

Winter 1987

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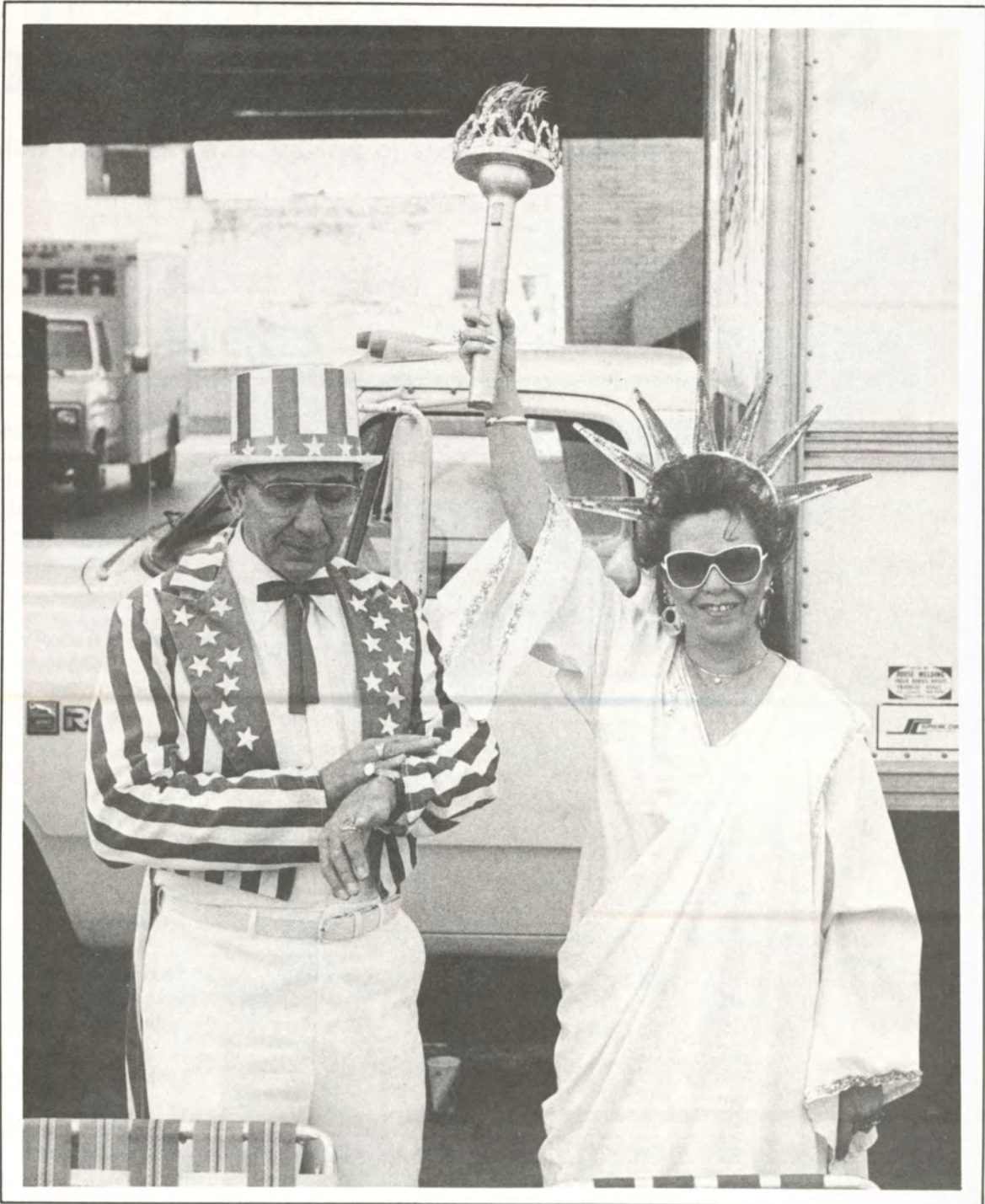
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Л И Х Т Е Р



Robert L. Wehmeier

THE JOURNAL

OF THE

ROYAL SOCIETY OF MEDICINE

AND

THE LIGHTER

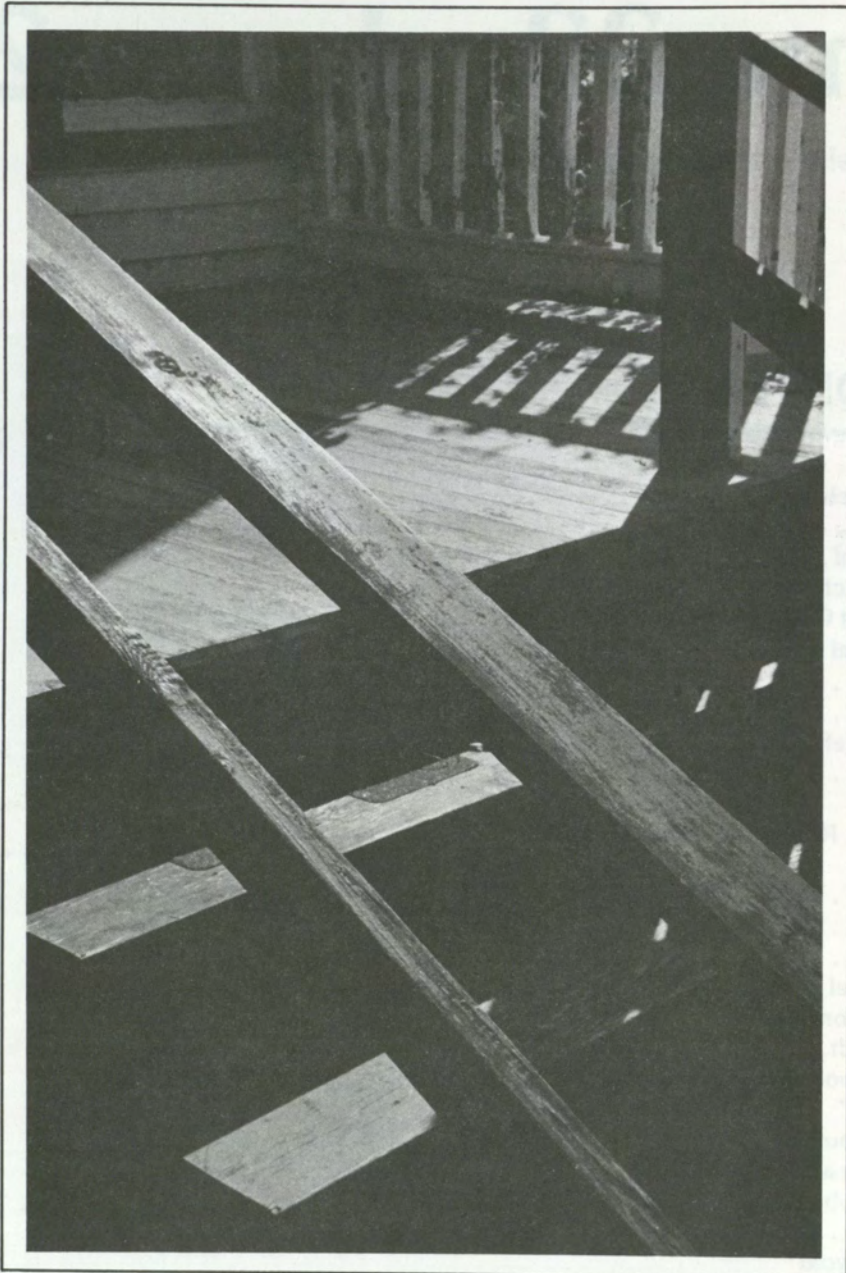
Volume 32 Issue 2

Valparaiso University's magazine of creative expression

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THE LIGHTER



Barbara Hoel

First Trip Home After Auction

Following blurred pavement, faded
yellow lines guiding my arm. I steer
toward the farm. Frozen fields beyond
my window echo with Pap's tired tractor.
Curving, the road takes me to the edge
of the drive. Red-worn and hollow, the barn
floods my sight.

