

Sower

1995

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Norman Bansen, Professor Emeritus
Sower

Sower of inland plains:
fling the whistling seed
against lusty spring winds;
thrusting it
into the humid earth-womb.

Sower of winged words:
rising before dawn,
swinging your arm over the world,
release your thought
into the lash and roar of winds,
send your seed singing
into the westering night

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Volume XLX

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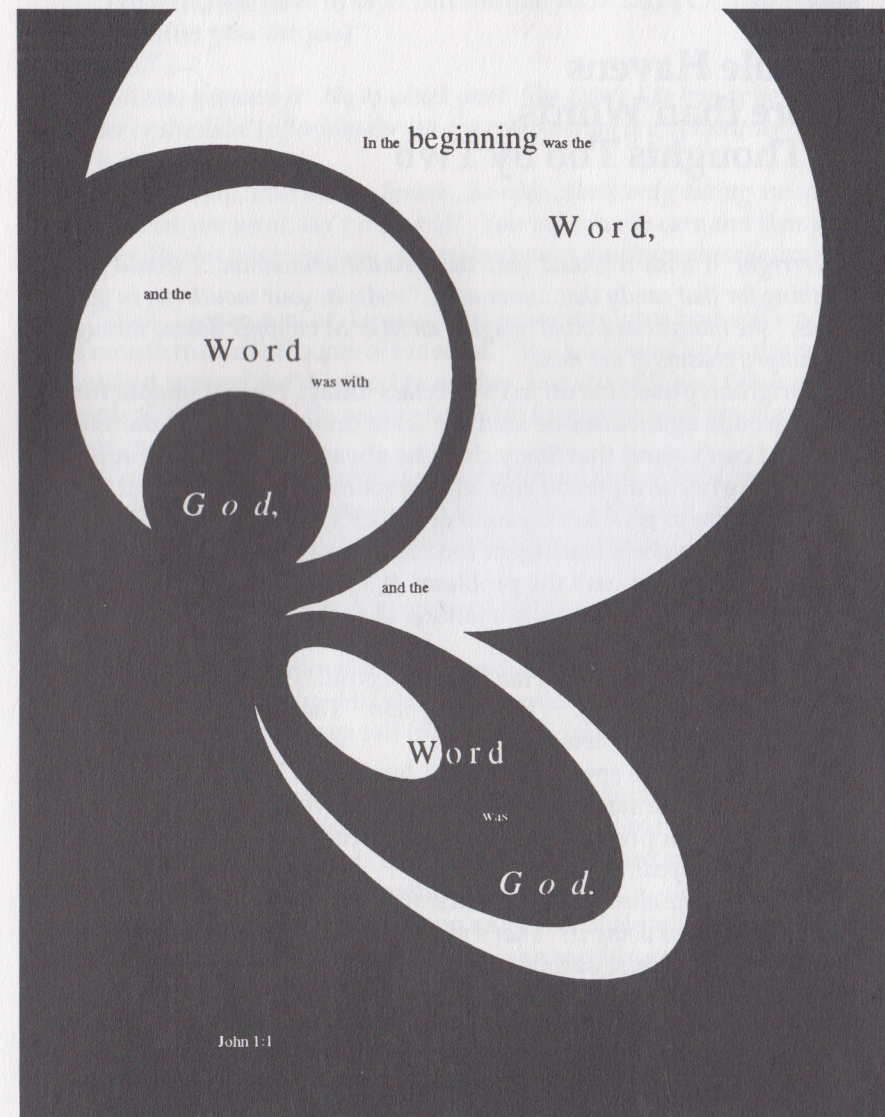
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**Kim Zulfer
To Sylvia**

You who awakened me now sustain me
Daddy and concentration camps
With some baby always screaming somewhere
You who longer to be free from he
He
He that took you by candlelight
Where there was only you and he

You who cried for the Jews
Your holocaust is sung but not heard
Secret sacred places-intruded upon
Your pills
Your bleeding
Your peeling

Your cries are not unheard
I hear you
Among the bleeding Blowing tulips incarnate,
Incarnate
In my dying your death
Everyday



John 1:1

Jody Mitchell
Computer Graphic

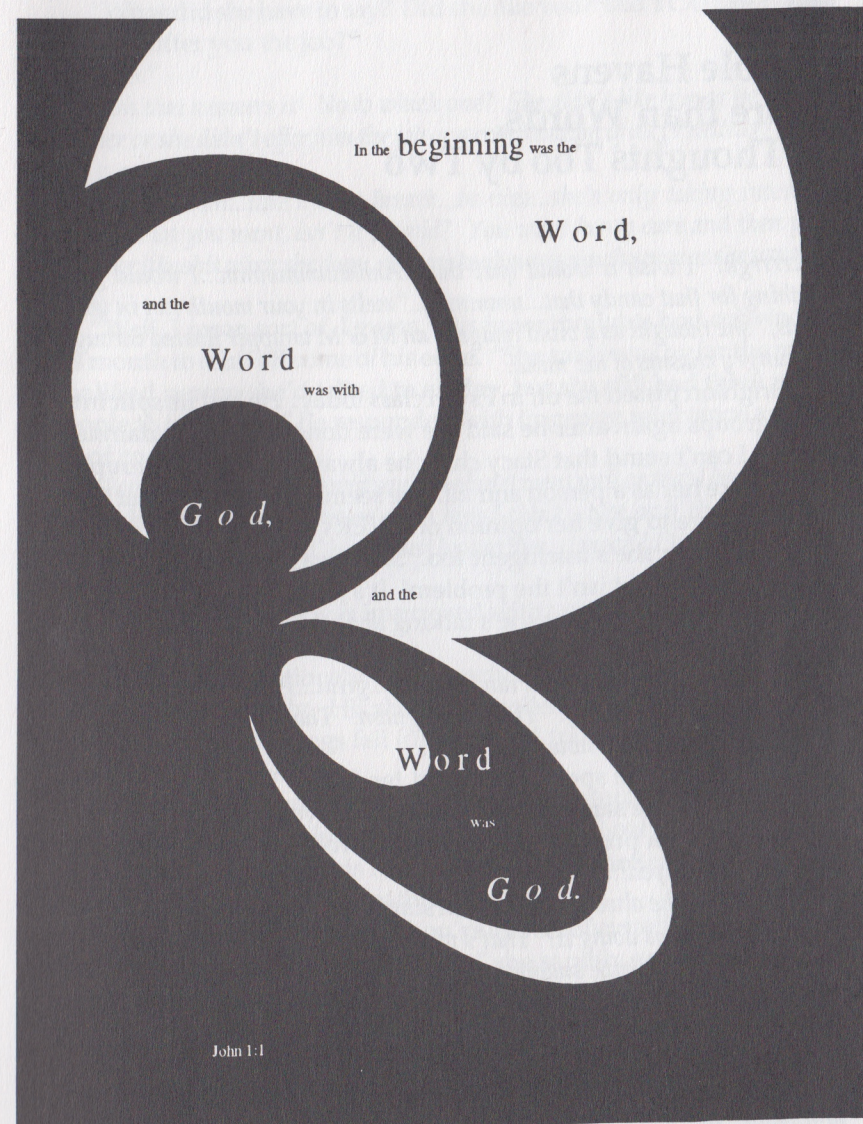
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Nicole Havens More than Words, Thoughts Too by Two

Arrrrgh! I wish it would quit that...Ahhhhummmmm...I would give anything for that candy that...ummmm..."melts in your mouth not in your hands," she thought as a vivid image of an M & M wrapper floated through the hungry chasms of her mind.

