

Metamorphoses

2003

## Cocoons and Butterflies

Prize: First Place in Poetry

Author: **Frances A. Cota**

It is fall, and not the time for  
butterflies to be emerging from  
some dark cocoon. Yet, there you  
were, expanding your iridescent  
wings, perched upon a trumpet vine  
next to my door. It would have  
been sheer folly not to invite you in.

If I had known then, what I know now,  
I'd have quietly closed that door and  
watched you secretly from behind the  
slatted blinds until you flew away. But  
bold and brazen I, listened to your  
susurrus murmur, during that florid,  
Indian Summer, knowing winter's cold,  
would cage you here.

By my hearth you deigned to stay.  
Languorous days of laughing; sweet and  
sensuous nights of joy; even the  
wrinkled, gray of fall could not hasten  
you away. But come the full-blown  
storms of winter you heard that call, and  
I awoke and found you gone!  
Chasing! Chasing! Following you,  
I spent myself in wild pursuit.

How could something be so fresh and  
end so soon? And I found you! Yes, I  
found you! Untouchable! Unreachable!  
Cradled soft and warm in your cocoon.

## His Father's Son

Prize: First Place in Short Story

Author: **Frances A. Cota**

They walked toward the campsite  
carrying their gear. He followed his father,  
rubbing the lump on his arm. It throbbed  
and it was black and blue. There was a  
lump on his head too from having his hair  
nearly yanked out, and his ear was still  
red. It was not the worst beating he had  
ever had but he wished it had not pre-  
ceded the camping trip. It only made  
matters worse and increased his hatred for  
his own father. He wondered too, how  
badly she had fared. Her eyes were red  
from crying and she had kept her big  
bathrobe on while she fixed them break-  
fast so he couldn't see if she was hurt  
much. She could have told him he could  
not spend the night, after all, they were  
divorced, but the results would have  
probably been the same. Bart made his  
own rules and they were never easy to  
follow.

"I'll set things up, boy," his father  
growled. "Just get the hell out of my way.  
I'll call you if I need you. And remember  
boy—about last night—I'm not an easy  
man. Hell no! I'm not easy, I'm hard!  
Gotta be hard in this ol' world, ya know."

The child knew only too well what  
his father meant by being *hard*. He wasn't  
just hard. He was cruel, and Bartholomew  
knew that sooner or later his mother  
would suffer. Worse yet, he might even

kill her, and then say, like he always did, "You shouldn'ta' made me mad, Shirley." A lump came into his throat thinking of his beautiful mother and how she had suffered, and as far as he could see now, there wasn't an end to it. The divorce was supposed to have made them free, and it probably would have, if that dumb judge hadn't said that he had to spend one weekend a month with his father. Bart usually used it as an excuse to spend the night. Now he was up here in the mountains and too afraid to even think about what to do. He willed himself not to cry but tears came anyway. They rolled down his cheeks and dripped off his chin and he wiped them away angrily.

The pond lay like a mirror in the hot August sun with only the water cascading down the rock slide disturbing it in any way. It reflected the tall sugar pines and the manzanita that grew along the banks, and they looked black-green against the cerulean, blue sky. Some white, cumulus clouds rose above the mountains to the west, giving the promise of rain - maybe before evening. At eight o'clock in the morning the parking lot was nearly empty. Only two cars stood there, and one of them was covered with dust. It looked like it hadn't been moved all summer.

A necklace of large black ants moved in army-like precision from the carcass of a dead ground squirrel to a crack in the ground where they were transporting minuscule crumbs of the dead

meat to their lair beneath. They were oblivious of a pair of piercing, blue eyes that watched their every move.

Bartholomew sat on a stump and observed. His sun-tanned face was freckled and he had a shock of reddish-brown, curly hair. One lock of it kept falling down in his face. He brushed it back and wiped the sweat from his forehead. "I'm eleven years old and he talks to me like I'm a moron," he muttered to himself.

He hated the way his father always seemed to think he was incapable of doing anything right. In fact, he hated his father. He hated the judge too.

His whole messed up life was really the fault of that judge. He hadn't even asked him what he thought. Just demanded that he obey the orders of the court. If they had let him talk at all in the court room he would have told them how his Dad beat up on his Mother and on him too. The thought of that horrible day in court brought fresh tears. His Mom had just sat there like a zombie, thinking that if she got divorced from him it would all be over. It was never over. Dad still came to the house whenever he wanted to and he had blackened her eyes and knocked her down once. Last night he had heard them in the bedroom arguing. It finally ended with the squeaking of the bed-springs and his Dad's drunken laughter.

A small caterpillar fell from an overhanging leaf and landed in the path of the marauding ants. They were on it in a flash and the worm rolled into a ball trying

to defend itself. Bartholomew picked up a small stick and carefully extricated the caterpillar. He placed it back up on a bigger leaf and watched until it unfolded itself, no doubt surprised to still be alive. The boy smiled. He hated to see some smaller thing hurt by a bigger and stronger enemy, even if it was only a little worm. He looked around at the familiar area. He had been here before but his father didn't know that.

He rubbed the sore spot on his forearm where his father had grabbed and pinched him just that morning. It still throbbed and he knew it would turn into an ugly bruise. "I'll make a man of you yet," his Dad had declared, in his rough voice, as he had jerked him along the gravel path to the campsite. Now he only hoped he wouldn't hurt him again.

He had not often been the recipient of that anger until after the divorce. His mother had taken it when they were still together. If only she was a stronger person, he mused. She had missed two weeks of work and spent two days in the hospital a couple of years ago. She had told them that she fell down a flight of stairs.

A plan began to formulate in Bartholomew's mind and the more he thought about it the more he liked it. He smiled as he pictured the outcome. Then he started to chuckle. It could work, he thought. He knew that his father would shove him down the rock slide. He had taunted him all the way up the mountain,

saying, "Just wait until you see the surprise I have in store for you," and there was no humor in his voice when he said it either.

As Bartholomew sat on the stump he recalled the precious week he had spent in this very same place last summer right after the divorce. His Mom had joined a *Parents Without Partners* club and a whole group of the kids got to go on a camp-out with several of the parents participating as leaders. With the help of a real nice man named James Parsons, he had learned how to go down the rock slide and even how to "shoot the chute".

The rock slide was exactly what its name implied. A huge rock with a path worn smooth by the water. It dropped nearly twenty feet in a twisting curve and then right into a deep mountain pool. The pool was part of the river but it was off to one side and the sizable stream that fed the rock slide meandered through a narrow, deep gap before it emptied into the larger and more dangerous white water.

