

Poetry Series

Charles Chaim Wax

- poems -

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"Bernstein, what good are you? "

Caught off guard by the question
especially the tone of Treasure's voice
sad, bitter, aggressive.
"And I'm tired of your talk."
Staring now, watching me,
waiting
I didn't like the waiting
so whispered, "What's this about? "
"Fucking children."
"Me?"
"I never in my life."
"Your kind."
Suddenly Larry Plunkett plopped down
at our table in Meng's saying,
"Need that dollar
in your pocket, Bernstein? "
I dipped in and handed him
two singles
then he quickly played
a tune on his Kazoo.
"Without this little darling
I'd be a dead man, " he said.
"You're good at that, Bernstein, " said Treasure,
"tidbits to the lost."
"He's does his best, " said Larry,
"I'll vouch for that, indeed
last week I seen him in
Brighton Beach coming
outta a health food store
which just so happened
was next to Starbucks, and don't you
know, the man spent \$4.75 on a coffee
for me, then handed me his copy of
the Times, and sat myself down, after saying thanks
and hobnobbed with the rich and famous
for a good six hours.
raining it was, so happy to be
indoors and warm. Thus,
to conclude, Bernstein is a righteous
dude."
"The New York Fucking Times..."
At that Larry began laughing
couldn't stop, flopped to the floor,
looked up at Treasure saying, "You got a way with words."
"Where I found out about children
forced into prostitution.
In the article I read twenty-six men
entered a twelve year old girl
day after day, until she said, "No."
Beat her. Still, No,
finally drugged her senseless
then the fucking,

like fucking a corpse
cocksuckers didn't care."
"Bastards," said Larry,
"This happen over in Brighton Beach?
cause there's perverts walking them streets."
"Pakistan," said Treasure.
"Oh," said Larry
lowering his eyes
then asking, "And where might that be?
cause I failed Geography three times
in sixth grade, and, well, never did make it to high school."
"Tell him, Bernstein."
"Far away," I mumbled.
"Here," Treasure said
her fist
plunging into her heart.

Charles Chaim Wax

A Bold Mission Coming to Naught

"It's funny, " I said
to Henry F and Dilly
in the Teacher's Center,
"how all our fathers are dead
and how all of us experienced
a tortured relationship
with the old man
leaving scars."
Henry F said, "He was a cruel man
beat my mother
and when he beat her
I vowed revenge
when I got older
but when I did get older
I never took that revenge"
"The man threw you out of
the house because you married
that Panamanian woman? "
"Didn't speak
for two years
called him
didn't call me back
then cancer struck
declined quickly
in the hospital
I went with my wife to visit
wanted him to bless
the marriage before he died—
childish
but I wanted it.
When I arrived
my mother said, 'I don't think it's a good idea
for her to see him.' I said, 'Ma, he's dying
can't still have such feelings.'
'Your father's very stubborn.'
'I'm stubborn too'
'Go up alone or not at all, '
my mother said. I was heartbroken
my dream of harmony
shattered
then
I remembered when
he didn't attend
his own father's funeral.
I went upstairs alone
now so frail
not the man
who beat my mother
lost weight
eyes closed
I shook him
a yellow film dulled

his eyes
making the pupils
appear distant. 'Hello, dad, ' I said
didn't utter a word
only stared
kissed him on the cheek
left
no reconciliation
dead
two days later
refused the funeral.
like him
when
his old man croaked."

Charles Chaim Wax

A Capacity For Limitless Serenity

Matilda Halbert pushed into Meng's
at exactly five in the afternoon
with her red shopping cart
empty except for cardboard
covering the bottom making it perfectly flat.
Not tall to begin with her bent back
created a wee woman in her early seventies
without a spot of gray in her auburn hair.
Each day like clockwork
white rice floated into the cart.
At times, wonton soup, that mostly in winter.
We spoke
mostly about the weather
and especially about wind
which she didn't like because gusts jostled her
making breathing difficult
If married, no ring,
perhaps the husband long dead
and if she bore children, no word of them.
Our brief conversations stayed put at the counter
as Matilda never dined in Meng's
but through the timbre of her voice
I understood utter contentment.
The red cart the white rice
protecting her
and wonton soup
a bit of bliss
on winter
nights.

Charles Chaim Wax

A Day in the Life of An Aspiring Transvestite

Tired of typing gibberish
on a rainy Sunday
I journeyed to Brooklyn's famous
Kings Plaza Mall
and wandered
until Victoria's Secret blazed before me
the placed packed with yearning women
and then I spotted a tall Transvestite prancing
into a Dressing Room
I waited for the howl
but heard not a peep from anyone
and five minutes later he pranced out.
"If he can so can I."
So selected a tent like leather bikini
and held it up before me
twirling around twice
next I frolicked to cosmetics
where I purchased a red Max Factor lipstick
then smeared the smooth tip across my quivering lips
finally I stepped to wigs
where a kindly woman
gently slipped a blonde one on me.
"Just want to see
how it looks with this, " I said.
pointed to the leather bikini.
"Stunning, " she exclaimed,
"and how lucky can a girl be!
we only began carrying
the full figured line two months ago."
I whispered, "The beard,
well, a genetic difficulty..."
"Don't say another world, " she sighed.
I paraded into the Dressing Room
and counted three completely nude women
and seven semi-nude women
posing before mirrors.
Legs trembling I mumbled
"Such beauty"
when I felt a tap
on my shoulder.
I slowly turned
and saw
a short Transvestite wearing
a pale rose satin slip who asked,
"Whatta ya think, angel? "
"Absolutely and thoroughly
Divine."

Charles Chaim Wax

A Debt Repaid Years Later

I dragged myself to the train station
and when I arrived
I was surprised to see
five police cars blocking Sheepshead Bay Road,
and about twenty cops
standing in front of Dunkin' Donuts
holding back a crowd.
I pressed forward
to see
but couldn't wiggle my way up front
so I turned to a guy
on my right and asked, "What's going on? "
He was short and thin
and his body tilted to the left.
"You carrying? " he asked.
"What? "
"They're rounding up
all known drug suspects in Brooklyn
biggest Dragnet
since the French Connection." He paused,
then again asked, "You carrying? "
"What? "
"Dump it
only chance you got
there's undercover narcs
planted every place
see that guy in the dry cleaning store
a narc
in the bagel place
two narcs
dump it
cause if you ain't carrying
they can't do nothing
it's on the floor
let 'em prove it's your stash."
"Who's in Dunkin' Donuts? The methadone junkies? "
"They're finished
you still got a chance
dump it
then walk away and whistle a merry tune."
"I only have Roloids, " I said.
"Never heard of it
some kinda new coke from Costa Rica?
Be careful
that cop's lookin' straight at you
dump it, my friend
flee
but don't walk fast
a sure give away."
This guy's a nut
I said myself, then whispered,
"I put Costa Rican LSD

in the Rolaid tablets
cooked up a batch last night
dropped a dropp on each pink pill
then wrapped `em up again
so they'll never catch me."
"5140," he suddenly yelled.
To make a long story short
this lunatic
tried to arrest me
but the guy
in charge of the operation
happened to be
a former student
who said when he saw me,
"Bernstein, my hero."
Well, I had helped
the youngster out
by giving him an A+
on a composition
filled with errors
when he had
no confidence himself
and said my benevolent
gesture
turned his life around
from dropp out
to first grade
Detective
protecting all
good citizens
from harm.

Charles Chaim Wax

A Father's Love

As soon as I walked into
the Teacher's Center
I said, "Congratulations!
you're the envy of every
teacher in the school—
New York State
Teacher of the Year! "
"Not such
a rosy picture, " said George Sweeny sadly.
"Whatta ya mean? "
"My son is a maniac."
"Which one? "
"Harry."
"At least Larry is OK."
"I don't know
cause he only moves
his bowels once a week
and you never know
when it's gonna happen
since there's such a build up.
Last week he did it
when we was riding
on the Belt Parkway."
George paused
he seemed lost in thought.
"Like a little
earthquake it was, " he laughed.
"Just my luck
there was an accident up ahead!
I hadda sit
there with that
stench for forty minutes."
"How come he wasn't
wearing Depends?
Seems like
a good solution
to the problem."
"Mrs. Goetschius
his shrink
says it ain't
good for him
well, the exact words
she used was
'Not advantageous
for his soul.'
Well,
she's the doctor."

Charles Chaim Wax

A Fragile Flower

When I strolled into Mike's Restaurant
under the Stillwell Ave subway station
at 3: 07 in the morning
I spotted Minnie Hollis
then turned and quickly left
as her presence quickly pumped
depression into my soul
while the frigid air outside
boosted my spirits
and snow
soon would descend
at dawn
so they predicted.
"Bernstein, " I heard
A moment later Ryan
the counterman at Mike's
stood beside me.
"Get back inside
without your sanity
I'm gonna be gobbled up
by insanity."
"Minnie throws me into despair."
"I know, I know, " Ryan sighed,
"but whatta ya gonna do—
she's alive
can't deny that fact
and life's all that counts
in each and every manifestation."
"Big word for you, " I laughed.
"I got it from your Buddha."
"Not my Buddha
for all in need."
We returned and just then Minnie
stood up and thrust out her chest.
"Take a good look, "
she proclaimed,
"I'm fifty-four. Do I look it? "
No one answered.
"I used to weigh 500 pounds
how much you think I weigh now? "
At that she lifted her breasts
so that they shot out
directly in front of her
and a moment later let them fall
hitting her chest
with a dull thud.
Bill Daley whispered, "She only
comes out on weekends
on a pass from South Beach."
Without warning Minnie screamed,
"JOE BAXTER
blasted 13 people in a bank

robbed, hog-tied, and shot `em all
told police,
'I'd have killed
thousands if I'd had enough
bullets.'
Baxter I said
don't never do that again
he only laughed."
Then Minnie took off her purple wig
revealing a head of close
cropped gray hair
which she began scratching furiously.
"Stop, " said Ryan,
"you're shaking loose
critters on the counter."
"I ain't got crabs, " said Minnie.
"Why you scratching? "
"Feels good in the brain."

Charles Chaim Wax

A Friend

I got a call yesterday
About Gloria, 74 years old,
From her sister, 69, a smoker all her life
Plus drank a fifth of rum,
Everyone thought she
Would go first
But cancer demolished Gloria through and through.
Lucy and Lorenzo said I should send flowers
For fifty dollars
Such kind children
Instead
I sent a Mass Card for five because
How does the inside of a coffin breathe.

Charles Chaim Wax

A Hundred Fifty Million Dead

in the first wave, "
declared Peter F
referring to the
killing power of the
Bird Flue
once the microbe
migrated to humans.
"Mostly in Asia
but we'll have
our share here."
"As bad as that? " I asked.
"Worse
much worse
and no more burials
forget about that
gotta burn the bodies
make sure
the minuscule critters
don't transmigrate
into the cells of crops
then
then
we're talking
three hundred million
mass hysteria
total insanity
fear
confusion
terror..."
"Nearer my God to Thee, eh? "
I said
a bit nervous at this point.
Peter F flipped his feet
on his desk
placed his palms behind his head
saying,
"The Almighty's in the clear
no substance
only Spirit."

Charles Chaim Wax

A Man of True Worth Extends His Protection to All the Realm

After ten years of teaching English
at Spinoza HS I couldn't take it anymore
and decided to devote myself
to writing full time.
Unfortunately
when I received
my 47th consecutive rejection slip
ten months later
I had a nervous breakdown.
"I'm finished, " I said
to my best buddy Sam Zellermyer.
"No cash left...gotta go back to work in September."
"Bernstein, get a grip on yourself, " he said,
"do you wanna wind up a mental case like Tom DeWitt? "
"He never wore shoes
that don't make him crazy."
"In Brooklyn it does
with all that dog shit in the street."
"Didn't want anything
coming between him and Mother Earth
wrote a poem about him and his feet."
"Get it published? "
"They only want happy poems
or abstruse stuff
you gotta read fifty times
and still makes no sense."
Zellermyer stared me
saw the desperation, my need to create
we'd known each other for two decades.
"I'll help as much as I can, " he finally said.
"You owe \$38,000 on fourteen credit cards."
"I wipe my ass with them paltry bills
and
so you know
it's \$52,000 on eighteen credit cards
and more in the mail
every day
this is America, Bernstein."
He paused, then said,
"I don't worry
and you shouldn't worry
that's what really destroys a man."
Then he marched to an ATM machine
lodged in a small bodega on the corner
whistling a merry tune
one I had never heard.

Charles Chaim Wax

A MEDITATION ON EMPTINESS

I awoke at 10: 55 Pm
I would have preferred 4 AM
because then I could have stayed
awake
and experienced
the coming of the dawn,
and heard the birds sing.
When I hear the birds sing
in the darkness
before dawn
I feel connected
to elemental indestructible nature.
I become extremely
happy at that time.
But since it was only 10: 55 PM
it was too early; y to wait
I felt the approach of sleep
and said: what is better than sleep?
and then I became euphoric
and thought of infinity.
What is there to fear?
Not longing for death
but no fear,
and it was lovely;
the cool breeze blowing on me
and the groggy eyes.
Enlightenment again.
Birth, death, infinity-
all one like a secret lullaby.
I started to laugh out loud
Bursts of laughter out loud,
over and over
and then a word came into my
laughter:
compassion.
And I started to laugh
at the sound of that word
as if I should have known
all along and now that I did know
it was all so simple and incredibly
true.
No doubt
And I wondered
why I had taken so long.
Laughing.
Hysterical.
Without abandon
And the word compassion
repeated again and again,
fusing with laughter.
And then
the laughter

stopped
and I knew
when the dawn came
I could not keep it,
I mean, Enlightenment,
the no fear of death,
the laughter erupting,
the word compassion
intimate
with every cell of my body.

Charles Chaim Wax

A Most Unusual Pleasure

Steamy night
even at 2: 42 AM
Coney Island
in summer
Joe Bauer and me
watching life
when Helen Linke
passed by
wearing a tight shirt and shorts.
I turned
not wanted to see her.
Bauer asked, "What was that all about, Bernstein?
looked nice."
"Her body, sure
I showed you her picture."
"Seen lots
but your naked women
show a part
breasts only
or buttocks
how can I recognize
a woman's face just from a part of her body? "
"You gotta have
the photographer's eye."
"That's baloney."
"Anyway I showed you
the photograph where she's
holding a bullwhip
wearing a cowboy hat and boots
nothing else."
"Oh, the girl with the whip."
"You remembered the whip!
dangerous
gotta be careful of her.
I don't know
if she ever killed anyone
with that long leather whip
but she could
ice water
running through her veins
yet
her voice
face
so sweet.
Suddenly I heard, "Bernstein"
and a moment later
Helen Linke stood before us saying,
"This guy I know
wants
pictures of a few lashes
4: 15
3204 Mermaid Avenue

be there."
"I gotta go home
for my camera."
"Don't never lie to me
in your pocket
where it always is
tiny digital number."
The sweet voice
froze my blood.
"OK,
forgot I had it."
"Want some tonight? "
she asked a smile on her face
then walked away.
Bauer said, "I wouldn't mind having
some of her."
"The lash
my friend
only the lash."

Charles Chaim Wax

A Paper Coat To Protect Against the Cold

"Some folks ain't never gonna make it, "
said Willie Benney, "don't ask me why
but that's the truth
so if they can't live in this world
they dream of another world
and maybe that
other world's gonna be better for 'em.
I been trying to get to that
improved place for fifty-five years
through vodka. Now, well,
I figure I just gotta live in this one."
"How old are you? " I asked.
"Sixty."
"Sixty? " I blurted out,
"but just before you said
you were drinking for fifty-five years."
Benny smiled saying,
"Started when I was five,
couldn't help it since my ma was a drunk
and I wanted to be close to her
so I did like her—
guzzle vodka.
Course she couldn't afford
no fancy booze but any stuff will do
if your heart's tortured."
"Is your mother dead? " I whispered.
"What the hell you think? "
"I really don't know."
"A drunk don't live long."
"You're still around."
"God loves me."

Charles Chaim Wax

A Sad Disaster Worthy to be Buried in Profound Silence

I sat inside Ruby's Bar and Grill
facing the vast Atlantic
with the old guys
as the storm raged on
snow pummeling
the boardwalk
no seagulls in the sky
the pint of Thunderbird
empty
liquor store
a mile away
Ruby the owner
playing marathon Bach
because the sounds soothed
his soul,
Suddenly I jumped up
and Joe Foley said,
"You're a good man, Bernstein
getting us
another pint
in weather like this."
I stared at Foley
eyes brimming with
with such profound hope
my heart melted in admiration.
Twenty minutes later
I returned with two pints,
one hidden in my back pocket
Bach still on
but louder than before.
We started sipping
well, swallowing really:
the first pint went fast
so I whipped out the second
Joe standing
proclaimed my name
Finally I moaned,
"I used to love Bach's
Cello suites."
"Is this gonna be about
Dentist Herman Swick?" asked Elbert A. L'Hommedieu.
"The name's Sicko."
"The card you showed me said
Dentist Herman Swick."
"Leave Bernstein, alone," said Joe Foley,
"the man's a saint
close to it anyway."
I smiled
went on:
"All he played was Suite number 1
performed by Rostropovich
hence I heard those heavenly notes

time and time again
after three visits I hated Bach
yet all my life I loved his sublime joy
and just because that Sicko
played it over and over
while the infernal drill
penetrated the soft tissues of
my cerebellum."

"Enamel," said Elbert A. L'Hommedieu.
"Always the brain," I moaned,
"always the brain—
with me."

Charles Chaim Wax

A Sad History of Misfortune

I strode to the Pier in Coney Island
on Christmas day. Eleven degrees
and with a gale off the vast Atlantic
the temperature zipped
to well below zero. No place
to match this, my private scrap of Nirvana
but in the distance I spotted a soul
and when I approached
who should it be but Harry Henwood.
"Hey, " I said.
He turned and at once
began to speak:
"God don't love me
and not only me
my whole family is cursed.
My mother choked on a chicken bone
and died when I was seven
and my dad is doing
life for killing his brother
with an ax. No wonder
my sister is nuts
and gonna die an Old Maid.
I gave Ralph Dillon
the go ahead to poke Marie
but don't you know she fell asleep
and Ralph filled with passion.
I told him the shrink's medication
made her groggy, but I don't know
if he's ever coming back."
As the tears fell
from Harry Henwood's eyes
they froze in a flash
on his mournful face.
Silence. My body in bliss. Warm inside.
Suddenly: "What are you doing here? "
"Getting ready to give God back
this load of flesh.
Enough is enough."
"Not on Christmas day, you're not
with a snowstorm coming in.
I'm only human, Henwood,
to watch you croak...
couldn't enjoy nothing then.
A ten enough to make you smile? "
Eyes shifting now
between me and the swirling sea
then a tilt toward Heaven,
fist suddenly shooting into the sky
finally: the smile.

Charles Chaim Wax

A Safer Place

After Thanksgiving Dinner
her husband Howard
left the kitchen
went to watch
Lawrence of Arabia
then my sister began
"The Zumbergs are the lowest scum
on the face of the earth
more money than God
and they treat you like dirt,
but God loves the Zumbergs
otherwise why would
He make them rich
and make me poor..."
My three year old niece
interrupted my sister saying, "We not poor."
"No, no, we're not poor, darling."
my sister having forgot
Howard was terrified of
that word. Suddenly
a confused and painful look
flooded my sister's face. "Why does
God love the Zumbergs
if they are the lowest trash
on the face of the earth? This is the question
I ask myself every night
before sleep
not every night
but a lot of nights. Why do such
DISGUSTING
people
have so much money? " She paused
and looked around. No one gave
an answer but by now she'd worked
herself into frenzy, "I'M WAITING.
WHY DOES GOD
LOVE THE ZUMBERGS?
I could understand it if
they had a shred of decency
but they don't. The whole DISGUSTING
bunch of `em
one worse than the other
five to five I put my pen down
and Arnold...that worm...yells at me,
'I'M NOT PAYING YOU
FOR HALF A DAY.'
If I told Howard
he'd go up there and punch him out."
I said serenely, "There's no God
no one UP THERE
creates Fate
that's ours to do

ours alone. I repeat
no God."
My sister gasped
face turning chalk white
finger pointed at the ceiling
finally saying,
"Quiet
He's listening."

Charles Chaim Wax

A Scrap of Remembrance

Had a poem written
last night
in the mind
now morning
gone
a sad life
that was in it
but mosta
my poems
like that
others
my own.

Charles Chaim Wax

A Spirit Broken Loved By None

Celene called at 8: 20
said she read my letters
and cried
said she was tired of the whole drug thing
just tired
but needed \$20 now
and could I please give
her the money.
In the background
I heard Billy boy's pimp voice
still I said, "OK,
I'll give you the money
be down to Atlantic Avenue in an hour."
Two minutes she called again
said she wanted to come here
and that if she took a taxi
would I pay for it.
OK.
So she came over
and had peed in her pants again
also shot dope
because as soon as
she flopped on the couch
she nodded off
awake asleep
this went on for eleven hours.
Finally asked me to give her
\$10 extra for her mother
already gave her a \$20.
It came out she had another
fight with her mother
about a new step father.
Celene said,
"Everything's for him
I feel like an outsider."
Then she began crying
I handed her a tissue
staring at her naked body
20 years old
but still a baby
soft and vulnerable
needing only a mother's love
to flourish
not in this life
the love
long gone
if ever
felt at all.

Charles Chaim Wax

A Tale of Love

Hubert at 38
and weighing 427 pounds
an only child
father dead long ago
had lived
all his life with his mother
also obese
so when she passed away
in October
the man was crushed
but when he returned
to Spinoza high school
after a week of mourning
he told me
of a dream about Monique from Martinique,
how she fell in love with him.
"Maybe if I lose weight
the dream will come true," he said.
So Hubert struggled up the stairs each day
cut way down on calories
and slowly began to lose weight.
Everyone at Spinoza was amazed.
In May Hubert announced
he was going to spend
the summer in Martinique
where he was certain he would find Monique.
The last week in June
Hubert walked on air
as he had lost 110 pounds
and looked positively thin,
relatively speaking. I told him
to call me, or write.
"You'll get postcard a week," he said.
On July 8th, July 16th, August 7th,
and August 20th
I received lovely picture postcards
from Hubert. Monique
had not yet found him
but the warm blue waters were comforting
and the people friendly.
Three days later a call. They found
my name and address
on a letter in Hubert's room.
Drowned in his bathtub.
"How?" I asked.
"Drowned," the heavily accented voice replied.
That night I dreamt of Monique
by the azure abyss
of the Caribbean sea,
in radiance,
shimmering under stars,
her bottom round and pure,

brown hair floating on a tropic breeze
when suddenly the back shifted
and she turned.
"Oh, don't touch yourself there, "
I whispered as she stroked her thighs.
"Have mercy.
I'm Hubert's friend."
She spoke in French.
I couldn't understand a word
but such sweet tones,
like delicate chimes,
like crystals caressing
and the surf rumbled,
and the warm wind
rushed through dense leaves
creating an hypnotic incantation.
"It is good
to love
and be loved in return, " I said
but really wanting
to ask about Hubert.
"Fat people suffer the most, "
she said in perfect English,
this Monique from Martinique,
"and they suffer until they die."
Then silence,
moonlight in her tears.

Charles Chaim Wax

A Tale of True Love

Mabel Catherine Rose allowed herself
to be wheeled into Meng's once a week
for her beloved pork chops with corn and applesauce.
She could well afford to eat that feast every day
since her late husband's life insurance policy
provided money enough to live a comfortable life
but her metabolism was slow, and had been so all her life.
Indeed her battle against obesity never-ending
now made more difficult by being confined to a wheelchair
after breaking her hip two years ago
the bones never healing properly.
Harold McSorley wheeled her in
also a widower McSorley was now her companion
and even in his mid-seventies the chap dressed in a jaunty manner
today sporting a lavender shirt and peach colored pants
glasses fire engine red
and fancy Michael Jordan sneakers.
McSorley and Catherine Rose had been a couple
for ten months, defeating the demon loneliness.
"Read any good books, Bernstein? "
"One about Mrs. Seton, founder of the American Sisters of Charity."
"You read books about Saints? McSorley watches the Three Stooges."
He said, "Whatever I like you got no use for."
"Did I ever stop you from watching the Three Stooges? " she said,
"even though Moe looks like a monkey."
"He makes me laugh."
"A baboon with half a brain."
"You don't want me to watch them no more, I won't."
"I never said you shouldn't watch them. Did I say that, Bernstein? "
"Not that I heard."
"I only said Moe looks like a monkey with half a brain,
and the other one, baldly,
squeaks like a mouse.
Fine! You want to watch, so watch."
Catherine Rose turned to me saying,
"So, Bernstein, what did you come away with
from reading the book? "
"That's a difficult question."
"If you want easy talk to McSorley. From me you get tough questions."
"Mrs. Seton felt the Heart of Jesus was her refuge
and in such a state of being
no aspect of existence could be painful or burdensome."
"A Saint!
Mortals have problems!
But not for long:
McSorley, the Pork Chops! "

Charles Chaim Wax

A Tale Worthy of Phrynicus

Percy Fleming sat on the couch
in the Teacher's Center
eyes red
tears still streaming down his cheeks.
Before I could ask what happened
he said, "Sam Budd fainted in class
by the time security got there
wallet gone
shoes gone
hairpiece gone
Sam gone."
"They took his hairpiece, " I said
not believing a kid would do such a thing.
"Dead, Bernstein
forget the wig."
I mumbled,
"Not gonna be the real Sam
in the coffin."
"I told the man stay home rest
no
even though
he said everything seemed
dark in his head
and two months ago he fainted
in Prospect Park
bums grabbed his wallet there also
so Sam had no ID
when he was taken to hospital
and he didn't wake up for two days.
Of course then he told the police
his name and they called his wife
who ran there at once
but the doctors said to her:
one day he'd faint
and never wake up.
After that she couldn't eat
even white bread
too much for her
yet the man
showed up to class each day
to instruct these youngsters
in the intricate details
of Rome's collapse
cause he wanted
to insure their success
on the Final Exam.

Charles Chaim Wax

A Teacher's Wisdom

All my students write about love
BRAVO!
Such sweet wishes of young hearts
BRAVO!
A lifetime of yearning
They will come to know
Is no guarantee
The matter will ever turn out
Quite correct.

'You are so sad, '
sighed Lucy
the award winning poet in my class
a smile on her lips and
Not to be dissuaded from the allure
of Paradise.
Oh Lucy!
Confident, and already quite tall.

Charles Chaim Wax

A True Child of the Buddha in Brooklyn

Mary McCall
one of my students
raped
in an abandoned building
her face
then set aflame
alive
but forever disfigured
no rest
from the nightmare
and when I lay down
couldn't catch my breath
a fierce rumble of
torment—
Oh, the dear girl
pain
I couldn't imagine.
"I wish I never knew."
Then whimpered for a moment
but didn't cry
mumbling, "I ought to cry."
Then I tried to cry,
but could not.
"No soul left
in this tattered body, " I moaned
and left the bed,
turned on the light
sat in the green chair
slowly following my breath
gradually rhythm soothed me
and soon began to muse
on the great matters
this entire experiment
of humanity
wouldn't last more than a million years
if that long
a blip in the grand sweep
of time
measured in billions
and billions of years.
I inhaled deeply
and felt tingling in my arms and legs
beginning to taste Buddha's great truth—
Not a thing exists
just the endless transformation of atoms
and a bit of joy entered me.
"No matter what happens
I'm lucky to have come across
his wisdom."
Without warning
tears
Mary's suffering

finally
real.

Charles Chaim Wax

A True Child of the Buddha in Brooklyn 2

Edgar Parrott lost four fingers
on his left hand,
his left ear and left eye
when a pack of firecrackers
unexpectedly exploded
in his face at the age of ten.
Soon he became prey
to all the bullies in the neighborhood.
Father Flynn protected him.
Sadly, he was also
a devotee of young boys.
For two years Edgar was subject
to his whims.
Then he told his parents.
Father Flynn denied all,
declaring Edgar to be delusional.
They believed the beloved Priest
rather than their son.
Edgar lost faith in the Catholic Church,
and also his parents.
He withdrew into himself,
unable to resolve the events
which had befallen him.
At the age of thirteen he stopped speaking.
At the age of twenty his parents put him away.
While at Southbeach Mental Hospital
he began to converse with Jesus.
He said these conversations
gave him solace.
He forgave Father Flynn
and resolved to become a Priest.
When he tried to enter the Seminary
he was rejected as "unstable."
After that he enrolled in CCNY,
studied assiduously, achieved his degree,
then began teaching English at Spinoza HS.
During the twelve years he taught
he went through being
a Mormon, a Baptist,
an Orthodox Jew, Hinduism, Scientology,
and now
he was a participant
in our Zen Buddhist group,
The Coney Island Sangha.
Since my beloved teacher
Kogaku Roshi
had said time and time again,
"All welcome"
We welcomed him.

Charles Chaim Wax

A Visit to Victoria's Secret

I made a left
and pulled into the huge
Staten Island Mall parking lot
my sister and Nancy hopped out
racing into Victoria's Secret
store packed
noticed a small carpeted section
motioned to my sister
sat down
watching women
examine racks and racks
of skimpy panties, silk slips, push-up bras
et cetera, et cetera
also four Transvestites
well, we all want happiness
I said to myself
no harm in a few accouterments
to help
in such a valiant effort.
Suddenly my sister appeared
holding a white silk bra
connected with several strips of more white silk
to a pair of white silk panties.
Nancy's husband fooled around
here today to lure him back
gave my sister ideas, fears
her dear husband Howard might do the same
so in this place to make sure he stayed home.
"Very provocative," I declared.
"Howard just
loved Ellen Barkin wearing this in The Big Easy."
"He loves you
only lusts after her."
"Want him to lust after me."
"Love is better than lust."

Charles Chaim Wax

A Wholly Unprecedented Wound

I said to Barry Waldbaum in the Teacher's Center,
"One of my students asked me, 'What's a hermaphrodite?'"
"That some kinda mollusk, Bernstein?" he said,
"cause I think I seen that creature on NATURE."
"Got both male and female sex organs."
"I was born with four toes."
"I never knew. Which foot?"
"Left. A missing little thing like that
and my father was against me from the start.
First time I went to the beach
a crowd of people hovered around me.
Well, when my father seen that
he right away started charging a nickel
for a look and for a dame
you could play 'This little Piggy
went to market'
with them four toes.
This one guy wanted to rent me
for his daughter's birthday party.
'Five dollars,' my father says.
'All the cake the kid can eat,' he shot back.
'That's for him—what about me? '
says the old man.
From then on I never took off my socks
always wore 'em, both
cause if I only had the left sock
people would think
there was something funny.
Two socks never drew no attention,
even in the shower when I was in high school
I told the guys I didn't wanna catch no fungus.
They believed me.
Julius Szollosy and Arnold Tranen did the same,
thought it was a good idea."
"Your wife?" I asked.
"How you mean, Bernstein?"
"When you're...intimate, socks on or off?"
"On. After so many years
she got use to it
the socks
not
the toes."

Charles Chaim Wax

A Wintry Birth

The wind turned about
and blew the keen squall into
my glasses. I started to count the snowflakes
on the left lens but it was an impossible labor
so I ceased and scanned the field. Snow
swirled directly before my face and in the distance
well beyond the horizon line.
Still, no matter how many snow-crystals descended
there would always be a number
but my eyes were not sufficient to the task,
and amid all this whirling profusion
no two would ever be identical.
I tried to walk on my hands but couldn't
and tumbled to the terrain
and heard orange salamanders deep asleep
in a dreamless world.
I felt immensely joyful.
I didn't care anymore.
Here was a place for me lost
in a billion billion snowflake falls. I didn't care.
Unbounded generosity grounded
my mind. Surely others should
feel this and know, at least once,
life without clinging to desire. The sharp particles slammed me with ease
and melted on my
warm nose as easily. In this state
what could be taken?
One could only give.

Charles Chaim Wax

A Wise Man Knows His Own Soul

I bumped into George Gauld in Nathan's
said after his meal he'd visit
his father in Seagate.
I offered a lift.
When we reached my VW van
it was difficult for him to step in
because his left leg was much
longer than his right leg,
and also because he couldn't
bend his longer leg at the knee.
While we ate in Nathan's I told him
I couldn't decide if I should be
an artist or an alcoholic.
Gauld said, "When you create
you connect yourself
to all the real visible realities
of other human beings
but the alcoholic high is
connected to nothing
floating disembodied in the void."
I didn't respond to his statement then
but as we neared Seagate
I blurted out, "How come you drink? "
"I'm a cripple, "
he said calmly,
as if he'd worked out
the torment
long ago.

Charles Chaim Wax

A Woman of Distinction

25
just finished
studying Shakespeare
at Wisconsin for my MA
then teaching
in Spinoza high school
a kid, myself, really
had Laura Adair
in my VW bus
just hopped in
didn't know where
I was going
told her
heading for Greenpoint
to see the building
where Henry Miller
was born
if Administration found out
I woulda been canned
but like I said,
a kid myself
and Laura 19
never gonna finish
school
to do what?
but the girl fascinated
me, not anything sexual
more like admiration
when we reached
the Brooklyn Queens Expressway
she rolled down her window
put her hand outside
forty degrees
didn't bother her.
"What are you doing, Laura? "
"Hand surfing
you never hand surfed?
had a deprived childhood,
Bernstein? You put your hand
out the window
and turn it different ways
to feel the wind different ways
it looks like the wind is just wind
but there's all different kinds
of wind."
Then Laura put her right hand
in front of me and continued, "Look at this
you hold your hand a certain way
and the wind's rough
cause of resistance
people are like that
if you turn one way to them

they're rough
but if you turn another way
they're smooth and silky
so you got to know which way
to turn."
then without warning
thrust half her body
out the window saying
"See ya, goin' body surfing."
Pulled her in
quiet after that
finally arrived at Henry's building
still there
nothing special to look at.
Two weeks later
Laura said,
"A wild man
that Henry
but the women loved him
like me
with men."
Today she'd be fifty
if alive
but not alive
dead
six years after our trip
rushed into
an ancient wooden building
fully engulfed in flame
pulled out three kids
lunged back for another
floor collapsed
under her
on the very street
where Henry Miller
came into the world
lived with a teacher
named Jim Kelly
who worked at Spinoza
how I knew the sad tale
a writer herself
trying
said Jim
the sad dear man
having no idea
of her journey
long ago
to the fabled
streets of Greenpoint.

Charles Chaim Wax

Above All Things Desirable

A little man in his late seventies
trudged along
in front of the Hebrew Home For the Aged in Coney Island
grey skull, faded skin,
huge rounded hump on his back
forcing him to totter on in a stooped position.
"The Messiah is coming, " he said,
"Are you waiting also?
I know it's a long time we're waiting.
But He will come. Otherwise,
what is the meaning of our Earthly existence? "
In order to look at me he tilted his head
causing his lips and cheeks to tremble.
"There must be a purpose to life
other than death. No?
What do you say? Walk with me. Walk for the Messiah.
If I only stand my strange shape pains me."
Just then Angie strolled over
and said, " Irving Frankel, you're looking good."
Then appeared a great rush of words:
"We want too much. No?
Perhaps not to want happiness,
not to think of it, then He comes?
Perhaps my suffering—the Messiah's gift?
Never do I rest. Later? After the end? Then?
"Irving Frankel, " said Angie, her voice so sweet, so gentle,
his name like a benediction.
No words now, silence
staring at Angie. "You're a handsome lad, " she said
kissing him softly on the cheek.
Still silence, his face serene,
waiting
Angie kissing him again
this time
a smile.

Charles Chaim Wax

Acquainted With Joy

As soon as I awoke
I knew
there'd be no work
for me today
after all I'd been waiting
the entire winter
for a decent snowfall
and here it was
swirling
out of the sky
brilliant flakes
flashing
falling
without end—
infinity
to touch
taste
smell
see
hear
yet
everyone at
Spinoza High School
thought this need childish
and those teachers
who drove in
from Long Island
or Westchester
positively detested
even an inch
on the ground
but I said, "I was born in winter"
the only defense I mustered
for those devotees
of warm weather.
December 23rd
my earliest memory
dearest mommy
wheeling
my baby carriage
through
a blissful blizzard.

Charles Chaim Wax

Acts of Grace

"What news from Lord Buddha? " asked Kate Callahan just having spent a year with Kogaku Roshi.
I said, "The same...suffering everywhere."
Just then Cookie opened the door of Meng's bathroom and stepped out completely naked exclaiming, "Angel, gimme the perfume."
Angel reached into her mini-purse removed a bottle and handed it to Cookie who returned to the tiny toilet.
Just then an obese man waddled in saying,
"I been looking for you all morning, Angel."
"Sit your ass down, Cornelius."
"I gotta go to work."
"I'm doin' a buttered bagel now, honey. You gotta wait."
"Can't wait, been waiting all week."
Suddenly Cookie stepped from the bathroom and returned to her buttered bagel.
Angel entered.
Cornelius followed her but couldn't close the door because of the big belly his massive frame blocking the view entirely.
But a moment later I had a pretty good idea what was going on when he moaned, "OOOHH, OOOHH."
From behind the counter Huey screamed, "NO NOISE FATTY MAN."
I don't think Cornelius heard Huey's admonition since he continued to moan finally ending his passion with "AAGGHH" as his knees buckled and he fell to the floor.
Angel spit into the sink, stepped over the fallen Cornelius, returned to her seat, and continued to munch her buttered bagel.
Kate Callahan sighed, stared at me finally saying, "Bernstein, what a life...what a life. I mean, that's no way to live. I mean, giving blowjobs in Meng's toilet. And poor Cornelius... everyone heard him moaning no love no tenderness...so sad..."
"I don't know, " I said softly.
Not responding she continued, "So much suffering... every damn place... so much suffering."
"I don't know, " I repeated more softly than before.

Charles Chaim Wax

Addicted to the Infernal Realms

His father hated him and
Martin
an only child. Eighteen he was
the only time I met his old man when he strangled
Martin
with a garden hose.
As we chatted in the living room
his father came in
put an arm lock on
dragged him to the lawn
twisted the tube around his neck and yanked
twenty seconds later he
stuffed the brass spout
into Martin's mouth
and turned the water on full force.
Thirty seconds later he pulled
the hose out of his mouth
and began watering
the lawn and Martin
as Martin
lay sprawled on the grass
gasping for air.
He didn't want to do away
with his only son.
Torture was the game.
Laughing his old man said,
You're all wet.

