

Spring 1994

Beyond Memos: A Journal of the UMF Faculty, Volume 6, Spring 1994

University of Maine at Farmington

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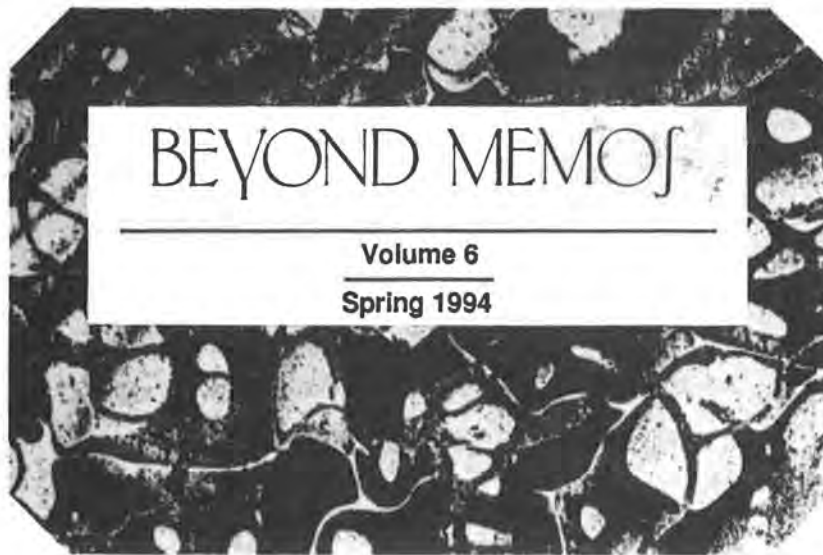
BEYOND MEMOS

A Journal of the UMF Faculty

Volume 6

Spring 1994





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BEYOND MEMOS is meant to be just that—a forum where UMF faculty can share ideas and creative work that go beyond the day-to-day campus routine of teaching, advising, committees, and memos. All materials, inquiries, and comments should be sent to Philip Carlsen, Editor, BEYOND MEMOS, University of Maine at Farmington, Farmington, ME 04938.

On Apprenticeship

This essay first appeared in the April 1994 issue of Maine in Print.

EVERY TIME I run a workshop at a writing conference and every time I make small talk at gatherings of professors or family or old acquaintances or friends I'm reminded how little our culture appreciates artistic apprenticeship, how little we writers (members, after all, of an unappreciative culture) admire our own apprenticeships, how much, even, we hate them.

At a Christmas gathering back home in the flatlands of Connecticut I got stuck at a house party talking to a real estate lady and her banker husband. Nice folks. She had read my book, a memoir called *Summers with Juliet*, which chronicles eight summers spent traveling with my now wife, the painter Juliet Karelsen. He had not read the book, even grinned admitting he hadn't actually read a whole book since college. Maybe not even in college, ha ha.

And she said, "We could have written that book."

"Yes!" he cried, "All the adventures we've had!"

"And a long courtship, too," she said.

I liked her. Who wouldn't? Lovely, intelligent, active, charming, successful.

He said, "Always wanted to take off a month and write the darn thing!" He really said this. A pleasant banker who hadn't read a book maybe ever.

"This is before we settled down," she said.

"Rent a little cabin, write the darn thing," he said, dreamily. Some of his rough edges, most of the possibility of personality, had been rubbed off by banking, but not all. There was enough of a man left there to take him seriously.

I smiled, said nothing. I'm not entirely churlish and I know people say dumb things sometimes. I do have a sense of humor. And I have had such conversations before:

Graduate Student in English: "When I finish my dissertation I'm going to write just such a book! I've got a whole summer before I'm off to Oxford."

Zoology professor: "So, you see, my story is just as interesting as yours: I'll get it written when I finish my treatise on color distribution in weasels."

Nearly everyone: "If I only had time like you!"

Folks don't quite see the difference between the story and the work of its telling. People don't quite see the enormous price of all that seeming free time.

A physician at a conference I won't name in Montana (and a doctor at Stonecoast and a doctor at Steamboat Springs and a doctor at every conference I've ever braved teaching—doctors are famous offenders) strode up to me during cocktails and announced that—now that she was established as a



Bill Rowland

surgeon (in fact, perhaps a little bored with it by now, the glamour having worn off)—yes, now that she had control of her time, she was going to take six months off and write her story. Mine had inspired her, she said.

I said I was pleased to be an inspiration. I wished her luck. Then there was a pause. The rattling of ice cubes. I knew how smart it would be

to keep silent, but I gulped my drink and said, "You know, you've inspired me! I'm going to take six months off and become a surgeon like you, since I admire you, and since neurology seems most up my alley—after all, I work with my brain practically every day! Yes! That's it! Now that I'm established as a writer, I think I'll just take six months off and heal a few brain wounds!"

She didn't get the joke. Didn't even smile. "You can't become a doctor in six months time," she said.

I just looked amazed at her news and watched her walk away.

BUT EVEN among the enlightened, among the best students I have had, among the best new writers I have talked to (and certainly within my younger self) contempt for the many years of apprenticeship (fully equal to the years required for an M.D., usually twice again more) seems a devastating undercurrent. We've all of us internalized our parents' question, our dentists' question, the competitive question at conferences: "Oh, you say you're a writer." Wry face. Then: "What have you published?"

And no matter if you've published two feeble stories in the *Wrinkly Elbow Review* or ten spectacular books: "Why no, I haven't heard of that one."

The next question (we don't ask doctors this!): "Huh. How much they pay you?"

And bless you if you haven't published at all. The smirk, the little anecdote about the aunt who thought herself a writer (before her suicide, poor thing), about the strange brother that wrote stories no one could make the least sense of. The anecdote about that spy writer guy who made ten million on his first book. Why don't you write about spies?

So it's no wonder that the first question many a new writer asks of her (usually struggling) teachers is: "How do I sell this thing?"

CONSIDER the apprentice glassblower. No one condemns her. No one says she should be blowing spy figurines. She's paying to learn, hoping to reach the point where she can earn wages as a journeyman so that after a prescribed number of years she'll be a master at her craft and able to make a real living. If you ask her what she's sold, she'll look puzzled, tell you (with aplomb and a little pity at your ignorance): Sold? I'm an apprentice. Sold? I'm proud to be able to sweep up around here. Sold? I know I'll be able at length to blow the perfect lamps the masters blow now. Oh, god, let me show you the lumpy vase I've made

before I smash it to make shards to melt for the next try! I'm working on necks, now; I'm working on making my vase necks perfectly graceful.

Imagine the glass apprentice taking vase-marketing courses before she's learned to make the glass. Imagine an entire Book-of-the-Minute Club devoted entirely to books aimed at glass apprentices and titled "Selling Your First Weak Attempts at Glasswork." First—and any apprentice to any master can tell you this—*learn the craft*. (And where does one find a master when it comes to writing? In the library, for starters.)

We've heard that writing is a talent, that one is born to it, that it can't be learned. Malarkey! Imagine the glass apprentice's parents saying: "Glassblowing? Glassblowing takes talent! You can't learn glassblowing." Or the medical student's: "If you can't do a heart transplant when you're in high school you'll never do one." Every apprentice in any endeavor arrives with certain talents, certain facilities, all intermixed with flaws. One hopes to hang onto talents while correcting deficits. Perhaps our glassblower is lucky enough to be naturally good at goblet stems (goblet stems are hard!). Should she quit because she's bad at vase necks?

No. She goes to work; she learns. And when she fails she smashes the faulty lamp or pitcher or goblet, musters all she's learned, and tries again. No one suggests she keep working on the flawed apprentice work, just as no one suggests that a medical student continue to work on her assigned cadaver until it comes to life. (Or worse, that she try to sell the bestitched and bloodless thing, or send it a bill.)

Here is the only rule I'm willing to make about writing: Honor your apprenticeship. Call yourself a learner. When your goblets are good they will sell (first at yard sales, then in better and better boutiques, then to the fine museums). Before that time, smash them and use what you've learned to make the next. One day, people will clamor for what you do. But first you must—we all must—learn to write. When some well-meaning banker asks what you've published, look shocked. Say, "But I'm an apprentice!" Be proud of this, be glad of it. Buy yourself a beer. Write yourself an acceptance letter. Cultivate patience. Quote Shinryu Suzuki: "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."

—BILL ROORBACH



ApHOARisms: A Dialogue

Wherein Prof. Hoar, on teaching Camus's essay "The Myth of Sisyphus," recollects (in tranquillity) a conversazione he overheard at Bread Loaf, Vermont, in the "Barn" on an evening in July 1959 between the philosophers Camus and Frost.

