

MARTHA'S LAMENT

In Omaha, November, 1975, Robert received a call from an official at Random House in New York City. The publishing house had just signed a contract with the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare to focus on "Severely and Profoundly Handicapped Citizens." They needed a director of the project.

On the day after Thanksgiving, Bob and Martha packed their belongings in a UHaul truck and headed for The East Coast. Upon their arrival, Bob helped move everything into a rental apartment. Then he went to work. Martha, without a complaint, worked alone at making the new home livable.

Even so, when Bob returned from work, late one night in January 1976, he found this poem from Martha on his pillow:

I have ridden the ferry
And taken the train
Seen all the brooks
And trees in the lane

I have listened to subways
So deep underground
And tried to ignore
Their inimitable sound

I have met the neighbors
And seen many faces
Been to the beach
And the quaint little places

I have sampled the sea food
And loved every bite
Sat by the fire
In the chill of the night

I have waved to my husband
Each morning at six
As he boarded the commuter
That sometimes played tricks

I have picked up my husband
At six every night
I love him 'cause he's
A famil-i-ar sight

I've shopped for the groceries
And tried to ignore
The longing inside
For my old Safeway Store

I've finished unpacking
And scrubbed all the floors
And hung all the curtains
On windows and doors

I'm happy to be here
Though prices are high
But I wish there were someone
Newer than I

And sometimes I'm sad
That we wanted to roam
How do I tell you . . .
It's time to go home.

By Martha Perske, January 1976