



SOWER 1976

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Volume XXXI

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DREAMS AND OWLS DIE

Karla Bergstraesser

Kaj Munk Memorial Award for Translation

ONLY WITH YOU

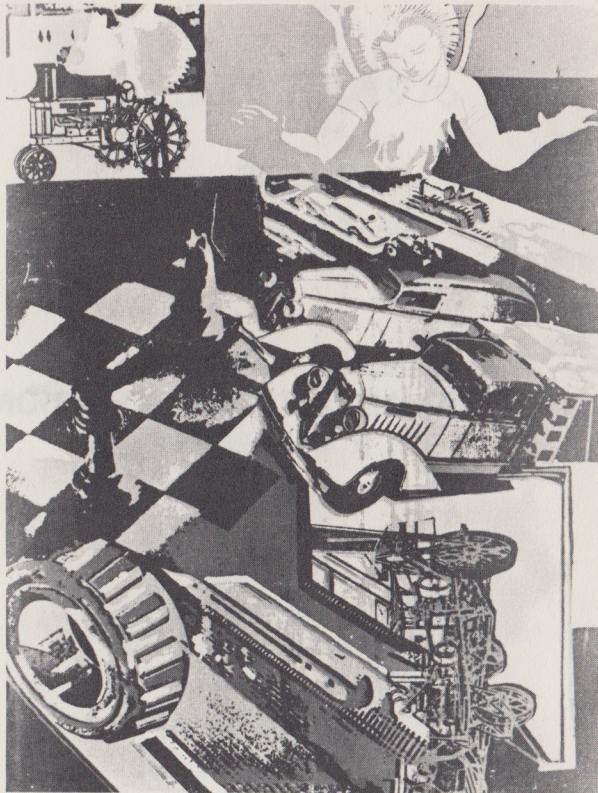
by Grethe Risbjerg Thomsen, translated by Paul Hundtoft

Hal Evens Cole Award for Excellence in the Arts

MACHINE #1

silkscreen

Paul Hundtoft



"Machine #1"
Silkscreen Paul Hundtoft

OLD MEMORIES

Ha Ha hahahaha –

The laughter of Nigerian children
 still rings loud in my mind
 and so must I listen quietly
 as it brings back to me
 simple joys that I once knew.

Onuegbunam E. Achalu

THE YEAR OF THE PUMPKIN

By George, God wouldn't have given him legs if he was supposed to sit in a rocking chair. Grandpa was a feisty bald Norwegian, and even though his sons had taken over the farm, nothing could make him slow down, or do a lick of work either, for that matter! And he didn't much care what our family or the neighbors thought a 73-year-old man should or should not be doing; he was going to enjoy himself.

Grandpa and I were the leftovers in the family. It seemed everyone else had important business to tend to. The men and older boys were spending long days plowing and planting, desperately trying to get the crop in the ground before the spring rains came. Grandpa and I just weren't good help – I was too small and he was, in Dad's words, disgustingly lazy.

So I came to know my Grandpa well. In early March we had spent night after night in the shop, building kites bigger than either of us out of green hog feed sacks, TV antennas and electrician's tape. With some good gusty March winds, a ball of twine I couldn't lift, and a little prayer, we would wander out in the spring clover and put our kites up a half mile or more, sometimes till they went nearly out of sight. Did they ever pull! As our imaginations went wild, we made each consecutive kite a little bigger. Finally we couldn't hold them down any longer, and we had to tie them to a post to keep them from pulling us off the ground.

On other afternoons we would throw our cane poles and chicken livers in his '53 Triumph and sneak off to the Big Sioux to see if the catfish were in a biting mood.

After supper, with a little talking, I could usually convince Grandpa to ride with me on our battered balloon tire bicycles down the dirt road to check if any muskrats had moved upstream yet.

I'm not sure why Grandpa and I got along so well. Maybe it was because we were growing up together. He was going through his second childhood the same time I was going through my first.

Kites, catfish, and muskrat dens were alright, but this year my fancy turned to something else – pumpkins. Not just any pumpkins – I wanted to grow the most colossal, mammoth, gigantic pumpkins anywhere in the state of Iowa.

So one night Grandpa and I sat down and ordered from Gurney's Nursery two packages each of Big Max, Russian Jewel, and Montana Mammoth.

We planted them the first day after the danger of frost was over, according to the Farmer's Almanac. Into each hole went two seeds and two scoops of chicken manure, which we hauled in our leaky tin wheelbarrow.

We didn't bother asking Dad if we could have a corner of the cornfield for a pumpkin patch because we knew he wouldn't let us. We just planted the pumpkins with the corn, waited for the pumpkins to come up, and then chopped out the corn. In disgust, he left the patch alone – after all, who would have the heart to ruin a pumpkin patch, especially when there wasn't any corn to interfere with it?

When it came to guarding the patch, Grandpa was a banty cluck with a clutch of eggs. Nothing – not cows, dogs, fertilizer men, pigs, sprayers, mowers, potato bugs, weevils, or worms – was going to hurt that pumpkin patch.

The June rains came and turned the patch into a tangle of green. By July 4 the fruits were set.

July turned hot and dry, so we began carrying water to the pumpkins – pail after pail after pail. I thought my arms would be two inches longer at the end of the summer. At the end of July we put a bathroom scale under the pumpkins. The biggest weighed 26 pounds. Not bad, not tremendous either.

The oats harvest was now done, and we were planning to take a vacation to the Rockies. For the first time Grandpa didn't go with us. He said he had to get an early start on his income tax.

When we returned, the pumpkins had finally begun to grow as they were supposed to. Yes, Grandpa said he'd checked on them once or twice, and had even thrown a couple buckets of water on them, just to keep the dust off the leaves, of course.

By the end of August the pumpkins were growing two or three pounds a day. We didn't know what they weighed because we couldn't see the scale when we put it under them. They were heavy, so heavy they were growing lopsided. The stress of the weight of the top of the pumpkin made the bottom grow flat.

At the end of September the early frost we had feared came. We heard the frost warnings, and knowing that pumpkins are one of the plants most sensitive to frost, we covered the patch with threshing machine canvas. The patch was saved, and grew for three more weeks during Indian Summer.

On October 19 a killer frost hit. In a few days the pumpkin leaves withered and the great orange globes emerged from the jungle of dark green leaves.

The Saturday after the frost we decided to bring the pumpkins home. The stems were too thick to cut with a corn knife, so we used a coping saw to hack through them.