Robert. I believe we are all indebted to Sisyphus. I have long applauded him in my heart.

Albert. Oui. Sisyphus possesses poetic integrity, for he was a born rebel with a *cause célèbre*. He is worthy of your ultimate luxury, your ultimate poem—to die in the bed you were born in.

Robert. The world loves an underdog, cynical though it be to say so.

Albert. Underdogs make our best heroes; most heroes, however, all too often become insufferable bores at last. One could do worse than be a raiser of rocks.

Robert. Earth's the right place for underdogs and for rocks. Frankly, I dunno where they're likely to go better.

Albert. Early on, you allowed how we're the right place for love?

Robert. Yes, but try'n find it!

Albert. Earthlings, such as we, are already underlings. Under a curse. Call it *felix culpa*. Call it *weltschmerz*. Call it divine justice.

Robert. It was a low pedestrian assignment . . . consignment to H— . . . that our friend Sisyphus was awarded. It wasn't on the level. I never felt he deserved it.

Albert. But, if just desserts were best for us, why do apple pie à la mode, brandied Danish pastry, and cheesecake make us ever fatter?

Robert. Well, at least Sisyphus'll never be fat. He was into isometrics ages before our Health Ed. folks.

Albert. Most think the gravity of his situation unbearable, a decided put-down, for the gods thought him worthy of their displeasure. After all, he did *manage* to steal their fire.

Robert. Yes'n, b'gawd, he's *been* stealing it ever since!

Albert. They thought humiliating him would be a great victory—all gold.

Robert. Ayuh—a sardonic joke they could always titter about as he teeters about . . . somewhere ages hence . . . or so they thought.

Albert. But Sisyphus did the unexpected—he found meaning. Found it anew. Did what each of us

should do . . . find meaning where the gods assume there is none. This exemplary act tends to confirm Homer's estimate: that Sisyphus has perhaps proven the most sapient of mortals.

Robert. I'm like the gods who wanted Sisy to feel downhearted, downcast, downright sorry for himself. And he wouldn't give 'em the satisfaction or sadist-faction!

Albert. They thought to make him the ultimate absurdity. But one who's never known the night can't appreciate daylight nearly so much as Sisyphus. He's a paradox. But, then, who isn't?

Robert. Sisy is all of dynamic. His nobility of soul has him saying "Yes" to his rock. He's a Yeayer.

Albert. He whom the gods look down upon in scorn, this mortal proletarian among 'em, actually turns more than his stone. He turns the tables on 'em by teaching 'em the higher fidelity, thus nixing all of 'em from Pluto, Moanarch of the dead, on up.

Robert. Ayuh, he's said even to have conquered death, so sacredly ordained of the gods. Before that, Sisy wasn't even average, tasting as he did of lowly human mortalities and contentments.

Albert. Oui, the dirtiest word on Earth is *average*.

Robert. But, if, like Sisy, you can more often say "Yes" to the world out there, you have a higher AVERage.

Albert. Just so.

Robert. Your Sisy, despite his ordeal (raw deal) by darkness, eclipses the absurd in that the rock's his thing. He's "doing his thing," as Emerson would have said.

Albert. The gods wane whiles he waxes, for grubby, dirty though his hands are—many a mortal would gladly shake them!—Sisyphus is the daring darling of serendipity.

Robert. He renders sere their pity. Why, he's a rock star! Pressed for a summation, Sisy must often have "Oh"-pined, "I'm between a rock and a hard place."

Robert. Are we earthlings not all little Sisys, reluctant ergophobes, tasking out our ephemeral

days for figsome praise in the work place?

Albert. Oui! For life's an uphill battle, taxing upon the soul as upon the body.

Robert. Our rocks (taxes) ever rise before us . . . are ever with us. While Sisy's rock constantly erodes by wear at every turn, each mortal of us must shoulder a growing tax burden, though we can barely budge it.

Albert. Such arbitraments *are* a bit much. We each must rise, like Sisyphus, to the occasion, burdened (apparently) in the knowledge that nothing is equal . . . nor should be.

Robert. The higherarchy among the gods—those Nay-saying doomsters, who failed abjectly in Sisy's case—have brainwashed us of the lowerarchy into mournful lamentations over our myriad inequalities abounding here. Humans heed not that a uniform equality in all things would be our tragic undoing . . . a veritable hell on earth. God knows, we're nearly there now.

Albert. To equate equality with paradise on earth is not only a myth but a mythstake.

Robert. Dear bungling (forgive the redundancy) human error—on our lips we croon equality; in our hearts we crave equity.

Albert. Absurdity and ecstasy *are* scions/signs of the same sod.

Robert. Even the gods have their quarrels, their petty jealousies, jockeying/jokeing for most favored status.

Albert. Humans are mixed bags, adulterated baggage.

Robert. There are good farts; there are natural farts; and then, of course, there are the *real* farts.

Albert. Sisyphus is a real good fart.

Robert. Sisy prefers pure water to being popular with the gods. Gawdjess, he'd rather slake than sleaze any day.

Albert. But Sisyphus is a peace craver and does humanity proud . . . enough so, to be their patron saint, if they'd but have 'im. To be acknowledged by one's fellows is often too much to ask.

Robert. Sisy is our logo! He symbolizes our futile inability to get out from under our largest,

Emerson Said

Emerson said everything in nature is cracked, now this is an idea that calls me in, and if I can get into this idea bone deep I will be a bit closer to naming my own redemption, that stance in nature I need, a step into that infinity outside human control. My entry into this wild universe is as dependent upon ideas from others as it is upon my singular walking the paths and fields of nature's body.

—ROD FARMER

heaviest, and most astonishing stone—WAR, our nemesis.

Albert. Sisy has monumental patience to empathize with humans at all, for he is inept at hatred(s). He is way out of sync with our sick compulsion for the gold, for victory, for Number-Oneness.

Robert. Perhaps our worst indictment is our not accepting Sisyphus for his saintly qualities. He teaches us that the *upward struggle* toward the Heights of our highest endeavors *is itself enough*.

Albert. Oui. Enoughness is his redeeming virtue. As Sisyphus to summitry, so ought we to be to the pinnacle of our dreams.

Robert. I admire Sisy, finally, for one other homely forte—his stamina, courage, originality, and direction all rolled into one: what oldtime Mainers used to call *bo-ink-um*.

Albert. *If we could have but these two qualities—ENOUGHNESS and BO-INK-LIM—we would be, like Sisyphus*, calmer within and achieve karma without.* Why, Robert, I believe we have breathed life into my favorite myth!

