Spring 1990

# Beyond Memos: A Journal of the UMF Faculty Volume 2, Number 2, Spring 1990

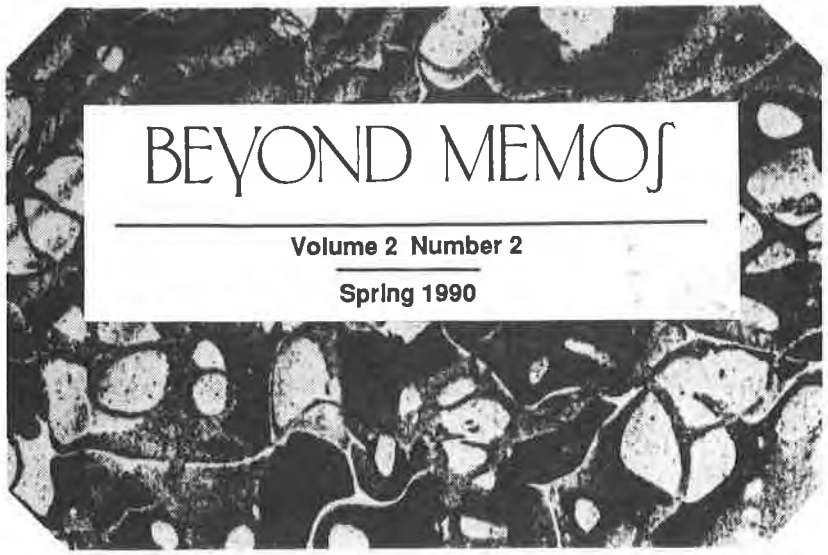
University of Maine at Farmington

# BEYOND MEMOS

A Journal of the UMF Faculty

Volume 2 Number 2

Spring 1990




**Volume 2 Number 2**

**Spring 1990**

**Editor:** Philip Carlsen
**Cover Design:** Svea Seredin
**Cover Calligraphy:** Liu Qiuxia

*Editor's note: The characters on the cover are difficult to translate. As well as I can understand it, they mean "the free travel through the universe of a spirit that is bound neither by space nor time."*

Grateful acknowledgement is extended to President Mike Orenduff for funding, and also to Bev Collins, Shari Witham, Stacey Hodges, and Fred Dearnley.

This issue was typeset using Aldus *Pagemaker* and printed at Wilton Printed Products.

# CONTENTS




**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, Farmington, ME 04938.

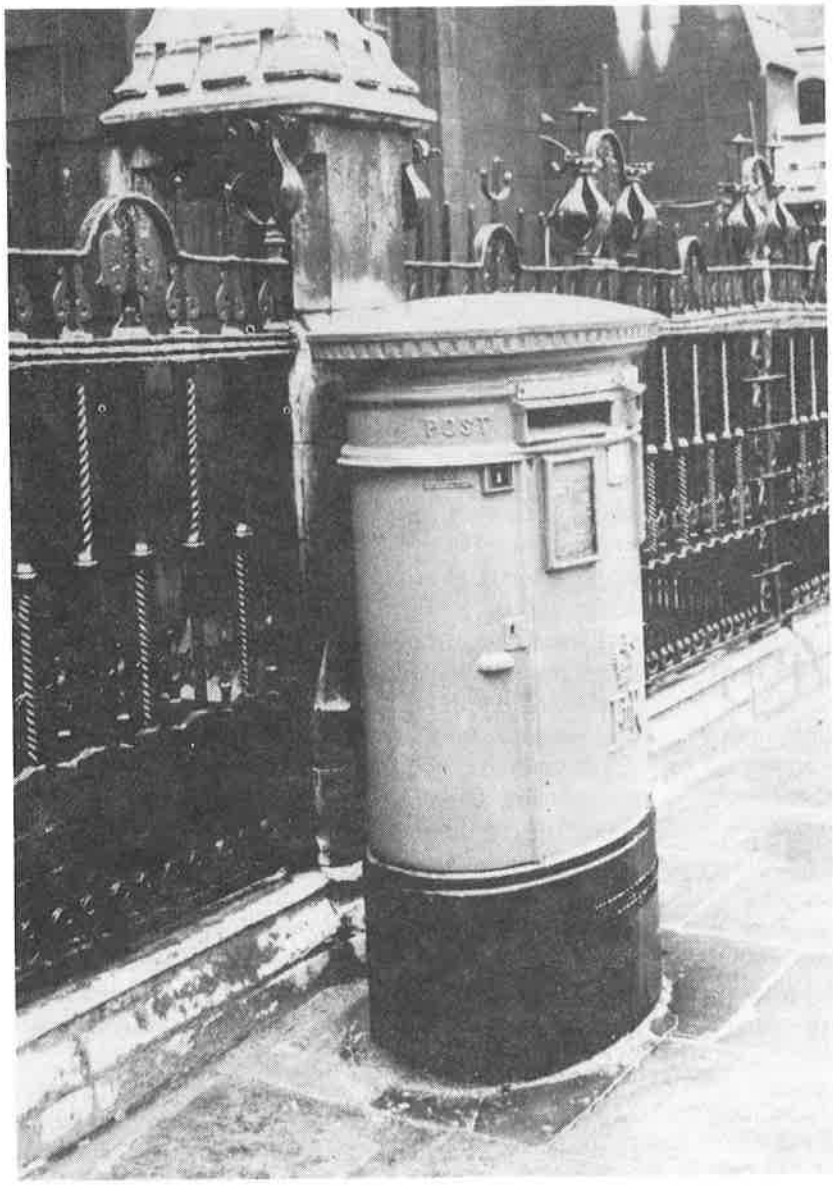
# The Sky is Falling

## Oxford, March 17, 1989

*Editor's note: Dan Gunn wrote the following letter from Oxford last spring, but it arrived too late to appear in that first issue of* BEYOND MEMOS.

MY FATHER, who worked for twenty-five years in the New York City Police Department, has tried to describe for me what it felt like to walk into a coffee shop or bar in Bedford Stuyvessant or Brownsville at the end of a long tour, a white guy, thin and stubbled, in this not-so-new raincoat, and know that everyone in the place was saying to himself, at precisely the same moment: *cop*. I have thought of this story several times during the last three months, because part of what you pay for, in travel, is a feeling of alienation which must be something like what he experienced. I mean, for example, the feeling you get sitting in your American clothes at a small round table in the back of a cafe, looking intently, say, at the pattern your hand makes against the table's marble surface, without silverware, without napkins, without a menu, without any sign of a waiter, while people stand and sit all around you, smoking, snapping their heads back here and there to drink something strong and dark from a liqueur glass, occasionally striking each other on the chest or shoulder and laughing (at you! at you!), conversing all the while, with steady exuberance, in a language you do not understand. At such a moment, it is impossible to maintain your ordinary fictions about yourself (you are quiet and thoughtful- looking, urbane, cultivated, yes, you have even a degree of charm); these collapse and give way, and you fall down, down, down into your puffy and thickening thighs and calves, your packages in plastic bags, your impossible clothes, your skin, pasty and sallow, the skin, you suddenly realize, of a tourist.

THE BRITISH might be forgiven if they felt something like alienation or vertigo themselves, these days, even at home, since there have recently been some alarming rips and tears in the fabric of their ordinary life. For all its flaws, they take their food very seriously, as the following story, quoted in its entirety from the *Oxford Mail*, will attest: "CORNWALL: Joseph Gilbert, 56, of Troon, was jailed for hitting his wife Valerie, 52, with a frying pan because her attempts to make him a Cornish pasty went wrong." But now they have more to worry about than the traditional bad cooking. Last November, Edwina Currie, a junior health minister, announced flatly that most egg production in the country was contaminated with salmonella. This inflammatory pronouncement (unjustified in degree, it seems, although there have been an unusual number of food poisoning cases involving eggs) led to Currie's resignation (she's going to write a book), an escalating series of muddled statistical reassurances from the government, and much anxious hard-boiling. Then, in January, the government announced that an outbreak of listeria had prompted it to advise pregnant women against unpasteurized milk and cheeses; in fact, it was considering a ban on such products. Angry responses from the producers of Camembert have saved the cheeses, for the time being, but their sales aren't breaking any records. An unusually mild winter has encouraged the growth of bacteria in water supplies; in Oxford, after the discovery of high levels of cryptosporidium, pregnant women and the immuno-suppressed have been warned not to drink the town water until further notice, and now people line up at all of the stores to buy Perrier and Evian every night. (Actually, this may not be anything new for Oxford.) Finally, just last week, the *Guardian* reported in a front-page story that only seventy- nine of the nine hundred and nineteen abbatoirs in Britain were sufficiently hygienic to meet EEC export standards. The produce of the others is "deemed fit only for British dinner tables," the newspaper claims, and the EEC inspectors complain that even the approved slaughterhouses are frequently contaminated by fecal matter from burst intestines, tumor-ridden condemned meat, insufficiently sterilized knives, standing puddles of waste water, and generally unsanitary technique. Lisa and I thought of this as we walked past a row of mutilated and bloodstained carcasses hanging from butchers' shops in the Oxford covered market the other day, and our friend's two-year old daughter discovered a garbage pail overflowing with rabbits' heads, their eyes staring straight ahead at crazy




angles.

All of this would be bad enough, presumably, without trains and airplanes smashing up on a regular basis, but so they have been. The crash and explosion at Lockerbie (some parts of the town simply disintegrated; they collected limbs and metal debris miles away) followed only weeks after a disastrous railway accident in Clapham Junction, just south of the center of London, in which three crowded commuter trains collided, killing thirty-five and injuring many others. An airplane fell inexplicably from the sky onto the M1 in January, and then, this month, in a single forty-eight hour stretch, there were two more serious train crashes, at Purley and Glasgow, killing seven. News of the Glasgow accident, which came in the middle of the day as the government and British Rail were attempting to respond simultaneously to testimony at the Clapham inquiry and demands for a new investigation into Purley, prompted the Queen to write directly to the transportation minister, Paul Channon, expressing her alarm at "yet another rail accident involving injury and loss of life."

NOT SURPRISINGLY, the entrenched Conservative government's position has weakened during this period. Labour's shadow ministers have had only to shake their heads repeatedly and call for public investigations into everything, and the government has been criticized on all sides for obfuscation and condescension during the food crisis and for inattention to the deterioration of British Rail. (The man who made the wiring mistake that caused the Clapham accident had worked three straight sixty hour weeks; British Rail has not installed a fail-safe signalling system, as other European countries have, because it lacks funds.) Meanwhile, interests rates, kept high to dampen inflation, have reached painful levels, with increases of forty and fifty per cent in monthly mortgage payments not uncommon. Prime Minister Thatcher didn't help matters any by announcing, "We have become a grandmother" when her son's child was born in the United States; Neil Kinnock, the Labour leader, has taken to mocking Thatcher sarcastically in the Commons ("And what did the Prime Minister have for lunch today?"), and he made her pay for this. The Conservative lead has fallen from ten to three per cent in public opinion polls; the opposition is beginning to wonder if its time has finally come.

This doesn't, however, seem likely. English voters, like Americans, are quite conservative in national elections, even when they express dissatisfaction elsewhere, and Thatcher has weathered more

severe mid-term slumps before. The wholesale rush toward privatization and the dismantling of the welfare state associated with her government continue, without any sign of effective resistance, even if there is a bit more open grumbling. Most recently, the government has proposed a radical reform of the National Health Service, under which doctors working for the NHS would have their funds cut and their referral options curtailed, old-age pensioners would be encouraged to take out supplementary private health insurance, and a great many hospitals would go private. Following another government plan, British university students will have to take out substantial loans instead of having their entire education paid for. Opposition to both ideas has been noisy. General practitioners, nurses, and the entire health establishment have complained that the NHS reforms will be disastrous for state-run medical care, and opponents of the education reforms have been retailing horror stories about American students leaving college with massive debts. (In Oxford last month, a huge crowd of students marched down Broad Street in protest, carrying signs that said "Stuff the Loans" and "Hertford JCR Against the Loans" and singing

*Education is a right*
*Is a right*
*Is a right*
*Education is a right*
*Not a privilege*

to the tune of "London Bridge is Falling Down." Earnest-looking young people sold copies of *Living Marxism* and distributed gay rights literature at the fringes of the rally.) But both measures will almost certainly go through. Education and health care are very nearly the last symbolic frontiers for socialism in Britain, and, to veterans of the left, kicking their way through the accumulated rubbish on a sidewalk in Brixton or waiting in a crowd to get out of the decaying underground, this must seem something like the end of the world.

