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A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

WESTVIEW

VOLUME 13 NUMBER 3 SPRING 1994 $3.00

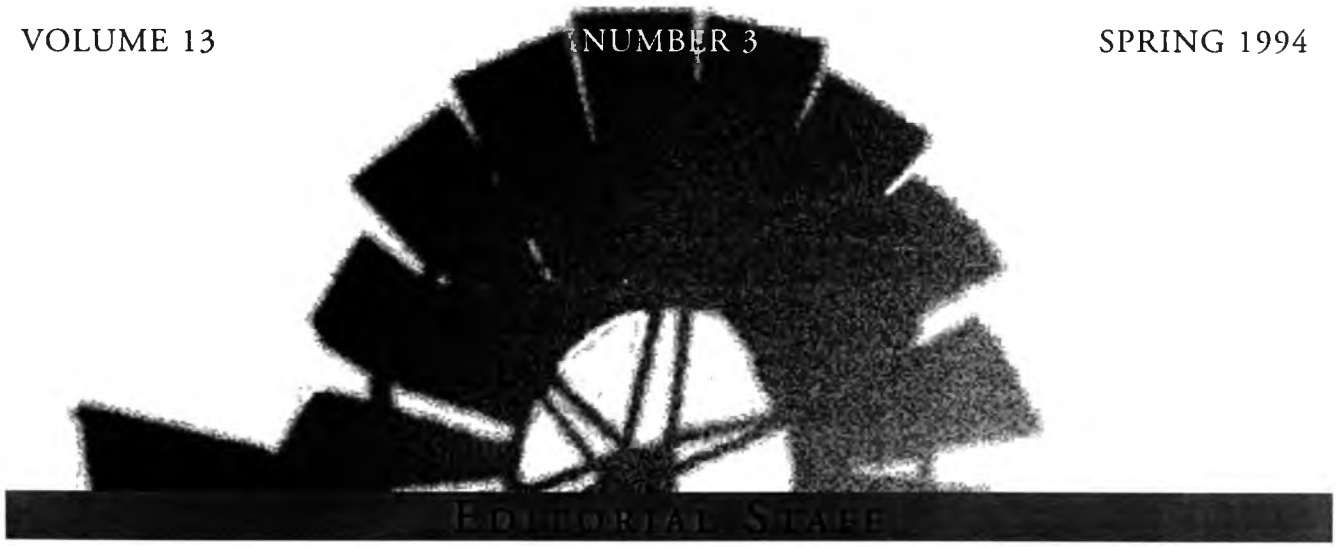
Western Oklahoma

FLORA & FAUNA

A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

WESTVIEW

VOLUME 13 NUMBER 3 SPRING 1994



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1. Mail submissions flat in a 9"x12" envelope. Include a SASE for possible rejection.
2. Submissions should be typed; prose double spaced and poetry single spaced on 8.5" x 11" white paper. Artwork: graphics-pen and ink on white paper; photos-5" x 7" or 8" x 10" black and white. Send copies of photos since they may not be returned.
3. We use themes related to Western Oklahoma, as well as non-thematic work of high quality by writers from elsewhere.
4. We accept and enjoy both free verse and formal poetry.
5. Please limit prose submissions to 10 double-spaced typed pages.
6. Include a brief biographical sketch.
7. We welcome submissions on a 3.5" disk formatted for Microsoft Word, IBM or Macintosh. Please also include a hard copy of your submission.
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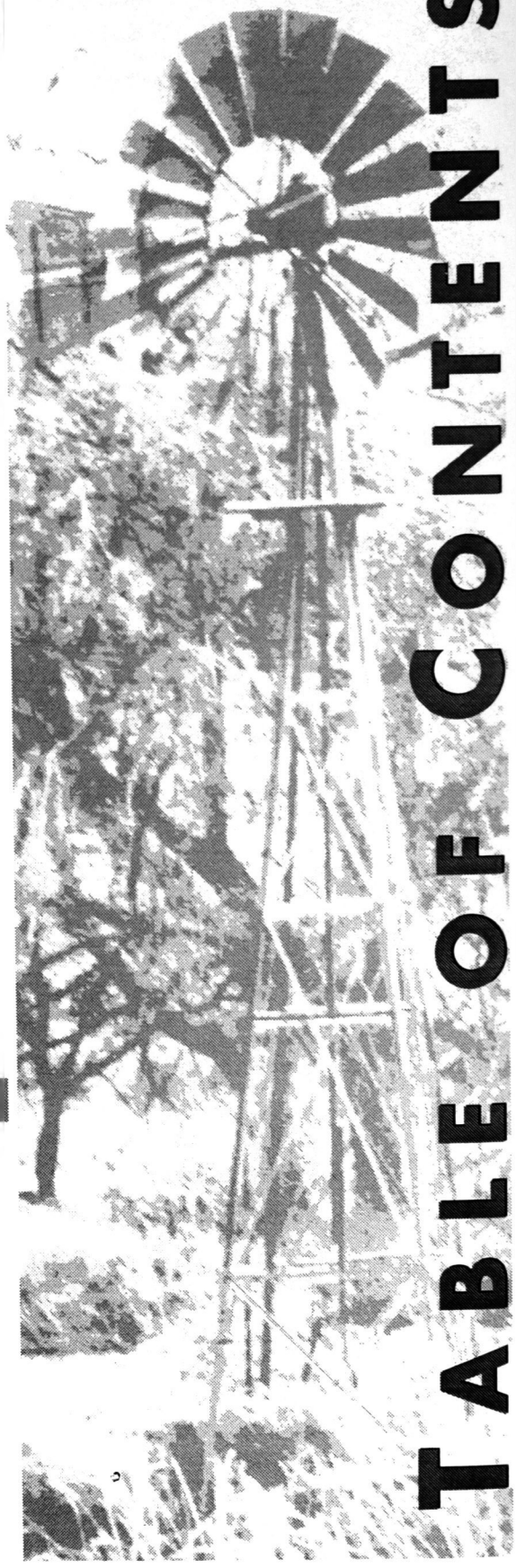

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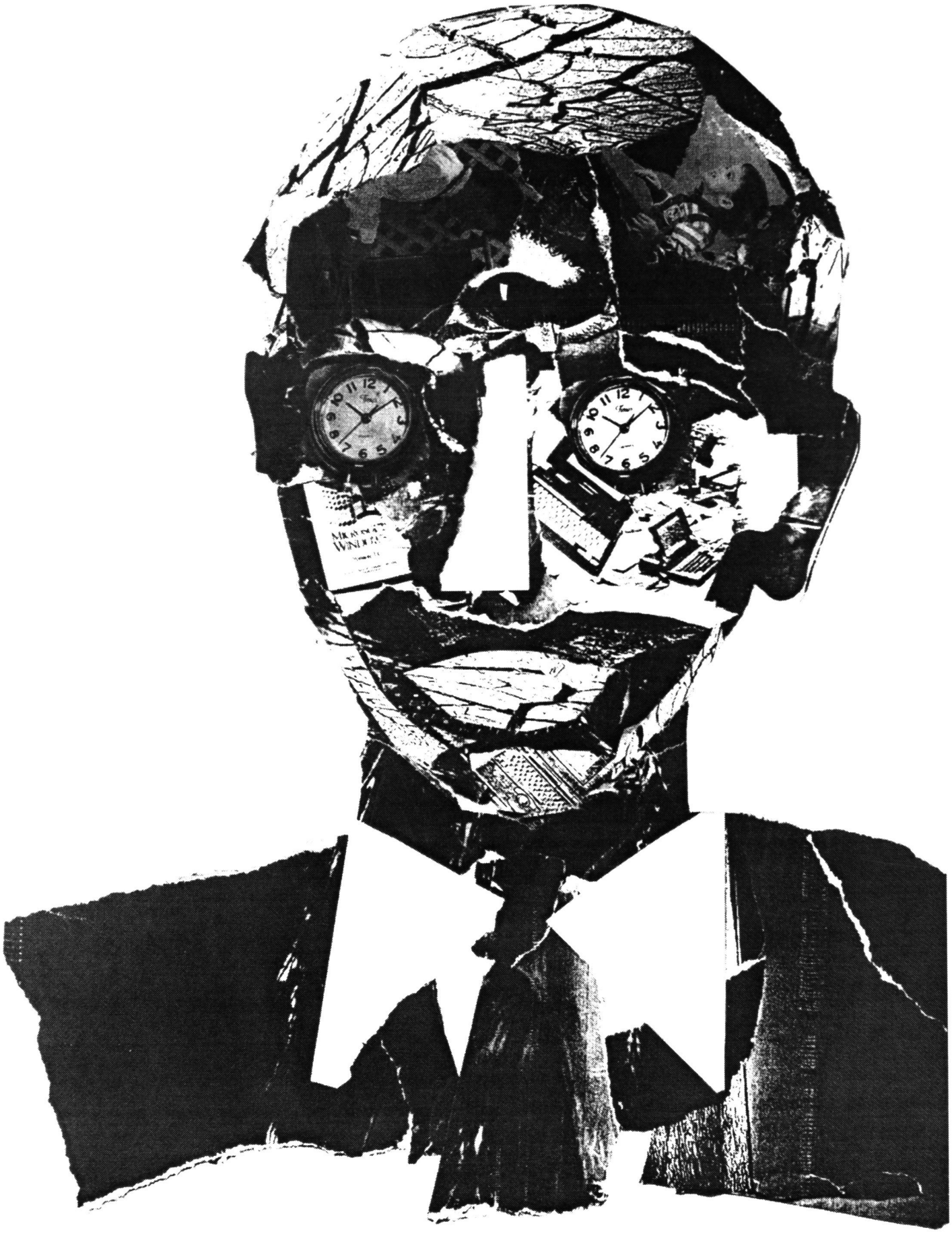


Illustration by Velvet Rogers

Little Sahara

Mark Sanders

The sun's light pierces the black panes
of the chrome and glass mountain, flooding the office.
It swims in the rivers of ink that slip and course
among the pyramids of daily ledgers and invoices,
warms its yellow coils on the margins of papers,
basks there, then slithers over the mail trays.
The little egyptian at his grey desk, at his grey task,
praying to the single eye of the Sphinx on the wall,
carves for his Pharaoh his red and black hieroglyphy,
a holy work, a woeful work of Ages.
But the egyptian presses to his broad and pale forehead
a troubled hand. Locked in his mind's eye
is a vision of an oasis, of square islands and gardens
of trees and of fruit sweet to the parched tongue.
There, his children dance in the fountain's mist
and rainbow, the sprinkler's folding and unfolding arch.
The sacrificed calf cooks on a black grid
over red, hissing coals; the cold tea
of the sun sweats Niles down the sides of his glass.

A phone rings and wakes him. A new epidemic,
a new burden and plague commences. The dream
dissipates like a mirage. The desk is a vast desert.
Like a nomad, he plods through eternal sands,
endless dunes of triplicate forms and letterheads.
Motes ascend the sun's bright bridge
and vanish into heaven's black, opaque glass.
Winds rise; the sand pelts the nomad's back.
He must keep moving or be lost, forever.

December 1944

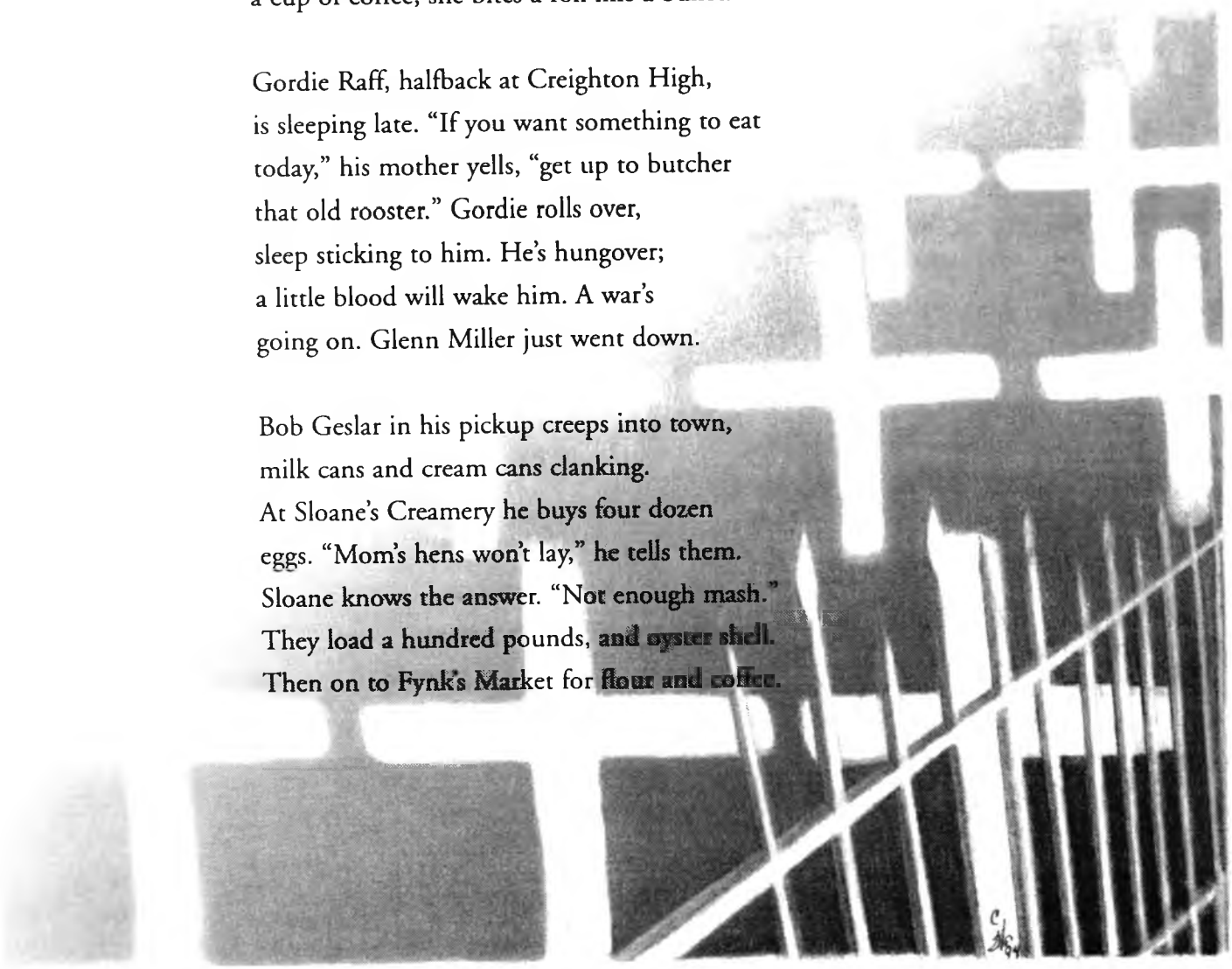
for Don Welch

Mark Sanders

Anna Shultz emerges from her house to retrieve
the Norfolk Daily News. Hengstler, the mortician,
drives down the street in his new Dodge. Anna
does not return his wave. She shuts the door
like the lid to a coffin. At the kitchen table,
where a photograph of her son sits, she drinks
a cup of coffee, she bites a roll like a bullet.

Gordie Raff, halfback at Creighton High,
is sleeping late. "If you want something to eat
today," his mother yells, "get up to butcher
that old rooster." Gordie rolls over,
sleep sticking to him. He's hungover;
a little blood will wake him. A war's
going on. Glenn Miller just went down.

Bob Geslar in his pickup creeps into town,
milk cans and cream cans clanking.
At Sloane's Creamery he buys four dozen
eggs. "Mom's hens won't lay," he tells them.
Sloane knows the answer. "Not enough mash."
They load a hundred pounds, and oyster shell.
Then on to Fynk's Market for flour and coffee.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLOTTE WILLIAMS

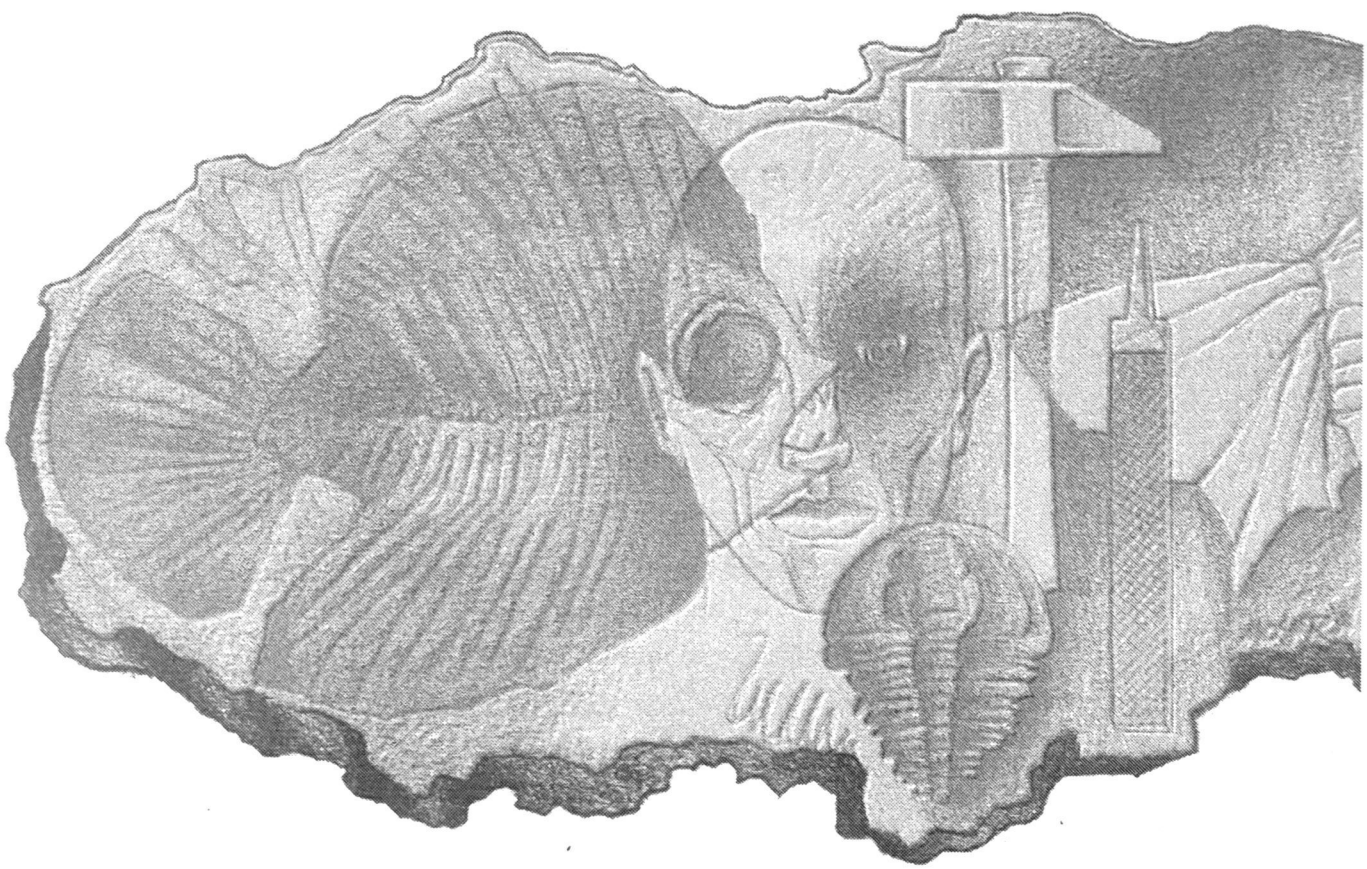
Bill Haskin, his folks the first settlers
in Knox County, shows up at the pool hall
with arrowheads, three of them nearly as new
as the day they were struck. The stories he tells
go back years, about his parents, the Pawnee,
fourteen mules, and a two-story sod.
Everyone listens to the stories they know by heart.

