

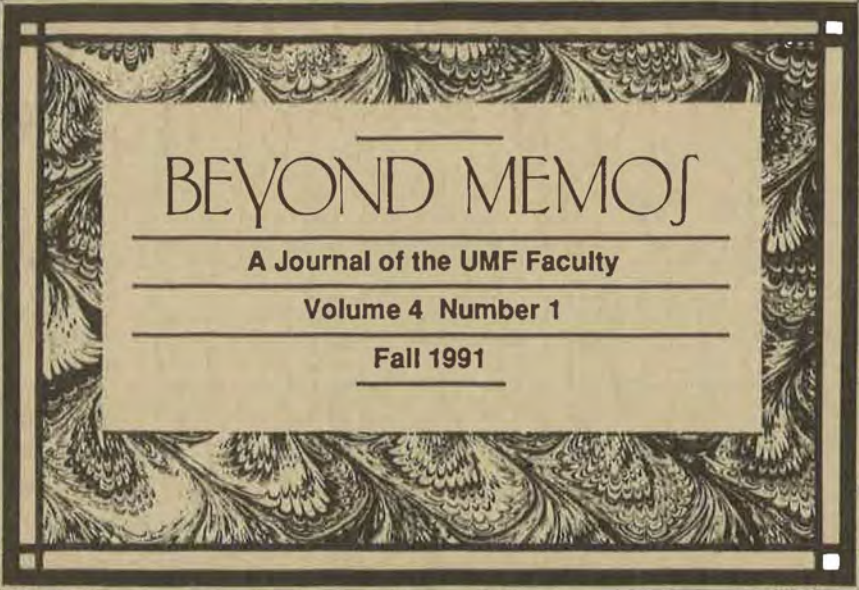
Fall 1991

Beyond Memos: A Journal of the UMF Faculty, Volume 4, Number 1 , Fall 1991

University of Maine at Farmington

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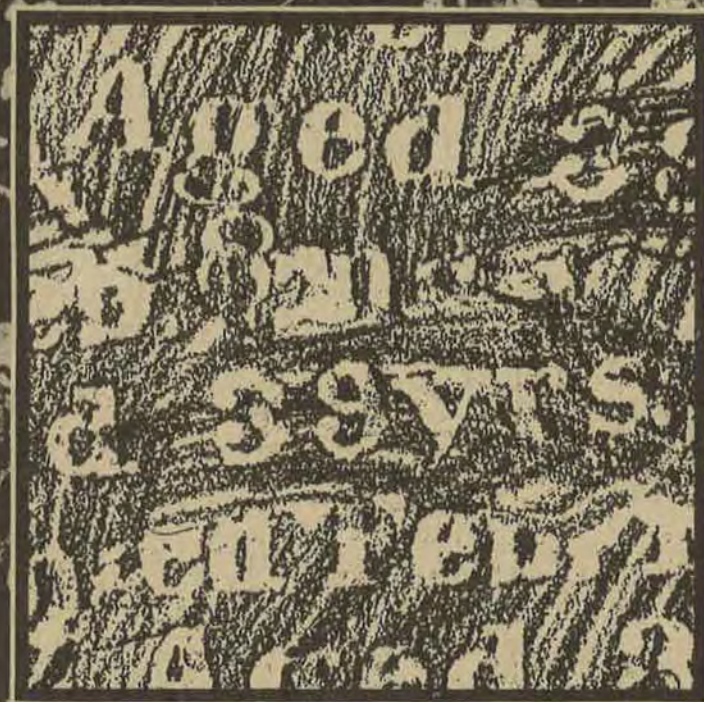


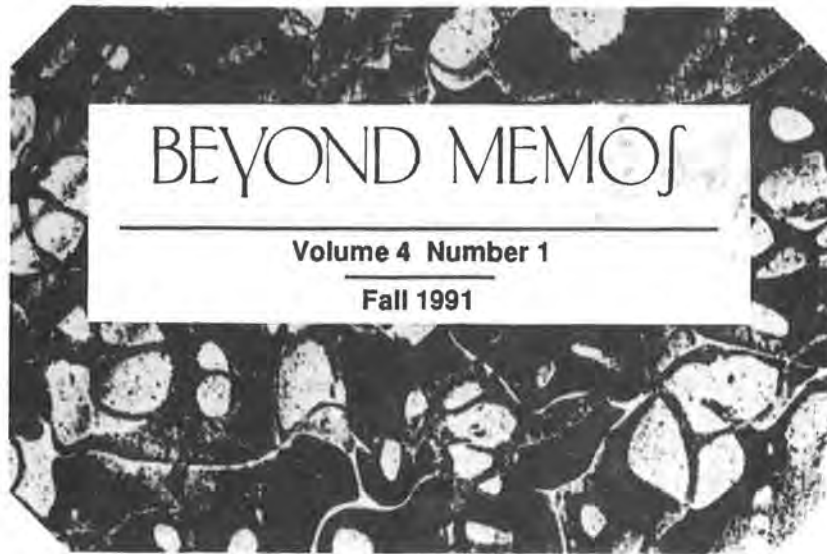
BEYOND MEMOS

A Journal of the UMF Faculty

Volume 4 Number 1

Fall 1991





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

Hot Tin Roof

AT EIGHT I was interested in fishing, reading, and the diligent scavenging of fabulous pieces of glass, and metal, and sometimes wood. I have clear memories of specific finds: a blue glass insulator from a fallen telephone pole; a railroad spike from the tracks behind Mead Park; an old cast-iron witch's pot with sticks and mud and snails inside. I found coins and bike pedals and spoons, collected pieces of wire and strips of metal, dug up hand-cut nails and fossils and bits of old bone. I even had a weathered board with Chinese writing on it, which I'd found floated up at the beach on Long Island Sound. How far had it come? (Well, probably from Stamford or Norwalk or New York, but I had a grander vision.)

At eight I knew about an old truck in the woods way back behind our house, a Model A, I thought, the lord of all treasures, with speedometer and steering wheel intact. I also knew about an old steamer trunk which sat half buried in leaves just off Jelliff Mill Road. I had spied it from the height of the school bus, kept it secret from all but Mike Didelot, convinced it was full of jewels or some poor prince's head or a giant gladiator's outside armor. When Mike and I finally broke into the trunk, the flower pots were treasure enough, three of them, at least a little bit ancient, and broken.

And, when I was eight, unbeknownst to me, Juliet Karelsen was born—June 15, 1962—away off in New York City, that tall town where my father worked and where a penny could kill. By the time Juliet herself had turned eight she was already an independent little New York girl, owner of an elaborate doll house, maker of two hundred faces, eater of ice cream, seller on the street of homemade greeting cards, rogue child of Central Park West, in charge of her parents, in love with her teacher, in cahoots with the doormen, going steady with a black boy from school, studying ethics, playing guitar, husbanding a hamster named Willy. So sensitive, said a family friend, that she could feel the grass grow under her feet. That summer, Juliet, bearing her hamster, and in league with her little sister Eva, deigned to accompany her parents to Wellfleet, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod. I was sixteen by then, about to turn seventeen, and Juliet and I had kept our relative distance. New York City, New York, to New Canaan, Connecticut is

about forty-five miles. Wellfleet, Cape Cod, to Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, is also about forty-five miles, and in Edgartown I was on vacation with my own family.

I had to go to bird sanctuaries and dumb museums and clothes stores and nature walks and church. We went to the beach in the mornings for a prescribed number of hours, then went to the hotel for lunch. At least I got to be the oldest for awhile; my big brother, Randy, was a college boy that summer, and off on his own someplace, free. I kept an eye on my younger brother and sisters, coddling little Janet while picking on Dougie and Carol, then in the afternoon was set loose for three or four hours. I knew just where to go: In Edgartown, you hung out on the lawn in front of the Old Whaling Church with cool kids from every suburb in the Northeast, kids who knew what it was all about. And on the Vineyard, when it wasn't all about how long your bleached hair was getting, it was all about James Taylor. There was always a party being rumored, and J.T. was always going to be at the party.

