the red wheelbarrow
1983-84
Editors' Notes

John Hiemstra:
"Don't be afraid to care. One day you find ten years have got behind you."
--Pink Floyd

Juan Núñez:
I'm not asking you to believe me. I'm asking you to accept what I say as fact.
Graham Lee: "You have to be quick, and you have to be able, or you become one of the devoured, and if you can kill first, no matter how and no matter who, you can live and return to the comfortable chair and the comfortable fire. But you have to be quick, and able, or you'll be dead.
---from My Gun is Quick
Mickey Spillane

Misook DesJardins: "Oh, for heaven's sakes," he said to his procreative organ, "how irrelevant can you be?"
---from God Bless You,
Mr. Rosewater
Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

Peter Steadman: "The fool doth think himself to be wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool."
---William Shakespeare

David Downing: "The blue man is everywhere or nowhere."

James T. Collins: "The vast majority of human beings dislike and even dread all notions with which they are not familiar...Hence it comes about that at first appearance innovators have always been derided as fools and madmen."
---Aldous Huxley

Gretchen Billmaier: "There's not much poetry..."
---Tom Sudinsky 1/26, 11:57 a.m.
as quoted by Dan Stevenson
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Cathi Winslow: "As far as we know, there have been people in all cultures at all times who behaved in bizarre, unpredictable, inexplicable ways."

George Hart: "Hey, Big L, it's like stitches!"

Deirdre Kovac: "In Kensington and even in Mayfair she danced at parties in private houses."

Chris Wick: "Maybe one day..."

Carrie "Late Lights" Brown: "What's all this hoopla? Como estas? No Comprende!
Hala mom. U.S.A. Magister est magna."

Terri Simons: "Beware of all enterprises that require new clothes."

Gwen Knighton: "I guess all songs is folks songs. I never heard no horse sing 'em."

Sarah Krive: "History does not repeat itself except in the minds of those who do not know history."

Contributors' Notes

As far as we know, there have been people in all cultures at all times who behaved in bizarre, unpredictable, inexplicable ways."

--Kayla Bernheim

"Hey, Big L, it's like stitches!"

--John Dos Passos

"Maybe one day..."

--Thoreau

"I guess all songs is folks songs. I never heard no horse sing 'em."

--Big Bill Broonzy

"History does not repeat itself except in the minds of those who do not know history."

--Kahlil Gibran
GEORGE HART .......... Boxed 26-32
CARRIE BROWN .......... Lines 33
JUAN NUÑEZ .......... untitled 38

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Lise Ferraro .......... 2
Graham Lee .......... 5 & 34
George Hart .......... 7 & 25
Rebecca Kopp .......... 16
Jamie Coulter .......... 21
Chris Wick .......... 39
Misook DesJardins .......... inside back cover
Deirdre Kovac

Stepping Towards Silence

I wanted to write a simple poem,
out of hunger, about bread
that rises toward my open mouth.
But your distant body dances
so loudly across the page,
legs flashing white
like so much empty paper.

And I draw the white curtains
open to December, to the circle
of frosted trees, petals
of light almost falling
at my feet.

I must find the center
of this simple circle.
leave my heavy desk
for the sad songs
of deep snow and open arms.

Words rise in our oven
of language and I run
through wide fields,
leaving them to burn.

Juan Núñez

in childhood the sky is
blue unlike this sky
so grey over chicago

i live here it is winter
buildings huddle like animals
the people are stripped

as the trees and the trees
even less fires are burning
smoke is rising and we take

our breath
for granted we say
it is so and it is

yet we know breath only
through our hands we know
i can never breathe

here this is
my life and for the moment
yours also but walk with me

from this page to the snow
in the streets where our breath
will cloud the air

as we speak i want to speak
with you please
chicago is grey

i cannot find child-
hood speak say
nothing language sky
Colette McGahan

Lullaby

Having betrayed mother and motherhood,
I cry sounds too simple for song.

Emptiness makes its own melody, one
sisters know. We catch hands and dance,
but there is no one in the auditorium,
no one who claps. So we bow, each one
of us daisy-white, daisy-frail, and alone.
Rashid Miller

Adam’s Ballad

I. Kenya, fifteen hours south east, lost between cloud levels, riding still in a jetstream. Cohen, as far from it as when he started. Walking up the slipway at Schipol in Burbary and Harris tweed.

Winging south, following the albatros. The African dawn rushes up on his left. And below eden spread out from the Rift to the sea.

The matatu riding back and forth between potholes, twenty people and Cohen, a white muzungu, in the back of a pickup. The prodigal son, barefoot and jeans, hundreds of miles of caked dirt.

Five hours on a train, north through coffee and tea, goat breath by his feet. Mushkil Gusha sits and sings in front of him, skin hangs heavily from hard bones.

The smell of mango rotting in the sun. Luggage in limbo between Paris and Nairobi.

He watched it rain for a month. The mountains hide behind the hills that hide behind the plane, beyond the sea. Everything is mud.

Rashid Miller

To My Brother

Three hours up and out of Heathrow, in still air I belong to no one. Where you are, is this my home? I am coming from nowhere, going to nowhere.

Looking down on his floppy red hat blowing in the wind. A three year old with a jersey six times too large. That was my brother at three, trapped on a photograph. Trapped in the crevices of my wallet.

Are you speaking to me, or is it just the laughter of the wind by the water. At each wave you jumped to flight, and I was left to the crashing sea. My feet are heavy with the years. We threw stones to the sea, the barnacles tore my skin. Brother, the blood that ran warm from my hands was the same as the redness in your cheeks.

Tell me now. Have I become as father. A door opening in the night, a present from a suitcase by your bed in the morning.

I will leave you from the top of the hill. When my feet fall on fresh snow you follow my prints into a field blown flat by the wind, surrounded by silver birch, oak and maple. And perhaps you will become distracted, perhaps you will lose me.
I. Deirdre Kovac

Woodbridge Once More Home

After five blizzard years in Northern absence
I am back by this tree,
the oak I climbed at 12,
sitting away long summers
with fat cheeked Diane.
Now, I swallow cheap Liebfraumilch
with my lover on the green bench.
We lean close beneath the absence
of leaves, before the thick wood,
silence circling our round laughter.

The warmth of wine obscures
the 17 years I was equal only
to myself, to the nights
that fell faster each year
I turned away, and to the days
this neighborhood was bigger
than the sum of streets
I walked alone,
And I stare past his smile.

