CABBAGES & KINGS
SPRING 1985
Editorial Message

With the end of another Spring semester comes this year's edition of Cabbages and Kings. It is difficult to express in words a year's worth of expectations, planning, and hard work. A magazine such as this one comes from a support network too long to list.

The finished piece is often all that is ever seen or remembered. But the time, efforts, and even the struggles should also be considered. For it's caring enough to disagree or struggle over an idea that ends up coming together as the finished piece.

On behalf of Cabbages and Kings, I would like to thank all of our contributors and all of those who were a part of our support network.

Frank Searson
Editor
CABBAGES & KINGS
SPRING 1985

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Displaced Memories

You take Exit 36 off the new stretch of interstate, then stop at the light. Impoverished eyes stare at your sports car. You look left, right, your pulse quickens, your stomach dives. An involuntary smile. Yeah, you've been here before. The light changes, a trucker honks. You take a left and drive for several blocks. There's the playground, so it must be back the other way. You turn around, go back to where you started. You drive several blocks now heading west, then know you've gone too far. You turn around, then suddenly you see the spot. The old white house transformed is now a concrete pier. You pull off the road, light a cigarette, drawing deep. You stare at the pier, say for twenty minutes or so. You drive back to the interstate aware of the dusk. You'll fill up at the next town, you say. You turn on the headlights, take deep breaths, talk to yourself: Just follow the yellow beams, you say, straight ahead, straight ahead.

Karen DeLaney
The Bus

I ride the bus to school
Not the yellow kind
No not that one
But
The City bus
It's mostly white

It costs money to ride the bus
Seventy cents
Eighty to transfer
Half price if you're old
Nothing if you're young

Other people ride my bus
I watch them
I never knew there were so many kinds
No two the same
And yet I wonder

Some sit up front and chat with the bus driver
I sit in the back
Graffitti crowds my seat
Thoughts crowd my person
Sometimes I need two seats if I bring all my thoughts along

Yesterday I missed the bus
God
Just think of everything I missed

John Mangan jr.
Don't Crowd Me

I know a person who stands too near;  
I can't answer her questions because I'm too busy thinking  
"how can I get out of here?"

It isn't that my friends need a written application  
But don't invade my space without an invitation.

Virginia C. Sloper
Red Pigeon

There isn't any more space for pigeons.
They have covered their red color
with their white feathers
for so long.
Red is the color they hate.
They were happy
  staying around holy places,
  flying freely around religious spaces,
  watching people praying to God,
    all living in brotherly peace.
They liked to fly in the blue clear sky.
  There isn't any more clear sky.
They preferred to live in a quiet and peaceful place.
  There isn't any more peaceful place.
  There is noise.
  There is struggle all over that space.
The pigeon is looking at its red feathers,
  feeling the signs of its death.
They want the pigeon to be red.
They want to use its blood to decorate their flags.
The pigeon hates the red color,
  the color of anger,
  the color of danger,
  the color of war,
  the color of terror and blood.

Written by an Afghani student
December 1984
Still in the Game

At two in the afternoon Skinner Road is empty. Still, I brake the Oldsmobile to a gentle stop although the light is just turning yellow. Always correct, that’s me. I check my make-up in the rear-view mirror, just a glance, don’t want to see those lines by my eyes too closely.

“... hope I die before I get old;” I turn away from my image in the mirror—in the next lane stops an old pink Pontiac Catalina, all windows down, the familiar Who song blasting from big speakers and five young men grinning at me.

The driver, in a sleeveless t-shirt, hair greased down, curling in the back, revs his engine, looks at the light, grins at me. Good God, he wants to race me. Should I ... green light! I push the pedal down, easy now, the Fourfiftyfive purrs, then roars as the secondary barrels open. The Catalina is behind me. I quickly check the mirror, nobody else on the road. My face is hot and I am grinning at my reflection. Doing seventyfive now—am I crazy? The Catalina is pulling up, the driver sits hunched over the wheel. He looks a little like James Dean, remember James Dean? My heart skips a beat as the outside flies by, taking all the years with it, until there is only the street and the car and the greaser and I.

