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literature and art magazine

towers is s.a. funded

We have used water in this literary and art magazine to metaphorically represent the creativity contained within.

Just as a water tower is a vessel that contains precious life-giving contents, this book is a vessel that contains the creativity of our fellow NIU students as expressed in their poetry, fiction and art.

THE ART DIRECTORS

"CLIFFORD"2

I walked up to the door every other summer day

and taking the bell to the store smelled of bill

Your slender neck invites me to caress you on this chilly day

touching you I feel the sensation of your lips as they pump and pump every inch of your mouth, waiting, waiting, wanting more

our motions, feelings, spills, satiated, leaving you on your bed of maple, alone, you for others to quench with you,

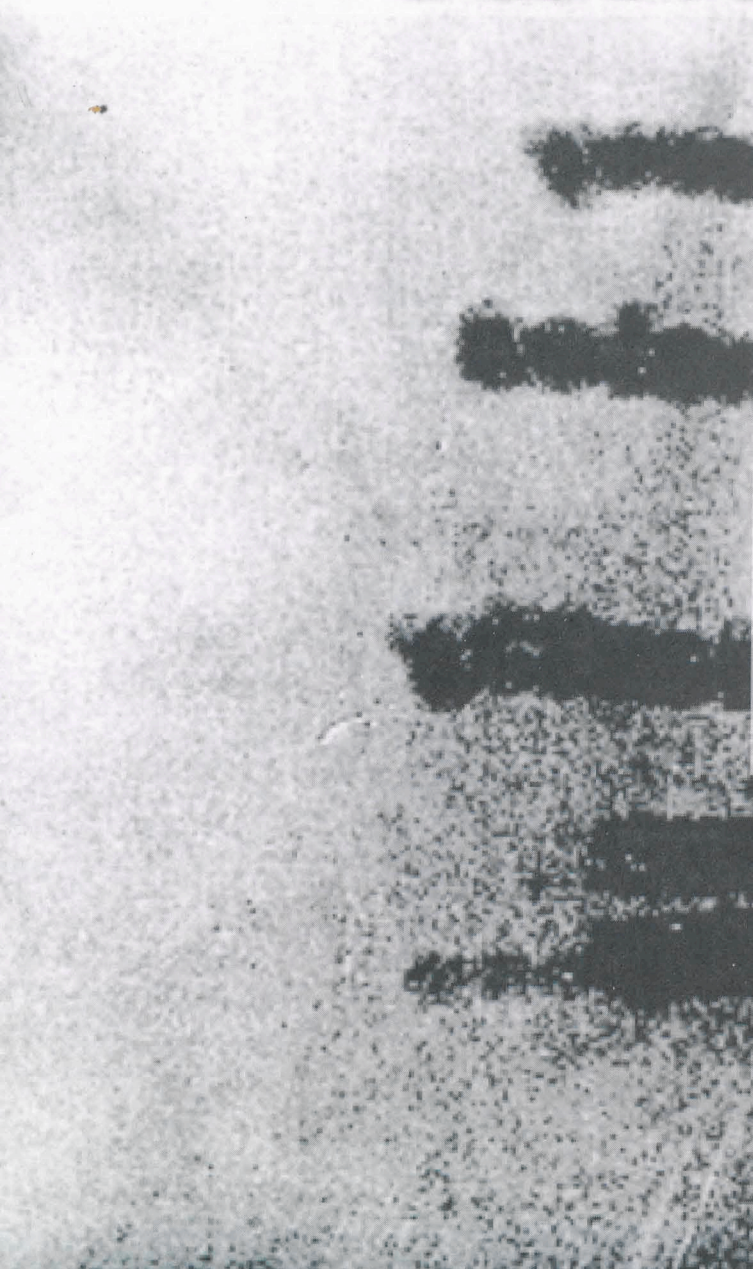
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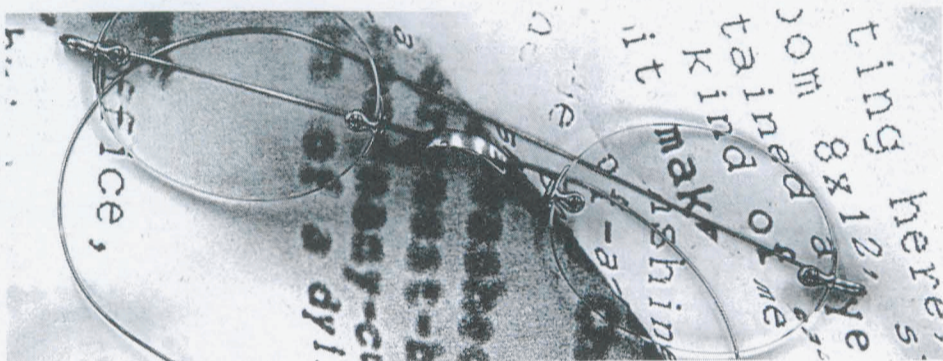
leaving you on your bed of maple, alone, you for others to quench with you,



This year's TOWERS takes on a new look.

Not only is the magazine more visible because of the eleven by seventeen size, but it is printed on recycled paper. Also, we have included a poster suitable for framing.

TOWERS **volume seventy-two, represents a renewal of enthusiasm, creativity, and a sense of ecological responsibility among the staff members. Everyone who has worked on this year's issue has donated**

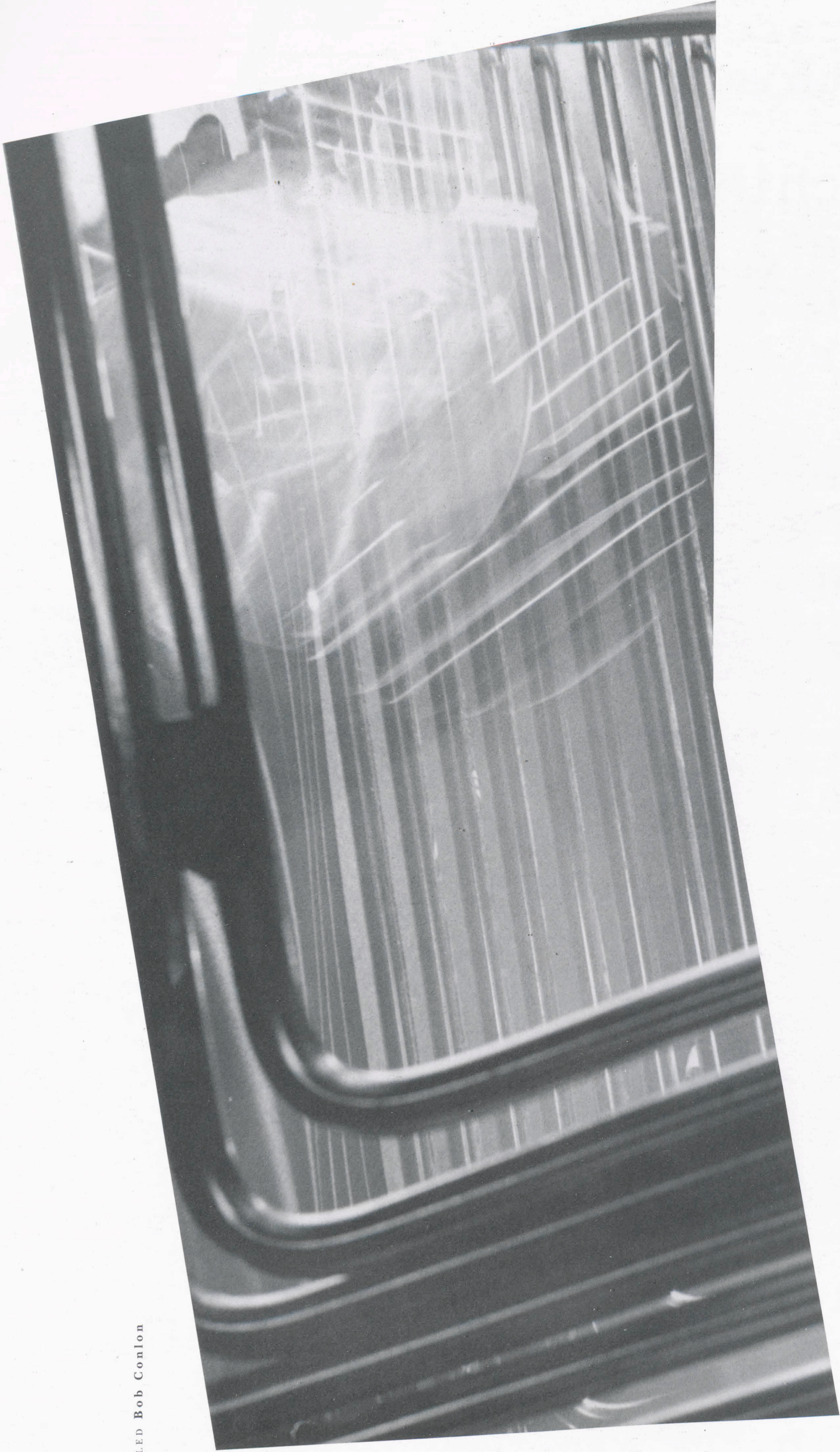


precious time out of their busy schedules so that the student body at NIU can have the opportunity to share in the accomplishments of our most creative students. Choosing the best work out of the many submissions was not an easy task. I would like to thank the writers, poets, and artists whose work did not make it to the final copy and encourage them to continue seeking publication.