On the Cape, meanwhile, Juliet would have been building a beach house for her doll family, a group made up of little European dolls: Hans and Bridget, the parents; Susie, Debbie, Peter, David, Frank, Louisa, and Christopher, the children; and Uncle Nick, their live-in dentist. Juliet and Eva and their friends sawed boards in the basement of her family's rented cottage until the dollhouse was done. There was no workbench in the basement and no vices, just a saw and a hammer and a pile of lumber, so Juliet made the other three hold on to the old boards, six skinny arms taut and trembling, as she sawed and hammered, intent on the work. When the other girls wanted to stop, Juliet said no. The doll family must have a beach house!



SO JULIET AND I lived the summer of 1970—she a little girl barely older than my baby sister, I about to turn seventeen, both of us sifting fine sands, a world apart (at least). As a treat on her birthday, Juliet got to play miniature golf. As a treat on my birthday, I got to go out on my own, was given a midnight curfew, a wild luxury, especially since I

knew of a party at which not only James Taylor was guaranteed to show but his brother Livingston, too, and probably Carole King. I dressed in my tightest black jeans and my hippest B.V.D. undershirt (that brand had a *pocket*) and flipped my hair many times in front of the wavy hotel mirror.

The party was in progress at an elegant old house, clapboard, square, white, the home once of a whaling captain, and now, having remained unsold all these two hundred years, the summer home of his progeny. Its door, painted red, was open. The music of Jimi Hendrix blared forth.

I gulped, gave my head a shake, marched up the steps of the austere porch. No one asked who I was. I accepted a mug full of wine, lit up a cigarette and found my way into the living room, and then to the hearth, where I could lean under the great mantelpiece and watch the proceedings. James Taylor did not yet seem to be in attendance. Indeed, no one older than eighteen seemed to be in attendance. I drank more wine, smoked another cigarette. I had a beer someone handed me, smoked a little pot, tried a slug of Jack Daniels as the bottle passed my way. I never moved from my spot. On the mantel was an array of objects, all of which held real interest for me: An antique sextant. A large marine vertebra. An old, well-used bos'n's pipe. A real harpoon. A walrus tusk, scrimshawed. A baleen comb, made from the great plankton-screening maw of a humpback whale. Gradually I got drunk enough to remember myself and forget the party and to pay attention to the treasures. A shark's jaw with triple rows of teeth. When had this shark swum? A little stone Buddha. How far had Captain Pendergast (for that was the name engraved on a brass box) sailed? A pair of brass-and-leather binoculars. A glass float, blue as the Earth and as round, escaped from a fisherman's net in Portugal, I knew, but when? And around the room, photographs and paintings and etchings: grinning second mates, sheets of blubber, boats under full sail and adorned with flags and fresh paint and men in the rigging, leaving Edgartown harbor. Doom or success? How far did they go?

The Pendergasts also had a clock collection, thirty or forty old things, well kept and tocking. They all struck at midnight, a prolonged concatenation of bongs and dings and whistles and tweets. I stayed. Silly curfew! The party was going strong, doors closed, windows closed, music very low in fear of the ever-watchful Edgartown police. James Taylor on the stereo, as close as we would get to him that night. Someone had handed me a full jug of wine and I clutched it, staring up at a trio of rudely carved, life-sized wooden geese. Full of wine I spoke my first words of the night: "I wonder what those geese were for?"



Bill Rowland

Soon a knot of us were sharing the wine and discussing the well-kept birds. Too unmarked to have been used by any hunter as decoys. "Too top heavy, anyway," someone said, poking at one, "not weighted at all." Each goose had a reddish glass eye, and feet painted onto its bottom. We argued the possible uses for the birds, the motives of their maker. A young woman came up, the young woman who was throwing the party, a good forty or sixty pounds overweight, somewhat older than

I, eyes brown and slightly occluded by her chubby cheeks as she smiled. "They're boredom geese," she said. "My great-great-grandfather made 'em whenever he got stuck on land for too long."

The clocks, all thirty or forty of them, struck one. Ms. Pendergast, our hostess (her first name, I think, was Roberta) showed me a box of scrimshaw tools. And two narwhal tusks, the likes of which were once sold as unicorn horns. And a coconut-shell mask from Tahiti made at the time Gauguin lived there. And a block of wood with leather straps, once some ancestor's replacement foot. The log of the Frigate Margaret, dated 1807, which my hostess wasn't supposed to open, but did. The handwriting was faded and loopy, pure romance. Upstairs, Roberta showed me her bed, which had been the captain's bed on the good ship Eleanor Alison, circa 1830. Quickly, as if her mother were about to catch us, she got me out of her room and down the back stairs. In the kitchen were thirty more carved geese, a flight of them on two long shelves that met in the corner over the stove, "A vee," as she pointed out, "like a real flock."

Downstairs, the party had dissipated to a few drunks and my tour guide's younger brothers. The latter were busy bouncing the former. The house was a mess. Soon, I noticed, everyone was gone but the two brothers, Ms. Pendergast, and I. My head was beginning to spin, the prelude to a night of vomiting in the shower while my father, disgusted, held me upright in the stall. "Mom's going to kill us," the youngest brother said.

"Who is this guy?" the other said, pointing at me with a back-flung thumb.

Spinning or not, I lifted the big green jug of wine to my lips.

"My friend," Roberta said. She certainly was fat, a good deal bigger than I.

"Well, mom's going to kill us," brother number one repeated, with special emphasis. The brothers were not fat, not at all.

I pressed on, undaunted. "What's that thing?" I said, pointing.

"Blubber knife," the bigger brother said, annoyed. "Time to go."

Ms. Pendergast and her brothers walked me out on the porch. She shooed the boys inside and, apparently having mistaken my interest in her family artifacts for an interest in herself, she took my head in her hands and kissed me *smack smack* on the lips. Her hands on my head seemed to contain the spinning somewhat, and her lips gave the whole fuzzy world a warm, wet focus. I put my arms around some of her, for support, and

there we stood, lip to lip, till the littler of her brothers came out and pulled her inside.

On the Cape, Juliet must have been asleep, hugging her pillow, dreaming of dolphins and sand bars and clam rolls and sun, after an evening spent at one of her family's ritual vacation shrines. (On a recent camping trip to North Truro she showed me everything: the Drive-in, the Dairy King, the Puritan Shop in Wellfleet; the houses of her friends, Meyer, Winkelstein, DeCarlo, Waters; the Howard Johnson's her family always stopped at; their various rented houses; their favorite beaches; the place she bought her best bathing suit *ever*). During the day, Juliet and Eva preferred the Buzzard's Bay side of the Cape, where low tide made miles of flats to play on and everyone bragged of knowing a boy who had walked to Provincetown across the sandbars before high tide came to drown him. The sisters played marina, using shells as boats and digging channels which the tide would fill, rising. They stole *Once Is Never Enough* from their mother, read the sex scenes to each other as they lay under their towels in the sand. They took Willy the hamster to the dunes, so he could see the ocean, and to Howard Johnson's so he wouldn't be lonely at home, or too hot in the car. In the cool Cape evenings Willy got to come out of his cage for a cuddly minute in Juliet's palms before bed.

My father at midnight was miffed. At one o'clock he was furious and worried, both, each emotion escalating the other. At two o'clock he went out looking for me. He got in the car (a wood-paneled station wagon which soon enough, newly licensed, I would wreck) and crawled the streets of Edgartown with his lights off. Earlier he and Mom had taken note of a party at one of the old captain's houses, so he slunk over to that neighborhood, and found me, sure enough, on the porch in the near dark kissing someone as big around as he was.



