

Needles

They didn't send him to war
But the Michigan farmer's son
Had scars enough to show
For eleven months in the army

Visiting Needles
Socially disarmed
He fought his conscience
To defend his self-esteem
And made one friend

Guilt pricked his confession years later
During a gospel revival
"I cursed while I was in the army, and drank some, too.
I thank God that He's forgiven me."
We sat with bowed heads
Feeling the embarrassment of his shame

I take pictures of bleached buildings
Simmering in the heat
And wonder how one man's remorse
Could become my recreation
I see again his pleading eyes
As I announced I wanted to move to California
I feel his rejection as he turned his head
To hide the tears
I hear his attempted joke:
"There's nothing there.
They should give it back to the Indians."

I vacation in the desert
Visiting a monument to the
Death of my father's innocence
And feel I've avenged his loss
With my gain