My Word
Modes of Discourse

Connecticut Writing Project
Summer Fellows 1991
My Word!
Modes of Discourse

by

Members of the
Connecticut Writing Project
Summer Institute 1991

Edited by Laura Hayden

Connecticut Writing Project
Storrs, Connecticut
1991
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First You Have to Eat a Book</td>
<td>Ellen Page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Junk</td>
<td>Gregory Mattesen</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webster Was Not Moses</td>
<td>Barbara Kleiman</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>Karen Harrison</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering</td>
<td>Carol Joseloff</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Football Game About My Brother</td>
<td>Kathy Ryan</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Hope's Boarding House</td>
<td>Elizabeth Burns</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dichotomy</td>
<td>Jane Harvey</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>Jim Fuller</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musings on Measurement</td>
<td>Patte Doran</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>Christopher Kueffner</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Reality</td>
<td>Lynn Hoffman</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innocence</td>
<td>Stephanie Swenkyj</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Medicine</td>
<td>Sheila Williams</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Chaos or The Metamorphosis of Tranquility</td>
<td>Penny Baril</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Connecticut Writing Project offers opportunities for growth and professional development to teachers of writing in all disciplines who recognize the worth of using writing as a means of learning any subject matter. A program of The University of Connecticut Department of English, the Connecticut Writing Project is affiliated with the widely-acclaimed National Writing Project, which now has 166 sites in this country and abroad.

In the project, experienced classroom teachers are trained as Teacher/Consultants in an intensive Summer Institute where they share their expertise and practice writing themselves. During subsequent school years, they present workshops on composition theory and practical strategies for teaching writing to teachers in participating districts.

The approach has proven effective by generating widespread interest in good writing and by upgrading students' abilities as writers and learners. For further programs, please write or call the director:

Mary T. Mackley
Director, CWP/Storrs
The University of Connecticut
Department of English, U-25A
Storrs, CT 06269-1025
(203) 486-2328

First You Have to Eat a Book

"How can I get my child to be a reader?" This parent's question, which I am asked every school year, echoes the concerns voiced by educators across the country in answer to a recent report entitled, Becoming a Nation of Readers.

This report identifies the qualities that characterize "good readers." How do we create these good readers?

I often answer parents by telling them to provide books to read to their children, and to let their children see them read. This answer rarely satisfies the questioner. It seems too simplistic.

I pondered the question, hoping for more insight. Out of the corner of my eye, I watched my nine month old daughter play amidst the array of primary colors that were blocks, cars, animals, stacking rings, and books. She came to a faltering stop, kept her tentative balance by holding one arm over her head, and bent down to pick up a book.

Self selecting -- one of the qualities of a "good reader."

She chewed the corner with satisfaction. (There's nothing like sinking your teeth into a good book!) She toddled over to me, soggy cornered book in hand, and climbed into my lap. Kathleen has a definite preference for the combined acts of lap-sitting and book-reading.

Reading for pleasure...

She listened appreciatively as I read and smiled as she studied the pictures.

Using context clues...

When I got to the end of the book and announced, "All done!" she began to cry sorrowfully (as I knew she would). So I started from
She had chosen a favorite, *A Duck Says Quack*. Kathleen has demonstrated a strong preference for books that contain realistic pictures of babies and animals. She enjoys reading them over and over again.

Initiating the act of reading...

Exploring a genre in great depth...

At times Kathleen holds her books upside down. In fact I have observed her very deliberately lay a book down, with its pages opened and flat, on the carpet and slowly circle around it, examining the pictures from every angle. This is really no different from how she comes to know other objects around her -- sometimes looking up at them from the ground, sometimes crawling head-on at them, looking down at them from Mommy's shoulder, staring intently from a still pose, and at other times catching only a blurred impression of them as she is carried past them by a hurrying adult.

Testing the message of the content in relation to the reader's own point of view...

Kathleen explores her books as she does the rest of her world. She chews them, throws them, bangs them, and sniffs them.

Interacting with the text...

She knows the word "book." When we tell her to get one, she goes in search of one of her sturdy, cardboard favorites and returns with it, arms up in anticipation of a good "read."

Predicting...anticipating the action...

For someone whose speaking vocabulary consists of just six words, four of which name her family members, her recognition of the word "book" says something about the importance of it to her.

One day when her twelve-year-old sister was laying on the carpet in the corner of the family room reading, Kathleen crawled over to her and tried to engage Aimee in play. She climbed on her back, tugged at her hair, and made "blubba, blubba" noises by twanging her finger over her lips -- all to no avail.

She crawled away, only to return a minute later, this time with a book in her hand. She plunked down on her bottom, inches from Aimee's face and peered at her expectantly as she opened the pages. She seemed to be matching her activity to Aimee's and looking for approval from her big sister. When she got a chuckle -- a sisterly form of approval, that delighted Kathleen and got Aimee to put down her book and scoop Kathleen up into her lap to read.

Developing strategies...

I marveled as I considered this little "reader" we had created. What had we done to make her such a "good reader?"

We bought her books -- age-appropriate material, with baby-appeal. We read to her because we shared her enjoyment of the combined acts of lap-sitting and book-reading. We, the "big" people in our house, all were readers. We read for school, for information, and for pleasure.

I deposited my little case-study back on the carpet, amid her toys and books, and took another look at *Becoming a Nation of Readers* and the qualities that defined a good reader, and answered that parent's question again in my mind. This time with insight.

Provide books, read to your child, and let your child see you read.
Old Junk
Gregory Mattesen

If my house ever burned down, I don’t think I’d be able to go on. I have spent so much of my life accumulating such a conglomeration of neat old junk that I just wouldn’t be able to recover from the blow of losing it all. Sometimes I criticize myself for putting so much emotional investment in inanimate objects. I tell myself that I’d be better off owning stuff that’s modern, functional, and has no sentimental value. But this would never work: I’m a sentimental person, and I need to surround myself with things that mean something to me.

Take the garbage can in my room, for example. It’s an old white domed garbage can that actually looks a lot like R2D2 from Star Wars. It has a square stainless-steel door on the side of it that reads “PUSH.” It’s the kind of garbage can that you used to see at roadside drive-in ice cream stands. Actually, that’s why I bought it: it reminds me of the Dari Delite down the street from Grammie and Grampa Mattesen’s house. The Dari Delite, which my grandparents always called “Julia’s,” had a couple of trash cans just like this one. When I look at my trash can I remember warm summer nights eating soft-serve sundaes on the lawn of the Dari Delite. I can feel the warm summer breeze tousling my hair; I can hear the breeze as it swooshes through the tall maple trees, whispering to the crickets that peep on endlessly; I can see the soft yellow glow of the bug-resistant fluorescent lights reflecting off Julia’s black and white ’55 Buick and Grampa’s big white Dodge, and I can smell the sweet smell of summer in the night air as I taste rich hot fudge and real whipped cream. After finishing our sundaes we’d throw them away in one of the domed trash cans and get a drink of cool, clear water from the bubbler. I don’t think of Julia’s Dari Delite every time I throw something away in my garbage can, but sometimes when I’m in my room I’ll look at the can, and I’ll be reminded of those warm summer nights. Could I relive these memories if only I had a Rubbermaid?

I also have an old parking meter from downtown Stafford Springs in my bedroom. It’s the kind that has two parking meters on one pole. The parking meters are grey on the outside with red and white dials inside to show how much time is left before violation. I can remember when the parking meters used to stand on Main Street when I was little. Before we moved to Stafford Springs we used to come to visit relatives. Main Street had a certain charm for me then. I loved the old red brick buildings nestled on both sides of the street, and I loved the old signs that hung outside the stores even more. A huge old white building that housed an old Chevrolet dealership stood at the top of Main Street; it had a sign painted right on the building that read "SERVICE" and depicted a yellow outline of a Chevrolet logo. Ideal Package Store occupied a building across the street and had a neat old blue sign that flashed red and green neon. A little farther down there was a Western Auto store, its sign a red circle with a white arrow looping around it in the shape of a nine. And on the lower part of Main Street, where it widened out some, stood Central Package Store with the best sign of all: "Central Package Store" flashed in bright neon while an arrow made up of a hundred little white light bulbs pointed to the package store’s door. This sign was always my favorite because the little bulbs in the arrow would light up in a way that made the light appear to flow through the arrow.

Sometimes my mom, my sister, and I would walk downtown from Uncle Ray’s house and go shopping with Aunt Hazel. My sister and I would always check the parking meters to see if there was a penny or a nickel still in the coin slot; if there was we’d fish it out with our tiny kids’ fingers. And all the while we were checking the meters we’d pass by the plate-glass windows of the cozy little shops, and the old signs would beckon overhead.

How could I hold onto all of these memories if I didn’t have one of those parking meters here to remind me of them? The Western Auto store and Central Package Store went out of business in the ’70s, and their signs disappeared. Ideal Package Store replaced its beautiful old neon sign with a wooden one in the early ’80s. And the rest of the parking meters were sold about ten years ago.

In addition to having old things all around me in my room, I presently drive a twenty-five year old Volkswagen Beetle. I bought it nine years ago, when I was fifteen. When I was growing up my grandfather used to have a number of old Volkswagens like this one.
I remember being fascinated by the two ivory-colored knobs on the dashboard, the chrome, lever-type pull handles that opened the doors, the tiny windshield-wiper blades as they'd sweep the windshield clear of rain. The white headliner seemingly had a million tiny polka-dots on it, and the car always had a certain dry, comfortable smell inside. And there was a little castle with a wolf standing on top of it embossed in the horn button.

Grampa used to take me in the Volkswagens to get the paper on Sunday mornings. I'd ride in the passenger seat, sitting way up on the front edge and holding onto the grab handle on the dashboard with both hands so I could see over the sloped hood. When we went under the 1-91 overpass I'd always make Grampa beep the horn so I could hear the echo it made. We'd get the paper at Tommy Ball's store in the center of Warehouse Point, and Grampa would always let me pick out whatever kind of candy I wanted. Sometimes I'd get a roll of Necco wafers, and many times I'd get Butter Rum Life Savers. And on the way home I'd make Grampa beep the horn under the overpass again. He always humored me, chuckling as he did so.

Tommy Ball's store burned down when I was very young (Tommy now belongs to the Warehouse Point Fire Department), and my grandfather sold his last VW around the time I started to drive. But every time I drive my old VW, I beep the horn under overpasses and in tunnels. Sometimes I just do it out of habit, but other times it reminds me of those trips to get the Sunday paper and my candy with Grampa.

Some people look at all of my old stuff and call it antiques. They tell me that my garbage can is a collector's item, my parking meter is "worth more than I think," and my car is classic. I'm not interested in the fact that my stuff is "worth money." Other people can't understand why I keep all of this old junk. My trash can is old and ugly, my parking meter is weird, and my car is an obsolete relic. I let it go in one ear and out the other. I know the truth: I know that these things can bring back warm summer nights, the glow of old neon, and Life Savers on a Sunday morning with someone I love. I wouldn't trade these things for anything.