Charles Chaim Wax

After 28 years in the classroom

took a Sabbatical to discover
what I wanted to do
with the rest of my life
well, that I knew—
photograph write
but to get cash for my efforts
had always eluded me
now with the time off
I thought I had a shot
at figuring out
the great conundrum
but days turned into weeks
no solution and now
exhausted midnight near
needed a bit of cheer
so left to rent A Wonderful Life
at Blockbuster Video.
Once inside I walked up and down the aisles
searching for that fabled tale
and passed a small, thin man
a couple of times
making notes on a tiny pad
after the fourth time I passed him
I noticed an American flag
sewn on the breast-pocket
of his sports jacket
navy blue shiny
more than two sizes too large for him
didn't look at movies
but simply walked
making notes
hit me he was a Security guard
I made a quick turn
and came up behind him
too busy marking the pad
to notice me
saw lines on the tiny paper
then a line through a couple of lines
bunched up marks neatly placed in rows
the guy noted each time
he finished an aisle
with a line on the paper
probably worked eight hours
a lot of aisles
a lot of lines
the harsh flourescent
light
illuminating his valiant efforts
at deliverance
for me no pardon
the night
still without salvation.

Charles Chaim Wax

After Dean Dooling's heart attack

Sprinoza HS descended
rapidly into utter chaos.
During the third week after his demise
ten students were transferred into my Drama class.
"Are you interested in the theater?" I asked each one.
"They put me here" was the response.
I immediately went to Mattie Trachtenberg, the Guidance Counselor.
"What's going on?" I asked.
"We've got a crises here, Bernstein,
so Principal Von Wiggins has decided to isolate disruptive students
by placing them in classes
which will allow these special young people to flourish."
"What about the teachers?"
"You're the only Buddhist in the building."
I thought that an odd remark
but let it pass saying only,
"Well, yes,
but Conrad Kaiser barks like a dog.
What am I supposed do?"
"Let him play Lassie."
"The lad needs treatment!"
"Has he barked like a pit bull yet?"
"Who knows? I'm not an expert on canine cries
a pit bull or a poodle it's all the same to me."
"If he did the pit bull you'd know.
Any other difficulties?"
"Lovely Casimir never wears a bra."
"How do you know?"
"Biggest breasts I've ever seen."
"Never stare."
"Monique Castor wears dentures."
"What has that got to do with anything?"
"Every so often she takes `em out because she says they hurt.
The class goes wild."
"We're all suffering."
"Immaculee Cashew is pregnant."
"Is that a problem?"
"She's in the ninth month. Everybody wants to rub her belly.
I can't get `em to concentrate on learning lines."
"Do improvisations."
"Bibi Bisnath is gonna cut Chaundra Bussey. I'm sure of it."
"Why?"
"Why do you think? Chaundra stole Bibi's boyfriend.
Can't you transfer one out?"
"Into Giles Swan's class? I don't think so."
"He's fully recovered from his mental breakdown."
"Really?"
"Seems like it to me."
"Master Clarke put a thumbtack on Swan's seat.
He sat down straight on it, without a peep."
"I don't get the point?"
"The point, Bernstein, is that the thumbtack

spent the entire day stuck up his ass
because his medication is so powerful
the man has become immune to pain,
and thereafter the wound became infected.

The upshot being he cannot employ
his left buttock for sitting.

Did you ever try to rest on only one buttock,
be it the right or left?

So, when Master Clarke comes into
your class tomorrow check your seat."

"He's coming in? "

"Just thought I'd mention it. Oh, by the way, Debrachristian Romero is coming in also."

"What's wrong with her? "

"She's wants to be an actress."

"At last! "

"Doesn't speak a word of English.."

"She'll do Mime, " I sighed.

Mattie Trachtenberg stared at me.

I waited, perhaps for the next revelation
which I would have to deal with.

Then: "How come you didn't stay Jewish? "

Of course, I was shocked
and really didn't know what to say
given the previous conversation
but her eyes

so yearning

so said: "Couldn't breathe

then I could

but can't say why

I came to his breath

only that I did."

Charles Chaim Wax

After Long Struggle Finally Victory

Following three years without a contract
the union settled
nothing but givebacks
but that's the way it is these days
anyway got a big check for back pay
and immediately bought
a Nikon which could
transfer images directly to my computer
without wires.

I journeyed to the Pier in Coney Island
lusting for the sea, sky, clouds
and the infinite combinations
these natural wonders
gave to humans
then spotted a blind man on a bench
his black Labrador retriever
resting serenely at his feet.

I stared at his gorgeous face
constructing an entire existence
from the electro-magnetic waves
leaping from his brain to mine
a hobby, although few believed
this talent to be mine
when suddenly
he began biting his nails.

I had never seen a blind man
bite his nails
why this should have amazed me
I really don't know
but it did

then he rolled half the leash
it was a long leash
into a tight circle
and once compacted
he unrolled it
and then repeated the process
three times
until the chewing started up again
when without warning he said,
"Fight it. Fight it."
but didn't have to
not for me
I had already felt
the majesty of his mind.

Charles Chaim Wax

Again doom

and I didn't want it, to be close
afterwards unable to escape bad dreams
and the immense sadness of olives
as she stuffed them tightly into the plastic container
red and green and black and "You only
take me here once a month"
referring to Brighton Beach, and the food
stores lining the block
her brother a buddy of mine
run over forty years ago
who knows what happened to her
and then the guy she lived with for a decade
ran away, she said he also
ran away from his first wife,
what that meant I had no idea.
"My eyes feel a terrible strain
when I'm at the computer, " she said.
I said, "Get a new pair of glasses
on Nostrand Avenue, \$35."
"They're only a dollar in the 99 cent store."
"They just make things bigger" I wanted to say,
"don't really incorporate vision correction" but said nothing.
She smiled, a youthful fifty-three, and only
a few wrinkles.
"Unless you want to pay, " she said,
always talking about money, as if she had none,
but with her father's credit cards
wanted for nothing, except love.
Once a week she went to a Recovery group at Lutheran Hospital
started after the man ran away
a place to go
doom less horrific when huddled together
each shattered soul enunciating details.
No hope, I thought
her glistening tears destined to drop
only on the vast desert of her own heart
to no avail
then, Surely hope, a bit
after all she simply wanted a decent lad to spend a dollar
on Chinese food to show he cared, the ache
for movie love long gone from the night
and not wanting to witness the final scene
I could not turn away.

Charles Chaim Wax

All night long searching for an important paper

I could not find
so turned the apartment upside down.
Such a vital item!
if found, I was sure, all my troubles would be gone
but the dream would not comply.
At five I went to Meng's for breakfast
almost empty, surprised at that,
anyway I ordered bacon, eggs, homefries, and a large coffee.
After a few gulps I started to sweat.
A gorgeous black woman sitting across from me
and wearing a nurse's uniform
smiled and said pleasantly, "You sweat on the nose.
Sweat on the nose mean for sure you must be evil
just like my son."
I said politely, "I never heard that definition of evil
but I suppose it's as good as any
since evil is such an unfathomable concept."
I paused, more coffee, of course
more sweat, then: "By the way,
how old is your son
that you already know he's evil? "
"Eight.
But age don't mean a thing.
He shall grow up an evil man
and all my valiant effort shall do no good."
So calm, as if a bit of sweat
were one of the Ten Commandments
yet such a stunning lovely face
and out of the blue I said: "You could be a Supermodel."
She smiled revealing white teeth, straight, strong, gleaming.
finally, "I heal the sick."
"Of course, of course, " I mumbled, staring
unable to deny myself the sight of her fabulous features.
Then: grabbing a handful of napkins
blotted up the sweat from my nose
forehead, arms, cheeks, even lips.
Suddenly Huey from behind the counter:
"Bernstein, you pay, you pay."
"Hot as hell in here, " I said in my defense,
not revealing my true motive
Then heard: "Did you see the newspaper this morning? "
still so peaceful, even after the horror of her own son's fate.
"A woman throw her child from a high window
the little baby only have a chance
of five months in this world.
Now this woman is evil..."
"But did she sweat on the nose? " I asked.
"For sure!
She have to!
But why evil come about
into God's shining world
this I cannot say."

Charles Chaim Wax

All Travelers On the Way To Infinity

As we trudged
to Coney Island Hospital
to visit
Jim Pitt
who'd tried to slit his throat
with the tiny attachment
on a nail clipper
Vinnie Early said, "The depression musta
hit him
after all he ain't a dinosaur. Them critters
never did such a thing
lasted 160 million years
and we humans been here for a million,
something like that,
but the strings
in our brains is knotted
and the nerves
go haywire.
A design flaw..."
John Couch said, "The Almighty
don't make mistakes.
When I was in the joint
they was dying like flies. Hanging with
the belt
the favored method
but the Almighty never sanctioned
such behavior
that was Satan's handiwork.
Do not be confused:
The Almighty is the Almighty
and Satan is Satan."
"All I'm saying, " said Vinnie Early,
"dinosaurs never committed suicide,
and that's a plus on their record."

Charles Chaim Wax

Almost An Illustrious Author

"Bernstein, I envy you, "
said Moses Aaron Ginsberg
having gone from
a hundred eighty pounds
to three forty
in less than a year
because he abandoned
the glittering land
of crystal meth
fearing impotence
stroke
dementia
incarceration.
But I couldn't figure out
why anyone should wanna be me
so said, "Why? "
"The novel."
"Not finished
not published, " I informed him.
Moses Aaron Ginsberg shoved a Three Musketeers
candy bar whole
into his mouth
sucked for a second
then swallowed
since chewing without teeth
presented a problem
"You're the Creator
I'm a zero, " he said.
"Well..."
"What'd you think of my story
A Disabled Father? "
I stared at him
wanting to boost his spirits
so said, "A fine piece of work! "
"You actually
read it, " he blurted out.
In truth
I couldn't decipher
a single word
worst handwriting on the planet
minuscule bits of shaking
from years I'm sure
of ingesting every
exotic drug
known to man
yet Moses Aaron Ginsberg
refused the computer
saying machines frightened him
as did
most everything else
the world threw at him.

Charles Chaim Wax

An Elegant and Romantic Desire

When I walked into the Teacher's Center
Doyle sat on the couch
eyes closed.

When I plopped down next to him
he opened his eyes
moist
as if he had been crying.

"The people
of this world are beyond
my comprehension, Bernstein."
"What? "

Doyle opened his notebook
and removed a newspaper article
which he had cut out
from the Daily News
The headline read:
CHILD-SLAYER KILLS SELF.

"It's about a woman
who killed her three young daughters in 1956
then shot herself at their graves
32 years later. When it happened
a grand jury took no action against her,
instead sending the woman to
the Florida State Hospital in Chattahoochee
where she was hospitalized for 12 years.
How could such a thing happen? " Doyle moaned.
"She cracked up."

"Bernstein, please.
Even I could think of such a simplistic answer,
but I expect more,
much more, from you.

You delve into the secret creases,
and this case
got creases within creases.

Straighten it out for me."

"Why this concern? "

"Well, uh, to be honest,
now that you ask,
I'm scribbling lately,
entertaining the idea of writing a novel,
and this here story
could be the jump off point,
if I could only understand it,
well, the motivation anyway,
but I can't make sense outta
the start,
middle,
or end of the occurrences."

I stared at my friend
Peter Doyle
who at the age of forty-six
had suddenly

decided
to become a writer.
"The seeds of sorrow
never wither," I said.
"OH," burst out Doyle,
"can I use that title?
I'd appreciate a 'Yes"
on this one
buddy boy
to get rolling
on
the great adventure
of
exploring the human soul
to remedy
the suffering
of the world
by telling people
of my discoveries
as
at last
I put pen to paper—
even fame may follow
HOLLYWOOD
who knows.

Charles Chaim Wax

An Illustrious and Sublime Author

When I landed in my third
period class
Trisha stood near my desk
I thought to myself, "She's blessed—
gonna be an honored author one day."
"Bernstein, I want to write
this story, but I don't know if anybody would believe it."
After she told me her idea
I muttered, "When you're
on Oprah
mention my name."
When I walked into the Teacher's Center
food of every kind and description
graced the long table
in the center of the room.
Henry F said, "Bernstein,
Edwardo Jesus Torres
catered the whole thing
in honor of Edwin, his twin brother
died exactly six months ago."
At the end of the period
Edwardo played
Handel's Hallelujah Chorus
for a few minutes
then spoke,
"All of this to honor
my beloved brother,
Edwin Jesus Torres
with God now."
The music commenced
once more.
I closed my eyes
lowered my head
and when I looked up Edwardo's tears
flowed
overwhelmed
I too wept
then raced out
went to the bathroom
threw cold water on my face
and left
only to bump into Trisha
who asked if I was OK.
"Got something in my eye."
Without hesitation she said,
"The first time
you ever lied to me."
Feeling utterly worthless
tears
once more
and the dear girl
whispered,

"Never again, please"
"How'd you know? "
"Heart to heart is where I live."

Charles Chaim Wax

An Uncharted Wilderness

"How could you love such a man? " I asked Kate Hixon
as she sat slumped on the couch in the Teacher's Center.
"All he does is take your money
and ask for more to buy presents
for that other women and you comply."
I paused stared
wanting to ease Kate's pain
trying to be a half way decent Buddhist
yet not having enough wisdom or serenity
finally sighed said sadly,
"After all these years still no marriage ring. Why? "
"Bernstein, " she said, "I've asked that question for nine years
and don't have an answer.
Perhaps his blue eyes suggested a purity
beneath that cardboard exterior
and I was the one to bring forth
this new man. He wears
a long mustache tapered to points
and is immensely powerful. His hands
can literally crush a watermelon to bits
yet his touch...so gentle.
Possibly this contradiction
intrigued me. As you can see
I'm merely grasping at straws.
I would have done anything for him.
I did!
but all my efforts failed.
He fancied himself a director.
Did you ever see Taboo? "
"Murnau's film? a story of the South Seas."
Kate stared. Thinking. Finally asking, "Murnau? "
"A love story. Can't remember if it had a happy ending."
Continuing not interested in Murnau,
"I was given the starring role.
He wrote the dialogue.
Unfortunately the man
doesn't have a modicum of talent..."
"How could a woman
as gifted as yourself fall for this bozo? " I asked.
"My shrink said I'm attracted to men
who will never love me
because I missed
the experience of intimacy
as an infant.
Now I'll have you know
this so called brilliant therapist
was later convicted of Medicare fraud..."

Charles Chaim Wax

An Unexpected Encounter

I went to Moe's Used Books
in Coney Island to look for
The Joys of Yinglish,
long out of print
and even though
it was the last week in September
the temperature hovered
in the mid 80s
and Moe's store lacked an air-conditioner
because all his meager profits
would have been eaten up
by the cost of electricity. Soon I was
sweating and barely able
to breathe
my throat tight and swollen
so I needed
a cool liquid quickly
and plodded along Surf Avenue
to Corn Queen
and ordered a large root beer
but in this particular establishment
they don't give you an item
until the money has been
deposited in their cash register.
I pulled out a fifty
all I had with me
placed it on the counter
and reached for the root beer
but the guy grabbed the cup
pointing to a sign on the wall:
no bills larger than \$20 accepted.
For some reason I blurted out,
"Turn on the air-conditioner,
why don't you?
It's like the equator in here."
He simply smiled.
"Look, I been coming in here
for twenty years.
Lemme drink,
then I'll get change."
He shook his head.
"Where's the owner, Two Ton Tony?
He knows me."
"Deceased, " he said.
When I heard that
my knees buckled
and I clutched the counter. Suddenly
a woman appeared
placing a dollar bill on the counter.
"For the big man, " she said.
I immediately snatched
the soda

gulping it down,
then I turned to her
saying, "Thanks."
She was a prostitute.
The outfit
plus make-up
gave her away
and one word led to another
and soon we were
in room 11 of the Terminal Hotel.
The dear woman
accepted
bills
larger than a twenty.

Charles Chaim Wax

And I know I can do nothing for her

suddenly eighty-four
this woman I have watched for fifty years
her back low now
since the old man
moved in with death
and she didn't
alone and not knowing
how to be alone.
"How do you feel today? " I ask.
She says, "The problems of life."
no more than that
each breath a whisper of absence
as little by little she drowns in a puddle.

Charles Chaim Wax

Angels of the Night

Mary McCue leaned into the shopping cart
for a romance novel
and the fat on her arms jiggled
with forty years of loneliness
squashing the three hundred pounds
against her heart.
Just then Huey called out "Mash ready"
and I heaved the triple portion of potatoes to Mary
who handed me a dollar for Huey
all she could manage at the end of the month
until the Welfare check showed up
yet she needed bulk for her belly
thus the heavenly starch.
Before she dug in
Mary poured a half cup of sugar onto her feast.
"I can't afford cake, Bernstein, " she said
as I stared, though not wanting to.
Just then Candy, Sugar, and Jasmine
strolled in, the night now formerly finished
with the presence of the local ladies.
Mary watched
their gorgeous and graceful forms
float to the table.
Pockets stuffed with cash
they ordered bacon, eggs, homefries, toast,
pancakes, apple pie, coffee, and orange juice
to show they could
but never consumed the entire fare
and when finished
placed the nearly full plates
before Mary
who smiled
eyes alive with adoration
the gift of dreams.

Charles Chaim Wax

Another Day At Spinoza High School

Matters went from
bad to worse
at Spinoza High School
turning the place into
a veritable cauldron of confusion.

First,
Murry Vos was pushed
down a flight of stairs
the man represented
twenty years of experience
both legs broken
out for the term
culprit never caught.

Next,
Henrietta Saxe
finally achieved her goal of becoming
a porno star,
moved to Hollywood,
and changed her name to Darling
thus the Drama Department
suddenly found itself without a teacher.

Then, without warning,
the mouse population
exploded. Marie Simonpoetri,
who taught biology, said the warm moist summer
caused it all. In any case,
they were bold little critters,
sniffing pant legs
and marching across desks
while class chugged on
students
utterly
immersed in joy
as tiny mouse feet
turned boredom
into Pandemonium.

Attempting a bit of creativity
I set bowls of Gerbil food
in the right front corner
of the room for
"Feeding."

No good. Apparently this particular
species had been created with
a sweet tooth
and searched student's back packs for
chocolate chip cookies,
Snickers,
Little Debbie Cakes
and other sundry bits of
concentrated sugar.
I suggested to my students
to leave such tidbits home

"Not coming to school Bernstein, "
said Larry Fiddle.
Others threw papers
slung paper clips
whistled
hissed
hooted
and
in unison
whipped out their goodies
munching loudly.

Charles Chaim Wax

Another Life 5

When I returned to the Terminal Hotel
Frances said to Candy, "I like these little drinks.
I like laughter
and to maintain a good job
but lately I can't work
except once in a while on the street."
"That's alright, " said Candy
opening the bottle of Cherry Liqueur.
"I once was set up
with this guy for a date
when I spoke to him
on the phone
he had a pleasant voice
but when I saw him
he had a big head
like a circle like a full moon
deformed
the features all too big.
the worst Fetish I ever saw..."
"Fetish? " I asked.
Candy said impatiently, "Bernstein,
don't interrupt Franny
just look out the window.
You like that."
Frances stared at me saying,
"Fetish. The evil ones,
the ones who lead you astray.
He went into the bedroom.
and took off his pants
then said for me to come in
for sex.
I told him I'm not like that.
Then he pressed me close
and I smelled the Fetish smell
from his ears
and a little from his anus
but not his mouth.
That's how people are fooled."
And I listened by the window
to profundities, to pain,
patiently, at peace
in a warm room
with Candy and this woman
safe now
the empty streets
distant, at least
a thousand miles away.

Charles Chaim Wax

Another Life 6

"Then there was another Fetish
who lived in the old Lido Hotel.
He had a scar from the side of his mouth
to the tip of his ear, with chains in his room."
"Ain't that always the way, " said Candy.
"What's that mean? " I asked
Not responding, either one, Frances continued,
"I was young and didn't know
he was a Fetish
till I gave him the blow job.
At the time I slept in an empty building
but didn't like that, so when he said
he'd take me to the Lido Hotel
I expected something wonderful
but the Fetish smell only made nightmares.
He drew everything out of me
with his strange laugh
like a fake Coney Island clown."
Candy said, "Bernstein, bring over the food."
I spread it on the bed.
Frances ate her sandwich quickly,
then gobbled a Danish.
saying, "I like good food, especially cake
that's why I'm round."
And then they stared at each other
quiet, content, the seeing enough
dreams reflected
back and forth, the past also
there
impossible to drift far from
one foster home to another
where Candy had spent her youth
cast away
my arms a shelter
of sorts
but not the final home.
Frances talking fast now,
"When I did the blow job
I threw up.
I was very much disappointed."
"There's always that, " said Candy softly.

Charles Chaim Wax

Another Life 7

The window looked in at us
huddled in the Terminal Hotel
the night dreaming of stars
that could never shine in Brooklyn
sucked up by arc lights
harsh, and they never dared to twinkle.
Frances continued, "The animals are everywhere.
You have to be careful.
A boy got killed the other day
by some bad boys
they killed him very badly
and when he tried to crawl away
they showed no mercy
he begged
they shot him in the mouth
and all sorts of places on his body"
Candy said quite calmly,
"There is no mercy
anywhere
on the face of the earth."
"I'll take care of you, " I said.
She stared at me
investigating my face, finally,
"Yes, Bernstein,
I believe you."

Charles Chaim Wax

Another rough day

at Spinoza high school:
Ernie Hopp fell asleep
in class
and somehow
don't know how
some kids wrapped him up
in Saran wrap
thankfully omitting the nose
so he could breathe.

Charles Chaim Wax

As Far As Mortal Sight Can Discern

When I told folks at Spinoza HS
I visited Big Breasted
porno sites on the web
they couldn't believe it,
then quickly became disgusted
finally shunning me
fearing contamination
by association
if the Big Shots found out.
Worst of all
my 19 year old niece,
now a feminist,
said if I didn't quit
she might never speak
to me again
even though I was her only uncle
and had just bought her a car
when she got her driver's license.
Of course,
no one would have known
if I didn't speak up
but I'd grown weary
of studying lengthy texts
delineating denial of self
but she, my niece,
kind of like a firebrand
once an idea took hold
so we discussed the matter
how I meant no disrespect
simply liked curves
and I was a photographer
so it all made sense.
"Bullshit, Uncle Steve.
Women are not objects."
How could I explain
the intricacy of despair
and the damage was done anyway
so I lied
saying, "Never again"
then bought a 21 inch LCD
the clarity
now amazing.

Charles Chaim Wax

As The Sweat Poured

from my skull
in the middle of November
fearing the necessity of
a bathing suit
on Thanksgiving Day
I lunged into
Red Lodge, Montana
twenty years past
the Rockies
deep
in summer snowdrifts
and even the pure gift of
a brief blizzard
the flying ice-crystals
catapulting
my ragged soul
into bliss.

dare I say it—
the happiest moment
of my life.

Charles Chaim Wax

At Four In The Afternoon

I poured a six pack of Rolling Rock
down the throat
with a quart of Bacardi Light
but failed to get there.
heart like a closed fist.
panic
in the burrow.

Charles Chaim Wax

At Four In The Morning

I awoke for my ritualistic
journey through Coney Island
air humid, heavy, ponderous
first gliding along Mermaid Avenue
I saw the hard whore
with long legs who lived in
the Terminal Hotel. For her—
no day no night
then drifted along Surf Avenue
heard a voice say
"Bernstein"
but in such a way, as if she knew me
so I slowed
a woman ran across the street
and said, "Don't you remember our date?
You were supposed to send me
pictures. That was ages ago
and you ain't never sent them."
I had paid
to photograph Minna Ginsberg
in the nude
but after she nodded out—
too much dope—
I took advantage of her
but when the wash of endorphins
evaporated from my brain
I thought,
This is how the dead are:
cold forever and insensate
as the vast stretches
of interstellar space
yet not an hour later
I sought to annihilate
the fearsome distances
and united with her again.
A month later Minna Ginsberg
pumped hot dogs at Nathan's
into the mouths of hungry beach-goers
saying only, "I got tired of the madness."
Now
I gazed at her tense face
as she panted, "I got ripped off
need twenty dollars
do anything for it."
"Anything?"
"Anything."

Charles Chaim Wax

At Spinoza HS mice ruled the night

thousands
secretly alive
in walls and closets and bookrooms
but even in daylight
a bold one would race across my shoes
seeking some mysterious delight
at the other end of the room
fear of humans
bred out of them.
Ziggy the newly installed head custodian
insisted on glue traps
indicating without subetly no cure existed
for the deadly Hunta virus
which floated freely into human lungs
from the dust of dry rodent feces.
At five o'clock in the afternoon
he placed eleven traps in my office
because he wanted me safe
saying I looked just like his older brother
who leaped from a roof in Warsaw
unable to find the perfect word
to conclude a poem
he'd worked on for six years.
As he plopped down the simple
mechanisms of death
he declared, "I am Ziggy the Terminator.
I will kill them all."
All this said in
an Arnold Schwarzenegger Austrian voice
even though Ziggy came from Poland
and in the morning
eleven mice became stuck
though not dead
their bodies
twisted and misshapen in odd ways
searching this unimagivable torment
for a way home
but eventually all
became glued to eternity
then a phone call to Sonny the sweeper
who scooped the scraps
into an immense trash bag.
And this went on
the same routine
four days straight
until too much death
wore out even Ziggy's lust for conquest.
And once more
mice ruled the night
but now
also daylight
the ferocious slaughter of life

coming to naught.

Charles Chaim Wax

At the Crossroads

Treasure pranced in, shook the snow
off her wool cap, sat down, said
"Bernstein, I'm here. What now? "
"Big Breakfast, " I called out to Huey.
"When I think of Andy's future, " Lucy said,
"I don't see it. Just a wall,
ten stories high, painted grey."
Huey appeared with scrambled eggs, homefries,
pancakes, fake maple syrup, and coffee.
Somehow Joe Kelsey had joined us
didn't see him walk over
but there he sat, a smile, staring
at the feast.
"Would you like some, " Treasure asked softly.
"I accept, " said Joe who then called out
to Huey for another plate.
"I wish Andy had a father, " said Lucy,
"but he walked out one morning
and never returned
because he refused to have a son
who couldn't play baseball, or go swimming,
or even eat a bagel by himself...
crippled from the neck down."
By now Joe had shoveled scrambled eggs
and pancakes onto his plate,
pouring syrup over both
then chopping up the concoction
so he could slurp it down
his false teeth having been stolen
three weeks ago
while he slept on the subway.
Outside the snow continued
creating a white wilderness
not yet pure but getting there.
Finished sucking up his syrup stew
Joe said, "Thank you, my dear."
Then to Lucy, "He's alive,
that's all that matters
my son's been in the ground
eighteen years
wife couldn't handle it
went mad
cooped up somewhere in New Jersey..."
"Blueberry pie, " Treasure called out to Huey
Joe's eyes wide now, thinking, hoping,
then the words:
"For you."

Charles Chaim Wax

At the Dragon Gate

Ray Havron walked into the Teacher's Center.
He seemed to have gained weight
since yesterday.

"Ray, can I ask you a question?
It's a little personal,
not too personal,
but a little."

"What is it, Bernstein?
I got things on my mind."

"Did you gain weight since yesterday? "

"I couldn't sleep,
like I said I got things on my mind.

At two in the morning
I ate three bagels and lay down.
No go.

I got up at two-fifteen
ate three more bagels
and lay down again.

Still no go.

I got up at two-thirty
and had a pint of Ben and Jerry.
That did it.

Most of the time I never eat
after twelve
because after twelve
whatever you eat
sticks to you like glue
while what you eat
before twelve has a tendency
to get burned up
but I couldn't deal with
the tossing and turning.
That's the worst."

Charles Chaim Wax

At The Summit

After yet another
rejection letter
I needed the Pier
in Coney Island
and went
and wandered to the end
where I spotted Volck.
"Ever get depressed? " I blurted out.
"At times."
"How'd you get out of it? "
"You got to know life."
Then Volck began walking
but so quickly
I could not keep up with him
as he seemed to float
along the wooden slates
finally he slowed and asked
a cop if he had a dime
for a phone call
because he might need it later.
Volck then loped to a pretty girl
who carried a cardboard box
and asked her
if he could have it.
"No."
Next he asked
a tall thin fellow
if he could have a stogie.
The man shook his head.
Volck said, "Well, you know,
these things cost money."
When we reached
Stillwell Avenue we left
the boardwalk
and headed to Surf Avenue
where Volck asked people for money.
"If you want anything, " I said to him,
"I'll give it to you."
He must have been drinking
before I met him
because now he could hardly stand
a moment later
sitting on the curb
then flat on his back
unperturbed.
I dared
not disturb
the unique
serenity of
Volck's life.

Charles Chaim Wax

At the Western Heaven

What went before
could not imagine
Sunflowers shining in Nebraska
light and more light
and yellow, so yellow
to spread spray of color
beyond distances
and filled with seeds
ah
the seeds.

Charles Chaim Wax

Bad Orb-Stalag 9B On Christmas Day

Vincent Acevado arrived
at Spinoza HS in September
by the middle of October
Principal Frank Drane
had dumped three Unsatisfactory Observations
in his lap.

Since I was the union guy
he came to me.

"The man is evil, " I said somberly.

Two days later Principal Drane
ordered Vincent to produce
lesson plans straight through
until June

or he'd suffer the consequences
of Insubordination.

By November Vincent had lost
twenty pounds.

He said, "Never should have
left my elevator operator job
but my wife's a teacher
said we'd have vacations together
plus I'd be earning more money."

A week later his wife Isabella showed up
at Spinoza
sought me out

I told her, "The man is evil."

She said, "Vincent spends hours and hours
working on his lesson plans
he barely sleeps—

I blame myself
for his torture."

"The man is evil, " I said.

"EVIL...here? "

Then Isabella closed her eyes
her face transformed
as if suddenly in another place.

When she opened them
she said in a flat monotone,

"On Christmas day Vincent's grandfather
Armondo and the other American POWs
were rushed out of the barracks
and lined up along
trenched dugouts
behind them the Germans
stood with machine guns
pointing at their backs
they had to stand
all day

in the snow

it was cold

and the men were bare footed
the Germans refused

to let them put on their boots
and as the day wore on
many were so weak
they collapsed
and fell into the trench
filled with excrement..."
The bell tolled for change of classes
the hall filling
with sounds of children.
Isabella continued, "The Germans
wanted to know who chopped off
the head of the cook
with a meat cleaver
food was so scarce the men were
starving. At the end of the day
the Chaplain convinced
the man to step forward
he was immediately taken away
then the torture began."
Isabella paused
tears now
flowing from her brown eyes
serenely.

Charles Chaim Wax

Being Alarmed At The Greatness of Such A Task

After Vinnie T
sliced off Ted Stern's left pinkie
then broke his left arm
with a baseball bat
for nonpayment of gambling debts
Ted became subdued
then one morning
he began sucking the thumb
on his right hand.
I waited for someone
in the Teacher's Center
to remark on this
Eventually Manton Minimott said, "Ted,
you're sucking your thumb."
"Yes."
"Think you should be doing it
in public? What happens
if a student sees? Or Principal Haydock? "
"My therapist
gimme permission
said it was normal in Regression Therapy."
Minimott exclaimed, "Wonderful
takes a real man
to know he needs help."
"I scared
"that why go, " mumbled Ted Stern,
speaking like a three year old
then he closed his eyes and
curled up into the fetal position.
I said to Minimott, " The first therapist he went to
said he couldn't help him
problems too deep
that he handled only neurotics
said Stern was Borderline Psychotic
so sent him to a Regression Therapist."
Minimott stared at me
his face awash in confusion
"Is that legal? " he finally asked.
"What? "
"Sending away a soul in need."

Charles Chaim Wax

Being At One Time Defeated

I descended into the pit with Caligula
while my hero the Dalai Lama
serenely watched men
sawn in half
their soft flesh
bubbling blood into the air.
And I understood nothing.
Lonely
and longing for
his words:
Goodness inherent
in every heart
he said that again and again
like stars
like wind
a million hours of meditation
so he knew
his breath impregnable
as chunks of diamond
yet I could not shift
from the immense crater of
Caligula's perversity—
slaughter from a jiggling
tongue
devouring my beloved
teacher.

Charles Chaim Wax

Betty's Bliss

Betty breathed vitality
Spinoza High School
could teach her nothing
about life
small, skinny
wore her hair in a pony tail
a smile forever flashing
across her face
in perpetual conflict
with authority
danced in class
smoked in the john
wandered hallways
until kicked out.
I saw Betty a year later
in the subway.
"How are you?" I asked.
"Fine," she said smiling
at ease in her own being,
"just came back from a hearing in school."
"Still the same trouble, uh?"
"Yeah."
The train rumbled
into the station.
Betty did what she wanted
and for awhile
the going might be rough
but in the end
she'd do well—
never abandoning joy
which alone
creates destiny
not merely grim acceptance.

Charles Chaim Wax

Bewildered By Disaster On Christmas Day

"The first time you shoot Coke, "
said Bessie Fountain
sitting on my bed
naked
on Christmas day
"you're gonna experience
something
you'll want
again and again
always trying
to recapture that feeling
and
the memory
will be with you forever
and the memory
hooks you. I'm strong
so I can deal with it."
"You're strong? " I said.
"Strong
that's right
you don't know nothing
about being strong.
Coke wipes you out.
Everything disappears—
everything."
"Even Christmas? "
"EVERYTHING...for a while
and tonight I need
a Super Speedball dropping
through my veins.
See you get some good Coke
and some good Heroin
and mix it just right
and you got yourself
a Merry Christmas. The whole world
says it to you then."
"But you said it works just for a while, "
I whispered
placing my hand on her knee
gently
trying to soothe her.
"IT WORKS.
Don't you never forget
the truth
of escaping misery.
That time is a good time
and just cause it don't last
don't mean that good time wasn't there,
but you ain't strong enough
to handle it
one taste of the feeling—
you're finished

never recover
spend all your days
desperate
searching
for that sweet miracle.
Just drink your little Bacardi, Bernstein,
and leave what
you don't know alone
cause that other stuff is for
some heavy sadness
for me
tonight
for real."

Charles Chaim Wax

Beyond that final blip of breath

Bernstein wept.
Too late.
Fifteen years alive
this beautiful woman
then:
Chained about the neck and wrists
three circles cigarette burned
into her face
raped
eye sockets smashed
finally found
flesh hardly there
only mold merry at the feasting
and the sad tongue pleading mercy
but there was none
in Brooklyn
and at night the dream:
200,00 dead in Darfur
and who dared then to postulate
Heaven or Hell or a heart
without blood
all having been gulped by demons
drunk on murder
singing a tune of their own creation
while the world's tears
chattered in a thimble.

Charles Chaim Wax

Bits of Dust Blown About

Quiet now in Meng's restaurant
in Coney Island as
Treasure felt Sugar's belly
smiled, said, "Bernstein, you."
"Big," I said, gently caressing
the life within her, twin boys.
David Cohen stared at Sugar
reached into his pocket
pulled out a twenty saying, "A present
for your babies
because Heinrich Gross died yesterday."
She took the twenty kissing
94 year old David Cohen on the cheek.
Just then I heard, "Bernstein."
It was Owen, a decent fellow who lived
in his own mind, spinning yarns
and today wearing a cowboy hat.
"Just got back from doing
some helicopter skiing in Banff,
that's near Lake Louise.
Nothing like it anywhere in the world,
like close to God."
"And did you happen to ask
the gentleman why he gave
Gross ninety years of life?" asked David Cohen.
Not responding
Owen went on, "And lucky I was there
cause I saved three people
buried for a week. They was living
on M&Ms and snow."
Suddenly Sugar laughing saying,
"They're kicking."
Treasure feeling, nodding,
then taking Cohen's trembling hand
under the tee shirt to flesh.
His face, that moment, like he would never
die, the glow, touching
so much life, then another twenty to Sugar
saying, "Gross is dead. I beat him."
"Who is he?" asked Sugar
gently placing the second twenty
between her blossoming breasts.
"He experimented on children in WWII
and was never punished for his crimes."
Owen removed his hat, said,
"Sorry for your loss." Then leaned forward
saying, "Bernstein knows
what I'm talking about."
"Yes, yes I do."
"This big dude saved me from
being gobbled up whole
by a forty foot

Anaconda in Brazil."
"Yes, yes I did, " I said, as my hand
drifted into Sugar's belly
stroking the boisterous lads
impatient for their turn.

Charles Chaim Wax

Bright as the Sun and Moon

Gustav Hauck had spent thirty years in a Texas prison
and how he wound up in Coney Island
married to a woman in a wheelchair
I didn't know nor did I know of his crime
but that was long ago
now he was an old man with stories to tell
and I listened because there was always
a kernel of wisdom to them
and never bitterness
in fact the man emanated joy.
John Bannon had just finished describing
the three days he spent in the Brooklyn House
of Detention on Atlantic Avenue
when Gustave jumped right in saying:
"That place is Paradise compared to a jail cell in Texas.
One time they put Duke Durando
in with me. A big man, so no matter what he did
I couldn't say nothing
but the man talked in his sleep.
Night after night. Now I thought
I could deal with anything but the night is special
in prison cause that's escape time,
when you dream of the life
you don't have but might have.
Without dreams you get all tied up in knots.
Anyway, Duke kept it up and I couldn't sleep
in the day time cause you weren't
allowed in your cell
so I started praying for him to get a heart attack
now I know I shouldn't but desperation
made me a sinner.
When that didn't work I told him to shut up.
Sure he said, not taking offense but that night
the talking continued cause he didn't have
no control over the matter.
I'm gonna have to kill the man I said to myself
stick a sharpened spoon into his eye
cause I knew I couldn't win in a fair fight
but the Lord must have heard
my pleas because two days later
Duke Durando was transferred
to some other hell hole
near Laredo."

Charles Chaim Wax

Care

What can I say
When he calls
To tell me
From the hospital
He's still alive
"Great, " I whisper
Wanting eloquence
Or solemnity
Or inspiration.
Then he puts his wife
On the phone
And she cries
Without respite
Until I hear him moan
At the distant end of the phone,
'Enough.'

Charles Chaim Wax

Caught in the Whirlwind of Memory

Daisey's father
leaped into a D train
when she was 28
now at 34
still pain
perhaps
she shouldn't
have thrown him that night
drunk
when he said he'd
never touch a drop
disgusted
Daisey
felt
good
about no longer
sponsoring his illness
and here we were
in Greenpoint
his boyhood
all around us
and she loving me
because
"I knew life."
Standing before
his childhood building
spending his first
14 years inside
she said,
"Father's are funny
when does it end? "
"Never, " I said solemnly.
Startled by the directness
and force of my response
she kissed my lips
wet
from tears now flowing.
"We are born into
the windowless room of
our parent's psyche
and we come to accept
the reality of what is real
for them
but which is not Reality
and when we get older
we see the walls of their house
contain their windows but not ours
their windows are our walls
and if we possess courage
and insight
we transform their windows
into ours..."

Daisey asked,
"What are you talking about? "
"Transformation...but there's resistance—
guilt
awkwardness
horror
shame
the residue of their lives
halts us
still we must persist until
vast clear glass
and even that
disappears—
the Universe twirling
and we
not separate
just steadfast
whirling.

