Eulogies for Rob

A Short Story

By JERRY HARRIS

Gerts says I have a talent for this kinda thing. And I guess he's right. A young reporter would just louse it up. You gotta have a little empathy to do this kinda thing right. No, if you're just another young reporter, you just sit there and scribble down notes, and make up all these thin details: "the chenille question," and skinny jokes and stories about the 10:30 all-day deal. I mean, I can't just do that. I need a real story, you know. Like this: The last game. Rob sitting in an easy chair. Just on the line. There's no head. The head is covered with a black wig made of red and white roses, and several footballs created for the occasion. It's gotta be like this. This guy's putting on a show for us. Look at the car sipping bourbon all afternoon and get anything done. Glad I got here early. Today there will be standing room only. Local papers say this is the largest funeral in recent history. But looks like I'm not going to make the first half at this thing. I'm squeezing off a few shots, taking long exposures, and moving the camera as slowly as possible. It's almost dark and I'm pushing the Tri-X.

It could have been any one of you instead of Rob. Let's not forget these guys either. I'm sure there's some good stuff there:

"...-buddy-and he always played a winning game on the field and a football in his front yard. He said to me once, 'Mick, I'm...-

"There's a note here about the fiancée dedicating a special song to her deceased lover."

I'll bet good money they'll have it all written down. I'll just ask for their notes. I press of mourners is growing larger. They are packed into pews and aisles and exits.

"-he always played a winning game on the field and..."

We are marching slowly toward the coffin and I'm at the first window and he is being carried into the hall. The body has been broken into heavy sobs. A long-legged blonde in a short black dress is being helped away by two men. This guy was a real heartthrob, huh? He is moving faster now and the coffin is five feet away. The layer drapes away from the body. There is no neck. The head is covered with a black wig made of red and white roses, and several footballs created for the occasion. It's gotta be like this. This guy's putting on a show for us. Look at the car sipping bourbon all afternoon and get anything done. Glad I got here early. Today there will be standing room only. Guess I'd better write this down before I forget: the fiancée is beautiful and so is the voice. Here come the chorus girls and they are singing. I'll have to get that tape and transcribe it later."

The soloist is beautiful and so is the voice. Here come the lyrics from the dedication: "You sheltered me from harm, kept me warm, gave my life to me, set me free. You gave me the finest years of my life. I would give everything I own just to have you back again..." Great stuff for a boldface type. The number is causing a lot of commotion. The chief next to me has used up the Wendy's napkins. Now there's some baby screaming near the back. Why the hell don't they use the nursery? I can't get quotes for a color story. The stuff like this going on right before me is going to be back on the court tonight. He was high point man last game.

Four-thirty p.m. Time to work. I need the preacher's quotes verbatim. "...God..." Well, Rob and I have been friends since we were in the same grade in school. By JERRY HARRIS: He tried to do a good deed, O Lord, killed by two assailants who were nothing more than dogs of Satan, O Lord, and we ask thee not to let this be a triumph over Rob, O Lord, but to let this serve as a means, O Lord, of winning others to Christ, O Lord, to glorify Thy name and to prevent Rob's death... from being in vain, if it be Thy will and in Your Son's holy name we pray, amen."

Four-fifty p.m. Looking over my notes, I feel confident I've got some good stuff. Some quotes like this:...-are men who need to be prayed for to be saved, but at the same time they are accused of murder and need to be prosecuted all the law will allow and if found guilty punished at the earliest possible moment by whatever means necessary..."

I think he's winding down now. He's turning this into a regular altar call: "...could have been any one of you instead of Rob. Let's not forget these guys either."

"...our community has been touched and..."

The soloist is beautiful and so is the voice. Here come the chorus girls and they are singing. I'll have to get that tape and transcribe it later. The soloist is beautiful and so is the voice. Here come the chorus girls and they are singing. I'll have to get that tape and transcribe it later. The soloist is beautiful and so is the voice. Here come the chorus girls and they are singing. I'll have to get that tape and transcribe it later."

"...at the funeral..."
At the park by the bay

The wind beats my face
As it roars
While sailboats speed
Across the bay
An old woman appears
Collecting trash on her way.
Then a sailboat silently skates
Pulling the wind for more
While small possessed waves
Caress the shore
The old woman sees me
Walks my way
Remarks on how today
Is unusually chilly
I say yeah
She heads on her way
While I sit in the park by the bay.

Another woman
Not quite as old
Walking her dog the only friend
She has to hold
Walks my way
She's friendly
I speak
Her dog speaks
Nice day today
At the park by the bay.

