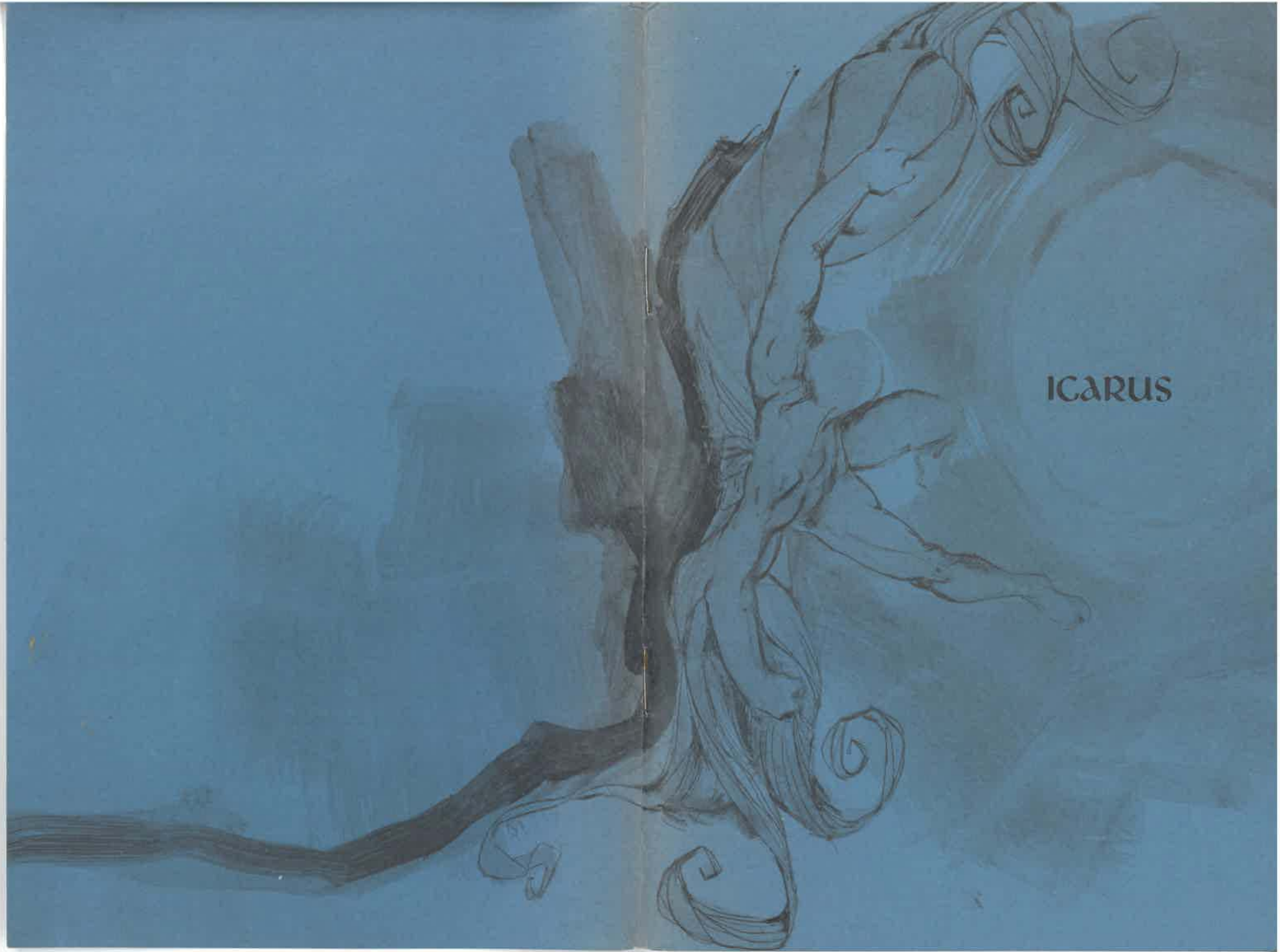
ICARUS

CREATIVE WRITING SYMPOSIUM

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# ICARUS

## A MAGAZINE OF CREATIVE WRITING

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
USAF ACADEMY
1974

Lieutenant Colonel Walton F. Dater, Jr.
6 September 1932 – 14 January 1974

*This issue of* ICARUS
*is dedicated to the memory*
*of*
*TONY DATER*

## THE DAY HE DIED

The day he died was breathing light,
Buoyant, bright, and splendid pied,
  With green and lambent floral.
No living thing gave thought to night,
All things lived on, unqualified–
  A quiet, clamorous choral.

No one dreamed to grieve the waste
Of heather, breath, second, hour;
  The world revolved, precisely.
A cow chewed, a horse paced
And crushed a young and yellow flower:
  Life persisted, nicely.

The day he died did not attend
His soul, it scarcely sensed he'd gone–
  The scales were never light.
A petal's fall does not offend
The rose: the start is still the dawn,
  The end is not the night.

Despite this cosmic negligence
He's gone, and I, I'm told, must mourn,
  Must weep and wail, and shun;
Yet, like the day's bright impudence,
I'd rather feel he'd have me scorn
  The darkness for the sun.

*RICHARD S. CAMMAROTA*
*Captain* *USAF*



## FOR TONY DATER – 15 JANUARY 1974

I pulled his record
  from our file today:
"OFFICER CAREER BRIEF
  For Official Use Only (When Filled In)"
Below his legal name
  and SSN
The record reads, "active and
  available."
It tells half-lies–as
  all such records do.
He is not active now, and
  will not be
To any purpose served by
  this dead file.
For yesterday he went off
  active duty
Beyond all possibility of recall.
Yet he remains available to us
Who knew his gentle ways
  and felt the touch
Of his kind hand.
With us his record, written
  in our hearts,
Can never lie.
It tells of one who left
  his treasure here
To grow with us as long
  as memory
And love and gratitude for
  such as he
Can nurture human trust
  in the good and the true.

He taught his lessons well
And closed his record truly with a deed
of sacrifice and trust.
His file is just.

*JESSE C. GATLIN, JR.*
*Colonel USAF*



## FOR TONY, *REQUIES IN PACE*
## JANUARY 14, 1974

Since we are brothers now,
Even lovers perhaps
By extension
(I have kissed your brother
your mother, your wife, your children
yes even your dog)
Since we are brothers, lovers, friends
I want to cross over,
Leave this maelstrom your death has created
And be very quiet with you.

They tell me you were a gentle man,
But I knew that
For you bent down from time to time to take
My baby's hand in yours
And smile into his eyes.
He did not run away.

They tell me you were a good man,
Yet I knew that too
In your careful phrases so as not to hurt,
In your dilemma of service and conscience,
You didn't have the answers
And you knew it.

What I didn't know
And now in whispers on the wind
Want to breathe of
Was that the power in you
To touch and feel and think and laugh
So lives in us
As to make your absence presence:
You were so real that nothing can change that,
Not even death.

The bird who took you with him
(and we all know that bird)
Who swept you into the most fully human
Moment of your life,
He did not know you had the power
To fly.

But we know.
And so do you.

*JOEY GRATHWOL*



TO HAVE BEEN
for
*Tony Dater*
14 January 1974

*"Memory believes before knowing remembers."*
—Faulkner

Mortality is just the difference
Between your blinking and your not blinking;
And if you blink at the wrong time in space,
Your eyes will freeze in a permanent blink,
In a forzen moment that will blind you
And bind you forever. But the last blink
Is the sum of all your blinks and becomes
You, you become history, history
Repeats, . . . you are remembered. Memory
Believes and teaches us the past about
Ourselves: are we the victims of our own
Proud knowlege? Or could the same hand
create
Both the tiger and the lamb? Or bring
Together a white heal-all, white spider,
And white moth? Or converge pheasant and
plane
With nowhere to go except down, down, down?
Determined seven million years before
The sea did roll, was this day when the seat
Was saddled to your back. A take-off roll,
Gear up, bird on the wing—your own hand set
In motion Providence. You, too, had blinked
At it all before, but today it was
Different. You knew what we remember:
To have been is worth the being, Tony.

*JAMES A. GRIMSHAW, JR.*
*Captain* *USAF*

Indian pheasant

And T-thirty-eight trainer–

Both birds on the wing . . .

*JAMES A. GRIMSHAW, JR.*
*Captain* *USAF*



Ah, design. That pheasants in their
twelve pound feathered glory
can bring to earth so many tons
of silver turbined thrusting might
so quick so sudden–to eyewitness
unbelieving awe so numbing final.

A moth colliding with a toddler's knee
could not bring to earth so small a quarry.
How then a gnat a giant?

Design. That a hurtling thunder whine
sky devouring exploding furnace
should choke on pulp and feathers,
its windscreens blackened by election blast
and impact boiling bird blood,
the young saved and master dead.

A flock of pheasants where they never were,
intercepting death in an eyeblink flash.
Who can time such things?

Design. That a never thought of moment
leaprushed upon this instant of altitude,
a finger flick on the controls,
thirty feet, no more, of sky
rich with blackblur dots of bird–
oh, what a migration, Lord, was that.

Trajectory closes with the whirl of horizon,
student chuting free to life below.
But what laid the farmhouse ahead?

Design. That crippled Icarus,
gravity drawn on leadrock wings,
still should bend his shattered craft
till nothing lay ahead but field,
plummet bailout, and, going gentle
even then, a windrush smile.

Bitter, Lord? No, furious.
Your design I, grieving, charge–
if design govern in a thing so large.

*FREDERICK T. KILEY*
*Lt Col* *USAF*



## TO A BEREAVED FRIENDS LITTLE GIRL

Well its a sad sad thing
And theres not much you can do
But you see your mothers lost her best friend
And you can help there
You dont have to do anything really
Just be around
In case she needs you
And maybe try to do things
Before she has to tell you
Yes I think picking up the house
Would help.

*FREDERICK T. KILEY*
*Lt Col* *USAF*

## IN MEMORIAM
*Lt Col Tony Dater, 1932-1974*

No bays weep, no myrtles sigh
In a dry west Texas town,
Where culture is confined
To broken remnants of a last picture show.

No Daedalus, he, whose youth had
Flown two decades past in New England,
Where whiffenpoofs were sung
And death, like youth, then forever young.

Now a fiery Pegasus roars off asphalt,
Hurtling old pilots to new escapades?
The proud nose, the sunswept wings
Straining to reach the hand of God?

The take-off, a flight of pheasants,
A shattered canopy, a farmhouse below,
A decision quick as shivered glass to ride it out–
An ejection too late, a parachute not quite deployed

Becomes a warrior's shroud in instant death.
The world is less today for the loss of a gentle man.
For you, a teacher, on earth and in the sky,
For you, Gypsy-scholar, the sad Icarian cry:

*"Ou sont les Daters d'antan?"*

*WILLIAM E. MCCARRON*
*Captain* *USAF*



## FROM A PILOT: FOR WALTON F. DATER, LT COL, USAF, 1932–1974

Once, as I remember, we stood two miles above the sea
In a high mountain meadow, watching a hawk –
An eagle, maybe – wheel and soar. You said, "I see –
"Christ – a windhover." No need for further talk.

There are certain feelings shared by men who fly:

Runway's end approaching on hot summer days;
Slight sink of takeoff flaps just raised;
Airborne safe sense when the airspeed builds;
Thumps of turbulence; serenity of night time silence;
Heart's clutch at red warning lights;
Radio chatter; static crackle; leg straps' knife pain;
Helmet's burn; misery of a too tight mask;
The welcome beckoning of a blinking strobe
Through gray mist; then the roundout ground swell,
And the abrupt, so satisfying feeling of the earth again.

