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A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

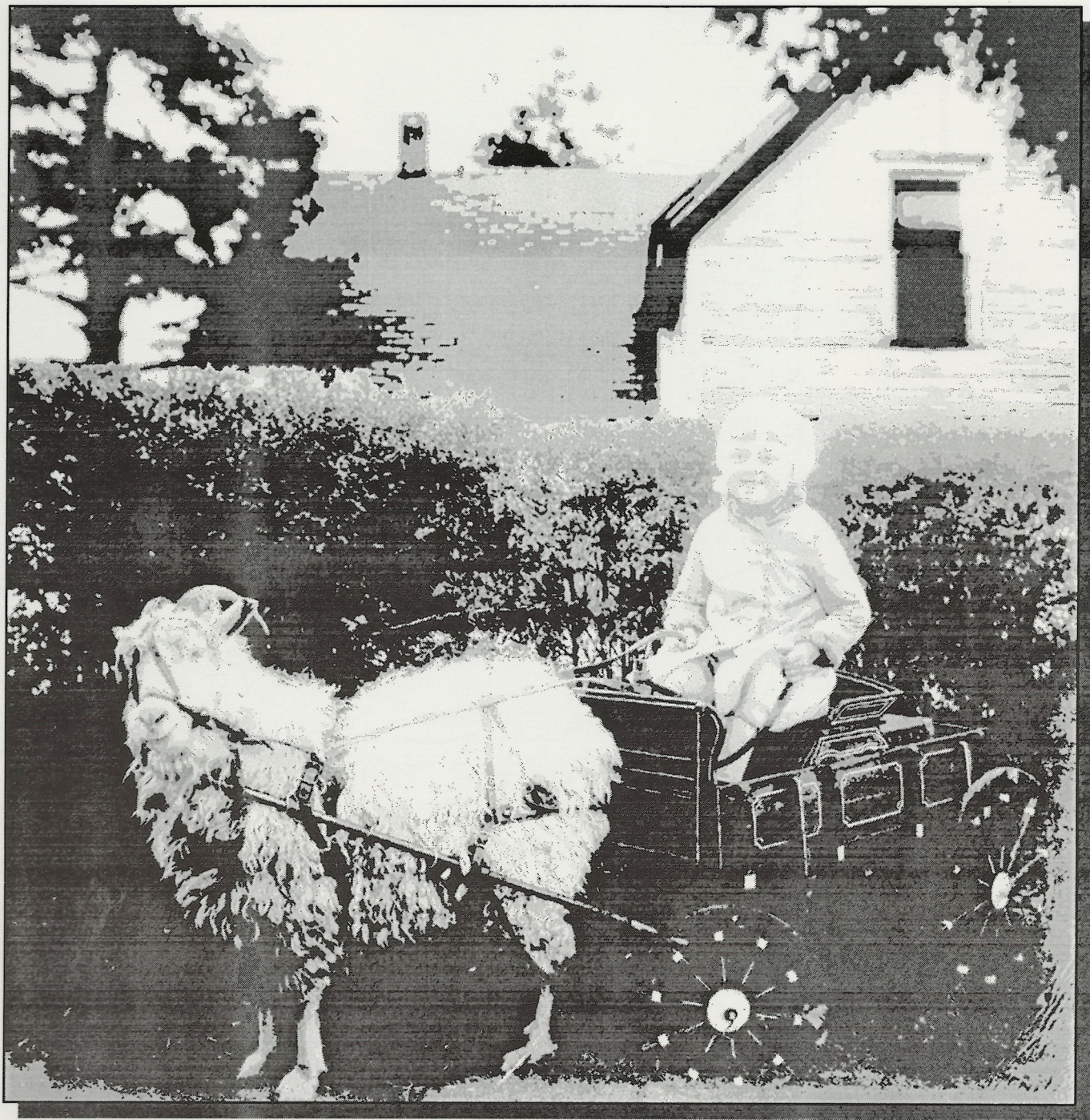
# WESTVIEW

VOLUME 14

NUMBER 2

WINTER 1993

\$3.00



Western Oklahoma

## Youth



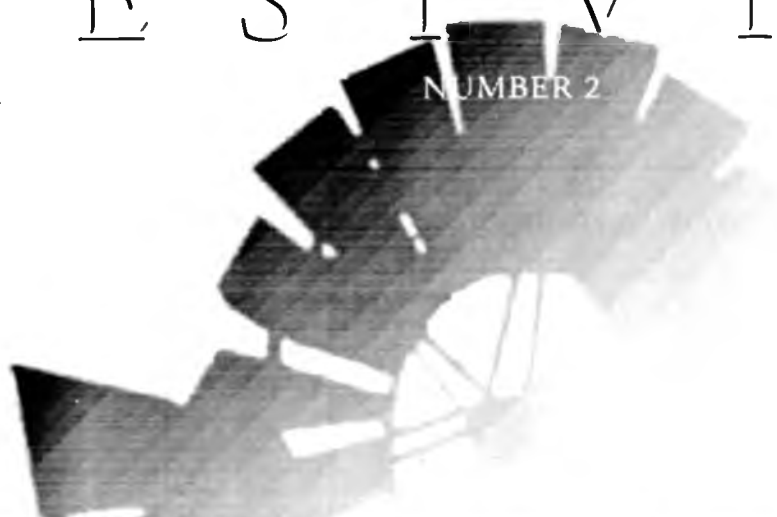
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# WESTVIEW

VOLUME 14

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Editor ..... Fred Alsberg  
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1. Mail submissions flat in a 9"x12" envelope. Include a SASE for possible rejection.
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3. We use themes related to Western Oklahoma, as well as non-thematic work of high quality by writers from elsewhere.
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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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Editor, Westview  
100 Campus Drive  
Southwestern Oklahoma State University  
Weatherford, OK 73096

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Western Oklahoma Flora and Fauna: Spring 94.

Western Oklahoma Hard Times / Good Times: Summer 94.

Deadline: 2-15-94.

Western Oklahoma Terrain—Rivers, Lakes, Hills: Fall 94.

Deadline: 7-1-94.

Western Oklahoma Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow: Winter 94.

Deadline: 9-15-94.

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# THE ONLY ROOM THAT MATTERS

*John Graves Morris*

Across the tundra  
Stretching for miles,  
The despair I've thickened to,  
You're a thread of smoke  
From the only room that matters.

In your absence,  
Three chairs, a table, a lamp,  
Still faintly glow,  
The weathered books are half-open  
& lit-up like the gold tooth  
Of the reclining old man  
In the bookmark photograph.  
He is renewing himself:  
The hills crest green,  
& each dandelion  
Is lording its stalk,  
Pointing the way  
In the breeze that is always blowing.



ILLUSTRATION BY STACY DUMLER

# THE CHRISTMAS PONY AND SOCKET SET

*Keith Long*

My childhood has only gotten good since I've grown up. Back when I was going through it, I thought it all a pretty mundane exercise, what with having to get my hair cut, going to school, feeding the dog, and trying to keep generally clean during the whole operation. If it hadn't been for some convenient lies thought up by my parents—namely Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy—I may have lain prostrate throughout pre-adolescence. Still, I became something of a procrastinator, especially in the area of good behavior. My detractors claim I still have problems.

I can remember that my procrastination began during my sixth year, and the Christmas season was pretty much to blame for it. I was convinced about this “naughty or nice” stuff, and I knew that I wouldn't get my Christmas pony again if I didn't shape up and make something of myself around the house.

But putting off is easier than shaping up.

I knew December was the month for being good. I stayed apprised of the situation, listened to all the Christmas songs on the radio, and gleaned what I could by eavesdropping on adult conversations. I began feeling the holiday crunch the day after Thanksgiving, and in my heart of hearts, I really did want to be nice. But, even as a kid, things come up.

Two weeks before Christmas that year, only

hours after I had spent most of my morning discussing the world horse situation with Santa Claus outside the Foodtown Grocery Store, my dad came home to find me out by the red barn. I was practicing my slingshot, which seemed a pretty harmless activity since I wasn't maiming any neighborhood pets or marauding the old ladies who carried groceries down the alley. In fact, I had set up a target on the side of the barn. I had taken a bottle cap, tied a six-foot string to it, and had it swinging back and forth as I hammered away at it.

“Hit it yet?” my dad asked when he saw the setup.

“Nope, but I ain't missed the barn hardly none.” I let fly with a round, which missed the bottle cap by several yards but made a loud wallop when it whammed into the sheet metal of the barn.

“Goodness,” said dad, “what're you using for ammunition?”

“I dunno. Found 'em in the barn.” Dad took a step up and looked in my ammo bucket.

“Hey,” he said with an ominous hint of alarm in his voice, “that's my socket set!”

“Oh,” I said. “Well, the 3/4 has a really great hum, but the 7/8th's got more knockdown power.”

“These are all ruined!” my dad hollered, getting down on his knees and lining them up by size.

“No they're not,” I said, fishing the 5/8 out of my pants pocket. “Looky here: I bet I shot this one 400 times today and it's only a little bent up.”



My dad began walking around on all fours, digging through the grass. "They're not all here. Where's the rest of them?"

"Well, there's a couple of the bigger ones under the barn. Too heavy. I undershot them."

Dad looked up at me. "And the smaller ones?"

"Overshot. Somewhere down by the railroad, I reckon."

Father reckoned on the spot that I wouldn't get my Christmas pony that year. I never got my Christmas pony. The very next Christmas I was thwarted only two days before the big event. Harv and I were digging around in my backyard. We were hoping to find some earthworms, even though we'd been told they went deep in winter.

So we went deep.

Most great discoveries, it seems, happen when somebody is doing something very unimportant, like yelling for Watson in the next room or digging for earthworms. So Harv and I were understandably excited when we uncovered the remains of a dinosaur in my very own backyard. We excavated the rest of the afternoon, and had exposed about a forty-foot length of the creature by the time dad got home. He was able to sneak up on us, since we were down in the digs, shovels flying.

"What's going on?" my dad asked, an ominous hint of alarm in his voice.

"We're discovering stuff," I said, tossing up a shovelful of dirt without even turning around. "A dinosaur." I looked up, indicated the forty-foot length. "We think it's a tooth. A saber-tooth incisor." I went back to work.

"That's a sewer pipe!" Dad yelled.

Harv and I quit shoveling and looked at each other.

"Wow!" I said. "I didn't even know dinosaurs had sewer pipes."

I went Christmas-ponyless again. In lieu, I got socks or something.

So here I am, a non-horseman at 36. The other day Quay, the 12-year-old resident of our household, and I found ourselves in the garage at the same time. I was throwing stuff around and muttering something about fuel pumps and Detroit engineers. He was strolling through with a measuring tape and evaluating the garage's worth as a pony barn.

"Have you seen my socket set?" I asked.

"You mean that sling-shot ammo?" he asked, an ominous hint of alarm in his voice.

# SHIPWRECKED IN OKLAHOMA

*Keith Long*

*(won the 1990 OSU Academy of American Poets First Prize)*

Summer

crushed against the landscape,  
pressing like an unrelenting hand  
of God Himself.

