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A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

WESTVIEW

VOLUME 15

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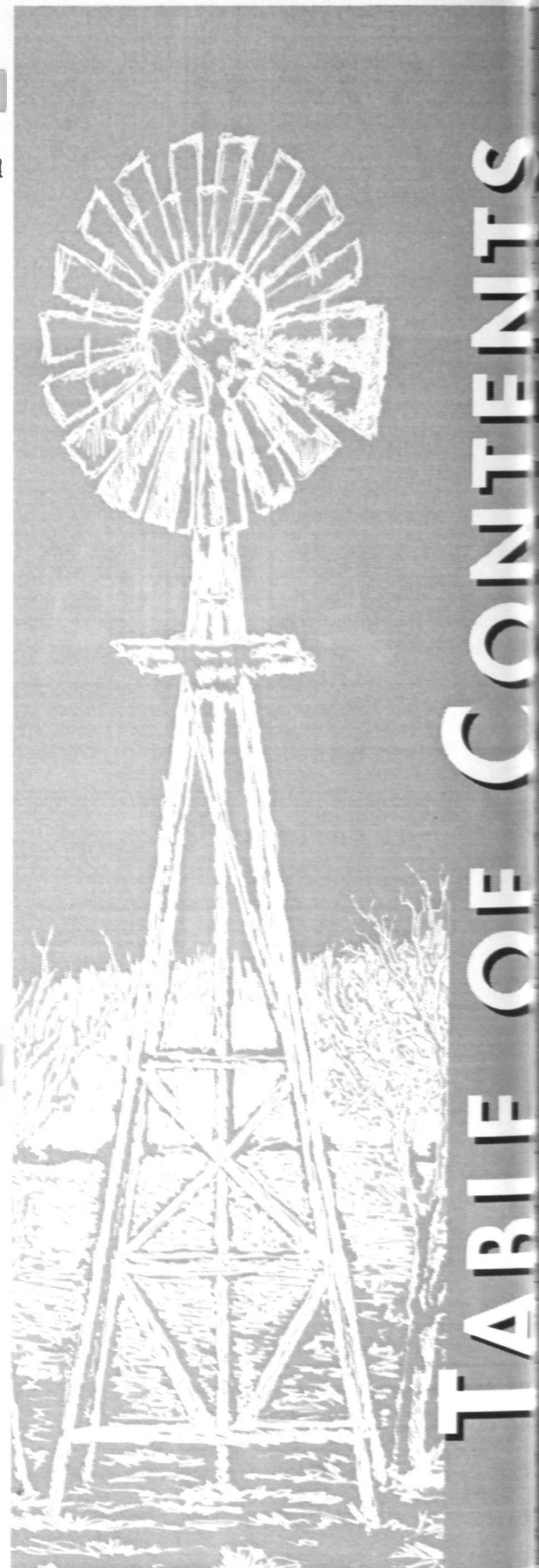


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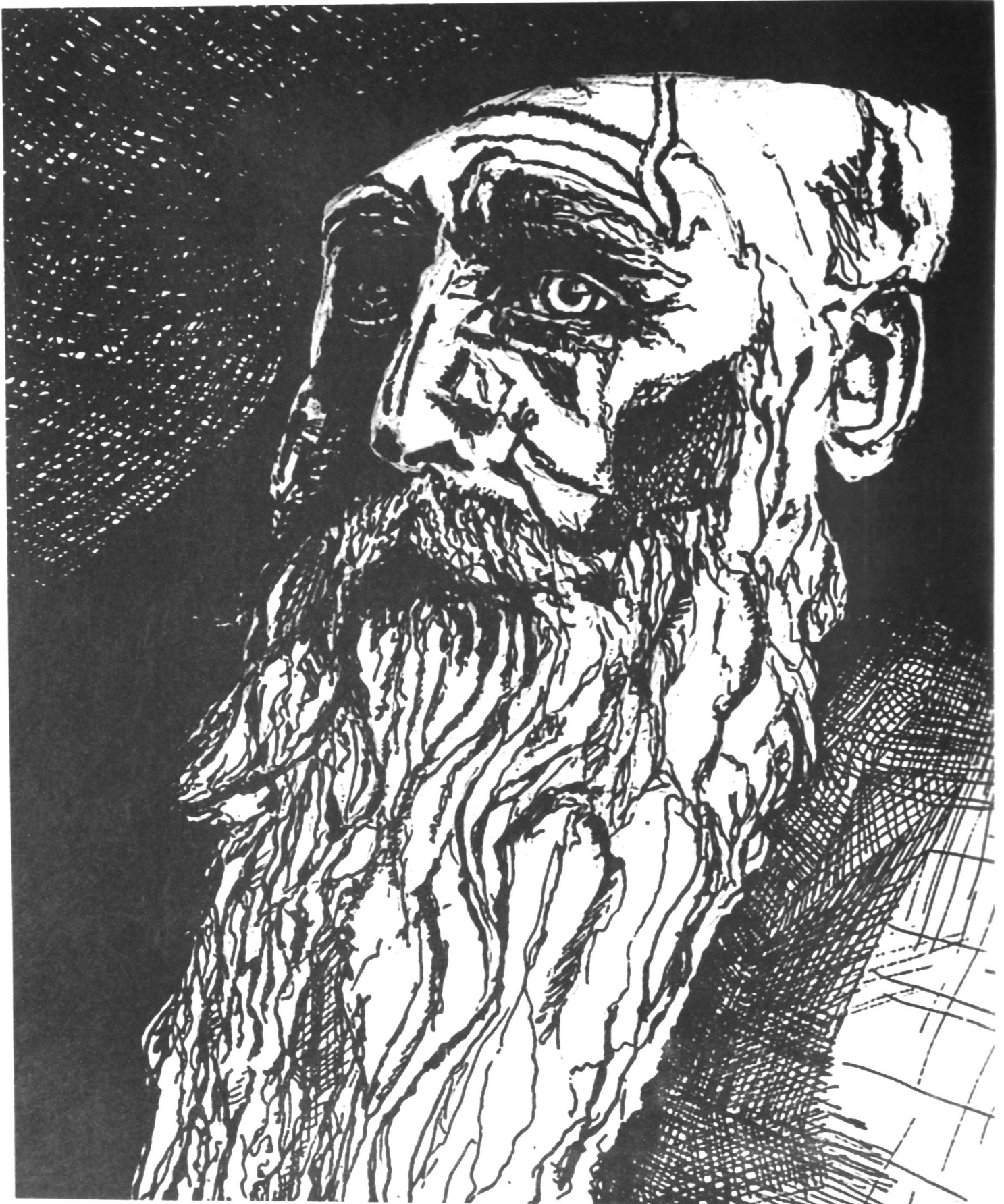


ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS HENSON

ON THE WAY TO THE CHEROKEE STRIP

by Elmer Suderman

On his way to the Cherokee Strip
to homestead a quarter section of land
father in his lumber wagon
followed hard-packed Chisholm Trail
where millions of longhorn cattle
had once raised clouds of dust
from the Rio Grande to Abilene.

All day in September's silent,
creeping hours the wagon,
slow as the long day,
creaked slowly beyond church bells
and smell of home baked bread,
beyond windmills and osage orange hedges,
across enormous blue-sky,
wind-and-sun prairie,
through Newton, Wichita, Wellington,
Caldwell, Medford, Enid, Hitchcock.

In vast, enormous land,
horizon as far away at end
as at beginning of day,
he saw neither beginning nor end,
the only change shadows,
rearranged by shape-shifting thunder heads.

It was a long and lonely trip.

ISABELLA

by Elmer Suderman

Yes, I can tell you how to get to Isabella.
It's best to start at Fariview.
Go south on Main Street and drive two miles.
Turn left at the first black top.
Be careful. It's hard to see
and easy to pass up,
and who knows where you'd
end up going south.
Go east past wheat land
and oil wells. Look south
to see the land billowing
toward the gypsum hills
you can barely see
far off in the distance.
When you see scrub oaks
you're close to Isabella.
You will have driven about ten miles,
but you won't see any sign of a town.
It's hidden in the black jacks.
Watch carefully and you'll see the sign
on the left for the Isabella Church of the Nazarene,
and on the right a billboard for
THE GOLDEN SUNSHINE FRUIT AND NUT COMPANY.
You'll miss the road,
but don't worry. Go to the next corner,
about a block ahead. Turn there:
that's your last chance.
Take it even if it's gravel and sand.
You'll pass the schoolhouse
on the left and on the right
the place where my brother John
used to live. He made the sandy
soil bloom and peas, potatoes,

corn, cabbage, carrots, cantaloupes
and watermelons grow.
He also milked a goat.
That way he could live on his
\$30 a month salary and have enough
left over to pay off the loan
on the house and five acres.
Don't look for the house and garden.
They're no longer there
and the goat long since dead.
Keep driving until you get
to the end of the road and turn west.
It's not far. Now you're on
Isabella's Main Street or will be
in another block when you'll see
a filling station on the right
and a little further on an empty building.
My brother worked at the filling station
and my father was the treasurer
of The Farmer's Union Exchange Company,
a hardware store, which seemed
a lot bigger sixty some years ago.
At the end of the block you make
a U-turn where the wheat elevator
and the depot used to be
just beyond Reeves Confectionery
in the front room of their house
which isn't there either.
On the way back — you're going east now—
you'll notice another empty building.
That was Cheese Schultz's grocery store.
You'll see about ten pickups parked in the middle

of Main Street. I don't know what they're
doing there. Nothing seems to be open,
The Countryside Cafe looks closed,
and the post office in the building
across from the Farmer's State Bank
which was bought out by the Fairview State Bank
years ago looks deserted.
We used to play croquet behind
the bank building. Now you can turn
right on the street you missed coming in.
Go back to the east-west blacktop
and retrace your way back to Fairview.
Be sure to look for Lone Peak
the free standing hill on the northwest
end of hills we call the Gloss Mountains.
You can't miss Isabella
if you know where it is.

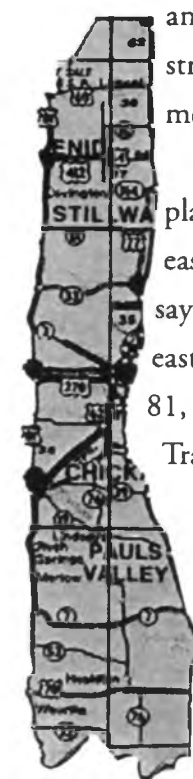
PLACE & PLACES IN OKLAHOMA: THE EAST, THE WEST, AND THE PANHANDLE

by Alvena Bieri



very long has heard of Gotebo. I know I have because I grew up in the metropolis of Hobart, a few miles west. Named for a minor Kiowa chief, Gotebo is the Oklahoma symbol for small and out-of-the-way. So in Oklahoma we hear "OU and OSU get a variety of students, many from high schools in Tulsa and Oklahoma City and occasionally somebody from—Gotebo," or "Our station's T.V. coverage is geared to urban areas, but we probably have viewers in places, oh, like—Gotebo."

Out-of-the-way-ness is relative, of course. Do you know where people in Gotebo go for a good time? They go to Hobart. And the people from Hobart go to Altus or Clinton. And the people from there go to Oklahoma City. Where they go, I'm not sure. As somebody who grew up believing Stillwater was a cosmopolitan city,



anything much bigger than Oklahoma City stretches my bright-lights, urbanized-excitement fantasies to their limits.

Oklahoma is at least three different places. It's a state with real-life divisions—eastern, western, and the panhandle. Some say Interstate 35 is the dividing line between east and west. Others say it's really Highway 81, roughly the route of the old Chisholm Trail.

Differences between east and west abound. Eastern Oklahoma was Indian Territory, southern in outlook, culture, and sympathies, despite the bad experiences of The Five Civilized Tribes

A resident of Santa Fe, New Mexico tried to call home from New York City with the help of the operator. "Hold on," the operator said, "it's going to take a little longer to place a call outside the United States." Yep, that's what she said. I'm big on knowing not just where places are, but on having a real sense of Place. I think we need to know where we came from, where our grandparents came from, and something about our old home town, even if we don't go back there much anymore except in memory.

In Oklahoma, like everywhere else in the universe, places are all different. That's what gives them spunk, spark, and "local color" as the literary people used to put it. Size is important. Everyone who's lived in Oklahoma



with being driven out of the South. Western Oklahoma, Oklahoma Territory, was more midwestern in background. Eastern Oklahoma is wet and wooded. Western Oklahoma is flatter and drier. The differences between Muskogee and Enid sum it up. Muskogee in the east is trees, azaleas, a rich Indian heritage, and Democratic politics. Enid in the west is wheat, cattle, an air force base, and Republicans. Maybe oversimplified—but still it rings true.

In that far upstate area where the wind blows so steadily that all the trees are slanted permanently northward, those Oklahomans have a real sense of place all right. They used to get mad when mapmakers cut the panhandle off the Oklahoma map and put it at the bottom of the page. “Your area just doesn’t fit in very well. You’re closer to Denver than Oklahoma City,” the mapmakers might have said. And in history, it was true. The panhandle was an orphan for a long time, till it was taken unto Oklahoma Territory in 1890.

Panhandle old-timers have a memory of being a sort of law unto themselves, independent as could be, and tough. You’d have to be tough to live through the dust “rollers” of the 1930s and to can and eat green tumbleweeds. Nancy Leonard of Beaver and Oklahoma City went around interviewing as many Panhandle old people as she could find here a few years ago. They harbored a strange mix of trust and mistrust toward the world. Way back in the early years of this century many thought it was almost sinful to lock your door when away from home. One man said to Leonard, “It was the rule of the country that no matter who came along, why, they were welcome to stay all night and be fed. Oh, it was disgraceful to have your house locked. Somebody might need to get something to eat or if it was bad weather,

might want to come in to keep from freezing to death. We were away at times and came back to find people in our house we’d never seen before.” The same people who were generous with their homes didn’t trust banks. They said they’d rather carry their cash on them or bury it under tamarack bushes by the creek than put it in a bank account.

Some people think there’s a kind of subtle upstate-downstate rivalry that goes on, based on the fact that the panhandle is so far from the center of the state that it’s left out of things. I wouldn’t call it rivalry exactly because the sad truth is that the differences of place between the panhandle and the rest of Oklahoma are so great that downstaters hardly know the panhandle exists.

