Klipsun Magazine, 1976, Volume 06, Issue 02 - November

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Having preselected Conflict as the theme of this Klipsun, we expected to see articles discussing innumerable political conflicts whose subject matter would stretch from landlord-tenant struggles in Bellingham to the proposed Nuclear Power system to be installed in Skagit County. However, the manuscripts we received by deadline outlined only a single conflict, the conflict between dream and reality. Had the writers not crept out from diverse and disconnected parts of the campus we could have engaged in a paranoid conspiratorial reverie. The forms were quite different.

Some of the dreams were expressed in violence, but more than half were directly related to the American Dream. The American Dream was expressly stated in a third of the stories and implicit in at least half. Some writers were despairing some, hopeful. Those included represent only a portion of those submitted.

The Editors

On the cover: Untitled leaded and stained glass by James Powell and Son Art Glass Studio, Bellingham. Photograph by Gerry Wolfe.
an american dream
by David George Damschen

1  "Armed robbery."
2
dave wondered where all the animal sounds were. He always thought that when he got to the jungle he would hear the chattering of monkeys or the throaty groaning growls of lions. And now he was in the jungle, and all he could hear was the droning hum of insects. The incessant hum began to bother him the first day he was there and now weeks later, it had penetrated his skull and it reverberated in his head, passing from states of mere annoyance to deafening proportions that drove him to the twilight of his sanity. Sometimes he felt like running until he left that endless buzzing far behind. He wanted silence.

Dave sat on the moist jungle floor almost completely surrounded by a bush. He was facing a trail and a small beam of yellow moonlight discovered a path through the tangling vegetation that grew savagely skyward. The moon barely illuminated a small portion of the path before him, and everything else around him was black. The tightly woven jungle canopy blocked the light and Dave was a prisoner in the dark.

He hated perimeter night watches. There were so many things that could kill him. And sometimes, deep within the endless humming, a metallic sound would tumble almost silently to his ear and snap him into a nauseated alertness as he search with blind eyes for the enemy that was lurking in the blackness. The insects' noise
confused him until he didn't know for sure what was sound and what was thought. And the terrifying blackness that closed in around him almost suffocated him, like the heavy, wet heat during the day.

Dave looked into the moon beam and saw a small figure of a man wearing a Viet Cong hat. The man was a shadow, almost an illusion, but the shape of the object that was slung over his shoulder and rested at hip level, triggered a track response in his memory and a sawed off, double-barrelled shot gun screamed into his head with crystal clarity. Suddenly Dave was enveloped in cold sweat and a sickening dizziness clung sticky around his head as he pulled his Colt .45 slowly out of its holster. The humming roared insanely in his head.

Dave prayed. "Please, for God's sake, go away."

Dave looked down his shaking, extended arms, through the cold sights of his pistol at the figure that stood in the moonlight looking back and forth. The shotgun, that seemed to be only a few feet away, swung slowly with the motion of the man. Its deadly path sliced through Dave's position with each methodical swing. Suddenly the shot gun stopped, pointing directly at Dave. In one flooding second Dave thought the man had seen him and wondered why he had not fired. Then a booming explosion echoed through the jungle and a sheet of intense light blinded Dave's eyes. Dave sat frozen in a total white blindness, wondering if he had hit his target. There was the horrific terror that perhaps he had missed and then all at once he was surrounded by sounds. They weren't insects sounds. They were the enemy. He whirled around in the direction of the noise but was smothered under a body. He didn't even try to fight. He just muttered. "What the hell am I doing here?"

"Take it easy, Dave! It's me! Russ!"

Dave lay quivering uncontrollably as his sight slowly returned and he saw the face of his friend. "It's O.K. buddy! It's O.K., man! You got him! You got the bastard."

