

OAKWOOD



CENTENNIAL EDITION

WHAT IS THIS OAK WOOD

What is this oak wood
of northern homesteads,
once less prized than wide grained walnut,
found in mansions and castles
other places, other times?

This wood, hard
reminder of life honed to the truth,
valued for a fine tough grain,
once found rounded in kitchens,
beautifully polished,
mirroring many faces
of those who were before.

George A. West

et al.: Oakwood

OAKWOOD

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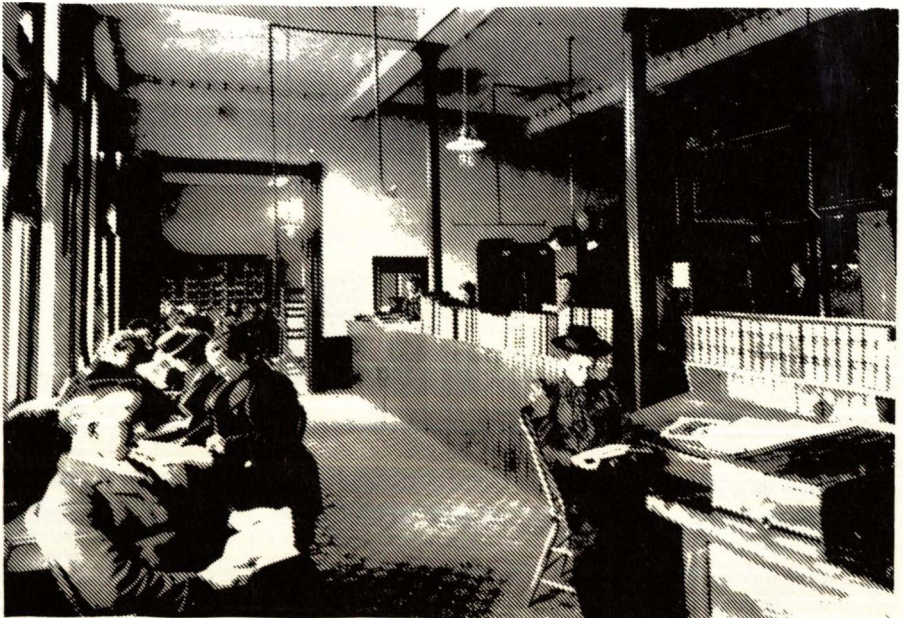
Number 7, March, 1981

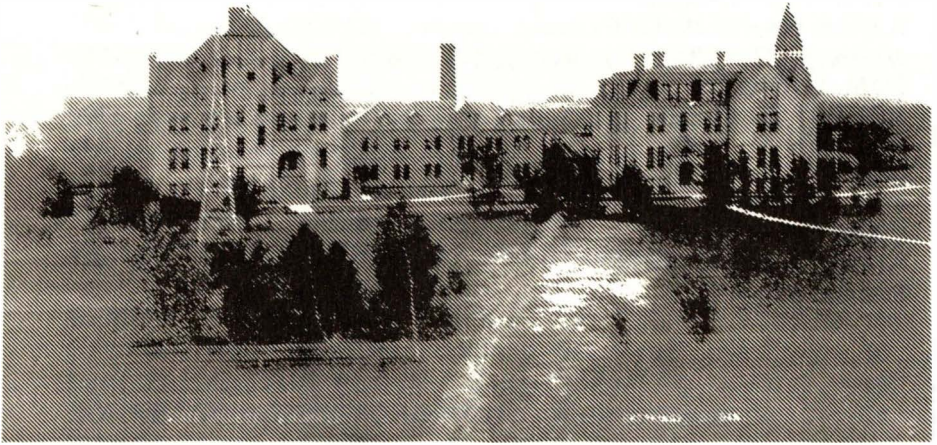
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In this issue of **oakwood** we hope that what is symbolized is not an arbitrary and static thing but rather the necessary and dynamic process of midwestern people joyfully struggling with the realities of life. The works contained in this centennial issue suggest the unending flux of everyday life, in shifting images and feelings both tangible and intangible, ephemeral and lasting.





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CAPITOL LAKE GEESE

Each day I think they will be gone

Snowplows charge the town like bulls
attacking huge stacks of slush and ice
Thanksgiving has come and gone
and Christmas and New Years
Frosted squirrels hunch in gangs
like dirty children in the streets
begging bread or seeds or candy

I haven't seen a robin in months
And the cornfields hide like promises
under a heavy white lie

But on the steaming water of Capitol Lake
nothing moves south
but the wind

Kevin Woster

WIND ON THE FORT PIERRE NATIONAL GRASSLANDS

makes no sound
in shortgrass draws
cropped low by herefords

feels it way up
pant legs and sleeves

runs in herds
of tumbleweed

finds its voice
in barbed wire, highlines
the wings of eagles, hawks
vultures

Kevin Woster

Kevin Woster



Photograph by Kevin Woster



Photograph by Rick Clott

THE ELEVEN YEAR OLD'S ESCAPE

Jim would skirt the house
on his bike rustling
the summer evening air

Like an airplane circling
to land he would follow
the curved sidewalk from the back
door to the front gate gauging
his angle and speed for efficiency

Straightening the bike and
himself he would launch
through the open gate and chase
the road away from the supper dishes

Mary Gales-Loyd

EVERY SATURDAY MOM

Mary Gales-Loyd

Every Saturday Mom
kneaded cream colored dough
rhythmically she rolled it
forward with her palms and

like a feline stretching
she straightened her arms and
urged her palms into the
warm resistant bread dough

when I was nine I watched
she worked my heart and mind
warm resistant with words
from her heart and mind warm

warm with a gentle love
raised from resistant nine
warm with her mother's words
kneaded with the bread dough

FRANK FAIRCHILD:

YOUNG AND A BACHELOR AND A FARMER

I'm off my feed again,
feeling lower than a bucket
in an empty cistern.
This farm I swear is shrinking faster
than a two-dollar shirt.
Nothing here any more to milk
but the cats,
no flank bigger than a baby bruise
to lean a forehead into.

Velma Jean writes
she'll not be seeing me this summer,
she's finally landed a steady job,
with decent pay,
even if it is in Houston,
but we can always be good friends,
can't we, Frank,
and Frank Fairchild you're certainly a gingerheart
if there ever was one.

You ever notice how when it gets dry
it gets dry all over?
Jesus, what I'd give
for a good toad-strangling storm!
Tell you what:
If I could muster up
so much as a small single dollop of spit
I'd play the saint just long enough
to share it with the corn.

William Kloefkorn

from the FELLOWSHIP OF THE SEVEN STARS

NANCY VEGLAHN

Mazie Ffoulke, a high school senior, and her friend Paul Clough, are invited to a meeting of the mysterious Fellowship of the Seven Stars by a young man Mazie has dubbed "Captain Sunshine." Troubled by family conflicts and wanting answers to the many questions that plague them both, Mazie and Paul decide to attend an informational session sponsored by the Fellowship:

Paul and I drove to a shabby neighborhood on the west side of the city. The house was one of those three-story wooden jobs with lots of shuttered windows and a tiny yard, crowded in among other such houses. The doorbell had a screw loose. But when that heavy door swung open, everything changed.

I supposed I'd half imagined people dancing around in sheets, chanting mantras, or maybe some kind of magic rites with weird music. Instead, we saw a couple of dozen people, mostly our age or a few years older. They had on ordinary clothes: jeans, plaid shirts, sweaters. The big living room we entered had none of the seedy look of the outside of the house. The walls were a soft blue; they looked freshly painted. The floor was carpeted with a shag rug of a deeper blue. There were comfortable-looking chairs and sofas scattered around.

Captain Sunshine came right up to us when we walked in. He looked as good as I remembered, maybe even better. He introduced us to the others, who smiled and said they were glad we'd come. After a few minutes, everybody sat down in the chairs that had been lined up at one end of the room. Captain Sunshine and a young woman sat at a table in front of the group. The woman was dark, with long, kinky hair and high cheekbones. I hoped she wasn't his girlfriend.

It didn't take me long to realize that this was not just another Bible Whoopee Tabernacle. The meeting wasn't high pressured or hysterical, but I felt an odd excitement as I listened to these people. It wasn't just the excitement brought on by Nick Sorenson's good looks, either. In fact, as the woman beside him spoke to us I got so interested in what she was saying that I soon stopped sneaking looks at the Captain and gave her my whole attention.

