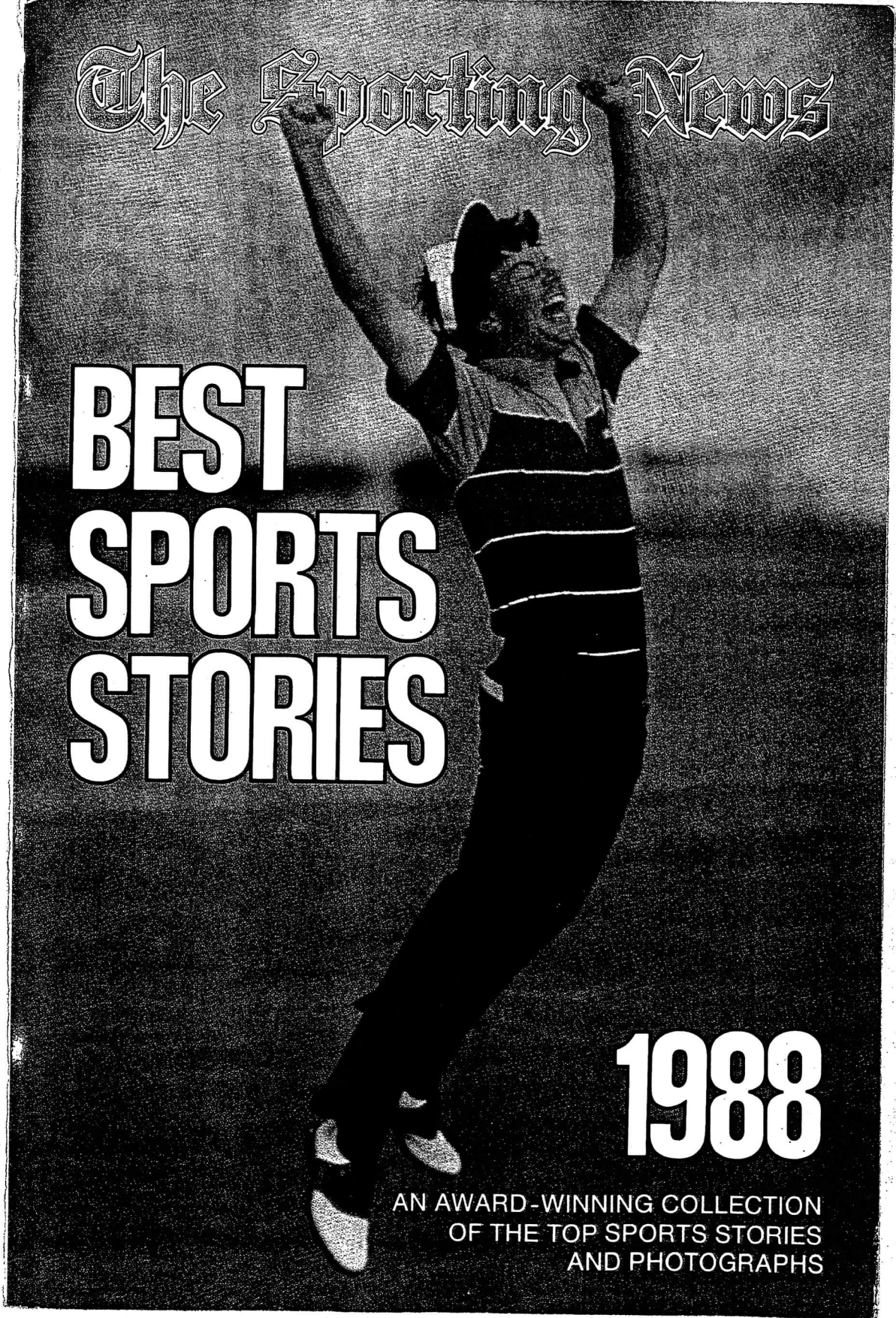




The Sporting News

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Falling Star

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

By **STEVE FRIEDMAN**

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On good days, Marshall Rogers can almost remember what it feels like to be rich and famous. Flipping through the scrapbooks he never allows to leave his room, he is struggling to make this a good day.