Charles Chaim Wax

Ceiling leaking in the dream...

Chinese guy perched on a ladder
attempted to sop up the water
with a sponge
then staunch
the flow with plaster
in an intricate way
I now cannot remember
when without warning
I pulled off my ears
but no blood
no pain
holding them one in each hand
while they wiggled
waiting
for a tone
any murmur at all
but only the profound
silence of the tomb
while water
dribbled on an earless head
at Spinoza HS told Peter F
he said Not to worry
the Bird Flu
would cure all my ills
imagined or otherwise
told him
he merely repeated my wisdom
which I had given him
the previous day
and he informed me
my wisdom too
repeated from
Taisen Deshimaru
namely
all problems solved
in the coffin.

Charles Chaim Wax

Chinese restaurant

on Broadway and 13th street
reading about insects in
Edwin O. Wilson's tome
then I see one
huge
moving ever so slowly
hope it doesn't come
my way
if it does
gonna smash it
yet desiring not to think
such thoughts
accepting Buddha's pure truth—
all life is scared.
close my eyes
to make the creature
disappear
smile
at least I can still
smile—
one more failed solution
in a life
littered with such moments.

Charles Chaim Wax

Christmas Day

When I ambled into Meng's
the place was packed even though
this was Christmas day.
Well, not every soul in Brooklyn
had a place to celebrate the holiday,
thus Meng's flourished as refuge.
"Bernstein, here, " said Joe Lutz.
"Greetings, " I cheerfully proclaimed
but Joe's drunken breath told another tale
as he sobbed, "My old man
killed himself on Christmas day
and after that things was never the same
mother went nuts
loved my father so
and after that I never got a present.
She tried to raise us kids but couldn't.
Then one boyfriend after the other
in the house and doing things with her.
The worst was a stranger on Christmas day
and my mother always made sure
to have a body on Christmas day.
Never a real tree, year after year
a tiny plastic thing maybe a foot high
without lights."
Just then Treasure showed up
sat smiled said,
"Merry Christmas."
Joe silent staring
perhaps a tear couldn't tell head down.
"That OK to say to a Jewish man, " she asked me.
"Sure."
"And it's gonna snow know you love snow."
"Yes."
Treasure silent, staring at Joe
now at me asking, "What's with Lutz? "
"Father killed himself on Christmas day."
"So."
"Never been the same."
"So."
"You know, couldn't handle it, the pain."
"Then he'll suffer, " Treasure said calmly
as Lutz blinked, then gulped, blinked again
still silent, waiting, wanting
time to shift, somehow turn or bend or break
but Treasure's implacable eyes
would not let that happen
so again: "Merry Christmas."

Charles Chaim Wax

Christmas In June

The hottest June on record
couldn't bear it
so played Christmas songs
sung by the immortal
Slim Whitman
Chairperson Linda
thought such behavior
not profession
ordering me to stop
but my students
as I did
loved the warbling
but she said
I'd be fired if I went on
so I haled the cherished music
Two days later a note from Chairperson Linda
to see her
She began immediately, "Mr. Bernstein,
I've been getting calls all day
from parents complaining about
the fact I ordered you not to play
Slim Whitman in your class. Why did
you force
the parents to call me? "
"Perhaps they're religious."
I started to sweat
a moment later
toppling to the floor.
"What are you doing? "
asked Chairperson Linda.
"Can't function
under these conditions
need an air-conditioned room."
"Mr. Bernstein, get off the floor."
"I'm a human being
I deserve sympathy..."
"The issue is Christmas songs in June."
"The issue is
the hope
of each mortal
in death's lonely night."

Charles Chaim Wax

Circular Plates of Iron Surrounding Their Bodies

After Mona stated I would never be the man for her,
she got rid of me.

I wrote twelve love poems in her honor
did no good, some heroic and published poet from France
having captured her heart, so she said,
and always the center of surprise, that one,
so when Herman Hoffstadt announced, "Just came back from
forty deuce. What a thrill Miss Mona put on me."

I immediately pondered: Could this be my Mona? Since
the dazzling woman forever flirted with imagination's edge
perhaps, and when I saw her I'd ask for a copy
of the French guy's poems, then laugh,
flipping her my thirteenth masterpiece with a smile
and welcoming her back with open arms.

The next day we hopped in my van and headed for forty deuce.
Shorty, a black 78 year old ex-con, next to me up front
Herman in back smoking cheap marijuana.

Once there I parked at a meter on 46th and 8th Avenue
and after hiking around for thirty minutes
looking for Mona's establishment Herman asked, "Which way? "
"You're the one who knows, " I said.

We continued on until we landed in front of
SHOW WORLD. "This ain't it, " he said.

"Let's see naked women, " said Shorty.

We ambled inside, looked around, left.

After that I went into Arnold's Smoke Emporium
to buy a corn cob pipe.

Herman said, "I wanna put five on Jumbo in the 9th."

"You can lose money the rest of your life, " I said,

"we came here to find Mona."

"Oh, man, I know Jumbo's coming up for sure."

We trudged to the one at the corner of 42nd and Broadway
the place a madhouse, Herman made the bet and lost.

"For the last time where's Mona? " I asked him in the street.

"I know she's somewhere."

Once we were in the van

Herman told how he lived off a ketchup bottle
for three weeks when he first arrived
in New York from Ohio. "I squirted a dab

on the palm of my hand every six hours. That killed the hunger."

As I drove home Herman fell asleep in back snoring loudly.

When I saw the Parachute Jump in Coney Island

I asked Shorty, "What's it all about? "

"You tickle me, " he chuckled.

"How'd I wind up like this?

Looking for lost love that most likely never was love."

"You tickle me, " he chuckled once more.

"I guess our life is chartered early on.

The rest is contortion and despair.

We're all in prison, really."

"Talking like that, " said Shorty,
his voice ancient and somber,

"you ain't never
going to make parole."

Charles Chaim Wax

Clobbered By Moonlight

Wide awake at 3: 40 in the morning
the full moon immaculate in my intimate dreams.
Such never-ending splendor.
I began scribbling at once
the splendid sphere demanding a response
also, the passionate expectation
this one would be a winner
bringing tears of joy to forlorn souls.
Ten minutes later no go
mush, so I put up Yamamoto Ginger Green Tea
from Japan, first tasted in 1690
by the Tokugawa Shogunate,
the words still swirling in my mind
without a proper place
when the flame somehow
ignited my shirt searing the skin.
I quickly put it out
but a moment later the utter dread
of burning to death became so real
I felt my blood bubbling into oblivion.
Of course, I dumped the cloth into the garbage
then grabbed a massive magic marker
to engrave the ultimate version on the kitchen wall:
Forget the moon
Watch the flame.

Charles Chaim Wax

Coney Island #33

At two am
In Kennedy Fried Chicken
Mary (Loli's friend)
who had no real home
now in her early seventies
sat
eating
a vanilla ice-cream cone
while the wind
drove the freezing rain
across the polished dark fabulous
streets of Coney Island.
"So cold, so cold, Mary, " I said
"why no coffee? "
She looked up at me
about to speak, she smiled,
no false teeth tonight
"All men I knew are gone, "
she whispered,
not answering the question
or perhaps answering it
the best way she could.

Charles Chaim Wax

Congratulations, Morley

I said as soon as he entered the Teacher's Center.
"Bernstein, you remembered."
"A man's 20th wedding anniversary
doesn't happen every day."
When I said that Ida Rice
hopped up from her chair
and joined us at the couch. "Congratulations, Morley, " she said.
"Thank you, thank you, my friends,
my dear precious friends."
Tears flooded his eyes
and streamed down his cheeks.
"What's the secret? " asked Ida.
Quickly composing himself
he said, "We love each other."
"Love! I'm sick of that word
I've loved countless times
Where'd it get me? Do you see
a ring on my finger? Now damn it, tell me."
Morley stared at her
as Ida's sad love affairs were well known
didn't hide them
indeed the woman felt compelled
to recount the events
in almost embarrassing detail
especially the objects
used to penetrate her
secret site of passion
like Ritz crackers
used by three of her lovers
one in Italy
and two in merry old England
all members of some demented cult
as far as I was concerned
yet I could never figure out
why happiness eluded her:
an attractive woman
intelligent
and with a fine sense of humor.
But her twin sister
also remained unmarried
so perhaps simply the Fate of her family.
"The secret? " said Morley,
"here you have it:
I do whatever my dear wife instructs."
"I did that, " said Ida. "Where'd it get me?
Do you see a ring on my finger?
now tell me, damn you,
my life's almost over
and I don't want to die alone.
Morley said somberly,
"I keep nothing back
Isn't that correct, Bernstein? "

I smiled saying,
"The man spills his guts
every chance he gets
that's a fact."
So once more he repeated his secret:
"I do whatever my dear wife instructs..."
"YOU SAID THAT BEFORE, "
protested Ida.
"...without so much as a hiss, tweet, or peep. Did I put that in? "

Charles Chaim Wax

Continuing To Celebrate the Solemn Festival of Life

As soon as I tottered into Meng's
Sam said, "Bernstein, over here."
Unbearable heat, the humidity a rabid beast
why I came in I don't know.
I plopped down saying, "Hot as hell in here."
"My doctor tells me don't stay in the house," said Sam.
Then added: "I speak to my doctor every day."
"If you had money you'd be better off," said Bill.
Sweat now burning my eyes. Blinking and blinking.
"We did everything wrong," said Sam
"We're not the only ones," said Bill,
"there's plenty like us."
"Huey," I called out, "turn up
the air-conditioner."
People suddenly stare, of course
no air-conditioning.
Sam and Bill without a whiff of moisture
on their seventy year old brows.
"I though I knew it all," said Sam
"If you didn't get married you'd be better off."
"I'm terrible alone."
"I mean financially."
Sam moaned, "I'd be nuts alone."
"What about TV?"
"I watch the radio
but mostly I don't wanna work no more
have to or the money will be down to nothing."
Twenty napkins already used up
still drenched, the lads still going strong.
Bill said, "What's a matter, your brother, the big
financial wiz, Norman, can't help you."
"He tells me to stop eating
but you remember the blue hat?
I lost it
don't know where.
If I found it
everything would be OK."

Charles Chaim Wax

Convicted of Fear

When I exited the train station
at Sheepshead Bay
in Brooklyn
I spotted
my favorite crazy person
talking to himself
so I shifted closer
to hear what he said.
"I wanna see
what's on both sides
of the street," he said
in his nasal twang
then marched
like a soldier
forging ahead
in battle
across the street
looked around
and returned
only to repeat, "I wanna see
what's on both sides
of the street."
so again
the triumphant
stride across asphalt
to concrete
then
the intense search
at last
returning to his starting point
eight times repeated
when I cried out
"BRAVO"
yearning
for his peace
in craziness
where I had tried
often to dwell
but could not
hugging
a bit of sanity
fearful
of what
letting go
might bring.

Charles Chaim Wax

Crackling In the Flames

Walked into Peter F's
office
sat
then said,
"Another rejection."
He swung his feet
on the large metal
desk
saying,
"Bernstein,
wasted your
life
at the Board of Ed—
36 years
shoulda gone to Viet Nam
put out the Great Novel
famous
money
Hollywood."
In my defense I said,
"Father hated me
mother crippled me."
A look
shot across his face
awe
sadness
couldn't be sure
"And if not an author
you coulda been
the greatest shrink
ever."
Once more the stare
then
"Father beat me
no mercy in the man
and mother
turning away
like
the purple bruises
were painted on."

Charles Chaim Wax

Danger Perceived And Rectified

One day
in the Teacher's Center
Nellie Nilan
sobbed uncontrollably
so Henry Heron
being a friendly fellow
put his arm around her shoulder
saying, "My dear, my dear."
Nellie turned to him
whispering hoarsely, "I got now
one foot in the grave."
"The glass is half full
I always say," proclaimed Henry Heron cheerfully.
"ASSASSIN," she screamed.
After that
no one dared
try to comfort her
because if the genial Henry Heron
had failed,
what chance did they have?
so day after day
she sobbed in the Teacher's Center
no one attempting to quell
Nellie's weeping
even though that noise
unnerved everyone.
Such a tone!
the reverberation terrifying
each individual
calling to mind remembered tragedies.
Then
I alleviated
the menopausal horrors of Nellie Nilan
through the use of nutritional supplements
and teachers at Spinoza High School
approached me for recommendations
on all sorts of medical problems
the most common being
corns
obesity
nymphomania
hemorrhoids
gout
gallstones
liver damage
heart murmurs
and melancholia
which
David Solomon
had suffered from
for more than
two decades—

600 mg of 5-HTP
did the trick
sent him
spinning like a top
but afterwards
I closed up shop
because
he began calling me
The Master
out of gratitude I'm sure
but
wasn't true
and Truth
is sacred.

Charles Chaim Wax

days

when I started
the bottle
early
then floating off
the whole universe
just
the difference between
vodka and scotch

Charles Chaim Wax

Deep Stains of Incurable Woe

"To make a long story short
we're both losers," said Harry Jacobs
sitting on the couch
in the Teacher's Center.
Outside the wind slammed snow
against the frail window
trembling in the blast.
"My father's fault," I said
staring at the traffic slowing in the storm.
"Everything's possible," Harry declared,
then went on to tell me
how his radio station
would soon be up
and running
and how during the summer
he'd tour Europe
playing his music
all of this set up
by his Danish ex-girlfriend.
"Not that he wanted
to ruin my life
but he did
ruin my life," I said.
"Who?" asked Harry
not remembering our conversation
of a minute ago
probably dwelling in fantasy
while I spoke.
"My old man."
"Blame yourself, Bernstein,
only way to recovery
this delicacy
from sixteen years on the couch
one confession after the other
and yes
I did love my mother."
The world fading now
people fading too
into white swirls
lifting earth
all of it
high
past memory.
"Any yellow pills left,"
Harry blurted out.
"Good eh?"
"Like an infinite movie—
happiness from the first frame
to last."

Charles Chaim Wax

Defying Sudden Destruction

I spotted Henry on the corner
so I joined him
then we both stood there waiting.
Henry's pants were too long
and dragged on the ground, thus tattered
and his shirt was buttoned haphazardly.
He graduated from South Shore HS in '67
must have been there with me but we never met.
I asked if I could take his picture.
He asked if I was the man
who took the picture of Vinnie the Tongue.
I said I was the man
then told me Vinnie had passed.
Suddenly his white tongue shot out
asking if he could replace him
and be called Henry the Tongue
said it was OK by me
and began to take his picture
but he quickly put his shirt over his head
so I couldn't photograph his face
finally informing him,
"You'll never be called Henry the Tongue
if you don't let me take your picture."
The shirt stayed on. I clicked away
and after seven snaps gave him a dollar
which calmed him down.
Henry had last worked in '72
as a messenger but now subsisted
on the generosity of passers by
never having sought Welfare.
John Guth appeared staring at the headless lad.
"What's wrong with Henry?" he asked.
"Can't take the pressure of life."
"He think a shirt over his head's gonna help."
"John," I said somberly, "who knows."

Charles Chaim Wax

Deliberating On the Circumstances Around Him

Even in high school Irving pondered the profundities
not interested in basketball or hot dogs,
luxurious sneakers or big breasted women.

As the years flowed one into the other
his investigations became focused on evil alone
of course no time for college, or a job
but luckily Irving's father
owned a used car lot on Coney Island Avenue
churning out enough cash
to set Irving up in his own apartment,
plus a tidy sum for incidentals, like food.

Lately all he'd say:

"Mao murdered 70 million."

The first 50 or 60 times I nodded
then simply sighed
having no words to say.

Then one day in Meng's a new story line
about a woman who jumped to her death
because she was about to be evicted
from her apartment

where she had lived for 28 years.

This time I had a word to say
saying, "Rotten capitalist bastards
their only God is money."

Suddenly tears now

Irving sobbing, then coughing
couldn't catch his breath

when John Toomey showed up
plopped down said,

"Can't believe what happened to me, "

then swallowing deeply
from his bottle of Thunderbird.

Well, why shouldn't the man drink
homeless in the midst of a Coney Island winter.

Another swallow finished the wine
so Toomey looked around for a possible taste,

at last noticed Irving weeping
said, "What's up, pal. Can't be worse
than the mess I'm in."

"More? " I asked.

"You're a good man, Bernstein,
not many like you."

I marched out, came back, handed him the treasure
then gulping, then a smile saying,

"Now do a good deed
and make this guy stop moaning."

Irving quiet now, tense, face white,
lips twitching, ready to begin again.

"Sad, " I said to Toomey, "a woman jumped
to her death because she was
gonna be evicted, ."

Suddenly Irving blurted out,

"I didn't know if I did
I would have asked my dad to help."
A monumental gulp this time
amazed at Toomey's fortitude, the pint gone,
staring, eyes glazed over
ready for the Arctic streets awaiting him.
Finally: "God seen
let her fly—
you ain't the Almighty."

Charles Chaim Wax

Delivered From Fears

This guy wrote 115 poems
not a single comment
amazing stuff
to me
I offer praise
fully deserved
and not just
because he treads
the Buddha's path
simply
his words
stars
blasting bits of joy
into sad human eyes.

Charles Chaim Wax

Devoted To His Art

After ten years of teaching
in Brooklyn
I attended
the Rochester Institute of Technology
for three years
and needed only to present my Thesis
but broke
and hadn't paid a credit card bill
in months
perhaps a year
so I sought a job
answering an ad for a "Legal Editor"
went to the place near Avon, NY
and was given a Xerox copy of
a Local Ordinance
the instructions simply saying
Revise,
correct,
and clarify.
The Ordinance was entitled:
Unlicensed Junkyards in Palmyra
the entire paper
printed in extraordinarily small type
and written in the most
obtuse legal language
so that not only couldn't I understand
the text itself
but the instructions
left me mystified
as to exactly what I should do
yet I took a closer look
but hadn't the faintest notion
what kind of corrections
were needed. At that moment
I longed
for the emotional subtleties of
a poem
but I figured
the best thing was to transform
the entire text
into simple declarative
sentences so I flooded the paper
with periods.
"Time's up, " said the woman.
"Should I call? " I asked
"Don't call us, we'll call you."
The next day I saw
a classmate, Bill Binter,
told him of the opening
for the Legal Editor job
because he too was looking for work."
He said, "Sounds horrible

Damn it, Bernstein,
don't torture your eyes by reading
tons of local ordinances. Just wait—
we all have to. Our time
as artists will come. Hell—it's here now
we just don't get paid that's all."
On Monday morning
a man knocked on my door. "Who's there? " I asked.
"J. J. Commander
from the Commander Collection Agency."
"Yes."
"I'm here to see Steve Bernstein."
"Deceased, " I said solemnly.
"Who am I speaking to? " he asked.
"Lyman H. Hoysradt
I moved in yesterday.
I have a brain tumor."

Charles Chaim Wax

Diligent In Correcting Evil

When Jim said
I'd saved his life
I simply smiled
at a loss for words
a Brooklyn fellow like myself
always lived here
as a kid
and today with his wife
and six children
a detective for ten years
now on disability
went nuts
and always loving literature
tried his hand at teaching
thinking his passion for poetry
would be enough
not enough
gave him a few pointers
afterwards
Jim got the hang of it
his class no longer chaos.
One day I blurted out,
"What happened
when you went nuts? "
feeling I knew him well enough
to ask the question.
"This once
but never again."
I nodded.
"Couldn't live in slime
day after day
the damned
the doomed"
Jim closed his eyes
then without warning
they shot open
"Got this tip from a snitch
a drug dealer snuffed a mule
because she didn't turn over
all the dope
found a pregnant girl
with her throat slit
bed soaked in blood
belly cut open
fetus ripped out
throat slit too
Bobby Velsor
my partner
fell to his knees
made the sign of the Cross
then wept
me

not a tear
just huddled in a bathrobe
seven months
my beloved Brooklyn
turned
to shit.”

Charles Chaim Wax

Dinner In A Diner In Dansville, NY

When I left Brooklyn
for the Rochester Institute of Technology
I'd thought
no more
odd ducks
dwelling in their own world
here in the majestic rolling hills
of Western New York State
but not so
perhaps such a condition
simply the result of life
pressing too heavily
on fragile souls—
anyway one day
after photographing in
Stony Brook State Park
with my 8x10 Toyo view camera
I sat in the Cup and Saucer Restaurant
in small town called Dansville
ordered grilled cheese, fries, tea with lemon
old fellow next to me
asks, "Got any chili? "
not waiting for an answer says,
"Not interested now. No. Not today
In the future. Well, maybe in the future."
"We have it now, " said the waitress.
"Cup of barley soup, " he informs her
and puts in half a tin of milk
immediately sucking the concoction down
no spoon
other uses for that implement
filling it with sugar
dumping it straight-away into his mouth
followed by a glass of water
not finished
with his feast
put salt on his palm
and licked it off with his tongue
all this time clearing his throat
then sugar spoon
water
licking of salt
that done
to the toilet
exits five minutes later.
"Any luck? " asks an old guy
no answer
just sugar in the spoon, water, salt
all the while clearing his throat.
I blurted out,
"Were you perchance
born in Brooklyn? "

Charles Chaim Wax

Don't get many fan letters

well, most people don't read my stuff
cause not published
except in little magazines
with an average circulation
of under a hundred
but one day got a letter
from a guy in prison
saying:
Greeting
from the mortuary
found your writing in Monozine #3
somber
yet cleverly amusing
your bio indicates publication in 50 zines
if you have any please send
zines pass the time
gonna be here
for another eleven years.
I laminated his letter
hung it on my wall
then Xeroxed my 3,487 page novel
WARRIORS OF THE UNSURPASSABLE COMPASSION
and sent it off by UPS.
Six months later received a note:
You're the greatest
Send more
The longer the better.

Charles Chaim Wax

Dreading Certainty

When I entered
the Teacher's Center
I could barely contain myself
saying, "All of a sudden
tomatoes
became my favorite
like apples I eat 'em..."
Just then the cell phone
chimed
Vincent Hale immediately
flipped it open listened
and a moment later said, "Don't worry
just lay down
put a cold compress
on your forehead
and yes, yes, I'll be right home."
Henry F glanced at me.
Vincent moaned, "Mary thinks
she felt a lump
on her left breast
she's terribly worried so I'm leaving."
Mary Hale suffered greatly,
in the mind,
nevertheless
such suffering was all too real—
a hypochondriac
the slightest ailment set her off
like two years ago
she experienced a pinched nerve,
but to her
a melon sized tumor
caused the pain
even though doctor after doctor
assured her the situation
would resolve itself
which is what happened
but Mary knew an irrefutable truth—
one day death
and this thought
haunted her like a plague
so she wanted absolute assurance
from every doctor
whatever ailment she thought
she had
would not lead to death:
a hopeless quest
but Vincent loved her
so on and on
to every doctor
in Brooklyn
up to "M"
so far

Mary
still
in terror
yet hoping her luck
would change
with "M"
the first
letter
of her name.

Charles Chaim Wax

Dueling With Memory

John Walsh wanted to be a psychiatrist
sadly he never finished high school
and could hardly read
and would go days
speaking a strange language
only he understood
finally returning to English
nevertheless he studied
the human mind
and asked if he could be called Doctor.
I had no desire to dash
any man's hopes and dreams
so when I walked into
Meng's Restaurant in Coney Island
I sat at his table and said, "Doctor,
a guy I know is drinking heavily
and the doctor said he gotta quit
or he's gonna croak,
plus he got Hepatitis C
and can't control his bowels
thus he's soiled
the couch innumerable times
and every chair in the house
thus his wife is going through hell
watching him drink himself to death,
to say nothing of constantly
disinfecting fabric.
He went away to dry out
but as soon as he came home
he started in again."
Without a moment's hesitation
the Doctor said,
"Bernstein, the man's on a suicide trip
like in my home town a guy was on
the same booze journey
but he was strong as an ox
In fact we called him that, Ox.
'Hey, Ox, lift that car.'
and he'd do it.
Eventually he hung himself
from a pipe on the ceiling
cause it was taking
so long for him to die."
"Why'd he want to do away with himself?" I asked,
"The man was strong on the outside
but weak on the inside
from a trauma
like when your old man
smashes you in the head
with a 2x4 cause you dropped
his favorite tea cup.
See maybe this guy

got thumped twenty times,
and that's the magic number
cause five bashes
a man can recover from
but twenty wallops
no way."
He paused, closed his eyes,
sighed, then said,
"A lousy teacup
and if not that
any old thing
to bang away
on
brains
so scrambled
sometimes
I forget my own name."
"Doctor, " I said,
"you're the Doctor."

Charles Chaim Wax

Dwelling On Steep Rocks

Frank Lawlor
watched the vast Atlantic
with me
as we stood
on the Pier in Coney Island
John Doyle
at our feet
passed out
from who knows
how many bottles of Thunderbird
"I like to stay awake," said Lawlor,
"drinking's not my thing
like to see what's going on
cause if you're drunk
and got your eyes closed
someone could
smack you
and you don't know who did it
so I want to be awake to see who did it.
"But guys
like Doyle
want
to be out of this world."
"Fellow I know
sick and tired of life
got five kids
wife left him
29
and he knew her
since she was ten
only woman for him
now stands in the middle of the street
saying, 'I don't want
to live no more.'
drinks everything
she left him
cause even when
she was with him
he drank
didn't care
what happened to him."
Suddenly
Doyle's eyes
fluttered open
"Got a taste," he mumbled.
'Stop the booze," Lawlor said.
"I guess
that's a No,"
I slipped a five
out of my pocket
lifted Doyle to his feet
and passed him the bill

he took it
kissed my hand
then tottered away.
Lawlor shook his head.
I said, "Never forget
the other suffers
had that line in my head
since I was twenty-six
can't remember
if I read it somewhere
or made it up
myself—
anyway
he'll be happy
for awhile
and happiness...
what a blessing! "

Charles Chaim Wax

Entangled in the Nets of Desire

By now the snow a foot deep on the Pier
and still tumbling downstairs to earth
the sea and sky a vast swirling
the heart in awe, aching
solitude now welcome
yet needing a deeper solitude
until breath and air one utter moment
folded neatly into ancient stars
doing what they do
simple as that
almost eternal yet not truly so they too
eventually shifting to driest dust
floating through inconceivable distances.
"Bernstein, " I heard, the voice of Billy Flynn
unmistakable. "Down here."
"Where? " I asked, almost sad to hear a human.
"Water's edge."
I trudged from the Pier to the boardwalk
then down the steps to his spot by the ocean.
I didn't ask the why of his presence
probably like my own
seeking a semblance of transcendence.
He tilted the bottle of Thunderbird to his lips
took a hit, then heaved it
into the immense invisible sea saying,
"Katy created another baby
no father again."
The cold now suddenly enough
I said, "Hot chocolate? "
Silence until we sipped the steaming sweetness
under the orange heating coils in Nathan's.
"My kid sister, fourteen younger than me
raised her up, after the drugs wiped my mother
off the face of this earth, did my best,
still Katy dropped out of high school with her first, a mistake
but six more, that's total catastrophe
with no ring on her finger
no name ever mentioned."
Outside the windswept snow
everywhere, no sign of let up.
"Why? " asked Billy.
"Needs her belly filled
forever, " I said, then added,
"If I were a woman—the same."
then stared at the superb display
of ten billion unique snowflakes
so generous
with the wonder of creation.

Charles Chaim Wax

Ernie Hopp threatened to strangle

Principal Tom Tartt
with piano wire
made sense
since Hopp taught music
police were called
spoke to my buddy
Officer Frank Belson
who said,
"Bernstein, being UFT Chapter Leader
ain't no bed of roses."
I smiled wearily, then whispered
"Pressure's too much for any man
and Ernie Hopp's not any man
forever writing symphonies
and screaming in the middle
of the night
Mozart eats Fruit Loops
this from his landlady
during eviction proceedings."
"Not part of UFT duties, "
said Belson, "yet you went—
always the generous man."
To make a long story short
Hopp apologized
said he ate some bad oatmeal
in the morning at Clement's Diner.
Belson must have seen
my weary face because he said,
"Need a lift home, Bernstein? "
"In your cruiser? up front? "
Off we zoomed
along Ocean Avenue
Well, the man never forgot
the pictures I snapped of his daughter
at her Confirmation
and not a single pimple
plundering the photograph
hours in the darkroom
to do it
this before digital
but the smile
on that dear girl's face
staring at her own image
immaculate
and shining
like a Queen on the highest throne
and don't you know
of course
the blemish faded
from her face
still
from my own hand

that brief bliss
ah!
felt like the Almighty.

Charles Chaim Wax

Even Zen Masters Make Mistakes

Kogaku Roshi had just finished his opening Teisho,
a speech given to spur students on
when Trentino leaped from his full lotus position,
pranced to Kogaku Roshi's mat,
and kissed the edge of it saying,
"You are the only true Master."
I was shocked,
as were all the participants.
Head Monk Hugo glanced at
the Zen Master. There must have been
some kind of telepathic communication
because a second later
Hugo lowered his eyes and stared at the floor.
"ONLY TRUE MASTER. PAIN, "
bellowed Kogaku Roshi.
"Yes, yes, " Trentino babbled.
"ALL NIGHT SIT, " Kogaku Roshi replied.
Trentino immediately rose,
tiptoed to his mat,
and resumed the full lotus position.
Hugo tinged the gong five times.
When I heard that sweet sound
my heart shuddered. Five tones meant
a Double period. I instantaneously
remembered the agony of a Double sit
during the second Sesshin
and that torment occurred
at the very end of the Sesshin
but now we were starting off with it.
After ten minutes I started talking
to myself. I didn't care, Mostly:
Kogaku Roshi is not the Buddha, far from it
for I feared the great Zen Master got it wrong.
I know he wanted to teach Trentino
about who the true Master was,
but not this way
because the guy was a ballet dancer
and could sit a week without a scintilla of pain,
like some of the other circus performers here.
This wouldn't teach Trentino a thing
but for guys like me, with legs
like blocks of wood,
this was going to be hell.
A jolt of pain hit me, and lingered.
I waited for it to pass.
The pain did not pass. I began to sweat as
I actually felt the bones in my ankles slowly crack.
"It's damn easy for an acrobat to enter
the Kingdom of Heaven, " I said,
making sure not to vocalize the words,
but the ever vigilant Head Monk Hugo bellowed,
"ONLY BREATH."

Charles Chaim Wax

Everyone Became Silent And Wrote

as I opened the Journal Folder
to Louise Zincke's paper
which she handed in two weeks ago
the last time she appeared in class:
"Who should I blame for my down falls? myself? my mother? I may not blame her for
my falls, but I do blame her for her down falls. Most of the time when she fall, I fall.
One specific time I fell with her was when she got pregnant with me. She was confused
and I was caught up in the confusion."
I quickly placed A+
on the paper
suddenly
joyous
feeling my babbling
about the miracle
of the Journal
was actually true.

Charles Chaim Wax

Excelling All Other Bliss

I came upon a black walnut tree
and searched high the branches
for perfumed green fruit
which surrounded
a hard particle of the tree's
soul
but I didn't spot any
so I searched the ground
where many were embedded
in the grass
but not green anymore—
dark brown
and had begun
to rot. I knelt
plucking one
sniffed
no trace of exquisite essence
the skin emanated
at birth
only decaying fruit
dwelling in
my hand
squeezing
to liberate
the seed
then
to dig a hole
dropping in the kernel
completing the miracle of
Earth's
perpetual transformation
even though
most certainly
I'd be dead
before
the scented fruit
swayed in a summer breeze
a gift
for all
who'd
tread
upon this ground
I now
briefly inhabited.

Charles Chaim Wax

Falling Asleep At 5: 30

in the afternoon
the sweetest part of my life
no solutions
life stained
an adamantine wrinkle
in my heart
wanting oblivion

Charles Chaim Wax

False Hope Or No Hope

When there's no hope you act
Because what else is there to do,
Just go on, head down,
Throat stripped bare of moans,
Ready for motion.
But false hope keeps the day from
Burrowing into the brain
And always propels a bit of tomorrow
Into the very midst of now.

Charles Chaim Wax

First Sermon of Autumn

Every so often
I felt the need
to spice up my class
with a sermon
"I do not fail you, " I began.
Immediately Oscar Bice
called out,
"My good Sir,
I believe you and you alone
gimme a 50."
Undeterred I continued,
"You fail yourself
ponder this: in fifty years
what?
time flies
gray hair arrives
and soon after
the coffin
luckily
just before being shoveled into
that everlasting box if doom
comes the question:
what is the meaning of Life?
If you can't answer
forget it
You're bound for Hell
on a one way ticket
and that's a fearsome trip
no way out
once the flames
crisp up your flesh
but you don't burn up
everlasting torment
TORMENT
therefore I say unto you
READ A BOOK
soothe
your troubled souls."
"You sound like my grandma, "
Oscar Bice noted.
"What a woman! "

Charles Chaim Wax

First snow of the year

elated rapture at last mine
pranced into the Teacher's Center
at Spinoza high school
sat next to Morris Klein
"What'll the Almighty do next, " I blurted out
referring in my mind
to the wonder falling from heaven.
'Don't ask, " sighed Klein,
his voice thin weary
didn't like the sound
not now
not the mood I wanted.
"Millie's daughter, Nellie,
got brain cancer
fighting for her life
Millie calls
then cries the whole time
she's on the line
can't take it anymore
can't take it
just...
know it's a terrible thing
but can't listen to her
cry
anymore."
stared at Morris Klein
Millie his childhood friend
from the Bronx
52 years
said not a word
had no words to say
"And Nellie
with a five month old baby
darling Fannie
and whenever Millie visits her
can't take it
her daughter in bed
no hair
head blown up like a balloon
from the chemo
four holes drilled through the skull
into the bone to get at her brain
to kill the cancer with chemicals."
stood up
patted Morris on his quivering shoulder
then headed for Flatbush Avenue
snow still descending
on the humans
suddenly a shiver along my spine
thought I saw
Irving Mandelbaum
my teacher of Hebrew

at CCNY forty years ago
couldn't be
eighty at the time dead for sure
but what he said in class
remembering his father's death
in Tel Aviv
heard the words
"Everyone walked
the sunny streets
my dear father
rotting in the coffin."
Rotting his word
"Only life..."
filtered through
the drifting ice-crystals
raced inside to Morris
mumbling
"Only life...
only life..."
lifted his head eyes red
a faint smile
sliding across wet lips
"I know...I know
but her voice..."
a pause
then silence.

Charles Chaim Wax

First teaching job a real hell hole

no hope
hadda stick it out
or off to the
jungles of Nam
greeted each day with
"Not you again Bernstein"
thought they'd run me off
like they did the three
souls who vanished
in a hail of paper clips
and thumb tacks
but my buddy
Michael F
told me tales—
once head held high
proved his courage
in the war
a year later
changed
now a white faced invalid
dwelling in a wheelchair
no feeling
below the neck
when once
every Brooklyn girl
he caressed
nibbled a bit of Paradise.

Charles Chaim Wax

First Time Out West

cannot go on
forty miles from the Colorado border
in Kansas
temperature at
one hundred and four
unbelievable heat desolation
humidity
enervating.
started out in Salina
called Boulder Holiday Inn
all rooms taken.
stopped in Collyer, Kansas
pop.187
wide street blistering.
the couple
in the only store in town
said they were from
Gunninson, Colorado.
'they got a Holiday Inn? ' I asked
'cause Holiday Inn
delivers the premium cold air,
something to do with conduits and
special insulation
only place I stay.'
'never gets past 70, '
the saintly woman said
about her home town,
'and at night
all the frosty stars
you can gulp.'

Charles Chaim Wax

Following the Scent

When I entered Meng's
I sat with John Hartnett, a convicted felon,
and Lotte Light, an aged courtesan,
both only with a cup of tea between them
so I called out to Huey, "Breakfast Special"
wordless while both devoured
the steaming food until each plate gleamed.
Then Hartnett began his prison stories.
Well, the man had few other memories
spending 48 of his 68 years
in a Texas prison.
"You never speak to anyone before breakfast
cause every guy in the joint leaves at night
and drifts to a different place
but the nightmare returns at first light
and they know for sure they're back
and hungry
so you don't ever talk before breakfast,
but afterwards you can mumble
nobody minds."
"Dessert?" I asked
but really didn't have to
because I already knew the answer.
Lotte said, "Blueberry pie,
if possible."
Strangely, Hartnett silent
staring
perhaps traveling
even though
now free
at last.

Charles Chaim Wax

For Julia Dulon

One my students at Berriman Junior HS
dead now, no chance for her childish dreams
ever to unfold or fail
a drunk in a demon car
heaving an entire life into an irrevocable coffin.
Twelve summers, that's all.
She sat in the first row, fourth seat
chubby, face like a butter ball, soft
always well dressed.
Julia adored cosmetics
had a special purse filled with
varieties of perfume, mascara, eye shadow,
false eye lashes, nail polish, blush
no lipstick, never asked why,
but eye shadow her passion,
especially blue and white.
"Julia, you're in a classroom, " I said.
"We don't put on make-up here
we come to learn."
"But, Bernstein, don't I look pretty? "
Julia become emotional at times
if someone took her potato chips,
or looked up her dress.
Thomas Minton crawled around the room
searching for fallen tidbits, a potato chip here
a pencil there, scraps of paper actually causing delirium.
One day during an intricate application of eye shadow
Minton stared up Julia's dress
a good five minutes before his shrill squeaks startled her.
"Bernstein, " she said angrily,
"you better tell that boy
not to look under my dress
or I'm going to beat his butt."
Julia's purpose in life was to discover
what it meant to be a lady.
She had come to believe reading
really didn't have much to do
with such a sublime mission
a lady meant wearing a lovely dress
with make-up perfectly applied.
I tried to make Julia happy
her innocence so overwhelming
so I said, "Your dress is gorgeous,
those shoes utterly fabulous
please, model for us."
She pranced to the front of the room
and turned and twirled
as she felt a Supermodel would turn and twirl
I clapped. A few students joined in.
She bowed.

Charles Chaim Wax

For Some Time Now

For some time now
I have been getting
the feeling of creation
That that
Is a way
And this time
After so long
It would be real.

Charles Chaim Wax

For the last forty-two years

Edna Ash had not permitted
her husband Harvey
to step foot in the living room.
In fact she didn't allow her daughter
to step foot in either.
I don't know what the living room
represented to her,
perhaps a pristine showcase for furniture,
but Harvey never disputed her command.
And now he never would.
Dead.
And the daughter barely alive
having just suffered her fourth
nervous breakdown
watching her father's face
turn blue
as he toppled helplessly from a chair
near an open window
in the kitchen.