Webster Was Not Moses

Barbara Kleiman

How long has it been since you stopped to think about where the English language, that sacred doctrine that we teach in our classrooms, came from? Sometimes we English teachers get carried away in our zeal for teaching the conventions of spelling, vocabulary, and grammar and forget that the language we teach was not engraved on stone tablets and delivered down to some ancient English teacher as he (certainly it would have been a he, old and stodgy) stood devoutly on a mountain top. (Gee, where would the mountain have been, Cambridge, Oxford, or, the home of perfect English, the American Midwest?)

Plato (4th century B.C.) thought that language was a divine gift and that the perfect language could be discovered if we just applied enough logic to the task; but now it is commonly accepted, if often forgotten, that language is arbitrary. In other words, a chair is a chair because we all agree to call it that, not because "chair" is the only appropriate word for it. In addition to being arbitrary, language is also a growing, changing thing.

Our English language has been growing and changing since about 450 A.D. when the Jutes, Angles, and Saxons paid a social call on the Celts and decided they liked the weather well enough to stay. It has been influenced by the Irish, the Romans, the Danes, and the French. (You see, back then if a tribe wanted something, they could not go to K-Mart; and if they craved violence, there were no football games to watch; so it became customary to fulfill their desires by invading the little island of England.) All of the intruders added words to our language and even changed lots of the words that were there already.

So we might as well chill-out. A language that has travelled through Old English and Middle English is not likely to stop changing in the 1990's in spite of all our efforts; but if you think you are up to the job of saving language, at least you are in good company. Several of our most revered scholars had the same notion.

In 1712, Jonathan Swift wrote his "Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue," a fascinating essay.
in favor of purifying the English language before it deteriorated any further. Other prominent authors of the time, like John Dryden and Daniel Defoe, chimed in to support the proposal. They wanted to establish an academy that would control the language, a kind of Supreme Court of English, but they could not decide who would be "chief justice"; and even if they had, the Academy would not have been able to force its decisions. Just think, if they had had their way, we would all be writing like Swift, Dryden or Defoe.

This idea of keeping the English pure did motivate a couple of significant contributions to our language. In 1755, after eight long years of work, Samuel Johnson completed his *Dictionary of the English Language*. Imagine, before Johnson no teacher could say the immortal words, "Look it up in the dictionary." Actually, there were some earlier simple dictionaries, sketchy word lists; but they were nothing compared to Johnson's two volume set.

Johnson's dictionary was the first to include multiple definitions and examples, from noted authors, of how a word was used. For over a hundred years it was the authority, but today it serves as an amusing example of how our language has changed.

Can you imagine writing or teaching without a dictionary? It did not seem to cause Old Will Shakespeare a problem. In fact, he must have found it quite liberating. In his distinguished career, he introduced 1,904 words into the language words like *arch-villain, barber, assassination, barefaced, countless, courtship, orb* and *laughable* into the language. In *Hamlet* alone, he introduced 600 new words. His audience did not seem to be bothered by the new vocabulary. They just listened to the context of the words and figured out what Will meant.

Spelling was also no big deal before dictionaries were readily available. William Caxton, the first English printer, dealt with spelling in several different ways. If he ran out of a letter toward the end of a page, he substituted a letter that he had available. If a line of text was too short to fit into the printer's frame, he added a few "E's" to the end of words to lengthen the lines; and if some letters happened to fall to the floor during printing, it was no problem. He just put them back anywhere. Of course, because Caxton's printing made books more available, spelling became more formalized, but not the major thing it is today.

Another contribution of the "fix the language period" came from Bishop Robert Lowth in 1762. If you and your students have ever thought of hanging Warriner in effigy, you were after the wrong man. It is the bishop you really want. He created the first widely accepted English grammar. The problem is that Bishop Lowth was a Biblical scholar and accomplished Latinist; so he based his grammar on the rules of Latin. Now we are stuck with his system. He was the man who said you cannot split infinitives, prepositions must have objects, and "shall," not "will," must follow "I" and "we" in formal writing; unless it is an imperative, in which case the rule reverses itself.

However, before you get out the rope, we cannot blame Lowth for parts of speech. They started way back with Plato. He named two. Wouldn't that have made life easy? Aristotle pushed the tally up to a very manageable three. By the first century B.C., Dionysius of Thrax had stretched it to eight, but not the same eight we have, because he used articles and participles instead of adjectives and interjections.

Oddly enough, some of our most respected authors often broke the rules of grammar or stretched their limits. Shakespeare experimented with phrases and sentence construction. Alexander Pope, a real rebel, felt that words should be spelled as they are pronounced. (Have any of your students ever come up with this novel suggestion?) Pope used lots of hyphens and contractions. God forbid, he even ignored the rules for using "you" and "ye." This gives you a good idea of where such rebellion gets us.

All of the changes in our language did not take place on the other side of the Atlantic. When the first settlers arrived in America, they had to borrow words from the Indians to describe many of the new things they found: *raccoon, skunk, pecan, squash, moose*. Thank goodness they Anglicized many of the words or we would be chasing *raughroughcums* out of our trash, serving *squatersquash* with turkey, and spending a lot more time on spelling tests. Our forefathers also picked up words from the French trappers, the Dutch settlers, and the Spanish explorers. When they could not borrow words, they made up their own, like *bullfrog, catfish, sweet potato,*
and groundhog. Some words, like dell, moor and fen, were dropped because they had no use in America.

Because it took about a year to make the round trip to England, Americans were cut-off from their mother-land, and their language became as independent as their spirit. It was this spirit of independence that inspired Noah Webster to publish his dictionary in 1828, but you may be surprised to know that the dictionary was not Webster's most popular accomplishment.

In 1783, Webster had established American English by publishing his first spelling book. In nine months it sold five thousand copies; and by 1829, more than twenty million copies had been sold. When you take into consideration that in 1830 there were less than thirteen million people in the U.S.A., it is obvious that the speller was a popular little volume. In Colonial America most families owned only one book, the King James Bible. It served as moral guidance and as a textbook. We should not be surprised that when teachers got a second text, they used it. (We still teach from what we can get our hands on.) With Webster's speller so readily available, spelling received lots of attention in schools; more attention than it had ever received before and probably more attention than it deserved.

In spite of dictionaries, grammar books, and the best efforts of battalions of English teachers, our language has continued to change. We blend words (brunch), add affixes (upgrade, downscale), create acronyms (scuba, radar), clip words (bra, ad), and incorporate brand names (Kleenex, Xerox). As long as our civilization lives and grows, our language will live and grow with us.

Alone
Karen Harrison

"There's mail for you today Mrs Graffe." Anna took the crisp brown package from Frank, immediately noticing the postmark. Saint Petersburg, it read. What lovely memories she had of their vacations in Florida. A beautiful package from Susie and Tommy. How she missed them. The years had slipped so quickly by. Her own dear Tom and his elegant and charming wife, Susie, must be on another vacation. How wonderful for them. They always remembered to send her candy. She now had a collection of these boxes on the shelf next to her bed. Each cover was decorated with a beautiful reproduction of one of the Impressionist's paintings. Her boxes included Renoirs, Monets, and there were several Degas. Maybe this one would have a letter with some news inside. She opened the box carefully with rapt anticipation, but only the perfectly placed chocolates stared back at her. From behind her a voice squealed with enthusiasm, "My word Anna, you are really spoiled. That son of yours is always sending you candies." Anna invited her friend and neighbor, Martha, to join her in tasting one of the chocolates. "Tom and Susie sent these from Saint Petersburg, Florida. They do take such nice trips."

After sharing the candies and exchanging the news of the morning, Martha shuffled back to her room. Anna once again looked longingly at the box and the postmark as a flash of memory went through her mind. She recalled all of the fun she and Tommy had had at the beach. They were masters at constructing castles in the sand and the memory came to her of how much fun it had been to dodge through the roaring waves together. These thoughts immediately sent her into one of her daydreams. This time the daydream took place in Florida. Tom senior was watching them from his sand chair close by. He would peer over the pages of his book and wave and smile fondly at them. They had been such a happy family together for so many years.

A knock on the door pulled Anna away from this reverie. The aide had come with lunch. "I love the way you've rearranged your furniture, Mrs. Graffe." It was true the room did look better this way. The bed had been moved to the far wall to make room for the table
by the window. Anna enjoyed eating her meals and watching the activities in the yard below. She loved seeing the mothers pass by with their children. Their voices echoed up to her window and sometimes she could hear snatches of their conversations. They were all so busy and had so many adventures ahead of them to share. Every now and then she was surprised by her own emotions as she watched these families go by. She felt no bitterness, only a certain longing. She longed to be touched, to be hugged.

Anna particularly yearned for two things. She would so very much like to see her grandchildren grow and change. Little Tyler reminded her of Tommy when he was that age. Father, son, and now grandson were all three alike in so many ways. Their mannerisms were exactly the same. The way they cocked their heads to listen more intently, raised their eyebrows to feign surprise, and most endearingly opened their arms when they needed comforting. From a distance no one was able to tell them apart. She hadn't seen Tyler for two and a half years now. It was difficult for Anna to imagine how he had changed. She kept asking Susie for his measurements, in order to finish the sweater she was knitting for him, but letters took so long in getting to her. The last had come more than six months ago.

The other thing Anna missed was the blooming of the dogwood trees in the spring. Tom had planted them just outside the kitchen window. It was comforting to know that Susie and Tom and Tyler were living in the old family house. How busy their lives were running to and fro, always on the go. The short distance that separated them seemed to grow with each passing month. Yet life at Downcaster was a good one. There was nothing that Anna needed. Nothing.

Remembering

Carol Joseloff

She watched him from the hallway as he looked around his room. She felt satisfied that his task was almost complete. They had chatted with friends and relatives about dorm life, and he even thumbed through that ridiculous guide she had left on his desk, The College Student's Guide to Dormitory Survival. He had packed the suggested number of soft new towels, blankets, pillows, hangers, a desk lamp, drying rack, handy tools, bathroom bucket, and stamps. He was more prepared than any Boy Scout she knew! She smiled when she saw the ceramics project he had made in seventh grade, a bowl of ceramic potato chips, and the requisite ceramic onion dip. She watched his fingertips stroke the goatskin shield hanging on his wall, under his autographed picture of David Copperfield, and the Miami Vice mirror he had silkscreened in eighth grade.

As he lovingly touched the goatskin, she was overwhelmed with the memory of the hot, sweaty, dusty smell of Masai warriors, invigorated by the dances they had just performed, displaying their dexterity. One by one, the young warriors had leaped higher and higher into the air, keeping both feet together, as the chanting grew louder and louder. Their war-like cries had startled him, but he was most attracted to their shields and spears. Wouldn't his brother like one, she had asked him. It was only the second day of their safari and he knew there would be other wondrous things to buy, but a real shield and spear from Africa, a real shield like the ones he saw the warriors holding so deftly as they defended themselves in mock competition, that would be something to be forever proud of owning, he had argued. He ended up buying three. She was startled to realize that he was staring at her. She gave him an awkward smile, embarrassed that she had been caught in reverie like that. It seemed like only yesterday, yet so very long ago, that she and her son had gone on safari.

