

**SPOTS  
IN  
TIME**

**TEACHING ASSISTANTS  
TRAINING SEMINAR**

**1987**



The Connecticut Writing Project offers opportunities for growth and professional development to teachers of writing in all disciplines who recognize the worth of using writing as a means of learning any subject matter. A program of the University of Connecticut Department of English, the Connecticut Writing Project is affiliated with the widely-acclaimed National Writing Project, which now has 166 sites in this country and abroad.

In the Project, experienced classroom teachers are trained as Teacher/Consultants in an intensive Summer Institute where they share their expertise and practice writing themselves. Then, during subsequent school years, they present workshops on composition theory and practical strategies for teaching writing to teachers in participating districts.

The approach has proven effective by generating widespread interest in good writing and by upgrading students' abilities as writers and learners. For further information about the Connecticut Writing Project and its programs, please write or call the director:

Mary T. Mackley  
Director, CWP/Storrs  
The University of Connecticut  
Box U-25A  
Storrs, CT 06268  
(203) 486-2328 or 486-5772  
or

Paye C. Gage  
Director, CWP/Fairfield County  
The University of Connecticut  
Library Building, Room B20  
Scofieldtown Road  
Stamford, CT 06093  
(203) 968-2213

SPOTS IN TIME

by

Members of the  
Teaching Assistant Training Seminar  
1987

Edited by CWP Staff

Connecticut Writing Project  
Storrs, Connecticut  
1987

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Kathy Tardif, <u>Repairing the Heart</u>	1
Hugh Blumenfeld, <u>Dear Derrick,</u>	7
Mark Haas, <u>When the Battle's O'er</u>	11
Tom Parmelee, <u>The Auction</u>	14
Jill Knight Weinberger, <u>Ciao, Francesco</u>	16
Mary Gillis, <u>What I Got for Christmas</u>	19
Andy Siegel, <u>Andiamo</u>	23
Susan Aordkian, <u>The Expedition</u>	26
Sian Mile, <u>Of Human Brundage</u>	30
Linda A. Evans, <u>Lady Landlord</u>	35
Branka Bogetic, <u>Play It, Sam</u>	37
Tracy Nashel, <u>Table Matters</u>	39

Sung Ko, <u>Don't Believe a "High-Nosed" Man</u>	45
Michele Pessoni, <u>The Stranger</u>	48
Barbara York Baker, <u>Moving Grandpa's Chair</u>	51

#### INTRODUCTION

The third Teaching Assistant Training Seminar was held at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, from August 19-26, 1987. After a brief "add/drop" period, we discovered ourselves to be a group of fifteen participants and two coordinators, comprising as diverse a range of ages, backgrounds, and experiences as could only make for learning, excitement, and differences of opinion!

The six days of the seminar were spent on both the theory and the practice of writing, but it is the latter that created this booklet. The daily writing group sessions nurtured and enriched the germinal essays of each group member, and as the narratives developed and grew, so did our respect for one another and for the craft of writing. We hope you enjoy the fruits of our labors!

Sue Pearce, Co-Coordinator  
TA Training Seminar, 1987

## Repairing the Heart

by Kathy Tardif

"Mom, he just doesn't understand! I'll never be an accountant like Dad. I like English! This is what I want to study!" Tears smudged my face, and sobs choked my words. I couldn't go on. I could only cry in frustration at my father.

After an argument with my father, I had burst into tears and stormed into my room. Mom had followed, the great conciliator and translator.

"Honey, Dad isn't saying, 'Don't study English.' He just doesn't want you to neglect other areas. You don't have to major in accounting, but maybe you'll want to take some business courses. He's suggesting . . . ."

"Well, he suggests awfully strongly! I'm not him! That's not right for me!" I argued back with venom left over from the encounter with Dad.

Ever since high school my father and I have had an uneasy relationship. I have always been my mother's girl. We know each other well, having shared life and its problems. As I was growing up, my father had spent long hours at work. Once my brother was born, Dad could relate more to Bob's Little League games and basketball practices than to my activities. Every time I had to discuss something with Dad (really the only time we talked), our conversation often degenerated into heated words, accusations, and my frustrated tears.

This relationship changed over the course of two months last spring.

"Dad's in the hospital," Mom told me over the phone. "He went there for tests, and they told him he'd have to stay."

Everything stopped.

"Dad's in the hospital? Is he okay? What's wrong?" I asked anxiously. My God, my father's in the hospital. He's never sick.

On my way home from work, I got off the bus at the hospital and found Dad's room. The doctors had discovered an aneurysm in his aorta and would do an exploratory procedure tomorrow to determine its size and location. Until then they wanted to monitor his high blood pressure and force him to rest.

Mom joined us a little later, and the two of us stayed with Dad until a nurse kicked us out at eight o'clock.

The next day Mom described the exploratory in detail. Goose bumps rose on my skin, and my stomach turned to nauseous mush, as always happens when I think about hospitals and operations.

Dad was asleep when I stopped at the hospital that afternoon. Unsure whether to stay or not, I sat down and gazed at him, wondering what he'd been through and hoping he was all right.

Eventually Dad's eyes fluttered open. Recognizing me, he made a weak smile.

"Hi, Dad," I said tenderly.

He fully opened his eyes and adjusted himself into an upright position.

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm all right, but the doctor told me to keep drinking water," he replied, pouring some into a glass. He was describing how the procedure had felt, when the doctor came in.

Dr. Low was a pleasant Chinese man, about Dad's age. He greeted us both and checked Dad's pulse. "Mr. Tardif," he began, "your aneurysm is bigger than we thought."

Dad and I exchanged glances.

"You have quite a balloon in your aorta. Unfortunately we won't be fixing it tomorrow. It's in a difficult spot, next to the heart, where two arteries branch from the aorta. The hospital will call you in about a week to tell you when the operation can be done."

When Dr. Low left, I commented, "Well, it can't be that serious if they're sending you home for a week."

Dad agreed, and we felt better for having fooled ourselves with that shaky piece of logic.

My father went home the next day, a Friday. The weekend went by, then Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. For one reason or another, I called Mom each day but she was out every time. So Dad and I would talk. We'd discuss what I was doing at work and what he'd heard on a talk show that morning. The last part of the conversation always went like this:

"So, have you heard from the hospital?"

"No, not yet."

"I'm sure you'll hear tomorrow."

Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday--

"Has your father heard yet?"

"No, not yet.--Tuesday, Wednesday--"Nothing yet, Dad?"

"No, not yet.--Thursday, Friday. Finally, Dad heard. Now we had something definite to look to (such as it was)."

My father went into the hospital the day before the operation. My sister Fran had flown in from Chicago, and she, Mom, and Dad were playing cards when I walked into the hospital room. Kissing Dad, I put a get well card in his hand. Charlie Brown stood on the cover saying, "Don't think of your hospital stay as an operation . . . think of it as maintenance." Dad laughed because he had just finished a few years as a financial officer in the overhaul and maintenance department at his aircraft company.

As the card was passed around, I found a place on the bed to join the card game. In a few short minutes, Dad won.

"That's the third time he's won," Fran commented with mock exasperation. "It's so annoying. You'd think his condition would have affected something."

We were all laughing when a technician knocked on the open door. Still smiling, we turned to him.

"Time to shave, Mr. Tardif." It wasn't to remove five o'clock shadow.

The three of us went into the hallway and chatted, killing time. When the technician came out, we walked back in and resumed our seats, but we didn't play anymore. We talked somberly about the operation, my father emphasizing that Dr. Low was an internationally-known vascular surgeon.

"He'll do a good job," we all agreed.

A few minutes later Dr. Low himself walked in, and the tension in the air broke. Here was the one who would fix Dad's problem, the only one who had control over what was happening.

Friendly though serious, Dr. Low stressed that this was "a big operation, a big operation." He explained that he would put Dad on a heart machine and cool his body down so

that he could work on the artery. He could only keep the temperature down for a few hours before brain damage would occur. Then, very slowly, he would warm Dad back up.

"Mrs. Tardif, you won't be able to see your husband for twenty-four hours because he will still be asleep and in rough shape. It's better for the family this way, when they wait. The patient is more awake and looks better. I'll call you as soon as I'm done, which should be about three o'clock."

Dr. Low left, and we took leave of my father soon after.

"Good night, Daddy. Take care," I said kissing him.

"Don't cause the doctors any problems tomorrow," Fran cautioned, giving him a kiss.

Mom kissed Dad and hugged him as if he were her baby going off to school for the first time. "I love you," she whispered, and kissed him again.

Walking out of the hospital, we were silent. Deep in our tight throats and stuffed back in a corner of our brains was the knowledge that Dad might die. He had a dangerous condition, and the operation wasn't just "big," it was life-threatening. The timing had to be just right, and the work was delicate. We could only hope.

At work the next day I tried to avoid talking to people. Their eyes said, "I hope all goes well. How are you feeling?" I wasn't sure whether it was going well, and I didn't want to feel. I might start to cry. I kept thinking, "Dear God, take care of my father. Let him get through this operation. Be with Mom and comfort her."

A little after three o'clock, Mom called. The operation was successful; Dad was in intensive care.

The nurse in intensive care let us see my father for a few minutes the next day. It was my first experience in ICU, and I was glad Mom and Fran were with me. Tubes, wires, machinery making gurgling, blipping sounds--somehow in all of that, my father was fast asleep. The oxygen in intensive care made me feel dizzy, and seeing Dad hooked up like an experiment made me feel queasy. He wasn't feeling a thing; he was exhausted. I wanted to be there for my father, even if he didn't wake up. But I didn't know how long I could stay.

Somehow I went back to intensive care two more days, overcoming my terror because I wanted to be with my father. Even if it was for just a few minutes. Even if he was asleep.

Dad finally went upstairs to a room, so my daily visits were easier. One afternoon I dragged into his room, weary from a long day. Dad's lunch was still on his tray, barely touched. He had closed his eyes to rest from the effort of eating. Unable to kiss him over the wires, I squeezed his hand gently. His eyes opened slowly, and he made an attempt at a smile.

"Hi, Dad."

"Hi, Kath," he answered, eyes half-closed. He struggled awake. Clearing his throat as if it were made of glass, he tried to pour some water.

"Here, I'll get that," I said.

"No, I've got it," he insisted, cautiously pouring from his tilted-up position on the bed.

After he had taken a sip, he asked me to lower his bed, so that he could lie down.

"How was work?"

Trying to keep everything natural, I answered truthfully. "I didn't get much done today. Too many interruptions. The people I work with are such incompetents sometimes."

"How are you doing, Daddy?"

"Okay, but I still don't have an appetite." He paused to sip some water. His boss had seen him the other day and told him that the guy who took over his old job had a nervous breakdown. The man was younger than my father, less experienced, more overwhelmed with the job and its troubles. Six months earlier, Dad had left that job for a department less stressful, more profitable, and better-run.

After pausing to clear his throat carefully, my father continued, "I've been thinking about the man at work. A lot of them have had heart problems--heart attacks, bypasses. Some of them have even died. This is how we're reacting to that place. Maybe this aneurysm was my reaction to it."