EDITOR'S STATEMENT

I would like to give special thanks to my Assistant Editor, Amanda Christensen, for her tireless efforts, to the Art Directors, Dan Kraemer, and Ken Fox, for their creativity, and to the NIU Foundation for their financial support of our prize winners. Thanks also goes to the editors, staff, Mike Malone, Joe Gastiger, and James McNiece.

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Janice L. Knudsen



UNTITLED Bob Conlon

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LEGACY David Hagerman

*Mine is a legacy
Of silence and dependency,
So much fear and efforts to ingest
The smoke and glue of many drugs
Which once enabled me
To believe, at least,
That life was for the taking.
But life took me
By the hair at the back of my head.
Then the fear and the silence returned,
Though in measures this time
Which amounted, it would seem,
To some sort of natural overdose.
Control would come to have new meaning,
As would fear and silence.
It became easier to imagine becoming a tree
Than being accepted in light of the fact
That I too was a human being.*



"IN THE ZEROX ROOM" Valerie Scholten

*I'm sitting here, in the English office,
In a room 8x12, staring at the brick wall;
It's stained a yellowish color—
It's a kind of sad yellow color—
Well, it makes me sad, anyway.*

*It's not a sunshine-on-a-summer-day yellow;
Or a center-of-a-white-daisy yellow,
It's not the Dorothy's-off-to-see-the-Wizard brick road yellow
Or even the smiling Chiquita banana yellow.*

*It's more a I've-washed-that-shirt-too-many-times yellow,
And a this-paper-must-be-from-the-1800's yellow;
It's the one-too-many-cups-of-coffee stained teeth yellow,
And the skin of a dying woman yellow.*

*So
I'm sitting here
In the English office,
In a room 7x11,
Staring at the brick wall;
Stained a yellowish color—
A kind of sad yellow color—
Well,
It makes me sad,
Anyway.*

REMEMBRANCE OF A CHILDHOOD Hilary Lee

**When I returned to the place of my summers, – I remembered
the closed door, the tan blanket, and the
cheap bedspread.**

**I saw the cattails and the rebuilt sandbar
I waded out to my thighs and the cold
water sprayed my face as the waves
broke against my body.**

**My footprints laid beside the seagulls'
The salt stung my legs and the sand clung
to my toes and ankles.**

**I walked barefoot down the gravel road—
the rocks hurt my once toughened feet and
the sand was slowly brushed off
by the blades of grass growing
between the rocks.**

**When I returned—I crawled onto the bed
that was once too long for me.
Curled up in a ball, I shook with
recognition as the blackness of the child receded.**

**I drown the reminders—the shards
of the champagne glass hurled against the
brick red wall—**

**I drown them in the salted waters,
the calm wisps of wind-blown sand
faintly brushing across my cheek and
my sun-lightened hair once
blackened with youth.**



CHASING A BUTTERFLY WITH MY NIECE **Mary Collins**
(first place poetry)

UNTITLED Edith Mendez

A far flicker of orange
and black among the deep
greens of the garden

in your eyes now tired
of the teacups spilling, dolls
face-down, behind on the deck.

Wide awake,
alive in your third year,
where colors fly

through handfuls of air—
not yet the cars
you'll drive, the styles

you'll wear, the eyes of boys
you'll love. Our bare feet
tear through the soft stabs

of grass inside the fenced-in
world where we laugh
and chase for something

not quite as fast
as the hours that pass
in an afternoon.

I bear on my foot the mark of remembrance, a monument to the only prize I ever won. Her name was Yertyl.

Yertyl was the green glass cat I won at a carnival. The game was one in which I had to pound with a rubber hammer on a teeter-totter-like launch pad. When I pounded my end down, the end with a rubber frog on it would shoot up, rocketing the frog—if my timing was right—onto a lily pad somewhere in a pool of water. I had wasted only a couple dollars on other games and won nothing, so I figured I could waste a couple more. I had won nothing yet, ever, not even as a kid at a fun fair. You can imagine how I, being grey and thin haired, with a back not what it used to be, how I valued the prize of the first game I ever won.

*Your slender neck, bare
invites me to caress you
on this chilly day*

*touching you
I feel the sensation
reverberating down
your cold, cerulean body*

*pumping, slowly caressing
every inch I explore
your mouth, pouting
waiting, wanting more*

*our motions, synchronized
feelings, surging water
you and I, satisfied
spills, dripping pleasure*

*satiated, I walked away
leaving you there
on your bed of shriveled
umber, maple leaves*

*alone, you wait patiently
for others to come
to quench their thirst
with you, my waterpump...*



ECSTASY IN NEHRING PARK **Zainal Z. Ahmad**



She was presented to me, and I held her close.

"Careful," the game operator warned me, "she's very fragile."

So I took extreme precaution to protect from any possible harm the cat I named Yertyl. Kids were so careless. They would barrel right on into me. I would gasp and then carefully examine my precious prize. Adults shouldered anyone in their Wall Street way. And the gangs, the gangs! They harassed me as I fled the carnival. "I must get you home," I whispered to Yertyl. "These people are animals!"

At home I prepared a soft bed of my finest bath towel so Yertyl could rest. She didn't look hungry, so I prepared only one can of cat food. Actually, it was canned clams, my favorite dinner when dipped in melted margarine and lemon juice. But let it be known as cat food because I was willing to share all I had with my dear Yertyl. If she found out it was not really cat food, she would be shattered. Eventually, I accepted that Yertyl would never eat in front of me. And if she did, she would take only the smallest portion of my meal as I turned away long enough for a glass cat to steal, chew, and swallow what she wanted of my clams.

As the days and nights passed by, Yertyl and I spent long hours together. We conversed by candlelight into the wee whispers of the dawn's rays. In these long, intimate discourses, I learned the story of her abused childhood, some of her most well-hidden secrets and confidences, and the one hope Yertyl held for the future. I listened patiently, digging for clues in her frequent stream of thought language—I, trying to gain her trust; she, releasing after so long many offenses by which she'd been nearly shattered.

Yertyl took up much of my time, much of the days I formerly enjoyed walking in the parks, browsing the super markets for rare ethnic foods of the Orient, and—the one I missed the most—quietly singing to the pigeons in the park at night. Yertyl needed all my attention. Yertyl would often cry even when she suspected I might leave her alone in the apartment where mice could, in spiteful revenge against a helpless glass cat, nudge her with their germ-infested, snotty noses until she fell to the floor a murdered, shattered, unprotected, and probably never-remembered, dead cat. So I brought her with me.

Yertyl rode with me to the grocery store. She would sit on a blanket bed on the front seat floor of my car. She complained often of the cold, for my heater was weak and I lacked the money to buy the car Yertyl claimed would have enough heat to keep her warm. Then she would come with me into the store and I safely hid her in my breast pocket. When winter ended and I could no longer wear the coat, Yertyl would nest on top of my head and beneath my hat.

Yertyl liked the parks, but she feared the pigeons. "One peck," she told me, "would shatter me to pieces. You know how fragile I am." And she was right. I soon discovered just how fragile my glass cat was.

e. After Yertyl fell, I found one piece among a thousand that could be recognized as anything but dust, for she fell on my hard kitchen floor one late night after we had come home from the park. A thousand pieces—no, I could not have counted them the pieces were so fine—of shattered glass splashed across my grey tile floor. I didn't gasp. I called my friend.

"I've dropped glass on the floor."

"Are you barefoot?"

"Yes. I'm barefoot."

"Well, don't walk on it. Get some wet paper towels. But don't walk on the glass! You'll never get the slivers out of your feet."

She was right, too. For I had to step somewhere to get the towels wet and to wipe up all that shattered glass. Sometimes even today I think I feel some slivers still in my feet.

I'd cleaned up most of the glass dust before I noticed the blood on the floor. Yertyl must have fallen on my big toe and cut me. She always had to lay her mark on me. I hadn't five minutes to myself when Yertyl was around. Now she had permanently left her scent on my foot. I remember how she used to rub her chin to mark me as her territory. "Yertyl," I addressed the shattered remains, "I'm bleeding."

And now, how long has it been? The glass has been swept up, and my cut healed over, but a scar remains where Yertyl, the only prize I ever won, left with me the memory of her etched into my skin. And sometimes my foot stings; there's probably a little piece of Yertyl in my toe somewhere. Especially under the pads of my smaller toes hurts. The skin is very tender under there.





