

Still Moments

by
Betty Burton Choate

Published by
J. C. CHOATE PUBLICATIONS
Burton Drive
Winona, Mississippi 38967
U.S.A.

Copyright, 1983
by
J. C. Choate Publications

Photography by J. C. and Betty Choate
Typesetting by Eloise Breazeale Nowell

Dedication

To our children, Darla, Sheila, Steve, and Shannon, the subjects of the thinking, the planning, the prayers of so many of my "Still Moments."

Preface

Moments—little blocks of time, removed from the whole of life and kept apart to cherish. Sometimes it seems the still moments are also the sober ones, near to tears, and perhaps it is so. I seldom take the time to write in the midst of a flurry of activity, bubbling over with happiness.

The still moments are also an exposure of one's vulnerableness. They are not shared easily. Each of us, as we glimpse that occasional "letting down" of defences in those around us, should walk carefully, being aware of the fragility of the trust.

Betty Burton Choate
Winona, Mississippi 38967
August 6, 1982

Table of Contents

For My Soul	1
Questions Unanswered	2
My Heart	3
Contrasts	4
Children of the Moon	6
Wealth	8
The Inheritance	9
Twilight	10
Hurt	11
I Live in the Now	12
Unspoken Words	13
From One O'Clock	14
Living for Others	15
The Mark That I Leave	16
My Gift to You	18
The Road Going Home	20

Lights in the Darkness	22
Advice	23
An Appalling Birthday Discovery	24
Hurt...Love...Joy	25
The Measure of a Man	26
Fragile	27
Careful Building	28
To a Cloud	30
War	31
Memories of the Past	32
To the Ocean	33
One Who Would Serve	34
I Cannot Write	35
The End of the Day	36
Two Who Care	37
Together	38
World of Waiting	40
"Hello."	42
The Empty Spot	43
My Waiting Heart	44
Sharing	45
One	46
A Child	47
Little Mother	48
My Toy Box	49
By Your Bedside	50
Only Three	52
We Made You So	54
A Goodnight Kiss	55
Six Years	56
Sweet Baby Kiss	58
Just Seventeen	59

Growing Up	60
A Father's Cry	61
Greatness of a Moment	62
Young, and Unafraid	63
The Touch of Young Love	64
Little Girl	65
When I Grow Up	66
Confidences	68
Love Walked By	69
To Shannon	70
Eighteen	71
Goodbyes	72
To Sheila, Newly Married	73
Tears	74
Dry the Baby Tears	75
The Block of Time	76
How Will it Be	78
For Our Children	80
The Pledge	82
Sweet Words of Love	84
The King	86
When the Very Old Find God	88
The Twilight Years	89
God's Sunset	90
Not By Sight	92
Why?	93
Thou Shalt Call	94
I Remember	96
What is God to Me?	97
The Substance of God's Thoughts	98
He Endured	99
Show Me the Way	100

FOR MY SOUL

Stillness.....

Absolute stillness for my soul.

I would wait to hear its weak cries
of insecurity that might have been muffled
in my hurry and busy-ness.

I would feel its strength,
if there be any.

I would know the size of its wings
that would lift me soaring
to the mountaintops.....

Let me have stillness for my soul.

QUESTIONS UNANSWERED

A very real part of my identification is this body that is me.
Another me is the spirit living inside this fleshly form.
Where do the emotions and feelings of one part end
And where does the other part begin?
Do emotions reach full growth
Along with the body
So that they cannot continue at last
To keep up with the soul?
Or why is it that the spirit of me
So often is bound and limited by the body that is me?
Why do I feel those muscles flexing and flailing,
Urgent in the need to express themselves,
Yet unable to find adequacy in the body
As an avenue of expression?
My body is too small for all that burns within it,
My emotions are too small to contain all that they feel,
My thoughts lack the flow of endless and heavenly words
Needed to communicate,
My eyes cannot convey the depth of my soul.
I cannot even find a place of adequate peace
For sorting out the turmoil;
No place is "right"
Without distractions
Or interruptions,
And all that struggles within me
Is thwarted in its desire to develop and unfold
In the greatness that it feels.
Has my spirit outgrown my body?
Is that "right" place no where on this earth?
Is this inner struggle the beginning of the need for release?
Is this longing
The cry of the soul for its God?

My heart is still today.
There are no impatient
words rushing to be spilled
over.

CONTRASTS

THE ARTIST PAINTED A ROSE. Its realness was so vivid my fingers seemed to feel its soft velvet curves and folds, though I touched it only with my eyes. The fragrance of all the roses past filled the air along with the smell of summer showers lingering yet in droplets on the petals. I turned from the painting, my thoughts alive with the captured image of beauty and perfection.

THE ARTIST PAINTED A ROSE. He called it a rose. There were heavy splotches of color. Critics said the painting had a message. I studied it closely and could see neither the beauty of the rose nor the message. I turned from the painting, my thoughts alive only with questions.

THE WRITER WROTE A SONG. He told of beauty and of love, of ideals and of sacrifices. I listened and felt the swell of happiness inside me. Pure love, treasured and respected by the writer of songs, is a beautiful story told. His words inspired me to love more fully.

THE WRITER WROTE A SONG. He called his subject love, but he didn't know. He wrote boldly of lewdness, of unchecked passions, and of infidelity. He left a sickness in my heart, a sad withdrawal from a world so misled it no longer distinguishes between lust and love. My spirit filled with loathing at his words.

THEY WERE YOUNG, THE BOY AND GIRL. I watched them looking deeply into each other's eyes, exchanging smiles, speaking words of softness. No one would have doubted the realness of their love or their understanding of each other; but much more was also evident: a security that grew out of respect and of being respected, a sense of worth, of knowing their own ideals and of liking themselves for those standards. They were people whole, capable of giving, of sharing, of receiving, yet whole and able to stand alone if need be.

THEY WERE YOUNG, THE BOY AND GIRL. Their appearance and way of life bespoke insecurity, immaturity. Rejecting established rules and standards without understanding them or their values, they wore the clothes of that rejection as a symbol, not realizing how much more they were saying about themselves than even they had reasoned out. They lived, free of standards, free of lasting ties, free of demands and hurts—they thought. But "freedom" can mean a life awash, nothing solid to fasten to, insecurity. And it can mean immaturity that mistakes cheap sex for love, irresponsibility for freedom, and the bravado to be different for the courage of convictions.

OUR WORLD IS CHANGING. The beauty of art forms, the inspiration of songs and poems, the uplifting experience of a moving story or book, the solidarity of enduring love—all of these ideals and standards of the past are giving way to the breakdown of the present. In every area of human involvement we seem to have reached the bottom of a disastrous rock-slide: our civilization lies in a torn and bleeding heap. Will we finally deliver the death-blow to ourselves?

Children of the Moon

The Moon's children?
Who are they?

Ah!—Her children are the artisans
Whose paintings stand alone,
The sculptor with his chisel
Breathing life into the stone;
Their genius makes the masterpiece,
Designs the dream in steel;
They write the books that move the world,
Their hands repair and heal;
Their songs, their music, stir the soul,
Their work is always best;
They stand alone above the crowd:
Her children are the blest.

The stepchildren?
Who are they?

They—poor souls forlorn—
Can *feel* the stroke behind the brush;
They know the artist's mood
But they cannot do the painting:
Stepchildren aren't endowed.
Theirs is not the talent,
The endowment to excel,
They see the children's work of art
And long to do as well;
But though perception opens eyes
To see behind the scenes
And though they ache to emulate,
Stepchildren lack the means.

I am a stepchild.

I look at work perfected
And from somewhere deep within
Rise the feelings of the artist
Through his chisel or his pen;
I can *feel* his every struggle
In his efforts to achieve;
The difference is *his* masterpiece
And *mine*, the empty dream.

But...

If I cannot with her children
Shine apart from normal men,
Still I'd rather be a stepchild
Than the mass that is no kin;
For how many are the mortals,
Living, dying, every day
Who never see the masterpiece
Or hear perfection play;
Who cannot feel enraptured
With the children's work of art,
Whose genius stirs no chordant sound,
No thrill inside the heart.

The children have within themselves
A wealth no others hold;
Stepchildren look with longing eyes
On gifts outshining gold;
And others look but cannot see
And never comprehend
The precious gifts the children give
To undeserving men.

WEALTH

To me there is a great wealth in music. No matter how rich a house is, if it has no music it is hopelessly poor.

THE INHERITANCE

Do you ever wonder what kind of world we will pass on to our children as an inheritance? It seems to me that our generation has been blessed with the Golden Age: the crown jewels of a king couldn't have made life as comfortable for our ancestors as it has been for us, because so many of the things the average person has and takes for granted today were just not there in ages gone by. And yet, with all the ease and comfort available today, the world is growing less pleasant to live in because it has become so ungodly and immoral and hard.

