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 138 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. Then, 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 information about the Connecticut Writing Project and its programs, please write or call the director:

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INTRODUCTION

The fourth Connecticut Writing Project Summer Institute was held in Storrs from July 1 to July 26, 1985. The sixteen participants were dynamic, dedicated professionals who joined together to learn more about the teaching of writing and more about themselves as writers by studying and practicing writing intensively every day for four weeks. Their diverse interests, their professional expertise, and their amazing energy helped to produce the special “spirit of ‘85.” The group consisted of seven high school English teachers, two University of Connecticut instructors of freshman composition, four middle school English teachers, a reading consultant, an elementary school teacher, and a nursing instructor. They were also joined each morning by a publisher's representative who was learning the teaching of writing and learning about teachers—and who was impressed by the teachers in this Institute.

During the four weeks of the Summer Institute, most mornings were spent discussing recent research on writing, arguing writing issues, and presenting workshops on aspects of the writing process and classroom applications. Guest speakers also addressed the Institute and focused on particular aspects of teaching and learning. Thanks to one of those speakers, Professor Kenneth Bruffee of Brooklyn College, collaborative learning became a topic of continued interest. During the afternoon sessions, writing groups met. In groups of four, the Summer Fellows critiqued and revised compositions in each of four modes of discourse: personal, narrative, analytical, and persuasive—and through the collaboration improved their understanding of the writing process.

The writings collected in this booklet represent each author's effort in one of these four modes. Pieces were chosen by the authors with the consultation of the other members of their groups. They are arranged by writing group rather than by subject or genre.
The writings of this outstanding group of teachers demonstrate their creative talents. Many of the participants carried one topic through the four modes of discourse; others changed to new topics during the four weeks. Only by reading all four writings from each author can the depth of their involvement with the writing process be fully appreciated. These writings here, however, indicate the quality of their work and explain in part why we were inspired and enriched by working with the 1985 Summer Fellows. We thank them for these writings and for their participation during the summer.

--Ann Policelli and Ralph Wadsworth
Summer Institute Coordinators.

Vertigo
By Jeri Diederich

Loose rocks on the mountainside made the going slow. With every step the climbers risked skinned knees and a slide back down the steep slope.

Testing each rock before he shifted his weight onto it, Tom moved cautiously. "Watch that loose rock," he called out to his son. "Be more careful. Watch out there. You're going to hurt yourself if you're not more careful. Tommy, you have to watch each time where you put your foot!"

Tom was beside himself as he worried about Tommy, worried about his own footholds, and, more importantly, worried about how he would ever deal with his reaction to heights. His problem was so bad that he even avoided looking out the window of his fifth floor office.

Yet, here he was precariously clinging to rocks that shifted with every touch on the steep side of a mountain. Looking up ahead, Tom saw Chip Garrett trying to match his stride to his dad's as they pioneered an ascent of their own parallel to the blue blazes of the marked trail.

"Look at that," Tom muttered. "They want to make this even tougher!" His eyes moved back to the boulder just ahead of him, the grim set of his features betraying his inner turmoil.

Wayne, the veteran climber, who knew of Tom's problem with vertigo, overheard his comment. He dropped back to wait for him. "How's it going?"

"Okay" was the tight-lipped reply.

"You don't seem to be too winded, so even that bit of hiking you did get to do seems to be paying off," Wayne said, encouragingly.

As he moved along, Tom thought back to that February night when Tommy hopped into the car after the scout meeting all excited about climbing mountains. "Six of them! All
six of the highest peaks in the New England states!" he had shouted.

Connecticut's Bear Mountain trek in May had been only a warm-up for Katahdin and its Knife's Edge. Tom remembered the woody trail that meandered up and over Connecticut's highest elevation. Trees close to the trail all the way enveloped him so he never even thought about heights. Yet, here on Katahdin above the treeline he knew he could not avoid the waves of gut wrenching nausea that always engulfed him if he looked down from any height.

"Don't slip, Tommy! Oh, be careful. Be sure you don't look down, Tommy," he warned.

Wayne intervened. "Tommy, why don't you go up there with the Garretts?" he suggested. Tommy looked relieved and smiled his thanks. Off he went.

Alex and his son Sandy, both overweight and out of shape, gradually dropped back to where Tom was struggling along, well behind the rest of the group. As they neared Chimney Pond Junction, Wayne joined the three of them.

"If you want to, you could take the Great Basin Trail back down to the base," he offered. "Actually, you could save us the two mile hike to the parking lot by driving the cars over to the bottom of Avalanche Brook Trail where we'll come down this evening. Or," he continued, "you can keep on as a group, going at a slower pace. My wife likes to move more slowly anyway, and we'll all join up again at lunch."

Sandy studied the trail below; he looked up ahead. After a pause, he said softly, "I'd like to go on. I walked five miles a day to get ready for this, and I'm not giving up."

His dad beamed at him and said, "We'll go on together."

After gazing upward toward Tommy who was trudging along steadily with the Garretts, Tom clenched his jaw and then announced,

"Me, too."

Wayne called out to his wife, Jeri. When she joined the trio, she smiled. "Am I ever glad you people don't want to race up this mountain! The rest of them act as though the first one on top wins a prize. Just getting there is enough for me."

"Me, too," Tom repeated.

Tommy and the others had finished eating when the slower group moved into view.

"Hey, look at you!" Tommy shouted to his dad. "You're moving right along, much faster than before."

Tom came to a halt, looked up at Tommy and returned, "I hope you saved me some of those brownies. I'm hungry as a mountain goat." He marveled that he could even think about eating. True, he had not once looked down the mountain, had kept his eyes on the rocks in front of him, but he never would have believed that his stomach would behave on a climb like this.

"Wait 'til you see this Knife's Edge, Dad," Tommy called. "It's something!"

As they neared the enormous boulder where the other group waited, the latecomers answered the jibes good-naturedly. "We'll get there too, so don't think you're so great". . . "What's the prize for being first?", . . . "Remember the turtle beat that hare."

Once they got up there, Sandy breathed in awe, "Look at that!" He stood looking at the treacherous Knife's Edge. From the long, narrow jagged blade, the mountain dropped steeply down each side for more than a thousand feet.

One quick glimpse was all it took to set Tom's stomach off. He felt so weak and dizzy that he had to stumble over to a nearby rock to steady himself. He closed his eyes, breathing in gasps, as he sat down.

Tommy, wanting to help, offered, "You want those brownies now, Dad?"

Tom shuddered. Several seconds passed before he managed, "No. No. Not now. Thanks."

All the while the rest of his group ate their lunch, Tom sat off by himself, his head down as he stared at the rocks beneath his feet. After a while he looked over at the group and caught Wayne's eye. Wayne got the message and crossed over to him.

"Other times," Tom began, "when heights caused this trouble, I always let it get to me. It's here now."

Tom's words came slowly, resolutely, "But I'm going to cross that Edge!"

"So far today, I found that if I just keep looking only a few feet ahead, I seem to be okay. Maybe that will work
Fate of Education in Connecticut and the Politics of Linkage

By Robert Kirk

When we reach the turn of the century, we will want to look back at this time as one of recommitment to educational excellence.

--Governor William A. O'Neill, January 25, 1985

Should Governor O'Neill ever tire of politics, he might do well to take up prophecy—educational prophecy, at any rate. The above pronouncement, which he made in January to a gathering of educators at the University of Connecticut as he revealed his education budget for 1986, could not have been more precise, either in substance or tone. The fate of public education in Connecticut in the next century may well be decided this fall in the legislature. The quality of classroom instruction in the year 2000 and after may hinge on political decisions pending. And, Governor O'Neill was wise indeed to qualify his otherwise buoyant tone: we "will not look back on this time" as one when we as a people found the collective foresight and political courage to design and fund real educational reform. Whether in fact we will be able to "look back" with such satisfaction and self-congratulation is another matter entirely; the verdict is still out.

The critical components of substantive educational reform here in Connecticut are threefold: first, teachers' salaries must be increased; second, professional standards for teachers must be upgraded by implementing a more rigorous, ongoing teacher certification program; and third, curriculum review and professional growth must be provided for by requiring that teachers work additional days.

