

## GYP SUM IN NOVA SCOTIA

Gypsum mines in Nova Scotia.  
Layers of anhydrite crumpled  
by the water that altered it  
to massive beds of selenite,  
the glassy crystals thick as  
my thighs. Mr. Reed janitored

at the Springfield Museum  
but assembled the largest  
collection of fresh-water mollusks  
in the world. Mineral collecting  
was a hobby, but mollusks  
were serious: no children

allowed, not even Norman,  
his son. We drove, then ferried  
to Yarmouth. The great quarries,  
called “mines” for courtesy,  
gaped like football stadiums,  
the gypsum too white in the sun.

We couldn't enter the mines  
but the foreman granted access  
to huge talus heaps. We sorted  
a hundred perfect specimens,  
needle-crystals, giant blocks,  
fibers of satin spar. Also

polyhydrate and possibly  
epsomite. We bagged our take  
and lounged for a day on the beach,  
chatting about our future  
careers in mineralogy.  
Then in Mr. Reed's shaky old Ford

we drove to the ferry and home to  
the USA, our bags of gypsum  
groaning in the trunk and our lives  
already metamorphosing  
into specimens no simple  
field test could identify.