"I scored 58 here," he says, and stabs a finger at a yellowed clipping, then at me. "Here," he says, and flips the page, "this is where I scored my 1,000th point. There. That's Lamar. I used them up. I had 18 the first year we played them. The next year I had 44." He flips to another curled piece of paper. "I had 58 points here. This is important. Look at this."

It is late July, the kind of hazy, sweaty day when even little children in this North St. Louis neighborhood stay off the streets and cling to patches of shade on their front porches. We are sitting in Rogers' bedroom, on the top floor of his mother's house. A fan blows hot, stale air around the cramped room, over the chessboard that sits on a footlocker between two beds, ruffling the pictures of naked women that plaster the walls. In a corner, nearly hidden, is a shiny, bronzed basketball engraved on its base. It says, "Marshal (sic) Rogers, The National Scoring Champ, NCAA Division I 36.8." Rogers received it in 1976, the year he scored more points than anyone else in major college basketball. He picks it up, rubs the top of it, mutters something to someone who is not there.

Then he shouts. "Hey, you've heard of Willie Smith (former basketball player at Mizzou)? They retired his number, right? Willie Smith never scored 58 points. They're crazy. Don't you think so? See what I'm saying?"

★ ★ ★

People remember Marshall Rogers. He was one of the inner city's success stories. A role model. By the time he graduated from Sumner High School in 1971, he wasn't just a high school All-America basketball player. He was also the school's Scholar-Athlete. And when he left Pan American University on a spring day in 1976, he held, as well as a slew of scoring records, a bachelor's degree in history.

Did mothers tell their little boys about Marshall? Did they say it was OK to run outside and play, as long as they remembered to study—like Marshall? The children surely paid attention, because Marshall was living their dream. People paid him to play basketball. He was on television. For a few glorious months in the winter of 1977, he worked for the Golden State Warriors, and on days he wanted to tool around the San Francisco Bay area, he hopped into a green Corolla, or a lavender Mark V. Sometimes he tooled around in a yellow van with "Warriors" emblazoned on the side. He made \$45,000 a year. That was a long time ago.

This past June, a downtown drugstore manager spotted Rogers stuffing something into his gym bag. When the manager searched it, he found a bottle of Mennen Skin Bracer, a stick of Adidas deodorant, a pair of white sunglasses and three Baby Ruth candy bars. Total value: \$13.

Rogers has lived with his mother for at least three years. He hasn't worked steadily this decade.

Hometown heroes often fall, but rarely from such dizzying heights, and seldom to such public lows ("Ex-Sumner, Pro Player Held in Melee," said the headline in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*). Marshall Rogers seemed to have it all, and when he lost it, those who knew him groped for explanations.

"Living in the past," said a man who played against Rogers in high school. "Like a lot of inner-city kids," said one of his college coaches, "who can never give up that dream of playing big-time basketball."

Impatience, said his mother. "He always wanted to jump fast. You can't jump fast if you're new."

Pride, said one of his two ex-wives. "He probably feels that things should be better because they were better. . . . He will have to go back down, in a sense, to get back up."

Rogers is proud, of course, and impatient. Those qualities, as much as his enormous physical gifts, helped him claw his way to success. And yes, he clings to the past, and to the dream he should have long ago abandoned. But those are small problems. What's wrong with Marshall Rogers is more serious. And more frightening.

★ ★ ★

"I was drafted number 34 in the second round, but I would have been in the first round, playing with the New York Knicks. But some important people didn't want me in New York."

We are sitting in Pope's Cafeteria in Central City Shopping Center. Rogers is halfway through his lunch—a pork steak, a plate of roast beef, a large salad soaked in Thousand Island and Italian dressing, a roll with six pats of butter, green beans, a large pickle, two cartons of milk, a piece of apple pie and a bottle of Budweiser. Before he digs in, he shakes salt over everything but the drinks and pie for five seconds, then pepper for three seconds, until there is a gritty layer of black and white covering his food. "Hey," he yells when a waitress walks by, "where's the ketchup?" She promises to bring some. "And bring some Tabasco and A-1 sauce, too."

