

WATERSHED



WATERSHED

A Literary Magazine

Volume 14, Number 1

Watershed

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A special acknowledgement to Gregg Berryman and his CDES 23 class for assistance with the cover.

Sponsors

English Department, CSUC

Instructionally Related Activities:

This magazine is funded by Student Activity Fee

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Editors' Note:

We wish to thank all the contributors to this issue of Watershed. In taking on the difficult task of addressing the theme of "Identity", these writers have enabled us to compile a varied and fascinating collection of poetry and prose fiction. In the reading ahead you will discover individuals coming to grips with, exploring, and sharing their feelings of who they are and what made them that way. We hope you will find, as we did, how intriguing this discovery is and appreciate the conflicts and inner struggles that exist within all of us.

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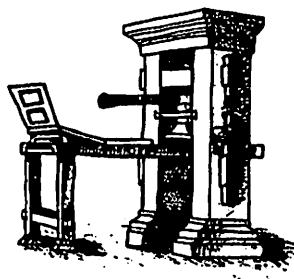
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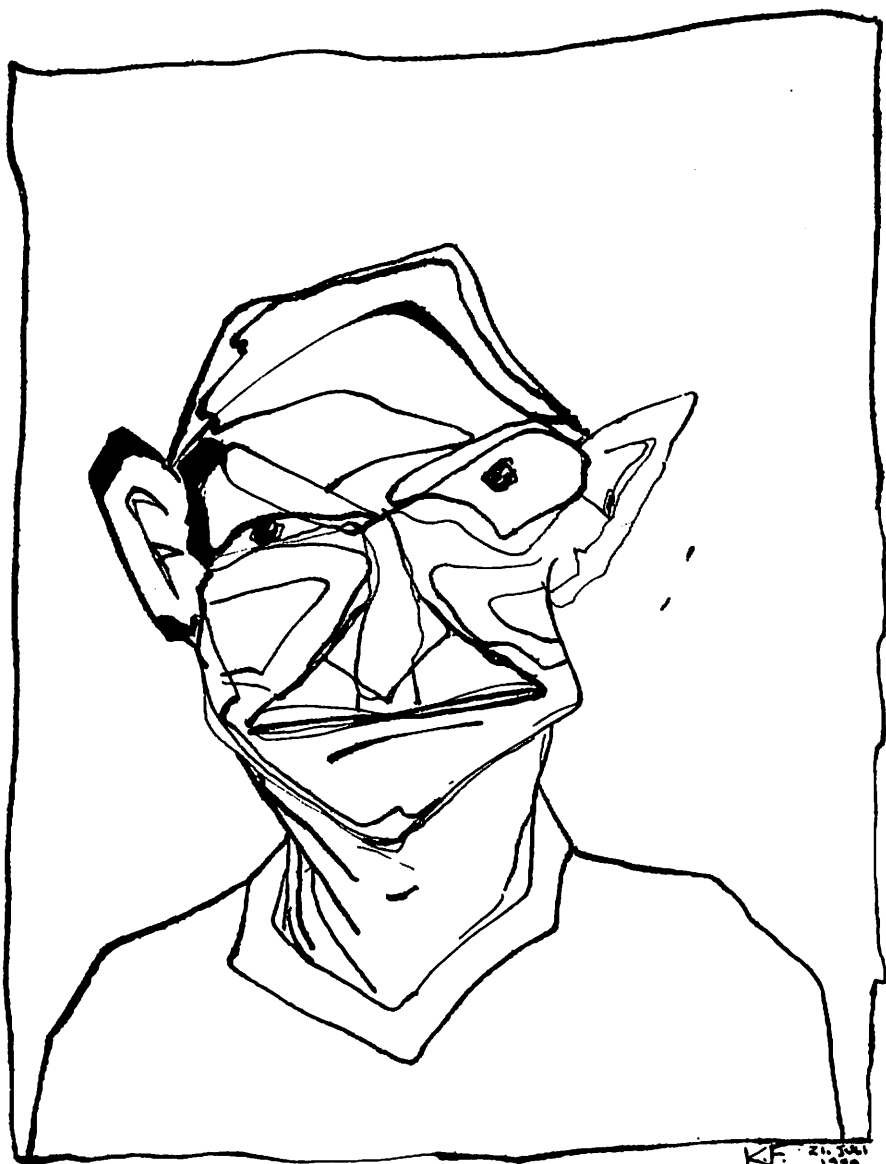
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Hank lives alone

Hank watched from the window of his big old house as the kids from the neighboring high school pissed on his lawn and threw their Taco Bell wrappers and cups in his bushes. Sometimes he could keep them away by turning on his sprinkler. Big street traffic noise. Heavy bass. Dog next door barking. All day.

Hank drinks.

Hank turned up the volume on his cheap JCPenney stereo. Loud jazz. Hank started to rumble. His eyes popped out and ran down his face. His thick glasses cracked and flew to bits. His big stomach swelled to bigger and bigger till he finally exploded all over the living room. Meat pieces quivered on shelves of books. Veins strung out on picture nails. Fluffy keeps barking.

Hank takes another drink.

Christine Szuggar-Martinelli

Wise-Woman Running

beach morning
I run the sun up
solemnly singing
heartbeat drumming
the sound of footfall
taste of salt in my mouth

I have been with the women
mit-wyf, they say
keeping the long vigils
of their laboring; with them
breathing and praying,
crying their fear, singing
their courage, exulting their babies
into this world
timeless,
doing women's work
now
comes dawn and I run the morning in
slowly, close to the ground
with short strides, enduring

the young men come,
loose limbed hunters, built for speed
running together fast and noisy
passing, they greet me
but they do not see
looking to the middle distance
the horizon for sails
the morning sky for signs of storm
they know only the places where the maidens dance
they see their lives before them

that farseeing gained
in the long night watch
keeping the vigil fire
crooning for dawn
the vision of eyes darkened in pain
the long sight born in witness
eludes them
long legged in the daylight
they run to their future

slowly, with a blessing
the wind at my back
I turn home

Miftah MacNeil

I Am

C.J.

Everyone who knows I am has asked me when I knew for sure, and I've always had to stop and think back through my life; back through the turbulence of my first years in college and all the friends, real and imagined; back through high school and the emotional junkyard I was sifting through; back to the childhood that still seems alien to me as though I didn't own it, but instead was privy to the memories of another child who actually lived it. I see signs, warnings, all along the way but nothing is really definite. Only hints and accusations from nowhere in particular.

But even then it seems too early to be thinking about these sorts of things. I have this feeling you've got to be a least 45 to even begin to understand your life. It seems like there's a certain kind of security and wisdom that comes with age, especially when it comes to understanding what's inside yourself, and to try figuring it all out at 22, especially when so much is still changing, seems like I'm reaching for Olympus.

The internal struggle was the easiest part. It was a matter of admitting to myself that I was gay, accepting it, and moving forward. But when I saw what was ahead, I got worried. You see, beyond the internal self is the external world, and reconciling these types of discoveries with the outside world is what gives rise to things like discrimination and hatred which ultimately can destroy the confidence we all started out with after we made it out of the womb.

But where to start?

I always felt that I should start with my parents; especially my mom. I used to think a lot about how I'd feel if she died and had no idea about who I really was. It was a fear I couldn't explain rationally. It just existed and it scared the hell out of me sometimes. I always thought I'd tell mom and then have her tell dad, but in hindsight, I'm glad I didn't do it that way.

They came to visit me one weekend where I was going to school just after I'd moved into a new place of my own. I had just met Sam the weekend before and the funny thing is that I'd always been reluctant to talk to my parents about my sexuality because I didn't feel I was really gay until I'd actually done something about it. There was a conversation that kept popping up in my head:

"Mom, dad? I'm gay."

"What do you mean? Who have you been sleeping with?"

"No one. I'm not sleeping with anyone."

"Well, then how do you know you're gay?"

Could I argue with that?

The logic seems a little silly now that I look back, but it was the way I was thinking and those were very confusing times. But in some ways it does make sense. I think the need to have my sexuality realized in the outside world with a partner was something I needed to prove to myself that I'd made the right diagnosis. I'd hate to throw a false alarm at my parents.

"Oh! That was just a phase. Here. I'd like you to meet Julia. The woman I'm going to marry." I could just see dad choking on his coffee.

Even when I did finally tell my parents I was gay, that sort of reaction came about anyway.

"Are you sure?" It was my dad who said this. I guess when something shocks you, you tend to rely first on that chance that it's a practical joke, and then you knuckle down and deal with it when you realize no one's wearing fake rubber noses or hand buzzers. I remember dad kept telling me, "Forgive me son if I seem a little detached from all this. But I'm really in shock."

Actually, I can't remember a time when dad seemed more real to me. He immediately attacked the practical problems we were faced with; things like insurance companies, discrimination, and AIDS. We talked a lot. Mom was quiet most of the time. She sat Indian style on the floor to the left of me twirling the shag carpet between her fingers. The only time she said anything was to make a joke about how her lack of breast size was probably the cause of my homosexuality.