"Shooting the chute" involved going down the rock slide, then diving deep and going through the chute into the big river but immediately veering off to the right to avoid the rocks and white water. You couldn't go through the chute on the surface though. The rocks hung over the top so close you could get a nasty bump on the head. If you dove deep the channel was wide and smooth and the current carried you swiftly along. When you did it

right you ended up in another small secluded pool where you could get out and go up a short path back to the rock slide again. Bartholomew remembered how scared he had been the first time he went through the chute. James had stayed right beside him though and encouraged him. When they came out in the pool on the other side of the gap they both just sat there and laughed and laughed. More cars were pulling into the camp ground now and there were several families setting up camp.

"Baaaart! Get your ass over here and help me with this tent pole," his father bellowed. Bartholomew ran to help. "I swear to God, boy. If you were any lazier you'd rot on the spot," he hissed, in a quieter voice so as not to be overheard.

Bartholomew was glad when the tent was finally up and most of their gear was put inside. He had helped as much as he could in spite of the constant admonishments from his Dad that he wasn't doing it right.

"I'm going to take a run over to the store to get some more cold beer," his father said.

It was the opening that Bartholomew had been waiting for. He knew after his Dad had drank a few beers they'd head for the rock slide. He'd be ready.

He quickly grabbed a pair of jeans, a tee shirt and his tennis shoes, in addition to his favorite baseball cap. He put most of the money he had taken along in the

pocket of the jeans and wrapped everything carefully in a black plastic bag. He made the package as small as he could so it would not be too obvious and headed down the back path leading to the lower pool. There was no one there at all; he was glad of that. He crawled back a ways into the dense underbrush and hid the package of clothing under some dry leaves, taking care to rearrange the branches after he crawled out. It was still early in the day and he was pretty sure that people would not be "shooting the chute" yet.

Most of the groups that he saw coming in had small children so it was doubtful that anyone would get to the lower pool until later in the afternoon. If his plan worked he'd be home with his Mom by evening and his Dad would be in enough trouble to keep him occupied for a good long while.

Bartholomew walked quickly back to their tent and waited. He wouldn't have had to hurry. It was the better part of an hour before his father came back. He saw the truck as it careened into the parking lot and when his father lumbered out of the seat and swaggered across the blacktop he knew that he had spent the time at that local bar. He was pretty drunk. He'd have to be careful. His Dad could be mean when he was drunk, but it would probably help his plan rather than hinder it.

"Get your swimming suit on, boy," his dad commanded, as he staggered into

the tent, jerking at his belt buckle as he started to undress himself.

Bartholomew did as he was ordered. He put his red shirt on too and he slowly unbuttoned it as they walked down to the rock slide.

"Wait until you see this swimmin' hole boy. You and I are goin' to have a great time," his father muttered. He slapped Bartholomew on the back so hard that he nearly knocked him down. "Remember how you learned to swim, boy?" his Dad bragged. "You never would'a learned if I hadn't just throwed you in at the deep end and let you sink or swim."

Bartholomew remembered it all too well. He was only about five years old and had never been to a swimming pool before. He still had nightmares about the incident. If his Mother hadn't dove in and dragged him out he probably would have drowned. He had been terrified of water after that until just last year at this very same place with James Parsons. After that week of playing and camaraderie he had regained his confidence and was an excellent swimmer now. His father didn't know that though. For that matter, his Mom didn't either. She hadn't seen him swim since last summer.

There were quite a few people around the rock slide by the time they reached it. One pretty lady with three young children stood on the side and watched the children sliding down and splashing into the pool. Some of them were scared at first too.

"Now you're not gonna' be scared and make a fool of yourself, are you, boy?" his father taunted.

"I don't think I want to try it yet, Dad."

"You still a little sissy, chicken liver, Huh?"

"No Dad. I just want to watch for a while," Bartholomew said.

He was watching his Dad carefully trying to guess just exactly when he would finally lose his patience and push him down the slide. When he felt his fathers arm go firmly around his shoulders he knew the time had come.

"I don't want to go, Dad," he said, trying to put fear into his voice.

His father pushed him toward the beginning of the slide, staggering clumsily as he propelled him reluctantly forward. Several of the grown-ups were alerted now, but no one stepped forward to stop him. Bartholomew feigned a cry, and as his father gave him one last shove over the edge and onto the slippery rock, he started to scream. It took only a few seconds to reach the bottom and splash into the water but it was enough time for him to scream out, "No, Dad! No! No! You will kill meeeee!"

Bartholomew landed with a mighty splash into the pool and he thrashed around in a tremendous frenzy. He could hear his Dad hollering up on the bank. "Swim, you stupid little jackass, swim!"

He took one big gulp of air, sank below the surface, and headed for the

chute. In moments he was through the gap and out on the other side. He wriggled out of his red shirt and let it float out in the current while he swam quickly into the lower pond, scrambled up on a large log and then onto the bank. Back in the dense underbrush he dressed as quickly as he could, leaving his wet trunks on under his jeans. When he walked nonchalantly out onto the mountain path he could hear screaming coming from the top of the rock slide. He took a back path down to the country store and bus stop.

Bartholomew knew there was a small bus that traversed the twenty mile trek into Bloomingdale every hour on the hour during the summer weekends. He hurried now because it was just about ten minutes to three and if he was lucky he could catch the three o'clock bus.

A crowd was milling around the store and the bus pulled up just as he was buying his ticket. They were oblivious as to what had just happened at the rock slide and no one paid any attention to Bartholomew as he boarded the bus and took a seat near the rear exit door. He kept his baseball cap pulled securely over his wet, tousled hair and he was lucky that there was the remnants of a comic book in the seat. He leaned back and started to read.

They hadn't gone more than a mile or two when the bus pulled over to make way for a police car and some kind of emergency vehicle. Half way down the mountain a helicopter flew over, scanning

the river.

Bartholomew was not perturbed at all the confusion he had caused. He knew exactly where he was going to go. Bloomingdale wasn't a large town and he knew where Judge Harold Weiss lived. He would go to his house and maybe if he didn't have to behave according to the dictates of the stupid court he could make the judge understand that he had made a terrible mistake. He had thought at first that he would make his Mom come with him too but discarded that idea. She was so weak and so afraid of Bart that maybe she'd just side with him again and he'd be worse off than he was before.

