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DIALOGUE

A Journal of Commentary and the Arts



Volume 23, Number 2

November 1990

DIALOGUE

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Cover Art: Liesl Bockheim **Illustrations:** Conrad Bakker

Located on a narrow street halfway between The National Gallery of Art and The Circuit Court of the District of Columbia, a small alternative gallery space drew 49,000 visitors to see a single exhibition the summer before last. Most who patiently lined up in the sultry heat of summertime Washington did not spend an hour or two waiting to see a collection of photographs which would satisfy their aesthetic longings but rather one which would appease their curiosity. The exhibition, "Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment," drew not only the attention of the 49,000 Washingtonians who viewed the show but also that of the national news media, members of Congress, and even those who admitted they knew nothing about art and had never been to an art museum.

From my apartment only a short walk from the site of the confrontation, I watched the situation develop—The Corcoran Gallery of Art cancelling the Mapplethorpe exhibition and the Washington Project for the Arts immediately picking it up—and realized that this was a show I could not miss not only because of Mapplethorpe's reputation as an accomplished photographer but also because of the media and political attention given to the controversy surrounding the retrospective. Purely by chance, I happened to be in the neighborhood of The WPA one workday afternoon and noticed that, finally, there was not a block-long line to enter the gallery. Having no deliveries to be made, I stopped, locked my bicycle, and wiped the downtown grime and sweat from my face as I climbed the stairs to enter the gallery. Once inside, I was greeted by a clean young woman who asked for the suggested entry fee of a few dollars. I ripped open the velcro closure of my black messenger bag and dug out my wallet. To my great embarrassment, I had only small change. I gave her the coins I had along with a sheepish shrug and walked in.

Once inside the gallery, I wandered about looking for the controversial pieces. I had looked at about 170 works before I realized that the five pieces for which I was looking were displayed in a separate room. Frankly, upon seeing them I was disappointed. They were exactly as the media had described them—photographs of men engaged in homoerotic acts. But five small platinum prints—could they be powerful enough to cause all that controversy?

The photographs themselves were mildly repulsive, but they were only pictures. In that small room, there were no living men urinating into each other's mouths, no actual men penetrating their bodily openings with blunt objects. There were, however, representations of these acts—photographic representations, very detailed photographic representations. Though these works of art were not in reality the execution of the acts portrayed, through the medium chosen by the artist, the photographs did visibly depict a world where these acts were happening. What struck me more than the artistic merit of the pieces or

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the repulsiveness of the acts depicted in the works was the fact that these photographs were not as powerful as I had imagined they would be. After all the controversy raised both on Capitol Hill and in the news, I expected these five photographs to cause a physical reaction in me—a reaction which would lead me to take some sort of action either for or against their exhibition. Disappointingly, they did not.

When judging a work of art by its affective value, one realizes that an artwork which precipitates human action is truly a powerful and rare piece of art. The Mapplethorpe works, however, were not that powerful. Surely the reputation of the works had caused human action, but the people these works moved to action were not moved by the works themselves. Television and radiowaves, newsprint and glossy magazine stock gave these images their power without ever presenting them directly to the public. Upon hearing through the media that such things existed, such sexually explicit things existed, many good Washingtonians were moved to action and chose to fight the works' exhibition in their community. Upon reflection though, I wondered why these people were fighting five small works of a dead artist—works they had never seen—rather than the scores of raffish and violent actions which occur daily in that city—actions which physically and mentally harm people. These photographs were not as affectively powerful as many of the events which never were reported in the local paper. During that summer, the fact that every night between one and three young, black men lost their lives in drug-related murders did not make news anymore because of its regular occurrence; strangely, this fact had more of an effect on me than Mapplethorpe's work—work which I was expecting to affect me strongly. These photographs did not hold power in that community because of their superior artistic merit or their highly affective qualities; rather, they held power because that power was granted them by those who were fighting to halt their exhibition and those who were reporting this fight.

When my beeper called me back to work, I was not nearly as disappointed that I had to leave the gallery as I had been when I was called away from a daytime visit to The Ansel Adams Collection earlier that summer, nor did I feel the way I always felt when leaving The National Gallery of Art. Though the exhibition had been undeniably meritorious, it had not satisfied my aesthetic longing; however, my curiosity had been appeased. Looking back now without that curiosity which I had before seeing the exhibition, I do think that because of the aesthetic reputation of Mapplethorpe's work I would have gone to see the exhibition. I am sure I would have gone even if the Corcoran had held it, even if the Religious Right had not fought for censorship, and even if a museum director in Cincinnati had not been brought to trial for showing those five pictures. But I am not so sure about the 49,000 others. □

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holding onto
heaven
back beyond the
sight
of blind
men came
from far
a way
true
light
in sheep
heards joy
to the world
wide
wonder man
kind is free
to be
not a me
but a his

hold onto
not blind back
but bright wisdom
sing gloria
gloria
Deo
amen
a man
is God





Blood of Amsterdam

The worn grey light bled through the gloom of the dust-heavy flat, attenuating the smooth pallor of the child's face against the darkness that crouched in her brown hair and navy dress. Her pliant body was coiled beneath the liberal folds of her smock, and her eyes, level with the warm scent of her mother's nylon-clad knees, reflected the swollen red blossoms of the geranium that sat immobile upon the makeshift coffee table.

She had come, her moist hand upon her mother's arm, to this history-pocked corner of Amsterdam to visit, as they had gone on previous weeks to the Rijksmuseum or the Nieuwe Kerk. Together, they had observed the grotesque mustard wall above the rust-stained sink, the pained white light that swung down from a chain above the table, the old texts bound in puce leather, and the newer paperbacks in purple and orange. None of the blankets that hid the decomposition of the furniture formally matched, but there was an aura of discordant fraternity in their design.

"I pulled the three chairs and that couch and this bookcase out of the garbage," their hostess had said. "They're not exactly heirlooms, but they do predate the Second World War." She had smiled as she filled the hotpot with dubious rust-colored water. "For such thrifty people, Amsterdamers certainly are careless about what they throw away."

But it was the tapestry and the photos that the little girl and her mother liked best. They gave the flat room an ironic sense of dimension that provided a depth

beyond the ahistoric stance that the grey walls exuded.

"The tapestry was my dad's," the woman said. "He found it at some estate auction and insisted upon hanging it in the dining-room. He was terribly proud of it, and though the appraiser had dismissed it with a curt, 'it's awfully banal, isn't it?' he showed it off to everyone who came to the house. A few days after his funeral I found it in the trash and sat down on the driveway and just cried and cried. I suppose it was my mother's revenge, but it was the last straw for me, and I left New York for Lisbon with a bag of clothes, a crate of books and my father's tapestry wrapped in plastic. It's from the fifteenth century."

She had hung the tapestry around her cot after the old Dutch fashion. The child traced the flat forms of the dogs and the knights with a tremulous finger but lingered a moment upon the hart that cowered behind the trees. The tapestry dented with the increased pressure of her hand, and she peeked behind it. A hiding place, she thought, like the one she had seen in Haarlem. She wondered if the woman ever had to use it.

The desk in the corner was an old door upheld by cement blocks. The child crawled under it and hid in the gloom.

"Don't you want to see my pictures?" the woman asked her, bending down so low beneath the desktop that her long hair dragged in the dust. She coaxed the child out with a smile. "I took this one in Egypt," she explained, after the child had climbed onto the chair. "Look at how differently their dress is from ours. And this is how

the poor people wash their clothes.”

The child studied the suspended activity. “Like Bible times,” she said.

“Exactly.” The woman smiled again.

“The strangest thing happened to me about a week ago,” the woman was saying to the child’s mother as she set three mugs of tea upon the carpet-covered crate that served as a coffee table. One was extra milky for the child. “It began when I heard loud voices at about midnight. I didn’t think much of it at first because there’s always some brawl going on in the bar down below. But I became more curious when I realized that the voices were in the hall.”

The little girl knelt on the floor at the foot of her mother who had eased herself between two deep hollows in the couch.

“My Dutch still isn’t very good and I wasn’t quite sure what they were saying. The door doesn’t have a peep hole; so, very quietly, I opened it to watch. They never did notice me. It was all very surreal, with that husk of yellow light dripping out painfully upon the stairs. Really, it was like the climactic scene in an Italian opera—the girl from the next flat stood to the side of the landing, screaming at a masculine face that flickered in the gloom below. Finally, her boyfriend—a Surinamer—came out and bared his chest as he cursed the stranger. I heard the shot ring out and saw the Surinamer’s chest collapse with blood. He tumbled down the stairs and the girl’s scream followed him. By the time I got downstairs, the old boyfriend—that’s who the guy with the gun was—had disappeared.”

The woman leaned upon her brown print lap, but in the gloom the red of her knit shirt did not conflict with the pink flowers caught in the texture of her skirt.

“She was too hysterical to drive—and anyway, she didn’t have a car—so I called a cab and we went to the hospital.”

She pushed a strand of pale hair back behind her ear and rested against the musty plush that covered the armchair, staring calculatingly at the triangular darkness that enveloped an old French flag.

“I didn’t get back until it was light. I wished that I had had my camera at the hospital waiting room. There were a ton of Indians who would have worked well into my collection. Anyway, I left the outside door open—it’s always so stale in here—and went up the stairs. I was about half way up when I noticed the bloodstains. It didn’t look as gruesome as you might think, but I washed the stairs all the same.”

In her mind’s eye the child saw the man toppling down the stairs, as helpless as a doll. He had probably lain twisted on the doorstep, like the bodies that were embedded in the Damrak Obelisk, but they were stone and didn’t have blood. She knew though, despite her age, the people they represented had once had real flesh and ripe pulses because she knew the Germans used dogs.

