

Philosophers on Holiday

Philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday.--LW

Volume V, number 1-2
Summer/Fall, 2001

small comforts

November, 2001

Dear Readers:

This issue has been a long time coming. We had fully intended to complete Volume V, number 1 and put it in the mail before the autumnal equinox--our version of being "on time" with the summer issue.

September had other plans in store.

For the first month after the disasters, we--like you--couldn't do much of anything but cry and listen to the radio. When our anguish had subsided to a dull, constant ache, we looked at this 'zine and said, "Is it appropriate to continue? Can we really continue to put out an at-least-somewhat humorous publication on the philosophical implications of travel? After what has happened to travellers?"

The thought of writing--humorously, no less--about travelling seemed so remote from reality as to be unconscionable.

First planes became bombs. And then our planes started dropping bombs. The thought of writing about being on holiday went from "unconscionable" to "beyond the pale."

And yet, here we are. Why? Well, to be honest, we don't know. We're still not sure this 'zine is a good idea. At least right now.

We've manifested our uneasiness in the way we've designed this issue. The first portion--through page seven--consists of pieces that directly address events related to September 11. The remainder of the issue we've devoted to things we're calling "small comforts"--a little bit of everything, from toast to trailer parks. Such comforts are unquestionably small--they can do nothing to bring justice, peace, or solace to those whose lives have been forever changed.

As always, we invite you to send us your thoughts and stories. And please tell us what you think about what you read here.

Looking for hope,
Peg and Lisa

Central Asia: a report from "on the ground."

T. Michael McNulty, SJ, of Marquette

University writes: My cousin Judiann is assistant country director for CARE Tajikistan, a country which shares about 800 miles of border with Afghanistan, and which has been suffering from drought and an acute food shortage. Because of the bombing, it faces the prospect of hundreds of thousands of hungry Afghans (who are suffering from the same drought) on its borders. She sent a number of e-mails in the time following Sept. 11. Below are some excerpts.

Sept. 12: "Thanks to satellite TV and BBC, I may have seen the terrible events unfolding in the U.S. before some of you did--by just turning on my evening news. It seemed somewhat surreal from here especially when narrated by the Brits, whose country was not under attack. This morning, as you try to sleep, it is much more a gut-wrenching reality to us. And, we are thinking about the after effects... since we share a border with Afghanistan.

"One of my co-workers is a Bangladeshi whose sons are studying in New York. They called him this morning to report that they were far from the Trade Center, but that some New Yorkers are starting to attack Moslems on the street--either verbally or throwing things at them. Can we tolerate this when we don't even know who is guilty? In our country where we preach tolerance towards all religions and people from all over? I know that 99% of the Moslems in the U.S. have immigrated because they want a better future for their families--the same reason our forefathers immigrated. They choose America for the freedom and economic opportunity, not to bring it down.

"And, out here in the rest of the world there are many millions of kind, moderate, decent Moslems who are as concerned about fanaticism as we are. When you pray these days for the victims, their families, and the rescue workers, also pray for all these millions of innocent moderate Moslems, that there be no undue retaliation, and that, in the end, they will prevail over the fanatics to restore peace in the world.

"Today, as soon as I left my house, neighbors and people I don't even know stopped me on the street to say how sorry they were about what had happened in my country. My office has been filled with our national staff expressing their concern and condolences. They are as sobered and shocked as any American."

Sept. 15: "One of the gospel readings this week was the one which advises that when someone hits you, you should turn the other cheek, meaning not to fight back. This, of course, would take a tremendous amount of courage, probably much more than striking out.

"Whoever planned the attacks expects the US to strike back. They relish inflicting violence to provoke violence. They are the same kind of individuals who pick fights on the playground.

.....
"How can we make our government see that the best reaction is no reaction?"

"Meanwhile across the border, a quarter of Afghanistan's population is suffering famine due to the drought. Hundreds of thousands are huddled in IDP camps along rivers, while as many more struggle to survive in their dried out villages - all oblivious to these larger world events. They only want to keep their children alive, to plant crops and hope for rain again in the spring...

"They are not conservative Moslems, they do not even support the Taliban. Should they suffer further for something they had no part in? The rhetoric about "punishing the countries who harbor terrorists" is really sad. Why should Americans who've never suffered hunger and live in a wealth people here can't even imagine, take out their anger on innocent, starving Afghans?"

Sept. 30: "We are starting to feel much more optimistic about the situation across the southern border because the war rhetoric has toned down in the U.S., the other governments supporting the U.S. are urging to go slow and consider the ineffectiveness of bombing, and

because the international press has started showing the reality of the innocent Afghan people. That has released a flood of aid money and significantly increased my work load because we are making plans to enter the north from here."

On Oct. 15, a story appeared in *The Washington Times* ["Starving Tajiks in Afghans' shadow," by Christopher Pala; copyright 2001 News World Communications, Inc.] in which Judiann is quoted. Some excerpts follow:

The immediate cause of the famine in Tajikistan - which is cooperating with U.S. forces in their drive against the rulers of neighboring Afghanistan - is a drought that began in the spring of 2000. The drought has affected a broad swath of Central Asia from Uzbekistan to western China and Afghanistan.

"People sold what they could last year, when the drought began," said Judiann McNulty, assistant country director of the U.S. relief organization Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE). "This year has been worse and they have nothing left to sell."

.....
Miss McNulty said it is too late to buy wheat from the United States or Canada before snowfall makes the remote mountainous areas inaccessible. "If we can get some funding very soon, we can buy wheat in Kazakhstan and get it to them before November," she said.

.....
Malnutrition has doubled hospital admissions in the past year, said Saifiddin Samodov, a surgeon at a hospital near Kizyl Kuch.

"When people only eat bread made from bad-quality flour, with all the dirt it contains, they get sick. Three out of four people have a serious B-vitamin deficiency, and 90 percent have some kind of stomach disease," he said.

The most recent communication I have had is dated Oct. 16. She says: "In their infinite wisdom, our regional management based over in gaudy Bangkok have decided maybe having Americans in these countries is not such a good idea since we are obvious targets. So, there may be a shuffle. We'll see if they actually carry through."

Fundamentalism

Peg writes: I really could not have chosen more appropriate texts for my feminist theories course this fall if I had full knowledge of the events that were to happen on September 11. I had no idea that the reading assigned for September 11 would be Joanna Kadi's *Thinking Class*, examining the issue of anti-Arab discrimination and violence in the United States. And as debates began to swirl around Islamic fundamentalism, my class was trying to generate a working definition of fundamentalism in the context of Uma Narayan's *Dislocating Cultures*. We learned that the term 'fundamentalism' has specific origins related to Protestant Evangelicism in the United States in the early twentieth century. In this context, fundamentalism meant taking the bible as the literal word of God, subject to no interpretation. It called for a return to the fundamentals or foundations of Christianity. Some scholars also saw fundamentalism as a response to modernity, and the challenges this was taken to pose to the fundamentals. Of course, these fundamentals are taken to be in the category of Given or Unchanging or Absolute. And this, as my students and I decided, is the decisive move in the conjuring trick. It is exactly this move that escapes notice.

Clearly, the term 'fundamentalism' has escaped its original meaning. As Wittgenstein might say, it has broken out of its original language-game. The term is now most frequently applied to the Arab/Muslim/Islam (with no distinction between these appellations) Other.

In order to understand the term 'fundamentalism' I encouraged my students to examine its uses: who uses it? To whom is it applied and by whom? Under what circumstances and in what

Fundamentalism, continued

conditions is it applied? Is it ever a matter of self-ascription? My students and I struggled with these questions, both on an intellectual level and an emotional one. We came to the tentative conclusion, subject to being revisited, that the term 'fundamentalism' is used as a kind of shorthand that serves two related purposes. First, it is used to demarcate a category of people who are radically different from and other than us (in this case the us of the US). This radical Otherness then provides some kind of explanation of the events of September 11 that has the form "they did this because they are fundamentalists." On this view, that is all we need to know or *can* know. We can know fundamentalism, but we can't know Them.

In examining how far the term 'fundamentalism' has moved from its origins, students began to question whether the term can be meaningfully applied to belief systems and practices that do not have a religious basis. Can one be a political radical fundamentalist? Or more worrisome for some students was the possibility of a patriotic fundamentalism that advocates the return to the intentions of the framers of the Constitution which would call for a major scaling back of social services provided by the Federal government. This question of patriotic/Constitutional fundamentalism is a very interesting one, one which might well achieve more visibility in the coming months, most directly in the context of antiterrorism legislation that curtails civil liberties and freedoms as such legislation wends its way through Congress.