None of these reforms is new, of course. All have been presented and discussed repeatedly in national studies; all have been debated here in the state; all now await legislative action. The important point is that these three critical educational reforms are politically interrelated; for any one of them to pass, politically, they must be considered as a package. Linkage is the answer. These three critical components constitute a tripod of educational reform which cannot stand politically if any one of the supports is withdrawn.
Increasing teachers' salaries is the single most significant step we can take to promote quality education in Connecticut. Not one national study—not "A Nation at Risk" by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, not "High School" by Ernest L. Boyer for the Carnegie Foundation, not "A Place Called School" by John I. Goodlad, not "Horace's Compromise" by Theodore R. Sizer—not one report fails to note the importance of raising teachers' salaries. Not one state figure—not State Commissioner of Education Gerald N. Tirozzi, not the State Board of Education, not Governor O'Neill himself—sees it otherwise. What remains is to reach consensus on specific figures and formula.

And what we decide now regarding increasing teachers' salaries will determine the quality of public education in Connecticut at the turn of the century. In the next decade an estimate one million teachers across the nation will retire. Significant teacher retirement is projected for Connecticut over the next decade as well. The question is, whom will we find to replace those soon to retire? Whom will we be able to recruit at salaries one-third below those offered for comparable positions outside education? Will they be the best and the brightest? Will they be even competent?

In his book "The Literary Hoax," Paul Copperman observes that "The basic unit of elementary and secondary education is the classroom—one teacher working with a group of students." The teachers we hire now will be standing in front of classrooms in the year 2000 and after. What we decide now with regard to raising teachers' salaries will to extent determine the fate of public education in Connecticut.

Of course, not everyone in the state is in favor of raising teachers' salaries. Individuals and factions hostile to costly educational reforms bridle at the notion that teachers get paid one-third less, they argue, because teachers work one-third less time. Laymen often begrudge teachers their 8-10 week summer vacation, coming as it does on top of all their other holidays. In a letter to the editor published in the Hartford Courant on December 15, 1984, David F. Bean of Bloomfield voiced his opposition to "major salary increases" because, among other things, "Teachers work 180 days a year...Teachers work on the average only 77 percent of the time people in business do." Accurate or not, the public's perception is that teachers get paid less because they work less. Mr. Bean's letter is representative; many feel the same way.

One response to this argument is enlightened capitulation: require teachers to work longer—say ten additional days a year—to help justify higher salaries. This proposal addresses two issues with one stone: 1) It might appease those who are against raising teachers' salaries, and 2) it provides time for curriculum review and professional growth.

Moderates—that is, those not openly hostile to increased salaries for teachers and perhaps teachers generally—see the need to raise salaries, but they want to be sure they'll get their money's worth. They don't want to wind up simply paying more for the same product, a product many perceive as mediocre. The chief concern of these moderates, the crucial swing group in the political equation, is upgrading professional standards for teachers.

Perhaps the simplest and most direct way to upgrade standards is through licensing. Assume that teachers hired in the next decade are of high caliber by testing them before granting them teaching certificates. See that all teachers remain committed throughout their careers by requiring evidence of professional growth for periodic re-certification.

Again, linkage is the key. If we are to secure higher salaries for teachers, teachers may have to submit to more rigorous professional standards. No doubt the State Board of Education saw the political wisdom of this position when it voted in December to link stricter licensing standard with "appropriate increases in teacher salaries."

Commissioner Tirozzi, members of the State Board of Education, and Governor O'Neill are to be commended for their efforts thus far on behalf of public education in the state. However, what has been accomplished to date will amount to just so much tinkering if not accompanied by favorable legislative action on the more central issues of teachers' salaries, professional standards, and additional time for curriculum review and professional growth. Politics, the art of the possible, requires that these three critical components of educational reform be treated as a package.

Fortunately, the political climate in the state favors educational reform more so now than at any time in recent memory. The flood of national reports has focused attention on public education. An energetic and able state commissioner has managed to keep the pressure on. Recent polls done by the University of Connecticut Institute for Social Inquiry, first for the Connecticut Education Association in January 1984 and then for the Hartford Courant in March 1985, indicate the public is receptive. Lastly, a healthy state budget surplus makes educational reform conceivable. Such a constellation of positive conditions does not appear often. The time is now; the opportunity will not come again soon.
When 86-year-old Ann complained about the black bean soup and said that it was OK if she starved, that she'd be better off dead anyway, something snapped in me. We had been in Mexico for two weeks. Ann had eaten three full meals each day, plus snacks, while the rest of us had subsisted on saltines and seltzer and had gazed our sightseeing according to the availability of comfort stations. I was so furious with her, I hoisted her out of her seat in the quaint colonial inn and marched her onto the plaza where I launched into her with angry looks, angry words, and shaking index finger.

How could she be so selfish and inconsiderate? Didn't she understand the sacrifices we had made to bring her to Mexico with us? How dare she play fast and loose with our love for her by suggesting she'd be better off dead? Ann's head dropped lower and lower and she took on every aspect of a naughty little girl catching hell from her irate mother. A part of me caught this and said, "Oh, there she is, playing again, trying to get my sympathy, trying to turn away my anger." Usually she did this before I was angry and she generally succeeded in diverting me, but in the back of my mind lurked a degree of disgust that this grand lady should stoop so low.

Though this episode was the first time I had shown my annoyance, there had been other aggravating instances during our trip: Ann's insistence that both my sister and I hold her hands whenever we were out of the hotel; the demand that the door be kept ajar between our adjoining rooms; the tearful wandering in the hallway looking for us when we had just stepped out--telling her we were going to the desk to pick up the mail. She was just acting like a spoiled child, I thought, demanding more than her share of attention and spoiling the trip for the rest of us. The problem though was that we could hire a sitter for a child, but we ourselves had to "sit" Ann. We seethed with resentment and showed our resentment by treating her like a child, telling her what to do, when to do it, how to do it, always with a peevish tone in our voices.

This scene in the plaza in Puebla, and the violence of my emotions, brought home to me the seriousness, not of Ann's condition, but of my attitude. It was an attitude which I had observed often in others of my generation as they dealt with the elderly, and as I observed the attitude in myself, I wondered, "Why? Why do so many normal, healthy, basically kind people become cruel tyrants when they deal with older relatives?" To find the answer, I looked into myself.

Why had I blown up at Ann? First, I thought, it was because I had not realized how far her physical and mental condition had deteriorated. I had deliberately blinded myself to all the signs that had been there and had been growing more evident as the months went by. The deliberate part had come about because I was always buying time. There was always something for her to do or some place for her to go and I wanted her to be able to do the things that interested her. This time it was a trip to Mexico to take part in the wedding of her nephew, my son, on whom she doted. He wanted her to be there; she wanted to be there; I wanted her to be there, so I ignored the signs--the fear of new places and people, the increasingly failing hearing and eyesight, the lapses into earlier times, the gaps in memory that led to confusion and frustration. I recognized the signs; I knew what they meant, but I bargained with fate for just a little more time by pretending these signs did not exist, thereby setting up the near disaster that followed. I had stolen all the props--the familiar surroundings, the regular routine, the notes to remember by--and had made no provisions for adequate substitutes for any of them. Ann--in order to survive--created her own substitutes and we all suffered unnecessarily. Mine had been the first fault. Intuitively I knew that, and the anger directed at Ann was really anger at myself.

And then I felt trapped. I could not walk away from her even for a moment and I rebelled against my prison of love and responsibility. It was a trap and in this trap I saw my future. I would never be free. As long as she lived (and though she had been giving me her funeral instructions for thirty years, I knew she'd outlive me), I would be tied by this responsibility. Painfully I saw my love turning to hate.

I saw myself the prisoner of both my children--who, though grown, seemed constantly to make demands--and my aunt. The private time toward which I had been yearning, time to spend with my husband, to garden, to canoe, or just to be me, was both running out and being gobbled up by others.

In the dowerager's hump that crowned my aunt's once ramrod-straight back I saw myself in 20 to 30 years, and I was filled with fear. There were so many dreams I had yet to dream, plans I had yet to fulfill. In my aunt's fading eyes I saw my fading life. In the death I saw hovering round her I saw the most frightening specter of all. I saw the end of my childhood. It seems strange perhaps to think of the end of childhood coming at fifty-six after raising a family, but Ann is the last family member of my parents' generation. When she dies, I will be the oldest generation. There will be no one to whom I can turn for the love, approval, and
support that only a doting elder can provide. When she
dies, I will fill the role of the aging, progressively sen-
ile, strong-willed old lady. I will be the one to receive
the scoldings and finger shakings. I will be the one to
think, and probably say, "You'll all be better off without
me."

