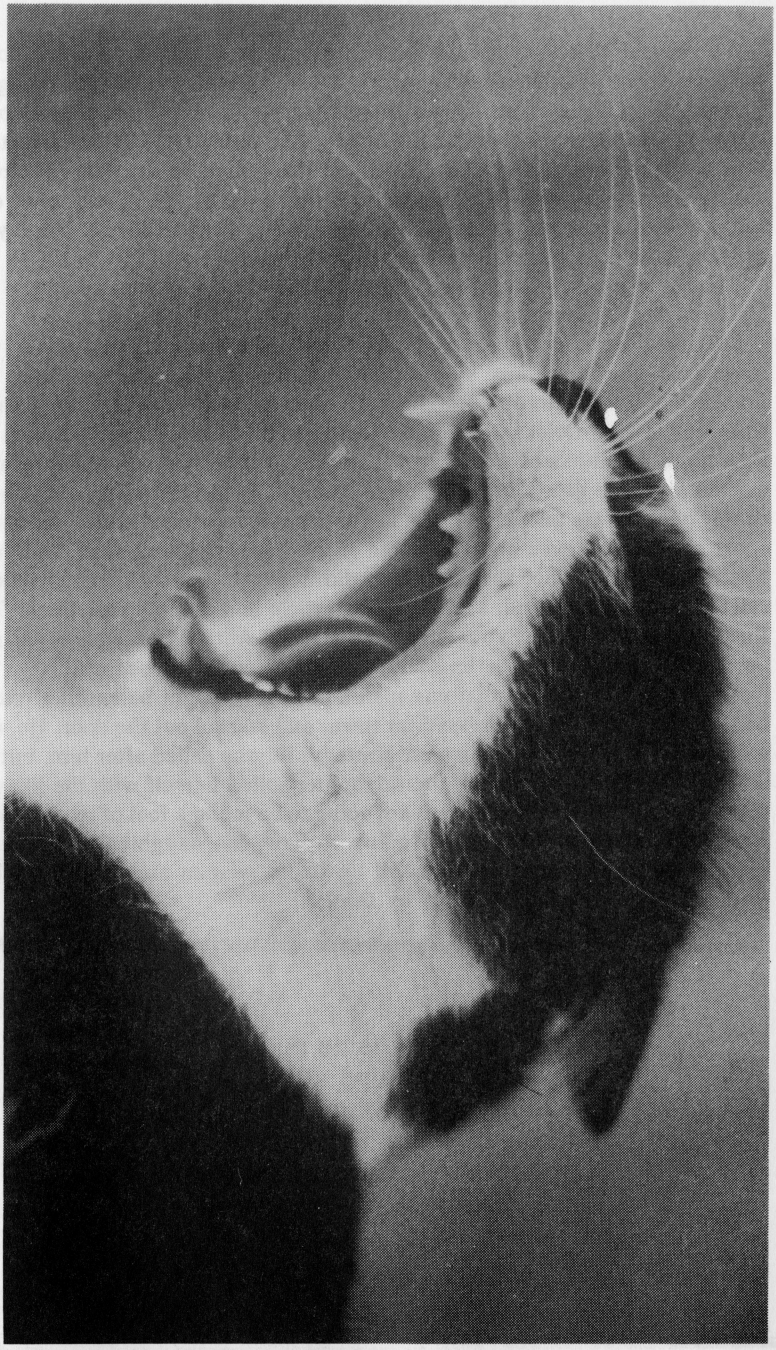
"You shut up, boy," snapped Aaron. "If I hear circus one more time I'll blacken your hide and lynch you for a nigger."

But he wasn't really angry until Edythe finally told him about the red-haired boy. Dan Rice's one good-luck charm had always been the presence of a red-haired equestienne in every show he'd ever put together. One year in New Orleans he simply could not find a red-haired woman. So he'd hired a red-haired equestrian instead, a young boy who dressed as a woman and rode gracefully around the tanbark. At the end of the show he'd calmly peel his wig and dress, much to the amusement of some, but to the consternation and even anger of some of the hotly admiring men. This year was the first year since then that Dan did not have a red-haired horseback rider, woman or boy, and, as the **Clipper** article had pointed out, Uncle Dan Rice's Great American Extravanganza and Wild Animal Menagerie was not on a good footing, having had bad luck all through the season.

Aaron could easily see that one man's good luck might be another man's bad, and he went inside, dressed for town, and started out the door. He was going to walk, give himself time for strategy. Edythe called after him, but he ignored her. She didn't care if their daughter soiled herself with the likes of these circus hucksters, but he was not going to be made a fool of by this Wild Bob, nor Dan Rice. He was not going to have his daughter in the ring, pretending to be some boy, dressed up like a woman and taking off her clothes. Not if he could help it, by God.

The flowers outside my window
Smirk at my being alone, as if
telling me how much they enjoy
the thirsty bumblebees hugging
and probing their pistils with
the eagerness of first kisses.

Wang Hui-Ming



Fierce Yawn

John Chambers, Photographer

Adam, where are you?
This cave is drafty and damp. It offers little comfort now.
That silly goose and her gander lead great wedges of birds south
across the sky past the rice fields.
Even the small animals have found burrows underground.
The bear is curled in its winter sleep deep within the cave.
We will need more than a *fig leaf* to keep us warm.

Adam, where are you?
What's that you've drug home?
"Followed you"?
In a pig's eye! *Get rid of her.* Scat, you ape!
Sometimes I think you took too big a bite of the apple—
or too little.

Adam, you are never around when I need you.
Oh, *oh,* it hurts. Damn that apple!
Well, Adam, don't just *stand* there—go boil some water.
I think we are about to raise a little Cain.

Mary Peak

From Gas City to the Met: An Interview with David Holloway

Eduard Straub, Photographer

By Deborah Seabury

January 1982. It is a cold, gray Sunday in Duisburg, West Germany, where the Deutsche Oper am Rhein will present *Die Bruste von Tiresias* (Poulenc's *Les Mamelles de Tiresias*) at three o'clock. At 2:40, Conductor Neil Varon learns that the baritone who sings the prologue, the Director, is not in the theater. He thought the performance was tonight. In the backstage canteen, where the stagehands sit unconcerned, drinking dark beer amid clouds of smoke, some of the cast huddles, discussing rumors of a late curtain. Varon bursts in, wagging his head. "What's the holdup?" "No Director. He's out flying his model airplane." "What are you going to do?" "Don't know yet." "Hey," someone shouts, "Holloway knows the piece inside out." "Would he do both the Director and the Husband?" "He's upstairs in the makeup room. Ask him."

3:08. In the auditorium, even the stolid, wool-clad matrons are shuffling their feet. My sons Robin and Bliss, at five and almost-three, grow more conspicuous by the minute, squeaking their chairs as they bounce on their knees. The first notes sound, the curtain opens. A piercing whisper, "There's Daddy!" I start to explain that Dad plays the Husband. "Wait, you're right! I guess he'll do the Prologue in French and the rest in German." I'm on the edge of my seat. He's always wanted to do both roles.

4:15. As the boys and I slip backstage, the conductor, director, and cast throng around a beaming David Holloway. Congratulations are flying. "They ought to pay you double for saving the show." Holloway waves his hands. "This is absolutely one of the great experiences in my career. Who needs money?"

David Holloway: Do you have to write that part about saving the show?

Deborah Seabury: That's what they said.

DH: I don't want to sound like some romantic hero. Maybe I shouldn't read this. I hate interviews anyway.

DS: I know, but why?

DH: Most writers concentrate on history, and then they get all the facts wrong. They don't know how to get to an artist's soul.

DS: You want me to write about your soul?

DH: Yeah, but be gentle.

We are standing in the kitchen, where David is making *Pesto* sauce. He wants to freeze enough to tide him over the winter. He strips the leaves from the basil plants, polishes them clean, and throws the stems on the floor for Nina, the pet rabbit.

DS: Okay, let me in on the secret. What turns you on about performing?
DH: The whole network of relationships that exists when I'm onstage—with colleagues, the conductor, the technical crew, everyone working to get something over to the audience. The opportunity to express my deepest feelings to several hundred people.
DS: Does it matter what you are expressing?
DH: Not a bit. It's about contact, not content. I am out on that stage, in the particular moment, giving my heart and soul to that particular group of people. When they get what I'm giving, it brings me fulfillment and joy. Be sure to say "joy."
DS: Do you experience joy singing dark, heavy characters, too?
DH: I don't experience them as heavy. A character like Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor* is so much darker than the dark side of me, that I enjoy letting go and playing evil. It's like a license to steal.
DS: Yes, you always hunt for the softer elements in those characters.
DH: I find every personality contains a whole range of different colors, including humor and sympathy. So that's a natural impulse in me. Besides, gorgeous Italian melodies deserve gorgeous vocalism. I have more reason to sing this music beautifully if this is the truth for Enrico, not something he's putting on, so I don't portray Enrico as a villain. I set up in my own head the limitations of the man. Enrico is young and alone, the head of a family which is faltering. The sister he loves refuses to do what he believes he has every right to demand. He'll do anything to regain control of the situation.

Discovering that a character feels he is right in what he's doing gives me command on stage. Father Germont in *Traviata,* for instance, has every reason to tell this Violetta woman what he thinks of her and to cajole her into giving up his son. I know a jillion people in Kansas who feel exactly that way!

