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George L. Hoffman

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MEDITATIONS AT THE GRAVE OF A YOUNG GIRL

George L. Hoffman

She lies apart here in this prairie earth
With but this stone to give her name and span of years
And only this infant child who died before her birth
As a sad uncertain link with her forebears.

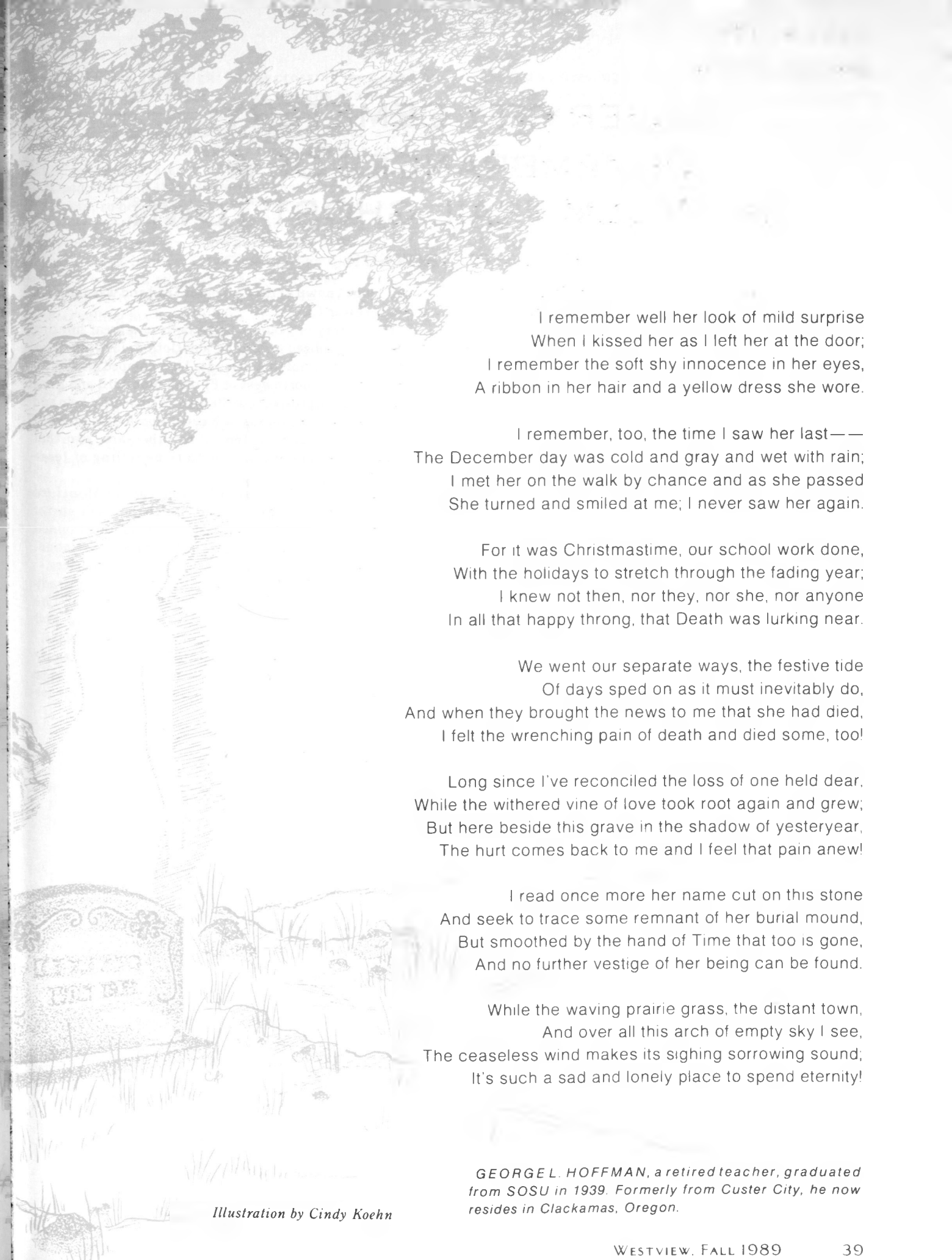
While roundabout some space away from them
In twos or threes or more, these others are at rest;
Their stones proclaim full fruitful lives and family names,
And fraternally they lie, companions yet in death.

I envy not the quiet peace they share,
For to the dead belong the dead——they are their own!
And yet, somehow, I cannot think it right or fair
That she should die so young or lie so much alone.

Or that so few of those whom she once knew
Come now in quiet meditation to this place
To think on her and how once she lived as yet we do,
And how sweetly fair she was in manner, form, and face!

I've had no souvenirs of her these many years——
no photograph, no lock of hair, no signature;
but visions in the mind put shame to souvenirs,
And my memories of how she was still endure.

I remember the lilting way she talked
And the eager way she smiled before laughter came;
I remember the graceful way she moved and walked
And the quiet way she worked and how she wrote her name.



I remember well her look of mild surprise
When I kissed her as I left her at the door;
I remember the soft shy innocence in her eyes,
A ribbon in her hair and a yellow dress she wore.

I remember, too, the time I saw her last — —
The December day was cold and gray and wet with rain;
I met her on the walk by chance and as she passed
She turned and smiled at me; I never saw her again.

For it was Christmastime, our school work done,
With the holidays to stretch through the fading year;
I knew not then, nor they, nor she, nor anyone
In all that happy throng, that Death was lurking near.

We went our separate ways, the festive tide
Of days sped on as it must inevitably do,
And when they brought the news to me that she had died,
I felt the wrenching pain of death and died some, too!

Long since I've reconciled the loss of one held dear,
While the withered vine of love took root again and grew;
But here beside this grave in the shadow of yesteryear,
The hurt comes back to me and I feel that pain anew!

I read once more her name cut on this stone
And seek to trace some remnant of her burial mound,
But smoothed by the hand of Time that too is gone,
And no further vestige of her being can be found.

While the waving prairie grass, the distant town,
And over all this arch of empty sky I see,
The ceaseless wind makes its sighing sorrowing sound;
It's such a sad and lonely place to spend eternity!

GEORGE L. HOFFMAN, a retired teacher, graduated from SOSU in 1939. Formerly from Custer City, he now resides in Clackamas, Oregon.

Illustration by Cindy Koehn