Paradigm Lost: Voices from the Institute

Connecticut Writing Project
Summer Fellows
1992
Paradigm Lost:  
Voices from the Institute

by

Members of the  
Connecticut Writing Project  
Summer Institute 1992

Edited by Laura Hayden

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Storrs, CT  
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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:

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Parents Weekend

Carol Virostek

When the long distance call came, she simply collapsed in a heap on the dorm room floor. "You'll have to come home, hon. Your father's gone," was all she heard. She never really thought he'd die, not yet at least. Sure, he was dying, but people can be dying for a long time before they actually die.

And just yesterday the visiting nurse had reassured her, "Go ahead. He'll be fine for the weekend." Yes, yesterday had been a reasonably good day, compared to the ones he had when the pain medication did not work. So, despite the twinges of guilt, she felt safe in leaving. As much as her father needed her, her daughter did too. Parent's Weekend at a picturesque college in Vermont - a command performance for her and her husband and a blessed relief from her bedside vigil.

This day had been spectacular until the call came. A late September Saturday, the air crystal clear, the sun blazing - a little too warm for her liking - the blue topaz sky just perfect. Family photos, taken at several points on their hike up the mountain, preserved the image. The three of them grinning, arms around each other's shoulders, having raced into position just before the camera's automatic timer clicked the shutter. She'd almost been able to put him out of her mind for a few hours after dealing with her daughter's initial inquiry, "So, Mum, how's Grampy doing?" She told the girl the truth. "Grampy had a pretty good day yesterday, honey." And he had, although the woman had provided no specifics at this point. Once the phone call set an inexorable sequence of events into motion, she would have plenty of time to think about the previous day, which at this point seemed so distant.

All dressed up for a dinner they would have to forego, they piled into the car. For the first few hours of the drive she cowered in the back seat in stony silence. This was interrupted sporadically by primal sobs that welled up from her very core. During these outbursts she'd find herself curled up like a fetus, on the back seat, her leather womb. From this position she emitted long keening sounds not unlike the wails of childbirth. When the spasm was over, she would return to her upright position in the corner, wedged between the seat and the door. Sitting in the front, her husband and daughter stole glimpses of her over their shoulders and looked meaningfully at each other. But neither said a word, sensing the futility no doubt, and they focused quickly again on the road ahead.

Their first destination on this seemingly endless odyssey - a small college in northern New Hampshire. Here to retrieve their older daughter whose only advance notice was a cryptic phone call from her father. "Pack some things. We're going to Massachusetts. Mum and I will be there in a few hours." This child was so different from the other, who was as calm and even-tempered as her father. This one was her mother's child, a kindred spirit,
and so it was her mother who would provide the details.

Having deposited a few sorry belongings in her well worn back pack - nothing suitable for a funeral, she realized - the girl was waiting on the dilapidated front stoop when the family drove up. In one graceful, unbroken movement she embraced first her father then her sister - both of whom had emerged from the car as soon as it came to a halt - threw her back pack into the rear of the wagon, and scrambled into her mother's embrace in the back seat. "Oh, Mum," she cried. "Poor Grampy, poor us."

The girl's trembling gradually subsided as she focused her attention entirely upon her mother's voice. For as long as she could remember, her mother had comforted her in this very same way. She'd be enveloped in her mother's arms, in a rocking chair until she was way too big for it, and then the story, a different one each time, would begin. On this night, the movement of the car on the long, straight southern interstate was a soothing rhythm of another sort. But the voice in the darkness was the same, and the efficacy of the ritual held.

"Tell me about Grampy, Mum. When you called yesterday you said he was pretty good. What happened?"

There it was again - yesterday. She couldn't avoid it any longer. Yesterday, an ordinary day as she counted days from that nightmarish one that spring when she'd received "the news." Lung cancer, inoperable. Already metastasized to the bones. Not much to be done except pray, said her mother, and keep him as pain free as possible, offered the doctor. Yesterday, an ordinary day with new significance because now it had become THE LAST TIME - the last time she'd seen him, spoken with him, told him she loved him.

And as she began to tell her daughter about yesterday, it struck her with the power of a revelation that she remembered it in the minutest detail. What was most amazing was that she hadn't tried to preserve the memory, hadn't done anything special at all except be there, hadn't known for a moment that this was in fact the last time.

She was a wealth of information and spoke nonstop for the next two hours. In a low, even voice, she narrated the events, as emotionless as the Ancient Mariner and as compelled. It was as if she knew she would tell this story many times in the days to come, so this first telling had to be perfect. Her family sat as if transfixed, rapt in the spell she wove as the road ran on and on, mile after mile.

Yesterday played itself over in her mind like a movie on a wide screen. She could see it in living color. White metal hospital bed installed in the sun room, yellow walls made warmer by the brightness of the day. Silver oxygen tank clicking and sighing as if its breathing were as painful for it as for the patient. Sports page spread on the bed while she reads the scores aloud. The frail man - half sitting, half lying on the slanted bed - barely making an impression on the mattress. His head dropping in the middle of the article about his beloved Yankees. I'm losing him, she remembers thinking. But maybe he's just sleepy from the medication.

More images. Stroking his fine silver hair, which she had cut and washed and combed a few hours before. A flash of her leaning over and kissing his cool cheek. "Don't you want a shave today, Dad? You always feel better when you're clean shaven."

"No. I'll be okay. I'll wait till Uncle Taddy comes. He can do it later."

"I can try it. After all, you let me cut your hair."

"No, honey. It's okay. I'll be fine."

More little tasks for her. Straightening the bed, giving him his medicine a half hour earlier than she is supposed to, cranking the bed down a bit for his nap. A quick visit from the nurse, who speaks gently to him, checking his vital signs. Annoyance that she herself, his daughter, can barely feel his pulse whenever she tries. But the nurse is encouraging. "Go ahead. He'll be fine for the weekend." And then the nurse is gone. She's dreaded this moment, hating to tell him despite knowing what he'll say. Knowing that he means it doesn't make the telling any easier.

"Dad, I have to leave now. We're going to Vermont for Parents Weekend. With school back in session, I won't be able to see you until next weekend. I hate to go, but I hate to disappoint your granddaughter."

"Oh, you go. I wish I could come along. Don't worry about me. I'll be fine."

One last hug and a kiss on his forehead. A hasty exit to the kitchen before the inevitable tears brew. But before they do, she hears him call her name, an act which she knows takes inordinate effort. Half reluctantly, half gratefully, she returns to his side. "Aren't you going to shave me before you leave?" The cockeyed grin beneath the ugly oxygen tubes, a painful reminder of the way he once looked and laughed and lived.

"Sure, I'll give it a try. I'm game if you are. Do you trust me?"

And amazingly she does it, as if she's been doing it all her life. The basin, aerosol cream, and faithful old razor carefully arrayed on the breakfast tray.

Applying the foam, she caresses his face with her fingertips, tracing the sharp planes of his face and the pitiful jut of his jaw. With the skill of a sculptor she uses the razor to trim away the sparse stubble. A warm towel, a mirror held up before him, and then that cockeyed grin again.

"How'd I do, Dad?"
"Great. I knew you could."

"I've really got to leave now. I'm running late."

"Don't I get any aftershave? What kind of a barber are you?"

She locates the bottle, then splashes the lotion on his face, a heady masculine fragrance, which has always reminded her of him. "You'd better go now, honey," a tear at the corner of his eye.

"Bye, Dad. I love you."

"I love you too."

And the scene ends.

As she finished her tale with just a few miles to go, she had her second revelation. He knew it was the last time, and he wanted her to remember. That last intimate moment together was his gift to her. And she was grateful.

The Anatomy of a Reader Response

Martha Olbrych

I had never been to a serious poetry reading until two years ago. I was very much looking forward to an enjoyable evening when the invitation was made. It was talked about by a professor of my Literary Criticism course and she recommended that we attend so as to experience a new form of poetry. We had been involved with poetry at the time and I found myself taken away by the images, rhythm, rhyme, and free-form samples that I was exposed to. I never expected to have such a reaction to this new form of poetry, namely, "Language Poetry."

It was a Tuesday evening on the campus of Saint Joseph College in the Crystal room. Not your average room by anyone's standards. The humongous chandelier hovered over a most pristine setting with dark oak chairs arranged just so with formal drapery adorning the many paneled windows. There was a table bedecked with appetizers and wines for all to consume. The plastic glasses seemed out of sync in this luxurious setting.

The poets were sitting in the front row. They looked like poets, I recall thinking, as they were dressed flamboyantly with scarves and a variety of ethnic clothes were worn by a few. I was rather impressed by their personna and style thinking how wonderful it must be to actually be published.

As it was time to begin, the congregation quieted and the first poet was introduced. I immediately knew that this was not going to be a typical poetry reading. As he neared the podium he began to half-chant and half-sing, "Calling the muse...Calling the muse!", over and over until, I can only assume, the muse actually came. I snickered inwardly thinking, "now, this is different."

It wasn't until the third reading by another poet that I lost control. I felt a giggle well up inside of me that grew into a monster that I had to keep contained. I looked down but couldn't keep it in. Without making a sound I proceeded to shake violently with laughter. Tears filled my eyes and I proceeded to lose it. My friend elbowed me and I still couldn't stop. By this time tears were streaming down my face. I didn't know what to do. If I got up I would have attracted even more attention to myself. I stayed seated and pinched myself hoping that the pain I inflicted upon myself would make me more serious. It didn't. Eventually, I did calm down and resumed my original composure, but the damage was done. My professor saw me laughing and one of the poets did too. I was never so embarrassed in all of my adult life.

This is the behavior I am going to attempt to analyze. What is it that made me respond in such an inappropriate manner? Before I begin to answer, it is fitting at this point to attempt to reproduce the poetry that I was subjected to. I remember thinking that it
seemed to be a series of words that, in my opinion, had no connection of which I was aware. Perhaps it was the poets' stream of consciousness that they felt compelled to write down for others to appreciate. It went something like this:

   My mother's kitchen....the panes on the windows....
   VULVA! (screamed) the dog is....the weary are....
   Freedom....cars can be red.... (etc.).

In the beginning I was earnestly searching for meaning and significance, but fruitless was my attempt. Perhaps I shouldn't have had the glass of wine on an empty stomach. My physical side was weak and weary, as it had already been a full day for me. Two glasses of wine is generally my limit so already I was in trouble. So much for the physical aspect of my explanation.

Intellectually, I was in a state of disequilibrium. The same state of mind I used to experience in Algebra II. The information was very new and my brain simply could not reconcile this new information. My left brain and right brain must have been having a duel and the only means of coping I could come up with was laughter. I imagine my right brain was titillated by the colorful words and associations, but my left side simply could not comprehend. The cross signals between the two hemispheres were having it out, if that is indeed possible.

Another reason is probably because my background didn't include such avant-garde prose. Growing up in the inner-city, and being quite a street urchin myself, my priorities didn't include the acquisition of an appreciation of poetry. This could have been developed had the school system thought of it as important. Unfortunately, at that time, the development of skills in the realm of Language Arts focused not on quality literature, but on the mechanics of grammar and phonics. I remember doing dittos till I was dizzy. The only exciting aspect of getting a new ditto to complete was anticipating its freshness and hoping it was so we could smell the strong odor of the purple-blue ink.

Emotionally, perhaps I was insecure about being in this setting. I was surrounded by professors, visiting community leaders, college administrators, and excellent students, thinking, "What am I doing here?" Of course I had a right to be there, I was after all, invited. I too can be an excellent student and my 3.4 grade point average was proof of that. I was close to the point of being certified as a teacher and have been a community leader as well. Why the insecurity? The years of unfortunate incidents are long gone at this point in my life. I have much more to celebrate than to commiserate.

Towards the end of the evening as people were beginning to go their separate ways, my professor approached me with a wide grin and said, "At least your response was an honest one." She herself is a reader response critic of literature. One of the poets smiled at me and commented, "I could tell that you were having a good time." What did she mean by that? I smiled at her and bid her good night. I wonder if I hurt her feelings or if she was used to that sort of reaction. I wished I could have talked to her about it, but I didn't have the courage.

I have attempted to analyze my reaction in the physical, intellectual, and emotional terms. I wonder if I were to attend another poetry reading and be exposed once again to Language Poetry, would I respond in the same manner? If I didn't drink the wine and immersed myself in that style of poetry until I developed an appreciation for it would I respond differently? Maybe I would and maybe I wouldn't. But at this point in my life I have other more significant events that require my attention and if there is ever another opportunity to attend a poetry reading in which Language Poetry is being featured, I think that I shall graciously decline the invitation, and snicker inwardly.
The strike was over and the teachers were back in school. Not much was different for Jacob. The winter winds swept the loose pebbly grains from the caked snow leaving patches of black top vulnerable to the February elements. The sea of yellow school buses, like yellow jackets engulfing their hive, encircled the school, emptying its human cargo. Among the 1600 students sluggishly filtering their way through the entrance, Jacob found himself moving with the herd. He knew that most of these students were coming back to school for the first time in two weeks, and he was envious because he had gone to school despite the obstacles. Jacob knew that staying home was not part of his destiny and never questioned his mother's decision. Jacob, the record holder for elementary perfect attendance certificates, had adjusted himself to the idea that little boys belong in school. It was his mother's decision. Jacob, the record holder for elementary perfect attendance certificates, had adjusted himself to the idea that little boys belong in school. It is your education that matters most," Jacob's mother told him often, and he knew that nothing would get in his way—not even a strike.