—JAY S. HOAR

**Translatable in Aramaic as "Jesus"*

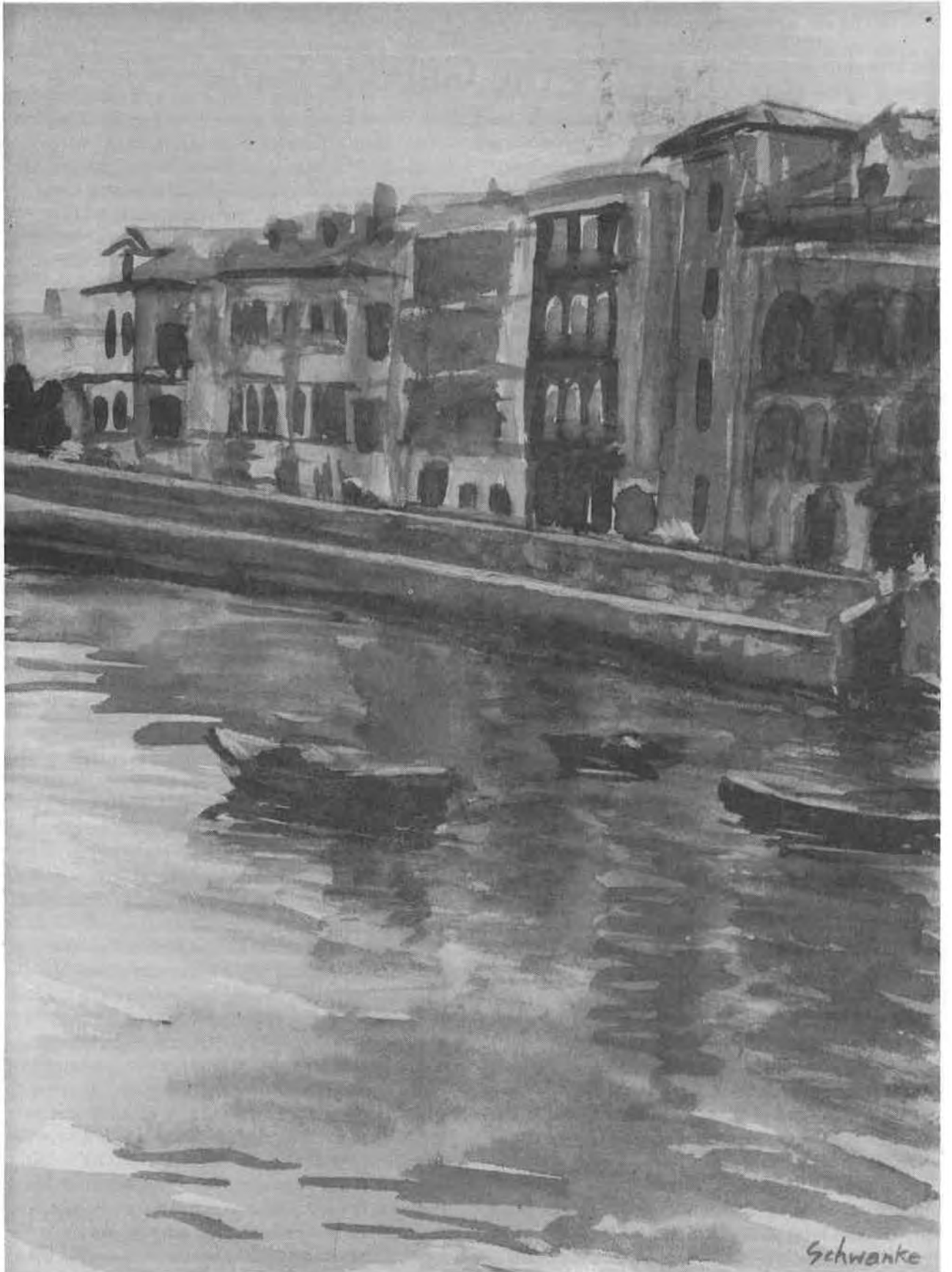
At International House

after the egg rolls, after the shangas,
Jade and Emilia fell to discussing
their lives as parallel universes.
That border dispute between their countries?
Jade knew it well—a factory worker,
she was handed a rifle; she lay on a hill
of wheat tossing in thin sunlight
and aimed it at her counterparts across the river.
Emilia (the enemy) ruefully shook her head.
Inside, a continent was swaying.

Upstairs were maps brought from home
on opposite walls of the study. Across her border,
Jade sounded names in Chinese characters:
Belegorsk, Blagoveshchensk, Svobodny;
Emilia, in Cyrillic: *Mo-ho, Man-kuei, Kulien,*
the charts incommensurate until one spoke
and light lifted the other's face.
Back and forth they paced,
following their recognitions
till the miracle stood on its feet.
Within these maps, 10000 miles away,
one tiny woman aimed a rifle at another;
to consider it made them dizzy
in this room where flowers traced the wallpaper.
They held on by the warmth of their flesh,
a peasant's daughter, a peasant's daughter.

—LEE SHARKEY

*Note: shangas—round flatcakes filled with
farmer's cheese, mildly sweetened, a traditional
food in the Komi Republic of Russia.*



The Way the Galaxie Ends

HIS GIRLFRIEND gets mad at him one night because, she says, he will never grow up, and she orders him out of her apartment even though it is late and cold, and Frank, not a native to this winter-gripped place, hates the cold. Feeling himself to be a victim in this, Frank puts on his sweater and his big coat and his wool cap, and he goes to his car—a '73 Ford Galaxie—gets it started, waits for it to warm up so that the heater will work, and then drives off, taking a quick look to see if his girlfriend's light has gone off yet, because if it has that would mean one thing and if it hasn't that would mean another. The light is still on as he drives away, but now he isn't sure if this means something good, or if it means something bad.

Frank decides to take the short cut back to his house, down the steep road through the Nature Park which in the summer is cool and pretty, with a creek and ferns and pines, but now, in January, is covered in snow and the road is nothing but ice. As soon as he starts down the road he realizes this had been a bad decision, as he begins to skid, and skids until he comes to the place where the road curves to the left and he slides straight into the bank on the right and the engine stops. He tries for a few minutes to back the car up and straighten the wheels but can't.

It is bitter cold, probably zero or below, as Frank stands there trying to decide what to do. He could walk back to his girlfriend's apartment, but she would only get mad at him again and probably not let him in anyway. He starts walking towards home through the Nature Park. He is thinking of a certain open, sunny hill in California, but ice-covered branches on the maple and birch trees keep breaking off and crashing down on the road around him, so that he must walk in the center of the road to avoid the exploding bits of ice and wood. There is no moon and sometimes he steps on patches of ice that he can't see, and then he thrashes about, his legs sliding in different directions and his arms up in the air, but only once does he fall.

It is 4:30 by the time he finally gets to his house and without turning up the heat he goes directly to bed. But not long after dawn the policeman who lives across the street in the house that always has bikes and puppies in the front yard wakes Frank up

to ask about the car they found in the Nature Park.

Frank considers a lie but doesn't have the energy for it, and can't even imagine what he would lie about anyway, so he explains everything while he makes a cup of coffee, which he doesn't feel like drinking, since he would just as soon go back to sleep. He has the feeling, though, that he is not going to get the chance, what with the problems with his girlfriend and getting his car towed out of the Nature Park. The cop wants to know why he drove down that road in the first place, since it has been a toboggan run for the kids for the last two months now, and Frank tells the story of his girlfriend kicking him out of her place, and they both laugh at that, because they are two men who know how that sort of thing goes. The cop says he will call the police in town and let them know that it's okay about the car, and he gives Frank some solid advice, says that he should call his girlfriend and see if she is still mad at him, and Frank does.

She says it was stupid for him to drive down that road, and he knows that this is true but she didn't have to say so. Really, she is a pain in the ass sometimes.

He calls a towing service to meet him at the Methodist Church building which is at the top of the road he shouldn't have driven down, and naturally there are stalled cars and minor accidents all over town. It will be one or two in the afternoon before anyone can get to him, which is okay with him, since that will give him time to have a good breakfast and time for his girlfriend to come over and drive him down to the church.

She shows up after eleven, and she doesn't want a cup of cocoa that he was nice enough to offer, but says she wants him to return the books he has borrowed. He gets the books for her and then she gives him a ride to the church, even though it is only a little after noon and he knows the truck probably won't get there until two.

He spends the time while he waits sitting on the steps of the church, out of the wind, where the sun is shining strong, and even though he is cold to the bone it still feels good to have the sun on his face. He is very tired and if it was ten or fifteen degrees warmer he could fall asleep. He leans against the railing of the steps and closes his eyes and thinks about his brother living in Texas, where

it is probably warm enough to sleep on a lawn right that minute.

The tow truck appears and Frank can tell that the driver thinks he is an idiot to have driven down that icy road. To get the Galaxie out they have to block the tow truck in the church parking lot at the top of the road, run a cable down the road about 75 yards, hook the cable to the frame and, while the driver complains about bad drivers, slowly winch the Galaxie up the hill. The whole operation takes about two hours before the Galaxie is in the parking lot and Frank can get it running again. Before he leaves, the tow truck driver points out that the front tie-rod on Frank's car is bent and will have to be replaced.

Frank rushes off to his bank then, the car rattling rhythmically on the road, and takes out enough money to last him for the rest of the month, until his next paycheck from teaching three sections of Introductory Economics at the University comes. He gets the short teller with the black hair and black eyebrows and the really nice mouth, and this is the only good thing that has happened so far that day. The day has already slipped away by the time he leaves the bank; only the sunset is left, that good color lighting up the tops of the steeples on the Common. He watches the light, which looks so warm, for a few minutes, and then he hears his name called and it is a friend, someone who is not from New England either, and the two of them go up the street to Barselotti's for a few drinks. Frank sips from a glass of beer and a bourbon, and then has the bartender pour out a water glass full of Metaxa for him and he sips from that for awhile. Soon it is ten o'clock, his friend long since gone somewhere else, and Frank drives carefully home, never taking the Galaxie out of low. He builds a fire in the fireplace and sits down by it, intending to think about things.

Everything is a hassle, Frank thinks, too much trouble. In his sleepiness it is the one thing he can focus on. Hassles, hassles. *Hassle*. The word booms and echoes in his brain, and when it finally dies away he realizes that hassles are what make up his world. Everything is a hassle, everything is too much trouble. His girlfriend, the car, building a

fire, turning up the thermostat—they are all too much.