"Thank God they caught it in time," I consoled him.

"Yes. But there's got to be a better way. No job is worth getting this sick over. Kath, that company is destroying people. I've put in almost 30 years there. I've worked my butt off and done my best. But it hasn't been enough." His eyes glossed over with tears.

"Once upon a time," Dad went on, "it was a well-managed company, but we've had some presidents lately who don't know

how to run it. They don't want to hear bad news about finances. So we 'bean counters' have to paint a rosier picture, play with numbers more than we usually do." He smiled weakly at his self-deprecation. "I have felt so helpless to stop the company from rushing headlong into disaster." Two tears escaped his eyes and slid slowly down his cheeks. "That company is my company. It's the only place I've ever worked. Now those idiots are destroying it."

Shadows blurred my father's features, and anguish filled the space between us. Wrapped tightly around my throat was a boa constrictor, trying to squeeze tears out of my eyes. I clung to my father's hand, as much for his sake as for my own.

"It is hard, isn't it," I responded. "A company sucks the life blood right out of you. I'm not as attached to my company as you are to yours, but I already work overtime regularly. You try to do a good job, and this is what happens."

"Don't let this happen to you, Kath," he whispered, tired from the emotion of his long narrative.

"I promise I won't, Dad."

Dear Derrick,  
by Hugh Blumenfeld

July 3. Ontario. The Owen Sound Folk Festival, tucked in a fold in the Georgian Bay off Lake Huron. This morning the sky was throwing rain around, and it was a chill wind blowing. I felt pretty silly on my way across the wet fields to wait in line for a shower. But the sky had cleared, and I'm clean and shaved, flipping through the Past Folk records among fascinated folks, here under the record store canopy. The wind now blowing from warm to cool in the shadow of the grain elevators.

The Folk Festival mind-set is hard to shake and harder to attack. Everyone is friendly. Helpful. People look each other warmly in the eye. It's hugs for everyone and teach the children peace and love. After a while I start itching for some "opposition is true friendship," some "without contraries there can be no progression." Friendship is trying (sometimes at least) (or maybe always? Have we changed/resisted changed/shaped/allowed-ourselves-to-be-shaped over the years? Have we tested each other?).

Just now I gave one of those warm festival hellos to a record browser before I registered the swastika tattooed on his forearm and the confederate flag on his T-shirt. Faint nausea. Just some facts.

So, we drove all night Thursday to get here. Five of us in a late 70s Ford with tents, sleeping bags, gear, records and one guitar for twelve hours. It was so cramped I didn't even try to sleep and drove most of the way instead. Lillie kept me awake by feeding cassettes into the stereo and reciting the lyrics, which were unintelligible over the roar of the engine and the wind. Tom Waits, Randy Newman, and a madman named Eugene Chadbourne, who is loved and hated for his scathingly satirical albums recorded in basements on boomboxes. AMERIKKA and 19866 took us through Elmira and three a.m.

Corning. Rochester. Tonawanda.

Saw Niagara Falls for the first time seven a.m. Friday. Lots of water, a public kind of power. But somehow not an inspiration. Not like the small waterfall you and I climbed up in the San Gabriel mountains outside of Pasadena. Or the evening mist over San Francisco roof tops from Steve G's terrace. Or the rainbowed water around your Uncle June's peeling yellow trawler, Mariposa, rusted to its moorings in the Puget Sound.



Traveling makes me feel different--younger, independent. Single. Maybe this should worry me? I look for love everywhere (still), though it's not a sexual thing. Or even a soul thing. Face it: beauty, if it doesn't inspire, is wasted. Once, on the ferry from Fire Island back to the little house in Patchogue, I had a clear, almost tactile sense of what beauty is. What it's for. It is a gift, not to have but to give, to spin out of nothing, to take us out of the frayed world. To alter our perception. Without beauty, who would suspect there was anything but pain and hardship. Material progress and satisfaction. But how beauty is abused. How the power of spurring perception on another level is traded for power--influence & possession--on this one. I almost wept out of pity for the men and women who walked in beauty and didn't know it, who knew it but didn't know why. Who sought it like a mask, wore it as a hard armor.

The shells of crustaceans are made out of sugar.

Have met some amazing musicians. The group Rare Air--2 bagpipes, electric bass, and an array of roto-toms. Grier and Pat are the pipers, half-druid, half-magician, half-mad. They call it bagpipe-jazz-funk fusion. Never thought you could listen to bagpipes with pleasure. Also an a cappella quartet named Catchpenny. Dave recorded them last time he was up here, and now we're like old friends. Frank and I talk about Jacob Boehme, Thomas Taylor, and Hermes Trismegistus. Keira wears black, dyes her hair blonde, and paints watercolors that glow like medieval illuminations. A strange alchemy. Tom and Cindy are always off rehearsing--they have reserved two rocks by the water with an inexhaustible supply of cigarettes and a view of twenty grain elevators across the sound.

July 4.

Oh dutiful rapacious lies  
And abject slaves of grain  
A people mounting travesties  
In love and freedom's name

America, America  
You shed disgrace on me  
And crown thy hoods, and sell thy goods  
From sea to shining sea.

July 5. It's strange to be back in Canada again unexpectedly, as if the place is a distant or future reality slowly being revealed to me in a series of dreams. Only Dave is constant. How surprised I was to realize I loved this man. A most unlikely friend, I thought--quiet, a dogged songwriter, tactless (though never offensive), big tired eyes like a spaniel's, a nasal analytical voice. But

he loves music with a passion that I don't find in most musicians. Beneath his tired quiet ways is a masterful record producer, an insanely loyal man. But even Dave has his limits. Faced with a fifteen-hour drive home just in time to start pediatric rotations at nine a.m. Tuesday, he's dead to the clanking of beer bottles and coffee mugs and the jangling of guitar strings.

Grier is shaggy. The land is shaggy. We are all shaggy. The music has gone on all through the night. Keira has worn her black tights, her half-open flowing black smock, and her torn black stockings all night. We have gone through three cases of Old Toby and gave some away to Pat and Frank when they left--hours ago. Some of us are now on to coffee. Fran and Jim, Keira's parents, take turns making pots of it in the kitchen. Jim looks a little sheepish, changing the filter, trying to keep his wise eyes open. It's hard work with his blue guitar, a distracting sidekick hanging on every chord, half a measure behind, but at least he saves me from Tom who wants to hear Puff the Magic Dragon or anything by Jim Croce (pronounced crocket). Cigarette supply is dwindling and we take to sharing them, even though I still don't smoke (despite what Steve G. used to say about nicotine and creativity).

Keira and I take a walk out back with her last one, both of us in stocking feet, staring at the stars and the dark shapes of garden plots, house frame, barn--a mound from the abandoned gravel pit out back covered with thistles eight feet high, like a huge porcupine. What do we talk about? I only knew her by the shape of her mouth, those hopeless stockings. By my standing here smoking a cigarette, not wanting to let the silence fall, my socks growing damp and melting into the cold ground.

Back on the front stoop, on the hoods of cars parked on the gravel and on the grass, Grier is imposed upon to take out his bagpipes and give us a try. Who all is here? Cindy the Husky-Voiced, Tom the Gentle, Marcus the Angry-But-Temporarily-Appeased, me (me who?), Keira the Artist and Work of Art, Fran and Jim the Guru, Viki the Invisible, and Grier the Pled Piper. No old, killed, red-faced Scot, Grier is lean, a mane of auburn hair, permanent quizzical smile. He unstraps the belt that holds the case together, pulls out a tangle of black plastic bag, and withdraws the magic pipes. He holds them under his arm like a young goat--a bladder of skin and knobby pipes akimbo. He warms them up and passes them around for us to try. I blow and squeeze and blow and squeeze and manage a peep. We roar to see Fran puffing and puffing and rolling her eyes. Only Grier can get anything liquid to come out. It starts as a hydrant, jetting up to the stars, and becomes a flood, filling the countryside sky, up the road to the far farms and down to

the chill Georgian Bay, fills it with a pagan heaviness, that ancient alertness, a light rain and the thistles waving around. And we take up a tabor and a couple of old drums and begin to march and dance, stepping out together across the Ontario highlands in the last hour of darkness. Wake up farmers! Oh wake up Dave! Grier marches and marks time, marches and marks time, while Viki and I beat out the rhythm on the same drum--Viki, suddenly visible, stamping her feet to shake the ground, blinking her birdlike eyes in the widening air. We look to Grier for the measure of things, but Grier never looks to us. Eyes closed, he plays for his life, blows the drone and scree that once begun in earnest never stops, unlike any other music in the world.

# "When the Battle's O'er"

by Mark Haas

The early morning light fell upon the English regiment as they stood ready for battle. Fog drifted in thick billows over the heather-covered hills before them. Suddenly a low drone flowed through the mist, causing the soldiers' hearts to race with anticipation. A shrill note pinpointed the origin of the awesome noise as a killed man emerged on a nearby crag, instilling a sense of foreboding in the English with his bagpipes. The quiet hills then erupted with cries and yells as waves of bare-legged highland warriors surged down upon the English . . . .

This romantic view of Scottish highlanders and bagpipes is not common. When confronted with the idea of bagpipes, a great many people cringe and beg for mercy from "those wretched whinnings." I, on the other hand, immediately embark on a journey to my inner world of clans, warriors, and the ever-present pipers of the Scottish highlands. This fantastic image did not emerge overnight, but was nurtured as I taught myself to play the bagpipes.

My earliest memory of bagpipes is one of watching bands play in hometown parades. The dazzling show of the drummers spinning their sticks matched the mood of the pipers, swinging their arms as they marched. Racing up and down the street as young boys are prone to do, I'd move from one band to another, picking up their cadence and falling in step. The music was unimportant to me at this time, my interest merely stemming from the sight of the uniformed members.

With age came a boredom with parades, causing my interaction with bagpipers to virtually disappear. This changed quickly, however, as I became a very close friend of a boy who played the pipes. I became a member of a military-like brass band, and my friend would sometimes play with us. My interest was revived, yet I was still content with listening to him play. One major change was that my interest was shifted to what he played: the music. I was amazed when I learned that there are only nine notes that can be played on the pipes and still there are volumes of tunes for the bagpipes. My friend sensed my interest as I followed him around and encouraged me to learn, but I could never imagine myself learning; the idea seemed absurd.

That summer certain events changed my outlook. My band attended a Scottish festival that featured five or six pipe bands from the U.S. and Canada. The Black Watch, a regiment of the Canadian Army, intimidated me with a performance of precision and expertise. On the other hand, I watched a

band consisting of high-school students present a great show that included sword dancing and folk songs. Used to hearing only military pipe music, I had not realized the potential for melodious laments and lively jigs. Seeing pipers who were my age finally gave me the incentive to learn to play.

Having made this decision, I immediately wanted to jump in full force. My friend informed me that I must take things one step at a time, that it would be a long process. First I had to learn the fingerings for the notes. I purchased a practice chanter (similar to a recorder) and a primer and began to methodically move through the notes. My patience and motivation were tried as I practiced. I continually wondered how my piddling little sounds could ever transform into the stirring music I hoped to produce. To help maintain a level of enthusiasm, I began exploring the historical and cultural aspects of the bagpipes. I also traced my family roots back five generations and discovered that among my predominantly Welsh and English ancestors I have a firm grounding in Scotland, with Clan Gordon. This affected my practice sessions as I began to personalize the pipes as part of my heritage.