Suddenly Dave was on his feet. The hum infected his head. There were soldiers all around him. He looked at the green vegetation on the other side of the trail, lit up by flashlights. The bushes were dripping with blood and splintered bone. Beneath them lay a headless body twitching nervously, involuntarily, as if from electrical shocks. Parts of the jaw bone jutted out of the neck. It was strangely white as it lay in the pulsating gore of tangled grey cords and tubes. Dave was stunned by how unreal it looked and then by how grotesquely funny it seemed. He heard someone laughing a long ways off, as if in a dream, and then his friend's voice saying, "Easy Dave. It's O.K."

3 "Got a body count from Bravo. Perimeter watch encountered enemy. Enemy dead — six, American — none."

4 "Armed robbery is a very serious crime. Robbery in itself is serious but when you point a gun at someone, whether it's loaded or not . . . I don't care, we have to treat it the same. Do you realize the potential of that gun: It's other people's lives we are talking about. And if you think this court is going to be lenient just because this is your first offense, you're wrong. Armed robbery is a very serious crime."

5 Dave had been in Vietnam for months, and he had never seen anything like it. That morning they had been on a goodwill mission through the village and now, in the afternoon, they were engaged in heavy fighting there. He was well back in the jungle though. He wasn't involved in the fighting.

The morning had been so peaceful. They were giving candy to the kids and cigarettes to the adults. The people were friendly, and Dave liked them. They were small and had deep lines in their faces, but they weren't so different. They smile and laugh. And they cry. That morning they smiled and laughed, and Dave enjoyed his mission.

There had been a small child, crippled by a war wound, and he could not keep up with the parade as the Americans marched through the rows of grass huts handing out their presents. Dave saw the frail little boy desperately trying to drag himself along the ground with his arms as his legs dangled useless in the dirt. And he picked him up and carried him the full length of the village. He was light in Dave's arms and the crippled boy's eyes were glossy with hurt and neglect. Dave could read the loneli-
ness in those eyes very well. At the other end of the village, Dave placed the boy back in the dirt. The boy looked up and smiled, it seemed like such a great distance that separated them.

“Dave! They need a rocket launcher up front!”

Dave reluctantly picked up a 3.5 inch rocket launcher and joined two other soldiers at the edge of the jungle. Dave stared at a battered school building and waited for his orders.

“We have the enemy contained in the school. They haven’t returned fire for 10 minutes. Can you lob a shell through that window?”

Dave took a long time getting ready and then he fired. The shot was perfect. Then Dave waited and watched as his troops cautiously approached the school.

“All clear. He got ‘em. Got ‘em all.”

Dave sighed heavily as he walked towards the school to help with the body count. The sun hammered against his steel helmet and he thought his brain was boiling. The nerve-shattering sound of the insects punished him and his body was sticky with sweat. He walked through the doorway into the dim air inside. He stared for a long time at the tangled array of mutilated bodies.

“My God! These aren’t Viet Cong. My God!”

Suddenly Dave was prying through the bodies frantically. They were women and children. He searched as his clothes became saturated with blood and tiny clinging particles of raw flesh. Then he found him. A piece of shrapnel had hit the boy in the stomach and had blasted his guts out a hole in his back the size of a football. Dave huddled the boy’s head against his body and cried hysterically as he knelt, rocking back and forth.

All the while the boy’s slimy insides were slowly slithering out onto the dirt floor.

“Easy man. Take it easy. They’re just gooks. It’s not like they were real people.”

In one swift, savage motion Dave had the soldier by the neck and he rammed the cold barrel of his .45 brutally against his temple.

“Say it again mutherfucker! Say it again! Say it again and I’m going to blow your fuckin’ head off!”

A black soldier stepped towards Dave but Dave turned so his hostage was between them. The eyes of the captive soldier were bulged out, and he could not speak because of Dave’s arm clamped across his throat.

“Take it easy, buddy. Don’t do something you’ll regret, now.”

“I’m gonna kill this fucker, I’m gonna kill him sure as shit!”

“Easy man, Don’t you go killin’ no more, hear? You gotta be cool, now. Let the man go. We dun killed enough here, already.”

Dave sat crying as the hot sun dried the blood on his face. He barely heard someone say, “Forty-seven women and children. Six Viet Cong.”

Then he heard an echoing voice through the loud din of insects saying,

“We dun killed enough here.”