The trip had been a birthday gift to her from her husband. She had always dreamed of going to Africa, and Gerry had decided that after forty years of dreaming she had better wake up. Michael had just turned thirteen and celebrated his Bar Mitzvah. She thought that a trip to Africa would broaden his horizons. After all, why should he
have to wait until he was forty to go to the cradle of civilization?
Outside in the yard she heard the voices the workers who had come
to cut the lawn. She could hear the lawn mower's powerful motor,
lke the roar of a lion, she mused, as whirling blades came to life.
Africa! Even the name was magical and beautiful and terrible.

As she entered his room, a photograph pinned to his bulletin
board caught her eye. It was a beautiful cat with glowing golden eyes,
sprawled in a bed of tiger lilies. She had been called Simba, Swahili
for lion, due to her hunting prowess. The female lion usually did the
hunting, they had been told by their African driver. She remembered
the excitement and revulsion of coming upon a kill. Perhaps the most
fascinating had been that last day in Ngorongoro Crater. It had been
mid-afternoon and they had spent most of the day game watching
from a Land Rover. The morning had started out chilly, damp, and
foggy, but as the warmth of the sun began to burn off the haze it
became easier to sight animals. They had passed a thick, marshy area
in which hippos were wallowing, snorting and blowing bubbles in the
muddy water. A stream of sunshine had brightened the dry grassy
area in front of them, and in the distance they could see three adult
lions and their young. A large male was ripping the flesh off what
remained of an adult zebra. Two females, who had in all probability
provided this repast, waited patiently nearby. The three cubs, tired
of waiting, had scampered over to the carcass to feed, but the male
gave a fierce roar and lunged at the cubs. The drama thrilled the
travellers peeking out from the safety of the Land Rover. A pack of
jackals watched, almost invisible in the tall grass. While the lion was
distracted, one of the jackals boldly snatched the zebra's tail. It
waved like a banner in a parade as the jackal clenched it between his
jaws and raced off into the bush, followed by the others. The cubs
had taken refuge behind their mothers. One of the females walked
over to the male and tried to calm him, licking his face and ears with
her rough tongue. Moments later the largest cub, a male, was
permitted to approach the remains for a taste of the succulent meat.
It was with great reluctance that they had left this scene of
domesticity in the heart of Africa.

Simba! Jambo! Tafadhali! Pesaa ngapi? She remembered the
voices of the marketplace. Michael bargained determinedly and
traded for carvings and beadwork along the roadside. The Africans
had been intrigued by the young American. Not only did he have his
own money to spend, but he had enjoyed the challenge of bargaining.
Everyone on the tour checked with him before making a purchase, or
as soon after the purchase as possible, to get an idea of what the price
should have been. She thought he got so many good deals because
the people found him so charming. It had been difficult to bargain in
Tanzania. The money was virtually worthless to the people who had
nothing to buy. Nothing to buy, not enough food to eat, in a land of
incredibly lush farmlands and a strict military government. The
Tanzanians had begged for sneakers, shirts, some soap, anything, in
trade for some of their wares, none of which were as skillfully
executed as those in Kenya. Gasoline was rationed. At one point the
travellers were unsure of where the group would be staying due to the
lack of water at some of the government-run lodges.

As she put down the freshly folded laundry, she watched him
stretch out on his bed and lean on the soft pillow behind him. She
was reminded of the flat, hard pillows they had rested their heads on
at the Seronera Lodge. It was a wondrous architectural feat, built in
an outcrop of boulders deposited eons ago in the center of the
Serengeti National Park. They had arrived at the lodge after a long
and dusty drive. After a sponge bath in cold water, they had strolled
along the dimly lit walkways, eagerly looking forward to the inevitable
glass of cool lemonade that would be waiting for them in the dining
room. They were among the last to enter the vast room and had
been startled as a bat fluttered past their heads. They sat at the low
end of the room's sloped ceiling and had difficulty concentrating on
their meals as the bats swooped back and forth overhead. When they
walked back to their room later that night they discovered a huge
dung beetle in front of the door to their room. The scarab was too
big to crawl under the door of their room, and they decided this was
definitely a sign of good luck. They passed the evening standing at
their bedroom window, watching bats chase insects, then return to the
overhang to rest upside down. Finally the wild sounds of the dark
African night lulled them to sleep.

She thought about their first day in Tanzania. After a comically
formal luncheon at a large hotel, the tour met their new drivers.
Hameshi had been sullen from the start. He wasn't patient and
friendly like George, their driver in Kenya. George had exuded
warmth and a quiet dignity and pride in his heritage. Hameshi
grumbled when anyone tried to put down a window in the hot and
stuffy van which reeked of the gasoline in the cans which were carried in the back of the vehicle between two unlucky passengers. He drove like a madman over potholes in the road. He invited flat tires. He never knew the answers to any questions about the wildlife, birds or flowers. Keith, their guide, warned them to be sure to humor him, because if Hameshi got mad and left, they wouldn't be able to find another driver. It would be difficult to fit all of them in the remaining vehicles. If only they could convince Hameshi to drive one of the other vans, Michael and Don, a mischievous vice principal from Los Angeles, had joked. He would enjoy the Slug bus, Don's nickname for a bus filled with slower moving senior citizens and Shamu, a fat, miserable writer from Washington, who grumbled and snarled and always grabbed the best seat in her van. Daily Shamu forced the sweet and gentle Cordts and Boots and his wife to crawl over her to reach the seats in the back of the vehicle.

Their van broke down twice during the third day of travel with Hitler Hameshi. After a brief visit to a roadside museum the engine flooded as Hameshi attempted to race the van to catch up with the departing convoy. Hameshi was furious and in the midst of his rage a Toyota jeep went speeding by. Moments later, the smiling Finnish driver returned and instructed Hameshi in the use of his tools. They soon caught up with the rest of their group. Everyone was busily snapping pictures at a marshy pond where piles of hippos were napping, plopping their huge bodies on top of one another. Lake Manyara was in the distance. Wildebeest silently thundered by in a long line across the horizon. Pelicans, egrets, marabou stork, and cormorants in great flocks dotted the shoreline. All too soon, Keith herded them back into the vans to continue on to visit some hot springs. He encouraged them to search for the elusive tree lions of Lake Manyara. He hadn't found one in thirty years of looking, but he hadn't given up either.

They paused to admire giraffe, baboons, a monitor lizard, and a colorful kingfisher. Hameshi pressed ahead to catch up with the other vans. Halfway through a sand river the van came to a halt. The tires seemed to have disappeared into the sand. Everyone scrambled out of the van. Elaine searched for birds, her passion. Mike and Don had tried pushing and pulling the vehicle but succeeded only in getting covered with sand as the spinning tires sank even deeper into the sand. The minutes went by slowly and the sun's heat intensified. They felt incredibly thirsty. Neither of them had carried their water bottles with them that day as they planned to return to the lodge for lunch. Charlotte stood in the middle of the road reading and nervously munching cookies which she washed down with big thirst-quenching gulps of water from the bottle she had carefully packed in her bag. Don and Mike started to wander down the road ahead. Angrily Hameshi had called them back. He had seen a large cape buffalo earlier, and he was worried that it might travel in their direction to get to the hot springs which were ahead a few miles. An hour passed. Hameshi became more and more agitated. He explained that herds of elephants often travelled the sand rivers in the dry season, following them down to the water about mid-day. They could be dangerous, especially if they had young to protect. Lions could be about, he warned. Suddenly, out of the bush, in a cloud of dust, a jeep approached. Everyone in the jeep assisted in extricating the van from the soft sand.

On the road again, the group became chatty and eager to see wildlife. The hard seats of their safari vehicle had never felt more comfortable. They soon roared with laughter when they realized that the six of them had been having the same fantasy of jumping into the van through the opening in the roof, in the event that a lion should appear. They were startled to see how close elephants actually had been when they came upon a small herd bathing in a scummy green pond. The adults were drinking and spraying themselves with water. One of the baby elephants was stretching his trunk, carefully trying to touch it to the surface of the water without getting his feet wet. They returned to the game lodge cured of their quest for adventure, at least for that afternoon!

As she stooped over to pick up a book which had fallen to the floor, she wondered how the long, dusty, bumpy roads they had traversed in Africa would compare with the long, dull ride to upstate New York, when she and Gerry drove Michael to college at the end of the month. The roar of the lawn mower outside had ceased and she could smell the sweetness of the hot sun on the freshly cut grass. She remembered the shimmering golden tall grass of the Serengeti, the mysterious animal shapes on the horizon at dusk, the pink haze of hundreds of flamingoes, the hum of a swarm of bees buzzing past the van, the wild sounds of the night, the sweet songs of the vast
variety of rainbow-hued birds, the grey haze of the morning sky, the muddy rivers, the outstretched hand of a Masai child, and the Oriental sweep of windblown acacia trees.

Michael had fallen asleep on his bed. She slowly shut his door and walked down the quiet hallway. It reminded her of the hush that had overcome the small group in the Land Rover on their last day on safari. For three weeks they had searched for rhino. Because of poachers and the Oriental market for rhino horn, the rhino population had been dwindling at an alarming rate. Twenty years before, rhino were usually seen on safari. That year only one in six safari groups might be so fortunate. The mother and her comically beautiful three-week-old baby were walking side by side. The mother seemed to be guiding her young to the safety of the forest at the edge of the crater. A soft mist rose from the forest. The air was still. Suspended in time the humans, who had travelled thousands of miles to see such a sight, watched in awe as the two walked slowly into the distance. They passed other travelers on their way back to the lodge but they didn't share their secret. There were times she and Michael had felt like voyeurs invading the private heart of Africa to witness firsthand the natural beauty of her countryside and wildlife. No one spoke during the long ride back to the lodge. They were content to reflect on all they had seen and shared.

They had known that the next day would be filled with the sadness of good-byes and the hopeful promises of new hellos.

The Football Game About My Brother

Kathy Ryan

Thanksgiving morning, 1987. Thanksgiving, a time for winter storms to start while the smell of turkey permeates the air and one is filled with the anticipation of eating oneself into oblivion. Time to put up the Christmas tree and time to worry not to gain too much weight as the holiday season begins.

That is what most people have on their mind as they wake up on the fourth Thursday in November, but all I could think of was getting through the day. Today was the "big game." In Meriden, Connecticut, that meant that high school rivalries, Platt and Maloney, were going to tough it out on the gridiron to see who would win the bragging rights of the city in football for yet another year. Even a mediocre season could be made great by winning one of high school's greatest rivalries.