College Street light up ahead—I look over, we are still neck-to-neck. I know I can take him, the pedal is only halfway down, but I ease off and he pulls in front of me, the guys in the back seat are laughing and throwing their arms up like victorious boxers in the ring.

I smile at them, really, they are only kids. At the expressway turn-off the blinker goes on, their car moves into the slow lane. When I pass, the driver winks and throws me a kiss. I grin and wave. I sing all the way home.

Barbara Dirksen
Ritual

Going to church on Sunday was a big deal at our house; getting ready for the day was an ordeal. My mother would begin to prepare my sisters and me for Sunday School on Saturday night. It was a long, tedious process of having our hair washed and pressed, taking a bath without leaving the bathroom in a disastrous state, and getting our clothes wet.

My mother would lay us younger ones on the counter top over the sink and wash our hair.

"Hold still, I'll be through in a minute," she would scold impatiently.

"Soap's in my eyes and water is running down into my ears," I'd whimper while clutching a face cloth over my eyes.

"There's no soap in your eyes, girl! I haven't even opened the shampoo yet, and that's probably the first cleaning your ears have got since the last time you got your hair washed ... now hold still here so I can finish."

Getting it washed was bad enough but the procedure got progressively worse as the evening wore on. The hair would have to be combed out and braided and by the time my mother got around to braiding it, it would be full of tangles and snarls. All of our hair was so thick that it would take at least 30 minutes to comb each head of hair out and braid it into sections to dry. After a short reprieve, it was time for the grand finale of torture. Cut the stove on, and find the straightening comb. What fear this would strike in our little hearts as we obediently did our mother's bidding.

"You gonna get burned if you don't hold still here," my mother would warn. I would resolve to be brave and not flinch when the hot comb would come close to my scalp, but my resolve would go up in smoke along with the smoke and scent of Ultra Sheen emanating from the hot irons.
“Ouch, you burned me,” I’d tearfully accuse as the comb would singe my scalp.

“You shouldn’t have moved; I told you to hold still. Don’t you want to look pretty tomorrow for Milton Williams? Has he asked for you hand yet?” my mother would tease. Milton was one of the little boys I attended Sunday School with and my family always had the mistaken impression that I was smitten with him. True enough he was a cute little boy, but I wasn’t into boys at that age, and I certainly wouldn’t go through this fiery punishment just to impress another 6 year old.

After what seemed an eternity, my hair would be as straight and slick as an onion skin and my poor little sore, abused scalp hurting something fierce. During the week we had to wear our hair in braids but since Sunday was a special occasion, we got to wear pigtails with ribbons or curls. That was the only reward we got for going through the “fiery furnace.”

By then it was time for our baths; of course, I did more playing than bathing as I tried to keep my newly pressed hair dry while blowing water bubbles and splashing around in a tub full of Mr. Bubbles. The water would be tepid and I still hadn’t bathed.

“Are you bathing in there?” Jackie, my older sister would bellow through the locked door. She had an identity crisis ... she thought she was my mother; she was so bossy.

“Yes,” I would fib as I furiously began to scrub.

“Well come outta there right now; somebody else has to bathe, you know.”

Sometimes my little sister, Lisa, would take a bath with me but we would invariably wind up getting a spanking for leaving most of the bathwater on the floor and tiles. I finally came to the conclusion that it was much safer to bathe alone.

Dried and smelling of Johnsons’ and Johnsons’ baby powder, it was time to set my clothes out. We had a large drawer called the sock drawer. I was more likely to find two snakes in the drawer
before finding two socks that matched. There were umpteen pairs of socks for seven girls, all of whom wore different sizes. Even so, finding a matching pair was practically impossible. Finally locating slip, underwear, and crinoline, I would get down to the business of more important things—filling my purse. My sisters and I would fill our purses with everything imaginable: pencils, paper (to write notes to our friends during the sermon), lotion, chap stick, enough kleenex for the entire congregation, and every small toy we could reasonably smuggle past our mother’s inspection. We each received money to put in the collection plate; a quarter for the younger ones and fifty cents for the older ones. Of course, we’d leave just enough room in our purse for the penny candy we’d purchase at the little Ma and Pa store around the corner from the church.