"Brighton pissed me off in Psych class today. He had us split into those groups again after he said we were done with those damned things. I can't stand that Stacy chick he always puts in my group! I mean, I like her as a person and all. She seems nice enough, but God does she have to give her opinion on EVERYTHING? Don't get me wrong. I mean she's intelligent too. She always knows what she's talking about. That isn't the problem! It's just that we don't care to hear that she knows what she's talking about! GOD! I wish I could drop that class!"

—What's he going off about now? Ohhh...great...Psych class again. It's ALWAYS pissing him off. Thanks Brighton. Thanks Stace. I suppose I should act sympathetic now...here goes...

"I'm sorry," she spoke softly and tenderly. "Why does he keep putting you in the same groups if he said he wouldn't?"

"Cause he's a prick!" he blurted defensively.

—Oh, that helped!!!

—Why does she always ask me such stupid questions? How the hell do I know why he keeps doing it? That's what's irritating me. Hummphhhh...I probably shouldn't have snapped at her though...

"I'm sorry. I don't know why; it's just pissin' me off."

He smacked the mechanical pencil he was holding in his hand onto the chipped edge of the small table.

—OK...Let's change the subject shall we? Let's see what could I ask...tell him about...no...he hates Ryan...lunch?...too trivial...Roger...sore subject...his interview...yes!

"So how did your interview with that lady today go?"

"Fine."

—I'm being a jerk...I know. But she...

—Was it really OK? Hmmm...he's just pouting...I think. Did it really not

go well? Do I ask...

"What did she have to say? Did she like you? Did YOU like HER? Did she offer you the job?"

"No."

—Oh that answers it! No to which one? She didn't like him or he didn't like her or she didn't offer him the job or a combination of all or neither? God he's a grouch!

—Calm down...take a deep breath...be nice...she's only taking interest. That's what you want, isn't it Stupid? You want her to care and then you treat her like shit when she does...you make about as much sense as she usually does.

"Well, I mean sort of, I guess," his inner thoughts had convinced his mouth to scuff off some of his edge. "She said I was by far the most qualified person she'd talked to all day, but she still had three more people to interview," he responded with lingering reluctance and an air of cockiness.

—I could be quiet...or I could say I'm glad it went well or that I hope he gets it or...she really was impressed with him I think. Not as if that's hard to believe...he tries so freakin' hard...just look at him...I mean LOOK at him...I'll bet...

"It sounds like she was impressed with you."

—God he's sexy!

She smiled flirtatiously. She reached forward and tousled the front of his hair gently. His short, controlled brown hair was longer in the front and his bangs fell forward and framed his round brown eyes.

—I know she was...quit it! Leave my hair alone...why does she always have to mess with my hair? She knows it irritates the hell out of me...

He irritably brushed his hair back out of his face and smoothed it down so it was once again featherly restrained.

"Who wouldn't be though? You're incredibly intelligent, cool and confident, and kind and considerate," she sappily asserted.

He tilted his head as if trying to act modest. It wasn't his nature though, and a smirk was slowly born on his face.

"I'm sure she thought you looked quite professional, but I don't know. I don't think you look all that professional."

He stiffened resentfully.

—What??? She doesn't huh? Well...

"Thanks a lot! So you don't think I look professional, huh?" he arched his thick eyebrows and his mouth was tilted and opened.

She rumbled her hair with her perfectly painted nails.

—I know he thinks it's sexy when I flip my hair...he told me so! I think I

actually upset him...good...now I can...

"Nope. Professional is not the word that springs to my mind. I'd say you look more along the lines...of super sexy! You look so HOT! God! Look at your butt in those pants!" She swooned as she reached behind him and playfully grabbed his butt.

"Don't mess with my *boutlierre*," he said each word succinctly and seriously.

"Oh come on now...don't be maaaaad," she responded sassily as she reached out and playfully touched his nose and pouted her recently glossed lips close to his.

-God she's a flirt!...I love it...she always denies it, look at her lips...ummm...but, no...I'm still supposed to be...

"I said quit it," he abruptly added with a half-laugh.

-He's just acting ticked off...how like a man...boy...they're all boys...I know he can't...he doesn't want to...I don't think...I mean surely he wants to...

"Ahhhh...come on now...don't you want to kiss me?" she said.

-Hell yes I want to kiss you!...but...then you win...NO WAY...

"Can't you tell I'm not in the mood? Knock it off," he exerted forcefully.

"Fine," she retreated briskly.

-Now she's gonna pout...great...

She sauntered off four feet into the corner and took her place on his rigid gray couch.

-If he doesn't want to kiss me...fine...I'll just make him miserable. Don't look at him...grit your teeth...what else...come on you're an actress...THINK!

"Don't pout. It's not becoming."

"I'm not pouting. I'm simply sitting on your couch relaxing. Is that OK by you, Sir?"

-Sir?!?!? I hate it when she does this!

-God, why am I reacting like this? So what if he doesn't want to kiss you right this second...it's not you...I mean I know it's not me because I...

"If that's what you were doing...fine," he hastily retaliated, clearly insinuating other reasons.

"Fine. Thank you for your permission sir."

-She can't get the last word...it's mine...I know I should quit...why can't I ever quit...leave things alone or give in...but I can't...SHE can't...

-I hate it when I do this! Why can't I ever just shut-up? I'm so damn competitive. Remember? Sid and I competed in speech, for guy's attention, even owning the most make-up. Look what happened...Look at me...Even kissing becomes competition.

"You're not welcome ma'am."

...Great now I've got him started too...Maybe I should tell him...now...no...not yet...

-Oh...great comeback dude...that sounded real tough. You pride yourself on being witty...and all you can come up with is "you're not welcome?"

-Can't he ever quit? I suppose though...it is my...I mean I pushed him...I didn't need to be...I suppose I should...I really do hate it to be like this...I think I'll...

She let out a long exasperated sigh and exhaled very deliberately. There was a silence that seemed to each to last eons. After some time passed she sat up and rolled her neck checking every crick and crack.

"What are you doing tonight? Do you have to work in the deli?"

-I feel bad...I'll try to be nice now...she really is beautiful...I'm going to be...

"Only till 9:00. Then I'm done. I've got all my work done. I was really proud of myself; I came back and worked for two hours on my paper and got it done except for the endnotes and title page."

-He doesn't sound so upset...maybe he feels bad too...good...

"That's great. I'm proud of you," she murmured sincerely. "I've really been putting my work off. I just feel so incredibly lazy like I don't want to do anything I'm supposed to."

"Have you started your journal for Intro yet?"

-I can see where this is going...I don't need a lecture...wait a minute...be calm...be patient...he's only concerned...I do need to get started.