As I got dressed with butterflies the size of bats in my stomach, I wondered, why am I going? Why am I doing this again? I mean, I had done my time in high school. I was football manager for the Platt High School Panthers for three years and all three years Platt went down with a loss. I had felt the agony of defeat, and now my time was over, so why do I care? I'll tell you why. It's about a small, scrawny quarterback who, at 5 feet, 10 inches, possesses not what Division I recruiters are looking for but plays with more guts and integrity of any pro football player that I have ever seen. This eighteen-year-old kid had put his heart and soul into every game, and this was to be his last game wearing the blue and gold colors of the Platt High School Panthers uniform number fifteen. Going into the game with three wins and six losses could make this seemingly poor season a good one, with a win on this Thanksgiving Day. Still, why do I care? I care because this kid is my brother.

Truth is, I never thought that there would ever come a time when I would be proud of my brother, Bo. Here is a kid who at age thirteen was skipping school, fighting, getting suspended and God only knows what else. But all that seemed to change when he was in high school and developed a love for football. It was almost as though he discovered the meaning of his life. Now he was going to
bed earlier, getting good grades and working out every day. He had worked and trained so hard to reach this point for, and was his day to show the world.

To say that things were tense around my house on that day is an understatement. My father has also been the football coach of Platt High School for the past ten years, so with my brother as the starting quarterback and my father coaching, you could have heard a pin drop as we all woke up early on that chilly, cloudy, damp day. Bo interrupted this silence by asking me to take him to Platt to get ready for the game. All we did was drive. He made me drive all over Meriden and only muttered directions on where he wanted to go next.

There is a look called "eye of the tiger." My brother had it. He was ready. He wanted to win. He had not lost on Turkey Day in his three years at Platt and did not want to start on his senior year. However, there was something more in his eyes than just fierce competition. There was determination and courage. This determination had helped him lead his team to a state runner-up title for the championship with an undefeated season the year before. The courageousness had enabled him to play with a bad knee, despite the doctor's warning. Here he was, with the eye of the tiger. He was ready. He was ready to win, no matter what the cost. No matter what the pain.

So as I drove, we both sat there in silence. Each of us was consumed with our own thoughts, but both of us, I am sure, thought the same thing. "This is it. You will remember this game for the rest of your life. Make it a good one. Play hard. Win. Stay healthy."

I dropped Bo off at school, where he would take the bus to the game field with his teammates and drove home. Finally it was time for my mother and myself to leave. Since the field is near our house, we walked. The fresh air felt good on our faces and the climb up the hill gave us something to do. Was I nervous? I guess if you could say that, if feeling like you were going to pass out and throw up all at the same time was nerves, well, then I guess I was nervous. My mother? Well, she was beside herself. She had seen Bo go down the first time and not get up on the first game of the season, and I am sure that sight still weighed heavily on her mind.

We took our usual seats in the corner of the stands to join the over 4000 spectators who came route their team on to victory. The seniors were announced. The National Anthem played. All I kept thinking was, "Please God, for Bo, for all his pain and for all his hard work."

The Maloney Kickoff came and the Stoddard Bowl was underway. Platt's first two carries with the ball seemed normal enough, until their third possession. A new defensive end was put into the game, one no one had ever seen before. Bo handed the ball off and was running with the fake and there was that defensive end, running straight toward Bo. His head down. His helmet crushing Bo's knee...Bo falling...Bo not getting up. The referee blew the whistle. Time out was called. The doctor ran onto the field. Bo still wasn't getting up. He was being helped off the field by two football players, his arms around their shoulders. As he moved toward the sidelines, his face was a mirror reflection of how he felt inside. Agony...from the pain in his knee. Anger...because the game, in three plays, was taken away from him. Despair...because this could be it for his high school playing days.

While I watched this, I felt like the wind had been knocked out of me. I felt like I was trapped inside a movie where everyone around me was moving in silent, slow motion. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't talk. I couldn't hear or see straight. But most of all, I couldn't believe that this was happening, not now and definitely not to my brother. My heart ached for him. Was there any justice? This kid has worked so hard to be where he was now. Why did he have to constantly suffer? All I asked for was forty-eight minutes of playing time, uninjured, and all Bo got was three, at the most.

I looked at my mother and she was white. Not pale, she was ghost white. Then I looked at the field and my brother was screaming for my mother. She couldn't hear him; it was almost as though she was in a trance. I shook her and told her that she had to go to him. Bo did not want the doctor to see him because the doctor would make him stop playing.

When my mother finally reached the sidelines, she kept the doctor away from Bo. Then she and the trainer taped his knee real well, and before the first quarter was over, he went back into the
game. He had taken no drugs, no painkillers, no steroids, not
anything. What he had was courage, strength and a strong desire to
win the ball game -- a desire to start what he had finished.

Bo finished that game on what turned out to be a broken knee

cap. He ended up spending two months in an air cast. Platt won the
game by a score of 21 - 6. I don't remember much else, but what I
will never forget is my brother's determination and courage. I will
never forget the sight of him getting hit and falling down. I will
always remember how he went back in, to finish what he had started.

Mother Hope's Boarding House

Elizabeth M. Burns

Clyde pulled up the collar of his raincoat against the chill, night
air of early spring in Oklahoma. Although it was nearing two o'clock
a.m., he didn't feel anxiety about walking Shelley home at this hour.
The easy familiarity of Shelley's presence at his side assured him the
comfort only a good friend can supply.

Thump, CLUNK. Thump, CLUNK. The sound of his wooden
orthotic shoe-lift echoed on the damp pavement. They were hurrying
toward Mother Hope's Boarding house not for any particular haste
of their own, nor because of the heavy moisture of the fog-chased
night. Hope would be waiting up for her seventeen-year-old, actress
daughter. Shelley was a good girl and didn't want to cause her
mother any undue concern.

They passed the next several minutes walking and discussing the
rehearsal of Clyde's latest play. Clyde had told Shelley more than
once over the past two years that she was his favorite choice for his
leading lady. Perhaps it was their similar view of life and adversity.
They subscribed to the Auntie Mame theorem that life was a
banquet, but most poor suckers are starving. Neither of them had
any intention of going hungry.

Mother Hope's Boarding House, as the residents fondly called it,
heeled into view. The shabby walls of the house had once been
painted a staid grey but showed no memory of any acquaintance with
paint. Despite the late hour, Shelley could see that the usual group
had gathered in the Artist's room at the front, left corner of the
house. She supposed that the reason it attracted the nightly crowd
was the relative cleanliness of the room. The other residents of this
least prestigious living quarters in the college's vicinity were not noted
for their personal fastidiousness. Most nights they gathered there to
discuss philosophy, smoke grass, argue about art or music or the latest
political cause. Shelley tried to make a point of not getting too
involved in the lives or pursuits of the young men who passed through
the world of the boarding house. The majority of them were poor,
intelligent people who had the good fortune to attend college because
of their brains, and not because of the size of their father's bank
accounts. Some, like the Artist, worked two jobs and studied in their spare time. The money they earned didn't leave much room for rent. Thirty dollars a month bought you a room at Mother Hope's Boarding House, a single outlet for your hot plate, and a nightly feast of hard-boiled eggs with Louisiana hot sauce as a garnish.

Shelley consciously distanced herself from Clyde's side as they mounted the skewed steps that led to the wide front porch. She supposed that Clyde would have described it as a veranda, but that was much too grand a word for the warped and creaky boards that prefaces an entrance to the house.

The thump, CLUNK, thump, CLUNK of Clyde's feet on the stairs brought the Chinese guy to the window at the front of the house.

"Hey, Clyde! Come on up! I made lice tonight! Plenty for you and Sherry, too, you want. Come up!"

"No, thanks, anyway. That last batch you made nearly burned all the taste receptors out of my tongue!" Clyde responded, in a tone of voice that implied the appreciation he had for spicy food.

Uninhibited laughter floated down from the second floor. Shelley and Clyde continued across the porch and into the hall. The door to the apartment Shelley shared with her mother was open slightly, not unusual but somehow disturbing tonight. It wasn't that Hope lacked confidence in the gentlemanly behavior that was Clyde's benchmark with women. In fact, Shelley thought that her mother's trust held its foundation in a subconscious perception of Clyde as somehow "not a man."

A smell of coffee came from the kitchen area. While the odor was inviting, its mere existence contributed to Shelley's unease. Her mother never made coffee at two a.m., unless there was company, or perhaps some other less pleasant cause.

"Clyde, I promise I won't make you rewrite any dialogue or ask for any costume changes. Will you come in for just a minute? I'll get you some coffee, or a beer, if you'd prefer."

He, too, had been thrown off by the change in routine. He supposed it was his playwright's curiosity, always looking for new material, ideas, but he wanted, needed to see what would transpire here tonight.

"How can I pass up an offer like that? Lead the way, my dear!"

The old parlor was dimly lit by the pinkish light streaming from the kitchen at the back of the small apartment. Shelley kicked off her shoes, dirtied by the combination of rain water and red-Oklahoma dust. She shifted out of her aged slick raincoat and reached to take Clyde's coat from him.

"¡Conchita! ¿Eres tú?"

"Sí mami, he llegado," Shelley answered her mother's soft inquiry.

"¿Estás sola? Oi el paso del deformado." Is the deformed one with you? Hope's voice carried from the kitchen, mingling the words with the pungent smell of the Mexican coffee she was preparing.

"Esperanza, forgive me for bringing your daughter home so late. We had to make some changes in the second act and ran into a problem with the lighting man. I hope we haven't caused you to worry." Clyde followed Shelley across the worn rug of the parlor floor toward the open kitchen door.

"Conchita invited me to have a cup of your most delicious coffee, with your kind permission, of course."

As Clyde followed Shelley through the open door, he noticed that he was not the only late night visitor in Mother Hope's kitchen. Shelley's older sister, María Elena, sat on the odd matched, kitchen chair. She was seven months pregnant with her second child and seemed to be having trouble adjusting her position on the seat to allow herself some semblance of comfort.

Shelley stowed the damp coats on an ancient hatrack in the far corner of the kitchen. Meanwhile, Hope located another chair and offered it to Clyde. He accepted her gift and sat at the table,
reaching down to absently massage the shorter of his two legs. He thought how odd that both he and María Elena had unwieldy body parts to adjust to the narrow chairs. She had her large belly, and he, his hunchback. He noticed María Elena's almost imperceptible withdrawal from his physical presence. Philosophically, he laid the blame at the feet of motherhood/pregnancy. Every mother wants a perfect child. What a disappointment he must have been to his own mother, whomever she might have been.

Clyde also remembered that in Hope's culture, the unborn child must be protected from witches, dwarves, and other deformed people, lest the evil that had been placed upon them in the womb seep out to infect the new being still growing and forming in the primeval waters.

His musings were interrupted by the sharp inhalation of Shelley's breath.

"¡Madre de Dios!" she hissed. "¡Ese bruto te está dando otra vez!" The beast is hitting you again.