I think mom still secretly hopes every night that it's all a joke or a dream. Dad might, too. But in the week after I came out to them, I got more calls from dad than I can ever remember. He

was giving me numbers of gay counseling centers and AIDS crisis networks like some crazed AT&T activist. He'd spent time talking with some of his gay co-workers in the Bay Area and I think it helped him out a lot.

I'm not sure who besides my dad mom could talk to. I'm not even sure she had anything to say.

My dad and I weren't always father and son. He was a baseball player when he was young. I wasn't, even though I played. When I was young, he was an alcoholic and when he wasn't an alcoholic he was busy making a living for the family because that's what men did then, I suppose. Men are still having families, and they're still drinking, and I suppose women are too. But this really isn't that peculiar. I think most people would be hard pressed to point out a family that hasn't been affected by someone who drinks.

My dad understands the undercurrents of life. He can see what's not obviously in sight. He can hear what people don't always say. My dad and I never fished together but we talked a lot about the undercurrents, and when mom is around, she listens. She'd rather not hear about any of it, though. She's afraid dad and I will get depressed and stop living if we find out the world might be an awful place to live after all. I can't blame her. I remember when dad was depressed.

* * *

Mom thinks I've changed now that she knows I'm gay. She doesn't realize that I still wear the same one color T-shirts and worn out tennis shoes and that art is still my fascination. You see, she thinks I'm a different person now that she knows I'm looking at him and not his girlfriend.

Sex is a powerful word.

More powerful than God.

Matter of fact, in some circles, if you have sex with the wrong person you won't make it to Heaven. And people still wonder why their god isn't yours....

Sometimes I have this unexplained urge to tell all the wrong people who I really am. For instance, I feel this urge when co-workers tell gay jokes in front of me. The jokes themselves don't really bother me that much. Matter of fact, Sam and I probably tell just as many gay jokes as anyone else, but it's the nature of the impulse that's important. Sam and I laugh out of understanding of what it is we're mocking. We know it's just play,

stress release, a way of looking at our lives here on Earth, and with all of its downright seriousness, just laughing and saying it doesn't matter. But some of my co-workers tell jokes out of hatred and ignorance and I know they'd freak if they knew the truth about me. They'd never expect it, and that's part of the reason why I feel this urge to tell them everything. I want to shock them, let them know that things aren't always what they seem.

The urge confuses me. I can't figure out if I'm trying to be some sort of messiah or if I'm crazy or both. Friends tell me there's no need to tell certain people everything. And there really isn't, is there? Dad and mom think there's no need either. Dad's thinking practically. Mom's just scared.

Still, it would feel so good sometime to just say, "Hey! Fuck you right in the heart!" You know, let them know how I feel.

It's really impossible to point out the exact moment when I knew for sure that I was gay. It's like trying to decide exactly what event led to the war. Sure, it could've been the assassination, or the sinking ship, or even the bombing and the loss of life, but there's always arguments for and against, and forensics teams keep collecting medals. But I do know that homosexuality as a life choice is ridiculous. It's like I told my parents:

"For Christ's sake. Look around. It would be so much easier to be heterosexual."

But I don't necessarily want life to be easy. I don't think I ever expected it to be; at least not now. All I want is for life to be livable, bearable; something that can be accomplished without feeling the need to blow away 17 postal workers with an automatic weapon just to get some relief.

And what's it going to take for life to be livable? I don't know. Hell, the President of the United States can't even answer that. And you'd think he could.

360 Degrees

Stripped away
torn a part
hands gravitating towards the core of my heart
DECIDING...

How it's shaped?
The color of my blood.

Ella blanca.

Ella nada.

Ella café.

PAUSE.
STOP!!
THINK??

"KNOCK! KNOCK!"

"A HOLLOW SHELL DOES NOT EXIST."

I am what I am

U.S. born

Native San Franciscan

Puertorriqueña

Scandanavian

MUJER.

A living being

an emotional soul.

Child created from love

blended with white *y café*

union of two distinctly different cultures

oppressor

oppressed

Destined to fail,
Before I begin.

critics call me:

Confusion
Chaos
Mixed-up
Spit-up
Assimilator
Half-breed
Mutt
Outsider
A
regurgitated
cocktail
of
Doom.

Accusations do not alarm me,
WILL NOT DISTORT MY VISION

Devastation is eliminated from my vocabulary.

The Path is vibrant,
Empowered with fire.

Acceptance Rejected!

Elesha Miranda-Werness

Key:

ella - She is

blanca - white

nada - nothing

café - brown

mujer - woman

I Think They Do It With Mirrors

Judith Martin

Across the street and down from my house was Pepe Avelino's Beauty Salon. It was a short squat building in the middle of nowhere, and beyond it were empty fields. The small window was filled with three or four plastic heads, topped by fashionable wigs. They blinked the promise of a future. My mom went there once a week to have her hair set and nails manicured. Pepe himself tended to her, twirling around like a magician doing a trick. It was very dark inside, shadowy, with small lamps in the corners and spotlights around the long mirror. The air was chemical, dense with the smells of hairspray and nailpolish remover.

When I was seven Mom started sending me over to get my hair "done." I was the only one in for this therapy of the three girls in my family, the only one with straight flyaway brown hair that defied all bobby pins and bows. Pepe would wrap my hair in tiny curlers, snapping them tight to my head with clips until the whole deed was done. Under the dryer, off with the curlers, then little sausage curls would pop out of my head. Pepe would pronounce me beautiful. Maybe being beautiful was very important. I'd walk out into the blinding light of the day and wonder if it was still me inside of me, or had that changed, too?

A few days after one of these monthly visits, I overheard my mother and her friend, Lola Gott, talking in the kitchen. Lola was a nasty woman with big red lipsticked lips who was always smoking Lucky Strikes and tapping her ashes on the floor. All around her would be mounds of cigarette ashes and crushed wrappers with the red bullseye, and that endless voice. "I don't know what you're going to do with her, Judy. She never smiles, and her hair! *¡Qué terrible!*" she said.

I remember the words screaming in my brain, and I knew she was talking about me. I carefully closed the swinging door so that it wouldn't creak, and went into the bathroom to look into the mirror. The thin, solemn face with the lying curls opened its

mouth and told me it was true. Deep shame took my heart and I picked up the hairbrush and started brushing the curls out. I didn't stop until they were all gone. I didn't stop until I was empty, and had found the girl who liked to ride her bike in the empty fields and fly her kites at dusk.

Hemstitch

**This is the dance passed on
from mother
to daughter, who stands on the chair.**

**"Turn," orders mother,
her mouth full of pins,
and the skirt
turns and turns
with its hem full of pins
and hair from its pins falls down.**

**Hair swung loose
and hem stitched under
order the elegant**

**music of silk
sung down the steep
scale from breast to thigh—**

**Music girls learn
in hot kitchen light**

**is the fabric,
the needle,
the stitch
in the side.**

Chris Hanna

Terminus Ad Quem

Joan Bassler

The bathroom reaks of stale smoke, but the stillness relaxes you. You've just been in two new classes and neither of them had any punks in them. Pastel colors, polo-shirts, and Gucci type handbags occupied most of the chairs. This and the fact that there were a few long-haired rancid heavy-metalers, you felt a little awkward. Luckily the last class was having a test, so you were allowed to leave.

Leaning your black and red skateboard against the wall, you can tell that the beige tiles, which cover the floor and run half way up the walls, had once been pink. The three sinks are littered with ashes, the floor with cigarette butts. You note that two of the three stalls look as if the doors had been kicked off. Symbols and words had been scrawled on the pink walls of the stalls. You wonder if the girls at this school were in gangs.

You hope you don't have to fight any "cows," like at your old high school. That fat bitch caused you to get 12 stitches in your head, and you had just shaved all your hair off. Looking in the mirror, you run your hand over the quarter-inch brown stubble. It had been about a month, you should cut it all off again.

Then again, maybe five metalers will attack and crack your skull. This would not be too much fun...school sucks. You tell yourself, "No more fighting...walk away, be tough. Just ignore the situations, be cool and get involved with school and studying."

You turn the faucet and are relieved to see that the water looks clean. Splashing cold water on your face, you wonder if you would ever catch up on the month of school work that you had missed. Why did you have to let yourself get into the fourth fight a month into the second semester? They didn't expell you after the bottle incident. Not even after ripping that other girl's shirt off. Why after breaking Jim Davis's nose? He grabbed you. He held you two feet off the ground, pinning you against the wall. What else could you do? He started it.

Dabbing your face with a paper towel, you think about taking your skateboard out for a spin. Thirty minutes is long enough to get to the store and back. You need a pop or something to calm you down. The door squeaks open and you hear what sounds like boots on the floor. Maybe there were punks here. Turning around you are face to face with a rather large elderly lady. She eyes you up and down. You know she must resent the fact that your boots have zippers up the sides and hers don't. Then again, maybe she was the driver of the huge tuna-board caddy thing you cut off this morning.

"What are you doing in here? You smokin' in here?" Her raspy voice sounds as if she should clear it and spit a gigantic lugee into the sink.