A car rolls in
As I write
The wind chills my body
Even though the sun is bright
The car stops and parks
A family gets out
Hamburgers, hotdogs, and children who shout
As they begin to play
I sit and watch
At the park by the bay.

John Riley Morris
October 5, 1980

Words to a son

You're on the threshold of my door.
You're going out to play.
I have some pretty balls you need.
I'll throw a few your way.

I choose the ones I'll pitch to you,
according to my need.
You choose the ones you want to catch,
among the ones I've freed.

Our love lives, not within this game
of toss we play today.
We each are serving our own name,
and you must walk away.

But, rather, see the love in this,
if not in what we say,
no matter what we choose to toss,
we let each other play.

Ann Spence

The experience

Death still—
In the quiet of night
a golden place,
Inhabited by the children
of the White Light,
Imparting a beacon
into the night.

Serenity abides here.
The noises of the darkness
add to the pleasure
of being in this place.

The rolling seas are envious
of such a calm.

The forest beckons you,
etices you,
to investigate its
mysteries.

Death itself only
can rival this serenity
that is called
eternity.

By ROBERT CAMPBELL

By Judy Simpson
The right signs

By Jerry Harris

"It's hopeless unless you do something, today." Jack reached a hand through her brown hair and shrugged. The monthly square-off had begun. I bought time pulling the tab on another Miller, then:

"Best not push it, Jan. I don't want to hear this."

"You don't want to hear that Alice can't have braces 'cause Daddy is behind with his payments. You don't want to hear that your wife is getting an ulcer over your financial mess."

Fighting tears, Jan looked at the mound of bills. I knew what to say.

That afternoon I scanned the classified section of "The Birmingham News." There were plenty of jobs for accountants, geologists, go-go girls, nurses. Nothing much for an unskilled recent male college graduate. Except sales. I wanted a part-time job and book sales looked good. There were ads for World Book, Britannica, and those of less repute.

I circled the numbers and picked up the phone.

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"The key is signs of children. You simply have to know what to look for," Mrs. Agnes Jackson said, eating the Buck Century down a narrow street. "A swing set, a backyard fence, toys scattered in the yard — those are the obvious signs. But you must also look for other tip-offs: a gating wagon in the driveway, diapers on the clothesline, pink and lace curtains in a corner window."

Selling encyclopedias, she said, is akin to the ministry. Salesmen are "educational missionaries" who must persevere against all objections to "light lamps of knowledge" in homes everywhere. Children who grow up without our brand of reference book, she said, lag behind in IQ tests, falter in basic math and reading, rarely make it to college. Salesmen must be aggressive — "loving, understanding" — with the "poor wards," the suburbs not yet purchased the Renaissance binding on sale this month. Salesmen have a very special calling, indeed. And the commission is twenty percent.

There is what we're talking about," she said, interrupting the indoctrination. She stopped the car and pointed to a run-down A-frame. Two kindergarten-aged children were playing in the front yard, an older child was standing in the open doorway eating a Popsicle, and two teenagers were busy hanging faded clothes on a sagging nylon line at the corner of the unpainted clapboard house.

Several window panes had been broken and replaced with strips of cardboard. A rusted, doorless Edsel rested atop concrete blocks in the front yard and the decaying front porch seemed overburdened with boxes of tools, a refrigerator and a ratty recliner.

"Do you think they can afford books?"

"Reference library, you mean. Oh yes indeedy. It's these kind of people who can't afford NOT to own them. They want their children to do better than they have as parents, wouldn't you agree?"

"We're not salesmen, Mrs. Jones. Let me put your mind at ease. We're merely here to demonstrate the value of proper educational material because they want to be sure they have a proper foundation in life. We all want our children to do better in life than we have, wouldn't you agree?"

"I thought you were from the school. You sellin' somethin'?"

"We're not salesmen, Mrs. Jones. Let me put your mind at ease. We're merely here to demonstrate the value of proper reference material in the home. Any decision to purchase is strictly yours."

Mrs. Jackson conducted a well-rehearsed 45 minute monologue, wrenching "yes-responses" from the woman at intervals. She passed out more trinkets each time the children grew restless and gave pamphlets to the teenagers who finally joined us.

I watched with a combination of averasion and astonishment as Mrs. Jackson wrapped Bonnie Jones around her little finger. I wanted to grab the woman by her shoulders and shake her into reality, tell her she should throw us out of the house. But Alice needed braces. Janice needed security. The bank needed a boat payment.

She gave the youngest child a colorful brochure of animal pictures and passed around reprints of an article on Disneyland.

"Won't you just look at that, Mrs. Jones. Just look at the way your children take to those reprints. I honestly believe they're above average readers."