Beyond the glimmer of the club pool,  
beyond simmering tennis courts,  
beyond:

asphalt parking lots,  
the parched fairways of mid-town golf courses;  
the concrete-tiled roofs of sprawling Spanish estates  
ranked, filed with driveway ovals;  
the east side tenements of last-generation Indians,  
hovels hidden by pig-wire  
and depleted auto tires and  
flourishes of johnson grass  
radiating from the posts of mailboxes,  
hair-lipped and rusted and flattened  
by whizzing beer bottles and waiting the month's  
government subsistence slip.

Beyond that—all that—

August.

A countryside condemned to cultivation,  
acre upon acre,  
quarter upon quarter,  
mile upon mile,  
the flat refuse of villainous dust bowls,

condemned,  
aligning itself,  
shakily,  
    shakily,  
into row upon row of  
cotton and peanuts,  
cash crops, subsidized by D.C. brokers,  
acre upon acre,  
quarter upon quarter,  
young and tender and vulnerable  
against the pressing heat of August,  
turned, gone cloudless,  
breezeless,  
oppressive in the afternoon.

Find it:  
the silver glint of  
irrigation units,  
miles and miles rolled into place  
by shoulder muscle and thigh muscle  
and groin—  
spraying the artificial godsend  
into the air, soaking the windless  
cotton and peanuts  
with the precious contents of stock ponds,  
measured and notched each morning  
along a length of bamboo stalk,  
studied by the tobacco frown of farmers  
who have turned the color of dust  
turned free behind tractor plows and  
left to hand limp over the fields  
in the moveless, endless afternoons.

The ponds recede day by day,



inch by inch,  
foot by foot,  
unreplenished against the drain  
of the season and the dry, usurping air  
of August  
which even at night  
while the landscape drowns,  
pulls moisture from the crops,  
dispersing it into the atmosphere,  
smuggles it off by method  
of phantom jet streams  
to the Gulf Coast,  
where, condemned,  
it drops in torrents over  
the open Sea of Mexico,  
prompting bursts and storms  
and finally hurricanes  
that lean their shoulders  
into the coast of Mexico  
and even Texas,  
with the water—the sovereign blood—  
wrung from the flat lands,  
the true property of cotton and peanuts,  
still young and tender and vulnerable,  
and moving against nature  
with a firmness and stubbornness  
gleaned from the red soil itself,  
the red soil which forfeits its moisture,  
turns its hot face  
on breezeless afternoons  
towards the sun and  
throws the heat upward,  
  
compounding the dry air,  
working in sly harmony  
with the air and the sun

and the heat  
against the reckoning of hard-jawed farmers,  
their faces gone red  
as the soil under the sun;  
their moisture, too, stolen,  
smuggled from them during sleep;  
they, on moveless afternoons,  
leaned against a tractor tire,  
rubbing their spit-browed chins  
and clearing their narrow nostrils  
and admitting above the red soil  
this is God's way.

August breathes:  
In herds of cattle, taking their little comfort  
under feeble elm trees  
along dry creek banks,  
standing like quiet shadows  
of themselves,  
so that from the hardtop you might count  
two times for each  
because their blackness makes  
shadows within shadows beneath shadows  
of elm trees,  
their tails moving against  
constant shrouds of insects,  
clouds which thicken in the shade  
and darken the shadows further.  
Insects, fertile and regenerate,  
humming along the dry creeks.

Summer:  
the cows standing  
nose to ass, curiously silent,  
large-bagged, letting the mass relax  
between their axles, guts sagging  
to the brown dust, the only sound



a slashing of tails  
and the heavy weightiness, the sound  
of tight breath held for evening,  
for autumn, for winter,  
for something easier shouldered  
than the smuggling press

of this heat,  
and horseflies landing on tender flanks  
until one shadow lies down,  
knees buckling to the ground,  
snorting against the brown carpet,  
sending dust billowing,  
scattering flies  
for the briefest moment.

Royal, black, haunted  
in the middle of cattle  
and cotton and peanuts,  
rising through the landscape  
like giant, mechanized locusts,  
their working jaws the oil units  
pumping up and down,  
whispering some unforgivable secret  
to Mother Earth, relentless  
as the sun itself: slowly,  
eternally, the diesel engine  
popping in resistance,  
the flywheel spinning its constant songs,  
the horsehead dipping  
back down with the slow grace  
of a trim Chinese waiter,  
dipping far down, the heavy, black crude  
working its way to the top  
and the storage tanks—  
the landscape's only



and final victory—  
smuggling itself from itself  
while it draws its attention  
from itself.

The oil money flows  
into the pockets of distrustful  
farmers who pour it back  
into the land  
in puny rows of cotton and peanuts  
and shadows of cows and  
calves and lazy, lethargic bulls  
that plod to the stock ponds  
at dusk  
to dip their nostrils  
beneath the receding water,  
sucking their first belly full  
before the water slips away,  
through the air,  
to drop, next week,  
on some Mexican beach.



PHOTOGRAPH BY LISA BRADFORD

# YUCKY SHORTS

*Keith Long*

June is the month that Vacation Bible School springs up all over western Oklahoma. Or at least it did when I was a kid. And VBS was a universally fun time for me, except for one particular year.

When I was seven years old, Doug Henton invited me to Fifth Street Baptist's VBS. Since I played first base for the First Baptist PeeWees, and Fifth Street was our arch-rival, it seemed chaotic to me to go to their VBS. But Mother must've known more than I did. She made me go, at least on Monday, since Doug had been nice enough to ask me. I went, feeling conspicuous and hoping nobody would notice me as the kid who had struck out in the second inning the week before, swinging at a hopper pitch, one that doesn't reach the plate until the second hop. As luck would have it, nobody even mentioned baseball. What's more, I had a great time. We got to play outside a lot, and I made this white-plaster thing of my own hand, and we sang some songs I already knew, and Doug took me on a tour of the whole church.

I came home that Monday full of enthusiasm for Fifth Street's VBS, especially the green punch and cookies, and told Mom that I had seen Billie Richards, our neighbor, there. Then I related what we were going to do on Tuesday and began making preparations, even though I had to squeeze in an afternoon at the pool and a baseball game against Presbyterian that night.

Life's rough on a seven-year-old.

The next morning, as I was getting ready for VBS, about an hour and a half ahead of time, Mom came up the stairs with a pair of shorts she wanted me to wear. They were horrid: a madras plaid, with green, pink, blue, and yellow worked into the pattern. What's more, they were hand-me-downs from my cousin Stanley, who had already poisoned me about the shorts.

'They're yucky,' he told me, which is a seven-year-old euphemism for geeky, nerdy, icky, and socially unredeemable. When I saw the shorts in Mom's hands, I retreated to my safe haven under my bed.

"They're yucky," I said.

"No, they're not," Mom said. "They're nice. And they're cool, too." Mom meant, of course, that they were airy and comfortable on a hot June day, not that they were "cool," the opposite of "yucky."

"I ain't wearing them," I said. The argument lasted until I was almost late for VBS. I won out that day, wearing my long jeans with the patch on the left knee and some t-shirt. Fifth Street's VBS lived up to its billing on Tuesday. It was great. I learned to play shuffleboard, got along great with my baseball counterparts, and sang in my loudest, most penetrating voice. But lurking above me somewhere was the specter of the madras plaid shorts. I knew the argument wasn't over.

I was right. The next morning, the shorts were on the towel rack when I went into the bathroom. I won again, however, getting to wear jeans on Wednesday and Thursday. But on Friday, the awards day and the day the green punch and cookies were to return, Mom made

her stand. I had to wear the madras plaid shorts or I wasn't going.

I lost.

When Doug and his mom came to pick me up, I gingered my way out onto the front porch, embarrassed by the riot of colors that followed me around. They really were yucky shorts. They had a little, clip-thing to hold them together where the button was supposed to be. And I had to reach almost to my knees to get the zipper started. And the zipper was silver instead of gold.

Yucky.

And worst of all, the pockets were cut so that when I sat down, the whole pair of shorts ballooned into my lap. I looked like I was hiding all my baseball gear in my shorts. I knew the shorts were, altogether, a bad trip. But, bad trip notwithstanding, there was the matter of green punch. Even a kid forced into shorts can't turn that down.

When we arrived at church, I got my second big surprise of the week. Nobody even mentioned my shorts. I even noticed there were other kids — younger though they were — wearing madras plaid shorts. And since I kept my arms crossed and hunkered down when I sat, nobody asked me what was hiding in my shorts. It was great. I was going to wear the shorts Mom forced me to wear, and I wasn't going to be laughed at and ostracized after all, which was obviously her dastardly plan. When we went outside to play, which was the last stage before green punch, I had almost forgotten about the shorts. But then the Oklahoma morning wind caught me and whistled through my legs.

I ran just a bit. I was startled. I had made an important, scientific discovery. The shorts made

me fast. I decided to check it out, and went for a spin around the churchyard. No doubt about it. I ran faster in shorts. The legs didn't bind. My knees didn't catch in the patches. The wind raced against my legs. I was one fast dude.

"Hey, Gerald," I said, yelling at Gerald Bolton who was always faster than me, "wanna race?"

We lined up on the sidewalk and off we went. Despite becoming much faster myself, Gerald began pulling away. But he was wearing shorts, so it was obvious to me that I had no technological advantage. When we came to the corner, I tried to make the turn, but my excessive speed was too much for my main frame and I tripped.

The shorts really were a bad trip.

I pulled all the skin off both knees, rolling it up somewhere around the pelvis. Guerny Bolton took me to the basement where he doctored me with stinging stuff and patched me up with huge hunks of gauze. I was the hero of the green punch party, and everyone wanted to see my injuries. I limped around the whole time, accepting all the green punch everyone was bringing me.

Of course, the injury didn't really bother me until I got home and Mother gasped at my bandages. "You did it! You did it! Oh, it hurts!" I cried, my knees now freely throbbing. "I ain't wearing yucky shorts ever again!" I said.

And I haven't.



# INTERVIEW :

## KEITH LONG

*Fred Alsberg*

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**Westview:** Both your poetry and fiction are showcased in this issue of *Westview*. How do you decide whether a topic should be addressed through poetry or fiction?

**Keith Long:** I don't believe it's the topic itself that has any bearing on that decision as much as my intentions with that topic. Sure, there are topics that lend themselves to one or the other, but I really believe that a writer can tackle any topic with either of those two genres. As far as that goes, a writer can use drama, screenplay, exposition, or any other type of writing to cover just about any topic. One of the best copy editors I ever had in the newspaper business once told me that when I'm writing an editorial or a personal column, that I should intend for the reader to either laugh or cry — but don't make him think. "If you do, you'll wind up like William Buckley: highly revered and rarely read."

Poetry, then, is the medium I use to make people think. People don't sit down with a newspaper to do any heavy pondering, and people don't sit down with a book of poetry for light reading. I write fiction to make people think, too, but the material I publish in *Westview* is from my column writing, which is intended to be lighter and more enjoyable reading.

**Westview:** Do you have a preferred genre to write in?

**Long:** Right now, screenplay is the most intriguing form to me. It's the hardest to be successful in, and I'm beginning to understand why. A writer has to visualize everything — everything. He has to visualize the paintings on the wall, where they are on the wall, the angle of a fork lying on the table, and whether the catsup bottle is full, half-full, or empty. The writer has to visualize whether the characters are left- or right-handed, whether they are bearded or clean-shaven, whether their shirt is long-sleeved or short-sleeved. Then, after visualizing all that,

the writer has to convey on a sheet of paper what he sees. It's not easy. It's the toughest form of writing I've done so far, but it has helped sharpen my other writing, especially my poetry, I think.

