

did not belong to a frat, or Glee Club, never helped out in the office, not in the school store, didn't write for the paper. I turn the pages, page after page of my class peers, pictures by the thousands, stacks and stacks all skulls like a European catacomb. yearbook faces: hungry and ignorant, optimistic, wanting the freedom and prosperity of American Ivory soap and Wonder bread. I was right about everybody. in their portraits I see: drug addicts, alcoholics, bureaucrats, divorcees, rapists, the murder of all life on the planet. I see suburbs and mortgages, two rusting cars, unemployment and unpaid bills, higher prices, wishes with broken spines, dreams in cold conversations over a second cup of coffee, ulcers, hernias, and ruptures, mastectomies, hysterectomies, wrinkles, psychosis, neurosis, schizophrenic eyes, open heart surgery, fat bellies, sagging tits, and one lousy poet.

STREET OF POETS

across the street lives a boy
who never comes outside much
and when he talks he chews
his tongue. he never walks
the dog. he never cuts the
grass. he is a poet. and
then there is the old woman
with her blue hair, who is
our block guard, who peeks
through a crack in her drapes
at every noise, at every car
stopping, starting. she has
the dirt on everybody. she's
a poet. and then there is
the immigrant man with his
skin like dried clay who
feeds the street's stray cats,
and the divorced woman with
her high high heels and the
nut down the block who helps
the garbage men heave the black
Heafy bags full of vodka
bottles, chicken bones, and
moldy cucumbers: they are poets,
waiting for the high point
of the day: the mailman!

who comes at 4 o'clock. on this
street of poets everyday
everyone hopes the mail will
be good, rewarding, announce
the prize, offer the trip
to Las Vegas, be a surprise,
a sunrise, but the mailman
in our neighborhood is the
grim reaper, hauling on his
back invitations to nothing
and nothing but rejection.

-- Michael Basinski

Buffalo NY

FOREMAN FIRED JOE

We called them cookie-cutters --
huge presses punching out
their little steel cookies.
You stand on a platform
and feed blank discs into two presses,
running back and forth
to keep them both loaded.
Used to be a two-man job
till a new-hire who didn't know better
fed both presses at once
and the job got re-classified.

I did that job one day in summer heat.
Running back and forth like that,
sweat soaking my coveralls, shoes,
I started hating myself on that platform.
But I needed the money
so I kept feeding
till I slipped and fell.
Another worker stopped the presses.

I ran to the bathroom and soaked
my body in water. Foreman yelled
but I had blood to show.
Driving home, I swore I'd quit
before I did that job again.

When Joe walked off that job
and got fired, the union didn't do
anything -- he didn't have his 90 days in.
I wanted to quit in support
but I wiped my hands,
took his place up there.