A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE **Linda Shepard**
(second place fiction)

It was October 9, 1967. The golden days of summer had long since faded into autumn. The stinging chill in the air caused him to walk a little faster. Dead leaves stirred and scattered in all directions. He wore faded jeans and a pair of black high top tennis shoes. The collar of his beige turtleneck blended with his long, ash blond hair. His face had the smoothness of youth. His eyes reflected the pain and uncertainty he carried in his heart. He walked with his hands jammed angrily into the pockets of his green and white Weston High School jacket. He had just turned nineteen three weeks earlier.

All afternoon he'd been thinking of Michael Sterns. When he'd read Michael's obituary in the paper a few months ago, something had flashed through his mind, something about a time to live and a time to die. Michael's time had come at eighteen. Gradually, his pace slowed. The chill in the air became insignificant.

He stopped for a few minutes when he reached Cahill Park. Leaning against the elm on the boulevard his thoughts drifted back to the sixth grade; the year Taylor's Dry Goods Store had sponsored the softball team he had played second base for. It was also the year he had fallen in love for the very first time. It had lasted all of two weeks. Her name was Sarah. She had short auburn hair, blue eyes and braces. He stood a few moments longer and then walked on.

Street lights flickered on. The neighborhood began taking on a warm evening glow. He found himself standing across the street from his home. The light in the kitchen was on. His mom would just be starting supper. The radio would be on. She would be humming to the music as she moved around the room. His dad would still be in the garage working on the Chevy. Slowly, his eyes wandered up to the darkened windows of his bedroom. An intense uncertainty settled itself around him. He sat down on the curb and closed his eyes. In his mind's eye he could see the peace poster hanging on the wall, the picture of him and Laurie on prom night taped to the dresser mirror, the battered old guitar resting in the corner. The draft notice lay crumpled on the floor. When he opened his eyes they were misty.

He stood, walked to the corner and turned south onto Jerico Street. He headed toward the shopping area on Cambridge Boulevard. Most of the stores had closed at 6:00 but there were still a few people on the street. Some were on their way to the Roxy to see "The Graduate," with Dustin Hoffman and Anne Bancroft. Others were headed over to the Pecos Bar and Grill. He stopped momentarily in front of Henderson's Five and Dime. In one window a huge advertisement invited everyone to a giant 40% off sale to start on Monday. In the other window was a haphazard arrangement of little toy soldiers with little toy guns. His thoughts went again to Michael Sterns. He turned and headed home.

The next afternoon he was out in his driveway, absentmindedly shooting baskets. The sun provided a comforting warmth. Leaves were falling gently from the oak tree in the backyard. He turned abruptly and walked into the house. The ball rolled silently down the driveway.

In the kitchen, the radio was playing softly. His mom sat at the table working on her illustrations for a children's book. He thought of all the hours he had spent sitting at that same table the day that crazy beagle, Charley, was killed by a hit and run driver, the time spent wondering when he'd start shaving, whether he'd ever learn to drive without running over the garbage cans, and wondering why Kelli Hunter had dumped him. He remembered all the hugs of reassurance and encouragement from his mom.

As he passed the den, he caught sight of his dad slouched in the overstuffed easy chair reading the Sunday paper. The headlines mocked him—"PEACE MARCH DISRUPTED BY VIOLENCE!" For him, the question had become not whether to fight, but how to fight. As he stood looking at his dad, he remembered that other Sunday afternoon at Stephens Park when they had sat on the swings and had their, now legendary, father-son sex talk. My god, they had been embarrassed.

He wandered up to his bedroom, fell back on the bed, clasped his hands under his head and gazed up at the ceiling. His eyes followed a crack that zigzagged out of one corner and abruptly stopped at the light fixture. He closed his eyes and let his mind drift—protesters marching, police marching, tear-stained tri-cornered flags, burned flags.

He sat bolt upright, leaned over and flipped on the radio. "Sgt. Pepper" came screaming into the room. He jumped up and paced restlessly around the room. He stopped in front of one of the posters. Give Peace A Chance! it read. GivePeace AChance GIVEPEACEACHANCE!!!! The confusion exploded in his head.

Several minutes later he was running down Sheridan Road. When he reached Schroeder's Drug Store, he stopped. His head was throbbing, his heart pounding. He felt like he could puke. He jammed his hands into his jacket pockets and leaned against the drug store wall. Across the street a bus destined for Canada was idling at the curb. After a few minutes, he picked up his backpack, took the bus ticket out of his pocket and started to cross the street. His attention was suddenly distracted by a young man in an Army uniform in the window of the drug store. He walked over to the window and stood for a few seconds before realizing he was looking at a reflection of himself.

The tin can tumbles down

over the crest of the week-

old snow.

Meeting the ash-darkened road

it abandons the black soot

(no longer Snow white)

to travel the world

(or so it thinks)

Casually exploring the teetering

edge

between the asphalt and

the frozen wasteland;

A car swerves across the

yellow line

Squashing the tin can flat.

UNTITLED **Hilary Lee**

The night was a still one. Outside, the rain fell in a lazy haze that clung to the windows thickly. Every so often the warm static of the rain would be broken by the sound of a car lumbering by. Not much was happening and this seat gave the best view of it.

A largely dressed man came into view seconds before the door to the bar opened. He pushed himself through the empty space and huddled at a table in the corner.

"The rain. It brings slugs outta the sidewalks, and rats hide inside the walls," said the bar-keep, as his breath smoked the surface of the glass he held and his hand polished it clean. He paused, waiting for an audience to explain this phrase to, and simply nodded toward the man in the corner.

"This one's the best of 'em all," continued the bar-keep. "You gotta put on a good show before they let you in, but once you're in..."

The man in the corner simply held his gaze at nothing in particular, and waited. The high-heeled echo of hurrying steps slinked in and out of the rain and died as quickly as it came. For a brief moment, the man in the corner changed his expression and then traded it back for the look he came in with. The bar-keep held a pause in his breath and turned back to the bar.

"But the boss says if they stay quiet and pay fer their drinks, I gotta serve 'em." The keep muddled below his breath. A rough cough exploded from the corner table and ended with an audible swallow. The rain outside stopped.

I walked around the end of the bar to where the bar-keep was polishing more glasses. He took my glass and vanished it below the bar with one hand as the other dropped the rag it held. I stared into the mirror behind the bar at the corner table. He seemed safe enough, but he came into the bar not to drink. Even if he did come into the bar to get out of the cold and rain, the rain had stopped and it wasn't really cold. As I focused back at the taps, my glass was full and the head washed down the drain below the large, hairy hands of the bar-keep.

"Not much of a spread tonight," I said, hoping that maybe a new voice would lift the feeling of...

"You know it ain't the change that's got me fixed," the keep barked. "It's the paradin' that huffs me." This time his glance went out the door and back to the corner table.

I drew my eyebrows together in a ridge on my forehead as if I knew what he meant. The walk back to my seat at the end of the bar seemed much longer than it did before. I could now feel two sets of eyes watching me. I sat down and found that spot of nothing that the corner man brought in with him and watched it.

We listened to the sound of traffic for a while. The man at the corner table pulled a brass-colored cigarette case from his suit coat pocket. His thin white hands coaxed a cigarette from the case and tapped the filter end on the table twice before installing it between his lips. One hand slipped the case back into the pocket as the other fished a lighter out of another. The cigarette drew the flame into itself and fell into a deep orange spot of heat. The man in the corner placed the lighter on the table and slid it away from him.

Outside, the sound of high-heels picked up again and this time the sound and the shoes came into the bar.

She was tall and blonde, but plain. She would never stand out in a crowd and she dressed like she knew it. Her dress was the tight fitting understated variety. The kind that older women wear to retain that fading shade of sexuality without exposing too much of the truth that years have left behind. She paused long enough to flash a stare at the bar-keep and wink a smile from the corner of her eye.

"Darling," the man in the corner issued, and made the guise of getting up.

"Sorry I was late," she began, "the wedding has me all wrapped up these days." She sat across the table and scooped up a cigarette out of her purse. She dug through her purse for a bit and then spotted the lighter laying on the table. She grabbed it and slapped it back down after lighting her cigarette.

The man in the corner made his first motion toward the bar-keep of the night. The bar-keep slowly trudged over, letting his shoes stick to the dried beer on the floor. He walked over to the table, got the order and filed back behind the bar to prepare it.

The bar-keep pawed his way through his collection of bottles and mixed the drinks. As he made ready to place them on a tray, the couple in the corner got up and walked arm in arm away from their table.

"False alarm, how about putting those on hold?" the corner man said as he slipped some money into a glass sitting on the bar. He turned his eyes back to the woman on his arm.

"Honey, I just can't wait, I just know that this time it's right," the girl said. "I can't wait until the wedding, I love you."