“From what I can tell you haven’t done anything productive to society in your life. Twenty-nine years of waste. Says here you’re a Vietnam Vet . . . medical discharge . . . You went to school three times. Dropped out three times. I see you’ve had various jobs. Longest one is six months. There must be something wrong. You can’t just fumble your way through life. Nobody owes you anything. You can’t make it in school, you can’t make it in the service, and it doesn’t look like you can make it in the working world either. What are we going to do with you? Now you’re pointing guns at people. Do you think that’s right?”

The violent droning was so loud it was on the verge of silence within Dave’s throbbing head. He hadn’t had any sleep in so long he couldn’t remember. He strained his eyes to penetrate the darkness of the jungle but he could no longer distinguish between reality and hallucination. The fatigue and the noise had worn him down to the point where he almost didn’t care anymore. But he still cared about Russ who was sleeping. And if he fell asleep, they’d get Russ. And Dave knew they were coming. He could see them everywhere.

“Russ,” Dave whispered.

“What? What’s up, man.”

“Oh Christ, I’m so fuckin’ tired... I can’t make it anymore. You gotta watch awhile.”
"How long you been watching?"
"Not long. I just can't do it, man. Just let me sleep for a half an hour."
"Sure, man, O.K."
"It's just that... I'm seeing shit... ya know? Seeing shit that isn't there."
"Sure man, it's tough. I'll try for awhile."
"I wish it would be quiet for just a few minutes."
"Ya, man... I know..."
"What the fuck we doin' here?"
But Russ was already crawling into the darkness.


"Survive!" Dave screamed as he leaped up and fired his .45 at the hat moving in on him. The hat fell but Dave fired again and again until his gun was empty and then he just kept pulling the trigger, mumbling.

"Survive, survive."

"What happened here: What the fuck happened?"
The black man was cradling Dave in his arms, rocking back and forth, his moaning mingled with Dave's sobs.

"Russ is dead. Dave shot him."
"That loonie fucker. I'll..."
"No man. He didn't know... We dun killed enough... We dun killed enough here, already."

9
"Got a body count from Bravo. Perimeter watch contacted enemy. Enemy dead — five, American — one."

10
One lone word rung through the court room, careened off cold marble walls and exploded through the incessant buzzing in Dave's head.

"Guilty."
GOOSE CHASE
by Pete MacKenzie
I'm here. That's one thing I know for certain. Whether I'm taking Verbs 423 or Hyperspace 101, I'm still dragging my body into crowded classrooms, taking notes and ambling on to my next class.

Having finally cracked the library code, battled the registration holocaust and passed enough finals to bog a starship, little confusions scurry away like a mouse out of sight, making life almost routine and leaving room for a single, burning uncertainty. What the hell, am I going to college for?

No longer satisfied with program­med requirements and canned lectures, I want to know why poets dream and if the "Greening of America" will ever come. I'm in the middle of a battle between questions and answers. Either I'm here to get some serious answers to age-old problems or I'm trying to get better at asking "deep" and "meaningful" questions.

What's four plus four? I want the answer, but it would never be an end in itself, I arrive at eight and then wonder how many times it will go into 64. Beyond that there are more questions, each one built upon the other so that the quest for knowledge becomes like a job on a treadmill.

But treadmills don't ever do much except go around in circles — you hop on one, start running toward some unseen destination at the end of an infinite belt and finally end up never getting anywhere.

If an effort to learn is always going to plunge me into deeper and deeper abysses of mystery, why did I get on the education treadmill in the first place? The more I discover, the more I want to search. But finding the object of my search forces me into new paths of questioning. I come full circle.

I lose sight of a goal I set up more than three years ago. I wanted to learn how to be a good writer. Seeing now the manifold and maddening degrees of "good writing", the old goal just slid off a dark horizon light-years away, I cover old ground but look at it differently. In gaining knowledge from learning, I somehow come to know that there is more learning to be done — the treadmill runs forever.

