Perceptions is a creative arts magazine published by the Humanities Division and Student Activities of Gainesville College to encourage the arts among students, faculty, and friends of the college. Some of the works published herein are the creative products of art and writing classes; others are contributions from friends of the creative arts.

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Red

"See Rock City"
on the roof of a barn
Rich, plump strawberries
dripping with cream
Rubies with diamonds
captured in gold
Tulips in springtime
braving the snow

Sandra E. Baker

Yellow

The color yellow excites me
With its many shades of the seasons.
Jonquils and forsythia catch my eye
Promising spring will come
With its myriad yellow blossoms.
Summer sunshine and sunflowers
Share a bond of enchantment
And golden wheat gently waves
In all its sunlit splendor.
Maple and poplar trees adorn themselves
In fall with saffron hues
Delighting all who see.
Yes, yellow is my favorite
Color of the seasons.

Eleanor S. Whitfield

Black

Infinities empty reaches
The Great Bull snarling behind the wall
If I can't see
My hand casts a shadow on the page
Into the night
Strange noises in darkness
Strange creations inhabit my corners

The Black Hole of imagination
Light cannot escape

David Strickland

Green

cut grass
collards cooking
Granny Smith apples
old cheese
mildewed shoes
band uniforms
crabapples
mint leaves
dill pickles
cool ocean spray
furry spring leaves
nausea

dianne t. parker
Lost Time...

Late one summer's afternoon, a boy's cry could be heard piercing the serene silence of the wilderness. Atop a mountain, the boy wandered aimlessly carrying only a bucket halfway filled with blackberries. As the sun drew closer to the neighboring mountain top, the boy's shadow grew longer along with his cries for the only passage back to civilization he knew. Alas, he has given up hope as the sun draws nearer to abandoning him, as his sister appears to have done. He now sits quietly on the trunk of a fallen tree, his chin resting in his palms and his elbows resting wobbly on his knees. He sits wondering how his sister always knew just where the blackberries were, right where the giant boulder was that they always ate their lunches atop, and how she always knew just how to get them home every time. If only he could remember the way home as his sister had always done. Would he ever be able to find the blackberry patch without his sister? The giant boulder? Or even his way home?

I sat on the porch of my parents' house, staring out across the fields at the hill upon which I used to play. I used to camp, hike, ride my bike, and pick blackberries. I recalled a summer long ago, along with a particular day when I thought my life was near its end. I felt those familiar butterflies in my stomach, just as one gets when thinking of the family pet that is no longer around. Then a smile came over my face as I thought of how ridiculous I must have looked roaming around hopelessly in that patch of woods, screaming and crying for my sister. At that moment I felt so foolish: I began to laugh aloud and decided to take a walk on the hill just to humor myself even more.

As I went into the house to take off my coat and tie, and to change my shoes, I heard a car pull into the driveway. It was my sister. Sherry had brought her two kids to visit. I told her I was planning to go pick blackberries. A smile came over her face as she said, "I had better go with you so you don't get lost." We both laughed as we walked around back to ask the kids if they wanted to come along. Both of the kids pleaded that they did not like blackberries and would much rather stay and play "Laser Tag." I followed behind my sister along the narrow path up the hill. Never doubting her memory or sense of direction, she led us right to the rock where we used to eat our lunches. On one side of the rock in faded red spray paint, we could barely make out the ever so familiar words: SHERRY LOVES BRAD. From atop the rock, we could see the kids playing in their grandparents' yard. From there she took us directly to the blackberry patch, or rather what was left of it. It seemed as though the birds had gotten the best of the blackberries over the years. Without many blackberries to pick, we decided to head for home. My sister began walking away until I stopped her. I looked at her with the most childish grin and confidently said, "Follow me!" Laughingly, she replied, "Are you sure?" With my lead, we started off down the hill.

As we neared our parents' house, I realized that the boy who was lost on the mountain that day wasn't lost at all. He was home the whole time, just taken in by the unfamiliar surroundings. Much to the manufactured astonishment of my sister, we arrived safe and sound without any unexpected detours. We stood in the kitchen talking about the "good ole days," while attempting to thaw a pouch of frozen blackberries, for which we had an uncontrollable craving, in the microwave. Just then I heard another car pull into the driveway. A few moments later my brother-in-law stepped into the house. "Hello, Brad!" I said. "How are you?" From that day on, I have never been lost again. There have been times when I haven't known where I was exactly, but never did I sincerely feel lost.

Jeff Markuten

The Trouble With February

February's sun is bright as butter cut by a well-chilled knife of wind.
Brown skeletal oak leaves cling to branches, chattering of lost summer life; yet buds rest on the same twigs, tightly wrapped packages that might as well be marked, "Do Not Open 'Til Spring."
Nothing's properly dead, nothing's ready to be born.
The month's a nothing caught between memory and may be.
February's an intolerable pause, a however interrupting all natural laws.

Brad Strickland
Willie

You are to me what nature is
fish feeding from your hands
rocks and treasures discovered in the dry lake bed

For only me
a turtle shell, half a reel
wild flowers from the path.

Animals who love you
cats lying on your chest for warmth and affection
dogs running with you in the snow

Life you love
the baby rabbit, held, warmed, released
the flicker, rescued, set free to fly again

You are my love and my hope
today and tomorrow
you are my treasure.

dianne t. parker

Thank You, Barbara

When I was an old man
I wanted only silver-screen love,
One that was quick and sudden,
Neat and controlled, fun and sexy,
Over in an hour and a half,
Leaving great memories and no scars.

Having moved on toward middle age,
I saw the foolishness of the old man's dream
And decided that love of that kind
Could not possibly be at all.
It was easy then to see
That love had to be bought
At great price and endured forever.

Having, however, arrived finally at my youth,
I know the truth now of love.
Love can be what you want it to be:
Silver-screened, fast-footed, fun and frolic,
Always ending, but starting all over again
Right in the next reel.