"No, I'm going to spend tomorrow afternoon working only on that. I know I really need to get going on it. Journals are so time consuming. I can't believe he wants us to write three pages a day. Doesn't he know I have a life? Sorry. I know. I really do. I just needed to give myself a break today."

"I want you to do well because I know how much it means to you. And I know you will do well. You always do. Sometimes I can't believe how you can pull things out of your butt at the last instant and do so damn well."

-Good, he's quitting that line of attack and interrogation. I think he's quitting period. Maybe I shouldn't...I mean I know he hates it sometimes...but I just have to.

She stood up and treaded lightly over to his dresser.

-Don't let the sun go down on your anger...I know I can't sleep till I tell him...I have to tell him.

She glanced over his CD collection although she knew each and every one and even its respectful place on the shelf. She turned to look at him.

-What now? What's she...

"What are you thinking?"

-He always asks that...what do I say? Just say it!

"I'm sorry. I know it wasn't a big deal, but I'm sorry I was such a brat earlier. I don't know why I do that. You just look so darn cute...what girl could resist? I should have been more perceptive and realized that you had a long day today. I'm sorry."

-There. I'm done...I did it...now let's see what he'll say...

-She always has to apologize...I hate that...but, I regret it too though...I really was a dick...I know I'm a dick sometimes...but I'm not...

"It's OK. Don't worry about it. It's not a big deal."

-I know it's not...but...why don't you...I wish you'd...

"I know. I just needed to...I mean I wanted to..."

"Forget it. It's fine."

-I should probably...now that she...and I didn't...I suppose...

-I'll drop it now...for GOOD. Leave it alone...just be cool. I wish he would say...

"Alright."

-I should tell her...or what's that song...God I haven't heard that in a long time...More than words...is all I have to do to...

"Come here."

"Why?"

-Just go girl...don't stand here like a fool. Go to him...

"Just cause. Come here."

-Then you wouldn't have to say that you...

She reluctantly moved toward him. He smiled slowly and his whole body relaxed. With his sincere smile and newfound bodily easiness he exuded, she could see that everything was in balance once again, and a grin gradually spread across her glowing face. He reached out and grabbed her around the waist and pulled her in for a long-awaited loving embrace.

Derek Otte Melancholy

i woke to the sound of melancholy roses playing black tambourines in the garden near the gazebo of my dreams where my scarlet-veiled mistress walked across the lawn not rustling a blade.

her blonde hair barely moves in the soft breeze as a black cat walked across her path and she smiled not believing in superstition or anything but herself.

a piece of sun fell and landed in the trees on the other side of the creek and began to burn and devour until smoke filled the air attempting to blot out the sun from which it came but the breeze was blowing against it and the sun was above her on the other side of the creek.

the fire quickly played itself out across the banks nearest my mistress and continued on its way to the west racing the sun as she watched it go.

the fire grew smaller and smaller as it followed the curve of the earth away from her and as the fire dwindled on the horizon it grew in my heart.

the sun left us and began to chase the fire westward and soon was down in the black haze excrement of its spawn.

my fire grew and radiated as the sun vanished creating loving shadows like erotic dancers on the lawn around her as she turned smiling to my window to find the source and saw me there illuminated in the dark by a fire of mine own as i outstretched my hands to her inviting her and begging her to join me in the fire and be engulfed with me.

she took a step toward me and then began to rise as the wind gently picked her up off of her feet and carried her up and placed her ever so softly on the balcony outside my window as i stepped out to greet her.

we stood there for hours and days enveloped in my fire in our fire in a realm beyond the physical.

from the east the fire appeared on the horizon and made its way toward us but we ignored it as it engulfed us because in our own fire we had already been devoured.



*Kim Beck
Photograph*

Erik Einertson My Life

I've been dying for twenty two years now,
but the day my family was told,
the doctor had the ignorance to say
Congratulations!

Asshole!

Life spins and dies in my head like a top,
always spinning and spinning and spinning.
cribs,
kitchens,
scissors,
ice,
snow,
pigs,
Ice capades,
fishing,
funerals,
fist fights,
nights out,
more clout,
What's it all about?
It's my life.

Days dreaming by a stream,
like eating all the cream,
easy, easy it all seems,
Not true parents scream,
tomorrow shall change it all.
IS IT ALL A DREAM?
No.
It's my life.

Nighttime stories,
full of glories,
sleep tight - don't let the bed bugs bite.
new house new life,
dog named Duke, my big brute.
Baby brother, full of trouble.
Dr. Suess
Kindergarten,
1st grade,
dog named Knute, a bigger brute.
Dog named Daisy, small and crazy.
Senior High, my, time flies
Life is so easy, all of it.
It's my life.

Goodnight, they said, as I laid down my weighted head,
but alas, man-made monsters lay under my bed.
They come in all colors and shapes,
to each their own,
mine came in black, my sins to atone.
My best friend, four days, six feet.
life is sorrow after sorrow,
I am afraid to live.

New times, new goals.
Death and life are the same.
No booze, no drugs,
just give me Sex, Sex, Sex.
Give me food,
give me water,
give me shelter,
give me a sad story.
Give me women.
Life is physical,
I am not important,
I do not exist.
Is this my life?
No,
It's no life at all.

Times have changed, and I along with them.
I exist for living, and my body is but just a part.
Life periodically loses it's grip on its own soul.
Sometimes, I start falling, falling with my hair flying
in the wind, out of control, screaming, crying, waiting
for the fear to stop, and the ground to crush me
and end this nightmare.
Homework,
loved ones,
fear,
basketball,
popularity,
sega,
women,
friends,
lack of understanding,
politics,
roommates,
We all have these things that lead us away from living, from
ourselves.
These things make me sad once more,

but when I need a refresher,
to remind me of my luck,
I return
to my friend,
now five years, yet six feet.
And I realize,
This is my life.

R.J. Redden

In the Name of the Daughter

Dear Tellie,

What I am about to tell you are some of the most painful secrets of my life. They are the monsters underneath my bed, silent and hulking, waiting to consume me until I'm alone. I've owed you the truth for a long time, Tellie, ever since the night I left you in the break room at Pizza Hut—the Thursday you asked one question too many. I ran out of there and into the dark as fast as my feet could carry me, leaving you and your damned questions behind. I pray to God you want to hear the answers now, because this story is too painful to tell twice.

So here we are. This is the real story of my father, and how watching my friend Charlie slowly kill himself has almost destroyed me.

I never told you my father is an alcoholic. There were many reasons, partly because it felt like a betrayal to him, partly because no one wants to be an alcoholic's daughter, but mostly because I was afraid you wouldn't understand.

The first and biggest betrayal was my father. His drinking took him inside himself, deep down behind the blue eyes to a place I could never get to. Believe me, I tried. Tellie, I need you to know that I loved him more than anything else in the world. When I was a little girl, I used to pretend to fall asleep watching TV so that Dad would have to carry me up to my room. He'd gather me up and I'd snuggle my face against his huge chest. His heat warmed me through his skin, and he always smelled so good; the smell of strength, a father smell. His right foot always popped when he climbed the stairs. My right foot does that now.

Sometimes I wish it wouldn't.

