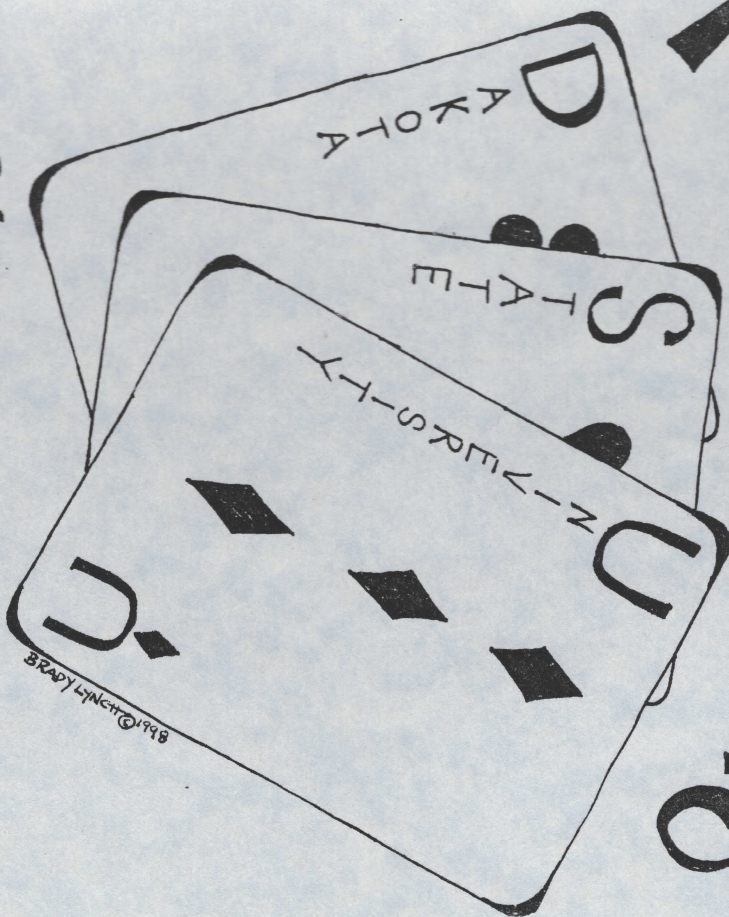


# NEW TRICKS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY  
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# NEW TRICKS



a literary magazine  
Sponsored by SIGMA TAU DELTA

♦ SPRING 1998 ♦



# NEW TRICKS

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**SPRING 1998**

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## Falling Star

By Wendy McCreary

Strolling down that dusty lake path  
away from the Fourth of July festivities—  
smooth palm to wrinkled palm we walked.

Gentle summer breeze caressing my cheek  
under a blanketing black sky—  
a solitary star begins its downward spiral from heaven.

Eyes bright with innocent childhood wonder  
curious to learn her ancient secrets—  
I implore the well-worn face.

Grandma, how long does it take  
for a falling star to reach the ground?  
I don't know the answer, Wendy.

Grandma, will the star burn out?  
Or will it shine forever—  
I don't know the answer, Wendy.

Slowly, slowly the star kept its path  
a candle snubbing out—  
youth fading to old aged death.

Always questioning golden experience  
hungry for the generational knowledge—  
soon passed on once more.

Come back to this spot, little one  
five years from now—  
then you will know the answer.

Time went by and seasons passed  
my glances stole upward—  
hoping to see the star land—it didn't

Her words expired from a stolen beauty  
her knowing heart stilled its loving beat—  
if only to relive that cherished moment.

I realize now Grandma had known the answer—  
faith in that star would last forever—  
its burning lay within my heart—  
like my love for her.

Broken Wings  
by Summer Gross

If angels could fly with broken wings  
we'd all fly high without warning  
to a magical kingdom for misfit toys  
where we could play again like girls and boys,  
a place for rusty trains and forgotten dolls  
that got locked behind lost childhood walls,  
a place where children could run free  
and plant flowers where nothing used to be,  
restoring our innocence by abandoning the past  
angelic smiles and hopeful eyes  
unpoisoned by life's surprise.  
I long for a place void of fear  
a heavenly land where children can sing  
and angels can fly with broken wings.



### Poetry Hides

by Clyde Brashier

When I have a special feeling  
like falling in love  
or being depressed  
I turn to poetry.

Poetry hides  
in wild flowers  
in trees  
in butterflies  
in birds  
in mocking birds  
in the lowly grackle  
in turtles I've known

in memories of my early home  
in people  
in cells under the microscope  
in students I've taught  
in teachers I've had  
in memories of dumb things I've done  
and said.