Bought at great price, maybe,
But doubling in value each passing year.
It seems that the old and the middle-aged
See through the dim glass only partially.
The youth, having had the greatest teacher of all,
Never makes a mistake.

Charles McMichael
The Tenth Life Of Ebony

Rosemary Baldwin sank into her overstuffed chair. She carefully rearranged her doilies on each flowered arm, gathered her knitting in her lap, and stared at the ceramic cat sitting on the mantel. It was black and sleek like Ebony had been with the glint of gold shining from each eye. If she stared long and hard enough, the ceramic cat would begin to breathe and she could again see Ebony stretch, the muscles beneath her shiny coat taut. The cat would yawn and she, Rosemary, would frown at her. "Now don't you go a' yawning at me, Baby. You got just as much sleep as I did." Ebony sat on her haunches and moistened a paw with her rough tongue. Then she stared for now that Jake had died. She never went anywhere; she was content to paddle around her small house and crochet her doilies or knit. The steady rapping at the front door made Rosemary stiffen. The cat leapt to the floor and scooted beneath the sofa.

"Who is it?" she said, her voice tinged with anger. "If that's you, Henry, I got nothing to say." The rapping came back louder. "Oh, all right," she said, opening the door. The man stood, his back rounded slightly, his hat held in his hands. "Sorry to trouble you like this, Rosemary, but I need to talk to you about your cat." "Ebony," she said. "Ebony," he repeated, looking past her into her perfect living room. "May I come in?" "You may not. Now, what do you want?" "Like I told you before, my Buster doesn't like cats and I'm afraid that cat of yours..." "Ebony." "Ebony," he repeated, then continued, his voice a little scratchy. "Ebony likes to tease Buster and one day Buster's going to tear her limb from limb." "Is that all you came over here for?" "Yes, well, no." "Is it yes or no?" "It's no." He cleared his throat. "We've been living here next door to each other nigh unto twenty-five years, Rosemary, and since Jake's gone a year now, rest his soul, and Grace well since departed, I thought maybe you'd like to get out of that house. Maybe go dancing:"

"That's what you get for thinking. I ain't interested," she said, closing the door. Dancing? That was the last thing she wanted. She wasn't going to get her kids' cat here. Ebony stood at the window and parted her lace curtains just enough to see Henry shuffle dejectedly down her drive, across the grass still heavy with the early morning rain and onto his property.

"Did you hear that, Baby? The old coot thinks just 'cause Jake is gone that he can come over here and change our lives. Well, he has another think coming." She traced Ebony's spine, feeling the muscles ripple beneath her fingers. "Come along, Ebony," she said lightly, "it's time for din-din." She smiled at the cat and whisked a tune under her breath as she opened a can of Fancy Feast and placed it in the cut crystal bowl.

The cat wound between her legs then sniffed at the food. "You know, it's your favorite, Gourmet Chicken." Rosemary watched the cat lock up, then blink. As usual, the cat knew what she was saying and began to nibble at the food.

Rosemary wrapped her heavy gray sweater around her. It must be 40 degrees outside, she thought. She shivered as she laid down her knitting and walked over to the mantel. She smiled at Jake's picture. The gray sweater she'd knitted years before looked better on him. It never fell off your shoulders," she whispered to the yellowed photograph. "I miss you, you know. You weren't supposed to go first and leave me behind. Now look, we've been over this before. Yes, I know. But I'm not alone, Jake, I'll always have Ebony. Henry came over today.

Old fool wants to go dancing. I ain't got no use for him now that you and Grace are gone. He makes me remember the old times." She picked up the gold-colored frame and touched the glass, tracing his strong jawline. "It hurts to remember, Jake..."

She quickly put the photograph back on the mantel, remembering how in the beginning, right after Jake's death, Henry would bring her flowers from his garden and how she would fling them back at him. "Don't try to patronize me, Henry George," she had said. And she would watch Henry stoo a little more as he ambled down the sidewalk.

After a while, Rosemary noticed that Henry stopped bringing the flowers. And cold weather began flickering in through the keyholes and under the doors. She dragged her sweater around her tighter and folded her arms. If Jake were alive, there would be a fire flickering in the fireplace and the week before Christmas there would be the sweet smell of pine as she laced the top of her mantel with pine boughs and spray-painted pine cones. It was almost Christmas now, but she still couldn't bring herself to gather the pine branches.

The snuffling tares out in the street sent a shiver through her blood. She raced to the window and pulled back the curtain. Nothing but a delivery truck, she thought; it's no concern of mine. She dropped the curtain's edge and turned away.

Her stomach growled. It was well after noon. She would have soup and crackers again. She had just opened her cabinet when the banging began at the front door. "Hold your horses," she shouted.

Rosemary opened the door to Henry. "Oh, it's you," she said. "I don't have time to fool with you now, Henry. I'm fixing my lunch." She had just turned on her heels when the sound in Henry's voice made her stop and face him.

"Don't go, Rosemary." Henry's voice cracked and his chin quivered as the words tumbled out. "It's Ebony." "What's Ebony?" she said. When he hesitated, she grabbed his shoulders and shook him. "Dang it, Henry, what's wrong?"

She watched Henry's eyes glaze over. She looked beyond him to the street where the delivery truck still stood. In a brief moment, the sound of screeching tires re-echoed in her ears. She started past Henry.

"Don't. There's nothing you can do." Her voice quavered. "She's my Baby. She's all I have." She shoved past Henry and raced to the street.

The black cat lay by the curbside. Rosemary sat down on the curb and lifted the cat to her skirt. She stroked the back of Ebony's ears, feeling once again the rich texture of her fur. Rosemary took one paw in her hand. "I'm sorry, Baby," she said. The stinging tears burst against her eyelids and she fought them back. As she touched the cat's stomach, she felt a flutter. "Henry," she whispered, "she's still breathing. I can feel her chest move." "I'll get the car," he said. Henry pulled alongside the curb. He got out and gently took the cat from Rosemary's arms and laid Ebony on a flowered pillow. He covered the cat with a blanket and climbed in the passenger side. He then handed Ebony to her.