Oklahoma has just about everything—hills, mountains, lakes, badlands, far-flung plains, big cities, tiny towns like Gotebo. In this place we call home there are places enough for everybody.



ILLUSTRATION BY HENRY MUENCH

HOME OF CHAMPIONS

by Melissa Price

There's only two things Ada, Oklahoma's, famous for. One's the four-man hanging that went down on Main Street in 1909. Seems the town's top men took the law in their own hands one night in April. Tired of bribed judges and smirking criminals, they broke into the jail and led four murderers, blindfolded, to an old livery stable and hanged every one of them. There's a newspaper photograph, snapped early the next morning, that shows a little boy peeking through a door at the four dangling bodies. Every ninety-year-old in Ada swears the kid is him.

The other thing's football. Officially, the program doesn't start until two-a-day practice the August before junior high. But by then, boys have been scouted from surrounding towns, the good ones shipped to quarterback camps in Norman and Texas. They drink high-protein milkshakes and pump iron at "Summer Playground," a weight room with drill sergeants for trainers. Come senior year, they've got fingers thick as sausages, championship rings wrapped around half of them.

There used to be a barbeque joint—Bob's—the north side of town that held promise as a third claim to fame. People flew from as far away as Canada to dunk Bob's tender ribs in his special, greasy sauce. He died of his own concoction, arteries clogged with clumps doctors swear, to this day, smelled of barbeque.

It was in this restaurant, the summer of 1992, that Bob's son, Lucas, saw Amanda Coffee for the first time in ten years. She was peering at him over a soggy pork-on-a-bun, gray eyes solemn with New York sophistication. Her blonde hair was rolled like a French croissant

against the back of her neck.

Lucas towed the barbeque from his fingers and plopped in the chair opposite her. "How's your food?" he asked, propping his boots on her table.

She stared at his sauce-crusting soles with eyes that seemed, to Lucas, a thousand years smarter than the ones she'd worn in high school. They'd seen the Statue of Liberty and Wall Street and, probably, some pro ball games as well. They didn't follow Lucas around with hopeful adoration anymore. They gazed straight into his own eyes (quarterback-blue) and narrowed slightly. "I thought you'd be famous," she accused.

"That's funny," he said, crumpling a napkin. He drew back and sailed the wad clear across the empty restaurant. It landed with a loud thump atop a can of paper balls. He brushed his hands together and said, "I thought I'd be famous, too."

Thing was, Amanda had fled Ada their sophomore year. She didn't know, yet, Lucas had spent his last two seasons on the bench. She just remembered the smack of his eighty-yard completions, loud as gunshots, halfway up the bleachers. "Nobody ever intercepted your passes," she recalled.

Lucas recrossed his boots. He leaned forward and chipped at a sauce stain with his fingernail. "Yeah, well, after a while, nobody caught 'em too much, either."

Amanda cocked an eyebrow in doubt. If she'd seen Red Conner's finger, scarred and arthritic, she would have believed. Took doctors four hours to reattach the pinkie, and it still stuck out like a queer's when he drank coffee. He was the last to go up for a Lucas Dotson pass.

Lucas took Amanda's empty plate. "You come all

this way to talk about football?"

"I came for the barbeque," she replied, tossing her napkin. "It's not as good as I remember."

"Nothing ever is." He didn't tell her his dad took the secret recipe to his grave. He wanted her to think things slid downhill automatically.

But Amanda was thinking just the opposite. As she watched Lucas walk away, she grew hypnotized by the ripple of muscles in his shoulders. She'd felt them, once, through his thin shirt at a junior-high dance. She twisted open her lipstick, thinking she might like to feel them again.

Lucas's dark hair was freshly combed, the sauce wiped from his boots when he met Amanda at the register. "It's on the house," he said, stabbing her ticket through a poker. "I do it for all my disappointed travelers."

Amanda shrugged and tucked her billfold away. "That could get expensive."

"No more than flying from New York for second-rate barbeque."

"I didn't fly from New York."

"Oh." Disappointment crashed against Lucas's heart; he felt his interest waning.

"I drove." She looked at Lucas evenly, then her cool, gray eyes slid to the door. She followed them.

Lucas locked the register, shut off the lights and closed down. Amanda's red convertible was the only car in the lot, save for Lucas's black extended-cab. The mud on his tires reminded him of last night's joy ride down at Sandy Creek. He'd shared a keg with the guys—"Survivors," they called themselves, leftover teammates enduring Ada together. "Home of Champions!" they'd sung drunkenly, sloshing their cups together in a delirious toast.

Sunlight pinged off of Amanda's hood, shooting the

hangover back to Lucas's head. He walked toward the convertible and climbed in. "Just ignore that stuff in back," Amanda said.

Lucas poked through it and found cameras and lenses and a dozen black-and-whites of people who looked familiar. "Who's this?" He tapped a finger on the singer's thick lips.

The car hummed to life. Amanda glanced at the glossy and said, "Steve Tyler, from Aerosmith. Put it up." She backed out, ignoring the fact that Lucas had pulled out a fresh pile of photos. As he shuffled through her work, she felt a satisfaction she thought she'd outgrown.

He shoved the prints under her seat. Staring forward, into the wind, he said, "So you went to New York and got all famous."

"*I'm* not famous," she corrected. "The people I shoot are famous."

"Well," he mumbled, "it's almost the same."

That's the deal. There's a whole population from Ada that's almost famous. Half of them still wear championship rings, and another fraction's in jail, serving time for petty crimes. You do what you have to do to make the papers. Worst thing to be is invisible.

Of course, that was clear opposite Curly's thoughts as he watched Amanda speed up to his trailer. He cursed and let the blinds fall. He was jerking on his boots, calculating an escape, when Lucas's voice shattered his plans. One second, he was mentally ducking through a loosened floorboard; the next, he was glowering from the porch at his abandoned childhood buddy. He spat over the railing and wiped his dirty mouth. "I musta died and gone to hell," he said and slammed back in the trailer.

Amanda switched off the ignition. "I owe you a meal," she confessed. "I came for more than barbeque."

Looking sideways, Lucas cringed at the stained sheets and tattered Levi's drooping from Curly's clothesline. The trailer park was a maze of outdoor laundry, poverty on a clothespin. Lucas sighed and climbed from the car. "You're in for another letdown. From what I hear, Curly's gone downhill with everything else."

"He's still my big brother," Amanda clipped. She hurried up Curly's rickety steps without looking back.

Lucas gaped after her. He'd clean forgotten about that, which isn't as strange as it sounds. When Amanda and Curly were kids, it was nothing for their mother to leave one of them sobbing at the supermarket. She'd be shelving Cheerios at home before it hit her she hadn't seen Curly since their fight in the cereal aisle, or Amanda was being quieter than usual. Those two just didn't belong together is all.

But together they were—for the first time in going on a decade. Curly quickly buckled his belt and, shirt still flapping open, snapped on his black Stetson. With all those red curls, he looked like Tom Sawyer—only stretched—after a shopping trip to Tener's Western Wear. He tipped his hat at Amanda. "I's just leavin'."

"Hi, Curly," Lucas said, blocking the doorway.

Curly froze. He'd escaped violent death seven times—generally with breathing room—but couldn't see daylight past Lucas's shoulders. Lucas was swelling right before his eyes, his chest wide as a yardstick now, his shadow, no doubt, cooling concrete all the way to the highway. Curly blinked, and Lucas shrank back to regular size, though a hazy outline reminded him of all Lucas could be.

Curly melted into his boots and spilled over onto the floor. He glared up over the shredded knees of his Levi's. "All right," he said finally. "You two tell me what's what."

"I'm taking you to New York," Amanda said. "It's



ILLUSTRATION BY HENRY MUENCH

your turn with the folks."

Curly could not hold his sister's gaze. Ten years, and she still reminded him of the good china, the good crystal—things he might ruin if he got too close. His eyes darted to Lucas, who coughed and said, "I'm just along

for the ride."

"You know I killed a man, don't you?" Curly warned.

A small smile curled Lucas's lips. He stepped completely inside, letting the screen bang shut. "I heard you killed more like eight."

"Coulda been," Curly mumbled. "Coulda been."

"You're such a liar," Amanda snorted. "You can't even kill a butterfly."

"Why would I want to?" Curly unfolded into the air, willing his thin frame to stretch higher than its six-foot boundary. When he stepped forward, the ceiling fan thumped his Stetson clear into the kitchen. Amanda glanced at the hat, then her brother, a good nine inches under the blades. She went to retrieve his Stetson.

Curly and Lucas gazed at one another in silence. You threw away some pretty important things as a teenager. Wasn't either one of them going to reach in that trashcan first. They sank to opposite chairs and waited for the stare to break.

In the kitchen, cupboards slammed. "Spam?" Amanda marveled in disgust. She moved to the refrigerator, surveyed the carton of beer, the two jars of Vlasic pickle juice. She marched into the living room and lifted her brother's chin, replacing his hat. "Your kitchen," she announced, "has the nutritional value of a breath mint."

Slowly, Curly peered around her, then shoved her away completely. He hadn't blinked; neither had Lucas. And they knew that about one another. Their gaze seemed tangible, taut as fishing line. Amanda chopped a hand through it and exclaimed, "You two haven't changed a bit! You're just alike!"

Simultaneously, the men flew up, across, into one another, snapped from the string that had held them at bay. Curly stabbed a finger deep in Lucas's chest and snarled, "You're just a wanna-be hero! Ain't nothin' in

you is still in me."

Lucas drew back his fist and gritted his teeth. Years ago, he would have thrown the punch without thinking. But that was before the motorbike crash, when his arm was still regular. What doctors had done to that limb, in the name of football, changed everything. Lucas lowered his arm—which could slice more than pinkies at close range—and breathed, "You're just a wanna-be outlaw."

"I killed a man!" Curly shouted as Lucas slammed out of the trailer.

The humid air pressed down, harder, on Amanda and Curly. They always felt so crowded when left alone together, like there was room for just one in all that silence. "You need to quit saying that," Amanda murmured, "about killing somebody."

"You need to quit denyin' it's true," Curly retorted and burst outside.

Across the porch, Lucas stared forward, ignoring Curly. Curly followed his gaze to the Indian kids slouched low in Amanda's seat. He glared silently, then leaned forward and shouted, "Scram!" The kids popped like brown spiders out of the car—a tumble of legs and hair and dark, beady eyes. They separated into three small boys who scampered, barefoot but unflinching, across their hot, concrete yard. At the door, the biggest, around nine, looked back. You could see it in his grimy face, that car was some sort of chariot.

Curly pointed his finger, like a pistol, at the kid and snapped, "Bang!" The boy flew backwards into his trailer, good as shot.

Lucas gazed at the neighbor's banging screen. "Curly?" he finally whispered. "You really kill a man?"

Slowly, Curly nodded. "Yesterday, I did. Yesterday," he repeated, to make sure Lucas heard.

"You kill eight?"

Curly grinned. "Mighta took credit for that many."

The two men sank to the porch's top step. They stared straight ahead, at the sun's dusty backside, the good half flipped toward town. "That man you killed," Lucas said, "was he anyone important?"

Again, Curly cocked his finger-pistol, this time at the sun. He aimed with a squint, then slowly lowered his hand. "Pretty much. He was—whadayacallit?—head of surgery."

White ripped through Lucas's bones, settling in his elbow. The pain faded quickly, with the memory. Boldly, Curly reached out and traced Lucas's scar—a thin, neat zipper sealing giant mistakes. He jerked his finger away and shot another bullet, recklessly, nowhere. "We almost made it out of here, old buddy," he said into the emptiness. "We just almost did."

"You've had a dozen chances," Amanda dismissed, suddenly on the porch. She'd gathered Curly's denim wardrobe, jeans worn thin as the paper sack they were in. "This is your last."

She had it all wrong, though. You get one shot, and if you blow it on a wet highway, you become who that leaves you. After that, you're just running away. "I got business here," Curly said.

Amanda crossed her arms. "I'm not leaving until you get in that car."

Slowly, Curly lifted his head and stared at the shiny vehicle, backed right into the setting sun. He could see what the Indians had—a perfect getaway car, sleek, topless, the color of lipstick. He forced his gaze away, toward the neighbor's overalls, bland and shapeless on the line. "Amanda," he sighed, "you'd best make yourself comfortable then."

"Fine." She dropped his clothes with a thud and squeezed a seat between Curly and Lucas. Wasn't three minutes, her leg overlapped Lucas's, the gulf between sib-

lings far wider than the fractured concrete that separated them. They sat like that for maybe an hour. Their thoughts could have filled a Sears catalog, but they flipped past each one silently, like a page without toys. Suddenly, Amanda shot up and announced, breathlessly, "I have to go." She hurried to her car without looking back.

People who briefly return to Ada learn this: A gong goes off deep inside you, and you've got to leave then. No matter if your plan flight's next week or, as in Amanda's case, you've paid up the motel for two more days. Another couple of hours, and you're destined for the city cemetery, a lifetime passed.

Lucas scrambled after Amanda. At the car, he glanced back guiltily. "She's my ride," he apologized.

Curly merely nodded and tipped his hat. His eyes followed Amanda's convertible right over the sinking sun. Eventually, her engine faded into the generic hum of night, and he was able to breathe. He stood, stepped around his paper luggage and walked toward his Harley. He rode into town with his Stetson pulled low, a football clenched tightly between his thighs—like he was eighteen and still gave a damn about tomorrow.

There are nights in Ada when stars multiply right before your eyes, a spill of silver glitter that makes heads jerk up and hearts pound. Anything can happen. You can kick a football all the way to heaven. You can kill a man.

Lucas kissed a woman with New York license plates, and his soul electrocuted.

Amanda pulled away, unaware of the jolt. "It is different," she murmured, "than I thought it would be."

"It was only a kiss," Lucas pleaded. "You haven't given me a chance."

"No." Amanda pointed forward. "I mean the foot-

ball stadium. It's smaller."

Lucas measured the peeling structure against what he'd seen as a boy. "It looks bigger on Friday nights," he defended. "That's what you're remembering."

"Maybe." She touched his lips to quieten him. "Your kiss was nice."