The boys I once feared would steal
dance on those asphalt strips
toward age, dance to a silence
that won't quite take me back
to chalk marking easy games
across the sidewalk.

Instead, I am taken by his present
tenses, by this very simple moment,
going towards the same corner house,
his hand leading
my same blind legs across the lawn.

II. Cohen would walk,
barefoot and jeans
to the sea.
To a stretch of beach deserted
by all but the wind
and the clouds moving like hands,
fingers outstretched over still water.

Bending like an animal
he would kiss the virgin water,
divide the wind from the sea.
Scream into a north west gale.

The insult of having lungs.

Somewhere on an African beach,
perhaps only a wind's breath
from Olduvai. A hand rising from the dust,
with eyes that look only forward.

And Cohen cried,
for the lack of the lack of rationality.
For his fear of wilderness.
Because he walked upright.
Because of his love of light.
Because he could no longer smell
The adder, Nyoku, slipping
over the sand, back into the rocks,
belly full of crab meat.

Nyoku, how he could sing. Teach
you how to be very still.
So still you could taste the wind's smell,
junipers, jasmine and lotus blossom.
Salt water, sand and snake sweat.

And for the moment, Cohen
sat back into the dirt.
Let the sea pull the earth by
below him, and waited.
Carrie Brown

Lines

That spring you walked
home from school
with blue lines
drawn on the palm of your hand,
tracing your love line,
your life line. You said you would find
me in 20 years
with your crystal ball,
and we would eat our fortune cookies
and drink warm tea.

In July you sat in front of the fan and thought
of the coolness of the grocery store,
the metal cart against your bare legs,
the smell of brown bags, or you thought of leaning
out the window at school and feeling the wind rush,
and glancing back
at the boy who held his pencil wrong, gripping it
like life; holding with all five fingers, a clenched fist.
His shaky letters as legible as palms
or secret codes written in lemon juice and held to the light,
or hidden meanings
in the stains of wooden desks, of carved initials and dates
resonating beneath the surface,
or the hands of a very old farmer,
dirt embedded into the crevices of his palms,
or shadows and the centuries of rings in fallen oaks.

Cathi Winslow

Stage Fright

Stephen looks for a face in the audience. The first row is full, the second row as well, the third row is darker... He squints to see an empty seat on the aisle. It is fading. A spotlight pins him to the stage, and he opens his mouth. A bird flies out between his lips, flapping its wings slowly, and disappears above his head. The auditorium is silent. A tiny pearl rolls off the end of his tongue, and falls to the floor—plunk! There is no other sound. The pearl rolls across the wooden floor to the edge of the orchestra pit, and stops. "You are looking for my face, Stephen, but I am gone. You had better close your mouth now." Stephen closes his lips over his teeth, frozen in the flood of light. Someone in the audience coughs. The light begins to fade, and Stephen disappears.
"I can't afford that. There's nothing wrong with this place."

"It's in the middle of the city."

"So."

"I don't like the city."

"Well I'm not going to go broke just because you don't like the city."

"You could go back to school and get certified. You should anyway."

"And work at the same time? No way. Why don't you go back to school and get a job? You should anyway."

"Well, I..." She looked down at her hands.

"Yeah. I'm going to take a shower. Then we'll go to Johnny's." He started for the bathroom.

"Tim."

"What?"

"Turn off the light, please."

He turned off the light and went into the bathroom. Julie watched the light escaping under the bathroom door. She heard the shower start running and walked into the living room. As she walked past Mark, she turned the TV off and sat on the couch.

Midnight had given up trying to get out of the box and had buried his face in his paws. For a while she looked at the sleeping kitten. When she turned to look out the window, she caught a glimpse of headlights moving freely out of the city, now that rush hour was over.
"It's not the same. I want to be outside tonight, alone, with you."

"We'll leave Johnny's early and come back here. Then we'll be alone." He leaned across the bed and kissed her.

"Mark will be here."

"He's already passed out in the living room."

"And you'll be drunk."

"And so will you. We'll be all alone and drunk." He moved to kiss her again; she turned her head.

"Come on, Julie," He stood up. "I've been working all day. I just want to go out, see my friends, and have a good time."

She didn't say anything. He went to the dresser and took out a towel.

"Tim."

"What?"

"Have you thought about looking for a new apartment?"

"What?"

"One not this far into the city. In the suburbs or something."

"Why? This one's fine, and I can afford our share of the rent."

"But it's nicer in the suburbs. We could rent out the third floor of a house. One with a nice lawn."
Peter Steadman

Solitaire

Vic sat, staring at the cards lined up on the formica folding table, surrounded by silence, his hearing aid off again. His shriveled hands with oversized knuckles could barely hold the cards. After a few, still moments, he took a seven of clubs and struggled to put it on an eight of diamonds. Thin strands of white hair blew in the soft breeze touching every blade of grass in the patio at the Four Seasons Nursing Home.

A few feet from Vic was a second card table, set up under a small roof in the grass. The old 'Jillowtree hunched over the lawn cast shadows across the checkerboard between Stan and Max.

"Vic's at his exciting game of solitaire again." Stan gurgled a short laugh.

"King me," Max said with a triumphant smile.

Stan grunted, shifted his chair and studied the board before giving in.

"Well, you're two games down anyway, so there."

Vic took three new cards, twisting his lips in thought.

"I heard Vic wet his bed again last night," Stan said in a matter-of-fact whisper.

"Where'd you hear that?" Max studied the board.

"That new, little nurse was talking to Betty at breakfast...she's got a cute little fanny," Stan gurgled. "You know, if I were just a few years younger..."

"Yeah, you're going to be a tough one, aren't you?" She heard him walking across the living room.

"Julie?"

"Yeah. Hi, Tim."

He turned on the light and walked over to the bed. Julie looked up at him, the light blurring her vision. When he came into focus, she saw his face was streaked black with grease from the gas station.

"Something wrong, Jule?"

"No."

He took off his shirt and threw it on the floor. "Johnny's going to have some people over to his place tonight." He sat on the bed and began untying his boots. "I'm going to take a shower, and then we'll go."

"Tim."

"Huh?"

"It's a nice night--why don't we go out to the park or something?"

"Why do you want to go out to the park?"

"Well, we're always here or at somebody's apartment. It would be nice to go somewhere different. Just you and me."