SOMEWHERE IN LONDON, too, Salman Rushdie and his wife are living in hiding, protected by an armed guard. Lisa and I heard that copies of *The Satanic Verses* had been burned in Bradford on our first morning in England, after one of those massive breakfasts, you know, eggs, tomatoes, bacon, toast, sausage, mushrooms, as we drove through the miraculously green countryside on our way to Oxford. W.H. Smith, the large chain of booksellers, withdrew the book from sale in Muslim communities that same week. At first, this seemed simply to be a question of censorship to me, and I slipped it mentally into the totalitarianism folder ("See also Chile, Bulgaria"), with what I had learned about the Official Secrets Bill, under the provisions of which the memoirs of a former head of intelligence were suppressed last year, even in the copy of *Granta* mailed to my house in New Sharon, and with the government's new proposal to require fans attending football matches to register with a private security firm and carry identity cards. But since the death sentence, it has seemed more complicated and troubling to me. For Khomeini's pronouncement—he has blasphemed, he must die, we will kill him—cannot be construed in the ordinary syntax of Western political or social discourse; it comes from off the chart somewhere, from territory that we have not colonized even by naming or understanding. The European governments have recognized as much. Their diplomatic response, the only *possible* diplomatic response, has been to withdraw, pointing at mouth and ears: *we do not understand you, we cannot talk to you any more.* Paradoxically, what such a moment reminds us is that the West's comfortable system for imagining and explaining the world— politics, literature, religion, everything—is, after all, a constructed artifact, and it is possible to get outside of it, to see it as a made thing. As such, it is fragile, no matter how long its traditions and how strong its current world hegemony; its influence might expand, contract, disintegrate. I keep thinking of the maps in my high school history books, which showed the Turks, the Visigoths, the Vikings, unknown tides of otherness, colored orange or blue, advancing into and receding from Spain, England, Italy, *our* territory, wherever it was.

But this train of thought reveals precisely what is most insidious about the affair: the easy way it resolves into a contest between their darkness and our light. The temptation to racism, xenophobia, and religious intolerance should be obvious, and people who, like me, feel impelled to argue against the suppression of *The Satanic Verses* and defend the absolute freedom of the writer are very likely to want also to insist on the intrinsic value of otherness and the importance of overcoming prejudice. But how practically can the principles of pluralism and tolerance and respect be extended to encompass a position which itself entails the violent rejection of pluralism? As Muslims in this country have been quick to point out, there are limits to the principle of toleration—one cannot incite to violence, one cannot reveal secret documents, one cannot urge the overthrow

of the state—and our decisions about what speech is to be tolerated are made in our own (and not Muslims') interest. Here perhaps we are forced to recognize not only the fragility but the logical instability of our ordinary cultural language, and it threatens to split open, revealing the empty spaces and blank terrain below, leaving us falling, leaving us nowhere.

WE TELL STORIES to keep ourselves from falling, and there is some refuge in their texture, in the shape they make and the order they provide, at least for a while. I've had to invent myself so many times, this year, in letters home to friends and family, that I've forgotten who I really am, when I'm not writing a letter, pretending to be a monk, or man of the world, or a political reporter, or an Old Testament prophet. But strangely, I find that my purely textual status doesn't bother me, any more than it bothered me, a few weeks ago, when I walked out of *Tucker*, after two hours of big cars, a man with a dream, by gosh, advertising posters, the screen door slamming on the porch, and found myself, with a start, on Little Clarendon Street, in Oxford, in England.

So. Here is a bicycle, leaning against a wall. It is old, painted black or dark grey, a little dented, maybe, but sturdy and practical, with a wicker pannier attached to the handlebars. Behind it, the wall is pale yellow stone, lit by the sun and cropped by the arch of a doorway at the right. This is a conventional image of Oxford, found on postcards and in guidebooks; in some variants, a don rides the bicycle, dressed in a suit, maybe even with a hat, trailing his academic gown blithely behind him. The idea is: *We are jaunty; we don't stand on ceremony.* And also: *We can afford not to care too much about the appearance of our bicycles, or the way we look pedalling down the street; this is Oxford.* This is a fiction, of course, but I've grown very fond of it, these last few months, walking and cycling around from our apartment to the library and back. It is an almost perfect place to study; even the college buildings turn in on themselves and huddle protectively around green quadrangles, flowers, walkways, all invisible from the street.
I don't care what the students say. Everything about this place says: *privilege.* Or better: *shelter,* even at the end of the world.

--DAN GUNN

# Christmas in...Colombia?

"WHAT? ARE YOU CRAZY?" The reactions I got when I told people I was going to spend Christmas in Colombia were not felicitous. To most folks, a trip to seething South America was a daunting enough prospect, especially for a woman alone, but Colombia? With all those bombs going off in planes and public buildings? With all those *narcotraficantes* strafing target and bystanders alike? As a tall blonde *gringa*, they predicted, I'd be a sitting duck.

In August, as the media splattered the world with grim images of the drug war in Colombia, I came close to changing my mind. But I had a feeling that for most Colombians life continued as usual. My friends in Cali corroborated this. You will rest tranquilly here, they assured me in florid Colombian Spanish, and we will pass lovely moments together. How could I resist?

Resting tranquilly turned out to be a fiction, I admit. Christmastime in Cali never includes resting. Between December 24 and January 1 is the *Feria de Cali*—Carnival! Visitors come from all over to join in the carousing and dancing in the streets during this wildly active week. Not this year, though. Bad press about Colombia scared most North Americans away. I was the only *gringo* I saw in the two weeks that I was in Colombia.

So yes. I was a sitting duck—but not for Uzis and bombs. On the contrary, I experienced characteristic Colombian good will, hospitality, and affection. Always in the limelight, a curiosity, I was beset by questions about my own Christmas customs and what it's like "up there." Even the overnight proliferation of *Yanquis Fuera de Panamá* graffiti did not dampen my welcome.

*Norteamericanos* are uncommon in the working-class *barrio* where my hosts live. Here the streets are too narrow for two cars to pass—which doesn't stop them from doing so—and some streets aren't paved. Most houses are small, flat-roofed, masonry rectangles attached to each other in rows. They are separated from the street by short cement or tiled "yards," surrounded by low masonry walls with iron grille gates. The front, and only, door might have multiple locks in the name of impregnability, but during the waking hours it is likely to stand wide open. The flow of drop-in visitors must remain unimpeded, as must access to neighborhood happenings. Here the outside is seen as an extension of the inside, or maybe it's the other way around. One Caleño who had experienced Maine lamented our need to live in "hermetically sealed houses barricaded behind piles of snow." Lonely. Cold in more ways than one.

Colombians are about Community. The more people crowded into a given space, the more replete my Colombian friends claim to feel. Add to that some very loud salsa music and an ample supply of aguardiente, the local firewater, and you have nirvana, Cali-style. The dancing begins, and will more than likely last till dawn: *rumbas, merengues*, the native *cumbia*, and this year the wildly popular *lambada* out of Brazil. No one hangs back from dancing, not toddlers or men or grandmas. It is not a skill, these subtle sensual movements; it is part of being Colombian.

Cali, a sprawling city in the western uplands, has been branded by the media as The Other Medellín. This was not the Cali that I experienced. During Feria week, at night, I accompanied my hosts and the rest of "the block" downtown to La Quinta—5th Avenue—where the *verbenas* were. Scattered outdoor bandstands with live salsa ensembles, the verbenas were surrounded by a sea of humanity, thousands crammed shoulder to shoulder, throbbing and undulating to raw Latin rhythms. To penetrate the throngs and not lose each other, we formed *trencitos*, or conga lines, hanging onto each other's belts as we snaked through, hunting for a bare spot in which to stake a claim and dance. Never, immersed in this high-energy "Third World" multitude, did I feel endangered. I only felt welcome. I felt Community.

On Christmas Day I felt especially cynical about Colombia's menacing image. The barrio rented a *chiva*, an old-style, multi- colored, befringed, be-sloganed potboiler of a bus, complete with shrine to the Virgin over the driver (who usually needs all the help he can get). Everyone, infants to octogenarians, clambered in, with the more adventuresome crowded onto the roof or hanging from the back and sides.

"¡Mu-si-ca! ¡Mu-si-ca!" the revelers chanted insistently every time the blaring salsa broadcast emanating from the dashboard shorted

out. We cruised the length and breadth of the city that warm sunny *Navidad*, along with hordes of other chivas, snorting trucks, overburdened motorcycles, and even horse-drawn carts, all with the same mission. To swill *aguardiente* and cheerfully pelt pedestrians and each other with *maizena*, flour. All in good clean fun. I returned hours later white with maizena and deeply impressed by the role of alcohol, not drugs, in the Colombian way of life. It seemed to me that what the individual Colombian must survive is not cocaine but aguardiente.

A softer memory is the nightly visitation around the barrio of the *niños de la besevre*, the children of the manger. Every night throughout Advent, a host of neighbor children travels from house to house to honor the elaborate Nativity scene that dominates each living room. Furniture is moved back, and the terrazza floor fills up with polite, seated kids with Unicef eyes. They are led through a liturgy involving chanted responses, punctuated by the rhythmic shaking of *maracas* made of bottlecaps hammered flat and strung onto circlets of wire.

My first night in Cali, as the ritual ended, I decided to treat the children to a round of "Jingle Bells", so as to share a piece of my Christmas. As I sang, they were galvanized, hushed, taking in my every move and nuance. Their faces betrayed no expression. The next night, after the chanting, I was baffled when the kids turned to me expectantly and stood looking up at me with those dark eyes, waiting. Finally, "Chinga Bowse!" they clamored. Ah! I launched into "Jingle Bells" and—unforgettable moment— the tiny room resounded with the voices of 30 children joining me phonetically in that North American chestnut. I had started a tradition.

Colombians deplore the Drug Sickness, the Violence Sickness, sweeping their country. They express sorrow, as if speaking of a beloved but ailing relative. It is but a few who ruin it for the rest of us, they say. Those few create a network of badness that affects everyone. The people still mourn assassinated Presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán, who was perceived as Colombia's hope. "I cried when he was killed," my host told me.

Meanwhile life in Colombia goes on. There are always reasons to gather and celebrate with dancing and *el trago*, the sip: baptisms, birthdays, New Year, a visiting gringa. In other parts of South America Colombians are viewed as having more *alegría*, joy, than others. They are the wild and crazy ones who know how to have a good time.

And I, back in Maine, hermetically sealed behind piles of snow, am looking for a rumba partner.

--PAULA WIDMER

# The Mustard Trick

"Now I'm safe!" I congratulated myself. I was ambling along a deserted street in Buenos Aires near my hotel. It was a tranquil Sunday morning. Traveling alone, I had just come through two weeks in notorious Colombia unscathed. Now I was in Argentina, whose glittering capital appeared Old World, civilized, by contrast. I relaxed and indulged in some unapologetic rubbernecking.

That was when it happened. A woman approached me from behind and began speaking to me—an older woman, of the working class, plain and careworn. Clean. Unthreatening. There was, she informed me, something all over the back of me. I stopped walking, puzzled. I peered over my shoulder. What?! Unaccountably, there was mustard all over the back of my shirt and my slacks—long, looping bright-yellow squirts of hot-dog mustard. This made no sense. My mind went into Surreal. I had sensed nothing touching me as I had strolled along so confidently.

The *senora* began dabbing at me helpfully with a tissue, clucking over the outrage. Confused, I stood like a sheep, unresisting. When she pointed out that there was *mostaza* on my purse as well—the purse over which I had been so vigilant for the past two weeks—I let her slip it off my shoulder as she cleaned at it. She set it on the sidewalk next to my feet. Then she pointed upward at a nearby building. Maybe someone had squirted me from up there. We both stood gazing upward. Mentally I was still in the Twilight Zone.

The nice lady made a couple more dabs at me and took her leave. I turned to pick up my purse...and it wasn't there. And both the woman and her unseen accomplice had vanished.

In my purse were my passport, plane ticket, and all my money. In thirty seconds I had been transformed from a self-assured, seasoned traveler to a cringing nonperson trapped in a Third World country with no means to get out. Alone. Knowing no one.

It took me five harrowing days of living by my wits...and $1800.00 wired from Maine...to extricate myself. Both the officer at the police station and the clerk at the U.S. Consulate said the same thing, "Ah yes. The mustard trick!"