Between huge bites, Rogers talks about basketball, and college, and women.

After he left the pros and before he returned, for good, to St. Louis, Rogers went back to Pan American University in Texas to take some graduate-level courses. He dropped out because "every time I went to take a test, they were using a machine to clear my mind."

"A machine?"

"Yeah."

"Who?"

"I can't tell you. You know what this place is called?"

"Pope's?"

"Yeah, exactly."

He attacks his pork steak, and we eat in silence. Then he tells me how he and his team almost defeated the University of Nevada-Las Vegas basketball team 12 years ago. "We were hooping 'em to death," he says, until "they were using some kind of animation machine to help them score in the second half."

"An animation machine?"

"They have these rays that grab the ball in midair."

"Who does?"

"I can't tell you."

Roast beef and green beans then, and more silence.

I ask how many children he has.

"I don't really know."

"Five?"

"No, about 12. I have some white ones, too. When I was at Kansas, I had some white girlfriends, and they had my kids. They wanted some money for the kids, and cars, and stuff, and they asked the regime, and they got the cars and money and places to live."

"You mean the athletic department got that stuff for them? Coaches? Alumni?"

"No, the regime. Pope John Paul, Queen Elizabeth, King Arthur and Hercules."

★ ★ ★

Marshall Rogers was the sixth of seven children. A bright little boy, he paid attention and worked hard. Before long, he was riding the bus to Sportsmen's Park with all the other straight-A students to

watch the baseball Cardinals. He decided he wanted to be a teacher when he grew up. That, or a professional baseball player. His heroes were Ken Boyer, Mike Shannon and Bob Gibson.

In third grade he discovered basketball. He was the best player in his class, "but the big dudes used to beat on us." For a while, anyway, Marshall stuck with marbles and hopscotch. But his mother bought him a shiny new basketball that year, and when he wore it out, she bought him another. By the time he graduated from Sumner in 1971, Marshall's mother had bought her baby boy 10 new basketballs. Every year, a new ball.

In the summer, he went to the baseball games with the other straight-A students. In the spring, he set sprint and long jump records for the Sumner track team. And always, there was basketball.

He played for the state championship team when he was a sophomore; when he was a senior, he averaged 26.7 points per game and led his team to a 22-4-1 record (a near riot forced the tie with Vashon). When practice was over and the rest of the team had showered and gone home, Rogers stayed in the gym. Coach John Algee stayed, too, and when Rogers dribbled and shot, Algee slapped his star's wrist. Or he smacked his star's elbow.

"I wanted to make him get his rhythm down," Algee says, "to help him learn to shoot with people hitting him."

He learned—on the court and in class.

"My favorite course was probably history," Rogers says. "Math was good, too. Cutting class was the best, though. Just to talk about what happened yesterday, or last night."

John Algee: "I can't say enough about him as a high school athlete. He was one of the greatest basketball players that ever played for me. . . . He was a very good student, carried himself well.

"But he more or less was a loner—stayed by himself. I don't think he had any best friends."

★ ★ ★

"My mother stole one of my tank tops." He has finished everything but the pie. He will take that home. He is sipping his beer and smoking a cigarette. "Someone probably called her—the Pope or the Queen, and told her, "Steal Marshall's tank top, so he won't look so good.'"

★ ★ ★

Rogers left St. Louis and moved to Lawrence, Kan., where he had accepted an athletic scholarship at the University of Kansas. He led his undefeated freshmen team in scoring and assists and enjoyed the social opportunities available to a healthy young athlete in a college town. He averaged 24.3 points that year. His freshmen coach, Bob Frederick (now athletic director at KU), says he "really enjoyed" Marshall, but remembers that "he did have a little bit of a temper. He'd flare up pretty quickly."

He had plenty of chances to flare up the next year. The Jayhawks employed a slow-down offense which could not have been less

suited to the insect-quick Rogers. His scoring average fell to 7.6. The team went 8-18. "I was unhappy," Rogers remembers. "We were winning quite a few games in the first half, then losing. There were some inner-squad squabbles. The teammates got upset."