My father had a shoe box, and on Sunday morning, he would shine our shoes up until you could see your reflection in them. I loved the smell of the Kiwi shoe polish and the rhythmic swish of the shoe brush. If I wore my patent leathers, I would find either Vaseline or cold cream and use that to shine them up.

Even though we engaged in this ritual every Saturday night, Sunday morning was usually total bedlam. No matter how careful my mother planned her strategy, there were always last-minute hitches; someone had mismatched socks on, a last minute run in the last pair of nylons, not enough ribbons of the right color to go around, juice spilled down the front of someone’s clothes, and so on and so on. Finally, everyone would be properly groomed and presentable and we’d all troup out to the car as prissy as you please. The adults at our church always marveled at how my mother seemed to handle the job of getting us all dressed and ready for school and church so effortlessly.

“If only you knew,” she’d say.

Alice Felder-Smith
Faith

The evidence of things unseen
the hope of things to come
Opening a door
Turning a corner
Answering a phone
An empty purse,
et it and go hungry
gasp it and hold onto nothing
look for it and go crazy.
Yet the salvation of many
is the result,
without it there is no tomorrow.
To An Athlete Dying Young

Music by David B.A. Haller
Words by A.E. Housman

Andante

1. The time you won your town the race
   day the road all runners come
   we cleared you through the market place
   bring you home And

2. To set before its
   echoes fade the fleet foot of the noble shade
   And

man and boy stood
   Set you at your threshold down the
   Toomsman of a challenge cup
   still defend ed shoulder high

hold to the
   Home we brought you shoulder high
No Free Boys

They all have wrinkles now
though some are only thirty
their war speaks to them
in the cavaties of their thoughts
and in the brightness of the day.
They killed, they remember
we chose not to know.
They remember with each rising
the suffering of their war.
They wear their wrinkles easily
and with dignity
a pride their country took
or did not ever give.

But they once were boys
free on the beaches, in the fields
picking apples, kissing girls—
They lost their way home
and went to war
they learned the ways of war
they became prisoners of their wrinkles
and the deaths they know.
There are no free boys
on those beaches
they lost their way...
to war.

Leslie D. Whitmore
Horns

There are many kinds of horns. A bull horn is an odd one. Is it something you talk to bulls with? Or is it a horn you speak bull through? Maybe you bully people with it. A fog horn is strange. With a fog horn you let people know there is fog. They probably know this anyway. Perhaps the fog horn is trying to scare the fog, it scares me. There are bicycle horns. Some very fancy with batteries and buttons, and others with a bulb on one end that make an obnoxious sound. They are not bad, but the bulb falls off easily. Car horns are popular. They can say hi or goodbye. It is against the law to use a car horn in Paris. I don’t know if that is good or bad. What do you do there after a wedding? There are civil defense horns. Defending against whatever isn’t civil. Many horns make music. Loudness, Or shrillness, Or calm like a French horn. Those are okay in Paris.

Jim Barber
Saturday Afternoon

Riding in my father’s pick-up truck
A joke, a remembrance
Questions answers, points of view
The laugh, the pipe
I will miss him very much
When he is gone

Jim Barber

Image of Time

A mirror is a clock.
Each time I look
Into the face
Reflects the minute
Past and present
Etching my future
In aging
Seconds I cannot touch
With the turning of the hand
That wipes the mirror
And winds the clock.

Sheree L. Ciao
Do You Love Me?

RING ... RING. I bolted to an upright position, scrambling for the receiver.

"Hello," I said, in an unawake voice.

"Rae? This is Dona (sic). Daddy is dying! The nursing home just called and asked if we were coming to see him."