After I had mastered the different notes and internalized them, I began playing tunes. My initial attempts were slow and often erratic, making the "music" fairly weak. Again I felt a need to look into history to keep myself afloat. Concurrent with my bagpipe interest, I was reading a great deal of literature and searched for a connection in that realm. Exploring Scottish literature, I was confronted with Sir Walter Scott. His novels of Scotland brought out the romantic side of me and fused it onto my interest in piping. Here began my romantic image, with the idea of playing an instrument with a strong national character.

This renewed exuberance diminished again as I grew tired of hearing my seemingly empty tunes. My next step was to buy a set of bagpipes (imported from Scotland). I could hardly wait, but I was forced to; it took months for my order to arrive by boat. When they finally arrived, a blow was struck once again as I realized that I couldn't just pick up the pipes and start playing, that I must now learn to manipulate the bag and drones. I wondered if this learning process would ever end. I tackled the process of learning to breathe correctly and soon became familiar with the instrument.

Now that I had progressed this far, the only thing missing was a kilt. I had ordered one shortly after receiving my bagpipes, but I still had a waiting period after I had mastered the pipes. To help pass this time, I renewed my reading of Scottish literature and history. This added the final dimension to my romantic image. As I played, I now became the piper who instilled deep emotions

in the Scottish people, whether I was calling them to war or creating a sense of tranquility and peace. I became intimately connected with the pure emotional power of the instrument as I finally began to play the music of Scotland.

## The Auction

by Tom Parmelee

It's hard for me to understand--and even harder to make others understand--but I have always had a love for things, for tangible objects. Perhaps this is why it was so eerie and painful to watch the machines and tools from the family dairy farm auctioned to strangers who had gathered from southern New England. For the first eighteen years of my life, the farm had been the center of my world; to watch the things that made it work sold--the things that gave it, in my mind, its reason for being--was to watch that world disintegrate.

The cows were auctioned first, sold by number, complete with a record of their average daily milk production. They were the economic heart of the farm--the income from the milk kept the farm alive--but listening to the auctioneers rattle off the numbers in rapid, clipped speech left me feeling dry and indifferent. I recognize that black and white Holsteins grazing on a hillside project an image of pastoral charm for some New Englanders, but they tell so little of the realities of farming.

It is my idiosyncratic sensibility that caused me to remember with such an odd sense of fondness the machines that were sold. The first two tractors auctioned were the John Deere "60s." I kept to the edge of the barnyard while the auctioneer called out in his crisp staccato voice; I did not want to see the faces of the men who bought them. I remember the day they arrived on the farm. Two big trucks pulling flatbed trailers backed into the same barnyard where I would later watch them auctioned. It was a momentous occasion: A New England farmer never buys two large tractors on the same day. They were a rich John Deere green and had yellow "60s" painted on their sides just behind their radiators. The engines were clean, free of caked dirt and oil that tractors inevitably acquire doing field work. To a boy of six, they were elegant, though at the time I had no idea that such a word existed. But they were clean, well-defined--and I could sense their strength.

Later that summer my father taught me how to drive one of the new tractors. Our family was having a reunion on top of the hill in the pasture lot next to the house. My father took me down to the farm--away from my aunts, my uncles, cousins, brother, and sisters--and lifted me onto the tractor. He showed me how to steer and how to stop; how to accelerate and how to slow down. I can remember the awe I felt at learning to master this brute machine; it was powerful; controlling it, guided by my father, was thrilling.

After skirting the barnyard during the first half of the auction, speaking only when spoken to, I climbed to the roof of the milk house and sat sipping coffee while I watched the sale wind down. I was a safe distance from the crowd, but I was directly across from the auctioneer who was standing on a hay wagon calling to the farmers, who pressed toward the wagon, dressed in dirty jeans and faded-blue work shirts. Perched one story above the ground, I had a clear line of sight to the auctioneer. I felt that with the sale of each machine, I was turning into a ghost and fading further from view.

A cool twinge ran through me when the three-bottomed plow was sold. Though it came equipped with a modern hydraulic lift to facilitate transport on paved roads, it was designed on an ancient pattern: each plow is a gracefully curved piece of iron, tipped with a blade that cuts the sod, which rolls onto the blade and over into a smooth furrow. I can still feel the hard, slow pull of the plow and the tough dignity of the tractor pulling it through the spring soil.

After the plow was sold, I knew the farm was gone. It is the most basic tool on any farm that grows its own crops and provides its own feed. Feeding can't be done without it.

Among the last things to be sold were boxes of bolts and tools that were spread out on the auctioneer's hay wagon. But it was the wagon itself that was the last thing to go: the auctioneer sold it right out from under himself. The farmer who bought it towed the wagon out to the pasture lot on the hillside with his pick-up truck and dumped the wagon's warped oak platform on the hill. He only wanted the chassis. After everyone had gone, I climbed down from the milkhouse roof and headed for the house. I scanned the yard looking for my father. He was on the hillside examining the oak platform, probably annoyed that it was dropped on the middle of the hill. I watched him walk back through the fields toward home. He was wearing bib overalls and an orange cap with a blue visor, and Beacon Feed was printed in blue on the front of the cap. He stopped on the way, bent over and picked a strand of hay from the field and twirled it between his teeth.

I was walking on that hillside this summer and noticed the oak platform among the sapling trees that had grown around it. I walked over and kicked the oak. It fell apart. Twenty years later it had finally rotted away.

Ciao, Francesco

by Jill Knight Weinberger

One of the compensations of being childless, my husband and I console each other, is the ability to travel. And so we do, conceiving trips like other couples conceive babies, waiting impatiently over the months between journeys, developing hopes and aspirations for their outcomes, drawing closer together in anticipation of the wonders we will experience together, brought together, too, by the very love of the thing. We have, we proudly tell ourselves, made the most of our condition. We have something of value others do not: an expanded vision of the world, acquaintance with its unbelievable diversity of beauty and ugliness. Our friends who grumble over the high cost of college tuition or violin lessons for their offspring are missing something from their lives too, we note, although we avoid discussions of relative worth.

We are of an age, also, when complacency sets in: the lull of life pulling us along makes the ache of having no baby duller. We no longer think of the guest room as the nursery that was not, or flinch when asked to hold an infant. We are fine the way we are.

Off we went, then, this summer, as we do all summers, content with ourselves and our lot in life. Content, that is, until a wretched, homely, foreign child shattered our serenity and made us aware of an empty space that cannot be entirely sealed off by airline ticket stubs and train schedules.

We named him Francesco for no other reason than that it simply seemed to fit. And before we even saw him, we heard him. We had checked into a hotel in Sirmione, one with the lovely name of Mon Repos: My Repose. It was our favorite kind of hotel--small, immaculate inside and out, and with a non-English speaking staff. We returned to our room after lunch for a siesta, a requirement for survival in the thick, hazy Italian summer. Our repose was disturbed by a voice from the next room. It had a child's peculiar pitch, and although words were indistinct, there was no mistaking its Italian quality. The voice droned ceaselessly. Occasionally an adult female voice would interject, tiredly, as if resigned to the fact of the child's endless monologue. Bill was angry. "Can't someone shut that kid up?" he demanded. I, too, was regretting our choice of hotel.

Francesco's voice became a part of our stay at Mon Repos, something that irritated us but which we accepted as being inevitably part of hotel life, like not enough towels or space for only one piece of luggage. We heard him during

siesta hours, before we went to sleep, and the first thing in the morning. In our minds we frequently uttered condolences to the child's obviously long-suffering mother; when the chatter became particularly grating, we cursed the apparent lack of discipline exercised by Italian parents.

Francesco became a real live boy and the object of our intense interest when we suddenly realized we were in a position to observe him at mealtime. Above the din in the noisy, family-filled dining room of the Mon Repos, we caught a snatch of his already-too-familiar pitch. Seated at the table directly across the aisle from our own was a small figure of a boy, his back turned to us. His sturdy little legs were swinging back and forth, straddling his chair. Before him was a bowl of pasta, which he slowly but methodically depleted by means of a spoon clamped tightly in his chubby fist. We smirked a little as we surreptitiously watched this unlabeled child plow through his lunch, the sparse, crew-cut hair of his head dipping toward his bowl, hair that was colorless--not blond, not even brown. A bib tied around his thick white neck suggested not so much a propensity for spilling but something infantile and frail. And indeed, frailty dominated our visual impression of him: the milk white, unbruised legs, however sturdy, created such a contrast to all the supple sun-browned Italian children we were accustomed to seeing.

At the table sat an older woman, apparently the mother, and a girl, perhaps 14 or 15, both of whom kept a watchful eye on Francesco. Mother eventually untied his bib and issued him, from what we gathered, a set of instructions. As he left the table we had our first glimpse of his face. He was in fact an unlabeled child. Thick rimless glasses magnified his eyes, which dominated his pale, milky face, eyes the same non-color as his hair. He wore a slightly stupid expression. Bill and I agreed that we had seldom encountered a less endearing child. I watched Francesco as he left the dining room, obviously under the restraint of the parental command, waiting until he was a decent distance away from his table before bolting past the lingering diners, through the lobby, and out into the fragrant air.

Sirmione is a small resort that lends itself to lazy strolls among the magnolias and pink and white oleanders. One shares the ancient paths of poets with green speckled lizards and lovers of Catullus. The pace of life is slow--the beauty of the place and the summer sun work on body and mind, gently suggesting a letting go of all but the most basic elements of living. Irritations evaporate like the Lago di Garda's morning haze. Francesco's voice lulled us to sleep rather than kept us awake. His homely person, clad in his shorts and striped cotton jerseys, white socks, and sandals, amused us more than repulsed us. He was a little character who offered a bit of dining room drama. One

evening he knocked his roll off the table, sending it bouncing half the length of the room. He retrieved it, brushed it off on his shorts, and clutching it in his fist, returned to his table, seemingly unaware of his mother's pinkish discomfort.

We began to greet the family of three whenever we encountered them in Mon Repos' leafy gardens or on our strolls into town. We nodded, said "Buon giorno" or "Buona sera," and mother and daughter graciously replied in kind. Francesco never responded. Mindless of the interruption, he simply continued his chatter, those great colorless eyes rarely taking us in.

One evening, however, we met him and his sister in the dim corridor of the hotel. "Buona sera," we said to her, and smiling at Francesco, greeted him as well.

"Buona sera," she responded, and elbowing Francesco, said to him, "Saluta!" Francesco, startled, looked up at us, open-mouthed, a bit of spittle collected at the corner of his mouth, his eyes eerily large.

"Ciao," he blurted, accompanying this with that curious backhanded Italian wave. I suddenly felt a piercing stab in a place I could not identify and an overwhelming urge to grab this wretched child and clutch him to myself. My eyes filled as I looked at Bill, who was simply grinning at the boy. We moved on to our room, my fists clenched just like Francesco's when he eats his pasta.