"No, I'm...this is my first day here. My second class is having a test. So, I figured, I would just get acquainted with the school. You know, wander around." You smile nervously. She might just hit you for the fuck of it. She could take you in for simply not liking the school. She might be an old lesbian, and want to jump your bones. Really! Get hold of your thoughts.

"What's your name?"

"Tara Davidson. I'm supposed to be in Mr. Crawley's math class...24 in the H wing."

"I know where his class is. You better behave, I'll be watching you." She grunts and turns to leave. Stopping she lets out a long gurgle sound. "Nmm...you watch it, next time I'll just run you right over. Krmnnck...Skateboards...Nmmck - Pth!" She spits into the trash can, before opening the door and disappearing into the blur of sunlight.

"Scared of that," you comment as you grab your skate and head for the door. There is a scuffling noise outside, like rushing footsteps. The door flies open, you back up to avoid what may be flying in.

Two black forms rush in, with their backs to you. They seem attached front to back. The one behind the other is hunching over hiding something. She has a black and white vertically striped mohawk, long black overcoat, and zebra striped creepers. The other, who has teased, "wigged-out" hair is wearing a mini-skirt, fisnets, leather jacket—all black—except for her blue t-shirt. Her pointed little boots are covered with silver buckles. They remind you of the shoes your grandmother might have worn when she was a teenager. Hers would have laced up though.

Simultaneously, they turn, see you and stop in their tracks. The door closes behind them. They stare at you blankly, as if their minds, behind black outlined eyes, had stopped completely. You notice that the blue shirt on the first girl is the same color as the blue on the tips of her black hair. They straighten up, not taking their eyes off you.

"Hi. Glad to see there are punks here. I was getting worried." A smile naturally forms on your face, but nerves make it shaky.

"There are a couple of us." Zebra steps out from behind Blackie. She is wearing tight black leggings and a white silk blouse, under her coat. A medallion rests on her chest. She switches a brown bag from her right to her left hand. "I'm Angel and this is Echo." She sticks her hand out and you firmly shake it.

"I'm Tara Davidson. I was really worried that there weren't any punks. Ya know you just missed the weirdest lady."

Smiles creep onto the girls' faces. Echo's voice is soft and cleanly smooth as she speaks. "That was Lilly the narc. She's easy to fool. She checks each bathroom once, during each class. We wait 'til she checks then it's our turn. Usually we use the one on the H wing, but there were metal heads in there...." Her black lips are outlined in bright blue and you can't help but stare at them as she talks. They part so effortlessly, revealing ivory or a moist tongue as she enunciates words. You're not listening to what she is saying anymore. You are thinking about Rocky Horror. Those lips were perfect, like these lips. Echo could have been in Rocky Horror. Whose lips were they anyhow? With a name like Echo, she should have been in the movie. Who names their kid Echo? The Bunnymen...Hmm. You smile at yourself. The lips have stopped moving and your ears turn on again.

"What?" You can feel the warmth of your cheeks as you blush.

"I said, what is so amusing about where you're from? You started to smile when I asked you if you just moved here." Angel cocks her head to one side. "Are you on something?" She gazes into your eyes. Her eyes are so dark brown, that they nearly look black. They glisten. You think she uses Visine, because the white of her eyes are too white.

"I was just thinking." You set your board against the wall once more.

"Naw, you're on drugs," Echo purrs.

"No I'm not. I'm gonna need some if I go here though." You think about leaning up against the wall, but decide that it's probably too dirty.

"Well, we got a half hour before third period and a bottle of Jackie." Angel growls as she pulls a pint of the famous Tennessee Sour Mash Whiskey. *Secundum naturam*.

You are confused by her magic words, but Echo leans toward you and whispers, "Latin for 'naturally'."

You nod as if you already knew that is what she had said. Jack Daniels is one of the drinks you had always wanted to try. You had had Jim Beam before and you like that.

Angel opens the bottle and holds it up toward the ceiling.

Echo smiles and steps beside you, turns and faces her friend. "This is like a ritual for her. Listen."

You wonder what kind of ritual can be done in a bathroom in half an hour with a pint of Whiskey.

"*Terminus a quo*." Angel takes a sip.

"Starting point." Echo whispers, as she retrieves the bottle from Angel.

Echo takes a gulp, holds it up and says, "*Lacrimae rerum...* tears for things, tragedy of life." Handing it to you she says, "Don't worry Angel'll say something."

The whiskey pleasantly tingles your mouth, it is smooth yet it bites your throat as you swallow it. You copy the move of holding the bottle toward the fluorescent-bulb heaven.

Angel's words pour out, "*Tempus edax rerum, sic transit gloria mundi. Suum cuique, sic itur ad astra. Tant mieux*."

"Time, the devourer of all things, thus passes away the glory of the world. To each his own, thus does one go to the stars. So much the better."

Angel takes the bottle and starts drinking. You lean to Echo and ask if she and Angel know Latin fluently. Echo smiles and shakes her head, "Naw, we just copied some phrases out of the dictionary for the fun of it." As the three of you polish off the bottle, Echo explains how when they party, meet somewhere, or write notes to each other, they use Latin words. "*Insaecula saiculorum*" meant "for ever and ever," "*nil desperandum*" meant never despair, "*cave canem*" meant beware of dog which in turn meant anyone with authority or anyone that isn't supposed to know what's going on.

The bell rings as Echo polishes off the last drop of whiskey. She throws it into the trash can. "*Terminus ad quem*!" she announces as it rumbles the sides of the can.

Angel smiles at you, "Finishing point, she likes to get dramatic." Angel's giggle is light and rolls out of her mouth, as if it had been Echo's. So smooth.

What class do you two have next?" You ask, shaking your legs out. You had accidentally locked your knees and were trying to relax them. The whiskey has affected you a bit and you lean against the wall. Oops.

"P.E. with coach Prile. Fat son-of-a-bitch." Echo says in a scruffy voice. For the first time her voice is not smooth. She lets out a giggle and repeats, "son-of-a-bitch." The two of them laugh. You are clueless to the joke, but figure it is a phrase he likes to use.

Unfolding your class schedule you see that your third class is P.E. with Prile. "I got the same guy."

"All right! let's go." Angel swerves to the door. The only part of her standing upright is her mohawk. Opening the door she bows to Echo saying, "*In pectore*."

Echo lets out a giggle as she strides out the door. You follow with quick combat steps, a little wobbly though. Angel grabs your arm. "Wait, there's Sky." She is pointing to a dark skinned boy, with bleach splotched pants like yours. He has a white, two-inch wide and four-inch long mohawk. His ripped olive muscle shirt has a skull sketched on the front. He is running toward you and your new friends. Echo sees him and grabs your other arm.

"That's my twin brother. Hey Sky, what's up?" She takes a few running steps toward him.

"Yeah Sky, what's the rush?" Angel slaps him on the back as he grabs and yanks on his sister's leather jacket collar.

"It's Kim. I heard someone talking about snagging her skate and starting a fight in the parking lot."

Nothing is said, aside from a few curses as you all jet for the parking lot.

There is a crowd just at the opening of the school. You feel the heat inside you. Energy is building. You can hear a girl's voice, but can't make out what she is saying. You get to the inside of the circle, but aren't sure where your friends are. There is a short skate-punk with a bloody nose sitting on the asphalt. Her hair is bright red, the color of your board. Her tears infuriate you. A muscular, but squatty, rather plump latino girl and two of her "heavies" are laughing at the punker. You really don't care if there are three of them, you know you can take them on for a little while. It really doesn't matter anyway, you could bruise them up a bit. They should pick on someone at least half their size. You take the largest one down by side swiping her legs out

from under her. You swing your skate into the belly of the other. The third one is greeted by your fist to her face.

Your energy is surging now. You are grabbed from behind by a pair of small hands. Turning around you see it is Angel. To your dismay, she pulls you out of the circle and through the crowd. As the five of you, Angel, Echo, Sky, Kim, and yourself, sprint back to the school yard, Kim gasps, "Thanks, but you could've gotten hurt."

"Yeah, but...I'd do it again." You snap your fingers. "Makes me feel...real. Ya know, reality...solid...here." The buzzer rings, the group splits up. Kim and Sky wave before disappearing around a corner.

We slow to a trot, then walk. "Shit, we're gonna be late." Angel curses then grabs Echo's and your arm. "You guys don't have sweats do you? Looks like we're all in for F's today. Damn it."

You suggest that the three of you should go back and finish the fight. "It's just a P.E. class." You argue.

"Shit no, I ain't gonna cut class for no fight!" Echo shakes her head. "No way."

Angel nods her head, "Yeah, first comes feeling good, then comes doing what you should...fightin'—that's next to last."

"What's last...dying?" You laugh.

They nod and stare at you.

Looking at your knuckle, you notice it is bruised a little and sore. "Girl, had a strong jaw. Should know better...next time." You stare at a scar at the back of Angel's head, wondering if she had been hit by a bottle too.

