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# Dialogue

March 1984



## Dialogue

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## Editorial

Although this issue of *Dialogue* is on the theme of feelings (and nothing more than feelings), assigning specific topics and articles was hard because defining exactly what an emotion *is* is no easy task. We all know that extreme outbursts of feeling are emotions, but what about pride at a job well done, quiet boredom, or joy expressed in solitary silence?

Perhaps we don't need to define *emotion* because we all will soon lose such emotions as we grow up and older. Small children may cry (I can remember crying at eight of our twelve basketball games when I was on the eighth grade girls' team), but when any one of our peers cries or rejoices too loudly or openly, we soon label him as "too hyper" or "too sensitive."

Such labels are sad and destructive, however, as are

thoughts that adults such as ourselves must "get over" our feelings. When we are so thoughtful that we cut ourselves off from feeling our emotions, we suffer, because suppressed, unexpressed emotions soon become forgotten emotions. We lose our ability to feel because of emotion disuse.

We can avoid this disaster of emotional amnesia through expression. Naturally, such emotional honesty—"I got an A and I'm thrilled!" or "I'm mad at you because you're ignoring me"—is a great risk. But the reward of having risked pride, joy, fear, guilt, love, worry, or wonder will be an emotional freedom that allows us to go on with life unburdened by the weight of suppressed emotion. ■

—Mary Boerman

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# Overcoming Despair

compiled by Mary Boerman

If we must consider the subject of feelings, we like to dwell only on positive emotions such as happiness and love. But negative feelings such as depression and loneliness also make up a large part of the emotional spectrum, and these strong emotions cannot be ignored.

Joel Niewenhuis, a Calvin graduate as of this December after only seven and a half years of study, has insight into these "downs," having gone through such depression himself. The following is the result of Joel's willingness to talk with Mary Boerman and Nancy Jacobs about depression, its manifestations, and possible responses to its appearance.

**Mary:** Joel, we'd like to talk with you about low-ebbing feelings in a general sense, not necessarily in your case specifically, although that may come up. We want to talk about some answers to questions of what people out there can do about depression.

**Nancy:** We want to print something that will be good for people to read. But now we're putting a lot of expectations on you.

**Joel:** Yes you are, and frankly, I'm not sure I can deliver. But we can try.

**M:** How would you define depression, and how is a deep depression different from general "blues" that everyone has on the one day that you just don't feel good and you're mad at everyone? How does one distinguish between the two?

**J:** Well, in a way the word *depression* covers such a wide variety of feelings. Basically, depression, I would say, is a feeling

of helplessness and hopelessness, being alone, feeling isolated, withdrawn and acting withdrawn. As to how a severe depression or despair differs from a temporary depression or discouragement, I think the distinction is basically one of intensity and duration. But that's probably rather obvious. In a severe depression, a person is really down for days and days on end, whereas temporary blues or blah feelings are something that come and go.

**N:** With depression, in your case or in people you know, do one or two events tip it off or is depression a result of a combination of things, and, therefore, is something that you can't pinpoint?

**J:** Hmmm. . . . In a way it's kind of both of those, I think. On the one hand there are deep underlying factors that give rise to a depression, and I think a person is often not consciously aware of those. Repressed anger is one big factor that causes depression. Of course if it's repressed, a person isn't conscious of it. But on the other hand, there often is a certain event or circumstance that operates as the catalyst for depression to occur, something that will trigger certain emotions or reactions that cause a depression.

**M:** Does everyone, you think, feel such a "deep-down" depression at some time or is that more rare? How many people may feel this way at some point in their lives?

**J:** You're dealing with such vague generalities that it's hard to say, but probably very few people never feel some form of depression. As to how many experience a severe depression, I don't know. I would guess that number would probably be quite high too, but I couldn't give any percentage or statistics on that.

**N:** Severe depression is probably something that its sufferers can hide

for a long time.

**J:** That's true.

**N:** Sometimes when people are depressed they don't want to admit it. They won't deal with it. This is something I've noticed: in society we're required to be happy; if we're not going to be happy and fun, we may as well just forget being around other people. Have you noticed that, and do you think that's a major problem? In other words, did you feel pressure from society as a depressed person? Or do you think that when someone's really depressed it will come out anyway?

**J:** Well, I wouldn't deny the fact that this general cultural expectation of having to have it all together is a factor. But at the same time, when the individual person is in that rut of depression, in a way it's a very personal, individual kind of thing, and you really don't care where it's coming from or why you're feeling bad. But the need for one to be individually strong, to have it all together by himself, that is probably a strong cultural current. People don't need what they think is this expectation or standard because if they don't meet it, they then feel defeated and get depressed.

**M:** And that just doubles the problem because you're failing at yet another thing. Do you get the feeling that people don't want to hear about depression? I know from my experiences on Greyhound buses that people are dying to talk to other people. Is that because other people don't want to hear about your bad feelings? In general, do even friends only want to hear about the good things because bad things make them depressed?

**J:** Again it's so hard to generalize like that. There are people who feel that way and respond that way to depressed people. But I think there are also people who care very

*Mary Boerman felt badly about the dented car.*

deeply about their friends and even about people that they might not know but that they see are in trouble and struggling.

**N:** Seeing that struggle gives those who want to help a very frustrated feeling also because you don't know how to help to make the person aware of some of the reasons for his depression.

**J:** I don't think you can make a person aware of something that he or she doesn't really want to be aware of. You can try to suggest certain things, factors that you see operating negatively in this person's life. You can try gently, lovingly, and even firmly at times to suggest those things in an effort to help that person. Such an effort can and does work, I'm sure, but there's no guarantee.

And along that line—I've thought about this quite a bit—I've been severely, suicidally depressed more than once in my life. I've come through those traumas, but retrospectively I've asked myself, "What could anybody have done to help me and to prevent my own suicide attempts?" and that question leaves me with a somewhat helpless feeling because I have to say "I really don't know" because people *were* trying to help me. I've come to see that basically—this isn't one hundred percent true—you simply cannot help a person who does not want to be helped. And if a person really does want to be helped, he will be helped. I was just building up the walls and building them so thick around me that they were impenetrable. Humanly speaking at least, there was nothing that anybody could have done to help me or to stop me from trying to take my life. So again, you cannot make something happen for somebody else; it's just a rule of life. It's tough . . . but that's the way it is.

**N:** So what did finally break down your walls? May I ask that?

**J:** Yes, you may ask that.

**N:** I just did. You seem to say that there has to be some sort of beginning inside the person who is behind very thick walls, so the decision to break walls was ultimately your own.

**J:** Yeah, I guess so. Theologically we have some paradoxes and one of them is the doctrine of God's sovereignty alongside of human responsibility. I guess I see that operative in my own healing from that severe depression. It was an act of God's sovereign grace, the Holy Spirit moving mightily within me, which caused the change. But at the same time, I guess it was a decision on my part too.

**N:** Sort of like a conversion to Christianity.

**M:** Sort of like a predestined free will.

**J:** Oh, it was definitely a conversion experience; turning from hopelessness to hope.

**M:** I would like to know more about that healing process. Do you think that one "gets over" an emotion (and I'm thinking of this on even a lesser scale)? When I'm angry or depressed or down, I try not to ignore it and say, "O.K., if I can forget about these two causes of my depression, I won't be depressed." I have to try to solve the problems that are causing my depression. So does one "get over depression" or does one go through it and learn from it and always have it? Is it more of a learning process or a forgetting process?

**N:** Oh, well worded.

**M:** Thanks.

**J:** Again I can only speak from my own experience and not make any hard and fast rules. I really think it's both a learning and a forgetting process. I, today, am no longer severely depressed, by God's grace, like I once was. I do have little ups and downs, but that's part of nearly everybody's life, something to be expected. So in a way depression is no longer a part of my life. In that sense I have forgotten it. It's no longer a part of me, of who I am today. But yet I have learned from it too. I've learned more about

myself: who I am, the dangers that might befall me (and have befallen me). So it's both.

**N:** I was wondering: when you have those daily ups and downs, do the downs frighten you at all?

**J:** I probably have more fear than your quote normal unquote person. Knowing what I have done to myself frightens me. The prospect of it happening again—I wouldn't say terrifies me—does frighten me somewhat because I know what it's like to be in the grip of a despair that is so deep that there seems to be no way of getting out. And the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness are so overwhelming and totally overpowering . . . it's very scary to think that that could happen again. When those feelings did come upon me, it was like an avalanche descending on me, over me, and undating me with stuff that I couldn't do anything about. That's how I felt. It's not necessarily true, but that's the way I felt. So there is fear about that, yet I'm not paralyzed or gripped by that fear and I'm very thankful for that.

**N:** What can lead to depression?

**J:** Rejection, disappointment, and another *big* thing causing depression is self-pity. They're so intertwined. I think anger and self-pity are two key factors contributing to the dynamic of depression, but then there is the biochemical component; for me that was a factor too. The people who adhere to a medical model and really believe in drug therapy go all out and say that if you can just find the right combination of chemicals and change all the enzymes in this guy's brain, he'll be all right.

**N:** That's scary.

**J:** Yeah, it is kind of freaky, really. But I really believe—you hear a lot about holistic health and medicine—there is something to

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*“Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness are so overwhelming. . . .”*

seeing us as a whole people. So many human factors or aspects operate simultaneously: the physical, bio-chemical, mental, emotional, and even the spiritual. I also personally felt—in my black hour, so to speak—that I was almost possessed by the devil himself. And whether that was true or not, I was sure—and I am still sure—that there is a spiritual dynamic operating and there's a spiritual battle going on: the forces of good are battling the forces of evil and the latter can really drag you down.

practice and a process of developing our sensitivities to other people, becoming tuned in to how people act and react, recognizing that there are so many different kinds of depression that the symptoms manifest themselves in different ways. Some people seem insecure and anxious while other people may be exhibitionists that they're fighting or struggling with something inside which is probably akin to depression. Just tuning in to some of those things and becoming sensitive can do a lot. There's no

safe, you really have to take it at face value, and therefore run the risk of being used yourself. Being concerned and trying to help entails some risk of being manipulated.

**N:** It takes a while to be able to make that distinction: whether you're being used or being useful.

**J:** Yeah, that's a tough line to draw, too.

**M:** Maybe you can't answer this question, but what do you think is the general attitude toward emotions or depression in the Calvin community (and you can take that to be whatever you want)? Do you think it's mostly a "buck up" attitude? Or do we acknowledge emotions? One of my friends says we cut off the emotional extremes; we're not allowed to be extremely happy or extremely sad. We have to act like we're always cool. Do you think that's true?

**J:** I think there probably is a lot of truth to that. There's something to realizing that, as part of the CRC, we are, Calvin is, overbalanced on the intellectual side. It almost becomes a truism after a while that the Dutch Reformed faith is quite rational and rationalized and intellectualized. I think that's a rather accurate appraisal of the way it really is. But there is in general, and that includes Calvin as well, an increasing awareness of the importance of emotions and feelings and having sensitivity to those things.

**N:** I hear *Dialogue* is going to print a whole issue on the subject.

**M:** I know you don't want to set yourself up as "Joel tells the CRC how to improve" but . . . Do you think students have been raised not talking about feelings and now are afraid to tell someone about their emotions?

**J:** I think a lot of them are, yes. It's too bad we can't be frank with our friends. That kind of openness in relationships is so, so lacking. You know, I have very few relationships with people that I can really get down to some inner, gut-level stuff with. That's sad too. And that makes me feel lonely at times. I may have a lot of friends—and I'm sure I'm not the only person in this boat—but many of those friends border on

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*"We need to show we care about people. People are primary."*

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**N:** Do you think it's important for a depressed person to have a Christian counselor?

**J:** Not necessarily. I do think that Christian friends are important and perhaps a Christian therapist is ideal, but, again, not necessarily.

**N:** I think that's interesting because that's not the answer I expected.

**J:** Seriously?

**N:** Seriously, because of the way you said that the entire movement to Christianity for you was such a great part of moving away from your depression. I thought a Christian counselor would be a important part of that.

**J:** He or she could be, but I firmly believe God uses nearly anybody and everybody to work His purposes out, His healing purposes in other people's lives, and He can just as well use a non-Christian therapist as a Christian one. And that's not to deny or disparage the spiritual element at all.

**N:** But Christian friends are important.

**J:** Sure, I think so.

**N:** I've heard that lots of the best counseling is done by people who don't have psychology degrees, just professors, family, friends.

**J:** That's true.

**M:** But how do those people do it? Do they just lend an ear?

**J:** That is a really tough question. I think it's just a matter of time and

magic formula for doing that; it's just a process that takes time to develop.

**N:** I think it's hardest for acquaintances. I've been thinking of someone I don't know well, but I realize is down. I really don't know what to do; because we don't have an intimate relationship I can't say "so tell me about it." All I can do is hope that this person's friends are helping. As a friend, you can butt in. As an acquaintance, you can only stand back and watch.

**J:** But even with an acquaintance, you can, very cautiously and sensitively, try to approach that person without imposing yourself on him or her. Your establishing a kind of relationship could be a very crucial thing. But it has to be done with a lot of tact.

**M:** So would you say never take any change in a personality too lightly? If a person seems to be going along normally but something "leaks" out, do you take that at face value?

**J:** I think to be safe, yes. Anything that you think could be wrong should be regarded as potentially dangerous. I've heard it said, for example, and I really believe this is true, that if a person talks about suicide—especially if you see other things that could lead you to believe that person is depressed—you take that seriously. It might be a cry for help and the person is not going to

acquaintances. I can have nice little chit-chats with them here and there, but I know that I need more than that, that I really need to relate on a variety of levels, and the superficial is not enough. It's quite something to get in touch with the deeper, inner stuff which is there for everybody whether they want to realize it or not. Some people are more quote in touch unquote than others but the deeper dimension is nonetheless there.

And I do see a lot of superficiality at Calvin, if I can say that without sounding too harsh. I don't want to make a rash judgment, but that superficially sometimes turns me off, frankly. However, you can't just automatically change that overnight and say "Come on, people; let's be 'in-depth.'" But I think that sort of talking has to go on more at Calvin. **N:** It's probably no more superficial here at Calvin than in the outside world, but for a Christian college, for something that calls itself a community, there should be more concern.

**J:** We need to show that we care about *people*. People are primary. That's such a basic thing but sometimes we get so nearsighted that we lose sight of that fact. We get so caught up in academia.

**M:** But along with that concern for people, does nosiness creep in at all? We want to know what's the matter sometimes; we want some "scoop." But I know that I want to separate nosiness and concern; I want my concern to be real.

**J:** Any time you show any amount of caring and concern for a person, you run the risk of it being perceived as an intrusion or an imposition or nosiness. You have to realize that you are running that risk. But then examine yourself, too, to see whether it really is nosiness or whether it is genuine compassion and concern, because there is a difference even though the line distinguishing the two may be rather fine.

**M:** What can we do to help a depressed person?

**J:** I think any concerned person, but especially a Christian, can do two basic things: be there and pray. First of all, it's important to *be* there with that depressed person to show that you care. You don't have to say a lot



or preach at him or quote Bible verses to him; in fact that might be the worst thing to do. I know that when people tried to do that to me it nauseated me. Depressed people don't need to hear "I'll read the Word of God to you and it will be a panacea for all of your problems." But they do need you to be there, to show that you care. Somehow that expresses a lot right there without saying much.

But to go a little further with that "being there" notion, if you are sure the person is indulging, in self-pity, *do not* sympathize with them. That is important; for us to really seek the vicious cycle: their self-pity leads to your sympathy which only leads to more self-pity on their part. Sympathy *ad infinitum* doesn't help a depressed person get out of his rut. We all have to quit blaming other people for stuff that is our own problem. It is so easy—I think nearly everybody does it—to project the fault or blame onto someone else.

**N:** Another part of self-pity.

**J:** Yes, self-pity: "poor me; I'm sinking here and I can't do anything about it and all those jerks out there are ruining my life." It's a lie. Anybody who believes that is self-deceived.

**N:** We do say things like "I'd be happy if it weren't for anyone else."

**M:** "But now I'm alone; how come I'm not happy? It must be me!" That's a scary realization. And it's hard to separate what is your fault from what is not.