"I see you everyday." He turned around on the bed to face her. "And it's been a long time since we've gone over to Johnny's."
"I think you've been in the suburbs too long." He opened another beer.

Taking another drag from her cigarette, Julie thought, "I need to get out in the open. Just out in the open where I can see things clearly." She crushed out her cigarette and reached down to pet Midnight.

"He doesn't like it in there."

"Humm?" Mark had turned on the TV and was absorbed in a Star Trek re-run.

"Midnight. He doesn't like being in a box."

"Oh, yeah; I never knew Tim didn't like cats." He lit a cigarette and turned back to the TV.

Midnight's paw edged over the side of the box. It slipped back, and Julie heard the kitten drop to the bottom. Then she walked into the bedroom, stepping over Tim's clothes on the floor. She lay on the bed and stared at the ceiling.

She was tired but didn't feel like sleeping. As the room finally began to grow dark, a floodlight attached to the building next door came on, pouring light through the window above the bed. She heard the front door open.

She knew Tim had come into the apartment. Tim wasn't talking to Mark, so he must have fallen asleep in front of the TV. Everything was silent except for the sound of the TV. Then she heard Tim.

"Hey, guy." There was no sound for a minute; Tim must be playing with the kitten. "You're a little runt. You know that?"

Julie smiled to herself.

"A few centuries, you mean," Max said, finally making his move.

Stan scooped up two of Max's pieces. There was a short pause. "You're two games down anyway." Stan was insulted.

"Well, you're six years older."

At the other table, Vic hiccuped slightly, studying the rows in front of him. Ten of spades, nine of diamonds, eight of clubs, seven of diamonds... each number lower than the one before. That was how the game worked. He carefully brushed a leaf from the ace of hearts above the rows. He had not touched that ace since earlier in the game.

"So, he made wee-wee in the sheets last night?" Max said, making conversation.

"Yeah... he made wee-wee." Stan gurgled for a few seconds. "You know, they might make him wear diapers." Stan settled into a fit of gurgles.

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Oblivious to Stan and Max, Vic picked up the cards from one pile and put them on another. His dry fingers faltered, and the cards spilled over the other rows. Just then the glass doors leading to the patio slid open, as a young, blonde nurse in a tight skirt appeared, balancing a tray of juice and pill bottles.

Stan gave a low, windy whistle at her approach.

"None of that now, Stanley. Max you left your pills in the dining room again. Now we can't be so forgetful, can we?"

"Who forgot?"

She placed a small glass of apple juice next to Stan, who was grinning widely. As she turned to give Max his pills, a quick hand leapt to pinch her through her polyester uniform.
Her head spun to Vic, hunched over his cards behind her.

"Victor," she shrieked.

Vic turned slowly, his eyes wide.

"Gosh, darn, Vic!" Stan yelled so loud that even Vic could hear.

Vic's gaze shifted slowly from Stan's leer to Max's concerned brow, his eyes finally resting on the nurse's flushed, red face.

"How...could...my..." The nurse gave Vic a sharp slap, almost upsetting her tray.

Vic stumbled out of his chair, spilling his cards on the ground. His eyes darting from the sharp eyebrows to the checkerboard and Stan's knowing grin.

"I didn't...please...oh..." A dark, wet circle began to form on the front of Vic's pants. He retreated through the door, his slipped feet shuffling down the hall as fast as they could go.

The nurse looked at the cards scattered across the grass and then at the blank faces of the old men at the checkerboard. She stumbled over her feet as she scurried indoors.

"You're the one that should be in diapers," Max accused.

Stan picked up one of his pieces and jumped it over Max's last two pieces. "Well, I won...so there," he said pouting.

"I don't know," she paused and sipped her beer. "Doesn't being in the city all the time get to you?"

"How do you mean?" He placed the last of the hamburger in his mouth.

"Well, don't all these buildings make you feel boxed in," she paused uncertainly. "Like they're keeping you from something?"

"No, I like the buildings. They a..." he hesitated, searching for the right words. "They make things full."

"Full?" She thought about it. The city and its buildings hid things from her.

"Sure. You go out into the suburbs or the country, and there's nothing out there. No place to go, nothing to do. There's plenty going on in the city."

"That's not what I mean. Don't the buildings seem to hide things from you. Like they're in the way, like you're missing something important." Julie kept groping for words to describe the feeling.

"No, not really. Take the buildings away, and there's nothing to see. There's nothing there."

She sat up and lit a cigarette. Setting the beer on the coffee table, she thought for a moment.

"I don't know what it is. I'll walk through the city, shopping or something, and each time I turn a corner, I feel there's something there, but it's gone before I get around the corner. Something important, something I should see." She knew she didn't explain it clearly. Mark wouldn't understand.
When she heard the door open, Julie bent to put Midnight back into his box.

"Hi, Julie." Mark came into the living room with a bag from McDonald's and a six-pack of beer.

"Hi, Mark. Where's Tim?"

"He had to stay at the station for a while. Finishing a tune-up." Mark slumped into an armchair, opened the bag, and pulled a beer from the six-pack. "What've you been doing today?" he asked, holding a handful of french fries in front of his mouth.

"Nothing much. A little cleaning."

Mark looked around the room and mumbled through his fries, "Looks nice." He opened his beer and, without finishing the french fries, took a swallow. "Want one?" He held a beer out to her. She took it, opened it, and sipped.

She sat back on the couch and watched Mark eat his Big Mac in silence. She hadn't known Mark long; Tim met him when he got his job at the gas station and then moved in with him. Julie got to know him pretty well after she moved in. He seemed okay.

She looked through the bedroom and out that window. Another building. When Julie had lived in the suburbs with her parents, she never realized how much city living could close you in.

"How long did you live here before Tim moved in?"

"Oh, a couple of months. Why?"

---

J. Joyce

Tathata  Claritas est quiditas. J. Joyce

I.
At night, I walk Wabakaness.
Here, time is the interval of ripples spreading from a stone thrown from the shore, the unseen space under fallen logs.
I dip my hands into its darkness, stirring the sand into circles, like an animal turning, treading the weeds before settling.

