


1989

# UA68/6/1 Zephyrus

Western Kentucky University

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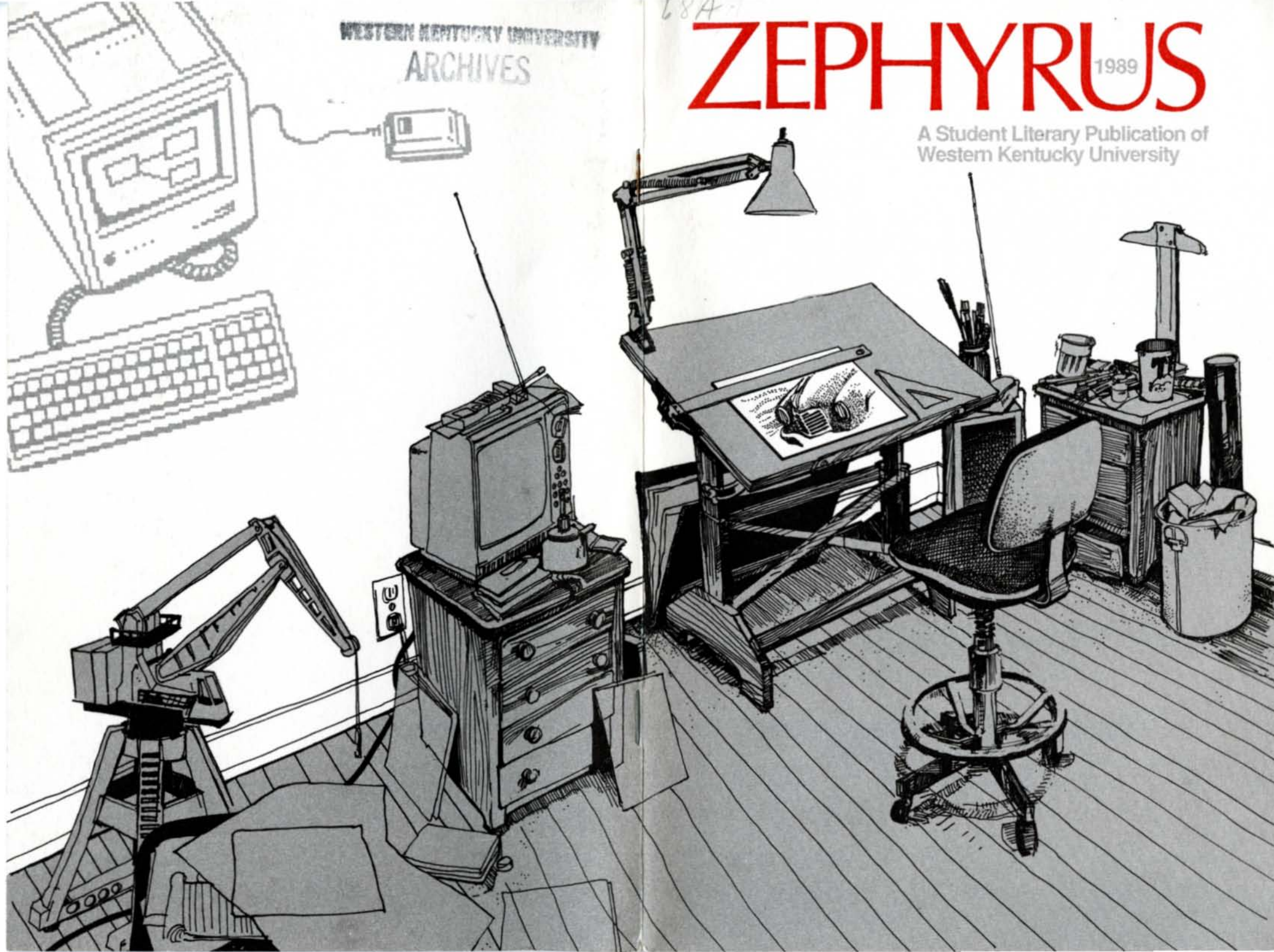
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**ZEPHYRUS** 1989

A Student Literary Publication of  
Western Kentucky University



# ZEPHYRUS

SPRING 1989

A publication of the English Department  
of Western Kentucky University  
at Bowling Green

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**AWARD WINNERS**

Geoffrey McCelvey Memorial Award  
**Chuck Keefover**

Browning Literary Club Poetry Award  
**David P. Goguen**

Ladies Club Fiction Award  
**Ruth O. Madden**

*ZEPHYRUS* Essay Award  
**Michael Budniak**

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Chuck Keefover

## The Leaner King

You can ask anyone who has lived in Weld Co. for more than awhile, and they'll tell you about Shad Titus Sr. Some will stand straight-faced and tell you how he's two acres short of a section. Of course there are those few who live to break them up at the barber shop. They'll grin and mention how ol' Shad seems to be five cows short of a herd; bust a gut, boys. CLANG...

You wouldn't give Shad Sr. a second look if you were to see him walking the streets of Gilchrist or Platteville; he doesn't howl along with sirens or slow dance with farm animals. No...No, what he does is pitch horseshoes with his son, Shad Titus Jr. You're asking yourself what's wrong with that? Horseshoes? America? You might have pitched a few yourself. Seems pretty darn normal. It would be normal as hell if my brother hadn't died just over ten months ago. So there you have the reason for the between-crops speculation. CLANG...

It was an accident; could have happened to anyone; that's what accidents are all about. Dad was backing his truck into the barn, listening to the Bronco game; how about them Broncos? He didn't see Shad Jr. run behind him. Jr. was after this kitten that was licking itself, oblivious to the truck. Shad Jr. was crushed against the barn's back wall; the kitten's fine and the Broncos had to punt. CLANG...

My dad's cousin Vernon, after talking with my ex-wife Louise, then the bartender at the Tomahawk Bar in Casper, and this old driller in Worland, found me working as a jug hand on a Seismic crew in Wolf Point, Montana. Vernon told me of Jr.'s death, the funeral and how my dad hadn't been seen since an hour or two after the accident. Did I have any ideas? CLANG...

It was two days of driving through the worst winter I'd ever known; if I'm ever an old man, I'm sure I'll be talking about it every chance I get. Anyway, two days of twenty miles-per-hour gives a person plenty of time to come up with an idea or two.