Lucas forced his gaze to Amanda's eyes and swallowed at the need there. She wanted him. He could take her back to the restaurant and have her right on the table she ate off. But she wasn't crazy like he was. He barely knew her, couldn't love her—wasn't even sure he *liked* her—but she was everything. He freed her hair, already loosened by the wind, and buried his face in it.

His mouth was on her breast when Curly's Harley roared by in the distance. You knew it was him, just like you know John Wayne's horse before it gallops onto the screen. Lucas tore his tongue away and glanced over his shoulder.

"Lucas?" Amanda whispered. He turned and trembled at the stardust in her tangled hair, the permission in her eyes. He battled the night's tricks. Never mind what it felt like. Amanda Coffee would drive back to New York and take the same photographs whether she'd had him or not.

He untangled himself from her arms. "We shouldn't," he insisted, "There's no future in it."

"Shhh. It's okay." She covered his mouth with a kiss.

He closed his eyes and tried to remember passion for passion's sake—the only kind he'd known. The Harley rumbled past again, and he gave up. He climbed out of the car and hopped onto the hood.

Amanda waited a moment, then joined him. "You should bring Curly to New York," she suggested. "You could stay for a visit." Urgently, she grabbed his elbow, eyes dancing with excitement. "You could *live* there."

For a split second, he *could*. The trip launched a decade ago—aboard Curly's motorbike, with a New York photo as their only map—could be completed. But when he tried to picture it, all he could see was Ada's last stop sign, wet as blood in the night...his right arm reaching through the wind to slap the sign good-bye...and finally, his fingers stained with barbeque, everything settles.

"I have a restaurant to run," he replied shortly. After all, people still travel to Bob's for the memories. It didn't matter what they ate. When they left, it was yesterday lingered in their mouths.

"Well," Amanda relented, "come for a visit then." She looked at her watch. Quickly, she dug through her purse and thrust some money at Lucas. "Here. Make sure Curly gets a flight to New York. You're the only one he'll listen to."

There was some truth in that. But so often—as was the case here—the only person you'd listen to is the last one who'd tell you what to do. "Sure," Lucas lied. "Okay." He slid from the hood and stuffed the money in his pocket.

Behind him, Amanda's car door slammed. "Hop in."

Lucas spun in the dark. The sky was a strobe light, blinking the world into slow motion. Amanda's smile spread out in fractions, and her hand had to travel a million miles to pat the seat beside her. Lucas closed his eyes. "No, really. I could use the walk."

She started her car and pulled up beside him. "You'll visit then?"

"Sure, Amanda. Sure, I will."

She squeezed his hand once, quickly, then drove away. She broke highway speed in town and never looked back. It didn't matter, though. Ada followed her right to her New York doorstep.

Lucas sat in the parking lot and waited for Curly. It wasn't five minutes, Curly's bike rolled to a stop at Lucas's boot tips. Curly grinned at the fear in Lucas's eyes. "Don't ride 'em too much, huh?" he laughed.

Lucas scrambled up and slapped the dust from his jeans. He met Curly's gaze evenly. "Don't get much chance."

Of course, that was nothing Curly could understand. He cut teeth on a Harley handgrip. When he swung off his bike, you could hear his soul rip, like Velcro. He pitched the football to Lucas. "I heard all these stories. I want to see you throw."

It's amazing how a ball can change some men. Lucas dropped ten years right there on the pavement. He scrambled around it, like it was just another linebacker, and sailed the football clear to the visitors' bleachers. He brushed his hands together and grinned.

Curly spit over his shoulder, right on Lucas's past. "I heard you could throw it to the moon," he said, unimpressed.

"Maybe I wasn't aimin' for the moon."

They laughed and ran like boys toward the field. When they dropped from the fence, Lucas caught Curly's shoulder. "Whydja come back?" he huffed. "You know, from New York and all?"

There's some questions just demand a lie. You can't be mean as Curly and have someone feeling sorry for you. You can't say you fled New York—where your parents thought you wanted to be—because the scowls followed you, anyway. "Crowded city." Curly shrugged. "Wasn't room for me and Amanda both." He raced away, before Lucas could argue.

They climbed the bleachers and sat on either side of the football. Lucas picked the ball up and spun it nervously. "Curly?" he whispered. "Whydja have to kill him?"

Curly winced. His sister was right: He couldn't kill a butterfly. But when Amanda drove into town the day before, the sky fell down on him. Felt like that surgeon—who'd fixed Lucas to throw to the moon with no one there to catch—was squatting right on his windpipe. "I don't know," Curly sighed. "I just went crazy, I guess." He grabbed the ball and trotted down the bleachers. "C'mon!"

On the field, Curly stopped under a floodlight, squinting up. He tossed the ball to Lucas. "Bust it," he dared.

Lucas—who'd never broken anything but a town's heart and Red Conner's pinkie—grinned. He drew the ball back and flung it. The light shattered, and a thousand stars winked out.

Curly brushed the glass from the ball and carried it to the next light. He handed it to Lucas. "Bust it," he ordered again. This time, Curly shot the light with his finger when the ball struck. "Bang!" Another thousand stars gone.

They broke every light in that stadium, and wasn't a star left in the sky. Their laughter froze, momentarily, as a siren approached. Curly grabbed the football from Lucas. Lucas grabbed it right back. Ten years was too long to hold something that wasn't yours to begin with.

The siren passed, and Lucas dug out Amanda's money. "Here," he insisted. "You might need this."

Curly turned his back on the money and sank to the field. Another siren screamed. "Curly?" Lucas whispered. Curly looked back. Lucas pointed at the sky. He drew back his arm and threw that football with everything inside him.

Maybe it reached the moon, and maybe it didn't. Thing was, it never came back. That's all that mattered.

DOWN AT DONNEY'S CAFE

by Richard Luftig

When the hurting grows hardest between us,
there's still the blue plate special
served down at Donney's Cafe.
Some days it's cod baked, breaded, and rough,
and potatoes with craters of gravy
large as half dollars.
Saturday's, ribs with three sides,
coffee and bread for three-ninety five.

And always the pie, thick with apples,
or cherries or rhubarb for under a buck
or twenty cents more if you want it
"with mode" as the regulars say.
But you better order it first,
have it brought before dinner,
he runs out that fast.

I asked him once why he never bakes more,
but all he said was "if I make it,
all you guys ever do is eat it up."
I pay my tab and take the long way home,
driving in twilight, swearing
to make things right with us one more time,
but knowing like Donney that it can't be
too much longer before
we quickly run out of
what we hunger for most.



MESILLA VALLEY MORNING

by Sheryl L. Nelms

hummingbirds hover
over pink mimosa blooms
buzz like bees in red clover

turtle doves coo
across the Rio Grande River

cottonwood leaves
twitter in the breeze

sun spangles the Sierra Madre Mountains
with the glisten of dawn

as tractors chortle through alfalfa fields
to each other like old farmers
exclaiming on the fine stand of hay

San Albino's bells charm
the day into being
good

ILLUSTRATION BY RODNEY CLOUD

HISTORY OF STRONG CITY, OKLAHOMA

by James Caldwell Strong

Strong City, Oklahoma, was dedicated the 25th day of June, 1912. The property was deeded from E. A. and Maud Humphrey the 17th day of June, 1912. Located in Roger Mills County in the south 1/2 of section 24-T14N-R23W and the north 1/2 of the north 1/2 of section 25-T14N-R23W, an area also known as the "Snaky Bend" of the Washita River.

Strong City was named in honor of Clinton Riley Strong, born the 31st day of March, 1877, to R. B. and Sarah Strong. R. B. and Sarah Strong's original homestead was east of Parkersburg, Oklahoma, which was a shipping point about five miles west of what is now Clinton, Oklahoma. The Strongs settled there in 1898 and on that property today is still what is called the "Cow Pond" which is where the "C.O.W." Railroad obtained its much needed water. The "C.O.W." Railroad will be discussed in detail later.

Known as a stalwart young man, Clint Strong joined his mother on the 16th day of September, 1903, in Parkersburg. His Father was bucked off a horse and killed in 1901. Having drifted into Oklahoma from Arkansas where he had had a not too profitable horse and mule business at Paragould, Arkansas. With the blood of adventure running madly through his veins, he was following the settlement of the new territory.

From Parkersburg he just naturally drifted on into the newly formed town of Clinton and there in 1908 he and a close friend, T. J. Nance, formed a partnership. With Strong as the promoter they built a railroad 55 miles northwest of Clinton to what is now Strong City. Approximately \$60,000 was subscribed by Clinton and other communities that would be benefited by the rail-

road. At a cost of nearly one million dollars the Clinton and Oklahoma Western Railroad was built through the towns of Stafford, Butler, McClure, Herring and on into Strong City. After a few years during which Strong and Nance operated the railroad together, Nance was killed in an accident on the same railroad which he had helped build. The "C.O.W." Railroad was later acquired by the Santa Fe Railroad.

By 1913 Strong City had a population of about 600 people and was the largest town in Rogers Mills County, also one of the largest in western Oklahoma. In 1912 the Cotton Exchange Bank moved from Cheyenne, the designated county seat of Roger Mills County, to the new town. The First State Bank was organized by the people living in Strong City. The town also had two grocery stores, three general stores, three lumberyards, two dry goods stores, a hotel, four newspapers and four doctors. There was even talk about moving the county seat from Cheyenne to Strong City. The residents of Cheyenne got wind of this and raised money for a water system to build the Cheyenne Short Line, called the "Calf." By doing this Cheyenne kept the county seat. On the 26th day of October, 1914, R. B. Strong, Jr., was born to R. B. (Clint's brother) and Calla Strong. He was the first and only Strong born in Strong City.

HAEMANTHUS: BLOOD LILY

by LuAnn Keener

As if I knew its name
without looking: these spiney spheres,
cross between dandelion and diatom.
What world is this, where the eye
cannot tell barb from blossom?
They shock me, rising
out of a dun ground littered
with dry grass, insect skeletons,
bits of hair and dung. Earth is never
satisfied. Something churns,
rises, hangs in space
deceptively still, odorous.
If I put my face close
these spears might pierce
the skin, enter the blood, spread
like fire till I am
consumed, become this wound
turned inside out,
this cry of needles.

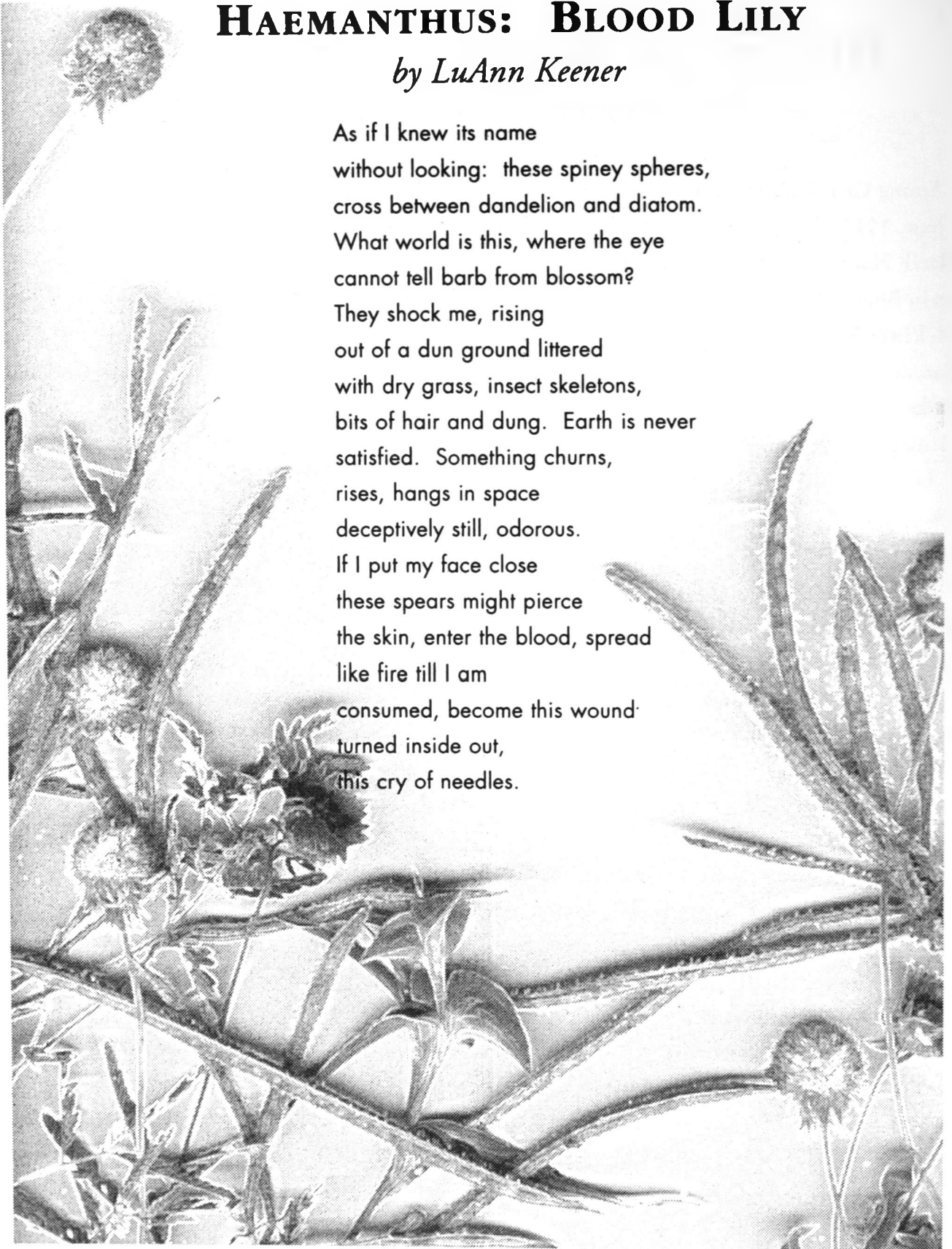
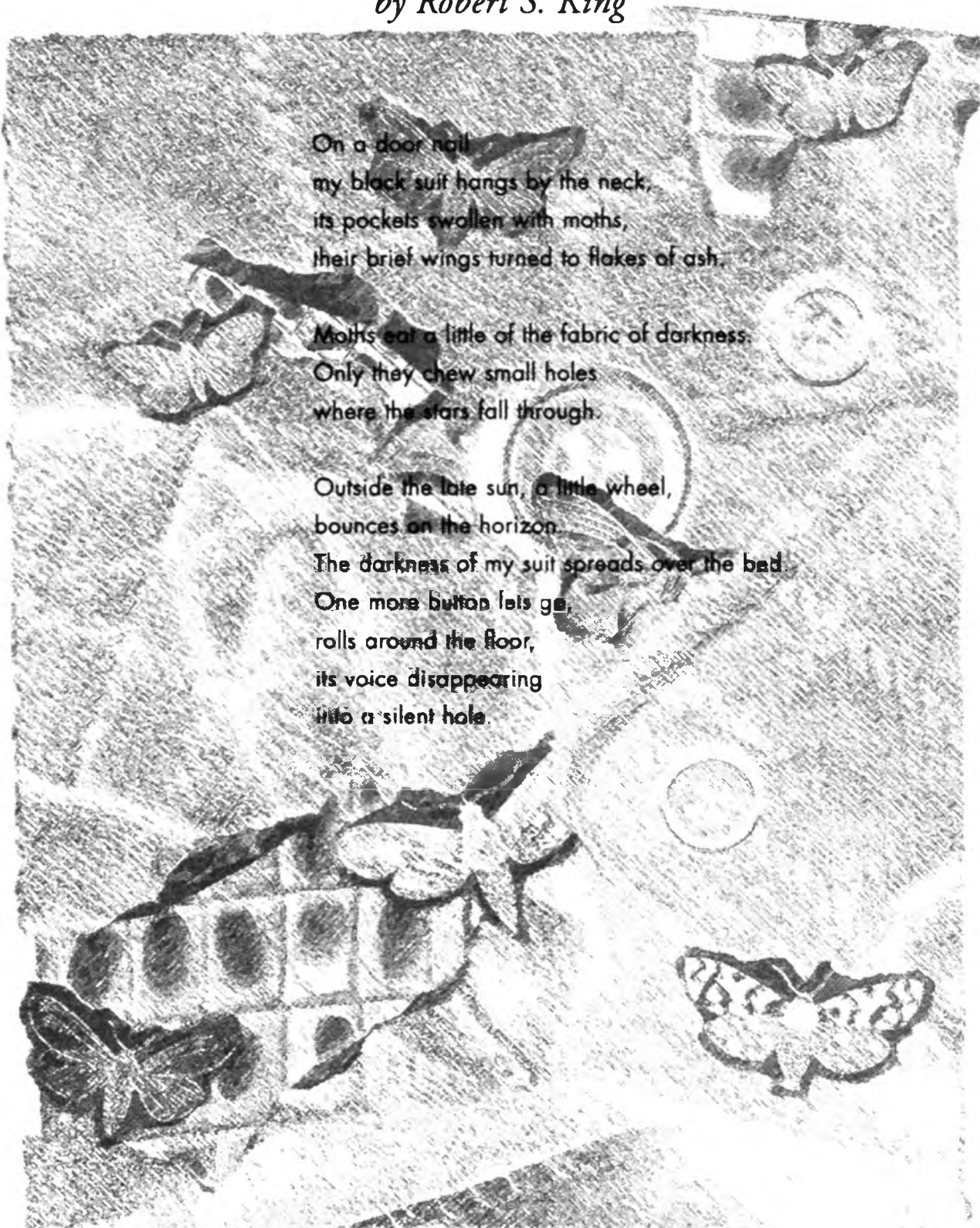


