

Second prize — Long poems

The Last Knish-Man

by R.N. Friedland

THE LAST KNISH—MAN

There are no more *knish*-men
on Pitkin Avenue.

No more flat *knishes* on waxed paper
sprinkled with too much coarse salt
so the crystals that did not adhere
slid off the smooth paper
on to the top of the sheet metal wagon,
or on to the wide sidewalks,
or off into the wind.
No more *Litvaks*.
No more *Galitzianers*.

Just black men in surplus greatcoats
burning beef fat in up-ended oildrums by the slaughterhouse.
Rubbing their hands, shaking and blowing on their knuckles,
passing a bottle, swallowing deeply to stay warm.

There are no more old tailors
not even Mr. Koenig, with numbers
tattooed around their wrists.

No more appetizing-store owners slicing lox,
or offering a taste of wooden-boxed cream cheese
to mothers' boys on the tip of a sharp knife.

No more push-carts,
No more delicatessens with spicy brown mustard
rolled up in small cones of heavy brown waxed paper.

Even Harry Cabot, who drove to Spring Valley with my father,
to buy milk, during the strike.
Even Harry Cabot is dead.

BROOKLYN 14, NEW YORK

1956, and
Father Knickerbocker in peeling paint.
Dutch colonial dress, cane
and a beer,
peers down from the wall of Dominic's Grocery
over rectangular reading glasses.

A gallon mayonnaise jar
filled with clear liquid,
and a note taped, hand-written,
on sandwich wrapping paper, says,
"Tears of Dodger Fans.
Wait 'til next year."

Across 18th Avenue
the new two-tone Pontiacs sit idle in the showroom,
the live poultry market is closing,
the men with the horse-drawn wagons,
the one who sells *javel* water,
the other who sharpens dull knives and collects rags,
are finishing their rounds.

The breeze off of Gravesend Bay
is smooth and salty.
The West End rumbles overhead on the F1,
where it turns down toward
New Utrecht.

In Whitey's, the boys drink soda,
smoke,
and re-live the perfect game.

KINGS HIGHWAY

The wind roars up Ocean Parkway
and slices the Sunday morning volunteers
on the spot where Washington marched off
to meet Burgoyne in Long Island.

There's a mural in the high-ceilinged bank.
Now the icy wind freezes the windows thick
with the heavy moist condensate of the bagel bakery
on East Fifth Street.

Inside, platoons of doughy circles are pulled
from hot water, spread quickly on long narrow boards
and advanced into the ovens.
It is warm steamy and loud
with shouted commands and orders.

"A dozen assorted, no salt."
"Six and six."

Under their arms, the volunteers shoulder
the *Times*, the *Mirror*, or the *Daily News*.

The bagels that are almost too hot to hold,
will be frozen by the time they are home.
Its better to eat at least one right away,
plain,
and let the warm doughy softness dissolve.

SOUTH BROOKLYN

Eddie P
had fronted the junkie
twelve dollars for two bags.
But the Puerto Rican kid had neglected
to return with the swag,
the stolen goods that Eddie P
sold from the private car service
on Fourth Avenue.

"Its not the twelve dollars,
its the principle."
Joe Fish explained,
breaking the addict's arm.

For three days they had him tied to a chair
in the back room, behind the curtain.
Everyone of the boys who came by,
went into the back and kicked and punched him
until they were too tired to hit him again.

On the third day,
the Puerto Rican's mother
and the Parish Priest
came and pleaded with Eddie P
to let him go.
"Father," Eddie P whined.
"Its got to do with respect."

The priest and the boy's mother nodded yes,
the boy was clearly in the wrong.
"But," the priest whispered,
"his mother is a saint."