Sitting in the dark in a flat located in a seedy section of Amsterdam, the child watched the red geranium and felt the impetuous throbbing of her ankle’s pulse.

“It would make a wonderful story, wouldn’t it? Someone will have to write it down.” And the woman laughed. □

Tacye L. Langley

The Day of the Jackal

The day of the jackal comes cracking
at the door in the night.
Green eyes glow ferally through
the black, primal slaving in the air.

And the day of the jackal comes,
creeping eerily through fog
as a half-glimpsed shadow slithers
over its eyes. Palpably empty hunger
stalks predators supernaturally,
sleek anger and terror seething in
its wake of darkness
as the day of the jackal comes calling.

The door detonates, crashing the room
with debris and liquid green fire.
The swarming flames cast their pall
on the man's impassive face, the
lupine form rippling into the room—
the jackal posts its final
call.

The face stares blankly at the wall,
spittle dripping absently from the
corner of the slack mouth.
The jackal grins, laughs quietly.
The face remains silent while the
self-created shadow consumes and
disappears.

And the day of the jackal comes
calling quietly again.



Empty and Waiting

Rebecca Warren

*"You don't run down the present, pursue it with baited hooks and nets.
You wait for it, empty handed, and you are filled."*

—Annie Dillard

There are certain days when the outdoors calls so strongly that it threatens to tear us away from all responsibilities—sunny, crisp, green days when it is torment to walk inside at all, but mostly we do. We have responsibilities too deep and cannot indulge ourselves in the pleasure of remaining outside. I've often wondered what would happen if, on one of those days, I stayed outside—skipped work and all of my classes and simply stayed outside. I've never done it, though, at least not for the whole day. This summer, I decided to make up for that. I wanted to find a job where I could stay outside as long as possible, so I applied to work as a maid at Yellowstone National Park. I got the job and decided that being a maid was a small price to pay for the fulfillment of a fantasy.

When I finished exams and an anxious two weeks at home, it was finally time to go to Yellowstone. On the plane ride there, I pulled out the in-flight magazine and looked at the map of the United States. Where am I going, anyway? I was a bit surprised by how far it was from Staten Island, but I was even more surprised at the lack of dots indicating cities. There must be something out there! Well, after a long flight, I found out what was there—the Skipper from *Gilligan's Island*!

I had arranged to spend a night at the Yellowstone Motor Inn before I checked in with the employment early the next morning,

and they said they would send someone to meet my flight. There wasn't much confusion as to which gate we would meet at because there was only one, and I knew as soon as I saw the Skipper that he was the one sent to meet me since he had a big smile on his face and a baseball cap that said "Yellowstone Motor Inn."

I introduced myself, and the Skipper said to me, "So, you're a savage are you?"

I somewhat tentatively answered, "Not that I know of."

"Oh, sure you are," he said, "that's what they call all of the college kids that work in the park."

I nodded politely, but was considerably doubtful. I did not feel like a savage at all and did not think that I would ever particularly like to be one.

The next week was a case study in mass confusion. I went through lines, signed forms, rode buses, signed more forms, stood in more lines, and, the highlight of the whole chaotic experience, went through orientation. I listened with a detached amusement to the hiking instructions given on bears. Did I really have to know all of this? The notion of a bear in the wild was about as remote an idea to me as a flying elephant. I watched everyone around me gazing seriously at their bear emergency instructions and giggled to myself. I came out of my daze to hear the words,

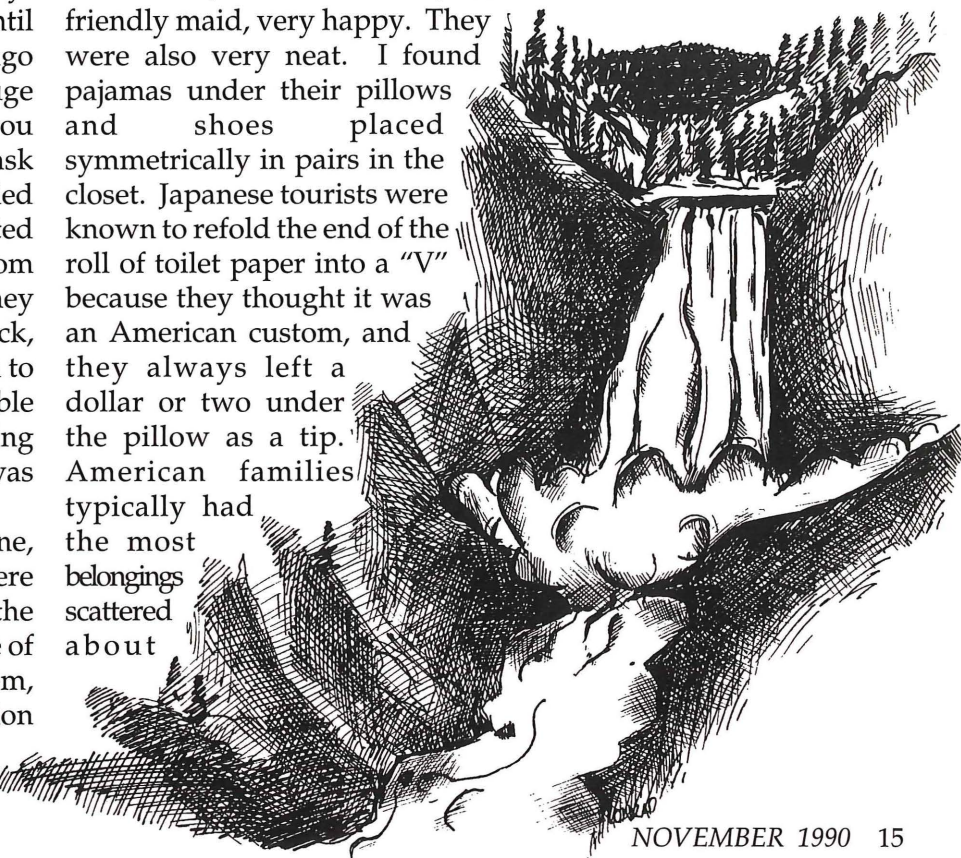
"Never, ever forget these things, or you may jeopardize your life . . . and now, moving on to fishing permits. . . ." Then I got worried, grabbed my information sheet, and memorized as much as I could. For the rest of the summer, the instructions for bear emergencies were a familiar chant to all the employees, frequently recited for amusement during supper or reassurance when hiking.

After I finally settled into my dorm room, I had the privilege of becoming a full-fledged maid. In housekeeping training we were quizzed on various and assorted chemicals and procedures for cleaning the cabins. As the trainers told us certain instructions, they included, "Can you believe there were actually maids last year that did *this*?" We maids-in-training laughed, but not because we couldn't believe anyone would do that. We laughed because we knew we'd wind up doing it too. I think the favorite rule to break, and the one most often broken, was "Never eat any of the food you find in a stay-over's cabin." When it was a half an hour until lunch and breakfast was a long, long time ago and you were cleaning a room that had a huge box of Oreo cookies which, I might add, you just finished cleaning off the floor. . . . I ask you, what would you do? I always worried that one day I would take a carefully counted cookie and ruin some kid's day. The mom would have counted them all out before they left to go sightseeing. "When we come back, there's just enough cookies for each of you to have two." And there would be considerable dismay when they discovered the missing cookies. "It's that darned maid again!!" It was a risk I was willing to take.

In those first weeks at Yellowstone, my encounters with the great outdoors were mostly snap-and-go. I quickly walked the path that led from the lodge to the falls one of my first days there. I was in a rush to see them, and when I finally reached the observation point, I quickly primed my camera and got to shooting film. When I was done, I

walked right back to the lodge, stopping along the way to take another quick picture of an elk grazing in a meadow. I took the super-deluxe, special tour of Yellowstone Park on my first day off and got pictures of various and assorted wildlife and a series of pictures from most of the natural features that tourists stopped at. After this I wondered what I would do for the rest of the summer. I had just seen and captured the whole park. Oh well, there was always my job to keep me amused.

At first I thought that my job was a necessary evil to be endured for the privilege of being at Yellowstone. I wasn't expecting to learn anything much, and I definitely was not expecting to enjoy it, but I did. I learned a great deal about people; the various things you find in a room tell the stories of the people staying there. I had quite a few groups from different countries stay in my cabins and after a while I knew what to expect from each one. The German groups would typically not use the shower, which made me, the friendly maid, very happy. They were also very neat. I found pajamas under their pillows and shoes placed symmetrically in pairs in the closet. Japanese tourists were known to refold the end of the roll of toilet paper into a "V" because they thought it was an American custom, and they always left a dollar or two under the pillow as a tip. American families typically had the most belongings scattered about



the room: crates full of food and essential snack items, games, toys, clothes, fishing and camping equipment, high-tech cameras and video recorders. The worst week I had cleaning rooms all summer was when a group of American kids stayed in my cabins on their way across the country. When I opened the door of the first room, my instinct was to close it again and go away, but I somehow managed to maneuver around the huge piles of clothing and suitcases and make the room look half-way decent.

Throughout the summer, tons of people came and went, but lots of their stories, or what I imagined their stories to be, stuck in my mind. There was the newlywed couple that had a fancy silk robe in the closet and, every morning, empty bottles of champagne in a bucket full of melted ice. They invited me in one day when it was raining and gave me some crackers and cheese and a soda. Then there was the couple that could only get a room with two single beds, so rather than spending their romantic vacation gazing longingly at each other over a nightstand, they tied their beds together with rope. I was considerably surprised when I tried to pull them apart to make them the next day. There was the frighteningly empty room with the respirator, the family that cooked pancakes over a tiny camp stove all morning, the British family with all of the stuffed animals, and the tap dance teacher who listened to tapes for her classes and talked to me about the Peace Corps while I cleaned.