Old Bill Cannon walks down Main
with a pouter in his hands, heading to Schoenstein's
to trade birds. Two stray dogs leap up,
smelling the bird, and he scolds them
in German. Other Germans gather in the bar's
basement. Playing cards, they coo softly
in their language. No one minds that they do.

Digging for Fossils

Mark Sanders

And then you come face to face with it,
some wide-eyed fish stuck in stone
surprised to find you there in his ocean,
shocked at the light that never disturbed him
even as he lived.
And you can't begin to find words enough
to explain the value of this meeting.
You try, but all that comes from your throat
are little chipping sounds like a chisel and hammer
tapping at the rock.



And maybe it's predictable.
But later, when you crawl into your tent to sleep,
and mosquitoes buzz about your head like sand
silting to a lake's bottom,
you hear the same chipping sound,
you open your eyes in surprise at the light
washing in eons around you,
then surprise again when you see the bright blue eyes
of someone looking at you, tape in hand
to measure your occipital, the jut of your jaw,
the distance between the centers of your eye sockets.
You hear the low sound of her voice speaking a language
that sounds like metal against rock,
and you're wanting to tell her what it is
you could tell her.

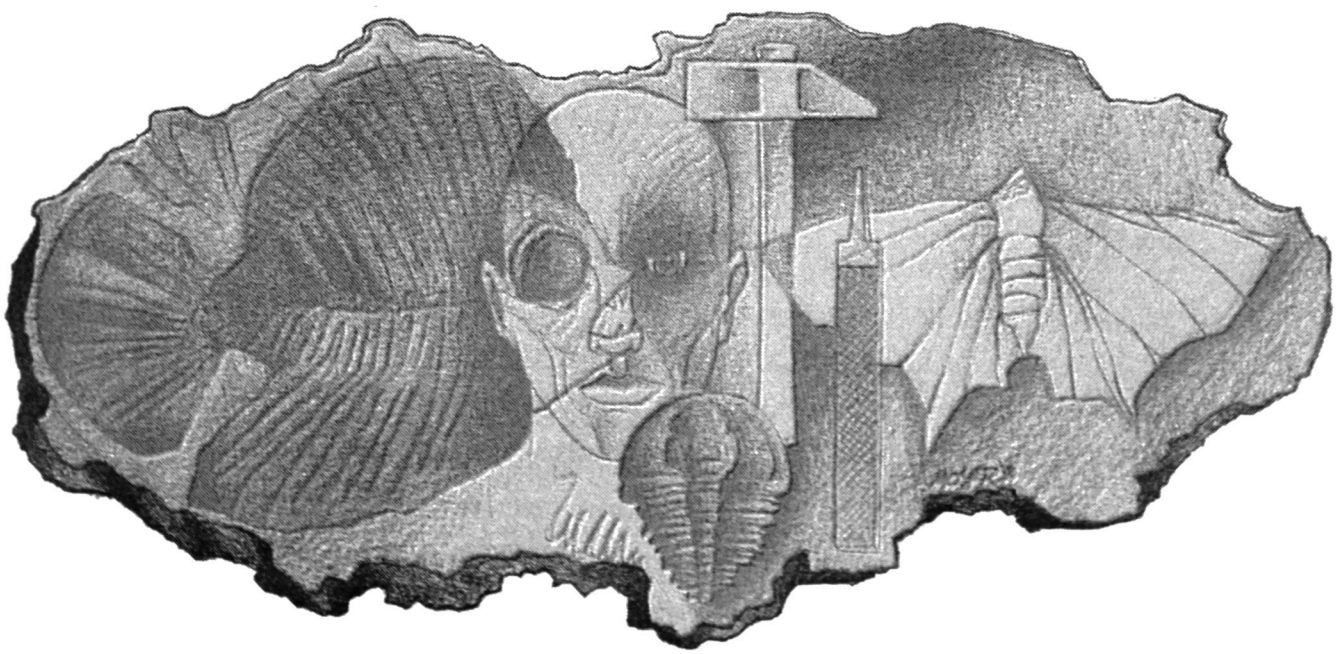


Illustration by Marc Moyer

An Interview with Mark Sanders

Fred Alsberg

Westview: What are the sources for your poetry?

Sanders: The sources for my poetry are many, ranging anywhere from digging for fossils to nuclear holocaust. I suppose the predominant sources, though, come from the personal experiences I have had the fortune or misfortune to experience. These poems include the blessings and curses of being a father, of blissful and failed love and marriage, of childhood, of parents, of small town life. Sometimes a secondary source might be the many poets I read; more than infrequently, something that I read by Randall Jarrell or Karl Shapiro, for example, might cause a connection to something I have had buried in the image attic.

Westview: What type of poetry would you say you write?

Sanders: Type might be construed as a number of things. Do you mean form or do you mean content? I suppose I an a writer of free verse, though as a literary critic whose concern is form, I am very conscious of the form of my stanzaic, rhythmic, or metric freedoms. Robert Frost's comment that free verse was like playing tennis with the net down is true inasmuch as a poet is careless or plays without rules. I play with rules in mind. Now, on the other hand, if you mean content, my poetry is generally a poetry of loss, of the significance of life that slips away from us and of the perseverance that compels us to continue.

Westview: What are your poetic influences?

Sanders: I wrote my doctoral dissertation on metaphor in the poetry of W. B. Yeats. So, obviously, Yeats is an enduring influence. In fact, I recently found a first edition of his *Wind Among the Reeds,* and forked over an embarrassing amount of money for it. I wouldn't have bothered had he not been important to me. William Carlos Williams' sensuous energy had a profound poetic and personal effect upon my life; that is, he has shown me how important passion is, even for the smallest of things. I have also been influenced by

Karl Shapiro, the Pulitzer Prize winner whose reputation has been sadly slighted in recent years; Karl is my poetic grandfather, the teacher of two of my poetry teachers. And then there's Maxine Kumin, Robert Bly, Wendell Berry, the Nebraska poet Greg Kuzma, Don Welch, Ted Kooser, William Kloefkorn, the black poet Langston Hughes, the Irish poet Seamus Heaney, Sexton, Plath, and so on. My own poetry library is made up of nearly one thousand titles, so there's one thousand influences.

Westview: What elements go into making good poetry?

Sanders: Go back to the March 1913 issue of *Poetry*, and read Ezra Pounds's *"A Few Don'ts for an Imagist"*: 1. Direct treatment of the "thing," whether subjective or objective. 2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation. 3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome. Pound added some additional rules in the introduction of *Des Imagistes* in 1915: 1.To use the language of common speech, but always the exact word. 2. To create new rhythms, encouraging though not requiring free verse. 3. Absolute freedom of subject matter. I might add one to Pound's list. Don Welch's desk once had a sign taken from a fish market that read, "Keep it fresh." There's nothing worse than a poem that stinks, including dead fish.

Westview: What makes good subject matter for poems?

Sanders: Anything, though the poet ought to know it inside and outside and from as many angles as possible.

Westview: Why is it often so difficult to pin down the meaning in poems being published today?

Sanders: The poet fails to consider the transcendent quality of verse, that poetry is an art medium for the people. What happens is that poets write too much of the closet sorrow or pleasure in the obscure terms that only they can understand. If the poet's symbol or image is of such obscurity that it cannot be understood by the people—and I believe accessibility is essential in good poetry—then that particular poem should have just as well stayed in the closet.

Westview: Should a writer write, then, for the general populace, the literary community, magazines, the future, or himself?

Sanders: As I just stated, accessibility is the key. If the poem is accessible, despite the fact it may be laden with allusion, symbol, archetype, the provincial, and so on, the writer can reach all audiences. Actually , this might seem very simplistic on one level, but it is actually a grand feat to be able to honor so many audiences with one good poem. I think it was Frost who said the he wanted to have one unlodgeable poem in the language. He certainly did that, and more than once, too. The common reader can understand it, hence "The Road Not Taken" read at Kennedy's inauguration seems appropriate. Furthermore, the literary community has been writing critical essays and dissertations on Frost for years. Magazines continue to run special editions devoted to Frost, and the future has continued to embrace him, even though he has been dead for thirty years. I would guess he wrote for himself. When he said that the reader was a kindly gentleman who wanted the poet to succeed if not for himself at least for the reader's sake, I assume he meant himself, too, gentleman poet and farmer that he was.

Westview: What are the most difficult poems to write?

Sanders: The ones that hurt because the pain is too fresh. It's very hard to control the poem when the pain still controls you. For example, my son was born with a deformed left hand. It tore me up, the cruelty that birth sometimes imposes upon the innocent. I never wrote about that pain until years later, when he was six. It took that long for me to control the agony I felt over it, though the idea turned in my head from the day he was born. The end result was a poem called "Hands," which was originally published in Canada and was later reprinted in the States.

Westview: Do your poems usually begin with an objective or do you discover your objective through writing them?

Sanders: I think writing is discovery. William Stafford wrote that we must revise our lives, and the objective of the poem is to discover the revision of ourselves as we travel through the dark of the poem.

Westview: A final question: Should poems possess different levels of meaning?

Sanders: Yes, definitely. I view the poem as a work of art, not unlike a vase. As in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," we can walk around that vase or urn and see a variety of pictures or interpretations on its surface alone. But what about the form of the vase? It compels us to walk around it, to study its shape. It asks us to analyze the way the thing has been fired and from what raw materials the porcelain was made. Then, if we are truly curious, and we have exhausted the freeplay of the pictures and of the shape and texture, we might even want to look down into the vase's mouth, to lift its lid, so to speak, and see its internal mechanism. Has the inside been given a coating? Or, is there dust in there, and what is the significance of that dust?

Wasted Tickets

Jack Matthews

When Gavin was taking his shower, he heard his wife, Mavis, scream, and his first thought was that they'd won the lottery. But he was mistaken, for she had just received a phone call from her mother, saying that her father had died of a heart attack.

Gavin was showering after finishing his workout in his basement home gym at 6:15 according to schedule so he'd be ready for dinner, which they always ate at seven. The lottery was announced on Channel 8 every Wednesday at exactly 6:30, and he knew that his wife, Mavis, had splurged more than usual this week, buying twenty tickets.

She'd told him about buying the twenty tickets at breakfast, and he'd frowned down at his cinnamon oatmeal and toast, muttering something about it being her money. This wasn't altogether true, because actually the money she regularly wasted on lottery tickets would have been a significant help for the family budget...if she had possessed more self control, as he sometimes pointed out to her. She knew he didn't approve, but went ahead and played the lottery anyway. After all, she pointed out in return, he would share equally in whatever she won. And anyway, wasn't she making extra money working half-time doing accounts for Ezio's, a local pizza enterprise?

The owner of Ezio's was a worried and cynical man named Howie Bender, who'd told Mavis one time that he'd named his pizza palace for a great operatic basso who'd been famous when he was a kid. She couldn't exactly remember his name, even though Howie was always referring to him; but she could have sworn it sounded almost exactly like "pizza."

"That's the trouble," Howie, who was discouraged middle-aged, fat and bald, complained to her miserably one evening; "what good's a really great and wonderful pun if nobody knows what you're talking about? 'Ezio's Pizza'—that's really one-hundred percent brilliant, you know? But so what? I ask you, whoever picks up on it? I might just as well have named it 'Caruso's' or something."

Mavis thought he was referring to Robinson Crusoe, because she couldn't remember ever hearing of Enrico Caruso; but then, as she might have pointed out in her defense—had she been indicted of felonious ignorance—Howie Bender probably could not have identified The Rubber Heels, Outboard Motor, Shebang, Utopia Limited, or any of the currently favorite rock groups that practically everybody else in the world knew about.

But there was no doubting the fact that the clever name Howie had chosen for his business was meaningless for the great majority of customers, who couldn't have cared less. Just like Mavis, who simply did her work and kept her mouth shut. However, this lack of communication in the name of his business really seemed to bother Howie a great deal, even though he was making money hand over fist, as Mavis liked to tell Gavin. "It's crazy. Sometimes he talks like the name is more important than making a humongous success out of his business!"

"Just so he signs your checks," Gavin told her laconically. Then added: "And has enough money in the bank to cover them."

"I know where you're coming from," Mavis answered, nodding. She'd picked up phrases that she associated with gutsy male competence, if not actual machismo, and liked to use them whenever possible. "You know damned well," Gavin said. "We need all the bucks we can get right now." He looked at their three-year-old girl, Timotha, and then at their infant boy, Broderick. Christ, you had to be practically a millionaire to be able to afford kids today! He couldn't remember his own parents struggling like this, and neither could Mavis. That is to say, she couldn't remember hers struggling like this, either. But of course, one's perspective changes, and Gavin and Mavis, when they were in, say, high school, may not have been aware of certain things about their parents.

Now, as he heard Mavis come screaming toward him in the shower, Gavin began to sense that something was not quite right with her. There was more than simple excitement in her screaming. Maybe she was coming unglued from winning so much money. Obviously, from the sounds she was making, she was hysterical and needed calming down. The prize that week was over two million dollars, and when he turned off the shower, Gavin meant to point out to her that there might be other winners with whom they would have to share the money. Also, the money would be spread over a number of years.

He opened the shower curtain, kind of smiling to help her calm down and get control of herself; but she violently swung the bathroom door open and yelled at him, "It's Dad, he's dead!" Then she started howling again, and Gavin stood there stunned, gazing at her out of a slowly dwindling perplexity.

"Your dad?" he finally asked, almost stupidly.

She nodded with her lips compressed, and he wondered how it was that trying to hold back tears always made you look as if you were kind of grinning. He nodded. "What happened?"

"Oh, Gav!" she cried and threw herself into his nakedness.

"I'm all wet," he told her.

"I know that. Why do you think I'd care about a thing like that at a time like this?"

"How did it happen?'

"Mom just called! Oh, God, she's still on the phone!"

Still holding her, Gavin felt the terrible news glance oddly off him, and realized how touching it was that she would instinctively head for him, leaving her mother stranded. He reached for a towel and started to dry himself off where he could reach around her clinging body. "Was it a heart attack or something?"

"Yes," she muttered, her voice muted by the thick hair on his chest.

"Just now?"

"Yes, he just fell over dead. Just now."

"How's your mother taking it?"

"She's hysterical. What do you think she'd be?"

"Don't you think you should get back to the phone?"

"And he's never been sick a day in his life!" Mavis gasped, pulling back and looking at Gavin as if she'd never really seen him before. Or as if he might fall over dead, too...right in front of her, dropping through her arms, as young and healthy as he was.

For an instant Gavin was going to correct her in what she'd said, for his father-in-law had been a

vociferous hypochondriac, which might not have been exactly the same thing as actually being sick, but was close enough. Nevertheless. Gavin prudently decided not to say anything along these lines.

"Now just get control of yourself," he told her, sounding calm and yet feeling his voice quiver a little. "And go back to talk to your mother on the phone. After all, she needs you." The thought of his mother-in-law waiting on the other end of the line for Mavis to get control of herself and stop crying struck him as oddly hilarious, somehow. Mavis had dropped her mother like a hot potato to come and cry on Gavin's nakedness; at least, that was the way it seemed to him at that instant. But, of course, he did what he could not to betray any such really disgustingly inappropriate thoughts. Not that Mavis was in any shape to notice much of anything in the way of nuance.

"Don't you think you should get back on the phone and say something?" he patiently asked again. "Didn't you say she was still on the phone?"

Mavis sniffed her tears back, nodded, and went back to the phone which was on the wall of the kitchen, by the entrance to their old-fashioned breakfast nook. But the instant she brought the receiver up to her face, she just started in crying again, wailing uncontrollably into the receiver, unable to say anything coherent, let alone comfort her mother. Well, her mother was probably doing the same thing, and wouldn't have been able to hear her, anyway.

Gavin finished drying himself off, put on his bathrobe, and went to the extension to tell Mavis' mother how sorry he was. He asked if there was anything they could do; he asked how they could help. He could hardly hear her answer. Then he asked if she'd notified Mavis' brother and sisters yet, and she said no, Mavis was the first one she'd called. It had just happened. The emergency squad people were still there. Mavis' father was still in the front room. His body.

Her voice had something almost like hilarity in it, but Gavin knew that it was really hysteria. Just as Mavis had had this weird sort of gassy baby smile on her face when she told him, with her cheeks as wet from tears as he was all over from the shower...just as there was this powerful ambiguity in the way she looked, so there was a similar one in the way his mother-in-law sounded.

"I haven't called anyone else yet!" she gasped quickly, like someone trying to get an entire sentence out between spasms of laughter.

Gavin nodded. Of course she'd call Mavis first, because Mavis was the oldest. In her own wacky way, his mother-in-law had a very orderly mind. He pictured his father-in-law's body lying stretched out on the sofa, with the emergency squad people getting ready to put him on the wheeled stretcher. Gavin thought of what a load he'd be to lift. And once again he felt a sense of something odd and recklessly comic, which almost made him laugh out loud...so he repeated his question to his mother-in-law:

"Grace, is there anything we can do for you? How about calling?"

"Calling?"

God, she really was rattled! But then, his question seemed to sink in, and instinctively his mother-in-law answered Mavis, even though Gavin had asked the question. "Mavis, you might call the Everts' and the Magnusson's. Bert Magnusson

thought the sun rose and set on your father!" Hearing herself use the past tense, she gasped and started in weeping again, while Mavis made soothing sounds. Jesus, it really had been unexpected, Gavin admitted to himself. In spite of the old guy's chronic complaints.

Then it suddenly, surprisingly, came to Gavin that people who complain as much as his father-in-law begin to seem immortal, in a strange way, because the subject of death is never far away from their presence, and yet they seem to just keep on living and complaining forever. They don't actually live longer, but they live longer within the context of death, or something. Maybe it was like the little boy who cried wolf—after all those scares and alarms, you don't really expect the old guy to kick off while he's taking a nap on the sofa. Probably with some game show running on the TV and the sound turned down to a low murmer of music and muted yells of excitement. Not that Mavis' dad would have been able to hear such things, anyway. Not even if they were tuned up to normal volume. He remembered reading that deafness in older men can be a coronary symptom. Like just about everything else you could name.