As his drinking began to take him, he stopped carrying me to bed. Whisker tickles and "chicken" games stopped too, but the thing that hurt the most was he stopped paying attention. There were no smiles or greetings anymore when I came into the room, there was just him sitting in the damned overstuffed chair. That brown plaid chair was the one he settled in most often, the one with the broken footrest. He

kept a TV tray on his left side, because it was a good place to store his bottle of peppermint Schnapps. Whenever I smell peppermint now, I think of my father—and my stomach clenches.

He never left the chair except for a few necessary things, such as getting more booze and carefully hiding his bottles. I once found a bottle in one of my puppets.

One day when my father was in one of his more mobile phases, I took a good look at that chair. The covering was worn through in some places, places my father had chosen to mend with silver duct tape. It also reeked of alcohol; he never did pour very well when he was drunk. In short, the thing was fucking ugly and it smelled. I loathed it. He spent more time with that chair than he did with his only daughter. How could he love that chair more than he loved me? As if in answer, my father slowly trudged into the room and grunted at me to get out of the way.

I almost wish he had been abusive. Isn't that just insane? At least then I'd have known I was worthy of some kind of attention. A slap in the face would have been so much better than the blank stare I usually got from him. I began to wonder if maybe there was something wrong with me.

A week after the chair thing happened, my father disappeared again. He did this with surprising regularity, often on Saturdays, usually before noon. But this time was different—he didn't return. Five o'clock passed, six o'clock, seven. It was time to go out looking for him.

Mom and I took the station wagon (all the better to load him in, my dear) and went out checking park benches. I know that you knew my mom from high school, Tellie. From what you've described of her, I can tell you she's changed quite a bit. She spends most of her time trying to support us, and what little is left she spends chasing after my father, bailing him out of jail, emptying his bottles into the sink. Of course I love her, because she's my mother, but I swore every day I'd never be like her.

We found my father a little after nine, shuffling up Sixth Street Hill on a freezing February night. He was carrying three cans of a six-pack by the plastic rings. Mom called out to him, and he pretended not to hear. She stopped the car and got out.

"Larry Murtree! Get in the car, we're going home!" No response. Mom was really screaming now, a screech she reserved for her disobedient, drunken husband. "Larry! Get in the car NOW or we're LEAVING!" My father sounded a grunt in our direction. Lights were beginning to come on in some of the houses, and suddenly I couldn't stand the humiliation anymore. I shouldered open the car door and

ran to my father.

"Dad. Please come in out of the cold. I love you, would you come home?" He turned to face me; I held my breath.

Illumination from the streetlight outlined his face, and I distinctly saw his stubble, stringy hair, and his lined and sagging face. Most vivid were his eyes. They contained my fathers' demons, writhing and wrestling for the possession of his soul. And it looked to me like the demons were winning.

Despite his drunkenness, he spoke very clearly.

"No. I don't want to come home, and I don't want you."

Just writing that makes me bleed inside.

My love for my father didn't die that night, Tellie, but it did contract a terminal disease. It was a long, slow, excruciatingly painful cancer that ate away my love for him and replaced it with hatred. It happened every time he grunted at me from his chair, every time I found another one of his bottles, every time he stared through me with eyes that were made of steely bank vault doors. Those doors not only shut me out, they locked everything wonderful about him inside. All I could see when I looked in those shiny doors was my reflection, and I hated that.

I felt so utterly lost when he told me he didn't want me. This man I have loved all my life, loved more than anyone else, the man who once taught me the game of Tiddlywinks on the living room floor—this man didn't love me back. If my own father couldn't love me, who would?

I couldn't talk to anyone about this. I mentioned before the friend I tried to tell. I was a girl whose own father didn't love her—I felt like a loser, some kind of a freak. I was sure I was the only one in the universe with this problem; after all, who had heard of a father not loving his own daughter?

The days passed, one way or another. My father did come back home, but I avoided him whenever I could. I lost even the hope that my father would someday love me, listen to me, pay attention. In order to spend more time away from him, I joined in some groups at school. I also got a job during that time, a day which stands out in my memory because it was on that day that I met you. I never told you, Tellie, but our late-night talks and your laughter helped me live through some very tough months.

I got more involved with the choir that March, and it was around that time that I first met Charlie. He was a soccer player (with rather nice legs, by the way) and a singing voice that could have charmed Attila the Hun, army and all. Our choir was on tour, which meant eight days of travel, rehearsal, performance; travel, rehearsal,

performance; travel, rehearsal (yawn) performance. I knew it would be exhausting, and I couldn't have cared less. I wanted to get away from home, and I knew Charlie would be there.

I had noticed him around school, but hadn't had enough courage to talk to him. I guess four hours in a crowded school bus gave me what I needed, though, because I started a conversation...something lame about the weather. I must admit I liked him right away—there was something about his crinkly smile that attracted me. There was also his giggle—a distinct, high-pitched hee-hee-hee that always made me laugh so hard I'd see spots. Hard to imagine a six foot tall muscular football type giggling, but that's how he was. He sounded just like a little boy when he giggled.

Somehow getting up the courage to talk to Charlie on the way over gave me the courage to talk to the others. I made many friends in those eight days that for me, lasted a long, lovely lifetime. Charlie had a birthday halfway through, and we helped him celebrate in the usual manner. I personally wrapped him in toilet paper ten minutes before our six o'clock rehearsal; he had no choice but to go in there that way.

The most vivid part of the trip was the day we were travelling to Aurora. The day before, I had taken a dare from Angie (the bus driver) that the next time this song by Bel Biv de Voe came on the radio, I would do a dance to it. I figured I'd be safe, after all, we weren't driving very far the next day, when Bingo! It came on. Angie stopped the bus and waited for me to get out. Everyone was looking at me expectantly—and I couldn't come up with a single good excuse. I got out.

See if you can picture this: A five-foot-nothing girl doing a dance on the edge of the Interstate, a yellow bus full of highschoolers hanging out of the window and cheering, the bus driver yelling and honking in time to the music. Best of all, I knew Charlie was looking on, possibly giggling. It must have looked incredibly silly to whoever was driving by, but it remains in my memory as one of the finest days of my life.

Eventually we had to come home. I saw Charlie around school a little bit more than I had, but nothing happened worth telling you about. Until the day of the Advanced Biology field trip.

That day, bird-watching was the name of the game. We were supposed to be scouting scarlet tanagers, and Charlie offered to pair up with me. I gratefully accepted, because after all, it wasn't against the rules to watch other things besides birds. Everyone split up, so we were relatively alone. He handled the binoculars; I handled the Bird Book. We talked about birds, teachers, and the fact that we both thought math was evil. We rested on a log, chatting comfortably and

spotting birds occasionally. Then Charlie asked me about my family.

I nearly began to recite the usual litany, giving him the impression of my home as a nice place to be, peopled with average parents who had a nice little daughter. That lie made it about halfway out of my mouth, and just sat there on my tongue. I could feel it wanting to come out, wanting to trick this person into believing everything was all right in my life. Charlie saw me bite my lip.

"Is something wrong?" he asked, probing my eyes for an answer.

