

1991

## Reflections 1991

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Barry Martin

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*Reflections '91*

# REFLECTIONS

Volume 23

1991

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# Literary Contest

Each year the English Department of Gardner-Webb College sponsors a literary contest for all student submissions chosen for publication in Reflections. Faculty and nonstudent submissions are not eligible for the contest. All works are judged anonymously by the final contest judges. This year's judges were Dr. A. Frank Bonner, Dr. Rudee Devon Boan, and Ms. Donna Spivey Ellington.

## Awards

First Place:	How Og Found God	Kathy Henson
Second Place:	Peace	DeEtta Arlene Hawks
Third Place:	The Demanding Task	Johnny Leon Morris

## Honorable Mention

Memorial Day	Kathy Henson
Wut I Seen	Johnny Leon Morris
Butterfly Regrets	Dawn Elaine Camp
Summer Scrapbook Selections	Nina Schnipper

## ART CONTEST

The Art Department of Gardner-Webb College has sponsored an art contest for all student submissions chosen for publication in Reflections. Faculty and nonstudent submissions are not eligible for the contest. All works are judged anonymously by the final contest judges. This year's judges were Barbara Cribb, Richard Drye, Barbara Selph and Susan Bell.

## AWARDS

<b>First Place:</b>	His Right Hand	Billie Dixon
<b>Second Place:</b>	Time Waits For No One	Don Ervin
<b>Third Place:</b>	The View Finder	Amory O'dell



## *How Og Found God*

Og walked out of his cave  
and looked at the sky  
and the hard hot sun that made him weak  
And remembered the sharp light  
from the sky  
that had stabbed his father  
and burnt him black like the coal  
in the circle at the mouth of the cave.  
And he thought of when the sky  
turned dark and rains came down  
as fast as if huge cupped hands full of water  
had suddenly opened.  
The rivers grew angry  
and swept away his mate.

Then he looked down  
at a hill of ants who crawled on his toes.  
Without a thought, he raised his foot  
and razed their village, then watched them  
scurry in confusion.

Then Og looked back up  
to the sky with  
revelation on his heavy brow  
And wondered what  
would appease.

*Kathy Henson*

First Place  
*His Right Hand*  
Billie Dixon



## *The Demanding Task*

I think that one of the most  
challenging things for  
an aspiring young  
black man to do  
is to look upon  
his  
feeble,  
tired,  
hardworking  
Mother, and love his father.

*Johnny Leon Morris*

## *Can't You Hear Them?*

Can't You Hear them?  
Scurrying behind your heels  
whispering loud enough to be  
heard but not quite loud enough  
to hear

Can't You Hear them?  
Chattering/Chittering/Hithering-Thithering!!!  
They follow You--Chase You--Rage all about You!!!!!!!

A silent Maelstrom of Treacherous Conspiring Plots

You turn!  
only to face The Phantom of your own Paranoia

*Barry W. Martin*

## *Interaction*

The darkness seemed to slip away just a little faster than the mist; only a hint of a line delineated the water's edge. The dampness quieted the steps of a figure making his way through grass and weeds. A few more features of the pond's dark surface could now be distinguished. A tree here and there along the edge and some algae in between made the man feel at home in this different place.

A box by his side rattled open, and he felt in it carefully and gracefully, not needing any light during those last, dim moments of darkness; it wouldn't be long now. One of the shadows that had earlier blended in with the twigs and grass now seemed to be the focus of the man's attention. When his stooped over work was done, the man arose on his side of the pond as the sun peaked over the opposite edge. With a surveying glance, he extended his tool across the dark, mirrored surface before him.

As the water's surface reflexed, so did the man. He began mechanically retrieving the object of his concentration. In pleasant anticipation, he continued with a relaxing diligence. He never broke his rhythm, and silence was the second loudest sound to the machine in his hands.

As if something had gone wrong, the man halted. Maybe time had stopped, the stillness seemed like an eternity. Then, his body sprang back to life as quickly as it had feigned death. Now arched over his head, the rod in his hands was almost as lively as he.

Water exploded in all directions as the opposing force exposed itself for the first time. Greens and whites danced on the water for a moment and then disappeared under the turmoil. The fish was of exquisite form and motion.

The struggle continued. The distance closed. The tension grew. Playing the line, and then reeling, playing, and reeling, playing, and reeling. The man's hand went out to the splashing mass of cold blooded determination. He grasped the fish, pulled it from the water, and brought it to the bank. It hung still, but taut, with every fiber feeling for oxygen, but poised for

escape. Its color was now dark, grays and blacks on a faded white.

Shafts of light, burning away the last trace of mist, stretched across the man's shoulders as he held the fish to see it in the early morning light. The fish's powerful body loomed glistening over the man as he held it in awful admiration.

After gently appraising his fish, the man placed it back near the water's edge. As the fish felt life flow against it again, its rich hues returned. With the first twitch of freedom, slipping from the unexpected fingers that held it, the fish disappeared in a swollen froth.

This man's sheer exhilaration had never before been equaled, or explained. It was primal. It was technical. It was many things to many people. It was impossible to imitate. It is irreplaceable.

Peering after the fish to watch it as long as possible, the man stooped where he had released his catch. As the day now came strong, the man wondered in amusement to himself, had he really overcome nature, or was he still held firmly in its grasp?

*Donald W. Durham*

## *The Dawn*

Deep within the darkest night,  
Lies a glimmering, shimmering ray of light,  
You may not see it, but you know it's there,  
It waits for the morning to part the air,  
And then...comes the dawn.

*David G. McAmis*

*Study of a Woman*  
*Susan Bell*



## *Letter*

The silence began  
when I just didn't know  
what to call you.

Couldn't say "Dad" and  
"Father" seemed too formal.

That's why  
from the time  
I grew too old for "Daddy"  
I called you nothing.

Just thought I'd mention it—  
in case you hadn't noticed.

All those roaring, silent years  
you were nameless.

Never said you noticed—  
did you?

All those years  
did we talk or  
just make noises  
at each other?

I started saying "Dad"  
didn't I?  
Before you died?

That's how I recall it.  
Isn't it so?

Can you tell me somehow  
that it's true—  
that our noisy silence  
ended?

*Dennis Quinn*

## *It has been another one of those days...*

It has been another one of those days.....

Like a child..

I sat upon my blanket of life

playing with my toys

It is hard sometimes not knowing which toy to pick up and play with  
and which toy to leave for later

hoping my dolly will not get mad if I don't play with her first  
but then....some bully walked by

and as I got up off my blankets to face him

he reached down, grabbed my blanket and gave it a good old shake

My toys went flying everywhere and the bully went on his way..

I am now sitting back on my blanket of life

slowly putting all of my toys back together again thinking how this is  
so

much like my life this very minute

One thing I have learned is that....

I did put all those toys back together..all by myself

and I will put all the pieces of my life in order

and some day soon I will have the harmony I once had on that blanket  
playing with all my toys.....

*Melinda Harper*

## *Recess*

Writing is the sanity of my soul.

I purge my being through the sanctity of the page.

The words flow forth from the heart

And allow me to escape the bonds of time.

I float above the world for a while--

Separate and untouched--

But pens do not last forever.

Time grows short and I must stop

Forcing myself to fall back.

Into reality.

*Dawn Elaine Camp*



## *For Socrates*

That grey beard grew with some wisdom—  
The kind of wisdom I once thought must have led the South to  
secede.  
But, now, I see sometimes wholes must divide to perfect unions.  
Some unions should never have formed.  
The wiser, less-attached state has already withdrawn.  
As the remaining circle and fight against the tidal wave that  
pulls us down the drain,  
I suddenly see things differently.  
We can't sink much lower.  
Our division could only permit us to rise above.

