

CLOSE FOR A SECOND

To the 1974 summer staff
YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly

Ten of us slipped away from dishwashers
ejecting hot silver and racks of plates,
long halls of luggage gripped with smiles
to a meadow off the parkway.

Riding the asphalt zipper, we peeled back
ridges of full trees, straining to see
the lace of whitewater, peering into coves
that flashed by the windows like color slides.

By a wide, graveled path, jeep trail
gullied with deep, familiar ruts,
a swirl of paintbrush, trillium, and vulgaris
flourished in the same foot of sod:
next summer, a beer can here, or weeds
crushed into footprints, each blade jerking
back like the hands of an old clock.

The meadow's high grass swished
over our boots, the sound of sponges
under feet. We spun a circle of nylon
cocoon and packs, laid out an aurora
of bags in plastic liners, squeezed close
to shield ourselves from the dew.

From Bearpen Gap, the thick morning
urged us toward the Graveyard Fields,
a story spread out in scrub trees and balds:
Long before the logging camps and trestles,
before overlooks numbered on folding maps,
the evidence lay in freak graves of spruce
and fir cracked low by windblasts,
but fifty years ago a fire
whirled the slopes, sucking up topsoil
and spewing out streams of dull ash,
trout bellying up to the ocean.

Fresh day lilies yawned like orange funnels;
yesterday's drooped in shriveled fingers.
We lay on our backs, listening, cold epitaphs
rushing by; we could have scooped up stories
and poured them in our ears, but let them swirl
slowly on that stone terrace, circling once,
drawing to the edge then like ourselves
squeezing close for that second they slipped
through the opening in the boulders
and were gone.

Ken Chamlee

Winter Haiku

Couples kiss, garnished
in fur against the snow, bright
as holly berries.

Frost that blemishes
my early morning window
flees the eye of noon.

David Drury

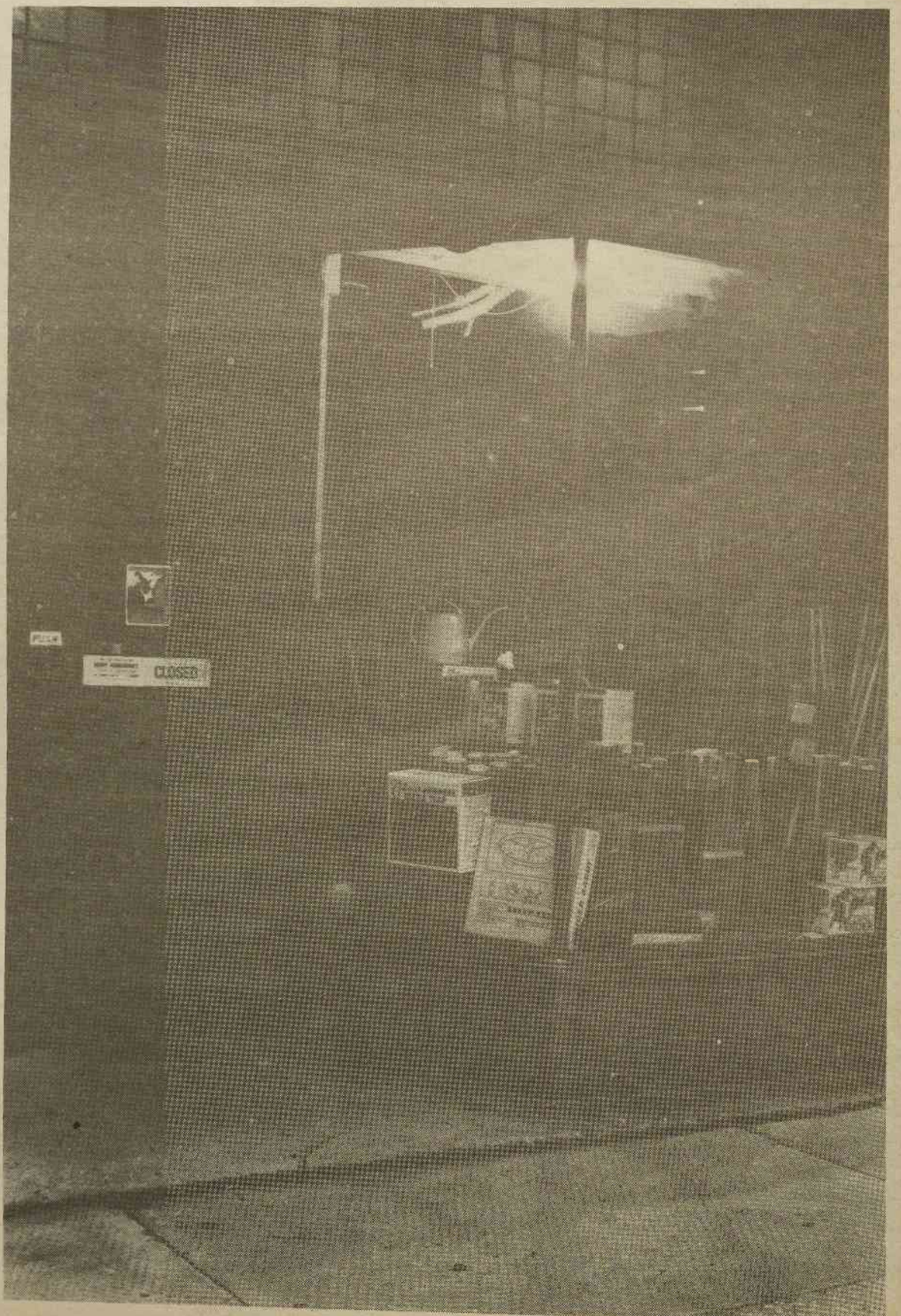
AROUND A ROUND

Half a carousel stood tall, but that was all.
Some of the tiny neon bulbs winked at the gaping crowds.
Twenty proud stallions held high their grey and brown shellacked heads,
Red saddles with golden tassels displayed twenty young riders.
Cleverly concealed containers blasted familiar tunes of mirth.

Half a carousel bowed and cried: its joy had died.
Smashed pieces of jagged colored glass lay in the still darkness.
Twenty color-less, lowered heads mourned life-less broken bodies.
The scarlet paint peeled from the children's seats with a cancerous hunger.
The brassy green ring screamed in the silence to be touched.

Half of me stood tall: but that was all.
Half of me bowed and cried: my joy had died.
Outside I radiated warmth and the twinkle in my eye hinted of gaily.
My shattered dreams severed my heart with their serrated edge of loneliness.
Twenty smiling years I'd perched upon my quasi-pedestal.
Cracks splintered through the plaster I'd so carefully placed my grin within.
Twenty child-like years I'd played with every toy and game.
My toys were all broken: my innocence shameless
My boisterous laughter blasted cheers and glee.
My soul screamed. "Touch Me!"

Lisa French



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Photograph by Cheryl Harrison