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# WESTVIEW

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# W E S T V I E W

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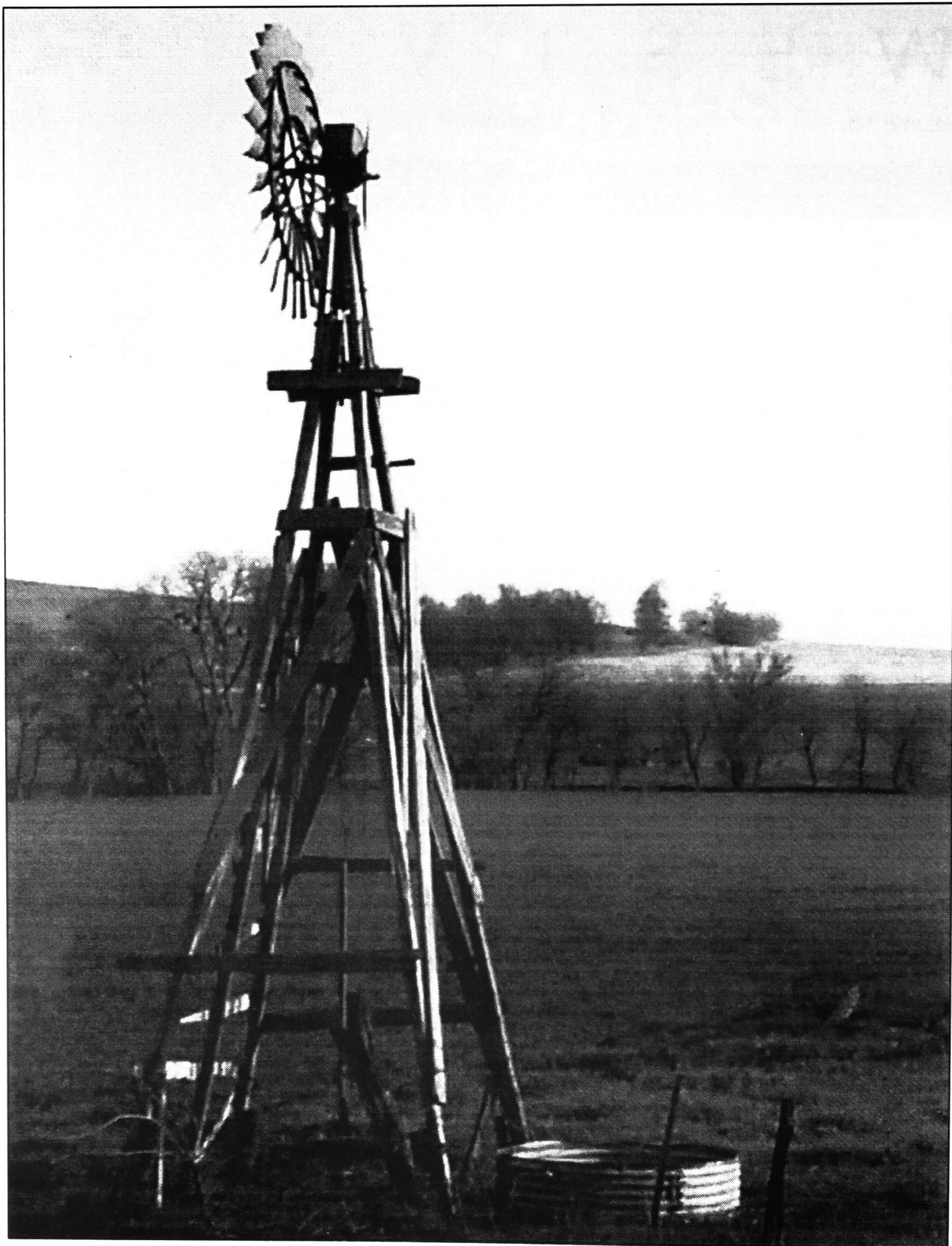
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2. Submitted artwork should be suitable for black and white reproduction. Work should be no larger than 8.5" x 14". However, photographs or slides of larger work may be submitted. Submitted artwork with a SASE will be returned.
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*Photograph by C. Michael McKinney*





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# Early Weatherford, The Twenties

by Julie O'Neal Fulton and John K. Hayden  
from chapter three of *Weatherford, Oklahoma: 1898-1998*

On November 11, 1918, World War I ended after Germany signed the armistice and surrendered. The end of the war created a combination of restlessness, desperation, boredom, and thrill-seeking in individuals who were about to enter into a new decade, the twenties. The mixture of attitudes earned the decade its nickname: the "Roaring Twenties."

Throughout the twenties, a broad conflict existed between a new, secular urban culture, connected to more modern views, and an older rural America, committed to traditional values that sometimes resented economic shifts and other change.

In the early twenties, the women's suffrage movement had a great impact on American society. By August 18, 1920, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, giving women the right to vote. Ever since the 15th Amendment to the Constitution provided Afro-American men the right to vote, but denied this right to women, the women's suffrage movement had been pushing in full force to achieve the vote. Moreover, many women had contributed to the war effort during World War I, providing their role in the work place as well as at home. The adoption of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution provided one of the first major changes in the early twenties which affected every community, including Weatherford.

During the 1920's, a group of American writers and artists made an impact on the cultural life of the world. Two of the most famous were Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Many writers, artists, and intellectuals tried to find a place in the world during the twenties because the war had broken their spirit. It was a period when many were wildly creative, liberating, and reckless.

Since the 18th Amendment prohibited the sale

of alcohol in the twenties, prohibition drove many thirsty townspeople to violate the law in search of a drink. By some accounts, the twenties soon became "a lawless decade." Police raids occurred in covert saloons and where people brewed their own homemade beer. These continual raids and violations of the law created a wild atmosphere in the twenties.

In Weatherford, the twenties did not necessarily live up to the nickname, the "Roaring Twenties," if the university paper is to be believed. For example, historian Mel Fiegel writes that Southwestern students were at least aware "of something called flappers" in American society, but were not inclined to emulate them. In fact, *The Southwestern* dedicated space to attacking the culture of the flappers. It printed a poem in which a bachelor surmises that flappers wear a great deal of makeup because they are ugly. *The Southwestern* also warned young men that dating "A cigarette-smoking profane girl" would only bring them trouble.

The school paper also warned that "picture shows and unrestrained social pleasures create vices that are antagonistic to the home." Finally, *The Southwestern* warned teachers that "the schoolroom is not the place to try out the latest fashion."

Fiegel concludes that these views "revealed a continuing spirit of idealism, strong threads of conservatism, and a devotion to the values of rural nineteenth century America. In the 1920s, *Southwestern* as an institution simply failed to perceive the historical developments taking place in society. No doubt, the same conclusion could be attached to small town Weatherford as a whole in the 1920s.

But this is not to say there was no fun in Weatherford in the 1920s. Since the university enrollment was small in number, the students all





*A pictorial greeting of early Weatherford*

*Photo courtesy Vonda McPhearson*

knew each other. The townspeople were also well acquainted with the students. In the twenties there were no dormitories; therefore, the students lived in rooming houses or private homes. In the local supermarkets, two cans of tomato soup cost 25 cents and a 24 pound bag of flour sold for \$1.10, while tuna fish sold for 10 cents per can.

James J. Craddock remembers regular dances being held in the basement of the American Legion Hall, a building now occupied by the Tautfest. In the east part of town, J. S. Decker operated a swimming pool. At this time it was one of the few in this part of the country.

Weatherford in the twenties was also a center of entertainment. During the summers of the 1920s, the Chautauqua was a gift from the Chautauqua Association to communities all across Oklahoma, including Weatherford. These entertainers traveled from one town to another bringing their attractions. This event only happened one week of

every summer. As such, the community valued and anticipated the return of the Chautauqua.

After arriving in the community, the Chautauqua set up a tent, a stage, and seating areas. The seats filled up quickly because of their popularity. The entertainment included various types of plays, bands, speakers, and there would be something special for the children in the mornings. The Chautauqua brought inspiration, livelihood, and entertainment to the Weatherford community during long, hot summers.

Other entertainment in the community included Southwestern's sporting events. J.P. Jackson lettered four years in football at Southwestern and was named to the all-intercollegiate teams of 1926 and 1927. He later played professional football with the Boston Bulldogs in 1929. Arnold Shockely earned an all-conference tackle in 1927. He also played professional football after college with the Providence (Rhode Island) Steam Rollers.





Joe B. Milam assumed football and wrestling coaching duties in the fall of 1926. In the first year of coaching at Southwestern, his team won the Collegiate Conference Championship. Also, Milam helped wrestling become a popular sport in Weatherford.

From 1927 to 1933, many state and conference wrestling champions came from Southwestern. Today, Southwestern's football stadium is named in honor of Joe B. Milam.

In addition to the annual Chautauquas and sporting events, the locals could also check out the latest Hollywood fare at the Bungalow Theater. Mary Pickford features comprised the most regular offerings for anywhere between 10 cents and 25 cents. There was also an ice-skating rink where the admission was 25 cents. In an age devoid

of television, the Weatherford Booster reprinted contemporary novels such as Booth Tarkington's *The Magnificent Ambersons* in a serial format.

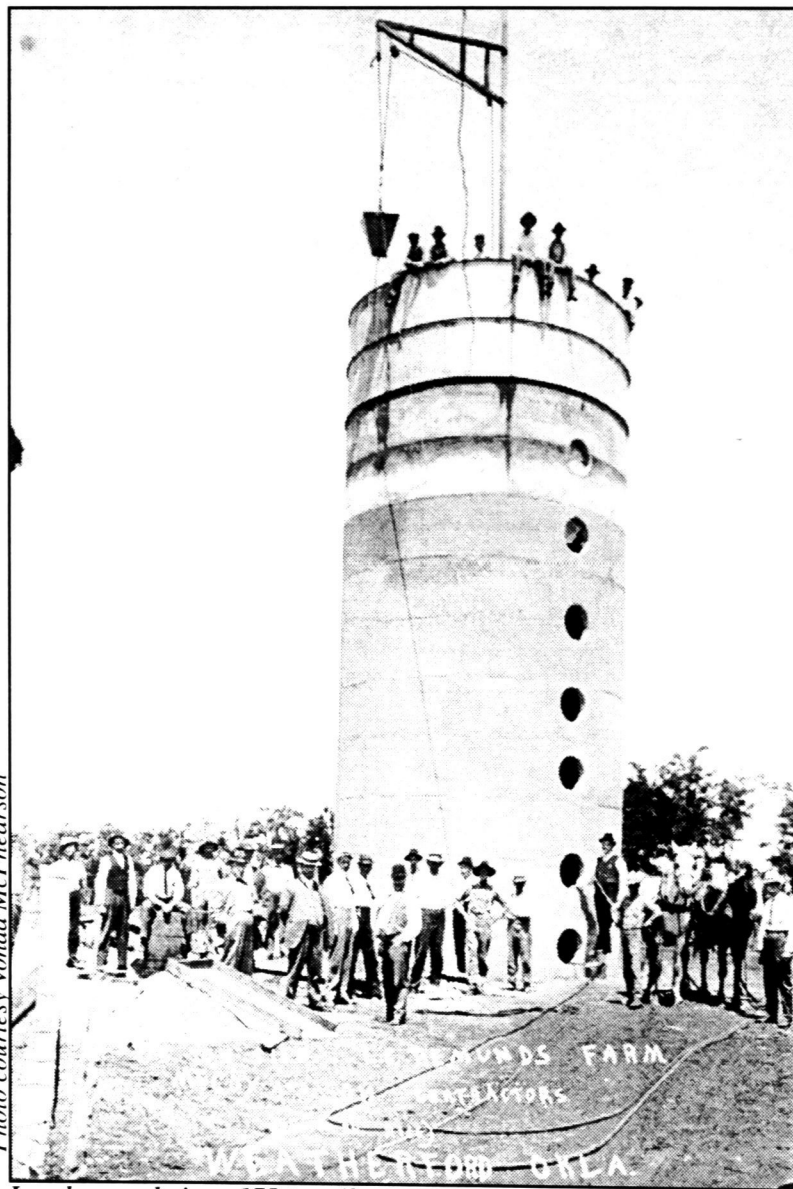
Kappa Kappa Iota, a national sorority for fe-

male teachers and wives of teachers, originated in Oklahoma on December 6, 1921. The sorority became known as the order of the Blue Violet. On February 6, 1922, Alfred Burris, president of Southwestern Teachers' College, extended to the women of his faculty an invitation to the sorority. Fifteen

women from Weatherford were initiated into the sorority. The organization grew, and other teachers from other states wanted to join. The Weatherford Chapter was called the Epsilon Conclave of KKI. The purpose of the sorority was to "promote good fellowship and fraternal cooperation among teachers, to strive for the elevation and dignity of the teaching profession, and to oppose all forces detrimental to the schools of the United States."