*Dawn Elaine Camp*

## *Père LaChaise Cemetery*

Their crypts are plundered,  
Their altars broken,  
Their marble soiled with communist graffiti.  
No one comes to pay homage anymore.

Bury me  
Wrapped in a crazy quilt,  
stuffed in a pine box,  
under a small stone with my name  
and dates--if you must.  
But,  
if you need a rock to remind you  
of me after my grease evaporates from the pavement,  
  
Don't bother.

*Kathy Henson*

*'Twas the Night Before Christmas*  
*(with apologies to Clement Moore)*

'Twas the night before Christmas and St. Nick was late  
But one child had vowed he'd stay up and wait.  
His stocking was hung at the foot of his bed  
As he listened for sounds of reindeer or sled.

But soon he grew tired, his eyes drifted closed,  
And Santa crept in while he blissfully dozed.  
After filling his back with goodies galore  
The jolly man turned and crept towards the door.

But before Santa had time to depart,  
The young boy stirred and awoke with a start.  
"Santa!" he cried, "It's really you!"  
"Yes," Santa said, "the stories are true."

Then Santa said, with a gleam in his eye,  
"It's time for me to say goodbye."  
Santa then hurried out the door,  
Afraid the kid would ask him more.

With him he took his large sack,  
Filled with stolen goods and slung 'cross his back.  
When he left the house, he got in a car  
And sped with his partner, away very far.

His partner asked, "How'd it go?  
Did you put on a convincing show?"  
'Santa' replied, "The disguise worked fine.  
The kid doesn't know we robbed him blind."

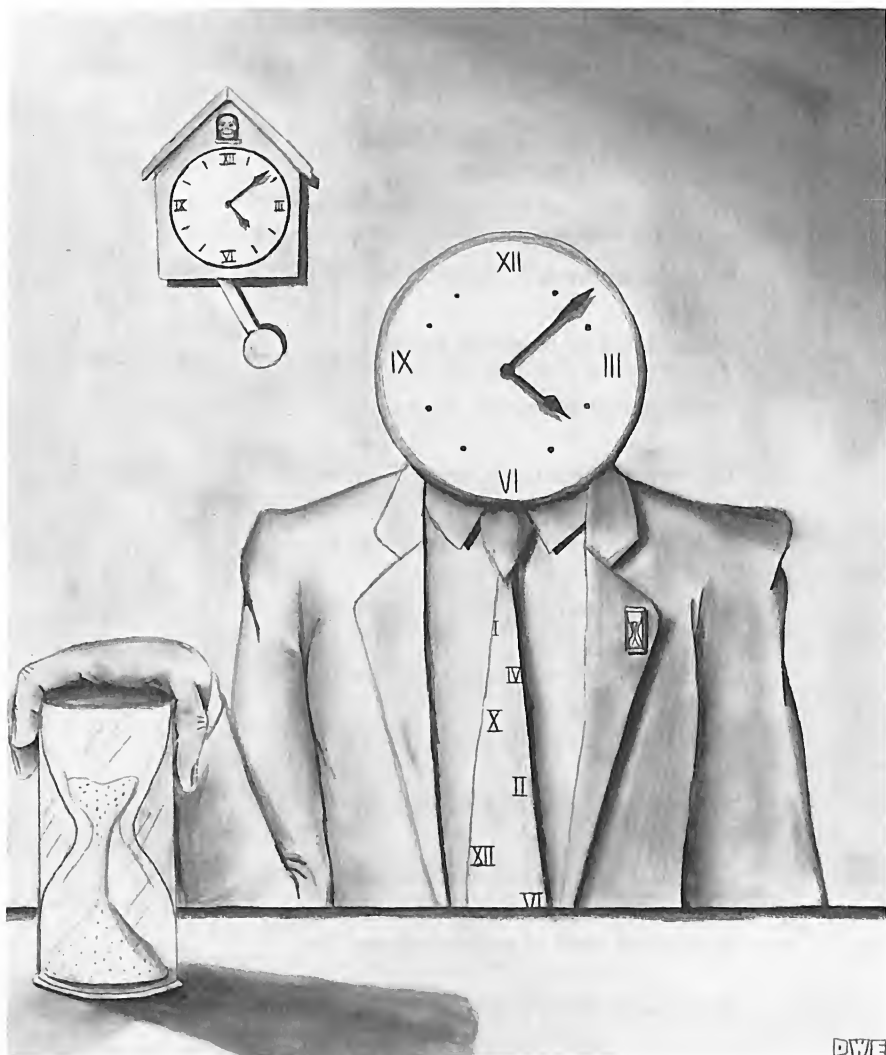
*Lori Freeman*

*Breaking Through*     11/12/90

Hard like rock-candy.  
Smooth as water, having similar properties.  
Clearer than the sunniest, cloudless day.  
Dividing between us, yet not obscuring.  
We hope to break it, in desire to refresh,  
But in doing so must also feel the  
Cold blunt of the world--the longing,  
The sadness, the inane music of the world.  
Not birds and bees or children with glee,  
But the saw and the axe, the mill and  
The press--that which destroys our life.  
Soon it will not matter whether or not  
You can break through, for breath,  
All inside and out will be decayed.  
And it will rank of such stench one hast  
Never seen and not known of since the  
Deletion of the dinosaur.

*Shannon M. Perry*

Second Place  
*Time Waits For No One*  
Don Ervin



## *Abstraction in the written word...*

Abstraction  
    in the written word  
        is like that  
            of art.  
The difference  
    lies in the painting  
        of the picture  
            in  
                the mind.  
Poets must paint  
    with words  
        a picture that is  
            more  
                universal  
                    so it can  
                        be seen  
                            by all.

*John E. Beam*

## *Bat Dance*

Early morning; That song's on the radio.  
I tumble from my warm ROBO-Bed and tie my  
Ghost-Buster shoelaces-  
don my favorite Ninja-"T" Raphael Holograph  
Breakfast is my Super Mari-O's  
I grab my Roger Rabbit folders  
I walk into a Dick Tracy sunrise,  
Just like every other (G.I.) joe

*Barry W. Martin*

## *Flesh and bone . . .*

Flesh and bone both man and snake

(i give the lord my soul to take)

Why then he of fiery lake?

(if i die before i wake)

And I mine own fate can never peep

(i pray the lord my soul to keep)

And for today can only weep

*Barry W. Martin*

## *What Does It Take to be Loved?*

Does it take the bringing of one's feelings under subjection?  
Or does it take continued defeat, and rejection?

Does it take a special understanding of this device?  
Or is it just always a repeated sacrifice?

Does it take waiting in line for our special turn?  
Is that the love, for which we all yearn?

Does it take always giving, and never receiving?  
Because if so, why should one think it is worth achieving.

Does it take a special understanding from above?  
Yes I think so.  
because there is a Higher Authority that gives us the comfort of  
knowing, that we all have what it takes to be LOVED.

*James L. Rowe*

## *Peace*

There was one

One I couldn't compete with

One I couldn't feel malice towards

Not my enemy

My Idol

to have and not to hold

to speak and not say

to touch and not feel

Tonight I find peace

in her victory

I cannot have, but

She cannot be had.