Mine was simple, head to the last place Dad and Jr. had spent some time relaxing; Medicine Bow, Wyoming. I've been there and I don't understand it either. CLANG...

He was there, living a bad country song, just drinking and denying. He was there stumbling around the Virginian Hotel with this woman he'd known for literally hours. Her hand was so deep into his pocket I figured she'd have to be laminated and reduced to wallet size before she'd be satisfied. Shad Sr. had proposed to her and had her believing that as soon as my brother showed up, the three of them would head to Rawlins and have themselves a big time; I've been there, too. Dad had been drinking; he was serious drunk, folks, and he was filled with venom that he spat at me time and time again before he nodded off in the hall outside what was to have been his honeymoon suite. It was a struggle, but I hauled him on back to this place. The woman, Yolanda I think her name was, mumbled something about Winnemucca; some folks just have a knack for finding a good time. CLANG...

If you've travelled the back roads of northern Colorado, you've probably been by this place, a one-story, faded-white squat-house, leaning among a grove of Oaks. If that was you who drove by fifteen or twenty minutes ago, I'm sorry, I meant to wave. CLANG...

Well, like I told you, it's been ten months or so since Jr. died. Dad has never visited his grave or acknowledged Jr.'s death in any way. In all this time Dad has gone about his life as if Jr. was right by his side. At first folks were respectful and just whispered among themselves. After about the fifth month, curiosity got the best of them, and they began to stop by---just to chat. They'd stand around like farmers do, arms folded, with the cuffs of their pants just touching the dirt. They'd stand and watch Dad pitch horseshoes, watch him laugh, slap the air and talk with Jr. Everytime Dad paused, they'd lean forward, intent, then catch themselves and look around to see if they reacted, as if in death my brother's voice had become a dog whistle; the mutts just looked back. Anyway, insanity doesn't have the appeal of say, some eunuch bouncing out of chute #2 on the back of a Brahma and so after a ringer or two they'd leave. It wasn't long before jokes about Shad Sr. began to make the rounds. Oh well, I'm not complaining,

most days are like this one, quiet and calm. I just stand and watch him, he's pretty good you know, and I got to tell you, I don't think he's crazy. Something about the way Shad Sr. concentrates soothes me. Put yourself in my place. What are you going to do? Huh? Have him committed? No I don't think so, at the very least he's getting plenty of exercise and sure there's more than a little truth in the fact that I enjoy feeling that my brother's doing okay. Hell, he's beat the old man every game since this all started and that ain't bad for a dead guy. CLANG...

Shad Sr. is hard at it this very moment. If this were downtown Denver, and I saw him laughing and talking to the afternoon, like he's doing now, well? This isn't any of that nonsense though. My great-grandfather was the first to turn the dirt in the fields around this place. My dad's a part of all this, as far as that goes; I am too. I can't just walk away from him, wouldn't work, no, because wherever I went all I'd be thinking about was here and now. Let's for the sake of argument say he really is crazy. Okay, what if one day he decides to go someplace and tells Jr. to drive; the man might starve, waiting. CLANG...

"Dad: We got to think about heading over to my place. It looks like we got some serious weather coming this way."

Shad Sr. turns, squinting into the dusk filled horizon. "You smell it?"

"Is this a rhetorical question? "What?"

"The snow. It'll be here 'fore too long, but not..." He turns toward the empty corral, "until we finish this one. I got ya down three, Jr. What? Shooooot, talk is cheap. Watch your old man work." He holds the horseshoe three inches from his bearded face, takes a deep breath and arcs the horseshoe end over end over end over end, CLANG.

"Make that six, Jr. David, you just hold your horses. Me and Jr. got to finish this one."

It used to bother me when he'd yell. I could be standing two feet away from him and he'd shout like he was trying to penetrate a coma. "Would it help if I started the truck and turned the lights this way?"

"You're a distraction, boy." His breathing is shallow as he walks the sixty feet to where his horseshoes lie, one on top of the other, wrapped around the stake. "Jr.'s gonna need all the quiet there is. He ain't never been down this many. Have you, boy?"

It's always been Jr. first and foremost. He seemed to understand that far better than me. He was always standing up for me whenever Dad began one of his, you're-just-like-your-mother tirades. She died giving me life, and I suppose Shad Sr. never really got over it. I understand it now; it was five years of just the two of them out here, one weekend a month spent in town. Five years of planting and harvesting before Shad Jr. came along and as you can guess, he was welcome; I mean they gave him the name. It was another six years before I came into all this, not knowing what I'd done. You tell me. Should I have apologized? "I'll just turn the lights this way and leave the motor off."

Shad Sr. waves his hand, dismissing me. His eyes intent upon the dark afternoon sky. "Not good enough, Jr., not near good enough." He laughs. "You're fading, boy; you fell way short. Huh? You think it might help?" He turns back to David. "Go ahead with them lights."

Shad Jr. told me about those early days after Mom died. He would walk in on Dad while he was standing over my crib, holding a pillow. Jr. told me about the tears in Dad's eyes and how he'd sit staring out the back door, like he was expecting someone. There was the time that the old man set me outside in February and if Jr. hadn't brought me right back inside? What the hell, my claim to fame would have been top prize in a snow sculpture contest. Those early times? What can I tell you? I went from guilt, to anger, to hatred and gone for seven years. If it mattered I'd change every moment of that period, but it doesn't. I'm older now than he was during that period in our lives and with all our differences...

We've got more in common these days. I told you earlier that I didn't think Shad Sr. was crazy; no, what he is, he's sad; I know the feeling. "You're right." I think this snow is going to stay. "It's been awhile since I smelled anything this clean."

"It agrees with ya huh?" Shad Sr. turns back toward the corral.