And as I say it, I will know that I yearn for someone to
reassure me. To tell me lovingly and sincerely that life
without me would be drab, the world without me a cold and
lonely place.

That is what Ann was saying to me in Puebla. At the time
I only heard the words. I did not understand the language.
Gradually I am learning it. The trap has been sprung, harm-
lessly. The future stretches before me. I have all the
freedom I choose to take. I now have time to love. Time to
tell Ann, "Life without you would be drab; the world without
you would be a cold and lonely place." And now Ann can
smile and face her stretching future.

"Walking? You want to know if Michael is walking.
What about your Jane?" the embarrassed mother si-
destepped the question.

"Michael is a deep thinker. When he talks he is
profound. He's just mature for his age. He
doesn't prattle like most annoying toddlers," the
father covered his own concern about his son's
reticent speech patterns.

"Doctor, there must be some mistake. There's
nothing wrong with our Michael," chorused the pa-
rents as they left the office.

That is what Ann was saying to me in Puebla. At the time
I only heard the words. I did not understand the language.
Gradually I am learning it. The trap has been sprung, harm-
lessly. The future stretches before me. I have all the
freedom I choose to take. I now have time to love. Time to
tell Ann, "Life without you would be drab; the world without
you would be a cold and lonely place." And now Ann can
smile and face her stretching future.

Why do parents force children into roles that complement
the adults' vision of success? Maliciousness or wanting to
live vicariously through their offspring is not the answer.
The parents, designing their offspring from birth, decide
what the world requires to be called successful and insure
that those qualities, possessions, and occupations belong to
their juniors.

Mini-molds foisted upon children appear on Christmas
cards, mailed to friends and family too far away to know the
truth. Simple accomplishments pale next to imagined stan-
dards and are embellished to fantasy. the beginning, bumb-
ing, bubbly ballerina dances to Broadway. Being one mem-
er out of a whole football team lacks the essence of
success--being number one. So, the average player is trans-
formed into the star kicker, who punted the team all the way
to the regional championships.

Written roles on annual greetings leave no devastating
imprints. The harmful impressions emanate from parents who
create personae for their offspring. The masks are posi-
tioned to cover a stigma that thwarts success by society's
values. The s-t-s-tutterer is silenced in front of compa-
nry. Below average IQ's are rationalized by parents, who
claim the tests are invalid in one breath and inflate the
scores with the next. Other imperfections, such as epilep-
sy, learning disabilities, and mild retardation, are hidden
from the community at large.

Parents use the small, existing network to transmit real-
ity into acceptable "truth." Immediate family members and
school staff are enlisted to help protect the child by
building a guise of normality. Dissent is not allowed--sim-
ply removed from the child's life. So, despite what individ-
uals believe, if they want to bring any positive influence to the created youth, they acquiesce. The one who has trouble conforming consoles herself that she is simply deferring to the parents' innate right to do what they feel is best. Silence is affirmation in the child's mind of the theory he can not succeed as is.

Individuality gets buried under the camouflage along with the pain and frustration at not being good enough for the primary source of support or anyone else. This dysfunction of love is perceived by the receiver as rejection, plain and simple.

The real puzzle is not why parents love this way. The mystery is they do not see anything but healthy protection in the way they take the fresh clay-child, disregard the deity's plan, and create a personal vessel, infinitely more shallow than the original.

Why did he do it? Was money his only motive, or was he still angry that his sister seemed always to have more than he? From early childhood up through his 38th year, David MacRae was bothered by the special consideration that his older sister always had received from their parents.

First, there was the tricycle that she had received just a week after he had asked for one for his birthday. Eupheme had received hers simply as a "good behavior" gift.

Eupheme was unlike most girls her age: she was fatter and shorter than her teenage friends, and she had attended a "special school." Because she was emotionally handicapped, at her age twelve Eupheme's parents had enrolled her in this institution. After her being there for only three years, the director of the school had convinced their parents that Eupheme was better off at home--there, she'd get the family love that she so desperately needed, and the financial stress on the family would be less severe.

When Eupheme was 18--and David, 15--their parents died in a car accident, leaving their Victorian-style home totally to Eupheme. To David, they left their used and worn out automobile, which he had promptly sold to raise the money for a second-hand stereo.

Following his college years, David seemed to "lose touch" with his sister, though she continued to live in the beautiful, two-story home given her by their parents. David had found a teaching job in the other end of the province, though it might as well have been the other end of the world.

Meanwhile, using the money that she would have spent, under different circumstances, for rent, Eupheme filled her home with beautiful and valuable pieces of antique furniture. In fact, the morning of the fire she was supposed to drive up to Halifax to pick up a set of Governor Winthrop chairs and a matching table.
It was at 12:00 midnight during the hottest evening of the summer of 1958 that Eupheme's neighbor Jim, returning from a late night swim in a nearby pond, had seen flames leaping out of a second story window of what he judged was the most beautiful and most valuable home in the village. Curiously, only minutes after spotting the flames spewing out of the house, John saw a figure—looking very much like Eupheme's brother—walking briskly out of the side door of the house and heading for his car that was parked at the end of the driveway. Even more bizarre was the fact that this man was all dressed-up in a business suit, and carrying under arm what appeared to be a businessman's attache case.

Two days later, David MacRae apparently took a massive overdose of an unknown over-the-counter drug, causing him to go into a deep coma. When this was learned, the RCMP ordered that his life be saved "at all costs." The doctors pumped his stomach, and administered what they thought was an effective antidote, in the hopes of neutralizing the drug he had so freely ingested.

Whether David MacRae was suffering more from a desperate need for money, or from a bad case of bent ego, is not known. In fact, those and other answers to this mystery went to the grave with this strange and desperate brother of an innocent and unassuming lady . . . .
The hearse from Cummings Funeral Home stood on the tarmac, its tailgate open for the crate.

"There it is," said Rory's father, buttoning his overcoat and pulling his hat down. He stepped outside. The wind blew through the open door and hit Rory in the face.

They waited inside until his father crossed to the hearse. As if she had made up her mind ahead of time they would wait just that long, Rory's mother opened the door, led them outside.

"Where's the American flag?" Rory asked as they walked toward the hearse. "Shouldn't army guys always get American flags?"

"He'll have a flag at the wake tomorrow," his mother said.

The wake was closed-casket because the army had labeled his brother "unsuitable for viewing by family." In the funeral parlor, red, white, and blue draped the casket. Flowers surrounded the bier. The set-up had color.

Colorful also is the ceremony at the Memorial wall 15 years later, where bands play, and where Rory stands with his fingers in the carving of his brother's name like Thomas with his fingers in a wound.
I had a delightful vacation visiting with friends who have a summer house near Harpswell, Maine, on Bailey's Island. Bailey is one of the largest of the three striking narrow strips of land which runs into Casco Bay below Brunswick. Bailey, Orrs, and Sebascodegan, outstanding in their natural beauty, also comprise part of the town of Harpswell.

Bailey Island was formerly called "Wills Island," after Will Black, the son of a Kittery trader who settled on the isle. The island was later sold to the Bailey family of Massachusetts in 1750 for the price of a pound of the best tobacco and a keg of rum: a small price to pay for permanently attaching your name to an island.

My favorite walk along the cliffs at low tide began by the seaman’s statue. I walked along the beautiful sedimentary rock which runs down to the sea. The road leads into two depressions where I could see Mackerel Cove. Driftwood Inn stands on the right nearby, as the narrow road runs to the waters' edge.

As I continued, I passed hedges of fine wild roses. Please don't pick! The narrow road meanders and terminates at the Driftwood Inn. From the Inn, I enjoyed a spectacular view of the island. I made some mental notes and told myself that returning in late autumn or early spring when it is quieter and not so busy, would be another vacation in Maine.

At first, I didn't know it was about his step-father's suicide. Some part of me took teacher-note of his scribble growing down the page. Some part of me was glad Joel had begun. He leaned over it a morning, leaned over it another morning, and then refused to place it in the blue folder. I wanted him to. There are rules in my class after all. Before lunch I saw him in the hall holding it, several wrinkled pages in a fist.

And then it stayed with him. He carried it to my class each day, had it every time I saw him. Did it go to the lav with him? Did it stay the night in his locker or hop the school bus with him, a teddy bear clutched by the ear, trailing down the aisle to his seat?

He read it to me.

I did not speak of run-ons or handwriting or margins.

And he wanted to read it to Miss Hausemann and the time was arranged for that and he did.