*DeEtta Arlene Hawks*

## *There Ain't Nothin' Here But Hardins and Doggetts*

At one of our recent church meetings, I heard a guest tell his wife in a disgusted whisper, "I wouldn't want to come to this church. There ain't nothin' here but Hardins and Doggetts." I looked around at faces I had been worshipping with for 40 years --folks named Burgin, Roper, Johnson, Taylor, Kindschi, Albertson, Newton, Kesterson, Nanney, May--to name a few. But a goodly portion of them, to be sure, were either Hardin or Doggett or some combination or in-law thereof. There was Mama (half Hardin and half Doggett), teacher of the Juniors' Sunday School class, sitting on her favorite pew. And there was her sister, my Aunt Alice, at the piano from which she has provided (free of charge) almost 40 years worth of music for revivals, prayer meetings, worship services, Easter and Christmas cantatas and generations of unruly youth choirs. Another sister, my Aunt Irene, was keeping babies in the nursery, a duty she has performed for eons. Yet another sister, Catherine, teaches a Sunday School class and assists in leading the singing.

Their mother was Addie Pearl Hardin, a feisty, independent little woman, who married my grandfather, Alton Leroy Doggett, some time back when women put their hair up in buns and wore ugly black shoes. He started to work in a cotton mill when he was 12 years old because his daddy died young of typhoid fever. He had to help his mama make a living for the family.

We called them Ma and Pa. From their huge two-story rented mill house on Depot Street we used to walk to evening church services at twilight. The church was only one street over, but we had to go around the cotton mill. We cut across the back alley, carefully picking our way through watery pot holes, or, time allowing, sauntered up one more block to Main Street and window shopped at Waldrop's department store. Ma always made sure I had a Bible and a song picked out to play for Young People's Meeting.

Ma's brother, Archie, had married Vera Mae Doggett, Pa's only sister. That's about as plain as it can be told. All the grandchildren used to say to each other, "My grandfather married your grandfather's sister and your grandmother married my grandmother's brother." Anyone who could keep it straight was considered above average intelligence. All the offspring, we were told were double first cousins.

Besides all this double trouble, there were other brothers and sisters, Hardins and Doggetts all. One of the Hardin girls, Hester, married a Collins boy and moved to the outskirts of Chesnee, S.C. But Ma married Pa, Aunt Florence Hardin never married, and Aunt Vera Mae Doggett married Uncle



Archie Hardin, so no other names were introduced to taint the purity of the lines until their daughters and granddaughters began marrying off.

A goodly portion of the whole kit and caboodle ended up at the Forest City Wesleyan Methodist Church. I was introduced by my grandmother at an early age to the Wesleyan Mourner's Bench, a place that, through the influence of modern sophistication, has been reduced to being called "the altar." She would, under the spell of a good sermon by Preacher Roy Parker, our minister, shout "amen" or walk the aisles in her spiritual ecstasy. I never saw her in more comfortable circumstances than warming her fanny by the fireplace at home or attending revival services at her church.

Her brother, Archie, or Uncle Arch, as we all called him, was a good man with a sweet smile who always sang in the choir. He is gone now, but to this day, when our singers offer a rendition of "Christ Receiveth Sinful Men" I can hear his scratchy voice. His brother, Dewey, raised 10 fine children by the guidelines prescribed in his Bible. His widow, Annie, sick now and ailing, can't come to church often. But even after amputation of her leg due to a medical emergency, she strapped on a prosthesis, grabbed a cane, and came to church every Sunday while she was able. A son of Annie and Dewey who is named Howard, became a preacher. One evening when I was a child, he presented a program at our church in which the participants symbolically chose heaven if they went to the right, and hell if they took a wrong turn and walked to the left. The right side of the church was a vision of loveliness with a beautifully decorated white archway which, of course, represented the sweet peaceful gateway to heaven. The left side of the church was a simulated area of damnation complete with piteous groaning and moaning. To this day when given a choice of direction at a fork in the road, I am always tempted to veer right.

Archie's widow, Aunt Vera Mae, is matriarch of the fourth left pew, and never misses church unless she is physically unable to crawl out of bed. She is of the old school that produced perfect ladies, always wearing a cameo brooch, or a hat, shawl, or detachable collar that she crocheted herself. Her allegiance to the church is more than mere habit. The cruel loss of her husband and several of her children over the years has not altered her faith, and she stares mesmerized by the deliverance of The Word on Sunday mornings by her pastor.

Her daughter-in-law, Mary, wife of her son, Steve Hardin, is a victim of multiple sclerosis and is brought to church in a wheel chair. She sits parked halfway into the middle aisle at the back of the church. That is her special place. Sometimes the bright Sunday morning sun, reflecting through the huge

red stained-glass cross, lights up her face, and the contentment I see pictured there makes me ashamed that I sometimes fuss and fume because I have to stop on Sunday morning to polish shoes or iron a blouse. She almost never misses services because Steve cheerfully supervises her travel and loads her bodily in and out of his car. Mary types our Missionary Mirror, a church newsletter, by stabbing the keys with a pencil held between her lame hands. She publishes the paper only after hours of patient and exhausting work, but sometimes apologizes for errors she's made and asks her readers to forgive her.

My great grandfather, brickmason/farmer Joseph Pinkney Hardin, wrote the names of his children in the big black family Bible as they were born. There are eight names and birth dates recorded in his beautiful flowing hand. Now there are seven matching dates of death, and only one survivor, my 88 year old Aunt Florence, who has the highest soprano voice in the church choir. On the Doggett side, only two are left. But the faithful example of these wonderful people, the legacy of hard-working, dedicated Christian servants, is etched into the memories of those they left behind, their friends, descendants, and fellow members of the First Wesleyan Church of Forest City, N.C. Here, five generations of Hardins and Doggetts have worshipped, married, mourned and plowed through enough fried chicken on Homecoming Days to dam up Broad River. I could ask no greater blessing than to play the old Hammond organ every Sunday for the rest of my life, and have my cousin, Mike Walker (who is officially 1/4 Hardin/1/4 Doggett), sing Beulah Land in his beautiful tenor voice, as they roll me out of my church for the last time.

Visitors are very welcome at our church. But just a word of warning--there ain't nothin' here but Hardins and Doggetts.

*Billie Dixon*

## *Butterfly Regrets*

Would that I were more than a passionless butterfly,  
Not lighting so easily on the wilting flowers,  
Allowing the slightest breeze to shake me from my perch  
And cast me, once again, off.  
To fly until I find the stifling security of another bloom.

*Dawn Elaine Camp*

## *HOME*

As Autumn starts its shuffling whisper in the trees  
I find myself yearning for thinner cleaner air,  
the need for sweatshirts and heavy jackets.  
The smell of woodsmoke in a clear starry sky,  
and Beautiful, Bold Mountainous Panoramas.

I miss the morning wind; biting.  
the way coffee feels to my insides,  
I miss the little electric charges in the atmosphere  
as the seasons change.

*Barry W. Martin*

Third Place  
*The View Finder*  
Amory O'dell



## *Wut I Seen*

I seen a gal in the grocery sto,  
alookin ruff, shabby, tired and po,  
a youngen at her knee,  
and one due in a week.  
Po thang jest stared at me.

"How You?"  
"Alivin!" She said.  
And I cried and wept,  
Cuz King wuz dead.

*Johnny Leon Morris*

## *Unfertile*

I came home from college,  
with an armful of books  
on Black Pride and Dreams

Only to find a note that  
Ma had left saying that  
she was going to work a  
double shift at the plant.

Daddy was down at the pool  
hall, while my little brother  
sat in front of the television  
with a snotty nose.