Although the people in the rooms were always different, a few things stayed the same. Every day an inspector would come by to check all of my rooms to make sure they were up to standard. I got along fine until I had Mr. Clean. Everyone dreaded the two weeks of the summer that Mr. Clean was their inspector because he was known to be ridiculously picky about things. Once,

he sent me back to a room to dust the inner edge of the toilet paper holder.

Besides the inspectors, the animals in my cabin area got to be pretty good friends of mine. There was a squirrel named Chester, a marmot named Owen, and a buffalo and a bird that I never named because I wasn't sure if they were the same ones that had come before. They kept me on my toes and amused me throughout the summer as they appeared at convenient and not so convenient times and places. Sometimes I would be particularly tired and sick of cleaning rooms and either Chester or Owen or the bird would come by and cheer me up. But this buffalo fellow mostly got in my way. One day he surprised and then annoyed me by sitting



in front of my cart. I had to wait forty minutes for him to decide to go away.

There were other things besides the animals and the stories which I found in the rooms that made the job bearable. There were the huge skies, the deep forest behind my cabins where I took breaks when I grew tired of cleaning, and the little brook where I often took my lunch. In addition to the outdoors, I enjoyed the community of people I worked with. There were maids of the most unlikely sorts from colleges and cities all over the United States, but we made a pretty good team. Each morning in the main linen room, we would joke and exchange stories. After the linen shelves were empty, we would often play

"Yellowstone Squares" by sitting in them and asking questions. We had water

fights with our ice buckets on hot days and played pranks on maids of the other cabin areas by putting their vacuums in trees or taking the wheels off their carts. We made the best of our lives as maids and didn't think it was so bad—most of the time. There were long, hard days of cleaning when it would be awful or rainy days of tracking mud everywhere and pulling your maid cart up slippery hills. But we got through it and helped each other out on those bad days.

The time off was a welcome break from work. I came to depend on the outdoors, and I eagerly awaited the end of the work day when I could run off to my favorite flower-filled meadow or go hiking into

t h e

backcountry. The falls became a special friend to me. They were dependable, always going on in their majestic strength. I went there often.

One of the most important experiences I had at the falls was a day when I went rock climbing in the canyon with a friend. I was scared out of my mind, and every time I put my foot on a bit of rock and pulled up with my hands I thought for sure I was going to fall to the bottom. But I finally made it to the top. And although my legs hurt from where I had scratched them and my heart was beating so fast and loud that I could barely hear, I felt more alive than ever. I was ecstatic, exploding with possibility. I discovered that the limits I set for myself were too small; much more was possible if only I would dig in my feet and try. We sat on the top of that rock for a long time. The sky turned pink and then got darker until finally it was black, but then the stars came out, and the moon was full, and it was so bright it seemed like day. My friend told me a story:

Once there was an old man who enjoyed walking along the beach. One day he saw an Indian man looking intently at some sand. The Indian took a handful, let it pour through his fingers, and then stared at the few grains that were left.

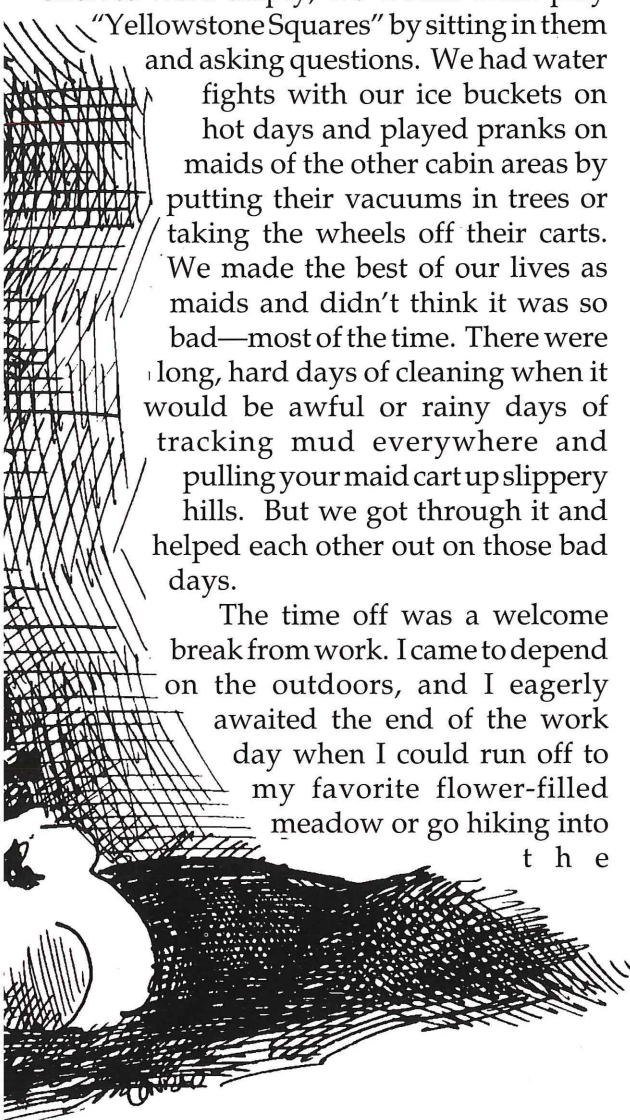
"What are you looking at?" asked the old man. "It's just a bunch of sand."

"Oh no, it isn't," replied the Indian. "It's wonderfully beautiful. Each grain is different."

The old man didn't believe the Indian, but he was curious at what kept the Indian so enthralled, so he picked up some sand himself. He began to cry, and the Indian asked him why he was crying.

"I've been walking along this beach my whole life," the old man said, "and I've never really seen it."

We talked about that story for a while as we stared at the stars and the shadows of the trees on the white canyon, and finally we



decided to go. We walked through the dark woods with only the light of the moon to keep us on the trail.

As the summer went on, I spent more and more time outdoors. One day I was sitting in my favorite meadow writing a letter. As usual, I was daydreaming romantically, leaning back as I wrote, and thinking about how lovely it was to smell the flowers and walk around in my bare feet. I was in the middle of a thought when I looked up with a start to see a buffalo, a very large buffalo, not five feet in front of me. I jumped back a bit, and backed slowly away. He kept coming. I left my letter paper and my shoes behind, got up and backed my way into a swamp. The buffalo lost interest and eventually wandered far enough away so that I could retrieve my things. I put my shoes back on and walked back to my room. On my way past the lodge, I laughed at the frightened stares I got from tourists eating their ice cream cones on the benches. I must have looked pretty funny with my muddy legs and my legal pad. Then a thought occurred to me—maybe I was a savage! I had had an adventure out in the wilderness, and instead of being terrified, I found myself amused and excited.

I became more and more exasperated with the behavior of some of the tourists. They annoyed the animals and endangered themselves with their insistently close picture taking. I wished that one of the large male elk would toss them across the street after the flash went off in his eyes. Some tourists even had the nerve to leave maps and soda cans along the trails in the woods. Sometimes they would come to my rock at the canyon where I liked to sit and stare for hours, look over at the falls for a quick second, and go on their way. They didn't really know the animals or the woods or the falls at all. I think beauty is something you don't really understand until it smacks you in the face, full force, day after day.

After numerous other savage-type adventures in the great outdoors, my summer came to an end. On one of my last days, I walked the now-familiar trail to the canyon. On the way I saw an elk grazing in the woods. I sat down and tried to be a quiet as possible. After an initial flip of its fantastically antlered head, the elk went about its business and seemed to forget I was there. I felt like a privileged intruder, watching something most people never see. For one more brief moment, the elk looked right at me, through me, and I was in awe as I sat there in the woods. I continued on the trail after a time, and looked up lovingly at the trees around me. They were strong, tall, friendly trees in the sun, and they were beautiful. I felt like laughing or crying, an intense feeling bubbled up deep inside of me. I twirled around in the sun of the path and sang. Before I even got to the falls I heard their roar, and I walked even slower, soaking up all of the wonderful things around me before I went on to what I knew was a steady friend who would keep waiting.

It was a sad parting. I had a few short days at home, and I came back to school. I wondered if it would be different. The familiar routines of study and work pressed down on me after a short week of being here. I wanted to be outdoors too. It was all over the campus, the trees and the grass and the sky. So I watched it. And it was enough.

Today I go to the Nature Preserve, another freer outdoors. It is early evening and the sun is beginning to set. Above me on a small hill, there is a wire fence surrounded by various weeds. I cannot see them clearly; they are only dark shapes; the sun behind them is bright. The sun jumps over those plants and lands on the wildflowers around me, yellow and white and violet. There is a tree off in front of me and its leaves, like a thousand shiny quarters thrown, dance in the wind and sun. I feel the wonder of this present moment, and I laugh. □

A SPOONIST'S DELIGHT

one day two giant MIKERMORKERS saw the earth just floatin' around in space looking real pretty.

the one MIKERMORKER said to the OTHER, "gee that's pretty, I want that."

the other ONE said, "yeah, it is pretty, I want it too."

"WE can't both have it," said ONE to the OTHER, so THEY got mad at EACH OTHER.

ONE took one side of the world and the other MIKERMORKER grabbed the other, and THEY tugged their toy back and forth.

the earth sighed as its mountains crumbled and mothers cried as their children died.

but the MIKERMORKERS kept tuggin'.

and the trees fell as the clouds ran away, and the shells lost their seas as the oceans swished over undertakers and toymakers.

but the MIKERMORKERS kept tuggin'.

the MIKERMORKERS didn't pay any mind as THEY kept pulling back and forth, until finally THEY ripped apart the world.