After a long pause I said, "Donna, would you mind if I visited him alone tomorrow?" My sister agreed, and after a lengthy conversation, I found myself wide awake at one o'clock in the morning.

Damn, why does everything seem to be so hard for me? Why? Tomorrow I will have to drive three hundred miles, to say goodbye to my father. Tomorrow is Father's Day. Why does he have to die on Father's Day? Why am I angry? Shame on me! I feel ashamed for being angry. I never knew this man. The last twenty years he'd been in a nursing home. Before that, he could never remember my name. He always called me Dona. Don't you know me? You named me after yourself, RAE, after Raymond. I'm your namesake! I look like you. I gave you your B-12 shots since I was eleven years old. Can't you even remember my name? Do you love me?

I dozed off for a couple of hours. Awakening, I felt the sun streaming across my face, announcing a beautiful day. Father's Day has always been difficult for me. It made me feel disjointed, apart from those who celebrated it.

At the breakfast table, I explained to the children that I wanted to say farewell to my Dad, alone. I wanted to be able to sort out what I was going to say to him on the way up there, and decipher what had been said on the way back. I didn't want, or need, the children to be depressed too. This was sad enough for me.
Corre got up from his chair, walked around the table, and gave me a warm hug. He said, “We have lots to do today, Mom, don’t worry about us!”

“Thank you, Corre. I love you,” I said.

It was noon and the sun was hot, which made the drive seem longer. Over and over in my mind I rehearsed my farewell speech. I didn’t want to say goodbye! I never had a chance to know him and really share life with him. He was always so sick. I know I loved him, but I never knew if he loved me. I’d always say bye, Dad. I love you, and he’d answer bye, drive careful. Or, bye, thanks for coming. But never—bye, I love you too. Maybe I’m making too much out of this. Of course he loves me! All fathers love their children. I decided to drop it, before it drove me crazy.

As I put on my signal to turn into the nursing home, I became scared. I prayed to God to help me through this ordeal.

Walking into his room I could sense death. Death has its own energy. It filled the room with noises of gasping and moaning. His face was filled with pain, and his body looked like a skeleton with flesh. Sadness filled my heart, and tears filled my eyes.

“Hello, Dad, it’s Rae. Can you see me? Can you hear me?”

“Yes,” he whispered slowly. His breathing was so labored, and so difficult, that I decided it would be best to just sit with him and rub his hand. I was surprised to find that after a few minutes, I relaxed and began to feel more comfortable.

The nurse came in. So many times I had been the nurse in a situation like this. I could see now how comforting it was to others.
“Can I get you anything?”, she asked, as she took my father’s blood pressure and pulse.

“No thank you,” I said. I wanted to ask what his vitals were, but I thought, what’s the point? Again, the sounds of death filled the room as I sat quietly on the bed, next to my father.

One hour passed by. Nothing had been said. Comfortable quietness had existed between us, but now I had to leave. One hundred fifty miles of traveling and work the next day forced me to accept leaving my father for the last time.

I slipped off the bed and let go of his hand. Leaning forward I kissed his forehead and said, “I love you, daddy.” My lips began to quiver and in a shaky voice I added quietly, “Do you love me?”

Rae Rubley
Draft

My eyes could see blood
Everywhere
Lifeless Kaleeb
Fell into my arms
Forgetting my location
Crying standing with opened arms
The bullets reached my stomach
I fell
Playing dead
Kaleeb, Kaleeb, Kaleeb
Ringing in my mind
Like music to my ears
The humming of rescue helicopters
My tears were many
I placed the pennies
Over his opened eyes

Charlene Roberts
Buy a husband

One hug, one kitchen room
One meal, not enough for one day.
The end of the month I often run around
To look for rice,
The money, I do not have to spend.
How could they ask me
"Do you want to buy a husband?"
Now I am reserving ten cents for each day.
Wait, until you come to visit me.
Open the box of money.
Could you help me
To calculate the money?
Is that enough for me
To make a celebration day,
To make a wedding day?
For one husband is wanted
To buy.