Do birds feel this too? Or was Auden* right:
Perhaps they just live out their birdy lives
Unconscious and indifferent to the fact of flight,
Like most men now, even some who fly. I've
Wondered about this, and so, I know, did you.
And I wonder too what those pheasants felt to see
Your strangely stiff-winged white bird hurtle through
Their gabbling flock. They, like you and me
When flying, were no doubt going somewhere too.
But you fell yesterday in a welter of feathers and fire
As once did Icarus, another man who knew
The wonder – and the sad, cruel beauty – of the sky.

*JOHN CLARK PRATT*
*Lt Col* *USAF*

*W.H. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts."

# FOREWORD

*Tony Dater* and *Dave Zink* founded *Icarus* in 1965 "to give," as they wrote in the Preface of that issue, "special recognition to those cadets who demonstrated maturity of ideas, technical skills, and imagination in the essays which they submitted to various academic courses at the Air Force Academy." For three issues *Icarus* maintained that end, and Tony stayed at the controls until 1968 when he left for Vietnam.

In the fall of 1968 three new English instructors organized the Creative Writing Symposium and revived *Icarus* as "a magazine of creative writing" and as "the vehicle for recognizing the best of the cadets' creative writing efforts." *Icarus* reappeared in 1969; by the 1970 issue, Tony had resumed his position as editor-in-chief, this time until his reassignment to Webb AFB, Texas, in 1973. The Symposium has continued to encourage cadets to express themselves creatively in competition with their peers. Faculty members in the Department of English and Fine Arts voluntarily judge the entries and award first, second, and third places in the various categories. Those places and other deserving entries are published in *Icarus*.

Under Tony's guidance, *Icarus* flourished: participation grew, quality improved, and the number of categories increased. In the 1973 Symposium, for example, cadets could submit not only poetry, fiction, and essays, but also drama and drawings. Although not all the entries in the various categories are judged suitable for publication, they contribute collectively to the success of the Symposium.

This year, through the generosity of Mrs. Paul T. Cullen, the Brigadier General Paul T. Cullen Award for the Outstanding Cadet in Creative Writing about Flight has been added to the Symposium. Mrs. Cullen has provided this award, which will be presented annually in memory of her late husband, to recognize outstanding cadet writing about flight.

We wish to thank Mrs. Cullen and the many other people who have contributed to the success of the Symposium—specifically the judges who expended considerable effort in the difficult task of deciding relative merit, and all cadet entrants, whether published or not, whose continuing enthusiastic response is the meaning of this magazine. A special acknowledgement is due Lieutenant Colonels Frederick T. Kiley and John Clark Pratt, who have helped compile the dedicatory material. To Tony Dater, co-founder and editor of *Icarus* for seven years, this issue is respectfully dedicated.

Department of English and Fine Arts
United States Air Force Academy
25 February 1974

The Editors

**DRAWING**



**SHORT FICTION**

THE BRIGADIER GENERAL
PAUL T. CULLEN AWARD

## THE BRIGADIER GENERAL PAUL T. CULLEN AWARD FOR THE OUTSTANDING CADET IN CREATIVE WRITING ABOUT FLIGHT

Brigadier General Paul T. Cullen, USAF, disappeared over the North Atlantic on 22 March 1951. Still listed as missing, General Cullen leaves behind an envied record of military and scientific accomplishments. Equally important, moreover, this memorial reflects his love of flight, a love reminiscent of the French author-pilot Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. It seems fitting that General Cullen, a man of high ideals, calm personal courage, and rare intelligence, be thus remembered by cadets at the United States Air Force Academy.





the sky:
freedom
freedom to roll and loop
freedom to poise and swoop
to prove the pleasures of the hawk
to fly beyond the ritualized limits of leatherbound gods
a place to strive to new maximums
to everfresh ecstasies
divingclimbingrollingspinning
pulling out and feeling (just for an instant)
the gray g-circles tighten around your vision
like Aphrodite
incomparably beautiful; always alluring
primeval paramour of men
at times coquettishly cruel to yesterday's lover
forever teasing and enticing
where one can
see forever
hurl sun bolts at the finite ground
carouse and roam and search
and find respite from a gravitybound subsistence
the camaraderie of the windrush
unknown to the thrashing masses
thermal born and borne; tenaciously enduring
above a plastic panorama of bondage
no airy-faery fiction, fact.

*JAMES A. MCCLURE*
*Class of 1974*

# POEMS

*First Place Poem*

## JUNKYARD MEDITATION

Blood-like oil stains
smother the dead
and dying
floor of earth.
Water
polluted by the souls
of radiators
and crankcases
and gearboxes
Stagnates.

Files and columns of delapidated Wrecks
Fallen.
Eye-like lights
stare
unveiled
yet unavailing.
Arm-like doors thrust back
crippled. Mouth-like hoods agape.
Sunlight races to a crack-mapped mirror
only ignored
and finally
rejected.
Prostrate dust-draped Highway Whores
Patiently await another Fling.

*DONALD W. SLOAN*
*Class of 1973*

*Second Place Poem*

## GEOMETRIC

Slumbering in their insulated cubes,
Engrossed in their printed rectangles,
They square their corners just in time
to miss the arc of earth.

*WILLIAM C. MUSICK, II*
*Class of 1976*



*Third Place Poem*

they come to me
at night,
skin needles
flesh lump in open sores,
of a man I knew once
many men
and a girl
whom we carried
her womb
full of life
warm in the white solidity
breathing to burst her child,
hospital papers
like diplomas passed her by
so young
her death an invisible child
peppering her arms
growing inside of her
leaking out in her swollen veins,
they rolled hard
couldn't give her anything
for the pain,
her veins,
too many punctures
and the papers
applications
a last line . . . extra.

and like the child
flapping white against sirens,
a voice in the mist
he left her there,
a hawker and a shiver
brought him down,
poor Les

## A QUESTION

Frightened
Whimpering
Biting his lip he stares
Without conscious hate
Without conscious love
at his sister
smoldering
ghastly
unrecognizable
but for a tiny charred cross
on the once soft
the once warm breast.
Life continues with the Liberators gone.

Naturally a four-year-old doesn't understand.

*DONALD W. SLOAN*
*Class of 1973*



## HOURGLASS

a ray of sun,
through the broken pane,
strikes the hourglass,
now more dust than sand.

a sentient being
observes the ancient glass,
and wonders at the purpose,
in this construct of silica and sand.

the hope of man
is sealed within its space.
man's prize marches on,
though it be his no more.

and what matters,
whether human hand explores,
the vast reaches of Time?
his end means nothing.

*RICHARD D. KIRKHAM*
*Class of 1976*

## IN MEMORY OF LOVE

What hideousness!

Trust
tainted by time

Hope
hampered by hesitation

Faith
frustrated by faltering

Love withering from doubt

And still
with her

I lie.

*DONALD W. SLOAN*
*Class of 1973*



## PATROL

orange-roseate forms over a black horizon
silhouettes of mounds of mud and miles of barbed wire;
hoping that the damned gun won't jam this time around,
thanking God i'm not in a trench of slimy mire.

a fresh and shivery windrush around my head
dispels the smell, paint healing yesterday's wounds.
the vibrations of a much overworked engine
shake the wings and wires in a monotonous tune.

constantly scanning, sweeping the dawn sky, searching
convincing, assuring myself and my machine
of our ability to fly thru hell and back
ready to fight, winning, and mean

waiting, longing to swoop upon the enemy
and then maneuvering, staggering, and swirling
into a position to make the final shot
leaving his funeral-smoke plumes upward curling.

*JAMES A. MCCLURE*
*Class of 1974*

## STRINGS

strange, magnificent
sounds
piercing my very soul
throbbing
spasms of the night

carnal vibrations
working
at extending my reach
my capabilities
to rise still higher

within you are the
wonderful strings
of the night
the strong low frequency
highlights of the deep

inside you there can only be
shaking whirling dancing girls dressed
in bright red linen, screaming

tomorrow the fortress will be forever
gone, with
jubilant fearful sounds of strings
and a loud, lustful voice crying
"I'm the only one"

you could never
see through your
tears

*MICHAEL J. MALIZOLA*
*Class of 1974*



## SNOW MIST

The way it was, it wasn't.
a naive coloring of the Soul,
My subdued thoughts turn to her.
feminine sophisticate, her body sublime,
Flippant turned to earnest.
thoughtful conception,
On a higher plane.
sine prole, What can it be?
body imprisoned mind, Only she can free.
but as the valuable becomes worthless,
The way She was, She wasn't.

*RICHARD D. KIRKHAM*
*Class of 1976*

## DONNA

While daydreaming
she came to me
Her laughter and beauty and gentleness
Exploding
into my life.
Days became livable
Nights lovable
life
at last
a reality.

Like a mermaid
she would wiggle and squirm
Striving to live a life
every moment.
Lubber that I was
She took my hand into hers
led me into her ocean
and then
Some strangeness of her world ceased.
(while there she taught me to swim
Oh what a teacher she was)

Like a fairy queen
she would flitter and dart
Straining to catch and cherish
every experience.
Lubber that I was
She took my hand into hers
pulled me up through the heavens
and then
Some strangeness of her world ceased.
(while there she taught me to fly
Oh what a teacher she was)

While daydreaming
she went on her way



Her laughter and beauty and gentleness
A memory
in my life.
Mermaids aren't livable
Fairy queens aren't lovable
Life
at last
a reality.

*DONALD W. SLOAN*
*Class of 1973*

## MY SUMMER PRINCESS

Time tumbles backward thru the mind
Back—thru the mists and clouds of a marred memory
that jumbles and distorts
pictures of the past.

Back to a summer
a summer when
I was a conquering Conquistador
riding a golden stallion
thru sunlit lands of adventure.

With loneliness my single companion
I had conquered so many dragons—
only to find them
windmills in my mind.

So I sat beside the highway
till I was captured by her eyes;
sparkling diamonds encased in velvet blue.
and I followed her to a land of magic,
where I was her hero,
and she my princess.
The summer nights softened her sighs and moans
and her eyes turned smoky blue when we made love.

And we followed the moonlit trail
across the silent sea made from dreams,
seeking something more—than windmills.

but she'd left a lighted candle in a window
and so she found her way back home,
leaving me
with only a dream.
And so it is
where all dreams belong,
a part of my memory not to be touched
never to be returned to.



Bitter-sweet now within my mind;
yet I will always hold it dear,
and parts of it will never leave me
like the sparkle of her eyes
or the way she slipped her hand into mine
in the coolness of a summer evening

As I go on my way
to seek out
other summers
and other loves.

*NEIL D. SHOTTON*
*Class of 1974*

## THE EMASCULATE'S STORY

Cool breezes of shining lace beneath
her flowing skirt "blew
your socks off" you said,
while the soulful Stars, and a scene of
much emotion, captured you like a
cannon barrage
across her beautiful "front lines."
Some War, I said, but was ignored, as
the clothing factory exculpated its
products, you have such a way with words,
I said, growing bored with his fantasy.
"I'll be out and back to normal in a few days"
you lied, as I turned away, eulogizing:
"You never know how much you miss It,
'til It's gone."

*MICHAEL J. MALIZOLA*
*Class of 1974*



## LOVE IS . . .

Her tender, blushing peek
(God help me–she's watching me)
Sears
Much too deeply into that unrelenting
Demon of mine
called Conscience.
Her moist breath
soft and warm on my arm
That only yesterday kindled such untiring Passion
Today
Fires such a like-enduring
Fiend of grief and pain and wretchedness that I start!
even through a calm
though feigned
sleep.
Her hand
gently touching my chest
As lightly as two flowers caressing in a warm summer breeze
Causes such a fuming and raging in my breast
that I am sure my Being
is being
Tortured and Racked
Up to the very point of its destruction
Only to be revived again
for atrocities to be renewed.
My sin
still unmercifully ripping and slashing the very
depths
of my
now seemingly worthless existence
she sighs

She sighs
and ever so softly
she whispers
so simply
"I know . . ."
so damned simply
"but I still love you."