The 1920s also witnessed improvements in Weatherford's infrastructure. For

example, in February, 1920, the town approved a \$15,000 bond to repair and extend its water system to enable it to supply an adequate amount of water. In 1923, Weatherford approved a \$100,000



Local men admire a 175-ton silo constructed on L.C. Remunds' farm

bond issue to extend and improve the municipal plant. Such improvements later allowed the city to charge less for electricity.

Other local progress included improving roads for better quality of travel. The first moves to pave three blocks of Main Street and seven blocks of Custer were made in May of 1922. The automobile had reached a new peak in popularity, and greater numbers were being seen in Weatherford. However, bad weather made roads muddy and undriveable. Paving was the solution to this problem. The contract for paving started with only Main Street, which made up the business district of Weatherford. The city commissioners let the Standard Paving Company of Tulsa have the contract. The price per square yard, including excavation, curbing, etc. was \$4.77. The contract provided that the two west blocks would be 72 feet wide while the east block would extend to 76 feet because of the narrower sidewalks. The work started ten days after this agreement was made and ended about thirty days after the beginning of the work. After it was done, seven blocks of Custer Street were also paved. This was not in the original contract.

Ralph Crall, a longtime farmer and teacher, helped work on the paving project. He remembers how the project took place:

First, the roads were fine-graded; after that, 4 inches of concrete were laid, then 1 inch of sand. Eight-pound bricks were laid, and finally, asphalt was poured over and between the bricks to seal them. The brick-laying was all done by one man. He would go from one side of the street to the other, setting each brick by hand. One man would push a wheelbarrow full of bricks and set them down for the brick-layer. He never missed a beat.

By 1929, Weatherford had "54 blocks of pavement." That same year, Charly Penn, a longtime resident, recalled how much Weatherford had changed since its incorporation. He recalled how The Choctaw Townsite Company camped on the spot now occupied by the Farmer's Telephone

Company, and how the construction of the Rock Island Road brought in a population that needed grocery stores, hotels, and saloons, which were often hastily constructed out of tents. Other early landmarks that had disappeared from Weatherford's Main Street included the old Weatherford Drug Store which was replaced by the Weatherford Drug Store and Cain Hotel, and the Old Park Hotel which was being replaced by the new Chevrolet garage.

Many townspeople were ready for this local progress in the community, but many continued to look to the older, traditional views of the past, and for organizations to promote this outlook. By 1920, there were fewer than 5,000 members of the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) nationally. The KKK wanted to get the group reestablished. Moreover, the KKK leaders believed that if the numbers grew locally, then they would soon improve at a national level. Col. William Joseph Simmons led the KKK in its reestablishment, and in 1921, the KKK was represented in all but three states. In April of 1923, the KKK staged a large rally on Main Street with many of its members on hand in their klan regalia (although *The Weatherford Booster* passed on the report that those in regalia "were citizens of surrounding towns.") A fiery cross was even erected on the roof of the Daughty Building. Ostensibly, the purpose of the rally was to dispel "the erroneous conception of the purposes and workings of the organization." *The Weatherford Booster* did report that the Klan had a large following locally even though it appeared less strong in western and southwestern Oklahoma than in other parts of the state. During the summer of 1923, the Klan increased its activities throughout Oklahoma. Governor John Walton then engaged in a bitter fight with both the Klan and the State Legislature, culminating in his impeachment and removal from office in November of that same year.

Less controversial than the role of the KKK in Weatherford in the twenties, but still a hotly con-





*Southwestern Normal, 1912*

*Photo courtesy Vonda McPhearson*

tested debate at the time, was the question of where to locate the county seat. For example, one tax levy Weatherford did oppose in this period was the July 1919 vote on a tax levy to build a courthouse in Custer County. Weatherford, along with every other town in the county except Arapaho, opposed the levy, which went down to defeat.

The vote reflected the struggle between the proponents of Arapaho and Clinton to lay final claim to the county seat.

An anonymous letter to the residents of Thomas and Weatherford, reprinted in the November 10, 1921 edition of *The Weatherford Booster*, makes plain how strongly folks felt about the politics of the county seat.

The letter accuses civic leaders in the two towns of selling out to the Clinton Chamber of Commerce by doing all they can to throw the county seat to Clinton in the December 6th election. But the letter writer is not surprised at the sell-out of Weatherford and Thomas, given the fact that the two towns are filled with preachers and cheap poli-

ticians, and that for the longest time the poorest breed of gamblers, prostitutes, and preachers comprised the bulk of the towns' populations. After observing that "politics are undermining the very foundation of the leading protestant churches," and suggesting that protestants emulate the more vigorous Jewish faith and Catholic Church by steering clear of hot political issues, the author concludes by assuring the residents of Weatherford and Thomas that "when you answer jury duty service or start a lawsuit, as long as you remain in Custer County, you will be compelled to do this business in Arapaho for the rest of your time."

On August 2, 1923, Weatherford was shocked nationally when President Warren G. Harding died suddenly. Many were alarmed because he had only been in office for two years. The true cause of the President's death is still not known because an autopsy was never performed. At one time, the cause was said to be food poisoning. Later, doctors in San Francisco said he suffered from pneumonia. As such, Calvin





Coolidge became the next President of the United States.

In the wake of the President's death, individuals living in Weatherford tried to keep focused. In March of 1923, A.L. Thornton of the Chickashaw Cotton Seed Oil Company purchased the old cotton gin site and seven adjoining lots. By June of that same year, the new cotton gin was up and running under the management of W. C. Hart. In May of 1924, a four year effort by the Weatherford Chamber of Commerce and other interested parties to obtain a Field Artillery Unit of the Oklahoma National Guard paid off when one of the two remaining firing batteries in Arizona, Battery "D," 158th Field Artillery, was transferred to Weatherford. Several months later, early Weatherford lost one of its landmark buildings when the Anhauser-Busch building on Main Street and Broadway was torn down in the wake of serious fire damage. It had served as part of the original townsite company, a saloon, a barber shop, and as a doctor's office.

In September of 1925, Lee Ratcliffe opened his first bookstore with \$4.25 cash in his hand and with another borrowed \$2.00. Ratcliffe had previously run his father's sandwich shop. However, this shop only had three to four shelves; there was hardly room to buy or sell used books. In 1936, the store moved to its present location and is still successful today.

In 1928, Ralph Logan Lockstone was elected as the mayor of Weatherford and was named president of the Weatherford Kiwanis Club. After Lockstone took over as mayor, Weatherford still had only two paved streets, Custer from Main to the college and three blocks on Main Street through the business section. Therefore, he had Caddo and Bradley Street paved also. Furthermore, Lockstone purchased land for the first city park and opened municipal swimming pools. Lockstone's many efforts led to growth and prosperity in the Weatherford community.

The 1920s witnessed a rise both in state financial support and student enrollments at the Southwestern State Teacher's College. During the war years, state support for Southwestern ranged from \$40,000 to \$60,000, but in 1920, state support totaled \$79,466, the most liberal disbursement from the state Southwestern had ever received. (The state legislature also disbursed more funds to other state regional colleges.) By 1927, the state appropriation had reached \$176,500. In 1921, the State Board of Education revised and raised the salary schedule at Southwestern. Instructors would earn a minimum of \$1,500 a year, assistant professors, a minimum of \$2,100, and associate professors, a minimum of \$2,700. The minimum salary for a full professor would be \$3,300 with a maximum of \$4,000.

Southwestern registered impressive enrollments in the 1920s. In the fall of 1921, over 300 students enrolled, double the total of the previous year. In 1922, enrollment reached 357, and the following year it exceeded 400.

To cope with rising enrollments, in May, 1925, two Weatherford businessmen, Carl Remund and R. Hoberecht, purchased the Park Hotel and converted it into a girls' dormitory for fifty students. The building, though privately owned, was supervised by college officials. Mel Fiegel points out that this action represented Southwestern's first known attempt to house and feed a large number of students in one dwelling.

The most important achievement at Southwestern in the 1920s, though, was its winning of accreditation in March, 1922. As Mel Fiegel observes, having been admitted to the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, "Southwestern was now a college in fact as well as name." The college then initiated a grading system which covered all areas of any given student's work. Seventy percent became the passing grade. Fiegel makes it plain that with accreditation came tougher standards.



New buildings also went up around campus in the 1920s. In March, 1926, Southwestern opened its first physical education building. The \$40,000 gymnasium featured a playing court with seating for 2,000, and was located northeast of the administration building. On Tuesday, May 21, 1929, Southwestern's new \$100,000 library was dedicated.

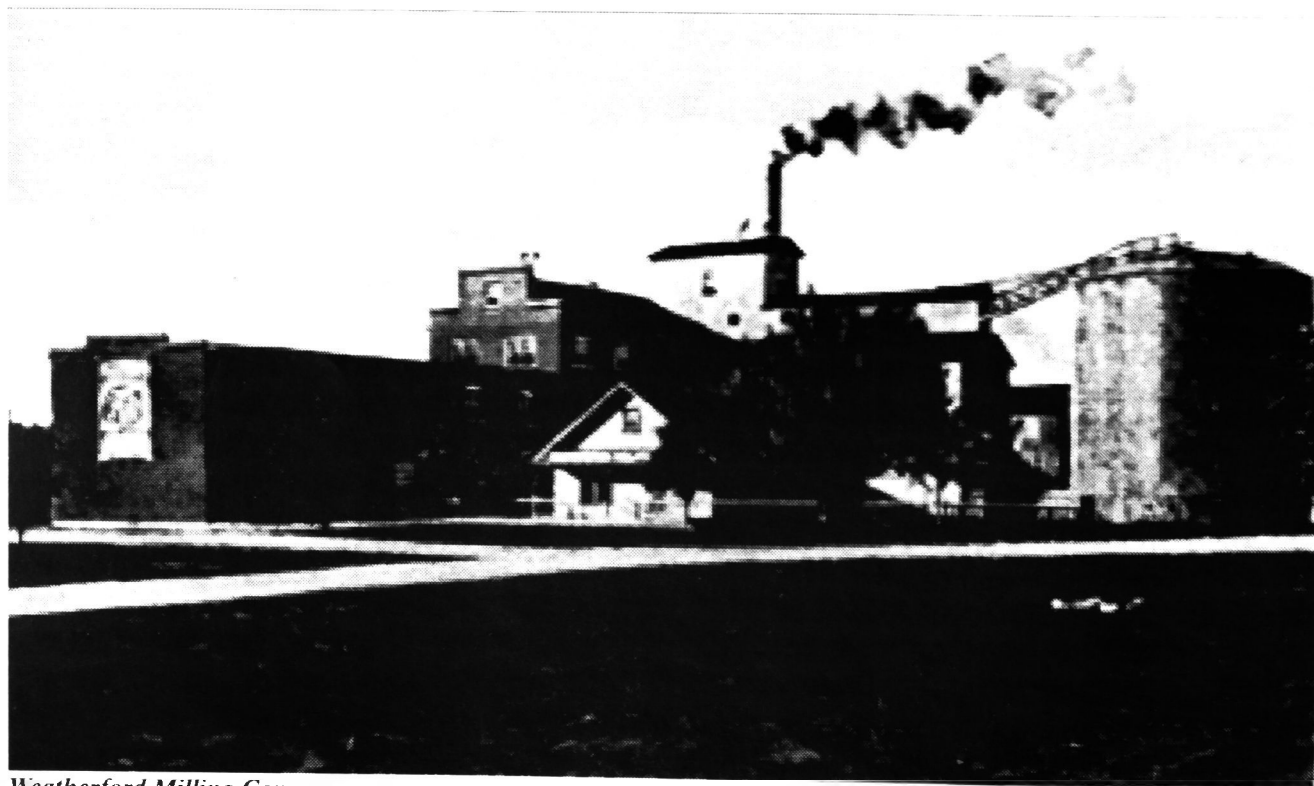
In the early 1920s, the Weatherford Public Schools boasted a staff of 15 teachers with an enrollment of 300 in the grade school and about 100 in the high school. Space was at a premium in the public schools, especially for the high school classes. Some high school students had to use grade school rooms. As *The Weatherford Booster* reported, the "lack of room is cramping every department." and so apparently the need for additional facilities extended beyond the high school. By 1922, 175 students were enrolled in the high school, and more than 30 students, a record to that date, turned out for football tryouts.

The close of the twenties brought economic dislocation to the country when stock market prices collapsed. The day of October 24, 1929 is remembered as "Black Thursday." Many individuals believed that the crash was the first phase of the Great Depression and world economic crisis. Americans speculated on stocks in unprecedented numbers and often overextended themselves. Banks and businesses had bought stock and lost everything. American stock losses were close to fifty billion dollars. As such, this loss is known as the worst American depression.

Thus, the post-World War I era closed with the stock market crash of 1929, and the approaching thirties would be sorely scarred by the crash as well as new national challenges such as Depression and the Dust Bowl.