"My name is Jeanne," she said, "and I just want to tell you about what it's like to be part of our Fellowship." She talked about how little most people care about each other, and how it seems like everybody's just out for themselves, and how mixed up and unsure young adults are these days. "Even in what should be the very closest relationships, in families or in couples, so often people just want to use each other," she said. I thought about good old Reed, and my brother, and I had to admit she had a point.

"The Fellowship is different," she told us. "It's the only group I've ever been in where everyone is truly accepted. Each member is important to all the others. We don't have to quarrel over little things, or be jealous of each other; we don't need to gossip and be unkind in order to make ourselves feel better than somebody else. We all believe in the same things, and we work together for the same reasons."

She made it sound pretty convincing. In fact, I noticed that Jeanne **looked** happy. Even her voice was soft and sort of peaceful. I found myself imagining what it would be like to be part of a group like that, without all the hassles I'd always assumed were the price of being with other people. Was it possible?

Then the Captain (of course, everybody here called him Nick) started talking. He told about how the Fellowship of the Seven Stars began, what the members believed, how it was run, and so forth. Several times while he spoke, he looked at me, and I got the feeling that he was explaining all this especially for me.

Here's some of what I learned:

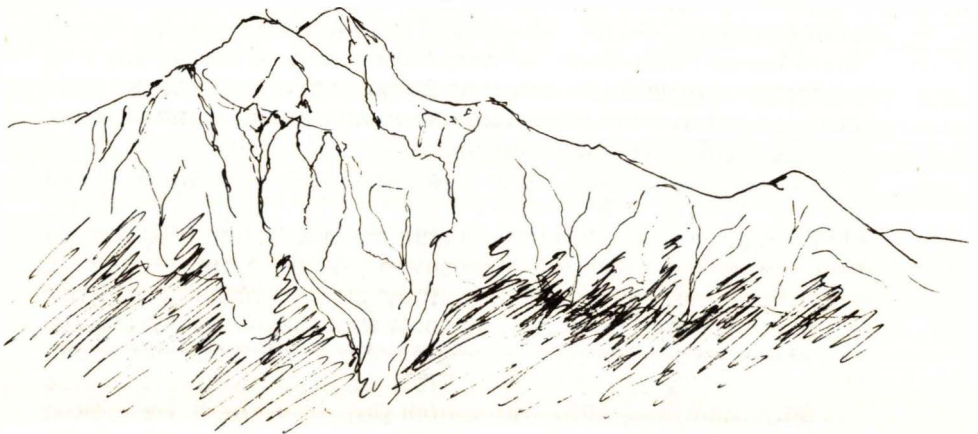
The Fellowship was about five years old at the time. It had been started by a business executive in Chicago who had a vivid dream one night. In the dream, he was taken into a huge hall. He looked down and saw seven jewels in his right hand, like diamonds. As he watched, they glowed brighter and felt warm in his hand. Somehow he knew that they were not jewels, but stars. A voice said, "You are Malakh," over and over again. When he woke up, he found a Bible open on the table beside his bed, though he didn't remember putting it there. He looked at the page and saw Revelation 3:1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.'"

The man called a biblical scholar at a seminary nearby and found out that Malakh means "messenger;" it's the Hebrew word from which the word "angel" was translated. He took the name as his own, sold his business, and organized the Fellowship. Since that time he's had a lot more dreams and visions which have told him what to do.

The purpose of the Fellowship is to communicate the messages the Malakh gets from the Almighty to the rest of the world. That's why the group has been nicknamed "the Messengers." The members commit themselves to spread the word, and to love and support each other.

After the talks we sang some songs (good lively ones with familiar tunes but new words), and then everybody just milled around, drinking Cokes and chatting. Nick mentioned that this had been the usual introductory meeting; those of us who were interested in learning more were invited to another meeting on Saturday night. This would begin with a dinner at 6:00, and would be more "in depth." As we were getting ready to leave, Nick came up to Paul and me and said he especially hoped we'd be back. Somehow I wasn't surprised when Paul said we would.

Excerpt from FELLOWSHIP OF THE SEVEN STARS by Nancy Veglahn. Copyright □ 1981 by Abingdon. Used by permission.



Drawing by Linda Rasmussen

SUMMER'S END

In the bottom
of the peanut butter jar
went beach sand
still warm and fishy
after last night's storm.
Two hands cupped water
from the lake into the jar
and caught a piece of seaweed,
green and crisp
but feeling jelly-dipped.
From under the dock
there was a clam,
no larger than a fingernail,
and a minnow,
rinsed with light
it gleamed
like a silver finger.
When I was ten
I could take the summer
home in a jar.

Polly Heins

SERVING WITH GIDEON

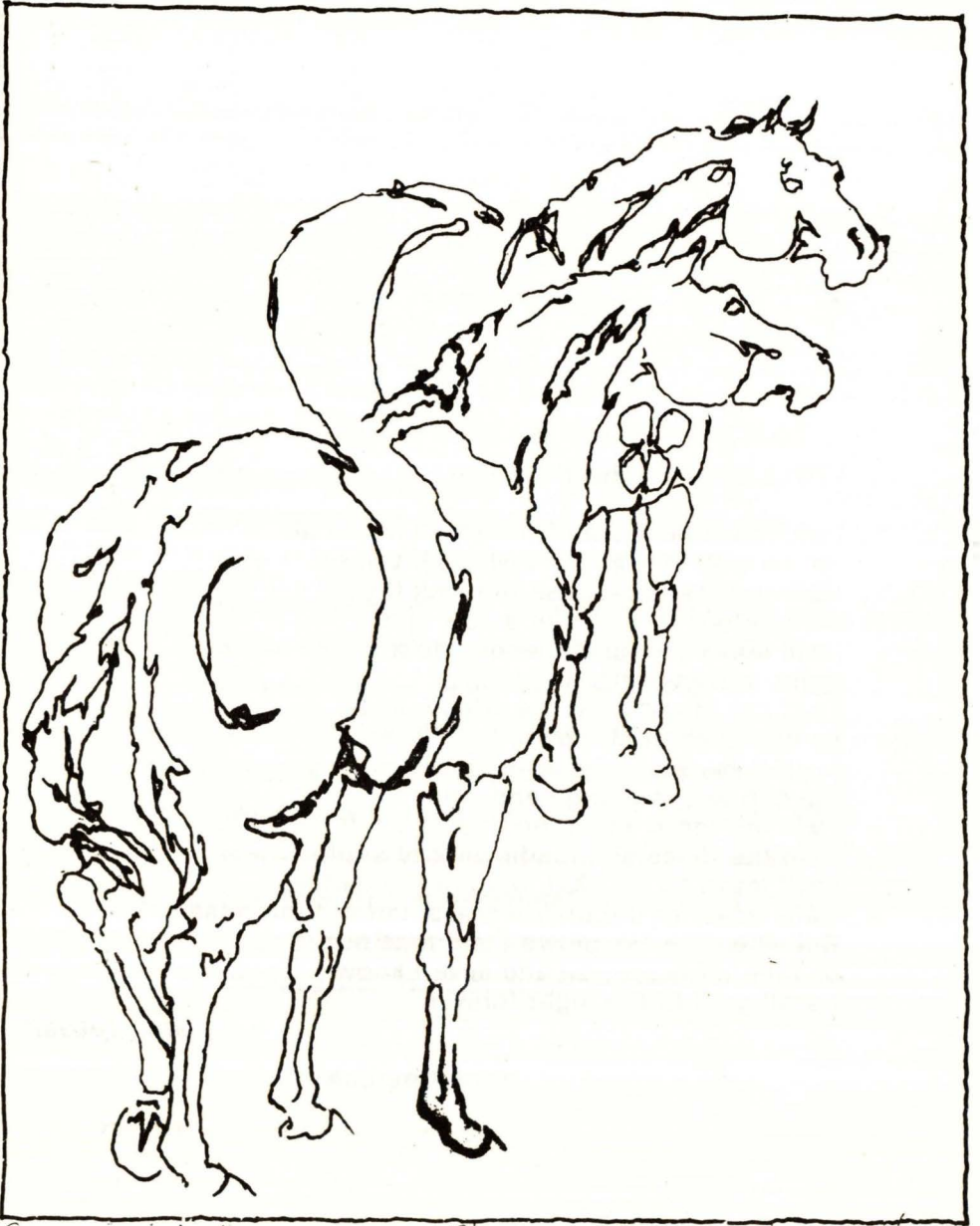
Now I remember: in our town the druggist
prescribed Coca Cola mostly, in tapered
glasses to us, and to the elevator
man in a paper cup, so he could
drink it elsewhere because he was black.