*DONALD W. SLOAN*
*Class of 1973*



## SEEDS

silent seeds–
darkness lit by beams,
Light

seeking its counterpart
in a melody,
Still
striving for liberation
in a word,
Life

–in dust
in shadow
how seldom
growth and blossom
how seldom
Fruit.

*WILLIAM M. CASKEY*
*Class of 1975*

## COLORS OF MY HEART

Saffron, cast of the foam on my beer.
Saffron, flush of the candle sitting here.
Saffron, twisted from the light and air.
Saffron, reflected color of her hair.

Wine, overflowed from stein and vial.
Wine, stay with me for just a while.
Wine, your cerise hue does well befit.
Wine, caress the lips, but dull her wit.

Raven, a satin touch of the night.
Raven, who tests your deep-set might.
Raven, wings on a deadly dart.
Raven, tarnish staining her very heart.

*RICHARD D. KIRKHAM*
*Class of 1976*

## ANTIQUE ANTICIPATION

Clinking and banging
Ringing and clanging
away
the oily, greasy, smoking

Dilapidation from yesterday
gasped
for a Tomorrow.

*DONALD W. SLOAN*
*Class of 1973*

## A DREAM OF ABRAHAM

sun-wise
the land turns in my hands,
adobe cliffs crumble in my hands.
a Crowman, ancient
in a dream,
fish nets tied to his head,
he speaks words
inaudible wind-words
of Human Beings
of partners of the appaloosa,
the apocalypse rising
in my hands.
He speaks of four horsemen,
four spirits, come to tell of
wind directions;
northwind cloudiness
southwind dusts,
earthworm, sink beneath my hands.

"It does not matter
they are all the same . . . ,"
he speaks
steel-gray, brown-wrinkled, sun-turned:
of winds, directions, trusts.

In a dream on cliff darkness
he speaks
and body risen
his legs like land canals
he takes,
a partner of the Human Being
body valleyed to cliffs
hands filled,
he takes to be my own.



Four directions, four trusts
"It doesn't matter
they are all the same, they find the land,"
they find the Human Being.

*GARY M. HOROWITZ*
*Class of 1974*

# FLIGHT

Flight–
the seemingly final challenge to man
to conquer the mystical fluid of space
empty
and yet not void,
it's filled with the Hopes / Plans / and Dreams
of men who have dreaded the thought of
Confinement–
on a sphere of content
A Prison–
where the freedoms and rights of Dreamers / Prophets / and Gods
are shackled by
Routine–
so man sought an escape
and conceived a design of
mechanical wings
Hoping to soar beyond the
bonds of the Earth
Free again to Dream
and they thought of a day
when the Stars and the Heavens would be
gathered by hopeful men– Planning / and Dreaming
as they soared on
mechanical wings
to run to the realm of
the Clouds and Stars
in search of the
Heavens, where lives have no
Bounds, no
Shackles, no
Prisons,
just the
Hopes and the
Plans of
Dreamers, and
Prophets, and
Gods.

*DOUGLAS J. LAIN*
*Class of 1975*

## LAST

A satin scream of sheet,
A dying ache of spring.
She's sifting through the clothing.
Why does she stop to stare?
I have nothing left to give.

*RICHARD D. KIRKHAM*
*Class of 1976*



## SPACE*

Vast, unlimited, empty beyond comprehension
This thing we call Space stretches to the
Ends of the Universe
Miles upon miles, volumes on volumes
Filled with Nothing, until for the briefest pinpoint of area
The fleetingest moment
There Is Something

Something which may be nothing more than an
Infinitesimal speck of matter, or a billion times earth-size star
Just as infinitesimal
In the cold, yawning, empty nothingness of Space
Dark and forever silent, that Something can suddenly
And irresolutely pop forth
Life

Laughing, learning, loving, boisterous, brawling, sprawling
For the smallest split second of Universal Time and Space
Pushing back the cold
Fighting the vacuum. . . . lighting, filling Space with the
Noise, the heat, the desire, the need, and the conviction
Of Being
I Am cries Man from his brief niche of Time
What, why, when, where he questions unheeding
Unresponding Space

From his unthinking, solely responsive to instinct
Animal existence, Man becomes a collective unity
Reaching for the Stars
He sets out to conquer Space—reaches, stretches to
The utmost limits of his Being
Grinding, rending, destroying that which thwarts his aims
Of subjugating to the human will all that he understands

*Editors' note: This poem appeared in *Icarus* (1972), pp. 41-42, erroneously ascribed and is here reprinted correctly.

And accepts, or doesn't understand and accepts, or doesn't accept
And doesn't understand

For this is his Destiny
To conquer unconquerable Space, undefeatable Man will
Taste defeat as Space curves back upon itself
At the Ends of the Universe
Yet there are no Ends, no defeat, only One Great Unity
One Underlying Reality from which All springs forth
Flickering into existence long enough to Recognize
Itself
From Something–Nothing, from Death–Life
From No Beginning–No End
Circling back on Itself
Yen and Yang

Then as suddenly and as irresolutely as it burst into
Thought and Being and Feeling
As suddenly as the cold, solemn, forever-dead Space
Erupted into negation of darkness and non-life
That Something Is no longer
Space resumes its silent vigil once again
Waiting. . . .

USAFA, USAF Academy, CO/74-0414

*JOHN WILLIAM WATKINS*
*Class of 1971*

DRAWING

"Just resting my eyes . . . "

*DARRELL G. MASTIN*
*Class of 1976*

# SHORT FICTION

## THE GOOD TIMES

Jemmie Hodge had put on a good show tonight and he knew it. He whistled as he climbed the wooden ladder behind the stage which led to the loft; he could hear the rustling of costumes above–he glanced up in time to catch Geoffrey's smile. "Hodge, you old mossback, how are you?"

Jemmie shrugged his shoulders, answering, "Not young enough to take these climbs."

"Great show tonight, Jemmie, great show," responded the burly man. "Here, can I give you a hand with those? Let me see, if I remember right that's Brandy Nan and Old Paddy. Pleased to meet you in person. How lucky you are to have such a fine master!"

"Yes, thank you, Geoffrey, if you would take Paddy." Jemmie pushed the dummy within Geoffrey's reach, still clutching Brandy Nan as he pulled himself up the remaining rungs to the costume loft. "Nan's got a bit of a problem. I think it's her leg–seems to be falling off. I won't be staying late tonight; Maggie's expecting a visitor, some friend coming in from the Potteries. Thought I might get home a little early, so I'll have to fix the leg tomorrow. Won't be using her for another few days anyway." Reaching the top he shook Geoffrey's hand. "Been a long time, Geoffrey. What brings you out, as if I might not guess?"

"Ah, you know that Ginny's always had that sparkle in her eye for me! She's down changing now; we're off to the Cider Cellar in a minute."

"The Cider Cellar?" Hodge stammered. "The entertainment here isn't good enough for you?" Jemmie held a puzzled grin on his face while he examined Brandy Nan.

"Nonsense! With you and Ginny here, no other club could boast of better entertainment. No, Ginny has a friend who works down in Fountain Court at the Cellar–just got back from America. Thought we'd pop in on her."

Jemmie was busy fumbling with the dummy, apparently not listening to his friend. "I say, I ought to have Ormann look at her; my eyes are getting too bad to do the delicate work involved, and I'd hate to throw her out on account of her leg! Seems to me the same thing happened with one of my puppets last year. Remember my act with Matthew, Mark and Teufel?" Jemmie questioned.

"I do indeed!"

"Or was it his arm? I can't remember; I did that act well over a year ago. Do you know, Geoffrey, that that was the last time I ever used more than two dummies on stage? What's the use, I kept asking myself. Frightfully hard to handle. And no other ventriloquist in London uses *three* dummies! Did you tell me that you were going to visit someone who'd been touring America? You might ask her whether she's ever seen an act where the ventriloquist used *three* dummies!"

"Yes, gladly, I shall ask her," Geoffrey replied, starting down the ladder. "Well, Jemmie, good to bump into you; my best to the missus and by all means see to that leg! Brandy Nan's one of your best acts–everyone was roaring! *Ciao*!"

Jemmie watched as his friend climbed down the ladder, reaching the bottom just as Ginny emerged from the curtains. She was a flower-like girl of twenty-four, who when on stage was a saucy charmer. Jemmie realized that *her* act was fetching the audience, although knowing that did not bother him, for it gave him a larger crowd to entertain.

The couple disappeared, leaving Jemmie examining his puppet in the dim glow of the stage lights beneath. What he had said to Geoffrey was true: in his withered condition his eyes had begun to fail him; he squinted for a solid minute,



motionless. Then abruptly he began to stroke Nan's auburn hair, catching her sparkling crown before it toppled from her head. "Oh, Nan, you *are* in a state of shambles! But we'll wire you up in no time." Opening a box, he gently set the dummy in it, then returned to the ladder which he descended with awkward movements. Finding his overcoat backstage, he slipped into it and buttoned the collar snugly around his neck. When he opened the stage exit, icy fingers of a winter gust wrapped about him, pinching his unprotected nose and ears.

Jemmie lived a short ten minutes from where he worked, so he told his friends. In earlier days he *could* make the walk in ten minutes, but old age and vigorous winds hampered his efforts to make it home in less than half an hour. Although it was not yet ten o'clock, the street was quiet, with only an occasional car horn or streetlight to disturb the dark hush. Hodge had lived with his wife Maggie on the Strand for almost twenty years. At one time he had worked at the Cider Cellar, which was why he was surprised that Geoffrey should mention it. Over the years, however, he and other performers were replaced by "fresher blood" as the owner had put it.

Halfway home he paused to look back on the deserted street. For a moment he resented the fact that as he aged, the neighborhood actually grew *younger*! Why, even the breeze was more spirited! He could remember the days when he would skip down to the confectioners, where old Mrs. Merriam would slide a pie across the counter. Strutting back to his service flat to surprise Maggie with the treat, he would greet Bob Harker, the Chemist, standing outside his store. But now the wooden counters had been replaced with stainless steel, and great sliding panels of glass covered the once open shelves. The young, cold salespeople no longer seemed to care about much more than selling their wares, as they scurried about, often staying at one job no longer than three weeks. Why, since Harker had left, it was quite difficult to find a clerk in the store, small as it was; so often they seemed to hide behind high shelves of bottles, peeping out only once in a while to insure that their flashing fluorescent

lights and those ghastly electric displays of hopping cardboard figures holding signs heralding "Vito's Vitamins" were still running.

Climbing the stairs of his flat, Jemmie could make out the voices of his wife and the visitor. Jemmie thought how odd it was to hear such a commotion from within, for seldom did the Hodges entertain. When the ventriloquist performed at the Cider Cellar, he would often invite friends over, but through the years both he and Maggie took less of an interest in such a busy life. These days, when Jem would open the oak door to his home, Maggie would peek out of the kitchen and greet him with a steaming bowl of porridge or thick split-pea soup, for Maggie now spent a good deal of time in the kitchen, often baking all day Saturday for Sunday church picnics.

But tonight when Jemmie opened the door he seemed so stunned at the sight of a visitor that he just stood in the doorway. "Jem, the door!" Maggie shouted across the room.

"Brrrrr, it's a cold night tonight," Jemmie murmured, clearing his throat.

