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A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

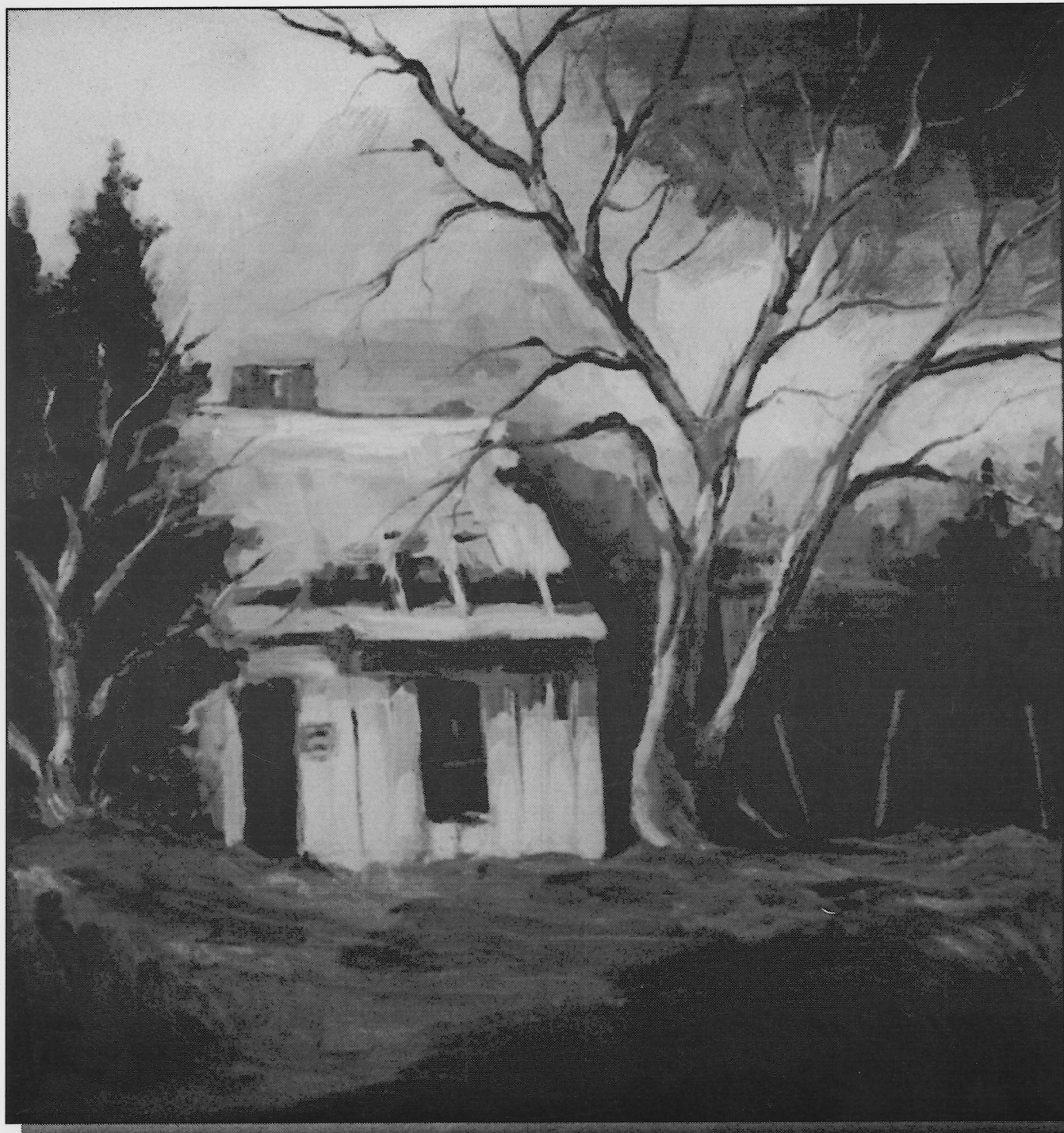
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Western Oklahoma

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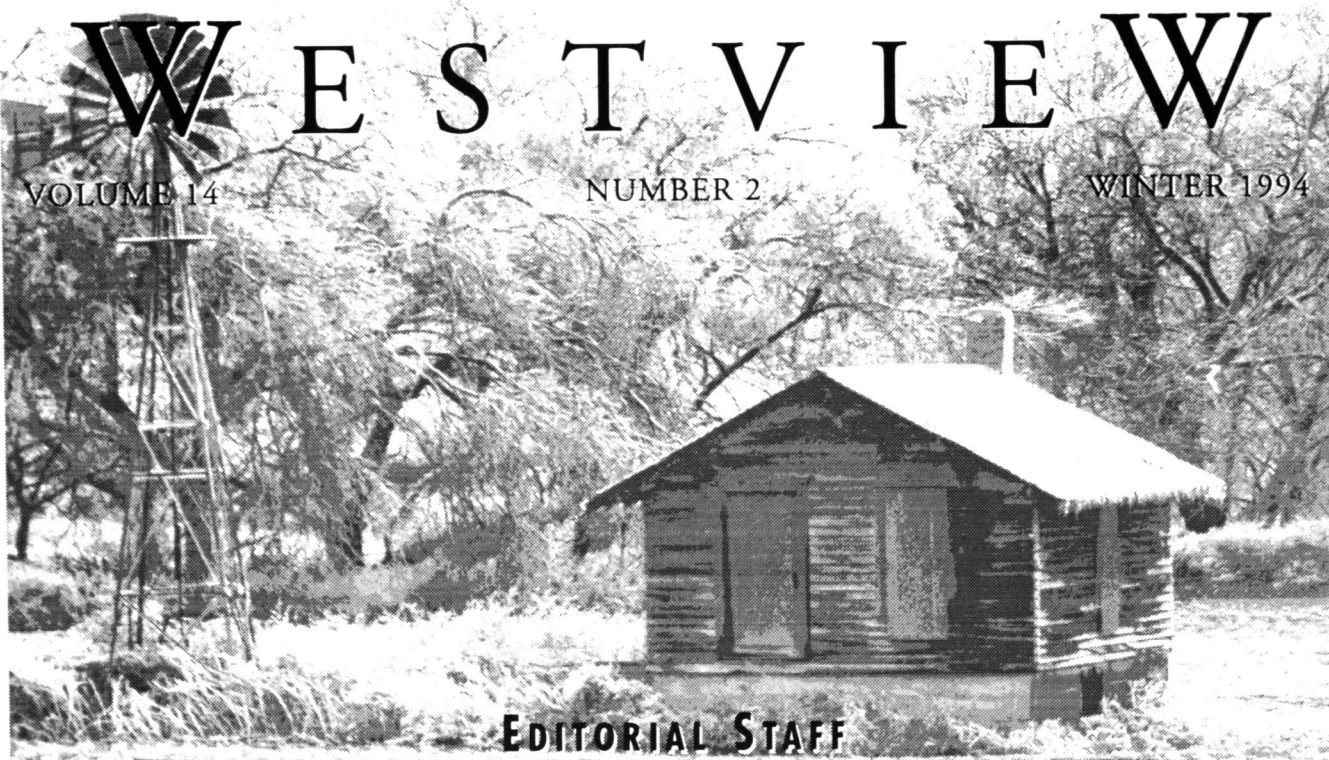
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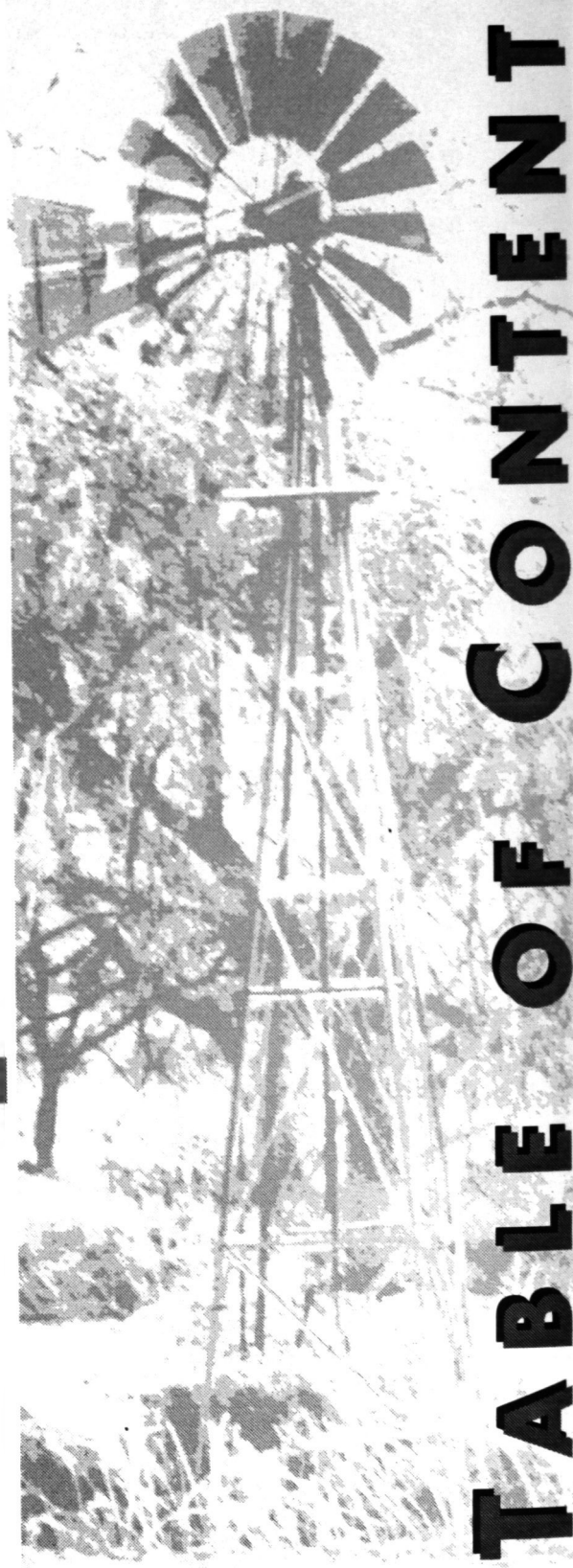
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3. Submitted artwork should be suitable for black and white reproduction. Work should be no larger than 8.5" x 14". However, photographs of larger work may be submitted. Please do not send slides. Include a SASE.
4. We use themes related to western Oklahoma, as well as non-thematic work of high quality by writers from elsewhere.
5. We accept and enjoy both free verse and formal poetry.
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Western Oklahoma Communities/Architecture:Spring 96
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Illustration by Scott Cummins

The Complicated Entertainer Travis Belfontaine Tells What Accounts for His Style

by James Whitehead

My mother says he had our pretty name
and was the brightest guy she'd ever met,
Like a shower of stars, and made her laugh.
Corey Belfontaine.

He worked refineries in Baton Rouge,
And so she married him,
Married how so sweetly he could sing
And play the guitar and the saxophone
He'd picked up growing up in Lafayette.

She says for years we were a family
A girl gets on her knees to ask God for.
For years he was a sweet lighthearted man,
And often I remember him that way,—
Playing—Mamma smiling on the porch.
We're singing "All Around the Water Tank,"
"Power in the Blood," that type of thing.—
All this before he made the choice to drink,
Or chose to drink too much.



He made some strange decision in his mind
About the possibilities of life
That ruined everything,
Imagined for their marriage
Curious pleasures she found pitiful.
"I swear I loved him and was satisfied,
And thought he was," she said.
He cursed and hit her for her innocence,
Then left for Baton Rouge forever more.

He left the instruments
And never failed to send his money home,
And wrote us letters for about a year,
Friendly letters. He taught me how to pick.
He taught me how to think,—
And I have never touched a living soul
Who didn't want the touch,
And I know a sober night of ecstasy
Is good and not far from the best there is.



Illustration by Scott Cummins



A Poem for My Humerus

by James Whitehead

1

A recent x-ray of my arm and shoulder
Set me against cremation's cleansing fire
More than I was before.
One time I heard it called *a cleansing fire*,
Suggesting guilt and terrible regret
Concerning life on earth. I'm not for that.—
Also, one time I called to ask about
A funeral, was told that the cremains
Were at the home of the deceased.

Say what?

There'd be a service in another city.
Cremains! O this is how the language dies
Or says we're desperate for metaphor
To give a little dignity to death,
A sort of mousse with ashes that won't do.

2

My humerus was lovely glowing there
Upon the wall, looking like the moon,
Or at least its head did, lit from behind,
The doctor smiling over my old wounds,
Scores in the bone, stray pieces of calcium.—
Worst comes to worst, he said, we'll take it out—
My humerus!—and put a new one in
Made from incredible materials.