I call two Petoskey stones and they come. Slick with water, they wait while I sink my arm to the elbow and lift them from the shadows. The fossilized pattern shimmers. I engrave its dance in my mind to decipher later, and slip them into my pocket. Tomorrow. I cannot trace the tapestry woven by water and moonlight. They are rocks, silhouetted gray against the lines of my desk.
II.
Riding from Hoboken to Peapack in a commuter train,
I sketch the seventy-mile-an-hour countryside
and find the blurred outline
of a tree not enough for imagination.
The man across from me reads his paper
without looking around, without seeing
the exaggerated clarity of morning,
magnified as if under three feet of still water,
without seeing the mist that rises from the low wet places
between tracks and towns. He marks time
by shadows of morning and evening,
always pointing away from him,
drawing the length of the train
from sea to sun. I want
to bend my arm from the elbow, anchor it
in the mud among the cattails
only now beginning to lose their airy silk to summer.
I want to stop this green hypn6tic rush.
Hold a single blade of grass and trace
the veins leading from the earth.

George Hart
Boxed

Julie sat on the couch, holding her guitar, trying to remember chords she had learned when she was still in school the year before. After she had dropped out, there had been nothing much to do. Sleep in, clean Tim's apartment. She had been living here for six months but still could not think of it as her place. She did all the cleaning and fixing up, but it was still just Tim's apartment, and Mark's.

She put down the guitar and looked at the kitten trying to get out of the box. Midnight was a stray she had found just a couple of weeks ago, but she was quite attached to him. Julie did not like keeping the kitten in the box, but Tim said he didn't want Midnight running around and getting in the way.

"Hey, Midnight. Let me help you out of there." She lifted the kitten out of the box as carefully as she would a baby. "You don't like it in that old box, do you?" She stroked the kitten's soft fur and looked out the window at the building next door. Only if she got close enough to the window could she see around the corner of the building and out onto the street. The rush hour was at its peak.

"Look at them. All lined up and ready to go, but they're not getting anywhere." She was half-talking to the cat, half-talking to herself. "Why do they even bother trying?"

She turned around and looked at the apartment. "You know, Midnight, I cleaned this apartment twice today, and it still looks filthy. I think that dirt was built in. What do you think?" She lifted him up in the air. "Yeah, that dirt's built in, all right."
III.
Sundays,
I drive the pavement to the limit of the land,
I stop and wander the sweep and range of the hills.
The country guides me;
grooves scooped by a retreating glacier
steer me from hollow to hollow.
The forest, like murky water at night,
absorbs everything.

Once among the pines,
I come upon a basin of clear water
fed by a stream.

Wading,
I follow it,
collecting the pebbles it lays down
to lead me to its source,
its course carrying me
within its rhythm.
In a clearing, the sky lifts suddenly towards the sun, blue as if brushed with undiluted paint. Here, long grasses replace the forest. Further, before the seeded rows resume, the sun crystallizes into a pond, a shifting faceted jewel, refracted light stippling leaves. On one end, a beach stretches and a decoy lies bleached on the fine-boned sand, a crudely carved caricature whittled from pine, some child's toy or hunter's tool. Lifted, it lives, glass eyes still iridescent through the dust. And having found it, what now? I could carry it back, tamed and tucked under my arm to set on the mantel amid other figures, or leave it upended on the chance that someone will come upon it before it settles completely into sand, or cast it adrift and turn back—leaving it silently bobbing on the water.

3. Wind steady, I stand with neck bared toward grey waves, grey sky, the border of black trees. I watch a boy, ankle-deep in the water. His eyes, they watch waves break over rocks, curl beneath sand.

4. Before, there was only this room. It can't really be you. Through cigarette smoke and exhaust we walk down city streets. Flashing lights beckon, offer to take us back. But there can be only this movement outward, past the dirty air and sunken eyes of America to the solitude of quiet rooms, which may be a sort of beginning.
Sarah Krive
Fragments

1. I ache to touch the grey sky, churning, the waters beyond my window, a bird flying. The sun is not warm and we will never feel the rain, hot, running over our faces.

2. An empty room, warm, swallows darkness whole. My finger traces the outline of your face until I know it in my sleep as a bird on the forgotten windowsill sings
Waking From Winter

Sometimes the wind enters this deep glass
and makes a hollow deep moaning sound
that wakes up all the laziness inside me
that needed to come out
and see what was outside this thick blind wall.
Square by square we
turn and dance around the ballroom
hand in hand
and our hearts fill until the last beam of
sun goes down.

Gwen Knighton

Social Lion

Tonight he stalks Art on plains of grey marble
patterned in gold and black and darker grey,
occcasionally slurping gin and tonic
(mostly tonic),
feigning understanding of Picasso and Rembrandt alike.
In the morning he wakes with a heavy head
and moves to other hunting grounds.
He laps at black coffee,
prowling the potted palm jungle
at 8th street and Broad,
reflecting on last night's kill.
What a feat --
Art never had a chance.
Next week, perhaps he will murder Music, or Keats.
Colette McGahan

Definition

*after a first line by Wendell Berry*

Did I believe I had a clear mind in this room with white curtains closing against the sun. Only when I was obsessed with the vagueness of my shadow did I find the courage to pull back the curtains, dispel the mist. Now in true sharp light my darkness is defined.
Tom Sudinsky
young poet still stuck in boarding school
(to Charles Bukowski: with more than you probably want)

Instead of this book, Burning in Water,
Drowning in Flame, and white typing paper,
I would, of course, prefer to be with men in bars.
But, no, the sound of Michigan wind, the cry of geese
flying south are all I hear.
I might as well be dead right now.

I know that somewhere
out there, city smoke rises,
and Ginsberg is living,
and I could be alive too.

Manhattan makes place for the dissolute,
and in UNCLE CHARLIE'S DOWNTOWN,
I could spell off the night
with some man in his forties.
There I could make Queen-sized bed
King for a night.
But Michigan, with lakes and red-necked poachers,
in season and out,
makes no place for those like me
who worry about
oral and anal
aids AIDS
who worry that a boy in P.E.
might tease
if I were to touch his groin
during a lay-up on the basketball court.
I settle for locker room lookings
at boys peeling sweaty jocks
from bare white bodies.

young queers are as bad as young poets

I know that somewhere
out there, city smoke rises,
and Ginsberg is living
and I could be alive too.

but I sit writing these lines
quite unacceptable to writing classes
to high school teachers
to their editors
who thank me for submitting but
regret....