**J:** That's where I think truth-seeking is important: for us to really seek the truth about ourselves and our relationships with others, to be as honest as we possibly can be with ourselves about the way we are, the

way we do things, the way we come across. And the truth, as they say, hurts. It cuts to the quick at times. We have to, I guess, make a commitment to be open to that kind of searching-for-truth process, to let it run its course. Jesus said "the truth will make you free." And that is really true. We are only free when we come to grips with who we are. And that includes all the rotten stuff too.

But getting back to the second thing that a concerned person can do: I truly believe there is something to prayer, to praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We must learn to say, "Lord, lead me; I don't know how to respond to this person. I want to help him, but I just don't know how." And again that's where that sensitivity comes into play, becoming sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Hopefully we progress in that as we become more and more sanctified.

But along with that prayer for ourselves, we must also engage in intercessory prayer. As a kind of personal testimony I'd say that if it weren't for the persevering, prevailing prayers of God's people, I would not be who I am today. I am a living example of the power of praying for people. God is mighty; He hears our prayers. If we strongly assert our faith by praying, we can help the depressed person to reach that asserting point also. If we truthfully and intensely work at acting out our faith, we will have an effect on the depressed person. Although he may not appreciate the Bible in the midst of this depression, there will come a time when he can say with the psalmist: "Oh, my soul, why art thou disquieted in me? *Hope in God*, for I shall again praise Him, my help and my God." ■



# The Balloon Plan

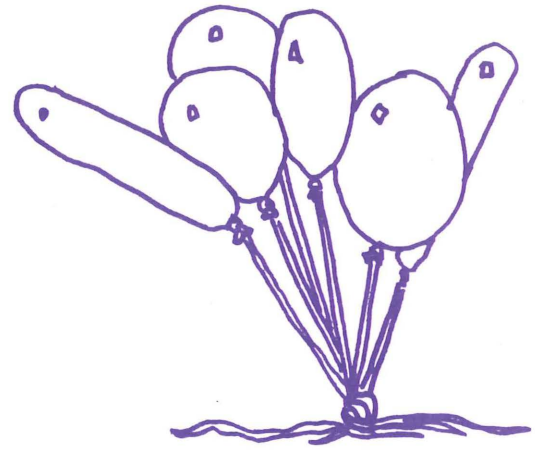
by Lori Kort

First off, Mrs. Homely came over to bring me dinner. "Your parents asked me to keep an eye on you while they're gone," she said in her loud but motherly voice. She lives next door, so it was the natural thing, but even my parents knew that her favorite dish was spinach quiche. My parents were only gone for the weekend, and I was certain that I could survive on the cake left over from last night's dessert. Still, there she was, smiling and proud of herself for taking a helpless ten-year-old under her wing. So I asked her to come in. "Here, I've brought a nice spinach quiche and whole wheat muffins." I said, "Thank you, Mrs. Homely. It looks very good. I'll bring back the dish tomorrow." I figured she'd get the hint and go home, but no, there she sat to watch me eat it. I put forth a great effort, struggled and fought it down like a man, but even I couldn't eat more than half of the serving she brought. I knew my dad wouldn't have eaten any of it. He would have said, "Why, thank you, but I am feeling a little under the weather today. I think I'll save it until tomorrow." But being as I am just a kid, I had to eat it. I smiled and told her about my day at school. She asked about my family, and I told her about my parents' having to take my sister into the city on the train to get glasses for her and not being able to afford to bring me along. I told her that they knew I was in good hands. She was so pleased with the compliment that she didn't even make me finish the quiche. In fact, she took it home with her—finally.

I was tired early that evening, so I went to bed and even fell asleep before Arby got there. But I woke up the minute I heard the three hoots of the owl, and climbed out the window. I could have let him in through the front door for all it would have mattered, my parents being gone and all, but a boy has his pride. We knelt down in the bushes to keep from being seen by any wandering bands of outlaws that might be passing through and discussed our plans for the next day, best day of the week, Saturday. On Fridays Arby got his allowance—a whole dollar—and on Saturdays we used it up. Rather a good system, I thought.

"What's it going to be this time?" I whispered.

"Franko, I've got a great plan." He always called me Franko because it sounded like the name of a mafia man, real tough. Everyone else called me Frankie, which wasn't so bad either. I was glad my parents hadn't



named me Timothy or William or any of the other upright names the boys in the Sunday school had. Anyhow, the plan: "I bought these balloons, see, and—"

"What! You already spent it?" Arby had to push me back into a bush to make me be quiet. Sometimes I forget, and you never know when those outlaws are going to be sneaking around. I asked him again, "You already spent it?"

"Well, I can't come over tomorrow. My dad is working on the barn and I have to help him—all day."

"I can't believe it. You are weak, Arby." I had to tell it to him straight. After all, this was my day of freedom—one day, you see, and my only friend was turning into a traitor. "You are downright frail. Why didn't you tell him you had more important things to do? My parents aren't gonna be gone forever."

"Franko, he's my dad." I saw his point. "Anyhow, this plan will make up for it double. See I got these balloons, and—"

"Let's see 'em." They were good balloons; you had to give him credit. "Good job, Arby; they'll hold lots of water for sure."

"And I'll tell you what we'll do—"

"We'll throw them at the girls again, right? Old stuff. I dare you to throw them at Deacon VanStilt."

Arby was shocked. He didn't say a word for a while minute. Deacon VanStilt was the most upright man in the whole town. People backed out of his way wherever he went. Arby and I both knew that we would probably be thrown in jail for throwing a balloon at *him*. Still, it would be such fun, to see him dripping wet and all. "Right in the middle of the town we should do it. Mr. Singer would fall off of his chair." Mr. Singer was the laziest man in town. He did nothing all day long but sit on a chair in front of the grocery store. But if you stopped on the way in, he could tell you some of the best, scariest stories you'd ever hope to hear. He made all the little kids laugh. Us boys—although I never did, but some of the boys did, I heard—had nightmares from his stories. And all the women of the town, though none of them would admit it, heard the gossip from him—he knew it all, sitting there all day watching the people go by. Even on Sundays he sat there and watched us all going to church. On Sundays he wore a suit, but he still sat there just like any other day.

Arby was scared; he really was. Once a guy has been dared, he has to do a thing, no matter what the cost. We looked at each other for a good five minutes, waiting,

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*Lori Kort was overheard to confess that she really does do cartwheels when spring finally comes.*

and then I couldn't help it—I started to laugh. It was a good thing my parents were gone. We laughed and laughed so loud it was amazing Mrs. Homely didn't wake up and come after us. Arby finally sat up and said, "Picture the Dea—" and that started us up again. We never did get around to talking about his plan.

Saturday was the longest day of my life—without Arby. He isn't very smart, and my parents say he isn't a good influence on me, being as his parents don't go to church, but he is an all right guy and always ready for an adventure. Not like those boys from Sunday school who are afraid to mess up their suits. Arby doesn't even have a suit.

I went fishing alone and didn't catch anything at all. I saw a dragonfly and tried to get it so I could hide it in Priscilla's purse on Sunday. She is the sissiest girl I know. Some of the boys think she's pretty, but I say she's a bore. She never plays baseball with us, or does anything but sit around fixing her hair. Every Sunday she comes to church with her sister and her mother, all three of them looking like a fashion show, and their poor father in his work clothes not even trying to talk sense into them anymore. My mother says he's a clod for coming to church in his work clothes. She says he has no respect for anything, not even church. But I'd sure rather spend an evening talking to him than to the three of them put together. Anyhow, I missed the dragonfly. The day was a complete loss. And when I got home, there was Mrs. Homely, complete with quiche. "Does your family eat this every night?" I asked, not meaning to be impolite, but I really wondered. She didn't say much to me this time. I smiled, though, and tried even harder to eat and this time I finished all of it, and I think that made her feel a little better. "Well, Frankie, honey, I'll pick you up on the way to church in the morning."

I was so depressed that I went over to Arby's house early. I hooted and hooted, and had to sit in the bushes for over an hour before he climbed out. "What in the blue takes you so long? I been hooting for an hour, loud as I could."

"I know. My mother got out her bird book to try to find out what species makes that particular call—boy, was I nervous. They finally went to bed. My dad was worn out from the work. He's asleep already; I heard him snore."

"So, what's the plan?"

"Tomorrow, on the way to church—"

"You're going to church?"

"No, not on *my* way to church, on *their* way to church, you and I throw balloons at Priscilla and company."

"What!" I have to admit, that one took me by surprise. Throwing balloons at school was one thing, but on the way to church? That was quite another. And then there was Mrs. Homely.

"We hide in the trees up the hill behind the grocery store and wait about when Mr. Singer is ready to say, "Good morning to you all," we chuck the balloons right over the roof onto their picture-perfect Sunday hats. Then we run around the corner and take in the effect."

It was a good plan, I had to admit, surprisingly good, coming from Arby—even worth ruining a Saturday for.

But there was one problem. "Arby, I can't climb the hill in my Sunday clothes. I can't hardly even move in them."

"So wear what you have on now."

I didn't know what to say. I had heard Mrs. Homely talk about Mr. Singer sitting by the store on Sundays. She said he would burn, would burn for it one day. My mother had said, "Now, that's a bit harsh, isn't it?" but she too had shaken her head about Arby not going to church. I was afraid that if I missed church the results could be quite long lasting. Still, it was such a fine plan. "I'll decide before morning."

"Franko, I dare you," he said. That was the clincher.

"OK, alright, I'll be here in the morning." Mrs. Homely would have to go on without me.

Arby's mother was a bit surprised to see me at their house the next morning instead of being at church, but she didn't say anything. We filled up those balloons, five of them, so tight with water that two of them broke in our hands on the way up the hill. We were pretty wet and I wasn't feeling too good by the time we reached our hiding place behind the old pines. We sat down and laughed about how Priscilla would look with her ribbons all hanging and drooping around her. The thought of it had a good taste. I began to feel better. We waited and waited, and there they finally came, strutting along like those birds with the big tails. "What are those birds called, Arby, the ones that walk like Priscilla?"

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*" 'Franko, I dare you,' he said. That was the clincher."*

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"Peacocks, but we don't have time to talk. Ready?" We crouched down and moved in closer. "Ready, ready . . . now!" I hadn't looked up before we threw the balloons. I knew where the girls would be when Arby said "now!" and the throwing took all of my strength—it was a long way from the hill to the front of the store. I threw two of them and he threw one. "Now . . . go!" Arby yelled.

"Did you see them? Did we hit them?" I asked.

"I didn't look. Hurry! We'll miss it."

We ran down the hill picking up speed. I was ahead. When I got to the corner of the store, I realized that I wouldn't be able to stop. I sort of slid into the street with Arby right on top of me. I saw a puddle of water and pieces of our three balloons on the ground in front of me.

Arby let out a weird little squeal. I looked up ready to laugh at the girls, but saw instead Deacon VanStilt standing in the middle of the mess.

"On your way to church, boys?" We stood up and didn't say a word. Water was running from the brim of the Deacon's hat onto his nose and down to his tie and the

shoulders of his picture-perfect suit. A bright red piece of a broken balloon hung from his left shoulder. It wasn't—just not a bit—funny.

I looked at Arby, and he was nodding his head real slow. We went into the church with the Deacon and sat in the very front row in our bare feet and still a little wet. On the other side of the aisle sat the Deacon and all of the little VanStilts. I looked over and saw the piece of red balloon still hanging there, and all of a sudden it was just too funny. I looked straight ahead and tried not to shake from laughing. But when I looked at Arby, and he looked

at me, we couldn't help it.

The minister kept on talking, except once he stopped, and I thought it was because he was going to laugh right out loud if he didn't stop. But all he did was clear his throat and take a drink of water from the little glass that he always keeps behind the pulpit just for times like that. Nobody laughed as we left the church—not Mrs. Homely and certainly not Priscilla, although her father clapped me a good one on the back. But over the front of the grocery store—you can go any time and see—Mr. Singer is laughing still. ■

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### Paradise Refused

We are not saints of bleeding pierced hearts  
or pitying adoration of  
some pale body dribbling blood  
from several arrows  
or tears gushing warm as an infant's breath

We are not other-worldly. Our rest  
even now is hot and still, as the eye of God  
shuffles through the leaves seeking shaded sparrows  
and melts the morning wings of those who flee

We choose to sleep and dream,  
jealous of the lawless cows  
reaping doggedly and  
swatting flies in the  
Sabbath heat

—Tom VanMilligen

J.C.R. (1897-1983)

Green and continuous  
The leaf  
Follows life's direction  
Striving to grow  
To attain its full beauty  
For so long  
Then  
Finally flushed  
In brilliant color  
It rapidly ages  
All too soon falls  
Before  
It was  
Fully  
Appreciated

—Kathleen Harris



### Consequence

Born at a point deep in my heart  
Suddenly expanding  
Pushing blood, nerves,  
Rushing, ever larger  
Beyond my fingertips, toes  
It explodes.  
And I am burnt through with joy.

—Dan Scheeres

# Salem's Crisis

by Dan Cole

Writers often invoke inspiration from divine or classical figures in history. Nathaniel Hawthorne preferred to look to his family's past, to sift through old documents that bore the family trademark, and fashion stories from what he discovered. What resulted were tales of demons and devil worship, stories of how evil could be bred from man's obsession with evil, and how this infatuation compelled man to delve all the more enthusiastically into the mysteries of evil in human kind: in part because Hawthorne's family tree carried the name of John Hathorne, prosecutor at the Salem witch trials in 1692.

In the winter of that year, Salem was a small Puritan community of seventeen hundred inhabitants. A local minister, the Reverend Samuel Parris, bought three West Indian slaves. Parris had a daughter for nine years, named Elizabeth, who enjoyed listening at the kitchen door when Tituba, a slave woman of Caribbean descent, told dreadful stories about the witches of the Indies. Fascinated by the thought of witch meetings and strange powers, Elizabeth told her friends, and the group began meeting at the parsonage to practice magic on cold winter evenings.

The girls' practice amounted to crawling around on all fours and making strange noises, which the wide-eyed audience that soon gathered to witness the spectacle regarded with fear and grave concern. Parris called a doctor, whose grim diagnosis caused the blood of those who heard to run cold. It was plain to him that the girls were bewitched by the Devil.

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*Dan Cole is afraid of the dark.*

The girls' act must have been quite convincing. The stricken and horrified community of Salem resolved to fast and pray until the bewitching stopped. It didn't, and at the intense pleading of her father, Elizabeth and the others implicated Sarah Goode, Sarah Osburn, and Tituba as their devilish tormentors. Goode and Osburn were older women, who lived in relative poverty and were considered by the community to be of bad disposition.