Why was Gavin thinking this way? Because, after all, damn it, he'd really liked Mavis' dad; and the old guy seemed to like him, too, on those occasions when he wasn't preocuppied with things like sour stomach and constipation.

One time when he'd felt pretty good, he joked with Gavin, saying that in-laws were God's curse for getting married. Naturally, Gavin had laughed. But actually, for all his human faults, the old guy hadn't ever seemed like a curse to him; and the joke hadn't really seemed to have much point, although he naturally didn't bring that up at the time. But maybe Gavin had somehow missed seeing some sinister defect in Mavis' dad that was right out there for everybody to see, if they'd just take the trouble to look. Maybe Gavin was too selfish to notice, too preoccupied with himself to be aware of the defects in his father-in-law's personality.

Maybe he really was self-centered. There had been that time three or four years ago when they'd had a serious discussion, and Mavis had told him he was too wrapped up in himself. Could that be true? But, when you came right down to it, wasn't everybody? Still, it was probably a matter of degree, like so many things. So maybe she was essentially right, and if Gavin hadn't been so wrapped up in himself, maybe he would have seen something despicable in his father-in-law.

The weirdness of this paradox was almost enough to make him chuckle, but he caught himself and felt a spasm of guilt and self-disgust as Grace went through the same old scenario again over the phone, obviously talking intimately, mother to daughter, to Mavis...as if Gavin hadn't been there to hear. The poor old soul was understandably hysterical, and now the two of them had reverted to some older, more primitive, female phase of their relationship as mother and daughter, and Grace had to get a lot of gab out of her system. Pouring it into her own blood, in a way. Gavin felt a certain decency in being aware of this possibility.

But then suddenly, once again, as if to ruin everything, he thought of Grace bottled up in the telephone while Mavis had come screaming into his wet nakedness, seeking dumb comfort from him.

But, good God, what was this? Why wasn't he

feeling the full shock? Why wasn't he missing his father-in-law? Why wasn't he more saddened? Why wasn't he even thinking more about his death, not to mention feeling a distinct sadness for the old guy, who wasn't—which is to say, hadn't been—all that bad, when you thought about it. Maybe such things would come in time; maybe it was too early for him to assimilate what had happened. Sure...but why was he so caught up in thinking about himself?

Once again, he found himself wondering if the old man really had died on the sofa. It seemed important for Gavin to know this. It was important for him to picture how things looked at this moment, and he almost interrupted Grace to ask if Mavis' dad had been taking one of his naps; but he decided that such a question would sound pretty indelicate this early in the game.

Grace was repeating herself for about the fourth time, adding a few details with each retelling but not getting his father-in-law's body any nearer to the sofa, so far as Gavin could tell. In a way, he hoped he had been there in his favorite spot; because dying while taking a nap wouldn't be the worst way to go. You couldn't deny that it would probably be a nice and easy exit. Maybe he should point this out to Grace and Mavis both, who were exchanging sobs once again; but again he decided not to, because it just seemed too early for that kind of comfort.

Suddenly, he realized that Grace had hung up, and Mavis was now approaching and gazing at him out of a bleary mindlessness. "Oh, God, Gav, he's dead!" she whispered. "My dad!"

Gavin, feeling old and sad and wise, clasped her in his arms again and said, yes, he understood, and, God, he was shocked and sorry, too...but they were going to have to bear up.

Then, in spite of himself, he thought of his first reaction to her screaming. "Incidentally, where's that damned winning lottery ticket now?" a voice in his head asked.

But naturally he didn't say anything about this, either, although he couldn't help wondering if the phone call had interrupted Channel 8's drawing. He wondered if Mavis had checked all twenty sets of numbers...not as if they'd ever win anything in a gamble as mathematically loaded against winning as the lottery...still, if you'd bought twenty tickets, you'd be an idiot if you didn't check them against the winning numbers.

After all, you could never tell. And, thinking this, Gavin decided he'd call sometime tomorrow from Rosewood, where Mavis' parents lived. Had lived. At least, one of them.

He didn't bring up the subject of the twenty tickets to Mavis, so he was considerably surprised when they were in bed several hours later (they were going to get up early the next day and drive to her mom's house), and Mavis said, 'Incidentally, for what it's worth, we didn't win the lottery, either."

He wondered exactly what she meant by "for what it's worth" and "either." But he didn't say anything. He merely patted her shoulder and then brought her body close so he could hug her and let her cry some more, if she had to.

But she was suddenly quiet. No doubt thinking. Or perhaps just remembering her dad, who hadn't really been a bad sort, when you thought about it, as Gavin kept reminding himself—half puzzled at why he couldn't feel anything at all,

hardly, beyond a certain responsibility to help Mavis get through what she had to get through in this whole sad, somehow goofy business.

At first, things at Rosewood were not quite as grim as he'd anticipated; but they were bad enough. Mavis' young sisters—one still in college, the other married to a skinny, adenoidal computer whiz in Memphis—had flown in with their husbands in tow; and her brother, a young political science instructor at SUNY in Buffalo, seemed to exert a somewhat stabilizing influence upon their mother.

For Grace seemed to be calm and deliberate now, after her initial, understandable hysterics. She was attentive as a hostess and mother; she was concerned that everybody had enough to eat from the table piled with cakes, freshly baked muffins, three casseroles, one loaded fruit dish, a whole roast turkey, and ham loaf that friends and neighbors had brought to the house.

Kirk, Mavis' brother, was drinking instead of eating. Glancing at him, now and then, Gavin noticed a bleak expression on his smeared, flushed face. He sat on the edge of his dead father's favorite naugahyde chair sipping from a bourbon on ice, mostly listening. Noticing how much weight he'd put on, Gavin realized with a sudden shock how much Kirk had gotten to look like his father. Maybe thirty or forty years from now he'd die taking a nap on a sofa somewhere, and his wife would phone their eldest daughter, who'd scream and come running to her husband, who was taking a shower...etc.

All of the attractive but heavy sisters, after much initial crying, were being ostentatiously, funereally brave; and by the second day, they had begun occasionally to talk about everyday things, instead of dwelling with relentless futility on the sudden shocking death that had brought them all together for this sad reunion.

Eating a cheese-filled biscuit and sipping from a glass of sherry, Gavin pondered all these matters. He'd decided to leave the heavy booze to Kirk, if that's what he wanted. And leave the food to Mavis's sisters, who really were putting on weight and looking middle-aged. Even Karen, the one who was still in college. Obviously, they were all using food to help recover from the shock; it was something of a family tradition. Given the fact that their deceased father would have perfectly accepted it—if not entirely understood—there was a sort of piety in their behavior. So Gavin watched them become comfortably garrulous in their own home; and noticed that even Grace had gotten some color back in her face. He watched her as she sat listening to her wonderful daughters with a sort of numb and helpless avidity. Curious things, families...not to mention females. Yes, essentially females. Not to mention funeral gatherings.

Gavin sipped his sherry and thought about all that had happened and all that was happening. There was almost too much to take in. Maybe Kirk felt like this, too—he had slid down in the chair so that he was sitting on the small of his back, like a man tired and dazed from hours of toil, his glass of whiskey tilted ten degrees to his right, his hair mussed and his eyes sleepy. Was he drunk? Maybe a little bit. But limping far behind, in some dim male distance, whatever was going on with his mother. Not to mention Mavis and her sisters. It was somehow as if they, simply as women, had all practiced for this, somehow. Had been in training.

Perhaps, deep down, it really was a male/female thing; and Gavin and Kirk had all they could do just to hang on. Or maybe sit quietly and listen—or pretend to listen—from deep down inside themselves, patiently stupefied by the inscrutable, mystical female authority that was manifest at such climactic moments. Beyond doubt, it was best for a man to be wary, take in what he could, and wait for cues. The two of them, in this instance, each with his private thoughts. The old guy who was dead would have been just as numb and bewildered, if he'd been there. All of them out of their depth before female competence in the essential transitions of birth and death. But, Gavin asked himself as he stared at his glass of sherry, where in the hell was the birth now?

Suddenly, he was aware of a subtle shift in the tone of their voices. Things had turned suddenly dark again, following one of the periodic downswings. The three of them were talking in hushed voices about the funeral arrangements. Hoffer's Funeral Home. That's where the remains of Mavis' father were lying. Gavin had gone this morning with Mavis, and they were going to go back this evening, during visiting hours from five to seven. He hoped Kirk wouldn't be stumbling drunk by then. Not that he'd ever seen him this way. And not that the dead man would have objected too much, having been at least a moderate drinker most of his life. And maybe at one time more than that. Who could tell? His death had swallowed untold mysteries.

Suddenly, for some odd reason, Gavin remembered Mavis' scream, and remembered how his first thought had been she was crying for joy because she'd just learned they'd won the lottery. Then, during all that grotesque choreography when poor Mavis had come stumbling toward him just out of the shower and hugged his wet naked body, how poor Grace had been bottled up in the telephone, maybe even holding back her tears because she knew they'd be wasted with nobody to hear.

The utter, inescapable hilarity of this scene struck him so forcibly that he couldn't hold it back, and, worse yet, knew he couldn't. It was going to be a losing battle. With a sort of horror, he felt himself sliding downhill, like a man slipping on sheer ice, until he actually chuckled out loud. The sound stopped the conversation in the room as if an electrical plug had been pulled. Gavin was aware that Kirk was looking over at him. Grace was looking over at him, too, from a different direction. Somebody abruptly inhaled. Mavis was frowning at him out of a distant perplexity.

What a grotesque sensation! There was this dense silence with all of these various intelligences—four out of five of them female—pointed at him, all of a sudden...as if it were somehow, finally, his turn. But he couldn't hold back. Sickeningly, he heard himself actually begin to laugh. And then Mavis was moving swiftly up to him in a rush of perfume, clasping him bewilderingly in her arms and whispering, "Oh, Gav, it's all right, Honey! You know it is!"

"Of course it is!" Grace cried passionately from a distance.

"Just go ahead and cry, Honey," Mavis whispered.

His sisters in law were murmuring softly, breathing through him like a breeze through the limbs of a catalpa tree.

"He loved you like a son," Grace announced judiciously from her even greater distance. Gavin heard the ice in Kirk's drink clatter like a frantic scrabbling of dumb claws against the glass as he raised it to his lips.

Gavin glimpsed him briefly as he sat there half-drunk and fascinated, watching his sister, Mavis comfort Gavin in her warm arms, while Gavin's laughter suddenly, abruptly, astonishingly, turned to a convulsive hiccuping. Actually, by God, suddenly, goddammit, weeping, goddammit! And why shouldn't he have felt like a one-hundred percent idiot? And he'd be damned if he could have explained why he was doing something so totally stupid right there in front of everybody, when at the moment he couldn't even have pictured what his father-in-law looked like, already.

Flies of the Ephemeral Kind

Peter M. Grant

There are times when it's not a good idea to be near me - while I'm washing the dishes, for example, or working on the family budget, or answering certain questions while playing Trivial Pursuit. Regarding the latter example, I've been asked the following question several times while playing the Genus Edition, "How many days does a typical mayfly live?" Read it yourself, card #540. I then explain, in great detail, that the answer on the card is "one" but the correct answer depends on the species– anywhere from one week to several years.

This answer really impresses the other players. I know because there always follows a brief period of silence, during which everyone rolls their eyes. I really end up impressing no one, but I at least feel reassured that I'm getting my money's worth from my Ph.D.

This preoccupation with the short life of the adult mayfly has influenced how we refer to these insects. Mayflies are a group of aquatic insects more formally named Ephemeroptera (from the Greek "ephemeros," living only a day and "pteron," wing). Of the different common names associated with mayflies, I particularly like the German name, Eintagsfliegen, which means "one-day-flies." The abbreviated adult stage has also been the brunt of a number of cartoons. These fascinating insects are found all over the world, just about anywhere freshwater is found. In Oklahoma, nearly every lake, pond, stream, and reservoir is populated with mayflies, and even some temporary pools and cattle troughs.

The fossil record indicates that mayflies have been on earth since the Permian Era, some 250 million years ago. They currently represent the most primitively winged insects in existence. One clue to their primitiveness is the adult's inability to fold its wings flat on its abdomen– they are held upright. Dragonflies and damselflies are considered primitive for the very same reason.

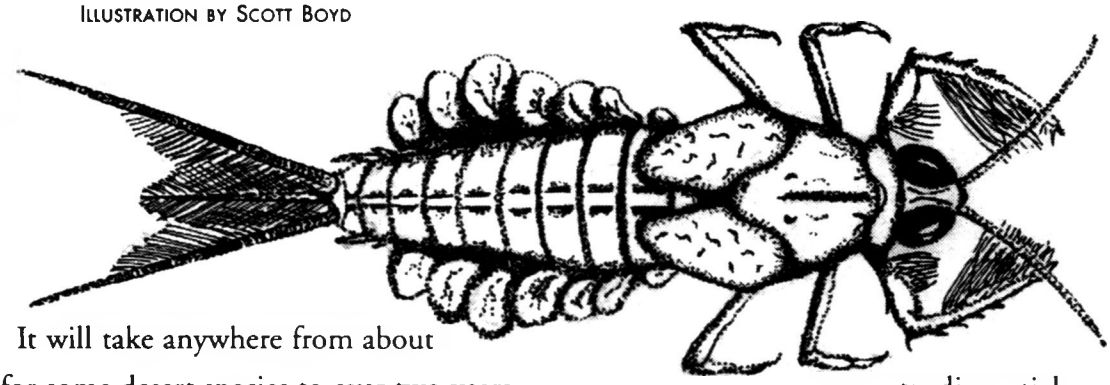
Life Cycle

Eggs are laid in the water by the female. Usually these eggs take a few days or weeks to develop and hatch. Some extremes in development are shown by species whose eggs hatch immediately after hitting the water to others that may remain in the egg stage for up to nine months.

Eggs are extremely tiny, just a fraction of a millimeter in length, and are subject to the vagaries of water currents and the movements of other aquatic organisms. To keep them in place after being deposited in the water, they have evolved knobby structures on the outside of the shell. These knobs become very sticky after contacting the water and end up attaching to the first thing they bump into. This reduces the chances of being transported downstream where they could become damaged, land in an area with low oxygen concentrations, or end up as fish food.

The next stage in the life cycle of a mayfly is the nymph, which hatches out of the egg and grows in the water. Being a typical insect, mayflies must continually molt or shed their external skeleton (exoskeleton) to grow. The nymphal life, then, consists primarily of eating, molting, and avoiding

MAYFLY NYMPH
ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT BOYD



predators. It will take anywhere from about one week for some desert species to over two years for some in the northern latitudes to develop into adults.

Abdominal gills are characteristic of mayfly nymphs and these occur in a variety of shapes - plate-like, feathery, forked, tufted, and filamentous. In some species the front gills are enlarged and form a protective cover for the more posterior gills. The shape of the gills (their morphology) is often used to identify nymphs.

Nymphs primarily feed on algae (herbivores) or other aquatic insects (carnivores), but most are detritivores, feeding on small pieces of decomposing organic material (the remains of former plants and animals). While this choice of freshwater cuisine sounds very unappetizing, it is extremely important in aquatic food webs because these animals convert dead organic material into live organic material (themselves!) which can then be eaten by other animals.

Nymphs continue to grow and mature in the water until they reach their final size, easily determined because their externally developing wing pads (which contain the developing adult wings) turn black.

Mature nymphs leave the water in one of two ways, either by crawling out of the water on a protruding stick or stone or by floating to the surface. Near or at the surface, the nymph molts to the next life cycle stage, the winged subimago, which flies away from the water, typically alights on some nearby vegetation, and remains secluded and quiescent for about the next twenty-four hours.

This emergence, or "hatch" in the fly fisherman's parlance, can be rather dramatic at times, especially near large lakes and rivers. Around dusk, literally millions of subimagos may be emerging at one time. This is typically when most people have a personal encounter with a mayfly– after a large emergence, when the subimagos with their smoky wings and dull colors can be found clinging to just about anything above ground level.

I remember waking up early one morning (no small task for me) to fish in a small lake in a state park. As I approached the dock, I noticed a nearby utility pole that appeared rather "fuzzy." Upon closer examination the pole was completely covered with recently emerged subimagos which provided the "fuzz." Another time, Southwestern's Natural History class had just pulled into Pine Creek State Park around dusk to set up camp. We were greeted by a blizzard of mayflies that had just emerged from nearby Pine Creek Lake. For me

this was wonderful. I ran around literally scooping up handfuls of specimens for my collection. However, the students, who had to remove mayflies from their sloppy joe sandwiches, were not as elated with this close encounter of the ephemeral kind.

The strategy behind these large scale emergences seems to be something called predator satiation, where there are so many individuals present at one time that predators literally become stuffed, and this allows some individuals to escape.

About twenty-four hours after emergence, the subimagos molt to the imago or adult stage, which now sports shiny, transparent wings and much brighter colors. With all other winged insects, once an individual develops functional wings, it no longer molts, and therefore can no longer grow. (So, little flies do not grow into big flies!) Mayflies are unique among insects in that the subimago, with its functional wings, molts to the winged imago stage.

Soon after molting, the males form mating swarms consisting of a few to hundreds of individuals. The males in these swarms constantly change their altitude as they fly and they do so in unison, which results in the entire swarm undulating up and down almost as if it was one individual. Swarms apparently provide a large target for the female, which typically has much smaller eyes than the male. A female flies into the swarm and is detected by a male, which then couples with her and the two copulate on the wing. (Please do not try this at home!)

After mating, the female separates from the male and proceeds to deposit her eggs in the water. Different species have different techniques for this. Some females fly over the surface of the water, occasionally dipping the tip of their abdomen in the water, which releases a few eggs at a time. Other mayflies have an extruded egg sac which falls into the water when the female performs a "dive bombing" maneuver. An effective, but tragic, method of laying eggs occurs when some females crash land on the water's surface– their abdomens literally explode, thus releasing the eggs.

Shortly after mating, males and females die. Because of this short adult life, mayfly adults don't need to feed– they rely instead on fat stored up during their nymphal life. In fact, the adult mouthparts and digestive system have atrophied to such an extent that they are physically incapable of feeding and digesting.

When mayflies are found and in which life cycle stage depends greatly on the species. Some mayflies can be collected as nymphs anytime and adults can be found whenever the air temperature is not too cold, even on a mild winter day. Other species tend to be more seasonal.

Mike Walters, a senior biology major, and I are examining the life cycle of a mayfly that inhabits the sandy bottom of a local stream. The nymphs are present from June through October and adults can be collected from August through October. From November through May, though, nymphs and adults cannot be found, implying these insects exist through the winter and much of the spring in the egg stage.

Interactions

Mayflies don't bite people, carry disease, or chew on crops, but they do cause a few problems. As a result of their mass emergences, small pieces

of the subimaginal "skin" (actually the shed exoskeleton) may float about in the air and cause allergic reactions in some people.