I asked him could I have the one displaced.
I realized I'd want it in a case
On view, with a bright plaque explaining things
The arm had done, helped by its hand,—tackles,
Blocks, embraces, many sentences.—
But it won't come to that, the doctor said.

3

Some Christians won't cremate because they fear
much difficulty with the resurrection,
God finding problems with the chemistry
It takes to put a body back together
After fire.

I'm not concerned with that,
For—alas—the Christian reconstruction
Seems far-fetched, to say the very least,
And is a mighty viciousness when faith
That some will rise tortures all the others.
Tacky or vicious seems to be the word.

Christ, I'd be rendered to a skeleton,
Then let an archeologist come on.
She's fascinated. She is taking notes.
She holds my humerus to the sun.



For My Father at Eighty

by James Whitehead

For years he never talked about the war
Except to name some places he had been,
Le Havre, Remagen, moving on Berlin.
I wanted him to tell some outright fear

He'd suffered in his bravery, the roar
Of German eighty-eights, the flinch of pain,
The dead, some hatred, a severe *God damn*.
For years he kept his peace, and he's never sworn.

Mother told me not to trouble him.
Maybe or not he'll somehow find the time,
And if he does, then leave the man alone.
You've no idea what the man has seen.

One afternoon, when I was married, grown,
A good time in the best of company,
He joined our easy talk of history.
Miller and Ward and Gen were there. He'd seen

The armies' soldiers, frozen, torn-apart,
And, worse, a death camp, thousands naked and starved,
In five great pits, enough to break your heart.
We did our best. Only three survived.

His story was five hundred words, no more.
He told it well. He'd told his war.
My father's a gentle Presbyterian.
At eighty, thoughtful, he believes in hell.

James Whitehead's poems are from *Near At Hand*, University of Missouri Press, 1993.



Interview with James Whitehead

by Fred Alsberg

Alsberg: If you were to advise young writers about the benefits of formal prosody, what would you tell them?

Whitehead: Most of the poetry in our language has been written in some sort of meter, and much of it has used rhyme. This is true of other languages. Therefore, it seems reasonable (and in the service of passion) to understand great and good work by way of its form. Also, I tend to believe that *form* and *content* are false distinctions. Think of **corm** and **fontent**, or maybe **foment** is the right word. All good poetry uses expressive *rhythm*, and a rhythm that is alive and well is usually scannable in one way or another. Also, good poems should be memorized.

Alsberg: What traits have made Southern writing into a literature that is distinct from writing produced in other parts of the country?

Whitehead: This question is asked so often it must mean something. Start by reading *The Mind of the South* by W. J. Cash. Also read *The South* by B. C. Hall. Is S. L. **distinct**? It tends to believe that **story** is the mind's way of understanding the world. Also the soul's way. Also, a story that tends toward **song** is likely to be the best story. We suffer our deeds and tell about them. Sometimes there is **revelation**—then the story dissolves into **light** or into the **outer dark**. Jews, no matter where they live, often write this way, and Greeks and Italians. Truth be told, I'd rather not believe in geographical regions. There's sociology and mythology. I prefer mythology, because I like to dance.

Alsberg: What can a graduate writing program do for an aspiring writer?

Whitehead: A writing program should offer a person time to write and time to read, and the company of other good writers and readers. The staff of a writing program should edit and edit and edit, with skill and care, and kindness.

Alsberg: What author that you know (or knew) personally has influenced your writing?



Whitehead: There are three. R. V. Cassill, Howard Nemerov, and Miller Williams. Cassill and Williams continue to encourage me. Howard is dead and I miss him. Encouragement is the best influence.

Alsberg: What non-literary books would you recommend for writers?

Whitehead: Non-literary books? Excluding poetry and fiction, here are some of the writings I've enjoyed over the last couple of years. I've re-read most of Loren Eiseley's books, and I've discovered Paul Johnson's histories: *Modern Times: The World from the Twenties to the Eighties*; *The Birth of the Modern: World Society, 1815-1830*; *A History of Christianity*. His book of short biographies, *Intellectuals*, is also a kick. Andrew Motion's *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life* is worth the effort. *Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell*, by David Kalstone, is excellent. I'm re-reading Amy Kelly's *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings*. Marion Meade's *Eleanor of Aquitaine* is also good. Ray Monk's *Ludwig Wittgenstein* may well be a masterpiece. I finally got around to Robert Hughes' *The Shock of the New*. I'm writing a novel in which a character reads Jesus scholarship, so I've read two books by Crossan; also *The Unauthorized Version* by Robin Lane Fox; also Wilson's Jesus book; also *Jesus the Magician* by Morton Smith; E. P. Sanders' *Jesus and Judaism*. I'm working back into Eric Voegelin's five-volume *Order and History*. All of this begins to sound tedious—when in fact it is a great deal of fun,—though not so much fun as reading Yeats or Bishop or Larkin. Or Welty. Or Cheever.

Alsberg: As a fan of Elizabeth Bishop's poetry, what would you say are the attributes and flaws of her work?

Whitehead: There are few flaws. She doesn't have the reach of Yeats or the sometimes genius of Dickinson, but she is, poem after poem, wonderful. *The Complete Poems* may include ten less-than-wonderful poems, but let me list twenty that are among the best of the age: "The Map," "Chemin de Fer," "Cirque d'Hiver," "Florida," "Roosters," "The Fish," "At the Fishhouses," "The Prodigal," "Arrival in Santos," "Questions of Travel," "Manuelzinho," "The Armadillo," "Sestina," "First Death in Nova Scotia," "Filling Station," "Visits to St. Elizabeths," "In the Waiting Room," "Crusoe in England," "The Moose," "One Art," "Santarem," and "Pink Dog."—That is twenty-two. Her music in fifty poems is flawless, and she is in a state of grace almost always. Helluva poet, Elizabeth Bishop.

Alsberg: What are the attributes and flaws of Philip Larkin's poetry?



Whitehead: The flaw one now discovers when coming to Larkin is not Larkin's flaw at all; it is Anthony Thwaite's. Thwaite is the editor of the *Collected Poems* and has chosen to arrange the poems in "chronological order of completion," thus destroying the organization of the published books. Thwaite includes early poems and poems Larkin did not choose to put in his books, and this is fine; but they should have been placed in sections to themselves. Best to get copies of *The North Ship*, *The Less Deceived*, *The Whitsun Weddings*, and *High Windows*. The *Collected* will be of interest to the student of Larkin. Larkin's poetry is formal, passionate, mordant, often very funny; he is, I suppose, my favorite recent poet, though I consider his ideas about marriage and children rather silly. I am married and pleased to be married, and I am the father of seven children, all of whom I love and admire. Whatever, Larkin is sour about the philoprogenitive process; his error is grim and witty and sometimes wise. He does approve of marriage for other people, and often he likes children. Larkin was a great poet, a wonderful librarian, and a serious womanizer, in his own peculiar and cautious way. Also I'm not keen on his politics.

Alsberg: Should a piece of writing contain a didactic element, or should it be simply for pleasure?

Whitehead: A poem that pleases a reader will teach the reader something. A good poem must please and will teach, directly or indirectly.

Alsberg: What will your next novel be about?

Whitehead: *Bergeron: A Character* is about the owner of a New Orleans professional football team, The Sax. I'm trying to figure out this person. Is he crazy or isn't he? Onward.



Illustration by Rodney Cloud



Meanwhile, Back Home

by J.R. Prince

When his name was announced, Cole was tightening the wrap of rope around his left glove and hand. Sundown and twilight had just passed into full night. Directly above, the stars pierced through the wash of the arena lights. All around the Jaycees' arena, however, the lights drowned out the night, shining down on the packed dirt inside the fence. The crowd sparkled as white T-shirts shifted back and forth to the refreshment stands and cigarettes were lit while others were tossed down and ground out underfoot.

As Cole's name reverberated over the P.A. system, he and the cowboys in and around the chute spoke urgently to each other, straightening and tugging on ropes. The bull stamped, snorted and slammed against the slats penning him in. In the high summer heat, the smell of the sweating bull and the dripping cowboys made it hard for anyone to breathe in the chute. Under his shirt Cole's bandages were soaking wet and filthy, and they itched. He would need help changing them later that evening, after his shower and a bootleg Demerol.

Cole wiggled his hand inside his glove to get it shoved more firmly against the rope and jamming his hat still further onto his head. In a lull between crashes against the chute, he clamped down into the bull's shoulders and quickly jerked his head up and down, staring at the bull's horns. At that signal, the chute door slammed open and the bull jumped out. The rope jerked tighter around Cole's hand.



At the tag end of another summer's night Cole had been looking out to the stars instead of down over

horns, staring out of a kitchen window over the sink. In his hand a cup of coffee turned cold, the first cup of coffee of the day poured well before dawn. While he stared, silently, out of the window at the stars, his mother worried at him in a low monotone from the table behind. Her coffee, too, was going cold.

Cole's mother collected and nurtured slights and insults as the memorabilia of her life. She could probe all her past hurts the way you can touch a sore tooth with your tongue, and just like a sore tooth she couldn't help probing them. Ten years after her mother-in-law's snub she could still be angered by her memory that baby Cole's grandmother had not bothered to come to his first birthday. Now that he was leaving home, not to go to college in Stillwater like he was supposed to do but to squander his life in the rodeo like white trash, she felt like screaming with pain. But she was all screamed out. He had not even told her until last night that he was leaving, precipitating a violent storm of argument that lasted for hours. Now, at dawn, after restless sleep for both of them nothing really was left to say. Not to say, however, that she would not say it all again.

"We've worked hard to get you the money to go to school, you know," she said.

"I know, Mama," he said.

"All our lives your dad and I thought you knew what we hoped for you, what we wanted for you to be able to do."

"I know, Mama."

"It would be hard on your dad for you not to be here to help, you can see he ain't young, but we were ready to sacrifice for your future; now you've gone and tossed your future in the trash," she nearly whispered.

"I know how you feel, Mama."

The sun was breaking over the bull pasture fence, coming up from behind the clump of blackjack oak at



the stock tank, with bands of orange and pink and light blue. I've got to get going soon if I'm going to get to Fort Collins tonight, he thought. If I don't get in tonight I'll be too stiff to ride tomorrow.

"I know we should never have let you play around at these little Jaycees rodeos. They're just amateur nights, son, you can't tell how good you are from them."

"I know, Mama," he said. I know I'm good, Mama, he thought.

He tried a sip of coffee, and discovered how cold it was. He threw it into the sink, and decided it was time to leave. He would stop and get breakfast on down the road, and wait until after to brush his teeth.

"I've gotta go, Mama," he said. He saw the tears in her eyes, but he also saw the familiar frown on her face.

"When will you come home, son?" she said.

"Soon, Mama, soon," he said, and he meant it. He kissed her quickly on the forehead and slipped out the kitchen door. The moment he stepped outside he filled his lungs with the only cool air of the day and he felt like running to his pickup. He did plan to come home though, to visit. He was still planning to do it, soon, when he could.

Heading north out of town he passed the section road turning down toward Marcie's house. He could just see the house, over on the first ridge up from the dry creek that ran by the section line. None of the lights were on.



When the bull jumped out of the chute on that late summer night, Cole shoved his legs hard against the bull's sides and speared his knees into its flesh. The shock of the first jump snapped his left arm and kicked the sharp pain in his rib muscles into action. The bull twisted his spine left in a kick of his hind legs and then planted those legs to throw his chest in a spin to the

right. Cole pedaled his weight side to side as if he were riding a bicycle with his thighs, trying to breathe in rhythm with the bull's feet. The bull was an ugly black Brahma with speckled horns and a white mask, and he had a reputation as a spinner. He was known to whirl around in circles, then plant and whirl in the opposite direction. Sure enough, after whirling to the right and snapping his legs out behind, the bull planted his weight and then lifted and hurled his head and shoulders to the left. But as Cole began to anticipate a hard thrust back to the left, the bull began to jump up and kick back behind, showing himself a buckner as well as a spinner. Cole lost an inch of rope on the back kick, and slipped to the left. He nearly touched the horn with his right hand, but saved the ride by throwing that hand up and away over his head.



Three hundred miles away in a hospital delivery room a young woman named Marcie Gibson was screaming with each push. She was soaked with sweat and the hot wash of blood and fluid between her legs. As she forced her exhausted body to push through the pain to hear the nurse say, "The head is coming out now, honey, just another push." Marcie panted and cried, and watched her baby's purplish head appear. Through the haze of hours of labor she had been focused on this one sight. Upon seeing her child, she felt all of her earlier life fall away before this moment. She began to cry, in fear, in awe, in joy.