And now I remember The Legion—gambling
in the back room, and no women but girls, old boys
who ran the town. They were generous,
to their sons or the sons of friends.
And of course I was almost one.

I remember winter light closing
its great blue fist slowly eastward
along the street, and the dark then, deep
as war, arched over a radio show
called the thirties in the great old USA.

Look down, stars—I was almost
one of the boys. My mother was folding
her handkerchief; the library seethed and sparked;
right and wrong arced; and carefully
I walked with my cup toward the elevator man.

William Stafford



Print by Susan Hartenhoff

I WILL LEAVE THIS PLACE

I will leave because of the smell of the air
on the way to the fields which lift me.
I will not leave because of black flies
on hereford dung under a July sun.
I will leave because I become lost
in the waves of flax in bloom.
I will not leave when the alfalfa grows
so thick I must sit down.
I will leave when the corn is in
the crib and is orange and cold.
I will not leave when the dust
from the fields and roads will not settle.
I will leave for my dog, but not the cattle.
I will leave for the prairie grass, but not the thistle.
But when the sky glows then goes out
and the air is precise and alive I know
I shall go into the night forever.

Leon Tetzlaff

SONNET TO A HEREFORD HOG

*How do we love you? Let us count the ways!
We love your docile disposition, pig,
And your large litters make us want to jig!
One thing that never ceases to amaze
Is your maternal love — of course it pays,
Since nearly all your babies grow up big!
An easy feeder, one that likes to dig —
No wonder farmers give to you such praise!
We love you with no reservations, then,
We gaze with fondness on your red coat's shine,
White face and feet, and on your firm rump's breadth.
You have one more appeal that charms most men—
Your pork chops and your ham are so divine
We love you even better after death!*

Audrae Visser



Print by John McCarthy

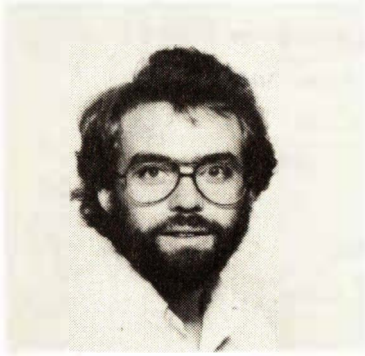
TOMORROW'S SOLDIER

*The little boy giggles,
happy with his new-found toy.
He wears a toy army helmet
and holds a long stick in his arms . . .*

*The young man
trudges through the swamp,
mosquitoes buzz incessantly.
He wonders if he'll ever
see his girl again, if he'll
make it home.
Yesterday his buddy
stepped on a land mine . . .*

*"Bam! Bam!"
giggles the little boy.
"Fall down," he points at his puppy,
"You're supposed to be dead!"*

Sonya Christianson



TOM THORSON

by Don Boyd

Tom Thorson is a South Dakotan who expresses his love for his native Black Hills in rough handmade paper collaged with found objects. The colors are in his poem;

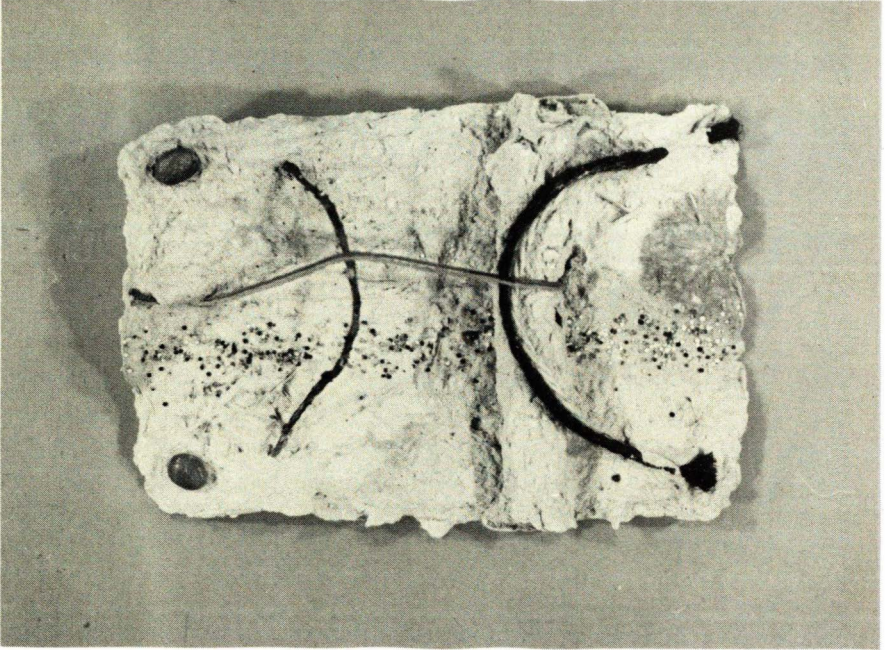
inhaling the morning
pink yellow
transparent passing into transparency

The objects include bits of string, nails, small stones, mica, (transparency) glitter and other related materials which may contribute a needed texture or color. All works are approximately five by seven inches. The paper is worked up wet, colors applied and thus dye the material, objects are imbedded. I find a sense of joy in his work reminiscent of Miro.

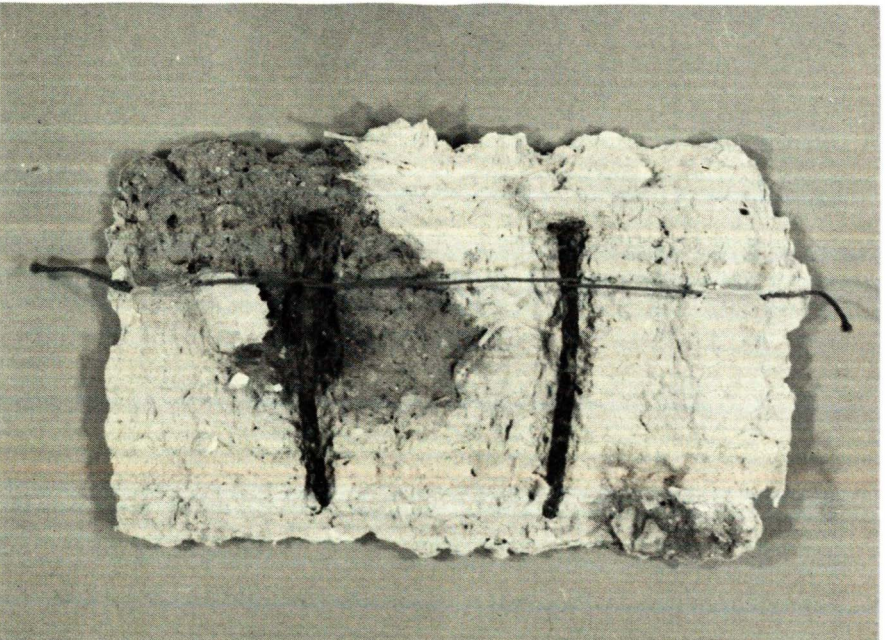
Tom graduated from South Dakota State University in 1977 with an Art major and a French minor. In 1976 he attended the Yale Summer School of Art and Music.

Since graduation Tom has travelled widely; Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Paris, and New York City but says, "South Dakota still holds my highest esteem and stands as my created or imagined source of health and well being." He has worked as a language teacher and at odd jobs to keep his art free. In 1980 he won the best of show award at the 5th Annual Juried Art Exhibit at the Community Cultural Center, Brookings, SD. Sue Morgan, New York City artist, was the juror.