It was a day-long project. It took both of us to lift one of them. There were dozens over four feet around and weighing 150 pounds. We loaded them in the pickup till it was full, unloaded them under the windmill in the yard, and then did it all over again. Six loads later we were done, and there was a massive hill of orange in the yard. Dad didn't appreciate having to maneuver the tractors around the mound of pumpkins, but he wasn't about to move 4½ tons of pumpkins by himself either.

There it stood – the great hill of gigantic pumpkins I had dreamed of in the spring. Maybe they weren't the biggest in the state of Iowa, but they were big enough to keep me happy. I wanted to keep them all to myself. I thought I could stare at them forever.

But Grandpa had other ideas; he was going to give them away. Now I didn't mind giving a few away to the neighbor kids for Halloween jack-o-lanterns, but Grandpa was giving them to anyone who stopped in – the mailman, the carpenters, the gas men. Even without asking, feed salesmen who stopped in to see Dad would find their front seat filled with pumpkins when they left. Each day when I came home from school I could see the pile had shrunk.

"Give them away," Grandpa said. "You'll always have enough if you do that." I didn't understand him. He was just an old fool who had betrayed me. After all the good times we'd had together – building kites, watching muskrats, and catching catfish – he was giving all our pumpkins away.

He finally saved the nine best ones. I didn't think nine was enough for us; they

would probably spoil and we wouldn't even have a Halloween jack-o-lantern or Thanksgiving Day pie.

Mom always hated to see things go to waste. If you gave her three dozen rutabagas, she'd find a way to use them. A measly nine pumpkins was no challenge, even if they did weigh 150 pounds apiece. Pumpkin pie and pumpkin bread were alright, but soon we were eating pumpkin cookies, pumpkin cake, pumpkin soup, pumpkin dessert, and pumpkin candy. Do you have any idea how many pies you can make from a 143-pound pumpkin? Or how many thousands of cookies you can make from half a ton of pumpkins?

It got to be a game we played. We kids sat at the table and would try to figure out where the pumpkin was in each meal. How had Mom disguised it this time? Was it in the meatloaf maybe? I was ready to cry when she found a recipe for pumpkin pancakes.

Something had definitely gone wrong. Those pumpkins were supposed to spoil and they just wouldn't.

For Thanksgiving dinner we had pumpkin pie. We also had squash, but everyone knew it was only pumpkin with a little brown sugar added. We all felt like praying, "Thank you, O Lord, for all your bountiful blessings this Thanksgiving Day, but please deliver us from pumpkins. ." I just couldn't stand to look another pumpkin in the face.

We ate pumpkin pie for Christmas. We ate pumpkin pie for New Year's. We ate pumpkin pie for Easter. Those pumpkins still haunted me at the end of April, when there were three left. But they were a little moldy, so Mom threw them to the hogs. I didn't bother saving any seeds.

Steve Berntson

Morning

Sunrise, with clouds, all carnivals of glass,
Spreads butter over summer's golden grain
And warms the lofty trees, the tender grass,
Which, crumpled, marks the place where I have lain.

The gravel roller coaster on the hills
Lies waiting for the cars which never come.
A creek runs to the lake it never fills
With loving giggles, but the lake is dumb.

My eyes reflect the sun's red morning glow
And salty dew tracks rivers down my face
For love develops fast, before we know
And disappears before we see the trace.

Last night I lay here angry and alone
And mourned the loss of love I'd never known.

Sheri Pond

THE DAWN OF LIFE

Heaven surrounded Earth with a warm embrace of love.
He kissed her with snow and his seed filled her
as a shower of stars.

She trembled
and fire burst from her mountains.
The Sun is born.

A fragile, green shoot struggled under the snow.
He strained and pushed and stretched until his tiny head
burst above the icy coating
into the sharp fresh air.
Green exploded into scarlet.
The Rose is born.

Spasms rack the stocky body of the ewe,
untouched by ram.
The fire of pain burns in her eye,
her agonized bleats fill the icy air,
but in the ecstatic triumph of motherhood,
she drops her wet, fuzzy babe into the snow.
The Lamb is born.

The Sun will rise
and enlighten our lives with wisdom.
The Rose blooms
teaching us beauty.
The Lamb dies,
perfect love,
We rejoice, in our once-empty lives
for the birth of wisdom, beauty, love,
for the birth of Jesus.

Deb Kolbezen

HAIKU

I looked in a pond.
A tiny pebble dropped in
and wrinkled my face.

Jean Wood

THE KEY

Un-lock your heart;

 p
 e
 t
And let me s in.
E x t e n d your hand
And let me---touch---
Look into my eyes,
So I may see if . . .
You
Are willing to let
Me
Love you.

Ellen Jipp



"Sunset"

Acrylic Paul Hundtoft

THE BELIEF AND THE HOPE

The pessimists
are really
the purest fools –
they believe
the opposite of
what they hope.

But the optimists,
on whom
life relies,
are those
who dare hope
for the same they believe in.

from the Danish of Piet Hein
by Mary Staby

OUTER SHELL

Facade of life: The crust of outer shell
protects the inner self that could be bruised.
For after all, one really cannot tell
who'll wear it out, then leave it cold and used.
A human skating rink most people cross
with startling speed, not even looking down –
the depth unknown, not noticing their loss,
they never see the blood inside the clown.
I'd show you me – unstable, insecure,
the part of me I would prefer to hide.
This Easter egg existence needs a cure –
a crack to let the feelings flow outside.
I want to change all this, yet will I dare
to break this senseless mask I wear?

Sherry Borglum

LET MY PEOPLE GO

Bloody and torn, young Joshua was peeled off the high voltage wires and shoved to the dark ground below. His body crumpled like a half-empty sack beneath the feet of the two prison guards. Each one grabbing a leg, they dragged him face-down through the mud to the nearest oven. They joked along the way, laughing at their own vulgarity.

Nearby, the prisoners watched with silent faces and apathetic eyes. They had been hardened by the fact of everyday cruelty and death in the camp. Devoid of feeling, each individual was concerned about only one thing: his own survival.

"Move on!" barked the Commandant to the emaciated mass of humanity. The captives slowly came to life, moving their legs mechanically to the military music that was now blaring from the loudspeaker on the guard tower above.

The dead man, Joshua, had been respected among the prisoners. His twelve companions on Work Detail #3 especially held him in high regard. He had a quality about him that each of them lacked, an inner strength that was unbroken by the humiliation of camp life. He had always been a mystic, seeking an explanation of life beyond the material. Jewish and a carpenter by trade, Joshua had been separated from his family by the Gestapo a year earlier. From the beginning, he had exhibited profound courage and strength of will.