Have we, as a generation, really made such a mess of raising our children and preserving a standard for the world that we have wrecked our own inheritance and made a shambles of what we should be able to give to our children? I pray that there will be a way for the world to be set right and to come out of the tail-spin it seems to be in, but I wonder how painful that way may have to be....

TWILIGHT

One evening last week I paused to catch my breath beside the windows in my bedroom and the enveloping peace and beauty of twilight closed around me. What a special time that hour is, when it is neither day nor night but hovers somewhere in between, and the birds' songs are so sleepy, and the crickets and katydids and frogs fill the air with their sounds in such a soothing kind of way. How exquisitely wonderful God's world is.....

HURT

Sometimes I hurt with such depth that the pain is all-pervading, smothering not only every thought and every emotion but engulfing my physical body in achiness in every fibre. The hurt goes beyond the conscious thought and even beyond sub-conscious thought, becoming an impelling physical need—an essential, a necessity—to find a black place where no light penetrates and to hide there, drawn up into a tight embryonic form, unthinking, unaware of anything in the outside world.

I Live in the NOW

Let me not live in the griefs of yesterday or seek to escape into its pleasantness. Let me not feel crowded or closed in with the pressures or fears of tomorrow. I live in the NOW. Let me live it fully, moment by moment, relishing its joys as treasures possessed, or enduring its hurts with the strength that *this* moment alone invariably brings.

UNspoken WORDS

"I love you"—such beautifully simple words, such comfortable words to live with, such strong words that speak of security and refuge. Yet so many people in this world have never learned the happiness of saying those words.

I had a brother who was as dear to me and as precious as a brother can be, yet when he was killed very suddenly in a car wreck I was haunted by the question: "How long has it been since I told him how much I love him?" That thought multiplied the loneliness and heartache that are always a part of death. One night I dreamed, very vividly, of being with Ted again and in my longing to relieve myself of those words that were heavy in my heart, I began to say: "I want to tell you something, Ted," but he looked at me with his quick familiar laugh and asked: "What? That you love me? I knew that already!" I had not really doubted that he understood but, oh, how the words needed to be said.

I learned then what a burden it is to carry those words silently in my heart, and I began to practice saying them instead. Now, it is hard for me to part ways with those I love or to end a telephone conversation with a loved one without the conclusion: "I love you." And it has been gratifying to teach others that those words will not stick in their throats either.

How much better it is to say those words so that those relationships between parents and children, between brothers and sisters, between husband and wife, between family members in Christ, between friends, can mature in the security of expressed love—how much better than to keep the words inside until death comes and locks them there unsaid, as a heavy weight from which there can never be relief.

FROM ONE O'CLOCK

From one o'clock
To three o'clock—
What a wonderful time to be o'clock
—I mean, awake—
And in the still and sleepless night
To read or draw or even write....
But first I think I'll take
A break
And pop some corn
And slice some cake
And get a glass of buttermilk.....

LIVING FOR OTHERS..... NO TIME FOR SELF

It seems so long since there was time
To study
Or to write;
My mind feels stale.
I suppose that for these years
I'll have to file "myself" away
And live for others—
But one day
When the kids are grown
And there is time for *me* again,
Out of the cobwebs I'll drag my mind
And oil the cogs,
Blow off the dust
And see if it still works!

THE MARK THAT I LEAVE

Will the world be better because I was here?
Will I leave some mark upon it?
When my lips are sealed and my hands lie still
Will the world in sorrow mourn it?

I've a day as long as the greatest man—
Why should I squander and waste it?
I've a work to do ere the day is through
And the vict'ry is mine to taste it.

Perhaps my writing will be sublime:
A poem, a book, or a sonnet?
Or should I enhance a canvas with paints
And leave a great masterpiece on it?

I could be a builder with matchless design
Or musician who has no peer,
Or maybe a dreamer, a beautiful schemer,
The footsteps of masses to steer.

I can feel in my hands the chisel and stone
And a figure ethereal emerges;
Whatever my goal, I can reach it I know—
But the talent slowly submerges.....

My spirit wings upward and soars to the heights,
But my hands cannot achieve it;
Not on canvas or stone or a book or a poem
Will you find the mark as I leave it.

Such “permanent” things tend to break and decay
And the artist is often unknown,
But the mark that I make in the softest of clay
Will linger long after I’m gone.

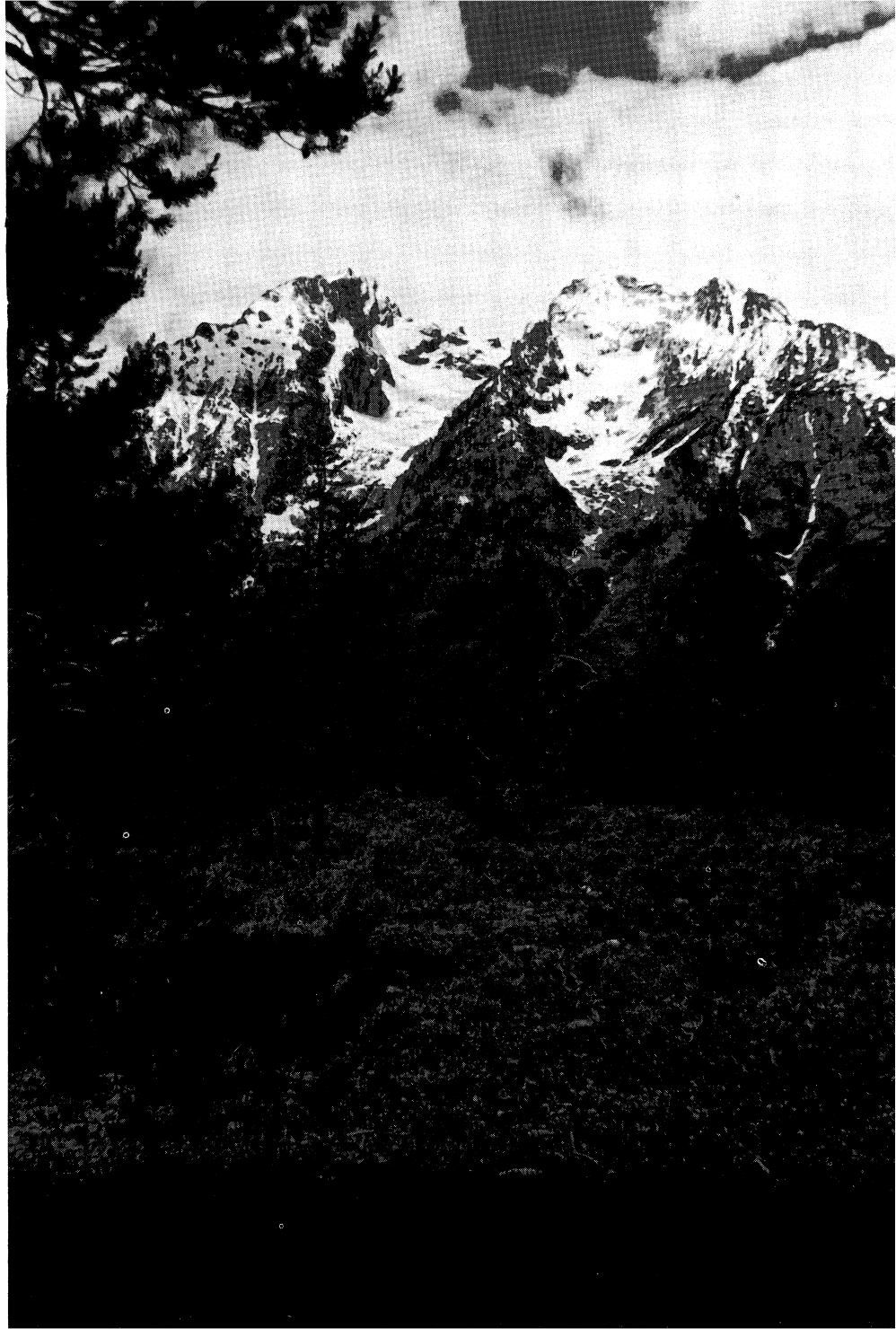
For if I can better the ones that I meet
And give them a brighter day,
If I somehow can share their burden and care
And help them along the way,

They too will reach out to the grasping hand
And steady the weary feet,
And the kindness I gave will not go to the grave,
But will spread like the waves of the sea,

And the mark that I leave when I say my farewell
Will beat in the hearts I adore;
No talent was needed and I have succeeded—
The greatest can do nothing more!

MY GIFT TO YOU

It is my gift to you
In lieu of legacy of gold;
I place it here
Inside your heart,
A refuge from the world
For all the time to come.
Find within its shadows
And its dim secluded spots,
 needle-strewn and mossy,
Peace
And strength when crises come.
Hear the wind among its sighing pines
And let that song
Become your own.
Sit in quiet stillness
In its flowering meadows
And cherish tiny bits of life.
Walk beside the gurgling streams
And catch the sparkle in your eyes,
The laughter in your voice.
Look up to drifts of whitest snow
And borrow pureness;
Let the cold clean air
Sweep through your mind and spirit
As it does your lungs
And cleanse your soul.
Feel the strength of rock
Beneath your feet,
The bigness of blue sky



That swells your heart with joy
And says you, too, must grow.

