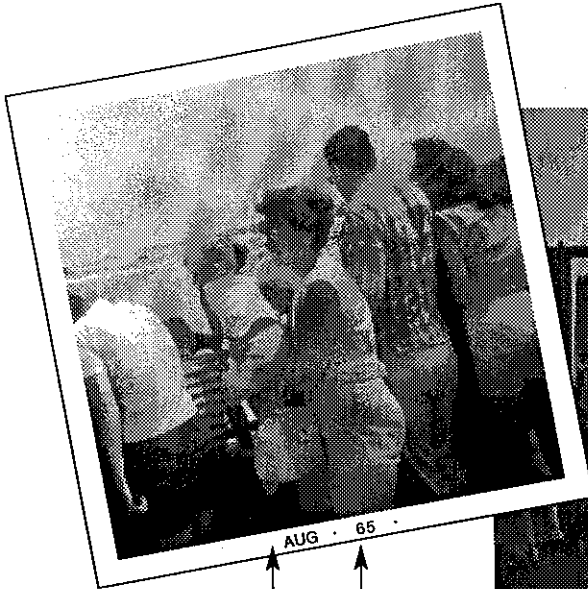


PHILOSOPHERS ON HOLIDAY

Philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday--LW

Volume IV, no. 1
Summer, 2000



↑ Lisa ↑ Mom



Lisa, Maid of the Mist



↑ Sister Sybil ↑ Mom
Lisa's first photo

NIAGARA FALLS

Lisa writes: We stopped at Niagara Falls this August, on our way from Maine to Minnesota. It was my fifth trip to the falls--Peg's first. For me, it's every bit as astonishing and awe-inspiring as it was the first time I saw it. No, I take that back; it's every bit as astonishing and awe-inspiring as it was the *fourth* time I saw it--the time when we went on the tour that takes you *behind the falls* (yes!), and visited the museum that displays all the barrels that people have used to go over the falls.* It's exponentially more astonishing than it was when I saw it the first time, at age five.

Peg writes: Somehow, the O'Connor family never made Niagara Falls a vacation destination. I suspect this was due to the fact that we all thought it was too far away for a car trip. As the youngest, who either sat in the middle of the back seat, or in the very back of the station wagon in the seat going the wrong way, I certainly thought it was much too far. So what if people came all the way from Wisconsin to see it? In New England, more than two hours in the car is considered a full day of driving.

See Niagara, p. 3

Philosophers on Holiday

A quarterly 'zine

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About the motto

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

From the Editors

The editors have returned from a wonderful summer in Brooklin, Maine. Brooklin is home to two of this issue's contributors--James Schwartz and Roxanne Sly. We miss them greatly, but are very happy that you can now meet them through their writings. We are very pleased to begin our fourth year of production. What started out as a tiny enterprise has grown significantly. We regularly print and distribute nearly 200 copies of this 'zine. America OnLine has not yet publicly announced its plans for a takeover, but after Time Warner what else is left?

In this issue, we continue with Joanna Crosby's tales from China; she will have you on pins and needles. Some of our readers chime in with responses to Brita DeRemee's reflection on vummanhood from the last issue.

Advertisements for airlines might be telling you to fly the friendly skies, but the skies seem a little tense when you suspect your seatmate is a suicidal bomb-toting mad man, as Charlene Haddock Seigfried reports.

The editors have been giving thought to re-making the movie *My Life as a Dog* since some of their adventures hiking in Acadia National Park. The new version will be entitled *Our Lives as Rescue Dogs* and casting calls will be sent out to all SPCA shelters in the coming weeks. Send a photo of your pooch to the editors.

Philosophers on Holiday is branching out more fully on to the world wide web. Jay Benjamin has been hard at work designing a page that will set the industry standard. Our address is www.gustavus.edu/~poconnor

The web page is not a replacement for the print version, but will feature some favorites from past issues as well as previews of coming attractions. We invite you to visit it and send us your comments.

We invite submissions for the upcoming cemetery, gravestone and memorial marker issue in the fall. Rumor has it that there will be stories about E.B. White's and Paul Tillich's final resting places.

Niagara, continued

But now it was my destination. After we had spent an interesting hour at the other great falls in New York State (Seneca, that is), we realized that we could probably make it to Niagara before they shut the falls off for the day. Coincidentally, I was in the midst of reading *City of Lights*, a novel about Buffalo at the time when the falls were being transformed into a source of electricity. Clearly, the timing was right for my first visit.