Also, mayfly adults are attracted to lights. During a large emergence, piles of writhing mayfly bodies may accumulate under street lamps and pump islands at convenience stores. This makes for an awfully slippery surface and has caused vehicular and other accidents. My father told me about the milk wagons during his childhood in Erie, Pennsylvania. In the early morning, he could tell when the horse drawn wagon passed under a lamp post because the horse's hooves made a squish sound instead of a "clop" whenever it stepped in a pile of mayflies recently emerged from Lake Erie. Turns out a few horses had to be shot because they broke their leg after slipping on a pile of mayflies. I wonder if students back then used that as an excuse for missing class: "I wasn't here yesterday because my horse broke its leg by slipping on a pile of mayflies."

By far the most important interaction of mayflies is with other organisms in the food web. Many birds, bats, dragonflies, spiders and fish depend a great deal on mayflies for food, especially during a large emergence. This is nicely illustrated by fly fishermen, who construct artificial lures that mimic the nymph and adult stages of mayflies and other aquatic insects.

Mayflies are even an important source of food for humans. Some Ugandans living on the shore of Lake Victoria harvest aquatic insects (including mayflies) during large emergences. They dry the insects and grind them into a flour. I don't expect to see the Frugal Gourmet baking up a batch of mayfly muffins in the near future, but food scientists have analyzed this flour and described it as being very nutritious.

Since mayflies spend their entire egg and nymphal stages in the water, they are an excellent means by which to measure water quality. In some cases, relative water quality may be determined, easily and quickly, by simply examining the diversity of aquatic insects inhabiting that water. This is known as bioassessment. A population that suddenly becomes reduced in size or even disappears could indicate an unfavorable change in water quality and a signal that intervention may be necessary.

This is one reason why Oklahoma has set up a number of stream monitoring sites around the state– to monitor what is happening to the aquatic flora and fauna over time.

Mayflies have been useful in laboratory studies, also. Eggs and nymphs are exposed to different concentrations of chemicals to determine lethal concentrations. This helps to establish acceptable and, one hopes, harmless levels of these chemicals for aquatic ecosystems.

Oklahoma Mayflies

Water management in Oklahoma has no doubt significantly affected the distribution and abundance of mayflies in the state. Some mayflies require clear water, running over a clean rocky bottom to survive. Once a stream is dammed, the water velocity slows considerably, the water becomes murky, and the rocky bottom becomes covered with silt. The original species become extinct in that stream. On the other hand, some

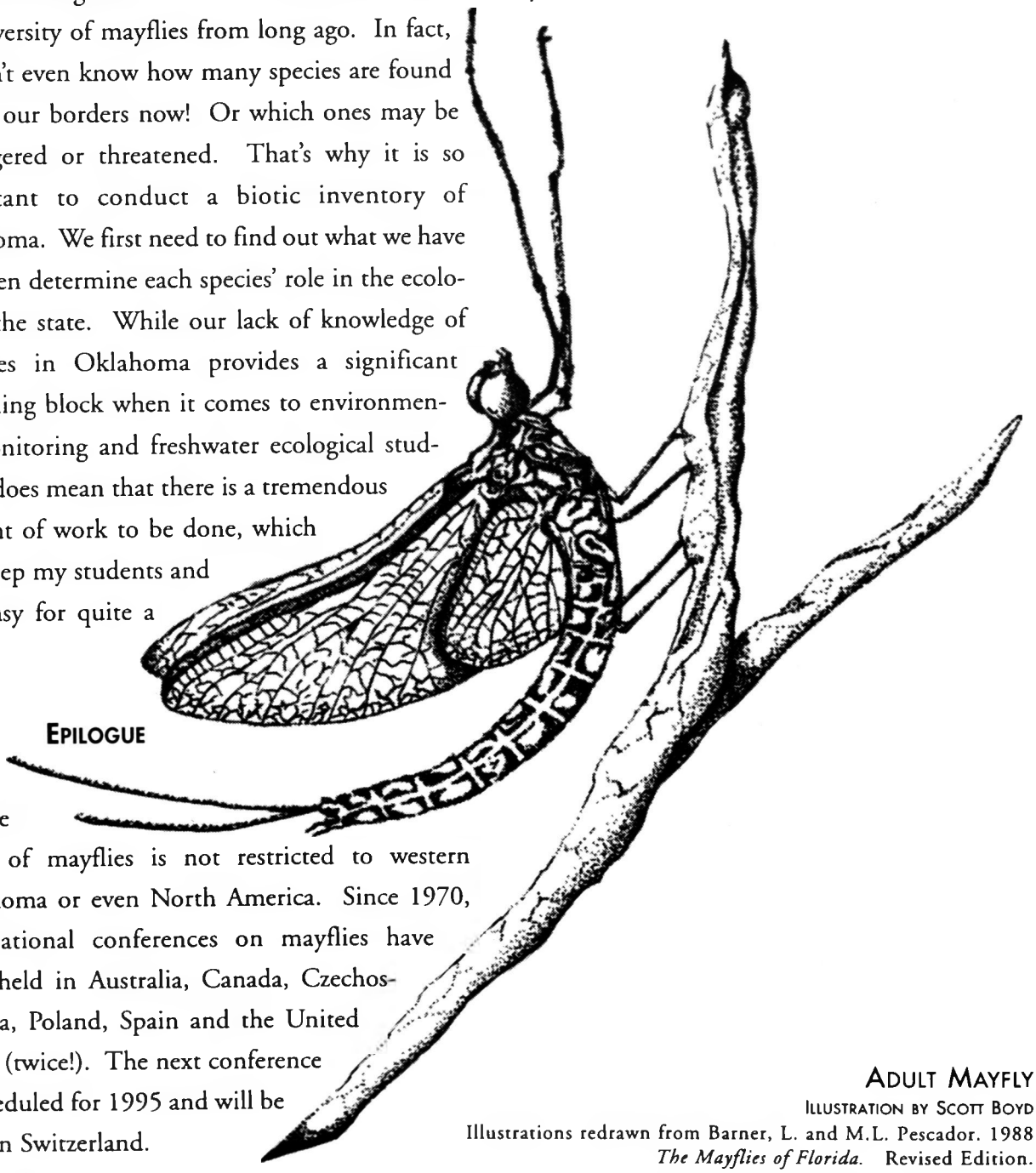
mayflies thrive in slow moving, murky water, and reservoir construction has probably positively affected those species - there may very well be more individuals now than before the land rush.

It is impossible to determine what effect we have had on Oklahoma mayflies because we know almost nothing about the distribution, abundance, and diversity of mayflies from long ago. In fact, we don't even know how many species are found within our borders now! Or which ones may be endangered or threatened. That's why it is so important to conduct a biotic inventory of Oklahoma. We first need to find out what we have and then determine each species' role in the ecology of the state. While our lack of knowledge of mayflies in Oklahoma provides a significant stumbling block when it comes to environmental monitoring and freshwater ecological studies, it does mean that there is a tremendous amount of work to be done, which will keep my students and me busy for quite a while.

EPILOGUE

The study of mayflies is not restricted to western Oklahoma or even North America. Since 1970, international conferences on mayflies have been held in Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Spain and the United States (twice!). The next conference is scheduled for 1995 and will be held in Switzerland.

There is even a newsletter devoted solely to mayflies, *The Mayfly Newsletter,* which is published at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. Over 260 people in 39 countries receive this newsletter, the purpose of which is to facilitate communication among ephemeropterists (those who study mayflies).



ADULT MAYFLY

ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT BOYD

Illustrations redrawn from Barner, L. and M.L. Pescador. 1988 *The Mayflies of Florida.* Revised Edition. University Presses of Florida , Gainsville, FL.

Russian Thistle

C. Michael McKinney

Tumbling weeds pop seeds that chute,
fall, roll like boulders
bouncing through badland canyons.
They wedge between rifts
of red clay wafers
cracked and curled
by prairie drought.
Only spring's wet hand
can cure the crust,
heal soil over seed
that will swell, divide,
and explode to emerge as a tentacled bush.
The thistle rounds in August
and brittles in December.
When the northwinds rock
the balls of thorn,
they snap at the base
to roll across pastures
of winter wheat
and reseed the barren prairie.

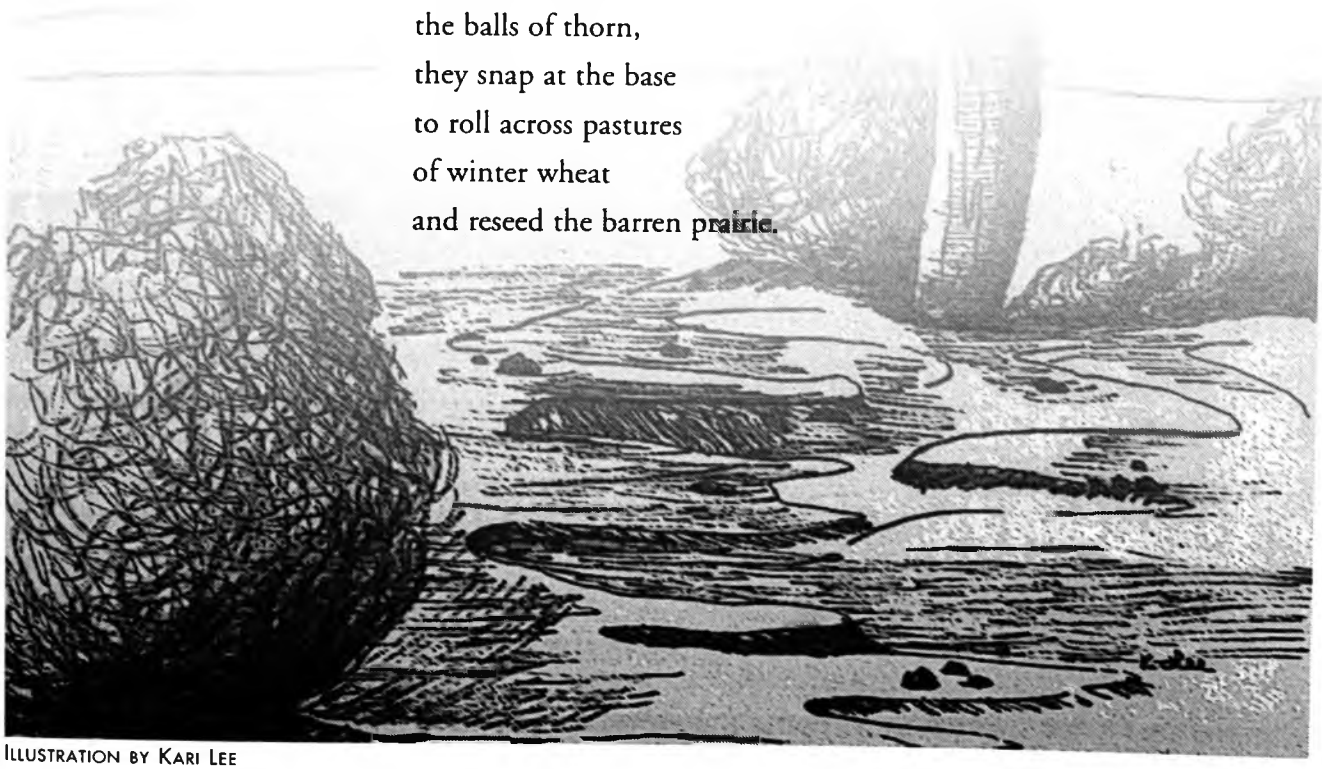


Illustration by Kari Lee

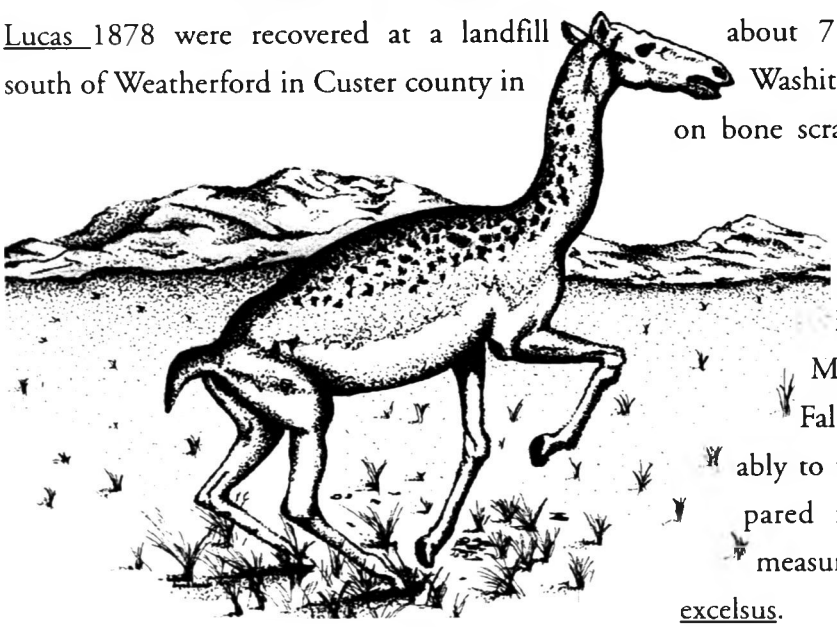
Fossil Collection at Southwestern

Henry Kirkland

Edited by Melissa Bruner

(Editor's note: The fossil collection at SWOSU is housed in lighted glass showcases on the third floor of the Science Building. Some of the fossils are of the kind that a casual explorer might find while poking through rocky areas in Oklahoma - ferns, insects, trilobites embedded in rocks. Others, however, bring Jurassic Park close to home. Fossilized remains of mammoth, bison, and camel range in age from eleven thousand to eleven million years before our time. Many of the items in the collection were found or excavated by Dr. Henry Kirkland, whose description of the collection follows.)

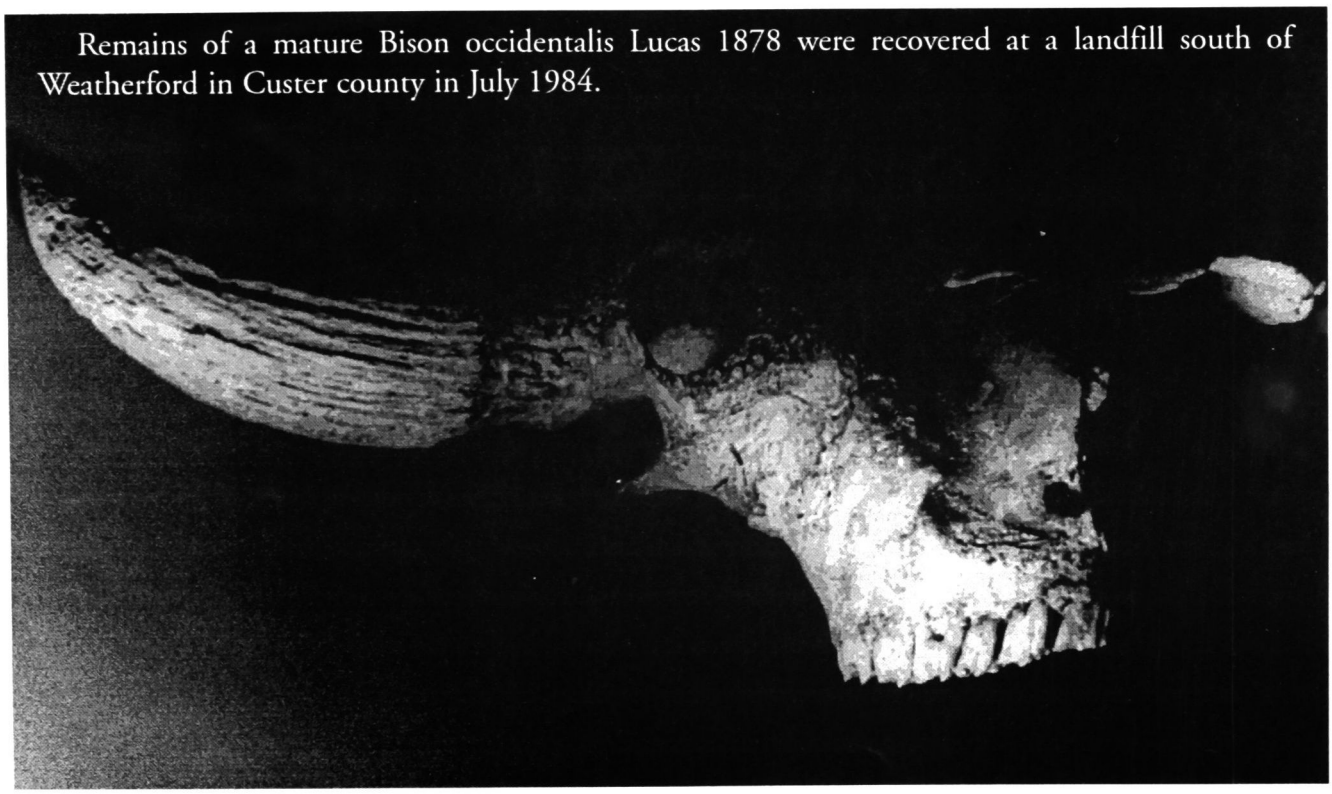
Remains of a mature Bison occidentalis Lucas 1878 were recovered at a landfill south of Weatherford in Custer county in July 1984. The skull and jaws were found eight meters beneath the surface of red-sandy, stream-terrace deposit. The skull, which was missing the left horn core and upper left side, has been restored. The right and left molars and premolar series are present, and tooth wear is moderate. Radiocarbon dating of 11,130 plus or minus 350 years before the present places the animal in the late Pleistocene age. (The Pleistocene age began 1.8 million years ago and ended 10,000 years ago.) Oklahoma is well within the geographic range of the B. occidentalis. Documented finds are common in Kansas and Texas, but the collection at Southwestern Oklahoma State University contains the first documented find in Oklahoma.



Prehistoric Camel
Illustration by Scott Boyd

Other finds from western Oklahoma in SWOSU's collection include two species of mammals collected in Washita county in the fall of 1991. These specimens, an astralagus (ankle bone) of a bison and a broken metatarsal of an extinct horse, were found in a bed of light gray silty clay about 7.5 miles south of Weatherford in Washita county. A radiocarbon date, based on bone scraps, is 18,295 RCYBP (radiocarbon years before present.) The astralagus belongs to a prehistoric bison. It was compared to a giant bison, Bison latifron, B. priscus and B. antiquus, at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas. The fossil compared favorably to the Bison CF occidentalis (CF=compared favorable). The horse metatarsal measurement was identified as Equus CF excelsus.

At least three fossils from extinct camels have been excavated from Roger Mills county. A



Remains of a mature Bison occidentalis Lucas 1878 were recovered at a landfill south of Weatherford in Custer county in July 1984.