I. Came. Home. From. College.

*Johnny Leon Morris*

## *An Uncomplicated Person*

When the Lord came down to this earth to redeem the world, to mend our brokenness, to bind up the wounds of the afflicted, he left rather explicit instructions as to how we should live, how we should treat one another, and how we should spend our time. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, minister to those in need. My mother was an uncomplicated person in the best sense of that word. She spent most of her life doing these things that the Lord directed us to be about. He redeemed our hearts and our minds, but he depends on us to be his feet and his hands. The Lord said, "Blessed are the feet of those who preach the gospel." My mother's feet were busy, but I observed her hands more closely than her feet. She had hands which would never be selected for a mother-daughter detergent commercial. Her hands were calloused and chapped, sometimes blistered, even gnarled in places, but they were beautiful hands because they consecrated everything that she touched. Her hands transformed things. She was an example of what the world would be like if everyone had taken the Savior's words and applied them to the needs of the world.

When Dan and Laura Callaway looked into the face of their brand new daughter on November 3, 1900, they would have known, if they knew what we know now, that God had given them a remarkable daughter. Of course, they had no idea what life would hold for her, or for us, over the next ninety years. the war and strife and economic depression. They grew up hard in those times. It was no little house on the prairie. My mother was introduced early to the kind of evil that would afflict so many tormented minds in this century.

When Rufus Blackburn came back to Lamsburg in 1919 after fighting in the Great War in Europe, he resumed his courtship with my mother. There wasn't much nightlife in Lamsburg except attending preaching services at the Missionary Baptist Church. My grandfather was a self-respecting man, and in those days no self-respecting father would permit a daughter as pretty as "his Hettie" to go off alone with a man, especially one who had just come back from France. He tagged along behind them just to make sure that nothing untoward happened. Dan Callaway had never spent a great deal of time listening to preachers, but he was a very practical man, and he would not walk that far for nothing. So he went inside the church to listen. My grandfather found God, but Rufus Blackburn got "his Hettie".

Over the course of her life, my mother saw her sons go off to fight wars started by people whose evil intentions put them at odds with the things that

she had been brought up to believe. Her faith was deep and strong, but she didn't wear her religion on her sleeve. There was nothing fickle, nothing frivolous about her belief in God. When her sons were away on distant battle fields or on dangerous oceans, and when her family members were experiencing pain or death, she sent up prayers to the throne of God on their behalf. No one will ever know how many prayers she raised to God on behalf of those in this congregation. She always did her part--usually more than her part--when any kind of need existed. She was proud of being the mother of four veterans, and she could do her part, even if she couldn't go and fight in some far off jungle. No one in this family ever inquired about directions to Canada when the nation's call came. My mother did her part when she set out to give back the blood that someone had donated to save her son's life. I heard her say that she wouldn't live long enough to return the favor in full measure but that she would try for as long as she could. She did live long enough to give five gallons of blood. She always found a way to get to the bloodmobile on the appointed day.

Life was hard. Our family lost one home to the Great Depression, moved to several places as tenants, and finally, taking advantage of Mr. Roosevelt's Farm Home Administration, Daddy bought sixty-nine acres of land in 1942. That land was so poor that it would hardly grow broom straw. In fact, the state had bought the top soil off it. After planting hay crops for three years and turning everything under for three years, food started coming out of that ground, and people were finding their way to our door. I remember the little black children who would appear at our door step with empty gallon jars and a few cents change. Mama sold milk for half price--that is \$.30 a gallon--when it was \$.60 in the stores. But those children learned that with fifteen cents or twenty cents they could go home with a full gallon of milk. Mama never knew how to run a business, but those cows kept giving milk and food kept coming out of the ground. Most people had a garden--Mama had gardens everywhere, planted at intervals so something would be coming in all summer long. We worked in the fields all day and put away food at night. It was endless: string beans, green peas, apples, okra, blackeyed peas, turnip greens, tomatoes. In the days before frozen food lockers, she canned a thousand quarts of food every summer. For six years in a row, her picture was in a farm magazine. And that was a thousand quarts canned on a wood stove in a seven quart pressure canner. Seven into a thousand will give you an idea of how many times that canning procedure was repeated. I never knew where all of the glass jars came from. I still don't know where she managed to get so many jars. No one in these parts who made a living legally could have had so many mason jars. Jars were everywhere, but they weren't empty

for long. She fed our large family; she fed hungry neighbors--black and white; she gave food away; she exchanged food at the North Main School Lunchroom for meal tickets for her children. No one ever went hungry around my Mama.

She was always thinking of other people. When I was about nine, I traded for an old bicycle, and it had a basket in front. That gave Mama an opportunity: she could send me all over the community carrying food to older people who could not come to the house to ask for it. I wore that old bicycle out taking food to Aunt Mandy Clark, an old black lady who was approaching one hundred years old. She remembered being set free from slavery, and she would thank me profusely when I brought food to her. I will never forget how she would thank me over and over again. My Mama believed in that Biblical admonition of measuring out your portion, heaping it up to overflowing; and it came back to her, not in money, but in love and satisfaction.

Mama could motivate people in her own unique way. She had a way of looking at you with her deep compassionate eyes when she wanted to say something serious. I remember once she was reading an article in the Progressive Farmer; it was a piece about Governor Luther Hodges. Mama looked up and told me in the voice that let me know that she had been thinking deeply, "Governor Hodges was born on a tenant farm. You know, you were also born on a tenant farm." What she meant by her comment was this: Just because you were born on a tenant farm does not mean that you have an excuse not to make something of yourself. I thought about that comment, and others that I heard from her a lot over the years.

My mother accepted people without condoning their behavior, when their behavior did not meet her expectations. She could always find redeeming qualities in people, and some of those people that she found redeeming qualities in were the same people who took advantage of her good nature and even exploited the family. Sometimes it would anger me to hear her insist that certain people had good qualities. I did not want to hear it. But that shouldn't mean that she was never angry. No one can ever forget the withering stare that she could give you when you did something that was unacceptable to her sense of values. She could make the earth tremble. And you knew not to say anything, not to make excuses, or to try to justify yourself. You had best straighten up. Some may have seen that particular gene at work in other members of the family.

And if anyone did anything to threaten her family, she would forget the natural fear that she always had. Once when I was in about the second grade, I told Mama that for several days a man had been parked along the wooded



stretch of road that I walked to come home from school. Mama had been reading about kidnappers. I'll never forget how she took me with her and marched out the isolated road, motioned for the man inside to roll down his window, and asked him what his business was. He said, "M'am, I'm just killing some time." Mama told him to kill his time some place else and that she never wanted to see him up there again. She didn't.

I often told her that she and Daddy didn't permit four-letter words in our family, and that the worst four-letter word to her was spelled out "QUIT". How she hated it when people left things unfinished. Her forty-two years perfect attendance in her extension club shows how unrelenting she was. I once asked her to spend a couple of weeks with us in Boiling Springs. She reflected a few moments and allowed that she would miss her club meeting if she went. But, seeing the disappointment in my face, she added: "I was afraid that I might be sick this winter, so I attended a few extra meetings with other clubs, so I'm three or four meetings ahead. So I guess I can go." She kept up that perfect attendance to the very end, and if someone would check the records, she's probably banked a few extra meetings. And all those years of studying nutrition and crafts were translated into quality life for her family and friends.

We have been blessed beyond belief by having her for ninety years. Her life stands as a testimonial to what one person can do when she is willing to do it long enough and is absolutely relentless in her determination to finish what she starts. She had that peace that passes all understanding, the peace that comes only to those who know the secret of contentment: love, service, labor. The contentment of a life poured out... given away in service to others. This contentment comes to those whose lives know no contradictions, and there were no contradictions in her character. There was no hatred, no contention, no doubts concerning what she should be about; there was no self pity, no paralyzing indecision. What there was was an overpowering and rare simplicity. She was not a complicated person; she was not at war with herself. Her whole being was dedicated to the basic things which give meaning to life. And the love that she poured out for others was returned to her in her old age when she no longer could look after her own needs. She was never alone and never in need and never in doubt about her family's love for her. And none of us can ever wish for more in our own lives. But best of all, there are any number of "Hettie Clones" in this room. They know who they are. They are special indeed.