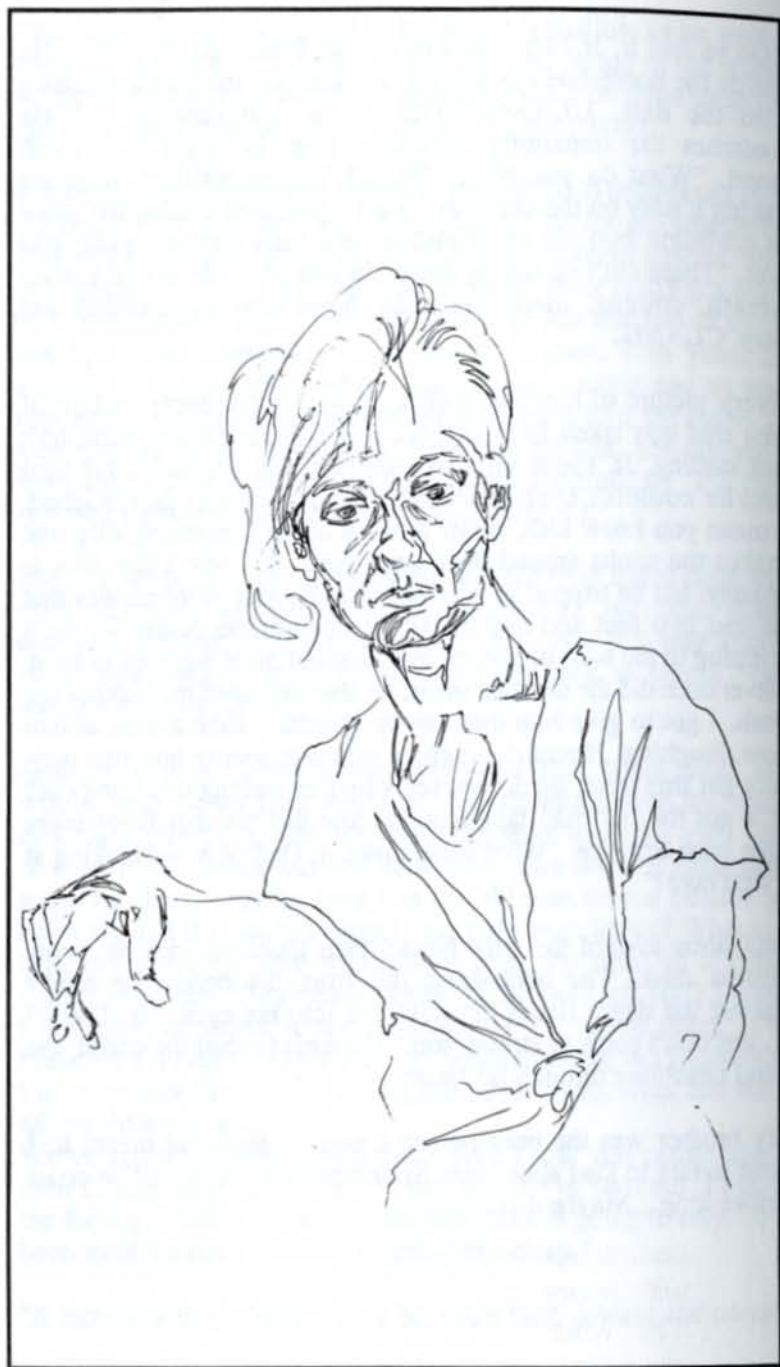
"Do ya feel it, Jr.? I'm closing ya out. Bound to happen..." He holds the horseshoe up, moving it in and out and in, then hurls it into the dark. **CLANG.** "This is the last chance, Jr." He switches the remaining horseshoe from his right to his left hand. "What do you think, David? Is this brother of yours taking it easy on the old man?" He laughs, then blinks, the snow is crowding into his beard and turning his eyebrows white and wet. "There ain't no taking it easy in this life." He takes a deep breath, coughs, then floats the horseshoe open-ended and lazy. **CLANG.**

Every picture of him that I've seen, well wait, every picture of him that was taken from say, oh, a year before I was born, he's not smiling. Jr. spent all that time trailing around after him and he couldn't ever remember a time when they just laughed. I mean you know kids, right? Always doing something silly that makes the adults around them grin. Well, Jr. I won't say he was clumsy, but he tripped in his sleep. His biggest problem was that he had two feet and had to put one before the other. So he's tripping in the barn or sliding over that old mare we used to have. Never once did the old man smile; he always helped my brother up, yeah, I got to give him that, but no laughter. Take a look at him now, laughing. Hmmm? It agrees with me, seeing him this way, he's got fine teeth. So do you see why I'm waiting this thing out? Jr.'s got the old man laughing, he sure did me that favor more than once or twice. "What's that make it, Dad? Are we looking at a first here?"

Dad turns toward the dark house, then looks up into the snow blurred dusk. The horseshoes fall from his hands, he blinks against the damp flakes that dissolve into his eyes. "Jr...David? Jr. just don't seem as strong, son." He turns toward the corral, the wind trembling through his beard.

My brother was the only person I ever hugged and meant it. I need to talk to Dad about that. Spring planting time will be on us before long....Maybe then.



**WAITING ON MR. JONES**

Stepping off the curb took all day.  
Out of habit,  
next to a trash can fire a scarecrow  
waits,  
for a ticket on the mainline. One way  
up or down a track that crawls through  
day and night.

Waits

beneath neon decay, hands  
jammed in pockets, clenched,  
then opened and clenched again...

Waits, with eyes glazed like mica  
at the bottom of an autumn stream,  
fools gold

waits,

possessed by the deceit of a collapsed vein.

Stepping off the curb took all day...

**CLOSING TIME**

I'm standing before the Big Horns  
pictured above the bourbon, behind  
the bar in the Washakie Hotel...  
Tall tales bounce back and forth  
between two beet farmers and that driller  
with eight fingers and one thumb.  
Young drunks arm wrestle old drunks  
as if they were Elk debating tenure  
and the barmaid shouts, "This round  
is on winter. It just passed through  
Ten Sleep and will be here for last  
call."

**LOOSE ENDS**

It was cold that day yet the window  
stood open and the curtains moved,  
then lost their nerve as he rocked  
wearing his once a week white shirt,  
bib overalls with an Agate string tie  
tight against his throat. He won it  
in the dark, in a boxcar between  
Cutbank and Butte City...

The wind, the heat took his land  
one failed crop at a time and  
he glares like the Colorado mid-day sun  
at the mention of that past and god-damned  
taste of dirt forty years of whiskey  
can't wash away. He rocks back and  
forth and "Don't tell your mama, boy,  
that she's like her mother, strong,  
proud and let's me and you  
have another taste...Winter's on the way."