Mrs. Jones gazed at the children and smiled for the first time during our visit. But the smile faded and she said something about seeing her husband before buying.

Ignoring the protest, Mrs. Jackson flipped to a page at the rear of her prospectus marked "H. S." for husband sads.

The page contained a photo of a beautiful middle class mother holding a little girl. The model appeared to be reading from an encyclopedia as the girl looked on with anticipation. Mrs. Jackson held the page in front of the woman and read the caption aloud:

"A husband works hard providing food, shelter and clothing for his family. It's the mother's place to rear the children and make decisions about their education."

Mrs. Jones looked at the beautiful mother and girl and nodded. Mrs. Jackson pulled out a purchase agreement.

"Just between us girls, Bonnie, wouldn't your husband simply leave it up to you? After all, it's not a selfish thing — it's for the children's sake, isn't it?"

The woman nodded again.

"And look what low monthly payments we've arranged — with no down payment. Less than a dollar a day is not too much to spend for your children's future, now is it?"

Mrs. Jackson placed the purchase agreement on a clipboard and gave it to the woman.

"There's not a thing to fear, hon. We're the leading publishers of encyclopedias in the world. If you should decide that you've made a poor decision, just notify us within three working days. No obligation. Hand her a pen, won't you Mr. Lane?"

"DON'T DO THIS, LADY! I screamed in my mind. Silently I gave her the pen. Alice needed braces.

By Judy Simpson
On that day I found four horses cross-tied for me to exercise. I opted to ride the first two, both black half-thoroughbreds, because they were feisty, and would require all my energy. I always do dark-colored horses first, especially if they are show-horses, because the noon sun would bleach out their coats, and, too, later on, the bugs would distract them, and I'd find the flies were getting more attention than I. After the colts, I rode my favorite, a little Quarter-mare. Her pasterns were flexible, and somewhat angular, so she was smooth riding enough to cut diamonds on her back, at a trot, just like all the old Buick commercials. I cooled her off after the ride, and then proceeded to the last mare, the Palomino.

There were two Palominos on the place, and being half-sisters, these two horses looked very much alike. I still had not learned to tell the two apart, but I knew that one was never exercised, because she was curiously lame quite often, for no apparent reason. I had saved this lanky mare for last, hoping that someone would tell me which one she was. Since my enlightenment never came, I figured that some light exercise would not seriously hurt the lame mare, while a lack of exercise could make the sound one stiff. And so, not wanting to appear so unobservant as to not know the two Palominos apart, I bitted up the mare in question, and took her out, bare-backed.

We walked around a while, and she warmed up without any signs of lameness. Then we trotted a few figure-eights, and since she seemed fine, I decided to try the pattern at the canter. Her right lead was fine, but she immediately showed great reluctance to take the left lead, and when she finally did, moved so awkwardly that I stopped the exercise and checked her out on the lunge line. As she circled around me, she was perfectly sound until she cantered. She was, indeed, gimp on the left fore. I walked her home and tied her up. The next day, the owner was furious to find that his horsemanship Palomino was lame again. Both the stableboy and myself were called up. The poor boy bore most of the owner's wrath, but I got off with a very firm assurance him of a healthy-income for many years. And to see it in her offspring, so they put her down when it got painful. Can't say as I blame them, either."

After that, the conversation moved on to the few methods of treatment available for the horse I was holding. I didn't even hear Bob tell me to take the horse back to his stall. On Saturday, I took a lack-lustre gelding through a course far too difficult for him well enough to qualify for the jump-off. There, the animal tried valiantly, but was not up to the top-notch competitors. The poor beast ploughed through the second half of a four foot in-and-out. But the owners saw that I was back on top again, and I started getting decent rides again.

Frances Rhett Steel

The next summer, I saw a familiar rider, on a familiar Palomino. “Is that Abbidy-Scoot?” Using the registered name for the lame mare.

“No, that’s another Palomino they sometimes show. They had to put Abby down, I hear.”

“Put her down? I knew she’d gone lame, but I was told she’d recover, enough to breed, at any rate.” This news was terribly distressing.

“Noppe, apparently the leg wouldn’t even stand a pregnancy; they put her down in the spring, when things thawed out, and she hadn’t improved. Say, ‘I’ve got a couple of horses to groom, see you later, huh?’

I could not imagine hearing worse news. I had ruined a potentially champion horse. Abby could have meant a great deal to that ranch, suspended as it was between the bush tracks and C-rated shows. To have competed successfully in A-rated shows could have put that man in business. A stud colt out of that champion mare would have assured him of a healthy income for many years. And to think, another week off that leg, and she might have been sound enough to continue her career.

