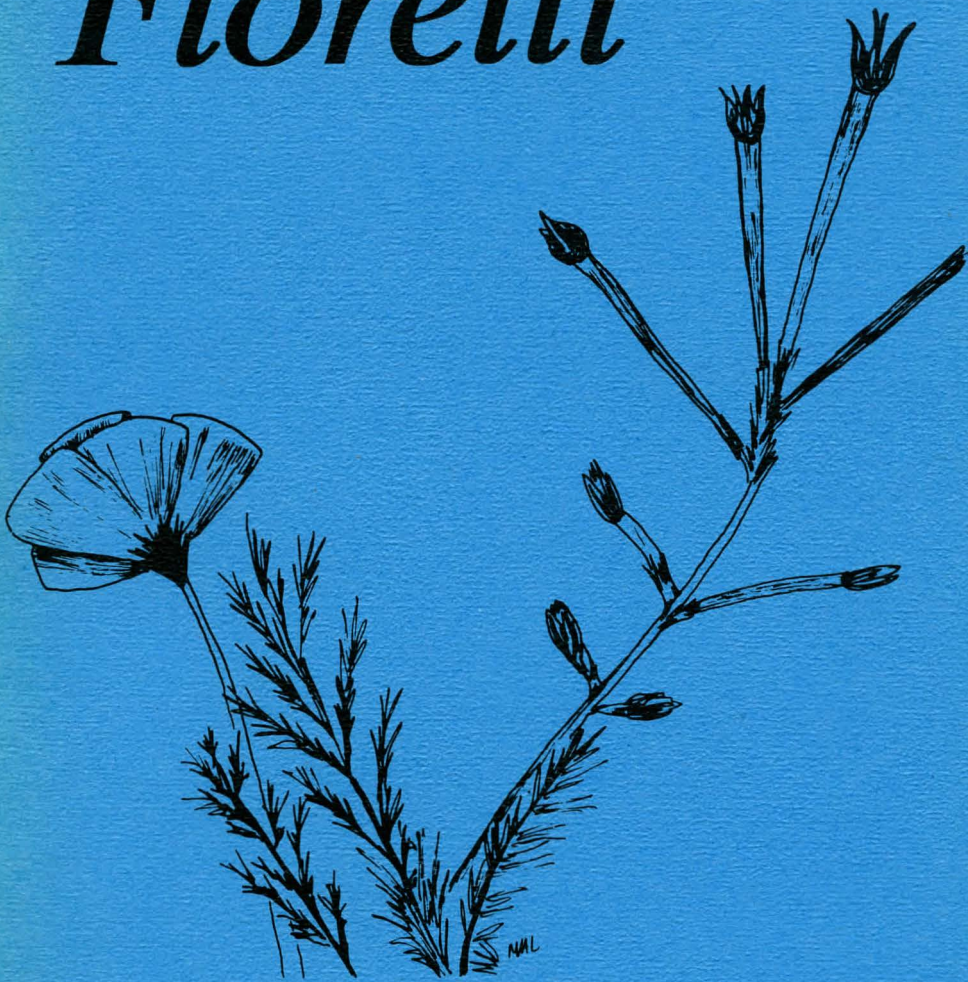


Fioretti



Fioretti

a literary anthology

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Staff

EDITORS/Don Vogt, Julie Biltz

ASSISTANT/Michelle A. Leman

PRODUCTION EDITOR/Michelle A. Scheidt

ADVISOR/Sr. Stella Gampfer, O.S.F.

THAT SPECIAL SOMEONE

Susie Schmeltzer

A few nuzzles of Sadi's soft furry snoot signalled that it was time to rise and meet this brand new Monday morning. As Josh reached to snag his alarm before it had a chance to go off, he was reminded of the fact that it was indeed springtime by the wonderfully fragrant breeze blowing through his window. He took a deep breath. "Ahh...I just love springtime, Sadi," he said, briskly rubbing his hair. He stood up for a final stretch and scratched the crown of his head as he always did when he was getting ready to tell Sadi about one of his great memories.

"I always want to get out of bed in the spring. I remember when I was little jumping out of bed early in the morning to get the chores done so my brothers and I could go down to the creek and explore." He began to make the bed. "I remember running through the fields of grass, which, most of the time, was an adventure in itself. The grass was so tall that we never knew where we were stepping, what we were stepping on, or what was going to step on us! But, when we made it down to the creek, it was all worth it. It was like a fairyland..." Josh remembered how the sun would sparkle like diamonds on the crisp running water, and how the sounds of the mini-rapids, combined with the many other voices of nature, created a symphony all its own.--Those were the great times, he thought.

After the bed was made, Josh headed to the bathroom. His first stop was the bathroom sink. He confidently reached down and turned on the faucet. He cupped his hands under the running water and gave a quick splash to his face. Knowing that Sadi was right by his side, Josh shook the remaining water at her face and got a sharp but amused bark for doing so. He apologized to her and patted the rest of his face dry. Josh pointed to the mirror in front of him, compliments of the previous owners, and chuckled, "Sadi, I am one lucky person. I don't

have to wake up every morning and deal with how I look. I mean, I could be faced with an extremely goofy looking person and be ever so depressed, or I could be faced with ultimate good looks and plagued with vanity! Maybe I'm somewhere between the two. That wouldn't be so bad, would it?"

Josh hadn't seen himself in a mirror for twelve years and had changed greatly from the twiggly fifteen year old he used to be. His now six foot frame was evenly proportioned and fairly muscular for someone whose primary exercise consisted of romping around the park with his faithful companion, Sadi, and a couple of "light" workouts at the gym during the week. He appeared to be someone who made an effort to look good. His blondish-brown hair, though short, was softly tossed on top, adding a playful character to his virile yet boyish face. His soft, light green eyes radiated with warmth and sincerity. Joshua Canfrey had grown into a dashing and attractive young man; much, much different than his boyish memory of himself. Even though Josh had often wondered what he looked like, he had grown to like himself all the same, something, he observed, a great many sighted people have a hard time doing.

Josh's thoughts were drawn back to the memory of the creek. "You know, Sadi, it would really be nice to go down to the old creek now and just sit and listen. I wonder if it would sound the same." --It would really be neat to do that, Josh thought. --It would also be nice to have someone to experience it with.

Josh had to skip Sadi's walk this morning and pop right into the shower, something he hated to do but had to in order to rearrange his schedule for an afternoon meeting.

After breakfast, he raced as quickly as possible to the bedroom closet to get dressed. Many people were amazed that, even though Josh was blind, he was such a sharp dresser. His closet told the story. Inside the doors awaited several rows of neatly itemized articles of clothing: pants, then shirts, sport-coats, etc. Each item was marked on the hanger, in braille,

according to its color, compliments of Laundry Service. There were many different shades of green since that was Josh's favorite color. Josh quickly reached in, felt the hangers, and made his selection; a teal dress shirt and a deep burgundy wool sportcoat and slacks. He was pleased with his choices and rushed to get dressed. Josh and Sadi made it to the bus stop just in time. The seven-forty-five metro had just pulled up. Josh was a regular pickup for the metro driver, Earnest. There had only been a few times when Josh could ever remember hearing the voice of some stranger greeting him when he had boarded the bus. Earnest had been with the metro system for thirty years and had only missed work on rare occasions.

"Howdy, Josh."

"How are you, Earnest?"

"Just fine. And yourself?"

"Oh, a bit rushed this morning, but other than that, terrific!"

"Josh, Mrs. Potter is back with us today."

"Really?! That's great. Where is she?"

"About the seventh row back."

"Thanks Earnest."

Josh made his way back towards the middle of the bus counting the rows as he went. Mrs. Potter always brought joy to his day. She was a bright, cheery, gray-haired woman about five feet tall. She was in her mid-sixties, but her vibrant personality seemed that of someone thirty or so. Josh enjoyed their conversations which included normal, everyday talk about the weather and world news to her childhood stories and memories of her late husband Tom, who had passed away three years ago. After her husband died, Mrs. Potter began taking the Witford metro uptown every day or so to visit her sister Martha. Josh had met her that very first day she decided to start taking those regular outings and had been enjoying her company ever since. Josh had noticed that Mrs. Potter hadn't been on the bus for over four days now and was beginning to get a little concerned. He

was curious to find out where she'd been.

