Fall 1989

Beyond Memos: A journal of the UMF Faculty Volume 2, Number 1, Fall 1989

University of Maine at Farmington

BEYOND MEMOS

A Journal of the UMF Faculty

Volume 2 Number 1

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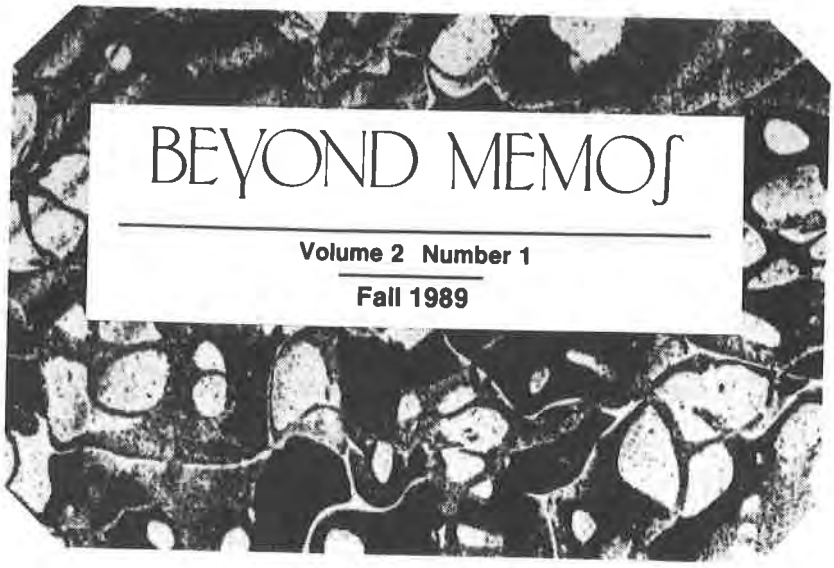

Volume 2 Number 1

Fall 1989

Editor: Philip Carlsen
Associate Editor: Norma Johnsen
Cover Design: Svea Seredin
Cover Photograph: Marilyn Shea

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Beyond Memos is meant to be just that -- a forum where UMF faculty can share ideas and creative work that go beyond the day-to-day campus routine of teaching, advising, committees, and memos. We welcome submission of anything of general interest: poems, stories, essays, drawings, photographs, interviews, humorous pieces, etc. All materials, inquiries, and comments should be sent to Philip Carlsen, Editor, Beyond Memos, University of Maine at Farmington, 04938.

In Praise of the King Cobra

THE OTHER DAY I'm sitting on the rickety porch of a friend's camp on the edge of a small lake, about 3 miles long. A sublime summer day -- sunshine, the fresh green, birdsong, a pot of tea, talk of the world's troubles, and all that. Pretty soon we hear the raw/raw/raw of a motor starting up, and soon after that, a motor boat about the size of half a city block blasts by dragging a single water skier. Just before the first wake hits the shore, the boat is back, then it turns and is back, and it goes back and forth, back and forth, and I thought well, how wonderful.

Summer is so boring. I mean we were exhausted with the peace and quiet, our companionship, the reiteration of birdsong, the talk of the world, anyhow. A good thing we were, because now we could no longer hear each other, much less the boring birds. So I decided then and there to write a modest essay in praise of the 123,723 motor boats registered in Maine as of December 1, 1988. I'd like to include some praise of the motor boats towed up here for the summer from out-of-state, too. The 123,723 doesn't include out-of-state boats, if those boats are registered elsewhere and enjoy Maine waters for less than 60 peaceful summer days. I tried to find out, so that they could get their share of praise, too, but no office, bureau, or whatever has any idea how many out-of-state boats join the in-state fleet of 123,723. The rough guess is many thousands more.

Nevertheless, we can safely assume, I should think, that the thousands of boats towed up here from away exhibit the same virtues as the 123,723 already registered in Maine. And we can also rest assured that Maine's approx. 96 full-time Game Wardens and 28 part-time "assistant" wardens (under whose joint jurisdiction fall all "recreational vehicles" now: snowmobiles, dirt bikes, ATV's, plus nerdy non-motorized boats like canoes, sailboats, dinghies, etc., plus the 123,723 in-state motor boats, as well as however many thousand out-of-state motor boats) have an easy, laid-back job taking care of the maybe 1 or 2 boating violations that occur over the summer in Vacationland. I mean, I think we have plenty of supervision here, don't you? For example, there are 4 full-time Wardens right in our area, responsible for 42 towns in 3 counties with 105 lakes and ponds, not counting rivers. And I mean these Wardens are well paid. You would not believe the salary they draw for just driving around in the nice fishing season, the peaceful summertime, the picturesque hunting season, and so forth. So there's a poacher once in a while, or a nut driving his truck out on thin ice, or a drunk on jet skis once in a blue moon. Giving the Wardens a little extra work -- responsibility for 123,723 motorboats plus however many more from out-of-state, hey -- they're getting paid, right?

Okay. So here's my list of what's wonderful about motor boats. Space is limited, and it's hard to know where to stop, so I'll just say -- Dear Reader, feel free to add your own praises, too; I'm sure I've left out some important things.

1. Motorboats Are Popular. Does right make might, or might make right? I forget, but either way, think about this: the population of Maine is around 1,125,000. That means (123,723 motorboats) roughly 1 motorboat per 10 people. Now commercial craft, like fishing boats, aside, this figure has to say something. If almost everybody loves malls, loves development, thinks the Maine Turnpike should be widened to accommodate tourists, doesn't that sort of consensus make you feel left out, as if there's something wrong with you? It should. Even President Bush has a motorboat. Maybe more than one. So, if you're opposed to 123,723 motorboats, including the President's, because you like peace and quiet, or you like to fish from the bank, or go out in a canoe or sailboat or a little fishing boat at dusk, with a like-zero horsepower putt-putt motor on back, or you like loons, or you have quirky environmental concerns like the "greenhouse effect," (which is probably just a scare tactic anyhow), try to get with it, won't you?