THE NEXT TEN YEARS took me through a lot of territory: Weston, Connecticut, where I worked for a crazy electrician; Ithaca, New York, where I made my way through college; Trumansburg, Interlaken and Newfield New York, where I lived in old farmhouses for a couple of wild post-graduate years of playing piano and singing in bands; Beaver Crossing, Nebraska, where I worked on two cattle farms; Seattle, Washington, where I waited on tables and bartended, and where I started writing in earnest. My path came nowhere near Juliet's

again until 1980, when, at the behest of my old musician friend Jon Zeeman, I returned to Martha's Vineyard.

I could afford the trip because I'd spotted a classified ad in the *New York Times* looking for someone to write a question-and-answer format home-repair book. (I got to New York four hours early for my appointment, stumbled through the interview, talking very seriously about my short stories and novel-in-progress, actually fell on my way out of the publisher's office, but got the job. Ten dollars a page for a 256 page book, \$2560, not much for a whole book, even at the time, but to me a fortune.) By that time I was living in Madison, Connecticut, working unhappily as a freelance handyman and sharing a classically depressing suburban house with my girlfriend Susan, who was a graduate student in music at Yale. I told her I wanted to write the home repair book on Martha's Vineyard. Maybe by myself. She cried. I cried. Everybody cried, but I was determined to go and she was determined to let me.

When Jon pulled into our driveway, I was ready. He had rented a U-Haul for his P.A. system and his amps and his Hammond Organ. He meant to have a band and play for the summer tourists. We emptied my little house of everything I owned, which wasn't much--mostly odd bits of pipe and lumber and boxes of books--and headed for the Vineyard, Jon with his guitars up front in the car, me with my typewriter and my tools. In Oak Bluffs, fresh off the ferry, we took possession of 222 Circuit Avenue, a rickety old gingerbread cottage with six bedrooms, which would make room for Brian Hess and Jeff Young (the other two thirds of Jon's jazz trio) when they turned up and make room over the summer for three or four oddball roommates who would help pay the rent.

On sunny days our little household banded together and went to the beach. On the rare rainy days, Jon and the boys rehearsed upstairs, thumping the floor. I typed in the basement, one or two frantic days a week, making the book. *Fix-It! Tips and Tricks for Home Repair*. Every fifty pages I'd stop and retype, send a package off to New York, then haunt the general delivery window at the Post Office until my check (five hundred dollars!) would arrive. I tried to make the questions sound like real people talking, used a lot of exclamation points to show their excitement at the task ahead. Q: *My darn faucet is driving me crazy! How can I get it to stop dripping all night?* Like that. Or, Q: *I'd like to build a bookshelf to keep this home repair book in! How do I go about it?* or Q: *My son Jonny [I always used my*

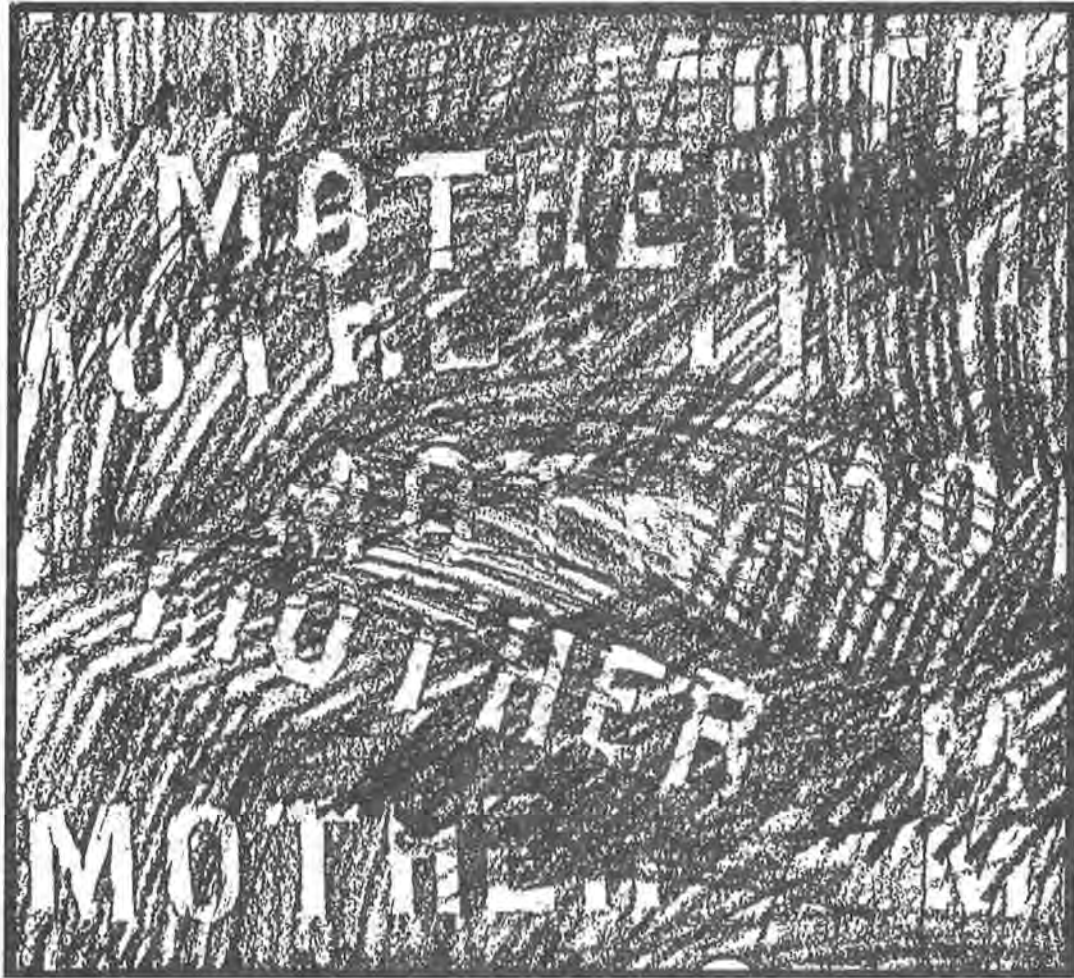
friend's names] just had a snowball fight to end all snowball fights! How do you repair a broken window? All the writing practice didn't hurt, I guess, and at last I could call myself a writer without inviting derision.

At night, Jon's trio, The Circuit Avenue Band, played around the island—at bars, at restaurants, at parties. I went along, and the four of us managed to meet a lot of women, which, after all, was the idea.

Juliet, being only eighteen, may or may not have been too young for our notice, though she was on Martha's Vineyard for a week that summer, visiting a college friend who was working as an up-island au pair. Jules was a freshman by then at the University of Michigan, had spent most of the summer working as a counselor at a camp for disturbed kids, had there found not a few suitors to send packing, had had her own heart broken, too, had learned what all those lyrics to all those James Taylor songs she liked to play on her guitar were really about. When her week's visit was up, she went back to New York, vowing to return to Martha's Vineyard. In September she flew off to Ann Arbor.

It was October before the island got too bleak and empty for Jon and me, but finally we got on the ferry to Wood's Hole, then headed west to New York, where we hoped to find a place to live. We spent some miserable weeks on people's couches. Then, at Puffy's (a bar in TriBeCa), we ran into a miracle: our old actor friend, Van Santvoord, who invited us to build rooms for ourselves and share his enormous loft on West Broadway in Soho. We moved in immediately, just before Thanksgiving. Around Christmas I got a job playing piano in the Mike Corbin band, which nearly paid enough for rent, an oppressive \$150 a month. In January, I put a handyman ad in the *Village Voice*, and that got me enough jobs to pay for food and quite a lot of beer. Done with the home-repair book, I wrote furiously, seriously, an obsessed apprentice to fifty favorite writers, no fame or fortune in sight.

The next year, after a fine summer on the Vineyard (Juliet bicycling through Europe), I built cabinets for neighbors in Soho, worked for a contractor, played piano in three bands. (Thanks to Jon, I even got an audition with Chubby Checker's touring band. I showed up at classy S.I.R. studios in my tattered workclothes looking like an urchin and was so nervous I could barely play. When my songs were done, Mr. Checker crossed the stage and hugged me. He's a big guy, and sweet.) And yes, I went out with women, one after the next.