DS: Are certain roles closer to you than others?
DH: Figaro—both of them. Learning the *Barber of Seville* with Maestro Ricci in Rome, I really learned about Italian *bel canto:* the recitatives, the musical exactness combined with legato line, the coloratura, which I can sing as fast and clean as any mezzo or soprano. I feel quite special as the Barber.

Also, the character of Figaro in the *Barber* and the *Marriage of Figaro* reminds me of myself. I'm just a peasant with a sense of fun about life and a positive way of handling people. I love wit and I love making things happen.

DS: Is developing a character an analytical process for you?
DH: Absolutely not. I am not a cerebral performer, which is not to say that I'm not smart or that I don't think. But emotion is what talks on stage. Even a symbolic character is driven by love, jealousy, rage, and pain. When I first come to a role, I don't start making decisions about it. I like to read it and reread it, letting the character speak to me. In establishing the connection between my inner emotions and what the character says and does, I look with my intellect to see what works. But I never play the reasoning. I go directly to the emotion.
DS: Do you "become" the character when you walk onstage?
DH: I am playing the character himself, not David Holloway acting like this character. But there is a danger in "becoming" somebody else onstage. You lose the thing that makes it art. Instead of creating the character from within yourself, you are suddenly trapped in the character. Personally, I want all my faculties with me to handle tricky vocal spots, to deal with staging problems, to find lights, and to watch the conductor.

I once looked down in the pit at City Opera in the middle of Figaro's aria "Non piu andrai" and saw Julius Rudel smiling up at me with his arms folded, his baton lying on the music stand, just listening to me sing. I want enough wits about me to enjoy such moments without forgetting my words. The magic for me is not losing myself onstage, but discovering intimate emotions with my colleagues.
DS: Would you clarify that?
DH: It's hard. In an opera, I am usually participating in an intense emotional situation. So I am exchanging intimate feelings with my colleagues, who are sometimes perfect strangers. I don't mean having a romantic or physical relationship with someone, even if we're playing a romantic scene. In that case, I am seeking, with this other person, to find elements that will project lovemaking so the audience is moved by that emotion. When it works, I don't experience lovemaking, I experience satisfaction in creating a powerful moment. I may have learned something about myself, or about love. It seems to me, that is the nature of art: finding out truths about life, saying "Oh, yes, that's how it is," and then revealing that to other people.

When all the elements come together, something happens in me that is far beyond knowing the staging or understanding my character. I experience a tremendous power. It is not being power*ful*—quite the opposite. I have to get quiet inside and wait. Something in myself will connect with this character and produce power. I am suddenly in the moment, in control of the moment, and observing the moment all at once. It must be a spiritual thing—I can't explain it in words.

Constant, reliable growth characterizes David in his career and in his life. Since leaving the University of Kansas, he has worked from the Central City Chorus and the Santa Fe Apprentice Program through the Kansas City Lyric, Western Opera Theater, and the Met Studio. He spent one year with the Metropolitan Opera, eight years with the New York City Opera, and toured the major regional companies in America. Now living in Düsseldorf, West Germany, he shuttles regularly between the Deutsche Oper am Rhein and the Metropolitan, Dallas, Hamburg, Berlin, and Bonn.

David has always studied relentlessly. He takes advanced German and Italian classes each semester at the *Volkshochschule* (the German community college), he translates librettos on airplanes or trains, he studied Italian repertory in Rome, French repertory in Paris, and acting with well-known New York directors. He watches other singers do his roles—he once attended *Don Carlo* (three and one half hours!) three times in one week to study Posa, the baritone role. He may complain about all the hours, but he actually thrives on his work.

He shrugs. "Growing up in Kansas, around farmers all the time, I experienced life as a process of endless work. There are no Sundays or holidays on a farm. You milk twice a day every day. You just finish planting and you harvest the winter wheat. By the time you cultivate, it's time to start haying. So I don't get depressed by the amount of work it takes to be an artist. I just keep hammering away at whatever's next."

I'm getting nervous. It's not so easy to capture the artist's soul, even if you've lived and worked and laughed and cried and fought with him for ten years. It's all true, about David being a dedicated artist, but somehow it sounds too serious. "I get a terrific kick out of what I do," he grins. Now that's more like it.

We are lounging on our big, empty terrace in Düsseldorf, drinking wine by candlelight. A few poplars and a locust tree stand tall overhead. The city is dark and still. No one else is sitting on the balcony, discussing life and art at one A.M. on a Tuesday night.

DS: How can you be so serious and easy-going at the same time?

DH: Well, I love to play, and I love life. I love people and sailing and fishing and cooking—and eating. I always play to win, but it's winning on my own terms. I can enjoy playing tennis every few years, making three really good shots, and losing. With practice, I could be a good player, but tennis is not a high priority with me. My marriage, my children, my music—they are at the top.

Deborah Seabury, Bliss and Robin, and David Holloway Eduard Straub, Photographer

DS: What is winning in your career?
DH: I want to become the best musical artist I can, a performer with something special to offer. Along the way, I set goals to help me achieve that. I value the fact that I can look at my career and see steady progress.
DS: Is progress the goal or the means to something else, like fame?
DH: The process of growth is the achievement for me. In attaining my goals, I find it more challenging to work in bigger and better theaters. Ultimately, I want to make music with the best music makers in the world. Playing at the Met in "Parade" with John Dexter, David Hockney, and Manuel Rosenthal is playing at a very high level.
DS: What about becoming a star?
DH: I would enjoy being in demand, able to perform all the time with the best colleagues under the best conditions. But the publicity and the attention don't interest me. I get the feeling "stars" start believing they are bigger than life, and I have a strong interest in maintaining a healthy view of myself.
DS: Still, it is a prestigious profession. How do you feel when you are robbed of that identity, when we go to parents' night at kindergarten and everyone talks about your career as a difficult context for raising children?

DH: I love being treated like a normal human being. I am at *Elternabend* because I want to help the boys develop happy and creative lives. Being a performer doesn't occur to me . . . although it's a wonderful opportunity to observe people. I love seeing all the temperament, people breaking up relationships and losing jobs. I don't think of it clinically at the time, but flashes of those evenings will come to me onstage.

DS: Has having a family held you back?

DH: I suppose, if you weren't worrying about other people in your life, your career might go a little faster. But the career wouldn't be worth it, alone. Making career decisions based on being married and having children has produced excellent career decisions, so there is no sacrifice involved. Coming to terms with having children, and working on our relationship, have brought me a tremendous sense of well-being. That calmness has altered my outlook on my career.

You know, ingrained in all of us is the belief that if you're not making all the major recordings and singing in the biggest opera houses all the time, you've failed. Finding satisfaction in my personal life, I have room to experience the enjoyment I have always had in singing and to realize that I am having a fabulous career right here and now.

DS: Does satisfaction make you static?

DH: Heavens no! I'm at the threshhold of the best part of my career. I am moving into more dramatic repertoire and more important theaters all the time. And I intend to keep moving. I just don't have to feel dissatisfied with where I've been.

Born sixth in a family of seven children, David Holloway grew up in Gas City, Kansas, a town of 350 in the southeast corner of that wide, windswept state. "Don't say 'flat,'" he warns, "I can show you hills." His father sold and serviced milking machines over thirteen counties. David worked for him "pretty much whenever he needed me. I'd walk in from school and Daddy'd say, 'There's a pulsator over there and the man's gonna pick it up in an hour. Have it ready.' It used to cost $2.50 to fix a pulsator and I never saw a dime of it. That's just what you got to do for being a Holloway."

His mother participated enthusiastically in the Methodist Church. She went back to college when David was ten and later taught retarded children. "My mother got me interested in humanity and other lands. She brought a constant stream of people home from church —Africans, Koreans, Indians. I remember a Pakistani man who stayed with us when I was twelve. He couldn't speak much English. I

liked him a lot, so I spent hours talking to him and everyone said I taught him English."

At five, David began piano lessons. "I always wanted to play the violin, but no one around Gas City knew much about the violin, so I got piano lessons instead. It wasn't until high school that I really fell in love with the piano." Saturdays, he used to ride his horse seven miles to his lessons, picking up his girlfriend on the way. But with all the people around home, it was hard to concentrate on practising. His sister Annabel remembers David seated at the piano under a big, black umbrella.

For eight years he attended the Gas City School, where each classroom held two grades and one teacher. "My first grade teacher thought I was lazy, so she kept me after shool and made me read. I learned to love books and words. I would read the newspaper to be like my dad, and I read the uncut *Count of Monte Cristo.* Do you know how many hundreds of pages he spends in prison?

"It was an unpressured childhood. My parents were a little worn out when it came to raising me. My mother supported anything any of her kids wanted to do, whether it was work at the brick plant or move to Cyprus. I sang a lot, but it wasn't competitive. There wasn't anyone for miles around who could sing like I did, or who really cared, so I just did it. One Field Day at school, I was the high point winner. I won the singing contest, the spelling bee, and came in third in the sack race. It all counted together.

"I also dreamed a lot as a kid, adventurous dreams in which I was the hero. My friend Jimmy and I played down on the creekbed everyday. We usually had a boat, one that had floated away in highwater and we used it until the owner wandered far enough downstream to find it. We played explorers and pirates and Coast Guard. Or I'd be out in the pasture with a bucket and stool, milking cows—we never had milking machines ourselves—and I'd daydream. I always came in late for dinner.