He can't believe how tiring that thought is. Sitting there in front of the fire it crashes down on him: all the hassles are sucking him dry, draining the life out of him. But what is he to do?

Action. You fight fatigue with action, he decides, and suddenly he is awake, energized. Do battle with the hassles and drive them off. He packs some old clothes that he doesn't want anymore into a suitcase, pulls the broken vacuum cleaner from the closet, gathers up all the newspapers and bottles that are lying around, and then turns the thermostat in the house up to 80 degrees. He goes out to the street and tosses the suitcase and vacuum and other things into the Galaxie and drives out to the Quabbin Reservoir, along the road that would eventually take him to Boston if that was where he wanted to go. He stops at a place on the road where the lake is directly below, at the end of a steep slope. He turns the car around so that it is facing off the road and he puts it in gear and hops out. Obediently the Galaxie heads over the edge of the road; as the rear fender of the car passes him he kicks it. The Galaxie doesn't tumble or twist, just goes faster and faster down the slope and into the lake, breaking through the ice on the edge so that most of the car, except for the trunk, is in the water.

He watches the trunk sticking out of the ice and listens to the sound of the ice cracking all along the edge of the lake, sending its message to the far reaches of the universe, and already he can feel the difference. So ends the Galaxie, he thinks. His walk back to his house is almost as long as the walk he made the night before, and the similarity causes him to compare the circumstances of each walk. He has now rid himself of many things, his girlfriend, he supposes, included, but he doesn't mind. He feels himself to be a great hero, having won a great victory. He even whistles a few tunes on his way. He plans to leave the heat up as high in the house as he pleases and sleep through every bit of the next day. Sometime soon he will go to Texas, sometime before they come to ask about the car.

—MICHAEL BURKE



Thinking About Food; Recipes Included

THE BEYOND MEMOS memo (March 7, 1994) "encouraged" us, by way of a long, inspiring list ("doodles . . . self-portraits . . . anecdotes . . . jokes . . .") to submit something for the next issue. Among that list was "recipes," and I'm tempted to inter-campus-mail Phil Carlsen a few of the same, using aromatically fresh goat cheese dropped, these muddy spring days, in my mailbox by a good neighbor. Goat cheese on broccoli stems; goat cheese & cherry tomatoes cooked until soft w/ white wine, then dumped on linguine; goat cheese melted, added, spread. The goats keep producing; the cheese happens; my neighbor is generous. We trade: walnuts for cheese; dried beans for cheese. A good deal.

But of course all readers don't live down the road from a goat farm, and I wasn't sure that Phil was altogether serious, either. I suspect he'd prefer Petrarchan sonnets from faculty, not salad-dressing tips. So I'm modifying his recipe a little and sending instead a few ways for thinking about food.

But why would I do even that? Surely we all own a groaning board or two of cookbooks, being, as we tend to be, so into print, so in love with black (or sepia) marks on white, cream, recycled tan. And Lord knows we exchange words all the time. We never shut up, constantly trading opinions, gripes, gossip, advice, conspiracies, suspicions, assertions, p.c. admonitions, and what have you in our various mailrooms and corridors. The faculty mouth, tireless and wonderful. But seldom do we discuss what goes *into* it.

My recipe here is for thinking about fairly awful things, declassé food groups, secret flavors, like private addictions to Twinkies or Steak-ums. I want to think about how we think about these mouthfuls. I also want to suggest that many of these—well, not exactly "foods," but close—go unexamined, unappreciated, not seen for what they are. I want to suggest a fresh reading, a revised reading. I will confine my subjects to three: canned potatoes; Miracle Whip; and extra-hard hard-boiled eggs.

In our town, when the time comes around (about 52 times a year, seems like) for the jello, bean, slaw, or pie committee to make their truculent calls for donations to the upcoming benefit

supper, the caller (and my whole heart does go out to her (always a "her") having been bullied or stared into the ranks of "casserole committee" myself) inevitably begins, "you're such a gourmet cook, we were wondering if you'd be willing to..." Our small town: cook: Big Frog; Little Pond. Of course I always say "glad to, what time should I get it there?" I bite my tongue (there's a flavor) and never take "her" to task for using "gourmet," that silliest of words, right up there with "lifestyle." I know that anyone serving on the jello committee has got to mean well, and that everyone says "gourmet" when they want to describe someone who uses fresh parsley or College Inn chicken broth, or owns a pepper or coffee grinder or a nutmeg & knuckle grater. So, like a multitude of other outrages, I just let the word boil on by.

But it certainly shouldn't be used to describe what goes on in my kitchen half the time. There are whole weeks when our best meal comes out of a box labeled "Swanson," washed down with liquid so raw and metallic that it should have been put on the table in its brown paper bag, and accompanied by a nearly dead tomato slice gasping for air beneath a final sentence of bottled sauce. For "bean suppers" I empty two large cans of, add a fist of brown sugar, some dried mustard if it's around, put some water in the dregs of a catsup squeezer, shake it hard, mix all & put in bean pot, then oven for a while, take to the supper and sit back for the raves. Or take fish sticks, for example. For all I know, my children grew up thinking everything that swam in the great sea was 3 inches long, rectangular, covered with crumbs, and was hauled on board with a packet of sweet pickle attached.

I truly love real potatoes in any form: baked, boiled, double-baked, fried, hashed, mashed. I love long dusty brown ones, small wet red ones, gnarly little yellow ones, potatoes with eyes even, and long white sprouty feelers. I love hot potatoes, cold potatoes, room-temperature potatoes dosed with anchovies, green olive oil, olives & chopped scallions. Pepper. But I also love the morsels called "potatoes" that come in cans, for cheap and fairly quick.

Canned "potatoes" have already been peeled and cooked (but not quite cooked) and come in two handy shapes: sliced and whole. Whole are better,

but I don't know why. Both come floating in a grey embryonic fluid, pellucid, nearly gluey, and almost useless. Except it keeps the "potatoes" wet en route, I guess.

You (well, I) buy these canned "potatoes" not when I'm in a hurry, exactly, because real potatoes don't take much longer, but when I want something that resembles a potato, but isn't. I mean, this is a different food, a little like hominy is to corn, or a fish stick to a fish. Now, opened can in hand, a few things are essential. First, you've got to have an appetite for exactly the chew of a canned "potato." The chew of it, the specific tooth-someness, is more enticing than the flavor of it; though the flavor, which always retains a slightly tinny edge to an otherwise cardboardy base, is also good. The chew of a canned "potato" is similar to the chew of a canned "clam," which is something like the chew of small square bits of pencil eraser. But sometimes this is just the texture you want between your teeth.

The second requirement of canned "potatoes"

is that you've got to be willing to do a little something to them. There are only two possibilities. One is to dump them, embryonic fluid included, into a pot, heat them, drain them, add a knob of something yellow, a grind of pepper, and call it supper's ready.

My other recipe is to slice up the whole ones, and fry them, fast, in some oil. Towards the end, add a lot of minced garlic. Don't let the garlic brown, *at all*. The "potatoes" get a brown side, and sometimes take on a crispy sensation; but most often, they don't. They have a tendency to sulk. Perhaps they've been soaking in their can for too long. To their ground-level taste of cardboard and tin (not earth, not sun) and to their meditative chew, fried canned "potatoes" now take on a versatility and a rakish Mediterranean hint, especially if you've used olive oil. They also "go with" nearly anything, from scrambled eggs to sausage. It just occurs to me that this isn't a very wide range. Canned "potatoes" would not go with fresh aspara-

Supping with Karina

Outside
in the rink below
the voice of children playing
trickles
up
through our open-winged kitchen window.

Now and again,
a ball is kicked.

Creamy-glazed panes
perimeter a fraction of
vertical tree
leaning before us
in late white sky.

Inside
we sip tea from polka dot cups,
savor breads
and work from cross-language dictionaries,
grasping more and more
about
past lives . . .

—ELLEN BOWMAN

gus, or with tiny but thick lamb chops. Nor would they hold up under a generous sprinkle of either fresh mint or rosemary leaves. I'll now explain why.