Many couldn't understand my style of life. The ones who could seemed a little nuts to me.

And so to the Vineyard, summer of 1982.

Jon and I found a cheap enough house near the sewage treatment plant on the outskirts of Edgartown, which sounds worse than it was; the sewage plant only smelled when the wind came our way, one night out of a week, or two. By now I was singing in Jon's summer band, which had somehow evolved into a jazz/rock/oldies/rhythm-and-blues/country band. He already had a keyboard player (much more versatile than I), and since I sang only a handful of songs I was paid half what the other musicians were paid. We hadn't enough money for restaurant meals, much less enough for a decent beach towel, or enough to fix our old bomb cars when they broke, but we had plenty of money for drinks at the bars, and plenty of money for

admission to the Hot Tin Roof, which had been Carly Simon's place, a 'seventies style disco in an old airplane hanger up in the scrub oak forest by the airport.

On the evening of July 20 I looked up from the bar there and spied a pretty young woman passing. She was blond and flushed and had an aquiline nose (which word until recently I thought meant *straight*, but no, it means *like an eagle's*, hooked), and fairly glowed with aplomb. I kept my eye on her as she glided her way across the dance floor and up the stairs through the crowd to the bar. It wasn't so much her good looks. It was her insouciance. She seemed to have no idea anyone was looking at her, least of all I. Holding my place at the bar, I waited for her to pass again. Soon enough she did. She'd cadged a cigarette somewhere, and now she brought it inexpertly to her

lips, blinked hard to keep the smoke out of her eyes as she puffed, passed me by without a glance. I watched as she made her way back up into the balcony area and sat at a table with three other young women.

Jon came waltzing by, holding a beer. "Have a look," I said.

He peered brazenly into the balcony, found the table in question. "Blond?" he said.

I pretended not to look. "Right."

"Nothing special." And off he went.

I danced with friends nearer my age then—Sally from the Rare Duck, Messina from the beach, Ellie Winters from the book store—hoping to give the impression of my own popularity and insouciance. I drank beer. I danced. I went to the bathroom. When I came out, the blond stood exactly in my way, having bypassed the line for the lady's room. Her eyes were blue as the sky over Nantucket Sound, blue as the edge of the ocean. Her face was bright with intelligence, bright as the planets on a moonless night.

"Anyone in there?" she said.

"I'll check."

She followed me in, scooted into a stall.

"Could you watch the door?"

I deliberated. Then, not wanting to seem too easy, I abandoned my post.

Later, when I found her near the dance floor with her friends, she pretended not to know me. "The men's room?" I said, to sharpen her memory.

"You!" she said. "There was a crowd of pissing guys in there when I came out!" It seemed she found this funny. She accepted my invitation to dance. We did so. She told me she lived with her sister and a couple of friends in Vineyard Haven. She told me she was from New York. She told me she worked at Cozy's, dipping ice cream. She told me she played guitar. She told me her name: Juliet.

I told her my name, which on the Vineyard was Billy.

"Oh!" she said, with real feeling, "I had a hamster once named Willy!"



AUTUMN COMES EARLY to the Vineyard. Leases expire on Labor Day. Flocks of geese start assembling for the flight south.

Juliet and I had formed a tenuous union which was about to be sundered by her trip back to Michigan for the start of her junior year. We'd danced at the Roof, kissed on the beach, climbed in

the cliffs at Windy Gates and Gay Head. We'd taken clay baths and body surfed and walked in the rain. And though I was in love, she was less sure. It had been a few weeks before we got around to *making* love (One late night at the Hot Tin Roof she kissed me nicely, and—full of beer and the heat of dancing—I asked her home. "No," she said, firmly, and went back to her friends. I stood out in the parking lot then, cooling off under the stars, cursing my temerity. All lost! All ruined! After a long twenty minutes Juliet appeared beside me in the dark. "Changed my mind," she said, simply, taking my hand); after that we'd stayed occasional nights at my house, in the bottom bunk of the child's bed I'd been stuck with, and even fewer nights at her's, where she and her three roommates shared two small bedrooms. She valued her privacy, wanted nights to herself, guarded her freedom, stayed always tentative on the issue of love. Insouciance itself, she seemed not the least troubled by the dark prospect of our separation.

Late on one of our last nights, she decided we should sleep on the beach, away from the crowd of superannuated teenagers in my house, and away from her sister and friends. Beach sleeping is not allowed on Martha's Vineyard, but we surreptitiously borrowed her roommate Joanna's car and headed to South Beach, where I was sure we'd be caught and arrested. Jules knew a place, a dirt road that ended high over a salt pond near a darkened house. We took along all the blankets from her bed, and one pillow, and several beers, and tramped like sleepwalking children across the dunes to the beach. We walked up-island a long way, past another couple who were already asleep. Finally we stopped and spread out our blankets and felt the cold wind and watched the surf coming in under the brilliant Milky Way, Venus coruscating near Mars at the horizon, enough light despite the new moon to illuminate the spray and the crests of the marching waves and to silhouette flock after flock of night geese arriving at the pond behind us. We shivered in our blankets, sipping beer, talking softly, kissing.

After a brief hour we saw flashlights coming. We held our breaths, watching the couple down the beach get arrested. We waited, Juliet calmly, I pumping adrenaline. But the flashlight beams could not reach us, and the cops turned back, satisfied with their catch. By five in the morning we had slept very little, had made sandy love and had decided to head back, to be warm in the car as the dawn arrived in pink and mist.

The pond, when we got there, was covered,

acre after acre, with geese. There were thousands, and new flocks arrived moment by moment: a busy airport. Juliet and I watched them from the windless warmth of the car for an hour. At sunrise the flocks began to depart, out over the ocean, big flocks then lesser ones, away in a chorus of honks from their fellows. I have never seen so many geese in one place; in fact, I have never seen so many of any single animal gathered such in one place, except humans, perhaps, and bees. I thought of Captain Pendergast's geese, unliving on their shelves.

I had always thought of geese as the end of things, flying off in melancholy Vs. I grew sad sitting there on the big bench seat of that old car,

overlooking the salt pond, which had become the very heart of endings, sitting away from tousled Juliet. Hard to separate endings from beginnings at times like that. Hard to think, *Oh, time will tell*, as my bright new Juliet waved from the ferry two days later. Hard to keep the melancholy out of the letters I wrote to her nearly daily, some on birch-bark from New Hampshire (anything to impress), some on my brand new letterhead from New York (anything, anything). Hard to recognize the beginning of something, but there it was. The multitudes of geese, oblivious, leapt to the air, circled above us forming flocks, then headed out over the ocean, and away.

—BILL ROORBACH

The Exchange

to Sandy F.

You carried your death
closer to the heart
than most of us do
(I've been told)
so I guess it wasn't much
of a surprise to some
when they finally collided

But it was to me

And then a card
from your wife
she wrote
how the poem
to my daughter
made you cry
how you sent it off
to your own Elizabeth

And I thought
I've got to meet
this guy

And then you died

So now I am left with this:

I imagine
your daughter reading
my poem aloud
the moment
of your last breath
knowing
through my words
what a father's love
can mean

And you
in exchange
sent forth
filaments of your own
exploding heart
deep into my daughter's dreams
fashioning them
into a vision
of my death
so intense
that she came downstairs
the next morning
to offer me a smile:
the first we've shared
in days.