EVERYTHING broke.

they realized that the little old EARTH wasn't pretty anymore, as they stared at two empty crumbled ROCKS.

neither mikermorker wanted to play with an ugly broken TOY.

so the giant mikermorkers walked away with tears in their eyes, crying over something they lost, but never owned in the first place.

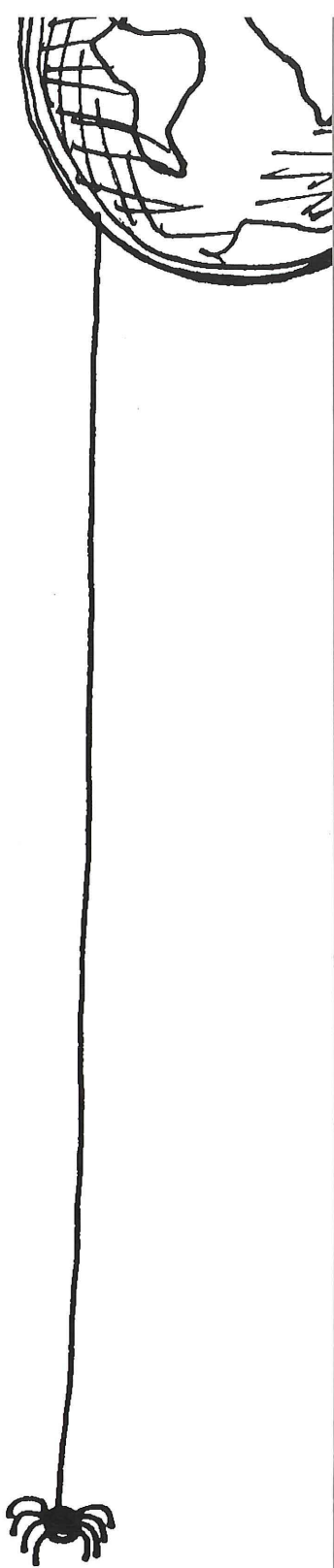
there's a lot of things in this WORLD I don't want to be.

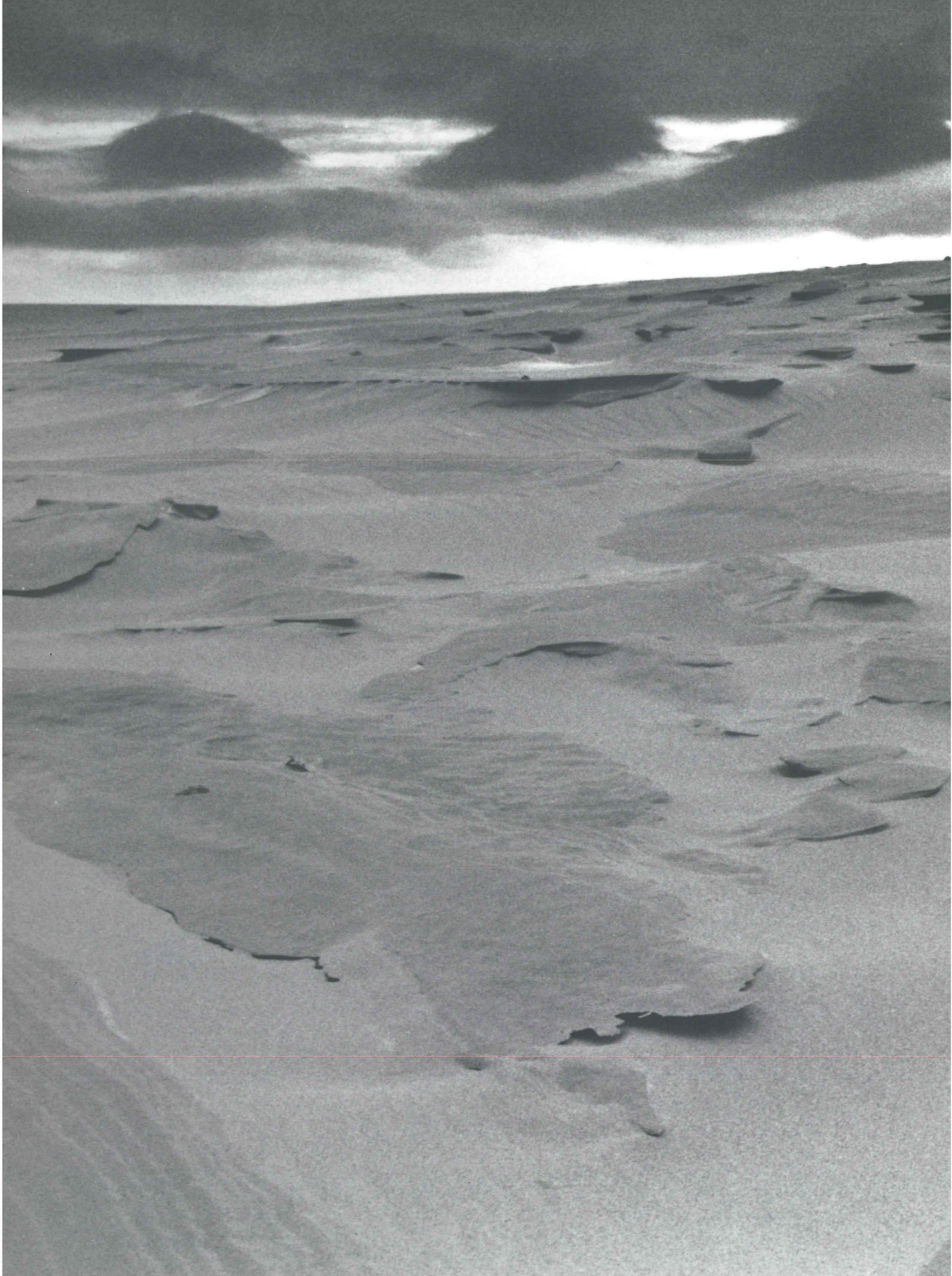
i don't want to be a leech,

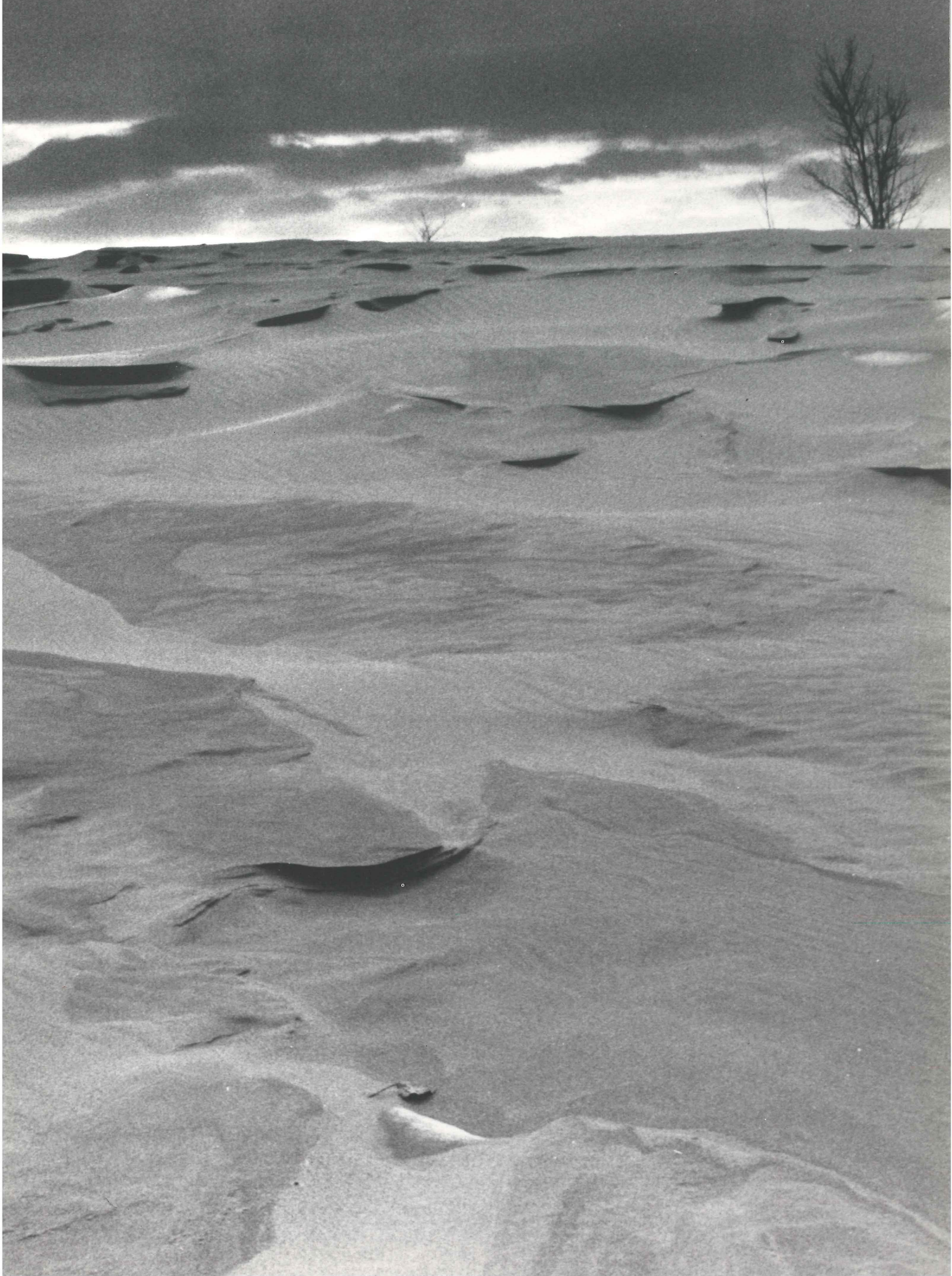
i don't want to be a stick of deodorant,

but most of all i don't want to be a mikermorker,

though most human beings are.