Maybe it was the understanding look in his eyes, or maybe I was just damn tired of my lies. "Would you like to hear the real version, or the Edited-for-Television version?" I asked, with a painful little laugh.

"You have two versions too?" he asked. Then he giggled, but it wasn't his usual glee-filled giggle at all. It sounded like he was trying to cover an enormous amount of pain, like a kiddie blanket trying to put out an inferno. It sounded exactly like my own laugh had the moment before. An unspoken and supremely powerful recognition began to flow between us.

"You tell me your real version and I'll tell you my real version," he said, slipping his hand under mine. His eyes also spoke, saying: I already know, so you might as well just tell me.

My God. For the first time, I looked into someone else's eyes and read my own pain there. Here was someone that understood what was going on with my father; someone who would finally listen to me. The bond formed between us instantaneously. Alone we fought battles that were impossible to win; but together, we were invincible.

No more birds were written down in our field notebooks that day. We walked and talked for hours, opening the crypts of our family histories.

That night, when I went home, I was able to face my father's blank stare. I knew I was capable of being loved again, because Charlie's eyes had said it all day. And oh God, I loved him too.

This was the beginning of a friendship that I woke up in the morning for, faced the day with, and dreamed about at night. Above all, I need you to know what an incredible friend he was to me. All those years of screaming to be heard in my family left me unprepared for someone who loved to listen to me. Not only that, Tellie, he talked to me. I used to listen to him sing in choir and wonder why an amazing person like that would want to talk to someone who obviously didn't have too much to offer, but there it was. I used to slip the ringer off on the phone downstairs so my parents wouldn't know he was calling me after one in the morning. We talked every night for months. Most of it was about school, but whenever the situation with our fathers

would rear its ugly head, we'd talk about that too. We shared hopes, dreams, fears and anger. We were best friends.

See, I could handle anything as long as I could talk to him. There were also times he needed me. Charlie's anger would come barreling out of him sometimes. He'd hit the walls, Tellie, and his knuckles would be so bloody I couldn't tell where the knuckles ended and the blood began. I wiped the blood and the tears away together. For the first time, I was able to ease someone else's pain, to love somebody and not run into steel bank vault doors. I loved him with all my heart, Tellie, loved him with everything inside of me.

This went on for about a year. I came out of that year with something I had never had before: hope. Hope that someday life might be different for me, hope that I might even be able to escape the vision of my father, sitting there in his damned chair. I might be able to have a better life, one that didn't include giving my love away to people who didn't deserve it.

Charlie came out of that year with something else: a desire to lose his virginity to me. We talked about it for a long time—and then one night, he was over at my house and it just happened. We finally shared everything, and the bond between us strengthened. I began to imagine a life with him.

During the next year, his drinking also became more frequent. I didn't take this very seriously at first, thinking that was just the way he was. He didn't worry me until he quit choir. I asked him why and he just said that it was taking too much out of him. I had to take his word for it, Tellie. What else was I going to do?

The turning point was a month later, when he moved out of his house. He moved in with three friends of his—friends that I knew drank like fish. Thirsty fish. I finally asked him directly about his drinking.

He condemned me for being a suspicious bitch.

I was paralyzed. Fear does that to me sometimes, stops my heart and makes my body so rigid it can't move. I was so afraid that it was something I'd said or done to make him say a thing like that. Before I could speak, he was holding me like he always did, telling me he was sorry, saying he must've been possessed, that he'd never say that again. I forgave him because I guessed everybody had bad days, and because I didn't want to lose him. I forgave him because he was the love of my life.

In the fall I left for college. I picked a place that was not too far away, close enough for weekend visits once in a while. Charlie was brave for me and said we'd be fine, but what I didn't count on was his jealousy streak. The phone calls started.

He'd call late at night, just to see if I was home. If I wasn't, there'd be some nasty message on the machine. If he did catch me, the conversation always started out friendly, only to end up brutal. He'd begin by asking how the day went, how were classes, on and on. Then he'd start asking if I thought any of the boys were good-looking, and I'd tell him that he was better-looking than any of them. Eventually the suspicion would settle in his voice and he'd ask me if I was sleeping with anyone. No matter what I told him then, the call would end with a screaming match and a dial tone.

These calls took their toll on me. I was no longer happy to hear the phone ring, but would answer it with a mixture of trepidation and dread. Finally I decided to go home and see him, reassure Charlie that I did love him.

That weekend the physical abuse began to rip out of him. I never dreamed he would hurt me, Tellie. But it became real for me anyway, when I tried to get him out of my bed so I could sleep in it. He was drunk, of course (in fact he smelled as if he'd taken a bath in Budweiser), and he wouldn't move. Frustrated, I shoved my right hand under his left shoulder, struggling for leverage. He opened his eyes to a slit, saw me, and backhanded me across the right cheek. To tell you the truth, I didn't really feel the physical pain—it was more the shock that I felt. Anyway, that was the start of it.

From then on, he abused me more frequently. It's been months now, and I've been clocked more times than I can count, thrown against my bedroom wall a few times, shoved into a parked car once. These weren't the things that hurt me, Tellie. I could always blame his being rough on his drunkenness. What hurt the most were the things he said to me when he was sober. Sometimes the hardest thing to believe now is that I'm not a bitch, I've never been a slut, and I'm not a stupid cow.

Two weekends ago, I went home because I needed to work. As always, Charlie found me. The conversation started out civil, and he asked me if we could watch movies in my basement. I opened my mouth to say that maybe that wasn't the best idea, and then he gave me one of those smiles that he used to give me, way back when we were sixteen and sitting in the back row of choir. I said yes.

You see, Tellie, he wasn't an awful human being all the time. Even when his drinking sabotaged most of the time I spent with him, there were still times when he was my old friend, the one I called when my father turned up missing or in jail. Even on this night there was still hope for our friendship, and that's why I agreed to spend time with him.

Later, I wasn't much surprised when Charlie's craving for alcohol

led us out of my basement and down the road to Barry's Bar & Grill. I decided I would leave if Charlie started any trouble.

I wasn't given that chance. I still don't know why Charlie did it, but he drank fifteen whiskeys in just under an hour and a half. I did everything I could to stop him, gave him the speeches I'd rehearsed a thousand times; I tried kindness; I tried to bully him. In the end, I just decided to wait until he had more or less passed out. I finally enlisted the help of the bartender in dragging him out the door. I was ready to load him in the car when I realized the problem; I'd parked two blocks away. I propped the Antichrist up against a trash can and began the dismal search for my keys. As I reminded myself to clean out my purse the unthinkable happened (at least I couldn't have predicted it): Charlie moved on his own. Not only that, he got my purse away from me.

I turned and he was stumbling down the street, throwing things out of my purse. I went after him, of course, telling him it was my car and I was driving it home. I couldn't make out what he said next, but I think it was something to the effect that he was the better driver. All at once, I was tired of the game.

"Charlie, I hate it when you're like this. Sometimes I think I don't want to be with you anymore."

He turned to face me. In the red glow of the neon sign, I could see his bangs falling over his ruddy cheeks. His eyes pierced me then.

"I don't want to be with you."