—DOUG RAWLINGS

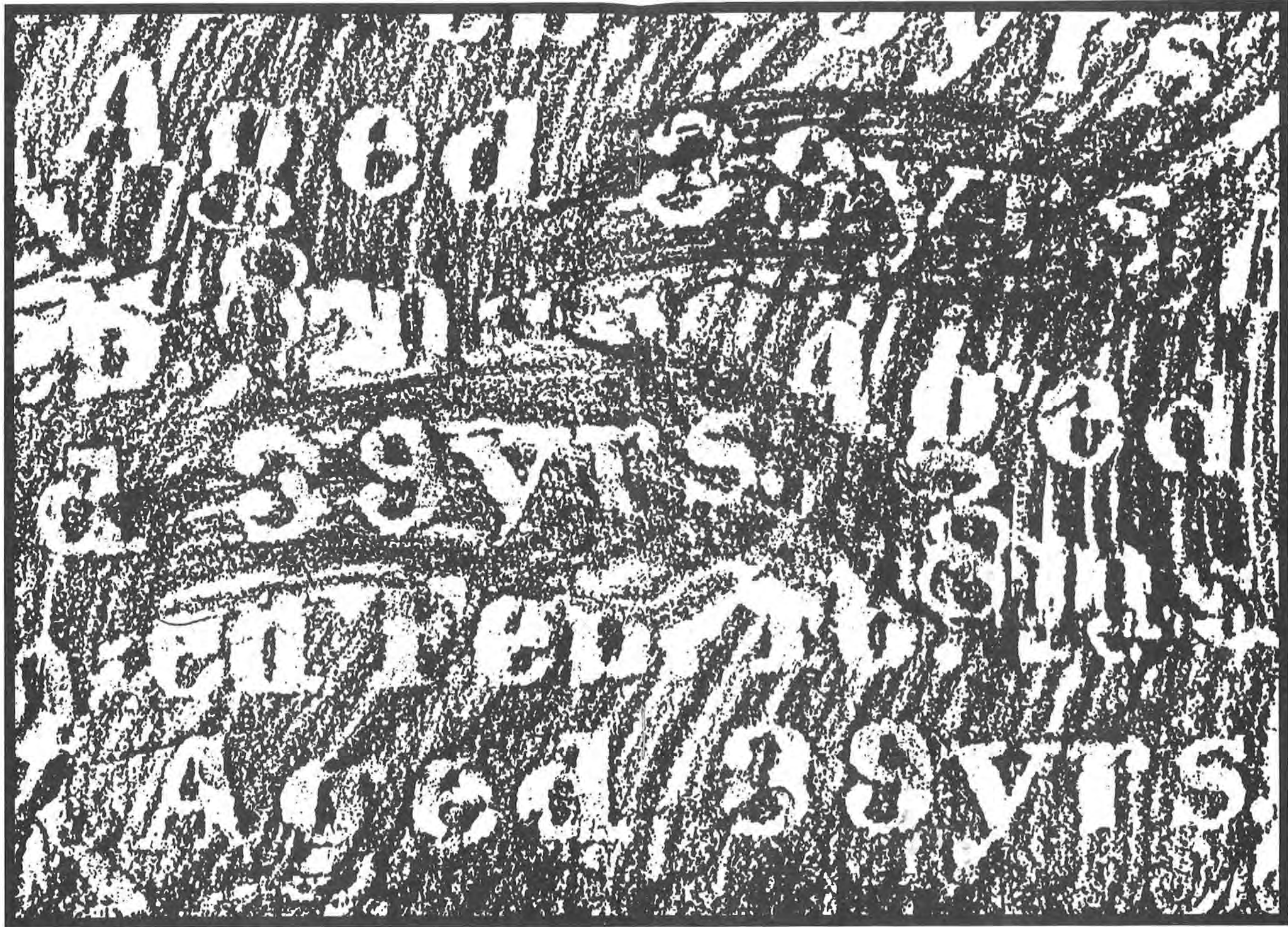


Robert

Eric

He is out at the table,
by himself in the kitchen,
his five-year-old
fingers grip bright-colored
pens, he is drawing
himself and writing his name
and that of his sister
who sits here beside me,
listening intently to the ranting
of Huck's pa. The Mississippi
flows and flows
slowly past,
and then he is here
to show us his portrait,
flowered shirt, barefoot,
little circles for knees.
"Aren't I a good
draw-er," he smiles
at his sister. Just last month,
staying with my parents
and missing her brother,
she watched him
on film, a two-year-old
running across a broad lawn,
and sighed, "Oh,
how I love
his little feet."

—PHILIP CARLSEN



Moderation

I didn't learn moderation
from nice people leading sane, ordered lives.

But from a home filled with fear and the stink of booze.

I didn't learn moderation in church, where there was
mystery, ritual, long robes, and candles. There I learned
extremes, excesses—the improbable. Sacrifice, scourging,
fasting and penance. There I learned how wrong *I* was.

I didn't learn moderation from stable, long-term
relationships based on reality, friendship, and trust.

But from husbands and lovers and one night stands who took
all I would give; then left. Food, sex, my soul. On to
younger pastures, fuller breasts, more perfect calves.

I didn't learn moderation by eating small, nutritious meals
at regular intervals. Starved myself, went for days without
food; then gorged.

AND NOT ON carrots and cabbage and broccoli.
I didn't learn moderation from yogurt, tofu, and granola.

But from racks of lamb, roasting pigs, and sides of beef.
I learned from pots of gravy, quarts of mayonnaise, gallons
of ice cream, and pounds of butter. Rich white butter on
freshly baked bread. I ate thick and I ate rich.
When I could.

One winter I made it through on turnips.
The next on chili, tequila, and garlic bread.

I didn't learn moderation by going to bed early,
by having one job, one partner, one passion, one cause,
one drink—one anything. One was never enough.

A hundred visions, a thousand tries.
What did it take for me to pay attention? To be awake?

I didn't learn balance by standing firmly on the ground

but by lurching forward,
listing into the wind,
and slipping over the edge.

—KATHLEEN BEAUBIEN

Lost in Collusion: An Adult Daughter's View

Adapted and excerpted from *Poison in my
Roots: Nazi Germany Remembered and Confronted*

THE HISTORIAN Gordon Craig wrote in his *Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* that the members of the Nazi officer corps fell into three broad categories: "a group, composed for the most part of senior officers, which remained true to the tradition of an autonomous army, . . . a second group, constantly growing in size, of 'Party soldiers,' . . . and a large mass of neutralists who did their jobs . . . rigorously abstaining from expressing opinions on political or administrative problems, lest they jeopardize their careers."¹ The officer about whom I am writing belonged to the latter group. He was my father. Since he thought himself a cavalry man or "Kavallerist," I will refer to him as such here. It is also my attempt at impartiality.

The Kavallerist's military career began in the Kaiser's officers' corps in 1914, continued in the Reichswehr of the Weimar Republic and ended with the collapse of the Nazi regime in 1945. According to one of his superior officers, he "zealously and diligently fulfilled his duties from the start and applied these to expand his knowledge of military science."² When Hitler invaded Poland in September 1939, the Kavallerist was not sent to free his former home in West Prussia as was his wish but instead was put in charge of the 175th *Aufklärungsabteilung* Reconnaissance Unit of the 75th Infantry Division and sent to the Western Front. After victory in France, the Kavallerist's contingency was sent to Zamosc, Poland. According to *Kriegstagebuch* (war diary) No. 3 of the division, their tasks were to secure the Russian border and to begin reconnaissance for "Fall Barbarossa."³ As ordered, the forty-five-year-old Lt. Colonel prepared himself and his men for the *Weltanschauungskrieg* (war of ideology) against the Soviet Union. Records indicate that the 75th Infantry Division, positioned at the southern-most edge of army group center, moved into attack at 3:15 am on June 22, 1941.⁴

The Kavallerist's nearly daily reports to headquarters indicate that the country's great expanse and impassable roads presented difficulties, yet

bad weather, bogs, roads with deep ruts, and damaged crossings were obstacles that slowed but did not stop him. The division's steady eastward movement was briefly halted and the Kavallerist was commanded on July 8 to march north-northeast⁵ from Berdichev to Zhitomir and on to Kiev. The Kavallerist had specific orders to oversee the traffic through Zhitomir⁶ which had become chaotic because several divisions including the "SS artillery unit 777"⁷ attempted to use the same good road. Orders accomplished, he left Zhitomir on July 22, 1941.⁸

The tempo of the advance had been quite rapid. East of Zhitomir it slowed considerably; as a matter of fact, it came to a complete halt at Belgoradka, a few miles west of Kiev. The advance in the *person* of the Kavallerist, that is; by August 18 he had developed a nervous heart condition. The physician's report stated that he had experienced frequent pain around the apex of his heart with no radiation down the arm, insomnia, outbreaks of perspiration, repeated difficulties breathing at night, sometimes for hours. The hardships of the campaign, so the report reads, had increased a former tendency to dizzy spells and light disturbance of vision.⁹ Put on reserve status,¹⁰ the Kavallerist was sent to Reserve Hospital I in Szczecin-Stettin, Pomerania, for tests: an EKG and a psychiatric examination.