Cole cried out, in an involuntary half-grunt and half-scream, as the bull cracked its back around into a clockwise spin, twisting away from the side to which he could feel Cole's weight slipping. Cole wrenched his left arm into a tight curl and shoved hard with his left buttock and knee, grabbing desperately to pull himself



out of a fall. The back of Cole's jeans were plastered to the back of his legs with his sweat and the bull's. In the spin his hat flew away. The strands of the strained muscles in his chest felt like they were tearing. He could not completely recover control, and felt off balance to his left, so it was only a matter of time before he fell, at least if the bull kept spinning. But it was only a matter of time before the whistle blew, so Cole was in a race with his own loss of balance.



"I guess I knew it was only a matter of time," Marcie had said, "before you took off."

"Now, honey," said Cole, "I'm not taking off. I'm going on a job, like, to make it big, to make you proud of me."

They were sitting at the lake watching the moon, pale bone white in the stars and broken and dimmer in the choppy water being pushed by the steady wind against the shore.

"I'm not joining the Army or whatever. I mean, you thought I was going off to school, right? So I'm going off to school, just like."

"I'm going to school, sugar, not you. I'm going to finish high school and go to OSU, where you were going, remember? So don't tell me it's like you are going off to school, I'm not buying."

"I love you, Marcie. I'll call, I'll write, I'll visit you all the time. You know I won't cheat on you Marcie," he said.

"What difference does that make? If you're gone, you're gone," she said.

They stayed there until the circles of talk tightened until the futility of saying more became too obvious to go on. But going to her house, Marcie and Cole did keep talking, because it was too hard to end. As he pulled up in front of Marcie's house, Cole felt relieved

when he saw her father peeking out the front window as he drove up. That meant they could end this useless conversation. As he helped Marcie out of the car, Cole said, "I'll call you and tell you all about the circuit. I'll make it like you are there."

"Yeah, sure, I know it, Cole. You call me, OK?"

Cole walked Marcie on to the porch of her house and squared around to face her. He leaned over, kissed her, and said, "I'll call as soon as I get there, OK?"

"You do that, sugar," she said, but she thought, you'll stop calling soon enough.



Which, after a few months, he did. He hadn't spoken to her since October last, when in the process of hiding from her that, once in a while, he'd been with someone in a small town, he felt her withdrawing. Was it really she who pulled away or was it his own wall of hidden feelings? Either way, that call made him feel too cold to ever want to call again. He still thought he wanted to call, but when the time came he never really could get around to it. He wound up sending her a card at Christmas, but she hadn't sent him one back. He wanted to ask his mother about Marcie, but his mother had never acknowledged Marcie's existence when they were dating, and anyway he didn't call home too much, either. He had spent Christmas with a friend in Laredo and Easter in a hospital in Roswell, New Mexico, and basically he and his mother weren't on the best of terms. His father, well, his father and he had needed an interpreter to talk to each other for a long time.



For what seemed like a very long time, while Cole felt himself slipping, the bull stayed tight in his spin without wavering at all. Cole knew he could make eight seconds and out, but he knew it would be close. If he just kept digging his knees, if he could just lean into the



turn a bit more.... His left elbow began to lock. Cole felt the rope cut into the meat of his hand through the tough buckskin of his glove. A moment of panic rushed through his stomach and tightened his lungs. A quick moan cracked his lips. Then he heard the buzzer.



Marcie groaned one last time and she pushed the baby's head out and the rest of him slid through into the obstetrician's waiting arms. Marcie saw the first miracle of her life in the mirror at her feet, then dropped her head back in exhaustion and numbness. Suddenly she could not see or hear anything except blue and red dots dancing in front of her eyes against the blinding white backdrop of the overhead lights. Then she heard the baby cry. For a moment, a confused instant, she thought her son was being taken away, the nurses were doing something, she couldn't tell what. But then the second miracle of her life took place. They put her baby down against her panting breast. Her child was bruised and misshapen by birth, but she could see how beautiful he was and would be, the most beautiful person in the whole world.



Cole slipped his left hand free of the rope in time to grab the pickup man and swing himself over to the ground. He briefly swung his head into the bright lights and caught his breath before dropping his eyes to the sea of shifting white T-shirts. He swung his hand up in a wave as he jogged over to grab his hat from the dirt. The clowns had the bull under control, playing him with the barrel and flopping giant handkerchiefs, so Cole was free to be gracious and look calm to the crowd. While he was bending over for the hat, though, the bull made a move toward his direction that Cole saw out of the corner of his eye. He scooped up the hat and scooted over and up onto the fence, before dropping down after the clowns

drew the bull back. He waved his hat at the grandstands and jogged over to the back fence and climbed it to get back behind the chutes. As he jogged over, the announcer called out over the P.A., "Let's give a big hand to that young cowboy, Cole Brown, from down in Cochise, Oklahoma! Looking over the scoreboard we can see that he's got the score to beat!"

Back near the calf pens, Cole stripped off his shirt and tried to stretch his left side. That may have been a mistake, but it felt good in a perverse way to explore the



Photo illustration by John Shear



burning that it caused. He reached into his gym bag, sitting on his saddle shoved up against the fence, and pulled out a clean white shirt. While he was buttoning the shirt, Billy Bejcek beat Cole's score to beat. By the end of the evening, Cole finished in third, worth a fair piece of change but not enough on which to get rich. He'd only spend part of his winnings with the doctor and some decent money would be left. Just enough, in fact, to keep him moving down the road and building his hopes for the National Finals in Fort Worth. Maybe he would go to the doctor here in town tomorrow, he thought, but he'd need to get on to Billings by Thursday.

After the crowds had left that night, before he left the fairgrounds, Cole asked Bull Conway, one of the clowns, to rewrap his bandage. Bull was an old hand and did a job good enough to last until the next day's stop at the doctor's office. A lot of the boys were heading to a bar they'd found the night before, but Cole didn't feel up to it. In fact, Cole was a little lonesome for someone he really knew, someone to whom he could really talk.

Cole went back to his truck, took off his spurs, threw his gear on the seat next to him, and drove back to the little strip motel where he had a room. In the room, he stripped off his chaps and shirt, sat on the bed and flicked on the television. The local news was on, talking about brush fires near towns of which Cole had never heard the names in his life. He turned the sound all the way down, and started to dial his home number. But at the last moment, after he dialed the area code and local exchange number, he changed his mind. Instead, he dialed Marcie's family's house. The telephone rang three, then four times, but there was no answer. It was not yet 10:30, so probably they wouldn't be in bed, but they might have been out. They didn't go out much, so

Cole thought perhaps they were just taking their time getting to the telephone.


Cole didn't let it ring a fifth time. He lost his nerve. It had been so long since he had spoken to her, and he would have no idea what to say to anyone in her family. He was a little afraid of what her parents might say to him. So instead of letting the phone ring a fifth time—it's not that big a house, anyway, they must be out, he thought—Cole hung up. When the telephone was back in its cradle, Cole sat and stared at the television, as the news became the *Tonight Show*, letting the images flicker in the silence.



In the hospital in Lawton, Oklahoma, Marcie was nursing her baby for the first time. The sensation of the little mouth fastened to her nipple, coaxing the flow of liquid not yet mother's milk, was like nothing else ever in her life, better than anything she had ever felt in a different way than anything had ever felt good. That was the third miracle of her life.

Next to her bed was a tall, thin boy of twenty, with auburn hair already beginning to show signs of receding, with shining red and freckled skin well on the way to becoming the wrinkled tanned leather it would be by the time he reached middle age. The boy had a look of exhausted worship in his eyes, swallowing in both mother and child. His face was so full of adoration that Marcie had to laugh. He grinned when she laughed, then he laughed too.



Cole finally turned off the television when he realized it was close to midnight. He never bothered to shower, and he slept on top of the bed with his boots still on. He had a long drive to make the next day. 



The Pearls

by Lyn Lifshin

An engagement present, from my husband's parents.
Shoved in a drawer like small eggs waiting to hatch,
forgotten. They seemed like something in a high school
photograph. I'd have preferred a large wrought iron pendant,
beads that caught the sun. Pearls were for them

and I was always only a visitor, tho he said he wished
I'd call him Dad. Sam was all I could get out,
it was hard to throw my arms around him, to bubble
and kiss. And not just because they thought
me a hippie, a witch, thought I took

their son's car and stamps and coin collection.
Pearls wouldn't go with my corduroy smocks, long black
ironed hair. They didn't blend with my hoops of onyx
and abalone that made holes in my ears but caught the light.
Pearls might have gone with the suits I threw away,

no longer a graduate student trying to please.
They weren't suitable for days with a poet hidden in trees
or for throwing up wine in toilet bowls after poetry readings
where I shook and swore not to let anyone see. My spider medallion
is in at least eight poems. Pearls remind me of the way I thought

I was: studious but not wild, not interesting. But I put those pearls
on last night tho I hadn't planned to wear them. They didn't seem ugly
or apt to choke, seemed gentle and mild as so little is in my life
these days. I slept in nothing but those pearls, they seemed
part of me.





Illustration by John Shear

Dredged

by Yvonne Carpenter

Gone was the illusion of grace, the noise of leaves
breathing against the roof, the slight drop of temperature,
and the witnesses to the life of this place, the farm.

I felt anger for my mother-in-law complaining in
death not of her own pain but of her big elm ripped
out to widen the lane for the new plow, anger for my
grandmother so starved for green she planted poison
castor beans, anger for myself and my children
who had played in that foliage. I screamed and pictured
green tractors crumbled between my hands.

All for our farm. The one that owns us. To which all
things are sacrificed, most certainly trees that clog
the drainage ditch.



Getting Flared

by Keith Long

Most of the torturous experiences of my adolescent years can be directly related to bell bottoms. And it remains so.

Quay was looking through one of my Outlaw yearbooks the other day when, out of the blue, he commented on my attire in one of the prom pictures.

"What's the matter with your pants?" he asked.

I checked. "Nothing," I said.

"I mean in this picture," Quay said, handing the yearbook over to me.

There I was, a high school junior, dressed in bell bottoms. I had a 34-inch inseam and 48-inch cuffs.

"Those are just bell bottoms," I said, trying to pass the whole deal off without becoming too defensive.

"Did you have shoes on?" Quay asked, beginning to giggle.

"Yes," I retorted. "I had shoes on. White shoes. To match that white belt," I added, pointing to my mid-section.

"Oh," Quay said, his giggling gathering momentum and becoming a guffaw by the minute. "No wonder you wore bell bottoms. You were hiding your shoes."

"No, I wasn't. I was styling. Everyone wore white shoes back in those days. White shoes were in."

"Right. And what kind of dance are you doing there, anyway?" Quay asked. "The duck squat?"

"We didn't do 'kinds of dances' back then. We just danced."

"I don't understand."

"We free-lanced it. We just moved. Like free-verse poetry. We didn't know any dances, but with our music, we didn't need to know any," I said, feeling as though my

explanation pretty well summed up the 70's prior to disco.

"It looks like you would've run into each other a lot," Quay said, still smirking.

"Maybe," I said. "Maybe not."

So much for yet another torturous moment thanks to bell bottoms.

Since bell bottoms were so in at the time, I had several pairs of denim bell bottoms, a pair of cotton blend bell bottoms, a pair of polyester bell bottoms and a pair of acrylic bell bottoms, which I wore to school on library day so I could pick up lots of static electricity and go around snapping people's ears.

When a pair of bell bottoms began to show some wear and tear, they naturally became my "outdoors" garment. In other words, I wore them hunting and fishing.

Once Harv and I were seining for shad in a shallow recess at Lake Fuqua, me in my bell bottoms and Harv in a pair of shorts and fluorescent green socks.

Being somewhat skittish because of the snakes in the area, I became reasonably concerned when something slick and scaly bumped against my leg and began climbing up the inside of my bell bottoms.

I shouted and sort of threw my end of the seine into the air and onto Harv's head. Since the water was only about two feet deep, I sat immediately down, lifted my leg out of the water and went grappling up the bell bottoms after whatever critter was in there.

I could grab the tail, but it was wedged in pretty tightly up above the knee and it was so slimy I couldn't get a good grip.

Harv finally talked me out onto the bank where I slipped out of the bell bottoms. It was a carp.

"Nice one," Harv said. "That'd go about six pounds."



I put my pants back on and picked up the seine.

"Let's try it again," I said, speaking with more composure than I was feeling.

"Let's not," Harv said. "Why don't you just go out there and walk around some. Those bells ought to be as good as this seine."