LARA

" . . . directness."

She said she'd always respected directness, ever since she was a little girl. I tried to picture her with glasses, crooked teeth, a little girl's plaid parochial school skirt, but could not get past the now omnipresent dark-toned business suits and briefcase. Directness? I told her that I felt the same

" . . . is a man so easily discarded?"

"Yes."

She could be cold at times. She was good at cold when the cards were on the table. Cold and calculated she was. Disciplined.

The sky fell in ashen drops of rain. We left the park, leaving only a series of muddied footsteps in the crushed and sodden grass, each foot slowly flooding, choking beneath the piled weight of ten thousand filthy raindrops. We instinctively moved

towards our favorite bar, the Pequod on Arnold and Sixth. The conversation was not quite finished. There was the issue of our merchandise.

I held the door with nothing to gain, just blind habit. I thought, "How odd. How stupid."

"Double bourbon and soda, rocks and an Amaretto Sour." The double was for me. My eye moved without volition over the other patrons of the bar, rediscovering a long forgotten truth—people can be happy.

The walls of the Pequod were decorated with counterfeit artifacts of the sea. Through the smokey dimness, aged-looking oak boards strained, heavy laden with bronzed harpoons and the jaws and bones of dead sea creatures. The booths showcased phony portholes lit by electric candlelight. Nets of various

sizes and endeavors stretched across each windowpane. Outside the oak-trimmed, leaded-glass front windows, the neon glow of St. Joseph's Mercy steadily pulsed its message of healing. I inhaled, weakly. She spoke.

"John has everything I'll ever need." By the way she intoned "everything," she meant more than personal possessions. "I'd like a simple cash settlement on all our mutual properties. Fifty-fifty sounds fair to me, OK?"

An hour later I'd learned a new truth—a man *is* easily discarded. I stumbled through a six-bourbon fog into the rain-greyed street, thinking only of frailty, of the delicate nature of temporal beings. I felt the warm slug's trail of a single tear ease down my cheek.

"Salt."

The salty taste washed quickly

away, the slug drowned infinitely deep in a windswept sea of sooty rains. I hailed a cab to nowhere.

"Look at'chyou," the cabby let out a low whistle. "What'd'ja forget, Mac, your umbrella?" he smiled through a question of the obvious.

"The storm caught me un-awares."

"I guess so. Where to?"

I counted the bills in my wallet. "I don't care. Drive fifty bucks worth. Leave yourself room for a tip, say ten bucks."

The streets slipped past, an endless neon newsreel flashing scenes from myriad broken lives. A waning moon struggled to surface from beneath the multi-layered clouds, exposed its gnarled, darkness-eaten skull, then sank slowly back beneath the overwhelming odds.

"Take it outta park will ya!" the cabby yelled as he slammed our vehicle in and out of traffic, eager to meter out the forty dollars and get on with his night's work.

Lara. She had never even mentioned Lara. "Funny," I wondered aloud, "Exactly how does a man tell his seven-year-old daughter mommy's gone?"

It should have come as no surprise that we had never discussed Lara. I guess we both already knew I was the only one who cared, that Lara would stay forever with me. She was my sweetheart, my girl, my everything.

"Did you say something, Mac?" the cabby inquired cautiously, humbly, his tone betraying the fact that I had been mumbling my consternations aloud.

"I, I might have . . . but I didn't mean to."

An awkward silence settled within the cab as the driver and I absorbed the lightning charge of exposed emotional ruin. The cabby's eyes looked into mine through the rear-view, then slowly moved back to the streets. He sighed, measuring his thoughts and words carefully.

"St. Joe's has some of the best doctors in the world."

Our eyes met in the mirror again, our gazes locked in mutual terror of the conversation that lay ahead. I could not speak. The corners of his eyes wrinkled as he considered another course of action. He looked back to the streets, sighed, said nothing. He looked again into the mirror.

I shifted my gaze to survey the littered floorboards of the cab, my heart beating out a panicked signal of retreat. A ticket for the horses lay torn in half between my feet, slowly

rotting in a filthy pool of water, oil, and cigarette butts. I was paralyzed while my thoughts screamed and echoed for what seemed eternity within my skull.

Dammit! Don't do this to me! My wife is not dead—she left me! Now three weeks later I can't even speak to my own wife in private, but have to meet her in the park on the advice of her lawyer?! A public place! Sure, you pick me up across the street from a hospital so you assume my wife is dead, but I could tell you this is much worse than that! Death makes sense, but how do you tell your daughter mommy just up and left? Lara! We did not even discuss our daughter! Mommy will just blow her off for a year or two or three or five, until one day down the road she will decide she needs a daughter back in her life, then the bitch will sue for custody

and there will be even more lawyers and character assassinations and hatred and fortunes spent until the family is torn apart again and again, and I don't know what to do but I should take Lara far from here, to another state, or Mexico, but first I need to know how to tell her mommy's gone!

"She's just gone! Dammit!"

"I know friend. I heard you."

"She . . . left me!" Tears flowed uncontrollably down my face. I double up in anguish, then wretched a stream of putrid booze onto the cab floor.

"Hey! Shit! Hey man, are you alright?"

"Let me out! Pull this damned cab over and let me out!"

"Are you alright . . ."

"NOW!"

The cab careened towards the curb, its tires squealing a staccato

punctuation, the end of a hopeless encounter. I stumbled out into the rain before the cab could shudder to its halt, the momentum hurling me forward. As I struggled to gain solid footing, my feet slipped on the wet, oily pavement. I danced crazily, desperately trying to keep pace with the unnatural velocity of my body.

"Hey man!" Are you alright?!" The cabby's appeals followed me as I fled his company.

My feet gained solid ground as I neared a blackened alleyway. I raced into its shelter, tripped over a pile of garbage that lay heaped upon the ground, then landed hard on cold cement. Dazed, I stood slowly, took a few more steps, and hunched down to rest beside an overflowing garbage dumpster halfway between the alley's mouth and the light that shown beyond its far end. My heart pounded, swollen with blood as I

sought to collect my scattered thoughts.

A swirl of headlights pierced the enclave's darkness, scattering the froth-mouthed cats and rodents inhabiting this negative space. A distant voice called out.

"Mister? Do you need some help, Mister?" It was the cabby, relentlessly offering an unspecified succor.

At the alley's wide mouth, a bundle of rags wearily struggled to its feet, shielding its eyes from the headlight's penetrating glare. It clutched a half-empty bottle in a twisted claw of hand.

"Yes . . . help me . . . please!" the bum beseeched. He stumbled drunkenly towards his unsolicited redemption. I cringed, slouching deep into the dumpster's overflowing filth.

The headlights swept across the

alley in an arc, reversing the pattern of their arrival. Again all about was dark and still. The motor revved as the cabby pulled away into the night.

The ragman collapsed with a piteous moan.

I sat, still for a little while, gathering my thoughts, thinking of what I must tell Lara. I stood, shakily, slowly resumed the journey home. As I approached the unknown beyond the untested end of the alley, I knew how I would begin my talk with Lara. I would start by using her favorite nickname.

Hello doll face. Lara always found that comforting. I practiced again, this time out loud.

"Hello doll face."

I stumbled slowly towards the light and home. □



God for gods

From my body made
soggy by your sun,
Sevilla, I stare out
wondering, my focus
wandering across
your rooftops, marred by the
persistent stubble of TV antennae,
pointed prickly at the sky.

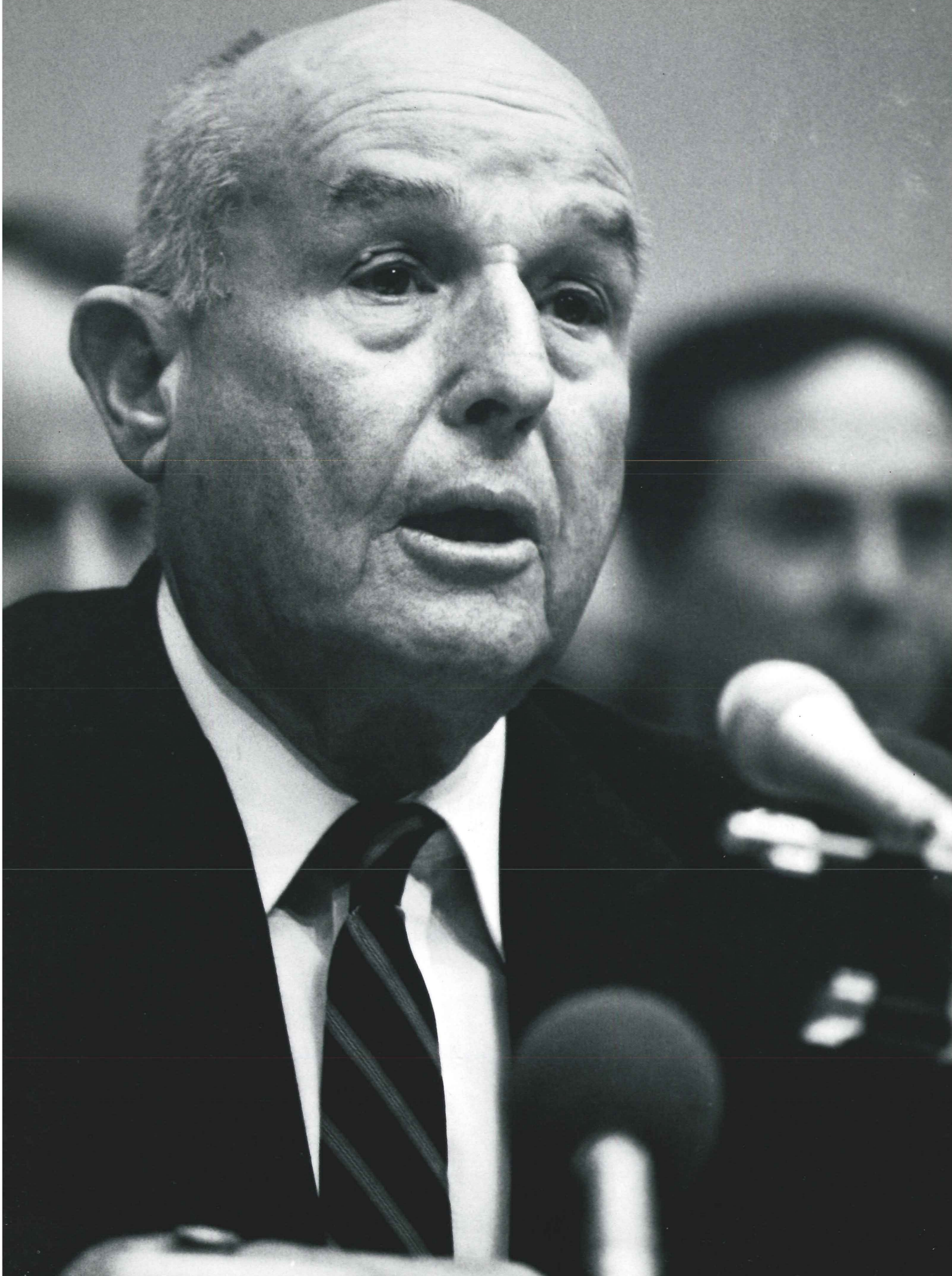
When, Sevilla, did you decide to
switch gods?