But what had happened to her recovery? The owner would have never allowed anyone to make another mistake with the mare again. She must have been too badly injured to recover. I tried not to think of the tendon tearing that must have gone on in the deep sand of the ring where I’d forced her through those figure eights. Yet these thoughts, and others like it were in my mind all that summer, and as a result, my riding began to fail. I lacked the confidence necessary to keep up the aggressive riding that was my main selling point. I pushed my mounts less and less in competition, and the horses, sensing my insecurity, performed less well. Now I was lamed as effectively as if I had been hamstrung. By the beginning of the show season, I was more a spectator than a participant.

One day, the vet was called out to examine a horse which I thankfully had not ridden, but which had gone lame. I was holding the animal, so I was there to hear what the doctor said.

"Can’t tell without an X-ray, of course, but I’m willing to believe it’s Navicular, Bob," he began.

"Navicular! He’ll eventually have to be put down, then," answered Bob, the trainer.

"It’s a hereditary thing, you know...this colt’s by Skippity Scoot, isn’t he? You know we’ve seen it in his line a couple of times, now."

"Not Abbidy-Scoot?" I quickly interjected.

"Yeah, that was that fine Palomino mare they had. Crippled her real quick, faster than usual. They didn’t want to see it in her offspring, so they put her down when it got painful. Can’t say as I blame them, either."

By Randy Gravette
Window watch

Dull,
Gray,
Sodden!

Rain chases itself down each thing
Made darker, misty by the chase.

Everything changes pace
Slower to match the measured rhythmic rain.

Cars with lights seek to dispel the gloom
Which creeps inside no matter what we do.

Hidden is the saucy cardinal who
Spent greedy hours among the dogwood fruits.

The solitary squirrel sequesters himself
Snug in his nest above.

I wait for the phone to ring
And sigh within myself—Introverted.

Peggy Moore
By BERT SPENCE

"Courage!" he said, and pointed toward the school, "This mounting wave will roll us classward soon."

In the afternoon they came into a school
In which it seemed always afternoon.
All 'round the campus the languid students swooned
And breathed like ones that had a drug caused dream,
Full cheeked, some stood above him and mooned
And, like an avalanche, the many Greeks
Along the row to fall, and piss and puke did seem.
A land of Greeks! Some, in their avalanche
Slow wilted groups of thinnest brain, did go;
And see through yellow lights and red ones ran,
And headed for the casks and kegs of foam below,
They saw the amber river toward them flow
From the land of a thousand streams and from the mountains.
Three silent pinacles of aged snow
That stood flood-illit, and dotted with cameras and anxious fans,
When up climbed Hoyt Axton into the shadowy pines and said
"Head for the mountains."

The charmed sunset couldn't be found
In the red-reek South, but through dorm clefts Bibb Graves
Was seen far in, and the lovely sound of chimes
Enraptured from the tape machine through many a winding hall
And stairway, a building trimmed with brick, as were all;
A school where all things always seemed the same!
And round about the leg with faces pall,
Dark pupils widened, even against a rosy flame,
The dull eyed enuf ridden acorn eaters came.
Handfuls they bore of that enchanted nut,
Laden with bark and hull, whereof they gave
To freshmen, but those that did taste of the nut
And pledge,* to him the handing of diploma
Far far away did seem, and in a sort of coma
Was seen far in,
A school where
The

1

Greek Choric Song

1

There is rock music here that harder falls
Than coconuts from palms upon the grass
Or night-haunts on still stars parted 'tween these dorms
Of nonscript brick, in a preston-like campus;
Music that harder on the ear lies
Than fly-swatters on doomed flies;
Music that sends sweet sleep back to the blissful skies.
Here are grey mulls deep;
And through the molds the roaches creep,
And in the class the long-toothed teacher weeps,
And from the flimsy desk we students hang in sleep.

2

Why are we weighed upon with tests,
And utterly perverted by the simplest
Lectures, while all others have classes that are easiest?
Others at this school can pass: Why? Why should we fail alone?
We only fail, who are the worst at things;
And make perpetual moan
As, because of ever cutting, we from class are thrown;

3

Lo! in the middle of the quad,
The THC is wooed from out the bud
With takes upon the bashing, and there
Get high and hunger us that take no care.
We are soop steeped at noon, and in the light of moon
Nightly pizza fed, and turning fat,
We fail, and roll adown the hill.
Lo! Was lightened with that snack light,
The full-juiced lemon (or lime) helps us really mellow out,
And drop down for a silent bed-spinning night.
All its allotted length of days
The semester ripens in its place,
Ripens, and fades, and goes, and still we fail,
Rooting for acorns in the fruitful soil.