2. 123,723 Motorboats Give Maine a Better Self Image. So everyone thinks we're poor up here, that we all live like the Beans of Egypt. Well this proves we don't. We have bucks. For example, the popular 130 horsepower Stern Drive Crestliner, goes 45 mph, comes with "plenty of plush pile carpeting and contour-padded seating," is $11,500, up front. Sea-Doo, a "personal watercraft with a real edge," 40 mph, a "fantastic ride," subject of a recent article, "Getting It Up," in the latest issue of the personal watercraft mag., is only $4,400, and at that price, we'll be wanting one for

every member of the family. Or just go ahead and get that Family Boat you've been dreaming about: the 454 King Cobra, 350 horsepower, a great little lake boat, goes 70 mph, $24,000, not including financing. Facts like these make us proud. Who says us Mainers can't have good, clean fun -- and pay for it, too?

3. Motorboats Are Good Clean Fun. Oh all right, they cause some dirt now and then, like air and water pollution, eye/ear/nose/brain pollution, shoreline erosion, the litter of floating feathers and dead fish; or folks throw their styrofoam, Pampers, six-pack rings and butts overboard; or flush their boat potties into Sebago, and other mischievous doings. But basically, boating is Clean: the pile carpeting stays clean, the contour-padded seats stay clean, the Wife and Kiddies and Clients stay clean, the cooler, the chips, the towels stay clean, and so on.

4. Motorboats Get You Back to Nature. Say you've got a lake 5 miles long and a boat that'll average 50 miles per hour. This means you can make roughly 10 trips an hour, or, one trip every 6 minutes. There's just no estimating how much of God's great world you can take in at that speed.

5. Motorboats Help the General Economy. Budweiser, Coors, Pepsi, Coke, Exxon, Frito-Lay, Coppertone, and many many more. To say nothing of Honda, Suzuki, Tohatsu, Yamaha, Nissan, Kawasaki, and other corporations dedicated to building and maintaining a free America at play, self-supporting and independent.

6. Motorboats Help with the Ongoing Need for the Conquest of Nature. Now this may seem contradictory but, when you Get Back To It (see #4 above) you realize that Nature has to be kept at bay. This effort should never slack off, otherwise cuckoos, whippoorwills, loons, bass, salmon, blue herons, puffins, and other rampaging examples of Nature red in tooth and claw like ferns, mosses, duck eggs and violent stuff like that, might take over. And where would we be then? Motorboating, especially of the back and forth, back and forth all afternoon sort, leaves man's mark, makes an impact on the environment, probably a lasting one. That keeps Nature under control, and shows who's who, and thus is related (see #2 above) to a healthy Self Image. Especially when you multiply that by 123,723, plus whatever comes in from out-of-state.

7. Motorboats Make Us Free. Free to enjoy ourselves, free to express ourselves, free to spend our own money the way we want to spend it, free to assert our rights, free to annoy, spoil, drive bonkers, wreck, ruin, pollute, free to be tearin' up the lake like a big old dinosaur. Plus, the Law, for once, is on Our Side. It makes sure we are Free to do all the above and more. God bless America, is what I say.

8. The Law -- Such As It Is -- Is On Our Side, for Once. A law? Don't worry: not much of a law. There is no law that protects anything about the non-human or human environment. No law, for example, about how fast you can go or how much noise your Cobra makes, or your Cigarette boat, or your Sea-Doo. There's a law about "safety," and one, I think, about "harassment." That means somebody has to be there and actually see us veering too close to Camp Lose-A-Leg, endangering the Little Nippers bodily; or somebody has to catch us deliberately chasing Mother Loon and Babies. And then they have to call -- no, not the State Police, not their problem, but the Warden -- who will then, if they can find him, and as soon as he can get the time, come out and chug after us in his probably about 15 horsepower boat, if that, hours later. And if and when he finds us, he can tap us on the wrist a bit, read us a wimp of a riot act, give us a fine. Other than that, motorboating on Maine lakes is what our Forefathers fought the 4th of July about. Fish, loons, somebody who wants to canoe or watch the sunset or read on his porch, that's not what the Revolution was about. Local control? Locals making claims that we're wrecking their lake, their lives? Don't worry; Be Happy. The town the lake is in, or the folks along the edge, they're powerless. Because the State owns the water; the State won't let towns or lake associations make their own laws; and the State has no laws itself; and even if it did, what can 96 Game Wardens do? So relax. The Water, like all Good Things, except King Cobras, is just about Free.

--ALICE BLOOM

Five Poems

FLASHBACK

"...stare upon the ash of all I burned."
--Wilfred Owen

Suddenly
the ash catches,
bursting into
betel-mouthed mamasans
licking at
that open sore
in my head,
nibbling at
the scars
of what I was:
their searing tongues
searching
for that one
special wound
that would ignite
once again
the spirit
of the bayonet.

WHEEL DREAMS

"If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face...."
-- Wilfred Owen

Each night of the full moon my dreams
reinvent Wilfred Owen's wagon wheel
only to hoist it up forged anew
above the fairgrounds
to carry our ripest youth
over the carnival and into the night air
where fingering the stars
and devouring the lusty fireworks
they never fail to feel too late
the wheel turn
to drop them off one by one
into some jungle
where the meat wheel squeals
like a buzz saw through green pine
devouring the moon and oiling its teeth
on their screams.