Charles Chaim Wax

For the Love of Snowflake

My sister spoke for no more than two minutes
to her twenty-one year old son
from a previous marriage
now living in Florida.
"He's gonna kill me," she said plopping on the couch.
"That boy's gonna kill me."
"What happened now?" asked her daughter Annie.
"Crying like baby. Ma! Ma! help me!
wants to borrow \$700
don't he know I'm down to my last dime already."
"I thought the bankruptcy cleared that up," I said.
My sister looked at me, amazed
at my utter failure to grasp her financial situation.
"Of course I told him it was out of the question
then he asked if you could lend him the money."
"Me? Well...what for?"
"After Navin's girlfriend dumped him he was lonely
so his father suggested a pet for company
next day that lowlife sold his own son
a supposedly 'pure bred' Pomeranian for \$200.
Now Navin says Snowflake needs braces."
"Never heard of such a thing," I said.
"Nobody ever heard of such a thing!"
"Is he serious?"
"The teeth ain't aligned right, that's what he told me
so Snowflake can't hardy chew, shrinking away,
getting to be skin and bones says Navin."
"The dog's damaged goods.
Tell Navin to demand his money back."
"I told him, I told him," my sister sighed wearily.
A pause. Deep breathing. Staring hard at me.
"He said he couldn't live
through another loss."

Charles Chaim Wax

Forever and Forever

So sad
so sad a life
to steal a poem
to write a poem
What's the difference
Truth beckons the heart
Always
As silence slips into eyelids
Again remorse
Again
Well, hope is
Hope is...

Charles Chaim Wax

Freezing

Today is the first day
the temperature
will go below
freezing.
Winter is here!
at last
Now I will freeze
There isn't
anything like it.

Charles Chaim Wax

Gates And Barriers Gone

Frannie shuffled into Meng's
face weary, heart wearier still
pursued.
Harry smiling saying,
"Today you shine like a star."
Harry always ready to uplift a soul
if he could.
"Indeed, " I said
wanting the same in his presence.
Frannie, eyes singing for now said,
"When you Display
everybody loves you.
Your spirit and body feels free
and a million people will follow you
and never leave you.
It's a true image."
"I know, " whispered Harry.
Frannie went on, eyes shifting
remembering, terror tumbling in,
"But there's things against you.
like the 666 Beast is against you
with Mental Talk.
Terrible talking
and the Beast has many heads
all talking Mental Talk
at the same time.
Swollen tear heads.
Fetish heads
telling you sweet things
so you'll go
to their Fetish rooms
filled with knives and chains.
I don't have a chance."
"The great great truth
is always near, " said Harry
gazing into Frannie's eyes
"Indeed, " I said.
"The Fetish men torment me, " she said.
"A small matter, " said Harry.
Silence.
Then, "Bernstein? "
"I don't know, Harry."
"We are here
we are in pain
and more pain will follow
I know this
and I know the Beast
in the night
calls my name
but I call another name."
"Who? " asked Frannie.
"My own."

Charles Chaim Wax

Giving Rein to Loftier Ideas

I ambled into
the Teacher's Center
plopped next to Herbert F
who said,
"What's up, Bernstein."
'You're not going
to believe this...'
"From you
I'll believe anything."
"This extraordinarily beautiful woman walks
into the Buddha's Bookstore
a small store
so when someone comes in
you notice.
I was reading
The Platform Sutra
a new translation.
She moved a few paces to my right
then stood next to me
saying, 'I want someone
to say my name.'
I didn't know
what to say
when she repeated
'I want someone to say my name.'
I mumbled, 'What? '
Again
'I want someone to say my name.'
I said, 'I will say your name
but first tell me your name.'
She only sighed
with such passion,
such longing...
am I making myself clear?
Probably not,
anyway she moaned,
'MY NAME.'
'Babette.'
'No.'
'Naomi.'
Out she went.
Had she actually forgotten
her own name?
How could she expect
a total stranger
to know her name?
See what I'm getting at? "
"Probably high
on some exotic drug—
so go back
speak to the dear woman
then get the name,

of the pill
I'm talking about."
"She looked a bit
out of it
perhaps because of
spiritual agony—
searching for her true self."
"She was,
maybe,
searching for more dope."
"Everything with you
is drugs."
"Alas,
you've found
my true self
at last."

Charles Chaim Wax

Gloomy Scenes Foreshadowing Future Commotions

In 1968 I landed a job in Berriman JHS
thus keeping me out of Viet Nam
but if I faltered and got fired
I'd be there swatting flies and fleeing bullets.
My control wasn't fabulous,
yet it existed, somewhat, at moments.
Melvin Smeld was another story.
He'd been relieved of his regular English program
when Ruth Kaufman returned from her bout with pneumonia
but as luck would have it
he landed a regular Science program
when Joseph Botts got pushed down a flight of stairs
and broke his left arm and right leg.
"How goes it? " I asked.
"It's rough, Bernstein, the kids don't listen.."
"Did you call up any mothers? "
"It doesn't do any good.
I call up at night and the next day
they're back to their old tricks again"
"Don't give up, " I said sternly,
"or you're off to Viet Nam."
Smeld stared at me, lips twitching
barely able to get the words out,
"Did you hear what happened? "
"No."
"They killed all the fish. Gilmore.
Oh, you gotta watch him
put ink in the tank, water turned blue
then he strangled a goldfish
in the back of the room.
Assistant Principal Stein came in
and gave him hell, but it won't help
next day he'll be doing the same thing."
"Sit him up front."
Smeld stared at me quite hopeless
finally managing to mumble,
"Principal Foy says he's fed up with me."
And don't you know
the next day a kid heaved a chair
out the window onto Foy's sky blue Cadillac
smashing Smeld to smithereens.

Charles Chaim Wax

Glorious Memories

Sitting in Moe Fine's
Ice Cream Emporium
on Flatbush Avenue
after Hannah McGill's funeral
I said, "So many teachers passed away
the last nineteen years...not the same."
"Remember Vinnie Weed? " asked Henry F
"Funny guy
hadn't thought of him in awhile."
"Never forget, never
all the years
he wore that cheap mat on his head
and nobody said a word
everyone knew
not a word."
"Mabel Fignat, " I sighed.
"Lord, yes
recall when she almost
crushed me to a pancake
after she slipped on the applesauce
and landed on me? "
"Thought you was a goner for sure
only thirty-three
when she passed
think she wanted to kill herself
after her husband passed away
eating two dozen jelly donuts a day
with a heart condition."
"NEVER THINK SUCH A THOUGHT
ABOUT MABEL, " thundered Henry F.
I quickly said,
"Jacob Friedman."
"His wife a shrink
but didn't do him much good
man talked
but never made sense. What a guy! "
"Huh? "
"Don't you see, Bernstein? His cuckooness
added to the flavor
of the stew."
"Sam Greenbaum, " I sighed;
"THE LAST HIPPIE, " exploded Henry F,
"wish he was back with us
always had a joke to tell."
"Matilda Frisby, " I blurted out.
"And Mary Eato, " chuckled Henry F.
"No more
no more names
my heart hurts."
"God is good, " said Henry F.
"You're an atheist
how many times you said

God and Hitler
could never exist in the same Universe."
"Not today when
a dear friend
journeys into the Great Beyond."
"The Almighty don't allow
a part-time believer."
"You can't figure out what God thinks
nobody has such understanding
else they'd be wise as Him
and there ain't not a person on Earth like that
yes, my friend,
all the departed souls are up there,
looking at us
hearing what we say
a great comfort it is."
"You've been an atheist for nineteen years! "
"Not today!
Today I know in my heart
the whole of Creation
moves toward
the Perfection of Heaven."

Charles Chaim Wax

God's Shining Light

"Bernstein, " said Clarence,
"I seen this girl walking down the street
with her little school books
and I knew she was for me.
I knew she was the mother of my children.
She smiled and said, 'I feel it too.'
Man, in the beginning
with that woman just everything was right,
good, pure, true and perfect.
The Lord anointed us with oil
and we dwelt in the land of milk and honey.
We were married for four years.
They were like the Return to the Garden.
That was a long time ago,
but you know all them years from then til now
it don't never ever all get lost.
A little always be with me.
Hell, I never knew what happened.
Don't know to this day what happened.
She just stopped loving me,
told me right to my face
there was another dude
and she was going away
and that was that.
I punched her dead flat in the mouth
and said, 'Says what? '
She looked up at me from the floor
with blood coming out her mouth.
I looked in her eyes.
Then I grabbed her up
and said, 'Say, what? Bitch.'
I smacked her face hard,
but she didn't do nothing
and she was from the streets,
she knew how to fight.
But she didn't do nothing.
She just look at me.
She didn't raise a hand
or wipe the blood from her mouth
or cry or scream.
She just look.
Hell, what could I do?
Beat her dead senseless.
I never forget that day.
I calls it the Day of the First Drunk.
It funny now, then...
You know like you see in the James Cagney flicks
dudes scratching lines for days
or weeks or years
on the walls in prison.
Hell, I had my drunk days
scratching lines in concrete with my face.

They all kinds of prison.
I asked God.
I got down on my knees,
I prayed to the LORD GOD,
I prayed for nights and nights.
I asked GOD what is happening here?
Why is this happening to me?
What should I do?
What I wanted to do was rip her throat out.
In my mind I kept watching her body
move in and around this other dude.
She grew up in my arms
and when she was grown she went away.
The boys said, 'Get you a gun
and kill her ass. You one of us now.
NOW you understand,
and we with you.'
The LORD GOD didn't come to me then.
HE cut me off from his safety
and put me far from grace.
I said to her, 'Say something to me.
Say why to me.'
All she said was, 'It's gone—you want me to lie? '
How you stop loving somebody you love?
How you do that?
You ain't a light switch.
You ain't a water faucet: off and on.
It don't work that way.
Love come from some part of your mind
where you can't get to easy—
it's a deep place. I was lost."
"Why didn't you go to a bar and get another woman? " I asked.
"I did, " Bernstein.
"I went. I looked.
I said to myself, 'Heil,
she don't want me, plenty other women
die for that chance.'
But when I went to the bars the women
didn't have no face.
I was in a distant land amid strangers.
I had no heart for anyone.
I took the kids to my daddy.
He told me, 'Son, you a man,
a child of the Living God.
Don't put yourself into Satan's jaws
too many there already.
Everybody know it ain't easy to suffer.
Satan know this too,
and then he come to you in the night,
in the naked dark.
He come with guns, hatred, wickedness,
drink, madness. He come to take away

Faith in the Living God.
And when that Faith go
we go down
in the deep and foul swamps
away from His Light.'
I said, 'He cut me off from His Safety.
Where be his grace? '
My father said, 'The Living God
always inside you.
Don't you ever say to my face
while there is breath in me
that the Living God cut you off from His Safety.
In my house there shall be no talk
of God forsaking His children
although sometimes
His children do forsake Him.
I say to you again
the Living God,
the God who took us out of Slavery
and the God who made the sun and moon
and stars and green grass and lights
that Living God knows what
must happen inside you
before you can see the Everlasting Shining Holy Light:
you got to love her even for what she done to you.
When you can love her
as God loves her
you be free.'
I did the bottle with pretzles six months
I guess.
Counting in those days got a bit sketchy.
Dead drunk every day,
couldn't work,
used all my saving for drink.
But then I couldn't feel my arms no more.
They were cold and heavy
like a hundred hammers be beating
on them every day
and more and more and more
you had to drink to get less and less drunk.
My chest began to hurt
all the time
like a hole was growing there
and soon my heart was going to fall out.
My body took all the pain of my soul into itself.
I be walking down the street
and be pissing in my pants,
and all manner of foul things
I don't ever want to have to say.
I know what you be thinking.
I see it in your eyes...
but I cleared my heart.

I cleaned out my heart to the bottom with fire.
I sucked on fire.
I stood on the street corner,
took a drink and put a match there
and spit out long silver blue golden flames
and screamed out loud:
I AM THE FIERY FURNACE.
I AM THE FLAMES OF HELL.
I was so numb that I felt
like I was swimming thru cool rainbows.
Then my hair caught fire
and the cops came
and took me to Bellevue.
My head was hurting like nothing
I ever felt before
cause the scalp was burnt tight and crisp.
Then I spent some time with the crazy folks there.
They put me in the back wards
where only the real gone dudes stay.
I seen stuff there taught me about GOD for sure."
"Like what did you see? "
"Why you want to know for? "
"Just curious."
"If you so curious you go see for yourself.
I don't want to speak about those folks.
I ain't got no right.
All I know is that I saw GOD'S TRUTH
in those folk's eyes.
I stood up and said to GOD:
In this moment I let her go.
As YOU love her
so I love her.
I wish her well although she can't ever be mine.
I set myself free.
That's what my daddy meant
when he said that GOD can't set you free.
HE don't want to do that.
HE want to let you set yourself free
so you can know even a little,
little bit what it is to have GOD inside you.
That's what GOD meant to teach us
when he breathed into the clay
and sent us into time.
My daddy said, 'You home now.' "

Charles Chaim Wax

Gone

Fifty years, more than that,
I've known the man
Next door neighbor
And for thirty-six years
He worked two jobs
Conductor for the subway
And sporting goods salesman
Sixteen hours a day.
Always read the ny times on Sunday
Last six months
Not well
In and out of hospitals
Eighty-four going on eighty-five
Never made it.
I went in to see his wife of fifty-six years
Her eyes huge red crumpled sad
Seeing now
What she had never seen before.

Charles Chaim Wax

Great Public Mourning

The girl always wore tight jeans
and painted her face
with extravagant make-up
the husband also my student
wrote poetry
no one understood
and often landed in trouble.

In Brownsville, Brooklyn
the day after the double murder
rain now
endless fall from Heaven
into Earth
pure
yet tinged grey
from the vast sky sphere
and happy
those in lit homes
hearts secure pulsing
far from the graves
of two tiny children
smothered into eternal silence
by a mother's love
twisted in a moment
into madness
redemption distant
if at all
the Almighty weeping
Brooklyn weeping
Bernstein weeping.

Charles Chaim Wax

Happiness On A Winter's Night

Snow began to fall at ten in the evening
fine cold adamantine snow.
On Atlantic I drove slowly, the streets being slippery,
looking for a lady
when I spotted Johnnie Mai
so pulled up next to her and she hopped into the car
and we drove to my apartment
where she quickly stripped
then made hot chocolate.
"This is a nice place, Bernstein,
sometimes I stay with Dempsey
he's forty and loves me
but not my baby."
"Mary with your mother?" I asked.
Johnnie Mai sipped her hot chocolate slowly
in silence
eyes closed drifting into that private world
where a soul's history tumbled forever alone
when suddenly she said, "Without
my mama I'd be dead,
also Mary." Eyes open staring at me
then: "I guess we should do it."
"That would be nice."
We walked to the bed
the presence of her youthful
and powerful body affected me deeply:
My turn now to drift
as her gracious passion warped warmth
into me, so tender, almost true.
"Now me cause I'm still a woman
even though I take money."
Later she asked, "Can I stay?"
"OK," I said.
Then in the tinkling of an eye
she was asleep and I slid out of bed
walked to the window raised the blinds
to see in the distance Downstate Medical Center
shimmering in the descending crystals
where at this very moment most certainly
death shaped a soul into a snowflake.
I returned to Johnnie Mai her body still afire
and pressed close
a profound silence in the dark room
and I did nothing to disturb it.

Charles Chaim Wax

Having Been Destroyed in the Womb

No chance Ella's grey hair
ever can be covered with dye
nor love be found
at 52.
One date after the other.
Suddenly her gums became infected
the left side of her face blown up
and then she called me
desperate to know
how to proceed
someone had gotten her
social security number
ordered a \$1,300 piece of furniture
and three credit cards in her name.
Her parents in Florida begging
Ella to join them
an only child now
the son killed in a car accident at 17.
Her friend Sarah told me, "Must be something wrong
with her. A pretty woman
but men run from her. I want to help
but don't know how."
Ella called my sister saying how lonely
she felt, that Sunday morning, so
my sister invited her for coffee
at the bagel place.
Silence, finally
Ella bursting into tears
saying, "Thank you, thank you."
Six billion souls
impossible
and the Buddha's truth hard to swallow
the years of meditation not enough
suffering in every breath
until a ton of earth
suffocates the pain.

Charles Chaim Wax

Having Discarded All For Love

In the end
a man without love
withers
so we sat in Ruby's Bar and Grill
3: 20 in the morning
dawn years away
listening to the sad tale
of Bob Bigley.
"I bought her a Chevy, " he said,
"wasn't good enough
so traded in for a Caddy
she liked that
two weeks later
she wanted a different color."
We stared at Bob Bigley
tears streaming down his face
a man plunged
into the depths of pain
"Then she wanted another man
and then another woman
I can't go through all these changes
I said but she said
she'd have me whacked if I made trouble
told her I didn't want trouble
because
I loved her
then came the strip club
showed her tits to strange men
and phone calls
in the middle of the night
couldn't sleep
couldn't work
next she said she was bringing
her three kids up from Florida
and I had to set up a trust fund
to send each one through college
and I said what kids are these
and she said my kids
and then the number went from
three to six."
Suddenly Bob Bigley
reached into his pocket
took out a small bottle
and began to unscrew the cap.
"I'll kill myself
I will
I really will..."
"That's no way
to get a woman, " said George Sturcke
grabbing the brown bottle.
"Try some of these."
"What are they? ".

"Aspirins, " Sturcke informed him.
"I'm going to sleep now, "
said Bob Bigley
sliding off his chair
onto the floor
where he curled up
into the fetal position
and a moment later
snored loudly
in a place
where life
went well,
or so
I hoped.

Charles Chaim Wax

heat

endless and terrible
started drinking
11 in the morning
passed out at 1
awoke at 4
dozed off at 4: 07
until 6: 20.
watched
Ripley's Believe It Or Not
then back
to the bottle

Charles Chaim Wax

Here by the water's edge

daylight crumbled
and the vast sky shifted endlessly
with flashing snowflakes
as wind howled unbreakable bits of sand
into me.
I turned my back to the blast
sat
and stared at the distant dim horizon
of ocean
to see far
but could not
then
for no reason
I could imagine
thought of my grandmother
dead now more than three decades—
how I never witnessed
the woman healthy
strong
only knowing the last part
of her human form
ravaged by heart attacks
her youth
just like
the dark outer edge
of the ocean.
This night
there would be
no vision
into the void
those luscious arms
pressing kisses
into six young children
hidden
and the children also
now all gone
including the second youngest
my dear mother
existence
just like that.

Charles Chaim Wax

Here's another story

I lifted from a student
but twenty-two years ago
so in the Public Domain by now
anyway
kid's name was Sargent Roach
A Time I Helped Another Human Being:
I was hanging with my homeboys
on a Friday night
when this Jewish lady said,
"Sonny, can you come
turn on my lights? "
Walking along she explained
how she couldn't use electricity on the Sabbath.
and I did it for her.
She said, "Thank you."
and wanted to give me \$6.
I politely refused.
End of story.
But when I told the guys
They said I was stupid
"No, " I said
"my heart feels good
No price on that."
They stared at me for awhile
until each one smiled
knowing
that feeling
is hard to come by
on the streets of Brooklyn.

Charles Chaim Wax

Heroin arms

littered with tiny
specks of blood
punctured
a hundred times
for the sake of
a Paradise
beyond pain
never obtained
yet sought
time and time again
still
he dreams of Celene
of her black hair
black as night
dreams of Celene
with her black hair
soft and sweet
dreams to flee
this god forsaken city
sewer of death
to Greece
Celene
in the sun with me
in the ever sweet burning sun
and rest in the night wind
the night wind
wind from the sea
upon the land
the golden land
shimmering
with wheat and melons
and something happens
happens to us
we would be happy.

Charles Chaim Wax

High Above the Treacherous and Shifting Ground

Tom Maguire never felt at home
on the spot where he stood
until his final attempt at flight
huddled in a pool of blood without deliverance.
Now his wasted cut wrist rested on his lap
and Jennie O'Connell kissed the wound
and Tom wept.
Suddenly the July 4th explosives in Coney Island
turned the heavens into fantastic tumbling rainbows.
"That's some mighty spectacular fireworks," said O'Connell
"puts me in mind of the time when I drank lighter fluid."
"How'd it taste?" I asked.
"Don't recommend it, not really
years ago, when I was wild
I also drank nail polish remover,
and nail polish for that matter
started swooping through the stars,
counting 'em,
one by one,
till I got to three hundred thousand
took me about four minutes
then I finished off the can of fluid
and all of a sudden I got it into my head
to have a smoke.
You can imagine the kick I got.
When I woke up my ass was smoking.
I mean smoking.
Of course the hair on my head was toast
and on the sand in front of me
I seen the words: 'Don't try that shit no more.'
And under that the word: 'God.'
Now I don't drink lighter fluid no more,
nor count the stars
because that's God's business.
How many? How far? Where'd they come from?
All we gotta do is stare at 'em
and feel the wonder.
If we can do that we'll be OK."
Maguire, still with tears
held out his ragged wrist
whispering, "When will the torture end?"
The fabulous blasts higher than heaven now
earth-shattering
I couldn't hear O'Connell
only see yet another kiss
into the scar.

Charles Chaim Wax

Hitherto Abounding With Copious Life

"What's that damn banging? "
said Howard
swallowing three more pain killers.
"Mickey mouse stuff, " I noted.
"Don't start, " said my sister.
"The man's in pain—
and there's nothing more real than pain."
Horrific banging still coming
from next door
Howard turned up the TV
to no avail
then he struggled to stand
but flopped into the chair
the herniated disk in his back plus sciatica
contorting tears from his eyes
which he quickly concealed
by pulling his tee shirt over his head.
The walls shook, noise deafening,
Howard moaning
a scene from a madhouse.
I stared at my sister,
then removed the bottle of
perfect yellow pills from my pocket
Howard's head still covered.
"NO, " screamed my sister
so back they went.
"What's that banging? " I finally asked.
"Evelyn's putting new rugs
in the whole apartment."
"The woman's 83
her husband Harry's dead,
and she got dementia..."
"Just forgets little things."
"The other day when you weren't home
and Howard was snoring
UPS gave her the package from
Life Extension
and she put it in the refrigerator
you asked her why
she said because the box was cold
cold yeah
14 degrees out."
I stared at Howard saying,
"Can he breath like that? "
head still covered.
Howard musta heard because he said,
"Gimme the yellow stuff, Steve."
Then he lowered his tee shirt
eyes still drenched with tears
he moaned, "Please."
I stared at my sister
not wanting to incur her wrath

but that Please broke my heart
so I gave him three yellow treats
saying, "They go under the tongue
designed that way for super quick absorption."
No sound from my sister
her face far off:
"When mommy died
Evelyn held me in her arms
I can feel her strong arms now
felt so lost then."
Howard smiled, the yellow wonders
working fast.
"But why the new carpet? " I said,
"half the time she don't know
what day it is."
"Tuesday, " said Howard
rising to his feet,
"feel like a new man,
well, thanks to Steve."
"Well, thanks to Tony T Jr.
the gym teacher at Spinoza HS
gets `em from his father
who got thousands
scattered around the apartment
from Dr. Coffin,
his name, I'm not making it up,
apparently Tony T Sr.
did Dr. Coffin a favor,
you know what I mean? "
"I wasn't born yesterday, " said Howard,
reaching for his toes
which he touched
then flipped up in triumph.
"She's trying to be alive, " said my sister
the tears already
rehearsing
death.

Charles Chaim Wax

Hopes and Dreams

\$8,000
down the drain
guy said my site
would light up the world
alls that happened
burned a hole in my pocket.
In school I told my buddy
Peter F who exclaimed,
"Wha'd you think
with 2 billion accounts out there? "
"Like the guy said:
I'd be the Brad Pitt
of the Poetry Internet."

Charles Chaim Wax

I ambled through Stop 'n Shop supermarket

in Sheepshead Bay Brooklyn
enjoying a camaraderie
with the jolly folks
buying stuff for
the great Thanksgiving feast to come.
On line with sweet potatoes and Splenda
my contribution
for my sister's dinner
I picked up Vanity Fair
featuring Kate Moss on the cover
and indicating they'd tell all about
her sad tale of coke addiction—
\$4.95 added to my bill.
Of course as soon as I got home
I flipped the pages to the expose
but just then the phone rang.
Steve D said, "Bernstein, I almost
sold a few of your photographs."
"Without you
I'm done for!" I said
hoping to spur him on to actually
selling one of my pictures.
"Don't count on me
count on yourself."
"But I only signed your contract
so I wouldn't
have to count on myself."
"C'mon. c'mon, Bernstein
this is wisdom I'm giving you."
I turned a page
and blurted out, "What planet
do these people live on? "
"Huh? "
"Vanity Fair—
nothing but big cash
and beautiful women."
"You have to love your life
to live your life," he said.
"Drinking again? "
"Sunday...a little..."
"And you just got a massage."
"The best, Bernstein, the best."
"Aren't you the least bit
perturbed
you have no big cash
and no beautiful woman."
"You have to love your life
to live your life."
I continued to turn the pages
then stopped and stared at a watch
costing \$6,299.
"Plenty of watches in this magazine

Movado, Ebel, TagHeuer
diamonds also, Cartier, De Beers,
and booze, and high-priced dresses,
and endless ads for perfume
sporting fantasy names."

"Think you'd be happy, Bernstein,
with big cash
and beautiful women? "

"Can't imagine big cash
can't imagine beautiful women
can't imagine happiness, " I replied.

Persistent this fellow:

"You have to love your life
to live your life."

Charles Chaim Wax

I Awoke

at 3: 45 in the morning
full moon
shining through
my window
began scribbling
at once
the majestic sphere
demanding a response
ten minutes later
no go
mush
put up tea
words still swirling
without a proper place
when the flame
somehow
ignited my shirt
searing skin.
and although
I quickly put it out
a moment later
the terror
of burning to death
so ripped off the material
throwing it in the garbage.
The magic marker
in my hand
writing on the kitchen wall:
Forget the moon
Watch the flame.

Charles Chaim Wax

I locked the cable release

and watched the river
and the evening light on the river
and my 8x10 Toyo view camera
resting on the big Gitzo tripod
with its single eye open
then spotted a green bottle
at the edge of the water
half buried in bottom mud
neck cracked off and
just below read the raised letters:
Clarke and White
Glass thick
most certainly handblown
contained
tiny ancient air bubbles
breathed long ago by the creator:
now white stars in a green firmament.
Everything eventually
something else.

Charles Chaim Wax

I read in the New York Times

that Kansas passed a law
endorsing intelligent design
and not long after reading the article
eighteen inches of snow hit Brooklyn
so deep that Spinoza high school
was closed for the first time
in eight years
at night I strolled the avenues
now
a winter wonderland
when suddenly from the heavens
more snow
and a joy I couldn't really fathom
took me—
alive
just being alive
then marveling at snowflakes
in the palm of my hand
no two alike
ever
on all the fabled streets of Brooklyn
now twinkling with mile after mile
of unthinkable beauty
this system of transformation
dazzling
or the heart beating
or each cell
living and dying
within me
without my awareness
of the miracle
yet
somehow
a force
beyond my calculation
shaped this fantastic
intricate
self propelled
structure.

Charles Chaim Wax

I refused the glance

a tiny man
in a toy coffin
eight years
my best buddy
kidneys dead
spent
endless
hours each week
captured by the machine
devouring his blood
then shooting
the red bits and liquid pieces back
into his guts
clean
from the day's turmoil and joy
doctors said the pumping
could last 20 years
past that
God's creation
withered
and he hooked up to
metal and tubes
2 years beyond
the fateful closing date
knowing
the last part of being
oozed away
without hope
his blood soon
to turn thick and turgid
he lived as long
as he could
yet not long enough
in the grave
now
six years
my tears this day
not praise enough
for a heart
consumed by life.

Charles Chaim Wax

I Remember

I remember
having gone
to Coney Island
and felt the cold
and watched the water
and the dark sky
was curative to me
and I was flying high
sailing.
So it was Friday
and I didn't want to go home
Yes!
some days I simply do not want
to go home
so I ride really
just glide in my
red big Bonneville.

Charles Chaim Wax

I saw Mary yersterday

Mary loves me
I can tell
in her own way
in the way a seventy-four year old
woman
loves
a fifty year old man—
her love
unusual, uncommon, exceptional
off-center, remarkable, exotic
screwy
yet all these words
somehow
don't completely re-create
the spark
in her eyes.

Charles Chaim Wax

I Stared Sadly

at Hugh
as he sat at the long table in
the Teacher's Center
having no idea
what words would benefit him
because when I thought of his misfortune
my stomach churned.
As a staunch Irish Catholic
Hugh had renounced
his only child, Patrick,
after he revealed his homosexuality
then Patrick perished of AIDS
without a reconciliation
between father and son. Four months later
Hugh's wife, Mary, fell ill. Cancer of the liver.
She suffered for six weeks,
then passed away.
He no longer attended Mass
proclaimed openly
Satan's dominance,
on earth at least.
One day he asked
what
Buddhism
said of these events. I said,
"Joy is the absolute basis of
all existence,
inherent in the very substance
and structure of matter
and our duty is to tap
into that universal rapture. When we did
our suffering would cease."
Hugh said,
"Gibberish."

Charles Chaim Wax

I trudged into Bay Pizzeria

after enduring another day
at Spinoza high school
didn't have time to eat lunch
starving
ordered a square
tottered to a booth
and plopped down
Two women walked in
looked like mother and daughter
younger one ordered
then sat in front of me
saying, "Next time he opens his mouth
I'm gonna chop off his hand
HE'LL DROWN IN HIS OWN BLOOD"
The older woman said,
"HE'S LIVED TOO LONG ALREADY."
A kid carried a plate of lasagna
to the couple
younger woman said, "CAT PUKE."
older woman, "TAKE IT AWAY"
then removed a bottle of Red Dog beer
from a paper bag
and gulped.
Enzio, Jr. ambled to the couple
and said calmly, "First,
no beverages from outside
Second, I made this."
"YOU'LL DIE LIKE HIM, " said the younger woman.
"Who you talking to? " Enzio Jr. asked.
"I'LL SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE, " said the older woman.
Enzio Sr. opened the door
with a flourish.
"ROT IN HELL—
YOU AND YOUR GRANDMOTHER, "
said the older woman.
"Remember them faces, " said Enzio, Jr.
"They looked like mother and daughter, " I said.
"Most likely, " he laughed.
"You got a good sense
of humor
after what they said
about your lasagna."
"You hungry?
a gift."
The still steaming pasta
before me
I plunged in
and after a single bite
proclaimed
The Best Lasagna in Brooklyn.

Charles Chaim Wax

Impossible To Restrain Decay

Max Feld entered
the Teacher's Center
angry, face red
ready for action
"Bernstein
you're the union rep."
I nodded by head Yes
as I stared at Max Feld
neck bulging
veins popping.
"I don't like looking
at another man's crap."
"Who does? " I said gently
trying to relax the man
but on he went,
"Walk in
there it is
and I know
who done it
and I'm gonna
do something about it."
"Who? " I whispered
in the softest voice I could
and still be heard.
"Alvin Bondy."
"The man's 74
with advanced
prostrate cancer—
he'll be dead soon."
The words
cracked
his skull
as if he'd been hit
with a baseball bat,
mouth opening
gasping for air
fingers on his right
hand trembling
"My old man
croaked from that, "
he muttered
a few tears
sliding
down his cheek.
When he left
I wondered
if I'd done the right thing
but a union rep
gotta keep the peace
among fellow workers
the truth being
Alvin Bondy was

slowly losing
his mind:
Alzheimer's.

Charles Chaim Wax

In Brooklyn Waters

I ambled along Jamaica Bay
out towards Plum Beach and
stared at the waves
flashing in and flushing out
bright waves and dark waves
here and in Coney Island.
the wind fondled my face
as it pumped through branches and
fluttered wings of birds and
flicked far grains of sand
instantaneously replaced
next to the unbounded ocean
filled with measureless life—
plankton tumbling
into vast blue whale bellies
shark's blood steaming
microscopic flotsam
swept into organic tissue—
a billion billion
moments of existence
devouring and
being devoured.
I drifted to a small cedar bush
picked an emerald berry
crushed it between my fingers and
this bipedal flesh
imagined immortality
in this very life yet
on the waters of Jamaica Bay
myriad coffins
floated by
their ceaseless transformation
free
of mortal desire.

Charles Chaim Wax

In Countless Droves

On July 4th
we walked to the liquor store
on Surf Avenue
in Coney Island
"What's a good Scotch? " I asked.
"Dewer's White Label, "
said the guy behind the counter.
"That's what Alvin Goldfarb
used to drink, " said Melvin Hopp,
"before he passed
had a twisted mind
seen him gobble a waterbug once
just to impress Ellen Cleary."
"Was she impressed? " I asked Melvin.
"Yeah.
Who wouldn't be
if a guy ate a waterbug
in your honor
then said
it tasted like applesauce."
"Used to be a fella worked here, " I said,
"but I can't remember
his name
left ear was like
bitten off, said
a lion done it, but I think
he was telling a story."
"Sid Baumgarten, " said the guy
behind the counter.
"Right."
"He works here in the morning."
"What about his friend
he was with all the time
they used eat dinner
in Meng's
and the man always
poured half a pint of Gin
into his ginger ale."
"You mean Roy Braine? "
"Right, right."
"Dead."
"No, " I said,
"and just the other day
I found out
Fannie Shepherd went
and Frank Dorr and Bill Walker
last week it was Jim Rogers,
Alice Foster, and Tom Wiley.
What's going on?
the whole world's dying."
"Got to be, " said Melvin Hopp,
"to make room."

Charles Chaim Wax

In Honor of Zen Master Dogen

When I walked into
my sister's apartment
Annie danced merrily.
so I whispered
to my sister
"I'm jealous
cause I want her
to be like me:
a loser
flop
failure
washout
not just me
also you,
your darling husband
not leaving your son
the whole bunch of us.
Not that I want her
to suffer
cause when you fail miserably
at life
you suffer
but
when Annie grows up
she's gonna feel out of place.
I stared
an entire existence
just movement.

Charles Chaim Wax

In Hopes of A Happier Life

Ever since Andrew Stern's wife
left him for guy living
next door
he couldn't shake the blues
well, eleven years of marriage
down the drain
so one day Henry F
trying to be helpful said,
"When my pet goldfish
Mr. Ben Brilliant
passed away I was thrown
into such agony
as few men have ever known
cause the joy his swimming around
gave me can't be put into words
at least not my words
so I'll just say watching
Mr. Ben Brilliant gave me delight—
joy, joy's the word
and such a golden orange he was
to dazzle the eye
for two days he floated
on the surface of the water
finally my dear wife said,
'Enough. He's garbage.'
I was taken aback
by her cruelty.
I said, 'Mr. Ben brilliant is getting
a proper burial.'
so at once I went to
the Yellow pages
and looked up Pet Cemeteries
closest one being in Huntington, Long Island
I dialed
then heard the toilet flush
such a sound the human mind
cannot imagine
so to make a long story short
I sunk into a catatonic coma
for three days
and three nights
then
the great Rebbe Nachman of Breslov
told me what to do in a dream
and I did it
straight-away racing
to the pet store
and bought a Mr. Ben Brilliant Jr."
"The point, " moaned Andrew Stern,
my wife ain't a goldfish."
"Uh, well,
yeah

I was getting to that
quoting the Rebbe now:
'It is a great achievement to be happy! '''

Charles Chaim Wax

In Memory of Elvis Presely

"My students don't read poetry," said Vinnie Darling sadly.
"And I want 'em to cause poesy inspires the heart and directs the soul to happiness."
He coughed, then began to recite from his favorite poet, William Alexander Percy.
"I heard a bird at break of day Sing from the autumn trees A song so mystical and calm So full of certainties."
"Maybe you shoulda selected a more popular poet." I said, "WHAT!"
shrieked Vinnie. That shrill wail pierced the upper left quadrant producing a sharp pain which immediately reminded me of my dental appointment at 3: 30.
"William Alexander Percy will one day take his place in the Pantheon of Immortal Poets," declared Vinnie.
"Indeed," I said to quiet him, then moaned, "Dentist Edith tortures me. Why? She sticks in the needle, then fourteen seconds later asks, 'Feeling numb?'
Of course I'm not numb. How could I be? Zip goes the drill while I still got full feeling. Many a time the agony stopped my heart from beating a good two, three seconds."
"Your pain is her pleasure. Well, soon you'll be finished cause a human being only possesses so many teeth."
"I been going for six years.

No end in sight. I stayed away
from the dentist's chair
for 13 years. Maybe that's why
I'm in bad shape."

"Bernstein,
sometimes the stories
you recount, well,
they issue from a man
who could be described
as nothing less than insane."

Vinnie started at me.
Perhaps he felt
his words were too harsh.
"Yet even the great ones
do harm to themselves.
The King himself sang
'Don't be cruel'
but he was cruel to himself.
No man alive can
devour

82 Eskimo Pies
and survive! "

Vinnie paused
eyes becoming moist.
They always did when
he spoke
of his idol,
Elvis Presley.

"The man threw it all away.
Why?
He had the world on a string.
Presidents
waited in line to see him perform.
The Queen of England
blushed like a schoolgirl
when she met him.

You're not alone, Bernstein.
Yes, well,
as a species
we're flawed. I know
the Good Book
says the Almighty
created man
in His image,
but
the facts
speak for themselves."

Charles Chaim Wax

In the Citadel of A Victorious Mind

As I chatted with Frank Freeborn on the Pier
I heard, "Bernstein, you old flabbergastor."
I'd know that voice anywhere, Melvin Losy
taught English at Spinoza HS for eight years
then never returned one September
a writer, and had added "Von" to his name
and only produced manuscripts in long hand,
refusing the typewriter
unfortunately, his script was well nigh unintelligible.
"Nathan's, " said Freeborn, "There's a chill in the air
and by the way, Bernstein, who's your pal."
"Melvin Von Losy, author."
"What'd you write? " asked Freeborn.
"The Ascension of Wladyslaw Mierzwinski, Tightrope Walker."
Nellie showed up.
"This is Melvin Von Losy, author, " I said.
"So you're the great man! " she said lunging at Losy
pressing her luscious wet lips against his
arms around him tightly,
finally the tears flowing.
"After reading about Mierzwinski's escape from the Abyss
I left the tormented life of a street walker
and transformed into a psychiatric specialist
healing humanity's wounds
and what a gorgeous cover, clouds floating across a blue sky
and stretched across the clouds
a thick steel wire
and on that wire were feet,
feet only,
the famous and fabulous feet of Wladyslaw Mierzwinski."
"How do you like that! " said Losy, then paused
breathed deeply staring into Nellie's eyes
at last saying, "Dan Dudek! "
"A fine teacher, " I said, "but only ate apples,
never could figure that out,
nor why his classes were silent, from bell to bell."
"Hypnosis, " said Losy.
"Of course he didn't want to apply his fabulous powers
but, like the rest of us,
he soon found out teaching wild kids wasn't a picnic,
took me up to his space ship one day,
that's where I wrote Tightrope,
rejected by eighteen publishers, but Dan Dudek
smiled saying Not to worry, Melvin, your words are too valuable
not to be read by humans."
Freeborn said calmly, "I always wondered about intelligent life out there, but..."
Losy cut him off proclaiming proudly, "Dan Dudek was a writer, like me."
Continuing Freeborn said, "Pick up any books from his starry home
cause I'd like to read what a mind
not of this earth
contemplates."

