

University of Montana

## ScholarWorks at University of Montana

---

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &  
Professional Papers

Graduate School

---

1984

### Extended care

Verlena Orr

*The University of Montana*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

**Let us know how access to this document benefits you.**

---

#### Recommended Citation

Orr, Verlena, "Extended care" (1984). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 2302.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/2302>

This Professional Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

COPYRIGHT ACT OF 1976

THIS IS AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT IN WHICH COPYRIGHT SUBSISTS. ANY FURTHER REPRINTING OF ITS CONTENTS MUST BE APPROVED BY THE AUTHOR.

MANSFIELD LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA  
DATE: 1984



EXTENDED CARE

BY

Verlena Orr

B.A., College of Idaho, 1961

B.A., Portland State University, 1982

Presented in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1984

Approved by:

Wm Fin Rest  
Chairman, Board of Examiners

E C Mendenhall  
Dean, Graduate School

6/6/84  
Date

UMI Number: EP35622

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35622

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

5-20-84

EXTENDED CARE

Many thanks to the editors of the following magazines in which these poems first appeared:

Backbone 4: List to Make Life Less Complicated for a Woman Over Thirty-Fi

Giltedge: A Small Celebration, Sunday

Artifact: Saturday Night at the Singles Dance

Fedora: Birth Day

Quivera: One Way Back

Northwest Magazine, The Oregonian: Learning the Language from Dad;

One Place on the Beach

Thornapple: Second Mirror.

Portland Review: Confiding in a Map Reader; After Leaving

Concerning Poetry: Night Flight

Windssock Poems: Kah-Nee-Ta Landscape

**For My Parents and Teachers**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### I. EXTENDED CARE

Daisy and Grace .....	1
Mary .....	2
Lily and Bill .....	3
Sylvia .....	4
Charrise .....	5
Brenda .....	6
Junior .....	7
Orville .....	8
Virgil .....	9
Robert .....	10
Mabel .....	12
Marie .....	13
Shirley .....	15
Violet .....	16
Azalea .....	17
Daisy Belle .....	18
Mildred .....	19

### II. TIME EXPOSURES

A Small Celebration, Sunday .....	20
Saturday Night at the Singles Dance .....	21
Birth Day .....	23

TABLE OF CONTENTS, CONTINUED

One Way Back .....	24
Learning the Language from Dad .....	25
Second Mirror .....	27
Confiding In A Map Reader .....	28
Night Flight .....	30
After Leaving .....	32
Kah-nee-ta Landscape .....	34
One Place On The Beach .....	35
List To Make Life Less Complicated for a Woman Over Thirty-Five .....	36

**I. EXTENDED CARE**

"Writers can be guilty of every kind of human conceit but one, the conceit of the social worker: 'We are all here on earth to help others; what on earth the others are here for, I don't know.'"

W. H. Auden. The Dyer's Hand

Daisy and Grace

I wrote, from affection,  
a poem for Daisy Belle Weatherspoon  
of her passion for maple syrup,  
her sitting like royalty on top of her TV  
soaps blaring between her thighs,  
her children chiming for supper  
(a quart of syrup, cold white bread).  
Daisy swarming with forks.

I took the poem to class  
where Grace damned my bleak vision  
demanded I write of daffodils and cherries  
give up gnarled Daisy.  
Grace believed alcoholics were truthful  
and beauty could be sold in bouquets.  
Picking flowers I thought an act of murder.

Daisy hummed over the drone of Guiding Light  
when Grace infected me with truth and I followed  
the bed of an unreal river bludgeoning Grace  
with every rock.

## Mary

She complained her mind  
wouldn't focus, a faltering TV,  
drew wavering pencil lines to show me,  
pleaded to try her dream of being  
a meatcutter. When she forgot  
that job, she wanted an education,  
classes in words, steel words  
keeping their sheen to cast light she could  
see in the dark. She brought me words  
she loved--muscle, shadow once heart  
with a long definition. I read them in  
my one voice and the furnace in her bones  
warmed the room as my voice echoed  
the language where we wanted to stay.

Lily and Bill

On the phone Lily sobs  
her husband demands  
unnatural sex. A nurse scolds  
her for being too loud. Lily tries  
to tell me without using names.  
It sounds like he wants his thing where  
she eats supper. She tries telling  
everything. There is too much sobbing.