"I've been to Kansas," says New York accompanist Steven Bleier, "and I marvel at David's journey. He hasn't renounced that homey, corn-fed background; instead, he has evolved, expanded who he is. Just contrast Gas City with le Mari, his role in *Les Mamelles de Tiresias,* a highly ironic, slightly Dada-ist, witty work which even the Metropolitan Opera worried might be too sophisticated for its audience. And David was a supreme success."

We are back in the kitchen, over salami and tomato on hard rolls. I have just returned from teaching English to Japanese school children. David has just fixed the door on the rabbit cage.

DS: So, how did you get from Gas City to *Les Mamelles* at the Met? Did you always dream of becoming a singer?

DH: No, I thought I might be in the movies with Roy Rogers, or become a lawyer or join the F.B.I. But everyone says they always knew I'd be a singer, so that's what I projected, even if I toyed with other ideas.

DS: How did you choose to become a singer then?

DH: At several points, I've made decisions which I knew were important, and they were always linked to someone close to me. First, my piano teacher, Mrs. Gard, sent me to the high school music camp at the University of Kansas one summer. I discovered other people in the world who loved music and weren't sissies, so I started feeling better about this thing inside me that was so different from my school friends.

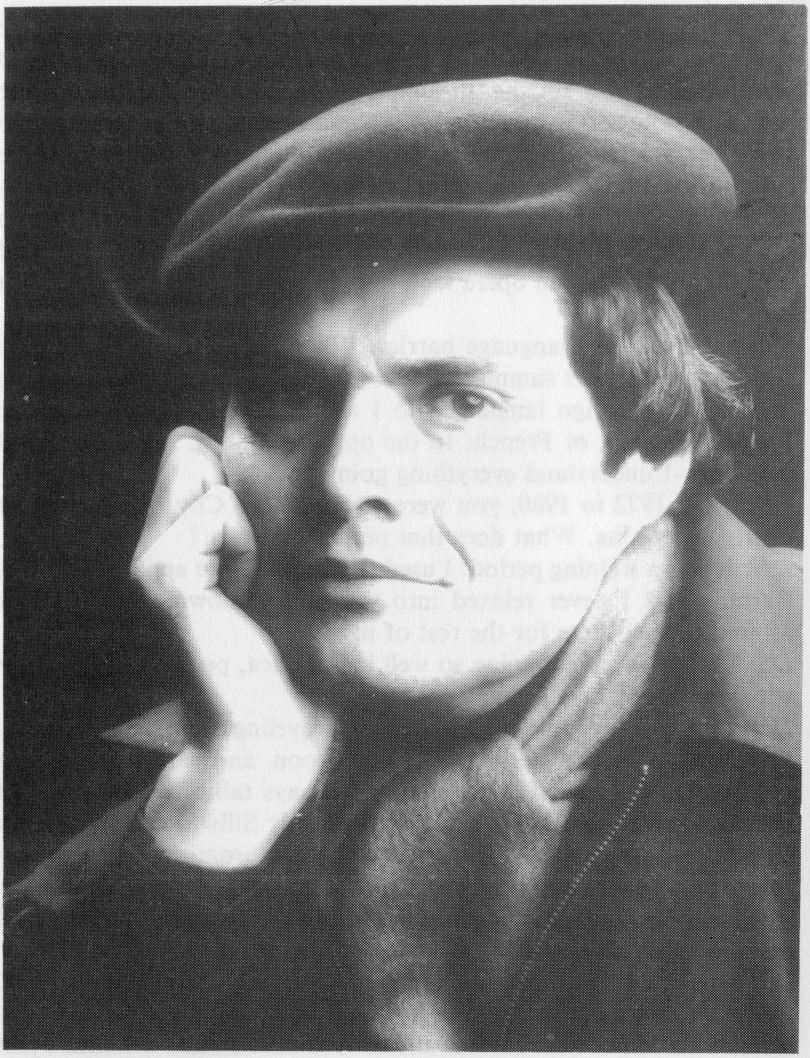
Then, at K.U. a lot of people thought I should be a tenor. I've always had a good high voice, but my teacher, Irene Peasbody, never felt it would be as pretty if I made it stay up there. I am grateful to her now for holding me down.

Conductor Robert Baustian at K.U. was the first person to assume I wanted a professional career. Up till then, I thought singing with the Robert Shaw Chorale would be the moon. Baustian raised my aspirations and made me feel I could achieve them. He coached every note I sang, took me through scores and records, talked about voice and language and style. I even took orchestral score reading and conducting, just to be in that man's class.

Meanwhile, I married and my son Devin was born. I taught voice for three years; then in 1969 I went to New York. I sang only two auditions and both recommended me for Western Opera Theater. On my way to San Francisco, I stopped off to audition for the Chicago Lyric Opera and ended up singing in the next three seasons there, too. In 1971 came Boston Opera and Tanglewood, and in 1972 I made my New York City Opera debut, after six hours of rehearsal in a room—no stage rehearsal, no orchestra rehearsal. I was so nervous, I forgot the locket for the locket duet in *Cosi fan Tutte.*

DS: A lot of disappointed singers would say you had good luck.

DH: Yes, but you can't do anything about getting good luck. You can only work at being a good performer. I have always felt that attitude is more important than luck. I didn't move to New York to get a part-time job and start attending auditions. I went to New York to sing, and I sang.



David Holloway. Eduard Straub, Photographer.

DS: What came next?
DH: Rome. Chicago Lyric Opera sponsored me for a National Opera Institute grant and I used the money to go study with Maestro Luigi Ricci. I absolutely fell in love with Italy—the people, the language, the food, the music.

Maestro Ricci slowed me down. I used to think it was an advantage to learn quickly. In college, I had even memorized and performed songs without ever singing through them! Ricci made me learn by ear how each note and word and phrase should sound. He expected me to strive for a total interpretation from the moment I walked into the studio. It was unlike coaching in America. I was not part of a committee trying to decide on the right interpretation. Ricci knew, and it was my job to learn it. Surrendering to that, I received a strong, firsthand exposure to the Italian opera from an old man who had worked with Puccini.

I also broke the language barrier. When we vowed to speak only Italian together, the summer of 1973, I found I could be intimate, be myself, in a foreign language. So I am no longer self-conscious in Italian, German, or French. In the opera, I am not at the mercy of memory—I understand everything going on.

DS: From 1972 to 1980, you were at New York City Opera, singing nearly everything. What does that period represent?

DH: It was a training period. I used that situation to apply what I was learning and I never relaxed into the routine down there. I never aspired to sing there for the rest of my life.

DS: With your career going so well in America, people must wonder why you moved to Germany.

DH: Lots of factors played a part. I was traveling more than I wanted. I realized Robin would start school soon and you couldn't go everywhere with me. Besides, we had always talked about living in Europe as something exciting. When Beverly Sills took over at City Opera, she gave me the kick I needed by not promising me any new roles for a few seasons. It was time for me to withdraw from New York anyway. I was moving into major roles at the Met, and I wanted the audience and critics to hear me with fresh ears.

DS: I never felt the move to Germany was such a calculated decision.

DH: I never make calculated decisions. I let all my thoughts and considerations come to the surface and drift around awhile and then I just act. I like to go with my feelings, the way I do onstage. Of course, it helped that I suggested moving to Europe and you said, "Let's go." That kind of support gives me a sense of power in my own life.

The move to Germany has been perfect. American theaters no longer see me as a "rising young singer" but as an international artist; and guest performances all over Europe arise constantly. Here in Dusseldorf, I sing the Italian repertoire that I love and I am beginning to do the heavier operas, like *Trovatore, Ballo,* and *Don Carlo.* I sing Figaro in both the *Barber* and the *Marriage;* and in the *Marriage,* I

alternate singing Figaro and the Count. This season, I open three new productions: *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo* (a 17th century opera by Cavalli), in November, that old standard *L'Elisir d'Amore* with director Otto Schenk in February, and my first *Eugene Onegin* by Tchaikovsky—in German, instead of Russian—in the spring. Over Christmas, I'll be in Monte Carlo singing *Orfeo* in the Casino. That's the kind of variety and challenge I've always dreamed of."

And when David Holloway dreams dreams, he means business.

Storm Approaching Gas City, Kansas, 1907

Courtesy of the Mr. and Mrs. Carl N. Hunter Collection, Pittsburg State University.

A marble-white full moon
Slithers through the window,
Creeping across my pillow.

Wang Hui-Ming

Lostyear

By Zula Bennington Greene

"This is Zula's lost year." Mamma made it sound like one word. It was the year I was eight, the fall that Julia, George and I all came down with whooping cough. Julia and George were soon back in school, but my cough held on and by the time I was well our six months of school had ended. I did not agree that it was a lost year. My spirit had greened and blossomed in the loving care given me by my parents. I read it in their faces, heard it in their voices, and saw it materialize in ways that ranged from quail to quilting.

I sat enthroned in the big rocking chair spread over with an old comforter. Most days it was by the kitchen stove, near where Mamma was working, and on chilly mornings another quilt was spread over my lap and tucked in. Mamma rubbed me with turpentine, lard, and coal oil. She swathed my throat in a flannel cloth, changed regularly, changes I welcomed for the comforting rush of cool air. A sticky cough syrup was given at intervals and Papa dosed me with quinine, removed from the blue bottle on the clock shelf with the tip of his pocket knife.