What have been your experiences in the classroom since September 11?
Write and tell us about them:
Philosophers on Holiday, Box 355,
St. Peter, MN 56082

Ashokan Farewell*

BTB writes: An engineering marvel nearly as amazing in its day as the World Trade Center was in ours, the New York City reservoir systems sits as a model of humans' blissful coexistence with Nature. Never has there been a more breathtaking spot on a crisp fall day or a sunny spring one. Nothing is more interesting than to check out how low the water is during times of drought revealing the foundations of the homes that were torn down to make way for the reservoir or to watch the water rush over the spillway in times of abundant rain. No one ever comes to visit us (or, I dare say, most mid-Hudson River Valley dwellers) without at least considering a ride to the Ashokan Reservoir. Creating it did admittedly require destroying a number of little villages that had to be abandoned to make way for the reservoir—but no one can quarrel with its present beauty.

But on September 11th, the roads around all the NYC reservoirs were closed to the public. The walking trails along the dike are empty. The row boats that can (with special permission) carry fisherman out into the water are beached and forlorn. A colleague (now retired) writes: "I put a boat in the Ashokan Reservoir one week before the twin tower attacks and have not seen this boat since as the Ashokan has been closed. I'm told that it will remain closed this year and I've also been told that the National Guard is in the woods and will fire on anyone on the water illegally. I don't even have a picture of this boat."

How sad for all of us. Of course it's essential that steps be taken to keep our water supplies safe. But how sad, in this great litany of sad things, that a thing of such great beauty is now locked behind gates and guarded with guns.

* Yes, THAT Ashokan, made famous by Jay Ungar's wonderful song about the end of summer music courses in our beloved mountains, and later embellished and played hauntingly through *The Civil War* on PBS.

You can learn more about the reservoir system at:
<http://www.westchesterlandtrust.org/watershed/>

September 27, aboard the S.S. Badger (The Lake Michigan Car Ferry)

Lisa writes: When I originally decided to stay in Maine for an extra month after Peg left, I had this idea to travel home slowly, taking lots of detours to see sights and to visit friends and relatives. I'd camp, cook out, get up early, stop for the day at noon, and enjoy myself.

It goes without saying that I abandoned that idea after September 11. The trip I've taken has been different in virtually every respect from the one I planned. Instead of adventuring and lollygagging, I've found myself moving from family member to family member—driving extra-long days in order to be in familiar locales, seeking out motels I've stayed in before, scanning the radio dial over and over, to find the familiar voices of the NPR program hosts. Yes, I went Christmas shopping in Freeport, Maine. Yes, I drove off the New York Thruway to see the place where Mormons believe Joseph Smith discovered the *Book of Mormon*, and to drive along the lovely shore of Lake Ontario. Yes, I even took a walk along Lake Michigan yesterday in the freezing cold. But everything I do takes on the form and substance of my grief—and plays against the background of Bob and Neil and Noah and Robert and Linda. (I time myself, to make sure my absences from the car won't interrupt anything—*anything*—important on NPR. I haven't shut off the radio in four days of driving, haven't plugged in a CD, haven't opted, even, for my own moment of silence. I've become one of those people I've heard about (on the radio, of course) who become convinced that if they stop monitoring the news, some new bad thing will happen.) In the rare moments when thoughts of the attacks have moved to the back of my consciousness, I've felt guilty afterwards, caught in the act of thinking about something else (which of course is another sure way to bring about a new disaster).

In the days since I left Maine, the radio reports have begun to change. Now, there are very few stories about the disaster sites themselves, and very few about the people who died. Now, the focus is on the U.S. effort to "root out

terrorism." Who has signed on to be our ally this hour? Who has severed ties with the Taliban? What is the credible risk of a bioterrorism attack? A chemical weapon attack? What can you do with a crop duster? Have any people with Arabic-sounding names taken crop-duster lessons? What is the latest from the Pakistani emissaries in Afghanistan? I find myself angry at these new reports, not only because they force me to confront the inevitable—the United States *will* bomb Afghanistan—but because they seem to be telling me, "enough grieving for people you never met! It's time to move on and Deal With The Situation." I don't want to deal with this situation. I will never be ready to move on.

Signs of the disaster are everywhere you look—if you know what you're looking for. If you dropped the proverbial intelligent Martian onto the highway system in the United States right now, I don't think she would guess that our country has suffered a devastating attack that resulted in a breathtaking loss of life. If she were a Martian anthropologist, she might draw some interesting conclusions about our fascination-cum-obsession with our flag; flags appear in store windows, car windows, on the sides of buildings, on people's bicycles, in newspaper and television ads. (I even saw one made out of colored plastic cups stuck into a chainlink fence.) She would probably also conclude that retailers have decided that espousing religion is good for business; magnetic signs, billboards, and sheets of posterboard in shop windows everywhere announce "God Bless America."

I wonder what the observant Martian would think about the new security measures I'm noticing. For me, these changes in security stand out as the most dramatic features of my cross-country trip. Time after time, they reduce me to tears.

Of course that's not particularly unusual; I've cried several times a day, every day, since the eleventh. But most of my tears have been prompted by images of the disaster sites, or by names, stories or photos of victims. These tears

Car Ferry, Continued

are more abstract. They're philosopher's tears—tears about principles, concepts, symbols that have fallen—or that will fall, as we enter into yet another bloody war.

Near Niagara Falls, New York, I find my route to the U.S.-Canada border blocked with orange cones. Is this road construction, or something more ominous—will I not be allowed to cross the border? I wander through residential streets and come back at the route from a different direction. Clear sailing. *Now* I wonder why I'm *able* to proceed coming from this direction; is it a mistake? Will I be stopped and sent back to the U.S.—or worse? (Once normalcy is disrupted, the apparently normal becomes an object of suspicion.) No; I make it to the border, where I find that a kind of exit station has been constructed on the U.S. side. There, I am questioned by a U.S. customs agent, surrounded by a group of military guys (six? a dozen?) in fatigues, carrying some kind of weapons. In my memory, they have become machine guns, though to be honest, I do not know what kind of guns they were—only *that* they were guns. On the U.S.-Canada border. The longest unfortified border in the world. The questions are just *slightly* hostile (his ears briefly prick up when I say I've come from Maine; the news was out that some of the hijackers had come through Portland), but perfunctory. It's not the questions, it's the guns.

I am sobbing by the time I reached the Canadian customs agent. After proceeding through where-did-you-come-from-where-are-you-going-what-is-all-this-stuff, she asks me—in that special flat, affect-less voice customs officials use—why I was crying. It isn't a recreational question.

I'm crying because everything has changed here. I'm crying because I was just met by soldiers carrying guns. At the longest undefended border in the world.

On my way out of Canada, a day later, I stop in the wrong place. Then I leave my car in gear; the group of customs officials tell me to move the car, put it in neutral and put on the

emergency brake. Translation: you'll be here a while. But not really. They search my car—sort of—but clearly they don't think a white girl is relevant in the Hunt For Terrorists. The search is cursory. They do ask me why I have so much stuff—am I moving? Well, yes. I give the same story I gave at the other border. They ask me if I have weapons. I should say “well, I have a Swiss Army knife—that seems relevant these days, doesn't it?” But instead, acting on the combined theories that: 1) everything that can become a weapon will, and 2) confession is good for the soul, I inform them that I have a camping stove. The agents snort derisively.

This time, I cry with relief—relief that I am apparently not a terrorist. And with frustration; clearly racial profiling was working in my favor yet again.

This morning, as I wait to board the car ferry across Lake Michigan, an employee of the ferry, apologizing profusely, searches my car briefly. And I wonder, during her 15-second search, does she really know what she's looking for? These searches seem so perfunctory. I have a *very* full car; to search it adequately (for *what*, Lisa? Razor blades?) would take at least an hour—probably a lot more. Is it because I'm a white woman that they're perfunctory? (Well, yeah.) Are *any* of the scores of people being detained anything other than male, Middle Eastern and Muslim? Surely there are folks in this network who don't fit that profile, aren't there? Don't you suppose someone had a white girlfriend? Couldn't I be that person?

The ferry is leaving Ludington, Michigan, bound for Wisconsin. A Coast Guard vessel is escorting us as we leave the port. I'm crying again.

What has it been like for you to travel since September 11? Write and tell us.

Philosophers on Holiday

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Opus 40

Jay Benjamin, our web guy, writes: My son Steve and his friend escaped their Manhattan apartment on Friday that horrible week of September 11 by taking the train up the Hudson River valley to stay with us for the weekend.

