



DRAWING BY TOM PIASKOWSKI

LEARNING FAMILY THERAPY

It was the final evening of the three-day family therapy workshop; and that was the sixth in the series over two years, this group trying to learn that infant craft. The presenters were mostly anecdotal, but tried to say some rules and structure, some ways to keep your feet on the ground in the smoke and thunder of a fully engaged family. We played roles and carefully steered clear of references to our own families, of the pain we'd endured or caused, the meanness in our hearts, the unmet needs, the loss. These artifices gave us beginners a chance to confront our fear, tongues-tied and anxious sweats as we tried to formulate something relevant, if not intelligent, to say to this inauthentic mish-mash of hostile actors in poorly scribbled scenes.

After dinner, the large man in the plaid shirt kept to himself, trying to read one of the few books in the field. The pony-tailed presenter from Marin approached to tell him that he had just spoken to the man's wife, who had telephoned to say the man's father had died of a heart attack. The man looked blank, tears welling. The therapist, of course, presented a hug which the man endured. Later, he couldn't remember saying, "I'm going."; or walking down the dark hall to pack and hurry home in the rain.

A FATHER'S VISIT

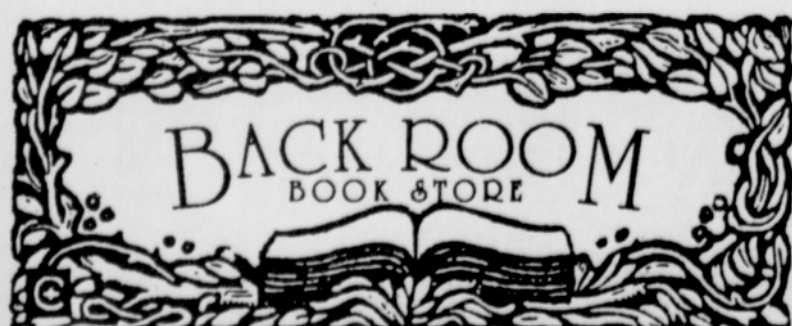
The old man reached to me;
I pushed away.
Bitter words I spat;
and he didn't have to take this.
In a corner of my mind I thought
there'd be time to sort out
who's father and who son,
and whose fault and what was done.
But before I knew our time's
used up.
Now I'll choke on I love you
till I'm gone.

FALL CHINOOK

The River is bleak today,
Same grey as yesterday.
A single salmon swimming by,
Up to spawn and die.
They never get to see
Their sweet smolts swim down,
Get schooled, make bad marriages,
Swallow hooks, entangle in nets,
Ending up on the seafood shelves at Safeway.
They never think,
If only I could be there
To guide them and steer them clear...
Going up to spawn and die.

LONG-DISTANCE

My son called last night.
He was trying to smile and deny me my share of his grief.
He told me he had options and he was shaking off the weights
that hold him down.
His dreams are still big, even as his friends
disperse to their minor gigs.
And love eludes him, though he has a date.
"Bye Dad. I love you; she's at the door."



Mary Lewis
325-9722 • 1052 Commercial, Astoria, OR 97103

HARRY JOHNSON

THE WINDOW

I leave the window open far too long.
It's October and fog and overcast and a light
North breeze.
But I have a feeling it will warm up again today.
After a couple of false starts in February,
I open it in April to let in the first fresh air.
By now my papers have blown around the room
For the twentieth time,
And paperback books are curling their covers,
With the top one held down by my old two-bladed
Case knife.
I bought it on the little boat-store which came
Alongside the ore boat in Duluth Harbor.
I have a fondness for it,
Even though it's been replaced in daily use by
A thin, plastic-handled Gerber which doesn't
Set off airport metal detectors.
Lucky I'm not as dangerous as my dreams.

SPIDER

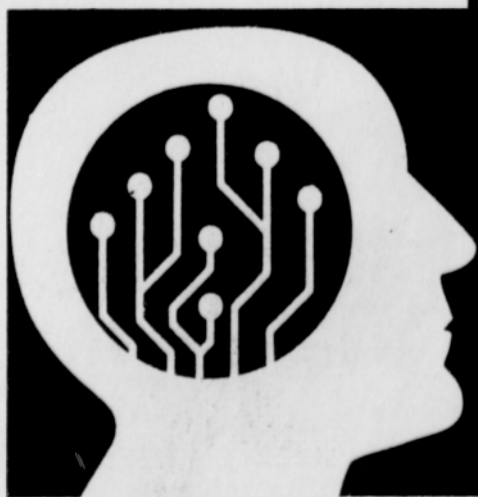
Outside my third floor window I can see
the top of a holly tree.
A smallish spider has spun his web
in the breezy branches at the tip of the top.
He must be thirty feet above the ground.
Did he, I wonder, make the climb,
searching and bypassing more ordinary sites?
Or was he born up here like a Sherpa in Nepal,
his life in the heights,
where thoughts of more sensible locales
never enter his mind?
Was he driven to cast his net farthest from the shore
by dwindling stocks, or competition,
or by bullies saying, "Don't stop here"?
Or, is he the most macho catcher of them all,
the most secure on the high iron,
the least unnerved by fear of the fall,
who sets his net to snatch the very bugs of Heaven?

TOURISTS

Stopped at the overlook atop the head,
with a little cove and Oregon coast rocky shore below.
Tourists stop and photograph and ooh and
"Does that hole go clear through the rock?" (It does.)
Three women in their 60s I guess; hard to tell;
and a little old man of half the mass of the large woman
who guides him and points out the sights and makes sure
he doesn't miss anything.
Even as she talks to the other women she maintains a hand
on him, or an arm around his frail shoulders.
As if he might take flight or be breezed away from her and
she'd have to chase him down like an old fedora
skipped along the parking lot by a seaward gust.
When they've had enough of this calendar sight,
he toddles off toward the car, and she, unable to get up
beside him, hooks a finger in his belt loop and keeps them
steady, on course.

AUGUST

It's Sunday afternoon, sunny and cool;
Strange for this time of year.
I missed a lot this weekend:
The Regatta Parade, the Democrats Picnic, the Gun Show.
Our sheriff, I'm told, looked heroic on his big tan horse
(probably a palmino), leading an impressive posse.
They say the posse was followed by a bagpipe band from Tacoma,
who later blessed and stirred the Schooner Tavern
with amazing grace.
Then followed a group of girl twirlers and batonistes
in shorts which showed their thick strong legs and
their disdain for vanity fair and painted pouty anorexia.
Love me or leave me the way I am, I refuse to shame and
hate my body; I've got stuff to do.
I twirl and march high-step, and care for my animals for 4-H
and the Fair.
I play with friends and think about things and brush my hair.
Of the other events I've not heard a peep.
Both were in Seaside which seems not to sleep.
But I've felt the breeze touch my face like a blind friend
making a map so she can find me if I'm struck dumb.



Harry Johnson appears as a poet for the first time in the NCTE. He has regularly contributed articles and essays, among them a series of *What's Wrong* problems in trade pacts, economics, healthcare, welfare and education. He lives in Astoria.

Tom Piaskowski's art has previously been featured in the Times Eagle (April 1987 & August 1992). He also lives in Astoria.