But since terminal heartburn will probably blow me away long before I see forever, I'm wondering why I can't settle down with a few nice solid answers and take a breather. Somehow, it doesn't work out that way. There are no real absolutes on a treadmill — answers are solid and comfortable only if I refuse to look beyond them. But I have to look beyond them to keep learning.

I can't shut myself off, I can't blind myself to what lies ahead. At the same time, I don't want to sign myself over to a lifetime of pursuing some nameless absolute I'll never find. Damned if I do, damned if I don't.

Dammit! I want to catch that wild goose I've been chasing for the past three years! But what would I do if I caught it? Probably chase another one.
GREG CALDWELL
Frankie entered the door with the neat black letters "R. M. Turner." The man behind the desk squinted oddly through his broad-rimmed glasses, and waved him to a nearby chair.

In the short pause which prefaced what both knew was coming, Frankie glared at Turner and thought, "Stupid bastard. Nothin' to do but sit at that damn desk all day and dream up things for people to do."

"You again, Frankie?" Turner asked finally, putting a last flourish on the fancy blue-letterhead stationery. "I thought we settled all your problems last Monday. What is it this time?"

"Nothin'. We wasn't doin' nothin'," Frankie declared. "Come on, we both know better than that. I've already talked to the yard monitor. You've been here over two years, and you know we don't allow gambling out in the yard." Turner paused, then continued, "I've known a lot of guys like you in the last 15 years, Frankie. Most of them learned to behave after a while, but you just don't know how. We've talked like this over a dozen times. What's wrong with you? What are we doing wrong?"

"This place stinks. Everybody picks on me. I can't do anything I wanna do," Frankie blurted. "Everytime I find something I like to do, somebody tells me to do something else. Nobody cares what I want. I hate it here."

"A lot of people don't like it here, Frankie. But we're not picking on you. Everyone has to learn the rules. If you haven't learned them yet, you'd better start, or it might take another three or four years to get out of here."

"Yeah," Frankie said acidly. "Another three years with everybody telling me what to do. And when I do go, it'll probably just be to another place where somebody else can tell me what to do, and nobody'll care there, either."

"Nobody ever cares, right, Frankie? Unless it's whether you stick to the rules?" Turner asked. "Doesn't your family care? Don't they have rules? Before your father died, didn't he ever tell you what was right and wrong?" Frankie grew sullen. "Naaa. That was a long time ago, but it didn't matter. He was real old — about 70, I guess. He was always gone anyway. He didn't like me, so we didn't do much together."

"How about your mother?" Turner pried, "and the rest of your family, don't you have any brothers and sisters?"

"Mom's real old, too. I've got a brother and a sister. They're both older than me. They're gone away now, and Mom is by herself mostly,"

"Where are they? Don't they help your mother?"

"Na. They don't get along. When my brother gets out—" Frankie broke off, "When my brother comes back, we might go away together."

"But first you have to finish here. You can't go out in the world until you're ready for it. When is your brother coming back? Where is he?"

"Some jail in California," Frankie declared defiantly, "and he gets out in three more years."

Turner stroked his cheek. The silence was broken by the blast of the noon whistle. Turner thought a moment.

"I'll have to give you another week of special detention, so don't make any big plans for next week. Now go on to lunch."

Frankie bypassed the cafeteria and crossed the yard to the gymnasium. In the vacant locker room he used a few minutes to rifle some open lockers. Nothing. He flopped loosely to the private plot of floor behind the lockers.

His cigarette was interrupted by the arrival of his friend, Marvin, and two steps behind him, Jimmy, the lucky winner of Frankie's dollar in the poker game just broken up by the yard monitor.

"Whaddja get this time, Frank?" Marvin asked.

"Another week of attention — shit, DEE-tention, I mean!" Frankie laughed. Then to Jimmy, with a sharp backhanded punch-shove into a locker, "And it's all your fault, you little shit. I want my money back."

Jimmy, two inches shorter, 15 pounds lighter, and many punch-shoves wiser, cringed at Frankie's logic.

"Crap," he objected. "The card game was all your idea."

"Gimmee your billfold."