From high in his Rockefeller Center workplace, Steve had seen a fireball erupt in lower Manhattan when the second jet plowed into the south tower at the World Trade Center. As the week unfolded, with building evacuations, sirens, smoke, asbestos worries, rising estimates of the missing, and rumors of new terrorist attacks, jitters and insomnia battled sadness and anger in our brains. Escape is what we all needed by Friday.

By Friday, though, I wondered what could possibly comfort our minds. Steve said he would like to show his friend the Opus 40 environmental sculpture at an abandoned bluestone quarry on the fringe of the Catskill Mountains just across the Hudson from us. He remembered the joy and awe experienced there when he was young. The drive over the Kingston Bridge, over 150 feet above the Hudson, with a wonderful panorama of the blue-green Catskills before us, did not yield its usual comfort. The river had become a pathway for a jetliner that made a sudden turn in upstate New York to find its target in lower Manhattan.

Once we got our first glimpse of Opus 40, its bluestone pedestals, ramps, and walls surrounding the nine-ton monolith at its center, with Overlook Mountain in the background, things seemed better. We walked throughout the sculpture, marvelling that one man, Harvey Fite, had spent thirty-seven years fitting together the stones without any mortar to cover most of the six-acre scar left by the quarrymen. In 1976, Harvey Fite died in an accidental fall onto the quarry rocks, three years before his envisioned completion of Opus 40.

As we finished our exploration, a wedding party emerged from the rustic house perched at the edge of the magnificent artwork. We sat down on the grass, uninvited guests, and

watched two people we didn't know get married at the base of the center monolith of Harvey Fite's creation. We felt better.

Opus 40 is in High Woods. New York, southwest of the village of Saugerties, and northeast of the village of Woodstock. you can find driving directions, photos, and background information via the official website at www.opus40.org.

The Trip We Didn't Take

A friend writes: On September 10th, we sat in our living room batting back and forth the idea of going to visit my partner's son and his partner in Chelsea, Manhattan, New York City "sometime soon." "How about this Saturday?" we said to each other, and sort of agreed that there was no time (and weather) like the present. The next day, this plan became unthinkable, as the only Manhattan dwellers we know watched out their office windows as skyscrapers fell from the sky. Instead of an autumn stroll through a city neighborhood, stopping to eat or shop in a new place and visit a new "home," we took these two survivors of the country's disaster into our home and tried to help them cope with it all. Of course we were powerless to explain the why. Or the "how to cope with it." We encouraged sleep and nourishment in an environment free of debris and smoke and the horrid silence that apparently fell upon the city immediately after the disaster. We watched two energetic, well-dressed 20-somethings sit around in sweats, without makeup and stare at the TV in increasing disbelief. How can one continue to live in a world so touched by this tragedy? We shopped for simple necessities for them and winked at their solace in "fast food." Of course the mega-fat meals didn't help; but they were comforting reminders of a simpler, happier time.

We put them back on the train, unsure what the next week would hold. They came back again the next Friday, and the terror had been replaced with the resolve to leave the city--at least for a while. At least for one of them.

Dewey Uncovered!

Peg and Lisa write: As our readers know, the editors of this 'zine will travel to the remotest corners of the globe in search of a philosophical landmark--especially if that landmark is in any way related to the life of either of the two philosophers who can legitimately lay claim to the title of most influential philosopher of the twentieth century. Their travels in Ireland in the summer of 1998 included a sidetrip to Connemara to look for the cottage where Wittgenstein had spent the summer before his death. On another trip, they visited the University of Vermont, and discovered the final resting place for the ashes of John Dewey.

This summer presented your editors--oh, for heaven's sakes, us--with a golden opportunity, an opportunity to travel to Nova Scotia. (In point of fact, Nova Scotia was not our final destination; Newfoundland was. But that is a story for another day.) Why golden? Well, because Nova Scotia is home to the town of Hubbards, also known as the summer residence of Dewey Himself!

How, you may ask, did we know that Dewey summered in this small town on the southeastern shore of Nova Scotia? The answer, of course, is, "keen sleuthing skills on the part of a certain careful reader of the Dewey corpus had detected a number of references to Hubbards; return addresses on letters, mentions in biographies, etc." That, and a party conversation with Larry Hickman, director of the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, who'd made a pilgrimage to Hubbards himself some years back.

Armed with a brief email from Larry sketching out his efforts to find Dewey's cottage, we pointed our trusty Golf in the direction of Hubbards. Taking a leaf from Larry's detective notebook (and thinking about where we'd start if we landed in our own small town), we started our search for Dewey at the local post office.

Larry's message had warned us that Dewey's cottage probably didn't exist any more; when he'd visited the town, a young man had taken him to Sawler's Lake, to the place where he said the cottage had once stood. But frankly, both Larry and we were hopeful that the young whipper-snapper was talking out of turn, and that, upon our arrival, we'd find the Dewey family cottage still standing. Failing that, we hoped maybe to meet someone who might know something about the man himself.

Upon arriving at the p.o., we found only one person in attendance--the postal clerk. But we were quick to draw a crowd--okay, one other person--who must have sensed that we were on an undercover philosophical investigation. We asked the assembled crowd if they had ever heard of John Dewey, and if not, did they know of anyone who might have been living in the 1920's and '30's who might have had contact with Dewey.

Talking it over between the two of them, the crowd hit on the name Roy Harnish. "He's the man; if anyone in town knows anything about that time period, it would be Roy."

And then, the postal clerk did just what we would have done, had someone walked into our office in St. Peter and told us that someone famous had lived there, and could we help them find out more about them; she got on the phone and called Roy Harnish for us. And Roy Harnish was home--



Dewey at his typewriter in Hubbards, Nova Scotia (Photo courtesy of John Dewey Papers, Special Collections, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.)

and said come on over, of course he'd heard of Dewey.

It was exciting to see our quirky search become theirs; they too became invested in finding out more about this philosopher who had lived in their town some seventy years ago. And it was absolutely astonishing to us that, in the span of ten minutes, two people and a telephone call put us in touch with someone who had known John Dewey. Never mind six degrees of separation; we were at the source!

Following the pastiche of directions--a combination of those from Mr. Harnish, the postal clerk, and the helpful citizen--we made our clumsy way to Mr. Harnish's house, located on Hubbards Beach. All the while we were driving, we effused like high school girls standing in line to see the Beatles perform on the Ed Sullivan Show.

When we arrived, Mr. Harnish escorted us to his back porch, overlooking the ocean. "What can I do for you?" he asked. "Tell us everything you know about John Dewey," we said. And this is the story that Roy Harnish told:

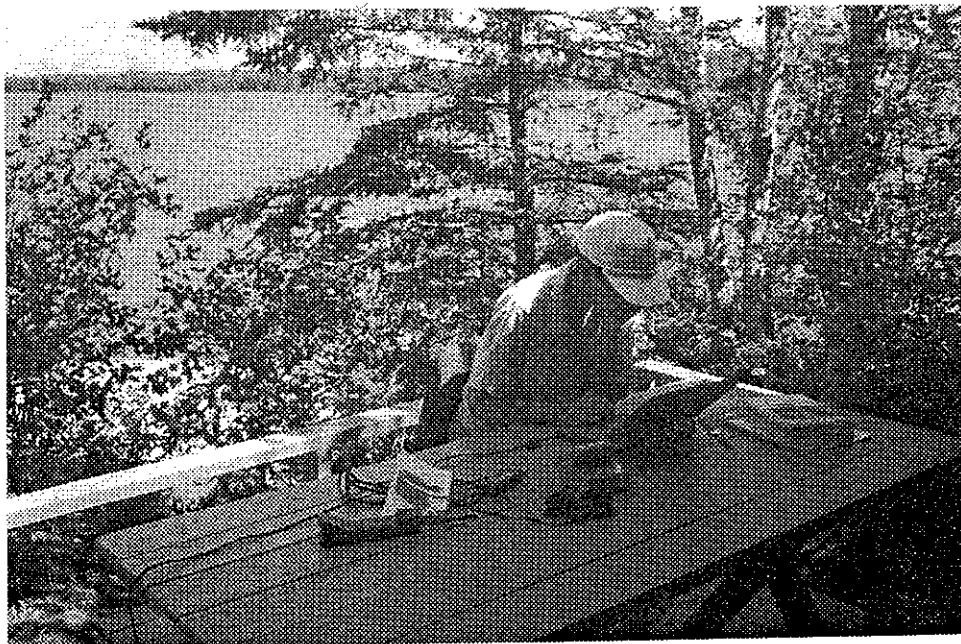
In 1925, when Roy Harnish was an inquisitive eight year old, Hubbards, Nova Scotia was home to one A.W. Shatford, a major merchant who built a grand hotel for summer occupants. One of those occupants was Dr. Robert Norwood, a man born in Hubbards who went on to become the pastor of St. Bartholomew's Church in New York City. Norwood was a very important and influential clergyman whose path crossed those of many New York literati, including Grossett (of Grossett and Dunlap fame) and...John Dewey.