"Jemmie," Maggie repeated, *"the door."* Getting up from the sofa, Maggie walked over to her husband and helped him out of his overcoat, after which she quietly shut the door. "Jemmie, you've met Elaine. We were just talking about your latest act; 'Laine has said that she saw it just last week. I scolded her for not dropping in on us afterward, but she said it was a chilly night like tonight."

"Oh?" Jemmie asked, while looking for a hanger for his coat.

"Aye, your Drunken Nan," Elaine exclaimed. "Beautiful work on 'er, Jemmie, beautiful!"

"Nan? Thank you, Elaine. But I'm afraid my lady's having some trouble—seems her leg's falling off."

"Oh, that's a shame, Jemmie, with such a beautiful costume on her, too! Why didn't you bring her home tonight? Could have fixed her here. Won't you be needing her for tomorrow?" Maggie questioned.



"No, I've got tomorrow off."

"Aye, and bless that Mr. Ormann for giving it to you, too! You need the rest, Jem," Maggie declared.

"The rest, luv? Been having too much rest lately—why, tomorrow's the fourth night out of ten."

"Ah, that's Jemmie," laughed Elaine. "Always fighting for the future. I bet you and Mr. Ormann really had it out over 'im shortening your hours!"

"Aye, and wouldn't you?" Jemmie replied.

"Lo, at my age, Jem, I'm more than happy to settle down to some overdue readin' and writin'. Between lettin' out the two back rooms, keepin' 'em tidy and lookin' after my cats, why, I'm busy enough!"

"But it's the way he's letting me off so many days that peeves me," Jemmie snapped. "Just yesterday he told me that the crowd was less interested in my act than in those chirping dancers!"

"Oooo, luv, you know the times are changing. Slapstick and vaudeville are gone for the most part," Maggie interrupted.

Jemmie Hodge sat down in a chair and rubbed his eyes. "You're right there, Maggie; yes, you're right," he conceded, as if having lost a long chess game. "But those days are not forgotten! Let none of the good times be forgotten!"

"Aye, Jemmie, *sure* they're not forgotten," replied Elaine soothingly. "How can they be?"

From the way Jemmie carried on for the rest of the night one might have thought that he was about to wage war on everything young—on all the forces which were pushing the good times into the past.

Odd then, that when Geoffrey and Ginny were married and had a son, a little of the youth which Jemmie had scorned for so long actually touched his heart. He nicknamed the boy Poppy for being "such a popping upstart": when the child visited Uncle Jemmie he was forever tearing about the place, jabbering so much that conversation was at best a one-sided affair. Yet Jemmie never seemed to tire of the boy. By the time Poppy was five, Jemmie no longer worked at the

club on the Strand, so the old man had much more time to spend with the sprite.

"How did you make them talk, Uncle Jem?" the little boy asked.

"Who's that you're talkin' about talkin'?"

Poppy giggled, "You're so funny! How did you make the puppets talk? I've never seen a ventrokiss." The lad said this somewhat apologetically, for he sincerely believed that Jemmie had to have been the greatest ventriloquist of all time.

"Well, I held them in my lap and asked them questions," answered Jemmie.

"Is that how you're making *me* talk? By holding me in your lap?"

Jemmie laughed. "Ah, but *you're* asking *me* the questions. No, I could make their lips move, while at the same time I could speak without moving my own lips. As a result, it appeared as though the puppet were speaking."

When the little elf asked how a person could talk with his mouth closed, old Mr. Hodge laughed. "Young man, if there were a ventriloquist act in town, I'd surely take you."

"But Uncle Jem, where are all your puppets?" questioned the boy.

"Why, they're upstairs. I don't suppose you'd want to . . . ."

"Yes, yes, Uncle Jemmie!" replied Poppy before Hodge could finish. "Bring one down and put him on your lap and make him talk!"

"Well, all right, but you must stay down here." Jemmie went into his bedroom and disappeared into the closet, where the staircase to the attic was. He returned a few minutes later clutching a dummy sailor in full blue uniform. A pipe was fastened to one of its hands.

"Oh, Uncle Jemmie, it's beautiful," exclaimed the boy when he saw it. When Jemmie sat down and propped the puppet on his knee, Poppy drew in close so that only Jemmie could hear, and whispered, "What's his name?"

Hodge was taken aback for a moment. "Why, I haven't named him yet. Just finished him last week; what do you think he'd like to be called?"



The boy smiled and gazed out into the distance, thinking. Then he looked at the puppet's face, rubbing his hand over the dummy's whiskered cheeks. "Let's call him Whiskers!"

"So be it! Poppy, meet Whiskers; Whiskers, Poppy."

"Pleased to meet you, Pappy," uttered the puppet, coming to life.

"*Poppy*," laughed the lad. "Hey, Uncle Jemmie, he talked without you helping him!"

"So he did, Poppy, so he did."

Two years after Jemmie's first performance for Poppy, the old man died. During the next few days friends passed through the big oak door of the flat, stopping by to console Mrs. Hodge. Even Mr. Ormann heard of the old ventriloquist's death and stopped by. Elaine came, of course, as did Geoffrey andGinny. Young Poppy came along, clinging to his mother's hand. This was the first time he had ever sat for more than five minutes in the same seat in Hodge's flat, as he was always so restless. In the early evening as the three adults were sitting in the front room, Poppy sneaked into the bedroom. Cautiously he opened the door to the closet; slowly and quietly he climbed the stairs, perhaps afraid to wake the puppets above. When he reached the top he peeked around the small room, but the dim light of the sun peeping in through tiny holes in the window-blind was insufficient to make objects discernible. Sliding his hand along the wall he found a switch. He shut his eyes tightly, then turned the switch. Nothing moved, so he courageously opened one eye. What he saw made him gasp.

Grabbing the railing, he ran down the stairs, whimpering all the way. Finally landing in the bedroom he ran toward his parents, yelling "Mommy, Mommy, Uncle Jemmie is upstairs! He's upstairs!"

Ginny exchanged a feverish glance with Mrs. Hodge, then held her arms out as Poppy approached, in tears. "No, no, Poppy; Mr. Hodge has gone away."

"But Mommy, but Mommy, he's upstairs," cried Poppy.

"No, darling. Now hush; you're upsetting Mrs. Hodge," Ginny whispered in his ear.

"Ginny," Geoffrey broke in. "I'd better check what it was he saw. May I, Maggie?"

"Why, yes," answered Maggie, "but be careful. Little Poppy shouldn't have gone up those stairs; I haven't been up there in ages—who knows, there may be *rodents* up there!"

Poppy wriggled from his mother's arms and followed his father as he entered the bedroom. "Daddy, do you believe me?"

"Sure I do, Poppy; I believe you saw something up there, but surely you've mistaken it for Uncle Jemmie." Geoffrey grabbed the railing and slowly climbed to the attic. Reaching the room, he shook his head in amazement at what he saw. The very likeness of the old man himself! On a chair in the center of the floor was a large puppet which bore a startling resemblance to the old ventriloquist. On his lap sat the image of a familiar smiling cherub, little Poppy. All about were the puppets which Jemmie had brought to life in his performances, plus a few, like Whiskers, which Poppy recognized as newcomers. Brandy Nan held a banner which read "Long Live the King." The puppets sat attentively, as though listening to a story which Jemmie was revealing to Poppy.

"See, Daddy, Uncle Jemmie."

"No, Poppy, that's no more your Uncle Jemmie than that is you sitting there on his lap. Now go downstairs; I'll be right down." Poppy lingered a few seconds more, then dashed down the stairs.

"Great show, Jemmie, great show," Geoffrey uttered under his breath. "Yes, old man, I can almost *feel* your presence: 'Long Live the King'! Touché!" Turning around, Geoffrey clicked off the switch. Slowly he descended from the darkened room, whispering, "You're a fighter, Jemmie; you'll be around for a good, long time!"

*MARK C. ALSPAUGH*
*Class of 1976*



## REFLECTIONS

"Bring in another."

The man remembered. His mind was slowly flooding with thoughts of the past. There were a few painful moments left to reflect.

"Bring in another."

Pop used to say that when mamma was big with child. It seemed as though she was either perpetually pregnant or sick when he was young. You could always tell when it got bad because Mrs. Rakowski from down the hall would come to cook with her pimpled face and sweaty fat and hard hand and Pop was drunk. The man especially remembered the summers then, the boiling, sticky days that pasted him and Vinny together in friendship. Long days of sitting in their underwear on the fire escape and spitting down on the squatty, bald men in brown suits that Pop called Kikes. Funny little men that bobbed on the river of flesh that flowed down 67th street, who only stopped to gesticulate and rub noses with each other, just like the funny little brown creatures in Mr. Brubach's ant farm.

Yes, the man remembered those long days when he and Vinny took turns at being captain of their metal stairway ship with her spotted and striped and gray flannel pennants waving over the concrete ocean with the people washing up against the bow. Those long cherished days that melted into longer nights filled with Mamma's noises and smells. Ugly, sobbing noises that scared him and the sickeningly sweat smells of decay that suffocated him. The boy could not understand Mamma then. He remembered how last Christmas

he had thrown his arms around her from the sheer joy of finding an orange in his stocking and had buried his face in the soft, black hair that was now streaked with gray and heard the laughing gentle smile that had since become cracked and feeble. She had taught him how to cut out the paper Christmas tree and paste all of his favorite toys from the *Post* onto it—toys she knew he could never receive. She gave him everything. It was not until later as a man that he would learn of the invisible disease that had devoured Mamma and part of his heart.

Those memories of his were like yesterday, fresh and vivid and yet gone and he loved them. The man also loved his father. The father who was so demanding and powerful in his every action, in his very being. The coarse, hairy giant of a man who was impenetrable and awesome in his brooding silence when sober and who was terrifyingly red and swollen in his drunken wrath. Who desperately clung to his children like so many roots sticking out from the broken and bare precipice of his life without her. The man who remembered his huge, unapproachable father as a boy thought of how the drooping shoulders and the listless, downcast eyes made Pop seem smaller as the boy grew into manhood. Times were good then.

It was good working together, Pop and the four oldest boys, in the mill that transformed the earth's molten flesh into ornamental girders and nickle beer into sweat. Work was sacred to him. His arms were still strong from dragging twelve-foot chains across the mill floor to the towering, hissing buckets where he humbly deposited his load amid the shower of sparks and unmerciful heat. The man was, indeed, God-fearing. He smiled at the recollection of the mid-day whistle's terrified scream and the huddled gatherings around the huge salamanders, the steel drums filled with coke that warmed the men and roasted the polish sausage that was washed down with slugs of cheap whisky, the jovial talk clouded in cigar smoke, and the arm-wrestling contests that gave the man reputation, respect, and self-pride.

He also thought of the girl he had met then and loved and remembered the first time he had seen her. She worked at Elmer's. The army of red-faced, gray-overalled men from the mill would descend upon the low, red brick asylum as soon as



the final day's whistle blasted its last agony. Elmer, dour-faced, with his stout body and thick, black mustache and greased-down hair parted in the middle stood ready at the sticky, foamy taps. The long, dark room with its stale smell of tobacco and grimy, chipped wall murals of Parisian parks and beaches, which seemed strangely out of place, was soon filled with coarse cries for service from the monster with the entangled appendages that was writhing impatiently before the mahogany bar. The man was standing next to Pop who was coughing and spitting and sipping his beer when he saw her. She was small and frail with white skin and soft auburn hair. Her hazel eyes darted timidly from the brass tap to the gruff commands made of her. She smiled caustically to the shouted and haughty endearments. To his chagrin, the man's quiet and polite request for a pint had escaped her slightest glance. The heavy, dripping mug was passed into his waiting hand without emotion or thought. He felt shunned, like just another one of the sweaty, pulpy faces that engulfed him. He would see her several times after that day and he thought about how he did really love her because she meant—everything. Now and then she would look at him over the low-hanging, smokey fog and the noise and would smile as she did at all those smelly, faceless men. Then that winter the man stopped going to Elmer's after Pop died of consumption and there seemed to be no reason to anymore. He had tried to forget those years, but he always had the memories with him. The memories that swept him away as he smiled one last time.