María Elena's attempt to turn her face from her sister afforded Clyde an unobstructed view of cuts in many spots, with several reddish purple welts rising under her eyes and across her jaw.

Hope's voice, though low, was emphatic. "¡El bebé! Shhh! you will wake the baby."

The baby to whom she referred was María Elena's two-year-old son, now sleeping on the cot that served as Hope's bed in the back closet of the kitchen, separated by a threadbare, calico curtain.

Clyde refrained from extending his hand to the woman, who was beginning to cry. He spoke softly, gently to her. "María Elena, tell us what has happened to you."

She was hesitant to begin but seemed to gain momentum as her words, half Spanish, half English, poured from her savaged mouth. Her husband had arrived home quite late that evening. As she was a good wife, as her mother had taught her to be, she served him his dinner and did not complain about the hour or question his whereabouts. When he began to complain loudly that the food was cold and had not been prepared as he liked it, his wife made an exasperated plea for him to find something that he would rather eat. This infuriated the man to such a state that he threw the plate of food, hurling it toward the white wall where it dropped to the floor leaving a trail of vegetables and grease to mark its path.

María Elena had lost the control that she normally possessed in the face of her husband's demands and began to scream, "¿Por qué veniste, por qué no quedaste con los machos?" Why did you come home, why not stay with the men?"

She knew even as the words passed her lips that she had transgressed beyond the point of salvation. She recounted each detail of his beating, the screaming of her child intermingling with her own screams, neighbors and friends terrified to do anything, terrified to call the police, whose solution would be to deport these illegal aliens.

When he had vented his anger on his ungrateful chattel, María Elena's husband stood over his wife's huddled body and spoke to her in teeth clenched in a parody of a smile. "¡I hope that hijo de puta you're carrying dies. I hope you die this time."

As he strode out the door, he overturned the bucket of dirty water María Elena had set aside at his arrival home. "That's so you'll have something to do while I'm out."

The water coursed across the floor where María Elena's shift mopped a portion of it. Salt tears mingled with ammonia water as the sound of the closing door echoed in the night.

When she was at last able to pick herself up from the floor, she called a neighbor to take her and her son to her mother's house. The pains in her stomach made her fearful not that she might lose the baby, but that she might die herself and leave her son in the hands of her husband.

Clyde looked at Shelley's young face and saw the despair in her beautiful dark eyes wrestling with an anger that had never before been seen there. As he thought how to respond, what to say or do,
he heard Hope's heavily accented voice say, "But María Elena, he's a man. He had to hit."

Hope turned to him as if to seek confirmation from a man who knew. Almost as imperceptibly, she dismissed his horrified expression. After all, Clyde wasn't really a man, was he? He was just the lame, hunchback who lived upstairs in the back room...the one who paid his thirty dollars and wrote his plays. Everyone said they were very good, but what does an old, Mexican woman understand about these things, anyway. "Los hombres tienen que golpear. Son hombres, tú sabes." They have to hit. They're men, you know. That she knew well.

Mamá, I can't believe what I'm hearing from you!" Shelley's voice quivered with the outrage that filled her brain, that threatened to consume her soul. "That maricón brother-in-law of mine will pay for this! I have friends! We can call tio Omar, cousins Antonio and Marcos. This is too much! They know it! She has done nothing! I will not let my sister go undefended."

Maria Elena rose slowly from her chair. Her battered face contorted with pain and anger. "You must NEVER say that about Luis! He would kill you. And then he would kill me for having such an ill-bred sister."

Shelley looked at Clyde for support. Her American feminism could not accept the brutality that had stormed like a spring tornado through the safe haven of her family. She had spent years finding her own niche in the intellectual and artistic community of the university. She felt as though her soul were being wrenched away from all that her mind told her was right and good, fair and normal. Clyde could read all of this in her face even as he understood her need for him to stand up as the macho in the house, to support her in front of Hope's and María Elena's defense of a sadistic monster.

Clyde felt at that moment that he had never cared so much for Shelley as he did right now. She was at once beautiful, strong, sweet, and so naive. He wished he could be there to see her, be her friend when she finally grew into the woman he thought, he hoped, she might become.

"No real man hits a woman. Violence in never part of a true man's approach to life...or love."

His words came softly, easily, yet they had the effect of a live electric wire touching briefly on bare flesh. Esperanza leaped to her feet and grabbed Shelley by the arm. She pulled her daughter around to face green eyes that burned with a passion that hinted at the fireball she must have once been.

"¡Basura! Garbage!" she spat at her child. "These are the lies the duende, this little troll whispers to you, fills in your head? You are a child! But I think now it's time for you to put away these childish ideas. ¡Piénsalo, Conchita! Think who you are! You don't know about men. You think the maricónes you prance around the stage with are men? This duende, he is a man to you? No! They are nothing! You know nothing of men! I have been wrong to let you grow up here, thinking that you are something that you are not. You are who you are, Conchita; tú eres mejicana, you are a Mexican woman. You must take your place by your man soon. Then you will know of men."

Although she resisted, Clyde could see Shelley's resistance reeling under the verbal blows her mother rained upon her. The years of seeing revulsion and shock in people's eyes had inured him to her attack on his views of manhood. defused the venom she had poured out toward him as a man of little value. He was not at risk here, but his heart was heavy with the pain that Hope, María Elena and, yes, Shelley, too had experienced and would continue to experience solely because of an act of birth. They were women.

"¡Y tú, María Elena! It is time now for you to go home. Make peace with your husband. Your place is with him."

Esperanza had gathered up María Elena's coat and bag. She extended them to her eldest daughter, even as she observed the girl's countenance of terror.

"Pero, mami, you are sending her to a monster. You may be sending her to die, mama!" Shelley's eyes threatened to spill over the tears that had welled up in them. Almost inaudible, her words accused the now silent kitchen.
"Mamá, estás hablando de tu hija -- she is your daughter mama. She is your life."

"¡Malcriadas! Ungrateful females! At least you have a husband!" Her words were daggers, striking María Elena, wounding Shelley. "He hits you, yes, but you could be alone."

Esperanza flailed her arms about the tiny kitchen. "You could be left alone with your two children. You could cook and clean for gringo pigs, to live like a slave in exchange for a place to live and meager food. Let him hit you, María Elena. It's better than growing old and drying up before your time." She turned away and walked toward the curtained entrance to the closet that served as her bedroom. "Leave my grandson here tonight. It will be better for you both if you are home waiting when Luis returns. Pray that he is too drunk to remember what happened. God is sometimes good to poor women."

She disappeared behind the greasy calico.

Shelley stood still, too deeply mired in her shock to move. Clyde rose slowly from the seat, eager to quit this chaotic scene, yet unwilling to abandon his friend. He took her hand softly and was surprised when she flung her arms over his hunched shoulders and began to cry.

That night Clyde knew that his friend would discover the truth that he had learned himself so many years before. Only when she had accepted her Mexican-ness, her femaleness, and all the parts of her life that had contributed to make her who she really was, only then could she feast at the banquet of life. When Conchita and Shelley merged and embraced and loved each other, she would at last be free to be happy, to be fulfilled.

"Cry me a river, Shelley," he murmured in her ear, brushing black curls with his lips. "Let it flow...let it go."

He embraced her and buoyed her while the fits and sobs lessened to quieter tears and finally to sniffs. She drew away from him, dragging the back of her hand over tear-streaked cheeks.

"Gracia, amigo mío," she whispered to him. "Gracias por todo. Thanks for everything." She released him reluctantly and turned toward María Elena who had been waiting docilely by the parlor door. "Vén, hermana. Let's call cousin Antonio to take you home."

Clyde returned the now dry raincoats from the hatrack. He draped Shelley's coat over shoulders that once again felt strong. He knew in his soul that she would be all right now. "If you need anything, you know where to find me."

She kissed him, just a delicate sweep of lips on his cheek, yet it conveyed more than any passionate outpouring could have at that moment. "I'll see you tomorrow at rehearsal."

"Yes. Hasta mañana, querida." He left them in the hallway. The clink of the coin in the pay phone preceded his signature thump, CLUNK, thump, CLUNK up the stairs.

He exchanged brief verbal parlays with the stoned group of philosophers in the Artist's room before going on to his own small studio. No one particularly noticed the typewriter, clicking through the night to greet the sunrise of a new day.
Dichotomy

Jane E. Harvey

1.

Distance is necessary,
With new loss, there is memory
Of gaping, sorrowful holes
That have been punched through.
(Holes with no remaining debris to remind.
Only nothingness. It serves.)

The goal is to start with the distance.
But space is no foundation.

Some need contact to survive.

2.

It's always sad for the ones who get too close.
There rarely is reciprocation with the same intensity.
Eventually all that love burns itself out,
And there is a big hole.

But these ones heal well, too. Form scars.
Forget pretty well.
And soon again
They blithely hurl themselves over the edge,
With eyes closed and arms wide.
Surely, this time,
Someone will catch them?

Fishing

Jim Fuller

The sky is gray like smoke and the water the gray of slate, but the bark of the trees is black from the night's rain. On the banks of the river, splashes of fluorescent yellow stand out among the gray and navy blue, but mostly green fishermen lined up in a row like dominos. They stare into the water, waiting for the signal, a gunshot, that will start the annual fishing derby.

The heat wraps around me, like sheets, and the branches arch over me like arms. Sunlight, filtered green by the leaves, tints the stones, the tree trunks, my own skin. The brook which roared so in spring is now just a series of pools connected by trickles of water. And then I see it -- a quick, brown blur in the shallow pool.

Bang! All along the banks five hundred fishermen in union, like synchronized swimmers, pull their fishing rods back and cast their nylon lines into the rushing waters of the river. And the banks come alive with chaotic motion as arms wind the reels, like eggbeaters; quick splashes on the water's surface become fish, hauled onto the banks, unhooked, and hurriedly tossed aside, so more fish can be caught.

Drawn to it, I crouch and stalk the blur. I see its dorsal fin waving back and forth, as if trying to generate its own current. Slipping a hand into the cool water, I wait, and then ease it towards the fish.

Out in the middle of the river a man in a fluorescent hunting jacket pulls back hard on his rod, and the rod curls down in spastic jerks. His line darts toward the bank and the row of fishermen lift their fishing poles, but too late -- two lines have become tangled with the streaking line of the fluorescent fisherman. A scrambling of rods, limbs, and lines follows. They look like a bunch of boys trying to sneak over and through a barbed wire fence -- all at the same time.

Easing my hand into position, just inches behind the fish, I gently reach forward and touch the velvety smooth skin -- an
explosion of motion as the fish darts across the pool and under a rock, leaving only the ripples of his wake.

The lines remain tangled and the three fishing poles bend, responding to the weight of the fish. A fourth fisherman slips a net into the water, and the three men guide the fish, floating on its side from exhaustion, into the net. As the man with the net lifts the trout out of the water, a cheer rises up from along the banks. A cluster of green fishermen gather around the fluorescent fisherman and his dying trout. The two men untangle their lines and return to their fishing.