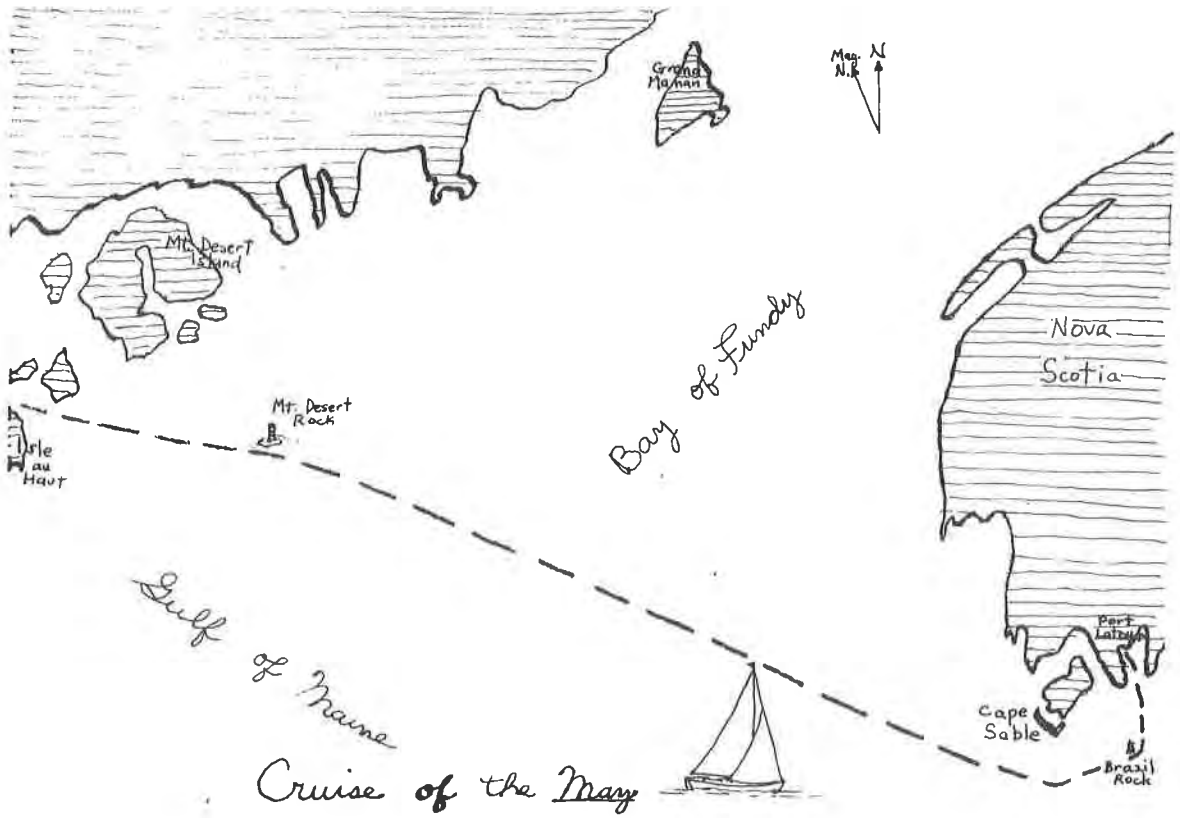
If only I had known.

# A Sea Passage to Nova Scotia

"BILL BEGAN TO FEEL QUEASY—took a dramamine too late." Wendy's log entry for July 11 records an inauspicious start for our cruise to the southeast coast of Nova Scotia. For the open ocean crossing which would take us fifty miles offshore, everything must be secured below and on deck. As the summer southwest wind blew us away from our snug Vinalhaven anchorage, I straddled our dinghy, upside down on the foredeck, criss-crossing ropes and lashing them to stanchions and cleats. By the time I was finished, we had left the protected waters in the shelter of Vinalhaven and were cantering briskly past seals sunbathing on Saddleback ledge. From there we planned to head *May*'s bow east by southeast and settle in for the long leg, but the skipper's stomach was objecting "not yet." No way to begin a test of boat and crew, so we turned north and ran up under the lee of Isle au Haut. Great Spoon, hiding in heat haze to starboard, revealed itself in creamy breakers, whiter than haze, before we smelled and hear its gull rookeries. At our anchorage off Point Lookout, a stomach quieting shot of bourbon, a chicken dinner, and into the beckoning sleeping bags. Day one. No progress.

5:40 A.M. and our noisy one cylinder diesel pushes us east as we thread buoys and ledges through the morning calm and fog. Signaled by its shadow on the sea, the sou'westerly strolls in for lunch, and the ancient partnership of wind and sails takes over from fossil fuels. Mainsail and genoa (an overlapping headsail) tug us past Mt. Desert Rock and its unmanned lighthouse at 2:14 P.M.—a lovely sunny afternoon at sea, unlike other fog-shrouded gropings past this remote granite outcropping.

This is our "good-bye" to Maine and the U.S.A., and a ruled pencil line from "the Rock" to the imagined turning point 10 miles off Cape Sable defines our mission for the next 30 hours. Humming stays, fluttering leeches (the "free" edges of sails), and our foaming bow wave cutting the



white-cap flecked ocean--all confirm the speed gauge needle hovering at five knots, close to *May*'s hull speed. "Knots" is sailor's lingo for nautical miles per hour, phonic shorthand which also refers to a primitive speed measurement system of casting a wood chip (the "log") over the side at the bow, and timing its transit to the stern by counting "knots" in an attached string as it runs out. The nautical mile actually is one minute of arc on a great circle through the poles, and thus represents one 21,600th of the earth's circumference. How tiny a scratch the track of our passage! Yet our scratch extends unbroken around the globe and crosses the tracks of all sailors through time, even as the disturbed waters of our wake vanish astern.

*May* is a sturdy 26 foot overall sloop, designed by Chuck Paine of Tenants Harbor to combine seaworthiness and speed, an elusive compromise but happily resolved in his design. Still, the top speed of any hull like *May*'s is limited by the laws of hydraulics to a mathematical function of the waterline length, or about six knots in our case.

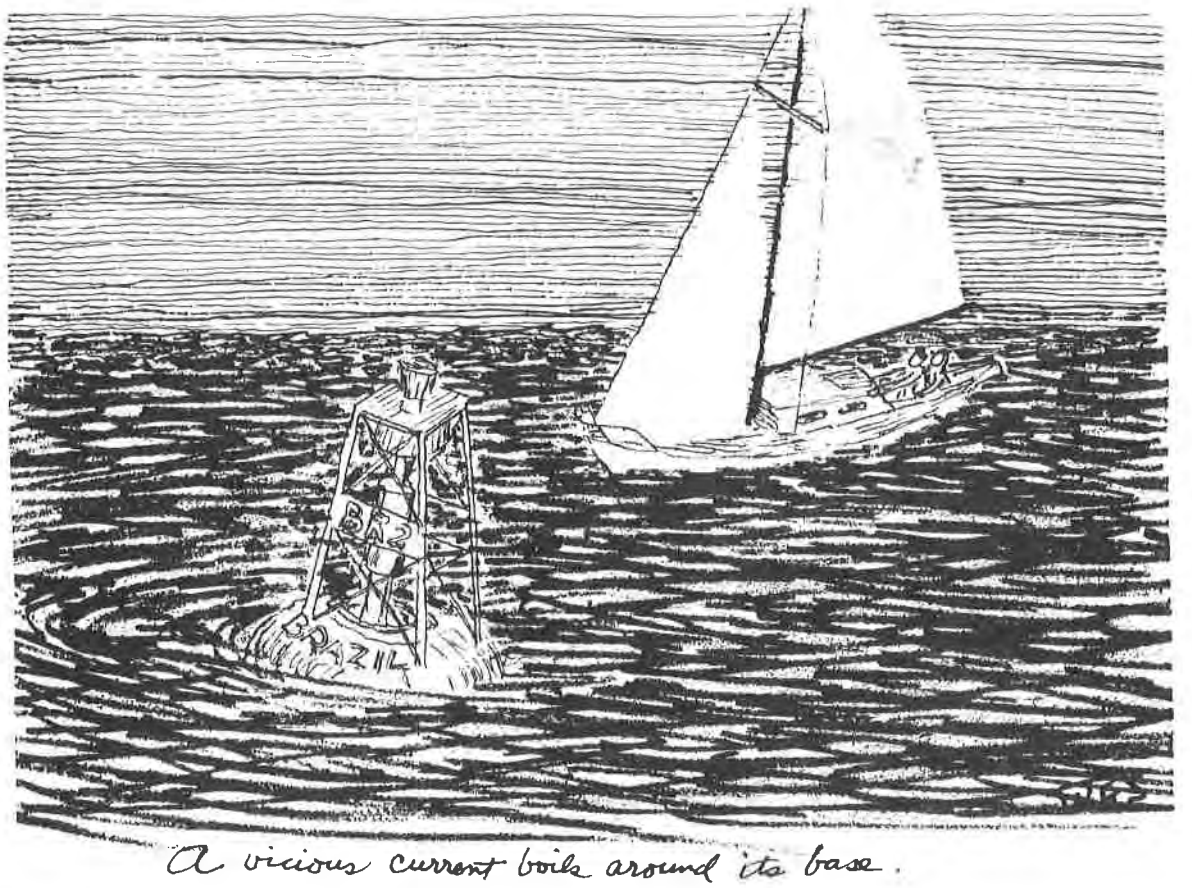
*May* was built by Morris Yachts of Southwest Harbor in 1982, and offers as much comfort as the cruising we choose to do permits. Berths, stowage space, and water supply are excellent for two people, adequate for three, and cramped for four. A two burner kerosene stove is supplemented by a gimballed camp stove for meal preparation underway, and a cabin heater, also kerosene fueled, is a "must" for the bone-chilling cold and damp of the North Atlantic. Although warmth comes first to mind, a built in ice chest keeps perishable foods and makes possible the luxury of cold drinks in quiet harbors. Beer, however, does very well wedged below the floorboards in the bilge,chilled by the Labrador current caressing our hull, three-quarters of an inch away. Yes, we also have a marine toilet, whose throne-like exposure can be a bit intimidating to visitors.

The sentinel lighthouse of Mt. Desert Rock has dwindled to a small bump on the horizon astern by supper, spaghetti heated in the gimballed stove, which we balance while eating in shifts, since one hand is needed on the tiller to steer. As the sun dips lower, the sea becomes incredibly lonely. By dusk, Mt. Desert Rock has disappeared, and the string which we could imagine unwinding between us and that last sight of land is broken. Out here the shearwaters and petrels, birds never seen near land, displace the gulls. We are an attraction for the quiet, streamlined, shearwaters, who circle and skim the surface across our bow, looking for small fish in the wave we churn up. Petrels skitter about us, half flying, half beating the water with little feet. Portugese fishermen named this bird "Petrillo," or "little Peter," for the apostle who found he could walk on the waters of the stormy sea of Galilee.

Sail changing at night is not a good idea, and before dark we shorten sail with two reefs while switching from the big genoa to the working jib. The breeze continues to strengthen as the light fades, and we set three hour watches for the night hours. Against the chill we bundle up in long underwear, sweaters, wool hats, gloves, and our foul weather suits of yellow vinyl. Somehow, the cold is always your watchmate, and the coffeepot stays within easy reach on the gimballed stove. The person off watch curls up on the leeward bunk (a boat under sail leans or "heels" in one direction) while the helmsman adjusts mentally and physically to the dark hours ahead. Light now is a red glow from the compass and the red and green running lights, reflected on the jib and splintered in fragments by the bow wave. Peeps and pattering of sea birds remind us of their presence, disturbed by our passing. The cabin opening is a black hole, and I *know* Wendy is there, yet there is some uneasiness—I feel very much alone.

Fatigue is another watchmate, aggravated by the need to concentrate on the compass and hold a good course. When I hear stirrings in the cabin and see a flashlight beam, I am both reassured of my shipmate's reality and grateful for relief. As she takes over the helm, I "read the log," checking the distance covered in my watch, and mark our progress on the pencil line. After heating up the coffee for her, I take over the leeward bunk and fall into an unquiet doze. The chuckle and murmur of water along the hull becomes a gabble of voices, much like the confused but animated conversation of a cocktail party. At times, the sense of voices is very real—I even have to get up and look out on deck to confirm the non-existence of others, but all I see is Wendy, her slight form bulky and black in heaving clothing and a faint glow from the compass on her face. Lying on the bunk off watch, she has had the same experience of voices, a mild hallucination from the strangeness and isolation of our surroundings—I suppose.