The man's limp shell laid upon the moist cot that was soaked with his blood and urine. The sunken, glassy eyes stared up at nothing, the still thoughtful smile frozen upon cold lips. The doctor with the shiny silver bars on his tunic looked down, shook his head and called to the orderly, "Bring in another."

*CHRISTIAN SEITZ VIEWEG*
*Class of 1974*

## THE DECISION

I sat bolt upright in bed, the cold sweat bathing my body. I blinked several times and finally realized where I was, then lay back down and pulled the covers over me with a shudder. I was wide awake now and stared at the ceiling in the darkness. My thoughts drifted back to haunting memories I wanted to forget. In my mind's eye I could see in vivid detail the events which took place on that day, years ago, when I had been faced with that terrible decision.

I drifted slowly down, swinging rhythmically back and forth. Too slowly, I thought. It seemed that I had been floating down for a long time and I was anxious to get on the ground.

I looked at the jungle, still far below me, and wondered how high I was and how much longer it would take to get down. If there were enemy troops in the area and they had noticed us coming down, they would be making their way toward us as quickly as possible. By craning my neck over my right shoulder I could see Jack Whitehouse, my navigator, oscillating like a pendulum beneath the orange, green, and white gores of his canopy. He was somewhat lower than I was and, I guessed, a couple of miles away. I thought of trying to maneuver myself around by manipulating the risers so I could see exactly where Jack was going to enter the jungle. I reached up and grabbed a riser with my right hand, but my left arm hung helplessly at my side.

I glanced at my left arm, then stared in horror and disbelief at the mutilated limb. The upper arm was shattered,





and protruding through my flight jacket just above the elbow was the jagged humerus. I had been aware of a sudden, sharp pain in my arm for an instant while ejecting before the G's caused me to momentarily lose consciousness, but oddly enough I now felt no pain and decided that the nerves must be numbed or that I was in a partial state of shock. I was amazed by the whiteness of the bone. I finally tore my eyes away from my arm and with my right hand tried once again to maneuver the chute around so I could watch Jack going down. It would be good if we could find each other once on the ground and travel together to a likely pick-up area in order to make things safer and quicker for ourselves and the rescue crews.

Jack was just above the trees now and I looked for some landmark near him which I would be able to recognize from the ground and use to navigate toward. There were no prominent features, only thick jungle in the vicinity where Jack's chute was now visible, draped in the tall trees. I made mental note of the direction to the place where Jack had entered the trees.

Now it was time to worry about where I was going to land. I had lost a lot of altitude while gaping at my arm and watching Jack's descent. My chute was carrying me in the general direction of a small clearing in the dense jungle growth and I began to tug on the risers with my right hand, hoping to hit the clearing. Getting out of the chute and onto the ground from the top of a tree using only one arm might be extremely difficult. I did not seem to be drifting down slowly and lazily anymore. Now the trees seemed to be rushing up to meet me, to pluck me from the sky. I felt that I was going to miss the clearing and pulled frantically with my right hand as I sped toward the trees, my unresponsive left arm still hanging at my side.

I brought the chute around again and believed I was going to make it. A scant second later my boots and legs entered the upper-most boughs of a tree on the very edge of the clearing and the smaller twigs and branches began to snap beneath my weight. I threw my right arm up to protect my face and clamped my eyes tightly shut as the small limbs gave

way and dropped me onto sturdier branches. My canopy silently collapsed overhead. As I plummeted down through the tree I felt my body being gouged and struck by increasingly stronger and thicker limbs and suddenly felt an intense, stabbing pain in my throat. I choked and coughed, trying desperately to breathe through my seemingly crushed trachea as I was jolted and bounced when the chute was finally snared by a bough. I caught a glimpse of the ground as I gagged and retched, trying all the while to control my short, painful gasps.

My breathing finally became controlled, each breath carefully drawn in and released. I swayed gently about ten feet above the ground, facing the clearing. My mind dimly perceived the urgency of getting to the ground and out of the area, but all I could do was hang there in my harness, my entire body aching. My mind was being bombarded by the sensation of pain from all over, the most severe being in my throat and only a dull throbbing from my arm. I could not organize my thoughts or mobilize my body, and I hung there for some time, my mind fogged. Once again I gazed at my left arm and this time noticed something new. Drops of blood had begun forming on my fingertips as the flight suit sleeve had become saturated and the blood trickled down my arm. The red droplets slowly but steadily grew and then fell away while more formed in their places. I wondered how badly I was bleeding and again started to realize the necessity of getting to the ground. I was thinking about bouncing up and down in an attempt to make the branches or parachute silk give way when I heard the noise.

I was suddenly alert as I heard the faint sounds which seemed to be rapidly approaching through the jungle. A wave of panic swept over me and I groped for my .38 with my right hand, fumbling to undo the holster. I started to draw the pistol and then switched to a better grip, cursing myself silently as I nearly dropped it in the process. The sound became louder as it approached from the other side of the clearing. I clicked off the safety, stretched out my arm toward the noise, and tightened my grip on the gun. If enemy



soldiers appeared, I was ready for them, but I had to make sure I did not shoot Jack by mistake. The tension was unbearable as I waited to see if friend or foe would emerge from the jungle. All of a sudden some plants on the other side of the clearing almost directly opposite me parted, and no sooner did the figure burst into view than I had him in my sights.

The Vietnamese man had been trotting and had taken three full steps into the open before he saw me and halted in his tracks. He would never know how close I had come to blowing away his head when I saw that it was not Jack. He was a young man dressed in typical peasant garb and appeared to be a simple farmer or villager. At his side was a large knife which seemed to me doubly suited as some sort of harvesting implement or as an ugly weapon. Without lowering my gun, I started to speak to him but was met with only a sharp pang deep in my throat. A second attempt produced the same result and I concluded that my larynx must have been damaged by the severe blow to my throat. I had studied French for years and was fairly familiar with the Vietnamese corruption of the language, but now it was all useless to me.

The fellow kept his eyes on me as I watched him and wondered what to do. Was he a friend coming to help, an enemy coming to find me, or just a curious non-partisan? Should I motion him over and try to get him to help me down? Could I trust him above me or behind me with that knife? I searched his face but it gave me no clue. He did not make a move or utter a sound but just stood motionless, his eyes on mine. I wished I knew more about this country I was here to save. Were the nearby villages sympathetic to the Viet Cong? Or more specifically, was this particular guy an enemy sympathizer?

The gun was growing heavy in my outstretched hand and I was now aware of a dull, throbbing pain in my left arm with each beat of my heart. I realized that the presence of this Vietnamese was not just an annoyance but a dilemma. If I went ahead trying to get down, or even dropped my guard for an instant, he could dive back into the undergrowth and

get away. Then he might lead enemy soldiers here before the rescue team arrived. I thought of just keeping him at gunpoint until the rescue choppers arrived, but began to doubt that I could keep him covered that long. The rescue would be handled out of Nakon Phanom, and the choppers and other aircraft should at this moment be on their way, homing in on the coordinates I had radioed from the crippled plane and the beacons from Jack's and my survival radios. How long would it take them to get here?

My thoughts had wandered and settled on the steadily increasing pain from my arm. The numbness was going away and was being replaced by a shot of pain each time my heart pulsed. I thought of the blood being pumped out of my body with each stroke and imagined a large pool of blood on the ground ten feet below. I was startled by the movement as the man took a step backward, nearer the edge of the jungle, and was surprised to find that my head had been nodding and my arm sagging. I leveled the gun on him and he stiffened, a frightened look on his face.

My mind was fogged and functioning only dully, being preoccupied with the growing pain. I wondered again how long it had been since we had been hit and how long it would be until the choppers arrived. I felt myself on the edge of consciousness and wanted to just let myself go. The rescue crews would be able to find me all right and pick me up even if I passed out, but what if this Vietnamese led the enemy here? I would be captured, and they might also get Jack. They might use me to lure the rescue crews and get them.

Everything was swirling around me and growing dark. I was blacking out. Summoning the last of my strength, I shook my head to clear it and focused on the Vietnamese who was stealthily turning around, ready to disappear into the jungle. I raised the gun once more and aimed at the center of his back, directly between the shoulder blades. Saying a silent prayer for his soul and mine, I squeezed the trigger.

*GARY ELLIOTT*
*Class of 1974*

## THE PATH TO HEAVEN

The room was bright as the late afternoon sun streamed in through the open curtains which framed the rather large picture window overlooking the river. It was a very pleasant room. It centered around a large walnut desk and its accompanying leather chair. The floor was covered with a thick green carpet which extended from one wall to the other. The walls were walnut-grain panel adorned here and there with pictures of past presidents of the Davenport First National Bank, giving the office a look of dignity and an air of importance. At the far end of the room were two leather upholstered chairs, resembling the bucket seats of a new and very expensive sports car. The chairs were separated by a colonial style end table. On the table, a chess board and its accompanying armies rested. The pieces appeared to be made of ivory; however, close examination would prove them to be structured of white marble. From an ashtray centered between the two black telephones on the desk, a single column of smoke drifted aimlessly upward, breaking momentarily into the stream of sunlight from the window on its journey upward. Facing forward on the front of the desk a large name plate extended its greeting:

WILLIAM A. HORTAN – PRESIDENT

Flanking the name plate on its right side was an eight-by-twelve picture. Captured within its frame were Mr.

and Mrs. Hortan at a party that they had attended some two years previously. She was a very beautiful woman and everyone in the building had thought highly of her.

The tranquil atmosphere of the room was suddenly ruined by the ringing of one of the two phones on the desk. It was almost as if they could sense that things were too pleasant, and they didn't want to let a man have a quiet moment. The large black chair, which had been facing the window, suddenly spun around and Mr. Hortan leaned forward and picked up the receiver.

"Hello, Mr. Hortan here."

"Hi Bill, this is Jerry. How about stopping by the club for a few quick drinks on the way home tonight?"

There had been no need for the caller to identify himself. Mr. Hortan had been rather expecting the call. He answered apologetically, "No thanks Jerry. I have some things to do yet and I've already made plans for this evening. But thank you anyway."

"Oh well, I guess I'll have to drink alone again tonight."

"Sorry Jer, don't drink too much. Remember you have to drive home."

"OK. I'll be careful. Have a good weekend Bill."

"Good-bye Jer. You have a good weekend too."

Mr. Hortan let the phone down carefully and sat back deep into the chair again. He had forgotten that it was Friday. Even with that unmistakable feeling that comes over you on a Friday afternoon, he had forgotten. So it was Friday, he was still glad that he wasn't going drinking with Jerry Seford. He was a nice enough guy. He was president of the Chamber of Commerce, had a wife and three kids, and was a good friend, but Mr. Hortan no longer cared for the company of anyone who would drink and drive. It was asinine in his opinion. The subject was touchy to him too. His wife, Jenny, had been killed in an automobile accident two years ago, on March 6, 1970, by a drunken driver. The thought of it upset him greatly. The police said that she was killed instantly when she was hit broadside by a hit-and-run driver, who ran the stop sign at the corner of Washington and River Drive.



