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1986 Spring Quiz & Quill Magazine

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Quiz
Quill

SPRING 86

LITERARY CONTESTS

Quiz and Quill Poetry Contest

First Place.....	Michael Hitt "The Carpenter"
Second Place.....	John Tetzloff "The Girl by the Shore"

Quiz and Quill Critical Essay Contest

First Place.....	Candace Hartzler "A Woman's Place" ¹
Second Place.....	Julie Lynch "Bridges to Inner Reality in Modern Literature"
Honorable Mention.....	Thomas May "The Effects of Deficit Spending: Now and the Future"

Quiz and Quill Personal Essay Contest

First Place.....	Linda Hardesty "Life-Line"
Second Place.....	Linda Hardesty "The House"
Third Place.....	Craig Tovell "The Turkey Bowl"
Honorable Mention.....	Bob Fritz "The New American Dream"

Quiz and Quill Short Story Contest

First Place (tie).....	Michael Hitt "Whispers of the Creek"
	John Tetzloff "Francis Beckwith"
Third Place.....	Craig Tovell "All-American Picnic"

Roy Burkhart Prize in Religious Poetry

First Place.....	Candace Hartzler "Jenni Linker, 1963-85"
Second Place.....	Linda Hardesty "Erica's Galilee"

Walter Barnes Short Story Award (Historical Short Story)

First Place.....	John Tetzloff "The Life of John Chapman"
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¹Printed in Winter Issue of *Quiz and Quill*

QUIZ and QUILL

Otterbein College
Westerville, Ohio

Spring 1986

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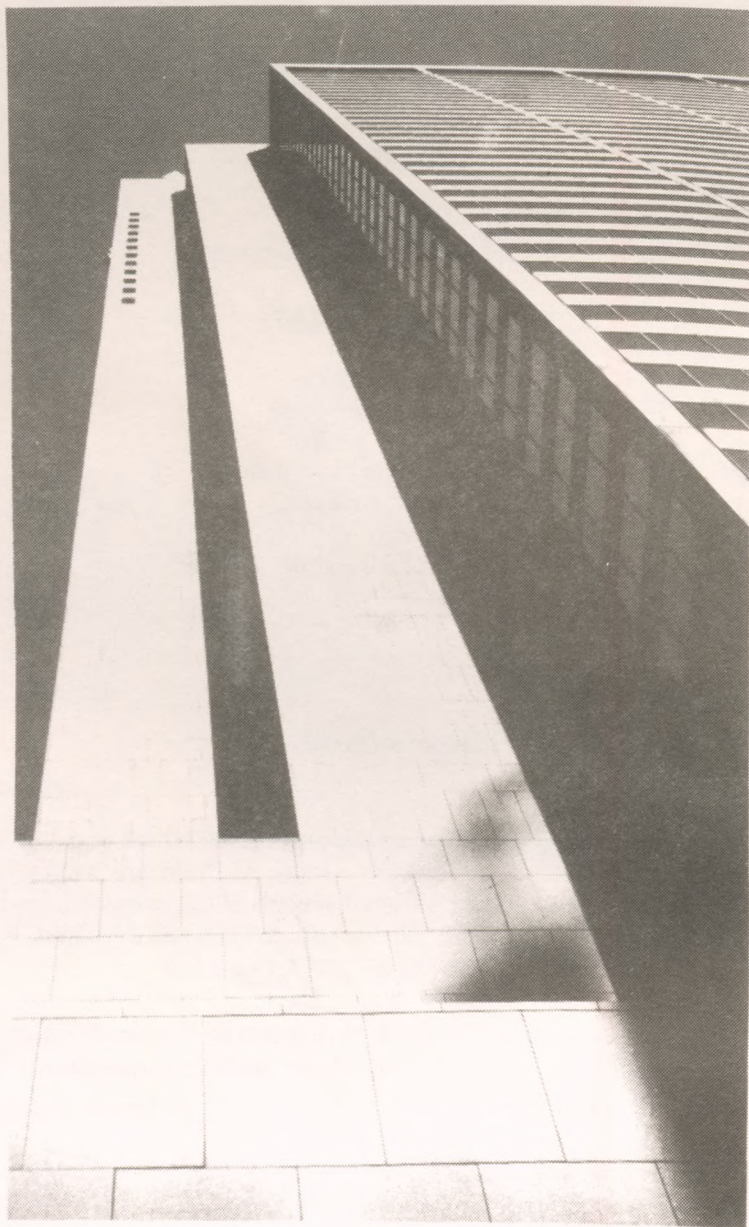
Editor's Note

As you page through this issue of *Quiz and Quill* I think you'll notice something about Otterbein students—some of them are very gifted writers. In this issue we have published several of the winners from the Quiz and Quill literary contests. But we couldn't print all the winners, so be sure to look for more great writing and art next fall.

Without sounding too cliché, I'd like to express my sincere thanks to all the members of Quiz and Quill and all our student contributors. You have given *Quiz and Quill* new life.

I also want to remind and encourage you to attend the sixth quarterly student poetry reading, to be held Thursday, May 15, at 8:15 pm in the Philomathean Room.

Julie Lynch



Susan Howell

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Jenni Linker, 1963-1985

First Place, Roy Burkhart Prize in Religious Poetry

The pain hammers
At the base of Jenni's brain
While she plays the piano
 In celebration of God.

"Another headache," she says,
And stays at her keyboard
Hoping harmony will assail the
 Throb of death beating in her skull.

"No chance for recovery."
Jenni lies reposed and quiet,
Her cheeks stroked by a tormented mother
 Who prays her daughter will die unafraid.

A machine plays the solo now,
Pumping a sustained melody of breaths
While Jenni's sun-baked hands
 Lie quietly on the pale bed sheets.

"Death is an awakening," the poet Shelley says.
So death is Jenni's ethereal ride
To a higher reality, a voyage
 Beyond the shadows of human hate and unrest.

As her spirit is heaved into the universe
Old women in Homes are fed watery puddings
While tied like rag dolls to their chairs
 And Jenni's friends applaud neither Plato nor God.

Candace Hartzler

All-American Picnic

Third Place, Quiz and Quill Short Story Contest

Memorial Day proved to be another non-event. The newspapers and television were all victory clips of World War II and 'Nam excerpts. I did not attend the usual flag waving sessions. I merely spent the holiday with my family and girlfriend, Betsy. Karen, the eldest of the kids, came home to say "Hi!" and report on her prosecuting scumbags in Cincinnati. It had been a while since I had seen her. Her short blonde hair that she kept in a bun was now long and wavy. Margo, my other sister, dropped in from Cleveland to give advice about the futures in advertising. She was looking healthy from her every-evening aerobics class and had a vogue straight-banged hairstyle like the Chinese, though blonde. She returned the Norelco blender she had made off with after Christmas and returned Christmas presents she was dissatisfied with. Mom threw a tantrum about the washloads we deposited in the laundry room. Mom's "This is not a laundromat!" scenario was calmly put down by Dad, the holiday mediator—ending in, "But, Bruce?" "Never mind, Jan, can't you see they're here for the weekend?"

After the initial bloodletting and re-acquainting, we prepared for an Andy Hardy picnic. Instead of playing our Trivial Pursuit games that lasted twelve hours and that after three cups of coffee and ten beers led to verbal abuse for wrong answers and ill feelings that would last until the next holiday—we chose a more pleasant pastime. This holiday was definitely more festive in nature than most of our family get-togethers. Mom prepared potato salad, cole slaw, and deviled eggs, packing them in large gallon Tupperware containers. Margo and Karen packed the condiments, disposable plates, knives, forks, spoons, cups, chips, hot dogs, raw hamburger, and buns. Dad returned from Panzera's Carryout with beer and pop, smothering it with ice in our large Coleman cooler. I went over to Betsy's apartment on north campus at Ohio State and brought her back for the picnic. My other donation to the picnic was my pro frisbee to break out when things got boring or ugly. Dad loaded the trunk of the Jetta with the picnic supplies, and tossed in the Hibachi grill, charcoal briquets, and a half gallon of lighter fluid.

