

## *Leon Stokesbury*

### **Lauds**

Even in Texas there's a rose on the air  
for just that quick half-hour during summer dawn.  
And we, *new meat*, the college boys,  
received our first good look at things  
that thirty minutes when *the permanents* came in  
to the Texas State Highway Department barn  
to sip the liquor of a cup of coffee —  
and then go.

Rysinger would not shut up.  
No one could shut him up.  
Rysinger was our father's age,  
and every day brought his constant routine,  
each morning beginning as a string of jokes  
more dirty than the day before. Each day:  
if he could gargle forth some image, some  
froth or new vulgarity,  
so strange to the new meat  
that it could make us turn our eyes away —  
then that would make him squeal and grin and giggle.  
Each day.

But when I think of Rysinger  
I do not think first of the day Plaunty  
came back from his honeymoon  
and Rysinger followed him around asking  
Plaunty?  
Why is Plaunty's mouth all puckered up?  
What had Plaunty been eating  
to cause his mouth to pucker so? Lemons?  
Lemons, Plaunty?  
And neither do I think of Rysinger's story  
of getting two milkshakes down at Dick's Drive-In, or  
of his particularly energetic rendition of the tale

of Grandma's French ticklers, which  
brought old Grandma back to life, which  
made her go "Whoa!" then  
"Oh!" then  
"Soooooieeeee!"

What I always remember about Rysinger  
is the two or three times that summer  
along about three or four in the afternoon  
when the heat on some country road was killing us,  
and the hot asphalt would steam up in our faces,  
would billow and speckle our clothes and faces,  
and there was nothing but heat,  
the world being endless waves of heat —  
and I would look over and see Rysinger  
trying to hide his red eyes,  
making gestures that tried to imply  
it was the steam, or the wind,  
or the sweat in his eyes  
that made them water and burn  
there by the side of the road.