On the go nearly every day for almost two months, the Kavallerist had covered five hundred kilometers, and that possibly on horse-back. He could have been physically exhausted. I do not think that the reason for his state of ill health was purely a physical one, however. He had had ambitions to make the rank of general. I had heard talk of it at home. The success of the Nazi army had seduced him; he hoped for fulfilment of his dream. Not only that, there was promise of glory as well; the kind of glory that brought one of his Prussian forebears to live with that celebrated Prussian General von Blücher in his palatial home in the king's capital. But when the Kavallerist butted his head and those of his men against the walls of Kiev, and he remembered what he had seen and perhaps

done in Zhitomir, he realized he was caught. Caught in the jaws of a vice, stuck between two enemies, one ahead of him and one behind.

The soldier in him fought the Bolsheviks, feared since their revolution during the first world war. The Communists, Bolsheviks, Soviets—all the same to him, a menace to the *Abendland* (Western world)—actually to his way of life, just as the Socialists and the political party system of the former Weimar Republic had been. On top of that, he had absorbed and uncritically accepted Hitler's and his superior generals' equation between Bolsheviks and Jews.¹¹ Such was the enemy in front.

Forming the vice from behind was the enemy in and on his back, the SS and their *Einsatzgruppen* mobile killing units, German speaking like himself but perceived by him as his social inferiors. Just the same, I suspect that he had begun the Soviet campaign by cooperating with the SS, calculating that this dirty work needed to be done as sacrifice for the future.¹² The SS unit most closely associated

with the region in which his unit and the 75th Infantry Division moved was *Einsatzgruppe C*, and its smaller contingencies, *Einsatzkommandos 4a, 4b, 5, and 6*.¹³ *Einsatzkommando 4a* reached Zamosc, Poland, and crossed into the Soviet Union a mere five days after the Nazi German attack. As the 75th Infantry Division had done, it crossed the Bug River at Sokal, staying there for three days doing their criminal work of murdering unsuspecting civilians.¹⁴

Einsatzkommando 4a entered Zhitomir immediately after the tanks¹⁵ and set about their ghastly work at once, assisted by the city commandant.¹⁶ During these first few months, these mobile killing units did not hide their evil doings and unashamedly did their shooting out in public view.¹⁷ When the Kavallerist and his troops reached Zhitomir, it can be assumed with some certainty that they saw the results. If not, the Kavallerist heard about the murders from his fellow officers; if not from them, he was told by one of his men. SS records indicate

Blackberries

Somehow,
I need
to steal
a sun
into what I am
to turn
my mind's
hard
red
blackberries
soft
and
black.

—ROD FARMER

that few army officers objected. On the contrary, Mobile Killing Unit C pointed out how cooperative the army had been. The day the Kavallerist left, on July 22, 1941, the SS documented to have 'killed 187 Soviet-Russians and Jews, many of whom had been civilians handed over to them by the army.'¹⁸

Could it have been that the Kavallerist also assisted, or ordered any of his men to do so? I have no direct evidence that he did, dreading even the thought but accepting it as possible. After the war when I was a young girl, he had continually said to me "*Wer Dreck anfasst besudelt sich!* (When you touch dirt, you get dirty)." I now understand. He had gotten dirty, much too dirty. Physically exhausted and with Kiev before him, he realized that whichever way he turned, there was no way out. He was stuck, caught. Sufficient enough reason to have anxiety attacks. Had the symptoms listed in the physician's report been caused by his heart, he would have been a dead man. But he did not want to die nor sacrifice his life; as a young man in 1916 during the Naval battle of Jutland, he had wanted to live and did. In 1941, he still wanted to live and feared for his survival and could no longer lie to himself; he had moved from being in collusion to being an accomplice to Nazi German crimes.

After recuperating at home, he was reassigned in February 1942 as commandant of an administrative unit, the *Führerreserve* Reserve Officer Corps of Army Group Center in Warsaw, Poland. When he arrived, someone surely took the trouble to acquaint the newcomer with what was going on and drew to the Kavallerist's attention the order of the commanding general of the Rear Areas of Army Group Center which stated that "all members in the area of my command are prohibited, either on-duty or off-duty to participate in any special actions or shootings by the order police or the security service or units subordinated to them."¹⁹

Protocol demanded that the Kavallerist pay respect to his superiors. Being only too familiar since my early childhood with such protocol, I am certain—although I have no evidence—that he paid a visit to the military commander of occupied Poland, General von Gienanth. He did call on Field Marshal von Kluge, commander of Army Group Center.

Drunkenness reigned and in mid-April the Kavallerist commanded that "Officers of the *Führerreserve* are prohibited after hours from socializing with non-commissioned officers and enlisted men."²¹ The order was put on the *Schwarze Brett* (bulletin board), a place that held the house

rules by which everyone had to abide.

News of this order reached the *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* (Reichministry for People's Enlightenment and Propaganda),²² claiming that "such prohibition contradicts the spirit and inner workings of the National Socialist Army and lends itself in its consequences to influence detrimentally the desired trusting relationship between officers and subordinates."²³

His case was battered about by various offices within Berlin headquarters, each determining the Kavallerist's wrongdoing; he in turn sent lengthy reports in his own defense. Army Group Center received orders severely to reprimand the Kavallerist; in January 1943 Army Group Center reported the case closed.²⁴

When upon arrival at Warsaw the Kavallerist found disorder in the *Führerreserve*, he gave orders to make order. He did what he knew how to do. He had learned on his father's knees as well as in the donkey cart following his grandfather through the fields of the family estate that the world was divided into two groups: those who give orders and those who receive them. Concurrently, however, he had not learned that subordinates and superiors alike are each born of woman and each a human being with the same basic needs. Each wished to be sheltered, to eat, to sleep; each wished for love and a household to call home.

At first glance, the Nazis of whom he had become a part divided the world not too differently from his family of origin. On one side were the superiors, the members of the "Aryan race," they the givers of orders. Nazi ideology held that only the community of Aryans were capable of human relationships. Not so the enemy, the receiver of orders, which was stratified "racially" since 1933, and designated subhuman—to be obliterated, wiped off the earth. That was the profoundly devastating difference.

In the jaws of a vice again—for the Kavallerist much smaller than the previous one, though, and not a threat to his life. Other lives were in serious danger, however; their fate already sealed. I shudder when I think that he wrote the reports to his Nazi overlords defending his order placed on the bulletin board, one a few days before and the other a few days after July 22, 1942, the day the deportations began of people—women, children, men of Jewish faith—from the Warsaw ghetto to the death camp of Treblinka.²⁵ He worked in Warsaw and lived in the area; from there he wrote letters to his wife and called her late at night on the



telephone. Did he know what was happening? He must have. Six months later people in the United States read about it in *Colliers* magazine.²⁶ About that time a junior Nazi army officer recorded that "*die Juden in Treblinka nicht ausreichend beerdigt seien and infolgedessen ein unertraglicher Kadavergeruch die Luft verpestet* (the Jews have not been buried sufficiently in Treblinka and consequently the air is unbearably polluted by the stench of decaying corpses)."²⁷ Having spent a good part of his life in rural areas, the Kavallerist knew the difference between clean and polluted air.