Copies of *Weatherford: 1898-1998* can be purchased by calling (580) 772-7101



*Weatherford Milling Company*

*Photo courtesy Vonda McPhearson*



# While Driving Home in Slow Traffic He Realizes Something about His Life

by Charles Rafferty

In my rearview mirror the sun ignites  
disaster in the clouds—a billowing mass  
of color. It's a chaos that indicts  
the tiny lights along this road. They pass  
in slow succession, an unbroken line  
of braking brightness that disappears around  
a bend. Under a darker sky, the wine  
is waiting for us all, the ones who drowned  
all day in offices, who filed away  
their afternoons without even the hope  
of windows and their larger light . . . We stay  
inside. We miss the pear tree on the slope  
exploding into blossom and calling in  
the bees. This is how it's always been.





# At the Antique Show

By Janet McCann

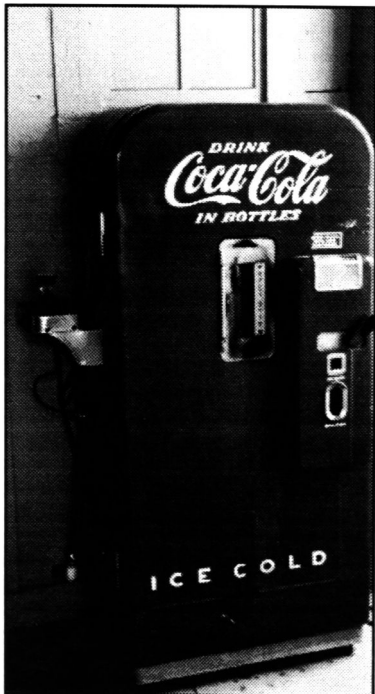
"Genuine bakelite," the antique lady said.  
And she was real too, her beehive hair  
and textured lacquered nails said '58.

Translucent, held to the light,  
a coppery gold.  
"That was before plastic," she said.

Nostalgia, remember the old Coke machines?  
Five cents a bottle. 5 1/2 ounces.  
Frosted, write your name on the cool

ribbed side. (The lady  
with the blue striped scalp will whisper someday,  
Remember Styrofoam?)

Bakelite. Tapped it with her  
perfect oval nail. Hard, a bright thin sound  
somewhere between plastic and glass.



*Photograph by C. Michael McKinney*



# The Problem of Evil

by Richard N. Bentley

In the middle of his prep school reunion, Wilmerding found himself at a supper where the conversation was beginning to fade. The men sat together in the living room of a faculty residence balancing plates on their knees. A clock ticked on the wall. The room was filled with stiff furniture and dense rugs. Frail curtains framed a window that looked out beyond some shrubbery to a chalk-lined playing field.

Their wives, Wilmerding could not help thinking, might have kept the evening more gamesome; women would not have allowed the diminishing conversation that was bringing this occasion to an embarrassing and premature halt. But back when the men attended the school, single-sex education was still the vogue, so it was not surprising that the wives had segregated themselves. Wilmerding could hear them in the kitchen, talking and laughing clamorously together over... what topics? Certainly not their husbands. Perhaps Glanville's wife, an accomplished monologist, was describing her recent trip to China for the foundation she headed. She was making it sound hilarious.

The abandoned husbands had discussed politics, both national, international, and back to national again. They had talked about the sports teams. Complimentary—though imprecise—testimonials had been made to Wilmerding's morning remarks as he accepted a Distinguished Alumnus Award (a crystal salad bowl emblazoned with the school's crest but lacking utensils) and Wilmerding hoped that among the embers of the evening his glow of distinction still lingered, and for that reason he felt an obligation to fan the ashes as best he could, to liven things up.

Gathered around him were a professor, two psychiatrists, the owner of a gourmet pet food company, and pudgy old Delafield who sat cross-legged on the floor. Delafield had become a minister and

was slated to give a guest sermon at the next morning's chapel service. Wilmerding turned to him and said, "There's something I've been wondering about lately, Tom. Perhaps you could touch on it in tomorrow's sermon."

At this Delafield looked amiably bewildered and a knot of muscle between his eyes creased downward. "Well, I'm afraid I've already written the damn thing."

"It's just this," Wilmerding said. "Tomorrow will be an important performance. Impressionable students, parents, faculty, reuniting alumni with ready wallets. How about something grand and sweeping, Tom, like the problem of evil? Most of us have always wondered about evil."

"I wonder about it too," Delafield said, uncertainly, but mildly, as he explored his salad with a tentative fork.

"Then you must at least have some preliminary thoughts," Wilmerding insisted. "How can God be so hard on people who have done nothing to offend him, like little children?"

"Like helpless animals," someone chimed in, not very helpfully. The owner of the gourmet pet food company.

"War?" It was the academic who was speaking, a soft, indifferent man, still too ridiculously pliant after all the years to be considered a Distinguished Professor of anything, in Wilmerding's opinion. Earlier he had predicted that the professor would be the one most likely, as the evening rolled down the blurring vista of drink, to address him by his old nickname, "Slash."

"Plague?" someone murmured.

"Disease? Can anyone remember the rest of them? The four horsemen."

"Sloth."

"Adultery?"



"By their fruits shall ye know them," someone volunteered.

"Who are 'they' and who are the 'fruits'?" another asked. "Is that anything like the healing power of rocks and crystals?"

"Speaking of rocks," Glanville said, "my wife and I, when we were in China recently..."

Wilmerding felt the discussion floating off again. This seemed a tendency he had observed all weekend among his classmates, the impulse toward indirect discourse. He imagined the pattern might have to do with a perceived requirement to broaden even the smallest social conversation until its nucleus had dissolved into benevolent vagueness. It was unclear to him whether this discursiveness was a natural accompaniment of aging, or whether it was an infestation from the surroundings, the tight cluster of brick buildings behind an iron gate where the world's bitter winds seemed never to have raged, and everyone could afford to be indiscriminately tolerant. Despite the width of familiar faces, the courtesy, the school's willingness to offer up a weekend of institutionalized nostalgia for their comfort, Wilmerding grimly steered back to his original question. "I mean, tomorrow. Will you be prepared to reconcile God's omnipotence, foreknowledge, and even His love with all the malice in the world?"

The two psychiatrists scowled as if pretending to think, and Delafield looked disheartened—in fact, at that moment, though Wilmerding could not have known it, a slight twinge shot through Delafield's rib cage, causing him to set down his salad plate abruptly on the coffee table in front of him. The fork clattered and fell onto the carpet, making an oily stain from which eyes were quickly withdrawn.

The owner of the gourmet pet food company jumped in with "Talk about injustice? How about meat inspectors? How about government overregu-

lation by tub-thumping bureaucrats?"

"Hmmm," said Wilmerding, "the grievances seem endless." He had always thought of himself as a man given to leadership, to convincing others to see where their self-interest lay, and the forceful thrust of the discussion appealed to his sense of personal enlargement.

A number of additional points were raised. Didn't the Book of Job provide the answer to all of these questions? Or was it Revelations? What about God's exhortation, "I am that I am." Didn't that really clear everything up? (Gruff laughter here.)

"Hey, lighten up, you guys," Delafield implored hoarsely, and Wilmerding felt for an instant the hot steam of locker room bullying seep into the room from around the window cracks.

"Lighten up indeed," sighed the Distinguished Professor. "Which of us, even Slash here, can ever know the unknowable?" He tossed Delafield a soft look. "Immortality, Tom. Could you take a crack at immortality?"

This remark seemed to produce a sudden flush of intimacy. "Well," one of the psychiatrists said, clearly the cleverer one, "I think this immortality business is overrated. Shouldn't we talk about just trying to make things tolerable here on earth for everyone? Just last summer, my wife and I..."

Wilmerding thought of his own wife, now enjoying the kitchen laughter with the president of the over endowed foundation. He thought of how she always warned him when he was being argumentative. But she'd been argumentative herself that same afternoon. What are we doing here with these people we hardly know? These people you haven't seen in years? What kind of person requires a colloquy of strangers, a retreat into distant familiarity? Delafield sat before him now, smiling and perplexed. He suddenly seemed like a Hieronymous Bosch figure sprung to life.





Wilmerding looked at the round face with its open, hefty-eyed proportions and slight jowls. He remembered how Delafield looked in another rendering, an adolescent with mottled complexion beneath a baseball cap with the bill intrepidly stuck out sideways. Wilmerding, then as now, divined in him an anxious groping toward recognition—someone in the same boat, as *he might* have put it—and even a flimsy reaching for love. Speaking from the heart, if he could manage it, what new proofs were needed of the pointlessness of wisdom? The passing years, Wilmerding sadly realized, had neither mellowed his own mind nor given it a philosophic turn. In fact, they had only sharpened the animosity and cynicism of his youth. But even if some of his jokes were still adolescent, they acknowledged the survival in him of that immature, untamed, unwise self that was the parent of any maturity worth having. With that thought he fell silent, at last. He

wanted to go home. He missed his old, blind dog.

Outside the windows one could glimpse a pale evening sky scratched with weather whorls and a campus whose Georgian buildings were gathered in a mild and knowable circle. They all knew, after all, about friendship, that it was dim and unreliable and little more than a curtain on the wall. It was also capricious, idiotic, sentimental, and inconstant, and most often seemed to be the exclusive preserve of others. How could its anchoring force be measured, how could one account for its random visitations? Of course they could not—which was why after a time they began to talk about other things: the stock market, the sports teams again, the weather, would it rain tomorrow, would the wind continue its gusty course, would summer ever come, where were they supposed to be in the morning.



# On Mr. Faulkner's Sailboat

by Edward C. Lynskey

How gay it was, pink voile  
curtains astir, orange cones  
guarding my porch, Tuesday  
book day without any guests.  
Or surprises. An ex libris  
lay open, a lit up Pall Mall  
coiled like kudzu tendrils,  
a cup of dreamy gin sat low.  
My moorings were cut adrift  
by midafternoon, yawny sun  
a mellow beryl across Lake  
Pontchartrain. "Keep yourn  
arm this side of the gunnel!"  
Aboard his new hooker named  
*Temple Drake*, he authored  
crazy dips and flourishing  
loops, words only Heavens  
above put into sentences.  
His ball of yarns rolled  
over — rich sassy brown  
Dilsey almost fell on my  
lap as both eyes focused  
on the facedown novel, me  
holding a chintz cushion.



# Muse

by Mike Carson

Shale. Mud. The sky skidded down  
the spilled slag of mountains. Tamaracks,  
stunted sycamores. Floating grackles,  
green-black as bruises, that clattered  
over the hollow. A caved-in barn, shacks,  
'50 Pontiac wrecked in the creek bed.

You waited there, surprised me, woman,  
with belief. So gaunt I could not work  
in your stare, afraid of being haunted.  
Like the yellow-eyed thing with fur  
that skulked under the slab of rock.  
But your voice took me where you wanted.

Those words, iron twang of loss, cut away soft  
ideas of beauty. Your raw hand brushing frost  
off the cold-frame touched me as you pointed —  
dim green sprouts licked up at the light. More than  
a kiss your cracked skin told what you intended.  
The bottom-land clay under us in thaw,  
I held you and became another man.



# Family Business:

## Do You Take This Man and His Farm?

by Sondra Dutreau Williams

If I had known what it was going to take, I would never have taken it on. If I had known that having our own business would demand the best of my talents, the bulk of my time, and become a third partner in our marriage, I might have gotten a job instead.

On the other hand, if I had known the rewards, the rush of adrenaline in the risks, I might have embraced it willingly. If I had known that having a farm is riding the seasons astride a spirited horse, running the whitewater rapids of success and sudden deadlines; that it's falling into crevices of loss and debt and pulling myself up with my own strength, wits, hard work, and luck, I might have known I'd get caught up in the excitement of the challenge.

My husband Doug is a fundamentalist. Not in his religious affiliation, but because he aligns himself with the basic elements. He works with his hands, loves the smell and the feel of dirt, rock, water, and cold. Likes to be out in the rain. Takes his shirt off and sweats in the sun. As a young man he raised earthworms. In his 30's and 40's he was a stone mason. Now he's a fungus farmer. He grows shiitake mushrooms on oak logs.

I don't really understand his love of fungus. He explained it to me once, on a starry night, as we walked hand-in-hand through a whispering live-oak grove, "A man can't lay stone past the age of fifty. It's too hard on your body..."

Drifting into wind and cloudless sky, I stopped listening, coming back just as he said, "...so that's why I've decided to grow mushrooms."

"I see," I said, thinking he was just dreaming out loud about cutting logs, drilling holes, injecting spawn, watering and incubating for a year, building greenhouses, force-fruiting, harvesting, marketing, delivering, record-keeping, filing, and

paying horrific self-employment tax.