And down
down
down the dark hall

boys ignore boys
to howl at centerfolds,
to stuff wallets full of condoms.
And this poem is due tomorrow,
like it or not,
I sit typing
click click click
another young poet going off.
Tom Sudinsky
young poet still stuck in boarding school

(to Charles Bukowski: with more thanks than you probably want)

Instead of this book, Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame, and white typing paper, I would, of course, prefer to be with men in bars. But, no, the sound of Michigan wind, the cry of geese flying south are all I hear. I might as well be dead right now.

I know that somewhere out there, city smoke rises, and Ginsberg is living, and I could be alive too.

Manhattan makes place for the dissolute, and in UNCLE CHARLIE'S DOWNTOWN, I could spell off the night with some man in his forties. There I could make Queen-sized bed King for a night. But Michigan, with lakes and red-necked poachers, in season and out, makes no place for those like me who worry about oral and anal and AIDS AIDS AIDS

who worry that a boy in P.E. might tease if I were to touch his groin during a lay-up on the basketball court. I settle for locker room lookings at boys peeling sweaty jocks from bare white bodies.

young queers are as bad as young poets

I know that somewhere out there, city smoke rises, and Ginsberg is living and I could be alive too.

but I sit writing these lines quite unacceptable to writing classes to high school teachers to their editors who thank me for submitting but regret.... And down down down the dark hall boys ignore boys to howl at centerfolds, to stuff wallets full of condoms. And this poem is due tomorrow, like it or not, I sit typing click click click another young poet going off.
Colette McGahan

Definition

after a first line by Wendell Berry

Did I believe I had a clear mind
in this room with white curtains
closing against the sun. Only
when I was obsessed with the vagueness
of my shadow did I find the courage
to pull back the curtains, dispel
the mist. Now in true sharp light
my darkness is defined.
Waking From Winter

Sometimes the wind enters this deep glass
and makes a hollow deep moaning sound
that wakes up all the laziness inside me
that needed to come out
and see what was outside this thick blind wall.

Square by square we
turn and dance around the ballroom
hand in hand
and our hearts fill until the last beam of
sun goes down.

Social Lion

Tonight he stalks Art on plains of grey marble
patterned in gold and black and darker grey,
occasionally slurping gin and tonic
(mostly tonic),
feigning understanding of Picasso and Rembrandt alike.
In the morning he wakes with a heavy head
and moves to other hunting grounds.
He laps at black coffee,
prowling the potted palm jungle
at 8th street and Broad,
reflecting on last night's kill.
What a feat --
Art never had a chance.
Next week, perhaps he will murder Music, or Keats.
Sarah Krive
Fragments

1. I ache to touch the grey sky, churning, the waters beyond my window, a bird flying. The sun is not warm and we will never feel the rain, hot, running over our faces.

2. An empty room, warm, swallows darkness whole. My finger traces the outline of your face until I know it in my sleep as a bird on the forgotten windowsill sings
In a clearing,
the sky lifts suddenly towards the sun,
blue as if brushed with undiluted paint.
Here, long grasses replace
the forest. Further,
before the seeded rows resume,
the sun crystallizes into a pond,
a shifting faceted jewel,
refracted light stippling leaves.
On one end, a beach stretches
and a decoy lies bleached on the fine-boned sand,
a crudely carved caricature whittled from pine,
some child's toy or hunter's tool.
Lifted, it lives, glass eyes still
iridescent through the dust.
And having found it, what now?
I could carry it back, tamed and tucked
under my arm to set on the mantel
amid other figures,
or leave it upended
on the chance that someone will come upon it
before it settles completely into sand,
or cast it adrift and turn back-
leaving it silently bobbing on the water.

3. 
Wind steady,
I stand with neck bared
toward grey waves,
grey sky,
the border of black trees.
I watch a boy,
ankle-deep in the water.
His eyes,
they watch waves break
over rocks, curl beneath sand.

4. 
Before, there was only this room.
It can't really be you.
Through cigarette smoke and exhaust
we walk down city streets.
Flashing lights beckon,
offer to take us back.

But there can be only this movement
outward, past the dirty air
and sunken eyes of America
to the solitude of quiet rooms,
which may be a sort of beginning.
III.
Sundays,
I stop and wander the sweep and range of the hills.
The country guides me;
grooves scooped by a retreating glacier
steer me from hollow to hollow.
The forest, like murky water at night,
absorbs everything.

Once among the pines,
I come upon a basin of clear water
fed by a stream.
Wading,
I follow it,
collecting the pebbles it lays down
to lead me to its source,
its course carrying me
within its rhythm.
II. Riding from Hoboken to Peapack in a commuter train, I sketch the seventy-mile-an-hour countryside and find the blurred outline of a tree not enough for imagination. The man across from me reads his paper without looking around, without seeing the exaggerated clarity of morning, magnified as if under three feet of still water, without seeing the mist that rises from the low wet places between tracks and towns. He marks time by shadows of morning and evening, always pointing away from him, drawing the length of the train from sea to sun. I want to bend my arm from the elbow, anchor it in the mud among the cattails only now beginning to lose their airy silk to summer. I want to stop this green hypnotic rush. Hold a single blade of grass and trace the veins leading from the earth.

George Hart
Boxed

Julie sat on the couch, holding her guitar, trying to remember chords she had learned when she was still in school the year before. After she had dropped out, there had been nothing much to do. Sleep in, clean Tim's apartment. She had been living here for six months but still could not think of it as her place. She did all the cleaning and fixing up, but it was still just Tim's apartment, and Mark's.

She put down the guitar and looked at the kitten trying to get out of the box. Midnight was a stray she had found just a couple of weeks ago, but she was quite attached to him. Julie did not like keeping the kitten in the box, but Tim said he didn't want Midnight running around and getting in the way.

"Hey, Midnight. Let me help you out of there." She lifted the kitten out of the box as carefully as she would a baby. "You don't like it in that old box, do you?" She stroked the kitten's soft fur and looked out the window at the building next door. Only if she got close enough to the window could she see around the corner of the building and out onto the street. The rush hour was at its peak.

"Look at them. All lined up and ready to go, but they're not getting anywhere." She was half-talking to the cat, half-talking to herself. "Why do they even bother trying?"

She turned around and looked at the apartment. "You know, Midnight, I cleaned this apartment twice today, and it still looks filthy. I think that dirt was built in. What do you think?" She lifted him up in the air. "Yeah, that dirt's built in, all right."
When she heard the door open, Julie bent to put Midnight back into his box.

"Hi, Julie." Mark came into the living room with a bag from McDonald's and a six-pack of beer.