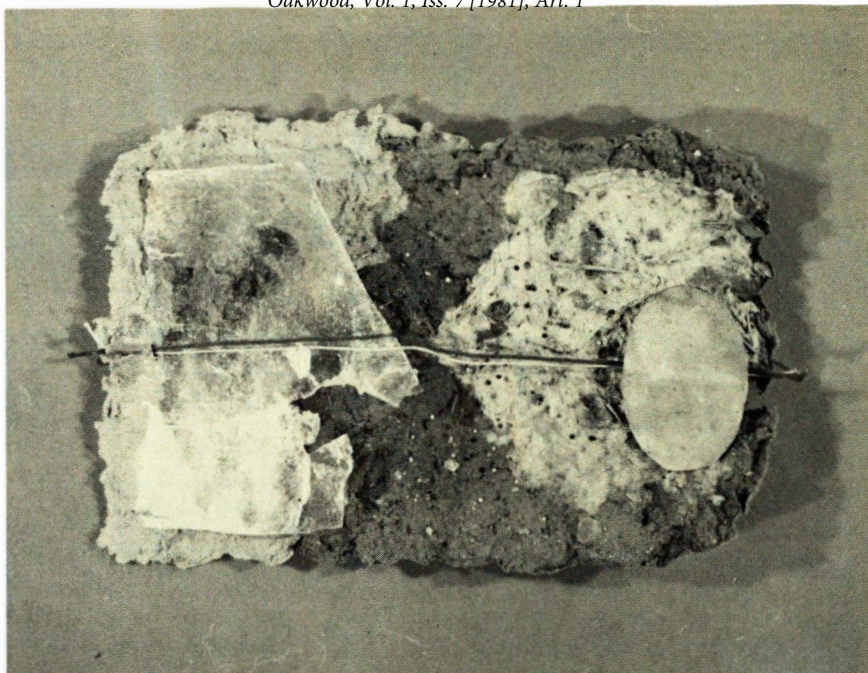
art editor for **oakwood** and Director of the Community Cultural Center.



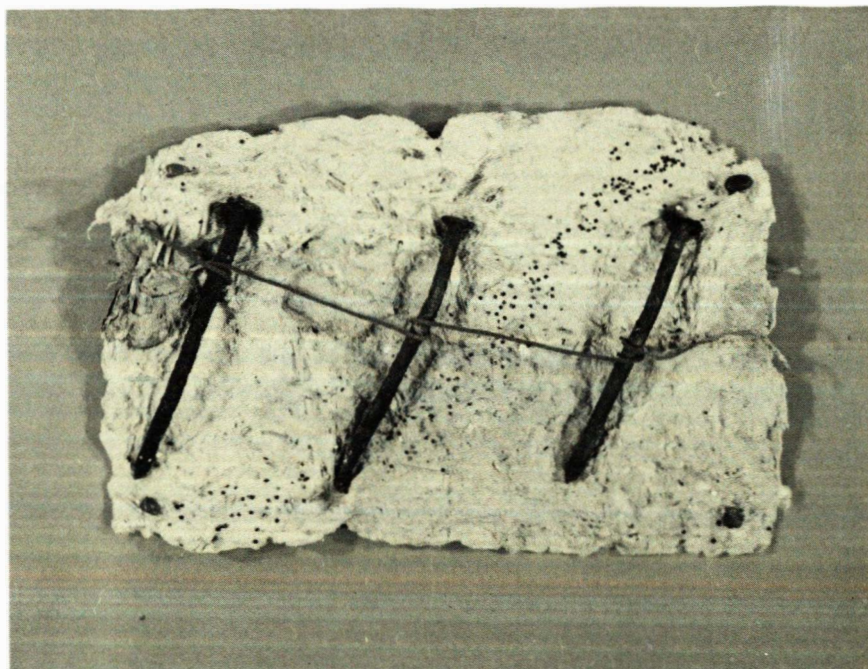
Scheherazade and the Magic Carpet, 3½ by 5½ inches, 1980, handmade/stained/paper, string, glitter, stones, twigs.



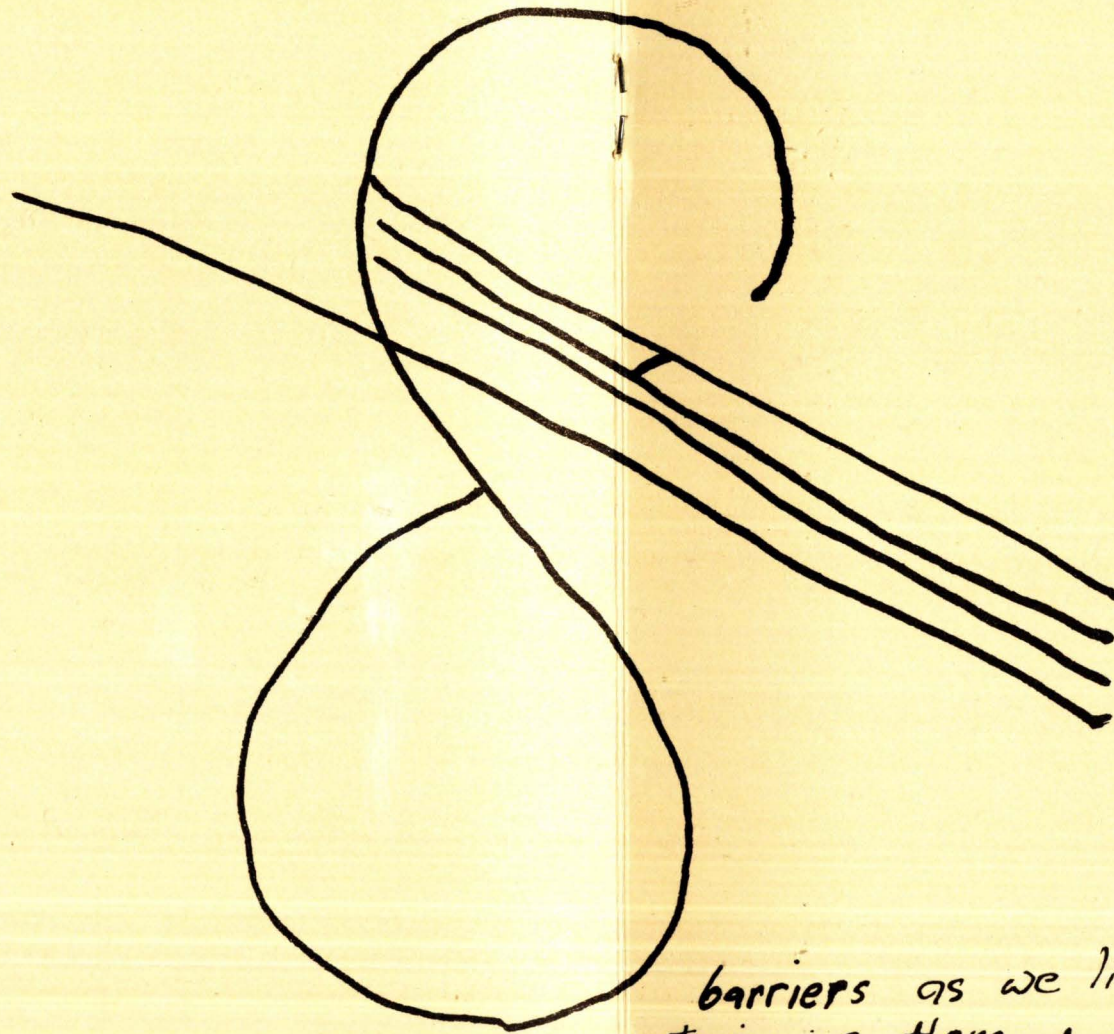
Fence, 4½ by 7½ inches, 1980, handmade/stained/paper, nails, string.



Menace Transformed into Intrigue, 4½ by 7 inches, 1980, handmade/stained/paper, mica, an old nail, pine needles, construction paper, string, glitter.



Lakota Badlands Fence, 4½ by 6½ inches, 1980, handmade/stained/paper, pine needles, glitter, nails, stones.



barriers as we like
to imagine them
© Tom Thorson

500 copies of this print designed by Tom Thorson for **oakwood** have been printed on Ivory Hammermill Cover paper, suitable for framing. This print was designed for the offset press process and is not a reproduction of art from another medium. Tom sent the design by mail and the editors carried out his instructions with the printers.



Photograph by Rick Clott



Photograph by Robert E. Alber

SOME THINGS DON'T REALLY CHANGE

Vernon M. Kirk

It was Sunday, and even though it was early September, the temperature had been over 90° since noon, with little air movement. Discretion told me that the best thing to do was just as little as possible, so I had spent the afternoon and early evening on a chaise lounge, reading (and napping) in the shade in the back yard.