Aunt Martha Bird came and, as my cough grew worse, the doctor was sent for. He thumped and prodded, listened to my breathing, and said the whooping-cough had gone into bronchitis. Neighbors came, listened to my coughing, and said to take care of that child. Plainly they doubted I would last out the winter. Brews from honey, roots, and bark were suggested, but the treatment most often recommended was rock candy soaked overnight in whiskey, then held in the mouth until it melted. Papa was opposed to whiskey. Not a drop was in the house.

News of sickness traveled fast and in addition to any concern that might be felt for the person who was ill, provided a touch of dramatic interest to the neighborhood. One day a man knocked at the door, stamped snow off his feet, and after exchanging some talk with my father, asked if the little one's ear ached. A sure cure, he said, was to blow smoke into the ear, adding, in explanation of the pipe he pulled from his pocket, "I knowed Jake didn't smoke." Mamma said I did not have any earache.

One morning Aunt Fanny Feaster, aunt only by neighborhood courtesy, came and, after the usual greetings, said she had "brought somethin' for the young one's cough," about which she had heard from her cousin. Modestly turning aside, she lifted her long black skirt and from a pocket in her petticoat brought out a bottle filled with liquid as dark as the inside of a blackberry. She had made it herself from herbs, some she grew in her garden and some she gathered in the woods and pastures.

"What that child needs," she said, "is to cut that fleem and get it out of her throat."

Shapeless underlayers of clothes, Aunt Fanny's figure had run together in the sexlessness of age. Thin gray hair was pulled back from a face carved by time, weathered by wind and browned by sun. Her dark eyes, the irises rimmed with narrow opalescent rings, burned with what in later years I was to know as the final truth.

She stayed for dinner and helped with the housework, talking with a quaintness I had never before heard. She wiped away tears as she spoke of her son who had died in the summer—"He's loose from his misery and I've been caught in the weeping wheel." Heaven was mentioned with as much familiarity as though it was just across the street.

"Visitin' has perked me up," she said. "Time can be awful pokey for us old ones." She picked up the dried peaches my mother gave her and said at the door, "Now look well after the young one. They're the enambel of life."

Papa expressed his concern with quail. He was not a hunter. Once or twice a year he would shoot a squirrel or rabbit or wild turkey, but when a child was sick, he thought the delicacy of quail should be provided.

He brought down his father's old muzzle-loading rifle, which lay on the floor upstairs, and the powder horn and bullet pouch which hung on nails above it. He cleaned the barrel with small squares of cloth laid over the end of the ramrod, poured powder into the barrel, pushed a bullet down, and went to the meadow to look for quail. He took powder, bullets, and ramrod with him. If a second shot was needed, the loading would have to be repeated.

Toward evening he returned with two quails. Their little heads drooped down gently, their gray throats stretched out long and limp, the wing feathers soft and dark. Papa handed them to me, their bodies still warm. Mamma scalded them in hot water, picked off the feathers, and cooked them in butter. We all had some for supper.

When Julia and George first went back to school I waited impatiently for them to return with news of the day—who got a headmark, who had to stand on the floor, and did anybody ask about me. I wanted to know what lessons were studied, what games were played.

But as time went on I began to feel a closer interest in home than in school. Allied with my parents, I regretted to hear the children returning from school to invade the closeness of our day-long world. For the first time since I had started to school I was seeing and being a part of what was happening at home during the day.

Mamma and I shelled the garden seeds to save for next year's planting. Peas and beans were stripped from the pods, radish seeds peeled from the "horns," tomato, melon, and cucumber seeds rubbed loose from the papers on which they had been spread to dry. Color and odor lingered in marigold and zinnia seeds. Each kind of seed was folded in a paper and labeled.

"You'll never plant all them seeds, Mag," my father said.

"I don't reckon I will," Mamma said, "but there's always people who want seeds and sometimes we have a failure."

The kitchen was the center of activity. Mamma brought in the washtub, rubbed clothes on the washboard, boiled, rinsed, and blued them. Then she went out and hung them on the clothesline, sometimes on days so cold they froze as they were pinned to the wire. She came in with misery on her face. I helped with the ironing, glad to be out of the rocking chair.

Papa brought in harness to mend, splicing broken leather with copper rivets. On cold nights he warmed the bridles. Cold metal, he said, would tear a horse's mouth. He got out the last and mended shoes, cut half soles and put them on. Rips were sewed stronger than new with beeswax-reinforced twine, using two needles poked through holes in a double stitch.

That winter Papa made an axe handle. I did not then appreciate his skill in hewing it out of a length of hickory he brought from the woods, much as a sculptor carves a figure from a block of marble. With hatchet, rasp and knife he shaped the long graceful curve and smoothed it with pieces of broken glass, so hands would slide easily and without splinters when the axe was used. The most difficult part was fitting the axe tightly into the handle, so it would not fly off in vigorous chopping. A person with a quick temper was said to "fly off the handle."

Mamma knit woolen stockings and mittens, mended and sewed. She made me a green box-pleated skirt with black sateen suspenders that had pointed tabs over the shoulders. She went all-out for tabs that year, put them on a brown waist for herself and on a white one for George, all neatly machine-stitched around the edges. She taught me to knit that winter.

A memory that comes back is my mother mending her coat, a brown, loose-fitting coat, the only one I remember her having in my early years. Suddenly she stopped and said to my father, "Jake, do you know how long it has been since I had a new coat?" Her voice had a tautness that indicated that more might lie beneath the surface. When she said "Jake" in that voice it meant that she was irritated, out of patience or angry.

Best of all were the winter afternoons when the rocker was moved from the kitchen to the "big" room, where potato soup or ham and beans were simmering on the heating stove for supper. We sat by the fire and tacked carpet rags, Mamma and I sewing on alternate strips. She taught me, by doing, that even carpets rags must be sewed neatly and firmly.

Papa read the papers and called out bits of news, about Theodore Roosevelt and his "square deal," about the Russo-Japanese War—he was on Japan's side—and trusts, labor unions, and tariffs. "It says here, Mag," he called out, "that this woman has got the purtiest back in the world." Then, preparing to be scandalized, as he was by any unusual exposure of flesh, he looked again and concluded, "She does have a nice plump back."

Some days instead of reading he played the French harp or gave me problems in arithmetic, which he considered the basis of all learning. I went

through my reader several times and knew all the poems by heart. Mamma knew them too. She sang old ballads, "The Gypsy's Warning," "The Letter Edged in Black," "The Bagage Coach Ahead," "Annie and Willie," "Save My Mother's Picture from the Sale." Mamma had a nice singing voice. As Christmas came, her ballads changed to carols.

Christmas came quietly. Our stores had no lavish decorations. Candy canes were the first heralds. Mindful of the Bible story, I visualized the manger birth, picturing the manger as a deep narrow triangle, such as ours. The hayloft would have seemed a better place.

Mamma had kept a turkey from the Thanksgiving sale especially marked for Christmas. He strutted proudly about the yard and I felt a distant sorrow that he was marked for killing, but watched with interest as he was stuffed and dressed. Papa always asked Mamma to go easy on the sage. Early Christmas morning the turkey was put into the oven.

The night before Christmas after Papa had gone to the barn for his nightly rounds, he wound the clock and said it was bedtime. We hung our wool stockings over a chair near the stove and went upstairs to bed. I lay thinking about that glorious song of old and wondered if it would come on the midnight clear tonight, but by midnight I was sleeping too soundly to have heard any song.

Morning did not bring a mass of toys. Each stocking held an orange and a striped sack of candy, with a striped candy cane peeping out of it. Each child had something that was bought and something that was made by our parents. It was pure rapture to find a beautiful bisque doll sitting in the chair by my stocking. Julia had a set of little dishes, no plastics, but real china. And George had a little train.

It was a special Christmas. Our gifts were usually simpler, a little iron, a silk handkerchief, a locket—Julia's was heart-shaped, mine round—a small vase. One year we had little plates with the alphabet and a pictured nursery rhyme. We kept these things and cherished them for years.

Each of us had a pair of red mittens held together by that wonderfully ingenious idea of a cord that could go through the sleeves of a coat, not only keeping the mittens together, but keeping them with the coat. One year Mamma knit me a pair of gloves with fingers and colored stripes across the hand. She made a ball for George, tightly wound twine sewed through firmly and covered with leather. She cut two figure-eight pieces from old gloves and sewed them around the ball. Papa and Mamma never gave each other anything for Christmas. Christmas was for children.

Uncle Willie Bernard and their children, Fratie, Fresca, and Lowell, came for dinner. We had fun playing with the new toys while the women, aprons over their long dresses, worked in the kitchen and the men sat by the fire and talked.

Then came the dinner. People who have dining rooms do not know the sensuous pleasure of eating in the room where the food was cooked. Adding to the taste was the smell of turkey and gravy, of spice and seasoning, of fresh-baked bread and coffee. Food was passed around; more was brought

from the stove; and the meal ended with the pumpkin pie, not served in a separate plate, but passed around for each to take a piece.

After dinner we played again while the women washed the dishes and the men dozed by the fire. When the company left we played with our new toys until Papa wound the clock and said it had been a long day and it was time for bed. We went reluctantly. I wanted to take my doll to bed—I named her Rosy Cosette—but Mamma said I might roll over and break her, an unthinkable calamity.