By 3:00 A.M. the breeze has lightened, and a halo of mist encloses our running lights, promising fog by daybreak. Wendy's tired face is wet with mist droplets on eyebrows, lashes, and cheeks as she comes off watch. There is a fishing boat ahead—we can see mast lights indicating a dragger or seiner, I'm not sure which, but we want to give




A vicious current boils around its base.

the gear towed behind plenty of clearance. A little later his red port light is visible, asserting right of way on a course converging with ours. I watch carefully—the mast lights start to move behind the red light, and then the green starboard light emerges—he is turning and no longer on a collision course.

As dawn breaks, the fishing boat is not in sight, nor anything else since we are in thick fog with slatting sails. We have no choice but to start the clamorous diesel, which adds an element of anxiety since its racket drowns out engine noises and fog horns of other boats. Our course has taken us along the edge of Brown's Bank, a busy Canadian fishing ground, and their vessels are more involved with earning a tough livelihood for the crews than looking out for eccentric yachtsmen who think they're having fun. We do not have radar, which puts heavy demands on a small sailboat's power supply, but we do carry aloft a radar reflector, to make us more visible on the radar screens of the commercial boats.

We are approaching the western shore of Cape Sable and the point where we "turn the corner," so we must get a better idea of our position. Loran, a radio grid system, enables us to locate quite closely our latitude and longitude, and a series of these "fixes" discloses that we have been and are continuing to be sucked closer to the land than our plotted position. This is not entirely surprising; the Fundy currents are powerful far out to sea, and set north into the Bay at nearly twice the velocity of the ebb, giving rise to the local rule that "one flood is worth two ebbs." Further, these waters pour into the Bay around Cape Sable ahead, as well as flood northeast along the New England coast, so there is indeed a tendency to get "sucked" to the north. We alter course to the south, and although we regain our offing, our distance made good "over the bottom" falls sharply as our modest hull speed contests with powerful adverse currents. The energies of these waters are revealed in coils of drifting weed and little whirlpools which form and swirl astern, as if someone had pulled a washbasin plug.

By late afternoon the Canadian weather service forecasts an approaching stormy front with winds over 25 knots, rain, and continued fog.

When we set out on this crossing, we expect to be two nights at sea, but this passage has been more exhausting than usual, and we are depressed at the prospect of dealing with an Atlantic storm as well. Wendy closets herself with the chart, and emerges some time later to suggest that we might make Port Latour, just "around the corner" on Cape Sable, before the storm hits and darkness sets in. I agree that it's worth a shot, although it would be more prudent to stay offshore and grit it out than run for a strange harbor in failing light and deteriorating weather.

Our first mark is the whistle buoy marking Brazil Rock in shoal water about six miles offshore and seven from the harbor entrance. By 5:30 we hear the moan of the whistle, but then it seems to fade. Wendy comments, "I think it's running away from us." The wind ahead of the front has picked up vigorously, and we add diesel power to sail in an effort to squeeze out the maximum speed. The moaning gets closer, and then we see the huge buoy, leaning at a 30 degree angle as a vicious current boils around its base and over the rock, only seven feet below the surface; no danger to us but an unpleasant discovery for the square rigger years ago whose name the rock commemorates. Indeed, the buoy *was* running away from us, and we are thankful to locate this first visible mark since leaving Mt. Desert two days ago.

Darkness is coming on fast now, but our course for the harbor entrance does not have to fight the current, which however is still setting us off at an angle as the longitude readings on the Loran confirm. We adjust course accordingly, but are startled by an explosion of water close alongside, as a blowing whale surfaces. Perhaps he wants to be our pilot! So preoccupied have we been on the grimness of our situation and race against time, that this visitation comes as a welcome diversion, as does the appearance of a very large seabird, which we take to be a gannet. About 8:00 P.M. the entrance whistle buoy appears in the fog, followed half an hour later by a green blur which resolves into a lighted channel buoy, and soon we see the looming lights of the U-shaped docks which enclose the harbor. We pass through the mouth of the U about 9:00 P.M., and after several missed attempts, manage to grapple alongside a big dragger, to which we attach ourselves more securely with fenders and lines. The kerosene heater soon is gaining on the cold, sodden cabin atmosphere, encouraging us to peel off our layers. Did I mention the ice chest? Civilized living returns with ice clinking in a glass of Kentucky's finest; dinner, with plates, on the cabin table and not balanced in our laps, and sleep in our double bag foreward.

We wake up later as rain drums on the cabin roof and squalls flog loose ropes and halyards against masts (not ours). The commotion outside makes our stability and comfort seem oddly unreal—isn't there some act of seamanship we need to perform? But gradually we let go of our concerns and, as there's really nothing to do, we might as well go back to sleep.

--WILLIAM G. SAYRES

# October 28th, Budapest

*While on sabbatical in the fall of 1988, I traveled to Hungary where I spent five weeks with Vilmos and Gyongyi (Gigi) Varga and their three children: Roland, Rita, and Renata. The following account describes one of many memorable experiences on that trip.*

ALTHOUGH HUNGARY'S LAKE BALATON is the largest in Central Europe, fish seem to be neither abundant nor cheap in that landlocked country. When Gigi asks if I would like fish for dinner, I have no idea what an adventure awaits me.

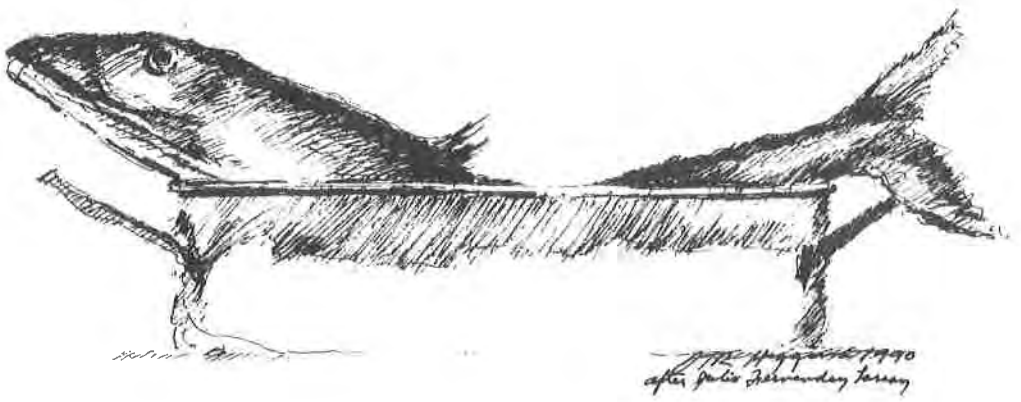
After spending most of the morning dealing with socialist bureaucracies and viewing an exhibition of textile art with a minimalist/conceptual bias (art styles are truly and monotonously international), Vilmos and I stop at a butcher's shop on our way home. As with most markets in Hungary, this one is small, old, dirty, and totally devoid of the obscene superfluity of American supermarkets. To my suburban, middle class American perspective, this environment offers a particularly intriguing ambience. There is the expected clammy aroma of a butcher's shop, of course. The walls do not appear to have been painted since the revolution of 1956, revealing a well-aged patina of blood and grime. All manner of sausages adorn the walls and fill open trays. The chickens are scrawny and unappetizing. (Haven't these people heard of steroids?)

The customer may enter one of two long lines. Vilmos goes to one, I to the other. I reach the head of my line sooner and place an order in Hungarian for two chickens. The butcher does not understand me, so Vilmos leans across and explains. After placing two puny birds behind the counter (they are loosely wrapped in paper), the butcher writes the price on a slip of paper. I am then directed to another line which leads to the cashier. I pay her, and the slip of paper is stamped and returned to me. Then Vilmos directs me back to the head of my original line, where I turn in this voucher to the butcher. He presents me with two dripping chickens.

In the meantime, Vilmos has paid for and secured three carp. These are in a lightweight, untied plastic bag. On the ride back to Budakeszi in the Polski Fiat (the "matchbox" car), two chickens and three fish share my lap. Suddenly, the plastic bag leaps convulsively from my lap and I have to focus all of my energy and attention on preventing the escape of our dinner. "I had no idea the fish were alive!," I exclaim to Vilmos. I don't think he truly appreciates my surprise.

At the flat, the fish go into the bathtub where they entertain the children for the better part of the afternoon. No one seems to show any remorse, however, when we later consume the fish in a delicious soup.

--THOMAS HIGGINS



# 37 Degrees South Latitude

The Southern Cross fades into a Sistine sky
That brightens before the Pacific-born sun;
Pink and orange clouds scud above the Southern ocean,
Washing in from far Antarctica.

The sun climbs over the Ottway Range
Spilling morning onto Warnambool Beach.
A horse and rider race across the sand
Soundless against the dull roar of surf.
Two solitary runners emerge from the dunes
At distant, opposite ends of the beach;
They lope along, pad through the cool tide,
Pass, and move on.

The sun rises higher,
Searching now for the Nallibour Plain.
Green-grey waves break and sparkle
In the new brightness.
A thin breath of warmth collects in the air,
As daybreak is now complete.

We embrace, the new morning and I,
And journey on.

--DOUG DUNLAP

# Ophthalmology, West and East

ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, 6 August 1986, while walking from the Silver Spring Subway Station to my brother's home for dinner, I first experienced what I came to learn were flashes. Sudden bursts of light, similar to flashes of lightning, always seemingly just on the edge of my peripheral range, the initial flashes occurred early in the twenty-minute walk and, being unlike anything I had ever before experienced, were slightly alarming. As a private little fireworks display, they were at the same time amusing and disarming. I continued on my way, noticing occasional flashes and testing first one eye and then the other to discover, apparently, that it was a phenomenon of the left eye. Thus began a long and trying but not painful ordeal.

While walking the next morning, I had flashes again, and began to see floaters as well, especially when re-focusing from curbs to stop lights. I was unable to see an ophthalmalogist until I returned to Maine. His examination on Monday, 11 August, led him to recommend laser therapy Tuesday to repair a small hole. He explained that laser therapy meant bombarding the retina around the hole with several hundred laser beams to produce inflammations that would create scars large enough to close the gap.

With surgery scheduled for 3:30, we arrived at the doctor's office shortly after 3:00. The left eye was dilated with a series of drops, dilated again a few minutes later, and the laser therapy began. I sat on a stool with my chin resting on one brace and my forehead inclined forward to rest more or less comfortably on another brace.

With his right hand, the doctor held a magnifying lens firmly against the left eye. With his left hand he directed the laser beam, looking through the sighting aperture in the laser instrument, and fired the salvoes. In less than half an hour the damage had been repaired. I rested another twenty minutes in the waiting room before donning very dark wrap-around goggles for the ride home. The bombardment hadn't exactly been painful, but the cumulative effect certainly approached pain, especially when combined with the strain on the back of leaning forward and the pressure on the head to keep the left eyeball in firm contact with the lens in the doctor's hand. He prescribed 24 hours of rest, and aspirin if needed.

The next morning, I felt good, having spent the evening and the night in darkness, for the most part, and having slept well. I stayed home, reading and resting, but went to my office on Thursday. On Friday, 15 August, noticing more floaters, I went to the doctor's office where I was assured that the floaters were normal. I returned to his office on Tuesday, 19 August; a few more zaps of the laser strengthened the bond and gave me an opportunity to discuss the wisdom of carrying out my plan of leaving in three weeks for Czechoslovakia on a Fulbright lectureship. The doctor had in the interim made some inquiries and had concluded that ophthalmologists in Czechoslovakia are trained and equipped to deal with retinal tears. He noted that no problems were foreseeable, but that people over fifty were less likely to have responsive vitreous humors, hence any trauma to the retina would more likely produce a tear than in a younger person. He gave me a note explaining the procedure followed on 12 August and prescribing an examination in early October. He also warned against physical exertion for at least a month, ruling out not only work-outs on the Universal but tennis and golf as well.

With his warnings in mind, and mindful too of the arrangements that had been made to go to Czechoslovakia, my wife Mary, son Joshua, and I completed travel plans and caught our flight from Boston's Logan Airport on 8 September. Aside from my worrying about the strain on Mary and Joshua occasioned by the doctor's orders to avoid exertion—hence not grab the heaviest luggage—the trip was unaccompanied by serious problems. We flew to Brussels, picked up a rental car, drove via Luxemburg to spend three days with friends in Munich, and headed for Czechoslovakia, arriving in Brno on 16 September 1986.

## II

ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, 25 March 1987, while we were visiting in Prague, Mary remarked that my left eye was bloodshot, a rare occurence. I replied that it felt tired (as did I, for I had taught three classes in the morning and driven 200 kilome-

ters to Prague in the afternoon, then worked on a paper in the American Library at the Embassy until closing time at six). Fortunately, I had an appointment with an ophthalmologist on Monday, 30 March.