The siblings, Karen, myself, then Margo, crawled into the back seat, sitting shoulder-to-shoulder. Betsy, being a petite ninety-pounder, had the misfortune of having to straddle the stickshift between the parental

squeeze. I am not the smallest any more for the designated bombardier position suspended between the front bucket seats. Betsy had to suffer Mom's third degree, elevator music, and Dad's driving at 40 miles per hour in the fast lane as other motorists relayed sign language that would give Annie Oakley the vapors. We cruised for thirty-five minutes, fifteen more than necessary, but Dad liked the scenic route up 315 along the Scioto River. We got to take in the sights of Mail Pouch barns, rural scenery, roadside carnage, and anything else you might see at fifty stop lights. Margo and Karen had not changed, bitching about elbow room like we were violating each other intentionally on vacation to Cape Cod. At least they did not count out-of-state license plates any more.

As we approached our destination, Alum Creek Reservoir, I could see that the surrounding levee was covered with holiday-goers. They looked like ants around the lip of a sugar bowl. Parking was nearly impossible. But, forty-five minutes later, Dad's keen senses found the ideal niche along a gravel road beneath the roaring dam. It was a windy day and we found ourselves downwind of the dam spray. It was a private spot and no one minded stopping before we had to be surgically removed at the shoulders. I could see myself going temporarily insane, clawing my way out through the sun roof because of an overdose of "beautiful" music and claustrophobia.

Dad pulled the Jetta up to the water's edge. As we climbed out of the car, the heavy whiff of fish cleared my senses like smelling salts. Mom methodically laid out the plastic red-and-white-checked tablecloth on the untrimmed crabgrass, unaware of the deliverance the rest of us had been through. We ritualistically circled the trunk and removed the picnic supplies. Dad cracked the first beer and we shared in conversation while organizing. Margo belittled Karen's profession, "You put people away—what a job—do you get anything out of it other than ulcers?" Betsy, being in such a weird situation, was humored by Mom's relentless questioning about her major and hobbies while the girls carried on. I do not know whether Mom was aware that she had already asked Betsy those questions on numerous occasions. When it was Karen's turn to speak with Betsy, she said, "Bethany, where did you meet Craig?" Starting out a conversation with my ex-girlfriend's name was not my idea of having a clue, or making a good first impression. But, Betsy let it slide by without alarm or any signs of irritation. To end the possible embarrassments I said, "Let's throw the frisbee!" with a tone of pseudo enthusiasm as if everyone had just won something on *The Price is Right*. When the girls and Betsy

headed to open ground, Dad called, "Aren't you guys going to make a fire?" knowing his audience was leaving. We about-faced and brought the Hibachi, charcoal briquets, and lighter fluid over to him in a well-regimented fashion. I poured the charcoal into the Hibachi and Dad said, "What are you doing—don't you know how to make a fire?" We have done this at every picnic since I was two years old. I just said, "No, show me how to make a fire, Dad." He dumped out the briquets and set each one on top of the other in a pyramid like the cannonballs in our town square. I handed him the lighter fluid. Dad squeezed the plastic half-gallon bottle until the petroleum stream ended. The rest of the family knew what was in store as we backed off quickly, but Betsy stood at attention like a good student. While Dad reached into the right pocket for matches, I yanked Betsy back by her shirt-tail. Dad drew the matches out of his pocket, struck the match, and hit the Hibachi from four feet away on the follow-through like a veteran. The grill belched four-foot flames and an oily black mushroom cloud. The people on the other side of the levee probably thought a boat had gone over the dam. Dad stood with a boyish grin and said, "That was to compensate for the mist."

After the pyrotechnic display we went back to tossing the frisbee while Mom and Dad prepared dinner. Margo, Karen, and Betsy stood at the incline some thirty yards from the water and I was ball boy, chasing the poorly thrown frisbees. The girls threw at forty-five degree angles so that the disc wobbled like a wounded goose. Each throw was an errant lob. The times that they threw well sent the frisbee over my head and close to the water. Sweat ran down my face, but the dam spray kept things cool. As we went on tossing, I became tired and close to immobile. Running became walking, and fielding became bending over. I eventually said in frustration, "You rookies, I quit!" With that challenge, macho Margo hurled one at me on a beeline that caught an updraft, sending it sailing over the water. I willed it to blow back as it hovered, then stalled. It slowly dropped in fatigue and I ran into the current, slipping on jagged algae-covered rocks, pushing driftwood aside, getting deeper with each step. I got closer to the dam and discovered why the county engineers were proposing building a hydroelectric plant. I took one ill-planned step, slipped, and got sucked away with the current. With the current went my Hawaiian print baggies. I had forgotten the frisbee and the concept of survival, flailing at my shorts that were moving faster than my swimming was taking me. Fifty yards down the river I came upon an eddy. There were two old black fishermen carp pooling. They stood without concern, smiling with my baggies in hand. "Going for a swim?" one of them uttered jokingly. In desperation, I said, "Can I have those?" I walked up to the fishermen, crouching low in the water, being modest. They pitched my pants to me.

When I pulled them on underwater I felt something slimy and freaked. I threw my shorts to land where my concerned family was standing. Dad said, "You used to like to catch crayfish." Mom, being the only truly worried family member, threw me the red-and-white-checked tablecloth. I wrapped it around my waist and emerged in embarrassment. Standing on shore Dad shook out my slimy shorts and handed them to me. I told them, "I'm going up to the bathroom" and uncomfortably shuffled up the hill. Margo screamed in the background, "Call me a rookie."

At the top of the levee there was a bathroom connected to the dam. It looked like a bunker from the shore of Normandy, made from the cement about the same time that the dam was constructed. I was getting closer as the human aroma of public bathrooms hit me. I walked through the crude doorway that led into a dark cell. It was naturally lighted through the doorway and a shoebox-sized hole in the wall. I could barely make out what the designers would call toilets—two holes in the floor that led to a sloppy death if one was not nimble. I walked to the corner where there was a urinal. It had a dry pink hockey puck-like sweet tart in it. There were spider webs with horse flies caught in them, fighting for life while nickel-sized bloodsuckers made their way for the kill. There was no shower or sink for me to rinse myself or my baggies. I released the tablecloth from my death grip, shook out my shorts, and pulled on the wet, slimy mess. I headed towards the door with the tablecloth trailing when I caught my right shoulder on something. It was an old hand dryer. I backed up and looked it over. I kicked the nozzle with my foot and to my surprise, in that hell-hole, it worked. I stuck my head under the warm stream of air, making my hair crisp from the film left behind from the dirty water. I turned around and dried my rear with it. And, on round three, I stood on my tip toes with bowed legs drying off my crotch. The clinging shorts were dry, but as I looked up my Dad was standing there and said, "Are you having a good time?" I dropped to my heels and told him I was just drying off. "I wondered why it was taking you so long--dinner's ready." Dad walked away, I trailed, and the tablecloth trailed. As we got to the bottom of the hill I was greeted by a round of applause from the girls. Betsy said, "Nice catch" and handed me the frisbee.

