

in fact
I was no longer interested
a couple of weeks later
the bell rang
I wasn't expecting anyone
a gray haired guy came up the stairs
full of false cheeriness
I didn't like him
he asked if he could sit down
I listened to his pitch
he asked me for some water
a little annoyed that he had to ask for it
he referred to writers as "scribblers"
that was another turnoff
I was only 22 at the time
he probably thought
that he could overwhelm me
with his seniority
but it was evident
that he was no writer
just a rather cranky salesman
my decided lack of interest
only made him press even harder
he must've really needed a sale
the contract was turned in my direction
he had taken a pen with black ink
& made a star
over & over on the same spot
it looked ugly & desperate
I was supposed to sign on the line
where he had inked in that star
both his hands were across the table
clenched in fists
I didn't sign
& he wasn't any happier
the school later received
some bad publicity
& quietly disappeared
that salesman probably
scarred every member of his family
for life

"FAMILY VALUES"

leave it to a politician
to corrupt the language
with a built-in abstraction
what does it really mean?
mom n pop n the kids
sitting in front of the set
watching 101 Dalmations?

I don't think so
it's just a phrase
like Warren Harding's
"return to normalcy"
the right emotion for the-right era
aimed straight at your heart
& about as meaningful
as any other commercial message

FOR A FUNCTIONING BRAIN

I pick up a bookmark
they're all over the place
this one
has some writing on the back in red ink
there is no liberty without leisure
no quotes around it
damn
did I say that?
doesn't sound like me
but shit
the statement has merit
wouldn't you say?

A FATHER & SON MOMENT

we came together on the subject of music
he loved Duke Ellington
Duke's son Mercer was mentioned
my father quickly dismissed him as a nonentity
I mentioned a fine standard
that had been written by him
Things Ain't What They Used To Be
my father was unfamiliar with the tune
& didn't want to know how it went

4 AMERICAN CARS

being 18 & impulsive
I gave the guy 90 bucks
& drove the black '52 Buick off the lot
later I remembered
that the car didn't HAVE a display price
just 2 zeroes on the windshield
make your own offer
the guy must've been happy with me
that white '57 Fairlane was the best
a real classic