And he read it to the vice-principal and the psychologist and begged to read it to the class.

Some finally got annoyed. Some finally wondered why he poked his revised and edited sorrow at us.

Was he weary? Was it wearying to march through his day, smacking littler kids, getting smacked, combing the front of his hair in the morning, looking too small for a sixth grader (pants too short, his mother's fault)—seeming a sum of his parts.

What he needed to do was build a placard and hoist it over his shoulders advising all that the noticeable facts of Joel were not all. He needed to print on it in large letters the name of the father who left him, and the step-father who would not choose another place to use the gun than his and Joel's livingroom.

And somewhere on the placard, a footnote or a parenthetical expression, he needed to log his mother's valium. What he knows about the valium comes from studying her eyes, the languor in her smile. He comes home. The Drowser is on the couch. He does not see her fish in the bottle, hoist the glass of water to her lips. He does not go later to sniff at the bottle, sound out the label. He has no words for
what he sees, thinks Mother is defined by his mother. Therefore, all mothers are part Drowser.

Defining himself as protector, he puts himself between the Drowser and his brother and sister. He watches them, scolds them, feeds them from his eleven-year-old repertoire of bread and jelly, cleans them, mitigates their TV fights, shushes them.

So he cannot write what he doesn't know. Maybe he should wear his mother's addiction like a silly hat, and then no karate teacher, or prissy sixth-grade girl with blond hair and beginning boobs, or no teacher of writing will ever mistake him for the child he seems.

He is scratching at his sores, and in his eleven-year-old brilliance and dimness needs to display them. Not an unreasonable request, but he does not know how to select an audience. Job would have told him to read it to God.

What is my first task in that square room? What is it he wishes of me? If I give love and sympathy, it's a start. If in my own doggedness, I try to show him how we place words in a long row, like steps in a morning walk, purposeful, brisk, that is good. And if I giggle with him when the steps back up and dance a jig, or smush over themselves the way steps do in deep snow—good. If I show him how to guide his own walk of words along the blue line, down, down the page, it is good, but it is not my first job.

The first thing, and yes, the pleasure I feel in talking of the first things, is to see him.

I fought you all year, Joel. By looks and words, I told you thirty times a day: you are a member of a group. My job is not to discover you, the group's job is not to discover you. You are not the New World Uncharted, misty to the explorers. We are not the explorers.

You gave me mean looks. I told you that once laughing. We laughed together, I remember now with some gladness.
She awoke to an empty bed. Cat-like, she stretched first the top half and then the bottom half of her body, ending by arching her back with feline grace. Then, she lay still, ears tuned for sounds of life in the house. The sound of streaming water came through the air.

She slid out from under the sheet, wrapped it around her like a sari, and padded across the floor toward the locus of the sound.

"Can I come in?" she shouted over the din of the shower. "Why didn't you wake me?" she demanded, suddenly petulant.

"I knew you'd wake up as soon as I got out of bed. You always do." He peered out from behind the shower curtain. "Of course you can come in, silly. I just got the water started." He grinned.

The petulance vanished as quickly as it had appeared. Clara grinned too. She let the make-shift sari drop uncere-

moniously to the floor, stepped into the tub, and under the stream of water.

"I'll wash your ... back if you'll wash mine," she of-

fered. Her eyes danced, brows arching, as she cocked her head to one side and began to soap the washcloth.

"Could you dry my back, sweetie? I can't reach."

Clara took the proffered towel and rubbed down the slightly sun-browned skin. "Looks like your Florida tan's fading," she observed. "Why don't we go to the beach today. Lord knows, my tan could use a booster." She ruefully held out a leg. "To anyone who can't see my tan lines, my legs look frog-belly white. Ahhh, the disadvantage of having Nordic blood." She sighed dramatically, holding the back of her hand to her forehead.

He stared at her legs appreciatively. "They don't look frog-belly white to me," he consoled.

"Ehh! Whadaya know? So what do ya say? The beach?" She looked up hopefully.

"Okay. Sounds good. Let's take sandwiches and lemonade. Those snack shack people charge way to much."

Clara grabbed her bathing suit, a black spandex string bikini, out of the top bureau drawer, and pulled it on. "Wear your new suit," she commanded. "I haven't seen you in it since Florida. ... I'll pack the lunch. What d'ya want? Ham and cheese okay?" Without waiting for an answer,
I would not see her die, but I knew what would happen. Her family would gather silently at the foot of the bed, watch her chest swell and fall with each grunt of the noisy breathing machine, and listen to the hiss and gurgle of air as it forces its way through blue plastic hoses into her lungs. They would study her frail features; the thin wisps of stiff, whitened hair, the prominent jaw, the gnarled, arthritic hands of a woman who proudly showed her age. She would be sleeping, just as she had most of each day for weeks, and would not hear the doctor tell her family how sorry he is. A nod from him would send the nurse to the machine where she would flick a toggle switch on its console. The room would grow suddenly still, and all eyes would focus on the woman’s chest and the heart monitor suspended on the wall above her head.

Without an impetus to breathe, her heart and lungs would soon fail from lack of oxygen, and with that failure, death. There would be tears, surely, and the quiet murmuring of grief in moments of tragedy never to be forgotten, but I would not be there to experience them.

Gwen had never smoked, never submitted to the obliterating effects of big-city pollution, never lived with a tobacco addict choking on his own phlegm. Yet she was afflicted with a severe lung disease which caused, over a period of thirty years, gradual deterioration in her lung’s ability to process air, and eventually, the tissue simply broke apart leaving an empty shell, not unlike the exterior of a home gutted by fire. She became increasingly short of breath until the point where combing her hair became a cherished goal for an entire morning.

But Gwen was British, so of course, such matters as getting enough oxygen to breathe assumed less importance than news that a favorite rugby team lost a tournament match. Her undaunted courage belied the gravity of her illness, and despite impassioned pleas to conserve her strength, she continued to enjoy life as she always had -- to the limit. To Gwen, age and infirmity were better spent on old, sick people and not the likes of her.

She was far too busy to be ill, and during those periods when she wasn’t as healthy as she thought she should have been and reluctantly agreed to hospitalization, she maintained an aura of royalty. One might have, at any moment, expected her to remove the oxygen mask, stand up, and sing “God Save the Queen.” She was a favorite, not only of mine but of everyone who came in contact with her, for she sparkled with life and hope and the rare understanding that even the most treacherous highway has both a beginning and an end which cannot be controlled or avoided, so that only the journey truly matters.

Gwen’s journey had been long and fruitful, but she was ready for its conclusion. She had said many times before not to revive her again, not to put her on the ventilator, just to let her go, and if it weren’t for an overzealous, misinformed relative, she would have died at home. But she didn’t, facing instead a protracted and hopeless existence irrevocably tied to a machine. Together with her family, she informed the doctor of her decision one day by scrawling on a notepad, Let me go.

Once the choice had been made, all that remained was to await a son’s arrival from the mid-west, due in that Sunday evening. The end, then, would come the following morning at ten o’clock, and despite an overwhelming desire to be with her, I could not. I would be out-of-state. Without an impetus to breathe, her heart and lungs would soon fail from lack of oxygen, and with that failure, death.

That last weekend, I was responsible for her physical care. I turned her, rubbed her knotted back with lotion, and regulated the flow of fluid into her tiny, fragile veins. Every two hours I threaded a small catheter into the plastic tube in her mouth in order to vacuum the mucus that had collected in her lungs. It was, to say the least, an uncomfortable procedure, causing her head to jerk off the pillow in a violent, coughing spasm. Each time, her eyes flared as if screaming at me to stop.

“I’m sorry, Gwen,” I would answer, “I don’t want to do this but I have to. Please, Gwen, I’m sorry.”

And her eyes would rest and a smile would form around the tube. Of course I understand, she was saying. It’s all right.

Before I went off duty that Sunday, I sat on the edge of her bed, next to the machine keeping her alive, and said good-bye.

“Wont be in tomorrow, Gwen. Can you hear me all right?”

She nodded.

“I have to go to New Hampshire.” For some reason, I felt an urgent need to explain why I would not be there, as if my desertion could somehow be forgiven. “My mother is in the hospital again. There’s some trouble with the chemotherapy, I guess.”
Her hand reached out and grabbed at my wrist. Her eyes melted in sympathy and spoke the words her mouth could not.

"She's fine, really," I said. "She'll only be in a few days, but I won't be back until Wednesday. Do you understand?"