Be alone with God
In this, His earthy haven.

Keep my gift,
This snow-clad granite peak,
Forever in your heart,
A dwelling for His Spirit:
Companion, guide, and comfort
As you walk the dusty roads
And crowded streets of life.

THE ROAD GOING HOME

This curving road before us
With its borders
Yellow, pink,
Here and there some red and blue,
The green of trees,
The shadows lying dark across the way,
This road,
Canopied,
Rich with boundless sky,
Sometimes with clouds and rain,
Sometimes with sun,
This road, going home, is life
Being swept beneath our feet,
Yet ever leading on...

Who knows what lies beyond the bend,
What hides in shadows dark,
What storms may come along the way?
For now we have the sun,
Bright skies
And happiness,
A splash of blooms
Dancing through our days
Along with stately calm of forests green.

The road wends on
And up ahead is home:
We'll reach there



—The thought is glad,
tinged with longing,
with relief—
We'll reach there with the twilight
If we have no problems,
If no trouble comes our way...

.....Home, and loved ones,
Smiling,
Arms of welcome
Reaching out to hold us close,
At the end of this road
And, one day,
At the end of life's road....
....If we have no trouble on the way...

LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS

In sombre mood
And thoughtful solitude
I look as in a vision down the road
And feel a chilling grief engulf my soul
For while, today, the world is warm and bright
With shining lights of love dispelling night
I see, in distant years,
Through mounting tears,
The candles quenched, the lights burned out
And chilling darkness growing all about
As, one by one, the candles flicker dim
And blackness fills the space where they have been.....

And I.....? Will I be left to burn in loneliness,
To ache for all the glowing lights I miss
And look in weary longing to that shore
Where they have been relit
To burn forevermore?

ADVICE

Whenever your day is gloomy
And nothing's going right
Wrap it all up in a sunny smile
And call it "Cloudy bright"!
For under the cloud is sunshine,
Behind the rain, blue skies,
And the laughter of growth and learning
The triumph of Christian sighs.

An Appalling Birthday Discovery

I feel round and young
Like a newly ripe plum,
But somehow this June
I look like a prune....

Hurt....Love....Joy

.....It is only to the degree that we love a person that he can bring us joy, and to that same great degree that we can be hurt by him through the vulnerability of our love. But who would desire to diminish the hurt of love, for that would require a diminishing of the love itself, and that would mean a diminishing of the joy we feel when love is returned.....

THE MEASURE OF A MAN

It is common for a person to be measured, and accepted or rejected, on the basis of his possessions or the lack of them. Often in our own minds we never make a clear distinction between ourselves and what we have. And sometimes when a person is separated from his material assets, he finds that there is not enough left of what he had thought was himself to even feel whole within his own soul. I think this is true of too many people who are always telling you what they have or the exorbitant price they have paid for something. They are afraid that their person alone is not impressive enough, so they have to bolster themselves up by pointing out that they are people of consequence. And, of course, nothing takes away quite so much of a person's stature as making such statements.

On the other hand, many truly worthy people are counted as nothing by the world simply because they have no impressive possessions.

We don't have much at home in the States—just average—so, since we were average people with average possessions, there were few occasions when I thought about a separation of self and possessions. But there are many things that we could afford there that we either can't afford in India, or that we think it wise not to afford. So, I've learned what it is to stand without props, or to stand with what some would feel are only liabilities. It has been a good lesson (There are occasions when I am still learning it!), but I do feel whole—in fact, stronger inside now than before because I know now that I am entire within myself and am not dependent on possessions to feel complete.

Fragile
As the morning light
Breaking through the night,
Touching clouds with golden light:
Young love.

CAREFUL BUILDING

Hmm....Let me see...

First, a small bed of lettuce

And tomato wedges,

Grated carrots,

Rings of onions,

Radish rosettes,

...oh...celery...cauliflower...

A dill spear,

A few little chick peas,

Egg

Cheese

Bacon bits...hmm...well, a few more bacon bits...

Croutons...

And, around on this side,

A little spoon of

Cottage cheese,

Potato salad,

Macaroni salad,

Carrot salad,

Slaw,

And, now, where...?...well,

Maybe the flavors

Won't mix

If I carefully place

Here

Just a taste of

Heavenly hash,

Congeaed salad,

Green lime salad,

Fruit salad,

Melon balls,

Vanilla pudding,

Chocolate pudding,

Banana pudding,

Mousse...

And...ah! now...let me see...

Thousand Island here,

Hidden Valley there,

French, Blue Cheese...

Oh, the sins committed

around the salad bar!



TO A CLOUD

YOU, White Cloud, bright against the sky and shining in the great sun's light—how does it feel to be formed from the airborne droplets that so recently played their part in the Earth's life? how does it feel to do battle with that relentless orb of light and to be burned away in its heat?

YOU, White Cloud, in the evening's cool—how does it feel to be re-born and to contrast your plumes of white with God's blue expanse? You reign majestically, as though there were no threat of doom hanging over your kingdom.

YOU, White Cloud, being overtaken by the mass of gray—how does it feel to blow about with the wind? to glow with the lightning fire? to empty yourself in millions of droplets and be swallowed up by the thirstiness of the earth?

You live so briefly, White Cloud, changing forms and identities all your little while. You live so briefly; yet without your brief life, there would be no life.



WAR

War is in the land.
Bombs fall on every side
And men die.
Their torn bodies prostrate,
They do not hear....
Shells scream past deaf ears
And guns and tanks and bayonets do their work
 but the dead do not see.
They do not feel the searing pain
Known by those who yet must live and grieve;
They do not know the fear
That comes when all is lost,
 When all must change,
 When existence itself is wrecked,
 And yet—though death would soothe—
 The living must go on.
 They move and breathe
 And face each day as robots,
 Hearts dulled with pain;
 Their life is living death.....
.....But the dead?
 The dead are fallen and lie still.
 A breeze of peace caresses marble lips
 And gently stirs a bloodied curl.

MEMORIES OF THE PAST,
like actors on a private
stage, fill my mind with
poignant moments that
cannot be forgotten.



TO THE OCEAN

Washing—gently washing—
In a ceaseless song upon the shore,
Your waves in words unspoken
Praise the One whom I adore;
How they sing of exaltation,
Of a majesty supreme,
Of a glory and a grandeur
That no man has ever seen;
How they whisper of the power
Held in check this star-lit night
That could sweep in raging torrents
Over earth's remotest height;
How they fold in soft caresses
All the creatures of the sea,
Blending gentleness with power
Just as God takes care of me;
Yes.....they whisper, softly whisper
And the echo fills my soul
With the song of endless ages
Of His love that makes me whole.

...One who would serve as the ideal for others must have his own ideals high in the stars so he will not fail those who follow him....

I CANNOT WRITE

I cannot write about a love
I knew so long ago—
I cannot tell of priceless dreams
I'll always treasure so.

I cannot say in simple words
That once I worshipped you,
And with a childish passion
Prayed my dreams come true.

I cannot whisper of the times
I watched you from afar,
And followed in your footsteps
When you were my guiding star.

I cannot tell of little things
That made me love you so;
And all your treasured actions
I'm sure you'll never know.

For my heart was only dreaming—
It called, but was not heard;
The love it wanted so to find
Lay in your breast, unstirred.

And then, at last, one warm bright day,
When all my hope was gone,
You whispered that you loved me
And made my life a song.

Yes, those childish passions—
The hopes and dreams are fled
And now I hold within my heart
Undying love, instead.

THE END OF THE DAY

At the end of a long, lonely day
When my faith has been tempted and tried
Then, Darling, I yearn in my weary heart
Just to lie down by your side.

There's a longing which comes from the depth of my soul
And it begs for your arms warm and tight—
When all of my friends turn against me
Then I wait for the coming of night.

For when night draws its shades round about us
And the world takes its rest from the day
Then am I clasped in the arms of love
And my burdens go winging away.

I cannot think of the morrow
Or the days and the years yet to come
If I cannot have you here beside me
To share in the laughter and fun.

No, I'd rather not go on without you
So, Darling, forever I pray,
Let me always have you to come home to
At the end of a long, lonely day.

TWO WHO CARE

The breadth of God's green earth
And the crashing of His sea,
The expanse of half His heaven
And a lost humanity——
 These mighty heights
 And lonely depths,
 These empty voids
 And weary steps
 Mark the space from you to me——
 The endless space from you to me.