"Hi, Mark. Where's Tim?"

"He had to stay at the station for a while. Finishing a tune-up." Mark slumped into an armchair, opened the bag, and pulled a beer from the six-pack. "What've you been doing today?" he asked, holding a handful of french fries in front of his mouth.

"Nothing much. A little cleaning."

Mark looked around the room and mumbled through his fries, "Looks nice." He opened his beer and, without finishing the french fries, took a swallow. "Want one?" He held a beer out to her. She took it, opened it, and sipped.

She sat back on the couch and watched Mark eat his Big Mac in silence. She hadn't known Mark long; Tim met him when he got his job at the gas station and then moved in with him. Julie got to know him pretty well after she moved in. He seemed okay.

She looked through the bedroom and out that window. Another building. When Julie had lived in the suburbs with her parents, she never realized how much city living could close you in.

"How long did you live here before Tim moved in?"

"Oh, a couple of months. Why?"

---

Gretchen Billmaier

Tathata Claritas est quidditas. J. Joyce

I.
At night, I walk Wabakaness.
Here, time is the interval of ripples spreading from a stone thrown from the shore, the unseen space under fallen logs.
I dip my hands into its darkness, stirring the sand into circles, like an animal turning, treading the weeds before settling.

I call two Petoskey stones and they come. Slick with water, they wait while I sink my arm to the elbow and lift them from the shadows. The fossilized pattern shimmers. I engrave its dance in my mind to decipher later, and slip them into my pocket.

Tomorrow. I cannot trace the tapestry woven by water and moonlight. They are rocks, silhouetted gray against the lines of my desk.
Her head spun to Vic, hunched over his cards behind her.

"Vic, she shrieked.

"Vic turned slowly, his eyes wide.

"Gosh, darn, Vic!" Stan yelled so loud that even Vic could hear.

Vic's gaze shifted slowly from Stan's leer to Max's concerned brow, his eyes finally resting on the nurse's flushed, red face.

"How...could...my..." The nurse gave Vic a sharp slap, almost upsetting her tray.

Vic stumbled out of his chair, spilling his cards on the ground. His eyes darting from the sharp eyebrows to the checkerboard and Stan's knowing grin.

"I didn't...please...oh..." A dark, wet circle began to form on the front of Vic's pants. He retreated through the door, his slippered feet shuffling down the hall as fast as they could go.

The nurse looked at the cards scattered across the grass and then at the blank faces of the old men at the checkerboard. She stumbled over her feet as she scurried indoors.

"You're the one that should be in diapers," Max accused.

Stan picked up one of his pieces and jumped it over Max's last two pieces. "Well, I won...so there," he said pouting.

"I don't know," she paused and sipped her beer. Doesn't being in the city all the time get to you?"

"How do you mean?" He placed the last of the hamburger in his mouth.

"Well, don't all these buildings make you feel boxed in," she paused uncertainly. "Like they're keeping you from something?"

"No, I like the buildings. They a...," he hesitated, searching for the right words. "They make things full."

"Full?" She thought about it. The city and its buildings hid things from her.

"Sure. You go out into the suburbs or the country, and there's nothing out there. No place to go, nothing to do. There's plenty going on in the city."

"That's not what I mean. Don't the buildings seem to hide things from you. Like they're in the way, like you're missing something important." Julie kept groping for words to describe the feeling.

"No, not really. Take the buildings away, and there's nothing to see. There's nothing there."

She sat up and lit a cigarette. Setting the beer on the coffee table, she thought for a moment.

"I don't know what it is. I'll walk through the city, shopping or something, and each time I turn a corner, I feel there's something there, but it's gone before I get around the corner. Something important, something I should see." She knew she didn't explain it clearly. Mark wouldn't understand.
"I think you've been in the suburbs too long." He opened another beer.

Taking another drag from her cigarette, Julie thought, "I need to get out in the open. Just out in the open where I can see things clearly." She crushed out her cigarette and reached down to pet Midnight.

"He doesn't like it in there."

"Humm?" Mark had turned on the TV and was absorbed in a Star Trek re-run.

"Midnight. He doesn't like being in a box."

"Oh, yeah; I never knew Tim didn't like cats." He lit a cigarette and turned back to the TV.

Midnight's paw edged over the side of the box. It slipped back, and Julie heard the kitten drop to the bottom. Then she walked into the bedroom, stepping over Tim's clothes on the floor. She lay on the bed and stared at the ceiling. She was tired but didn't feel like sleeping.

As the room finally began to grow dark, a floodlight attached to the building next door came on, pouring light through the window above the bed. She heard the front door open.

She knew Tim had come into the apartment. Tim wasn't talking to Mark, so he must have fallen asleep in front of the TV. Everything was silent except for the sound of the TV. Then she heard Tim.

"Hey, guy." There was no sound for a minute; Tim must be playing with the kitten. "You're a little runt. You know that?"

Julie smiled to herself.

"A few centuries, you mean," Max said, finally making his move.

Stan scooped up two of Max's pieces. There was a short pause. "You're two games down anyway." Stan was insulted.

"Well, you're six years older."

At the other table, Vic hiccuped slightly, studying the rows in front of him. Ten of spades, nine of diamonds, eight of clubs, seven of diamonds...each number lower than the one before. That was how the game worked. He carefully brushed a leaf from the ace of hearts above the rows. He had not touched that ace since earlier in the game.

"So, he made wee-wee in the sheets last night?" Max said, making conversation.

"Yeah...he made wee-wee." Stan gurgled for a few seconds. "You know, they might make him wear diapers." Stan settled into a fit of gurgles.

Oblivious to Stan and Max, Vic picked up the cards from one pile and put them on another. His dry fingers faltered, and the cards spilled over the other rows. Just then the glass doors leading to the patio slid open, as a young, blonde nurse in a tight skirt appeared, balancing a tray of juice and pill bottles.

Stan gave a low, windy whistle at her approach.

"None of that now, Stanley. Max you left your pills in the dining room again. Now we can't be so forgetful, can we?"

"Who forgot?"

She placed a small glass of apple juice next to Stan, who was grinning widely. As she turned to give Max his pills, a quick hand leapt to pinch her through her polyester uniform.
Vic sat, staring at the cards lined up on the formica folding table, surrounded by silence, his hearing aid off again. His shriveled hands with oversized knuckles could barely hold the cards. After a few, still moments, he took seven of clubs and struggled to put it on an eight of diamonds. Thin strands of white hair blew in the soft breeze touching every blade of grass in the patio at the Four Seasons Nursing Home.