The two walked hand in hand past the bar and paused as the corner man stepped ahead of the girl to hold the door open for her. As she ducked under his outstretched arm and stepped out the door, she shot another half smile at the bar-keep. I must admit, it took quite a man to hold the look that the keep had. He did not falter until the sounds of their footsteps and giggles were eaten by the silence outside. I then saw his eyes close and his chest fall. Ever so slightly his tongue licked the pad of his upper lip and one furry hand checked his eyes for tears. In this I saw a man very much in love and very much forgotten.

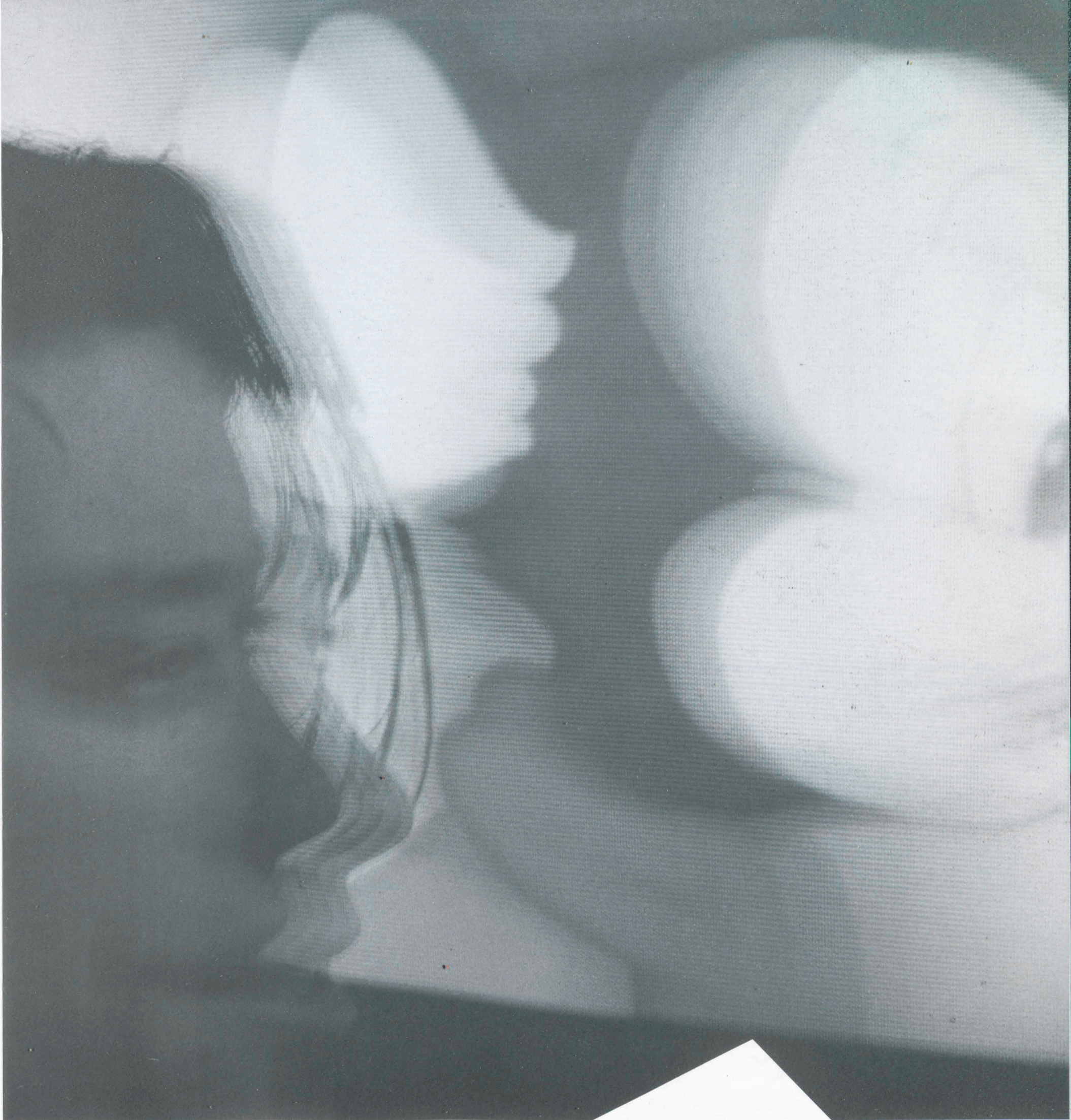
I walked over to the front of the bar and settled my tab with the man. He made change and I left it on the counter.

"You know, it's not only the rain that brings the bad things inside," he said. "Once in a while you find out that something inside has gone bad. It's only when you close all the doors and windows so that the rain can't get in that you smell it. The smell just builds up and you finally realize that something already inside has gone bad. You either get used to the smell or you get the thing out."

"I don't seem to follow you." I hushed.

"It's only that sometimes the bad thing has been inside too long and you can't get the smell of it out. At least not all of it," he finished.

I took a step back and he rested his elbows on the bar and rested his face in his hands. His furry hands just held him there until I saw it. It was a small bare patch of skin around his left ring finger. It marked the rub of a lengthy marriage. The ring itself was no longer there.



UNTITLED **Bob Friese**

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REMOTE CONTROL **BRIAN W. VASZILY**
(second place poetry)

Drop it, sucker! Up against the wall! The party's over Phump good times mean Wastums Beer Phump ooh baby I love you, open wide an' you'll see its true Phump o let jesu heal thy wounds Phuuuump the female mantus has a curious habit of devouring her mate Phump blacks today are under the misconception that their vote has no Phump you're a dirty old man; so when we going out Phump Fumble! Pactus recovers and is nabbed at the phuump Yeeow! You crazy rabbit, that smarts phuump there's nothing you can't do if you use your imagination Phump these knives are guaranteed to cut through steel Phump Phump the father apparently claimed that his infant son was the devil and that "God willed" him to kill the boy. Well, tomorrow's weather

Phump

Finally the screen door opened and Horace appeared, dragging his fishing pole which skittered down the steps. Rust had overtaken the spring and the door rattled as it struck the house.

"Almost gave up on you, Horsey," Billy said, standing up. He swiped at the dust which clung to his clothes.

Horace walked by him toward the gate which led to the meadow, which led to the woods. Billy gathered his pole and rusty coffee can and caught up. Both boys had to push to open the gate, which protested loudly as they passed through.

There had been no rain, only heat, and the meadow grass had stopped growing weeks ago. Still, the boys had to walk through with arms raised. Billy looked toward the shade of the woods, where the river lay.

"Sorry it took so long," Horace said.

Billy noticed Horace was already breathing harshly though they had walked only a few steps. Horace was not a tall boy and had always been heavy, but his weight had increased sharply since summer began.

"No big deal," Billy said.

The heat in the meadow was growing thick and suffocating. Grasshoppers jumped sluggishly through the still air.

"Mom decided to explain the sermon again," Horace said. "As if I needed her to. He was staring right at me the whole time."

"Me too."

The grass whisked by under their arms. Stickers had sprouted and were tugging at their clothing.

"Mom says I gotta get serious," Horace said, laboring to keep up with Billy. A dragonfly, nervous and unsteady, was crossing the meadow and Horace swiped at it with his pole.

"What did you say?"

"Told her I know I do," Horace said in one rushed breath.

THE BAPTISM **Gregory Nettles**
(first place fiction)

Billy glanced toward the woods and wondered if Horace would make it. "We're only fifteen. You tell her that?"

"Course not." His mouth was open, his cheeks bouncing. Sweat dripped down his nose. "Would I be out here if I had?"

They neared the woods. The grass was now only waist high but the stickers were plentiful. Horace stopped, dropped the fishing pole and bent over. "She said... Brother Willetts was only...only interested in what's best for me."

Billy stopped and looked at the woods, only a few yards ahead. The sun would not find them in there. He thought back to the morning service and how old Brother Willetts had paced the floor of the pulpit, thumbs hooked in his belt except when he shook a fist. He had paced and preached for over an hour, starting with John the Baptist, who lived in the desert and ate locusts and wild honey.

Billy looked at Horace, then at the woods, thinking it was unforgivable to hold anyone captive in the heat for so long.

"I almost fainted in there today," Horace said. "Couple times I couldn't see nothing but stars." He stood up straight. "Had to shake my head and blink my eyes to keep from passing out, so Mom starts poking me, thinking I'm trying to stay awake."

"Let's get in the woods," Billy said.

They stepped in and found the path which led to the river. The air was cooler, the walking easier, and Horace had regained his breath. Billy felt better.

"So what do you think?" Horace said.

"About what?"

Locusts buzzed in the trees around them, the sound rising and falling. A bee droned by.

"About what Brother Willetts said this morning. You think we're going to Hell?"

Billy made a crooked smile, staring down the path. Horace watched him intently.

"I don't think about it a whole lot," Billy said.

Horace lowered his head and changed his pole to the other hand. "I've worried a lot lately," he said. "Maybe it's all true, you know?"

Billy said nothing, only stared down the path.

"Anyway, I think I might just go ahead and do it," Horace said.