ELEVATING THE COMMITMENT

to Charlie and Brian (two veterans fasting to protest U.S. policy in Central America)

Up here
we're working up
this winter's wood
down there
below the Rio
below the Durangoes
deep in the sweet underbelly
of America
in the fruit section
of our global IGA
down there
we're stacking up bodies

Up here
Fall is in the air
the morning is crisp and clear
the leaves die beautifully
in earth browns
translucent yellows
blood reds
down there
healthy limbs are dropping off
young peasants
into puddles of mangled skin
down there
willie peter* is hard at work
down there
the morning air
smells of burning flesh

Up here
business is as usual
save for a brave few
who choose to starve themselves
to death
for life
stretching their emaciated skin
from the Pentagon
to San Salvador
from Wall Street
to Managua
taut as a drum
throbbing with the agony of the war torn
pounding in the ears of the war mongers
we have become
in our greed
in our ignorance

* *"Willie peter" is Army slang for white phosphorous*

HANDS

I come in
from doing wood this
late November evening
catch my gloves
out of the corner of an eye
clutching and aching
drying beneath the stove

picture the hands
of Victor Jara
scrambling like headless chickens
in the stadium dust
lopped off
by my tax dollars

think of my own hands
where they have been
what they have done
in the name of
this country

go to the bathroom sink
wash them
before supper
think I see
Pontius Pilate
in the mirror
staring back at me

THE WALL

to Jerry Genesio

Descending into this declivity
dug into our nation's capitol
by the cloven hoof
of yet another one
of our country's tropical wars
slipping past the names of those
whose wounds refuse to heal
past the panel where my name
would have been
could have been
perhaps should have been
down to the Wall's greatest depth
where the beginning meets the end

I kneel
staring into the Wall
through my own reflection
beyond the names of those
who died so young

and know now that
the Wall has finally found me:
fifty-eight thousand
thousand yard stares
have fixed on me
as if I were their Pole Star
as if I could guide
their mute testimony
back into the world
as if I could connect
all those dots
in the night sky
as if I could tell them
the reason why.

--DOUG RAWLINGS


Maggy '87

The Dance

LAURA WAS sitting on the screened-in porch, waiting for her brother to arrive, when she first heard it. It was a tiny, monotonous sawing noise, difficult, at first, to distinguish from the rustlings and chirps at the bird feeder. At first she thought it might be one of the neighbors sawing wood with a handsaw. But it went on and on, with no pause, and Laura began to realize that the noise was coming from somewhere very close to her.

Their yard was constantly being visited by strange animals: chicken escapees from the hen-house next door, stray cats from the same source, skunks and garbage-seeking raccoons, and a host of birds, hungry for seed and suet. Her own cats had the knack of opening the porch screen door with a hooked paw and slithering through, quickly, before the door banged shut again, so unusual small noises were common around the place. She guessed that the source of this noise, too, could be attributed to some small animal.

It seemed to be coming from beneath the floor. Laura went outside, quietly closing the screen door behind her. She crept to the shady end of the porch and got down on all fours. By placing her head on the ground, she could see under the porch, into the dim world of floor joists and corner posts and smooth, damp earth. There, not five feet away from her, crouched a small, gray cat. It didn't move when it saw her, unusual for one of the wild cats. Its mouth hung open, and its breathing seemed to take all its energy and concentration. Each inhalation and exhalation made a tiny saw-like, raspy sound.

Oh, you poor thing, thought Laura, feeling a little sickened. This was the cat that Doug had supposedly killed a few days before. As usual, his aim was off, and Laura felt a rush of anger at her husband's insensitivity, his easy resorting to violence. And now she had this to cope with.

But there was nothing she could do right then. A car was pulling into the yard--her nervously-awaited brother. She knew he had been lonely since his divorce, but had still been surprised by his letter, asking if he could come and visit. She had written back, in polite phrases on her correct blue vellum stationery, that he was always welcome and didn't need to stand on invitation.

She stood up, brushed off her knees, reflexively patted her hair, and came around the side of the porch, composing her features into her public face. Her brother Michael was just getting out of the car, apparently with effort, moving slowly. He was a tall beefy man, 15 years her senior, dressed in blue jeans and a tight red T-shirt.

"Mike!" she exclaimed, going through the motions of the familial hug and peck on the cheek. He held her at arm's length and said in his blustery way, "You're looking good, Laura. A little bit of a spare tire maybe, but not bad for forty."

He was here for one minute, and already he had managed to annoy her. She forced a laugh. "I'm forty-five, Mike--you're supposed to remember those things. And you're not looking bad yourself."

One of those pleasant lies. He definitely was *not* looking good, looked, in fact, like deathwarmed over. His face was pale, clammy, the large pores accentuated by the ashen quality of his skin. His lips, once full-fleshed, had thinned over the years, and were now compressed into a hard line. Only his eyes looked kind; he had the Steuben eyes--dark, deep-set, with full pouches of flesh above, so that as he aged, the pouches sagged a bit, giving the eyes a merry, triangular shape. He looked older than his years, because he stooped a little now, and placed each foot carefully as he walked, like an old man, favoring his bad back.

After the exchange of pleasantries, an awkwardness set in. They had never had much to say to each other, a fact that had been less obvious in the past, when Mike's ex-wife, Katie, had been around. She and Laura had always gotten along--Katie was voluble, easy-natured, stout, friendly. She took some of the hard edges off Michael.

They went up to the porch, and Laura proudly brought out her *zwetschenkuchen* and freshly-brewed coffee, struggling with the heavy tray. How like him not to offer to help me, she thought. Mike waited on the porch and let her serve him, then praised the juicy plum pastry, their mother's old recipe.

In the silence that followed, Laura was aware again of the tiny sawing noise. It lent a jagged edge to the afternoon, making it seem as if it would never end.

Doug pecked her hello on the lips. She was

just turning the round steak in its garlicky marinade and didn't respond to his greeting.

"How's the bro," he asked, "taciturn as always?"

"He's in the living room. Try to be nice to him."

This was not going to be easy. Doug and Mike had a relationship of mutual low regard bordering on contempt, which had evolved over the years, for the sake of the family, into a civil, mutually agreeable stand-off.

Doug nuzzled her neck. "The hell with your brother. You smell wonderful."

She leaned against him, her fingers dabbling in the marinade. "That's not me; that's the garlic you're attracted to. Beat it."

When Laura brought the tray of cheese and crackers and drinks into the living room, Doug and her brother were watching TV, all pretense at conversation having long since evaporated. She looked at them. Physically, they were as disparate as their interests and attitudes. Michael had been a carpenter until his back injury forced him into early retirement; his attitudes toward hard work, his allegiance to God, country, and family were the working man's. Traditional and somewhat stiff-necked he had always been. Now, oddly, his body had become a living expression of his rigidity.