Rosemary stroked the cat's head while she whispered, "It's going to be all right, Baby. We've been together too long for anything to happen now. I know it's going to be all right." She looked over at Henry. "Ain't it, Henry?"

Henry's lips formed a grim line and he nodded. After pulling into the gravel parking lot, he hurried around the car and opened the door for Rosemary. "I can open my own door, Henry," she said. She eased herself out and carried Ebony inside the building.

Rosemary stood across from the veterinarian while he prodded the limp cat. He shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said. "There's nothing I can do. If you'd like, I'll be glad to dispose of her." Rosemary was shaking. "You'll do nothing of the sort. She's coming home." A tear burst onto her cheek. "I want her to come home, Henry."
The Tenth Life of Ebony (continued)

Henry put his arm around her quaking shoulders. "Let me handle this, Rosemary. I promise I'll bring her home." Rosemary let him lead her out to the car. She sat down and when the hot tears began to fall, she didn't fight them.

In less than five minutes, Henry crawled in and started the car.

"You'll bring her home?" asked Rosemary.

"I promised, didn't I?"

She nodded.

As the purple of the evening blanketed the skies, Rosemary paced the floor. Danged old coot, she thought, it's been five hours. She had just reached for her coat to get Ebony herself when headlights flickered against the living room wall. She pulled back one corner of her curtain and watched Henry crawl out.

"It's about time," she said, opening the door. The bags under Henry's eyes seemed more swollen than usual, but he managed a smile as he held up the black ceramic cat.

Henry cleared his throat. "I made it myself," he said, answering the question forming in her eyes. "The cat here, I made it myself. I wanted to give it to you earlier but you weren't ready... ."

"Henry, where's my Baby?" Rosemary's speckled hands trembled as she clutched the neckline of her sweater.

"I want my Baby home... . She belongs... ."

Henry placed a finger against Rosemary's still moving lips. "She is home, Rosemary. I had the veterinarian place her ashes inside." He rubbed the ceramic cat lovingly and handed it to Rosemary. "She'll never leave you."

The memory made her sigh. She looked again at the ceramic cat. Its chest seemed to rise and fall. She smiled, then slipped the gray thread over her finger once more and began knitting furiously. "It's only two days to Christmas, Jake," she said, winking at the yellowed photograph on the mantel, "if the old coot behaves himself, I'll give him a brand new sweater for Christmas. And, who knows, maybe I'll feel like dancing."

\begin{center}
Nanette Thorsen-Snipes
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textbf{The Evening News}
\end{center}

They've arrested the sheriff for selling cocaine
He was seduced by the lure of fast money
But after all he's only human

They've taken away the priest for raping and sodomizing eight little boys
His flesh was weak and after all he's only human

They've come for the governor for selling pardons and prison reprieves
Intoxicated by power he traded his soul but then he's only human

They're searching for my neighbor for robbing and killing the check-out girl but he was abused as a child and of course he's only human

Then folding the paper and turning off the t.v. I closed my eyes and pondered this:
If they are human What am I?

\begin{center}
Sandra E. Baker
\end{center}
Oak

How desolate you seem
In the cold winter night
With the full moon casting
  shadows on your furrowed trunk
And the icy wind assailing
  your twisted limbs
As you keep your faithful watch
  over decaying wood and
  crumbling chimneys
A cache of memories you possess
When generations laughed and played
Where now lie only gnarled roots
  and dead, broken branches

As I stare at you
In the cold moonlight
With the wind whistling in my ears
It seems as if you're lifelike
Calling to me from a world unknown
Evoking a sense of sadness
And a sense of aloneness
As if you're trying to remind me
  of something —
Perhaps of an ancestor
Long dead and forgotten
  or
Perhaps of my own mortality

Barbara T.

It's A Weight On Me

It's a weight on me, and
the longer I try to ignore it,
the heavier it gets,
and vice versa.

It's the world today, and
the more I care about it,
the more apathetic it gets,
and vice versa.

Terry Hulsey

The Red And The Gray

The dead
are planted in rows.
The steamy rainshine
will bring them
lurching forth
from the ground
in a half-step.
Red is a wonderful color,
oh what a beautiful color.

The steam
has turned,
tears are
dripping from the sky
as the legions
are suddenly
marching
knees turned
to stone.
Gray is a beautiful color,
oh what a beautiful color.

Stacey Alexander

DOROTHY HARBIN
Watercolor
School Days

When I decided to return to school after a twenty-five year hiatus, I had no idea what college held for me. Having raised my children, and liking them reasonably well, I saw no problem in attending school with other people's children. Oblivious to the generation gap, the physical stamina needed (I had worked most of my life, hadn't I?), and the mental and emotional requirements, I registered for college.

I soon found out that anyone on campus who looks over thirty is assumed to be a teacher. I was asked repeatedly for information and directions the first few days of class. I got some strange looks when I explained that I, too, was a student and was also lost. The classrooms, however, are great equalizers.

Years earlier I had taken the S.A.T. and scored pretty well. The verbal portion, however, accounted for 75% of the score, which led me into developmental math. For two quarters I threw up every morning that I had a math test scheduled. The anxiety of just going to this class caused hives over most of my body. Then, came Math 100. Migraines soon accompanied the nausea and hives for that quarter. At that point I gave up any notion of a normal life and devoted the majority of my time to studying math, doing math homework, and being tutored in math (for all the good it did). I can only say that I am grateful to have gotten through the course the first time (a non-math person just has to forget all about his or her GPA until the required courses are completed). I have since heard several talks on "Math Anxiety," and I have learned two important things: 1) There are a lot of us who have it, and, 2) very little can be done about it.

I fared better in courses like English and History. I even did well in the "Rogers Neighborhood." In addition to learning about geology, I had the opportunity to observe firsthand classic chauvinistic behavior. (There was a rumor that Dr. Rogers had wanted to teach the continuing education course on "Sexual Harassment" until he found out that it was a "how not to" course.) Check his coffee cup gift from some of the "girls!"

