

# THE PORTABLE WALL

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VOLUME II    NUMBER 4    FALL    1989

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## letters & health hints

Nathaniel Blumberg

Mark Fryberger

Dana Graham

## short stories

Patricia Flinn

Roger Coleman

S. Patrick Waters

R. B. Odell

## poetry

William P. Haynes

David E. Thomas

Kathleen Taylor

Linda Lee Curtis

Robert Struckman

Sharon Eve Cox

Gary A. Scheinoha

## artworks

Hannah Graham

Tom Struckman

Frank Dugan

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## What's in this issue?

Letters and Health Hints.....	2
With Matching Dictionary, poem by Linda Lee Curtis.....	4
Ajax Evangelist, poem by Gary A. Scheinoha.....	5
Two poems by David Thomas.....	6
Video One, story by S. Patrick Waters.....	8
Four poems by Elliot (William P. Haynes).....	9
Goodbye Pamela, story by Roger Coleman.....	13
Three poems by Kathleen Taylor.....	16
What God Hath Joined Together, Let No Wall Put Asunder, story by Patricia Flinn.....	25
If, poem by Bob Struckman.....	31
Two poems by Sharon Eve Cox.....	32
The Invention, story by R.B. Odell.....	34
Back in Business.....	40

Dear Readers,

We love to hear from our readers whether it's about the *Wall* or just things in general. Many of the writers in this issue had responded to a notice that appeared in several writers trade journals. For a while there we were getting a dozen or so responses a day: offerings of poetry mostly and here and there a short story. We read and reread these offerings and then read them aloud to each other. We think we have chosen the best of the lot.

As ever the touchstone of good writing is: is it news?

Our address: The Portable Wall  
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Billings, MT 59101

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# Letters and Health Hints

Good Daniel--

Best job yet on *The Portable Wall* : Lots of good stuff, but sad that a friend of yours could turn to the palpably meretricious doctrines of bigots, fools and hypocrites....

There *is* a conspiracy afoot, but not the one to which he succumbed.... All's well--Shalom/Salaam--

-Nathaniel Blumberg

Editor's note: We sent the above note to *Portable Wall* co-founder Mark Fryberger. We also wrote a card to Nathaniel assuring him that the "white power" writer was attempting satire. Both their responses follow:

Good Daniel:

I see crap like that all the time in right-wing-nut publications-- *AND THEY MEAN IT*. I went back and read that terrible piece as "satire," and it was even worse. I have every issue of *The Realist* published and--as you remember--emphasize always *A Modest Proposal* as satire supreme. If all the thousands of attempts at satire I have read were piled one on top of another, this one would be on the bottom....

Great print job. All the best...Shalom/Salaam

-Nathaniel Blumberg

Dan,

Regarding that "meretricious" (a fine word, though just a fancy way of calling somebody a "flatbacker") friend of yours--I went to college with him and occasionally see him on campus here. He's an intelligent and handsome fellow, but I would caution you on publishing any more from him. He strikes me as emotionally unstable and easily swayed. I spoke with him last week and found that his "philosophy" of life has changed about 180 degrees from what it was when last he wrote you.

He claims now that the "research" he thought he was doing *for* the white power cause has in fact turned him completely against that crusade. Now (as of last week, anyway!) he says that "white power" is a bunch of crap perpetrated in ignorance by assholes. Now he argues that, according to his "studies," women, non-white races, and social outcasts are finer folks by far than the "white power" stooges. Now he wants the Northwest preserved as a sanctuary for the oppressed, where Peace, Free Love, Rock 'N Roll, Miscegenation, and Tree-worship will be the highest values. He even is "research-



ing" a homeland for the white power people -- he's decided that it should be one of the moons of Jupiter, and now spends hour upon hour with astronomy texts in an effort to determine just which moon. This guy kills me -- who knows what he'll be off on next week? The point is, Señor Publisher, if and when you receive another disquisition from this guy, *caveat emptor!*

My own research, I must confess, has led me into some strange territory -- pre-historical matriarchal cultures. Amongst the Big Questions in this area is this one:

"...did the Bronze Age Amathaonians, who worshiped the immortal Beli in his

Stonehenge temple, find that they had less in common with their white goddess-worshipping overlords than with the invading Iron age Belgic tribes whose god Odin (Gwydion) had emancipated himself from the tutelage of the white goddess Freya?"

Damned if I know. There's lots of interesting material here though, lots of true facts that I hadn't known -- did you know that women who live near the equator tend to ovulate during the full moon?

Needless to say, I've come across feminist authors in this area. They really are pissed about the cruel patriarchal civilizations who destroyed the gentler matriarchal cultures. And I tend to feel the same way, especially after seeing what these feminist scholars have dug up -- namely, a lot of information suppressed by the patriarchs for these thousands of years.

However, these feminists tend to be fundamentalists, and in their true religion female = good, male = bad. (Another interesting fact: vaginal secretions are more destructive to the Y-bearing chromosome. The male fetus has to fight like hell, by producing lots of testosterone, to survive as a male!) Check this out from *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*:

"Such then are the rulers/snoolers of snooldom, the place/time where the air is filled with the crowing of cocks, the joking of jocks, the droning of clones, the sniveling of snookers and snudges, the noisy parades and processions of pricklers....This is a world made to the image of its makers, a chip off the old blocks/ cocks, who are worshipped by the fraternally faithless as god the flasher, god the stud, and god the wholly hoax."

Yikes! I'll be wearing securely fitted athletic supporter and cup before I venture into this land of Avenging Sisters!

Finally though it seems worth the risk - very provocative stuff. Us men aren't feminists, though and we need different mentors (see: Joseph Campbell, Robert Bly, Crazy Horse).

-Mark Fryberger



Hi Struckpersons,

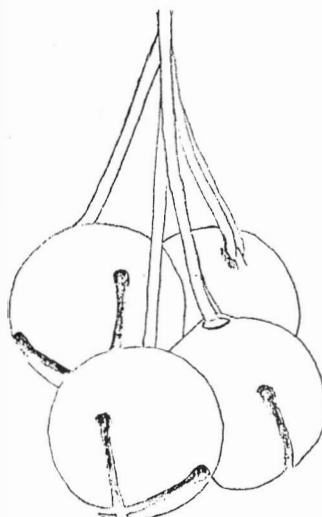
I greatly enjoyed the *Wall*, especially the 'In Memoriam' by Dan, which sent me off on quite a poignant trip down memory lane myself.

'Wish I didn't know now what I didn't know then.'

--Bob Seger

But, actually I feel that the next phase of my life will be the rediscovery of that innocence that seemed lost -- O my we took it all so-o-o-o seriously. Moreso than ever I am grateful that we had those days -- each other -- and such a deep sense of wonder.

-Dana Graham



WITH MATCHING DICTIONARY

Our neighborhood market makes a heap of commotion

Concerning its encyclopedia promotion.

Volume 1 is fifty cents, Volume 2's a dollar.

With Volume 3, the price goes up.

It outlines CAB to COLLAR.

Somehow, they always suck me in

With crisp fresh paper, bright and thin.

New words are such a thrill to see,

A typeset world that sings to me.

I just buy Volumes 1 and 2

And lose the words from CAT to ZOO.

Someday when all my bills are met,

I swear I'll buy the entire set.

In between B and Z

Is much more grist for poetry.

Ajax Evangelist

She preached a gospel,  
of cleanliness  
and order  
to an uncaring  
multitude.  
I was only  
one of the  
unrepentant  
heathen,  
stomping  
around, lost  
in my many sins  
of dirt, clutter  
and confusion.

NEW MOON

all day  
thin storms  
stretch  
across Blue  
Mountain  
Lolo Peak  
shines thru  
holes we dig  
fill with  
weekend beer  
"I am made  
of loss  
I accept loss  
forever"  
Jack Kerouac  
pukes  
his final tuna  
fish happy  
shopper music  
makes everybody  
clumsy dolls  
sunlit  
cloud  
behind snow  
ridge  
"Pure Land"  
bus exhaust  
rattling  
home.



SIPPING AGUARDIENTE

church bells ring eleven pm  
    my comrades toss under  
        coarse wool blankets  
a bare bulb burns white  
    washed walls  
    I sit and read Prescott's account  
        of Peru  
ancient blood spilled by crude visions  
    the cold tiles of the floor  
    a vast silence etchd  
        by Dugan's traveling  
            alarm  
ticking our sleep to a volcano's pulse

d. thomas  
12 Jan 76  
popayan colombia

# VIDEO ONE

by S. Patrick Waters

Just your average class. Not too many escalating climaxes of discovery. Hell, it was inner city schooling.

Tare, a medium sized gang on the school grounds, used to hang around, watchin' in the halls. Not dopin,' just hangin.' David Diggs, "Mr. K.O.," as Tare let him know he was, was starting to have doubts about hangin.' He called himself a restless man. He kicked tail, but placed his cool loose gang-member faces on the ones he beat.