(Lisa) I remember our family trip to Niagara Falls in the summer of 1965, although to say that I remember it "vividly" would probably be stretching things a bit. Remember that we had a white station wagon with wood sides, and we pulled a trailer (named Little Terry) behind it. Little Terry had a yellow hammock on one end, called the "crow's nest." That was where I got to sleep. A person remembers a thing like sleeping in a crow's nest. A person *also* remembers a thing like being forced to wear a gigantic black rubber raincoat that didn't even pretend to fit a person. That is the sort of thing a person *really* remembers, if you know what I mean. A person would remember that raincoat more than, say, the Maid-of-the-Mist boat trip into the falls that allegedly necessitated the wearing of such a gargantuan raincoat. But they maybe wouldn't remember it more than being allowed to take their first-ever photograph while riding on that boat--a photo op offered in the hopes that maybe a person would stop crying about the raincoat if they had something else on their mind.

(Peg) When we were an hour away from the falls, the weather turned rather bad. We could see lightning on the horizon, in exactly the direction we were heading. I was becoming convinced that my visit would be ill fated. As we skirted the traffic around Buffalo, we noticed that the sky was clearing in exactly one place, which, as it turned out, was right over the falls. This was incredibly odd, to say the least. Every bit of the sky had serious cloud cover except the falls.

When it was time to make the big decision--United States side or Canadian side--we knew that we would do both. The U.S. side has the Maid of the Mist, but the Canadians do have the

better falls. I figure they deserve it, having us for neighbors.

(Lisa) In 1965, when I was five, my mother was 40. I look at the photo I took of her on the boat, and I see a lot of myself in it. I turned 40 this summer, just a couple weeks before my trip to the falls. I've found it startling to be the age that my mother was when I started to know her--when I start to have vivid memories of life. I've always felt that I'm way too young to be a mother, and perhaps this has been the reason; up until now, I've been younger than any mother I ever knew. Not any more. Now I'm the very same age as that woman in the photo who had the good sense and creativity to hand me the camera and give me something to remember thirty-five years later, other than the big black raincoat that made me cry.

Nowadays, the raincoats have turned into blue ponchos made of that filmy stuff they use for grocery bags. They say "Maid of the Mist" on the back in big letters, and they're disposable. I fished two out of a garbage can and brought one home to my mom for a souvenir.

(Peg) The Falls were all I hoped they would be. I was overawed by their beauty and power, though I must confess that I found the waters in the river heading towards the falls to be more frightening. After seeing some amazing white caps on the Maine coast, I was impressed by their fresh water cousins. No small wonder that so many workers were killed trying to harvest its raw power.

I wonder why the Falls are hailed as a honeymoon destination. They are beautiful in a sublime kind of way, but by no stretch of the imagination are they romantic.

(Lisa) And I, of course, wonder why Nabisco Shredded Wheat is "the original Niagara Falls cereal."

*The first person to go over the falls in a barrel, incidentally, was a retired schoolteacher, who went in a pickle barrel with her cat. She was hoping to supplement her meager teacher's pension with speaking engagement fees. I'm not making this up.

The Future *Tense*

In our last issue, Lisa confessed her fear of flying, and noted that she sometimes eavesdrops on others' conversations, as a way of easing her fear. Charlene Haddock Seigfried begs to differ.

Speaking of fear of flying, maybe it's not such a good idea to listen in on others' conversations as a way to relieve anxiety. I hope I won't soon have such a scary trip as I did the last time I flew back to Chicago from San Diego. The young man seated by the window in my row was very nervous when we boarded. Very nervous. He kept looking all around, especially back and out of the window, and then putting his head in his hands and leaning over. To his obvious relief, a woman entered the plane as the doors were closing and went to seat herself at the back. He kept craning his neck to see her, but she seemed to be ignoring him. Just before take-off, a stewardess asked him whether he would like to have her move up to the seat between us, but he said no. After take-off, she did come forward. She was wearing what can only be described as a funky dress and she had on a strange black hat with a veil over her eyes (really!) and carried a compact case that looked like it held a computer. She put it down very carefully in front of her. She took the window seat and he moved to the middle seat next to me. She turned toward him—and me—stared deeply into his eyes, then down to a little black book from which she recited a prayer from some Eastern mystic it seemed, to the effect that we should trust in God and not be afraid, it's all for a great cause. He only got more nervous and they began to, well, become pretty intimate.