Penis Envy

excuse me
Doctor Sigmund Freud

she was the child
with harp seal eyes
reading the Bard at three

books were her masturbation
wanted daddy's bulging shelves
never knew he had a penis

he left one day at midnight
taking his bookshelves and penis with him
psychological ground for making a little girl

crack
pull her deranged hair
out of her shocked head

mama welcomed another
this one had roaming fingers that scraped
against her seven year old thigh

what do you think of that
Doctor Freud

she would hear him
slink like Ninja
prowling near her slammed door

in the closet
behind the winter coats
she would roll into herself

like a pill bug
being touched
by a giant thumb

**listen up
Freud**

**she grew up with her name
and number
in caps**

**she was a good time
and counted thirty boys
her junior year**

**who had slept in her trap
with their
you know**

**the thing
she's so
envious of**

**and
Sigmund**

**what about that man she married
did she turn green
over the thing**

**that he was
old enough
to father her with**

**in the end
holding her churned stomach
yes**

**now
Siggy**

**the little girl
who was always
crouched in the corner**

of the library
is grown up
she's alone

and very much at ease
with not owning
one of those

Kandie St. Germain

Partly Truth, Partly Fiction

Roger Shaw

I was thinking about the time I met Willie Nelson. It was during that cold winter that I lived in a one room apartment on Magnolia Street in Atlanta. It was the winter I met Monk and Sara.

It wasn't an apartment at all really. It was what had been the parlor of an old two story home in what was once a prosperous section of Atlanta. It was not prosperous any longer, and hadn't been for some time. The place was quite run down and seedy. One of the windows had been broken and replaced with a piece of cardboard. There were water stains on the walls. The floors creaked and there was a faint but pervasive smell of mildew. I won't even mention the cockroaches. I loved that room. It was there I would live the bohemian existence of my Jack Kerouac dreams.

My room had a sink and a refrigerator and a stove along one wall, and a partitioned off bathroom. That seems Spartan, I know, but Monk and Sara's room didn't even have these things. They had the room next to mine. They shared a bathroom with other tenants of the boarding house and their lone appliance was a hot plate. The only thing I ever saw cooking on that hotplate was a pan of water for coffee. Monk existed on a diet of mostly bar food: pickled eggs, pork rinds, pepperoni sticks, that kind of thing. I never saw Sara eat except at my place when I would cook for them. They were the first people I met in Atlanta and we became friends.

I was drawn to them in the same way that an anthropologist is drawn to a tribe of New Guinea headhunters. I had grown up in the Bay Area and was thoroughly middle class. Ranch style homes with two car garages, Little League, Boy Scouts, P.T.A., paper routes, barbecues and cul-de-sacs with well-kept lawns was the milieu of my childhood. To me, my life had had the color and texture of a cereal box. I had spent much of my life longing for other worlds. Monk and Sara were of other worlds.

Sara was from Tennessee. She was slender and had dark red hair and wore black eyeliner, greenish eyeshadow, mascara and red lipstick, all of which she applied with a lavish artfulness. She was pretty, but middle age was beginning to have its way with her. She reminded me of women I used to see in bars in Long Beach when I drove a taxi. They would be there every day, all day long and you would wonder how they supported themselves. You would know that they never had worked and never would. Their earthy sensuality and lusty charm would always be enough to attract a man who would care for them a while. Only as time goes by, their looks fade and their choice of men narrows. Sometimes they end up with a mean one and their life turns ugly.

Monk was short and stocky and bowlegged. He had a scraggly blond beard and stringy, colorless, long hair. His eyes were heavy lidded; one was just barely open. It gave him the look of a washed up prize fighter. His face was pasty and fleshy with several scars, a couple of them fresh. He had introduced himself as, "A deeviated, pree-verted, East Dallas Texas, hippie."

He wasn't your San Francisco, peace/love/groovy hippie. In fact, by this time in the mid-seventies, hippiedom had degenerated into a drug selling, quasi-criminal subculture that bore only surface resemblance to its origins. Monk was one of these latter day hippies. He wore a knife. It was a big knife, that he kept in a sheath attached to his belt. I never saw him use it on anyone, but I got the feeling that he had, and would. Although he was friendly, and had a nice laugh and an engaging manner, he was primitive, and dangerous. There was something profoundly fascinating about him to me.

That first day that we met, Monk and Sara joined me in my room and we drank tequila and I played the guitar and we sang songs until late into the night. There was a song by Kris Kristofferson that Monk knew the words to, so he sang and I played. He loved that song and sang it often after that. I wonder now if it was his life that fit the song or the song that fit his life. The chorus went like this:

He's a poet, he's a picker,
He's a prophet, he's a pusher,
He's a pilgrim and a preacher,
And a problem when he's stoned.
He's a walkin' contradiction,
Partly truth, partly fiction,
Takin' ever' wrong direction
On his lonely way back home.

We spent a lot of time together that winter. Sometimes other people were with us, like crazy Jimmy who lived on bennies and played that beautiful set of Ludwig drums so badly, or Kenny and his wife Shirley, who watched wrestling on T.V. and who could comment on any subject by quoting from either *The Bible* or the *National Enquirer*. But usually it was just the three of us, Monk and Sara and me.

I quickly got a job in a cabinet shop. I didn't make much, but I always had money in my pocket. This impressed Monk and pretty soon he asked me if I could get him a job at the shop, which I did. I don't know what he had done for money up till then, except that he sold a little pot. As a laborer he made even less than I did. He seemed to enjoy having money but it changed his life somewhat. Since we worked early in the morning he started going to bed earlier. He and Sara's nightlife was affected.

It was in February when Willie Nelson came to Atlanta to play at the Omni. I asked Monk if he wanted to go with me. "Boy howdy, you bet," he said. "I seen Willie at the fourth of July picnic that he holds in Austin ever' year. Shit, what a fuckin' brawl that is, man. A hun'r'd thousand screamin' hippies. When's he playin' you say? Tonight? Hell, let's go then." So we did.

On the way to the concert we bought a bottle of Mad Dog 20/20, which is a cheap fortified wine that Monk liked. We opened it with the paper bag still wrapped around it and started drinking. We had drunk our normal few shots of tequila before leaving, so the alcohol was beginning to hit us hard.

When we got to the Omni, we saw that the tickets were twenty dollars. I got in line, but Monk said, "Y'all can pay the twenty bucks if you want, but I know a way to get us in for a lot less. Look here, you just fold up a couple dollar bills and give 'em to the guy at the door, like they's tickets. He makes some money and we save some money...hell, I do it all the time."

I was hesitant—having a strong sense of social propriety—but Monk's economic logic was compelling, so we each folded up a couple of dollars, handed them to the man, and walked in the door. Once inside, we found seats up front and sat down.

Now since we didn't have proper tickets, I was doing everything I could to see that we didn't draw attention to ourselves, but Monk didn't seem to understand this "lay low" concept. He continued to drink wine and talk loudly, which was causing people to look at us. He set the bottle on the floor at one point and accidentally kicked it over, spilling the wine. "Fuck," he said,

reaching down to retrieve what was left. He only succeeded in causing the empty bottle to roll away, loudly, several feet across the cement floor. Maybe it was the alcohol, I don't know, but Monk's thin veneer of civilization was peeling away and mayhem was in the air.

The opening act came out and Monk hollered for Willie the whole time they played, which, mercifully, was not long. Then Willie got on stage. Monk let go with one of his falsetto whoops.

Now this is hard sound to describe with words. It was ancient and had the tonal quality of the howl of a wolf but without the plaintiveness; it was more exuberant. An Indian war cry would probably be close, or the scream of a banshee. In any case, it was a sound that I heard Monk make before, only this one was prolonged and of a substantially higher decibel level. It reverberated off the rafters of the auditorium. Not even the amplified twang of the electric guitars on stage could compete with this unearthly sound. The fact that he was standing on his seat added to the overall effect. Monk looked around at the audience, amazed that they weren't joining him in his display of appreciation for Willie. But this was a genteel audience who had paid twenty dollars a piece to see this show. This wasn't a fourth of July picnic full of beer drinkin', Texas red-neck hippies. I knew that Monk's concert experience was destined to be brief but noteworthy.

Willie started to sing "Whiskey River" and that drove Monk to even greater levels of ecstasy. The eyes of Georgia were upon him, and so were Willie Nelson's. Willie had an odd look on his face. He seemed bemused as if he knew Monk or at least other men like Monk, and not only was tolerant of them, but in some way approved of their all out approach to enjoying themselves. Monk of course was being asked to sit down and be quiet by the people around us. He tried, he really did, but it just wasn't in him to watch that show quietly. And so, inevitably, he was escorted out of the building by two large security guards. For a moment, I felt obligated as a friend to go with him, but I didn't. I stayed and watched the rest of the show.

During the intermission, emboldened in my own quiet way by the wine, I snuck backstage. I found Willie's dressing room. It was crowded with people, but Willie stood out as if a spotlight were shining on him. He looked over at me as I stood in the doorway. His eyes were mesmerizing and they had the most startling effect on me. They seemed to pierce through me. I had the feeling of

being exposed, yet there was such a depth of understanding in those eyes, that the exposure didn't feel uncomfortable.