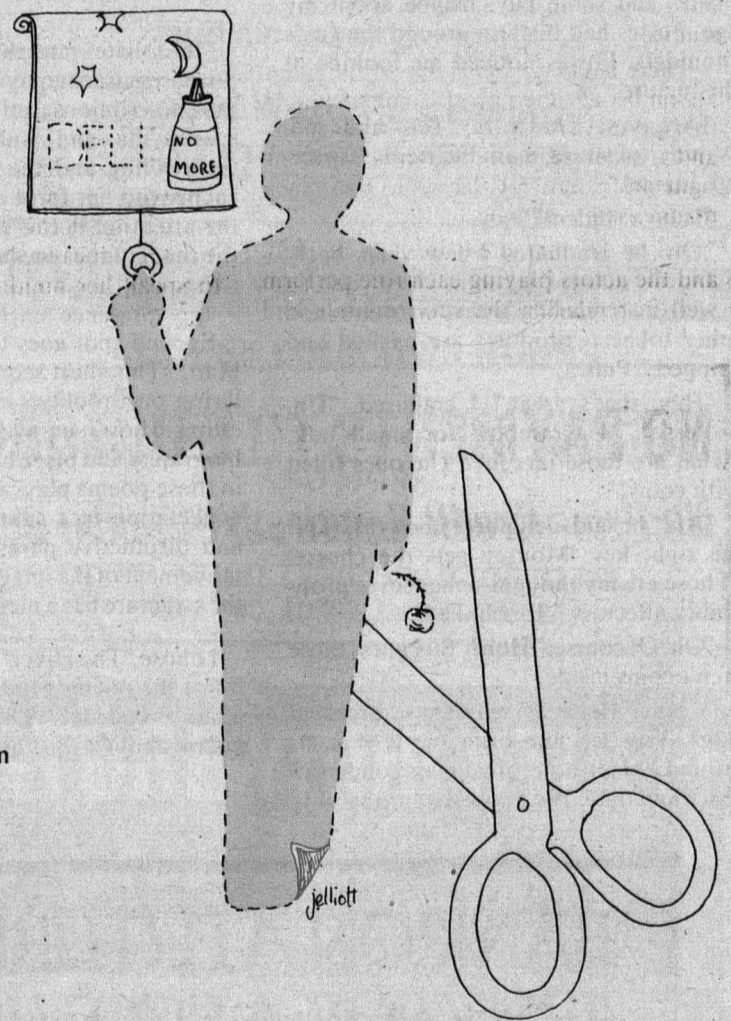
THE CANDY STORE

The power's out,
and the button men pitch pennies and laugh
at Fat Mike
trying to save the ice-cream
melting in the coolers.

Mike had a weakness for teenaged girls,
and Martha let him do it to her in a small closet.
It was no big thing.

He walked with a limp
from when Joe Hook shot him
for fucking his sister.
Joe's brother was okay.
But Joe was crazy.

Martha's boyfriend was surprised
at how salty she was.
"Don't. Don't Not today," she had asked.
Without knowing precisely why,
he sensed thickly how wrong the world was.



Third prize — Long poems

Trifoliate

by Thomas Wharton

Trees are scrolls
as yet unfurled
in the arcane forest.

Logging roads reach in,
they arrive limbless, shocked
to be steamed in stacks

in the dank steam vaults
and stripped of cortex
expertly by the perfect

teeth of the grinders. Here
on the main level
I sweep I sweep I sweep

the sawdust that falls
all day and night from
jubilant hot machines.

A machine never stands back
to wipe its brow.
A machine is illiterate.

My friend is the old woman
gnarled and strong as a pine.
She takes the dry bonewood

from the oven and sorts it.
She will never be felled.
She has seniority.

Ray drives a forklift
and is born again. At lunch he says,
just before the dread clarion

announces the reign of hell
on earth, he and the rest
of the elite few thousand

will just vanish before us,
right to heaven, rightly escaping
the terrible culling.

He prays loudly in the lunch room.
The older ones pay no attention.
They chew their lunches mechanically.

The horn sounds. Back in the mill
the foreman directs me
underneath

to the access tunnel clogged
with sodden shavings. I crouch
in broiling gloom and shovel

grassy mulch up the shuddering
conveyor belt. It's quieter here.
I think that I am forgotten.

No such luck — called up
to search among the lofty stacks
for errant woodscraps.

I wander.
Late shift I find tucked away
a helical staircase

behind the boilers.
Winding around, wary of vigilance
I climb through the motes

shaking from blackened beams.
Through an unwilling door
I wake in vast cool night.

The firmament and the city
sustained
in points of light

blooms all space, who can decode it?

There came a day I saw
Ray's forklift rolling along
without a driver.
I stopped,
aware of implications.
He came running sheepishly,
having forgotten the hand brake.