

Bruce Morton

The Things We Learned

Things we learned in school we never knew—
Under the desk is a safe zone where is
A sampler of complimentary gum.
In kindergarten we had not a clue,
But by first grade we had certainly known
That when the alarm bell sounded its alarm
We knelt or squatted under our small desks
Hands clasped tight and arms pressed hard up
Against the ears so as not to hear the clatter
Of mushrooms dropped from big red airplanes.
When we returned to our seats, all that was
In my mind was how hard the gum was and
How could anyone know which flavor was what.
The teacher taught us to write bang and boom
And spell fear, and I wondered if I would be able
To chew the gum that is under my desk and blow
Bubbles that would explode and stick like skin
To be peeled from my face.