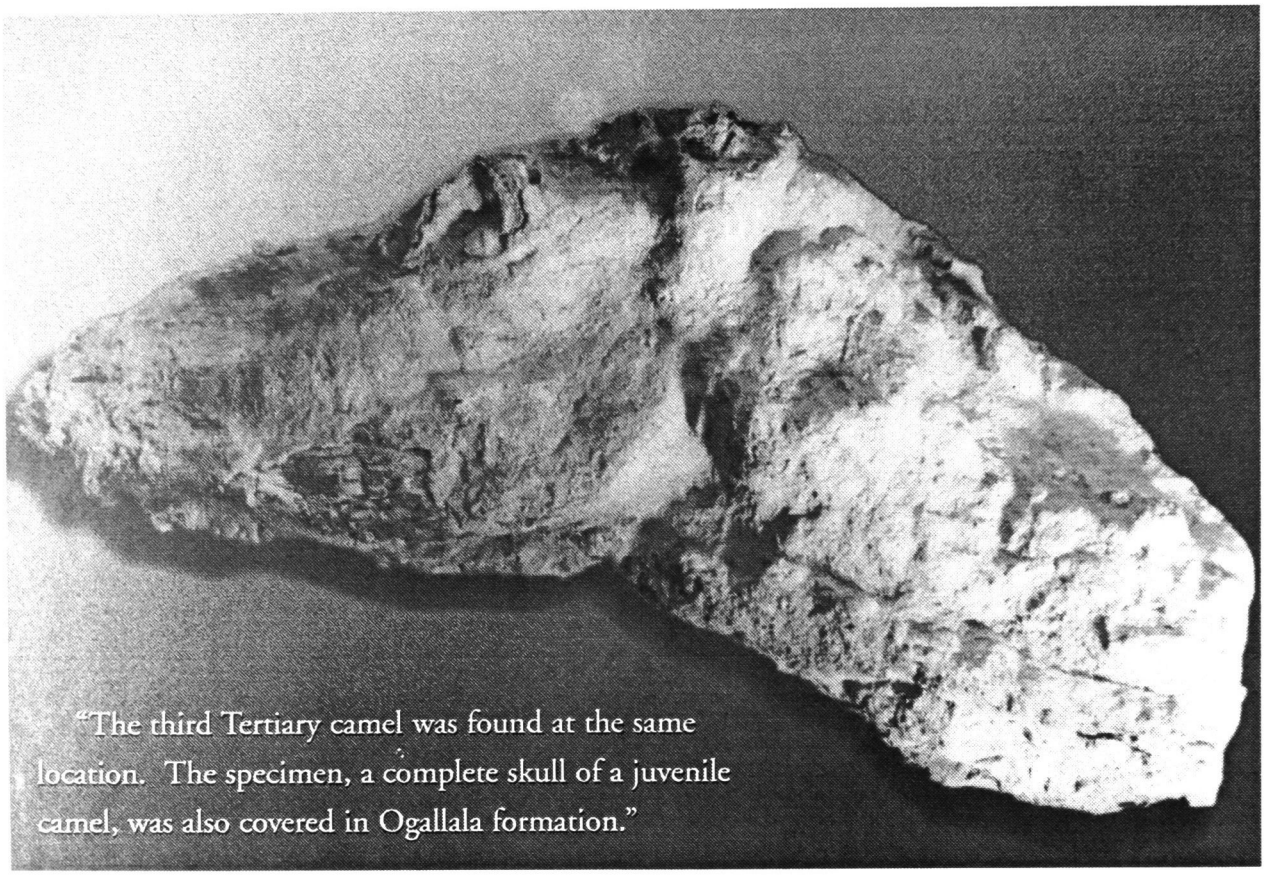
fragmented skull with upper and lower molars, several cervical vertebrates, and metapodials were collected. The camels were identified by comparison with the camel fossil collection at the Natural History Museum at the University of Kansas as Procamelus CF grandis. SWOSU's first camel fossil was collected in 1989 and dated in the Tertiary age of the Miocene period at eleven million years ago.

The second Procamelus CF grandis was collected in 1990 from Roger Mills county. Specimens found in this collection include a skull, a mandible with lower molars, metapodial bones, cervical vertebrates, and toes. Most of the bones were covered with Ogallala formation, which is a rock formation found in western Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. Ogallala rock formation has been applied to the tertiary formation in the late Miocene (22.5 to 10 million years) and early Pliocene (10 to 2.3 million years) epochs.

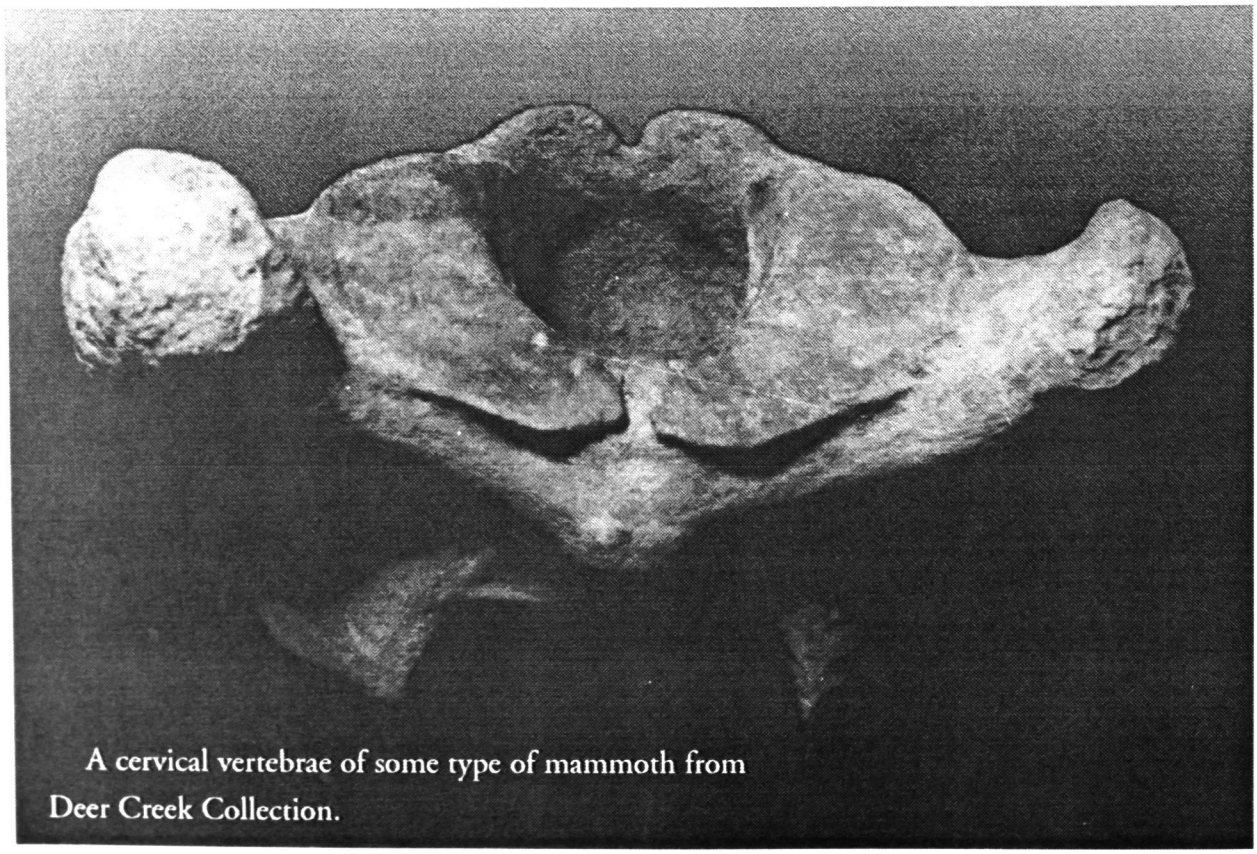
The third Tertiary camel was found at the same location. The specimen, a complete skull of a juvenile camel, was also covered in Ogallala formation. The skull was identified by the visible eye sockets and ear cartilage. The complete skulls have at least four articulated cervical vertebrates, a complete esophagus, and mummfied tissue along the neck region. After an extensive study of the external anatomy of the skull, the internal anatomies were examined through two Computerized Tomography scans.

During the fall of 1992, the Paleontology group from Southwestern excavated a fossil from Harmon county near Vincent. The fossil was identified as a Bos. The specimens in the find were vertebrae, tibia, femur, and humerus. The fossil is of recent age, 300 to 500 years.

The most recent excavation in the collection is



"The third Tertiary camel was found at the same location. The specimen, a complete skull of a juvenile camel, was also covered in Ogallala formation."

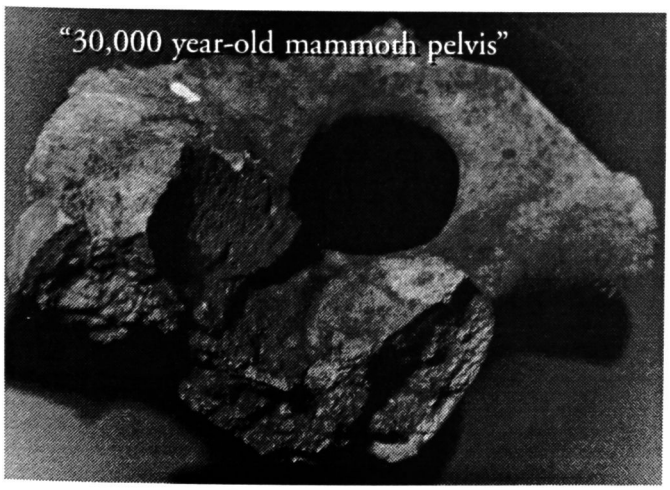


A cervical vertebrae of some type of mammoth from Deer Creek Collection.

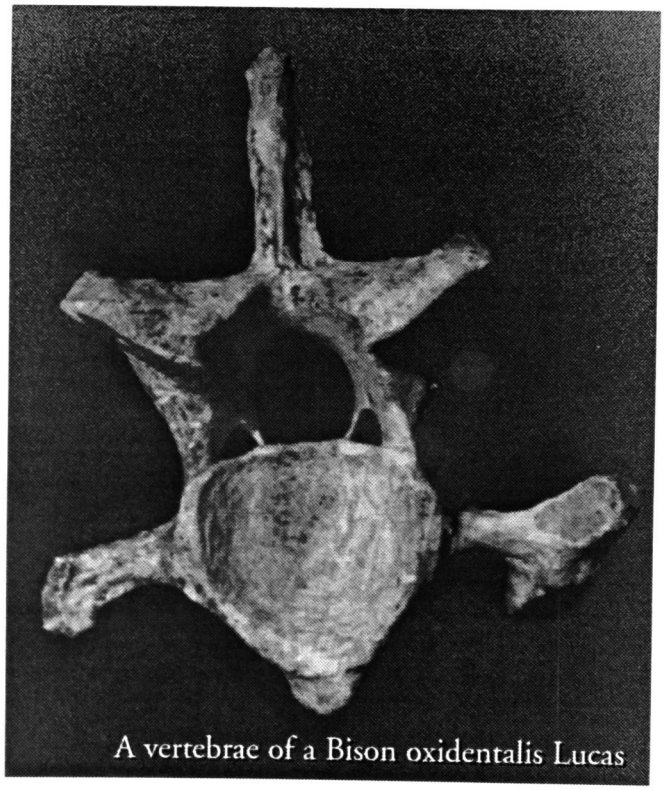
a fossil of a musk ox, known as Bootherium bombifrons, from Washita county. The fossil was dated as late Pleistocene age, carbon date 16,300. Specimens include a fragmented metacarpel, ungulate (hoof) phalanx, two horn cores, four molars, and a broken cervical vertebrate.

The fossil collection at Southwestern also includes a 30,000 year-old mammoth pelvis and torso from Ellis county. In addition, several specimens collected and identified from Deer Creek in Custer county are a part of the collection. Teeth from different organisms, including mammoth, Equus, Bison, and many other genus excavated from western Oklahoma counties are also on display.

Not all fossils in the collection were found by Southwestern faculty or students. Some are donated or loaned to SWOSU by individuals. All fossils in the collection are cleaned, identified, and catalogued. The dating of the fossils is performed by radiocarbon dating through the Geochron Laboratories, a division of Krueger Enterprise Inc. Thanks are due to Southwestern Oklahoma State University for the faculty research grants which made the collection possible.



"30,000 year-old mammoth pelvis"



A vertebrae of a Bison oxidentalis Lucas

(Editor's note: The camel fossils in Southwestern's collection are the subject of two different studies by scientists at other universities. The first is a study of the camel's fossilized skin, and is being conducted by scientists at the University of Kansas. The second, conducted by Dr. Michael Engel at the University of Oklahoma, is proving true the adage that "you are what you eat." By extracting material from the camel's fossilized throat and esophagus, Dr. Engel will determine what the camel ate when it roamed this region eleven million years ago.)

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAN BRADFIELD, BRANDON RAPER, AND SHANE SMITH

The Man He Didn't Kill

Stephen G. Eoannou

January is the slow month in the liquor business. People receive bottles of scotch and liqueurs as Christmas presents, or they have champagne and mixers left over from New Year's. Some people have resolved to go on the wagon, starting January second. Others went overboard with their holiday shopping and now have too many bills piled up to spend money on booze. And, of course, there's the weather, subject to change at any minute without notice. Freezing rain, blizzards, lake effect squalls, temperatures in the single digits are all possibilities and all keep people indoors instead of driving to the liquor stores.

Panepinto's location on the west side didn't help business either. If he was to have any sales, besides the occasional half pint, it would have to come before dark. People didn't like being on the streets after nightfall. Everything they saw on the six o'clock news could be waiting for them in that shadow or that doorway or in that car. Their fear, or caution, was more real than the actual danger in his neighborhood. The west side was an old section of town and many of the people who could afford to move out did so or were planning to in the near future. But during the thirty years behind the counter of his store, Panepinto had never been robbed. People shoplifted, but they did that in the wealthy wine shops in the suburbs, he'd tell people. And before he installed the grating that covers the front window and the door after he closes for the night, kids would sometimes break the glass and grab whatever bottles they could as the alarm screamed in the night. But he'd never been held up at gunpoint.

Panepinto would concede that these younger kids scared him, especially the ones who were so quick to hurl insults and fists and sometimes objects much more deadly at each other. The newspapers were filled with stories of stabbings over a pair of sneakers or a jacket with a team logo embossed on the back. His heart would start beating faster if he saw them near the store or he'd hurry to his car after closing if he heard voices or laughter in the darkness. They all seemed so strong and wild. Or maybe he was just feeling old. He'd turn seventy this fourth of July.

On nights like tonight, with winter storm warnings announced on the radio every ten minutes and strange clouds rolling in from Canada and customers few and far between, Panepinto would think of selling the place and retiring. He'd stand in front of the display window, peering out into the night with his hands clasped behind his back, and watch the cars drive past. He knew the time was getting close. Monday morning deliveries were taking all day to put away now. His left shoulder drooped lower than his right from thirty years of carrying liquor cases high on his shoulder and it throbbed with every temperature change. And on nights like tonight when he was alone in the store, he was, quite frankly, afraid. He had dreamed the scenario many times: the ski mask, the leather jacket, the blue steel of the handgun. And other scenarios: slipping on the ice in the deserted parking lot after closing, or drinking too

much coffee laced with mini bottles and then driving home on glazed roads.

He liked it better when the stockboy, Billy, a freshman at the community college, worked nights. His laugh would fill the store and bounce off the bottles as he stocked the shelves and told Panepinto of what happened in his classes or on his dates. But he only worked the latter half of the week. Panepinto's daughter, Gina, worked Monday through Wednesday but had called in sick, so tonight he was alone and wondered how much he could get for the place as he watched the snow begin to fall.

He had remodeled almost three years ago. The top shelves with the expensive items were right at eye level. He replaced the linoleum with light green indoor/outdoor carpet and had the walls painted a pearl white so the store was brighter and cleaner looking. High on the walls, above the top shelves, he had hung plastic green signs patterned after the signs on the thruway: Exit 5 Cordials, Exit 10 Imports. And by the cash register: Last Exit Pay Toll. It would be a good business for a young man to get into, he decided.

The electric bell rang as the door opened, and he was relieved to see a man about his age, perhaps a little younger, enter the store. He was taller than Panepinto, over six feet, and still had a full head of white hair. He smiled at Panepinto as he brushed the snowflakes from the sleeves of his blue overcoat.

"It's getting nasty out there," he said. His voice held just the slightest accent.

"No January thaw tonight," Panepinto said, walking behind the counter. "Can I help you find something?"

"Just browsing, thanks."

The man removed his gloves and put them in his coat pocket, and then blew on his cupped hands. He walked past the New York state wines, stopped briefly in front of the California wine section and then drifted over to the imported wine selection in the middle of the store. He reached into his inside coat pocket and brought out a pair of glasses and began to read the labels.

"If you need any help, just yell."

The man looked up and smiled. He skipped past the cheap imports, the lambruscos, the sangrias, all the fruity sweet wines that make up the majority of Panepinto's import sales, and studied the labels of the premium wines kept in the racks on their sides to keep their corks moist. Panepinto kept an eye on the man. Too many bottles had been disappearing lately and a coat like his could have deep pockets sewn on the inside.

"You have a fine selection," the man said without looking up. "Some very good years here."

"We try to keep a little of everything."

"Yes, I can see that." He pulled a bottle from the rack, held it to the light, and then put it back. "And business, has it been good?"

Panepinto shrugged and told him what he always told people, regardless of the truth. "Slow. It's been very slow lately."

No use in making anyone think there's money in the register, Panepinto always told Bill or Gina. He doubted this man was a threat. Still, that coat could conceal many things. Panepinto took a step to his left so the panic button under the counter was fingertips away.

"And this weather probably doesn't help."

The man moved in front of the French wines,

smiled, and then nodded when he saw the vintage.

"Only the skiers are happy tonight," Panepinto replied.

The man didn't respond. He kept pulling bottles from the rack and then replacing them, occasionally whispering something to himself, smiling or frowning, depending on the wine he held.

Panepinto cleared his throat. "I've never seen you in here before. Did you just move into the neighborhood?"

The man looked up, startled, as if he had forgotten there was anyone else in the store. He blinked a few times before answering. "I'm just visiting," he said. "My sister lives in Kaisertown, and I wanted to pick up a few bottles of wine or perhaps a nice brandy before going to her house." He paused. "You're not closing now, are you?"

"No, take your time. We don't close for another hour."

Always say 'we', he had told Billy. Make them think there's someone else in the stockroom or next door in the deli getting coffee and they will be back any minute. Never let them think you're alone, vulnerable, an easy target for a robbery.

The man wandered the aisles before deciding on a domestic champagne, a bottle of dry French wine, and a medium priced cognac. He held the wines in each hand by their necks and cradled the cognac in the crook of his arm. He placed all three on the counter in front of Panepinto and reexamined each label before nodding. "I think these will do."

"You've picked some good ones," Panepinto said, and the man looked pleased. Panepinto pulled a cloth from under the counter and wiped the dusty bottles. He reached in his pocket and brought out a box cutter and scraped the price tag off the champagne before ringing up the sale.

"I wish I had more time to browse, but I don't trust this weather," the man said, gazing out the window to the deserted street.

"I know what you mean," Panepinto said, and finished wiping the bottle of French wine. His finger hovered above the cash register's keys. "I'd forgotten I had this one in stock."