I lay in bed peaceful and happy. I had not heard the angels sing, but I had been touched by love, which is the magic of Christmas and as I fell into a dreamless sleep the silent stars went by.

Warm days came, bringing plans for plowing and planting. They also brought the seasonal visits of peddlers. The coming of a peddler was something to think about and talk about for days. Peddlers traveled in a buggy, men remembered as short and stout and, despite the loneliness of back country roads, jolly and jovial. They brought gaiety and excitement into weathered farm houses and were never denied admission into a home.

Out of their big battered telescopes, held together by two leather straps, poured a stream of laces, ribbons, embroidery, hair pins, buttons, scissors, fringed shawls, little vases, mugs, children's plates, kitchen knives and small tools, needles and pins, even dress lengths of material, bright things to entice women who had so little of brightness. We all gathered around as the peddler spread his wares, hoping Mamma would buy something. A Magical Top that spun on a string came from a peddler's pack and lasted a long time! We remembered the way he wound it, pulled the cord away suddenly, and set it spinning, then stood back and said admiringly, "I'm here to tell you that thing warbles."

If it was dinner time a peddler was asked to stay and eat and in return he reduced the price of an article that Mamma had lingered over or gave some little trinket to a child. Peddlers slept at the farmhouses, too, for no hotels were available short of the county seats.

Mamma bought some ribbon and lace, a package of bone hairpins, a paring knife, a comb and several packages of shoe laces. We were all delighted at the purchase of a bright frippery from a peddler, but nothing brought as much solid satisfaction as shoe laces. Much of my early years seems to have been entangled with getting my shoes laced. The first time a string broke it was nothing at all. It could be tied and made as good as new. Even the second break was not a calamity. But when it was worn to the breaking point and the tips began to come off, a frail shoestring could cloud a child's life.

A farmer was not going to hitch up the horses and go to town for a shoestring, but he could provide a substitute, a length of twine, twisted, doubled, twisted again, then rubbed with beeswax. The child who needed the shoestring took one end of the twine and helped twist. The knot tied in the ends was hard to get through the holes, particularly if the metal eyelets had come off. At such a time a nice new pair of shoestrings with tips that went

right through the flabby holes—well, no bright frippery could touch the solid ease and comfort.

Peddlers had little trouble selling. They supplied needed things like hooks and eyes, needles and pins—"I'm all out and haven't been able to get to town"—and bright novelties that gave pleasure, all affordable. But the real hotshot salesmen were the picture enlargers. They knew the vulnerable spots and never missed one.

The standard pitch was for enlarging pictures of parents and an even more surefire was the picture of a child who had recently died. The enlarger talked sentimentally of the dear old father who had worn himself out with the hard work he did for his children and of the sainted mother who went down into the valley of death for them. Then he paused to allow the message to take hold.

After exactly the right length of silence, he asked gently,"Are your dear parents living?"

If they were he said how proud they would be to see their pictures hanging in their dear daughter's home. If they were not living it was all the more reason why they should be looking down from the walls, big as life and twice as solemn. Pictures were hung, not at eye level, but considerably above. Then of course the husband's parents must not be neglected. They too had worked hard and gone down into the valley. The amount of the down payment was skilfully negotiated—high enough to close the deal, but low enough to be acceptable. Then frames were needed and the sharpest picture peddlers sold enlargements in odd shapes that would not fit any ordinary frame.

A final event in the lost year was a quilting party on my birthday, the second of March. Mamma had set me to piecing a quilt, my first and my last, a simple quilt with blocks of nine squares. A lining made of two lengths of white muslin was sewed into the quilting frames, then covered with cotton batting, and the pieced top sewed to the lining.

Neighbors and relatives were invited to come and spend the day. They brought needles and thimbles and sat along the sides, quilting a comfortable "reach," then rolling the frames for another. The usual jokes were made about my husband getting his toenails tangled in my big stitches. Mamma cooked a good dinner of chicken and dumplings and, when the last narrow panel was almost finished, the women began to talk about going home. A few said they would stay until it was finished.

The pleasure of the day spilled over into the next, when Mamma and I bound the edges of the quilt. We pointed out squares of all our dresses, bright as the day the materials came out of the store, pieces even of the very ones we were wearing, faded from sun and suds. As a museum of family clothing, the quilt took on new importance.

With the coming of spring my cough had gone and I took my usual place in the family again. One thing was certain. It was not a lost year. How could it be when I had been so loved and nurtured, had a beautiful doll and a special quilt of my own?

Voice from the Valley

By Donald H. Burr

I feel moved to tell you of one of my mother's aunts who lived in Quaker Valley a good part of her life, having come here with her parents when they made their first settlement. Then, years before I knew her, she had gone with relatives to start a new life in the western part of Kansas—not far from Dodge City. She was a maiden lady, studying medicine with her uncle who was a doctor, and became a fine practical nurse. (Because of her ability, she was called upon almost as often as a doctor as she was a nurse.) Upon her return to the Valley, it was after one of her nursing sojourns that she received a proposal of marriage, which she accepted. She had nursed a man's wife until she left this Vale of Woe, as we called it then, and soon after the man asked her to keep on looking after him and his home. She became a resident of the Valley for all of her later years.

Her husband was of the Conservative Friends, and although my great-aunt had been born and reared as such, she had broken with the "slow Quakers" and had become a Progressive Friend. However, she reverted to the religious beliefs of her husband, using the "thee" and "thou" of the Conservatives and attending their First Day and Midweek meetings at the old Stone Academy with her husband.

One small incident happened during this period of her life which bears reviewing, as it shows her impatience with conditions about which she did not feel deeply. Her first time after marriage at a First Day meeting was attended by silence of the entire congregation. The Spirit did not move any of them. The second First Day's meeting was a duplicate of the first. Apparently she had made up her mind to get some action started on the third occasion, for she stood up and sang a hymn. Her rendition was met with frowns from the elders, but she continued until she had finished. (As we knew her singing voice in later years, we can agree with the frowns, but for another reason.) The fourth occasion of her attendance of First Day's meeting, she started to sing again—only to be stopped by a scowling elder's rebuff: "Thee's out of order." It is said that she never returned until the day she brought her husband to the Stone Academy for his funeral.

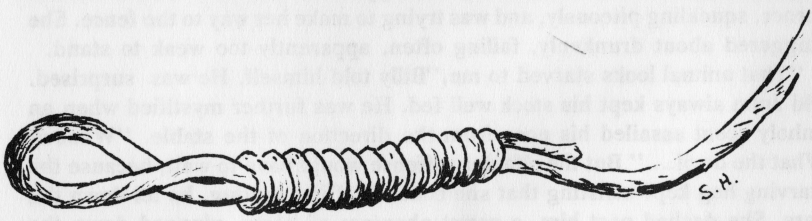
She had definite views on the education of children. For a short time, four of her brother's children lived with her and attended the district school in the community. When they returned home from school, she always had a jelly sandwich or other treat for them, but if she heard them misuse a word or speak slang, she removed the treat and sent them to the cellar to ponder on their shortcomings.

Story-telling was her stock in trade with us youngsters, and many were the tales she told of her life in the "wild and woolly West." Since I had a seemingly inborn aversion to snakes, the story of how she killed rattlesnakes with her quirt always chilled me. She would dismount, kill the snake, and return on her way as if nothing had happened. If she was driving a buckboard, she would alight from the vehicle, unhitch one of the horses, and use the single-tree as a club to dole justice to the rattlers. Such were the stories we were told and, since we were not there to verify, of course believed them. One favorite quotation which she used as a means of getting us youngsters to quit talking was "Was that thee that spoke, or a cabbage head broke?"

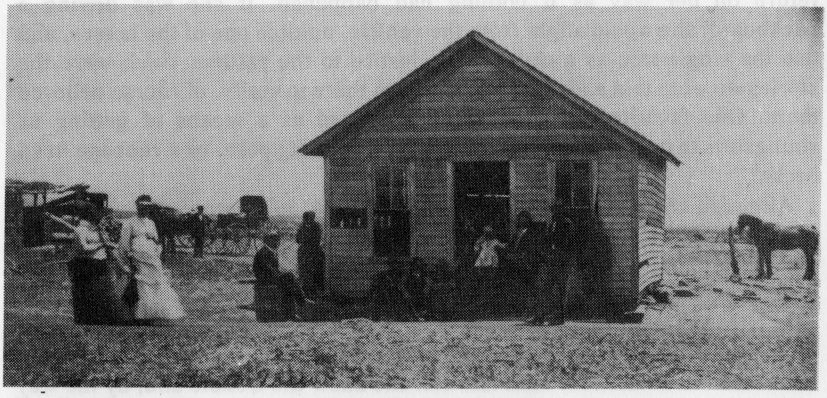
Although she was noted for being a good cook, my mother always insisted that her aunt really didn't cook that well, but rather was so slow in getting a meal ready that when it was served, her guests being so hungry, it tasted exceedingly good.

In later years, our aunt became at least pleasingly plump and had attacks of vertigo, caused (many thought) by her obesity. But, having studied with her uncle the doctor, our aunt felt that she knew the trouble and, by the way of self-justification,suggested that the bones of her head were separating, thus causing the vertigo. Mother said that she had eaten herself into the shape she was in; she could just eat herself out of it. (When it came to this aunt, my mother was as adamant in not showing praise as our aunt in not showing mercy or the milk of human kindness.)