Each day during those two weeks, he walked down the empty halls, their floors cluttered only by the shapeless dull white salted footprints, and into the classroom manned by parent volunteers, women just like his mother who felt it their mission to maintain continuity during the strike. Jacob did not comprehend the ordeal. For him much stayed the same as it had always been. There were the nightly homework assignments and the daily exercises in grammar, reading, science, and math.

Mr. Barker, Jacob's social studies teacher, stayed to teach those few students forced to go to school during the two-week strike. Jacob liked him better during those two weeks. He seemed nicer than those parent volunteers. With a reduction in class size, from 33 to six, Mr. Barker appeared more relaxed and even managed a smile or two. The fact that Jacob's mother spoke fondly of Mr. Barker each morning while Jacob devoured his frosted strawberry Pop Tart, describing him as a man with conviction, made his social studies teacher into a character of mythical proportions in the eyes of Jacob. Jacob wasn't sure what his mother meant by conviction, but he knew his mother thought it made Mr. Barker a good teacher.

Mr. Barker had only one ground rule: he would not comment on or discuss the strike. This was fine with Jacob, because truthfully, he didn't think much of the strike. Strikes only made people angry and bitter, and there were more important things to think and dream about.

Actually, Jacob's only unsettling experience occurred each day during those brief moments when his mother drove by the broken line of teachers as she dropped Jacob off and picked him up at school. The faces of the strikers, this disordered assembly, bothered him. Teachers were not supposed to be disordered in Jacob's world. They were not supposed to look angry. They didn't look right holding signs--signs with slogans: Teachers on Strike. Mrs. Frawly, with her frosted silver hair, should have been holding an open copy of Ethan Frome in front of the class. Instead she stood outside alone, a strand of hair blowing across her nose, holding a sign. To Jacob she looked cold and out of place.

His uneasiness gently faded, and a faint smile grew on his face as he recalled the events of October when his Mets turned the year of 1969 into a year of miracles. Jacob loved miracles, especially when they involved his Mets. Jacob remembered the first and only time he had been taken out of school early. His father met Jacob in the General Office to take him to see a World Series game. "And we're off to Shea Stadium—as easy as that," Jacob whispered to himself in exuberance. Jacob remembered how unusual it was to see his father in school. He appeared out of place, but Jacob was too excited to dwell on such matters; he was going to see Tom Seaver pitch against the Baltimore Orioles in the World Series.

It was a cold morning when Jacob looked out of the passenger window and saw the striking teachers clad in their overcoats, huddled in little groups jumping sporadically tiny bounces to keep warm. But it was that October game that Jacob saw. Tom Seaver's win over the awesome Orioles, Tom Swoboda's out-of-body experiences in right field, and J.C. Martin's mystical journey to first base. These were things of which miracles were made. It was baseball that mattered most to Jacob. It didn't matter to him if he had stayed home or went to school as his mother demanded. He still dreamed about the same things. The faces on the picket line were from a different world than Jacob's. He had no place to store those faces in his world—a world with baseball, Beatle songs, and the security of his family.

After two weeks, the teachers and students were back. The bus stopped two blocks from Jacob's house as it always had. And the old bus stop faces and personalities were broken into the same cliques. Jacob stood alone, a floater between the groups of adolescents, attached to no one and nothing but his dreams. He hummed to himself familiar songs only for them to reverberate and suddenly die within his closed mouth.

The cliques dissolved and a small river flowed upstream as the students climbed aboard a bus for the first day back to school. Walking through the halls that day, Jacob saw small groups of teachers gathered in various places while he went from one class to the next. He was more concerned with making his way through the wall of students than listening to the topics of discussion. But at times he couldn't help but hear fragments of ubiquitous dialogue. "How 're we gonna get through this Taylor Law?" "They can't do this to us; can they?" "Those bastards are taking more money out of my pockets!" "I got to pay them four weeks for bein' out two?" "Let them throw me in jail." To Jacob it all sounded like grown-ups complaining about their lives. They were always doing that. He wondered, "Couldn't they find more interesting things to talk about?"

It seemed to Jacob that the only teacher not among one group or another was Mr. Barker. He was in his classroom when Jacob's class filtered through the door. Social Stu-
dies was just before lunch, a perfect time to think about baseball tryouts next month. He worried about how he was going to run around the entire field three times. It angered him to think that he had to do such things to make a baseball team. What did running around a field three times have to do with baseball anyway? Jacob couldn't wait to get his glove oiled and tie the baseball inside the mitt to develop that extra good pocket—to get the winner's edge.

Trying out for the team really scared Jacob. He feared failure, and coach Bosco was one who broke many dreams, especially Jacob's dreams. Jacob had that secret knowledge that coach Bosco hated him. He couldn't prove it, but he knew, and suspected his parents knew as well, though his friends scoffed at the idea. Coach Bosco broke Jacob's dream last year when Jacob's name did not appear on the list of those who made the Junior High Baseball Team. He looked at the list hanging on coach Bosco's door from the middle of the printout to the end and back, name by name, to the list's first name. Jacob found nothing that even resembled his name, and his heart sank. He was defeated. This year he was ready to try again, but the running scared him. The bell rang, and the students moved from Mr. Barker's class to lunch.

The line of young adolescents, bouncing their backsides against the cinder block, sluggishly moved toward the open door where the lunch ladies scooped the rice and poured the salty sauce with mysterious chunks onto anonymous plates with the orchestrated motion of synchronized swimmers. Right hand grabbed the plate; left hand jerked the rice from the scoop; right hand then poured the sauce. The menu on the wall above Jacob's head identified today's mysterious chunks as turkey. Jacob liked the turkey. Finally, Jacob made it to the door. He reached to where the trays were stacked and grabbed one, assuming his position holding his tray against his hungry stomach. He continued his daily argument with his friend who stood to Jacob's left. Jacob again insisted to Andrew that the Mets were in fact the superior team. "What have the Yankees done lately?" Jacob liked to ask.

As the discussion continued, Mr. Connors, a science teacher in white lab coat and horn rimmed glasses who was deep in thought, walked into Jacob's tray. Jacob barely noticed the tray as it nudged into his abdomen. Undisturbed by the teacher's callous disregard, Jacob turned to more important matters—the discussion with Andrew. To Mr. Connors, the tray which Jacob held represented the last obstacle. "The strike was one thing, but now this kid is blocking my access to my lunch, the one last thing they can't take away from me—my lunch." He felt the sting of Jacob's tray swell within him as he charged the young boy, the hand poised, stiff, every nerve stretched like millions of rubber bands on the verge of breaking. Jacob was the obvious target.

Jacob's face felt the sudden violent impact of a hand coming across it. His head jerked in the opposite direction of his glasses darting to the floor, crash landing against Andrew's foot. Jacob lay on the floor momentarily paralyzed, dazed in disbelief. No one had ever hit him before, not even his brothers. Not even his friend Andrew after their zillionth argument.

Andrew's shaking hand delivered the bent glasses to its owner as Jacob rose to his feet, clinging to the tray stand for support. As he stood Jacob saw the back of Mr. Connors as his white coat blended into the sun glaring through the cafeteria windows. Kids he had never seen before asked Jacob, "Why did he hit you? What did you do?" Jacob could not answer them, and he shivered as he shrugged his shoulders. The tears would not come. It was finally clear to Jacob what had happened. "Mr. Connors hit me. He slapped me across the face. He knocked me across the floor." Jacob continued to stand in wonder, comforted by his friend Andrew, as other students went to get the Vice Principal.

Jacob could only remember the sudden sting of the hand that slapped him across his face. It was an angry hand, a bitter hand, a hand that knew that the world was a dangerous and hostile place. Jacob now also realized that the world could be a dangerous and cruel place, even in school, even within close proximity to his best friend, even during this year of miracles.
The Right School

Stella Holmes

The selection committee from the Pleasant Branch School Board has chosen Miss Charlotte Moore to become the head teacher at the Pleasant Branch School (Grades 1-6), in Pleasant Branch, South Carolina.

Miss Moore, a recent graduate from the prestigious Crickett Point Academy, had been given superb recommendations from the headmaster to teach school in this rural southeastern town.

As for Miss Moore, she was quite inspired and filled with a deep sense of honor. The school board had received numerous resumes from other interested candidates, equally qualified, but she was the one that emerged as the most effective person for this particular position.

Her roles would include such jobs as administrator, custodian, guidance counselor, and social worker. Even though these were many roles to assume as a dedicated teacher, this was the most honored position in this community, second only to the minister.

Intuitively, Miss Moore looked up from the desk, smiled, and glanced all around the interior of the pine oblong-shaped structure of the entire school building. The ceiling had exposed beams, and cabinets had been installed alongside the wooden walls for the storage of books and other school supplies.

The school was built with eight paneled windows, four on each side, logistically installed to allow the Carolina sun to disperse enough light throughout the inner areas of the classroom. The design of this school was built around the stove and chimney which were placed in the center aisle for balanced heat distribution. In the back of the classroom a large blackboard occupied the wall and installed on the left side of the blackboard was the American Flag.

The arrangement of the classroom furniture took an excessive amount of time. Attention was focused on the six padded, movable, slatted-backed benches, 54 inches in length, which hugged all of the available areas along the two walls. An equal number of work tables, 54 inches in length, were matched and placed in front of the benches. This arrangement was checked carefully to ensure that all 12 students would have an adequate amount of comfortable work areas to perform academic tasks and projects.

It seemed most sensible to place grades one, two, and three along one aisle, and grades four five, and six in the other section. But, throughout the school year, the opportunity could be provided for students to change their seats and to move to other sections of the room.

Students were expected to arrive daily by 8:45 a.m., and formal class instruction would commence at 9:00 a.m. A bell would ring to warn students to prepare for announcements and other plans for the day. The beginning of school would commence with a respectful salute to the American Flag. One hour was given for lunch and recess.

In addition to the basic curriculum, daily projects and other activities had been incorporated into her plan which included crafts, wooden projects, outside nature projects, sewing, and cooking. This was a great place for students to grow and develop talents in different areas. Continuous thoughts and ideas flashed through Miss Moore's mind repeatedly, as to how, as head teacher, she would create, motivate, and stimulate the students with a variety of learning experiences.

This region was not affluent. Supplies were limited, and very little materials came from public funds. These few were ordered just after Miss Moore was hired.

The morning was quite busy, but a great deal of work was accomplished and completed. Miss Moore realized there were many more things to do, but guidelines were set to work from an agenda. This was a strategy that would be used from day to day and she discovered that it helped to achieve all of the goals planned each day.

While these thoughts raced through her mind, her eyes glanced up and over toward the first paneled window. She observed a blue car and a gentleman removing some boxes from the trunk of the car.

Inside the classroom she walked from the desk and over toward the front door, and opened it cautiously. This unknown person, from his clothes, probably was a minister. The man was neatly dressed in a black suit, white shirt, black tie, black shoes, and a black hat. The stranger continued to pull out large boxes from the trunk of the vehicle, then turned around, and proceeded to walk slowly toward the large front door entrance of the school building.

Miss Moore stood outside of the door and said, "Good morning, sir."

The stranger responded with a pleasant smile and said, "Welcome to Pleasant Branch School, Miss Moore. My name is John Chapman, and I have been working very closely with the county superintendent to improve the school problems that we have in this area. As you may have already known from my appearance, I am also a minister."

Meanwhile, Miss Moore was speechless because the minister was the most honored person in this district.
"It is my civic duty to see that classroom supplies are delivered to this school whenever you need certain equipment for the school," the Reverend Chapman said.

"Your kindness is appreciated greatly, and I have already begun to feel quite comfortable in this new school as well as the environment," replied Miss Moore.

"You are already well known by everyone because of the position you hold in this community. When you assumed the position of headteacher, you also became part of the region. I understand you will be living in Mrs. Collins' Boardinghouse?" he said.

Her answer was only a polite, "Yes," because she was really caught off guard to have a complete stranger, a minister, reveal this information about things not related to school. But she was very happy to meet this gentleman.

"Here are some books from the district. They cover a wide range of subjects. I have a copy of the curriculum and the books to get your programs started for the school year. So, Miss Moore, there are people in this region who are interested in expanding the education programs," the Reverend Chapman stated.

"You know, I never really thought about this area not having additional grades beyond grade six. As a matter of fact, my parents have always sent me to a private school. There are things in life that we automatically take for granted," she replied.

"Thanks for taking this position because you will inspire our youths in more ways than you will ever know," said Reverend Chapman. "This is an enjoyable conversation, but I must end it, reluctantly. Perhaps I will see you at the Big Meeting on Sunday?"