The Kavallerist's own military paper trail ended here. Official Nazi army records show that he was transferred to Minks, Soviet Union, then back to Warsaw in 1943, to be followed by his final and last transfer to Wildflecken, north of Frankfurt, in 1944. He quietly shed the Nazi army uniform in April 1945 when he requested and was granted a discharge, and wrapped his war experiences in silence.

The loss of home, war, career, and honor made him, so he said, into *ein armer aber anstandiger Oberst*—a poor but decent colonel. This description of himself soon became a family expression. We, that is, my mother, my sister and I, handed the poor but decent colonel bread at the breakfast table, we poured him water, brought him a pencil, helped the poor but decent colonel find something that was lost and also—but not only—fell silent when the poor but decent colonel wished to listen to the news, including the broadcasts of the Nuremberg Trials. He countered any and all statements that

even faintly hinted that in Poland and the Soviet Union the Nazi army had worked hand in glove with the SS by exclaiming, "That is not how it was. The army was instructed by Hitler to treat the Soviet soldiers and Jews as subhumans but the fighting army did not do that; the SS however did."

During that time the Kavallerist developed severe infections around each of his finger- and thumbnails. In spite of the fact that every finger was bandaged and carefully padded, when he wished to dress himself or make any other infinitesimal move or ever so lightly touched an object, he wailed with pain. The physical cause of the infection was most likely malnutrition. But it was so symbolic! He indeed had touched something that had been very dirty. Not only had the dirt rubbed off; it had infected him!

An unofficial network of the former Nazi officer corps began to develop as did the beginnings of horse trading, lessons and horse shows. In this equine connection, I met two men who stand out only because of my father's unusual behavior towards them. As long as I can remember, he had been exceedingly careful to instruct me about the pedigree of each person to whom I was introduced. The person's rank was mentioned, so was the branch of service, name and family of spouse, parents, estate and size, where they had met, and what their particular association had been. When I—by this time sixteen—was introduced to General von Gienanth, none of this information was given me. I took notice of the omission but attributed it to the post-war confusion. I was very much aware

as well that toward this man my father was awkward, tense, solicitous, if not subservient, something I had not observed in him. He was well rehearsed in social situations. I had known him to be charming, gallant, and erect, adhering to the finest points of etiquette. Not so with Gienanth.

About that time I attended a horse show with him which took place at the bank of the Neckar River in Heidelberg. My father spoke with anticipation of a man named Rau. Without giving me the usual details of pedigree, he spoke of Dr. Rau's importance in regards to and great knowledge of horses. When they saw each other, my father became very dutiful and stiff, his behavior reminiscent of his toward Gienanth, his demeanor masking, I thought, inner tension and discomfort.

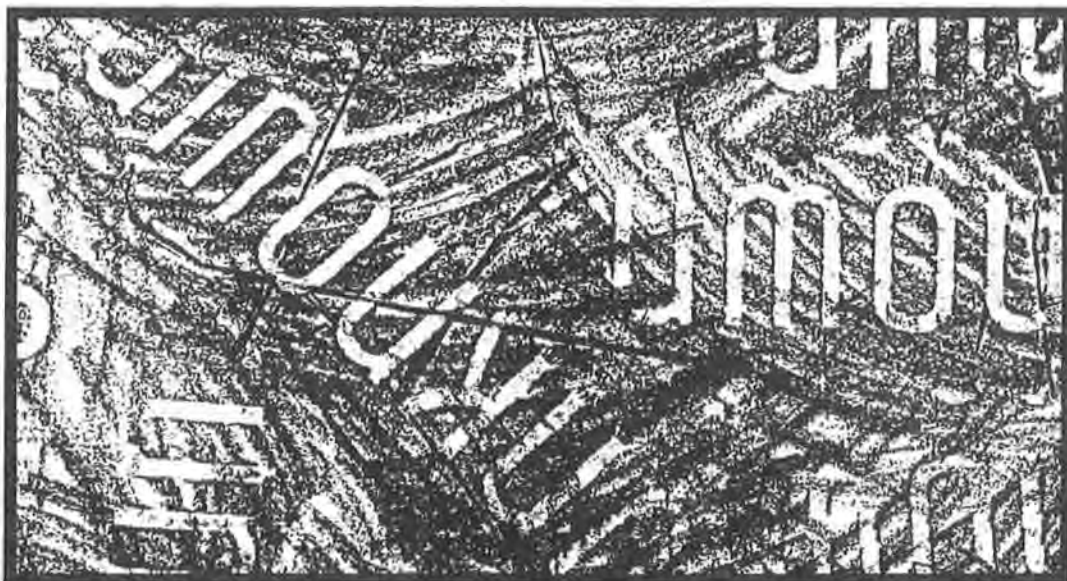
Three years after that incident I left for England, returned to West Germany for a time, married an American GI who was Jewish, and came to the United States. Busily learning what immigrants have to learn besides being a wife and becoming a mother of three, I had managed successfully to absent myself—or so I thought—from Nazi German heritage. Nearly forty years later in 1988, however, I went to the *Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv* (Federal Military Archive) of Germany to get at exactly those facts. To my horror, I discovered that in the geographic area where the Kavallerist had been, Nazi army document after document bore witness to army collaboration with the SS in acts against the Jewish and non-Jewish civilian population. (In my book I cite a good number of documents.)

I was enraged! And aghast because I knew

them to be true. I had been alive at the time these records were written. Related by blood to a participant-member of the Nazi army, I had become a living link to these dreadful, dreadful deeds and the immense suffering they wrought.

This link took on an added dimension when I found documents signed by von Gienanth,²⁸ *General der Kavallerie* (cavalry general), the man to whom the Kavallerist had introduced me in Heidelberg in 1947.

Another bit surfaced when I came upon a document with the name of a Dr. H.C. Rau, chief operation officer of the stud farm in Bialka, Poland. Reading about horses caught my interest at first and suddenly the writer's name clicked. Rau! That must be the man to whom the Kavallerist bowed and scraped in Heidelberg not too long after the war! They too knew each other from Poland! Not only that—they knew about the transports out of the Warsaw Ghetto to the death camps and also their actual purpose, the gassing and results. I realized that their common knowledge of atrocities towards Polish and Soviet prisoners-of-war, the civilian populations of those countries, and the Jewish people from all over Europe bonded them together. I think also they were lulled by the thought that the records they themselves had produced had been destroyed. Facing the possibility of prosecution by the Allied Forces, these three men shielded each other. They, like many other Nazi army officers, had a gentlemen's agreement which, I surmise, went something like "if you don't say anything about me, I will be quiet about you."



Giving me, his daughter, a seemingly minor piece of information such as that they had known each other from Poland, would have been like opening Pandora's box. The bond created by passion for horses turned out to be thicker than the proverbial thickness of familial blood!

Sitting in the Military Archive in Germany it FINALLY all came together! The Nazi army had been in collusion with the worst crimes in modern history! My blood boiled! I wanted to spit! I wanted to drag the Kavallerist out of his grave, grab him by the collar, shake him and yell:

"You lied! *Armer aber abständiger Oberst!*!?!? Poor but decent colonel!?!? I do not call that decent! I call that indecent! Immoral! Unconscionable! Why did you not object in the beginning when young men of Jewish faith were not allowed to be officers or even ordinary soldiers? Why did you not take a stand in 1934, when there would have been a chance? In 1938 when the synagogues burned, why did you look the other way? In Zhitomir and in Warsaw you were amidst the murders! Why did you not refuse to fill out the *Ahnenpass*, the ancestral passport, providing proof(!) of your supposed 'Aryan' ancestry? And

why on earth did you enter the date of your mother's death in 1953 and then hand it to me ten years later as if—as if it were an ordinary family tree and not a document of hate? Why, why, why did you not speak to me? Why not in 1970 or 1980? After so many years you should have given me an explanation. The extent of these inhuman and criminal acts was so great, so incomprehensible—you owed me an explanation! You should have told me what you wished you had done and—maybe even tried, then gave up. You were the adult, I was only a child when all those dreadful deeds were committed. It was your responsibility to talk."