I went along with it in the way that we encourage people we love in the things that make them happy. In no time, I understood what our forefather farmers and their wives have always known: It takes both of you. It becomes your life, not just your livelihood. A farm is a joyful connection to the chain of all living things. We are guardians of life in a one-on-one relationship with weather, gravity, earth, and air.

Nature is a good teacher and we're quick learners. Cold rain shocks the logs and triggers their natural fruiting cycle. Too much rain means too many mushrooms. The fall of our first fruiting, it rained for four days. We picked thousands of shiitakes during the day. We called our family and friends to help us cut and process them and we worked late into the nights. We composted hundreds of pounds and thousands of dollars worth of mushrooms too big, too wet, or too ripe to sell, because they grew four inches or more in a single day and turned black before we could pick them.

Now we cover our investment — six thousand forty-inch logs, three to six inches in diameter — with plastic every fall and spring.

Doug ministers to his fungal flock with sprinklers and heaters and fans, cold water or warm blankets, whatever it takes ~~today, to keep his fruiting~~ logs in the temperature range they call heaven.

He loves his logs, knows them all by name, and who their friends are. And they love him: I've heard him talking to them as he picks their fruit, freely and proudly given, more mushrooms than other growers get, bigger and more beautiful.

We also sell Grow-Your-Own Shiitake Mushroom Logs. A kit will produce shiitakes in increasingly larger yields for about four years. Someone can return a 15-inch gift log after six months of



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We also sell Grow-Your-Own Shiitake Mushroom Logs. A kit will produce shiitakes in increasingly larger yields for about four years. Someone can return a 15-inch gift log after six months of neglect, with the bark falling off, and he'll recognize it, saying, "This was a good log."

After over eight years of growing shiitakes, we never tire of them. One of us will see a perfectly-formed mushroom, as if seeing one for the first time, with its thick rounded cap, pure white gills, border of whitestars on a field of luscious brown, "Look! Look at this one! Ohh . . . it's so pretty..."

Lost Creek Mushroom Farm is a "mom and pop" operation. Doug and I are living the American Dream, owning our own business, and working together at home. People who don't know better think that owning your own business means *freedom*. Well, yes, you have the freedom to make your own decisions, no one else tells you what to do. A good decision, fulfilled in good time, means the fun of accomplish-

ment and success, profit, and ease of operation. A bad decision, or a good decision poorly executed, means trouble and loss, hard work now and hard times ahead.

Yes, we have freedom. But, as an ancient Greek statesman said, "The price of freedom is constant vigilance." Some weeks, we can't get off the farm. The "business" drives our days. It comes with us to the dinner table, wakes us up in the morning. It calls us home from dinner with friends to light the furnace, and gets us up at night to block the greenhouse doors against a sudden, drying wind. Customers call with questions and complaints, drop by to buy a gift log during Christmas dinner.

Owning our own business means we get up when we want to, but we don't get to bed until the work is done. And it's true, we don't have to work if we don't want to. But — aside from the income — our logs and mushrooms and our stores and chefs depend on us, and we *want* to work every day.

In our personal activities, we have almost no gender-specific jobs: The one who gets hungry first, cooks. Whoever's working hardest, the other one cooks. I do the mowing because I like to; Doug vacuums and makes the bed because I hate to and he

doesn't mind.

But in running the business of the farm, we have clear separation of labor. Doug works the greenhouses, Sondra works the comput-



Photo courtesy Sondra Dutreau Williams



ers. Doug handles the logs, Sondra handles the papers. I rarely go into Doug's log yard, he rarely goes into my office.

And working at home together? Sometimes we're both here all day and we only see each other at meals and at bedtime. There have been times when we haven't seen each other for a week, one of us up early and the other to bed late. At worst, we endure days when we're irritatingly in each other's way or one of us is angry. And the best part, we relish the days we can work together, laughing and complaining, carrying logs, running our errands, helping each other with the smallest tasks, not wanting to be apart.

We're busy and we're never bored. Through tough and tender times we stand by each other in the way that marriage partners are meant to. I lose faith in the down times, but Doug never does. He *knows* this farm will work, despite my fears and despite our weaknesses and differences.

Neither one of us were born to business. We are night owls. We are artists — he's a painter and sculptor, I'm a writer and theatre director. Money was never our motivation. In this we are alike. In our work styles and temperaments, we are as different as Tigger and Eeyore. I'm energetic, ebullient and speedy—if a little messy and haphazard. I think of something and I want to do it *now!* Doug is patient, slow, thorough, will wait until all is in readiness (and in my opinion, long past readiness), to take action. I panic easily, gripe and yell when things go wrong. He puts one foot doggedly in front of the other, conserving his energy for the long haul. Despite our opposition in action and opinion, we've learned to trust one another to take care of our share; and work goes easier if we don't



*Photo courtesy Sondra Dutreau Williams*

crowd each other too much.

One thing we always do and fight through together is to take our mushrooms and our Grow-Your-Own Shiitake Logs to fairs and shows. First we pack up in the 'Shroom Room, snapping and growling, because I want to get there early so we don't have to set up under pressure. He waits 'til the last minute to pick the mushrooms so they'll be absolutely fresh. He triple-checks everything so we don't forget anything.

We're always late and we always leave something undone.

Then we set up: I'm the testy director and he's the beleaguered stagehand, arranging and rearranging our booth in the current venue: convention center, cafeteria, livestock barn, or outdoors in whatever weather.

We open the booth, and when the people come, we're a team in every sense: sharing the spotlight, helping each other, finishing the other's sentences. We're a comedy duo, contradicting each other in fun; or we're a professional team of experts, discussing production and marketing or the nutritional and medicinal benefits of shiitakes. We listen compassionately to stories about friends and fam-



ily poisoned by mushrooms and people who were healed by them.

We stand together in the quality of our work. We have the same high regard for our customers and high standards for our products and service. I can't imagine working and living with your business partner, your marriage partner, and differing on these issues. Because we share the same values, we share pride in our work and in each other.

"Growing a business" is, in all ways, "growing a relationship." Before we started the farm, we led fragmented lives. We were apart all day in different settings, then came home to responsibilities and a set of attitudes and expectations completely different from those of that workday world. One of us might be stressed, the other wanting to play. Now, when we have problems, they are generally the same problems. We share the same disappointments and joys in a hands-on way that was never possible when we were working apart.

We did it the way the experts tell you not to. We gave up our jobs. We gave up predictable income and security, free evenings and weekends. In the six years we've been full-time farmers, there have been days I was so frightened about the future I was paralyzed. Days Doug wouldn't get out of bed. Twenty-hour days of frantic labor. Catastrophes that wiped us out—a storm that took down our greenhouse, illness that kept us down when we had to get up and go, our first year of \$25,000 profit when taxes took \$14,500 and left us poorer than if we hadn't worked at all.

Doug and I fight more than we ever fought before we started the farm. Our safety, security, present and future, are at the mercy of every decision, every lapse into thoughtlessness, carelessness, laziness.

I know I give and do my best, even when I don't feel like it, so the farm will thrive and grow and we will grow with it. Slowly, year by year, we *are* growing—in size, reputation, and sales. And day by day, we are growing in the faith that what we are giving to the farm, the farm, with Grace and good luck, can and will give back to us.

This is a marriage *à trois*: Mushroom Lady, Mushroom Man, Mushroom Farm. Sometimes the wedding ring feels like a ring in my nose, and I'm sure that's true for Doug as well. But most times it feels like a ring I've caught on a dream and Doug and I have won the prize.



Photo courtesy Sondra Dutreau



# Hibernation

by Gordon Grice

This wasp sleeps her papery sleep.  
Touch her and she is crisp as cold,  
folded into a dream that doesn't breathe.  
Will she waken if I bring her into the warm?  
I do not want her blur of brown wings,  
the threat of electric fire she carries  
in her. I have felt that rebound  
of drumming wings, that sizzle  
of life knotted into a small space,  
an instant before the sting.  
That same life is still in her,  
brittle though the sleep has made her,  
little as there is to tell her sleep from death.



# questions

by Cherri Randall

my daughter and her friend  
walk up giggling  
"Mommy, *didn't* I get born out of your stomach?"  
I explain to her that they are both right  
and both wrong  
babies come from wombs  
not stomachs  
but sometimes the exit chute is detoured

ten minutes later they interrupt me again  
the friend is too chicken to ask  
but my daughter has been told for nine years  
she can always ask mom anything  
she asks me to show her friend  
the evidence

for about three seconds I wonder  
almost nine gestational months  
four months after that with never more  
than five consecutive hours of sleep  
enough diapers to afford us a private landfill  
in six years I never ate an Oreo cookie  
with white stuff in the middle  
crayons, spelling words, Barbie dolls  
and in the seven years since she acquired language:  
where is the kingdom of monarch butterflies?  
where is the rest of the crescent moon?  
where are my socks with Angelica Pickles?  
and why Momma, why Momma, why  
now this

her friends says it's a better scar  
than the one her father got in Vietnam



# Poem for the 7th Decade

by Errol Miller

You could ask me where I've been.  
A song for the evaporation of the old folks at home?  
Coming back around, across the Blue Mountains,  
to Higher Ground, I sense a sense  
of place...

So why not write it out.  
The coastal waters here are pretty.  
Sasha, My Lovely One, assists me  
on the Inland Sea of Change.

Listen, there are dark roads ahead,  
beautiful adobe houses, Southwestern ladders.  
Of course my ballroom words will endure, spinning,  
spinning, spinning, for it is a long way home  
& I will need company for comfort.

But what about springtime, the dancing there?  
I know it is a sacred song, given away in ceremony.  
Meanwhile, coffee simmers on wood cookstoves, I hold  
in common all creation with mankind, I have  
a long list of hopes & dreams, a  
cryptic compass acting up.





# I Never Really Liked Hemingway

by Ray Johnson

I actually wanted to purchase a Pontiac Firehawk, 5.7 liter V8, six-speed manual transmission, sun roof, the works. Instead, I ended up with a Volvo 850 four door. Darleene said the Pontiac would be a gas hog and that I should think of the environment first, myself second. So I bought the Volvo, which made Darleene happy and Standard Oil miserable.

Now I was staring at my new Volvo 850. Two very tough looking young men were sitting on the fenders of my Swedish safety machine. Another young man had his foot on the front bumper and the fourth inconsiderate was leaning against the driver's door.

Darleene and I were just returning to the car after watching an avant-garde movie. Unfortunately, avant-garde movies are usually shown in avant-garde theaters, which tend to be located in avant-garde sections of the city. The small, somewhat seedy theater had no real parking lot, so we were forced to park almost two blocks away. The area was foreboding and treacherous, and that was during daylight. Now, approaching midnight, the streets looked truly deserted and forlorn.

There was a dispirited street light burning, but it was on the other side, almost a half block away from my Volvo, which was being violated. How in God's name did I get here anyway?

Now I remember. I had suggested that we go see a new movie at the Multi-Plex, whose parking lot was not only safe, but well lit. Darleene had nixed the idea be-

cause the movie starred an actor who had recently been arrested for biting a dog. I honestly could not see where biting a dog had anything to do with the way he acted in a movie about fighting drug dealers in Colombia, but I gave way, as always.

She had read somewhere that this Czech movie was playing in the Mission District. The thought sounded bad right from the start.

Her apartment was in the Castro District and she often chided me for condemning an entire area. I always suspected that she had picked her neighborhood well, the Castro was safe. Five blocks further east and things changed dramatically. She prided herself on being able to tell her friends that she lived close to the Mission District, close enough to be able to volunteer for two hours of service on Free Food Day.

At the moment, I wished I had some of those donated cans of Hunts tomato sauce to throw at the four villains who were sitting on my Volvo. Didn't they know that I had a three hundred and ninety-six dollar car payment? Plus the insurance. We were still too far away to see their eyes, but I knew the midnight bandits were lurking like vultures, waiting to pick clean the bones of whoever was stupid enough to park in this area.

To make matters even worse, I hated the movie we had just seen. The subtitles looked like they had been written by the fourth grade class at Jefferson Elementary.

"Are you willing to die for freedom, Pazderova?"



What an idiotic question. If you're dead, you have no freedom. Had the question been "Are you willing to *live* for freedom, Pazderova?", then I would have understood and answered *yes*. To compound my misery, Darleene loved the disjointed movie. And to further vex the logical, the subtitles were not aligned with the actors' lips. There seemed to be a perpetual four second delay between when the actor said something and when the subtitle dialogue appeared on the screen. Worst of all, it was made during the Cold War and nothing was relevant. The Czechs and the Russians are now good buddies, selling each other weapons and oil.

I would have to keep quiet about this movie misadventure because my colleagues at work would die laughing at me for being dumb enough to see the movie in the first place, and even dumber for parking my car where I did. I honestly had the feeling that the theater had rented the film from the foreign movie section at Blockbuster for two dollars and then soaked me fourteen dollars to see it.