Doug, on the other hand, lounged in his chair, easy, loose, and liberal, still the campus troublemaker. Last year, as student newspaper adviser, he had let his students paste a packaged condom into each issue of the paper, in the center of a full-page ad about AIDS prevention. That had caused quite a stir on campus, and made the local TV news. Mike couldn't even *say* the word condom in mixed company.

Laura turned the TV down. "Doug," she said, "I forgot to tell you. One of the henhouse cats is loose under the porch. It's breathing real hard--won't move--I think there's something terribly wrong with it."

"What do you want me to do about it?" Doug was looking at her steadily.

Testy, aren't we, though Laura. This had come up between them many times before, her habit of bringing him problems she couldn't, or wouldn't, deal with, like flat tires, skunks in the grain barrel in the barn, plugged toilets, bats in the bedroom. "You're just as capable of fixing a flat tire as I am," he had shouted at her one day. But she wasn't, not really. She believed in equality, but not to the point of crawling under the house to get to the clogged plumbing.

They were wary of each other, eyes locked. Laura said, "I brought it up so that *we* could decide what to do. It's suffering." Then, as there was no response from Doug, she added, "I think it's the one you shot."

At this, Doug flinched, and Michael perked up his ears. "What's this?" he asked Doug. "You're going around shooting pussy cats?"

Laura was already sorry, but it was done. Doug's eyes turned to blue ice. "Yeah," he said, "they're driving us crazy. Must be 10 or 12 of them. They've moved out of the henhouse, taken over our yard, our barn, terrified our two cats. They drive Laura crazy because they dig up her flower gardens."

"Well, let's go see, little brother-in-law." (Laura wildly expected him to add, "Sounds like a job for a real man," but mercifully he didn't.) The two went out together, leaving Laura to her regrets.

But she couldn't, absolutely couldn't stay out of it. She found herself looking out of the kitchen window, listening in.

"Yeah, it's right there." This came, somewhat muffled, from Doug, whose small lithe frame was prone on the ground, head partially under the porch. "But I'm sure as hell not going to grab that pussy with my bare hands. I don't think I can reach it anyway."

Michael was crouched down as far as his back would allow, lending moral support and making tired, sly, sexual jokes about how no pussy was unobtainable if one knew how to go about it. Laura grimaced.

Doug's departure for the tool shed brought Laura like a shot to the back porch. "What are you going to do?" she asked Michael.

"We're going to get that kitty out for you. Don't you worry about it."

Doug came back with the potato digger, a hoe-like affair that boasted several ugly-looking blunt claws at its working end.

"You're *not* going after it with that!" ex-

claimed Laura, her voice rising to what Doug called its hysterical pitch.

"Do you have a better idea?" Doug asked. He got down on his hands and knees and peered under the porch. He shoved the hoe under, and started raking around.

"Yes! Well, no, not yet anyway. Let's think about it. Doug!"

His efforts had met with success. A gray ball of fur came out with the hoe, scrabbling frantically. Laura was surprised that it had so much raw energy left. It was biting at the claws of the hoe with sharp white teeth, so effective on mice, so useless against steel. The cat rolled over once, twice, in rapid motion as it was raked out, once almost getting
away. Then the blunt steel bit into its soft side, and it lay, panting, rasping away with that awful noise like a miniature bandsaw.

"STOP IT!," screamed Laura, rushing out through the screen door.

"Shut *up*, Laura," from Doug--"Laura, it would be better if you went inside," from Michael--simultaneously. She looked at them, shocked, Doug on his knees, looking up at her, Michael towering above her, disapproval written in both faces. Brothers, under the skin. She turned and fled.

It was about two hours later when Laura returned from her walk, or flight, to the spot by the river. From there, the little cluster of village houses, including her own, had looked serene, aesthetic, like a town straight out of the 19th century, which it mostly was. Viewed from the periphery, the village and her life in it seemed pleasant and uncomplicated. It was only when she got up close that she saw the peeling paint, the rusted metal roofs, the ice in Doug's eyes, or heard the blaring of the neighboring teenager's stereo, or the yowling of the tormented cat.

As she approached the house, she heard the strains of a Strauss waltz. Doug and Michael were both at the kitchen table, drinking beer, looking flushed, convivial. Doug wouldn't look at her. Hurt, she started to walk by them. As she passed, her brother reached out and caught her hand.

"Stay, Laura. Remember these waltzes? I brought some of mom and pop's old record collection. I thought you might like to have them. Remember dancing at the German Sunday picnics at the *Schulverein*? Sit and listen. Have a beer."

The cold beer tasted good going down, dissolved the lump in her throat. The taste of the beer and the music of "Tales from the Vienna Woods" took her back. She closed her eyes and was seated again at the long wooden table under the huge tent canopy. All her German relatives were there--the aunts who looked like men except that they wore dresses, her mother and father, who rarely sat out a dance, her cousins, with whom she attempted a childish imitation of the hop of the polka, the sway of the waltz. She remembered the excitement of being asked to dance, when she was older, by strangers, but never so strange that one couldn't find out all about them in the closely-knit German community. She particularly remembered doing a dance where a circle of men enclosed a circle of women, the outer circle marching clockwise, the inner counterclockwise. When the music stopped, the participants grabbed the nearest partner and danced the waltz until the march music interrupted, signalling the dancers to form circles again. Laura had danced with a stranger one afternoon, for a brief moment or two, who was the best dancer she had encountered in her entire life. He didn't speak, but held her firmly, and seemed to lift her to the music. She soared, she didn't touch ground with this man. They fit together; their movements were uniquely suited to each other's. He seemed lost in thought, in some sort of rapture of motion, as was she--and when the march music intruded, they were slightly dazed and couldn't move for a minute. Then he looked at her, and in thickly-accented English thanked her formally for the dance, and added, "You are a wonderful dancer." She remembered being conscious, while dancing with this man, that she had never, and would probably never, dance so again. The perfection of the moment was enhanced by her realization that this was so.