There was that one time. One time David was catching something, like a thought or maybe a hunger, locked behind a door. It came. It was a thought. He could understand. He was with the "Ice Man," at that moment. The Ice Man had been Mr. Joost, teacher of tenth grade Lit.

"What was Annie Sullivan's strength in 'The Miracle Worker?'" The Ice Man asked. He didn't take crap, the Ice Man. But the students were out of range, beyond his reach, most of the time. Either glassy or just plain dozin.'

There were pictures in David's head. His heart was pounding, he was going to answer.

Religion. No, hell I read it. Mama talked about it. Annie Sullivan had bad eyes. She was raised in the...asylum. Played with rats, her and Jimmie, they were playing with rats. Blind kids...she had nine operations, she was fighting that whole time, patient, pullin' Helen up, the girl inside the hole, buried without anyone diggin.' Annie was, was puttin,' the spoon in her hand, pickin' it up when she threw it down, over and over...Must be the Pepsi, **god!** I'm rememberin' alot of this sh...What was the question?

Mr. Joost was the color of ivory. He had a bright wine stain birthmark covering his left cheek. He was scratching it. There was alot of noise goin' down in the class, alot of bullshit.

"I think it was..." There were three

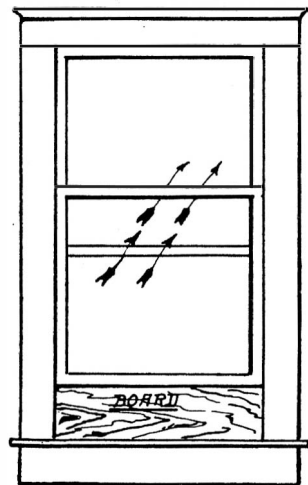
members of Tare in the class. They were waitin' for K.O. to let loose his verbal blow.

It was still inside him, the word. David's mom had listened to him. She wanted to know what the story was about. Endurance, he conquers who endures, he thought, that's it! That's what mamma told me. The word was ready.

Video one came on. The shutters opened automatically. The tube held six minutes of splatter news updates, and two of solid Hollywood glam. It captivated, it was novel. It was mindless. It was in the center of the room, a room looking for something to distract. The room went vacuum and so did David's mind. Video one was going to be on every-single-day with two minutes of solid commercial time aimed at the kids. Aimed at gettin' them jazzed.

Mr. Joost went back behind his desk. He pointed at the screen and picked up his novel.

#



How to use the window-board in ventilating.

LOVE

Try it in blue  
"The Mirrored shadow of my own decay."  
"Isn't that what you called it?"  
Very poetic

I remember your eyes only paper - mate  
pen caps come that color.

Not poetic but truthful  
You wanted azure and I wanted honesty  
You never believed I loved you  
I didn't, I only thought I did  
You knew, I had to find out  
How I hated you! I hated you for knowing  
when I did not. I hated you to tears.  
The days I didn't hate you; I missed you.  
I called once but when you answered  
I hung up. I wanted to say, "Sorry  
wrong number." But I was afraid you'd  
recognize my voice. Love has become a  
mystery to me. Your heart is a half  
remembered ending. Just a tease to start  
me over. I wonder sometimes if I'll  
ever meet someone else.

I lied, I did

DRIFTER'S LOGIC

The rains of starving artists  
Melted ice  
Fortuneless collection of pens  
Fool's Gold  
Sand imprisoned shackled soul  
Blind Ego  
Are the tears of angels' wings  
Drowning heart  
How dark is octopus ink?  
Rash Judgment  
That struggles to be free  
and ambition  
They pour from angry clouds  
Wayward Dream  
The color of my soul  
Tin Cup  
From the handcuffs of my mind  
is frozen  
Over the blind eye that I stole  
Drifters Logic  
Is a dead end motion       scream  
Dark Glasses  
Locked away from what I need  
The Lake

## WHAT IS A POEM

It is a page longing for words  
    An ear longing for music  
Everything written on a paper is a poem  
Your laundry list is a poem  
Your parking ticket is a poem  
Your taxes bill is a poem  
Your restaurant menu is a poem  
Your hold-up note is a poem  
Your cooking instructions are a poem  
Your note on the fridge is a poem  
Your cancelled check is a poem  
Your liner notes are a poem  
Your arrest warrant is a poem  
Your 'Do not remove' tag is a poem  
Your job application is a poem  
Your favorite book is a poem  
Your Christmas list is a poem  
Your Hanukkah list is a poem  
Your T.V. guide is a poem  
Your grocery receipt is a poem  
Your junk mail is a poem  
Your good mail is a poem  
Your blue eyes are a poem  
    And I love them

BLACK IS BACK

Baby got her laundry list  
Sister needs new shoes  
Ed. says he would not rhyme it  
    So I won't  
But if you'd like a clue or two  
Three words and some blues  
Baby got her mother's smile  
She takes it out often  
Sometimes she lets me touch it  
But her words are often a leash  
Baby likes to confuse me  
It makes her think she's got the  
edge. I wouldn't tell her but  
she's got the entire sword.  
    So I won't  
We went to dinner the other night  
and baby showed up dressed in ebon.  
I asked "What gives?"  
She smiled and answered,  
    "Black is Back."  
I smiled at baby and she smiled  
at me and then our smiles met.  
Later over smiles we had dinner

# Goodbye Pamela

by Roger Coleman

Homer, a tall, thin, blond soldier took Manny aside, "I've got a two day pass to London coming up but I've got to stretch it to four days. Things are slow at the lab; nobody'd miss me. Can you sign me out on Friday night and sign be back in on Monday morning?"

Manny Sondheim and Homer Cherry were the young laboratory officers at the U.S. Army hospital in Malmesbury, England. It was 1943

Manny scratched his dark hair. "No problem. Just leave me a good of your signature."

Homer responded with relief, "Thanks. That way I can leave on Thursday and come back on Tuesday. I want to get four days to see my English girl friend, Pamela. Her parents have invited me up to see if they approve of an American boyfriend.

"Signin' out's not the only problem, Manny. I've got to get off the post at 1400 to catch the train. I've gotta be in my class A uniform without the Colonel seeing me." He paced the floor of their tent.

Manny thought for a minute. "Tell ya' what. I'll ask for a conference with the Colonel at 1400. You know, about the poor quality typing serum we have to use. That would also tie up that brown-nosing Adjutant. They're the only ones you gotta worry about. I'll cover the lab."

"That's great," said Homer with a smile. I can't get any official transportation so I'll ride my bike to the railway station, ditch it in the bushes and take off. Sounds fantastic."

The plan was in motion when Manny rushed into the tent, out of breath, to stop him. "The Colonel's foolin' around in the mess hall. He's going to be late for my meeting with him. You wait, when you see him start over to HQ, take off..." Manny's thoughts were broken by his realization

that Homer had no bag packed, but just had a gas mask carrier over his shoulder. "But...you aren't even packed!"

"The gas mask itself is under my bunk. I'm using just the case for my shaving gear," Homer explained.

Homer checked out of the tent flap. The Colonel was briskly walking toward HQ.

"Time to go," he said. He smoothed his off-the post class A uniform.

Since it was after 1400 by now, he quickly left the tent and started his decrepit old bicycle down the road. In the distance, he saw the Colonel between him and the exit. Darn! He didn't go to HQ afterall. Homer quickly turned off the road and cut between two of the hospital ward buildings. He pedaled to the rear of the Nissan hut that housed the Medical Supply and cycled out on the road behind the Colonel, who was now walking the other way. Wow, he thought, a close call!

He cycled off the post and started up the hill to town. Obviously behind time now. He pedaled harder when he heard a loud whoopie-cushion sound from the front tire, followed by a ninety-nine thump, ninety-nine thump, like a centipede with a wooden leg. He smelled that musty, stale air escaping. Damn, he thought, a flat tire and still a mile from the train station. Appropriate expletives sprayed the air.

A taxi? He thought. No, since there's only one cab in town and old Mr. Hutton, the driver, would be impossible to reach at this time, there's nothin' to do but walk... at a very quick pace. Just don't know if I can make that train anymore.

As Homer puffed along the road, sweat began to bead on his forehead. He wished he didn't have his long johns on. The sun shone clear in a vast deep sky, the fields a spectrum of greens, and the country smelled a bouquet of tranquility. Considering how it drizzled most of the time in England, it was a spectacular day.

As he hurried along the road, a new

thing caught his attention: a large brown two-and-a-half ton American truck from the hospital, which was parked before a cottage at the edge of town. It shouldn't be here, he thought. Probably some GI making out with a local girl.

As he approached the big camouflaged truck, and blurted out, "Good afternoon, Captain." Ardmore fidgeted with his tie.

