

Lindenwood University

Digital Commons@Lindenwood University

Theses

Theses & Dissertations

1996

Seasons Through My Window

Sandra L. Burke

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/theses>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

SEASONS THROUGH MY WINDOW

Sandra L. Burke, B.S.



**A Master's Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the
Department of Art of Lindenwood College in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the
Master's of Art**

1996

thesis
B 9185
1996

COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF CANDIDACY

**Professor Elaine Tillinger
Chairperson and Advisor**

Associate Professor Jon Hargate

Associate Professor Hans Levi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	I.	Introduction	1
Chapter	II.	Spring	4
Chapter	III.	Summer	12
Chapter	IV.	Fall	37
Chapter	V.	Winter	53
Bibliography			54
Vita Auctoris			55

List of Illustrations

1. Shadow Side	3
2. The Changing Seasons	6
3. Dandelions	10
4. Follow the Leader	11
5. Innocence	15
6. Veiled mask	19
7. Weeds	21
8. And I A Wanderer	25
9. Abandoned	27
10. Summer's Child	29
11. Which Way To Paradise?	32
12. And Love Un locks The Door	35
13. 2 A. M.	40
14. Vanity	43
15. Would You Please Listen To What I Am Not Saying?	46
16. I Will Survive!	48
17. Hope Peservers Through Adversity	49

Chapter I: Introduction, Seasons Through My Window

This body of work began on a subconscious level. When thoughts and feelings have been suppressed for decades, they surface in surprising ways. I began this work for myself, without much thought as to why I was attracted to certain images or what they meant to me. On some level I knew that was searching for answers. That I was trying to find a new pattern for my life and a solution for my discontent. And so, I turned to my art and poetry that I had long since abandoned. Gradually, images surfaced in my photographs that seemed to have a life of their own. I had no idea where they came from or what they meant to me. It was only through the patient prodding (and sometimes not so patient) of several of my instructors and family members that I began to piece it all together. And so, these images, began to take shape; fueled by my imagination, discussions and critiques with instructors and by my willingness to face my shadows.

The shape of my life has been determined by many things. Of primary consideration was my southern background. Childhood experiences, education, religious influences all played a role. The resulting composite was a shy, awkward child, with little self confidence. These feelings of poor self image plagued me well into adulthood. The self alienation was so gradual and long-standing that for many years I did not recognize it for what it was. My self image was dictated by parents, teachers, and peers. "We are who we pretend to be. To pretend is to escape reality, to

play a role written by somebody else” (Wells 17) As I came to the middle years of my life, I gradually began to realize that I did not know who I was. Sooner or later, if one is to grow, one has to confront her shadows and make certain changes. “It involves confronting realities that may be too painful to accept and then accepting them anyway—with new-found compassion” (Wells 19) And so I began my soul searching journey. To do so I must travel back in time and face the ghosts of my past, I must confront my shadows.

Shadow Side

The night shadows call
and she who has the courage answers the summons.
Freely, she gives herself over to utter
darkness.

No one who survives to speak of life reborn
can avoid it, this entering into their
shadow side.

No one ever told her she would have to balance
so many lives, all multicolored, mismatched
jagged shapes,
while remaining whole herself.

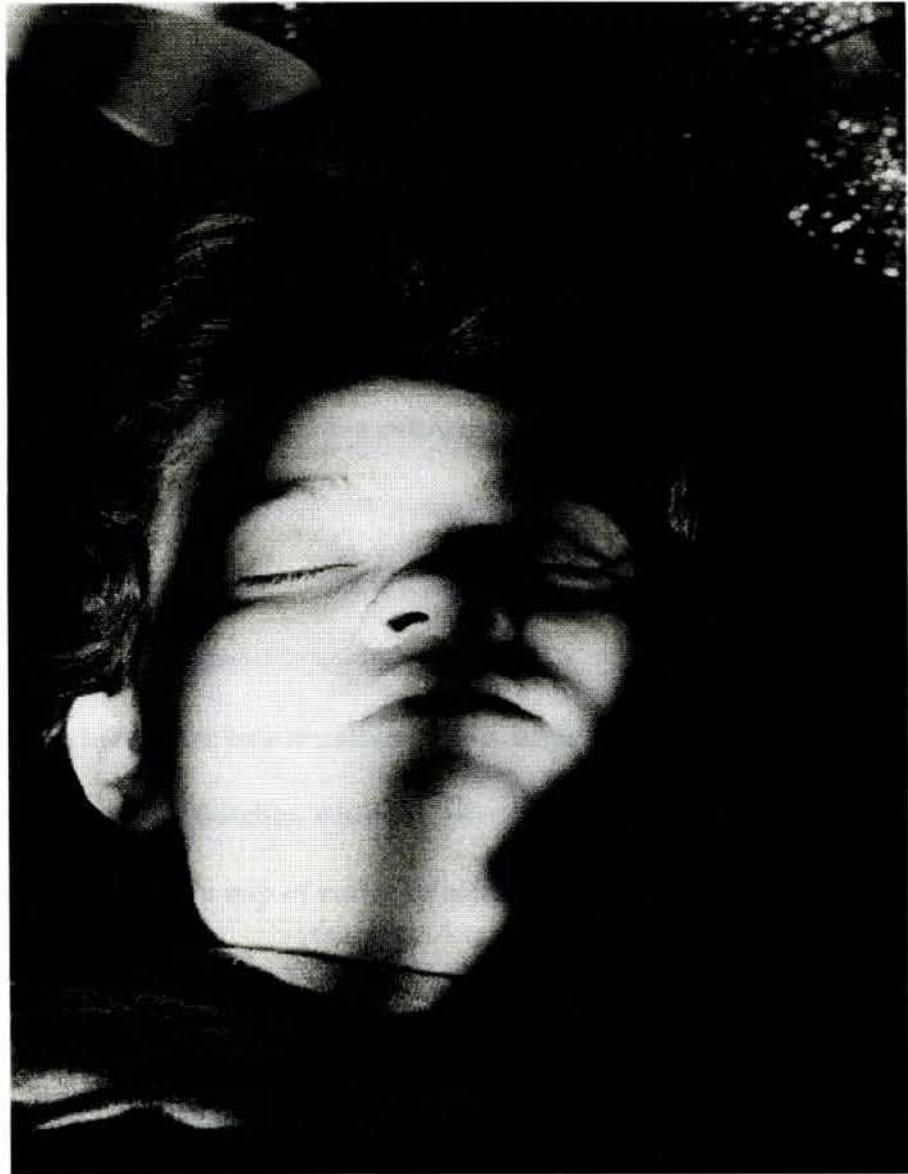
So, towards the approach of the endless night,
she lays down amongst the shattered shards,
eyes closed,
and sinks into the dark.

And in that, solitude finds the strength to survive,
to face her demons and send them on their way.

She listens
for the harmony within her soul.
Then, from deep within her central core she hears the poet
sing, I AM
I AM

For the present, this is enough.
One link of the chains that have bound her
is broken.

**She can clearly see a child's' forgotten
wanderings through fields of bright blue flowers
and she remembers,
the dream.**



**This poem, and the images that accompany it, will symbolize the
beginning of that journey.**

Chapter II: Spring , Seasons Through My Window

The Changing Seasons

I sit at my kitchen table looking out.
Spring is here and it shines
brightly through my window panes.
New life and pink and white blossoms.

Spring is here, and I sit,
Looking out. Always, looking out.

The window through which I look back through time has narrowed over the years, until at last it was just a tiny slit that let through just the barest amount of light. Training my step back in time through this narrow space distorts my perspective. This window and the house which frames it began as simple spaces, uncluttered and spacious. How untidy it has become. So I sit at my kitchen table to reflect back through this time lapse, to begin to sift through the cluttered, skewed memories.

I have before me two negatives, one is of my daughter sitting on a bench looking out our kitchen window. The other is one of my self sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee in my hand. Somehow, alone, neither image satisfies me. When I combine the two negatives and print them as one image—it works. This then expresses what neither negative alone can express and I am satisfied with the result. Two women, different generations, both appear to be quietly reflecting on their lives, their dreams. Is the older woman reflecting back on her youth, wishing she could recapture that youth or wishing she had made different choices along the way? And, what does the young girl reflect on, what are her dreams for the future?

THE CHANGING SEASONS

I sit at my kitchen table looking out.
Spring is here and it shines
brightly thorough my window panes.
Flowering trees bursting with
New life and pink and white blossoms.

Spring is here, and I sit,
Looking out,
Always, looking out.