It was more than a mile from the bus stop to his own house and Bartholomew hurried. He went down the alley at the end of the block just in case the news had already reached his neighborhood. His Mom was gone and the house was locked but he didn't care. All he wanted was his bike. It was nearly five miles to Silverstone Estates where Judge Weiss lived and he didn't intend to walk it. He was glad to see lights on in the big house as he rode his bike up the long, circular driveway. At least it looked like the judge was home.

It was early evening when Bartholomew rang the door-bell. The smell of something good wafted out the door as Judge Weiss opened it and the boy realized how hungry he was.

"What can I do for you, young man?"

"I have to talk to you, Your Honor," Bartholomew said as he removed his cap.

Mr. Weiss smiled. The boy was probably selling something, but he had a nice smile and he certainly was respectful. Somehow he remembered this boy. He'd seen him someplace before. "We're just about ready for dinner I think. Come in," he invited, as he closed the door.

"How's dinner coming, Mary?" he called out to the kitchen.

"About ten minutes yet," she answered.

The Judge led the way into a small study off the living room and sat down in a big chair behind a desk as he motioned to another chair for Bartholomew. When Mary came in too and sat down Bartholomew began to have some serious misgivings. This was going to be harder than he thought.

"Now tell me what your problem is young man. You seem to know me but I can't remember where we have met."

Bartholomew grasped at the opening. "It was in the court room, Your Honor. You divorced my Mom and Dad, Bart and Shirley Smith. "Do you remember them?"

Mr. Weiss nodded. "I remember you now." he said. "Let's just drop the 'Your Honor' part and you just call me Mr. Weiss."

The child relaxed, but only a little. "You made a real bad mistake Your Hon—, I mean Mr. Weiss. You made me spend a weekend with my Dad every month and

it's been terrible. You don't know how he is, Mr. Weiss. He beats up on my Mom so much and now he beats up on me because he can't live with her."

"You mean that he still comes over to your house and beats up on your Mom?" Mrs. Weiss interrupted.

Bartholomew nodded.

"Your Mother didn't say anything about problems of this kind in court," Mr. Weiss added.

"She was too scared. She knew he'd come after her if she did. He did too. He broke two of her fingers only a week after they got divorced." At that Bartholomew pulled up his shirt sleeve and showed them the ugly black and blue bruise on his arm. "He did this to me just this morning, and I have a lump on my head too; then I think he was trying to kill me. He threw me down the rock slide. I got away though and came here. They are probably looking for me in the river right now. They probably think I drowned, but I managed to get to shore. I sneaked back into the tent and grabbed some clothes and took the bus back here. I—I—I—just wanted to get home to Mom," he stammered.

Harold and Mary Weiss exchanged anxious glances at each other and then at this small child telling them this story of horror. They didn't know whether to believe it or not. Harold switched on a small television that stood in the corner and changed channels to the local news. Sure enough! There were the helicopters

hovering over the river and a newscaster holding up a red shirt.

They listened for several minutes as people were interviewed. The pretty lady with the three small children came into view and she told it exactly as it had happened, ending with, "That man was a monster! He should be hanged. The poor kid was crying and screaming as his Dad threw him down that rock slide."

"Well, Bartholomew, it looks like your father has been arrested. I think right now we should call the authorities and tell them that you are safe and also see if we can reach your Mom and let her know too. She is probably going out of her mind." Bartholomew nodded again.

"This is Judge Harold Weiss," the Judge spoke into the phone. "I am calling you to tell you that Bartholomew Smith is here with me. He managed to get out of the river and came into town. He is safe, so please discontinue the search. We'll be coming down to the Police Station to talk to the authorities right away."

"I guess we'd better go now Bartholomew and see if we can straighten this mess out, but let's eat a bite first. I'm hungry and you probably are too."

Bartholomew sat at the beautifully laid dining table in the big house in the Silverstone Estates and partook of an excellent roast beef dinner with mashed potatoes and gravy, one of his favorites. He ate in silence, remembering his manners as good as he could. He remembered to thank Mary Weiss too and tell her

that it was a very good dinner. She smiled and patted his head as the three of them walked out the door.

"You can leave your bike in the garage and we'll get it to you tomorrow," Mr. Weiss said, as they all got into the big black car. It smelled like new cars always do and Bartholomew settled back on the soft, leather seat. He noticed that his hands were shaking and he folded them, prayer-like, to control the trembling. It was working! His plan was working! Now if only his mother would say the right things——.

Bartholomew was surprised at the crowd in front of the police station. He wondered what all the people with cameras were doing, but he soon found out. The Judge's car pulled up in front of the station and parked in a red zone. As they got out, the crowd parted for them and there were so many bright, flashing, camera lights that he could barely see where they were going. Mr. Weiss had his arm around his shoulder though and they walked silently into the station not bothering to answer any of the questions that were shouted at them.

It wasn't until he saw his Mom standing there with her eyes red from crying that the full impact of what he had done finally hit him. Bartholomew flew into her arms and he cried too. He cried so hard that he didn't know if he could ever stop and she just held him, rocking back and forth and stroking his back while the camera lights kept flashing and flash-

ing.

Mr. Weiss spoke briefly to Shirley Smith and then stepped up to the counter. "Mrs. Smith will need a restraining order to keep her husband from communicating with her or the boy," he said to the Sergeant behind the desk. "We'll proceed with the proper paper work right away. Bart Smith will be kept in custody until I say so."

It was weeks before all the hub-bub died down. School started in the fall and Bartholomew was glad that he could go into junior high and be with a different bunch of kids. He waited patiently for the sentencing portion of the trial. The job of saving his Mom was nearly done, but not quite. There was just one thing he had left to do, but he had to wait until he knew how long his Dad would be in jail.

It was in the middle of October when he finally learned that his dad had been given six years for attempted murder and two extra years for aggravated assault. He made one final visit to Judge Weiss's house. He called first this time though to see if he would be welcome. They seemed glad to see him.

"I just want to thank you so much for what you did for me and my Mom," he said. "Then I want to ask you one more thing. I want to visit my Dad in jail, but I don't know if I can or not. Does the restraining order mean that I can't see him either?"

Mr. Weiss smiled. "No Bartholomew, you can visit him if you

want to. In fact, I will be going up to the prison next week and you can come along if your Mom says it's alright.

"I already asked her if I could go and she said it's okay, as long as she doesn't have to see him."

"I'll pick you up on Saturday then, a week from today, at nine o'clock.