The reason I gave way so soon on the movie was because Darleene and I had a small spat earlier in the day. We were at the Academy of Sciences, in the African exhibit hall, when the tiff started. Africa made her think of wild animals and animals made her think about hunting animals. Next thing I knew she was grumbling about men who hunt animals for sport. Before I could derail her, she took off on Hemingway. I think it was the lion display that set her off.

The lion exhibition at the Academy is magnificent, with a powerful male, black mane bristling, and three sleek lionesses, plus a bunch of cubs, all staring out over

the Serengeti. I think she was secretly angry with the male lion for having so many wives, as she liked to call them. Anyway, the big male made her think of the Hemingway story where the white hunter has to save the cowardly husband from the wounded lion.

Darleene was furious with everyone involved, but mostly Hemingway. She railed against the hunter who turned and ran when the lion charged.

"But, he wounded the lion to begin with and . . ."

She snapped, "He should never even have been there! No one has a right to harm an animal, any animal, including humans."

She is both humanitarian and vegetarian, which somewhat limits where we can go when dining out. I pretend that I'm a vegetarian also, to keep peace. Sometimes I grab a Whopper or a double cheeseburger at lunch, but who's to know?

By now I was close enough to see the quartet of miscreants clearly. All four of them were staring at us like hungry jackals. They were wearing black and silver football jackets. Darleene hates football. I'm a 49ers fan.

"I think we have a problem." I lowered my voice, trying to sound profound.

She scolded me, "Never judge a book by its cover."

"I try not to, but this doesn't look good."

She attempts to find some good in everyone, except for Hemingway. Earlier I tried to explain that the character in Hemingway's story had been devastated by his own cowardice, only to be rejuvenated when he rediscovered his courage.

She had countered, "At the expense of a



poor, defenseless lion." By then she was seething. "Real courage would have been to dismiss the white hunter immediately, renounce hunting altogether, try to understand his wife, and vow never to harm man or beast again."

I had to be cautious how I responded. I was in no position to rile her. We slept together, but not on a regular basis. She felt that if we spent too much time together I would begin to encroach upon her space. So we went together, but not exclusively. She pretended that she did not see other men, but I knew better. Whenever I could not reach her, she would explain that she was out shopping or off visiting a sick friend. Unfortunately, these shopping sprees and errands of mercy usually took place on Friday or Saturday night.

Tonight was one of those rare nights when I was going to be allowed to stay over. These benefactions were infrequent enough as it was, and the last thing I needed was to confront her over some ridiculous story that was fiction to begin with. I secretly admired Macomber for overcoming his fears and standing firm against the Cape buffalo. He had faced down a marauding Cape buffalo and recovered his shattered manhood. Bravo.

I often envisioned myself, wearing an L.L. Bean bush jacket, Weatherby .460 magnum in hand, facing down a charging black rhino. My gun bearer would flinch at the sight of the onrushing rhino, two thousand pounds of death bearing down upon us. His thundering hoofbeats would rumble the arid ground beneath our feet, further terrifying my bearer. But my calm and steady manner would give him courage.

"Hold fast, Ngono. I'll stop him," I

would say in a resolute voice. "Keep the .378 backup at the ready." I would drop down to a .378 Weatherby Magnum for the coup de grace. More sporting.

"Yes, Bwana," his fears and trepidations now washed away.

I chamber the belted .460 cartridge, the nine locking lugs of the rifle bolt sounding like a bank vault closing. The rhino's beady little eyes are glaring at me, demanding, "Who is this arrogant human who dares to invade my territory?"

Dust is flying from his pounding hoofs. He snorts like an enraged dragon as he closes the distances between us. Tick birds jump from his shuddering back, like rats leaving a sinking ship. The other animals on the plain freeze in terror, knowing that the grim reaper will be coming for one of us. I can hear my bearer sucking in breath behind me. He sounds like an old steam engine, trying to negotiate a steep grade.

Once again I steady him, "Easy there, Ngono. I have him right where I want him."

"Please, Bwana, may your aim be true. I have wife and babies."

"No need to fear." I'm as steady as Gibraltar.

The rhino snorts out his rage, furious that I have not turned and dashed away in cowardice. Slowly I take the slack out of the single-stage trigger. I take three and a half pounds of pull on the three and three-quarter pound trigger. Only an angel's breath keeps the firing pin from driving forward, striking the primer and exploding the magnum powder, sending the Nosler bullet on a deadly trajectory. Just as I'm ready to squeeze . . .

"Are you daydreaming again?" Darleene sounded irritated.



"I . . . I must have been. I guess I was thinking about the African animals.

"I sincerely hope you were not wool-gathering about that insidious Hemingway story. It makes me angry just thinking about it."

"No, no, of course not. I was just wondering how they did such a marvelous job on these displays." A magnificent lie.

The displays are well lit, but the museum itself is rather shadowy, thus shielding my lying eyes. I had absolutely no desire to jeopardize what I hoped would be a banner evening.

I did not get to stop the charging rhino and instead found myself staring at four hoodlums. The two on the fenders were holding knives, their razor-sharp blades glistening in the shallow light.

"Darling, I . . . I think we should turn around and try to find a taxi instead." I did my best to sound confident, yet prudent.

"Nonsense. They're just harmless young men. If we prejudge them, just because they're minority, then we're no better than someone who listens to those terrible radio talk shows." Her voice was cheerful, very self-assured.

"My pet, they really don't look too friendly. Perhaps they've been unduly set upon by society and are . . . are looking to wreck vengeance upon anyone of another ilk."

"Don't jump to conclusions. They probably discovered something about your car that you failed to notice and are merely waiting to tell you about it." She remained dauntless.

As always, she was striding purposefully, in her sensible pumps. I normally had to hurry to keep up. Tonight was even worse

because my brain was telling my legs to slow down. Actually it was screaming out the warning.

Boom.

The roar from the .460 Weatherby Magnum was terrifying. Birds exploded from the acacia trees and hundreds of Thompson gazelles bolted as one. Wildebeasts and zebras shot forward, terrified by the thunder stick. The ferocious rhino slowed, but did not go down. He continued coming at me like a runaway freight train. My formerly faithful bearer threw the expensive .378 magnum rifle into the air and scampered for his life.

Unfortunately, he ran headlong into a wart hog that had been spooked by the roar of the powerful .460 magnum cartridge. It was a boar wart hog and we were right in the middle of rutting season. I could not stop to help Ngoni because I had my hands full with the killer rhino.

The sounds from behind me were incredible. Never had I heard such screaming and grunting. Ngoni was bellowing at the top of his lungs in Swahili and the wart hog was grunting out sounds that only another wart hog could comprehend.

I had no time for playful Serengeti games. The rampaging rhino was almost upon me, with fire blazing from those pygmy eyes. I took careful aim. Again I took the slack from the trigger.

Boom.

One of the assassins pounded on the hood of my financed Volvo.

Darlene touched my arm to calm me. "Don't get excited. They're probably just trying to see if the car is as sturdy as the ads say it is."

The two on the hood slipped menacingly



to the ground. The one by the driver's door joined them. The loser with his foot on the bumper turned to face us. By now we were close enough to see the determined looks in their evil eyes.

I mustered my courage and demanded, "What do . . . do you want, fellahs?"

They all looked to be in their late teens, a dangerous age when out at midnight on a dark and deserted street. Their leader may have been twenty; it was difficult to tell in the poor light.

The leader, who was a shade taller than the rest, said in a thievish voice, "We want your money, your watch, and . . ." he hesitated, seemingly for effect, "and your woman." He eased a wicked-looking Buck knife from an ankle sheath to emphasize his sincerity.

All of them glared at Darleene, with lust burning in their depraved eyes.

Darleene was mortified. She offered sincerely, "I . . . I volunteer at the free clinic on Ashbury on alternating Tuesdays."

This artless revelation invoked a chuckle from the menacing quartet.

The moment of truth had arrived. I was alone. No Weatherby Magnum rifle to down the rogues in front of me. No faithful bearer with a backup weapon. No white hunter to back me up with his Rigby .500 Nitro Express. It was just me and the four young assholes.

I was alone in the chilled night, armed only with my Nike Air Max trainers, with synthetic leather and breathable upper mesh. What would Macomber do?

The windshield of my Volvo had three gaping holes in the safety glass. Both right windows were completely broken out. The

left front window was cracked and the rear window was gone, vanished. The headlights, as well as the taillights, were all broken. The driver's door had been kicked in and all four tires were flat, slashed by finely honed knives.

Unfortunately, my car was in better shape than I was. Both of us had insurance, but at the moment I felt the car had gotten the best of things. I had made my decision in a heartbeat. Macomber was right the first time. That damn lion had big teeth. I bolted for safety, but not before shouting to Darleene. The shortest of the villains had just grabbed her by the wrist and she was screeching some obscenity at either him or me, I wasn't quite sure which.

"Be brave, my darling. I'm going for help." I tried to sound reassuring.

My shouting required a great deal of dexterity. Rather than shout over my shoulder, I instead turned and ran backwards, yelling as I continued running—a feat in itself.

"Fight them off, sugarplum. I'll be back with the police in no time." I flung my words over her like a protective shield.

I heard her snarl "I'll kill you for this, you bastard!" Obviously she was screaming at her young assailant. Two of the gangbangers started after me and I was forced to stop shouting my words of encouragement.

I heard one of the pursuers yell, "Get him, Ruhulio. I want them shoes." I ran even faster, for the police.

My right arm was broken in two places. Not compound breaks, thank God, but still it was in a cast. Two knuckles were cracked on my left hand. My nose was broken and



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I had three large knots on my skull. I had numerous welts on both legs and a broken big toe on my right foot. Other than that, I was in relatively good shape.

Darleene caught me just as I stepped from the elevator at work, on the eighth floor. She had one of those little wooden bats that parents buy for their children when they're too young for a real bat. The damn thing must have been made of hickory because it refused to break.

She was lurking behind a huge potted palm and jumped me like a hungry cheetah going after a springbok. She was pounding away with a vengeance when Bryce and Justin tried to pull her off. They said she turned on them, screaming something about a cowardly white hunter who ran away and left his client facing a pack of wild hyenas. Obviously they were mystified. She apparently continued pummeling away until security arrived and dragged her off me.

I never hurt so much in my entire life. She was screaming that she was going to castrate me and the two security guards were doing their best to restrain her. Their

hats were cocked off to the side and they were both panting heavily, winded from the battle. Rather than her usual stylish pumps, she had worn spike heels, to better stomp me.

When I thought they had a firm grip on her, I asked, "Darling, does this mean we're not going to the Exploratorium on Saturday?"

For some unknown reason, my innocent query seemed to set her off. She broke free from the guards and started beating on me all over again. My co-workers jumped into the fray and six of them finally subdued her.

The doctor says that I'll be as good as new in another five or six weeks. Apparently there was no lasting damage done to my testicles. My Volvo is now serviceable, but the insurance company canceled my policy. Darleene sued them as a co-principal to assault and attempted rape charges and stung them a good one.

That Macomber fellow got me into a world of trouble. I swear, I'll never read Hemingway again.

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# Slippers

by Diane Gage

Useless solo, they mate as geese do,  
or wolves, as they say: for life.  
Yawning welcome to commence shuffling  
they fluff up toes, soles and heels  
with little pillows of warm air,  
pat and soften the way  
from sleep to work and back.  
More independent than socks  
less serious than shoes  
they tread the short interior paths  
over and over  
nursing the sick  
gathering with the family  
on holiday mornings  
dashing out for newspaper or milk.  
At night they dream of opera premieres  
and glacier climbing expeditions  
or they prowl forests as giant cats  
until they wake to their job:  
whispering hearth-news  
to extremities.



# Country Roads

by Richard Dixon

Section lines, my father used to call them. A lot of them now are paved, or rather asphalted, especially closer to the large cities and towns. What I'm referring to here, though, are *dirt* roads. In dry weather, I was always accompanied by the large plume of dust trailing behind the pickup; in wet weather, I had to be careful about sliding off the roadway; that hard clay could be slick as glass. And, there was no stopping on a really wet, muddy road for fear of getting stuck.

In dry weather again, there was the dealing with the ruts, made from the rain and cast now as if in concrete; the only way to do this sanely was to straddle the original wheel tracks. Also, it paid to be careful not to drive too close to the right; erosion could take its toll, resulting in a vehicle dropping down, sliding off and ending up in the parallel bar-ditch. So, basically, about half the time the best thing to do was drive more or less in the middle of the road, with an eagle eye for any oncoming traffic.

Oh, and let's not neglect to mention those murderous washboards, able to shake the nuts and bolts loose from absolutely anything. There were two opposing theories regarding the navigation of washboards: one was to drive real slow, taking it nice and easy, and the other was to just drive like hell over them, the faster the better! And who wanted to drive slow, in the days before seat belts and the double-nickel? Of course, with the roads being under the purveyance of the county commissioner, if your family were friends with that august official, your road got graded a

lot more often. Or if your family were friends with the grader driver, same difference. My state is notorious for the poor condition of the majority of its county roads. Vermont, on the other hand, is just the opposite; so well and constantly graded it's hard to tell the difference between dirt and paved. What's the secret? A void of kickbacks and corruption, possibly?