As he passed by me on his way to the stage for the second show, he stopped and said, "Your friend was havin' a good time." Then I said, "He's a big fan of yours, and so am I, since even before you were popular." God, what a stupid thing to say. But Willie didn't seem to think much about it. He just continued to look at me with a kind, but enigmatic smile, then moved on, and was gone.

I watched part of the second show from the wings, but the songs were the same and I was thinking about Monk so I left. I walked home, and when I got there, Monk and Sara and Jimmy were sitting in the foyer. Something was real wrong. Sara was sitting in the background in the hallway near their door, which was open, revealing a room in total disarray, clothing on the floor, and a chair turned over, and something broken. Her hair was dishevelled and her clothes looked like they had been thrown on hastily, which was unlike Sara. Monk and Jimmy were sitting in cushion chairs perpendicular to one another, both looking straight ahead, not at each other. They looked like they had been in a fight. Nobody spoke to me. Monk was muttering a long invocation of epithets. "Mother fucker...you mother fuckin', shit bag, son of a bitch."

I asked what was going on but got no reply. I went into my room to take off my jacket, but left the door open and soon heard the sound of scuffling outside. I went out and saw Jimmy and Monk rolling around on the floor. Monk had a handful of Jimmy's hair, and Jimmy was punching Monk in the face and one of his teeth was on the floor and his mouth was bloody. Sara was still sitting in the hallway. I ran over and pulled them apart. Monk still had a handful of hair. Jimmy, like Monk, had long hair, only he kept it very well combed and was vain about it.

He was holding his head and saying, "You fuckin' pulled my hair out, man. You pulled my fuckin' hair out." He stood there for a moment looking at Monk's gap toothed smile and down at the handful of hair Monk was holding. "You stupid fuckin' cock-sucker. She's a fuckin' bitch, man. You think I'm the only one, asshole?"

Then he ran out the door. Monk went out the door also, still holding on to the hank of Jimmy's hair. I looked over at Sara and asked her what was going on. She shrugged her shoulders and

walked in her room and closed the door. I went outside and walked up and down the street a few times, but they were both gone.

I was feeling hazy from the wine and tequila, and so I went back to my room and tried to sleep, but couldn't. I guess he found 'em together. But why would she sleep with Jimmy? She doesn't even like him. She used to laugh about him, we all did, the way he would wear those cheap, skin-tight polyester shirts, unbuttoned halfway down to show off that hideous shark tooth necklace. He fancied himself quite a blade and he was such a sleazeball. Monk wasn't a woman's dream either, but he treated Sara nice. God, I don't understand it. Why did she do it? And why with Jimmy?

I thought of a time, several weeks before, when I went to Rosie's Bar to meet Monk and Sara. There had been an argument, and Monk had left by the time I got there. I sat with Sara for the rest of the night and we drank and she talked about Monk. "I don't need him. And I ain't afraid of him neither...I'll tell you that right now. Go ahead let him leave, I could give a shit."

I felt like I needed to say something. "He's not gonna leave, he loves you Sara."

"Don't talk to me about love, O.K.? I could tell you shit that he done...just don't talk to me about love when you don't know what the fuck you're talkin' about. There's plenty of men I could have. I don't have to take his crap. There ain't a man at this bar that wouldn't love me if I'd let'm."

I knew that was true. The dim bar light was made for her and she was beautiful in it. Her auburn hair was silky as it lay on her bare shoulders, and the makeup, too generous for daylight, was perfect: the red, red lipstick giving a scarlet passion to the voluptuous fullness of her lips. Her voice was velvety, and though low and husky for a woman, carried easily around the bar, and drew attention to her. I had already been aware that all the men were watching her, and I too was feeling strongly attracted, a fact of which she was not unaware.

"Even me?" I asked with a playfulness that belied the heat I was feeling.

She looked me straight in the face. "Especially you. But I don't want you, you're a goddamn tourist."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked, taken rudely aback.

"I mean you're a goddamn tourist. It's like you have your little instamatic in your pocket...and, and...you take pictures of all the interesting places that you visit. And when you get back home,

you'll put 'em in an album and show 'em to your friends."

As I lay there in my bed, I thought of these things that she had said to me. I could still see the clarity in her eyes as she had spoken. I began to understand something about Sara, and Monk, and myself. Our time together was over, I knew that.

I never saw Sara again. I knocked on her door the next morning but she was gone. Monk didn't show up for work, but he came around about three days later riding on the back of a motorcycle with a Hell's Angel named Chancey. He picked up his clothes and said he was going with Chancey to Mardi Gras.

A week later I packed my things into my van and left for California. As I was crossing the Mississippi, somewhere in Louisiana, I thought of Sara and Monk and how close to them I had been and how separate from them I was. I was going back home to California and they were staying, and I knew that their lives were hard and would get harder. I remembered again the conversation in Rosie's with Sara. She nailed me alright, and surprised me. But then isn't that just like a tourist, to underestimate the intelligence of the natives?

Mother

Late evening.
There is a wall between us
Dividing our rooms.
Thin wall.

Lights out. House still.
I think I hear it breathing.
(Or is it her that I hear
On the other side?
A low, slow exhalation
A surrender.)

Caffiene-eyed
I hear everything
And bury my head beneath the blankets.

Not two hours since
His vicious temper
So pride-swollen
(So male)
Tore her down
To her foundation
(I buried my head in a book)
The black-hearted satisfaction
 in his red-eye glare
Taunting.

But now above her
Thick with lust
My father feigns apology
He wants sex.

Does she look at his face?
His thinning hair?
Does she dare stare into those eyes?

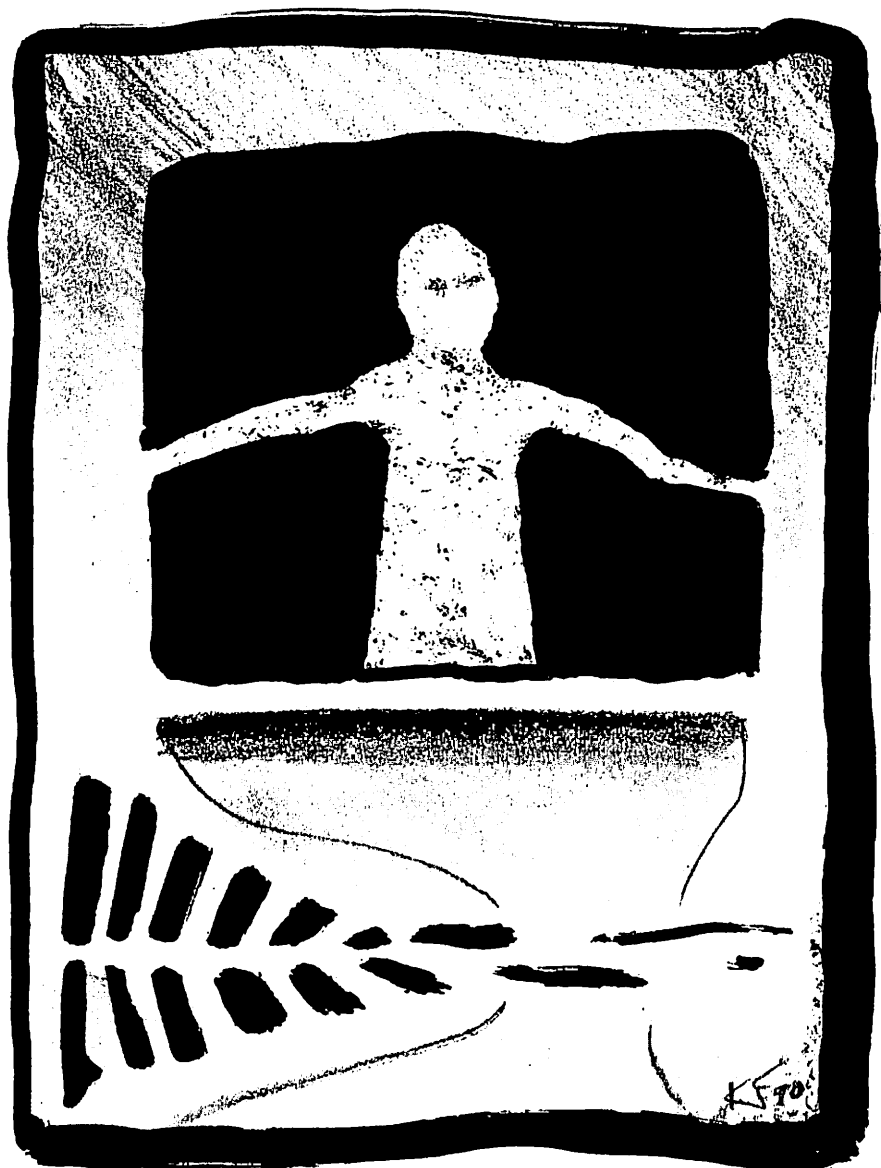
I close my own
And the wall is a heavy, soiled sheet
The other side is lamp-lit
And my father performs
 in silhouette.
I stare fixedly.