Shatford owned property on Sawler's Lake, and Norwood purchased land there to build a big log cottage for himself and his family. He persuaded Dewey and his other intellectual colleagues to do the same.

The Norwood-Dewey circle built cottages clustered around Sawler's Lake--close, but not too close to each other. Their occupants formed a tight community, coming in to town to get the mail and the groceries, but mostly sticking to themselves. To young Roy Harnish, who saw the summer people in the drug store and the post office, Dewey cut a rather unimpressive figure. He used to come to town in his hang-around-the-house clothes, while Pastor Norwood was always well turned out in a proper suit.

But apparently there were occasions when neither of them was wearing much of anything. Mr. Harnish reports that Sawler's Lake cottage owners--including one John Dewey--built high walkways extending from the second floors of their cottages out into Sawler's Lake. And what was the purpose of these walkways? Mr. Harnish has it on reliable authority that they enabled cottage inhabitants to walk out into the lake and swim nude whenever they felt like it. Yes, dear readers; John Dewey swam naked.

Mr. Harnish didn't know why or when the Dewey family stopped summering in Hubbards; he remem-



bered that Norwood's son, Ted, drowned at the lake, an event which led the family to build a new home on the ocean. Norwood himself died at the tragically young age of 33.

It is true that Dewey's family cottage had been torn down; no part of it remains on the site at Sawler's Lake. But we found something much more valuable in Mr. Roy Harnish; a masterful storyteller who showed us John Dewey through the eyes of a child.

You Can Call Them Anything

We're pleased to bring you this work by Laura Hendrie, a writer whose most recent address is Blue Hill, Maine, but whose roots in Burro Country run deep. Her fiction includes Stygo, a collection of short stories, and the novel Remember Me.

There hasn't been much change in the valley where I live. The pollen count finally dropped last month. The snow finally left. The dog sleeps out in the middle of the road nowadays like he owns it, and last time I drove to the post office, I noticed a cow in the field next to ours with a twisted horn who looks as if he's pointing to himself. But that's about it, except that our toolshed is still flat on its face out there in the field. I told Mark I wanted to get it hauled away, but he said no. He says the sight of it keeps him humble. I told him he ought to try developing a sense of humor, but he just sighed at me like I'm a fool.

But I guess I've been thinking about Detonator, too. He was the donkey we adopted through the BLM's Adopt-a-Wild-Horse Program, which was being run at that time by the State Penitentiary down in Los Lunas, New Mexico. The warden had put an ad in *The Journal*: "Ready for Immediate Adoption: One Burro. Cute. Come see." So we did, and in fact, he *was* cute. Small, shaggy, soft and gray with white whiskers, sleepy eyes and an enormous pair of forlorn ears. He was like a little gray orphan, with a belly that swung off his spine like a water balloon, and pink hooves as delicate as tulips. When you gave him a carrot, he'd wag like a dog. Of course, we had to wonder how such an adorable and innocent-looking little animal had gotten mixed up in the Wild Horse Relocation program at the prison. Also, why somebody had named him Detonator. Also, why they were willing to give him, his halter and bridle, *and* a week's worth of hay to us, all for free, no questions asked. But how could we say no? Hadn't a burro just like this one carried the Virgin clear to Bethlehem? On the drive home, Mark decided that the name Detonator must have come from someone who'd been caught with illegal explosives. That seemed reasonable. Looking over our shoulders at our new friend,

who was staring in through the back window at us like the kid who never gets the punchline, we even thought it was funny.

But it wasn't. Burros, donkeys—whatever they are, their goal in life is to make jackasses out of anyone who thinks they aren't. They also have a thing about dogs, as our blind Great Dane, Kickstart, soon discovered. After he bumped into Detonator a few times out in the yard by accident, his nerves were shot. He refused to even leave the house unless one of us went with him. We tried donkey hobbles, but it turned out Det could travel just as fast as a tripod. Then we tried tying him up, hobbling him, *and* locking him out in the toolshed, which worked until he decided to lean against the beam he was tied to which blew out the wall and collapsed the building, which was all we found out in the corral when we got home that night, until we decided to give up looking for him and went up to the house where we found standing at the kitchen table, helping himself to a stick of butter while Kickstart cowered under a chair. The 110-volt electric fence didn't work either. As soon as Mark turned it on, Detonator hopped over (he was still hobbled) and leaned against it with a little sigh of pleasure. Then he saw the dog, who had *just* decided it might be safe enough to try crossing the yard again by himself and after yanking up the new triple-heavy-duty metal stake he was tied to as easily as you might yank a carrot out of the ground, he dropped to his knees, and rolled under the fence out to the other side. It took him all of three and a half minutes. I ran out to separate them, while Mark, cursing his ignorance of electrical things, went down to find out why the fence wasn't working. To put it mildly, it was, and Mark's hair has never been the same since.

And that, in jackass terms, was a slow day.

For a while, we stopped trying to keep him in and tried to keep him out. Mark gave him a nine-foot creosote railroad tie to drag around and we put him down by the stream, as far away from the house as our land went. But Detonator didn't mind. He'd stand out there next to his

railroad tie, sleepy-eyed and downwind, letting the flies settle over him, letting the day move onward, so peaceful and quiet and still that he might have been the product of a taxidermist. Meanwhile, our poor blind dog would sit on the front porch, cocking his head first one way and then another, trying to decide how lucky he was. It was sad. I'd always thought of him as an intelligent animal, but he made the wrong decision every time.

So in the end, we did just what we'd cursed the State Pen for doing to us: we gave him to people who didn't know any better. I phoned around until I found a man from Alabama who had just sunk his money into a small tourist motel up near the ski area north of us. He felt a little donkey might make good advertising. "Tourists out west like to see western-type things," he mused. "A little bitty burro can't be that much trouble, can it?"

Not at all. We coaxed Det into his horse trailer using a 4 by 4 winch. When he threatened to blow out the trailer walls and climb in cab with us, I offered to ride in the back with him, where he helped himself to his favorite food, a 40 lb. bag of dog food and the top half of my favorite cap.

The tourist motel had been built to look like a miniature frontier army outpost, wagon wheels lining the driveway and a semi-circle of log cabins facing a carefully mowed lawn in the center of which was a tall pole with a American flag flying from it. The owner wasn't there when we arrived, and his wife said she hadn't heard anything about getting a free donkey, but we could leave it if we had to.

Detonator had enjoyed the ride so much we were worried about getting him out of the truck, but who can say how a mind like that works? Maybe he'd spotted a wall that needed moving, or a handicapped dog. In any case, he stepped off that tailgate as easily as if he'd been born to it and stood with one foot cocked, sucking his teeth and dozing, eyes at half-mast. Mark led him over to the flagpole, a tall, stout wooden flagpole, about twenty inches round, and tied him to it with as many knots as he could

make out of the reins. The woman stayed on her porch, watching from a distance.

"Excuse me, you people," she called over. "He won't bite the children, will he?"

When I said no, that was the one thing he wouldn't bother with, her face cleared. Then she called, "What if I made a straw hat with holes for his ears and some flowers? Would he mind that?"

"Why, no," I said. "Detonator loves hats." I leaned in the truck for the tack.

"Excuse me again," called the woman. "But why do you call it Detonator?"

I put the tack down. "Why do we call it Detonator?"

Mark pretended not to hear. I turned and called back over to her. "Detonator was his name when we got him," I called. "But he'll go by anything. You can call him... anything."

"Daisy," mused the woman. "That'd be cute, wouldn't it?"

I agreed. "Here. He likes this a lot," and I brought her the last of the Kibbles'n Bits. Then I shook her hand and wished her luck, went over to make sure Detonator's rope was fully secured around that pole, and then Mark and I got in the truck and we shot out of there like we'd been blown from a cannon.

Sure we miss him. Detonator was the most excitement we've had in years. But here's the thing. Last month when we drove up to see him—not to visit in person, just to wave from a distance, just to see what he looked like with a straw hat on and how many fences they'd built trying to keep him in—the place had a For Sale Sign on it. The cabins were boarded up, some of the wagon wheels had fallen over and one of the screens on the office porch was missing. And that wasn't all. In the center of the lawn where the flagpole had been? A splintered stub sticking out of the ground at an angle. And that, I imagine, was only the beginning.



Hometown Tourist...