I kneel behind the rock, and again slip my hand into the water. Reaching down, I feel the sleek skin and the burst of life, but I have him pinned against the smooth gravel.

The fluorescent fisherman lugs the arm-length trout up the banks to the weigh-in station. A boy and his father, side-stepping down the bank, stop and stare. The fish’s mouth opens and closes as if out of breath.

Cupping both hands around the brownish green fish and feeling the hard edge of his gills against my finger, I lift it from the water. As I turn the fish on its side, it explodes with color, like fireworks -- red spots against a shimmering silver background, colored stars against an iridescent night. What kind of magic could convert dullness into such beauty? My hands shake, and I release the fish into the water.

At the weigh-in station a man in a white butcher’s apron, smeared with orange fish guts, drops the fish onto the scale, then slices open the belly, checking for illegally added weight. He finds none. The fluorescent fisherman wins third prize for his trophy trout: a thirteen inch, remote control, color television.

Musings on Measurement

Patte Doran

When I was five, I threw sand in another child’s face over some sandbox issue. My mother made it plain that civilized people did not do such things. I felt terrible. (Later, as an adult, I learned that, if the sandbox was big enough, like Kuwait, not only could you throw sand, figuratively speaking, but you could be praised for doing so.) Anyway, that was an early interaction with assessment. My mother had standards and I was evaluated accordingly.

When my best friend and I started ninth grade, we were scrutinized by the clique as to whether we were suitable material for inclusion. Being reasonably presentable, we were within inches of acceptability when we committed a huge faux pas. One day we came upon some members of the clique taunting a student who was an unredeemable pariah. Why I can’t remember. It could have been any number of things: from the wrong side of the tracks, too intellectual, weird looking, who knows? Diane, my best friend, and I came to his defense. Needless to say, we joined the ranks of the unredeemable. The pariah was as surprised as the clique and avoided us thereafter, as if we had confused the script somehow.

In the course of things, I began to date. There was a kind of universal criteria superimposed on each individual’s personal criteria for choosing someone to go out with. In those days, boys were the choosers and girls, the choosees. Each boy had his own standards, such as blond versus brunette, cheerleader or homework helper. Universal criteria had to do with society’s structures on good and bad girls and what was considered pretty or ugly. So there are personal measures which one is probably aware of as well as others which may escape one’s awareness.

Horses were an (pardon the pun) overriding passion with me from age eight to age forty-eight, when I reconsidered and thought I better put some money into future retirement funds instead of into hay. Judging whether a horse is worth buying is a science, in that there are plenty of cut-and-dry specifics. It is also an art, in that there are plenty of murky areas that can trip you up. It is pretty much common sense to know that if you want to rope cattle, you want the
kind of confirmation that will best help you do this. Thus, you won’t see a chunky horse with big chest and hindquarters racing at the Kentucky Derby. A couple of murky areas have to do with color and face. If you tend to get too carried away by color, you should probably stick to those breeds, like Lippinzaners, who only come in grey and eventually turn white. Otherwise, dazzled by a golden package, you might overlook such flaws as too small hooves or too long a back. Face is a problem too. A lovely face can, unfortunately, be attached to a ramshackle body or belie an uncooperative personality.

By now, I had learned quite a bit about assessment. Mankind, in addition to calling himself Homo sapiens (What test have we passed to merit that label?) could also be called ‘mankind the measurer.’ He decides that this mineral is very valuable, this one less so. This piece of land is desirable, that one not. We seem to have an inner drive to assess and to be assessed. How do I measure up- as a teacher, friend, student? Even on our death beds, there are those who, in addition to deciding who gets their material goodies, also speculate on their lives. Did I leave the earth a little better than I found it, or did I raise children who would be happy, or successful, or whatever, or did I accumulate the most material toys? There’s no escape, it seems, from our measuring tendencies.

One day, returning from the yoga center, I found my mother in the garden looking at a hollyhock. Pointing at it, she said, "This hollyhock has resurrected itself after two years of no hollyhocks whatsoever. Maybe it is a reincarnation of one of its earlier fellows."

"How depressing for it," said I. "To come back and find you are still a hollyhock, and you still haven’t made any progress in your soul’s evolution. I bet it only gets a passing grade for soul progression."

Bruce

Chris Kueffner

My wife Lynn and I had each written out our family histories and sent them in to an anonymous address. We had gone to class with other couples week after week through the winter ice. We had been interviewed in person, questioned over the phone, fingerprinted by the police and had our house inspected twice. We had worked hard and sometimes nervously to be permitted into a world many pointedly avoid. We had accomplished something together as a couple that would shortly fill our lives night and day with anxiety and with satisfaction, with doubt and with laughter. It would consume us and we would consume it and make it a part of our selves – our bettered selves. We had been licensed by the State of Connecticut as foster parents.

Newly married, newly housed, and alternately uncertain and blindly eager, we were feeling young and energetic. A diminutive ten-year-old, Bruce, would test us, try our patience, win our hearts, expend our energy, remind us of the hope in a child, and teach us the ruthlessness of fate.

Bruce came to us on weekends from a boarding school half-way across the state. At the school run for troubled children, the teachers worked relentlessly on behavior modification. Academics were necessarily incidental to learning respect for others and forging self-control. Bruce feigned distaste for the school and its ways, but it brought him more adult attention and interest than he had ever known. The attention and approval of his peers, however, was not as readily had. Bruce tried so hard to impress and fit in with his schoolmates that he was accepted by none. He was near the bottom of a pitiless caste system and while he knew many other children there, all of whom he called and considered friends, for Bruce it was a lonely place, without true companionship.

The first night Bruce stayed with us it didn’t thunder, it didn’t even rain. But it did get dark, and he did feel alone in his room, and so, in the night, Bruce rose and arrived in our room, nesting on the floor at the foot of our bed. We were sensitive new parents, sensitive to sound, to movement, and we knew he had risen, that he was
inching toward our room in the chilly dark. He had been scared, alone in an unfamiliar place, and in attempted silence he made his way closer, frightened most of being spurned.

Lynn and I held hands under the covers and squeezed, acknowledging to the other that each knew, not wanting to be found out ourselves. We were awake, widely so, stiff in our independent qualms. Do we get him up then? Do we wait and pick up the sleeping boy? Do we ignore it now and talk about it later? But here was a call for companionship, a move against loneliness, a vote for our attempts of the long day at establishing trust. Into the dark we stared and blinked and wondered and fell asleep.

repeating an apology. "You were real close." The lifeguard smiled stiffly, turned, took a step, and Bruce finally drew a breath.

Lynn worked with Bruce. We both urged him on, but it was unnecessary urging. The raft was etched in his ambition. Two weeks later he gave it a second go, and the raft was his to keep.

The days pressed into the evenings with board games and cards and wood projects. At night, at bedtime, with face washed and teeth brushed, we made it a ritual that we read to him. Bruce yearned to be read to and he loved stories, stories that he could not read himself. The bargain would be that he would read one page, and then Lynn or I would read the other. With more difficult stories, we might read two pages to his one paragraph. But it was brutalizing for him to read. He would slog through it like a man with a peg leg in a marsh, tripping and wrestling, and sinking in the mud, unsure, when it was over of what had been accomplished.

We praised his efforts sincerely and his successes with pride. Still, he would beg us to read. "But I like the way you read," he would desperately cajole, so that he might skip his turn. Three Billy Goats Gruff was his favorite, Trip, trap, trip, trap. He could just about make it through on his own. Bruce liked Shel Silverstein too, his poems and bits about this and that. When the reading was done, he would plead for more, yearning not to be left alone, "But at school, I have a roommate." "Goodnight, Bruce," Lynn and I would each say. "We'll be right out here," pointing toward the door, and we'd watch him resign himself to the blankets and burrow into the pillow.

He stood nipple-deep in the water and met the lifeguard’s gaze evenly, wide-eyed and expectant. His mouth was open, poised to draw in a breath, but waiting. His head was up. This was a boy challenging himself. He did not make it, but it was the first time I had seen him meet and hold another's eye. Bruce was a student of glance-evasion. He looked at your eyes only to see what they were looking at. But now he turned his eyes on, trying to do what all his thrashing and froth could not, and he held the lifeguard in a momentary trance. "You didn't make it," the lifeguard said, apologetic for the news and awkward at breaking the silence between them. "You can try it again tomorrow," he said as if he were
Should I kiss him? His cowlick arched imperturbably over his forehead like the back fin of a seahorse. Should I kiss the child? And if I do, what will it mean to him? How will it make him feel? Will it snap our shared sapling of trust? Do I want to kiss him? Will he think I am trying to be his father and resent it? Will he wish he had a father and resent me because I am not his own? Where should I kiss him? How long has it been since a male last kissed him? What will he say? Will he know, from my touch, that I care? "Goodnight, Bruce," I said again. "We're happy you're here with us tonight," I said. I leaned down and quietly, quickly, gently, kissed him. His cowlick tickled my cheek.

There is a boy across the street whom Bruce used to play with. That boy has grown half-again his size in the two-and-a-half-years since we last saw Bruce. We struggle to imagine Bruce at thirteen, a lowering voice, cracking now and again, lanky arms, and for him we hope a little taller. We used to write to him, before he left the school, but once he returned home to his mother, we stopped. We didn't want to interfere. He never did respond. About six months ago, though, he called us from his grandfather's. He had grown up some, though I recognized his voice, and he was no more the spontaneous conversationalist than he had ever been. "Hower you guys doin?"

"Bruce, we're doing very well. Tyler now has a sister." Bruce had been with us through the time Lynn was pregnant with Tyler and he was thrilled to hold the baby and coo. He would rock the child and lovingly sing a confused jumble of nursery rhymes to no tune in particular. And as freely as love falls upon a child and an infant, he would huddle Tyler and kiss him on the brow.

"We'd love you to come over and visit us, Bruce. You're welcome here anytime." We think about him coming one day hence. Arriving at the door of our house, having pressed himself to come. He will stand at the door, uncomfortably shifting from one foot to the other, peering into the house to look for things familiar. He will remember the bike we proudly fixed-up and the jubilant rides we took. He will re-hear the cacophonous music we all sometimes played, he on a recorder we gave for his birthday. He will feel again the warmth of his bed and the rising and falling mumble of our voices from the next room. He will taste the sweetness of reward in ice cream cones he earned long ago for deeds we've all forgotten. He will relive our July fourth trip to Washington and the thronging fireworks searing the night. He will feel again the ecstasy at being caught and tickled; oh, how he begged to be touched. He will smell the first-soft, then invading scent of maple sap boiling down to syrup on the wood stove. He will imagine it was only happiness in the house, forgetting disappointments, and raised voices, and battles of will at the dinner table.

When the door opens, it will be a suspicious greeting. He will not be recognized. He will stammer an explanation. Attempt a question. It will not be one of us at the door. We will have moved to some other place more distant. We will have moved on, joining the rest of his past, leaving Bruce alone, again.
"All I want to be able to do is to pick up the newspaper, one day, and read it by myself," was his modest reply.