**Westview:** At what point did it dawn on you that you wanted to be a writer?

**Long:** I don't know that it has. I do remember that in grade school — the fourth or fifth grade — I received an electric football set for Christmas. I would lock myself in my room and play a game against myself, keeping statistics on each play, and then when the game was over I would write a story about it. I'd go to the newspaper and read about real games and steal some of the words and phrases that the writers used. I learned what words like 'ramrod,' 'blitz,' and 'stellar' meant by doing that. All through high school I wanted to be a sports writer, and then in college I got my chance to do so at the Ada *Evening News*. In a couple of years I became weary of that, and that's when my attention turned strongly to academics. I wanted to write something of substance. Now, because of the illness I've been through, I'd like to write something about the lonesome pain of disease — something that people could relate to and appreciate without having to experience. I know there's a whole world out there in constant pain of one sort or another while most of us remain clueless about it.

**Westview:** You mentioned your illness, which is kidney failure. How else has that influenced your writing?

**Long:** I took a fiction-writing class my first year in graduate school, and I had to write two short stories. I still have them somewhere, and it really aches to get them out and look over them. I was 23 at the time, and had absolutely nothing in the world to write about. Both of those first stories contained a lot of action, a lot of thinking, a lot of posturing, but no story. They're just words hung together in cumulative sentences. I got sick at age 25, went on dialysis for three years, received a transplant, and then went back to graduate school. I won both the OSU fiction and poetry contests the very next year because I had something the other writers didn't — experience. I've been blessed through this illness because I've been given the chance to experience emotions and agonies that most people usually don't face until they're much older. I've been told that I was dying and I had only about a week to set my life right. This evokes an emotion that cannot be duplicated by any other set of circumstances; it sets off a process of quantifying

and qualifying my life that most people don't live to write about. The illness is making me a better person, and because of that, I think it's making me a better writer.

**Westview:** What do you tell students who aspire to be writers?

**Long:** I tell them to practice. It seems to me as though most writers expect everything they write to turn into something publishable. They never just practice writing, as a basketball player practices free throws and a baseball player practices his batting stance and swing. A lot of students come up to me and say they just aren't any good at writing. The reason, of course, is that they've never written. They couldn't make a free throw the first time they shot one, either. I believe writing is a talent that must be cultivated, just like any other talent. When I was sports editor of my college newspaper, I became friends with the tailback on the football team. He was great, and he still holds rushing records for that school. One day we were talking about some other players on the team, and I mentioned that it was sad that they were wasting their talent by not developing a strong training schedule. "That's nothing to waste," he said. "Now, if it were a real talent, like your writing, that would be a thing to waste." I had admired this guy for what he had, never thinking that I had something he could admire.

**WESTVIEW:** How much time do you spend writing?

**LONG:** It varies with my work load and my health, but one thing is for sure — rain or shine, I'll have a column ready to fax to my hometown newspaper by four o'clock every Tuesday. The columns are only about a thousand words, but in a year's time, that's 52,000 words. Over the course of 12 years, that's more than half a million words. The columns aren't always great, and some of them don't meet my expectations. But it really is good practice for my writing, because many times during the year I'll be staring at a blank computer screen at 2 p.m. on Tuesday with absolutely no idea what to write. And then, two hours later, I'm faxing a column that I'm satisfied with and that blossomed from the smallest kernel of an idea. It restores my confidence and helps me realize that I can write about practically anything I want.

# CHEYENNE POET

*Norman Arrington*

He spoke to black eyed children  
With old women's words  
And wrapped his forms in the ancient language  
Learned in the sacred circle  
Of his grandfathers

Long ago in the place  
Of the beautiful black spider  
He turned his skin inside out  
And gnawed hot red meat  
From his bones

Yesterday an echo of his voice  
Called to me  
Out of a different time  
Where dust and shadows on hard ground  
Dim his footprints

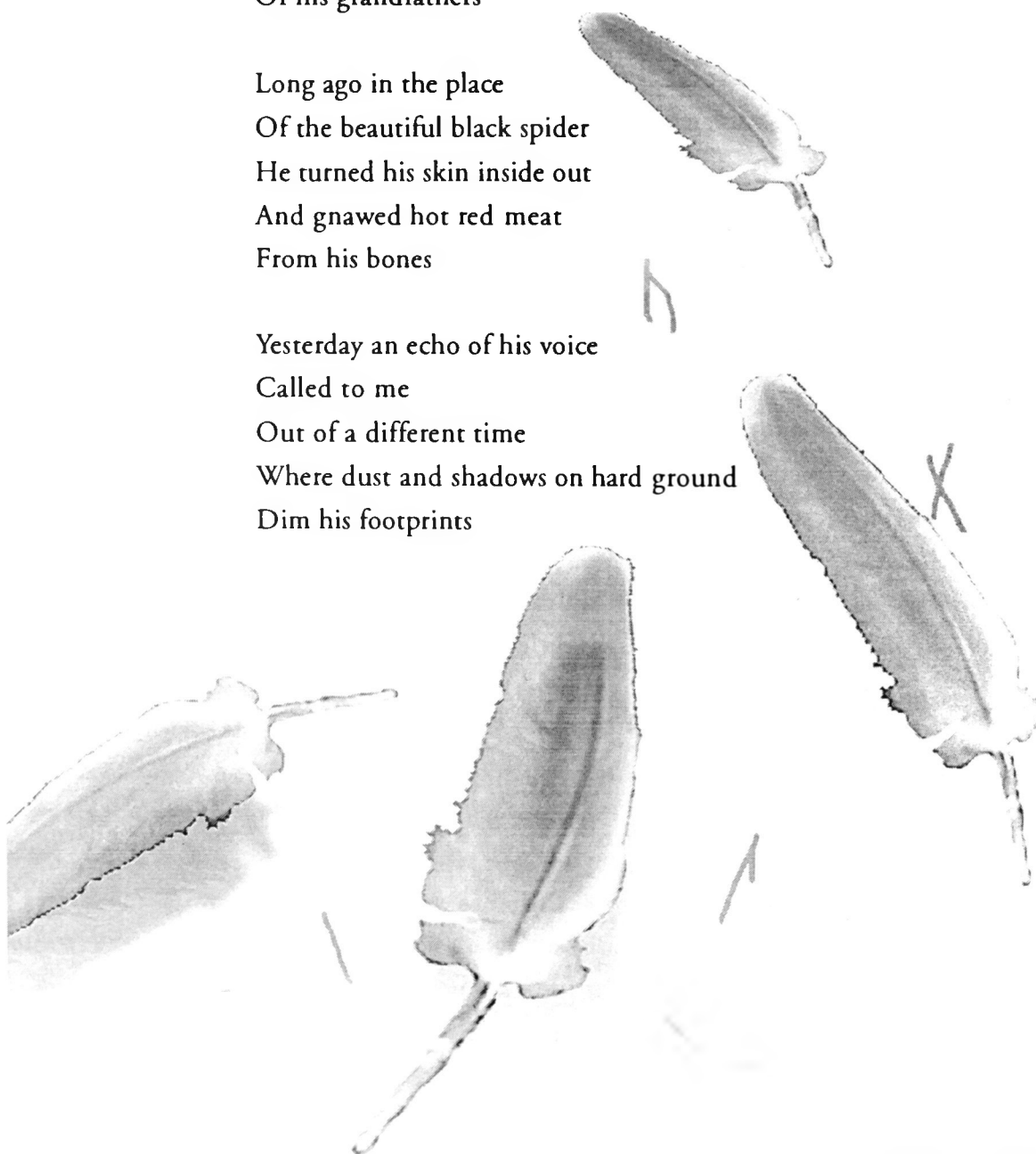


ILLUSTRATION BY JAN BRADFIELD

# MADE IN OKLAHOMA

*by Pat Sturm*

"Hi, Mom."

For the third time that week, we'd deposited capital into Ma Bell's coffers. The more the world disappointed Cindy Robinson, once of Weatherford, the more often she called home.

"I think I almost got mugged today, but I didn't realize it at the time."

Great. For this we'd invested every extra penny in dance lessons, gymnastic lessons, singing lessons, and time and gasoline to get there for almost eighteen years? And now, could I merely stand in the kitchen nearly two thousand miles away, unable to play Mama Bear and slap that mugger into the middle of next Tuesday?

Sage advice warns us to "Be careful what you wish, for you shall surely get it." The axiom stabbed me deeply the day I watched the kid disappear into the accordion tunnel leading to the airplane bound for New York City. Clad in pale green overalls, hightop Reeboks, and a puffy peach leather jacket, and hauling a dance bag splitting with the essentials of a nineteen-year-old, my red haired, fresh faced daughter set out to Make It On Broadway. She looked twelve. My heart felt a hundred and twelve.

I should have known. We'd worked hard to see that Cindy had the best training the state had to offer. Dance lessons since age two topped off by two summers at Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute made her marketable in dance.

Voice lessons at SWOSU and Oklahoma City University developed a resonant sound. And her rise up OKC's Lyric Theatre ladder (apprentice at 15, full chorus at 16, dance captain at 17, secondary leads at 18) clinched our fate: she would venture into the biggest, meanest city in the world and offer her talents to the quirkily selective powers of the theatre. I would pace the floor in calm, rural Weatherford and field phone calls.

"Never come up here without connections," she advised me to advise anyone else who might want to follow in her footsteps. Such wisdom after three weeks. "You can't even get an apartment here without knowing somebody." I had hyperventillated when she found a space to share with two other girls for only \$1600 a month. One room, a kitchenette, and a tempermental steam heater.

"Surely you can find something cheaper," I wailed.

"Mo-om. This one is a bargain, believe me."



IMAGE COMPOSITE BY J. BRADFIELD, SCOTT BOYD

Hefting someone else's discarded couch from the street to the apartment had also seemed a bargain. Hefting it back down again after refusing to share their tiny space with the city of roaches ensconced in the upholstery proved it otherwise.

We on the Oklahomafront raided cellar and attic; we packed up long-stored pans and blankets and silverware to stock the empty space. The UPS man enjoyed the installment story of our daughter the actress in New York City.

But Cindy had not gone to the Great White Way to languish in a rather ratty apartment with occasional heat. (At \$1600 a month it should have had gold leaf panels.) In addition to developing her talent, we'd also tried to instill solid midwestern values like self-confidence, goal orientation, and chutzpah. My husband says we created a pushy little broad. At any rate, during those first three weeks she did two shows at the World Trade Center and answered an ad in the paper calling non-Equity (actors' union) members who wanted to be Equity members to audition for *Candide*, slated for production in Atlanta. Hoping for a chorus part, she hardly needed Ma Bell to announce that she'd snagged the lead. Money rolled in for eleven weeks, the reviews praised her talent, she got her Equity card, and an agent called, wanting to represent her. Incredible luck.

Back in the city, however, she found the Big Apple peeled. In desperation, she took a job singing telegrams. "I was a raisin on Wall Street today, Mom," she phoned. She also donned a banana suit for an art gallery opening and a

chicken suit (plus a dozen balloons) for an executive birthday party. Of course she reached her destinations for these stellar performances in the most dignified of all New York transportations — the subway.