"Hello Ardmore." Homer returned the salute. He asked in his best command tone, "What's going on here?"

"Well, Sir, you know how it is," Ardmore explained with a nervous grin. "I just stopped by to give my girl friend some sugar that I pinched from the mess hall. I'm soft-soapin' her mum."

Homer, never one to let a good deal go unexplored, got right to the point, "Ardmore, if you take me to the railway station right now, I'll forget I ever saw you here."

"You got a deal, Captain," Ardmore said greatly relieved. "Get in. I'll throw the bike in the back."

"And you didn't see me either, OK?" Homer warned, as he touched the Private's arm.

Ardmore studied him, "Right on. I don't need any more trouble with the detachment commander."

They were at the station in minutes and the little train was still at the platform. Homer grabbed the bike and quickly put it in some shrubbery near the entrance.

"See you around, Ardmore," Homer shouted as he raced for the train. The coach began to move. Whew! he thought, close!

He settled, out of breath, into a first-class compartment. As he wiped the perspiration from his face, he thought, damn, should've had Ardmore take the wounded bike back to camp. It'll do me no good when I return. He groaned when he realized that he had to do this whole production over again when he got back.

## Epilogue

Actually, the return was easy, in spite of his worries. Mr. Hutton was delivering



someone to the train as he arrived. Homer immediately engaged the cabbie and put the bike on the back. At the entrance of the camp, he walked the bike, not so fast as to attract attention, straight to his tent. No one seemed to notice.

"Everything was perfect here," reported Manny. "How did you come off with Pamela's parents?"

"One hitch! Things went so well that I got careless; sneaked into Pam's bed last night..."

"What's so bad about that?" Manny interrupted. "Was she sleeping with her father? Did you get into the wrong bed with her mother?" Manny poked Homer with his elbow.

"You're so crass, Manny. I really love this girl."

"Well?"

"We had a great night. A real symphony of love," Homer reminisced, as his face lit up.

Manny persisted, "So what went



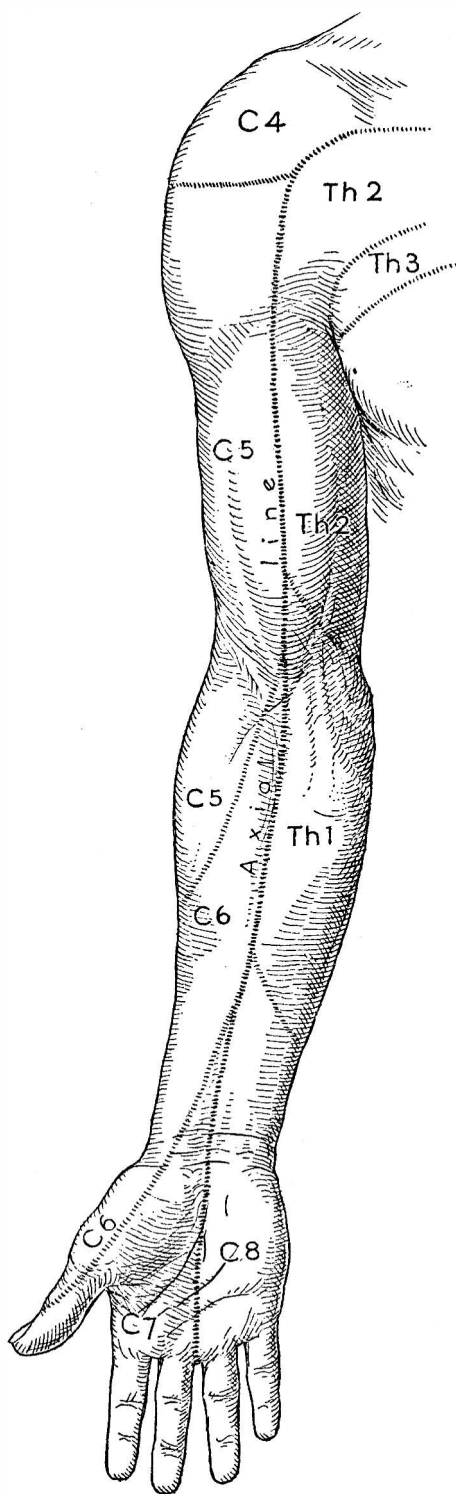
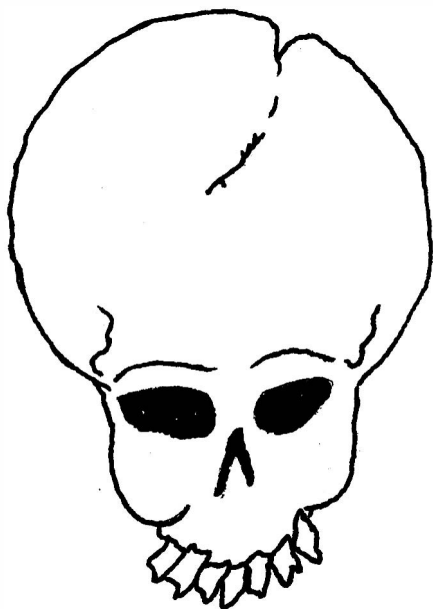
wrong?"

"Well, you know how after a good love feast, you get that afterglow, that post-coital lethargy?"

"Don't get scientific on me, Homer, so you fell asleep after a good screw. That's no disaster." Manny continued, "You get caught the next morning?"

"No, Pamela woke me in time, but just before I dozed off last night, I tied that loaded condom in a knot and tossed it under the bed. Forgot all about it! On the train, I was thinking with relief that Pamela's parents accepted me since I am so fond of her when I remembered the rubber. I haven't been able to phone Pam. If her mum or her old man finds it before she does, I'm afraid it'll be 'goodbye Pamela' as far as I'm concerned."

#



...AND WHITE MAN CONQUERED

I had been in Alaska for one  
Week and it was crazy times  
For all. The oil Pipeline  
Was in full swing, jobs and  
Money plentiful, marijuana  
Legal and the

Natives

Were pushed to the outsides  
Of the Big Picture and were  
Forced to watch their be-  
Loved land violated rudely  
By a bunch of beer drinking  
White Teamsters and it was  
The coldest winter  
in 57 years.

I was on the waiting list to  
Work on the Pipeline and make  
My fortune along with every-  
One else but in the meantime  
Was working in a hospital on  
The terminal  
cancer ward.

It was my first hospital job  
And I didn't have a clue and  
I felt sorry for my patients,  
Not because of the illnesses  
As much as having to have an  
Incompetent, blubbering idiot  
Like myself  
take care of them.

But they were wonderfully brave,  
Much braver than I and I cried a  
Lot and threw up every time I  
Attempted to change a bedpan and  
usually didn't make it to the  
Bathroom but not one of them  
Ever made

mention of it.

The snow fell constantly and  
Never let up and it was dark-  
Ness all the time and gave off  
The illusion of one being in  
Outer Space with the swirling  
Snowflakes posing as little  
Stars and I dreamed of Calif-  
Ornia and

my beaches.

The old Eskimo women sat to-  
gether talking of dead days  
Before the White Man and the  
Pipeline and they passed a jub  
Of homemade brew and took their  
Turns

gumming the top rim.

They were beautiful with taut  
Golden skin and midnight hair  
Pulled back in waist-length fat  
Braids and they gathered their  
Wheelchairs in a tight circle  
Facing one another and slapped  
at their old brown

Flanks when laughing at tales  
Exchanged and smoken cont inu-  
Ally an endless supply of hand-  
Rolled cigarettes and sucked at  
Oily hunks of whale blubber with  
Much noise and there was not one  
Of them

under 97.

They cackled and called white  
People the 'Dog-People', but they  
Liked me because I never tried  
To capture their bottle and I  
Gave them thrilling, fast rides  
In their wheelchairs and managed  
Only to spill out

one or two.

And I think they probably felt  
Abit sorry for me, little white  
Dog-Girl, because I cried at the  
Bedpans and most of them even-  
Tually got out of bed and dis-  
Pensed with the waste

themselves

While I sat in a corner of the  
Stink room, smoking their hand-  
Rolled cigarettes and sobbing  
That I didn't want to be a nurse  
And threatening to return to  
College and

learn to type

And run away to Georgia or New  
Orleans or some such place and  
Become a legal secretary and  
They laughed at this, high and  
Loud, but not unkindly and then  
Offered me a nibble at the rim  
of their bottle.

One night as darkness hovered  
At the windows and the icy-cold  
Sneaked in through the invisible  
Cracks, I was feeding Euphrasia,  
One of the oldest Eskimo women  
And I was  
shoveling in

As she began pushing out at the  
Same time and then she acquired  
A peculiar look about the face,  
Really very peaceful and I was  
Sure that I  
had killed her.