A few feet from Vic was a second card table, set up under a small roof in the grass. The old 'Jillowtree hunched over the lawn cast shadows across the checkerboard between Stan and Max.

"Vic's at his exciting game of solitaire again." Stan gurgled a short laugh.

"King me," Max said with a triumphant smile.

Stan grunted, shifted his chair and studied the board before giving in.

"Well, you're two games down anyway, so there."

Vic took three new cards, twisting his lips in thought.

"I heard Vic wet his bed again last night," Stan said in a matter-of-fact whisper.

"Where'd you hear that?" Max studied the board.

"That new, little nurse was talking to Betty at breakfast...she's got a cute little fanny," Stan gurgled. "You know, if I were just a few years younger..."
"It's not the same. I want to be outside tonight, alone, with you."

"We'll leave Johnny's early and come back here. Then we'll be alone." He leaned across the bed and kissed her.

"Mark will be here."

"He's already passed out in the living room."

"And you'll be drunk."

"And so will you. We'll be all alone and drunk." He moved to kiss her again; she turned her head.

"Come on, Julie." He stood up. "I've been working all day. I just want to go out, see my friends, and have a good time."

She didn't say anything. He went to the dresser and took out a towel.

"Tim."

"What?"

"Have you thought about looking for a new apartment?"

"What?"

"One not this far into the city. In the suburbs or something."

"Why? This one's fine, and I can afford our share of the rent."

"But it's nicer in the suburbs. We could rent out the third floor of a house. One with a nice lawn."

Cathi Winslow
At Sherrill's

A cozy restaurant at two in the morning. People are talking, laughing. One sip at a time, light drains from the ceiling into my teacup, and men with umbrellas sit down. A mustache talks, endlessly, burning my hand with a hot spoon under the table. Mustache laughing. A tiled square with lights for the dancers and someone slips outside. The ceiling is gone. A siren wails, and everyone runs outside, but the mustache and I sit listening to a tenor sax. The restaurant burns to the ground. We crawl out from under the table, pulling loose tiles behind, and dance to Canadian jazz. The clock rings three, and a waiter refills my teacup. The umbrellas ride home in taxis, and the mustache tells me about this great little restaurant called "Sherrill's"...
"I can't afford that. There's nothing wrong with this place."

"It's in the middle of the city."

"So."

"I don't like the city."

"Well I'm not going to go broke just because you don't like the city."

"You could go back to school and get certified. You should anyway."

"And work at the same time? No way. Why don't you go back to school and get a job? You should anyway."

"Well, I..." She looked down at her hands.

"Yeah. I'm going to take a shower. Then we'll go to Johnny's." He started for the bathroom.

"Tim."

"What?"

"Turn off the light, please."

He turned off the light and went into the bathroom. Julie watched the light escaping under the bathroom door. She heard the shower start running and walked into the living room. As she walked past Mark, she turned the TV off and sat on the couch.

Midnight had given up trying to get out of the box and had buried his face in his paws. For a while she looked at the sleeping kitten. When she turned to look out the window, she caught a glimpse of headlights moving freely out of the city, now that rush hour was over.
Carrie Brown

Lines

That spring you walked home from school
with blue lines
drawn on the palm of your hand,
tracing your love line,
your life line. You said you would find me in 20 years
with your crystal ball,
and we would eat our fortune cookies
and drink warm tea.

In July you sat in front of the fan and thought of the coolness of the grocery store,
the metal cart against your bare legs,
the smell of brown bags, or you thought of leaning out the window at school and feeling the wind rush,
and glancing back at the boy who held his pencil wrong, gripping it like life; holding with all five fingers, a clenched fist.
His shaky letters as legible as palms or secret codes written in lemon juice and held to the light, or hidden meanings in the stains of wooden desks, of carved initials and dates resonating beneath the surface, or the hands of a very old farmer, dirt embedded into the crevices of his palms, or shadows and the centuries of rings in fallen oaks.

Cathi Winslow

Stage Fright

Stephen looks for a face in the audience. The first row is full, the second row as well, the third row is darker...
He squints to see an empty seat on the aisle. It is fading. A spotlight pins him to the stage, and he opens his mouth. A bird flies out between his lips, flapping its wings slowly, and disappears above his head. The auditorium is silent. A tiny pearl rolls off the end of his tongue, and falls to the floor—plunk! There is no other sound. The pearl rolls across the wooden floor to the edge of the orchestra pit, and stops. "You are looking for my face, Stephen, but I am gone. You had better close your mouth now." Stephen closes his lips over his teeth, frozen in the flood of light. Someone in the audience coughs. The light begins to fade, and Stephen disappears.
Deirdre Kovac

Woodbridge Once More Home

After five blizzard years in Northern absence
I am back by this tree,
the oak I climbed at 12,
sitting away long summers
with fat cheeked Diane.
Now, I swallow cheap Liebfraumilch
with my lover on the green bench.
We lean close beneath the absence
of leaves, before the thick wood,
silence circling our round laughter.

The warmth of wine obscures
the 17 years I was equal only
to myself, to the nights
that fell faster each year
I turned away, and to the days
this neighborhood was bigger
than the sum of streets
I walked alone,
And I stare past his smile.

The boys I once feared would steal
dance on those asphalt strips
toward age, dance to a silence
that won't quite take me back
to chalk marking easy games
across the sidewalk.

Instead, I am taken by his present
tenses, by this very simple moment,
going towards the same corner house,
his hand leading
my same blind legs across the lawn.

II. Cohen would walk,
barefoot and jeans
to the sea.
To a stretch of beach deserted
by all but the wind
and the clouds moving like hands,
fingers outstretched over still water.

Bending like an animal
he would kiss the virgin water,
divide the wind from the sea.
Scream into a north west gale.

The insult of having lungs.

Somewhere on an African beach,
perhaps only a wind's breath
from Olduvai. A hand rising from the dust,
with eyes that look only forward.

And Cohen cried,
for the lack of the lack of rationality.
For his fear of wilderness.
Because he walked upright.
Because of his love of light.
Because he could no longer smell

The adder, Nyoku, slipping
over the sand, back into the rocks,
belly full of crab meat.

Nyoku, how he could sing. Teach
you how to be very still.
So still you could taste the wind's smell,
junipers, jasmine and lotus blossom.
Salt water, sand and snake sweat.