Summer comes, hot and humid.
The trees are fully leafed out now.
City smog hangs low over the landscape.
Blue skies turn grimy gray.
The bright green leaves turn olive drab.

Summer is here and I sit,
Looking out,
Always looking out.

Autumn arrives and suddenly the world
is on fire with brilliant colors.
Autumn winds have banished
the suffocating city summer smog.
Autumn, has brought new life to my soul.

Autumn is here,
and I have been.....
REPLANTED!

Winter is coming soon,
but I shall no longer waste time
sitting in my kitchen looking out.
For I no longer fear winters frozen breath.
I will leave the warm safety of my kitchen,
and dance in a frozen fairy land.

Winter is coming,
and I shall dance
in the snow.



Spring is traditionally a time associated with rebirth; nature awakens from its long sleep. Trees that appeared dead begin to bud and bloom. All the world seems to come back to life. Yet the spring of my life was not filled with the wonder and joy of spring and rebirth. Childhood was a painful experience from which I sought escape as often as possible.

The pure joy of childhood! How beautifully it begins, yet, it is so easily damaged. Self awareness begins in innocence. There is the joy of discovery of oneself and the world surrounding us. Gradually that joyful self awareness begins to break down. Self awareness becomes self consciousness. The growth of self awareness becomes hopelessly enmeshed with the core of the self conciseness which is constantly measuring itself against the standards that are not ones.

We wish to be accepted, loved, popular. Children take to heart all the put downs, taunts and teases imposed upon them by others. They see these as serious character flaws in themselves-not what they truly are; a defense mechanism used by others to draw attention away from themselves. Often their parents say things in anger that cause the child to doubt him/her self. Even the most conscientious parent cannot avoid inadvertently damaging this fragile young ego. So, little by little a self image begins to emerge which is a composite of reality and myth. If they are lucky we eventually realize this and if they are courageous we try to come to terms with it.

“Little girls are made of sugar and spice, and everything nice...” As a child growing up in the deep South, there were very definite sets of rules governing thier behavior; dictates used to define the roles of the sexes. Girls wore pretty ruffled dresses, spoke softly and were subservient to the men in their lives. They definitely did not play in the mud and climb trees as I was inclined to do. I scorned dresses, preferring shorts or slacks. I rarely played with dolls, but I did love to catch frogs and lizards. I preferred dandelions over roses and would gather them from our yard as well as the neighbors' yards. I would present these bouquets to my mother and she would pretend to love them. My poor mother never really understood. I believe some part of her envied me in my rebellion of those standards that southern girls and women had forced upon her. Even if she did perhaps have a glimmer of understanding, she herself was powerless to break free of those bonds and she did her best to raise me according to the traditional southern standards.

One of her tactics involved taking me on shopping trips. Since my mother did not know how to drive, we would take the bus to downtown Houston. It was a long and involved process. First she would have to coax, cajole and finally bribe me, just to get me in a dress. Then we would walk to the bus stop and stand in the hot summer sun, finally boarding an even hotter stuffy bus. Once we arrived, we would first go to the 5 & 10 to purchase my bribe, usually orange slice candy. Then we would window shop.

It seemed as if we spent hour upon countless hour doing this. All the while my mother would point to all the lovely dresses on the pretty mannequins. There were scores of department store windows with perfectly poised mannequins staring down at me. As a small child of maybe five or six, these mannequins on their raised pedestals appeared to be misshapen monsters. They stared at me with sightless solemn eyes, gesturing woodenly. The experience was so frightening that it would haunt my dreams for several nights.

Many years lie between that very young girl and the woman I am now. And as I look back on those days, I see a lonely child, so different from her peers that she was shunned by most. I was a quiet reflective child, who wrote poetry and stories and painted purple horses. "Real horses are not purple", my father said to me upon seeing my painting. In his misguided way he tried to encourage my artistic inclination by buying me paint by number sets; which I hated. Since my father was such an important person in my life, I eventually succumbed to pressure and tried to be the little girl

he wanted me to be, but it was a genuine struggle, so I continued my poetry in secret. I never again attempted to draw or paint, at least not until I was an adult, when my children were almost grown.

Since discovering photography, I have taken many photographs of my children. As I look through these I come across a photograph of my youngest daughter. She is alone, laying in a field filled with dandelions. In her hands she holds this small puff of white, and I am reminded of my childhood when I also gathered dandelions. She and I have much in common; our childhood's are so similar. I look at this photograph and remind myself that I must cherish her just as she is. She is special just as she is, but it is hard not to try and control her or try to mold her to my to fit my concept of the person she should become.

DANDELIONS

My child of Autumn, what a rare gift you are!
 You, who can lay quietly in a field of flowers,
 then suddenly race up the hill gathering.....dandelions.

Dandelions, this first flower of spring,
 with golden heads on stems of verdant green,
 which are now crushed by childhood joy.

This daughter of mine with her bouncing blond curls
 and wide eyes full of wonder,
 offers up to me her bountiful bouquet.

Then she races up the hill again,
 leaving with me this golden offering, a gift so precious
 which is now pressed between the pages of my soul.

Dandelions: a plague to be purged,
 a menace to manicured suburbia
 that must be eradicated each spring.

**These first flowers of spring
are considered trash to all,
except a small child and her mother.**

**I do not need dozens of roses nor riches
as long as I have you my child and
as long as dandelions grow abundantly.**



Other snapshots that I have taken of her often capture her alone or with a group of other children, yet somehow separate from them. She is often just a bit apart from the others and I wonder, "Does this happen often, or am I just photographing THESE moments more often than others?" How often does self get into my images without my realizing it? And I begin to sift through other images to try and find clues that will give me the answers. In doing so will I understand myself better?



Chapter III: Summer, Seasons Through My Window

Summer comes, hot and humid.
The trees are fully leafed out now.
City smog hangs low over the landscape.
Blue skies turn gray.
The bright green leaves turn olive drab.

Summer is here and I sit,
Looking out,
Always looking out.

It seems that I have spent much of my life looking out at the world. I was not a participant. Instead, I passively watched life, even my own, from a safe distance. If you want to avoid getting hurt, one self defense method is to first shut yourself off from others and then ultimately from yourself.

Solitude is a necessary ingredient in my life. Even as a young child, I sought out time alone, time away from all others. Most people considered that odd. I can remember my parents taking me to the doctor to find out what was wrong. Until very recently, I did not understand this need myself. By taking time to be alone with myself, I find that I can restore some sense of order. If I can find a few moments of peace each day, I can better deal with the fast paced world we live in much better. But, more importantly, I find that time alone is essential to my art; which in turn is essential to my emotional well being..

“We are all, in the last analysis alone”(Wells) And yet we try to deny this. We seek to fill the empty spaces. Being alone implies a misfit that society shuns. The wallflower panic takes over and we run around in a

frenzy to try and fill the void. It's as if we feel that if we surround ourselves with noise, people, music, or television, then we can be assured that we are loved and loving. We work hard to change our personalities so that we will fit in with whatever others concept of "normal" might be. We feel the need to find our place. Unfortunately, we do it in all the wrong ways. We feel that if we could just fit in with this group or that one—THEN we will find ourselves.

Our innocence, I believe, is lost in small increments. It is whittled away by time, worn smooth by the constant crashing of life's storms against our fragile egos. By the time we reach puberty, our self esteem has taken quite a pounding. Most teenagers by this time have lost their wide eyed innocence. Self is still important, but only in the context of the 'whole of their peers'. They spend much of their time trying to mold themselves so that they fit in perfectly with their peers. It is a time for pushing aside the belief that we are a world unto ourselves.

The dreams change and we envision ourselves involved in the perfect relationship. We have lost some of our innocence and yet, as teenagers we still hold onto some of it. We hold on to the belief that the relationships we become involved in can remain pure and uncomplicated, untainted by the world around us. We hold on with all the tenacity that we can muster to the belief that for US it will be different from the generation before ours. OUR love will not become encumbered by it's contact with the world. Our friends will remain true. We believe that WE CAN change the world and all it's

prejudices. WE will be loved and accepted --IF we can changeourselves.
 Teenagers see themselves as highly imperfect. Most teenager girls do not
 have perfect model bodies, few boys are built like Adonis.

I love photographing my daughters. I photograph the oldest one more
 often, not because she is my favorite, she is simply more cooperative. I was
 photographing her one day and on a whim, I threw some white lace over her
 face. I was hoping to evoke a look of pure innocence. The resulting image
 was not quite what I had in mind. Something else was making it's presence
 known. The feeling of innocence was captured however, the photograph
 leaves me with the impression that there is an undercurrent of emotions that
 are not quite so innocent.