"Hello, Joshua Canfrey. Hello, Sadi." Sadi gave a cheerful whimper, for even she had missed Mrs. Potter's presence.

"Hi Maria!"

"Now I know you've probably been wondering about me," Maria chuckled, "so just plop down here, and I'll tell you the scenario." Josh sat down beside her.

"You're right, I was starting to get a bit worried."

"Oh, you're such a dear, Josh. Well, it was nothing big. I simply had a wart removed from my foot and had to stay off of it a couple of days. Isn't that silly?"

"Well, I'm glad it was nothing serious. How are you otherwise?"

"Oh, just fine, Josh. You, Dear?"

"Terrific. It's a beautiful spring morning, and there's a nice breeze blowing...It's going to be a very enjoyable day at school."

"Oh, good for you." There was a slight pause. "Joshua Canfrey..."

Josh knew by the concerned inflection in her voice what was coming. There wasn't a month that would go by without that ever familiar question being asked.

"...Have you found that very special someone since we last talked?"

"No, I'm afraid not, Maria." For some reason that question didn't seem to make him as uncomfortable as it had in the past. It came to him that he'd had thoughts earlier that morning about having someone in his life.

"You know what, though, Maria? I think I'm beginning to understand why you ask me that question."

"You do, Sweetie? I'm so glad. I can just tell that there is something missing in your life. You are somewhat lonely, and I think the absence of that significant other might be why. My thirty-eight years with my husband Tom were the happiest,

most satisfying years of my life. You know I just want you to be happy, don't you?"

"I know, Maria, that's very sweet of you. And, I have to admit, you just might be right about a significant other. If I do find that someone I'm going to make sure she's as sweet as you. I'll keep you informed."

"You are a dear, Josh."

"You are too, Maria. I'm so glad you're back." The bus rolled to an easy stop and Josh rose to depart. "I'll see you tomorrow, Maria."

"You betcha. Have a wonderful day."

"So long, Earnest."

"See ya' tonight, Josh."

"Sure thing."

With the trusted guidance of Sadi, Josh made his way down the street to the blind school. He had been working as a staff counselor at the Wilmore Braille Institute for two years now. He really enjoyed his work and loved helping the students by sharing his own personal experiences. The students there really loved him because he was someone they could relate to. He had high hopes for the school and worked hard to make it a success.

As Josh entered the front door of the Institute, he was greeted by his secretary, Mrs. Crass.

"Good morning, Joshua!"

"Good morning, Mrs. Crass. How are you?"

"Oh just fine," she replied in her usual chipper tone. "Would you like for me to take Sadi out back to the kennel today?"

"Yes, it's a perfect day for her to be out of doors." Josh bent over and gave Sadi a big hug and a rub on the head before Mrs. Crass took her out back.

"Bye, Sadi." Sadi acknowledged Josh's goodbye with a quick bark.

"See you shortly Joshua. Oh, by the way, did you re-

member you had a one o'clock appointment with Randy Mathews?"

"Sure did, Mrs. Crass. Did I by chance tell you that I was coming in early this morning?"

"No, dear," Mrs. Crass replied.

"Then how did you know to meet me here at the door?"

"Ohhh, I had just put a letter in the mailbox and saw you coming up the street. So I thought I'd wait for you."

"Well, thank you very much."

"You're quite welcome. See you shortly."

Josh's morning went great. He had finished all of his paperwork, and his counselling sessions went well. All went a lot more smoothly than he had expected. The twelve-forty-five bell rang and Josh realized he needed to get to his office to run quickly over his questions before the prospective assistant counselor was to arrive.

Josh was hoping, finally, that this would be the counselor he was looking for. Even though Josh had wanted to hire the person most qualified for the job, he was hoping it would be a woman because he had been informed that some of the female students had requested a female counselor to talk to about their personal problems. Josh had to face the facts, though. He was interviewing a man and even though he had wanted to hire a woman, if this gentleman qualified, he would have to hire him. The school board was getting impatient.

As Josh closed his office door behind him, he was refreshed by a distinct spring fragrance filling the room. He took a deep breath. "Hmm...I didn't think I'd left the window open this morning," he said to himself aloud. "It smells so springy in here."

"I don't think you did, sir. None of the windows are opened now. It must be fragrance I'm wearing." Josh startled, turned towards his sofa, where the gentle feminine voice had come from.

"Gosh, you startled me," Josh said.

"I'm sorry. Are you Mr. Canfrey?" the woman asked confidently.

"Yes. Did Mrs. Crass let you in?"

"Yes. She said to come right in, and you would be here shortly."

"Oh," Josh said, somewhat puzzled. "She must have forgotten that I had a one o'clock appointment. I do have a few minutes though, before Mr. Mathews arrives. What can I help you with?" Josh walked over to the sofa and reached out his hand in a greeting.

"How do you do," the woman said pleasantly, extending her hand. When the woman's soft hand met his, an unexplainable sensation ran through his body. He could feel his heart increase its speed almost instantly. For some reason all of this was a pleasant shock to his system. Josh's mind began to drift. He began to wonder what she looked like. She sounded as if she might be in her mid--twenties--definitely a younger woman. Her voice also sounded genuine, sincere...

"Mr. Canfrey," she started, kindly removing her hand from his. Josh had realized he had been holding it a bit too long and was a little embarrassed.

"Oh, I'm sorry..." he began to apologize.

"Oh...no...I was just going to say that...I think I AM your one o'clock appointment. I'm Miss Mathews, Miss Miranda Mathews. I'm called Randy for short. I'm sorry if that caused you some confusion."

"No, no, that's quite all right. I suppose I shouldn't have assumed...Well then, let's get started." Josh sat in the seat beside her. He was completely flustered by the unexpected surge of emotions he had just experienced, and struggled to compose himself so that he could proceed with the interview.

Josh had learned very much about Miss Mathews during the interview not only because she was a very open person, but also because Josh seemed to have gotten sidetracked a few times and had asked some questions that obviously had nothing

to do with the position that Miss Mathews was applying for. She didn't seem to mind though and actually appeared quite flattered that Josh had taken such an interest in her. Before the interview was even over, Josh knew that this was the right person for the job. She was caring, sincere, and seemed to have taken a general interest in students at the school. She had also mentioned that one of the driving forces behind her wanting to help blind children was her mother, who had been blind. Miranda Mathews was the one. She had the spark. Josh could just sense it.

"Can you come in tomorrow?"

"Really? I got the job?!"

"You sure did. You are very qualified and just what we've been looking for."

Why did Josh feel that he was going to be THE most excited to have her on staff.

"That will be great. You don't know how much I'm looking forward to working with these kids and you, Mr. Canfrey."

"That's great! And you can call me Josh. We are informal around here. Can I call you Miranda?"

"Actually, you can call me by my middle name, Marie. That's what I'm called by my family, and I think it will be much less confusing."

"I like that name. It reminds me of a very nice lady I know. See you tomorrow at nine o'clock!" Josh said rising to his feet and holding out his hand for a goodbye shake.

"That sounds just fine. Thank you very much." She placed her hand in his. Josh felt the same surge of sensation rush through his body again. He made sure he did not over-extend the gesture this time.

After Marie had left, Josh sunk into his chair. He felt relieved, excited, and at the same time, completely perplexed. What in the world had just happened to him? Why in the world did he just act the way he did?

Over the following months Josh's feelings for Marie grew immensely. The two had become fairly close friends, but for Josh, the situation became awkward. His feelings for Marie deepened and he found himself wanting to be more than just friends. He had noticed a change in her too but could not tell if she was reacting to his changing emotions or whether something was happening with her, too. He didn't want to confront her though, because he was afraid his behavior would be inappropriate.

Josh was sitting on his living room sofa. Sadi was lying next to him, her head in his lap. --That's all there is to it. I just have to call her. She has been acting so different, and I think it's because of me. I don't want to lose her friendship, and if that's all we can be is friends then I will just have to accept that...At that moment the phone rang.

"Hello, Joshua Canfrey speaking."

"Hello, Josh..."

"Marie?"

"Yes. I think we need to talk."

"Marie, I know, I was going to call you..."

