our emotional wiring is getting laid down, and a lot of our emotions are associated with certain visual imagery,” Ms. Barrett says. “People have basic anxieties about other people evaluating them. And our society puts a pretty strong value on test-taking.”

A defining feature of many exam dreams is the dreamer’s role in his or her own demise. The psychic gist isn’t so much that the big test is a monster, but that one has somehow ushered the monster in, by skipping class or failing to prepare for a task. In the end, we seem to judge ourselves more harshly than the grader of any exam might.

So those who’ve never had such a dream should be very glad. To everyone else, there’s just one more thing to say: See you in class.

What Is Poverty?*

Jo Goodwin Parker

When George Henderson, a professor at the University of Oklahoma, was writing his 1971 book, America’s Other Children: Public Schools outside Suburbia, he received the following essay in the mail. It was signed “Jo Goodwin Parker” and had been mailed from West Virginia. No further information was ever discovered about the essay or its source. Whether the author of this essay was in reality a woman describing her own painful experiences or a sympathetic writer who had adopted her persona, Jo Goodwin Parker remains a mystery.

1 You ask me what is poverty? Listen to me. Here I am, dirty, smelly, and with no “proper” underwear on and with the stench of my rotting teeth near you. I will tell you. Listen to me. Listen without pity. I cannot use your pity. Listen with understanding. Put yourself in my dirty, worn out, ill-fitting shoes, and hear me.

2 Poverty is getting up every morning from a dirt- and illness-stained mattress. The sheets have long since been used for diapers. Poverty is living with a smell that never leaves. This is the smell of urine, sour milk, and spoiling food sometimes joined with the strong smell of long-cooked onions. Onions are cheap. If you have smelled this smell, you did not know how it came. It is the smell of the outdoor privy. It is the smell of young children who cannot walk the long dark way in the night. It is the smell of the mattresses where years of “accidents” have happened. It is the smell of the milk which has gone sour because the refrigerator long has not worked, and it costs money to get it fixed. It is the smell of rotting garbage. I could bury it, but where is the shovel? Shovels cost money.

3 Poverty is being tired. I have always been tired. They told me at the hospital when the last baby came that I had chronic anemia caused from poor diet, a bad case of worms, and that I needed a corrective operation. I listened politely—the poor are always polite. The poor always listen. They don’t say that there is no money for iron pills, or better food, or worm medicine. The idea of an operation is frightening and costs so much that, if I had dared, I would have laughed. Who takes care of my children? Recovery from an operation takes a long time. I have