Mike changed the record. Amid scratches, persevering through the inferior technology of the old 78 records, came the unmistakably rich strains of "The Blue Danube." It was always her parents' favorite.

"Care to dance?" said Mike.

No, she didn't care to dance, not really. But she said yes anyway. Immediately she felt the familiar discomfort of complying with someone else's wishes, not really doing what she wanted to do. She didn't want to dance with him in this kitchen, with a surly husband sitting by; it felt maudlin, stupid.

They stood and walked to the middle of the floor, assumed dance position, and awkwardly began. Everyone in the Steuben family knew how to waltz, so that wasn't the problem. But Mike

lacked fluidity, grace; and their 1-2-3, step-together-step was wooden. She was acutely conscious of his damp palms, of the difference in their height, of the ache in her calves from dancing on her toes, of her right shoe slipping off her heel. Her mental discomfort wasn't eased by Mike's silence, by his staring straight over her head.

Their dance was just a faint shadow of those German dances of her growing-up years. Her parents' generation, most of them immigrants, worked hard, but they played hard, too. And they did something that we never do, thought Laura: they danced. They went to a German night spot regularly, and they joined a *Schulverein*, which held weekly dances and periodic festivals--frequent excuses to gather, eat, talk, laugh, drink, dance. Families went, all ages, from small children to ancient grandmothers. The children danced. The aunts danced, with each other. It wasn't sedate. It was athletic, with energetic yips from the participants during the polkas.

Laura remembered the lustiness, the heat, the hilarity of those dances. Mike's lips are so thin, she thought, our dance so quiet. She remembered fat, red sausages of lips on the men, red sweating faces, energetic, indelicate hugs. The children always got wound up tighter and tighter, running amidst the dancers, up and down the long tables, overeating, begging for ice cream. It was a far cry from this country kitchen, this reserved husband, this cold north country.

When Laura came out of her reverie, she noticed that Mike was looking at her. He was breathing fast with the exertion of the dance, in a little pain maybe, but controlling it. Not panting--that would be giving it away. His steady respirations made a slight wheezing noise, and reminded her, grotesquely, of the dying cat. His eyes looked weary, puzzled, but somehow innocent, their kindness belying the hardness in the compressed lips.

"Are you feeling better?" he asked, hugging her a little. Tears welled up in Laura's eyes, as the waltz, matching her mood, reached that crescendo of sentiment and nostalgia that would be almost too cloying if it weren't purified by the astringency of sheer beauty.

Suddenly, joy swept over her: the joy of a body moving with music. The joy music brings--of being able to transcend pain and disappointment by creating this sound, by moving to it. Their dance gradually became a real dance, a moving together. Leg aches, backaches were forgotten, pain and disillusionment forgotten. They danced from the kitchen to the dining room, across the broad painted floorboards, then down the hallway to the wide front door. It was open, and as they danced past, the late slanting rays of the setting sun illuminated them, casting a ruddy glow over their faces.

--CAROL WYCKOFF

Birthday Greeting

A birthday--
Like yesterday,
And Sunday,
And all the rest--
Lasts 24 hours,
Just as long.
Though you know
The hands on the clock move,
You cannot see it.

Suddenly,
The meter flips over
And a whole year drops away.
If you look quickly,
All time comes into sharp focus,
And you are aware of your long fall
From the past
Into the future,
Continually gathering a life.

--PHILIP CARLSEN

The DJ's Short Career

I HAD BEEN a college teacher for over 15 years when I arrived at a summer break with no summer class to teach. This was fine with me, but it also meant that I wasn't earning any money. When the same situation occurred the following summer, I knew I should think about a part-time job.

I had had all sorts of jobs as a teenager and as a young adult. I'd worked in stores, done yard work, painted houses, served in the military, and worked for the U.S. Department of State. But for the past 17 years I hadn't done anything except teach college. I knew I wouldn't make any real money in a non-professional job, so I considered my options. What kind of work could I do? I had good judgment (sometimes) and I was a good manager and organizer. But in a town of 7,000 how many offices needed an office manager or vice-president?

I could see that I had to scale down my ambitions. So I started to use a more practical approach. What businesses were located in Warrensburg? There were some paper companies nearby, there was a branch office of a newspaper, a radio station, a small printing office, and a few small department stores. Not much really available. There were a couple of small cities an hour away by car. But I didn't want to drive an hour each way if I didn't need to.

First, I tried the paper companies. They were big and paid very good salaries. I thought they might be able to use an extra writer-editor from time to time, so I was hopeful. I found that they also hired out their writing to advertising agencies in the cities.

So I decided to try the local radio station next. I had recently taught a course in newswriting, and I thought that might help my application. The station manager at WKRY, Peter Sullivan, was a personable fellow. Nice voice. Lots of inflection in his sentences.

He asked me how I got interested in radio. This was a hard question for me because I wasn't interested in radio. I hadn't listened to the radio (ever) in the past 7 years. Before that I heard only easy-listening stations in the evening. But for 7 years now--nothing. No radio at all.

So I told him that I was mainly interested in news writing and reporting. I said I had gotten involved in that from teaching a course in Journalism. As it happened, the year before I had somehow been asked to serve on a University committee dealing with the local college radio station. I even wrote the report dealing with the campus station. So I spoke about this to Pete Sullivan, trying to generate as much enthusiasm for radio work as I could. He said he'd let me know if anything came up for the summer (it was now March) and we said goodbye.

On the drive home, I turned on the car radio. Finding that it still worked, I turned to WKRY. But by the time I got home I had heard only three commercials and two popular rock songs--I assumed they were popular. Rock music is for others, not for me. But I figured I could get used to it if I had to.

During the next two months, I continued to look for jobs in a rather haphazard manner. I even started reading the want-ads in the local newspaper. Occasionally, there was an opening in town. But I didn't want to be a bartender. What could I do, feed drinks to my students and former students until they were smashed? My colleagues would be impressed with that. I also didn't think I was suited to provide day-care services to little tots. I wasn't sure my patience was what it should be for that job. And I definitely was not going to work on the telephone trying to sell photographs to unsuspecting citizens.