I took speech and worked harder than I thought possible (would you believe in the same quarter as Math 100?). I discovered that even though you may have given talks before, this does not mean that you know how to. Mr. Cabell's speech class should be required for all students. In addition to learning how to give a talk, learning the proper way to research and organize materials is invaluable.

And then, I met the French language. This was the single most humbling experience of my life. I did not realize that having a good command of the English language might one day be a handicap for me. No one had warned me that the "mature" student often has difficulty learning a foreign language. (I understand why French is called "foreign." It is certainly foreign to anything I have learned and used all these years.) Now, in my third quarter, I have only met the enemy, not conquered it. Thankfully, I am very stubborn and have a strong belief that anything is possible if you try hard enough (and, if Ms. Russell's patience lasts long enough).

There are a lot of things college orientation doesn't tell the "mature" or "non-traditional" student. The desk seats are designed for 18-year-old rumps, not 40-year-old ones. Some students instantly dislike older students (my nephew says he always hated "them" because the older students come to class regularly, do assigned work, and generally ruin the curve). Women are not cautioned about squelching their natural instincts (you should not wash out the basins in the bathrooms, nor pick up everyone's paper towels off the floor. It is not your responsibility to furnish Kleenex nor guidance for your young classmates). You are not told that, just because you have had personal experience in many areas and have an opinion about most of what you read and hear in class, you should limit your classroom comments. They don't warn you that when people ask for your place of employment and you say you are a student, they laugh and say, "You're kidding!" There are no instructions about how to participate in extracurricular activities without making you or the younger students feel uncomfortable (I am fortunate—it's hard to make me feel uncomfortable).

My two years at Gainesville College have been very happy ones. I have learned a lot—in class and out—and would like to pass along a few suggestions that might be helpful for other "mature" students.

1) Never take a nap in class, particularly a Gnann history class or a Westervelt art class. Stay awake—you might learn something new and interesting.
2) Never be rude in French class. A tongue-lashing in French is awesome, even though you may not understand half the words. Believe me, you get the message!
3) You will feel better (and temporarily forget the age difference) if you never let anyone call you "Ma'am."
4) Take some non-required courses—register for painting, computer graphics, or creative writing. (You can get even with your children—write them poems, make them "computer valentines," or paint them pictures. They'll have to display your work just like you did theirs!)
5) Join any organization on campus specifically for the non-traditional student. It will lead to involvement in other areas. Get to know your fellow students.
6) Participate in class and get to know your teachers. The number of outstanding and caring teachers at G.C. is too long to list.

Gainesville College is a wonderful place to enter or re-enter the academic world. I don't believe I can ever go back to "work" now, so, I guess I'll just have to teach! Or, maybe I could become the oldest professional student at G.C. There are still a few courses I haven't taken.

dianne t. parker
Nellie Belle and Me

Nellie Belle and me have been together now for twelve years. Mostly they have been good years, except for the illnesses and breakdowns in communication. Like the time we were traveling to Atlanta to join family members for a special holiday meal. Nellie Belle suddenly stopped alongside the freeway and gave me the silent treatment, for no apparent reason. I had no earthly idea what was wrong. When I finally found out and all was forgiven, we became good friends again.

Nellie Belle is my 1976 Ford Mustang, and, of course, she has the occasional mechanical breakdowns. I'm sure many have wondered how I could get so attached to a motorized mate. I suppose part of the reason is that Nellie was my first car. We were both younger, and she had never belonged to anyone else. I taught her all the rules of the road, you might say. We understood each other from the start.

But, alas, Nellie has her shortcomings, which have become more pronounced with the years, as I've grown older, too. I've tried to overlook these irritations but only manage to become more intolerant of them. Now that I'm older, I'm uncomfortable with her lack of air conditioning, her 4-cylinder power, and her increased use of oil. My bad back and aging joints complain at having to change her gears and use the clutch.

But still she's faithful to me. She starts up almost as good as when she was new and runs almost as quietly. She seems to be trying to please me and hold my attention and devotion.

That is why I feel so guilty for my unfaithfulness. I've chosen a much younger "mate" now. Nellie still sits faithfully by, but it's painful to see her neglected, while I lavish most of my attention on this welcome new beauty with all her charming attributes. But she has yet to prove she can be as dependable as Nellie Belle, for as long.

Anyone who gives a car a name and treats it like a person with feelings must be just a little peculiar, right? Well, I believe that reliable horse power is wo-man's second best friend and must be treated with lots of respect and tender loving care.

Eleanor S. Whitfield

Sleep (T.V.)

Mr. Sandman, come on down!
Make me a limited-time offer, and believe me, you, I'm prepared to pay by cash, check, C.O.D., or MasterCard, even Visa.

Because I need quick relief, new and improved, please, and even though your best friends will never tell you, I'd feel much drier, secure, and confident, not to mention streamlined.
So bring the economy-sized bag of the fine premium stock good enough for friends, and sprinkle my twinkling orbs.

Within minutes, I'll be relaxing in European styling and comfort. (Believe you, me!)

Terry Hulsey

On Waking Up

On waking up at three a.m., I felt the urge to walk outdoors. Where the air was clear and cold, the stars shone brightly in a winter sky. Stenciling the darkened void.

All sounds were muted to my ears. I felt a peace and harmony. Out in this wall-less world; cloaked with warm remembrances of other sleepless nights of moonlit strolls before the dawn while the earth remained in slumber.

Eleanor S. Whitfield
Easter 1986 - A glad occasion
Celebrating the Resurrection and Life

You were happy and carefree
On that Easter morning
Getting ready for a family visit
Laughing, playing
Never knowing
Never contemplating
This Easter was somehow different
This was the day to treasure life's simple things:
- hugging mama,
- smelling the flowers,
- saying I love you

You ate and played that day in Newnan
And when time came to go
You rode in the back as any 12-year-old
You were happy and carefree --
- with the wind blowing in your hair
Unknowing what lay just down the road

Something happened
The truck began to roll
Michael and Spear were thrown free
But for you, shy Brent,
It was not to be

In our unending pain
And through our tears, oh God,
We wonder so many things --
- Did you feel?
- Did you know? or,
- Was there time for thought at all?