I am late for a meeting.  
Lily screeches another  
indignity that sounds like a hairdo  
and the phone goes dead.

There is nothing like it in the dictionary.

The meeting is a lecture  
on accountability, assigning numbers to  
disease and pain.

The numbers are too low.

Sylvia

Three kids at seventeen,  
she stuffed the baby with Koolaid,  
never held him. The nurse and I filled  
her with advice, hot fudge sundaes  
and warnings. She got religion, quit  
wearing "Hot Stuff" T-shirts, wrote  
a prison inmate and was saved on a rainy  
Wednesday in her kitchen. For weeks after  
she stayed in bed, the children heaped  
on her, their faces crumpled like potato chips.

Charrise

Bringing embroidery and a deck of cards  
we miss films on birth control  
play long games of gin  
pretend we are not there for her abortion,  
pretend we don't feel utterly alone.  
I am numbed with embroidery, thread needles  
that suck white cotton pillowcases  
into bloom. Stray rivers of color vein  
my thighs while fuchsias spill on my legs  
in violet, pink, magenta, their centers  
permanent knots like my stomach.

She asks how long it will take to finish  
the flowers growing in six-strand cotton floss.  
I let her try a French knot and she twists  
the thread until it breaks. It is her turn  
for the procedure and I re-thread the needle  
start in the corner where lilies wilt  
their stencil permanent as our grief.

Brenda

She passed the clap around  
like a hat for beer money,  
ran in a circle away from  
her mother who droned like  
a fly in a window, wanted  
the kid locked up anywhere.

Nervous, I felt the metal door  
lock, saw the grated windows  
and wished the girl cunning  
as she straddled the fence where  
we all cling to escape metal circles  
hooked like rings in a failing magic act.

## Junior

He made a suicide attempt  
by shooting himself in  
the foot and limped around his  
girlfriend's house, who still  
didn't care, until he was  
off his crutches.

Everyone laughed behind his back.

He dived into a depression that made  
him cry over small things like running  
out of cigarettes or dropping a glass.

He wore his cast like a uniform  
asking friends to endorse his ankle.

They all signed, some drew hearts  
and eagles. Alone, he raised his leg  
to light for clearer vision.

Orville

Unzipping he showed the family album  
to his granddaughter who bragged about  
Grandpa's shining quarters.

Now it is my job to lay down  
rules for looking at pictures with children  
until we have a common vision.

I dress him in a jail--  
barred windows correcting his myopia. Too soon

his wife forgives him, too late the child  
tattles about her money and candy. Too late  
he goes to church where the rose of his bald head  
blooms as he takes in the collection, the wire  
rims of his glasses

slipping down, dim green currency  
blinding him. As I write, so we won't  
forget, the rules in duplicate,  
he leans his face toward me  
like a plain white cake.

Virgil

He gave me a cigar  
swore he was no longer  
unusually interested in  
little girls then found a woman  
who longed for appliances and taught  
her daughter to call him Daddy. As the  
avocado washer and dryer arrived he  
was showing the little girl pictures  
in a coverless magazine promising  
ripple ice cream. Before the matching  
freezer came, the woman called crying  
her little girl was not the same.  
Taking off my glasses I fumbled  
for a cigarette in the shreds of the old Roi-Tan.  
I saw her, sitting on the edge of the bed  
between piles of clean sheets and towels  
lolling in his absence, the freezer droning  
the washer gasping with a heavy load.

Robert

Because he was a family disgrace  
they adopted him. He called

his real mother "Aunt Irene"  
liked Beethoven and math

played trumpet through  
the father's bankruptcy, the mother's

addiction to Percodan. Father continued  
wearing bow ties, gave out his business

cards at the welfare office. The mother  
died and Aunt Irene hired a lawyer

to get her kid back. The boy practiced  
oboe after school. The judge ordered me

to inspect the father's heart and house. He dusted  
everything. The boy dressed as a shepherd

(Stanza break)

for the school play, asked Santa for a piano.

Irene coiled her hair, swore the boy loved her best.

In the courtroom, we sat like tambourines, rattling

when questioned. The boy polished his shoes

maroon, hummed a Bach fugue, swung his

short legs in a rhythm none of us recognized.