Poetry is there  
everywhere  
in the rain  
in the air

Poetry hides  
but you can find it

### Miracles

by Randy Anderson

As we go about our busy lives  
there are so many things we never realize  
We take everyday things for granted  
and abide by the laws that are enacted.

We have lost sight of special things  
and are blinded by our own dreams.

So many events are happening that affect us,  
and we cannot see clearly why all the fuss.

If people would just stop and look around  
they would see miracles happening with no bounds.

Mother Nature provides unique wonders every day,

These signs of beauty resemble the warmth of the sun's rays

One of the greatest miracles is provided free of charge,

and that is the gift of family, friends and the love they provide so  
large

So now if people can see these facts so great,  
they will realize life is a splendor when looked at right.



# Quit Yelling—You Don't Live in a Barn

by Nancy Moose

You're crying in a biscuit—  
For crying out loud.  
But don't cry over spilled milk  
Just head toward the land of milk and honey  
Where, of course, you'll attract more flies.

And there you are, sitting on the fence  
Looking like the Wreck of the Hesperus  
Which is homelier than a mud fence.  
Luckily, those homely in the cradle are cute at the  
table!

Pretty is as pretty does and  
Only low class people call dollars "bucks."  
Only low class girls join the military.  
Only boring people get bored.

Holy buckets, that's a fine kettle of fish—  
But fine or not, something smells fishy.  
There's something rotten in Denmark;  
Do you suppose it's the fish?

Mark my words—and truer words were never  
spoken:

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words  
will never hurt me.  
However, no pain, no gain  
Which leads to no rest for the wicked.

People get what they deserve.  
Oh, God! What did I do to deserve this?

# Everybody Gets Played Out

by Kara Vickerman

Everybody gets played out  
Nobody can win—  
but there's always  
someone to lose.

I feel as if I am  
struggling to fit in  
society.

To fit it seems like  
you have to be a jock,  
cheerleader, an honor student,  
or something around there.

But what about  
being yourself?

Why can't society  
accept you for who you  
are? And not what  
they want you to be?



## The loon: that trickster

By Dianna May Torson

fishing it samples the bait  
allows itself the freedom  
of underwater flight

mom's messenger  
it arrives on the end  
of her fishing line  
feathers flat as a fish's scales  
flirting with its northern eye  
under her northern tree

it winks

and mom motionless mouths its message  
dials her daughters the dance  
whistles her lost pot of coffee

alone now  
we cry  
laughing like loons

## Soldier

by Brandon Hess

The horizon burns with an eerie light  
as my eyes search the war torn land,  
clouds mix with the sky's reddish tint as  
I run my blackened fingers through my hair,  
my metallic shell reflects the sun's rays  
one last time as if beckoning light to stay.  
My mind wanders through life's riddles  
that even now,  
I find hard to decipher.

The setting sun descends back to its home  
and its warmth drenches my face as if saying goodbye.  
Darkness falls upon me like a dreaded curse  
for which I know no cure...

surrounding me,  
taunting me,  
binding me,  
frightening me.

Closing my eyes,  
I wait for the shrill cry of the horns,  
the horns that have taken so many a friend  
and called upon so many an enemy  
once again call to being a monster  
far more dreaded than any affliction,  
than any man,  
than any pain.

Cries of horror ring through my head  
and pierce my soul as the horns' shrill call  
echoes throughout the land.  
Memories of fallen friends,  
of forgotten joys  
and sacrificed feelings  
fuel my soul and  
strengthen my will.



Into the field I march,  
my eyes fixed on the horizon,  
my feet avoiding those before me  
that have long ago given into the darkness.

My reward is not land,  
my motivation is not greed,  
hope is my companion  
that guides me through this war  
freedom has never met me...

A thing I would die to meet.

### Memories of My Father Donald by Eric Geurts

I've spoken to you many times,  
and you've always been there,  
listening to my every worry.  
I still see the flashbacks . . .  
I stand at your grave now a grown man,  
putting the flag into the ground,  
still seeing the picture in my head,  
of the last time I saw you.

I looked out our neighbor's window,  
saw the house ablaze,  
the lights of the fire trucks,  
the yells of the people.

But most of all,  
the faces etched in memory . . .

Mom getting the news,  
looking at everyone's reaction.  
Without a word to me, I knew.

Blinking fast in my head,

St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church,

Three coffins,

Brian on the left,

Matthew on the right,

and you in the middle.

### Deadline by Marc Sundemeyer

I don't know how it happened,  
I was just sitting there at the terminal.  
I don't know how it could be,  
That the ink had stained me so.

The words flow across the page, yet they lack order.  
My blood fills with the ink,  
And my mind is poisoned by the chaos.  
Reading is no longer a peaceful act.