We will never know
We can only hope
That on the day we celebrated
- the Resurrection and Life
You within a breath and without pain
Beheld the purpose for our celebration
And that you smile again
Just beyond on another realm.

Barbara T.

Dedicated to: Troop 106
Boy Scouts of America
Homer, Georgia
Billy Thomas, Scoutmaster
No longer do I see him,  
Always alone, knapsack on his back,  
Hurrying, yet, not hurrying,  
Along the highway's edge.  
Mute to the rushing traffic,  
His eyes seemed focused  
On a distant compass.  
Stiff legs carried him forward on  
Long, non-muscular strides that  
Seemed more mechanical than human.  

"Where did he come from?"  
"Where was he going?" I wondered.  
Always----why did he wear the  
Faded remnants of the "Doughboy"  
Issue of WWI, the olive drab,  
 Tight-fitting tunic, often buttoned  
Without miss to the collar?  
And the John Brown belt, always  
Buckled and properly displayed?  
Even the calves of his legs were  
Spirally wound with the cloth  
 "Puttees" familiar to the "Pershing  
Crusaders" of 1917-18.  
What sense of earlier soldiering  
Guided his hands, again and again,  
To button up, to buckle up?  

But there he was, time and again,  
A lonely caricature beside the highway.  
"What age-worn adrenalin spurred him on?"  
"What commands did he hear?" I wondered.  
In his youth, had he been unable to  
Evade Uncle Sam's piercing eyes and  
Pointed finger in that everywhere poster  
Which demanded: "I WANT YOU FOR THE US ARMY!"  
Or had he read Wilson's war message  
Which ordered his generation into a  
Europe exhausted from terror and stalemate?  
"The world must be made safe for democracy,"  
The President had proclaimed. "This is  
The war to end all wars."  

Or had he been stirred to "sign up"  
After hearing Cohan's, "Over There?"  
Or had he, after arrival in France,  
Sung heartily with fellow conscripts  
In a beer-laced voice, "The Yanks are  
Coming! The Yanks are Coming!" over and  
Over until they learned the words of  
"Mademoiselle from Armentieres?"
Grandma's Blue Rocker

Little by little her life goes--
Hands that used to hold me and knit afghans
Used to teach second graders penmanship too--
Now--can barely write her name.
Apple pie baking days are gone--
Replaced by long hallways and
Hospital rooms--without a view.
There's no Flowering Crab tree with
Cardinals and Doves and those nasty
Blue-jays she hates--
They make all the other birds go so they can eat....

The chair from where she used to watch those birds--
Used to rock and swivel--
It's been replaced by one with wheels--
Two big and two little--
Made for movement--not show--
To support her--
There aren't any more hidden
Peanut cans and candy jars under
Her old blue rocker--
She's not there to hide them.....

I'm so far away
I can't visit her every day--
I can only think about what she's doing.
But, maybe it's for the best.
I love her so...
And I know someday
All will be gone--
Even the magic of life.
It sparkles in her eyes--
And when that disappears,
All that will be left will be
Memories--and
An empty blue rocker with nothing to fill the
Empty "blue" place in my heart.

Brenda Leheff
cried, more clearly than he had ever spoken before, our newborn twins home from the day. Not having a phone at the time, this vivid description, but we busied ourselves over tea and cookies to cover our embarrassment.

There was quite a bit of coughing and feet shuffling being done by the Reverend and me throughout the visit. He had come to see how we were faring, and after a quick peek at the twins, we headed for the living room. Everything at this point seemed to be going smoothly. Matthew was engaged in cookie eating while we chatted. All too quickly though, he reached a point where his cookies were not as interesting as they had been; he decided to share them with the dog. "One bite for you, Kelly," he chirped delightfully, "one bite for Matt." I, of course, explained that we should never feed the dog from the table or eat after the dog. Matt corrected his mistake by placing the whole plate of cookies on the floor for Kelly. The minister looked out the window, pretending not to notice.

At this point I was praying that Reverend Smythe would realize that this was going to continue to be a trying visit for both of us, and say farewell. Oddly enough, my prayers were answered, but before he left, he wanted to ask for a visitor. I was spellbound, like watching a horror movie, attempting to move the dog aside, but Kelly interpreted this gesture as petting and stuck to the spot and forced to watch this misadventure, while not really wanting to. It seemed his prayer would never end. I wanted him to leave quickly so I could put this painful experience behind me and hopefully never have to recall it again.

I did recall it though, and each time I do it seems funnier and funnier to me. Now, after nine years, I actually enjoy remembering the day the preacher came to call. I try to remind myself when I am in an embarrassing situation that I will probably look back on this experience and laugh, or at least I hope I will.

Donna Sparks
Coach

The autumn air was cool this evening in the small town of Lansing, Indiana. Several boys were playing on the school playground. It was not necessary to look to know what game they were playing. It was the same today as it had been yesterday, the day before, and a thousand days prior. All the great players had started on this playground. Steve Johnson had been no different.

Steve stopped beside the court to watch the game that was going on. He knew all the kids. David Manning had the ball. He had a good outside shot but couldn’t handle the ball very well. Scott Coker, a hard-nosed guard, quick, was a good all-around player, and Kyle Thomas, big, tough inside or outside, was a great defensive player, the best player his age around.

