

KANSAS

Prologue

Kansas!

I remember you.

Your funnel-cloud,

Like some angry child's

Charcoal stick,

Smudges my days,

Asleep or awake,

With random whorls,

Blackens my heart's

Once peaceful rooms

With bold brush strokes,

Blots its joy

With grey-green smear

Of smothering fear.

I remember you,

Kansas!

Folklore

Thirty seconds

To pile a city in a heap

Between two rivers

Where tornadoes never hit.

Thirty seconds

To smash a life to fragments

Between two rivers

Where tornadoes never hit.

Thirty seconds

To learn the taste of terror

Between two rivers

Where tornadoes never hit.

Thirty seconds

To learn the primal lesson

Between two rivers

Where tornadoes never hit.

June 8, 1974

Like a finger flicking an ash;

Thoughtless as a bored child

Who tears open an ant hill

And watches for awhile

The frenzied scurryings,

Blocking an exit with a twig,

Or sifting dirt into the hole,

Abstractedly watching the struggle
Against the engulfing dust
Which alters a world's shape,
Then walks away;
So a tornado seems;
Violently unintentioned,
Battering and destroying,
Without malice or plan,
Leaving no one to blame
For my fear.

Aftermath

The wind blew last night,
Whistling around my windows,
And rattling the glass.
I woke up afraid,
Trembling, heart racing,
Groggy in half-sleep.
Soon I remembered:
This is Oregon, not Kansas;
The winds are friendly here.
When I slept again,
I did not rest, but dreamed
Of Kansas' whirling winds.

Jim Vandergriff