Dr. Jaromila Valova had examined the eye in October and found the scar to be sound, the retina intact, and the vitreous reasonably healthy. She warned that floaters and even an occasional flash might remain a possibility for some time longer. The appointment on 30 March was to have the retina looked at, but was primarily for me to have my eyes checked to see if I needed new glasses, my left eye having felt lazy or tired or both at various times during a fall and winter that was unusually busy and productive in a scholarly way, and because I wanted to experience getting new, socialist glasses.

Early the next morning I saw a small floater in my left eye. Unalarmed yet, I was again thankful for the 30 March appointment. Mid-morning, while typing in a workroom in the rear of the American Library, I saw a few more floaters, but before I could worry too much I received a telephone call from Mary who was at the Polish Consulate arranging for visas to go to Krakow where I was to deliver a paper on 9 April. She had just discovered that she did not have my passport; hence I would have to hurry it over before the Consulate closed for the day. I ran out to the nearest subway station (Mala Strana) and caught a train for Vaclav Namesti, arriving with little time to spare. After obtaining the visas, we crossed the street to the Air France office for information about flights from Salzburg to Aix-en-Provence in May. While sitting there—getting the bad news that Salzburg-Marsailles requires two changes of planes and one of air-lines, and is quite expensive, AND still requires train or bus to Aix—my left eye was flooded with floaters, for all practical purposes rendering the eye sightless.

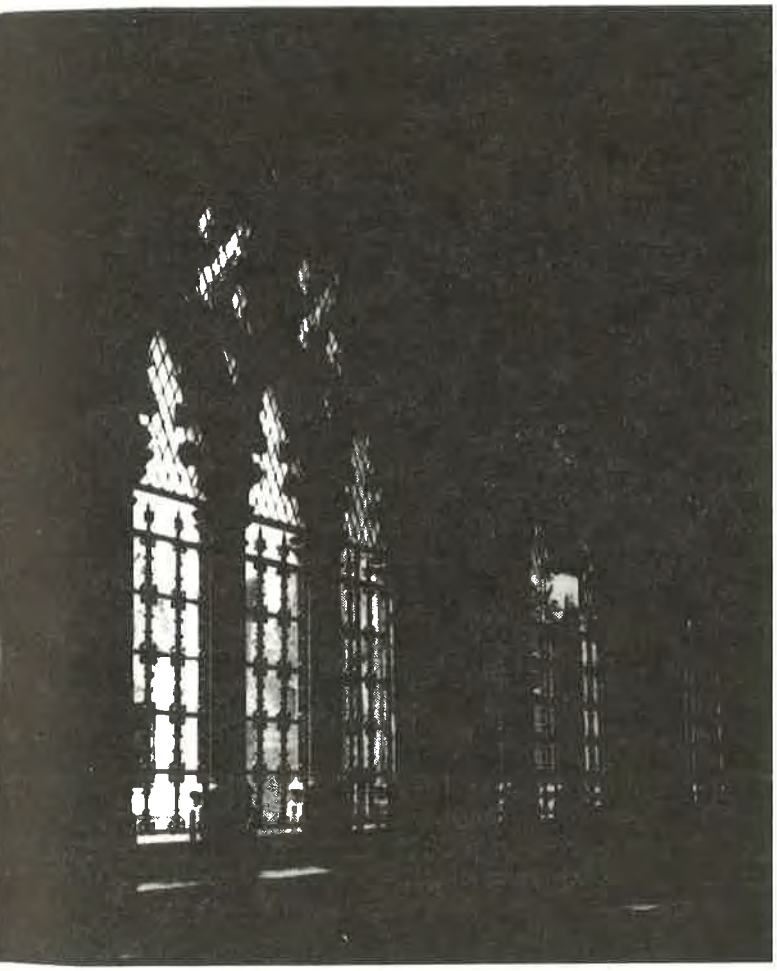
We tracked down our car in the maze of Prague streets, returned to the Embassy to collect papers and odds and ends left there, and headed towards Brno. As there was no change in the eye by evening, and especially as a patch seemed more comfortable than not, and as there was no pain, we fulfilled a dinner obligation made some time earlier. (To talk with a couple who between them had survived nine years in five concentration camps in three countries is too crucial to be missed.)

Friday morning, Dr. Valova agreed to see me when she heard my symptoms, even though she had an impossibly crowded schedule. By the time she examined me in mid-morning, I could see virtually nothing out of my left eye—the wall the chart was on, but not the chart, Dr. Valova's outline, but not the fingers she held up to be counted—and she could see that the left vitreous was totally opaque. She said immediate hospitalization was imperative; not trusting her English nor my Czech, she sent Mary to the Faculty of Arts for a colleague while I was placed on a cot in the examining room.

Dr. Valova called Professor Doctor Otto Riebel, Head of the Ophthalmology Department in the Medical Faculty of the University. She had great difficulty getting through—such is the telephone system—and then was cut off in mid-conversation. By that time a colleague in the Department of English and American Studies had arrived, so Dr. Valova explained the situation to him to be translated. She also gave him a letter to be delivered to Professor Doctor Riebel at the Eye Clinic.

We drove there, arriving just before noon, to begin the process of getting me admitted to the hospital. Although the sign just inside the main entrance seemed to indicate that the Eye Clinic was to the left and up the stairs (a sign we followed, in vain), in fact the Clinic was out the back door and around two other buildings in the inner courtyard of the large Faculty of Medicine hospital complex.

At the door we put cloth socks over our shoes, turned left down to the end of a long hall (and incidentally past Room 8, which would be-



come my home for two weeks), and upstairs to the office of Professor Doctor Riebel. The colleague introduced himself and my wife and me, gave the Professor Doctor the note and chart from Dr. Valova, and explained what he knew of the situation. Professor Doctor Otto Riebel is tall, graying, distinguished, dignified, likable, and formal.

He examined me, ordered hospitalization, and turned me over to Dr. Jan Janula whose four years on an exchange program in Malta give him an easy and graceful command of English. Janula is very tall with dark hair and moustache and an ease of manner engagingly and disarmingly fluid. He moves with the grace of a professional athlete. When (later) he saw my wife writing a note, he said, "You're left-handed." "Yes," she replied. "Do you play tennis?" he asked, with the sure confidence of somebody seeking a mixed doubles partner with just the right attributes.

Dr. Janula took us downstairs to the Clinic's examining rooms, examined my left eye, and began the process of admission, enlisting initially the assistance of the ward nurse and her assistant, and himself typing a special pass that would admit my wife to the ward daily, instead of the usual 2-4 Sunday and 3-5 Wednesday visiting hours.

By two in the afternoon, I was in room eight, with blue hospital pajamas and robe, a snack of bread and white coffee (too late for lunch), and strict orders to stay in bed except to go across the hall to the toilet. For anything else, I was to call a nurse. Dr. Svatopluk Synek, another member of the faculty in the Department of Ophthalmology, came in to examine me and to repeat the importance of flat-on-the-back bed-rest. Shorter than Dr. Janula, with straight blond hair and a quietly handsome and serious manner, his English is careful and thoughtful.

Sometime after three, I was brought another snack of roll and coffee; I assumed the order had been duplicated, but was to learn that a snack at 3:15 or so was the third of four meals served on the ward: breakfast at 8, dinner at 12, and supper at 5 being the others. Breakfast and snack were bread and weak, milky coffee; dinner was usually soup, meat and potatoes, and often canned fruit compote; supper was a one-dish affair, or simply bread and cheese or bread and sausage. Weak and pre-sugared tea was available all day, and provided to bed-bound patients (me included) in a thermos, other patients walking down the hall to a shelf outside the kitchen to pour their own. The food veered between prison-fare dismal and quite good (presumably depending on which chef was on duty in whatever kitchen the food was delivered from), with more good meals than not. As seemed generally true in Brno, soups were good, meat was disappointing. Fresh fruit and vegetables were never served, even though apples were plentiful and oranges not unavailable—in fact, the gifts most often brought to patients were fruit and fruit juices.

The three-person room was as spacious, well-equipped, and cheerful as a room needs to be,

with a high ceiling and a long window over-looking a space largely used by pedestrians going between buildings. Lights out at nine, when the radio owned by one roommate also went off. He, the Young Guy, turned it on at 6:00 A.M. and off at 9:00 P.M., caring only for music—any music—and promptly abandoning any station that began to talk. There being little else to do, both roommates frequently combed their hair, the Young Guy because he was young and dapper, and the Bald Guy because he was bald and dapper (but worked hard at giving some flair to the side hair he had trained to run up and curl in). Neither admitted to speaking any English, which proved not to be entirely true, but they knew less English than I knew Czech. "Dapper" was deduced on the following Monday when the Young Guy left in his tight jeans, loud sweater, and leather jacket, and on Tuesday when the Bald Guy left in thoughtfully color-coordinated layers of brown and beige. Hospital robes and pajamas, which all the men wore, made us appear old and runty. At the other end of the ward, most of the women maintained their individuality by wearing their own robes.

On Saturday morning (28 March) at 6:00 a nurse entered, turned on the light, and said, "*Dobre rano*" (good morning); the roommates arose, went across the hall to the toilet, returned to the room to brush their teeth and shave, and made their beds—all with a practice and precision that quite bewildered me until I learned that the Young Guy had been hospitalized for fourteen weeks, repairing damage caused by an exploding battery (if imperfect communication was even remotely accurate). While the Bald Guy had been there less long, he was the more fastidious, with a nice attention to perfecting his bed, which I quite admired when a few moments later a young nurse entered the room, heaved a sigh, and re-made my bed.

Nurse's training in Czechoslovakia is four years and takes place during an American's high school years; they enter at age fourteen and graduate at age eighteen, normally. Except for the Surgery, I saw only three nurses on the various shifts on the ward who could reasonably have been older than twenty or so. Consequently, the night charge nurse might be so young as nineteen. This being true, I was impressed at their skill, confidence, competence, and that tough but gentle bossiness that seems to characterize good nurses. Still, they were girls, and girlish in many ways, with white caps and white aprons over their blue uniforms, slender and bustling and chirping like nothing so much as Ransom's "Blue Girls." The language barrier (only one nurse claimed, even, to have tried to study English, and she strove mightily) combined with the unusual deference paid to my rank to seem at first to subdue the nurses a bit. (I was almost invariably addressed by the Czech equivalent of "Mister Professor," and was, apparently, beneficiary by association to the respect paid to Professor Doctor Reibel.)

Except for visits from my wife and an officer from the American Embassy in Prague, Saturday was long. On Sunday, I was permitted to take a quick shower, but could not shampoo or shave. The day was enlivened by visiting hours, when I had as guests colleagues from the University (with some of their family members as well); they brought candy and flowers and were in my room improperly. The catch was that I had to remain in my room, and visitors could be seen only in the waiting room; invariably, my visitors seemed to know enough to ignore the rules. The radio played all day Sunday, for a brief five minutes providing, through the indulgence of the Young Guy, news in English from Radio Prague, but most of the time music. Sunday's radio music differed from Saturday's only in relief from Saturday's day-long fascination with "The Beer Barrel Polka," 28 March being the birthday of the composer, a Czech.

Monday, 30 March, opened with energy and bustle. Blood was drawn from my arm at 5:45 by two pert nurses. The Young Guy told me I must shave as the Professor would be in. So between six and seven we tidied ourselves while waves of women cleaned the room. First was a woman who emptied the waste basket, dragging a large plastic bag behind her and announcing "good morning" as she entered the room and "good-by" as she left (as most Czechs do when entering and leaving shops). She was followed by a nurse or two who tidied the beds, followed by the waste-basket emptier who now washed the table and the window sill. Next was a nurse who wiped the top of each individual bed-side cabinet and straightened the two glasses and one green plastic pill tray. She was followed by the cleaning lady who had made two prior appearances, and who now washed the sink (which we had finished using) and the mirror above the sink. Then, shortly before 7:00, a nurse brought in a small but powerful flashlight and our three folders, in a larger folder with the number "8" on the cover. Two of us were by now sitting at the table, with the third in a chair at the foot of his bed. Folders were placed on table or bed nearest each patient. As it takes little time for three people to brush their teeth and shave, most of the time from 6 to 7 was spent

in watching the room's cleaning, and trying to stay out of the way of the women doing the cleaning. One nurse hid my flowers, apparently because the Professor Doctor doesn't like flowers in the rooms; the same caution prevailed on subsequent mornings.