I reach across His earth,
Breakers singing in my ear,
And feel the dome of heaven
Bringing God and you so near——
 The height of joy,
 The depth of calm,
 A hope fulfilled,
 A soothing balm
 Fill the space from you to me——
 The little space from you to me.

No earth can sever two who care,
No breakers drown your voice;
Our hearts through heaven's wide expanse
With one heartbeat rejoice——
 There is no height,
 There is no depth,
 There is no void,
 No weary step:
 *We walk together, you and me——
 As one we face eternity.*

TOGETHER

Oh Love, with winging spirit
I defy this cell of clay
And slip my fingers in your hand
And walk with you today;
I turn with joyous laughter
To the streets you walk upon:
With singing heart I match your stride—
You shall not walk alone.
Once more you buy carnations
And I pin them in my hair:
With pride I wear the token
Of the glowing love we share.
We walk along familiar streets,
Exotic though they be,
And sit in dreamy silence
On the rocks beside the sea.
We visit the perfumers
And the gold shops of the sukhs
And search for little treasures
Fit for princesses or dukes;
Again we hear the music
That enhanced those happy days,
We see a Hindi movie
And your smile shines through a haze.
Once more through starry darkness
Quiet footsteps fill the night
And we walk inside "The Neptune"
For a steak by candlelight;
I smile in sweet contentment
As you reach to take my hand:

The day we've shared surrounds us
With a peace we understand;
Then the doorman bids, "Good evening,"
And we turn our steps toward "home"
Where in trust and full assurance
Deepest thoughts are bared and shown;
Far into the morning
While the world around us sleeps
We share that mental oneness
In a closeness, rich and sweet,
Then when every word is spoken
And a stillness fills my soul
I snuggle on your shoulder
And your arms around me fold.....

Oh my Love, with winging spirit
I would fly to your embrace:
How I miss you, how I love you,
How I long to see your face,
How I look with wistful dreaming
To the treasures that are mine,
Precious gifts of cherished memories—
Through the loneliness they shine,
And they bring back vivid moments
Of the life that we have known
So, through them I walk beside you:
Love—you never walk alone.

WORLD OF WAITING

In a silent world of waiting,
Caught in time that never moves,
How intently do I listen
—Turn with bated breath and listen—
For the old familiar stepping of your shoes!

Sweet the feel of spring surrounds me,
Gently blows the evening breeze,
And the stars that glow in heaven
—Burn like bonfires set in heaven—
Burn no brighter than the hope that burns in me.

Every footfall growing nearer
Seems to walk upon my heart,
And the ache of anguished waiting
—Sweet and bitter ache of waiting—
Is an agony that tears my soul apart.

How my face is masked in pretence
Of contentment and of rest,
But no eye can see the turmoil
—No one's ears can hear the turmoil—
Of the ocean that is raging in my breast.

With unseeing eyes I see you
As you bend to kiss my lips,
As your gentle hands caress me
—With possessive love caress me—
I can almost feel your burning fingertips.

With a smile I turn to face you—
Oh, my love, you are not there!
And the empty disappointment
—Bitter pang of disappointment—
Even drowns the scent of spring that fills the air.

Now the world seems dead around me
For I know you will not come,
But, my Darling, I am waiting
—Through life and death still waiting—
And I listen for the steps that bring you home....

“HELLO.”

My name is J. C. Choate.

Lonely sticker on the door
Saying still, “Hello.”
You put it there with hurried hand
Before you turned to go.

You put it there without a thought
But, oh my dearest one,
How often have I read its words
And seen the deed re-done.

Early in the morning
When I wake and you're not there,
When we have a special dinner
And I see your vacant chair,
When I need a word of wisdom
Or a shoulder, mine alone,
When my strength begins to falter
And my courage seems all gone,
When I want to share a secret
Or a laugh with someone dear
Then the hurt seems doubly painful
That My Love is never here,

But I see your little sticker
Calling out its bright “Hello”
And somehow your presence lingers
Just as you turned to go.

THE EMPTY SPOT

If it were mine to choose our ways
I'd be with you because
I love you;
But God has chosen different paths
For us to walk awhile,
And so I walk alone.

And you? You're lonely too;
With people all around
We know the empty spot
Of loneliness
That no other's form
Or voice or smile
Can fill.

But we know the sweetness, too,
Of loving deeply and of being loved,
Of trusting and of waiting
Till the paths converge again,
As sure they will.

We would not have the joy without the hurt,
The thrill without the pain,
And so we walk in loneliness
Awhile
Until one day
Our hands will clasp across the way again
And tears become a smile.

MY WAITING HEART

Though hours turn into days
And days stretch into weeks,
And lonely time hangs heavy on my hands,
Yet still my pulses beat,
And still my sad eyes seek
For that dear form of one most precious man.

Through the empty door
And down the lonely lane
And out across the empty stretch of earth,
I search for you in vain
And call aloud your name
And wonder how a heart endures such hurt.

I wait in hope, my love,
With faith forever true
And one day I will feel you in my arms;
The loneliness for you,
The sorrow that I knew,
Will fade before the magic of your charms.

And then my heart will sing
And then my lips will smile
And all the world will know the joy I feel—
Yes, in a little while,
Another lonely mile,
My heart before its absent king can kneel!



SHARING

How much it means to me,
This time of walking in the stillness
Before the dark,
Trailing footsteps,
Admiring flowers,
Checking little trees
To see their growth,
Talking of improvements
And the work we want to do,
Smelling roses
And exulting in new blooms,
Ending up at last
Here in the swing
Listening to the waterfall,
Watching stars come out
And dusky blueness sweep the heavens,
Talking,
Contented,
Filled with happiness
For all God's perfect gifts.

How much it means to me
To share these things with you.

ONE

As one, my Darling, you and I
Each thought, each dream, the same;
I touch your hand and feel your love,
A deep and burning flame.

What need have we for chosen words,
Polite and self-concealing?
Our eyes can say what words cannot,
Undying love revealing.

You speak. Your murmured words
The golden silence break;
You turn your head upon my knees,
To seek my eyes, my face.

Some answer falls with gentle tone
Upon your list'ning ear;
The love that flows from heart to heart
Leaves not a doubt, no fear.

I feel the coarseness of your hair
Between my fingertips;
Your cheek, fresh-shaven, prickly still
Is warm against my lips.

Oh, sweet the pang of happiness
That wells from deep within;
To have you near—I ask no more—
Such love can never end.

A CHILD is mine.
God gave it to my hands,
A soft, impressionable bit of dust,
Untouched, and waiting to be formed—
A bit of dust, frailly mortal,
But radiant, too, with a living spark
Of immortality—
A gift from God that never dies.

This child, this life, is mine.
What it does,
What it becomes,
Where it lives, both now and throughout
The aeons of eternity
Depends on me.

With love and care these hands and heart of mine
Can grace its form with beauty—
Can nourish goodness and a pure heart—
Can make it one to love,
 one to cherish, one to bless mankind.
But easier still,
 Through failure and neglect
 I can make this life
 A bitter cup of sorrow,
 Of despair and loss and death.

It takes a strength to impart a strength to others;
It takes a will and love
That perhaps I do not have.
But there is One—
 He is strength and love and purity of will;
 He it was who gave this gift to me—
And I can turn to Him for all I need
And, with His help,
These hands can shape a soul
For immortality!

LITTLE MOTHER

How she goes about her work,
Engrossed and deep in thought,
Caring for her baby's needs
In the way a mother ought.

First she rubs her head to toe
With the cloth that mopped the floor,
Washes gently on her face,
Smears the jam a little more.

Now the darling must be fed
From a bottle filled with air:
Though she aims for baby's mouth
There's a detour through its hair.

But Baby's burped and resting well,
Wrapped inside a little rug;
Mommy pats her on the back,
Gives her Sweet a final hug.

Now she lays her down to sleep—
Conscience says her work is done;
With a grave, maternal look
She forsakes her little one,

And she crawls into my arms
For the love she feels is due:
Oh, she's such an infant yet—
Little mother, not quite two.

MY TOY BOX

I have a toy box full of all kinds of things—
Marbles and bottles and cowboy rings,
Three wooden camels and a little car
That runs real fast, but not very far,
A funny old man with a tall red hat,
And a striped ball that goes spat-spat-spat,
Seven screw-y kegs from big to little
And inside the least is a baby kitty,
A spotted doggy that's long and lean,
Two fat balloons and a piece of string,
A fuzzy bear and a spinning top,
And a funny seal that goes flop, flop, flop,
A cowboy hat and big six-guns,
And a fine stick-horse that really runs,
Books and colors and puzzles and games, and horses
 and cows and choo-choo trains and—
—There's not anymore—
But look where it is—it's all on the floor
And Mommy will come and spank, spank, spank
If I don't clean them up as quick as a wink,
So I'll put every piece right back in the chest—
But they won't go in, though I do my best
And here comes Mommy—she's sure to see—
But she isn't mad—she just looks at me
And hugs me up like a cuddly toy
And gives me a kiss 'cause I'm her boy—

I love Mommy.