She was dead all right, but of  
What they referred to as "natur-  
Al causes" and I didn't see any-  
Thing natural about an old woman  
Who had been forced off of her  
Land, that had been her parents'  
Land and their  
parents' land

Before that and then, against  
Her religious beliefs and cult-  
Ural tradition, stuck in a stink-  
Ing, pitiful hospital that was  
Owned (privately) by a white Dog-  
Man and forced to meet with  
her Creator

While being  
Spoon-shoveled  
Some indistinct goop  
They called dinner by a  
Blubbering white Dog-Girl.

## RAW SOUL ON THE HALF-SHELL

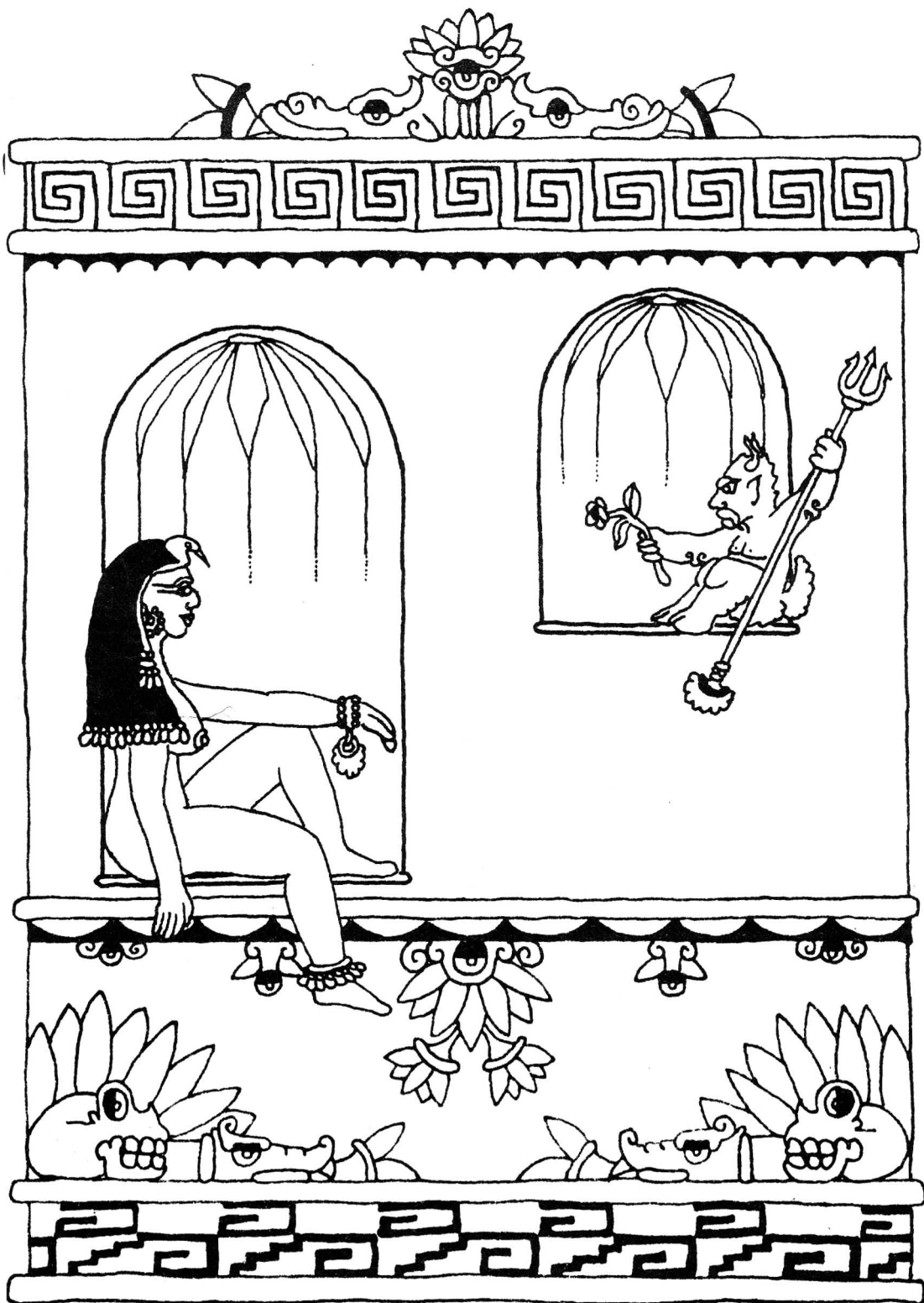
It's a tricky feat, this letting  
Go. I've heard that even Jesus  
Had a problem with it and has the  
Rust-encrusted holes to  
prove it.

You are two months dead now but  
Arose from your grave today and  
Crawled through the black wires  
Of the telephone to deliver a  
Speech, somehow like the one I  
Suspect we all offer up on  
Judgment Day.

Serving ourselves on a silver  
Platter with a sprig of parsley  
In our hair and an apple crammed  
In our mouth, the apologetic re-  
ferences find their way free as we  
Keep babbling and glancing down  
The open tunnel to Hell,  
hoping for a pardon.

My lips are sealed oyster-tight  
Trapping inside for keeps, raw  
Soul on the half-shell, afraid  
It will fly out in a spew of  
Jet-stream if I pry open the  
Doors to speak  
and worm its way

Through the phone receiver-gate  
And straight back through your  
Mouth, skimming the old teeth  
And cleverly side-stepping the  
Adams Apple to settle at home,  
Quite comfortably, somewhere  
near your rib-cage.





RIGHT KIDNEY'S SONG OF PROTEST WHEN  
THE BOTTLE'S BOTTOM MOONS THE SUN

It is a matter  
of forgetting  
you. Blanking  
via bottle.

It's a k.o.  
It works nicely.  
I am Houdini  
held captive,  
escape something  
I've managed to  
master with prac-  
tice; a necessity  
of life.

My tongue is in  
handcuffs. My  
mind bound tightly,  
circulation cut off.  
Numbness falls gently  
anesthetic and smoothe.

I am Houdini.  
I can extract myself  
neatly, no longer a  
hostage,  
free but for the  
retaliation of my  
right kidney

who sings a song of  
protest clear and smug  
as the anti-Namers in  
Berkeley 2 decades ago.

It's an argument.  
It's a vibrating bass-  
drum beating out its  
debate.

It's a soprano note  
high and pure in  
operatic form.  
It's a steel guitar  
all honey-filled with  
twang.  
It's a harp with soft  
little pulses.

It's a church choir  
swollen with prayer.  
Its high-pitched quiver  
shatters glass.

It feels good and hurts  
all at the same time;  
it's a loose tooth  
wiggled.

It's rough and smoothe.  
It must be raw silk.

It has gotten so good  
that I am going to  
market it.

It'll make the top-10  
Hit List and be heard  
in juke-boxes across  
the nation.  
It's going to win a  
Grammy.

It's a one-woman band  
in a one-woman parade.

And the right kidney  
sings its protest song  
loudest when the  
bottle's bottom  
moons the sun.

# What God Hath Joined Together, Let No Wall Put Asunder

by Patricia Flinn

It was a beautiful day in early spring when Wanda Whitlock became stuck in her bedroom wall while practicing a series of seemingly harmless experiments from a little handbook entitled "Miracles of Mind Control."

A curious, but somewhat skeptical woman, Wanda had apparently been attempting to prove whether there was any validity to the claim that mind is a more powerful force than matter by mentally trying to project her consciousness and thus herself into and out of the wall.

Mid-way though the experiment, however, when Wanda was passing through the very center of the structure, something apparently went wrong, and to her horror, she found herself trapped inside a thick slab of plaster and was pressed between an old oak beam and a sturdy four by four.

At first Wanda thought her imprisonment was just a temporary lapse of confidence on her part, a momentary lack of faith in her own powers of imagination and concentration, but as her arms and legs became more and more encased in the shell of plaster, she began to realize the seriousness of her situation.

This is awful, she had said to herself. Why, I feel like I've been buried alive.

And buried alive she was. Utterly unable to move or speak, trapped in total darkness, her face jammed up rudely against a wedge of rough wood, Wanda was sealed inside the plaster as securely as a candle wick lodged in a tub of wax.

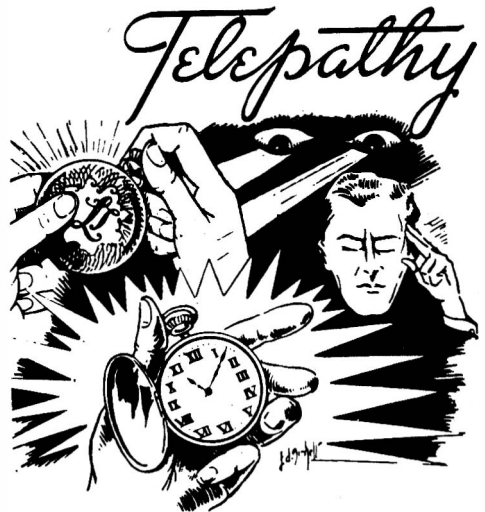
If only Walter would come home, she thought, trying her best not to panic. He'd get me out of this mess. I know he would.