"What's a Big Meeting?" she said to herself.

The Rev. Chapman turned around after hearing the comment from her and said, "Oh, I forgot that you are from Charleston and probably don't call it that at your church. A Big Meeting is nothing more than a church gathering which is a big celebration given each year by individual churches in this section of the state. Entire families participate - parents, children, and even relatives come from other areas and get involved in these Big Meetings. So, Miss Moore, the next Big Meeting will be held at Antioch Christian Church, three miles from here on Sunday. If you should be there, I will ask you to stand and say a few words about the school concerns. As I have said previously, you are an official member in this community."

Miss Moore smiled and felt somewhat overwhelmed because this was the first time anyone had ever wanted to make her feel comfortable and become a part of a friendly group.

"Goodbye, Miss Moore."
Leaving the Nest

Tania McNaboe

I call my parents fairly frequently. Usually it's just to check in and say hello, see what they're up to. They're both retired and when they have the time, sometimes they call me too. It's an unwritten rule but during these conversations we usually try not to talk about anything too heavy or thought-provoking. Instead, my mom and I have marathon discussions about life-moving issues such as deciding what she should wear to an upcoming family event or assessing her suspicions about why her kitchen floor is getting darker. (She is almost certain that it's wax build-up but is wary about telling my father who assumed the floor washing duties after her first hip operation five years ago.)

One day in early spring she calls to tell me that a bird has built a nest in the hemlock bushes next to their deck. "It's got four eggs in it," she says and then describes how much fun she and my dad have watching the mother fly back and forth from the nest. Much to my surprise, the topic, enhanced by the excitement in her voice, is sort of interesting.

Every phone conversation after the first bird report includes an update on the development of the nesting family. One day there is a message on my answering machine. "The mother hasn't been around for a while. Should we worry?" my mom asks, sounding worried.

A few days later she reports, "Just wanted to let you know, the mom was here again today. I am so relieved." (So am I.)

Finally, I get the news that the eggs have hatched and I stop by after work to visit. My mother greets me in the kitchen, kisses me hello and whispers, "Come here, you can see them now."

I am honored. Free admission. She opens the slider and motions for me to step outside. In the middle of the deck, a plastic chair sits facing in the direction of the bushes. I hesitate. I don't want to startle the poor babies, certainly not with my mother hovering so closely behind. I look desperately for the homestead but since I had never seen the nest before, I don't know where to look.

"There, there," my mother whispers. She jabs her finger impatiently in front of my face.

Suddenly, a robin flies out of the bushes. I jump back. "Oh!" says Mom. "Now you've scared her away."

I shrug my shoulders, one of those gestures which is a mixture of childlike guilt and...
this drives me crazy, I love my dad for this protectiveness. I think it's sweet.

Smiling at him I answer, "I'm sure the mother knows what she is doing."

He looks at me and walks away. I know he doesn't believe me. I am doubting the security of the nest myself. But doesn't the mother know what she is doing? By sheer instinct? After all, she is not like human parents who can reason, make choices and, like all humans, make mistakes.

The next week I stop over my parents' house again. In a matter of days the bird babies have grown from infants to young adults capable of caring for themselves. I find this impressive. So quick and trouble free. No terrible twos. No adolescent trauma or parent support-group sessions. Wandering out onto the deck I see the empty home, still safely intact in the hemlock branches. I am relieved to see that the seemingly fragile home has survived the onslaught of the growing bird family. What happens now, I wonder. A realtor puts up a sign?

I go back inside and sit down in the kitchen with my parents, "Did you see the birds leave?" I ask. My mother stares forlornly at her hands and turns them slowly round and round in her lap. She explains how, one morning, she noticed that two of the birds were gone. She then describes how she and my father spent the day watching both of the remaining birds fly away, away from their lives.

She softly murmurs, "I think I felt worse when that last bird left than I did when the last of you children left home." I just sit there and stare at my mother. I am almost certain that she is about to cry but I don't know what to say. My dad, sitting in his corner chair, nods slowly and bends over to pick up the newspaper. Since this is his usual mannerism intended to halt any pending emotional outburst, I am surprised when he pauses. "Maybe you should write a story about those birds," he says.

His words shock me. What does he think, I'm a writer? Suddenly, as I consider the significance of his request, I feel strange, lightheaded. Related memories spill out from within and circle around my head waiting for me to assemble them in some sort of recognizable pattern. I see a picture of my parents, 44 years ago, as they make their dramatic leap from their home in Europe to come to the United States. This is followed by a picture of myself preparing to leave for college, alone with my packed boxes in the front yard. I look up to see my father pulling into the driveway. He steps out of his truck and gazes at me for what seems like an eternity and then, without a word, he reaches into the paper grocery bag and pushes a package of napkins into my hand. At first all I see is the bright red 'reduced' sticker. Then I notice the pattern. A large yellow and red bumblebee flies across the paper and the bold caption underneath exclaims, "Don't buzz off." As I hug my dad, the plastic covering protects the bees from my tears.

This thought triggers another and I see myself nearly four years later, now in my senior year at college. I am sitting at the base of the Christmas tree, silver tinsel clenched in one hand and Kleenex in the other. I am sobbing, frightened about graduating in the spring and saddened by the realization that it is my last Christmas at home before I leave my parents for good and live life on my own. My mother kneels down to hold me and chase away my fears. Although she is trying to make me laugh by saying silly things, I steal a look at her and watch the tears roll, silently down her cheeks.

Finally, I am back in the present, back in my parents' kitchen. I look up at my father who is waiting for my response, unaware of the miles I have traveled, launched by his innocent words. In that moment, the memories fall softly into place and I am left with a wonderful understanding about my golden-aged parents -- despite the years of life behind them and their fear of the future ahead, they still have the courage to continue to love, despite the pain of inevitable separation. And even though I am so afraid of losing them, I realize that it is the memories which I have stored in my mind like snapshots in a family album which will keep them alive forever. And I feel blessed because I have learned yet another valuable lesson about the enduring power of love -- we need it to take the leap, let go of the nest and continue with life. Because without love, you go nowhere. But with it you can soar.

"No, Daddy," I finally say. "The story is really about you and Mom."
Learning to Care for Peter

Cheryl Cassidy

Before I began teaching, I had imagined growing close to students. I visualized my students' beaming faces as we shared reactions to literature or journal entries. But I hadn't imagined growing close to a student who did little but antagonize me; I hadn't thought I could care for a student who failed to bring anything positive to the classroom.

Peter was a short boy with dark cropped hair and unkempt clothes. He wore the same four or five outfits continually. When I talked to him, the gaze of his brown eyes flitted around the room, seeking to look at anything but my face. It was apparent even without checking his records that this was a troubled child. He found it impossible to stay seated at his desk, even for the duration of morning homeroom. He would poke at another student's bookbag or write on another's sneakers. During homeroom at the end of the day he would sometimes crawl under a desk and sit there, not saying a word to anyone. Or he would make himself a dunce cap out of composition paper. Other days he would act completely withdrawn and keep himself remote from everyone around him.

Peter was being evaluated by the school psychologist for possible entry into a residential psychiatric program. As I attended meetings on his case, I learned that his mother had quit her job because Peter was frequently placed on out-of-school suspension and she did not trust him at home alone. His mother reported that Peter had always been a problem, even as a baby. She said he was spoiled at three weeks old, so she had to leave. His mother threatened his parents and had assaulted his sister. The summer before the current school year he had taunted the family dog to the point where the dog had bit him. The guidance counselor later told me that Peter probably deserved it.

Peter was an infuriating student to have in class. He was aware that at any time the State might pull him out of class and place him in a special program, so he never put any effort into schoolwork. This gave him lots of time to pester other students. His classmates did not seem to understand that Peter suffered severe emotional and psychological problems. Rather, they seemed to give him little regard at all. If he did not irritate them by stealing a pen or hiding their books, they did not talk to him.

Often during class while the others were busily attending to their writing assignment, I would watch Peter stare out the window. I would watch him until he looked at me, and then I would smile. He would immediately look away. Other times I would look up from my own writing and catch him watching me intently. I felt there was some connection between us, but because he would neither talk nor write to me, there was little I felt I could do to ease his isolation.

Peter was in my fourth period language arts class, which was the last period before lunch, and the time in the day when both teachers and students were often at their crankiest. One day in January Peter came into class with a smile on his face. He was chatting happily with the other students. In fact the whole class was rather noisy. While I was attempting to explain an assignment for the fourth or fifth time, Peter uncharacteristically interrupted me. "We're supposed to be working on our research papers, and you want us to do this other assignment too?" he asked.

I exploded in anger and frustration. "Well, Peter," I yelled. "Since you don't ever do your work anyway, what difference should it make to you?"

Peter looked shocked. A grimace crept across his face and he lifted one hand to cover his eyes. Other students chuckled. I had stripped away his carefully constructed facade of being one of them. I watched this boy fight back tears.

As much as I wanted to stop everything to apologize, I felt forced to get the rest of the class back on task. Ten minutes later when students were working quietly, I asked Peter to meet with me in the hallway. Accustomed as I was to his refusal to do as he was told, I was somewhat surprised when he rose from his seat. But the moment for intervention had passed. His jaw was set and his eyes were cold. He turned his back to me and faced the lockers. His bony shoulders stuck out of his shirt. My apology could not remove the pain that I had caused him.

Weeks passed and the incident was forgotten for more immediate concerns. Peter continued his daily antics in the classroom, especially during seventh period study hall. It was impossible to accomplish any work without having to look up to check on Peter's whereabouts. He wandered the room relentlessly. He would scribble on someone's homework, drag a pen across the bulletin board, or throw an eraser out the three-story window. When I would attempt to monitor students in the hallway, I would sometimes look back into the room and see Peter hanging out the window from his waist.

In the teacher's room I bemoaned my ill-luck at having Peter for seventh-period study hall.

"You want to switch kids?" asked Mr. Sweeney, the science teacher.

"You'd take him after everything I've said?"
"I don't see that in the kid. He's always quiet for me," he replied.

"Well, I'll think about it. Maybe he'll calm down," I said, not quite ready to send Peter from my room. Mr. Sweeney's comment made me wonder if I was unconsciously doing something to antagonize Peter which encouraged him to act up. I decided to ask the school psychologist.

"Peter feels safe with you. That's why he behaves with less inhibitions in your classroom," she told me. "You know, some of these children you just want to take home with you. This boy just never got enough love. Do you feel that way?"

"Yes, I do," I said. I tried to say more, but my throat hurt from holding back tears.

Days passed and Peter remained in my homeroom. For the most part he had quieted down. He even turned in a draft of his research paper. The draft was quite short but it showed evidence of some effort and ability. It was the first piece of writing he had done for me that was not full of references to death and violence. Maybe, I thought, he's coming around.

In February, however, his behavior worsened. He became uncontrollable at the end of the day. No longer content to pace the classroom, he would run from corner to corner, throwing whatever was handy. It was more than I could take. On one such afternoon Mr. Sweeney happened to walk into the classroom.

"Mr. Sweeney," I said tersely. "Peter--is yours."

"Okay, that's fine. Come on, Peter, you're coming with me."

I knew that Mr. Sweeney was more than willing to accept Peter into his study hall because it meant that he would send me a student who was a misfit in his room, someone who wasn't cooperating. It was not until Mr. Sweeney escorted Peter from my room that my anger cooled enough for me to consider what I had done. I was chagrined to imagine Peter immediately replaced with another troubled and troublesome student, but I was more acutely aware of Peter's reaction to my hasty decision. He had looked at me in disbelief and with some other emotion I wasn't sure I could name.

If I leaned forward at my desk I could spot his new seat across the hall in Mr. Sweeney's room. But Peter wasn't looking at me. He was staring down at the desk, looking desolate and forlorn. There was nothing to be done.

The very next morning I found a note from the guidance counselor in my mailbox: "Peter Daniels. Transfer to the Children's Center effective at the close of school today. Student has been informed." I clutched the note in my hand and walked upstairs to my classroom. My initial reactions were disbelief that after so many months the State was actually about to commit Peter to a residential program, regret that I had so recently rejected him by thrusting him from my classroom, sadness, because I would miss him, and a small portion of hope that this change might help him.

During fourth period I took Peter's class to the library. I attempted to talk to Peter, but he would move away as soon as I approached. He went through the motions of researching an oral report, apparently not telling any of his classmates that this was to be his last day.

At lunch time I crafted a card out of white paper and a picture of a lion cut from a magazine. The lion held a heart that read, "You make me roar." And I wrote a short message: "Dear Peter, I know you find it difficult to speak to me, but I couldn't let you go without telling you how much I care about you. I hope this new school will help you. Since you won't be with us for Valentine's Day, here's some candy. I'll miss you. Write me a letter if you want to. I'd love to hear from you. Mrs. Cassidy" I stuck the card into an envelope with three pieces of bubble gum.

I didn't know if Peter would accept my letter, but I was going to try. As students awaited dismissal, I approached Mr. Sweeney's classroom and said matter-of-factly, as if I had come to see several students, "Mr. Sweeney, may I see Peter for a moment? Let's see, who else, no, that's it for now." The ruse worked. Peter came into the hallway.