Canned "potatoes" are the star of the food group of canned "vegetables." All of these: peas, beans (green), okra, carrots, etc. are new and different foods. They are not vegetables. They've become something else for which, I notice, we have no name. Clearly, a canned "pea" is not a pea. A canned "pea" isn't simply an inadequate, ruined, prole, disgusting, or fake pea; it isn't a pea at all. It's something else, and only itself. Ditto canned "green beans" vs. green beans. The whole secret to eating these objects is never to add to them anything real. This is why canned "green beans" need canned "mushroom" soup, canned "onion" rings, and a last-minute topping of "bits o' bacon." Or a squeeze of "lemon juice" from a yellow plastic lemon. What's fatal is to sneakily add anything real, like real bacon. At most, real butter, real

garlic, or real salt is about as far as you can go without ruining the integrity of the dish. In short, stay with fake ingredients as far as possible. Then you end up with a homogeneous thing which stands quite alone, related to real food but not imitative of it; and you, as the cook, have not put on culinary airs. You've honestly dealt with the world of dishonest food, but real fake food. If you see what I mean.

One of the most praised, licked-clean, and begged-for recipes at our local benefit suppers is known as "7-can casserole." I'd include the recipe here, but I don't have it. I know it involves several cans of different colored "beans," "corn," and one can, at least, of "carrots." Some "soup" of some flavor, but I don't know which. Top with Cheez-Whiz.

At one point in his reckless and always exciting career through the world, my father owned a small neighborhood grocery, so small that he bought his coffee beans in bulk and packed them in bags

butter (or cholesterol 227)

the nurse said
you don't have to give it up
just cut back, use less
enough to get the flavor

what does she know?
it's not only the flavor
but the excess I love
the luxury, the extravagance

the glistening pool
in the potatoes
the golden sheen on a grilled bagel
waffle wells full
the translucence of onions
the slither of eggs
it's bread and
peas and
syrup and
grease on my chin
stains on my tablecloth

butter is more than
food
more than fat

to an Irish survivor
it's status
a sense of rightness about
it being on the table
of depravity in its absence
the insult of substitutes

I grew up on butter
view it as food as natural
and necessary as meat
and potatoes

years of poverty
improved my taste for it
resentment increased my need
now I honor a commitment to
myself to satisfy this need
grab my right to butter
now cheap & available
I always buy
two pounds at a time

—KATHLEEN McNALLY BEAUBIEN

which had my name printed on them. It's the only time any product has carried my first name. My mother (an artist) made his store signs for him, weekly posters announcing this or that on sale, and I came of age believing she had designed the original Jolly Green Giant and the moon logo for Ivory Snow. Ah, salad days.

In addition to being a most careful, knowledgeable butcher (no easy task, faced with an entire cold cow-half on a hook) my father was also a Violent Man when it Came To Food. Once he bodily tossed into the busy street, or punched out, a slimy salesman peddling "artificial cheese." It was packed in little wooden cartons just like Velveeta. The story—"artificial cheese"—and the salesman slammed flat—became a staple for years thereafter, good for an hour's verbal feast. "Artificial cheese! Artificial cheese! Can you imagine such a thing? With milk going down the drains!" At Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day, Easter, birthday suppers, picnics, this story would always inspire one uncle to tell his story about Pepperidge Farm Breads, and how you could tell when they were stale. And this in turn would inspire the third time-honored food tale around the food-laden table, of how another uncle, dead now, bless him, had invited the extended family over for a chicken cook-out, but had bought only wings. This was another opportunity for my father to resemble Pavarotti hitting sustained thrill. "Airplane feast! Airplane feast!" he'd repeat, "remember when Ollie had that Airplane Feast!" Which led to the fourth saga (a little like the mead hall in *Beowulf*, my family...) about my mother's one and only attempt to bake bread. She produced a loaf, one loaf, so wizened, heavy, and hard, that my father saved it, smuggled it to a church event, and laid it on the Fellowship Hall mantle with a sign that said "I hereby contribute the cornerstone to our new addition." I don't think my mother ever forgave him, though it was always told, even by her, as a "funny" story.

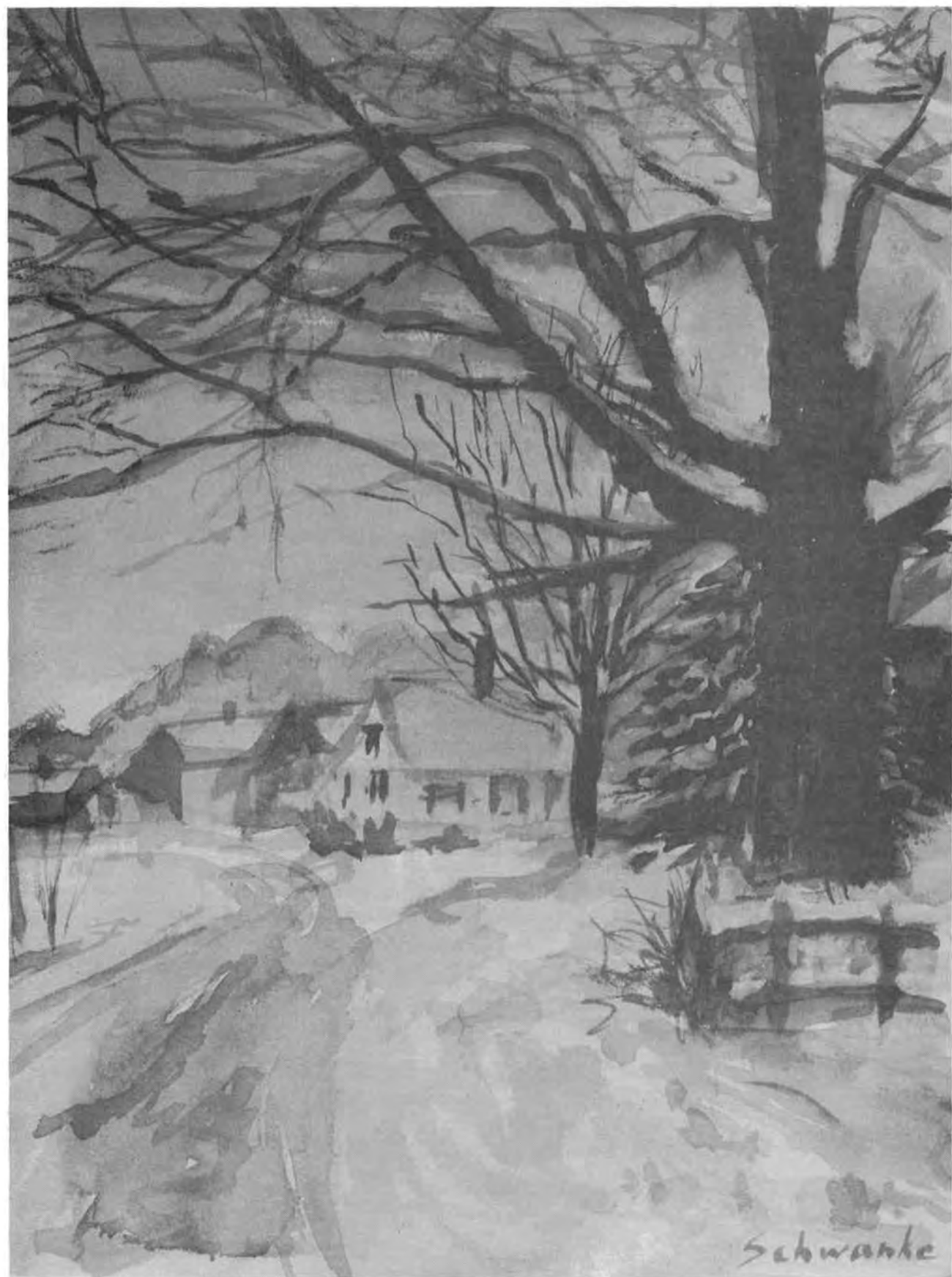
About Miracle Whip, you again have only two choices. You can either make your own mayonnaise from eggs and scratch (*Joy Of Cooking*) or you can lay out 79¢ and have a little jar of Miracle Whip. Those are the only alternatives. I'd avoid anything inbetween, especially newish items labeled "Lite." Those, unlike odd-food food-groups (canned "peas") are absent-food food-groups, the essence of wishy-wash. Real mayonnaise (break an egg) is something good indeed, and Miracle Whip is something else indeed, and has the added virtue of coming in such small jars that it

gets used up at a June picnic, thus preventing botulism. Plus, its taste is childhood: strange, mixed, memorable, a little melancholy, and only itself. Furthermore, small children even today prefer it on Spam sandwiches. Once again, we have that perfect match. Spam is to animal (what animal?) what Miracle Whip is to mayonnaise.

