

Jim Bogan

MRS. FRANZ: MOTHER EARTH'S DAUGHTER

Eighty-six years old
never been to Kansas City
got as far as a St. Louis suburb
once.

Still, fairly radical:
"I ain't against pool
or dancin."

She used to walk ten miles to go dancing Saturday nights
about the time her father sold apples for a quarter a
barrel.

She's lovely
bright *old* blue eyes
white mop top
teeth in a drawer somewhere
voice travels from the mourning dove to the crow,
mostly crow
four layers of flower-print dresses
sturdy as a turnip
didn't wear shoes in the summer til she was 73.
milked cows *every* day from the time she was 8
til she turned 78 (hates milk).
Still keeps chickens, says,
"A day without work is a day without food."

Remembers what happened:
yesterday
last week
a year and a day ago
forty-nine years ago
seventy years ago
and everything in between--
Quick at arithmetic, too.

She's four when the calendars shift over to 19-ought.
22 when the man who will be her husband
ten years later embarks for France
to fight their mutual 2nd cousins.
38 when the WPA builds the bridge down the road
56 when Ike gets elected for the first time--
and she voted for him--been Republican ever
since Wilson lied about keeping us out of war.
76 when Otto died and that almost killed her:
"I wished I was dead. Never done that before."

Otherwise vigorous
and what her wood stove won't heat
port-wine will.

Plants her man-sized garden by the Moon:
"If you sow radishes by the light of the Moon,
all you'll get is greens.
It never fails."

Petrified of snakes, lightning, and the dark:
"I wouldn't open the door to Santa Claus himself
after the sun goes down."

She was weeding the okra one morning
when a pair of Jehovah's Witnesses
descended upon her
them in shirt and tie
her in bonnet and sweatin some--
"Git on, if the Lutherans couldn't save me,
you sure as hell cain't."

Always has a can of Gold Label beer ready,
and a dirty joke:
"Lady goes into a music store
asks the clerk, "You have *Hot Lips*?"
He says, 'No, but I got nine inches.'
She says, 'Is that a record?'
'No,' he says, 'but it's a damn good average.'
-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee."

Had one child of her own, Henry
cried "a barrel of tears"
when he shipped out for Korea,
"But it was *me* in danger, Ma."
Raised eleven kids,
orphans that she literally picked up off the street
"and made us work,"
says the religious one.
"And my husband never made complaint."

She listens to mathmeticians
astrologers (She's a Virgo Soul
with a lot of Leo somewhere)
physicists
bums
English perfessors
minstrels
Truth or Consequence on TV
says, "It's very educatin,"
while crocheting on her pink and white *african*.

I knocked at the door louder and longer than usual.
She finally appeared, looking like a cat that's been
shoved off a chair
I shouted (her hearing aid lives in the same drawer
as her teeth):
"What ya doin? Takin a nap?"
"What?"
"TAKIN A NAP?"
"Eh - You make me sick.
I been workin.
It's you been takin a nap."
She was right too.

You know its her coming down the road
engine revved
honking like a teenager
in her speeding Maverick
headed for the Big Star Market
purse full of coupons.

Always candy for the kids
and for their parents:
tomatoes
and okra
and zucchini
and pumpkin
and scallions
and cabbage
and pickles
and turnips
and peppers
and radishes
and beets
and lettuce
and apples
and pears
and jelly
and flowers

When the local undertaker met her
in the potato chip aisle of the Krogerstore
he put his hand on her shoulder
to which,

Mrs. Franz,

"Ain't cold yet, Marvin."