Our aunt was kind, but not demonstrative. If she ever felt any feelings of love or affection, she never showed them. She was not sadistic or cruel, but positive that hers was the only way. She could identify favorably with the story told of another Quaker lady whose husband drank. As with any other denomination, Quakerism doesn't keep one from sinning, but it certainly does keep one from enjoying it. So the husband would be very sorry and contrite after he had been apprehended in his drinking. He would say that he was so unhappy and sorry for his sins that if he had a rope he would hang himself. His wife's reply to that was given much as our aunt probably would have given it: "Thee'll find a rope down by the shed. Thee'd better double it."



The Bender Hills Mystery



The North [or Front] View of the Bender Murder Site, Labette County, photographed by G.R. Gamble, Parsons, Kansas. Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

by Leroy Dick, as told to Jean McEwen

Chapter 6

More than two weeks passed without further developments. Then the heavy curtain of mystery was parted ever so slightly.

It was on Sunday morning, May first, that Billy Toll drove his cattle to the open range over the trail that crossed young John's claim and angled northeast through the mounds. Leaving the herd to graze, he rode on to Sunday school at Harmony Grove. As he drove them back past the Benders' after the service he was struck by the deserted appearance of the homestead. Things looked oddly amiss. He particularly noticed the strange behavior of a mother hog in the sty. Roused by his approach, she had risen from her corner, squealing piteously, and was trying to make her way to the fence. She staggered about drunkenly, falling often, apparently too weak to stand.

"That animal looks starved to me,"Billy told himself. He was surprised. Old John always kept his stock well fed. He was further mystified when an unholy scent assailed his nose from the direction of the stable. "Wheew! What the devil...." But the olfactory offense would have to wait, because the starving hog kept insisting that she couldn't. Dismounting, he let down the bars. She dashed past him, a gaunt phantom of haste, plunged down the draw on her wobbling legs and buried her snout in the cool water. Billy watched her, fascinated.

"Just plain famished, she was," he told me afterward. "I had to drive her back to the pen to keep her from bustin' herself."

* * *

He eyed the house dubiously. He didn't want to appear to be taking liberties. The Benders had always discouraged his attempts at being friendly. But the entire premises looked so utterly abandoned that he decided to satisfy his curiosity about that obnoxious smell. The scene that greeted him in that stable yard brought his indignation up hotly. A young calf, left tied to a post, had died, evidently of starvation, and lay at the end of its rope in a sorry state of decomposition. A cow that had brought the calf had received no care and her udders had burst from neglect. All of which reminded Billy that loose Bender stock had been bothering around his place for several days past. What did it all mean?

Crossing the garden plot to the house, he made bold to knock on the rear door. The sound echoed noisily through the still air, but it was not answered from within. "Gone.... Skedaddled," Billy muttered, and walked round to the front. The window shades were drawn. Again his curiosity mastered him. Thrusting a stick through a broken window pane he pushed aside the blind and peered in. "Nobody home, that's certain." He withdrew hastily. The small store was silent as a tomb.

He remounted and rounded up his herd. He was so excited by the mystery he had chanced upon that when the two partners of a real estate firm, Schwartz and Brooks, passed him with a load of prospective settlers from the east, he stopped them on the highway.

"The Benders are gone," he exploded.

"What's that?"

"Yeah—gone, hide and hoof. Their stock is all starving down there."

"What the hell—Say, men, we'll take a look," Brooks clucked to his team, and the wagon was soon veiled in a cloud of dust.

* * *

Billy hurried home, drove his cattle into the corral, told his brother Silas the news, and galloped back down the road. He wanted another look himself—with plenty of company.

The members of the real estate party were milling around the stable yard, their indignation spiced with what Billy felt was warranted profanity over the suffering of the animals. Schwartz was just emerging from the stable door.

"Team is gone," he announced, "—unless they're loose."

"They ain't," Billy made a gesture to prove it, "Cause the wagon's gone too. I noticed it while ago."

Schwartz whistled softly. Their glances met and held.

Brooks overheard. "Guess we had just as well take a look inside, then." He was already on his way to the house. The others followed. They found the doors and windows locked. It took but a brief heave of heavy shoulders—the lock of the south door gave way. The men crowded curiously through.

Nothing more than the ordinary furnishings of a primitive household met their searching eyes. A littered table in the kitchen, a cook stove, some

splint-bottom chairs, a tier of uncurtained shelves behind the stove stacked untidily with cooking utensils and on the topmost an eight-day clock, now rather audibly silent. Beyond the wagon sheet curtain, the store presented the same appearance as on the day Col. York visited Kate. It was no novelty to Billy. He had been there before.

His big thriller lay in the fact that the Benders had for some drastic reason abandoned their homestead, and nobody in the neighborhood knew it but himself. "Guess I'll jog over to Harmony Grove and throw a little excitement into the folks at Leroy Dick's singing school," he told the men.The jog soon quickened into a mad gallop down the highway. He felt as elated at the prospect of spreading the news as a cub reporter with his f'st big scoop.

Our Sunday afternoon singing, which I directed, had just been dismissed. Several of the young men — the Dienst boys, Charlie Campb ll, Newt McMain, Maurice Sparks, and others, were in various stages of departure when Billy dashed up with his bomb.

"Say, boys, the Benders have hit the trail.... In their old army wagon."

The men crowded around him, their amazement all that his garrulous heart could desire.

"The Benders—gone?"

"All of them?"

"You don't mean they've gone for good!"

"Gone—where?"

Billy could answer two of those queries positively. "Yessir skedaddled. The whole outfit. We should reckon it's for good. They left all their stock starvin' to death." As for the fourth, "Though only the devil knows where," he admitted.

His listeners expressed themselves pretty freely.

"Left their stock starvin'. Why, the dirty coyotes!"

"I reckon a few starvin' brutes more or less wouldn't worry those dumb Dutchmen."

"Anyway, the neighborhood is well rid of them."

"And may they never come back."

"That's right. May they never come back," agreed Mrs. Dick, who was visiting in the yard with some of her friends while I put away the song books and set the school room in order. The other women heartily endorsed the hope. In fact, in all our minds the unpopular Benders had become a disfigured excrescence on the otherwise fair contour of our community.

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It happened that I heard none of the news, for by the time I came out the others had left. So I was at a loss when, as we neared home, Mrs. Dick remarked in some relief. "Well, I'm glad we are rid of those Benders."

"Rid of the Benders?"

"Didn't you hear Billy Toll say they were gone?"

"Why, no....When did he say that?"

"After singing. Maybe you were still inside....Yes, they have cleared out. I wonder why."

I thought it over. "Col. York's visit may have had something to do with it. They say the guilty always run....If they really have abandoned their property, it will be my job as township trustee to take charge of it. I'll go over to church tonight and talk it over with some of the men."

Billy Toll was again the center of attraction as I drove into the school house yard that night. "What is this I hear about the Benders?" I asked him.

He repeated the story of his discoveries that morning, and the fact that the Schwartz and Brooks party had broken into the house.

"They shouldn't have done that without an officer present," I objected. "I'll go over in the morning and take charge of things."

"That's your duty as trustee, Lee," Father Dienst said.

"That's right," the other men agreed.

"Si and I will be mighty glad if some disposal can be made of their hungry stock," Billy complained. "They'll be in our kitchen eatin' our sugar and bacon next."

In performance of my duty as township trustee, I set out early Monday morning to make a survey of conditions at the Bender homestead. A short way down the road I met my neighbor, Aaron Collins.

"We went over there last night and looked around," he said, when I explained my errand. "There's no doubt that the whole outfit has cleared out for good."

That being the case, I began to estimate roughly, as I rode along, the amount of property it would be my job to dispose of. I already knew approximately how much grain and livestock I'd find on the place. As township assessor I had canvassed the property for taxation earlier in the spring. The old woman objected to my valuation of the livestock, particularly the cattle. There were eighteen head at the time. She said their number often varied, as young John traded and sold. In some vexation she discussed the matter in German with old John. I caught fragments of the conversation. I'm of German stock myself.

"Sind Sie auch Deutsch?" (Are you also German?) I asked her.

"Du kaunst mich nicht in Deutsch verkaufe," (You cannot sell me in German) she retorted with characteristic shrewdness.

* * *

I remembered, too, that in the spring of '72 young John had broken sod and planted corn as a requisite to holding his claim. What remained of his crop was in a crib near the stable. That would have to be disposed of. But not an acre of sod had been turned on the main homestead except the negligible garden plot between the house and stable. In this plot, I noticed as I rode in, numerous apple sprouts had sprung up. Not as having been planted. More like the promiscuous sprouting of seeds in parings tossed from the kitchen door. These shoots, now in full leaf, swayed in the pleasant May breeze.

It was one of those delicious May mornings when the sun beams down with encouraging paternal pride on growing things. When cottony white clouds drift low across the sky with a graceful nonchalance. Not too

aloof—just minding their own business.When fresh green blades of life crowd and jostle one another, each trying to nose through the sod to the sunshine ahead of its fellows.

"Too fine a day for such bad business," I told myself.

I tied my horse to the corncrib—then I stopped and sniffed. For then and there my finical nostrils got a hint of the gruesome tragedy which wafted its first revelation on a vague gust of wind....For I'd got a whiff of one of the vilest odors on earth. Yet I wasn't quite prepared to believe it was what my nose intimated it to be. It didn't come again....