"Josh, I have to be up front about this...I care for you more than just as a friend, but..."

"You do?! Marie...so do I!"

"You do!"

"Yes! Do you think you could come over tonight? I think we need to talk about this!"

"Yes. I just need to change my clothes and I'll be right over!"

It had been a long time since Mrs. Potter had asked the question, and from the way she was acting, Josh had a feeling that today...

"Joshua Canfrey..."

"The answer is yes, Maria," Josh said affirmatively.

"I thought so," Maria said putting her hand on his knee and giving a delighted pat. "You just have that certain glow."

"I do?" Josh chuckled, "Well, Maria, let me just tell you all about her."

C.O.G.
(Children Of God)

*A people wandering,
but not without direction.*

*A people uncertain,
but not without a vision.*

*A people searching,
but not without each other.*

Raymond List

THE UNICORN

The Unicorn

*A glistening, snowy creature
standing proudly*

beside a crystal clear lake

*The moonlight shines upon her
and creates a magical glow*

*Her graceful movements
would shame a prima ballerina*

*She serenely wanders
to the water's edge*

*she poses
as if for a picture*

*Her ivory mane
ruffles in the cool night breeze*

*She is unaware
of the trouble in the world*

*Most,
because of disbelief
cannot see her*

*But for those who believe in magic,
in dreams*

*She is a magnificent sight to behold
Something to prove
that beauty still exists*

Pamela A. Webb

APRIL: GRASS GROWS, BIRDS SING

Stacey Nicholas

Walking to Clare Hall, I was surprised to notice the vivid greenness of the grass. Actually, I don't know what surprised me most - the colors of the earth's carpet or the fact that I noticed the new colors.

I have missed April for the last three years. Oh, I was physically here, but April came and went without my noticing. As the grass was turning greener and pushing up through the softening, brown dirt, I stared at the pulsating green cursor on a blackened computer screen. "This is a poem on racism..." blossomed on the line.

While the birds began their chirping chorus that welcomed the return of spring, I could not hear them. My head was buried in the *O.E.D.* and the *Encyclopedia Americana* in a sound proof library. Listening closely, I could hear only the continual humming of the cooling system as it maintained a constant sixty-four degrees.

When the leaves were bursting forth from their buds on the awakening trees, I was hurriedly typing research papers on Quakers, Thomas Paine, and Herodotus. Each had accumulated and now must be typed and handed in.

As I look at the lush beauty of Spring, it is hard for me to believe that I've missed the last three Aprils. It happened because I chose to believe that reality was term papers and final exams.

Yesterday, I noticed the grass growing. I heard the swallow sing. Is there still hope for me?

MEMORIES OF A FRIEND

Ed Ertel

Memories of our past are like hidden treasures waiting to be opened. Often times, the most subtle things serve as the key to these locked treasures. The most uneventful things can sometimes trigger our memories and send us on a journey to our past.

The other day I was sitting in my office at the local high school where I serve as the guidance counselor for the sophomore class. It was about eight o'clock on a humid August morning, the first day of the new school year. As I organized various schedules and papers, there was a knock at the door. I looked up from my desk and saw a tall, lanky boy standing in the doorway.

"Hi! What can I do for you?" I asked.

"My name is Jeff Ryan. I'm a new student, and I was wondering if you could tell me where room 308 is."

"Sure, Jeff! You go up the stairs to the third floor and 308 is the fourth room on your left. If you have any questions or problems, feel free to come talk to me. My name is Mr. Browning."

"Thanks a lot, Mr. Browning," the boy said as he left my office.

This meeting was one of those ordinary events that hurled my thoughts back to my younger days. Jeff reminded me of a guy I knew in high school, and I found myself reminiscing about my old friend, Matt Williamson.

Matt's family had moved from Champaign, Illinois, to my hometown the summer before my junior year in high school. Our basketball coach, Joe Curry, held an open gym three nights per week from seven to nine. On one particular night, Coach Curry had told us all that a new kid named Matt Williamson was moving in from Illinois, and he was going to come in and

scrimmage with us. Coach didn't know a whole lot about this new kid, but he did say that he was pretty tall for a sophomore.

As we continued to warm-up before playing, we heard a loud racket over by the gym doors. We turned to find a tall, embarrassed figure sprawled on the floor. The boy had fallen over the rolled up wrestling mats that were resting in front of the doors. All of us burst into laughter as the lanky kid picked himself up and walked toward us. Coach Curry accompanied the boy onto the court.

"Boys, I'd like you to meet Matt Williamson. He'll be a sophomore, and he and his family just moved here from Illinois," said Coach.

Matt mingled among the players making small talk while shooting around. I gradually made my way over to him and struck up a conversation.

"How ya' doin,' Matt? My name is Danny Browning. How do you like our little town so far?"

"It's great! Everyone's been so friendly. I still don't know my way around very well, though."

"Well, tomorrow afternoon I can give you the grand tour if you want me to," I said.

"That would be great, Danny. Thanks a lot!"

We continued to shoot around until it was time to select teams. He was about six feet four but weighed only 155 pounds. As we played the game Matt showed exceptional skills. Despite his awkwardness, he displayed a talent for basketball with which very few people had been blessed. We won all five of our pick-up games that night with Matt hitting the winning basket in four of them. Coach Curry sat in the bleachers drooling over this raw talent of this diamond in the rough.

The next day I showed Matt the town and introduced him to several people. He was very polite to everyone he met and showed a genuine friendliness. That day was the beginning of a great friendship for Matt and me.

Matt was the kind of kid that lived and breathed basket-

ball. His dad had been a basketball star himself, and he passed on his love for the game to his son. Mr. Williamson worked hour upon hour with Matt, teaching him the fundamentals of the sport. The two of them developed a special relationship. It was more than just a father-son relationship. It was a strong friendship bonded by blood.

Over the next year, Matt blossomed into a phenomenal basketball player, and by his senior year, he stood six feet seven, and weighed 210 pounds. The lanky, awkward kid that I first met was nowhere to be found. The awards and accolades rolled in for Matt. With each honor, he thanked his father and shared it with him. Major universities across the country were hounding Matt. Mr. Williamson was very proud of how Matt worked hard at making himself a great player and a great person. His son had become the ideal role model for all the little kids in our town. But Matt's biggest fan lived in the same household. His eight-year-old brother Nolan idolized him. Nolan followed Matt around like a lost puppy, and he imitated his every move.

The summer before his senior year, Matt was working for his father's construction company. On Friday, June 3, Mr. Williamson was inspecting the progress on a four-story office building. It had rained that morning, and there was water all over the job site. Mr. Williamson had gone to the fourth floor to talk to the foreman. As he went to step onto a scaffolding where the foreman was, he hit a slick spot and fell over the railing. Mr. Williamson tumbled four stories and died instantly.

Matt was devastated by his father's death. The two of them had been so close, and he could not cope with the loss. The emotional strain became an insurmountable obstacle.

As the weeks passed, Matt became more and more depressed. He lost all interest in basketball and started running around with a gang. With his father gone, Matt did not seem to have that driving force to excel on or off the basketball court. He would not have anything to do with his mother, Nolan, or me. It wasn't until six months later that Matt opened up and

told me this story. At that time, though, he refused any help and was very rebellious. In a sense, the real Matt Williamson died along with his dad. The new Matt was skipping classes and hanging around with known drug users.

Nolan saw the deterioration of his brother, but, since he idolized Matt so much, he imitated the bad behavior. One day Nolan and a couple of his friends had gone into a shopping store to buy some baseball cards. The group of his friends ended up shoplifting the cards and some candy.

The store manager caught the kids after they had left the store. The police came and took them home to tell their parents. When Nolan arrived home with the police, Matt was the only one there. The policeman left Nolan and told Matt the whole story.

The two brothers sat down and had a heart-to-heart talk once the policeman had gone. That was the first time they had really talked since their dad's death.

"Why would you do something like this, Nolan?" asked Matt.

"I saw you steal a tape last week at Sneider's so I thought it was okay to take the cards and candy," said Nolan.

Matt eased back into his chair and remembered the day he had taken a cassette tape from Sneider's Audio. Instantly, he realized how he had allowed his grief over his father's death to dominate his life. Until now he was unable to see what he had done to himself.