When it became too dark to read, I marked my page with a blade of grass and moved to the Pawleys Island style rope hammock. Now, this hammock wasn't much good when the bright sun was shining this time of the year, because it was out in the open, away from any shade. But after sundown, it was just the thing, for there was good air circulation all around it.

Several crickets had been sounding off in the yard all afternoon, and they didn't seem to want to stop now. Instead, they apparently chirruped a little louder, and every few minutes another individual joined in, along with some katydids, until the whole back yard — trees, vegetable garden, flower and shrubbery borders, and even the grass — was throbbing in several different pitches and cycles. At least half a dozen different species were calling, each in hopes that a potential mate from among the females of their own species would come to them.

It's interesting that only the males of certain insects vocalize. This is true for the crickets and the katydids. The calling reminded me of the old sage who said, "Happy are the cicadas' lives, for they all have voiceless wives."

During one short lull in the seranading, I found that there were 2 choristers about a foot apart in the grass just under the head of my hammock. Their calls were so soft that I couldn't hear them unless I turned my head sideways toward them. I checked them out by using a flashlight and saw that they were little brown crickets about half an inch long. Although they didn't have much volume, each was going full blast with what he had.



One usually doesn't look much above eye level, except for very short intervals, and few people have taken the time to watch the heavens above them for more than a minute or two. However, when you are lying on your back under the open sky, it is easy to concentrate on what is up there, especially when you are not bothered by the glare of the day.

The tops of several young trees framed a large patch of cloudless sky above me, and for a while the sky was like a huge gray lid clamped over the area. A couple of swifts and several purple martins were combing flying insects from the air, but pretty soon they gave up and disappeared. Then the last night hawk zigzagged across, chasing one last moth just below the tree tops, after which it, too, retired for the night.

But that didn't mean that the show was over.

As I lay gazing up at the almost imperceptibly darkening sky, I thought I saw the faintest suggestion of a star. I blinked once and it was gone, but only for a few seconds, for it returned brighter than before, and definitely there. This was Vega, the brightest star of the constellation Lyra.

Even though there was no breeze so far, there were very few mosquitoes to plague me. I eliminated 4 or 5 as they made their presence felt on ankle, brow, or arm. However, no more came after it got a little darker.

I searched for other stars, but none appeared for several minutes. Then, 2 more slipped into view—not by moving, but by gradually shining out from an ever-darkening sky.

I scanned the sky constantly, and over the next 15 minutes the number of visible stars went from 3 to 4, then 5, 7, 10, 12, and 15. A bat flew over and I watched it dart about after insects for a few moments, and when I looked again for the stars there were too many points of light to count.

Now, the gray of the sky had completely disappeared and the apparent lid over me was more like a huge dome with a rather uniform scattering of stars — some dim, others bright — that all seemed to be at the same height — about 2-3 miles above me. The almost imperceptible switch from a single star on a gray background to many stars on a black background was most impressive.

A little breeze began to drift through the yard, and soon the steady rustle of the leaves blended in with the songs of the crickets and katydids.

There was no moon that night, so the stars had the sky to themselves. It was their night to shine!

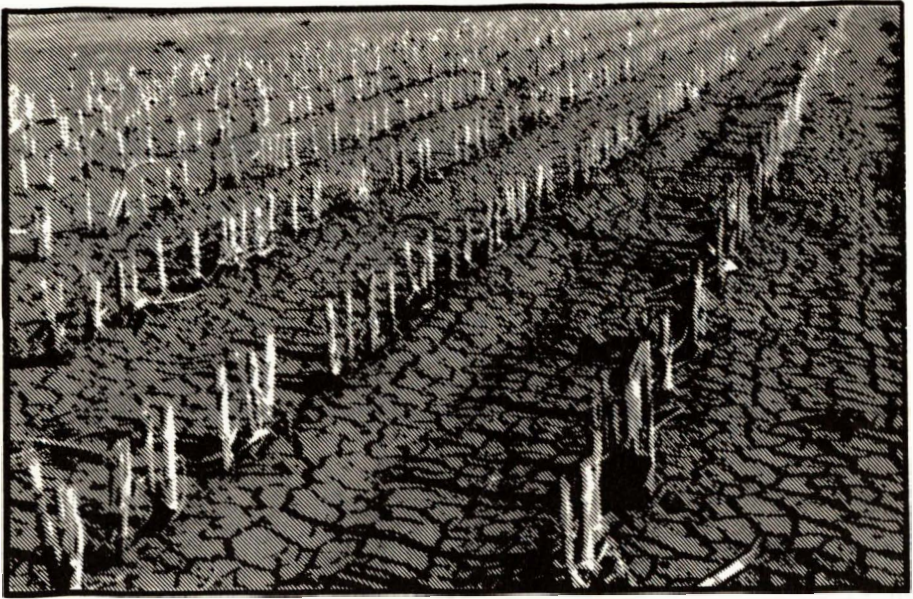
As I continued to watch, it looked as though a small patch of fog was developing just a little to the east. It grew lighter and larger, and then I realized that it was a portion of the milky way that was just coming into view.

I wondered whether I would be lucky enough to see a meteorite, and about 20 minutes later I saw one cut a clean, white line across one corner of the bit of framed sky above me. It burned out before it reached the far side. Then, during the next half hour, 2 more meteorites entered and burned up in that part of the earth's gaseous coating.

All this time, the orthopteran musicians continued their ages-old serenade, and when a high-flying airplane passed overhead, I could see its lights but couldn't hear it — which was just as well.

Close to midnight, I knew the evening breeze, going in the windows on the south side of the house and pushing the hot air out the north windows, had made the bedrooms comfortably cool. But before I forced myself to leave the hammock, I thought about the time of my youth — as my children say, those prehistoric days before TV — when my family, after a hot day, would often lie on blankets on the lawn of our rural home and watch the night steal up on us. We would hear the day-creatures settling down for the night, and the night-creatures stirring and coming out for **their** time, and the stars popped out by ones, twos, and the hundreds, all to the accompaniment of the chorus of crickets and katydids.

Some 1500 miles and 50 years away, nothing had really changed — not the things that really mattered in the long run. True, some of the species of birds and insects were different, and my ears couldn't catch some of the higher-pitched sounds, but the play was the same.



Photograph by Vernon M. Kirk

PICKING CORN BY HAND

Frosty, dim, October morning—
farmer in denim jacket;
on his hands the two-thumbed flannel gloves.
band of leather
strapped to the wrist
with hook adjusted.

Off to the cornfield with the team—
horses hitched to the wagon,
in tune with the picker.
fingers numb—
reach, twist, throw,
bang—bang—bang
rhythmic,
staccato on wood
team matches its pace
to the bang on the bangboard.

All day—morning cold, noon warmth, late afternoon chill—
misery,
blisters, callouses, fatigue,
not daring to break the rhythm—
bang—bang—bang.
fastest picker in the field,
clean too,
pride,
joy at end of day,
showing off the pocketed perfect ear.

Beryl Younger



Print by Dorothy Morgan

HOME FROM VACATION

The Last 200 Miles to Brookings

It is good to travel East
coming home —
sleepily learning that losing hours
is of no matter.
The unplugged clock
dutifully disconnected,
stopped at 7:00 AM for three weeks
while we gained hours West
to play in the sun,
will hum anytime we get there.

Now Wanda drives her turn—
we go nonstop,
to reach the eastern interchange
before dawn—
night is the time for coming home
with sleepy eyes.
And my daughter and my son,
asleep in my arms,
do not yet know that time
does not tick or hum,
is not gained or lost,
but promises the sun
and makes us sleep.

They've time to learn of time-
that tantalizing cheat
like the gum machine in Wall Drug
with mixed up cogs,
dropping out two gum balls
for a penny,
making my son drool of double pleasure,
but end with sore cheek muscles,
and just a bigger tasteless wad
to spit out in the dust.

Now down on the Missouri,
there are reflections of stars.
I will not look but wait
for the eastern interchange,
where, easing down,
around and under,
turning north for home,
I'll see the north star,
drawing the dippers down to the horizon
to pour out summer.

George A. West

WHITE RIVER

James Marten

I am not a fisherman. I am also not a camper, backpacker, or long-distance biker. I feel rather out of place, in a way; many of my English department colleagues at St. Louis University consider themselves great outdoorsmen. They wear high-laced, waffle-stomper boots under their doubleknit slacks and drive air-conditioned four-wheel drive Scouts and Rangers. After work, they gather just off campus in a little lounge called "The Sportsman" and unwind by regaling one another with tales of their wilderness adventures.