We sat in the grass joking about how stupid I was and ate dinner. As the evening went on, the wind diminished and the mosquitoes came out, ending a long day. We packed the picnic supplies, crawled into the Jetta, and drove down the gravel road to get onto 315 for the scenic ride home, listening to elevator music and smelling fish aroma from my body. Whenever anybody asks me if I would like to play frisbee I just tell them, "No thanks, I'm just a rookie."

Craig Tovell

The New American Dream

Honorable Mention, Quiz and Quill Personal Essay Contest

This decade has been heralded as that of the return of the American Dream, for a number of reasons. The primary one is that the drive to succeed is back. Ambition is no longer a word to be sneered at.

A look around Otterbein spells this out. Good students are no longer dismissed as “nerds.” Straight A’s are in—in fact, there are two kinds of students at this college: four-points, and students who say they have four points. Faced with spiraling college tuition, most students (myself included) want to get the best education for their ten grand-plus. The days of *Animal House* are gone, let alone the legendary “tune in, turn on, drop out” epoch. The college student of the ’80s is much more interested in earning an MBA than taking LSD.

College, of course, is just a microcosm of American life, and I won’t insult your intelligence by telling you how much the craving for money and power is back in our society. Our country is once again the “Land of Opportunity.”

This renaissance is all fine and dandy—I must admit that I’m part of it. I’ve had to resolve my own champagne-tastes-with-beer-career-interests conflict by changing my major several times and cooling my enthusiasm for a literary career. But sometimes I ask myself a crucial question: Does this American Dream really exist?

Are we *really* a new breed of high-reaching, productive people, or do we just enjoy posing as such?

First, I wonder about the leaders of this new wave of upward mobility—the punjabs of American business. Ayn Rand once said that “productive work is the road of man’s unlimited achievement and calls upon the highest attributes of his character...”¹ What do some of today’s business giants produce? What has John DeLorean produced, besides the modern-day Edsel which bears his name and a few juicy headlines in the *National Enquirer*? How about the current darling of the press, Lee Iacocca? There is something to be said for the man, I must admit. It takes a good deal of smooth talking to persuade the government to bail out your failing

company. The Chrysler seems to be running on hot air, like a balloon. People who own one and pay taxes have bought their cars twice, so I hope they run better than hot-air balloons. The real heroes of the business world are the entrepreneurs of old. Look to Henry Ford I and his industrial brethren for inspiration—they knew what it was like to work for a living.

Second, if America is a great land of opportunity, where a kid from anywhere can grow up to be President, then why is it so difficult for some of those kids to get jobs? I've seen some incredible horror stories come out of the last two Otterbein graduating classes: computer whizzes who end up in fast food, business grads who now make keys at Sears, and the list goes on and on. The goodies seem to be reserved for those who are currently in command, regardless of their competence, with little left over for the latest generation of upwardly mobiles. Imagine my chagrin when I took my vocabulary out to look for a summer job last year. After asking one manager if he was hiring, I was brilliantly informed (verbatim quote, folks!), "We done did it."

Perhaps this frustration is taking its toll on my generation. Which brings me to my last point—there's a certain impatience among my fellow overachievers. They're obsessed with the pot of gold, but they don't realize how long the rainbow really is. I am constantly reminded of a scene in *Risky Business* (a movie which sums up what it's like to grow up in the '80s better than anything else I've seen so far). The protagonist, Joel (played by Tom Cruise), is sitting in the local diner with some of his high school friends, talking about the future. One of his buddies says he wants to be a dermatologist because "they make a lot of money just for popping zits." Joel asks the group en masse, "Doesn't anybody here want to accomplish anything?" The response: "No, Joel. Make money. Make *lots* of money." Not that there's anything wrong with making money, but you have to give so much of yourself to expect anything in return—something many of the new American Dreamers have yet to figure out.

I realize that the views in this essay may be controversial. If anyone wishes to comment or complain, I can be found in my room or at the library. I'll be in there giving...till it proverbially hurts.

And the only zits I'll be popping will be my own.

¹Avn Rand. *The Virtue of Selfishness*. p. 26

Bob Fritz

Erica's Galilee

Second Place, Roy Burkhart Prize in Religious Poetry

Her hand,
Half the size of mine,
Reached for me.
"I have to show you my special place."

We walked,
Down the path,
To the edge of the pond.
"Don't say anything," she pleaded.

Silently,
We sat on a wooden bench,
Shaded by stucco condos.
"Mother, I believe Jesus was baptized here."

I contained the urge
To laugh aloud.
We were surrounded by paganism
As only Florida can be mid-winter.

White skirts flounced on the courts.
Warm, oiled bodies dotted the shore.
And I had been thinking
About a drink with an orange slice.

The heavens were invisible in the bright light and the heat.
No planets twinkled off the horizon.
No black sky pressed insignificance on me.
And my Bible was north, safe on my nightstand.

But she was not on vacation.
And I hadn't come far enough to escape her truth.
I told her what she already knew.
"Yes, He was."

Maybe not right here, I thought
But here--just over the ocean's edge
A little beyond as far as I could see.
I turned and watched Jordan reflect the sunshine of her soul
on me.

Linda Hardesty

The Carpenter

First Place, Quiz and Quill Poetry Contest

Knuckles like dried apples
turn the door knob.
Your face is etched
like the roads
on the hills
where you built houses.

In your house
of polished wood
everything has its place.
Memories are stored
in newspapers and mothballs.
This box has your childhood,
that closet your married life.
There is a corpse in that drawer;
we will not open that today.
You are the house,
your windows paned
with spectacles.

You unpack memories.
Your grandson
will place them
in the closets
of the life
he will build
with the tools
you gave.

Michael Hitt

The Life of John Chapman

First Place, Walter Barnes Short Story Award

I.

"...most important fact is that he was a devoted religious man. He was quiet, unassuming, yet hard-working. And what kept him going—through his endless, thankless journeys—was this devotion to God. He knew, above all else, that he was doing God's work, that he was serving Him. And surely as important to him as his work was prayer and his worn leather Bible. So whereas in the eyes of those of his time he may have seemed an eccentric, crazy old man who wandered through the Indian lands, he was in reality nothing more than a true Christian. In this way he...Bobby...Bobby Thomas! Would you be so kind as to tell us all what is so interesting outside that window? Surely it must be very important. Turn around and pay attention...Now, what was I saying? Oh yes. In many ways John Chapman typified the early American religious spirit, which emphasized one's right to worship as one pleased. And it was his religious devotion which, perhaps more than any other characteristic, has made him such an inspirational figure..."

It was a cool, clear morning. A light, wispy layer of fog floated over the roof of the forest, drifting in and out of the dark green branches of the trees. In the east, across the valley, he could see the sun, low in the sky, beginning to burn a red hole in the fog.

He stood in an open field on a hillside overlooking the wide valley. Below him a broad mist-covered river ran straight through the heart of the flat valley floor. The little meadow in which he stood had only a hint of the morning fog—thin wisps that had begun shifting in a growing breeze.

He was happy this morning. As he walked down the sloping meadow, he looked out over the vast valley, with all its forests and fields and promise. Unconsciously, he walked very slowly so that he could prolong this exceptional view. He loved, especially, to cross the hills and look out over the lands below. Even the patch of daisies at the bottom of the meadow did not distract him from the panorama of the valley.

When he reached the edge of the forest, through which he would continue his descent to the river, he was suddenly unwilling to go on. He had the urge to simply stand and stare at the valley. An anxious feeling had come over him to preserve that moment, to halt his journey at that instant.

This feeling came to him now and then. He did not notice the strangeness of it: he did not wonder that this feeling should come, without warning, in the middle of his ceaseless, restless journeys. If he had, it might have seemed contrary to his nature. But he did not question it at all—did not bring it to his conscious mind.