"Nolan, I know you were trying to be just like me, but I've done a lot of terrible things since dad's death. I've had a hard time dealing with it. From now on, though, I'm going to be my old self, and I don't want to see or hear of you doing something like this again, Nolan!"

"Okay, Matt. I promise I won't ever do anything like that again."

Matt began putting his life back in order. He started playing basketball again, and with the help of Coach Curry, he

was able to get a scholarship to a small school in Kentucky. It was a far cry from what might have been, but it was a major step toward a bright future.

It's been fifteen years since I last saw Matt. After high school, we both went our separate ways. I became a guidance counselor, and Matt ended up getting his law degree from Northwestern University. Although we didn't know each other for very long, I learned more from Matt than I ever have learned from anyone else. By seeing what Matt went through, I realized that I shouldn't take what I have for granted, because it could be taken away at any moment. To this day, I have a deep admiration for Matt and for how he straightened himself out.

Jeff Ryan has a striking resemblance to Matt, and I heard the other day that he was going out for basketball. I'm going to have to keep an eye on that kid. I think he might be something special.

PROGRESS

I was here once

Myself, or as part of the one before me

Or the one before her.

There were many trees

And meadows of wild flowers and berries

And scampering creatures

And trembling streams.

I was here once

And knew the fragrance of early blossoms,

--And then ripe fruit

--And then dry leaves.

*Now the trees are gone.
I see no flowers
No berries
No scampering creatures.*

*Now the air clogs my nose
And films my eyes
And turns my heart to stone.*

*The home that was once mine
Is filled with mounds of dirt
And machines
And structures, close together.*

*Where has everything gone?
Where are the scampering creatures? - dead?
Or exiles, journeying to a new home?*

*I know I must go also.
I spread my wings and soar high above,
Never to know again this home of my birth
Nor will the one after me,
Nor the one after her.*

Deardra Webb

THE MIRROR

*When I look in the mirror,
Who is it that I see?
Is it only a reflection
Of what the world wants me to be?*

*A simple bend in the mirror.
A mirage made up of light
When I look in the mirror,
Is what I'm seeing right?*

*Am I the person that I see
When I look into the glass?
Or is it the one I pretend to be?
--But I'm afraid to ask.*

*Through the endless reflections
I look closely to find
A glimpse of the one in the mirror
--The me I've left behind.*

Mary Weinzapfel

IF HEARTS COULD TALK

*If hearts could talk,
Would tell of pain
And love,
Of relationships
Old and new,
Of hidden feelings
Buried deep
Lost in wells of blood
Sunken to the cold depth
Of the BOTTOM.*

*If hearts could talk,
Would tell of strength
Gained by hurt and anger,
Reaching out for hope
Of what could be,
Striving towards the shallow
Grasping the warmth,
Understanding the source
Breaking through
To the SURFACE.***IF HEARTS COULD TALK**

Lisa Schmeltzer

IT GETS BETTER EVERY YEAR

Mary Brita

An estimated 500,000 people polka-dotted the two sides of the Ohio River. Some had been there since early afternoon, while others still rushed to find their places before 9:00. Children sat contentedly with mountains of pink cotton candy next to their parents who were busy focusing cameras and adjusting lenses. The suspension bridge was closed. There was no more traffic connecting the two banks of the river. Everyone sat looking around grateful to have left home when they had, and convinced each had chosen the best seat on the whole river. As time inched closer and closer to 9:00, there were yawns at bedtimes that drifted by; there was music echoing across the water, and there was silent anticipation dancing in each pair of eyes. Minutes later, 9:00 had arrived. Children were lifted onto Daddys' shoulders, the music got louder, and every head turned to see the great color and listen to the sounds that the barges on the river hoisted into the night sky.

Thirty minutes and hundreds of "ooh-ah's" later, those 500,000 contented people turned into pushy people who fought and pulled to leave the banks of the river as fast as possible. The blazing sun and all the day's excitement had exhausted everyone, and although each group had straggled in over a course of six or seven hours, the entire populace wanted to be home in fifteen minutes (or less). The barricades were lifted from closed streets and bridges, car keys were relocated, blankets and coolers were packed, and the once vibrant, excited children were carried home asleep. The streets were jammed with families and friends discussing where they had parked the car and what the shortest route home would be. Talk of the elaborate air show would have to wait until the trip home - or maybe even the next day. The thirty-minute enchantment didn't go unnoticed, though. Everyone there last night appreci-

ated what he saw. This was the Labor Day Fireworks Display in Cincinnati, Ohio - complete with half a million friends, relatives, and strangers with whom to share. It gets better every year.

THE GREATEST GIFT

*I thought I was brave,
you showed me that it takes more courage
to open up,
than to keep inside.*

*I thought I was strong,
you showed me that it takes more strength
to share feelings,
than to hide them.*

*I thought I was true,
but you showed me that the truth
lies in the way I feel inside.*

*I thought being brave and strong and true were enough
You showed me that real courage, strength, and truth
lie within and are shared.
You opened my heart and showed me that
To give love is to be loved in return
And that is the greatest gift of all.*

Brenda J. Gauck

CONNECTIONS

Beyond Iran.

Came Poet Wanderers

Talkin' Poet Talk -

Makin' New Connections

Gentle Folks

Connections;

those

Enjoyin'

nourishment --

gettin'

poems

milkers'

from

fed

laughs

Eye

Averse to Verse

Seekin' metaphors --

Feelin' Good Connections

Non-Linear rhythms

Below the mind

Hearin' off of paper --

Learnin' fine connections

Daniel A. Felicetti

A LETTER OF IMPORTANCE

Jodi Yonts

The sound of the bouncing basketball echoed in the empty gym as Megan ran up and down the floor. Her tall, strong, muscular body easily glided through the air for a perfect lay-up, and with a final "swish," she stopped. Bending over, she took a few deep breaths. She glanced up at the clock and was surprised to see that an hour and a half had passed by.

-- Uh-oh, she thought. Mom's going to be worried. She grabbed her bag after removing her shoes and ran out of the gym.

The mile walk home was set at a brisk pace, and the wintry chill went right through her parka. Megan tried to keep her mind on basketball. The back screen on the weak-side will work, she thought, flipping her long, brown hair back over her shoulder. Dad always told me to work on that, she thought and smiled sadly. Dad. If only he could see me now. But then she brushed another thought aside and ran the rest of the way home.

She relished the blast of heat that greeted her as she opened the door.

"Hi, hon," her mom called around the corner. "You're a little late tonight."

"I had to stay and practice. We have conference coming up, and I have to get better."

"You're already the best on the team, Meg. Maybe you should just take it easy for a couple of days." Her mother's voice was soft.

"I want to be *better* than the best on the team, Mom. Besides, it gives me something to do."

Megan didn't see the hurt look on her mom's face as she said the last sentence, but she realized she wasn't being too helpful lately.

"I'm sorry I'm such a bad daughter, Mom, forgive me?"
And without waiting for an answer, she bolted up the stairs.

She plopped onto the bed in her room and looked around, and every way she glanced, she was reminded of her father. The picture when she was just five years old with him trying desperately to hold out a basketball to her caught her eye first. She smiled to herself remembering that she had been too interested in John, her older brother, who was standing behind him making a funny face.

The other pictures were just as vivid. A smile, a frown, a look of pride. There were many of those.

She jumped up. "Stop it," she said to herself. A tear began to form, and she was certain that this time, crying wasn't the answer. There was a soft knock on the door, and her mom peeked in.

"Phone for you, Meg."

"I'll get it up here," she said confused by the fact that she didn't even hear it ring.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Megan, it's Coach."

"Hi, Coach, what's up?" Megan voiced her curiosity and glanced at the clock. "It's a little late for you to call, isn't it?"

"Well, it's pretty important; I think we need to talk. Can you come in early tomorrow?"

"Did I do something wrong? Am I in trouble?"

"No, no," Coach assured her, "I just think we have a few things to say."

Megan's sense of humor couldn't resist what she said next. "Don't you like me anymore, Coach Travis?" she said in her best whiny voice knowing how Coach hated whiners.

"Funny, Meg, really funny." Coach chuckled, but then became serious. "You know I'll always like you."

