

six,  
snap,  
the water goes down,  
crisis over,  
came back into the living  
room and started watching my  
show again,  
she looks at me with hatred,  
"You'd like to kill me  
wouldn't you?" I ask.  
"Yes."  
Of course I didn't JUST  
unplug the drain did I,  
that's not the way I DO  
things.

— Hugh Fox

East Lansing MI

## OLD PHOTOS: 2

Here's a picture of my dad only 6 years old  
standing on a vacant lot in Indianapolis  
the buildings on the verge of falling down behind him.  
"I can't believe they're still standing there," he says.  
"And that people still live in them."  
He'd been back there last summer he tells me  
just to see what kind of progress 50 years would make.  
"The old neighborhood still looks the same," he assures me,  
easing back into the sofa. "Only the people are different."  
I think back to all the stories he used to tell me  
about breadlines & cabbage soup  
& suddenly it's easier to see why  
he'd want to live in a big 2-story house with a fireplace  
drive an air-conditioned car  
& look for ultimate contentment in a job he hated  
8 hours a day 5 days a week 48 weeks a year 39 years to  
retirement.  
Back then it was totally immaterial to suburban-born me  
that I got here just in time  
to enjoy the world's highest standard of living  
& was a teenaged credit card carrying member  
of the first American generation to grow up on T.V.  
& shag carpets.  
The first thing I wanted to do  
the very first minute I was old enough to do it  
was to break out from all this suffocating opulence  
& run wild in the open air  
pursue the bluejean bhikku life  
be a genuine wandering tennis-shoed mendicant

like the beatific beat saints of old  
& find immortality as a regular married-to-poverty  
backpacking bum.

I didn't want anything to do with  
prison-grey suits, white shirt straightjackets or  
choking striped ties.

Dad turns the pages of his life with the photos  
& starts telling his old war stories again  
about sweating his way through the jungles of Burma.  
He swears he still has the scar from the shell that  
sideswiped his back.

I ask him if he had it to do all over again  
would he fight? "No," he says. "I don't think I would."  
Which surprises me, WWII being the good war & all  
& knowing too that our impending argument over whether  
COs could still love their country right or wrong  
had only been prevented by the Saigon airlift. But now,  
in a voice as mellow as the 12-year-old Scotch he's  
balancing on his knee,  
dad tells me about the day he was discharged from the army  
& found himself standing alone at a Greyhound bus station  
in Boston:

"Up to that point there'd always been someone  
giving me orders saying what I had to do where  
I had to go & then all of a sudden there I was  
on my own with no one to tell me to go up to  
that bus ticket window & buy that bus ticket  
home."

Right at that moment he could've gone anywhere in the  
world he wanted,  
but the only place he wanted to go was home.  
I remember one night walking down a deserted country road  
looking for a dry place to unroll my sleeping bag &  
enjoy a few moments of sleepful oblivion.  
I was thinking how nice it would be just to be home  
to sit by the fire with a cup of hot tea  
& go to sleep in my own bed with my own soft pillow.  
But the rain was falling down; my sleeping bag was soaked.  
There was nothing to do but walk on.  
Now here I am,  
sitting with my dad looking at the old photos all cozy  
by the fireplace  
knowing that home isn't really home any more  
once you've gone.

#### THE VACANT CHAIR

There's a chair at the table no one sits in  
because it used to be grandpa's.  
He died just three weeks before I made it home.  
He was 96 years old. I never got to see him,  
only the place where he was buried