The group noticed that Steve was watching their game and immediately stopped playing to talk with him. The boys were accustomed to having people watch them play. Usually the boys paid little attention to the people who gathered to watch them play except to acknowledge a compliment, but then only with a simple nod. Everyone in town was always anxious to find out who was going to be the next great player for Lansing High School. Who would carry on the tradition? Who would be the next Steve Johnson? As the conversation drew to a close, one of the boys tossed the ball to Steve. The feel of the worn leather brought back memories of a team one point down, time running out and an unbelievable shot. The memory is stirred every time he sees the 1967 Indiana State Championship banner hanging from the ceiling of Lansing High School’s gym. Steve dribbled once to get his rhythm, then nailed a twenty-five foot jumper. As he turned to walk away, Steve said nothing; the little smile on his face said all that he didn’t.

Steve walked down the streets of the town where he grew up. Nothing had changed. Mr. Wilson still gives free cokes to the basketball teams after practice. Mrs. Branch had continued to cook pre-game meals for the Lansing High basketball teams. Steve Johnson would be on the basketball court for Lansing High once again, but this time he would be on the bench, though not because of foul trouble or an injury. Steve Johnson coaches his first game for Lansing High School tomorrow night.

Tim Smith

The Occasion

Awakening is warm, safe, secure
Surrounded by sheets, pillows, arms that protect me
I drift slowly
in and out, awake, asleep,
remembering, yet not remembering dreams

Cool air surrounds
my sweet world
The smell of honeysuckle,
coffee brewing

Eager for a new day
another chance
I struggle to wake up
And, again, rise to the occasion

dianne t. parker
Premonition

Is there really such a thing as premonition, gut feeling, foreknowledge? Some would argue that premonitions are nonsense, or fantasies of people with funny minds; others may have strong, even spiritual feelings about things of this nature. I think that there is truth to premonitions and that they have little to do with special powers or with the occult. I see them as an extension of plain common sense that has been unadulterated by the revision process of one's own reasoning.

Usually I make a sincere effort to reason my premonitions away, and - although my gut feeling will usually prove correct in the end—I will tell myself that it doesn't make sense to think this particular way or that I am judging someone unfairly. Two months ago I was doing just that, reasoning with myself. My premonition, however, persisted, and I decided to share it with my husband.

Our new house was almost finished! We had moved in, although many details were still waiting to be taken care of. The builder requested his draw for the 66% completion stage, which had been approved by the bank. Everything seemed normal, but suddenly... 

"I don't think we should give him the money," I said. "We should pay off his subcontractors ourselves, and he can have the balance when he has finished all the work." My husband gazed at me with a puzzled expression. "I don't trust him," I said. "I have this feeling!" My other half said that I was being ridiculous. We had been paying draws to the builder all along! He was a man who took pride in his work and his reputation, and there really was no reason for me to suddenly become suspicious.

Frankly, I was feeling a little ridiculous... as well as worn-out, tired, and overworked. I had spent almost all of December at the new house, painting and staining woodwork. Somehow I had managed to do the Christmas shopping, wrap the gifts, cook Christmas dinner and be hostess to the grandparents. Between Christmas and New Year's Eve we had moved (our second move in six months). School had started again, and we still had boxes everywhere. I had no idea when I would find time to unpack them, let alone to find a place for their contents somewhere in this new house. Maybe I was going just a little bit crazy... And after all, Lawrence took pride in his reputation. True, he was worried about his two teenage kids and the fact that his ex-wife was moving to Texas with HIS kids and HER new boyfriend. Maybe I was just seeing ghosts. I felt compassion for Lawrence. He was a good man who took on troubled teenage boys as helpers and taught them a trade. He had built us a beautiful, solid, log house, and he would finish it.

Two days later my husband wrote the builder a check for $10,000. Lawrence said that he would be back on Friday with the plumber and the electrician to finish up details. On Friday the plumber and electrician showed, but Lawrence didn't. The plumber and the electrician were a little upset because the builder owed them money. So was I.

"You were right," my other half said sheepishly three weeks later. "How come you knew?" It looked could kill, I was converting his life insurance to hard cash that very minute and I had been doing so for a while. It had been a difficult three weeks! We had seen hide nor hair of our illustrious builder, and we now had a warrant for his arrest. The plumber was making ugly phone calls. We didn't even have a driveway yet. What a way to initiate our life in the house we had always wanted....

"It wasn't very difficult," I snarled. "Any idiot could have seen it coming. The man was moving out of his apartment, he has no family here, he owns no property, he has no community ties, and he ended his friendship with the only people he was close to. He may have been in this area for three years, but he could disappear overnight if he wanted to. I doubt that even the IRS knows he exists; he likes to deal in cash, you know.

My husband said demurely that all Lawrence's actions had been consistent with those of a person who is relocating to his next job. That was true, but it hasn't helped us much.

From now on I will heed my premonitions, no matter how far-fetched they may seem. I hope you will pay attention to yours. And if you happen to come across a smallish graying man with sunglasses and cowboy boots, who drives a red pickup with a silvergray camper and Mississippi license plate... please call us! 

Jeanine Blachly
Fuzzy Honey

If you sit
in a big fuzzy chair all day
Ask me for the time
and I'll have to say
(sorry honey)
I just don't have it

Then you say
(hey babe)
Not even the time
to save a life
And I reply
Not even the time
to save my life...

don't cry now
(fuzzy honey)

Stacey Alexander
Low-Ebb

In the forlorn days
When life is at its lowest-ebb,
   seemingly to echo emptiness
When anger and cruelty are the norm
Kindness and understanding outdated modes
When individual rights are of no value
Only domination is the rule
When friendship requires conformity
    instead of acceptance
When life seems to demand survival of the
   fittest

Thank you God for the beauty and the
    peaceful serenity of

   a long walk in rolling hills of
   pasture land in the cold
    February wind
   the jonquils that bloom along the way
   the newborn calf struggling to stand
   the call of a crow in the distant trees
   the gentle, gurgling flow of the river
   on its winding path to the sea
   a child's spontaneous laughter

Barbara T.
Hourglass

Time is relative
when you are 14
It seems you will never
get to magic 16
Days flash by at 40
Clocks and calendars
your enemies
Things undone
places unvisited
haunt your dreams
Sleep a waste of
precious hours