INNOCENCE

Oh, child of innocence, caressed in your cocoon of pure white lace
 what dreams have you, in your soft and silent slumber?

Dreams, perhaps of space and stars and silent moonlit nights,
 of sunny beaches with silver sands and seashells for the gathering?
 Oh child of innocence, so young and fair with virtues yet unspoiled.
 What dreams have you? Do you dream of dew kissed hills, of golden
 buttercups in the early morning light, of sparkling spring and the air
 swept clean by soft April showers and bright blue skies at dawn?

My child, though our sophisticated society does not value sweet
 innocence, hold on to your dreams.

Dream your dreams of love and peace and end to prejudice; then,
 when the morning star fades at days dawn and the hot summer sun
 simmers the pavement beneath your feet, let your dreams sustain you.



As a teenager I was not very different from generations before me or since. I wanted to fit in, to have a boyfriend, to be accepted. I stopped fighting my 'southern belle' ancestry and threw myself body and soul into the 'act'. Needless to say it didn't work.

All young people feel vulnerable and beginning with the onset of puberty are searching for an identity. And so like all others I sought to find my identity by trying to fit in with my peers, which meant trying to be just like them. The need to fit in and be accepted was too great and I did not have enough self confidence to go against the crowd.

As I look at my oldest daughter today it is as if I am looking back in time through a magic mirror. She is much as I was, a quiet reflective child. She also hates wearing dresses and make-up. Past and present, the circle turns. We view ourselves through our children. It creates a pattern and a rhythm. If we are wise we will take the time to watch and listen .

I can learn much from this young girl. For while we share some similarities, I see little or none of the duality that plagued my own teenage years. She does not like dresses, so I do not impose them on her. She will not wear make-up because ,”It is a pain to put on” she says, “besides, if they don't like me as I am that's their problem.”

What freedom! Only on rare occasion does she succumb to pressure and 'put on a face'. I can learn a lesson from her. Past, present, and future; the music of our souls.

On another occasion, while walking through the woods with my daughters and one of their friends, I naturally began to photograph them. I decided to experiment with double exposures. When I developed the negatives, I was pleasantly surprised. I started photographing them with only a vague idea of what I wanted. Sometimes I purposely set situations up, other times I just let things happen. This day we just enjoyed a pleasant walk in the woods. I had brought along some bits of lace which I let the girls just play with.

The resulting images both startled and pleased me. In some of them the human forms seem to grow out of the forest and the tangled weeds growing all around us. In some of them the human form is barely perceptible. I was reminded of the masks that we all wear to discourage anyone from looking too deeply into our real selves.

VEILED MASK

Just beneath the surface of this weary weathered tree
with it's jagged bark peeling back to expose a still and silent figure,
a passive lady awaits her fate in secret solitude.

A sheer dark veil shrouds her gleaming golden hair.
The trees rough and rugged bark masks her soft smooth skin,
distorting her features so that she looks half human, half tree.

Despoiled of innocence, she spends her dark days dreaming
of nightshades and serpent tongues which haunt her hollow house,
and of dread devotion to deep seclusion and tyranny of the mind.

But soon the essence of her being will no longer be enslaved,
nor forced to endure the harsh barbs of slanderous words.
No longer shall she fall prey to perverse presence surrounding her.

This transformation, so carefully created, so cautiously woven
from years of tangled webs and broken promises
is now almost finished, the last layers are being laid in place.

The beast who haunts her, shall find the barrier impenetrable.
No shaft of light, nor arrow from his poisoned palate
shall pierce the armor of her carefully woven web.

And she shall sleep at last, the sleep of innocence lost,
and dream of finer things, of sunny days and love not betrayed,
until at last it is safe to emerge and spread her wings to life anew.



In one image, my daughter's head is draped in black lace and she appears to be entangled in the weeds surrounding her. I am reminded of her words—"...If they don't like me the way I am, that's their problem."

Something within the photograph suggests other feelings as well. I look back through the years and see another young lady who sees herself as not being physically perfect. She dreams of the day when others can see past that imperfection to the personality; the soul that lies beneath the imperfections. If my daughter truly believes that it is "their problem" did I somehow project my feelings into the photograph from my own youth? The young girl is alone, isolated and a soft black veil covers her head. Is she in mourning? Did she give up too much of her soul in order to be accepted? Or does she simply wish to be accepted.

Weeds

Hidden deep within
the tangled twisted maze
Behind a wall of weeds
lies beauty beyond belief
Held tight within this
dark and wretched wood,
a golden head lifts high
above these mangled masses.
She waits in quiet solitude.
Waiting for someone
to search for the beauty hidden deep within.
Hoping against hope,
for someone to take the time
to find the
beauty beneath the surface.



I must relearn the art of being alone and deliberately seek out solitude. I need that time to get back in touch with myself and my dreams. My daughter is re-teaching me that lesson today. She will shut her door and take time for herself. She has the courage to tell friends that she cannot talk on the phone. This pensive youth, my daughter, perhaps should serve as MY guardian.

In another photograph, my older daughter is dressed in white and sitting by a pond. This is one situation that I purposely set up. I even went out and bought her a new dress just for this photograph. Yes, this is one time when I did ask her to wear a dress and put on some make-up. At the time I did not set out to make images that would go into this project. I wanted to try my hand at fashion photography. I shot several rolls of color film, then just for fun, I shot two rolls of black and white infrared film. Those I believe are my favorites out of all the film we shot that day. The infrared images give an almost surreal quality to the scene and the black and white gives the suggestion that these images could have been taken a generation before. I am transported back in time as I look at these images. They evoke a yearning in me that reaches back through the generations. I am reminded of a photograph I have of my mother when she was a young woman. I am also reminded of myself as a young girl when I used to sit by a certain pond. I long to reach out to each of these young women, I long for them to reach out to me. We are separate, yet connected in ways that bridge the generational gaps. We walk different paths, yet the paths intersect and overlap.

AND I A WANDERER

It was the summer of my forty-seventh year,
and I, a wanderer, awoke to the sound of the soft
summer breezes, softly sighing against my window panes.
The breeze beckons to me through the partially open window,
whispering through the crack and wafting over the white washed walls,
until at last, it stirred my still prone, form and I arose
in the early morning light to greet the new born day.

And I, a wander, set forth leaving behind the comforts of my confines
to wander further still; seeking I knew not what,
only listening to that still center within my soul
and following the sound of the wind singing sweetly on this summer morn.
I set my foot upon a new path, uncertain of my destination and knowing
that I must travel through murky landscapes--through dark and desolate
forests.

Full circle I must travel, with singleness of eye and purity of intention,
weaving through the patterns of the multiple landscapes,
encompassing all points of the compass which radiate out from the central
core,
pausing occasionally to peer through the windows of time and space
to face the ghost of the past.
Seeking only the simplest of shelters
for the pines of the forest shall provide my protection.

To begin I must start with the present, with this soft summer morning.
Here I look upon the craggy crooked path before me,
when suddenly the breeze blows cold
and the brightly blooming gardens of summer turn brown
and I am faced with a barren hostile forest.
Through the mist I view the faraway wood, dark and forbidding,
yet softly veiled as a bride upon her wedding day.

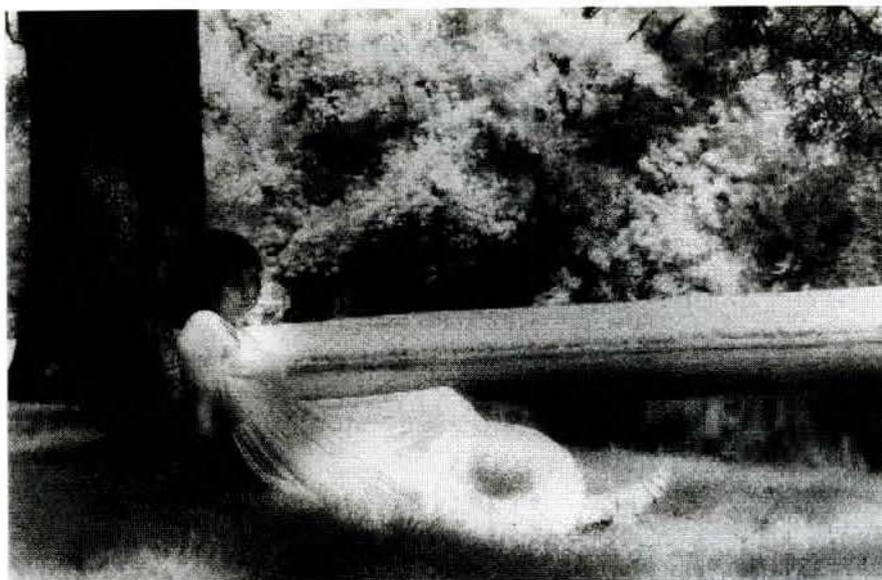
And I marvel at the seasons so suddenly turned round,
one step upon this path, then two.
The morning gone so swiftly, the afternoon deepening to dusk,
and the path I set out upon turned now to a narrowed darkened street.
From this vantage point I can view the weary window watchers,
lonely women who watch and wait alone; for what, I do not know.
Their peering eyes and passive faces do not reveal their secrets.