In January, when Walter first came to 'Read to Succeed,' he couldn't read a word. By the fourth week of the program Walter was writing. I knew this because Elaine, the director, had asked me to work with Walter on sentence dictation. I was supposed to dictate simple sentences from his reader.

"The man was fat," I said to him, and Walter, huddled over his paper, dutifully began to print, carefully forming each letter, taking great pains to spell each word correctly.

"Pam and Sam had fig jam," I said, again reading from his book. He repeated the painstaking process. When he finished writing, I asked him to read the sentence back. He read, without expression, in an erratic rhythm, word-by-word, but -- correctly.

I stopped. This wasn't working. It went against everything I believed and had been taught to do as a reading/writing teacher. I got up, shut the door, then sat down, again.

"Walter, Elaine tells me that you can write-. Is that true?" He nodded. "It's true."

"Write something for me. Anything," I said.

"I've done everything I've wanted to do in my life 'cept one thing," he said and shifted his position in the chair. "I never learned to read."

"How did you survive, all these years, without knowing how to read?" I asked. I could not conceive of such an existence.

"I asked people," he said, briefly looking up at me, then looking away. "People always seem to like me. No matter where I was -- Florida, Detroit, Connecticut. They take to me."

I could see why. He was a very personable and humble man. "What kinds of things do you want to read?" I asked him.
"I didn't. Someone showed me how," he said, smiling proudly.

"What did you write?" I asked, my heart racing wildly. I wanted him to share the words with me.

He read, "A good man lives in the house."

I repeated his sentence. "A good man lives in the house." Walter, where did you learn these words? They're not in your reader.

He shrugged.


He took the piece of paper and wrote, again in cursive, "Enterprise," with an uppercase 'E'.

"What's 'Enterprise'?" I asked.

"That's where I was born in Alabama."

"Enterprise, Alabama," I repeated. He nodded. That must have been the same place he had talked about in an earlier conversation, the same place where those "three white men sharing a jug on a Saturday night" called to Walter, an eleven-year-old boy, at the time...

"That you, Walter?" They asked.

"Yes, sir," Walter answered.


"No, sir," Walter answered. "I can't."

"You can now," one of the men said, pulling out a gun and shooting at Walter's feet. The man with the gun laughed in wild delight as Walter dodged the bullets.

"That must have bee Enterprise, Alabama," I thought, recalling Walter's story.

"Write something else, Walter," I prodded.

He wrote, "Dothan," another town in Alabama, where he had lived. Then without coaxing, he wrote, "I went to red." I knew that he meant, "I want to read," but I purposely asked him to read his sentence to me. With quiet determination, he said, "I want to read," then quickly apologized for misspelling "read." He knew 'r-e-d" was wrong, but he didn't know what was right.

I told him that didn't matter, right now. What mattered was that he had just communicated to me through writing. I knew what he was saying.

"Punctuate that sentence," I said. We had been talking about punctuation marks. "Which punctuation mark describes how you feel about wanting to read?"

He thought for a long moment, running through his three options. Then, he lifted his pencil and, purposefully, inserted an exclamation point at the end of his sentence.

"Read it the way you've punctuated it, Walter."

He said, full of excitement, "I want to read!"

"I know you do," I said. We exchanged a knowing glance. "May I show this to Elaine?" I asked, referring to his paper.

"Whatever you say," he said.

Elaine responded as I had hoped she would. Rushing over to Walter, she lavished praise on him.

But Walter refused to take credit for his efforts. Instead, he deferred all the praise to me. "She's the one who got me to do this," he said, looking at me, but not identifying me. I'm not even sure Walter knew my name.
"You wrote those sentences, Walter. I didn’t," I said, insisting that he accept the praise he had earned.

He looked up at me, through his cloudy lenses, smiling wide, his gold fillings flashing, and said to me, "You make me feel so proud."

Innocence

Stephanie Sywenkyj

Shrouded in secrecy,
It crept silently.
Touching people, the waters, the land,
All innocent
None aware.

Workers’ children played,
May Day festivities continued,
Children of high officials
Moved to untouched grounds.

Waters, air, and land contaminated.
People continued to breathe, drink, and eat,
Inhaling, digesting, poisons unseen.

Trusting people,
More than 135,000
Told to evacuate,
Forced to quickly move and leave all behind.
Affected by the fallout --
CHERNOBYL.

Mothers still weep,
Children continue to cry,
Diseases afflict young and old,
Many continue to die.

Radiation
Destroyed their souls,
Land and air,
Their future.
Entombed in a sarcophagus,
It patiently looms
Awaiting escape.

Radiation does not discriminate.
Borders it knows not.
Neither loves nor hates --
DESTROYS

Internal Medicine
Sheila Williams

(from my journal entry March 8, 1991: "Balance is the word that comes to mind when I look back on this year. I want balance in my life and peace in my soul. I think the peace in my soul has been easier to work on and simpler, only on some days, to define.")

His eyes looked up at me with such frantic fear, only slightly trying to cover that up, that I had to look away. I had to make comfortable small talk about how good his color was while his lips loosely formed around a large, plastic tube hooked to the respirator. The machine forced his chest to rise and fall so heavily that I wondered if it hurt. I wondered what it felt like to have a machine force the air into your lungs and then relax for too short a time to let it exhale. Didn't it feel like you had lost control of your body and that maybe it might not come back to you? Didn't you want to scream for breath and cry in fear at the same moment, and moments later try not look like you were thinking of these things when people came to see you? And didn't some of them know you were thinking these things and have to turn their eyes away from you? Or maybe people would come to see you and sit around the bed while someone else nonchalantly picked at their nails or read a magazine, and you thought you would do anything to trade places with them. For all those moments you wanted control of your body, your emotions, your life.

"Sheila Marie!" my mother's voice called from the living room.
"Get out here!"

Mom sat smoking a Marlboro on our cream-colored naugahyde couch and looked up at me as I walked into the room and plopped myself into the recliner.

"You have an attitude, little girl, and I'm tired of you walking around here thinking you're better than the rest of us, and looking so snotty whenever my friends come over. They think you're strange. We go over Dorothy and Duke's for a barbecue and you sit in the front room doing your homework while the other kids play outside. I'm tired of everyone asking me why you never smile."
The truth was that I hated going to the Aldriches for a picnic. They lived in Navy housing with three hundred other houses that looked exactly like theirs. Scattered around the project were what always seemed like dirty children with straggly hair, the boys with overgrown crew cuts and the girls with loose ponytails and strings of hair stuck to their sticky, candy-covered cheeks. The front lawns were often sprinkled with plastic ride-on toys and red bikes with banana seats. The grown-ups sat around the barbecue chain smoking and laughing at stories like how one wife sewed closed the fly of her husband's boxer shorts before he went out to sea. The men drank beers and the women sat in lawn chairs with their iced tea in Tupperware cups and perched next to them in metal holders that bobbed precariously whenever they waved their hands around in gesture. On second thought, as the years went by, the ladies switched from iced tea to Miller Lite. They often joked about fewer calories.

I walked out of the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit, away from the beeping monitors, the sighing respirator, and the attentive nurses who had managed cheeriness yet distance. It wasn't their father whose heart had failed. Though it could have been. They would try very hard not to think like that. They would be assured that it couldn't happen to them. They could put on their nurse's uniform, add a pink, floral smock and some Reeboks, and rush to their duty station with their hair still wet, and fumbling to buckle their watchband. They'd look at their patients' medication schedule, check vials, push beds aside for new arrivals, take their coffee breaks, and know that they were doing their best. Trained for the unexpected, they were still in control. The haunting question of "What if?" would not stay in their heart for too long. That would relinquish their control.

When I walked into the Visitors' Lounge just outside CICU with its aluminum door only opening to the push of a worn, red button, the room was empty and dimly lit with a single lamp. I sat down in a comfortably cushioned chair with wooden arms, and I tried not to look through the glass window into the adjacent lounge. I didn't want to see any more teary eyes and helpless-looking faces. I didn't want to acknowledge any more gestures of tragedy -- mascara-stained cheeks, crumbling Kleenexes clutched between sweaty palms, and people dressed with both day and night attire. I hated that feeling of invasion when you see strangers in bathrobes and slippers.

It's boring to go to those picnics. I don't like Kim Aldrich. She's weird," I answered my mother.

"What do you mean, weird? Has she done something bad?"

When I was growing up, my mother always thought the worst of everything and feared naughty behaviors, kidnapping, or child molestation. That's certainly not unique for mothers, but my mom's propensity for dishing out the guilt, criticism, and shame certainly made it feel like she was the only mother who did those things. And, being the first-born child of an alcoholic father who was also in the Navy, guaranteed (I now know) my response whenever there was any confrontation - avoidance and isolation from it all with the feeling that it was somehow all my fault.

Needless to say, whenever Mom confronted me about my friends, my attitudes, my life, "What's wrong?" I gave the minimal, non-committal, and safe reply, "Nothing." In my mind I knew that I could take care of myself. I didn't need anyone or anything except school and friends. The truth was, the ice princess didn't really need friends. They'd better need her, but she was just fine. After all, she was in control.

I simply wanted to sit there and read an old *New Yorker* and close my eyes afterward and pretend I was not where I was, unless, of course, someone else came into the room. Then I would have to play at the postures of acceptable gestures, which I can never seem to do.

I don't remember now if any of my family came in or if there was anyone else in the room when I thought this, but I sat in that comfortable chair and ran through all the major decisions I'd made in my life in about two minutes. Though there had been more than the normal amount of crises, and the turmoil with all of them was hell, it became perfectly clear in that two-minute assessment. I sat right there in a hospital lounge and realized that I had to give up.

"Sheila, I'm leaving. I can't take the hassles any more and it's something I just have to do." I know those were the words I heard when my husband stood with bag in hand in front of the sliding glass
doors in the kitchen of our second floor condo. The boys were asleep in the next room and even when they woke up, they would not realize anything different. They'd know it was morning and Daddy was off to work. And even after a few days they would not understand the whole concept. Not at three-years-old and eighteen months they wouldn't.

I don't know much of what I understood about that six-month separation except the tangible. I understood too much money too fast, too much booze, and too much ego. I understood sales better than I wanted to. I sure as hell didn't understand why my life was falling apart, especially since I was always in control. I finished college, started a family, and stayed home and took care of it all. I did 'Mom and Tot' classes at the YWCA, baked my own bread, used cloth diapers for the babies, looked good for the boss, and believed everything my husband ever told me.

I was giving up. I was thirty-five and assessed those years in two minutes, and it was over. I couldn't carry anyone else on my back anymore. Wasn't that it? Hadn't my desperate need to try and control everything that ever happened to me and anyone who ever became a part of me?

"Lola, L - o - l - a Lola..."

