

Slouching Towards Bethlehem

by Jack Swenson

We didn't wear shoes in the summer, except for Sunday school and church. The soles of our feet were black and tough as shoe leather. On lazy afternoons we would head for the old golf course west of town. We'd swim there in forbidden ponds. When we came home, our filthy clothes betrayed us.

There were little white balloons in the river behind the Bible school, floating in the scum like dead fish. We played war games on the parched hills and alongside county roads, and from the long grass in the ditches we flushed clouds of angry mosquitoes.

We'd spy on the fat man, too, at a farm outside of town. He was the son of the farmer. He lived in a stone outbuilding by himself. I saw him once. He was walking from the barn to the farm house. He was wearing bib overalls. He moved slowly, like some prehistoric animal, all thighs and belly and jowls.

When he died, some years later, they couldn't get him out through the door. They had to knock a hole in the side of house with sledge hammers. They said he weighed over six hundred pounds.