Again I felt shortness of breath in my safe haven in middle America. "Don't worry, Mom," she assured me. I look weirder than most New Yorkers, so they mainly leave me alone." I worried.

She continued to audition for shows.

Cindy (on Monday): I have an audition for *Forty-Second Street* tomorrow.

Mom (on Tuesday): How'd it go?

Cindy: Oh, fine. It was me and the rest of the tapping Amazons. The director took one look at my height and cut me without so much as a tap. And I had on heels and high hair and everything.

At 4' 11", her height, or lack of it, served to keep her out of Broadway chorus lines. Instead, she had to audition for nasty old leads. One of those was for the national tour of *Into the Woods*. Three times they called her in; three times she got thanks, but no thanks. Then about five months after the closing of *Candide*, and after about 50 singing telegrams and balloon deliveries, her agent called to say that they wanted to see her for *Into the Woods* again. "I don't know why," he said, "but they do."

This time she used Ma Bell only as a courtesy to call me at school. "Mom, I'm on BROADWAY!" Her incredible luck had kicked in again. Stephen Sondheim, writer of *Into the Woods*, had been at that fourth audition and

declared her hired — not for the tour, but for the Broadway production. While she was officially cast in a walk-on at the end of the show, she also covered three leads and went on in those parts over forty times in eleven months.

I don't know which subsequent event thrilled me the most: seeing her in the *Woods* float on TV (and hearing her name announced by Willard Scott to the whole of the United States) in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, or sitting in the audience in New York while she played Little Red Riding Hood. I mentally bit my nails waiting for the orchestra to strike up the overture. I loved my kid desperately, but she was just from Oklahoma, after all. How would she compare to all those professional people who'd done show after show 'til it had become their second — no, first nature? Oh me of little faith....

She skipped out in red cape and red curly wig, a sassy lass scarfing the baker's wife's cookies. She taunted the wolf, consoled Cinderella after the prince strayed, and helped Jack in the Beanstalk to go on after the giant orphaned them both. That evening I saw not Cindy Robinson, talented little girl from Weatherford, Oklahoma, but Cindy Robinson, leading actress — and rightly so — in a Broadway musical. Savvy New York theatregoers saw the same personna; the rise in applause when she took her bow affirmed my opinion. And yes, I did the motherly bit and leaned to the stranger next to me and whispered, "That's my daughter." The woman passed it on. After the show, I stood back while Cindy signed autographs outside the theatre.

A month after *Into the Woods* closed, Cindy began two-and-a-half years in the national tour of *Peter Pan*, with twelve weeks of it back on Broadway, and followed with an international tour of *Evita*. Now married to actor/director Jim Alexander, she's also come full circle at Lyric Theatre, playing leads in three summer productions. One evening as we wound down after a Lyric show she said, "Mom, I used to get so mad at those people in New York. They'd say, almost right to my face, 'Who is she? How'd she just walk in off the street and get this job?' But I didn't just walk in off the street. I'd had experience. I'd done at least twenty shows before I ever went to New York."

A trained professional at nineteen, her career was forged before she ever left the state. In every sense of the word, Cindy Robinson, Broadway actress, was made in Oklahoma.

REVIEW:

MICHAEL WALLIS'

WAY DOWN YONDER IN THE INDIAN NATION

*Melissa Bruner*

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On a crisp, blue-sky Oklahoma football Saturday afternoon, it seemed particularly fitting to read about the past and present of the state so famous—or infamous—for its strong and abiding beliefs in God, America, football, and barbecue (and here, the hierarchy of these things is debatable). Michael Wallis' most recent book, *Way Down Yonder in the Indian Nation*, is rich with details about well-known features of Oklahoma, but also provides glimpses of lesser-known people, places, and traditions.

The book is difficult to categorize. It's not exactly history or travel writing or sociological study or tall tale, but it has elements of each. This book, a collection of sixteen essays, is really a celebration and exploration of Wallis' own fascination with the state, also depicted in his *Route 66: The Mother Road*.

In a dramatic and poetic introductory essay, Wallis provides a concise, balanced history of Oklahoma, giving equal time to the state's glory moments and shameful blots on the state's founders. He also establishes the tone and theme of the remainder of the book by claiming that Oklahoma is a state well-known through stereotypes (mostly unflattering) but still lacking a sense of identity, among its own

residents and elsewhere in the country. Here Wallis establishes the series of contrasts that follow in other chapters: the state's rugged terrain and the mansions of Tulsa; the 50-yard line of a football field and the pulpit of a "Bible Belt" church; descendants of royalty and cattle thieves. In her introduction to *Cimmaron*, a novel set in Oklahoma, Edna Ferber states that "Anything can have happened in Oklahoma. Practically everything has." Wallis vividly illustrates this in the essays comprising the remainder of this book.

Some of Oklahoma's famous residents receive fresh and insightful treatment from Wallis. For example, Woody Guthrie's sad life is retold as most native Oklahomans have heard it from childhood, but Wallis also examines Guthrie's lack of acceptance in Okemah, his hometown, and the efforts of some present-day Okemahns to recognize Guthrie's legacy.

On the other end of the social spectrum, oilman Frank Phillips is presented as the patriarch of the "family" of Phillips Petroleum Company. Wallis portrays Frank Phillips as a man of contradictions, "a riddle waiting to be solved." Phillips was a shrewd businessman who entertained outlaws with rowdy barbecues at his sprawling ranch, but was equally



comfortable at sparkling high-society evenings in his Bartlesville mansion. His devotion to his wife, "Lady Jane," contrasts with his reputation as a ladies' man.

Most of this essay centers on Woolaroc, the museum/lodge/resort that was Phillips' refuge and is perhaps his greatest legacy. Wallis drops names of politicians, outlaws, and entertainers who were Phillips' guests; he also catalogues the groups of Boy Scouts, veterinarians and others who were welcomed as guests of the lodge. Although its social glory days passed with the death of Frank Phillips, Woolaroc still hosts countless visitors each year and is, as Will Rogers said, "the most unique place in this country."

Also featured in Wallis' collection are essays describing Oklahoma's contributions to culture and art. Gilcrease, Philbrook, and Woolaroc are mentioned as outstanding museums with impressive collections. Wallis devotes a chapter, though, to Tulsa's Art Deco architecture. Wallis' chapter on Oklahoma's major contribution to the culinary arts, barbecue, is reverent and almost worshipful.

Since Oklahoma is a state with a colorful history, Wallis features well-known actual

Oklahoma ghosts and haunted spots. Although the examples included in this chapter are certainly interesting and worthy of inclusion, there are several legendary spooks and tales that are missing. However, Wallis uses an entire chapter to a sketch of a Tulsan who is a descendant of one of history's most chilling and enduring monsters: Count Dracula.

*Way Down Yonder in the Indian Nation* provides an enjoyable and stimulating new assessment of Oklahoma's unsung merits. If the state does suffer from a lack of identity, Wallis' collection—if it receives the circulation and attention it deserves—may help to establish Oklahoma as a state worthy of respect for its diverse and colorful past and present instead of a state so inconsequential it can be eliminated from road atlases. The book, a June 1993 publication of St. Martin's Press, is \$18.95 hardcover and is available in most bookstores.



## VACATION PICTURES

*Helen Maxson*

My son Bill wanted to go to the Grand Canyon, so the day he finished the sixth grade we set off to see it, along with a number of other marvels we had built into a two-week itinerary. I was tired from a year in the classroom, so the idea of vacating my day-to-day life was attractive. I was looking for refreshment, to see landscape not available in Oklahoma, to glimpse alien lifestyles that would broaden my perspective on things. I had a new camera with which I would capture all this refreshment so I could partake of it for the rest of my life.

The trip delivered immediately. As we headed toward Amarillo, I marveled at the deception in the fields along I-40. There did not seem to be much distance between me and the cows we passed, but since they looked like tiny plastic toys, I knew they were very far away. The rows of crops running perpendicular to the highway seemed to grow toward each other as the eye followed them outward, the distance between them shrinking as they approached the horizon. They seemed to radiate from a distant vanishing point, blades of a fan sweeping by us in one direction as we passed in the other. I was pleased. The process of vacating had started already. I wasn't seeing the usual sights of my life any more.

Crossing the mountains just east of Albuquerque offered, not only the refreshment of physical beauty, but also the intimation of something beyond themselves, something that promised, if only I could possess it permanently, to keep my perspective on life unskewed no matter how long before the next vacation. The altitude,

the sudden vistas out and down, the evergreens enfolding us, all seemed part of some monument to the best the earth can produce, and to the creative power behind it. The freeing sense I had of the world falling away as I progressed upward, my feelings of awe appropriate to a cathedral and comfort appropriate to a warm quilt as I drove down brook-side roads overarched with foliage, the play of sunlight on the brook and in the depths of the woods I peered into from the road, the road's paradoxical journey across and around in order to get over, the sense of power and strength we find in the massive shape that a mountain is: all these combined to give this landscape a monumental character. The mountains seem something ultimate and transcendent, no doubt for many who live among them, and especially for those who vacation in them, looking for something they can take home to cure the ills of everyday life. I shot as many rolls of film in the mountains as I had originally bought for the whole trip.

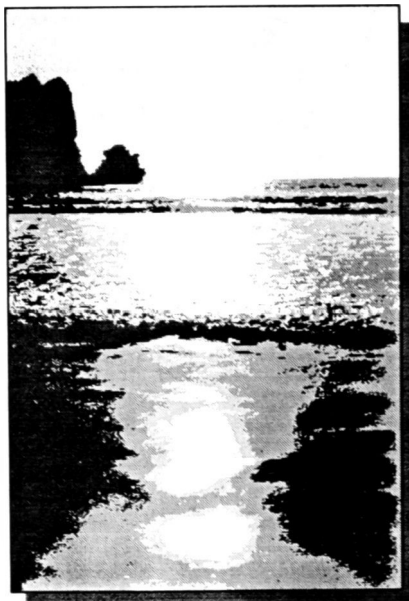
The Grand Canyon, of course, is a huge ditch carved in rock by water and wind. But even for those who live near it, it cannot fail to evoke an awe of something beyond rock, water, and air. It has its own list of monumental characteristics: the dramatic depth of the canyons, the multiplicity of rock forms scattered about within the rim, the ten-mile distance from north to south rim, the birds flying within the canyon that make it seem a universe in itself, the billions of years that painstakingly produced not only the canyon itself, but also the strata of rock in which it lies, the subtle gradations of hue that color the rocks, changing as the sun moves across the sky: all these speak of a largeness that we can only start to comprehend, of something unbelievable that,

because it is right there in front of us, we must believe in. Bill and I watched the sun rise on the Grand Canyon. The stillness was a strong presence despite the birds announcing the dawn, an unsettling presence. I guess I expected some sort of commotion when the sun broke the eastern horizon, but none occurred. The stillness continued as the sun cleared the rocks. Since I was studying a surface to the west, I almost missed the event. And then, a different kind of activity than I had anticipated began. The rising sun in the east shone a wash of yellow on the rocks in the west, starting at the canyon's rim and spreading slowly downward as the sun moved upward. One stratum after another glowed into color: red, brown, gray, orange, black, red; vertical cliffs of hard rock alternating with gentle slopes of softer, more easily eroded material. And I had a sense of the rocks slowly moving into the sunlight as if into an embrace, some surfaces boldly jutting into it, others shyly opening to it, letting the light into its recesses, one at a time. Later, as the sun spread its light more evenly from a higher point in the sky, the romance ended. But even then, it was no feat to see in the rocks something more than rocks.