According to a witness the other car didn't even stop. It swerved to the right and continued on down the road weaving from one lane to the other as it went. Mr. Hortan didn't like to think about it. God, how he hated that son of a bitch who killed her, but he didn't want to think about it: the blood, the skid marks, the smell of burnt rubber and flesh. It made him feel ill.

He glanced down at his watch for a second, then to the clock on the wall. It was three-thirty. He leaned forward and tossed his *Wall Street Journal* into the wastebasket next to his desk, ground out his cigarette and dumped the contents of the ashtray into the wastebasket on top of the paper. He then spun the big chair around, got up and walked to the closet to remove his hat and coat. He wouldn't need his coat now. It was a beautiful day. Spring, he thought to himself, is certainly a lovely time of year. He greeted his secretary on the way out giving her a few instructions on trivial matters to take care of before she left. He then proceeded to the elevator.

When he emerged from the door on the first floor, he was greeted by the warm, late afternoon sun and the hussle of downtown shoppers. He walked to the corner and crossed 2nd Street to the parking lot across from his building. Once in the car, a feeling of exuberance came over him, as if arriving at the car had confirmed the wonderful idea that he was now free for the weekend, away from the office and its problems. He thought that the feeling was much the same as he had experienced as a small boy when school let out on a Friday afternoon. He left the lot turning left on Main Street and let the traffic carry him down River Drive where he took another left. It was a very enjoyable ride he thought to himself. The road ran parallel to the Mississippi River and he enjoyed watching the Sunfish and the Lightnings, with their sails full, darting back and forth over the glimmering water which seemed to be alive as the sun's rays danced on its surface. It was certainly more enjoyable to travel this route than to go directly from the office to the pub with Jerry as he once had. He had justified it to his wife by saying that he

could avoid rush-hour traffic and a possible wreck. He and Jerry would sit around discussing world affairs and the affairs of their friends while getting drunk. Then they would head their respective ways homeward. Mr. Hortan would drive south down Washington Boulevard and Jerry Seford would head north and take Division Street home. Mr. Hortan thought to himself how foolish he had been to forfeit the simple pleasures of a drive along the river for the revolting escape he had sought in alcohol.

At present, he reached Rushome Street, turned left, and proceeded up the hill away from the river. It was a very old street. Its brick surface was still unmarred by the progress of asphalt. It was lined on both sides by large elm trees which arched out over the street providing a canopy beneath which to drive. Bill continued up and over the crest of the hill and finally pulled over to the other side of the road at a spot where the green canopy was broken by a church steeple. This was St. Paul's, a Roman Catholic church. It was old like the brick road but was very beautiful in its old age. A quick glance at his watch told Mr. Hortan that it was four-thirty. About a fifteen-minute wait, he thought to himself. He had been coming to confession every Friday afternoon since about March 9th, making it about two months ago that he had first come. His thoughts drifted back to the first time. He remembered arriving about four-thirty and waiting until about ten before the hour. Confession ended at five on Friday afternoon and Mr. Hortan wanted to be the last one there so no one would be waiting after him. He remembered the lost and confused feeling he had experienced as he stepped into the small dark room and closed the door behind him. He recalled thinking it was much like a telephone booth, only a little larger with a place to kneel and a small crucifix above an eight-by-twelve sliding partition which was opened when the priest diverted his attention from the confessional number one to confessional number two. The two confessionals were identical to one another and were directly opposite each other. They were separated by the priest's compartment and the priest would alternate from one to the



other. After he finished talking to one person, he would slide their partition shut, turn to his right, open the other partition and listen to someone else's grievous and sinful deeds.

On that first occasion Mr. Hortan recalled the silence of the confessional being interrupted by the sliding of the partition. He could not see the priest for they were still separated by a white cloth, which looked like a large handkerchief, hanging over the opening in the partition. The cloth was there so the priest would not see the face of the person who was confessing his sins.

Mr. Hortan began by saying, "Bless me Father, for I have sinned."

The priest answered, "Yes my son, what is it?"

"Father, I have done something terrible."

Again the priest answered, "Yes my son, what is it?"

At this point Mr. Hortan wanted to forget the whole matter, to make up some small story and leave the confessional. He had to confess, though. Being a Catholic, if he were to die without confessing his sins, the gates to heaven would be forever closed to him. There was a moment of silence, then Mr. Hortan burst out, "Father, I have killed someone!" The priest, somwhat taken back, asked Mr. Hortan to explain.

Hortan, now in a flood of emotion, began, "Father, I have killed a man and I don't even know who!" The priest, more confused, asked how this situation had come about. Mr. Hortan then explained that he had tried for two years to find the person who had been responsible for his wife's death and then two months ago he had hired a private gunman to find and kill the wreckless driver who had killed Jenny. Ever since that first afternoon Hortan had been coming to St. Paul's at precisely ten minutes until five each Friday. He was truly sorry for his action and wanted to be sure that he was forgiven for his sins. He had to go to heaven if he were ever to see Jenny again.

The clock on the drugstore wall across from the church read ten minutes until five when Mr. Hortan stepped from his car and proceeded across the street and up the stairs into the

church. It was cooler inside the church and out of the fading sunlight. A quick look around told Mr. Hortan that except for Jesus and Mary, an old lady in the back pew saying her rosary was the only person in the church. The old lady knelt there with her head bowed and looked more like a statue than the two stone figures. Mr. Hortan followed the red carpet around to the left toward the confessionals. Much to his relief, the old lady got up as he passed and proceeded out of the church. He didn't like the idea of other people seeing him come out of the confessional and wondering what kind of sins he had committed.

When he reached confessional number one, he opened the door and stepped into the room, closing the darkness in around him, and knelt down facing the partition and the small crucifix above it. Almost before he was ready the partition gently slid open, Mr. Hortan swalllowed hard and began, "Bless me Father, for I have sinned." There was the usual pause, then a dagger-sharp pain shot through Mr. Hortan's chest. It was as if God himself had struck at him with a bolt of lightning. Mr. Hortan's mind reeled like a very fast time-lapse film. His first thought was that it was a heart attack. Then as if his surroundings were in slow motion, his mind began to assess the situation. There had been a flash lighting the small room. The curtain in the partition opening had jumped toward him, and then the pain shot into his chest only to be followed, what seemed to be ten minutes later, by a deafening roar much like a clash of thunder or an artillery piece going off next to you. Mr. Hortan's mind realized this only as his body was thrown against the back of the small confessional. The room was spinning about him and the man on the cross above the partition seemed to smile as he spun around Hortan's head. He tried to breathe, but nothing would come. He tried to cry for help, but not a sound was uttered. He felt himself falling but it was as if he were falling in slow motion; as if he were outside of his body watching himself drift toward the floor. The door of the confessional flew open as his body fell against it and his body continued downward, bouncing slightly as it hit the floor. He lay there



facing the ceiling, his feet and legs still within the confessional. His coat was open and his tie off to one side. There was a large hole in his blue shirt with shreds of burnt material hanging in the pool of blood rapidly forming on his chest. His eyes were open with a look of terror and were transfixed on the ceiling. With his peripheral vision he saw the door to the priest's compartment open and the blurred outline of a man step out. He was wearing a grey suit with a pink shirt and a bright red tie. He was a middle-aged man, thirty-two or thirty-three years old. He had cold black eyes which were accented by his dark hair and well-groomed mustache. On his hands he wore a pair of tight, black leather gloves and in his right hand he maintained a confident grip on a .44 magnum Smith and Wesson revolver. As he looked down at Hortan, his left hand slipped into his own breast pocket and produced two pieces of paper. He bent over and placed the papers on the now blood-soaked shirt and placed the revolver on top of them. The stranger then stepped over Hortan's body and walked with an easy stride toward the door at the rear of the church, peeling off his gloves as he went.

The lights of the church had been turned on; yet, they were fading as Hortan strained to gain some clue as to what the papers said. He managed to raise his head just far enough to see them and recognition was immediate. One was the small yellow note that had accompanied the fee that he had sent the hired assassin. The other was a certificate of release from Mount Pleasant Mental Institution which read:

MOUNT PLEASANT MENTAL HOSPITAL
Certificate of Release

Mr. William A. Hortan, after two years in residence, had been classified as non-dangerous and ready to return to an unmonitored life. Hortan was admitted as a result of a severe shock situation introduced in an automobile accident in which he

was involved. He can remember only that the accident took place on March 6, 1970, just two days before he was admitted. The traffic investigation files are of no help for they contain no mention of his involvement in any such accident.

His loss of memory, or amnesia, is a form of repression, a defense mechanism, instituted by Mr. Hortan's subconscious, to protect him from some fact that he does not wish to recall. Except for a few lost hours, Mr. Hortan appears to be fully recovered and is therefore to be released to periodic psychiatric treatment effective March 9, 1972.

Dr. Adam Collins
Dept of Psychology
Mount Pleasant Mental Institution

Then suddenly things became clearer, as if the last small piece of a large puzzle had fallen into place, and Hortan began to realize the horrible reality which he had previously refused to see. He tried one last time to call for help but soon realized that it was to no avail. As the room grew darker about him, tears began to stream down his cheeks, and his mind raced faster and faster. The room began to feel cold, and he could feel the blood, pooling in his lungs, slowly drowning him. Then he felt nothing.

*THOMAS J. RICHARDSON*
*Class of 1974*

## FROM DUST TO DUST

"Ah! That was good." John had just finished his second cup of coffee and was now thinking of the day ahead. He had been somewhat upset for the past few weeks concerning his sales manager job. If he didn't secure that titanium-alloy contract, he would probably lose his job with the company. John was extremely worried, and Sue could sense it. They had been married for 17 years, and Sue could always tell when something was bothering her husband. To cheer him up and to get his mind off the company, she invited Stan and Louise over for dinner. Company always cheered John up, and Stan was his best friend. "Well, I've got to hurry back to the rat race, dear. Wish me luck."

"Have a good day, and don't forget to be home early tonight. The Andersons are coming for dinner."

"Good. See you tonight."

Sue was also thinking of the day ahead of her. First on the list was to clean up the house. "There's quite a bit of dust under the couch. I'd better take care of that first."

* * * *

After almost 10 years of intensive research, Dr. Forrest Heiser and his dedicated team of colleagues were on the verge of a major breakthrough. Project Omega Minus had already enjoyed reasonable success but as yet had not accomplished its goal—to see inside the atom. To date, the "Heiserscope"

was already more powerful than the world's best electron microscope. Heiser had improved the electron microscope to the point that the magnification power was theoretically infinite. The team had seen what they believed were actual molecules, but the molecular and atomic vibrations were so great that only an extremely blurry image of an atom's path could be photographed. Something had to be done, and Heiser's genius and ingenuity once again solved the problem. The solution involved freezing the motion by taking a "photograph" of the vibrating atoms with an atomic particle accelerator, then magnifying the picture. Heiser and his men had spent months trying to develop a satisfactory technique to produce the image. They finally arrived at one and were very confident that it would work. The atoms they hoped to see were those of ordinary dust particles floating through the air. The apparatus had just been assembled. The next few minutes would determine whether Heiser's idea was correct or not. The team, eager to start the experiment, had to wait until the generators stored up enough energy to produce the image. "I think it's time for a coffee break, gentlemen."

* * * *

John's thoughts had drifted to Sue. "God, if I'd never met Sue I probably would have been sick with ulcers long ago. She's got to be the most wonderful wife there is. Seventeen years and I'm still head-over-heels about her." While John was counting his blessings, his immediate problems with the corporation suddenly seemed trivial. He realized that this was just another one of life's many crises and that it, too, would soon pass. "I think I'll buy her some roses tonight, a small thanks to show her how grateful I am for her, for making me so happy."