Long ago I developed an immunity to pretty babies, but I never realized before Francesco that it is the ordinary ones who pose the real danger to my serenity. They are the ones--those possessing little beauty and irksome habits, wearing their vulnerability like a bib about their necks--who remind me of all that I do not possess and never will.

# What I Got for Christmas

by Mary Gillis

The Christmas just after I turned five, I received a sled. My four brothers got a toboggan. At least one of them thought that this was an unfair distribution of gifts. I remember the shock I felt shortly after Christmas when I went to use the sled for the first time. The tag, which read "To Mary--from Santa," was still attached, but someone had added the names of the four boys and our dog to it.

Being the only girl in the middle of four boys had always led to some amount of dissension in the family. The boys claimed that I was spoiled. They based this accusation on the fact that I had very few hand-me-down clothes and that I always had a bedroom to myself while they had to double up.

From my point of view things were quite a bit different. Most of my parents' time was spent on boy-related activities. I was the one who was dragged out of the house to sit and be mosquito-bitten at countless little League baseball games and to sit in stuffy gyms while the boys played basketball. It was impossible to move down the hallway where our bedrooms were without tripping over baseball bats, basketballs, and footballs. Dinner conversations were dominated by the game the boys had just played, or were going to play, or were going to watch on TV.

Sports were always ousting me from the television set. My parents had a simple rule: whatever the majority of the family wanted to watch, got watched. Bill and Rob, the two older boys, would bribe Pat and Mike to vote with them. At four to one, I always lost.

And then there was the matter of chores. We had a system where we rotated jobs such as setting and clearing the table, sweeping the floor, and taking out the trash. When the boys were at baseball practice, someone else had to do their chores. I once calculated that collectively, my brothers owed me at least 2,695 make-up chores.

One final irritation was that Billy, the oldest, could not stand to watch commercials on TV. At the start of an ad, the channel would have to be switched to another station until he deemed that the ads might be over. Not only did this mean that we inevitably missed part of the original show, but who do you think did the channel switching? To be fair, Billy imposed this switching slavery on Pat and Michael as well as on me.

An additional grievance with me was that Billy and Robert were old enough to do some interesting things that I was

always too young to do. They went to bed at eight o'clock, while I had to go at seven o'clock with Pat and Mike. They could go out to movies and shows with my parents--I had to stay home. The cutoff point in age for these things always seemed to be one year older than I was.

My sense of life's unfairness increased during that winter. I was allowed to make solo runs on my new sled down the small slope on the side of our house. Billy and Robert could coast down the big hill in back of the house. The backyard was mostly vertical, and had the best sledding for several blocks around. In order to get a coast down the big hill, either Bill or Rob had to go with me. Once again the cutoff for sledding the big hill solo was six. After one of the boys had steered me down the hill, I had to drag the sled back up. Then whichever brother it was would get to sled down by himself as payment for having had to take me down. It was my responsibility to run down the hill after them and bring the sled back up to the top for another coast. After all it was my sled, and I was the one who wanted another ride.

One day I got fed up with this arrangement and decided to show my family that I was big enough to sled down the hill by myself. I had had considerable experience on the small hill and felt perfectly capable of coasting down anything.

It was getting late in the day, and I knew that I would soon be called in for supper. There were a lot of children on the hill getting in a final run before it got too dark. The streetlights were on, and the sky was a deep purple-grey. I trudged back up to the top of the hill, the other coasters dark shapes against the snow. It had not snowed for a few weeks, so the snow was icy.

I lined up the sled carefully so that I would miss our house on the left and Mr. Miller's fence on the right. It was also important to avoid the patch that was the garden in summer, as that made for a bumpy halt. Although I have no memory of it, my two older brothers claim that they tried to stop me from going down alone. I have no doubt that they honestly think they did.

I started down the hill with confidence in my abilities. It was necessary to swerve to the left to avoid some people coming up the hill, but I steered around them easily. So what was the big deal about sledding down the big hill? I soon discovered one of the problems as the wrought-iron railing around our cellar stairs connected with my chin, and stopped my flight.

I felt surprise more than anything and then a concern for my sled. I looked up from the snow where I was lying face down and could see it at the bottom of the stairwell. That

was nice. I put my head back down. By this time a small crowd had gathered around me. No one made a move to touch me until my father came out and picked me up. I saw, but did not register the significance of, the red puddly-shaped spot on the snow.

At the emergency room the damage resolved itself into two missing baby teeth and two cuts, one in my upper lip and one long one just below my lower lip. Both cuts required stitches. The doctors proudly informed me that they had put in fifty-two stitches.

It was so late when Dad and I got home, that even my older brothers were in bed. As Mom got me some supper, she told me that Billy and Robert had been running to the window every time they heard a car, expecting to see me. She implied they were concerned about me. I was at first surprised by this news and then thoroughly disbelieving. Not my brothers!

My thoughts were removed from my brothers' highly unlikely behavior by the arrival of my hot dog and a piece of Mike's birthday cake that Mom had saved for me. I had missed the party while I was at the hospital. My hunger was not to be satisfied at this time, however. Eating is painful when you have fifty-two stitches in your mouth. For the first time that evening, I burst into tears.

I was put to bed with assurances that I would feel better in the morning. The next day experimentation showed that I could drink milk and eat soup and warm ice cream. I spent most of the next two weeks being very hungry. An attempt midway through to eat a cracker nearly reduced me to tears. Crumbs and cuts don't mix.

Confined to bed rest for two weeks, I spent most of my time on the living room couch, reading Nancy Drew books and watching TV. During the day I could watch what I wanted and even get Pat or Mike to switch channels. But the battles I had been expecting over the selection of TV shows when Billy and Rob got home from school never arose. They either watched what I was watching or went off and did something else.

The day after I tried to eat the cracker, Billy stopped by my room after school. "Here," he said, and tossed a bag of Canada Mints, one of my favorite candies, on my bed. Later I thanked my mother for them. She replied that she hadn't bought them and even insinuated that Billy had spent his own money on them.

It slowly became apparent that my brothers were being nice to me. I waited for the teasing to set in and for requests to use my new sled. That sled was mine, and I knew

how the boys could wreck something once they got their hands on it. Of course I now had no excuse not to let them ride it. They may have been acting under orders from our parents, but they didn't tease me, and they never asked to use the sled.

Having little else to do while in bed, I began to think about this new side of the boys' characters. I could remember a few past instances of similar behavior. There was the new outfit for my doll that they had given me for my birthday. She was wearing it now. In fact it was the only outfit she had. The boys had spent a lot of time teasing me about my "naked" doll. It was odd that they would seek to remedy this situation when they got so much enjoyment out of it. And what about Dog, the stuffed animal I played with so much that he had undergone three operations to replace his stuffing in his short life of five years? Dog was not much younger than I was. How many times had I heard the story of how Billy and Robert had so wanted to give me a present for my first Christmas that they had bought Dog with their own money and presented him to me when I was three weeks old?

The conclusion was obvious, but I didn't want to believe it. Could it really be true that, given the proper circumstances, some luck and a little bit of pushing from my parents, my brothers could actually act like human beings?

Andiamo  
by Andy Siegel

There is that smell of morning freshness in the air, a faint odor of dew mingled with the breakfast coffee taste and excitement. Across the yard a hazy mist is wisping off the grass. The crickets are buzzing in their mellow drone, assuring that today will be a hot one.

Walking into the dark garage, cool from the night air, I flick on the lights. Over there in the corner is the engine from my old Triumph. Here is a street sign I stole from up the hill. All around are broken memories of gone times in this garage: rusted bicycle pumps, cracked window panes, and hubcaps from dilapidated Fleetwoods. The only new thing in the garage is my Honda Sabre: the cutting edge of automotive technology compacted into the shape and beauty of a motorcycle.

Sitting on the bike and making sure it is in neutral, I roll back into the dirt driveway to warm it up. Key, choke, throttle, start button, kickstand, helmet, leather, first gear, and go. At the start the wind sends a chill down my neck, which I stretch forward toward the pavement.

With a good grip on the throttle I go up from first gear, second, third winding it up to six thousand rpm until it gets warm. Top of the hill, out of the road, watching always for sand and bumps. All movements synchronize: left hand--clutch in, left foot--gear lever up, right hand--throttle off, all in one motion. Left hand--clutch out, right hand--throttle up, I wind it up a little higher.

Up onto the Merritt Parkway ramp, I stop and wait until a car passes in the slow lane so that I can gauge my acceleration. The right car approaches, and just as it passes the ramp, I twist full throttle. With the first burst of energy, the rear end jacks up, and I burn down the pavement. Coming out of first, I can see the tachometer pegged at 10,500 rpm. The high-pitched whine of the engine shrieks back at me, telling me when to shift. There is no time to look at the speedometer, only the road, the tach, and the car closing in ahead. As I pop into second gear, the front tire lifts slightly off the ground, and I swerve into the fast lane. Almost instantly I am alongside the car, doing 60 and popping into third gear. The wind is ripping by, pressing on my torso, making my jacket flap in thick undulations. Now five car lengths ahead, I level off in fifth gear, rocketing along at seventy-five, satisfied with the pass, and shaking from its exhilaration. I downshift for the off ramp ahead, dropping gears from fifth,



to fourth, to third. The wind lets up as I turn down into the exit.

Making my way up to the reservoir in Weston, I cruise along at twice the speed limit. The radar detector sends a preliminary geiger-counter click, indicating either an alarm system or a cop. The clicking gets louder as the red lights jump up the scale, and I know what to expect over the rise. I cut my speed from sixty to forty to thirty-five, and pass with a congenial smile.

On the country road I wind past street signs, over bridges, into other towns, other places, and other states of mind. There are rivers, a fire house with a Dalmatian outside, waving fields with old oak trees reaching out into the sky. I see countless houses, each with a family--yards, mail boxes, kitchens full of kittens, and I smell the fresh-baked bread. I smell cut grass from early lawn mowers and the musky reassuring odor of milk cows. Chipmunks and squirrels run across the road, crazy daredevils confused by the noise and speed. The dream-like beauty drinks me in and I am part of the landscape, flowing along like a river, constantly in flux. Hot black tar, hot black tires, black bike, black leather--and all the world is white. I feel a closeness between the finality of my momentum and the beauty of life.

Nearing the lake road, where I plan to test the limits of my nerves, I fear there may be speed traps ahead and, worse yet, sand. So the first run is slow--I keep a close eye on road conditions. To the right spreads the reservoir, dappled on the distant shore with pine trees. In the middle, two islands humping out of the water. The railings along the lake side curves are not very sturdy. This is the same turn where that guy was killed. He went through the railings, down the bluff, into the trees. I saw the blood and read the papers.