Vow each day to forget
father time's march
Call your mother
(hers clock is ticking)
Sleep less, do more
Visit dreamed-of places
Say, "I love you"
Make the most of time
The grains of sand in the
hourglass are silently
falling
falling
dianne t. parker

Red and Yellow, Black and White

For Mickey and Ann

Tiny fingers (God is Great)
arms flailing (God is Good)
eyes blinking
to see the bright new world
(Jesus Loves Me Yes I Know)
crying aloud again and again
I'm here! I'm here!
I AM
A Miracle
(Jesus Loves The Little
Children of the World)

Thank you, God, for Michael Paul
April 26, 1988
dianne t. parker
Caught Behind A Star

When you look up to heaven
With your heart and not your eyes
A rebellion is found
Never to be captured
It screams away
Leaving a hole in your body
That everyone can see through
Out from my ears comes neon
I was caught behind a star
With my thumb in my mouth

David Strickland

Illustrated

Modern
Colony of people
Intrepid
And often mismatched
Against the light
Living in persecution
Under no power
In control
The world collapses
With no weight, strength
Or support

Light
The deceiver, the conqueror of souls

Mercy
The forgiveness of evil
Sufferage to all
Who believe

The long sadness
Without passion

David Strickland
Silhouette

I barely see you in the distance
yet I know it's you
Your smile shrouds
your tall erect figure
like a veil

I feel the warmth of
your love, your strength and
encouragement
Your gentleness is
my comfort

What's that on your head?
Your policeman's cap!
The cap you always put on me
when you came home
from work

Why is it so smoky here?
It's not smoke!
It feels cool and pleasant
They're clouds!
Clouds all about you

Fingers of bright light
break through behind you
Slowly your silhouette glides
toward me
arms outstretched

I try to run and meet you
Can't move! What's wrong?
Why can't I touch you?
It's not fair. It's not fair
I love you so much

Please wait
Don't leave me again!
You're fading away
I miss you
I need you, Granddaddy

dianne t. parker

BRENDA LEHETT
Oil Painting
Different Apple

I plucked an apple from the box
and tossed it in my cart
I was almost home
when I fished it from the sack

Why this apple is deformed
It's misshapen and discolored
I'll have to take it back

Confronting the storekeeper, my voice began to quiver

I can't keep this apple
Its color isn't right and its shape is much too flat
I'll exchange it for another —
One shiny red and applely round

Angrily, the manager retorted
There are no other apples, they've all been sold
You'll either keep this apple
Or you'll have to do without

I'm sure if you will try it, you'll find
Its nectar just as sweet, its texture extra nice
I am sorry, Mr. Manager, I'd rather do without
I'll never taste an apple that isn't red and round

Sandra E. Baker
"Life's a Beach, Then You Die"

The waves are splashing on my legs with assuring force. The grinding of sand on my skin produces something more than just a physical sensation. I will never let go of the experiences of life.

The setting sun sparks my mind. I have witnessed thousands of setting suns and none can compare with this one. Children playing up the shore remind me of my own childhood. When I was seven my father helped me build my first sand castle. I remember the creeping waves slowly dissolving it. It might have stood where I am lying now. As a teenager I took several midnight strolls up this shore. I consider the beach a medium of escape. It has a quality that takes problems out of people.

I suppose everyone needs some time on the beach. The magical tension release I got from it during my middle-age years was extremely rewarding. My office job became very tedious. I had spent so many years in school to suffer under mountains of paper work.

The only real pleasure I got out of the world was swimming in the ocean. The smell of the salt air almost thrilled me spiritually. I was such a good swimmer in the past. I could swim almost to the fishing boats. I remember the breathless physical exertion of being far out in the ocean. I suppose pushing your limitations is a part of life.

I was such a fine swimmer that on several occasions I risked my life to help a person in distress far out in the water. It is a pity that all the other life savers are never around when you need them.

The sun has set now, and all that shines in the sky is the moon. It is very beautiful. It has been several hours since the current pulled me down for the last time. Will I ever be able to bring myself to realize that I am dead?

David Strickland

Whispers

My cousin Patty is flying in from Texas today to be reconciled with her father, my uncle Carl. I don't know what happened to cause father and daughter to become estranged; I just know I lost a playmate when Patty and her family moved to Houston when she and I were ten. A few years ago, Uncle Carl, now divorced, moved back to the Georgia mountains to be near his aged mother.

Rumor had it that Uncle Carl was bad to drink. I didn't doubt those rumors, though I personally never saw him drinking. Although college educated, articulate and personable, he never seemed to get his life together again after he and Aunt Ruth divorced. He did remarry briefly, fathered a child much younger than his grandchildren, but now lived the life of a semi-recluse in a tiny trailer just across the state line. I suspected that his drinking was the cause of his second divorce, but no one spoke of it, so I kept my suspicions to myself.

My grandmother thought the sun rose and set with Uncle Carl and he equally adored her. Sometimes he would sit by her bedside for hours, even days, patiently waiting to hand her a Kleenex or fetch her a cup of juice. Other times, he would not be seen or heard from for days, or occasionally, weeks. During one of these absences I inquired about him. Grandma's face flooded with concern as she related how Carl had taken sick, how the doctor had charged him thirty-five dollars, and how he had been confined to bed for several days. Recalling the rumors, I guessed that Granny had given Uncle Carl the thirty-five dollars, that the money had not gone for medicine, and that it probably wasn't the flu that had him laid up, but I didn't say anything -- not out loud.

Once when Uncle Carl had not made an appearance at the nursing home in several weeks, Granny took a turn for the worse; she would not eat, drink, or take her medicine. Rushed to the hospital, she continued to deteriorate rapidly. The family was called in, a feeding tube was inserted through her nose, and on the rare occasions that she would regain consciousness, she recognized no one. I was shocked when I saw her; she was near death, I was sure. Explaining that death was imminent, the doctor suggested that the feeding tube be removed. Eleven of her children huddled around, crying and distraught, but most of the consensus that their mother's death should not be prolonged. However, the twelfth child had not been consulted; no one could find Uncle Carl.