Warrants were issued for the arrests of these women, and a special court was instituted to offer quick proceedings. Many came to

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*"The stricken and horrified community of Salem resolved to fast and pray until the bewitching stopped."*

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the witness stand, and even Sarah Goode's five-year-old daughter testified against her mother. The verdict in all three cases was guilty. Sarah Osburn went to prison, where she died a short time later. Tituba was sold to a Southern planter and was shipped out of the community after a year in prison. Sarah Goode went to the gallows. As she mounted the scaffold, the Reverend Mr. Noyes demanded her confession. "I am no more a witch than you are a wizard," was her fiery reply, "and if you take

my life God will give you blood to drink!" She was hanged, and the incident became the spark that started the fire in Salem, Massachusetts. This fire brought death to nineteen accused witches, sent many more to jail, and even pressed to death an old man named Giles Corey. In September of the same year, Mr. Noyes again presided over the hangings of eight accused, and was so moved with spiritual indignation that he remarked, "What a sad thing it is to see eight firebrands of Hell hanging from our trees!"<sup>2</sup>

When attempting to offer reasoning for the wholesale murder that occurred in Salem, one should note that the witch craze in the colonies was unique in Massachusetts. Although Rhode Island had a law against the practice of witchcraft, it was never used. Down south, the situation was similar: "There was no question about the tolerance of the Southern colonies whose inhabitants were preponderantly Episcopalians; witchcraft in the colonial South was viewed in the same light as was the practice of voodoo among Southern black slaves. It was rarely taken seriously."<sup>1</sup>

Even in the Quaker colonies, the witch craze played virtually no role. Swedish Quakers accused a woman of being a witch in 1684, and the case was brought to trial in Pennsylvania, with the honorable William Penn presiding. The Quaker jury found her "guilty of the common fame of being a witch; but not guilty as she stood indicted." No fiery sermons were delivered from the pulpits as a result of the case. The Quakers didn't cower in the hidden corners of their homes, pointing accusing fingers at those

who walked past their windows: "The psychological epidemic, not finding there a moral atmosphere capable of sustaining the infection, died out. There were no more cases of witchcraft in Pennsylvania."<sup>2</sup>

The tendency is to place the blame on the strict, over-zealous religion of the Puritans. This most assuredly played a role, but it cannot be considered entirely the cause. Many historians argue that it is best to look at the Salem witch craze as a 17th century phenomenon rather than a Puritan phenomenon. These historians argue that the Puritans feared witchcraft because they were people of their time. Indeed, New England was settled during the reign of James I, whose book *Daemonologie* gave royal support for an active spirit world, one characterized by the visible presence of evil. Moreover, the events in Salem occurred while a similar yet far more devastating witch epidemic had just about run its course in Europe. The remarkable text of Charles W. Upham deserves quotation:

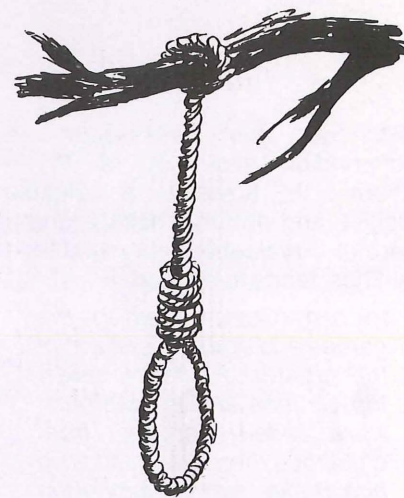
*The delusions that brought ruin upon them [Salem] was not the result of any essential inferiority in their moral or intellectual condition. What we call their ignorance was the received philosophy and wisdom of the day, accepted generally by the great scholars of that and previous ages, preached from the pulpits, taught in the universities, recognized in law and in medicine as well as theology, and carried out the proceedings of public tribunals and legislative assemblies.<sup>3</sup>*

That the patterns of accusations in Salem were endemic of the values stressed in the Puritan community cannot be disregarded. Reacting to conditions they had left behind in England, the Puritans were devoted to the conviction that one's social status had little to do with one's spiritual status. This helps to

explain not only the fact that respected, well-to-do members of society were tried and convicted and tried of witchcraft, but also the fact of accusations which occurred within families and the damning testimony often made by one family member against another. The statement "Many parents believed their children to be witches: many husbands their wives,"—is by no means an exaggeration.<sup>4</sup> The tragedy of 1692 becomes even more mysterious and horrifying when one notes that the principal accusers in the witch trials were children. Historians are amazed at the reliability which was placed by adults on the testimony of children. Their court-room antics were the main reason for sending several persons to their deaths.

The Salem witch trials are infamous not only for the use of pre-teen testifiers but also for their use of the afflicted as witnesses. Spectral (spiritual) evidence was not only welcomed, it was desired. That children were supposedly gripped with seizures when the accused happened to glance their way was enough to send many to the gallows. The case of Susanna Martin, the one who was tried, convicted, and hanged as a witch for keeping her feet dry on a rainy day, stands out with particular notoriety.

What could possibly have brought about the conditions that existed in Salem in 1692? The Puritans, from the very start, had been strict and uncompromising when it came to violations of the Puritan code and other forms of non-conformity. Some have been moved to write: "Those people, who had fled Europe to avoid having to conform, and to avoid religious persecution, enjoyed the prerogatives of bigots in the New World by instituting with the same rigidity all that they themselves had fled Europe to escape."<sup>5</sup> The point must be stressed, again, that certain conditions unique to Massachusetts fostered the terrible events that took place there at the end of the 17th



century. Many historians agree that these conditions were the growing uncertainty of the position of the Massachusetts colony in the New World; a changing attitude towards the theology of Christendom and a skepticism towards the "Invisible World"; and the influence of over-zealous ministers, namely the powerful Mather family, on the socio-religious fabric of society. I will address the latter first.

Cotton Mather once said, "Witchcraft is the most nefarious high treason against the Majesty on high. A witch is not to be endured in heaven or on earth." He was the third generation of a family of religiously-fired Puritans, his father and grandfather both ministers before him. Cotton was a strong believer in the powers of evil and accepted the arrival of witchcraft in New England with, as some believe, great relish. Throughout the proceedings of 1692, he generally advocated swift and violent punishment for the accused, and even in years after the event, he supported what had happened in Salem.

Historians and others who have taken interest in the Salem witch phenomenon have exhaustively argued that Mather acted from a position of political ambition, personal and spiritual vanity, and again a type of macabre glee in the event. It is difficult to determine the validity of these arguments, even while most of them are based on interpretations of Mather's own accounts of the witch craze, *Wonders of the Invisible World* and *Memorable Providences relating to*

*Witchcraft and Possession.* An observation made by M. Wynn Thomas is, however, a valuable insight, and one that history, and a careful evaluation of Mather's writings, tends to support:

*In him (Cotton Mather) the names and ambitions of two of the greatest Puritan families, the Cottons and the Mathers, were united, and that from childhood there was instilled in him a belief, almost visionary in its intensity, that he was the*

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*"It . . . seems more than likely that the works of Baxter, Cotton, and his father Increase filled the people's minds with fear. . . ."*

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*chosen of the Lord in His great purpose of salvation towards his chosen people in New England. Therefore the Puritan process of rigorous and constant self-examination to search out the workings of sin and grace became in Mather . . . so intense as to damage his imaginations and judgments permanently.<sup>6</sup>*

Again, whether or not Mather "went off the deep end" to the extent that some historians suggest, is open to interpretation, but the fact cannot be denied, however, that Mather, like his father and grandfather, was devoted to the fulfillment of a spiritual destiny, intent on purging New England for her corrupted and cancerous element, and preserving her as the chosen of God.

It was Cotton's father, Increase Mather, who laid the ground-work for his son's zeal and enthusiasm. Increase not only believed in the existence of witches and the supernatural, he made a hobby of collecting evidences of parapsychological occurrences in New England. Cotton no doubt grew up with considerable talk of this material floating around his head (no pun intended). In 1689, Cotton published a book on witchcraft, which was followed shortly by a similar work written by Richard Baxter in England. Both of these were widely circulated in New England, and the witch craze of Salem occurred only a short time later. It therefore seems more than likely that the works of Baxter, Cotton, and his father Increase filled the people's minds with fear and paranoia. As Julio Baroja writes: "It must be emphasized the cases of possession which repeatedly occurred between 1688 and 1693 were, without a doubt, provoked to some extent by too much reading of books on witchcraft and demonical possession written by influential theologians."<sup>7</sup> This theory is further supported by the fact that previous witch cases in Massachusetts, around the 1640's and 1650's, drew less attention and fostered no degree of hysteria characteristic of the Salem outbreak.

All this helps to explain an immediate cause of the events of 1692, but more has to be said regarding the socio-religious atmosphere of New England at the time, one that made the Mathers and others feel obligated to write of witchery and the presence of the evil one. The role of religion was changing in world culture, and with this change there came an increased skepticism in the presence of the spirit world and the ensuing hysteria occurred at a time when written material on the visible presence of the spirit world, and the ensuing hysteria, occurred at a time when "experimental science in Europe was just beginning to develop. With this went a cold,

objective approach and concern for evolving methods rather than fixed beliefs."<sup>8</sup>

Increase Mather and his son, among others, were obviously alarmed by this development and became entrenched in the conviction to keep the power and validity of the supernatural firmly in the minds of New Englanders. The lack of certainty in the spirit world called into question the very existence of God, and the Mathers' fear of a religious decline in New England moved them to publish books and other affirmations of the active presence of the evil one in human kind. It was the fear that faith in God was "doomed to vanish before the light of science and education, to pass from the realm of supposed reality into that of acknowledged fiction that brought about the preoccupation with witchery and ultimately the deaths of many individuals."<sup>9</sup>

Charles Hoyt cites uncertainty as "the greatest cause of all of community hysteria."<sup>10</sup> This brings us to the third possible reason for the witch craze of Salem. By 1690, Salem had secured a promising foothold in the New World, and the inhabitants were succeeding in establishing their own cultural tradition. They had survived decades of living somewhat precariously on the edge of a vast, unexplored land. When 1692 arrived, however, Salem was confronted with problems that seemed to threaten her very survival. Provoked by international strife in Europe, French traders began giving the Puritans trouble. The Indians, whom the Puritans regarded as barbarians and servants of Satan, had lost their tolerance of the settlers, and hostilities were becoming increasingly overt. These troubles were seriously compounded when the English government, concerned about the growing independence of the colonies, began questioning the validity of Salem's own constitution, and threatened to revoke her charter.

What this all adds up to is a vital threat to Salem's somewhat newly acquired tradition, the New England way of life. As a result, these circumstances were regarded as "a national calamity, an infliction of Divine wrath for supposed sins and shortcomings."<sup>11</sup>

The fact that Massachusetts was prone to long, hard winters, those of 1690, '91, and '92 being particularly so, only added to the displeasure of Salem's inhabitants and fostered in them the belief that divine disfavor was being enacted. When writings and stories of witchcraft started making the rounds within the community, events took a turn for the worse: "Epidemics, household accidents, bad luck, drowning, obstructions in one's career—indeed, all irritations whatsoever—were seen as the result of opposing influences, the malign wishes of a neighbor or some other enemy, aided more often than not by professional evildoers: witches, sorcerers, witch doctors."<sup>12</sup> Conditions could not have been more favorable for an outbreak of paranoia and hysteria, the kind characteristic of Salem's witch trials.

The fact that the Salem witch craze ended nearly as abruptly as it began makes the phenomenon all the more remarkable. As Salem's notoriety spread throughout Massachusetts, and the "special gifts" possessed by the principal accusers became sought after to determine witch cases elsewhere, the skepticism of few became the skepticism of many. When a young girl made public the story of how she was approached by the demonic apparition of a respected Bostonian, the accused promptly filed charges of slander against her. Strangely enough, the vision stopped tormenting her almost immediately.

In Salem itself, many felt the situation in the release of those yet imprisoned. Shortly thereafter, a number of accusers confessed that they had been wrong in their testimony. The guilt and paranoia

that had led to the hangings in 1692 was replaced with the guilt of knowing innocent individuals had been executed. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, writing of the events in Salem, ask a thought-provoking and indeed frightening question: "How many Salem Villagers had their own Geroge Burroughs—a person they accused in an effort to expunge from their own minds the suspicion that the real 'guilt' was their own?"<sup>13</sup>

Was there ever a legitimate practice of witchcraft in Salem? As for incantations, sabbats, and abuse-inflicting apparitions, historical proof can be no more concrete than the spectral evidence used to condemn innocent individuals during the trials. In all likelihood, the slave woman Tituba might have demonstrated some type of voodoo practice to have incurred the wide-eyed interest of her youthful audience. Other Salem inhabitants, take one Bridget Bishop for example, could very well have kept small dolls made of rags and goat's hair handy, if only for the novelty of the idea and the curiosity sparked by all the chatter. The fact remains that there is simply no evidence that witchcraft was being practiced in Salem. It seems, however, that everyone thought it to be, and with the situation in Salem as it was, that was enough.

There have been some who have argued that the Salem witch craze was an early manifestation of a type of provincialism still evident in the American way. While historical observation (not to mention the bias of this writer) generally tends against such a theory, it does seem safe to say that the events of 1692 are evidence of a certain facet of human nature. This facet is prone to fear and paranoia, even relishes these qualities to some degree, and has reared its head periodically throughout history. The "New York Negro Plot" of 1741, which resulted in the deaths of 33 individuals wrongly accused of plotting the mass murder of whites in New York,

and the 1950's campaign of Sen. Joe McCarthy to rid the United States of suspected communists, are cases in point. Even on a more personal level, the tendency is there. Most individuals can recall instances in their own experience wherein fear prompted a hasty and ill-conceived response. Hopefully, the values espoused by our "modern" culture—values founded on experience, the advantage of hindsight, and for many a faith and trust in God and His love for all—would not allow a repeat of the events of 1692. ■

<sup>1</sup>Lauran Paine, *Witches in Fact and Fantasy* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1971), p. 112.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Ennemoser, *The History of Magic: Vol. II* (London: Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden), p. 518.

<sup>3</sup>Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft: Vol. I* (New York: Fredrick Ungar Publishing Co.), p. 321-322.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Williams, *Witchcraft* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 285.

<sup>5</sup>Paine, p. 112.

<sup>6</sup>M. Wynn Thomas, p. 204. (see reverse side of back page).

<sup>7</sup>Julio Caro Baroja, *The World of Witches* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 138.

<sup>8</sup>Baroja, p. 138.

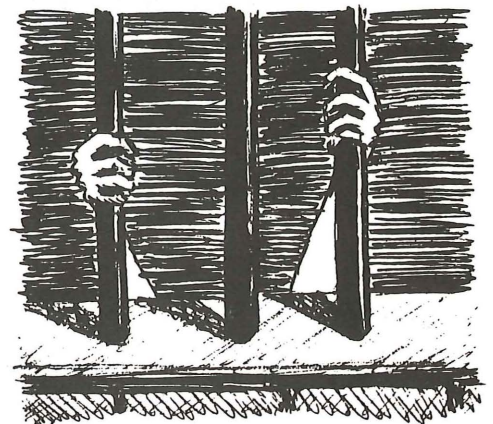
<sup>9</sup>Upham, Vol. II., p. 467.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Alva Hoyt, *Witchcraft* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), p. 122.

<sup>11</sup>Ennemoser, p. 511.

<sup>12</sup>Hoyt, p. 121.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, "Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft." *Colonial America*.







## The Last Bastion of Man

I

I came with Father, mightiest warrior  
Of Old, and beheld all Creation wide  
Put to the sword—my soft alabaster  
Tunic spattered with fortunes of battle.  
    Innocent eyes joyed at the carnage;  
    Weak limbs and frame yearned to pillage.  
The lessons of war I learned from Father,  
While with the foe's flesh he greased  
The axle of his chariot  
And dense smoke billowed from the last bastion of Man.

II

In my youth I saw with experienced eyes,  
Still but his son and eager apprentice,  
Armies put asunder by iron cannon  
And small arms that could spill blood from afar.  
    Into his chest a bayonet I thrust,  
    Vengefully pursuing the sacred trust.  
    Yet uncast was the bullet meant for me;  
    Emperor of all was my destiny.  
With weighty saber I felled another,  
And a score more hacked to pieces  
With my broad-hilted, bloodied cross—  
Ability my sword, fortune its sheath.  
And yet unfallen was the last bastion of Man.

III

Mastering the trade I conquered abroad,  
Faithfully leading the spirited into  
Combat. By plane we flew; by ship sailed;  
By tank crawled. And every man armed against  
Us surrendered or fell by our guns.  
    Pearl-handled revolvers hung at my side  
    While four gold stars I wore, my rank and pride.  
    The scent of the crumpled and muddied dead  
    Came sweeter to me than any flower bed;  
    The Fox knew the smell, he craved it like me;  
    Fruits were we of the same ancestral tree.  
I had taken the worthy foe as an  
Eagle does his prey; stripped its bones  
And trampled them beneath my boots.  
And in the tumultuous procession  
Followed a slave, carrying a golden  
Crown and whispering in my ear,  
"All glory is fleeting—such is the plan,"  
While there stood stalwart the last bastion of Man.

—Chas. S. Cairns

# Living in Two Worlds

*The following is a conversation/interview between two good friends, a heterosexual female and a bisexual male. The views expressed in this article are their personal views and do not necessarily represent the views of Dialogue or Calvin College. As they are both Calvin students, the names have been changed to protect their identities.*

**Jennie:** How would you define the terms *homosexual* and *bisexual*?

**Peter:** The term *homosexual* deals with a man or woman who cannot have a natural relationship with the opposite sex because it would be unnatural to them. So they have what they consider “natural” relations with the same sex. It has to be that way because it would be unnatural *not* to be. A *bisexual* is a person who considers it to be natural to have a relationship with either sex.

**J:** And you consider yourself bisexual. Is this because you choose it, or because that’s who you are?

**P:** Because I have been and can be aroused by both sexes; it’s not because I decided to be that; it’s who I am.

**J:** Can homosexuality and bisexuality be cured?

**P:** Some people hope it is curable; some say it can be cured . . . I don’t know. Right now I don’t really know if I want to or can be cured.