Then there was the time Harv and I decided we needed to have a bike race. There were these two girls staying a week with their grandmother and we felt we could get their attention by swooping past their house at 70 mph on our bicycles.

We both knew why we wanted to race, but we didn't mention it to each other, since we weren't supposed to be interested in girls yet, anyway.

Nevertheless, we both agreed the race should go directly in front of the girls' grandmothers' house three different times, which meant the race was going to be about 12 blocks long.

We started and everything was going well. Harv was a little ahead of me on the first pass, but that was all right because the girls weren't really noticing us yet. They were on the front lawn doing cartwheels, undoubtedly trying to catch our attention without telling each other they were doing so.

Harv and I were dead even on the second pass, and by now the girls had quit tumbling and were standing in the middle of the yard with their hands on their hips and watching us go whizzing past.

When we rounded the curve for the third pass, the girls were sitting on the curb, obviously watching to see who would win.

I was just a little ahead when disaster struck. My bell bottoms got caught in the bicycle chain, which meant the bike sort of flipped over onto my head, which was bouncing around skinning up as much gravel as it could.

I wound up getting the attention of the girls' grandmother, who bandaged me up as best as she could and sent me home, while Harv sat out in the front yard and explained to the girls how really clumsy I actually was.

I think it should've been against the law to ride a bike with bell bottoms. I think there is a law to that effect now, tacit within the law that bell bottoms are forbidden now as clothing, period. ☒

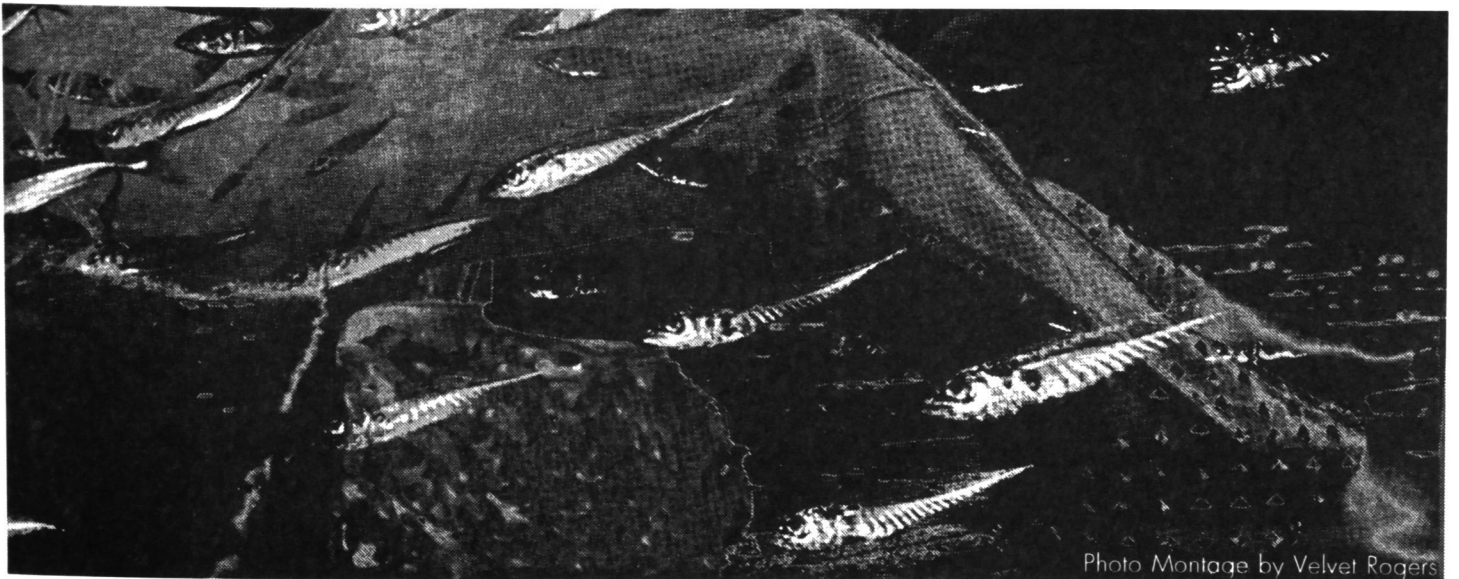


Photo Montage by Velvet Rogers



Legacy of a Dustbowl Woman

by C. Michael McKinney

Hers was the chair
rocking empty at the window,
blown by the northwind
ripping soil from seed.
Hers was the apron
muddied with sweat,
hiding a womb dry
and emptied by hunger—
red water makes pink bread,
feeds only the mind
with wind-howls
from clapboard cracks.
Hers was the stove
cold and full
with cow dung and bible ash,
rancid with fat
from a meatless skeleton
three weeks gone
and half buried by dust.
Hers was the view
through cracked wire-rims
of a southwest winter sky
where the powdered blood
of a grassless prairie
rose in anger
to shine red on her depression.



From the Convention in Mama's Back Yard

by R.S. Carlson

Mama, for all the years
the family never traveled back
to what you'd call
"the ol' stompin' ground,"

now that you've "gone to your reward,"
I bring wife and child
to a literature conference
in the winter South.

We room in a grand hotel—
at conference rate—
still a state line from your birthplace,
but near enough to hear
the "ahs" and schwas your vowels kept
through our decades of children's stories
in the North and West.

Since your days, cash and law
and a dash of dignity
have mixed guest and service worker ranks
till color, now,
is not sole argument for class—
 who opens a hotel door for whom;
 who drives the van, who rides to the airport—
though the statistics of this century
through our lives
still creep toward our better dreams.

You would be pleased that so many teachers
came to talk over stories,
to test what and how they tell:



but you would not recognize
half the turns in the telling
since your Brer Rabbit studied law
and gave back to God-as-you-knew-Him
some latitude for grace.

Sistuh Possum and Sistuh Fox now spin stories
allowin' as how they left the ol' briar patch for The City
(a journey you know partly yourself)
since the day you did Amelia Earhart's perm in Richmond.
But sagas spun now vine past
the old segregations you knew.

And though women still sometimes
come out of the cold wind into lecture halls
through doors men sometimes hold open,
women also, now, open doors on their own.

Jewish Mothers of Midrash
cite their testaments to daughters and sons
genteel and gentile and genkind alike.
Before the memories fade,
old soldiers who haven't died
story the young who did,
and the scholars story the stories—
 fabling fragments rare to real;
 classifying assumptions, denouements,
 resurrections, resections—
and reclassify their classifications.

Poets tack the winds of gender:
Pittsburgh nuns beat the hell out of
boys errant in Catholic school;
Kentucky grandmas "cain't see the fuss



over two women sharin' a bed
 (like in the ol' days
 when a bed'n'blanket was hard ta come by
 fer a big fambly, 'n' the hounds an' babies
 warmed the feet anyhow);
they never imagine "'em" gals might
"rub each other the wrong way,
doncha know. . . ."

No, Mama, these days the tales explore
sweat by seam, root and branch,
thickets you did not traverse
via language and theme you would have marked
"better left unsaid between a lady and a gentleman."

The poems' lines don't necessarily rhyme
route stepping march
through the dimensions of our dust—
 the seen and the unseen, birth to pubescence,
 the obscene, the incessant, insensible,
 menarche to men, menses to menopause,
 the insensitive, the incensed,
the kiss, the cut, and the kill. . . .

Lips press all possible conflicts
for each possible breath caught chill
down streets beyond those you once walked.

So many stories, Mama, you would "not fathom"—
even these flowing in your home dialect.

But I gather you still might reckon—
past your twilight—our need
to speak stories of our own
 against the dark.



Classical Mythology in Western Oklahoma

by Wayne Ellinger

Around the turn of the century, the Oklahoman Al Jennings was very good at his profession. At one time he actually ran for the state Governor's chair, but failed. Later in life he moved to California where he wrote movie scripts and articles for *The Saturday Evening Post*. Hollywood made a movie of his life, entitled *Al Jennings of Oklahoma* (starring Dan Duryea).

This was a "local boy makes good" story, right? Perhaps, but in between his birth and his writing career, Al Jennings was the most notorious outlaw in early Oklahoma history. As he relieved a train and its passengers of their valuables, this bible-quoting and classics-reciting train robber drove railroad officials to drink.

Eventually caught, he was imprisoned for several years. In 1907 President Theodore Roosevelt invited the freed outlaw to the White House. The stories related by Jennings fascinated Teddy, who couldn't believe that a "hick" from Oklahoma could be so well versed in the classics.



The enemy was storming the gates. In the sixth century B.C. Rome was in dire peril as the pesky Etruscans reached the bridge over the Tiber River, unprepared Rome's last defense. Panic ensued! Suddenly, a hero appeared from the east. The Roman General Horatio took his stand on the bridge, delaying the foe until his city properly prepared its defenses. Rome was saved by "Horatio at the Bridge!"

Twenty-five hundred years later the enemy again stormed the gates. In 1931 A.D. Oklahoma was in grave danger as those perverse Texans reached the bridges

spanning the Red River. Dismay rampaged! Suddenly a hero appeared from the north.

Alfalfa Bill Murray took his stand. Governor Murray objected to Texas toll bridges competing with Oklahoma's free spans crossing the Red River, especially since Texas would not connect its highways with our bridges.

Alfalfa Bill personally led the Oklahoma Militia to the north end of the Texas toll bridges. Claiming the Red River was Oklahoma's, by order of the Supreme Court, he barricaded the alien crossings. The rascally

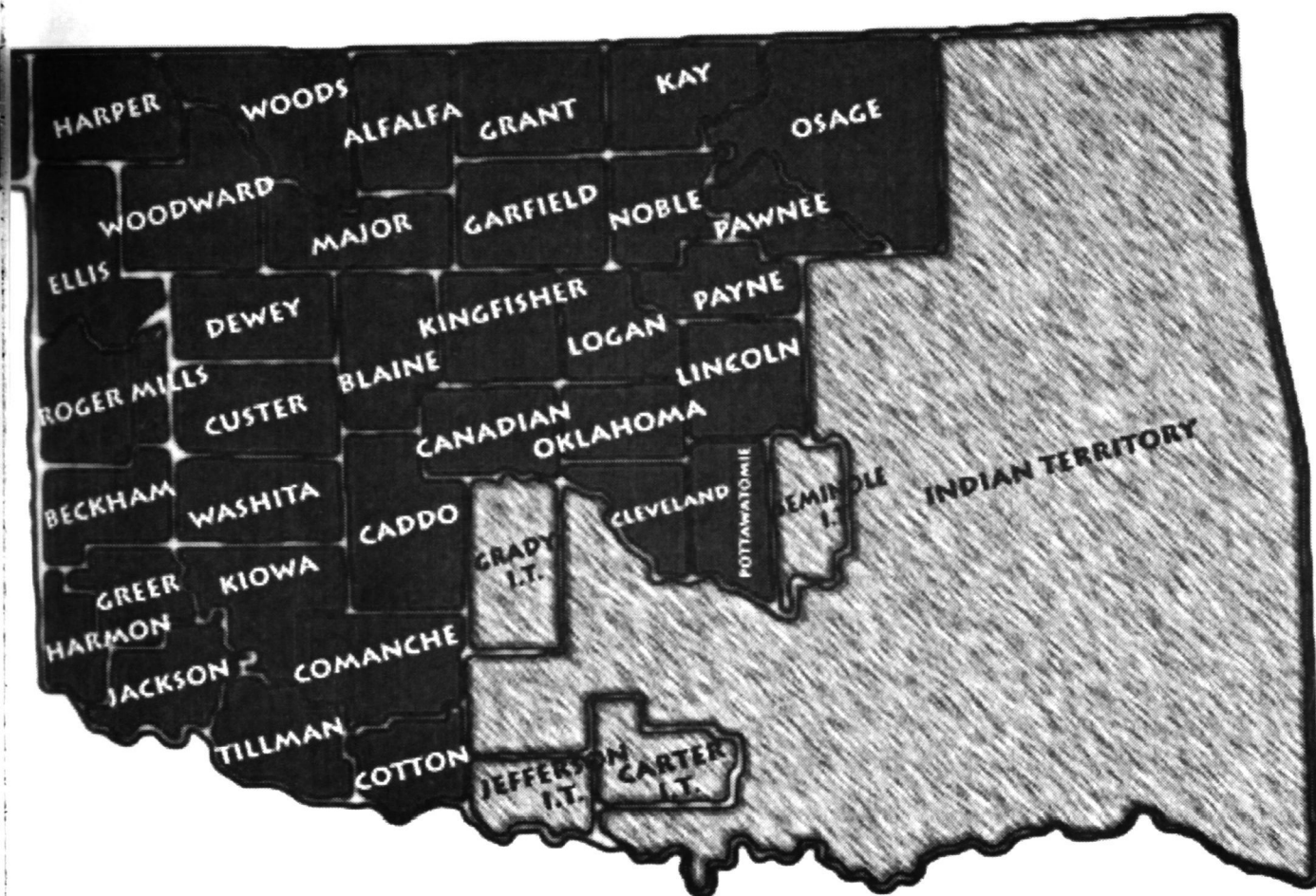


Present State of Oklahoma Counties
formed from Oklahoma Territory



Indian Territories





Texans backed down.