ILLUSTRATION BY HENRY MUENCH

THE SUIT WITH THE MISSING BUTTONS

by Robert S. King



On a door nail
my black suit hangs by the neck,
its pockets swollen with moths,
their brief wings turned to flakes of ash.

Moths eat a little of the fabric of darkness.
Only they chew small holes
where the stars fall through.

Outside the late sun, a little wheel,
bounces on the horizon.
The darkness of my suit spreads over the bed.
One more button lets go,
rolls around the floor,
its voice disappearing
into a silent hole.

ILLUSTRATION BY COLE RACHEL

BEAR CREEK SCHOOL: GONE THE WAY OF PROGRESS

by Karen McKellips

Today's generation looking over the landscape of southwest Oklahoma can hardly envision the settlement patterns of the area soon after it was opened to white settlement. The dreams of many to become small farmers, supporting themselves and their families on their own land, led to families on most quarter sections of land. The dream did not last beyond a generation or two for most, extinguished by the reality of the inability of climate and land to support all of them. But for a time, small community centers, some with store/post office and/or church, could be found every few miles down the more traveled "section line" roads.

These were not towns really, since there were hardly enough homes in most of these communities to qualify. The most common building, sometimes the only building, was the school. The school was the center of the community and served many functions besides the education of the children of nearby farmers. Church services were often held there as were community gatherings of all types.

Among the school-centered communities in the area between Weatherford and Thomas were Bear Creek, Deer Creek, Jefferson, Mulberry, Rogers, Swan and Wrangle Grove. Today these community centers are gone...gone with the schools. And those who remember how it was in those places and those times are almost all gone, too.

In 1974, Kenneth Sweeney, who had attended school at Swan and taught there and at Bear Creek and Mulberry, was given a picture of himself and his pupils standing in front of Bear Creek School. Here are his thoughts:

"This is a picture of the Bear Creek School, located eleven miles southeast of Thomas near the mouth of Bear Creek where it flows into the South Canadian River in Blaine County. It was taken during the 1924-25 school year, my second year of teaching at this school. I am standing at the left of the back row. The pupils beside me are Blanche Keiffer, Ernest Keiffer, Ray Short and Eli Bradford. On the front row are Florence Keiffer, Gladys Keiffer, Elmer Slagell, Ellen Slagell, Lena Slagell, Maggie Bradford, and Tommy Thompson.

Of this group today (1974), only three now reside in this area. Elmer Slagell is a highly respected citizen and farmer who lives nearby and owns the land on which the abandoned school house now stands. His sister Ellen Slagell (now Mrs. Alva Yoder) lives south of town and for many years has been employed as a registered nurse in the Thomas Hospital. I am presently living in Thomas following my retirement as Superintendent of the Thomas School.

At the time of this picture, this school was a part of the Bear Creek community of about 12 houses. A well-traveled public road and mail route passed in front of the building. Earlier there was a country store and post office nearby. East of the school was a popular early-day river crossing leading to the Whirlwind Indian camp whose buildings and tents could plainly be seen across the river when one stood on the school house porch. Indian wagons sometimes stopped to fill their wooden kegs at the school water well pump.

It was a beautiful area then, with much virgin timber remaining along Bear Creek and in the river bottom. I remember as a boy attending in this school house a box

supper sponsored by the community in the interest of the Red Cross. It was during the First World War. I bought my first auctioned pie-supper pie. The lady who baked the pie and shared it with me was Mrs. Minnie Cagg, the mother of the late Walter Cagg of Thomas.

Today (1974) there are few people living in the Thomas area who will remember attending 'Open Air' Baptist Church sponsored religious services held in the summer time in the school yard surrounded by T-model cars and horse drawn wagons. And all who attended

Bear Creek school will remember the 'Bear's Den Cave', a most interesting place to all school children in a deep nearby canyon.

Should you drive through this former community today on the one remaining dirt road, you may pause and wonder where everything was...so little remains today. One answer is, "It went the way of progress."

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF KAREN MCKELLIPS





ILLUSTRATION BY RODNEY CLOUD

THE LAST TIME I SAW MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

by Elaine Hoffman Wagener

my aunt Ruth then eighty-eight
said, "Don't look. Remember
how it was. I just turn
my head away." I looked. Saw
long mourned house. Just a common
cottage. In my imaginings it
was bigger sweeter magical
more like Grimm's. Wrap-a-round
porch, honeysuckle stalk, giant
cedars, swinging gate, gingerbreaded
door— all covered now by bright
new paint— cedars, fence and gate
gone, new Hansels had devoured
the gingerbread and magic.

LOOKING FOR THOSE FLUSH COLORS OF YOUTH —BASED ON A NEWS ITEM

by Edward C. Lynskey

Tonight every lady in the Cream City
goes up to the attic carrying a lamp,
looking for a lost, lesser painting
by Van Gogh. It seems a spinster on
the early evening news found locked in
a cherry chest of mothballs and Caruso

records a masterpiece signed with "V,"
a still life of starry mums and fiery
poppies prized high into the millions.
Ladies look in every crack and crevice
they know, but don't love, from their
housekeeping. It's not pasted behind

the old vanity mirror. It's not swept
under brussels sprouts carpets. Who is
this Van Gogh every lady shakes castle
inside out, seeking as a stray hairpin?
Will they find the mad spark that was
once theirs to have lost in a portrait?

THE BEST KIND

by Ken Robertson

Mike had installed a single-bulbed ceiling fixture in the sparsely furnished bedroom and was covering the wall switch with an ivory plastic plate when the farm woman stepped into the room and announced, "They's two men here saying they want to talk to you."

Mike finished tightening the screws, pocketed the screwdriver, wiped sweaty hands on his coveralls, and went outside through the screen door of the kitchen. Two strangers were waiting by the door of a panel truck marked with a faded McClelland Electric Service sign on its side.

Mike flashed his usual smile, "What can I do for you gents?"

The heavy-set one asked, "You the owner of that rig?" He pointed a hairy thumb at Mike's Harley parked in the shade and surrounded by coils of romex cable, a Navy sea bag bulging with his supply of fixtures and fittings, and the jerrybuilt conduit trailer he pulled behind the motorcycle.

Mike looked and nodded. Before he could sense danger, the tall, wiry one stepped behind him, forced an arm under his left armpit with the hand clutching his neck, and seized his right arm to brutally wrench it high behind his back in a tight half nelson. Mike struggled helplessly and demanded, "What's going on? Let me go!"

The burly one grabbed the front of Mike's coveralls with his left hand and shook his right fist in front of Mike's eyes

"Listen, you dirty gut-sucker, stay out of our territory. We do the electric work in this county and we won't stand for no undercutting by a two-bit scab like you.

We're warning you, get your cotton picking rig out of McClelland County and stay out."

He stuck out a thick leg. The wiry one pushed Mike across it and released him as he fell to the ground. The two jumped into their truck and roared out of the driveway.

Mike lay where he had fallen in the dry August dust until the sound of the truck faded away. He rose and slowly brushed off his clothes. Flashes of pain shot through his right arm. Anger and frustration seethed inside like a fire in dry cedar branches. The racial slur was the first that had been hurled at him since grade school, and he had nearly forgotten the impact. He went inside and, working somewhat slower than usual, finished wiring the farmhouse. He found the woman in the kitchen bent over her kerosene cookstove attending a boiling stewer.

"All finished," he said, "I'll call the Electric Co-op and tell them to run a drop to make it hot and plug in the meter. I'll be back to check it out as soon as they're through. Oh, Ma'am, do you mind if I leave my extra wire and fittings on your front porch overnight? I'll be by first thing in the morning to pick them up. Thank you kindly, Ma'am."

The deep black of a prairie night without moon closed in around him before he rolled into town on the big Harley the dealer had been able to deliver after an eleven month wait. He pulled into Tom's Big Dipper on OK State 23 at the south edge of Concha for a cold one before going home to the meal his mother would be keeping warm for him. The beer joint's dreary plainness was broken only by a garish pink neon line that traced a

square below the ceiling and bathed the room and its occupants in an unnatural glow. The jukebox was spewing a steady dirge of nasal country music.

Mike took his Schlitz to a booth in the far corner. The bar girl and the three or four customers were strangers to him. Most of his friends from high school had gone away to fight the Germans and the Japanese and never returned or had married and moved to the City.

After his discharge from the Navy, he loafed at home for three weeks, gave his mustering out pay to the Harley dealer as earnest money on his bike order, and left Concha to enroll at A and M under the G.I. Bill.

His thoughts returned to the afternoon's unsettling encounter. Until today, the summer had gone better than expected. Brain numb from studying after a full year of classes, he had returned home for the summer break unsure of the kind of work he would find in Concha. Summer jobs seemed limited to working in the wheat harvest, filling cones at the ice cream store, or selling door to door.

He explored the countryside, testing the horsepower of his new Harley on the long straight stretches of highway and on the steep inclines of the dirt roads built across the red rock canyons that drained the flat plains. He imagined how the terrain had appeared to his Cheyenne great grandfather as he traveled these same lands astride his pinto pony.

On his drives, he noticed the new poles, black with creosote, and their gleaming aluminum lines that were being extended by the Electric Cooperative to bring rural Minooka County into the twentieth century.

"A natural," he told himself, "why didn't I think of it before?"

He biked to the Sears store in Clinton to buy their booklet on "How to Wire Your Home" and to get an

electrical catalog. House wiring seemed to be a good fit with the skills he had learned as a Navy electrician.

Mike's father had inherited a swarthy handsomeness from his Cheyenne mother and a genial nature from his Scottish father. After sixteen years as County Commissioner, he knew most of the whites and many of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes in Minooka County. He took Mike to the Co-op office and introduced him to the manager, Walt Thompson, who was helpful and enthusiastic. Walt gave Mike a copy of construction standards and a map showing their recent line extensions.

Mike followed the routes of the new lines, knocking on doors, asking for business. Concha Electric, the sole electrical contractor in the county, was overwhelmed with the demands of rural customers impatient for service and their estimator had surged far ahead of their construction crew. Mike discovered he could bypass the tedious work of making a cost estimate and bid by telling a farmer, "You got a quote from Concha Electric? I'll do exactly the same work for fifty dollars less, and I'll finish it this week with satisfaction guaranteed. If there's any part of my work you don't like just tell me and I'll stay with it until you're happy."

The offer worked often enough to gain him all the work he could do. When a customer asked if he were a qualified electrician, Mike would pull out the Navy photo I.D. card he had managed to keep.

"The best kind," he would say confidently, "this shows I was an Electrician's Mate, First Class, in the United States Navy."