Perhaps I'm just jealous—but I happen to know that the Dickens instructor was fined a hundred dollars last year for dropping a MacDonald's sack on a hiking trail and the fellow with whom I share my office fries his fish on a hot plate that plugs into his pickup's cigarette lighter.

Anyway, what all this is trying to point out is that I am not an outdoor person, and that anything I say about that subject has to be taken with a grain of salt.

My wife Carol grew up in a town named Anchorage near the White River in South Dakota. We visit Anchorage for a weekend every June on our way to the Black Hills to see her parents, who retired to Rapid City a few years ago. Since I was born and raised in St. Paul, my only contact with this stretch of the Plains has been our annual visits there. No one calls that part of Mellette County "God's Country." Eighty per cent of the time the wind is blowing something in your face: snow drifts in January or swirling, biting, hungry dust in July. The nature there isn't pretty in the classical sense; it's a place to raise cattle and oats and corn and hogs and wheat and milo and barley and to make use of a prairie that one doesn't find reproduced on dime-store post cards.

Though I'm not enraptured by the landscape, I do enjoy seeing Carol's family; I gain about fifteen pounds during those two or three days, and I can once again match the faces and names and houses and children with all the right relatives. Every year we sleep in the same beds and eat the same meals. We hear the same gossip about the same neighbors and can't leave until we play a few games of ten-point pitch with Grandma and Grandpa Gunnarson.

And Carol's Grandfather Morrisson always tries to get me on the working end of a fishing pole. In the fifteen or sixteen years we've been visiting Anchorage, I've probably ended up going only two or three times. The weather, or hospital visits to sick aunts in Pierre—one year I had a broken ankle—usually save me, but last summer no excuse surfaced. As a result, shortly after noon on our second day there, Grandpa Morrisson—everyone around Anchorage calls him Mort—and I sallied forth from his small white house on the west edge of town. We piled our gear in the back of his black 1959 Chevy pickup, climbed into the dusty cab with the gray-green blanket thrown over the torn seat, and lurched out of town on a one-lane gravel road that wanders through twelve miles of countryside to a tiny fishing hole on the White River.

It was hot for June—over 90—but the wind was down and the sunny, deep blue sky was crowded with puffy white clouds sailing gently eastward. The drive was hot and dusty; I leaned against the door, my elbow sticking out the window and the breeze blowing my hair in eighty different directions. The road that led to his fishing spot wound over low, rolling hills that are used mainly for pasture. We saw calm herds of cows and their two and three month-old calves grazing inside barbed wire fences and sweating crews of high school boys manhandling green alfalfa bales onto tractor-pulled flatbeds.

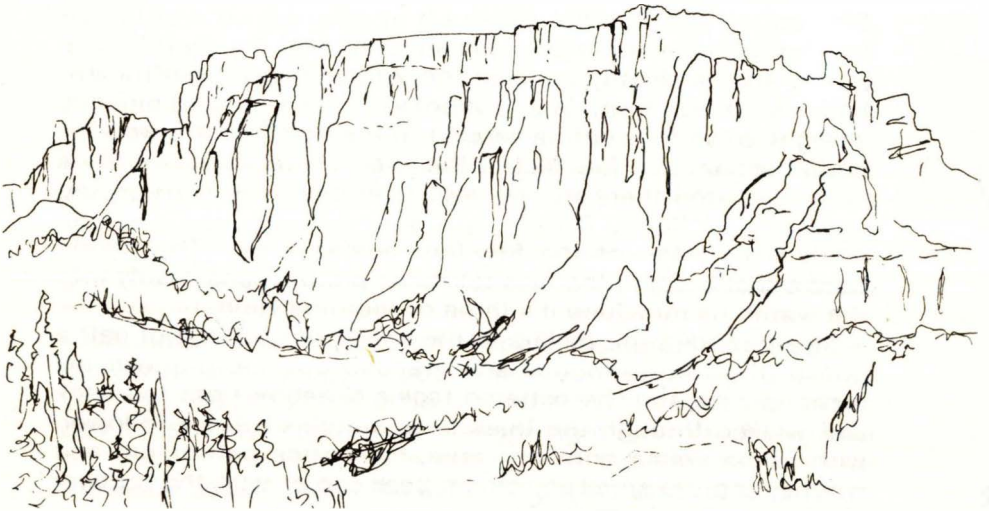
Through the shimmering heat we drove, Mort shouting news to me about cattle prices and new silos and old farmers. I couldn't hear much over the racket of the gravel bouncing off the bottom of the pickup and the wind whipping through the cab, but Mort is usually disgusted at the few important things I've learned in all my schooling anyway, so neither of us minded.

After forty-five minutes of his shouting and my squinting into the sun we finally reached the White River. It isn't a particularly striking spot. The road sneaks over a hill and plunges straight down to it before veering to the north over a wooden bridge spanning a few feet of the river. There are a few more trees gathered there in one spot than one's used to seeing westriver in South Dakota; cottonwoods are sprinkled all around the edge of the fifty-foot across pond. The prairie brome that carpets the hills for miles around runs nearly into the water; by mid-June it's three or four feet high.

Mort stopped the pickup in the shade of a clump of half a dozen or so cottonwoods and stepped out. He grabbed his bamboo pole and the battered tackle-shoebox from the back and walked through the trees to a stretch of dirt. I followed with Uncle Seig's borrowed pole, the coffee can of dirt and worms, and the small styrofoam beer cooler with the leftover chicken and a six-pack of beer.

Mort ignored me and got right down to business. He threaded a worm onto his hook, arranged the bobber on his line, and tossed it into the middle of the pond. He sat against a tree, his arms crossed in front of him, holding the rod between his knees. I vainly looked for a sign of rain, then dropped my gear and sat down by a tree about ten feet from Mort's. I managed to get my worm impaled—along with my finger—and threw my line into the water. I was hot, and the sun glancing off the water hurt my eyes. I gingerly tried to relax against my tree and waited with half-closed eyes for the sweaty afternoon to pass. After a half hour of quiet fishing, Mort reached over to the beer cooler and took out a can of Schlitz.

"Have one?" he said. I'd wanted one since I'd gotten out of the pickup but didn't want to appear too eager; it was his beer.



Drawing by Linda Rasmussen

He opened his, and got out a little glass salt shaker that belonged on Aunt Bertie's kitchen table. After carefully sprinkling some salt into the beer, he pushed all the granules that had landed on top of the can into the opening with one finger and returned the shaker to his pocket. He sipped once and turned his attention back to the still, shining pond.

Mort had talked my ear off on the way out, but volunteered barely ten words in the next three-quarters of an hour. I was bored, and for some reason got the uneasy feeling that the silence was my fault, since what I don't know about fishing would fill volumes. However, from some process of osmosis, I guess, I remembered some of the "fish-talk" that had been bandied about the department, and I thought this might help me get a conversation started.

"What size blue gills are they catching over on the river this spring?" I asked.

Mort moved his head slightly, but didn't look at me. "Don't think I've heard that they're catchin's any, yet," he said. "Could be three-quarters pound."

He didn't elaborate, and I decided to leave the blue gills in the Missouri. After a few moments I said, "Do people up here try to catch carp, or do they think they're mostly a bother?"

"They'll clean a carp every once in awhile."

"I guess if one wants to catch them, corn is pretty good bait."

"Could be." Mort's bobber bobbed and he gently started pulling in, but the little plastic ball popped out of the water and stayed on the surface. I finished my beer and kept chattering doggedly.

"Down in the department some friends of mine make what they call doughballs. They mix up jello and cornmeal with water and a few other things and roll it into little balls. They say they make pretty good bait."

"Sounds kinda messy."

I shut up and wished for another beer.

It was a long wait. I have never seen anyone drink as slowly as Mort did that afternoon. He nursed a single beer for nearly an hour, and didn't bat an eye when he downed the last, hot, sour swallow. When he finished, he got up, said "Keep an eye on that, Rich," took our empties to the pickup, and, leaning through the open window, set them on the floor of the cab. Then he ambled back, got two beers from the cooler, handed me one, and sat beneath his tree.