Topping a hill, it always paid to be extra-cautious: I never knew when I might meet a farmer driving a sixteen to twenty-foot combine. Believe me, there was only room for the combine. And when I met another vehicle, usually another pickup, common courtesy dictated that we both, the other driver and I, raise our index fingers from our driving hand at the top of the steering wheel in a rural "howdy," a "Southwestern Salute." A true, born-to-the-breed country-roader never, ever drove with both hands on the wheel. Are you kidding?

As hard to drive and as fearful as those country roads could be, I miss them. Or maybe I miss that time in my life; the country Christmases, the warm Thanksgivings, the driving home in the summers, coming back from town at midnight, with both windows rolled down, inhaling the cool, crisp air of a late July evening. Maybe it has to do with innocence, and a time when that innocence was pure and pristine, no more than a year before Kennedy was killed and I was still sexually a virgin, although I was convinced otherwise; and those dirt roads are just a connection, a link, taking me from here to there.

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*Photographs by Joel Kendall*



# Straight to Heaven

by Mary F. Casey

It says they take orphans. Pa, he don't like me ridin' none. Samantha Eloise! You come on in here, c'mon out 'a there, in here, you hear? You come on inside and sit real pretty at that piano your mama used to play so nice, God rest her soul, and play me that nice tune 'a Mr. Foster's, the one about the river.

Pa, he don't like me ridin' none. Don't like it for hisself, neither. Don't like swingin' up back of a fine hard neck full 'a the smell 'a sweat and willow trees and leather and the creek south a' St. Jo.

Pa, St. Jo! Sign says they take orphans, orphans who love to ride and they throw 'em a sack a letters and parcels and such and give 'em a fine, strong pony and slap its rump and they're off outta St. Jo, hooves smackin' rock into dirt into hooves over miles of I don't know what 'cause I never been west 'a thirtymiles east of St. Jo.

Ridin' ain't no life for a girl, Pa says, whupping the wagon wheel into shape over the anvil. You go make your brothers' supper. Make them some fine chicken and collards and some 'a that apple spice pecan pie like your mama, God rest her soul, made. You go on.

Old buzzard colonel down at the store won't let me sign up for the Express. Don't take no pretty young ladies, he says, tobacco creeping outta his mouth like a loose bit. You lookin' for a husband, tho, I got some ideas for you. Some thoughts, maybe.

Pa, he won't let me ride none and I'm startin' to wake up middle of the night thinkin' how am I gonna do it? How'm I gonna get me on that pony headed west outta St. Jo toward Sacramento California heaven?

I'm tryin' Pa one more time out behind the barn as he's tarring up the wagon wheels, silver tongue of a knife flickin' back and forth 'cross that old anvil and I'm watchin' it flick and flit like a slithery old snake and seein' out the corner of my eye eight big old brothers walkin' toward the house sayin' whaddya think? more 'a that apple spice pecan tonight or maybe a truffle cake, maybe a rhubarb pie with some cream or a couple cherries or something and I feel my face goin' hot and pretty soon my hand's movin' toward the flit, flicker, snake knife and Pa he's lookin' up and I'm sayin', but you won't let me ride none and then it's done.

It says they take orphans. With my hair up under my cap and some big old baggy breaches and Pa's shirt, they don't know I'm a girl. Now I can jump on the finest, strongest, fastest pony you ever did see, mail bag over its rump, and with my back to the wind I can ride the Express outta St. Jo straight to heaven.



# Out of Chaos, the Dancing Star

by Sarah Webb

Out of chaos, the dancing star.

--*Nietzsche*

At night in the ruined city,  
there is one building still standing;  
roofless, its walls are rough blocks  
askew from foundations.  
Its pillars are thrown down.  
Its shattered fountain  
cups rainwater and rubble.  
There you will find the star moving.



# True West

by R.M. Davis

True west is far as eye can see,  
ten miles at least  
from rise to rise.

Trees, if any, in the dips and bends  
where water flows but rarely,  
or gathered as a sign  
of human intervention.

Hawks. Roadrunners.  
Crows will do.  
Few buzzards —  
death, like life, is rare.

Speech is sparse and pointed,  
salted with Spanish:  
arroyo, canyon, chapparal, mesquite,  
yucca, mesa, pinyon, juniper.

Stetsons outnumber gimmie caps.  
Skin more brown than red.  
Lips and cheeks are lean.  
Eyes slit against sun and distance.





# Conveniences of One Night

by Todd Heldt

Pretend we chose your bedspread blue,  
decided the color of the sky.  
Left on our own we could design  
a morning more artwork than scribbles:  
borderless painting.

We wake, cumbersome,  
strange to each other's arms,  
the odd closeness of breathing.  
We have been turned to salt, the taste  
on our lips. Not warm enough to feel good

about staying in bed together,  
we get up. We make the bed.  
We say words, *comfort and real*.  
Again we pretend to have made something,  
fashioned words that only apply to us.

Outside the bedroom, daylight  
is unbearable, our time after waking.  
We have made nothing. And if I look,  
the sky is more blue than anything  
I have ever imagined feeling.



# Charles Dodgson's Fantastical Basement Box

by Terri Brown-Davidson

I was accustomed to the rest of the world thinking him strange. Lord, yes. Even as a baby he had those quiescent, luminous, strangely protruding eyes. Frog Eyes, they called him. And the stammer that began quietly as a train stalling on its tracks and rose to the stuttering “whata-tat-tat” fury of a Gatling gun. Despite his eyes, he *was* pretty to look at, no doubt about it. But even from the age of seven I understood that my best defense for my brother was silence; that my best distance from him was as far away as possible; that my best endeavor on his behalf was never informing my parents about the box in the basement.

He loved to play down there. At first, alone. The basement was a shrouded affair, white-hunched with all of Mother’s old furniture layered with sheets to keep the dust out. The problem was—alas—that the old furniture was the new furniture. Mother had a thing about dirt and debris, couldn’t bear to see furniture marred through the course of everyday wear. So, as soon as we drudged ourselves out into one of those awful English yellow fogs on one of those dreadful family excursions and bought ourselves the grandest, most gleaming Windsor heirloom rocker we could find, Mother couldn’t rest until she’d ruined it for us, until she woke in the middle of the night, frowny with her wrapped head in curlers, and, all one hundred and ten pounds of her (Mother weighed exactly the same as the giant sewer rats inhabiting my nightmares), dragged that huge chair thumpitythump into the basement, wedged it against the furnace wall, draped it in sheets avidly as if it were a family-member corpse.

Of course none of us dared utter a word.

Would you?

We made no allowances for Mother except silence. After all, Mother was starkers and we all

knew it from the day we were born because she’d go into these weeping jags that never had any beginning or end. It was typical for us all to be eating our breakfast of warmed milk and rashers and Momma’d sit there with a red, soiled-looking face, sobbing into a handkerchief. “Postpartum,” the doctor said. We got used to it but the fact that her weeping seemed completely causeless was, admittedly, the source of a continuing great irritation for us, for we liked to think of ourselves as a rational family; whatever you thought of the Dodgsons personally, I know we had first-rate minds. So, gradually, as our best defense against a terrific offense, we stopped considering Mother at all. Not to be cruel, you understand: simply to face the matter square-on, practically. So, when she spoke, we’d smile vaguely in her direction, as if the orchid-and-rosebud wallpaper had sprouted a mouth. When she whimpered and carried on, we passed the Westminster bowl of peas and onions in front of her. It was the only form of emotional survival, I daresay, that we had.

Or that she offered us.

Charles, though, was different. Charles wasn’t starkers but strange. He never would read upstairs with the rest of the family but preferred the looming furniture, the amorphous shadows and shapes, of the basement. Now I believe it was because he loved to enlist that sheeted furniture as a backdrop for the fantastic mental movies he’d project against all that onstretching white, as if it were a screen. This in the age before movies were even invented. But he was amazingly ahead of his time in so many respects, though sometimes, as in a badly perspectived portrait painting, where the subject scarcely appears to be inhabiting the framed territory of the canvas, I think of Charles as in front of his time instead of ahead of it: don’t you see, there’s



a universe of stagnant distinction attached to that phrase.

His play in the basement was orderly, progressive, because the Dodgsons are a logical people. First the toy soldiers were lined up, the reds against the blacks. Then the initial shots were fired, and some men went down, were carried most tenderly in a tiny strip of sheet Charles had purloined from the furniture drapes to the little military hospital Charles had set up near Mother's stored nightstands. Sometimes the soldiers suffered greatly because they were men of action, men of war, and we could hear their keening through the basement vents. Other times they died quickly and mysteriously and tragically, but always with Charles' concerted attempts to revive them, restore their spirits, pull them, resurgent with a newfound happiness, laughing back to life. The fact that this didn't happen often wasn't his fault. It demonstrated, simply, that he was a realist. In this rigorous game called "life," Charles might've said then, referring, perhaps, to his own situation, there are always more losers than winners.

It's a mathematical inevitability.

Still, he was so devoted to the soldiers that I was surprised, startled even, when the box first appeared. One morning the soldiers stopped scaling the good living-room set and retired to their respective camps or were shipped home in body bags or, more horribly, were listed as Missing in Action: Charles posted a list on the gray-slab door of the basement. For days the soldiers were everywhere, rolling wounded across the sweat-oozing floor, wrapped smothering in a thick wad of sheets stuffed into the padded armcushion of an easy chair, lying gasping for breath with their life-blood flowing out across the basement stairs. Then Charles simply scooped them under a divan and declared that, by order of the king, the war was officially over. Charles was weary of the agony, exhausted

with the perpetual wounds, suffering, bloodshed. The soldiers had all died or gone home: more, we simply didn't need to know.

The box appeared that same morning, clutched too tightly under Charles' trembling arm.

It was a soggy affair, a damp, water spotted square of gray cardboard that looked as if it'd been plucked from the nearby pond before completely submerging. "What have you got there, Charles?" I demanded, trailing him to the stairs. Charles nodded abruptly with that grim adult way he had, never guessing, since I was the family's baby, the family's pet, that I spied on him all the time, that I dislike secrets—and especially his—with all the forthright detestation we Dodgsons are capable of harboring. So, when Charles scooted immediately downstairs with his mystery box, I was hanging on the railing, tracking his every move, determined not to let my odd-man-out quarry get away.

He bore it rapidly down, thrust together into a clump the Jack-in-the-Box dangling clownface-out from his painted garish canister, the *Young Masters of Science* series he'd been studying on the subjects of Botany and Exciting Varieties of Flightless Birds, dropped in his brown-velvet knickers to the concrete floor, lifted the lid for a peek. Though I practically slid down the banisters, struggling for a better glimpse, though I killed the light in the foyer so he'd have absolutely no clue I was hovering, that's all I could see: his lifting the lid, removing the lid, taping the lid down before he retired to the back of the basement, located our old goldfish bowl, discarded after all our fish had floated in a single day submissively belly-up, rinsed out the bowl at the cast-iron sink, filled it with water dense with dispersing matter, for we didn't have the cleanest pipes. Then, chuckling, I swear—chuckling—this, from the dourest boy on God's green Earth, he carried the bowl carefully, at arm's-length, straight beneath the stairs, where, though I was as frustrated as any spoiled miss under similar





Photograph by Joel Kendall

swung my body half-out into space for a keener look, I saw nothing except Charles disappearing beneath.

The first of many vanishing acts, wouldn't you say?

The next day *she* showed up, and weren't all of us surprised? Knocked a fine strong rapping at our brass lion's head, then, when my father swung open the door, was standing there boldly, insouciantly, as a crimson tulip in January snow, the prettiest little girl I'd ever seen, with waist long brown ringlets curled, I suspected, with a veritable dozen rags, and a dress frock the color of plums, and such a lovely silky sash I, who pretended not to be interested in girlish things, felt my mouth water. "Well, let her in, you two," Mother commanded from her knitting, in a startling act of self-assertion, "let's not all be dolts," and, our mouths popping open, both Father and I stepped back from the door. "I've come for Charles, if you please," the little girl said, and, nodding, smiling, pointing, we indicated to that fairy creature exactly where her scary beast dwelled—which was, of course, in the basement.

All that afternoon I struggled to get a look, but Mother wouldn't let me. Decorum, she told me, forbade me from invading Charles' privacy, though I thought it was only Mother. But a secret jealousy nibbled at me viciously (what Mother called the Green Worm of Envy) and I listened to them laugh, their musical voices floating upstairs when we sat down at four to tea, rattled our good china cups, straining a little to catch their voices until all of us, collectively, realized what we were doing, and then we had the excellent grace to stop.