But since Walter was not expected home until later that evening, Wanda found it extremely difficult not to panic, despite

the dire warnings in the opening chapter of her book.

Under no conditions should the mind ever resort to terror, the instructions had specified. Extreme care should be taken at all times to guard against any and all types of negative and debilitating reactions such as fear, hysteria, acute anxiety, dementia praecox, temporary insanity, delirium tremens, etc., etc.

But since Wanda hadn't bothered to read the entire chapter, she was clearly at a loss on how not to panic. Her very being cried out to panic, especially when she considered that she might not be entirely alone inside the wall. Every so often she would hear strange little noises--scratchings, scurryings, hungry gnawings above her head, beneath her feet. Once or twice she even thought she felt something wet and furry brush past her leg.



I have to control myself or I'll go crazy, she thought. Maybe I should try some yoga or deep breathing. Perhaps that will calm me.

She knew from her other experiments in mind control that yoga and deep breathing were always recommended as ways of relaxing the body and calming the emotions during periods of stress, but as far as she could see, in her particular condition, yoga and

deep breathing seemed out of the question. For one thing she could barely breathe let alone breathe deeply, and for another thing how on earth was she to do yoga when she couldn't even lift her fingers.

But I have to think of something, she told herself. I can't stay locked inside of here forever.

She closed her eyes and tried to think.

I know, she said, after a few moments. I'll do what the first chapter in my Creative Visualization book recommended. I'll think positive thoughts and try to imagine a pleasant outcome to the problem.

She closed her eyes again and this time began to picture herself passing through the wall as smoothly as a oiled snake easing itself from beneath a clump of rock.

Yes, she said, thinking as many positive thoughts as she could muster, pretty soon I'll be standing right smack in the middle of my kitchen. Lovely warm sunlight will be streaming in softly from my big bay window. I'll sit down, make myself a nice cup of tea and--

She paused, her spine suddenly turned to ice.

Did she or did she not shut off the gas burner from beneath the boiling tea kettle?

She couldn't remember. Good God, here she was stuck inside a wall with her kitchen possibly on fire and she couldn't remember.

Think, she told herself frantically, think.

She had fed the cat, she had emptied the garbage bin, she had watered the plants in the garden room, she had swept the porch, the patio, but she couldn't remember if she had ever returned to the kitchen to shut off the tea kettle.

Jesus, she said, sinking deeper into the plaster. This is horrible. Any minute this house could go on fire and I could burn to death in here. I've got to remember.

But there was simply no memory inside her head. No picture of what had occurred in those few minutes just before she had entered the wall. Had she shut off the damn stove or not? Her mind was as foggy as a

dirty milk glass.

No wonder I'm stuck inside this place, she moaned. My mind is a dud! A complete failure. Why can't I remember a simple thing like whether or not I shut off a lousy stinking stove. Why, I must have been a fool to think I would stay focused long enough for me to get in and out of a goddam wall.

She sighed, It was the same old story, over and over again. No matter how hard she tried or how many times she worked at her exercise, her mind was as unreliable as a horse in heat, galloping off for a romp in the woods.

Even now, in fact, when it was absolutely essential for her to concentrate, her thoughts were crashing like noisy billiard balls in the raw pocket of her brain. If only she could control them somehow.

Maybe I should try meditating, she thought, fighting for calm. Maybe that would help.

Slowly painfully she began to count backwards from 1,000. 999, 998, 997---

By the time she reached 832, however, she thought she heard something like the front door shutting.

That's funny she thought could that possibly be Walter?

She longed to cry out, but her mouth was sealed tightly with the plaster.

Heavy footsteps began passing back and forth in the hallway outside her wall.

That must be Walter, she thought, It has to be Walter. I knew he would save me. I knew everything would work out just fine. Now the house will be safe, I'll be rescued and everything will--

"Looks like the coast is clear, Lou," said a man's voice from the other side of Wanda's wall. "What do you think?"

"Looks pretty good to me, Joe," Lou replied. "No dogs, no neighbors, nobody home. Maybe we finally struck it lucky for a change."

Wanda could hardly believe her ears. Was it possible? Were there really two men in her house or was it just her mind playing

tricks again?

"Think the family's on vacation or something?" Lou asked.

"Who knows?" said Joe. "Nowadays people can be anywhere."

I'm *not* imagining it, Wanda thought. There *are* two men in my house. But where on earth did they come from and what do they want?"

"Well, where should we start?" Lou asked. "The bedroom, the living room, the den?"

"Let's start here," Joe said. "I'll check out the stereo and the T.V. you go through all the drawers. You might run across a couple of credit cards."

"Good idea," replied Lou.

Credit cards? Wanda thought. What in heaven's name would those men want with credit cards?

"Hey, Joe, what do you think of this camera."

"What kind is it?"

"Cannon."

"Grab it," Joe said.

Wanda tried to stay calm. She tried to think positive thoughts.

Well, at least now maybe the house won't burn down, she told herself. After all, even if the kettle *is* on, I'm sure one of those men will have enough sense to shut it off.

"Hey, this T.V. is a lot heavier than I thought. You wanna gimme a hand here, Lou?"

"You think that thing works?" Lou asked. "It looks kinda old."

"I donno," said Joe. "What do you say we try it and see."

"O.K." Lou replied. "Maybe there's something interesting on now."

He clicked on the set. A woman's soft voice came drifting through the wall toward Wanda.

"Hey, what do you know?" Joe said. "That's Marcia on *All My Children*. I like that show."

"Me too," said Lou. "But I haven't seen it for a while. Do you know what's been

happening?"

"Yeah," Joe replied. "The last time I tuned in, Marcia there found out that she was pregnant by this guy named Tony, and so she got this abortion, and then she met this dude named Maurice who--"

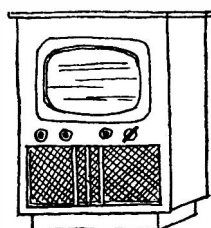
This is incredible, Wanda thought. Why, it sounds like those two men are about to watch television.

"Pretty good picture, wouldn't you say?" asked Joe.

"Not bad," said Lou. "could use a little more blue though."

"Yeah, I agree," Joe replied. "Marcia's eyes are usually a little darker than that."

"Hey, you feel like a beer, by any chance?" Lou asked as he plopped down on



the sofa.

Wanda could hear the springs squeal.

"Yeah, that would be very nice," Joe said, dragging something heavy across the floor. "You relax. I'll check out the fridge. Maybe there's a few cold ones in there."

"Great," said Lou. "And if you don't mind, see if there's something we can eat. I'm starving."

"Righto."

Joe's footsteps disappeared down the hall.

Walter is going to be very angry about this, Wanda thought. *Very angry* indeed.

"Oh, Maurice," said a woman's voice from across the room. "Who would have ever dreamed it would be like this?"

"Darling," Maurice replied, his French accent as heavy as the darkness surrounding Wanda. "You don't know how long I've waited for this moment. You're everything I've ever wanted. You're beautiful, you're lovely, you're..."

"Hey Joe," Lou called out, "Hurry up, you're missing all the good stuff. This dame Marcia's about to have all her clothes ripped off."

Moments later Wanda heard footsteps racing back into the room.

"God, what a doll!" Lou sighed. "What knockers!"

Wanda heard two sharp pops.

"A couple of buds and some nice cold chicken coming right up. That should tie us over for a while, right?"

"Great," laughed Lou. "It looks delicious."



Walter's chicken, Wanda thought. Those two men are eating *Walter's* chicken.

"I looked all over for the salt, but I couldn't find any," Joe said. "I hope this is O.K.?"

"It's fine," said Lou. "I never use salt anyway. I got high blood pressure, remember?"

"No fooling? I didn't know that," Joe said. "You look pretty good to me."

"Thanks," said Lou. "I feel pretty good,

knock wood."

Wanda heard three short knocks.

I can't believe this, she said. Those men are actually sitting out there eating my husband's chicken.

"God, talk about a good-looking woman," Joe said, choking on a swig of beer.

"That Marcia is a real knock out, huh?"

"I sure as hell wouldn't throw her out of my bed," Lou agreed. "No siree. She can lay her head down on my pillow anytime she likes."

Wanda's mind began darting back and forth like some small, frightened animal startled from its sleep.

If she didn't stop those men from eating that chicken, there would be nothing left of Walter's supper.

"Boy, oh, boy," she heard Joe say.

"This is finger-licking good, isn't it?"

"The best," replied Lou. "My compliments to the chef, wherever he may be."

One of the men began sucking on a bone.

"Geez, wouldn't you just love a nice hot plate of french fries now?" Joe asked.