"It was the last one in the rack. It's a good little wine, yes?"

"Very good." He punched the numbers into the register. "It comes from a small winery outside a beautiful village." He scraped the price tag with the blade.

"You've been there?" the man asked, taking a step closer to the counter.

Panepinto nodded. "During the war. Of course Patton was moving too damn fast most of the time for us to do much sightseeing."

The man smiled and in a soft voice repeated Patton's name.

"Yup." Panepinto began wiping down the cognac. "I was in Patton's Third Army. Dashed from one end of France to the other and then through Germany. Shouldn't of stopped, either."

"We were young then, weren't we?" the man said, looking past Panepinto to the pints and half pints kept behind the counter, but he hardly noticed them.

Panepinto laughed. "That was a lifetime ago all right."

"And were you at the Bulge?"

Panepinto nodded. "Shrapnel in the leg to prove it."

"I was there, too," the man said.

ILLUSTRATION BY TRACY KENT

Panepinto looked at him after ringing up the cognac and totaling the purchases. "Oh? Who were you with? First Army? Airborne? Don't tell me you were in Third too."

The man shook his head. "No, my friend. I was on the other side. The one looking back at you."

They stared into each other's eyes from across the counter; both wore queer smiles, and Panepinto remembered advances and retreats, noise, prayers, blood in the snow. He remembered how fast time went during combat, and how slow it seemed to drag during peace. He wondered what the odds were of this meeting, at this time, in this place. The same, probably, as that other meeting they may have had in that other place a lifetime ago when they were both young.

"Is that right?" Panepinto finally said. "Well I'll be damned."

"And here we are almost fifty years later. Perhaps we've met before and never knew it?" The man laughed and shook his head. "Curious, isn't it?"

"It sure is." Panepinto reached under the counter and brought out a brown paper bag. "It sure as hell is."

He placed the bottles in the bag and reached back under the counter for pieces of cardboard. He placed the cardboard between the bottles to keep them from clinking together. The only sound came as the blower kicked on and blew heat into the store.

"That'll be forty-two seventy with your sales tax."

The man reached into his coat pocket and smiled at Panepinto. His hand froze inside his coat as if he was deciding something, and Panepinto felt his stomach tighten and all the old fears racing through his body. He envisioned the dull blue steel of a luger emerging from the coat. He could see it being leveled at him as clearly as he could see his smiling old enemy before him. He could see the flash of light, hear the explosion of the bullet leaving the gun, feel it tear into his chest as he was thrown back into the pints and half pints, scattering bottles from the shelves and then falling to the ground in a shower of broken glass and blood.

He always knew his death would come in a senseless way, empty of meaning and caused by chance: A step to the left onto a land mine when he easily could have stepped to the right, or by a mortar round fired by an enemy, a stranger, who was probably more like him than either side would admit. And now, finally, he knew his end would come by a drifter who found him alone in the store on a deserted night.

But the man only shook his head and pulled his arm out, empty handed.

"Back pocket," he said, and reached around for his wallet. He placed two crisp twenties and a five on the counter.

Panepinto, feeling the fear escape him like the exhale of poisoned air, felt ashamed and made change without looking up.

"There you go, sir. Thanks for stopping in," he said trying to make his voice sound normal.

"Thank you," the man said.

He slipped his gloves on and then scooped up his bag and headed for the door. The man hesitated, and Panepinto thought he was going to say something else. And it seemed that the man wanted to say something more, that something definite and telling should be said by one of them. Panepinto wanted to put it all in words, and somehow make sense of how decades earlier he could have had this man in his gun sights or been at his throat, but now they could talk about the weather on a snowy evening like old neighbors. He thought of the kids outside, the ones laughing in the shadows, the ones in his darkest fantasies, and wondered if they were his enemies at all. If this was a different neighborhood in a different place or different time, would he hurry to his car as quickly, waiting for the shots to ring out, the blows to fall? Or would he stop and talk with them, joke with them the way he does with his stockboy? Panepinto wanted to say something profound about fate and enemies and how circumstance, not passion, sometimes chooses them. But the two men just stared at each other, both uncertain and inarticulate, until the man said good night.

Panepinto raised his hand in a feeble gesture, and felt that something precious and rare was slipping away, that he was losing something he wanted to hang on to. But the man was already at the door. He pushed it open with his free arm and held it for a young man wearing a black leather jacket, his hands buried deep in his pockets, who entered the store with a chilling rush of wind that made Panepinto shudder.

In the Bathroom Mirror

Lyn Lifshin

the medicine chest
reflects the long
mirror. Here I can
be myself. Let the
bones of my chest jut
out or muscles go.
My body flows like
oil into a shape
I've never chosen.
I see my fake rose
tattoo reflected in
a reflection of
a reflection of
a reflection, each
clear as loss coming
back in dreams
as the mirror
speaks to itself,
talks to me,
talks about me

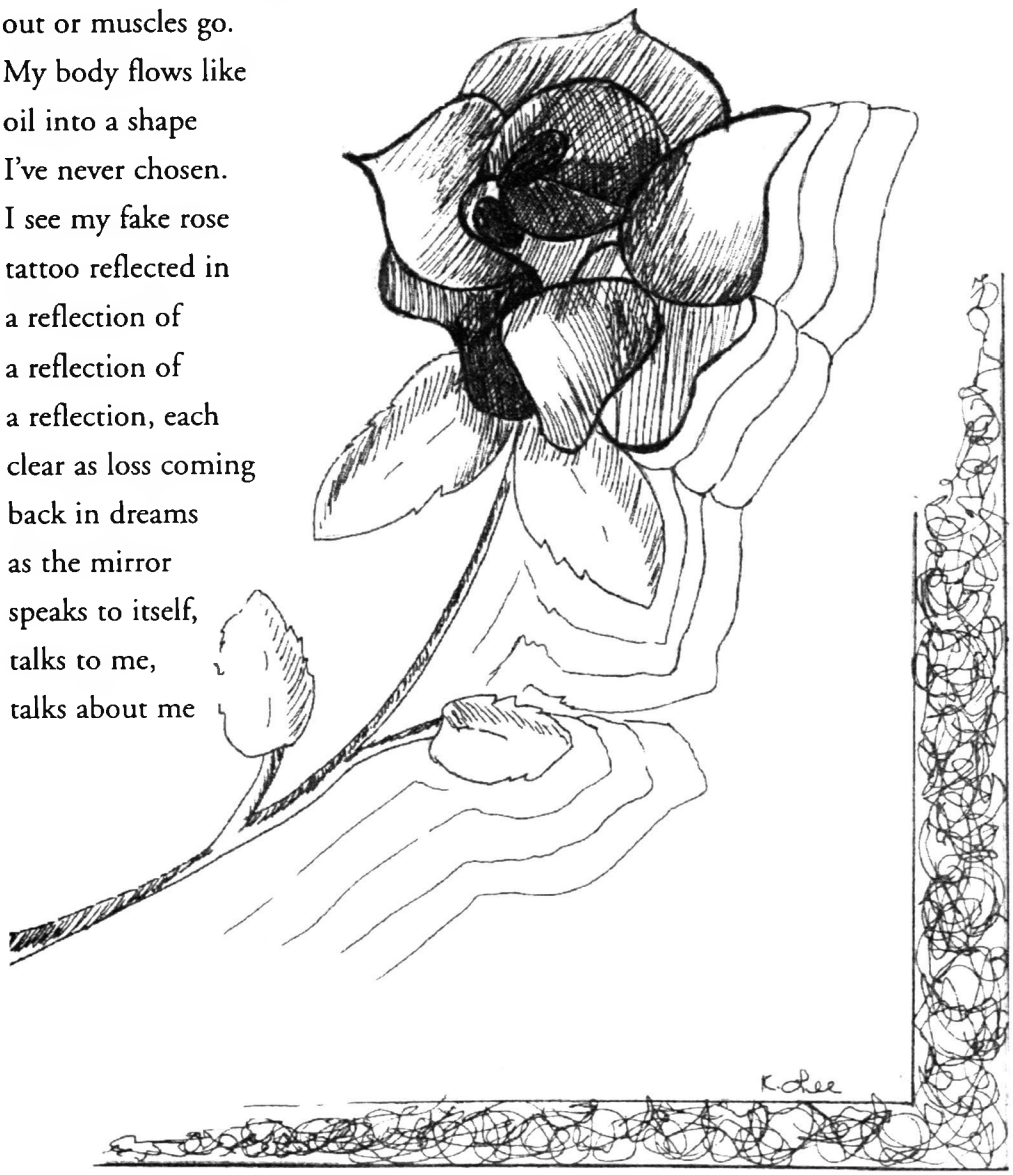
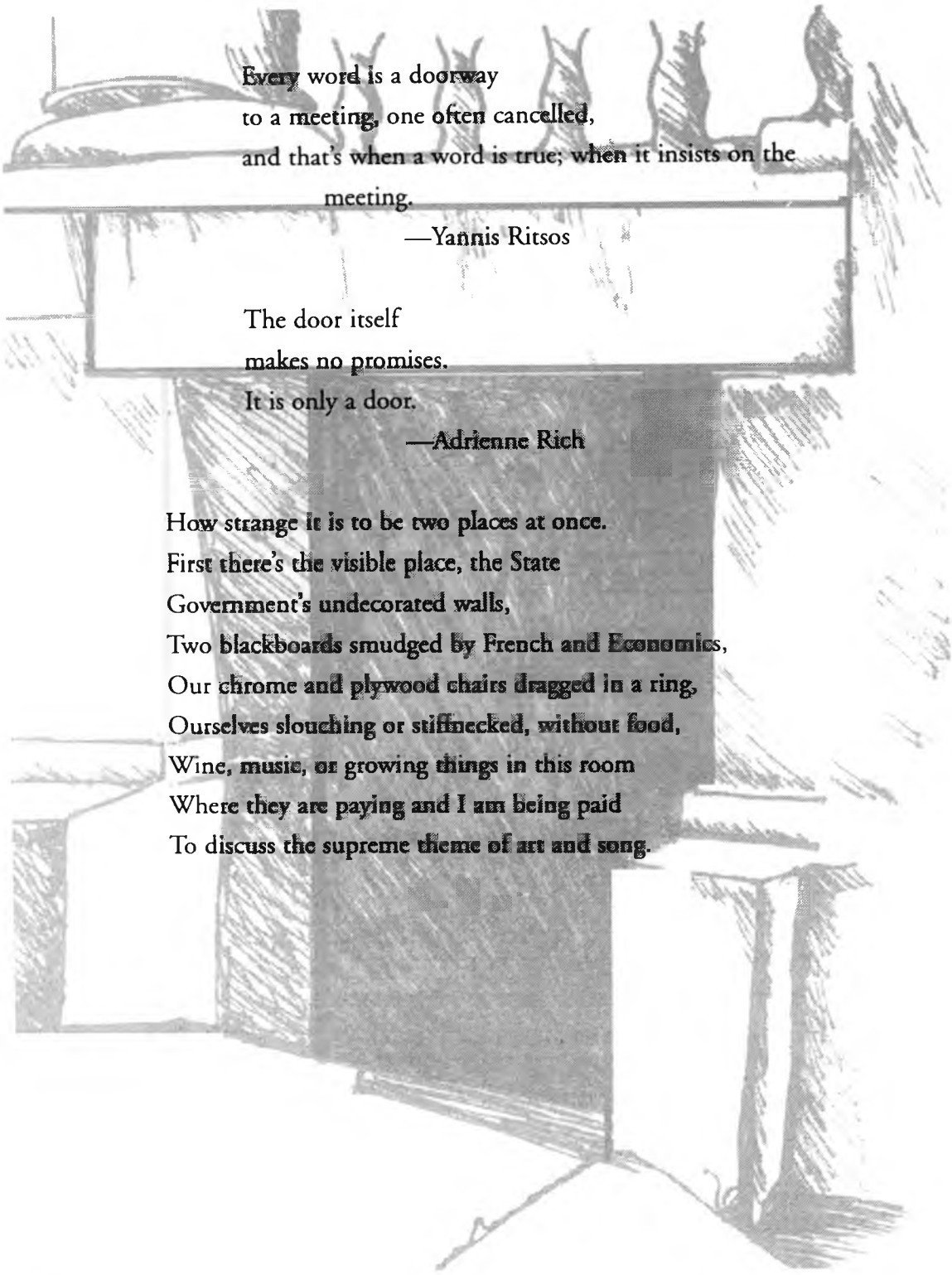


Illustration by Kari Lee

The Supreme Theme

Alicia Ostriker



Every word is a doorway
to a meeting, one often cancelled,
and that's when a word is true; when it insists on the
meeting.

—Yannis Ritsos

The door itself
makes no promises.
It is only a door.

—Adrienne Rich

How strange it is to be two places at once.
First there's the visible place, the State
Government's undecorated walls,
Two blackboards smudged by French and Economics,
Our chrome and plywood chairs dragged in a ring,
Ourselves slouching or stiffnecked, without food,
Wine, music, or growing things in this room
Where they are paying and I am being paid
To discuss the supreme theme of art and song.

Simultaneously, a corridor
Which for each of us arrives
At an unlocked back door,
Odd noises, sunbeams, and a floral smell.
Once past its peeling step we are
Again collected, but invisible.

How strange a classroom, both on College Ave.,
Where we wear the uniforms of the University,
Jeans for them, pantihose and a skirt for me,
And also on Eternity
Way, where the unintimidating climate
Puffs at our things, so we can all go naked–
And do, a good five minutes each semester–
How strange for the busy teacher who distributes
The xeroxes and keeps discussions running,
Scanning the circle, to see inside each student
What seems to be a sort of weeping flame
Mourn our unconscious lies, most of the time.

(Previously printed in *Prairie Schooner.*)

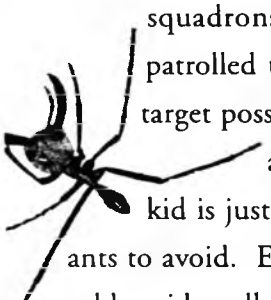
ILLUSTRATIONS BY LAURA BROMLEY

Bugs, Beetles, Grasshoppers, and Kids

Patrick L. Odell

A major portion of any farm kid's recreational and work life is centered around a continuous and grand battle with bugs. The simple act of walking through a patch of grass can result unintentionally in becoming attached to some ten to twenty or so chiggers. I don't recall ever actually seeing a single chigger. I have felt their stings and seen their welts. Their behavior is intolerable. They not only choose to bury themselves in the back of one's legs, behind the knees, but insist that at least one of them climb up and chew their way inelegantly into one's groin. Mothers have been socially blighted by being accompanied in public by a child scratching vigorously away at his or her crotch, yearning for relief from a chigger bite. I visualize chiggers as being all mouth with enormous teeth. However, I have read that they look like little red spiders.

Summer evenings were noisy with crickets and locusts vibrating and clicking away in harmonies and rhythms. The evenings were times when squadrons of buzzing mosquitoes patrolled the area, searching for a living target possessing enough blood to supply a banquet for every member. A kid is just such a target. There were red ants to avoid. Every summer at least one of us would accidentally sit or stand in a den or on an ant hill. The fiery red soldiers countered these unintentional intrusions with stinging retaliation. There also exists the smaller black variety. With great disrespect and naughtiness, we called them "piss" ants. Their stings were less painful, but unfortunately, there were more of the little critters available to chew on you. They scurried along the branches of the trees, tumbled off, and fell down the necks of loose shirts of those walking under the trees. There must be some profound law of nature that states that if each sting is less painful, then there will be more bugs available to sting. The total sting power of each species is invariant with respect to the total number in the species.



There were blow flies that generated white nasty wiggling swarms of little repulsive worms called maggots that devoured a carcass, either alive or dead. They were especially disliked by stockmen who, motivated by their threat, treated every cut, wound, and open sore on sheep, dogs, cattle, and pigs with a dosage of creosote dabbed on each abrasion to discourage the fly from depositing its eggs. There were horse flies whose sting was equally as painful as that of a red ant. Horse flies are giants of the fly family, approximately four times the size of a house fly, that hung around our barnyard. Then, of course, there were hordes of the common house fly.

During the 1930's, my aunts actually herded house flies out the door of the farmhouse using tea towels. Each aunt held her towel by its narrow edge and waved the lengthy loose portion above her head. Together they drove the flies toward the door in groups. One of the kid cousins would on cue quickly open the door, and the herders would drive

the flies through the opened door into the outside air. If told to use a fly swatter to assassinate one, you were required to be very careful and not squash the fly. A squashed fly would leave a slight but permanent blood stain on the wallpaper or curtain, depending on which surface the fly was sitting when the unsophisticated blow was delivered. To squash one against the surface of a clean plate or dish was an almost unforgivable sin. It was best, with respect to minimizing the amount of chastisement one received, to develop a glancing blow that stunned the critter so it fell first to the floor. There you could squash him good and proper with a bare or shodded foot, and then no one would complain.

I really can't believe that there is much use for any of these creatures even though some modern ecologist might vigorously defend them. In fact, if there were much use for any one of them, I am sure that at least one would have found some minor place in our literature. I recall that a scorpion (called a vinergeroon) was mentioned briefly somewhere in the literature of the Southwest. The movies have done more by developing a few stories with giant locusts or bees or hordes of marching ants attacking an affluent suburb or a frontier settlement, thereby properly and profitably frightening our own children in an air conditioned, well sprayed, bugless theater or TV room.

To be perfectly fair, I must admit the poet Robert Burns did write a poem entitled "To a Louse" in which he recorded his thoughts and philosophical speculations while observing a louse crawling about on a lady's bonnet during a church service. I suppose a louse's behavior is more entertaining and intellectually stimulating to a serious poet and perhaps even to some of us than a church service. At any rate, this poem includes the famous words:

"Oh wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as other see us!"

It is true however that we kids would recite a few choice verses also! We thought them especially appropriately defiant. We also thought them to be funny.

"Some skeeters fly high,
Other skeeters fly low,
Any skeeter fly on me
Ain't going to fly no mow!"

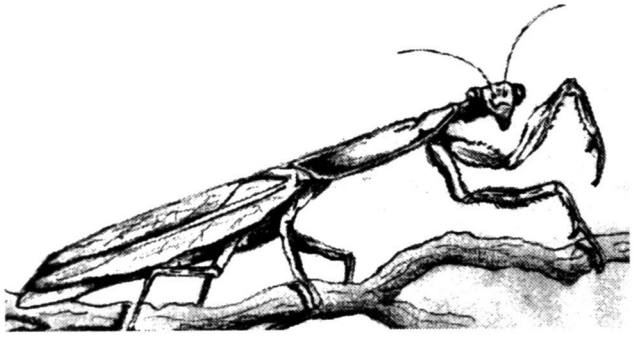
Another ditty that was popular and useful to gleefully taunt a sulking female cousin, a sister or an unhappy little brother was the following:

"Nobody loves me!
Everybody hates me!
Going out to the garden to eat worms.
Big fat woolly ones,
Slimy long skinny ones,
Oh how they tickle when they squirm!"