**J:** Can gay people change if they will to?

**P:** Gay people can live in different manners. Many marry and ignore

their true sexuality forever. Change completely? I don’t think so.

**J:** For clarity, let’s just refer to you as “gay” and me as “straight” from now on. When did you first realize that you were gay?

**P:** I would say that the earliest time that I was aware of my sexual identity would be eighth grade, seventh grade.

**J:** How did you know?

**P:** Basic dreams, fantasies. I heard once that all young boys have them [gay dreams] occasionally. I assume it’s common; I can’t quote anything. And I assumed that’s what it was.

**J:** How did you know for sure? I mean, when did you know that it wasn’t a passing thing?

**P:** When I decided to practice, to enter the gay world, my first experience was as a freshman at Calvin. And if you want to use a specific point it would be then that I entered the gay world.

**J:** Do you think that anything in your upbringing influenced you to be gay? They say that a dominant mother or a lack of a father figure can influence a person.

**P:** I’ll answer that by saying that I know a lot of people who did not have a dominant mother or dominant father or broken home, and they are gay.

**J:** But you don’t think that happened in your case?

**P:** . . . I don’t see how my family life affected me to be such. I have straight sisters and brothers.

**J:** When you first realized that you were different from the majority of society, how did you react? Did you go through a period of trying to deny it? Or did you gradually accept it?

**P:** For years I put it out of my mind;

it was not a driving force. I never really thought of it that often. Only lately have I thought of it a lot, this past school year, because I’ve been thinking a lot about my future and how I plan on living the rest of my life . . .

**J:** When you came to Calvin, how did the gay aspect of your life change? Did it become more easy or more difficult?

**P:** Having gone to a school where there were no gays apparent—you never saw them where I lived—I was used to always neglecting it, ignoring the fact. I dated women; I still like women; and if people want to say that’s hiding . . . well, it might be, but that’s how I did it. Hiding is an art, and I’m a master.

**J:** What is the gay community at Calvin like? Is it just an informal acknowledgement of each other, or is there a network of gay people, like a private club?

**P:** There is no private club. There is just a constant acknowledgement and hopeful search for more. Somehow we find each other, whether it be at bars, or wherever. And then from there we just meet more people whom we know, and know of: “My friend knows somebody. . . ,” and it goes from there. There is no formal organization, or informal, for that matter.

**J:** It would seem to me, for instance, that most of the Blacks at Calvin tend to hang around together and seem to be pretty close friends. They’re together as a group a lot. Why doesn’t this happen with the gay people? Because they’re all trying to hide it?

**P:** Because Black people can see each other. It’s a noticeable minority.

**J:** But why don’t the ones [gay

people] who know each other blend together? It would seem to me that you would want to get strength from each other because of your mutual isolation from society.

P: We do meet each other; it's not *en masse*, though. Sometimes on campus of few of us meet, but we really can't have an open discussion due to lack of privacy.

J: How many gay people are there?

P: Official statistics would say anywhere from five to ten percent of the general population. On Calvin's campus, I know either personally or by word of mouth that that figure is about right—closer to ten percent.

J: About how many of them are men, and how many are women?

P: Since I very seldom spend time in the lesbian bars, I don't know as many gay women; but from speaking with friends who are lesbian, I would say there are more women.

J: Really? That's surprising.

P: But with women, from what I understand, most of them are bisexual. Most of them are not straight lesbian. With men it's probably a fifty-fifty mix, straight gay and bi.

J: There seem to be two main stereotypes about gay men. I don't know why there aren't any about women, but there aren't.

P: Do you want to know why there are no stereotypes about women?

J: Why?

P: Because the thought of two lesbian woman having a sexual relationship has for years been idolized by straight guys.

J: What? Come on . . .

P: No, no, it's accepted more, I think. Not as a disorder, but almost as . . . it turns men on. I'm speaking from going to movies with friends who are straight, and from their comments about two women having a sexual relationship; it's almost as if they approve of it.

J: Well, anyway, the stereotypes—the ones I know of—the first one is patterned after the movie *Cruising* with the big burly men in leather and chains.

P: As being very rough . . .

J: Right, going around the bars at night, picking up whatever action they can find. And of course, the

other is the wimpy, effeminate male with the downturned hand. How true are these to real life?

P: Well, how many sado-masochists are there in heterosexual relationships? You know . . . how many "wimps," if you want to use that term, are there in heterosexual relationships? It's not a gay thing. Whether you're straight or gay, there's roughness and effemininity in both fields.

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*“. . . it is living in two worlds, and it is very, very tough, sometimes more than others, but that's the only choice I have at this point.”*

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J: I'm talking about the extremes. I've never been to a gay bar, so I don't know. When you go, do you see a lot of men with leather and chains walking around?

P: Uh . . . there's a few, always a few—depends on the bar.

J: What you think about stereotypes on television, like say the ones that are done by Eddie Murphy and Joe Piscopo on "Saturday Night Live"? What do you think when you see something like that?

P: Well, for one thing, they do it just for the laugh. I seriously doubt that they mean it.

J: Well, some people do take it seriously.

P: I am not insulted by it; I like a good joke. If the person seriously believes this and has the opinion that this is so . . . The truth is that this is fallacy, but there will always be people who will believe it, and there is nothing I can do about it. I've seen Eddie Murphy and his show, and by his jokes it came across that homosexuals are always after sex. But sex is not the only thing; a relationship requires much more than sex.

J: But doesn't it bother you that there's such a large stereotype that people actually believe and is very rarely countered?

P: Polish people would say the same thing about their ethnic jokes . . .

J: OK, let's change the subject. So, basically, you're living two different lives. You're hiding from a lot of people . . .

P: Yes, I am. I'm hiding something from people who I don't even know. I tell some people when I want to tell them, if I ever do.

J: But my point is that sexuality is so . . . pervasive in our lives. It colors how we live, how we relate to other people, the things we talk about, the

things we joke about, and you have to slip in and out of these modes of concealing and being open about it.

P: This is the society I live in. I have no choice. I cannot come out openly to everybody because—it's kind of obvious. Calvin's community . . . future job plans . . . family . . . there are some things that are just best not told. And it is living in two worlds and it is very, very tough, sometimes more than others, but that's the only choice I have at this point.

J: I'm just trying to get at what it's like to have . . .

P: . . . to live in two worlds? It's rough. I, uh, you know, I'll be in one group, and nobody knows, and I'm no different. I mean, I'm no different than when I'm with a group who knows . . . it's just the fact that they know or they don't know. It causes problems because some people who know have a hard time relating to me now that they know.

J: What do you mean?

P: When I told some people, I expected some harsh comments or a little bit of sarcasm or discrimination, and I didn't get that. I got a little bit of cold shoulder, but the people who cold-shouldered me weren't really good friends anyhow. Most of the people I told accepted it because most of them had friends who were [gay] or knew of people who were [gay] and had already

experienced the relationship of a straight person with a gay person. Some people I told don't approve of it because they believe it's not religiously, morally, or socially correct, but they've accepted me. Some people accept it when I'm around, and when I'm not around, they don't accept it. I know that. It does create two worlds, but I think a lot of people live in two worlds. The people that have accepted it understand the fact that it's just not a degeneracy, an illness or sickness or perversion; that I can be a good person just like anyone else can be, that I don't have diseases, germs, or "cooties." And they've accepted me very well, know where I might be coming from and know my troubles.

**J:** What troubles?

**P:** Well, the troubles I have living in two worlds or the troubles I have with people who don't accept it. There are people who know I am gay, and they can't accept it, but they're having trouble with their own lives. Until they have identified themselves and realize where they stand, there's no way I can expect them to know where I stand. I think some people don't know where they stand, and they feel very threatened when I'm around.

**J:** Why?

**P:** Because either they don't want it to be assumed that they are bi, or gay, and/or they don't know if they are or not [bi or gay]. Some people have not matured; they don't know. . .they've had thoughts. . .and I threaten them when I'm around them because they're worried that I'm going to make them gay. But they might already have it in them; see what I mean? Or they're worried that other people are going to think that they are gay. Just shows how insecure they are, I think.

**J:** It's kind of funny you brought that up, because, um, I had an experience with a professor that I was talking to about you. We talked for about an hour and a half, and I was getting ready to leave, and he looks me straight in the eye, and he goes, "You know, a lot of people come here talking to me about their quote friend unquote and they're really worried about themselves." He was implying that I was talking about myself the whole time I was talking about you, and. . .um, I just got so embarrassed and ashamed that he would ever think such a thing. So I quickly said that it wasn't true, etc., you know, and I'm walking down the hall thinking things like, how am I ever going to sit in class in front of this guy and stuff like that. . . . And then it occurred to me; why am I so embarrassed? This is what people go through all the time: problems with the attitudes of other people.

**P:** Exactly the point I'm trying to make. Even people who have accepted themselves completely still have trouble with what other people think.

**J:** But, um, do you think that a lot of the gay people at Calvin go through this struggle with themselves? I mean, you've accepted yourself, but do you think a lot of them are still struggling with themselves, trying to decide or deny. . . .

**P:** Yes, they are. But even after accepting yourself, you still have problems. I've accepted myself, and I'm still struggling with it. . . .

**J:** What do you mean, struggling with it?

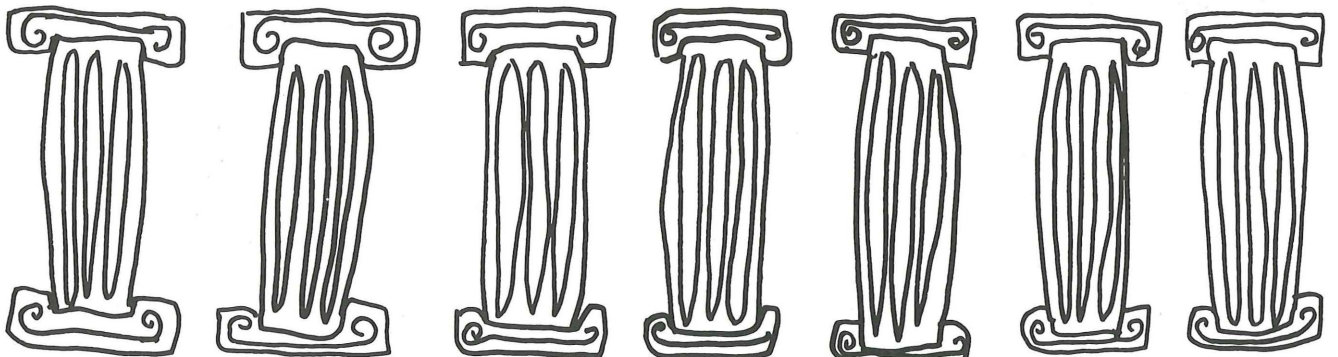
**P:** Struggling with the rest of my life because I still want a family. . . . I do plan on marrying one day. But what if I stray? That's something I struggle with all the time.

**J:** But what about guys, or women, who are gay but don't want to accept it to themselves at all?

**P:** I know many of those. I know a few people who are going through it right now. And one case I know of in particular, one guy on campus who has had homosexual relations, and now. . . he's denying it completely. Not the fact that he had gay relations, but the fact that he could be gay. And in doing so, he is almost destroying his life. He has alienated himself from all of his friends because he wants to get out of it. . . but yet, those were his friends. He is hiding himself in the deepest closet man can enter, to the point of hurting himself. I know another friend who goes on a drinking spree every time he has problems with his identity, and his schoolwork falls. I don't even have to talk with him because I can tell he's having trouble whenever he's like that.

**J:** Do you think gay people have a problem with self-esteem when they're going through all of these identity crises, even the ones who have accepted it, because of that constant negation by society? Are they constantly putting themselves down or thinking of themselves as lower people?

**P:** I never think I'm a lesser person because of what I am, you know what I mean? I never think worse of me because I'm bi. Sometimes I have a downer; I get into a depression because either somebody cold-shouldered me or some other reason. . . but it doesn't make me an entirely depressed person. I think about things, think about it all the time, and sometimes things aren't always going well, but I don't think that's just solely a gay problem. I think even heterosexual people have these depressions



where they just don't know what's going on. They don't know what to do, they don't know if they want to date . . . .

**J:** Yeah, but whatever we do it's still acceptable to society. Our problems are just with ourselves; they aren't with everybody thinking we're strange.

**P:** Well, there's nothing I can do to change those people's opinions, not that I really care to . . . I mean, I would like their opinions changed, but there are always going to be ignorant people. Bringing race in here as an example, there are always going to be people who hate Blacks. No matter how educated, you know, there are always going to be people who are biased. There is always going to be that hard core group of people who just don't like minorities. Well, there's nothing I can do about that, and if you talk to a person of a minority race, he's going to say the same thing. The only advantage he has is that he can go home and everybody there is going to accept him because everybody there is of the same minority. That does not happen often with gay people.

**J:** Do you think that's why they tend to flock to gay bars?

**P:** Oh, exactly, exactly. It's the only place where I can go to feel completely at ease and not have to worry about people knowing whom I don't want to know. I cannot worry about what I do and have a good time. I'm just there because it is a release; it is that home that minorities have and we don't.

**J:** Speaking of home, how would your parents react if they knew?

**P:** I believe that neither of my parents would accept it, being very religious. I have a very close relationship with both of my parents,

but I don't think they could ever accept it; in fact, I would tend to believe that if they found out, I would probably be kicked out of the house. And it's a shame, because I'm no different than I was before they found out.

**J:** How do you deal emotionally with such possible rejection?

**P:** Makes me very bitter sometimes. What causes my parents to hate it so much that they would probably kick me out? I get very bitter sometimes about that.

**J:** Is that what has turned you against the church?

**P:** Well, many things have turned me against the church, but this issue is in the forefront. The person in the CRC who would say that he or she were gay would be ostracized; he would never hold any office, teach Sunday School; he would never do anything of any official status. It's an impossibility. I know in my own church, if it ever happened, it would be incredible the problems I would have and my family would have. I don't think this is an uncommon fact, either. If we all think of our home churches and what would happen if the son or daughter of a prominent family proclaims openly he or she is bisexual, I think, in every church the same thing would happen: severe ostracization. And trouble for the direct family—and probably even more. I would say as far as even relatives, you know, “. . . don't appoint him as deacon, his nephew's gay . . .”

**J:** What about God, I mean, the church is . . . .

**P:** The church is an organization made by man, and man is sinful, so the organization is sinful. God exists; I have a personal relationship with God. I think that's the finest, the only true relationship man can have with

God.

**J:** But how do you feel about God creating you in this way? I mean, the Synodical Report brings up the fact that a lot of gay people turn against God because they feel that somehow God created them . . . with a disorder.

**P:** Created them wrong? Well, I blame it on the Fall. All sins were the response of the Fall . . . .

**J:** So you think homosexuality, then, is a sin that was started with the Fall. You don't see it as something good, you see it . . . .

**P:** Well, I don't see it as something good, yet none of us are inherently good. We are all sinful.

**J:** I know that. But the condition of heterosexuality, in the beginning, was good, and is still seen as good, practiced in the proper manner. Homosexuality is still seen as evil in itself, the condition and the practice. Do you see the difference between the condition and the practicing of the condition?

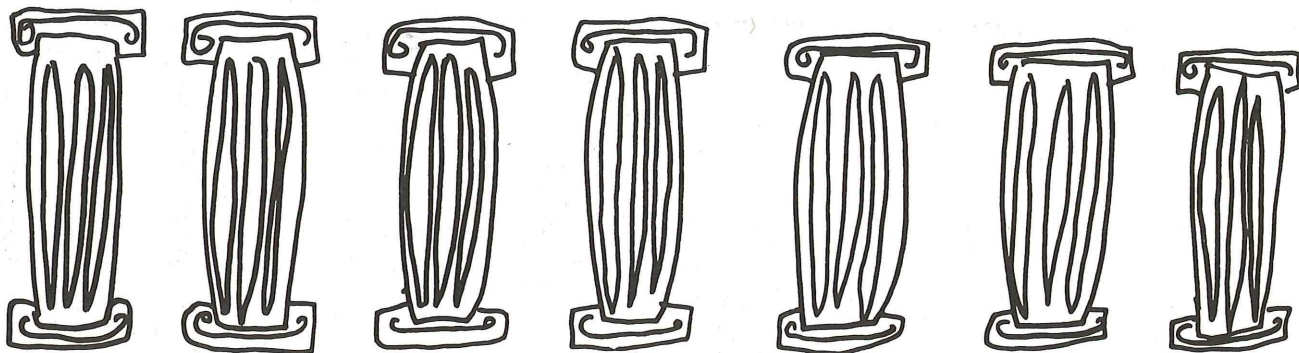
**P:** Oh, of course. The condition of homosexuality and the act of homosexuality are different, but yet the same person, the same identity; he still is homosexual. I know the Synod makes a distinction between the condition and the act, but you're still talking of the same person—although he may not commit the sexual act, he still is.