"Yeah," said Lou. "Why, I'd give my--"

"Hey," Wanda heard Joe shout. "What the hell is going on? What happened to Marcia?"

"I donno," Lou said, his mouth full.

"The damn picture got all cloudy all of a sudden."

"Try shaking the box," Joe said.

"Maybe a wire or something got loose."

Wanda heard several loud thumps.

"Must be a bum set after all," Lou said, pounding it with both his fists.

There was a sharp crack, like a light bulb exploding.

"Jesus, pull the plug," Joe said. "Pull the plug! This damn thing is smoking like hell."

Something burst, then began to sizzle.

"Christ, what a mess!" Joe said. "Look at this thing."

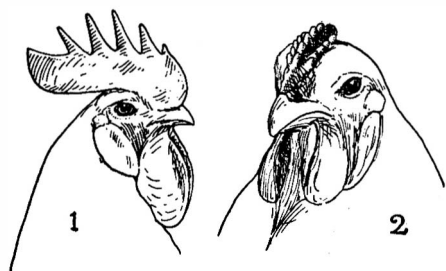
"The rug's all burned."

"Talk about a piece of shit."

"Good thing we didn't decide to lug it out to the truck, right?"

"Yeah, but now we won't know what happens to Marcia."

"We still got time," Lou said. "Maybe we could hit another house before the show ends and watch it there."



"Hey, that's a real good idea," said Joe. "Now you're using your head. Before we split, though, let's grab the beer and the rest of the chicken. And, oh, yeah, we might as well well take along the camera, the stereo and the V.C.R. too. I mean, just as long as we had to go to so much trouble and all."

Wanda listened as the men began moving back and forth in the living room. Moments later the front door slammed and the house grew silent again.

Jesus, she thought, talk about rudeness. I sure am glad they're gone. Wait till I tell Walter about this.

She sighed. Poor Walter. He'd have to eat an omelette now, and he hated omelettes. But there was nothing else left in the house.

If I could just get out of this damn wall, she thought. If I could just concentrate. Then maybe I could get to the butcher's and buy Walter a nice steak or maybe a nice piece of pot roast. Walter loves pot roast.

To calm herself, she began meditating again, this time counting backwards from 2000. 1,999, 1,998, 1,997--

Wanda meditated all afternoon, but she was still stuck inside the wall when Walter arrived home later that evening.

Oh, God, she thought, hearing his key turn in the door. I can't believe it! He's here. He's finally here!

She heard the door click shut.

"Honey? I'm home."

She listened as Walter walked down the hallway toward the living room.

Walter! she longed to cry out. In here. I'm in here.

But her voice was as silent as a tomb.

"Honey? Where are you? Are you there?"

Walter's footsteps suddenly stopped dead.

"Holy Christ! What the hell--"

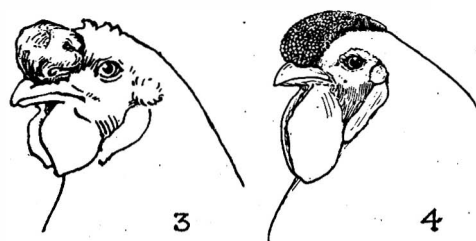
All at once she heard him running across the room. Something crashed to the floor.

"Hello! Operator? Get me the police. That's right. The police. This is an emergency."

She could hear Walter's labored breathing. He seemed very upset.

Relax, darling, she tried to tell him. Everything's going to be all right now. Just take a nice deep breath and relax.

"Hello! Police? This is Walter Whitlock. 209 Colinwood Lane. I'm calling to



report a robbery. Yeah, that's right, my house."

Close your eyes and count to ten, dear. One-two--

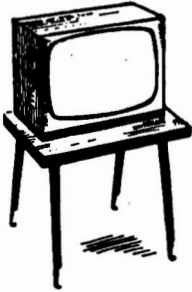
"No, of course I wasn't here. I just got in. But you wanna see this place. There's stuff all over. I think they might have even broken my television set."

*Three--Four--*

"And my camera and stereo. They're gone."

*Five--Six--*

"And, oh, yeah, my wife. She's gone too. I looked all over, but I don't know



where she is."

*Seven-Eight--*

"Well, yeah, it's true she does take off from time to time, but not usually at this hour."

*Nine--*

"Well, maybe, but I really don't know why anyone would want to kidnap *her*. I mean, we're not wealthy people or anything like that."

*Ten!*

"Yeah, well, O.K., thanks, Officer. I'll be waiting for the squad car."

Walter slammed down the phone. He began walking back and forth across the room.

"Of all the damn, rotten times--"

Oh, the poor man, Wanda thought. He's still upset. I guess I'm still not doing those exercises correctly.

She heard Walter pick up the phone

again. He was still breathing pretty heavily.

"Hello," Wanda heard him say. "Lucille? This is Walt. Look, there's a problem. I don't think I can make it tonight. My house has just been robbed."

Lucille? Wanda thought. Who was Lucille?

"No, I ain't pulling your leg. Really, I'm serious. There's stuff all over the place and my wife is missing."

I'm not missing, Walter. I'm here. Right here.

"No, I have no idea where she could be. Yes, of course, I'd rather be with you, sweetheart, but what can I do? Right now I got the cops coming. I gotta stick around. But look, I'll see you tomorrow, O.K.? We'll meet at the--"

Wanda's heart began to beat, softly at first, then harder and louder, like tiny fists pounding against a plaster moon.

To calm herself, she began counting again, this time starting with zero and making her way upward.

#





IF

If lost in the jungle  
or on a strange planet  
or in the middle of the sea  
with only room for nine  
where twelve existed  
what would you do with the three?

Would you climb in the lifeboat  
get into the rocket  
or walk away with eight others?  
Would you quickly choose eight others  
ensuring your life in the jungle  
in the lifeboat  
in the rocket?

Who would you choose to be left behind  
would you valiantly say  
"I'll stay"  
and then wish you hadn't  
would you be scientific?  
and choose the fit not the weary  
or save the stumbling and  
ignore the strong  
what would you do, if lost in the jungle

MUSICAL CHAIRS

Music/Silence  
A time distinction  
And the ear a blunt instrument.  
I strain to anticipate the scratching  
needle, clawing, fighting  
to keep in the groove.  
I measure the scuffed shoes  
and mean elbows of my competition  
against the nearest seat.  
Then the next.  
I want to touch each one,  
metal, wood, in two opposing lines.  
All comfortably safe  
until the music ends.  
The pairing begins: bottoms and chairs  
meet between shoves;  
when the scrambling ends  
I stand, homeless.

POLLYANNA

They plant words in your dead mouth  
to disguise the holes,  
jagged wounds of fear  
tattooed by the multitude  
upon your foreign body.

Most mis understood,  
regurgitated by human failure.  
Nature of the beast  
to spit out what is swallowed,  
but not digested.

Mocked with glory,  
a sacrifice for the misguided,  
those smiling parrots.  
Cracker fed, repeating,  
They're killing you still.

# The Invention

by R. B. Odell

I had driven out to Martin O'Connor's place to review his insurance needs as he had recently retired. Since I had been his agent for a number of years, I wanted to make sure he understood what his new policy covered. As I turned into his gravel driveway he was coming toward me pushing a squeaky old wheelbarrow loaded with what looked like a pile of junk. He passed by me like I wasn't there and continued to roll the staccato-banging mess in the wheelbarrow to the end of the driveway and then across the gray potholed landscape of County Road D to his mailbox. He yanked a pick ax from the wheelbarrow, swung it over his head and began hacking away at the gray asphalt. A milktruck drove by and I saw him step back and wave a greeting at the driver, then he started digging what looked like a trench in front of the mailbox.

The other butter makers that Martin used to work with are all pudgy-looking, whereas Martin looks like he's starving to death; but as I got out of the car and walked over to his mailbox I saw that he had some healthy-looking color in his cheeks for once which, undoubtedly came from swinging the pick ax.

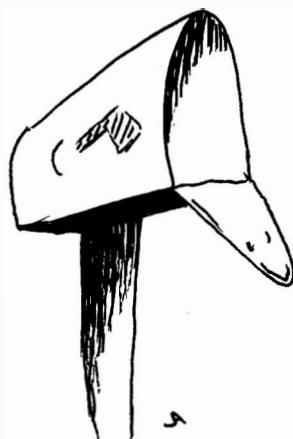
"Well, Martin," I said, as he stood grinning at me with his hands folded over the end of his shovel. "I see you're up bright and early this morning. Looking for oil or just digging a new flower bed?"

"Ha," he said. "That's funny. No. There's no oil around here that I know of and I've got enough flowers blooming in the back of the house. What I am about to do though, is to finish installing a device onto my mailbox that I hope will make me rich."