Some bugs were tolerable. Butterflies were nice and at times interesting. The story that the monarch butterfly would fly off somewhere to Mexico was perhaps true but not particularly believable at that time. The docile lady bug was fun to catch and amused us for hours when we let it walk on our clothes, our hands and arms. Fireflies were fun to watch, hard to catch, and impossible to figure out.

The stick-like praying mantises were funny creatures that almost never moved

when watched, unlike the dragon flies who moved almost continuously. The harmless, ill-proportioned, long-legged spider with a tiny body that we called granddaddy-longlegs was fun to collect and could be used to annoy the younger kids. This was done by placing several on their person, preferably



in their hair or down their shirts or blouses.

My sister Martha actually enjoyed crickets! The crickets, I suspect, did not enjoy Martha. She kept pouring water down a cricket hole until one, two, or three would come struggling out gasping (if crickets gasp) for air. A sister who enjoys drowning crickets had to be watched since the next step may be drowning chickens, and from there who knows what larger critters would be next. Wet or dry, there is not much of a market for crickets. And Martha, now a teacher in a small town public school, probably wishes, at times, to drown some other critters!

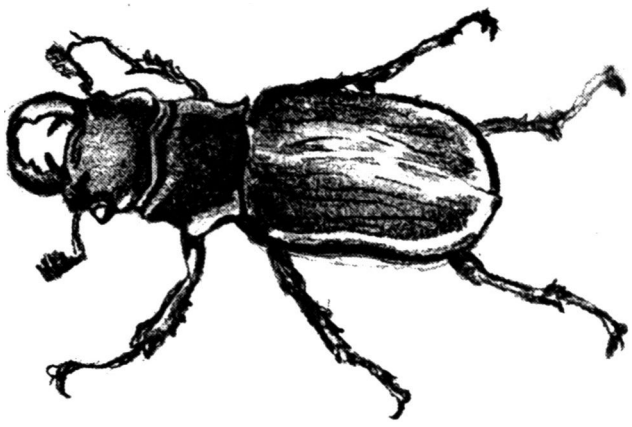
A few insects were even useful and lent fundamental aid to important projects. Clearly, grasshoppers were by far the most useful bugs since these creatures, along with angle worms, were our major source for fishing bait. Worms were better bait, but grasshoppers were easier to find. Grasshoppers were plentiful and readily available throughout the summer for catfish bait. All you had to do was catch one of the right size. If they were too small, they wouldn't thread properly on a hook; if you chose to hunt one that was too big, you spent all your fishing time trying to catch the elusive critter. One just the right size was one whose shell was tough enough to hold securely to the hook and small enough to be caught.

Your cupped hand was your net. The object was to pin the hopper down on a bed of grass. If on your first try you missed, the grasshopper would leap, fly, or leap and fly some five to twenty or even thirty feet. Then the process had to be repeated. The task was to creep again slowly and stealthily close enough to be able to make a second attempt. A sequence of these maneuvers usually resulted in a captured hopper for bait. If your prey was one of the larger ones, it could leap out of danger again and again, and the efforts of the hunter were wasted. Another disadvantage to a large hopper was that the sinker (usually a ten penny nail) was not heavy enough to pull the struggling rascal beneath the water. An unsuccessful yet stubborn and tenacious hopper hunter was never a successful fisherman. He never had the time left over to fish much.

One useless but interesting characteristic of most grasshoppers is the very nature and appearance of their saliva. It looks just like tobacco juice. It has the dark brown appearance of the spit of a person (male or female) who chews tobacco or dips snuff. After each fishing trip, our hands were discolored with a brown stain and looked as if we had been cleaning spittoons at some local pool hall or domino parlor. Nasty looking hands and a fishy smell were natural disorderly signs of a successful fisherman.

Potato bugs were serious criminals. They had

to be plucked from the leaves of the potato plants and executed. Insecticides were not used since they were expensive and dangerous. One summer during wheat harvest, a neighbor kid had tragically



swallowed some poisonous liquid by accidentally drinking what he thought to be water from the wrong jug and died. Some of our mothers feared the poisons and argued against having the stuff around the farms. Kids and dogs couldn't be trusted. But mainly it was cheaper with kid labor to purge by hand the ten acres of bug infested field of "new" potato plants. Each bug found on a leaf was picked off by hand and then crushed by squashing the guilty varmint between one's pointing finger and thumb.

Tomato worms also had to be eliminated. There were woolly ones, and slick green ones, and one with a single horn like a rhinoceros. The worm had more legs than a rhino. Each worm could devour a leaf right in front of your very eyes. Their eating manners were horrible. If you listened closely, you could actually hear them as they crunched and gobbled away. They were eating machines. It seemed as if everything went in but nothing ever came out. All of which still remains a mystery to me. Reason says that they ought to have exploded or grown to a monstrous size. Neither ever happened. I guess they must have eaten continuously until they just up and died. This brings me to an interesting question; do bugs sleep? A professor friend of mine said they rest but was not real sure that they actually slept. His answer made my next question moot. It was, do bugs snore when they sleep?

There were stink bugs who were offensively odiferous when squashed. These creatures could be found between the dry loosened bark and the inner trunk of a rotting tree. There were blister beetles whose touch would cause a rash of blisters on one's skin. Blister beetles seem to prefer one species of tree over other species. I recall that species to be the chinaberry tree. When one walked beneath a tree, a blister beetle could fall on one's head, neck, arm, or bare leg. Fortunately, they were slow to release their irritant and could be brushed away fairly quickly to avoid the blister.

Then there were tumble bugs. These industrious critters rolled balls of livestock manure along the sand. The tidy spherical balls were used later as nurseries for their young. The balls were about the size of a large marble, one used for a "shooter," about one and one quarter inches in diameter. We would watch these creatures for hours and speculate how many bugs were necessary to rid the corrals of their soggy contents. We concluded that one cow could keep a truckload of them busy! A herd of sheep would have kept a million of them rolling along. Maybe a billion or even a trillion.

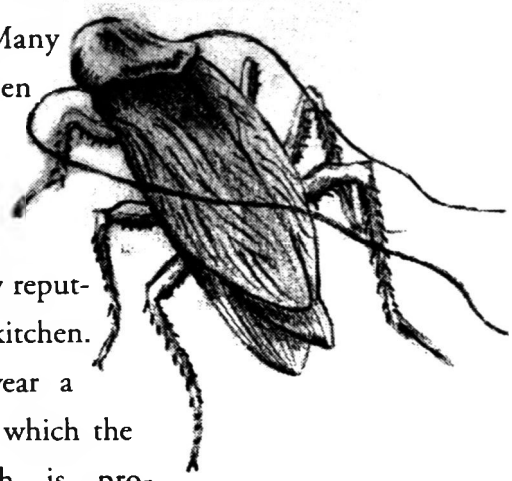
The big villain of our insect world was the black

widow spider, a truly beautiful shiny black creature with a red dot on its large round belly and a horrid head with deadly looking jaws. My Uncle Pete was bitten once and laid frighteningly still for a week and was very ill. We kids would look in on him intermittently and wondered how it felt. Every visit to the outdoor toilet brought forth frightful visions of a black widow spider lurking somewhere under the seat ready to do his deadly deeds on those parts of us that protruded through the holes.

Great centipedes had to be watched since they also had a painful sting. One learned early to flick blister beetles, spiders, and centipedes and never pin them to one's body by slapping directly down on the bug against your body. Even though you may have squashed the vicious villian, it could get in the last painful punch. My brother, Mac, in the summer following his fourth grade, smacked one with the palm of his hand and unfortunately pinned it down against his leg. The centipede laced him with a set of stinger marks, one for each leg of the centipede.

It was later in Texas that I met the champion of the obnoxious stinging fraternity. The scorpion is an evil little creature with a sting that can bring tears to the toughest West Texas cowboy or Mexican sheepherder. They range in size from a tiny nasty version to ones as long as six evil inches long. They search everywhere for moisture, a wet bathing suit hung to dry on a clothes line, a moist shoe lying on the back porch of a house, or simply the moist environment of a musty crack in the floor. When riled, they strut threateningly about with their stinger tipped tail curved above their back, defiantly daring anyone or anything to challenge. I suppose the Lord hasn't let them get to western Oklahoma, yet. Maybe He figures those unfortunate dry land folks living there have enough problems the way it is, with lesser things to deal with like tornadoes, rattlesnakes, and their own peculiar collection of irritating and obnoxious insects.

It is true that the largest cockroach I have ever seen was in Texas. Oklahoma cockroaches are disgustingly ugly, but the Texas ones are both disgustingly ugly and big! Texans claim that "flyswatters are for small ones, a fishing net is for medium size ones, and a Winchester rifle is for the large ones." Many mothers have been embarrassed to discover that a school insect project included a few reputed to be from her kitchen. In Dallas each year a contest is held in which the largest cockroach is proclaimed the winner and the location of the restaurant in which it was found is revealed.



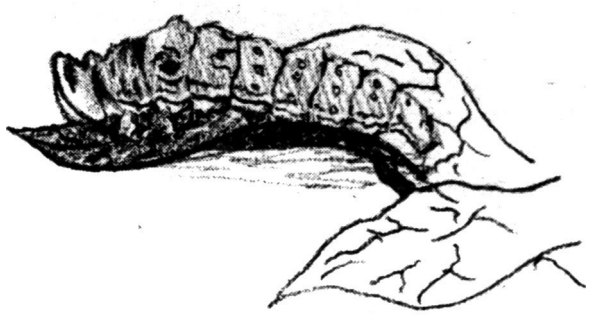
Every year there existed a two week period in June in which the June bugs appeared suddenly to dominate and destroy the peace of the nights. They appeared all at once in great numbers, clustering, and swarming around and over and about the glowing electric street lights in the towns. Each morning the sidewalks would be literally covered by dead ones lying scattered about. The cause of their deaths was and still is a mystery to me, but they came in bunches and they died in bunches. They were brown beetles with hard shells and

wings about the size of a marble. When a car would run over their dead little bodies, they would crunch and pop. If June bugs had a purpose, it must have been to annoy kids by making their summer nights disagreeable, especially those kids who wanted to stay out after dark and not go home. June bugs did more for keeping kids at home than most activities devised by parents. It seemed as if someone kept throwing small living marbles at you. They not only hurt when they flew into you, but they made a disgusting thumping noise (a dull thud) when they hit somewhere on your head.

Gnats are weird! They swarmed in cylindrical clouds here and there beneath the trees. Yet the cloud remained stationary. That is, it did not move. The gnats would be flying their little wings off to stay within the swarm. All day long they are content to fly within a swarm clustered motionless somewhere under the trees in the canyon. Yet about sundown the swarm will find a cow being milked, a pig being fed, a sheep lying down, or a human doing most anything, and then the swarm will move en mass and form a buggy halo about the poor individual and bother him to no end. If you moved, they moved with you. If you swatted at them, they simply parted and your hand passed through the swarm without hitting even one. If a gnat chose to light, it landed on your eyelid, or in your eye, in and up your nostril, or in your ear. They, like the June bug, appear to have absolutely no use. They must be a mistake of nature.

I know that God has a reputation of making no errors, and far be it from me to foolishly and impertinently accuse Him of one, but if He ever did, it surely must have been in creating a June bug or a gnat. I suppose there are those that would question the usefulness of cockroaches, pill bugs, ticks, fleas, lice, and chiggers. Each person's choice of the most worthless bug probably depends on the type and kind of companions each of us have kept or are now keeping.

I have had two occasions to mix socially with the tarantula spider, the large woolly black creature that biologists claim to be harmless. Both of these occasions occurred in New Mexico near The White Sands Proving Grounds. The first occasion was when I drove my car over some as they migrated across the highway one evening, apparently moving to some mountains nearby. They walked along in herds, and I failed to avoid them as I drove to El Paso. The second occasion occurred while climbing one of those mountains. As I pulled myself up over a ledge and my eyes came level with the top of the cliff, I stared directly into the eyes of one of these seemingly enormous creatures. He sprang aside, to my relief. He really didn't have to, for I



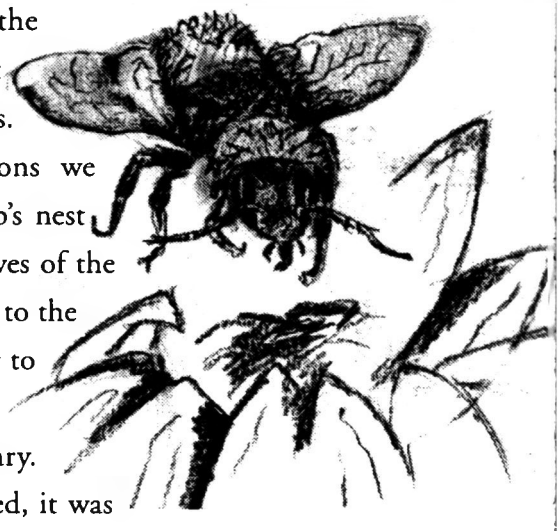
would have gladly fallen off the ledge to let him stay where he was.

There is a hierarchy of wasps. Mud dobbers are ranked lowest on the fear index. No kid except a few city girls would ever worry about being harmed by a mud dobber. Brown wasps were a real bother and had to be watched. Their stings were painful and their numbers significant. However, a yellow

jacket was the one member of the wasp family that made even the bravest of us run in real terror. When a yellow jacket came flying along the banks of the wash out or along a creek, we all kept a cautious eye on him. Every one of them had the disposition of a cobra snake crossed with a pregnant junk yard bull terrior dog, and when riled, looked indiscriminately for a victim for hasty retaliation. Their complex eyes generated pure hate for kids. Hate was returned by us kids, although with a much lesser commitment to battle. On approaching the wash-out which contained our summer swimming hole, our corporate conversation would include statements like, "Hope there are no wasps," or "Do you think there will be many wasps today?" and "If there are wasps today, I hope they ain't any yellow jackets." Then the bravado would encourage us all with the boast, "Come on, I ain't scared of no yellow jacket!"

In the canyon in which our house was located, there were many colors and kinds of wasps. They all socially congregated at their social club, which happened to be the nearby swimming hole, just as we did on hot summer afternoons. They flew about in patternless trajectories, not like butterflies that flit about randomly apparently without purpose or destination. Yet they did not fly like birds on straight line paths, either, but in trajectories which were short sequences of crooked spurts followed by straight and purposeful paths of more orderly flight. Activity would come to a cautious and hushed lull when a yellow jacket entered the flying paths that crisscrossed the swimming hole. At times we were motivated to evacuate various portions of the swimming hole if one or more of the cranky creatures chose to skate in that area on the surface of the water. Every now and then, one of the yellow dive bombers would, apparently unprovoked, take after an unfortunate swimmer. We would scream and holler advice to each other and the unfortunate victim. "Protect your eyes! Lookout! Here comes another! Protect your eyes!" On returning home after a long afternoon at the swimming hole, one or more of the swimmers would wear puffy eyes nearly swollen shut from the stings of the yellow jackets. Our mothers would shake their heads, either truly sympathetic at our misfortune, or with the predestined knowledge that another generation of Odells had taken another licking from another generation of cantankerous and evil yellow jackets and their allies. Apparently, the good guys never won in these battles at the swimming hole.

Now there were some battles of a different sort that we kids won over the wasps. Actually, and more accurately, the victories were over the larvae of the wasps. Even these encounters with the earliest forms of the species were not complete victories. On many occasions we would find a wasp's nest attached to the eaves of the house, or attached to the rafter of a shed, or to the inside of the roof of a granary. When this occurred, it was

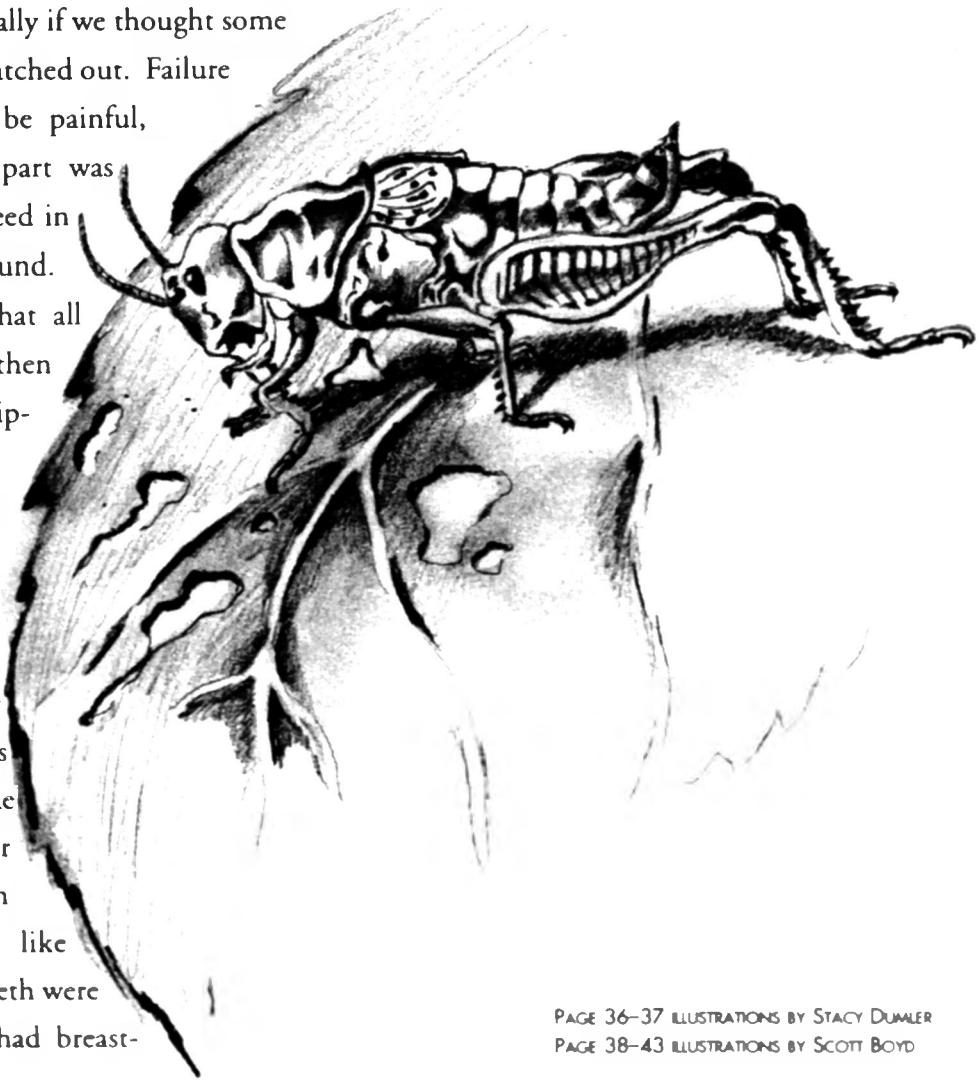


our exciting task to destroy the living contents of the paper-like nest. It looked much like a circular shaped dried out honey cone growing out of a spot on the structure upon which it was attached. Each of the cells eventually would produce a new wasp, and for a while after that, it would be the wasp's earliest residence. In fact, if the wasps had already hatched, these cells became rocket launchers from which the enemy could launch an attack. Our strategy was to knock the nest off the wall and then smash it with several hasty violent blows from a scoop shovel. Other times our strategy was to burn the nest in its place, especially if we thought some of the wasps had already hatched out. Failure in these instances could be painful, and everyone who took part was prepared to run at full speed in retreat from the battle ground.

