

# The Point

*by Debbie Edwards*

First there's sand. Then, there's blacktop over white, metal drainage pipes. Finally, the dirty, cracked concrete of Waukegan Harbor's south pier begins.

By the first part of the pier, near the shore, a billboard reads, "Welcome to Waukegan, freshwater Coho capital of the world." Only someone has blocked out the word "Coho" and put "PCP" in its place. A mass of driftwood, McDonald's packaging, and a few dead fish clump ironically to the sign's watery base. The smell of factory waste, fish, and urine hangs in the air. Arches made of iron rods rise about ten feet from the concrete pier, placed like giant croquet hoops between the shore and the breakwater. Fist-sized spiders make their homes in the tops of these hoops. In the concrete between the arches are deep, round holes, usually stuffed with beer cans, which trip those who are too busy watching the spiders. This part of the pier separates the north and south boat docks. Ducks swim in and out of spaces among the various crafts as the sound of boat motors mixes with that of the squawking gulls perched on the red, white, and blue Mobil gas pump sign.

The second part of the pier, from the white rock breakwater to the stout, black-capped lighthouse, is much higher and narrower than the first mile or so. Here, the sounds of birds and boat motors are lost in the crashing of the waves against this concrete intruder. Gone, too, are the factory stench and rod-iron arches. Looking south, there's an uninterrupted view of the Chicago skyline. The Sears Tower, about the size of a domino, looms over its partner, the Hancock, the the snow-white Standard Oil Building. The rest of the structures, too small to pick out, form little bumps on the horizon. Further out on the pier, right before the lighthouse, is a colorful collection of spray-paint graffiti with an almost perfectly stenciled Ghostbusters' emblem glaring up from the concrete in bold red and white. Lastly, the lighthouse sits at the very end of the pier, as if on the point of an arrow. At the tip of the pier there is no railing; the concrete drops straight into the deep, blue water. The blue-green beacon, coupled with the blow of the air horn, sweeps the rough waters of Lake Michigan.

Most people are scared of the rushing waves, only willing to venture as far as the lighthouse.

Touch it.

And then turn back toward shore.

They feel uneasy, knowing they're surrounded by a presence far more powerful than themselves. No one ever makes it to the point, especially at night.

Except for me.

I go to the point, especially at night.

Or sometimes, most of the time, I walk the pier just as the sun goes down. By the time I reach the lighthouse, the sky has turned dark blue. Then, I slip around the cold, white sides of the landmark and, finally, come to the point.

I stand, my hands stuffed in the pockets of faded Levi's. My hooded sweatshirt bunches up around my waist. The blowing wind makes its metal zipper cold. I line the toes of my worn, gray Nikes up with the crumbling concrete tip of the pier. Sometimes I try to kick one of the exposed pebbles loose, but they never give. So, I just stand, very straight and still, and watch the dark, blue sky turn to black.

The wind usually picks up after dark. And the waves get higher and stronger. And, weather permitting, the low rumbling thunder of a passing storm competes with the horn of the lighthouse to fill the empty night.

My feet and jean bottoms become wet. I get a chill.

Then, a shiver.

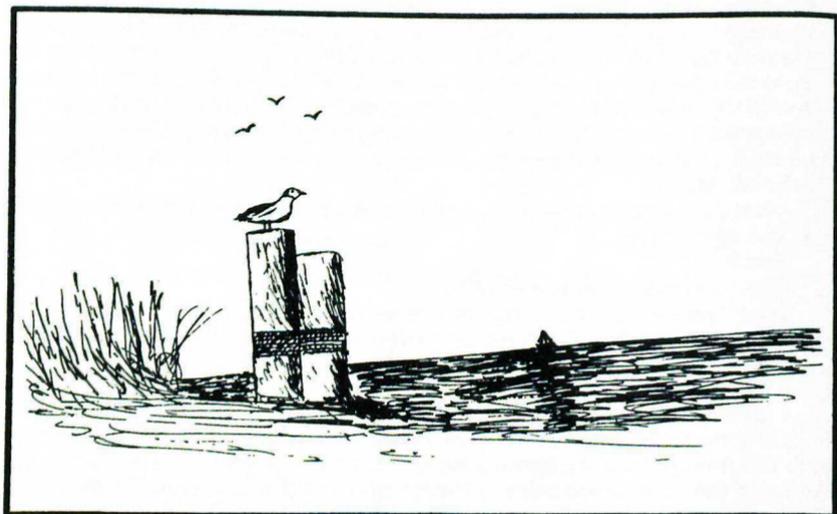
My hair is blown back away from my ears and forehead; I never wear the hood of my sweatshirt.

I stare straight ahead. Before me is a wall of black. Calm, solid black beneath my feet. Frenzied, churning black beyond. Pressing, endless black from above. Only texture divides this charcoal medium; all outline is lost.

I let my eyes slip out of focus. I can no longer distinguish myself from the pier, the pier from the choppy waters, or the water from the horizon. We all become one. We all become nothing. This is why people turn back. This is when I hear my dad saying, "Be careful; it's not safe out there."

They're scared of the force of nature. Maybe it's because they read it wrong, or maybe they just don't understand it in the first place. But I know they're scared.

This power, the rolling waves, the sharp, biting wind, the invisible horizon, is far beyond their grasp, and their control. People always want to understand things, and afterwards, manipulate them. They want to put everything in a place, an ordered slot. By doing this, they decrease the inherent power of the object, or force, and, thereby, increase their control over it. If they can't do this, if they can't control, they feel insignificant, and they get scared.



They can't do it out here.

And they **are** scared.

But I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid of insignificance, and I understand that some things can't be understood. I watch the raging, uncontrolled water.

That's enough.

I don't want to master it, or own it, or anything. I don't even want to think. I close my eyes; the night grows colder, the wind more powerful.

Suddenly, I hear a purr. It's low, but it keeps getting louder. I open my eyes and search for the source of the sound. I see nothing. The sound becomes less of a purr and more of a technical grind. It doesn't belong. Not out here with me.

The blue-green beacon touches a shiny spot on the water. I see a yellow, 40 foot Criss-Craft, its small but powerful engine cutting through the rough water. There's a family of four on board, all dressed in matching light blue rain slickers. The father is having a hard time taxiing the boat, across-current, to the breakwater. They all look scared, anticipating the smooth, glassy, controlled area of the breakwater and the boat slips.

I smile.

They wave, but I don't wave back. The back of the boat reads "Windtamer."

Something else catches my eye. The reflection of light off the boat makes another glimmer. It's on my wrist. I look down at the gold Timex on its black leather strap.

And I step back.

## Poem

*by Chris Crane*

You compete with cats,  
resurrecting without fail  
Your arrival is a mystery  
bringing mists, or sheets  
of you  
warm and refreshing or  
chilling to the marrow.  
You wash the residue  
of human touch to a film;  
we lose you to thin air,  
returning to drown  
those who marvel at your maker.