Again she nodded, closed her eyes for a moment and patted my hand, as a mother would comfort her young child. My fingers traced the length of her face until it brushed the underside of her chin.

"You know," I whispered, "I love you."

We clasped hands and smiled to one another. "Good-bye, Gwen." Then I kissed her forehead and walked away.

She died quietly the next morning, surrounded by the love of her children, and at ten o'clock, standing vigil at my own mother's bedside, I thought of Gwen and wept.

Let me go, Let me go

Thin wisps of white age
caress her weathered mien
knotted stubbled hands
consigned to imminent
certain death
quiet eyes writing in air

let me go

In accordance with all due process and inexplicably tied to the system of health, we herewith tempt with our trade and hang you from your needs

barbaric, egocentric
ways of modern life
How dare we trade her choice for our gain?

Do not blaspheme our world for we are the way and the light and few who reach us ever really leave

But there
staring blindly from the console
controlling her life
lies a singular switch whose power exceeds the will

To there
my finger drags
to there and back again
Her eyes thrust out to scratch the itch

let me go

slowly doth the finger crawl
toward windswept melodies
slowly doth the finger creep
toward once begotten dreams
slowly doth the finger nudge
the niche of instant end
and then to press or turn away

let me go

let me go

let me go

click.

July, 1985
For Gwen Wooten
The Anachronism

By Karen Waggoner

Any attempt to analyze the effect of the Vietnam War on career military personnel has to be accompanied by a strong historical perspective. Generalizations are always theoretical, but some must be made about the generation of military men who went to war in Southeast Asia in the mid-sixties and returned, or died, by the mid-seventies.

Born in the turmoil of the late thirties and during the violent but patriotic atmosphere of World War II, the men and women were educated during the Cold War, but were "Happy Days" insulated from political awareness. The days of emergency attack drills and home basement fallout shelters came and went. Despite continued active military presence in Korea following the conflict there, many men entered military careers for highly personal reasons: a secure job, a sense of adventure, an opportunity to expand educational horizons. Few anticipated the heating up of the global conflict which had simmered on the world's back burner for fifteen years or more.

They were family-oriented people, their lives not unlike their upwardly-mobile civilian counterparts who moved frequently and focused on the husband and father's career while the wife and children remained snugly at home. In one suburb the mother heard a knock at the door and was relieved to find that the husband and father was often absent for months, that the pay was at poverty level, that the housing was substandard, and that the much-touted benefits were haphazard or missing. The family was large, the nightlong ills of cold and the mending of many shoes brought out the distinction of the uniqueness of the military career. They began to take enormous pride in the hundreds of technological breakthroughs of the fifties and sixties which accompanied the development of the space program, nuclear powered ships, and super weapons. The computer alone opened avenues of learning and achievement that made dizzying feats ordinary. By this time, most career personnel were associated with technology, and they too achieved rapid advancement, made more money, and enjoyed more prestige.

The political events of the early sixties, like the Cuban missile crisis and the infiltration of Russian and Chinese influence, caught many of this generation by surprise, and their response was naive. They had played at war for years, sitting out a number of conflicts, as if spectators, playing the role of protective shield against an almost mythical hydra-like monster which now included Russia, China, Cuba, North Korea, and the newly-emergent North Vietnam. They had flirted with conflict until actual combat seemed unreal. The beast they had long heard growling now roared and spat flames. It may have caught them momentarily off-guard, but when they recovered, they were increasingly involved in the gratifying business of being the knights-in-armor, uniformed grandly in the latest a good military tailor could produce.

While the muddle in Southeast Asia perturbed the non-military citizen, the military, following a George Custer model of viewing conflict as simplistically as possible, saw their impending participation as an actual encounter with the monster. It was a God-given opportunity to bomb, shoot, scald, denude, and deface the scaly beast who dared to infringe on a territory they had never seen. By this time, the career military man was so deeply committed to his ideals that the uproar going on just outside his proverbial castle walls served only to make him more certain he was right. Kent State passed right over his head. Draftcard burners were at first pitied, then vilified, then ignored.

When he did get his chance to confront the monster, the military man found that the enemy did not resemble the beast he had imagined. To his disappointment, John Wayne movies had not prepared him to deal with an enemy he could not recognize and who did not play by any rules at all. He was required to shoot an enemy, an extension of the monster, who was as likely to be a pregnant woman as a uniformed soldier. Americans cried, "Dirty tricks!" in response to a camouflaged jungle trap in which sharpened sticks were planted, encrusted with human feces. Trusted civilian employees and their children carried deadly satchel charges into American compounds. One estimate claims that nearly half the enemy in South Vietnam was entirely contained underground in tunnels. Military personnel in Vietnam found no safe place because there was no front; the war was fought throughout the country.

As if all this were not bad enough, the military man, still envisioning himself clad in armor and protecting his values against the beast, now faced the fact that his kings and councils of princes called all the moves and would not allow him to accomplish the only goals he ever had: to win the war and to come home with honor.

No loyalty, no decorations, no advancements, no spit-and-polish uniform could erase the humiliation of the defeat, and no words could alleviate the disgrace of the American military personnel who had identified for twenty or more years with a superior force defending a superior nation. Unlike Custer, not one of these men was celebrated to become the fabric of American legend. Instead, they were ignored, their wounds left to fester unhealed, and the monster lived on.
Stone faces, worried frowns, torn blue jeans, rattling hip chains, business suits, leather briefcases . . . Some parade in spikeheels, some slouch in dirty Nike sneakers, and some file past in wing-tipped oxfords. Uniformed guards pace the room, and clerks shuffle files of papers. Nervous coughs echo off the high plaster walls, and metal chairs scrape on the bare floor. The stale air and cramped seats make it hard to breathe. I feel lost in this crowd of commotion, this Monday-morning clearinghouse of human problems—lower court. I should have come with a friend, I groan, I didn't know this ticket would whirl me into legal bedlam.

"All rise." Like a wizard, the black-robed judge appears and swiftly mounts his elevated platform of dull mahogany. He settles in the well-worn, green leather chair. The stoic stenographer moves his listening fingers. The room quiets and the judge spews forth a monologue about rights, restrictions, conduct, and directives. A small, dark woman in a blue velvet suit repeats his words in Spanish. The courtroom stirs, and twenty or so people line up before the Public Defender. Lawyers resume their search for clients or continue an interrupted argument. The translator is hidden in a circle of distressed babble. The judge scans the courtroom shaking his head slowly from side to side. Lawyers approach him with questions, speaking in low monotones. The prosecutor and clerks have endless details for him to acknowledge. The judge watches the mess of activity and frowns.

Do, we the people, annoy him?

The clerk finally calls a name but no one stirs. The judge scowls under his crown of thick, white hair. The clerk flatly recalls the name. The judge's scowl deepens when he sees the stocky man with a stubbled beard rush to the bench from a side door. His lawyer follows and the clerk begins reading the charge. "Mr. Brown, you are charged with illegal possession and selling of alcohol . . . under the Connecticut State Statutes . . . how do you plea?" The man mumbles "guilty." The scowling judge asks the prosecution for the facts. The judge's face flushes in anger. "This is your third conviction on this charge, Mr. Brown, you have not listened to the advice of the court." The judge's eyes flare as he pronounces the sentence.

Do, we the people, anger him?

A shoplifting case is next. A tattered-looking couple approach the bench. This husband and wife team have been caught stealing two jackets and pockets full of aspirin, soap, and such from K-Mart. The judge questions them softly. He asks about their children and their financial means. He looks concerned and worried. He refers them to the Public Defender.

Do, we the people, worry him?

A woman, about forty, pale and shaky, is charged with drunk driving. The judge's attitude changes and again his face is flush red. His voice rises, "I cannot and will not tolerate drunk driving. I have a personal and lawful resolution and responsibility on this charge." He issues a harsh, maximum sentence and lectures the woman on the seriousness of the charge for all the court to hear. He openly proclaims all drunk drivers to be "potential murderers." His personal hatred of this charge shows painfully on his tense face.

Do, we the people, hurt him?

A scrape of metal is heard. Four white-shirted sheriffs appear by a steel-grey cage in the far corner of the courtroom. Four handcuffed prisoners are brought out from behind a double bolted door. I stiffen from the tension that paralyzes the courtroom. The judge glares at the men in tee-shirts and tattoos. Assault, rape, car theft are some of the charges made in the litany read by the prosecution. Pre-trial dates are set, bail is determined, and the sneering prisoners return to their cage and down an elevator to the cells beneath the courtroom. The tension relaxes, the judge pauses, leans back in his chair, and calls a recess.