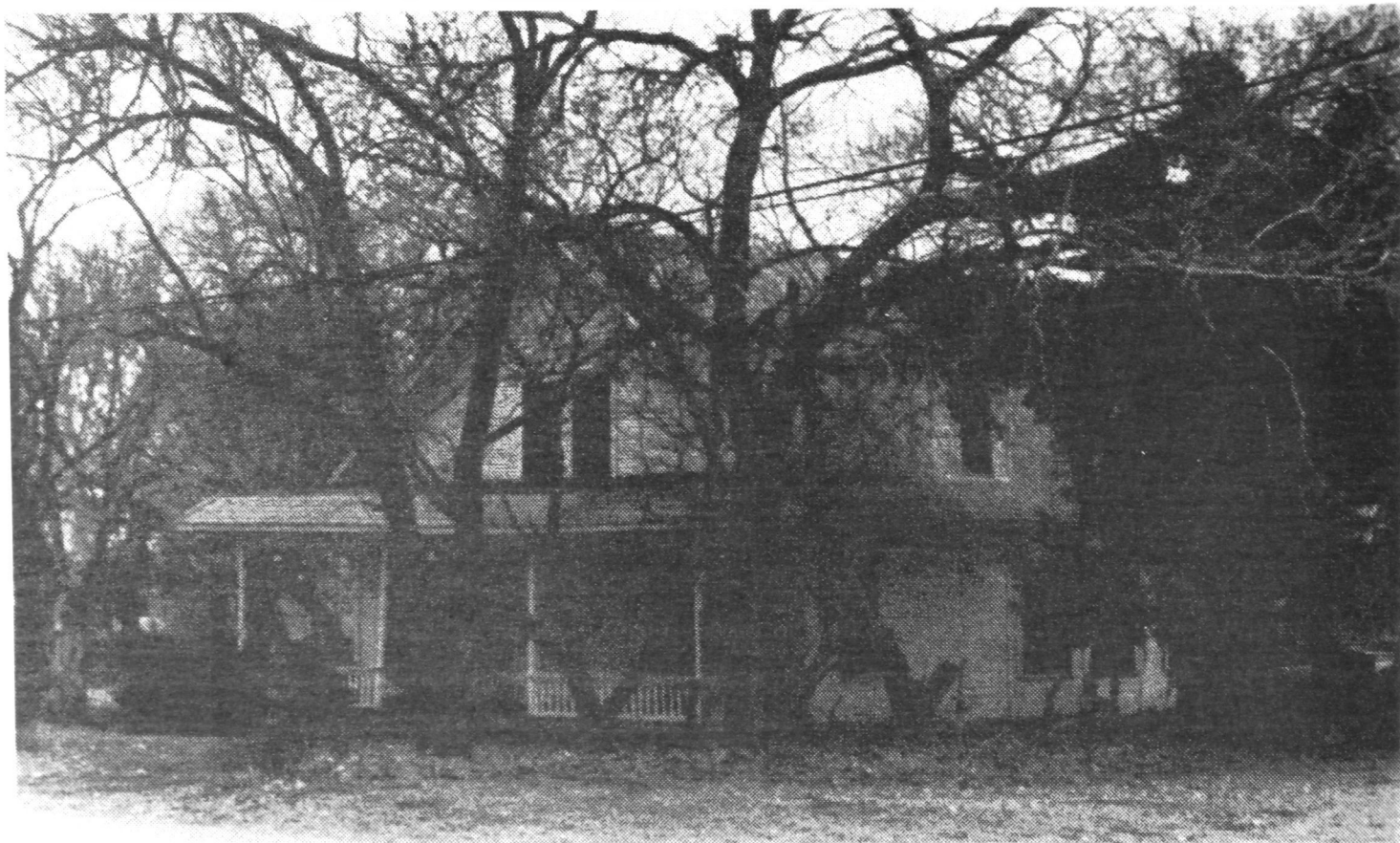
The weeks fell into a pattern. Mondays, dressed in white shirt and chino slacks, Mike followed the route of the line, ahead of the Concha Electric crew, and arranged for enough work to last the week. Tuesdays through Fridays, clad in tan coveralls, he worked from

early light to dusk, installing the service entrances and meter loops on the old farm houses, pulling wire in the stifling summer heat of attics lined with the fine, earthen powder blown in during the dust bowl years, attaching boxes for light fixtures, drilling holes in the two by four top plates of the frame homes, and fishing the cable down through the walls to the holes he cut for switches and receptacles. Saturdays, he ordered supplies and collected for jobs that remained unpaid. Sundays, he slept late and relaxed with fun trips on his Harley or flirted with the high school girls that gathered in coveys by the pool at Roman Nose Park.

Mike became a familiar sight on the rural roads of Minooka County. "That electrician that carries all his tools and supplies on his motorcycle? Why that's Hank Campbell's boy. Seen him coming out of Concha last Tuesday morning, two coils of wired wrapped around his

belly, a big sack full of fittings tied on behind him, tools poking out of his saddle bags, and pulling a wobbly little trailer loaded with electric pipe. He's just like Old Hank, never met a stranger, and do anything to help a neighbor."

In late July, Mike's wiring jobs in Minooka County became harder to find, and by August, ended completely. Concerned, he stopped to see Walt Thompson. Walt said he read somewhere the Co-op in McClelland County was extending some lines down where the Government was building that new dam on Salt Creek. Mike scouted the new construction on Sunday and, on Monday, began working the area. By that time he could walk through a house, count the rooms, and quickly set a price for his work.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF JAN BRADFEILD

The jukebox went silent for a moment. The bar girl's thin voice broke into Mike's thoughts, "You going to have another Schlitz?"

Mike smiled at her and nodded with enthusiasm. The first beer had quenched his thirst and he needed a second to relax with. "And here're some extra dimes, Hon', play some popular music for a change. You know, Dinah Shore—Andy Russell—something from the Hit Parade."

As the strains of Dinah Shore's "For Sentimental Reasons" filled the room, his mind returned to the afternoon's encounter.

"It's a free country," he concluded, "I'm not going to be bullied by a couple of rednecks."

But Mike decided to shorten his workday so he would be on the road only during daylight. He finished the week without further incident. Once he thought he glimpsed the McClelland Electric panel truck driving slowly by the house where he was working, but it had continued ahead without stopping.

Wednesday of the following week he was finishing the wiring at Adam Blake's house. A huge, talkative man who had just laid his crops by until harvest, Adam insisted he help Mike with the wiring. He had been a fireman on the battleship Oklahoma in the World War I Navy, working, stripped to the waist, in the sweltering heat of the boiler compartments, shoveling coal into the blazing fireboxes.

Adam wanted a wall switch installed next to the side of his bed so he could turn the light off and on from the comfort of his mattress. He was so pleased with Mike's work that at the end of the day he invited him to stay for the smothered chicken and fried okra his wife was preparing for supper.

Before the meal, Adam brought out a partly used

bottle of bourbon he said was left over from Christmas. They shared the bootleg whiskey and exchanged stories from their war years with the three Blake children gathered around, listening, and trying to ignore their mother's pleas for help in the kitchen. After supper, there was fresh peach cobbler for dessert and more stories.

By the time Mike gathered his unused wire and fittings and stacked them for storage overnight on the porch, the summer evening had waned into heavy dusk except for a lingering red glow in the western sky. Mike told the Blakes goodbye, kicked his Harley into action, and departed.

As he glanced right before making a left turn out of the driveway, he saw a pair of headlights down the road flash on as if someone were waiting for him. Alarmed, he accelerated and sped to the brim of the red rock canyon the section road crossed. As he dropped into the canyon, he glimpsed a vehicle in the road on the opposite side silhouetted against the red glow in the sky. Its headlights flicked on and he saw it was stopped in the center of the dirt road, facing him and blocking his way. At the bottom of the grade, out of the beam of the facing headlights, he switched off his own lights, accelerated with full throttle, and steered to the narrow shoulder of the road. He was temporarily blinded as he cut through the glare of the lights and then out of their field as he sped by on the passenger side of the waiting truck.

For a moment, his rapid heartbeats seemed to stop as he felt his wheels begin to skid on the sandy slope of the shoulder, but the skid ended when his tires dug into the tough roots of Bermuda grass lining the road's edge. Suddenly he was past the pickup that had blocked his way and back into the center of the road. He switched on his lights and leaned low over his machine. He thought he heard the sound of a bullet whiz past his head but the sound was indistinct in the roar of his exhaust.

"Those bozos mean what they say," he muttered.

Ahead to his right was the angling intersection with the construction road leading to the Salt Creek Reservoir. A collection of Le Tourneau earth movers and Cat graders had worked day and night all summer moving and shaping the red clay and shale from the borrowed areas along the banks of Salt Creek into the long, earthen dam. Again, to foil his pursuers, Mike snapped off his lights. He turned into the construction road entrance and bumped over the cattle guard.

At the dam, with his lights on again, he avoided the machines working at the top of the structure and rumbled along the gentle slope of the inner wall in the open space between the newly spread limestone riprap and the top of the earthen fill. Halfway across, he slowed to look back. He saw only the lights of the dirt contractor's machines. Relieved, he crossed the temporary bridge over the diversion channel for Salt Creek and followed the construction road on the other side to Highway 23 that led back to Concha. The cool evening air rushing by his face and body soothed his anxiety. His heartbeat returned to normal.

He found his father sitting on the front porch enjoying a final pipe of Granger before going to bed. During the war years, the older man had taken a job at the gyp mill and turned the prairie land Mike's grandfather had homesteaded back to grass and cattle.

"Say, Dad," Mike opened as he approached the porch. "You've been wanting to try out the Harley. How about trading for the rest of the week? You ride my bike to work and I'll drive the old Chevy."

He was silent about his encounters in McClelland County. He knew how his father would react.

"Those scoundrels," he would explode in a mixture of Scottish determination and Cheyenne fierceness, "we'll go down there tomorrow and clean their plow!"

Mike's summer work had been far more profitable than he had dared to dream of and he was determined to resolve the matter in his own way.

The next morning, Mike explained the bike's controls to his father and checked him with a test drive before he left for the mill. Satisfied with the performance, he waved him off, confident his father would be safe on the familiar and friendly roads of Minooka County.

Mike threw the saddle bags with his tools onto the floorboards of the Chevy and drove to the Blakes' farmhouse to pick up his trailer and the leftover wire and fittings. He showed Adam Blake how to insert the fuses and turn on the main switch after the Co-op crew had strung the service wires and set the meter. Mike drove a mile east to the last farmhouse that remained on his work list. On Friday afternoon, with the wiring of the three-room house completed, he instructed the woman about the fuses and the switches, and telephoned the McClelland County Co-op office with the names of his customers who were ready for electric service.

Saturday morning, he slept late and got to the bank just before it closed to withdraw enough cash from his summer's savings to pay the balance owed on his Harley and to buy traveler's checks.

Lunch was waiting for him when he returned. At the table, he told his parents, "I finished my work down in McClelland County yesterday. Still have a few accounts to collect, but I'm going to log some vacation time before I go back to school."

After the meal, he replaced the tools in his saddle bags with his shave kit and an extra set of Levi's and skivvies, attached the bags to his bike, and headed west for the Grand Canyon.

WEEDS

by Jannett Highfill

Inheritance and bankruptcy being what they are,
some farms are not worked but owned.

Investors mark the gray
across green fields and revere
the noxious "kerosene weeds"
whose roots above a rich crease
of methane inhale combustion.
Gas will pay the section's taxes.

Counting cattle, scratching the washes
for arrowheads to sell in the City
or Dallas, dabbling at a town job—
farmers call it "loco weed."
Each March its quivering silver
cover their barren fields.
No cow is crazy enough to graze it.

ILLUSTRATION BY JAN BRADFIELD



ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS HENSON

PORTRAIT IN CHAIR

by William Orem

Asleep she is a thing close to dying,
cheek near to it,
her drift of hair, the long space of forehead.
Here the small book that moved her to dreams,
open-rested,
forgetful in a spill of lax fingers.
The frowsy lamp shows her
in a lemon-blond light, & her mind
goes to deepness, a field
loved by so many stars.

RAKISH NAILS AND TREEHOUSE ARCHITECTURE

By Keith Long

I craned my neck and gazed up at the treehouse.

"Gee, I don't know," I told my cousin Stanley, who had built the aerie all by himself. "It doesn't look too sturdy."

"Of course it's sturdy," Stanley said. "It's walnut."

"Well, okay, sure," I said. "But I didn't mean the tree. I meant the house."

"What's not to be sturdy?" Stanley asked. "It's still up there, ain't it?"

"More or less," I answered.

Stanley began to climb the rope that hung alongside the million-year-old trunk of the walnut tree.

"Come on up," he hollered over his shoulder.

"I'm not getting into that rickety thing," I said.

"Weenie," Stanley answered in his most mocking 12-year-old voice.

"I'm not a weenie," I said, less forcefully, since I was two years his junior. "It's just that my major inhibitions stem from my awareness that your questionable edifice doesn't conform to the pattern of other arboreal architecture I have observed." When in doubt, I tried to make up in big words what I lacked in age.

"Say what?"

"Your treehouse ain't as straight as other treehouses. It lacks for, umm, corners."

"Where have you ever seen another treehouse?" Stanley asked, peering over his plywooded wall at me.

"In the funny papers."

"Give me a break," Stanley said. "Those trees are drawn in. For Pete's sake, I could build a square treehouse if I got to draw the tree. I had to take what I could get."

"Yeah, but just look at it," I said.

"Hey, life doesn't imitate art, okay?" Stanley said, throwing his sixth-grade knowledge of philosophy of art all over me. "C'mon up."

"Nope."

"You can see McFinney's swimming pool from here."

"Hurry up and toss the rope down," I said. After all, McFinney's 11-year-old daughter had the greatest set of legs in town. She could kick a football forty yards.

My worst fears were realized once I reached the floor of Stanley's lookout. He had pretty much thrown the whole Doric, Ionian, and Corinthian ideals out the window, so to speak, and left the notion of balance and support to nature. The interior did not bespeak of Early American or even Primitive. It was more like "Splintered Primeval."

I grabbed a two-by-four to pull myself up into the structure, but the whole contraption swayed sickeningly.

"Don't worry," Stanley said. "It's solid. I used 16-penny nails."

"How many?!" I asked, too shaky to move.