And I a wanderer, traveled on, not pausing on my way
 to console, nor endeavoring to understand their plight.
 I turn my back on their pain; and find again stretched out before me the
 path
 The seasons are ever-changing, days, mornings, afternoons and evenings,
 all whiz past as the wind picks up again.
 No longer the softly sighing summer breeze; it's an angry whirlwind,
 twisting , turning, tossing me to and for, broken tree limbs batter my body.

When at last, exhausted it blows itself out and sets me down again
 in a soft summer landscape by a placid shimmering pond,
 and I view, as if through a magic mirror turned back in time
 a young woman reclining there in that self contained world.
 Pensive youth; what guardian guides YOUR steps?
 What fragile fleeting dreams do you conceive
 as you rest there quietly reflecting on the meadow before you?

I know-- I know them all to well, these dreams of yours.
 For we dance to the same rhythm, you and I.
 A timeless rhythm, where past, present and future are a never-ending song
 which creates a pattern that is lyrical, yet unreal.
 It is the music of our simple souls, singing softly on the wind.
 Such harmonies vibrate off the mirrored surface of the lake,
 echoing eternally back through time and the forest of our imaginations.

Pensive youth; I am tempted to stay here with you
 to serve as your guardian, to guide your steps;
 but I am a wanderer in this land and I must leave you to find your own path,
 while I travel on through different lands, following different paths.
 I shall move from this point forward then,
 but I shall not forget your dreams.
 They shall forever be encased within my heart and I shall wait
 for you at journeys end.



Yes, I can learn from my daughter, and my mother. I can relearn to seek solitude. I must remember that when I seek solitude, that I must not allow it to again become isolationist. I must try and never again allow myself to pull back into my shell to avoid getting hurt. That never works because I not only hurt myself, but I also hurt the ones I love. Its a difficult lesson to learn.

A large number of the images I have made recently reflect these concepts. They are I think about the search for identity. They speak of feelings of being on the outside of the main stream of society, of being abandoned, the loss of innocence. One such image is a double exposure of my daughter and an old abandoned house. The house was close to the Missouri river and was built on stilts. Even though it was raised up, it was still not protected from the raging river when the floods came. The river and neglect ravaged the house. My daughters image is superimposed over the

image of the house and her expression and body language also suggest a feeling of abandonment and neglect.

ABANDONED

ABANDONED-

This tumbled-down tattered shell stands
wavering, while the winds whip through
it's hollow frame and the tangled
Twisted vines reclaim their own.

Oh tattered shell; if you could speak, what tales could you tell?
Could you speak of sleepless spirits lost in limbo,
when that restless raging river stole your soul
And loosened the foundation upon which you stand?
Could you speak of a black raven wing nailed,
above the bruised and broken mantel
and of the child's dreams turned to nightmares.
Abandoned-you stand alone. What tales could you tell?

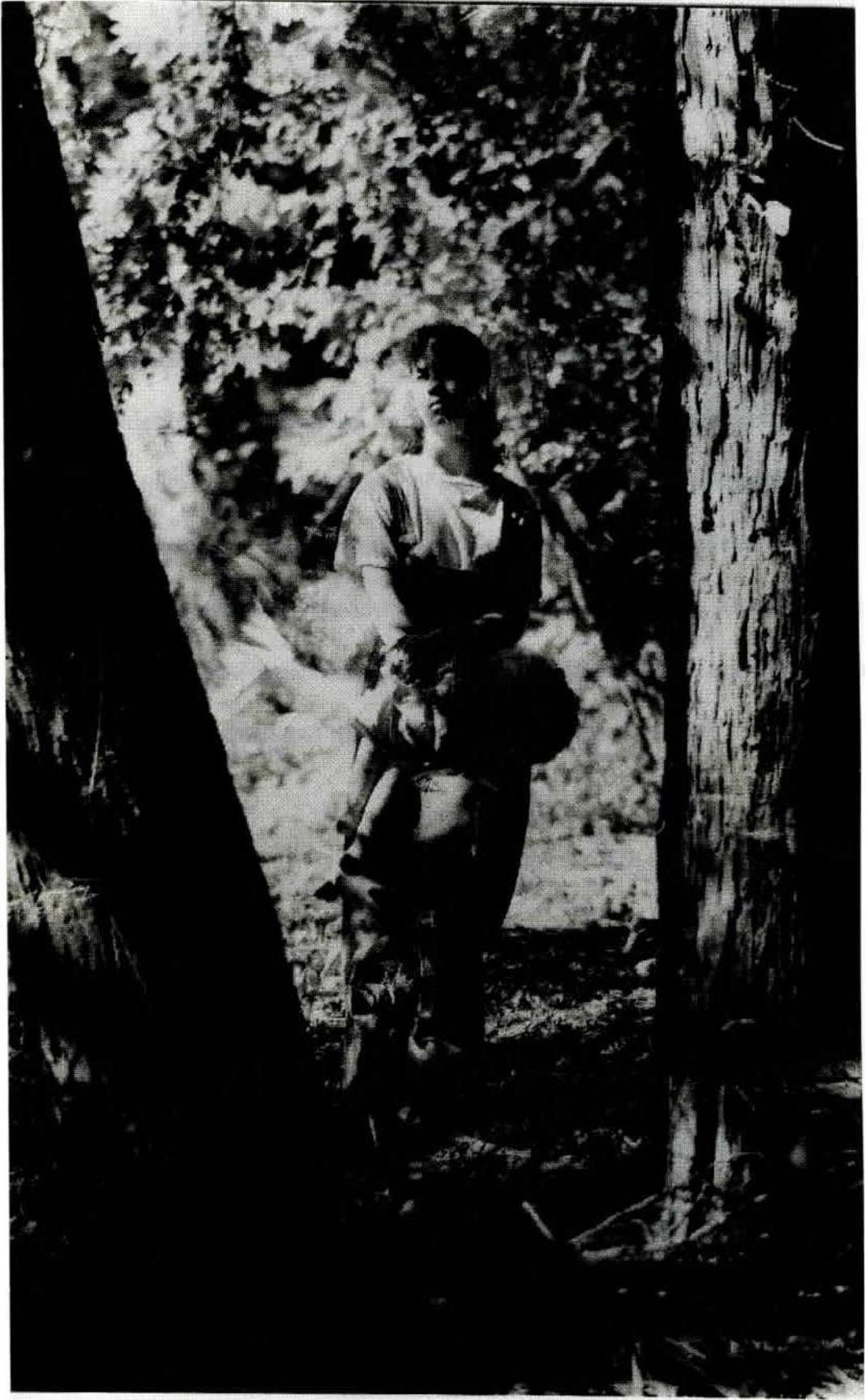


In another image my daughter is standing alone between two trees with a rag doll held loosely in her hand. It is a sunlit scene, yet she does not look like a young girl who is enjoying a bright summer day. On the day that I took this photograph, she was very worried about two of her friends. One had attempted suicide and another was contemplating suicide. I was concerned about all of them. This photograph, I believe, reflects what both my daughter and I were feeling that day. In this photograph I see a young girl on the verge of adulthood, yet she is afraid to step over the threshold. She knows that she can never hope to become the perfect, ideal woman which advertisers insist she should strive to be.

SUMMER'S CHILD

Into the solitude of this leaf strewn chapel,
Summer's child withdraws;
and the raven pauses in mid-flight,
As the sunlit sky streaks down through the darkened wood,
and floods her face with light and shadow.

She rests here briefly and reflects on childhood remembrances.
Summer's child, stands trembling
on the threshold of Autumn,
and whispers to the trees; truths told in secret silence,
while the raven cocks his head and listens.



