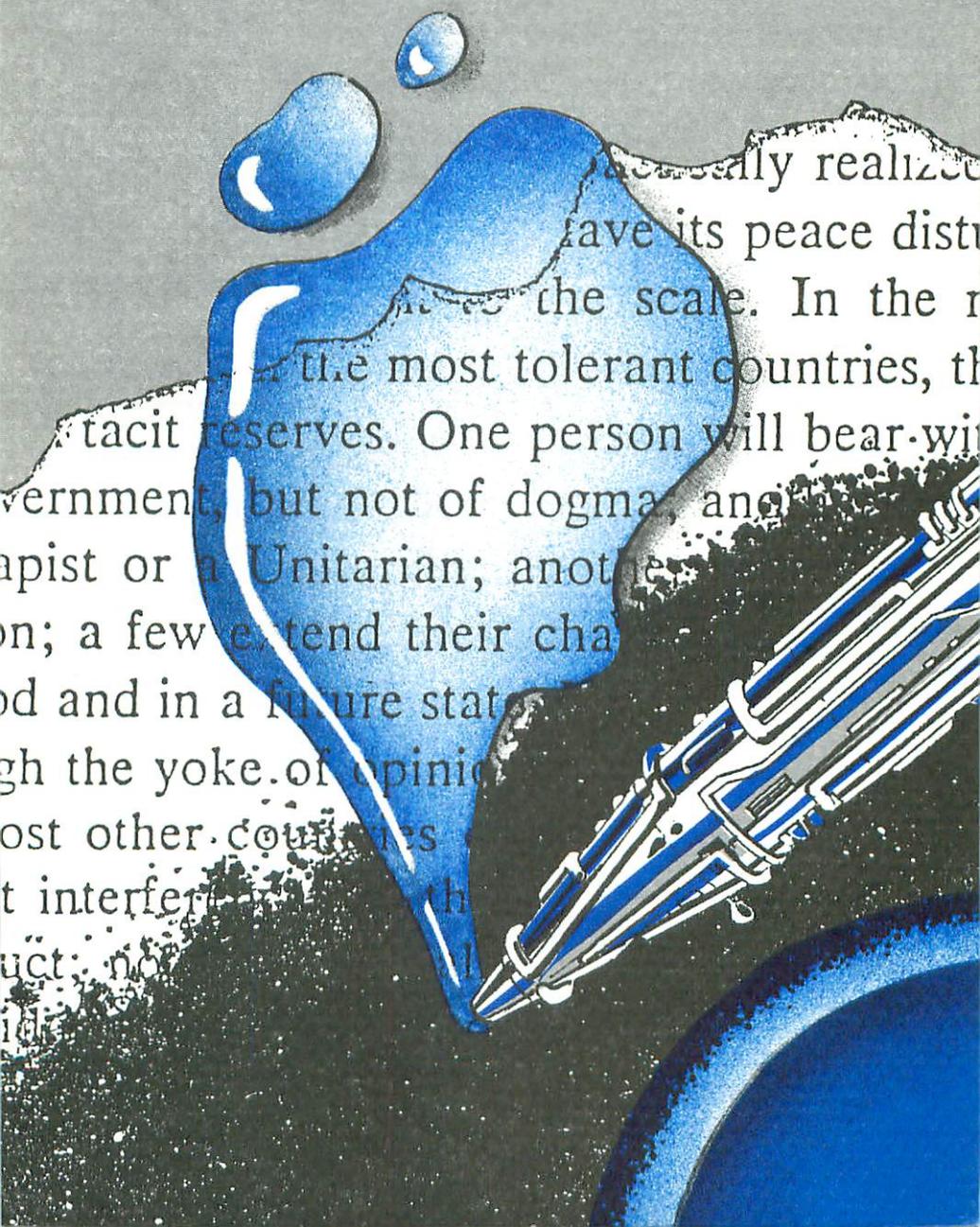


WATERSHED



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WATERSHED

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Volume 11, Number 2

Watershed

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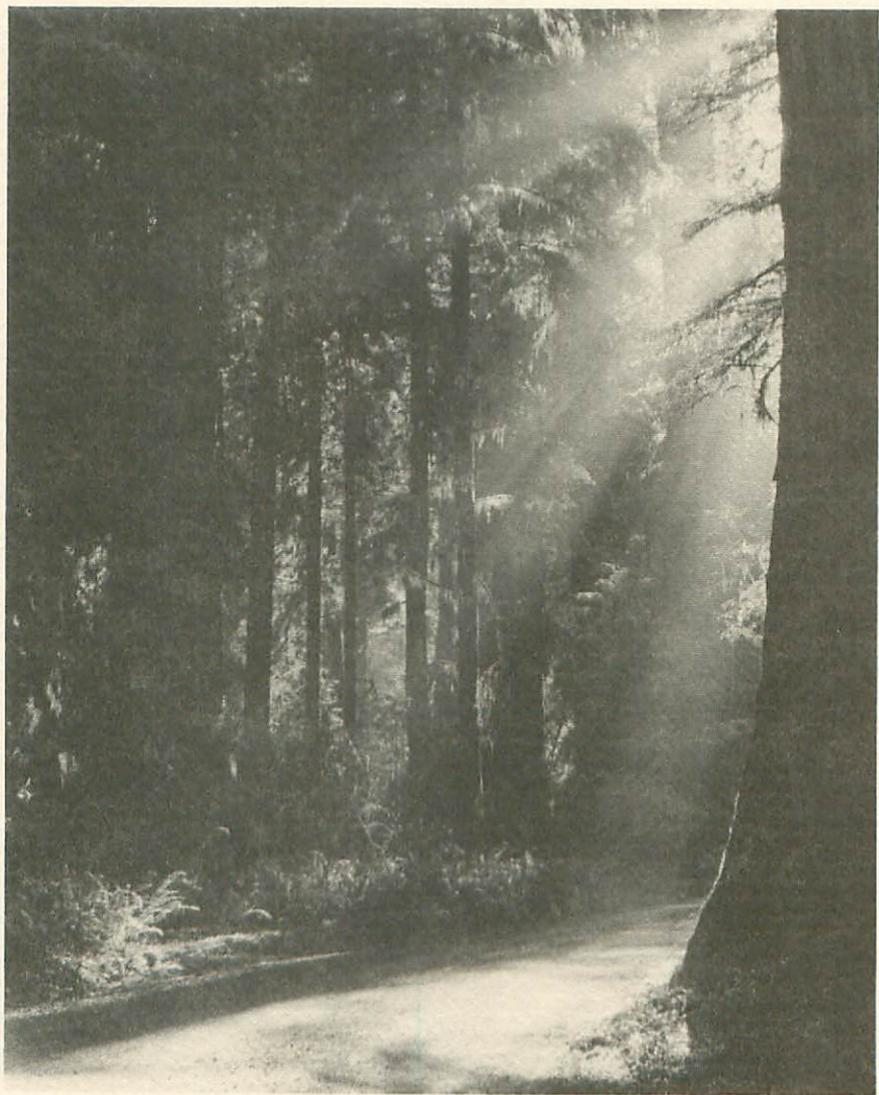
Department of English, CSUC



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Breakthrough

Lisa Whipp

Cradling Field

A small marker at the edge
of the field
Is the three years spent waiting
And the cloth she wound
and wound

It is not the raw bite
of cold wind inside her
It is more like wings grown up
from her back, unfolding strong
and white and feathered

Wings that lift her up from the bedside
of grief,
her daughter's cradling field
The meadow flowers rooting there
all through her now

The Cord

When you were new,
I whispered in your ear
late at night
to help you feel close,
since the cord had just been cut.

For years our words flew
soft and hard and silly
through the air, bouncing
off the ceiling and each other.

How strange to hear you now,
whispering through a wire,
whispering in my ear late at night
to help me feel close,
connected.

Wino at the Wharf

The ocean stretches beyond his gaze
to where the sun fell in burning
a memory in pink.

His shadow went with the sun,
the boats came home to sleep,
and a mud-hen found another morsel.

He hunkers down by the wall,
the bundle of his world on his lap,
a paper sack in his hand.

He looks up at the lighted windows
to the room with gold candles,
red wine and warm laughter.

At the end of the sky, he hears
a seagull, black on pink, bugle
an off-key *Taps* to a world he once
let die—on purpose.

Not a God

Headlines hustle
the children of the world are for sale
huddled on a dirt floor sleeping
innocence
only in dreams

Not begging
to be prostitutes
or labor in a blouse house
in Bangkok

The children of the world
have bright eyes
soft skin
demanding five figure
prices never paid
to impoverished parents

The children of the world
salute me, timidly
in a special report on page 2
I slip them in my pocket
carefully, carry them home.