Charles Chaim Wax

In the Greatest Possible Danger

"What's up? " I asked Joe Muldoon
his face gaunt, eyes bulging
as he stepped into Meng's Restaurant at 4: 38 in the morning.
"I want to know what God thinks
cause an infinite mind thinks infinite thoughts."
I nodded my head to calm him
as the lad seemed overzealous,
"And then there's the question of the eternal soul
hadda exist from the beginning
but what about the Big Bang,
and before that, WHAT?
Anyway, even as we speak,
Is He thinking about you, me, giraffes,
a guy in Mexico? all at the same time
and you gotta multiply that
by the total existing earthly creatures,
like twenty-eight trillion."
By now his fingers were wiggling wildly,
as spittle oozed from his lips, down his chin,
then hung there, suspended in the collapse.
"So back to souls.
when the Bible was written there was
a fraction of people that now exist,
but if the soul is eternal
where was the souls of the current six billion? "
Louis Chivvis now suddenly awake
the wine having evaporated from his cells said:
"Waiting in the land of silence."
Muldoon said, "The mind of God shall never be grasped
through hallucination."
"I got a body that don't know if it's there, " said Chivvis
searching every pocket
finally finding a half pint of Dewer's
which he miraculously downed
in one long gulp, then paused to breath
at last continuing, "I prayed for eighteen years
fourteen inside the nuthouse and fourteen outside
of course I was young...Save me."
Again the desperate search
checking even his shoes
ending with that final moan, "Please."

Charles Chaim Wax

In the Monastery

sitting meditation created pain
my legs being wooden
so I loved walking mediation
especially one night
when the Head Monk
led the way into the darkness
with a flashlight
and all I could see was
the blizzard whizzing past
a guy in front of me
as the howling wind
overwhelmed the heartbeats of humans
flipping me into a blip of euphoria
my laughter
free to fall everywhere
without obstruction
then
serene
the wind windless
snow soft as an ancient opiate pillow
enticing sleep
so I stepped off the line
lay down
unperturbed unemotional
in the tranquilizing drifts
narcotized by cool dreams
of high white stars
burning
and me burning
one utter conflagration
and placing palms together
babbled, "Bernstein's coffin is a billion
snowflakes—
fine with him."
Suddenly the glare of the Head Monk's
flashlight seared my eyes
and a second later
felt his grip
as he whispered, "Cut
this amateur crap."
The fellow meant well
but the word "amateur"
hurt.

Charles Chaim Wax

Inscribed On This Gravestone of Flesh

Helping an old man
push his shopping cart,
how old I don't know,
she tripped,84 herself,
my sister there
immediately calling an ambulance.
She told me of this that night
said, "If only she didn't do that."
stopped her
said, "She needed to
from love or pride, don't know."
Next day the news:
broke her hip
worse
afterwards
if the operation went well
an aluminum walker
to lean on.
And all her life
hauling groceries
and laundry.
The only matter now
I'd tell her, if I dared,
to carry on
beyond the inconceivable
betrayal
of the body
which once
she called her own.

Charles Chaim Wax

July 4th

I trudged into Meng's on July 4th
sweating already, not yet dawn,
plopped down next to Treasure and Mary.
"You alright, Bernstein?" asked Treasure.
"Hmm," I managed to utter.
"Anyway," said Mary turning to Treasure,
"my sister is a moron
and her husband Larry is a bigger moron."
"Huey, where's the napkins?" I called out.
"Go McDunnie," he replied.
"Larry got fired for stealing from the liquor store," said Mary,
"and he also got fired from 7-Eleven."
Treasure leaned forward
and gently wiped my brow
I stared at her, tears almost in my eyes
as I said, "When will this end?"
"Only six months of torture
to go, Bernstein."
Mary went on, "He's a gambler. It's a sickness.
Well, that whole family
is dysfunctional anyway.
When he was dating my sister Ida they took Evelyn,
her kid from another man, she was seven,
to the motel
cause Ida didn't have nobody to watch her,
she didn't trust me!
and they made love in the room
while Evelyn was watching TV.
So, I ask you, how normal is Ida?"
"How's Evelyn doing?" asked Treasure.
"Don't ask."
"I wanna hear."
"She's a...
I don't know the word for it,
but she likes to watch floods.
She got transferred from two schools already
because she stuffed up the toilet with Kotex
the flushed
and held the handle and..."
I fell off the chair, quite by accident
and lay there, quite peacefully
as Mary continued, "soon there was
a waterfall as Evelyn screamed with joy
the kid unbelievably happy."
And then the ice-cube on my forehead
Treasure smiling
happiness all my own
which but a moment before
seemed utterly inconceivable.

Charles Chaim Wax

Kansas Fried Chicken

in Coney Island
a bit past midnight
my pint half gone
yet somehow happy
don't know why
don't care
just dwelling there
a young guy appears early twenties
no shoes sores on his feet
suit jacket no shirt
cigarette dangling from dry lips
head bobbing back and forth
puts the coat over his head
at times an eye peers out
searching
flip the bottle
into my mouth
gulp
nearly gone
hold it out
for the dear lad
to share this strange midnight joy
eye retreats into dark cloth
I wait
still hiding
the bottle returns
a deep swallow
until the Jack Daniel's gone
the eye appears
searching
but
too late
now.
the story of his life?
my life?

Charles Chaim Wax

Katrina Curtain has no breasts

I wonder about that
used to be in the army
now at Spinoza HS
37
never married
no children
born in Trinidad
but raised in Florida
flew home to her mother there
for Thanksgiving dinner
needing a home cooked meal she said
or no one in Brooklyn
to share the feast I mused
says she enjoys her
own company
so lives alone
and that to her liking
sings Ray Charles
while working on the computer
felt a brutal wretchedness
when Richard Pryor passed on
lamenting how MS cut short
his creative life
then all life
does her own laundry
because she doesn't want
anyone to touch her clothes
not a gorgeous woman
but a sparkling smile
flashes enthusiasm
traveling her hobby
proclaiming Africa
a land of wonder
and for Christmas
off to New Zealand
to the mountains
then sea
for a swim
in unknown waters
so my sadness
at pondering her round face
inexplicable really
no reason for it
except
no love.

Charles Chaim Wax

Kogaku Roshi wanted to visit Brooklyn

again where he called himself Jimmy K
and when he did so
always stayed at my place
bringing a student with him.
this time an Apache Indian from Mexico named Inez.
At the airport I opened the trunk
to place the luggage inside
and was surprised to see a shoe-box
labeled John Dunn's Ashes.
He was a teacher who died of AIDS a month ago
thin as a pencil, no hair left, also no relatives
so I took care of the cremation
but not knowing what to do next
the shoe box stayed in my trunk.
"Who is John Dunn?" asked Inez
and I told the sad tale and Jimmy K
immediately said he needed a proper Buddhist funeral.
John's not Buddhist, "I said
"He true true child of Buddha."
So off to the Pier in Coney Island
where Jimmy K opened the shoe-box
and chanted in Japanese for fifteen minutes
then removed the plastic bag
and held it out to me
Inez whispering, "Into the water."
I grabbed a handful of ash and flung it over the ocean
watching the gray dust drift away
Inez the same
followed by Jimmy K who asked,
"No tears, Big Bernstein?"
Shocked at the question. Nervous.
The old man up to his old tricks
every word a challenge to wake up
so I quickly tried to force a few but no go
then Inez weeping before me
and didn't even know the man
when suddenly her finger on her face
then on mine
smearing tears across my cheek
as Jimmy K chanted again in Japanese
and more ashes into the ocean
until none remained.
"No tears, Big Bernstein?"
What could I say, my head a block of wood
but the old guy kept trying and trying
his deepest vow
to liberate all beings
so I spit on my finger and rubbed my nose.
"OK. OK. Almost there."

Charles Chaim Wax

Last night reading Trakl

then awoke at 3: 40 AM
from a dream in dim flat light
could hardly see what was going on
even though my dream
street, no sidewalks, large trees looming
the dark wind of tears falling
onto wounded rooftops of decrepit houses
when Irving said,
"I saw Lou Reed's ass at the Chelsea Piers
last night." Both swim there. Possible.
His computer graphics web site nowhere for two years
then wants to interview me
on his radio station soon to appear
from his apartment, needing only FCC approval,
as the RABBI, former All Star wrestler from Alabama
when I only did that one summer
and who'd remember,
thinking I'm all he can get,
finally red bells under an ancient sea
Trakl's voice pushing into mine, trying,
not possible, his life there, like
many of my narratives, drug abuse, insanity, suicide
and Irving so happy
never seen the lad so happy
Lou Reed's ass sending him into artistic delirium
and what could I say having been bumped
into oblivion by those illustrious buttocks.
"My chance, Bernstein. I interview him
and everything's gonna take off."
Like the soft brains of that soldier splattering
into Trakl's skull doing him in,
and beyond the door stretched necks
dangling on forlorn trees, too much, stuffed cocaine
into his veins with a sledgehammer
death the final solution
and Irving dreaming
never so happy as when dreaming
but never of his mother's suicide
eight years ago, or the two
she spent inside a German whorehouse
in Bergen-Belsen
only twelve
and lost
ever since.

Charles Chaim Wax

Leaving the Dust Behind

"Zobel Gibbs
jumped off the roof
in my home town," said Treasure.
"I'll never forget his body
as he lay there.
hitting the concrete
face first. I never knew
such an unhappy soul.
When I was seventeen I slept with him—
to give that tortured man
a taste of pleasure
but the depression was so deep
that afterwards he asked,
'What now? '
Just delight
wasn't enough for him. He wanted
something more.
No one knew what that
'more' was.
I don't think he knew himself.
Only five people attended
the funeral.
My mother wept
since they were childhood
sweethearts
so when my father died
she took it into her head
to care for Zobel.
Maybe she thought
to cure him. Maybe
she was lonely. Maybe Zobel
brought back memories
of a happy childhood.
I don't know but
I don't believe
they were lovers.
Soul mates
might be the term. This went on
for eight years. Zobel wrote
poetry.
Sadly he invented
so many words
none of it made any sense.
My mother,
she said she loved
his verse. Not that she understood
a word of it either. But something
inside of him
never felt what my mother said.
I tried to speak to him,
boost his spirits,
but the mystery of

his sadness
remained.
I caught him one time
just before dawn
staring out the window
crying.
'Zobel, ' I said,
'what's happening? '
He rocked
back and forth. That motion
soothed him,
a little.
'Out there, ' he said,
then burst into
tears again. I was angry
so few people
showed up at
his grave.

Charles Chaim Wax

Led On By A Desperate Exile From Happiness

Cool metal of blue dawn
the sunny day yet again summoned
into the terror of
shrieking shadowy crows
plucking soft dead flesh
floating serenely into sewers
already stuffed with rancid wreckage
the names not even a memory.
Her body beaten to death
each speck colored purple
by blasting fists
while bound to a chair
the heavy robes
declaring absolute misery
while the dear girl's childhood
cries are soaked up by vast walls
bloated with revolting silence
The fourth death this month
in Brooklyn
the borough of Churches
by mothers
by fathers
addicted to the only
power
possible
for them
already defeated
already doomed
squeezing the life out of
all the life
they could lay their hands on.

Charles Chaim Wax

Let Us Rise Up Like Brave Men

I walked into Navin's room
my sister's son from her first marriage
which ended after eleven years
because Herbert refused
to refrain from picking
his nose in public. "It's my finger.
It's my nose," he often said.
When my sister filed for divorce
he straight-away
bought a dozen handkerchiefs,
but by then it was far,
far too late.
Navin asked me
if I wanted to trade his old radio which he had sold me
for his new one
since the new one played like shit,
his words.
I said, "You must live with your choice—
there's no other way."
"That's how a Guru talks," said Navin
to his friend, Michael,
then both twelve year olds laughed.
While they laughed I sprinkled fish food
into Navin's fish tank
and eleven tiny creatures swam upwards,
opened their mouths,
and gobbled the flakes.
"Expound on what you have just witnessed," I said.
"Use words for normal people," replied Navin.
"Of course, whad ya just see?"
"You fed the fish," said Michael.
"A correct observation,
but what does it mean with respect
to your life?"
"Gurus are like that," said Navin,
"they can only talk to other Gurus."
"It means," I said seriously,
"that fish want to survive
and you wear your father's underwear—
shit stains and all."
"MA, MA," screamed Navin.
"What's the matter?" asked my sister rushing into the room.
"Uncle Steve's a nut."
"THAT I knew before you were born," she said,
"tell me something new."
"SPEAK
SPEAK NOW," I bellowed.
Navin said, "C'mon, c'mon.
pop your fuckin' psycho pills already
my head's hurtin'."
then he laughed
the sound the same as Herbert's

so I whispered, "No escape."

Charles Chaim Wax

Living And Dying

Late at night
I watch the dots
dancing on the tv screen.
at first
only a jumble
but as I stare
they swirl and squirm
flip and roam
effortlessly
and I assume
in great joy.
billions and billions of
different combinations-
each point a face
a fate
our singular life
this unfathomable
activity.

Charles Chaim Wax

Love's Last Shift

As soon as I walked into Meng's
Billy Symes said, "Bernstein,
whatta ya think about Viagra? "
"Why ask me? "
"You're a pill man."
"Vitamins, " said Treasure,
"caused he's scared of death."
"Two weeks ago, " moaned Symes,
"My Lord and Master failed me."
"Lola mentioned it, " said Treasure,
"but I'd avoid Viagra
and go for the Penile Pump instead."
"Billy, enough is enough,
you're 87..."
"84, Bernstein."
Lola appeared dripping wet
having been caught in the rain.
"How are you, Billy? " she asked tenderly.
"One time ain't a catastrophe..."
"We could go another way, holding..."
"If you want extra cash
you got it, no problem
but I gotta push through the gate
or I'm finished...as a man."
He paused, stared at everyone, finally
bursting out, "I wipe my ass
with hundred dollars bills."
"He does, " said Lola.
"Not Bernstein, " laughed Treasure
winking at me
which I took as a cue so, "Go to a doctor, Billy,
and see what he says."
Thunder now, huge booms
setting off car alarms
as the rainstorm plunged from heaven.
Lola stared out the large plate glass
window, eyes drifting past the window
until she said dreamily,
"When I didn't have a place to stay
before I came to the Clement Hotel
I used to sleep in Lincoln Square Park
over by Eastern Parkway
and the puppies would come to me
in the night
and sleep with me.
and I kept them warm."

Charles Chaim Wax

lucid midnight images

compel the mind
to inspect
the possibility of infinite drifting
vast space a thimble
of no note
to a soul so imbued with
time ripped to shreds
yet
ordinary earth
calls
and calls
no eternity
outside of breath.

Charles Chaim Wax

Many Vain Attempts At Escape

When I arrived in Mike's under the Stillwell Avenue
subway station I spotted Abie drinking a Bud
two empty cans already on the counter
surprised to see him at eleven in the morning
usually a night person but
perhaps never went home, nor had
he shaven in a few days and now
wore a scraggly beard. I sat
next to him asking, "How you doing
today? "

"I beat it two times before but now I
don't know."

No expression in his voice
like a dim hum from within a distant tunnel.

"I beat the depression two times
before but I don't
know if I can beat it now."

"What happened? "

His voice flat and unemotional
as if there were no longer
any question as to it's certainty.

"Tomorrow I'm gonna be institutionalized. You
gotta want to help yourself. I don't
want to help myself. Anyway
it goes back to childhood, it's an
accumulation. All these years
hiding from life and now life
caught up with me. I got
myself in a box and
there's no way out."

Fearing the worst I howled,
"THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY OUT."

Abie made a motion with his lips, a slight
motion of putting his lips together and
blowing out a bit of air, a

Pfff

which indicated
no hope, or
it didn't matter, or
why bother, or
so what.

Charles Chaim Wax

Money

Belle Lorton inherited five million
when her father passed away
and at forty-two was ripe for love
which Swan gave her for cash,
although Lorton didn't see it that way.
Now she blossomed with a big belly.
and knitted for the baby
which would soon emerge from her being
and be with her whether or not Swan joined them.
Then one day this guy with one arm
strolled into the Teacher's Center,
tall, very thin, with brilliant blonde hair.
When he smiled the two front teeth
gleamed with gold caps.
I had never seen him before.
"My name is Barlow Woodhead.
I'll be taking over Estelle Salz's program."
"What happened to her?" asked Van Allen.
"Don't know. The district office sent me."
Two weeks later Kenna saw Barlow and Swan
kissing in the fifth floor bathroom.
As it turned out this Woodhead
also was loaded,
apparently he received a whopping settlement
in lieu of his right arm
which was sliced off in his previous job
at a sardine factory on the West Coast.
Why he needed to teach I don't know.
Felix Zellermeier, who gave me the information,
didn't say, and I didn't ask.
Nor did I inquire how Felix got the information.
When Lorton heard the news she laughed.
Van Allen stared at her.
Swan started wearing expensive clothing.
I knew the price of the stuff
because of my subscription to GQ magazine.
Like a pair of \$450 jeans, a \$320 silk shirt.
The shoes were some poor animal,
alligator, or lizard, perhaps rattlesnake,
a creature I couldn't readily identify,
but they had to be at least \$1,300.
I figured he was now getting cash
from both Lorton and Barlow.
Where this triangle would end up
I couldn't imagine.
Van Allen stayed away from Swan.
He felt a positive aversion to the man.
"They're all adults," I said.
"Bernstein, don't gimme crap.
The man is evil. Evil.
No other word.
And the Almighty takes care of them

that are evil,
not maybe in the next second
but soon, sooner than you think."
Van Allen was wrong, in this case.
Swan quit in May,
didn't even finish out the term.
Apparently he had wangled as much money as he needed
or thought he could get.
Barlow, however, being a responsible chap,
finished out the term,
then went back to the West Coast.
How much of his money he had left
I didn't know,
but Felix Zellermeier who went with him
said before leaving, "Enough."
Lorton was well into her seventh month,
and smiling all the time now.
Whatever it was she gave Swan
apparently was well worth it.
Van Allen said solemnly,
"I'll wait for what's gonna transpire."
"You hint at retribution to visit Swan, " said Kenna,
"but the man's rich now, I guess.
Got it by fornication,
with a woman, with a man..."
Suddenly, Kenna began laughing,
heartily, without restraint.
Finally he mumbled something
I couldn't make out.
Then he resumed guffawing.
I joined in
somehow caught up in Kenna's merriment.
Van Allen merely stared at us,
at last sighing,
"All laughter...slain."

Charles Chaim Wax

Mr. Winnie strolled into Meng's

sat at our table
then spread out his goods
but I was shocked to see him as
the temperature now hovered near zero.
Sophy Suling heaved her corpulent body into a sad sigh, "Got no money."
I immediately said, "Pick one
my treat."
Sophy stared lovingly at the images
of men sporting long pricks
standing at attention
then said, "This one."
"Mr Harvey," said Mr. Winnie,
"a wise choice."
I plunked down a five.
A moment later Davidson Kip showed up
the left side of his skull
permanently bald
after doctors stuck a steel plate
in his head to keep
his brains in one place
but the deep neurons were never the same
and horrid visions stormed the soul
preventing sleep
and resulting in remarkable behavior
which shifted with the seasons
the cold being especially hard to bear
as the steel often froze
constricting tissue mass
causing terrible pain
of body and soul
yet being alone in his tiny room—
unbearable.
Kip said, "You're going to Hell, Sophy,
looking at trash."
Mr. Winnie packed up quickly
and left, as Kip had once
tried to devour, literally,
a naked photograph of Marilyn Monroe,
this during a heat wave in August
cannibal time for Kip.
But in December a different story
perhaps the Virgin birth
giving him ideas
that only a pure heart
could leave torment forever.
"I got a right to masturbate," Sophy replied.
"Someone will come along," I said.
"He ain't yet...in real life
but in my dreams
he takes me to sunny beaches
in Florida or Hawaii and we make love."
Then she lifted the picture of Mr. Harvey

and held it up saying, "I like pictures of men with long weenies."
 "God bless Mr. Harvey," said Irving Cohen,
 "but my fella been sleeping three years
 ever since my dear wife passed away."
 Sophy tenderly stroked the smooth
 glossy surface of the photograph
 saying, "It's big."
 "Yes," said Irving,
 "but I seen bigger. John Boyden
 hadda strap his to his right leg,
 else it flopped around too much
 and the Germans woulda heard
 when we was on patrol."
 "How do you know the size of Mr. Harvey?" asked Kip.
 but before Irving could answer he had another question,
 "Are you a cock sucker?"
 "Putz, shut up," said Irving,
 "the German's blew his head off,
 and a good part of his chest with mortars.
 After the fire fight the Captain sent a detail
 to identify the bodies
 but some of `em was just parts of bodies.
 I thought it was Boyden
 but couldn't be certain
 so I pulled down his pants to be sure."
 Kip gently caressed the left side of his skull
 closed his eyes, smiled, then
 without warning wailed,
 "YOU TOOK IT UP THE ASS. YOU TOOK IT UP THE ASS..."
 "You wanna see an ass
 I'll show you an ass," said Irving standing then dropping his pants and bending over
 finally to thrust his thin blotchy buttocks toward Kip, wiggling
 as best as a 74 year old man could.
 Sophy pinched his left cheek,
 then grabbed his long sagging testicles.
 "Oy vay," said Irving. "That feels good."
 "It does?" said Sophy, surprised and delighted.
 "Now turn around so I can see your
 Mr. Harvey."
 And when he did Sophy gently
 slapped the dangling item saying,
 "Wake up, Mr. Harvey,
 the war's over."
 "Oy vay," said Irving, "Mr. Harvey's alive."
 "Alive!" said Sophy
 the long sought dream now near
 while Davidson Kip
 banged his steel skull
 on the table
 waiting for mercy.

Charles Chaim Wax

My First Visit To A Psychiatrist

After the operation
on my right foot
I became impotent
went to the surgeon
told him
said he wasn't a psychiatrist
and gave me the name
of a well respected shrink
affiliated with the hospital
told my sad tale
and immediately
Dr. Guth
said he wanted to write up
my case
in The New England Journal
of Medicine.
"What about a cure
before publication?" I asked
Smiling he unlocked
the top draw of his desk
slipped out a paper
and handed it to me:
Fifty Fabulous Internet
Porno Sites
5 hours a day
5 days a week.
I stared at Dr. Guth
thinking
was this guy for real?
He must have read my mind
because he said,
"Mr. Bernstein,
logically
there's no connection
between toes and testicles
so only
radical therapy
can ensure a cure
which is what you want,
am I not correct?"
"But porno," I mumbled.
"Five Degrees
plus
two thousand three hundred
eighty-nine
testimonials
in my pocket...
well,
resistance to cure
always presents a problem
thus we'll go traditional:
So Mr. Bernstein,

tell me the first time
you undressed
your mother
in your mind.”

Charles Chaim Wax

Mystic Ceremonies

John Shelley waited for me
in front of my period 7
Creative Writing class
and I knew
what he wanted
even before he spoke.
"I'll drive you
again today, " I said.
"I can't bear
the bus ride home
after the hospital—
so much noise
confusion."
"No problem."
John Shelley stared
into my eyes
perhaps wanting a solution
to his agony—
not possible.
"It's not her death, "
he finally said,
"but the slow dying
I can't endure
a hope turned to dust
then another glimmer
that soon gone too
feel so weak
my wife tries
to understand...
well
it's my mother
and I'm an only child."
Suddenly I heard a commotion in class
nodded to John
rushed inside
to see
16 year old Carrie Cook
belly bulging with child
holding her hand high
the diamond engagement
ring
sparkling
in the flickering fluorescent light
of motherhood.

Charles Chaim Wax

Nagarjuna in Coney Island

Helga stumbled into Meng's Restaurant
in Coney Island
I was surprised to see her
in weather like this:
the bitter wind blasting in from the North
now close to zero and well below
with the wind chill accounted for.
"A waif, " I said to myself,
"blown this way...that way."
"Over here, " said Tom Fay.
She sat at our table
her body swaying gently back and forth
eyes staring
at the red Formica table before her.
I wondered
how she walked through the windstorm.
Dangling at the chair's edge
spittle drooling from her lips probably
just shot heroin into her emaciated arm
and needed a place to be warm
so wandered here
thrown from the shooting gallery.
Suddenly the Preacher strode into Meng's
immense black Bible in hand
to spread the word of God.
"Satan grows more powerful
each day people sin,
but the rain will fall and the crops will grow
because Jesus loves us."
Helga said, "Suffering rules creation at each and every speck in the cosmos."
The Preacher fearing her soul
lost, Helga's thin face the exact image of Christ's torment
declared, "The Father in Heaven
gave us life,
the Father in Heaven
gave us an immortal soul."
"Soul? " said Helga
shifting ever so slightly
to the center of the chair
and craning her neck
to stare at the Preacher whispered hoarsely,
"The soul exists after death.
Yes or no?
The soul does not exist after death.
Yes or no?
The soul both exists and does not exist after death.
Yes or no? "
I stared at Helga
her words, I had heard them before,
but where I could not remember.
Tom Fay looked at her saying, "So many questions."
"The world is evanescent. Yes or no? "

"What's 'evansint' mean? " asked Fay.
Without a moment's hesitation
she said, "Ephemeral, fleeting, vanishing...more?
Yes, always more clarity is needed.
Brief, disappearing, transitory, temporary, meteoric, passing..."
"You read a lot, " said Fay.
"Too much, " sighed Helga.
Suddenly I remembered
the musical name and blurted out,
"You ever read Nagarjuna? "
"Among others—
now this I ask you,
Where is he reborn
who has attained enlightenment? "
"The Buddha is deep,
immeasurable,
unfathomable, " I said.
But she didn't hear my words
as her eyes gently closed and
she tilted to the left
almost
slipping off the chair
but not quite
suspended
in the Void
where heroin
pumped
Nirvana
into every heartbeat.

Charles Chaim Wax

Napkins

"Over the years I lifted
more napkins from Nathan's Famous restaurant
than any man alive, " said Sam.
"How long you been stuffing your pocket? " I asked.
"42 years."
"Any napkins from Burger King? "
"ONLY NATHAN'S, " he hollered
with the fervor of one who long ago
found his true calling and never wavered.
Being unemployed I figured
the man was on to something
and set about to follow in his footsteps
avoiding Nathan's for obvious reasons.
I visited Burger King for a week
then Saturday night did the counting
988 napkins
not bad for a novice.
Next week I broke a thousand and
after a month I had plenty of napkins but
the thrill of petty theft was gone and
as I stared at the bags of napkins
mused, what's Sam do?
"So, Sam, I was wondering
whatta you do with your goods? "
"Sell 'em to sundry eatin' emporiums, " he said.
"From this you make a living? "
Not answering my question
directly he said,
"My own boss
work when I want
bend the knee to no mortal
without worry
I ply my trade."
"I guess you get by all right."
He stared into my eyes
not blinking
"I am this day
and for the last 42 years
a happy man."
Overwhelmed by
the unmistakable
force of his words
I shook Sam's hand
and understood
for the first time
how a human life
flourishes.

Charles Chaim Wax

Never Abandoning Desire

On Thanksgiving Day
movies with my obese
twelve year old nephew
Navin
saw Rocky IV
crowd in the theater
cheered Rocky
walls rocking
in passion
man sitting in front of us
yelling, "execute him"
referring to the Russian
in the ring with Rocky
said it eleven times
each scream louder than the one before.
after the film Navin went to the toilet
suddenly he called, "Uncle Stevie, Uncle Stevie."
"what? can't hardly breathe in here."
"no toilet paper."
"two big popcorns,
three sodas,
two ice-cream cones,
a bag of M&Ms—
what the hell you expect? "
"no toilet paper."
"forget about it."
"can't wipe."
"forget about it."
"mommy always says
wipe after a dump."
"not now."
"what? "
"when you get home."
"I'm gonna tell."
I opened the other stalls
found none
went downstairs to get a roll
was told by the manager
someone's been stealing the stuff
for weeks
so he didn't put any out,
the man
who screamed
wore a red velour shirt
and plaid pants
he exclaimed, "great film.
seein' it again
how bout you?
nobody throws a punch
like Rocky,
coulda beat Marciano I betcha."
before I could respond

I heard Navin mumble, "Let's scam."
the guy asked, "Your son? "
"nephew."
he gleefully asserted, "eat your Wheaties
and you could be another Rocky
when you grow up. well,
maybe not another Rocky
cause there's only one Rocky,
never be another like him—
couldn't be
he's the Champ of Champs."
Navin mumbled once more, "let's scam."
outside I asked, "what's
the big hurry? supper
ain't for an hour."
"wiped with my draws
then flushed `em
bowl overflowed."
"oh."
"you know that guy? "
"never seen him before."
"talked like a fruitcake."
"liked the movie a lot."
"talked like that stuff was real."
at the bus stop
Navin spotted a bakery
mumbling, "need a few jelly donuts
to settle my stomach."

Charles Chaim Wax

Night drifted through heaps of white stars

spilling into space where a billion light years
yearned for understanding
but not possible, the tender mind
too fragile to witness even ordinary death
without that famous promise
but more than grains of sand or leaves
these stars burning and burning
into a final bit of frozen dust drifting
all this before souls wept
and I never could believe that either
as a gust of wind blasted out of the North.
I felt cold.
It would snow here
long before it ever snowed in Brooklyn.

Charles Chaim Wax

nightmare upon nightmare

loneliness upon loneliness
donkeys nibbling my testicles.

Charles Chaim Wax

No Chance For Safety

I ambled into
the Teacher's Center
sat next to Max Door
who immediately said,
"The Bird Flu's coming
no escape
death toll:
150 million
at a minimum."
Oliver Murtha sneezed.
"God bless you, " said Henry F.
"Again with that word! " said Murtha,
"how many times
I gotta tell you
the Almighty
done a bad job creating
humans
shoulda just assembled
the earth
and all the glories
of the earth."
Henry F said, "Couldn't be helped
being I was brought up polite
respectful
when a sneeze occurs
but meant no offense
none
none at all
now that I remember
your feelings about the Almighty
not that I'm gonna try
to set you straight on that matter
I've tried
yes
my duty
cause a man's soul is
nothing to trifle with.
'The fires of hell
burn exceedingly hot, '
they do
no question
but, well, you got your views
and so I honor them
entirely."
Max Door smiled
saying,
"Bird flu's coming
Hell on earth
for sure."
Henry F closed
his eyes
intoning

The Lord is my Shepherd
I shall not.."
"150 million
dead
more
if the mutations
go on and on
thus no vaccine
possible."
As Henry F still intoned
his beloved prayer
Oliver Murtha sneezed.
"STARTS WITH A SNEEZE! "
said Max Door
eyes opening wide
then still wider.

Charles Chaim Wax

No Expectation Of Reward

Being the union guy at Spinoza HS
created a morsel of interest to the day
like when Darwin Dix showed up
his hair a bunch of purple spikes
a good ten inches off his skull
held upright by some fancy gel
from Italy I never heard of.
Chairperson Linda wrote him up
declaring his appearance demented
thus hindering the children's education.
"A poet don't play by your rules, "
I informed her, knowing the union had
gone to court on this one:
No dress codes for teachers.
Darwin wrote a poem in my honor:
The Real Big Boss of the Universe
sent it off,
and was immediately accepted by two magazines
The Infinite Green Frog and Punctured Flesh
thus granting me fame, albeit minuscule
as both only had a combined circulation
somewhere near 48 souls
the exact number not definitively known
but the smile on Darwin's face
as he handed me a copy of each
spoke volumes about
the true nature of happiness.
Of course I immediately asked
for his autograph on the cover
which he did saying,
"After all these years of despair
finally getting known."
Then added, his voice soft and tender
and filled with gratitude,
the tone like a moment from a Bach Pastorale,
"All this, thanks to you."
Well, what could I do
tell him this minor success at 46,
really not much
but then again perhaps Darwin Dix
now a published poet
knew more than I did
that I was indeed
The Real Big Boss of the Universe
and if not
at least a good union guy.

Charles Chaim Wax

No Greater Love

On September 8th
Effie Day told everyone at Spinoza HS
to call her Ann Lee
because she'd joined
the United Society of Believers
in Christ's Second Appearing
commonly known as the Shakers.
I was shocked such a gorgeous woman
had vowed to abstain from sex forever
but another part of me
understood the soul's necessity
still before she left I asked her
in the Teacher's Center, "Why? "
"Bernstein, " she said calmly,
"there's too much fucking in the world
no room left for elephants to roam free."
Henry Duffy said just as calmly,
"I ain't had none since I was 23,
42 now."
Henry, a nice enough fellow,
but now I wanted to hear Effie
still he went on, "A birthday present
from my dad, cost him two hundred
which in them days was quite a tidy sum."
"Well, " I began.
Henry continued, "Two weeks later
sucked a bullet, half his head
blown away, but always thinking ahead
he done it in the bathtub
so my mother could clean the mess up easy."
"Why? asked Effie softly.
"Wanted to give me something
before he croaked himself, " said Henry,
"cause he knew I'd never get a woman
on my own."
"The other matter."
"I'm sure the man
had his reasons, " I quickly said
still wanting to hear Effie's confession
but don't you know
Henry's tears
put an end to that
as Effie cradled him in her arms
her wet tongue plunged deep in his ear
whispering words of comfort.

Charles Chaim Wax

No Tracks in the Great Void

Larry Yeury waddled into the Teacher's Center
unable to actually lift each foot from the floor
flopped into a chair
and launched into an immeasurable pumpernickel bagel.
Suddenly, "OUCH."
"What's up? " I asked.
"A roach in the cream cheese, Bernstein,
crunched when I bit into it."
Yeury unlocked his bagel
to get at the crushed creature
then flipped it into the garbage
then stared at sections of abdomen and antenna
studying intently this message of mortality
finally putting the halves together and munching on.
"There was a roach in the cream cheese, " I noted.
Waited for a response, None.
Continued, "You just swallowed about 68 known diseases
plus a few probably not yet identified
death in each bite, my friend
spit it out, save yourself."
Yeury stuffed a chunk into his mouth
mumbling, "I'm strong
a fortune teller told me this and other
important information regarding the future."
An odd wink, then another bite, finally a smile
and at last a belch followed by a bigger smile.
"What did she tell you? " I asked
always interested how life tumbled into death.
Yeury gently placed the bagel on his lap
suddenly serious, face literally transformed,
then: "In this life a hippo
but after
a butterfly
yellow
with six small blue circles
on each wing."

Charles Chaim Wax

Not A Precise Report

my sister said
Minnie said
her friend's son
fell off a moped
near Rochester
on a country road
then a car
killed him.
'how old was he, ' I asked.
'twenty-one or twenty-two, ' my sister said.
'I can't remember.
anyway
what's a year?
after you're dead.'

Charles Chaim Wax

Not Often Destroyed In Such A Manner

My sister called
sounded desperate
said I should come over
now.
As soon as I showed up
she said, "Some kinda monster alligator
named Buck ate mosta Howard's
best buddy, Huey—
both arms
a leg, and the head—
like a brother
all through
Howard's rough childhood
only friend
he had
to tell the truth.
Suddenly Howard appeared
dressed all in black
and obviously shaken
by the loss of his
boyhood friend. I mumbled, "Sorry for your loss."
He muttered, "Damn Buck
shoulda been dead
years ago
got enough buckshot in him
to sink a battleship
don't know what's keeping him alive."
My sister
moaned, "He's a lucky alligator."
but Howard didn't respond
to the remark. I asked, "How can
an alligator be lucky?"
"HOW? HOW?" my sister shrieked
as Howard banged his head
against the wall
finally
bursting into tears.
Annie, my three year old niece
ran into the foyer
saw her father
saw mother
ran back to her room
the sight too much
for the child
and me too.
"HOW HOW HOW?" my sister wailed on
then stopped
as did Howard
who slumped to the floor
the frenzy gone
from both
for the moment

My sister stared
at her fallen husband
finally saying,
"There's lucky ones
and there's unlucky ones
that's it
that's all.
the history of everything
case closed."

Charles Chaim Wax

Not Spared by Adverse Fortune

I arrived early at the El Greco Diner
in Sheepshead Bay
waited outside
the waters glistening
with black flecked streams of pink light
reflected from street lamps
and the cold I desperately desired
now here
felt better
but happiness had not arrived
so set my sights on Christmas.
Jack showed up
went inside
sat at a booth near the window
moved the curtains aside
watched the waters of the Bay.
"All true," he said,
"Why?"
"Sounds bad
the part about selling drugs?"
He paused
waiting for my reaction
said nothing
he continued, "Fell in love
my crime
she's younger than me..."
The waiter appeared, I said,
"Two deluxe cheeseburger platters
two diet Cokes
no ice each with a wedge of lemon."
"I got married young
loved my wife then
had two kids
my life set
happy on that path
good father, kids OK
didn't plan for this
stopped loving my wife
but didn't want to stop loving her
no big blowout
love gone
but still my soulmate
yet something missing
maybe only realized it at 53."
"The drugs," I whispered.
"I'm afraid...
met Lynn
saw a chance for new life
an actress
but couldn't leave my wife
not just leave
and no heart to confront her

two sons would've sided with the mother.
I said impatiently, "Jack, you weren't arrested
for falling in love."
"Seen Lynn in a small cafe..."
"Selling dope's evil."
"I couldn't breathe
not a particle of air in my house..."
"I know all the sorrows, Jack
no one's exempt."
"Then one night Lynn sat at my table
place crowded
small round table. She said, 'I'm sorry to intrude
but I've been on my feet
all day going to auditions.'
sounds like a movie, right?
desperate old man
meets a mysterious younger woman
and after that everything in his life changes...
I felt a thrill.
I JUST WANTED TO LIVE."
"She ask you to sell dope? "
"She knew some people
who knew some people
I had this crazy idea
to make money
not only for myself
also for my wife
make up for leaving her.
"Doesn't make sense."
"Couldn't think straight anymore
got ripped off for ten grand
first time I tried
took out another ten
this time
undercover cops...
help me."
I heard the rumbling blast
of fog horns
boats sailing out at twilight
on the dark ocean
where myriad fish
swam
and for a doomed few
utter catastrophe
from a world
they couldn't even
imagine.