When he is done he stands
His figure growing as he moves
Coming toward me
(I know what those eyes look like)
Coming to me
 to rape me for having watched.
I start to scream
But he has only extinguished the lamp.

I open my eyes.
Hard heart beat and hot hand sweat
I discover an erection.
I am a man
And I am
Ashamed.

Solitary
I perform in darkness
Then sink into sleep.
No one is hurt.

James A. Eaton



The Down-side of Front

Brian Congliare

The carpeting at the Fairmont Hotel costs three hundred ninety-five dollars per square yard. It runs around the vaulted lofty halls of the hotel in flat wide ribbons of crimson and honey. So did I. For three days, I ran around the hotel's vaulted lofty halls. Instead of crimson and honey, though, I wore a short red tunic with gold braid on the breast and sleeves, a black trimmed front panel, sixteen gold buttons and a white plastic collar piece that made my neck sweat. The sweat cascaded down my back, along my spine, and, collecting in the porous lining of my trousers, formed a pool of perspiration exactly at the top of my butt.

I stood and stared at the floor. I noted how the carpet fuzz had begun to build up around the seams of my loafers. What wonderful expensive lint the carpet made, I thought. Slowly, my eyes lifted their gaze and beheld a door. It was a distinguished portal and wore several coats of egg-shell white paint and was decorated with a gold-leafed square narrow trim that framed the number 527.

Summoned for some unknown mission of mercy I remained motionless and rebuked myself for deciding to become a bellman. In my menial subordinate little mind, I drifted back to my pre-employment interview in the sub-sub-basement office of the hotel's General Manager. Hunched over his desk, he never looked up, so I maintained a conversation with a head of white hair.

"Why do you want to be a bellman, Mr. Con...," he mumbled, giving up on the pronunciation of my last name. His eyes perused my job application and resume. Although I could not see his face, I gathered, from the look on his hair, that he was puzzled. My previous experience was formidable. I had been a New York City concierge and had worked for three of the most well known hotels in Manhattan.

"I have known many bellmen, sir," I began glibly. "They were all extremely happy, had been on their jobs a very long time, and

each had a home with a pool, a car, and children in college." I took a breath. "I guess I would like that kind of security." I lied. I wanted a job with flexible hours so I could write, go on acting calls, and do comedy. The fact that bellmen made good money and most of it in tax-free cash only fueled my aspirations.

"Well, San Francisco must seem very different from New York?" he asked the top of his desk.

"Actually sir, I feel quite comfortable." This was a titanic understatement. After the burned-out urban war-zone of New York City, San Francisco seemed like a sleepy little storybook village. The thought of precious little cable-cars and charming gabled houses overlooking picturesque hills and an exquisite bridge-filled bay made me ill. It was a Rice-A-Roni commercial. Even the street-people were wimps.

Briefly, my imagination toyed with the idea of an inter-city Street-Urchin Olympics. Competing in catagories like marathon conversations with no one, team urinating, or vomiting for distance and accuracy, the worst of the worst could gather together for spirited events and prestigious ceremonies. It would be wonderful, I thought, to finally determine which city's scum could really drum up the most spare change or scream the most disgusting obscenities at passing pedestrians.

Suddenly, I was snapped back to the hallway as from behind the door I heard a name being called.

"Byron, is that you? Come on in it's open. I'm in the bathroom. Byron?"

"Brian," I insisted. "My name is Brian!"

Cautiously, I bid the door do its job and with the aplomb and experience of eight decades worth of openings the mighty oaken orifice unclosed. I entered the room.

Every room in every hotel I had ever entered had its own particular odor. This room had the distinct antiseptic fragrance of "hospital." In a hotel, that smell could mean only one thing. It was the smell of old people. I looked around. The oxygen tank leaning against the wall confirmed my fears.

Hopefully, the elderly ones were rich and nice. The kind that thought everything was splendid and tipped accordingly. I wouldn't mind hauling their shit down in a cart and wheeling them around in their wheelchairs if they came through with some big bucks. I figured I was in for a split of about two hundred dollars, but when I went into the bathroom my fee doubled.

Tony, the other bellman, was about twenty-nine years old. He wore the exact same uniform as I and was standing at attention next to a very frail, very old man who was sitting on the toilet. The ancient diminutive fellow was doing his best to catch his breath. Tony was holding his.

"It's o.k. now, sir." Tony shouted to the bethroned guest. "Someone is here to help us."

The little old man gave a slight shiver. I took this to mean that he had either heard and understood Tony, or had caused his bowels to move. I moved to assist.

Firmly grabbing the gentleman by his arms, Tony and I lifted him. He did not weigh much. As Tony was the more experienced bellman, I hoped that he would do any essential wiping. Fortunately, the man made motions that he would prefer to perform that function himself. Gratefully, I reached back and handed him the paper. His arm moved with firm resolve and lightning speed. I discovered a hidden talent for breath holding, and, when he was done, flushed the toilet.

I was perfectly willing to leave this poor man standing shivering on spindly legs with his pants around his ankles. Instead, I leaned him against his waiting walker and bent down to retrieve his slacks. Pulling them up with the aid of Tony, I watched him attempt to place the now soiled piece of toilet paper in the commode. It stuck to his fingers. Violently, the aged guest attempted to dislodge the used sheets. Tony and I dodged the flapping piece of sanitary tissue and looked like two uneasy Lambada dancers. Finally, the paper came loose and almost hit the john.

"Good shot, sir!" Tony exclaimed with enthusiasm. For a moment, I thought he was going to pat the man on the back. It would have probably killed him.

The cavernous furrows on his face deepened dramatically as he smiled with the satisfaction of a job well done. The now smug old geezer waited as Tony and I buckled up his pants. I handled the shirt tucking while Tony did the belt, button, and zipper. Nice suit, I thought as I became intimate with its construction. We finished and leaned the shaky prehistoric man against his walker making him responsible for his own locomotion. I headed for the door determined to make it before nature called again. I made the usual gestures of completion that would indicate it was time to tip, but the old fart didn't get it. Tony and I left, palms up, but empty.

The next day I called my boss and informed him that I would not be in. I stated that I would not be in that day, the next day, or any day after that. I indicated that I would be unavailable nights, afternoons, weekends, or any other time. I hung up the phone. Fuck it, I thought, I'm going to college.

The Mango Man

The wrinkled old hand of the mango man
trembles as he reaches for *pesos*.
Pesos you have given.
Pennies on the dollar you'd pay in America.

Pennies on the dollar you'd pay
against a grey sky,
blacktop parking lot backdrop
in a supermarket for a mango in America.

The tembling old hand of the mango man
slips *pesos* in a polyster pocket.
Pesos you have given
pennies on your dollar in America.

Pennies on the dollar in the Yucatan
buy suntans and white sand beaches
against flowered shirts and bermuda shorts
or rice and beans for the mango man.

Scott Paulin

Cup of Joe

George Young

My wife came into the dining room and said to me, "Hey Joe would you go to the store to pick up some milk?" She turned and left the room before I could answer. Of course I would go—eventually. At the time, however, I was busy watching the last teaspoonful of coffee evaporate from the bottom of the cup. As I swirled the dark liquid around, I could see about a dozen bits of coffee grounds bobbing at the bottom. I liked the way that each granule sat suspended in solution as though floating in time and space. I don't normally drink coffee, and I don't usually make it (maybe that explains the grounds) but today the aroma was overwhelming.

The last time I got swept away by a scent was when Gina Frindel walked past me for the first time in the hallway in high school. There wasn't another girl in the whole school who smelled like Gina. There was something about the way the perfume mixed with her own personal scent that drove me crazy. It was like mountain air beside a lake, or a nearby rose garden in springtime. I'm sure other girls wore the same perfume, but Gina was the only one I got into the habit of walking behind. I knew it was the perfume that attracted me because I had known Gina most of my life, and, as I recall, I barely gave her a second glance all the way through elementary school.

Of course, in elementary school I was far more interested in playing four square, baseball, and dodge ball than I was in following girls who smelled good. I especially liked dodge ball. It was great to catch somebody unaware and drill them in the side of the head with the ball. You couldn't let your guard down for a second. It required perfect timing to avoid one ball, catch the next, pick a victim, and let the ball fly. It was pure and simple, and though we played fairly cutthroat, there was no real malice involved.

I didn't discover real malice until I ran into Blake Johnson. That was in the summer between fifth and sixth grades. Blake

moved into our neighborhood from somewhere in Texas. I saw him riding his bike and decided to ride my skateboard over to say hello to him. I did a three-sixty as I approached him...well, to be honest, I only got around about three hundred and twenty degrees before my board shot out from under me and stuck in the spokes of Blake's bike. As we both got up from the ground, I noticed a look in Blake's eyes that made my stomach start to roll. I knew before he even hit me the first time that he was going to hit me again. The only other things I knew about Texas were that President Kennedy was shot there and the Alamo was taken. I decided to avoid everything in or from the state.