She then unclenched, reached down, opened the case, and took out a box of pills. She took out two pills and held them out for a few seconds, as if in some ritual. She said they tasted just like (some brand of) breath mints. Then she put one into his mouth, still talking soothingly, and she took the other. She said he should relax, it wouldn't take long. By now I'm getting very nervous myself and thoughts of a suicide bombing raced through my mind. I listened even harder to see what they were talking about. This wasn't hard, since she kept turned toward him—and me—the whole trip and talked pretty

loudly. She talked about how she boarded at the last minute because she was afraid someone would find and stop her before she could do so. [Why would they stop her? Who are *they*?] She said she told her mother goodbye. She was very moved. She kept her mother turned a certain way so she wouldn't see *them*. She waited to board the plane at the last minute so *they* wouldn't know she was getting on the same plane with him. [Oh, my.] Her mother didn't want to let her go and told her she shouldn't be doing this. [What? *What*?] She said her mother would miss her [because she'd never come back?], but this was still the right thing to do [*what was?*].

More hugging. He's weeping now. She keeps trying to calm him down. She is as calm and steely as, what? As a dedicated follower of some cause bolstering a new recruit? A volunteer on a suicide mission who's having second thoughts? She talks of having joined a way-out group and traveling with them across the States in a van. They were so wonderful, like a family to her. NO one was ever so good to her as they were. She tells him not to worry about his kids. They will be all right. They will be taken care of. [Should I tell the stewardess that I think they have a bomb? When is it timed to go off? Could we land before then? What if they don't, though, I'd look like an idiot. What if *they do*?] I kept listening to see if they (she) talked about anything in the future. Did they have any plans for *after* the plane landed?

She kept talking about how much she loved him and not to worry. [still only the present tense] Then she opened the little black book again and recited a passage to the effect that no matter what happens we are in his hands. What will be will be. [!] She then says that he shouldn't worry about his wife. If she really loved him and wanted to keep him, she wouldn't have just followed him in a car, jumped out and slapped him in the face, she would have been more belligerent. [!] He wasn't really deserting her, there was no love left. HE just sort of nodded and put his face in his hands again. [still no talk of the future]

She continued soothing him and then talked more and more about how she liked his kids, about the group [cult?] she traveled with, how nice each one of the members was, although

they might seem a little strange. How they visited her faithfully. How one was into drugs again. [still no talk about the future] "I've moved my stuff out of the garage," she then said, "and made room for your boat." [This sounds promising, at last.] "You can stay with me for as long as you like until you get your own place." [Ah, the future tense never sounded so good. So they expect to walk off this plane!] "As soon as we land [blessed words], we'll go our separate ways in case she has someone spying on us. Go to the luggage area by yourself and then immediately to the plane for Las Vegas." By now we were more than three hours into the flight. I ungripped the seat dividers and looked around for the stewardess and a drink.

So, there *is* some sort of escape and conspiracy, after all, but for what? I listened less intently now, but still learned that he was running away from his wife and kids. The mesmerizing lady was a Las Vegas showgirl, and she was now talking about more of his possessions besides a yacht and how wealthy he seemed to be. Also, how easy it would be to get married, once all this was over. But it never became clear why all the clandestine maneuverings were necessary. It was his wife, apparently, that they were both trying to escape. Why did they fear arrest or detention? Why did she need to keep bolstering his courage? Why was he nervous to the point of collapse? Was she kidnapping *him*, so to speak?

And, so, the soap opera wound down. Next trip, I think I'll wear ear plugs.



Did You want the Regular or the Tsunami Wave?

On July 21 (Lisa's 40th birthday), we fulfilled Lisa's annual birthday requirement—to do something she's never done before—by traveling downeast to Lubec and West Quoddy Head (see Travel Notes). Enroute, we passed a beauty parlor with the name "Coastal Hair Designs."

We got to thinking about the various hairstyles such a shop could offer, and came up with the following list.

1. Low Tide: Style designed to flatter a receding hairline.
2. High Tide: A classic beehive—an updo, to the younger generation. Accomplished with a liberal application of spray (hair, not sea).
3. Riptide: The male comb-over. A dangerous hairstyle that threatens to pull its wearers into stupidity, as they struggle to fight the forces of nature.
4. Sandy Beach: Severe dandruff. Stylist may suggest tweedy fabric to obscure the problem.
5. The Red Tide: A Lucille Ball-style dye job.
6. The Exxon Valdez: A slicked-back D.A.
7. The Lighthouse: Artificial highlights. (In snow country, this hairstyle is often known as "Frost 'n Tip.") This is the perfect hairstyle to make you stand out like a beacon in the crowd. Remember: every head needs a lighthouse. (That's coastal geography humor.)
8. The Undertow: A wig. (There's more there than meets the eye—and what lurks beneath the surface often isn't pretty.)
9. The Rogue Wave: A super permanent, resulting in a single, giant, Woody-Woodpecker-style crest.

