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# Commencement

Richard Conklin

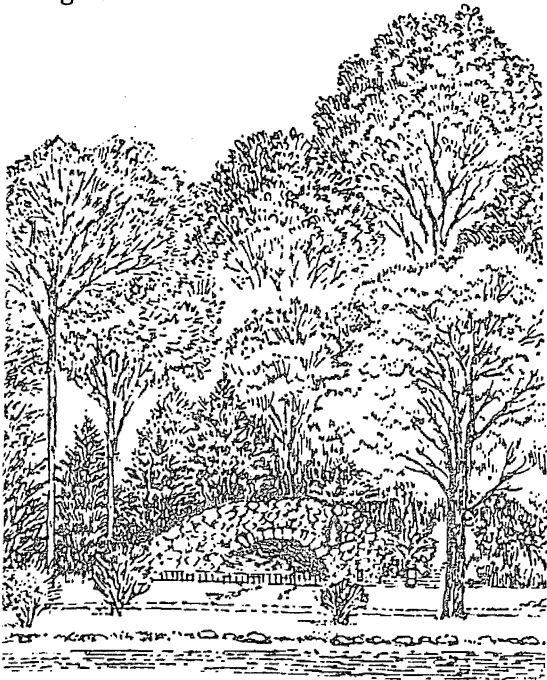
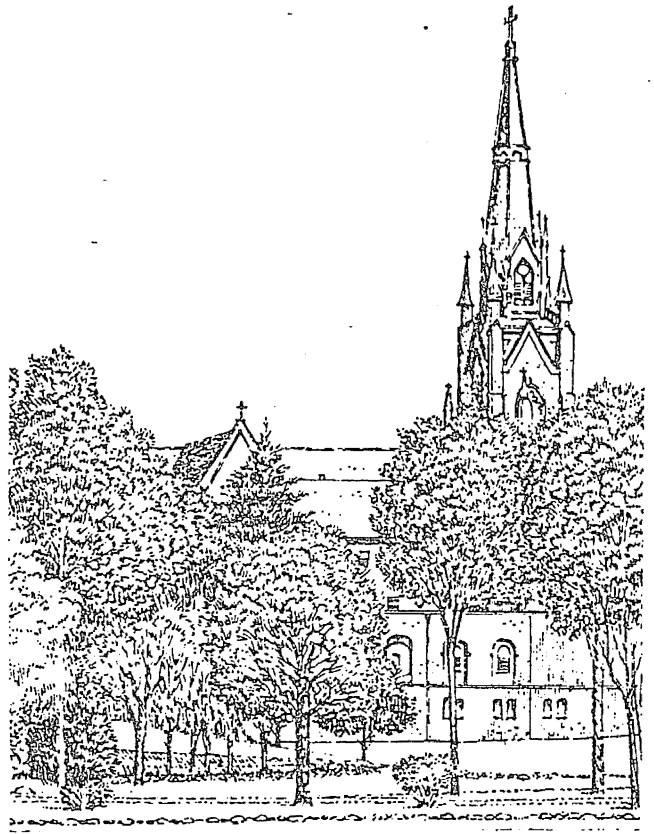


**C**On the Monday after Notre Dame's commencement exercises, there will be some beer cans on the hallowed steps of the Main Building. I am as certain of their arrival as I am of the earlier blossoming of the nearby magnolia and dogwood trees, or of the green-to-russet turning of the steps' brick ivy some months hence.

(continued)

# Commencement

These beer cans signify treaties struck here, by drinkers whom I do not know, but whose acts I have come to understand. They come here, I suspect, because the light is good, especially at night when the sodium glow bathes an ancient golden dome. Although those who sit and drink here might not realize it, the place itself is a symbol of the very rite of passage they gather to confirm. For many years in the University's history, the steps could not be used by students until graduation; the catechumens entered underneath at ground-level.