...In which Carol explains How to Be a Martha Stewart Grandma

The grandkids--Emma, 11 and Max, 7--were coming for a long weekend late in July. We hadn't had the fun of having them alone at our house for some time so we were making big plans. The County Fair was on, we could go to that and ride everything, eat everything, toss balls and throw rings like we have never done before. And, it is summer, so we can go to "Pete's Lake" and play in the water and have a picnic for Bettie's birthday. And of course, the raspberries are ripe so we can spend a lot of time telling the kids how much fun it is to pick berries every single day!

WRONG!

The temperature every day was in the high 90's. We actually "farmed out" the berry picking because we were too busy and it was too hot. The kids did pick some and did a bang up job too.

Too hot for the Fair, at least for Gramsie and Granpaw. They can't take the heat like they once could. We did go to the lake but the water was pretty green and the responsibility of watching two good swimmers in a big lake was giving Gramsie a nervous fit. We had birthday cake and came home.

But--have you any idea what a wonderful machine an old L.C. Smith manual typewriter can be? We put it on the kitchen table and they took turns writing stories, learning to spell words, playing around. No mouse, no push button, just them. It was wonderful. And a couple of castoff wallpaper books provided hours of creativity with crowns, hats, boxes, greeting cards emerging with a little cutting and pasting. No money, no worries, just a little garbage when they were done.

Then Max found some long cardboard tubes in the basement--who knows what they were from? They became all kinds of things, scepters, weapons, and--with a long bungee cord

fastened on the side--musical instruments, batons, telescopes, and inventions of every kind. We had kings and queens, marching bands, artists, and yes, a few disagreements.

I hope the kids enjoyed it as much as we did. Kids still have wonderful imaginations and it isn't always necessary to have real "Toys" in order to have real "Fun".

However, it does take time. We were pooped after they left.

Travel Notes

Come for the art; stay for the...worms?

Eagle Lake, Wisconsin has not one, but two claims to fame: Carl's Wood Art Chain Saw Carvings, featuring a 28 foot tall cowboy, and the bait shop, where nightcrawlers are sold by the baker's dozen.



Wittgenstein's latest career change

Imagine Peg's excitement when the engineer on our cog railway trip up to the top of Mount Washington introduced himself to us as L.W.!!!



If Plato Went On Holiday...

...would he be likely to stop in Republic, Michigan, where they celebrate Republic Ethnic Days every July? (Do Spartans count as "ethnic" in Athens?)

...and would he stay *away* from the Hemlock Hideaway Resort, on Hemlock Lake in Wisconsin?



Pantheon Gastronomique

A Toast to Us

Toast, at least in the United States, is ubiquitous. As a result, it is the sort of foodstuff that is often taken cruelly for granted. It is the "also ran" on the breakfast plate, the "comes with" on the menu. The thing you don't pay any attention to.

Unless it is good, which it almost never is. In this Pantheon Gastronomique, we want to showcase two really exceptional toast experiences we had this summer. But before we do so, we need to tell you what makes toast exceptional.

For many people, the most important question to be asked about toast is "white or wheat?" But for us, that question pales in comparison to a far more important one. "Is the bread homemade (or "housemade" as we say in snobby restaurants these days)? It doesn't really matter to us all that much if it's white or wheat; the important thing is, did this bread come out of a factory--or from something at least resembling a kitchen?

Another, related question, is "Can the toast stand up to the task to which it is assigned?" Peg, for one, wants a stand-up kind of toast, a hearty toast that can hold its own under a variety of toppings, including not only jam and marmalade but also poached eggs, baked beans, and, if you're into that kind of thing, chipped beef. Toast that is too thin can't withstand this test. (Of course toast that is too thick risks the dangers of the untoasted middle; browned outsides and a still-cool inside disrupt the pleasure of toast.)

Of course most of the time, most of the world's toast is not topped with eggs or beans or cream sauce and canned peas; it's topped with what we *call* butter. Even when we really mean that the toast is slathered with some vegetable oil "spread." And let's face it; even the best toast in the world can--no, *will*--be ruined by the use of margarine (or "oleo," in parts of the south). Butter is butter; margarine is, well, it's imitation butter. (You don't ever hear anyone saying "pass the margarine" when they mean "pass the butter," do you?) Good toast is buttered toast. Q.E.D.

That, all too briefly, is what we mean by "good toast" (and believe us; there's a *lot* more to be said about the matter). Now, it's on to our Toast Experiences.

The Candlepin Restaurant, Barton, Vermont: We came upon this toast oasis late one morning, when we were trying to stretch our breakfast to last until we met Peg's parents for a late lunch in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Unable to survive for a moment longer, we saw this unassuming little cafe next to--guess what?--a bowling alley. We split an order of their homemade white toast, which came with its own peanut butter and jelly. Let us just say that it is a testimony to the high quality of this toast that our enjoyment of it was not utterly vitiated by the presence of margarine. This was the kind of bread Lisa's grandma used to make; a dense, ever-so-slightly sweet white bread that attains ineffability when it is sliced and toasted. Our advice: ask for it dry and bring your own butter. (Go for Cabot's, a Vermont standby.)

Some other restaurant-and-bakery, on the Trans Canada Highway, near Big Bras d'Or Lake, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia (no, we are not making up the name of that lake): This was a late afternoon toast experience, after a long day's drive. Perhaps this explains the fact that we failed to write down the name of the restaurant or the name of the town. We remember that it was on the righthand side of the road as you proceeded north; does that help?

Peg ordered wheat toast here; she asked for it dry, having learned her lesson in Barton. However, in a truly fortuitous turn of events, the baked potato that Lisa ordered came with a surfeit of butter, from which supply she was able to pilfer. The butter served as the perfect adornment for this truly splendid whole wheat bread, which had been toasted to golden-brown perfection. Toast was accompanied by a dish of sweet, brown, home-baked beans, into which Peg dipped the crusts. Just the thing for a decidedly cold and rainy August day.

Have you a toast experience? Write us at PonH, Upper Crust Division, Box 355, St. Peter, MN 56082

small comforts: toast

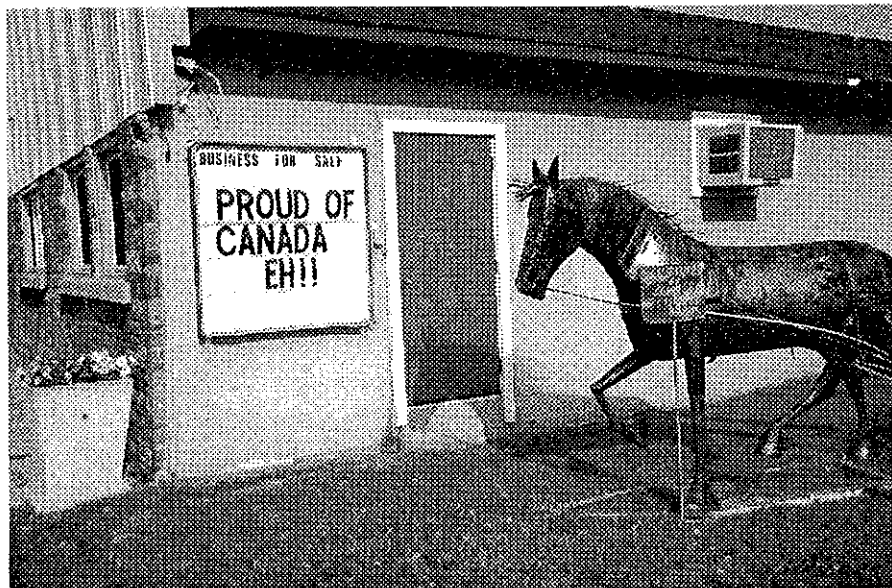
AN ODE TO HOTEL TOAST

We're very pleased to be able to increase our coverage of the international culinary scene, thanks to the addition of Samantha Brennan to our staff.

In Newfoundland¹ where I lived from the age of 4 to 11—having emigrated from England with my baker parents and baby sister—the locals called it “fog bread.” White, wispy, and insubstantial. Mass-produced, eerily free of mould for weeks on end. The bread of choice for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches as well as such more traditional favourites such as bologna and mayo or margarine and sugar. “My dear,” said a neighbour, “it ain’t much of a bread but it sure makes a lovely piece of toast.”