And for the moment, Cohen
sat back into the dirt.
Let the sea pull the earth by
below him, and waited.
Rashid Miller

Adam's Ballad

I. Kenya,
fifteen hours south east, lost
between cloud levels, riding
still in a jetstream. Cohen,
as far from it as when he started.
Walking up the slipway at Schipol
in Burberry and Harris Tweed.

Winging south,
following the albatross.
The African dawn rushes up
on his left. And below Edén
spread out from the Rift to the sea.

The matatu riding back and forth
between potholes, twenty people
and Cohen, a white muzungu,
in the back of a pickup.
The prodigal son, barefoot and jeans,
hundreds of miles of caked dirt.

Five hours on a train,
north through coffee and tea,
goat breath by his feet.
Mushkil Gusha sits and sings
in front of him, skin hangs heavily
from hard bones.

The smell of mango
rotting in the sun.
Luggage in limbo
between Paris and Nairobi.

He watched it rain for a month.
The mountains hide
behind the hills that hide
behind the plane, beyond the sea.
Everything is mud.

Rashid Miller

To My Brother

Three hours up and out of Heathrow,
in still air I belong to no one.
Where you are, is this my home?
I am coming from nowhere,
going to nowhere.

Looking down on his floppy red hat
blowing in the wind. A three year old
with a jersey six times too large.
That was my brother at three, trapped
on a photograph. Trapped
in the crevices of my wallet.

Are you speaking to me,
or is it just the laughter of the wind
by the water. At each wave
you jumped to flight, and I was left
to the crashing sea.

My feet are heavy with the years.
We threw stones to the sea,
the barnacles tore my skin.
Brother, the blood that ran warm
from my hands was the same
as the redness in your cheeks.

Tell me now. Have I become
as father. A door opening in the night,
a present from a suitcase by your bed
in the morning.

I will leave you from the top of the hill.
When my feet fall on fresh snow
you follow my prints
into a field blown flat by the wind,
surrounded by silver birch, oak and maple.
And perhaps you will become distracted,
perhaps you will lose me.
Colette McGahan

Lullaby

Having betrayed mother and motherhood,
I cry sounds too simple for song.

Emptiness makes its own melody, one
sisters know. We catch hands and dance,
but there is no one in the auditorium,
no one who claps. So we bow, each one
of us daisy-white, daisy-frail, and alone.
Deirdre Kovac

Stepping Towards Silence

I wanted to write a simple poem, out of hunger, about bread that rises toward my open mouth. But your distant body dances so loudly across the page, legs flashing white like so much empty paper.

And I draw the white curtains open to December, to the circle of frosted trees, petals of light almost falling at my feet.

I must find the center of this simple circle. Leave my heavy desk for the sad songs of deep snow and open arms.

Words rise in our oven of language and I run through wide fields, leaving them to burn.

---

Juan Núñez

in childhood the sky is blue unlike this sky so grey over chicago

i live here it is winter buildings huddle like animals the people are stripped

as the trees and the trees even less fires are burning smoke is rising and we take our breath for granted we say it is so and it is yet we know breath only through our hands we know i can never breathe here this is my life and for the moment yours also but walk with me from this page to the snow in the streets where our breath will cloud the air as we speak i want to speak with you please chicago is grey i cannot find childhood speak say nothing language sky
GEORGE HART ............... Boxed
CARRIE BROWN ............... Lines
JUAN NUÑEZ ............... untitled

Art Work:

Scott Long ............... inside front cover
Lise Ferraro ............... 2
Graham Lee ............... 5 & 34
George Hart ............... 7 & 25
Rebecca Kopp ............... 16
Jamie Coulter ............... 21
Chris Wick ............... 39
Misook DesJardins ............... inside back cover
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Cathi Winslow: "As far as we know, there have been people in all cultures at all times who behaved in bizarre, unpredictable, inexplicable ways."

George Hart: "Hey, Big L, it's like stitches!"

Deirdre Kovac: "In Kensington and even in Mayfair she danced at parties in private houses."

Chris Wick: "Maybe one day..."

Carrie "Late Lights" Brown: "What's all this hoopla? Como estas? No Comprende! Hola mom. U.S.A. Magister est magna."

Terri Simons: "Beware of all enterprises that require new clothes."

Gwen Knighton: "I guess all songs is folks songs. I never heard no horse sing 'em."

Sarah Krive: "History does not repeat itself except in the minds of those who do not know history."

--Kahlil Gibran

Contributors' Notes

"As far as we know, there have been people in all cultures at all times who behaved in bizarre, unpredictable, inexplicable ways."

--Kayla Bernheim

"Hey, Big L, it's like stitches!"

--John Dos Passos

"Maybe one day..."

"What's all this hoopla? Como estas? No Comprende! Hola mom. U.S.A. Magister est magna."

--Thoreau

"I guess all songs is folks songs. I never heard no horse sing 'em."

--Big Bill Broonzy

"History does not repeat itself except in the minds of those who do not know history."

--Kahlil Gibran
Graham Lee: "You have to be quick, and you have to be able, or you become one of the devoured, and if you can kill first, no matter how and no matter who, you can live and return to the comfortable chair and the comfortable fire. But you have to be quick, and able, or you'll be dead." --from My Gun is Quick, Mickey Spillane

Misook DesJardins: "Oh, for heaven's sakes," he said to his procreative organ, "how irrelevant can you be?" --from God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

Peter Steadman: "The fool doth think himself to be wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool." --William Shakespeare

David Downing: "The blue man is everywhere or nowhere."

James T. Collins: "The vast majority of human beings dislike and even dread all notions with which they are not familiar...Hence it comes about that at first appearance innovators have always been derided as fools and madmen."

--Aldous Huxley

Gretchen Billmaier: "There's not much poetry..." --Tom Sudinsky 1/26, 11:57 a.m. as quoted by Dan Stevenson

THE RED WHEELBARROW

march 1984
juan nunez
john hiemstra
editors

INTERLOCHEN ARTS ACADEMY
INTERLOCHEN, MICHIGAN 49643
Editors' Notes

John Hiemstra: "Don't be afraid to care. One day you find ten years have got behind you."

--Pink Floyd

Juan Núñez: I'm not asking you to believe me. I'm asking you to accept what I say as fact.
the red wheelbarrow
the red wheelbarrow

1983-84