And the next morning at breakfast I asked him, point-blank, what he'd been doing all those hours with Young Miss in private, demanded to know what, exactly, he thought he was doing, until Mother insisted in her new firm voice that I stop. Somnolent, introspective as ever, Charles buttered his toast with a scrape, layered on the apricot jam, sipped his Earl Grey. I was furious that he wouldn't divulge his secret, furious at Mother's insistence that I not try: truly, I considered them both weaklings, was enraged that they'd seemed, in one of those intuitive flashes that can illuminate a life, to have discovered each other, fathomed the essence of each other's unfathomable being, this knowledge making them both powerful as little tin gods in our household.

That day, when Mother was calling up the grocer for a shoulder of new spring lamb, I sneaked to the stairs. And caught him, again, with the box. He was cradling it, cooing to it as if it were an infant in swaddling clothes. The cardboard looked a little soggy, a little droopier; Charles carried it under the stairs again, to the goldfish bowl, I presumed, and came out with an empty, lidless box, wiped down the dilapidated cardboard with a rag, placed the box carefully in a corner for some undetermined future use.

At ten a.m., when Young Miss Beautiful showed up on our doorstep, Poppa and I simply smiled and let her in and pointed toward the stairs.

At lunch, after she'd departed, I plied Charles with my usual questions, pleading, hoping, praying. "No," he said, "no," to my repeated yearnings for information. At the sink, when Mother started singing "Evangeline" under her breath, I knew that she knew.

That very night, I'd determined, I'd learn Charles' secret, too.

The moon, that night, was full and russet as a cast-iron pot. But I waited until it was gone. Vanished into a thickening swirl of white clouds banking sky. Sucking in my breath, I crept out of bed in my nightgown, checked on my parents, who were sleeping, checked on Charles: he had a blank look when asleep that could only be described as "angelic," as if those surges of self-doubt that tormented him during the day were wiped clean nights from consciousness. I left him then, dreaming or not, face up in his bed, snapped on the foyer light, stairs light, crept down the basement stairs.

The box was empty. That much I could ascertain in a second. And even worse for wear, the cardboard puffed out, sodden as the drowned, the lid caving in with an inaudible sigh. But it was what was underneath the stairs I sought so avidly, violently, my blood rushed vibrating into my chest; I felt scalded under the influence of a pulsing crimson tide. *Enough*, I chided myself. *Enough*. The mystery was ending. All, soon, would be revealed. I slipped under the basement stairs and saw the goldfish bowl, glinting like thinned milk in the eerily translucent light.

At first I saw only faces. Pressed up in clumps, mouths extended. And I was confused and thought, *Are there babies in that bowl?* Then, I realized I'd been wrong. Though the basis for my error was rooted in the intensely human apparition of those clustering visages which, childlike, pushed up against one another, staring toward me, beguiling me, faces expressive of some blank inner yearning I couldn't quite fathom until I recalled Charles'



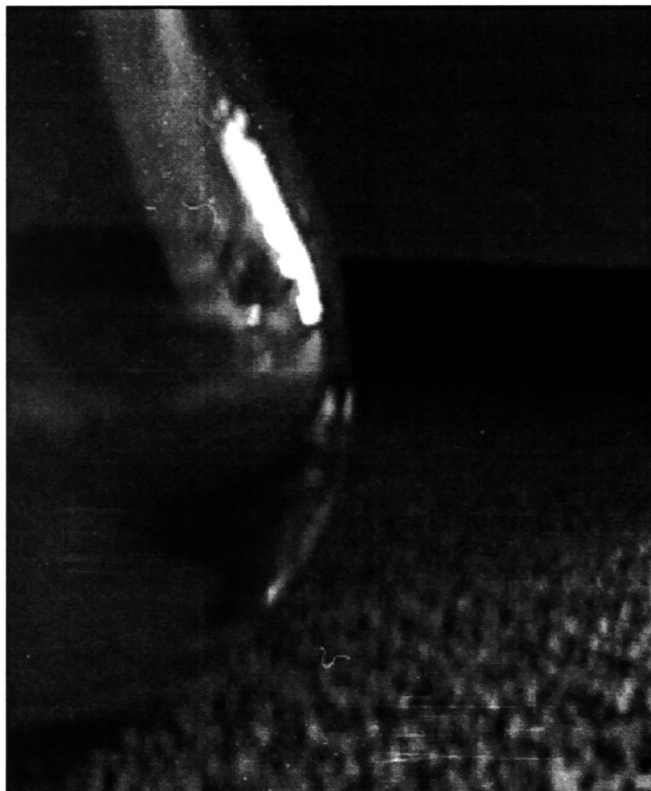
sleeping countenance upstairs.

And then I realized there were eight or nine frogs in that bowl. A lid had been fashioned with a dozen air holes, taped firmly over the top, and the frogs breathed deeply, longingly, though they were doomed to remain partly submerged in the terrarium Charles'd prepared. And then, much to my horror, astonishment, I understood as quickly as one understands, in those precipitous moments in dreams, that one's lover is dead, that one's life is over, that something was *wrong* with those frogs—all were missing a leg, a foreleg, an eye, or possessed some inexplicable facial deformity that rendered them grotesque.

And then I couldn't breathe, his cold clammy hand clapped over my mouth.

And when he released me, turned me around, I knew, exhaling, that I could be silent. That it mustn't be his fault. Charles took my hand, led me to the stairs; I sat down with him, uncertainly, on that rickety bottom step, still lightheaded with what I'd seen.

"I didn't do it," Charles said. "I mean, I know you don't think I—I just found them that way. In the pond. Some had eye infections and some had broken legs and some had skin diseases and some just looked sore or bloody all over. And they would've died like that, so I decided to bring them here. Bring them home. You know—" and here his voice got a little dreamy—"all my life I've had this really weird feeling about myself, growing up. Something strange, something that made me feel as if I were set apart, didn't belong. But these frogs have made me feel as if I do belong, after all. As if I had—a purpose. Oh, I know it sounds silly, but I love taking care of them, and they're the only thing I've actually ever felt truly belongs to me." He peered around into the darkness, furtively, leaned over, seized my hand. "But you won't tell, will you, Sis? Won't tell Father? Because you know how he is. He



Photograph by Joel Kendall

wouldn't like it at all. Wouldn't think it's . . . hygienic."

"And Mother's been keeping this a secret from him?" I asked.

Charles averted his eyes.

"I'll keep your secret for you," I breathed, suddenly, clasping his hand. "Charles, I'd be proud."

Slowly, in that greenish glimmer of underwater darkness, he managed a smile.

And it was true, what I said. I did feel proud. I look back on that day and try to analyze the emotions as I watch myself, with Mother, cutting up carrots under running water in the sink, listening to Charles and Beautiful Little Miss laughing and playing downstairs, and everything is a swirl of white snowlight through the window and winter settling down somnolent as a fattened Arctic bear over trees and Father standing stiffly, like a statue carved of warping wood, staring out the window, biting down on the stem of his pipe and wishing, I



suppose, that he were anywhere but here while Mother and I grow closer and closer, cocooned in our secret as I tear the lettuce apart with too-cold hands and place the radishes just so on top of the garden salad and the house grows warm and misted with our closeness until we can almost ignore Father, just as we once ignored Mother, whom now I've grown to love.

And I know, as we eat our salads delicately, careful not to bite down on the tines of our forks, as Father calls Charles more and more peremptorily to dinner, his forehead swelling red with rage, that Mother and I both pray that the laughter downstairs will never end while accepting that it must, it must, life is as much a passage into suffering as it is into joy, and, for us, I feel, for Charles, that journey is only beginning.

And the day, finally, we hear the shouts from downstairs and Miss Beautiful in her knee socks and ravishing red-gold dress comes pounding up with a wildly flushed face and glittering cold eyes and runs out the front door without even calling goodbye, I sense that the time is near for that journey to begin. I glance at Mother, who's reading a novel in the breakfast nook, who places a finger against a page to mark her place, Mother, whose face darkens quietly as if she's just received word of a death in the family, and I wait for her to nod and, when she does, quietly I travel downstairs.

All the basement lights have been turned off. But I see him, sitting silently, hunched, in the shadows, in the farthest corner of the basement, slumped so low his head and chest are wedged tightly against his legs. And when he sees me, he nods, but so mechanically I know something has begun and I feel lightheaded, almost exhilarated, with a foreknowledge of pain, and I sink down next to him on the cold cracked concrete and wordlessly we both stare at the drained and empty goldfish bowl while I wait for him to speak.

'We had a fight,' he says, finally.

I wait but now I close my eyes and the no-light against my lids is darker than the no-light in the basement.

'We had a fight,' he starts again. "And the frogs are dead."

"She or you?"

"She killed them," he says. "She killed them. With a pair of scissors. In my whole life, I've never imagined that people could be so cruel."

And, though I'm agreeing with him and sharing his incredulity because—my God—who wouldn't?, some strange power in me is tamping my words down, dissipating the hot white wave of rage I'd love to sink in, drown in, Miss Beautiful's face sucked with me into that maelstrom.

But I suppress everything I'm thinking and believing, and what I finally say is, "Charles . . . Life by its nature is cruel, don't you think?"

And I wrap my arms around him then quickly, quickly, before he's lost, and I can tell, from the warmth seeping into my bodice, that he's quietly, desperately crying, and he stammers out a few words I can't understand, because his stutter is so bad, but beneath the surface of our suffering, as we're holding tightly to each other in that basement, so fiercely I imagine us as a statue with locked heads and torsos, something beautiful beneath that surface is growing and developing and emerging: Alice is sitting in a boat with the Reverend Charles Dodgson, who's suffused with love when he studies her, whose empathic eyes shine radiant with longing, and Alice Uddell and her sisters and the Reverend Charles Dodgson sprawl in that langorous boat as it glides along the riverbank on a brilliant, sweltering day toward the rabbithole, toward his destiny, toward Charles Dodgson's second glorious plummeting into pain.





From the Diary of Sophia Starling  
Early January 1874  
A Shack Between South Park and Denver

by Robert Cooperman

Just as our legs were about to crack  
like the limbs of trees used  
for too many executions,  
we found this abandoned ranch cabin.  
John breathed warmth into my frozen fingers,  
both of us glad to have left the company  
of vampirish Mr. Crane.

We spoke not a word all evening,  
the loose shutters echoing my heart.  
John fed the fire with logs  
he had hatcheted from a pine beside the shack.  
I never asked, never fail to wonder  
why he doesn't grow a beard to hide his scars.

My fingers darted to them, smooth  
as a snake one dreads will be oily.  
I ran my hand along the raised edges—  
not thinking of my forwardness—  
heard a purring rise in his throat,  
felt a warmth spread inside me—  
spilled tea on a skirt,  
but none of its accompanying clamminess. . . .

He sleeps curled like a wolf.  
The heat ebbs from my stomach;  
embers pop like tiny pistol shots.  
What occurred earlier can never be repeated.  
Cruel of me to melt, even once,  
into sweetness and his world—  
as we draw closer to Denver, my train to New York,  
the steamer to the England I left,  
a staid life that begins to glitter.

John Sprockett too much the bear  
when I close my eyes  
and recall his drunken rages—  
even when weighed against the heights  
we soared to, eagles rising to Heaven.  
Ladies, when they travel,  
must be untouchable as saints and angels.



# Sophia Starling Arrives with John Sprockett in Gold Creek, Colorado Territory, Early 1874

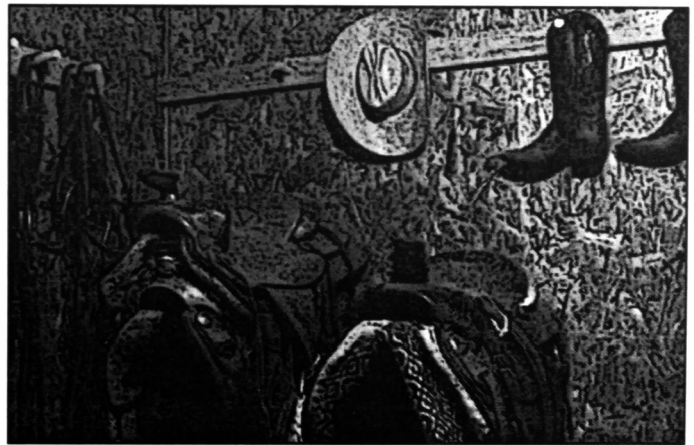
by Robert Cooperman

Though we've stumbled ten miles  
in waist-high snow, I feel no gratitude  
for this town, as foul as any hole  
since apes, or angels, fell from trees,  
or heaven, into caves dank as crypts:  
a livery, a jail, and the saloon-hotel  
that doubles as a courtroom  
when the circuit judge isn't drunk.  
Beds upstairs for exhausted miners,  
and for poor drabs who have bartered  
their hearts for money from strangers.

Meals are being served.  
I cling to John's arm, a child  
afraid to be splattered by bullies.  
One terrific glare from Mr. Sprockett  
and all eyes drop to their hands,  
as men once trembled  
at black welts of plague.