As toast was where I first encountered it. Growing up as a child of bakers who cared deeply about such things as the proper ingredients for bread, there wasn’t any of the processed white sliced stuff in our house. Sure, we had french baguettes from time to time, or nice, hard crusty rolls. But just trying getting those in the toaster. The first time I had puffy, white bread was as toast in a hotel dining room. What a culinary eye-opening experience—hotel toast. Yum. Soft, squishy and evenly brown all

over. It was the perfect receptacle for strawberry jam. I remained convinced through a few years of my early childhood that there was something special about hotel toast, some special appliance they used, some secret recipe. Whenever my family stayed in hotels, I ordered toast. I even called it “hotel toast,” convinced that one couldn’t get it elsewhere. Years later I discovered the secret—the bread that my parents never put in the shopping cart because it was full of “artificial preservatives.” (Ketchup



was similarly maligned and banned along with “miracle whip” and pre-fab pastry, individually portioned in plastic wrappers.) The love of puffy white toast hasn’t successfully been transmitted through the generations. I tried some on my children while we were renting a cottage in Prince Edward Island² this year. “Ewww, ick.” they replied. I’m sure their rebellion of parental standards will take a different form. Perhaps they’ll admire lousy but successful arguments.

Your Canadian Correspondent,
Samantha Brennan
Philosophy, The University of Western Ontario
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¹ A word to the wise for the would-be tourists. It’s pronounced with “fun” in the middle. New-fun-land.

² More Canadian geography facts: P.E.I. is Canada’s smallest province (population 139,000), home to the Anne of Green Gables industry and lovely red sand beaches. Yep, red. You’re sure to come home with formerly white, now pink, socks and towels.

Biscuits...and Grandma Kuehn

Philosopher of food Glenn Kuehn is, like Lisa, a Wisconsinite by birth and disposition. After spending last year teaching in Atlanta, he has secured a real-live tenure-track job at Mississippi State University in Columbus (a place, he reports, formerly known as Possum Town). Glenn sends us periodic posts, chronicling his efforts to adjust to his new landscape, with particular attention to its culinary aspects. Here's his latest.

In 1825, Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin reluctantly published, anonymously, *The Physiology of Taste. Or Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy*. Brillat-Savarin was the greatest gastronomer of his time and he proposed that there should be a tenth muse, Gasteria. He was pressed to write about food and cooking by his friends, and he eventually came up with his book...much of which is filled with pithy aphorisms. Among other things he said: "It is heresy to insist that we must not mix wines: a man's palate can grow numb and react dully to even the best bottle, after the third glass from it," and "To invite people to dine with us is to make ourselves responsible for their well-being for as long as they are under our roofs," and of course the famous, "Tell me what you eat, and shall tell you what you are,"...but above all, so far as I'm concerned, the greatest of Brillat-Savarin's sayings was: "A dinner which ends without cheese is like a beautiful woman with only one eye."

The best translation of Brillat-Savarin's work was done by M.F.K. (Mary Francis Kay) Fisher (1908-1992)...who herself is arguably the greatest writer regarding food/cooking ever...even surpassing Jean-Anthelme. In her extensive annotations of Brillat-Savarin's book, she consistently refers to him as "the Professor." (Among guests to Fisher's house included Julia Child...a long-standing friend until Fisher died.)

In my writings about food and cooking, I have looked to MF (as she was reportedly called) and also to Jean-Anthelme. J-A (as he was probably not called) who said, "the universe is nothing without the things that live in it, and everything that lives, eats," to show me that that a philosophy of food is not only important, but necessary.... "animals feed themselves," he said, "men eat, but only wise men know the art of eating." The choice of taste is everything when it comes to choosing what one puts in one's mouth. So much of the world is edible, but so little of it is food, and so little among foods is what one would personally consider tasty.

M.F.K. Fisher wrote several books...to say the least. *Serve It Forth, Consider the Oyster, How to Cook a Wolf, The Gastronomical Me, An Alphabet For Gourmets, With Bold Knife and Fork*, and others. *The Gastronomical Me* begins with a quote from the American Pragmatist (which is a qualifier for my philosophy phrend as he was Spanish by birth), George Santayana..... "To be happy you must have taken the measure of your powers, tasted the fruits of your passion, and learned your place in the world."

I imagine I'm one of the few philosophy Ph.D's out there who have quotes from M.F.K. Fisher, Brillat-Savarin, Julia Child, and Martha Stewart in their dissertation...yet I feel deep

A Northerner's Recipe for Southern Biscuits

1. *Preheat oven to 450.*
2. *Peel off outer, foil layer.*
3. *Rap tube sharply on edge of counter until it bursts open.*
4. *Separate biscuits and place them on a baking sheet (close together if you like them soft, far apart if you like them crispy.*
5. *Bake until golden.*
6. *Eat while still warm.*

Biscuits, continued

down that it is vastly important to understanding the relationship we have to our worlds through food.

In that light I have learned a new taste and texture...and I see it as a new world that I had not known until recently. In Wisconsin we had dinner rolls...we had croissants. For a couple years from the Ovens of Brittany my family ate the butteriest and flakiest croissants.....oh, so good. I remember them. I know my parents remember them too....we also remember fondly the sticky buns on Sundays?? Such pastry rituals that defined our lives. Well, of course you could say they didn't "define" our lives, but, c'mon.....we'd give a lot to have a sticky bun, or an Ovens' croissant right now. So many of us would give so much to have our favorite foods.....a Sammy's Pizza, Sesame Chicken at the Mandarin Club, Quattro's Pizza, a martini at Spice...these special places of food mean so much to us. I'd give a lot right now to have a sticky bun on a Sunday morning...with coffee.....sugar, half/half, and real butter. That food-moment was, well, a moment. Rituals come and go...and that was a "sweet" one.

In the south.....an odd phrase I've come to adopt, I have discovered a gastronomical delight not explored by Brillat-Savarin nor MF, and I consider it a great oversight. Perhaps it is simply too common, too southern, too simple, but I have come to love the biscuit.

It's buttery, it's simple, it's salty, it's flaky...it goes with virtually everything, and it's so damn simple. It's a lesson in learning about other people that I was taught a long time ago but didn't learn, or understand, until today. I've had some strange "southern" cooking tendencies lately. Tendencies I did not have in Atlanta...but then Atlanta is really no more than a hot Chicago and the restaurants providing gourmet food were only a few minutes from my apartment. Here, in rural Mississippi, things are slightly different...and cooking is far more, well, local. I've gained a temptation to cook "southern" things. Things like grits, cornbread, and poke...anything that has the suffix "greens" is on

my menu lately. And then I simply had to make them....biscuits.

How is it that I've missed out on this culinary delight all these years. All these years of Wisconsin dinner buffets of chicken gizzards and hot bacon dressing...but no biscuits. Biscuits so delicate and buttery, so absorbent and filling.....where were these delights in my life?

I made them the other night, and it brought me back to my childhood....a child of northern lands. I remember my Grandma Kuehn making a dish. It was fried Oscar Meyer links and mashed potatoes and gravy from the links. If you were British or Irish you could probably call it "bangers and mash," but she died long before I came into any sense of culinary knowledge to give it a label—to me it was a really salty gravy and sausage links. Yet, I now think she was preparing me for my current life. She used to cook bangers and mash, and without calling it so taught me a taste....a taste that brings me back to her and the cooking-related-relation we had.

Today I fried links and made a gravy, and I poured it all over biscuits...fresh biscuits I cooked. It was fabulous and I thought of Grandma Kuehn who taught me of a particular taste, and then I thought how I incorporated it into my new life here. And it tasted good....and I smiled.

As MF wrote...."I tell about myself, and how I ate bread on a lasting hillside, or drank red wine in a room now blown to bits, and it happens without my willing it that I am telling too about the people with me then, and their other deeper needs for love and happiness.

"There is food in the bowl, and more often than not, because of what honesty I have, there is nourishment in the heart, to feed the wilder, more insistent hungers. We must eat. If, in the face of that dread fact, we can find other nourishment, and tolerance and compassion for it, we'll be no less full of human dignity.

"There is a communion of more than our bodies when bread is broken and wine drunk. And that is my answer, when people ask me: Why do you write about hunger, and not wars or love?"

Pie Fallout

Our piece on pie in the Spring 2001 issue bore us some bitter fruit, in the form of this crisp response from Jackie Minks of Princeton, Minnesota. We're still wiping the filling out of our eyes.

Why didn't cream pies make it into your chart? Don't tell me you shoved them all into the category of "other"? Banana cream is a particular favorite of mine, as is French Silk. What about Key Lime? Fruit and nut pies are wonderful, but they are not alone. Have you ever seen a member of PETA throw a blueberry pie at a fur-wearing fashion designer? NO. Cream pies are the activists of the pie world. They deserve a place in your chart.



