FANTASIA AND DEFENSE

the husband and wife, arm-in-arm
in the darkening park, are set upon
by a gang of youths. the savages
pinion the man to watch and listen
as they rape and torture his woman.
two pedestrians observe the scene:
one joins the assault, while the other
summons the police. the police arrive
in time to arrest the delinquents.
one cop comforts the woman; one adds
to her humiliation. everyone is made
uncomfortable and contemptuous
at the spectacle of the husband.

the newspapers indict the violence
of today's youth and the bad sense
of the victims. a jury takes two days
to return verdicts of guilty on
two hundred and fourteen counts,
not guilty on one hundred seventeen.
the judge assigns the maximum determinate
sentences, regretting that the law
does not allow him to send all of them
to the chair. that evening he gets
even drunker than usual, and calls
in sick the next day.

i am the wife, the husband, the
rapists, the good and bad samaritans,
the police, the reporters, the public,
and the judge.

so are you.

GIRLS' NIGHT OUT

i call her to inquire
how the wedding shower went.

she says, "it turns out that s.
has recently been born again,
so my gift from frederick's of hollywood
was not greatly appreciated."

"any booze?"

"not a drop."
"what did you do?"

"first we all stuffed ourselves on macaroni salad, even though i, believe it or not, was the least obese person in the place. then we played 'newlywed games.' like 'according to government statistics, how often does the average husband hug his wife after one, two, five, ten, twenty-five years of marriage?''"

"what was the answer?"

"what would you have guessed?"

"i would have started low and dropped off steeply."

"you would have won the grand prize: an assortment of evangelical bumper stickers."

A BIT CLOSE TO HOME

a friend of mine, judy seal, wrote a poem about her salvadoran babysitter telling of having watched death squads burst into classrooms and machine gun her professors. she admitted the professors were generally not sympathetic to the regime and that the guerillas were sometimes guilty of deliberately staging shootouts where civilians were sure to be caught in the crossfire. nonetheless i think the blowing-away of professors in mid-lecture is a serious violation of academic freedom.

THE TEST

my youngest daughter and my youngest son think, like siblings everywhere, that they hate each other. the older often announces, matter-of-factly, that she wishes the younger were dead.