Hinges tight with rust
give with the weight of my shoulder. Slits
of sun ease between shrunken boards. Straining
to see, dust-smoke burns my eyes.
Under dung and straw I find
a gnarled pitchfork, a bridle,
bit broken and tarnished, and jagged pieces
of forgotten bottles. Stumbling back into day
light shows me, splintered and sagging
the sacrifice of five generations.

— Polly Atwood

Alligator Sunday and That One's Asleep

The sky never clicked
blue today and this limbo
between week's end
and Monday makes me hate
to be alone
curled up on a hollow couch
and so hard I want warm
flesh next to me
snores to muffle
and toes to pull —
Not every grey day goes on
like this, mostly what's me is what's
me and there's no more beyond —
but when the wind asks for a fire
and the sofa for my body, the blanket
crawls up my legs reluctantly, hoping
for another pair to softly scratch.

— Samantha E. Arnold

A Short Visit

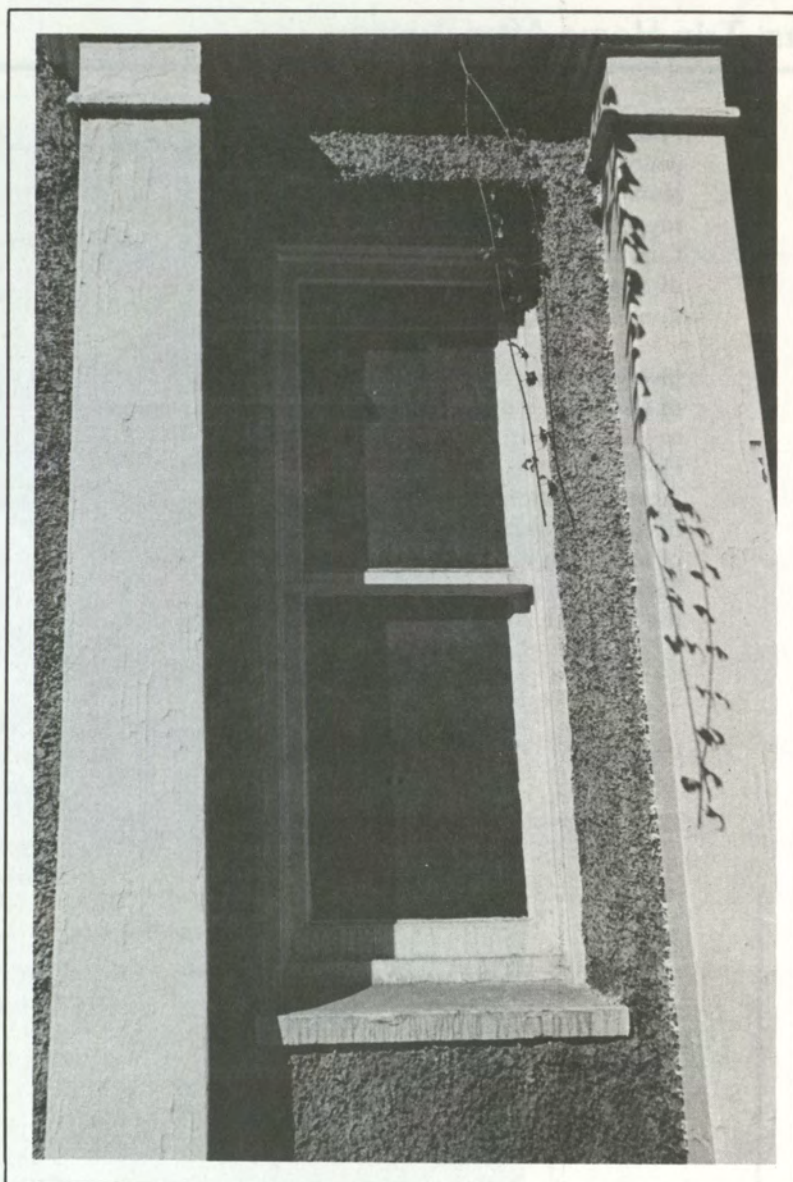
He's on display.
They step
By
Fashionably adorned
In carcasses;
Weasels
On their shoulders,
Foxes
On their heads.
They peer at
The Man On Display.

"He looks good,"
The audience says
And applauds.
He doesn't bow,
He's frozen.
He smiles a lifeless
Smile,
His hands folded
Across his chest
Contentedly.

And the display case;
Ornate
To compliment him,
Upholstered
In white silk
For his comfort,
But his spine
Is stiff,
Pinned.

He is a circus clown
Forced to perform
Naked.
He peers back
Through eyelids
And grumbles excuses.

The lid slams down.



Barbara Hoel

— Brian Jung

A Good Cover

So you see, we have to clean
the house. Mom says
they'll be here as soon
as they fly the body
up from Texas. A houseful
of black clothes, black
bands wavering up
the driveway, hovering
at the white front
door to ring
the bell.

So you see, we have
to clean all the hidden
places a houseful
of black will never
look, barely conscious
of the smell of furniture
polish and roast
beef. Turn a light on

so you can see
all the dirt. Wash
the keys on the piano, too, (a noisy
job with the vacuum wailing
and the washrag hitting
all the wrong notes -- abstractedly
hitting black and white keys down
at the bottom of the scale, the ones
we used at Halloween to scare
the kids when they rang
the bell), then close
the cover to keep the dust
out.

— Christine Grusak



Robert L. Wehmeier

I'll be sitting at my desk pouring over an old picture of Kim Novak when I should be doing homework. Or I'll be listening to jazz on the stereo while reading a Kundera novel, when the phone will ring. Putting my glass down, I'll get up and answer it. Mother. She always calls on the weekends. But it is night now, and I don't understand. Usually when I don't call first, she will ring me at seven or eight in the morning. So I always make a point of calling her first, so I can sleep peacefully late on the weekends. But it is dark now, and she calls me.

Her voice has the enforced calmness she always invokes when something is wrong. I'm used to it, probably just something small, like Sean twisted his ankle. Ever since I was a young child she would do this. Once at four in the morning she would wake me to say "Mike, Sean had an asthma attack and we had to take him to the hospital," enunciating every syllable so clearly, as if saying "as-thma" would help a six year old understand the word. Now I live alone and she still calls me to say things like "Grandma got a little cough and we had to take her to the doctor."

So when I pick up the phone to her "Hello Michael, how are you?", and every word is pronounced like her life depended on it, I know that something is up.

"Yeah how're you?"

"Fine, I've got a little bad news for you." This voice always annoys me because I know it's not a life and death situation, just someone scraping an elbow or something. And that voice always has in it the words, "Maybe you should sit down," just like I was a six year old again. I'll pretend fear and ask her what she has to tell me. Instead of the usual preliminaries "Well, you know..." or "Remember how..." I hear her through the phone.

"Michael, your father died today." There will be a pause at both ends. I'll get all the details. It will be a heart attack most likely, he smokes so much. But it could be something more complex. At the time it doesn't matter. Just that he is dead.

And so I'll hang up the phone and go to the closet and pull it out. At moments like this, he would do it too. Behind the sweater on the top shelf, I keep a bottle of what my father called "The real stuff." I won't need the sweaters tonight, just this. I go out and walk.