During his sophomore winter of discontent, Rogers happened to pick up a magazine on one of the Jayhawks road trips. He spotted a story about a coach named Abe Lemons, legendary in basketball circles for his explosive offenses.

"Dear Coach Lemons," Rogers wrote, "My name is Marshall Rogers. I'm 6-foot-2-inches and 180 pounds. I averaged 24.3 points and 6.0 assists respectively for the Kansas freshmen team last year. My main strengths are speed and quickness. . ."

Fourteen years later, Lemons still has the letter.

"I just thought he was the nicest kid," the coach says. Lemons was especially impressed that Rogers didn't badmouth his Kansas coach. "And he wrote a real nice letter."

After his sophomore season, Rogers left KU and transferred to Pan American University, where Lemons was coaching. When he showed up at the campus in Edinburg, Tex., and laid eyes on his new coach, the "nice kid" demanded money. "He asked if I was going to give him plane fare for his trips back to St. Louis," Lemons remembers. "I said no. He asked if that was the way it was for everybody on the team. I said yes. He said, 'Well, I can live with that.'"

While Rogers was waiting to become eligible to play for Lemons, he joined a city league in Edinburg. "They kicked him off," Lemons says, "and they told me he would never be able to play for me, because he shot too much."

They didn't know Lemons. Famous for his cowboy boots and his drawling one-liners, the coach never met a jumpshot he didn't like. And if some of Marshall's shots were—shall we say, inventive?—well, Lemons took to splash and dazzle the way other coaches take to crew cuts and blazers.

For two years, the city kid and the country coach created a defensive specialist's worst nightmare. Their supporting cast could have been dreamed up by Ring Lardner. At one guard was Jesus Guerra, a short (5-feet-10-inches), skinny kid who grew up on the Mexican border. He penetrated and passed. Teammates called him "Chewey." Fans called him "Little Jesus." In the pivot was Pete "Pizza" Severa, a 6-foot-5-inch, 250-pound manchild who worked during the day at—where else?—Pizza Hut, then threw opponents around at night. "He was what we jokingly called our center," says Lemons, who now coaches at Oklahoma City University.

The Pan American Broncs often scored more than 100 points in a single game. And the biggest scorer and main attraction of the hardwood circus was Rogers.

"He was the best pure shooter I've ever seen," says Jim McKone, Pan American's sports information director for the past 18 years. Likeable? Rogers is one of two Bronc athletes McKone ever had to

his house for dinner. Tough? McKone remembers a game—it was January 29, 1976—against Houston Baptist University. Rogers drove the lane in the opening minutes, and when he stretched toward the basket, Houston Baptist's 7-foot center caught the nation's leading scorer in the jaw with an elbow. "He was out on the floor," McKone remembers, "absolutely cold." A minute passed. Rogers didn't move. Two minutes. Nothing. Three minutes. Rogers got up, walked to the free-throw line and sank two shots. He ended up with 45 points. Final score: Pan American, 81, Houston Baptist, 79.

Rogers averaged 26.7 points per game his junior year. The team went 22-2. In his record-setting senior season, he hit 36.8 per game. The team was 20-5.

"He was amazing," says Guerra, now head basketball coach at Roma (Tex.) High School, in the border town where he grew up. "Coach Lemons kept stats every day, and Marshall would shoot 40 out of 50, 25 out of 30. He was the most dedicated player I've ever been associated with."

"He was one of the best," Lemons says. "He had the size, the ability. There wasn't anything he couldn't do in the game. . . . He was what you'd call an All-American boy. He made his grades, worked hard, got along with everybody. He was a coach's dream."

* * *

Rogers: "We were playing the University of Hawaii. The Queen called me on the phone and said we had to beat them by 15 points. I scored 47 points, but we had to play them the next night again, and I was too tired. So one of my brothers, who looks just like me, from Africa, he played."

* * *

Rogers was selected in the second round of the National Basketball Association's annual draft, and in the fall of 1976, he signed a \$45,000 contract with the Golden State Warriors. He played in 26 games that year and averaged 3.8 points. "I was hooping 'em to death," Rogers says. "I should have been" playing more.