With my feet chained to the table  
In a dungeon of carpet and wooden desks,  
I groan as I must type what the ink compels me to.  
The issue must come out, it must for me to survive.

The ink will drain me  
For every page I write.  
The newspaper will finally kill me  
Unless I finish this tonight.

### Now What? by Nancy Moose

All these years of experience... of life...  
of challenges...

All these years of practice... of learning...  
of loving...

All these years of watching... of trying...  
of searching.

All these years. *All these years!*

Why don't I know what I want to be when I grow up?



Mandy  
by Michael Reese

How ya'll doing today? Gooooo?  
I'm Mandy, the femalewrangler and I've got to tell ya'll how  
happy I am you all are here.  
*Fucking kids.*  
*I hate this place.*  
*If they handed me my check, I'd be gone.*  
How was dinner? Gooooo.  
Why don't you all follow me over to the corral . . . ?  
Now being Sitting Bull Eagle Butte Rodeo Queen, I know a  
thing about horses,  
Here's how I'll be 'spectin' you to treat yer horses while yer  
here . . .  
You got all that?  
Good. Now let's go on out for a ride.  
Well, I go to Eagle Butte Community College, I'm gonna be an  
English teacher.  
What do you want to be?  
Hun, you got to pull back on them reins, or he'll run away from  
you.  
Hun, if you can't hold your horse back, I won't let your riding  
group lope,  
and they'll hate you and make fun of you all week long.  
Thank you all for coming on the ride.  
Hope you had fun, see ya'll tomorrow.  
*I hate this place.*

Information  
by Rick L. Janssen

information  
imprint

INFORMATION

probe  
time  
reveal  
future  
past  
present  
total  
transparency  
paralysis  
real  
madness



Civil War  
by Jim Janke

From Sumter at the start of battle  
When cannons roared and sabers rattled

With Grant and Lee and George McClellan,  
And Pickett, Pope, and William Sherman,

Manassas Junction, Yellow Tavern,  
Antietam Creek, the hill at Malvern,

The Wilderness and Chickamauga,  
Mechanicsville and Chattanooga,

From Gettysburg in Pennsylvania  
To Saylor's Creek and Spotsylvania,

The Rapidan and Rappahannock,  
The Mississippi, General Hancock,

Cold Harbor, Wilson's Creek, and Shiloh,  
The Rebel yell and Yankee bellow,

And Beauregard, Atlanta, Vicksburg,  
And Sheridan, the Landing Pittsburg,

Some goober peas and hardtack crackers,  
Some heroes, cowards, soldiers, slackers,

With Jackson, Custer, Stuart, Longstreet,  
A bugle blaring, marching drumbeat,

At Fredricksburg, Fort Pillow, Richmond,  
And Chancellorsville and surely Bull Run,

With Hooker, Hill, and Hood and Fremont,  
And Rosecrans, Reynolds, Burnside, Dupont,

At Lookout Mountain, Bloody Angle,  
In Devil's Den or thicket tangle,

At Cemetery Ridge or corn field,  
Wherever men refused to say, "Yield."

Gray ironclads or Union gunboats,  
The Rebel foot or men in bluecoats,

A million men and then another  
Fought neighbor friend and even brother,

From savage fight to moments tender,  
From op'ning shot to grim surrender:

Ungodly slaughter.

Old House  
by Summer Gross

Down a forgotten hallway  
of dead pictures,  
of lives once breathing  
covered in darkness,  
like a thick blanket.

I intrude upon a room  
clouded in a collage of gray shadows,  
the room sits empty.  
I squint to see

a lone table standing in a dusty corner  
in the company of an old chair,  
low and forlorn.

The table holds the memory  
of a cracked rose in a dead vase.  
A spider scurries across the table  
at the creak of my eyes.



## Pain!

by Malcolm Spaulding

Pain,  
 Pain comes....  
 Then it goes.  
 When does it end?  
 Has it just begun?  
 The pain in my head  
 The pounding inside  
 It's hard to hide.  
 The feelings....  
 Frustrations....  
 Fight or give in?  
 Pounding and pumping  
 Cold then warm  
 The burning sensation  
 Down deep....  
 No one knows  
 The truth!  
 The beauty  
 The sensitivity of...  
 One's pain inside.

## Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo

by Cristy Rohla

Dee  
 Long sleek legs,  
 "Wa-su-zo-tean-o!"  
 Her nice clothes, full-figure, and pretty smile shine,  
 She struts closer  
 "No marna, not 'Dee,' Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!"  
 Her smooth face painted with make-up,  
 smiling selfishly.  
 "I couldn't bear it any longer being named after the people who  
 oppress me."  
 As usual, greed overcomes her,  
 "Can I have these old quilts?"  
 She strokes her desire,  
 her devious eyes stare at the quilts and then at her sister.  
 "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday  
 use."  
 Her ears can't believe what she is hearing,  
 Her mouth stands open in astonishment,  
 "But they're priceless!"  
 She stabs remarks at her sister,  
 and then at her marna.  
 Dee returns to the finer things in life,  
 things marna and sister could care less about.



Urges of Danger  
by Marc Sundermeyer

He is so close to me  
In my mind he touches me.  
The feel of his skin to mine  
The breath upon my cheek.

I lie in bed dreaming  
While he lies down beside me.  
We laugh at the sound of thunder  
And cry when it rains.

We hold each other in symbolic embrace.  
Not knowing when we shall part,  
To face those that fear, those that hate.  
We kiss good bye and leave in peace.

Clueless  
by Angela DeJong

When I think about you I explode.  
I am very mysterious:  
To read me you need a code.  
Sure, I have been hurt before,  
But this time don't close the door.  
You fall for me, but I can't clearly see.  
My heart beats for you,  
But still, I have no clue.  
I am happy,  
I am sad,  
I am trapped,  
And I am glad  
When it comes to guys,  
I am so confused.  
If I am around you,  
I feel so amused.  
All of the time, it's so hard to tell.  
I wish love was as easy as ringing a bell.

Cowboy  
by Edward M. Smedsrud

The cowboy leans on the old wooden gate  
with his leg half bent and his hat on straight.  
He stares at the sunset with a half a grin,  
and drinks the last swallow of his bottle of gin.

His face is leathery from the dust and the sun;  
some days have been hard and others been fun.  
He pulls out a smoke and thinks a minute or two,  
he strikes a match on his old horse's shoe.

He's been working the range since he was eight;  
he never had time for pleasure or mates.  
His father died young and left him the place;  
the amount of hard work shows well on his face.

His hands are all callused and cut up and torn.  
His clothes are dusty and dirty and worn.  
His body does ache each and every day,  
as he looks to tomorrow he must stack up the hay.

He stomps out his smoke into the ground,  
and hops on his horse for one last go round.  
He checks on the cattle and closes the gate,  
his day is now over and morning can't wait.



# The Reflection Behind the Mirror

by Jodie Harn

What you see in me  
is a happy child.  
One who never frowns,  
never complains, never cries.  
Always a smile you see  
lighting up this face.  
Happy thoughts and laughter  
from this voice you hear.  
You come to me  
when you need a friend  
a shoulder to cry on  
someone to share with.  
I only wish you could see someone,  
someone other than the reflection in the mirror.  
My smiles are self-protection  
to keep my mind from troubles.  
My laughter, cries  
for a new beginning.  
My lack of complaint a sign  
nothing is right.

The dreams of the reflection in the mirror  
are that you will be my friend,  
my shoulder to cry on,  
my someone to share with.  
But the real dreams  
are that I will forget  
all that makes me cry,  
all that makes me complain,  
all that makes me frown  
and no one will see the reality  
behind the reflection.

Willie  
by Dorothy Steward

His work is unique.  
"Nobody else would fix it."  
Grease on his face and under his fingernails.  
"You get stumped."  
Unrolling his spine and pushing back his cap.  
"But you've got to be a little calm, a little patient, and figure out  
why."  
Willie sees himself as a visionary.  
"That airplane was made back before many people thought air-  
planes should look that way."  
He takes the plane delicately in his gigantic, powerful hands.  
"I was about eleven years old when I carved that out."  
Willie is the premium mechanic in the commonwealth.  
"I've worked for the farmers for so long, I can't turn them  
away."  
Exhausted by the long hours in the shop.  
"Their work comes ahead of anything else."  
His satisfaction comes from the simple problem solving in his  
daily work.  
"Things are broken or worn in different ways—they each have  
their own characteristics."



## Left Over

By Angela Ulmer

The bell rang.  
 We flowed out of the front doors  
 like water breaking free of a dam.  
 I ran smiling beside my friends,  
 my spelling paper with the little gold star  
 securely placed in my backpack  
 awaiting its placement onto the sacred refrigerator door.  
 I ran to my favorite swing,  
 joining the rest of the kids  
 for a few minutes of play.  
 I glanced around frequently,  
 looking for that familiar splash of red  
 to pull up along the fence.  
 Each time I looked up  
 the number of my playmates decreased  
 until I was left alone,  
 swinging back and forth.  
 I pulled my stocking cap snugly around my ears  
 and ventured to the other side of the building  
 No red.  
 I sat down on the cold ground next to the building.  
 The playground was quiet,  
 except for the sound of dead leaves  
 whisking across the black asphalt.  
 The playground was empty,  
 except for me.  
 I waited.  
 I finally heard a voice call my name,  
 but it wasn't the voice I had been waiting for.