I won't cry. He wouldn't either. When his father died, this is what he did too. I pull on the smooth bottle, letting the liquid go down. It burns bad, but the warmth will soon spread and the bitter taste go away. He wasn't such a good man. He was a rotten father. I think back to my childhood and try to remember him. My earliest memories are all of my brother and playing. But I remember when I was four, he took us to Kankakee State Park to fish, without Mom. I hated the bugs, and had no patience either. He used to yell at me for pulling my pole in and out all the time. "Either leave it in or go sit in the car, little man." Sean wasn't much better, but he was only three. Dad would wade out a ways, plumbing the depths near weeds or fallen trees for the catfish he loved to eat so much. When it got so warm he knew the fish wouldn't bite anyway, he'd take us to a restaurant. It wouldn't be a nice place, he preferred greasy spoons with waitresses who said "Honey" when addressing customers. We didn't mind, he made these places seem like a lot of fun. He'd joke with us and the waitress. If there wasn't an ashtray on the table, he'd say to the waitress in mock anger "Darlin', you know where I can get an ashtray in this town?" She would laugh and go find one. He and these small town people spoke the same language.

He was from "down South" as he used to say. When he spoke of his childhood, it was usually in economic terms. "Swimming lessons? Pay for them? When I was a brat my Pappy threw me and Kenneth in the river. Swim or drown. That's how you learn." He was a lot like my grandfather. They both had the same wheezy way of breathing when you sat on their lap. They both liked to smoke, drink and work hard. Sometimes I think they were more alike than he knew. Mom told me that grandpa lost his first wife to a fever when dad was only seven. Grandpa got drunk for a week, then passed off his three children to the relatives. He worked on the TVA and went west. When he came back, dad was fifteen years old and mad. He never forgave grandpa for leaving them like that. When grandpa kept losing jobs later on, dad told him he would drop out of high school if they ever had to move again. A few months later when grandpa took the rest of the family to Cincinnati, dad dropped out and entered the army. That was just like him, never one to make idle threats.

But then tipping the bottle up farther, I'll begin to recall other times. He was an excellent climber of trees, but God help either of us when we climbed the little silver maples in the front yard. If no one was home, we'd try the huge maple in the back yard, using the picnic table to reach the lowest branches. All the time we were up in the tree, Sean and I would keep a lookout for the red Maverick. One time we saw it before we were ready to come down, but scampering madly, we tried to beat him into the house. We had been in the house for a few moments before he arrived, so we just knew he couldn't have seen us in the tree. Examining the mail on the table, he said "You boys been in the trees again?" We were sure he hadn't seen us, but then why would he ask? When neither of us answered right away, he knew, regardless of whether or not he had seen us.

Beatings from my father were common. He was actually better at it than my mother. She would wildly flail at your rear, hitting lamps and walls more often than your ass. But dad was methodical and calm. He'd use one great hand to hold you over his knee, and the other to wield the long belt. It hurt more than with mom, but there was almost a kind of security in getting punished by dad. You and he knew exactly what was going to happen, and there was no getting out of it.

Now having to tilt the whiskey horizontal to reach my lips, all the awful times will come back. The times he disciplined in anger. When he struck out with hands and made blood. The only time he got a beating from my mother, when he hit my brother and gave him a nosebleed, and the blood running down onto his shirt. Then my mother turning that windmill of hers against my father, knocking the cigarette away, his dumb defense of himself. Or the drunk times, when he'd yell and say things we know he couldn't have meant. And then the divorce, and his promises. The months of unpaid child support, and the court order. He left the state, children, ex-wife and even his new wife for Georgia. It was the only thing he had every really been loyal to. The red mud, the colors, the people. I'd remember how much like him I always wanted to be, how proud it made me to hear people say I had his eyes, or was built like him.

Turning the bottle vertical, I would try to think of the last times I had spent with him. The work trip with the church youth group to Mississippi,

where he met me late at night. We went to some all-night dive. He sang and danced about his poverty, why he couldn't pay support or help out. How he must have underestimated the sensibilities of a fifteen year old in driving a sports car and wearing a new watch. The recent summer of grooving cattle pens in central Illinois. "A hundred dollars a day when we work, and fifty when we are looking" is what he promised. And my giving him another chance, my trusting him again to be a father. So we spent three weeks west of Vandalia working a fifty mile square area. The German farmers bitching about Reagan and dad bitching about the farmers. "They got a million dollars just in farm equipment lying out there" and then he would quote me the costs of a John Deere harvester. When the tire blew, he cursed the state and his luck like I have never heard cursing. "You can't give me this goddamn state." It wasn't what he said so much as how he said it. He literally spat the word "goddamn." And then he let me drive the rusty van with all the play in the steering wheel home. "Keep your hands off the wheel. You don't need two. Just one, and barely that." Then as I was concentrating on the road, he forced me to take half of what he owed me. Crafty bastard. He knew I couldn't argue with him well while driving. And then it was settled. We got home, he told Candy how Mom and Mike both hated him. No more letters, no more calls. He owes me. Then Mom calling me. I had expected it for a long time.

Damn you. Always keeping me hanging on with your promises. Never quite coming through. But never quite failing utterly. And it still pleases me you fucker, when they say I look like you. You owed me, and now you've gotten out of it again.

And then I'll look up at the sky and locating Orion, the only constellation he ever showed me, send the bottle singing end over end at the hunter.



Amy Miller

Unwashed Dishes (2 a.m. Reunion Weekend)

In the flannel pajama kitchen,
I am the boy I thought
you hated. The others are in bed while we sit
in straightback chairs, burning our tongues
on hot chocolate. You remind me

of the seven months we went out, the gifts
I never gave you, and the Monday
that we broke up. I think, but never speak,
about the night before our first
date. I was fifteen
in a hallway, dialing sweaty numbers
and wondering what to wear.
You were so easy
to talk to after busy signals, laughing even
when I mumbled. Soggy french

toast and sticky plates from breakfast clutter the sink
as you rinse the cup, thinking
about Tom upstairs and the security
of six-and-a-half feet.

— Bill Rohde

Camera Obscura

The manifold reality of your
Crimson red slings
Never hit home as hard as
This morning
Bright and shiny as a ping-
Pong ball in a nail polish commercial
They posed at the edge of the bed
In great disarray —
(More confusion than two
Objects should be capable of)

Twined tightly together
The shoe's leather straps
Also blood red
Echoed the breathless tangle
That lay quiet on the
Rumpled sheets:
The interknit outline
Of my sneaker's laces

— Patrick Burnette

Passed Time

Her tongue moved like flames
on a burning monk, melting protest
before collapsing inward
in a gasoline scented spasm

of flesh and thought. I have been
here over and over and why do I
always return because she was once
my friend could be read

on his face as he sat across
from her, toying with styrofoam
fast food cartons and ketchup
smeared wrappers. She writhed

in a fire of her own pleased stoking
(I am Joan d'Arc with hoop earrings,
red nail polish and the correct books)
and her words were small

charred white pebbles that he gathered
in one hand, testing their weight
before slipping them one by one
into his ear.

— Eric Appleton

Burning Bridges

I see her face in flames,
across the chasm where the river cuts,
styx-like through the memory.
The birds flew in, dusting
the trees. Stripping them
 bare as her skin between
 the sheets.
Napalm on huts, children — burning
 flesh,
leaves, forest.
In the stillness of the ashes,
the river, the bridge.
 Crossing,
a bullet drops Harry to the ashes,
 rolling
like a die, black and white.
Craps — and another game lost.
 Speckled
in ashes.
The plastic molded and set;
the wire ready; placed,
activated and diving
 down.
Not enough time to wonder
who's on which side,
breaking families,
who is right — splinters of bamboo
 driven flaming into
 skin.
 Lying face down in warm blood,
twenty yards from a river
too deep to reach. I can hear father
reading from the bible. Lazarus
on Abraham's
 bosom.
All I need is a finger dipped
in the cooling stream.

 She rolls away, eyes
burning. Dark skin
 like soot.
Grasping her shoulders, I turn her back,
force myself onto her. Passive as I
slide into her. I feel the sting of
 bamboo splinters
 driven burning into my legs.
Blood flows between us.
I roll off her to the far side of the bed,
waiting for morning, for
 a drop of cool water.
She is still as
 a corpse, a burned village.
Flames in her eyes
 as the bridge burns.