**J:** But was that person created good or bad? Do you see what I mean? Heterosexuality, practiced within the proper manner, is still good.

**P:** It is the ideal, I think, according to God's creation.

**J:** If that's true, then why shouldn't all gay people try to strive for that?

**P:** I don't disagree with you. I think heterosexuality is the way God wanted it. But because of the Fall, that's not the way it is. Some present



psychologists and psychiatrists would say homosexuality is curable . . . and that might be so . . . .

**J:** But for those that it's not . . . .

**P:** They have to live that way. They were created that way.

**J:** You read the analogy (in the Synodical Report) between the homosexual and the alcoholic. A lot of people think that since the alcoholic person is born that way he does not have a choice and he has to learn to live with it, that is, refrain from drinking. And they're saying that the Christian homosexual should act the same way. He should acknowledge that he was born this way, but not practice it.

**P:** OK, quoting from the Synodical Report, "a misuse of his [the alcoholics] responsibility contributed to his alcoholism. In the case of the homosexual, however, his personal responsibility for his condition is in many instances minimal."

A gay person is different. We did not, and I speak for all the gay people, have a choice. It was in us to begin with. We are not all of a sudden at age twelve, or fifteen, or twenty-seven, or forty, or sixty, all of a sudden—I'm gay! No, that's not what happens.

**J:** OK I see your point. So, you believe that you were born with a sin within you, as everybody else.

**P:** Yes.

**J:** And you were somehow burdened with more of a sin?

**P:** Well, I don't consider it more of a sin than anybody else has. I don't believe homosexuals have this added sin that heterosexuals don't. I think we all have the same amount of sin, mine being bisexuality, and another person's being kleptomania, and another person's being whatever—lust, adultery, rape, etc...

**J:** But the solution to all of those problems is refraining from the practice.

**P:** Exactly. And a solution to world hunger is not to have any more children. I don't think it's possible.

**J:** OK, but there is still a difference . . . .

**P:** One being the prescribed order of God's creation and the other being a complication caused by the Fall. But even heterosexual relationships are

sinful because of the Fall. In the eyes of the Synodical Report I should become a celibate monk, and be happy with my place within fellowship with the Lord, in fellowship with a knowing and loving church that knows me as I am and accepts me wholly without any discrimination. I don't believe that's possible.

**J:** Are a lot of gay people struggling with this problem? Do they feel like they've been burdened with an extra sin? The word I'm thinking of is *trapped*.

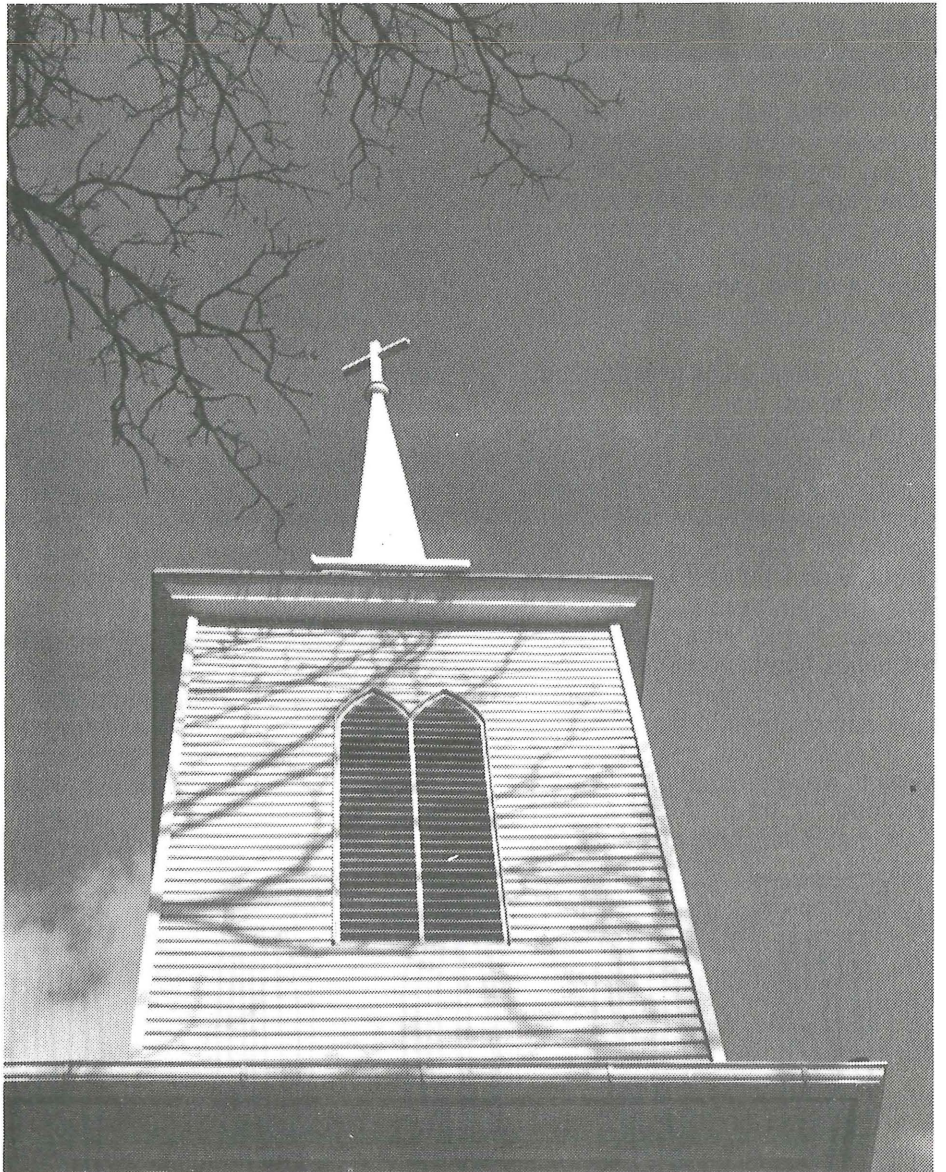
**P:** Most people I know who are bi or gay have completely ignored, forgotten, put out . . . religion is nothing to them anymore.

Fortunately, many people at Calvin are struggling with it within a religious perspective of their choice. And that's a good thing. That adds a burden to us because I have to struggle with it in the context of the final saving. But I would say that most people have left religion out of their lives as if it never happened to them.

**J:** I think a problem that arises is that the straight community tends to view the gay community as being much more active than they are.

**P:** A myth.

**J:** OK, maybe in the secular world. We can't deny that in the secular world heterosexual relationships tend to be promiscuous, very short



Untitled

Bob Johnston

lasting . . . . But within the Christian community, where you're supposed to love one person and stay with them for the rest of your life—I mean—is that possible for gay people? If they were accepted, could that happen?

**P:** If they were accepted, I think you could find some people who would live in an open relationship with their lover. But I don't believe it ever will be accepted in the Christian Reformed community. If I were to find a person whom I really loved, and he really loved me, and we wanted to live together in a relationship . . . .

**J:** Similar to marriage:

**P:** Well, in a coupled relationship. I could probably do it, but it would probably be not open to all of society. It would probably be like most people I know living in such conditions. Their whole life would be centered around the gay community.

**J:** But if the issue is love, not sex, then why can't there be more gay couples? I mean, why can't they be faithful to each other? Is it because of condition, or is it because of society?

**P:** I don't know. I think some people venture to say that's because there are no children holding them together; but how much of a reason is that why heterosexual couples stay together? I don't know. I can't say what will happen in the future. I would say a lot of it has to do with the absence of roles. I do believe there are a lot of gay couples out in society. You just don't see them because you don't know them.

**J:** The point I'm driving at is . . . . Lewis Smedes in his book *Sex for Christians* says that if a gay person cannot remain celibate, and he's very compassionate—I mean, he can see how that's practically impossible—that they should opt for a relationship such as this. Is this part of the condition—that gay people can't remain faithful to each other—or is it because society won't let them?

**P:** I think a lot of it has to do with society; I do know people who have been together twenty, thirty years, and live very well. They decided that they didn't want children, they just wanted to live together for the rest of

their lives and they manage very well.

**J:** Well, there are a lot of gay couples who are trying to adopt children . . . .

**P:** Yes, and there have been court cases that have let them; precedent has been set. The old myth that a homosexual cannot raise children has been shattered. Face it, we're not child-preying perverts . . . . Oh, or course, there's the seedier side of homosexuality, same as there is in heterosexuality . . . .

**J:** Yeah, but because of the stereotypes, it seems like there's much more . . . .

tendency. I want a marriage; I want a family. My wife will know. I could not honestly marry a person without telling her that I had had bisexual experiences and might again.

**J:** What do you think of the report that says that those who cannot marry and want to live a Christian life should remain celibate:

**P:** I don't believe there are many who can live a celibate life. I don't believe it's possible. I don't think these committees address it in depth—the fact that a gay relationship with one person can be just as satisfying and acceptable as

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*“Homosexuality is not seedier than heterosexuality. That's a myth that my parents and your parents and my minister and your minister and our parents' ministers would love to keep continuing because it scares people.”*

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**P:** Only because it's hyped up. When was the last time you were on South Division? There are parts that are very seedy, and they're not all homosexuals. Homosexuality is not seedier than heterosexuality. That's a myth that my parents and your parents and my minister and your minister and our parent's ministers would love to keep continuing because it scares people. Same with the old myth about a lot of things. The myth that masturbation will make you go blind. Why were these myths created? To scare you to stop doing it.

**J:** What about marriage someday to a woman? Will you be living a lie?

**P:** No, I won't. She will know.

**J:** What about a lot of the gays who aren't bi and who will probably eventually get married?

**P:** A lot of them have been married and probably will be married again. It might sound like, oh, they've been married twice, how seedy; well, divorce is not a homosexual

a heterosexual relationship. But remaining celibate, that's asking too much.

**J:** Well, they're comparing it to the Christian single person who should also remain celibate.

**P:** Yeah, that's true, although I would say they happen to be rather hopeful or ignorant of the fact of how many people actually stay celibate. What about premarital sex? I don't think those singles who are remaining celibate are a majority, even among Christians.

If you say that promiscuity is a problem then homosexuals and heterosexuals have the same problem. Another myth I'd like to clear up is that all homosexual males or bisexual males are women in disguise. I do not believe this is true for most gay people.

**J:** Do you think they may have more feminine qualities?

**P:** No, I think that's a myth. That's a very large myth, that homosexuals are feminine or act feminine. That's



what I hate the most: that people assume that I want to wear women's clothing. That's not true at all; I'm still a man; I'm masculine.

**J:** Why are men more threatened by femininity?

**P:** Because we are supposed to be the leaders and rulers, the deacons, ministers, politicians, businessmen. Because of the myth that homosexuals were weak, quote fag unquote, a man had to be strong, to get anywhere. How many guys on campus will not hug another man? But women do it all the time. How

many of our fathers would not kiss the sons good-night, but would the girls? That's a bunch of hogwash.

**J:** How would you like the church to react to you? I'm sure a lot of people disagree with your views.

**P:** Oh, I'm going to sit down when this magazine comes out and expect to hear criticism of this article from people sitting near me, and there's nothing I can do to change that. Nobody's going to be able to change the world. There are always going to be people out there who won't be able to accept anything that they don't see as being

right. Anything they don't do is abnormal and wrong. There are a lot of people who will be understanding and say that they cannot tell me what to do. They cannot tell me what's wrong or right because they are not in any position to tell me what to do. And I believe I am not in any position to tell anybody else what to do. It is not our right to do so. Those people give me support. Although they don't personally give me support, they give me support. People have to get the chip off their shoulders before they can look at other people. ■

## An Open Letter to the Straight Community

by Jennie VanMeer

I hope that the previous article which I did with my friend Peter will help you as heterosexuals to feel some sort of empathy for the gay community. Chances are good that you may know or will get to know a gay person. Some of your friends now may be gay although you may not know it. Whether they be casual or closer, relationships are a two-way street and you will have to respond in some way to a gay person or gay people in general. No one can tell you the proper response; it will have to be yours individually because of the complexity of the issue and the diversity of our lives. What would be your feelings if a friend told you that he or she was gay, and how would you respond?

The initial response for most people would be, "What will people think?" I don't have to tell you what society (even at Calvin) does to people whom they don't approve of and to people who associate with such "undesirables." You will feel embarrassment, shame, self-consciousness, and maybe anger. You will have to decide in your own mind how real the danger of rejection by your society and friends is and whether this is more important to you than your friendship with a gay person.

Next you will have to resolve for

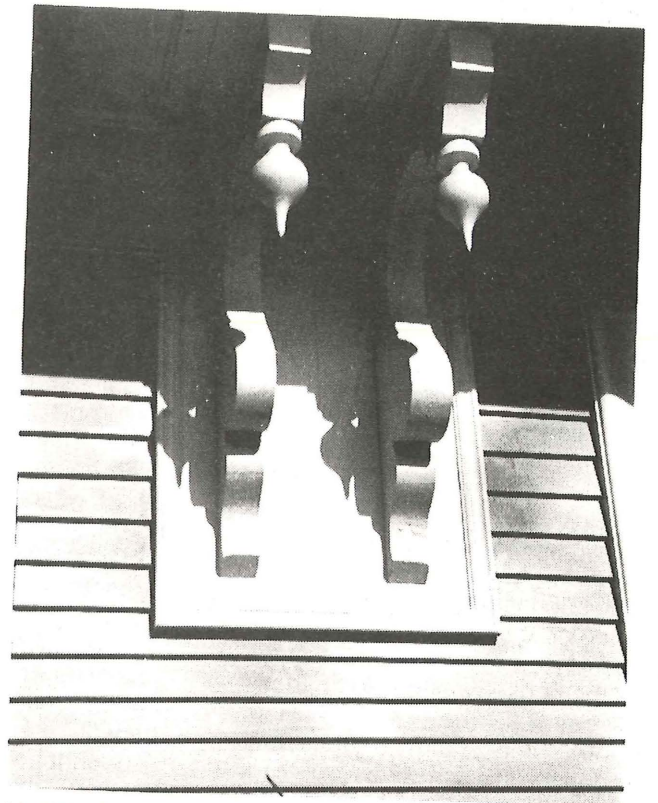
yourself exactly what homosexuality is. Whether you see it as a willful deviation from what is right or as an emotional illness which should be cured, or as another normal sexual preference will determine your response to your friend.

You will also have to decide whether homosexuality is compatible with Christianity. This is not as easy of a question as it appears, and an in-depth study on the topic will test your theology and perhaps your faith. You will have to decide how much God requires us to become hermeneutical scholars before we can be satisfied with our conclusions. If you see homosexuality as an acceptable condition and practice, you will be directly contradicting most interpretations of the Bible. If you see it as a sinful condition which cannot be cured, you will ask God why he chose to burden so many people with so great a problem.

The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church has stated that condition of homosexuality is not sinful in itself, but homosexual acts are. You will have to struggle with the question of whether acts from a sinful condition are always sinful. Consider this: Handicapped people have also been burdened with a condition resulting from the Fall, yet the way in which they derive as

much good from their situation as they can is not deemed sinful.

If your friend is practicing his/her sexuality, an important question that you will have to answer is whether it is right for you to judge his/her behavior. Most of us in the CRC were raised with people who were sinning repeatedly. You will have to ask yourself whether you as a Christian can rate different levels of sinning and how much you can tolerate in a friend. This will also require you to define the levels of sinning within heterosexual relationships, as so many people at Calvin are already struggling with. You will have to decide for yourself whether you want to avoid tempting thoughts and situations by limiting yourself to "morally acceptable" group of friends. This will cause you to evaluate how strong your own Christianity really is. You will have to decide whether a "tough-love" rejection will do more harm than good to your gay friend. As a friend to a gay person, you will have to struggle with the questions I have raised and many more. The church as a whole will also have to struggle with how it is going to deal with a Christian practicing gay community. But the final decision on how to respond in a one-to-one relationship will be yours, and whether the decision is easy or difficult, it will influence your life. ■



Untitled

Bob Johnston



Untitled

Dave Gelderloos

# EHMcB

by Ruth McBurney

I remember my mom telling my three sisters and me that my grandparents had decided to move from Nanuet, New York, to the little red brick house across the street and two doors down from us. My sisters and I had always liked their Nanuet house because it had a tree painted on the dining room wall and woods in the back yard, but mom said the house was too big for them and besides, they were having trouble living alone because grandpa's speech was getting worse.