And how she loved her family. The hundreds of pictures of children, grandchildren and others down to the fifth generation, grace the rooms of her

house. They were every one precious to her. Someone once told me that if you painted a picture of the perfect grandmother, she could model for it.

She died contented but not idle. She was working right up to the end, working in her mind, with her brow concentrated and her voice firm as she counted out loud, day after day from her hospital bed. Anyone who knew her knew that what she was doing was not an idle counting. She was doing something--we will never know for sure what--but she was working as determinedly as she had ever been in anything that she did. So someone up there must know that she will need some large gardens and a very large kitchen. Heaven now has a wonderful cook. Her Heaven will be peaceful, but it will not be a Heaven of eternal rest. The Lord did not make her that way. He made her the way we needed her to be and she became what He intended her to be. And for that we can say, "Thank you Lord. Amen."

*Gil Blackburn*

### *Willie*

Listen ta Willie a playin his sax!  
Play it brother! Jump back! Get back!  
Boys, Willie sho can blow dat horn!  
He's even played fo Lena Horn!

Look at Willie a jammin dat tune!  
Play it brother! Make'um swoon!  
Boys, Willie got gales from here ta there!  
And he's got chilrens everywhere!

Look at Willie a playin dat sax!

*Johnny Leon Morris*

## *Summer Scrapbook Selections*

Sprawling out on the patchwork quilt  
Beneath a bluish-black sky speckled with stars  
Catching the latest flick at Shankweiler's Drive-In;  
No curfew meant we could giggle in delirium  
at two in the morning if we wanted a few  
cups of cheap coffee after the movies.  
Breezy warm air meant kicking off my shoes—  
It's hard to keep them on for that good-night  
kiss when he made my toes curl up like that  
And all I could hope for each day was  
that the days would never end...

*Nina Schnipper*

### *5 a.m.*

If I were to tiptoe just delicately enough  
through the purple plush  
I'd become trapped,  
By shadows,  
And echoes of my father's stormy snore,  
And raindrops teasing our rooftop,  
And the eerie stillness of every object  
in this house signaling my return to bed.

*Nina Schnipper*

## *Memorial Day*

On the day before, we buy white mums,  
The kind that reek of funeral home.  
Mama worries they'll wilt sitting in the sun.  
I think: so what? they're just dumb flowers.  
And then I fight with my brother.

Sunday morning Mama reminds me  
To get ready five minutes early.  
And we pass the church parking lot,  
Rolling instead down the dirt drive,  
Graves before us, dust billows behind,  
Pine woods on either side, mist still over the sun.

We nestle our mums against granite pillows,  
Creased with names and dates, that lie  
At the heads of earthen pallets.  
And cluck our tongues and stare at other things,  
Lingering longer at the young stone  
Facing east, near the end.

I bite my mouth and suck the blood  
(Just a bad habit I have)  
And turn and leave, looking back to fill my memory  
Enough to last 'til next year.

*Kathy Henson*

## *The Re-Creation*

Y \* T

R            H

P            E

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\*            \*

f r o m        i t s

\*            \*

r e s t i n g

\*            \*

place. Guide  
the body into  
the chamber of  
destruction.

Turn the crank  
of the torture  
m a c h i n e .

It will eat  
away the bones  
of wood to  
give a point  
to the life.

Release the  
new creation.

Finally, allow  
the h e a d-  
hunter to pour  
the blood of  
the victim  
onto its  
wooden  
kin

*Dawn Elaine Camp*

## *Cynical Love*

Does your tongue take a sardonic lash at my self-being?  
The words you speak pierce my heart and the blood runs—  
Forming little pools at the bottoms of your feet.  
Slowly you turn away as if never to acknowledge me  
BUT I AM HERE!

One day your heart will collapse and break into tiny pieces.  
May someone strong be there to sift through the pain,  
and put your heart together again.

For I will not go insane trying to make you love me  
The jagged tear in my heart is still there,  
and forever

bleeding.

Pleading for me to run, urging me to finally walk away  
BUT STILL I AM HERE!

*Sandy Basinger*

## *The Loss of Self*

All the walls have been stripped  
And there's nothing in there now!  
Little by little everything  
Has been removed and only the  
Shell remains.  
Perhaps, it began by taking out  
Pieces that did not seem so valuable  
at the time.  
But pain permitted the gradual removal  
Of those things that were not replaceable.  
Each removal became more valuable  
Than the last.  
And there's nothing in there now!

*Lynn Carpenter-Keeter*

## *The Weather Vane*

The building sits near the center of the campus,  
A prominent weather vane on top tells which way the wind is  
blowing  
While below the creative processes are at work.  
The bird hovering over knows that beneath  
Administrative duties are quietly performed,  
But exciting events are also taking place.  
The best thoughts of the best minds in the best possible  
expressions  
Are being explored by hungry, young, and energetic souls  
Who themselves are practicing the art of creation  
By producing such publications as SCOP TALES and REFLECTIONS.  
And by the graphic art they make and display.  
The satisfaction thus is greater than dining out  
Or taking a stroll along the beach.  
Questions asked inspire wise answers even of the questioners.  
While pursuing the highest esoteric values, participants do not  
overlook  
The most mundane tasks of patiently nurturing the slow in  
perceiving excellence,  
For those who learn are learning with a purpose.  
Not only do they enjoy the work they do;  
But they look forward to sharing with all those coming after,  
the fruits of their experiences.  
Chaunticleer has reason to flap his wings and crow—come fair or  
fowl weather.

*Ernest Blankenship*

## *How Do You Feel?*

I am the fasting figurine of bitterness;  
the mosaic of madness swelling with  
disbelief and eternal ironic questions.

This hated heat makes my teeth sweat and  
the cold steel of H<sub>2</sub>O makes my  
skull crackle and shatter.

My reality and ideality are a fraternal  
pair of iron spheres:  
one; a black hole of light forever rinsing in radiance,  
the other, pickled brown reflecting rabid dog spit.

The world is nothing more than a  
string of balanced equations  
contradicting itself with  
equal and opposite reactions.

I feel fine.

*Jason T. Barnes*



## *Poison Pen*

Emotions seep through the ink  
Feelings harsh, passionate, heated  
Is it worth this ?

Solace...does it truly fall  
from the deadly stroke

Art or Vengeance

Beauty or vile hatred

Acceptance means...

nothing

Life is meaningless in a world of self-indulgence

Escape is more than necessary

It's life or death

Inside we bleed,

Outside, sigh,

As the pen falls to peace.

*DeEtta Arlene Hawks*

## *Some People Are Not Allowed to Talk About Love*

Janice and her beau  
sneak down to the woods at night.  
We can't know!  
Because, she's black and he's white.  
We won't know!

Because, some people are not allowed  
to talk about love.

Richard and his beau  
live alone, near a lake.  
We can't know!  
Because, their windows can break.  
We won't know!

Because, some people are not allowed  
to talk about love.

Rita can't say no  
to a man that beats her blue.  
We can't know!  
Because, her friends are so few.  
We won't know.

Because, some people are not allowed  
to talk about love.

Daddy doesn't know  
'bout his son's gal, on the street.  
We can't know!  
'Cause son needs a place to sleep.  
We won't know!

Because, some people are not allowed  
to talk about love.