**IT'S ALL DONE WITH MIRRORS**

That rut and its twin run  
side by side  
from somewhere toward somewhere  
else...Maybe Montana

and

I'm tired, content to sit outside  
that tent I pulled from my pack,  
as if magic was meant to be shared  
with the sage

and

the Antelope who might assist me,  
perhaps saw me in half, free me  
to leave

and

stay between mountains

beneath

rain-laden skies

and

Wyoming grows mud, sells it  
to tourists unlike me but  
just like you

or

you who hold extinction next  
to your ear and listen for the sea.

The irony of the prairie,  
once an ocean floor...

**ICEFALL**

My passion is like my bone  
strong, yet fragile,  
yielding to fractures.

Splinters

of untouched

ivory

surface the skin.

Blood

drops like silent tears,  
then...mingles with dust.

Well... again,

it walks

runs

then... rests.

No one sees

invisible snow.

**FAR AWAY**

It is a terrible fate being sick constantly.  
Nothing serious--an innocent cold to keep  
the mind off better things.

Making love with sleep, hoping it will love  
back, so rest will come.

Waking, 2 A.M., snot dried on the nose,  
breath impaired,  
inhaling only through the mouth over a sore  
throat. It makes tears come to eyes.

Sheets so cold that they're wet  
and smaller for the discomfort.

Nothing works. Not even simple lids  
to shade the eyes from light that's brighter  
for the size of dilated pupils.

Rolled up tight and white as a cue ball,  
cornered in the bed, feet cupped warm in  
bunged blankets, one arm naked in stale air.

Alternating between lifting a steam-cup of  
Nestle cocoa to chapped lips  
and keeping the pages of some anthology of poems  
held close to a clotted head.  
Thumb pressed tight in the binding pages,  
separated like stubborn wings of a fallen bird-god.

Letters visible by the lemon scented candle flames  
and extant rays of moon.

Reading again and again a soothing poem  
by an obsolete NYC shoe-saleswoman.  
Wondering if maybe she is her poem,  
if she is soothing without words.  
Using only hands and breasts and thighs  
and subtleties never mentioned.

**AUTUMN BREEZE**

The wind, she rips at me,  
Imploring by her strength  
To turn and run with her.  
A leaf  
Then two  
Then dozens race by,  
Shouting brittle noise.  
Am I moving the wrong way,  
Back towards places  
They have never been?  
Or have they simply passed through  
The World,  
Without bothering to stop,  
Or stare, or wonder,  
Endlessly caught within each other  
On a path I choose not to follow?

**The Peace of the Sargasso**

Few places are left in this world where the peace and beauty of nature can still be felt as they must have been hundreds of years ago. For me, one such place is an area of the North Atlantic known as the Sargasso Sea. To some people, the name Sargasso may evoke half-remembered dreams from Jules Verne and William Hope Hodgson, while others who are unfamiliar with the lore of the sea may picture the place as just another part of the vastness of the ocean. But the sea is a very large expanse, and parts of it can differ from each other with the extremes of city and countryside. And the Sargasso Sea contains an ocean radically different from the normal view that people on land hold when looking out from a beach or dock. To be a part of the ocean for a time brings to light experiences and images beyond the typical stereotype most people have when thinking of the sea.

I was able to see the Sargasso while working and serving aboard a sailing research vessel last fall through the S.E.A. Semester program in Massachusetts. With thirty-two other crew and students, I experienced for seven weeks the reality of being at sea, while I lived on the ocean as sailors a hundred years ago did, traveling from Boston to Grenada over 2000 miles off the U.S. coast. The voyage led my ship through the vastness of the Sargasso Sea, exploring its beauty and mysteries for a full week of new sensation and learning.

The Sargasso is an area of the Atlantic some seven hundred miles off the Eastern coast, covering Bermuda and encompassing much of the so-called Bermuda Triangle. There have been legends and stories built around the Sargasso from the time men first sailed through it. Even before our crew boarded ship, a six-week Maritime Studies course introduced us to many of the experiences and feelings about the sea that were written by nineteenth century authors who were overwhelmed by the grandeur and magnitude of the Atlantic. The legendary Sargasso is apparently a place well-liked for its ominous implications, because it appears frequently in so many authors' works. The

recent, disturbing incidents of ships disappearing without trace in the Bermuda Triangle also contribute to the dread associated with it by mariners of today.

Jules Verne, in his *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, tells of a dead region in the ocean containing the graveyard of ships, enshrouded by masses of strange, glowing seaweed--an area deadly to sailors, which is completely still of wind and wave. Many of the other well-known authors of the 1800's, including Captain Frederick Marryat, William Hope Hodgson, and even Jack London, have included in their writings both first-hand impressions and cloudy fantasies of the expanse of the Sargasso. Even to them, the Sargasso was a place to be feared and avoided. Because of the stories that I read and learned of, my own sense of subconscious uneasiness started to form long before we had left Massachusetts, and after sailing through it, I can understand where some of the earlier writers' fears about the Sargasso might have originated.

When our research vessel crossed the Gulf Stream into the beginnings of the Sargasso, the old stories merged from dreamy visions into reality. Our sails slacked and the sea calmed, deepening from its green-blue to a pure, hypnotic blue which turned transparent enough to see great distances beneath the surface. Wind and wave continued to deaden, and the horizon seemed to flatten out for miles around. We sighted the first of the great *Sargassum* seaweed rafts, which float in huge clumps within the current boundaries surrounding the Sargasso, just before sunset, with the off-watch all topside on deck struggling to keep the absolute silence broken with laughter and an occasional guitar tune.

The silence itself was most disturbing until I got used to it and began to enjoy it. Always on the ocean there is some kind of sound--the wind whistling or snapping in the sails, the waves splashing against the sides of the hull, even an occasional breaking whitecap or lone seagull crying overhead. But within the Sargasso, all sounds are lost to the past, drowned by stillness and an all-pervading quietness which is almost solid.