Carcassonne

You share with me a castle
in the south of France
stretching far past the borders of this photograph
mighty white turrets attest to its stamina
vivid blue banners
to its chimeric quality
 her eyes wet from weeping
 pools at the tower's base
 she undoes her wimple unleashing
 cascades of copper locks to wash
 upon her anxious lover's feet
You say: I want to take you there,
to Carcassonne
and I say: soon

The Knowing

I feel like a thief . . .
Before I heard the news,
I pictured her coming,
put lilacs on the table,
made her favorite tea
(the one with hibiscus and mint).

You see, she was getting ready,
buttoning her coat
for the walk through the park,
crossing Thirty-fourth Street
at the corner.

She was still alive,
alive until I heard the news.
And we would still have April tea
had they not
told me.

My Soft Day

The day breaks softly
My warm world
my bed
treats me kind
Allowing me to find
and curl
around thoughts
that quietly roll off my mind

Brightly colored
Winding
Like a silken skein
it slowly spins
A quiet day begins

Faces, features
Emotions
a conspiracy of dreams
moves
glides behind my eyes
like a softly flowing stream
It sighs and plays
treading softly around my yesterdays

The Fruit Stand

We met
at the fruit stand—
over the peaches
placed just perfectly.

Faint orange
yellow—one on top of the other
passing to the purple-black
bruised at the bottom.

You asked, “Do I dare eat a peach?”
I replied, “I shall wear white flannel trousers
and walk upon the beach.”
You said, “I have heard the mermaids singing each to each.”

And in the years the peaches told
of us as others came,
Delighted to behold you after many years,
but, my, how you look the same.

She Sings Him No Lullabies

He watches TV all the time. He stares at it with the sound turned all the way down, waiting for a cure to his own muteness to come out of the silent mouths moving before him.

If he is not watching TV, he is sitting at the piano in the living room. While his mother watches from her dusting, he sits with his hands in his lap and stares vacantly at the keys. Sometimes a finger will raise up and press one of the ivories, usually middle C. But it presses down so softly, not a sound rings through the house. It is then that he gets up, goes to his room, shuts the door, and tries to scream.

His mother teaches piano. She had a dream once of becoming a concert pianist. It never happened. Four years at Juliard, and it never happened. She had a baby.

He wakes up late at night, and lies in bed while Bach drifts down to his room. Mozart dances by. Beethoven glides through the door and out the open window to weep quietly in the moonlight. Why does she do this to me? he wonders to himself as he stuffs the pillow into his ears and, holding it very tightly about his head, runs to the window and shuts it, pulling down the shade and casting his room into total darkness.

He is afraid of the dark. He is afraid of the things that live in the farthest corners of his closet, and under his bed. Confused and frightened, he lingers for a moment, debating whether to pull up the shade and let the awful silver beams and whisper of moonlight in, or to run to his mother and hug her and hug her, never to let go.

In the living room, she hits the wrong note. A raucous discord resounds throughout the house, and he gets into bed, listening to her mutter to herself between sobs. He falls back to sleep on a damp pillow.

In the morning, he is awakened by the piano again. This time it is scales. Up and down the register they flow, up to the highest C, then down to the lowest. He imagines himself in a brook, leaping from stone to stone. As his foot touches each stone, a note rises. In the daydream, he is smiling.

He gets out of bed and puts on his robe. The wood floor is cold. He starts to look under his bed for his slippers, but then he remembers the darkness of the night and slips out of the room with cold toes.

The key of the scale changes and the second note is flubbed. There is a pause. He hears his mother chastise the student for not continuing. The scales start up again, travel swiftly and perfectly up into the high register, then back down the same way, stopping abruptly.

"Now you try," his mother's voice rings, "and don't stop."

The scales start once more, slower, full of errors, but the student does not stop. The key changes to an easier one, and the progression quickens.

He finds his way, as if by chance, to the kitchen, and climbs up the stepladder to get his bowl from the cupboard. His mother has made some chocolate Cream of Wheat. He pours it out of the saucepan into his bowl and sits down in front of the TV set which rests on the kitchen table. He turns it on. The Rabbit begs for some Trix, but only gets laughed at by the stingy children. The boy shoves the spoon into his mouth and lets the contents slide down his throat.

Later, after the tediously played scales are finished, and the mediocre attempts at Bach have been made, he hears his mother greet the pupil's father and send both away with the words, "practice, practice, practice."