As the newspapers of the day reported, Oklahoma was saved by our "Horatio at the Bridge!"



Oklahomans are often ridiculed in many states as "Dumb Okies," especially in the North Atlantic and West Coast regions. There are those historians who claim Indian Territory (eastern Oklahoma) was inhabited by savage natives too primitive to adapt to the White Man's culture. Even within our state certain writers say Oklahoma Territory (the western half of our

commonwealth) was settled by two groups—uneducated farmers and inept townspeople, both of which were too incompetent to make a living in the established states.

The stereotyped image of the "noble savage" in the Indian Territory is too ludicrous to give it credence. The accomplishments of the Five Civilized Tribes and the smaller tribes there belie this absurd motion.

The hypothesis that Oklahoma Territory was homesteaded by "losers and outlaws" is just as preposterous. The purpose of this article is to point out how sophis-



ticated the educational level of early Oklahoma settlers really was, even among those who were self-educated. The concept stressed here will be their obvious knowledge and appreciation of the classical culture of ancient Greece and Rome, particularly in the realm of classical mythology.

One sphere where this can be seen is in the names the homesteaders chose for their communities. Dozens of town names in western Oklahoma reflected ancient origins, either directly or indirectly. The following paragraphs will present a sampling of Greek and Roman place names in western Oklahoma which were derived from classical culture. Though many of the communities are now extinct (others still exist), all were once realities in our area. [As a rule-of-thumb, I define "western Oklahoma" as identical to old Oklahoma Territory, plus the part of Indian Territory west of present day Interstate Highway 35.]

Beginning in the west, in the Panhandle at least three town names were classical derivatives. Texas County had the towns of OPTIMA (Latin for "best possible result") and CARTHAGE (Hannibal's city and bitter enemy of Rome). Cimarron County once held the community of FLORENCE (the old Roman city north of Rome), which is now Kenton.

Within the old Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation numerous classically-named towns existed. Dewey County contained VICI (Latin for "I conquered"—mirthfully named after Caesar's boast, "Veni, vidi, vici," or, "I came, I saw, I conquered"). Nearby were the villages of SPARTA (from the early Greek city) and RHEA (mother of the Greek gods Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Hades, Hestia, and Demeter).

Roger Mills County experienced the hamlet of ROME (the Empire's capital), while Blaine County had ETNA (after the deadly volcano in Sicily). Ellis County once

produced the community of SOLON (the great Athenian lawgiver).

The Cherokee Outlet (usually and mistakenly referred to as the Cherokee Strip) embraced its share of classical names. In Woodward County was OSIRIS (Egyptian god of the underworld, and much feared by the Greeks), while Woods County contained Virgil (the outstanding Roman epic poet), which is now called Capron.

Noble County reflected its agricultural economy with the town of CERES (Roman goddess of grain), and Kay County gave origin to another CARTHAGE (Hannibal was a popular military hero to early Oklahomans).

The shining star of Major County is ORION (the mighty hunter of Greek Mythology who angered the Olympic gods, so he was killed and placed in the sky as a constellation). Alfalfa County is graced with the city of HELENA (indirectly named after Helen of Troy, the Spartan queen whose abduction triggered the Trojan War). Harper County once harbored two communities, CUPID (Roman god of love and son of Venus) and ALTO (Latin for "high").

The region of Old Greer County has given us two towns. In present Greer County was ATHENS (the greatest of ancient Greek cities), while Jackson County still has ALTUS (Latin for "high," referring to the high ground to which the older town of Frazier was moved after a flood, and then renamed Altus).

After Oklahoma Territory was formed in 1890 several counties contained towns reflecting classical values. We find in Portawatomie County the twin hamlets of ROMULUS and REMUS (the twin orphans who were raised by a she-wolf and who later founded the city of Rome before Romulus killed Remus in battle, thus naming the city after himself). [NOTE: In the



neighboring Indian Territory county of Seminole, there once was the community of WOLF, only a few miles from Romulus and Remus—and please note that today's nickname for the high school teams of Shawnee, Pottawatomie County's seat, is the "WOLVES."—A coincidence—na-a-h-h!]

Lincoln County provides us with a HORACE (the Roman poet who contributed to classical mythology) and CLEMATIS (Greek word for the vine "Klemna"). Payne County spawned the village of VINCO (Latin for "I conquer"), but now absorbed by Perkins, while Canadian county offered up CEREAL (after "Ceres," the Roman goddess of grain), which later changed its name to Banner.

This brings us to the "Championship County of Classical Communities"—Kingfisher County. Here have been founded no fewer than five such settlements, including CATO (Roman orator and writer), PARIS (Prince of Troy who kidnapped the Greek beauty Helen, thus causing the Trojan War) and EXCELSIOR (from the Latin term "Excelsus," meaning "high" or "upward"). We cannot omit the beginning-and-the-end of Oklahoma towns, ALPHA (first letter of the Greek alphabet) and OMEGA (last letter of the Greek Alphabet).

In Indian Territory, but still within our definition of "western Oklahoma," were places with classical names. Carter County once saw EOLIAN (after Aeolus, Greek god of the wind), later changed to Joiner. Grady conceived Naples (named after the Greek colony founded in Italy, "Neapolis," which is today called "Naples"). And finally, Jefferson County once held the village of VETO (Latin for "I forbid"—a word still often heard in Oklahoma City and Washington D.C.).

The foregoing communities are only a representation of the many other classical place names in Oklahoma

and Indian territories. In addition to these, we can discover the educational level of early Oklahomans in such town designations as SHAKESPEARE, BYRON, SHELLEY, VERNE, and VERDI (there also has been a ZENDA, after Anthony Hope's novel, "The Prisoner of Zenda").

In any state today, if you ask the average person, whether he or she is a farmer, merchant, laborer, or professional, "To what do these classical place names refer?", the most received response would be, "Huh?" The early Oklahoma homesteaders knew, and they named their communities accordingly. Of the thirty-nine counties in or adjacent to western Oklahoma, 65%, or two-thirds, have contained towns with names of classical origin.

So, to those cynics who attempt to put-down the educational level and the knowledge of Oklahoma's pioneers, I shout, "VETO!" 🗑️



Amor

by Steven Frattali

Night of the flowering jasmine
And a thousand fireflies,
Each firefly a thought
The night will think just once.

Inconsolable therefore
The ceaseless waters of the spring
In which the chalk moon shines
In shimmering black oil.

The garden and the walk
Are empty now, and only we
Are heard by night's wide open ear.
The night is hushed to listen as we speak.

And everything we do is seen
By deep night's open eye, a single pupil
Velvet and hypnotic black
And wide as the entire sky.

Don't worry. All this just fills
Our solitude more deeply. The night's
Vast eye is our own eyes
Made wider, deeper by desire.

The night's ear our avidity
To hear just our two selves.
They're my desire to hear, to see
Just you, just you, just you.

And your desire likewise,
I hope, for only me.
Even a thousand fireflies
Somehow are yours and mine.

The grass is full of wetness,
And the garden sleeps tonight
Untouched by breeze. I listen
For your silence. Speak it now.



Illustration by Scott Cummins



Speech is Not Writing

by Randy Prus

...for Doris Andrews

Intent on seeing one thing, other things
appear through the difference,
the full moon in the east becomes
clouded by stars in the north

the night's full moon veiled,
repeated in starlight, momentarily

as if language rendered the night
touchable

Observations strive for significance
like cottonwood trees or
cotton fields, but sometimes fail
the duty we assign them

the full moon's absence, clouded

On a ride home, through backroads
in a crowded car, cows,
stories appear on wooded hills.
Tender ears draw parasites
leading empiricists to study them
but the stories fade beyond
the curve of terrain.



The strength in knowing lies
in knowing words as words
as a preparation for knowing:
a country girl desires to move
above the drugstore in Paris,
where old men spoke like kings,
bones now white as Texas sunlight

as we speak together
our words fail us, fail
to transform what we touch
and are touched by

But the play, so essential to the drama
you call life, only finds itself
in writing, in uncertain terms,
in the pharmacy of letters.



What Now Is

by Robert Parham

In what seemed a silent, confused battle,
that, if on television, sends us
groping for some control which would startle
us back into full sense of sound,
then comfort, then the fat ennui
which will not allow the picture
of ants scurrying atop carrion,
even that of humans, to stir
us for long. We eat pot pies
and pop the corn, toss back the beer
while before us in Mitsubishi
color the attack goes on.

Let us look again, leave the sound
off, deal with discomfort a wee bit
longer than we like. The door is locked,
we are undressed and have nowhere to go.

One ant, quite shiny black, is larger
than the rest, but only for a moment.
He (she?) darts down and we see what
must be jaws, for flesh dangles
from its front in what cannot
be accident. No close-ups just yet,
no Blakean monster for the dreams.
The pinchers we must imagine, the teeth
only the stuff the brain will supply
from its ill-spent reason. We feel
the tickle, the rise of thought
against the back of the head.
They think it is something which drugs
will care for, cause to desist.



This will not go away. It has been
there a long, long time, you see,
and stirred must make its way
complete throughout this circuit
we named thought and believed
was always intact and practiced,
like goodness and will and breath.

We climb upon this bicycle
waiting to be ridden again.
The body leans at gravity, rights
itself, and the blood in our cheeks
is part embarrassment. What we learned
we learn again, we must, and know
it better than before.

the ant
looks up; the meat is gone. The camera
races in to see the jaws. We shut
the vision off, we close our eyes,
we dream our monsters properly.

Visitations

by Kelley Logan

There I was. Stuck in Europe with three people I absolutely hated, horrible mixtures of grasp and dogma, spouting guide book euphemisms and screaming over maps that they could not read; spending money I didn't have, to see things I couldn't care less about—the door and nail holes of Calvin's horrible little sheet, one of them rapturously saying again and again, “The Blow heard ‘round the world” and it was all I could do not to correct her, slap her, dance on her head; after which followed the innumerable churches, fountains, rocks on hillsides.

When all the bickering and crying reached this gigantic plateau in my head, and I began leafing through my German/English dictionary for the word “Ax,” thinking that I could leave bits of them tidily wrapped up in packages of their clothes in those super clean bathrooms along the Autobahn.

To get away from them, I ducked into an obscure church in Salzburg, ran to hide behind a marble pillar up front near the nave.

As I slid down, back against the stone, to sit splayed on the cold floor, I looked up at the angels struggling to the painted heaven on the ceiling and thought, “How fake, fake, fake it all is.” I heard their insistent whining, “Where could she have gone? I am hungry. She is always off somewhere,” and I just couldn't take it anymore.

Crying hard, I rocked back and forth, repeating over and over as one will do when utterly miserable, “Please, please, please, help me,” and the walls echoed softly in response, “please, please, please.”



Illustration by Rodney Cloud

And then I heard, felt a change in the air and looked up. The angels were pulling away from their niches, turning to me, their bodies horrible with foreshortening, pieces of them missing from where they had been glued to the walls, to the paper mache clouds. Half-lipped, one blew angrily on 3/4ths of a horn, others serenely flowed on painfully truncated wings. And I was struck with the horrors of Art.

Now, I see them everywhere. Look by the door, by the stairwell as I came up today to see you. They really don't bother me, but what I need your help with is this: How do I break it to them that I really can't afford to believe? ■



The Hermitage, 2:10 P.M.

by Wendell Mayo

But there is a meaning?

A meaning? . . . Look it's snowing. What meaning has that?

Chekhov, *The Three Sisters*

My roommate Smith, a civil engineering student and a troubled boy with dark circles around his eyes, sat on his bed with his back flat against the cinder block wall. He looked gaunt, beat-out, the usual for Smith, but he looked snug and serene too. And I was feeling pretty good. I had a glow on and I was beginning to feel the dark beer. I was in the best state possible confined to our room in a snowstorm, feeling perfect since it was Friday night, a long stretch to Monday classes, and since Smith hadn't had a drink all night. He was diabetic and not supposed to drink anymore, so this time he could be straight about things, and I was the one who could catch a buzz, so I wouldn't have to worry about Smith drinking and going into spasms.