The next fall, he attended veteran's camp, where he continued to ride the bench. In October 1977, the Warriors played the Los Angeles Lakers in an exhibition game in Reno, Nev.

"I should have been starting," Rogers says. "I got kind of upset. . . . You get real upset and feel like hurting somebody. It's best just to get away so you don't get into trouble."

He left the team.

* * *

We are driving to Shoney's, in North County. Rogers is in the passenger's seat, stroking an invisible baby he holds in front of him. He is talking out of the right side of his mouth, addressing something outside the car.

When we sit down, he calls to a waitress. "I'll have an apple pie a la mode while I order," he says. She brings it, and he asks for spaghetti with extra meat, and a turkey club sandwich, and the salad bar. He gives it all the salt and pepper treatment and asks for ket-

chup and A-1.

"On May 30, 1976," he says, "I went to the Olympic camp in Raleigh, N.C. There were two practices a day for three hours each time. It was grueling. It made you tired. And mean and mad. I did real well before the animation machine got in my way.

"Wait," he says, after we finish and I start to stand. "I have to do something." He stands in the aisle, turns and crosses his arms under his chin, elbows outstretched. He stands that way, rigid, for almost five minutes. "That was the Pope," he tells me later, "telling me to do that."

* * *

After leaving the Warriors, Rogers stayed in the Bay area. He played in pickup games, in tournaments. He was a substitute teacher in Hayward, Calif. And he was unhappy.

In September 1978, he tried out with the San Antonio Spurs. "I was doing good enough to be in the top seven. I didn't see anyone else hitting as many jumpshots as me. (But) people in the underground were saying, 'Marshall likes himself too much 'cause he scores too much.' That's why I didn't play. But I'm thinking about trying out again."

"The last I heard from him," says Coach Lemons, "seems like he was down in San Antone. He called and said he needed \$100, so I telegraphed it to him."

* * *

Rogers is standing at the free-throw line in the gym at Vic Tanny on Dorsett and I-270. His right arm is cocked in a U, and a scowl splits his face. He hits 34 free throws without missing, and without smiling. Then he hits 31 without missing, then 17. The only sounds are the clanking of the weight machines nearby and the rock music being piped over the fitness center's sound system. That and the occasional bounce of the basketball on the floor, and the swish of the net. And Marshall's muttering. He is talking to the voices.

* * *

KU's Bob Frederick heard from Rogers last winter. "He wanted to know if I could put in a word for him with" Topeka's semi-pro basketball team. "He told me how he and his friend were hooping everybody at Forest Park Community College."

Frederick clears his throat. It pained him to hear from Rogers. It pains him to talk about him.

"I don't want this to sound wrong," Frederick says, and clears his throat again. "It was like he was just a year out of college, instead of 11 years."

Roma's favorite son, Guerra, doesn't know what to say when he learns of his old teammate's troubles. First come the adjectives: "hardworking," "gifted," "dedicated." Then memories of specific games, particular feats of athletic heroism. There is a realization that "it was very rare when we got together" socially, and a few half-hearted attempts to understand why some people succeed and others fail. Finally, there is simply a request.

"Do you have Marshall's phone number?" Little Jesus asks. "I need to call him."

★ ★ ★

We are driving to O'Fallon Park with a photographer to shoot some baskets and some pictures. Rogers is expansive—laughing, smoking, jiving. He is telling us how he played one-on-one with a local teenager a few days earlier. "He was woofing on me. I smoked him. I'm gonna steal his mother from him now. She knows me from high school. She knows me from when I was a superstar."

It is Thursday afternoon, August 27. Today, Rogers turns 34 years old.

★ ★ ★

Narrating his own life story, Rogers will gladly rattle off dates and statistics. December 2, 1974: The Broncs steal the ball three times in the final 30 seconds to erase a 5-point deficit and beat Arkansas State in Jonesboro. January 3, 1976: The Broncs lose to the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, and Rogers feels the "animation machine." May 16, 1976: Rogers graduates from Pan American University. September 1978: He tries out with the Spurs, but is cut.