She comes into the kitchen, pours a cup of coffee and sits down at the table with him. He knows she is watching him, but does not return her gaze. Instead, he watches the television, his spoon going from bowl to mouth, bowl to mouth.

Bugs Bunny, in blond wig and horned helm, sings. The boy turns up the sound, but does not smile. Another spoonful goes into his mouth.

"Well," his mother speaks abruptly, picking up his empty bowl and carrying it to the sink with her coffee cup. "I don't think I'll ever get used to these 8:00 classes. Why parents think their children can learn to play piano at that hour is beyond me."

There is another commercial, and he turns the sound back down. His mother continues chatting in a bland, empty voice while she does the dishes. "My last lesson gets over at 11:00 today. I thought we might take a picnic lunch and go to the park and the zoo this afternoon. Would you like that?"

He nods absently, his attention drawn away from the screen by her hands. Long bony fingers caress the dishes and float through the soap bubbles. He sees the fingers caressing piano keys. Blinking back tears, he turns back to the TV. The credits are rolling. He reads each name,

wonders who the people are, and what it would be like to live with them. He wonders how many TV sets they have, and whether there is a piano in their living rooms.

That afternoon, they go to the park. His mother points to the swings and says, "Go play while I get lunch ready."

The boy walks toward them, dragging his feet. The swings are all taken, children laughing as they perform circus tricks. He sits down on the edge of the abandoned merry-go-round and waits for one of the children to get off. He wonders if they will laugh at him like they laughed at the Rabbit.

Soon the other children see him, and a boy jumps out of his seat and runs up. Others follow.

"Hello," they cry, introducing themselves. "What's your name?"

He shakes his head and looks down at his feet.

"What's the matter with him?" a girl asks.

"Maybe he's from another country and can't speak English," someone ventures.

"Maybe he's from another planet and can grant our wishes!" a little boy says hopefully, only to be derided by the rest.

"Would you like to play with us?" the boy who had first run up to him asks, very slowly and loudly.

The mute looks up, nodding a little.

The children get on the merry-go-round, pushing and running as fast as they can. It squeaks and wobbles as it turns. The boy watches the other children laugh while all he wants to do is cry. The squeaks sound vaguely like an aria his mother plays on the stereo sometimes.

In the night, the boy dreams of the zoo. All the animals have come together in the zoo amphitheatre. Monkeys, tigers, flamingos, gazelles, bears, zebras, and lions all sit and watch the other animals perform. The penguins dance, their stout bodies glide and sway like Fred Astaire. The kangaroos stand on their heads. The snakes juggle knives and flaming torches. The elephants perform a delicate high-wire routine. And always, in the background, the giraffes provide the music. They sing, each with the voice of a siren.

The words of his mother reading a sign in front of the giraffe enclosure break into the dream. "Giraffes are the only land animals that do not make a sound." With a scream only he can hear, he awakens. His mother is playing the piano.

Moonbeams fall through his window to the floor, and he watches with wide eyes as Beethoven slips through the door and glides across

his room toward the moonlight. Notes, like silver tears, drop to the ground and gleam in the pale light. The boy grabs the pillow and wraps it around his head, but he cannot shut out the music. It seeps through the material and the feathers and fills his ears with its lament.

He jumps out of bed and runs across the icy floor to the window, thankful it is already closed and he only has to shut the shade. He reaches for the string and pulls. It is stuck.

The music grows louder, a crescendo of regret. The boy tugs at the shade, imagining his mother's cold fingers melting over the keys. Beethoven cries of lost hopes and dreams. But the boy holds the pillow tighter around his head with his free arm.

The shade will not budge. He tugs harder and the string begins to hurt his hand. Finally he drops the pillow and throws his whole weight onto the string. The shade pops out of its brackets and comes down on top of him, burying him in canvas. The boy cries out as it falls, and is surprised at the sound of his own voice.

The music stops. He hears his door open and his mother's bewildered voice as she walks toward him. "What happened? What were you doing?"

She lifts the shade off of him, helping him to stand. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," he whispers, throwing his arms around her neck.

She briefly returns his embrace, her hands cold. The house stands silent, like a tomb. His mother lets go of him to roll the shade up. "We'll fix that in the morning. Come on now, get back into bed."

His throat closes up as he gets into bed. His mother presses cold lips to his forehead, then moves to the door. "Go to sleep, dear."