"Peter," I stammered. "I just couldn't let you go without telling you how much..." He was watching me intently and my eyes filled with tears. He turned from me as if to rush back into the classroom. "Peter, just read the note."

I thrust the envelope into his hands and returned to my own classroom, busying myself at my desk to avoid the curious looks of other students. Would he throw the envelope into the wastebasket? Would he open it and read the letter? Would he take the candy and throw the rest away? I needed to know. I walked back towards the hallway.

"Bus S. Lincoln Street." The secretary's voice came over the P.A. system. I looked up in time to see Peter rushing down the stairwell, and I could see he was chewing a wad of gum.

"Goodbye! Goodbye, Peter!" I yelled down the stairwell. "Good luck!"

Later that afternoon I mentioned to Mr. Sweeney that I had given Peter a note wishing him well.

"That poor kid," he said.

"Peter probably threw it out," I said.
"No, he'll keep that note forever," Mr. Sweeney replied with certainty.

I wonder if he has.

A Man, His Wife, and a Boat

Jane Giulini

The new sailboat stood gleaming at the dock. Tied at all four corners and then some to the staunch, weathered pilons, the 28 foot sloop in glistening black looked like a bucking bronco, just "itching" to be set free. Its owner saw the boat sometimes as bronco, sometimes as shrine, sometimes as mistress. It was, despite personal feelings at any one moment, waiting to be tested. Short sails up and down the sound were uneventful; this boat handled well. In sailor jargon that means those on board did not fear imminent death at all times. The sailor's last boat had been smaller and very tender; that is to say his family was not impressed. As any boat passed by, his first boat had responded by rocking temenously from gunnel to gunnel or side to side. Looking down into the swirling, whirlpool-like wakes, his wife had threatened nothing short of divorce. His younger son had cried, and everyone had felt a need to have rosary beads in a pocket for quick reference.

So it was, then, that the proud new boat owner was anxious to get out beyond the Sound - into the broader waters to points unknown. In Connecticut that means just one thing - a trip to Block Island. Men on the dock, that little community formed every summer by summer people, urged the sailor on. The Season, they explained, "begins every year at Block." Graciously they invited his entire family to join the armada about to make the pilgrimage the next day.

Reactions were mixed. His young son responded with, "O.K., but I'll sail with Renee on DAWNGREETER." The sailor, sensing his son's insecurity, agreed. His older son felt more confident. His wife, the realist, warned, "Have you listened to the marine forecast? What does Renee say about this weather?" Renee was the sailing guru of the dock, a very comforting neighbor for a neophyte.

"Stop worrying," the sailor responded. "Have faith," he snapped in obvious frustration. "Maybe we should have bought a camper. We could sit in a trailer park somewhere and everyone would be happy."

Dawn broke the next day in continued gloom. Low hanging clouds dripped like steam in a sauna. Men paced the dock like expectant fathers, while wives tended to curl up with summer reading in hopes that this frustration called Memorial Day Weekend would soon pass. By afternoon the tension had reached obvious heights; the men more resembled snorting cows at feeding time than the staid grey-suited professionals they were during three seasons of the year. All eyes focused on both sky and horizon. Suddenly - as though an act of God - a glimmer of light, surely a sign from the heavens, shone through.

With a maniacal fervor held in check for eight months - or about 241 days and 11 hours - Renee and the sailor scurried eagerly to collect their crews, ready the boats, and
set sail for Block, the little bit of "paradise" 30 miles away from land. With nerves in check and Dramamine in stomach, the sailor's crew reluctantly unleashed their boat from the protective pilons and watched as they slowly left the safety of the shipyard.

Sailing to Block Island from Mystic, Connecticut involves a long and winding motor down the curving and picturesque Mystic River. On a clear day, one thinks he is wending his way down a living, linear postcard, with its view far more wide-reaching than anyone on land can envision. On a foggy day the river can be a tortuous, frightening trip through a Fun House - a house of horrors - at an amusement park. The latter was the scene that Memorial Day weekend. "Watch for the buoys," the sailor commanded. "Don't you remember port means left? Do I have to do EVERYTHING on this boat?" Nervously his wife and son scurried with adrenaline pumping wildly - to be ready to respond to any command.

"This certainly doesn't look too wise," answered his wife. Considered to be galley slaves traditionally, seasoned wives of sailors would know that such inferred pleas for sanity generally go unheard. "Do you think we should turn back?" she asked with a tone of resignation.

"Not a problem," the sailor responded. "We know this will clear off Watch Hill." His image was that of a Norman Rockwell character, standing tall, Greek sailor's cap adorning his head, gazing pensively at the horizon beyond. Following his example, both crew members, although feeling inadequate, sat silently frozen in the cockpit.

The passage around Watch Hill, Rhode Island, is like a one-way trip through Hell's Gate on a stormy day. When the tide rips into the open, unlimited boundaries of the Atlantic, boats do resemble bucking broncos as they toss and lunge through powerful currents, dodging treacherous lobster trap buoys, the Scylla-like snares of modern man. As FLASH, the unseasoned sloop captained by the sailor, entered those waters, its crew became keenly aware that perhaps the decision to set out for Block had not been prudent. Too fearful to speak, they tightly gripped winches and braced their legs against the seats as they felt the boat lunging with the overwhelming force of every wave.

Once beyond Watch Hill there is no turning back. Any sailor knows that he must follow the dictates of Mother Nature. She states clearly that to buck a tide is not only dangerous, it is futile. With his younger son aboard the other sloop, the sailor felt doubly compelled to venture on.

Suddenly it seemed that the trip through the most horrific Fun House would be a pleasure. Fog rolled in and blanketed the seas like an unravelling roll of cotton and visibility dropped to fifty feet. Seas became confused and the boat, suddenly miniscule, tossed about side to side and front to back. Waves rose to seven feet and seemed to engulf it with every pulsatng and random surge. The name DAWNGREETER became the beacon of as it pushed ahead in and out of the sailor's view. Straining to make conditions aboard FLASH more comfortable, he commanded his son to go forward and drop the jib, the smaller sail at the bow of the boat. Today, the son noted, that meant the sail at the very front and bouncing part. In seamanly fashion he quickly responded. Holding onto anything, the boy carefully took hold of the sail to release it; simultaneously a wave of seemingly tsunami-height hit with such force that he appeared to be airborne. Clenching the sail, he crawled back to the cockpit, looking very ashen, and went below. His mother suspected trouble when he did not return.

The sailor stood silently at the helm. Scrutinizing the knot meter, he read "4 knots." Four knots per hour divided by 25 miles equals at least six hours. "Impossible," he silently admitted to himself. "My family will hate me forever." The roaring seas prevented him from talking. Mal de mer, the scourge of sailors for aeons, began to overpower him. His wife watched in shock as he began heaving over the stern rail, holding on tightly to the wheel.

"Go below. Get our son." Her thoughts came in staccato-sentences as fear mounted. Carefully climbing down the steps into the cabin, she clenched the grab rails tightly and was tossed from side to side, taking forever to reach her destination. Once below she was flung like a rag doll again, striking seats and galley sink as she attempted to reach her son. Repeatedly she struggled. In a momentary lull she was flung to him. Landing upon his legs as he lay stretched out on the settee, she begged him to get above to help. He responded with a groan. "God," she thought, "this is the worst kind of seasickness."

Back on deck the sailor had his own war to wage. With every ounce of strength left in him he fought to read the compass, keep DAWNGREETER in view, and convince his stomach to remain in its proper place. None of the tasks was possible. "Well," he thought, "the boat will get somewhere - with or without its crew." The thought of getting to Block Island seemed very remote.

Within minutes the scenario changed. Rapidly an observer would imagine seeing a bizarre game of Musical Chairs. As her husband continued to wretch, the sailor's wife left her role as "galley slave" to captain the boat. Both "players" were darting between the wheel, the seats, and the stern rail. As one moved, the other quickly replaced him at the wheel. Without choice the wife clenched the wheel, turning it carefully to keep the boat on course. She knew too that the rest of the family was in serious trouble. Faintly, the sailor decided to try to rest briefly in order to recapture his strength. He hunkered down in the cockpit praying for recovery.

Feeling a need to maintain calm, the sailor's wife, when she felt seasickness coming on, excused herself, allowed herself to be flung down the stairs, and vomited uncontrollably into the galley sink. Remaining the picture of composure, she would check on her son who was still unconscious, and return for another bruising trip to the deck, fresh air, and steering responsibilities. At some point she began to doubt the possibility of ever reaching shore. The world, it seemed, had no boundaries, no life, no order. She became tired, confused, and
overwhelmed. "There's no point in calling the Coast Guard," she thought. "No one is overboard. But no one is in much control either." The afternoon became an eternity.

A few small boats approached when FLASH had been underway for several hours. "Ya goin' to Block?" captains shouted. "Can we follow ya?"

Both sailor and wife responded with, "We think we're going there." "This must be," the wife thought, "much like the relationship of Santiago and the terns in Old Man and the Sea. God, I hope this tale ends differently." Nevertheless, the entourage of little powerboats added a sense of comfort.

Without warning they suddenly heard a great roar of motors, the sounds magnified by the dense fog. The trailing power boats shot off to the west as if attacked by hovering sharks. "What the hell?" responded the sailor, as he jumped from his perch on the seat. "They know something that we don't." He went below to check his chart for location. "Maybe," he shouted, "maybe we're near the island."

At that point - when a sense of hope seemed to well up in the sailor and his wife - the sweet and distinct scent of sand roses enveloped the boat. It jogged the wife to reality, causing her to recall the words of a student who had explained, "You'll know you're at Block Island by the wonderful smell of the roses before you can see the island." With wet hair straddling around her face, yellow slicker stuck to her purplish, chilled skin, she found it hard to show her urgent anticipation. As she faced west - with all energy drained from her every limb - she realized that they had just reached the end of the far-reaching fog.

The sun shone. Sailing lore tells us of coming into a port after a tumultuous sail only to find denial of such a trip. So it was that day. The sailor and his wife "dropped sails", motored to a mooring near DA WNGREETER, and anchored. Renee, peering over the break before enjoying a small taste of concrete. Undaunted, I decided that the only reason to really learn would be to buy my own. I wasn't sure how much longer Mark was going to let me scratch up his. I began to research my new purchase. On my first trip to the Honda dealership it was readily apparent that everyone there knew a great deal more about motorcycles than I did. Eventually I settled on the CX500, a bike large enough to handle my oversized frame, but small enough that it wouldn't dominate my personality.

In future days I cautiously and carefully extended the scope of my riding. Although I had always held an admiration for bikes, I needed to overcome the obstacle of having never ridden one. I convinced my friend Mark to let me learn on his. My first ride was a thrilling but brief fourteen second run in which I confused the clutch with the brake before enjoying a small taste of concrete. Undaunted, I decided that the only reason to really learn would be to buy my own. I wasn't sure how much longer Mark was going to let me scratch up his. I began to research my new purchase. On my first trip to the Honda dealership it was readily apparent that everyone there knew a great deal more about motorcycles than I did. Eventually I settled on the CX500, a bike large enough to handle my oversized frame, but small enough that it wouldn't dominate my personality.

I was embarrassed to admit to the salesman that I hadn't yet acquired the skill needed to ride it home. Mark rode it over to his house for me where I spent the next several afternoons practicing my technique. Finally the day of truth arrived and I took my first solo trip through the streets of Boston's suburbs. Someone had told me that the only safe way to ride a motorcycle was to assume that everyone else on the road was deliberately trying to kill you. During this maiden voyage, I couldn't get this thought out of my mind. By the time I arrived home, I wasn't overly anxious to take my next trip.

Although others failed to understand the logic of my thinking, I didn't really need to convince anyone. The decision to purchase a motorcycle was mine alone. Freshly separated from a marriage that began too early in life, I generously gave my eventually-to-be ex-wife our aging Toyota Corolla and decided I could best brave Boston traffic riding something with only two wheels.

Better Reasons to Die

Thomas Jefferson

Although I had always held an admiration for bikes, I needed to overcome the obstacle of having never ridden one. I convinced my friend Mark to let me learn on his. My first ride was a thrilling but brief fourteen second run in which I confused the clutch with the brake before enjoying a small taste of concrete. Undaunted, I decided that the only reason to really learn would be to buy my own. I wasn't sure how much longer Mark was going to let me scratch up his. I began to research my new purchase. On my first trip to the Honda dealership it was readily apparent that everyone there knew a great deal more about motorcycles than I did. Eventually I settled on the CX500, a bike large enough to handle my oversized frame, but small enough that it wouldn't dominate my personality.

In future days I cautiously and carefully extended the scope of my riding. Although I'd been in Boston for nearly two years, I saw their drivers and roads through new eyes.

I had long since passed the age of adolescent rebellion associated with motorcycles. I was already closer to thirty something than my teenage years. Why did I seem to be getting less, rather than more mature?