On this day, after the workers had gulped their watery soup and crusty bread, Joshua dared to do something that was strictly forbidden. He broke line to go and comfort an old man across the yard. The man, doomed to death, was wailing and crying, "What am I to do? What will happen to my wife and children?"

Joshua put his arm around the old man's trembling shoulders. "Calm yourself, man. Your family will be cared for. God will see to it. Remember, death is not final. It is not the end, but merely an entrance into life, eternal life. You see?"

The man ceased his sobbing. Joshua's words had restored his composure. "Yes," he replied, "I was behaving like a child."

Nothing more could be said, for Joshua was torn away and kicked to the ground by the devilish Commandant. "Break ranks, will you?" the red-faced officer shouted. "You know what happens to violators!" With that, he viciously whipped the writhing figure in the mud. The lashings echoed through the camp. In the dead silence that followed, Joshua's bleeding body was picked up and made to stand at attention. Joshua raised his blackened eyes, tears streaming down his skeleton-like face. Barely audible, but clear and true, he uttered, "Let my people go."

The Commandant's derisive laugh reverberated from tower to tower, deafening the ears of the silent prisoners. The laughter stopped. His eyes gleamed as he worked his mouth for the hurling wet insult that was to find its mark in Joshua's tear-filled eyes. The deed done, he abruptly turned and walked away. The guards hurled Joshua against the hot fence – crucified.

Renaë Johnson

INDIAN SUMMER

Tales of the ancient ones
relived, century on century,
Still quake with the heavy tread
of bison and mastodon,
deified by extinction.
Stone points, well-aimed,
strike as lightning
Into the monster hearts;
Blood, pounding
From the chase, blackens the dust.
Paleolithic bison fall dead
As boulders against the earth.
The strength of the prey
Becomes that of the hunter.

Drum-beats and whistles pulsate
In a ritual dance. Magic
Rhythms boom against the prairie
until dawn.
Spirits seen in frenzied visions
give spearpoints power;
By throwing stones
Hunters slay the god
with his own magic.

Hot blood and wasted sweat
of a fallen god
Flare the hunter's nostrils
And set heart and lungs
throbbing against his ribs.
Panting prairie air sucks
moisture from his mouth
and from the earth
Hot beneath his feet.
Sweat stings his eyes
As he gazes at a companion whose magic
was not strong.
Bone whistle,
Skin drum
carved from his carcass,
Will make his magic
powerful in death.

C. F. A. Warman

ONLY WITH YOU

Only with you can I live and flourish,
Only with you am I joyous.
Throughout the tiresome, solitary days
I sail on in my misty ship.
When first you entered into my chamber,
It then became as it should be,
Pleasant and secure, a human dwelling.
Only with you am I free from fear,
Only with you am I calm and glowing.
Only with you can I sleep secure.

from the Danish of Grethe Risbjerg Thomsen
by Paul Hundtoft

THE SMALL CHILDREN'S SMILES

I collect small children's smiles
— the small children's radiant smiles
and if one should open my heart
with a drill or a key or a file —

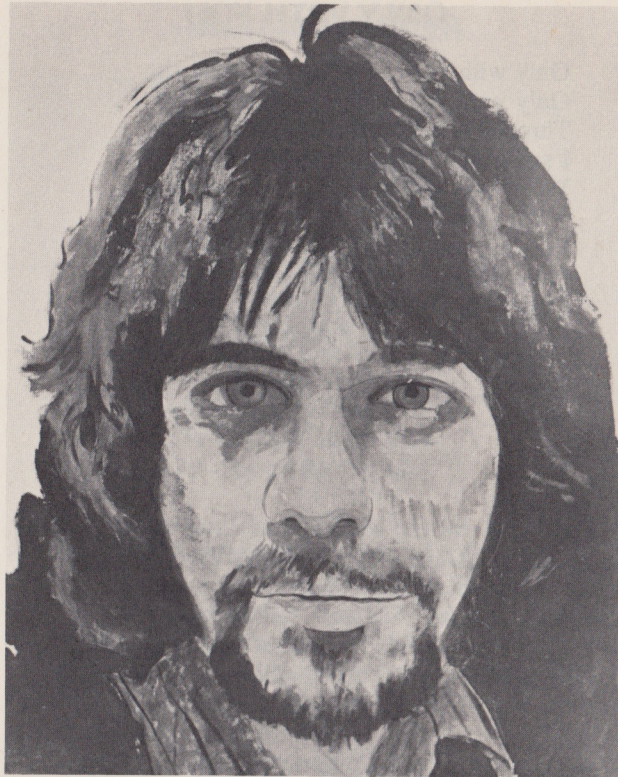
One would find the biggest collection of smiles
which anyone has ever seen
— one would find the gentle reflection of
what thousands of children have left.

And if you should step into my heart
and break it in the end
what would happen, is that at the same time
the poor walls were broken —

the small children's smiles, the radiant smiles
would break out, become loose, become free
and would fill me and fill you
with sunny playfulness.

So therefore I gather each time
there blossoms a smile on a cheek,
a little smile — I lock it
in my heart's treasure chest.

from the Danish of Nis Petersen
by Nancy Hansen



"Self-Portrait"

Acrylic Gary Rasmussen

A Flower

Touch-me-not, for if
You do, you find I curl up.
I'm afraid of you.

Janet Lippert

GOOD-BYE, ROBBIE!

It was late Sunday morning and the house was filled with odors of roast beef and hot bread. Waiting for the company to arrive, I sat down to relax with a steaming mug of coffee. Then the doorbell rang and there they were. I opened the door to the throng of adults that stood outside. They came past me one by one with the usual greetings, and then I felt a tug on my pant leg. I looked down and spied a tiny figure peering up at me from under a straw cowboy hat. He was dressed in blue denim with a red cowboy shirt.

"Hi, Robbie," I said.

"Hi, 'ean."

"Let me hang up your jacket." As we stood by the closet door, he pointed his finger at something high in the closet. My eyes followed upward, and there on the top shelf was my dad's 'real' cowboy hat. I looked in his pleading blue eyes and I melted. "O.K., I think Rocky will let you wear it a while."

A huge smile spread across his face. The frayed, straw cowboy hat was abandoned to the floor and in its place went the 'real' cowboy hat. It sat down over his ears and the tiny towhead seemed lost in this 10-gallon monstrosity.

"Come on, 'ean." Warm tiny hands tugged me away and we were off to the basement. "We'll p'ay pool," he informed me.