Lansing Grandma

A balloon, left
in the cold
for a very long time,
your wrinkled pride.
I hardly know how to respond
to your frantic synaptical meanderings
and urine smell.

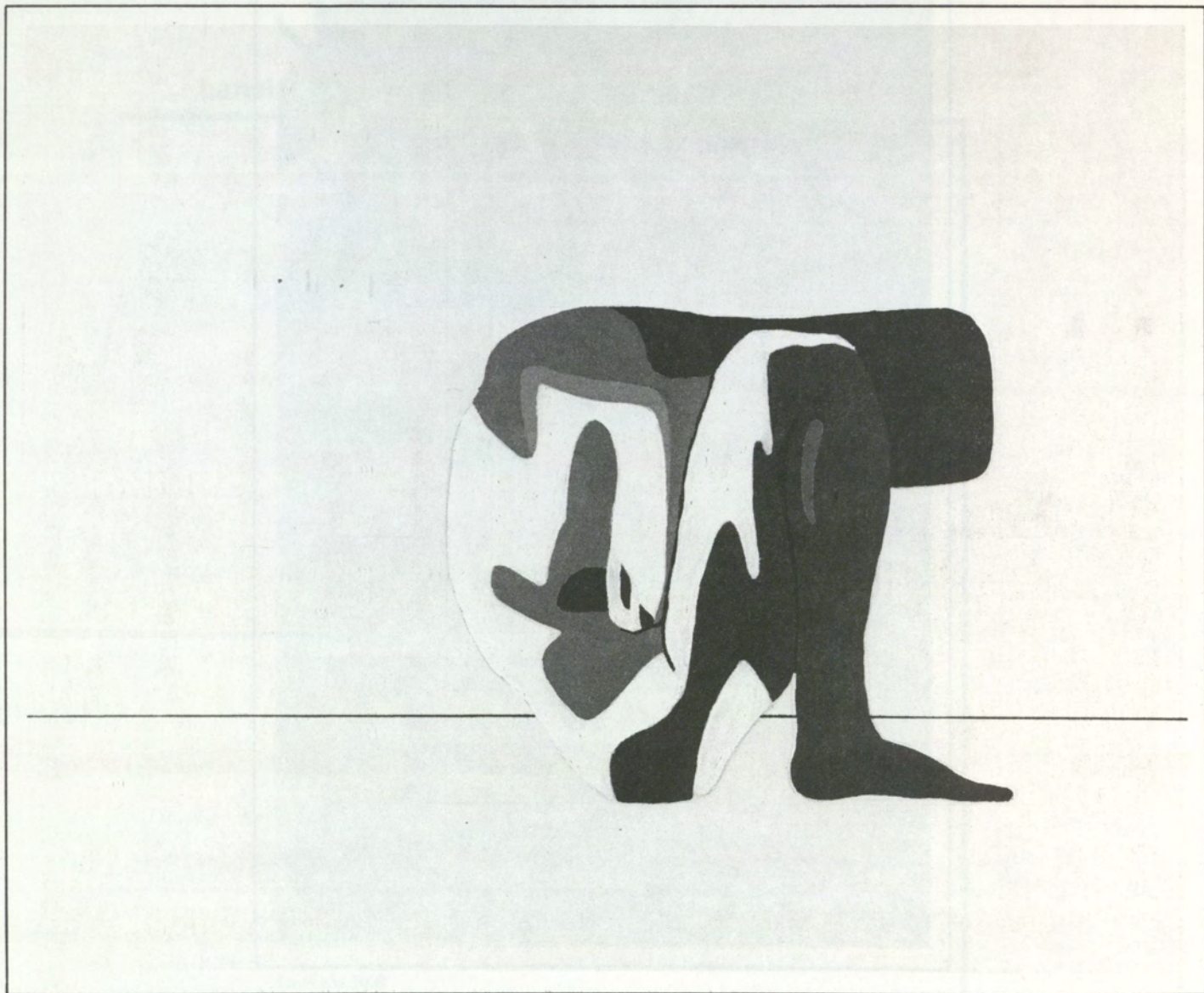
You could have sewed the world;
a stitch of time — for what?
Humble royalty, where are you now?
A purple kingsuit for all
for all to see (on Halloween)
is lunch for a family of moths.
A voice, echoing away inside my mask
screamed, “too young! too old! too wise! too crazy!”
I had a tough time transposing
my gratitude to thanks,
and now it’s too late, I suppose:
the rotting earth extends warm
feeling tendrils, already
hearkening your crag-toothed call.
Is that a glare of accusation
or a gleaming remnant
of crystal remembering pride?

On an anonymous Sunday,
how can you know that no,
we’re not here to take you home,
only your rancid laundry.

