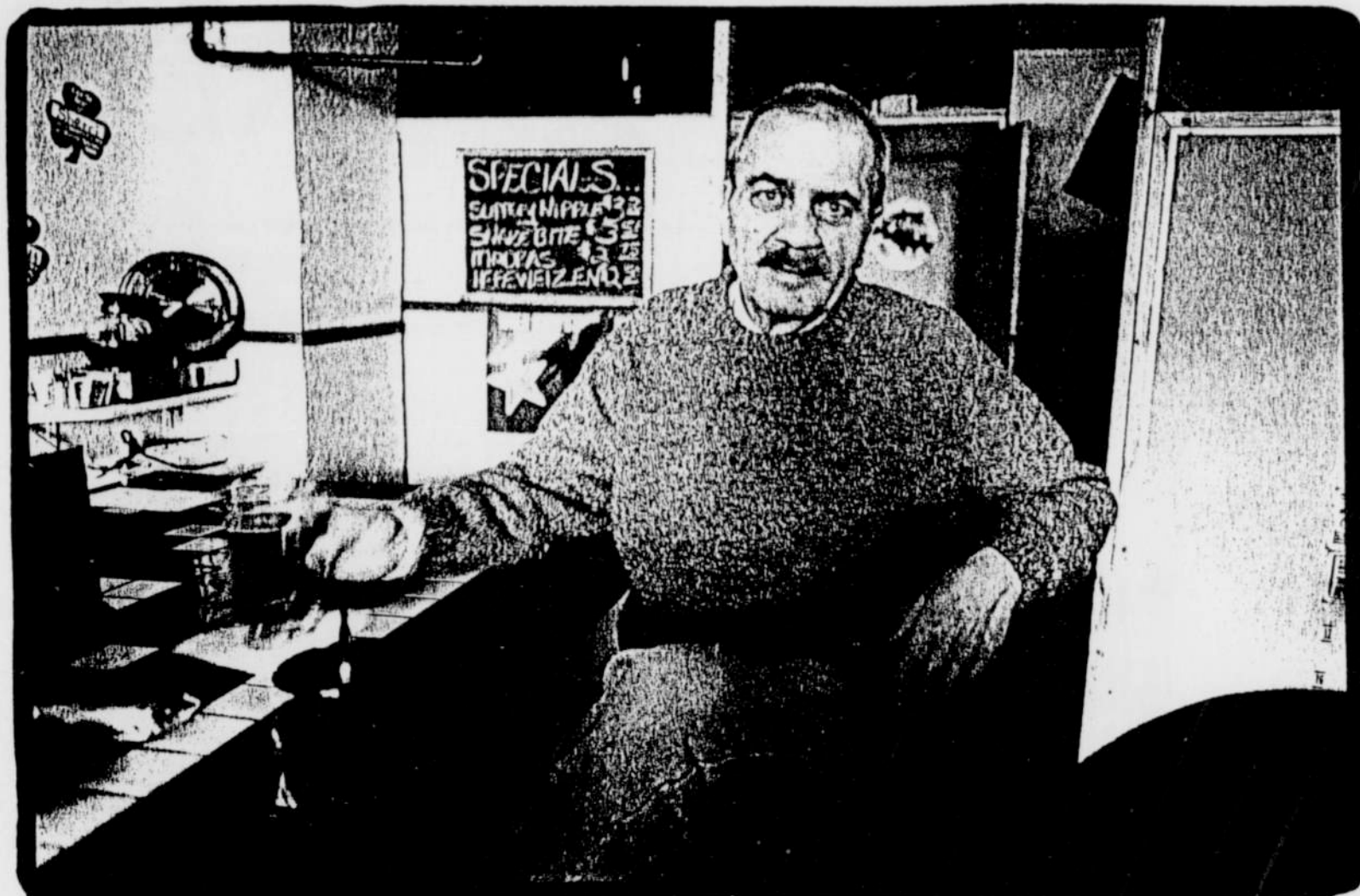




PHOTOGRAPH BY GENE FAULKNER

VERSE FOR OLDER CHILDREN

EARTHLINGS

Do not volunteer truths,
these will make them pale.
Do not disturb fantasies.
If one smiles, smile in turn.
If you are spoken to, listen.
Do not look at them for long.
This they take as staring,
causing crotch panic.
Do not look closely at them.
They are angry enough
even when smiling.

P.O. BOX 424

If I don't find someone
to share me with soon,
I may turn on myself
and bite my own ass!

FURNISHED ROOM (WRITER'S BLOCK)

The Muse whispered at the keyhole of his mind.
He let her in, cautioning about the clutter.
She smiled and unzipped a corner of the room,
unzipped the ceiling and down the farther end.
They stood in other walls of his head.
She urged against one wall and another,
raising the ceiling to an outer world.
He complained of the dark and cold,
standing in other walls of his head.
An axe was swung in all directions.
The room reduced to a child's toy block,
the Muse fled through the keyhole of his mind
as he stood in the four walls of his head.