The danger of "falling in," by the way, is real. For some reason, I was glad it was. It was only when I was holding on to a tree that I would approach a sheer cliff at the rim and look straight down. If no tree was available, I took my pictures scooting forward on my rear end, shooting across, not down. We watched a rock squirrel disappear

nonchalantly over the edge of the rim. My head spun briefly. But the danger helped satisfy my need for unusual truths that would expand my ordinary life when I took it up again.

From Arizona, we headed to California to visit family. Twenty years ago, I had driven Route One, the narrow road along the coast, between San Diego and San Francisco. I remembered the drama of feeling sandwiched between mountains immediately to the left and abrupt drops to the ocean immediately to the right. I wanted to experience it again, and to give my son the same



PHOTOGRAPH BY LISA BRADFORD

opportunity. He wanted simply to say he had waded in the Pacific Ocean. Either way, we both wanted to drive to San Francisco on Route One. Needing to make time, I drove most of the northward journey in California on the interstate east of the coastal mountains. We crossed over to the ocean and found Route One just south of Santa Cruz. Immediately, we encountered signs offering free access to the ocean. We pulled off the road across from a particularly lovely beach with a particularly lively surf and a broad view out to sea. The driver in the California car behind us gave the thumbs-up as he passed, glad, I guess, that we deprived Okies would get to experience the ocean.

Of course, the sea is always suggestive of more than just rhythmically moving salt water, even if one has access to it every day. The huge, fluid interface between continents, it bespeaks the beginning of life, and evokes several notions as refreshment: the mysterious power of the waves; the immense pressure it must exert downward at

its deepest points; the vast expanses that it would present to one stranded on it; the drama of the breaking waves as they run up the beach and then recede, leaving porous, creamy foam behind; the energy of its counter-currents as they contort the waves they create; the green glassy undersides of the waves as they crest; the lacework of foam that overlies the glass. We knew we were in a world apart. Bill built a ritual sand castle and smashed it in a ritual dance of kicking and stomping. As he built, I gave into the hypnosis of the waves, staring for a long while and drawing as much salt as possible into my lungs, hoping that enough would stick to conjure up the ocean in my Oklahoma living room.

Having taken possession of the ocean, in lungs, on film, in spirit, we headed north to my aunt's home near San Francisco, and then east across Nevada, into the Salt Lake Valley. In Salt Lake City, we savored yet another unusual experience of monumental proportions, chancing on a rehearsal of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. For me, an avid lover of choral music, it was the high point of the trip. Those who take a guided tour of the Tabernacle are told that the building seats 6500 people, and that the organ has 11,650 pipes in it. The tour guide took us to the very back of the Tabernacle, and from the very front, a woman speaking in an unamplified voice told us in clearly audible and distinct terms that she would tear a piece of paper into strips. She did so, and it sounded like it was happening right next to us. Then she told us she would drop three straight pins, one at a time, on the table in front of her, followed, for contrast, by a nail. Each pin made a distinct sound, followed by a much louder clunk—the nail. The Tabernacle has phenomenal

acoustics created by an inverted dome roof. Imagine the sound of a 325-member choir, one of the finest choirs in the world, in that space. I do not have a highly-developed musical ear. I have thought more than once that a recording of a certain piece of music had more vitality and clarity of sound than the performed version I was hearing, at that moment, live. But, having heard several recordings of the Tabernacle Choir, I knew as I sat there in Salt Lake that no recording could ever capture the full sound of that choir in that building. It was a dense, enveloping sound; yet each component was clearly defined in itself. The crystalline highs, the deep, rich lows, the vibrant middle tones helped create a fabric in which no strand was lost. I greedily strove to impress on my memory not only the sound, in every detail, but also the experience of hearing it. For me, a real transportation results when I let a melody take me on its journey of notes, hear tones in harmony with each other, participate in their rhythmic interplay, and appreciate the timbre of a strong, lovely voice or instrument. I knew while I sat there on my journey that memory would never do it justice, no matter how greedily I journeyed.

From Salt Lake, we drove to Colorado, where we took a steam train into the mountains, visited the cliff dwellings of the ancient Anasazi Indians, and went white-water rafting in 43 degree water so swollen with spring run-off that it carried us over rocks usually one and a half stories tall. All these activities were the raw material of monumental experiences; all of them, perfectly alien destinations for two Oklahoma vacaters. When we finally came home, it was with a clear sense that we had been away, and had been broadened by our adventures. The rolling green and gold of



Oklahoma just before harvest looked Edenic after the Panhandle emptiness we passed through on the way home, and honestly lovely to our refreshed sensibilities.

And yet, there was more to the vacation than loveliness. One of my strongest impressions was of the vast amount of barren desert we passed through. It was not beautiful or magic as essays on the desert have suggested. It was drab, ugly, monotonous, and even frightening. Realizing that I had neglected to fill my gas tank at the last human outpost for nearly a hundred miles on a relentlessly hot day was a new experience for me. I was fairly sure I had the gas to make it to the next town on the map, but not positive. The safety net of civilization was gone. In the Grand Canyon, I could look at danger while avoiding it. Here, I was caught in its midst. True, I took comfort in the frequent emergency phones on the side of the road, but even they suggested the seriousness of my situation. One could say that my fear was a genuine vacating of the day-to-day of Weatherford, Oklahoma, a form of what I was looking for. The fact that I don't say it reveals my aversion to anything problematic in my getaway. I wanted ease and reassurance, not dramatic variations on the stress of everyday life.

And we were blessed with a smooth trip. But although stress was largely missing, the mundane was not. We spent far more time crossing monotonous, arid land on the way to the monuments than we did in their presence. I don't remember the series of fast food joints that provided most of our nourishment on the trip, or the series of Motel 6 rooms where we slept when we weren't camping. My son does remember their swimming pools, but he swims in a similar pool

every day in Weatherford. I do remember a restaurant-video store in Monticello, Utah, at a tiny crossroads in the middle of nowhere where we turned east toward Colorado. It was getting ready to storm, and we still had a few hours to drive before we could put up our tent. It would be a dreary drive.

And I remember watching a teen-ager in the restaurant-video store while we had supper. He had long, somewhat greasy blond hair, earrings lining the outer lobe of his ear, sunglasses, and two packs of cigarettes rolled into the sleeve of his black t-shirt, perched obtrusively on his shoulder. I remember, on one hand, marveling that he existed at all in the middle of the desert. He was as unlikely there as the bright new video posters all over the walls, a counter to the desert.

But, he was part of the desert too. There was no irony in his impersonation of a 50's-60's teenager. In fact, it was not an impersonation at all. He really was the person he portrayed. And, in that naiveté, he became, for me, a counter to the mountains and the ocean. Not eternal, but specific in time and place, outdated, stale, and in an ugly place at that. Furthermore, Monticello was like many other towns on the trip, a collection of five (or fewer) buildings surrounded by vast wasteland. I wondered what it would be like to live in one of them, or to live near enough to it in the desert (where? in what?) to be able to work there daily.

The mundane was a big part of the trip. I shut it out as well as I could with the excitement of being on the road, but when I got home, it was prominent in my memories, although excluded from the photographs. In the end, it underscored what I had known all along, that seeing my trip as



a vacating of the mundane was a creative act, as was seeing the choir or the ocean as monumental, even though the beauties of life did conspire with my will in the creation. And I knew that every time I used my new camera to capture a monument, I was, to borrow the poet Wordsworth's notion, half-perceiving and half-creating. I framed and angled my pictures carefully so as to maximize their monumental nature. I won't go so far as to say that reality cannot be monumental in itself, but surely the degree of healing power we find in its wonders is proportionate to our desire for a cure.

I showed the pictures to a friend. Sad to say, new camera notwithstanding, they seemed flat compared to the soaring heights, wide gulfs, and rich textures I had thrilled to when on the scene. The "wow!" was missing. And it was startling how soon after I returned I lost my temper at a phone that kept ringing one day-to-day hassle into my life after another. It was as if I had never gone. So much for the restorative power of vacating, or of wishfully invented monuments.

And yet I realized, when I showed my pictures to my friend, that they hadn't seemed that flat the few times I had looked at them myself, just after they were developed. Seeing them through eyes that hadn't been to the places portrayed was what flattened them. And so, my eyes must have picked up a permanent change of perspective on the trip. Or perhaps I retained, through my memories of being there, the power of my wishful imagination to transform what I had seen, a power growing out of an original magic not operable in the living room. To first acquire the power as a life-long antidote, we must leave home, coming into the presence of an unusual loveliness and

mixing it with whatever evils we need it to fend off, whatever voids we need it to fill, whatever hurts we need it to mend. It may be the mixing itself that provides the original potency, a sort of alchemical process that produces not gold from base metal, but rather a golden activity in itself. In the end we are not deceived. Having heard the Tabernacle Choir cannot reduce our resistance to the telephone, or keep it from ringing. But we know, in our living rooms after the alchemy has taken place, that we have hoped it could, let ourselves believe it could, for a while. We savor the pictures of our trips in light of that faith, no matter how the day-to-day may flatten them, knowing that on some future trip, it will operate again.

# MOTHER GOOSE

*Sam Lackey*

The child's long, plaintive cry  
Flew across the inlet.  
The staccato notes of disapproval arrive  
From brother and sister  
Who knew the parents were still asleep.  
"Got to go under that . . ."  
The words sank into the hissing waves.  
The notes of the morning dove turned  
My mind around to land.

Then they were there.  
The clatter and gossip of geese.  
Canadian geese on an Oklahoma lake.  
Still in formation,  
Sliding down the tilted water  
Into a wondering crowd at the shore.

All found voices as tiny Alice  
Cast her web of innocence and bread.  
Her mother's magic carefully at rest,  
Magic of a thousand birds.  
Standing out of the charmed circle,  
She sees her gift alive.

Electric, the child quivers,  
Flexes like a bow,  
Arms full of flight;  
And, eye to eye,  
She casts her web of life in  
Long, sure, arcing shots . . .  
Into the golden throats.

# POTTER'S POND

*Jon L. Grissom*

A mile from the interstate I parked on the edge of the red sand road which Granddaddy, my Dad and I had long ago used to drive cattle. Little Keith bounded from the car like Spiderman, jumping up and down.

"Where is it? Where is it?" he cried.

Shelly, a seven year old picture of serenity, looked at me and I pointed. "It's right through there, but you can't see it from here." Actually you can't see it from anywhere until you get right next to it, as it is in a low spot and surrounded by trees.

As we walked down the bare red rock wash, the pond came slowly into view and I saw Granddaddy there, water spiders dancing in front of him, his cane pole reaching out over the water and the pigeon he cut for bait next to his feet. He gave me that big grin and I felt a little silly, carrying three poles, an ice chest, store bought worms, chicken livers, and a tackle box full of fancy lures.

"Oh, it's so pretty!" said Shelly, her oval face now filled with excitement.