His words reverberated in my brain as if they'd been said in an echo chamber. I remembered my father, standing under a streetlight on a cold February night. The demons were winning again, only this time, it was worse. The pain was tremendous when it finally came, but right then, I had to get my keys away from Charlie. I couldn't imagine what would happen if he got behind the wheel.

It was easy to catch up to him, because he'd only stumbled a few feet away. I caught his left arm and pulled on it with all my weight, hoping to bring him down before he could get to my car. Before I knew what he was doing, he brought his left arm up, swung it, and I was bouncing off a parking meter.

I slid onto the sidewalk. The next thing I heard was my car's engine revving—and it was gone, tires squealing down the street.

I tried to get my legs under me, tried to stand, but a hand on my shoulder forced me back down. You're hurt, hunny, stay down, a voice said, but I shoved the hand away and somehow summoned the strength to stand. The hands pulled at me again, and this time there were so many of them trying to stop me. They obviously didn't understand that I wasn't hurt that badly, that the one who really

needed help was Charlie. I had to get to him before he could hurt himself.

In the sound of one collision, my fear became reality. I heard the squeal of brakes, the screech of metal on metal, the sound of shattering glass, and the collision. For me it shook the ground. As the crowd turned to look I broke free of them, terror giving me new strength.

I ran so fast I tripped over my own feet, crashed to the street, got up and ran again. Sweat stung my left eye, and I wiped it away with my hand, almost losing my balance again. I had to see if Charlie was all right, had to help him.

It was then that I saw what remained of my car. Charlie had been driving on the wrong side of the road and crashed into a parked Ford Fairlane. None of this registered until I saw the blood spray on the inside of my Chevette's windshield; Charlie's blood. Suddenly I knew without a single doubt that Charlie was dead. It was over.

Grief consumed me and I fell to my knees, screaming. The connection between us was suddenly and irrevocably broken, and it was agony. I put my hands to my eyes and the tears streamed down my cheeks. Charlie was dead. How could you fucking do this to me, God? How could you?

When I took my hands down from my face, they were stained a dark red. I realized that what I had wiped out of my eye before had not been sweat, but blood. I was apparently losing a lot of it, because my hands were almost completely covered.

The pain clawed deeper inside me as I realized that I couldn't look for Charlie to clean me up, not this time. I would have to do it for myself.

Using the very last of my strength, I stood and wiped the blood and tears off my own face.

I don't know whether it was the blood loss or the grief that finally took me, but it was then that my body gave up. I passed out.

Do you know the movie *Forrest Gump*? The scene that comes to mind is where his girlfriend (Jenny?) is throwing rocks at the house she used to live in with her alcoholic father? Forrest's voice comes over the speakers, saying "Sometimes there just aren't enough rocks." Tellie, sometimes there just isn't enough dynamite.

I stayed with him for so long for two reasons. One I've already told you about: the hope that someday we could go back to our wonderful friendship. The other reason, the more important one, is this: I couldn't face the fact that Charlie might be an alcoholic. I poured more love and trust into him than anyone, including my father, and it just couldn't be true that my best friend was like my father. In the end, the

pain of taking Charlie's abuse was easier than facing the pain of the ultimate betrayal.

I love Charlie still, Tellie. I would have taken all his pain away if I could, but I think now it's time to heal my own.

My father, for all I know, is sitting in that damned chair drinking himself to death as I write this. It's agonizing for me to admit that I still love him too. He is also killing himself, and I'm powerless to stop it.

No matter how many times I vowed I'd never be like my mother, I have to be honest with myself and admit that's exactly how I turned out. I'm finding out that maybe change is brought about by more than words. Maybe changing myself will take action, and right now, I'm willing to do anything for a better life.

I can't let this destroy me anymore.

I'm writing to you for help, Tellie. I lived in my father's name until he didn't want me anymore, then I lived in Charlie's name. I want to go on living, living in my own name this time, but holy hell, where do I even begin?

You were the only person who listened to me and didn't demand a payment of some kind. I'm begging you to listen now, and to reply. I don't have another chance.

Please,
Emily

Erik Einertson Fall in the Valley of Elah

a brown and shriveled leaf seems suspended in the frost midair, as it flutters from the distant branches of the once mighty, but now conquered oak.

AND NEARBY, A PINE TREE STANDS TRIUMPHANT, AS IF HOLDING SLING AND FIVE STONES IN HAND.

Julie Koziel
I Remember Corn

I remember eating corn on the cob
On a hot summer evening.
It was our third
No...
Fourth date,
And I loved the taste,
The sweet buttery yellow taste
Of the damned near perfect food
For a sweet buttery hot summer evening
When love was new and sweet and buttery and hot,
But...
I pushed the corn away after only a few tantalizing bites.
I looked at the still steaming cob with longing,
But knowing the corn would stick in my teeth,
Knowing the butter would run down my chin,
And knowing that would never do.
I remember eating corn on the cob
On a hot summer evening.
But now it is a freezing February night,
And as he walks out into the frigid blast,
I wonder if he remembers the corn on the cob,
And I wonder if the corn had stuck in my teeth,
And if the butter had run down my chin,
And I wonder if that is why he left me.

Luis Navarro
Incessant

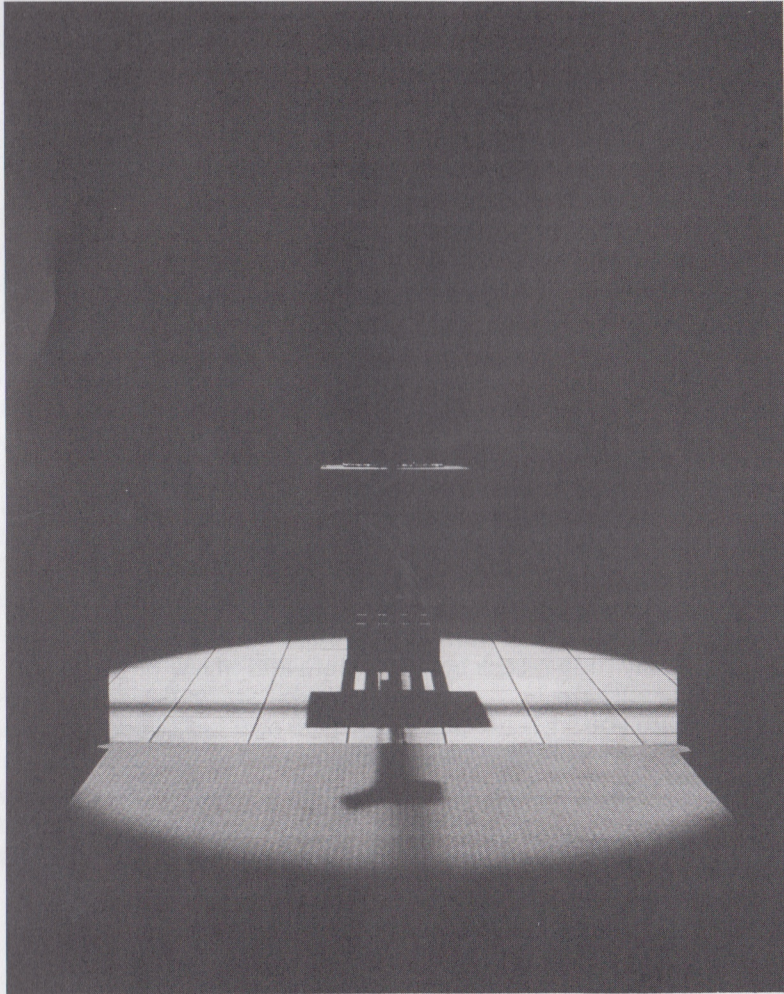
For M.M.H.