Nhung Ta
a Vietnamese student
Arms aching, I haul the last box of books out to the rotting, creaking porch and heave it atop the other cartons. A billow of dust escapes, covering my face with ancient particles. I rub my eyes, then survey the cluttered porch. There is nothing here I will keep. Although I love books, I have no use for the yellowed, musty-smelling paperbacks and assorted book club selections—the escapist fare that provided mother temporary flight from her life.

Inside the house all windows are flung open, but the day is hot and still. I survey the near empty rooms and run my fingers over the faded, grimy wallpaper. "The home of my childhood," I whisper aloud. The only house I'd lived in until I left for college. Tomorrow I'll leave and not return—there will be no reason.

For weeks I've waited, and waited, for a flood of emotion to wash over me, to cleanse me, like the baths she gave me as a child. Once again I'm leaving, this time forever, and I want to grieve and mourn, and most of all to be forgiven: for being different, for my hatred of this bleak, pathetic town, for my unrelenting pride and ambition. To others I'm successful, self-determined, but to mother only willful, a stranger she would never understand—a bad daughter.

Karen Delaney
The Wedding Ring

What did I know of her long nights when the light would waver between October and the black wood, the late hours harvesting the falling sticks the tangle of vines and leaves hanging like mittens stiff with cold on trees? I found the wedding ring. Probably a woman had ditched it out of her car in a moment of rage or resignation like Friday weather, herself full up with dread, saying, Is this what you want? and believing nothing would ever be more tentative, nothing not even a hundred tomorrows could retrieve. I dropped that gold loop into a pocket of my jeans, pulled the last tangle of juniper berries out of a blue spruce to let it breathe.

Harriet Susskind
Advisor to Cabbages & Kings
Night's Sleep

Sleeps there a soul the long night through
Whose almost corpse reposes, still,
One foot tenderly cradles its twin
Fingers laced above patient breast
Rhythmic bellows lift and lower,
Hear soft whistle of easy breath.

No such fortune belongs to me.
My mind fractures, neurons shattering.
Retrieve one, worry it, discards pile,
Skitter after another before it melts.

In the mist of pseudo sleep
I windowshade the covers, trapped,
Freed. Insomnia, a threshing machine
Separating sheet from blanket, head from pillow
Partner from partner. I long to be
A fetus floating in peaceful dream.

Bobbie Reifsteck
The Mastery

“Let me introduce myself first, and then each and every one of you will get a chance to present yourself to your fellow Mastery students. My name is Joseph Scalzo. I am a graduate of New York City University. I have a Masters in psychology, and I also majored in Modern American Drama. I have been leading Mastery workshops in New York and Toronto for the last four years. I have also appeared on various soap operas and ‘starred’ in several commercials around the New York Metropolitan area. I, like yourselves, felt a desire to ‘broaden my horizons,’ if I may coin a cliche. I also knew that I was allowing a lot of my talent to sit in a state of potentiality. For some reason I was allowing myself to suppress a great deal of my creativity. How may here are maybe just a little bit skeptical or afraid about being here this weekend?”

Almost every hand shot up.

“About five years ago I learned about the Mastery from a friend of a friend. I, like yourselves, was a little skeptical also. Thoughts of Moonies and Hare Krishnas groping at me for a whole weekend ran through my head. After I took the Mastery, I was convinced it was the best thing I had ever done for myself. Hopefully, you’ll feel this way, too. It’s going to require some give and take on your part. If you are to reap the full benefit, it will require a willingness to make yourself vulnerable. Hopefully, you will carry this vulnerability with you forever. You will be critiqued by myself, my assistants, the Mastery students and by yourself. I repeat that it is very important to leave yourself space to be open to suggestions. Tonight, I’d like to just have you introduce yourselves to everyone. Tell us anything you’d like to about yourself. Your family, your job, your dreams. Anything. Who’d like to start off?”