Jimmy caved in meekly. Frankie rummaged through the billfold, littering the
“Christ,” Frankie thought. “Nothing ever changes.” He grooped along the wall behind a tattered plastic curtain, cracked up the thermostat, then swore and pounded it when nothing happened.

“How the hell am I supposed to keep warm?” he wondered aloud.

The kitchen was worse. A mound of dirty dishes were crammed into the rust-stained sink, and an assortment of garbage slumped on the floor in a wet paper sack.

“Try the refrigerator,” he thought. He inventoried a part of a quart of spoiled milk, a withered porkchop, two cans of beer, a bowl of rock hard, dried up peas, and in a red and white container, a spoon or two of Colonel Sanders’s potato salad. He chose the beer.

Frankie dialed through a number he found scrawled on the phone book, then ruffled idly among the mail on the table. Some ads, some bills, an old TV guide and a familiar shade of blue in the corner of a long, official envelope.

“Hello. Al’s Tavern, Tommy here.”

“Tommy? Frankie Anderson. Is my mother there?”

“Just a minute.”

Frankie ripped open the letter. What are those bastards up to now, he wondered. He read slowly.

R. M. Turner, Principal, Hillcrest Elementary School. Dear. Mrs. Anderson, I have just given Francis a week of special detention for an incident he provoked on the playground this afternoon.

“Whadda ya want?”

“Mom? Are you coming home pretty soon? I haven’t had anything to eat and I’m getting awful hungry.”

“Well, the guys just got off work, and we’re gonna go get something to eat when I’m done here, but I gotta stay a little while longer.”

“Can I go over to Marvin’s house then?”

“No, not tonight.”

“But there isn’t anything to do here and it’s cold and there isn’t anything to eat. Can I come over there?”

“Just a minute, let me check with the guys.”

I feel I must bring his deportment to your attention once again. His behavior is disrupting the progress of many other students. His new teacher has suggested that he be transferred to the special education class. His scholastic ability is satisfactory by fifth grade standards, but his attitudes are definitely below those expected in an 11-year-old. We would like to arrange a conference to —

“Frankie?”

“Yeah . . .”

“We’re going over to another place as soon as I get off, and they don’t allow no kids in there. Why don’t you go over to the corner place and get a hamburger?”

“But I don’t want to go get a hamburger, God dammit!”

“Listen here, you! You just go get something to eat, and then you get back home. I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?”

Frankie slammed the phone down.

“God damn bitch! You God damn, no good bitch, you! You fat slob bitch! You don’t even care! I’m going to Marvin’s and I’m not coming back ‘til I want to! Screw you, you fat old slob bitch!”

Only the cold, empty house could hear his anguished sobs.

floor with Jimmy’s cards and papers. He jerked out the dollar that had passed between them, and stuffed it into his pocket. Then he threw the wallet into the shower.

At a quarter past four that afternoon, Frankie slipped carefully through the winter dusk, past the bus monitor and into a seat on the south-side bus. Five minutes later he was free — headed down the hill, away from Turner, away from detention, and away from all those things he hated.

The night and the house were pitch black when Frankie arrived at his mother’s. Inside, it was cold and bitter-musty-stale from too-long-dead smoke and too-often-damp furniture. The living room, three brown bottles and a dirty glass huddled on the ring-stained coffee table. An overfull ashtray lay where it had slid down the arm of the sofa onto the grumpy, faded-purple slipcover. On a window sill the brittle, brown corpse of a sweet-potato vine reached out over the edge of a jar of ugly green water.
THE MARCH
I got into this motorcycle accident, you see, and the other guy's insurance gave me some money. At first they only wanted to part with $500 but I said that $5,000 was much more fair, since I flew off at 45 m.p.h. and they should try it sometime if they wanted to get scrambled in mind and body. I got $4,650 plus hospital bills paid in full so I thought over what I might do with it. A car sounded nice, so everyday I would read the papers, in the hospital bed, until finally I found a '56 VW convertible for $90. I bought it over the phone — not the best idea. When my bones mended and the bruises finally lightened and disappeared, I started in on that car's restoration. The top was shredded, a fender was missing completely and the last owner had painted all, including chrome and much of the glass, with a sickening coat of dark green paint. The beautiful stock olive-drab paint remained only on the door jambs and inside. Two hundred dollars later I owned a car and $4,000. The little nickel want ads advertised a three acre piece of land for $1,950, so I bought that cash.