I started looking around. And I was telling myself, "Leroy Dick, you've lain beside dead comrades in the battle field while the Confererate guns kept up their incessant bombardment. You've breathed the stench of rotting human blood too many times to be fooled about its smell." That's what my inner judgment kept telling me....Pretty soon it drifted past again. Just a whiff, from I couldn't tell where.

I was certain it didn't come from the large manure pile outside the stable, though there was a noticeable peculiarity about that: solid chunks of subsoil were mixed through the waste that could have come from neither the well nor the cellar. Had the Benders been digging in or around the stable? I looked inside. Similar clods were scattered through the litter on the dirt floor.

Billy Toll had fed the stock. I went on to the house. I smashed the lock on the outside cellar door and went down. It was quite empty. The dirt walls had crumbled, packing the crevices around the stone slab.

* * *

I came out and entered the house through the front door. I explored its two rooms thoroughly.The walls were neither lathed nor plastered. The ceiling joists were likewise devoid of covering, gaping to the peaked roof. The cellar was under the kitchen, its north wall running parallel with the partition studding. An opening thirty inches long had been left in the kitchen floor between the first two joints over the wall, and a lid fitted into the space, held in place by lapping an inch over each joist, and lifted by means of a boot-strap nailed to one end. This very simple inner entrance to the cellar was nothing less than the celebrated "trap door" of exaggerated, unauthentic accounts of the Bender atrocities. The fact is, there was no "trap" about it, although its purpose later became very apparent.

The clock on an upper shelf behind the kitchen stove had stopped at 12 minutes past 9. A combination meat-saw and knife on one of the lower shelves attracted my curious inspection. Further exploration revealed three hammers under the cook stove. The smallest was a three-inch claw hammer. the next was five inches long, of the sort used by shoe cobblers. The third was a light hand-made sledge 7 inches long and weighing—including the stout handle—5½ pounds.

But some disposition had to be made of the stock at once. I went out and rode down to George Mortimer's to ask him about putting Bender's cattle with his herd. He agreed, and promised to come and get them. I then went across the mound to Moneyhon's and made similar arrangements with him

about the chickens, ducks and peafowls. It took a big load off my mind to make such satisfactory distribution.

* * *

It was now past noon. I decided not to go home for dinner. Instead I circled all the near neighbors—Douglass's and Hornback's, then across to McCrumb's, Ben Ferguson's and Maurice Sparks', notifying them of my discoveries at the Bender place and asking their cooperation in unearthing whatever tragedy it unquestionably held.

"There's a dead body buried around the premises somewhere. If you'll meet me there tomorrow morning at daybreak we'll hunt till we find it. I wish you would notify the neighborhood to that effect. We'll need all the help we can get."

They all agreed to come. "I'll send my team and plow." George Mortimer had promised. I also notified Col. York of our intentions, and asked him to be present to identify his brother's body in case it should be found.

I met Mr. Coleman on the road and explained the situation to him. He gladly consented to help. By the time I got back to Bender's, Ben Ferguson and Maurice Sparks had galloped across the range and were waiting for me with another electrifying disclosure.

"Say, Lee," he accosted me, "do you know there's an account in the Thayer paper of a team and wagon abandoned on Thayer Lake?"

"Why, no, I don't. What about it?"

"Well, the Headlight says that on Sunday morning, two weeks ago, a man living near the lake went over there for a bucket of water. He noticed a team tied to a wagon drawn up on the bank and a little bench-legged dog frisked around him as he walked. When he dipped up his bucket of water the horses nickered as if they were thirsty. He thought there might be someone asleep in the wagon. He walked over to investigate. Nobody was with the outfit. Looked like it had been there for several days. The horses were still in harness. They were so hungry they had gnawed at the wagon. It all struck him as being pretty queer. He looked things over thoroughly. A bullet had bored through both sides of the wagon bed. Its dashboard was spattered with blood.

"The fellow hurried uptown to spread the news that a murder had been committed. A big crowd gathered at the lake. Everybody was excited. They thought a big tragedy was on foot. They dragged the lake for the victims. Every square yard of the bed was searched.

"Did they find any bodies—any clothing—?"

"Not a single clue. Not a trace of foul play except the bullet holes and the blood, which some thought were just a hoax."

A very likely possibility had been tugging at my mind. "Say," I suddenly inquired, "did you say a bench-legged dog?"

* * *

Bob grinned. "Lee's beginning to catch on, Maurice," he told Sparks hopefully. "Yes, Lee, a bench-legged dog like that mongrel of Bender's. Maurice and I have been talking this affair over, and comparing dates. The team and wagon must have been abandoned at Thayer around April 15.

That's about the time the Benders made their get-away. Wouldn't be a bad idea for you to go up and look that outfit over, would it, Lee?"

I considered the whole matter. "I believe you fellows have figured this out about right. The team and wagon are missing, and of course the Dutchmen couldn't have got off the place without them. Why they abandoned them so soon isn't quite clear....But I can't leave now, Ben. I've got to be here in the morning, and I couldn't get back in time. Say, why can't you and Sparks go? You have good horses to ride, and you could identify the outfit just as well as I."

They were willing to help me out, and rode away on their mission at once. Upon arriving at Thayer, the first thing to confirm their surmises was sight of a bench-legged dog socially engaged with some new canine friends on Main street. Nothing less, in fact, than the Bender mongrel. The team and wagon were as unquestionably Bender property, and as such Ben and Maurice officially identified them.

This discovery, proving the actual flight of the family, was given much publicity through the press. And that old wagon told an incriminating story of its own. You see, it was an assembled vehicle. Its front axle was of the old North Carolina gauge. As a result it made two distinct tracks, the front narrower than the rear. That bit of news put our Labette County officers into a flurry. They proved on examination that its double-gauge tracks tallied precisely with their measurements of the tracks by the Drum Creek water hole where Jones' body was found two years previously.

Which, of course, linked the escaped Benders with that murder—later thought to be their first crime in Kansas.

Responding to my appeal for help in investigating the Bender premises at daybreak on Tuesday morning, George Mortimer brought his plow as requested, others had spades, I had brought my wagon rod to be used as a probe, if need arose.

War veteran that I was, it was natural for me to divide the men into squads for a thorough, systematic search. The first of these I detailed under my brother, Temple, to investigate the waters of Spill-out Creek, the two branches of which converged on young John's claim. As the men sprang to their saddles I called out final instructions: "Scatter out. Search every water hole here to Drum Creek....Come back as soon as you can."

I asked David Lindsey to superintend the second group in cleaning out the stable and corral and examining their dirt floors for signs of digging, to account for the foreign clods of sub-soil scattered through the refuse there.

The third squad accompanied me to the cellar to dig out the dirt-packed crevices around the walls, preparatory to an inquiry into affairs under the stone slab.

* * *

The first detachment soon returned to report they had found nothing questionable in the three-mile windings of Spill-out Creek. The efforts of the squad sent to examine the stable and corral floors proved equally fruitless. By this time my men in the cellar had carried out all the crumbled dirt from

the floor and were widening the crevices around the stone slab in order to pry it up. Suddenly Si Toll's spade probed deeper than was its wont. It sank into soft yielding muck. He lifted a load dripping and vile. And up through this newly opened aperture rushed a stench of such overwhelming virulence that the men came tumbling out of the place, several of them in a state of violent nausea.

Dave Moneyhon voiced his scorn of such delicacy. "You fellows haven't any stomach at all." He caught up a spade that leaned against the house. It had belonged to the Benders. "I can dig this place out." He set vigorously to work. But with his third spadeful he too came staggering forth to purer air, for the small unventilated hole was now so poisonous with putrified odors that is was wholly unendurable.

"Human decomposition," I told them, "or I've never helped to bury the dead on a week-old battlefield.... But we've got to lift that slab and find out what's under it, smell or no smell."

The slab, however, fitted too snugly to be lifted. To demolish it required an ax or a heavy bludgeon. I sent Billy Toll for the sledge I had noticed under the cook stove, also to uncover the hole in the kitchen floor for ventilation below. I then descended once more into the cellar and after some labor succeeded in shattering the heavy stone. My helpers quickly removed the fragments.

We were surprised to learn that the stone had not rested on the dirt floor as we had supposed. Instead it was set on stone columns some five inches in height, leaving a corresponding open area beneath in which the obnoxious gasses had collected. A thorough probing of the slimy floor proved futile. If any of the missing men had met foul play at the hands of the Benders, they had not been buried in the cellar. Yet on the joists that framed the yawning hole in the kitchen floor several dark stains were apparent. Dr. Keebles, a physician from Thayer, who analyzed them, pronounced they were made by human blood.

I was equally certain about another point. "There was human blood in that muck under the slab."