Bartholomew was nervous as they walked down the long corridors in the big detention center. He had never been in a jail before. They had assured him that there would be a wire division between the prisoners and the visitors but still his heart was pounding when his father walked through the door and came up to the window to sit down. He still looked the same. Jail hadn't changed him one bit. He could see the sneer on his lips and the seething anger in his eyes as he sat down on the bench in front of him.

"So you came to see your old Dad, huh boy?"

"My name is not 'boy'. It's Bartholomew, Dad."

"Now don't get uppity with me you little bastard. Just remember that I'll be getting out and I'll——"

Bartholomew didn't wait for the end of the threat. "You'll what Dad? Right now you're in there and I'm out here. I only came because there's something I have to tell you. I'm not afraid of you, Dad. I'm not afraid of you at all. Judge Weiss is going to tell me the day and the hour that you get out of this place. Don't

## The Last Cigarette

even bother to come looking for us Dad,  
*because I'll be looking for you!"*

Bart Smith looked through the wire mesh into those intense blue eyes and they were staring right into his own. They didn't flinch one bit. He tried to stare the child down but there was no way. He'd seen those eyes before and his heart began to pound in his chest. He looked down then to break the icy connection. His hands were shaking as he got up quickly and walked back toward the prison guard who was waiting for him. When he looked back the boy was gone.

Bart was still shaking when the cell door clanged shut behind him. Those eyes! My God! The kid had his grandfather's eyes! He had never noticed it before. He was such a skinny, no-account kid. Many times he had accused Shirley of fathering the bastard with some other man. He knew now it wasn't true. The last time he'd seen those eyes was when he was fifteen. He had lashed out against his own father with a heavy board that he had been lucky enough to get his hands on. It had happened out in the barn. He was just tired of having the hell beaten out of him - and for nothing. He'd looked down at his father lying on the barn floor with a bleeding lump on his head. "I hate you! You drunken, filthy pig!" he swore. He remembered it as clear as if it was yesterday. He had bent over to see if he was still alive and his father opened his eyes and said, "I'll kill you for that, boy."

Prize: Second Place in Poetry

Author: **Marcinda E. Coil**

I pace the porch floor,  
as restless as a hungry owl at  
midnight.

Yet as scared  
as the owl's prey.

*Hurry up*

Smoke that fresh-tasting  
cigarette.

*Hurry up*

Get inside  
the security of the house.

Something unseen  
creaks.

It is only the old sycamore in  
the front yard,  
swaying like a stumbling  
drunk.

# Bald Like Me

Prize: Second Place in Short Story

Author: **Shirley M. Davis**

"I can't go. Please don't make me go," Vicki sobbed. "They have hair! You said they'd be bald like me. You said this is a camp for cancer patients!"

"It is, Sweetie. This is Ronald McDonald Camp. It's just for three days. The kids who went last summer said they had a great time." Alexandra stroked the few surviving wisps of her daughter's golden curls as she searched desperately for other bald heads in the cacophony of children, parents, doctors, sleeping bags, pillows and duffle bags crowded into the Ronald McDonald House assembly room. Tears of self-pity stung her eyes. She had insisted on being with Vicki through all of her treatments and had fitfully slept at the hospital in a recliner next to Vicki's bed nearly as much as she had slept at home. Her hopes for promoting to vice-principal at Chatsworth High School were history. Five-year-old Eric was about to be expelled from kindergarten for disrupting the class with frequent tantrums; and she couldn't even remember the last time she and Sam had made love. A three-day vacation from this nightmare wasn't too much to ask—was it?

"See, over there," she said as she gently dislodged Vicki's grip from her neck

and guided her frail shoulder to one side. She nodded in the direction of a bald young girl in a wheelchair, head hanging forward from bent shoulders as if neither her shoulders nor her neck could bear the weight of it. The Power Puff stickers and "Lucy" name tag on her wheelchair matched her Power Puff sweatshirt, sleeping bag, and backpack. A triangular purple bandana barely covered her red-dish-blond peach-fuzz.

"Not in my group." Vicki hiccupped, looking over at a group of six young girls who had been selected to share the same cabin as Vicki. "Why did they put me with the younger kids anyway? Where are the other teenagers? This is a big mistake. Take me home!"

"Oh, Vickeee," a voice trilled from across the room. Melody, the oncology nurse from Kaiser, was working her way towards them, juggling an armload of medical containers in her ample arms. Vicki looked towards the familiar voice just in time to see the cardboard medical containers tumble out of Melody's arms and bounce into a group of kids sitting on their sleeping bags. The sight of the kids batting at the containers and scrambling to gather and stack them back in Melody's wobbly arms, made Vicki giggle. She looked at her mother who was trying unsuccessfully to stifle a grin.

Both were remembering their first chemotherapy appointment at the Kaiser Permanente oncology clinic after the

doctor's world-quaking diagnosis had settled into numbness and intermittent aftershocks. They had arrived early for the first of their weekly (sometimes more often) chemo appointments. Melody had been the only staff member on duty before 8:30 a.m. "Hello, Darlins. I'm Nurse Melody and you're going to be seeing a lot of me. Would you like a drink of water? The videos and cd's are stacked right next to the TV just above your head. Oh dang me!" Half of the water splashed onto the stainless steel table beside the paper cup she was filling. "The remote is in the basket with the sani-wipes and band-aids!" She had a habit of talking to herself and others all in the same breath so that Vicki didn't know whether to join her conversations or not. "We're going to be great friends. Oh, come on, Straw!" Huffing and puffing with the effort, she bent over and picked a straw up from the floor where she had dropped it and tossed it on the floor next to the waste paper basket. Ignoring the miss, she unwrapped a second straw and set it in the cup. "Your IV will be ready in just a minute. Jason is next. You and Jason will get along great. Oh, I almost forgot!" She suddenly dashed out of the room without giving Vicki the cup of water.

"Mom?" Vicki had looked anxiously at her mother.

"Lord," Alexandra had rolled her eyes and shook her head in disbelief. "This is the person I am trusting to treat

my daughter?" Neither mother nor daughter knew then how much they would grow to love and trust Nurse Melody. In spite of her clumsiness, she could slide a needle into a slippery vein in a heartbeat without causing the slightest prick of pain. With the same painlessness and ease, she scheduled the appointments of clinic doctors, nurses and patients as if she had some magical insight into all of the demands on their lives. She shuffled their erratic schedules like a casino card dealer.