A smile was on his face. He felt lazy, and did not move. Yet his imagination raced over the forest, across the wild river, and into the unspoiled hills beyond. He was amazed by the rich green forest. He was mystified by the wide river, which was spotted with rising, swirling columns of fog. And he was thrilled by the ascending, tree-covered hills beyond. He moved one foot slightly, and suddenly a thick black snake rolled off a rock in front of him and tumbled down the hill and vanished in the trees. A chill went up his arms.

This lazy emotion, which had suddenly come upon him and held him motionless, was one of thankfulness. For long moments after, he stood perfectly still and watched, content in the sight of the land, and in joy over the thought of when he would move on, when he would go into the forest, when he would continue to walk through God's endless garden.

II.

"From this unparalleled Christian devotion, all other characteristics stemmed. One of the things he was famous for was his love of animals. Like everything else about him, in this love of animals he seems to have exceeded the normal capacities of the average man. As legend has it, he fearlessly walked through the wild country west of the Appalachians—a country of wolves, bears, snakes, and who knows what else—without once meeting with harm from these beasts. This was not luck. Rather, it was the result of his love for all animals. Just like the man who removed the thorn from the paw of the lion, he cared deeply for God's creatures, and sought to care for them and help them when he could. Many were the times when he gave food to animals that he came upon when he nursed a

wounded creature back to health, or when he saved some helpless animal from a larger foe. As a result, as he grew older, and became a common sight in the wild Ohio Valley, it is said that there developed a kind of primitive understanding between God's creatures and himself, such that as he went through the forests the animals came to love him just as he loved them, and would flock to him and follow him, and actually protect him and share their lairs with him. Thus through his Christian example, Chapman left us a valuable lesson: Give love and you shall receive love, even from the simple creatures of the earth..."

He saw the bear before it saw him. It was standing in the middle of a small brook that ran down the hill splitting a grassy meadow full of yellow, purple, and mostly white flowers. He had just emerged silently from a stand of trees. He stopped and stood very still. A hundred yards away the bear continued splashing clumsily in the shallow water, turning over rocks and almost playfully chasing some small creature through the water. The bear was unaware of the man.

For a long time, he watched the black bear splash and play. He smiled. And he waited patiently for the bear to notice him. He did not want to surprise him.

As he knew it would, the bear soon ceased his unconscious splashing, and raised his head to the wind. Suddenly he stood very still in the middle of the stream, the only movement a slight bobbing of his raised nose as he struggled quite consciously to identify a new smell that was in the air. In a few moments he had discovered the direction, and he turned and faced the man who stood still by the woods. Then, finally spotting him, he stood on his hind legs and raised himself to his full height. His front limbs hung limp in front of him. It was a simple statement of territory.

The man watched the bear's movements. Unconsciously, he read them. He understood that the bear was not particularly hungry, but was rather spending a lazy day wandering through his woods. Further, there was no rage in the bear, as was the case on rare, unpredictable occasions. So the man walked deliberately toward the stream, following the stand of trees which extended to meet the water some distance below. The man still smiled slightly, and watched the large bear more in admiration than in fear. Nevertheless, he kept near the trees.

As he began to walk, the bear began to grumble and cough. He fell to all fours, and climbed out of the stream. He came out on the same side as the man. But he went no closer.

The man walked confidently toward the stream. He walked tall and rather carelessly. And although he kept his eye on the bear, he did not stare. On the surface, he did not appear overly interested in the bear's presence. The bear began to grumble more. The man crossed the brook. Now the bear was behind him. He did not look back, but began walking up a grassy slope on the other side, toward the woods. Here there were no trees.

The bear began to growl and spit at this man who turned his back on him. But he did not cross the stream to follow him. Instinctively he knew that the man had no fear. The man was sure of himself.

As the man approached the woods he stopped and turned around once more. The bear was now absently wandering through the flowered grasses of the meadows, his face sniffing the ground, looking for small bits of food. Every once in a while the bear raised its head and glanced toward him. But he had returned to his lazy, meandering ways. The bear also was not afraid. After one last glance, and one last smile, the man turned and plunged back into the cool forest ahead of him.

III.

"...also was an indispensable aid to the early settlers in their struggles against the Indians. Through his extensive journeys, he of course became an expert on the Indian tribes in the Ohio Valley. Therefore, he was able to keep the settlers he met informed of the movements of the various tribes, of their dispositions, and of wars and hostilities that they should avoid. In a strange and dangerous land, filled with unpredictable savages, who might prove placid or violent, he was a much-needed voice of intelligent guidance in the pioneers' efforts at survival.

"One exciting incident is especially famous. Perhaps it might even interest you, Bobby. During one period, Chapman was staying in a settlement of farmers in northern Ohio when they were suddenly attacked by a group of warring Indians. It was the middle of the night, and they were awakened to horrible war cries from painted savages carrying tomahawks and knives. In the confusion, Chapman managed to escape into the

woods, where he ran barefooted for fifteen miles to get help from a nearby settlement. He arrived, his feet scratched and bloody, and nearly dead from exhaustion, in time to get the reinforcements which saved the settlement of frontiersmen..."

No moon, no stars lit the black forest that night. Instinctively, he found his way through the tangle of branches and underbrush. His chest and legs hurt—his legs with a dull, heavy weariness, and his chest with a sharp pain that shot through him with each pounding step, and with each gasping breath.

He ran without consciousness. All he knew was terror of the forest. At no time could he see more than a few feet ahead. Black branches, bushes, trees, shapes, flew by his wide, desperate eyes, appearing and disappearing quickly. He tripped constantly, but did not slow down. From nowhere branches ripped at his clothes, and at his flesh, stinging him, throwing him off balance. He ran wildly, holding his arms in front of his face, warding off a few of the branches. When he fell, or ran into an unmovable object, his feet did not stop moving.

He ran with the unconscious knowledge that the Indians were quicker, were stronger, and knew the land better than he. In the darkness, which faded to complete blackness in the depths of the trees, the Indians might be easily catching him, while he struggled blindly onward. They might be mere steps behind him.

Now and then his mind returned to the cabin where he had slept when the Indians had attacked. And when it did, it was the same vision that flashed in front of him—a vision of a savage face, painted red, grinning insanely over the body of the man who had built the cabin. As if it were real, he saw the bloody head, the look on the wife's face, and most vividly the terrible, paint-enhanced grin of the Indian. Each time the vision came to his mind, he ran faster through the night. And he ran for what seemed like hours.

But after a while the blind terror began to subside, as if it were such a powerful emotion that it could not be sustained for long. He was still afraid, but he began to think more calmly. Then he gained his second wind, and his running became more controlled. He learned to step high as he ran. Gradually he began to feel a great power within him. He

seemed to glide in long bounds through the woods. He did not trip as often, and he learned to let his body go the way the branches pushed him. His legs, which had grown deathly tired, suddenly felt powerful, as if they had become so exhausted that they had lost the ability to protest, to feel pain, and so worked on mechanically. He also learned to close his eyes to avoid the branches that poked at his head, opening them only briefly every few seconds to scan the path before him.

And with this dull, mechanical second wind, his terror came to be replaced by a deep sadness. In all his wanderings, in all his journeys, these times of conflict, of human violence, were the only ones which evoked this feeling in him. Again the vision from the cabin came to his mind. He felt remorse, and almost hatred at the stupid, evil act of the Indians. But at the same time he felt anger at the others, who tore down the Indians' trees, who killed their animals, who showed them no respect, but rather shot them from a distance with their invulnerable guns. He felt the Indians' frustration, their confusion. And he understood their painted grins and their savage cries of anguish and false triumph.