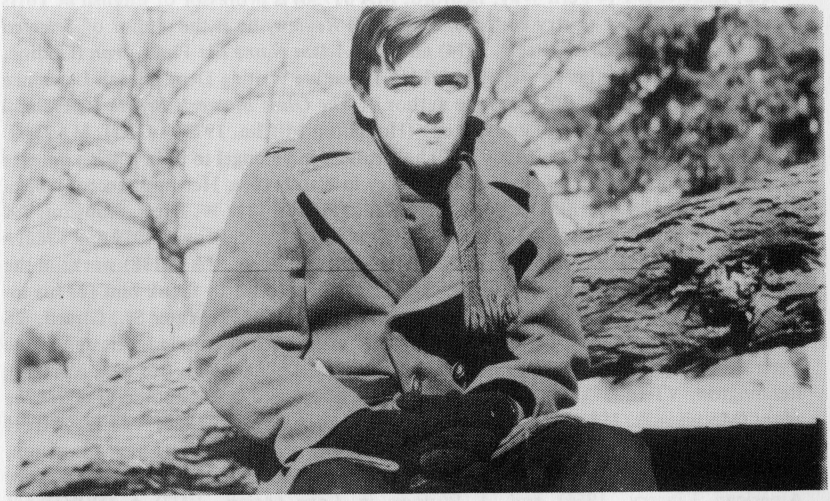
(To be continued)

Contributors

THOMAS FOX AVERILL (720 Green St., Topeka, KS 66616) is an assistant professor of English at Washburn University. His fiction in this issue is the second chapter of a novel in progress • **ALEX BARDE** (Box 71, Rt. 1, Pittsburg, KS 66762) is an assistant professor of art at Pittsburg State University. In 1963 he was in a production of Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* with James Tate, Charles Cagle, and Gene DeGruson • **MARIANNE BORUCH** (1917 Sherman, Madison, WI 53704) is now a mother, in addition to all of her other accomplishments. We discover that she is also a former student of Tate's • **SUE ABBOTT BOYD** (2406 S. S St., Fort Smith, AR 72901), founding editor of *South and West,* was the first non-university editor to publish Tate • **DONALD H. BURR** (Box 342, Rt. 1, Galena, KS 66739) presents the second in a series of reminiscences of Quaker Valley • **CHARLES HARLAN CAGLE** (113 E. Williams, Pittsburg, KS 66762) is an associate professor of English at Pittsburg State. He states that Tate was one of his students in fiction writing • **JARED CARTER** (1220 N. State Ave., Indianapolis, IN 46201) teaches in the Department of English at Purdue University. His "From the Watertower" appeared in the Spring 1983 issue of the *LBR* • **JOHN CHAMBERS** (1330 Morgan, Parsons, KS 67357) works in Special Collections at Pittsburg State. Last spring he was named the outstanding freshman history student at the University • **FRED CHAPPELL** (Department of English, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC 27412-5001) is the author of *Moments of Light* (New South Co., 1981) and *Midquest* (Louisiana State University Press, 1982) • **JOHN CIARDI** (359 Middlesex Ave., Metuchen, NJ 08840) is familiar to all as the former poetry editor of the *Saturday Review* (1956-1972) and one of its contributing editors until 1980. His numerous books include the recent *A Second Browser's Dictionary and Native's Guide to the Unknown American Language* (Harper & Row, 1983) • **WILLIAM CORBETT** (9 Columbus Sq., Boston, MA 02116) has been most helpful in putting together this issue. His works include *Runaway Pond* (Apple-Wood Books, 1981) • **PETER DAVISON** (8 Arlington St., Boston, MA 02116) is poetry editor of *The Atlantic* and senior editor of the Atlantic Monthly Press. His works include *Barn Fever and Other Poems* (1981) • **GENE DeGRUSON** (601 Grandview Heights Terr., Pittsburg, KS 66762) is an associate professor of library science at Pittsburg State. He has served as editor of this issue of the *LBR* • **ELSA DORFMAN** (603 Franklin St., Cambridge, MA 02139) did the jacket portraits of Tate for *The Lost Pilot* and *The Oblivion Ha-Ha.* For more of her work, see the delightful *Elsa's Housebook* (Godine, 1974) • **ROD DUTTON** (212 E. Carlton, Pittsburg, KS 66762) is a major new addition to the editorial board of the *LBR.* He works for Words and Pictures Corp. as a graphic artist • **NIKKI GIOVANNI** (American Program Bureau, *Encore Magazine,* 2 Penn Plaza, Suite 1500, New York, NY 10001) lives in Cincinnati with her son. Her most recent book is *Those Who Ride the Night Winds* (William Morrow, 1983) • **ZULA BENNINGTON GREENE** (1205 Mulvane, Topeka, KS 66604) recently celebrated fifty years as columnist for the *Topeka Daily Capital,* an event honored by Stauffer Publications, the city of Topeka, and the state. Her birthday, incidentally, is March 2 • **MICHAEL HEFFERNAN** (510 W. Euclid, Pittsburg, KS 66762) is professor of English at Pittsburg State. His *To the Wreakers of Havoc* will be published this spring by the University of Georgia Press • **GEORGE HITCHCOCK** (325 Ocean View, Santa Cruz, CA 95062) is the founding editor of *Kayak,* probably Jim Tate's favorite magazine • **SHELBY HORN** (1212 S. Larson, Chanute, KS 66720) is nonfiction editor of the *LBR*

and staff attorney for Consolidated Oil Well Services • **FANNY HOWE** (195 Winthrop Rd., Brookline, MA 02146) is the author of many books of poetry. The editors also recommend her novel *The White Slave* (Avon, 1980), based on the life of Peter McCutchen, who was born near Diamond, MO • **DAVID IGNATOW** (P.O. Box 1458, East Hampton, NY 11937) teaches at York College of the City University of New York, Jamaica. His many books include *Rescue the Dead* (Wesleyan University Press, 1983) • **X.J. KENNEDY** (4 Fern Way, Bedford, MA 01730) is professor of English at Tufts University. A former poetry editor of *The Paris Review,* he is the author of *Selected Poems & Ballads* (Helikon Press, 1974) and *Did Adam Name the Vinegarron* (Godine, 1982), among many others • **THOMAS LUX** (Creative Writing Dept., Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY 10708) is the author of *The Glass Blower's Breath* (Cleveland State University Press, 1976) and *Sunday* (Houghton Mifflin, 1979) • **GAIL MAZUR** (5 Walnut Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140) has truly been an angel to us in getting out this issue. She is coordinator of Blacksmith Poetry in Cambridge. Her most recent collection is *Mashpee Poems* (1983) • **WILLIAM MATTHEWS** (411 W. Drew, Houston, TX 77006) is the author of *Rising & Falling* and *Flood* (both Little, Brown, 1979 and 1982) • **GEOFFREY H. MOVIUS** (42 Fresh Pond Land, Cambridge, MA 02138) works in the University Development Office of Harvard. The editors wish to thank him for his invaluable assistance in contacting poets • **MARY PEAK** (100 N. Water St., Girard, KS 66743) here appears with her second published poem, the first being "Easter at the Veterans' Hospital" *(LBR* 2.3) • **STEPHEN SANDY** (Orchard Sea, Box 524, Northing Bennington, VT 05257) teaches at Bennington College and is the author of *After the Hunt* (Moonsquilt, 1982) and *Riding to Greylock* (A.A. Knopf, 1983) • **ELIZABETH SARGENT** (Suite 901, 881 7th Ave., New York, NY 10019), dancer, poet, musician, novelist, and composer, has written our favorite *Love Poems of Elizabeth Sargent* (New American Library, 1966) and *A Woman in Love* (Avon, 1977) • **DEBORAH SEABURY** (Grunerstr. 25, 4000 Dusseldorf 1, West Germany) has been free-lance writing since 1973. She, in addition to teaching English to Japanese students, is working on an opera libretto and a high school musical with American composer, Roger Ames • **BETTY SEARS** (10337 Lamar, Overland Park, KS 66207) has worked as a proofreader in a travel agency, we were told. The editors wish to express an especial thanks to Mrs. Sears not only for her cooperation but also for her encouraging enthusiasm for this project • **CHARLES SIMIC** (Box 192, Strafford, NH 03884) is the author of numerous fine books, including *The Chicken Without a Head: A New Version* (Trace Editions, 1983) and *Izabrane Poems* (Nolit, 1983) • **WILLIAM STAFFORD** (1050 Sunningdale, Lake Oswego, OR 97034), one of the few native Kansans in this issue, needs no introduction. Recent works include *Roving Across Fields: A Conversation and Uncollected Poems, 1942-1982* (Barnwood Press Cooperative, 1983) and *Smoke's Way* (Graywolf Press, 1983) • **LEE UPTON** (3406 Park Ave., No. 6, Richmond, VA 23221) teaches writing at Virginia Commonwealth University • **DIANE WAKOSKI** (607 Division, East Lansing, MI 48823) has recently published *The Magician's Feastletters* (Black Sparrow, 1982) and *Saturn's Rings* (Targ Editions, 1982) • **WANG HUI-MING** (Montague, MA 01351) is a professor of art at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His books include *The Land on the Tip of a Hair* and *The Boat Untied* (both Barre Publishers, 1972 and 1971) • **TED WATTS** (Box 303, Oswego, KS 67356) is currently illustrating a book on American Olympic stars. (The retail price—$1,000—has chased the title from our minds at this setting.) He did the cover illustration of this and all previous issues of the *LBR* and drawings of numerous contributors • **NATHAN WHITING** (P.O. Box 649, Brooklyn, NY 11215) is highly prized for such books as *Running* (New Rivers, 1975) and *This slave Dreads Her Work . . .* (Hanging Loose, 1980) •

FREDERIC WILL (Dept. of Comparative Literature, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003) is also editor of *Micromegas: An International Journal* • **JOAN YEAGLEY** (Box 60, Rt. 1, Stella, MO 64867), in addition to writing poetry, is a courier for a diagnostic medical laboratory headquartered in Dallas



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