If the reader thinks that all this is a bit far fetched, then consider the following scripture extracted from Revelations, verses seven through ten in chapter nine:

"The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lion's teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like a thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months."

Now that is what I call real mean bugs! Even the Texans can't match that!



PAGE 36–37 ILLUSTRATIONS BY STACY DUMLER
PAGE 38–43 ILLUSTRATIONS BY SCOTT BOYD

Habite (My Darling)

Tim Neller

"Why do the nations so furiously rage together?
And why do the people imagine a vain thing?
The kings of the earth rise up, and the
rulers take counsel against the Lord,
and against His Annointed."

(October, 1985: massive car bomb in southern suburb of Beirut, directed at spiritual leader of Hezbollah, Sheik Fadlallah.)

I

In the name of Allah
She
And twenty like her
But none so fair as she
Seduced into a marketplace
On a street called Ainahl Rue Maynee
Lured by the texture of smooth white silks,
Purple velvets, cotton khakis, denims, woolens
And delicate lace
Summoned by the hollow clanging of brass
And tin cups and pans
By migrant voices, trumpeting their wares
Enticed by the crystal jars of creamy white Lahbnee
By the lemony scent of zahtar sprinkled on toasted wafers
By the amber oil oozing from the pores of fattened oak barrels
Gorged with ebony olives
By the serpentine rosary beads that hang
From a rack and glitter and sway
And glitter and sway to the echos of a Muslim wail
From a distant tower

II

Down the street of Aihnal Rue Maynee
Danced the Lebanese princess
She twirled
Waves of laughter followed waves of elegant jet black hair
That settled itself on smooth brown shoulders
"Yah Roohee, my spirit, wait here—I'll be right back,"
She promised
"Najat, wait, I—"slender bronze arms embraced me
Warm full lips engaged me.
"Don't worry, Yah Albee, I'll be right back."
Lightly laughing, deeply loving, she released me
Looking at me with those eyes.

"If eyes are the windows to the soul, then I just looked into heaven"

And she was gone.

III

Honking horns blared their way through the swarm of scents
odors, and elbows
Slithering down the street called Aihnal Rue Maynee
All but one
A loaded Mercedes, a crippled derelict
Silent
But not forgotten
For the eyes of the Unseen were watching
Waiting
Praying for the second it would uncoil and strike
Strike in this uncommon place for common people
Allah spoke
The snake struck
Releasing a radiance that poured itself
Upon the unannointed, the unforgiven, the unsuspecting
Blasting them into non-existence

Martyrs among mortars
Tarnished by the black powder
Blown from the bowels of a constipated car
Whose effusive greeting smothered
The laughing prattle of little children
With rotten breath that withered the life from them
With pillows of angry, belching smoke
And tongues of jealous flames
A maelstrom of burnt flesh peppered
With splintered glass and twisted bits of shiny metal
A calliope of shrieking, moaning, sobbing souls
Whose God had forsaken them
In the name of Allah

I nestled in my trembling arms
A lifeless princess bathed in crimson
Borne unto a new kingdom
Heralded by my screams
Louder and louder and louder
As if turning up the volume
Could breathe life back into a broken body
Yah Roohee "my spirit"
Yah Albee "my heart"
Yah Hayetee "my life"
Tender words swallowed by greedy Death
Lost
Forever
In the murmur of a thousand incantations
The barely living rose in the haze
Weaving their arms toward heaven
Like fields of rusty grass
While the Unseen had seen
And kneeled in supplication
To their god
As they sung and swayed, and sung and swayed
All
In the name of Allah

O Lebanon my Lebanon
Have you forsaken me?
From you she came
To you she has returned
I have communed with her
On your snow-drenched mountaintops
And felt her soft white breast close to mine
Her perfume lingers in the verdant fragrance of your cedars
Her hazel eyes shout out to me
From the warmth of your soft cinnamon soil
Her haunting voice cascades into an endless sea
Her flesh is the food of your people
Your red blood pulsed in her veins
Now her quiet heart sleeps in your holy womb
Anticipating rebirth
In the name of Allah

Discovering Roots

Pat Sturm

Carolyn is a political activist, deeply concerned with all matters legislative. I am an artist, deeply concerned with all matters creative. Yet we are fast friends, bonded by a seemingly strange element — our love of wildflowers.

For nine years Carolyn has lived in a wonderful canyon settlement in western Oklahoma where most of the pioneer-spirited residents joke about the warts on their handbuilt homes and plan their landscapes around the multitude of thick cedar trees and whatever else grows naturally at any given time of the year. Recently I became her next-acre neighbor.

At about the same time that my husband and I started construction on our house, Carolyn and her husband started an addition to theirs. Together we building families hired a friendly old man with a great jawed dozer to clear the hill separating our properties. That hill, in its healing process, has become a classroom for Carolyn and me. We've watched the varieties of wildflowers reappear and now know that, while the hardy red and yellow gaillardia and the chrome yellow coreopsis endure almost any kind of condition, a myriad of ground gobbling weeds flourish in deeply disturbed soil. Once, our hill featured slender grasses and delicate blossoms; now it boasts a luxuriant crop of tall, bright green weeds whose name I refuse to learn and oversized mounds of prickly Carolina nightshade. While the purple nightshade shows well from a distance, at close range it is thorny and invasive, encroaching on every spot of land it can grab. I plan to eradicate it when I get into serious horticulture.

We have spent many hours discovering. From our earliest walks, I noticed (with no little envy) that Carolyn had a much broader command of wildflower names than I did. "Oh, that's a Texas thistle," she'd announce casually, gently fingering the pale orchid puff. I found her secret, however, when we both happened onto a lovely little blossom that neither of us had seen before. One-inch globes surrounded by gold-tipped fuschia spikes nestled on spreading branches of leaves that resembled mimosas. We pondered its identity.

A few days later Carolyn strode over the hill with the same enthusiasm she exhibits when the Supreme Court renders a decision that she's lobbied for. "I found it!" she boomed. "It's a sensitive briar. See? It's right here." In her hand she waved the telltale source of her knowledge: a hardback copy of *Oklahoma Wildflowers**, a virtual encyclopedia of color pictures and descriptions of everything that could possibly grow on our prairie acreages. Determined to catch up, I hied myself to the bookstore the next afternoon for my own copy and began memorizing page one.

Later in the summer Carolyn gave me a pre-housewarming gift – a small flower press. I take great pleasure in gathering and pressing samples of all the blossoms on my lot, then taping them next to their entries in my book.

Standing on my screened porch, Carolyn and I have decided that an open area, gently sloping away from the house to the east, will make a perfect wildflower meadow. Material from the National Wildflower Research Center in Austin*

informs us that we're looking at a five-year project at best. But we're prepared to mow each fall, spray to control the weeds and probably engage in hand-to-stem combat with them, then scratch the surface barely one inch to start the flowers that we want and discourage the weeds that we don't.

Also from the porch we see a pocket in the cedars to the south. Perhaps not exactly indigenous to western Oklahoma, a symbolic Japanese tea garden will nonetheless fit nicely into that frame. The literature tells us that "beautiful flowers are avoided in this area, for elegant simplicity must prevail. However, plants with small white or purple flowers are acceptable." Wonder what's Japanese for horsemint?

As we breathe in the summer scent of red cedars and hot sand, Carolyn forgets about the legislature; I abandon the theatre. Instead, we loll on my screened porch, swirl glasses of iced tea, and savor a friendship rooted in buffalo grass, Queen Anne's lace, and daisy fleabane.

* McCoy, Doyle. *Oklahoma Wildflowers.* Oklahoma City: Doyle McCoy, 1987.

* National Wildflower Research Center, 2600 FM 973 North, Austin, TX 78725-4201.

ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT BOYD

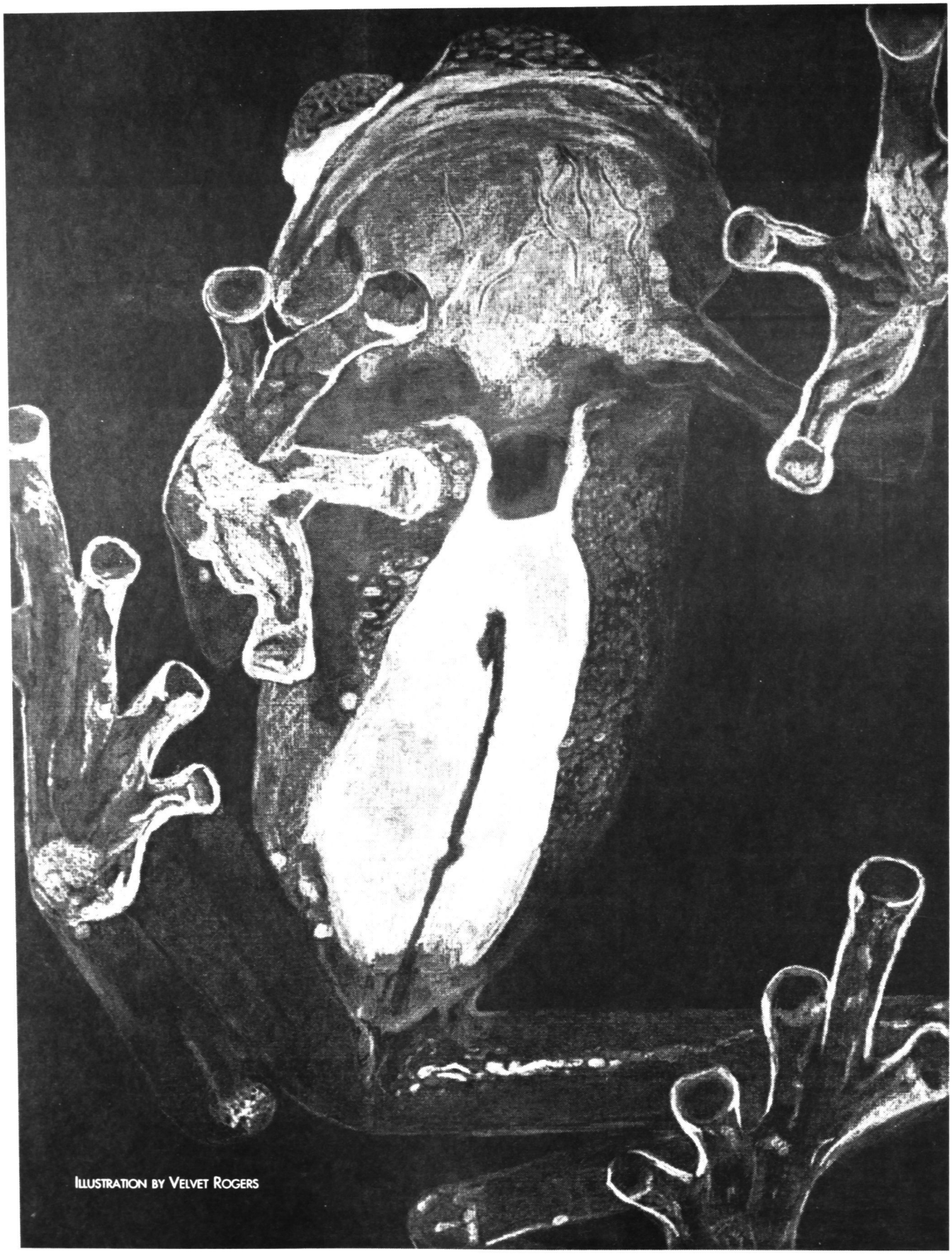


Illustration by Velvet Rogers

Contributor's Notes

Fred Alsberg teaches at SWOSU and edits *Westview*. His work has appeared in *Blue Unicorn*, *Black River Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Greensboro Review*, *Oklahoma English Journal*, and *Rhino*.

Stephen G. Eoannou, originally from Buffalo, New York, received his M.A. from Miami University. He has taught English at both Ball State University and at the College of Charleston. His fiction has appeared in *The Minneapolis Review of Baseball* and *Verb*. He currently lives in Charleston, South Carolina.

Peter Grant is associate professor of biology at Southwestern Oklahoma State University and is the publisher of *The Mayfly Newsletter*. He has studied mayflies since 1976.

Henry Kirkland Jr. teaches at Southwestern Oklahoma State University and edits the Biology Department newsletter. His work has appeared in *Southwestern Naturalist, Proceedings of Oklahoma Academy of Science*, and *Texas Academy of Science*.

Lyn Lifshin's work has appeared in *The Greensboro Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Ploughshares*, *The New York Quarterly*, and other magazines. This is her first poem in *Westview*.

Jack Matthews, of Athens, Ohio, is the author of over twenty books. His publishers include Scribners, Harcourt Brace, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Houghton Mifflin, and The Carnegie Mellon Contemporary Classics Series. Individual short stories, poems, essays, and reviews have appeared in periodicals such as *The Yale Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *The National Review, Poetry*, *The Kenyon Review*,and *The Southern Review*. He has been the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and an Ohio Arts Council Major Artist Award. His stories have been included in *The Best American Short Stories* (various years) and *Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards* (various years). He has also won the Sherwood Anderson Award.

C. Michael McKinney grew up in Beckham and Roger Mills counties of western Oklahoma. He earned a B.A. in professional writing from the University of Oklahoma and a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing from McNeese State University. McKinney teaches Language Arts at SWOSU–Sayre and spends summers as Poet in Residence for the Louisiana Division of the Arts.

Tim Neller attended the 1993 Oklahoma Fall Arts Institute at Quartz Mountain, where he studied poetry with Alica Ostriker. He lives and writes in Tulsa.

Patrick Odell is a professor of Mathematics at Baylor University, Waco, TX, and is Professor Emeritus at The University of Texas in Dallas. He was born in 1930 at Talala, OK and completed elementary and secondary schools in Watonga.

Alicia Ostriker lives in Princeton, NJ and teaches English and Creative Writing at Rutgers University. She has published seven volumes of

poetry, most recently *The Imaginary Lover*, which won the 1986 William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America, and *Green Age*. Her poetry appears in *The New Yorker*, *The Nation, American Poetry Review, Atlantic Monthly, Kenyon Review,* and other magazines. She is also the author of *Vision and Verse in William Blake*, and has written two books on American women's poetry, *Writing Like a Woman*, and *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*. Her most recent book is *Feminist Revision and the Bible*. Ostriker has received awards from the New Jersey Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Guggenheim Foundation.

Mark Sanders is a Nebraska native whose poems, short stories, and essays have been published in the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain. He is the editor and publisher of the Plains Poetry Series and Sandhills Press.

Pat Sturm teaches creative language arts at Weatherford High School. She has most recently written of her country life in *GreenPrints*—the Weeder's Digest. She shares her house with her husband, Dr. Clarence Sturm of the Southwestern faculty, and one hairy dog and one finicky cat.

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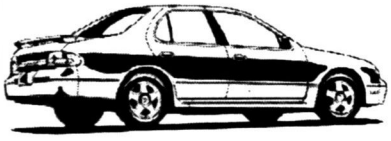

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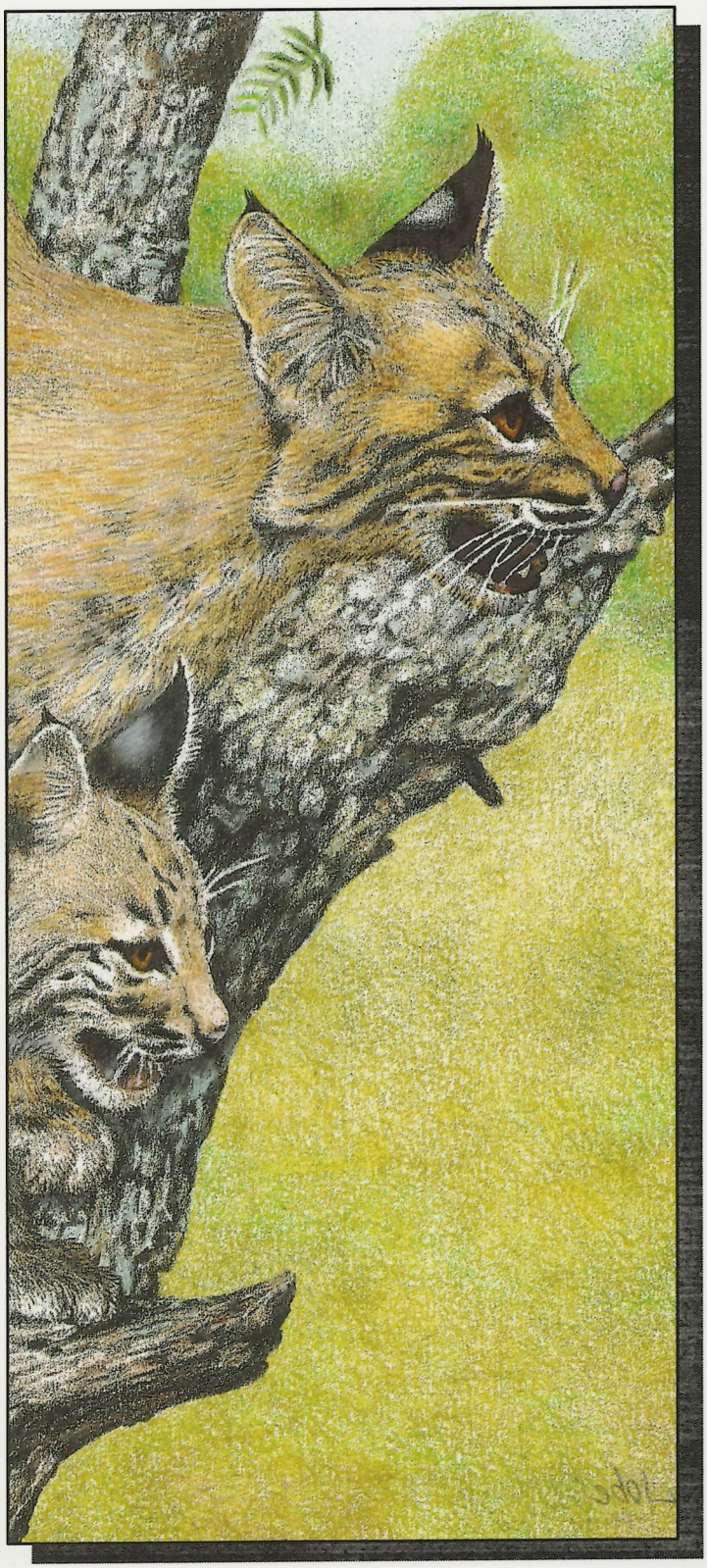

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