Suddenly, in the midst of his mindless running, and of his distracted regrets and fears, he plunged into a clearing and flew to the ground in a heap. He had not expected the opening and he fell from his own momentum. Exhausted, he climbed to his feet, the effort of rising suddenly requiring more energy than that of his mechanical running. His second wind was gone. He stood there, swaying, and looked toward a faint light that came from the top of a small hill. Then he saw that there were many cabins around him. He had reached help. He tried to call out, but all that came was a fluid gasp. He paused, and coughed, and spit, then yelled as loud as he could. He stood swaying and waiting, his mind slowly going blank. Then suddenly a man was holding his shoulders, asking questions that he could not comprehend. Behind the man he could see a woman and two small children standing in the lighted doorway of a cabin. The woman held both children close to her side. Her face was motionless, severe. Then the lit opening began to blur. He looked at the man. The man's face showed fear. A dim awareness of his purpose hit him, and he said: "Indians." He stood staring blankly. Then suddenly he knew that he was crying. He cried in relief and exhaustion, and in infinite sadness. Then he saw the blackness of the cloudless sky, and slumped into the man's arms.

IV.

"...was most noted, of course, for his apple orchards. Throughout his life he wandered the western wilderness planting tree after tree wherever he found a hospitable spot. To this day one can see these wild apple trees dotting the countryside, still producing delicious fruit. It seemed as if Chapman had been given a mission in life: to precede the early settlers into the wilderness and spread God's manna to feed them when they came. Many were the pioneers who enjoyed an unexpected treat in the form of beautiful apple blossoms in the spring, or bright red apples in the fall. But his apples were more than treats: they were an important staple in many settlers' diets when other food was scarce. So once again, his Christian concern was his chief motivation..."

Unconsciously he stopped as he stepped out of the trees onto a sand bar. To the north, the river wound through open land. The place was familiar. Across the fields he saw the powdery white clouds, like puffs of cotton, floating above the grasses. An almost imperceptible smile touched his tanned face. It was spring, and the trees were thick with blossoms. He had been to this place before.

He walked along the river's edge until he came to the flatlands. There he passed into the tall grass and headed toward the trees. In the grass and brush around him pairs of robins and cardinals hopped and scolded as he came near. He liked walking through grasslands: he liked being immersed in the lush growth full of teeming life: he liked the sensation of being in a swirl of activity.

He reached the edge of the orchard. Over the years, the trees had grown tall and full. He grinned. He grinned with pride. He had planted them. He had grown them. He had given them life, and order. There in the low flatlands of the river he had made his mark, his creation.

And his creation was beautiful. He never ceased admiring the apple tree in bloom. And before him there were a hundred: tall, healthy, full, heavy with white blossoms. In the meadow they were the crowning glory, beside which even the daisy and the daffodil paled. And they were his. They were his purpose in life. In the long, trackless wilds which were his

home, these patches of ordered beauty gave him the stability, the inspiration, and the confidence in his own creative powers that he needed to be happy. He walked through the orchard, feeling the gnarled roots under his feet. The trees were in straight, even rows.

As he walked, he thought with pleasure how he had, many summers ago, planted small seedlings in the black earth, how he had cleared the ground around them, how he had watered them for days afterward. He thought of how, if not for him, these grasslands would be wild, untamed, and unfruitful. Now they were fertile and useful to man and to beast. He was happy and satisfied as he walked through his trees. He was content. Behind his life, and his every waking moment, was the unconscious knowledge of orchards spread throughout the wilderness.

V.

"...finally his time came, and he was taken away to greener pastures. Legend has it that he fell asleep one beautiful afternoon under one of his apple trees, and passed quietly and happily away. And although it is not for us to judge, I am certain that he was carried away to a better place. One would like to imagine that he went to a place where he could live forever under the shade of apple blossoms, with juicy red fruit always at his fingertips, and with the love of God constantly surrounding him."

The voice paused and sighed, as if satisfied to have completed its story. Then it went on.

"And that's the story of Johnny Appleseed. His life is an example that is truly inspiring. Or at least it should be. Bobby! I cannot believe that you have not been paying attention. It is important that you learn about the great men in our history. It is they who created this country and made it great, and it is their example that must guide us in keeping it great!"

The small, blonde-haired boy sat by the window and looked out at the playground. He heard the teacher's words, yet they did not touch him. They were always the same, and so though he heard them they had no meaning for him. He knew only that he did not agree with the teacher. He never had. He had no reason that he could name. He knew only that somehow he did not agree with her, did not agree with what she tried to make him feel, or with how she saw him. So he did not struggle with her.

He did not protest. He only looked out of the window at the world outside. Beyond the playground there was a grassy field, with a baseball diamond, and woods beyond. For hours he stared out the window every day. He liked best to stare at the woods, with its deep suggestion of mystery in its tangled underbrush, in its thick depth. There was a quickening in his eyes, as of expectation.

The feeling had struck him suddenly one afternoon. It was the feeling of weakness, of physical failure. He did not feel any definite pain or sickness. But he suddenly felt tired, and weak. And strangely, with this sickness he felt a deep sadness. Unconsciously he knew something was very wrong with him.

The next morning he felt better. He seemed to regain his strength and desire. But by midday he had to stop walking and rest. A dull fear began to awaken in him. He knew he was dying. The next day he was again exhausted, his body was filled with a dull ache, and his mind was in confusion. Again he was so tired by the afternoon that he had to stop to rest.

So he sat down beneath one of his apple trees. It was autumn, and the branches hung very low to the ground, each full of the red apples. Across the ground ripe apples had fallen into the grass. The odor of ripe, rotting apples hung thick and powerful in the cool autumn air. The smell evoked strong memories in him—memories of feelings, of emotions, not of times or places. The memories made him sad, yet oddly gave him at the same time a tremendous feeling of happiness, almost of contentment. As he sat under the tree, at certain moments he thought that it was enough to think of these memories, of these emotions that his life of travelling had given him. At moments he was content.

Yet as he smelled the rich apples and felt the emotions of his past, he thought that he was not ready. He did not feel finished. He had lived happy, it was true. He had been free. He had accomplished much. He had created a valuable system of apple orchards across virgin woods, and his apples would give pleasure and sustenance to many who would come later. He had set a goal for himself and his life, and he had accomplished it. Yet he was not ready for his life to end. Although he was thankful, he wanted more.

Nevertheless, he did not regain his strength. Once, as he sat with his back against his tree, he tried to get up and go on. But he could not rise. A brief pang of terror hit him. The state of being unable to move his body, to function as he had functioned all of his life, suddenly frightened him. He had always been healthy.

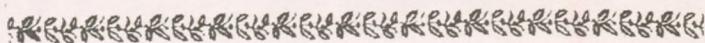
Many different thoughts went through his mind. At times he thought with joy of his life and journeys, at times he told himself that he would get better, and at other times he struggled to suppress terror. Once he cried in helpless fear. He was surprised that it had happened so quickly.

With terrible swiftness he lost strength in the afternoon sun. He was old, but he had always been healthy. Was it really happening? He had always thought it would happen later. A chill struck him. And his thoughts went on and on.

In the late afternoon, with the low sun shining brightly through the leaves of the apple trees, he felt himself dying. He fought off sleep. He was afraid. If only he just keep staying awake...

Then a sort of calm came over him. His last thoughts were colored by fear, but not despair. For despite his fear, he closed his eyes holding onto the same vision that had driven his life since before he could remember—the vision of something beyond, something unknown, something vast and good, of which he would surely be a part.

John Tetzloff



Ruth

I took her last picture in June.
She sat on her husband's lap,
While he prayed her colostomy bag
Wouldn't break or overflow.
They both said "cheese" and laughed.

