August 13, 1995

Our Sister Margaret.
You ask about her. Well
I'll tell you.
Our Sister Margaret.
She invented the Berry
Family. That is she
Created our awareness
Of who we are and where
We come from. She reintroduced
Us to each other after
Growing apart from
Earlier years.

She's somewhat in the middle
You know, sixth in a whole
Line of children.

Alive, Lord she really
Is alive. Most of us are a
A little slow, but Margaret
She's quick. The energy
Of Mama Berry seems to be
Doubled in her.

A friendly person, You wont
Find many persons so ready to
Help things along in life. You
Get the feeling that the Creator
Wanted someone around to move
Things along a bit, especially
When, at times, they get jumbled up.
Or when someone of us gets shattered
By a little more life than we
Bargained for.
As I was saying, My sister Margaret
She invented the Berry family
Strangely we never knew anything about
Our Ancestry, who we were or
Where we came from.
Life was too much
A question of survival
With a half-step glimpse
Into the future and hardly a concern
For the past.

When questioned
I always answered scotch-Irish
Since we seemed to have no obvious
Connection with the latin countries
Or the slavic or germanic countries.

It was Margaret, after our Mother died
In 1980, who began to inquire about
Where we came from and how we come
To be here in Guilford county
In the foothills of the southern
Appalachians.

To learn that we were English
On both sides of our family was
Surprising. I never thought
Of myself as English. Yet it seemed
Right. Our family mentality
Our emotional quality
Can, I think, be easily associated
With English ancestry. We seem
To have a touch of English
Impassivity.

The Vize's, our mother's
Family, also from southern
England, seems to have arrived
later, in the 18th century.
While all this is not
The most important thing in our lives,
It is a help in establishing a family
And a personal identity; also enabling
Us to interact with other families
Through marriage and joining our own
With these other family heritages.

Yet there is another sense in which
Margaret has created our family identity.
She has established a communications
Network whereby the distant
Families, the Greensboro families,
And the families associated by marriage
Are in communication with each other.
Without Margaret we would probably
Be strangers by now.

As I was saying
Margaret not only brought
Us together in our sense of the past
And in relation to the present
But also in relation to
Our movement into the future.

She has bonded the generations
Together more than any other
Single person in the family.
If future generations know
Anything about themselves
About their Ancestry, their
Cousins aunts and uncles
It will be by the grace
Of Margaret
She has introduced the cousins
To each other. Cousins
Especially I consider
A special relationship. Not
Swallowed up in the intimacy
Of immediate family, yet
Not without sharing the wonders
Of a common descent
And a shared heritage.

Considering all this
It's quite appropriate then
That we take this occasion
To give Margaret some
Of the recognition that
She deserves.

Some day the American story
Of the family will be written.
The Ocean crossing,
The Virginia colony, the move to
Maryland, the wagon journey
Through the Cumberland or
The Delaware Water Gap
To the Ohio Valley,

The railway journey
To Greensboro
From there out
Into the farther reaches
Of the continent.

Only through on-coming
Generations will adequate
Expression of gratitude be given
To Margaret, surely never in her
Lifetime. Yet today
She might know that
We have immense appreciation
For all that she has done
Especially in recent years
Since her return to the region
Of her birth.
I am myself especially
Grateful since I do not
Know how I would have managed
My own transition back
To my homeland
Without her assistance.
This brings up the welcome
Home for myself that is also
A purpose of our gathering.
There was the thought of giving
Everyone an opportunity to see
What your generosity has done;
And for me to express my appreciation
For the concern of so many
In setting up the Stables
As a delightful dwelling
Where a wandering scholar
Might write out His last manuscripts
Giving his suggestions concerning
A viable mode of human presence
On the planet, suggestions primarily
For consideration by the children
Of the next generations.

Although I cannot today
thank each of you individually
I will in time send to each
Of you a note of thanks -
As soon as I can complete
the lingering details
Of the move. Meanwhile
I offer my enduring gratitude to you all.
The third, perhaps the single
Most significant aspect of this day
Is to have a brief moment.
With Joe and Jean.

You ask about Joseph, Well
I’l tell you in plain language.
Joseph can be considered
The second Father of the family.

He has rescued more of us
From drowning than we will ever know.
It’s a bit heavy to bring up
Joseph in Egypt giving out
Sacks of wheat to his brothers
Also to think of the other Joseph
Walking along in front of a donkey
With a woman and a child
Yet if we are quiet for a moment
We will discern a resonance
that passes through all three
designations of the name Joseph.

A phrase that comes down
To us in our Christian heritage
Tells People in trouble: Go to Joseph.
A cry that has rung down
Through the centuries
A cry that seems to be well-known
By the bible-reading
People of this region

Even those of us who are not
Particularly bible readers
Seem to instinctively feel
The rightness of the phrase.
To Joseph and Jean we have come
Consistently for a place to have
Our family gatherings, Their home
Has long been the closest
Thing that we have
To a Family Home. Here we
Have come on winter evenings
To experience their presence.

Here our children have come
For summertime swimming,
The youngest ones watched over
And taught by Joseph. Then
Again it was a great adventure
Paddling the rowboat in the
Dark of night hunting bull-frogs.

Here a new intimacy
Of the family with each
Other has been born.

This has not been easy for Joe and Jean
Yet they have endured our impositions
With that remarkable grace that is
Their distinctive characteristic.

Here we need to give a special
Tribute to Jean. She it was
Who rescued Joseph from
The Perils of his own wild
Self that might well have
Driven him over some cliff
If there were no such person
Nearby to guide him safely
In his passage
Through the mountains.
To both Joe and Jean
We express our gratitude.
Our indebtedness is beyond
Any full expression of thanks.
Yet in the awkward way of family affairs
We simply bow our heads in quiet gratitude.

Today is a day that sums up
The events of the lifetime
Of the older ones among us.
It's a day that the younger ones
Might recall through the years

Today is a day when
We gave some thought
To the larger issues
That give to our lives
The richness
Of their meaning.

If we had the ability we might sing
A conclusion to this day with
Beethoven's Ode To Joy. Since
This is beyond our ability we
Can only say a soft
Peace upon this dwelling
And Heaven Bless us All.