Well, we had all these children out planting trees, see, because we figured that...that was part of their education, to see how you could care, how you could individualize...and also, the sense of responsibility, taking care of things, being individually responsible. You know what I mean. And the trees all died. They were planted in our yard and the roots walled up and what not. So we had to pull them all out. And the kids would look at those little brown stumps, it was depressing.

With the herb garden, it was probably a case of over-watering and a lack of weeding. The children were very conscientious with the herb garden and some of them probably...you know, slipped them a few weeds. Now they know not to over-water. The children were very conscientious with the herb garden and some of them probably...you know, slipped them a few weeds.
little extra water when we weren't looking. Or maybe . . . well, I don't like
to think about sabotage, although it did occur to us. I mean, it was some-
thing that crossed our minds. We were thinking that way probably because
before that the gerbils had died, and the white mice had died, and the sal-
mander . . . well, now they know not to carry them around in plastic bags.

Of course we expected the tropical fish to die, that was no surprise. Those
numbers, you look at them crooked and they're belly-up on the surface. But
the lesson plan called for a tropical-fish input at that point, there was nothing
we could do, it happens every year, you just have to hurry past it.

We weren't even supposed to have a puppy.

We weren't even supposed to have one, it was just a puppy the Murdoch
girl found under a Griswold's truck one day and she was afraid the truck
would run over it when the driver had finished making his delivery, so she
stuck it in her knapsack and brought it to school with her. So we had this
puppy. As soon as I saw the puppy I thought, Oh Christ, I bet it will live for
about two weeks and then . . . And that's what it did. It wasn't supposed to be
in the classroom at all, there's some kind of regulation about it, but you can't
tell them they can't have a puppy when the puppy is already there, right in
front of them, running around on the floor and yap, yap, yapping. They
named it Edgar—that is, they named it after me. They had a lot of fun run-
ning after it and yelling, "Here, Edgar! Nice Edgar!" Then they'd laugh like
hell. They enjoyed the ambiguity. I enjoyed it myself. I don't mind being kidded.
They made a little house for it in the supply closet and all that. I don't
know what it died of. Distemper, I guess. It probably hadn't had any shots. I
got it out of there before the kids got to school. I checked the supply closet
each morning, routinely, because I knew what was going to happen. I gave it
to the custodian.

And then there was this Korean orphan that the class adopted through the
Help the Children program, all the kids brought in a quarter a month, that
was the idea. It was an unfortunate thing, the kid's name was Kim and maybe
we adopted him too late or something. The cause of death was not stated in
the letter we got, they suggested we adopt another child instead and sent us
some interesting case histories, but we didn't have the heart. The class took it
pretty hard, they began (I think; nobody ever said anything to me directly) to
feel that maybe there was something wrong with the school. But I don't think
there's anything wrong with the school, particularly; I've seen better and I've
seen worse. It was just a run of bad luck. We had an extraordinary number of
parents passing away, for instance. There were two heart attacks and
two suicides, one drowning, and four killed together in a car accident. One
stroke. And we had the usual heavy mortality rate among the grandparents,
or maybe it was heavier this year, it seemed so. And finally the tragedy.

The tragedy occurred when Matthew Wein and Tony Mavrogordo were
playing over where they're excavating for the new federal office building.
There were all these big wooden beams stacked, you know, at the edge of the
excavation. There's a court case coming out of that, the parents are claim-
ing that the beams were poorly stacked. I don't know what's true and what's not.
It's been a strange year.

I forgot to mention Billy Brandy's father, who was knifed fatally when he
grappled with a masked intruder in his home.

One day, we had a discussion in class. They asked me, where did they go?
The trees, the salamander, the tropical fish, Edgar, the poppas and mommas,
Matthew and Tony, where did they go? And I said, I don't know, I don't know.
And they said, who knows? and I said, nobody knows. And they said, is death
that which gives meaning to life? and I said, no, life is that which gives mean-
ing to life. Then they said, but isn't death, considered as a fundamental
datum, the means by which the taken-for-granted mundanity of the everyday
may be transcended in the direction of—

I said, yes, maybe.

They said, we don't like it.
I said, that's sound.
They said, it's a bloody shame!
I said, it is.

They said, will you make love now with Helen (our teaching assistant) so
that we can see how it is done? We know you like Helen.
I do like Helen but I said that I would not.
We've heard so much about it, they said, but we've never seen it.
I said I would be fired and that it was never, or almost never, done as a
demonstration. Helen looked out of the window.
They said, please, please make love with Helen, we require an assertion of
value, we are frightened.
I said that they shouldn't be frightened (although I am often frightened)
and that there was value everywhere. Helen came and embraced me. I kissed
her a few times on the brow. We held each other. The children were excited.
Then there was a knock on the door, I opened the door, and the new gerbil
walked in. The children cheered wildly.