There are a lot of things, however, that I found impossible to avoid. For instance, somewhere along the line I discovered that I had to eat. At first I thought I was born addicted because my mother was hooked on food when I was conceived, but pretty soon I found out that everybody did it. Still, I don't always like to eat—it takes too much time. I hate to waste time. I always wished there was some pill I could take instead. In college I did come across some pills I could take that made it so I didn't want to eat for long periods of time, but unfortunately they also made me not want to sleep for long periods of time. And I like to sleep.

This became a real problem when I had my first child. I don't know what people mean when they say, "I slept like a baby." To me, that would mean waking up hungry every couple of hours with a mess in my pants. As a parent, I found that children cry at the oddest hours of the night and that the crying almost always woke me up. Sometimes I'd fake like I was asleep and hope my wife would take care of it. I still had to actually get up about half the time, but if I tried to ignore it any more than that, I got an elbow in the ribs from my wife. Yeah, sleep was hard to come by in those early years.

A lot of things are hard to come by though. My first day in college I found that I was to share a dorm room with an hombre named Octavio Diaz from Argentina. When I met Octavio, he was wearing a pair of boots that he said were made of penguin skin. They were mostly black, with little white tips. I don't see myself as a covetous person, but I wanted those boots. I didn't really want *those* boots—they were worn and a little smelly and two sizes too small. What I wanted was a pair of boots like them. Of course, Octavio got his from his father in Argentina and had no idea how I could get a pair. Well, I've been looking for boots like those in every exotic catalogue, out of the way shop, and on every foot I

come across, and still haven't come close to finding anything like those boots.

I did come close to dying once. My brother took me to an abandoned gold mine that had been dug sometime during the California goldrush of the nineteenth century. You could almost feel the presence of the Chinese miners. About twenty feet into the tunnel there was a small room dug into the side. The room had small dirt benches that were cut into the walls, and my brother told me that this was where the workers would smoke opium before they went down into the mine to work. My brother had some marijuana that he insisted we smoke in the little room before we went down into the maze of tunnels. The shaft itself was about six feet high and five feet wide and went down at a steep angle for several hundred yards. The tunnel split at the bottom, and we went to the right. After another twenty feet, the shaft went in three different directions—we took the middle route. The shaft continued to split, and we often came across flooded sections. Against my brother's advice, I started to wade across one of the flooded sections. Suddenly, Whoosh! the ground dropped out from under me. I got totally disoriented underwater and began to thrash about. I took one pretty good gulp of water and thought to myself, "I'm never going to smoke pot again." The next part is a bit hazy, but I guess it was like one of those things you hear about where a woman miraculously rips the door off a burning car to get to her child. My brother used a single hand to rip me clean up out of the water.

I've been thinking quite a bit about clean water and clean air lately. I decided I should use my car less, so I bought myself a mountain unicycle. I mainly needed it to ride to work. I was going to get a regular mountain bike like most of my friends, but the salesman at the bike shop convinced me that what I really wanted was the adventure of bombing down a hillside on one wheel. Oh sure, it was a little more expensive to buy just half a bicycle, but then the maintenance is only half as much. It took a bit of practice to be able to ride with my briefcase, and I had to learn to take a change of clothes because I usually arrived at work a tad on the sweaty side. I'm just glad to be doing some little part to help save the planet—I'd really hate to lose it.

I was doing a trick called "around the world" with my yo-yo once, when the string broke and the yo-yo flew out of my yard and I lost it. I kept the broken string and used it to start a string collection that I rolled up into a ball. I decided it would be kind of

neat to have something special at the middle of my ball of string, so I started by wrapping my broken yo-yo line around an old silver dollar my grandmother had given me. By the time I was seventeen, I had a ball of string about two-and-a-half feet in diameter. That year at Christmas, my grandmother chose to tell me that the coin she had given me all those years earlier was now worth about twelve-hundred dollars, and she wanted to make sure I still had it. I was thinking of a trip to Europe—I wanted to make sure I still had it, too. I used a hand saw to cut through the first couple of feet of string, and it was a good hour until I had the rest of it unwound. It was kind of sad to see my ball of string as nothing but a pile of junk, but the way my grandmother's eyes lit up when she saw that shiny piece of metal in my hand made the whole thing worthwhile. I never did get to Europe, and I still have the coin, though I now keep it in a safe deposit box. In some ways it was more fun to have a ball of string. I thought it was somewhat ironic that my grandmother gave me a yo-yo as a present that Christmas.

In general, I love holidays, especially those associated with the giving and receiving of gifts. That doesn't count, of course, the time that Ellen Gilmore gave me the crabs for my birthday. And I don't mean the kind of crabs you eat. There were certain good things about the way she gave me the gift, but it isn't the sort of present I wanted to keep or pass on. I was kind of embarrassed to tell anybody about the little critters scurrying through my pubic hairs; although, I did show them to my best friend, Dave. He told me that I should wear a flea collar in my pants to get rid of them. Naturally, I was somewhat sceptical, but when I found that there was no way I could pull them all off with tweezers, I decided to give it a try. I don't suppose that this is the medically approved method of crab removal—but, hey, whatever works, right?

I have an uncle, on my mother's side, that I don't think has ever worked a day in his life, not that I think that is a bad thing. My Uncle Max was just sort of a wanderer. He would drop in on our family out of nowhere every few years, hang out for a while, and be gone. I was staying with my parents for a couple of days before my wedding, and late one night I heard a rapping on the window of my room. In the shadows I recognized the familiar shape of Uncle Max's fedora. For some reason he didn't want to come in the house, so I climbed out the window and we sat on the back lawn. He asked me about my fiance, my wedding plans, and

about my dreams. I knew he wouldn't talk about himself, so I didn't ask. For a while we just sat and stared at the stars. There were no goodbyes, my uncle didn't believe in goodbyes. He handed me a little multi-colored cardboard box saying, "This is for you and your bride," then he wandered off into the darkness. There was nothing in the box, yet I wouldn't say it was exactly empty. I call it Max's box of dreams, and it now sits in a glass case in my living room. Whenever I feel like giving up on life, I open that box and think about my Uncle Max out there in the world. Somehow it just makes me want to carry on—I don't think my family could deal with two Max's.

The best deal I ever got was a Royal Flush in a game of poker, and most people would think that was pretty lucky. There was a time I would have agreed, but that was before I turned twenty-one and went to one of those card parlors where it's legal to play poker for money. I sauntered in like an old pro, bought myself fifty dollars worth of chips, and sidled up to an empty seat at a table with four other players who had just finished a hand. I anted up five dollars like I saw everybody else throw in, and a small, nervous guy with a name tag that read Hussein dealt the cards. I must have gasped or something when I picked up my cards, because everybody else folded when I opened the betting for thirty dollars. I had a Royal Flush, and all I won was twenty dollars worth of antes. I should have known right then that I wasn't much of a poker player. Unfortunately, I went ahead and played another hand. I left ten minutes after arriving, without the twenty I had wone, the fifty I had brought and the watch I had worn. Nowadays, when I find I feel like I've gotten a lucky break I don't push my luck.

I'd kind of like to push my wife over a cliff, though. She just came in again to remind me to get the milk. She seems to have the mistaken impression that I'm absent minded or something. I don't know where she gets ideas like that. If I didn't have tremendous powers of concentration, I would have taken my eyes off the coffee cup by now. There isn't much liquid left in the cup, and all of the grounds are starting to pile up.

It's strange, but I remember reaching out to pull in that small pile of chips better than I actually remember the Royal Flush itself. It's sort of like the way I remember my brother carrying me, soaking wet, on his back the whole way out of the gold mine better than I actually remember the mine or nearly getting drowned. It's sacrifices like that that make me not mind so much

giving up a little sleep for my kids; that's just what people do for people they care for. One of these days, I'm gonna take my kids to Texas, and we're gonna stay there until we meet somebody nice—I don't care how long it takes. I'm not going to let Blake Johnson ruin their lives, too. Blake was the only guy who could beat me at dodgeball. He could see right through me like those people at the poker game, and though I got in an occasional shot at him, he knew that I couldn't beat him in the long run because I was afraid of him. Though I'm really not afraid of him anymore, I still wouldn't want to meet him alone in a dark mine. I'd like to see him try to scream down some skinny little hillside trail on a unicycle; I'd shoot a two-wheeled skateboard right into his spokes just to watch him ball up on the ground. Actually, that wouldn't be nice to do to the ground. I revere the ground. I'm pretty sure that my uncle Max sleeps there quite often. I wonder if he ever got crabs. I should have told him how to get rid of them that night we sat talking under the stars. I sure hope he's O.K. I'd hate to think he didn't have enough to eat or anything like that. Unlike myself, he really appreciates food. I must have gotten my distaste from my father's side. Or maybe people just tend to appreciate things they don't have. I know I'd sure appreciate a pair of penguin skin boots. I just hope that mine didn't get to smellin' as bad as old Octavio's. Whenever that guy took his boots off in the room, I had to go out searching for a nice smelling woman to follow. I never did find another woman that smelled like Gina Frindel, but my wife comes pretty close. What she lacks in scent, she makes up for in texture. Her skin is so soft and creamy.