Another bike comes by the other way three-quarter tilt--we wave. No sand has come into sight, so I begin to push a little harder, sinking down a little lower on each turn. Suddenly it is the end of the road, and I must turn around. So I head right back through, hiked forward in my seat, eyes bent on the road. I jump on the throttle from the start, winding up the rpms, shifting, downshifting, and throttling down on the rollercoaster ride of road. Each turn gives more angle, more slant and forward momentum. On my plane now I see only endless speed. Through the turns I drop gears--third, second--sending the rpms high so that I can power through. Coming to a right-hand bend, I countersteer by toeing the front tire out, and the bike leans over on its right side. Now heavily into the turn, I lift my torso up onto the left side and shift my weight forward. Nearly skimming the ground, I test how low the bike is by touching

my right shoe to the ground--only inches. The centrifugal force has driven me into the seat and taken the blood from my head. Adrenaline rushes through my veins in reaction to the angle, the speed, the momentum, and the fear. Sweat makes my hands cold, while my body becomes increasingly hot. Up from the tank with the waves of heat come gas fumes, which intoxicate me. I cling to the moment, vibrating with the balance of the cosmos, which has burst suddenly into the guttural cry--of a motorcycle.

I break out of the groove at the dam, decelerate, and stop at the bridge, with motion still ringing in my ear. Flipping up the visor, I take a look down into the chasm below and chuckle. It is time to go to work now.

There was a car in the driveway. Good, they were here. As I got up to greet them, I reminded myself to withhold judgment of any person or of the trip itself until one full day had passed. I had to remember that with every group of strangers, there was a twenty-four-hour period of head-butting, of clash and compromise, of defensiveness and delicate egos. I knew that it was the natural process of people finding their places that caused such unrest, but it was still a difficult period of waiting for people to loosen up and open up their minds (myself included). I promised myself that no matter how frustrating and hopeless things seemed (I like to prepare myself for the worst), by the next evening, by the first campfire, I would see a change.

The first woman I saw, possibly because I was looking for her, was Pat, who bounded out of the driver's seat of her yellow VW Thing, flew up the steps into the house, hugged my sister and me in greeting, and immediately pulled out a topographical map to show us the route of lakes through which we would canoe. Where did she get all that energy at eleven o'clock at night? I was thrilled to see that Pat had not changed a bit since last year's Annual Woman's Canoeing and Camping Expedition to the Adirondacks. She was wearing typical granola gear, including a yellow bandanna, which was skull-capped to her head, and out of which a few wild, neglected curls had escaped. In about three minutes Pat had unloaded all of her camping gear from her car. I laughed to see the familiar goat-skin-covered water bottle (which I knew would be filled with Scotch instead of water) and her sit-upon from L.L. Bean's among her collection of camping tricks and gadgets that she had gathered from around the world.

Now just getting out of Pat's car were her two friends. They seemed overpowered by Pat's exuberance and content to stand unnoticed in the background. They finally came into the house and introduced themselves--Mila and Segal. Neither of them had camped or canoed before. As a matter of fact, neither of them could swim. I thought it was brave of them to interrupt their daily routines, to venture out of their familiar environs into an unknown adventure. They must have realized the personal challenge that was involved.

Mila looked about fifty years old. She seemed tired, but she carried in all of her bags, and then she proceeded to help Segal carry in her bags as well. And Segal did have plenty of bags. Segal, in a matching pink sweat suit, looked close to forty and not exactly on the frontier of fitness. I could tell that Segal would play the role of the one who did not really want to be there, the one whose idea

of vacation was a hotel and a good restaurant, and the one who, if she ever broke a nail, we would all wish we had left home. She spoke with a Spanish accent and was asking Pat how they would keep the champagne cold if we were not taking a cooler.

Just about then Corty drove up in a little grey Subaru. I had talked to Corty on the phone, but this was the first time I had met her in person. She, too, had never been camping or canoeing before, but she was zealous about the trip. Corty was assigned the duty of doing all the food shopping for the Expedition. Nancy, my sister, and I had made a list of the things to buy based on the previous year's Expedition. So Corty was busy unloading grocery bags from her car. Although she was older than I had expected (around forty-five), she wore obviously-used running shoes and sprinted back and forth to her car. From the looks of things, Nancy (nineteen) and I (twenty-two) would be the youngest and the most experienced women on this year's Expedition.

Now that we were all together, we all sat down to sort through and repack our equipment and supplies. First the food--Corty showed us what she had bought. Only half-listening, I heard phrases like "stir-ry," "blueberry pancakes," "lentil chili," "peanut butter and jelly." At the mention of "jelly," Segal reached into her bag and pulled out a jar of blackberry jam that she had made. Then Mila reached into her bag and pulled out a jar of apple butter made without sugar. Corty brought white rice, while Mila brought brown rice. Corty brought bagels; Mila brought seven-grain bread. Corty brought coffee; Mila brought herbal tea; Segal brought General Foods International Cafe Amaretto. Corty brought Chips Ahoy chocolate-chip cookies; Segal brought homemade Toll House cookies. I wondered if we were going to the mountains or to a bake-off. The general feeling of unwillingness to cooperate or to compromise, the defensiveness and insecurity in the air, and the overall fear of starvation was starting to make me ill. I vaguely remembered my promise to withhold judgment for another twenty-two hours, but I could not help thinking that I would never go camping with a bunch of gourmets again.

The next morning I could have predicted the seating arrangements in the van. Corty and Pat sat in the front seat. Pat drove because she had the maps. Corty chose the passenger seat so she could easily turn around and address the whole group of us sitting behind her to tell us all how excited she was. Nancy and I sat in the second seat from the front, and Segal and Mila sat behind us in the third seat, Mila because she did not want to be in anyone's way, and Segal because the backpack with the food in it (the "pantry" as she was now affectionately calling it) was right behind her in the fourth seat. Being the socialite that I

am, I tried my hardest to fall asleep as soon as the engine started. Looking to my right, I was relieved to see that Nancy, my sister, my mirror image, an extension of my personality, my canoeing partner, was with me on this trip. As I dozed off, I could hear Mila telling Corty that in case anyone got sunburned, she had brought suntan lotion, aloe, vinegar, witch hazel, and moisturizer, while Segal was crinkling around in the "pantry."

As soon as I was sitting in the stern of my canoe, my cynicism left me. I always forget the power of water until I actually get on it again. There is something soothing and peaceful and fascinating about water, and I found myself hoping that the other women were feeling it too. We canoed to our first campsite, which we unanimously chose as the sun was getting close to the water. We were all thrilled to be outside. Even Segal was impressed with the clean air and the green pine trees. Since it was getting dark, we were all anxious to set up camp. I noticed the way everyone's personalities dominated the tasks they chose to do. Mila ran around trying to do everything. She dug the latrine, she could suggest soft places for each of us to lay our sleeping bag. Pat pulled out a tiny gas burner that attached itself to a special two-cup pot and started boiling water for hot toddies (tea with a "blast" of scotch). Corty followed Pat around and chatted. Nancy and I tied up the boats and filtered water, while Segal started cooking dinner, which, when she served it to us, was a true culinary accomplishment. I wondered at her ability to whip up a chicken stir-fry and rice over an open fire. Needless to say, we all loved it, and Segal's face glowed warmer and warmer with every word of appreciation and praise.

After dinner Mila insisted on doing the dishes. Nancy and I helped her, and everything was going smoothly until Mila broke the frying pan. She did not break it since the handle was already on the verge of falling off; the pan just happened to be in her hands when it actually did fall apart. She asked everyone if the frying pan belonged to them and no one admitted to owning it because, as Segal put it, "who cares about the stinking frying pan!" Poor Mila. She tried so hard not to offend. Finally, a half-dozen apologies later, Mila was silenced firmly but humorously by Pat, who told her, "Mila, if you take responsibility for one more thing, I'm going to give you a noogie."

Now the work of the first day was done. As I looked at my watch, I realized that the head-butting period was over. We all sat around the fire as Segal roasted us all marshmallows and planned mimosas and blueberry pancakes for breakfast. Defenses were down, talk was easy, and everyone seemed genuinely interested in what the other women had to say. Our conversation ranged from Corty's divorce to

Nancy's love affair with the state of Maine, from Pat's reoccurring dreams about flying and climbing, to Segal's experiences of being born and raised in Argentina, from Mila's philosophies on child rearing, to my latest religious crisis. As I looked around the fire, at Pat and Nancy (lying on their backs, looking at the stars), at Segal (still cooking), at Mila (writing in her journal), at Corty (still talking), I realized how well I knew these five women, and that I cared about them.

I am not related to Mrs. Brundage--but she often takes me by the arm and, despite my accented syllables, introduces me to the vicar as her granddaughter from Washington, D.C.

I am not Mrs. Brundage's maid--but she often tells me that I can take the rest of the afternoon off (if, of course, I've finished all my work for the day.)

I know Mrs. Brundage's name--but she does not know mine.

I live in Mrs. Brundage's house--but she has no idea that I do.

We are intimate strangers. One minute, I am a familiar face, the next, strange. Stranger by the minute. Sybil in stories.

It's hard sometimes to keep track of who I am. This much I do know. I am one of the "Girls Upstairs." We are Mrs. Brundage's sitters. She is a ninety-six year old New England born and bred Republican woman who can't remember what happened one minute ago, but is spot on when it comes to any event before the Second World War. We call her Mrs. B.

Mrs. B does have kith and kin; her daughter is a sixty-year-old fount lover and recycler who lives three thousand miles away in Oregon and who does not want to put her mother to sleep in a nursing home. So four years ago, she sought out some "Girls Upstairs" to look after (and not down upon) her mother. We "girls" live on top; Mrs. B, beneath. Two stories.

Mrs. B's story is somewhat longer than ours. She came to this small rural Connecticut university town in 1913 and became secretary to the president of the university. She joined the church; she rode the social whirl. Two years later she married A. J. Brundage, dashing and aspiring with good prospects. They bought an old farm near campus and called it "Brundage Acres." She bore three sons and one daughter. She lost two of these sons in the war. She spent five years in the Orient. "Dear," said her husband one day, "Would you like to go to Formosa?"

"Sure," she replied, "where is it?" Mrs. B has never physically moved from this small, refined town. She has, however, moved back in time. She has chosen to forget that her parents, her husband and her sons are dead. In her house, her old pictures and old letters were taken and

written just yesterday. This is a safe old house. Her house.

And we all want to keep it that way. So we make sure that Mrs. B gets up, dresses, eats, and stays well away from the stove, fireplace, and pond. No mission is impossible for the Brundage Squad. An odd squad indeed. Ex-hippy, but still hip Penny, a witty thirty-five-year-old woman who explains most occurrences by the position of the planets. Psychic, sensitive Kelly, twenty-five (a "quart" like me), and interested in other worlds. Slowly becoming sure, as she remains at Brundage Acres, that truth can be stranger even than science fiction. And there's me: the "foreigner," as Mrs. B calls me (whenever she discovers again that I come from England).

Our Jackson Pollack lifestyles allow us to have schedules flexible enough to ensure that someone is usually in the house; that Mrs. B is checked on every two hours, and that someone is there to eat lunch and dinner with her. For our services, we pay no rent or utilities. But we can't bank on tranquility. Up top, we live in a state of constant anticipation as we await Mrs. B's SOS calls. Whenever she needs help, she calls upstairs, "Yoo hoo! Yoo hoo!" The calls say "It's time, girls, to come down, to be responsible for a while."