What a fiasco! The bitty pool hustler struggled with pool cues twice as long as he was tall. Stubby fingers couldn't manage the correct hold and balls were scooting in every direction except towards the pockets. In determination he pushed the hat back out of his way for a better look and peeped over the edge of the table. Cue in hand, he jabbed at the nearest ball. It wobbled a couple feet and stopped. In disgust, he rested his elbow on the table and propped up his chin.

"Guess I'm too 'ittle." He looked so sad, but then he dashed off and over his shoulder he yelled "Come on. We need a dwink." Robbie made his way across the room to the bar and finding a vacant bar stool, scrambled up to the seat. "Gimme a dwink, 'ocky," he commanded and pounded his tiny fist against the counter for emphasis.

My dad, or Rocky as his friends call him, mixed Robbie a strong 7-Up and set it in front of him with "There ya go, partner."

Robbie sat on his high perch and nursed his drink. He examined the actions of the adults around him and dipped an inquisitive finger in to stir his ice cubes. Next to him on the counter sat an abandoned whiskey sour. Robbie gazed at it a long time and then having decided it belonged to no one around him, took a big gulp. His eyes lit up and the corners of his mouth turned down in a sour expression. Finally he recovered and declared, "Whew! T'at's stwong!"

"Dinner's ready!" came the call from upstairs. Robbie took a flying leap from the bar stool and landed on all fours down on the carpet. He hesitated only a moment and then went galloping up the stairs. I followed behind.

"Come on, 'ean, you sit by me."

"O.K., Robbie. What do you want to drink?" I asked. "Milk? More 7-Up? Water?"

"Ice tea, p'ease."

I trotted off to make his ice tea. When I brought it back, he took one sip and then sat there and stared at it. "What's wrong, Robbie?"

"B'ing me some sugar," was his answer.

I was off again, out to the kitchen, and returned with the sugar bowl. After adding three heaping teaspoons of sugar to his tiny glass he decided it was just right.

Dinner was going fine, but I noticed Robbie wasn't eating much. I directed his attention to my brother sitting across from us. "Robbie, look at Chuck's plate. If you eat like that you'll grow up and be big and strong like him."

He looked at me in disgust and fired back with "I'm a'weady stwong! I kin knock you out!"

All right, forget that idea. I'll leave his eating habits up to his mother. It was dessert time. "What do you want for dessert, Robbie?"

"Ice c'eam, p'ease."

Off I went to the kitchen and came back with a dish of vanilla ice cream. He played with it for a while and then shoved it over in front of me. "Stir it up, p'ease."

I stirred the ice cream, under his directions, until it was a sloppy, runny mess that resembled a malt. "There you go, Robbie, all done."

He gave me one of those disgusted looks and commanded, "I need choc'ate!"

So, I was off again to find the chocolate syrup. Task completed, I sat down to enjoy my now lukewarm coffee.

Dinner was over and it was time for play. Robbie scooted off his chair and ran for the basement. "Come on, 'ean!" When I got downstairs he was already digging in the toy chest and objects were flying out in all directions. Finally he selected a muslin drawstring bag filled with miniature plastic cowboys and Indians. He took the cowboys and I took the Indians and no matter what I did, I lost every battle that was fought. The war continued until a plastic dinosaur disrupted the game. Then the miniatures were forsaken for the red hobby horse.

"Giddy-up, ho'sie!" Robbie roamed the range of the basement and ran down the bank robbers that were loose on the premises. He rescued schoolmarms in distress and on his trusty horse carried them to safety.

Eventually it was time for Robbie to go home. Reluctantly, he climbed down from the hobby horse and mounted the stairs. "'ean, will you get me my jacket, p'ease."

I got down his jacket and picked up the frayed, straw cowboy hat from where he had abandoned it. "Here, Robbie, don't forget your hat."

He looked at me with those liquid blue eyes. "I can't take 'ocky's hat, can I."

"No, I don't think so, Robbie."

"Oh well," he sighed heavily and walked to the front door where his parents were waiting for him.

"Bye, 'ean."

"Good-bye, Robbie."

Jean Wood

Think

Grook about a rumor
It can sometimes make
your head swim:

think how little we would know
about each other
if we were not so endlessly
clever
that we immediately found out
from the third.

from the Danish of Piet Hein
by Mary Staby

THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE

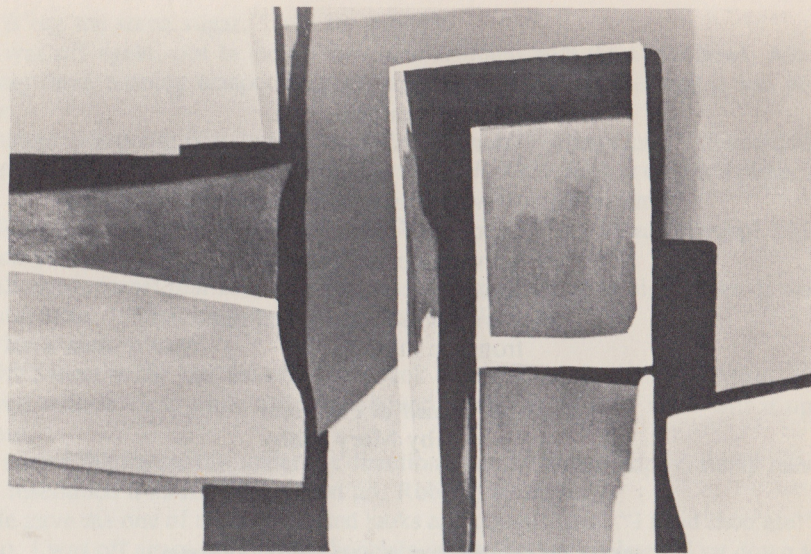
A hare had once been boasting of its tremendous speed before the other animals of the forest, and challenged any one of them to race with him. All of the animals declined the offer, but then a tortoise stepped forward and said quietly, "I accept your challenge." The hare at first thought it a good joke and laughed heartily, but the tortoise insisted that he was indeed serious. The hare then replied, "Right, then, fix a course and we shall race." This was done, and the race was under way. The hare darted almost out of sight at once and it looked to all that the tortoise would surely lose.

The hare was so confident of the big lead he had established over the tortoise that he decided he might rest and take a short nap, as he had been out late the night before because he lost the key to his apartment. The hare lay down in the soft grass along the side of the road and quickly nodded out. Resting peacefully, the hare began to dream; which ended abruptly when he dreamed he was an Easter bunny about to be covered in chocolate and placed in an Easter basket. Awakening quite shaken from the experience, the hare abandoned the race and fled to a faraway village, and found work there later as a mail order clerk. The tortoise, meanwhile, knew not of this and continued along, driven on by patience and sheer determination. It looked like the tortoise would win, after all.