He brought the picture to the funeral,
And rubbed it thin between his thumbs
While his tears coursed over their smiles.

Vickie Kayati

Whispers Of The Creek

First Place, Quiz and Quill Short Story Contest

Melvin Wood stood on the bank of the creek and watched water ripple and hiss over rock. The creek carved its way through the land in front of the old farmhouse in which Melvin had grown up. No one lived there now, and the house watched over the creek with white drapes hanging in its hollow sockets. Wooded hills rose on all sides around the house, and a gravel road followed the bank of the creek through the hills.

Melvin was now sixty-five, and he smiled as he remembered his youth when he waded and splashed in the creek. He took his shoes and socks off, placed his socks within his shoes, then carefully rolled his pant-legs just beyond his knees which looked like large knots on gnarled, pale tree trunks. Cold mud oozed between his toes. He stepped into the water. The water seemed to be made of splintered crystal; it pierced his skin and pricked his bones until the chill made his feet numb. Melvin guided his feet through jagged rocks. He stopped when the water reached his shins and gazed downstream where the water became turbulent and disappeared behind a bend.

Somehow the creek seemed strangely altered. It grew louder and more fierce—its whispers became taunting screams, hissing and howling. For the first time it seemed threatening. The current tugged at his skinny legs. The water swelled around his knees, and before he could turn to wade back to the bank, it swept his feet out from under him. His body slipped into the creek which swallowed and engulfed him. The water coiled around him and swept him in the currents. He was battered against swelling waves and broken stones and any effort to struggle against the currents was useless. Finally, water gushed around his head and entered his mouth. His lungs were filled with it, and his helpless, sodden body churned beneath the currents.

"Grandpa," a voice called over the roar of water. "Grandpa," it beckoned again. "Grandpa, where are you?"

The old man began to rise from the depths; he tossed and turned to shake the water from him.

"Grandpa," the voice grew louder, nearer and nearer.

Finally, he rose from the water and opened his eyes to see the blurred figure of his grandson. The sound of rushing water began to fade to the ticking of a clock.

"Oh, were you asleep?" Johnathan loomed over his grandfather, who was lying on the living room couch.

"Yes," the old man gargled, "I think," he cleared his throat, "I think I was."

"Is it true, Grandpa?"

"Is what true?"

"The Old Farm, did Aunt Josie really sell it?"

Now he remembered the reason he had taken a nap. He had spent all morning talking with his lawyer trying to get the land back. "The Old Farm" was what his family called the land with the farmhouse and the creek.

"Yes, I'm afraid it's true."

"Why? How could she do that? I thought you and Mom were going to buy that land to keep it in the family. Wasn't that the agreement?"

"What agreement?"

"Didn't Josie promise to keep it in the family?" Johnathan's blue eyes burned with confusion and anger. His red cheeks blended into his fire-red hair.

"Yes, we all agreed on that when we sold our shares to her, and she knew that your mother and I wanted to buy it."

"Then why did she sell it? She knows how much that land means to you. That land's like a part of you. You grew out of that land like the trees."

Melvin rubbed his hand over his forehead. His fingers explored the cracks that splintered his flesh.

"I don't know why she sold it," Melvin's voice shook with despair. "I told her we would buy it when she needed to sell it."

"Well, who'd she sell it to?"

"Jack Price," Melvin said matter-of-factly.

"Jack Price! He owns the lumber yard. He'll strip the hills!" Johnathan began pacing the floor, making his grandfather dizzy.

"I don't know what we can do about it. I've seen my lawyer. It seems that oral promises don't hold in court. I feel so helpless."

"Well, I'm going to do somethin'." Johnathan stomped towards the door.

"Where you goin'?" Melvin shouted.

"Gonna' talk to Jack Price and some other people; explain what happened, see if I can get it back."

"You be careful, now. People 'round here don't like city people pokin' in their business."

The door slammed.

Melvin got up from his couch. His frame was small, and his back was sloped. He went out the back door of his house, climbed into his car, and drove toward the Old Farm. He clenched the steering wheel with his thick fingers (his white knuckles with their deep crevices resembled apples that dried during the autumn on the branch), and he guided his car along a serpentine highway that weaved through a valley and snaked by corn fields and barnyards. He turned down the dirt road that passed the Old Farm; gravel popped and dust rose from his tires. He stopped his car in front of the farm house. The green tin roof sagged in the middle and the wood siding had become grey and weathered. Over the hum of the car engine he could hear the hiss of the creek that flowed in front of the house.

He drove across the creek on a bridge, then turned into the large yard of the Old Farm. He passed the tool sheds that were the last remnants of the farm buildings. The barn, chicken coop and potato cellar had been destroyed long ago. He parked his car beneath the shade of a large oak tree, and trod to the farmhouse. As he stepped onto the wooden porch, a hollow thud echoed beneath his feet. He sat upon the porch swing; its rusty chain chirped under his weight. For a moment Melvin looked at the grey dilapidated wood of the old house; then he gazed at the creek. The sun sparkled on ripples. The creek was not as high as it had been in his dream, but the creek's whisper still hissed clearly in the summer air.

He thought about his grandson, Johnathan, who was always spunky and impossible to tie down. Even when he played in the creek as a boy, Johnathan was independent and active. He was a young man of twenty-three now, but while gazing at the water glistening and surging, Melvin could almost see Johnathan at the bank of the creek after a family picnic, and in the creek's voice he heard Johnathan's words.

"Mom, can I play in the creek?" little Johnathan yelled back to the picnic table where his mother, grandmother, and his little brother and sister gathered damp paper plates stained by baked beans and steak juices.

"No, not this evening, Johnathan, its getting chilly," his mother shouted.

"But I need to wash my hands." Johnathan held up his hands encrusted with mud from the woods. He brushed his hands against his sun-burned cheeks, "And my face, too." His tiny eyes burned with intensity, two blue ponds in a blazing landscape. He could not have been more than ten years old.

"You can wash your hands at the pump."

"But this way is more natural—just like the Indians. That's why we come here anyway, to be close to nature; that's what you said. And besides I wanted to build a dam today."

"It's not that cold out, honey," Melvin said from his lawn chair beside the picnic table.

"Okay, I don't care. Just don't get your pants wet," she said with a forced indifference.

Johnathan sat on the muddy bank, yanked his shoes from his feet, then with one quick fluid motion pulled his tube socks off and threw them behind him like streamers. Then he slid his pantlegs past his knees, stood up, and walked directly into the water, wavering to keep his balance on the algae-covered rocks.

By the time he was in the creek, Sam and Ann, his younger brother and sister, were at the bank. They too took off their shoes and socks with their brother's enthusiasm, but they paused, with bare feet, dipping their toes into the water and shivering. They eased into the water, and the dam-building ritual began. Johnathan would pick big rocks out of the creek and place them in a row while Sam and Ann placed little rocks in the crevices.

Ann, who was only six years old, stooped down to place a rock on the dam, and her little buttocks dipped into the current. Feeling her pants suddenly become damp, she raised her bottom and lowered her head like a see-saw and her long hair dipped into the water like the ends of a paint brush in paint.

"Whups," she murmured.

"Hey look, Johnathan, Ann peed her pants," Sam shouted. A large smile parted his cherubic cheeks.

"Did not!" Ann insisted.

"Hey Grandpa, look at our dam," Johnathan exclaimed. Sam and Ann looked up to see their grandpa standing by the creek watching them.

"It doesn't do any good," Sam said with hands on his hips. "Water just slips right through."

"I used to do the same thing when I was young, and I couldn't stop the water either. Neither could your mother."

"Maybe if we used mud and sticks like the beavers do in the movies," Ann added.