As darkness dropped on us, the *Sargassum* rafts seemed to float by more frequently, with their masses darkly back-lit by the subtle blue fire of phosphorescence from tiny microorganisms surfacing within the clumps to feed, as the huge mats slid to either side or were parted by the bow of the ship. Hanging onto the very tip of the bow and staring out and ahead of us, I could sense more than see the flowing contours of seaweed rafts in the distance, rising and falling slower than sleeping breath, on a wilderness of liquid glass.

But far to the contrary of the stories of death, there is an infinite diversity of life within the waters, mostly in the seaweed itself. Although the stuff may seem incredibly eerie, it houses multitudes of organisms and communities. The silence, after I have listened to the cacophony of traffic and the city, is more restful and fulfilling than a vacation in the mountains, without even the gurgling of a stream or the buzz of an insect. The complete and utter solitude I found was more relaxing than frightening, making the rare sounds of a surfacing fish or an echoing roll of thunder so much more impressive and beautiful than they are normally given credit as being, if a person even bothers to listen or can hear them at all.

To me, silence and nature are hand in hand. Quiet thought and contemplation are necessary to maintain my sanity. And within the silence of the Sargasso, my time for gentle self-reflection was increased a hundred times what I can normally take from a busy schedule. Instead of a legendary, endless expanse of danger and uneasiness, I found just the opposite: the peace of the sea itself, while I lived within an area most people can never reach.

Sam Droganes

## How to Tell 'Em Apart

In the United States we have something almost unprecedented in this world, something as unpredictable as the weather, and something that people like Archie Bunker have long said stinks like New Jersey. This institution is called the two-party system and consists of Democrats and Republicans, whose differences are like those between night and day. Yes, there are many differences between the members of the two parties which are very significant and cannot be ignored when voting or choosing one party over the other.

To start off, neither Democrats nor Republicans are left-handed, and since the right side of the body is controlled by the left side of the brain and left side of the body is controlled by the right side of the brain, neither Democrats nor Republicans are in their right mind. This is aptly displayed at all times.

Democrats buy most of the books that have been banned somewhere while Republicans form censorship committees and read them as a group. More people are Democratic than Republican but more Republicans than Democrats vote. Democrats frequent K-Mart while Republicans go to Sears. This explains why K-Mart operates the most stores while Sears takes in more money.

Republicans consume three-fourths of all the rutabaga produced in this country, while the rest is thrown out by the Democrats. Also, Democrats eat the fish they catch, whereas Republicans hang them on the wall. Republicans always wear hats and almost always clean their paint brushes; Democrats grow thick heads of hair and use their paint brushes only once. When bugs crawl on their fish, Democrats step on them while the Republicans employ exterminators.

To get to the more basic difference, Republican boys date Democratic girls. Of course they plan to marry Republican girls some day, but feel they're entitled to a little fun first, before the

sacrificial torture. And finally, Republicans sleep in twin beds--- some even in separate rooms. That's why there are more Democrats and fewer of them vote.





David P. Goguen

## DROUGHT

Another leaf

fell

today--

brown and brittle  
against the bleached ground  
Survivors rustle,  
creating a song  
for grass  
the color  
of shopping bags.

Behind callous bark,  
trees hide  
subtle hints  
of emotion--

tight rings

where memories linger  
like a cat's whisker  
wound steadfast  
in a carpet.



### APPROACHING HEATING SEASON

Anyday now,  
the air conditioning unit  
on the building next door  
will cease its waterfall imitation  
and die gracefully.  
My curtains will come alive  
like lungs expanding and contracting  
with the breath of winter,

penetrating

layers of weatherstripping  
laid by my hands  
on autumn afternoons.

Anyday now,  
an earthquake  
will rumble below  
and air from forgotten vents  
will impersonate summer.  
I will remember  
when I was the grass  
under old tires  
lying next to the barn--  
restrained and tender,

sheltered from light.

### A Few Questions

"Mrs. Lane, I'm going to ask you a few questions. They're part of the paperwork I need for the Green River Home Health Care Office. So we can send someone out here to help you take care of yourself."

Tootie nodded but withheld total approval. The tall, soft-spoken nurse seemed nice, but she was a stranger.

"How old are you, Mrs. Lane?"

"I'm ninety-four years old and I weigh ninety-four pounds."  
She smiled at the accomplishment.

"When's your birthday, Mrs. Lane?"

"February 9! I was born in 18 and 94."

"Are you single?"

"I'm a widow." Tootie wondered why she had asked that. The nurse already knew about Kirby. Tootie had overheard Katie tell her about the hard life she had led in the years before Kirby had settled down. The two women, one a complete stranger, had stood at the front stoop and discussed her marriage, her man. As if they knew! She remembered the day Kirby had told her father he wanted to marry her. Wasn't that like him to tell her father instead of ask him. Kirby was always so sure of himself. Independent, cocky.

"She's never had a well day in her life," her father had glared at the tall, sassy farmhand who wanted his daughter. "You're buying yourself a bundle of doctor bills." But Kirby didn't flinch. He took her, skinny and sickly and barely able to handle a hoe, and made her his wife.

"Do you own your home?"

"Yes, I do. Kirby bought it, oh, back during the time FDR was president. He bought it then, and now he's dead, I own it. He paid cash. Never owed for it at all."

"Do you live here alone?"

"You know I do. That's why you're gonna send somebody to help me."

The nurse smiled and recorded the answer on her clipboard. Tootie reminded herself that she was supposed to be friendly to this woman. If she didn't pass the test, she had to go to the nursing home. She hoped they didn't put her in the same one Kirby went to. The smell of urine and alcohol filled her nostrils and she saw the long hall outside Kirby's door. Crazy people touched her as she walked toward his room.

"I want to come home," Kirby whispered when she leaned over his bed. "Give me another kiss, Toot."

"Mrs. Lane, do you watch TV?"

"I hardly ever do. I can't see. I listen."

"Do you have a favorite program?"

"Umhuh, I like Divorce Court. That judge really gives it to 'em good. They can't put anything over on him. And I like wrestling. Sometimes I can't find the channel for it though. And I like both them shows Little Joe is in, you know, the one about heaven and, what's that other one? Oh, you know, Little House in the Prairie."

Tootie's thoughts drifted to Little Joe. She saw him ride up to the ranchhouse. Young again. Not so much hair. He really has too much hair for an angel. It'd be something if you could get that old show of his on the TV. What was the name of it? Big green fields and horses and Pa . . . "Bonanza." She said the last word aloud.