Sadly, however, two hundred yards short of the finish the tortoise came to a road crossing where he failed to yield the right of way to an oncoming vegetable truck, was struck and vanished without a trace. Why a vegetable truck was speeding through a dense, uninhabited forest in a fable remains a mystery.

The lesson that this fable teaches is that nice guys finish last, although bad guys can expect to have their tax returns audited.

Michael Behuniak



Acrylic Paul Hundtoft

DREAMS AND OWLS DIE

It was a bright, dark fall day — the sky was overcast, but the crisp air made the pine trees and buildings seem brighter and alive. That day, my grandparents' farm was filled with the dying, swirling leaves, the sniffles of grandchildren, and perhaps a certain wild anticipation in the air.

My cousins and I were walking and wandering, trying to re-create our childhood which was wonderfully full of memories: an old tank that really was a deep-sea submarine that boomed and echoed, a rusting harvester that turned into a magical silver fortress, or the musty, sun-shafted hay loft that sometimes held wild, scratching tiger kittens. So we rambled, trying to remember as we peered into machinery compartments and trying to forget as we glanced at dangerously high roofs which had caused spankings and tears.

We soon discovered that we'd lost the magic of the past, and somehow our innocent little fantasies seemed so ridiculous when we got our hips stuck in a former hiding hole or kicked around moldy hay where only pigeons left tracks, no tigers. Slightly saddened, we made our way out of the forest of memories and back to the brown yard of the farmhouse. We were now wise and mature adults or at least sedate teenagers, all quiet and cousinly and more conscious of ourselves.

Suddenly, one of us — I can't remember who — accidentally spotted a small, white object in a scrawny pine tree. "Look! What is it?" In a flash, all of us shed our reserves that we'd built up and gathered together under the branches, once more a bunch of wild-eyed children.

"Look at it! An owl . . . It's only a baby." Up a few feet, its tremendous green eyes staring calmly, was a small, quiet owl. Its yellow clawed feet gripped

the branch and held a beautifully speckled body upright. We were kids again, looking at it and its fearlessness with all the awe and amazement of five-year-olds until . . .

"Get the pellet gun, quick!" breathed the tall one of the group, a boy who was practically a man. His firm, peach-fuzzed chin defied the owl to escape, and his eyes calculated in an instant the ease of the kill. The white and gray bird sat, still as a soft statue except for a slow, slow blink, and the boy-man, Michael, gazed at it for the moment it took the gun to reach his willing hand.

Cautiously, he got the gun ready as the rest of us began to beg childishly, "Don't! You can't shoot it. It's so cute . . ." He glanced down from his superior height and spit disdainfully. "I won't kill it — just nick it enough so we can catch it." We were acting like children, and he seemed so sure and mature that we shut up. The owl was listening too, but its only reaction was to wink a wise green eye as if it were all a joke.

Michael aimed the barrel slowly, but the brave little body stood its ground. Eyes steady and firm, he stared for a long while . . . "No . . . don't do it," I whispered, but by then he'd decided, and CRACK!

With a blur of white wings, Owl fumbled through the green needles and branches and finally floated down to the leaf-covered ground. We all rushed toward its quiet feathered body, but Michael's long legs reached it first. He gently picked it up, and we again stared with young eyes. "It's alive! Look at its wings . . . and its talons!" Owl still blinked its wide, innocent eyes at us as we looked it over, smoothing the mottled feathers and congratulating Michael. But he was silent, and soon we saw why.

The dark hole surrounded by mangled, bloody feathers showed up against the white breast clearly, and I gasped, "Look, it's hurt. You **did** shoot it!" Michael's eyes weren't those of a man any more, but of a child, defiant and guilty.

"But you guys wanted it." He handed it over to me with his lean hands. Owl was warm, yielding, and patient, and I couldn't believe how those big green eyes were blinking acceptance, but slower now.

I gave him back, and because the roles were switched, I swiftly grew up again. Michael and the others watched the bird, and I saw that there was dark red blood on the palm of my hand. I took a leaf from a lilac bush to wipe it off but it wouldn't disappear. All the while, Owl was blinking. Huge, all-knowing eyes, opening and closing. We became silent and faintly sick as the green started to get hazy and tired. Michael sullenly repeated, "But I didn't really kill it . . ."

The sky was overcast, and the air was full of old ghosts. Our childish laughter came floating through our heads with the memories of how it used to be. Corn cob dolls, pretty butterflies, dreams of growing up big and strong . . .

Owl's eyes struggled to open, pulled against the inevitable and slipped up slowly one last time, wide and green and sad. Michael still held him, a boy holding a bird, a man with a dying dream. The past was swirling and dancing away with the brown leaves . . .

I washed the blood stains off in the kitchen sink.

LOG CABIN FANTASY

The shadow of an empty wine glass
Flickers across the evening plates
 butter-colored
 in lantern light.

Aromas of venison and kerosene
Mingle with pine-fire smoke
And with the scent of wooden walls
 sticky with pitch.

I listen to the sleepy sound of the hearth
 my eyes closed,
 head back, rocking.

She pokes gently through the coals,
Lifting the hottest into the bedwarmer;
Then goes to fluff the quilts,
 piled five high
 on a brass bed.

I rock slowly, tempted
 by food and fire
 to the edge of sleep.

Crickets join me near the hearth
 and we dream

Of nights like this one, falling
 into the future

Like flakes of midnight snow.

C. F. A. Warman

DIANA'S PASSION

The moon hung in the sky this morning,
 full and round, like a baby's tummy.
She countered the sun haughtily.
Her ringing laughter showers the earth
 with icy crystals,
 coating the grass and trees.
Reaching up, I bend the bough
 to my mouth,
 kissing the leaves,
 taking her ice into my mouth,
 smiling, knowing
 I have the moon inside me.

Deb Kolbezen

FAITH IN RAIN

The day was overcast and sultry – the cracks in the ground breathed hot air. Scarcely a breeze stirred to provide relief from the sweat that dripped profusely from every pore in my body. The overcast sky held our only hope for rescue, and every few seconds one of us looked with longing at the pregnant gray clouds that were building in the northwest. As we did so, our feet continued to maneuver themselves down the rows, over clods of black dirt as big as your fist and dry corn stalks and roots. We only stopped long enough to chop out a button weed, cockle burr, pig weed, or any other pesky weed that grew defiantly with the soy beans. It took longer to chop them out now – we had been walking beans since sunrise. Our backs and arms complained louder each time we had to swing the hoe. Two hours ago we ate the rolls and drank the water that Mom had brought out for us, so our stomachs were adding to the messages our bodies were giving us. Still we continued through the field, all three of us soaked and dripping with sweat. Gnats swarmed around us, buzzing in our ears, while mosquitoes chewed our arms and necks. Our faces showed only the emotions of exhaustion and endurance, for we knew that the job had to be done even if it didn't rain.

