THE MASKED MAN, LEAVING BEHIND A SILVER BULLET, RIDES OFF TOWARD THE SUNSET

For Jim Hall
By Anita Skeen

The letter came today saying you are leaving
the ranch, something I’ve known
would happen sooner than I wanted.
The words of black type squirm
on the page like injured lizards.
I remember seeing you that first summer
looking like the lowest-paid hand, jeans
and plaid shirt, boots and a battered hat.
You looked like the guy in all the western movies
who gets shot somewhere in the first few frames.
"There's Jim Hall," someone said.

I think of you in conversation:
at ease with strangers and friends in a chapel,
in the dining hall at a loaded table,
on the patio of your adobe the night
we all come to watch the sky
and you talk about Ruth's bones.
I have yet to see you on a horse.
The clouds of dust you kick up mushroom
behind the pickup, gravel spraying
like buckshot, like the stars flung out
against the dusk above Chimney Rock.
I think of you like these ribbed red rocks,
old Pedernal, the prickly pear,
and take you for granted.
Your apparition wafts in the doorways,
all lank and sinew.

When I drove off the ranch last June,
our pickups passed, and paused nose to tail
like horses nuzzling on the trail.
We spoke, each of us framed in our windows
like a school photo, and our hands
poked out to meet in the puffs of dust
sifting between the two trucks.
I had just come from O'Keefe's house,
picked up a quartz rock veined with Abiquiu
red from her yard to take home.* As I grabbed
your hand, I touched the muscle
of this land, the pulse of the precious
liquid flowing below the ground, the heat
of the afternoon sun. My fingers burst
into bloom like the stalks of cholla,
and you said, "Adios."

* not recommended
Meet the Keesecker Family: Joe, Selena, Shandra, and Joshua

As I noted in the last Amigos letter, Joe is the Director of Ghost Ranch as of February 1. In a real sense this will be a coming home for Joe and Selena, daughter, Shandra, 14, and Joshua, 11. For several years the family home was the San Luis Valley, just over the Colorado line to the north. While living at La Jara, they welcomed into the family a foster son, Johnny Gallegos, now 30, married, a Navy medic.

Joe was born in 1943 in Kansas, Selena in Colorado, both attended the College of Emporia. Joe finished McCormick Seminary, went on for a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Chicago, and for a year worked with Northwest Community Organization in Chicago. In 1970, they moved to La Jara and later, Alamosa. He was Mobile Minister in the San Luis Valley providing leadership for community ministry with Pueblo Presbyterian and congregations in the Valley. He developed San Luis Valley Christian Community Services to provide an ecumenical base for continuing community development and service. Of primary concern were issues of health care, alcoholism, youth services and economic development.

During that period of ministry, the family frequently participated in Ranch programs. Shandra learned to walk at the ranch. Briefly Joe did have an official tie to the Ranch. As a member of the Program Agency Board, he was, upon our nomination, appointed as the Agency Board's official liaison member of the Ghost Ranch Foundation. However, he was asked to become the Associate Director of the Presbyterian Hunger Program and the family moved to the New York area. As a staff member, to his disappointment and ours, he could no longer continue as a member of the Program Agency Board and this ended that official tie. For the past several years, Joe has been the Co-Director of the Hunger Program.

Selena is a pianist, organist, and vocalist with a graduate degree in musicology from Texas Christian University. A wide range of interests and concerns has led to securing a lay theological degree from New York Theological Seminary, teaching at elementary and secondary levels, serving as a sales representative for a small specialty items company, LaLeche League leader, and extensive involvement in church and community affairs. Her parents live in Cheraw, Colorado, with other family members not too far away.

I am pleased that there is the prospect for the ranch of many years of caring, creative leadership from this family. I think the right choice has been made. I support it wholeheartedly and leave to you all the richness of the ranch's history, the promise of its future, and an able and dedicated staff. You will, I know, give to Joe and Selena the warmth of your caring and support which has so blessed us all.

Jim Hall