I must have been in about the fourth or fifth grade because I remember that the day they moved in I was at my school's Summer Recreation program. We made ceramic pins that day, and I made a blue pin with a red *M* on it. When we came home at noon, my grandmother was sitting in the family room in dad's chair, and the four of us flocked around saying hello and getting hugs. I gave her the pin I had made as a peaceful gesture.

"Oh, *M* for Marion!" she whispered in a Boston accent.

"No, *M* for McBurney," I explained (who ever heard of calling your grandmother by her first name!!).

"It can be for both!" she replied and pinned it to her collar. It didn't match her dress, but I didn't tell her.

Where Grandpa was at the time, I don't know, probably down the street supervising the move. I don't really remember being reintroduced to Grandpa at all. He was always somewhere in the background, pattering around his house,

*Ruth McBurney has the unique ability, whether she is ecstatic or in the depths of despair, to look serene at all times.*

cleaning, gardening, or watching us play in his yard.

Ann, Elaine, Susan, and I would go to his house, knock on the door, and ask if we could rollerskate on the porch.

"Hello girls, how ah you?" Grandma would ask, letting us in the house.

"Good. Can we go rollerskating?" one of us would ask, all of us holding up our rollerskates for Grandpa's benefit.

Grandpa would smile and lead us to the side porch. "Thurswun, thurswun, very good, thurswun, thurswun," he would say in the same

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*"THURswun,  
THURswun,  
thurswun,  
thurswun,  
THURswun."*

---

tone of voice that one of us would use to say, "Of course, you know you're welcome to skate here," which was, after all, exactly what we had just said.

Grandpa had a few words and phrases he could say very well. He could say "very good," "somewhat," "Wexford" (the name of our town), "Oxbridge" (the name of my aunt's street a few miles away), "church," "bike," the names of his children and their families, "shopping,"

"telephone," "Marion," and his own name, "Edwin." These words and a few others he said and recognized with relative ease. He could say other things too, but it took time and concentration to search out the words he wanted.

One day I was running around with my cousins, Benjy, Joel, and Will in the yard behind Grandma and Grandpa's house. We were playing spies and hiding from each other in some bushes covered with wild grape vines, and gradually we wandered farther and farther back into the weeds. Grandpa, who was working in the garden, eventually noticed where we were and ran over to the edge of the yard.

"THURswun, THURswun, THURswun, thursSWUN, thursSWUN, thursSWUN," he yelled anxiously, beckoning us back toward the house. We all straggled back, debating what he could want. I had never seen him so agitated.

"Thurswun, thurswun, thurswun," he explained in a calmer voice, "thurswun, thurswun . . . POISON . . . Ivan."

"See, I told you he wasn't mad," said Joel to Ben, and we went inside to wash up.

Grandpa's speech was getting so bad that he and grandma couldn't keep up their lifelong habit of family worship, so we reinstated family worship at our house and invited them to join us. We each took turns reading except Grandma and Grandpa—Grandpa because he couldn't say the words and Grandma because she spoke so softly. Then we would sing a psalm, Grandma joining in with her thin old-lady voice and Grandpa watching his psalter silently and solemnly. Last of all, mom and dad would pray, and Grandpa would stop watching

his psalm book and close his eyes; I know because I peeked.

If I had waited long enough, I wouldn't have had to peek because after a while Grandpa didn't recognize the "Amen" anymore and would sit with his eyes closed until several seconds after the noise had stopped. This wasn't the only word he had lost. More and more often he was having to write down what he meant, and even his written messages were getting garbled. Grandma was getting more confused and forgetful and wasn't able to do much housework. They couldn't stay in the little brick house anymore, so they moved in with us.

This arrangement worked out well. Our whole family was gone during the day, and Grandma and Grandpa had the house to themselves. They ate early; we ate late. My quiet grandmother wandered cheerfully around the house and asked us how our days had been. The only time she was any trouble was when she tried to help out—washing paper plates for a picnic, mashing cakes, or trying to clean the bathroom with Liquid Bold. Grandpa took care of Grandma and generally hovered in the background, silent, intelligent, and dignified, like one of the family cats.

I liked having them around because they were there when Ann and I came home from school.

"Hi, Grandpa."

"Thurswun, thurswun, harrison, harrison."

"Hello, girls. How was school today?"

We would mumble small talk back and forth as Ann and I headed straight for the kitchen, coats still on, to find something for our coming-home snack. Grandpa's contributions to these conversations made as much sense as anyone else's.

When we had something of significance to say, he would reach into his shirt pocket and pull out his index cards. These were covered with little scraps of old conversations like:

*EHMcB to Giant Eagle? Yes*

7:30? Yes.

All this meant that grandpa, Edwin H. McBurney, wanted to go grocery shopping at the Giant Eagle, and yes, mom could take him. Mom wanted to go at 7:30 and yes, that was OK with Grandpa.

The notes were always filled with scribbles because he underlined key words and crossed out words that he didn't understand or that were wrong guesses at what he was trying to say.

I remember one Saturday afternoon when Grandpa came out of the kitchen and over to where I was reading on the couch.

"Harrison, harrison, . . . .," he asked, ". . . mmMOTHERr . . . CELLAR?"

I was amazed to hear him speak so clearly. I didn't think Mom was in the cellar, but I called down anyway.

I shook my head. "NO, she's not down there."

He shook his head too. "THURswun, THURswun. MOTHER, CELLLLLAR."

I shifted into my heavy concentration gear. Maybe he *wanted* Mom to go down to the cellar.

"Mom? . . . MOM!?!? . . . No, I don't know where she is."

This didn't work either. He waved his hands, crossing and uncrossing them in front of his face, and there was tension and frustration in his voice. This time as he responded, I tried again to understand him with the same result.

I was clearly on the wrong track. He didn't seem to want Mom or

anything in the cellar. I tried to connect the words a different way. Mother, . . . cellar . . . seller? Did he need to go to the store? No, he would have let me call Mom. I was at a loss and my thinking time was up. I gave him a guilty look and shrugged.

"Thurswun, thurswun, THURswun!" He walked over to our refrigerator, opened it up, and looked in the produce drawer. He found the celery and held it up."

"CELLarrrr . . . , CELLar!!"

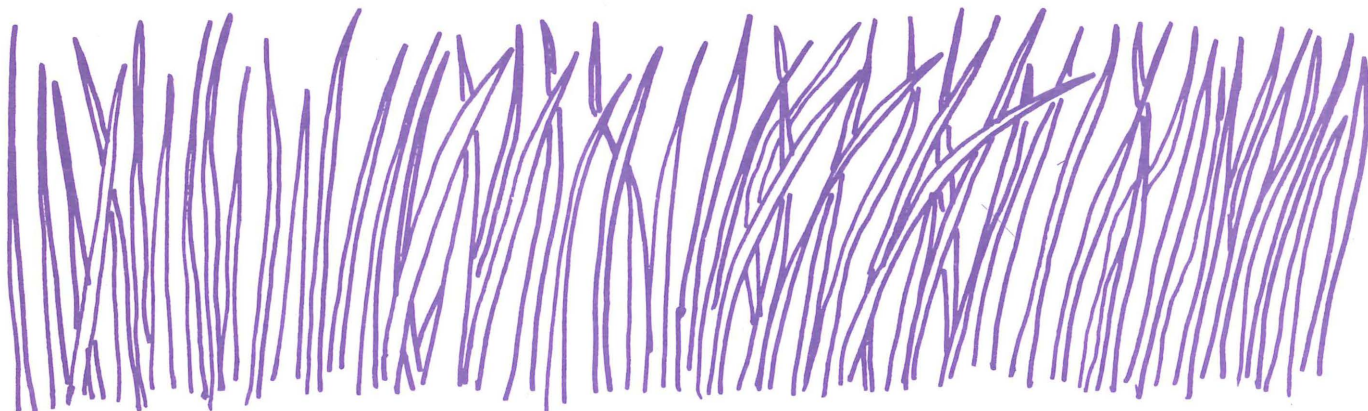
"Ohhhh . . . sure, you can borrow some celery. YES, YES."

He took some celery and wandered back to his cooking, muttering loudly to himself in an almost whirring tone for a full minute or more. That was the most I ever heard him voice his frustration. He was remarkably patient with his isolation and almost never complained. He *couldn't* complain, of course. He had lost the words that he would have needed. But he always paired nonsense syllables with tone of voice, and we would have known what he meant.

Most "conversations" I remember having with him went much more smoothly. Sometimes we understood each other and sometimes we didn't, but usually we *almost* understood each other.

Once I drew a picture of him copied from a photograph. I must have been in seventh or eighth grade and was learning to draw faces in art class. It turned out reasonably well, so I decided to give it to him. I wrote "EHMcB" in the corner to make sure he recognized who it was. When I gave it to him, he slowly underlined the "EHMcB" and then smiled and mumbled approvingly. He seemed really pleased and so was I. About a half hour later, he came into my room with it and gave it back to me. I don't





know why it bothered me so much that he gave it back. He just didn't know that I meant him to keep it, that's all.

I think the best "conversation" we ever had was when Grandpa and Grandma were flying out to Indiana to visit my aunt and uncle and cousins Cynthia, Wilson, and Laurie. The night before they left I stuck a letter in Grandpa's coffee cup for him to find in the morning:

Dear Grandpa  
—have safe, fun trip  
—say "hi" to Cynthia, Wilson,  
Laurie  
—I will miss you  
Love,  
Ruth

I got a letter from him in the mail a week later:

Dear Ruth  
—trip safe, fun  
—Cynthia, Wilson, Laurie—hi  
—miss you  
—sunny, warm  
Love,  
EHMcB

Grandma died the next winter after breaking a hip. Our Indiana cousins came down and the entire "cousin club" was reunited for a few days. We saw a lot of each other at the funeral home because we were there for two day's worth of visiting hours. Our ages ranged from five to about fourteen. Will, the youngest, was unphased by the solemnity of the occasion and wanted to run around the funeral home playing ghosts, but, being older and more

mature, we talked him out of it. We passed the hours trying to entertain ourselves quietly. We wandered around the lobby while church friends and some vaguely familiar and probably distantly related adults came in and joined the crowd in the reception room. One of the grown-ups suggested that we sneak upstairs and see the room full of coffins for sale, and this kept us occupied for a long time. In the reception room was a small basket of free matchbooks. We helped ourselves and then wandered back to the reception.

The general atmosphere of the gathering was relaxed and happy. Everyone seemed to agree that Grandma was better off now and that she was like the "old Marion" again, her memory and strength restored.

I don't remember much about the funeral itself, except that we sang the psalm that says "Thou shalt see thy children's children." When the service ended, the immediate family went back into the viewing room to see the men close the casket, and something very startling happened. Grandpa started crying—OUT LOUD. My silent grandfather was making an effortless and very understandable sound. It didn't take any deciphering. Although he wasn't saying anything, he was crying in plain English. Only there did I finally connect my grandfather with a younger version of the same man who had, among other things, talked. It was wierd to think that in there somewhere was a man with things to say.

Shortly after Grandma died, Grandpa moved in with Aunt Faith

and Uncle Fred on Oxbridge Drive. Sometimes when I went over to babysit my cousins, Grandpa would come downstairs with his stamp collection or something we could look through together after the cousins were in bed. By that time he had lost almost all his words; even writing didn't help much. He would point to a stamp and mumble incoherently. I replied with a running stream of *yes's* and *oh's*, and *mm-hm's*. I'm not sure which of us sounded stranger. After a while he would close the album and go back upstairs.

"Goodnight."

"Harrison, harrison, harrison."

Before he went to sleep he would kneel beside his bed; I know because I peeked. I wondered how he could pray with all his words missing. I wondered if he could recognize the "Amen" at the end or if he still just waited for the noise to stop.

Grandpa died a year-and-a-half after Grandma. The cousin club met again at the funeral home. We stole matchbooks again and all promised to steal matchbooks at each other's funerals to keep up the tradition. In general, though, we were more subdued, partly, I think, because we were older but partly because we had each gone out of our way to get to know Grandpa, and so we were more emotionally involved with him than we had been with Grandma.

I don't remember much about his funeral service either, except that we sang the psalm that says, "And when thou hast restored my speech, I will thee praise accord." And afterwards we went to Aunt Faith's for dinner. ■

# “And I Protest, Oh Lord, Against So Many Murders”

by Dale Cooper

Philemon vs. 7: “Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have *refreshed the hearts of the saints.*”

Heidelberg Catechism Q and A 105: “What does God require in the sixth commandment?”

*“I am not to belittle, insult, hate, or kill my neighbor—  
not by my thought, my words, my look or gesture,  
and certainly not by actual deeds—  
and I am not to be party to this in others;  
rather, I am to put away all desire for revenge.*

*I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself  
either.*

*Prevention of murder is also why  
government is armed with the sword.*

On Tuesday, the thirteenth, she fell asleep in my 9 a.m. class for the umpteenth day in a row. My self-restraint long since depleted and my reputation as an able and vibrant lecturer clearly on the line (at least in my own mind), I arrested her after class. “Barb,” I advised her curtly, “you’ve been sleeping in my class for the last three weeks, and this irritates me. Now, either stay awake or don’t come back!”

Barb’s voice was poignant and breaking: “I know that I have. And I don’t know what to do about it anymore. I’ve had this problem for three years already, and it’s getting worse. My mom has taken me to the doctor, and he advises putting me on powerful medications. But I’m only 19 and he hesitates. Help me! What can I do?”

I’ve been haunted in the last weeks by what I did to Barb. For I, blunderingly so eager to preserve my own reputation and so piqued at the slightest injury to my own pride and fragile self-esteem—I committed a miniature murder on her. I was so ready to use the accusative case rather than the interrogative mood—I deprived her of the very thing she needed most: acceptance and affirmation. I belittled, insulted, hated and killed her, to use the Catechism’s words.

I am not alone. I live among a society of those who murder daily. Cleverly, we deny others the acceptance and affirmation that they need so desperately.

How? In myriad ways. Let me identify some that I’ve spotted in my own life. My six-year old, Mark, clamors for attention and wants help with his Legos while I’m reading for a sermon. I ignore him. My daughter Karen misses one note on the piano recital, and I inquire: “What happened

to that one note?” I call attention to her faults. Ten-year old Dan timidly steps away from the plate in a Little League game for fear of getting hit, and I muscularly reply: “Come on, be tough!” (Real men, after all, don’t eat quiche, and ought never to cry.) I ridicule his fears.

At other times I revel in belittling others, to use the Catechism’s word. I build myself up by putting them down. By cleverly-timed insertions into the conversation, I play the game of one-up-man-ship: “But you’ve never studied hermeneutics”; “When you’ve lived as long as I . . .”; “Now at a fine liberal arts college like Calvin, we . . .”; “But you’ve never tried it”; “You wait till you’ve driven as many miles as I have”; “I got an invitation to the \_\_\_\_’s party.”

I even take delight—secretly, of course—in a colleague’s failure. Yes, yes, I know backbiting and gossip are malicious. But delicious too. Why not indulge my appetite for it at least a bit, I rationalize. After all, I myself die a little death when others close to me succeed; why not even the score and rejoice when they don’t.

Then too there is criticism of others, clobbering criticism. I am so adept at sniffing out other’s flaws and frontally assaulting them without offering them also the love, understanding and acceptance without which they’ll never be able to distinguish the (perhaps necessary) criticism from an attack upon their persons.

When others hurt me, I find it easy to indulge in a special form of hate. I hold a grudge. Paul advises: “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong” (1 Thess. 5:16), and Jesus too commands our using the excretory system of forgiveness. But thank you, Paul and Jesus, I’ve been hurt—badly—by others who’ve assaulted my person, marred my name, destroyed my business, cheated on my trust, or whatever. And, contrary to every Biblical counsel I’ll wallow in the desire for revenge. I’ll kill him like he killed me. Let’s be honest: the flame of revenge burns within us.