Come little princess please don't cry
and let me sing you a lullaby.
Hush my dear and hear my song
and maybe you can hum along.
Come little princess let's end the day
and enter life's ethereal pathway.
Remember when you sleep tonight
to set yourself free, alright.
 You'll dream of me
 I'll dream of you
and together we'll fly
out of life's rusty hue.

Let's forget about life's sorrow
and play like there's no tomorrow.
Come little princess don't be shy
chin-up and let's explore the sky.
Let's lose ourselves in the twilight
then we'll dance under the moonlight.
You and I will touch and burn like the stars
then we'll play hide-n-seek between Pluto and Mars.
 You'll be with me
 I'll be with you
and we'll always mean it when vowing
"I'll die for you."

Come little princess
let's never wake up
but dream forever.
And let's never grow up
but stay young forever.
Come little princess
let's never wake up
but dream forever.
And let's never break up
but stay together

forever



Jeff Rademacher
Photograph

Jeremy Woodliff Lost in Middle America

Two overweight men sit stagnate on an algae green vinyl sofa. They just sit all day staring at the television and stuffing moon-pies into their already bloated bodies. The only time they get off the sofa is to pee or get more Old Style from the gas station across the street. Bernie, the fatter of the two men, is wearing his favorite blue mesh half-shirt. Mike his partner in inactivity, is sporting a 3/4 length sleeve Chevy-Power shirt and his favorite 4x4 hat. The pair look like guys you would encounter at a car show or fishing expo.

Today is sort of a special day for the two. It's Saturday, which is "Monster Truck Day" on TNN. They always get out of bed early so they don't miss any of the action.

"This is the best, Mike; I love Saturdays."

"Yeah Saturdays kick ass; throw me a beer."

Mike reaches his soiled hand into the open case beside him on the couch and is surprised to discover that only one beer is left. Shocked by this development, he looks to Bernie.

"We're outa beer man. It's your turn to get more."

"Fine, but I need to borrow some cash until my unemployment check gets here."

"Let me see how much I've got," Mike replies as he pulls his wild-life-scene-embossed trucker wallet from his pocket, unhooks the chain from his belt and peers inside. All that remains is a single dollar bill, his NRA membership, and the Official Boob Inspector card Bernie had given him for his 21st birthday.

"Shit all I got is a buck! What are we gonna do?"

"Don't panic," Mike says in a comforting voice, "I'll think of somethin."

Mike slides down into his seat and sets his mind to work. After several minutes of staring blankly at the smokers-tooth yellow living room wall, a smile comes to his face.

"I know who we can get money from."

"Who?" Mike quips impatiently.

"Jim. He's got a good job. He's probably got plenty of money lying around. He won't mind lending us some."

"Yeah! Jim's a good guy."

The two flabby men peel themselves off the couch and with a determined look about them head out the door of their double-wide powder blue mobile home. They ooze into Jim's shit-brindle brown 1976 Firebird and with a few pumps of the gas pedal they speed off to see their buddy, Jim Fryer.

Jim is a back-yard mechanic who, although he only has a GED, is the smartest guy they know. When the two pull into his junk filled yard, they find Jim engaged in his normal routine, shirtless, up to his neck in grease, and swearing at an engine like it was human.

"You dirty bitch! What the hell's wrong with you?" Jim yells as they step out of the car.

"How you doin' Jim?" Mike asks in a careful tone.

"I'd be doin' a whole lot better if I could get this fucking thing to run!" Jim yells as he hurls a socket wrench at the engine compartment of the Escort wagon he's been trying to fix all morning.

"What's wrong with it?"

"Well dipshit, if I knew what was wrong with it I'd fix it," replies Jim as he exhales a drag of his non-filter cigarette into Mike's face.

"What do you fagots want?"

"We were just out driving around and thought we would stop in and see what you were doin'." Bernie explains, trying to sound convincing.

"Yeah, we were just out driving around, and Bernie said 'Hey lets go see what are old buddy Jim is up to,' and I said, 'yeah, that's a good idea.'"

"Really? You sure you didn't come over here to hit me up for beer money so you can sit on your fat ass's all day and watch the idiot box?" Jim asks as he glares at Mike.

"No, of course not, but it's funny you should mention money." Mike replies sheepishly as he runs his fingers through his grease encrusted hair.

"The answer is no! I'm done givin' you assholes money."

"Come on Jim; all we need is six bucks for a case; it's on sale." Bernie begs like a little boy asking for a new toy he's just seen on TV.

"Every weekend you son's a bitches come over here and beg for money like the trash you are; now leave me alone so I can get some work done."

The two know by the tone of Jim's voice not to push him any further, so with their tails between their legs they get back into the Firebird and speed off down the gravel road, back to the trailer park.

"Boy, Jim was being a real dick, wasn't he Bernie?"

"Yeah! I wonder what's up his ass."

"He shouldn't talk to me like that. I was going to kick his ass right there."

The two men sit back into the torn vinyl seats and wonder where they're going to get money. And deep down inside, in a part of their souls they don't reveal to each other, they wonder where they're going. The two have been lost for so long it has become a comfortable place.

Dana Holz The Magnificat of the Penguin

He said, "Together we can soar the heights of genius. Fly with me, my little eagle."

"I'm afraid you've misunderstood. I'm not an eagle, but a penguin," She answered, closing the door behind Her.

EXODUS

The prissy jaybirds and the paladin sparrows,
The gossipy stork and know-it-all geese (I hated them the most)
And those sporting, boring pigeons;
They all smirked as they flew by,
As we tried, *strained*, to fly.
But while God had remembered the sparrow (and the lily),
He had forgotten us, it seemed.
So, we waddled as quick as we could (though it was slow going)
To the numbing artc water,
As those stupid fowl did kamikaze dives
At our little black heads.

ANNUNCIATION

But the water, soft and sensuous,
Became our soothing muse.
We could now soar, and we honked our thanks
To this glorious creation which enveloped our souls.
And those birdbrained hens,
Well, they cocked their beaks into the wind,
And flew off to torture the defenseless Dodo Bird.

REVELATION

The arctic winter taught us our karmic destiny:
To be trapped in fat, waddling masses,
Killed by ravenous polar bears;
Portrayed as scatterbrained klutzes in Walt Disney films.

It is through these karmic challenges that we have
Finally understood our
Balanced and fluid nature:
Our bodies, fat and squat,
also the symbols of Yin and Yang-
Part white: which holds no color;
Part black: which embodies every color.
We are not at home with our species:
Instead we make our own communities,
Outcast but full of peace.