Smith was listening to me talk, watching me pace the room back and forth, wall to wall, like a slow pendulum in the housing of a ridiculous clock. So even if he wasn't loaded, I said, "On a night like this, don't you feel exquisitely removed from even the smallest calamity? Even the most minor disturbance?"

Smith rubbed his back up and down against the cinder blocks and sighed with relief. Smith knew what I meant. He had said so. It was the combination of things, the snowstorm, the gusting wind, the small cinder block room, "Good company, right?" Smith had said.

I carried my bottle of dark beer and wandered the room, knocking into one object then another: two twin beds with vintage mattresses, one of two small matching

dressers, two desks, and four stick chairs. I went over and stripped the blanket from my bed. I wrapped it around myself. I pinned the blanket with one hand at my neck, and continued to drink my beer with the other hand. I started pacing again. Tick. Tock.

Smith just sat there, looking up at me, looking like he expected me to say something more. He was not like himself at all. Shy Smith. Unselfconsciously conscious Smith. Smith of Smiths. Broke Smith. Absolutely flatbusted, student-loaned to the yin and yang Smith. He could hardly afford to be diabetic.

"I'm going to Russia when I get out of here," he said. "I'm going...maybe for good."

Smith had been going on about Moscow and what-not all night. No doubt about it, this was uncharacteristic of Smith or Smiths, and the boy seemed obsessed more than happy about the notion of living in Russia.

"Damn it, Smith," I said, feeling woozy, "why don't you give it a rest." Smith wasn't listening. I went on. "What's the difference, anyway? If you're going to Russia to get away from the ordinary, forget it. The item in Moscow is the All-American hamburger. The Big Mac. It's progress."

Smith reached for something on the floor, got up from the bed and stood in front of me; his face was obscured by black—click!—pop!—light exploded in the room; then circles of light crested like waves; an orange dot, like a tiny ripe setting sun, was stuck in the air; it bounced and wobbled; it grew a tail of light and swung back and forth; my eyes hurt.

"I'm blinded, you son of a bitch," I told him.

"There," Smith said very seriously, "now you won't be forgotten."

The orange ball stayed in the room a long while, and after it had died a long and stubborn death, I got my glow back from the dark beer. Give it a rest, I thought,

for cripes sake, Smith!

That was when Smith got out Luba's photos of Russia. Luba lived in the east wing of the complex. She had grandparents in the Ukraine. She was really fat, but she liked Smith, so she gave him her pictures to keep as long as he liked. Smith knew she liked him, but he ignored her. He ignored most things he didn't want to face.

So Smith rifled his desk, and he came out with all of Luba's notes that went with her pictures. He opened a bottle of dark beer, poured some into a small tumbler he had borrowed from the cafeteria that morning, and handed it to me.

"How you feeling?" he asked me, like he wanted to be sure I didn't mind looking at his photos.

I told him, "Okay." I had a good buzz on. "Thanks for the beerski," I said.

"You really want to look at these snapshots?"

I could have cared less about Smith's photos of Russia. I really didn't care to see them again. Besides, I was already feeling okay, so I didn't want to spoil the glow I had on. But I didn't tell Smith this . . . and it wasn't that I wanted to spare Smith's feelings; it was more like I just didn't know how to explain the glow to him, how strange and delicate the feeling was, like a silken sleep, like a web heavy with dew, about to break, about to be broken by Smith's photos. I felt a little ridiculous thinking about how I couldn't explain things to him, so I let him go on with his picture show.

He sat up in bed; he flipped through the book-length stack of snapshots; he coddled them in his lap, picking them out, cocking them up for me to see. I was standing and sipping the dark beer slow and easy so I wouldn't accelerate the evenness of my glow. Then Smith started flipping through the photos faster, then he slowed, and he slowed some more when he came to the shots of

Leningrad. It was somewhere around Leningrad that I lost what Smith was saying about the photos. I started listening to the wind outside the room and turned to the window. I watched the powdered snow swirl and blast the window like sand. I was thinking about how my mind had gone off, how my whole head had gone off, prodigal-like, how the place it had gone was so far from where we were; my head seemed to be walking in a distant province, not part of the same continent; it wasn't that I didn't want my mind to be with me, it had left because of where I was in reality, and the snow-storm.... Was it the enigma of exile? Dorm life? Was I really imprisoned and yet, somehow, free? I was feeling so good and comfortable to be in the dormitory with Smith, and not to be with more than one other person—any person; I could have easily been with myself; being with Smith was usually like being with myself—just me and Smith, and no place to go, no place that wanted us, no place we wanted to be. I did not know where my head had gone.

I wanted to tell Smith the only way out of here was to imagine his way out, which bordered on the metaphysical. Or he could put himself half-in-the-bag as I had done and walk, wall to wall, hoping that with one swing across the room, this way or that, he'd break out of the dull pattern. But this also verged on the metaphysical, and would not be entirely wise since I had figured he would need to stay blitzed until the spring thaw to achieve a completely crabbed state of mind: much, much too metaphysical, and the dark beer'd kill him for sure. But there wasn't any use in thinking about this further. I mean, I couldn't say this stuff to Smith, or he might have taken it seriously and got snookered; then I would have had a mess on my hands! So I couldn't tell him the truth about being blitzed and free, except in my head, where I'd make up these dialogues with myself.



This thought. That thought. Tick. Tock.

So this was the way my mind worked most of the time—by itself, on itself. It was worse in winter.

I let the blanket fall to the floor, stepped over it, found my Salems on the desk and lit one up.

By now Smith was way into his stack of snapshots of Russia, and he hadn't really shown me one up close. He just kept flipping them up at me and laying them down. It was like as time went on, he knew about the glow I had on, and how my head had run away, and how I didn't want to be bothered. He was probably hoping some odd juncture of shape and shadow would capture my attention. I knew he was trying to have me say just once, "Tell me about that one, Smith," or "Where do you suppose Luba shot that?" But I thought, Who cares, Smith? I knew where I was, minus my head, and I'd be there until spring, same as Smith. We weren't going anywhere, least of all Russia. So why did he go on with the photos?

Then he stopped flipping and straightened himself in his bed. I could see his head had come off too—the way his eyes seemed lifted and distant.

"You want a diet soda or something?" I asked him. "You up to it, Smith? Hey, Smith... Earth to Smith!"

He shook his head no and took up the stack of photos again, and with his palms he squared the corners of the pictures sticking out of the stack. He dragged one of the chairs up to his bed and tapped the stack on the wooden seat. He set the photos neatly aside. And I don't know.... I guess I had just had enough of looking at the cinder blocks and the institutional bone color of the room; I was tired of hearing the steam condensing in the radiator, socking itself against the pipes. Bong. Bong.... So I became this evil person I sometimes became when I felt free, when I thought I really felt I had a hold of a problem with something, and felt merci-

less since I could be so falsely merciful.

"Smith," I said, "you need a break. You want to go hitching rides with me tomorrow?" Smith didn't answer me. He smiled briefly, then he rapped the stack of photos on the chair again, and I laughed, but I recognized the laugh as my evil laugh, so I quickly took another sip of dark beer, hoping I could keep the glow on, and shut up before Smith found out I was slipping into my evil mood.

I walked over to his bed, and he held a photo up for me. I looked at his picture of Russia and sipped more dark beer. I was rocking a little, so I caught myself and stood straight up.

"What's in that next photo?" I asked Smith, partly to divert him from studying my face, and partly because I felt odd, like I was losing my balance.

I took the photo from Smith and moved it back and forth in front of my face. This wasn't working at all, so I paused, moving my eyelids up and down, blotting the beer foam from my mustache with my hand. I rubbed my thumbs into my eyes, and finally got the scene of the photo: the snow was trampled; a gray wet street ran up and down the snapshot, terminating at a river's edge; a huge granite building stood on the right side of the road; the building was ornate with curling cornices, lions resting on smooth white slabs, small windows, no people.

Smith's commentary was synchronous with my perusal of the photo:

"When Peter the Great was a boy," he said, "he had them build an enormous boat house, like a grand tomb. There, he kept a boat the size of a skiff."

The storm was coming up hard, reaching its peak. I heard the wind rattle the glass in the window frame. I put out my cigarette. I didn't know what to say. I mean, it wasn't like I couldn't appreciate the absurdity of little

Peter's big boathouse, it was just that I already knew Smith had. We had agreed at the beginning of the semester that we wouldn't waste words with one another when things were already understood.

Smith took the photo of Peter's boathouse back from me.

"Who asked you, anyway," he said.

He put on his slippers and went down the hall to take a whiz. I could feel the glow I had go heavy in my head, calling it back from distant places, like gas cooling and seeking ground zero—sinking. My head was sinking and my thoughts were trickling down inside me. I didn't dare sit down or lie back on the bed—but there was this evil in me that kept going. I was standing there lock-kneed so I wouldn't keel over, swaying a little, side to side.

I lit another cigarette. I decided my mood wasn't the worst sort, since Smith already knew about my moods. We had talked about them before. I had given him fair warning: since he knew about my evil moods, I had told him, it made them less sinister, right?

Smith came back from his whiz.

"You're full of shit," he said with his Smith smile.

I took up another picture from Smith's pile and got it into focus. This time I focused on the photo quickly since I'd had some practice, and by now the glow was centered in my stomach, not in my head or eyes.

Smith stood behind me. I heard him rub his beard stubble with his hands.

"That's the prison in Leningrad, there, you see, that tall wall cut off in the picture at the right? Thousands of political prisoners were executed in there. When the bodies piled up they heaved them over the side of the prison wall.... The bodies floated out to sea."

I could tell from his voice that Smith was proud of himself, proud of his lurid description; it was not like

him. It was getting really creepy—spooky—since I was supposed to be the one with the mysteriously evil moods, not Smith.

"No shit, Smith," I said, "you suppose they tortured any college students?"

That was all I could say about the photo of the prison at Leningrad. So Smith went back to his bed. He sat on it and rocked. And I was still standing, then I was prowling again, bed to bed, talking, remembering how glad I was that Smith wasn't buzzed so he could hear all this straight.

"Look, Smith," I said, "I hope you get to go to Moscow and what-not when you get out of here, and I won't talk about it anymore after now, okay? But you can't live on this kind of thing exclusively. I mean, you can't be thinking about being over there all the time you're over here. Nobody says you have to choose. You couldn't go to Russia even if you wanted to. You don't have any money. So why don't you just calm down." I felt my foul mood unapproachable; there was no way to stop it. "To hell with you and Russia," I added.

Smith got up and went over to the radiator by the window. He twisted the round black valve on top. The steam gushed in, banged once against the pipes, then twice; it knocked softly a couple more times, bing, bong, and stopped.

"You want another beer?" Smith asked me.

"Yeah, okay."

I set the photo of the political prison in Leningrad down on his desk. Then I said:

"How are you, Smith? You okay? I mean are you really okay?"

Smith took the cap off the dark beer and handed the bottle to me.

"I don't know. What difference does it make?" he said. "You know, a little can't hurt."



I poured the dark beer into my glass.

"Jesus," I said. "You know what I mean, Smith. You have those black rings around your eyes again. Just forget about that shit I was saying. . . . You going to stay off the sauce tonight?"

"I don't know," Smith mumbled. "You don't look so great yourself."

The glow was in my feet now, so I stretched a hand back uneasily for a chair. The chair wasn't there, so I swayed upright, locking my knee joints again. Smith sidearmed a photo at me. It hit my arm and fell onto the toe of my boot. Smith came over, got the photo and handed it to me. It was a picture of a dark palace with many peaks and spires.

"The Hermitage," Smith said, and sat back on his bed. His head banged on the cinder blocks and he winced. "It's like Louis the Fourteenth influenced the architect. The Sun King. It's really rich, gold leaf everywhere—everything curls, really curls from the walls, pillars, furniture."

"The Tsar's Winter Palace," I said.

"During the Revolution, the Bolsheviks took the place in a single afternoon."

"Not a hell of a good hermitage," I said.

"Not really," he said and tossed me another photo. I juggled it, but got this one. "Here's a shot of Catherine the Great, a full-length portrait."

The photo showed a painting of a farm-faced woman with thin lips. She had no body to speak of, since whatever curvaceousness she may have possessed was sunk somewhere in billowing silk and ruffles. She had a librarian's eyes, eyes that made me feel like I had run up a big tab at the main branch back home.

I told Smith that Catherine the Great did not appear to be as great as her reputation. I said I'd rather be making it with the *Mona Lisa*. At least she seemed like

the kind of woman who could have a good time and still show some faint recollection of it.