They hung up, but Coach's last words echoed in her mind. "...I'll always like you." She smiled. She and Mary Travis hit it off the first moment they met almost three years

ago. Coach immediately saw her potential and made her into a growing basketball star within a year. They had laughed together and become good friends. She often told Megan that she was the daughter she never had since she and her husband were unable to have children.

Their relationship was simple; Megan listened to Coach Travis, and in return, Coach Travis made Megan one of the best basketball players in the area. Megan had even been contacted by a few big name college coaches, including a Division I school. But as she fell asleep in her bed that night, her mind was far away from basketball. It was on her dad, and she drifted off with his smiling face in her thoughts.

She suddenly awoke and found herself covered with sweat. Another nightmare had jolted her from her slumber, and the tears coursed down her cheeks. The nightmare was familiar - she had been having it about three times a week since her dad died two months ago. She told no one, but she knew it was affecting her. She was often scared to go to sleep afterward, and tonight was no different. She sat staring out into the dark until the sun rose.

In the morning she dressed quietly, packed her gym bag, and left, running the whole mile to school. She showered there, and met Coach T as she walked in the building.

"Morning!" Coach said as she opened her office door.

"Hi!" Megan returned, as she took a seat in the musty office. She watched as the 30-year-old woman shuffled through the mess of papers on her desk and noticed a little bit of grey forming in her curly, dark hair. Suddenly, Coach T lifted her head up, and her brown eyes leveled with Megan's. Her look was somber as she handed over the yellow paper in her hand, and Megan was confused until she realized what she was holding - her grades. They had been steadily declining in the past few months, and Megan wasn't aware that Coach knew.

"Look, Megan," Coach said gently, "you're not flunking anything by far, but there has been a serious drop in your

quality of work in every class. I'm only concerned for your well-being. You are a talented high school athlete who needs to have strong grades this last year especially if you're still planning on Pre-Med in college. That is still your plan, isn't it?"

Megan's eyes didn't look up from the old coffee stain on the floor.

"I don't know, Coach T," she answered after a few moments of silence. "I just don't know much about anything anymore."

At that moment, she looked up, and the pain in her eyes was obvious. She was struggling, and coach Travis saw it. Her dad's death had changed Megan from a fun-loving, outgoing individual into a quiet, unemotional, almost resentful person. Her heart was crumbling.

They talked for a while about the upcoming games, and then Coach told her to take the day off.

"Go home and get some rest. You look like you haven't slept in weeks."

Megan rose, hoping the guilty look on her face didn't show. If she only knew exactly how much sleep I got last night, she thought.

"I'll see you tomorrow, Meg." The woman's round face smiled warmly. "Take care of yourself."

"I will," Megan said as she walked down the slowly filling halls, stopping for only a few seconds to tell a friend that she wouldn't be in trig class that day.

Although Megan wasn't excited at the thought of an empty house, she decided it was the only place to go. Maybe I'll clean my room, she thought, and almost laughed out loud. Nah.

At home, she fixed herself a large glass of orange juice and headed upstairs. Instead of going into her room, however, she found herself standing in front of the door to her dad's study. The smell hit her like a punch in the gut as soon as she opened it. It was him. If she closed her eyes, it was almost as if he were standing right there next to her. She made her way to

his desk, pulling out the old, worn in, brown swivel chair that she knew so well. She used to spend hours at his feet in here. Under his desk, around it, and often somehow ending up in his lap. And, no matter how much work was piled up, he was always willing to give her a hug and a playful tweak on the nose.

She leaned forward. Everything was just as she remembered it. Top, right drawer -- pens and pencils. She jerked it open. Score one for her. Middle, right drawer -- papers. Boring stuff. All the other drawers had been used for business purposes and were now unlocked and empty. Except one. Why is this still locked? she thought to herself. Her dad's business partner had picked up all the other things a month earlier, and yet this was locked.

She was curious. The numerous keys on his regular key ring didn't open it, and after a while, she became very determined to see what was in that drawer.

Suddenly, she remembered. In his garage, there were sets of keys to things she didn't even know about. "Surely one of those has to work," she said out loud. She scurried down the stairs and into the garage. She returned a few moments later with two sets of key rings and began to try.

She was to the last key on the second ring, about to give up, when it clicked. She slowly turned the key, heard the latch slide, and then unlock. She stopped, suddenly afraid. Her strong hand pulled the metal drawer open, and what she saw at first glance was a flash of gold. She reached in and pulled out a Christmas card she had given him when she was in kindergarten. She looked a little more and couldn't believe what she saw. Everything she had given him, he had kept in here. A wooden cross with "DAD" etched out from her eighth grade hiking trip; a valentine from when she was nine which said, "Daddy of mine, will you be my valentine?" She smiled as she read this, remembering his words to her. "I'll always be your valentine." There was even a piece of the net she had cut down in basketball last year when the team won conference.

"You were so proud of me," she whispered not even bothering to brush the tears from her eyes. She savored each treasure, each gift. It was as though he was giving all of this back to her, and she had almost emptied the drawer when she found it.

It was a sealed long manilla envelope, and when she flipped it over, it was unmarked. No, wait, it was dated in the corner. September 30, 1970.

"September 30, 1970?" she said out loud. "I was only five days old!"

She fumbled with the opening, finally breaking the 17-year-old seal. She slowly unfolded the single page that was enclosed, took a deep breath, and began to read. To her surprise, it was addressed to her.

My Dearest Megan,

Five days ago, you made me the happiest man in the world. As I watched you take your first breath of life, I was overcome with love and affection for you, your mother, and God's gift of life. From that moment on, I resolved to do everything in my power to make you happy for the rest of your life.

The purpose of this letter is to let you know how much I love you. Always try to be the best you can be, and always remember that I'll be here for you.

My love,
Dad

She put her head down on the desk and choked on a sob. It was as though her father had just read that letter to her. And, as she set the letter down, she suddenly realized that he was gone. Forever. It was as though a huge weight had been lifted from her shoulders, and she suddenly realized how tired she was. She cleared the desk, making sure that everything was exactly how she found it, and went to her room, taking the letter

with her. She lay down and was asleep in minutes.

When she awoke, she was surprised to see the morning sun coming through the window. The aroma of pancakes drifted through the air, and she sat up with a smile on her face. She threw off the covers and strolled downstairs, and her mom met her in the kitchen with a smile.

"Morning, sleepyhead!"

"Morning!" Megan replied with a yawn. "How long did I sleep?"

"Over 12 hours, you were out like a light when I tried to wake you yesterday when I got home."

Megan was silent as she remembered the events of the previous day. She glanced at her mother and her heart swelled at the sight. Megan suddenly felt selfish for the way she had been acting the last couple of months. She knew that her mom was struggling, too, and she walked over to hug her.

"What was that for?" Her mother turned with a look of surprise.

Megan shrugged her shoulders, then paused for a moment before she spoke. Her voice was soft, but firm. "You miss him a lot, don't you?"