There was a surprising practicality to my new toy. It got me to my job everyday, kept conversation lively in the faculty lunchroom of the school where I taught fourth graders, and proved invaluable for weaseling through traffic jams. It was no problem to scoot past impatient lines of cars waiting at stoplights. I could sneak into that leftover portion of a parking space in Harvard Square or at Fenway Park.

I grew to love the recreational rides I would indulge myself in on weekends or when I had a free day during the summer. My bike was neither designed, nor ridden for inti-
idation. The driveshaft and watercooling system made it quiet enough that the sound of the bike itself became soft background noise when I explored the backroads of the surrounding towns and countryside. Although many equate motorcycles with speed and thrills, there is a kind of serenity it can provide as well. These country roads liberated me from the intense concentration needed to monitor safety at high speeds. Also freed from the tedium of gear-shifting demanded by city traffic, I was able to relax and enjoy the scenery, to provide my own breeze, and to roll with the hills. On such rides a destination is either optional or inconsequential. One day, I rode ninety miles with a friend to see Bob Lanier's size 22 sneakers in the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield. We arrived moments before closing, talked the guards into letting us in for a quick look, and left for our return trip.

Easing through uncongested back roads at 40mph offers a travel experience hard to rival. Bicycles don't provide the same range and always keep you on call for that over anxious automobile. Running provides an inner peace and health, but the landscape is difficult to enjoy while bobbing up and down. Automobiles, even sports cars, don't let you feel like you are part of the out-of-doors. With a motorbike you create your own breeze and are free to travel great distances without having to do much advanced planning.

I remained somewhat in awe of the incredible power even my small 500 cubic centimeter engine could provide. Although neither a thrill seeker nor a daredevil, I did once succumb to the desire to experience riding my bike at its maximum velocity. To this day I'm not sure what possessed me. At the moment however, it was a challenge I couldn't decline. Having recently lost both my parents in addition to the separation, I felt somewhat freer to take risks I wouldn't even momentarily consider today. I remember that the particular day for my adventure was perfect for riding; warm temperatures and, most importantly, not a trace of moisture either in the air or on the road. While touring on a barren and smooth stretch of Highway 25 I realized that I had come to my moment of truth. Although I had some highway experience at this point, I'd never reached a speed that that would qualify me for an interstate speeding ticket. I coaxed my wrist to begin its downward turn of further acceleration. Every few seconds I would settle on a mark slightly higher. I glanced down at the speedometer to check my progress. At 65mph I could feel a different pull of the wind and had to clutch the bike harder. The thrill was surging throughout my body. Acceleration seemed to feed upon itself. 70mph brought a change in the visual field as the road began to blur, rather than slide by me. My heart began to beat out of my chest.

Turning it up to 75 brought a higher-pitched squeal from the engine. I could no longer distinguish the divider posts which marked intervals on the side of the road. I remember being frightened at the thought that the bike might explode within me. Each second I was exploring personally unchartered territory. No stopping now. After a few more seconds to reach a temporary state of homeostasis, I was ready for the final twist of the handle to the bottom of its register. By now I was too fearful to look at the needle which measured my speed. My concentration was totally absorbed with an attempt to remain physically still as the engine prepared for its ultimate test. I was at first disarmed by the awkward angle I was creating by turning my wrist so far. I knew I couldn't let go to read just because the spring inside the handle would cause me to decelerate too quickly, thus risking a spill. I remained locked in position as the bike continued to climb. For a few moments the noise of the bike was quieted. I had reached a point where it would go no faster. I continued to cruise. During this brief equilibrium I delighted in my accomplishment. Internally I screamed ecstatically. It had taken such courage to reach this point that I was reluctant to leave it. My voice of reason began its own acceleration and I knew it was time to begin the trip down. I inched downward slowly, wanting to hang onto those upper registers a few extra seconds. By the time I was again traveling at the posted limit I felt like my world was suspended in a most uneventful slow motion.

A few miles down the road I stopped to stretch. I remained intoxicated from the adrenaline of my recent challenge. As I entered the roadside cafe I noticed an elderly man wearing a John Deere cap finishing his coffee and pie. He reminded me of my father. I wondered what foolish but memorable things this gentleman had done in his life. How had he stretched his limits of courage and consciousness. I then realized that his generation had gone to war. There was no need to risk your life for mere thrills when you had put it on the line in defense of your country and its values. There were better reasons to die.

As years went by my motorcycle began to take a less conspicuous place in my life. Although I continued to ride, I never again had the need to push my bike to the blinding speed I had come to know. Eventually I succumbed to the practicality of owning a car. The Honda was now reserved exclusively for infrequent pleasure trips. In time, the maintenance and upkeep became more of a demand than I wanted to address. Its last three years were spent untuned, unregistered, and unridden until it was finally sold. It's surprising how many people hang onto old motorcycles, not quite ready to let go, thinking that next year they'll get them up and running again.
Broken Tees and Empty Glasses

Carol B. Marshall

It is just a little paperback book with blank spaces and black and white drawings. I picked it up in a bookstore about three years ago. It was entitled Grandpa was Quite a Boy. Thinking it would be important for my sons to have a record of their grandfather's life, I asked Dad to fill it out.

Three months later he gave it to them for Christmas. He had done a beautiful job! The same man who has alienated every one of his children (I joined the ranks about eighteen months ago), took hours to fill in each part in detail, fix photographs to various pages, and copy and glue his favorite bluefish recipe to the "More About Food and Cooking" section. The work of a man who cares deeply, right? The scenes he created on each page reveal a man who has lived a rich and full life, with no regrets. "I believe you live life one chapter at a time," he wrote in the book.

For my own mental well-being, I needed to find an answer as to why a father would alienate four children. One child I could understand, perhaps even two. But when all four children are totally out of a father's life, the question usually asked is, "Why?" I searched the pages in this little brown book for the answer. He painted a lovely picture. But the memories triggered by his comments did not ring true with the images on the page. Parts were left out; important parts. As I compared his images with my recollections, I believe Dad was ordered and routine.

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He attended the Naval Academy and made a career in submarines. He learned to run a tight ship. During the time on duty, he followed orders. He liked doing what he was told. During leave, he partied hard because he had to fit it all in before duty started again. It was heavy drinking when it was allowed and sobriety and stoicism when not. Is that where the abuse of alcohol began?

After marrying, Dad had four children: two sons and two daughters, two years apart. Order! Never having lived a "civilian" life, he couldn't distinguish between discipline in an authoritarian way and the more forgiving, authoritative sense. You did it his way, "the Annapolis way," or not at all. Any sense of order that went against his view was seen as "mutiny" and severely reprimanded. Any uprising from the children was immediately squelched. No room for a coup among this group. Keep the troops busy and on task at all times with chores and duties and any flames of rebellion would be squelched.

Family days were every Sunday. They were not something we, as children, looked forward to because they were so controlled. "It's a family picnic, Goddammit, and you will go!"; "What do you do when you must leave the table?"; "You don't get up until you've been excused and that won't be until we are all finished.;" "What do you say? Yes, what? Yes, sir!"; "How do you answer the phone? Jones' residence, Carol speaking"; "Curtsy when you are introduced to commander Allan." We had our orders and we carried them out.

When I was five years old, Dad was transferred from the Pentagon in Virginia to the Naval base in San Diego, California. He announced to his family that "we're going to camp our way across country. We're going to see America the way it should be seen!" Our days were spent cramped in a car, driving all day to stay on schedule. Every night, at 1700 hours, we pulled into a campsite. We all had our duties. Dick and Rob (nine and seven, respectively) pitched the tent, I got the water, and my sister, Bitty (age three), fetched the kindling for the fire. Mom began dinner and Dad made sure everything was shipshape. What an operation! It took us just seventeen days to travel from Virginia to California. I don't remember very much about the trip. It occurs to me now that it was quite a feat to form an obedient, well-trained battalion out of such young troops.

But this was real life, not the military. Children do rebel; it's part of growing up. Never having had this experience, Dad didn't know that teenagers are supposed to question authority. My two older brothers, who had had rebellion beaten out of them when they were younger, finally stood up to Dad. They were both legally liberated from the family when they reached sixteen years of age.

Dad never considered, as far as I know, that he had pushed too hard. Rather, he grew bitter. He claims he always wanted to write an autobiography entitled Broken Tees and Empty Glasses. The bitterness of lost dreams and misplaced priorities implied in this title says a lot about the man.
He suffered many disappointments after that. His wife, who had always been so beautiful -- a lovely possession -- got cancer and died. His sons were never close to him. Rob tried to talk to him about his drinking -- he was banned from entering the house again. Dick tried to talk to him about a memorial for Mom -- and about dad telling us what he had done with the ashes -- but dad’s response was, “Let’s just say they are scattered and the subject is closed.” The two daughters soon followed their brothers’ rebellious path. Bitty fell out of Dad’s good graces when she had the nerve to confront him about Mom’s ring and ask him why he had given it to another woman. And I blasphemed by asking him to give up some of Mom’s possessions before he remarried.

We all mutinied. And the punishment was discharge -- from him! He has a new family now. He is married to a woman who would not dare insurrect. Her children are old enough to have children of their own and live far enough away not to be too concerned with the situation. They visit on holidays. We don’t.

Yes, I would say Broken Tees and Empty Glasses is a fitting title for a book about Dad’s life. He can always replace the tees and refill the glasses. No room for sentimentality or commitment in this military. And if he keeps those glasses filled often enough, he might not regret all those broken tees.

Making the Magic

Michael G. McGunnigle

Sawdust, dirt, the odors of paint, and freshly drilled wood hung in the hot, sticky air of a Saturday morning early in May. Power saws, power drills, and hammers drowned out normal conversation; students talked in shouts as they scurried about the backstage shop area and the loading dock, finishing sections of the stage and carrying them through the open sliding doors at the rear of the main auditorium. It was move-in day for the Manchester Community College Theatre Wing’s Spring 1990 production of the medieval morality play Everyman. Paul Zotos stood in the middle of the chaos, tapped the dead ashes from his pipe and bellowed, "Okay, people, time to make some magic!"

Paul, the technical director for the play, also taught the MCC Theatre Department’s Play Production class, whose students constituted the play’s technical crew. The students paid particular attention to a tech director who would determine their grades for the course. Although I was the play’s director and script adapter, I was merely an observer now. The actors were fully rehearsed and my job was over. The show now belonged to Paul and to Karen Hardie, the stage manager.

There was little about the scene that would strike the casual observer as magical. Rectangular eight-by-four-foot sections of the platform stage were strewn all over the stage and shop area, along with four-foot-high sections of stairs standing alone and leading nowhere, four-foot lengths of two-by-fours, plywood panels, piles of burlap cloth painted black, and assorted loose tools and pieces of hardware. Students--both cast and crew--picked their way through the clutter to do whatever jobs needed doing at any time. At one side of the stage George St. Georges, the play’s master carpenter, finished building the trap-door panel that would be placed downstage-center when the stage was assembled. This would represent the grave from which Death would summon Everyman to leave his earthly existence.

Preparations for this exercise in theatrical magic had begun in January, at the first meeting of the production team--Paul, Karen, and myself, along with Clark Bowlen, the producer/production designer and head of MCC’s Theatre Department--to discuss plans for designing and mounting the play. Everyman, which dates from the early 1500’s, dramatizes allegorically the inevitable encounter each human being has with death. As he tries to come to terms with his appointment with Death, Everyman finds no help or solace from things of this world: friends, family, possessions, even his earthly attributes and facilities (Strength, Beauty, Intellect, Five-Senses) all fail to accompany him on his journey to settle accounts with God. Only his Good Deeds and her sister Conscience stand by him until the end.

The play’s theme suggested some approaches to production design. According to the production notes in the program, “we have based our decisions on a hypothetical question: ‘What would this look (and sound) like if some descendant company of the original late
medieval touring groups were still around doing those same plays in the same general style?...Our stage is a bare platform, without an elaborate set, whose makeshift appearance represents the transitoriness of the 'touring-troupe' style of production and, by extension, the transitoriness of earthly life that is so important a theme in Everyman." Four months later, signs of transitoriness were all around, but Paul's "magic" was nowhere in sight.

Clark supervised students numbering the undersides of platform sections, which were then carried to the loading dock and placed in pickup trucks and transported about a quarter-mile across campus to the Program Center in the Lowe Building. At the time, MCC's Main Auditorium (known affectionately to Theatre Department faculty and students as "Maud") was undergoing renovations for fire-code compliance and could not be used for performances, but only for classes and set construction. Consequently, we had to build sets in Maud and move them to the Program Center for each production, for seven semesters.

Once all sections of the stage had been transported to the Program Center, the students attached legs made of two-by-fours and fastened the sections together with clamps, according to the numbers painted on the undersides. George handled the installation of his trap-door section. Then the two plywood panels, each one eight feet wide by six feet high, were attached to the rear of the stage to form a backdrop. A curtain covered the eight-foot-wide rear entrance between the panels, and a small crew set up the steps leading to a platform behind the curtain. Other carpenters-for-a-day attached stairs to each of the four corners of the stage. A rear platform, twelve feet by eight feet and raised about six inches above the main platform, completed the set. A couple of students stapled burlap to the front and sides, to hide the platform legs and the rest of the machinery behind the magic. Paul dismissed the crew and told them to come back at ten the next morning.