"About 4,000."

"No wonder," I said. "The house is full of nails. It's too nail-heavy for the tree to support it."

"Nonsense. This thing will be here long after you're dead and gone."

"It depends on which'll hit the ground first — it or me," I pointed out.

"It won't hit the ground," he said. "It'll hit you. C'mon. I've got binoculars stashed up here."

I stepped hastily up into the drafty confines of the house, almost plunging to my death through a gaping



ILLUSTRATION BY HENRY MUENCH

hole in the middle of the floor.

"What's that?" I asked, pointing at the hole.

"I'm going to put a trap door there," Stanley said.

"What for?" I asked.

"Girls."

I looked warily through the hole at the mass of briars waiting 40 feet below, and imagined what a mess the ambulance crew would have to deal with.

"Even for Minnie McFinney?" I asked.

"Of course not," Stanley said. "She ain't a girl. She's a kicker."

I edged my way around one side of the treehouse, noticing that from the inside the roof hinted of a cathedral effect, producing an attitude reminiscent of the Tudor style.

"Pretty tall house," I said.

"Makes it seem more spacious. I'm going to add a mirror to further the effect," Stanley replied, stepping to one side so I could squeeze around to the north face.

At the corner, or at least that section of the treehouse that most resembled a corner, I narrowly escaped a severe raking by a protruding, 16-penny nail.

"What're all these rakish, protruding nails for?" I asked, indignantly.

"Hanging stuff," Stanley said.

"What kind of stuff?"

"I hang lots of stuff on them. Binoculars, canteens, hats, and. . ."

"And skin?"

"Well, you've got to watch where you edge," Stanley confessed.

Judging Stanley's admission a moral victory on my part, I grabbed the binoculars and in an instant the McFinney estate, with all its wonderful splendor, came into full view.

"Where's Minnie?" I asked.

"Beats me. Probably in town, practicing her coffin-corner punts."

"Where's the swimming pool?"

"Leaned against the outhouse. That blue thing."

"Bummer," I said. "You got me up here under false pretenses. There's not even any water in it."

"Hey, it's February. What'd you expect?"

HOLDING ON

by Joe Benevento

Some oak trees keep half or more
than half their leaves into winter,
even though those leaves are dead
and brown, even though the trees
will have to let them go before
new ones may green
their stubborn limbs again.

I have lived with oak trees all
my life, there are some in front
of my office window right now,
clutching bits of January
ice and snow in a sullen
lethargy of leaves,
but I never was aware how they held on
to death until I bought
a house in May, waited
for my oak trees to unleaf,
so I could cart death off
all at once, in dark
garbage bags.

Now I wait almost patiently for April,
knowing those leaves must come down,
however long winter seems
to linger, knowing new
life is at least as inevitable,
as formidable as dying;
their place is on the ground,
rotting a solemn song
of cycles
and seasons.

PRISONERS

by Amy Wilson

For Betty Shipley

From the Broadway Sonic Doris & Diane
saw six men in orange jumpsuits
pacing the Carter County Courthouse roof.

I thought at first glance they were weather balloons
then I see legs,
Someone's making jailers asphalt
that leaky old roof, finally.

Doris & Diane thought no more about it,
went back to their sugar-free malts.

Wendy, watering begonias,
looked up at a Honda-shaped cloud
and a man in an orange jumpsuit blows kisses
from the roof.

I had on a pink halter, he must've noticed!
Those inmate uniforms don't
do much for the male physique
All the same I was flattered.
That fellow, the others
let out for fresh July air or something.

Joe was driving to Oklahoma Baptist
where he teaches Tuesday night poetry class.

The way you do at a cakewalk six of them
pacing in a circle. I figured a guard up there
just beyond my sight with a rifle.

Sixteen people saw the prisoners
none thinking the obvious:
Six men locked in a basement cell
escaping the confines of the Carter County Jail.
Each slid down a gutter pipe
ducked into a waiting Suburban.

Lord, how'd we not know what we were seeing!
Joe went for counseling.

Wendy & Meg
organized a Keep Shawnee Safe Volunteer Patrol Force.
Volunteers drive a designated route
extending twenty-two miles of city streets.
So far the roof has been empty
although Doris & Diane spotted
an unidentified teen throwing a beer bottle
at a cat.

Other than that
no one sees anything out of the ordinary
but everyone deadbolts
and no one goes to the grocery after dark.

THE WALL

by Anne Helen Jupiter

I heard the crying, punctuated by gasps for air that refilled the lungs of the crier. I hadn't been living in this duplex long when, like a persistent hum, it emerged slowly from the background noise and permeated my consciousness.

The landlord, who talked at length every time he collected the rent, had felt inclined to enlighten me about the type of people who lived next door. "A young couple with no real future, just don't have much smarts," he had said as he twirled his finger at this temple. He was being generous to let them stay, he said, because the man's work history wasn't dependable, but they always paid their rent within days of when it was owed.

When I first moved in, I wanted to stay off to myself. Licking my wounds, some might say. I'd have to admit the people I work with were right; I hadn't known it was coming. At least, that's what I tell everybody; looking back, the signals were there in blazing neon, but I paid no attention. Now I was fending for myself.

As for dating, well, my wife has stated that I was a cold fish, one of the reasons for the divorce. Apparently, I shouldn't have to worry about the children, since, I had never been home enough for either of them to miss me now anyway. That was something else I hadn't noticed until it was too late.

So here I am: a man of thirty-eight, in good health, with all my teeth and hair.

My work provides a steady stimulus. As the personnel administrator in my firm, I assure everyone in the corporation the security of their benefits. I delegate to supervisors the sticky emotional problems that arise among the staff, because I once attempted to intercede

during an disagreement, but the situation turned into a fiasco. I just couldn't understand why they were getting so upset. I was simply stating the rules, and to this day I still don't see what all the fuss was about.

I will have the children every other weekend. That will be more difficult. As I hadn't had much to say to them when I lived with them, I had no idea what I would say now, or even what I would do with them. What does a person do with a boy of fifteen and a girl of twelve? But that could wait for later.

Later. I thought a lot about that now. I has always assumed that I had a lot of time for things later.

One evening as I was scraping burnt rice off the bottom of the pan, I heard the child's wail trumpet. As the cries thumped up the stairs, they butted with the adult voices, shrieking at each other. Then feet thundered down the stairs and the door crashed behind them. Dishes in my sink rattled. Slowly, as I waited for the TV dinner to release its delectable delights from their frozen prison, the child's wailing faded to sniveling then to silence. I stood across the room from the wall, thinking, people have to help themselves. You just can't expect the world to be there just because you need something.

The next night, my next-door company remained silent. I sat, putting forkful after forkful in my mouth, casually, not waiting. The big hand of the clock inched its lonely journey down the right side of its face. A car in the street, tires squealing, rubber burning, made its getaway. This time the sobbing had a different quality to it; I heard the sadness. In the quiet of the minute, I heard a pleading "Mommy," and a loud smack that answered it. Now there were two crying, each telling of

their sorrow and betrayal. Sometimes you could hear the higher pitched voice say, "Things are going to get better."

Work became a time to endure in order to return to the apartment and listen. Occasionally friends would invite me out for a drink. Others had a nice person they wanted me to meet—someone else who was divorced. But I refused with weak excuses of important things to do at home. They shook their heads. I knew some were saying, "Give him time."

At night I waited for the melee to begin, as if I was a member of the cast. Each incident followed a routine. He would get home and the hum of their conversation would rumble. Whacks and thumps would sound through the wall. She would plead, and her tears would goad him into more. Other nights, the child would babble and the mother would hush him, but to no avail. Either way, the eruption occurred, the door would slam shut, the tires would screech his departure. I was left standing in the middle of the room, listening to their moaning.

During the day I wondered if there was anyone I could speak to about my neighbors. I went through the list of my friends; they were all my wife's. Maybe it was better to keep it to myself.

One night the door didn't slam and the tires didn't squeal. The screaming continued. The wall was pounded.

All three joined in. The man was yelling about how unfair life was. The woman would bounce between placating—"It'll work out,"—and accusing—"If you'd only listen!" The baby blubbered, "I be good." It went on for hours, stomping and tramping like the hammering of a thunderstorm. I stood at arm's length from the wall, swelling and aching with each beat.

I had never known there was so much intensity in

this world. Maybe if my wife and I had debated more or had questioned things, we would still be together. Yet emotions could carry a person away. At my office I watched my co-workers and wondered if they too suffered through violent storms at home. I amazed myself with how little I knew about the people with whom I had been working for years.

I listened all night to the couple next door, standing one foot away from the wall. The next day, I was bleary-eyed and yawning. Co-workers accused me of having stayed up late for some perverted reason having to do with "young blood." I had to hurry home. They laughed that there was still life in the old boy. I had to get home to my next door family.

Saturday afternoon, standing in the doorway looking out onto the street, I heard the door shut in their apartment. The woman crossed the street in a bulky jacket with a bright-colored scarf tied around her head. The child was held at her side, zipped in a snow suit and boots with only rosy cheeks showing. I raced outside, pulling on my coat. I wanted a glimpse. I wanted a face with the sobs.

Inside the grocery store, she loosened her jacket and removed her scarf. Long, wavy blonde hair fell to her shoulders. She undid the child's suit and removed his hood. His hair was as thick and wavy as his mother's. She moved quickly, sure of what she needed.

Surprised by my own cunning, I rushed down the other aisle so I would be facing them. As they approached me, I did not know what I had expected. A maiden in need of rescuing? It had been a long time since I had viewed myself as a white knight. If ever.

The toddler threw an orange on the floor which rolled to my feet. The woman came around the cart, sputtering reprimands to the child and stooped as I did to pick it up. I reached it first and handed it to her. She

smiled, a bright and young smile, filled with the kind of indifference only the young have. But her blue eyes were those of a washwoman of the Victorian age on an icy day. They had quit looking for tomorrow because today was hard enough.

As the two strolled past me, I smiled at the baby. The child stared back, face void of any curiosity. He didn't smile, daring me to give him a reason to trust. Other children in the store wrestled with wrapped packages, their smiles spreading from eyes to ears. A few sat holding onto the bar of the shopping cart, gurgling with delight when their mother's face came back into view. A few others, like my neighbor's child, had no light in their eyes. It was so obvious, once you noticed. Is that why I had never looked before?

As a man walked up behind the woman, the child grabbed her jacket and pulled her to him. The mother shook him off, telling the child to behave as the man touched her shoulder. He was taller than his wife and as slender, smiling wide.

I stared. He didn't have horns or scars crisscrossing his face. If I hadn't seen them together, I would never have guessed he was the one. This man hung his arm over his wife's shoulders. He leaned close, saying hi to his child. He laughed and she laughed. The baby watched.

The man looked over and caught me staring. He smiled, said hello. I smiled, tipped my hat, then he gave me his back and whispered to the young woman. His wife peeked from around his shoulder and glanced over at me. I scooped up a package of hot dogs, and hurried away. Now I was the one under scrutiny.

I waited inside the shadows of the doorway of my apartment. As the couple walked by, the husband's hands struck the air in front of him as he told his tale to his wife. The child slipped on the ice. With one hand,

the father grabbed the child by the back of the hood, pulling his hair, and lifted the child to his feet. The mother turned away and checked to see if anyone was watching. Child tears continued as the family entered their home. Inside, I heard him say, "Enough of your bawling. What you gonna do? Grow up to be a wimp?" Then there was stumbling as mother, carrying child, bolted up the stairs.

That night my children arrived for dinner. That's all the time they had to spare for me, they said. I asked about school. They both answered, "Fine." I asked them what they were doing now. They both answered, "Nothing." We sat down to eat.

My daughter complained, "At home, Mom never serves us on paper plates. How come we have to eat off paper plates? Even on picnics, you'd make Mom serve us on regular plates." Her face tilted upwards, her finger poking at the paper plate.



ILLUSTRATION BY BRADON WEBSTER

My son rescued me. "Hot dogs! Great! We haven't had anything like this for a long time."

My daughter's face lowered a notch from its lofty heights. "Mom's on a nutrition kick. She's worried about our psyches, now that we're from a broken home."

"Yeah, she can't do enough. the more she worries about being a good mother, the more new theories we have to go through. You know, the other day she goes, 'We're going to have family meetings. Every week!' Boy, if you were living with us that sure wouldn't be happening."

Staggering from my son's comment, I heard the neighbor's door banging shut.

My daughter sniffed at her hot dog and proceeded to camouflage it with ketchup, mustard, and relish.

My son drew out a piece of paper from his pants pocket and pushed it towards me, leaving a ketchup thumb print on it. "Sir, by the way, could you sign this release form so I can go skiing with my class next Thursday?"

I eyed the piece of paper, bewildered as to what I should ask or know about such events. "Shouldn't your mother be the one to sign this? She's always been the one that's taken care of this sort of problem."

"Yeah, I know, but she wanted me to at least ask, just in case you were feeling lonely, and to make you feel like we still need you."

His sister turned on him. "You bozo, Mom told you not to say that part."

My son spoke with his mouth full. "Twerp. Just forgot. Anyway he doesn't mind. Never has before, you moron."

Pointing a fork, she says, "Don't call me names, air-head."

I watched them attack each other with a vengeance that startled me. I had never seen them like this. Each

morning, my daughter had bounced out of the house, dressed in the high fashion I had afforded her. My son had returned home after school with just enough time to change clothes and head out for some sports practice. I was mystified as to how to stop their bickering when the bellowing from next door outdid them. They stopped, looked at each other, then at me.

"Who's that?" My daughter's nose rose into the air.

"My neighbors," I replied, feeling protective of them.

"Well, aren't you going to do anything?" my daughter asked.

Her brother shouted, "How do you know anything gots to get done?"

At that moment, the child waited for a release from his tragedy.

"Wow, you got some neighbors, Dad," my son said.

"Does this kind of stuff go on often?" my daughter asked, curiosity winning.

I was reluctant to divulge any essentials about the people next door. They had become my life, and I had no idea how to include my children.

"We had a film just the other day about this kind of stuff," my son said.

"Did they have any suggestions?" I asked.

"They said to call the Social Rehabilitation Services," my son advised.