*Johnny Leon Morris*

## *A Fifty-Year-Old Man Named Rufie*

Unlike another friend of mine, when Rufie turned thirty he didn't threaten to commit suicide. But he didn't throw a party either. When he turned forty, Rufie refused to answer the phone for the first five days of September and was seen only while teaching classes at William Howard Middle School. When he reached fifty, Rufie denied, lied, and accused his friends of memory aberrations caused by senility, hoping that his good Christian mother would never learn that her Southern Baptist son had mastered prevarication. So, being upright ourselves, Gene and I told her.

On that infamous Saturday morning of September 3, 1989, Gene called from Belhaven, awakening the birthday boy from five o'clock slumber with an off-key Elizabethan baritone version of "Happy Birthday to You." Only Gene knows the full context of Rufie's response. Of course Gene is the only preacher to whom Rufie would speak with perfect candor. If one of your best friends is a man of the cloth, then you know how misjudged preachers can be. All it takes is to be around them when they are sprawled out in red Bermuda shorts while eating popcorn and listening to Conway Twitty.

After all the taunts and threats, I completely forgot about the big event and had to call two weeks late to offer belated insults. By then Rufie had decided that he would not require counseling after all. "Just remember," he drawled, "that you and Gene got there before I did." The next summer when we had our reunion, Rufie, relapsing, claimed that he was really thirty-nine. A friend at school had given him a cushion--strategically placed in my guest bedroom--on which was inscribed "Thirty-Nine Forever." So I reminded him that the world's most famous man of that age had been dead for fifteen years. That was the first time his mustache threatened to fall off.

Rufie saved his mustache, which resembled a burnt-brown french fry, contrasting with the uninterrupted black hair above. Gene solved that mystery when he found the Grecian Formula, left there by a guest, if you want another version. After three traumatic birthdays punctuated by an avalanche of risque cards and snickering calls from his devoted friends, Rufie must have empathized with Charlie Brown's mournful lament: "Why is everybody always pickin' on me?" A few months later, having mellowed

somewhat, Rufie received his membership card from AARP, followed shortly by his first issue of Modern Maturity. It was his mother's little surprise because she wanted him to have all the benefits, and she planned to reveal herself as benefactor on her next visit. After Rufie wrote me to describe what he planned to do to "the piece of trash" who came out of the sewer to pollute his home, I called Gracie Harrows to suggest a more protracted anonymity.

Rufie hasn't always been Rufie, of course. That name somehow developed after he, Gene, and I became friends at Bennett-Macon College in the North Carolina Mountains in the late 1950s. Gene arrived from Bath, way down east, lugging his Elizabethan accent and a fierce religious independence to the hallowed grounds of B-M, where Southern Baptists planted preachers and required chapel thrice weekly. When I first saw Gene Tullis, he was dressed in T-shirt and shorts, a lopsided crescent-moon grin shining on his face, his fingers flicking a Salem as he sauntered through the rec room of Myers Dorm. He waved the Salem and greeted me cheerily: "How're y'all?" I nodded back but, bloated with propriety, declined to introduce myself. When you are a freshman from Person County and haven't yet located the exits in the rec room, it pays to be scrupulous.

Gene, however, knew no ceremony but community, and his openness was an attraction stronger than our aversion--even anathema--to his radical views. We argued from what we had been told to believe; Gene had thought about it and decided for himself. We never had a chance.

Rufie was Briley then, Briley Harrows. No middle name. When asked, Hubert Harrows always said, "After we put Briley on his back, we figured we'd done him enough harm." No one can remember why we began to call him Rufie. Perhaps it's the natural thing to afflict small people with diminutives, something you can't do with "Briley." Or we may have been mocking his aristocratic, blue-blood pretensions. He arrived at Bennett-Macon from Richmond, his suitcases crammed with thirty pairs of undershorts and a like number of undershirts. Gracie Harrows thought it all quite logical. After a month Briley would be well adjusted to college life and could then turn his attention to the mastery of washer and dryer. In two boxes Briley had several dozen records, which he cleaned religiously. Bach, Handel, and Scarlatti were names missing from my vocabulary. I

had 45s of Elvis, Bill Haley, and the Four Aces. Gene had no records but swore by Ernest Tubb, Roy Acuff, and Hank Williams. The only classic he tolerated was "Roll Over Beethoven," which was as close as he wanted to get to "Batch."

Briley did have something of a Richmond air about him, although I claimed it was tobacco smoke and not the rarefied stuff. In every pore of his skin, he brought to Bennett-Macon a sense of history as only Virginians know it. Trailing clouds of Confederate glory and Harry Byrd conservatism, he had inexplicably abandoned hallowed ground for a school he had never seen until the day he began his freshman year, almost as a missionary would sacrifice home hearth for pagan privation. He wore his fundamentalism like a breastplate, yet denied Gene's flippant assumption that Briley had undoubtedly been baptized in the James River and that the pollution had made him brain-addled.

After that first week in gym class, it is remarkable that we became roommates at all, much less for three years. When he entered the gym that Monday morning, Briley was dressed in a long-sleeved white, button-down shirt under a cardigan sweater which matched his navy blue Sunday slacks. Those of us who had been shooting baskets interrupted our fun to stare, exchanging knowing looks before returning to dribbles and jumpers. "Bet he thinks he's English," sneered Eddie Cantwell. Pop Slater taught the class and, being basketball coach, considered his sport the only one worth teaching the young men of Bennett-Macon. Spying his latest student, Pop seized Briley by the arm and escorted him downstairs to the locker room. Briley emerged a few minutes later wearing a gray B-M issue that floated to his knees and blue terrycloth shorts barely visible at the hem. Chest out, chin up, he walked like a penguin and was not much taller--and decidedly wished to be elsewhere.

That first day, now legend, this strange kid managed to kick a basketball in all seriousness, get lost in a figure-eight drill and run the wrong way, and finally hit Pop Slater in the back of the head while attempting a baseball pass. Pop, two years from retirement, declared that Briley had a medical disability and made him locker boy in charge of equipment distribution. In other words, he gave out shirts, shorts, and jock straps and received full academic credit in return. In my opinion, no guy named Briley should take PE in the first place.

This locker room boy became my roommate the next year. Because we had a couple of classes together and worked together on the school newspaper, I began to enjoy his quirky habits, his Virginia drawl, and his skittishness. We were both testing this new world against the ones we had left behind. Briley was, I noticed, a decent human being who despite his pretensions used his good humor to absorb our crude jokings and return in kind. I soon became accustomed to the baroque music and its attendant architecture, which Briley liked less well though he had examples hanging over his desk.

Gene, who lived down the hall, soon made our room his second home, and in short order Rufie's fundamentalism became about as clear as a Sunday morning radio evangelist trying to shout his way through the static. These two, one Richmond born, his feathers unruffled, and the other Bath born and left to fly free, became inevitable antagonists, alternately repelled by yet attracted to each other because the conflict soon became essential to their growing friendship. Our bull sessions, intellectually anemic since we had read and conceptualized just enough to be dogmatic, produced much heat and little light. More than once Gene stormed out when Rufie, his arguments having become personal attacks, tried weakly to reconstruct what Gene had systematically destroyed. Actually, Rufie and I had greater knowledge than our new friend; we simply didn't know what it meant. Gene, staunchly anti-denominational, strafed Baptists for their exclusiveness and bigotry. I know now that he was struggling, fighting himself as much as us, and in the process changing forever what we thought was unchangeable.

Raised mainly by an aunt, Gene was one out of eight children. He was able to attend college only because of scholarships and by spending four hot, dirty years in the college cafeteria, cleaning plates, sweeping, and rearranging chairs and tables. Often he came straight home from work to our room, ignoring Rufie's suggestions that he might enjoy a shower first. When it came to bathing, Rufie was a believer--Virginia style.