We invite readers to add their own Coastal Hair Designs to our obviously-incomplete list. Send your submissions to PonH, Life's a Beach Department, P.O. Box 355, St. Peter, MN 56082. Every published submission wins the coveted PonH dental hygiene Kare Kit.

NEW ADDRESS!!

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VUMMUNHOOD

Brita DeRemee's introductory essay on "Vummanhood" (Vol. III, No. 4) prompted two readers to respond. First this response from Purdue University philosopher Charlene Haddock Seigfried.

To Staff Vumman, Brita DeRemee:

I propose as the philosophical locus classicus for vummanhood, the following passage from William James. It is part of a letter sent to his wife after traveling in—where else?—Germany. Like the original coinage, it comes from a man, and like any classical text, it needs updating—but it has the essentials of self-respect and power stirred into a mash of self-sacrifice.

Vienna September 24, 1882

Dear, perhaps the deepest impression I've got since I've been in Germany is that made on me by the indefatigable heavers of old wrinkled peasant women, striding like men through the streets, dragging their carts or lugging their baskets, minding their business, seeming to notice nothing in the stream of luxury and vice, but belonging far away, to something better and purer. Their poor, old, ravaged and stiffened faces, their poor old bodies dried up with ceaseless toil, their patient souls make me weep. 'They are our conscripts.' They are the venerable ones whom we should reverence. All the mystery of womanhood seems incarnated in their ugly being—the Mothers! The Mothers! Ye are all one! Yes, Alice, dear, what I love in you is only what these blessed creatures have; and I'm glad and proud when I think of my own dear Mother with tears running down my face, to know that she is one with these.

I wonder what Alice dear thought of the compliment! Better yet, it would be fun to imagine what the other Alice in his life—his sister, with her acerbic wit—would have made of it.

Cordially,
Charlene Haddock Seigfried

And a second response from Patrick McCormack of New Brighton, MN (and bro-in-law of Brita)

My initial reaction to Brita DeRemee's article on vummunhood was to ponder the gender question. Is there a male cognate? Is there a manly apposite to a vummun?

How about a Mennan? The ice blue? A man with fat triceps wearing a wife beater? He drives a Ford pickup, scratches his ass in public, and wears cheap cologne on dates. His idea of cuisine runs from beans to weiners and back again.

He calls forth vummunhood by his lack of involvement in child rearing... he roughhouses the kids and heads off to bowl. She shakes the flour off her apron, and squeezes her fat arms around the kids for a quick hug before doing the laundry.

They live in a trailer.

I was sniggering my way through these witless caricatures when I tumbled onto something. There is real substance to the entire question of vummunhood.

Start with Alisdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, pages 59-61. MacIntyre outlines how the Enlightenment destroyed rational discussions of ethics by destroying the concept of a person-as-they-should-be. Ethical principles are merely guideposts to direct you to become the good man or woman. Destroy the concept of a good man or woman, and ethics are arbitrary personal preferences.

In this light, when John Wayne says, a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do, he is really saying that there is somewhere out there a debatable concept of a good man, and in that light, a man has to do what a good man has to do, to become a good man. And a good woman has to do what a good vummun has to do, in order to be a good vummun.

So, the entire concept of vummunhood is an attempt to restore a discussable image of what a good woman is.... a specific sub-species, the mother of children. Doughty. A bulwark. A whirling combination of hard work, wit, discipline, and commitment. This is not a concept against feminism, it is a flavor of what it means to be an independent woman -- A feminist with kids and a tincture of selflessness. One who

does what is necessary, because the vummun is able to see what is crucial, and do it because it has to be done.

So a vummun does not exist except as a process towards a set of goals.... the vummun is a creature of motion, and snapshots look like caricatures because they flatten the dialectic of a woman in the midst of the whirl of change that is a family. Instead of chopping logic at the entire concept of vummunhood, the legitimate critic would offer instead a different image of what a woman should be.... If not a vummun, what?

I need to rotate the tires on my old pickup, and my ass itches, so I will leave off on this essay. Onward, vummunhood!