## Apology

By Dianna Torson

I survived. I survived the week so  
 far. Above the clouds now, I walk the  
 earth in timeless space; relive  
 the week and see bright February  
 flash of yellow low across your vision  
 plane, black throat patch echoing  
 silence. Diving down. It was the  
 message we missed; unable to decipher.  
 Listen to the meadowlark they say it  
 can speak Lakota. But we don't know  
 the language and it takes us longer to  
 untangle the translation. When it  
 crashed we couldn't hear that yellow  
 silent song. We could not hear the  
 earnestness of earth.



## Victim

by Marc Sundermeyer

Another THUMP of dirt falls upon my face  
 And pinpoints of stars are drowned by the worms.  
 With hands bound in rope and mouth gagged with cloth  
 I scream in restricted rage.

He took me here, to show me a trick  
 And then he hit me, and sliced me,  
 he tied me then left me.  
 I scream in silent rage.

Another THUMP lands softly above.  
 Worms wiggle into my ears  
 Gophers nuzzle to my warm feet.  
 I scream and dirt falls in my mouth.

The air is leaving me,  
 I choke in pain  
 And dream of my love  
 My love so fair.  
 I scream, until the end of time.

## Spring

by John Nelson

"Think of me," she says,  
 and brings flowers, gets up early  
 to turn everything green—the grass, the trees,  
 bushes that were sticks in the snow.

You begin to forget how you lay in bed,  
 watching the leafless trees  
 bending in the blowing winter.  
 You forget how, less than a year ago,  
 sweating in bed at night,  
 you wondered what it would all come to at last.

Once again you want to spend all day  
 with the spring, all night as well.

You want to be good for her,  
 you go jogging, lose weight,  
 learn to waterski again  
 and ride your bicycle.

You plant a bigger garden,  
 go to parades all summer long.

You find yourself looking to the sky  
 for everything.

You forget how, last time,  
 in August, she arrived later each morning,  
 the peonies fell,

weeds invaded the garden.

One night the frost came and killed  
 everything, and you knew

when she came back briefly in September,  
 nothing was the same, and then it was over,

and she was living somewhere in South America.



Daddy Warbucks  
by Gerald Lange

"All I care about is  
money and power and I hate kids!"  
grows Daddy Warbucks  
(before his redemption).

But is he  
happy?

Like the Dead Sea  
he devours fresh  
waters, letting  
none escape.

So inexorable heat  
of sun over time  
evaporates pristine vapors  
leaving him salty, alkali, and sterile!

Annie says: "Love kids,  
use money and power to nurture,  
educate and inspire them!"  
Then like the Sea of Galilee  
the life-giving waters that  
gathered  
find release to refresh  
everyone down stream.

Looking Up  
by Nancy Moose

Life spirals around me, with me.  
The spiral staircase slowly spins upward into  
nothingness,  
And I can't stop stepping, stepping, stepping up  
Into the spiral above me where now Mom and Dad  
Step closer and closer to that last disappearing  
stair.

Slow the spiral. Slow the spin.

Once Grandma and Grandpa stepped bravely  
toward the top,  
Following *their* parents to the edge.  
Now only my parents stand between me and  
oblivion—heaven—?

Slow the spiral. Slow the spin.

Below me, laughing and smiling—unaware,  
My children push on, stepping vigorously,  
unwittingly.  
They don't yet see the end.  
And on the bottom, spiraling out of the  
nothingness beneath  
Toddles my grandson, innocently joining the helix  
of his life.

Slow the spiral. Slow the spin.

Don't let me fall off too soon.



## My Mother, My Self by Jennifer Mertens

"He hasn't hit well all season. Let's see if he can even connect. I wonder where Tommy picked this kid up? I bet he's some rookie right out of college with no experience under serious pressure." My mother harumphed and settled herself more firmly onto the aluminum bleachers. "Come on! Concentrate! Earn your paycheck!" She hollered at number 26, who was neither a kid, nor a rookie, nor was he playing for the LA Dodgers, my mother's favorite team since they left Brooklyn. She says that any team that preferred living out West to anywhere east of the Mississippi, especially in the shadow of the snotty, too-big-for-their-briches Yankees, is a smart team and therefore, a team worth cheering for. Or she used to say it. Before.

"What kind a strike zone you got there, Ump? From the top of the helmet to the bottom of the cleat? That was no strike! Can you believe that, Katie?"