And while we're taking blame, we may as well admit that we received not a few messages from readers asking why there was no pie recipe in an article on pie! Well, we heard you, readers! Here, without further ado, is the Hometown Tourist's recipe for piecrust. (Note that we did not say her "virtually foolproof" recipe. We have been down this road before. There is no such thing as a virtually foolproof piecrust recipe, for there is no bigger fool than a piecrust fool. However, the egg and vinegar--unusual ingredients in a piecrust--do seem to help keep the crust from getting tough.) You're on your own for the filling. Just stay away from that gluey stuff in the can. This recipe makes three generous single crusts--or, if you prefer, a double and a single.

The Hometown Tourist's Piecrust

1 1/4 c. vegetable shortening
3 c. all purpose flour
1/2 t. salt

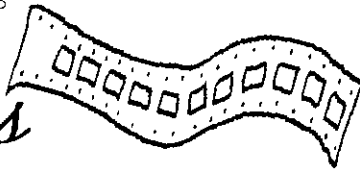
Stir together flour and salt, cut in shortening with a pastry blender. When you're done, you should have a mixture that has small and large lumps of flour-covered shortening. (Large lumps may be as big as a penny; small lumps will look like very coarse cornmeal.)

1 egg
5 T water

1 T vinegar (white or cider; not foofy herb)

Stir these together in a cup, and then add them all at once to the dry mixture with a fork. Stir just till moist. Then gather the mixture into a ball (don't linger over this step), and cut it into three equal portions. Make each portion into a tight, thick disk, wrap them tightly, and refrigerate for at least an hour. (This lets the gluten relax. Translation: when you try to roll it out, it will not spring back into a tiny ball as if it were made out of silly putty.) Roll them out and do with them what you will.

Barb's Briefs



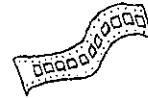
The Brief serves up a double portion in this double issue--and introduces a sidekick to boot! Can we hope to hear more from "Uneven?"

Fresh from a dismal showing of "The Pledge" (whatever were they thinking--all those fools* just returned from rehab or something and decided to get together to make a ghastly Movie??), The Brief has just watched "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" Homer would poke out both his eyes if he could find a sharp stick. And the ruse of making me want to hear the "great music"! Not nearly enough to make up for such a ridiculous movie.

* Jack Nicholson, Harry Dean Stanton, Mickey Rourke, Sam Shepard--all looking ghastly (no it was NOT makeup--this was cinema verite at its most!!) There was no believability to this--of COURSE he would have heard that the "giant" died in a car crash. Sheesh! [Ed. note: *We are not responsible for the fact that BTB has probably just done the equivalent of revealing that Rosebud is the name of the sled, or that Anna Karinena throws herself in front of a train.*]



If you loved "American Beauty" [see vol III, no. 2-3], check out "PANIC" (William H. Macy, Donald Sutherland, Tracey Ullman, Neve Campbell and Ally McBeal's boyfriend's son, David Dorfman). Better characters, less weirdness, same "predictable surprises."



And now, a word from the newest member of the Phil on Hol stable of critics, Uneven (a.k.a. New Paltz philosopher and FOB[arb], Verone Lawton):

We went to Rosendale to see "Songcatcher" on Monday and liked it quite a bit. It has a great cast, FABulous music, good production values, etc., but they apparently tried to save money on the script, which is dumb and full of absurd holes. Too bad; with a decent script it could have been a terrific movie. Worth seeing in any case, if only for the music. There is a little bit with Taj Mahal that is quite inexplicable. He's featured prominently on the poster and pops up at one point to play banjo with Anthony Quinn and then disappears without a trace. No reason whatsoever for him to be there at all, and his little song adds nothing to the already splendid soundtrack. Maybe he's a friend of the director or something.

DOMESTIC OR IMPORTED?

BTB writes: We recently dined at the new Mediterranean restaurant in Rhinebeck NY (in this case the only part of the Med in evidence is Italy--much to our disappointment). It has a very prestigious chef, an interesting menu of beautiful fresh dishes and (I'm told) a nice wine list. My dining partner selected the day's Chardonnay special and I requested my usual drink. Water. The wait person asked politely if I would like the Perrier or the House Water. The Roz Chast cartoon of "recipes for water drinks" flashed through my mind and I politely said "plain will be fine" or something like that. After she scampered away, my partner commented that a lot of people must select the House Water since there were several large pitchers of it standing around on the serving stations! I found the house water to be quite fine--an unassuming little domestic I believe.

The October Vumman

Minneapolis vumman Brita DeRemee writes: Thank you, thank you! to Charlene Haddock Seigfried and Patrick McCormack for their responses to the my first "Vummanhood" column (Vol.III, No. 4). I started "Vummanhood" for the purpose of stewing and processing my identity as a postmodern mother and housewife. My "vummanhood" concept grew out of an image of a 1940's hausfrau: a strong, apron-ed woman who was the wageless commander of her home front. Why this particular image tickled me so was that I could idealize this woman as someone having shameless, self-respect for her position as housewife. She didn't apologize for her figure or fashion, or have to justify the use of her time and energy. Her role had silent, unquestionable significance and purpose.

I hold onto this image of Vumman because I yearn for her shameless self-respect.

It's essential for getting me through the rigors of my daily routine managing a household and the lives of three small boys. I yearn to identify with that idealized image of a woman from 60 years ago, but I never put on an apron or wear support hose with jeans. However, like the 1940's Vumman, I am the operating system, the Outlook, the Quicken, the mitten and permission slip finder, the nurse, the cook, the conversationalist and athletic director, and so on and so on. But what do I look like? Is there a contemporary vision of me? June Cleaver? Carol Brady? On a good day I might feel like Mary Poppins and Mary Tyler Moore all rolled up into one. Sometimes I feel a bit Emeril-ish and even a bit of Martha-ish once in a blue moon. But most of the time I feel exactly like an "indefatigable old beaver" (see Charlene Haddock Siegfried's letter of William James, *POH* Vol.V, no.1). Vummanhood is one tough job.

We expect 21st century women to define themselves by what they do professionally. And before we get around to listening to their an-



Lysistrata takes to the waves: The entire cast of "Lysistrata, Aweigh!" a musical, aquatic version of Aristophanes' classic comedy, takes a break during dress rehearsal, to pose for a photo. Your editors were thrilled to land bit parts in the musical, which has been performed annually at the Brooklin (Maine) Repertory Boat Launch for some twenty years now.

Vumman, continued

swers, we've judged them by their degree of physical youth and beauty. And then whether or not they're married, etc. The challenge of being a vumman is that: 1) you may or may not be married; 2) you are beholden to your genetics as to whether or not your body youthfully endured the rigors of child bearing; and 3) you may or may not have a job outside of vummanhood. A vumman might very well look like an "indefatigable old beaver," but she could very well look like Farah Fawcett too. Even if a woman is a vumman with all the desirables going for her, we're not so sure we want to visualize her as an unpaid worker wiping snot and clearing dishes. We need to understand the role of vummanhood exactly in those terms, however, terms, which include the gamut of messy tasks. The complex, essential role of a vumman is assumed by an incredible variety of women, not just June Cleavers or wrinkled faces in print dresses. Vummanhood didn't just disappear when the women's movement and automatic washers and dryers came along. Yet I think we're all more comfortable imagining vimmen (pl.) looking like "indefatigable old beavers" wiping snot and clearing dishes, not in the images of executives and super models. Perhaps the 21st century is ready and much in need of a non-corporal image to describe and embody the complex, essential role of a vumman. I offer the following....

A month ago I was taking a walk in my neighborhood and passed a house put into a rather precarious state. It was a charming, old bungalow that had been jacked up off its foundation and was now resting five feet above the ground on a ridiculous looking system of zig-zag supports and metal beams. At the time I was preparing to depart on a long-awaited "trip with the gals" to wine country. In order to leave town I had to write what might be called an "operations manual" for my husband who would be taking over my tasks of vummanhood for four consecutive days. Even though I stuck to what I thought were essential details—things like

medications, school schedules, etc.--and had no intentions of micro-managing, the length and detail of my lists seemed daunting once all the essentials were spelled out.

In fact the lists seemed practically unreal, as unreal as the temporary support system holding that bungalow five feet off the ground. Then it struck me that one way to describe vummanhood is that it's like the foundation of a house, the underlying structural support of home life that often goes unnoticed, the unglamorous basement if you will. The arrangements I had to make in order to step out of my role as a vumman for a few days were akin to the zig-zag jacks and I-beams holding up that bungalow, and I was the basement who got up and left town.