There was a vast silence that spread over the broad field of green. As I looked back over the field there was an interesting and satisfying contrast between the rows we had cleaned and those that were still dirty. If I hadn't been so tired I would have seen the beauty of the field. The velvety soy beans looked like a soft quilted coverlet spread between two tall corn fields. But I wasn't feeling either emotional or poetic, so I simply turned back to my job, hurrying some to catch up with my two brothers who were likewise hurrying to reach the end of their rows. The three of us had hoed beans together for years – ever since my youngest brother was able to see over the tops of the rows. Now, at ages sixteen and eighteen, they towered over their older sister.

“Hey, sis, ya' comin'?”

“Oh, you bet. Just choppin right along! My rows must be weedier than yours or else you guys are missing a lot of weeds.”

“Quit your yapping and come on. I want to get done. How many more rounds do you think we can do before dinner?”

“Oh, two, three; depends on how weedy they are.”

“I wish it'd rain, then we could quit right now.”

I wished that it would rain too, not only so we could go home but because we needed it so badly. People talked about the weather and it wasn't small talk. Dad began to talk about the advantages of irrigation again. Our lawn was almost entirely brown and the leaves on the corn were curling. You could smell the earth baking. There was still hope for the beans though, because they were smaller and grew close to the ground. Even the corn would probably give some yield if it rained, but given a few more days of dry heat and it would be a total loss. Dad was pessimistic – he remembered the '30's – but I still had hope. When we walked outside this morning and felt the humidity, I told Dad that today it would rain for sure. He just looked at the sky and went off to his chores.

The clouds had been building up all morning as we trudged up and down the bean rows. We had been joking and talking all morning, but for the last half-hour or so there had been only silence. We had hit a patch of cockleburrs and were

chopping away at them doggedly, the dull edges of our hoes sending a chorus of sharp thuds into the heavy air. At the end of the row we jammed our hoes into a crevice and drew our gritty arms across our foreheads. My brothers sank to the ground and stared at their shoes while I turned my head in search of some air. A few birds shuttled across the sky and a meadowlark sang his clear, musical song that sounded so incongruous with the taut stillness that hung around us.

"Well, come on. Let's finish this round."

"Which rows are mine?"

"These here, and these are yours."

We started back. Intent on walking and scanning over the tops of the rows we scarcely noticed when the breeze began. It cooled and dried the sweat on my face and re-arranged the blouse that stuck to my skin. The breeze picked up and all three of us looked anxiously at the cloudbank that was moving our way. We continued with more haste, looking frequently to the northwest. Pretty soon we could hear an old familiar rumble. We finished our round and started another, all the time aware of the storm building behind us. The rumbling grew louder, and when we turned to begin the last half round we expected to see the storm bearing straight for us. Instead the clouds were moving to the east. We knew it was raining north of us. We finished the round in silence, picked up the thermos, and walked back to the house. It sprinkled a little on us then, almost as if it was laughing at us, calling us fools for continuing to hoe the beans. When we got back to the yard, Dad was standing there, watching as the storm went round us, a look of helplessness and frustration on his face. So many times I had seen him stare at the sky that way, hopeful but at the same time pessimistic. I went up and stood beside him.

"Maybe the storm will come back this way. It's done that before, you know."

"No, it won't rain. It always goes around us. You kids just as well forget about the beans."

But we didn't. We were out there again the next day at sunrise.

Lori Nielsen

drowning island fragments

He wrote to me, "i am a rock,"
(alone, a self-sufficient sole),
"i need no help to watch this clock —
nobody else, for i am hole."

yes, he was write, no (w)ones would flock,
nor toos nor fors. He was not donne
with his own life, for he must stand
alone, apart from us, with nun.

He thought his life to be so grand,
(an ignoramous igneous),
He didn't see by each of us stand
a man called God, (a man four us.)

Mary Staby

Love Song

Later as I went from thee
To the great day
I saw, when I began to see
Only merry people.

And from that evening hour,
You know already, which one I mean,
I have a more beautiful mouth
And more nimble legs.

Greener is, since this I feel
Tree and shrub and meadow
And the water is nice and cool
When I pour it upon myself.

from the German of Bertolt Brecht
by Joy Rethwisch



"Closet"

Acrylic Liz Searle

SING THE SONG OF LIFE

Hey! Wipe the tears off my sunshine face,
and let's dance across the sky.
And let's sing our own song of life together
that's meant for you and I.

And rescue me from my castle and embrace me
in your arms.
And play your instrument and sing the melody with
all your sweet-filled charms.

Grab my hand and let's run bare-foot in the grass
and we'll sit by the cool stream,
and make star-bright faces in the water.
that reflects upon our dreams.

We'll meditate a while and let a thought
stand out,
and guess what each other thinks about
and find what life's about.

And just knowing each other cares so much,
kiss me on the cheek,
and we'll drift away from the cool stream
to start reaching the highest peak.

Tell me about tomorrow and I'll tell you
about yesterday.
And we'll both experience the present
that lives in our minds to stay.

Rosey Cupich

THE DEMON

A demon screams
in my veins,
its poison gnaws at
my stomach.
It cries only to satiate
the ravenous ache
with love,
like a birdling
pleading for worms.
My desperate demon
haunts the desolation
lonelier
and hearts are no longer
sacrificed at
my altar of insecurity,
stealing the fumbling dreams
of gentle kisses
and hesitant caresses.
The demon aged me,
a year with each dream
murdered,
till death claimed
the dreamless birdling,
wings clipped
before flight ever became reality.

Deb Kolbezen

FOUND

I walked in the woods,
For no special reason,
Not searching for anything,
Just enjoying the season.

In the shade I saw
A flower, my prize,
Like bright shining stars,
Like beautiful eyes.

I reached to pick it
But it said to me:
"I will only wither,
and no longer be."

I scooped it up
Roots and all,
Took it to the garden,
Where it stands so tall.

I planted it once again
So it could blossom,
Its seeds to flourish,
And grow in the sun.

from the German of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
by **Malinda Wallman**

THAT DREADED "SOMEDAY SOON"

You can be nearly certain that in southeastern Nebraska, sometime during the period from mid-April until the end of August there will be a stretch of dry, hot, parching weather. Weather arid enough to make any crop, especially corn, cry for moisture. But trying to predict when it will happen is about as easy as picking winning horses on a muddy day at the track. So eventually every year my father, a Nebraska farmer for many years, would get ready to try and combat nature's stinginess.