As students wandered in Sunday morning, more or less on time, Paul and Clark hunched over drawings spread out on the stage. After checking the stage against the design drawings, they assigned cast and crew to such tedious tasks as touching up nicked and scratched spots with paint, tightening clamps and carriage bolts, and setting up the seats for the audience.

Then Paul and his lighting crew turned their attention to hanging lights. The schematic drawing known as the light plot told them which types of lights to hang at certain places from the grid of pipes above the stage, and which "gel" -- color transparency -- to attach to the front of each lighting instrument. After hanging the lights, the crew focused them, aiming them at the stage so the light would illuminate the actors properly. The colors of the gels and the play of light and shadow created by the focusing would contribute to the establishment of a mood, a visualization of emotion, on stage. Paul was beginning to work his magic.

After a break for dinner, the cast and crew reassembled at about 6 p.m. for a technical rehearsal. Actors often refer to tech week, from move-in day to dress rehearsal, as "Hell Week," but the night of tech rehearsal, especially, is "Hell Night." Actors want to act, to make their characters move and breathe, rejoice and suffer, to make them live; but on the night of tech rehearsal, they are not allowed to do so. They go through their paces, say their lines, stand or move as the well-rehearsed blocking notes say they must stand or move, but always with the technical crew looking over their shoulders, telling them to stop, refocusing a light or adjusting a light's intensity, hammering down a loose piece of carpet, or otherwise preventing them from doing the one thing they want most to do. After about three hours of being pushed around by the techies like pieces of furniture on stage, the cast of Everyman wore sullen expressions on their faces and answered questions with a distinct edge of irritation in their voices.

Finally, all the light and sound cues were noted in the stage manager's book, and tech rehearsal was over. But before dismissing cast and crew, Paul rubbed his hands together and said to Clark and me, "Now let's make some real magic."

We had rented a portable smoke machine especially for the final scene. But Paul had an idea for the opening scene, in which one of the cast addresses a prologue directly to the audience, summarizing the play about to take place and telling them its point. "If we're operating on the premise that we're a shabby, cheesy traveling troupe," he suggested, "why not let the audience see us as actually creating a shabby, cheesy visual effect? If we let them see a clumsy attempt at creating an illusion, we could convince them to accept a completely different illusion -- that we really are this group of traveling hambones."

The actor playing the Prologue, dressed in his worn, stained top-hat-and-tails outfit, stepped out from behind the rear curtain, carrying the smoke machine. He put the machine down and began his speech to the audience. Towards the end, as he urged the audience to "Listen to what He (God) has to say," Prologue picked up the smoke machine, began to churn out smoke all over the stage, and exited through the rear curtain. As the smoke hung over the empty stage, a single amber light played over it, and the Voice of God began a monologue lamenting the sinfulness of his creature Everyman. Finally, in response to God's call, Death entered down one of the aisles into a house almost completely dark, except for the dim light on stage still illuminating wisps of dissipating smoke. As she neared the stage, accompanied by the Grateful Dead's version of 'Death Don't Have No Mercy,' she was illuminated by first one, then another tightly focused, isolated pool of harsh white light, until she finally mounted the platform. We went over that series of effects three or four times to get it right. The actors were nearly falling over from exhaustion, but even they had to admit that the magic was beginning to happen.

Finally, Paul set up an effect that I had visualized and described to him as early as our first production meeting in January. In the next-to-last scene, as Everyman and Good Deeds stand before his grave, Death opens the grave (the trap door) and beckons them in. Underneath the trap door, Paul had George rig a light with a blue gel (suggesting the cold of the grave) and start the smoke machine, so that the grave emitted an unearthly blue mist.
Everyman, holding hands with Good Deeds, started down the steps, praying:

Gather me up in your heart, Lord, I pray,
So I may be with you on Judgment Day.
In manuas tuas -- into your hands --
Commendo spiritum meum -- my soul I commend.

(EVERYMAN and GOOD DEEDS go down into the grave
together; Death pulls the door of the grave shut)

As the trap door slammed shut, all the lights in the house went black momentarily, before coming back up for Conscience's final monologue. Everyone in the Program Center -- cast, crew, and the security guard who had wandered in out of curiosity -- burst into raucous applause.

Monday night, the actors braced themselves for another night of tedium: the "Q-to-Q" rehearsal. Again, they were not allowed to act, but only to recite lines and stand in appropriate places wherever the stage manager's book called for a light or sound cue. Again, they were frustrated in their desire to let their characters come to life. But all actors know that if they don't endure this grueling boredom, the magic doesn't happen. Acting involves the creation of illusion, making the audience believe, for a time, that the man standing on the stage is not a librarian at the Connecticut State Library, named Ted Wohlsen, but a completely different person named "Everyman." But the illusion also depends on the efforts of the technical crew.

After a night off and a Wednesday evening dress rehearsal, Everyman went up on Thursday night. In the climactic scene, as the trap door slammed down on the blue smoke and everything went black, an involuntary, startled, collective gasp erupted from the audience.

Magic!

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Dog-On Philosophy

Evelyn Guttmann Foster

"WELCOME TO YOUR RECYCLING FACILITY" read the dog as we drove in with our load of garbage, cans, and bottles. We were doing some weekend chores and errands. "ABSOLUTELY NO DUMP PICKING" she read as we passed the next sign. She was sitting on the front passenger seat.

"Welcome to your recycling facility? Absolutely no dump picking? Aren't those mutually exclusive concepts?" she pondered aloud.

"What do you mean?" I asked, scratching her affectionately between the ears.

"Well," she said. "I remember your telling me about when you first moved to the country. Garbage never accumulated in the house because your husband loved to go to the dump. He used to find great stuff and hang out with the guys."

"True," I said. "It was before you were born."

"Well," she philosophized, "that was a dump that really was welcoming. It didn't just say that it welcomed you, but it behaved in a welcoming way. It received, but it gave back willingly. A cottage industry approach to garbage and recycling. It retained the human, (or should I say canine?) element. I see it as almost analogous to what I do at the neighbor's house. When the neighbor leaves leftovers for her dog, I go over quite spontaneously and give her dog the opportunity to share, sometimes dragging the whole roast pan over to our yard."

"I think the analogy is breaking down a bit," I said, "but the neighbor is impressed with the weight of the pans you drag to our yard. She does want to know, though, why she has to come after the pots and pans herself, why you don't return them on your own the next day."

"That's getting off the subject," said the dog. "Back to the cottage industry concept of recycling. Do you think there is an underlying theory implied by those two contradictory signs I read on the way in?"

"You're getting too abstract for me," I said.

"Well, let me help you," replied the dog. "This is how I see it. The idea of the importance of recycling has become, well, canonical. And that is good. If we don't take care of this recycling stuff, why, there'll be no place left for a dog to bury a bone. However, we're no longer throwing everything in one heap by the river, just because we are sorting..."
and separating our recyclables like plastic, glass, cans, paper, and tires, and putting them into larger trucking containers to be transported for reuse, just because we are separating our hazardous chemicals and encouraging composting, does that mean we have to be so impersonal, so industrial, and so corporate about it all? Talk about anonymity and alienation."

"Look, I know I give the raccoon who comes to our compost pile a hard time when I get to be out there (which frankly, is not often enough), but that's what I mean. That is my natural behavior, just like it's the raccoon's to check through the compost pile. And it's natural behavior for sensible humans to hang out at the dump and pick through for the good stuff. Recycling on a spontaneous human (or should I say canine?) level. We are proud of our town's high rate of recycling - 93% return. But let a citizen have some fun. Or if not, don't lie about it with phony public relations statements like, 'Welcome to your recycling facility.' Do you understand what I mean about the contradiction and mutually exclusive concepts?"

"I see your point. You're a pretty smart dog," I said as I carried my bag of glass bottles and cans to toss into the appropriate container. Then as I looked down I saw, balanced at the edge, a box of canning jars. Somebody hadn't had the heart to just throw them in, had probably realized that someone else might want them, might be able to use them. Furtively looking around to make sure the attendants of my recycling facility were not watching me, I picked up those three of the canning jars that were the old fashioned kind, the ones with glass lids, rubber rings, and metal clamps. I rushed back to the car trying to look casual, but thrilled with my find.

"Good work," purred the dog. (She does her best to be multicultural, you know.) "Maybe the day will come when you can come back out of the closet about this kind of thing." 

"I hope so," I barked back in return, thinking that I don't know what I'd do without her. But she does make me feel inadequate sometimes, the way her conceptual ability goes beyond mine. I mean, it's one thing when I realize that my teenage daughters have a better love life than I do. After all, I didn't expect to be young and beautiful forever. (Actually, I did.) But to realize that my dog's intellect is surpassing mine, when I'm the one who's taking the graduate writing and research course, that's really tough. Maybe if she starts to write and publish we'll have enough money to finish the house.

"Would you write my next paper for me?" I asked. "I'll buy you a steak."

"Cholesterol," she answered. "Too much cholesterol." 

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Honey, the Kids are Shrinks

Valarie Botta

(Joan and Jill are sitting on a park bench talking. Off to one side are Jill's twin three-year-olds playing in the sandbox.)

Joan: Two of my friends got married last weekend. It was great.

Jill: Really? What made it so nice?

Joan: After 10 years of living together, they finally did it. Their parents were thrilled. You know the traditional view of wanting your kids to get married so they are happy and secure and not "living in sin."

Jill: Yeah, I know what that's like. My parents were ecstatic when Bill and I got married after two years. If they only knew.

Joan: What do you mean? Bill doesn't hit you or anything like that, does he?

Jill: No, no. Nothing like that. It's just no fun anymore. It's stagnant, and it's only been seven years. We hardly ever talk about us, or about important issues.

Joan: Well, at least you have Alexander and Catherine to liven things up for you and make you happy.

Jill: Yeah, I guess. How about you and John? Are you two happy?

Joan: John works those two jobs, you know? And he usually goes out with the guys when he has time off. Between my job and playing golf, we don't really see much of each other. I wish he was around more. It would be nice to talk to him like I talk to you. But at least it's security, as my mother says.

Catherine: Listen to them. They don't sound very happy.

Alexander: I know. Listen to our own mother. She and Daddy never do anything together. I wonder why they got married. We're not anywhere near seven so it wasn't that she was pregnant.

Catherine: I bet it was just like what she said. Her parents expected her to get married. It was the right thing to do.
Alexander: It wasn't just mom's parents, though. It was also Joan's friend's parents. If two unrelated sets of parents feel that way, I bet there are others, too. I think there's probably a whole group of people who share that same belief.

Catherine: You could be right, and I bet it's a big group. For people to be stuck on an idea, it must have taken a long time to develop - more than one generation. Remember that article by Maxine Hairston we saw mommy reading - the one that discussed how long and difficult a process is for a paradigm shift to take place?

Alexander: Sure, I remember.

Catherine: Well, I think it's the same idea. For a whole society of people to accept that view, the view must be solidified, and once it is, it becomes the governing practice and provides security for those who comply.

Alexander: You're pretty smart, even if you are my sister.

Catherine: Well, let's continue the conversation and see if I can say something similar about you.

Alexander: I'll take that as a challenge...Let's see, that must be the security Joan's mother talked about So, Joan feels safe.

Catherine: That doesn't sound so bad. We like feeling safe.

Alexander: True, but that's different. We're three years old; they're all grown up. Security implies being protected and free from risk. Good for three-year-olds but not so good for adults. What kind of life would it be without risks? It makes me think of Little Chandler from James Joyce's story "A Little Cloud". Daddy was reading it a few weeks ago, and I climbed up on his lap. I remember being interested in the weather when that title caught my eye - and it had nothing to do with the weather! Little Chandler couldn't bring himself to comfort his wife, nor did he pursue his interest in writing, and he placed the responsibility for his life on everyone but himself. That's what Joan is doing. Just like Little Chandler, she's afraid to take any risks, afraid of what might happen if she speaks up. Think about all the risks we take. We risked getting a spanking when we ran through the sprinkler wearing our good clothes. We risked hurting ourselves when we learned to ride a bike. We've risked a lot. (At our age you really can't expect adult-like risks.)

Catherine: O.K., I'll repay the compliment; you're pretty smart, too - for a boy. You've made a good point. Thinking of security that way makes it less attractive. If two people marry to have the security that the institution of marriage in society offers, it may not be to their advantage.

Alexander: Well, how about if they marry for love?

Catherine: Yeah, let's think about that for a while...Don't you think two people can love each other without getting married?

Alexander: Of course. It must be a matter of degree. If you love each other a lot, you get married.

Catherine: So you mean two people can't love each other a lot unless they marry. Hmmm. Do they already love each other before they plan to marry?

Alexander: Sure.

Catherine: And it goes away if they don't?

Alexander: I guess it wouldn't have to. Let's think about people we know. What do you think about dad's friends Pat and Ken?