"Don't think that will work either," Melvin said, "just can't stop this creek." He watched his grandchildren continue their dam building. The current passed over their tiny feet and swelled around their legs like time caressing the trees.

Sam, imbalanced, waved his arms. Johnathan saw that he was going to fall, and he grabbed his brother's arm, but it was no use. Sam fell into the water and pulled his older brother down with him. Sam stood up quickly while Johnathan just sat in the water feeling the currents filling his pants.

"Oh no," Sam said, "what's Mom going to say." He looked down at his sodden pants that dripped and clung to his small frame. "Maybe she won't notice."

"No, I don't think she'll notice, do you Grandpa?" Johnathan began to laugh. Then Sam, Ann and Melvin joined in the laughter. Like school children in class they tried to suppress the laughter. It gargled in their throats and resounded in their nostrils. Finally, it burst out into the air and flowed downstream with the sounds of the creek.

The voice of the creek rang in Melvin's ears and called him back. Once again he was sitting on the porch swing. His smile receded as he thought of the reason Johnathan had come to him that afternoon. "He's still a dam-builder," he thought.

As far back as Melvin could remember, the creek had always had water flowing through it. On the hottest days when even the sun seemed stagnant in the sky the creek flowed, bringing the cool evening from the hills. Melvin could remember only one occasion when the creek had been still. One winter evening the creek was frozen stiff, and Melvin had lain down in the snow beside it, and in the cold silence he had been convinced that time itself had frozen to a frigid halt.

Melvin listened to the creek.

"There you are still singing away, still not letting me know your little secret."

The hiss of the creek had always mystified Melvin. The sound had soothed him to sleep at night when he was a boy, but sometimes the hisses seemed cruel to him. While he sat listening, another memory came to him with the whispers of the creek.

"Maudy, Maudy!" Melvin ran into his oldest sister's room. He was only a young boy. "Maudy, can you tell what it's saying?" Melvin stood beside Maudy, who sat before a mirror brushing her hair.

"Who's saying what, Melvin?"

"The creek, the creek, can you tell what it's saying?"

"What are you talking about?"

Melvin became frantic. "The creek is saying something, only I can't tell what it is. Sometimes I can tell, but not tonight. Tonight it's pokin' fun at me, laughing. See, do you hear it? Listen real careful."

"Go to bed, Melvin, you're a silly child. Just go to bed and don't listen to it."

The aged Melvin smiled at the memory.

"Maybe, you never said anything," he said aloud. "Maybe I just found things I wanted you to say, and when I changed my mind, I told myself you were always saying something different, and I misunderstood."

Melvin remembered another evening by the creek. A summer evening. Melvin walked out onto the porch. The screen door mewed and slammed behind him. The light of the window cast a glow around the house. Melvin was a young man of twenty, and his body felt strong and limber. He walked to his fiancée's silhouette. He could tell the dark figure in the bonnet was she although he could not see any of her features.

"Well?" she said looking up from the creek, her voice full of apprehension and anticipation.

"They still don't want us to get married. I tried everything I could."

"Why, I don't understand."

"There's nothin' to understand. It don't make no sense. They don't want me to marry you because you're from the city. They say you're an outsider."

"Outsider? What's that supposed to mean? Oh Melvin, what are we going to do?"

"We'll just have to get married without my family's blessing."

"Outsiders," how he hated that word. He had heard it many times as he grew up. Outsiders meant those few city folks that came by in automobiles and made fun of his family.

"Melvin...Melvin!" a small voice rang in the creek's hiss.

"Melvin, where are you?"

It was Josie, and she was crying. She couldn't have been more than eleven years old. She was wearing Melvin's old overalls, and she sat beside the creek weeping. Her ponytails hung like braided rope on either side of her lowered head. Melvin, three years Josie's senior, stomped down the wooded hill grabbing trees to slow his steps. He ran to his sister's side.

"What's a matter?" Melvin stooped next to his sister.

"It was them outsiders. They came and th-threw cans into the creek," she sniffed and whined so that Melvin could hardly understand her. "When I told them to st-stop, they threw them at m-me. Then they made fun of my clothes and asked if I was a boy or a girl. They said all sorts of bad tings 'bout us. It was awful, just awful."

Melvin was silent.

Josie suddenly stopped sobbing. She looked up at Melvin angrily with her black-pebble eyes. Her facial features were harsh and pronounced as if they were carved from cold marble.

"Where were you, anyway? Where were you when I needed you? You always disappear when I need you most," she hissed through clenched teeth.

"I was in the woods."

"In the woods! You're always in the woods. What do ya' do up there anyway?"

"Nothin', just think."

"Think! Well, I think you're strange, and so does everybody else. You always go up in those woods. Pa says it ain't natural. Why don't you stick around here so you can lick them outsiders next time they come and make fun a' us?" She began to cry again. "Damn outsiders." Her tears etched lines down her stone face, and her sobs faded into the rush of the creek.

Melvin gripped the rusty chain of the porch swing and looked at his hand. The lines in his hand looked like the swirling crevices of driftwood. He took a deep breath that heaved in his chest. Losing the Old Farm was like death to him. The land was his best friend, his home and his church.

"Josie," he thought, "how could you sell it? Why, why, why did you sell it? Don't you understand? Are you angry at me?"

Angry? Yes, he could remember several times when she was angry at him. In fact, Josie always seemed angry at something, but there were a few times when the anger was focused directly at Melvin. Melvin was the father of two girls before Josie was married to Claud Flint, who owned the only butcher store in town. Even after Josie was married, she spent most of her time at the farmhouse caring for their mother who was bedfast for thirty years because of arthritis. Josie always resented this responsibility, especially after their father died and she had to lift her mother's stiff body out of the bed and bend her stone-cold limbs into sitting position on a wheelchair by herself. Melvin and his other sisters, Maud and Fanny, did not purposely leave Josie with this burden; it just worked out that she was the last to get married and leave the house. Even when she did marry, she did not have to work because Claud made so much money in the butcher business.

Melvin came to the farmhouse as often as he could to help Josie with their mother. He would bring his wife and two daughters with him, but his wife would usually sit uncomfortably in the musty living room while the

little girls played in the creek. The girls did not feel comfortable in the house. They did not like the cold stares that Josie gave them. Melvin's wife thought it best that the girls played outside anyway, so they wouldn't upset Josie or Melvin's mother.

"Why don't you come more often?" Josie shouted, slamming a tea kettle upon the burner of the gas stove. Melvin sat at the kitchen table beneath the print of DaVinci's "Last Supper."

"Keep your voice down, Josie. Ma' will hear you."

"It don't matter, Ma' knows. I talk ta' her about it all the time." Josie broke three stick matches by striking them too hard on the box before one finally lit. For the first time Melvin noticed that Josie seemed old. Time seemed to have eroded deep crevices into her harsh flesh. She was the youngest of the family, yet it looked like time had worn against her the hardest.

"I come as often as I can. I have to work; you know that. I've got a family now."

"When you do come, ya' have to bring that family of yours don't ya'. You and your family come here for picnics to enjoy the woods while I have to take care of Ma. Or you and your pretty little wife sit and watch your girls splash around in that damn creek." She lit the burner and shook the match out vigorously. Melvin heard his wife stir in the living room.

"Nobody said that you can't come out and enjoy yourself with us, Josie. I have those picnics for Ma too, ya' know. I think she enjoys it."

"Well, she don't, and I don't either!" Josie began to sob. She put her hand up to her forehead and sniffed tears. Melvin went to put his arm around her shoulder, but she jerked away.

"It's just hard," she whimpered, "everything's changed and I'm the only one left. I have to look at her grow weaker and older every day. Why can't it be like it was? Why does it all have to change?"