Keith, always down-to-earth, said "Come on, let's fish!" So I gave him his pole first, before he took off to explore, then baited mine and Shelly's, and we settled down to fish.

The pond wasn't as big as I remembered; a copy of the image in my mind, but shrunken

somehow by time. Huge cottonwood and elm trees encircled the water, the branches reflected perfectly in the dark green shallows around the edges. The green faded to blue, then to a shimmering silver mirror of the sky. As I watched, a brave pair of bullfrogs broke through the water thirty yards away to see who had dared to disturb their domain. Scattered about on the warm red clay of the bank were the remnants of fallen trees, giving us as comfortable a seating as we could wish for.

In early statehood the main road to town had gone through here, and now the remnants of a bridge, long since abandoned, protruded from the earth at the south end like a prehistoric rib cage.

When I was small, only an occasional pickup or tractor would disturb the birds resting in the green tangle of branches which overhung the pond. Now, cars and eighteen-wheelers roared unchecked down four lanes barely over the hill to the north.

The sounds didn't bother the kids any and sure enough, they caught fish after fish. Big ones, some of them bigger than my hand! We put every one of them on the stringer just like it was a trophy catch. I watched Granddaddy as he would pull in a two-or-three-pounder, hold it up, and then let it slip without a splash back into the water.

The hours passed quickly and we ate our lunch. Keith caught a little leopard frog, which promptly got away from him, but he found a baby turtle while chasing the frog, so he was



IMAGE BY DESIGN STUDIO STAFF



happy. Both kids were getting tired of fishing and from reeling in all those 1/4-to-1/2- pound fish.

Granddaddy got up and beckoned for me, pointing to the spot he'd been fishing. I said to Shelly, "Let's try over there before we go, okay?" and we walked around to the other side of the pond.

"Wait for me!" called an anxious four-year-old voice, as Keith came running to catch up with us.

I put the ice chest and tackle box down on the smooth sand where Granddaddy had been. They each cast into the pond without tangling their lines and I had settled back when Shelly's bobber suddenly disappeared.

"Help me, Daddy!" she called as her pole bent toward the water. I started toward her when Keith yelled "I got one! I got one!" I told them both to just walk backwards and hang onto their poles.

Shelly pulled hers out first, and it was a catfish as long as Keith's leg, whiskers dragging wearily in the sand. The reflections of her in its golden eyes contrasted oddly with the wet cucumber green skin. I couldn't believe how big it was! As it flapped on the shore, Keith dragged his in and it was just as big, mouth open as if it would like to swallow him. It was a hard run as to whose mouth was widest, the kids or the fishes.

We let the little ones off of the stringer and hooked the two big ones on it. In the next few minutes, they each caught another good one. Not as big as the first two, but good enough to keep.

I could see Granddaddy grinning at me

like he did when I, twenty five years ago, would catch a big one.

After a few minutes of no more bites, they were ready to go. "Let's go show Grandfather," they said, meaning my Dad, Bill, back at the farm. So we gathered everything up and headed back to the car. As we got to the rock wash, Keith said "See my pretty feathers. They were under the fishing box." In his little hand there were about a dozen beautiful gray, white and purple hued pigeon feathers.

I turned back to the pond and Granddaddy waved his worn straw hat at us. I waved back and Keith asked "What are you waving at?" a puzzled look on his face.

"Oh, I'm just waving," I said, and we turned back to the car.

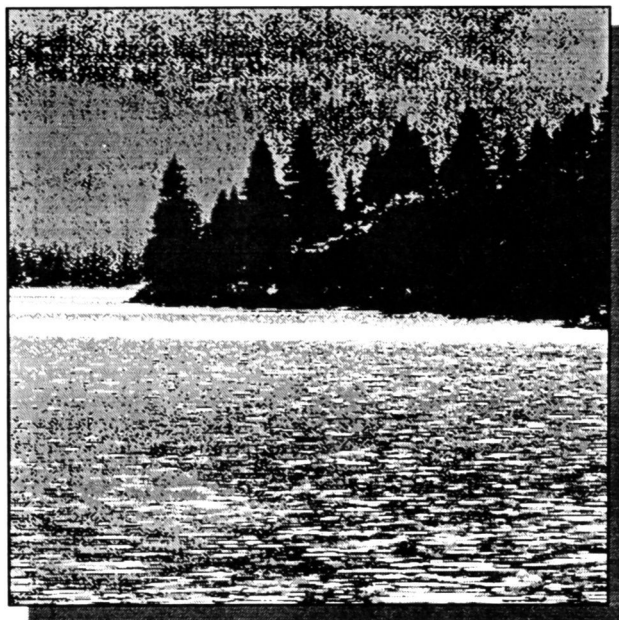


IMAGE BY DESIGN STUDIO STAFF

# OUR FARM HOME

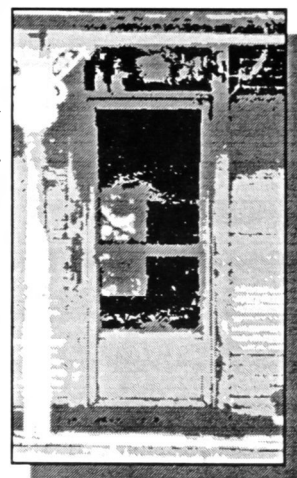
*Sherrie Sharp*

Our farmhouse was set back exactly one-half mile from the blacktop road. Of course, to get the blacktop back in 1964, one had to first travel through the small farming community of Tillar, Arkansas. Tillar's population was maybe 700 in a good year, but for those of us living in the country, Tillar was the big town. Far in this southeast corner of the state we commonly referred to our part of the world as "The Delta". I still ponder the "delta" nickname, but I suppose it accurately described the flat terrain on which our farmhouse sat. Living in this rural environment produced my fondest, most cherished memories of growing up.

One tangible memory of our country home was the gravel driveway. In fact, my knee still holds a scar of the time I crashed on my bike hurrying to get the mail. The driveway was wide enough to allow access to one '57 pickup at a time. On either side were fields used for various purposes, sometimes a cotton crop, sometimes tomatoes, but always for our explorations. Debbie and I spent much time exploring those wide-open fields. Mother didn't need to worry about us; we were always within hollering distance. The farm- untouched by materialism, crime, drugs, or pollution- provided a safe haven where we learned values, beliefs, and attitudes we still hold today. On the farm we were able to enjoy the simple pleasures of

life, such as listening to the birds as they made their nests and noticing how unbelievably big a horse's mouth is when chewing. We entertained ourselves by discovering nature and creating our own excitement. We didn't take for granted the passing of an airplane or having friends visit.

Our country farmhouse was more to us than a structure; it symbolized the foundation on which we based our living. The simple structure of our home included two small bedrooms, a kitchen, and living room. The house had one bathroom the family shared. This plain vanilla home came complete with enough furniture for practical use but certainly nothing to picture in any magazine. The living room was equipped with Early American decor and a vinyl red hassock we rolled on and fought over. Our formica-topped yellow kitchen table served as the hub of activity. Anytime friends or family came by, the kitchen served as the gathering place, even though it was probably the smallest room in the house. Debbie and I shared a bedroom with a double bed and pulled the bedspread over the headboard each night to make a tent. We dared not make a peep to alert Mother of our mischief. The most noteworthy piece of furniture in our home was a huge rolltop desk from my father's family. Mother had appropriately painted it green to correspond to the decorating style of the time.



We felt fortunate to have a black and white television. *Bonanza* was a Sunday night favorite, especially when Debbie and I convinced people from church that Mom and Dad wanted us to invite them over. On the way home, our parents would discover company was coming, but by then it was too late to alter any plans. Debbie and I always enjoyed sitting around listening to the grownups. Company always brought a welcome diversion. One day, however, without company present, that little black and white television announced the death of President Kennedy. That day we did not feel so fortunate.

During each weekday morning, Mom busily prepared lunch for Dad and the farmhands in a kitchen equipped with only the bare necessities. Lunch usually was fairly substantial because working in the fields until dark was typical, and night fell late. We would gather around that metal-legged table, feasting on fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, black-eyed peas, both fresh and fried green tomatoes, cantaloupe, and fried okra. (Healthy preparation of food was unheard of back then.)

I can't remember ever helping Mother cook or clean up, but do remember her taking a nap with us when our noon meal was over. She would rest at the end of the bed, tell a story, and before Debbie or I had even closed our eyes, would be fast asleep. The house was unairconditioned, but the window to the north allowed a small breeze to blow those off-white curtains. I would try to sleep as well but often found myself dreaming of things little girls imagine while watching flapping curtains during nap time. I wouldn't dare get out of bed for fear the creaking

hardwood floor would awaken Mom. Instead, I envisioned the day I too would become Miss America, my Prince Charming would come for me just like Cinderella, and, of course, when I would have my very own Barbie and Ken family. I suspect Debbie dreamed, too, only of frogs, mudpies, and various other ways she could torment me after our rest. Eventually, I'd find myself climbing out of bed renewed, refreshed, and ready for the afternoon treat.



That treat became a daily occurrence when the cotton was picked. As each trailer became fuller with the soft white crop, my sister and I were allowed jumping privileges in the trailer. We didn't need a trampoline; it was ready-made. As we bounced in the middle of the cotton, sweat poured from our bodies. However, undeterred, we carried on, waiting for Dad and the farmhands to complete their assignment. The treat we longed for would finally come to pass. At the destined time the huge, juicy watermelon would be pulled from the irrigation ditch. We would all sit around, eat watermelon, discuss the day's cotton, and eventually Debbie, Mother, and I would take the cotton to the gin.

After returning home from the gin we would watch television, play outside, or listen to Mother read a book. Evening time events were minimal as we needed our sleep for the next day's labor. Each day brought some new adventure. One day our mare gave birth to Prissy, the colt we named. Other days we would play on the swingset or make mudpies. We watched in awe as a crop dusting plane flew over. We listened to the birds singing and thought they were talking to us. We bought a car that required Debbie and me to hold the back doors while traveling or they would come open. These were simple treasures but helped provide lasting firm foundations. Amazingly, with only basic necessities we had more than we needed in life. We appreciated each day. We laughed and

worked together as a family. We loved each other and the blessings God had given us. I'm thankful for this simple, uncomplicated beginning to life. It's those memories I'll always hold dearest to my heart. I *did* marry Ken, but haven't yet become Miss America. I'm beginning to conclude that this may not happen. However, of one thing I am certain... life is richest when it's simplest.



PHOTOGRAPH BY LAURA BROMLEY

## ONE PLUM-BLOSSOM DAY

*Maggie Aldridge Smith*

One plum blossom day  
I would not linger  
you kissed my lips  
tenderly, just so;  
these many years later  
I've always wondered  
Where?  
And why?  
Did I go?