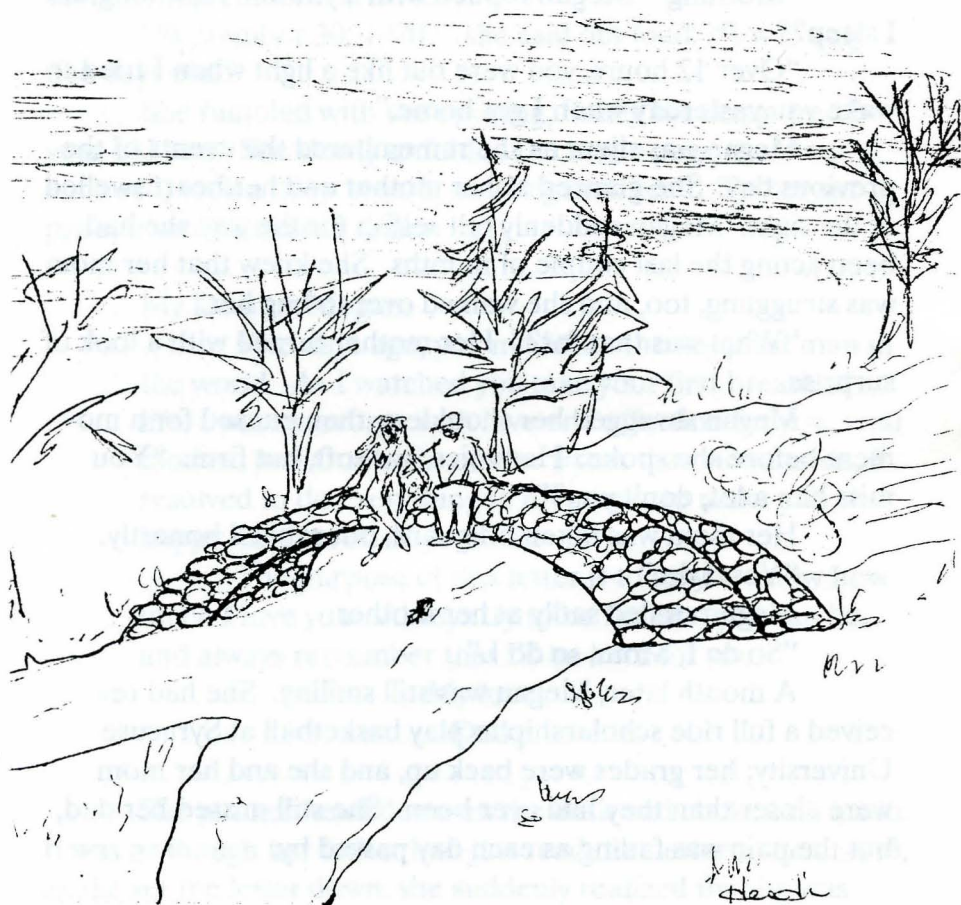
Her mom was taken off guard, but replied honestly.

"Yes, I do."

Megan smiled sadly at her mother.

"So do I, Mom, so do I."

A month later, Megan was still smiling. She had received a full ride scholarship to play basketball at Syracuse University; her grades were back up, and she and her mom were closer than they had ever been. She still missed her dad, but the pain was fading as each day passed by.



THE TRIBUTARY

*Under the Eyes of the night Libra sky,
Remnants of Spring seed lay cut in the fields.
Stirring, the forces of winter on high --
Vast and unfurrowed the frosty Earth yields.*

*Invading this mystical countryside,
Gently winds Life as a masked, flowing stream.
Sweeping us forward from which none can hide --
The current cold and untravelled it seems.*

*Downward from Heaven the Right Balance Arm
Touched a soft nightbird migration forgot.
Away from the leaf that saved her from harm,
Flees she to the darkness, gone from her lot.*

*The tiny leaf falls with strong Libra's care --
An innocent baby from his mother's hands.
The infinite trek that he must prepare
Begins with the stream upon which he lands.*

*Swaying, the trees on the steep, grassy slopes
Bow to the sojourner; no visit he makes.
On the leaf travels, a child of hope
Guided by Libra - all gifts for his sake.*

*Onward through Autumn the nocturnal beasts sing.
Unchartered voyage - no path free to take.*

*Libra keeps vigil - love everlasting,
Maternal the bond that never will break.*

*Infringing stones do appear in the brook
As obstacles causing anguish and pain.
Yet early in life can no leaf but look
Up on the Eyes of Balance who reigns?*

*What will come to pass divinely withheld
No creature divulges Fate's secret course.
Obstructions in youth can oft be dispelled,
But stones will remain, a bond-breaking source.*

* * *

*Crickets now quiet themselves in a rush
While petals of snowflakes rhythmically fall.
The breeze through the cattails fades to a hush.
The silence of winter comes for a call.*

*Maturing in the slight chill of the air,
The leaf trickles down the widening stream.
Passing the muskrat's dark underground lair,
Sea-visions now become part of his dream.*

*A fork in the pathway offers a choice --
For independence he stubbornly fights.
Libra's tears echo her heart-aching voice.
He chooses his way defying her might.*

*Losing intangible reins from above,
Bonds still do attach in spite of his will.
Libra sustains unconditional love -
Forever her heart with pride he will fill.*

*The leaf on his new path awkwardly sails
Into the distance - Frontiers do await.
Undoubtedly his soul never will fail
In loving his guide, no matter his fate.*

*Solemn the void from which all things commence --
Time ripples on from its mythical springs.
Yet, Life interrupts, a stream of suspense,
But time must return - to Libra it clings.*

*The forces behind the autumnal blade
Which push the undaunted child ahead,
Flow under the Eyes which now seem to bade
The leaf toward a new light, Terran instead.*

* * *

*As a mirage through the mists of the snow,
An ancient bridge made of cobblestone spans
The banks that funnel the waters below
Into the realms of far, infinite lands.*

*From out of the darkness come to the ledge
Two lonely strangers whose paths oddly merge.*

*Afar, music drifts from bells on a sledge
While nervous emotions internally surge.*

*With their cold feet dangling over the side,
Together they watch the vanishing stream.
Toward the future she stares, trying to hide
Her feelings existing merely in dreams.*

*Stealing quick glances he finally rests
His quivering glove on her fragile hand.
Untravelled waters he patiently tests --
Rather he'd drown than try grasping for land.*

*Returning his gesture shatters her will
As previous wounds of the heart ascend.
But in his strong arms, Life's arrows that kill
Touch not her soul as the injuries mend.*

*His eyes from the waters lift to behold
A face silhouetted by moon-lit shades.
Unknown embracing in midst of the cold --
This moment for nothing he e'er would trade.*

*She traces the sides of his blush-red cheeks
As he softly whispers three simple words.
Awake dormant heart from your blinded sleep
To the first three words you have ever heard!*

*Just as time dawns from its mythical springs,
The genesis rises of sweet romance.*

*A bright Phoenix flies with love on its wings --
The strangers decide on taking a chance.*

*Chills from emotions that never were felt
Induced by a sensual warmth that they share
Pierces the ice that is starting to melt
The walls hiding love that's doubtlessly rare.*

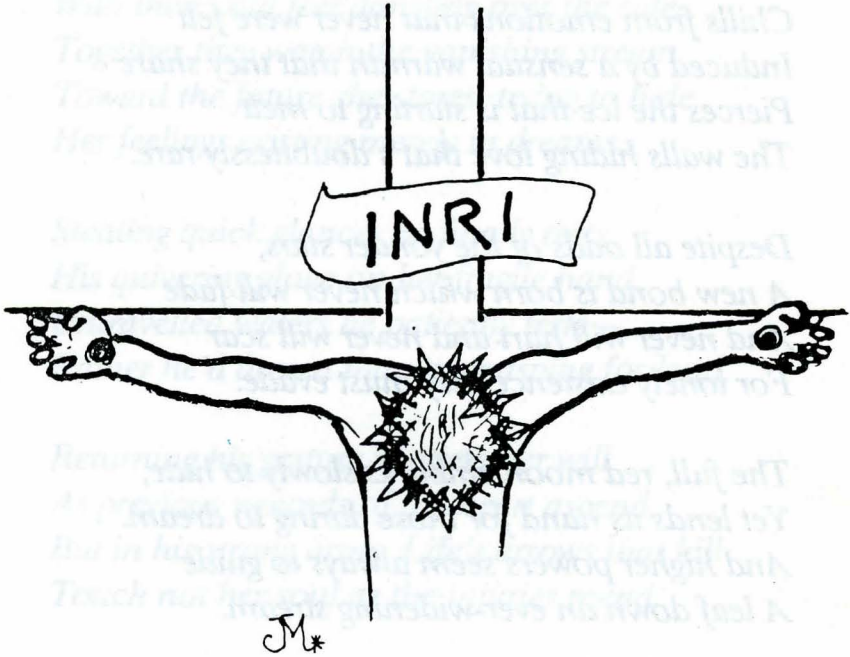
*Despite all odds of the yonder stars,
A new bond is born which never will fade
And never will hurt and never will scar
For lonely existence they must evade.*

*The full, red moon embarks slowly to hide,
Yet lends its hand for those daring to dream.
And higher powers seem always to guide
A leaf down an ever-widening stream.*

*Peering its head through the veil-curtained East
The dawn arrives and replaces the night.
Close to the sea, he fears not in the least,
As the fated leaf drifts far out of sight.*