When Carl arrived the next day, he was adamant, "Hell no! The tube will not be removed. I'll have a lot of sins to account for when I meet my Maker, but killing my 86-year-old mother will not be one of them." Not one person dared to disagree -- not out loud anyway. Carl set up an around-the-clock vigil at Granny's bedside, talking to her, coaxing her to drink, and eventually to eat. Within a month, to everyone's astonishment, Granny had made a complete recovery. We all knew that Uncle Carl had saved her life, but few of us spoke of it -- not out loud.

Later this week, however, the whole family will gather to honor Uncle Carl; even Patty has come to see him. Unfortunately, we will not be allowed to look upon his face -- the casket will be sealed.

They found Uncle Carl last night. The melting snow revealed his decomposed body lying alongside the highway. He wore no coat or shoes. Dogs, the sheriff told my mother matter-of-factly, had taken their toll -- but of course, no one will speak of this -- at least not out loud.

Sandra E. Baker
Dear Librarian:

I had every intention of getting these five books returned on time when I checked them out fall quarter. However, on the very day they were due, I received an urgent letter from my grandmother in Colorado, who has been terminally ill for several years, begging me to hop the next plane out for a two week visit over Christmas break. She even enclosed a ticket; I couldn't refuse.

It was a great visit but on the day I was to fly home, my great uncle Charlie died (nothing tragic -- he just didn't wake up that morning). Naturally, Grandma insisted I stay for the funeral which had to be delayed two weeks because one of my cousins was on a safari in Africa and couldn't get back until then.

We got Great Uncle Charlie buried in a beautiful service on New Year's Eve. The next day I decided to take in some last minute skiing before catching my plane home and that's how I happened to be caught in the great snow avalanche of 1988. I guess you saw me on the network news as they lifted my stretcher into the ambulance. I was the one with two broken legs and a neck brace, mouthing "Hi Mom" to the camera.

Of course, the day I was released from the hospital, I appeared on "Good Morning America." Oprah Winfrey saw me and one thing led to another -- I'm now making big bucks on the lecture circuit, speaking on "How I survived the Avalanche of '88." I heard it was amnesty week at the library and I hope you don't mind that I'm shipping these books C.O.D., but I've got to be on "Donahue" in the morning and I'm not scheduled to be at Gainesville College until 1992. Thanks and amnesty to all!

Sincerely,
John A. Lyre

Sandra E. Baker

Do-Da Day Book

I took my book and went to town,
Do-da, Do-da,
Rode the Marta bus around,
Oh, Do-da Day.

Went to Rich's then got mugged,
Do-da, Do-da,
Stole my book and hurt my pride,
Oh, Do-da Day.

Chased that thief for twenty miles,
Do-da, Do-da,
Ran him to the Chattahooch,
Oh, Do-da Day.

Threw my book right off the bridge,
Do-da, Do-da,
Landed on a south-bound barge,
Oh, Do-da Day.

Jumped into the cold, cold Hootch,
Do-da, Do-da,
Swam to Florida all night long,
Oh, Do-da Day.

Caught the barge out in the Gulf,
Do-da, Do-da,
Went with the barge to Mexico,
Oh, Do-da Day.

Stayed on that barge for three full weeks,
Do-da, Do-da,
Looking for my library book,
Oh, Do-da Day.

Found my book and just got back,
Do-da, Do-da,
Sorry that it's overdue,
Oh, Do-da Day!

dianne parker
Lester's Confession

I drove my rattletop of a pickup up and down in front of the Backwater Police Department a thousand times, trying to get my nerve up. It was getting dark and that tiny block building got bigger and bigger every time I passed by. It was still hot out and I was still shaking over what had done happened. I thought about waiting till Friday when Sissy and J.C. got home from Bible camp 'fore I turned myself in. But by that time, Wanda, bless her soul, would be starting to smell and stinking up the place, and besides, I didn't have nowhere else to go — not with her being dead right there in the middle of the kitchen floor. I couldn't of got no rest noway — her laying there, couldn't of concentrated on the t.v., and sure couldn't of fixed something to eat. So I decided to get it over with.

I seen the policeman through the window watching t.v. and having a big laugh. I hated to ruin his day but I thought, "What the heck — my day is shot and Wanda's day is ruined." I walked right in and told him I wanted to turn myself in for killing my wife. He just stared at me, blank-like, like I had sure enough come at a bad time. So after we watched Vanna turn the last letters, I told him again he'd better arrest me and go see about Wanda. I was starting to feel real bad about leaving her like that — laid out on the floor, dead as letters. I told him he'd better arrest me and go see Wanda, bless her soul, if I wanted her brother to get a t.v. dinner and just kinda fling it at her — like a frisbee. I didn't know she wasn't gonna duck. That thing hit her slap between the eyes and she just dropped dead, kinda sudden like.

That policeman looked sick:
"My God, what a mess!"

"Yes sir, was sure — peas and carrots went everywhere."
"I mean it's a tragic situation."
"Yes sir, I know. I never meant to hurt nobody."
"If only . . . ."
"If only — those are sad words."
"Yes sir, sure are, if only I'd learned where that washing machine was, I'd have clean drawers on and Wanda would still be alive."

And that's when I seen her, kicking open that police station door, dried blood on her forehead, peas and carrots in her hair, using words she ain't never used before.

So you see, Doc, that's how I ended up here — in the emergency room.

Sandra E. Baker

Politician Working the Crowd

Your lips form a smile your eyes can't keep
You grasp my hand delaying rejection
Your tongue forms a promise your soul can't keep
You flash perfect teeth concealing deception
While your campaign touts an image your character can't meet
For you can't serve humanity lacking a heart

Sandra E. Baker
I once read a short story
by Toni Cade Bambara
it was titled "The Mama Load"
it was heavy
I am living the long story
of a Mama's load
It's even heavier

Phyllis Dean-Westbrook
PERCEPTIONS 1988