This tower, this ancient building
seems now silly, senseless:
tourist's laughs slide into
mocking grins as they
walk past the Guinness Book of World Records'
proclamation: This is the most absolutely huge cathedral
IN THE WORLD.

Meal times conversationless,
sitcom-filled.
No cross is crossed,
no grace is said.
The unfortunate story of a
letter bomb blowing off a
secretary's hand causes a
pause an embarrassed laugh,
a clutch of fear.

The Virgin Mary with her painted
crocodilic tears stares
inanely.
Quickly, tune into something better,
tune into Cheers!

(What will be exposed at Expo '92?)



WILLIAM SEIDMAN

by E. E d u a r d o R o m e r o P.

Mismanagement of lending institutions, fraud, and government policies which are not tight enough or are not adhered to have led to the collapse of many savings and loans institutions, necessitating the need for financial first aid. This debacle has

led to the single most expensive bailout in United States history. Each year since

Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation

1986, the estimate of cost to repair this damage has nearly doubled, with continuing

Chairman William Seidman testifies

investigations pushing the cost even higher.

before the House Committee on

When I finally got through to the man who is in charge of this massive clean-up

Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs.

operation, the voice on the other end of the line battered me with questions. "Who

AP/Wide World Photos

are you? What do you want? Why are you calling me?" And although these

seemed like relatively easy questions, the fact was that I had just answered each of

them only seconds before. I knew the aggressive voice was driving at something

The substantial contributor to the S&L Crisis is the mistaken belief that the previous [Reagan] administration had in deregulation.

deeper than the obvious. The real question was why was L. William Seidman, Chairman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and the Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC), a somebody, talking on the telephone with me, a nobody. Feeling that the end of the interview could very well be drawing nigh much sooner than I had anticipated, I drew a deep breath and tried to start over again.

"Sir," I stammered, "Sir, my name is Eddie Romero and I was asked to conduct an interview with you on behalf of *Dialogue*, Calvin College's literary magazine." I bit my bottom lip, unsure of whether I would be hearing a dial tone or a voice as an answer.

"Oh, I see. That explains it," answered the rough, intimidating voice.

"That explains what?" I silently pondered. I waited for that unseen voice to come back. It finally did.

"I come from Grand Rapids, you know. Born at Blodgett. Raised in GR. I would not be talking to you if it were not for the fact that you were from Calvin. That's the only reason you got through."

I emitted a small, forced chuckle.

Beginning to reminisce, he continued. "Fact of the matter is, I represented the sellers when Calvin bought its [Knollcrest] campus. Since I know Calvin well and have a great respect for the institution, I accepted your call."

Being a proud alum, I have never shirked from any opportunity to use Calvin's name, but I had never imagined its full potential as a credential. I made a mental note of that and tried to wrest control of the conversation.

"Did you attend Calvin?" I inquired. I knew the answer to be negative because had that been the case, Calvin's PR department would have placed him right next to the minorities on all the promotional material. Nevertheless, I asked anyway.

"Oh no, no, no! I don't think in those days Calvin would have let me in. I am not a Calvinist, you know."

I was ill-prepared to discuss Calvinism with the Chairman, but it was getting progressively tougher to get us geared back to economics.

As it turned out, Mr. Seidman studied at Dartmouth, moved on to Harvard Law School, and finished his

academic career at the University of Michigan's Business School. He had been rather successful in the private domain, running the Grand Rapids-based Seidman and Company before entering public life. In this age of avarice and egoism, I wondered what had prompted him to leave private business.

"I think that public service, if one can afford it, is something that everyone who has the appropriate talents ought to try. It is something that I really enjoy and it brings real fulfillment."

I thought about decrying the fact that I am being governed by the wealthy elite but quickly decided against it. Instead, I opted to continue a more personal approach to this interview. What I discovered was a good and compassionate man. And while his gruff voice disguised these characteristics, it was not too difficult to envision a human quite distinct from the infamous Washington bureaucracy. Here was an individual who seemed to have his heart in the right place, striving for what is right and just.

How could he then survive among the sharks in today's government, I wondered. Would not the balance of powers-that-be, be enough to send him to eternal frustration?

"I have days when I wish I was the dictator. Dictator Seidman. (He laughs.) But there are not many of those days. You always have to deal with the organization. Sometimes, however, it does seem as if there is an easier way, a more efficient way," says Seidman.

Efficiency! Economics had raised itself, unlike its doctrine, with no incentives. And I was more than ready to take it from there. The Savings and Loan Crisis was heavy on my mind. It has taken up a gargantuan proportion of the nation's time and promises to swallow even more of its money, and I was talking to the man who was trying to rein it all in. "What really happened?" I ventured. "How did this all begin?"

"The substantial contributor to the S&L Crisis is the mistaken belief that the previous [Reagan] administration had in deregulation."

Although the words were not new, hearing them spoken with such authority stunned me. I was being told

that the country was going to have to spend upwards of 500 billion dollars because of a "mistaken belief."

However, not everybody agrees with Seidman. In fact, just two days before, I had heard Don Regan, former Chief of Staff and Secretary of the Treasury in the Reagan administration, quite explicitly say that the opposite was true. Testifying before the House of Representative's Banking Committee, Regan proclaimed that the Savings and Loan debacle was a result of too many restrictions, not too few. Broadcasting to the nation on C-Span, Mr. Regan declared that the root causes of the crisis were "restrictions that limited the liability of US banks to diversify their loans outside their localities and made them extremely vulnerable to regional economic troubles. Regulators, on the other hand, are like generals—they never have enough troops."

"Never enough troops?" I cautiously asked the Chairman.

The question was too much for the interviewee and it was impossible for him to hold back.

"That statement probably cost the American people about \$50 billion," Seidman shot off. His rancor was made clear through his louder, more gravelly voice. "He made that statement without ever looking at the facts, thereby cutting off supervision when it was badly needed. It's one of the most pompous, arrogant Chief-of-Staff statements I have ever heard," he denounced.

When asked if Neil Bush, the President's son, who is himself embroiled in his own fiasco with the Silverado Savings and Loan, had followed that arrogance, Seidman tartly replied that Bush and Silverado were being treated like every other case. "He, or they, will receive what they deserve. If they broke the law, then a price must be paid."

The truth, however, is that price will inevitably be divvied out to all Americans, no matter if they were involved in any impropriety or not. It is quite impossible to think that regardless of who is right, Seidman or Regan, the American people are going to be forced to hand over upwards of one half of a trillion dollars (\$500,000,000,000) for something they will never see, smell, or touch.

From this point on, the interview took on its own dynamics. The Chairman became a fount of economic wisdom and professionally proceeded to tell me of the central tenet of all economic culture, that of the market. What was to follow was not just dogma, but a heart-rendered truth.

"The free market is a supervised market. No market ever worked without supervision. It starts with the fact that you have to have police so people don't play the market by bonking you on the head. And it goes to the fact that you cannot test pharmaceuticals that will kill you. Et cetera."

What it came down to was that he believed society had to create normative economics, that is, economics according to some set of principles. In an age of absolute free marketeers, these were radical words. In the age of the economic revolution where whole economic systems were crashing down, these were words people could hold on to. Instead of letting the free market set the rules, Seidman was saying, there have to be clear boundaries.

"As I have always put it, the free market is like a boxing match. You can slug and hit but there are rules. You cannot pick up the stool, and you cannot continue fighting when the round is over. People who conceive of the free market as a bar-room brawl have never truly understood the free market."

I could not resist the temptation to draw further upon his analogy, so I asked him if the referee in the ring was God.

If ever one could hear a smile over telephone wires, it was now.

"This is a good job in which to be religious. Prayer is vitally important from this perspective."

Having already been pleasantly surprised in the beginning of our conversation, I was ready to be surprised again. And so I probed further by asking, "Would you consider yourself to be a religious man?"

After a brief pause, the Chairman settled the matter, albeit ambiguously. "Not in any formal sense. But I do believe there is a higher being and I do ask for his help. You have to in my position with the things that run

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the head.*

through my office.”