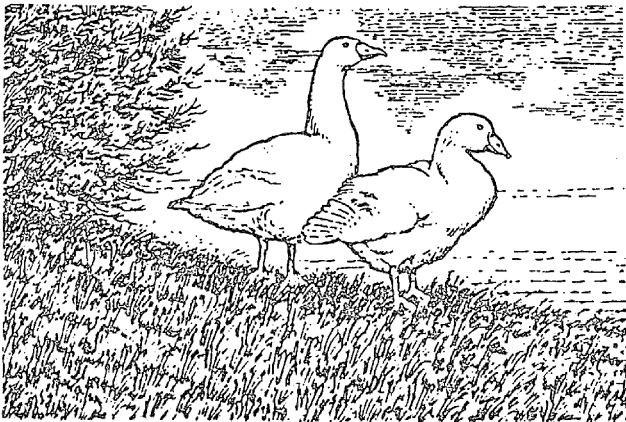
What is sealed on these steps in these days is a sacrament of reconciliation. Young men and women arrive at commencement with renewed respect for what has gone before; they come somewhat sadly upon the independence they fervently sought. Their parents who have sacrificed so much to the future are uneasy at the prospect of love matured becoming love unpossessive. The terms for both have changed -- children sense that freedom gained must encompass valued bonds; parents realize that they will always have children but now have to renegotiate the tie.

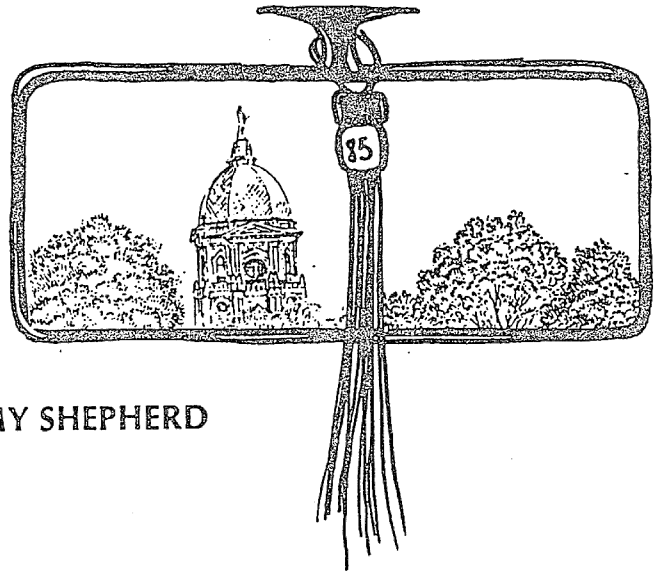
**S**o I imagine a father and son who sat and drank beer on the steps of Notre Dame's Main Building on a commencement Sunday evening in May. It is for them one of those rare moments that can release feelings and affection that always seemed too awkward before. The experienced one has forgotten old angers in momentary pride. The less experienced one has reason to regret irreverent challenges to recently rehabilitated wisdom. The father has come to know (again) how children cause adults to grow up. The son reaches for words that will erase the estrangement that accompanied his search for self. The father regrets his often careless exercise of authority. Both know they have not lived up to the expectations of the other. And now, here they are, one with thinning hair and a paunch, the other with a young metabolism and a tan, along with a growing realization that the hue is not the wear.



**T**hey finger their beer cans and talk — about family, about baseball, about grandmothers and grandfathers, about the university and about home, about politics and jobs. They exchange more than pleasantries. The words slowly form a diplomatic communique of sorts, speaking of one thing while treating another, a conversation obliquely direct. This is a conversation starting to resolve differences. As the evening lengthens, it will become all right to say they love each other.

(Richard Conklin is the Director of Public Relations and Information for the University of Notre Dame)





### Psalm 23 THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

The Lord is my shepherd;  
I have everything I need.  
He lets me rest in fields of green grass  
and leads me to quiet pools of fresh  
water.  
He gives me new strength.

He guides me in the right way,  
as he has promised.  
Even if that way goes through deepest  
darkness,  
I will not be afraid, Lord,  
because you are with me!  
Your shepherd's rod and staff keep me safe.

You prepare a banquet for me,  
where all my enemies can see me;  
you welcome me by pouring ointment on  
my head  
and filling my cup to the brim.  
Certainly your goodness and love will be  
with me as long as I live;  
and your house will be my home forever.