AT THE ROUND TABLE

Seated and dressed
in that particular pride
of men who have been tried
and passed the test,
they would meet for breakfast.
Longtime knights
of the neighborhood.
Appetites
whetted by a good fare of memory.
Their shared treasury.
Pancakes and eggs and hashing through
ball games
business deals
World War II.
They accepted the strangeness
of all the changes
that were occurring
while they were maturing.
And held their exemplars:
devoted to Buicks
but generous critics
of their children's imported cars.
Materialists. In the best sense.
Past tense and present tense.

~MIKE McCAULEY

TO A SKID ROW WAITRESS

Give us your bravest a.m. smile,
wipe the fogged counter of our minds.
Towel up the crumbs of our flaky poems,
ignore the deep-fried disorder of thought.
Dismiss the weak coffee paleness of wit,
forgive the dishwater muck of our words.
But really you season the soup of the day,
you butter both sides of our bread.
Out to the street for whatever spare change,
this day we shall drink to your eyes only.

MICHAEL MARSH, POET

The poem ended,
you lie in your grave
grey with exhaustion.
As in life, unkempt,
wrinkled as your brow
retaining wonder.

THE PARTY IS OVER

All credit cards nationally canceled,
America's Elm Street shades are drawn.
Women and children, under pastel bedding
lie stunned before TV static and snow.
Manly beer bellies soured and gaseous,
the boneheads under hardhats are crushed
as Military/Industrials foreclose on the land.
Now matriarchal scout cookies are crumbled,
the air let out from all our balloons.

CHILD'S PLAY

In a moment of delicious madness
she gleefully undid the knot of his navel.
Undone, his bottom fell to the floor.
Shedding an alarming stuffing,
the rest of him collapsed in her lap.
She fingered the exposed spinal cord
until his jaw began to work at her:
No, he would not forgive, would never forget.
Unforgivable then, never to be forgotten,
gathering his several parts,
she dropped him from a many-storied window.

Waking, tearfully confessing maybe murder,
she is given Kleenex, a hug and a smile.
In the next room, trembling, paler,
Brother's birthday teddy bear is appalled!

BENEATH THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS

In sarcophagus within sarcophagus within sarcophagus
the mummy smiles
thinking of the good times he did have:
the golden days, the nights brighter than gold.
And he smiles recalling the further truth:
all lives are but dreams of the Ancient Ones.

I think I shall never see

A book of verse written by me.

~BILL BERTIN (1973)

Bill Bertin died in Astoria on Monday, December 3 at age 73. He spent the last five years of his life in Astoria after much of it as a merchant sailor, and his youth as an orphan raised in New York. He lived nearly thirty years in Portland.

He did live to see a book of verse written by him, published just before his death by stroke and incipient cancer. The poems on this page are from that book, *Verse For Older Children*, which he had printed for friends, and from other publications such as the North Coast Times Eagle.

I knew him for a long time before he moved to Astoria. I printed many of his poems in the NCTE, and just as often committed typos upon them, which he declared in a favorite phrase, "Shocking horrible!" Just before he died I read a few on KMUN-FM, which Mike McCauley told him about. "I hope he got them right," he said.

I hope I've got them right this time also.

~MICHAEL McCUSKER

WINTER FOR A DEAD POET

No one came by today.
You should have seen the way
the thinner first year trees
stood shaking in the breeze.

No one came by today.
The dog is just a stray
who sometimes comes to tease
by nosing at my knees.

No one came by today.
It seems a waste to play
at whispered rhymes like these
with only me to please.

LOVE STORY

Love me or leave me, she cried!
Leave you? Not ever, he lied.
Say I'm the one, she pleaded.
But of course, he conceded.
Then, later, he loved a lot.
But then, later, she did not.
I was just her toy, he sighed —
the more wounded in his pride.

CULTISTS

Centerpieces
waiting in dark grottos,
drawing the unwary
to dark embrace,
down hollow maws
without echo.

ALL ANIMALS IN CHORUS

There never was a plan
More suitable for Man
Than going to the moon.
May you all leave soon!

ON COOKING A GOOSE

Working from her own recipe,
she peeled the skin all around
exposing trembling sinew and nerve-ends.
Exposing, as well, the purpled hurts,
the yellowed strands of self-rejection.
There a shriveled peach-pit heart,
a quivering liver choked with bile.
After a time she looked it over
Basting with juices simmering darkly.
When all was done she simply left it
Having, really, no appetite for goose.



B. KADRIE, 'NATIVITY' (1968)

MALACHI KEEFE

BORN DEC. 3, 2001
SON OF JENNIFER & PATRICK