Billy stopped and turned on him. "Don't do something you don't want to do."

Horace backed up and switched his pole to the other hand.

"Well, my mom..."

"Don't do it just to shut up your mom and the preacher."

Horace frowned, shifting his feet in the dirt on the path. "I don't have it easy at home like you do," he said.

Billy laughed. "You think my folks aren't harping at me about it? My dad's always telling me I can't be a man until I do it. And what about old man Willetts? He stares at me, same as he does you, and I just stare right back at him."

Horace looked ready to cry. From the treetops came the screech of a bluejay.

"I just think I ought to get it over with."

"Fine," Billy said, and turned to start back up the path. "Let's go find Willetts and tell him. Tell him you want to do it right now."

Horace shrugged and kicked at a beetle which crossed the path below him. "Let's fish," he said, looking past Billy at the path, narrow and straight as it cut upward through the trees toward the meadow. "Maybe Mom will like it if I bring home supper."

"Good man, Horsey, good man."

They started down the path again, which began to widen as they neared the river. The woods had fallen strangely quiet. Billy could usually hear the current of the river from this point.

"I keep thinking about that story Brother Willetts told this morning," Horace said.

"Which one?"

"About that angel that would touch the water and churn it up, then the sick people would have to race to be the first one in so they could be healed."

"Yeah," Billy said, remembering how the old man had gone on to say, 'I guess we need an angel to come down and churn up this here water behind me, cause our young folk seem to be in no hurry to do it.'

"Thank God," Horace said, and Billy looked up. They had reached the river.

What was normally a moderate current had stalled to nothing. There was no movement from the leaves or from the

grayish bubbles which hung at the surface. Even the waterskates seemed to have trouble getting through it. Billy wondered if there were any fish alive down there.

Horace had fastened the writhing bait on a rusty hook and sent it to the water. It disappeared with a flat, thick sound and the ripples immediately dissipated.

As his own hook dropped into the river, Billy remembered a Sunday service years back when Brother Willetts had strutted across that stage, spouting praise over young Elizabeth, who had decided to wash away her sins. Then he had led her down the steps, into the baptistry where the water was deep, and Billy remembered the sound of the water as it had sloshed around Brother Willetts' hip boots. A few more words were said, but Billy hadn't heard them because of the look on young Elizabeth's face. She was staring down at the water and her eyes were growing larger, as if something were below the surface, waiting for her. Then Brother Willetts covered her mouth with his hand and plunged her under the water.

She had come out of the baptistry room a few moments later, drenched head to toe and shivering, crying what appeared to be tears of joy as she was embraced by her family and friends. Billy had walked up onto the pulpit and pulled himself up high enough to see over the edge. The smell came to him first, which was foul enough, but the sight was far worse. It was dark and green and completely still. Billy felt certain he could have walked right across it.

The breeze was now dead. Billy felt a tug on his line, felt it slacken. The smell of slow, advancing stagnation was coming to him again, only this time it was coming from the river, and he began to doubt that they would pull any fish from this water.

The sun was well to the west now and had found a few spots to break through the trees which hung out over the water. Billy thought he saw a frog's eyes sitting at the surface, reflecting sunlight, watching.

Horace swore loudly enough to still the locusts. He was trying to reel in his line, which was taut and not moving.

"Got a branch," Billy called to him.

Horace began to whip the pole fiercely right and left. He grunted with disgust.

"Better break it," Billy said.

Horace shook his head violently. "Can't. No more hooks." He stopped and looked at Billy. "You got any?"

Billy calmly shook his head and Horace began to whip the pole again. The line still would not give.

"Let's forget it," Billy said. "There aren't any fish alive down there." They would have jumped at the hook just to get out of the water, he guessed. Even if it meant ending up in a frying pan.

"I'm gonna free it," Horace said. He dropped the pole and took off his shoes.

"What for?"

Horace stomped into the water, churning up the mud, mixing the river into a still darker shade of green. "I'm not leaving without fish." He held the line as he walked outward to the point where it disappeared some thirty feet away.

"Better be careful," Billy cried. "Can't swim, you know."

Horace was up to his waist in water and he pulled on the line again. "Water's so warm," he said.

"Just forget it, Horsey. Come on, you can use my pole. I'm done with it."

Horace turned around and said, "It's okay, Billy, we've waded this river a thousand times."

Billy stood up. "Yeah, but the water's usually clear."

Horace tugged. "What's to see, anyway?"

Billy walked to the spot where Horace had been sitting. "It's useless. Break it."

"Almost got it," Horace said with a grunt. He took another step and disappeared.

Billy stood watching the spot where Horace had been, his mind unable to adjust to what his eyes had seen. His first thought was that Horace had fallen, but he knew that was not right. Horace had gone straight down, as though the riverbed had suddenly collapsed.

There was a hole, then. The thought seized him like a mad animal. He picked up Horace's fishing pole and pulled until the line broke and he sat down hard in the sand. There was no Horace on the end of the line.

"Horace?"

He got up and ran to the water as the idea of saving Horace tugged at his mind, but then he stopped. There was nothing he could do. He could not swim, and if he yelled for help, the only people who lived along this stretch of the river were Horace and his mother, and even if she could get out the door through the gate across the meadow into the woods down the path to the river...

Billy began to tremble. He watched the water where Horace had been, and it was as still and smooth as green glass. An image of Horace came into his mind, clawing, struggling, eyes bulging... he pushed it out.

If it was a hole, he was gone, Billy knew that. The river was chest deep at best, even with occasional rain. But the holes were there. They had seen them while wading. Once, they had lowered a fallen limb at least fifteen feet into one of the yawning black pits and had never touched bottom.

Billy sat down again in the sand. He gathered Horace's shoes and waited for him to come up out of the water. He closed his eyes and squeezed the shoes and willed the surface of the water to break.

He saw Mrs. Mills in front of him, saw her smile and say Hi Billy where's Horace and he would open his mouth and say Horace drowned and the smile would leave her face...into his own house where his mom would be cooking dinner and his father reading the paper and his mom would say catch anything and he

would say Horace drowned and his mom would faint...sitting in the church building in his blue suit as old Brother Willetts paced the stage and talked about heaven and it would be so hot and his dad would whisper to his mom I tried to teach Billy to swim he would whisper but Billy would hear him anyway I tried to teach him but he was just too afraid just too afraid of the water he wouldn't even put his head under water I told him he couldn't be a man until he did it but he wouldn't and he couldn't save his friend couldn't save Horace...Mrs. Mills was yelling at him now yelling He's in Hell and Billy saw her, tears running into her mouth saying My boy's in Hell there's no way around it I tried to raise him after his daddy died I raised him best I could but he wouldn't listen to me wouldn't listen only listened to you and you told him don't...

"Don't do something you don't want to do," Billy muttered and opened his eyes.

The river had changed. The sun had broken below the trees, spreading light everywhere, picking out patterns on the surface of the water, textures and flashes of bright green in the leaves which sat on the surface, bubbles which would sputter and break. He saw individual grains of sand where they clung to Horace's shoestrings. The woods were teeming with life once again, swelling with sounds of birds who sought their nests, locusts and dragonflies buzzing, butterflies flitting about and beetles scurrying across the sand. A breeze was carrying in from across the water and he heard the leaves as they left the trees and landed in the water. There was a deafening splash, then another, and Billy watched as still a third bullfrog leaped into the river. Billy's cheeks felt cool and he realized that he was smiling.

He looked upward and felt himself being drawn and puffed downward as the tree raced into the skies above him. The sounds of the river engulfed him.

Billy hugged the shoes even tighter and waited for Horace to come up out of the water.

these are
not just tropical
bubbles we float in, sighing
at the hazy world outside, our lives
are planted onto real islands, on mountains
sprouted from the bottom of the sea— like two
creatures crawled up from the deep, we circle,
approach, then circle again, dancing naked
on the beach like slow moving octopuses,
pushing with fingers and eyes,
clutching at edges and shelves
only to rip apart
at the scream
of a gull

looming
larger now
as we circle
setting to task winds
with the sweeps of our arms,
catching hurricanes between us,
casting out islands across
the archipelago of our lives
on mountains, in supermarkets,
at garage sales, bumping
into gods on street corners
where madmen stop to wink
at us then mumble
on their way

making love
holding you tight,
drenched in the mist
of a soybean sea,
green wind-driven
waves dash us, while
combine dreamships spin us
vast distances beneath
a rainbowed sky

waking
on the black earth
beside your cool skin
to discover that I am free,
broken open— fear washed white
by the gentle cascading
of your breath

now
the purple
drains from the foot
of the cloud shaped like a dancer
we are alone on the windward shore,
the sea pours rhythmically over a raised
coral shelf, the salt wind blows your hair
I am terrified that a wave will come and take you from me, yet
I remain silent and search anxiously through the trapped water
discovering a jellyfish, a clam, a small white crab— a starfish clings
tenaciously to the corner of a jutting edge, the clouds, black now
fade into the haze—I am paralyzed by an inhuman terror,
for the first time I know that you will someday die—
I hear the terrible silence of the creatures below,
feel the pull of the starfish's disks upon
the rock, and all the
hungry mouths
of the sea

I cling to the shore on the
barren wall— beyond the breakers
the sea whispers to me, transforms me—
my arms grow fins, delicate and embryonic
they undulate as I do gently against the rock
you too are changing, holding me loosely from behind
with each wave your breasts and thighs delicately bump me
I strain to see you, our sad eyes are bulging
scaled necks grown thick, their vertebrae
fusing— a chunk of coral breaks off
crumbles in my narrowing hand
slimy calcinated corpses
of uncountable tiny lives
the small white pebbles
roll between
my fingers
slip beneath
the gray
wave

UNTITLED Zandra Maguigad



HARVEST Phillip L. Buoscio

Soft, cracked, black skin
stretches the horizon
scattered dead shafts
plug pores where
my toes sink

excited dust
frosts my nostrils.