I believe that this poem and the image that accompanies it deal with teenage depression and feelings of suicide. Teenage suicides are on the rise as well as teenage pregnancies. Drug use and alcohol abuse are also becoming more prevalent. We need to ask ourselves, why? Are we putting too much pressure on our children to be beautiful, perfect students and model citizens, while we ourselves set poor examples? The image that I have titled 'Which Way to Paradise' and that poem that goes with it struggles with these questions. The image is of a mannequin which is printed with another negative of a forest. Broken glass was placed on top of the photographic paper, then the glass was colored with markers. The resulting image is brightly colored, with the shards of broken glass slicing through the figure. The poem speaks of the struggle to obtain perfection.

WHICH WAY TO PARADISE?

**Belladonna-Belladonna; lady of the red cloak,
Which way-which way to paradise?
Beautiful lady, I can see you raised on high, high above us all,
surrounded by your marquees fiery globes of glowing savage lights
twinkling starlike
yet, burning, burning the eternal fiery flame
torches the starry night with riotous cosmic colors.**

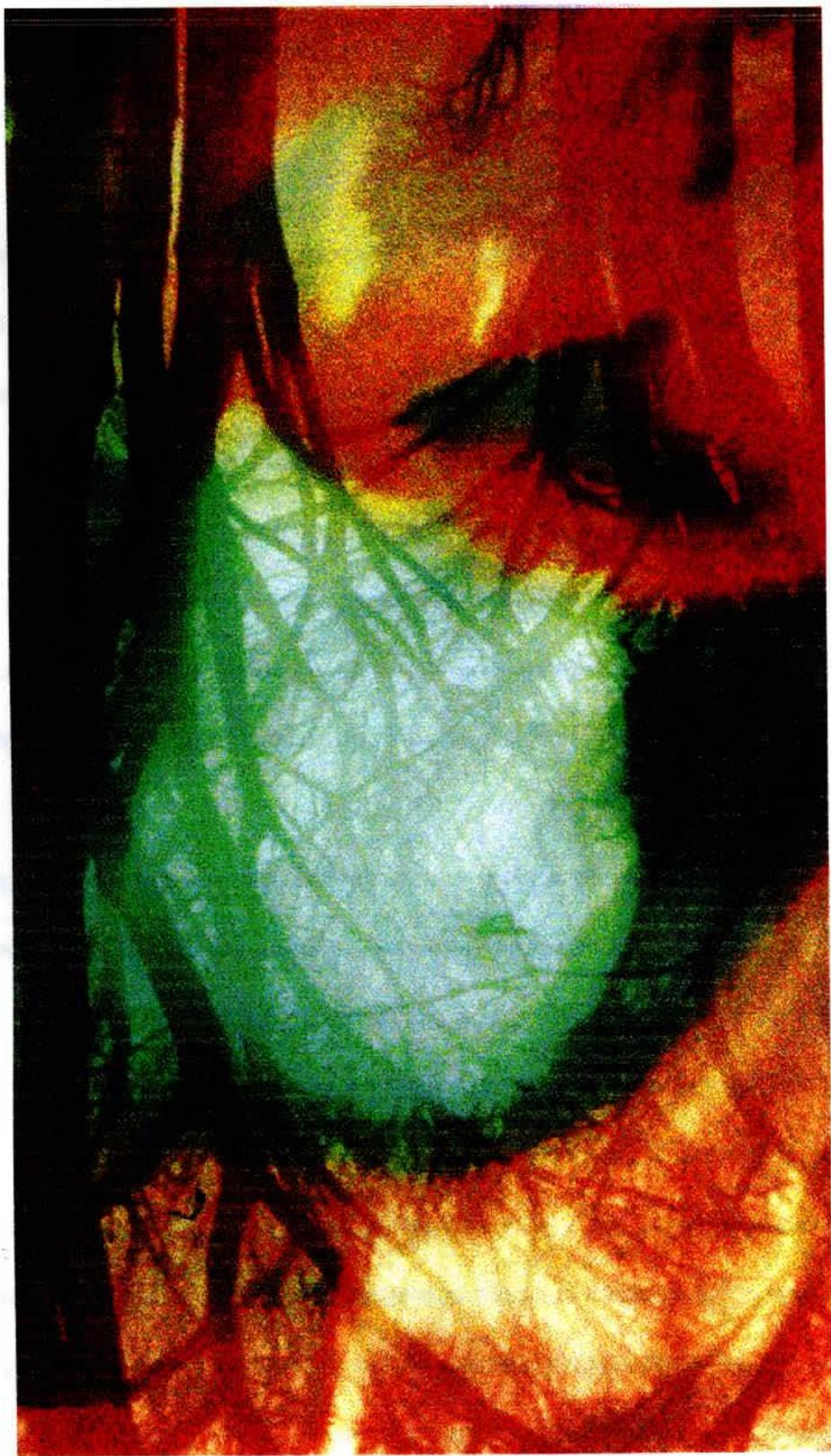
**Which way to paradise, my lady?
Where is your perfumed porcelain palace?
Are you only a shape without a soul?
A hollow mannequin form?
Is their nothing in your head?**

**You stand there poised on your raised pedestal
gesturing woodenly, staring from sightless solemn eyes
while the raging rivers flow with our blood
the angels wings are burning,
our faces come from jars,
perfumed potions formulated to make clones of us all,
all in your name-all for your sake.
Have no idols before me.**

**Which way to paradise?
Betrayed-Judas-Liar!
The prophets pledge is broken
the altar lies in shambles.
Belladonna, Erebus is Your promised land,
deaths dream kingdom your paradise**

**Empty and hollow are your shrines,
Your temples shall be destroyed,
your stained glass windows shattered and a fresh clean breeze
shall cleanse the ruins of your ruined and rotting paradise.
The merchants mistress shall become a widower
and her palace destroyed. Death to the false goddess!**

**Paradise is an inner peace that comes when we
accept ourselves
just as we are
unadorned and
BEAUTIFUL!**



These are painful images. After making an image, I ask myself, "Where did This come from? The self creeps in whether I will it or not. At times I will begin to make one type of picture and something very different emerges in the darkroom. Then, I am forced to make a decision. I must ask myself the questions, "Do I really wish to deal with this? What does it mean? And do I really wish to find out?" If I am truly serious about my quest I must at some point deal with the image before me. My first photography instructor was fond of saying, "A photograph tells more about the photographer than the subject matter of the photograph". I believe there is a great deal of truth in that.

Nothing lasts forever. I had so looked forward to the end of my high school years for what seemed like an eternity. When my high school years did come to an end, it hit me like a slap in the face. My family expected that I would marry right after high school and "settle down." But, at the end of my high school years I found the thought depressing. A husband and children were responsibilities that I was not yet ready to assume. How could I be a wife if I did not know what I wanted out of life? And when I took a good hard look at the young man I was currently dating I could not envision myself spending the rest of my life with him.

After a series of mundane part time jobs, I was forced to confront myself and re-examine my goals. I had spent my high school years trying to be one of the crowd and trying to and keep a boyfriend. I had few skills and absolutely no idea of who I was or what I wanted to do with my life.

Against the intense disapproval of my family I decided to go to college. My mother, I believe firmly supported my decision. Yet, she had concerns, our family could not afford to pay for my education. She knew that I would have to work almost full time in order to go to classes. My father could not understand my decision and suggested I get a job as a receptionist or a secretary. No one in our family had ever been to college.