THE STAGES OF HELPFULNESS

One day this summer, while on a hike in Acadia National Park, your fearless editors were coming down a trail made particularly treacherous by a combination of lots of granite and lots of rain. We had just remarked to each other for the umpteenth time that it sure was slippery, when we turned a corner and came upon a mother and two young children sitting in the middle of the trail. We waited for them to move and, when they didn't, we, being philosophers, sought a cause for their unusual behavior. It was not an extensive enquiry; within moments, we noticed that the woman was sitting on the ground with two sticks and a shoelace wrapped around her unbooted ankle. A verbal investigation revealed that yes, indeed, she had slipped and fractured her ankle/foot. Her husband had gone for help. In his absence, she had mustered all her Girl Scout training to jury rig a splint for her injury.

Having never been Girl Scouts, but having read a lot of hiking books (not including Lorraine Code's *Rhetorical Spaces* (see *PonH*, vol.I, no.1)), we never go anywhere without the

Backpacker's Ten Essentials. So, we whipped out our first aid kit, gave her some ibuprofen and one of our many bottles of water, and wrapped a wide, self-adhesive Ace bandage around her foot, splint and all. We continued on our merry way, passing the husband and stretcher-bearing rescue rangers on their way back up the trail. We waved a greeting, content in the knowledge that we had acquitted ourselves well as Rescue Dogs.

As we drove home, we started to have our doubts about the course of our actions. Should we have taken the sticks off before wrapping the ankle with a bandage? Why weren't we carrying a crushable ice pack?? Could we actually have hurt her more than helping her???

Then the light dawned. We were experiencing the Stages of Helpfulness!! Reams of paper have been devoted to a discussion of their better-know cousins, the stages of grief, but Helpful Persons the world over know that the Stages of Helpfulness are every bit as real, and every bit as daunting to one bent upon Doing Unto Others.

And so a service to our readers, we summarize the Five Stages here. We have reprinted them with permission from *Helping the Inner Helper*, by Enid Pufhell (self published, 1987). Dr. Pufhell (Ph.D., anthro-archeology, 1967) deserves the credit for having first identified the Stages, while doing field research for her dissertation.

1. Euphoria: We are Rescue Goddesses! We are human Malamutes! We could have carried her and the kids down that path! Heck, we could have set her bone!
2. Second Thoughts: Wait, if we could have carried her down, why didn't we? Why didn't we at least have a crushable ice pack? And some wrapped candies for the kids, for God's sakes! We didn't do diddly!
3. Self-Flagellation: Did I wrap her ankle wrong? Will her foot need to be amputated? Will those stones we piled under her foot to elevate it topple, causing her ankle to hit the ground with a thud, and starting an avalanche that will bury dozens? Will the rescue rangers track us down and punish us?
4. Penance and Prospection: We'll never be caught without a crushable ice pack again,

we promise! We'll take a refresher first aid course!* We'll learn underwater rescue! We'll build up our fitness level, so we can carry people on our backs!

5. Circumspection: Okay, our help was probably pretty much a wash. We had some water, we had some ibuprofen, we had an Ace bandage. She also had a husband ten minutes away from her on the trail, bringing trained rescuers with a stretcher and an inflatable cast. We probably saved her a minute or two of discomfort, and chances are good we did no irreparable damage. So we're not Lassie—but we are certainly sturdy little rescue daschunds!

*Ed. note: Since this adventure, Lisa has taken a refresher course in *both* First Aid *and* CPR.

joanna@china.edu

In this second installment from Morgan State University philosophy professor Joanna Crosby, who spent the fall of 1999 teaching in China, we learn about her close encounters with Asian medicine and Chinese taxis.

A first-century moment: I had my inaugural experience with acupuncture today. I don't think I fared too well.

Every month in the states, I visit my favorite chiropractor, Dr. Joe Somma, a witty, caring, and charming individual about my age who whoops a little snap, crackle, pop on my spine. (Back off, he's taken). Needless to say, we lllloooovvee Dr. Joe. However, he is a bit far to visit just at the moment, but this doesn't mean that I am any less in need of his services. (I hate to admit it, but my hard-as-three-day-old-bread bed may have actually postponed the need for treatment. Doesn't mean I like it, and doesn't mean I'm not still pining for my foot-thick, properly mushy mattress at home.)

Li Hong Yan, a member of the Hubei University athletic department, whose husband treats another foreign teacher (Ken the Canadian), came to my apartment yesterday to check out my back, and to make an appointment for a

ten course acupuncture treatment. She returned today at 2:00, armed and ready to practice her ancient art. Through an interpreter, my next door neighbor Vicky, she announced her own dislike of acupuncture. I suppose this should have been a sign.