He turned to his wheelbarrow and pulled out a length of plastic-coated cable. I went over to lean against one of the birch trees that line the ditch so that I wouldn't be in his way and watched.

What sort of a device he intended to fashion on a rural mailbox that would make him rich I had no idea, but since he seemed serious about his project, I thought that the wait would be worthwhile to see what he finally ended up with.

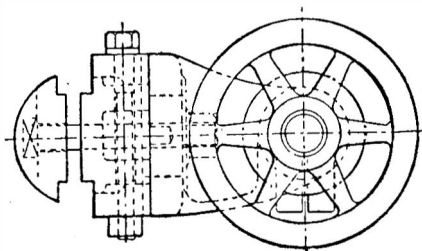
He wore bermuda shorts of a bright-blue with yellow and red flowers. His shirt was a short-sleeve pullover, lime-green. His scrawny legs were creamy-white and hairless, just like his small head which was covered with a faded Minnesota Twins cap. I noticed that he was unshaven, probably because of his haste to get going on what ever it was that he was doing. He paused to adjust his glasses and wipe his brow then I caught his green eyes in their oval field of yellow flit my way.



"I see you bought a new mailbox," I said, hoping that he would loosen up and spill some information out about his money-making idea.

"Yep," he said, looking with apparent admiration at the large white box. "Got it anchored down real good to the post, too. Used six of them quarter-inch lag bolts so when them jerks that drive the county plow hit it this winter, it'll stay on. And with the whole thing sticking out of that old milk can that's filled with concrete, it ain't going to go bouncing down the road when they hit it."

Martin had lettered his name down the side of the box in one of those bold styles common to cereal boxes. I noticed that there was a little metal tab sticking out on one side at the back of the box that had a small 'r' painted on it. "Hey, Martin," I said. "What happened with that small 'r'?"



"Well," he said, scratching one arm pit and then switching the shovel over to the other hand so he could scratch the other, "I got as far as the apostrophe on O'Connor and then I stood back and took a look at how I was doing and I realized that if I didn't want to run out of room I'd better start squeezing the rest of the letters up a bit to get them all on. As you can see, I darn near made it but I had to solder that piece of tin on just to hold the last 'r'."

"Well. It's different," I said, as he motioned for me to have a look at the device he had attached to the mailbox.

Parallel to the edge of the asphalt and running six feet on either side in front of the mailbox, he had dug a foot-deep trench. At the bottom he had laid a ten-inch wide plank the length of the trench. At each end of the plank he had attached some coil springs that apparently had come from an old Plymouth sitting in his yard. On top of the springs another long plank was attached so that the entire contraption was level with the road. From the center of this springboard, as he had called it, several plastic-coated cables ran

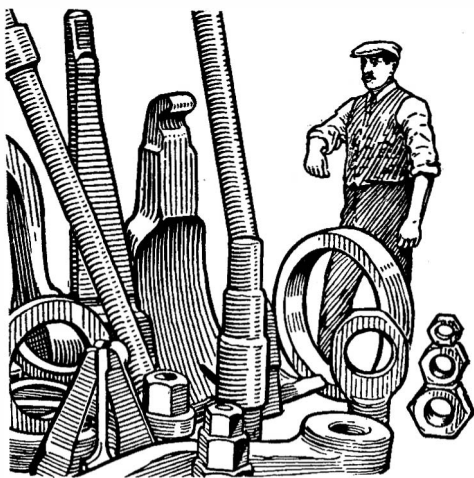
up to a mechanism of bellcranks and rods that were bolted to the unlettered side of the box. "How's this all supposed to work?" I asked.

"Well...Ah. When Torval Johnson drives up with the mail, his right front wheel is going to hit this springboard which will depress causing the cables to go taut which will cause the bellcrank to rotate and push the rod that will open the door of the mailbox. All Torval has to do is throw the mail out his window into the box and drive away. When his rear wheel rolls off the spring board, the process is reversed and the door closes by itself."

He stomped down hard on the springboard. A shrill squeak sounded and the door shot open and then, because there was no steady weight on the board, the door snapped shut like a steel trap.

"How did you get this idea?" I asked, wondering what Torval Johnson's reaction would be to the idea.

"Well," he said, "I was sitting on the porch last week waiting for Torval to drive



up and drop off my mail but I noticed that when he did, he had a hard time yanking the box door open. That made me wonder if he didn't have the same problem on some of the other boxes on his route. So I thought, maybe I could rig up something so that he wouldn't have to tear his arm out of its socket each time he had to yank a mailbox door

open. So I bought the biggest box I could to hold this rigging I came up with. Once the post office sees how this device will benefit their rural mail carriers, I'm sure they'll require every mailbox in the country to have one of these devices. And that, Gerald, will make me rich."



We cleaned up the scrap pieces of his invention from around the mail box and then went and sat on his porch to await the arrival of Torval Johnson and the mail.

When Torval's blue sedan came over the hill and pulled along side a row of mailboxes down the road we trotted over to the Martin's mailbox and hid behind some trees that lined the ditch to watch Torval's initial reaction to the invention.

We knew that Torval was due to retire at the end of the month but what we didn't know was that he had picked up a brand new car during the week and that it was the same color as his old one.

Torval's stoic looks never wavered as he rolled toward us until I saw him rise in his seat like he wanted a better look as to what an old plank was doing laying in front of the mailbox. He must have feared something because he wrenched the steering wheel to cross the springboard past the point where initial contact was designed to be made and the first flaw in Martin's design became evident when the mailbox door shot open with a squeak and struck the lower right corner of

the windshield. The glass cracked in a pattern like a giant spider web and Torval's eyes grew as big as sunflowers and his face bloomed a deep purple. I thought that he should have tried to stop the car right there but he didn't. The car rolled forward and the door of the mailbox snagged the chrome trim around the windshield and the right-hand door and coiled it up like a strand of barbed wire.

At this point I heard Martin gasp like air was shooting out of a puncture and he pulled me deeper into the shadows.

We heard a loud twang and looked up just in time to see the mailbox door break free of the chrome and snap into the open window on the passenger side of Torval's new car. The door became embeded in the plush red cushion of the seat back and ripped it open so that it looked like it was puking rags.

A deafening screech followed as the door broke free of the seat and gouged an erratic line across the rear window and snagged anothe strip of chrome. By the time Torval hit the brakes, the car had rolled off the



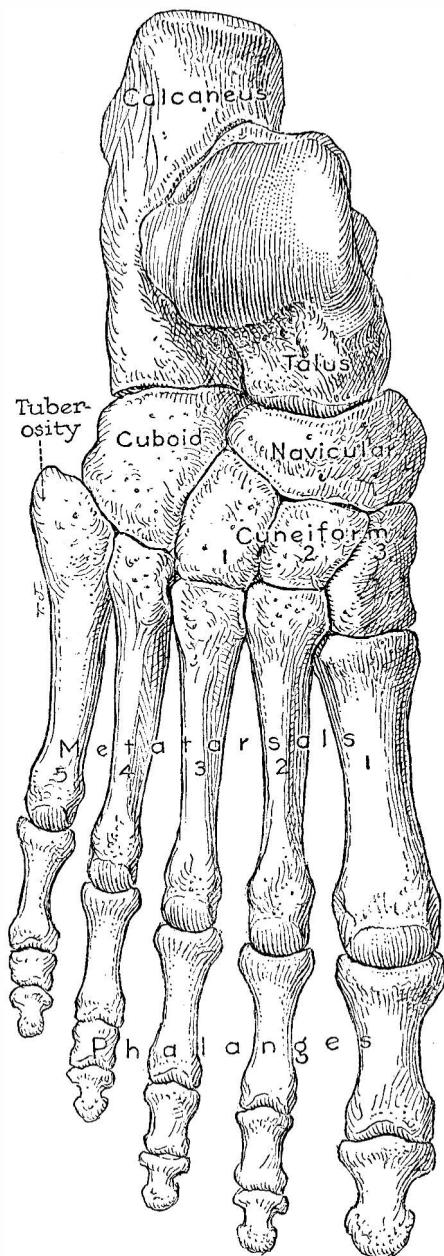
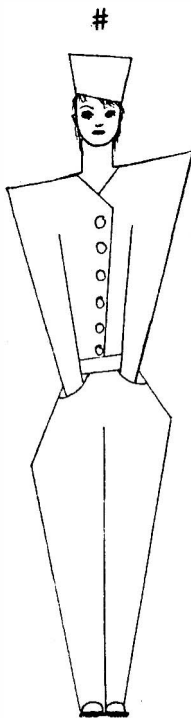
springboard and then, true to its design, the door, twisted beyond all recognition with about eighteen inches of rubber window seal dangling from its latch, snapped shut.