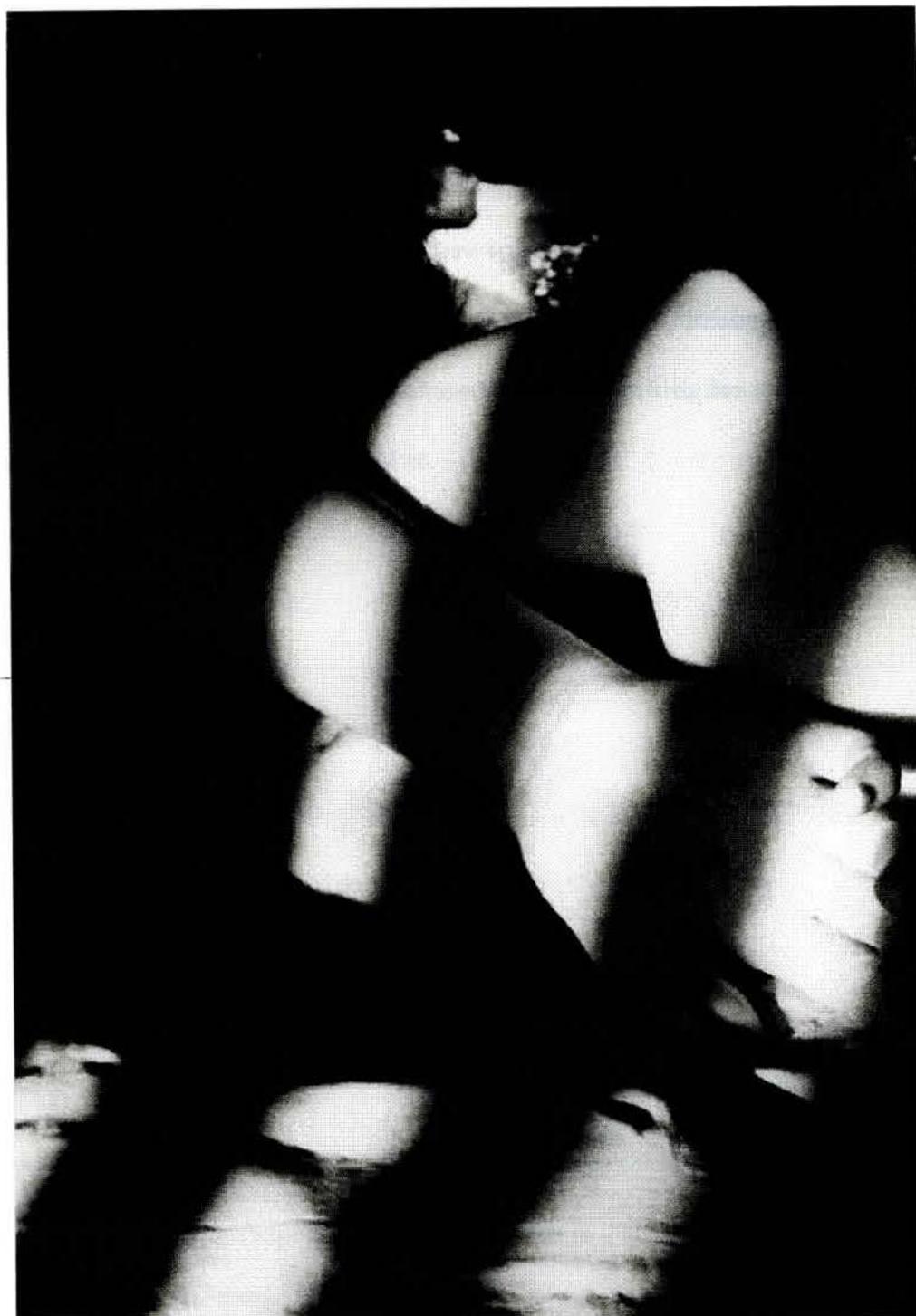
It would have been easier to remain in that self contained world, in that womb in which I was encased. I had shelter and security and, straying from that path could prove to be a frightening experience. Yet not to try was even more unthinkable. Several of my images that are the direct result of my attempt to understand and confront my fears and shadows are of my daughter laying amongst fragments of broken glass. One in particular expresses the fears of moving into new situations, into unexplored territory. For this I wrote the poem, "And Love Unlocks The Door".

AND LOVE UNLOCKS THE DOOR

In the fading twilight
 ribbons of light through shuttered windows
 in a darkened corner dance
 across her sheltered face.
 In the dark of night her soul retreats.
 Dawn, is not forthcoming,
 and she alone, cannot face the truth,
 so in that darkened void,
 she lays and weeps for all that is lost.

Her shelter provided,
 security was there for her to take,
 the boundaries were well marked.
 But, she strayed from the well traveled roadway,
 the borders were too fixed,

and now she stands on the precipice,
her blood frozen from fear.
In desperation, she prays to God,
and love unlocks the door.



College during the sixties was full of the hippie movement and "of do your own thing; if it feels good do it, as long as it does not hurt anyone else." Obedience to the norm was very unpopular, rebellion of the establishment was. Here at last I felt was a group that I could identify with, I did not have to behave like those pretty painted ladies in the storefronts, so lifeless and completely false. And yet something did not quite ring true about all of their pronouncements of love and peace; of free spirits doing their own thing. Once again I found myself on the outside looking in as if through a window obscured by years of accumulated dirt and grime, searching for a balance between the two false worlds I lived in.

Chapter IV: Autumn, Seasons Through My Window

Finally, I got married. We were still in college; so my relatives were quite content, until I announced that I planned to complete my degree and start a career as a dietitian. There was still the pressure to settle down and start a family. The career I started did not last very long; for an unplanned pregnancy interrupted it, and I realized that I could not bring myself to let this tiny young life grow up with a series of baby-sitters. I needed to be there.

One child multiplied into five, none of whom I was willing to leave with others and the years passed quickly with five young children to care for. I forgot my dreams and busied myself with the traditional roles of a wife and mother. With five children to care for, the years quickly passed .

The life of a housewife and mother involved a myriad of complications. Babies need to be fed around the clock seven days a week; they do not care that you have had one hour of sleep or four. Rarely do they allow you more than that. They get runny noses, fevers, colic, and a thousand other demands that must be dealt with.

For most of us the days are gone when one could call on a loving grandmother, aunt or cousin to help. They either live in another state or they have full-time jobs outside the home. Being a mother involves dealing with doctors, dentists, carpools, soccer practice, tutoring, counseling and consoling our children through physical and emotional pains.

I used to think that when the children reached their teenage years and began to drive themselves to their own activities that life would become

simpler. I felt, I think, that this would allow me more time for myself. I would not be so exhausted at the end of the day. It would give my husband and myself more time for each other. To some extent this was true, but what I was not prepared for were the new worries thrust upon parents of teenagers.

Our children usually reach puberty at about the same time that their parents are going through their own crisis, our-middle age crisis. Both generations enter a period in their lives when dramatic changes are occurring in their lives, both physically and emotionally. Both fear being alone and lonely. Both generations find their own ways to rebel. Both are searching for their place in life. Both are afraid. The tensions build up and the entire family is stressed. The end results are a lot of sleepless nights. And so I found that this was not a period in my life where I could relax. We were all going through a lot of changes. The relationships were strained.

As I reflected on all this recently, I decided to try and capture the emotions that I experienced during this time. Using a large format camera, I photographed my daughter and myself waiting by the front door. The only light illuminating the scene was that of the front porch light. Since my daughter and I look so much alike, the original concept was to do a double exposure showing a younger and older version of myself, as if I had been waiting by that door off and on for years.

As I look at that image today I see something that is a little different from my original intention. The tension I wanted to portray is there, the

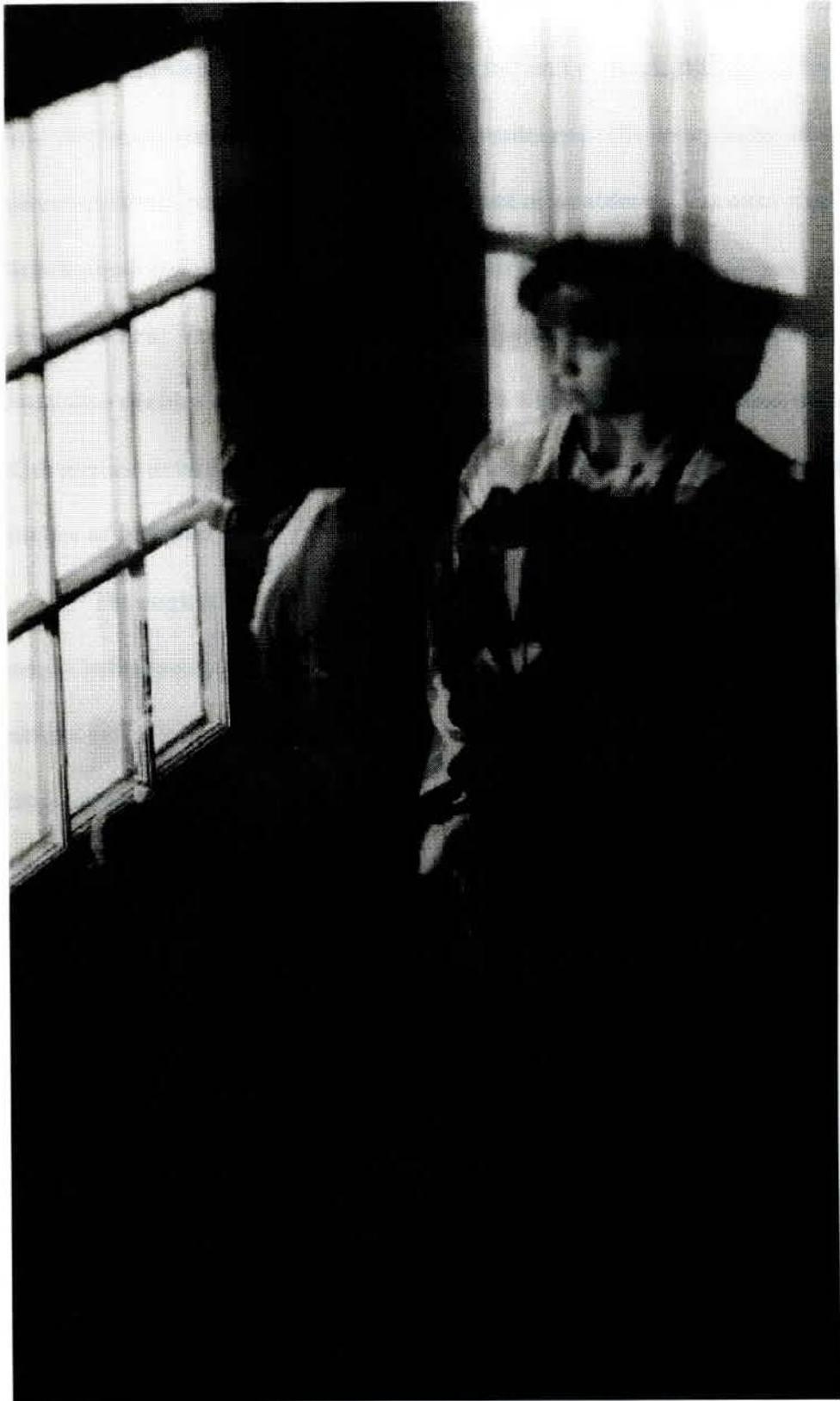
worry and the grief. But, instead of seeing a young woman grown old from waiting, I sense two separate women. Two different generations watching and waiting. There is a quiet tension between the two. I did not consciously intend to make such an image and it is a bit disturbing. I tried to make sense of it, in a poem. Some of the answers came out, but I know others are still hidden beneath the surface.