Paul had been on stage before, and he’d been in front of crowds unrehearsed quite a few times, but he still felt an uneasiness about being the first one up. He allowed several people to get up and finally decided that he ought to get it over with now. When the lady up front sat down, he took a deep breath and slowly rose from his chair. He took his position, center-front, and faced the crowd.
"Hi. My name is Paul Berensen. I'm from Toronto. I go to school at McMaster University in Hamilton, and I commute back and forth everyday. I live at home with my mother and my two younger brothers, Allen and David. My parents are divorced. My father left about twelve years ago when I was eight. I've basically put myself through school with part-time jobs and loans from the bank. I'm majoring in chemical engineering. I'm also studying drama and have often toyed with the idea of a stage career. I play a lot of sports, baseball and football mainly. I like to keep in shape, and I enjoy the competition. I guess that's about it."


"I go out once in a while for a quick beer or two. I'm too busy with school work and all to get too serious with anyone, so I guess—no, I don't date much at all."

"OK, Paul." Joseph paused for a moment. "What would you like Mastery to do for you?"

Paul expected this question, and without hesitation said, "Just make me more alive on stage."

"Sounds fair enough," said Joseph. "And what did you plan for your presentation tomorrow?"

"I'm going to do a small scene from a play that our high school put on years ago. It's about a street punk who's just been brought home by the cops after getting picked up for a petty crime. Actually it's a monologue by the boy to his dad."

"Sounds good, Paul. Thank you and good luck tomorrow."

Paul sat down feeling quite relieved. He felt that the hard part was over. It was just a matter of getting up tomorrow and delivering his soliloquy. Hopefully, the criticisms would open him up to his problem.

* * *

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“OK, who would like to start things off? Any volunteers?”
Paul felt good. He had gotten his six hours of sleep and was well rested. “If I get up now, and get it over with, I’ll have the rest of the day to enjoy the other presentations,” he thought. He was ready. He had dressed the part. His hair was slicked back, in true punk fashion. He wore a black tank top, a pair of old levis, and old high-top sneakers. He could have easily walked in from the streets of New York City.
When nobody else pressed forward, Paul inhaled deeply and stood up. “I’ll get it over with,” he said jokingly, to cover his nervousness.
“Good, Paul. Now, let’s see ... you’re doing the skit about the punk kid and his father, right?”
“That’s right.”
“OK,” Joseph said, “project to the crowd. You owe it to them to give of yourself.”
Joseph relaxed in his director’s chair. He clicked his ballpoint pen authoritatively, crossed his legs and prepared to begin his written critique.
“Do you want me to begin now?” Paul asked.
“Yeah, sure.” Joseph’s eyes glanced left, then right, then straight at Paul. A hint of a smile crossed his face. “Whenever you’re ready.”
Paul straightened himself up. He looked indiscriminately into the crowd and began his speech.
“I don’t know why I did it. Kicks, maybe. I don’t know. Nobody was looking, maybe. What do you care, anyway? You never let nothing I did bother you before. Maybe I just ....”
He paused, looked at the crib note pressed in his left hand and took up where he left off.
“Maybe I just felt like you don’t ... um ... didn’t — Maybe I just felt ...”
He grasped for the lines in his mind, a fever broke in his palms. His thoughts short circuited. Vertigo! Vertigo! Vertigo!
“Can I start over?”
“Sure, go ahead. Get rid of the notes, though. You’re on stage.”
Paul pushed his hair back, clenched his fists and swaggered a little, just to get himself into character. He began his lines again...

"I don't know why I did it. I guess kicks. I don't know... I don't... maybe... I guess... um... maybe....."

"Paul, what's the problem?" There was no smile with the question.

"I don't know. I just can't get the lines out."

"Did you rehearse any of this?"

"Yes, I knew them perfectly this morning."

"Well, you sure as hell don't know them now."

"I'm doing the best I can. I just forgot them."

"Then you're not doing the best you can. You're really wasting our time."

"Well I'm sorry," Paul shot back, looking straight at Joseph.

Joseph cocked his head upward, eyes fixated on the ceiling, and slowly rose from his director's chair. He took a long breath, and exhaled deeply. He walked slowly and deliberately up the center aisle, eyes still upward, hands behind his back.