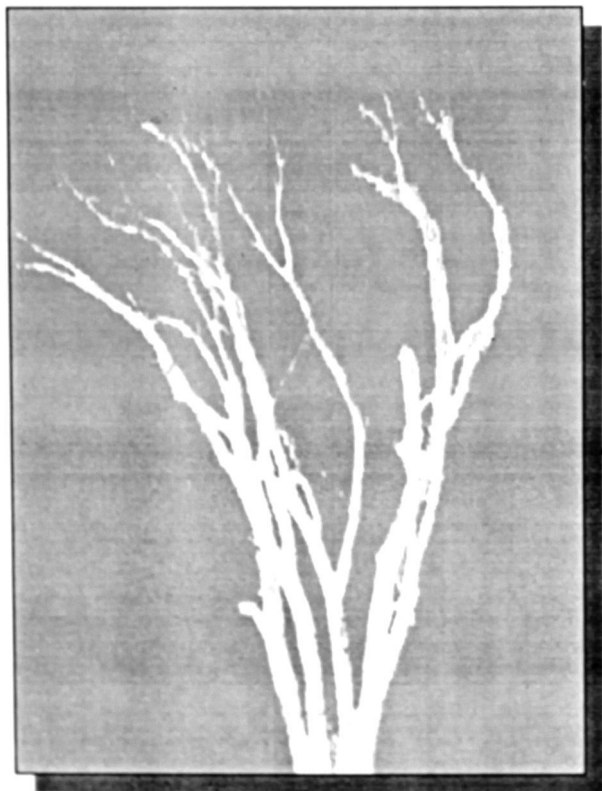


ILLUSTRATION BY BRANDON RAPER

## ONE SOLEMN NIGHT

*Maggie Aldridge Smith*

One solemn night  
The big, whitened dead tree  
Left the high bank  
Of some sixty summers,  
Laying its great length  
In the valley.  
No storm or wind  
presaged its passing.  
No lightning strike  
Brought it down.  
The soil is unscarred,  
As other roots surround it.  
But there, against the sky,  
A huge vacancy cries.  
Surely I,  
In passing from this earth  
Will leave no scar.  
But, oh, let there be  
In the atmosphere,  
A void,  
for me.



## TO PLOW A FIELD

*Michael Cervini*

The old man climbed into his tractor, gently settling himself into the ancient rusty seat. A scrap of foam rubber and a few rags stitched together made up the cushion upon the metal frame. He set his water jug beside him in the cab. Reaching over, he opened the windows and switched on the fan.

Today was sure going to be a scorcher, he thought. One of these days he was going to have to break down and buy a new tractor, one of those fancy ones with air-conditioning and a radio. He started up the engine and put it into reverse. Looking over his shoulder, he lined up with the plow sitting outside the barn and backed up to it until he felt the familiar nudge that told him he was positioned just right. He climbed down and hooked up the plow and the hydraulic hoses which would raise and lower the blades as he plowed up his fields.

It was late August, and time to begin plowing up his fields to get them ready for the winter wheat he would plant in September or October, depending on the weather. Pulling out onto the dirt road between two fields, he looked up at the sky. Not a cloud up there. Just a burning sun making everything so bright it seemed to blot out even the shadows. Looking off to the side, out across the fields, he casually watched the bugs, grasshoppers and locusts, darting around. They never seemed to have a plan, never seemed to know where they were going to end up next. The dust his tractor kicked up, as it traveled down the

dirt road, must have agitated them. They just jumped and flitted about, and annoyed him.

He drove on past his near fields toward the far ones. He would start there and work his way back. He liked doing it that way, so the last part of his work would be the easiest and closest to home. It would take him the better part of a week to finish all his fields and when he thought about it, he considered that there was really nothing very easy about it. It was dull and monotonous sitting in the cab all day, and with hot sunny days like this, the sun beating through the glass of his cab would fry him. But he was used to it. He was tough. And he knew how to take care of himself out in these open fields. Always make sure your tractor is in good running shape—it's your only way back home. Carry plenty of water with you—you could sweat to death before you even knew anything was wrong. He had always heard that it was wise to bring food along too, and an extra jug of water, just in case. But he never ate while out in the fields, and never needed much water. He'd been doing this for so long now he could handle any problem that might come up.

At last he reached his farthest field and swung his tractor around to the far edge to begin plowing in long straight rows back toward the next field. As he looked back across his fields, he saw the heat waves fluttering up from the ground distorting his vision of anything beyond. Not that there was much to see. The house and barn were long out of sight and there was nothing but wide open flatness in between. Sure was going to be a scorcher today. He was a methodical man, not given to superstitions or fears. When

there was work to be done, he did it no matter what. Heat didn't bother him any more than cold did. It was just mother nature, and he was always one with the land, working it and taming it, until it produced for him what he wanted it to produce.

As he plowed down the first row, he wiped the sweat and dust off his brow with his sleeve. Seeing the thick, damp layer of dirt on his shirt, he looked around, then sniffed. He'd gotten so used to it that he hardly ever noticed the musty, biting smell of the dirt floating up around him. But thinking about it now, he felt like sneezing. He reached for the jug of water and took a swig. That would do him for a good while. He just had to get his mind off that sun beating on him. He knew it was going to be hot today, but no hotter than any that he'd seen before. It was only a typical Oklahoma summer day. He'd listened to the radio that morning before he set out. Record breaking heat they'd said. Stay inside if possible, or at least stay covered. What did they know? They didn't even call themselves weathermen anymore. Meteorologists, they liked to call themselves; college kids depending on radar imaging and other such nonsense. The old man would have been willing to bet that not one of them had ever worked in a field in their lives. They had no idea how to take care of themselves on a hot day.

Row after row, he plowed on, sweat dripping off his forehead, nose and chin. He squinted to see the row in front of him off to his left where he had already plowed. It was important to keep straight lines. He never wore sunglasses. That was only for the younger generation and he had

never gotten into the habit of wearing them. Unconsciously, he reached for the water jug again. Sure was getting hot, he thought. He figured it would get well into the nineties today, but to hell with what those weather kids said. Though it did seem like it was ninety already, and dry, too.

The sun climbed higher and the old man began to sweat less. It was beginning to evaporate from his body before it had a chance to drip off him, but he only noticed the brightness of the sun, and the heat. "Yep, gonna be a rough one today," he mumbled out loud to no one. "Might even be into the hundreds by now."

About an hour later the old farmer felt he needed a break. Be good to get out of this glass oven and stretch my legs, he thought. He switched off the engine and climbed down from the cab. Carrying his water jug, he walked around into the shade provided by the tractor. Leaning against the tire, he took a long cool drink and contemplated the sun, the brightness, and the heat. Definitely into the hundreds, he thought. Maybe even a hundred and ten or twenty. He wasn't even sure anymore. But it didn't matter. He had work to do, so he started around to the cab to hoist himself back up.

That's when he heard it, a low, steady hiss. He paused for a moment; then he knew what it was. "Damn," he said. "I hope this don't ruin my whole day. I can't afford to be driving way out here too many times just for this one field." He opened the metal cover over the engine and looked at the source of the noise. A thin jet of steam was spewing from one of the radiator hoses. No matter. It was only a loose connection between the hose and the engine block. He



grabbed a screw driver from the cab and tightened the fitting, and then gave it an extra twist for good measure.

Climbing up into the cab, he wondered how much coolant he had lost. He'd find out soon enough, he figured. As he started up the engine again, he kept an eye on the temperature gauge. So far, so good. He put the tractor in gear and continued on down the row.

Not twenty minutes later, however, he saw the needle of the gauge climbing up toward the 'overheat' zone. "Damn," he said again as he shut the engine off. Sitting there thinking about his alternatives, his mind was working more on how to finish the field, not how to get him and his tractor back home. He never doubted for a minute that he'd get it back home. He just wanted to finish this one field today so he wouldn't have to come back tomorrow.

There was enough water in his three-gallon jug to keep the tractor going until he finished. By then it would be cooler out, and with less strain on the engine and radiator, he should have no trouble getting home. Looking around, he could not find the jug. Then he realized he had left it on the ground beside the tractor when he first noticed the leak.

"Damn heat. Making me lose my wits. Now where did I stop back there?" Walking back to where he thought he'd left the jug of water, he glanced up at the sun, but only for a second. It hurt, really hurt.

"Well, maybe it is gonna be a record-breaker today," he said. "Already feels like it could be. It damn sure is hot." He didn't usually talk out loud to himself, but today was an exception and in this kind of heat it was okay to make exceptions.

As he looked around for the jug, he was conscious of the burning sensation on the back of his neck and the dryness in his mouth. His mind wandered off to when he would be sitting around with the guys telling them about how he plowed up a field and fixed his tractor too, on the hottest day of the year.

Far off, he spied the plastic container lying on its side between two newly plowed rows. Approaching it, his apprehension grew to anger. He kicked the empty, lacerated jug up into the air. Between the shimmering heat and the blinding brightness, he had plowed right over it.

The old man walked back to his tractor. It was a source of comfort to him, a home away from home. Leaning against the front of the thing, he noticed for the first time that he wasn't sweating as much as earlier in the day. Maybe it's getting cooler out, he thought. But he knew that couldn't be. The sun was high in the sky now and it seemed to be cooking him from the inside out. His tongue felt parched and thick. If only he could have one drink.

The engine was probably cool enough now to check the radiator. Maybe, he thought, there was enough coolant left in it that he could nurse his machine back home. He'd just unhook the plow and return tomorrow. There was no doubt in his mind now. He wasn't going to finish this field today.

But the radiator was bone dry. He chuckled to himself as a perverse thought crossed his mind. He couldn't say which was dryer, him or the radiator. Turning to face the direction of his house, he considered the only option he had left, and started off, walking, in that direction.

At first he stayed on the dirt road, out of habit. But as his feet grew heavier, he decided to



cut across the fields, making a beeline for the house. It would be shorter, he thought. And no sense wasting time out here doing nothing but frying under this sun.

A half an hour later he began to wonder if it was such a wise idea cutting across the fields. It might be shorter, but it was much harder walking. The road was flat and smooth. The fields were rough, with little ruts, ridges, and the left-behinds of the last harvest. He'd already stumbled once over a large dirt clod and skinned his shin badly. The bugs kept annoying him, too. He swatted at them incessantly and cursed their buzzing around his head, though he was aware that it was him, disturbing their resting places as he walked, that caused them to fly up at him.

He stumbled on, his mind wandering. He thought about his friends and the story he'd have to tell about this. He thought about home and having a long cool drink of water. But mostly he just thought about how hot it was and how the sun seemed to burn right through the top of his head. He pulled off his cap and stroked the hair on his head. It was dry. That's funny, he thought. There's usually a river of sweat up there on days like this. "Damn, it's hot," he said out loud.

Stopping to put his cap back on, he looked around. Somehow he'd gotten off course, veered a little too far to the right. He looked up at the cloudless sky, then back toward the horizon.

"Gotta pay closer attention to where I'm headin'. Can't be wandering around all day now."

However, he decided this would be a good time to take a quick break. He was feeling tired and knew he still had a long walk ahead of him. A short rest would be all he needed. So he sat down and closed his eyes to ward off the sun. In a few minutes he was up again and heading off on

his new bearings, in the direction he knew the house to be in.

Onward he walked, wishing he was making better time. His feet were getting sore and each step hurt more than the last. He had to squint so much now that his eyes were beginning to ache. He raised his hand to his eyebrows to shield out the sun's glare. It helped a little, but not much. Most of the brightness was being reflected up from the ground in front of him. He plodded on, keeping to his bearings as best as he could.