Sue decided to save the vacuuming until after the morning dishes were done. "The dishes will take maybe fifteen minutes at the most. If I get them out of the way, I can start the steaks."

* * * *



"I think it's ready, Doctor," announced Baker. Baker had just checked over the instruments and all seemed to be working properly. Heiser barked out the orders: "Man your stations, put on your protective goggles, five seconds to trigger!" Five, four, three, two, one, FLASH! The room was bombarded with so bright a light that it was almost blinding even with eye protection. The brightness seemed to linger for a few moments until the scientists' eyes got reaccustomed to the darkness. One by one they were able to look at the image on the screen, and one by one they gaped in speechless awe at the image of a nearly perfectly centered electron the size of a baseball.

* * * *

John was thinking now of the slow pace on the freeway. "Pretty heavy traffic. Must be an accident up ahead." Cars were slowing to a stop. "Hundreds of cars ahead of me, hundreds of cars behind me, with no way out. Thousands of people, just like myself, wrapped up in the everyday doldrums of a ho-hum life which oftentimes seems purposeless. Millions of faceless people in an overcrowded city struggling hard not to lose their identities which they never had anyway." Traffic started to move again. Up ahead he could see a flashing red light. "It *is* an accident. I wonder if anybody was seriously hurt. Maybe man never knows the purpose of life until after he's dead. The answer certainly isn't here among the rat race. Billions of people in the world, each concerned with his own personal problems as if they were the most pressing issues of all. Life is *trivial*! We are just one minuscule planet of trillions in the galaxy alone. How can an entire galaxy even consider itself substantial when there exist an infinite number of galaxies in the universe? What is man when compared to the rest of the universe? Nothing. People talk of their importance; mankind is obsessed with its problems. If only everyone could forget about his problems for a brief moment, and take time out to conceive how minute and infinitesimal we actually are."

* * * *

The scientists stood frozen for what seemed an eternity, until Heiser broke the spell with a chuckle. "Well, we did it. I can't believe it."

"We certainly did," replied Baker.

"Wait a second!" interjected Heiser, "That's just the initial image. We can magnify that even more. Let's do it!"

As the electron got larger, they could see that it was composed of different colors. What was primarily light blue had separated into patches of greens and browns on the blue background with puffs of white interspersed throughout. With a terrific impact it suddenly became obvious that Heiser and his colleagues were looking at a planet not unlike their own, but a mere electron of an atom composing a mere particle of dust floating through the air. As the greens and browns grew larger and larger, Heiser's further suspicions became fact as he could see evidence of an intelligent civilization on the tiny planet. Again the men stood in wonder at the spectacular sight unfolding before their eyes. There, on one tiny infinitesimal electron, existed a world complete with people, freeways, automobiles, and factories. "You realize of course, gentlemen, that this crumbles the very foundations of our universe as we perceive it to be."

* * * *

It crumbled far more than Heiser could have imagined; for as John was contemplating the triviality of his existence, his wife was vacuuming the dust underneath the couch, inadvertently destroying thousands of galaxies, including the one containing Dr. Forrest Heiser and his team of colleagues, along with billions of other planets just like it.

*DONALD K. MCDONOUGH*
*Class of 1975*

## CHILDREN

He didn't really understand what had happened, but was really trying to figure it out. The children had been friendly enough when he stopped to help them; they even seemed to appreciate him. The young boy shuffled on down the dirt road between the high, green fields of corn, already ripening in the hot July sun. It was a typical Carolina summer day; hot sun, high humidity, and the sweat was flowing freely down the boy's black skin, trickling down on his face and across the cuts and bruises on his back. His skin was like black marble and the sheen of sweat made him gleam in the sun. He took off his tattered straw hat and wiped the perspiration and tears from his face with the sleeve of a dirty shirt.

"I can jus' hear Mama now," he thought, "I'se warned you 'bout messin' round them white folks house. You best thank the Lord they only whupped you."

But the children he had met were very friendly. They were so clean and pink and had clean clothes and the little girls had pretty ribbons in their hair. He felt a sharp twinge that ran all the way down his spine and across his beaten back. The pain in his back made him hurry along a little toward home. To home, where his Mama could wash his back and put some cool ointment on it. His head swam and he almost stumbled. The little white children came again, as he saw them in his mind running and playing on the huge lawn that bordered the large white house.

"But Mama, I only helped 'em git their cat outa the tree," he said aloud to no one in particular, "the little kitty couldn't get outa the tree and the children was too small to get him theirselves, and you always said we should help each other. That we's all Gods chilluns."

The sweat and tears now flowed freely down his young face, mixing together in a solid stream and fell to the dusty road. His eyes were so full he could barely see and the pain in his back was getting worse. His thick homespun shirt stuck to his back. The black boy had never really been close to white children before and they in turn had never really seen a colored child. Their maid, Jessica, was black, as was Rastus, the butler; but this boy was smaller, only a little older than they. The white children had all shied away from him as he approached the yard, and he was so afraid that he almost turned away. But the children were all so little and the poor kitten couldn't get out of the tree, that he forgot his Mama's warnings and leaped over the small wooden fence and climbed the tree to retrieve the kitten. The children had all been so happy to have their kitten even though they were afraid of the Negro boy. After a time they even talked to him a bit and gave him some lemonade out of a large pitcher. He drank it gratefully. One little blonde girl who owned the kitten walked gingerly up behind the boy and touched him on his bare black elbow where it protruded from his worn shirt. She had almost expected her finger to come away black and when it didn't, she looked up directly into the startled eyes of the boy. They looked at each other for a moment and then began to laugh together.

The boy stumbled on a rock again and caught himself before he fell. He was very tired and he wanted to sit down but his thoughts wouldn't let him. He heard again the laughter, tasted again the lemonade, and could see the happy children; and then he shuddered. For it was then that they came out. There were three of them, a handsome white woman in the front, her tanned face distorted in a hate-filled snarl. She was flanked by two men. He didn't run, but merely waited and watched as the woman snatched away the



children, and with a string of obscenities directed at him, the two men grabbed him.

He was through the honeysuckle vines now and could see the little wooden house that was his home. The pain in his back had numbed now and he felt light-headed as he neared his home. The vines sent their sweet scent to him and he could hear his Mama singing softly to herself. Suddenly he was afraid his Mama would beat him too, and his fear and dizziness overcame him as he opened the screen door and fell into the little house. His Mama, weeping softly, cradled her young son gently in her arms and wiped the blood from his face. He awoke to see his Mama crying over him.

"I'se sorry, Mama, but them chilluns couldn't have got their kitty outa the tree by theirselves, could they?"

The children were playing in the big yard. They laughed and chased the little kitten around the yard. But every now and then, one little girl, clutching tightly to a small cat, looks down the dirt road and wonders about the strange little boy that she never saw again.

*JOESPH C. HOYLE*
*Class of 1974*

# WOULDBY, COULDBY AND NEVERS

## I

"Twist, Benjamin, *twist*!"

"Oh, sorry, Nathaniel," Benjamin Couldby muttered, giving his key a twist. Nathaniel cracked the massive oak door, and each of the three men removed his key in turn.

"Ah, I see people still have problems," Nevers exclaimed, glancing at the scattered pile of letters on the floor. "Here is a clever one: 'To Wouldby, Couldby and Nevers–Scientific Consultants (Designs and Schemes).' Makes us sound a bit devilish, eh, Nathaniel; schemers are we?"

"Our latest advertisement in the *Times*. I thought 'Scientific Consultants' sounded a bit dry, so I tacked on that ending," Nathaniel explained, taking off his overcoat while Nevers counted the pieces of mail. "Well, Nevers, what have we got to work on this week?"

"Hmmm. Better than last," Nevers replied. "Twenty-six."

"Yes, you are quite right, I see," added Benjamin, glancing through the pages of a large thin book which he had removed from the shelf. "Last Thursday we hadn't but twenty-one. Here is the record book; who makes the entries this week? You, Anthony?"

"Yes. Toss me the book and let's get started." Anthony Nevers opened the book to the first blank page and scratched 'Thursday, April 8, 1875' at the top. Then the three men diligently removed twenty-six letters from their envelopes. Nevers read the first. "Ha! Do you remember old Mrs.





Dansley Eaton? She would like us to build a 'steam-powered perambulator' for her granddaughter. Says the French already have one. What do you think, Benjamin–care to build the better baby buggy?"

"Open the next one," Benjamin replied curtly.

"Been reading this fellow Verne; he's French," mumbled Nathaniel, as Nevers jotted down a note in the record concerning the first letter.

"Verne? Did he write the second letter?" asked Nevers.

"No, no; he's an author. He's having his Phineas Fogg travel around the world in eighty days."

"Seems a waste of time to me," responded Nevers, glancing up.

"Precisely. Why go around the world in eighty days, when, left to itself, the world is quite content to go around in one?"

Benjamin put down the second letter, which he had been reading. "I'm afraid I don't follow you, Nathaniel."

"You see, gentlemen, rotation is the key. We should not go to New York; let New York come to us." Nevers dropped his pen and gazed quizzically at Wouldby. "Our task merely is to separate ourselves from the earth for a short time," Wouldby exclaimed, "and within hours New York will have come to us."

"If *that* could be done I'm sure someone would have tried it by now," laughed Nevers.

"Possibly, Anthony, possibly someone has tried–but not hard enough." Nathaniel popped out of his chair, and with his hands clasped behind his back, strutted towards the window. "For it is only with height that man can escape the influence of the earth." Peeking through the curtains, Nathaniel gazed longingly at the clouds.

Benjamin demanded "How do you propose–"

"A balloon–a gas-filled bag," interrupted Nathaniel. "Large enough to take us to an altitude greater than 50,000 feet."

"To take 'us'?" protested Nevers. "I've been to New York, Wouldby, and I'm content to remain in London, thank you. Besides, I haven't the time to go to New York!"

"Ah, don't be hasty, Nevers; I'm quite sure you've got six hours to spare!"

Nevers was silent for a moment, then shook his head abruptly. "Nathaniel, you've taken this 'designs and schemes' bit all too literally; what you are talking about smacks of wizardry." He raised a finger in admonition. "Why yes, balloons can take man high into the sky, but as my dear *published* friend James Glaisher will attest, it is impossible to soar above 20,000 feet without ill effects. Why, not ten years ago he and Henry Coxwell set off from the gasworks of Wolverhampton. Slumped into unconsciousness, they did, just seconds after pulling the valve cord at 21,000 feet. *No air*, my man, there's no air up there!"

Benjamin slipped the stack of letters into a desk drawer. "Intriguing. But I'm sure, Anthony, that the Oxford-trained mind of Nathaniel has come up with a solution to such a simple problem as 'no air'!"

Nevers wrinkled his brow and exchanged a puzzled glance with Benjamin. Together they turned to Nathaniel, who displayed a broad, self-confident smile.

## II

As the months passed, no entries were made in the record book of Wouldby, Couldby and Nevers, for the three had embarked upon Nathaniel's project to make the first six-hour flight from London to New York. Although Anthony had taken a dim view of the endeavor, he was persuaded to help, and, after much work designing a gondola for the balloon, was astonished when Nathaniel suggested that Nevers might observe the ascent from the ground: "My dear Nathaniel. If *anybody* shall ascend in that wicker work of art, *I* shall!"

Benjamin had supervised the construction of the envelope; each gore of rubberized silk was specially treated to provide as near an airtight sphere as possible.