Throughout time,
The kindred water has protected us
And now praises our aquatic talents, a delighted parent.
With as much grace as Eagle in the Air,
We fly in Water, artists of the sea.
For She has baptized us:
"Penguin-Water Painter,
Penguin-The Balanced One."

And when in love, we are truly inspirational.

Winner of Joseph Langland Award for Poetry

R.J. Redden Distilled Spirits

I. RAVAGED

Forcing me into reality
A woman's voice speaks to me

*go to the riverside
what you need, you will find
your own kind*

I silence her words, I brush away
I thought it was only I that knew
How fast I'm dying, every day
I have no choice

Suffering from self-inflicted degradation
My feet fly toward their destination
I'm running so fast because I know
I have nowhere else to go

Why did that woman send me here
Jolting apart in the face of my fear
(My wants have no meaning here)
But the voices are drawing me in
*(And my feet won't follow
the command to get out)*
Terrified, angry, powerless
I take my place in the crowd

This crowd of my own kind
Standing shoulder to shoulder, facing the river
No one here looks at each other
Hoping they can go on hiding their pain
From their brothers and their mothers
And all the others

I can see their faces now.
Whispers and sobs and silent rage
Some are screaming, long and loud

*(the seeds of the cottonwood
carry a cottony tuft. it brushes
against my skin - the only softness
in a reality that crushes)*

Campfires circle all the refugees
Hiding from a life we can't handle
Some of us forced to our knees.

Acrid smoke forms a screen
On which our stories play out
Curses from God and madmen's dreams
Form our collective reality
Confusion reigns, the senses combine
(The voices are buildingblendingblinding)

II. REVELATION

Stories erupt like dormant volcanoes
Spewing poison and selfish pride
Images flash faster on the screen of smoke
Envy and ego and fear, oh my
The woman beside me explodes

*-so many times I hoped I was just insane - there wasn't any other
explanation for what I felt - there was just a whistling hole in my gut that
I had to fill with anything, anyone, no matter who it hurt - it went on for
so long, I destroyed people - no just God could ever forgive my sins -*

Thoughts I'd had for years
Made their way to the surface
Through her tears
I could fight no longer
The power of the voices was so much stronger
My story was told.

*- I had the hole too - in the end it was all I had - life had
taken everything else away from me and God was either a cruel joke or a
cruel joker -it seemed that no matter how hard I tried, it wasn't good*

*enough - never good enough - I stopped wanting to be good enough -
stopped wanting to wake up at all -*

Down where no bandage will stick
I am bleeding. The poison drains
Of the hatred I once lived on
Nothing remains

III. RELEASE

The woman beside me grips my hand
Others behind help me stand
I wish they wouldn't look at my misery
These people who have suffered the same atrocities

*blood from ruptured hearts
streams from everyone, flowing rapidly
carve hieroglyphics in the ground
trails trace the stories of our pain
for those who will come to read them
tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow*

All these lives have been destroyed
Precious promises, null and void
Everyone here has a story to tell
Disease and pain and living hell

*crying and screaming all the old questions
of why anyone has to bleed, I feel
hands on both sides, pursuing and persisting
squeezing mine, sending strength and
breath washes my lungs
again and again and again*

On my right, I hold the hand of a brother
Our sorrow finally helps us find - each other
Facing our pain, we find our peace
We suffer, we bleed, we are redeemed.

IV. REDEMPTION

Speaking
Softly, lovingly

Voices guide me
(there to the river's edge where the raft bobs, waiting)

Slowing
Terrified, clenching
Can't step on
(We'll be here, they all say, patient and pulling my hands)

Stepping
Hesitantly, careful -
Onto the raft
(the raft that carries us in our rite of passage downriver)

Stopping
At places
Along the river
(everyone lives in the huts along the river here)

Seeking
Secret siblings
Strangers for now
(but we know who they are, the recognition binds us)

Sensing
Ravenous pain
Beneath their glances
(subtle glances that tell us their secrets and their stories)

Seizing
The memory
Of the riverside
(where our pain released us, where everyone connects)

Sending
Future siblings
To that riverside
(and now they will bleed and grow and love)

Sacred
The circle
Connecting us all
(the pain and the river and my brothers and sisters)



Stephanie Carlson
Painting

Roisin Bell
Shooting Star

A single graceful dancer
pirouettes across the sky
a flowing silver gown
sleekly trailing behind
the dancers stop
and gaze in awe
at the beautiful maiden
on whom dreams befall

Justin Garcia
The Petals

If you take away my petals,
will you still find me beautiful?
If you take away my smell,
will I still be sweet?
If you take away my touch,
will I still be soft?
If you could see me clearly,
would you still open up your eyes?
If I lost my mind,
would you still be there to find me?

Luis Navarro
Sticky Smile

For A.N.H.

Swimming secrets
in the salty sea
sunshinesandcastlesnocones
and
make-believe...
Crashing waves
sea rippled sand
come the
wrinkles of time...
Dainty limbs
wrapped in
carmel supple skin.
Brilliant black
ponytails swing
as she
skips.
Pupils glitter in Innocence
as the bubbles of youth wash up.
Her imagination glides
with
chirping laughter
and a
sticky smile.
Wild her happiness soars.

Kim Zulfer
GENERATION X

The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner

*From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.*

-Randall Jarrell

Red Electrified Images screaming from the tv
Bleach Blond Black haired lost souls
Lost in the dream of life
Generation X falls into step.

Why?

Because we yearn for the clarity of Jarrell.
He saw the black flak and small fighters
He hosed out the children of that generation.

Jarrell, what is generation X?

Undisciplined, uncaring, drowning, lost gunners
Your generation tells us to get a job and cut our hair
"Just put them to work and that 'ill fix 'em!"
That will fix the black flak in our brains.

For we see the shinny waste lands
Of malnutrition, manifesting into magnets
Feeding on pop culture
We feed on Liquid TV, Pepsi, and Pop Tarts.
We are the abused Punished People
We are the mutants.

Mutants born from your generation Jarrell.

Mutated by our own generation
Because we make Idols of the Juice and Nirvana
We are like sheep, following in step
Down the path already chosen for us
No escape, no change.
We don't even have a name

Oh Jarrell, Where is your clarity?

Michael J. Haddock
Dust

It's that time of year
When nothing seems to shine
Pondering every thought that creeps up from behind. . . .
A long time ago.

On a trail above the ocean, the sky stood still and the clouds held the sun between them. Children jumped from rocks and high plateaus to meet the incoming waves. The sand was red beyond them. People strolled along the beach. Their footprints were taken by the tide, and their voices were drowned by its crashing. Sails far from shore told of passing boats and ocean cruisers. The outline of an island became the backdrop. The red sand turned a shade of white, while the empty spaces were taken by the lounging cavities. In the distance, the white sand turned into green patches of grass where many tables were assorted. The view of some trees poked their way into the background. The ocean air was cluttered with fond smells of coconut butter and barbecues. Along the white sandy shoreline, some children had begun to gather seashells while others constructed enormous castles with deep trenches around them. Still others chose to swim or run about like tiger cubs so playful and happy to be there. No words can explain nor pictures ever hold, what a perfect day it was. For the wind has blown dust in my eyes, and I open them to find myself in a cornfield in Nebraska.