The blast from the alarm clock scared me awake; automatically my hand reached out and pushed aside a can of Coke, a pile of books, and the bowl that had held the chocolate-chip mint ice cream I had eaten the night before to shut off the alarm. Everything fell to the floor with a loud crash. The dog, Indiana, raised his head from his supine position across the entire length of the foot of the bed to look at the cause of the commotion. I could just barely make out the whites around his big, brown eyes. I hoped -- no prayed that his head would drop back down and I could drift off for ten more minutes of sleep. At five A.M. ten minutes can mean a lot.

FAT CHANCE! I could feel his legs as they stretched outward stiffly. The bed bounced under his weight; a moment later his black jubilees (as my mother affectionately called Boxer cheeks) were beside my face on the pillow and a wet tongue darted out and moved upwards from my chin to forehead.

"Aw c'mon Indy, go back to sleep." I whispered, fearing that at any moment my husband's voice would bellow through the room, "Cut it out! Just because you are awake doesn't mean the whole world has to get up!" The wet tongue was persistent, scratchy.

"She was a long cool woman in a black dress..." My hand shot out again (after many years, it is now a reflex) and slammed down the alarm again, toppling over a glass that hit the Coke can on the floor making a loud tinny sound.

"Shut the God damned alarm off! It's Saturday!" came a voice from under the covers. I silently obeyed. How could I have been so stupid as to set the alarm? The face wash continued unabated. "C'mon you pain in the neck," I whispered into a pointed ear. Slowly -- gently I pushed aside the covers and made my way out of bed. To
what end? Now there's a question for analysis! I was not out of the door before the dog leaped off the bed on all fours, shaking it with a force that would register seven points on the Richter Scale. I followed the dog outside fearing further reprisal from the form of the bed.

The backyard was bathed in the grey shadows of early morning and alive with the song of birds. It was going to be a gorgeous day. Even better, I could go back to sleep. Without hesitation, Indy and I made ourselves comfortable once more, looking forward to some extra snooze time. The quiet tranquility of the house, the whir of the fan and my husband's steady breathing soon caused me to drift off. Yet somewhere in the Twilight Zone of consciousness I heard the sound of car wheels and the squeak of brakes.

A moment later a door slammed and the dog opera began. It started across the street and spread from one house to another, raising in volume and tone until the quiet of Saturday morning had been violated to the degree that it would never be rescued. The dog chorus was joined by the sound of one faint human voice that drifted in on the balmy July breeze:

"Shannon!"

"Shannon!"

Sister Chaos had arrived.

The door to my bedroom swung open and Travis, my seven-year-old, stood standing in his BVD's and announced at the top of his lungs, "Aunt Sandy's here!" A terrible sound bubbled up from the covers beside me followed by a large blue mound that rose up at my side. A moment later one winking eye appeared. I thought of the science-fiction movie, *The Creeping Eye*, and decided that I would write a sequel called *The Creeping Flesh*.

"I'll go and help her get the dog." I said as a peace offering.

"Good. Because I'm not getting out of this bed until Monday!" The metamorphosis had begun! Normally, my husband is the kindest, most even-tempered person I know. Sister Chaos does strange things to the people in my house.

I was not yet in my shoes when the back door flew open, slammed into the wall with a bang and a fat brown dog rushed in followed by a shout: "Bad dog! Bad dog! I told you to stay!" The dog leaped on my husband's stomach and began licking his face.

"Get this damned dog outta here!" He yelled.

Chaos had entered by my back door. My life would not be the same until it left the same way. But would I survive the strain of kids, dogs, husband and The Writing Project? Just how much can one person take at one time?

"Aunt Sandy!" Travis shouted, climbing over the dogs to throw his arms around her neck.

"What time did you leave?" I asked, trying to maintain an aura of welcome while my brain was screaming four-letter words. It was 6:15 in the morning -- Saturday morning! It's a three and a half hour drive. That means she left at 2:45 A.M. Why? What could we possibly do at six A.M.? Besides sleep like normal people do, that is. I tried really hard to think of nice things, that she was anxious to see us. But the other side of me kept saying, "Every time she comes you tell her not to come so early. Why should you suffer because she's an insomniac?" In five minutes my personality split. One half glad to see her, the other possessing an overwhelming urge to kill her. "Would you like a cup of coffee?" I asked as I slapped the coffee pot under water.

"Shannon!" she shouted. No longer bothering to lower her voice. I knew that I was going to serve grilled Shannon for dinner on Thursday night.

"Good. Because I'm not getting out of this bed until Monday!" she squealed and flung her arms around my sister's neck. Why is it
that every other morning for 365 days a year my daughter has PMS,
but when her aunt arrives in the middle of the night she's like
Rebecca?

The dogs were barking. My dog doesn't know how to bark. At
least he didn't until chaos arrived. Maybe Tuesday night would be
grilled Shannon night!

I poured coffee seriously wishing that I had some Irish whiskey.
I made a note to go to the liquor store when I went grocery shopping.

"Who's going to help me unpack?" Sandy asked after gulping
down her coffee in one swallow.

"Me! ME! Me!" The two traitor-brats shouted with such glee
that you would think they were leaving for Disney World on the next
plane.

My thirteen-year-old son, Gary, came into view and said, "Hi,
Aunt Sandy," without any emotion at all. Finally there was someone
who didn't have an alter ego that just appeared with the new arrival.

"Travis, go and put some clothes on!" Gary go to the van and get
my cigarettes. Ashley, put the dog upstairs!" She barked orders like
a five-star general. Miraculously, amazingly, astonishingly, my kids
who never do anything at the first request, jumped into action. Gary's
normalcy was short-lived. What is it about my sister that makes my
kids do things that I have to bribe, beg or threaten for? I could feel
my alter ego getting stronger...

The parade of suitcases, boxes, milk crates, bags, coolers, a T.V.
set, VCR, hair dryer, and thirty two-liter bottles of soda began. The
constant train back and forth reminded me of ants at a picnic. In no
time at all there was nowhere to walk in the house. The living room
had boxes and bags on every available chair and piled in every corner.
The hallway between the kitchen and my room had been reduced to
one foot of walking space by the neatly arranged rows of soda bottles
next to the wall. Every step leading up to the second floor had
something on it.

"So how long are you planning to stay?" I asked, afraid of what
the answer might be.

"Oh, just a few days." Sandy said from the center of the living
room that now looked like the JC Penney warehouse. I knew it
would be entirely useless to ask why she brought so much stuff. She
does it every time she comes. I haven't figured it out yet. It's either
that she requires the security of her own home and therefore brings
everything that will move, or her need to fill the van from top to
bottom to prove to everyone that the 30,000 she paid for it was a
worthwhile investment. It took the ants at least an hour to unload all
the junk. They were not very quiet in their movements. I never
moved from my spot at the dining room table for fear that I would
fall over something.

The door to the bedroom opened with such a force that I could
feel a breeze. My husband stepped out and promptly tripped over a
bottle of Sprite. I snickered, or was it my demon? I couldn't help it.

"What the....?" He looked up at me with a strange expression on
his face and headed into the kitchen where he dodged coolers, soda
bottles and paper bags in an effort to get his coffee mug from the top
half of the closet. The kitchen counters had also fallen victim to the
chaos. Containers of frozen chile and spaghetti were interspersed
with thermoses of coffee, bags of fruit, and various sundry containers
of food.

I began dreaming of ways to escape. Even the library was
beginning to seem like paradise.

I couldn't wait to get back to class on Monday -- or could I? How
could I write my paper? Read those articles that were due? Plan a
workshop? What would happen to my house if I left my
metamorphosized children home alone with Sister Chaos for eight
hours? The thought was paralyzing. My husband said very little all
weekend. I noticed that he did an awful lot of yard work. One side
of me said, "I should have her come more often, the weeds wouldn't
get so high." Sunday afternoon he went fishing -- a big mistake. The
chaos followed. His pole fell in the water and he had to go and get
it. He wasn't very happy when he got home.
My children forgot what time they go to bed. They forgot how to wash their hands and set the table. Every time I looked at them they were sucking on a piece of candy or blowing bubbles out of a six-piece wad of gum that made their cheeks stick out like chewing tobacco. The boys had a burping contest at the dinner table; Ashley picked up her behind and farted and then laughed until she nearly turned blue. I began to envision spending the rest of my life in jail on a murder charge. Where did my sweet, mostly well-behaved children go? Who were these Tartars? They certainly did not belong to me! In one day they had been transformed into beings I did not want to care or recognize.

I tried not to worry as I got dressed for my Writing Project seminar. A calmness had settled over the house once the initial shock of chaos had subsided. I was even grateful that my sister was around to watch my kids during the day, not that they needed anyone to watch them. My two oldest were very responsible and capable of taking care of themselves. But that was during normal times, not in times of chaos. I didn't think of that until I pulled into the driveway at 5:10 P.M.

My husband's truck was already in the driveway. The house was eerily silent. Nobody was around. Not even the dogs were barking. There was dirt on the side of the house that had not been there when I left in the morning. When I stepped out of the car I noticed that there was a trail of mud on the sidewalk that continued up the stairs to the door. I knew that a mudder had been committed and that the perpetrators were in the house. The trail continued into the bathroom where the once-shining white porcelain of the sink and tub were now covered with brown filth. There were hand prints on the walls and the towels and a pile of mud-infested clothes lay in the center of the floor. I was close to escaping back out the door when I heard my daughter's voice behind me: "Daddy says we're not going to Riverside tomorrow." She tattled. At this point it didn't matter, I felt as if I had been on a roller coaster ride since Saturday.

"Where is your father?"

Ashley pointed wordlessly to the bedroom. Ahhh -- the inner sanctum. The one remaining bastion of normality. I opened the door cautiously to find that this too had been seriously altered. My husband was grabbing clothes from the clothes basket and flinging them into dresser drawers, something he never, under pain of death, does. A vision of the guillotine loomed before my eyes. "What happened?" I asked. It was one of those questions that you don't want an answer to, but you know that if you don't ask the consequences will be much worse. "How come there's mud on the house?" (another one of those stupid questions).

"What happened? WHAT HAPPENED? I'll tell you what happened if you really want to know what happened!" He shouted as he threw a pair of jeans over his shoulder.

I waited.

"Your sons, (of course they were now mine through immaculate conception) ran the house for three hours this afternoon, and after they had created a mud hole in the yard decided it would be fun to have a mud fight. They have been sent to their rooms for the next decade! When your sister told them to stop, your son (it was amazing how much property I had acquired in one short afternoon) told her, "Why? My mother lets me!"" I knew he wasn't my child.

It was only Monday. My house was full of strange people. I knew they would not go away. Somehow, very oddly I was connected to all of them.

I won't go into the broken bed or the bubble bath in the kitchen. Suffice it to say that for now the house is still standing. I can see the floor in the living room. I can even sit down. All the soda is gone, and the side of the house is sparkling clean. My articles are all read, and the paper got written. I even had time to plan some of my workshop. And oddly enough, I miss my sister already.