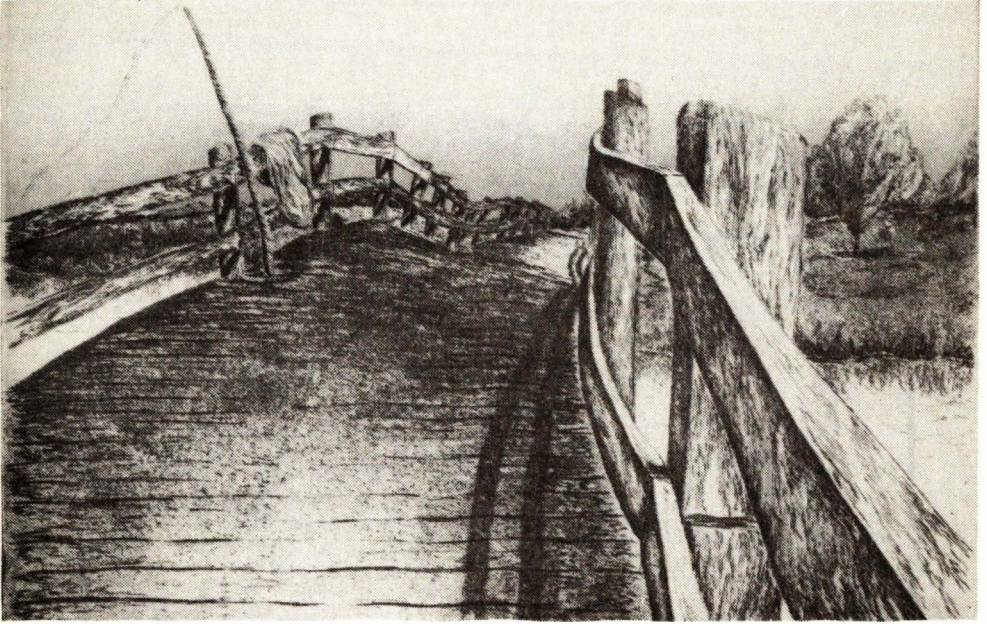
I looked at Mort and was struck by his youthfulness. He looked like a seventy-three-year-old Huckleberry Finn. He was slouched against the gray-brown cottonwood, his knees bent impossibly around the pole, his straw hat's green visor pushed down over his eyes. He had reached around behind the tree to

grab a foot-long spear of wild grass and with it was dislodging a piece of lunch from his back teeth. I imagined him bootless, with a few stained patches on his blue and white Lee overalls, minus the blue long sleeve workshirt that even at 90 degrees was buttoned to his neck and wrists. In a fit of fancy I saw him floating down some river, casting a line from the back of his beat-up, amphibious pickup, bare feet dragging in its gentle wake, drinking salty, hot beer.

Suddenly I felt like an intruder, like a literary reviewer critiquing junior high essays. With my handful of artificial knowledge and misplaced cynicism I was jutting into Mort's world—a world that right now consisted of his tree and the dirt he sat on, and which ran out along the pole and line to the green, rippled pond and to the hills on the far side and maybe the cloud-speckled sky. It was a world he came to without asking anything of it, and left taking a few fish and some fresh air.

I watched as Mort took a worn wooden pipe from one of his breast pockets, struck a match on a brass overall button, and sucked small white clouds of smoke out of it. He blew out the match, watched it cool, and returned it to the pocket. He looked out on the pond, at the red and white bobber rolling and dipping on the water. After a few moments, his head slipped the few inches back to the tree trunk, folding his hat brim, and he dozed off. He woke up a little later when a small carp nearly snatched his pole out of his limp hands; Mort threw the fish wriggling back to the pond. It was the only thing we got all day, but we drank the beer, ate the chicken wings and necks, and let the late afternoon sun streak under the limbs of our respective trees and wash over us.

I finally found a soft spot under my tree and stretched out in the shade. Evidently I slept, because suddenly I was awakened by the mosquitoes that had come up from the pond to feed. Mort was ready to go then, so we picked up our few pieces of gear and climbed into the pickup. Then we headed home, waved on by the sunset and the evening breeze, leaving gentle tracks in the dirt road that would blow away tomorrow.



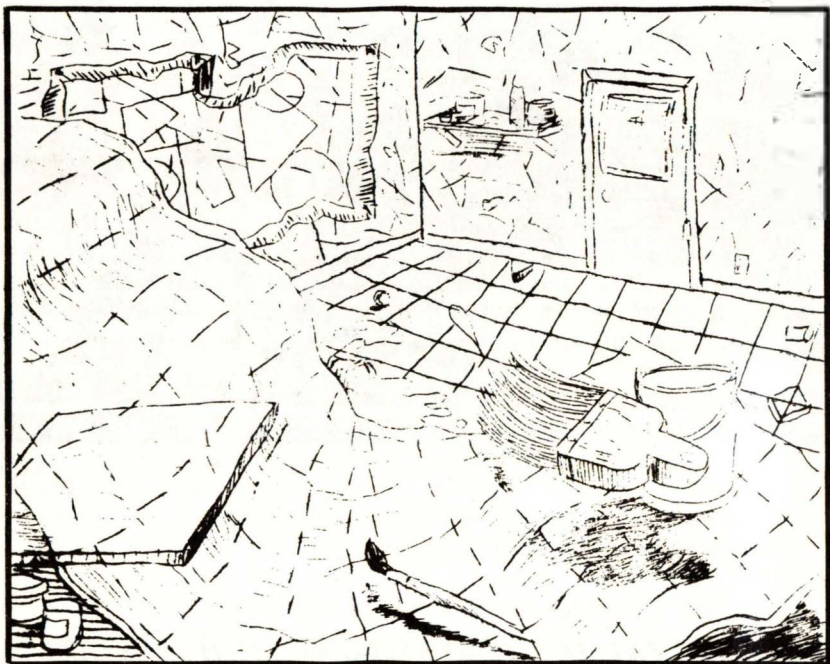
Print by Greg Painter

WHY I DON'T EAT MACARONI SALAD AT THE HY-VEE DELI

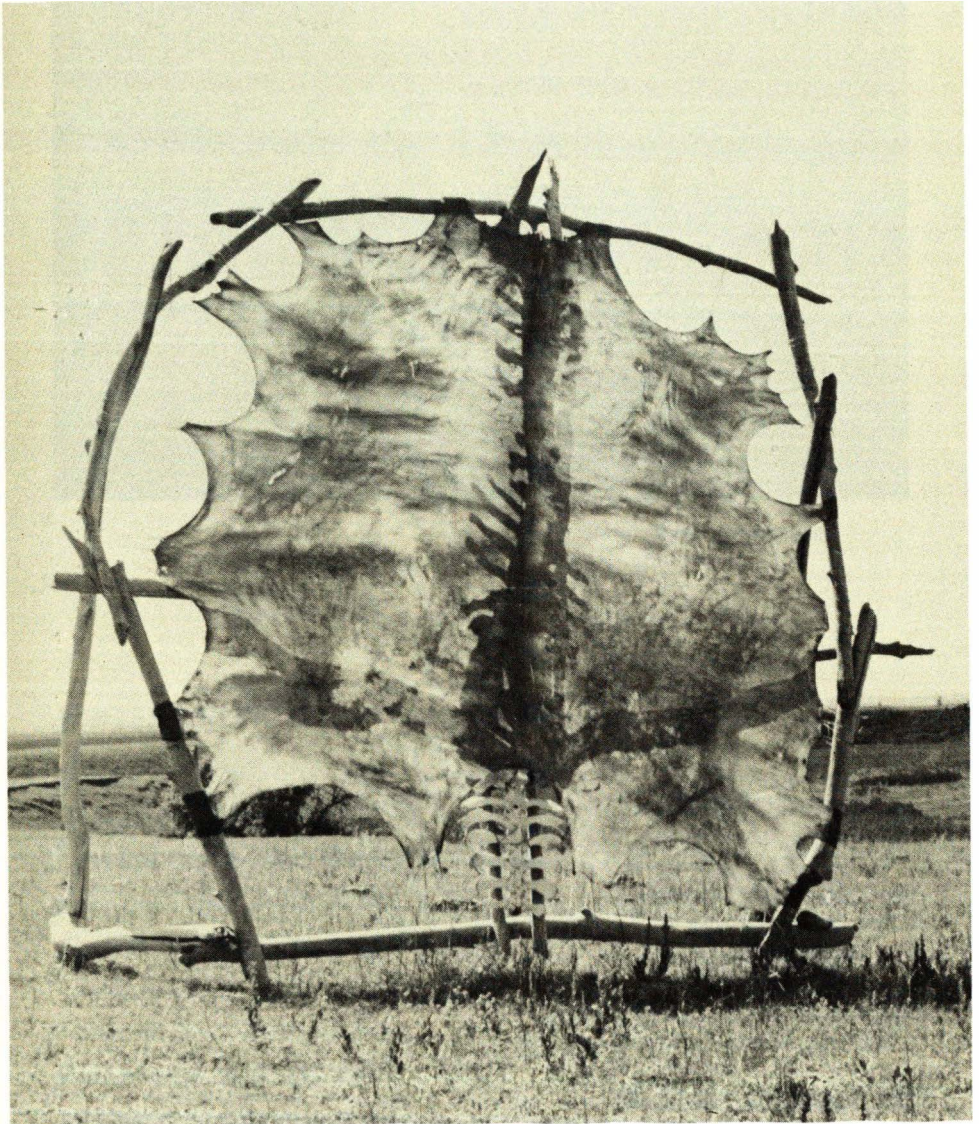
Crackly smooth
was Grandma's macaroni salad,
hugged against a calf-sized hip in her clear glass bowl.
She stirred, her wooden spoon swinging with Glen Miller
to "In the Mood."