That first clinic appointment had been eons ago— last October. For at least that long, the clinic had been buzzing with talk about the next Ronald McDonald winter camp out. Vicki had been caught up in the excitement of the other kids. She desperately needed a break from her mother's red-rimmed eyes and swollen nose, and her father's gruff avoidance.

Now that the awaited day had arrived, she didn't know whether she could bear to be away from either of them.

Nurse Melody dumped her armload of boxes on a table, stepped over two Batman back-packs and a Barbie duffle bag, and wrapped Vicki in a great lavender hug. Vicki wished she could hide in those tender arms forever. She reluctantly backed away.

"Are you going with us on the camp-out, Melly? Where's your scrubs?"

"No, Dear. I'm delivering medical supplies and seeing you off." She cupped

Vicki's chin in her hands and lightly kissed her nose. "I know, the first time is scary for most of the kids. But, guess what! Every single one of them comes back with a smile. I promise."

"Where are the rest of the kids from clinic, Melly? Where are the other bald kids?"

Melody's answer was muffled by a piercing shriek from the loudspeaker and the blare of an amplified voice. "Campers, please join your assigned groups for further instructions by camp counselors."

Alexandra's eyes filled with tears. "Honey..."

"Oh, Mom!" Vicki grabbed her duffel bag and sleeping bag and stormed through the shuffling crowd to her group. Alexandra watched, her hand suspended in the air, ready for one last goodbye wave; but Vicki didn't look back.

"Hi. Is this your first time?" A dark haired girl at least five inches shorter, took Vicki's sleeping bag and set it on the floor. "Might as well sit. The lecture takes at least a half hour. My name is Tammy. I'm fourteen. I've been on chemo for four years."

"You are? I mean, you're fourteen? Really? I'm thirteen."

"Yah, My Mom thinks the chemo stunted my growth, but the doctors say it doesn't. But look around. Some of the others are fifteen and shorter than me. You must have grown before you started

chemo. I hate doctors! I hate nurses too!"

"I hate hospitals!" Vicki added.

"I hate needles!" Another voice joined in.

"I hate hospital food!" Lucy, the girl in the wheelchair, squeaked at them.

"I hate pills!"

"I hate bone marrow tests!"

"I hate operations!" A boy on crutches with an empty pant leg chimed in.

"I hate spinals!" Two voices shouted in unison.

"Shhhh," The counselor assigned to their group looked anxiously at the group of parents

who were looking anxiously at their children about to be whisked out of their control into hers. "Girls! Please!"

"I hate wigs!" Ignoring the counselor, a chubby blond yanked her fluffy curls from her head and tossed them in the air.

"Me too!" Black curls hit the floor.

A younger group nearby chimed in—more wigs yanked and tossed. Another group overheard and joined the ruckus. Soon the entire room was filled with bundles of blond, brunette, and red hair bouncing high above rollicking bald heads.

Rocking back and forth, holding her sides, Vicki bubbled with laughter. She looked over at her mother, pointed at her head and gleefully mouthed the words, "Bald like me!"

## Do You Need E eny Peekers

Prize: Third Place in Poetry

Author: **Shirley M. Davis**

"Do you need eeny peekers?"  
Oh how we howled  
laughin', holdin' awr bellies  
repeatin' them words overheard  
in the orchard we worked.

Jes' who do they think they are  
invadin', stealin' awr jobs?  
The'r litters of brown little brats  
plopt in the prunes  
whawl they pick awr crops.  
They cain't ev'n talk good.

Bet they cain't pick  
good as us.

They stayed,  
fingers still flyin'  
The'r sun-baked Mama's  
still, pickin' one handed  
t' other hand holdin'  
the'r babes a sucklin',  
while we slunk away at midday  
sweat drippin'down dirty backs  
inta prune-squarshed denims.

We scratched awr caked heads,  
puzzled, amazed, as we passed  
by the'r piles  
of plum-piled boxes  
higher by half then  
awr puny pickin's.

Awrs got us presents,  
nik-a-naks, and denims.  
The'rs fed families of fifteen  
'til they come back  
next season pleadin'  
"Do you need eeny peekers?"

## Fatal Wishes

Prize: Third Place in Short Story

Author: **Shirley M. Davis**

"I hate my Dad. I wish he was dead." RJ sucked hard on the joint and passed it to Jake. Both boys sat on the grass behind the Crescenta Valley Park restroom building in La Crescenta, California, backs against the wall, lanky legs sprawled in all directions. The understaffed regional park nestled against the foothills of the Verdugo Mountains was their favorite hangout.

"So, what's new? We all hate our parents." Jake considered the shortening joint, took a quick drag, and smashed it into the grass.

"He says he's legally blind, but he can pour himself a drink without spilling a drop," RJ said. "I have to drive him everywhere unless he gets some old babe to drive him. That doesn't happen much any more. He's getting too fat and too mean. I'm tired of his sick pranks too. Last week he pretended to be in a coma, wouldn't wake up no matter how much I shook him. He waited until I dialed 911, before he came off the bed laughing. Jesus!" RJ shook his head as if trying to shake off the memory. "I wish I could have gone with Mom when she left him. He said he loved me, couldn't live without me. Truth is, he just wanted a slave."

"Yah, life's tough in the big shitty,"

Jake said. I wish both my parents would leave. They never stop bickering." He rummaged through his backpack and pulled out a Marlborough butt. "Got a match?"

"Dude, I don't think I can make it til graduation in June." RJ handed him a book of matches that looked like they had been through the wash. "I want out of here. I just can't take one more sick joke."

"Yah, Man." Jake stuffed the unlighted butt and matches in his pocket and stood up. "We all got problems. I gotta go. I'm late already. My old man's gonna croak." He hoisted his backpack over his shoulders and trudged through the park toward his home.

RJ hunched forward, elbows resting on his knees, and watched the darkening Verdugos swallow the park in one long oozing shadow. The poison oak along the foothills deepened from orange and crimson to burgundy brown—the color of coagulated blood. He chuckled, remembering the Iranian kids climbing the hill, rolling in the poison oak last weekend while their parents watched. No one had bothered to tell them what would happen the next day. That their smooth olive skin would be peppered with oozing pimples that would drive them mad with itching and burning and swelling. No one told them about the ugly scabs that would cover their bodies before it was over. He had thought about telling them. Had even

walked over to their parents as they were scrubbing the benches with soap and water and covering the table with a paisley bedspread. They had ignored his greeting. Turned deliberately away and talked among themselves as if he didn't exist. He had been close enough to reach out and touch them.