Mabel

On the phone she complained  
for hours--insults from strangers,  
shortchanging storeclerks, mailmen  
stealing her checks and finally  
uninvited neighbors sitting naked  
in her living room calling her  
names, stumbling through her  
brain bearing quarts of whisky.  
Like larkspur their abuse grew  
the more she tried to uproot  
them until her whining exhausted  
them. Frozen over, holding the empty  
bottle of indignity, she hung up saying  
"too busy to gossip."

I silently nurtured those weeds,  
their violet blooms, cut her down  
to one poison call a day when I shriveled  
at the end of the short wire silent like  
the worm lying on the clear bottom  
of a mescal bottle.

Marie

Swaddled in an apron of fat  
she dressed her evenings  
with long-haul truckers,  
whined for her missing husband,  
fed her kids elephant heart  
they knew was liver.

When the husband returned  
from looking for work,  
beat her at Monopoly,  
she was mad for days.  
He told me he was a rabbit  
"lose my load too fast"  
asked my advice. I watched  
his freckles twitching, his pink eyes  
darting, crossed my legs  
pulled out a form for him to sign.

He signed for a job, promised  
to keep track of his efforts,  
make no sloppy excuses.

(No stanza break)

I took stuffy notes  
in my black book.  
With a new man,  
she glowed like a candled egg.

Shirley

A sagging mattress preserves  
the family in one bed, father easing  
mother to the edge, reining daughter  
to his side until the cops send them all  
to a cluster of bored psychiatrists.  
Father clutches his groin, mother gazes  
like a vacant cloud, and daughter,  
in front of the two-way mirror, preens.

## Violet

The baby, seldom changed, waved  
the stalks of his arms and legs  
like truce flags. The little girl  
wet the bed nightly and the kids called  
her Stinky. Fat and mold congealed  
in an aroma of food and urine where Violet  
envisioned a kiss that would make her faint--deep  
energy to set her in a frenzy  
of cleaning. Tired of promises,  
I threaten to take her kids.  
She sinks into haircare magazines,  
Elvis movies, goes off on  
Greek ships in port for weekends, looks  
for lips to incite her, untangle the wad  
of clothes blocking the door where I stand  
with legal papers and foster homes, refusing  
to surrender.

Azalea

Like fall she is bloodless yellow--  
her eyes dead leaves

men track through on gloomy  
nights. She crosses her legs

as she says she loves her kids.  
They stamp and swear, call

each other bastards knowingly.  
The men drag their long faces and limp cocks

back to pale frame houses  
as she dissolves in their bones.

Daisy Belle

Wads of bills stuffed in her  
breasts, her print dress wrong  
side out, the collar-facing  
a fluttering truce, she parades  
a slow cadence trailing a purse  
full of licorice wrappers.  
As she crosses the khaki river,  
green bills bury in her thatch--  
and when she finds them she believes  
it is a sign the war is over.

Mildred

The carnival barker sold her  
three hard balls to knock down stars,  
divined her weight by seizing  
her lips in a kiss that grazed  
the last full moon.

When the mist heaved she opened  
her knees, thrust her puny breasts left--  
then right--wishing lavender sequins  
twirled on the nipples. He knocked her  
up, maneuvered a stint in the dime-a-throw  
win-a-dish booth where clear saucers  
flamed with light.

The carnival blew town like the first  
snow and the girl stood in the track  
of the pony ride, the tight dry  
circle that remained.

## II. TIME EXPOSURES

A Small Celebration, Sunday

We're on stairs of the Promenade,  
try to speak of photography  
how to capture the scene,  
beach grass in thin long shivers.

Neither of us knows technique.  
You suggest we begin  
with a camera, use a tripod,  
black and white film, a long time  
exposure. We are covered with sand.

I will lie here perfectly  
still while you learn  
my soft belly.  
Part of me dims.  
One fragment missing.  
Lights train on us from sad windows.

On cement, deaf to surf in this exchange,  
in air so thick I suck it deep to keep breathing,  
you keep speaking of photography.

Saturday Night at the Singles Dance

The high thin vocalist delivers lyrics like instructions,  
makes the blues sound like a weather report.

The band learned its last new song the year  
I was born and the reason I remember my name  
is that it is stuck on my chest with a cheery salutation.  
No one can pronounce it.