Charles Chaim Wax

Not Yet Dust and Ashes

I'm sitting at the table
in the living room
with my sister, her daughter and husband
and her friend Sarah
everyone gathered for a
Rosh Hashanah dinner
Even though the holiday
falls late this year,
October 3rd and 4th,
the weather is still hot
and we talk about
the brutal summer
perhaps a hint of what is to come
and how if the Polar caps melt
all of Florida will be underwater
which includes my sister's son
who just bought a house there.
The doorbell rings
My sister gets up to answer.
Sarah says, "Well, Steve,
whatta you recommend for depression? "
"Still got that, " I say stupidly.
"Data entry all day is
driving me insane."
My sister is talking
to someone at the door.
Howard, her husband,
gets up to see what's going
on, who'd be interrupting
the Rosh Hashanah dinner.
"Menopause
doesn't help any, "
says Sarah.
My sister returns,
her face strained,
I know her well enough—
something happened
at the door.
"Claire wanted me to
hook up her bra,
said the girl who cares for her
forgot to do it,
that she had an appointment
at the beauty parlor for nine,
all dressed up she was,
ready to go out."
"Now? " I said.
"She must have dozed off
got up
then thought this was nine
in the morning.
I told her

Claire
this is at night
She was so embarrassed.
"She's losing her mind, " declared Sarah.
"No! " my sister said,
"No! "
Well my sister had every right not to
want Claire to disappear
after all she'd been living
next to her for fifty years
and Claire's husband
dead at eighty-five
less than six months ago
now alone
two children, yes,
but alone
so morning and evening
day and night
life and death
for each essence
in motion
all one. Then suddenly
"SHE'S STILL ALIVE, "
my sister shouted,
then more quiet
even serene
"that's all that matters."

Charles Chaim Wax

Nothing Beyond Mercy

For the first time in 14 months
I went to the movies
afterwards we went to China New Star
myself and six friends.
The oldest at 78, Max, a diabetic
with three toes already removed said,
"The book was better, always is."
Nellie Nilan who had lost 200 pounds
in the last two years
and had never married and at
58 probably never would, said,
"I couldn't cry
I wanted to cry but I couldn't cry."
The film had ended with both lovers
finally finding love
in one another's arms.
"I told you's all, " said Larry, "we shoulda
seen King Kong."
"I couldn't fall asleep last night, " Mona moaned,
"so at 2 AM I watched TV, the Comedy channel
Lynn something can't remember her last name
funny and filthy making fun of everybody."
"That's not funny, " said Vivian
born without a left ear
but never combed her hair to cover the absence.
"Where's the damn waiter, " exclaimed Ed Henwood,
"in a fancy place like this
the guy shoulda been here by now."
Jim Wink simply said, "All in good time."
"Meaning what? " said Henwood.
"Meaning: we'll all be dead
soon enough, what's the hurry."
"Do me a favor, take your freakin' medicine
next time you come out in public."
"You're quiet, Bernstein, why? " asked Ella Le Blanc
almost bald and completely
grey at 26, crushing anxiety
having sopped up the last possible speck of human joy.
"The God complex again, wanting to grant
Salvation to all beings
but unable to—
can't handle it, just wanna be Bernstein,
eat a little Lo Mein, go home, sleep."
"Meaning what? " said Henwood.
"In the movie
when a farmer plucked that chicken
still alive and shrieking for mercy
I could feel every feather
being yanked out."
"I didn't see that."
"As the lovers were kissing
off to the left."

Charles Chaim Wax

Now On the Throne

Six years I've been going into Rite Aid
to buy Diet Coke, Excedrin PM, Doritos,
Corn Cobb pipes, and other stuff
to keep me alive
and always chatted with Ed, the manager,
about sale items not stocked, why no
discount for Red Bull, the weather.
A chubby guy from Guyana, hard working
serious, keeping tabs on everything
then yesterday
Billy Roy Byron walked in
and handed him a stack of Lotto tickets
which Ed quickly dumped in his back pocket.
"A gambler!" I declared, with a smile.
"Fifty-three tickets," said Billy Roy Byron.
Ed placed my Guacamole chips in the plastic bag
then began laughing.
I slipped him my Chase credit card
which he ran through the machine
still laughing
and when I left
still laughing.
My God
I thought to myself.
he's a happy lad
and returned to watch
still laughing, and caught up
in the merriment I said again
"A gambler!"
Still laughing
others now, the same
soon the whole place
the pulse of it all
no explanation
just the blessing.

Charles Chaim Wax

Numbers

I walked into the bank
to count nineteen people on line.
The guy in front of me turned and asked,
'Is this November 20, 1995? '
(He had just written '1995' on a withdrawal slip.)
'November 20, 1994, ' I said.
'I don't know what's happening.
They hit me car, they robbed my house,
and, now,
all my teeth fell out-gum disease.'
'Don't let it get you down, ' I merrily proclaimed.
'Yeah. I just gotta hang on.'
Then he crossed out the '5' and substituted the '4.'

Charles Chaim Wax

O Brave and Faithful Dream

The day began
with the temperature
plummeting
closing in on zero
wondered if I should wear
a coat
decided to put one on
not wanting
to be a show off
told everyone at Spinoza high school
my mother bore me
on the steppes of Siberia
wasn't true
but felt
it should have been true
I loved the cold so much
well,
we all had our little
dream.
Later that day
I pranced into The Teacher's Center
ecstatic
below zero
soon to happen.
Just then Herman Hammer trudged in
saying,
"If I didn't have bad luck
I wouldn't have no luck at all."
Couldn't understand the man
a little while ago Bob Bacon
gave Hammer
two one hundred dollar bills.
"What's going on? " I asked.
"Blew it, Bernstein,
just lost Bacon's two hundred
plus eight hundred more."
"Weren't you in class? "
"It don't take long
to make a phone call."
"After all Bacon said
wha'd you bet on? "
"A soccer game in Paraguay."
"What? "
"I follow every sport
in every country
on the face of the Earth."
"Are you insane? "
"Just wanna be rich—
my dream
quickest way
win a bundle
with a bet."

"But you owe fortunes! "
Suddenly a blast of wind
rattled windows
as frigid air
seeped into the room
and I smiled.
Herman Hammer stared at me
tears welling into his eyes
then streaming down his cheeks
finally dripping from his chin
well,
my heart ain't made of stone
so I slipped him a ten
which he quickly took
whispering,
"There's a Chess game
in India
which I know for a fact
is fixed
sure thing
and a twenty
could turn into two hundred
so Bacon
won't be on my case."
Another mighty gust
slammed Brooklyn
so I presented
Herman Hammer
the dream ticket
twenty
not asking
how he came by
such important information.

Charles Chaim Wax

Obtaining Delight This Night

A winter
without snow
to transform
brutal asphalt
into a wondrous cradle
where humanity
could dream pure thoughts—
in Brooklyn
at least—
unbearable
so when
the first
delicate
crystalline
snow
drifted from the heavens
my spirit soared
high
far
dwelling amid the countless
manifestations
and this night
the air fell
to ten degrees
so no thick heavy snowfall
instead what I called
a Twinkling—
iridescent flakes
given a brief
optic life
for humans
by the brilliance of
mercury vapor
street lights.

Charles Chaim Wax

Of course no matter what happened

I needed the teaching job in '68
or off to Viet Nam
but when I told what happened
no one believed me.
I said to my buddy John Wiley,
"Each day I cover for teachers who are absent."
He smiled, Viet Nam not a problem for him
having declared himself
a Communist Homosexual Drug Addict
a month ago to avoid servitude.
Continuing I said, "Or who quit on the spot
running from the building in terror and tears."
"Bernstein," he said, "the life of homosexual drug addict
ain't that bad, anyway,
after seven years the records are expunged."
"You left out Communist."
"Too doctrinaire for polite conversation."
"So," I said, needing sympathy,
"Norma Lumley ran away in the middle of her Science class
and Principal Pink sent me to the room.
When I stepped in
Assistant Principal Pekale stood next to the board
like a catatonic zombie as students ran around
and the water gushed out of the faucet and the gas hissed.
At last he intoned in a low monotone voice,
'There, there...let's try to act like young ladies and gentlemen.
Let's see who can do this problem.
If Johnny had ten cents and wanted to buy candy
and the candy cost two cents,
how many pieces could he buy? '
No one had listened, therefore no one responded.
He pointed to the blur of whirling bodies
at the center of the room and babbled,
'Yes. Five. Wonderful.' '
Wiley began whistling. Don't know why. Didn't ask.
Went on, "No student had uttered a word.
He had answered his own question.
He droned on, 'You see how well you can do if you just try.'
The water still gushing
and the eerie smell of gas floating in the air.
'Now Mr. Bernstein is going to take over,' he said
then vanished.'
"When this is over," said Wiley, "put pen to paper."
A Pause. Then a smile:
"These phantasmagorical tales, Bernstein,
you make 'em up, right? "
Whistling again, now with a bit of a tap dance.
Finally: "The insanity ploy.
Bravo! "

Charles Chaim Wax

On Friday night

I accompanied my sister
and her two children, Navin and Annie,
to Jahn's restaurant to celebrate Annie's sixth birthday.
"A Demon" we heard from the booth behind us.
A wrinkled woman no more than five feet
appeared before our table wearing a tattered blue dress.
Without warning she lifted a French fry
from Navin's plate and stuffed it in her mouth.
"They make the best here," she said taking another.
I counted three brown teeth in her mouth.
"I ain't finished eating yet," Navin managed to say.
"Just like my daughter—selfish," she said
sitting next to him. "And you could afford
to lose a few pounds. Move over, sonny boy."
"This is a private party," I said.
"The long nose speaks," she said lifting yet another of Navin's fries.
"Take the whole plate," he said,
"I ain't eating from it after you touched my food."
The old woman grabbed a handful of fries
stuffed them in her mouth,
then chomped rapidly.
"My daughter said to me, 'The only reason
I tolerate you is because you're my mother.'
TOLERATE, that's the word she used.
What happened to love?
My husband died and that did it.
The insurance money brought it out of her."
"When I worked after college I gave
my mother the whole paycheck," said my sister.
"You did, ma?" asked Navin incredulously.
"You gonna finish that, little girl?" she asked Annie,
then grabbed the hamburger,
squashed it into a ball,
and dropped it into her mouth
and swallowed, not bothering to chew.
Without warning she burst into tears.
Navin gaped at her in disbelief.
"You ate everything on the table," he said.
"Whatta you crying for?"
She stared at him,
the rims of her pale gray eyes now limp and red.
"To bury a daughter is not so easy, sonny boy."
"She's dead?" my sister gasped.
"To me! To me!"
"It's only money," I said.
"MY MONEY," she shrieked in a high pitched wail
as she reached across the table
for a handful of Equal packets
which she slipped into her pocket.
When Navin saw this
he did the same cleaning out the bowl.
"All of them you need, sonny boy?"

she asked.
He handed her two.
She grinned uncontrollably
as if he had placed a gold coin
in the palm of her hand.
Once again she began to cry.
Navin quickly dumped
all his Equal packets in front of her.
She slid them off the table into her waiting hand,
then into her pocket.
"So much heartache I got
from that cheapskate creature.
But the Torah says,
'Even in adversity
a pious woman must eat for the strength
to praise the name of the Almighty.'
So, what's for dessert? "

Charles Chaim Wax

On March 14th, at 8: 10 in the evening, the phone rang.

"She's in the hospital, " said Howard.
"What's wrong? " I asked nervously.
"The umbilical cord got wrapped around the baby's throat."
A cold wind blew across the dark streets of Brooklyn.
I parked three blocks from the hospital.
Five buttons were missing from my fifteen year old corduroy jacket
so I kept it closed with my hands.
I rushed to the waiting room
at the end of the first floor corridor.
"I got a daughter, " Howard immediately said.
"Congratulations! "
Then he asked if I wanted a look.
"Second one's Annie, " he said.
She didn't look cute.
In fact none of the babies looked cute.
They all appeared tormented.
I could understand why.
They had been thrust
into the immeasurable expanse
of the whole eternal kit and caboodle
where each body was growing and dying
at the same moment.
After seeing my sister I looked at my watch.
10: 50.
I didn't know how much longer I should hang around
because there was really nothing for me to do.
I told her I was going home.
Howard said he would stay.
He did the right thing. He was the husband.
As soon as I hit the arctic air I became hungry
and found a pizza parlor and ordered two slices
eventually dumping four into my gut.
Five kids played video games in the back.
As I watched them
I watched my coffin sail through
the indomitable night sky of Brooklyn
and I felt only joy.

Charles Chaim Wax

Once Thoroughly Skilled In the Language of Lust

Peeping at porno
downloaded three years ago
and not seen since
a horse and a woman
of course
so big
mine not even close
but besides that
what?
in his beating heart
what?
the unbearable delight
the same
trembling flesh entering Paradise
and agony later, if corruption seeps in.
Ah!
that magnificent stallion
manifesting the universal maneuver
all beings were born into
but I tell you
from the bottom of my heart
I want only
the serene camaraderie of distant stars
and their unimaginable burning
in eternal fire
until the final act of creation
collapses into a black hole
sucking both memory and revelation
into absolute gravity
and now the naked woman
flashes her Technicolor breasts
the horse high and ready for the next scene
don't want to see it
not anymore
the Buddha sad
I ever sought such desire
or any desire.

Charles Chaim Wax

Outside snow dazzled the air

each joyous dream bit twirling out from infinity
as I sat in Meng's with the crew
watching the soothing streets without desire.
Suddenly I heard the exuberant sound of a kazoo
going at full blast, Yankee Doodle Dandy the tune,
or something close to it
and that could only mean one person, Henry Kosminski,
known to all the world as The Original Mr. Universe
here to earn a few dollars,
as he often did since his retirement from the circus.
Well, at the age of 92 I suppose he couldn't do
what he did as a young fellow.
Besides seventy years at the same job was enough for any man.
Ginger, Sugar, and Susan Honey Baker
gawked at Kosminski's still formidable physique
his body still retaining remnants of glory.
Now silence as Henry bent straight down,
lifted a chair by the bottom of one leg
straight into the air, then gently placed
the tip of the leg on his nose, removed his hand,
and left the chair balanced there.
Ginger, Sugar, and Susan Honey Baker
clapped without reservation and
while the chair still perched serenely on his nose
he played the kazoo.
At the conclusion of this demonstration
of strength, skill, and musical ability
he sat at their table and they each handed him a five
a moment later Huey brought
a steaming bowl of oatmeal
topped with six soft prunes which Henry eagerly slurped down
as this was his only meal of the day,
the money collected most certainly
used to buy trinkets for his mother
still alive at the age of 110 in the Half Moon Nursing Home.
"God loves Henry Kosminski," I announced.
Mary Dillion said, "Long life is a marvelous wonder."
"He's a great man," said Pete Bennell,
"all these years and he still takes care of his mother."
George Lowrie opened a small brown bottle,
swallowed pills, how many I didn't know
nor did Lowrie, finally, "I'll never see 38," he said.
"Take a few more," said Mary and Lowrie did so.
Of course, I felt pity, his lifelong depression a brutal curse,
but the snow and the sight of Henry slurping prunes
tilted joy my way and I held fast to such a precious item
even when I heard Lowrie say, "What do they talk about? "

Charles Chaim Wax

Overcome With Awe

As I parked the car on East 12th street
a mouse appeared on the outside
of the windshield
a baby, anyway so small
from where
can't imagine
not brown not white
sky grey
but eyes dark
met mine
but I didn't know
what to do
looked at the people
walking along
suddenly
I felt like a holy man
intimate
with the mystery
of creation.

Charles Chaim Wax

Overwhelmed By Desire

When I first became
the union guy at Spinoza HS
I felt proud of myself
after all I'd be standing up
for the working man
against vicious and demented oppressors
so I now sat in the Teacher's Center with Ernie Repetti
getting him ready
for his Mental Testing day
at the Board of Education.
I began, "When you walk into the room
don't smile..."
Without warning
Ernie began to pick his nose.
"I'm talking to you."
Her wiped a green gob snot on the couch
not an inch from my leg.
"Don't do that
people gotta sit here."
"Sorry, Doctor Bernstein."
"Please, don't call me Doctor Bernstein."
"Reverend Bernstein? "
"No."
"Father Bernstein? "
"No."
"Well, I'm not gonna call you
His Holiness the Pope.
I ain't that far gone yet."
Bill Claxton said, "The man's a nincompoop."
"I'm the union guy, " I said.
All the while Ernie sitting there.
Claxton continued, "The man cracked up
ate half a box of chalk
in front of the whole class
and then told Principal Lalor
he chomped the sticks for calcium
cause he felt his leg bones crumbling."
"His wife threw him out
so of course
he felt his leg bones crumbling."
"Why'd his wife dump him? " asked Claxton.
"A delicate matter, " I said
staring at Ernie
waiting for him to speak
but he was at his nose again
so I said, "Wife found out
he's a coprophiliac."
"Win some, lose some, " said Claxton,
"this one you lose."
"I'm the union guy, " I said proudly.

Charles Chaim Wax

Poem For A True Hero

The Mighty Atom
strode into Meng's
to show off his considerable
feats of strength made more remarkable
because this was his 98th year of life
having been around
in the heyday of Coney Island
appearing at the original Luna Park
and Dreamworld
also he toured Europe
and traveled across the country
but now he stayed home
in a small apartment
on Mermaid Avenue.
Sadly, the Coney Island of his youth—
gone
yet not so
The Mighty Atom.

Charles Chaim Wax

Poems In My Mind

but I won't
punch the computer keys
to let the world
see the words
because
the dear souls
which inspired
my verse
would feel pain
seeing
how their lives
turned out
so different from
the internal image
they imagine
Perhaps I'm
dead wrong
but if a glimmer
of truth plunges
a heart into sorrow
I'm not living
the Greatest Vow:
Do no evil
do much good.

Charles Chaim Wax

Possibly the Most Dazzling Woman In the World

It all started when Camille Finiel
arrived from Harvard
to teach Creative Writing
here at Spinoza HS
Unbearably gorgeous
and thin
she could have been a Supermodel
but said she wanted to inspire children
so began to publish
Lizard's Eyelid, a Literary Journal.
Not to leave out the staff
she sent a note stating
any submission would
automatically be accepted.
Billy Murphy sent in one poem
while Henry Curtle handed in five.
After publication Billy told Henry
one seemed not quite up to the others.
After that Henry stopped speaking to Billy.
"Who cares?" I said to Murphy
in the Teacher's Center.
"But why?" he asked
when Camille floated in.
"Bernstein," she said to me,
"I am disappointed
you didn't submit."
Hard for me to talk to
this woman, too beautiful
didn't want to hold that against her
but couldn't help myself.
"Next issue," I mumbled into her smile
white teeth gleaming
so I wanted to ask her
to open wide to see if
she wore a single cavity inside
but Murphy cut me off saying,
"Curtle's angry at me
cause I said one poem wasn't
as good as the others,
and him a holy man,
at least a follower of Guru
something or other,
can't pronounce the name."
"Let me tell you about
poets and holy men," said Camille.
"First: poets are a jealous lot.
And as for holy men,
those pimps for Paradise,
most just want to get laid
as much and often
as possible."

Charles Chaim Wax

Profoundly Skilled In Agony

At 52 Minnie Weiss needed love
to be loved
perhaps more than any woman
I'd ever known
so each day at Spinoza HS
we'd go through the ritual
her asking me if I'd found a guy for her
and me saying not yet, but definitely
still looking
well, what could I say
all my friends were married
and if not, a bit out of alignment like
Bob Benney, obsessed with his final victory
at the track
never to arrive of course
plus overweight
with a permanent purple boil
quivering on the left side of his forehead
or Ernie, paranoid
believing the government
spied on him through light bulbs
but only when turned on
so candles lit his apartment
TV the same—watching him,
electricity the secret weapon.
Frank Weigi held out hope
he lived in my building
and had just retired at 55
and loneliness would soon seep in
then true to my word
I set up Weiss and Weigi
but the man didn't pay for dinner
probably still haunted by memories
of crushing poverty in Louisiana.
Minnie wrote him off as cheap
and he was cheap
but for her— the ultimate curse
yet not the real one
another
blocked Minnie's heart
her arms empty
grasping air
the unfathomable certainty
of the gift
eluding her tears.

Charles Chaim Wax

Punished More Severely Than Most

When I landed in the Teacher's Center
Isaac Edmunds began ranting,
"Rat stole my lunch
know who it was
wanted to take a make up exam
without a note
from home
wouldn't let him."
Belle laughed, "Got back at you, didn't he? "
"What now?" Isaac asked sadly.
"Buy yourself lunch."
"When the cops catch him
they gotta chop off his hands."
I laughed, "A bit extreme
buy lunch like Belle said."
"I like my own lunch."
"Not today."
"I like my own lunch."
"Not today," I repeated
staring at Isaac
well,
the man wore the same
faded white shirt
all term
same with the brown suit
brown shoes too
didn't like change
I could understand
the emotion
the sheer terror
of that slight shift
in existence
which would tilt him
into chaos.

Charles Chaim Wax

Read a poem

by a poehunter regular
about another
poehunter regular
the other day
so figured I'd give it a shot
English sounding name
but living in Amsterdam
perhaps hiding from the law
51
no longer young
but not old
picture the lad wearing
a red silk robe
smoking hash
while
semi-nude women
polish his toenails
fellow writes
jaunty poems
and I've always admired
such
a wondrous state of mind
immune
from the mutilation of depression.

Charles Chaim Wax

Reading Chuang-Tzu

Things
the matters in Helen's life
never went smoothly for her
nevertheless she endured them
but finally
it must all have been
too much.
She died of a broken heart yet
rumors
circulated she had taken
her own life.
Helen's son died of AIDS in 1984
never reaching
his 29th birthday
left instructions
as to what he wanted
after he was dead.
It must have helped him
die.
He asked for
an Orthodox Jewish Funeral
although he had never practiced
Judaism, the faith
into which he was born. He also
requested
a Memorial Service be held
100 days following
his interment.
For the first month after his death
David, his lover, and Helen
spent
many long hours
together
each needing
the other.
In the third month
David began seeing
another man.
Helen felt
that wasn't right
that he should have been
loyal
the way she was
loyal
should have lived out
the grief
she was living out.
At the Memorial Service
I handed her a copy of
The Inner Chapters
by Chuang-Tzu.
She gently

kissed my cheek
and at night
she slept
never waking again as
Helen.

Charles Chaim Wax

Roaming the rolling hills

of Western New York State
with my big 8x10 Toyo view camera
I poked around for beauty.
One day by a small river
I lifted a rotting black walnut
from the ground
white worms wiggled inside
the dark brown nut-meat
and I cradled this minute universe
in the palm of my hand
meant nothing to them
jiggled as before
not faster or slower
but steadily going about
the business of eating:
white star worms in the blackness of space.
Later driving along Route 15
in the dim twilight
the stars happened again
when an insect
smacked into my windshield and exploded
into a phosphorescent green point.
I drove on.
A second green illumination
then another
soon the glass pulsated
with infinite green lit up specks
well, not really,
but more than I could count
then pulled to the shoulder of the road.
Insects no longer alive
glowed with residual chemistry:
the gentle radiance of green stars.
Finally authentic darkness descended
and I headed to the Anais Dairy in Avon
for a cup of cinnamon ice-cream
store still open
ordered two scoops
sat by the side of that country road
and scanned the expanse of heaven:
stars without metaphor.

Charles Chaim Wax

Secretly Humming A Little Love Song

She smiled, sitting at the counter in Mike's restaurant,
pulled out her false teeth,
then polished the uppers with a napkin.
For the lowers she removed a toothbrush
from her purse, then scrubbed.
At last she stuffed her dentures back in and said,
"My stage name is Dinah Rosenblueth. Ever seen me? "
"Don't get around much, " said Morris.
"I guess you never been to Bethlehem, Nevada,
just outside of Reno.
I played there sixteen weeks straight,
packed house every night.
William Korn, the guy who made
a fortune in typewriter ribbons,
proposed marriage.
I turned him down.
At the time Herman Walker was courting me,
also a rich guy.
Richer than Korn.
Two weeks before the marriage Korn got a stroke
left me everything in his will, he told me so,
but his rotten kids burned it."
She laughed loudly.
"Burned it!
That's a crime
but they had big shot lawyers
so what could I do?
I went back to Walker
he took me in his arms and said, 'Now or never.'
He was referring to marriage.
But I could never make a judgment
right then and there.
I was young at the time.
I never liked to jump into something too quick.
Anyway, I wanted to find love.
I didn't love the man
because he had a huge wart
on the side of his nose.
I told him to get rid of it
but he said that wart brought him luck,
and he didn't trust doctors.
Whip out that cock, Doyle.
Shoot your load.
How long's it gonna take?
Twenty seconds? "
"I gotta finish the potatoes, " he said as he peeled.
"Here. Here. Look at this picture."
He glanced at the photograph asking, "When was that taken? "
"Years ago."
George Fritz mumbled, "Like a hundred years."
"No, thank you, " said Rosenblueth. "I'm a young woman."
"Young! You're ninety."

She lifted the hairspray and pointed it
in his direction, then sprayed him,
but the stuff didn't reach his face.
"Old age is fine, " said Morris,
"gotta be fine
cause the way of reality
cannot be anything but fine.
And reality demands every human being
to get on in years.
Can't be countermanded by no cosmetics.
My wife turned 72 on Tuesday,
and Lord, I declare
I love her more each passing day."
"How old are you? " asked Fritz.
"Me? " said Morris.
"Her, " said Fritz pointing to Dinah.
"None of your fucking business, you putz.
Anyway young enough for triple orgasms every time."
I stared at her.
She appeared to be in her mid-sixties,
perhaps older.
John Sitter hobbled in, leaning on his cane.
must have been at least 80.
"Sitter, " exclaimed Rosenblueth joyously.
"Where you been?
These morons here provide
no thrill for a woman like me.
But you! You!
You do things with verve! with style! "
"I try to please, " he said smiling,
"cause you're a woman highly endowed with mercy."
John Sitter settled next to Dinah
Rosenblueth, then gently stroked her hair.
She caressed his bald skull.
At that moment John Sitter
kissed the extravagantly painted
red lips of Dinah Rosenblueth.

Charles Chaim Wax

Sermon of a Soon to be Zen Master

What is power?
What is freedom?
When I stop breathing all of you will die.
Not only trees, rocks too. There are some
very clever rocks behind the Zendo.
My friend Hans
committed suicide. Everything went
smoothly. He planned it very well.
He turned on
the gas stove
and sat there
reading a book. Just this was not
the right place for him, so he went
to another place. He wasn't
psychotic or anything. He knew what
he was doing. I had another friend. His wife
committed suicide. She tried three times
and on the third try
she was successful. But for her
no place was the right place.

Charles Chaim Wax

Settling Into Infinity

Saul trudged into Meng's
and ordered rice and beans
while Irving asked Anna for coffee saying,
"Can you please fill it up.
I'm a poor old man."
"Already fill up. No more, " said Anna.
Of course that was true
but what he wanted
and what I pointed out to her
was that he wanted
the coffee to spill over into the saucer
and then she did it.
So Irving sat next to Saul,
inhaled the pungent coffee aroma,
then sipped a bit and said, "That's the life."
"I don't want to hear about it, " said Saul,
"I'm just waiting to die."
Irving tried to cheer him up saying,
"It's not bad as all that."
"Three months in the hospital
a hundred tests, no good
not a single one
rotten inside, top to bottom
You think my daughter came once to visit?
No, and two months I got left
no more
the doctors wanna send me to a spot
to croak but I'm gonna stay in my own place
there I know
there I finish this off."
Irving sipped his coffee in silence then
looked at Anna for a possible free refill,
depending on her mood.
Today Irving was in luck
as she shuffled to his table
and poured until the saucer
itself
was flooded.

Charles Chaim Wax

Shark Man

As I ate tofu ravioli
at my sister's place
the phone rang
Annie answered
a moment later saying,
"Shark attacked Navin."
"What? " said my sister
grabbing the receiver.
Five minutes later
she told the story of how
her eighteen year old son
Navin had been
zooming on his jet ski
when he lost control
and flipped off
sadly the machine sped away
as he bobbed in the water
the current too strong
for him to swim after it
so he screamed for help
but ten minutes later
tired of howling
he simply quivered on the open sea
as four hammerheads
crisscrossed in front of him
but a yacht soon showed up
hauling him out:
the Captain
dubbing Navin
Shark Man
because not one
even nibbled a toe.
The next day
my sister called saying,
"Navin made a grand last night."
"Oh."
"Dave Eickwort
owner of the Banana Peel
read the article
called Navin
and offered him a job
as a male stripper
so he prances on stage
wearing a fancy shark skin suit
then peels it off to Mambo music
with women stuffing
hundred dollar bills
in his jock strap."
I said proudly,
"The young lad's
found his true calling—
a rare accomplishment

in these days of turmoil
and confusion."
"But is there a future
in stripping? " asked my sister
always worrying
even when
good fortune
appeared
this time
via
four
not too hungry
hammerhead sharks.

Charles Chaim Wax

Snow falling

the Pier enveloped
in a dim gray twilight
swirling with endless flakes
coming from all directions
"The middle of December—
remarkable," I said to myself,
"and under the churning sea
another universe whirls
oblivious to air
snow stars humans."
As I stared at the vast Atlantic
the thought of the Sheepshead fish
entered my mind
even though Sheepshead Bay
lay off to my left.
I knew that fish had given its name
to the bay
where it once lived in abundance
now none
"Well everything eventually disappears
nothing stays the same
all creation
just ceaseless transformation."
"Talking to yourself, Bernstein,"
I heard Frank Freeborn say behind me.
"This weather lends itself to musing," I said.
"Or frozen testicles
especially for men
living in a refrigerator carton
under the boardwalk."
"After a cup of hot chocolate
you'll once more be able
to contemplate the meaning of life."
"You buying?"
"I believe so."
"The meaning of life—
an easy conundrum
the impenetrable component
happiness."
"Ah
the eternal abyss of happiness," I sighed.
Freeborn said, "The Almighty
created rapture
and our task
this snowy evening
I tell you from the bottom of my heart
to soak up hot chocolate."
"No Thunderbird?" I asked.
"For a man such as yourself
with a warm apartment
but for a man such as myself,
living out doors

a dangerous delight
last week Fat Floyd Ford
froze to death during
that cold spell."

found a wallet with a twenty in it
bought a fifth of Jack Daniel's
and finished it off by himself
under the boardwalk
then fell asleep."

"Happy for a time, " I said.

"An hour before passing out."

"That's something."

"Not much."

"Some people
never
even have
that hour."

Charles Chaim Wax

Solemn Emotions No Longer Concealed

I pranced into the Teacher's Center at Spinoza HS
the snow already drifting from heaven
my heart soaring, 22 inches predicted.
Felice McLaughlin and Frank Tropp
sat on the couch
I pulled up a chair and joined them saying,
"God loves this world
and all souls dwelling within its mystery."
"Cut the bullshit, Bernstein," said Felice,
"you're an atheist."
"Buddhist," I corrected her.
"The eternal illusion of male perfection—same shit."
Well, Felice, a beautiful but bitter woman
the husband she had loved and nurtured for 12 years
run off with another man leaving a note saying,
"It's now or never."
Tropp said, "I like that line, Felice,
can I use it in my poetry?"
"You can wipe your ass with it three times
for all I care," she said.
"Sorry," said Tropp,
"but I had a bad day yesterday
dumped another shrink, fourth one this year."
"Worthless scum."
"I'm trying," said Tropp, his face downcast.
"The shrinks, I'm talking about," said Felice.
"Yeah, ain't that the truth."
"What happened?" I asked Tropp.
"I told my shrink I'd finally downloaded
my goal of ten thousand porno pictures
and he said, Enough
Is that legal I responded,
because in my voluminous
reading of the psychoanalytical literature
a shrink listens, not pontificates.
Tropp he said you're a smart fellow
too smart, unfortunately that's just
another aspect of your illness.
Then I glanced at my watch
another loser I said to myself, thinks he knows it all.
I said Time's up
Ten minutes left he said
I threw the cash on the couch and left."
Felice stared at Tropp, her eyes, to me,
sad, but couldn't be sure. "Why so much porno?"
"No love and lonely," he said.
I stared outside as the billion bits of pure snow
descended lovingly upon Brooklyn, creating beauty
when I heard Felice whisper, "Should have murdered
that cocksucker in his sleep."

Charles Chaim Wax

Sometimes I read shipwrecks

from lads
explicating their own profundities
on a grain of rice
as if there were actually profundities
but missing the authentic
profundities.

Tricks
teetering on the head of a pin
because who cares
in the absence
of love.

Charles Chaim Wax

Songs of the Sea-coast

Depressed
almost devoured
yet
still the scribbling
on sand
the eternal sea
your witness.

Charles Chaim Wax

Sonja watched

the entrance to the Surf Hotel
a prostitute but more than just that.
"Bad night
to be walking the cold ground, " I said.
"Where'd you get the idea
it's easy being alive? "
When a guy crossed the street
she simply said, "I have to go"
and followed him into the hotel
where I watched as she undressed
her golden body.
"The Voices torment me
so what I want to know:
Will electroshock
do me any good? " Jack said,
to interrupt my reverie.
"The current goes
from your brain to your balls
and they end up like little burnt chestnuts
stay away from the wires."
"Well, then, I'm finished."
"Finish your soup and watch the storm
do like the Doctor."
And we devoured our barley soup
in silence and stared at the snow
heaving Heaven onto the earth
transforming
the broken streets of Coney Island into
an endless stretch of pure land
untrammelled and gorgeous
a born again
Garden of Eden in white
the troubled world at last gone serene.
Sonja returned
fifteen minutes work
at two dollars a minute
but for her money didn't exist
except to purchase heroin
which kept something from her
and that was all she wanted.
"Bernstein, can you help me with a five
so I can get straight the whole night? "
"If I give you this five
will everything be all right? "
"Yeah."
I gave her the five
hands soft, warm, tender
Thereupon she lunged into the whirling polar tempest
and began to march across the street
but before she reached the other side
she turned
and blew me a kiss

while the wind pummeled her hair
and the snow slapped her face
until she reached
a small man in a blue parka.
They spoke
impossible to hear their speech
but when she returned to Nathan's
I had some idea of their conversation
and handed her another five.
After she had gone
I asked Jack, "Do you want to know the answer to your question? "
"About the electroshock? "
"I already told you about the electroshock."
"Then about what, Doctor? "
"About why life is suffering
and how to end suffering."
I hiked to the center of Nathan's
and howled, "How many of you want to know why life is suffering
and how to end suffering? "
To my surprise silence greeted me.
"It's so simple when you hear it
you won't believe it."
Then with a tremendous roar
I emptied myself utterly into "MU"
a one syllable Koan given
to Rinzai Zen students.
I turned to Jack and commanded,
"Do MU shouting with me
it's your only chance for the good life. SHOUT."
"I can't."
"Leap into the sound
until you and the sound are One."
Then I hurled myself into a thirty second wail
to show Jack how it's done
finally staring at him
and whispering, "Like that."
He didn't.
I trudged outside the snow still fell
I looked at it
this snow seemed to be everywhere
and without end
yet I knew it would never empty
the ocean
or overflow the ocean.
I thought to go inside
and tell Jack another
Secret of the Universe
of the Perfection of our home
balanced in the Void amidst stars
which we could never separate from
even if mind became encapsulated
by the chatter of punishing Voices,

but I had already enlightened him enough for one night.
It was his turn
to do
for himself.

Charles Chaim Wax

Soon To Depart

When AIDS
couldn't be fixed
all the people
suffering from it
were goners
one such soul
happened to be Frank Brown
a teacher at Spinoza high school
who was spending his last days
at Pine Grove Nursing Home
me and Tom Pray
went for a visit
Tom bringing
a couple of videos
and People magazine
this one a special
The Fifty Most Beautiful People in the World
Frank sat in a wheelchair
eyes closed
dozing
but Tom opened the magazine
and began reading,
"Ricky Rocky Paull Goldin
says of this here Yasmine Bleeth,
'I can spend the rest of
my life looking at her face.'"
suddenly Pray laughed
as his body twisted in odd ways
the laughter consuming
his tiny musculature
finally he blurted out, "This guy is
a total featherbrain
a boob, a bubblehead,
a blathering bumblebeebrain,
the rest of his life looking at
Yasmine Bleeth! A fate
worse than death!
looks like a plastic surgeon's
handiwork to me
but to conclude this
IN DEPTH AUTOBIOGRAPHY
says Yasmine Bleeth is 5'5"
but would rather be 5'11".
What a dunderhead this creature is!
short people is...is...well say
we do OK for ourselves
I'm five foot even
who the hell
would wanna be anybody
but who they are? "
Frank Brown snored
peacefully

and I was happy
for that.

Charles Chaim Wax

Sorrow

Solemn Emotions No Longer Concealed

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sad, but couldn't be sure. "Why so much porno?"
"No love and lonely," he said.
I stared outside as the billion bits of pure snow
descended lovingly upon Brooklyn, creating beauty
when I heard Felice whisper, "Should have murdered
him in his sleep."

Charles Chaim Wax

Spiritual Entanglement

As soon as I landed in the Teacher's Center
I said, "Anthony, I heard stories."
"What stories, Bernstein."
"The Blue Babies, you're giving 'em away,
but not to me."
"Not so loud," he said, eyes darting about the room.
Suddenly: "Hello, Anthony" from Princess Rothchild
a smile, then sauntering to a chair she called her Throne.
"You been holding out," I said, not
letting him off the hook.
Immediate laughter, the space where his
front teeth were,
hitting me between the eyes.
"I swear on my mother, Bernstein."
"What!
she's been dead eighteen years
I was at the funeral, remember?
and who stuffed your gut with Yellow Wonders
so you wouldn't crack up. Me."
"My other mother," he mumbled
clearly grasping at straws
then silence, a quick stare at Princess Rothchild
and the immediate giggle from her.
I said slowly: "We ain't crazed druggies,
just need a bit of peace
at night, if the bad dreams
storm the soul."
"Always the Poet, Bernstein," he said
again trying to shift facts.
Silence, both weary
realizing we weren't tough galoots
the world having kicking us in the ass
for years, now only a few left
when Anthony sighed
all breath crushed from his chest
finally pulling out a handful
of sky blue Beauties.
"For me?" I asked merrily.
"Does things my wife never will."
From the corner of my eye
Princess Rothchild moving in
Anthony hadn't spotted her
the Hefty One Zip gallon storage bag
already open
and waiting, a moment later
the tumbling.