He hears her walk back out to the living room. He hears the piano stool being drawn up. His eyes focus on the window, and on the shade lying on the floor beside it as Brahms fills the house.

Love

was a bright helium balloon
which I held by a string
for awhile
I was happy
wherever I was
it was with me

Shining.

Then suddenly it burst
and I stood a long while
with a torn bit of something precious
dangling
behind.

I knew that dragging it
on the ground
was wrong.

so finally
I let go.

And walked on.

DIANA
The Night Huntress

The Moon's gone hunting
tonight
She's spinning light
across the grass
Scattering dogs
Slipping milky hooks
under their ears
Raising warnings for
incautious cats.

Under a bush now
Moon's hands move
To seek nested kittens
To silver their fur
with pale caresses
she mutes their cries.

Then, a splash
Daggers of light
Clouds of varnished dust—
firelight rising
to polish night's cool glow.

The Moon's found us
twisting under the grass.

The Moon stops
her mighty arms spreading
She stoops low
 reaching under
 frameworks of leaves
To bend loops of silver
 circling the soft thorns
 of our sleep
To order the frail rooms of
 oblivion
Setting in perfect timing
the motion of our eternal rest.

Clair's Romance

From his smile returned,
Clair discovers
feelings of yesterday
Finding that which no longer
feels right today:
The red of hesitant rage
endured by
nervous misgiving.
No more living thus
Favoring the want that
cannot be theirs,
But rather the want of others.
In solitude she's often run
Talking with people as they
come and go
Longing for the understanding
that has never
really been real.
Again, in solitude he looks
Reflecting life's most
subtle seduction,
A passion of reality—of
love and acceptance.

Mare

The translucent sea,
slick as wet pavement
lapped against the beach.
Each wave stole a grain
of the gold sand, greedily
washing it toward the setting sun.

Elegy for Richard

Emptiness—Forgetting
Waves of sorrow
wash over my body
as death echoes through my head.

Pain—unfeeling pain
drives into my heart.
Youth was, but is no more.
How does it fade?

Age—unattainable age
Touch me. I aspire
to break free, this infinite web
that binds.

Seclusion—unwanted seclusion
Must I be trapped?
Spend my feeble solitude searching
in a world of dashed hopes.

Freedom—Free me
No longer shall I cease to exist
but burn with you—
A timeless journey we shall take.

Autumn Night

The silver truth of throbbing distant stars,
Though seldom from a mortal moment wrung,
Is sometimes deep within us quiet sung,
Far beyond Venus and far beyond Mars.
Once greener than that waxy goddess Love,
Now redder than that autumn god of fear;
To straining senses, Truth is almost clear,
On brittle wings descending from above.
The universe within a fading mind,
Or slouching withered body lacking strength,
Will still burn brightly though a man be blind.
In darkness, where the dying passion breathes,
I smell and hear the burning autumn leaves.

The Picture

The pink paper smelled like her,
And still does,
 A little.
It brought me words from far-away voice,
And a picture,
To make me feel near.
 I don't.

The picture has suffered long hours
Of insatiable stares,
From longing eyes,
Afraid to forget
Fresh white
 Touched by warm glow
 Of excited blood
 Through soft cheeks.
Dancing light on gray-blue eyes
Reveals the energy,
 The fire,
 The life that colors tender flesh.
Long curls frame the pearl solitaire,
A modest veil
 For slender neck
 And unseen ears.
I imagine
The unchanging smile
 Shaped by moist lips
 Is worn for me.

I don't know which is harder . . .

Being away

And not hearing from her,

Or

Hearing from her

When I cannot be with her.

Waiting for the mail has become a religion.

Lily Lies

The fine white
spiral
opens
to reveal
a tempting yellow
tongue.
Lily lies
forgotten,
crumpled tissue
torn away,
satin ribbon curling
white
against the polished
wood.

The Cook

She warned him the garlic would
get him—
rise out of the pot and pursue him
into the night,
purifying his air,
his lungs, his blood.
For days
he left his amulet at home;
the pearly buds had cleansed,
had purged even his soul
completely.
And he had only to crack
the kitchen door
to renew the sacred spell
that rose like virtue,
potent and relentless
from the shining silver pot.

Painting

drop of white in red
mixes
runs to yellow
suddenly salmon
appear on my palette.
On the paper
Penguins.
Pure orange, I make them
bills out, feet flipping,
marching unabashed
into an icy ocean.

the drop of white on blue
mixes
goes to grey
over a lone
old adobe home.
Line shadow line
bone, bits of blue
quiet turns to color
when desert craves to bloom.