He chuckled again. "I hope they got a good dose of it from the kids. Rude bastards deserve it." His chuckle turned to a scowl. Too bad about the kids, he thought. He stood up and ambled across the park lawn toward his house.

"Where the hell you been?" His Dad was sitting on the front porch steps, a beer in one hand, cigarette in the other, ashes flicked all over the steps. "I've been waiting here for two hours. This is my last beer and not a damn thing in the house to eat. You don't give a damn about me. Probably already ate without me."

"How could I? You didn't give me any money." RJ didn't bother telling him he hadn't eaten all day. He hoped his Dad's disability check had come. They were down to Campbell's soup, one can a meal, for the past week. They had eaten the last can for yesterday's dinner—chicken noodle. Chicken soup for the dysfunctional soul. Someone ought to write a book about that one.

"Let's go get some beer and cash my check. We can get it cashed at the Nite

Owl. They're serving hot dogs tonight. Drop me off. I'll bring a couple of dogs out to you before you leave." His Dad sucked the last drop from the Coors, crushed the can, and tossed it into the weeds beside the steps. He stood up, opened the front door, reached in and grabbed his cane and dark glasses. He put the glasses on and tapped the cane along the ground as he moved carefully towards the battered, blue, '65 Volkswagen. RJ rolled his eyes as he folded his own lanky limbs into the driver's seat. His dad only used his white cane when he wanted attention, or sympathy, or both.

RJ drove to the Nite Owl, dropped his dad off, and waited for a half an hour for him to bring out the promised hot dogs. "I'll call you when I'm ready to come home." His Dad handed him the hot dogs and was back in the bar before RJ could answer. Not that there was anything he wanted to say. It was past 9:00 p.m. when he got home, and after 11:00, when he settled into bed and slipped into slumber.

"Come pick me up, Asshole!" RJ held the receiver away from his ear. He had become accustomed to grabbing the receiver to stop the piercing ring halfway through its first shriek, also before he was fully awake.

"Shit," was all he could manage as he tried to shake the stubborn grip of slumber. He threw the receiver at the nightstand, tossed the frayed comforter on the floor. Still in his jeans and sweatshirt,

he was lacing his Nikes before he had fully regained consciousness.

"Gaawwd," he groaned. He stumbled over scattered shirts, pants, shoes, magazines and fast-food containers scattered across the floor. "Where the hell are my keys?" He kicked empty beer cans across the entry hall redecorating the splattered walls and floors with new splotches of stale beer. He found the car keys where he had dropped them.

The frigid night slapped him awake as he opened the front door and gasped fresh air. The Volkswagen sputtered and coughed and rumbled through sleeping Montrose streets to the Nite Owl. His Dad and two friends were nursing their final rounds, savoring the last swallows of stale beer. "What took you so long, you son-of-a-bitch," his dad shouted.

"No, you the sumbitch!" George, his dad's drinking buddy for the evening, draped one arm around RJ's father's neck.

Arthur, the other member of the drinking bash chimed in, "You both sumbitches!"

RJ's dad, the largest of the trio and the least drunk or at least most able to hold his liquor, was the leaning post for both buddies as they wobbled towards the door guffawing and giggling like teenage girls.

"Let's take the party to my house," RJ's dad proclaimed as they all staggered towards the Volkswagen.

"We ain't gittin in that piece o' shit beetle. Lesh take my truck," George slurred.

"There ain't nuff room," whined Arthur.

"You kin ride in the back" said George.

That sent RJ's dad and George into more gales of guffaws and back slapping. RJ felt his stomach muscles tighten. "Dad, come with me" he pleaded.

"Mine yer own bisnizzz yalilshit! Git in the pickup."

RJ knew better than to argue. He slid into the driver's seat hoping he would be allowed to drive.

"Yer not drivin my rig," George roared as he shoved RJ across the seat into his dad's shoulder.

RJ's neck snapped to the side as his dad shoved him back across the seat into George's shoulder. George pushed him back. He was beginning to feel like a volley ball between two front line slammers.

Arthur had one leg over the back rail of the pickup bed when George started the engine and jammed the gear shift into reverse. "Watch this." George stomped on the gas pedal. Arthur sprawled into the center of the bed, limbs askew like a rag doll carelessly tossed into a toy box.

George, watching Arthur's dive in his rearview mirror, bent over the steering wheel and cackled, "Did you see that? Too funny, man!" As Arthur tried to pull himself up, George set the gear in drive and stomped on the gas again, which slammed Arthur against the tailgate. RJ's father couldn't see what was happening. He

slapped his thighs and added his guffaws and cackles to George's anyway.

"Jesus, be careful, be careful." RJ's pleadings were ignored.

"Yeehaw," shouted George as they sped down Honolulu Blvd. "Lets see if the bastard can fly." Watching Arthur in the mirror, he jerked the steering wheel down on the right side, then down on the left.

"Loook oooout," RJ screamed. The pickup suddenly bounced over the curb, off a retaining wall and rolled over and over, crashing through the plate glass window of Pams Clothing Store. A smirking manikin stared upside down through the shattered windshield, one arm reaching through as if to stop the rampant wreckage from skidding into her home.

When RJ regained consciousness he had the sensation of lying in the middle of the floor at a rave with strobe lights flashing and dancers dancing all around him, stepping over him as if he were a rock.

"This one is waking up," One of the dancers finally noticed him, attached something to his arm. No, not a dancer, not a dance floor. Cold concrete. The thing on his arm got tight, then loose. "BP 120 over 70," the baritone voice boomed against RJ's throbbing skull.

"D-Dad? D-Dad?" RJ couldn't stop his teeth from chattering.

"What,s your name, son?" asked the baritone. RJ felt the sudden warmth of a heated blanket.

"D-D-D-Dad?"

"Your name, honey." said a soft motherly voice belonging to a face too young to be his mother. Her face swam in and out of the fog above him. She was tucking the blanket under him.

"RJ, RJ Perry. Where's my dad? Is my dad ok?" His teeth finally stopped chattering.

The two attendants looked at each other then both looked in the same direction at something RJ couldn't see. "He—he's ok isn't he? He's not dead. He's hurt maybe, but he'll be ok after he goes to the hospital, won't he?"

The baritone cleared his throat and opened his mouth like he was about to make an announcement to RJ's belt.