*The stream now rushes, the current is strong.
The bridge will fall under weight of the snow.
As for the two strangers, what will love bring?
Time solely knows as it flows into Spring.*

Don Vogt



IT WAS FOR YOU

*Some saw Him in the cradle,
Some saw Him on the street,
Some nailed Him to the cross,
While some wept at His feet.*

*I saw Him just today,
In the things you did and said,
It shows He didn't die for naught,
Or for nothing His blood was shed.*

*And even if you're the only one,
Who worships and adores,
Then it was for you He suffered,
And for you the thorns He wore.*

*It was for you that He endured,
The scorn, the hate, the pain,
For you that He followed God's merciful plan,
To wash you of sin's stain.*

*And if you do indeed believe,
Then your anguished heart is quelled,
Because that day He died for you,
He bought your soul from Hell.*

Dallice Hesselgrave

Lone Sailor's Perceptions

*The horizon stretches endlessly.
The morning sun is watching me,
Reflecting bright off each new wave.
The sky is an intense deep blue,
An unforgettable God-made hue --
As far as my human eye can look.*

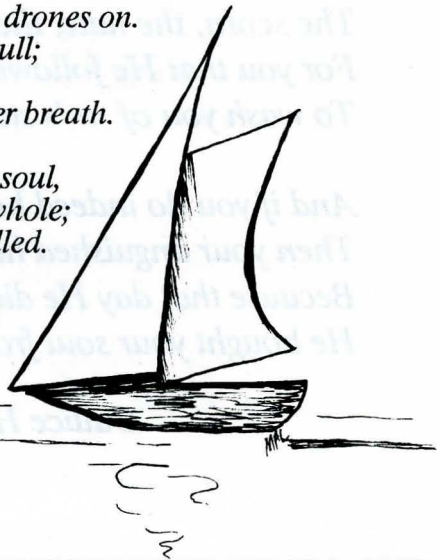
*A deep-drawn breath of salty air
Fills my lungs and helps me bare
The ugly smell of oil upon God's sea.
A runaway wave catches my face;
It wets my lips; salt is the taste.
I know I'm with the sea once more.*

*The sun warms me, pretends to care,
As the breeze tossles my wind-blown hair.
The rough-grained wheel rests beneath my palm.
A wave douses me where I stand
With the sheet gripped tightly in my hand.
The deck slopes steeply under my feet.*

*A lone seagull's high-pitched scream
Draws me back out of my dream
Into reality, where the winch drones on.
Waves slap on the wooden hull;
Sails flap in a moment's lull
As the wind stops to catch her breath.*

*A sense of peace deep in my soul,
I sense that my life's made whole;
Something within me is fulfilled.
I find God on the open sea;
I only hope that he finds me.*

Michelle A. Scheidt



THE BOXCAR

Kerry Dearth

The sun slowly descended over the western horizon dragging along with it the beauty of the day. Orange-puffed clouds and a pink sky followed the large, rosy sun as it shed dimmer and dimmer in the darkening landscape. It was 1932.

A lone, black figure carrying a small suitcase jogged to the top of a lonely hill and paused. As the figure exhaled, his breath froze in the cold winter air. The rickety-rack sound of a train echoed in the silence. Puffs of black smoke rose above the barren trees. Quickly, the man raced down the hill. The freezing wind bit at his ears, nose, and cheeks and froze his watering eyes so that, for a moment, he could not see the lay of the ground properly. He stumbled across a ditch and fell, nearly hitting his head on the railroad tracks. The sound of the train grew louder. Its headlight blinded him. He began to pick himself up, but then, for some reason, he stopped. Quickly, the engine drew nearer and nearer. The light grew larger, growing, growing. He dazed as the rickety-rack, rickety-rack grew louder and louder. The train, its blackness, its power grew ominous as it raced the setting sun. Rickety-rack, rickety-rack. Tweeeee! The train's whistle pierced his mind, and the man rolled back into the ditch. The train engine whizzed by. Rickety-rack, rickety-rack.

The man gathered himself in the stance of a runner, grabbed his suitcase and watched the cars of the train race by. He spotted an opening in a passing boxcar and dashed alongside the speeding train, gradually closing in on the open door. At arm's length he tossed his suitcase inside and tried to find something to grab onto so he could pull himself in, but he found nothing. The train began to edge further and further from his outstretched hand. He gave up. But, just then, a hand reached out from inside the boxcar. The man began to run faster,

harder. His heart pounded frantically. His temples throbbed as he sprinted, and the freezing air burned inside his lungs, but he kept running. He grabbed the hand and lunged toward the opening just as his legs turned to jelly. The hand pulled him in.

The man collapsed in a heap on the boxcar floor, exhausted, panting from his long run. A three-inch gaping hole under his left arm exposed a dingy, white dress shirt beneath his cheap black suit. He lay there for nearly five minutes unable to move. Then he clinched his fists and rolled over.

He was clean-shaven, exposing his baby face - smooth and pale white. He closed his deer-like eyes tight then opened them again, staring at the ceiling. He stared for what seemed like hours, contemplating, planning, or perhaps just praying.

He stopped staring and sat up. He scratched his head, frantically disheveling his straight brown hair for a moment until it fell back into its natural place. He was not a very big man, five-foot-ten at best, nor did he appear heavy beneath his cotton jacket. Timidly, he examined his surroundings.

Inside, the boxcar was dark, lit only by the light of the fading sun through the open door. From the light he saw the garbage and filth that covered the floor of the car, left behind by undesired predecessors. Now and then, a long skinny tail or small beady eyes peered out from beneath the refuse and then dashed away into the corners of the boxcar. He could not see what else lurked in those foreboding shadows, swallowed up by the darkness.

A large figure of a man lay dead-like in the midst of the litter. He was curled in a ball, hiding his face. He wore a charcoal gray coat that used to be white. A red stocking hat was pulled down over his head, and he held a crumpled brown paper bag in his hand.

Standing in the doorway, engulfed in the light, was the man who had pulled him in. He appeared very old, in his seventies or even eighties. His age, along with his shortness and small build, belied his strength. He had a full head of silver-

white hair, and as he stepped forward, the man could make out his facial features. He had bright blue eyes that burned like the flames of a blue-white fire. He had a scruffy complexion with tiny whiskers and many wrinkles, yet they did not detract from his aged attractiveness. He wore long red underwear beneath his white sweatshirt that had more holes than cloth. He smiled, exposing a single gap in his pearly white teeth. Then he spoke.

"My name's Sammy Savens," he said proudly. He whistled on every "s" as he spoke. "What's yours?"

"P--P--Peter," the man stammered, still recovering from his run. "Peter VonDenBennn---," he progressively mumbled until it became intelligible.

Sammy moved over to the lifeless figure on the floor and gave it a nudge with his foot. "Wake up, Buster, we've got company.

The figure remained in a ball as it rolled over. It gave no other signs of life other than an occasional grunt or groan. "Buster's not the sociable type," Sammy offered as an apology for Buster's slothfulness. "We's both runners too. How long you been runnin'?" he asked only as a matter of conversation. Peter's appearance already gave away the answer.

"I just came from home," Peter's voice trembled as he spoke. "I need work."

"Ain't there no work here in Illinois, anymore?" Sammy said stressing the "s" on Illinois.

"No"

"Where're you headed?"

"Don't know. West I guess."

"So you decided to jump on this here train?"

"Yea."

"You know where it's going?"

"No."

"Neither do I. It's not always smart to put your life on the wheels of the train. Listen to me. I know. I've seen it. These are hard times; I know. There's a depression. Men don't

have work. Men can't eat. They come here. They go where the train takes 'em. Some ain't ready. They ain't prepared for life at the end of the line. I don't know what it is. Life on the train can play awful tricks. It can mess up your mind, and only the strongest can survive, like me...and him." He motioned to the lifeless body on the floor. "And even we ain't got off the train yet. Are you sure you're prepared to pick up your roots and ride this train?"

"Yea," Peter replied shakily.

"You have a peculiar pr'unciation. What is it, Irish?"

"No!" Peter shouted and then calmed himself. "I'm Dutch."

"Well," said Sammy as he offered his hand to Peter.