"It's Maureen, Mom." I automatically corrected her, still hoping that something besides baseball could get through to her. She squinted at me through her thick, brown-framed glasses, her green eyes once so lively with humor were now confused as they tried to match the face to the name. She then glared at me and turned back to the game.

"Come on, rookie. This ain't practice! This is the majors!"

I'm tempted to tell her, again, that this isn't the Dodgers; it's the Tucson Armadillos. I'm tempted to remind her that this is opening day and there hasn't *been* a season yet. I'm tempted to condescendingly explain that not only is that not Tommy Lasorda in the dugout, but that Tommy Lasorda doesn't even coach the Dodgers anymore. But I don't. I bite back the sarcasm and the frustration and the hurt. I swallow the bitterness and the resentment and the rage. I try to abolish the "Why me's?" and the "Why now's?" and the "Why her's?" from my consciousness. But they still linger and pierce the shell of acceptance I have constructed because the subconscious is beyond my control and acceptance is so difficult sometimes.

My mother has Alzheimer's disease. Some days are

better than others. Sometimes I walk in her room at Siever's Rest Home, and she greets me like the daughter she knows—the daughter that inherited her love of words, of books, of animals, and of travel, but not, unfortunately, her love of baseball. We talk about my brother Brock and his wife Erica. Whom we love, but why did she have to be from Maine which is so far away from home. We talk of how it's even farther now since I insisted that she move down to Tucson near me. We talk about her only grandchildren, my two nephews Toby and Michael. With emphasis on the *only*, of course, for, so far, I have failed to find a man to share my life with, to grow old with, *to have children with*. After all, all my friends, and most of her friends' kids did. At least the ones she liked.

We talk of the people back home and the people she's met at the Siever's. We talk of the heat. And, we talk of baseball. But my mother's concentration is not what it used to be. She tends to drift off in the middle of a sentence or start on a totally different topic that we have already discussed. A conversation with her could last up to fifteen minutes or never start at all.

She often calls me by her sister's name. The family always said that Aunt Katie and I could have been twins. I take after my mom's side of the family. My curly red hair, freckles, and near-sightedness label me an Irish O'Hare more than my last name, Reich, labels me German. In black and white photos, my mom and I could almost be mistaken for the same person, but her hair is brown and her eyes green and that sets us apart. Eye color is the only physical trait I inherited from my father: a warm, dark brown chocolate when we're happy and stormy black when we're angry. That and a sense of guilt that all Catholics seem to be born with are the heritage of my loving but distant father.

Because I look so much like my mother's sister who died when she was twenty-four, my mother often asks me if I'm the Ghost of Christmas Past. That is, when she doesn't spend the whole time visiting with me as if I had grown up with her as a sibling and not as a daughter.

"I wonder when Bud will get here," my mom questions me and searches the stands for a glimpse of that familiar someone that she was married to for thirty-nine years.



"I don't know, Mom." I don't even attempt to bring her into the present, now. I know that my dad didn't even like baseball when he was living. Smiling to myself, I find a little macabre humor in the thought that if Dad wouldn't watch a baseball game while he was alive, there sure isn't a chance he'd watch one with us now.

"Strawberry's hitting .307, maybe he'll be able to help out that rookie on first. These kids nowadays don't know how to steal. They're too cocky, too careless. Give me Jackie Robinson any day." She branches off in the same vein with similar, yet even more mistaken information. "Did you know they're on a winning streak? This is the Dodgers' first home game after winning four on the road." She smiles at me throwing out facts and figures of the sport with an ease that is sadly wasted on her non-athletic daughter.

"Really? But Mom, this isn't the Dodgers, it's the Armadillos. Remember? Tucson's minor league team?" She looks at me like I'm speaking French. Spanish she could've understood. She decides to ignore what I've said and turns to encourage the team moving to the outfield, who are not in the cherished blue but in Tucson's green and tan. Or maybe she has already forgotten what I said.

"Come on, Ryan! Rock-and-fire! Rock-and-fire!" I have no idea who she's cheering for now. Neither Ryan Sandburg nor Nolan Ryan ever played for the Dodgers, neither did Darryl Strawberry for that matter, at least I don't think so. I also have no idea what "Rock-and-fire" means.

I've heard my mother yell this at players for as long as I can remember. I grew up on baseball. I remember my mother grabbing the bag of seeds and the water jug and hopping in the car to drive to wherever Brock was playing. I watched my brother and countless others through T-ball, Midgets, Teeners, Legion, college and finally, the amateur team (the KC Cannons) during the summers before he graduated from college, got married and moved to Augusta. I sat in the stands and cheered for victory until my voice was hoarse, my legs scabbed from mosquito bites, my nose sunburned beyond redemption, and my lips cracked from the heat, wind, and sunflower seeds. I felt miserable when he lost the state championship in his senior year

of high school and elated when he received a scholarship to Pepperdine to play baseball. But during all this I resented, not my brother and his success, but my mother.