Do, we the people, threaten him?

When court resumes, a case is called where a woman is charging her husband with abuse. "Domestic disputes," remarks the judge, "can be highly emotional incidents." The husband, when asked to enter a plea, states, "guilty." The

The clerk barks another name. Again there is a waiting space. A lawyer approaches the judge and makes some excuse for his absent client. The judge reschedules the hearing without expression. Another name is called, and a man in a vested suit approaches the bench. The charge is speeding. "Guilty," responds the man. "Pay the fine," flatly states the judge. Then another traffic violation, then another, then another. All the same pattern—charge, plea, fine. The judge yawns.

Do, we the people, bore him?

A shoplifting case is next. A tattered-looking couple approach the bench. This husband and wife team have been caught stealing two jackets and pockets full of aspirin, soap, and such from K-Mart. The judge questions them softly. He asks about their children and their financial means. He looks concerned and worried. He refers them to the Public Defender.

Do, we the people, worry him?
judge asks him if he has anything to say about the matter. The husband answers sarcastically, "she deserved it." Whereupon, the wife retaliates, then again the husband. The judge orders them to be quiet and calls their lawyers to the bench. After a long discussion and a lot of persuasion from the judge, he warily announces that the case will be continued on another date. He looks drawn, and he draws a deep breath.

Do, we the people, tire him?

An eighteen-year-old boy is ordered to pay back the money he took from his employer at a gas station. A nineteen-year-old girl is fined and scolded for driving an unregistered car without insurance. The judge orders her to reappear with valid documentation. An elderly woman is charged with vagrancy and disturbing the peace. She is directed to a home for the homeless. A leather-jacketed youth is charging a state trooper with brutality, and a pretrial date is set. Two neighbors dispute property lines and boundaries for their dogs. They are charging each other with harassment and trespassing.

Do, we the people, think he can solve all our problems?

The docket calling seems endless. Calls for bail, reissues of arrest, contempt notices, postponements, applications for accelerated rehabilitation, dismissals, bargaining, subpoenas, fines, and on and on and on. The docket is clogged with names, congested with issues, and overloaded with problems. One man, or woman, the judge, must hear it all, act on it all. I sit on the hard chair studying him. How will he deal with me, I wonder. Will he be angered, bored, or threatened? Will he be concerned, compassionate, and willing to instruct and protect? Or will he be indifferent and dismiss me? Will he listen or has he heard it all already? How does the fate of so many and so much rest on this one stranger’s shoulders?

Do, we the people, expect too much?

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William Provost
Grace Polivka
Sheila Murphy
Joyce Morton

Reflections
By William Provost

The wind rattled the cedar shingles on the house, the house that was never a home. Paul awoke at near dawn to the beating of a shutter against the house. Paul, thirty-seven, out of work, another intermission in this play of life, still lived in the house. His dad had met life’s director last April and Mom had since moved to a convalescent home, the final act. Paul yearned to be free and needed to make the break. What held him here?? Memories??

Rocky yelled, "Hey, Porky! Run the six hundred!" Rocky the gym teacher led youth by day. Some leader. On that warm spring afternoon Paul ran into the pale sunlight. Midway through the run, the chants of "Porky" echoed in Paul’s ears. He tasted the May air. The chants grew louder. "Porky, Waddles, Bubble-Butt." Those were only a few of the names. Paul finished the run, and somehow warm and chilly, lumbered to the locker room. There, confusion inhabited the air. There lay Paul’s clothes in the shower. There lay his books scattered on the floor. And Paul. He began carrying on a conversation with the mirror hoping for a friend to listen.

The phone rang. More memories.

"Paul, Paul, get your lard ass down here!"

Paul’s mother liked slow tortures. When he came home from school that early summer afternoon, she was there. She was there every afternoon. How he wished she had worked at W.T. Grant or Topp’s. He didn’t want her in the house. Today she shrieked. Paul obeyed. As he entered the kitchen, he saw them—split peas piled in the corner. His mother was going to her favorite torture learned at the hands of Sister Mary Magdelena who had loved to punish this way.

Paul trembled, "Mom, Why?"
"You're here, aren't you?"

Always the same answer.

For two hours Paul knelt on the peas. At intervals he leaned forward trying to touch his head to the wall. At times he lifted one knee in an attempt to relieve the hurt, but this only put pressure on the other knee. Tears trickled down his cheeks.

The phone still rang. More memories.

"Paul, Paul get your . . . here." How he detested that phrase! How he loathed this time of year, shopping for school clothes! Sure he had the opportunity to see the Back to School Parade! Ha! Dad dropped them off and his mother pushed Paul up to the sixth floor. There in bold lettering at the top of the stairs was the sign "HUSKY" in fat wooden letters.

"Good morning." The salesman acknowledged them.

"Good morning, son. What a healthy young man you are!"

Paul thought, "What a joke! A lumberjack is husky. Superman is husky. But not me. Call me Fat Boy. Call me Waddles." His mother yanked at his ears.

"Paul, try on these trousers!"

As Paul went to the dressing room, he hoped the pants would fit. But they didn't. They never did. Sucking in his stomach, he tried to reach the first belt notch. No! He stared into the mirror again looking for that friend. As he stepped from the fitting room, he heard his mother.

"Sixty-five dollars and ninety-six cents. Fat bastard."

As they marched out of G.Fox, hundreds of kids, cute kids, descended from the Connecticut Company buses. Their moms held their hands. Paul's mother never held his hand. She clamped it. She scissored it. She wrenched it. These kids were waiting for the parade to begin. They were waiting for the rasp-limes and tuna fish sandwiches at Sage-Allen cafeteria. Paul—he was going home. His mother yanked him on the bus and pushed him into the seat. Turning, he saw kids on the sidewalk's edge shaking Mr. Peanut's hand and eating roasted peanuts. Paul longed to be in their places on this crisp fall day.
Museum Pieces: Handicrafts
By Grace Polivka

Shit! Nikki had better things to do with her Sunday afternoon, but Ms. O’Conner insisted that the group meet at her convenience. Just-out-of-grad-school Ohsee was trying hard to “inspire my students to write with feeling.” Why couldn’t she be inspirational during school time? Must be the latest “Process Approach to Writing” that Ohsee had babbled about during Friday’s class. Nikki couldn’t remember. In fact, Nikki couldn’t recall what else she had wanted to do today; she sensed a headache coming on. And Mother had done her Bufferin-number-twelve routine this morning:

“What do you mean ‘I am going out’? Your room could stand some attention, and there’s plenty of laundry to keep you busy for hours. You never do anything around here! Get out of my sight!”

At least the museum was quiet, except for Ohsee’s twittering and an occasional squawk from Reebok.

The hope chest engaged Nikki’s eye.

CATALOGUE #17, ITEM NO. 1985, circa 1923; HOPE CHEST; handmade; local artisan.


The woman’s little black straw hat, tilted slightly forward, was a perfect imitation of a mushroom wedging itself between the slate slabs of a garden walkway. But that’s all the girl recalled. No “contact” with the Mushroom; no hugs; no wonderful Nana times. Perhaps this was the girl’s fault; perhaps the timing. It troubled the girl, however, that she hadn’t any clear, sparkling September-in-the-park memories—about anyone. Stairs. There were stairs to the Mushroom’s house, and in one old photograph of Pop and the Mushroom, a baby wrapped in a voluminous shawl. Maybe that’s all there ever was—the faded Kodak.

"Note, students," observed Ms. O'Conner, "that this hope chest is valued merely as a, quote, slice of Americana, unquote, and not for its originality or artistic quality. Obviously, some young man worked longingly for hours to prepare this "heirloom" for his blushing bride-to-be. Wonder if things worked out for them. We're going up to the second floor. There are some really interesting pieces up there. Come along."

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INVENTORY CHECK LIST: PIECE #374: Shirley Temple doll and accessories.

Analysis: The Stages of Memory

"Kitten."
The She-Cat purred.

And the Berry-Blue eye Winked; life number 1.

"My Kitten,"
The She-Cat lulled.

And the Strawberry Fluff Truckled her head; life number 2.

"Trust me."
The She-Cat mewed.

And the Whiskery Nose Crinkled; life number 3.

"In Butterfly days, The slug buries deep,"
The She-Cat struggled.

And the Golden Lamp-eye Glintery-beamed; life number 4.