But Smith the Smart Ass got out his camera and popped another photo of me. I felt dizzy and blind. I put my arms out and reached for his throat, but he ducked and I fell onto my bed. I laughed my evil laugh, watching an orange dot dance under my eyelids, up and down.

"Do that again and I'll clean your clock," I said.

Smith relaxed. He didn't seem to mind my cracks about his photos or my trying to choke him. And my biggest fight was to keep my evil mood under control.

Smith wagged his head, "I don't know, man. There's something about Russia, something...."

He went over to the window and felt it with his hand. He said it was a real bitch out. From my bed I watched him remove his hand from the glass. I watched the steamed outline of his hand fade from the pane. I doubted that either of us would be remembered.

I got up from my bed, swallowed the last bit of dark beer, about a one inch heel in my glass, set the glass back on the desk, and slumped back onto my bed.

"You and goddamned Russia, Smith," I said and closed my eyes. My mouth was on automatic, like I was speaking in tongues to him. Between my eyeballs and eyelids there were worms and stars, and ringing in my ears. Ring a ding. "It's a free country," I added. "You do what you want to."

And then my wagging tongue was still, just like that; it got numb and stopped. The worms and stars were still in a strange interplay behind my eyelids, and it seemed like I could hear the smallest things. I heard Smith's weight load up the springs of his mattress. I heard him get back up, turn off the lights, and lie back down. My glow was all gone. Everything stopped.



Later that night Smith woke me. He was sitting on my bed. He was right at my face with a burning candle. He was holding a photo up to my eyes. The rings around his eyes were blacker than before and swollen.

"Jesus, Smith," I groaned.

"Look," he whispered, keeping the 5 x 7 photo right at the ridge of my nose.

I reached out of the covers and pushed the 5 x 7 back a little so I could see it better.

"It's a clock... you got it?" Smith said. "See it—? A mantle clock in the Tsar's Winter Palace."

"Yeah, it's got the same curly gold leaf all over it." I rubbed my eyes. "So what."

"Right, exactly," Smith said. "Read the time, check out the hands, right here."

"Ten after two," I said. "So what?"

"Right, two-ten p.m. The clock's broken. Stopped. It's stuck at two-ten p.m. It's been stuck at ten after two in the afternoon for over seventy years."

"No shit," I said.

"Right!" Smith seemed elated. "The Bolsheviks broke the clock in 1917, the moment they swarmed the Winter Place, and it's been stuck ever since then, just like that."

Smith was sitting on my leg, so I yanked it out from under him.

"So freaking what, Smith?" I said.

"Well, isn't it incredible? I mean there's really something to it! You know what I mean?" Smith took the picture from me and stared at it. His eyes were glued to it for a long time. "It is. It's incredible. Everything stopping. Just like that. We can never know how incredible. We can never know!"

I sat up in bed and flung the covers off myself.

"Why don't you just take it easy?" I said. "Look at me. I've never been so damn content in my life! But

every time I get feeling good you start this Russia crap on me. What do you know about it? What? Nothing! That's what! You never will! Go to sleep!"

Smith stood over my bed and glared at me, then the photo, then back at me. He looked like he was going to kill me—or himself. I didn't know which or what to do. So I asked him: "Hey, Smith, you want a beerski or something?"

He said no and he went back to his own bed holding the candle in one hand, still staring at the photo. I asked him again if he wanted a beer, but he just sat staring at the picture, nodding no at me.

"I feel really cooped up in this place," I said. "You want to walk?" I asked him. "Do you?"

Smith threw the photo onto the bed.



When Smith and I got outdoors, the snowstorm had ebbed and the sky was clear. The powder lay still, shining in the way snow shines with bits of blue light, reflecting in the moonlight. We made our way out from the complex. I remember we sounded like horses working through the fresh snow, muddling the flat, wide blanket with our boots.

When we were far out across the dark, white expanse, Smith turned to look at the hunkering complex from which we had come. Not one window was lit, not even that of our tiny cinder block quarters.

"Look Smith," I said, "all that crap I said before about Russia. I didn't mean it—it was just the black beer talking."

He wasn't listening to me. He was walking ahead of me, out from the complex.

"What time is it?" he asked without looking back to me.

"I don't know. I honestly don't know," I said. I made a couple quick steps to catch up to him. "You've got a



touch of cabin fever, Smith. That's all."

I told him this, but it did not seem to make a bit of difference—so without a bit of the glow, without the evilness that had been in me, without a smidgen of my usual meanness, I caught him, took his arms, turned him, and faced him to me.

"Come on," I said. "Right now," I pleaded softly. "Freaking come on. I can't take all this back and forth shit: here, there, here, there. Things are the same all over."

But Smith didn't say a word. Not about Russia. Or Leningrad. Or afternoon revolutions. Or Catherine the Great. Nothing.

"Jesus H. Christ," I said, then looked at his cold, wizened face, his eyes sunk into dark pockets in his head, and I knew I had failed, that my meanness had come back with all the claustrophobic force of my glow, only now it wasn't a delicate, silken glow, just a leaden throbbing in my head like the dull knocking of a cracked chime.

"Snap out of it," I whispered.

He lowered his eyes and looked at the snow.

So I hit him. I hit him hard on his chest with my fists.

"Say something," I groaned. "For my sake," I said. "For pity's sake, Smith!" ❧

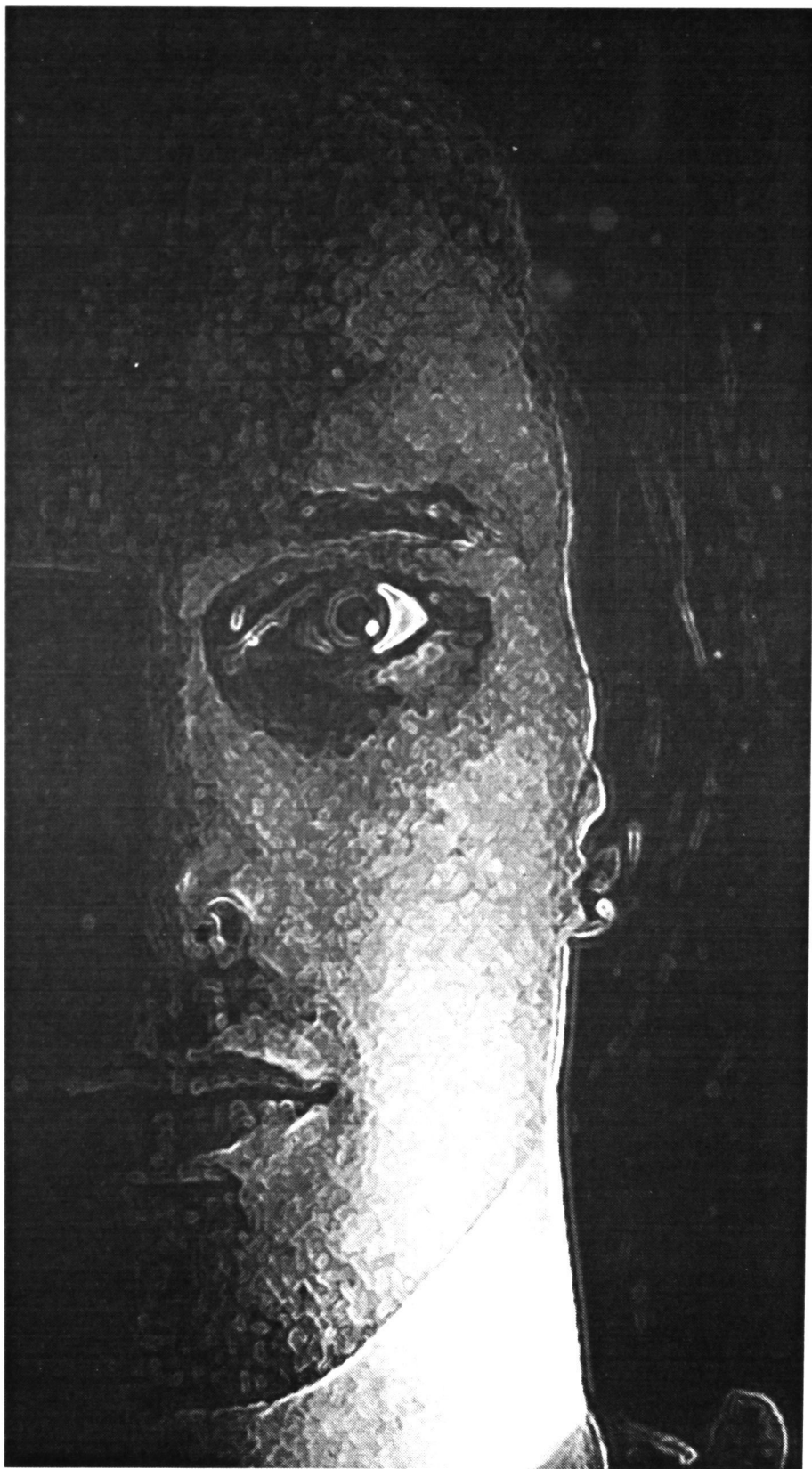
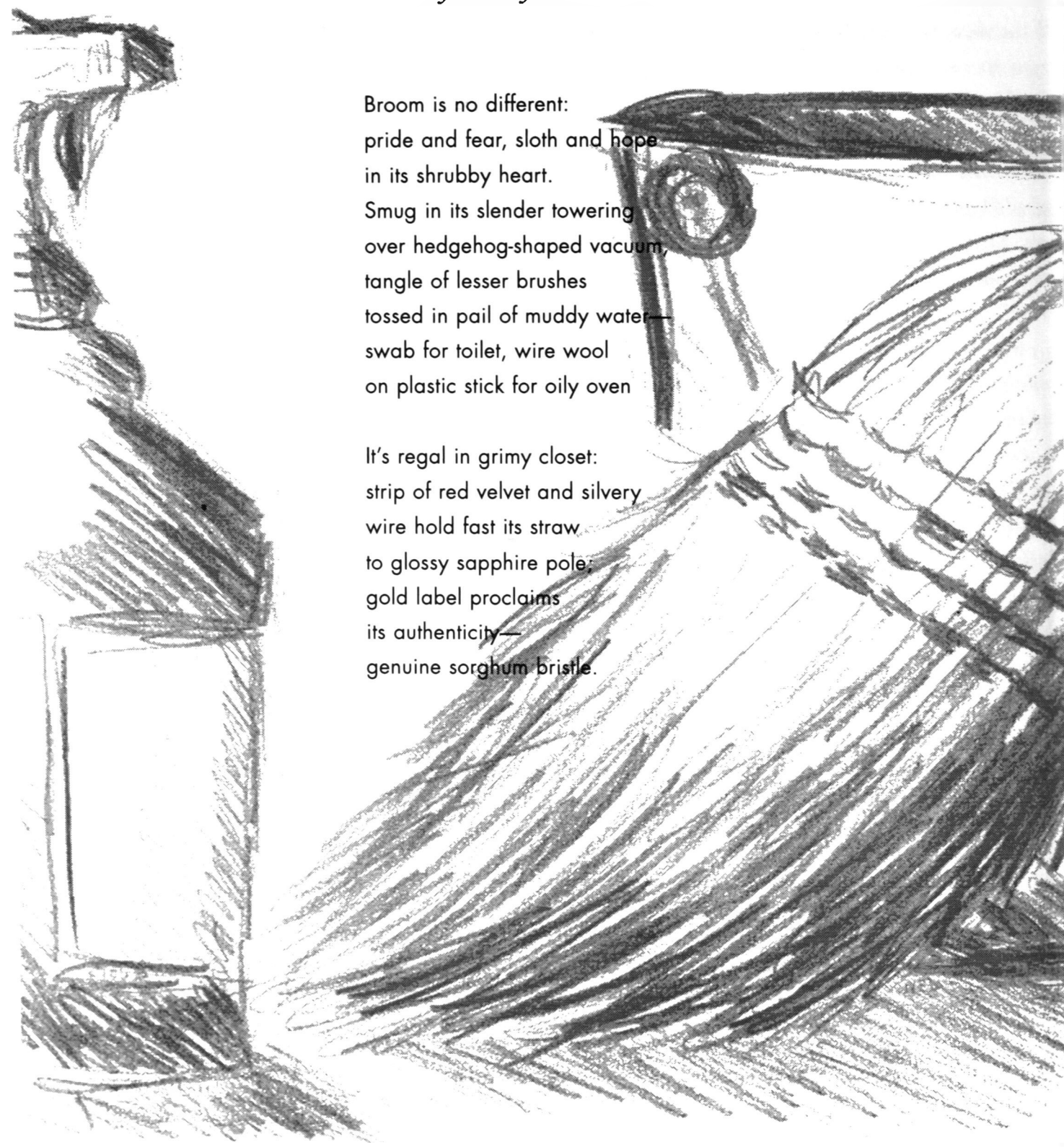


Photo Illustration by Jan Bradfield



Alike Underneath

by Mary Winters



Broom is no different:
pride and fear, sloth and hope
in its shrubby heart.
Smug in its slender towering
over hedgehog-shaped vacuum,
tangle of lesser brushes
tossed in pail of muddy water—
swab for toilet, wire wool
on plastic stick for oily oven

It's regal in grimy closet:
strip of red velvet and silvery
wire hold fast its straw
to glossy sapphire pole:
gold label proclaims
its authenticity—
genuine sorghum bristle.