Now, of course, having been educated in western ways, I assume you treat where it hurts. Silly me. Actually, I wasn't far off, but the first needle went into the top of my right forearm about two inches above the wrist. She thought I had complained of current numbness in my hand, while I had merely mentioned it as the result of lack of treatment. The following needles went into my neck and back, right about where the muscles spasm the most. I was doing okay, until I made the mistake of moving the middle finger of my right hand. Suddenly, I felt as if I had an IV in my arm, and those of you who know my general and all-encompassing aversion to needles can imagine my alarm. (It still feels weird almost an hour later!)

I started blacking out, tried to put my head between my knees, and that was even worse. Li Hong Yan took out the needles and told me to lie down, which was the exact right thing to do. She put pressure on my hand, just below the bottom knuckle of my first finger and just above the thumb. This immediately cleared my head. (There really is something to all of this. My back was even feeling better before I freaked.) She said that this happened to other people, but not usually to healthy people. I wondered why healthy people would need such administrations, but I don't think that was translated. Smart Vicky. Li Hong Yan proceeded to massage, squeeze, and pound on my back, and a pesky shoulder muscle in particular. She said I probably read too much.

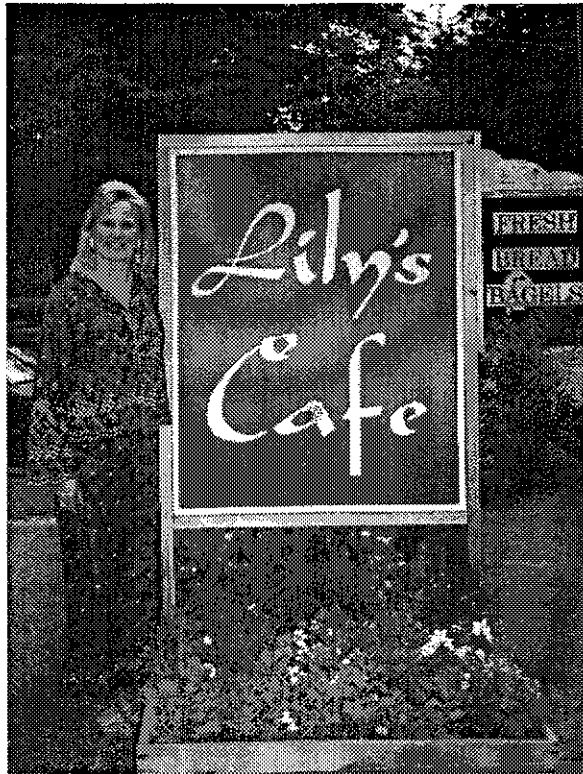
I just love irony.

So we will try again on Thursday; she had promised no more needles in the arm. I figure if I can't see them, I am probably okay. Such an adventure.

Oh, and I am going on an adventure this weekend. The university is taking me, Carol, Josie, and Carol's newly arrived husband Mitch all to Qianjiang to speak to English teachers at a petroleum factory. Yeah, I know, the question is begged, but I have no idea. I don't really know

See China, p.10

Pantheon Gastronomique



D.M. Ulrich, L.P. poses for us in front of Lily's

Lisa writes: One of my favorite things about the coast of Maine is the fish sandwich. Now, in most of the country--everything from, say, central Pennsylvania to eastern Washington--order a fish sandwich in a restaurant and out comes a perfectly squared-off rectangle of chopped, pressed, battered and deep fried Something. (Oh, and I forgot the frozen part.) In Maine, on the other hand, drive in, walk up, or sit down at a table in any of a skillion restaurants, order a fishburger, and out will come a piece of haddock the length of your hand, fresh, moist, lightly breaded, and (generally) deep fried--but perfectly so. Okay, so it's served on a Wunder Bun, and the fish extends three inches beyond the bread, but never mind. That fish is exquisite.

Suffice it to say, this is not one of Peg's favorite things about Maine. Despite her geographically privileged upbringing (a mere 45 miles from a real coast), Peg hates fish--all fish except canned tuna (an exception I cannot understand). This makes dining in Maine a bit of a

challenge, because most of the places that serve those delectable fish sandwiches do not offer an extensive menu for Our Vegetarian Friends. And I can only watch her eat so many grilled cheese sandwiches on Wunder Bred before I start to feel a twinch guilty.

Enter Lily's Caf . Lily's, located on beautiful Deer Isle just inside the Stonington township limits, serves a baked fish sandwich the memory of which is causing me to break down in tears right now while sitting at the keyboard. Yes, Lily's bakes their fish sandwich--a practice that may sound suspiciously Health Conscious. And, truth to tell, it has a bit of a rectangular look to it. But I don't hold that against it, because it is one delicious piece of fish. Light breading, a bit of (homemade?) mayonnaise, and (fancy this) whole grain bread. (I think I've had different kinds of bread on different occasions.)