So I was pleasantly surprised when in June I got a phone call from Pete Sullivan at WKRY. He said they might have something opening up, and he asked me to come over the next day for an interview.

The next morning, trying to be informal, I arrived in my sportcoat and tie. I knew that disc jockeys and radio people were definitely casual. Pete Sullivan was wearing a yellow and green t-shirt as I strolled in for the interview, and I made a mental note to revise my notions of informality around the radio station. I also tried to avoid my measured, professional manner. But I wasn't all that relaxed.

Pete told me that right now WKRY needed a disc jockey to fill the Saturday morning slot. The job started at 7:00 a.m. and lasted until noon. He

explained that the assignment would involve reporting the news (he knew I was interested in that), reading the weather, playing music and commercials, and making some public service announcements (PSA's in the trade).

I figured I could do all that. I wasn't very confident, however, about the popular music part of my job. I hadn't the slightest idea about what groups were around. Nor did I know any of the top 20 songs. But I reasoned that I could fake it. How long could it take to learn a few songs?

I told Pete that I'd like the job. (I knew I had to be positive about everything in this interview situation.) But in the back of my mind lay the idea that I didn't want to be a disc jockey for very long. So I asked Pete what the prospects were for eventually specializing in news and newswriting. He said that WKRY usually started new people off as disc jockeys, then--depending on their talents--if something else opened up at the station, they would be first in line for the job. I found out months later that Pete was stringing me along; they hadn't hired a news person in over 15 years. But I didn't know it then.

Because this offer was the best I could do at this point, I agreed to start my training as a disc jockey. Such training was without pay for the first few days, said Pete. But the training involved only about three or four evenings with one of the present DJ's, Frank Johnson. Frank would give me practice in the basics, then I could begin to work with the present Saturday morning DJ. I'd start to draw the minimum wage when I began working with the Saturday DJ. With some mental reservations, but none spoken aloud, I agreed to start off next Monday evening with Frank Johnson.

That Monday at 6:15 p.m. I arrived at the small WKRY building to meet Frank, a young man of about 24 years of age. Frank was wearing a t-shirt with "Sister Sledge" written across the front. He had fairly long hair, a glib manner, and did everything three times faster than I did.

Frank set about training me in a determined manner. He'd been told by the Program Director to do it right, and by God he was going to. I think I may have been the first person Frank ever trained. The problem was that what Frank meant by "training" didn't do me an awful lot of good.

He would run rapid-fire through a series of six details, look me in the eye winningly, nod his head enthusiastically, and decide that I had absorbed every little intricacy. Then he would move to the next item and proceed in the same fashion. If only things were that simple. When a new DJ trainee sits in the control room for the first time, he sees an array of technical equipment. For example, in front of him is the control panel with seven control dials. (Frank calls them "pots.") You have to know when to turn the dial up in volume so that particular channel will broadcast. If you forget to turn up the volume, of course, those radio sets out there are silent.

Now each dial controls a different device. The first dial on the left controls the microphone that lets the DJ talk to his audience. If you forget to turn the volume off after you speak, then the casual conversation you have with someone else in the room goes out over the airways. Or if you decide to mumble comments to yourself or curse out the equipment or the records--that too is broadcast to all your listeners. One learns quickly to be wary of that first dial.

What else do the dials control? Well, they regulate two turntables that play the records and three tape cartridge players that play commercials ("spots") and popular songs. Since most popular songs average only about 3 or 3-1/2 minutes of playing time, it gets to be a real juggling act to fill up 15-minute sections of air time. I had to have the next song, or commercial, or public service announcement ready well before the previous song was finished.

After three nights, I thought I was getting the hang of the place. I even tapped my foot to some of the music now. So I figured I was on my way to success as a DJ.

But then Frank began to speak of the necessity for "flow" in the work. I could read in his manner that we were now discussing the big stuff. "Flow" separates the DJ's from the masses. One either has it or not. It doesn't do to talk much about it.

"Flow" is based on the notion that there should *never* be a moment of silence on the airwaves. Frank called it dead space. God forbid that a listener would ever have a moment of quiet. "He would have to think," I used to mutter to myself as I tried to master the flow of my performance. Evidently DJ's base their livelihood on the belief that their listeners are scared to death of silence and need every instant filled with sound. Well, maybe they do. What do I know? I was only a DJ for four nights.

The essence of flow, then, was to blend the end of each song with the beginning of something else--say, the DJ's own conversation. You couldn't wait for the song to end, then start talking. There would be that moment of quiet. You had to begin

talking toward the end of the song. Or if you were going to play a second song right away, you began the second song before the first one ended.

So far, this doesn't sound so bad, does it? But you've forgotten one item: The DJ needs to know when the record is ending! For me that was a problem. You've heard the repetition in those rock songs. When you listen to eighteen repetitions of such lyrics as "Give me back my rapture," how do you know when the song is ending? I was gaining a new respect for Frank's talents. He knew when the songs were almost over. He always merged his voice, or a commercial, or another song with the ending of a recording. Frank had flow.

Frank let me have half-hour periods of air space for practice. During that half-hour, I had to play songs, read the weather, read public service announcements, and make "segues." A segue is the transition from one item to the next. For instance, in concluding a song, a segue would consist of my saying something like, "This is WKRY. That was Irene Cara with 'Flashdance.' Next we have Donna Summer and 'She Works Hard for the Money.'" It doesn't sound like much, does it?

But consider the technical details. "Flashdance" is playing on one of the turntables. When it's over, I need to turn off the volume on that dial. In the meantime, I need to turn up the dial on the microphone so I can speak my profound segue. Then as I finish my few words, I need to push the tape cartridge for "She Works Hard for the Money" and turn up the volume on the appropriate dial. All the while, I have to concentrate on flow. And, hopefully, I have remembered to turn off the microphone so that my brief conversations with Frank are not sent out to our listeners. On the other hand, if I forget to turn up the volume on Donna Summer's song, the radios throughout our area are silent.