"Is your dad's name RJ Perry too,?" The motherly voice seemed to come out of the baritone's open mouth as RJ stared at him waiting for an answer.

"Uh huh," RJ squeaked. A drop of water fell on his arm now held by the pretty attendant as she looked at her watch. Another drop and another. RJ looked up to see where the water was coming from. The drops were coming straight down from her face. She looked up from her watch into his eyes. Her hand slid from his pulse into his hand while she moved her other hand under it. The drops kept falling as she tenderly cradled his hand in both of hers as if it were a baby and she could protect it from the pain she was about to inflict.

"I am so, so very sorry," she said in a squeaky whisper. "Your father didn't

make it. The truck rolled over him. I'm certain he didn't feel anything, honey. His death was instant."

"None of you had your seatbelt fastened," gruffed the baritone, suddenly able to speak. The driver is ok, but the guy riding in the back is in bad shape. You look like you'll be all right. We're taking you to the hospital to check that lump on your head, kiddo."

RJ stared at him, eyes wide. "I'm not going to cry. Don't expect me to cry," he shouted. He squeezed his eyelids together, gritted his teeth behind pursed lips. Then opened them and relaxed his face—expressionless, as if he had harnessed the pain and dragged it into the dungeon of his soul. He could almost hear the clang of steel as the door slammed shut.

He didn't cry. He didn't laugh. He didn't smile. He didn't frown. He watched but didn't see. He felt like the camcorder set up on a tri-pod at the high school prom recording tedious hours of tuxedos and gowns moving in and out of its viewfinder. The flashing lights moved past him like a muted laser light show as he was hoisted onto a stretcher and carried to the ambulance. The siren seemed to come from miles away as the ambulance whisked him down Honolulu Boulevard to the Verdugo Hills Hospital.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning RJ woke up in his own bed, startled to hear water running, cupboard doors opening and closing.

Dad must be up already. "Dad, I need some lunch money," he shouted. He stumbled out of bed, down the short hallway, and into the kitchen.

"Your mama can't come, RJ," Aunt Celia purred. She ignored his confusion, tried to fold him into her fluffy embrace. He pulled away, bewildered. "Poor, poor, boy; how you've grown. You look so much like your daddy. Your mama can't come. There is just no way she can leave that job of hers."

"What are you....when did you get here? Where's Da....? Memories of the previous night forced their way through the barriers RJ had created in an effort to stave off the screams pressing against his throat. He stumbled into the living room and slumped onto the couch. The hot dogs from last night's dinner whirled in sudden confusion. He ran into the bathroom, slammed the door and hung his head over the toilet. Sour hot dog chunks splattered the bowl. Wretching spasms ripped through his body until he was too exhausted to hold himself up. Slumping onto the floor, back against the wall, RJ pieced together the horrors of the previous night. At last he remembered Aunt Celia blasting through the hospital doors, shouting his name. The rest came in fragments—cold instruments, pissing into a cup, bright lights jabbing his corneas, voices.

Aunt Celia's voice had been the loudest. "No, I'm not his mother. Yes, of course I have insurance. Well, no it doesn't

cover him. No, his mother can't come." They had wheeled him to her car in a wheel chair even though he could walk perfectly well. Made him think of his dad's white cane and dark glasses. What a fraud! Probably isn't even dead. Just another one of his sick jokes. RJ pulled himself up from the floor and was suddenly face to face with his disheveled father staring back at him, terror in his eyes. "You're not my dad," he accused the terrified image. "Christ, you're me!" He turned away from the mirror, horrified at the resemblance. He jerked the door open, stumbled back into the living room, and sagged into the couch.

Aunt Celia was still opening and closing cupboard doors. "Where does your daddy, I mean, where did your daddy keep his whiskey, honey?" She didn't look his way or wait for an answer. "The Neptune Society will take care of his dear body after the coroner releases it, Lord knows when that will be. We'll have the services right here in his house, or how 'bout Tujunga Canyon where we used to party. He'd like that for sure. You can do whatever you want with his dear ashes. I recommend the back yard or one of those squirrel holes up in the canyon, legal or not. Who'd know anyway?"

"I'd know," said RJ in a monotone. He didn't look at her.

Aunt Celia grabbed her purse and slung it over her shoulder. "I guess I'll have to go to the store. I can't find a

thing." She walked out the door, picked up the morning newspaper, and walked back into the house, reading the first page. "Did you know that terrible accident is already in the newspaper with pictures and all? It's heaven's mercy you survived. That pickup looks like one of those aluminum cans you been smashin' to take to the recycle center. How much you get for those anyway?" She sat down on the couch next to RJ and put her arm around his shoulders.

"Trudi and Tudi will be here tomorrow.

"Who?"

"Your aunts. They're driving down from Happy Camp. You probably don't remember them. You were just a baby when they moved up there to join the hippies. I hope they make it. They're driving that rickety old van they've been livin' in for the past nine years. They're bringing Rodney along with his tools so he can fix it if it breaks down."

"Who?"

"Rodney. He lives with them. He's a good mechanic when he's not sucking weed. They live in weed paradise so he's not likely to be off it much. Them either. They raise enough of the stuff to replace that old van with a proper mansion if they'd sell it all instead of sucking up half of it themselves. The Governments been crackin' down on the business up there I hear."

"Who?"

"You're not even listening, poor

dear." Aunt Celia hoisted herself up from the sofa. "I'll be right back. I'm going to pick up a few things from the store." She leaned over, smeared hot pink lipstick on RJ's cheek and swooped out the front door in a cloud of imitation Georgio.

She was right. He wasn't listening. He was studying an image of his mom and dad smiling at him from a faded photo framed in dusty plastic. A piece of glass still covered half of the photo, its broken edge forming a jagged line between the smiling couple. His dad was wearing the dress uniform of the Glendale Fire Department. His mom, always well groomed, was dressed in a business suit. The photo leaned against a dusty scale model of a fire engine the engine house crew had given his dad after the Chevy Chase fire had stolen his sight and his career. His eyes had been bandaged when they presented it to him in the hospital. He had asked RJ to describe it to him each time RJ visited him in the hospital.

"Tell me every detail," his dad would say. "I'm going to check your accuracy when they remove the bandages." After the bandages were removed, he never mentioned the model again. After RJ's mom left, RJ occasionally found the model fire engine and the photo in the trash can when he set the cans at the curb to be collected by the community trash trucks. Each time he found them stashed among beer bottles and Taco Bell containers, he quietly retrieved them and set them back on the shelf in the living room. No words

had ever been exchanged regarding the incidents.