But Lily's is a lot more than fish sandwiches--which is why Peg and I like it so much. I think of it as a kind of *Enchanted Broccoli Forest*-inspired cafeteria that serves meat.* Sort of. Walk into the restaurant (an old two-story farmhouse) and you come upon a giant pastry case and a cashier, who'll hand you a menu, tell you about the specials of the day, and take your order. There's usually some pasta thing (one night it was roasted red pepper ravioli), and some Asian-inspired thingie. A veggie burger. Like that. I dunno; I don't really pay that much attention, to tell you the truth. But I always feel good, knowing that Peg *can* actually eat something *other* than a grilled cheese sandwich--something she actually likes.

And then there's dessert. Lily's puts the dessert case up front for good reason; that way you can grab your piece of chocolate cake/berry pie/fruit cobbler right at the outset, rather than running the risk they'll be out of your favorite by the time you've finished your fish sandwich. Lily's desserts are great. Their pies don't feature the world-class crusts of Mom's Pies in Nimrod, Oregon, but I wouldn't be ashamed to say I'd baked them.

*Re: meat: So convinced am I that Lily's is a vegetarian restaurant, that I once deviated from The Usual and ordered stuffed peppers--and then ate them, because I couldn't believe that the lumps I was eating could possibly be sausage.

China, continued

who else is going, but I have been asked to speak for about an hour on the American educational system. All those evenings with the parents bitching about the administration of their school districts finally pays off! Now if I can just rid myself of the image of beets drowned in French dressing, I might remember something useful.

Love to you all,
Joanna

Subject: A little whinging (aussie for whining)

I'm feeling a bit out of sorts lately, cranky and pissy. Partially, I think I am at odds with my inability to process my experiences here more expediently. Partially, I think I am just tired of the provincialism and generally rude behavior of the people I encounter every day. You would think that they would be used to seeing a few foreigners around the university and just outside its gates, but the open-mouthed stares never cease.

On the front street, the main road out of the university, there are shops, street vendors, students, factory workers, autos, taxis, and motorized pedi-cabs. Needless to say, this is only a one lane, barely paved road; never enough room for everyone. The taxis are particularly obnoxious, honking just because they can.

Today, Josie and I were walking back from using the internet, and a taxi, who had plenty of room to go around us, honked one time too many, and I reached out and kicked his fender as he drove by. Well, okay, I rubbed my shoe against part of the car. I was wearing slip-ons, and he was moving, so I couldn't do much. But he gave me a look, and tried to pull in front of me. So we walked around him.

This happened about three times, until he got out of his car, came over to me, and grabbed me by the arms of my jacket and started yelling, in Chinese, of course. I think he thought I was a guy, as I was wearing a big shapeless jacket, no makeup or jewelry, and a knit cap on my pointed little head. I started yelling at him, telling him to let me go, asking him what the hell he thought he was doing putting his hands on me. I shoved and pushed a bit, and Josie yelled "ta shi ting bu

dong," meaning, look, idiot, she doesn't understand what you are saying. Now mind you, this man is shorter than I, perhaps a bit stockier, but I think I probably outweighed him by at least 20 pounds. He let go, we walked off towards our bikes, Josie thanking me warmly for the afternoon's excitement, and telling me I was too much of an American.

When I looked back, the taxi driver was getting into it with a few of the local shop keepers who see us everyday and smile and yell 'hello' at us, who were probably asking him what he thought he was doing putting hands on a woman. He looked confused and defensive, and I was just glad he didn't aim his taxi at our bikes and hit the accelerator when he finally got back into his cab. Mind you, we took the 'no cars allowed' route home.

**Theorem: $\sim\forall x(Cx \supset Cx)$,
or: Sometimes a canner
is not a canner**

Lisa writes: Peg's patron saint, Wittgenstein, is fond of observing that things acquire their meanings only in context. A surprisingly large portion of his (admittedly miniscule) output is devoted to observations about how ill-equipped we would be to understand features of our world, were we ignorant of the context in which those features appear. If a lion could speak, and all that.