I received no answer. Of course not. Deadly silence had reigned throughout his long life. The Kavallerist's death in 1982 lifted his ban of silence off my shoulders, however, freeing me to formulate my questions and to examine the records. After reading innumerable accounts, I am able to see.

Given his silence, I came to the devastating conclusion that the Kavallerist, my own father, had participated in the murders and that he agreed with the basis on which these murders were committed.

NOTES

¹Craig, Gordon. *Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956 p. 484.

²*BundesArchiv/MilitärArchive Personalakte* 6/11805.

³BA/MA RH 26-75/39 *Kriegstagebuch* begun May 10, 1941.

⁴National Archives Microfilm T-315 roll 1074 frame 000657.

⁵BA/MA RH 26-75/39 entries July 17-20, 1941.

⁶T-315 roll 1077 frame 000273 July 21, 1941.

⁷*Ibid.*, frame 000269 July 22, 1941.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹BA/MA PERS 6/11805 Physician's Report September 9, 1941.

¹⁰BA/MA RH 26-75/142 entry September 1, 1941.

¹¹Streit, Christian. *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen, 1941-1945*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1978, p. 57.

¹²*Ibid.* p. 54.

¹³Hilberg, Raul. *The Destruction of the European Jews*. New York/London: Holmes and Meier, 1985, Vol. 1 p. 287.

¹⁴Krausnick, Helmut und Wilhelm, Hans-Heinrich. *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1984, p. 187.

¹⁵Report cited in Streit, Christian op. cit. p. 112.

¹⁶Op. cit. Hilberg, Raul, Vol. I p. 302.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁸*Einsatzgruppe C* Report dated July 22, 1941 cited in Krausnick, Helmut und Wilhelm, Hans-Heinrich op.cit. p. 234, footnote 462.

¹⁹BA/MA RH 22/230 March 21, 1942.

²⁰BA/MA PERS 6/11805 sheet 35, first page of report of July 28, 1942.

²¹*Ibid.* sheet 29 April 14, 1942.

²²Goebbels' branch of the Nazi government. I am indebted to Professor Hilberg for pointing this out to me.

²³Op. cit. PERS 6/11805 sheet 40 August 21, 1942.

²⁴*Ibid.* Sheet 44 January 18, 1943.

²⁵Lukas, Richard C. *The Forgotten Holocaust The Poles under German Occupation, 1939-1944*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986 p. 156.

²⁶Bialer, Tosha. "Behind the Wall: Life and Death in Warsaw's Ghetto." *Colliers*. February 20 and 27, 1943.

²⁷BA/MA RH 53-23/80 November 24, 1942.

²⁸Curt Freiherr von Gienanth took over that post on July 20, 1940. Institut für Zeitgeschichte Archiv Nr. 1151/53.

—ELIZABETH I. KALAU

Not running the writing workshop

Do not violate his concentration,
do not offend her need to scribble
furious across the page.

Do not interrupt her while she waits
for words to surface.

His jaw works as he begins to sound a sentence.

Set paper and pencil by her;
she'll pick them up when she is moved.

He sits beside you
and reads a misspelled letter
in a prophetic voice, then leaves the room.

She lifts her head but does not smile
while her thoughts circle flying
elephants, tuck them in.

Stretching his legs, biting his tongue
he lets the pen be drawn
through the motions of writing
by a question: *What is normal?*

Through the blur of memory
she describes you
through the blur of memory.

In friendship's name
he adds a postscript.

Notice the paper in her lap,
pencil in her fist; she's printing
in small neat letters, "I feel like dying. . . .
Just go on with your happy life."
Will you enter space she's shaped
as she was entered
when she was a child?

If she had written then,
"He comes into my room, pins me down
and hurts me," be clear:
what you would have done.

—LEE SHARKEY

Morning in Keene Valley

Mists float above the low Ausable River
And spill onto bordering hayfields
Damp with dew
Where I lie in a wrap of sleeping bag and blankets,
At dawn.

A full moon hangs over the western peaks,
Attended by wisps of pink and orange clouds,
Tinted by morning sun,
A sun that I can not yet see from my pallet
On the dark valley floor.

There is no sound at all,
Save for hushed break of low water over smooth stones;
All else is at rest.
Not a bird beats the cool air; not a meadow creature stirs
In the stillness.

No,
All is mist and half-light,
Breathlessness
And quiet;
In a gentle pause
Between night and morning.

—DOUG DUNLAP



DD
1/15/91

The Mists of Bigelow

WHILE CARETAKING for the Maine Appalachian Trail Club on Bigelow Mountain near Stratton, I have glimpsed from the cabin doorway late in the evening a startling phenomenon. The visionary effect is not chiefly one of light such as the red alpenglow on Yosemite's monoliths after sunset. It is not, in fact, spectacular at all. The effect is produced by mist and a very little light. Mist is common enough in the forests of Maine. On one Appalachian Trail hike over Old Blue, I could scarcely see my hiking boots, so dense were the low-hanging clouds, and I had the sensation of traversing without feet. But standing in the doorway on Bigelow, I sensed in the water vapor something extraordinary, although my journal describes it quite simply: "Mist blowing by, darkness falling." How shall I explain?

The mist beyond the door had swept up the northeast flank of the mountain, past Old Man's Head, and now was being drawn quickly between the two peaks, through the col, and down the other side. What so arrested me was the rapid movement of this diaphanous vapor, set off in primeval starkness by the foreboding, dark tree-forms through which it passed.

I have pondered the effects of this sight. Why have I failed to notice it while hiking through cols and over barren peaks? For some reason the sensation is not the same when viewed from the woods, nor is the spell captured by waiting for it on the cabin porch bundled against the cold in hopes

of glimpsing the apparition stealing through the col.

The cabin's warmth and light, I am certain, condition the inner sense into something of a soft idle, and from this snug stupor the eye roves to the door, the door is thrown open on the cold dark evening—and there it is! The vision beyond the door must be experienced from the comfortable side—and suddenly—to work its magic.

If this eerie, aerie exhibit is taken to mean something, what is it? The sensation is definite, "felt in the blood," as Wordsworth says, "and felt along the heart." Standing in the doorway at the right moment, one has the distinct presentiment that—despite the civilized comforts of the cabin, the controlled order of the area (with its shelter and tent platforms, its network of trails), the multitude of hikers from widely divergent lifestyles, the scarred face of Sugarloaf across the valley, the hum, of an occasional plane, the evidence everywhere of acid rain—that despite all this encroachment, Bigelow Col is still *a very wild place*.

Preparations for experiencing this phenomenon, one of the most exhilarating to be found anywhere, are simple enough. The evening must be cold and damp, the daylight nearly gone, the cabin warm from its ancient woodstove, the kerosene lamp burning brightly, and a cherry cobbler in the oven. The seeker should then step softly to the door, and fling it open.

—J. KARL FRANSON

CONTRIBUTORS

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DOUG DUNLAP is an Associate Professor in the Department of Human, Health, and Family Studies. He claims an affinity for sleeping on the ground, as he has done on more than one occasion in the Adirondacks, location of Keene Valley.

ROD FARMER, Professor of Education and History, has published over 40 articles, and his poems have appeared in many journals and magazines. He has authored a book of poems, *Universal Essence*.

J. KARL FRANSON, a Renaissance specialist who has published on Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, and Wordsworth, finds it impossible to write or read in the woods—too much “hilly sweetness”—and instead watches for the Mists of Bigelow and other phenomena.

ELISABETH I. KALAU, Associate Professor of Rehabilitation Services, came to this country in 1955 at the age of 24. She studied at American universities and has three adult children. She is currently seeking a publisher for the book from which this essay is excerpted.

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