4

Hateful is the dark blue sky,
Vaulted o'er the tall pine trees.
Graduation is the end of life; ah, why
Should life all studying be?
Let us get high. Grass takes effect very fast,
And in a little while our lips are numb.
Let us get high. What drug is it that lasta?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and packages of the dreadful past.
Let us get high. What pleasure can we have
To war with ignorance? Is there any peace
In ever stacking up the stacking books?
All courses have finals, except the ones we've took.
In silence we sit as test, lecture, lecture, test and final cease:
Give us long parties, dances, drugs, and dreamless ease.

5

"How sweet to party;" say we, the sluggard Greeks,
To give half-closed parties, all invited save for freaks;
(They are the ones not dressed reptilian, in short, geeks.)
To drink and drink the yonder amber drink,
Which leaves its mark upon the tongue; (and likewise
The hill.

6

Dear is the memory of our high-school lives,
And dear the home-cooked food, the baked potato (with chives!)
And lots of warm butter, but all hath suffered change;
For surely now our household ovens are cold,
Our mothers liberated have become, our father's moods are strange.
And we at home are merely in the way of parents practicing
The latest Master's and Johnson's techniques.
Or else a little sibling, overload,
Yes, even in our bedroom, the radio sings
Before us of the perpetual war with Troy,
And of Ed Lett's great deeds, we must stay here to see these things.
Our parents have had the work to do a long while.
Let us, now broken away, so remain.
Our parents are hard put to reconcile;

Tis hard for them to keep order, and they are fighting once again.
At home is confusion worse than death;
Trouble on trouble, pain on pain,
Long fights unto seeming death.
Sere tasks to ears worn out from parental wars
And eyes grown dim with dividing the house and cars.

7

Ah, propped on mattresses both old and hokey,
How sweet-in spring when warm airs hush us, blowing slowly
With half-dropped eyelid still,
Beneath a heaven gray, nine stories, and holy,
To watch the long tanned legs arriving slowly,
Returning from classes at the university in Jacksonville;
To hear the dewy voices answer when we're calling
From boy's dorm to girl's on the telephone line;
To watch the many colored sorority labels falling
(If sometimes seems) down the stairs shrieking words like "divine"
When they learn it's a KA mixer we're attending and they find
That we drive Z cars and Camaros; and if we're affectionate
They will reciprocate in kind.

8

The oak trees grow all over Jacksonville;
The Acorns found in valley or on hill.
All day the Southerners blow loud with mellow tone;
They've heard all over campus. (especially the sousaphones)
Round and round through residence and academic hall the oak pollen is blown.
We have had enough of learning, and of studying, we
Blood driven from the left, Miller driven from the right,
What time have we left free?
Where the Kappa Sigma house sits on the path to PAB,
There let us swear an oath, and keep it in our feeble minds
In the boring Acorn-land to live and lie reclined,
On the row like Gods together, careless of the independent kind.
Let them study and go to class while we chase girls-
The ones whose jeans are tight and hair is curled-
Round our fraternity houses. When they are slightly drunk
They'll do anything in the world.
That's why we smile in secret, when we look out over Acorn-
Land.
Let others work, and research, and write, and read, and study and . . .
Ad infinitum. Let others think for themselves, while we together band.

For they will smile and find joy in accomplishing something on their own,
While we sing a lamentation for the few things we do must alone,
Like going to the bathroom, or grocery store, or using the telephone.
Any task that is solitary is shunned by us as toil
That is too tedious, and goes against the spirit of Brotherhood and soils
Our reputation as a group of brainless brats whose imaginations are rusty and need oil,
If indeed they've not already perished from lack of use,
As we only dig them out to create new methods for passing
Without studying and to devise clever ruses
For fooling teachers into thinking we're in class when we are taking well deserved snoozes.
Surely, surely slumber is more sweet than class when we've been out 'til three the night before.
More sweet than accomplishing anything worthwhile or doing what our parents scold us here and are paying for;
O, rest ye, fraternity brothers; we will not be educated more.
In the midst of it all lies life.

The Life of people present—past.

All the same.

Lessons—
not of perfection,
but of practices
and practical events.

Yet—
Lessons of fantasy
and festivity
sneak in
bringing simple delight.

The Writer, the Poet, the man
with a flair.

All in line as one,
to take me

on their trip—relate their idea—
put their rhyme.

They are of me.
I am of them.

The words make us one.
Their story is my story.
Their end—is my beginning.

Amy Bliss Mason