Myopic men breathe on my neck, their eyes inches  
from my left breast, trying to sound it out.

My friend froze in her chair twenty minutes ago.  
her eyes glazed after her first dance.  
Now it is my turn with her partner,  
a classical composer who works as a landscape gardner,  
who dances in a step that makes my calves ache.  
He interrupts his resume with wet kisses on my cheek,  
and for the first kiss, I am grateful.

I am grateful when the pain reaches my thighs.  
I am grateful for Stardust and Deep Purple.

We paid for this dance, left the dishes to be on time,  
arrive at the same moment as whoever we look for.

(No stanza break)

We knew we could not not be there.

We knew we could not turn down a dance.

We are beginning now to sound out names.

## Birth Day

I follow spore of slashburn to October  
where my birth day lies, stalk  
the day for weeks, hearing it stir  
in thornbrush. Pale hunting moons  
worry over pine as the day turns on me.

What if I'm living someone else's life?  
I leave scent for the chase  
consider a climb through shale  
to the next year, make tracks  
for the day to follow.

That day is heavy with blood  
of the sky's feeding. It slips  
out of my reach, moves in my eyes  
like quicksilver the slow moon swallows.

One Way Back

Used to be, a thin brown stream  
of Copenhagen could take you  
on a projectile from stale dishwater  
on the woodstove to any hayfield  
where gentle men offered a pinch,  
where you could swirl profanities  
under your tongue privately,  
take aim and prove yourself accurate,  
then follow  
your markings back

back to the truck  
back to the ditch  
back to the house.

Learning the Language From Dad

It begins under the John Deere.  
At first it sounds like thunder  
over by Cottonwood, twenty miles west.

But it is the incantation  
of the slipping crescent wrench,  
that sacred oath of B's like bells  
S's that steam in a long train  
coupled with 'ings that ricochet  
in the walls of the abandoned granary  
echo the canyon  
clear down to Seven Mile Grade.

Pigons fall from the hay mow  
at the top of the barn  
then rise like death.  
The sow lifts her snout  
from her morning slop.  
Old Jack runs under the milk house  
where cream in the separator goes sour.

(NO stanza break)

Silver, the new palomino, lays  
his ears back, ready to throw any rider.

The loose two by four falls in the shed  
crashes like the end  
of a long celebration.

Second Mirror

For Phil

"They say in the mirror you don't see yourself, they say."

I came here limp and ready to bend and break in contortions  
for the brave, the cowards, the timid. You saw me first  
holding my knees to my chest, my fingers an open cradle.  
You thought me limber. I was placed in leather restraints.  
You wore a suede coat. I took food from you when I was hungry.

Do not lock this poem in a room. It will float as gas to  
torture you. The melody will play every morning on your radio.  
This poem will dance topless, turn somersaults in the nude, fall  
off a sink, crash on a metal bar. It will escape on the cold  
day and dazzle the snow. It is a yoga sponge, a faith, a salt shaker.

Confiding In A Map Reader

for Scot

Some days I try  
to find myself loveable.  
Pines guide the covered trail,  
Stellar's jays sentinel and I forget  
this is a city where light  
is the biggest lie on the street.

Lead me back in the direction of land  
I called home and I will tell  
you secrets in code, precious dots  
of humiliation. I save shadows,  
lose my directions and permanent truths  
like gravity and opposite poles.

Willows sting my hand in a whip of wind.  
I rely on lightning for clear light  
to see the lines of the map,  
wires connecting like trust  
the extraordinary event of rain

(New Stanza)

where winter wheat grows,  
a grandmother making French knots  
in dresser scarves and all horses  
moving in circles even at night  
finding their own way home.

At night you can read this rain  
like circuitry, trace the source  
where your hands fill with fish.  
On the map there is a legend  
for gentle that has your name.

Night Flight

A woman tells me her sister is seducing  
her husband at this very moment.

It is the night flight  
at 50,000 feet and climbing.

The woman says she can do nothing.  
She is doing needlework.  
Since Seattle she has embroidered  
French knots in centers  
of all the tiger lilies stenciled  
on pillow cases that say His and Hers.

They quit charging for drinks  
at 70,000 feet and she gets religion,  
decides sex is the answer, forgets  
the husband, wonders how long she can  
survive a forced landing.  
We are over Greenland.