"Pussycat."
The She-Cat cried.

And the claws of her words Icily slashed; life number 5.

"Oh, Pussycat."
The She-Cat sighed.

But the Huntress,
now fled, life number 6, where
Maggots of memory
Wormed through
Her morning-red fur; life number 7.

"Sunflower memories
Outlast not the Dawn."
The She-Cat whispered,

"And the Night
Is a Wasp."
But the Pussycat-Kitten
Pawed at the Teardrops
of Thought; life number 8.

"Ladycat."
The She-Cat pleaded.
And the Sleek One now feared
The slime of the Slug
The bore of the Maggot
The welt of the Wasp.
Life number 9.

Thinking of Home
By Sheila Murphy

Grandma's stone wall, its graceful curves framing the
front of her big house, always seemed custom-made for pa-
rade-watching. The smooth hard top of the wall formed a
raised stone bench, a private reviewing stand for our family
and friends. We'd sit tall, swinging our legs and savoring
the painted clowns, Sousa marches, or starched military uni-
forms--whatever performances the particular holiday dictat-
ed. Once, during World War II, my father, strutting in his
World War I Army Air Corps greys, had led the Memorial Day
parade. Our whole family--Mama, Gene and I, even Grandma
and Uncle John--had sat proudly on the wall and cheered as
Pop marched by. A faint smile crossed his face but he
didn't turn or give any outward acknowledgment of our rau-
cous adulation.

The wall seemed built more for walking on than for sit-
ting, though. Starting straight and low at the sidewalk in
front of the barn, it gradually rose with the contour of the
yard, curving at its highest part as it rounded the corner
onto Main Street. On school days, walking Grandma's wall on
our way home was almost automatic. We'd hop on at the low
end, walking faster and faster--if we dared--as the wall
rose. Familiarity allowed for perfecting various balancing
techniques--walking ever so slowly at the very edge of the
wall; or sometimes even hopping the whole length; or making
running leaps across the two breaks where the front and side
steps surfaced the long flat surface of stone. A last
hop down at the high end of the wall on Main Street and we'd
continue up the block, cross the street, and be home.

When Grandma was alive, walking the wall was just a small
part of the magnetism that drew us to her rambling white
Victorian house, the house where she had come as a bride,
the house where Pop and Uncle John had been born and raised.

Comfortable ghosts of those earlier days would often fol-
low as we raced around the yard, poked into the barn, or
played in the house itself. Pop had been able to climb the
old cherry tree that now reached higher than the peak of the
barn. We were limited to gazing skyward at the red-rich
fruit, then scavenging the ground for perfect, shiny speci-
mens. We'd stuff our pockets and our hands, then hide behind
the barn to suck the sweetness and carefully spit seeds at
each other in a delicious display of forbidden rudeness.

In the back yard, a similar aura of forbidden fruit sur-
rrounded the grape arbor. With echoes of Uncle John's stern
admonitions only bolstering our bravado, we'd reach on tip-
toe to rob him of the richness of his ripening purple harvest, again for the dual pleasures of sweetness and spitting.

Hide-and-seek in the grape arbor or, even better, in the huge old barn, was reserved for Uncle John’s absence too. The massive wooden door wobbled on its pulleys and, inside, the steps and the hayloft floor were worn and probably rotting. How could sensible adult cautions prevail against the temptations of that glorious space? Those dark stalls were empty now, but not in the days when Grandpa had driven his horse and buggy down Main Street. Together we’d push aside the thick wooden door, our hands slipping on the shiny green paint, our fingers too stubby to curve around that bulky thickness as the ancient door creaked on its pulleys. Inside, the shiny black carriage, its brass lanterns gleaming, its traces lying along the dirt floor, beckoned in the dim, musty expanse. Gene would lift one trace, I the other—small, two-legged “steeds,” pulling the carriage to brief, new life.

When we played inside the house, Grandma’s rocking chair became our base of operations. Fortified by tonic and cookies, with ginger ale bubbles still tingling our noses and cookie crumbs whiskering our faces, we’d watch for Grandpa’s eyes to close as she rocked slowly back and forth, her hands falling limp on her faded apron. That was our signal to go exploring in the cavernous spaces of the house itself. Gene liked the cellar, finding enough light from one bare bulb to rummage among boxes of nails, rusty tools, bottles of chemicals, and stacks of old National Geographics with their Playboy -centerfold aborigines. The lure of the cellar was purely masculine so I would try to persuade Gene to explore upstairs. The second floor had four huge rooms, each piled high with furniture, trunks, cardboard cartons. Just lifting a lid would reveal bits of quilt, lace, velvet—tactile treasures we didn’t dare disturb but could feel, rub, and wonder at. Yellowed papers covered with Pop’s distinctive unreadable script, his certificate from the Mexican-American Campaign, his law school diploma of real sheepskin—these illumined our heritage but, to us, were less exciting than the fading photographs and glass negatives showing stiff, frowning, unknown forebears. Our usual tour would be brief, perhaps an hour, so we’d limit it ourselves to one corner of one room each time. Never since have I felt the luxury of infinite archeological resources.

On rainy days we’d usually do the top floor tour—perhaps just to listen to the magical staccato beat of the rain close above the slanted ceiling that grazed our heads; or to stand at the wide window and stare down, down at tiny cars slowly inching their way up or down Main Street in the downpour. Finally, our inner clocks, or the dusk at the windows, would warn us to wipe our dusty hands on our pants and get back to the kitchen. We’d stomp noisily. Grandma would awaken and we’d kiss her good-bye, then walk the few blocks home. On those days, with all the wonders of the house and yard, we’d often not even bother walking along the stone wall.

If Uncle John’s long black car was parked in the driveway, I knew that walking the wall or playing in the yard was off limits and I also knew why. The reason was Uncle John, whose brooding presence marred the house as much because of his profession as his personality. And his profession, dreadful in our eyes, announced itself with that monstrous sign on the front lawn, a sign that I saw always as a blight on the house, a cloud on its magic and its memories. The sign read:

MC SHERRY FUNERAL HOME
John A. McSherry, Undertaker

Naturally, we had learned at an early age that, on wake days, playing in the yard was forbidden. Not that we’d want to play. Cars cluttered the yard; people were talking on the porch and in the front hall; and, of course, worst of all, a dead body was laid out in the parlor. I would wait on the corner for Gene so I wouldn’t have to go inside by myself and endure people staring at me; or worse, if no one was there, to run by the parlor, trying not to look but somehow compelled to glimpse the mirror smears of nails, rusted hands, bottles of chemicals, and stacks of old National Geographics with their Playboy -centerfold aborigines.

The lure of the cellar was purely masculine so I would try to persuade Gene to explore upstairs. The second floor had four huge rooms, each piled high with furniture, trunks, cardboard cartons. Just lifting a lid would reveal bits of quilt, lace, velvet—tactile treasures we didn’t dare disturb but could feel, rub, and wonder at. Yellowed papers covered with Pop’s distinctive unreadable script, his certificate from the Mexican-American Campaign, his law school diploma of real sheepskin—these illumined our heritage but, to us, were less exciting than the fading photographs and glass negatives showing stiff, frowning, unknown forebears. Our usual tour would be brief, perhaps an hour, so we’d limit it ourselves to one corner of one room each time. Never since have I felt the luxury of infinite archeological resources.

After Grandma died, only the sign was a reminder of those dreadful entrances—the sign and Uncle John, of course. The house itself was empty now, and playing in the yard wasn’t much fun anymore; most of the time we felt too grown-up even to walk the wall. We would wave at Uncle John when we saw him mowing the lawn in his black suit, white starched shirt, and black tie. Mama said he felt useful mowing the lawn and
that we were lucky he did it. That big empty house belonged to us too and he took good care of it. Only when Uncle John had a case was there any activity in the house, and that wasn't very often. Younger families took their business to the new, modern Duffy Funeral Home up the street. Only a few, especially those burying someone of Uncle John's generation, chose McSherry's, with the wake in Grandma's homey double parlor and kitchen, and parking on the lawn under the cherry tree.

For us, the dread of "walking the gauntlet" past the mourners, flowers, bodies, had faded. The green trim on the house and barn was fading too, and the white paint was peeling; but we didn't notice. Mostly, as we rubbed a stick or a pencil along the wall on our way home from junior high, we came to treasure the memories and magic of our visits to Grandma, her barn, her yard, her attic and cellar.