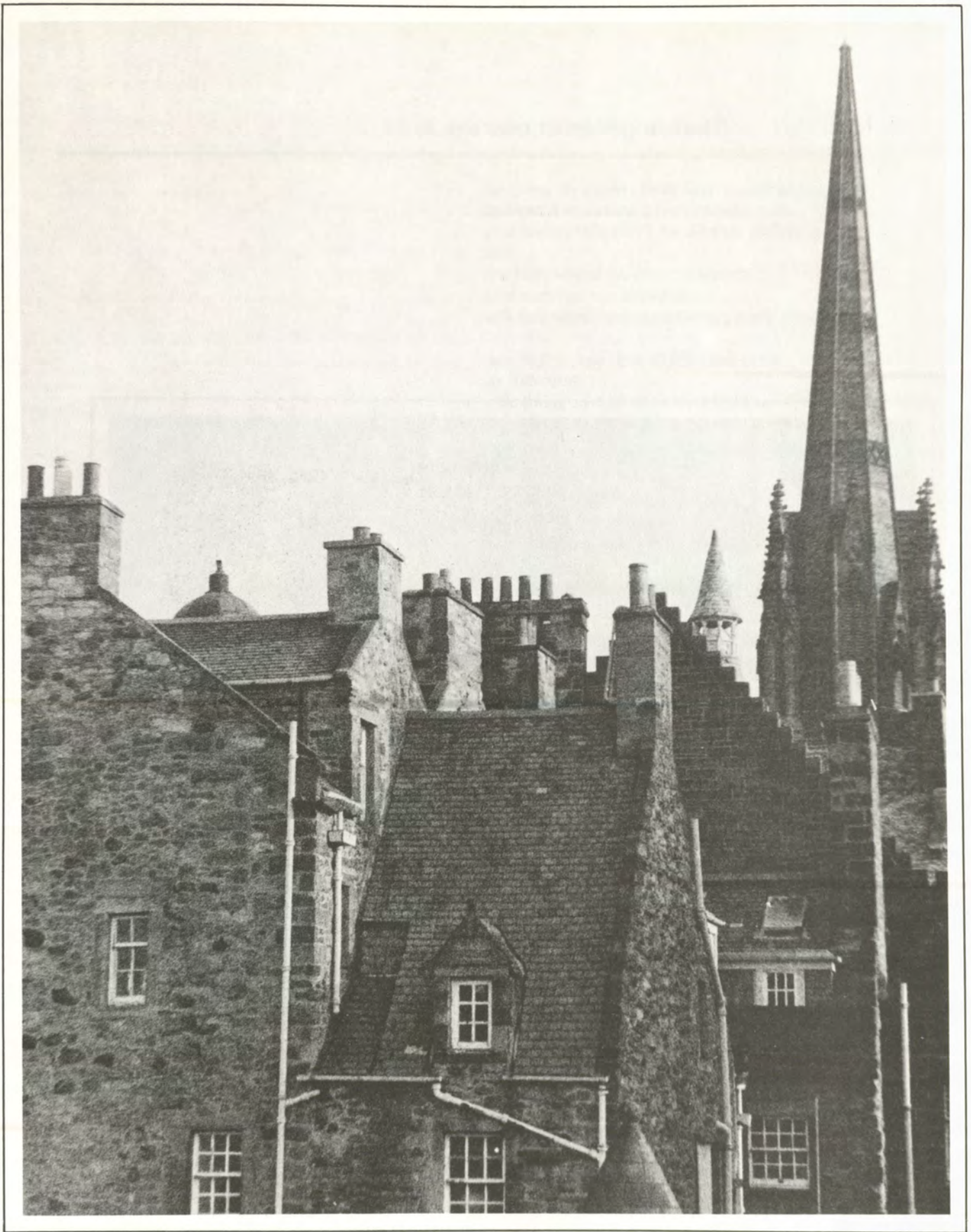
— Rick Van Grouw



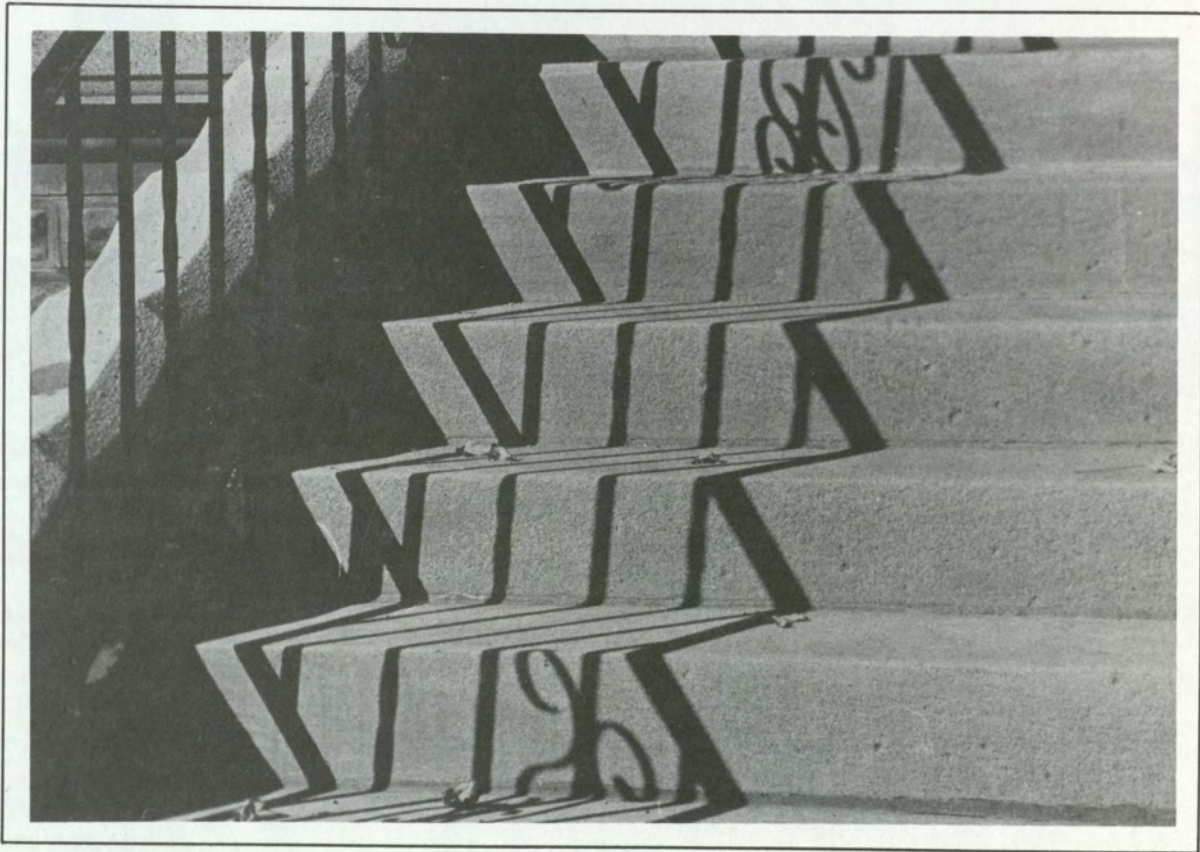
Barbara Hoel



Armand H. Antommaria



Ann Rehfeldt



Debra Griswold

what are you thinking about?

jumping in again both feet holding my own
against a constant grey chicago rain.
you know, this can't be all that different,
still,
the rain keeps so close a watch
and everywhere everywhere
soft fog whispers soak through my shoes.

two nights ago that same rain sang
so different,
a dashing sort of slide that led me
in just one more spring direction.
weaving drunken leaves through
tents that held a secret sort of lie.

I sank into those eyes again,
two warm pools singing paradise
from black lash rims--
never figuring you'd beat me to the end.

— Fritz Eifrig

THE SKY WAS BLACK
THE SUN WAS OUT
I WAS ASLEEP
WITH MY EYES OPEN
FISH WERE DYING
BECAUSE OF POISON
I ATE BOLOGNA
WITH MY TOES
MY ANT FARM BROKE —
THEY STOLE MY BABY SISTER
MY MOM RAN AWAY WITH THE SPOON
SO MY DAD ATE THE DOG

— David C. Donahoe

Symposium on Kay Boyle and What to Do Next?*

The days and dark have been full
of revolution and dead
scribblers and your life and thoughts
hitting so hard to break the skullcap wall —
I would not have missed it for the life
Dear Kay — it seems like two lifetimes
before that you watched your first heart die
a tomato-mouthed
last song in the south of France
When you brought the Canadian woman chasing
huskies in the jail
in 1968 everything seemed incapable
of squeezing in the brain of one body's life
 "If you have read it before, don't write it"
I'll try, I will,
but it's so much harder when all the words are put
down in black ink that never fades
I've been to classes that you've never
had and you write stories I'll never start—
I look to a lifetime not yet really started
(in some ways gone on for timelessness)
and wonder what this spirit will move to —
what gaping mouths will leave
imprints on a unscarred soul
A gray hem-ripped prison
dress you might not wish for me
but again that gray may well be the thing
that stirs the clouds
of my collective —
maybe my dress will be sleeveless and lopsided

— Samantha E. Arnold

*Kay Boyle (1902 -) Activist and writer who visited VU during the Fall semester 1986.



Christine Dyba

Dear Mother

— Margaret Perry

Newspaper item: "A new study reveals that the typical mother-daughter relationships may be much better than has been thought." (NYT, June 1981).

Sat. 13 June 1981

Dear Mother: The enclosed article from our yesterday's newspaper assures us that we probably aren't troubled in our relationship; but, of course, we do not live together, which is certainly a factor in our harmony. I wonder, also, about the questions the researchers asked. No one ever asks the question(s) I want to answer. Each survey I've ever bothered to answer is full of questions to the right or left of the mark. It's worse when one must make choices — fair, good, understanding...I mean, what happened, for instance, to better than good but not outstanding? A simple "other" would suffice, but no one ever thinks this is scientific enough.

Sorry the clipping is so brief, but it's from our provincial paper, gleaned from the *Times*; perhaps the complete survey will be published. What do you think of the 35 year-old woman who said: "When you come to accept yourself, you will stop picking on your mother." As you know, I'll be 35 this year, and I wonder if I have been picking on you all these years? You must tell me, since we presumably have this harmony.

Forgive any lapses in syntax: I only teach others — not myself; not anymore, in any case.

Love — your daughter, Lucia

P.S. Of course, there is the assumption (in my question to you)* that I have come to accept myself.

*I always tell my students to avoid this habit of using (), when it would be better to solve how to state what you wish without 'em.