I felt unneeded and unwanted. I felt that nothing I could do would ever compare to the exhilaration my mother felt at seeing her flesh and blood triumph at her passion. And though she never missed a play or a band concert of mine, I felt that she did it only because she felt she had to and not because she enjoyed it. To her, Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" was nice, but Harry Carry's "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" was *the* incomparable classic.

I even tried playing baseball once, but I was tall for my age and wasn't quite yet coordinated enough to even walk without tripping let alone swing a bat at the right moment to connect with the ball or to judge where or when a ball coming at my face (at a velocity well above the speed of light) would reach the catchable spot. It took three pairs of broken glasses, several black eyes and one broken nose before I collected the courage to face the disappointment in my mother's eyes as I informed her that I would never be a baseball player. "Oh, well," she said, "baseball's not for everybody."

"What a catch! Way to go, Jones! Nice snag!" My mother was now cheering for the opponents and we caught a few glares from the crowd. I wasn't sure whether it was because the centerfielder was not named Jones or because we were sitting in the Armadillo section.

"That'll show those Cardinals!" My mother was closer this time: the white and red uniforms of the San Jose Wildcats did resemble those of the St Louis Cardinals.

"Honey, you need a haircut! How many times have I told you that hair that long isn't attractive if it's as curly as yours? I'm only saying this for your own good. I hope you'd tell me if I didn't look my best."

The lady who was speaking to me was wearing a full-length navy skirt, complete with hose and dress shoes complemented with a ratty green "My Son is the Shortstop" sweatshirt from back when Brock was in Legion, or maybe Teeners. I had asked her about her outfit when I picked her up and she had replied, "If the day ever comes when I need fashion advice from



someone in *shorts* call the men in the white jackets!" Would that be 911?

"I'm hungry, get me a hot dog," she commanded over her shoulder, her attention still on the game.

"Mom, you don't like hot dogs."

"Well, I think a body ought to know what it likes and don't likes, and I love their hot dogs! So could you quit flapping your trap and get me a hot dog!"

I should have remembered how my mother hated to be corrected almost more than she hated hot dogs.

"With onions, relish, and lots of mustard!" Before Alzheimer's my mother wouldn't even allow mustard in her house let alone on her food. Oh, well, just another thing that has changed since this disease ravaged her mind.

I stood in line and tried to remember the woman who had always encouraged me to do my best, be my best, the lady who when I told her I wanted to go to college said that the sky was my limit. And when I told her I had chosen to get my degree in English, she told me that of course I could, it was a great idea, but maybe I should get my teaching degree too, though, just in case.

My mother had always been my standard. I wanted to be as beautiful as she was and I tried in vain to scrub off, peel off, and sunburn off the cursed freckles. With my first babysitting wages I bought hair dye and tried to darken the red curls I hated. And when I ended up with green hair, my mom said that there wasn't any damage that two weeks and a hat wouldn't cure. I had her face but not her beauty, I had her build but not her grace, I was reasonably sure I had her maternal love but not her friendship nor her faith in my future.

My mother had gone to college when most of her friends did not. However, she went for only one year before she returned to her hometown to marry my dad, her high school sweetheart. She said that she didn't realize people would lend her money to actually go to school and that's why she didn't continue her education. "My life, my love, were here." I never asked her how come loaning money to Aunt Katie to finish her education was okay but loaning money to her when it came her turn was not. And now I could never ask.

I wanted to marry my high school sweetheart, too. But when I found him holding hands at a romantic restaurant with another coed four weeks into our second semester of college, I decided that maybe that was a goal I would forego. And so, after one year of college, I didn't know what else to do but keep going to class. When anyone asked me what my major was, I always said "English." That's what my mother's had been the one year she went. It's a good thing we shared that interest because it was the summer of my junior year before I realized I was going to graduate in a year and had no idea what I going to do. Once again, I asked myself, "What would my mother do?" It took me years to realize that even if I thought that my mother was the most perfect woman in the world, the one thing I could do better than her was to be myself. Besides, I sure wasn't any good at being her.

I bought the hot dog and garnished it with the comments suggested but bought a bag of sunflower seeds on the off chance she remembered she didn't like hot dogs, mustard or no.

"Who're you? You can't sit there, my husband is sitting there. Our son is playing right field and he's one of the best hitters on the team."