2 A. M.

She waits alone, this weary window watcher,
 As the night fires are burning bright .
 By the glow of lamplight she waits
 with shadowed weary face,
 and clutches tightly to her breast her
 icon of cherished childhood memories.
 She waits, dry eyed as firefly headlights
 go blinking, bobbing past her front porch window.
DEAR GOD, LET HIM BE SAFE!

And in the silence of the darkened hostile house,
 the late night voices scream within her head,
 "What if--- What if--- Where-- Dear God Where is he?"
 Then, through her shuttered eyes the nightmare visions dance.
 Visions of broken bodies on bloodied streets and severed limbs
 amongst the torn and twisted metal and shimmering shattered glass.
 Still she waits dry eyed, for the tears she could have shed,
 have long since dried up from countless nights of waiting.
DEAR GOD, LET HIM BE SAFE!

2 A. M. ---And the kitchen clock drums out loudly with
 each passing second, slicing through the silence of the night.
 Time---a lifelong river running swiftly past, and yet,
 at 2 A. M. on this darkened winter night with white snow falling,
 time creeps sluggishly forward and the raging river freezes over.
 Still, she remains on the long dark night, alone, and prays.
 She prays for time to make amends and time for wounds to heal.
DEAR GOD, LET HIM BE SAFE!



Being a wife and mother includes a million other details as well.

There are meals to be planned, shopped for and cooked. Bills must be paid and the house cleaned. Our modern conveniences take away some of the physical labor, but they carry their own set of problems. Vacuum cleaners break down or burn up and must be repaired. Sweeping the carpet just doesn't work. The washing machine overflows and floods the basement. Someone decides to put liquid detergent in the dishwasher instead of regular dishwasher detergent and the entire kitchen is filled wall to wall with two inches of bubbles.

Through it all our social obligations are expanding. The Church needs volunteers, the school needs volunteers. There are social functions to attend involving your husbands career. And of course you need to save time and energy for your spouse. But more often than not there is little, if any, left over and the poor man only gets scraps. I don't mean to make light of the enormous demands made upon the men of today's society. The pressures on them have become tremendous in this age of downsizing. They often get stuck in jobs that they hate, and they have more and more responsibilities heaped upon them while at the same time their pay and benefits are cut. I know the pressures must be immense. But, I can only speak of my own experiences.

We are constantly bombarded by advertisers, the media, movies, radio, and talk shows with images of the perfect wife, mother, lover, and family. Magazines are full of advice on how to get a man, keep a man, and

make him happy. One would think in this day of 'enlightenment', of women's liberation, that we would have left all that behind us, but apparently not. More and more young women are bulimic and or anorexic. Young girls seem to feel that they must be model perfect, mere mannequins perhaps?

Vanity

In a dark and distant forest; Vanity, the supreme seductress, awaits her prey.

This cold carved conqueror of souls stands on the edge of the tempest while the firestorm rages about her, her icy countenance repels the red hot flames.

Conceived of greed she consumes the souls of the innocent who worship at her feet.

Our children have been deceived, sophisticated societies spoiled virtues have laid to waste a whole generation of young.

Bulimic and anorexic, they walk these forsaken cities as the undead might, with sunken hollow eyes and sagging slack flesh hanging on bare boned skeletons.

And the raging rivers flow with their blood. Fire and ice join forces to form a deadly duo.

While the night burns fright amongst the bent and broken skeletal forms. Still she beacons the multitudes towards her and they come--lambs to be slaughtered.

For her promises are all to alluring, "Worship me and you shall have your hearts desire,

Fame, Love, Acceptance!"

And the heavenly minions eternally weep for justice, while the poets cry out their warning;

"Beware--Beware of the false goddess, this stealer of souls. For her promises are hollow

and the path to her city is laden with snares for the unwary."

The cries of the just shall be heard and those who have the strength to survive

shall walk amongst the burning flames and be cleansed and the heavenly host shall rejoice.

While the poet whispers. "I am."

And the merchants mistress shall fall from her throne, her wealth shall be plundered.

**A new generation shall arise from among the smoldering embers--
transfigured.
While the poet whispers.
"WE are."**



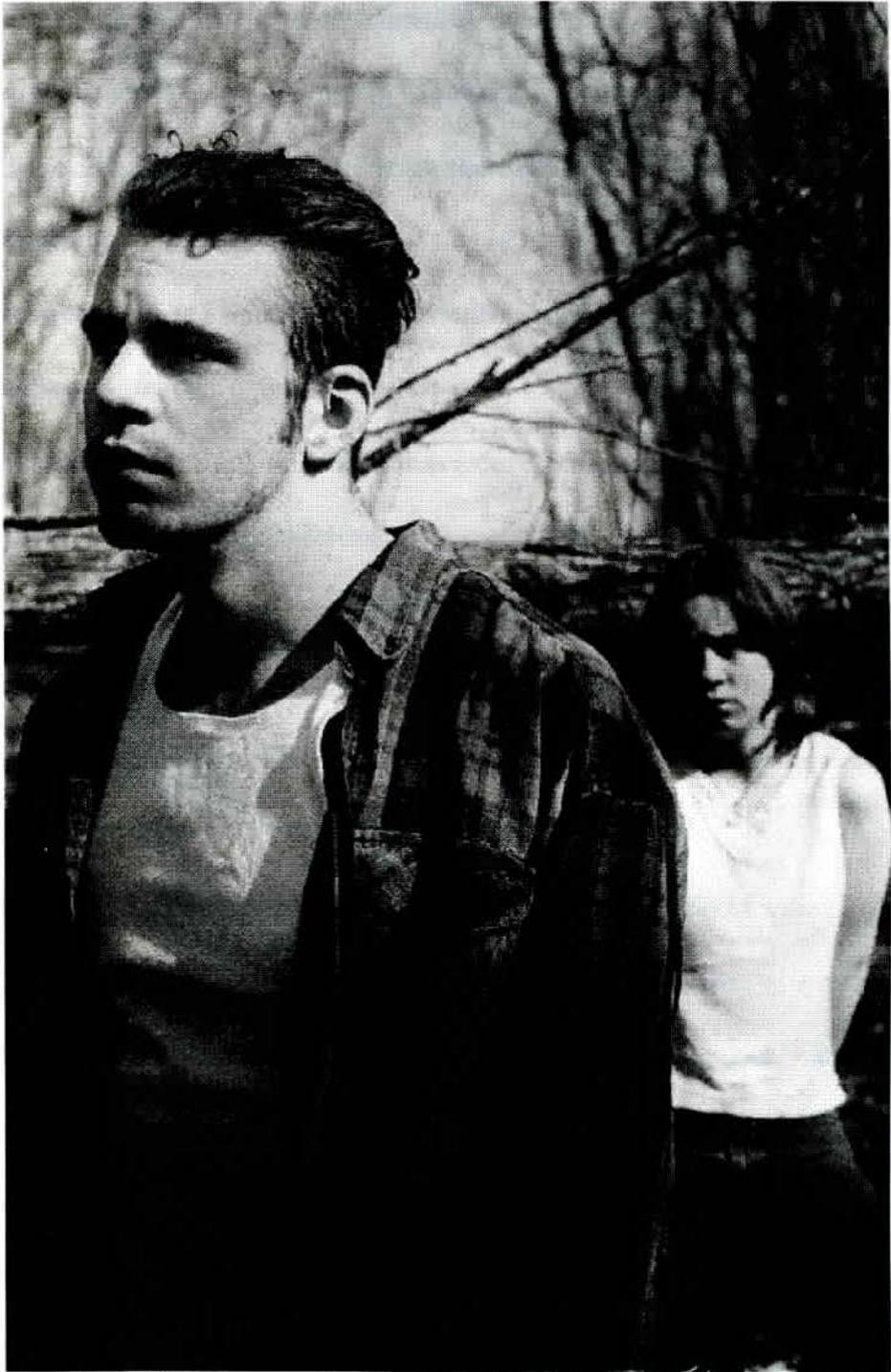
All of these things combine to make our lives one frantic rush from one 'important' activity to another, leaving little or no time for self reflection. Never mind that we wouldn't have the energy for it anyhow. Our lives are fragmented and we are spiritually starved. We hunger for closer relationships, yet shy away from them. This fragmentation causes problems within the marriage as well as within ourselves. We do not take the time for one another as we once did. Time alone, time with each other has become a rare commodity.