Sat. 20 June 1981

Dear Mother: I don't know why I use the colon when I write to you. Perhaps it's because I became the undergraduate advisor last year and have been writing more business letters than heretofore. Did I always use colons? I really don't know.

You are right to question my assumption that we have achieved harmony in our relationship simply because neither of us has told the other to get lost. Your quotation (why the quotation, if you don't know to whom to credit the expression?), "Never presume," has an ineluctable ring to it: I mean, how can I get around the truth of these two simple words? Is there an escape from the implication that never to presume is probably always correct? It seems to me that love implies a degree of assumption upon the part of persons who have a strong bond between them.

Didn't I presume you would feed me when I was a helpless child? (Never mind the fact of my not giving thought to such an idea in a cognitive sense then.) I am confused by your suggestion of "Never presume." Perhaps I am overreacting. Perhaps in giving to me when young was your eleemosynary nature made manifest: you would have given to any creature so small and helpless because you are kind and, indeed, charitable.

There must be more to it than that, mustn't there?

But I have to prepare for tomorrow's class. I'm going to discuss Freytag's Pyramid and then see if the kids can enlighten me on its use in the few plays we're studying this summer. (I make them read three plays even in this mini session because I don't fathom how they can understand dramatic writing through fewer pieces of lit.)

Love — your daughter, Lucia

21 June 81

Dear Mother —

I guess I overlooked the question in your letter (for a long letter like yours, I'm surprised at receiving only one question).

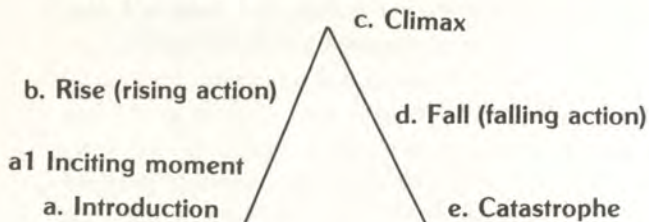
Yes — I go to church. Why did you ask?

Lucia

28 June 1981

Dear Mother —

I thought I told you about Freytag's Pyramid when I was in graduate school. It's a mid 19th century descriptive theory (by Freytag, of course!) about the structure of the ordinary 5-act play. I'll illustrate graphically:



I don't know if any of my colleagues use this, and I'm not about to ask any of them. There's no need to use the Pyramid, but I find it catches hold of the kids (for other reasons I pretend to ignore.) Ah, and I bet you wonder what happens when we discuss a 3-act drama — yes? (Most are, by the way.) One can, of course, discuss plays entirely without theories of rising and falling action because the action usually goes this way, so one must still explore the progression of the play from beginning to end, which is about action rising and falling...etc. I feel as if I'm sounding stupid. Please forgive me; my sense of proportion seems distorted. You surely don't want a lecture from me. But if you want more about Freytag's P. I can send you a copy of my lecture notes. (You can tell my traditionalist slant: would one care, for instance, about rising and falling action in "Waiting for Godot?")

It's not that I don't want to answer your question fully that I say little or nothing about church. What is there to say? I go to early mass every Sunday — or to 5 o'clock on Sat. I perform my duty. Why should I do more, if I'm not inclined? Presumably God knows my mind. You know I've always hated things like Legion of Mary, retreats with holy housewives, Bingo, etc. Now don't preach about my attitude: almost all activities in churches are fashioned by people who need this so-called fellowship for reasons I fail to fathom. I don't think God would come, for instance, to Sat. night Bingo.

There's too little and yet too much to say about the Church. In your heart of hearts I'm sure you understand me concerning this matter, even if you disagree with me.

I won't pick on you if you don't pick on me — O.K.?

Later: — It's nighttime now and I'm listening to a string quartet by Beethoven. I'm definitely a night person. Did you know I used to read in bed at night with a flashlight? You and Daddy wanted me abed long before I was ready to sleep. Children are so helpless before the power and fears of grown-ups. Even if I marry I shan't have children. Partly, I'm too selfish. . .

Wed. 8 July 81

Dear Mother,

I didn't complete my last letter? Sorry. My God, it doesn't mean a thing. You know I'm traveling a bit to do research for my book. That's why I consented to that pre-summer course. I was probably in a hurry. And I'm not criticizing you when I say I don't want children. And no, I'm not "one of those funny people who love their own kind." Lesbian: say it, Mother — lesbian. And if I were, so what? Why are you suddenly upset with me? There must be something about me you find so difficult to comprehend that you're designing fantasies about my life. No one's life is an open book; but I believe I live and speak honestly.

What would you have of me? Who should I be?

The interesting thing, Mother, is that I know less about you than you do about me. What you write to me is extremely conventional:

"Your father and I were well matched and happy."

"Your father was a good husband and father."

"Ours was a good Catholic family, but we also believed in culture and the arts." (whatever that means: are they mutually exclusive?)

I believe, as a matter of fact, Father was more complex than you remember or perhaps acknowledge. He was, in fact, an *artist manque*: his role as a good Catholic husband and father misdirected the creative vortex of his being. Indeed, the artist in him was sucked down under the weight of his daily duties. Maybe he made the choice to abandon this side of his nature before I was old enough to detect the longing I later sensed and, I believe, shared. Had he lived longer perhaps he would have felt free to unleash this unsung creativity.

Kafka was right; aloneness is the natural state of the writer (and, therefore, the artist). Just as the writer's life is one of solitude, I think most artists need the seclusion of the self to create.

I suppose that answers your question about why I haven't married. My two books got me tenure, but there are other things I want to write in addition to the sort of stuff I'm doing now. (I thought you knew this; after all, I did have a story and two poems published a few years ago.) Well, I still labor at the craft of writing, when there's the time. Scholarly duties, and the onslaught of students who seem to need my help, encroach upon my time and also have left me with a prose and poetic style far from my own approval.

But now I have a little more personal time, and I use it to practice my creative writing, to get back - as Eudora Welty terms it - into "the habit of being."

Having said that - I yield to my art and bid you good-bye.

Love, Lucia

14 July 1981 - Bastille Day

Dear Mother,

I didn't mean to imply you didn't understand Daddy. But I won't dwell upon this; please simply believe me when I agree that you probably knew him better than anyone.

Why are you surprised that I "ache after the difficult art of writing poetry?" I'm please you see it as an art — and difficult. Many people believe any literate person can write poetry, and it isn't true. Rod McKuen is ample proof of this — and any daily, small-town newspaper corroborates this, I fear.

Mother: writers are compelled by an inner urge, a psychic need, an ineluctable desire to express the self in her chosen mode — prose, poetry, painting, sculpture, whatever ... I did not choose writing; writing selected me. Words burn in me and must be released; the form - poetry - I did select, although I enjoy grappling with a story from time to time. Novels? I may even try writing one in the future. The notion is not unappealing.

Once, when I was in college, I thought I would kill myself if I didn't see one of my poems in print in the college literary magazine. Now I work hard for perfection, simply for knowing a poem is saying what I intend it to in the manner I wish. I want to be published - but I can't compromise with my own style or subject. Recently I've had some encouragement from the editor of a respected literary magazine, so I believe I may be on the verge of appearing in print again.

Must dash now —

Love, Lucia

Sun. 19 July 81

Dear Mother,

Of course, I know all about the Church's prohibition against suicide. Doesn't everyone? Nothing in life is that simple, however; there's always a conflict between belief and will, faith and reason, and you must admit to the possibility of a loss of control over one's actions. Luckily, most of us fight against death, probably because we pursue (consciously or unconsciously) immortality. As Unamuno says (in his *Tragic Sense of Life*) — "We cannot conceive ourselves as not existing." Anyway, it was long ago when I was rather melancholy and not particularly happy at school and the notion of suicide seemed attractive. I even thought of it as a positive act — an inversion of loving life and therefore a pursuit to extend it into eternity through death. But the soul in torment can recover. Again, to quote Unamuno — "Anguish leads us to consolation." I came to terms with myself long ago, Mother, and am happy and relatively unafraid.