Charles Chaim Wax

Still Alive

Twilight in Coney Island
blue descending into deeper blue
at last obscurity
indicating
Universal Fate—
a bit of turmoil
then eternal darkness
well, I'd had a Pint of Jack Daniel's
hoping for release
but only a spongy depression
seeped in
so I stood with the boys
in Nathan's
keeping an eye on
the great matter.
Ralph Goldberg, 67,
penniless after a lifetime of gambling
watched gusts of wind
swirl
and sipped tepid coffee
he'd been clutching
for the last hour
a coffee I'd bought for him
Vinnie T said, "There's sharks
out there."
"If they had to
they'd sell their own mother," noted Goldberg.
For some reason he asked Vinnie T
"Are you a shark?"
"I ain't in the class of
the real sharks
a real shark would
eat me up quick
those guys—
the ultimate
way beyond sharks
sharks see them coming
they go behind a door
don't come out.
see that fly over there..."
I saw no fly,
but remained silent. "Them guys
when they kill you
to them just like
that fly
they took two rat bastards
to a barn Upstate
went and bought a new ax
then stripped both guys naked
and tied 'em to chairs
next gagged 'em
chopped off the toes

of the left foot of one guy
afterwards put a bullet
in his head
no way the guy's still living, right?
but they chopped the toes off
the right foot anyway
other guy swallowed his gag
cause he seen what was happening
too much for him
choked himself to death
the ultimate them guys.
Then Vinnie T
studied his watch with care
finally asking
"Got any spare change
for the subway?
getting late
and my mom's all alone."

Charles Chaim Wax

Suddenly the Air

no longer oppressive
the sky suffused
with light
changing
clouds also
and In my mind
I snapped pictures
as I journeyed along the beach
here
in Coney Island
and for a moment
perfectly still
wind blowing
astonishing golden streaks
across heaven
overwhelmed by
the beauty of the world
and questioned why the whole shebang
could not be wonderful as this
and how suffering
had become rooted
in the being
of humans
Ah!
to willingly leave
let go
not bothered by departure
simply immersed
in a single breath.

Charles Chaim Wax

Teeming With Bright Tales

Frank Happ crossed the street.
"I been in Canada," he immediately said.
"Oh."
"Montreal.
My girlfriend's mother is sick. I loaded
everything into the van,
and drove up in eleven hours.
When I got there it was
forty below. The river froze.
We went ice-skating."
I had no actual idea
what Happ did for living. At various times
he had installed satellite dishes,
been in high steel construction,
and done photography with a 147mm lens
attached to a Hasselblad camera
but when I checked a catalogue
I discovered
no such lens ever existed.
Happ continued, "My fiancée's a writer
wrote four books
working on one now
done volumes
one after the other
so they offered her a job, \$900 a week
but I could get her a job as a model
for \$1,000 a week. Then we had
a meal for \$120,
in a very fancy French restaurant
after we went skiing
bobsledding."
"You did a lot that day."
"Went mountain climbing also."
I said, "Aren't you scared? ...falling?
there's nothing underneath you."
"I died already
so did my girlfriend. She was climbing
a steep wall of rock
when this gust of wind
whipped her against the cliff face—
banged the hell out of her. She died
then saw herself being
slammed against the rock
over and over
but she loved me so much
she got back to her
body. That's called being born again."
"And you experienced that? What's it like? "
"When it comes you'll find out."
"Some say
nothing but peace
and glistening stars

and a comforting breeze,
like from the tropics,
cradling you when
the last breath is forever dispersed
amid the winds of eternity
so, what's death like? "
"I'm also a Tai-chi master, "
Frank Happ informed me,
then joyfully demonstrated
the intricate exercises of that
ancient discipline.

Charles Chaim Wax

Ten thousand poems of despair

I read them
read them all
the unbelievable human heart
so easily hurt
yearning, always the yearning
for breath
simply
without pain.

Charles Chaim Wax

Ten Thousand Times Pounded

By now the delicate falling
of a shining snowfall soothed
every inch of Brooklyn
which I announced to everyone
in Mike's restaurant.
Behind the counter Ryan glanced
at his watch, then continued
peeling potatoes for the morning rush hour.
"Bernstein, " he said, "you're one way out dude."
"Still a miracle, Ryan,
and did you know each snowflake's alive
also unique, never to be repeated
a billion births going on right now
on the streets of Brooklyn."
Kotz struggled to turn his head to me
then said, "I'll be dead
but I'll survive—on the street,
lost, homeless, a bum.
But what's that? "
Before I could respond
Celina Callahan, the writer, said to Kotz,
"Many people who are that bad off
kill themselves.
In my last novel fourteen characters
did away with themselves,
mostly with a cocktail of Clorox and red wine,
although a few took the gas pipe.
One jumped from the roof of
a six story building. I made him land
on bushes breaking his fall.
He lived.
Thus the irony of a leap to life
propelled the novel
with such dramatic force
I was amazed at my own skill.
I say a 'leap to life'
because after the attempt
he realized how wonderful
simply being alive could be.
He broke a leg, of course,
but in the hospital he met a nurse
who became fascinated with
his few seconds of falling.
Conversations ensued,
then love, then marriage,
then children, then happiness."
"How do you come up with that stuff? " asked Kotz.
"I follow authentic life, " said Celina Callahan.
Kotz stared at her, lips moving towards a smile
then stopping, serious, saying,
"A real man puts
a bullet through his brain."

Charles Chaim Wax

The Almighty spoke to Bernstein

often
of life, of death,
of eternal bliss
but it did no good
none
none at all
and his dear Louise locked in murky medication
the dense wound
of his tongue
useless
in the faded silence
love gone
not wanting to be gone
by anyone
but moved out
to a distant city
then a far away world
finally
into an exotic universe
the language
much, much
too harsh for the tenderness
of tender hearts
or what the Almighty
said
saying
only One Love
can the human heart encompass
more, even a bit,
my Creation
forsaken.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Anointed One

A short lad, his walk aggressive and powerful,
the football coach at Spinoza HS
six winning seasons in a row
the last one a perfect 12-0,
also Head Dean, keeping malefactors in check,
and more: almost a Real Estate tycoon
"Just getting started, Bernstein," he said
because I asked if he'd made his first million yet.
Then Danny announced his engagement and I said,
"A Jewish woman, I hope."
He laughed, plopped a hunk of cantaloupe
in his mouth, asking if I wanted some,
then said, "Fifteen grand for the ring."
"A nice chunk of change, but you got it, I'm sure."
Again: "Just getting started."
Then, out of the blue saying,
"I was born blind, first six weeks of my life,
doctors couldn't help
that's why I put on the Tallis and Tefillin
each morning when I pray."
This time a piece of honeydew melon.
"You lost me, Danny."
"My father went to the great Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson
of righteous memory, head of the Lubavitchers."
"The guy they said was the Messiah?
but he died, and the world's still in the toilet."
"Take a grape, Bernstein. Calm yourself."
I lifted three red beauties, dumped 'em down.
"The next day my eyes opened wide, my father
told me all this, and the Rebbe only
asked morning prayers for the miracle
which my father did until the day he died
and which I now continue from three to four each morning
day in and day out, rain or shine,
happy or sad
because the prayers must go on.
Tears now
and standing saying,
"A single good deed can transform the world,
the Rebbe's words to my father
and then I could see."
Still tears, shining on his cheeks.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Archer Brings Forth His Secret Arrow

I secured a teaching position
unfortunately
as a substitute
covering for a teacher
who was absent
Today I had
Larry's 8th grade reading class
the same kids the entire morning
one youngster was small for his age
loved to fool around
his specialty:
imitating Sammy Davis Jr.
which I allowed
for about half an hour
and then felt
time for work
OK for fifteen minutes
then the Sammy Davis persona resumed
with a rendition of CANDY MAN.
"You only did fifteen minutes of work, " I said.
"Mr. Bernstein, I just get tired."
CANDY MAN again
but as a gesture to his fans
he threw pieces of Good 'n Plenty
around the room
class clapping and screaming.
I said. "READ ALOUD
and we won't do anything
until then."
Everyone silent
off the hook
at the movies.
"You got a big mouth with the singing
READ NOW."
Not a word
crying
my arrow having pierced
his tiny heart.
The class quiet
each one feeling his weakness
none could read.
I stared at the diminutive lad
all my experience being:
"That big dummy Bernstein
is tryin' to scare me."
or, "Shut up yourself."
Now studying his tears
I felt terrible
yet
couldn't prevent
delight
from prancing through

my tortured
teacher's brain.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Barbarians Show No Mercy

Not yet dawn
bitter cold
a frigid front
blasting in from the Canada
but Meng's steamed
with hot oatmeal
and green tea
Walter Eddy trudged in
sat down saying
"The good old days are
gone forever."
"Them good old days
wasn't so good," said Abe Rosenblum,
"they only look good
when you look back at them
like people say how fantastic
Coney Island was
but the place was rough
very rough
right over there
off Surf Avenue
they electrocuted an elephant—
Big Alice
half the lights of Brooklyn
went out
when they threw the switch."
"I don't believe that," said Eddy.
"Irving Hirsch told me," said Rosenblum,
"and he was a Rabbi
lived to be a hundred and one
seen Big Alice fry
at the turn of the century this was
when Dreamland
had a hundred thousand light bulbs
cause in them days people went crazy
over electricity
since it was so new and do you know
Hirsch said Kaddish for her
He did!
for a whole year
he recited prayers
for her soul
to rest in peace
cause she had a miserable life
taken from her family
back there in Africa
and then with the Circus
and the whips
and then she got old
and the rat bastards
figured they could make
a few bucks off her.

I stared out
the large plate glass window
the air
now suddenly simmering
with the aroma
of crisp flesh
a century
after
the life and death
of
Big Alice.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Barbarians Were Beaten Down But Too Late

When Max walked he tottered
the left leg shriveled at birth
a good six inches
blamed the Germans
because they tortured
his grandfather at Bergen- Belson
the tormented genes
never recovering
tainting his father, now him
said I didn't see the connection
told me the story:
a guy took some rubber
from a broken conveyor belt
for the bottom his tattered shoe
the SS found him
bitter cold that day
stripped him naked
feet seized by a pail of water
the prisoners watching all this
at twilight
left him there
at dawn
liquid now solid ice
incredibly the man still alive
then blew a hole through his heart
no blood
too frigid to flow
Max's grandfather
unable to breathe
terror too much for him
more to come
a simple death not enough
for the SS
so shot off the dead man's ear
and crippled Max
for life.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Calligraphy of Suicide

'Sad, ' said Irving Kaufman
as I entered the Teacher's Center.
'especially for the kids, ' I said,
'to live through a
mother's suicide.'
'Did you read the note
the cops found? Can't figure out
why she wrote such a thing
to her husband, 'You drove me to this
and you are not
the father of my children.'"

Charles Chaim Wax

The Chemistry of Solitude

Miriam curled up
at the far end of
Meng's Restaurant
in Coney Island
a young girl who took pills
now gradually her body bent more
and more until her head
rested on the Formica table.

Many times
I had seen her
like that for hours
every so often raising
her head
looking around
if she saw someone she knew
she'd struggle to rise
and if she couldn't
she'd whisper,
"Got stuff? "

Nothing else.

One time
when Miriam slumped
on a table
her mother walked in
ordered Wonton soup
sat
slurped
then gone
no love left
I said to myself
hoping
my words were false.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Day Harry Became A Writer

As soon as the bell rang
I said, "Those with eyes, Harry, see."
"So what you sayin'?"
I ain't got no eyes? "
"You should think
of becoming a writer
whatever happened
to your rap songs? "
"I ain't no real rap writer."
"No confidence, eh? "
"I got confidence, to the max."
"Could be
but
there's no way to know
unless you do
the writing a long time."
"What's my chances?
plus, my spellin' ain't that solid
and I got deep worries
that's why I bite my fingernails."
Harry held high his hands
for all to see.
"Categorically
and fundamentally
all a great writer ever needs is
honesty—
those with eyes, see."
"Yeah
I see
sure
true
no confusion...
those with eyes, see...
they ain't got no blind spots
coverin' up they knowledge
like a million watt bulb in the brain,
shinin' out,
beyond mere bulbs
you got in your house
and I got a super bright bulb
burnin' in my brain. Yeah, I see...
those with eyes, yeah,
sure, those with eyes,
see
sure...so...so..."
and then his head turned
into a frenzied bobbing blur of motion.
Mona said, "Bernstein, "You made the boy go nuts."
Harry ceased his mad bobbing
calmly stood
pranced to the board and wrote:
"One morenin

the boye wackd up wit
one thowzan eyz
insteda the usuuel two.”

Charles Chaim Wax

The Enemy Lodged in the Brain No Reinforcements Possible

When a man
tries to do away with himself
well,
you gotta make a visit
to the hospital
even if
that's not a pleasant journey
so we went
made inquiries
and a Dr. Root
said he was the resident shrink
in charge of such sad cases
and who also said
he went to school with me
although
I hadn't the slightest
memory of the man
anyway
we took the elevator to the third floor
followed Dr. Root as he turned left
prancing jauntily down the corridor
until he opened a door
leading into a large room
musta been twenty souls inside.
"Bed number 8, Cole."
When we saw him
his eyes were closed.
"Dead?" said Melvin Strub.
"Sedated," said Dr. Root.
"Why's his hands tied up?" asked Strub.
"For his own protection."
Strub glanced at the next bed
where an old man
also had his hands bound.
"Is everybody tied up?" I asked.
"For their own protection."
"Guy looks 90."
"Not really," said Dr. Root, "84."
"He tried to kill himself?"
"The elderly have a high rate of suicide."
"Let's go," said Strub. "Cole's sleeping."
"Nurse," called Root, "ice cubes."
A minute later the nurse
brought over a bowl of tiny ice cubes
and the good doctor
shoved one into Cole's ear
and his eyes fluttered open.
"How you doing?" I asked.
It was then I noticed
the bandage on Cole's throat.
"He will not be able
to answer you," said Root pointing to his throat.

"How's he gonna tell us why he tried it? " asked Strub.
A nurse came over
and told Dr. Root he was needed in Suicide Ward 4.
"How many Suicide Wards you got here, doctor? " asked Strub.
"Ward 3
Indigent Suicides
those with no visible means of support
and no medical insurance
Ward 4
suicides with medical insurance
Ward 5
suicides who wish private rooms
well, not the patient
but the family
stay as long as you want, Bernstein
but when you're ready
to leave, let me know
so we can talk about old times
and what times they were!
Remember Denby Kenna? "
"Who could ever forget Kenna! "
"Could pick his nose
with two fingers
up the nostril at the same time
and what about Ella Fair."
"Hard to forget her."
"I never told you
but I had a crush on her
once showed me her wee-wee."
"I never knew that."
"I wanted to tell you
but I gave my word."
"You were always a man to keep his word."
"Dr. Root, " said the nurse, "you're needed."
He vigorously shook my hand, then left.
As soon as he was gone
I said, "The man's got
a fantastic memory
I remember nothing."
"You said
you recollected
all them kids, " said Strub.
"I lied.
to give the guy
a bit of joy
cause being with such misery..."
Strub mumbled,
"Gotta be cuckoo
living
with the half-dead
almost dead
soon to be dead."

Charles Chaim Wax

The entire crew gathered around my birthday cake

which Chairperson Linda had brought in.
"As the senior member of our Department, " she began,
"Steve Bernstein has helped us with his experience and wisdom.
Now make a wish! "
I blew out a candle.
"What? " asked Chairperson Linda.
"If I told you it wouldn't come true, " I said.
"That's only for children. Adults makes their wishes come true! " she admonished, her voice tinged with annoyance.
"I wish I could cut my toenails, " I said,
then immediately felt disgusted with myself.
Everyone stared at me, not understanding.
Well, why should they, all young and thin.
"I got old and fat..."
The next day I didn't go to work.
I needed an action film to boost my spirits.
When I arrived at the W.4th street station at two o'clock
I had an hour to kill
before Arnold Schwarzenegger did his Terminator routine
so I decided to wait in the NYU Loeb Student Center.
I opened the glass door and trudged past two
Security Guards in dark blue uniforms.
Then I plopped down in a wooden frame chair.
Suddenly I heard behind me, "That moron Maloney
said I should pick up papers.
I'm no damn janitor.
I been with the Laverty Detective Agency thirty years
but I don't curtsy to nobody so no stripes."
"He didn't say pick up every piece, Tommy, " the other guard replied.
"He said, 'If you see any big pieces of paper
near the door pick 'em up.' It wasn't like an order or anything."
"Today it's big pieces.
Tomorrow it's pullin' toilet paper outta his rectum."
Through the large plate glass window
the wind roared into the brittle branches
shaking some
shattering others.
Behind me Tommy went on about Maloney.
"The dumb jerk couldn't pass
the entrance exam to the Police Academy,
but since he made Sergeant,
he thinks he's a damn war hero."
Then I heard the sound of tearing paper.
I twisted my weary body.
Tommy had ripped a student flyer in half
and thrown it on the floor.
He looked in his late fifties with a big beer belly,
red nose, and thin strands of black hair
combed toward the top of his head from each side.
He ripped another flyer in half.
"Tommy, " gasped the other guard.
Two minutes later I heard, "Not the phone book, Tommy."

I turned to see the individual yellow pages
flutter to the floor like huge sad lost butterflies.
"You're finished, " sighed the other guard.
Tommy whistling now
couldn't make out the merry tune
finally the tome tumbling
and the jumping
on the tattered papers
as well as the book itself.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Etiology of Silence

his dog died
after that
he fell off the edge
(teetering there all along?)
now he stands, very still
looks straight ahead, doesn't move at all
on streetcorners
in front of stores
or sits on the ground, head bent low.
his dog never felt the leash
mental telepathy.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Exquisite Prison

As soon as I entered
the Atlantis Bar and Grill
Lolli spotted me, took my arm,
and said,
"Walk with me, Bernstein
we'll be like husband and wife."
Lolli had loved a shoe salesman
for twenty years
without respite
and without
the possibility
her passion
would ever be returned.
We left the restaurant
and strolled on the boardwalk.
After going
a few steps
we came across
a yellow comb on the boardwalk.
"Do you want it, Bernstein? " asked Lolli.
"No."
Lolli immediately picked it up.
Half a block away
she spotted a dart on the boardwalk.
It was blue but the metal tip was missing.
Still,
the object found
a spot in the shopping bag.
Then she bent and picked up
a pack of cigarettes.
To me it looked empty,
but lo and behold
a single cigarette remained inside.
She spotted a plastic bag
skimming along.
In that went.
A shell wedged between
the slates on the boardwalk
seemed especially to excite her.
She knelt and tried to remove it,
but it was stuck in too tightly.
She rummaged through the shopping bag
coming out with a Bic pen,

no point,
and used that to pry the shell loose.
"Let's sit down, " said Lolli.
By now the wind was really blowing.
White caps formed
in the great distances of the ocean.

I said that I wanted
to tell her a story which would help her.
"If it is going to be a sad story, "
said Lolli, "like the one you told me before
I don't want to hear it."
"I don't remember which story I told you, " I said.
"It was the one about the girl
who loved this man
for so long
that when she finally did confront him
in an alleyway
she didn't even know that it was him.
She had gone insane."
"You condensed it too much, " I said,
"and you didn't say
all the years she tried to be with him,
like twenty years she longed for him
and those years were ones
of unbearable suffering.
The unbearable suffering unhinged her mind."
"Yeah, yeah. Let's hear the new one."
"Study the waves
and let the waves enter deep into you."
"This talk I don't understand."
"Each wave
that comes
to the shore is different
no two the same
which means
the past
can never return,
and you must be aware of this fact."

Charles Chaim Wax

THE FROSTY SEASON

'No snow. Not a single flake.
I feared it would be
this way.
The Universe hates me. But...
I said not a word. Did I? '
Tar said wearily,
You said not a word.'
'I held it in.
But...this is the last week
in February. Each day
the sun shines longer and longer.
Ehat chance is there?
Precious little.
A blizzard?
That's not even in my dreams.
But a few flakes...
that...that I want.'
Tarr slowly sipped his coffee
He seemed relaxed
and contented. A surge of anger
shot through me. He was not feeling
the pain I felt.
'Bill Chlupsa was right.
You're nothing but a caffeine junkie.
You'd sell your mother for a cup,
wouldn't you?
C'mon, have the guts to admit it.'
'Bernstein,
I know how much you look forward
to winter, but I don't like snow.
I live in Riverdale.
Icy roads add a good half hour,
forty-five minutes to the commute,
plus the driving is hazardous.'
'Who told you to live in the Bronx?
There fine apartments in Brooklyn.'
Bill Chlupsa
walked into the Teacher's Center.
I immediately said,
'No snow.
Not a single ice-crystal.
The Universe hates me.'
'Huh? '
'I said, 'No snow. The Universe hates me.' Are you deaf? '

Charles Chaim Wax

The Great Activity Of Karma

As soon as I entered
my sister's apartment
for a home cooked Chinese dinner
she said, "Howard hurt his back
I don't know if can go to work
you might have to help with
the rent this month—
well, not might,
you gotta help."
"How'd he hurt his back? " I asked.
"They drilled through the bone
to get at the brain,
to put some stuff in
to kill the cancer."
I stared at my sister
what in the world was she
talking about? "I'll pay the rent
I'll pay the rent—
if Howard can't work."
"I got problems of my own
with the gallstones
and Howard's back being hurt.
He never shoulda lifted up
Mr. Orthman
when he fell down three days ago.
And all the while Mr. Orthman is yelling,
'DON'T TOUCH ME. DON'T TOUCH ME.'
I ran up to call his son-in-law,
Frankie—he's on pills, pills for sure.
He says, 'Get my wife.'
I looked at him.
I just told him his father-in-law
fell down in the street
and he tells me to get his wife.
How the hell do I know
where she is. They wanted him
dead anyway,
for the money.
Now they got the money.
But to wish for such a thing.
What goes around comes around.
Mr. Orthman wanted his wife dead.
When she was sick
he didn't give her food.
A coupla times she banged
on my door
asking for a slice of white bread.
They been next door neighbors
for forty years so of course I gave it to her."
I said slowly, "How could Mr. Orthman be dead?
You just said Howard lifted him up three days ago."
"It don't take long to die."

Charles Chaim Wax

The Greatest Mystery

1: 47 at night, still loitering on the Pier
with the usual crew
when old Tom Duffy walked by unsteadily
and as he passed under one of the lights
his face emerged haggard and white as a sheet.
"Tom, " I called out. He tottered to us.
"How's everything? " I asked.
"Bernstein, my son died, " he said
bursting into tears crying like a baby.
"You're still alive, " said Hugh Stryker.
The remark took everyone
by surprise. Even Joe Devoe was shocked
and when he was deep into depression
it took a lot to shock him.
"You're still breathing, " continued Stryker.
"A sad life, " sighed Tom Duffy,
"a sad life, and then to die
in his mid-fifties of stomach cancer."
"Poor kids
to lose their father, " said Joe Devoe.
"Never married, " sighed Tom Duffy.
Devoe stepped to Duffy
then gently kissed him on the cheek
lingering, perhaps needing to smell
the sadness
forever, but finally pulling away, saying,
"Over and over in the lives
that have ended you see
no miraculous lunge into happiness."
Duffy went on voice hoarse
worn ragged from weeping
"I told him, 'Go out. Meet a woman.'
I told him a hundred times
but my wife said,
'There's time for girls.'
Now...in the grave."
"Gone but not forgotten, " said Devoe
wanting with all his heart
to shift sorrow
everywhere and for all time
into joy
but without God's grace
so Tom Duffy still wept
staring at the vast Atlantic
dawn yet to come, if at all,
for a father in darkest grief.
Then another kiss
Devoe's lips trembling
longing for purity enough
to sing that lullaby
of deliverance
he had sought all his life.

Charles Chaim Wax

The heart twists

never able to stand
quite still enough
for pain to seep away
just torture
and again torture
until a moment of mercy
descends
from
somewhere
no need to ask
why.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Impregnable Barrier Of Time

Speaking to Jake Fineman
28 years ago
my study hall partner
at Spinoza high school
a young lad I was
and enjoyed conversation
with older men
perhaps searching
for what the future
might hold for me
Jake said it was time for him
to get out of teaching
18 years enough
but nothing he could do
to earn money
his voice steeped
in weary acceptance
as if he'd pondered this question
long and hard
but to no avail
and couldn't return to the sea now
like before when
youth stoked his heart
with burning dreams
glowing with promise
a sailor
he met an Italian girl in '38
rich and a fascist
Jake a Jew
asked her to come
to America
she didn't
but after the war
journeyed to Italy
the woman rooted
in the secret happiness of his heart
calling him home
to her home
by the sea
now total devastation
the navy
blasting every stone
into oblivion
no trace.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Inner Chapters of Godfather Arturo

Ready Freddy was the local loan-shark,
although no one called him
that disparaging epithet to his face.
He preferred Godfather Arturo,
his persona during the narcoleptic seizures
he suffered from.
He announced this discovery
six years ago. Of course
due to this condition
he was prevented from rising
in the Mafia hierarchy. That was the Cross
he bore, like Jesus he often said.
He developed this condition
at the age of four
while he witnessed
the decapitation of both parents.
It was rumored it instantaneously occurred
after his father's head rolled
across the floor
bumping into his knee.
People in the know
said he slept through
his mother's beheading.
Carmine ordered this revenge
because he thought Vinnie, Fred's father,
had skimming thousands off
high-jacked cigarettes.
A week later a crew from Bay Ridge
were found to be the culprits.
I don't have to tell you how Carmine felt,
but the damage was done.
After that he took Fred under his wing,
paying in secret for his Catholic school education.
When Fred reached the age of eighteen
he wanted to make a name for himself.
Carmine sent him on a few jobs
but Fred invariably
fell asleep at crucial moments
allowing truckloads of dresses,
cigarettes, and video tapes
to fall through his fingers.
Carmine then set up Fred
as a loan-shark. In this way
a little bit of Brooklyn
belonged to him
but he would never rise past this.
Other rumors had it that
Fred was gay because
he never went out with women
spending all his time with Enzo, Ricky, and Zippo,
the members of his crew.
Still other rumors hinted Carmine

had let Fred live only because
he had emasculated him
at the time of the double decapitation.
Fred related amazing tales
of Godfather Arturo
after every narcoleptic seizure.
A few details remained constant
such as his vast estates
covering a quarter of Sicily,
and the magnificence of his wife,
a woman with flowing blonde hair,
radiant blue eyes,
and over seven feet tall.
She was also his bodyguard.
They had seven children.
So far Fred had related
facts about only two.
Joseph, the novelist,
and Frank, the Pope.
Joseph was currently writing
a spy novel in Chinese
with his left hand,
and a romance in Spanish
with his right hand—
at the same time.
Because of this ability his output was prodigious.
At the age of 22 he was already
being mentioned
for the Nobel Prize in Literature.
Frank had ascended to the position of Pope
at the age of 14, the youngest ever
in the history of the Roman Catholic Church.
In his first Encyclical
he guaranteed
the entire population of Sicily
a place in Paradise.
Years earlier, in desperation,
Fred sought the assistance of a psychiatrist,
but he invariably
slept through 98% of the session.
It was then I told him about Chuang-Tzu.
He was so interested
I brought the text the following day
and read him the section on the butterfly.
"What's that mean?" asked Zippo.
"If you gotta ask you'll never know," said Fred.
"Make it simple for me."
"Go ahead, Bernstein."
"All life is One," I noted.
"There you have it!" said Fred
eyelids suddenly fluttering
until soft snoring.

"He's home, " I said sadly
knowing I could not join him.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Invincibility of Valor

Who did we see trudging towards us
from the end of the Pier but Pop. He wore
a black vinyl leather jacket
with some twelve safety pins holding it closed.
"Hey, you dropped this, "
I said handing him fifty cents.
"Oh, thank you, thank you,
now I can get myself some coffee.
If I had fifty cents more I could get cake."
I gave him a dollar.
"I been in the hospital. My feet swelled up."
"What happened?" asked Doyle.
"Drinking," said Pop.
"Drinking," said Doyle amazed.
"I only drank half a pint
but couldn't finish it, got sick
depressed about life."
Pop stared at his feet covered with hospital booties
said, "My sons keep coming back to me
can't get rid of 'em."
Breathing shallow now,
the good wind gone from his chest,
a sigh, "One after the other
suicide, no note,
both from this spot
a year apart they sucked water
but their lungs couldn't hold the ocean
keep coming back, always smiling,
can't figure that out."
Doyle held out a ten, Pop didn't see it
staring elsewhere, then Doyle held Pop
held him hard, both trembling
gulls whooping above wanting tidbits.
Finally: "I got hard luck since I was born
and most likely die with hard luck."
Doyle shifted to gaze at his beloved ocean
saying: "Bernstein, How deep you think the water is? "
"Here?" I said.
"No, out there."
"Coupla hundred feet."
"And there's life out there:
fishes, eels, crabs, sharks, worms,
bacteria, plankton...
and they don't know my name.
Don't you find that astounding? "
Pop on the floor now leaning against the rail
ready for sleep, a bit of twitching, but eyes at last closed.
Doyle smiled.
I knew the poem
had already been written
he could do that, listen and compose
while holding back tears

having grieved as much as any man
the only woman he ever loved
loved more by insidious cells gone mad
in her pancreas
shocked when he asked me to photograph her
now near death
face wracked in pain, pure white
eyes already into the skull
had to ask her to
look
as eyes are everything in a photograph
and the heroism of that slight smile
for him...
but he never wrote of her
just others
suffering.
Later I'd ask to see Pop's poem.
Staring still at the sea Doyle said,
"Bernstein, those sons sought
an ancient peace when all travails
were not yet born."
Then: leaning to Pop
placing a wet kiss on his forehead.
Finally: "We are here."

Charles Chaim Wax

The King of Hollywood

On Thursday I dragged myself
to Clark Gable's class—
All Time Great Films—
at Kingsborough Community College
After attendance
I thought of walking out
his class nothing but chatter about
Hollywood's stupidty
and his perpetual
undeserved
non recognition
but when he said
with particular anguish
"They're gonna screw me over"
I decided to stay. He continued, "I just got the word
they wanna go with my idea,
gung-ho all the way
but they'll probably bring in
some putz to write the screenplay."
Someone asked,
"Why would they do that
since it's your idea? "
"You're dealing with
the biggest bunch of morons
in creation.
Hollywood makes crap
three hundred films a year
99.9% garbage
sometimes they get lucky
and the lousy sequels
shoot out like diarrhea. If any
producer had half a brain I'd be
the King of Hollywood but
I don't kiss ass."
Suddenly Mabel Pearse called out,
"Do we have any papers
in this class? "
He seemed annoyed
mumbling, "Whatta ya askin' me for? "
Everyone stared at him.
"Yeah, yeah I'll play the game
just keep it short
the shorter the better,
and make sure
it's double spaced
big margins too
I like a lotta
white space on the paper."
"Do you have a particular
font you prefer? " asked Mabel.
Clark Gable laughed,
"After I ate some

bad fish sticks I gave
the next paper a C. That's life."
"Aren't there any standards?" Mabel asked.
"WHATEVER SELLS," shrieked Clark Gable
then added, "Forget it. Class dismissed."

Charles Chaim Wax

The Lion's Roar

Albert stayed after class saying,
"Mr. Bernstein, please help me."
"Yes."
"I need a woman."
"Don't we all, " I said smiling.
He continued, "I love Marva
but I freeze
set up a date for me, if you do
I'll be the happiest man in the world."
Next day I said, "Marva, stay after class."
Alone now. "I want you to say hello to Albert."
"He's a punk."
"Just for me."
"OK, but it's for you, not him."
Next day when they remained after class
Marva said, "Hello, Albert."
Silence.
At last I said, "Well, Albert, speak up."
He blurted out, "Nice weather."
"And, " said Marva.
When Albert raced from the room
I said, "Try to feel his loneliness
Albert loves you..."
"LOVES ME..."
"But he's paralyzed."
"I'm not his mother."
"We're all human."
Next day same scene
finally Marva saying, "I'm trying,
but he's a punk."
"I ain't no punk, " he asserted,
then silence once more.
I said, "A man must roar like a lion, then an enormous surprise takes place."
"What? " he asked.
"He becomes Emperor of the Universe."
Suddenly Marva laughed a grand laugh, the laugh of youth and power
and at that moment I understood
why Albert had fallen for her.
Next day both were absent.
"I guess they eloped, " I said merrily.
"Albert got shot, " said Clifford, "in Kings County now,
"musta got his nerve up
cause he was walking Marva home
when somebody tried to take her coat.
He fought with the guy and got shot."
"He did that, " I said in amazement.
"Marva ain't in Brooklyn, " continued Clifford,
"I know cause I live in her building and
her mother told my step mother
she sent her to South Carolina
didn't want her daughter here no more."
After school I bought a large bag of M&Ms and went to visit Albert.

The lead lodged in the spine
paralyzing him from the waist down.
"Is Marva coming to see me? " he immediately asked,
then roared like a lion
sending in a bunch of nurses.
I stared at the lad, his hot hungry eyes trapped in a stillborn lust.
"What's going on? " asked one of them.
"My girl's coming to visit, " said Albert beaming.
Of course, courage now all that mattered
so felt entirely unclean, my words already
chopping up my bloody heart
when I whispered,
"Said what a great guy you are
just before she died,
two shots in the brain
after you passed out
from the bullet in your back."
"No, " he whispered
then sobbed,
a nurse gently caressing his forehead
not touching his tears.
"The funeral, " he muttered,
"I gotta go."
My mouth stuffed with horrid putrid dust
now
I rushed from the room
tried to weep, could not,
returned saying,
"Not dead, Albert.
her mother sent her to South Carolina."
Again the roar
like not from a human throat
potent and utterly joyous
finally serene Albert said,
"I'm the happiest man in the world."

Charles Chaim Wax

The Manhattan Bridge

Rae Zevie
said she was riding
her bike
over the Manhattan Bridge
and a Chinese man
stood by the rail
and eventually jumped.
Rae Zevie
saw him in the water
for a minute
or so
and then
he went under
and drowned.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Memory of Great Men

While I was eating
scrambled eggs
smothered with hot sauce
in Meng's Restaurant
in Coney Island
I heard, "Is that little Stevie? "
I turned to see
an old man at the door.
I had no idea who he was
but I got up and went to him
and he immediately put out his hand.
"How you been? " he asked,
then continued without
waiting for an answer. "Still teaching? "
"Not at the moment, " I said.
"I'm living in Florida now,
just outside of Miami,
but Jennie's still living in the co-op."
As soon as he mentioned
the word "co-op"
I knew I had a chance of
remembering him
because the co-op was
the group of five buildings
in Sheepshead Bay where
I had grown up. This guy must have been
a member of that group of fellows
like my father
who moved in
after it was first built
but most of those men,
including my father,
were now dead.
"Jennie's living with her boyfriend."
"Jennifer, " I mumbled.
"C'mon, Stevie, all your life you called her Jennie."
I stared at Louis Goldberger,
his name rushing into my brain.
"How do you like living in Florida? " I said.
"Half of Brooklyn is down there."
"What ever happened to Abe Hoffman? " I asked,
amazed that a name
I hadn't thought of in
many years simply popped up in my head.
"Dead. Stroke."
"Harry Lipshnetz? '
"Dead. Heart Attack."
"Joe Lubben? '
"Dead. Cancer."
I tried to remember
all my father's friends. "Herman Grossenbacher? "
"Alive, " he laughed.

"At last! "
"Barely, " he said.
"How's that? '
"Can't walk, talk,
or move his bowels
by himself.
Stroke victim."

Charles Chaim Wax

The Palace of Pleasure

The place closed
new owners
coming in
switching from
Chinese to Thai
one taste
the establishment became
my favorite
twice a week
every week
I consumed
every item
on the menu
got to know
the waiters
waitresses
also
other patrons
90%
immense
truly obese
gobbling
Basil chicken
Coconut shrimp
Steaming red crabs
in a fiery sauce
such happiness
on plump faces
sometimes
stopped munching
to stare
guilty
a voyeur
but when
a woman
cracked a chair
fell
I leaped up
helping the dear soul
to another throne.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Red Thread

I called Foy and told him
Jack Miller needed to speak to him.
"Come right over, " he said.
We drove to Michael Foy's apartment.
I listened to soft jazz on WNEW.
Jack closed his eyes.
When we arrived Foy sat in the living room
his wife Kathy in the bedroom watching TV.
I told Foy the sad crazy tale, as best I could
how Jack stopped loving his wife
when he met an actress
then felt guilty, sold coke
to make a fortune and give it
to Carol, his wife of 22 years,
thus absolving himself of guilt
but got ripped off,
took more money out of the bank,
same thing happened
nothing left now.
Foy said, "We all dream of Paradise
that's no sin, but selling drugs is a sin."
Jack bent his head forward
resting it between his knees.
Foy continued, "You can't ever go back
to the life you had.
Tell the truth.
Tell everything to everyone."
Jack slowly raised his head
a thin stream of saliva
stuck to the left side of his chin.
He made no effort to wipe it away saying,
"I could do that, couldn't I? "
But there was no conviction in his voice.
Kathy came into the living room
and asked if we wanted tea or coffee
to go with the cinnamon cookies
she had just baked.
I said, "Thanks. That would be wonderful."
Jack said, "I can't face anyone.
Foy, could I live here with you secretly?
For a while...until this is all cleared up...
I wanted more...
now there's nothing
but spikes in my heart.
I'm bleeding to death,
bad blood leaving a bad body."
Foy remained silent.
Kathy brought in tea and cookies,
the room at once smelling of cinnamon.
I drifted off the balcony to Sumatra
and watched huge orangutans
float from tree to tree.

Their orange fur rippled in the air.
A sweet smile curved their lips.
The cookies were still warm.
They melted in my mouth.
I didn't want to think about Jack now
just wanted to be with the great apes
in the great trees
watching life on the forest floor.
I looked out the window.
Metal planes sailed through
an ocean of air to distant places.
Silver clouds yielded effortlessly to their mass.
No resistance.
I walked to the balcony
and opened the glass door.
A blast of cold air
pressed against my warm flesh.
I turned and looked back at Jack
his face a solid mask of lead,
his heart, I supposed, a dead end sadness,
all the more terrifying
because he had seen Paradise,
but had gotten lost on the way
to that fabled spot.
If only he had said to Carol,
"I'm leaving. I found another woman.
I don't want to hurt you but I have to leave."
Unfortunately he didn't say that,
and now he could never say that.
Not after the lies. Their money gone.
I walked inside to silence.
I took another cookie into my mouth
but no dreams came.
Jack went into the bathroom.
After a moment he returned and sat on the couch.
Kathy said, "I have to get up early in the morning
to go to work." Then she left the room.
I took a third cookie into my mouth.
It had cooled slightly but was still warm.
Foy said, "There is no harm done."
Then he became silent
as if he did not believe in what he had just said.
Jack's head fell back on the couch
his eyes closing.
After a moment he said, "The game's up, Bernstein."
There was a lightness in his voice which surprised me.
I gazed out into the darkness.
The planes still sailed to distant places.
I looked at Jack and wanted to say something, but couldn't.
Foy ate a cookie and smiled,
then ate another and another.
A great golden glow suffused his face,

and for an instant the gloom
in the room was gone.
I whispered, "The great orangutans of Borneo and Sumatra
sleep well in the cinnamon trees tonight,
as well they should being both good and free."
Jack laughed at that,
but only for a moment.
And then he wept.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Three Marks of Existence

Billy Mullins trudged into Meng's
having just returned
from four months in a Florida jail,
possession of marijuana
without intent to sell.