"Excuse me?" The nurse leaned closer to the old woman.

Tootie fled a cloud of confusion. It might be a trick. Her eyes narrowed to alert her mind. "What was your question?" She had to think straight. This was a test.

"Mrs. Lane, do you have any family?"

Tootie regained her confidence. "Yes, I do. I have a grandson. He lives in Texas. He has two sons, but I don't know where they live. He's divorced. But he brings them to see me sometime. I have a granddaughter in Chicago. She said I could come and live with her any time. She would come and get me."

"Are you thinking about moving in with her, with your granddaughter?"

"I did think about it, but it's too noisy and I don't like smoke. It chokes me. Sometimes, I can hardly breathe when all of 'em are smokin'. Whew!" Tootie shook off the memory.

"Do you communicate with your granddaughter? Talk to her?"

"She lives in Chicago. Oh, you mean the telephone. I don't use it. I don't like the ringin'. It makes me nervous."

"Do you write to her?"

"Mrs. Kellogg writes for me. She reads me her letters, too. My granddaughter has a phone. Mrs. Kellogg can ring her up if she has to. She called her when I was in the hospital."

The nurse seemed to understand and continued writing.

Tootie studied her large figure. Boy, she's a big girl! She's bigger than the boys. In her mind she saw her two sons. The older one stood tall, like Kirby, on the rock ledge. He was casting his line. It swung out, way out into the river. The younger boy sat nearer her own spot. His line dangled, tempting nothing. She could outfish both of them. And her, only ninety pounds. She moved her hand to reel in the sleek catfish that tugged at her line.

"Are you O.K., Mrs. Lane?"

"Just a little cramp in my hand. A charley horse." Tootie massaged her right hand with her left. Her bony fingers clutched the loose skin, and her nails dug into the flesh. She had forgotten her nails. She had meant to have Mrs. Kellogg trim them. She could feel their length and could imagine the yellowed thickness that should have been trimmed off. She quickly hid them in her lap so the nurse couldn't see them either.

"Mrs. Lane, have you ever considered going into a nursing home?"

She had seen them! She knew about her nails!

"Has your doctor ever talked to you about it?"

Tootie concentrated on the question. "He told me if I didn't get anyone to help me, I'd have to go. I have a lot of people to help me. Mrs. Kellogg writes my letters. She reads me my mail and takes care of my bills. Neighbors bring me food. People from the church stop in nearly every day. Brother White brings tapes of his sermon. I don't go to church anymore. I don't cook anymore." Someone had told her to say she wouldn't cook and Tootie was glad to get it in. "I might have to go to the nursing home. If I have to, I will. I don't think I have to yet. I'd rather stay here." She wondered if she should tell the nurse that she would die if she had to live in a nursing home. Better not to say too much. "Empty barrels make the most noise," her mother used to say.

"Mrs. Lane, do you take your medication by yourself?"

"Yes, I take the four on the table in the morning, one from each bottle. At night I take the same ones except for the little, bitty one. It's only for in the morning. I have a headache pill in on the dresser--- for when my head gets to hurtin'. I have some sleepin' pills in the top drawer, but I don't take them except when I can't sleep."

"Do you usually sleep through the night?"

"Most always."

"If you need to get up during the night, can you manage it alone?"

"Yes, I can manage it." Tootie felt herself sigh. The test was getting long and the weight of fatigue began to settle over her shoulders. Who was sitting in Kirby's chair? He wouldn't like it if he came in. Katie. She had forgotten that Katie was in the room. She couldn't see her face, but she knew Katie was smiling. Katie was the one who had told her to be friendly, to answer the questions, but not to talk too much. Katie thought she might sound confused, and Tootie knew she was right.

"Mrs. Lane, do you ever go out?"

"I don't go to church anymore." Had she already answered that question?

"Do you go out in the yard?"

"They won't let me." A pout clouded her face and she forgot that she was hiding her fingers. She pointed through the window at a small white house much like her own and directly across the street. "The one over there keeps an eye on my yard. If she sees me in the yard, she tells Mrs. Kellogg. And then I really get the dickens! Once she told me she cried when she heard I went out under the tree to put some food out for the birds. She's afraid I might fall and break my hip. I don't want to worry her so I promised I wouldn't do it anymore."

Tootie watched the nurse write down her promise. With it written down and turned in to the government, it would have to be honored. She couldn't sneak out to feed the birds anymore. They really didn't need the food, but she enjoyed feeding them. She turned her heavy head toward the window and envisioned Kirby's yellowbird. It flitted about the tree and settled near his lawn chair. Cautiously it pecked at the bits of pawpaw Kirby tossed as bait. Contrary to its nature, it finally hopped up on the barrel, not two feet from Kirby's hand, where it found the fleshy orange pawpaw that was its reward for the intimacy.

"Mrs. Lane, I know you are getting tired. We have only a few more questions."

Katie had said she would be nose. How many more questions could she have on that paper? Tootie reminded herself that she wasn't going to tell her about her money. Some things other people didn't need to know. They would probably talk about it after they left. All the neighbors would be chattering about how much she got on her check. Kirby had kept cash and hid it away. No one knew how much they had then. They thought he was rich. He let them think what they would. That's why Mrs. Kellogg said he was mean to me, thought Tootie. He wouldn't put in a real bathroom for years. Taking care of her colostrom was so messy without a sink and running water. He finally had 'em fix one. Paid for it the day they finished. Took all the money he had hid. "'Bout time," was all they said then. They didn't know. They didn't know she had twenty-eight dollars hid under the rug right now. She reaffirmed her decision not to tell them. Not even Katie.

"Mrs. Lane, do you think you need someone to help you?"

Tootie studied on it. It was a trick question like Judge Whompner would have asked. "I'd rather do it myself. I can do most of it. I just can't see to take care of myself in the morning."

"You mean to irrigate your colostomy?"

Tootie heard Katie move in her chair. This must be an important question. Tootie had always taken care of herself. Kirby would move the chair in there for her. He picked up the vaseline and soap. He got the Cancer Society bandages down from the top shelf. But she did the rest herself. Why couldn't she do it now? Oh, yes, she couldn't see. But she could hear, better than she could ever hear before. She could hear them on the street talking:

"Kirby Lane's widow."