Deciembre a Noche

Tight
wrinkles
on brown leather.
An old Spanish woman squatting,
slouched, bundled in rags
a face poking through.

Lights
flashing
the cold bites my fingers.
Streets piercing warm cafés.
Enduring in what was once
the center of the Universe.

Puerta Del Sol
sanctuary of lottery tickets
cigarette stands.
I must go
to meet a girl at the metro.

I Am Falling Asleep

I

Into a night of perfect orange
and prayers to red sky at morning

I walk over quiet bodies
and wet cogs behind the curtains;

in a forest of shoe testimonials
I walk in constellations
of barking dogs lacing yards
with panic and musk;
yard grass sways with the tension
of stilled flesh
legs turn
and the skeleton follows;

there is hi-diddle-diddle
and, in the beginning
there was the heavens and the earth

II

and we are all of us
walking and breathing
walking and eating our years
walking the hours down
with the shabby poise
of those walking behind the bones
of past walks; this

is why you do things:
to change from
riverbed to riverbank,
from face A
to place B,
to piece the square hole
into slot C;

walking in a paper landscape
of tattoos on water,
an endless slab
chiaroscuro
of this and that
the importance of

the impermanent,
of the pavement,
of the eyes without form
of words without sight.

III

I am gathering cups in vacant memory,
nurturing white roses in liquid;
that was long ago;
my father is a pair of shoes, in a box, across
the country;
I walk to those artifices,
impervious to the invisibility
of water.
I walk away;
I am falling asleep
in a creek of slow-moving wet shoes
in a slow-moving creek,
my mouth forming the words:
"I am falling asleep"

Piano Teacher

She is a mother to the empty rooms
 polished daily
by the natural brooms,
by the sun-sweeping light hung down
 like the chapel bell
 ringing mute and fluted,
 still with streaming ribs
to floors waiting warm
for her clogged feet.

What glad strength in these brown fingers
that brush away the nightly bird cloth;
that tuck away the dangling hair-strands into a comb
 of "Indian Wigwams"
 and "Monarch Moths."

One by one
she hangs her pictures on the walls;
 two by two
she loosens thongs from berry feet.
Tulip petals start to fall
 around her work bench,
and there she spins out pretty birds,
and there she lifts the window sash,
and there she lifts her children past.



Jim Johnston

Contributors' Notes

Sherrie Alexander has a B.A. in Communications and is currently pursuing a teaching credential. She plans to be working and writing a novel in Los Angeles this summer.

Cheryl Cardoza will graduate this May from Chico State with B.A.s in French and English, and will study Comparative Literatures in graduate school. Her poetry has appeared in *Watershed* and *Tributaries*.

J. C. Caruso is a Yuba City native now majoring in English at UCLA, where he is also this year's editor-in-chief of *Westwind*, UCLA's journal of the arts.

Andrew Duff was born and raised in California.

Katherine Hubbard is a graduate student at Chico State and is working on a special M.S. in visual arts for ESL. Her work has been published in a number of literary magazines.

Jim Johnston has a B.A. from Chico State and is currently doing graduate work. He works in Security at Whitney Hall Food Services and is interested in old movies, old books, running, and dreaming.

Barbara L. Kimball is working—slowly—on her M.S. in English Literature. She likes writing, traveling, and—occasionally—studying.

Margaret Kirk is an Elder College student in CSUC's writers' workshop and is a published writer of short stories and poetry.

Jeffrey Knorr believes that all writing should come from intense personal experience—beginning with travel and adventure, and including good literature, good wine, good friends.

P. Koronakos is a nice guy.

Geri Mahood teaches basic writing part-time for Butte Community College and is a teaching assistant for Chico State.

Mike McGee is a native of Chico who's finishing up a credential pattern in English. He works hard but makes time to write, anyway.

Betsy McNeil says she "writes poems because they make me write them." Her first chapbook, *Thought She'd Never Sprout Wings*, is being published this spring by the Butte County Poetry Center and Press.

Berylene Rizor is an English major at Chico State with plans of obtaining her teacher's credential. She has been published in several regional publications, and has received awards for her poetry and photography.

Amanda Suver is an English major with a minor in Biology. She plans to work in the publishing field after graduation this May.

Clyde D. Switzer graduated from Chico State in 1987 and makes his home in Chico.

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