Prodded back toward regulation, he began to outline one of his solutions to the S&L Crisis. He believes the good savings and loans have to be immediately separated from the bad ones in order to try to put the remaining good institutions back on their feet. Hearing about a “good savings and loan institution” seemed like an oxymoron to me, but I took him at his word.

The Chairman shifted his focus to the impending banking crisis. He disputed the notion that the banking system in this country was going the way of the savings and loans institution but, nevertheless, was quite defensive about the “preventative medicine” banks had to take in order to avoid any pitfalls. Mr. Siedman’s recipe for the banks includes the following: more full-time, on-site resident supervisors to monitor risky activity at all banks; a constant dividend policy for troubled institutions; and new methods for reviewing banks’ underwriting standards.

“We recruit resident supervisors primarily off smaller college campuses. We look for business and economics undergraduates and pay the going rate. And I think Calvin graduates would be well prepared for such a job if they are interested.”

The final topic for which I had prepared was the topic of the world debt. Last July, Seidman had proposed the creation of an international insurance fund for the underdeveloped world which was choking under insurmountable debt.

I wondered aloud why he would be getting involved in other world problems. Could it be that the S&L Crisis was not challenging enough for him?

After some hearty laughter, the Chairman explained that he personally was interested in the third world debt. Nonetheless, he emphasized that his agency had a stake in the outcome of the debt problem. “If any of the large American banks runs into serious trouble because of this, it would be of immediate concern to the FDIC.”

However, his proposal has gone nowhere. The Treasury “was not interested,” deciding to exclusively

follow the Brady Plan, named after the current Secretary of the Treasury. When asked for the main difference between his initiative and the Brady Plan, Seidman quickly replied, “I wanted to set up an agency that would insure the unpaid amount of debt. I wanted new monies to be set up in an insurance fund against all remaining debt.”

Although he saw some Latin American countries pulling out of their crises (“Mexico and Venezuela have one foot up”), he felt some “painful vindication” over some other countries. “Argentina and Brazil were what I was warning Brady about. Their unpaid interest alone has grown too fast and now the whole thing has to be revisited.” I paused to imagine what a restructured world might look like under Dictator Seidman.

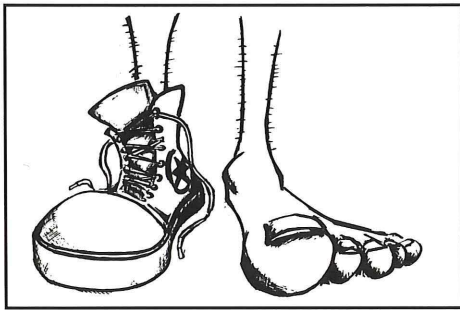
Continuing on the subject matter, but on a more personal level, I asked him about my home country, Peru. “They have been a bit belligerent over the last few years,” he said, referring to the government’s decision to pay their debt on their own calculated time scale. “After all, they borrowed the money. If you just walk away, why, nobody is going to hand you any more money. They took an ideological crack at it and they found out that markets work for them, too.” In a strange and mysterious way, I felt that my own life and beliefs had followed the delineated pattern of my country, from belligerence to faith in supervised markets.

As the interview came to a close, I wondered whether the Chairman, as a youth, ever dreamed of being who he was now. “My greatest aspiration in high school was to play football in college,” he said. For the first time, I bemoaned the lack of a Knight’s football team.

Mr. Siedman’s leave-taking showed that it was not so easy for him to forget this paucity in the Knight’s program. “I wish Calvin well. And in lieu of a football team, I wish the Calvin basketball team well.” □

The Other Shoe

Nathan Bos



When Time magazine named Mikhail Gorbachev "Man of the Decade" late last year, their decision was criticized by many political observers. Various writers questioned whether Gorbachev really is a great leader and visionary, or simply a man in the right place at the right time. Did he free Eastern Europe or just let it happen? Does he have a vision of the future, or is he merely being swept along by the tide of change?

This article will attempt to scientifically decide whether or not Mikhail Gorbachev is a great leader. We will decide this question once and for all by running a genuine scientific experiment, complete with hypotheses, observations, and—get this—control variables. This experiment will hypothesize that instead of being born into the Soviet Union of the twentieth century, Gorbachev had been born at some other time in history. We will then observe if Gorbachev's personal greatness would have been enough to elevate him to historical heights in these time periods as well. In this experiment, our control variable will be that we will select our designated time periods randomly. So pay close attention as we spin the great wheel of history and place Mikhail Gorbachev in four semi-historical settings.

TIME: 100 AD
PLACE: JUDEA, A SMALL PROVINCE IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Being born into a small shepherding family in a tiny village south of Jerusalem, little baby Gorbachev's arrival caused a great stir. An eccentric neighbor of the family predicted that the newborn baby would some day become a great man. His proud but perplexed parents named the new baby "Mosher Kyshorebbe" which means, in Aramaic, "we prayed that God would make our son a rabbi and instead we got a Russian." Baby Mosher quickly conquered the language barrier, however, and adeptly worked his way up through society. (The Jewish boy our experiment displaced to twentieth-century Russia also thrived, excelled in physics despite government discrimination, won a Nobel Prize in 1960, and spent the remaining fifty years of his life waiting in line at the government emigration office trying to get an exit visa.)

Mosher worked his way through correspondence school as a galley slave on the Joppa-Ephesus shuttle. After graduation he borrowed some money from a rich uncle and moved all the way to Rome. In Rome, Mosher had his name officially changed to "Gorbus."

Once settled in the big city, Gorbus began to do some crowd scenes. His big break came when he was asked to play not one, but two different roles in the epic *Ben-Hur*. Gorbus aptly filled the roles of the third legionnaire from the left and the schizophrenic gladiator; from these roles he catapulted to fame as an evil chariot driver in a made-for-TV movie. By 133 AD, Gorbus had gotten himself elected to the Roman senate.

Gorbus distinguished himself as Senator by not getting assassinated. With skilled political maneuvering, Gorbus eliminated all of his rivals and declared himself Emperor of the Roman Empire in 148 AD.

As Emperor, Gorbus had very little time to lie on the Imperial Couch and be fed grapes. Gorbus undertook a course of slow reform which, depending on the historian you ask, either slowed or greatly accelerated the Empire's decline. Gorbus' term of Emperor was fraught with tension and conflict. The

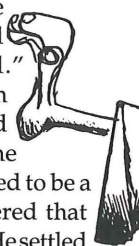


Empire was threatened by barbarians from without and by dissent from within. Within the empire, slave rebellions were a serious problem. The greatest of the rebel slave leaders' name was Spartacus. Spartacus' army is not to be confused with the Spartans, who were not Romans at all but a college football team. After causing a lot of trouble in the provinces, Spartacus' slave army was offered a new contract by Gorbus which provided for limited free agency, one floating holiday a decade, and no beatings on government holidays. Historians disagree on whether this new contract had a positive or negative effect. It is a historical fact, however, that the most destructive of the slave rebellions started on the Monday after the first floating holiday three-day weekend.

As far as the Empire was concerned, however, the slave rebellion was quickly made irrelevant by a massive barbarian invasion from the north. This final, overwhelming defeat was made inevitable when Attila the Hun traded two draft choices for Conan the Barbarian. By the time Attila's army had swept undefeated through the regular season, the line in Las Vegas was 400-1 against the Empire, and Gorbus' reign was doomed.

TIME: 1100 AD
PLACE: CENTRAL CHINA

This time Gorbachung was born in the Orient during that long period in Chinese history that we Westerners refer to as "the time after the Ice Age and before Mao, when all the Shoguns and stuff were running around." Gorbachung was born into an influential Chinese family and again rose quickly to power. The ambitious young warrior aspired to be a Shogun, but then he remembered that Shoguns were Japanese rulers. He settled for a position as a regional warlord instead. While he did not get to wear all the funny masks and costumes that a Shogun gets, he did get a big castle with paper room dividers and lots of good Chinese food. As warlord, Gorbachung pioneered the fifth degree karate black belt. Before an important battle in 1150 (the Year of the Horny Toad), Gorbachung issued these belts to all of his



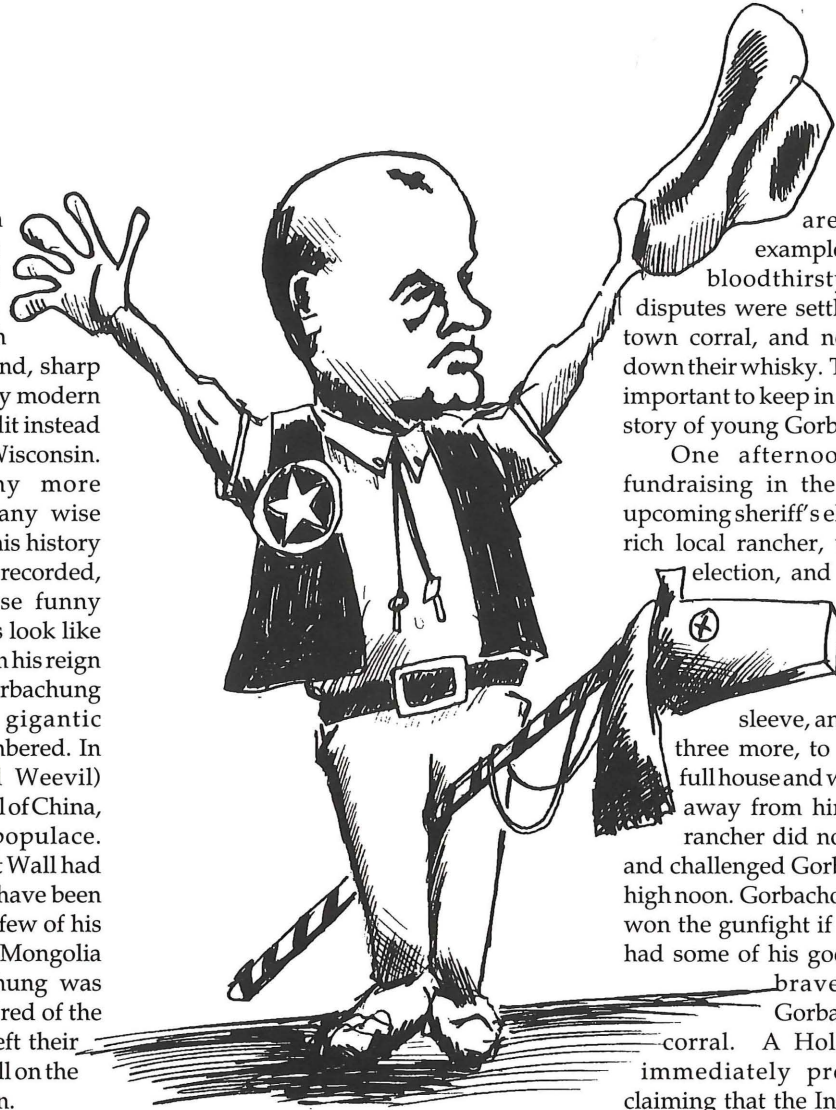
ninja warriors, giving them a distinct advantage over the ordinary one-degree black belts of the other team's ninjas. Gorbachung is also credited with the development of the little, round, sharp throwing ninja weapons, but many modern experts debate this, giving the credit instead to a third-grader from Madison, Wisconsin.

