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Saint Francis

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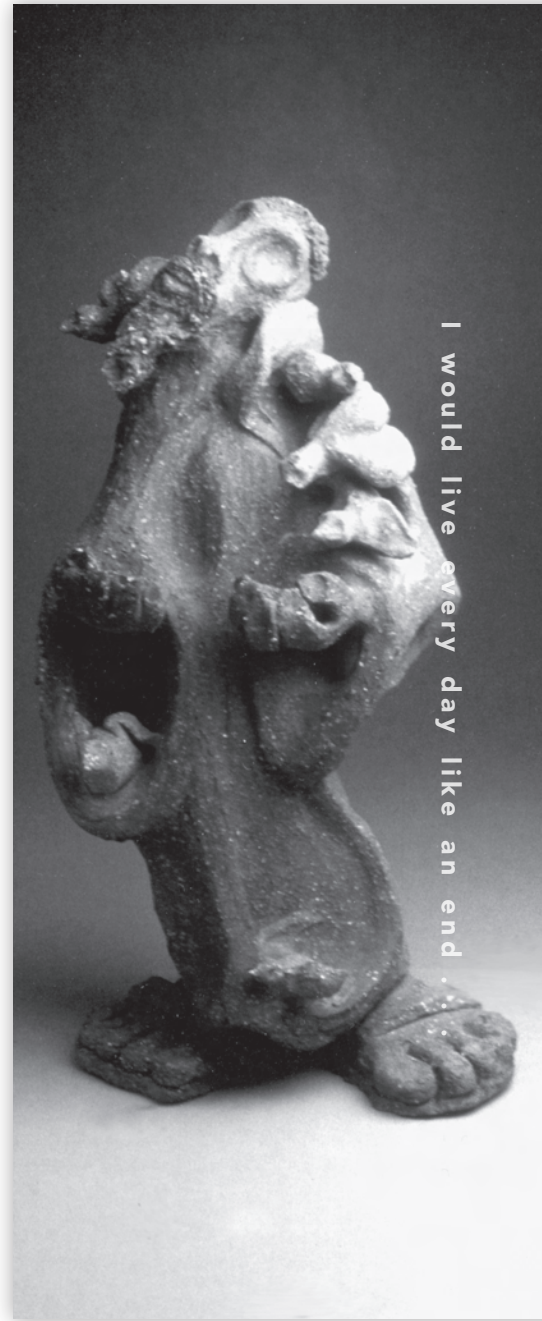
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A MATTER OF FACT

Beth Turner Ayers

She wheeled him in
Parked in front of my chair
And left to register his presence.
"I'm a hundred and two."
No exclamation point.
Matter of fact.
Bright eyes peeking
Beneath the brim of a tweed cap.
No, I thought. I misunderstood.
"There were four boys and two girls
In my family"
He nodded, asserting his truth.
"They're all gone now.
Nobody left but me."
His companion sat down
I smiled the kind of smile
That asked "Is he? Really?"
Her eyes greeted with
I've heard it, and heard it again.
"I'm a hundred and two."
Four boys and two girls
In my family.
They're all gone now.
Nobody left but me.
That's all right.
I just keep on living.
What else can you do?"

He looked straight into my eyes.
His companion took his attention.
"We have some paperwork.
You remember your birthday?"
He spoke. She nodded and wrote.
I did the math.
No, he wasn't a hundred and two.
Raised on a farm
Forty miles from Houston
Looked like New York City
When he finally saw it.
Worked for the railroad
For "a good many years."
Never sick in his life...
Well, he remembers a fever
With chills, as a child. That's all.
But now he can't walk.
"I'm a hundred and two."
He started again.
"No." Corrected the companion.
"You're a hundred and three."
"I'm a hundred and three."
He began again.
A matter of fact.



I would live every day like an end . . .

SAINT FRANCIS Suzanne Hess