After half an hour of this, I was a heap of anxiety. I couldn't imagine doing it for four hours at a time. And that's what WKRY had planned for me on Saturday mornings. I think what finished me off was the music. I couldn't fake it. I would have to memorize the songs--they would need to become second nature to me. Remember Frank's concern with flow? Well, a good number of songs concluded abruptly (a "cold" ending, Frank said). They didn't trail off gradually. They just stopped. And if you didn't know the record had a cold ending, guess what? A moment of silence over the air. You wouldn't start up your next song in time. No flow.

I went home after my third session with Frank and considered my part-time job situation. Was it worth it to me to fill my mind with rock music? Was I willing to speed up my reaction time so that I could achieve flow? At age 45 I found I wasn't ready to do it. I didn't want to go through my days humming, "Don't pay the ferryman" or "She works hard for the money." I didn't want music by Supertramp to fill my moments. I was licked.

Now I had to find a graceful way to decline the job. Pete Sullivan was expecting good things from me. And I didn't want to be critical of the job activities because--after all--Peter earned his living that way. I wasn't going to insult anyone.

Next morning I told Pete that some people loved rock, but I wasn't one of them. I told him I didn't know the songs, so I really couldn't be a DJ. After all, about 40 or 45 minutes out of an hour were spent on music. Pete understood, and accepted my bowing out of the job. He was a nice guy. He probably felt a little sorry for me, anyway. After all he was an experienced DJ. He could sympathize with the untalented who couldn't get the flow.

He was nice to me. Pete told me that probably news and news writing were my bag. And he assured me WKRY would contact me if they needed someone in that area. But Pete and I both knew I'd never hear from them again. WKRY was a small station, so their two news people doubled as DJ's. They also had the flow.

As I walked back to my car, I realized this was the first time in my life I had turned down a job. I felt almost guilty until I found Supertramp's latest hit going through my mind. I could do without that in the years that lay ahead of me.

As I drove home, I didn't turn on the radio. I was thinking about other jobs. Maybe I could try some ad agencies. I wondered what a job there

--A. BRUCE DEAN

The Cloning of Shakespeare's Young Man

It is not implausible that in 1902
G. Haberlandt had the Sonnets in mind
When he predicted cloning.
A perceptive perusal of the intensive units
And homogenous blocks of Sonnets 1 through 126
Reveals that the Bard hoped for his handsome friend
Something more than mere posterity to perpetuate his good looks.

In like vein, David Rorvik says of the man
Whom he chooses to call Max:
He did want a son--well, not exactly a son.
Max had in mind the perpetuation into another generation
Of an already existing genotype, Himself,
For which he is reported to have paid one million dollars.*

Whoever had what in mind when,
It now appears unmistakable that Shakespeare desired
A re-creation of the *lovely boy,*
Even going so far as to hint at genetic engineering:
What is your substance? Whereof are you made?
He wished the boy to be *new made,*
Distill'd as a flower into some vial,
Retaining his *substance still sweet*
[Him]*self again after* [his own] *decease--*
Or as Mr. Rorvik says, reduplicated.
Hyperbolizing, he envisioned perhaps *ten* of him,
A small race of clones:
Ten times thyself were happier than thou art,
If ten of thine ten times refigur'd thee,
Then what could death do if thou shouldst depart,
Leaving thee living in posterity?

Might a man through cloning--
Through microaspiration, microinjection,
Cytochalasin/fusion
And cell-cycle synchrony--
Might a man swindle the Fates
By extending his consciousness beyond the boundaries
Nature seemed to have dictated?
Might his own awareness somehow survive the death of the body
In the locus of the cloned consciousness?
Might he emerge from the womb of his surrogate mother
With *remembrance of things past?*
In short, does each cell nucleus contain man's soul
Or a piece thereof that might be induced to divide
To replicate itself and
All soul-molecules intact

Live full-blown *a second life* [in] *second head*?
Max was getting up in years (fifty or fifty-five)
Was still single
And lacked the *tender heir*
That Shakespeare envisioned for his friend,
One who will *bear his memory*
Or perpetuate *the beauty of* [his] *mind*.
Max wanted a male heir (the Poet specifies a son)
Who would be a chip off the old stock.
It should be noted that F.C. Stewart's term "clone"
Denotes a slip, a cutting, a twig,
Which is just what Shakespeare had in mind
When he suggested *ingraft*[ing] *the young man,*
And the scion must contain in embryo
His *sweet face,* his *fair brow,* his *bright* and *fair eyes,*
His *heart,* his *pure and most most loving breast,*
Or in sum, his great beauty.
Max too was not unattractive, was vigorous,
Exuded an aura of confidence and command,
And stimulated his free-lancer to speculate on the replication
Of genius and great beauty.

Shakespeare thus foresaw a technology
In which man literally remakes himself,
Re-creating himself in his own image.
Certainly the author of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*
Desired man to exercise as much conscious will
Over his destiny as he could
And would be among the first to rise and applaud
The regenesis of Romeo and Juliet.
To the Great Poet it seems more natural
Than nurtural
That Nature's final act, *her quietus,* would be
To render thee *new made when thou art old*
And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.
Thus we have, if nature renders the copy faithfully,
The young man's clonal self.

Even the dead should be replicatable, writes Rorvik,
If enough DNA is left.
So if the legion of Shakespeare scholars
Would apply a speck more ingenuity to identifying
This *sweet boy,* his remains might then be sought,
A facility procured, a staff employed,
Funding secured through the Shakespeare Trust,
And the Bard's fervent request,
That overgoes [his] *blunt invention quite,*
At last fulfilled.

--J. KARL FRANSON

*David Rorvik, *In His Image: the Cloning of a Man* (1978).