"Yeah, us too. We saw this film and someone spoke about it. Bit it don't make no difference." Thumps sounded from next door. "You see what I mean?" My daughter looked at me with eyes that reminded me of my mother.

I asked, "You don't think those people can be helped?"

"People have to help themselves. The world isn't going to be there just because you need something."

I stared at her, listening to echoes of my statements mouthed word for word. What had I done? Had I always believed that? Did I still? The slamming door shook the walls and was followed by tires escaping.

"Wow, that guy's rough on his car." My son tilted his head listening to the disappearing noise.

The weeping filled our senses.

"At least," my son turned to his sister, "those people talk to each other."

They exchanged glances. "Mom said to be nice."

My son stuffed a quarter of his hot dog into his mouth and reached for another. My daughter glared at him. I wondered if I should comment on my son's eating habits.

I looked from one of my children to the other. Their mother loved taking care of them and our home. I had been free to do my job without trepidation. I had listened attentively as friends shared their troubles from home. When it had been time, my wife and I planned the children. I had provided the food on the table and the roof over their heads. Isn't that what my role had been? Isn't that all that had been expected from me?

"Dad, you gonna sign this or not?" He waved the release form in the air, adding a spot of mustard.

"No, tell your mother she has my total confidence in her ability to decide what is best for you."

My son folded the paper and was putting it back into his pocket when I heard him mutter, "I knew he wouldn't want to be bothered." He then stuffed himself with his fifth hot dog.

Stunned, I searched my children's faces, attempting to find a resemblance to myself. The crying increased in volume. Over my shoulder on reflex, I asked my wife to quiet the child. Noise at supper time is bad for the digestion. My children looked away.

A short time later, they had to leave or else they

would be late. I understood, didn't I? At least I wasn't like their mother, always worried about them.

After they left, I stood in front of the wall that divided the apartments. I could hear the young wife's muffled crying. I put my hand on the wall, jerking it away quickly. I scolded myself. The heat from my own hand had frightened me.

Mother and child both sobbed now. I could imagine them, with their arms around each other, rocking in rhythm. So little strength to share. I worried; how much more could she take? Except, it was her problem. She could call the police herself. Right. Why should I get involved? They weren't family; they were just neighbors. I had no real business getting into someone else's life.

Their tears and whimpers fused into a tune of despair. On the wall, I saw the child I had been so long ago reaching up for a hand. Play with me. In a minute, in a minute, was the reply. I watched the dirt-stained "child" smile as its tiny hand was enveloped in a bigger, rougher, firmer hand. I remembered how safe that small "child" had felt with his father.

The security vanished one day.

I watched the "child" searching, chasing, grabbing after that feeling and never finding it again. I knew exactly when the "child" had decided the hurt was not worth the seeking. I saw the light go out in the "child's eyes."

I put my hand on the wall. This time I didn't draw it away. Waiting for later had caught up with me. My sobs joined theirs.

Much later, I rinsed my swollen eyes with cool water. Then I reached for the phone and dialed. "Hello. The kids told be about the family meetings. I was wondering if I could come to the next one. Yes, I'm all right. I think for the first time in a long time, I'm all right."

MARCH WINGS

by William Snyder Jr.

Mais voila l'oiseau-lyre

qui passe dans le ciel

l'enfant le voit

l'enfant l'entend

l'enfant l'appelle:

Sauve-moi

joue avec moi

oiseau!

Jacques Prevert

This row house of narrow rooms—
storm glass shut, windows sealed,
shades drawn down. But for one.

My kitchen window— this shade up,
this pane free— for light,
for strength.

And through this window, the house
across the way, backyard sketched
in winter leaf, scattered twig,
deck-rail planters
topped with ancient snow.

A brick walk— the bricks
seem random, stained. I drink coffee,
cup the hot, glass cup in my palms,
press my forehead
against the inner pane. Then birds.

Small birds. A troop
of grayish birds
with black and chestnut wings
flit here and there across the way,
perch on naked, brown limbs,
alight on bricks, peck and preen.

They sing. I think they sing.

KADOKA

by Richard Luftig

In Kadoka, South Dakota, the main business
of town is dying, the worn-out,
flat-front stores huddle and shield
their faces from a constant, yawning wind.

The town lists to railroads, its back
pressed flush to rusted tracks, waiting
for trains that don't come anymore,
not even in dreams.

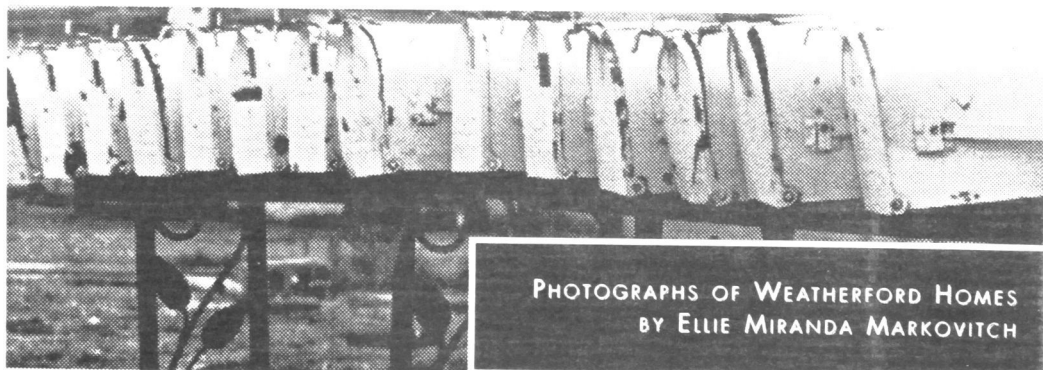
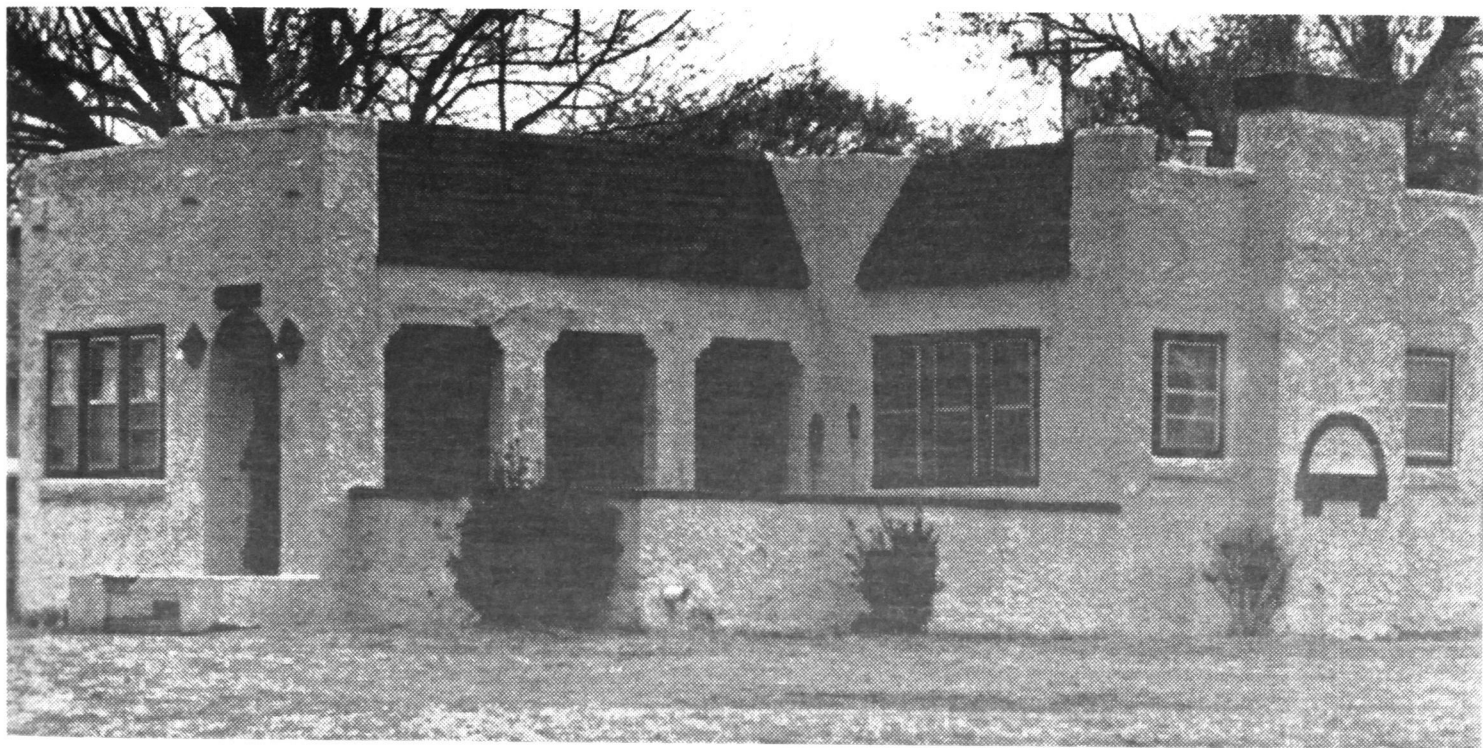
Out from Kadoka, the ribbon roads
crease black and empty fields,
land so flat you can drop a line
and weight and come up plumb

crazy from the straightness of it all.
Those roads run east to the end
of the town where buildings straggle
and fade into fence posts and winter

wheat, or west, past where the town
used to be, out to the highway lined
with truckstops full of placemats
for Yogi Bear Campgrounds and Badland Motels.

The graduating class, reduced to twelve,
drive brown beaters or trucks all tuned
to the country station in Pierre, are headed
to Denver or Cheyenne, wherever there's work.

The old one's sit and watch blacktop roads
buckle and roll against the August sun.
They count time by quarter hours and moons
waiting for ghost trains to take them home.



PHOTOGRAPHS OF WEATHERFORD HOMES
BY ELLIE MIRANDA MARKOVITCH

THEN THERE IS THOMAS

by Margie Cooke Porteus

It can be argued that all small towns in a geographic area during a given period of time have more in common than they have in differences. Of course, there are exceptions. One of these was Thomas, Oklahoma, during the twenties and thirties, and, to a lesser degree, today. Thomas, a small town eighty-five miles west of Oklahoma City on Highway 33, is where I grew up during that time. It wasn't until years later that I seriously began to realize the opportunities I had missed to absorb more of the area's diverse culture.

Like most small towns in the former Indian Territory during this period, a large segment of the population was homesteaders and their families. Many remembered, not only when the town was established, but when the Cheyenne and Arapaho lands had been opened for settlement. Many had helped to establish schools and churches before there was a town. When these pioneers moved into town they often brought a milk cow and some chickens, as my parents had. Some brought a horse, but most of these were gone by the mid-twenties. One exception was Floyd Vickers with his horse drawn dray which met the four daily trains. (Today grain elevators rising on the east and west sides of town mark where the trains ran.) Vickers hauled freight and occasionally passengers into town with his dray, which was still working at least into the late forties.

Among the citizens of these decades were the veterans of World War I, the Spanish-American War and even the Civil War. I can remember my grandfather, a Civil War veteran, telling of seeing Abraham Lincoln. What a thrill hearing him tell about it! Even though it was during the Depression, or maybe because of it, these veter-

ans helped bring a sense of patriotism to the community. Veterans were much in evidence then, as now, at Memorial Day observances which remain a big event in Thomas.

Although they weren't called entrepreneurs at the time, there were many enterprising business men. Maybe there were so many because they had the same need to be successful and had the same sense of adventure that had made them or their families willing to take the chance of getting a homestead.

Although some of these enterprises were before 1920, Thomas had the businesses one would expect for that era, plus, at one time or another, it had a brick plant, a broom factory, a cement factory, a canning factory, a cheese factory, a power plant, a feed mill and a flour mill. People talked for years about the smell when the latter burned. Sometime after the mill burned, the people in town were debating whether to pass a ten mill levy. Some of the young boys, not understanding about a mill levy, were quite concerned about where the ten new mills were to be built. Although I don't remember many of those early businesses, I do remember the cotton gin and the power plant whose heartbeat was a soothing, reassuring sound.

So, you ask, how did all of this make Thomas any different from many other small towns in the area? Maybe those things didn't, but other things did.

Southeast of town was the Amish community with their immaculate farms, well-built homes and sturdy barns. Common sights in town were their horse drawn buggies and in summer their horse drawn wagons loaded with wheat vying for space with trucks at the elevators.

We thought nothing of these sights even after the car had replaced this mode of travel for most other persons.

The business community catered to the Amish with hitching racks behind some of the stores. Stutzman's dry goods store kept dark solid color material for their clothes, especially the women's dresses, which were all made alike with no adornments.

Amish children went to rural schools, usually quitting after the eighth grade. Often when they started to school they could speak only the Amish dialect.

Southwest of town a community of Mennonites, who like the Amish were successful farmers, and especially the women, dressed pretty much alike. Both the Amish and Mennonite women wore head coverings in the form of a bonnet.

On a farm a mile southwest of Thomas, the Mennonites sponsored an orphanage which was run by a Mr. and Mrs. Eisenhour. Later this was Jabbok Bible School with students attending from other communities, even from out-of-state.

Both the Amish and Mennonite communities were close knit, but this didn't keep them from helping others when there was a need. I especially remember after severe storms in Thomas and Woodward, they pitched in to help rebuild homes that had been damaged.

A third influence on the community was the Indians who lived on farms scattered throughout the area. Like the Amish, most of the children dropped out of school before the twelfth grade. It wasn't until 1938 that any Indians graduated from Thomas High School. It was a common sight to see the men with long braided hair and women with blankets walking along the rural roads on

the way to town, and once there to sit on benches outside the stores.

Growing up in Thomas during the twenties and thirties I never thought about these different cultures, they were just part of the community. It wasn't until my future husband, a New Yorker, visited and his comments and curiosity started to make me realize the uniqueness of the little town.

Author's note: Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Webb Barton and Mrs. Zelma Crane of Thomas and to Ross Cooke of Henderson, Nevada for helping me to verify information.