I remember pulling up to my property, after all the paperwork was done, and just imagining how the house would look. All wood I thought. The land sloped to the southeast, and I dug my partial cellar by hand, carried all the river rocks from scattered areas, and built the foundation with strong mortar, water and dripping salty sweat. It was a grand feeling, looking over the foundation. The house was made with no plans but those in my mind's eye as I went along. No commission approved the building, and no electricity or septic tank fed or drained its majesty. Cedar poles, the fattest about 12 inches in diameter, made everything smell good. I hoped the bright summer sun on the works would not shrink it so badly as to make gaps and weaknesses. It was truly beautiful and ugly, along with being poorly fit together, but a young lady from town came out and sat on the ground taking photos as I split more cedar for the shake roof and rails for the fence.

From March until August, I worked seven days a week. Some days I just looked and walked around and picked things up, making small changes. The porch was added later and there needed to be a roof over it but I had sealed off the rafters with shakes. Days went by where I would just look and look for a device to protect, from the weather, anyone coming to knock on my door. My VW had broken by now, and I had nursed it carefully home stuck in high gear, then placed it on blocks and locked the doors. It sets there now, by the side of the house next to the pumpkin patch, its hood taken off. That hood makes a wonderful guard over the front door and that young lady from town says it looks like my house is sticking its tongue out at the world. We both laughed.

I finished the house last week. Every thing worked, and all things had a place. I sat on the porch and thought of what to do next, but even the dishes were clean. Stretching slowly and stiffly I walked diagonally across my land to the pond on the extreme southeast corner. I took off my sandals and pants. Folding them with my shirt carefully I placed them on an old fruit crate. Slipping into the cool water up to my chest I skimmed my hands into the water (as I would with them in the air outside the window of my father's car on long summer trips) and arched my back while completely entering the water. I pulled myself to the pool's bottom and in just a few strokes I was across to the far side.

"That's my wife," I said. "She probably won't be back. Maybe she just wanted to see what I was doing. I haven't seen her since last January. I sent her $1,000 to get a divorce."

A warm day had almost dried my pants so I put them back on and carried the remaining apparel up to the house.

Nobody was going to come by anymore I thought. That motorcycle wreck never hurt me at all; rather, it had released me. I don't mind if no one ever comes by again. I feel the same now.
Some days just try to be different. They have no respect for a continuance of the natural order. Days like that destroy people; create unnecessary conflict; bring on the feeling that power must be applied somewhere or the world will just up and fall apart.

Karl kept the world together on a day that slowly destroyed itself with change. He performed his morning toilet ritual at 5:18 a.m. to insure the sunrise. Yellow green urine offered itself to the bowl, glistening beneath the foam. He heard a fire truck clearing away the morning mist with a long wailing blast that echoed in the rising sparkle of light on dew.

The drive out of the country was eventful, Karl used his special horn sound on three cars as he moved down the freeway. He assured that they didn’t change lanes before they were supposed to. He hoped others in this self-chosen profession of controller were as conscientious.

Karl knew it was a special day when the third car heeded his warning but changed into the wrong lane. He slowed down to take that car’s place in line, leaving his chosen spot unguarded. He could feel the outside influences building, he would have to stop it before it got completely out of control.

He pulled over to the edge of the road and slowed to five miles an hour — as his car coasted along the dirt sidelay he scratched the hidden spot beneath his left kneecap. He hummed a steady monotone drone for 30 seconds. A warm feeling moved slowly up his leg, through his crotch, down to his right toe, pushing his foot down on the accelerator. He looked for a puddle in the dirt and waited

**rituals**

by

p.t.

Martin
until he hit a small one before he swerved back onto the freeway with a magical beep at 70 miles an hour.