Sparrows drop and rise,
lean then brake, in currents
tumbling, gusting, tripping
over you.

Farm house rests
in a palm
of stubby trees,
as fingers
they lean over it

When I leave
these currents that drive life
escape.
I must learn to look inward
for *this* peace.

NEWTON'S THIRD LAW **Khin Win Kyu**

When I smiled at a stranger, he smiled back to me.

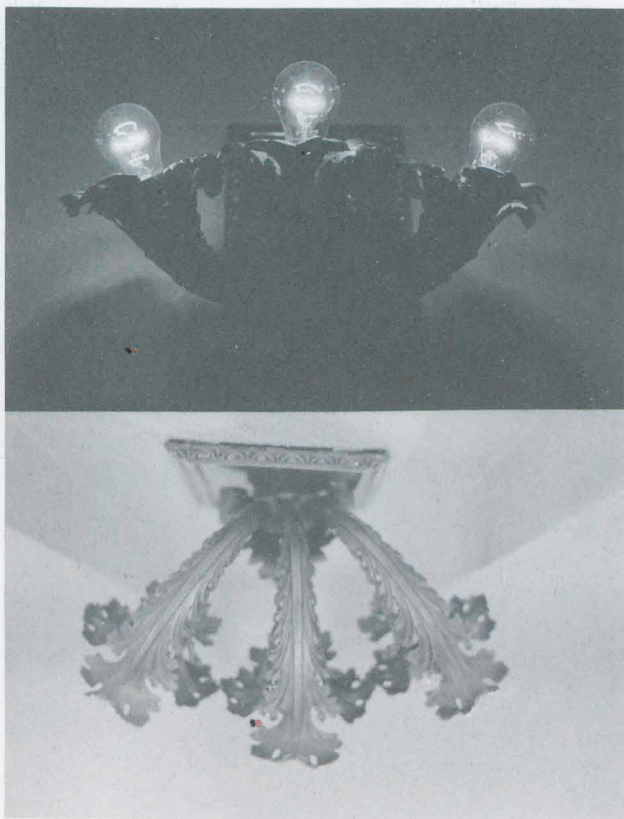
When I said, "Hi" to someone, he said, "Hi" to me.

When I gave some money to a beggar, he thanked me.

*When I gave some food to a stupid dog, it wagged its tail
in appreciation.*

But, when I told you, "I'm in love with you."

you answered me "I'm sorry, I can't."



UNTITLED **Colleen Dahlberg**

SELF-PORTRAIT **Jill L. Strubbe**

As a little girl
she was my mentor, my goddess
i ran around in the bee-sting garden
pretending the rocks to be stars
the bird bath to be my salt water sea

i would run in the house and
jump into the tacky green paisley sheets
i would jump over the newspaper clippings
and tumbled tea cups and empty
cigarette cartons

my skinned knees would be comforted
she pacified me with peppermint patties
and licorice snaps
as i broke her favorite bottle of
cinnamon cologne
i put the lipstick-stained cigarette butts
in my mouth—i wish i was her

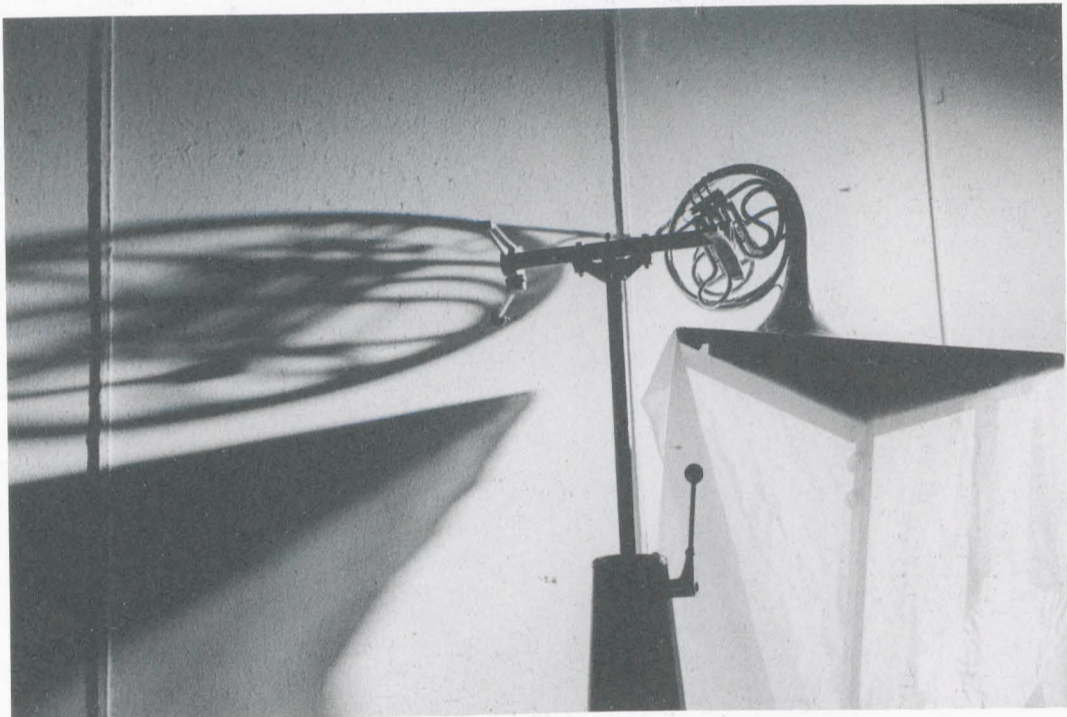
i carved my initials into the waxy wood
of her bed post
i broke every good piece of cereal-box china
she owned
cherry kool-aid stained every piece of tattered carpet
i was awkward and shy
she still loved me

days grew older
so did i
i grew tired of the shoddy conversations
of powdered toothpaste and ice blocks
i learned to smoke my own cigarettes
carved my initials into someone else's
bedpost

now i stay out at late-night coffee-houses
i've broken every one of her commandments
i still break her favorite china
and her

she still loves me.

UNTITLED Edith Mendez



UNTITLED Jim Chamberlik



UNTITLED Zandra Maguigad



I parked the car around the corner. That part of Congress Street was dead. There was no one around. The sign above the store read "CLIFFORD'S ONE STOP." It was very humid just like every other summer day in Mississippi.

I walked up to the door and swung it open smoothly, stepping in and taking the bell tied to the inside handle in my hand. The store smelled of dill pickles. Next to a huge barrel of them a man was standing behind the counter. He was reading a magazine. The door eased shut. He didn't move, and the store was completely empty. It was going to be so easy.

Right in front of the counter, another barrel, the same size as the one with the pickles in it, but this one was full of soda and ice, beside it was a rack of Moon Pies. I'd take a few drinks with me for the road, maybe a couple of pies.

I looked back toward the man. He was a big-bellied, thick-necked, lump of a man, somewhere on the other side of forty. His hair was dark grey and completely slicked back. He was sweating, really sweating. He looked like a big sack of wet potatoes, standing hunched over the counter with his head directly beside the register. He'd have to stand up to see me.

To top that off, it was kind of dark, but if he got a good look at me, so what. I'd be long gone before anyone found him. I took a couple of steps towards the counter and stared. He looked like he was asleep. He was still. Completely still. So still that I might have actually mistaken him for a sack of potatoes or even a mannequin had I not seen a drop of sweat tumble from his nose to splatter on the page below him. He simply turned to the next. I smiled. He'd probably be so scared that he'd give me his own wallet.

As I watched him, he took his glasses off, and set them on the dingy green counter. It would have been a perfect time, but I waited. I began to look around the store.

There were five aisles of shelves piled with cans and boxes and dust, lots of dust. There was produce along the far wall, and the back wall was a cooler, dairy products on the left, soda and beer on the right.