Down the Upscale Road

IT'S THE YEAR 2018, there's a BMW in your driveway, and perhaps another ultimate driving machine en route home with your spouse, kids, and groceries. At least students in ENG 101, writing futuristic profiles of their classmates, see them driving BMW's by a substantial margin over other makes in the enjoyment of their predicted prosperity. The red convertible appears more than once, along with model numbers not yet conceived by Munich marketers and designers. Surely these freshman fantasies, transformed into forecasts, represent one of the great marketing triumphs of our time. Economists' concern with levels of consumer installment debt, mostly for cars, often is expressed as "mortgaging the future" of the debtors, but these students have mortgaged their souls, even before they have become economic statistics. Success, thy name is BMW.

Since I dreamt up this writing assignment, I was able to include myself among those still present in 2018, but strangely enough, no one saw a BMW in *my* future. Yet there was a BMW in my past. The time had come to trade our cancerous compact, and the local BMW dealer, a customer of the bank where I was thought a rising executive, confided that he felt I was the "BMW type." We're talking over a decade ago and the hot car was the 2002, but it didn't take me long to acknowledge that the dealer was a perceptive judge of character, even if I failed to come to this recognition unaided. A few trial spins through the slush of an early Maine spring, the mellowness of the Germanic sound system as we fitted our contours into orthopedically engineered seats, confirmed the dealer's wisdom to my wife and me. The car was pricey but the result inevitable. After the financial settlement, we were married to the car in a *ménage a trois*.

For the wedding trip, we took our daughters on a junket to Massachusetts to visit their brother in college, and stopped by his dorm in the revelry of a weekend evening. Two students peered in at his radiant sixteen year old sister in the back seat, explaining "we just wanted to see the girl in the 2002." She understood the meaning of the BMW. Later, I taxied some visiting French businessmen around town, who acknowledged that "we like the BMW very much." Here was a car, not only a fitting carriage for queenly sixteen year olds, but a generator of international good will between ancient enemies. Yes, we were the types.

The ambience of the courtship and wedding caused me to discount an occasional balkiness or hesitation in acceleration, but this flaw grew to be an annoyance and more frequent as the honeymoon was succeeded by housekeeping. Added to this was a frequent refusal to start on cold Maine mornings, a chronic complaint which introduced us to the certified BMW doctor, who made house calls with his kit of spark plugs and other minor organ replacements. Often, the doctor had to admit the patient for examination and treatment. The BMW clinic was segregated from the Detroit riffraff and had an atmosphere of professional exclusiveness. On the wall were framed certificates of the doctor's training and competence, and he himself demonstrated laconic reserve worthy of the noblest neurosurgeon.

All this treatment was covered by the marvelous BMW warranty, except for my time away from the office or customer calls, while I was craning my neck to ogle the beauty's underbody aloft on the lift, or peering into the engine compartment to observe delicate valve surgery. These problems became a positive interference with my job, and gradually it dawned on me that the 2002 might not advance my career, and was more appropriate for those to whom a career was irrelevant. Compounding my mental uneasiness was physical discomfort, as I found that the orthopedically engineered seats were molded for a Teutonic physique, not my imperfect Celtic frame. A longish trip became agony, despite cushions and steady squirming.

All good things come to an end, and as we emerged from the shelter of the BMW warranty, our checkbook came into play along with the continued time commitment. One day, I noticed a burning smell after a drive of several miles. I could not attribute it to friction from squirming on the seat, and a trip in to see the doctor disclosed a linkage in the exhaust system which was glowing red hot. When I was told the defective part was the "thermal reactor," I thought we had changed the subject to nuclear submarine technology, but found, indeed, that this was the name for a compo-

nent in the anti-pollution system. Despite the premium price for BMW professional services, the labor charge for replacement was not high; but the unit, which was made in Italy, cost $500.

I had to stanch this hemorrhage of time and money. When the thermal reactor had cooled off and the red glow faded to dull grey, I drove to a 100% Detroit dealer and traded for a mainstream American compact, assembled with time-honored erector set technology, jarring suspension, window cranks that fell off, mystery rattles never solved, but which ran reliably. I held on to my career, however, not trading it until some years later, but little expected that ENG 101 students would remind me, in a flood of *déjà vu*, of BMW days. Maybe I'm still the type.

--WILLIAM G. SAYRES

CONTRIBUTORS

MAGGY ANDERSON, Professor of Mathematics Education, is an active member of Upcountry Artists. Her drawing in this issue won a blue ribbon at the Franklin County Fair.

ALICE BLOOM is back teaching half-time in the English department after taking a year off to finish a book of essays. Her essays and reviews have appeared in *Yale Review, Hudson Review, New England Review/Breadloaf Quarterly, Harpers,* and other periodicals, and several anthologies. This essay appeared as a column in *Maine Progressive,* for which she writes on a semi-regular basis.

PHILIP CARLSEN is an Associate Professor of Music and director of the orchestra and band. Also active as a composer, he is at work on a commission for the Manhattan Marimba Quartet to be premiered next spring in New York.

A. BRUCE DEAN, Professor of English, is in his 20th year at UMF. He is currently writing on Solzhenitsyn and Bellow.

J. KARL FRANSON, Professor of English, specializes in Renaissance literature. His publications include articles on Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, and Wordsworth; he is completing a book on hidden numerical structures in Renaissance poetry. "The Cloning of Shakespeare's Young Man" is a revision of a poem that appeared in *Scholia Satyrica 4 (Autumn) 1978.*

DOUG RAWLINGS, Coordinator of Basic Writing, has published a chapbook of his poems dealing with his experiences as a Vietnam veteran; his poems have also appeared in small presses around the country. He is founding member of Veterans for Peace, an organization dedicated to educating the public about the consequences of war, eliminating nuclear weapons, and abolishing war as an instrument of international policy.

WILLIAM G. SAYRES is a part-time instructor of English Composition. He received his M.A. from the University of Maine in 1988; before returning to school, he had been in banking for 32 years. This essay originally appeared in the *Daily Maine Campus.*

MARILYN SHEA, Professor of Psychology, was born in a suburb of Chicago, has not died yet, and in between expects to continue taking photographs.

CAROL WYCKOFF, who will be rejoining the part-time English faculty this spring, has had numerous articles, essays, and features published in periodicals. She is working on a collection of short stories.