"She must be a saint, puttin' up with that old geezer for fifty years."

Their picture had been in the Clarion. Fifty years. Not all bad. Not all bad.

"Yes," Katie interrupted. "She can't see to insert the tube properly and to keep everything clean."

"Let Mrs. Lane answer the questions please."

Tootie realized that Katie had helped her. She must have drifted off.

"Katie could help me take care of myself, but she can't get here every day. I have to do it in the morning. The doctor said to do it at the same time every morning. The nurse in the hospital told me that too. I feel better if I do it early."

"When did you have the cancer surgery? How long ago?"

"Years! Maybe 25 years ago. They all said I couldn't handle it. It makes my sister sick. She can't hardly talk about it."

Only Kirby hadn't worried about her. He had just said, "Do it, woman. It's your job, now." He even left when she came home from the hospital. He was gone ten days that time. He knew she could handle it and she did. By the time he got back it was a routine, a habit. He got back on the first. He always came back in time to pay the bills. They - the women who brought food - said he had deserted her when she needed him the most.

"God only knows where he's gone off to," they whispered. She didn't know where he'd gone. She never knew where Kirby went off to when he left. But this time he came back with money, money to pay the hospital. She should have told them that. Some things you just don't tell.

"Mrs. Lane, do you know who is president, President of the United States?"

"I didn't vote. I didn't want to. I hated to vote for a Republican and I'd had to vote for the actor, Ronald Reagan." Kirby used to take her to vote. They'd walk down the alley and cut through the back of the Baptist Church, her church. Not Kirby's.

He never went to church with her. Not even once. That's why they said he was an atheist. Maybe he was. He said he might die a lost soul, but never a hypocrite like some of her church friends. He shouldn't have judged them so harshly, the way they judged him. He should have gone to church with her. But, she didn't think he was an atheist.

"Mrs. Lane, do you know what day it is?"

"Tuesday."

"What date? What month and year?"

"October 15, \_\_\_\_." Tootie reached into her mind for the year, but it was not there. She said some years to herself, 1939, 1975, but they were wrong.

"I have to study on the year for a minute." She put her hand to her forehead and rubbed slightly, hoping to stimulate the thought. Clouds pushed into her memory. She felt a tight band around her throat.

"That's all right, Mrs. Lane. I forget the year sometime myself."

"No, you don't, Tootie thought. Only an old, senile, washed-up hag who can't take care of herself would forget what year it is. Dear God, she prayed, what year is it? 1980? No. No. October 15, \_\_\_\_." She needed time to study on it. She was married in 1912. Her babies were born in 1919 and 1920. Her mother died in 1930. Her father died in 1944, during the war. A year later her oldest son died. An accident. Then Kirby. When was it Kirby died?

"Mrs. Lane, I th \_\_\_\_"

"Wait a minute." It was 1969, the year they said we went to the moon. Kirby never believed it. He said they had all kinds of tricks they could do on the television. A while after that her boy had a heart attack. She couldn't remember the year. She went back to Kirby.

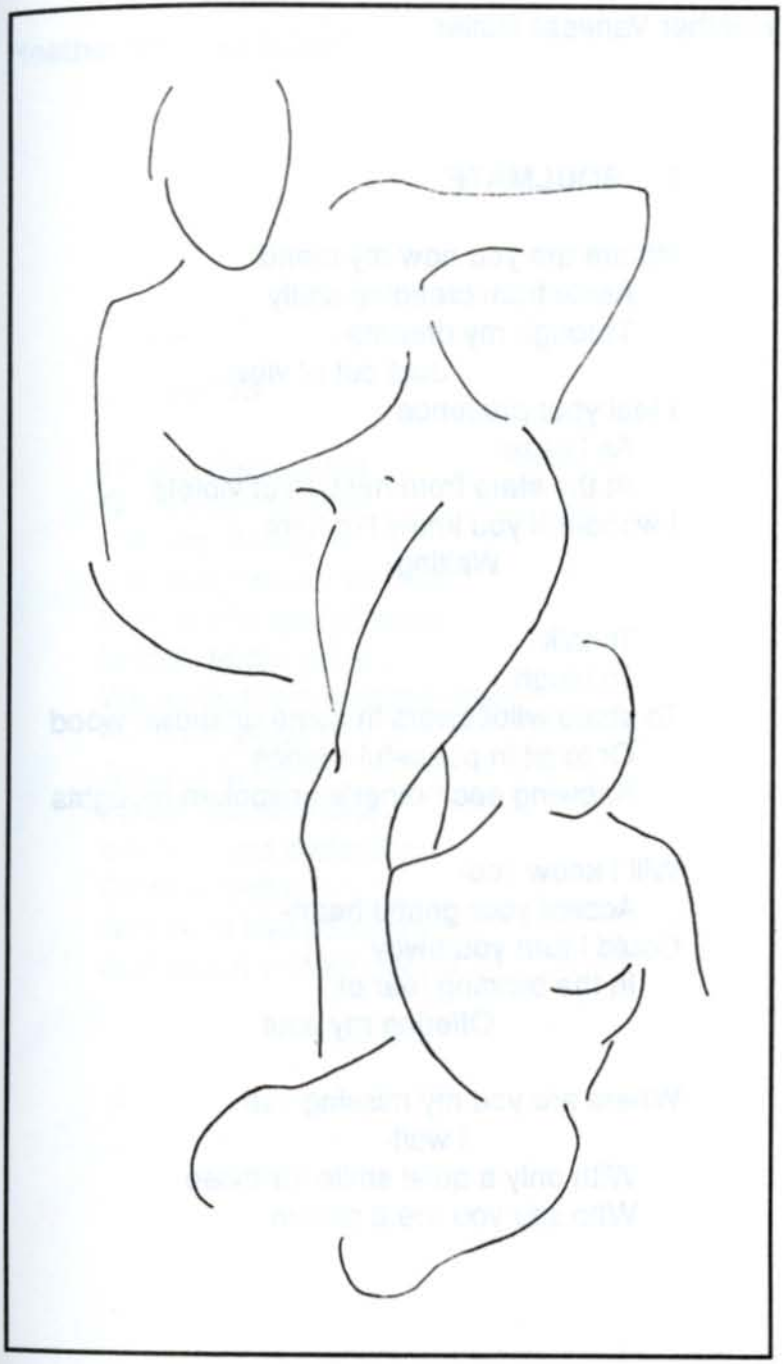
"Mrs. Lane, I think I have all I need now. I hope I haven't worn

you out." She turned toward Katie and began explaining the next steps in the application process.