Gene's radicalism soon ceased to bother Rufie, except in classes they shared. Gene delighted in bouncing his ideas off professors, moving Dr. Bass, in future situations, to label any unorthodox opinion a "Tullisism." Rufie considered changing his seat; Gene rolled merrily along, even, to the dismay of the preacher boys, joining the Ministerial Alliance. Rufie, who

had felt insulted by the comments of one of its members, savored the possibilities. He celebrated by finally agreeing to accompany us to the local Presbyterian church, yet hurrying to stay a step ahead of the flames flickering at his rear.

Throughout those four years, Gene Tullis struggled with the nagging idea that he should become a minister. Yet when we graduated, he and Rufie spent two years teaching in Maryland while I did the same back home. Then Gene met Gail Sheffing, a Pennsylvania Lutheran, who tamed his denominational anathema and led him to a Baptist seminary, becoming a Baptist herself before they married and teaching to support them while Gene tried to learn Baptist ways while fighting the pain that pricked his conscience. Appropriately, his first churches were rural, one located in Ku Klux Klan country in Virginia where Gene was threatened with termination for advocating integration of the saints.

Although Gene and Rufie had finally separated after six years and I was hundreds of miles away in North Carolina, we kept our vow to continue our friendship as best we could. Gene and Gail became parents of three children; Julie and I had two.

Briley Harrows, professional bachelor, settled in the greater Washington area and became cosmopolite--season subscriber to the ballet, haunter of museums, patron of great art and music, and world traveler. He has visited most European countries, trekked the Holy Land, and wandered through Mexico. Asia is next.

Perhaps Rufie's wanderlust began with his father. Hubert Harrows, a man of many interests, became a skilled amateur genealogist, taking Briley throughout several states in search of graveyards where Hubert might find some of the rare information about the Harrows family. Sometimes they lingered until dusk, the boy imagining what it would be like to encounter the spirit of one of his ancestors. As an adult, Rufie returned the favor, taking his parents on various excursions. After the death of Hubert Harrows, he and his mother flew to Great Britain, where for the first time Gracie Harrows saw Scottish castles and the white cliffs of Dover.

As we discovered to our delight while at Bennett-Macon, Rufie had an abiding fascination with the supernatural. Horror movies robbed him of sleep. Ghosts just might be out there, all rationality aside. As the years passed, he flirted with astrology, UFOs, and reincarnation. So I told him:

"If you come back, it will be as a rat." Rufie is deathly afraid of rats, spiders, and even squirrels, which he says are related to rats and are of demonic origin, especially since they once set up housekeeping in his attic and kept him awake at night, fearing that if he fell asleep he would awaken to find a bushy tail tickling his nose.

As a child in Richmond, Rufie could peek through the window of his back bedroom and discern across a service road the ominous gray tombstones of a moonlit cemetery. Hubert, hoping his son would join him in the back yard for astronomy lessons, was more often than not left to gaze solitary into the heavens. Yet as an adult, Rufie fondly recalled all that he had learned in that chilly yard and could converse with some authority on the subject. But as Gracie Harrows put it, "Hubert had a lot of books."

On a trip to the South Carolina lowlands, Rufie, anticipating a traditional inspection of old homes and other historic sights, found himself tricked by his father into taking the ghost tour of Charleston, a city famous for its legendary spooks. Rufie pled fatigue when Hubert entered the grounds of St. Philip's Episcopal Church, where the Gray Man reportedly roams the cemetery at night. And he shopped while Hubert visited the Sword Gate where Madame Talvande, headmistress of an exclusive girls' school in the early 1800s, patrols the halls at night to prevent the escape of her students. Hubert told us all this, a mischievous twinkle in his eye. Rufie huffed and claimed that one can do only so much sightseeing.

Destined never to be a father, Rufie became an uncle to seven children, biologically to Mike and Deborah, his sister's two, and by adoption to Gene's three and my two. The young ones treasured their adult friend as one of their own--fun-loving, eccentric, interested, and sharing. Uncle Rufie had been places they never had, had seen marvels they had only read about, and believed in reincarnation, having told each child what identity awaits him in the new life. Best of all, as his friends have always known, you can say anything to Briley Harrows.

The friendship endured and even deepened as time passed and children grew older. Having completed the bulk of our paternal responsibilities, Gene and I began summer travels to reunite with Rufie, perhaps borrowing time from the past, recapturing the elusive butterfly of youth. Perhaps for more zaniness, more shedding of the adult self. For Gene, the reunion was escape therapy, from sickness and death and kindly churchwomen who



considered it their Christian duty to elevate the pastor's cholesterol level. Gene sometimes missed the reunions at the last minute, summoned to a funeral or some church crisis. But mainly, I think we enjoyed and were reinvigorated by our quirky friend, the man to whom everything happened.

I prepared for our most recent reunion by sending Rufie articles about rats that had been discovered swimming in the commodes of homes in the Myers Park section of Charlotte. He wrote back, complaining that thanks to me one of his natural habits had become a daily nightmare, and he fully expected to be punctured at any moment. Besides, he couldn't see what was splashing around down there.

Rufie's townhouse in Fall's Church was financed primarily by the huge profit he made from selling his condo in Arlington. Large enough to accommodate a small family, it is perfect for a private man who enjoys occasional entertaining. The house has two bedrooms upstairs with a small office at the end of the hall, a spacious living room with advanced stereo and televisions systems on the main floor, and a third floor downstairs with TV, sleeper, utility room, a rowing machine and exercise bicycle (there mainly for show, I say), and two well-stocked wine racks. On the main floor his kitchen, bordered by the dining room housing Rufie's four plants, seems superfluous considering Rufie's finicky eating habits. Yet both rooms epitomize the orderly classical man for whom structure and cleanliness are a given. Gene had another view: "That's easy to do when you don't have kids and a maid comes in twice a month."

And he had four bathrooms. Four. For one person. Upon entering the townhouse the first thing you see in the vestibule is the door to a half bath. Another such bath graces the bottom floor topped by two full bedroom baths upstairs. Kid him about all the plumbing and he says the place had already been built when he bought it. In a sense Rufie makes good use of his spacious accommodations since his home has served as a guest house for many friends who pass through northern Virginia, attend conferences in Washington, or simply pay a visit.

When I reached Falls Church, Gene had already arrived, as confirmed by his black Fairlaine keeping company with a haughty BMW in the parking lot. Gene, his untamable gray-flecked hair contrasting with the symmetry of Rufie's living room, had changed to Carolina blue Bermudas

and a yellow T-shirt. Feet propped up, that ageless crescent grin shining at me, he wasted no time.

"I can't get Rufus to come clean about his trip. I think there's a woman in there somewhere and he's clammed up on me."

Rufie had returned four days earlier from Germany and Austria. When the reunion and his travels conflicted, Rufie always asked for four days to recuperate.

"What woman?" I demanded.

Rufie, who had halted to glare at Gene, padded barefooted to the stereo and cut the power on Loretta Lynn. He wore denim cut-offs and one of three dozen short-sleeved plaid shirts hanging in the guest bedroom. Townhouse attire.

"There is no woman," he sputtered, his mustache twitching like a confused elevator. "All I said was that Jerry and I went to a beer garden in Munich and met some people. Jerry speaks German."

"Ha!" Gene cackled. "He said they talked to some fawlines."

"You can't even pronounce the word," accused Rufie. "And besides, why did you take out my Bach tape and put in that awful music? Ben just got here and you're already carrying on like some swamp creature. North Carolina swamps."