At other times I cleverly try to keep others in their place. I know the rules very well for being an authority figure. Maintain a serious demeanor at all times. “Authority figures do not always smile” advises a consultant to those clawing their way to the top of the corporate ladder. “People who have high authority profiles maintain a superior/subordinate relationship between them and all those who work for them. They do not discuss with subordinates what is going to happen . . . Effective power figures impose upon the people who work for them. When a subordinate enters their office, they make the person wait two or three minutes before talking.”

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*Chaplain Cooper is brought to you today by the emotion  
anger and the verse seven.*

Sometimes I can feign caring about others. Professional careers can become quite adept at playing the role. We can mouth plastic praise ("Great, Mark, I'm so happy that you got into graduate school.") We can kill another's genuine joy by artificial smiling. We can minimize their fears ("Getting a job after college worry you? *Don't* sweat it. God's got a place for you somewhere.") We can short-circuit their griefs; sharply, smartly, and quite expertly we offer them advice and

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*“ . . .we offer . . .advice  
and comfort when . .  
.what they really need  
and want is someone  
'just to talk with them.' ”*

---

comfort when, as Rev. Jim Kok advises, what they really need and want is someone “just to talk with them.” And to listen to them.

These are a few of the most popular murder weapons in my cabinet. There are, I suppose, more. Maybe you can add your own favorites to the list. Murder, remember, is committed not merely by parents who batter their children physically, by desperados who hold up a bank, and by political ideologues in far away South Africa who value human life too cheaply, especially when it is clothed in black sin. *Murder happens*, as Conrad Baars says, *whenever you or I deprive another of his God-given right to be affirmed by us*, of the right to have his value and beauty revealed to himself by us. *Murder is deprivation*.

Sometimes—often, in fact—the victim is our very own self. We're skilled at those little daily suicides. We turn those bludgeoning instruments I mentioned above upon ourselves. We refuse to accept ourselves. C.J. Jung writes:

*To accept oneself as one is may sound like a simple thing, but simple things are always the most difficult things to do. In actual life to be simple and straightforward is an art in itself requiring the greatest discipline, while the question of self-*

*acceptance lies at the root of the moral problem and at the heart of a whole philosophy of life.*

*Is there ever a doubt in my mind that it is virtuous for me to give alms to the beggar, to forgive him who offends me, yes, even to love my enemy in the name of Christ? No, not once does such a doubt cross my mind, certain as I am that what I have done unto the least of my brethren, I have done unto Christ.*

*But what if I should discover that the least of all brethren, the poorest of all beggars, the most insolent of all offenders, yes, even the very enemy of himself—that these live within me, that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness, that I am to myself the enemy who is to be loved—what then?*

*Then the whole Christian truth is turned upside down; then there is no longer any question of love and patience; then we say “Raca” to the brother within us; then we condemn and rage against ourselves! For sure, we hid this attitude from the outside world, but this does not alter the fact that we refuse to receive the least among the lowly in ourselves with open arms. And if it had been Christ himself to appear within ourselves in such contemptible form, we would have denied him a thousand times before the cock had crowed even once!*

*(C.J. Jung, quoted in Conrad Baars,  
Born Only Once, p. 9)*

Preventing us from seeing that God, our Creator and Gracious Redeemer, has magnificently endowed us and that we therefore are duty-bound to praise Him and to revel in our own gifts is one of the devil's cleverest strategies. And Calvinists, I am convinced, are some of his easiest prey.

What are the tragic consequences of our failing to “put away all desire for revenge,” preferring instead to deny others (including that neighbor called our own self) rather than to affirm them? We drive a flying wedge between us, and the distance between us grows ever wider. Need some examples? Purists on niggling points of doctrine patronizingly say: “What a shallow emotional bath that church service was!” while pietists add: “All I ever hear is doctrine from that minister!” Those who prefer Bach's music to the Blackwood Brothers ridicule the other side, and vice versa. Academicians say: “Oh, he's just a dumb jock,” while athletes counter with: “What an intellectual egghead.” Ministers downplay laity, and laity are quick to retort: “If only that man would get out of his study and into the real world once, then . . . !” Races dig in their feet against one another, ethnic groups poke fun of one

another ("Did you hear about the Polish barber who . . . ?"). Nation gets pitted against nation, and religion against religion. One church prides itself on being for what others are against. Labor ends up becoming anti-business, and business, anti-labor. The urban voters have no use for farm price supports, and farmers ignore the cry of the cities. Tragically, even men get set against women and women against men. (One of the saddest results, I am convinced, to have come from all of our denomination's recent debating about the "women's issue" is that certain human beings who are women, one with males in being children of a common father, feel themselves deprived of the affirmation which all of us, men and women alike, so desperately need to survive.)

God created us with the voracious need to be appreciated and accepted by others. We're hungry, terribly hungry, to be wanted, loved, accepted and affirmed by others. We want to feel that we're worthwhile, that our presence in other people's lives makes a difference. We need to feel that we count for something to them. God saw that it wasn't good for Adam to be alone; he needed an Eve in his life so that she, affirming and appreciating him, could make him realize the precious gift that his person and life really were. Vice versa, she too needed him. For without those significant others in our life who make us feel worthwhile, our real humanness withers.

Simply affirming oneself won't do it, as Baars notes. Once could have all of the gifts in the world—athletic prowess, physical beauty, musical talent, brains, good health, promotions at one's work, "the breaks," what have you. But if there were no other in his life to appreciate him and to celebrate those gifts within him, he would be empty. He would be left with a mad—and utterly unsuccessful—drive to convince both himself and others that he is, after all, really worthwhile. Self-worthwhiling is futile; we need one another.

That, by the way, is why each of us wields a hefty stick in determining whether or not another is ever going to be happy. Possessed as he is by the need to feel worthwhile, we can, if we choose, deprive him of it. They're at our mercy, so to speak. Parents use it on their children all the time; the variations on the theme, "Be good or else we won't like you," are boundless: "How come you cause us more trouble than all your brothers and sisters put together?" "Why can't you pick up your room like Nancy always did?" "You're the only one of our family who ever got in trouble with the law," etc. But children use it on parents too. (After all, parents want to be liked, and children know it.) And wives upon husbands and husbands upon wives. ("Mike *always* takes Pam out for

dinner on her birthday." The implication being that unless you too do this for me, you're not worthwhile to me.)

The positive, I hope, has become clear by implication. God calls us to "do what I can for my neighbor's good, (and) that I treat him as I would like other to treat me." (H.C. Q and A 111) Paul commands us "to encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone . . . (and) to be kind to each other and to everyone else." Whether they deserve it or not makes little difference. Whether they've done you a marvelously good turn or heaped upon you a colossal evil is immaterial. "Be like your heavenly Father" advises Jesus, "who—indiscriminately—heaps upon both righteous and unrighteous the life-nourishing gifts of sunshine and rain." Contrary to the image some have of him nowadays, God, our gracious Father, is not out to kill his children's joy and deprive them of the qualities they need for growth. "He's perfect," says Jesus; "he's compassionate" (cf. Matthew 5:48, Luke 6:36).

Good teacher that he is, God knew that his pupils would say as teacher says but do as teacher does. That's why he gave us others to model for us what genuine accepting and affirming are like. Each of us, I trust, has at least one person who does this for us. Philemon apparently did so in Paul's day. Others took great joy and fresh courage, for Philemon had "refreshed the hearts of the saints" (Philemon:7).

No one did it better, however, than Jesus. To a brow-beaten and guilt-ridden Peter (John 21), to a weeping Mary Magdalene, to a Samaritan woman at the well, to tax collectors, to an adulterous woman (John 7-8), to children for whom his disciples had little space and time, to Thomas—indeed, to so many others—Jesus enfolded what *grace* was all about.

Joy and affirmation, when shared, always get multiplied. Producing it in the other begets it in oneself as well. Therefore, writes Isaiah Powers in *Kitchen Table Christianity*, ". . . of all the practical plans for self-improvement—and for healing the hassled nerves of others—this is perhaps, the most practical plan of all: 'It is wrong and sinful for me to nag others by comparing them unfavorably to myself. Even though it's the quickest way of punishing them and the most efficient way of getting what I want from them, I won't do it.'

'And I won't nag myself anymore either. That's not the way to be healed of my hurts. It won't help to keep irritating wounds of "wishing I were as good as \_\_\_\_\_" I'll give myself, and others, rest. I'll let the mending come from the inside—with the sun and rain, the love and peace, that are available to me now from God in His gracious presence and from the worthy—and 'worthwhiling'—friend I have.'



# To Stand in Awe

by Lori Kort

Again and again the psalmist tells us to fear our God. "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (2:11). "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him" (89:7). In fact, only a wicked man has "no fear of God before his eyes" (36:1).

C.S. Lewis, in his book *Reflections on the Psalms*, suggests that what the Old Testament people feared was the wrath of their God. "If there is any thought at which a Christian trembles, it is the thought of God's 'judgment' " (p. 15). After all, these people had seen their God destroy cities with fire and break down walls at the sound of a trumpet. They had seen His angel of death destroy the camps of their enemies and kill the first-born son of every Egyptian family. What if this God should turn His wrath against His own? Certainly that was reason to tremble.

But we have not seen our God in a pillar of fire. Nor is judgment our worry, now that Christ has freely forgiven us. Perhaps in the twentieth century we have begun to think that we have no reason to tremble before our God. Still, just as the Old Testament writer described a wicked man as one without fear, the writer of Romans describes the unrighteous saying "there is no fear of God before their eyes" (3:18). Fearlessness seems to continue in the New Testament to be associated not with heroes but with fools.

Although Christians today do not need to fear the *wrath* of God, the fact remains that "His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation" (Luke 1:50). If we

*Lori Kort cried at Bambi (last year).*

need not tremble because we are afraid, then we must tremble in an attitude of awe. Fear for us means recognizing God's greatness in power and in love, and feeling respectful toward that greatness. Not every person today is capable of standing in awe. However, a Christian is the kind of person who *can* stand in awe of God, and it is on that kind of person, that kind of attitude of respect and wonder, that God has mercy. Where does one begin to develop such an attitude?

In traditional Chinese culture, people of lower classes would kowtow, bow to the ground, before those in higher standing. They knew the meaning of respect. Had they been worshippers of God, they

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*"If we need not tremble because we are afraid, then we must tremble in an attitude of awe."*

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would have known how to fear Him. But little in our society moves us to feel awe; we do not get much practice from day to day. Little children see cartoon characters fly through space to save whole planets of people from destruction by changing the courses of stars. They see incredible hulks lift amazing weights to the admiration of all. They are exposed to an imaginary world far more exciting to them than the real world in which they must live. How, then, can they

admire their fathers who go quietly off to work each day as a means of preserving their children's security, or their mothers whose efforts to keep things running at home seem far from world-shaking, and certainly have no cosmic results? If they cannot learn to respect the parents whom they see every day, how can they learn to respect, to stand in wonder at, a God who long ago quietly died for them?

As these children grow older, they learn about equality and human rights. They learn to stand up for themselves, to respect themselves, to love themselves, to obtain the best for themselves at all costs. They are taught to hold themselves in high regard, to let no one put them down. Slowly they become unable to look up to anyone. Editorials today bemoan our society's lack of heroes, but the real problem is a lack of respect for those who deserve it, whether they be people or God himself.

Along with their lack of opportunity to "practice" wonder, modern Christians have a second problem, as Dr. Harry Jellema pointed out in his philosophy lectures at Grand Valley College. Our problem, according to Jellema, is the availability of scientific explanations for everything that happens in our world. Jellema said, "One of your and my troubles, therefore, in dealing with historic Christian theology, in making it meaningful for ourselves, is precisely the fact that we approach it with the mind of modernity rather than with the mind of historic Christianity" (Jan. 20, 1969). He went on to explain, "Plato says, you know, that all philosophy begins with wonder, not just in scientific curiosity, as we understand that



term today, but in wonder—wonder that something is, that anything is, that anything should be. Why should the universe exist at all? . . . if you want to understand Augustine, you ought really to understand Augustine's wonder, and share his wonder." What Augustine was wondering at was the fact that God reveals Himself to finite man. This revelation made Augustine stand in awe of God, through whom "our minds now are enlightened so that we respond by *seeing*; we see God now in Christ. We see God's grace in Christ. We see God's nature in Christ."

The problem today is that society has lowered its standards. Most people refuse to leave home until their hair is "perfect." Everything from steak to wall paper rates "wonderful." And a good shot on the

basketball court is "awesome" today. Once we have reduced our awe to things even less significant than ourselves, we know that we are only kidding ourselves. We are no longer able to find anything that we consider worthy of respect. We don't need to obey our parents once we are of age (unlike the traditional Chinese who honor their parents through old age and even after death). We don't need to stand in awe of the beauty of nature because we know that science has explained every aspect of its structure, or soon will. We are unable to truly stand in awe of anything, unable to wonder even at the greatness of our God.

Fear of God is a matter of perspective, a matter of seeing things straight. If our God struck our enemies with lightning, if He caused the earth to open and swallow up those who would harm

us, then we would stand in awe of Him. How much more should we now kneel before Him in gratitude, knowing that He died and lives for us.

How can we rediscover the greatness of our God? We can listen to our God when He says "be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Like the psalmist we can "consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained . . ." (8:3). We can look at our God's creation and at His Word, through which He reveals Himself to His people. Having recognized the greatness of our God, having learned to fear His name, we can go on to live humbly before Him, serving Him as Lord and rejoicing in His mercy. We can then stand in awe and say "Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth." ■

### A Reverie

In early twilight, when billowy clouds,  
Purest white, sparsely spot a pale, blue horizon,  
I lay me down in a poppy field; shrouds  
Of luminous hues hang before the burnished sun.  
Then Kubla's chronicler his vision relates  
To meld with the Easter's pangs into reverie,  
Untainted, sublime; expand and abate—  
In gloaming augmenting my mind's entranced eye.  
Gold Stratos I fancy suspended high  
Upon an idea, pure white, once read.  
Silver, bronze and iron compose its walls;  
And around it runs a thunderous river  
That spills clear from its bank is to fall like snow  
And veil my taxed flowerbed; but one drop  
Wets my lips, and I sleep in brown study.  
I wake at night in a dreamy darkness  
And quick to my secluded farm-house I rush  
To pen my musing before the fireplace—  
That glares and beats as a winging thrush.  
But the sounds confound, the numbers refrain,  
Try as I might few whole lines can I write;  
Yet they're on my lips, but by time contained—  
I'll read in the poppies again tonight.

—Chas. S. Cairns

# LOVE is the ANSWER

by Nancy Jacobs

Love is everyone's favorite emotion, and probably the one we know the best. We begin our lives as dearly loved babies, and as we grow, we learn to love not only ourselves, but also mom, dad, and sometimes even siblings. Friends are next to be loved, but differently than family. Even the dearest friends come and go, so we stretch our love to include more people whom we love less possessively. But certain friends we come to love best of all, and we express it not only verbally or through our actions, but also physically. If that love is strong enough we call them "husbands" or "wives" and build a life with them, perhaps one which includes children, who repeat life's pattern of love. A Christian's love expands to include an unknown neighbor, valued as highly as self, and a God loved above all. Legitimate, true love has many different expressions in different relations. The Greeks recognized this and used various words such as *agape* and *eros* to define the different shades of our one English term *love*.

Add to love's inherent ambiguity its overuse, and the adventurous thinker who tries to define it has to cut through an even thicker jungle. Our popularization of love has cheapened the term until it means little more than the nicety "how are you today?" For centuries moony-faced poets have been moaning about unrequited love: one-sided crushes, although hard on the nerves, being the loftiest, most chivalrous love. Clever culture-makers from William Shakespeare to Bernstein and Sondheim have exploited the story of starry-eyed star-crossed lovers who self-destruct. "LOVE" written in chubby, psychedelic letters was the password for the then "now" generation of the sixties, and in the eighties too, love, in the forms of valentine-pink adoration and red-light lust is the best-selling theme of mellow music and acid rock. Popular infatuation with love had made the emotion St. Paul valued highly and defined precisely into an over-used, sloppy term. Paul's Corinthians treatise on love is popular, especially the conclusion "the greatest of these is love." Less well known is his specific definition of love: that it is long-suffering, not easily provoked, not self-seeking.