The pilot is quiet, steward tenderly  
pour tall glasses for the woman.

(No stanza break)

When we drop 10,000 feet, she develops  
an allergy. The men keep their hands  
in their pockets.

As we circle sunrise near England  
we welcome the last free drink.  
The woman folds her scissors  
sharpens her needle on her hair.  
Tight as French knots, we are  
in this together.

After Leaving

He is young  
sleeping in a common dream  
of two sons and a boat.  
My elbow falls on the rolls  
of his belly as he breathes.  
Limber, I crawl  
through barbed wire  
of children and dogs  
to the glitter over the next rise.

He turns and the wire  
hooks the throat of his dream as he hangs  
a picture of a woman,  
a large calendar.

Stale weekends linger  
like smoke in a closed sky.  
Summer edges in on a long line  
out of season.

(Stanza Break)

Love is like someone

doing a survey.

Death, the angle of vision

behind the calendar, the years

I lie still.

KAH-NEE-TA LANDSCAPE

Night, the still black rock,  
burns after sundown.

The day's heat in my throat,  
I cut a clear trail  
with tumbleweed knives.

Sage moves in on a vein of green wind.  
The knots, my hands, untie  
turn to red centers in Queen Anne's lace.  
My arms are stalks of fireweed.

There is another way to kill:  
Break stems of wildflowers.  
Death to the larkspur and Indian paint-brush.  
Daughters admire lupine in a jelly jar.

If I say sky is one bridge,  
the span of color in these hills  
like a new river through dried blood,  
the lupine will root.

But you are here in one cool cry  
of the coyote and it is night, nothing more.

## One Place On The Beach

I gamble on sun  
then throw snake eyes  
for a squall that lasts.  
Peppermint taffy sinks  
in my hand. What remains  
slips the separate wrappers,  
huddles in a tight pink swell.  
Dim rocks lie offshore  
in a vague covenant of safety.  
Odds are everyone here is in love.

Lovers blink over foggy glasses,  
pat themselves with damp towels.  
At night, raw sheets rub their legs  
like starved cats. Crazy dogs  
chase low-flying birds through  
the drone of surf.

But weather here breaks even,  
comes back like the next roll  
after the end of what was sweet.

List to Make Life Less Complicated For a Woman Over Thirty-Five

MEN

If a man at a large party tells you he is a poet,  
ask to see his poems. He will have them in his  
back pocket if he is, in fact, a poet.

If a man tells you he is a sonofabitch, believe him.

Do not play doctor with real doctors.

At a class reunion, remember that the kid you thought  
was a creep when you were fifteen, has not changed a bit.

If you must talk with a man in a bar, speak with  
an older alcoholic. Sometimes they quote Shakespeare.

When you start looking younger and prettier,  
it makes your husband nervous. It was easier for him  
when you were fat and depressed.

Do not tell your husband how well you handled yourself  
in a compromising situation. He will wonder why  
you were there in the first place.

When you fall in love, it means that you are still alive.  
Do not take it too seriously if you are married.

(Stanza Break)

### FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES

The forty-ninth time your friends insult you,  
begin regarding them as acquaintances.

When friends have not sought your company for a year,  
they regard you as an acquaintance.

Do not tell acquaintances you are happy.  
They will be compelled to make you unhappy.

Do not cook dinner for people you loathe.

The only other person who thinks you are witty and charming  
after eight bottles of beer, is whoever had the other eight bottles.

Remember that some folks are one brick short of a full load.

Remember that everyone does not love you.

### PROFESSIONAL

It is sometimes wise to lie about your choice of occupation.  
When in doubt, tell people you are a librarian or a  
Christain Scientist.

Take up geology and bird watching: they are longlasting  
gentle pursuits.

(No stanza break)

Make people think, then get the hell out of their way.

#### HEALTH

Quit smoking so you will be at the nursing home  
when your friends come to visit.

After two drinks, sit in the corner and look mysterious.  
Do Not Talk.

Do not yell when you tell people your age.

Quit trying to explain yourself. It takes too much  
of your precious energy.

Do not dance slow with anyone but your husband or father.

#### BOTTOM LINE

Strangers will ask if you are going through a divorce,  
your friends are too old to be that polite,  
acquaintances will suggest a counselor.

Do not ask strangers or friends or acquaintances to read your poems.