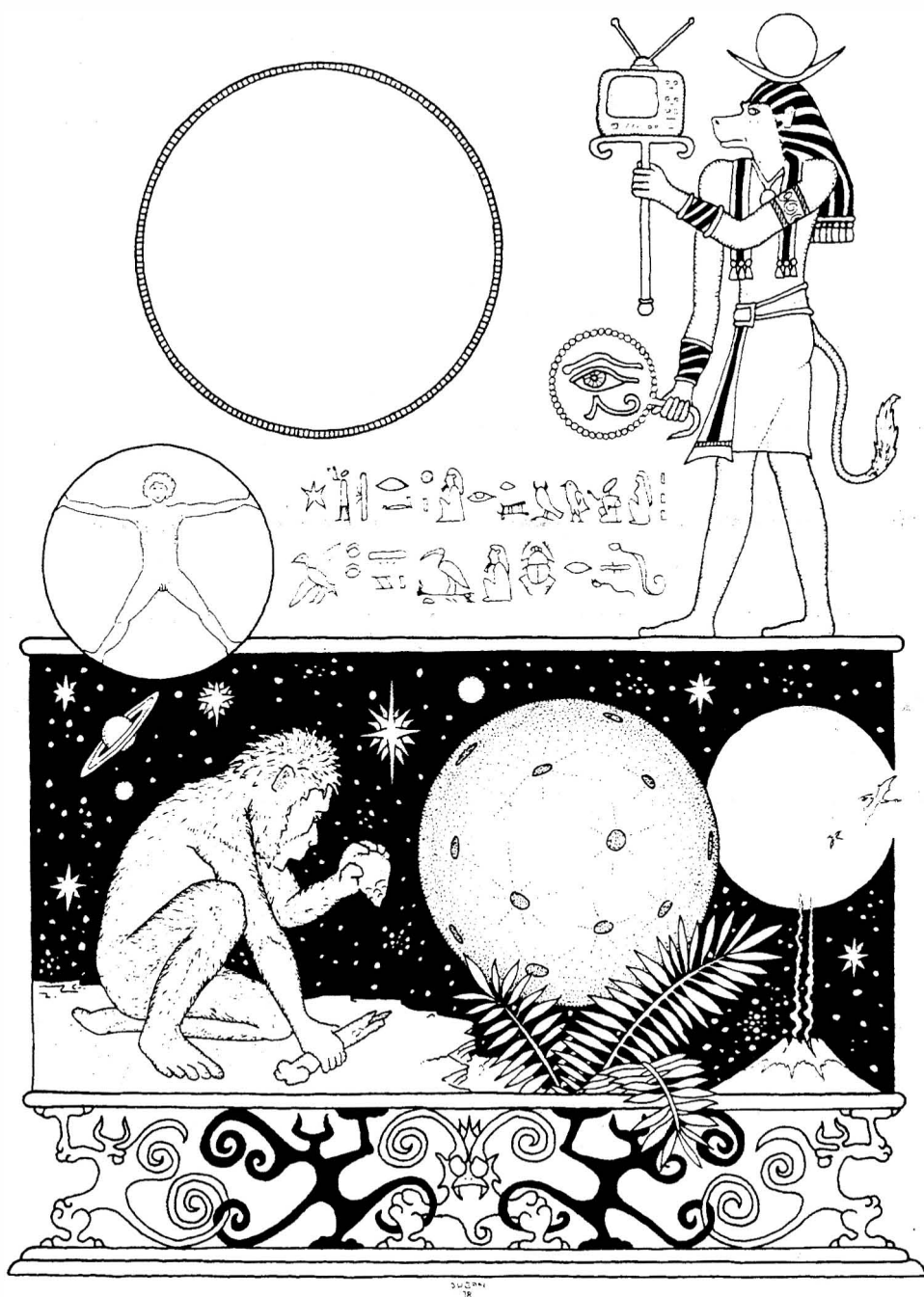
Torval bounded from his car, white-faced now with blue lips and swearing in Norwegian which he was prone to do when upset.

He shook his fist at the mailbox, at Martin's house, at the house again, then picked up a rock and flung it at the mailbox caving in the side where Martin's name was lettered. He stomped over to the front of the mailbox and slammed his foot down on the spring-board. He shouldn't have done that. The bellcrank squeaked and groaned and then the door shot open. It swung down and hooked Torval's shirt, then pulled him off balance as it swung back up. Torval fell against the mailbox and they both toppled into the ditch.

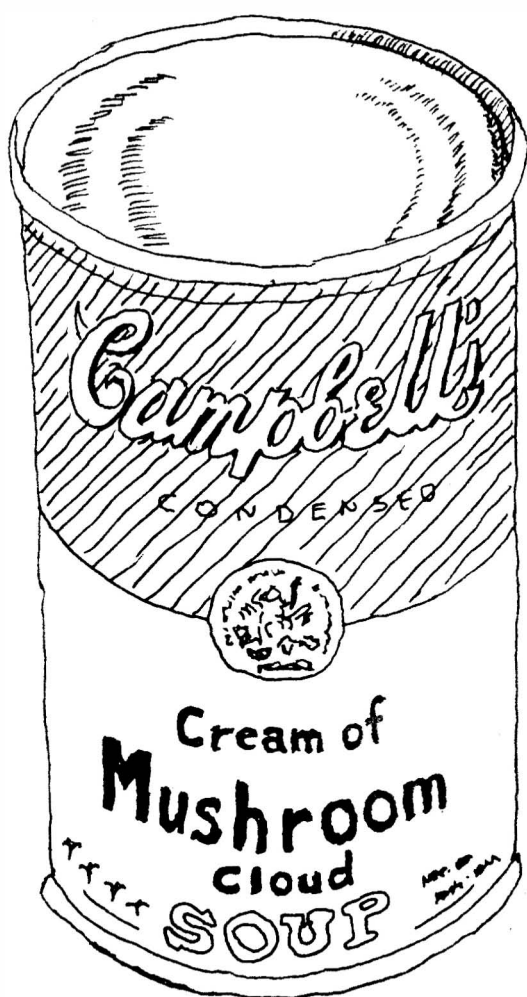
It took almost seven minutes for Torval to vent his rage but when he finished and drove away, there wasn't one recognizable piece left of Martin's mailbox or of his invention.

I suggested to Martin that now was a good time to plan on visiting his brother in Duluth for a couple of weeks. He left within the half-hour and I then drove to my office where I checked over Martin's insurance in preparation for Torval's call.









Tom Struckman

# Back in Business

*Jon Angel* is more and more a professional printer and typesetter. He lives in Flagstaff, AZ, but is looking at Missoula, MT. He can unicycle and juggle pretty well.

*Ron Bergerson* lives in Burnsville, MN, where he does industrial art. This is his first magazine story published. (He is R. B. Odell.)

*Nathaniel Blumberg* is a professor of journalism at the University of Montana. He was dean of the School of Journalism during the 1960s. He has supported *The Portable Wall* since it began in 1977.

*Roger Coleman*, of Laguna Nigel, CA, is a retired scientist.

*Sharon Eve Cox* brings us two poems from Rothsville, PA.

*Linda Lee Curtis* writes about her experiences shopping for food, from her home in Phoenix, AZ.

*Patricia Flinn* of Warren, NJ, has lived in cities most of her life and says she cannot imagine what it would be like to live in Montana. She does know how to convey anxiety in her short story though.

*Mark Fryberger* has written a new resume and although he wants a new position, he remains in top status as one of the brains behind the *Wall*. He still lives in Missoula.

*Dana Graham* has moved from Eureka, MT, to Bellingham, WA. Her daughter Hannah drew several of the pictures found throughout this issue: the soldier, the skull, the bells, the lion.

*William P. Haynes* lives in Rockville Centre, NY. He brings us his memorable poetry in a mysterious way. On the back of his pages he writes: "Dear Mr. Lyden, I'm out of words, only letters are in my hands." and "The clue is line ten. I have never been the walrus."

*Gary Scheinoha* writes his poetry in Edin, WI.

*Robert Struckman* is a baker in Flagstaff, AZ, this summer. Otherwise he attends high school in Billings, MT.

*Dan Struckman* is still the same, tall and slender.

*Kathleen Taylor* has written scores of poetry, published in the U.S. and abroad. She has won numerous prizes and contests. She lives in Occidental, CA.

*David Thomas* lives in Missoula, still. His book, *Fossil Fuel*, was published by Peter Koch of Black Stone Press. David says he has a book-length manuscript circulating.

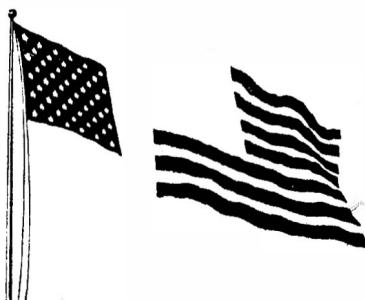
*S. Patrick Waters* lives in Tampa, FL, where he writes his stories and manages a document security firm.

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