Having conceded to legitimate variation in the term's definition and questioned its superficial, popular usage, *Dialogue* decided to investigate personal conceptions of the word. Confident of striking a deep well of thoughtful, articulate answers, staff members distributed a survey of eight questions for digging into the average Calvin College student's psyche. The



questionnaire, to be answered anonymously, asked, 1) What does "love" mean for you? 2) How many people do you love? 3) What do you offer those you love? 4) What do you expect from those you love? 5) How does your love change in different relationships (dating, friendship, family)? 6) Do you experience different kinds of love, or different intensities of the same love? (Example: are platonic love, crushes and romantic love different loves or different kinds of the same love?) 7) Is it possible for you to feel real love for humanity in general? 8) Compare your love for God with your love for people.

Admittedly, they are eight demanding questions; any of them could have stimulated entire books, but no one person thought all of the questions interesting enough to write paragraphs and paragraphs on each. In retrospect the questionnaire was too formidable and some of the questions unclear, so it is partially the survey's fault that

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*Nancy Jacobs frightens easily.*

so few were returned. Yet no one expected a torrent of completed questionnaires enthusiastically clogging the intra-campus mail system, and despite modest hopes, the trickle which did return was disappointing in quantity but not in quality.

The responses to the first question "What does 'love' mean for you?" were often uncertain answers such as "love cannot be defined, or at least I cannot define it." But most answers did share an understanding that the basic element in love's definition is selflessness. "Sacrificing your desires," "putting the needs and goals



of others before your own," and "forgiving without being asked to forgive" all referred to that selflessness. The second question further explores the meaning of love. "How many people do you love?" or, in the light of the first question, it could have been worded "How many people are you willing to be selfless with?" The respondents did not idealistically claim to love universally. All limited their answers to "many" or a list such as "God, my family, my friends," or "as a wife I love one person, as a daughter and sister about twenty, as a Christian I try to love everybody." The number twenty appeared in several answers, although some said that different types and degrees of love made the question too difficult to answer.

Questions three and four are also related questions. "What do you offer those you love?" and "What do you expect from those you love?" elicited a few consistent responses: "myself/themselves," "time for whatever we/they choose to do with it: going out, talking, laughing, crying," "understanding," "help," "honest and openness," as well as "softness, sex." Most agreed that they wanted the fruits of their love to be reciprocal, although some thought that asking "what do you expect from those you love?" stated it too strongly. One answer read simply "Nothing. I anticipate a lot."

Answers to question five showed a general consensus that love changes in permanence, intensity and expression, specifically physical expression. One respondent wrote "Love for my immediate family remains constant. Love for friends remains, so long as close proximity permits (in the case of friends I find the old adage 'out of sight—out of mind' applies. It is, of course, hard to love someone when they are 'out of

mind')." Another respondent regrets how her love varies: "Because humans cannot love perfectly, love is conditional, depending on situations in each person's life—sad to say!"

The most difficult question is the sixth one, asking "Do you experience different kinds of love or different intensities of the same love?" The answers often disagreed, but shared an emphasis on the practical expression rather than the abstract essence of love. Two such answers follow: "I have different intensities of love. My love towards my family is different than my love to my friends, boyfriend, and God. Love in itself is the same for everyone. I am just more willing to give to some people at different times, but love is honesty, concern, and prayer for all," and "Platonic love is different than erotic love, and crushes are not love—but it all comes down to being a commitment to another person. It may take different forms, but it all stems from *agape*."

Interestingly enough, questions seven and eight seem to have been the most thought-provoking ones. Answers to number seven "Is it possible for you to feel real love for humanity in general?" ranged from a large, emphatic, block-letter "YES!" to smaller, more humble yes's and qualified no's. The answer hinged on definitions of love. One man who defined love as "the four c's: care, concern, companionship and cooperation" excluded the vague mass of humanity from his love because he cannot share companionship and cooperation with them, explaining "I can express care and concern for humanity in general, but to say I



'love' humanity in general is stretching it." Those who asserted that they can love humanity defined that love as compassion, empathy, and sympathy. Some cited humanity's common Creator as the root of their love: "It's a different type of love, but everyone is created in God's image, so I feel a real bond there."

Love for the Creator himself is the topic of the last question. The summarizing words here were "deep," "transcending," "unfailing," and especially "unconditional." At first glance "unconditional" would seem to define God's love for the Christian rather than the Christian's love for God, but respondents explained that their love for God drew strength from His

love for them. Comparing their love for God with their love for people, the respondents wrote, "My love for God is more constant because he never fails me. People disappoint me sometimes, but God is perfect," and "My love for God is very different from my love for people. It's not as tangible and therefore a lot more difficult for me to understand. It has sort of a mystical/spiritual quality. It's not as reciprocal as people-love; I draw a lot from God and don't always deliver much in return," and "at times I can feel very close to God, at other times removed. But I will always come back to God because this love is always there. Although because God is intangible, I need reminders sometimes."

Any good pollster provides proof that his findings are representative. Sociologists and their statisticians thrive on bar graphs and multi-colored charts which break down the intricacies of their methods and findings. The poorly-qualified humanists in the *Dialogue* office could not provide such data if they tried. At the beginning of this experiment, *Dialogue* passed out one hundred copies of the survey, twenty-five on a women's dormitory floor, twenty-five on a men's, and fifty in the library. Of the first batch, three questionnaires returned from the dorms and seven from the library. Seeking a wider response, we distributed fifty copies in Knollcrest East; none returned.

Only a very naive pollster expects to get anywhere near a quarter of his surveys back, lack of time and interest killing many potential responses. Add to that the number and vague nature of the questions on *Dialogue*



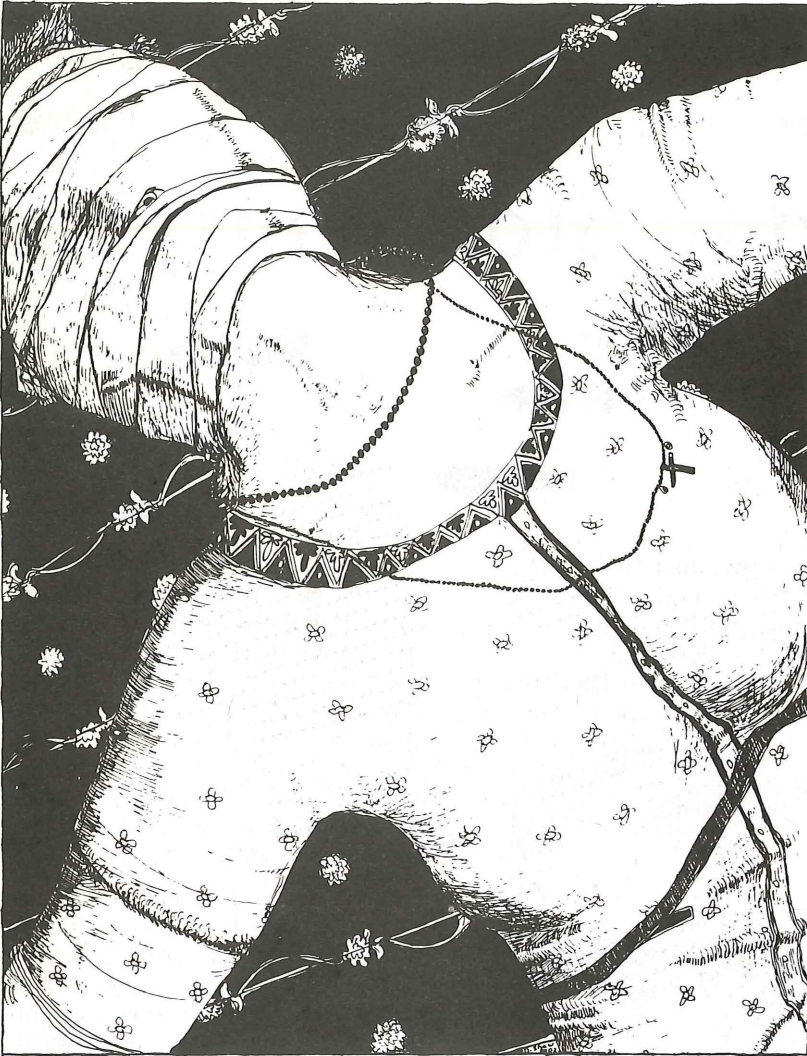
survey which must have intimidated many other possible respondents, and the number of completed surveys drops even more.

But the most disturbing probable reason that less than seven percent of the surveys returned is that love, the emotion, is not being analyzed or examined. As one respondent added to her questionnaire, "I think love is taken too lightly these days." Rationalizing feelings which appear irrational is difficult, but any aspect of human life as intricate and important as love and loving must be examined and discussed. *Dialogue's* report, then, is not representative. Due to insufficient response it cannot be; instead the report is a collection of some students' opinions, not the definitive study of a word badly needing definition, but perhaps is food for thought. ■



Untitled

Dave Gelderloos



Untitled

Dave Shaw

### While Out Walking

Being a yellow handed  
fellow  
he tied his money  
in his dead wife's scarf  
while sitting  
on the top rail  
of a house exhausted  
by futile possibilities  
and watched the shadows move  
across the silent wings  
of the faltering birds,  
and dropped his bundle  
to his tight-wrapped  
impotent feet.

—Dave Shaw



# How I Learned to Stop Worrying

by Maarten Pereboom

Another round in the nuclear arms race took place in May, June, and July 1962 when the United States, despite admonition from the United Nations, conducted a series of atmospheric nuclear tests in the area of Christmas Island in the central Pacific. These detonations in the one to five-hundred kiloton range, were the first atmospheric tests by the US in over three-and-a-half years. The second week of June was a particularly busy week for testing. During that week of routine tests, I was born sometime between a little explosion on the tenth and a big one on the twelfth.

1962 was a good year for nuclear tests. Americans conducted 90 of the 130 reported detonations. But 1962 was also the year in which I was born. When I was four months old the Cuban Missile Crisis evoked fear of nuclear war in people's minds. Since then other events and issues have provoked much discussion and feelings of anxiety about the threat of nuclear annihilation. I've known about "the bomb" for almost as long as I can remember. I haven't learned to love the bomb, but I've had to learn to stop worrying.

When I was five my brother told me what an atom bomb was and I never forgot. Older brothers seem to derive a malicious pleasure from

striking terror into the hearts of their younger siblings, and in this case the fear has remained to this day, in varying degrees of intensity.

The idea that a bomb existed that could blow up the whole world



(since that time both my brother and I have brushed up on our knowledge of the technical aspects of nuclear explosions) did not exactly traumatize me, but I do think that I worried about being blown up more than most kids my age did. I suppose that in that respect I was

simply a product of the times, when new homes in suburban Denver came equipped with fall-out shelters and Bert the Turtle told kids to "duck and cover" in case of nuclear attack. But my brother never told me about Bert the Turtle, so I didn't know what to do. I grew up a happy and well-adjusted child nevertheless, worrying only from time to time about being annihilated.

Sporadic worrying eventually became a kind of anxiety. In the fall of 1973 another war broke out in the Middle East, and my older brother (different one this time) informed me that World War Three might break out in a matter of weeks. I didn't want to believe that; never before had I experienced global tension (if my brother analyzed the Cuban Missile Crisis for me, I didn't understand). His prediction proved to be wrong, but that was it: my age of innocence was shot once I realized the possibility of a third world war.

I remember a particular newspaper headline—"China Warns of War"—that caused me a good deal of stress. I hardly dared to read the accompanying article, but I was actually relieved once I did. China had made some threatening remarks, but nuclear war was indeed not imminent, and, besides, the Chinese hated the Russians more than they did the Americans, anyway. They could destroy each other and leave us alone, I thought.

Rumors of war persisted, but as

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*Maarten Pereboom did not cry at Bambi (ever).*

long as no real wars reinforced those rumors, I stopped thinking about it. I did dream once however, that the United States nuked Peru. I don't remember why they did it.

But then in 1979 the Iranians took hostages, the USSR took Afghanistan, and the Moslem world in general was becoming feisty. People bought gold hoping for war; those were frightening times. Such crises subsided, but then Tito died, Solidarity spoke up in Poland, and war broke out in El Salvador. A network of generally bad interna-

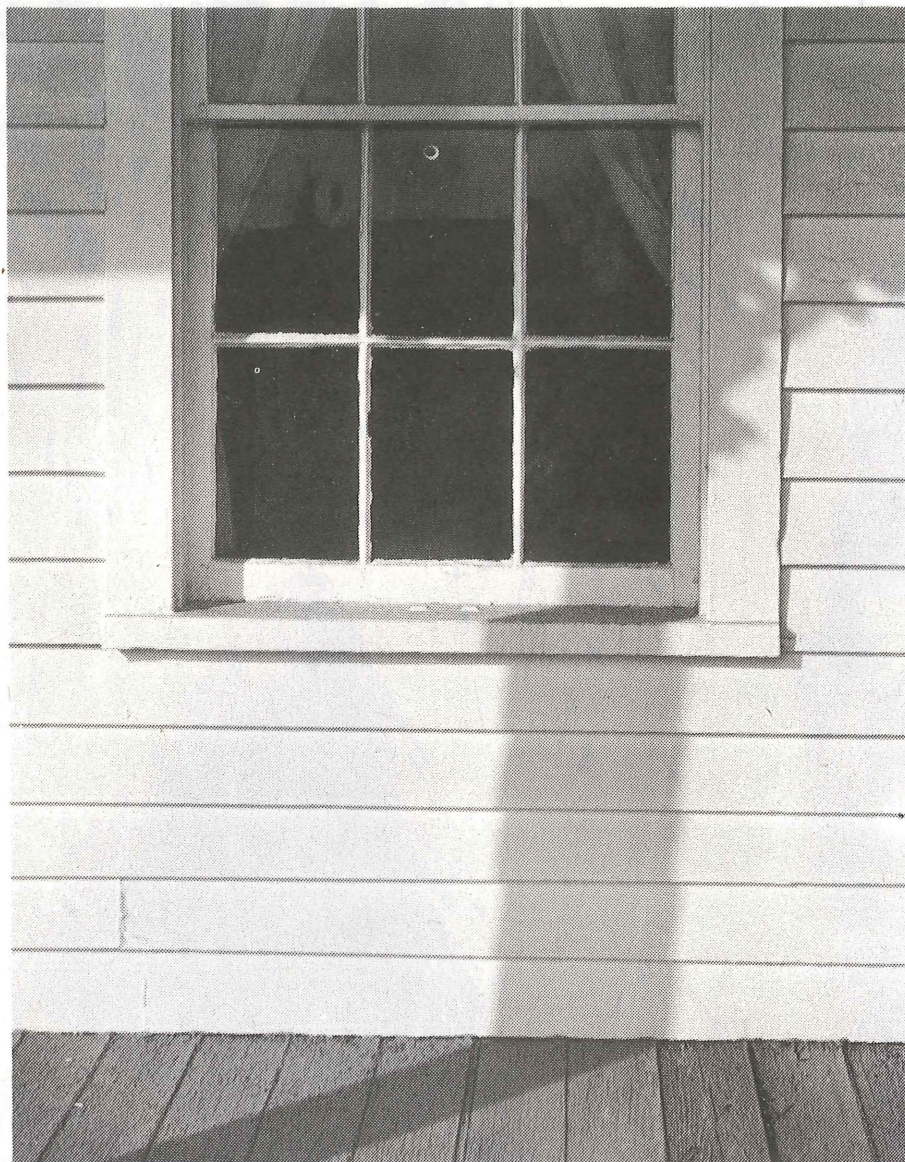
tional relations coupled with an escalation in the nuclear arms race had more people worrying than just me.

I finally saw *Dr. Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* my freshman year. Earlier I had wondered how a film about nuclear war could be funny, but when I saw it I soon understood. In this movie Jack D. Ripper orders a nuclear attack on the Russians, who are robbing him of his precious bodily fluids. Before sanity can take over, Slim Pickens straddles the missile and personally sees it to its

target in the now-famous scene. The late Ethel Merman then belts out a number to accompany a fireworks display of nuclear explosions.

So I've made progress. Now I can laugh at movies about the bomb, albeit nervously. The comic relief has done me good. After all, one can't worry endlessly about nuclear annihilation and function in society at the same time. Once worry matures into a healthy concern, a person can begin to take action to improve his lot and stake in life.

So who needs Bert the Turtle? ■



Untitled

Bob Johnston