NEAR-LIFE EXPERIENCES

John Grey

Someone is always telling me
how they almost died.
Laura sinks out of conversation
into the sofa,
shedding the almost
for a light nap.
"I thought the ice was solid,"
he continues, "but I crunched
through, sunk to my waist before
a deeper crust held me up."
Laura's breathing
is not loud
but I can hear it
over the rattle of coffee cups,
the snug memory of
near-death experiences.
His face fell ten stories,
white as the landscape,
thoughts speed-reading
his life's newsreel
as the end
leaped up out of the glacier
like an alligator
to almost crush him in its jaws.
Laura's life
is less dramatic,
breath giggling from her lips,
walking on ahead of her
like a child.

Taking his cue for a moment,
I imagine her falling from an airplane,
thrown from a car,
tumbling off the deck of a liner.
But her death never really takes hold,
her life always returning
to this starting out point,
gentle as my listening to her breathe,
on the smooth pink surface of her face,
the best there is
the perfect buffer
to the worst that could happen.

A REVIEW OF *OKLAHOMA HOMES: PAST AND PRESENT*

by Alvena Bieri

In Charles R. Goins and John W. Morris's *Oklahoma Homes* (The University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), blooms a wealth of photographs of unique Oklahoma houses, many of them in western Oklahoma. In style and purpose the architecture of Oklahoma houses ranges far and wide, all the way from the homes of the oil rich of the 1920s and 30s to ordinary houses to structures of historical importance. A convenient way to classify these dwellings is simply by observing the obvious wealth of the owners. Construction prices at the time of building would hardly be a reliable guide now. But as a clever sociologist said, "Big house usually equates with big man (or woman) in the realm." So in the section of the book labeled, "Oil Field Houses and Oil Mansions," we aren't surprised to see the shacks of the oil workers and in another part of town the abodes of the lucky oil entrepreneurs. In Oklahoma there's not only Philbrook, the remarkable Italian-style home of the Phillips family in Tulsa, long since turned into an art museum, but also in Enid the ornate columned Knox-Hedges House and the more-than-stately Champlin House of 1939. It's called by these authors "one of the best constructed dwellings in Oklahoma." It would ride out a tornado unscathed, I'm sure. Goins and Morris evidently base their structural assessment on the fact that the Champlin House was made of Ohio (not Oklahoma!) sandstone, thirty-five train loads of it, they write, and a quantity of Vermont slate. At least the "sun parlor," a bright place graced by eleven leaded glass windows, features many little scenes

from Oklahoma history and there's a Remington sculpture of a bronc buster. I don't think he's from Vermont.

Beaver, that 1,500-population town in the eastern panhandle, boasts not only the 1887 Presbyterian Church, but the Long-Leonard House of 1922, the Barby House, (home and art study built in 1962), and the striking, red Dace House of 1964. These look to be designed by architects and would probably fit well into certain neighborhoods of large metropolitan areas. Unfortunately, in such crowded places, the inhabitants couldn't enjoy a twenty-mile view of the plains outside Beaver or a view of the Wichita Mountains either, such as the mostly glass place called the Joyce House, west of Snyder has way down in Kiowa County.

Before we leave the Oklahoma panhandle, where any kind of house seems unusual on those long, flat roads between the small towns, the authors present one of the oldest (1892) houses in white western Oklahoma, the Hitch House south of Guymon. The Hitch place started as a bona fide sod house which over the past hundred years has just grown and grown. Now it has the look of a prosperous

compound of impressive proportions, a most pleasant retreat and working place down on Coldwater Creek.

In nearly every western Oklahoma town there's a little section of town where there still exist exceptionally good-looking, pre-statehood homes. That usually means big, white, and semi-Victorian, many with imaginative millwork design under the front gables. Such are the Johnson House in Elk City, the Berry House on Duck

Street in Stillwater, both built around 1905, and countless others, east and west.

In the large category of comfortable, but a little less pretentious and somewhat removed from the old Victorian ideal, are places like the Walcott-Watson House in Olustee, the Lee-Rainbolt House in Cordell, the Goodwin House in Clinton, the Jones House in Hollis, and the Mead and Farrand dwellings on the southwest side of Hobart. There's also a large, red brick house in that same section, an icon of my childhood, standing on the far west side of town whose Indian name I have long since forgotten. It's not mentioned in the book. In Weatherford, Goins and Morris show the Grossarth House, built, they say, in 1918, ordinary looking except for the two-tiered turret on its right side, which is reminiscent of the Governor Seay Mansion in Kingfisher, as is the little tower on the Ames-White House on Flynn Street in Alva.

But the dwellings of western Oklahoma encompass more than modified Victorian architecture and oil baron excess. The Heilman House and others in Guthrie, for example, were designed by 1890s Belgian architect Joseph Foucart, who also designed the Victor Block and much of downtown Guthrie, now wonderfully restored, as well as the little bank building on the southwest side of the town square in Perry. His style was an interesting mix of castle and Arabesque. Keyhole windows were common in Foucart design too, such as the ones on the now-gone Williams Hall, one of the earliest buildings on the east side of the OSU campus.

Not all the houses described in the book are open to the public, but some are, such as the Mattie Beal House in Lawton, on the National Register of Historic Places. Beal came to southwest Oklahoma from Wichita where she worked as a phone operator; she registered and received 160 acres in the August 1901 land drawing,

which opened the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache lands to white settlement. West of Lawton at Cache is another imposing dwelling tied closely to Oklahoma history, the famous Star House of Comanche Chief Quanah Parker, decorated with big white stars to tell the world that he was just as important as the white officials with whom he dealt in the latter part of his life.

For ancient Native American historical dwellings, however, Anadarko is the place to visit. On the hill to the south of town is a re-created group of homes of many tribes, some native to Oklahoma, some not. Here the most livable-looking of these is the Wichita Grass House, a domed kind of affair covered with grass thatch and pretty cozy-looking inside. The Caddo hut isn't bad looking either, but by comparison the Pawnee Earth Lodge looks a great deal like a half-dugout of white pioneer times. Either that or they were before their time, experimenting with earth-

sheltered houses and solar heating.

As a non-expert in matters of architectural detail, I've found that observation of real houses in Oklahoma and the study of books like this one can add depth to

what has become a favorite hobby of mine, looking at all kinds of houses from the curbside.



WHAT IS LEFT BEHIND

by Doug Simpson

Rose branches sway in a warm wind,
They caress the flaking paint of the eaves,
And scratch the weathered wood.
Pink and red petals droop over the gate,
And curve in the hot sun,
Moored to drying topsoil.
In the back room,
Amid cobwebs and musty curtains,
Grandfather Coleman naps on his widowed bed.
His alarm clock ticks in the pastel heat,
He breathes shallow but sure,
An occasional snore wrinkles his nose.
His weak, bare legs lay straight,
Delicate blue veins pulse in the dim light,
Hands curled loosely around his T-shirt.
There are few reminders of Grandma Mimi,
Dusty Avon bottles sit untouched on the mantelpiece,
Norman Vincent Peale is on the bookshelf,
But the double bed and unfinished sewing are gone,
A nest of late Spring birds sing in the garden,
The sparrows preen amid dry tomato branches,
Their winds whisper against the dead vines.
During the annual visit the garden seems smaller,
Plucked stems bend to the browning grass,
More neighbors borrow roses for their vases.
Although he doesn't tend the flowers anymore,
And the odor of wine is gone from the soil,
He says he feels soothed
By what has been left behind.

CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

Joe Benevento teaches creative writing at Northeast Missouri State University and is the poetry editor for the *Green Hills Literary Lantern*. His work has previously been published in over four dozen publications including *The Chattahoochee Review*, *Footwork*, *Fennel Stalk*, and the *Wisconsin Review*.

Alvena Bieri is a native of Hobart, lives in Stillwater, and is the book columnist for the Stillwater Press. She is the author of *Romancing Oklahoma: A Celebration of Time and Place*. She has also recently published a spoof on Oklahoma history, *Oklahoma Explained in Half an Hour*.

John Grey is an Australian born poet, playwright and musician. He writes a weekly poetry column and is a theater critic for *Providence's Nice Paper*. He has been most recently published in *Paintbrush*, *The Seattle Review*, *Sequoia*, and the *New Delta Review*. His latest chapbook is *Dance To The Window* from hosomeen press.

Jannett Highfill's mother was born in Ada, and her father was born and raised on a farm 15 miles south of Freedom. Her father still owns the farm his father was born on. She has had several poems published on rural/agrarian themes, most recently in the *Rolling Coulter*. She has also had poems published in the *Kansas Quarterly*, the *Mississippi Valley Review* and elsewhere. She does a considerable amount of professional writing as well;

her specialties are international trade and economic methodology.

Anne Helen Jupiter has recently graduated with a MA in Creative Writing from the University of San Francisco. At 17, she was writing melodramatic love stories and a romance novel. When she showed the novel to a nun at her all-girl Catholic school, she was sent to confession and never saw the manuscript again.

LuAnn Keener is a native of Texas. Her first collection of poems, *Color Documentary*, was published by Calyx Books last November; it received a 1990 Virginia Prize, and a chapbook selection under the same title was published by Troika Press in spring 1992. Poems from *Homeland*, a second manuscript which is currently under consideration, won the Mary Roberts Rinehart Award in Poetry, the 1992 Writers at Work Award, and the 1992 Chelsea Award. Her work has appeared in *Nimrod*, *Chelsea*, and numerous others.

Robert S. King's poems have been published or are forthcoming in hundreds of magazines, including *The Kenyon Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *California Quarterly*, *Chariton Review*, *Negative Capability*, *The Hollins Critic*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Poem*, and *Louisville Review*. He is the publications editor for the University of Georgia Agricultural Experiment Station and has published two chapbooks: *When Stars Fall Down*

as *Snow*, Garland Press, 1976; *Dream of the Electric Eel*, Wolfsong Publications, 1982.

Keith Long is a regular contributor to *Westview*, and during the past year his columns have also appeared in the *Antique Almanac*, *Update*, and the *Oak Ridge News*, as well as other newspapers. Long's writing has appeared in such national publications as *Cimarron Review*, *Midland Review*, *Weber Studies*, *Pegasus*, and *Living With Teenagers*. He has written more than 700 articles for his home-town newspaper, the *Marlow Review*, over the past fourteen years.

Richard Luftig is a professor of educational psychology and special education at Miami University in Ohio. During 1994-95, he has had over forty poems published or scheduled to be published in literary journals such as *Negative Capability*, *Four Quarters*, *Aura Literary Arts Review*, *Moody Street Review*, *Black River Review*, *Mind Matters Review*, *Mind in Motion*, *Emrys*, *Parnassus Literary Journal*, *The Lucid Stone*, *Ebbing Tide*, *Black Buzzard Review*, *Pinehurst Journal*, *Bone & Flesh*, *Poetalk*, *Plainsongs*, and *Potpourri*. Two of his poems are scheduled to appear in the upcoming anthology *Reader's Break*.

Edward C. Lynskey has had or will have his works published in *Poet Lore*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Southwest Review*.

CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

Karen McKellips grew up in Thomas, Oklahoma, and received her B.S. from SWOSU. She is now a professor of education at Cameron University specializing in history and philosophy of education. Her father, Kenneth K. Sweeny, who lived in the Swan community as a child, lives in the Thomas Nursing Center.

Sheryl L. Nelms has had over 3,500 poems, articles and short stories published. Some of the publications using her work are: *Reader's Digest*, *Modern Maturity*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Capper's*, *Grit*, *Country Woman*, *Poetry Now*, *Confrontation*, *Strings*, *This Delicious Day*, *The American Anthology*, and *Men Freeing Men*. She has also published six collections of poetry. She makes her living as an insurance adjuster. She is also a painter, weaver, and an old dirt biker.

William Orem's poetry appears in *The Sulphur River Literary Review*, *The Piedmont Literary Review*, *The Yalobusha Review*, *Onionhead Literary Quarterly*, *The Wolf Head Quarterly*, *The New Press*, *Black Bough*, *The Penware National Poetry Award Anthology*, and *Exquisite Corpse*. His short fiction and articles have been sold to *The Potomac Review*, *Mystery Scene Magazine*, *Haunts*, *After Hours*, and elsewhere, with an honorable mention in Datlow and Windling's *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* 1990 and again in 1994. He was also one of the three finalists in this

year's short story awards for *The Missouri Review*.

Margie Cook Porteus graduated from Thomas High School, and in 1943 graduated from Southwestern. She is a retired teacher who is interested in writing and the 3 G's: grandkids, genealogy, and gardening.

Melissa Price currently works in public relations in Ada, Oklahoma. She has won awards for her writing from Associated Press and edited a literary magazine as an undergraduate. She just completed her M.A. in Professional Writing and is in the process of beginning an M.F.A.

Ken Robertson of Decatur, Illinois, spent his formative years in Custer County near Fay.

Doug Simpson was born and raised in Ketchikan, Alaska, a small fishing town that is filled with the smells of dying salmon and cedar trees. He has been previously published in the *CWC Journal*, *Statement magazine*, and *X-It Art*. He recently graduated from California State University, Los Angeles with a B.A. in media studies.

William Snyder, Jr. is a graduate student at Florida State University and is a former poetry editor of *Sun Dog: The Southeast Review*. His poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Chaminade Literary Review*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*,

Midwest Quarterly, *The Louisville Review*, *Amelia*, *International Quarterly*, and *Negative Capability*.

James Caldwell Strong writes from Clinton, Oklahoma.

Elmer Suderman, born in Fairview, Oklahoma, winner of one of the Seaton Awards of *The Kansas Quarterly* for 1986, has published poetry in *Wind Magazine*, *Descant*, *Forum* (Ball State University), *Cimarron Review*, *North Country Anvil*, *South Dakota Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Loonfeather*, and many others. In addition to poetry he has published short stories, essays, and scholarly articles on American literature. He is a professor emeritus at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota.

Elaine Hoffman Wagener was born in Douglas, Oklahoma, and migrated to Texas during the first oil boom. She graduated from Southern Methodist University with a B.S. in Education and from the University of Tennessee with a M.S. and an Ed. D. She has taught elementary school and at the University of Texas in Austin and the University of Texas in San Antonio. She has been writing for twenty years.

Amy Wilson received her M.F.A. in Creative Writing —poetry from Columbia University, New York, New York. She teaches creative writing at Mohave Community College in Lake Havasu City, Arizona.



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