Women instinctively feel the need to give and so we do. We give until our supply is exhausted. All our instincts command us to be nourishers. At some point in time we begin to resent this and we begin to feel bitterness toward the very ones we wish to nourish. I believe that it is not that we resent giving, but we are secretly afraid that it is all for nothing. We are not able to see the fruits of our labor in concrete terms, such as having a paycheck to show our effort. The fruits of our labor are much less tangible and often our efforts are unwanted. A child does not like to be told that he must wear a raincoat, be home at a certain time, or do his homework.

Years passed quickly and without realizing it I found that I had slipped back into my old way of thinking. My identity was irrevocably intermeshed with that of my husband and children. I measured my worth by the quality of my family's happiness. If my children did poorly in school I blamed myself. If my husband was unhappy it had to be my fault.

I was walking in my husbands shadow. My childrens' lives were my own. Try as I might I could never make everyone happy. Bill Cosby once said, "I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is to try and please everyone" (Wells 35) I was walking on eggs trying to please everyone and I was miserable. Worse yet, those I loved most were miserable. I found myself trapped in a prison of my own design. My children were unhappy and my husband and I were barely speaking to one another. I wanted to make an image that would express the tensions that my husband and I felt at that time, so I photographed the two of us, with me standing in his shadow. One look at the negative and I knew that this was not the image I had in mind. Weeks later I took my son and daughter out and began photographing them, with this idea still in my mind. The resulting photograph is titled 'Will You Please Listen To What I Am Not Saying?'

It is a painful image. The young man appears arrogant. It looks as if he is trying to pretend that whatever transpired between himself and the girl does not bother him. The girl looks bewildered and hurt. Both are in pain. I have a difficult time looking at this image. I think this one comes too close to some painful truths about myself and touched on things that I am still unwilling to face. Again, I must ask myself, 'What am I willing to risk?' "Much of what we face that we find dark and difficult is partly of our own making." (Wells 22)



As I peered out from my isolation, I realized that the traditional roles of mother and wife had dramatically changed from those that I grew up with. Women were beginning to shun the traditional roles placed upon them by society. They were challenging themselves in ways that my mother never would have dreamed of doing. It began to dawn on me that I had become the very thing that I had feared as a child, a mindless wooden mannequin, hollow and staring from sightless eyes. I allowed myself to step back into the old Southern mindset. While I have never regretted those years that I stayed home to care for my children. I do regret that I allowed myself to become virtually a vegetable. I did not seek ways to enrich my mind or spirit. It is all too easy to slip into a comfortable routine. It is much harder to face ourselves honestly. To ask ourselves—"What am I willing to risk?"

In my photography, I have again begun to experiment with images of broken glass, combining those images with images of real women this time. The images are dark and foreboding, yet I see them more as a symbol of breaking free rather than one of being trapped. In one such image there is a young woman standing erect, looking hopeful and gesturing with her hand outstretched toward the viewer. She is surrounded by broken glass and the image is dark and foreboding. Yet, there is hope there also. It is as if she is saying to us, "I will persevere, though all around me is shattered, I still have hope and I will survive!"





As I emerged from my fog, and from the very confining cocoon that I had wrapped myself in for so many years, I began to search for ways to fill the inconsolable longings, the indefinable yearnings I felt deep within. For a while church and volunteer work filled that void and I immersed myself in this, it kept me close to my children since much of the work revolved around the school they attended, but it did not satisfy my needs. On an impulse I joined a group and took art lessons from a woman who taught from a home studio. At first this seemed to be the answer, but as I progressed, my paintings took on a life of their own. These were not the romantic landscapes, nor pretty flowers that the other women seemed to want to paint, but quite often were abstracts. They were a timid and tentative attempt at self expression. And once again I returned to my poetry.

My husband, who probably saw my struggle more clearly than I, urged me to go back to college and study art. Again and again he would prod me, goad me into returning. We had had several difficult years together. This plus my background involving a very controlling father caused me, for a time, to ignore his urgings, to rebel once again and defy the authority of the male figure in my life.

At last I did return and it was the beginning of my rebirth. At long last I discovered why I never fit in with the society that had surrounded me all my life. I discovered what all creative people must eventually come to terms with; we are a world apart from what the majority of society considers "normal." I had been so afraid of returning to school at my age. Since

everyone would be so much younger. I would be going to school with people who were the same age as my sons.

I was amazed to find that these young people readily accepted me. The years that separated us proved to be no barrier. In fact, I found that I had more in common with them than I did with most of my peers. These young people were more accepting of individuality, less prejudiced than the adults I had been associated with.

As an elective, I took a photography class and discovered a new voice for my self expression. Although, initially all of my images were captured exactly as the camera saw them, they gradually began to change, to become more and more personal. Mannequins began to appear in these images, the perfect mannequins of my childhood. Yet, now they began to transform. In the darkroom I manipulated their poised perfection, using broken glass fragments, and incorporating these shards into my photographs.

As great as this need was within me, it was not without some serious mental and moral conflict. I am still very much the product of my southern family roots; torn between my needs and the needs of my family. I am to this day still searching for that perfect balance and I believe my poetry and my images reflect this struggle. Images surface as if they have a will and a life of their own. They came into being without any conscious effort on my part and I struggle to interrupt these through my poetry.

I began to photograph real women doing ordinary things, sometimes I leave these images untouched, sometimes I manipulate them through double

exposures or other methods. The mannequins have become a symbol of artificiality.

Chapter V: Winter, Seasons Through My Window

As I approach the winter of my life, I find myself more at peace with who I am, and what I will become. My photography and poetry have become my means of self expression. It is becoming increasingly less important what others say about who I am and what I do, although I have not fully resolved that dilemma. I have rediscovered the joy of expression, which has been buried since childhood. I have a new sense of self confidence and my relationship with my God made stronger.

I have a new sense of self confidence and I am beginning to listen more to that inner voice, to that poet and artist that I have buried deep within for so many years. And so, gradually I begin to emerge from my cocoon, not into the spring of my life, but towards the autumn. As I do so I find many like myself; women and men who are searching for their own rhythms, their own individual balance of life. I begin to realize that my own experience is not so very different from that of others.

This work that I do has become more than a way for me to resolve myself to myself, its message is more universal than I first believed. It is a gift to myself and to those who helped me along the way. I hope that those who are still tangled in that same twisted web will find some comfort in knowing that they are not alone, others have walked the same path.

Works Cited

Lindbergh, Anne Morrow. Gift From The Sea. New York; Vantage Books, Rangoon House, Inc. 1983

Wells, Joe. Who Do You Think You Are? How To Build Self Esteem. New York, Bantam Books, 1989