At 7:00 sharp the Professor Doctor entered, followed by his two senior assistants, followed by six or eight junior staff members, followed by the chief ward nurse, followed by two or three other nurses. The Professor Doctor greeted us, we greeted him. That first morning of Rounds, without more than turning on his flashlight he said he wanted to see me and the Bald Guy, exchanged good-byes, and left with his entourage. The Young Guy, it turned out, didn't need to be examined because he was scheduled to go home.

When I was examined, Dr. Synek translated, explaining that the Professor Doctor had found a tear in the retina, near the scar from the laser therapy of 12 August. Then Dr. Synek further examined me as thoroughly as the Professor had and explained that a closer look would be taken on Wednesday, but the regime prescribed on Friday last—total bed rest, flat on the back as much as possible (except to go, carefully, across the hall to the toilet), plus injections to accelerate the absorption of the floaters—would continue for Monday and Tuesday. Then if on Wednesday the diagnosis was confirmed, "prophylactic therapy" would take place on Thursday. "Prophylactic therapy" proved, on questioning, to be cryopexis, a surgical procedure centering around freezing the retina into inflammations large enough to produce scars to close the tear. A local anesthetic would be injected, the eyelid raised, the sclera cut, and the retina frozen and sewn. When Dr. Janula examined me a bit later, he explained again the procedure, stressed total bed rest, and expressed understanding of my desire to avoid surgery.

Midmorning, a very tall nurse came in, handed me a heavy parka, and announced that she would take me next door to be X-rayed. When I protested—or at least tried to discover the reason for a chest X-ray—the nurse left, to return with the head nurse. Communication failing again, they left and returned with Dr. Simone Winklerova (beautiful, black-haired, from Ostrava, conversant in English), who explained that the chests of all surgical patients are X-rayed as part of the procedure for determining general fitness for surgery. After consulting further with Dr. Janula (who asked me why I was afraid to be X-rayed), all of us agreed the X-ray would be taken even though a final decision on cryopexy had not been made.

The X-ray department, in an adjoining building, was fast and efficient; the fresh air I breathed while crossing and re-crossing the street was welcome even though walking back and forth seemed to undermine the importance of immobile bed-rest.

When I explained all this to Mary later in the day, we agreed that she would consult the ophthalmologist in Maine and that I would ask Profes-

sor Reibel about the possibility of laser surgery instead of cryopexis. To us the advantages of the laser therapy were that it seemed more advanced, it involved considerably less trauma, and it didn't (in America, at least) require hospitalization. At that moment we were prepared to go to Prague (200 kilometers), Bratislava (138), or Vienna (127) should laser therapy be unavailable in Brno. (On Friday, part of the discussion about rushing me to the hospital had touched on the risks of transporting me, in my delicate condition, to Vienna.) Of course, just driving to another city without specific appointments was rejected as too utterly irresponsible.

After some delay, and through an intermediary, my wife learned from our ophthalmologist in Maine that the differences between laser therapy and cryopexis were not great enough to be the deciding factors in choosing a method of treatment. When I discussed laser therapy with Professor Reibel on Tuesday (31 March), I learned that laser therapy was not available at that hospital, that it might be available elsewhere in Brno, but that the opacity in the vitreous was too great to permit laser therapy (a theory earlier suggested to my wife by the ophthalmologist in Maine). He advised against laser therapy, and against transporting me, and again recommended cryopexis.

After the examination, the tall nurse appeared again with a parka and announced that she would take me for further examinations. I followed along, this time to one building for an EKG and to another to be examined by a Doctor of Internal Medicine, who seemed mildly bemused. The tall nurse used my exotic origin as excuse to propel me to the head of the Internist's line. (She was also the nurse who collected my clothing on 27 March and returned it on 10 April.)

When Professor Reibel examined me on Wednesday, 1 April 1987, he confirmed his diagnosis and reiterated his recommendation. In the meantime, my wife had consulted several people within and outside the medical profession, and we had pretty much decided to proceed with cryopexis. I so informed Professor Reibel on Wednesday, and surgery was scheduled for 8:00, Thursday morning, 2 April. Dr. Synek repeated the examination of the retina later Wednesday morning; he told me that there was a small, easily repaired tear. I was told not to eat, drink, or smoke after midnight, the steps of the operation were described again, and I was given a sedative at 9:00 P.M.

The routine early Thursday morning was unchanged, except both original roommates had been replaced by two others, older, awaiting surgery. The Tall Guy had learned late Wednesday that a stomach ailment would delay surgery for several weeks, so he was being sent home, and the Big Guy had learned on Wednesday that surgery he had expected on Thursday was being delayed to the following Monday. I brushed my teeth and shaved (the latter for the last time until the following Tuesday) and waited.

Shortly after 8:00 I was taken down the hall to the operating theater, where my pajama top and slippers were removed and I was placed on the table. I was given an injection in the left hip, the I.V. was attached to my right wrist, and Professor


Reibel came into view and announced in his clearest English yet that he would inject a local anesthetic under the left eye. He did and there was no pain, leading me to suspect that the earlier injection or the I.V. (which the nurse said contained breakfast) continued the sedative effect begun at 9 the previous evening. I was aware of a certain amount of probing during the operation (and had an over-powering sensation of beauty when two soft fingers lingered momentarily in my right hand), but there was no pain, nor any memorable awareness of the operation.

At 10:30, according to later timing by Mary, I awoke to a conversation between the head nurse and one of my colleagues, the gist of which was that I was to lie flat on my back—no rolling or turning—all day. To that end, I was given another injection (this in the right hip) and had no awareness of time until 5:20 that afternoon. When Mary had arrived at 9:20, I was already in the room, so the time in the operating room was one hour at most. By the time I awoke Thursday afternoon, I hadn't eaten for 24 hours; although thirsty, I was not hungry. Nor was I sleepy, as I had had a long sedated sleep the night before and had slept all

day. I spent a long sleepless night trying to get comfortable without turning or rolling, and trying to stop the itching in my left eye without touching my left eye.

By mid-afternoon on Friday, I felt fine, with only the slightest pain, and that usually brought on by looking up (hitting the sutures) or by trying to move my head too quickly. I was sure I would be home by Monday. However, I learned on Friday that stitches are usually not removed until 5-7 days after surgery and that I certainly could not be sent home with stitches in my eye. Further, no serious examination of the eye would make sense before Monday.

On Saturday and Sunday (April 4 and 5) the more relaxed regime returned (no processional Rounds); Dr. Vaclav Hrachovina's limited English facilitated giving directions as he re-dressed the eye. I was permitted to bath, but not to shave. The nurse who was studying English tried to practice a bit; she and I discovered a mutual friend or two, she talked about her family, and we tried to discuss Updike's *The Centaur*, one of three or four books I was reading or re-reading.

On Sunday evening, Dr. Janula returned from a meeting in Presov in eastern Slovkia near the Russian border, and from the High Tatras, where his hopes of a day of skiing had been dashed by the cable cars' being rendered inoperable by high winds. He examined my eye and found some cloudiness (opacity) that I had told myself wasn't there in the morning (but in fact I had had so little time to see while Dr. Hrachovina was re-dressing the eye that I couldn't really say how clear the eye was). When I questioned Dr. Janula about a release date, he guessed Monday, 13 April, and seemed surprised that Friday, 10 April, had been mentioned as a possibility. He also said that whatever speculation anybody else might have, Professor Reibel would make the decision.

On Monday morning, 6 April, the nurses and I were unusually efficient, with toileting completed, and bed re-made by 6:10. I had slept soundly from 8 to midnight, then lay awake for 2 or 3 hours, then for the third time in a week dreamed of playing golf. The examination during Rounds was as cursory as ever, but Dr. Synek took a quite thorough look at the eye before dressing it. He said the Professor would examine me on Wednesday, the stitches would be removed on Wednesday or Thursday, and that I could probably go home on Friday or Monday. One of my colleagues brought home-grown apples during her visit in the morning, and translated for the New Guy who had moved into the room. He's from southern Moravia, in for cataract removal, doesn't know when his surgery will take place, is always going across the hall for a cigarette, and is nervous. In late afternoon, an American colleague from another Czechoslovak university dropped in to say hello before giving a public lecture that evening.

Tuesday, 7 April, was eventful. During rounds after the Professor Doctor examined me, and while Dr. Janula was cleaning and replacing the dressing, the Professor and staff (having ignored the Big Guy) spent several minutes discussing the New Guy. Dr. Janula said I could shave and that he would examine the eye more thoroughly after breakfast. He did, shortly before 9, accompanied by two students from Cyprus who were studying with him for the week. One spoke no Czech, so Dr. Janula addressed him in English, but the other wanted to improve his Czech, so Dr. Janula addressed him in Czech. The pattern this set meant that Dr. Janula's instructions to me might come at any moment in English ("look up") or Czech ("*nahore*"). He reported that the eye looked better, but that more bed rest was required.

After having expected surgery the previous Thursday (delayed during an examination which apparently revealed that he somehow drank beer during visiting hours), the Big Guy learned on Sunday evening that his operation would be on


Tuesday. He sat and fretted all of Tuesday morning—no food or drink—and wasn't wheeled off to surgery until 12:30 Tuesday afternoon. He didn't return for well over an hour—perhaps nearer two hours—with both eyes bandaged, with a head band over the dressings, and with a bandage on his left foot and ankle. It wasn't until later that I learned that a strip of sinew was transplanted from his ankle to his right eye. He was out for the rest of the day, and had a difficult, restless night.

After eating a heavy dinner of goulash and knedlicky (the delightful but weighty Czech bread

dumplings) and to use properly the oranges and apples I had received as gifts on Sunday and Monday, I decided to eat as little of the starchy foods as possible, and to finish breakfast with an orange and dinner and supper with apples.

On Wednesday, 8 April, the radio covered in minute detail the visit of Comrade Gorbachev to Prague, and my stitches were removed by Dr. Simone Winklerova. She said Friday release was a possibility, but that the Professor would decide on Thursday. I met Dr. Synek in the hall; he said he would examine me on Thursday, after which the Professor would decide about a release date, and he also said Wednesday should be for me a day of "relative calm," as it was the first day without stitches and without eye patch, but that I need not be bed-bound.

The New Guy returned from surgery in less than an hour, with one eye patch, and slept most of the day. The Big Guy was quite restless, and thirsty, all morning.

Late Wednesday afternoon, Dr. Janula visited and said I should ask the Professor during Rounds about going home. On Thursday, 9 April, exactly a week after surgery, the Professor raised the issue of my release date before I or anybody else could do so, leading me to suspect that Dr. Synek and Dr. Winklerova and possibly Dr. Janula (although he seemed least to favor Friday over Monday as a release date), might have intereceded in my behalf. After asking me how I felt, and conferring with Dr. Synek, the Professor said, *"Patek"* (Friday). Dr. Synek then told me I could go home on Friday, Dr. Winklerova smiled, and Dr. Janula signed thumbs up as the entourage followed the Professor's good-by out the door.

Late that afternoon when Dr. Winklerova saw me in the hall and asked how I felt, and I admitted to a slight headache, she advised against reading and writing—rather to give the eyes a good rest. A bit later Dr. Janula examined my eye and found, as had Dr. Winklerova on Wednesday, that I could read the next-to-bottom line on the eye chart, hence that vision in the left eye was essentially normal. Dr. Janula was concerned, however, that the floater was still so large and so largely unchanged in form, and that there was still more opacity in the vitreous than he wanted to see. He recommended against a trip to Prague planned for the following Thursday, and suggested that I would probably have an appointment at the Eye Clinic on the following Friday, and that the interim should be spent as quietly as possible.