Which reminds me, I guess I ought to think about going to the store. First I'll have to remember where I left my pants I guess, but that'll give me something to do for a while—there's nothing but a lumpy, dry stain left at the bottom of my cup now.

More of Me Than I Am

When you grow up with a brother who insists on
Referring to you only as
Rodent or dog face or fat-gut
It becomes difficult to trust anyone who might
Extend a compliment
Any compliment
(They're lying).
When the girl who sits next to you in fourth grade home room
Suggests that if you were to be reincarnated
"You'd come back as a whale"
It becomes difficult to believe that your lover loves your body.
(He's lying)
Even if fourth grade was many proportions ago
Its bruises you carry and wear like the extra ten pounds your
Mother was determined you'd lose.
She would say
"Now Honey, I really think you'd be happier if you had a
Body you could be proud of.
Don't you want the boys to like you?"
I'm nearly thirty
And the remarks of brothers and mothers and nine year olds are
Strangling me.
They cover this body which is now
"Just fine" according to my mother and
"I wish I had" to my girlfriends and
"The only one I'll ever touch" to my lover.
When I leave the bed to get us both water
I retrieve my clothes from where they've been tossed or
Grab a nearby towel or
The blanket where we've just been and I
Cover my brother's remarks
My fourth grade memories.
They are the everpresent.
They are more of me than I am.

Jessica Neeman

Hands

Victor Martinez

As I walked down the dirt road, holding my mother's hand, I knew my stay in boarding school, the *Internado Espana Mexico*, would not be a short one. I glanced at her, wondering if she was really going to leave me there. I realized I would soon live in a different world from my mother despite the tie of our hands now keeping us together.

As we got closer to school, my sweaty palms gripped my mother's hands tighter and tighter, expecting the change of heart that was never to come. On this morning my mother's face was expressionless. She walked quickly, jerking my arm whenever I slowed down hoping to avoid our arrival.

This was one of the few times I saw my mother determined to do what she set out to do. Confident of herself, she walked on towards her goal.

I was seeing a side of my mother I'd never seen before. All memories of life together to this point were of a mother protecting me, shielding me from pain. As we approached the school, my mind drifted back to another time. My mother had walked into the hospital room, her eyes were red and irritated from crying. She was tired, not having slept for several days. At that time I needed the comfort of her touch. But my body was isolated from hers: an oxygen tent surrounded me. Still my mother tried desperately to touch my hand, struggling to push through the plastic barrier of the oxygen tent. When she finally reached my hand, she held on as if for the last time. Her eyes were watery. No words were needed to tell me what she felt: her face told all. Her hands were warm and comforting as I touched them. They communicated love, safety and happiness of being together forever. After my hospital stay, my mother showered me with love—until my departure for boarding school. Now, for the first time, her hands were cold: no feeling, no emotion, no life. Her face was expressionless, cold as ice. Her eyes were as dry as the dirt that lifted with our every step we took.

I looked up. The "wall" seemed to reach to the clouds drifting overhead. It surrounded the entire school, something I knew because it was my brother's favorite topic of conversation at the dinner table.

I looked into my mother's ice-cold face. "*Porque, Mama? Why do I have to go to this school?*" She gave no answer. I was hoping she too recalled her visit to the hospital. But her face showed no life, no memories of the love between mother and son.

As we got closer to the school gate, my mother began to loosen her grip on my hand. First came the wall, then the locked gate. Locked not to keep people out, but to keep students in. An old woman struggled to lift herself from a seat behind a desk. She was the *guardia de la puerta*, guardian of the gate. She walked toward us, keys jingling in her pocket. I jerked from my mother's hand and ran away from the school. But my legs were not as fast as my heartbeat or the thoughts of what would happen if locked inside which raced through my mind. I would be locked inside—forever.

My mother grabbed my collar, almost strangling me. Before I knew it, I was sitting in front of my mother and the principal in his office. I felt small, insignificant. Something was wrong with me. I was being examined for some strange contagious disease. Throughout this examination, my mother's expression did not change, but I did notice she rubbed her hands, as if trying to bring life back into them.

As the principal's examination continued, my mind drifted away. I thought of the family unity that was disappearing. Familiar faces, sounds and words so common to me, the festivities, the ceremonies, the love and gestures—I would miss them all.

It was time for the principal to show me to my dormitory. I hugged and kissed my mother on her forehead, then rubbed her hands, warming them for her. She uttered some quiet words in my ear, "*Portate bien y Te Amo.*" She told me to behave and that she loved me. Then she gave my hand to the principal. I smiled at her as I walked away, holding a stranger's hand.

On Papa's Back

Tiny hands clasped tight
around his freckled neck,
corny plaid trunks and legs lit up
like white ghosts
caught unaware by headlights

A daring crash
then swift, even strokes
glide us smoothly across glass
echos and chlorine—green water
alone mimic our moves.

Together we are off
two dolphins dancing in the sea
or maybe a pair of armored knights
swords bright,
destined to slay dragons

No matter that I cannot see
against the oncoming watery rush
clinging on to save my breathless life,
for I am free
on Papa's back.

Katie Jaques

Contributors' Notes

Joan Bassler is from Southern California, but was a Chico State student from 1983 to 1986; however, due to lack of funds she had to drop out. She is now studying Criminal Law at Butte College and hopes to be involved with Law Enforcement some day.

C.J. states, "I suppose it's the crazed, messianic ego in me that wants this to be printed for those who can identify, but I still hear that sometimes tricky voice of Sensibility telling me to use a pen name. So with a divided mind I listen to reason."

Brian Conigliaro "is going to school and he is just this guy who writes and stuff."

James A. Eaton is an English graduate student and a prospective writing teacher.

Kevin Frost is a junior studying German literature, international relations, art and communication. He hopes to someday be an influential cartoonist, a celebrated author, the U.S. ambassador to Germany, or all three.

Chris Hanna currently teaches English 1 at CSUC under a Composition Teaching Assistantship. She hopes to complete her Master's Degree in English this spring. Her poems have appeared in *Watershed*, *Suisun Valley Review*, *Cutbank*, and *Naked in a Plum Tree*.

Katie Jaques attended a junior college before transferring to the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, where she graduated in 1984 with a degree in Communications. She is now a full-time CSUC student, and her future plans include either teaching or working as a journalist.

Miftah Hartwell MacNeill is married with five children. She works in services to families which include a person with developmental disabilities. She is now a student of Tai Chi Chuan and has been writing poetry off and on since she was sixteen.

Judith E. Martin is a resident of Chico and a student at Butte Community College. She is currently working on a four-year Accounting degree.

Elesha Miranda-Werness grew up in San Francisco and is half Puertorican and half Scandinavian. She attends U.C. Berkeley, but is a visiting student at CSUC for Fall 1990. She is double-majoring in Ethnic Studies and English, and hopes to become a teacher "helping children to respect and admire their diversity."

Jessica R. Neemann is twenty-one years old and is a senior majoring in Theatre Arts. She is originally from St. Louis, Missouri. She enjoys film and theatre and participates in the Chico State Speech and Debate Team.

Scott Paulin is a senior for one more year. He loves his wife, his dog, and Jimmy Buffett music. He can't wait to get back to Mexico to recuperate.

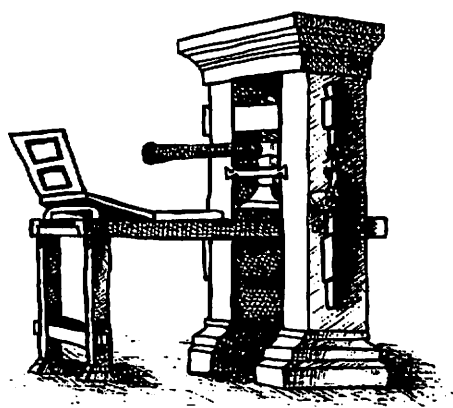
Roger Shaw is a re-entry student at Chico State, and is majoring in English. He has had several careers already and intends to teach after receiving his degree.

Kandie St. Germain is a full-time English student at Chico State, and believes her own identity is quite unremarkable. She enjoys doing regular things with her son Buz, her boyfriend Lincoln, and her cat Larry. She hopes to eventually write a poem that is worth the paper it is on.

Christine Szuggar-Martinelli is a senior Social Work and English student. Her poem, "the moment your tiny," appeared in our previous issue of *Watershed*. She would like to be able to travel to San Francisco by horse and wagon because she feels there are too many cars.

George A. Young received Bachelor degrees in Spanish and English from CSUC in 1980. He is currently working on a Masters degree in English, and teaches through the Student Teaching Program at Chico High School. He has lived in Chico for fifteen years and was married here in June 1990.

Watershed was set in 10 point Century Book by CSUC Typesetting. The text was printed on 70# Medallion Cream White (50% recycled paper) by CSUC Print Shop.



\$2.00