"OK, Paul, let's try something different. I'm going to be a prop. I'll be your father. When you play your part, play it as though I'm the part of the father."

Paul gave himself a moment to compose and concentrate on his part. He looked towards the empathetic crowd, and then towards Joseph. He began his lines again, and again he faltered. Whatever lines he had memorized earlier became an insurmountable barrier—a cloud of confusion enveloped him, suffocating his thoughts.

"Paul, I don't know what your problem is, but I do know you've completely wasted our time."

"You've got no right to say that."

"Whoa, big man. Big time jock. Pretty boy. You think you're gonna make it on your good looks or what? You've gotta have talent to make it on stage. And Balls! You've got neither."

"I think I do."

"You can't even remember your lines to a simple high school play! Why do you even bother? Why don't you stay home and be a mama's boy? No wonder your old man left. If I had a completely worthless kid like you I'd have left too."
Tears welled up in Paul’s eyes. The audience sat in an uneasy awe; a feeling of communal pity spread through the crowd. Paul wanted nothing better than to slug Joseph, but Joseph’s massive frame and penetrating dark eyes kept him from crossing that line. He looked straight at Joseph and uttered, “You bastard.”

Joseph moved closer towards Paul and pushed Paul’s shoulder with his fingertips.

“I’m your old man now, Paul, and I’m telling you I would have moved out too, if I’d known what a lousy, fucking son you would have turned out to be. What are you crying for, you wimp?”

“Shut up! Goddammit!”

Joseph pushed Paul again with his fingertips.

“I’m your father, Paul, and I’m saying you’re no good. I left because of you. Come on, punk. What are you crying for? Be a man!”

“I am a man,” Paul cried. “I’m more of a man than you are.”

“Bullshit,” Joseph screamed back. “You’re nothing but a crybaby.”

Paul’s fists were clenched in a white-knuckled madness.

“Go ahead and punch me, punk,” Joseph taunted. “I’m your old man and I say you haven’t got the nerve to punch me. What are you waiting for? I’m your father.”

Paul started hyperventilating. He began to punch rhythmically at a shadow; a shadow that had followed him from the past. Joseph prodded him even more. “Come on, Paul, what do you want to say?”

Paul began swinging towards Joseph, flailing uncontrollably, missing every punch.

“Come on, Paul, be a man.”

“I am a man, goddammit. I’m more of a man than you were. At least I never abandoned my family! At least I stayed and helped out! I filled in where you left off, Goddammit! I helped Mom! I helped raise the boys when you walked out. You never gave us a fucking thing! Don’t tell me about being a man! You weren’t there to watch Mom cry and get old and bitter. You weren’t there to be a husband. You walked out and left me in charge! At eight years old! You weren’t there to be a father, so I had to be. Goddammit, why’d you leave us! Why couldn’t you be a father? I tried to love you, but
I couldn’t! I hated you! I hated you for leaving, for leaving me and Mom and the boys. I hated you for ruining every school play that you didn’t attend, for ruining every ball game that you didn’t watch, for ruining every holiday that you weren’t there! I hated you! I hated you! I hated you! I hated you! I love you!”

Paul dropped to the floor. His body convulsed. He wrapped himself in a fetal embrace and cried like a baby. He heaved and heaved, but there was nothing left to expel.

Joseph bent down to Paul and put his hand gently on his shoulder. Paul looked up, his face damp and reddened. He sat up, put his arms around Joseph, in a childlike embrace, and cried like an eight year old.

“Paul?” Joseph’s voice just barely audible to the audience. “Do you understand now where your creativity was blocked? Do you see what was preventing you from projecting? From giving of yourself to others? From making yourself vulnerable? And did you notice what you picked as a skit? That was no accident, Paul, even though you don’t think you picked it out intentionally. Now, get up and deliver your monologue. And give of yourself.”

Paul rose and faced the crowd squarely. He began his monologue. It was a flawless, powerful, believable delivery.
Rene' Rivera