"Yoo hoo!"

"Could someone come and help me wrap these toothpicks?" I go down. Mrs. B tells me that her mother (dead for forty years) has asked her to send some toothpicks to her. I dare not ask her present location.

"Can't she get them where she is?" I ask instead. I guess they're not too hot on dental hygiene in heaven.

"Yoo hoo!"

A desperate call this time. We go down to find Mrs. B on the floor by her bed with her hairnet on. She can't get up. We lend an arm. "Oh, you're angels in disguise," she generously exclaims. A pretty good disguise in my case. We take her in an ambulance to the hospital to get her checked over. The siren sounds. "Is there a fire somewhere?" she asks.

"No, that's just us," the paramedic explains.

At the hospital the doctor tells her to say if he hurts her. She tells him she'll just slap him across the face, then laughs. By the time we take her home in the car, she's forgotten everything. "Oh, what a lovely day out," she says. "We'll have to do it again soon." Every ride is a joy

ride.

"Yoo hoo!"

"Is my husband there? I need to know his itinerary for today." Mr. Brundage died fourteen years ago. I tell her that he's gone on a long trip. I'm a chicken when it comes to breaking bad news. Penny, on the other hand, tells her that he's dead. But no matter, he'll be resurrected by supertime.

"Yoo hoo! Yoo hoo!"

Mrs. B repeats her call. She needs to bellow to wake us up. It's five a.m.

"What can I do for you?" I ask, as pleasantly as my pre-caffeine state allows.

"Could you find out when the tram's coming?" she asks.

"Oh, not this early I'm sure. No one gets up at this hour," I reply as pathetically as possible.

"Well, some people do," she argues. She then tells me how her parents were married at six in the morning so they could catch the early train to Boston for their honeymoon. Awake now, I ask her whether the guests minded getting up so early. She is obviously more awake than I as she replies, "How should I know? I wasn't there at the time." I walked right into that one. I should know by now that Mrs. B doesn't stand for any nonsense.

"Yoo hoo! You two!"

Another desperate call. But this time from me, not from Mrs. B. I call the others. The worst has happened. Mrs. B is missing. I rush from pond to road, across field, and back to pond again. God, we don't even know whether she can swim or not! Suddenly I hear Kelly laughing. She has found Mrs. B. Relief. My palms drip dry and I, too, start to laugh. Apparently on her way out to the pond, Mrs. B decided she needed to rest and now sits and snoozes obviously and obliviously in the passenger seat of Kelly's car. As nice a place as any for forty winks.

"Yoo hoo!"

I look up from my graduate studies. Easily done. Mrs. B is distraught. She tells me that Pierce (her dead son) was just sitting talking to her in her bedroom and has now disappeared. We check under the beds. No sign. Kelly and I try to comfort and distract her. Kelly points to her shirt that is decorated with Oriental characters. "You

spent time in the Orient didn't you, Mrs. B? D'you know what my shirt says?" Mrs. B moves close up and concentrates. "Well, let me see," she says. She points to each character and smiles. "Be in by ten." We laugh and laugh, and she knows she is a hit. And Pierce is forgotten. For now, at least.

Nothing comes as a surprise anymore. When we eat lunch together and Mrs. B puts vanilla pudding on her salad (it does look a lot like mayonnaise) we don't flinch. When I go downstairs and find supper laid out for some unknown and unseen visitors, I play along as guest of the day. I no longer bat an eyelid when Mrs. B tells us that today we're in Taiwan and that she's just got a shipment of clam chowder from America. That today I am her lackey. That today the Second World War is the one that is "going on now" and that we should sing a strong rendering of "God Save the King." We can travel from place to place and time to time cheaply and easily at Brundage Acres.

Every night we have to travel downstairs to leave Mrs. Brundage a note to let her know in the morning what day it is, what year it is, and what her itinerary is for that day. Sometimes she'll return the note to us with corrected grammar--Freshman's revenge. "Dear Mrs. Brundage," we may say, "today is Sunday, November 23, 1986. Would you like to go to church today?" The answer is inevitably and unfortunately for the Squad agnostics, yes. In Church, she shakes everyone's hands and reveals in being the oldest living member of the Church. At the end of the service, she'll often turn to me and say, "let me introduce myself, I'm Ruth Brundage."

So I say, "Well, I'm your chauffeur for the day," and another identity crisis begins. For me.

I've even been cast as Mrs. B's honey. In a full dentist's waiting room once, holding hands for warmth, Mrs. B turned to me and said smilingly, "It looks like we're courting, doesn't it? Isn't it terrible, holding hands in public like this?" Everyone seemed to agree. I turned gum red.

At times like these I think that she's putting us on and seeing how far we're prepared to take our part (or parts) in her glorious practical joke. Maybe her role is to show us how utterly useless reality is if it makes us unhappy. She can change hers if it starts to darken. Is all this a conscious plot? I look into her eyes to check that she's for real. Of course she is.

Every day is a good day for Mrs. Brundage. Even though Hurricane Gloria may be on its way, she always says, "look outside. There's not a breeze in the trees or a cloud in

the sky." Always.

PAGE 34

## EPILOGUE

The Last Yoo Hoo

But always does end. One morning I came home to find Mrs. B on the floor calling for her daughter, Peggy. Peggy wasn't there--she'd flown back to Oregon that morning. Mrs. B slipped, her hip broke, and the excitement of our lives fell off. We made no more jokes about toothpicks or vanilla pudding. We missed our trips downstairs.

A month after she fell, she was put in a nursing home. And from there she made a fast escape. She died willfully and with great spirit. To begin with, she thought hospital was summer camp, but by the end she knew that this was no holiday. She knew on some level that she would not be able to go home. So when the nurses told her to eat, she refused. Again and again. She even refused her favorite foods--bananas and chocolate pudding. It was then we knew that she had made her decision. "Can I do anything for you?" the doctor asked two days before she died.

"Well, you could do the Stars and Stripes Forever," she replied. For his own sake, I hope he obliged.

On the day she died, the air was still and the sun was bright. Not a breeze in the trees or a cloud in the sky. Just the kind of day Mrs. B would have liked. All day, I kept trying to remember that. That and the words to Stars and Stripes Forever.

Lady Landlord

by Linda A. Evans

PAGE 35

I don't remember when I actually decided to change the direction of my career, but knew the initial enthusiasm I felt at the onset was waning. I was no longer excited about the work, and held no illusions about what could or could not be accomplished. Perhaps it was the change in national social policies, or the politics of the town, or maybe it was just a feeling of knowing when to move on. Whatever, I decided one Friday morning in January 1986 to officially resign my position as Executive Director of the New Haven Housing Authority.

I drove to work that morning thinking that my resignation would inevitably cause some furor in the public housing community, since there were only four female directors of large authorities nationwide. Nevertheless, my mind was made up.

I turned off Chapel onto Orange Street heading for the office. The music from the car radio was reminiscent of the sixties when I first taught English at Wilbur Cross High. At that time, the environment for teaching was extremely cautious. The country was embroiled in social welfare reforms. All doctrines seemed to be in question, particularly those dealing with human rights. It wasn't uncommon to have police stations in school hallways for class changes, or hear orders over the PA system to evacuate the building because of a bomb threat. How ironic that a teaching career started here some eighteen years ago was now resurfacing.

It was about 8:15 when I pulled into the reserve parking space at the Authority. The day would be longer in light of my decision to resign. There was a 9:00 meeting with senior staff, a 10:30 meeting at City Hall, a business luncheon at Graduate Club, a press conference at 2:00 and a 4:30 session with local 713.

I stopped at the receptionist desk just long enough to pick up a stack of messages. Mr. Hernandez from HUD called about the Brookside bids, there was an invitation for me to speak at a Woman's Day luncheon, and there had been a shooting at Farnum Courts last night.

The air was filled with phones ringing and tenants waiting as I made my way through the winding corridor to the office. Once there I returned the call to HUD and considered speaking invitations, skimmed correspondence, and settled an eviction dispute. 8:45 a.m. There was still enough time to do a cursory review of a development proposal

before the meeting. The proposal was markedly different from those developed in the early seventies. It was in 1972 that I finished graduate school to join a team of planners developing a small rural community just outside of Washington D.C. Gum Springs was an historic Black community filled with slave ancestry dating back to George Washington's Mount Vernon Plantation. Washington had a slave son named West Ford, and bequeathed property, now known as Gum Springs, to Ford and his family. For generations they lived there in wooded shanties perched on top of cinder blocks.

It was exhilarating to eventually see them torn down and replaced with standard housing for Ford's descendants. Jesus, I'm going to miss being a part of transforming a community from the past to the present.

Suddenly my thoughts were interrupted by a call from the mayor's office inquiring about the Farnum shooting. It was a brief conversation, and when I hung up the phone, I knew I should have told him of my decision to leave.

It was now 9:00 and the staff was assembling in the conference room. I was somewhat apprehensive but left to tell them---knowing New Haven had had a lady landlord for the past four years.

play It, Sam  
by Branka Bogetic

"He has a strange personality, and I am sure he considers himself different from his pals. He never bothers anyone and is quite an individual." She paused and turned to him.

"Sam, why don't you eat your seafood, and I'll get you some dessert. See, last night he came into my bedroom and looked so upset that I decided to let him sleep in my bed, although I knew I would not sleep a wink because of his snoring."

Listening to this woman, I was shocked. She let this furry creature sleep in the same bed with her and eat seafood from her plate. I was new to this country and did not know that cats were treated as humans. I was accustomed to cats that caught their own meals. Here in the States I noticed that stores are normally stocked with pet food. Pets can have anything: biscuits, seafood, dry food, wet food, bags small or large, cans, boxes, gourmet treats, Chef's Blends and Meow Mix are only a few of the hundreds of options for the anthropomorphized pet.

At home we do not sell any cat food. The idea of buying fancy treats for animals is alien to us. If we had extra money, we would send it to the countries in need. Pets are certainly not the center of the universe.

I was alarmed even more when one morning I discovered that Sam had chewed up a part of the computer printed translation on which I had worked so hard. I was angry but glad at the same time for I thought that now I could say something about my work.

I heard myself saying: "It is a historical portrait of the prewar Europe. The language was so hard to translate that I was relieved when I had finished it. It seems, though, that I need another printout, but the deadline is tomorrow morning. I don't know if I can manage it." Nobody paid any attention to me. My hostess merely nodded her head and continued her monologue.

"As I said before, he is unique. He knew it was something important, and that is probably why he decided to play with it. He could have easily played with his pink socks and fluffy teddy bears, but he did not. He's always been like that. I remember when we snuck him into a hotel that did not allow pets, he showed himself to a chambermaid by jumping into a bathroom sink. He loves to look into flowing water."