I failed the test, Tootie accosted herself. What year is it? Kirby, how long have you been dead? Old Ugly-cat died the same day, ten years later, 1979. That was the year the great-grandsons came to see me on Christmas. They were here for the first service at the new church. We will be in the new church nine years this Christmas. Mrs. Kellogg said so.

"1988!" She said sharply. "It's 1988!" Her eyes squinted as she scanned the room for a response. There was no sound. She was alone.

Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.



▯ SOULMATE

Where are you now my friend  
    Aside from creeping softly  
    Through my dreams-  
                    Just out of view

I feel your presence  
    As I gaze  
    At the stars from my bed of violets  
I wonder if you know I'm here  
    Waiting-

    To talk  
    To laugh  
To share wildflowers in some unknown wood  
    Or to sit in peaceful silence  
    Knowing each other's unspoken thoughts

Will I know you-  
    Accept your gentle heart-  
Could I turn you away  
    In the blinding fear of  
                    Offering my soul

Where are you my missing self  
    I wait-  
    With only a quiet smile for those  
    Who say you are a dream

▯ BIRDS

I watch the sun set  
Quietly by the river  
I sit, wondering if  
It is rising where you are  
I share this spot of earth  
With a mockingbird  
We enjoy the spring together-  
He in his world  
And I in mine  
I await the time when  
our light and darkness  
Come together  
And I can see your lark  
And you, my mockingbird

III GREY

I am the mockingbird  
And you may pass by  
My wan grey wings  
In search of  
More lustrous hues  
I do not mind  
They revel in their glowing moment  
In the sun  
While I remain silent, unseen  
I wait  
And listen  
And all their brilliant melodies  
I seal within.  
When darkness looms near,  
And with the colors  
of the sun  
Their songs fade into shadow,  
My voice becomes a prism  
For the colors in my soul  
I unleash the songs  
and shine





Brian J. Bacher

### MOUNTAINS AREN'T FOREVER

Hikers  
Walk my trails  
Zig zagging  
About the plants and trees  
Enrooted in my skin  
As they tease the clouds

This is how I was

The rains came  
Pounding my skin  
Taking pieces of me  
Downward  
Until  
I am no longer  
Playing with the clouds  
But rather  
Just a hill  
Reaching  
For my friends  
In the Sky

Flowers  
Have replaced the trees  
Supplying  
Bees with nectar

The wind blows  
And again  
The rains fall  
Reducing me

Until  
All that remains  
Is a single  
Pebble

Kathy Binns

### AQUATIC VOWELS

Marginal balloons, flowers  
reflect I don't care  
if animals talk.  
Honey bees, chimps communicate.  
People are linguistic puzzles  
linking morphemes, forming phonemes.

But the dolphin. . .  
on the blackboard  
my mind sketches  
illustration to accompany  
Dr. Dill's narration. Classmates'  
chuckles become water sloshing.  
impeded by the whale's dead weight  
and the dolphin's mournful whistle.

The dolphin swims  
to her partner.  
The whale disintegrates inside  
afraid of the air  
she's carried to.  
supported underneath by  
instinct  
till death comes cold  
and wind burnt.

The dolphin's whistle  
--hear it? It says  
assistance kills  
with every tide.  
That whistle follows  
me home.

Kathy Binns

### MY FIRST EXPEDITION TO THE DOLLAR STORE

You snicker and roll your eyes  
when I say I wear  
my brother's long johns--  
but your concern  
is which crayolas to buy.

I feel like a child,  
but for two weeks  
I've driven thru Red Barn Liquors  
alone.

Obediently, I follow  
chewing my lips  
as you play in the aisles  
in that voice  
your brothers  
must have  
squelched.

Contradictions, you say  
when I question your hypocrisy.

Now, I sound like an impatient mother,  
but those socks you've chosen  
do reveal our ages  
because I would wear loafers  
sockless rather than  
printed knee-highs.

I need to study,  
want to talk.  
Instead,  
I dawdle and wait  
while you  
visual  
shop.



**BREAKING FREE**

In February last year  
I stood by and watched  
four old elms  
do an odd dance,  
shake their limbs  
free of the ice storm,  
like a Collie  
coming in from rain.

First, the head,  
a slow wag, then like ripples  
on a dead pond  
other branches cracked free,  
one by lazy one.

Chunks fell angry  
all around  
but did not touch me  
where I stood.

I thought  
of the two of us,  
separate,  
after seven years of hard  
time and labor.

In due time  
we all sever ourselves  
from the ice in our lives--  
our own, and others'.

Sometimes, the ice creaks  
all the way down us, bouncing  
long and restless  
before it finally hits bottom and pounds  
the concrete full of holes.

Other times,  
it melts down us,  
while we lie,  
like great Collie dogs  
by the fire, half asleep,  
tired, and dripping.

Scott Earle

**TANGERINE**

I hear the buzz  
Of flies landing  
So daintily  
Before I shoo them away.  
They too adore  
Such sticky sweetness.

Holding its fullness, the color of  
Florida entices me to sink  
Slowly  
In. Ah,  
To taste  
A sunset!

Lisa Frye

**POEM**

Every night  
I sleep alone  
between line-dried sheets.  
My laser smooth legs  
glide under the weight  
of a hand-sewn wedding ring.  
I listen to night sounds  
and ceiling fans.  
Huddling  
then hunching.  
A pillow is no comfort.

**PICKLE LOVE**

Cucumbers  
fresh, firm on the vines  
stream like veins across the ground.  
Canning-time hot  
bare feet ache against red clay mud  
as squash vines scratch summer-brown legs.  
Choosing the best against the heat  
we pick tin tubs full  
then pack them up the slope to the kitchen  
Bread and butter  
kosher dill  
Grape leaves covering slices  
before Kerr lids did.  
I ate my share of our labor  
then brought back the empty jars,  
the rubber rings still intact.



## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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