
Pro Rege

Volume 31
Number 2 *Fine Arts Issue 2002*

Article 17

December 2002

Buddies

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Recommended Citation

Vanden Bosch, Mike (2002) "Buddies," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 31: No. 2, 30.
Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol31/iss2/17

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Buddies

Mike Vanden Bosch

The Chinese man I meet on the street
looks like a college student back home:
clean-cut, shiny black hair, no obviously
Asian features. Square jaw, like mine.

He's my height. "Are you American?" He's
looking me over. "Yes," I say. "What
makes you think so?" "Clothes, hairy arms,"
he says. "Easy to see." "And gray hair?"

"Yes, much gray—grayer than my father."
"How old is your father?" I ask, curious now.
"Fifty-eight." My age, I think. His son could
be my son. "I'm fifty-eight—like your father."

He looks doubtful, so I ask him, "What's
your father do for a living?" "Work in factory
now. Soldier when young—fought in Korea."
Korean War, I think. Of course, Korean War,

the war I begged my dad to let me join. His
father might look like him, and I try to imagine
this square-jawed young man charging me,
me aiming my M-1 at his torso, as taught.

"Would you speak English with me for a while?
I need practice—my English not wary good."
I hear his father, not shooting, but wanting
to talk, and I, enemy, aiming to kill. "Sure,"

I say. "Did your father talk much of the war?"
"He no like it—much noise—much afraid." "Me
too," I say. "We'd have made good buddies."
"What's buddies?" "We," I say, "Hao pengyou."*

*close friends