The man lifted his face, took a hanky from his back pocket, and began to rub his eyes with it. After a couple of seconds, he raised his arms above his head and yawned heartily. Feeling the contagious effects, I couldn't help myself. My mouth opened with a yawn almost as great as his, but completely silent. He put the hanky to the back of his neck and began to roll his head. First to his right shoulder, then, slowly, over his left. His eyes were pointed right at me. I didn't move. He paused for a moment...another...another—my heart sounding loudly in my ears. Suddenly, sweat began to form on my upper lip, and the air began to thin. A complete rush swirled through my body like a blast of cool air. I was smiling right at him with a half open mouth, tensing.

And his gaze rolled right past me, totally vacant. He sighed quietly replacing his glasses, and his hanky. Then he buried his face back in his magazine. I took a deep breath, gagging a bit from the strong smell of dill, and thought, "He must be as bored as I am. Maybe this will help." I started to ease toward him, reaching inside my jacket.

Flashing, a shock erupts in the base of my spine, rising violently, stiffening the hair on the back of my neck, a ringing everywhere, a strange ringing, kind of like a string of jingle bells—so violent in my ears that my head becomes thick with the sound—like the bells are on a reindeer who is rolling down a gully, or maybe someone is smacking him in the head with a two-by-four like a piñata, the bells coming down all around me reflecting light—tiny silvery flecks of light, swimming around my head as a draft of cold air presses in, wrapping round my body—a breeze, drawing me backward toward the door opening. I raise my hand to my face, feeling the air surround each finger, and an old lady passes me as quick as that.

I took my other hand from my jacket as she walked out in front of me, in front of the counter. In a crisp voice, that seemed to be part the air, itself, she addressed the man behind the register, "Good mornin' Sam."

He looked up quickly and smiled, "Mornin' Miss Welty."

Say what? Miss Welty? (A dull hum in the back of my head sending vibrations down my spine.) No, no, no. No way. Get out. Eudora Welty. Right. Sure. Uh huh. Eudora Welty (My eyes dropping to the floor, my hands diving into my pockets. My toes only wiggling in the tips of my shoes.) Miss Eudora Welty.

I followed her with my eyes. She bent over, quite fluently, picked up a plastic basket from beside the pickle barrel, put her purse in it, and began to walk up the first aisle, slowly, coolly.

"Son, can I help you find something?" Sam's voice made me jump. He sounded a bit impatient. He must have sensed that I had been standing there for a while.

I walked by him without meeting his eyes, "I'm just looking." And I was looking, staring actually, staring at Miss Eudora Welty.

A tiny woman about up to my shoulders, she had on a dark green sweater and a lime skirt that almost touched the tops of her shoes.



Everywhere she moved, floating a bit behind her like a flashlight moving through the darkest room, a stream of green colors flowed. She was gliding across the floor as if she were rolling around on wheels, but the colors trailed behind her like the wake of a ship.

After a few seconds she turned a bit to look at some canned vegetables. For the first time, I caught a glimpse of her face—very pale, her nose, kind of on the long side elegant looking, maybe Victorian, her hair, very dark, drawn back into a bun. Although she was moving quite spryly, there was something quite fragile about her. She looked like a doll.

About half way down the first aisle, she picked up a can of Jolly Green Giant French-cut Green Beans. And then, all of a sudden, she looked at me, quickly and directly. Her entire face, over her left shoulder, pointed right at me. My mouth must have fallen open like a complete idiot, but I didn't look away. I couldn't. I was frozen watching her, Eudora Welty. I half expected her to cry out, "Stop staring at me, young man," but she didn't. She didn't say anything. She just smiled, actually, and, for the very first time, I saw her age. The corners of her mouth were turned up, but the rest of her face didn't move, it just hung there like a raw pizza crust on the heat of someone's arm. I love pizza. And then, she raised her hand to me, her left hand. Eudora Welty's left hand. It hung there, flat against the air, and she was looking right at me.

Sam piped up again, "Son..."

I turned, the smell of dill strong in my face, and interrupted him. "Do you have any uh motor oil?"

His brow puckered a bit. He picked up my northern accent. Smiling kind of slyly, he spoke like a county sheriff, "Now son, you should have asked when you came in. So, you're having a bit of car trouble are ya, son. You think you're low on oil, do ya? Well, son..."

I looked him straight in the eyes and spoke under my breath, "No sir, you see... sir. My car's fine, sir. That's not it at all, sir. What it is, is that I have a date tonight." I paused a couple of seconds enjoying the way confusion was swelling through Sam's face, repuckering his brow, then I continued, "Do you have thirty weight, sir? I don't want to get bogged down. I smiled and walked down the second aisle.

By this time, she was thumping melons over in the corner. There she was, Eudora Welty, in an old beaten down grocery testing watermelons like any ordinary person. I wondered, wandering around the store. Does she want to buy one of those watermelons? How could she carry it? Could I help her to her house with it? Could I, I wondered?

That is, I wondered until I realized that she was right in front of me, smiling just as she was before, but this time only two feet in front of me. Suddenly, a hazy black and white snap shot started flashing. Thinly bordered she had a dark dress with a light lacy collar. Her thin neck was

circled by a string of jellybean-sized dark beads. Her hair was chin-length and was parted on the right side; drawn over her left cheek. There was a spark in her right eye that must have reflected off the camera to flash a shimmer in her bottom lip—twenty years old, Eudora Welty, oh that it were. Twenty years old. I'd nibble those jelly beans right off your throat, Eudora Welty. Twenty years old. You and I, we could...weeeeeeeeeee.

She spoke to me. "Could I trouble you, young man?"

Oh yeah. Uh huh. Trouble me. Trouble me. Speak to me. You have. You did. You spoke to me. You're right here in front of me speaking to me. Oh wow. Oh God.

I just kind of mumbled and shook my head and said yes with every part of my body.

She continued, "I hope you could reach that bottle of dish washing detergent for me." She pointed behind me to a shelf on the wall.

Without looking, trying to form words, I just shook my head up and down, slowly.

An awkward moment passed, I standing there staring and, she, Eudora Welty, trying not to look uncomfortable. Then, she stepped past me, and I turned my head as she motioned upward to a single bottle on the top shelf. I turned around, walked over, reached it, turned back around, and smiled.

She was just standing in front of me when, all of a sudden, her hand started to approach me. Her hand, coming through the air, going right for the bottle. I had an awkward grip. The bottle of syrupy liquid squirmed around in my fingers, my index and thumb pressing so tightly at strange points on it that my thumb slipped off the top, and it spun around one full time in the air. A tiny burst of sound escaped from her lips before I could catch the bottle with my other hand at the bottom. I smiled. Her hand on top of mine, she smiled. My fumbling hand on top of hers, and then she dropped her basket to cover the top of the bottle with her other hand. We both giggled and let it go.

She picked up her basket, put the bottle in it, and said, as if I had known her forever, "Thank you, much," and, still smiling, walked off towards Sam.

I stood there for at least five minutes until I heard the bell jingle again as she left. I began to walk towards the door wondering why I hadn't spoken to her, what she thought, if I should have at least introduced myself, if I should come back. She probably came by here two or three times a week. I could see her again. I got to the door and began to open it. Immediately, I felt the air outside. Oh. I turned around, the bell tinkling a bit as the door swung shut, walked back up to the counter, and smiled at Sam as I pressed my gun in his face.