Irrigation is an absolute savior to agriculture some years. As a youngster I remember that my father was one of the first to pioneer the area of deep well irrigation in our vicinity. It did my dad's heart good to see cold, sparkling rainbows of water arch out from the dull gray aluminum pipe, covered with beads of sweat. I always enjoyed watching as Dad would open the gates on the pipe and the water spurted out, splattering and making a little cloud of dust as it hit the dry, cracked soil between the rows of thirsty corn. I always thought I could hear the corn breathe a sigh of relief as its feet were finally being bathed in the cool, muddy stream.

That was the fun part of irrigating. But there is another side to the story. In order to be able to get the water to the corn all the pipe had to be loaded up, laid out, and linked together along the cloddy ends of the fields. This was a dreaded task each spring.

Dad never failed to put this job off until the last possible moment. (Not that I blamed him!) This chore usually waited until one of the hottest days of the spring, when we knew it had almost become an emergency situation. Maybe that's why Dad was always in a sour disposition whenever it finally came around. I guess he knew he should have done it long ago, and now on a sweltering day, he was in a hurry to get it over with.

After finishing morning chores, Dad would come into the house. I'd awaken to the dreaded sound of his heavy work shoes clumping on the stairs, and his voice calling up, "Better get up! We're going to lay out pipe this morning."

I dragged myself slowly out of bed and after finding my bearings called to Mom, "Where are my clean jeans?"

By the time I made it outside Dad already had the tractor out of the shed and was waiting for me to hook it onto the pipe trailer. It was still parked behind the old brick chicken house where we had left it the fall before. As Dad pulled it from the clutches of the tangle of weeds that had overgrown it, somehow it always managed to have at least one flat tire. This just added fuel to the fire of Dad's stormy mood, as he would have to crank up the air compressor and make a repair before we could get started.

When everything was at last in order, Dad, Dad would pull alongside the pyramid of pipe. (I always drove too close or too far away!) We always stored the pipes on the south side of our evergreen tree windbreak to protect them from the north winter wind.

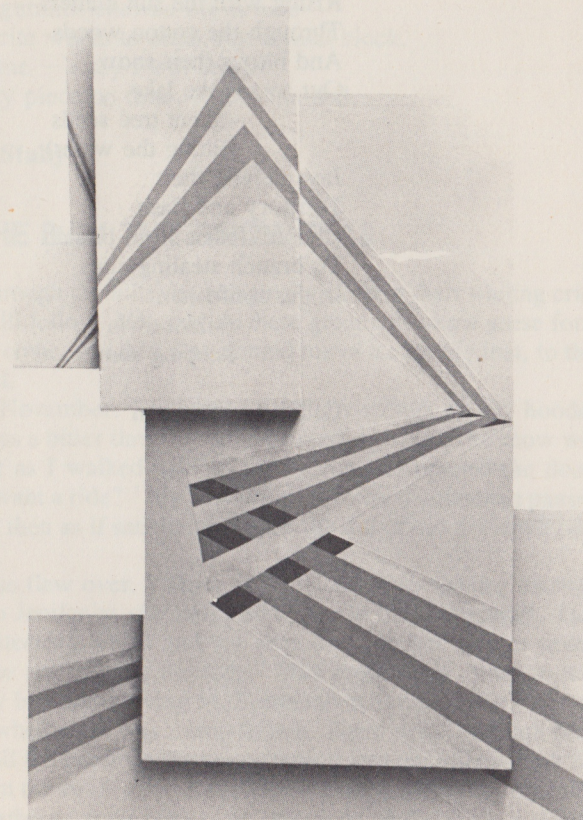
There were two piles, those eight inches in diameter, and those six inches. We always loaded the eight inchers first, because even though there was only two inches difference I swear the big ones were five times heavier at the end of the day.

Problems never seemed to come up when we first started. Taking the pipe from the top of the pile and laying them in the bottom row of the trailer was fairly easy. But the lower the pile on the ground got, the higher the one on the tractor got. This made it much more difficult for me to control the pipe as I stacked it. I knew that I would have to listen to at least two sermons before the job was completed. One was, "Don't drop the damn pipe so hard when you put it down. You'll bend the hell outta the pipe, plus you could smash our fingers."

The other one would be to hurry up and to quit looking in the end of each pipe before I picked it up. But I wasn't about to stop looking in the ends though. In years past there had been all kinds of animals in those pipes, and I could visualize some beast biting my fingers off, or charging out and clawing me to death.

Once the long tongue of the trailer started to bow with the weight of the load we knew we had enough pipe. I knew too that the worst was over, because as Dad saw the ribbon of pipe start to grow longer in front of his corn, his temper wasn't as short either. We both knew that the enjoyable part of irrigating was just ahead.

Curt Maschman



"Kinetic"
Acrylic
Paul Hundtoft

PICTURES AT AN OUTDOOR EXHIBITION

Water striders
And feeding fish
Disturb the surface
Of a still lake
With rings of ripples
Like a phantom rain.
(silent raindrops
falling out of the fog)
Beetles founder in mud
Along the shore and quake
In the shadows of grinning
Killdeer hungry
Atop their stilts.
(silent beetle prayers
reaching no one)
A morning breeze
Rising with the sun clatters
Through the cotton woods
And blows their snow
Out across the lake.
(silent tree seeds
hitting the water)
Jays defend their
Territory and flash
Blue uniforms from branch
To branch stealing eggs
In the confusion.
(silent owls
keeping score)

C. F. A. Warman

roto-rooter retrospect

BUZZZZZZZZ
that damn alarm . . .
oh no - i'm late
why me? i know i set the clock
to ring a bit before. it's fate
that made the time not operate.

of all the days for it to wait
to wake me up. it is a crime -
for i am not prepared to state
my piece for them, yet at this time.

my lids are bags from work done late
last night. i did not plan to cram,
delay, or to procrastinate.
how do i get in such a jam?

my fingernails chewed off in hate
write words to crack my mental block.
next time - i say i will create
my piece on time, before the bell.

Mary Staby

THE DAY THE SNOW FELL

Soon they will drift through the hillsides bringing with them their wailing cries to remind me of what will follow. Not only do these great wild snow geese forecast the winter that is to come, but they also remind me of a memory that, to this day, chills my very soul.