Nathaniel Wouldby directed the entire production, contacting colleagues at home and on the continent for specifications and hints. Never's friend Glaisher reluctantly related his near-fatal experience with extreme heights, recommending the eminent Munich physicist Karl P. G. von Linde, who was working with compressed gases and perhaps



could suggest a feasible oxygen mask. Nathaniel corresponded with the French aeronaut Gaston Tissandier, the sole survivor of the ascent of the *Zenith* from the Paris suburb La Vilette earlier that year; Tissandier claimed that the lives of his two companions might have been saved had their oxygen hoses been fixed with masks to their faces, and had the voyagers worn proper clothing to combat the fierce cold.

Forewarned, Nathaniel Wouldby had taken every precaution. He calculated the rate of ascent and descent and was convinced that six hours and forty-five minutes after launch that morning, Wouldby, Couldby and Nevers would land in New York.

"We look like scarecrows, all puffed up in these thermal suits of charcoal," Nevers bellowed. "Are you absolutely certain, Nathaniel, that with the cold, we'll not have fits of *rigor mortis* up there?"

"Mmmm," answered Nathaniel, ignoring Nevers as he checked the tubing from some thirty-odd barrels within which hydrogen was being generated. Townspeople from Epping were huddled nearby, and more were climbing atop the hill to see the giant balloon in the early hours of the morning.

"Gentlemen. We shall launch the *Fly* in one hour," announced Nathaniel, closing his pocket watch.

"One hour? Nathaniel, the envelope is still limp. Will we have enough gas?" queried Nevers.

"Absolutely. Hydrogen expands nearly one five-hundredth of its volume for every degree rise in temperature. The envelope shall be heated considerably by the rising sun; once aloft the gas temperature should double every three miles. Actually, the balloon won't be but half full at launch."

"Half full?" questioned Nevers. "Then perhaps we'll reach equilibrium at 5,000 feet and be pushed by the winds towards Edinburgh. I've a cousin in Edinburgh who—"

"Don't be absurd, Nevers," cried Nathaniel. "Equilibrium *before* dropping ballast will be 42,000 feet. Below that we shall be tossed about at the mercy of the winds. But I believe the winds to be *non-existent* at higher altitudes. You will

note the fibrous nature of clouds near that region—appearance caused by friction of the turbulent winds meeting the still ether above! Near 50,000 feet we shall watch the earth turn silently below us. Now, Benjamin! Anthony! Our final inspection."

With deliberate movements the men checked the outside of the round wicker basket which would carry them and their instruments to New York. Nevers inflated the life raft which encircled the gondola; Benjamin carefully inspected the many knots, while Nathaniel counted the bags of sand—ballast to be dropped over the ocean to give the *Fly* added height. Dangling from the side was a brass speaking trumpet with which the three aeronauts would bid the crowd farewell.

In his bulky thermal suit Nevers slowly climbed a stepladder and hopped into the basket. Above him was a large wooden ring, attached by ropes to the netting which covered the balloon; from the ring hung the gondola. Three barometers were suspended from the ropes; these would be used to indicate altitude. Six metal flasks of compressed oxygen were strapped to the floor; a metal tube with a stopcock connected each flask to a flexible hose. Several containers held food and water, and another, emergency provisions: knives, rope, maps and extra gloves.

The gondola was nearly seven feet in diameter, equipped with wicker seats and padded cushions. Four guide ropes were tied to the ground to prevent the balloon from swaying; the wicker basket was likewise anchored to the earth. The British flag was sewn to the silk panels of red and gold, centered below the giant 'FLY' painted across the middle.

Nathaniel climbed into the gondola and gazed upward, inspecting the escape valve. He disconnected the thick pipe which was pumping hydrogen into the balloon. From outside Benjamin carefully pulled the pipe away as Nathaniel checked the valve: he gave a quick tug on a rope and a short burst of gas escaped.

Anthony and Nathaniel spent most of the remaining hour checking the instruments and equipment, while Benjamin stood amidst the spectators, answering questions. Finally he



too climbed into the gondola and the three men posed for photographers before donning their woolen face masks. The crowd giggled as the three made their final preparations, for the aeronauts looked like arctic explorers in their outfits.

But the townspeople fell silent as Nathaniel gave the command to loosen the ropes. Schoolboys quickly untied the knots.

"Away," yelled Nathaniel. With that, the balloon slowly rose, and immediately the crowd began to cheer. The eskimo figures waved to the people. "We'll cable from New York this afternoon!" Benjamin shouted through the speaking trumpet.

The ascent was every bit as impressive as all the test flights, thought Nathaniel. Rather than the craft rising, it was as though the earth were sinking beneath them. Faster and faster the *Fly* began to soar; soon the people were nothing but pinheads, blurring into the country side. Even the widest roads were soon imperceptible; only the broad, meandering rivers sliced through the quilt below. Benajmin pointed at the distant buildings of London—the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace looked like match boxes through the smoky mist; the Westminster Bridge was but a sliver across the Thames. Looking to the south and east, Nathaniel scanned the blue-green waters blending with the sky in the distance.

Taking advantage of the wind currents, birds appeared motionless as they flew nearby, but soon the curious fowl were lost below as the *Fly* ascended to greater heights, where the thin air yet did not bother the flyers. However, Nathaniel soon insisted that each man take oxygen from the flasks at regular intervals.

Benjamin broke the silence. "I believe we're drifting southwest."

"Yes," agreed Nathaniel. "There are prevailing north-easterlies at this altitude from June to September. Although it is not noticeable, we are traveling nearly eighty miles per hour relative to the ground. Eerie—we are hurled by the wind, yet there is only silence." Nathaniel paused reverently, then glanced up at a barometer, pulling a table of figures from a pocket on his thermal suit. He pointed at a number

with his thick glove, and announced, "We're presently at 12,000 feet. I'd advise that we continually take oxygen from this point on. If we should—" Abruptly an updraft hurled the *Fly*, precariously tossing the basket about. Couldby and Nevers had been holding on to guard ropes, but Wouldby was flung across the gondola. Slumped in a heap he groaned, "Open the valve. Let—" Again the fierce winds jolted the balloon; this time Nathaniel's barometric charts danced off into the winds.

"Hold on, Nathaniel," Nevers demanded.

"The valve! Open the escape valve, Nevers. Get us *down*!" shouted Nathaniel, trying to stand as the basket swung like a pendulum.

Clinging to the side Nevers cautiously moved towards the valve rope. Above him the rope played tricks as it darted within inches of his outstretched fingers, just out of reach. Boldly Nevers jumped for the rope, caught it, and tugged on it vigorously; instantly gas whistled out of the opening. Once more the craft was knocked about by the updraft; Nevers lost his grasp and the thick cord shot upward, intertwining with the ropes overhead. Wouldby's mouth dropped open as he realized what had happened; gas was still hissing from above—the valve was stuck open and the cord was tangled almost ten feet above them!

As the gas escaped, the balloon slowly descended; gradually the harsh winds subsided to the point where Nathaniel could stand erect without clinging to the sides. He commanded, "The rope in the emergency provisions! Benjamin, open the basket of emergency provisions!"

Benjamin did not bother to untie the thin leather straps which held the basket lid shut; instead, he ferociously ripped off the top, yanking from within a twenty-foot length of rope.

"Benjamin Couldby! I've never seen you quite so frenzied!" chuckled Nevers.

"We're dropping! We'll be dashed into the earth!" cried Benjamin.

"We're *descending*, not dropping," assured Nevers. "And I dare say, we'll not be dashed into the earth; for, if anything,



we will splash into the ocean. There's water below us." Benjamin regained his composure.

Except for the uncomfortable hissing of the escaping hydrogen, the air was finally quiet as Nathaniel attempted to free the valve cord by throwing the spare rope upwards. This proved fruitless, so he climbed onto the side of the gondola and, clinging to a thick support rope, slowly inched himself towards the valve cord.

"You are taking this rather lightly, Nevers," Benjamin sputtered.

"There is nothing I can do; Nathaniel's about to save the day. We'll drop some ballast and be on our way to America," replied Nevers. "Slightly off course now, no doubt; perhaps we'll land in Washington instead; no matter—Nathaniel tells me he knows their President Grant."

Nathaniel reached the cord, untangled it and immediately the valve shut. "Hoorah!" shouted Nevers from below. Nathaniel nodded and slowly lowered himself into the basket.

Instantly he began to untie the bags of sand which were fastened to the outside of the gondola. "Quickly! Drop ballast. We are still falling," warned Nathaniel. The other two scrambled to the sides and began loosening the bags.

After two frantic minutes Nevers uttered, "Mine's eleven; Benjamin, you've got the last one."

As Benjamin dropped the last bag, Nathaniel studied the horizon. Moments later he lamented, "We're still descending; we have lost too much gas. Dump the oxygen flasks."

"But Nathaniel," Benjamin protested, "If we drop the flasks and again begin to rise, we will soon need the oxygen!"

Nathaniel shook his head in disagreement. "Gentlemen," he said solemnly, "our choice is a grim one. We may ditch now and hope to be rescued as we float aimlessly in the Atlantic, or we may hope to pass over the Spanish Canary Islands or the Portuguese Azores or Madeira Islands before much more gas escapes from the fabric of the balloon, when we shall be forced to ditch and—"

"And float aimlessly in the Atlantic," interrupted Nevers. "A grim choice indeed. Dump the flasks!"

III

"Fifth letter," exclaimed Nevers. "Ah, Mrs. Dansley Eaton again! Seems her granddaughter has outgrown the need for a baby buggy. Wants a rocking horse."

"Steam-powered, of course," interjected Benjamin.

"Exactly," replied Nevers. "Says the Americans already have one."

Nathaniel looked up from the record book. "Might we interest our well-traveled Mrs. Dansley Eaton in a three-day balloon flight to the Portuguese Madeira Islands?"

Nevers chuckled. "Mmmm. Experienced crew!"

"Guaranteed risk-free at *low* altitudes!" added Benjamin. The three gentlemen had a hearty laugh.

"Nathaniel, have you been reading any Verne lately?" Nevers asked, grinning.

"As a matter of fact," replied Nathaniel, "*Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea. . . .*"

Benjamin wailed, "No, Nathaniel, *no*!"

"You know, Benjamin," Nevers spouted, "I would feel much safer if we bought our friend here a volume of . . . Dickens!"

*MARK C. ALSPAUGH*
*Class of 1976*

# BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

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**MARK C. ALSPAUGH** is a humanities major from Glen Ellyn, Illinois. In addition to writing, his interests include flying, photography, and skiing.

**GARY ELLIOTT**, from Schererville, Indiana, is an international affairs major with concentration in Western European area studies. On the Dean's List twice and the Commandant's List once, C1C Elliott enjoys building models and reading as hobbies.

**GARY M. HOROWITZ** comes from West Sayville, New York. He is a history major and has a special interest in music. He has been on the Dean's List for seven semesters.

**JAMES A. MCCLURE** has published poems in *Icarus* (1971 and 1972), and in 1973 his poem "Phantasyland" won second place. His poetry has also appeared in *Talon* and *Seven Hills Review*. He is from Cincinnati, Ohio; he is majoring in history and concentrating in Soviet area studies. His interests range from Russian culture and literature to soaring. C1C McClure is the first recipient of the Cullen Award.

**WILLIAM C. MUSICK, II**, is a management major with concentration in organizational behavior. He was born in Orlando, Florida, and has for interests reading and music. He is an active member of the Protestant Choir, the Chorale, the Chapel Gleemen, and the Tropological Troubadors.

**DONALD W. SLOAN**, from Philpot, Kentucky, a humanities major, is a second lieutenant in UPT at Vance AFB, Oklahoma. His entries were completed and submitted during the spring semester of his first-class year. His hobbies include photography, writing, and camping.

**CHRISTIAN SEITZ VIEWEG**, a history major, comes from Coloma, Michigan. Flying, sports, and reading are his main interests.