There are other handy recipes that stretch our habits and, in fact, take them to new territory altogether: cocktail hotdogs in melted red currant jelly. 7-up, lime jello, and mini-marshmallow molded salad. Pillsbury canned biscuit "pizzas." Occasionally, in sources such as a Grange or Extension cookbook, you'll see a recipe for "My Family 1-Bowl Chocolate Surprise" calling for two cups of Miracle Whip. I've never tried one of these, but intend to do so, someday. I bet it's a cake that is melting, seductive, orgasmic, worthy of a Vienna (Austria, not Maine) coffee house. One of the blue ribbon prizes for our relaxed theories is how good a canned "bean" can be so long as it's treated like a "canned" bean. How good a cake, at least once in a lifetime, with \$1.39 of Miracle Whip whisked into the batter.

I close with my recipes for thinking about food by discussing hard-boiled eggs, a can of beets, and a casual splash of vinegar. A toss of sugar. Salt. Don't be too picky about any of this, except for the secret: you've got to boil the eggs, low but steady, for about two hours. Watch the water level. Boiled, that is, until egg becomes new thing. Transformed. Virgin into tree. Frog into prince. God into swan. Wet life into old wineskin. Egg no longer. Mouthful in beautiful shape of egg. Chewy whites, resistant as saddles. Green-stained yolks, dry as pollen. Peel the cooled eggs, dump over them a can of beets. Canned beet juice has stained the whites about an 8th of an inch inwards, a blessing of deepest red. Your dish now resembles a Russian Easter. So far, so good. Better if you let it sit at the back of the fridge about a week, thus getting harder, thus beetier, thus deeper in red, thus drier at the center. You now have an "egg" that will celebrate the first spring night. The gourmet touch is 8 or 11 caraway seeds or a stem of fresh dill. By adding either caraway or dill (I wouldn't add both) you risk, however, getting on the "benefit supper: beets" list in a permanent "gourmet" way. And really, there's nothing we want to be in a permanent way.

—ALICE BLOOM



Daedulus again

me, I'm the driver,
the one with the prehensile thumbs and all
the wisdom needed to guide these 2000 pounds
of rolled steel through the night
dodging the odd farmcat, porcupine, skunk

you, son, you're the chosen one captive in
the dashlight's subterranean glow, your finger
punching the radio, searching for some dj
savvy enough to stroke the pain out of your
tumescient rage

me, I'm still trying to figure us out, wondering
if after these seventeen years, I'm any closer
than I was in those midnight hours spent caressing
your mother's swollen belly
intent even then on tracing out designs to
carry us both out of this maze I have made
of my life

you, son, I can't blame for collapsing into
an inertia of your own choosing
moved by instinct
to ward off any warped calculus
any feeble construct
fashioned from these clumsy thumbs
this superfluous wisdom

—DOUG RAWLINGS

For Mark Bartholomew

It seems that each spring
just when I gather the apple leaves
into a tight, neat circle on the lawn
the wind will rise out of the west
quicken and scatter my morning's work

Or just when the snow finally melts
from the meadows and the days of April
begin to lengthen and the frost eases up
and the fiddleheads sprout along the stone wall
to challenge the cold grays of winter
the basement fills with water

It is good that I have learned long ago
to cease forcing answers from the workings of this world
to listen, instead, for the counterweights
that will surely fall into place
to balance even this ache that has found its way
into everything I have done these past six days

Mark, I will learn to not look for your quick laugh,
your shy sideways smile, as I pass the rooms where you taught
but to leave open a space within for your spirit to seize me
with a grip as sure as your infamous hold on a coffee cup,
as true as your damnable ease at filling an inside straight

And then I will know that you have found me again
that you have given us your life as a gift
that will always move — as all good gifts must do —
and that I shall have to do my part to keep it alive
to meet the despair of this world
with a force of love and hope and wonder
made stronger from having known you

—DOUG RAWLINGS

Should We Eat Tigers?

TWO VIRUSES had gorged themselves on a fat juicy tiger. Since it was a warm summer evening, they had retired to the back porch for coffee and conversation:

- H. Life is good. I hope our posterity will have evenings like this.
- I. Yes, that was a very fine tiger—so young and fresh. But it was not easy to find. If that circus had not been in town we would have been hard-pressed.
- H. Our families have lived on tiger for millions of years.
- I. But they are getting more difficult to find.
- H. Hmm. Let's see, there are about 5,000 tigers left; at 150 pounds apiece, that's only 750,000 pounds of tiger.
- I. Not much, is it? It will be tough for the children to find a meal like the one we just had.
- H. Speaking of the children, when are we going to—ah—reproduce?
- I. Oh, not for another twenty minutes or so.

(They fell into silence and watched the sky redden with the setting sun, thinking of the offspring who were yet to be.)

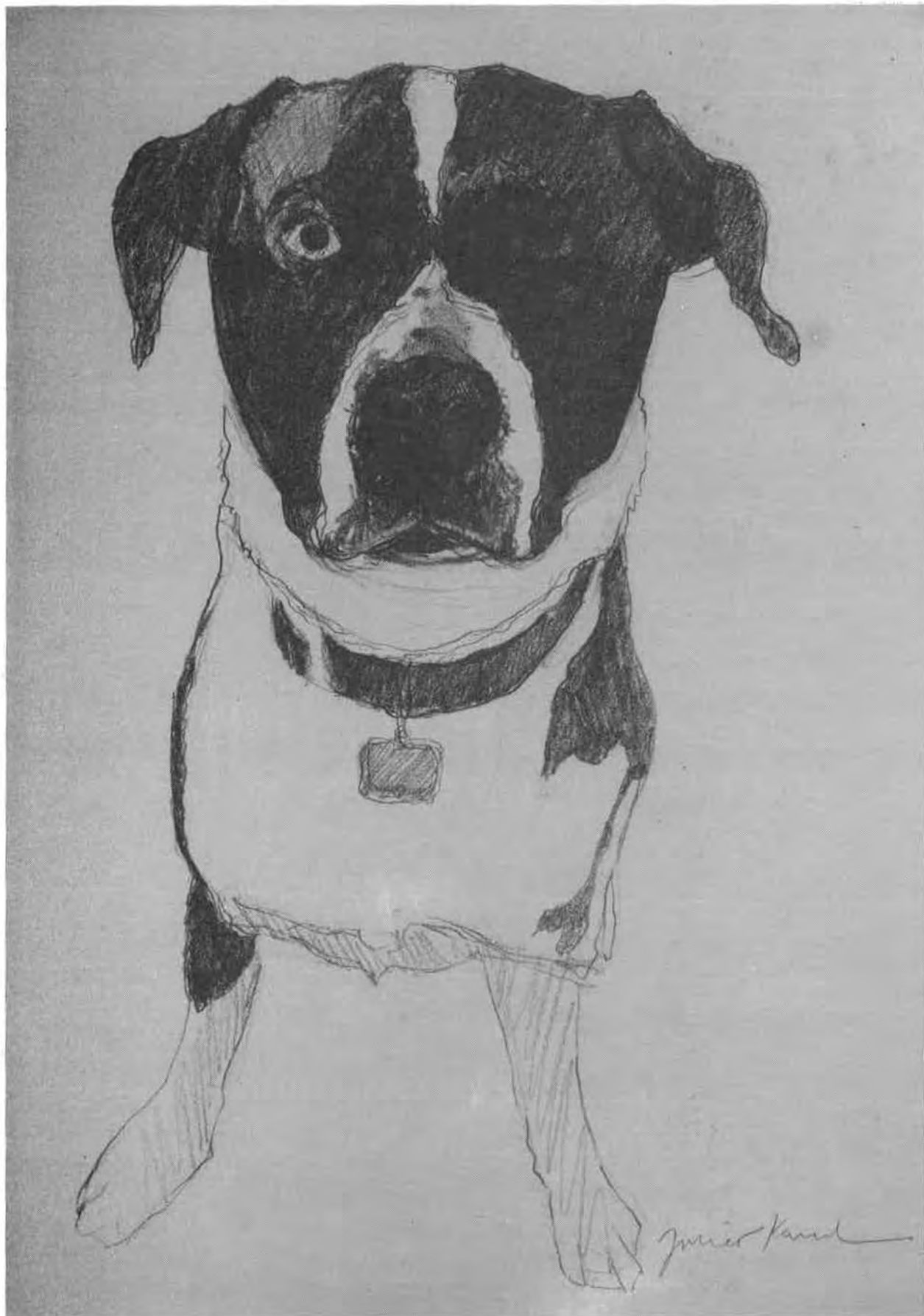
- I. The little ones are so hungry when they are first born.
- H. Maybe we should switch our diet. Eat something that is easier to get. It would be hard, but—
- I. But what would we switch to? Ants?
- H. There certainly are a lot of ants, but they are so small. It takes a great many ants to make a pound, and they are almost all shell.