Oh wow, not only had she totally forgotten me, she thought Dad and Brock were here and worse than that, she had gotten Brock's position wrong. Some things you never forget—your name, your native language, whether or not your allergic to water. My mom had never forgotten such an integral part of her knowledge.

"Mom, it's me, Maureen, I brought you your hot dog just like you asked."

"Maureen, have you completely lost your senses? You know I don't like hot dogs! And what did you put on it? Mustard! Yuck! Maureen, whatever possessed you to buy that! You know how much fat is in hot dogs? It'll go straight to your hips and then Danny Mundelein will never ask you to the prom!" She abruptly turned back to the game. "Come on, Dodgers! Pull it together!"

I wanted to cry. Then the humor of the situation struck me—here I was, at a game I didn't care about, in a sport I didn't like, in the company of a raving lunatic with a \$3 hot dog no-



body wanted with the most malodorous condiments known to mankind. How could this person, whom I had loved, respected, even idolized become such a cantankerous old woman, a stranger to me? Why would I never get to ask her if she loved me, if I had done enough, if she had any regrets? Why did she remember Brock and Dad as if they had just left and she couldn't remember my name even though she told me when I was a child that Maureen O'Hara was her favorite actress? Why didn't I get the chance to settle old fights, soothe ancient hurts, apologize for tearing her cherished handmade lace shawl that had been brought all the way from Ireland by Grandma Dunlap? Why can't I tell her that I feel like a failure sometimes? Why is she taken away from me in spirit but not in body? Could death be worse than becoming a parent to my parent as she became a child to her child? Why did this proud, fun-loving, intelligent, energetic woman have to be disgraced like this? What had we done to deserve this? Where was God now and how could he let this happen?

The game was winding down to its rousing 12-1 finish with the home team, sadly, defeated. People gathered their hats and coats and began the slow straggle towards the exits.

"Well, maybe the Armadillos will do better this weekend. Maureen, are you ready? I do appreciate you bringing me here, I know you don't much care for baseball." She stood and looked down at me expectantly. "Time to get back to the Siever's. It's just about supertime. Don't you have a date?"

"Y-Yes," I stuttered. Where was the woman who had not long ago refused to let me sit beside her and talked of a boyfriend and proms that were fifteen years gone?

We walked back to the car as Mom began talking about how that Rabern kid on second had done pretty well and what a great hit Anderson had had since it scored Tucson's only run. Rabern was a dentist in Pierre now, but he had played second base, and Anderson was on the team but he was the batboy. Mom continued to chatter in a reasonably rational sort of way about the game and the traffic. I pulled into the parking lot at Siever's and put the car in Park.

"Oh, you don't have to walk me in. I'm sure you're in a hurry. Maureen, I want to tell you how proud I am of you. You

are so bright and so beautiful, I am almost jealous of the things you get to do. I wish I had had your faith in myself at your age. I never regret marrying your father but I do regret not living a little before I did. I can't rightly claim to take credit for the wonderful person you are today but I can try."

Tears came to my eyes as I tried to form words around the lump in my throat. "Mom, I love you. Thank you for everything you did for me and still do."

"Well, now, don't cry. It makes your eyes get all red. That's so unattractive." She opened the door to the car and stepped out. As I brushed the tears away and tried to come to terms with what I had just heard, my mother leaned back into the car and said, "Maureen, I love you, too."



## You Might Be a Farmer's Wife . . .

by Jim McKeown

If your name is taped to the side of a cakepan

If a "night out" involves the local 4-H club

If the word auction makes you tingle

If you've ever washed your kids or the dishes with a pressure washer

If "picking rock" is considered a chance to get out of the house

If "wild game" reminds you of dinner and not the bedroom

If the "fresh ingredients" your recipe calls for reminds you to do the chores

If taking lunch to the field is as close as you get to a picnic

If your rock garden was hand-picked

If you can mend a pair of pants and the fence that ripped them

If your tan lines are somewhere below your shoulder and above your elbow

If "Lacey" or "Frilly" refers to a farm animal but not your nightgown

If you ever went on a date to the rodeo

If being taken out to dinner has ever included a talk by a seed corn dealer

If your mailbox looks like a piece of machinery

If your kids' wading pool has ever doubled as a stock tank, or vice versa

If duct tape is always on your shopping list

If the tractor and the combine have air conditioning and an FM radio but your car doesn't

If your farm equipment has the latest global positioning technology and you still can't find your husband

If you've ever grown your own wall decorations

If you've ever said, "Oh, it's only a little mud."

If you need a pair of vice grips to run a household appliance

If your husband gave you flowers, but you had to plant the seeds yourself

If you've ever discovered a batch of kittens in your laundry basket

If dinner is at noon and lunch is before and after dinner

If your job in town is considered a farm subsidy.