

SHERWIN W. HOWARD

## *Cedar City, 1940-46*

Pictures in books suggest  
That I first stood grey and white  
On short black kodak grass.

Parental evidence  
Tells how I cried at trains,  
Of crayoned bedroom walls,  
And infant oddities.

But this is borrowed memory;  
I begin in Cedar City . . .

## *Two Recollections of the Cedar City Second Ward*

Somehow I feared that they would make  
Confession of sin a prelude  
To my being baptized at eight.  
When they did not, I felt relief  
Beyond the joy of pardoned guilt.  
I felt the need to celebrate  
By boldly writing LIFE across  
The blank space of my new-washed soul.

We played football at the ward at night  
Using a white t-shirt for a ball.  
A single streetlight cast both shadow  
and dim light across the playing field,  
Where children's echoes passed and ran like  
Furtive sparrows dancing in a wind.  
We played on ageless summer grass; and  
When one team scored too many points, we'd  
Shuffle players till it came out right.

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SHERWIN W. HOWARD, *Associate Professor of Theatre, is Dean of the School of Humanities at Weber State College in Ogden, Utah. His poetry cycle "The Jimson Hill Branch," appeared in Dialogue VII/4.*  
SUZANNE KEARNEY (opposite page), *of Ogden, Utah, is a senior art major at Weber State College.*

*Helping My Brother to Ride  
Bareback on Grandpa Corry's Cow*

Low, stall rafters let us climb where  
Only inches of musty air  
Kept Burt from light brown backs below.  
My job outside the barn was  
Waving skittish creatures in  
Until the moment he dropped down.

It would be hard to verify  
Whose fear was greatest, cow's or boy's.  
She may have dreamed a panther leaped,  
Burt scarcely breathed the wind he rode  
Out of the barn and into the yard;  
Holding her neck, her ears, the air . . .

Our rodeo was halted by  
A mother's scolding garden hose  
Which washed away the clinging scent,  
But could not make cowboys repent  
Of having helped or done the deed.

*Eating Raspberry Jello on Fast  
Sunday on a Tin Roof*

My mother let me lick  
The powdered red paper,  
But that was hardly taste  
Enough to satisfy  
A young addiction. In  
Me there was appetite  
That yearned for more than licks.

Then one April Sunday,  
While others stayed at church  
To testify the sweet  
Inward peace men gain  
When passion sinks subdued,  
I saw my chance; and with  
A teetering homebound stool  
Accomplice to my reach,  
I plucked an entire box  
Of bushless raspberry.

Evil could not have waked on such a day.  
A southern sun and sky of brilliant blue  
Had warmed the low roof of the shed where I  
Climbed to sit, feet hanging over edge.  
My untrained fingers lifted out the pack  
And let great gulps of jello break my fast,  
Nor did I taste a granule of guilt.  
My tongue was scarlet; but my soul was light,  
For one brief moment sweetly satisfied.

*Playing Strip Poker  
Once in a Sheep Wagon*

Halfway down the field  
Behind the Corrys' barn  
Was parked a covered wagon.  
Summers it was home  
For mountain tending men  
Who swore and drank black coffee  
While they watched the sheep—  
Leather men with shy smiles  
Who'd disappear September,  
Resurrect in May,  
And push the sheep back up  
The greening mountain valleys.

In fall and winter  
The wagon was ours,  
A dusky place still holding  
Adult remnants—  
A rope, a box of tea,  
Two western romance magazines . . .

I was the youngest and first to lose  
One of my socks and both of my shoes.  
Another sock followed, then shirt and belt,  
Until I realized how it felt  
When grey boards and bare bottom meet—  
Cool and awkward but strangely sweet.

In awkwardness shared  
By bared and clothed alike,  
We poked the boyhood mysteries  
Of god, of girls, of  
Whether parents ever sin,  
And who had dared the taste of beer.  
Taking communion  
From jacks and tens, we lied  
The best and worst we'd done,  
Playing at men by  
Pushing dreams up greening  
Mountainsides of truth, knowing  
They would slip down again  
When supper dressed us home  
In the early dark of fall.

Even now, whenever I see  
A herding wagon beside a tree,  
I smile and wish I could look inside,  
Remember small boys trying to hide  
Together in a moldering ark,  
Groping for light in sequestered dark.