It's midnight and the POH deadline police are at my door, so time to sign off.... Reporting from the trenches, looking forward to your comments,

The Vumman

A-OK

This summer, to her great surprise, Lisa received an AOK award from the state of Minnesota. AOK, which stands for Acts of Kindness, is presented by the state division of Citizenship and Volunteer Services, to recognize people for their volunteer service to their community. So, in the Shameless Self-Aggrandizement Division here at Phil on Hol, we now bring you the Hometown Tourist, reporting on the trip she and Lisa's dad, Richard, took to receive the award on Lisa's behalf. Lisa wants to note that everything she knows about volunteering, she learned from them.

The state of Minnesota has an outstanding volunteer services organization and Governor Jesse Ventura claims to be a big supporter/promoter of volunteerism. A friend of Lisa's nominated her for the organization's "Act of Kindness"—and she won! The prize was a brunch reception at the Governor's Mansion and an award presentation at the Minnesota State Fair. Lisa was spending her summer in Maine; that's a long way from Minnesota, and a very expensive trip to make for a one-day event. So, she "conned" Mom and Dad to act as her proxies.

It took some convincing, since we prefer not to drive around crowded streets in unfamiliar territory at this time in our life. Enter Donna Rogstad, cousin, niece, godchild, and more; she lives nearby, is a great driver and is willing.

Of course the Governor was OUT campaigning in New Jersey for another Independent governor candidate so my boastful remark about shaking hands with the next President of the United States [ed. note: No! No!] was in vain. We really didn't miss him though, because Lieutenant Governor Mae Schunk was a magnificent hostess at the Governor's Mansion. She immediately made us all feel very welcome, invited everyone to be free to look around the house and the beautiful gardens, and to help ourselves to the brunch when we were ready.

The food was excellent, regular brunch fare but all served at the proper temperature on lovely dishes at tables set outside among the flowers. The crew from Gustavus (who were also there to receive an award for student volunteerism) invited us to sit at their table and—we were joined by Mae Schunk! What a lovely experience on one of the best weather days of the summer!

After enjoying our meal and taking many snapshots of the flowers, we went in to explore the house a bit more. One of the discoveries we made was the need for a minor plumbing repair in the ladies room. Donna was accommodating about taking care of that—should she submit her bill? Or shall we keep it as a story to share at family gatherings?

Then off to the fairgrounds, a familiar experience to us as former 4-H leaders. We had a long, standing, wait while a group of young people used the stage to present a play. Then it was our turn to be seated on the stage while awards were handed out to the winners. [Ed. note: a walnut plaque in the shape of Minnesota.]

As parents, it is a very humbling experience to be a stand-in for a "child" who has received an "Act of Kindness" award. It is even more humbling to be parents of three children, each who have shown us ways they perform these kind acts as a routine part of the lives they live, not always with awards.

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Chapter 16: Deriving Ordinary Life Conclusions from an Ordinary Life Theorem

To illustrate this Ordinary Life Logic Lesson, we will utilize the following Ordinary Life Theorem:

You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

Alternatively, we may read this theorem as, “For all x , if x is a fly, then for all y , if y is honey, and for all z , if z is vinegar, then $Lxy > Lxz$,” that is, the number of x 's that love y is greater than the number of x 's that love z .^{*} (We leave the symbolization to the student.)

At this date in the course, agile students will easily construct their own derivation of this theorem.* We instead turn our attention to the task of deriving additional conclusions from it.

Corollary I: You catch fewer flies with vinegar than with honey.

Proof: The proof of this corollary is obvious to students who understand the commutative property.

Lemma: You catch more wasps with honey than with vinegar

It follows (Lemma, Corollary I), that you catch fewer wasps with vinegar than with honey.

Lemma: You repel fewer wasps with honey than with vinegar.

Proof: We leave the proof to the reader.

From this proof, the adept student can clearly see that it follows that:

Corollary II: You repel more wasps with vinegar than with honey.

The student is instructed at this point to construct an empirical test, to determine whether they have performed the derivations properly. Please meet at my house at 8 on Saturday morning to carry out your test. Bring your own vinegar, in a stout spray bottle, preferably one with a powerful nozzle. Better yet, bring one of those Super-Soaker squirt guns.

* Adventurous students may, at this point, ask, “What happens if we begin by negating the theorem?”—that is, is it possible to prove this theorem by the *reductio* method? Inquisitive students will recall that an attempt to prove the parallel postulate indirectly led Saccheri to a series of conclusions of such fantastical dimensions that he slammed his notebook shut and fled geometry in horror—only to have his conclusions dignified into geometrical systems some generations later by Lobachevsky and Riemann. Alas, nothing nearly as interesting follows if you negate this theorem. “It is not the case that you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar”—or, to put it in more colloquial language, “You don’t catch more flies with honey than with vinegar”—simply turns out to be false.

Where Are They Now?

This, people, is the postmodern condition in a nutshell: While doing some web research to provide some kind of documentary evidence for the allegedly-deceased Michel Foucault's current occupation, I came upon the following item, in a column in a web magazine called artnet.com:

Does nature depicted through the screen of memory make you melancholy? Imagine, then, checking into the Barthes Motel or Foucault's Trailer Park for a more "continental" stay. The German artist-cartoonist Oleg Westphalen suggests as much in a group of four drawings at Apex Art, the international exhibition space in Tribeca, operated by artist Steven Rand. My favorite is Lacan's Grill and Lounge, an uncanny pun on psychiatric method. ("Gallery Yenta," by Rosetta Stone, <http://www.artnet.com/magazine/reviews/stone/stone6-9-99.asp>.)

Should it come as a surprise to ANYONE to learn that, in fact, trailers are EXACTLY the line of work Foucault has taken up? Of COURSE his life would trump, scoop, preempt all attempts to satirize it! The satirist got it just a bit wrong, however; Foucault is not running a trailer PARK, but a trailer SALES company. Yes, that's right, Foucault Trailer Sales, located in--where else?--Val Therese, Ontario, a hamlet just outside Sudbury.

Sudbury, Ontario. A city already rich in tourist destinations, including:

1. The Big Nickel—a giant (nine meters tall) facsimile of a nickel, erected on the side of the road, to commemorate the fact that Sudbury is home to...
2. The largest integrated mining complex in the world, which extracts—you guessed it—nickel! And copper. And which built...
3. The world's tallest smokestack (381 meters). And also...
4. The world's SECOND tallest smokestack. (I might be making this up, but damn, that second one is tall!)
5. A really great supermarket.
6. Some of the most barren landscape you are ever likely to encounter (courtesy of item 1).

And now we can add to that already-impressive list:

7. The opportunity to meet, chat with, and purchase a popup, RV, or airstream from the man who once said, "Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this "more" that renders them irreducible to the language (langue) and to speech. It is this "more" that we must reveal and describe." (Obvious why he went into trailer sales, no?)

Note: in an even more postmodernist moment, while we could find the website documenting that FAKE Foucault-trailer juxtaposition concocted by some artist type, we could not locate the website for the REAL connection between Foucault and trailers—Foucault Trailer Sales, Val Therese, Ontario. While their billboards proudly proclaim that they are "on the web at <http://www.Foucaultcountry.com>," no amount of pleading would coax my web browser to unearth such a site.

Real. Fake. What meaning could such words possibly have in a world constituted by discourse?

*For more on the Sudbury nickel, see <http://www.cyberbeach.net/~seajay/sudbury.html>. This excellent website documents the impressive progress that Sudbury has made in reclaiming its environment from years of mining activity. (Let's put it this way; Apollo astronauts visited the place to prepare for their walk on the moon. No kidding.) Surprisingly, the website says absolutely nothing about the fact that it is also home to a famous philosopher **who was thought to be dead!***

For a report on the smokestacks, and their part in Sudbury's turnaround, see <http://www.loe.org/archives/960119.htm>.

For what it was like to be stranded there, in the middle of the summer with a (broken) car full of little girls, in the "bad old days" of Sudbury, see Lisa's parents.

Philosophers on Holiday: A quarterly 'zine

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We borrow our motto from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein suggests that philosophical problems emerge when we forget how words function in ordinary circumstances. When language "goes on holiday," we *create* our own thorny, knotty problems—and then we proceed to chew on them for a thousand years or so.

Our 'zine was born out of our recognition that when philosophers *go* on holiday, we also tend to thrum up thorny little problems that keep us worrying all the way across Montana. Philosophers, unleashed in the ordinary world, are *dangerous*—or, at the very least, highly amusing. Of course on a good day, we can also be rather insightful. (Paying way too much attention to the ordinary *can* produce real wisdom every once in awhile.) *Philosophers On Holiday* attempts to bring all things philosophical and holiday-related together in one place; the danger, the amusement, the bumbling, and, yes, the occasional pearl of wisdom.

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