See what a good job you did with me!

Love, Lucia

20 July 81 (postcard)

Mother,

Forgot to answer one of your questions: Bruce? Have no idea where he is.

We would have produced the most awful grandchildren for you. Feel lucky.

X Lucia

26 July 1981

Dear Mother,

I fear we have spent a large part of our lives writing inconsequential letters to one another. That is why we seem to be experiencing problems now. O, that I had never discovered that simple, brief newspaper story!

There's no need to remind me again that the Catholic Church says suicide is a sin; I even agree it is (when committed consciously). Sin is attractive to those who believe in it precisely because it creates a justification for one's inner conflicts and allows one to seek reconciliation of those famous opposites — the good, the bad. Laboring to burrow through the chaos of a troubled soul into a state of grace threatens to make sin seductive. Witness the euphoria, albeit tinged with insidiousness (from my viewpoint), of all of those born-again Christians. One must assume that by shedding the chrysalis of the old (i.e. sinful) self one believes oneself to have achieved a plan worthy of God's continual approbation.

Enough of that.

I have a modest proposal: Why don't you come for a visit? I'm here steadily now, and it would be nice — I'm sure. And...well, I wonder if we don't need this? Letters are fine and lovely things, but they lack the spontaneous, immediate response of conversation.

Tell me what you think of this.

Love, Lucia

9 August 1981 (Sun)

Dear Mother,

Our telephone talks don't seem to me to be

authentic conversations; I'm always inhibited by machines that act as intermediaries. Once again, can't you come for a visit? There's a concert of baroque music in two weeks — out of doors — which I think you'd enjoy. Authentic instruments of the period will be used. There are those who think all music sounds best on modern instruments; I can't agree, perhaps because I like the effort it requires to exhibit true musicianship on authentic period instruments. Ah, there's something Puritan in this notion, I think.

But I know you love the dance, and there's to be dancing on the lawn to baroque music. Sounds delightful — yes? Tell me you'll come! yes?

I'll cease this use of yes. I'll get your bed ready and. . .

Gotta dash —

Love, Lucia

10 August 1981

Dear Mother,

I heard from that editor I mentioned last month and he wants to publish two of my poems. Oh, joy! I'll wait until you get here to show them to you. Or maybe I'll wait until they're in print.

15 Aug 1981

Lots of love, Lucia

Dear Mother,

Well, we both know what day this is. Can I get you to say yes to my invitation today? Of course, it will be past today when you receive this. But I really am sincere in wanting you to visit. Why don't you think so?

Mother, please come.

Please come.

Come —

With love,
Your daughter, Lucia



Debra Griswold

Mimicry

And even
the children run
blindly towards the
swingset — not caring,
not thinking — pushing,
laughing, falling, toppling
over, knocking others down. Who
will be first to reach the bright
shimmering decrepit metal stand with
wooden seats that hang from ropes? After
all, that is the most important thing in the
whole world.

— Laura Sebastian

It is a pleasantly warm day, and I step confidently down the three flights of stairs to the street below. Six steps and a landing. Six steps and another landing. The world seems particularly vital today, and I am ready for it. Max is in a good mood, too, pulling on his leash now and then. Max is my dog, and, I must say, a very good dog. He goes with me everywhere. Sam, who lives across the hall, has a little fuzzy dog. They won't let Sam take his dog on the bus because his dog isn't very well behaved. It yaps too much. Of course, I would never tell him that.

Once down the stairs, it's 74 steps to the corner where I catch my bus. Max and I wait till the bus rolls up with its slow, heavy hiss. Then the door squeaks and we get on. Three steps up, slide the dollar in, and down the aisle to the second seat on the left.

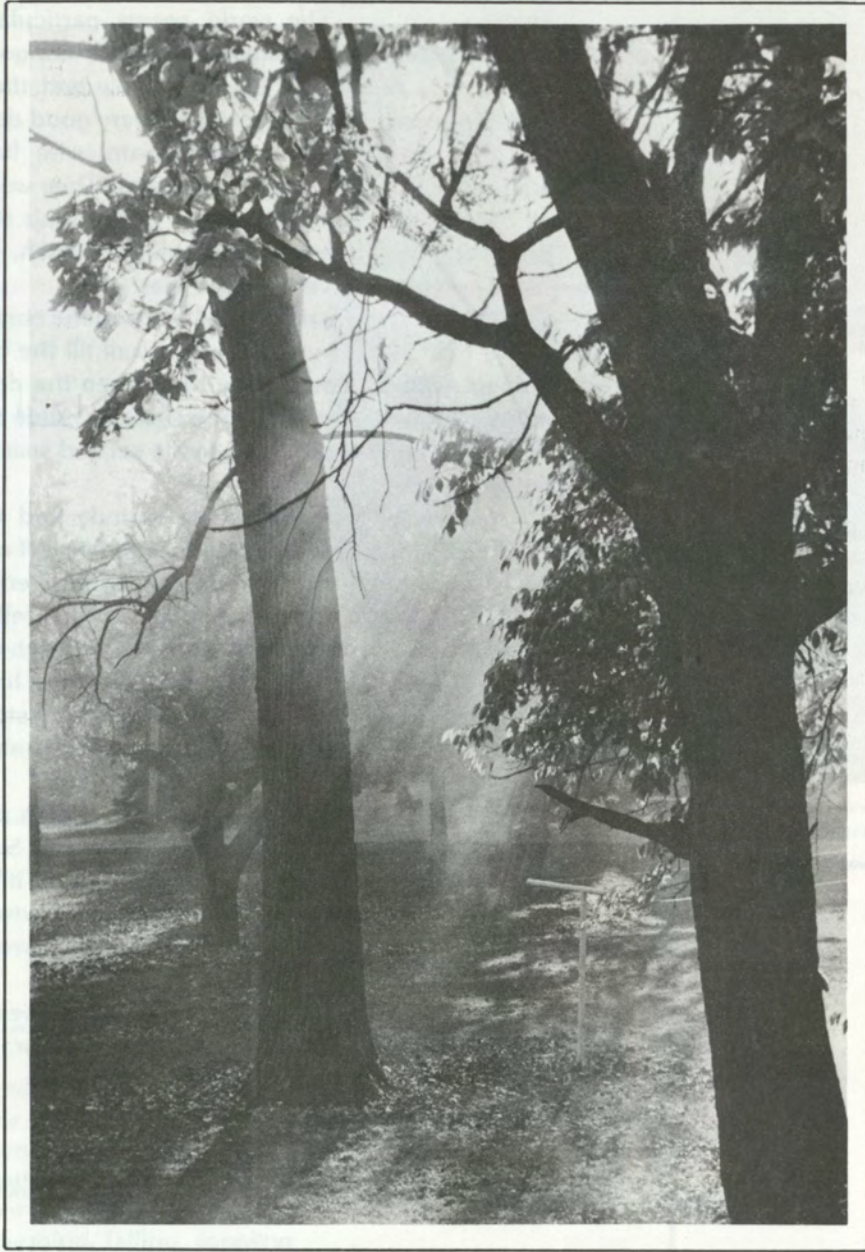
It's a lovely trip, full of the sounds and the smells of a busy city. At the sixth stop I get off and go 96 steps left to the door of my building. I enjoy the bustle around me as I walk and arrive feeling energetic and able, but find no door. I search my mind for an explanation, but nothing could have possibly gone wrong. I know I counted my steps exactly. I reach out again and again find only a wall.

I puzzle a little while and then stop a man and say to him, "Where is the door to Jones & Son, Inc.? It was here before. What happened to it?"

"Can't you see?" he replies. "You took a wrong turn somewhere, and you've come to the wrong corner."