BY YOUR BEDSIDE

I've come to tuck you in
And I linger by your bed
To kiss your baby cheek,
To caress your tousled head.

How can it be, my Darling,
That the years are flying by,
That you'll soon grow up and leave us?—
I linger with a sigh.

How I treasure every moment,
Every day that we have shared—
There are no words to tell you
How very much I care.

But perhaps you'll grasp a little
Of just what you mean to me
If I say that through my Sheila
Lives the one I hoped to be.

Many dreams I'll see lie broken,
Many cherished goals not gained,
But you'll go beyond my failures
To a higher, brighter plane.

You are like a little image
Of the self I might have been,
And I pray for God to help me
As I mold my Sheila Lynn.



I must be so very careful—
No mistakes can be allowed;
Every virtue, every goodness
Must be shaped and polished now.

For when the work is finished
And you face the world alone,
I can change no fault or blemish—
The clay will be like stone.

So, my Darling, we must mold you
Just as sweet and good and kind
As the lovely face God gave you
When in love He made you mine.

ONLY THREE

He's only three—
A little boy with eyes a flashing blue
And golden hair cut short...
How can I tell in many words or few
Just what he means to me?

He's only three—
And never heard of anything called fear
But only knows the beauty of this life;
That flashing smile I hold so very dear
Is filled with ecstasy.

He's only three—
What precious ways the little darling has!
His kisses are as endless as his love
And all I have to do is ask—
They're sweet with purity.

He's only three—
I hold him in my arms and watch his tired eyes close in slumber:
How free from care he is! and peaceful!
It nearly makes me wonder
Why can't it always be?

He's only three—
And now he wanders in the land of dreams:
I look back upon the day gone by
And think how much this small boy means—
He's all the world to me.

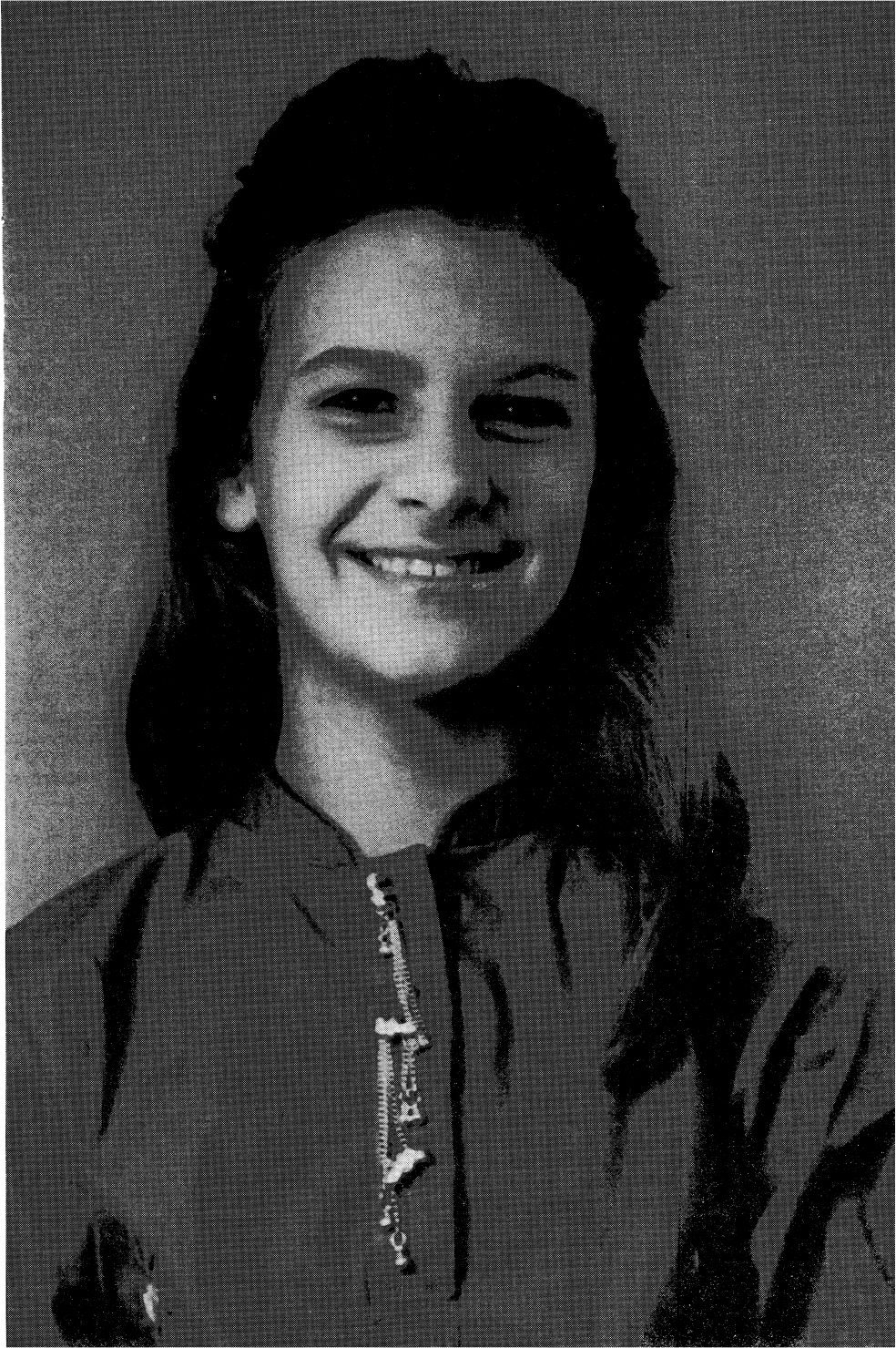
He's only three—
He cannot see the road that lies ahead
When from the innocence of babyhood
He passes on to be a man instead—
As yet he cannot see.

To have him put his baby arms
Around my neck so tight
And hug me "plumb to death" he says—
It makes my burdens light!
He longs to help me with my work
And do the things I do:
He tells me all the feats he'll try
"When I'm as big as you!"
He wants someone to play with him
And "swang me one more time:"—
The laughter peals out merrily:
It makes me glad he's mine.
He loves to read his story books—
Adventures great and rare;
And every night before he sleeps
He says his childish prayer.
His eyes grow round and glowing
When he tells with all his might
About the fish that brother caught
"—Yester-dy-day-night!"
How can I help but love the boy
Who comes with outstretched arms
And begs me for forgiveness
When he's done a wrong or harm?
But nothing yet is quite as sweet
As when he bows his head
And prays aloud "in Jesus' name"
For God to "bless this bread."

—He's only three—
A message sent from Heaven up above
To say we must become as pure,
And filled with endless, selfless love—
As innocent as he.....
.....He's only three.

WE MADE YOU SO

Though by birth you were not ours,
We made you so.
We longed to make your world secure,
To end the sorrow you endured,
To turn the wrongs back into right
And change your darkness into light;
We longed to heal each aching pain
And never let them come again,
We longed to fill your future years
With every joy and not with tears,
We longed to guide your every step
Until the time you'll need no help,
We long to see the happy day
When we can proudly stand and say
For all the world to know:
 Though by birth you were not ours,
 We made you so.



A GOODNIGHT KISS

At home I usually stop by the kids' rooms to tell them goodnight, if they don't come to me before going to bed. But here in India it has gotten to be a real ritual. Every night Sheila reminds me, "Mother, come to my room before you go to bed." So we talk for a few minutes about what they are thinking or feeling, or about some book they are reading, or we work together on a jig-saw puzzle, or do something else that they are interested in, and then I kiss them goodnight, turning out the light and leaving the door slightly ajar so they won't feel alone.

A few nights ago I was unusually tired and went to sleep while I was lying down with Shannon, waiting for him to go to sleep. About one-thirty a sleepy Sheila pushed open the door and woke me with, "Mother, aren't you ever coming to tell us goodnight?" A goodnight kiss that is an every-day occurrence would seem to be too common to be important, yet she had waited an hour and a half for it. How different are children's measurements, sometimes, compared to those of adults.....

SIX YEARS

Six years have passed—
Years of forgetfulness,
Or some would tell us so...
The friends I meet along the way,
Whose eyes were red with tears
Six years ago
Smile in happiness today.

Perhaps they think
(As it is true of them)
That time for me
Has healed the wound
And left the mem'ry dim.
They see the smile upon my face.
They cannot see my heart.

They cannot see,
And cannot feel as I,
The sudden thrust
When some chance word
Cuts like a knife
And frees the pent-up pain that flows
Like gushing blood inside.

They think of him
As in the past,
Dead and buried,
Forgot by all who cared,
For sorrow cannot last.

And though I smile, dry-eyed,
They do not know my heart.

No, not to me
He isn't dead,
For when the box was sealed
And buried from my sight
He claimed my heart instead,
And there I made a world for him
And there he lives today.