One night of no longer being a maiden  
and the world seems depraved to me:  
this fetid saloon—tobacco smoke  
like the fumes of Hell—those beds  
with barely a curtain instead of a decent door.  
I fear Mr. Sprockett will try with force  
what I yielded to for love.  
He seemed dear as a play-panda last night,  
not this walking scarred horror  
infamous for the rage I've ignored.

I can barely touch my half-cooked meat.  
"This flea-bag has one private room,"  
Mr. Sprockett advises. "Use the lock."  
I touch his hand in gratitude,  
love flooding like Juliet's.  
He pulls back as if from a scorpion.



*Photograph by C. Michael McKinney*



# Mary LaFrance, Prostitute, Gold Creek

by Robert Cooperman

One look at John Sprockett's face  
and spiders are walking all over my belly:  
that evil eye ripped out by a grizzly,  
claw marks jagged as Satan plowing his cheek.  
An ugly heart too, always sizing up a fight  
when he's downed enough rot-gut  
to kill most of the men sipping as far  
from him as the walls will allow.

"What you gawking at?" he'll snarl.  
One feller laughed once, and was dead  
before the guffaw could roar out of him.  
Now, boys just mumble apologies,  
knees knocking like the nutcracker  
I saw in Mr. Smith's window one Christmas.  
The other girls hate him too,  
afraid he'll tear our throats out  
like that grizzly should've done to him,  
though he's always polite with all of us.

So you could've knocked me flat  
with a tail feather when he traipsed in,  
an Englishwoman on his arm,  
her eyes superior slits.  
Yet something in the way she held him:  
heart-shot by that murderer.  
And him stately, sober as Lincoln.

They ate so silent you could hear  
the whiskers growing out of Sid's nose.  
Sprockett set the key for the one private room  
in her hand, escorted her upstairs.  
I thought we'd hear the bed creaking  
like a stage chased by bandits.  
But he thumped back down,  
men hiding smiles behind swigs of liquor.

Silence sank into the warped floorboards  
while he sat in a corner and glared,  
big as a bear, waiting for the least excuse  
to toss someone through the window,  
and business slow enough  
I wouldn't have minded the excitement.



# John Sprockett Sits Alone in the Saloon at Gold Creek

by Robert Cooperman

Each bottle on the bar whispers, "Drink me!"  
For once, trembling, I resist their whore's call.  
Miss Starling's asleep upstairs—  
after our trek through snow deep as quicksand.  
I told her to use the key.

Last night in that shack above the timber?  
A fluke of love I had no right to expect,  
but wanted more than breath:  
Miss Starling's skin white against the fire;  
my heart pounding like a drum on the Fourth.  
After, I pretended sleep while she wrote;  
I couldn't have read her words any clearer  
if I'd stared over her shoulder:  
"My one misstep with Mr. Sprockett."  
Just sensing she felt that way maddens my blood  
for her like a bear swatting a hive for honey.  
I made her lock her door against me,  
not from these mine-rats and trappers.

As each layer of her clothes came off  
she was saying good-bye and thank you,  
"For showing me Colorado, for not  
stealing my money and killing me."  
A whore who thinks she knows me stalks  
past my table, enough hate in her face  
to knock me across the room.  
For spite, I'd invite her to sit and drink,  
talk to her polite as a preacher at Sunday dinner,  
but I'd wind up guzzling from the spout,  
and smashing the door in, and killing us both.



# Sophia Starling Records How John Sprockett Found Her Mount

by Robert Cooperman

My heart swelled almost for my sister  
when Mr. Sprockett led Wren from the livery—  
a miracle in this Sodom of a mining town.  
I had spent the night too trembly to sleep,  
expecting him to break down my door:  
infected by the sour odours of lust and drink  
that rose from the saloon below.  
A lady traveling alone must be impeccable,  
and I've fallen, if only one avalanche of dalliance.

Still, when he sauntered up with my mare,  
saddled and bridled, I wanted to melt like pooled wax.  
His own stallion lost in the storm,  
a huge, gentle gelding trailed behind,  
obedient as a sheep dog.  
“She must've smelled hay and other horses,”  
he chuckled to remember Wren's running off  
when attacked by that mountain lion months ago.  
“Stable owner didn't charge a cent  
when he saw whose mount she was.  
Called it an honor to hold her for me,  
and said I could have this one free,”  
he grinned, patted the sleek, dun neck.  
“Swore it was good publicity for his trade.”

I stared until his eye dropped with shame,  
his reputation enough to mold most to his wishes.  
He gave me a leg up, smeared blacking  
against snow-blindness; a dear man,  
and the danger that shimmers off him  
stirs something wholly un-English in me.  
If he were to lead me to that locked room,  
no telling what mischief might transpire.

To be continued in future issues.

Cooperman's poems are from *The Badman and the Lady* soon to be published by Basfal Books.



## Contributors

**Richard N. Bentley's** stories have appeared in such publications as *Michigan Out Of Doors*, *Paris Transcontinental*, *Southern Indiana Review*, and *Pleiades*. He won the Paris Review/Paris Writers' Workshop International Fiction Award for 1994. He is a graduate of Yale and the Vermont College MFA in Writing program. An urban planner by training, he served as Chief Planner for the Mayor's Office of Housing in Boston, and teaches creative writing at the University of Massachusetts, Holyoke Community College, and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (formerly North Adams State).

**Terri Brown-Davidson** holds the PhD, MFA, and M A in creative writing. Recently she was announced as a 1998 *The Literary Review*/Web del Sol Featured Writer. She published an additional chapbook of her work in the spring 1998 *The Literary Review* "Emerging Writers" print issue. Her collection *Rag Men* won *The Ledge* 1994 Annual Chapbook Competition. Individual poems, short stories, and novel excerpts have appeared in or are forthcoming from more than four-hundred national and international journals, including *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *TriQuarterly* 86, *TriQuarterly* 90, *The Literary Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *Puerto del Sol*; twenty pages of her poetry are featured in *TriQuarterly's* first anthology of emerging writers, *TriQuarterly New Writers* (Northwestern University Press, 1996).

**Mike Carson** lives in southern Indiana, and has published poems in *The New Virginia Review*, *The Southern Review*, and *The Spoon River Quarterly* among others.

**Mary F. Casey** is a playwright and fiction writer with an MFA from UCLA. She writes mostly about the West and is currently at work on a stage play about women and horses.

**Robert Cooperman's** second collection, *The Badman and the Lady*, is forthcoming from Basfal Books. His work has appeared in *The Centennial Review*, *Cimarron Review*, and *North Dakota Quarterly*. His first book, *In the Household of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, was published by the University Press of Florida.

**Robert Murray Davis** is a professor of English at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. He has published several dozen poems in literary magazines such as *Westworld*, and personal essays about the West in *Cimarron Review*, *Redneck Review of Literature*, and other quarterlies. His most recent book, *A Lower-Middle-Class Education* (Oklahoma, 1996) is his second volume of reminiscent social history.

**Richard Dixon** lives in Norman. He has spent the last

thirty years teaching school, the last fifteen of those as a high school teacher working with students with learning disabilities. He is also a tennis coach. His published work is included in anthologies of poetry and fiction of the *Individual Artists of Oklahoma*, as well as various other anthologies and chapbooks.

**Diane Burdick Gage** was born in Montana and now resides in San Diego. Gage works on both sides of the poetry/art border. Later than ever Press (Ed. Fred Moramarco) published her chapbook *That Poem, Etc.* in 1994, individual works have appeared in various magazines in the U.S. (*Cafe Solo*, *Plainsong*, *Seattle Review*), and recent art venues include Arrowmont College in Tennessee and the Athenaeum Music/Arts Library in La Jolla, California. She studied formally at Arizona State and Duke, teaches occasional workshops and classes, and engages in some freelance journalism. Recent projects that include poetry along with visual art, participatory events, installations, etc., include "Mom's Nuke" and "Women at the Edge of Language." Her poem, "Slippers," has been awarded an honorable mention by the National League of American Pen Women in their 1998 International Poetry Contest.

**Gordon Grice's** book of creative nonfiction, *The Red Hourglass* is forthcoming in April from Delacorte Press. It details the lives of rattlesnakes, black widow spiders, and other citizens of Oklahoma. The Book of the Month Club has picked it up as an alternate main selection. He contributes an occasional article to *Oklahoma Today*. His other credits in poetry and nonfiction include *Harper's*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, *The Best American Essays 1996*, and others. Grice is a resident of Guymon, Oklahoma.

**John K. Hayden** has been teaching European history at SWOSU for seven years. He hails from the Bronx, New York. After finishing college at Georgetown University, he went on to earn his MA and PhD in History at the University of Virginia.

**Todd Heldt** attends graduate school in literature at Texas Tech where he is studying verse under the guidance of Bill Wenthe. He has published poetry in journals such as *Birmingham Review* and *North Texas Review*.

**Ray Johnson** has published two novels: *The In Vitro Madonna* and *Disappearances*. He also wrote the screenplay for the movie, *Texas Tall Man*. He lives in Clovis, California and is enrolled in the MFA program at Fresno State University.

**Edward C. Lynskey's** work has appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Southwest Review*.



**Janet McCann** has published widely in literary and popular journals, including *Kansas Quarterly*, *Parnassus*, *Nimrod*, *Sou'wester*, *New York Quarterly*, *Tendrill*, *Poetry Australia*, and *McCall's*. She has won three chapbook contests sponsored by Pudding Publications, Chimera Connections, and Franciscan University Press. She is interested in animal rights, spiritual poetry, and the problems of middle-aged women.

**Errol Miller** has recently published in *American Poetry Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Rhino*, *Rio Grande Review*, *Rain City Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Santa Clara Review*, *Santa Barbara Review*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *Centennial Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Nebraska Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Sulphur River Literary Review*, *RE:AL*, *Alabama Literary Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Greensboro Review*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *Savannah Literary Review*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Laurel Review*, *Cumberland Poetry Review*, *River City*, *Maryland Review*, *Potomac Review*, *Wallace Stevens Journal*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Georgetown Review*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, and *Blueline*. Work is forthcoming in *Seattle Review*, *Crazyquilt*, *Roanoke Review*, *Georgetown Review*, *Arkansas Review*, *Centennial Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Rhino*, etc. Recent chapbooks are *The Downtown Diner*, *Blue Atlantis*, *This Side of Chicago*, and *The Writer's Ancestral Sense of Place*. New, larger collections include *Forever Beyond Us*, and *Downward Glide*. Forthcoming larger collections are *Bittersweet Blues*, *After the Dreamship Crashed*, and *Literary Junkies*. Several of his poems have been nominated for Pushcart Prizes. Examples of his work appear in several issues of *Poet's Market*.

**Julie O'Neal Fulton** is a Weatherford native. She earned her undergraduate degree at SWOSU, where she majored in both history and psychology. Presently, she is pursuing a law degree at the University of Oklahoma.

**Charles Rafferty's** first full-length collection of poems was published by the University of Arkansas Press; *The Man on the Tower* won the 1994 Arkansas Poetry Award, selected by Susan Ludvigson. In addition, he has published two chapbooks: *The Wave That Will Beach Us Both* and *The Bog Shack*. Currently, he is an editor for a computer consulting firm and the book review editor of *Hellas*.

**Cherri Randall** is currently an English major on the creative writing track at Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma. She is a non-traditional student who has published a local newspaper column for over four years and has published articles in several national magazines. Additionally, she has had poems published in the *Cameron Forum*; *Cooweescoowee*;

*SPSM&H*; *The Rose Review*; the *English Major*, and *Offerings*.

**Sarah Webb** teaches in the English department at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma and lives in Chickasha with her daughter. Her poems and essays have appeared in *Apalachee Quarterly*, *The Oklahoma English Journal*, *Bomb*, *Poets of Oklahoma*, *The Magazine of Speculative Poetry*, *Zen Gong*, *Zen Bow*, and other publications.

**Sondra Dutreau Williams** is known as "Mushroom Lady" on the Internet, and is a writer and a theatre Artist-in-Residence with the Oklahoma Arts Council. Fungiphiles can visit Lost Creek Mushroom Farm in Perkins, Oklahoma, online at <http://www.cowboy.net/~lcmf>.

### Illustrations

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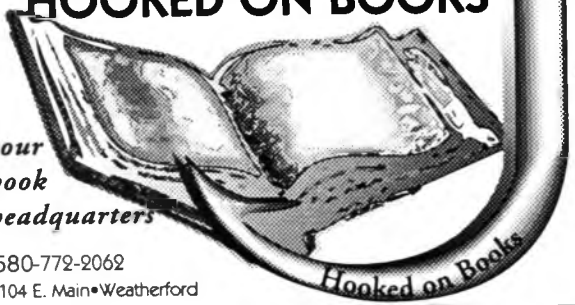
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