I stopped him with a stare. "You've changed since last time. Your face is fuller."

"Yeah," added Gene. "His shorts, too. All those beer gardens."

"Sorry I forgot your birthday," I apologized in mock solemnity. "Glad you got psychiatric help. Sure wish Julie and I could afford a trip like that. Bet you did have a blast in Munich, but I doubt you remember much about Austria."

"Well, you two might as well turn around and go home," countered Rufie, his eyebrows joining the protest. "I bought steaks for us to grill tonight and I refuse to waste fifteen dollars on a couple of orangutans."

When Julie was new and had just met my two friends, she called me aside one day and sternly reprimanded me. "Why do you and Gene treat Briley like that?"

Then Rufie, unaware that he had a defender and never having met a Mississippian nor even passed through the state, being a blue blood, gleefully commenced to ridicule the "hicks" who lived there. Then he

turned to Julie's accent, rich and syrupy, yet to him like the lines from a comic plantation opera. Bristling because she thought he was serious too, Julie quickly deserted and joined Gene and me in the struggle against Virginia snobbery.

Why is everybody always pickin' on me?

After steaks on the patio, Rufie asked the question. "What do you want to do while you're here?"

"Let's go to a movie," I suggested.

"Well, what?"

"See if Arachnophobia is on."

"Never heard of it."

"Where have you been this summer?" taunted Gene.

"I've been in Europe," snapped Rufie.

"With the frowlines."

Rufie groaned, pushed himself out of the lawn chair, closed the grill, and went back inside for the Post. Returning, he asked, "What is this thing anyway? What's that word mean?"

"Ah, it's just a film word," I replied.

He wrinkled his nose. "You're trying to pull one on me. I'm going to look it up."

So back he went, returning to announce indignantly, "I'm not going to a movie about spiders. You're crazy."

But he would--eventually. Once when Gene couldn't come, I went through the same routine with Rufie before he agreed to see Monkey Shines. He exited the theater pale, vowing never again to think kindly of the species nor under any circumstances to attend a movie upon my recommendation.

But the spiders had to wait. We had known before arriving that Rufie had federal jury duty, so for two days Gene and I were on our own. We slept late, watched videos, walked, drove into Washington, and I even shamed Gene into riding the exercise bicycle, after which he took a nap and nearly slept through supper.

Although Rufie's kitchen is well-equipped, finding something to cook is always a scavenger hunt. For breakfast I located a box of pancake mix bought for our reunion two years before, and Gene found enough orange juice for two hidden behind three bottles of white wine. But he had to go

out for bacon and milk. I don't know how old the coffee was, but we drank it. Since Rufie once roamed the aisles of five supermarkets, vainly searching for a half loaf of bread, we counted our blessings as we ate.

Rufie served at a sordid trial involving drugs, rape, and extortion. The FBI had nabbed New York Mike, kingpin of the New York-Washington narcotics traffic. Home the first day of the trial, Rufie branded Mike "the most frightening creature I have ever seen. Oh, law! He has long, stringy hair and the eyes of a psychopath." Home late the second day Rufie, pale and shaken, announced a guilty verdict, then found the sherry bottle. His mustache quivered, threatening to fall off.

"What?" I inquired.

He drained the glass. "It might be over for me."

"What happened?"

"It was awful. When we brought in the verdict, New York Mike was staring right at me. I read his lips. He said, 'I'm gonna get you.'"

"But isn't he in jail now? Didn't they put handcuffs on him and take him away?"

"I don't care. He might escape. Somebody might bale him out. I'll call someone to check the windows."

So the Gray Man was back, the moonlight on the tombstones, the monkey with the straight razor, and the rats in the commode. The next day, however, Rufie no longer needed sherry and had forgotten to call the window man. When Gene reminded him of the movie, Rufie decided that as a good host he must please his guests, even treating them to seafood at Pier 7. We rode in Rufie's Civic, allowing sufficient time after dinner to drive around the beltway to the Cinema 12 complex. Because the parking lot was crowded, we cruised for several minutes. Finally spotting a space, Rufie prepared to go park only to have the green Charger in front of us slam on the brakes and back swiftly in ahead of us. Rufie shouted an oath worthy of a Virginia gentleman, banged his fist on the steering wheel and vowed, "I'll get him for that."

He was still fuming when we finally parked on the back lot. "I'm going to find that guy and tell him a thing or two."

"Let it go," advised Gene.

But Rufie stalked on, finally locating the Charger, empty. Arms crossed, lips puckered, he hovered by the driver's door like hot, simmering soup, tapping his foot in frustration.

"Come on," I urged. "We'll be late."

"Well, I say he ought to be hung." Surveying the lot once more as though fearing undercover police, Rufie took one step back and then delivered a quick kick to the green door.

Let's just say that we were a bit late for the jungle scene, Rufie a brave warrior hobbling on a wounded big toe. When we were finally settled in our seats, Rufie unlaced his right Reebok, removed it, and rested his foot on the shoe bed. As the throbbing subsided, he lost himself in a world of spiders in jungles, in barns, in popcorn--and in shoes. When John Goodman, the exterminator, rested his bulk on a commode seat, oblivious to the leggy creature beneath, Rufie pressed his fingers against his bared teeth and slowly disappeared, his head but a memory below the backrest.

Poor Rufie. Now threatened doubly from the netherworld.

When we left the theater, Rufie, generating new steam, launched once more in search of the Charger. This time a man, lean and stringy-haired, was bent by the door, inspecting the slight dent that Rufie had inflicted. He occasionally straightened up to glance about the parking lot as though hoping to find the vandal who had ruined his night. Then Rufie, unprepared, froze as his and the man's eyes locked. Obviously this sortie had taken him into the danger zone. Abandoning his hobble, Rufie elevated his nose and strolled rapidly toward the back lot as a man who must tend to serious business. As we passed the Charger, Gene lifted a friendly hand, grinned, and said cheerily, "How're y'all?"

In the car, Gene began to laugh uncontrollably, nearly sliding into the floorboard and finally infecting me and multiplying the uproar, while Rufie fumed in the back seat, having reinjured his toe in his mad rush to safety.

Gene wheezed one last time. "Hey, Rufus. That guy looked like New York Mike to me. Did you see that long hair?"

Rufie swore at his toe and at us. "Shut up and somebody drive. I hope you fools don't hope to be invited back."

The following day, Rufie's doctor declared the toe unbroken. But it was swollen a magnificent purple, forcing the invalid to sit with elevated foot while suffering applications of ice and dosages of aspirin.

"Look at it this way," I philosophized. "If anyone asks you what happened, tell them you've got the gout. It's an aristocratic disease."

Since Gene and I were leaving the next day, I called Betty, Rufie's secretary in the library at school. Neurotic herself, she asked if the toe would have to be amputated. And, yes, she would check on him. Poor Rufie.

Maybe next year we'll have a less adventurous reunion, though that would actually be a disappointment. Everything does happen to Briley Harrows, and everybody at home looks forward to our return.

Betty arrived as we were leaving and immediately began to play nurse. I heard Rufie squawk and rushed into the living room to find that Betty had force five pillows under the famous foot, and Rufie was in danger of sliding to the floor.

"Look," I said in parting. "Take my advice and in the future spend more time worrying about your feet and less about New York Mike."

As Gene and I carried our baggage to the cars, Betty was busily searching for a sixth pillow, ignoring Rufie's protests.

"You know," smiled Gene. "Maybe he really is a lot younger than we think."

Well, not really. I just hope he will never change. After all, everybody is entitled to worry a little bit. Especially if you are fifty and your mustache is about to fall off.

*Jim Taylor*