Gorbachung fought many more important battles and made many wise decisions as warlord, but little of his history was recorded. Well, actually it was recorded, but it is written in one of those funny alphabets where all the characters look like little one-eyed spiders. Research on his reign has been understandably slow. Gorbachung the Warlord did make one gigantic contribution for which he is remembered. In 1189 AD (the Year of the Boll Weevil) Gorbachung opened the Great Wall of China, so as to free his oppressed populace. However, the opening of the Great Wall had less impact on society than might have been supposed. As it turned out, very few of his subjects wanted to emigrate to Mongolia after all. Nevertheless, Gorbachung was revered as a hero by several hundred of the original wall builders who had left their car keys on the other side of the wall on the final day of construction.



TIME: 1839 AD
PLACE: UGLY ROCK, NEVADA

Now I know what you're thinking. A rough and ready guy like Mikhail Gorbachow, born out in the Wild West, would be destined to become the the rootin' tootinest, toughest, gruffest, gunslingingest hero ever to sleep in a cattle barn. A lot you know about your own country's history! Enlightened historians know that the Wild West was not wild at all. Cowboys led extremely boring lives, spent a lot of time talking to their cattle, and often had severe mid-life crises. Many other things we believe about the West



are also myths. For example, not all Indians were bloodthirsty scalp hunters, few disputes were settled by gunfights in the town corral, and not all saloons watered down their whisky. This last fact is especially important to keep in mind when we hear the story of young Gorbachow's early demise.

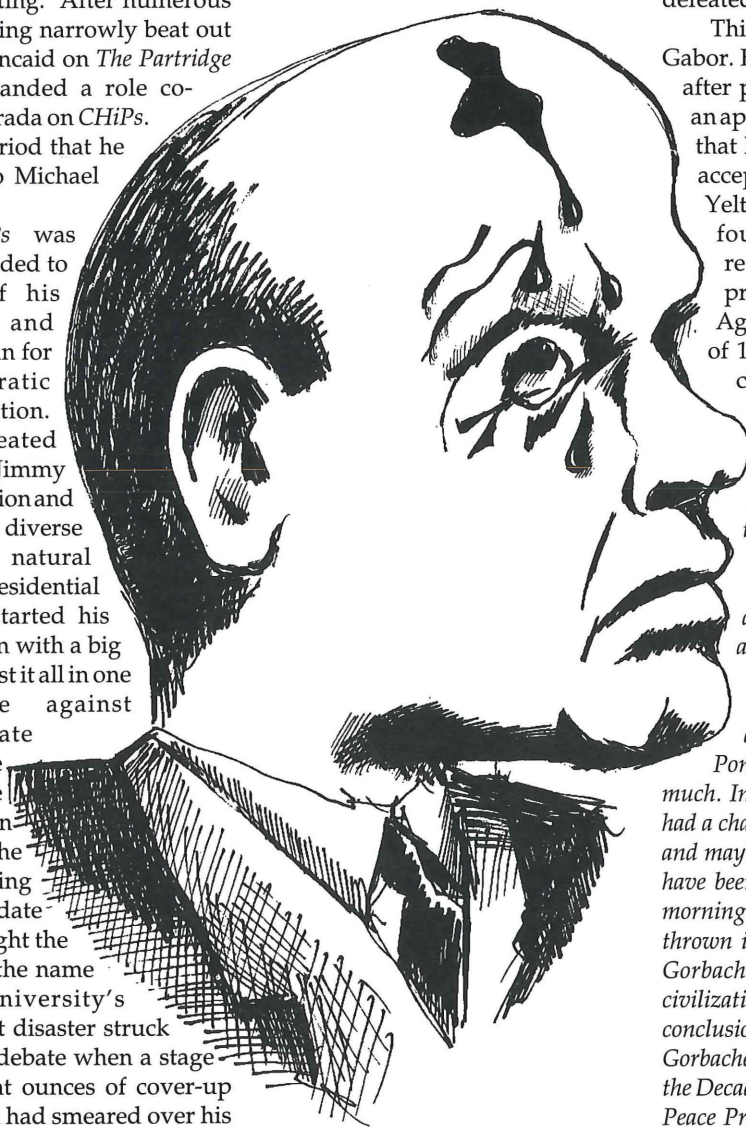
One afternoon, Gorbachow was fundraising in the town saloon for the upcoming sheriff's election. His opponent, a rich local rancher, was trying to buy the election, and no one gave the poor cowboy Gorbachow a chance of winning. But our young hero had an ace up his sleeve, and he used that ace, plus three more, to beat the evil rancher's full house and win his opponent's ranch away from him. Of course, the evil rancher did not take this lying down and challenged Gorbachow to a gunfight at high noon. Gorbachow would certainly have won the gunfight if the evil rancher hadn't had some of his goons dress up as Indian braves and ambush Gorbachow on the way to the corral. A Hollywood actor's guild immediately protested the murder, claiming that the Indian roles should have been played by union members, not dressed-up goons. Although the Nevada Supreme Court eventually ruled in favor of the guild, the decision came too late to help poor Gorbachow.

TIME: 1946 AD
PLACE: HACKENSACK, NEW JERSEY

Michael Gorbachev was born into a family of Soviet immigrants in this New Jersey suburb. Gorbachev showed great intellectual promise and at age eighteen was admitted to Princeton University as a chemical engineering student. In 1968, halfway through his senior research project, while trying to isolate a particularly stubborn isotope of strontium, the realization dawned on Michael that strontium was nothing but a tool of closed-minded, war-mongering, baby-killing fascists. Unable to continue his research, Gorbachev sold his best microscope, bought some steel drums, and spent four years touring the Southwest with a calypso

band. Sometime during the 70s, Gorbachev decided to turn to acting. After numerous failures, including being narrowly beat out for the part of Mr. Kincaid on *The Partridge Family*, Gorbachev landed a role co-starring with Erik Estrada on *CHiPs*. It was during this period that he changed his name to Michael Gabor.

Soon after *CHiPs* was cancelled, Gabor decided to take advantage of his national exposure and winning smile and run for the Democratic Presidential nomination. Gabor handily defeated incumbent President Jimmy Carter for the nomination and tapped the ethnically diverse Erik Estrada as the natural choice for his Vice Presidential candidate. Gabor started his Presidential campaign with a big lead in the polls but lost it all in one disastrous debate against Republican candidate Ronald Reagan. The politically astute Gabor had Reagan on the ropes early in the debate, actually getting the Republican candidate to admit that he thought the Supreme Court was the name of Georgetown University's basketball arena. But disaster struck near the close of the debate when a stage light caused the eight ounces of cover-up Gabor's makeup man had smeared over his birthmark to melt and drip into Gabor's eyes, temporarily blinding him. Across America, millions of Americans wondered, "What would happen if his head melted



during a national emergency?" Gabor was defeated by a landslide.

Things soon went from bad to worse for Gabor. He was condemned by many pundits after punching Morton Yeltsin Jr. during an appearance on his talk show. Realizing that his political career was over, Gabor accepted HBO's offer of a rematch with Yeltsin and KO'd the obnoxious host in four rounds. Gabor subsequently retired undefeated, and Raisa used his prize money to start a chain of New Age paraphenelia boutiques. In January of 1990, Gabor had his name officially changed to "Moonbeam."

Was Mikhail Gorbachev destined for greatness? It seems clear that Gorbachev does possess some innate ability that steers him towards leadership positions. In none of our experiments did Gorbachev achieve so much greatness as to win a Nobel Prize; on the other hand, if Gorbachev had been born in America it is likely that CHiPs could have lasted another two or three seasons because Ponch wouldn't have had to carry John so much. In that case, the writers would have really had a chance to develop Ponch's character more, and maybe even a few successful spinoffs might have been possible, with an eventual Saturday morning cartoon series and a couple of Emmies thrown in. So, what I'm trying to say is that Gorbachev's net positive effect on Western civilization would have been about the same. In conclusion, Dialogue has no choice but to endorse Gorbachev's selection both as Time's "Man of the Decade" and this year's recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Congratulations, Mikhail. Just a thought: next time the Gorbachevs are in America, what might be the effect on civilization if he and Raisa were to do a short cameo appearance on Twin Peaks? □