I had a hard time following her because I never personalized any animal, at least not to that extent. Sam was obviously more important and more valuable to the hostess than the human guest from Europe who kept trying to start conversations about more serious subjects. I wanted to tell her that the translation was so important because it spoke about my people who suffered through ice and famine to free their country. I strove for the words but was only able to show by the expression on my face the pain of those brave freedom fighters. Coming out of my own reverie I asked myself: Who are these Americans? What am I doing here? Learning about cats, their canned food, leisure time, and peculiarities. This was bizarre. They introduce you to their pets and forget to ask for your name. I wanted to ask when this patting Sam, feeding him, watching TV with him and talking to him had begun, but I was afraid of the answer. What if she did not understand my question? What if she thought I was impolite? She probably did not think her attitude toward Sam was remarkable. Ignoring my concern about the damaged translation, my hostess turned on her television and there on the screen was a group of cats singing of their love for "Purina Chow." I looked at Sam and thought he was jealous of the singing trio. I was sure that if my cat saw such a scene he would run away in disgust.

Table Matters  
by Tracy Nashel

We had finished eating dinner, and the maid was clearing away the dishes.

"I'm not finished yet," said my uncle, taking his last bite of smoked salmon. His thin lips puckered as he chewed, and he wiped his fingers off on the red cloth napkin. I looked next to me at my father, who was hunched over in his chair. He was much thinner than his older brother and not nearly as bald.

"O.K., now, Carlotta," said my aunt, motioning to my uncle's plate. My aunt looked at me and smiled. Her face was very white, and her lips very red. "I'm so glad you could come," she said. "I thought it would be nice to have the two families together for dinner, and I wanted to wait until you got home from school."

"I had a lot of work," I said. "But I'm glad you waited."

My mother put her arm around my shoulder and hugged me. "It's a pleasure to have her home for the summer. She's the only one of my kids who listens to me."

I smiled.

"And where's Denise?" my uncle asked. "I haven't seen my second-oldest niece in a while."

"She had to work," said my mother, lighting up a cigarette. "She's still living in the Village and waitressing."

"The actress," my aunt laughed. She looked at my mother. "We don't have any ashtrays. Carlotta," she called, "will you please bring a cup?"

"Does Denise have a boyfriend?" my uncle asked.

My mother nodded and took the cup from Carlotta. "Thank you," she said.

"Is he Jewish?" asked my aunt.

"No." My mother flicked her ashes. "He's black."

My father looked embarrassed. He chuckled.



"Well, I guess you could expect that from Denise." My aunt looked up from pouring the milk into her coffee. "And I'm not at all prejudiced, but if Marisa went out with a black boy, I don't think I'd approve."

"What difference does it make?" I asked.

They all stared at me.

My aunt smiled. "Are you still dating that same boy from school?"

"Bob? Yeah, we're still going out."

"And what does he do?" My uncle put a huge piece of cheese cake on his plate.

"He's going to teach high school."

"Oh." My aunt turned to my mother. "Well she's not planning to get married yet, I hope."

"Oh, no." My mother smiled. "She's got a good head on her shoulders. She'll finish college and have a career first and then worry about getting married, right, sweetheart?"

I nodded.

"The boys must be crazy about you," my uncle said. "She's a knockout, isn't she, Jerry?"

I rolled my eyes.

My father smiled and patted my head.

"Is Bob the same boyfriend you had last time you were here?" My cousin Marisa had come into the dining room. She had changed to go out and had on twice as much make-up as her mother.

"I don't remember when I was here last."

Marisa laughed. "No, you don't remember because you've had so many boyfriends."

"And she knows how to keep them in line." My uncle winked at me.

I had gone to Bob's apartment after my classes. I was tired and depressed and I felt like I wanted to go home. I lay down next to him on the bed and he started to undress

me. I got up and went to the bathroom. I came back and lay there and he didn't move.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"You never make the first move," he said.

I was tired. I was not in "the mood." And I would be doing it to please him. "Sometimes I just can't," I said. "I'm not used to it."

"Oh, that's just great." He got up and stormed out of the room.

I started to cry and put my clothes back on.

He walked in. "If you leave, don't come back."

"I'm not going anywhere," I said. "You're the one who left. What do you want me to do, lie here by myself?"

"I don't care what you do," he said, unzipping his pants. "I want to get my rocks off."

"Bob's not Jewish," my mother laughed. "But he is white."

My uncle leaned forward, nodding his head. He put his hand on mine. "What's important is that he treats my niece right."

"Bob's nice," said my father.

"Yeah," I said, "he's nice."

Bob went out drinking the night before the abortion. The next morning, in the waiting room, he was falling asleep.

"Bob," I said, elbowing him.

"What's your problem?"

"Oh, nothing. But it would be nice if you'd stay awake."

"I'm tired," he said, lighting a cigarette.

I sighed. "And I'm not?"

My sister walked into the room.

"Jen's coming out with me," said Marisa.

"I borrowed this shirt," said Jennifer, "O.K., Ma?" She was wearing a long, studded denim shirt with her Guess jeans.

"Sure," said my mother. "Have a good time."

They kissed everyone good-bye and left.

"You don't wear make-up, do you?" asked my aunt.

"No," I said.

"She's beautiful without it," said my mother.

"Jennifer's the only one who's really into clothes and make-up."

"Like Marisa," said my aunt.

My mother nodded. She pointed to my cut-off sweat shirt. "Now this is more down-to-earth." She laughed. "She's a slob like me."

The woman sitting across from us was wearing a dress. It was a short, pink, ruffled dress. I had on sweat pants and a sweat shirt. Black. The woman was crying. It seemed like she couldn't stop crying. And the man sitting next to her was holding her. She was much heavier than he was, and she seemed to be pushing him away, but he held on.

Bob leaned back in his chair and lit another cigarette.

I brushed the smoke out of my face with my hand. "Do you have to smoke?"

He glared at me. "I just can't do anything right, can I?"

The nurse called my name.

I stood up and looked at Bob. "Bye," I said.

My father looked at his watch. "Where's Brian?" he asked.

"He's in the den." My uncle smiled. "I gave him some of my jazz albums to listen to. That kid's an excellent

drummer, and he's only in high school." He leaned back in his chair. "Do you still play the piano, Jerry?"

"Sometimes," my father said.

"He's great," I said.

My mother lit another cigarette. "If only he spent as much time with his school work." She took a long drag. "He has to go to summer school again."

My aunt shook her head. "Kids have got to learn the importance of education. I'm wondering if Marisa and Jennifer will both be more interested in social life or in studying."

"We'll see in September," said my mother, flicking into the cup.

"Is Brian going to college?" My uncle rubbed his clean-shaven chin with his hand. "He really should. He's a bright boy."

"He wants to be a drummer," said my father.

My mother shrugged. "It's hard to understand kids."

Bob came running into the recovery room. He was crying. He ran over and hugged me. We hugged so tightly that I couldn't tell whose wet hot tears were on my face. For a second I thought that maybe we did understand each other.

And then we went back to my apartment and he went to sleep while I sat on the couch, watching television and crying.

"It's hard to understand people," I said.

"Hmmm?" My mother put her arm around me.

"Nothing."

"Well." My aunt took her napkin off her lap, folded it neatly, and placed it on the table. "So what do you plan to do after college?"

"I don't know," I said.

"She'll do whatever makes her happy." My mother squeezed my arm.

"Did you ever consider law school?" asked my uncle.

"Yes," said my father, "you could be a lawyer like your uncle."

"No," I said to my father, "I don't want to be a lawyer."

"Well, her grades are excellent," said my mother.

"How did you do this semester?" asked my aunt.

"I got a 4.0."

My father patted my head.

My mother smiled. "She stayed at school for a couple of extra weeks to finish some work."

"Yes," I said, "to finish some work."

Don't Believe a "High-Nosed" Man

by Sung Ko

I had learned a lot about America in my country. I was fairly familiar with American politics, and I remembered a fairly large number of the names of the American presidents. I even knew the fact that Mr. Reagan is the only president of the U.S. that had been divorced. I knew that five pennies make a nickel and two nickels make a dime. I knew how long an inch is and how long a foot is. In addition, I was fairly good at American geography. I was able to memorize most of the names of the large cities and locate them on the map. I knew where the Rocky Mountains, the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, and other places were. I knew that cotton and oil are produced in the South. I was well prepared to head for the States.

It was three years ago when I stepped on American soil for the first time. Our plane was approaching the L.A. airport. From above I was able to see the green ranches where cattle were grazing in herds here and there. The houses were jammed together like piled-up safety match boxes. The rivers were running like snakes. Streams of cars appeared to be standing still between the lights which were dozing with heads down at either side of the street. Far beyond, a long crescent beach was still glittering under the sun.

It was slightly after ten in the morning when our plane slid onto the ground. My heart began to beat faster. In the seat I cast a glance here and there, looking at the ceiling once in a while. I would close my eyes for a time and then open them. After a while I found myself in the aisle along the center of the plane, following the footsteps of the other travelers. I moved step by step, sometimes taking a long breath. It was tedious to stand in line. I was almost pushing the people in front of me until I stepped onto the threshold of the plane.

After a long tunnel I was able to see the sunlight again coming through a thick window. Looking for the way to the new plane, I hastily moved my feet. Soon after, however, I found myself going nowhere, surrounded by people speaking in a language I almost could not understand. As luck would have it, I was able to find my way by reading signs, which I had never seen except in the Western movies. However, I was not able to take it easy since none of them were familiar to me and I could not understand the speaker's announcement. The speaker spoke so fast that it sounded like the buzzing of bees. All I could catch were simple words, frequently used: airline, TWA, passengers, tickets, gate numbers, etc. I could not make sense out of the words I heard, so I had to

rely on guessing all the way. Occasionally I asked some people in halting English where I should go. Americans (I call them so because I saw them in this country) were kind enough to show me the direction, but my heart was still beating quickly because I could not understand for certain what they were saying.

Walking up and down and looking around, I ran into the "Korean Air" sign. As soon as I had seen it, I took a deep breath. "At last I found a right place to ask." With the expectation that I could get sure answers, I dashed and rang the bell on the counter. No answer came at first. I hit it again but still no answer. I held my breath so that I could hear the approaching footsteps. My hair stood on end. This time I kept hitting the bell strongly with my palm. No answer at all. Only some people behind me were watching me. In seconds I felt as if I were playing a villain being chased by the police in a Western movie. I was desperately looking for the way out, asking myself what I should do and where I should go. But I was not playing in the movie. I was not an actor, nor was I a white man. I could not come up with suitable answers to my questions nor could I act like a hero in the movie. I was just one of the plain people who were lost.

While I was sunken deep in thought, a lot of time flew by. I could not exhaust the whole time running around for nothing. One reason was the time limit. Even though I had more than one hour before getting aboard, the time was approaching. The other was my baggage. I was not able to keep it at a distance because I was afraid my possessions would be stolen. So I had to carry it with me all the time. These things reminded me of my friends saying, "Don't believe a high-nosed man in any circumstances. You may be misled. You may be cheated." I felt as if I were on another planet, where there was nothing dependable. No more sunlight. The total darkness prevailed. The cliché, "like a fish out of water," fit me exactly.

Deeply stressed, I asked myself, "Wasn't it I who believed I knew enough about America: American history, politics, geography, and virtually everything? Wasn't it I who believed I was one of the few who could survive here?" After a while, I became revived, but only halfway. I was still dubious. "Don't believe a high-nosed man" was still a good proverb to me. So I had no choice but to feel my way to the gate.

