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THE TRUTH OF POETRY AND FICTION:
A NOTE ON PROMETHEAN CREATION

Kim Stafford—Director, Northwest Writing Institute

Winning Entries:

“Father” (Spring/Summer 2002)

Brian Blums

fiction

“Rounding Second...” (Spring/Summer 2002)

Mark Brittain

poetry

Comment:

I remember sitting at a tiny chair in an elementary school library as I waited for a group of children. We were going to talk about writing, the life of creation, and as I waited I saw a curious thing. To clarify the world for the young, the school librarian had separated the book collection into two categories. Above the north book-wall was a sign: “Fiction—Not True.” Above the south wall: “Non-fiction—True.”

If only life could be that simple.

Every day I find myself surrounded by the partial truths and frequent lies of writing and speech presented as non-fiction. My newspaper tells me tragedy, failure, crime, and lets that pass as a true assessment of us all. In memo after memo, my college tells me my work is about budget figures, class enrollments. And advertising everywhere informs me what I should want. The truth of all this, I believe, often resides in what is not said. The real news is about reconciliation, how we keep on. My college is really about a moment of resonant silence in a small class. And I don't want what I can buy; I want what I can understand, create, and give my life to. I want true things.

True things come to me in poetry and fiction when it is written with courage, insight, and grace. This is the fire for which Prometheus rightly risked life and freedom. True things are complex, require both heart and mind, and produce a spiritual reality that lies behind the visible, the measurable.

When fiction and poetry are true, you know this with your body. The words of the text “ring true,” speed your pulse, lead you toward the person you will be. This is why poetry and fiction have a place at the heart of learning now. They are the arts that connect us, rather than merely inform us, advance us, or enable our economy or preeminence.

I was asked to select two winning pieces from the Fall and Spring issues of *The Promethean*, 2001-2002. I had a rich reading experience, and I've done that. Wonderful work. But beyond the winners—the “news” of my judgment—I want to honor all the writers who took the time to write a story or poem that is true. You help us all create the new world.