

MAY 27, 1982

Large water marks stain the ceiling of this motel room. Rust-colored circles that attest to the heavy rainfall of East Texas. I'm in Nacogdoches, far in the pineys, attending one of our son's graduation exercises. As I write, the rest of the family is down by the swimming pool, depressurizing from the formality of the event. I am not as enthusiastic about working as of being in the shade.

Less than two hours ago we were part of a crowd of 4000 in the college coliseum. The humidity was so high that hombres wearing neckties were bobbing their heads up and down for air like long necked cranes grazing in a marsh. I watched ladies dressed in starched dresses make sponge marks in their face paint while fighting the heat. Young kids romping in the foyers turned their white shirts into locker room tailoring; dignitaries passing to the stands left vapor streams from the backs of their black robes.

The morning started with our hunting down our six children that are here and their respective girl friends and spouses. All but two made first muster. At second call, I was assigned to wait out front of the building to assure that we sat together.

Standing around out front gave me a chance to watch the graduation crowds. These latecomers were made up of parents and grandparents, just like our support group. The mommas ranged in emotion from frenzy to a lighthearted front, but I began to notice that the fathers, without exception, had an unusual bounce in their steps that far outreached their age.

You'd see an old guy about my age swing his car into a parking place, dismount in a brisk manner, and at about 20 paces, he'd pat his hip pocket. Some would go so far as to slip their checkbook from their coat to make a quick balance audit. I saw one fellow stop to one side and count the change in his pockets.

Then I realized that passing by was the financial strength of the Class of '82. Within reach were the behind-the-scene supporters of hundreds of roadhouses and the scores of lake and beach parties that make the scene. The collateral, so to speak, of thousands of library fines and untold dollars in collect telephone bills. In spite of the noble words that were being spoken inside, I was sitting in on part of the great system that keeps the breweries and the gas pumps running in America.

These men were the financial wizards who had in the past four years stabilized tuition fees, bonded light meters, and stood behind the deposits on hundreds of kegs of beer.

Hidden underneath their single breasted coats and white shirts were the patrons of the college frolic. The unsung financiers of books and tapes and records and an endless list of other necessities of the modern student.

I was so overcome by emotion that I had to retreat to the restroom to regain my composure. Over the pipe-in sounds I heard, or thought I heard the following: "Graduating With a four point average and a \$62,678 deficit by her family, the toast of old New Orleans, the Queen of the Easter bash in Florida, Shirley May So-and So."

Over the dashboard of my typewriter, and through the picture window, I still see the families snapping pictures and celebrating the day. The fathers continue to lead the packs. The measure of their relief is visible even from my second floor vantage point.