And the kitchen smelled of summer
and the sound was the sound
mustard and mayonnaise and macaroni
and hard-boiled eggs make
when they're rubbed together
Crackly smooth.

James Marten

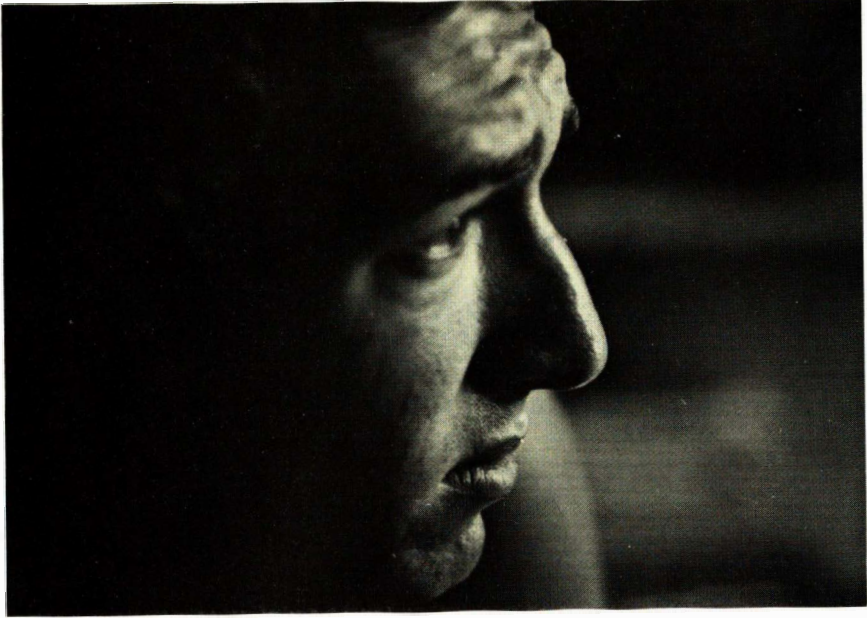


Print by John McCarthy



Buffalo Hide, 8.8 by 9.3 by 4.5 feet, 1980, hide, wood, bones.

Sculpture by Carol Hepper



Photograph by Steve Szymanski

A GOOD MAN

"Be punctual," he said.

He rose at 6:00,
napped at 1:00,
retired at 9:00.

He gritted his teeth doggedly
and regularly in his sleep.

"Be righteous," he said.

He attended church faithfully.
He had no bad habits:
no gambling,
no drinking,
no womanizing.

Well, maybe cigars.
He chewed cigars.

"Be wise," he said.
He wasted no time with
newspapers,
magazines or
books.
He listened little.
He advised a lot.

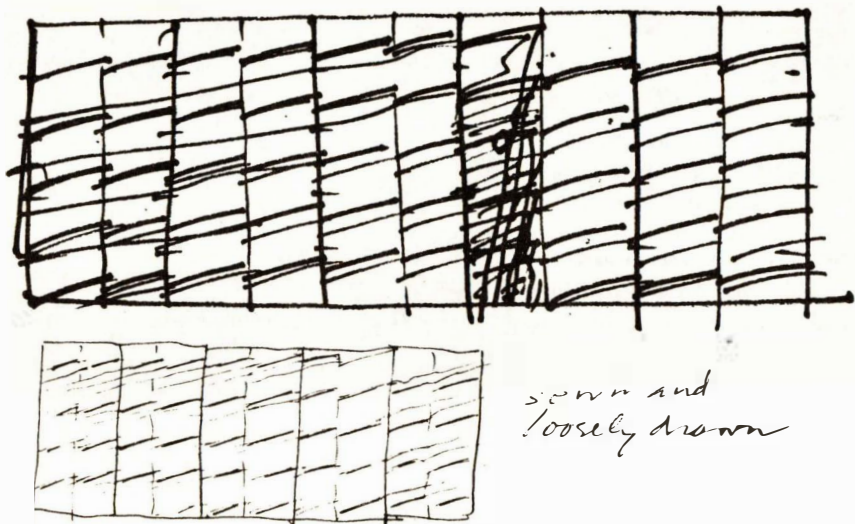
He ground down lives
like his cigars
and spat them out
vehemently like
so much mutilated tobacco.
The remnants stained
wherever he flung his spittle.

Mary Raney

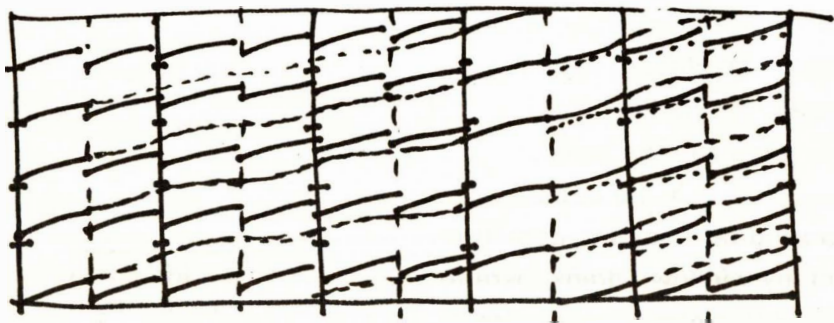
WINTER CREEK

Only the blizzard of 1975
covered it over and then
only until the snow slowed.
That stream emerged again
carrying the blizzard with it.
Artesian fed, looking like
Rhine wine and the taste
as sweet to passing birds
forgetting territories to drink it in.
From my window I drank there too.
Savored that clarity as it rolled
around the tongue of the bend.

Polly Heins



Drawing by Signe Stuart



Drawing by Signe Stuart

NO ONE SPOKE HIS NAME

for THOMAS

*The box on the radio
when I was four
did not contain my brother
who could not clear his lungs
on his first morning,
but just his "things,"
I was told,
brought from the hospital
and placed there hurriedly,
as friends and neighbors came
to speak of weather and a picnic,
ignoring the box as if it were
a worn out piece of furniture.
They brought me jelly beans,
said "how big you're growing,"
and I ran away,
to an old cave in our wooded ravine.
Hunched down in darkness
I dared to cry his name;
it echoed and ricocheted
around uneven walls of dirt,
and then escaped out the trap door,
left carelessly ajar,
as sound bursts from a plugged gun barrel.*

*Occasionally still
on a lonely morning as I run
out on the solitary prairie,
that cry, wrenched from a boy,
caught forever in the wind,
whirls by my ears,
leaving me shivering in the summer morning,
knowing that my brother
is still in that box
on the radio.*

George A. West

ON SUNDAY

There are Sunday mornings I want
to climb into the haymow of a barn
and curl up in the hay. I want
to lie alone in silence for hours
as blocks of light through the windows move
across the hay, until it fades
into the blue presence of the moon.
And only then will I get up and go out
into the world of things.

Leon Tetzlaff



Drawing by Linda Rasmussen

CONTRIBUTORS

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