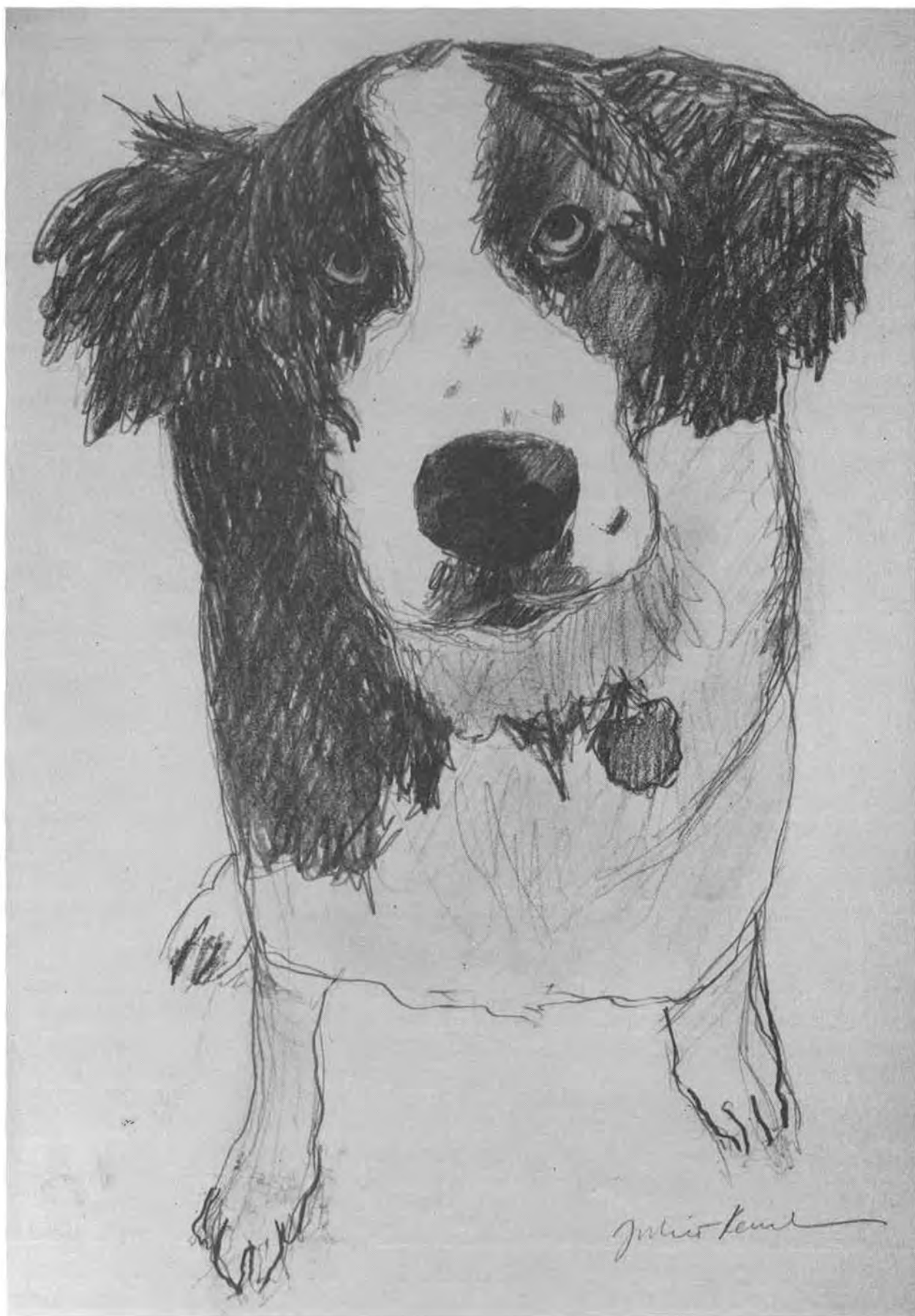
- I. If not ants, what?
- H. I was thinking of people.
- I. People? The family tried that once, several hundred years ago. From what I hear, they taste foul and cause gas.
- H. Yes, but look at the numbers. There are five billion of them. At 120 pounds each, that's 600,000,000,000 pounds, and in another fifty years, it will be 1,200,000,000,000 pounds. They certainly are easy to find.
- I. You're being silly again. No one would switch to eating people.
- H. I don't know—what about the HIV family? They switched and seem to be doing very well.
- I. Well—yes. It's disgusting. Great-grandmother was at the mall yesterday, and those HIV's were all over the place.
- H. And they aren't the only ones. Grandmother was reading in the paper this morning about some viruses in the southwest who switched from deer mice to people.
- I. Switching from deer mice to people is one thing, but who would give up tigers?
- H. I suppose you are right. It was just an idea.
- I. Anyway, it's time to reproduce. We had better get at it.

(They both smiled as they rose to go inside. At the door, H paused, looked around, and, with a worried expression, turned to I.)

- H. The little ones are going to be hungry when they are born. Do you see any tigers about?
- I. No—only people.

—RUSSELL RAINVILLE





From "Three Failures"

THIS CLASS, THIS CLASS. When I assigned this class a film review, they went out, just about all of them, and lifted their text from newspapers and magazines. One of the sources was easy to track down: a Pauline Kael review—words one through five-hundred, that is—right out of the current *New Yorker*. This was a young woman who couldn't write two consecutive coherent sentences in English, or any other language, and she had painstakingly transcribed several columns of Kael's sinuous, looping prose, one delicate participle after another, transcribed *ennui*, *lugubrious*, and *pellucid*, without ever once suspecting that I might notice that she hadn't written it. I remember an editor at the *Herald* reading me another review over the telephone, both of us excited because we had *found* it, *yes*, and he said, "So I gotta tell George, what, is this some kind of advanced journalism class?" "No," I said, "it's freshman writing," and he said, "Maybe I won't tell him." I asked them to write a description of

something small, smaller than your hand, and I got an encyclopedia article on a spider, another on bees, and the entry on "Nail" from the *Random House Guide to Home Repair*. One tall, pimply boy had his friend or his mother write a paper on the third assignment, and it was nothing like what he had written on the first two. When I asked him for a draft, he gave me one, *in someone else's handwriting*, and, when I pointed this out, he said that this person had "helped him a little." Later that day, perhaps forgetting that I had been studying his handwriting, he left a note on my door: "Mr. Gun sucks hairy moos cock," with a skull and crossbones.

This was in Burlington, Massachusetts, not far from a huge shopping mall, in the spring of 1980. The students had been admitted to Northeastern University, but they had chosen to do their first year in a dismal brick building on a slab of asphalt, right near where they had all gone to high school together, rather than brave Huntington Avenue,



Daniel P. Johnson
4/22/94

where there were trolleys, museums, people of color, real professors. My car had blown a head gasket, on the way back from some other miserable job, and I had to take a series of buses from Kendall Square out there three times a week, only to have these frightening thugs sit in front of me, placid, snickering, and impenetrable, one week after another, and maybe I would talk after class with the other English professor, Mr. Tutein, a gangly, neurotic man with a high pitched voice, writing a science-fiction novel, I think, who said this was a relaxed place, I should *relax*, and then I would get on the bus again and come home to the apartment I shared with Lisa in Oak Square, where I had the number of classes remaining written on a piece of paper taped to the inside of a kitchen cabinet, and I would cross one off and open a beer. The dean who administered the Burlington campus said, like Mr. Tutein, that I should *relax*, get to know them, and so I refereed some of their lunchtime basketball games, until one of my students, on a team suffering a humiliating rout, undercut an opposing player intentionally, pushing his legs while he was in the air, with both hands, in an effort to hurt him, and I threw him out of the game, and we were back where we had started. My dissertation advisor said that I didn't know, maybe I was having some effect on them that wouldn't show up until later in their lives. But I knew enough to recognize this as an instructor's last, desperate line of defense, the thin wooden railing at the edge of the cliff, with impotence and despair below.

ON THE WEEKENDS, that spring, I spent a lot of time downtown, wandering aimlessly, trying to imagine a different life. Lisa worked at the Boston Public Library on Saturdays, and I would meet her for lunch, say, and then walk over to the Museum of Fine Arts to grade papers in a small room full of line drawings, or wander through the Fenway to Hemenway Street, past the Berklee College of Music, and then perhaps over to the Gardner Museum to sit for a while in the courtyard, watching water dribble from the mouths of stone lions and looking up at the cracked lavender stucco on walls.