Presently, he remembered a small pond, little more than a mud hole, that almost always held at least a small amount of water. He remembered passing by it recently and seeing some water in it. There might not be much, and it would be as muddy and dirty as he'd ever seen. Normally, he would never consider drinking it, but he knew this was not a normal situation. He was angry at his predicament and knew he had to get a drink somewhere to cool his parched tongue and cracked skin. He'd already accepted the fact that he would be suffering from dehydration when he got home, maybe even a severe case of it. But that was treatable, and with a day or two of rest he'd be good as new again. Finding something to drink now would lessen his dehydration, not to mention his thirst, only causing him to remain home until the next day. So he turned and headed off in the direction of the pond.

Onward, he walked, occasionally scanning the landscape for signs of the pond. With his hand held over his eyebrows, shielding the sun from his eyes, the old farmer thought he saw the pond off in the distance. He walked in that direction and didn't look up again until he was at the pond's edge. What he saw surprised him, then angered him. It just wasn't fair, he thought,

this streak of bad luck. In front of him lay nothing but dried, cracked earth that had once been the pond's bed. Dropping to his knees, he looked at the hard-baked clay around him, patched together like an ill-fitting jig saw puzzle with large gaps between the pieces. He clawed at the pieces, frantically in his mind, but slowly and without strength in his efforts, trying to get at the water that he hoped lay beneath. The only rewards for his efforts were scraped and cut fingers, and a growing nauseous feeling in his stomach.

Fighting back the nausea, he now understood that his situation was getting desperate. He was surprised at his own weakness and angered at his cruel fate that left him here in the middle of nowhere, under a boiling sun, without water. As he picked himself up from the pond bed, a small ache lodged itself in the pit of his stomach. He ignored it and started walking.

Instinct began to take over the man. He no longer tried to think. There were no more decisions to be made. He had to get out of the sun. He must keep moving. Time was running out on him. It was now a race.

Barely able to see through the blinding brightness, he staggered on, stumbling at times, but each time picking himself up again and continuing without pause. He hoped he was heading in the right direction. He had to be; he had no choice.

Heat can be an illusive thing. It comes without immediate pain, nor does it come all at once. It is subtle and sly, sapping the body of moisture and strength without one being readily aware of it. It is like a slow moving poison that invades the least felt parts of a person first. The heat the man felt was only the heat affecting his

skin and his tongue. The danger he never sensed was the temperature of his blood rising beyond its limits.

At one point he fell down hard and lay there for a few moments before trying to get up. When he did, he doubled over again with an excruciating cramp in his stomach. He would have cursed everything from mother nature to God himself, but he could no longer speak. The heat was suffocating. His tongue was swollen and he gasped for each breath. His lips were cracked and bloody, his skin red and peeling. As he lay there holding his stomach, he felt a trickle of blood filling his right eye from a cut on his forehead. The sensation caused him to rise again and stagger onward. And all the while the sun beat down on him mercilessly.

Walking was now a tortuous task. Each time he lifted a foot to take another step, stabs of pain shot through his hands. He could no longer stand up straight, and twice he doubled over and dropped to his knees from the cramping inside of him. Each time he got up again and forced his legs to move, though it couldn't really be called walking. Only a pathetic combination of stumbling, falling, crawling, then rising up to stumble some more, kept the man moving forward.

The old man moved blindly on, no longer considering whether he was going in the right direction. Once, when he fell down, he became aware of a slight movement just inches from his nose. Wiping the dirt from his chin, he looked and saw two small locusts partially hidden under a large old leaf. They looked like they were eyeing him, wondering what he was doing out in the sun, wondering why hadn't he found shade like they had. The farmer tried to chuckle as he

contemplated the locusts hiding themselves beneath the stalks and old vegetation, shielding themselves from the sun.

Then he thought about the stark vegetation in front of his face. Should be moisture in those things, he thought. So he grabbed some of the weeds in his hand and stuffed them into his mouth. It tasted bitter, horrible. Prickles stuck his tongue and lips, causing him to gag as he tried to suck the moisture out and swallow it. He retched and would have vomited, but there was nothing in his stomach. The unbearable heat had long since affected his mind, as well as his body. But this he never sensed. He only felt the dryness in his mouth, the pain in his stomach, and the blinding stabs of light in his eyes.

He had begun hallucinating without even being aware of it. His mind drifted back to images of far-removed places and people. He sat down at times, dreaming. Sometimes a smile would spread across his face, then a trickle of blood would ooze out from his cracked lips and his moisture-starved tongue would greedily suck it in.

Soon enough, however, he'd be back in the present, cursing his predicament and his rotten luck as he dragged his body onward. It wasn't fair that this should happen to a good man like him. He fell yet again, then got up yet again.

"I don't deserve this," he whispered. "Not me, dear Lord." The old man just couldn't accept what was happening. But then he was off dreaming again of youth and strength and happier days.

Finally, he fell down again, hard, and doubled over on his side, unable to get up. In his last lucid moments, he recalled a story he had read many years ago, as a boy. He'd long since forgotten about it, until now. Funny how

such unrelated things can come to you at the strangest of times, he thought. It was a story about a man who was traveling alone during the winter in the Arctic, in the Yukon or something. The man had frozen to death. Funny, the old farmer thought.

# PRIVILEGE

*Fred Alsberg*

Usually I am unnoticed  
on this sidewalk;  
today

there's a smile from Malaysia,  
and the greeting  
an old man saves for his cronies.

Even a wino resigned to his calcified heart  
falls to chuckling,  
and everywhere people hold the door,

for I follow someone  
in close escort.  
All heads bow down

to the two year old,  
who reigns angelically  
in a yellow dress,

and in a store window,  
a cat stops its grooming,  
and stares.



ILLUSTRATION BY JAN BRADFIELD



## CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

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**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*.

**Norman Arrington** was born in Colorado in 1941. He was raised in New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma and has traveled extensively throughout the Southwest and Ozark regions. He holds a Masters of Fine Arts degree from the University of Oklahoma and has done post-graduate study in Maine and Arizona. He has taught art in a small college, was an Artist-In-Residence with the Oklahoma State Arts Council and has run a pottery studio and a small town newspaper. Norman currently lives and works in Roger Mills County.

**Melissa Bruner** is addicted to mystery novels and Vincent Price movies. She also teaches English at Southwestern Oklahoma State University.

**Mike Cervini** is originally from the Washington D.C. area. He moved to Oklahoma about three years ago and enrolled at SWOSU about one and a half years ago, majoring in engineering. He hopes to graduate from O.U. by 1996. Though glad he left Washington, he still considers himself an Easterner through heritage. At the time he wrote "To Plow a Field," he had seen the inside of a tractor only once in his life. He hopes he isn't too far out in left field with his story!

**Jon L. Grissom** is a single parent majoring in accounting at SWOSU. He writes for pleasure and has enjoyed participating in Fred Alsberg's creative writing class. Jon grew up in Burns Flat and now resides in Weatherford with his children.

**Sam Lackey** is a native of Tulsa and received his Ph.D from Tulsa University in 1975. He has taught writing and literature at Southwestern since 1970. His poetry has been published in a

dozen journals in the U.S. and Canada. His current writing is focused on his four-year-old daughter and will be titled "The Alice Chronicles."

**Keith Long**, 36, is an instructor in Language Arts at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. He writes a weekly humor column for the *Marlow Review*.

**Helen Maxson** teaches English at Southwestern, and has a strong fascination with highways west.

**John Graves Morris** is an associate professor of English at Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma. He has had poems published in *None of the Above*, *Upriver*, and the *Wisconsin Review*.

**Sherrie Sharp** teaches at SWOSU, coaches the forensics team, and is a licensed speech pathologist. She also drives like a maniac and brakes for all malls.

Maggie Aldridge Smith was born in 1913 and grew up in Oklahoma. She has taught elementary school, Sunday school, and has published both prose and poetry for several years. She now lives in Siloam Springs, Arkansas.

Pat Sturm teaches creative language arts at Weatherford High School. She has written and published since the '80s for a lot of praise and a little money. In addition to her several publications and two books-in-search-of-publishers, she takes great pride in the more than 140

student winners of writing contests that she's guided in the past seven years.





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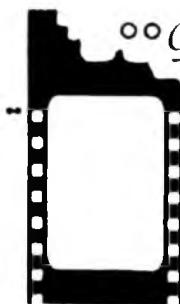


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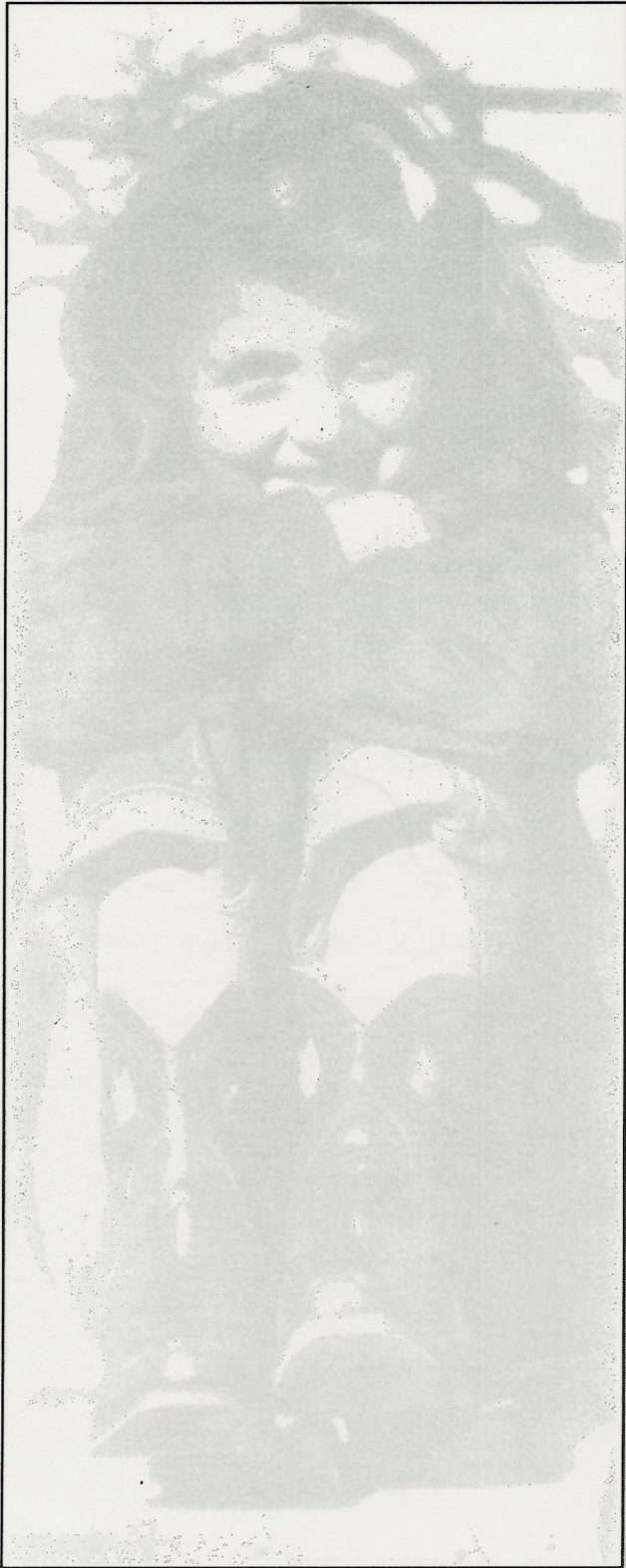
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