Catherine: They might love each other; it's hard to tell. I've never seen them laugh together. They seem to prefer other people's company. But, they are pleasant to one another. How about Ben and Barb next door?

Alexander: That doesn't sound so bad. We like feeling safe.

Catherine: They're nice to each other. They laugh together; they talk; they seem to support one another; they act like they're close friends.

Alexander: How do you know they are supportive?

Catherine: I've seen them go places together, as well as alone. At parties I've heard conversations about positive things they are doing. Twice I heard them talking about making a change they were afraid of making, so that means at least they're not stagnant. And they talk things out; they don't yell. I've even heard them disagreeing a few times. So I'd say they love each other.

Alexander: O.K., I agree. But that reminds me - you know who else is like that?

Catherine: Who?
Alexander: Mom's friends Amy and Steve, and dad's friends Diane and Rick.

Catherine: They're not married, though.

Alexander: It's a good thing Jan and Paul aren't married. Jan won't open her mouth, and Paul controls everything. On the other hand, Lisa and Steve are married, and she's always covering something up for Steve. Relationships sure are strange.

Catherine: So I guess you can love someone, care about them, and be happy with them, if you don't have that legal stamp that says you're married. Or you can love someone, care about them, and be happy with them if you have married them.

Alexander: And of course looking at the other side, you can also be pretty miserable whether you're married or just living together. I'd have to say the institution of marriage doesn't make people stay in love or stay happy together. It could even do the opposite.

Catherine: What do you mean?

Alexander: After marriage, people sometimes take each other for granted, and instead of treating their spouse like a friend whose relationship they'd nurture, they take advantage of them, and then the relationship deteriorates. I mean if marriage represents the ideal, the culmination of goals, it could hinder individual growth, especially if they marry for the sake of getting married - to avoid society's disapproval.

Catherine: This all seems to make sense. A lot of people won't buck society and live together without being married despite the fact that marriage won't add anything to their already good or already poor relationship. It's easier to follow society's dictates and get married, thereby propagating the popular belief that marriage is synonymous with living happily ever after, and any other relationships couldn't possibly accomplish that.

Alexander: Some people think marriage adds a sense of permanence to the relationship. I can't see how, though, since people get divorced. It seems loving each other is what lends permanence to a relationship, not marriage. It's a good example of society's stronghold. Not only are alternative lifestyles severely frowned upon; the motivation to choose is within society's control.

Jill: Time to go home, kids. My God, Joan, will you look at those two men holding hands...

Catherine: There they go again. Think of how many more chances you'd have to find someone you could really communicate with if people didn't eliminate a whole sex.
Les Soldats de la Guerre

Diane Mikan

He appreciated this square in the center of Paris' famous artist district, Montmartre. The umbrellared tables, waiters who leaned against open cafe doors enjoying the extra bonus hours of a sunny May day, and cobble-stone sidewalks before the onslaught of tourists, all this was home now. It had been home for a long time ever since he was a man without a country.

He turned and entered Le Lapin. His frame cast a shadow as he stood in the doorway with head bent to pass under the oak door frame. It was a habit, and like all habits he had kept on with it for years although now it served no purpose. He stooped forward, leaned on his cane, and carefully edged his way down the stone steps toward his usual table in the back of the dimly lit cafe. Passing the kitchen, he peered in to say hello to the proprietor.

"Bonjour, Gustave," the old man smiled to the younger one.

"Salut, Jean. How goes it?"

"Bonjour!" His accent was neither French nor English. "Where is Maurice? He's never late."

"At the Tabac getting his usual Gauloises." He turned to Michel, the waiter, and placed an ashtray on his round wooden tray. "Take Monsieur's - the soldier's order."

Michel, with his typical formality, wiped the table with the white cloth hanging from his belt. He spread a brown paper cloth over the circular oak table and placed the ashtray in the center.

"Café crème, garçon," Jean ordered. The waiter was in the process of writing it, in the usual French manner, on the tablecloth itself.

Gustave had placed the steaming hot coffee with cream on the counter as Maurice, with a gauloise cigarette protruding from his thick lips, returned to the cafe. Ducking his still tall frame, he could not clear the door.

"Merde," he cursed as he struck his head.

For fifty years you've been doing that, Frenchman," Jean laughed.

"So, I'll probably do it for another fifty. Vin rouge, garçon. Vive."
"It is your story, today, my friend Jean," Maurice said as he leaned over his plate of mushrooms, fresh veal, and petits pois. Occasionally, he'd rip a piece of bread off his baguette and dip it in the sauce. "O.K., is it not? For it is Spring once more, and anyway the turn is yours."

John signaled the waiter for another café. He needed time to think before he began the ritual that they had kept every Wednesday for almost fifty years. When Janusz Simatolwicz-Kowalski spoke of Monte Cassino it was with bitter sweetness that only his fellow soldiers who fought on such stony pieces of bloody terrain could truly understand. And understand him they did, for all were never more alive than when they could smell and feel death waiting. From September of 1943 to May of 44 death took no holiday for Janusz Simatolwicz-Kowalski.

"It began at 11:00 p.m. on May 11, 1944. Warm like today, my friends, but with none of the comforts we have here," he raised his hand and swept it sideways across the café. "That was the time they decided to launch the fourth and final battle to conquer that hellish abbey. God wasn’t sitting up there - the devil was. By that time it had already cost us too many lives. Nonetheless, we were given what turned out to be the last job - holding Hill 593. The English needed to cross in the valleys below."

"That was the same with us at Omaha beach. The Yanks hit the beaches in the first wave, but we Brits and the Canadians were caught like sitting ducks ...."

"We know, Henri, but that was in June. This is May, and Jean's story was in May." Maurice added gently. "Continue, Jean."

Jean lifted his coffee cup to his lips with both hands. He had assimilated many French habits since the war, but he never could forge a liking for the thick strong gaulloises that Maurice thrived on. He looked at his friend pull the cigarette out of his mouth with his stained thumb and index finger and crush the last centimeter in the ashtray before he continued.

"You know the Germans had a devilish genius for war. They started to use mines, so the Allies invented the mine detector which was sounded to work when it sensed metal. The Germans changed the mine encasement to plastic or wood. It was the wooden encasement type that blew off Stanilaus' foot when he stepped on it." He paused, wincing at the memory which seemed like yesterday.

"But what I hated most was their nebelwerfer. Remember those? Six-barreled mortars like six fires from Hell. Made a noise, a wailing beast - you never knew where it was coming from or where it would fall."

"So what happened that day?" Maurice asked although he knew too well the answer.

"They sent us up - the Second Polish Corps - a group of men aged 16 to 65. Some were seasoned veterans of previous campaigns - Poland '39, France and Norway '40, Libya '40/'41, but the majority of us were former prisoners of war released after two years' captivity in Russia. I was neither. I had escaped the Russian round up and had chosen to fight with the Polish Army in Africa, but not even that prepared me for Monte Cassino - and Hill 593." He stopped, sipped a cognac the proprietor had left from him on the table and continued.

"For weeks we adhered to a wireless silence so our language would not betray any of us. We were to relieve the 78th division in the mountains above Cassino. It was very meticulous, our plan. We had reconnaissance of the terrain; we knew about every given position. We knew what units were in front of us because we had taken prisoners. We knew that the Americans, Indians, and British had each attempted to conquer the gorges, thickets, and thorns which would meet us at every inch of the way up those treacherous slopes. We knew it was up to us - we Poles whom Roosevelt betrayed at Teheran ...but we did not know when."

Henri and Maurice waited for him to continue.

"From six o'clock on we were confined to our lines. The eerie silence on the eve of May 11 was intolerable. Not since Easter when a temporary truce had been observed had there been no guns booming across the mountains and through the valley. That night there were no guns, and the silence was broken..."

"By the songs of the mating nightingales," Henri finished.

"Yes, it was the most beautiful sound I have ever heard. Oblivious to the destruction, bombardment, annihilation, the nightingale still sang of love."

Each man nodded in agreement; then they nodded to one another and Janusz continued.

"When we attacked, we found in front of us double forces. If we had attacked twenty-four hours later, we would have faced only half that number. They had just come from Greece and were in excellent physical condition. Fanatics to the last. Afterwards, some taken prisoners refused to have blood transfusions. They didn't want blood from some inferior race."

"Salauds," Maurice growled as he lifted the glass and gulped the last of his wine.

"Caught in a constant crossfire, we were pinned to the ground behind the battle debris and rotting corpses of men and mules left on the slopes from the winter attacks."
Throughout that night I had but one prayer - to hear the nightingale sing once more.

"By dawn I was still alive, but there only handfuls - clusters of survivors. During the battle, all vegetation was grey, dark brown covered with dust, but rain came after the battle, washed the grey away, and the poppies blossomed. A profusion of poppies -- like a red river coming down the hills, red because they were soaked with Polish blood."

All sat in silence. They knew he would continue when he was ready. The café had emptied. The workmen had returned to their jobs and would later return home to their lives and families. To them the three old men were just that - old. Few knew just how long they had been coming to Lapin, but long enough to have seen most customers and shopkeepers come and go.

"When we finally marched across the slopes of 593 into the ruins of the Abbey and raised the Polish flag high in the warm of a May sun, 1500 of my friends and countrymen never saw it."

"But we see it, Jean. We are all of the same cloth, my friend," Maurice whispered. Then he shrugged, "Your French - it is getting better."

"But can it sing like a nightingale?"

"Some say it can, especially in the realm of love."

"Ah, you frogs are all the same. Now there's a topic we Limies know."

"Come, it is getting late. We don't want the cemetery gates to close. The day is still warm and my breath is coming easier now." Jean had finished for that day.

The three stood up together. Henry reached down and tore off the scrawled computations of Michel. Each left a 20 or 50 franc note and some coins on top of the piece of soiled paper. Maurice placed the pack of Gauloises in his rolled-up shirt sleeve and tipped his beret to Gustave standing by the door in the late afternoon sun.

"The sun never casts a bad reflection on the white dome, n'est-ce pas?"

"You have a fine café and healthy children my friend, Monsieur Gustave, le patron. Keep them wisely and kiss them often - for me. Enjoy your fine church. How can you go wrong with Sacre Coeur at your doorstep, non?"

"Adieu, Gustave. Au revoir."

Levels of Competition

Bill Taylor

It seems to me that Americans, particularly men, have had a love affair with automobiles for almost as long as they have been in existence - sort of a logical progression from the horse. Of all the different kinds of cars which they can buy, men in extended adolescence, mid-life crisis, or second childhood, opt for sports cars and an abundance of horses now under the hood.

One of the things which draws men to sports cars is their speed. Why would a man buy a car with speed capabilities in excess of 150 miles per hour when the speed limit across the country is 55, or 65 at best in some of the more progressive rural areas? It's true that the sports car driver can pass just about any car on the interstate, and he usually does. It's the motorized version of the psychological game, "I've got you now you son of a bitch." That same driver can also play the game in the city, for he is one of the few to yearn for a red light and the starter's green to follow.

Then again, he is also screaming LOOK AT ME! Now what might be the motivation for a man to want a vehicle which inspires people's stares? A sports car tells us that the driver is really "with it" although he was probably born the runt of the litter, grew up having sand kicked in his face, or could only get a woman to look at him for more than a casual glance by sitting in the driver's seat of a mean machine. Perhaps he is trying to transpose the power of the car into an illusion which places him, as the owner of that power, in the limelight. Yes, the perfect sports car does scream out something about power at passers-by, but it also says something like, "My car payments are bigger than yours." Then again, it may also say, "Look at me, I've made it," when the man behind the wheel can ill afford any other manifestation of wealth on a higher scale.

Now there's another strange attribute to sports cars. It seems that the more you pay the less car you get. When we think of sports cars, we think of power, yes, but we also think of small. The most exotic, and therefore the sportiest, sports cars are in the $100,000 dollar range like the Lamborghini, Lotus, and Ferrari. Yet, they should come with special devices for men who cannot stoop low enough to enter. Is there some sort of comfort here that he stoops to conquer? Perhaps, and those are the cars which separate macho men from the range like the Lamborghini, Lotus, and Ferrari. Yet, they should come with special devices for men who cannot stoop low enough to enter. Is there some sort of comfort here that he stoops to conquer? Perhaps, and those are the cars which separate macho men from the man who can't afford any other manifestation of wealth on a higher scale.

The truth is, though, that the weather has absolutely no impact on the image. The image these days has everything to do with the cars having all the toys of the nineties. A contemporary guy doesn't have to be macho-man in order to have a car which looks and sounds like a macho-car.

Speaking of winter, why do we find so many sports cars in northern climates? It makes about as much sense as speeds of 150 miles-per-hour. Consider the fact that snow-covered roads and high-powered machines do not go well together: the slowest cars on winter roads are sports cars. Consider the fact that the optional and expensive convertible tops and T-tops must stay in place for more than half a year. But, then again Cro macho-man is still with us at times when he bares his torso to the penetrating rays in the blistering heat of mid-July or claims the record for the first top down of the season. The truth is, though, that the weather has absolutely no impact on the image. The image these days has everything to do with the cars having all the toys of the nineties. A contemporary guy doesn't have to be macho-man in order to have a car which looks and sounds like a macho-car.