Melvin put up his hand to touch his sister again, but hesitated and withdrew. He walked out the front door, and his wife followed.

"Where you goin'?" Josie yelled out the window.

"To the woods," Melvin replied, as he walked toward the creek to get his children.

"Oh, of course. I shoulda' known. Just like always."

"I'll be back in time to put Ma back in bed."

Even after their mother's death, Melvin continued to bring his family to the Old Farm. He watched his girls grow up while playing in the creek, and when they grew too old to play, they would sit and watch the flowing water. His two little girls were the first in his family to go to college, and they both married and lived in the city. When they returned with their children, Melvin would take the entire family to the Old Farm for picnics. He sat complacently, watching his children and grandchildren, reflecting upon the three generations of his family that were represented. From the youngest grandchild to himself, he felt that the people present were just a segment of the ever flowing family line, and in his heart he was pleased that he could watch this small section of life grow and shift.

Melvin got up from the porchswing and walked down a slight incline to the bank of the creek. He sat down on a rock and listened to the whispers of the creek. Voices rose and sank in the hiss of the water.

"Are we all agreed, then, that only one of us should own the land, to make it easier to care for?"

It was his oldest sister, Maudy, speaking. She sat at the kitchen table with Melvin and his other two sisters. It was only two weeks after his mother had died. It was evening and the light above the table cast a sombre glow on the table.

"I think it's a good idea," Fanny said. "I can't take care of the land, I have my own place to keep up, but which one of us can take the whole thing?"

"Why don't we sell it to Melvin? He's the one that's here all the time. Even brings his little girls here for picnics," Maudy said.

"I'll take it," Josie blurted.

"I can't afford it now, anyway," Melvin said softly.

"Well, that settles it," Maudy announced, glancing at her watch. "Josie, you take it."

"I think that we should always keep it in the family," Melvin added.

"Oh yes, oh yes, of course we will," Maudy said, "and don't worry, Melvin, you can spend time here just like you always did; it's just that this way Josie will legally own the land."

"Josie, you wouldn't sell this land to anyone outside the family, anyway, would ya?" Fanny said.

"No."

"Of course you wouldn't."

"And I won't let any outsiders get the land, either," Josie added. "No tellin' what they'd do to the land." Josie looked pleased. Melvin knew she was glad that she would own the land, and that she would control the land. She was like a rock in the creek that never moved but forced water to ripple around it. Though the currents etched against her, she was happy to always be in control of her own destiny.

"Well, then, let's settle on a price for our shares. How 'bout two thousand for each share? I just happen to need two thousand for some new farm equipment," Maudy said. "I know it's not much, but since we're all family and all."

"Promise me, Josie, promise to keep it in the family," Melvin said.

"I promise, Melvin, don't worry."

Other voices began to rise in the creek all at once; then they faded into the summer breeze. It seemed to Melvin that he could hear it all in the voice of the creek, all he ever knew, all he ever heard.

"You know, don't you," he said aloud. "You've been here all along; you've seen it all, and you know."

The creek hissed over rock.

Melvin looked at the crevices that the creek had etched in the rocks and the earth. He picked up a twig and threw it in the currents. The water engulfed the stick and swept it away.

The stick bobbed in the water as it passed down the currents towards the bend in the creek.

Melvin took off his shoes and socks, rolled up his pant-legs, and walked into the creek. He looked down through the water and listened to the faint whisper. He strained his ears, but he couldn't tell what it said; then, looking up, he saw the water disappear behind the bend of the creek like a serpent retreating to its hole.

Leaning over, he placed his hand into the water as if he could grab something out of the creek, but the water seeped through his clutch, trickled down, and was swept away around the bend. Melvin stared at the empty hand.

"Grandpa!" a voice called from the distance.

Melvin jerked up, lost his balance, and fell backwards into the creek.

"Hey, Grandpa!" It was Johnathan's voice.

"There you are. I thought I would find you here. What in the world are you doing sitting in the creek?"

Melvin glanced up at his grandson. "Just trying to figure things out." He stared back down at the water.

"Ya' know, if Mom were here, she wouldn't like the idea of you getting your pants wet." Johnathan waded into the creek.

"She wouldn't like you walking in here with your shoes on, either."

Johnathan smiled, and helped his grandpa to stand up. With one hand he clutched Melvin's arm and pulled him out of the creek.

"Don't think we'll get it back, Grandpa."

"No, I don't either."

"Ya' know she got over eighty thousand dollars for it."

"There's a lot of good timber on those hills. She could have gotten more."

"She don't need that money. She got plenty from Claud's life insurance, and she doesn't have any children. Why did she sell it? I don't understand it."

"We'll never understand it, Johnathan. Some things people do around here just don't make sense."

There was a long pause. Both men stood in the creek watching it gush. Each loving the creek for a different reason.

"I wanted my children to play in this creek someday, just like you did and Mom did, and Sam, Ann, and I did."

"That's your memory, Johnathan. Your children will find their own memories to look back on."

"Yeah, but the creek connected us all, we all played in it at one time."

"Yes, but it was different, Johnathan, it was always different, and the creek just keeps going. I always hoped I was more, more than a twig that drops into the water and is swept away."

Michael Hitt



The Girl by the Shore

Second Place, Quiz and Quill Poetry Contest

I first saw her last summer,
When on weekends I spent my time
At the marina, or sailing my boat.
She was always in the same place:
Behind a small spit of wooded land,
Which encircled our little harbor,
And protected the floating docks,
She sat on a rocky beach
Overlooking Bohemia Bay.
The beach was old, forgotten,
Rarely used by anyone now;
Yet she was there every time I went,
By herself,
Alone.

From the first, I noticed foreignness in her—
Perhaps it was her skin,
Which seemed a little too dark;
Or perhaps it was her summer clothes,
Which were neither in nor out of style:
But probably it was the way
She seemed so satisfied to spend her day
On that dirty little beach,
As if she saw something there
That I simply could not see.

At any rate, she always smiled,
As she sat looking out over the water,
Or reading a paperback novel,
Or eating a picnic lunch.
And when I walked by,
As I often did,
She always waved at me.
Soon I learned from the dockman
That she *was* from another country.
Yet aside from this
He could tell me nothing more.

One day when I drove down,
She was walking back and forth,
Stooping over now and then
Along her secluded home.
Curious, I went to her
To see what it was she did.
She met me with a silent grin,
And held out her hands for me:
She held two piles of dirty stones,
Which she had picked from the sand.
Then I noticed that she had cleared
A small portion of the beach of rocks,
Leaving only soft, white sand
To bake in the afternoon sun.

I sailed that day past Turkey Point,
And did not return until evening.
But as I rounded the spit of land
I saw her still walking along;
And to my surprise, in the failing sun,
Her beach was all shining white!
She stopped and waved as I sailed by,
Her dark face smiling brightly.

I have not seen her since that day,
Nor heard of her, nor ever shall.
But today while I was at the docks
Cleaning my boat for winter,
I saw the empty beach
And suddenly thought of her.

I never took the time to learn
Anything about her:
Where she was from
Or why she chose to spend her summer there.
Yet—strangely—something about that girl
Has gotten hold of me,
And I find that I can't forget her:
That foreign girl
Who somehow gleaned some happiness
From that tiny spot of earth;
And was content in the thankless job
Of picking rocks from its dirty sand.
(Why, even now the lapping waves
have washed new stones ashore!)
As I got into my car to go
Back to the city for the long winter,
I looked once more at the beach.
Still the thought of her haunted me,
And now I fear I'll never know why.

John Tetzloff

CONTRIBUTORS

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