It was a raw day in November. I tightened the draw strings on my hooded sweatshirt and shivered as a bitter thrust of wind pierced my skin. The snow will soon be here, I thought as I walked over to the pickup and opened the door. "Here, Jenifer, do you want a ride?" My shivering, wet-nosed doberman paused to sniff the crisp air and then as if satisfied by what she did or did not smell, she jumped into the pickup.

Another flock of geese flew over. "There are a lot of geese moving through this morning," I said to Jenifer as she snuggled closer to me for warmth. Dad climbed in behind the steering wheel and we were soon on our way to town.

"The way these geese are moving through," Dad proclaimed, "one would think there was a deadly blizzard moving in. I remember, it must have been almost fifteen years ago, when there was a crop failure. There wasn't enough food on the bottom land for all the geese so they were forced into the hills to look for corn. One flock landed in the south-east cornfield and I spent half of the morning sneaking up on those feathered noise boxes. As I came up on the flock, I slowly

and carefully aimed my gun at a plump bird then — BANG — shots rang through the air — and not a one of them had come from my gun. Bob Hansen and his two sons had seen the geese and had climbed up the opposite hill; it's a wonder we didn't shoot each other! Only one bird was shot and"

Just then Dad was interrupted by those "feathered noise boxes" which had become stationary overhead. Dad stopped the pickup as the geese circled above us. "Look how low they are," I shouted above all the noise. Jenifer stood up and shook her head, first to the right, then to the left, then she let out a single "woof" as if to proclaim her authority over the birds.

I sat there and watched the snow geese as they circled. They looked like giant fluttering snowflakes gleaming in the sun. Their individual tones were united into one silver melody.

Then suddenly, like a falling leaf surprised by a gentle breeze, the geese thinned across the sky to a distant hill. "I think they're going to land in the south-east cornfields," I shouted with excitement.

"Let's see if we can shoot one or two of them for supper," Dad said as he raced the pickup in the direction of the geese.

Needless to say, I was extremely excited; I had never been hunting before. When we came within a mile of the geese, Dad decided that we had better leave the pickup and Jenifer behind. "We'll sneak up on them through the bordering field;" Dad whispered, "that way we'll have the fence for cover." Tall weeds had grown and died along the fence and made the perfect camouflage. As I climbed the fence I ripped the knee of my jeans. Luckily I wasn't cut, but the raw air nipped at my uncovered flesh.

"We're going to have to crawl now," Dad whispered, "You can stay here if you want to."

"I want to see the geese," I replied.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Okay, stay behind me, and keep low and don't talk." As I moved across the frozen ground my bare knee felt as if it had been scraped raw. Small stones gnawed at my uncovered hands. My whole body ached and it beckoned me to stop. However, there was a much deeper, stronger inner force that lured me on.

We were within fifty feet of the geese when we finally stopped. I immediately forgot my fiery muscles and my gashed skin because above, on the hill were the spectacular snow geese. I then realized why they had the name they did. They looked like a gentle bed of freshly fallen snow, so soft and so peaceful.

At that instant, we were discovered. The entire mass of white began to ascend into the heaven. KABAM! A sudden chill had frozen my body. "No don't shoot," I wanted to shout, but I was unable to move. KABAM! The pleading cry of the birds screeched in my ears, I wanted to scream to the top of my lungs, I wanted to cry, but I remained motionless; the only thing that seemed to function were my thoughts. KABAM! Oh God in Heaven, please make them fly faster. Hurry, please hurry, get away!

It seemed to take the geese forever to get into the air, but when they were finally in flight, I looked to the ground to find it spotted with snow. I walked over to a wounded bird; its pure white feathers were splattered with blood and its frighten-

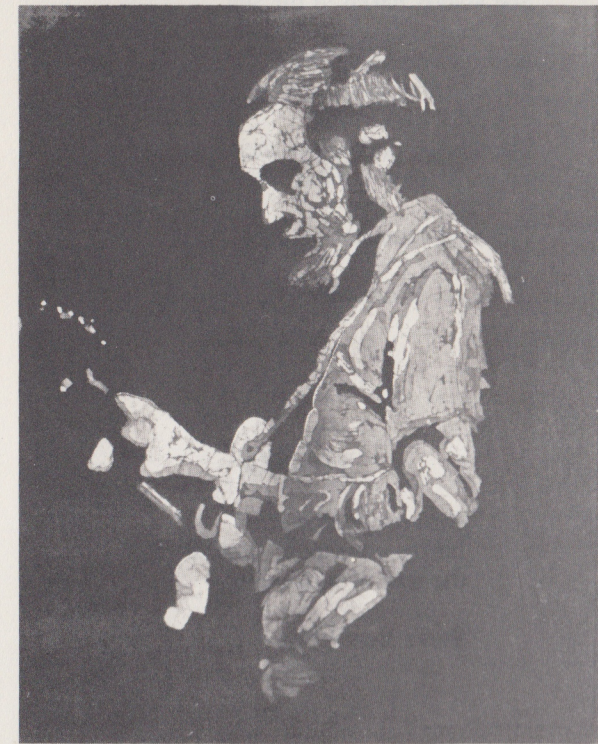
ed ghostly eyes seemed to speak to me "Why — I didn't hurt you, why have you hurt me?"

One large tear rolled down my cheek and fell, lost to all but the ground. It was followed by another and another. Soon I was sobbing in my father's arms. I felt tired and cold. My hands and knees were numb. My sickened stomach felt as though it was twisted into one large knot.

That day many geese fell victim to only three shots. As the great birds were beginning to ascend, they flew right into the buckshot. Dad had only meant to shoot a couple, but he didn't see all that dropped.

The haunting cries of the geese and the ghostly eyes of that wounded bird still scar my memory. The pathetic cry of the great white snow geese, a plea to survive in a man's world.

Debbie Petersen



"Roy"

Batik . . . Roger Barratt

ARIZONA SITE #371

A thumbprint on a shard of fired clay.
(#371-884 Unglazed, unclassified)
Buried with human bones.
(female - 2,150 B.P. by radiocarbon)
A piece of skull.
(#371-924 Mandible w/out left ramus)
A piece of arm.
(#371-906 Radius - distal end only)
The sole remains.

The sun vibrates against the desert
yellow heat on yellow sand.
Mesquite quivers in the wind
As rattlesnakes lie motionless
in burrows below.
A woman piles brush on a head-high fire,
Her pots harden and turn
an ashy gray.
She stands naked in the sun
and sucks desert air through dust
And smoke-caked nostrils.
Her children throw globs
of leftover clay;
She smiles, and hopes they live
To make pots of their own.

The soul remains.

C. F. A. Warman

HAIKU

Bird-dropped berries
makes concentrics that die at
the feet of blue reeds.

Steve Berntson