"I'm glad to meet ya'." Peter looked at his hand for a moment then slowly reached out and shook the old man's hand.

"Care if I have a sit?" Sammy motioned with both hands to a spot on the floor, and then he sat down. "So. What happened? Why did you give up the Dutchland for all this?" He opened his right hand, palm-up, motioning to the outside world. The rolling landscape flashed by in the darkness.

Peter thought of his tragic childhood in the Netherlands. His parents were very strict, and his father would beat him often. "I came here because I believed America was the land of opportunity and free choice."

Peter rubbed his neck. He felt the traces of a scar behind his left ear. By his father's wishes, he had been apprenticed on a fishing boat at the age of twelve. Early in his apprenticeship, Peter was caught stealing a piece of cake from the captain's cabin. When he returned home that day, his father beat him with a wooden shoe, inflicting the cut and the scar. That night Peter snuck onto a Dutch cargo ship heading for America. "I lived in Boston until I was seventeen."

In Boston, Peter found a job as a furniture mover. He lived in a small room with no windows above the furniture shop. He worked and lived there quietly for four years. While in

Boston, he took up billiards and became involved in small time gambling. At one time he lost a fifty dollar bet to an Irish man that he could not pay. He was nearly murdered in the darkness of his own room before he got away. That night he jumped a train to Liberty, Illinois.

Sammy interrupted his thoughts. "How did you come about to getting to Illinois," again whistling the "s," almost purposely.

"There was nothing for me in Boston - only bad things. I heard of Dutch settlers in the Midwest, and I needed more open surroundings. Boston was so busy, so closed. My mind seemed so closed." Peter began to think of his early years in Liberty. He became a dime store clerk, rented a room in the town hotel and earned a quiet honest living for himself.

In Liberty, Peter met a young lady named Prudence Fortuna. They fell in love and married. A year later, Peter became a father himself, and he swore he would never be the father his father was to him. But then the hard times came, and the depression. Business in the dime store went dry. At first, Peter's earnings were cut, and then he was let go.

"Let's see your money. Where's your money?" Sammy blasted out, changing the subject. Peter hesitantly pulled out a black wallet from his back pocket. Sammy snatched it away.

"Heyyyy," Peter opposed half-heartedly.

"Don't worry. You'll get your money but this goes." He held up the wallet. "Never carry a wallet on the run. You'll get killed for it. He removed the cash and handed it to Peter then began to toss the wallet out the door.

"Wait!" Peter shouted, "Give me that." Sammy handed him back the wallet. Peter took out a black and white photograph hidden in the folds of the billfold and showed it to Sammy. "That's my wife Prudence, and that's Daniel." He pointed to a four-year-old boy held in his mother's arms. Underneath, printed in white ink, was the name "VonDen-Benken." For minutes Sammy stared speechless at the picture.

He rubbed his left eye with his fist.

"You left them in Illinois," he said quietly, and this time there was no "s."

"Had to," Peter said unblinking. "They're better off this way. The town will find pity for 'em. And I'll find work out west and send for 'em or send 'em a cut in my wages."

"There's nothin' west, son," said Sammy sorrowfully. "You've run out of room. You can't run any further. You can't run from everything all your life." He handed Peter the picture. Peter hid the picture and his money in his shoe. Then he laid down and turned his back to Sammy.

Peter chuckled. "If there's nothin' west, old man, why are you two on this train?"

"We've all got our different reasons," answered Sammy. "I ain't like you. I ain't got nobody out there. I'm ridin' 'til it's time for me to go to higher places."

Peter began to feel a sense of pseudo-power. He turned to the other traveller. "And what about you, you lifeless bum? You two are here because you can't find life outside. You're afraid of what the world might do to you. You can't beat it like me so you hide in this stinkhole - You're bums."

"And you're not?" asked Sammy. "Out there," he pointed to the darkness outside, "is the real world - toothless and decaying. To some it is repulsive to look at, but underneath it is the paradise in which we live. What we make of it is of our own free will. We choose whether or not the land is beautiful. It is the garden which we till."

"Well, I choose to till the riches of the west," concluded Peter.

"If that's your destination, then perhaps Cap here can show you the way." Sammy patted the other man on the back.

"I thought he was Buster."

"Call him what you want. He has no real name. He can't hear you anyway. He's deaf and dumb. Look at him. Everyday he drowns his sorrows in a bottle of whiskey and every

night he drowns his senses in a pool of lost thought. Like you, he had it all. He used to be a millionaire stockholder before the crash. Now he's got nothin' but his self and his bottle."

"I'll never be like that," Peter said as he rolled onto his side. Sammy chuckled.

* * * * *

Peter awoke in a pool of sweat. He heard a rustling. He sat up and scanned the boxcar, partially lit from the light of a full moon. A figure rolled out of the shadows. It was the deaf man. He appeared to be struggling with someone. He rolled back into the corner of the boxcar and then back out of the darkness. In the moonlight, Peter could see the struggle. It looked as if the man was wrestling with some shadowy creature. Peter was frozen. He reached out to give Sammy an awakening shove, but before he could touch him, the deaf man and his attacker culminated their fight. In an instant the deaf man was thrown out of the door into the darkness. His attacker disappeared in the shadows.

Quickly, Peter shook Sammy awake. He whispered as he stared at the invisible intruder. "Sammy. Sammy, someone's here. In the corner. He just threw Buster out the door."

Sammy sat up and looked around. "Forget it," he said calmly. "Nobody's here. It was his time. He was fighting with himself. He struggled for so long, he couldn't take the struggle anymore. He threw himself from the train."

"But I saw it...the shadow," Peter stammered

"Good. Good. Yes, I know. There's shadows all around us, but so is there light. See the light of the moon? It's there even in the darkest hour." Peter began to calm down, searching his mind for the right answer. "Here, you must be hungry." Sammy pulled a white handkerchief from his pocket and opened it. Inside the cloth were a few bites of bread. Peter picked up a piece and took a bite. Sammy ate a piece then reached behind him and pulled out a small bottle of red wine.

He took a drink and handed it to Peter. Peter looked at the bottle and then to Sammy's eyes that burned in the moonlight. Sammy smiled and nodded. Peter closed his eyes and took a large drink then returned the bottle and laid back down. Sammy smiled.

Peter woke up coughing. There was no light in the boxcar. The door had been shut. Peter sat up. "Sammy," he cried. He felt for him but found nothing.

"Sam--urrrggghh!" Cold fingers closed around Peter's neck and forced him to the floor. As Peter and his rival rolled back and forth across the boxcar floor, Peter tried frantically to jab the back of his invisible opponent, but there was nothing there. Instead, his fist ended up punching his own chest. The icy hands tightened around his neck as they fought in the filth. Peter's back was thrown against the boxcar door. He reached up and found the door latch. He pulled on it with all his strength. The latch gave way. The door opened. Peter nearly fell out the door; his head combed only inches above the ground. As he looked up into the brilliant moonlight, the icy fingers released their grip. The freezing wind bit at his ears, nose, and cheeks and froze his watering eyes, but, for a moment, he thought he saw a shadowy figure fall from the boxcar into the dark ditch below.

Peter pulled himself inside. He was alone. Sammy was gone, and all that remained were a few bread crumbs on top of a white handkerchief and a near-empty bottle of red wine.

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Peter took his seat in the train compartment. "Hi, my name's Peter VonDenBenken," he said proudly. "What's yours?" he asked the business man sitting beside him. The mustached man wore a black derby hat and an expensive gray suit. He said nothing as he stared lifelessly at the compartment wall in front of him.

The train began to pull out of the station. "Where're you headed?" Peter asked smiling, still wearing his cheap suit. Again the man said nothing. Peter looked out of his window. The sun was beginning its ascent above the horizon. The landscape basked in the fresh morning light as the train sped by. Beautiful white clouds greeted the golden sun in a gorgeous blue sky. A figure, wearing a tattered white sweatshirt, engulfed in the sunlight, stood atop a lonely hill and waved as the train passed him by.

Peter looked to his closed right hand. He opened it exposing a black and white photograph of a lovely lady and a small boy. Peter smiled, "I'm going back to Liberty," he said. The train raced eastward into the light of the rising sun.