"Bernstein, " he said seriously
"stay out of the State of Florida."
"I intend to."

Then he lowered his voice
to an almost inaudible whisper,
"Almost became a Sissy Mary
but took to writing
and that saved me."

"You don't say, " said Treasure
now interested in the conversation.
A big guy says to me I got cute eyes
and right away I knew what he wanted
but a bigger guy says to join
his poetry club and I won't have no trouble.
And that's what I did, and I didn't
have no trouble."

"Damn, Billy, " said Treasure,
"I like the way you bullshit."
"Big guy's name was Larry Littlejohn,
Little for short
and he called his group
the Fortune Cookie School of Poesy."

Treasure handed the Thunderbird
to Larry who swallowed, then smiled
saying, "All the poems had to
give the meaning of life
everything else was fluff, Little's word,
and so I scribbled away
day after day, time going,
days crossed off, and don't you know
I got into it, especially Little's
urging, to go deeper, deeper,
but soon poetry shifted to Biography about this guy."

"You liked him? " asked Treasure.
"First man I ever met with the Big Three:
courage, compassion, panoramic awareness,
the last one came to me yesterday
from Bernstein's Tibetan rap."

"Tibet! " exclaimed Treasure
staring at me, smiling, then again: "Tibet"
but softer now, almost trancelike
as she whispered, "Panoramic awareness."
"A thousand eyes, each twirling turning
seeking searching
all worlds inner outer
no escape from vision."

Charles Chaim Wax

The True Meaning of Our Birth and Death

In the recovery room
my sister held up
the bottle of Afrin nasal spray.
"This saved me!" she exclaimed,
kissing the red letters
printed on white plastic.
"Ma, what's with you?"
asked Navin, her 12 year old son.
"When I was waiting
to go on the operating table
I couldn't breath
because my nose was stuffed
so I sent Howard
to buy Afrin
and spritzed up
ten sprays in each nose
then I could breathe!
I didn't fear to suffocate."
"Ma, you're talking like a dope addict."
"A lot you know!
while your little sister, Annie, was coming
into the world
I gave good sprays
up the nose," she said kissing
the plastic bottle once again."
"When you comin' home, ma?"
asked Navin. "I'm starving."
"I'll buy you a slice of pizza," I said.
"One slice! Get real, Steve."
"Don't you want to see your new sister," my sister asked Navin.
"Is she going someplace?" he said walking towards the door.
I found a pizza parlor
a block away and ordered a pie.
Navin quickly devoured four slices,
then belched. Kids were playing
video games so he asked for a few dollars
in change
which I gave him
and as I watched these youngsters
I wondered what Annie
would be like at their age,
and what she would say
as she watched my coffin
being lowered into the ground.
"Hey, Navin,"
I called out. "When I croak
whatta you gonna
say at my funeral?"
"Depends what kinda food they got there."

Charles Chaim Wax

The Vast Extent of A Human Life

Outside the temperature
kept falling
near zero now
when Izzy trudged in
sitting at my table. "I have to have
an operation on my leg, " he said,
"the third one
after my wife died
everything went bad
and where I'm living
they don't give heat! "
"Call the Housing Department, " I said
trying to be helpful.
"BUMS, " he exploded
leaping to his feet
only to plop down
a second later. "I had a hard life
didn't ask for a hard life
but had a hard life
my two children I hadda bury...
all sorts of pain
force myself to go on—
but got no pleasure
such energy just
to put on my clothes.
I grow weary. Free from suffering
I'll never be.
Memory...
what a torment!
Do I make sense?
The plug's
been pulled. I'm
in the bottomless hole! the Rabbi says,
'With sufficient Will
you can do anything.'
WHAT A PUTZ!
Yesterday I fainted twice
trying to tie my
left shoelace.
Such a thing!
Go know God hates me.
I never knew.
Now I know! "
"Need a few dollars, Izzy? " I asked,
"to get a good meal. It'll cheer you up a bit."
"Another life!
my young friend
can you help me with that? "

Charles Chaim Wax

The Wild Lament Of Their Broken Mouths #1

As soon as I trudged into the Teacher's Center
Milton Pell said, "Bernstein, you'll never be a great writer
until you delve into the mysteries of the track.
And booze! never forget booze! "
Ever since Milton received a personal letter of encouragement
from the legendary writer Charles Bukowski
he had tried to emulate the Buk's lifestyle.
Sadly, Milton Pell was no Bukowski
So when his girlfriend, Mona discarded him
Milton tumbled headlong into a nervous breakdown.
That was how his eating a box of chalk
in front of his class was interpreted.
Milton claimed the calcium carbonate
cured his constant heartburn
the result of Moan's departure.
Of course he was relieved of duties.
I visited him once.
He asked if I had gone to the track.
I said, "No." Strangely, this upset him.
"But I told you, I told you...I'm finished.
Mona saw to that.
But you! You! Let it be you! "
"What? " I asked.
"To write!
to be where suffering humanity is...
at the track."
I stared at him as he swallowed
half the bottle of Pepto-Bismol
in one long desperate gulp.
More than enough suffering right here,
I mumbled to myself
then said: "The Buk would have gotten
five, six stories outta this affair with Mona."
"I am not him, " he sighed
as he quickly dumped down the remaining Pepto-Bismol
a goodly portion of which
drooled from lips onto his chin.
"It's up to you, Bernstein. You!
Tell my tale!
Betrayal!
Loneliness!
A man crushed! "
I stared at Milton Pell
now trembling
barely able to open
the box of chalk
which I did for him
then: crunching
then: a smile.

Charles Chaim Wax

The world continues on with death

Unknown names
too vast for any tongue
to declare, or arms
to lift up
each bit of flesh destroyed
by torture
on the open honest fields of grass
yearning for sun
for rain.

Charles Chaim Wax

The Wound Gaping Wide

I sat in Meng's weary, waiting
dusk long since descended
nightfall now master of the sky
with wind blown snow
swirling chaos into perfection.
And finally Mabel Muldoon trudged in
with eight children from her belly
aching for the return of daddy
who got caught robbing a liquor store
so he could buy Christmas presents
worthy of Mr. Michael Muldoon.
Now Mabel sold herself
to raise bail, but unable to succeed.
Not because she wasn't good-looking
but would only lie there
weary, waiting until lust unraveled.
Al Hoppe went with Mabel
but her sadness and his sadness
shut down desire.
"Thirty years of whores, Bernstein, " he said
staring hard at me with "I'm finished."
Mabel plopped at my table.
"Empty streets, " she sighed.
"A night like this, " I said.
"Cold."
"Cold."
And I wiped the wetness from her cheeks.
"Wish I had a million dollars."
And I wished for words.

Charles Chaim Wax

They come to me

I really don't want them to
these souls
inhabiting destruction.
Reading Virginia Woolf
her words catapulting me
into the London twilight
then drowning herself
no instantaneous death
before the lungs burst
Or Cesare Pavese
his friend saying
"an immense and complex
distrust of men and life"
went under at 42
his poems
shining on his grave
And Edward Lear
that queer duck
who scribbled absurd lines
seeking to capture
a human touch
on his desolate cheek
never did
and others nameless numberless
somehow the great matter
eluding intelligence
not so the Rinzai Zen Priest Poet
Ikkyu
scribbling delight
in the moonlight
with his own frail flesh
his precious poems
an elixir of life.

Charles Chaim Wax

Thin Walls

she was tall
blonde hair
not especially beautiful
unmarried
early forties
and through
thin walls
came to know
her existence
mostly alone
two years
my next door neighbor
but for a three month stretch
laughter with a man
love making with a man
perhaps happy
don't know
then gone for awhile
came back
no hair
gaunt
Alice
the super's wife
visiting often
speaking words
of comfort
hope
but there was
none
dead a month later
wept
really wept
we never talked.

Charles Chaim Wax

This Stranger Having Departed Without Any One Suspecting It

Ever since Joe Busick retired
he leaves the door to his apartment wide open
so that when I pass in front of it
to get to my place he rushes into the hall
and starts to speak
about three pairs of new shoes
he bought in an Italian shoe store
or the upcoming surgery on his left eye
to fix a cataract
or the person below trying to get him evicted
because he flushes the toilet
too many times, twelve I've been told,
always in rapid succession
or asks read any good books because he's seen
my walls lined with them
from floor to ceiling
although his place doesn't have a single one,
also no pictures,
the walls painted salmon pink.
I've never seen a soul enter his apartment.
Some days he actually sits in the hallway
waiting for words to happen.
He dyes his hair a reddish brown.
Four years ago a woman living in a private house
across the street accused him of masturbating
in front of his window, shades up.
The TV stays on all day now
played much too loudly
except when the door is open
or he's perched in the hall.

Charles Chaim Wax

Thoroughly Self-Defeating

I walked into the office
Peter F looked tired
and when I sat he said,
The man is worthless.'
The strongest condemnation
yet
of this guy we both knew.
'he only reacts to fear
and that's most of the time
and he'd sell
his own mother
if it meant
his survival.'
I intoned, 'The Buddha said...'
'Bernstein, stop
with the conversion.
I'm Catholic
gotta be
else my wife
would throw me
out.'
'Anyway, '
I said,
'forget the Buddha
just the fellow's completely
a manifestation of
self-concern
so when he harms
others
there's no
internal registration
just fear
diminshing
for the moment...'
'But the moment
for him, '
sighed Peter F,
'has turned out
to be
a lifetime.'

Charles Chaim Wax

Thus Have I Heard: The Lord Buddha Was Traveling Through Brooklyn On the D Train

"Just ask Navin to ask, " I said to my sister, "I'm his uncle anyway down there in Florida they give pills out like cotton candy, also have him ask his wife Sarah to try."

"My brother, the drug addict."

"We're talking Mickey Mouse tidbits here, to take the edge off.

Writing poetry every day takes it's toll."

"YOU'RE A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER."

"Exactly that's why I can't take the chance of buying `em myself,

damn computers hook up everything these days."

Howard strolled into the living room and I immediately said,

"Thanks for the Xanax, Howard."

"Prefer Brandy myself, " he said, a twinkle in his eye,

"a blessing to the brain, each and every time."

"You don't have to tell me

but now I got sugar problems so alcohol is out." I paused then said, "You're a lucky man."

"All this talking is getting a thirst in me, can you pour me a glass, darling? " he said to my sister.

"Are you outta your fucking mind."

"Well, uh, I thought we cleared that up."

"Insanity don't get cleared up it just shuts up."

"Yup, " said Howard sitting on the couch.

"Look, " I said to my sister,

"did I ask for that psycho-hypnotic stuff? "

"No, only because Tony T's selling you his father's stash."

"These are sad, sad days

when a man's simple search for happiness is demonized as drug addiction."

"Thirty years you been

a Buddhist, two years in the Monastery,

and day after day on your ass

what about that? "

"Getting thirsty, sweetheart, " sighed Howard.

"Are you a fucking cripple, or what? "

"That mean I can have a taste."

She closed her eyes, nodding Yes

sending Howard racing for his beloved Brandy.

"Say something, " she said staring hard at me.

"If I were famous, well, that horrid nagging thought of failure would be banished forever, likewise the pills."

Suddenly an ancient whisper, "Bernstein, you're gonna die soon in a day, or in a thousand years,

I know you know the lingo."

"Been studying your words for thirty years."

"Breath breathes the poem

and until the end of time always a single word:

Compassion."

Charles Chaim Wax

Time Eventually Seizes Everything Valuable

Joel waited outside
my apartment building
I nodded
he said, "Mailman didn't come yet."
"Only eleven-thirty."
"That's cause
we don't got
a regular mailman no more
died
young girl
in the prime of life
brain tumor
can't get a steady replacement
only substitutes
half of `em can't read
so it takes forever to put the mail in."
Mary Speranza tottered
out of the building
said proudly, "Today's my birthday."
"Maezol Tov, "
proclaimed Joel
as loudly as a man
with a heart condition dare proclaim.
"How old is the birthday girl? " I asked.
"How old do I look? "
"Sixty-three."
"Uhhh, such a good boy
seventy-eight."
"Don't look a day past sixty-five, " said Joel.
"Uhhh, such good boy, " said Mary
slowly zigzagging off
to the corner grocery store.
Joel stared at her
finally saying
"After
my first triple by-pass
I prayed to hit forty-nine
fifty-two now
praying to hit fifty-five—
nobody wants to die."

Charles Chaim Wax

To Aspire To Greatness Beyond What Is Granted

When I entered my sister's apartment
Howard sat slumped on a chair
watching TV.
"Comancheros, " he said,
"when men were strong,
not an over the hill dinosaur
waiting for the final tumble-down."
"With John Wayne? " I blurted out.
"The King himself."
"I thought Elvis was the King."
"King of the Eskimo Pies, " Howard chuckled scornfully.
Then he stared intently
at his wife and moaned,
"We ain't never gonna
be rich, darlin'." He paused
shifting his gaze to me, "Who's gonna
free ole Howard
from the Poor house?
Steve? "
"Well, uh, how much cash
you talkin' about? " I asked.
"Don't listen to him, you moron, "
my sister said, "that was his big dream when he was a kid:
To be rich.
well, we're not rich,
probably never going to be rich unless..."
Not finishing the sentence
she flipped into hysterical laughter.
At last calm she said,
"...Howard croaks on the job."
Celestial mirth once more.
Unbelievably Howard began to sob
from behind a mask of hands.
I was shocked—
a grown man weeping
before my very eyes
yet at sixty the yawning maw of the Void
could crush even a strong man
and Howard was no tough galoot—
childhood dreams now
irrevocably beyond his grasp
not one of my many problems
because I couldn't recall a single one
so I said cheerfully,
"Kogaku Roshi says, 'Expect nothing'"
"Ain't never bought a new car, " Howard sighed,
"ain't never been to Disneyland neither."

Charles Chaim Wax

To Whom the Gods Have Not Given Long Life

Harry Willing recently returned
from his third heart operation
which he explained to me
but sadly I couldn't fathom the intricate details
as his second stroke, at age 49,
had impaired his speech.
Once a bus driver
today Harry stood next to the mailman
and told him the apartment number
for each name on the envelope.
He needed this job. It gave
him a sense of purpose.
In the end, six months later,
he disappeared into death
not wanting to
the work still to be done.

Charles Chaim Wax

Trapped in the elevator with Ella Mae Moskowitz

and Harry Feldman, two hours already
"Help is on the way, " said Bob Bonaparte
assistant custodian at Spinoza HS.
Harry repeating for the third time, "Go help the poor
not everything for yourself."
Eventually I said softly,
"Gimme a new line."
"Certainly, Bernstein."
Then he stared at Ella Mae Moskowitz
and said tenderly, "Today we shall do it
without lubrication.
This Commandment the Lord has given me."
Ella Mae Moskowitz replied, "My first general order is:
I will guard everything
within the limits of my post
and quit my post only when properly relieved."
Suddenly both kissed, then separated.
"What the fuckery is going on? " I mumbled.
"The Lord has blessed us, " said Harry
and Ella Mae added, "It's all about suffering."
Without warning the fluorescent light
flickered, then went out
and the gyrations commenced
and I waited in the corner
listening to love.

Charles Chaim Wax

Traversing the Summit

Principal Norr put a Letter of Reprimand
in Joe Ward's file.
As UFT Chapter Leader at Spinoza HS
I could not let that stand.
We marched into the conference room.
Principal Norr began, "I walked into Mr. Ward's room
and saw a student wearing a hat.
Unacceptable."
I said, "Larry Sutton's a mental case.
I know it. You know it. His mother knows it.
Strangled his cat at home. Unpredictable.
If Joe told him to take off his hat
no telling what mayhem might have ensued."
Norr stared at me, then continued,
"Another student had his feet on the desk.
Mr. Ward did nothing."
Norr smiled, looked at his notes,
said, "I asked for a lesson plan.
None was provided. Late twelve times
last month." He slid a Xerox copy
of Ward's time card in my direction.
I flipped it back without a glance
saying, "That all you got."
Again the notes: "The man ate
a bucket of fried chicken
all during class, never taught a lesson."
"Lemme take this one, Bernstein, " said Joe.
"Be my guest."
"I bought the bucket, 22 pieces, original,
with the thought to give the kids
a taste of the good life,
but, well, after that first morsel
I became weak, this I admit
before God and Country
and munched on and on,
but as for the lesson, by my actions
these bright and yearning scholars
learned more than mere words
could ever say: Greed, my own,
for which I apologized the next day
with a bucket for the class, and the class
alone."
"I believe a Letter of Commendation
is in order, " I said nodding at Norr.
Almost a smile on his thin lips, not quite
then: "And the most serious charge:
Mrs. Landau accused Mr. Ward
of staring at her breasts."
"I stare. I'm sure you've stared..."
"Watch it, Bernstein,
just because you're Union
doesn't mean you can't be

brought up on charges."
"Is that a threat? "
I stopped, stared hard,
stood, looked down at Norr,
my eyes bulging, finally saying,
"You threatening a duly elected
Union official?
You coming after me now?
I been here thirty-six years.
You coming after me now?
I can retire tomorrow
but before that happens
I will bury you.
Ask Principal Blum why he left.
You want his number?
I'll give you his number."
I paused, sat down, said softly,
"This place is an insane asylum
all I ask is a little decency,
and if not, I already said what
would happen,
and it will happen."
Norr shuffled papers,
blinked several times
at last whispering,
"Just make sure
Mr. Ward arrives on time."

Charles Chaim Wax

Two Unpublished Authors

We stood at the end of the Pier
peering at the vast Atlantic
dawn still two hours away.
I said to Tunstill, "I can't find Candy
everyday I see the same girls
on the stroll
but I never see her
and nobody knows a thing.
She never comes out anymore."
Tunstill said, "You saved her
from a life of prostitution, Bernstein."
"What do you mean by 'saved'?"
"Well, you have this long history of being
into these Ultimate things
Religious stuff
and you spent over a grand
on Candy so all that time
with her had to have an effect."
"Perhaps. Who knows about
these subtle
mysterious interconnections.
Yes, I just may have put an end
to her career as a hooker
Maybe I'm like a spiritual catalyst.
I inspire others
like you, like Candy
although not myself."
Tunstill said, "You finished The Triumph of Symbiosis
while I'm still working on my novel."
"You'll finish. Don't worry.
"Can't get a title."
"I thought it was A Hebephrenic Man Tells All."
"Changed it to Ruminations Concerning Inevitability."
"Like it."
"Your mind's still on Candy."
I said to Tunstill,
"How about Burrowing into the Cliff's Edge?
maybe The Blank Silence of Castration."
Tunstill stared at me, then asked quiet seriously,
"What happens if we never get published?"
"Meditate on the Almighty,
from dawn till the stars twinkle
in the Heavenly night,
thus shall you find liberation."
"Talked that way to Candy?"
"Yeah. She doted
on my every word."
"You paid her!"
"And I'd pay her again
if I could find her.
What an inspiration!"

Charles Chaim Wax

Two Unpublished Authors Await Publication

Julia Doyle arrived at Spinoza HS
with visions of creating a real Community
and to that end she announced
all submissions from the faculty
would be published in the school's
literary magazine.

One day in the Teacher's Center
Minna Cohen asked Julia,

"When's the magazine coming out? "

"Soon...but I didn't understand a word."

I immediately said, "Julia, you promised us
we'd get published."

"I thought Minna would do a love story."

"Not much love the last decade, " she said

"Imagination, Minna. You've got that...

at least I hope so...

no writer can function without it."

Minna muttered, "You said I'd make it

no matter what, just no dirty words

that's what you said.

I need this...

just stick it in...

anyplace."

Julia stared at Minna saying, "You're in."

"Thank God."

"But Auschwitz? for a student magazine?

and so confusing, the entire story

a six page monologue of mixed up words."

"I can see that because the narrative's

part of a larger work I've been writing

for the last eleven years

about the life of Hannah Greenberg,

a doctor and survivor of Auschwitz

who went mad thirty years

after her incarceration. The Death Camp

deposited a time bomb in her soul."

"But, Minna, you only gave the insanity."

"How about my story? " I asked blurted out.

"A fat man's saga into stroke."

"Yes."

"I expected humor, after all

you're a funny guy."

"Not all fat men are funny, " I said,

more bitterly than I intended.

"Yes, I'm sorry, but the entire tale

is uniformly dismal, yet I felt no sadness...

sorry, Bernstein, but...

why didn't he just stop eating? "

"Insanity, " said Minna, her voice

so soft, so calm, but with such certainty,

"still here

now

the whole world.”

Charles Chaim Wax

Two Unpublished Authors in Their Late Thirties

"Bernstein, I thought you were a man
of integrity and action,
but then you appeared
diffuse and lacking will.
That depressed me."

"It depressed me too, Tunstill."

"You were becoming a paradigm for me."

"In what sense? "

"You were in your late-thirties
and getting it together.

I was impressed by your writing
thirteen hours a day

for thirty-five days. There was
a supreme devotion to your art.

Here in you was a model
of someone who had overcome
rough and conflicted beginnings.

See both of us

stumbled at the starting block
then I saw the same old nagging
confusion pulling at you

so it was disappointing, disheartening,
saddening."

"Did you notice

how I'm back on my feet again?

Just look at that damsel

in the short pink dress

and she's not wearing panties

takes guts to walk around like that

cause a strong breeze comes along

and there it is for all the world to see."

"You know, Bernstein,

it's difficult to have

a serious conversation with you

but listen:

you have periods of

intense

almost

manic creativity

followed by intervals of

a fallow depressive quality

you are, and I say this

with utmost sadness,

an intermittent artist."

Charles Chaim Wax

Unconquered By Years

Herbert F staggered
into the Teacher's Center
made it to the couch
flopped next to me
saying,
"What a night!
I was a cross-dresser
in the dream. Her Royal Highness,
Bessie B. Clock,
threw a gala soiree. I wore high heels
and had on a low cut
black sequined dress
a fabulous blonde wig
when out of nowhere
Mr. Birnbaum appeared
wearing a red mini-skirt
and smiled at me
then said, 'Don't I know you? '
I said, 'Why, sir,
my mother never allows me
to converse with old men.'
He said, 'I've been admiring you
from afar the entire evening.' Suddenly
I kissed him on the lips,
then he keeled over. Everyone stopped
what they were doing
and looked at him.
A guy said, 'I'm a doctor.' Then he immediately
pounded his chest
after a few wallops
he said, 'He is no more.'
A thin man dressed
as a vampire said, 'Poison lipstick
the kiss of death.'
I said, 'No, no.
I bought it at Woolworth's.' Nevertheless
'The kiss of death'
echoed around the room
and I woke up."
The next day
a note appeared
over the time clock:
Mr. Nat Birnbaum
passed away last night
from a massive heart attack. Funeral
arrangements to be announced.
Herbert F moaned,
"Life,
how brief, how brief...
what do you make of it, Bernstein?
heart attack
coming the day after my dream."

I said gently,
"You never mentioned
the color of
your lipstick."
Herbert F became sullen
and I was about to speak when he said,
"It shouldn't have ended like this:
dreaming of him in
red mini-skirt
after all, he won the Purple Heart."
Suddenly
tears streamed from his eyes
and he whispered,
"In his youth
so long ago
a hero."

Charles Chaim Wax

Under the Pressure of Extreme Necessity

John Dunk slumped
in Meng's Restaurant
the wine already having
done its work, mouth open
he gazed at the ceiling
Fanny Wentworth sat next
to him clutching
the empty bottle of Thunderbird
and Dr. Arnold Feiden former psychiatrist
at the University of Miami
dozed at the table.
I plopped down, ordered tea
waiting
the three remained silent
hoping I'd buy more wine
"Why not" I said to myself
reaching into my pocket
and at that motion
the dozing Dr. Arnold leaped to his feet
holding out his trembling hand
so I slid him the five saying,
"Bring back change."
He returned shortly
no offer of change, in fact said nothing
and passed the bottle to John Dunk
who swallowed, then handed it
to Fanny who knocked back a belt of the booze
and at last Dr. Arnold tasted the sweet wine
a slight smile twinkling in his eyes
he said, "Bernstein, a question concerning the mind"
as the second bottle appeared
and each in turn indulged.
"So, " continued Dr. Arnold,
then paused
waiting for my response
without ever having asked the question.
Silence more gulping
until he muttered, "Eight years ago
in Orlando, Florida Harry Schlassberg,67,
one of my patients
shot his wife, Bertha, also one of patients,
then kept the body in the house
for two days before calling the police
why that second day? "
The third bottle miraculously showed up
and in the blink of an eye
gone.
Dr. Arnold watched me
wet lips askew
body in a wobble
waiting
but John Dunk

offered a truth of his own saying,
"The man didn't want to be alone."

Charles Chaim Wax

utterly alone on the planet

felt myself
growing old
lay there
waiting
for
the abyss
to pass

Charles Chaim Wax

Victims of Life

After receiving
my 38th
consecutive rejection
the confidence I felt
at the start
of my writing career
waned
and I dipped into
a severe depression
"I'm finished, " was all
I could muster
as I sat in Meng's Restaurant
in Coney Island.
Bill First must have
heard me
because he said,
"Bernstein
never give up
that's the lesson
I learned after
eighteen years
in the nuthouse
and now look at me
I can even tie
my own shoelaces
in the morning
when before
I walked in slippers
from dawn to dusk."
I inquired as to
the reason
for his transformation
and he mentioned
Southbeach Psychiatric Center
"Ain't got cash
for a shrink
cause
my writing
is garbage
and I depleted
all my savings writing
instead of working."
He smiled saying,
"Free,
see would be shrinks
practice
on indigent crazies."
On August 6th
I attended
my first group therapy session
"My name is Dan Buckenberger, "
said a young man

in his twenties
wearing a long white lab coat,
"and I'm in charge
of this repair facility.
Now let's whiz around for introductions."
"My name is Herman Higgs.
I'm 27
with 56 shock treatments
under my belt,
but I still got all my own teeth."
"Harold Vunk, homeless,47."
"I am Irving Crummey,
advisor to the Gambino Crime Family
and also his Imperial Majesty, Caesar Gallus."
"Steve Bernstein, " I said, "a spurned writer—
rejected,
discarded,
cast aside,
abandoned...
thrown into the pit of despair."
"Admirable! " said Dr. Buckenberger
a smile on his face.
"We'll start with an illustrious
quotation from
Valerius Maximus,
although scholars have
ascribed the words
originally to
Sophocles
in any case
helpful
inspirational
AN INSTANT CURE
for what ails
the soul:
'No one
ought to be
called happy
as long as
he is still
alive.'"

Charles Chaim Wax

Wandering Stop `n Shop in search of Slim Jims

nowhere to be found
finally dump a six pack of Diet Coke in the wagon
also four Red Bulls needing the safety of caffeine
because outside the 62 degrees
hurts my heart, only later to learn
the warmest January on record
winter now damaged beyond repair
so I begin my casual search
for gorgeous women to stare at
when I hear, "Bernstein" and turning
see Melisha Powell smiling
speaking in Jamaican, the rhythm
like Shakespearean speech dipped in honey
so happy to see me, her favorite teacher
now a model, her face pure beauty
mumbling I ask, "How much? "
why I don't know, nor what I meant.
"A hundred grand, " she whispers
when an elderly woman appears
her granny, well, another beauty,
then Melisha leaning to kiss my forehead
and both drift off
like black rainbows in a perfect sky.
Slims Jims forgotten now,
at the register I hand over cash
getting pennies for change
and see two men packing my stuff
faces awkward, off center,
intelligence spoiled at birth
yet alive
and for years not knowing how to feel
but wanting to feel:
all being are perfect
yet pity.
"Good job, " I say smiling
as I hoist the bags
waiting
no reaction from the brain broken man
his mouth frozen open
the tongue locked just past the lips.
"MELISHA, " I call out
again: "MELISHA."
The sound traveling far
a moment later she rushes to the register
"What is it, Bernstein? "
her granny next to her
already knowing the answer
nevertheless I say,
"Another kiss, if possible."

Charles Chaim Wax

Watching His Movements With Great Diligence

Since the weather turned warmer
Robert waits on the sidewalk
near our building
so what could I do but give him
a bit of chit-chat saying, "How ya doing? "
"They want me out, Bernstein,
but I don't wanna move.
This is my home."
Then tilting his body to the left
and lowering himself
stared up, bobbing, shifting,
grey hair eating up his dye job.
"The landlord told me
'If you flush your toilet
more than once you're evicted.'"
"That legal? "
"The woman on the fourth floor
hasn't paid rent for six months..."
"Fourth floor, you're on the sixth."
"Says I keep up her half the night."
Swaying now, excited, eyes wide open
two weeks ago had surgery for cataracts
suddenly very still said, "Bernstein, I wanna
ask you a personal question: After a crap
you only flush once? "
Not answering asked one of my own,
"How many times, on average? "
"Five, six. I need a clean bowl."
Ah, the magic perfection of porcelain
so white and gleaming and without stain
here no spot for ruin to rot the heart.
Staring now. Yearning for that number
to give sustenance to his soul.
Well, this is what happens
to those
who live without love.
Finally: "Two."
Then: a sigh, a shining smile.

Charles Chaim Wax

went to Key Food

bought stuff
a short fat woman
in a black coat
in front of me
curly dyed blonde hair
black roots visible
face caked with white powder
lips smeared unevenly
with red lipstick
her son arrives
taller than she was
thin chest thin legs large belly
I knew at once
just the way they spoke
the dear middle aged man
exchanging virility
for ontological peace

Charles Chaim Wax

When Hearts Are Crushed By Vast Stones

I trudged
into the bus
plopped down
closed my eyes
when I heard a rattling sound
then a clank
and opening my eyes
spotted Pepsi bottle
on the floor
closed my eyes
and heard the bottle rattle
then, "Baby's back, "
from one of the
dope smokers
at the back of the bud
musta thrown it
now watched
when suddenly an old woman
struggled to her feet
while the bus clattered on
and just as she was upright
the Pepsi bottle hurtled
down the aisle
kicked by the dope smokers
and the old woman
stepped then fell
on her back
crying, "God. God.
I can't move."
The driver pulled to the curb
went to help but I called out,
"DON'T TOUCH HER
"injuries you cannot see
may be present
so the good you do
might cause irreversible harm
GET A DOCTOR GET A DOCTOR."
As soon as
I entered my apartment
I mumbled
"Shoulda picked up
the damn bottle"
and that night
the sight of the old woman
kept sleep from me
and at 5: 03 in the morning
I wrote on my white wall:
TAKE BETTER CARE
in immense letters
continuing on
until
the first light of dawn.

Charles Chaim Wax

When I Arrived At Meng's Restaurant

in Coney Island
I spotted Harry Tood and his crew
at my favorite table
near the toilet.
"Who invented the kite? " he asked.
"Alberto Savinio, " said Vedder,
"during the summer of 1946 in Milan, Italy."
"How many different
kinds of goldfish swim the tropic waters? " asked Harry Tood.
"Exactly 428, " said Vedder.
"Only 100."
"I'll check, " said Vedder
closing his eyes. "No.
the man who created Heaven and Earth
said there's 428, no more, no less
that's the number He created
but He further informed me
as of yet
human beings
have only discovered 100."
"In the end, " said Hugo Rupprecht,
"a man discovers
whatever he does
it is certain he must die
at a time hidden from him
fixed in advance
by a power which surpasses him."
"What's that mean? " asked Vedder.
"Sir Francis Drake
ate peanuts with his left hand, " said Hugo Rupprecht.
"I doubt that, " said Harry Tood. "I know for a fact
the man was right handed
and preferred pistachio nuts.
So be it, so be it,
how many steps
does the average person
walk each day? "
"None, " said Hugo Rupprecht.
"19,000. Try this.
How much do nine pennies weight? "
"Four pounds seven ounces, " said Vedder.
"How many seconds in a century? " continued Harry Tood undeterred.
Vedder looked up toward Heaven
nodded his head
several times
then said, "3,153,600,000."
"Amazing, " declared Hugo Rupprecht.
"Why? " said Vedder,
"God don't make mistakes."

Charles Chaim Wax

When I landed in Coney Island

I was in luck because Candy sat alone
in Kansas Fried Chicken.
She possessed the soul of a poet
and the body of a sex goddess,
but things had not gone well for her,
I was sure of it,
even though she never spoke
about the details of her life.
"How do you feel? " I asked.
"Snowing, " she said,
"just your kind of weather."
"Yeah."
"Where'd you get this liking for the cold? "
"I told you I was born in Siberia."
"Last time you said Outer Mongolia."
"They're close."
Just then Irving trudged in.
I nodded to him
and he sat at our table.
"I got to have an operation on my leg, " he said.
"The third one. Diabetes.
After my wife died
everything went bad.
And where I'm living they don't give heat! "
"Call Housing, " said Candy.
"BUMS, " he exploded leaping to his feet,
only to plop down a second later.
"I had a hard life.
I didn't ask for a hard life,
but I had a hard life.
My two children I hadda bury...
all sorts of pain.
I force myself to go on—
Memory...what a torment!
Do I make sense? "
"Yeah, " said Candy softly.
"The plug has been pulled.
I'm in the bottomless hole! "
Candy closed her eyes,
breathing deeply, words almost
ready, but not yet.
Irving going on, "I can see why
there are suicides..."
"No, " gasped Candy.
"Yesterday I fainted twice
trying to tie my left shoelace.
Such a thing! Go know
God hates me. I never knew. Now I know! "
"Do you need a few dollars, Irving? " Candy asked,
"to get a good meal.
It'll cheer you up."
"Another life! my darling.

Can you help me with that? "
Candy staring at Irving, lips quivering
perhaps now, then: my mother did it."
The words out. Silence.
Snow everywhere. Streets covered.
Finally. "Bernstein, get a pint of cherry liqueur for the hotel
and a bag of chips and a ginger ale."
"Between a man and a woman
I don't interfere," said Irving,
dragging his flesh into the blasting snow.
I raced after him
and slipped a five dollar bill into his hand.
"Which way is Paradise?" he whispered.
"The next step," I blithely proclaimed,
then went half way down the block
to get the stuff for Candy.
When I returned
she brushed the snow from my beard.

Charles Chaim Wax

When I walked into Peter F's office

he was printing photographs
of his son's girlfriend
gorgeous woman
"Bernstein," he said, somewhat sadly,
"time flies."
"What else is new."
"My son's in college
costing me a fortune
fourteen grand a year
but that's not the worst of it
he's in love..."
"What a blessing! " I said, then
shook his hand
"Really in love..."
Once more I pumped flesh saying,
"What a blessing! "
"Helen, the girl's name,
wants children
right away
an orphan
so I can see her need
but then
what?
I'm a grandfather..."
Grabbed his hand again,
squeezed this time
saying, "What a blessing! "
"Yeah,
but time flies
faster
than my mind can comprehend
and after
what?
in the coffin."
"I ever tell you about Emperor MacNabb? "
"Real or a guy
from one of your stories? "
"His name
mother really loved him
but that's another narrative
so every time I saw him
he amazed me
ninety-four years old
arms powerful enough
to sling a line
as far as any man on the Pier
fifty years worked high steel in Manhattan
now fishes everyday rain or shine
upbeat, positive, joyous
asked him one day, 'Aren't you ever
going to die? '
said, 'Can't see myself in the coffin but

certainly, one day,
I'll be there, just like every other Joe, Jim, and Johnny.'
Now his seventy-three year old son
I'd seen him once...
unbelievably
the father looked
less tarnished
than his kid
guy seemed worn out
face devoid of courage
the never-ending
motion of life
too much."

Charles Chaim Wax

When Treasure stepped into Meng's

the sadness had not yet
left her
burying her grandmother
two days ago.
"Why do people die, Bernstein?" she asked,
her voice still dwelling in a trance.
"96," I said softly.
"Too much love."
"A blessing."
Benny plopped down,
hoisted the Thunderbird
above his open mouth
tilted his wrist, swallowed,
then smiled, finally holding out
the bottle to Treasure
who shook her head, No.
"I didn't want her to die,
not yet."
Outside sudden thunder
followed by pounding rain.
Benny gulped again, no smile
just a sigh, then another.
"A little longer
her eyes.
That too much to want, Bernstein?"
"About your grandma?" asked Benny.
Silence. I said, "Yeah."
"Her name?" he asked.
"Janice," said Treasure.
Benny held the bottle high
said, "To Janice"
then began the swallow
until all the booze was gone
also Benny, head down,
eyes closed, barely breathing.
"Looks almost dead," I said.
"So pretty
in the coffin, blue dress,
shiny black shoes
told me not to be troubled..."
"She spoke to you?"
"As best she could
being she was dead."

Charles Chaim Wax

Why I went to Manhattan

to see The Seven Samurai
I'll never knew
already seen it eighteen times
but the huge screen
always an enticement
and I needed
a strong dose of courage
that day as the temperature
hovered near a 100
only 97 when I stepped
into the street
could barely breathe
sweat dripping into
my eyes
"Hope I can find
the damn subway"
I mumbled to myself
finally made it
train comes packed
fear for my life
imminent heart attack
but have to get home
push my way in at 57th street
by 14th street
no good
gotta get off
feel feeble
don't wanna faint
knowing my wallet
would taken off a helpless body
before the cops come
also shoes
but I'm on the opposite
side of the door
and mutter,
"Never get out."
some black guy says, "You ain't gonna have
no trouble
not the way you look
no
no you won't"
And true
to his profound analysis
of my existence
he was right.

Charles Chaim Wax

With Respect, An Explication For Mr. Konisberg

i

A fellow from across the sea
doesn't allow messages
don't know him well
so don't know why
this need
but every man
should know what he's doing
and I respect such insight.

ii

Someone wrote
Jerry Hughes, Loser
couldn't let that stand
and usually I never
enter public quarrels
basically
not smart enough
for scintillating repartee
but
couldn't let that poem
stand, as if true.

iii

Also gotta stick up
for this land
land of the free
and home
of the brave.
Ah,
so many sighs now
laughter not far behind
yet
many here feel
the bloody pain
Bush has shoved down
our clotted throats.

Charles Chaim Wax

Years ago

had a friend
good friend
for more than a decade
we talked of poetry
and how the love of a woman
cured the soul of many ills
though not all
as death still lurked
beyond even
the most passionate kiss
then I went Buddhist
told him of my discovery
and the peace of the man's words
said I sounded
like one of those Sunday morning
Tele-evangelists
that all I needed
to be the same was
more grease in my hair
and a tie.
Told him I was on the path
now
but didn't need others
to join
if they didn't want to
he laughed
finally telling me
to stop the bullshit
that I was just
a failed Talmudic student
on a jaunt through Eastern fantasy.
Two years I listened
every so often
confessing my heart
until I ended his chatter
with distance
sad
that he never saw me.

Charles Chaim Wax

You think that's funny

Something's wrong with me
Or them
I'm talking the men and women
Who deliver the weather
All of 'em like heat
While I'm a blizzard through and through.

Charles Chaim Wax