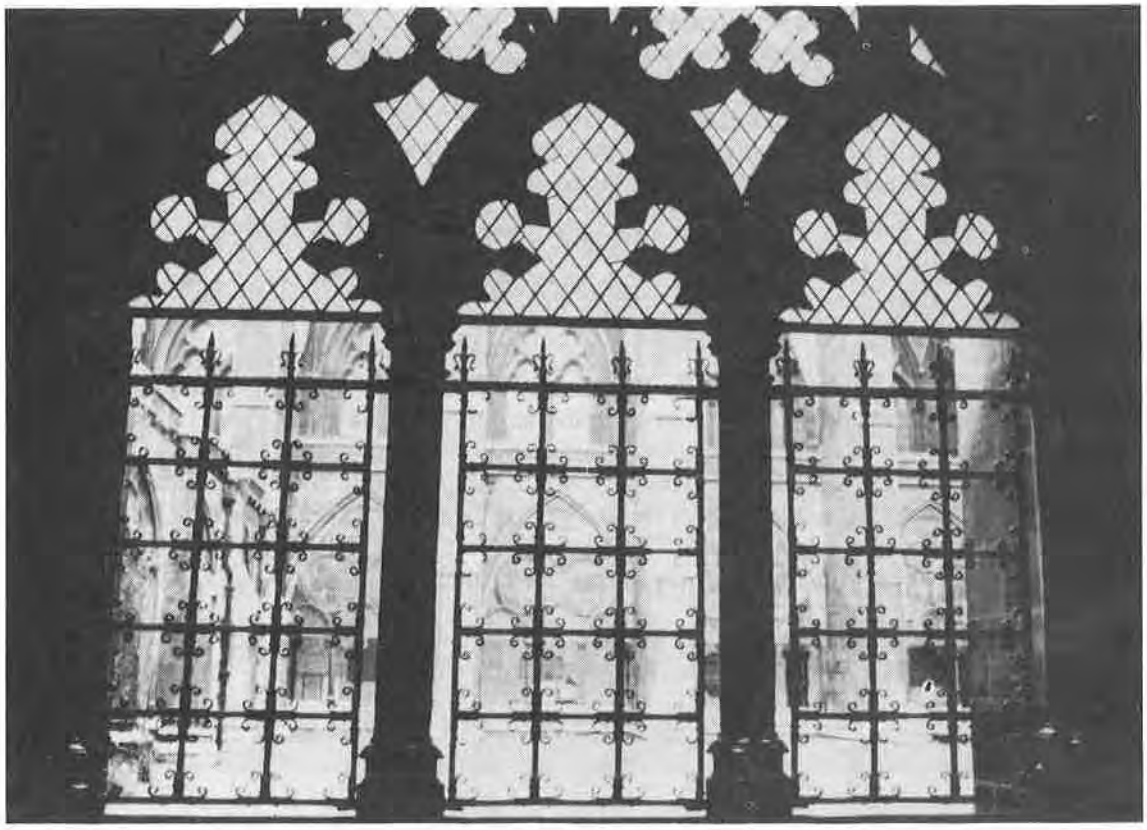
The night of 9 April was a restless one in Room 8. I was still awake just before midnight when I noticed the Big Guy apparently groping at a picture on the wall. He had pulled the plug on the nurse's call system from its socket and was trying to put it back, but was a foot or so too high in his efforts. I took over for him, but could not, in the dark, insert the plug. When I turned on the night light I discovered that the prongs of the plug had been badly bent, presumably by the wrenching motion of disconnecting the plug, probably as the Big Guy turned in his sleep. Worried about breaking the plug by bending the prongs, I nonetheless tried and succeeded in inserting the plug into the socket. The Big Guy then called the nurse for a drink of the ubiquitous weak tea—two glassfuls in fact. Just as the room was settling down after the nurse's departure, the New Guy got out of bed very quietly and cautiously and went across the hall to smoke a prohibited cigarette in the toilet. (There is a smoking room next to the toilet, used by patients permitted to smoke, thus leaving the toilet to those patients not permitted to smoke.)

The anonymous camaraderie of the similarily afflicted prevailed as the tone of the relationships in the room. The patients conversed politely without using names—referring to each other as the equivalent of "Mister," which sounds somewhat less formal in Czech than in English. They also helped each other—easily and without apparent embarrassment emptying urine bottles and otherwise stepping in when it was easier not to summon a nurse.

On Friday, 10 April 1987, Dr. Winklerova sent me home with three bottles of eye drops, a note to my employer excusing me from work for a week, instructions about the bill ($25 per day plus drugs, covered by all sorts of insurance), instructions for making an appointment with Dr. Janula on the following Thursday, and orders to stay home, in bed most of the time, and not to exert myself or bend over.

I HAD MISSED a workshop for high school English teachers in Austria at which I was scheduled to make five presentations and my wife one, and another conference in Poland at which I was to have read a paper. I had also missed two weeks of classes and was home convalescing, hence missing a third, and then a fourth, week of classes. What had been a simple half-hour procedure in Maine was treated more or less as major surgery, incapacitating me for four weeks in Czechoslovakia.

--ALLEN FLINT



# Travelling is Hard

Clear wine in golden goblets, ten thousand cash a cup,
And costly delicacies on jade platters.
Yet I spurn drinking and toss away my chopsticks,
Sword in hand, restless, I wonder what to do.
I want to cross the Yellow River, but it's ice-bound;
I want to climb the Taihing Mountains, but they are snow-covered.
So idly I fish by a limpid stream,
Dreaming of sailing toward the sun.
Travelling is hard! Travelling is hard!
So many crossroads; which to choose?
One day I'll skim the waves, blown by the wind,
With sails hoisted high, across the vast ocean.

--LI BAI
(*trans. by Yiang Xianyi and Gladys Yang*)

*LI BAI (701-762), also known in the West as Li Po, is one of the greatest of Chinese poets. The translation above appears on page 23 of a collection entitled* Poetry and Prose of Tang and Song, *published in 1984 in Beijing by Chinese Literature.*

*The calligraphy on the facing page, drawn by Cai Zunan, is the poem in its original form. The three large characters on the far right are the title. Just below them are the two characters of Li Bai's name. The two vertical columns of characters on the left essentially mean "Done in Farmington, Maine, by Cai Zunan", followed by the date.*

# 行路難

李白

金樽清酒斗十千，玉盤珍饈值萬錢。
停杯投箸不能食，拔劍四顧心茫然。
欲渡黃河冰塞川，將登太行雪暗天。
閒來垂釣坐溪上，忽復乘舟夢日邊。
行路難！行路難！多岐路，今安在？
長風破浪會有時，直挂雲帆濟滄海。

祖南書于江明板
一九八〇年四月四日


Kirby Squibb's
YUKON QUE

# Alaskan Mushing

THE PLANE DESCENDED into the valley. The sun was still high in the sky even though it was almost midnight. Purple and grey shadows crept along the hillsides. It was late and my body thought it ought to have been dark. My excitement began to build as we continued the descent. I had not seen my sister for five years, and not in her current home in Two Rivers, Alaska. Neither had I been this far north for about eleven years. Bud had been away as long as I, and Ben, our son, had never seen the north. Ben was asleep, having succumbed to the eighteen-hour day that began in Maine at 5:00 A.M. I always admired his ability to sleep anywhere and under any conditions. He continued to sleep through the bump of the landing.

Finding it impossible to awaken Ben, we picked him up and headed out of the plane. Would she be there? She was, among the waiting passengers, blond hair flowing wildly around her face, flashing green-blue eyes, tee shirt and faded bluejeans, smiling with arms outstretched. We hugged.

"It's about time. Where have you been?" she asked impatiently. My sense of time was warped by the sun. "Are we late?," I asked vaguely. As we waited for the bags her words to me rang out in the crowds, "You should see the crowds in the airport for the Quest. There are hundreds of spectators. Let's go. I can't wait to show you guys the dogs." After the trip, it occurred to me that these early words were significant. I should have known.

Bouncing along through Fairbanks in her dilapidated truck, we laughed about how this vehicle was newer than her usual. She stated matter-of-factly, "It burns oil some but carries the dog boxes and gets me through. Food?" We swung into MacDonalds and Bud and I looked at each other in amazement--Fairbanks was modernized. Laughing our way through the drive-through, either because of lack of sleep or Amy's infectious silliness or both, we emerged loaded with the entire MacDonald's menu. We set out, still laughing, to Two Rivers, some 26 miles northeast of Fairbanks.

The scenery started to seem familiar, the flatness of the land in Fairbanks and the hills and mountains in the distance. We were heading out along the Chena River to the hills. I smiled at the scrawny trees kept small by the harsh climate. They looked like baby Christmas trees although some were really quite old. Sitting on strange squishy ground called permafrost, trees break up the flatness. Although small compared to the trees in Maine, they seem mightier when you come down from the tundra. It was about 1:00 A.M. now and deep shadows covered the hills. The midnight sun is strange if you are not used to it. I never can tell if my eyes are tired or a haze persists all night.

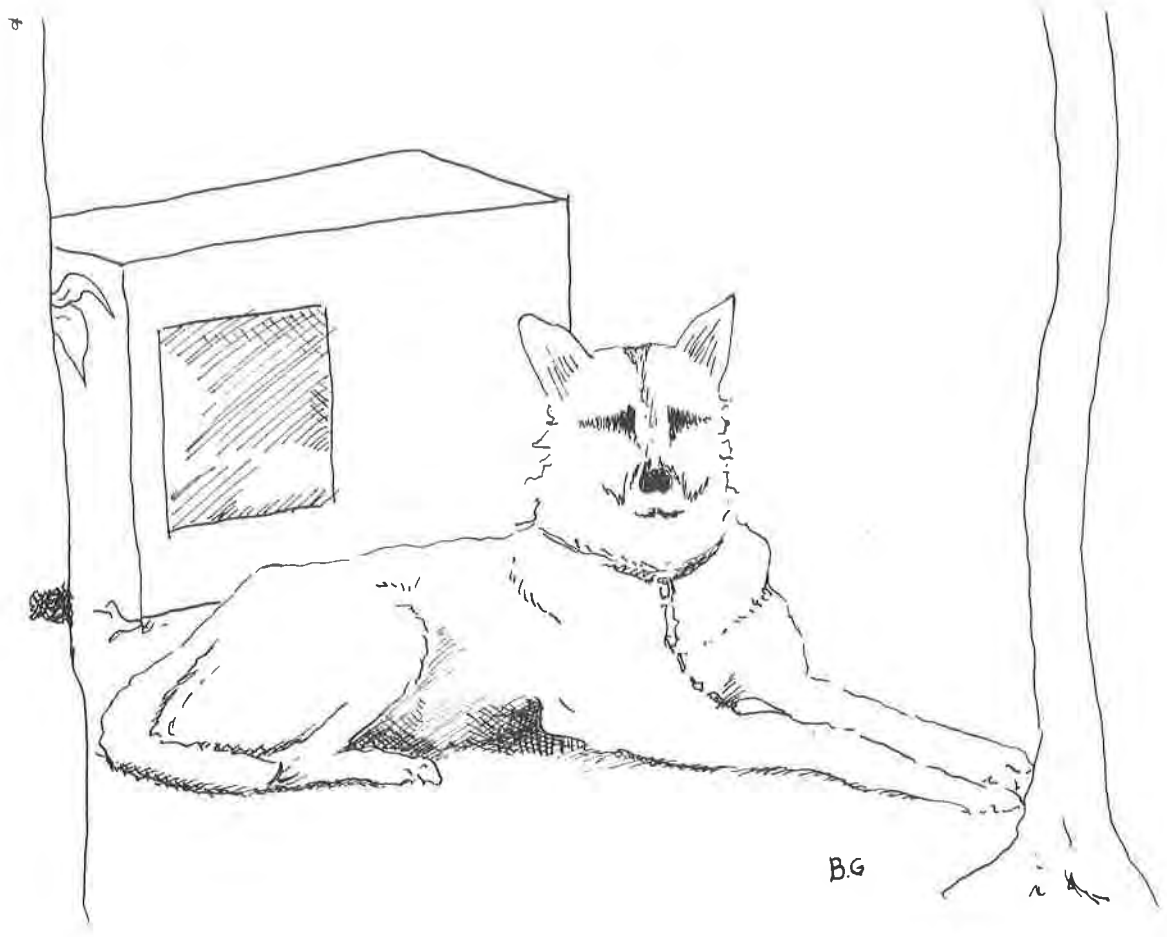
From 11:00 P.M. to early morning there is twilight. The light from the midnight sun spreads from the north to Fairbanks. At the Arctic Circle, some 100 miles north, the sun is in the sky all night. Here, it sets behind the mountains but still provides light throughout the night.

The road was asphalt, much to my surprise. I expected dirt roads as soon as I got out of town, but there had been some improvements. We bumped along in the truck over frost heaves.

"The Quest follows the Chena into Fairbanks over there," Amy pointed out. Her truck started to travel into the other lane as she excitedly continued, "That's the big one. Eagle summit. Mushers get caught in storms there all of the time. I did. Stuck for two, three days. I'm going to show you guys all around." She jerked the wheel back to the center of the road. "I live right near the trail. You'll love it."

About one hour from Fairbanks, we pulled off the road at Two Rivers. I was surprised to find new kinds of trees, aspen and birch. The leaves turned white in the early morning wind. "Can we drive to your house?," I asked. I remembered crossing permafrost for miles to her summer camp in the wilderness. Three miles of squishy bog carrying a sleepy six-year-old did not appeal to me. "No problem," she replied. "I'll drop you off at the door."