His parking space was a second strong indicator. There was someone already in it when he arrived at his office. He stopped his car in the middle of the drive, got out, and walked over to the offending vehicle. He opened the door, released the brake and rolled it out of his space and into the driveway. He pulled his car into place. As he got out, he spit twice on his back tire in liquid blessing.

He waited at the door of the building until someone opened it from the inside. He didn't want any outdoor demons in his office. It was opened by a woman taking out the morning mail, a very good sign.

The morning passed quickly. Karl filled out the required forms, wrote the appropriate notes and avoided talking to anyone. He could feel chaos growing as noon came, and a cloud of smoke rose to cover the sun that he could see in the windows across the office. The cloud came from some distant building, and he had to cast a shadowed glance at it to slow it down. As soon as he could muster his inner strength, he went to the bathroom and chanted three wind charms over running water to disperse the haze across the light.

When he came back to his desk, it was clear, but a strong odor of seared flesh permeated the room. Everyone got up from their desks and left the room. Karl knew that their presence was a sign. He would have to offer up his monthly erection as a sacrifice. It must be a full moon.

Karl left work at exactly 5:01. The young secretary that had attempted to interrupt his noon rites was in the same elevator. He followed her through town, catching the same bus out to the college. She was his.

Dusk settled into darkness. A drizzly mist crawled out of the sunset and floated without lines through the gray hulls of the evergreens sparsely spread across a grassy knoll. Karl waited in the chill for the secretary to leave the building that she had taken as a hiding place. While he waited he performed the calling ritual, forcing her to come to him by amplifying his heartbeat deep within his throat.

The light globes along the path below him came on suddenly, glowing without casting a definite shadow. The moon slowly emerged from the black on black horizon. Karl throbbed quietly from his hiding place behind the trees.

Rita came out of the building and walked slowly along the asphalt path that wandered between two lightly wooded knolls. She smiled, feeling satisfied with her performance in the class. She wasn't normally a participant in their discussions, but today she had strength enough to tell everyone to take their modern beliefs and forget them as being irrelevant to the real meaning of things. She chuckled when she thought of how flustered their defenses were.

She looked up at the trees through the light evening mist, they looked settled into the steep sides of the slope. A shorter blackness, tall and lean like a tree with only two branches stood out in silhouette against the tired moon.

Rita stared at the apparition, feeling a slight gnawing of an almost familiar fear. It resembled the classic ghoul waiting just out of range of the lights. The tree moved and then it was as real as the grip of her stomach grabbing for itself.

Rita saw Karl coming down the hill. She ran, heading straight off the path for the buildings on the other side of the small hill on her right. Her sandals dropped off, and she ran faster. She had to get away.

Karl stretched out his legs in quick pacing pursuit. He knew that she was his as soon as she headed off the path and up the hill away from him. He knew she was special, she seemed to be waiting for him, just this side of darkness. His eyes widened and he could see her personal glow surrounding her, guiding him on in the blackness between the trees.
Saint Rita of Cascia was born in 1386. Her parents, being of advanced years, married her off at the age of 12, contrary to her desire to become a nun. Her husband was a man of ill temperament and ungentle demeanor. She was, however, a model wife and mother, bearing him twin sons. After 18 years of marriage, her husband was murdered over a trivial dispute regarding a gambling debt of one young pig.

Saint Rita tried to dissuade her sons from seeking revenge, appealing to heaven to prevent such a crime on their part. They died shortly thereafter of a painful stomach disorder, although they were reconciled to God.

She applied to an Augustinian nunnery and was refused admission on the grounds of her widowhood. But, through continued entreaties and Divine Intervention, she received the habit of the order. She excelled in mortifications and the efficacy of her prayers.

On account of many miracles reported to have been wrought at her intercession she received, in Spain, the title of La Abogada de los Imposibles (The Pleader of Desperate Cases).