I turn to go because the man clearly doesn't know what he's talking about. Wrong corner, indeed! As if I don't know where I'm going!

— Joyce Jacobson



Amy Miller

Seeking Star Quiet One February

Some storm clouds
let slip the secret
of searching...

The wind, my breath being
a wooden vacuum,
my racing pulse
lightning fast
in the dead indecency of snow,
blows down to the sand
screaming "HA HA" to emotions several.

AND my parents' hopes I cannot uphold
AND dreaming this icy act utterly ridiculous,
this costume a cold clown face that holds
some laughter, sometimes.

Salt-empty gray slush streets,
and me, hollow-mad in black leather,
twisted metal and wandering self,
strangely I feel that
tears still push me to the edge
and that one memory still haunts,
just beyond seeing.

— Stuart Selthun

Out in Silence

Out in silence
the earth is fading from my eyes.
It slips by the window,
whispering the soft night's sirens
Distant time of dying
confused swarming grey rain puddles
dark night

— Andy Shaw

Failed Vision

“Old Saturn lifted up
His faded eyes, and saw his kingdom gone.”

Before each step, the undisturbed sand lies smooth,
while behind, the ocean eats my footprints.
Along the shore line, to where the gathered
trees offer sand with twisted fingers to Charon
to cross the waters. Leaning back, shirtless against
thorned bark. Watching waves and sand.

At the party, she turned away.

She laughed, because there
was nothing there.

“Particles vibrating,” Henry said, “just particles
vibrating.” Walking along the beach.

“They’re footprints, you bastard. Not particles
of sand in some damned mathematical formula.”

“And what do the footprints say?”

A tiny figure stoops to pick up a shell.

She loved listening to the shells, but
could never name the ocean.

“Imagine that each grain is a world.”

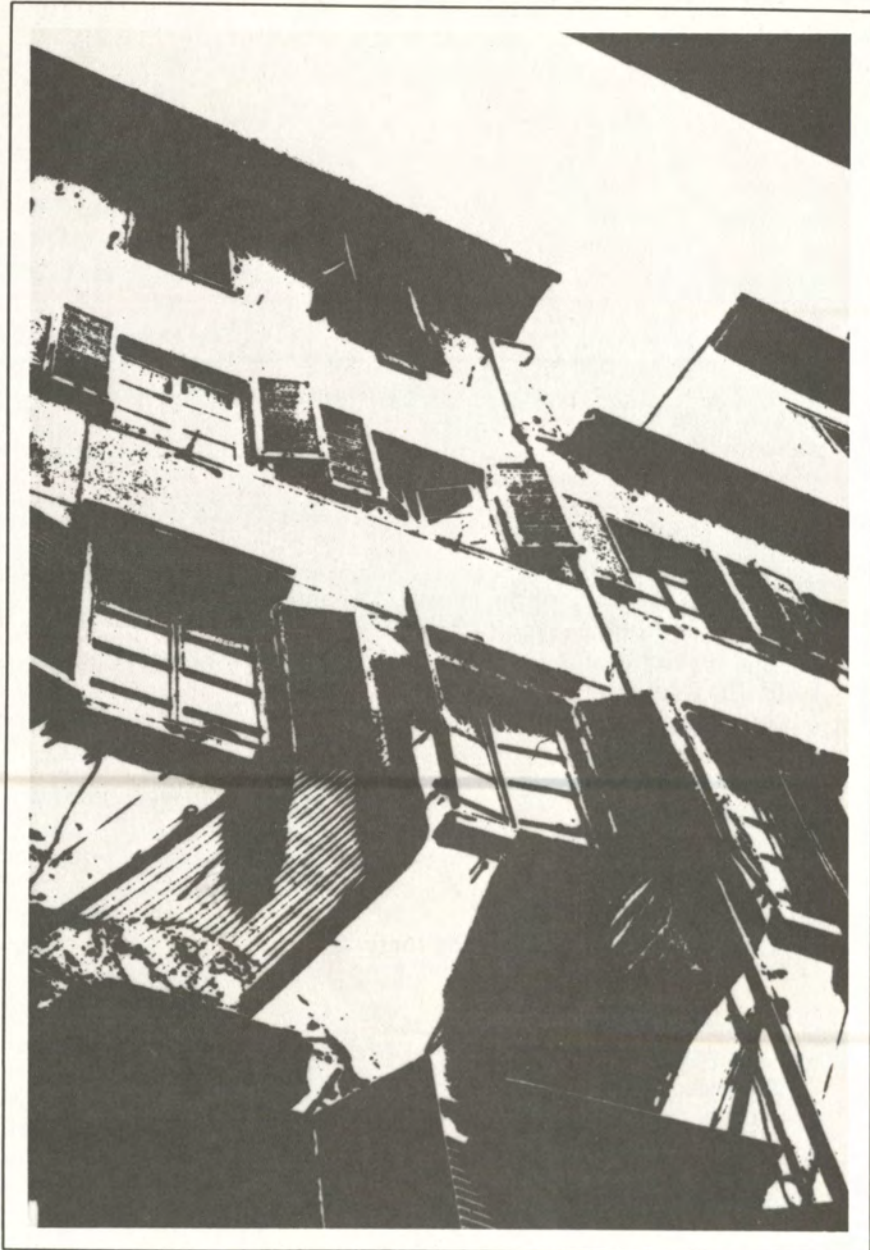
“A possible world,” she said. Sifting grains
between her fingers. Letting them slip away
one by one. Laughing as she gave me
her hand, empty. Turning around, she said,
“Find your footprints behind you.”

Looking for children among the grains.

Digging. Looking for
lost castles. As if they could still be there
after the tide, in between the grains.
She found the abalone,
running her hands first over the rough
exterior, then the inside. Maybe
it explained life as I never could.
She gave me a sand dollar, laughing as she said,
“Spend it wisely.”

The tide turns with the pull of the moon.
The particles slide with gravity, down. Filling
in the footprints. All the children swallowed
in the sand.

Down the beach, in the half-light of a swallowed
sun, I see a figure wavering
on my field of vision,
to turn, and return,
laughing in the night.



Amy Richter

After Two

Leave the living
room after flipping
through 20 channels, junk
mail that moves. Scatter
your clothes at the foot
of the bed and slip in
the plain envelope of the sheets. A chapter
of Harold Robbins (you tossed
it in the cart on top
of the Soup-for-Two's
you've yet to stop buying), bending
back the pages till the binding
finally gives. As you lay
it open-faced on the floor,
the cat sleeps curled
in the chair Mike used
to slouch in, arms crossed,
grinning while he watched you
dress for work. The approaching

brushes of the streetcleaner scrub
the concrete — it must be
after two. Then
you reach up, your arm too white
for August (you'll spend
Sunday at the beach), fingers click
off the switch. Now blackness
and the swish of swirling bristles
sweeping old trash down the road.

— Bill Rohde

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Art Editor: Debra Griswold
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Thanks to Dave Soderna and the *Torch* for their help and use of typesetting equipment.
Printed by Home Mountain Publishing.
Published under the auspices of the Valparaiso University Committee on Publications.

The Lighter is Valparaiso University's student-funded and student-run magazine of literature and art. We welcome submissions from any member of the VU community. Selections are made on the basis of quality, interest, and entertainment value.

Submission deadline for the Spring Issue is March 18, 1987.

Note: The cover features *Lighter* spelled phonetically in Cyrillic letters.

The Lighter welcomes constructive criticism. Please address all comments to *The Lighter*, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Ind. 46383.

The *Lighter* staff assumes all responsibility for the contents of the magazine.

Paul Fackler — English/Philosophy, senior, St. Louis, MO.
Armand H. Antommaria — EE/Chemistry, senior, Valparaiso, IND.
Stuart Selthun — 1986 graduate, currently living in Scottsdale, ARIZ.
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