It was about 2:00 A.M. and still light. I saw a small house in a grove of aspen and birch. One good thing about the midnight sun is that you can make out your surroundings at night and do not have to wait until daylight to explore. Ben, however, had fallen asleep again and could care less about where he was. We left him in the truck and stretched. The ground was hard and dry; not the




soggy permafrost I expected.

"Hey guys," she yelled softly to the dogs. I heard a soft rustling in the bushes behind the house. A rattle of chain against wood followed. "Let's not disturb them until morning," she said. I nodded numbly and followed her inside.

We hung a blanket across the window to block the light. It covered most of the glass, leaving a triangle of light at the top. The result was a grey room with a pale shaft of light running accross it. I dumped my bag in a back room filled with clothing piled six feet high and crawled into my sleeping bag on the floor. Amy disappeared up a ladder to a small loft rattling off the dogs' names. "Hungry is the lead dog, Orchid and Daisey are the girls, Bugs, BJ," she yawned, "then there's..."

The next thing I knew it was lighter. Ben was up and climbing the ladder to see Amy. I heard a thud as his body hit the covers and she growled, then laughed. I wanted coffee. Remembering that Amy lives as though she is camping in the Antarctic, I began to improvise. I was delighted to find a stove with fuel and made a coffee filter out of paper towels. I boiled water in an old pot and poured it through the towels. I found three mugs--two of which were Quest mugs--and took one to Amy and one to Bud. Bud turned over and said, "I remember that sun now. I knew there was something about it I hate. It's always there and you can't sleep."

Amy took two sips and was out the door, saying, "Come on, let's meet them." I didn't

expect them to look quite the way they did. I knew sled dogs were half-wolf, half-Alaskan Husky, Siberian, Malmute or large dog, and they were. They had a lean look and were different hues of black, brown, and white with bluish eyes. Those eyes seemed so distant as you stared into them. I had seen the small plywood boxes they lived in and the short chains that attached them to the boxes. What was unexpected were the holes in the brown dirt. Smooth, shallow, bowl-like holes; a few were deep. It was difficult to avoid the holes, they were everywhere.

"Do the holes keep them cool?," I asked naively.

"No, they're bored in summer," replied Amy. "We all are. I wish it would get cold. When it's below 40 degrees, we can start the training. That's about eight weeks, mid-August. They dig holes, I sleep and eat." She talked as she mixed a bucket of food.

Feeding and watering thirteen dogs is a complicated task even in summer. The food must be mixed and hauled to each dog in a bucket, then ladled into the bowls. There is an order to who is fed first so that the yard maintains some sense of calm. She checked our sneakers for cleanliness before we walked in the yard. Sneakers cannot go into other yards where diseases can be picked up and transported back to her dogs. We listened carefully to her instructions, patted each dog and became acquainted. I was amazed by her sense of purpose as she walked among them, conversing seriously with each as she checked for tangled chains, foot problems or anything unusual.

Suddenly dogs began barking from both sides and I realized there were other yards close by. Amy commented that both her neighbors were occasional mushers who never fed their dogs on a regular schedule. The dogs were constantly barking and generally bad-mannered. "You have to love them and treat them like family," she said wisely. Her yard was calm and reflected her attitude. Being in a valley of hundreds of dogs was fascinating. There was a steady chorus of barking at all times.

We learned a lot about the Quest during the course of the day. It was obvious Amy loved the race. She lived and breathed it. The Yukon Quest is named after the old-time "Highway of the North," the Yukon River. The trail crosses some of the most sparsely populated and undeveloped country in North America. The 1000-mile trek takes between eleven and fourteen days, depending upon the weather. Teams cross diverse and challenging terrain, take a thirty-six hour mandatory layover in Dawson City, travel 250 miles along the frozen Yukon River, and follow the longest unguarded international border in the world. Strict rules ensure that the race is challenging. Mushers and their dog teams must depend upon each other for survival. Food and supplies are packed ahead of time and airlifted to the seven checkpoints along the trail. Support teams are required for each team, yet helpers or handlers can only help with the dogs at Dawson City. The musher must do everything by herself the majority of the race. Each dog team must have at least six dogs at the finish. Amy provided a steady stream of information about the trials of the race.

The next day we climbed a small mountain nearby. As we swatted swarms of mosquitos, Amy talked constantly. "The top should give us a good view of Eagle summit—it's the worst part of the Quest." I nodded as I squashed at least five bugs against my face. All the way to the top Ben complained about bugs while Amy analyzed nearby hills for approaches and descents.

"How do you train?" I asked, as we sat on top. Bud looked at me as though to say, "Don't start her again."

"Well," she began, "you start in two hour stretches and gradually work up to six or eight hours on and two or four hours off around the clock. My friend Carla helped me. We don't get any sleep--just run dogs and fix equipment and feed on and off all day. It's dark anyway at that time of year, so you don't know you're missing the day or night."

She continued, "There's Eagle summit. I'll take the mountain from that direction. See how steep it is?"

Eagle looks like the largest mountain around. The thought of running up any mountain after a dog sled in snow was pretty overwhelming. It struck me that the mushers run most of the 1000 miles; they do not sit in sleds. Sometimes pushing the sled, sometimes running along, they coax the dogs up the mountains. Then they descend, at times hanging on for dear life or running along beside the dogs as they go down. Sled dog races are a challenge even for the experienced mountain climber.

On the way down, Amy added, "You know, I fell in the Yukon River two days out. There was open ice and two of my dogs went in. I went to pull them out and slipped in with the sled turning over on top of me. I jumped out somehow and started a fire. My suit was frozen, it was below

zero. Somehow I got out of my stiff clothes and into my spares. I warmed up a little and then headed out. I never really warmed up until some two days later in Dawson—an extra hot bath did it." (Everyone else who fell in scratched—not Amy).

The days became a blur of climbing, and visiting. One day, we hiked to the Chena River. Amy pointed out the practice trails and places to avoid on the river. The Chena flows lazily with lots of switchbacks. It looks like a corkcrew from the air. Ben and I, now accustomed to the heat, swam in the icy waters to cool off. It was numbing, even to Mainers. Amy slept in the sun.

One day we visited Leroy Shank, one of the founders of the Yukon Quest. His house sits down on an incline surrounded by dog boxes. I counted about twenty dogs on chains next to the boxes. One dog ran round a pole constantly. Leroy smiled and said that she was always racing and did not know how to relax. We sat at his kitchen table surrounded by trophies he had won. The Iditerod, the Quest, the Cold Spring, too many to name.

Another day we visited the dog mushing museum. Sleds and equipment of the winners of the 1989 Quest and the Iditerod were on display. As we admired Jeff King's sled (1989 winner of the Quest), Ben asked, "Why does he have a seat?" A friendly staffer came over to explain that Jeff was the only musher to have one: "He prefers sitting to standing." It seemed like a good idea to me.

"My aunt is a musher," said Ben.

The staffer looked interested and asked his aunt's name.

"I call her Tecou but others call her Amy," he said.

"Amy Squibb?," she asked. "We all know Amy. She's great."

Another staff person appeared out of nowhere and asked, "Is Amy here?"

"In the car, asleep," said Ben.

"I'd like to ask her opinion about these dogs in the back."

"I'll get her," Ben offered, eager to show off his aunt. A few minutes later, a sleepy, begruntled Amy was being pulled inside. She warmed right up to the occasion and immediately began conversing with the two museum people. They examined the puppies' legs and concluded they would be good for short sprints. More conversation about the races for 1990 and we were off.

The ten days were suddenly over. Before we knew it, Amy was dropping us off at the airport. It was almost midnight. She stood solemnly by the truck and her last words rang in my ears, "You really will come for the Quest?" I said yes and we headed home.

I called her regularly during the fall. Training began late after a warm August. Unfortunately, the three new dogs from Jeff King's yard did not fit into the team. They lay down in harness and tried to remove their booties when they were supposed to run. Amy was well aware of the consequences of this misbehavior. With a small kennel, she needed every dog to perform at peak levels. She could not replace dogs who did not fit as large


kennels could. Four-time Iditerod champion Susan Butcher has a kennel of over one hundred to pick from; Amy has sixteen. Amy has to use all of them, assuming a few might not pass the vetenarian check or be sick at the start. In despair, she called on Christmas Eve to say she would probably pull out of the Quest and do mid-distance in 1990. (Mid-distance races can be up to 500 miles and still pose a considerable challenge.)

Her depression lasted a good month. But then a musher left the area and she inherited his team of sixteen. She is ecstatic again and planning for 1991. The other night she remarked, "You know, I've been thinking. When you come this summer, let's stake out a new approach to Eagle summit. You up for it?"

How could I say no?

--BETSY SQUIBB

*to my son Olan*

# Upon Visiting London

Ever the organizer,
I planned our London trip with care:

The glitter and grandeur of St. Paul's
and the haunting vision of John Donne
in his wafting robes,
The vaulted spines of Westminster Abbey
and the memory of
Elizabeth and Mary and Edward
and Chaucer and the Poets,
The Tower of London
where the Little Princes were killed
and the chapel was a graveyard
but the guide made us laugh,
Dickens' house
because you were reading *Oliver Twist,*
(Can a poor person afford to be good?)
and *Return to the Forbidden Planet*
(loud rock 'n roll, flashy sets),
Tandoori Indian food, scones for breakfast.
All this you liked,
sometimes to my surprise.

But you pronounced:

The sung speeches in *Miss Saigon*
too ridiculous.
The Museum of the Moving Image
too crowded
(You stood
like a patient and exasperated foot soldier
waiting for us to finish).
The Tate Gallery
too tiring
(Anyone
could have painted those Mondrians.
The all-black square
confirmed your worst suspicions
about modern art).

In the British Museum
the Rosetta Stone and Elgin Marbles and
Magna Carta
had some appeal.
But your favorite discovery
was an ancient Egyptian shrewmouse
hunched
small
absurdly long-nosed
in a remote case
with figures of jackals
whose bright alertness
reminded you of your foolish dog
and cats
whose erect self-confidence
made you think of Nan at home
and wonder if we should pierce *her* ears
and insert large hoops
so she could be smug and pretty
like her Egyptian sisters.

For once, I didn't read the information aloud
and try to Teach the Significance of remote
deities.
We laughed at the silly pets,
leaping back the millenia
to feel that our forebears
loved those animals
as we love ours.

We went back the next day
to visit the shrewmouse.
An unscheduled stop.

--VALERIE HUEBNER

# CONTRIBUTORS

MAGGY ANDERSON, Professor of Mathematics Education, is also an active member of Upcountry Artists and the Maine Audubon Society.

CAI ZUNAN has taught Chinese at UMF for two years, and his wife, LIU QIUXIA, is taking art courses here. They are both trained in Engineering, which they teach in Beijing.

DOUG DUNLAP is an Associate Professor of Rehabilitation. He enjoys writing about wilderness, and once was overheard saying "A word is worth a thousand pictures."

ALLEN FLINT, Professor of English, was in Czechoslovakia on a Fulbright during the 1986-87 academic year. This summer, he will be at Dartmouth for eight weeks on an NEH grant.

DANIEL GUNN is an Associate Professor of English. His essays have appeared in *Georgia Review, Iowa Review, James Joyce Quarterly,* and other periodicals. While on sabbatical last year, he lived for six months in Oxford, where he did research for a book on the ideology of moral rhetoric in six English works.

THOMAS HIGGINS, Professor of Art, will return to Hungary in August to attend an international meeting of artists. An article about him is appearing in the May issue of *American Artist,* and he will have a one-man show at Gallery 68 in Belfast this summer.

VALERIE HUEBNER has taught writing for the Program of Basic Studies and the Department of Language and Literature. She is currently Assistant to the President.

WILLIAM G. SAYRES is a part-time teacher of English composition. He received his M.A. from the University of Maine and is a doctoral student in English literature at the University of New Hampshire. His poetry and prose have appeared in various publications.

MARILYN SHEA, Professor of Psychology, was born in a suburb of Chicago, has not died yet, and in between expects to continue taking photographs. Her photos in this issue were taken in England.

BETSY SQUIBB, Professor of Early Childhood Education, goes to Alaska frequently to visit relatives, but never in winter.

PAULA WIDMER, an Instuctor in the Visual and Performing Arts Department, is currently editor of the new UMF catalog. Her essay on Colombia, in slightly different form, was originally published in *The Morning Sentinel.*