The toys. Most sports cars these days can rival Cadillacs with all of their luxury appointments. There's hideaway lights and T-tops and radio controls on the steering wheel and remote control gas tank cover releases and remote control hatch releases and remote control power outside mirrors and heated outside mirrors and power windows and power door locks and six-way power seats and lumbar supports and reclining seats and sun visors with lighted mirrors and map reading lights and graphic equalizers and lights on graphic equalizer controls and automatically retracting antennas and turbo boosters and intermittent wipers and cruise control and climate control and passenger seat ejection button and outside temperature gauge and lots of other gauges. Modern macho man must have all the toys in his rolling symbol of success.

a matter of fact, there are very few televised ads for sports cars, and the few ads which we do see show women doing the selling and men doing the driving. There are more ads for sports cars in magazines, and those ads depict sports cars in the lap of luxury parked at the marina, next to the owner's private jet, or cruising down mountain passes toward Aspen. Car manufacturers don't need to promote sports cars when society has done such a good job convincing men that they need to find some visible counter response to their own inadequacies. They can't have the Lear jet, but by God they can finance the car sitting next to it on the runway.

There's a slogan that says, "The only difference between men and boys is the price of their toys," but with modern sports cars it's not just price, it's also the number of their toys. The original sports car purist of the fifties doesn't really fit that mold. We have re-defined macho-man and sent him to vehicles of the four-wheel drive variety although even those are currently filled with an abundance of toys. "Cro macho-man" was the one who was content to buy an MG, Triumph, Spitfire, or Austin-Healey. Hardly a toy was to be seen since a true sports car was defined by its snap-on plastic windows. It of course had a tachometer, but that was all. Those macho men could impress us all as they drove through the winter with canvas flaps flying in the wind and ice pellets stinging the driver's face as he tried to scrape the frost off the inside of the windshield with his fingernails.

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A sports car, then, is really competition on all kinds of levels. It's for the younger guy who won't win girls by his physique, it's for the mid-life crisis male who is trying to prove that he can still be successful on some level, and it's for the second-childhood man who is trying to prove that he has really made it if his retirement can support something other than a Ford Escort. I ought to know. I'm a skinny guy ten years from retirement who owns a 300ZX. Sometimes I let my wife sit in the passenger seat.

The Princess of Bangor

H. Ann Gallant

The sun finally began to peek through the gray clouds as the small girl walked the mile to her grandmother's house. She was dressed in a scratchy starched dress and black patent leather shoes that hurt her heels - a very unlikely outfit for a Saturday morning. Normally, she would be swinging her violin case by her side, planning to stop at her grandmother's house after the lesson. Today, her steps were slowed - the walk longer than it had ever been.

In front of the gray house she noticed many cars, but the one that caught her eye was old Minnie Peavey's Chevy. Many afternoons, her mother would send her to spend time at Granma Babb's so she would stay out of trouble. The sight of the Peavey car as she would start down the street would promise an afternoon of a hair-raising trip to the "ladies card party" - three hours of whiskey on the rocks and poker for Granma and her old friends. The girl never told her mother of the honor she felt when asked to join the old ladies, intuitively knowing the consequences. She learned about holding inside straights, drinking Shirley Temples, and shifting gears on a speeding car.

As the little girl neared the porch, she began to recognize uncles, aunts, and cousins. She seldom saw them in one place because of the feud that separated the family into armed camps. She had never been told the reason for the war in her father's family, learning the only clues in overheard conversations between her parents and the two brothers of her father who were still allowed in her house. From what she discovered, the other three brothers had stolen the family business and destroyed it. She always wanted to know how brothers could hate one another, but decided not to ask.

Granma's small house was spewing people out the front door. The girl remembered the few guests she had seen there before. Granma never complained, but the girl knew that she and Minnie were the only regular visitors. Granma would sit in her old over-stuffed chair with a cigarette gracefully held between her stained fingers, her glass of whiskey by her side. She sat in the same chair day after day because it was next to the telephone. She told the girl that she wanted to be able to pick up the phone quickly if any of her sons should call. The telephone never had rung when the girl was visiting. She thought Granma probably had lots of calls at night.

As the girl entered the tiny vestibule, overcrowded with hat racks, desks, and oriental rugs, she noticed a group of her uncles wildly gesturing at two strangers. They were all angrily whispering at a man and woman who looked embarrassed as the level of noise echoed around their one shabby suitcase. The girl edged nearer to the angry group and
suddenly realized that the strange man was her beloved Uncle Eddie. The last time she had seen him, two years ago, the angry voices had belonged to her parents, as they told him to leave or get a job. She couldn't understand then why they had treated him so cruelly because he had been so kind to her, taking her on trips with him to the park, talking with her on the hill in back of her house, and telling her funny stories at dinner. She knew it must be her parents who had not let her hear from him when he moved to Texas. She listened again as the adults questioned Eddie about why he had turned in his round-trip ticket which they had sent him for two one-way tickets. While he tried to explain to the adults that the lady was his new wife and he wanted the family to meet her, the little girl quietly moved away. She hoped that later her favorite uncle would give her one of his bear hugs if he didn't know she had heard the embarrassing conversation.

The girl pushed her way past the crowd and went through velvet burgundy drapes into Granma's front parlor. The girl had always had to weave her way through the dark mahogany tables, couches, and chairs which were crowded into a room too small for their bulk. Today the room was almost emptied of the huge furniture and the heavy window curtains were closed. The pungent odor of flowers assaulted her senses as she moved toward the casket that had become the centerpiece of the dark room. Finally the girl had found a quiet place where she could have one last visit with her Granma.

The girl moved into Granma's old dining room centered with the beautiful Tiffany light that sparkled with hundreds of colors. Granma had loved the dining room and had shared stories of festive parties with important guests, when there had been a cook to create French cuisine and a maid to serve in her white cap and apron. Now, under the light sat the big bed that had been carried down the two flights of stairs so Granma could see the street and the flowers. It was just last week when the girl had been to see her and they had a strange encounter. After sitting on her bed and showing all her school papers, the girl had been sent by Granma to the French highboy, empty now of the Limoges china and cluttered instead with a rainbow of pill bottles, to fetch Granma's cut glass water pitcher. The pitcher was an antique and when she was old enough, the girl had been allowed to polish it when she visited. She knew that when Granma asked her to get out the pitcher, the air would be filled with glorious stories of the past as she worked. The last time Granma asked for the pitcher the girl knew was different. Granma was very weak when she told the girl to wrap the pitcher in a towel and take it home. Granma told her she wanted the pitcher to be with someone who loved it, and shared with the girl her fears of vultures and wills and death. The girl walked the mile to her house, fearful of tripping and breaking the pitcher. She had decided that when the vultures or whatever Granma feared were gone she would return the pitcher.

The girl moved into the kitchen where the noise was loudest. The small room had usually been silent when the girl had visited for lunch which was always Granma's speciality - American Chop Suey with burned Shredded Wheat crust washed down with sweetened condensed milk. People were crowded around the tiny antique table which was serving as a bar. Each one held a glass of something that looked like Granma's whiskey, and each person was trying to talk louder than the other. The girl knew that Granma had her own rules of drinking - ladies and gentlemen never lost control. The girl heard people talking about a "tough old broad" who thought she was better than everyone. She heard about a woman who never knew her place in town and lived beyond her means and forced her husband into bankruptcy because of her spending. She heard them talk of a woman who had aborted children she didn't want and then hired women from the poor house to care for the ones she kept.
Meditation

Janet K. Pernerewski

Have you ever speculated on the nature of that mystical force that draws the exhausted teacher back to her deserted classroom on the very next day after her satiated students have begun their summer vacation? Perhaps the wisdom of an Oriental garden will enlighten our musing.

Can it be the Currier and Ives tin holding the broken and abandoned remains of twenty-nine sets of Crayolas somehow parallels the pleasing abundance of neat beds of crushed stone? Do the wax shavings that line the bottom recall Kristen's contentment when each crayon has been sharpened back to its original point? And the discovery of a white crayon evokes memory of Angela's pleasure in completing her drawings with white instead of space. Do the partially depleted squeeze bottles of tempera paint hold the allure of the vivid landscape of Bethlehem so expertly created by Sami and Tim for the Nativity Play and the unexpected variety of shades of green concocted to illustrate Mitchell's imaginary creatures.

How Kaeleen beamed as she received the gold medal for three consecutive fastest times on the obstacle course! And Gerald captured the balloon relay with his innovative bent-legged gait. Do these somehow inspire contemplation of the simplicity of striving for the best inside each of us?

Is the attraction of empty cubbies whose labels must be removed and whose fingerprints will be scrubbed away with Murphy's Oil Soap in reality the search for harmonious human relationships? Recollection of the triumphant satisfaction of successfully completed negotiations between Ben and Nicholas to schedule equal time to store their lunch boxes on the coveted top shelf is restoratively calming.

Perhaps the lure is the play of light and shade through the huge panes with their fractured caulking that displayed the spreading limbs of our tree for all seasons. Each tiny remnant of cellophane tape to be stripped from the smooth surface conjures the cavalcade of acorns and snowflakes, apple blossoms, and insects during the passage of seasons—Crosby's tissue cocoons and emerging butterflies in all their cyclical beauty and Gilbert's snowman sporting the only Tyrolean hat along the mittened and mufflered snowscape. Flecks of green tempera still cling from the spring grass painted on in joyous anticipation of the promise of spring.

It can't be the box of now forgotten trinkets, sharpeners, ball bearings, magnets, erasers, etc. gathered by the floor monitor at 2:05 each afternoon. Caitlin's skateboard pencil sharpener was constantly underfoot until it lost one axle. Jonathon's infamous rubber snake lies playfully entwined with the drawstring from Nikole's neon fuchsia windbreaker amid selected artifacts from Christopher's magnet collection found clinging in unexpected locations. Their irregularities and textures are strangely satisfying.

Can it be the abundant variety of the crowded bookshelves with their dog-eared books needing rolls of tape to reinforce bindings and repair torn pages? How John poured over the pages of The Big Book of Building and Wrecking Machines dreaming of the future! And how Katherine grimed her peanut butter and jelly grin during morning snack as she turned the pages of Charlotte's Web with sticky fingers, following the spider's unfolding writing career. Is it the powerful beauty of the gift of literacy half-revealed yet half-hidden?

What mystery lies in the faded background paper of the bulletin board boldly facing direct sun from nine to three each day, now punctured with the millions of impressions of straight pins and staples that suspended Brian and Justin's huge Mayflower on the stormy Atlantic and Jessica and Katie's underwater world for The Little Mermaid? Tiny pearls still appear unexpectedly from the strings of beads plundered to add treasure to the indigo deep!

Does the antiquity of stone find wonder in the stained and sticky slate board, its corners chipped, its surface speckled by the adhesive of masking taped Daily News sheets and sale posters? Is it the search for truth in today's events and anticipation of the future in Rosa's advertisements designed to tempt potential customers into our class store? The ledge is thick with the residue of chalk and the erasers cough choking limestone clouds from the endless creations and revisions of rich inventive minds.

Perhaps the water rings left on the wide window sills by the profusion of gift plants brought on the last day teasingly trigger appreciation of the myriad shades of brown in the weathered wood, and the stack of yellow cum folders still to be inscribed with the triumphant achievements of a year's smiles and toil elicit the serenity of affirmed promise. How can this emptiness and echoing silence bring tranquil completion to the ephemeral yet ethereal enigma of teaching?
The summer of '92

I felt the need to write to all
To say a word or two,
That even when we hit the wall
We managed to get through.

We volunteered to learn the art
Of writing, so they said,
But little did we know that part
Would numb our brain and head.

More work, more work, another piece
Another roll, I'm close to dead,
And will it ever end or cease,
Please pass another piece of bread.

Of paradigms and articles
And Murray, Hillcock, Hull,
Bartholomae and Daniels,
We waited for the bull.

Which did not come, Arline said more
And research we did start
With ERIC files through which we'd pore
In finding one more part.

The groups of four, we tried to write
(Excuses did come first)
Our piece we finished late at night,
We typed and typed and cursed.

Now back to class, it's time to "share"
Reflection time has come,
And one by one we take the dare
Of sounding really dumb.

Then Mary said, "The workshops start
On Monday of next week."
We thought, please Mary, have a heart,
We're no where near our peak.

We ran up to the wall as fast
As we could get us there,
And tried to sign the very last,
"Twas more than we could bear.

But Val began and talked to us
Of speaking to a group,
And others went without a fuss
We marched on as a troop.

We've finished now, the task is done.
The month has been so full
I'd say that we've not had much fun,
But that would be pure bull.

Arlene and Carole, Mary not just
My thanks do I extend,
To all my new-found friends: I trust
Our paths will cross again.

Who would have thought: sixteen who dared
Touched all of us because we shared.

Thanks.