He's always there,
And through the years
I visit him among
Familiar scenes and well-loved spots,
As dear as he is dear,
And call again his name
And feel less lonely when I'm there.

Sweet baby kiss
In drowsiness given:
No other gift
Partakes so of heaven.

JUST SEVENTEEN,

Just on the threshold of his own life
With so much promise,
So much ability,
And then
Without a warning
He was gone.

I stood beside you
Looking down into his face,
So dear,
Somehow unchanged
Even in its stillness,
And all inside I bled
With you.

The years have passed
And now I have a son
Like yours was
In so many little ways.
I see his form again,
See his emotions
In my own son's eyes;
I feel his hurts, his hopes,
The love built year on year;
I feel the emptiness,
The reaching of my heart
When he's away,
And oh how multiplied
My grief has grown
For you.

GROWING UP

They are my babies.
How can it be
That they are walking around
On such long legs,
In such big shoes?
And where is the little girl
That only a day ago
I was embroidering dresses for?—

In my closet, confiscating!

A FATHER'S CRY

Wrung from
A father's heart
Is the cry,
"Deal gently with the young man..."

...His son,
The embodiment of years of love,
Gone out into the world
Beyond a father's hands.....

The hands reach out
Involuntarily
Protectively
Futilely,

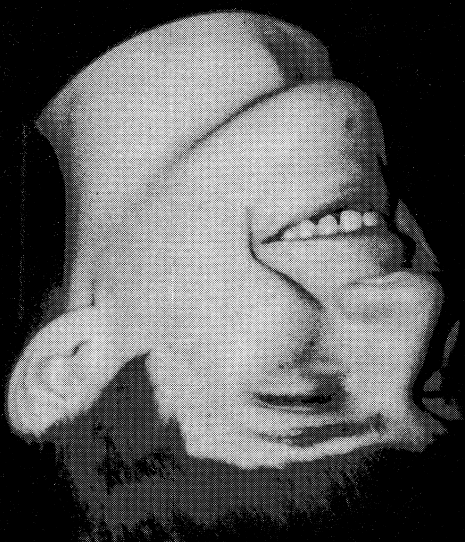
And a plaintive cry
pleads with the world,
with passers-by
whose lives may touch the boy's,
with girls along the way
who have the power
to build or to destroy,
with God, at last,
whose hand is over all,

A cry, caught up in the echo
Of departing steps,

"Deal gently....oh....
Deal gently....."

GREATNESS OF A MOMENT

Casually,
Without design,
You pass the door
And then you turn around
And come inside to sit awhile
And talk....
About school,
Or something you have read,
Or to show some recent art....
Nothing important, really,
Yet your grin,
Lop-sided in its fun,
Deepens the dimple in your cheek,
And happiness glows with unawareness of itself
From shining eyes;
I listen to my son
 —My almost grown-up son—
And feel the greatness
Far beyond the things
We talk about:
You have turned aside
To share,
Inviting me without the use of words
To join your laughter,
Know your thoughts,
Extol your triumphs,
Minimize defeats,
To be a part of days
That form your life,
And this is greatness of a moment
Far beyond the measure
Of the world.



YOUNG, AND UNAFRAID

I watch them,
And I wonder at their courage
And their daring,
Walking boldly out to face the world,
So unafraid.

Or is it
That they yet are much too young
To know the hurt that life can bring,
To know what struggles
May await around the bend,
What joys or heartaches
May be theirs one day
A little further down the road?

Is it courage in their step,
Or could it be
Just youth's unknowingness?

The Touch of Young Love

As the paleness of the dawning
Paints with pink the eastern sky,
Or gently and serenely
Like a bird wing brushing by,
As the ebbing ocean wavelet
Folds the shore in sweet caress,
So the innocence of young love
In soft touches is expressed.

I have a little daughter
(Seventeen is yet so young)
Whose heart in aching sweetness
Beats a song of love unsung;
I have watched the two together
—Manly boy and girlish charm—
Of the world around unmindful,
Walking quietly, brushing arms;
And I see her eyes upturning
Speaking through the wordless hush,
With a smile her love outpouring,
Wrapped within the robe of trust.
Though I cannot hear the murmurs
Or the plans and hopes laid bare,
Yet I know they taste of heaven
In the depth of love they share,
And I feel within my own heart,
As I watch through deep'ning dusk,
All the aching love transmitted
In the lightness of her touch.

LITTLE GIRL

Stubborn little form
Resolutely lying
Face down across my bed
While I want you
To go and heat our lunch.
My little girl,
Grown so suddenly
Into a woman's form
With a woman's thoughts and love;
I have you now, lying there,
—Belonging—
Across my new-made bed
But, Darling, how will I fill
The empty spot
When only the impression remains
On the bed
And in my heart,
When you have flown
With fairy wings
To other arms
To be the heartbeat of another home,
And a void is left in ours?

WHEN I GROW UP

He stood there in his work clothes,
Hammer and nails ready to go
To Papa's
And to work.
His face was absorbed in thinking
Of the "project",
Big with importance
In the mind of a five-year-old
And he began to say
That he and Papa would do this or that
Together
"When I grow up..."
But he stopped,
Interrupting his thoughts to ask
Half in hope,
Half in fear,
"Will Papa be the same
When I grow up...
You know:
Will he still be like he is now?"
Time seemed to stop
As I read the hurt
Forming already behind his eyes.

*How do you tell a baby
That flying years
May not wait for him
To learn from Papa all he wants to know,
All that Papa wants to share?
How do you tell a five-year-old
Of time
And age
And death?
I had no words....
Only a knot of hurt inside
And tears burning my eyes
Because time may not wait
Until "I grow up..."*

Confidences.....

the Last Night Before College

“Mother, I didn’t want to leave her.
She looked so small
And so alone
Standing there
With tears running down her face.”

His own eyes held a remnant of her tears,
Talking thus,
His heart still reaching out
To her who needed him.

“Her folks—they’re not Christians, Mother...
They’re not close like we are...
She needs somebody, Mother.
Help her while I’m gone—
She’s so alone
And she’s such a little girl.”

Those young arms,
Already strong and wanting to protect,
Were helpless, and he knew it;
I could see the anguish in his eyes,
His longing to supply the greater strength
She needed,
And my heart ached for him
In the pain of manhood settling down
On shoulders yet so young.

LOVE WALKED BY

Love walked by...
Young love,
Sweet love,
So absorbed in the loving
That it shines
Subconsciously
In every conscious act:
Love walked by
And wrote
In scribbled pen
Across my study-pad:
"Rob—Sheila".
Love walked by
And spoke its piece
Before it left.

TO SHANNON

Little Pixie-Face
—Our gift from God—
What thoughts are there
Behind those twinkling eyes
And laughing lips,
Upturned in kisses sweet?
Would that I could have
The pureness of your mind
Unstained by guilt of sin,
Radiant still
With heaven's love
And God's own gentleness;
Would that I could know
That bliss.



EIGHTEEN

Little boy,
Hurting,
Trying to grow up,
Torn with emotions
Too big for his body,
Tears
Spilling from eyes
Ashamed of being
Babyish,
And behind the tears
Silent begging eyes:
"Understand me.
Help me.
Part of me groans for independence,
Part of me cries
For the security of being
A little boy
Again.
Let me go, Mother...
But
Not
Entirely,
Yet...."

GOODBYES are said;
They are on their own.
Whatever the shape,
The molding is done.

To Sheila, newly married:

Your letter was sweet. Yes, loneliness and homesickness can be very strong feelings, even when you are happy in your own life. You were wondering how I was able to go to live in Pakistan when I was only 21. I'm sure part of it was pure ignorance rather than courage! I might not have gone if I had known all the heart-pains that would have been part of the enduring.

But as bad as the hurt got to be at times, it never was so bad that the breaking point was reached when I had to say with Popeye: "That's all I c'n stands; I can't stands n' more!" Up to that point, any hurting is a building thing, a developing of strength, a growth in the ability to treasure the good things, and an increasing of the capacity to enjoy the happiness when the hurting time comes to an end. I am sure we would not have treasured togetherness so much if we had not had the long enforced periods of separateness.

So, for yourself, mentally turn the coin over when you are feeling far away and alone, and savour the deep-down satisfaction that will follow when the alone time ends.

Have you thought, Sheila, that "yesterday" really is only "now" in memory form? If you close your eyes and concentrate, it can be almost as real as what you are experiencing in newness—and so often the memory is more special than the event seemed at the time it was lived because....well, maybe we realize its value more at a distance...and because we tend, too, to forget the unpleasant. So, all that was good is enhanced by memory until it radiates with the warmth of being a real treasure.

We are so blessed, first, to have the places and the people to be lonely for and, second, to have the good times and the peace around us that allow us to luxuriate in feelings of loneliness. I pray that those things will never change.