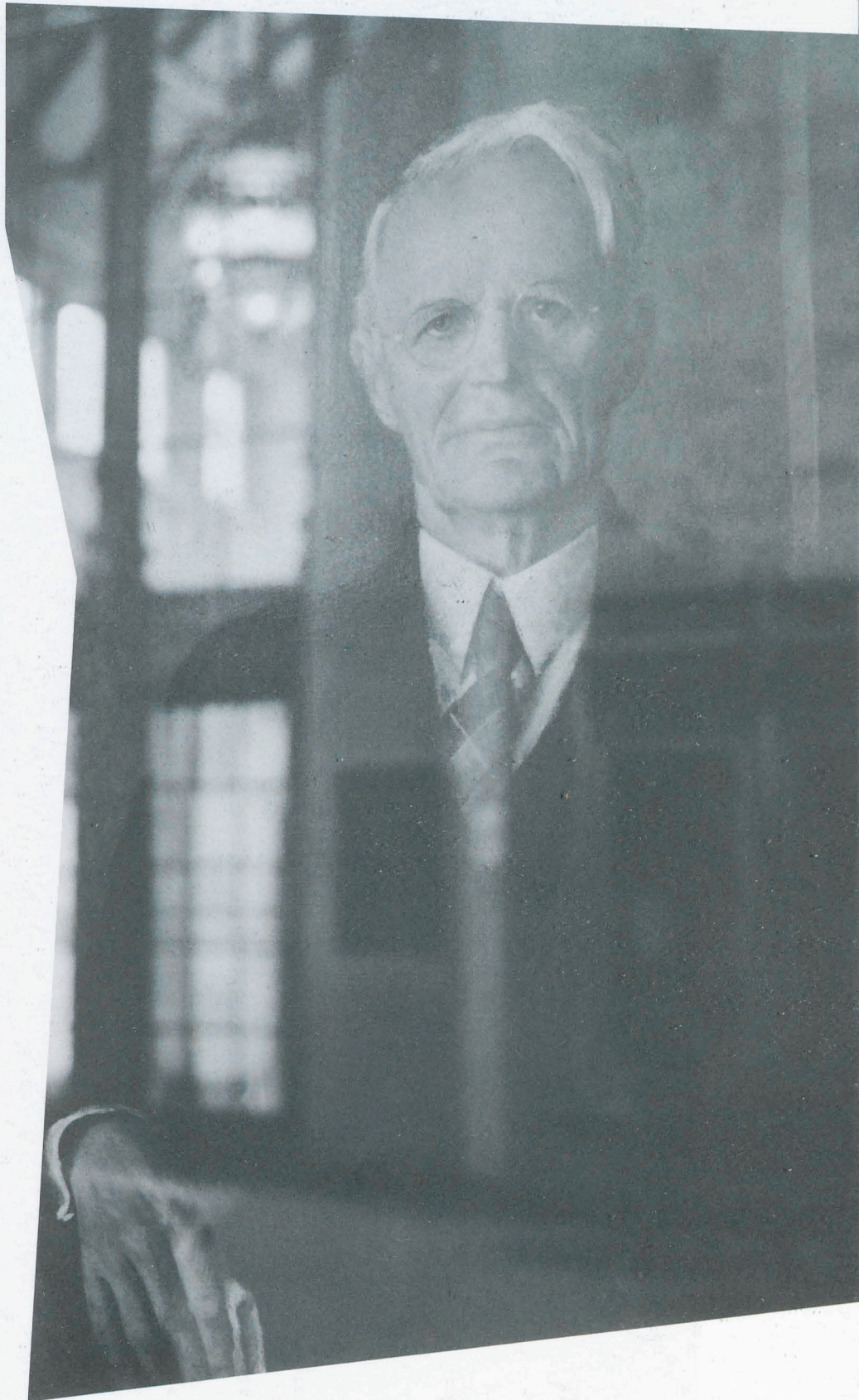
grandfather (paw) Christine Holoway

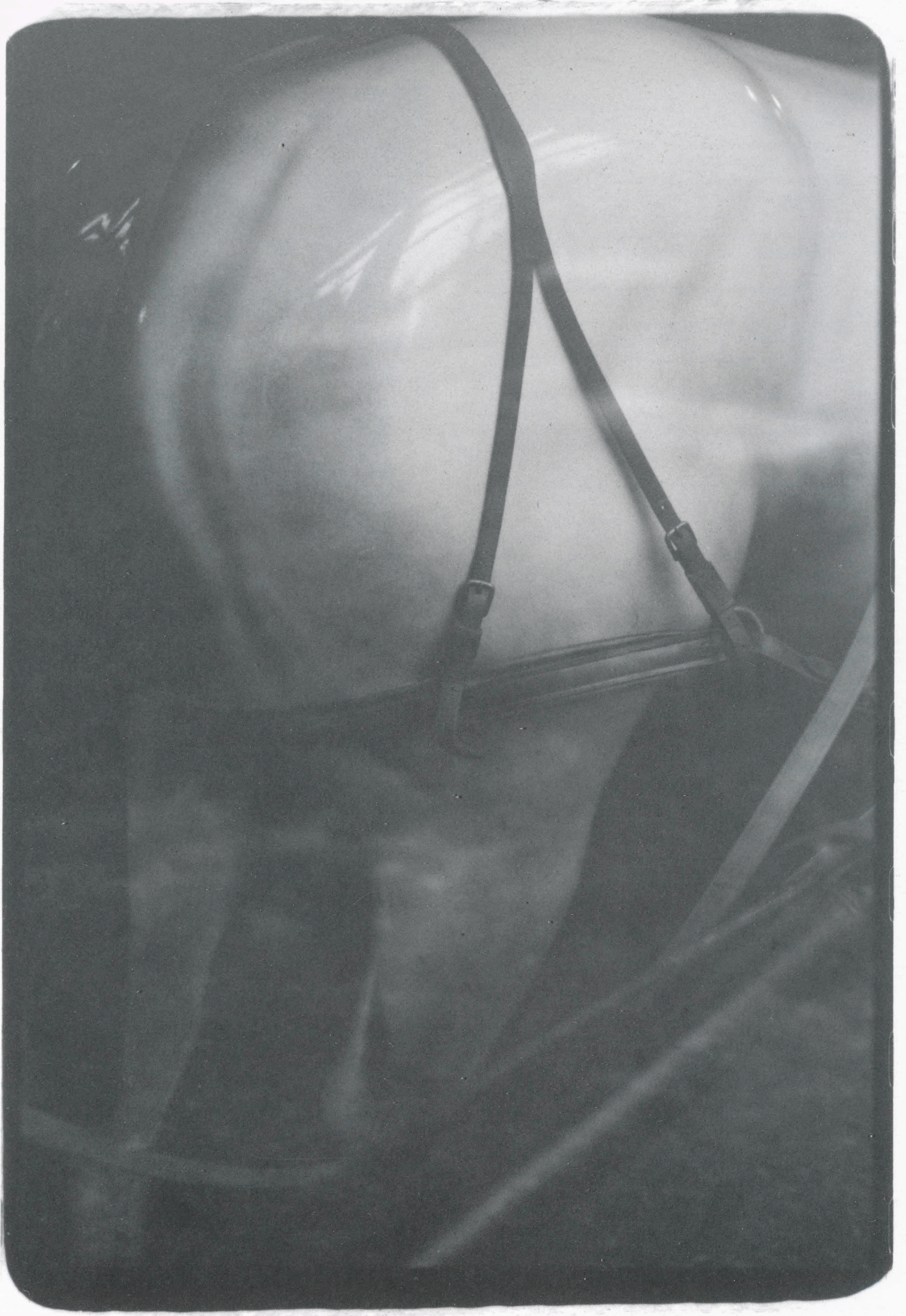
*spring came when, in
the garden, you turned
dead earth to womb
and sunlight*

*overflowed your eyes.
i learned summer from
the snap of beans
in your large hands,*

*from the wooden stutter
of the stool as you dragged
it from the garage.
in fall,*

*you hung sunburnt tools
on dusty pegboard,
padlocked the shed, and sat
in tissue thin trousers
to wait for winter.*





UNTITLED Mike Mihelich

UNTITLED Colleen Dahlberg



Some Blessed Pig wrote a poem on the subway wall;
Spoke of love, long wet kisses, the ability to kill,
Mentioned rape, famine, roses, the colors of the fall.

Taught hope, commerce, chastity, the necessity to crawl,
Proffered seas, plastic, babies, the power of the pill,
Regalled Gandhi, Hitler, Reagan, the redwoods standing tall.

Victored voice, drugs, and TV, the downing of the wall,
Graced Kellogg, Oil, and GM for freedom of the will,
Cheered Lenin, Beauvoir, Plato, the heroes of football,

Lauded guns and stars and lust, the rushing waterfall,
Blessed Vegas, Manson, Jesus, the beauty of a thrill,
Cherished Shakespeare, Smith, Picasso, the local toilet stall.

Painted slogans, Revlon faces, the patterns on this ball,
Granted dreams, Popes and pussies, the good ol' dollar bill,
Added sand and air and SDI, new deals at the mall.

Offered rain, Billy Graham and red-meat, cure-alls to the ill,
Spoke of love and long-dead wishes, pushing to stand still.
Gave blood and birds, clouds and cum, penned oneness to it all.
Some Selfdamned Saint wrote a poem, on the subway wall.

RIDE bRIAN w. vASZILY

I stare at the piles of books,

but the words before me are stick

people marching off the page

to fight a war with the graffiti

on the buildings downtown where

we once walked and wrote words of

love in our heads and printed dreams

across each other's eyes, our own

classic works of fiction.

STUDY BREAK Jennifer Davidson

UNTITLED Colleen Dahlberg



And the rails gradually stop

ENDLESSNESS David Hagerman

Vibrating, the full moon's glare,

In hazy darkness, and the vulgar,

Ferocious, low gurgling tinkle

Of the roosting electric wires,

Like long dark snakes,

Remain and exist in lifelessness,

Reminders of the perpetual

Pang of endlessness

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And to anyone else we forgot—thank you.

Dan and Ken

Islands Corporation

There are

not just tropical

islands, but islands

of the world outside, our lives

are planted onto real islands, on mountains

sprouted from the earth.

They are the islands of the world.

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u n t i t o w e r s
n e x t l
y e a r



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slowly caressing
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synchronized
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 y satisfied
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 I walked away
 you there
 bed for riveled
 maple leaves

you patiently
 us to come
 the first
 my waterpump...

form



never being satisfied

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