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Marj McAlister

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What Ever Happened To Autograph Books ?

-By Marj McAlister

Vicarity

Autograph books were one of those "art pieces" or entertainments or pastimes which shouldn't have been allowed to fade into oblivion. They were examples of the best in "poetry" known to the average school child. Though not original, the verses expressed a certain brand of humor, sometimes of questionable taste. These books were the nearest to "poetry" that some of us got. The thread running through all the pages was that the penman not be forgot.

Some of the complimentary closings were classics, of sorts: yours till breathing is out of style; yours till Niagara Falls; yours till you try Eaton, Ohio. Or, regarding household items: yours till the door steps; yours till the pillow slips; yours till the kitchen sinks. Even animals were addressed: yours till catfish have kittens; yours till the elephant packs his trunk. Not original, but quaint!

Some of the verses give definite advice—mostly against boys:

*Love many, trust few—
Paddle your own little canoe.*

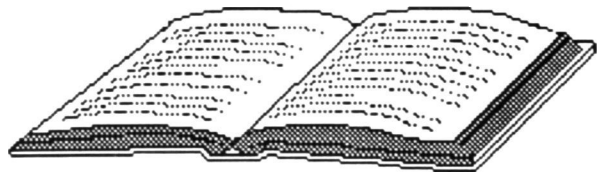
*May angels around your bedpost hover
To keep you from kicking off the cover.*

*Love your books, love your toys—
But whatever you do, don't love the boys.*

*As sure as the vines grow round the stump,
I'll be your darling sugar lump.*

*Some kiss beneath the mistletoe—
Some kiss beneath the rose—
But I think the proper place to kiss
Is just beneath the nose.*

*Man is somewhat like a wiener
Very smooth upon the skin—
But one can never tell exactly
How much hog there is within.*



Design by Scott Voigt

Now who would want such sentiments to be only a part of the past? A recurring theme is the supreme wish:

*When your days of life are ended
And these paths no more you trod,
May your name in gold be written
In the autograph of God.*

This is the autograph to end all autographs. And surely no one wants such sentiments to die.

(MARJ MCALISTER, often published in WESTVIEW, is a poet living in Oklahoma City.) *