On the day my mother announced that we had to move back to that house to live, the sheen of those memories was tarnished forever. All the memorabilia from those upstairs rooms was carted away; we gradually made the house our home. Eventually, even I managed to sleep soundly on the infrequent nights when a body rested in the parlor downstairs.

At the time, hating the move, I directed my active animosity toward my mother, my passive hostility toward Uncle John, and my sympathy toward my sick father—whose illness had become progressively worse. The subtext of my sorrow and anger was only recognized much later, when I realized that Grandma's stone wall was more permanent than the fortress of my childhood which had crumbled forever.

How often have I lain beneath rain Under a strange roof, thinking of home.

William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying.

Journey

By Joyce Morton

Though the drover had tried several times to strike up a conversation since they'd left the cluster of houses that marked the edge of town, Mary Helen had surveyed no more of him than his extremities—squat gum rubber boots with garish green stockings rolled over their tops and thickly mittened hands that every once in awhile raised the double reins and deftly snapped them over the team's shaggy winter rumps. Not that the horses took any heed of his wishes. Their jog trot never varied. Their rhythmic hoofs moved in unison, throwing clods of hard packed snow and an occasional pebble against the footboard of the double sled.

The squawk of the sled's runners and the crisp jangle of harness bells made it hard to hear inside her hood. She didn't want to talk anyway. She just wanted to sit there high on the blanket-covered seat and be certain this was the long awaited day. At last she was on her way to the woodlot where her father'd been since first snow.

"Your pa—he's some kind of teamster," the drover said with admiration.

She allowed him a shy glance for that, but only long enough for an impression of white stubbled chin, small steel-rimmed glasses and a grin that turned the corners of his mouth down. She wondered what his name was.

"Knowed your pa since he was a boy. Helped raise the barn on your grandpa's place. Set the kingpin myself. Your pa was right smart with a team even then."

Of course she knew that. Wasn't her father always joking about graduating school sitting on the plow? His younger brother had cut across the field on his way home from the schoolhouse to hand him his sixth-grade diploma.

"Best swamper on the crew, too. Your pa can lay out a twitch road no 'mount of snow ever closes. Early rains neither. Got a real canny feel for the land, your pa has."

That earned him a brief smile which for the moment eased the soberness of her round face. Though one mittened hand rose self-consciously to cover the space where her front teeth used to be, her serious brown eyes remained longer on him this time. She'd never seen so many wrinkles in a face. He must have been grinning all his life to get lines so deep at the corners of his eyes and mouth.
"Learned that from your grandpa, I 'spose. Must nigh on to see your pa' lose everythin' way he did and not be able to help none. Leastwise kept the home place. Got a roof over your head. And your pa's still got his team."

Pat and Mike. Their warm brown backs were so broad, when she'd sat on them, her legs hadn't been long enough to get a grip. She'd had to work her fingers into their coarse manes and hold on tight.

"Good thing that. Your pa's one of them men's always got to have work to set his hands to . . . ."

She knew that was important--the work part. She didn't know why. Everyone kept saying the farm was gone but it was still there, not two miles from Grandfather's, with its windows blank, its porch up to the top step in snow, its barn full of hay but with no cows to feed on it. She didn't mind so much having to live with her grandparents but her mother must. She cried all the time. There were probably tears sealed inside the letter Mary Helen wore now, pinned inside her blouse. Mary Helen never cried. Everyone told her she dows blank ' its porch up to the top step in snow, its barn full of hay, but with no cows to feed on it. She didn't mind so much having to live with her grandparents but her mother must. She cried all the time. There were probably tears sealed inside the letter Mary Helen wore now, pinned inside her blouse. Mary Helen never cried. Everyone told her she must. She cried all the time. There were probably tears sealed inside the letter Mary Helen wore now, pinned inside her blouse. Mary Helen never cried. Everyone told her she mustn't get in the way, she told herself.

The drover must have read her mind for suddenly he cocked his head and peered at her with half-moon eyes. "You know," he said, "I'd knowed you for Lucas Buchanan's kid anywheres I'd seen you."

That brought a full-fledged grin, missing teeth forgotten. And by the time they first sighted smoke rising over the dark trees from the main camp, her jaws were aching from chewing spruce gum and her side hurt from laughing so hard at his tales of snow snakes and gorbie birds. She'd learned four new verses to "Comin' Round the Mountain" and had had a go at driving the team all by herself. She rose at first sight of Pat and Mike but then stood still as suddenly gone shy again in the confusion of sound and motion as four teams came in, one behind the other, and the crew, anxious to finish the week's work, attacked the heavy chains that bound the saw. Their shouts and laughter rang over the whine of the saw. That unfamiliar figure gave her a wave. She waved back. But she didn't run to meet him the way she'd thought she would. She mustn't get in the way, she told herself. That had been Grandfather's lecture all the way to town.

Heat met them at the door of the cookhouse, a barrier that had to be pushed through. It set her nose to running and her eyes to watering as she walked through the sawdust of biscuits and beans and wet wool from coats set too close to the stove. Her father put her jacket there, too--so small beside his. Then he silently held her hand in his strong calloused fingers as they waited in line for the wash basin. She tried to imitate the men, scooping the hot water up in her hands to douse her face but it ran up her chapped arms, setting them to itching and the harsh soap got in her eyes. She couldn't see well enough to pull the coarse roller towel down to a clean spot and she wouldn't use anyone else's place. "Your Mama's lectures finally sinkin' in," her father said gently as he reached over her shoulder to help. "Best see to your hair, too," he added and boosted her up to where she could view her flushed face in the mildewed mirror. Her short, fine hair was all askew from her twistings and turnings inside her hood. As she tried to smooth it into the long afternoon shadows of the clearing as if, as Dan'l boasted, "They was goin' to a fire."

Her father wasn't there to meet her. Dan'l had warned her he wouldn't be. As winter lengthened, so did the distance to the choppings. But Dan'l kept her busy helping him unharness the horses and bed them down in the makeshift sta
chest. But she wouldn’t tell him about the letter yet. She turned instead to look down the length of the oil-clothed table and wondered what the thin frosted cake that was set before every overturned tin plate could possibly taste like, for the cook was a man.

She ate the dark beans and drank the black tea but she thought about her mother’s soft raisin bread as the loud voices expanded in the heat around her. She was unbearably sleepy. Her father turned down the men’s offer of a card game. Rummy, they’d compromised, in honor of her visit. He zipped her into her jacket instead, kneeling down to pull the hood tight around her face. “Bet you sleep like a log tonight,” he said. She didn’t protest. “Take you to see where we found a bear holed up while they’re loadin’ in the morning,” he promised. She tried not to yawn. He understood.

“Get yourself a good night’s sleep, you hear?” Dan’l called to her from across the smoke-filled room. “Got six more verses of ‘Comin’ Round the Mountain’ to learn on the way home—less’n we get snowed in, of course. Been knowed to happen, you know.”

She thought about that. Outside, when her father lifted her up to his shoulders, it was the first thing she asked. “You think it’s goin’ to snow?”

“Don’t worry none.” His boots whined against the crust the way they used to as they’d walked from the barn to the house when chores had been done. But that had been so far away from here. The air was as sharp as a razor’s edge against her face. Her breath made frost against his woolen cap. Trees cracked—near and far. “Remember what that is?” her father asked.

She looked up at the pinpricks of brilliant light above treetops that rose lay as black and as sharp as the teeth of a well honed saw. “The stars snappin’,” she replied, going back to how he’d eased away her long ago fear of noises in the dark. Only it wasn’t noises that wouldn’t let go of her tonight. It was the deep silences that lay between.

He had built himself his own small camp close to the stables where he could better tend his team and keep his harnesses in repair. One lamp filled it with light. There was a small black stove, which he promptly lit, and one bench, a crudely fashioned table and a two-tiered bed. The gear he stored on the top bunk had already been moved aside to make room for her. He boosted her up and helped her out of her snowsuit. As she sat there with her legs hanging down over the edge, she was on a level with his gentle grey eyes. “You must’ve growed six inches since Christmas.”

“Figured there might be.”

He waited patiently while she struggled with the pin. “That wouldn’t be nail polish I see now, is it?” he teased, pretending to peer at her hands. “No,” she protested with a self-conscious grin and thrust the letter toward him.

He took it with both his hands. He paused, looking at it for a moment, then put it carefully into his pocket. He tucked her in and kissed her lightly, his beard scratching her face. “Sleep tight,” he smiled, with a playful pinch on her cheek.

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