RJ marveled that the photo had managed to survive this long after so much abuse. He searched the faces and faded background of the photo for answers to questions he couldn't even formulate.

"I got Coors, Seagrams, Smirnoff and Red Mountain. Oh, and Burger King," Aunt Celia said breathlessly. She staggered through the doorway juggling bags of bottles, cans and Burger King. "Nourishment for the troops," she announced as she plopped them on the kitchen counter, pushing empty cans and fast food cartons aside to make room. "Better hide these. Mama's due to arrive any time now. Boy howdy! Is she going to have a cow when she sees this mess!"

That was an understatement. When RJ's paternal grandmother arrived an hour later, she set her purse on her son's bed and attacked the rubble with a vengeance. She stuffed twelve garden leaf bags with trash from her deceased son's house and spit-shined every surface she could reach. She insisted that RJ soak in the tub while she took all his clothes and bedding to the laundromat. She washed, dried and folded them before she gave him clean clothes to wear. RJ had to refill the tub with warm water four times while he waited. It was as if Grandma Perry blamed the house, the filth, and the rubble for her son's death.

Aunt Celia had disappeared as soon as Grandma Perry arrived. She had

greeted her mother with a mushy hug and was instantly out the door for a terribly inconvenient but unavoidable appointment that would surely keep her occupied elsewhere for the rest of the day.

The next day Grandma Perry sat exhausted on the couch next to RJ in the spotless living room. She watched the front door as if she were waiting for her son to come through it and greet her with one of his giant bear hugs. RJ was looking at the olive green carpet wondering if Grandma Perry had dyed it that color or if he simply hadn't noticed it before.

The rumble and coughing of an old Ford van announced the arrival of Tudi, Trudi and Rodney. Tudi and Trudi wore their waist length hair tied at the nap of their necks, long flowered skirts, and matching tie-dyed tee-shirts. They held oblong ceramic slabs with burning sticks of incense out in front of them like choir boys carrying candles in church.

"This is for Big Treeeee," Tudi crooned as they both glided through the living room into the back bedroom. They had been calling their brother "Big Tree" since he had reached the height of 6' 7" in high school. Rodney barely made it though the door to the nearest chair. As he slumped onto the chair, his head fell forward, chin resting on his chest. RJ and Grandma Perry watched him slither out of the chair onto the floor like a dirty towel thrown carelessly over its edge. Grandma Perry turned her attention back to the

front door. RJ continued his study of the green carpet.

"You wanna come live with me, RJ?" Grandma Perry asked. She didn't move her eyes from the front door. RJ looked at her, then at the front door, hoping she was talking to someone standing there— not him.

"He'd be better off with us, Mama." Trudi had come back into the room. "Tudi, get in here. Tell Mama and RJ what we have planned. He'll just love living in Happy Camp with us."

"Oh no you don't." Aunt Celia seemed to appear out of nowhere. She had come through the front door and stood in the middle of the room facing her two sisters. "I have it all worked out. He is staying with me until he graduates."

"He'll do no such thing." Grandma Perry was suddenly in the middle of her three daughters shouting three octaves higher than her usual screech. None of them paid any attention at all to RJ, who was suddenly back from wherever he had been. The screaming battle had cut through his fog like a razor blade. He was out the back door, driving the Volkswagen up the nearest freeway on-ramp before he even knew he had left. Tears gushed from his eyes distorting the highway. He took the next off-ramp, parked in a MacDonald's parking lot and screamed at the top of his lungs until he choked; then broke into racking sobs until he was completely spent. He looked at the passenger seat where his dad usually rode, where he

should have been riding home the night of the accident. The white cane caught his attention. It was stuck between the door and the seat, where his dad had forgotten it in his rush to get to the beer. RJ picked up the cane and studied it, gently running his fingers back and forth along its length. He could almost hear his dad's bellowing laughter echoing through the car, like his guffawing after one of his sick jokes. "Be careful what you wish for, boy!"

## I Never Knew She Was a Viking

Prize: Runner Up in Poetry

Author: **Ralph Hermansen**

I thought I knew her well, but I never knew she was a Viking!

Margie was as alive and happy as anyone I've ever known.

She became our newest sister when she married brother Hugh.

This was the blessed marriage, which love's wind to them had blown.

I thought I knew her well, but I never knew she was a Viking!

Margie was petite and pretty, southern accent rather striking.

She would turn your head, in her tight little dress and high heels.

She lived her life like she drove her cars;  
she loved to corner on two wheels.

I thought I knew her well, but I never  
knew she was a Viking!  
We couples spent so many warm and  
wonderful times together:  
Eating our favorite antipasto salad, hearing  
music to our liking,  
Smelling Hawaii's orchids, or camping out  
in coastal weather.

I thought I knew her well, but I never  
knew she was a Viking!  
Margie gave us little gifts, knew our wants,  
memorized our likings.  
We tried to beat her at this game, attempt  
her thoughtfulness to tame.  
She always outdid us in loving deeds. Not  
my idea of a Viking.

I thought I knew her well, but I never  
knew she was a Viking!  
Her doctor gave her ill advice to ignore  
that lower pain.  
Months later, they said the cancer had  
spread throughout her abdomen.  
Chemotherapy and the surgeon's knife  
were weapons now in her fight for life.

I thought I knew her well, but I never  
knew she was a Viking!  
In the early months just moderate strife,  
she could live an almost normal life.  
Then she had to quit her job, the chemo  
treatments toxic toll to fight.  
She lost her soft and wavy hair, but wore

bright scarves to hide the sight.

I thought I knew her well, but I never  
knew she was a Viking!  
Hope slowly ebbed as the cancer's toll  
became more vicious.  
In time, she was tied to machines in a  
room full of tubes and meters.  
Yet, she looked death in the face, almost  
fearless, almost tearless.

I thought I knew her well, but I never  
knew she was a Viking!  
She fought against the relentless foe with  
all her strength and might.  
She valued our visits ever cheerful,  
pleased to see us, never tearful.  
She cared about our tribulations, while her  
own woes were not in sight.

I thought I knew her well, but I never  
knew she was a Viking!  
O Vikings of centuries past, Valhalla was  
your prize for holding fast,  
No show of fear, no loss of dignity, no  
breaking down, no self pity.  
Margie, I see your Viking ship ablaze and  
your Viking courage in those final days.