AS THE WEATHER got warmer, I sometimes played basketball at the Fenway court, where there was good game, mostly black guys my age or younger, with lots of clawing and scratching and backboard-rattling. The place was crowded on the weekends; even in the morning, you'd have to wait two or three games before you had a chance to

play, and if you lost in the middle of the day, you knew that you might as well leave. And so I was excited, one day, after dropping Lisa off, when I got to play, finally, with a solid, hustling team, full of good defenders, the kind of team you could stay on with all day, featuring two chunky, muscled guards, who went right at the basket, hard, every time. Once the game started, I rebounded, kept the fat kid on the other team out of the game, collected a few loose balls, set some screens, and tried not to do anything stupid. After a few points, the stud guards began to trust me: they stopped shouting "here, here, man" every time I touched the ball, and they occasionally let me handle it on offense. The game stayed even, mostly because the other team had a tremendously good player: a tall, thin guy, in cut-off sweats, shirtless, with incredible strength, quickness, and agility, a player with a soft dribble like Calbert Cheaney or Sean Eliot, who dominated play at both ends. He glided past the rest of us, went over and around us, took the ball out of our hands, blocked shots. At ten-ten, though, he made a bad play. He got the ball in the wing, took two dribbles to the right and cranked up a leaning shot, from a little too far away. It clanged off the side of the rim and hit the fence, and he said, "My bad," running back and hitting his chest. A few seconds later, at the other end, I cut out to the left wing and someone threw me the ball. I turned to face the basket—an orange rim and a chain net about fifteen feet away, bolted to a perforated silver backboard—and the fat kid didn't guard me, so I shot it.

You have to understand: this was like a dog talking, or a tree hailing a cab. I hadn't taken a shot all game—it wasn't what a slow white player without moves was expected to do, in a game like this one—and *this* shot was the one that would determine whether we stayed on, with a chance to play all day, or went to the end of the line or, more likely, with five or six groups of players lounging in the bleachers, talking to their girl friends and spinning basketballs in their hands, home. Even the good players wouldn't usually settle for a jump shot in this situation, with so much at stake; they all wanted to drive, take it in close, jam it if possible: we got the ball, let's make it *count*. I don't know why I did it. But it was an easy shot, one I had made maybe ten thousand times in my life, and I was wide open, so I didn't think, everything fell away from me, and I just shot, looking steadily and firmly at the basket, lifting my arms straight up and through the ball as I released it.

When the ball went up, one of the kids on the

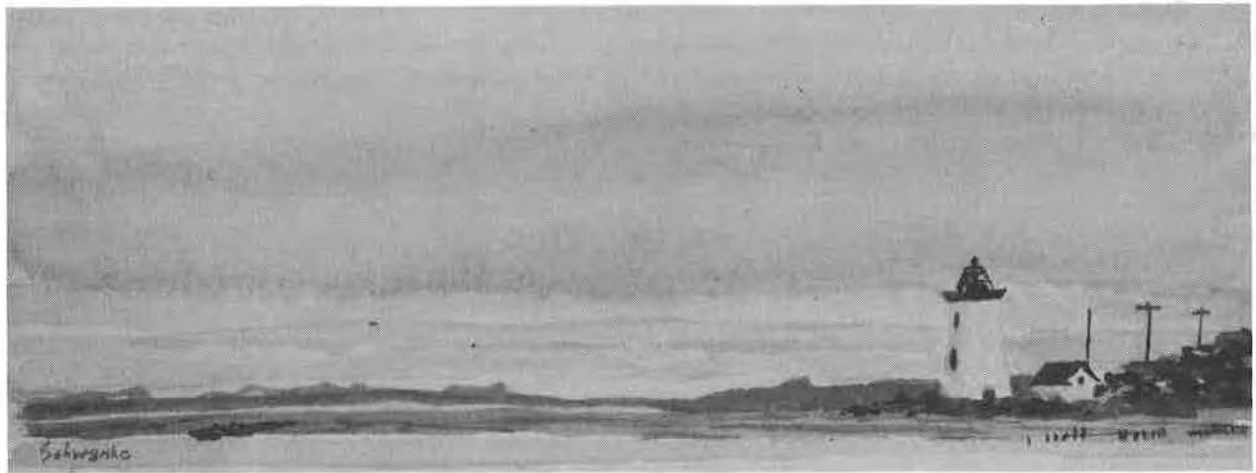
side said, "Game." In his voice, there was a mixture of excitement, begrudging admiration, and parody. He was going to play with the next team, and so part of what you could hear was: *It's our turn now; take a seat, you sorry motherfuckers.* And maybe he also thought: *This guy is going to win the game.* But there was also a hint of the tone you would use with your little brother as he dribbled around you in the driveway (*You're bad, little guy*), or the tone the bemused Frenchman on the other side of the fence uses in *Stalag 17*, as he listens to an earnest British prisoner outline some half-cocked plan in his language: *Que tu parles bien le Français.* This one word rang out, *game*, with all its implications and suggestions, as the ball hung in the air, and for a second anything was possible. I rose up out of my

class at Northeastern and into my new life, no longer sucking hairy moose cock, somebody to be reckoned with.

THE SHOT WAS SHORT and off to the right; it hit the front of the rim and bounced out toward the foul line, right into the skinny kid's hands. "Motherfucker," said one of the guards on my team. I took off after the skinny kid as he headed down court, and somehow, as he jumped, I got a hand on the ball, but it made no difference, and as he laid it softly off the backboard, he looked down at me and said: *See you later, chump.*

—DANIEL P. GUNN





The Farewell

A good-bye dinner
he had said
when he called, and
she said sure, why not.

Cocktails for two
in the Mexican place
where the food wasn't as good
as they remembered.

The waitress winked
at one or both of them
as she withdrew.
They weren't very hungry.

I'm fine, he answered
to her unasked question,
and she really was
but said nothing.

Dessert? The waitress
again, but they refused
and returned
to her new house

where he kissed her
tenderly, on her mouth.
Goodbye;
she closed the door

and untied the last box
he had packed
of her things: a few
familiar, worthless books,

but underneath,
the ragged corner
of a wedding album,
chewed once by their dog.

Pulling it out,
she fingered the smiling
pictures. She stopped
as she saw

there was one page
missing, and cried hard
when she couldn't
remember which one.

—LINDA BRITT

CONTRIBUTORS

KATHLEEN MCNALLY BEAUBIEN, instructor of English, is learning and writing about the adventures, gains, losses, and wonders of being 50-something.

ALICE BLOOM is back teaching English this semester after being on leave last fall. She will spend this summer running her arts/crafts/edibles shop, The Corner, in Mt. Vernon.

ELLEN BOWMAN, a child therapist and musician, teaches art methods. She wrote this poem in St. Petersburg while presenting at the International Center for Music Therapy.

LINDA BRITT is an associate professor of Spanish who writes an occasional poem.

MICHAEL BURKE, instructor in English, is a noted *bon-vivant* and gentleman farmer who has published non-fiction in *Outside Magazine*, *Islands*, *New England Monthly*, and the *New York Times*. This story is about a dozen years old.

PHILIP CARLSEN, ever the dilettante, began doing oil-pastel improvisations last fall. He teaches music at UMF and has edited *Beyond Memos* since its inception.

ROD FARMER, professor of social science-multicultural education, has over 400 poems published in over 100 journals, including *Blis*, *Wordsmith*, *Phase and Cycle*, *Webster Review*, and the *Coffeehouse Poets' Quarterly*. He still needs a red Corvette, desperately.

DANIEL P. GUNN is a middle-aged white male who teaches English at UMF. He got a "D" in art in high school.

JAY S. HOAR, Professor of English, divines himself to be between a rock—the solid(?) intellectual climate of our UMF groves/grooves—and a hard place—his uphill research struggles along a heightened path out of Huma/Hades. Prof. Hoar, ever watchful for new heroes to extol, identifies with Sisyphus as a brother scion of the same sod and endorses him *a outrance*.

JULIET KARELSEN is a painter and art therapist. She teaches art methods at UMF.

RUSSELL RAINVILLE is an associate professor of mathematics who has been at UMF for seventeen years.

DOUG RAWLINGS has been the coordinator of the Basic Writing Program for the past eight years. He teaches developmental English and the history of Western thought.

BILL ROORBACH teaches in the Creative Writing Program and is at work on a novel entitled *Here on the Ground*.

MARY SCHWANKE, associate professor of biology, does research on nerve-muscle function in lobsters when she is not off sailing or painting.

LEE SHARKEY, instructor of English, is traveling to her grandparents' birthplaces in the Ukraine this summer, then back to Syktyvkar to meet again with Emilia.