Rita ran faster, panting, out of breath. She ran into a tree and fell down along its rough bark, to lie face down in the cold, damp grass. She gasped for air, clutching her fingers into the dirt and roots. The only word in her mind was a resounding “NO!” echoing, reverberating, crashing into itself, growing louder and louder until she realized that it wasn’t her mind. It was someone standing above her.

Karl, tall as the trees, stood next to his woman. He screamed “‘No! No! No!’ Each syllable coming as soon as the preceding one began to fade and die. It was his stopping ritual, he didn’t want her hurt, yet.

Rita looked up and could not see his face, the darkness hid his features, the light of the moon was behind him. The noise of his screams told her where his head was, his spine and out to illuminate the darkness within her.

Rita felt all the symptoms of fury — the sudden pulsing of the temples, the lurch and pound of her heart as adrenalin surged. Her hands shook with constrained power, and a scream was buried in her throat, waiting to erupt.

It came with a cry for her patron: “RITAAAA” came out as she reached up and grabbed him by the throat and twisted the windpipe shut with a loud crack.

“I must be the sacrifice,” Karl thought. “That’s strange.” His body hung limp, suddenly quiet. His mouth moved a few times, and Rita could see a hint of moonlight gleaming in his satisfied eyes.

She pushed the body off and away. Exhausted, she lay in the cool damp grass, feeling the individual blades caressing the inside of her thighs like the Earth welcoming her back to the fold. The damp drip of Him became a cold shivering stain that caused her to roll over with a jerk. Grasping on to the rough comfort of the tree, she pulled herself up while wiping off her legs with the remains of her skirt.

She could do nothing with what her body found acceptable. It wasn’t possible to destroy that which God had willed on her. She wept, she screamed, she prayed under the auspices of her namesake and she would come to hate the growing beast within her with a fury she had never known possible — until he was born.
Rarely do expectations of a nation evolve into messianic dreams of such noble pretensions that have been equated with the promise of America. America has always been something special, a dream of something new and vast — a second chance for the world's dispossessed. America was a break from Europe's imperial corruption and totalitarian grasp: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..."

But somehow America swallowed like the rest of Europe. The Dream failed. There developed two Americas. One is democratic and humane. The other is intolerant and self-righteous, strengthening over the years, to mock the Dream. As a nation that perverted its power, we acquired a sense of self-righteousness, viewing ourselves as omnipotent, confusing our power with virtue. Imbued with this missionary zeal and blinded by our own arrogance, we over extended our power, too often in the name of God, weakening the moral stature that first made us different.

We cannot forsake our destiny to these dark, intolerant forces. We must recommit ourselves to the ideals of that original Dream. We must realize that we cannot find freedom and equality, we must create it. But there can be no rights and privileges without responsibility. We cannot always blame others or society for our national misfortunes, each must look within him/herself. Paraphrasing a visionary President, we must ask what we can do to better our country, instead of asking our country what it can do for us.

July 4, 1776, brought a new hope for mankind, what will 1976 bring? They had a second chance, do we respond to a third? If so, then let our bicentennial birthday be more than a celebration of longevity. We can begin to make the Dream a reality. If we choose not to, our birthday will be an empty one, a "Freedom Train" exhibit where one observes but does not touch or feel. But I do not think we will fail. There is a movement across this land that demands the fulfillment of the Dream. It can be seen in a child's smile, in the face of an honest politician, on a struggling farm, in a clean stream, in a teacher that cares, a doctor that weeps, a mechanic that doesn't overcharge, a nation that saves its cities, a nation that wants peace. I see the dream awakening, it must, or we will perish from the earth.

Over five decades ago, Thomas Wolfe had seen enough in his own lifetime to cynically decry the moral hypocrisy around him. But as the years passed his cynicism faded, as so must ours. While Wolfe had premonitions of his own early death, he knew that his country would live to fulfill the Dream. In his last major work, "You Can't Go Home Again," Wolfe found his own credo, and possibly one for his nation for 1976:

"I think the true discovery of America is before us. I think the true fulfillment of our spirit, of our people... is yet to come. I think the true discovery that all these things are certain as the morning, as inevitable as noon..."
ROSS CANDOO