TEARS

With dragging feet I approach a point in the road that I dread and, looking back, I wonder that I could have lived through such a time of happiness and not stood in awe each day that such blessings flowed to me. These years, so soon to end, have been a time of peace and sweet togetherness, a time of health without real crisis.

So few people after entering the adult world live “just across the road from Daddy and Mother” and know the full joy of sharing life with them without friction and quarrels. Our two homes have been like one, with consideration for each other and a real willingness to help, without any desire to interfere, and the years have been rich with closeness and with love.

I have had the treasure, too, of children growing beautifully into young adults, children who are my friends as well as my sons and daughters, and we've shared so many things. Now the time has come for college, and work, for marriage and homes of their own that may take them far away. We've been so close all of these years, but who knows how little time we'll share in years to come? And how can I endure the loneliness when all is quiet and still, yet crowded with memories of the past?

Growing up and growing old—common experiences that everyone must face...but, oh, the changes hurt so much when you have loved so much....

DRY THE BABY TEARS

Grow up, Betty. Dry the baby tears.

Suppose you had lived far from home for all of these years; think of the happiness you never would have known. Or suppose, instead of growing old, they had been taken suddenly in death—others have endured such loss—but you have them still. Don't cry for pain that's yet to come.

And think of the children who never grow up. Think of the sorrow if you knew they would be mental or physical babies always—some parents endure that pain—. Be glad that they are strong and normal, that they have potential lives of worth to live for God; and surely, with the love you share, they won't forget. They'll come home, because they need you too.

So dry your baby tears and smile. You cry today because you have no real grief or tragedy to cry about. Oh, be grateful, be thankful, and sing and laugh through all these happy days!

The Block Of Time

Tonight I was frustrated and worn out with marshalling kids, refereeing, enforcing work and rules. I wondered if I would ever survive the pressures of raising a family. Tears were very near the surface with every correctional word I said.

Then Sheila insisted, "Come on, Mother. What you need is to relax." So she pulled me by the hand to the living room and had me to stretch out on the couch while she put on a stack of old favorites, records from my girlhood. The lights off, the music pouring sweetly through the darkness of old memories and moods, she sat beside me on the floor, her hand resting companionably on my arm. Shannon tipped in to kiss me softly on my nose and to whisper, "I'm going to finish my work so I can come and give you a massage."

And Steve eased down on the couch at my head, saying, "I think I'll just do what we were encouraging you to do—relax!"

So often we don't recognize memories as we are living them; it is only in retrospect that we see that particular block of time separated from the rest and filed in the bank of memories. But lying there tonight, feeling the gentle natural love of my children expressed in a kiss, the touch of the hand, I was strongly aware that a very special memory was being formed.

The darkness obliterated sights so that sounds, emotions, feelings dominated the awareness. All at once my mind was reaching back to pleasant memories of the past, using the music as a bridge, and I was mentally surrounded by

those days; but the blessing, rich and sweet, of being hovered over, cared for solicitously by my children who wanted me to be happy, also filled my mind and heart to overflowing; and a part of all of it too was the realization that they will not always be near enough for a gathering like this, to reach out and pat my arm or cheek lovingly. Some day this sharing together, reliving the old times in mutual appreciation of the days and in contentment with each other, will be a part of the past. Perhaps it will be forever beyond recall.

But *tonight* was there, and no one can take away the block of memory I made of the beautiful gift they gave me. Maybe I will even be able to feel always Shannon's baby fingers as they "massaged" my shoulders in light little open and shut caresses!

HOW WILL IT BE?

I stand with my back against the door,
Seeing the place as never before:
“How will it be?” I question again,
“Alone in a house where children have been?”

“The work will be light,” says a voice in my head.
“Think of the things you can do instead!
So little cooking, so little mess,
The clothes in the wash will surely be less—
And now with no children to train or correct,
No quarrels to right, no lack of respect,
You’ll be the ‘perfection’ you’ve longed to become,
Surrounded by nothing but healing balm.”

I turn with impatience away from the voice,
“The children—the work—were ours by choice;
Whatever they cost in money or time,
Whatever they took out of me that was mine,
Was minor compared to the fulness they brought
In living learned and living taught.
You would tell me it’s better having them grown,
That life eases up when children are gone;
I question you now, beginning this time:
Rooms that are empty don’t seem to shine,
And it’s sadness that lives in the lonely heart,
Not the contentment you named at the start.”

I stand with my back against the door
Drawn to the past as never before,
The voices are silent and all that I hear
Is the echo of footsteps dull in my ear,
My own as, unguided, I walk through the rooms
Knowing these years have ended too soon,
Feeling the loneliness fill up my soul,
Feeling the emptiness taking control....
No bickering echoes down the hall,
No music, no laughter, no sound at all;
I stand in the silence, a world apart,
And listen to teardrops fall in my heart.

FOR OUR CHILDREN

They are our children and, above all else in this world, we love them. Our most urgent prayer is that they be deeply dedicated to God.

But I wonder if we are ready to live with the answers those prayers might bring.

Eve had a son. The beauty of his pure love for God aroused anger and jealousy, hatred, in his brother's heart so that Abel's dedication cost his life's blood crying up from the ground.

Rachael had a son. Some would label him spoiled by his father and a braggart, but his life portrays him as merely innocent and trusting. By the hands of his brothers he was mercilessly sold into the bitterness and isolation of slavery. Dedication brought false accusations, imprisonment for long years, and untold mental anguish that is hinted at in the name of his firstborn, Manasseh ("For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house."), and in his uncontrollable crying when he revealed himself to those who had wronged him so deeply.

Jochebed had a son. Dedication to the right cost him the wealth and honor of Egypt and sent him into exile for 40 years. And a dedication grown into maturity led him to bear the unrelenting burden of leadership to hundreds of thousands of unbelieving, complaining, fault-finding people for another 40 long years.

Elizabeth had a son. Men would have called him an extremist, a fanatic. His boldness in speaking the truth cost him imprisonment and his life.

Another woman had a son. She named him Paul. With him, dedication urged that he deny himself the happiness of a wife, a home, children to love him. Instead, he wore out his life walking, braving storms at sea, enduring beatings and rejection, because of his love for God.

How many other sons of the past have we studied and admired, applauding their willingness to sacrifice themselves in God's work? But those sons tore at the yearning bowels of other mothers, not at our own. We read; we don't feel what it cost them to see their children suffer and sacrifice because of dedication.

We pray without reserve, that our children will be deeply dedicated. And somehow we falsely assume that dedication will assure God's physical protection for them. God does care. He does promise that "all things will work together for good to those who love him," but he has never promised to shield His own from pain, from the cost involved in belonging to Him. Past history shows that if people love Him enough, He will allow them to make immeasurable sacrifices because of that love. Have we stopped to consider that? Could we pray as earnestly if the words were translated differently:

Father, help him to serve you so well that he will spend his life away from me, living under painful conditions, facing grave danger, for your cause. Help him to be so pure that his love will survive the storms of jealousy and vengeance it will provoke. Help him to choose devoted service to you even if it means that he will never have the sweetness of a wife who loves him, even if it means that there will be no child of his body to cherish in his arms and heart. Help him to endure the loneliness, the burden of the unconverted, the half-converted, a world opposed to him and all that he stands for.

Is my faith strong enough that I can look at this unknowing little form in my arms and pray for him such costly devotion?

Or would it maybe be a relief to have him only....average?

THE PLEDGE

Dedicated?

A word, but more than a word:

The giving up of ownership.

Sometimes, Shannon,

I feel the need

Now, while you are small

And still here in the safety of my arms

To hold you close

With all the love that cries out,

“You are mine.”

I grasp these days we have,

These years,

When God has left you in my care to mold,

To love.

I know they have an end
And that no one
Now
Can tell me what that word
—Dedication—
Will demand of you;
It's best we cannot see the cost:
Our strength would fail—

I cannot unsay the pledge I made;
I wouldn't, even if I could.
So, what help is there for us,
For you and me,
For all the hearts who love you and would shield you
From that word
And from its cost?
If there is no other path for you,
No easy road that you may walk,
Then
I must pray that you will have the strength
To live that life
And, if need be,
To face the death that life may bring.
And I must pray for us
Who watch you grow and give,
Who watch the sacrifice you make,
That we, too,
With growing faith
May find our strength in God
To endure
Whatever pain you bear,
More painful far to us
Than if it were our own....

SWEET WORDS OF LOVE

Sweet words of love:

“I have redeemed thee...”

The son of Heaven,
Weighing out my worth to Him
Against the bitter cup,
Laid down His life
And bought me for His own.

Sweet words of love:

“I have called thee by my name...”

Precious gift
That He would let me wear,
As though it were my own,
That name of His,
Unblemished from the dawn of time.

Sweet words of love:

“Thou art mine...”

No human holds possessively
A worthless thing,
Nor does my Lord.
His words, declaring me His own
Exclude all others' claims
And seal my worth.