Broom is twice superior—
grander than mere twigs
tied to stick by witch
because partly machine-made,
yet not dependent
on modernity—no need
for electric power to smooth
a floor prickly with sand
or chide roistering neighbor
with raps on the ceiling;
hit a dropped denture
out from under the dresser.

It's loyal, will toil
—let its handle bend
to near-breaking after a flood
to push away mud: its overhead
fear "new broom sweeps clean"
—but most content to hang
thoughtless from nail.

Illustration by Rodney Cloud

The Surprising History of Oklahoma

By Alvena Bieri

Davis D. Joyce, editor of *An Oklahoma I Had Never Seen Before: Alternative Views of Oklahoma History*, uses the Howard Zinn approach to writing history.

What's that method? Zinn, American historian and playwright, author of the eye-opening, iconoclastic *A People's History of the United States* says "the world of the university, of publishing, of scholarship is a world where historians often, consciously or unconsciously, play it safe." The work of these mainstream, middle-of-the-road, sometimes dull historians reveals no social conscience, no viewpoint, but turns out to be mainly lists of facts, dates, and statistics, told from the dominant, official point of view.

Zinn's style of history (and we're just about ready to relate this to Oklahoma history) has a different purpose and style. It is not told just from the perspective of the Important People, the generals, the prime ministers, the presidents, the kings, the queens, or the best and the brightest. Instead history is turned inside out and upside down and seen from the view of the people at the bottom. From our view, in other words.

The history of Oklahoma is so long and complex (Arrell Gibson calls his survey of Oklahoma history *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*) that there's just too much to be covered in one volume. And, as Zinn says, important things can get buried in such a mass, or glossed over quickly, or just plain left out.

Now look at *An Oklahoma I Had Never Seen Before*, sparkling because its selections are specific, interesting because its viewpoint is often intensely personal, and relevant because the issues presented are still important

in the 1990s. Although these essays have much in common, they're not all neatly packaged. Historian Kenny Brown asks—Is there a clearly defined progressivism in our past? His answer is no. We can't interpret Oklahoma history that way and make it tightly unified. Brown writes, "Telling the story of the era, with its rich variety and contradictions, is far more productive and insightful than trying to generalize using the inadequate concept of 'progressivism.'"

Contrasts are plentiful. And sometimes the bottom dogs have become the top dogs. Dr. Jerald Walker, Oklahoma historian, president of Oklahoma City University, and Creek Indian, presents the Indian versus white view of the great, romanticized land runs and land openings. Were they opportunities for peaceful white pioneers to get established in a new land on their own small farms (that has been my interpretation for a long time), or from the Native American viewpoint, was white settlement a series of "invasions of Indian land by non-Indians," and just "another land grab?" Walker quotes Will Rogers who spoke for this view—"We spoiled the best territory in the world to make a state."

Still suffering from the idea of white people that land ought to be owned by individuals are some of the down-and-out tribal members of the woods of eastern Oklahoma. In *The Case of the Deerslayer* Stan Steiner describes the full bloods in the mid-1960s, barely subsisting and about to rise up in arms because they were hunting deer for food, and they bitterly resented being arrested for killing them on what they considered was their own land.

Oklahoma history has no lack of outstanding leaders. Think of Peter Hanraty, union man and first state mine inspector. Think of Oscar and Freda Ameringer, socialist organizers and newspaper publishers for their cause in Oklahoma City. Think of Kate Barnard,



premier social worker and reformer of prisons. Then there is Clara Luper, black leader and teacher, the prime force behind the desegregation of downtown Oklahoma City eating places. In *Behold the Walls* she writes about the Katz Drug integration and of her unusual friendship with Mrs. John A. Brown.

Mrs. Luper was a fervent follower of the non-violent philosophy of Martin Luther King, and she applied his ideas to her work with the NAACP Youth Council in the late 1950s. After extensive preparation her group of thirteen black teenagers took the daring and dangerous step of going to Katz Drug Store in downtown Oklahoma City and ordering cokes at the fountain. Anger, abuse, and embarrassment resulted. But in two days—two days—the walls went down in all the Katz Drug Stores in several states.

Frankly, I got carried away by Luper's account of her relationship with Mrs. John A. Brown, owner of the famous department store. The next story ends happily too. But Luper had long put off going to see Mrs. Brown, even though she had been invited to go in and talk with her. She was prepared to give the old, white woman a piece of her mind about segregation and injustice. With much trepidation on Luper's part, when the two women met, what a surprise! In Clara Luper's words, "...when Mrs. Brown opened the door, we both stood speechless before each other and with tears in our eyes, we embraced each other as if we had been friends for years... two women, one black, and one white. One rich and one poor."

Wow. Break down the walls. Cross the line. Fraternize with the enemy. And turn the enemy into a friend. As I said, this one got to me.

As reviewers often say, there's much more in this book—Dr. Michael Shadid and Elk City's successful experiment with "socialized medicine;" anti-World

War I Mennonites at Corn; the Reverend Nicholas Comfort, activist Presbyterian minister at Norman; unions in the oil fields; Woody Guthrie's Oklahoma days; the New Deal as it worked in Shawnee; abortion rights from a personal perspective; gay and lesbian struggles.

Howard Zinn recently wrote that he understands pessimism about the future of people's movements, but he doesn't share it. He prefers instead to keep the faith. He optimistically believes that "the roots of one era branch and flower in subsequent eras...I think back over the decades, and look around. And then it seems to me that the future is not certain, but it is possible." Reading this book, at this moment, I agree. ☒

An Oklahoma I Had Never Seen Before is a recent publication of the University of Oklahoma Press.

No Stories

by Elmer Suderman

No one has written a novel
about my home town.
Whatever would it have been about?
Nothing ever happened there
except the old boredom
and the long ritual of the mundane:
stepping on the cracks as we walked
the sidewalk after picking up
the afternoon mail, then sitting
on the porch swing rocked
by preaching and the revival hymns
the Baptists down the street
sang on hot summer evenings
while we read Mutt and Jeff
and the Katzenjammer kids
in *The Enid Morning News*
and who won the high school
football games.

It held no stories for us,
this town, where I grew up,
none anyone told, at least.
No one remembered, if they ever knew,
what stories of Comanches
and Cherokees roamed the land
we left red behind a three bottom plow
sowing our meager crop of dry stories
about the price of wheat,
planting dust storms which blew away
away the stories we should have told.



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R. S. Carlson is a professor of English and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) at Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA. He holds a BA in English Language and Literature from Seattle Pacific University, an MA in English Literature and a Ph.D. in English linguistics from the University of Oregon. He has published critical survey articles in *Magill's Critical Survey of Short Fiction*, *Magill's Critical Survey of Drama*, and the 1991 Update to *Beacham's Research Guide to Biography and Criticism*. Carlson's poetry has appeared in

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Yvonne Carpenter has published fiction and poetry in *Grain*, *Concho River Review*, and *Westview*. She has also published nonfiction in *Farm Journal* and *The Texas Wheat Producer*. She is a co-partner in a wheat farm in Custer County, Oklahoma.

Wayne Ellinger taught Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern History at Southwestern Oklahoma State University for twenty-six years, retiring in 1987. He has published articles in various historical journals, including the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* and the *Great Plains Journal*. In addition, since retiring he has published nearly six hundred and fifty articles under the column heading, *Sooner Silhouettes*, for a dozen Oklahoma newspapers.

Steven Frattali, a writer and translator, lives in Weatherford, Oklahoma. His poetry and translations have appeared in *Graham House Review*, *Webster Review*, *Pacific Coast Journal*, *Blueline* and others. Two of his plays have been presented in

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Lyn Lifshin has written a number of articles for *Writer's Digest* and has a collection of poems dealing with the Holocaust coming from Event Horizon. Her present book, *Marilyn Monroe*, is a collection of poems that seek to illuminate a woman who lived and died in the spotlight.

Kelley Logan is presently masquerading as Kelley Richardson teaching at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, finishing her dissertation, and longing for a car that runs. She has been published in the *North of Wakulla* anthology, *Paintbrush*, and *Xtreme*.

Keith Long writes a weekly humor column for the *Marlow Review*.

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J. R. Prince was born in Lawton and raised in Oklahoma, where his family still lives. He is now a lawyer practicing in Philadelphia, but he says his home in Oklahoma is never far from his heart or his mind. Mr.

Prince currently is writing a novel that he says is in part inspired by his grandfather, the late Rex Adams of Cyril. He is married and has two sons, as well as what may be the smartest dog on Earth.

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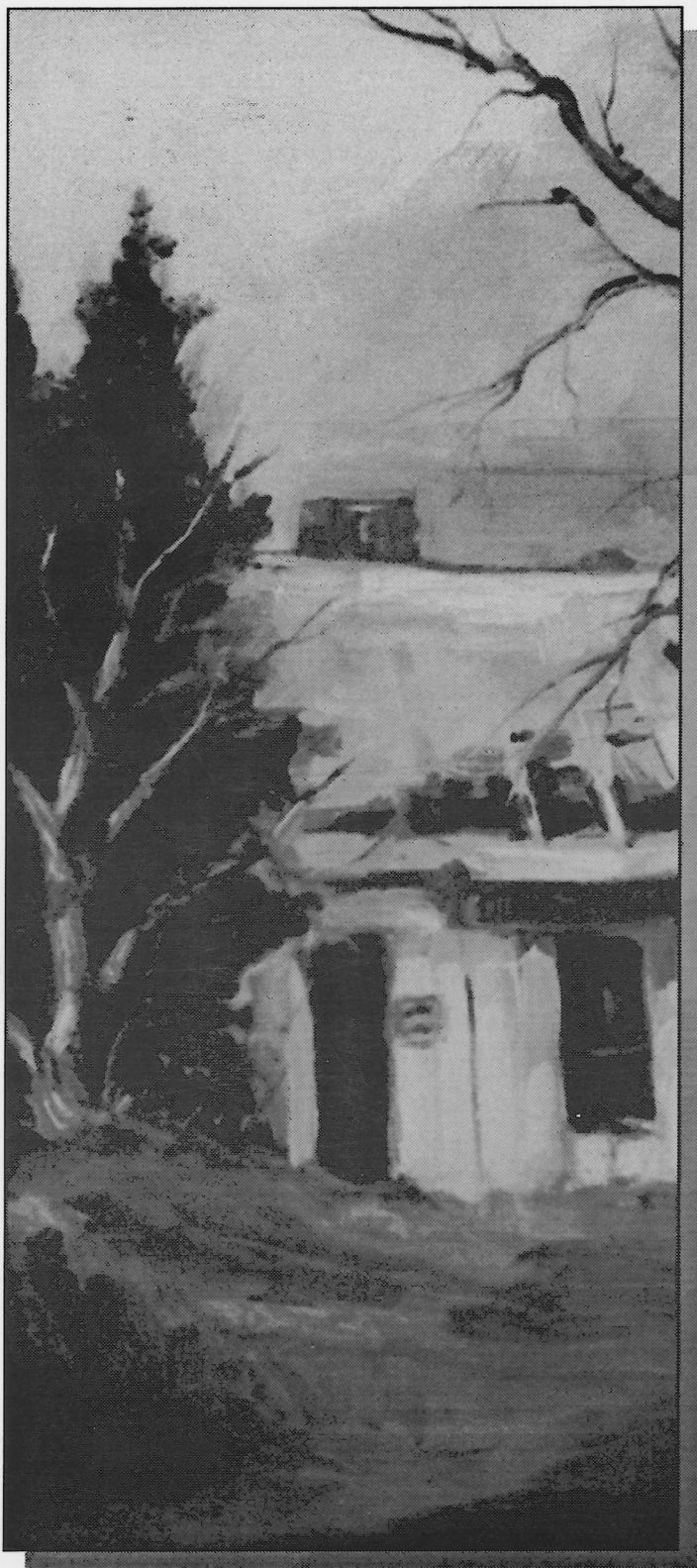
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