Recalling what Americans said to me the other time, I crawled over to the gate and sat down. Still nervous, I repeatedly read the gate number and other signs to assure myself. I looked around from time to time and soon began to yawn. Still about an hour to go. In the midst of boredom I saw a party of passengers coming out of the plane in front

of me. They were chatting, laughing, and casting an occasional glance around. They were coming near me. At the moment my mind ran like a kaleidoscope: the plane might be the one I had been waiting for. I should keep my attention on the announcement coming out of the speaker lest I miss the plane. How would I be assured whether the plane was for me, etc.?

There were still a number of people bustling--some greeting the arrivals, others waiting in seats as I was, and still others passing by. It was all messed up. I was still looking around when a family (it seemed to me) came from behind. My eyes followed them in spite of myself, until at last my eyes opened widely: they are kissing, kissing in public. Animals? Barbarians? or what? Abruptly I turned my eyes away as if I had seen what I should never have seen. Something was surely going wrong. I looked at my feet once and felt that they were real. Nobody around was handling a movie camera. It was not a movie. It was not a Western movie because I was not an actor, nor was I an audience. I was surely in the movie, though. Then who was I? Yes, don't believe a high-nosed man. I was an extra.

## The Stranger

by Michele Personi

"This day is going by too damn fast. I haven't even gotten to the laundry yet, forget the grocery shopping. I'll be lucky if I get anything done today."

I had just turned off the engine and was still mumbling to myself when I saw him, a man in a wheelchair, in front of my car. He wasn't doing anything, just sitting there on the curb with his eyes closed. And there was nothing so unusual about a man in a wheelchair, except this man just didn't look like he belonged in the chair. About twenty-five, with shoulder-length, sun-bleached hair and muscular arms, he looked like he was sitting in a beach chair enjoying the sun. I half expected him to open his eyes, jump up, and announce the beginning of the next volleyball game.

He did open his eyes. He saw me and smiled. I quickly lowered my eyes and managed a weak one-sided smile, feeling flushed and embarrassed about staring.

What was he doing there just sitting in a wheelchair in a Dairy Mart parking lot? He kept looking at me as I got out of the car and fumbled with my keys to lock the door. I finally succeeded, and he watched me deposit the keys safely in my purse.

"It's a beautiful day, isn't it?" I heard him call out.

"Mmm," I replied, nodding my head.

I started toward the store, but the wheelchair man continued talking about the weather: how he just loved sunny days--although he hated it when it was too hot because the heat made it hard for him to breathe--but really today was just perfect since the humidity was low and there was such a nice breeze blowing--and . . . .

And I was beginning to get nervous. As he had been speaking, the man had rolled closer and closer toward me, coming to the very edge of the curb, where he stopped and leaned forward, almost beckoning me to approach him.

Why was he keeping me there, forcing me to listen to his nonstop nonsense about the weather? Why did he keep trying to move in closer to me as though he would grab me once within reach? What did he want to talk to me for anyway?

Then I heard my mother's voice echo through my mind, interrupting and overpowering his.

"Don't talk to strangers."

Startled, I gazed beyond the man to a desolate wooded area behind the store. I clutched my purse tighter as my imagination filled the woods with leering, bloated faces and distorted laughter. I looked back at the face of the man before me.

Stupid! Stupid! I cursed myself for thinking so irrationally. Nothing was going to happen to me, not in broad daylight, not by a man in a wheelchair, not . . . .

"So where do you live?" he asked, interrupting my thoughts.

"Ah . . . . Portland," I lied, avoiding his eyes and moving away from him. I didn't care anymore how irrational it seemed. I had heard too much about the clever ways a man could fool an unsuspecting girl. Like that time a man posing as a police officer stopped that girl on the highway. I wasn't taking any chances with this guy. I pretended to look at my watch.

"Listen, I really have to . . . ."

"Please wait," he pleaded, "I'm not trying to pick you up."

I stopped and forced a laugh. "I know. I didn't think you were."

We both paused and looked at each other. He leaned back in his chair and folded his hands. I didn't know what to do, what to say. Somehow I just couldn't walk away now. I felt guilty, like a shameful school child caught in the act of drawing a nasty picture of the teacher. Did he know all the horrible things I had thought about him? I waited apprehensively for him to reproach me.

"I'm sorry for taking up your time," he said so quietly I had to bend forward to hear him at all. "It's just that I needed someone to talk to today."

What? No reproachful words? No hurt feelings? An apology given instead of demanded? I straightened up in surprise. So he just needed someone to talk to. Why didn't he just tell me that in the first place? I certainly would have taken the time if I knew that he just needed someone to talk to, wouldn't I have? Wouldn't I?

Looking at his lowered eyes and slumped shoulders, I knew that if I wanted to, I could just walk away from this man and probably never see him again. Instead, I leaned back against the fender of my car. He looked at me in surprise

then quickly began a new conversation. He complimented me on my car, a 1975 Volkswagen Bug with a graphic paint job and a Porsche whaletail.

"Actually," he admitted, "I don't really like Bugs, but you do have a nice paint job."

I was so used to people asking questions about the car that we quite easily fell into a conversation. He mentioned that he had a friend who owned a paint and body shop.

"As a matter of fact, he has a VW too, only it's a squareback," the man eagerly informed me. "It's midnight blue with pink graphics and it's . . . ."

"You don't mean Raul, from Middletown, do you?" I gasped.

He grinned widely. "You know Raul?"

Yes, I knew Raul. Not only had he helped me with my car, but we also attended car shows together. He was a wonderful person.

As we swapped Raul stories, I forgot about myself and my fears. I forgot about the dirty laundry in the backseat of my car and the grocery shopping that still needed to be done. I only knew that I was glad to be right there where I was.

"By the way," I said extending my hand toward him, "My name is Michele."

"Nice to meet you, Michele," he beamed, taking my hand. "I'm Mike."

# Moving Grandpa's Chair by Barbara York Baker

I didn't climb Annapurna this summer. Nor did I go on safari on the distant Kenyan plains. I didn't relax upon Lake Louise. Nor did I ride atop an elephant in Katmandu. I didn't work as a private detective or earn money to do any of these things. I didn't rewallpaper or resod or retile or even respond to many letters. So what did I do in the summer of 1987? I moved to Connecticut. I didn't do this all by myself, of course, or do it on a whim. In fact I knew last January, when I basked in the sun in Cocoa Beach, Florida, near our home in Orlando, that I would very likely be trading in my swimming suits for snow gear by this Thanksgiving.

I am not a first timer at moving to a new state. In fact I have done it twice now, and in two more short years I will be doing it again. Waiting for the moving van to show up is always a time of anxious anticipation for me. Will everything be in the same shape it was in several days before when it left us? Will it all be splinters? Will the truck not show up at all? Will it rain? I wait on the top step of the porch as if something I get will surprise me. I have that childish Christmas feeling at seeing my own belongings after several days without them. As a self-proclaimed non-material girl, this always bothers me. But when I am in a completely foreign place where I have not ever been before, when I know the phone won't ring unless it is a long distance friend or a wrong number, when I have no one to call and nothing familiar within 100 miles, when even finding out about garbage pick-up and what newspaper to get delivered is a hassle, I find enormous comfort in my own possessions. There is a coziness like faded jeans about everything I own, just because it is mine. So I excitedly count off the boxes and furniture until the last pieces come off of the van. Then I dig in--opening up many of them just to look inside, not to unpack--as if I will find someone else's football helmet lamp or poster of Ramesses II or something else I can't imagine. Both times now we have been very lucky. The only broken things were easily replaced. But those few hours of unloading still cause me great anxiety, as if these movers didn't do this every day and as if it would somehow be to their advantage to break some one of my precious things.

Of course the large furniture pieces are the worst, and it is these I watch with the greatest concern. They are all carefully padded with big ugly-colored quilted things and then huge rubber bands are slipped over to hold the quilts in place. So as the pad is folded back, I sigh relief to see that each piece has survived the trip. We have very few

pieces that are really valuable. But most of them have sentimental worth at least. An antique chest, a nice oak rocker, a chrome table and chairs that were parents' first furniture are among the items that mean a lot to us, even if they make the mover's helper snicker. And so it is with Grandfather's chair.

It sat in our first living room for the longest time looking rickety, neglected, even dirty. It was certainly not a piece that would stimulate any conversation nor inspire a compliment from some new visitor to our home. It looked as if a good sneeze would probably upend it, so it caused us to size up the probable weight of our guests before we offered it for actual use. But I always knew. I always knew that it was my grandfather's chair--the grandfather I never knew because I was born so late and he was gone before I had a chance to meet him, or even draw breath for that matter. This has always left me with a curious sense of incompleteness, so I hold on tightly to any tangible proof I have that he lived.

It was the chair he ate dinner in for many years. Its shape reminds me of how he might have been--straight, sturdy-backed, solid-legged, strong-armed, dark and handsome. But the years of pushing it back from the dinner table or joggling a child had caused it to wear down as all things well-used do. It once had a leather seat with springs to provide cushioned comfort. When we got it, Grandfather's chair was unfit for a bird to perch on. Except for this sense of family heritage it represented, the chair had no desirable qualities.

Then it happened. We refinished it. A curious idea. Finishing is just that--the end. But in this day of plastic and wood veneer, an urge exists in at least some of us to preserve, or in this case to restore. Grandpa himself loved wood. He carved and sculpted it like clay. In fact, he made the chair. He whittled link chains out of single pieces of wood. Once he penciled in the wood grain that had faded from a kitchen table because he appreciated the natural beauty of wood so much and he wished to preserve it. He made doll furniture and music boxes and rolling pins. Each time I work with a piece of furniture, I feel closer to Grandpa, as if this is something we share even though he is long gone and I missed knowing him.

The oils from Grandpa's body were so deeply absorbed into that chair that it had to be professionally dipped to get all of the stain out. We wondered if somehow we would be stripping the character out when we sent it through this chemical bath and rubbed it down with sandpaper and new color and oil. But we did it, justifying our action by telling ourselves that it was the only way the chair would get any use. We also had the old springs removed and the

seat reinforced. Then instead of keeping the original concept of a spring-cushioned chair, we cut a new sturdy plywood seat and upholstered it in a dignified blue. Now it is still a "captain's chair" with arms and a high straight back. It is a nice antique piece and something we are proud of because of the time we spent on it. It is cleaner, darker, sturdier and . . . . Is it? Is it still Grandpa's chair?

I understand from family oral tradition that Grandpa had a booming voice, always audible, especially during the hymn singing on Sundays. He commanded respect at his family's dinner table, but managed also to bring the family close together at these times. We observed this family dinner time in my home as well. He struggled through the Depression, numerous job changes, and, later, failing health. He used this chair, that he had built himself, through all of it. He loved children. He would have loved me. So I hold onto this piece of him. It is my solace, even in this new place. It represents all that I come from. I am lucky enough to have this ancestor and I know, wherever I go, I have this tangible evidence that he existed--Grandpa's chair.