Sweet words of love:

“I have redeemed thee,
And called thee by my name;
Thou art mine...”

Commitment—eternal—
Demanded my redemption,
Freedom from the slavery binding me...
Yet even that was not enough:

Love bought my soul
But a like love given back to Him
Was what He wanted
And so, with His own name,
He honored my unworthiness;
And now, defiant of the forces that would call me,
Wresting from His care the one He loves,
He shields me from the world,
From all that would endanger,
And claims again the triumph of His love:
“Thou...art...**mine!**”

THE KING

The mighty king of heaven and earth
Was one day crowned for me,
Was lifted high upon His throne
For all the world to see.

His "loyal" subjects watched Him there
And, mocking, bowed the knee.
"All hail the King of Kings," they cried,
"Who hangs upon a tree."

Through agony of sweat and blood
The King, in anguish deep,
Looked down upon the heartless throng
That knew no sympathy.

Indignation surely welled
And burned in white-hot heat
At all those blind and stupid fools
Who mocked His majesty.

Why did He not in triumph call
The legions heavenly
Who only waited His command
To set their Ruler free?

Why did He not defy the crowd
That reveled at His feet,
And grind them into broken bits
For such audacity?

Why did He not lift up the arm
That pulsed in agony,
And sweep those men from off the earth
That crucified the King?

He needed only speak the word
To set His body free
And damn the human race to death
For all eternity...

But anger did not rule that day,
Nor yet did majesty.
Only love and sorrow filled
The heart that died for me.

“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him **endured** the cross, despising the **shame**....for consider him that **endured** such **contradiction of sinners** against himself, lest ye be wearied...” Heb. 12:2,3

When The Very Old Find God

There is happiness when someone very old
And near to death
Finds God,
But there is sadness, too:

With heavy heart I see
The wrinkled face,
The trembling hands,
And know within myself
That Time has come
Already
And has stolen
All he had to give—
His years,
His mind,
His strength.

With sight impaired,
How can he learn God's word?
With memory worn and dim
How can he grow?
The shortness of remaining years
Gives little time
To live past babyhood in God.
And often, oh too often,
With his new-found life
There's nothing he can do
But hug it to himself
Alone
And wish in vain for words,
For knowledge,
And for time,
To share with someone else.....

THE TWILIGHT YEARS

Time has come already and has stolen
All she had to give?

No. Not all...

One thing is left:

The voice of what she does.

Can you fathom what it meant

To those who watched her

As that snowy head

Was buried in submission

With her Lord?

Can you weigh the impact

Each time she braves the cold

Or rain or heat,

Or defies her age,

Ignoring pain,

To worship with the Saints?

And sitting here beside her,

Sensing the depth of her devotion,

Hearing a trembling voice

As it seeks to praise its God,

Knowing in my heart her thankfulness,

Her hope

Where there was none before,

It makes me think.....

Yes,

Much was lost

With wasted time and stubborn will

But the voice of what she does

In these, the twilight years,

Will speak in soberness,

humbly,

To all who cross her path.

GOD'S SUNSET

I come to the seaside at twilight
As the sun is just sinking to rest,
And I see that great ball of crimson
As it vanishes into the west.

It blazes in all of its glory
And pierces the floating clouds—
Bright shafts of its scarlet beauty
Mingle with purple shrouds.

The blue and the gold and the crimson
Make patterns of light in the sky:
E'er changing it is in the shadows
And it passes so swiftly by!

For after that burst of great glory
When the sea reflects its bright rays,
The sun in its pomp and its grandeur
Soon sinks 'neath the glistening waves.

It burns for a speeding instant
Like fire in the depths of the brine,
Then dulls in the haze of the twilight
And wanes with the passing of time.

It fades and it dies in the darkness
Like a moment of perfect delight,
And the brilliant red hues of the sunset
Are replaced by the shadows of night.



The waves of the sea underneath me
Murmur in calm repose—
And the world is all peaceful and quiet
As the stillness around me grows.

It's a picture of perfect contentment—
Of rest and release from the day;
And I pray I will meet that great Artist
When I've come to the end of life's way.

NOT BY SIGHT

I do not know the path, dear Lord,
That you would have me take;
No lamp is shining in the night,
No finger points the way.

The fleshly man cries out for words
To guide the stumbling feet;
He fears the dangers in the depths,
The sorrow, tears, defeat.

The inner man with timorous voice
Keeps pleading to be heard;
He knows the pledge you've made to man,
The promise of your word.

He tries—Oh Lord, he tries—
To help me walk by faith,
To tell me I must learn to step
Although I see no way.

And, Lord, I ask your added strength
To gird the inner man,
To help me learn to trust your eyes,
To wait your guiding hand.

I'll see the light, I'll know the path
As every step unfolds;
Please help me learn submission, Lord,
Please guide my trembling soul.

WHY?

As I journey through this land
Of sin and pain and death,
I see people all around me
Strive for things they cannot get,

And I think about the question
Asked by Christ long years ago:
Wherein is all the profit
If a man shall lose his soul?

Thou Shalt Call And I Will Answer

Oh, my Father, in the morning,
In the dawning of my days,
Thou shalt call and I will answer
With a song of ringing praise.

In the happy dreams of childhood,
In the years of growing joy,
Thou shalt call and I will answer,
In thy work my hands employ.

Through the burning of the noonday
When I stumble in the heat,
Thou shalt call, oh loving Father,
And my tongue will answer Thee.

Though so weary from the burden
In the sultry afternoon,
Thou shalt call and I will answer
For my rest comes sure and soon.

Oh, my Father, in the sunset,
When the warmth dies with the light,
Thou shalt call and I will answer,
Unafraid to face the night.

Thou shalt call me through the darkness
When my work at last is done;
I will hear the wings of angels
Sent from Thee to bring me home.

Chorus:

Thou shalt call me, oh my Father,
Endless work there is to do;
Take my hands, my feet, and use them,
Let me live and die for you!

I REMEMBER

I remember, Father, when I was a little girl and Mother would hold me on her lap to rock me in the afternoon. I used to turn my face against her body, under the crook of her arm, to close out the light and to help me sleep.

I've outgrown Mother's arms, Lord, but still I need that refuge. How I long to feel the security of being held close in Your arms, of being able to retreat from the world, hiding my eyes from the work of the day.

I don't want a long unbroken rest, Father; only a reprieve, a little nap in the afternoon. In the quietness of Your love, away from the clamour of the world, I can find rest and renewed strength to get up again and live for You.

WHAT IS GOD TO ME?

It is difficult to explain such a feeling in words. As I write, I am sitting up in bed and our little son is lying beside me asleep. I hear his breathing; I feel him move. But we are not alone in the room. Though I cannot see Him and cannot reach out and touch Him with my hand, God is here too. I feel the realness of His presence at my side all the whole day through, and every time I awaken in the night. And the prayers that I pray are not prayers as most people imagine them but more like a little girl talking in confidence and familiarity with her Daddy. I know He loves me and He will take care of me and will do for me everything that is for my good. So much of the day, as I work around the house, I have silent mental conversations with Him. No, he doesn't speak audibly to me; I don't hear His voice, and He works no miracles, for there is no need. But through His power over all, He works things out silently, and I can see His hand at every turn.

THE SUBSTANCE OF GOD'S THOUGHTS

Today while it was misting rain with a slight fog in the air, and while the feeling of fall seemed so strong, I was relishing the achy pleasure of that feeling, and it dawned on me that all of these things are thoughts of God made into reality.

A human can envision a suit of clothes or a house or a rocket, and if he is ingenious he can set to work and develop every facet of his thoughts into substance, reality. That is what God did, too. The atmosphere of a nippy fall day enhanced by a wreathing fog and the cool mistiness of rain are God's thoughts translated into substance. So is a tree, a mountain, a man.

And when I look at His thoughts and see their beauty and feel the atmosphere they create and appreciate their intricacies, I am to a small degree sharing God's thoughts. I am so glad that we are made in His image so that we can have that companionship with Him.

HE ENDURED

It is galling, frustrating, to appear less successful materially, less authoritative, less upright, less capable than we know we really are. How difficult it must have been for the human side of Jesus to have been elevated before the eyes of the world.....but on the degrading cross of a criminal instead of a kingly throne. It must have hurt deeply to appear a failure in the eyes of man, a villain and dependent on the mercy of others, unable even in words to speak out in His defence and clear His name in the hearts of those who meant most to Him. How shameful it must have seemed for the King to have lived and died as a pauper, dependent even in His burial and grave on the outpouring of those who cared about Him personally.

But....“.....for the joy that was set before Him (He) endured the cross, despising the shame.....”

Show Me The Way

Father....

The way is not clear.
My heart is confused
And numb inside my breast
And tears flow.

Show me the way.

I want nothing but peace
And to be useful,
To have this happiness.

Show me the way.