And "that's it," Rogers says. "Right there. You don't need to write about any of that other stuff."

★ ★ ★

Kurt Gull used to work as a security guard for St. Louis Centre. He was on duty Wednesday, June 24.

"We got a call from Walgreens. They said they had a shoplifter in custody. I was the first person on the scene. When I got there, Marshall and the manager were arguing and pushing and shoving. . . . (The manager) explained that he had seen him take some items, and that he and the assistant manager had talked Marshall into going into the backroom, and they checked the gym bag and found the items. What they were pushing and shoving over was that (Rogers) didn't like the idea of them getting into his gym bag.

"I said, 'OK, I'm placing you under arrest.'

"He said, 'OK, what's going to happen now?'

"I said, 'I'll have to handcuff you until the police arrive, and you'll probably get a summons, and you probably won't have to go anywhere.'

"He said, 'OK,' and I put one handcuff on his left hand and he went crazy. He jumped back, slammed me against the wall. He swung, he pushed, he shoved."

By then, two more security guards and a police officer had arrived.

"I'm 5-foot-9, 225 pounds, 50 inches across the chest, and he was tossing us around like we were rag dolls."

In September, Rogers was convicted of assault. He was placed on probation.

★ ★ ★

After the Spurs cut him, Rogers returned to St. Louis. Except for a brief attempt to take graduate courses at Pan American in the fall

of 1979 (where the machine "cleared his mind"), Rogers has never ventured out again. One of college basketball's greatest scorers hasn't done much the past 10 years.

He taught at McKinley High School and O'Fallon Technical Center in 1978-1979. He left McKinley because "the principal was upset . . . because the students were acting crazy, and one girl especially, and I started to curse her out." He has been married twice and has at least two children. His second wife, who asked that her name not be used, says "he probably feels that things should be better because they were better." His mother says he "does funny things with his hands." She wishes he would see a doctor.

Rogers spends much of his time sleeping and eating. He wakes up early every day—sometimes 5:30 or 6 a.m.—and makes breakfast. A typical meal is two eggs, two hot dogs, two pancakes, milk and Kool-Aid. After that, "sometimes I go back to sleep. Sometimes I cut the grass. Sometimes I just sit on the porch. Sometimes, but not all the time. Sometimes it's fun. Sometimes it's boring."

He usually skips lunch, and after a typical afternoon of "just relaxing," his mother cooks dinner. After that, he usually hangs around the house until he decides to go up to his room and go to sleep, which could be any time between 7 p.m. and 2 a.m.

"Sometimes I get mad at the voices," he says, "and I can't go to sleep. And I say, 'Leave me alone.'"

* * *

We are sitting in a courtyard on Laclede's Landing. Rogers is here with mixed feelings. He doesn't want anything written about his recent troubles with the law, and he would rather talk about how many points he scored against Lamar than his difficulties finding a job. On the other hand, without a car, he doesn't get a chance to leave the house much. And I'm buying lunch.

I ask who his friends are.

"No one."

"No one?"

"Sometimes, I'll be with friends, but not very often. Nowadays, I'll be by myself at home."

"You ever get lonely?"

"Sometimes. Sometimes. But not all the time."

"What do you see yourself doing in five or 10 years?"

"Some type of work. . . . With a job, I could get around and do more things I want. I could go to a discotheque and buy some drinks that I like—that's why I need to get some work. You know, I haven't been having a real good time lately."

"What plans do you have for looking for work?"

"I don't know. I haven't thought about it."

"You have any regrets about what happened at Walgreens?"

"It's over with."

"Do the voices bother you?"

"I'll be trying to lay down, and it really upsets me when I'm

trying to lay down and go to sleep and I don't feel like standing up and they tell me to stand up."

"You told me you talked to a doctor about this once."

"That was someone else. That really wasn't me."

"Sometimes they say things to me that don't pertain to what I want to do. They tell me to do something while I'm playing and I don't feel like doing it, and I just say, 'Shut the fuck up.' Sometimes it gives me a headache."

"Do you ever think now about seeing a doctor?"

"I don't need a doctor. I just need to go to sleep and not talk to them anymore."