This summer, I've been observing what might be called a corollary to Wittgenstein's claim, which I'll call the Absent Context, Meaning Endures Corollary (ACME for short). This corollary draws our attention to the fact that an object, once it has acquired a certain meaning for us, *retains* that meaning *even when it is removed from its original context and inserted into an entirely different one.*

A single example should suffice: In the stupendously fantastic little boathouse we rented this summer, there sat two giant blue enamel canning pots. I knew they were canners because my mother has one. (She uses it, if my vague knowledge of canning practices serves, to can tomatoes, because they don't have to be cooked

in a pressure cooker for reasons that have to do with acid and like that.) I first noticed the presence of the boathouse canners when I was trying to saute two bushels of spinach, and realized that the largest frypan in the cupboards only held about two cups' worth. While the bottom of a canner was awfully thin, and the deep ridges in it (ridges designed to keep the canning jars from sitting right down on the hot burner) made burning a real danger, when carefully watched it worked just fine. On subsequent occasions, a canner came in handy for boiling large amounts of pasta and even (believe it or not) for making risotto for eight. For five weeks, I pondered these pots. Did the family that once occupied this house love to spend their precious summer vacations canning tomatoes? It seemed unlikely, somehow—especially since tomatoes don't seem to ripen till after Labor Day in Maine.

One day, I had my chance to discover the truth. We invited the two sisters from whom we were renting the boathouse, to come for dinner. Midway through dinner preparations, down came the canner. "Was your mom a big canner?" I asked Marti and Cathy—who responded with gales of laughter.

Think about it: large, thin pots in a cottage on the Maine coast. What do you do with them? This question doesn't even warrant a contest. Think large crustacean.

For me, the meaning of large blue enamel pot persisted, even across a contextual chasm that spanned several states and a whole lot of culinary territory. But sometimes a canner just isn't a canner.

And not all large outbuildings with hip roofs and red paint are barns either, a fact that took me two summers and an intervening year to realize. I'm from Wisconsin; for me, a large red barn-shaped building with gigantic doors is a barn—even if it happens to have tracks in front of it that lead right down to the water. All last summer, I would stop to look at my favorite scene—a little cove with several beautiful boats in it, and a quaint old red barn on the shore. I loved the view, and yet I found it disturbing to think that someone had built a *barn* so close to a water source. I mean, all of that *waste* running into the *water*?! Yuck! "But," I would reassure myself, "it doesn't look like any animals live there any more. Probably legislation prevents

more. Probably legislation prevents them from housing animals that near to the water now."

And then, suddenly one day, in a flash the barn turned into a boathouse. Was it because I was now living in a boathouse, and the concept had come to have three dimensions for me? Was it that I finally noticed the track leading down to the water—a track clearly designed for a boat? Some combination of these? It's just not clear to me.

Moral of the story: You can lead a horse to salt water—but it's not very likely you would.

This summer, we were privileged to have Roxanne Sly as one of our neighbors. Roxanne had recently acquired a computer with power to burn. As someone who still knows how to turn out a crisp page of prose with a manual typewriter, Roxanne found the computer more than a bit annoying --so annoying that she took to calling it "The Uninvited Guest." After one particularly frustrating session at the keyboard, she composed this poem.

Soliloquy

(To the tune of "It Might as Well Be Spring"—with apologies to Richard Rodgers)

I'm as restless as a willow in a windstorm
I'm as angry as I think I've ever been.
I've got this new computer
And there's no way I can win

I've instruction books and lots of information
But not about the things I need to learn.
How to tell a matrix from a pixel
Or an "enter" from "return".

I just wish I had the wherewithal:
SOMETHING that would make it work.
This damn toy is such a "know it all"
Makes me feel like such a JERK!

I'm as busy as a spider spinning daydreams
But the dreams can turn to nightmares on a Dell.
Yesterday I tried to make a spreadsheet.
Couldn't exit from Excel!

And I feel so dumb
Like the relic I've become
That I'll try it. What the Hell.
I guess I just might as well.

Asticou Anyone?

A major summit conference of the *PonH* editors and staff occurred in Maine in July. Barb the Brief and the Web Virtuoso, Wilkerson's World and the Glad Corn Guy, and the editors all converged for a few days of food, "travel", and fun. On one particularly chock full day, the three couples split up into groups of two, each group comprised of a different pairing of the people. Two cars and six people gave two pair in one car and "BTB" and "WW" in another. Written descriptions of the reconnaissance point--Asticou--and the time for the reassembling--one p.m.--were prepared, and all went off for a day of fun (hiking, biking, Acadia Loop driving).

Now, it bears noting that only a year ago a slightly different assemblage of six people had visited Acadia's Thuya Garden (the garden formerly known as Asticou Terrace)--and that only after a very arduous search. This year, we were in search of Asticou Gardens. Since it was on the map and since we (Barb and Abby) found it with surprising ease, we parked our car and proceeded to visit the garden, and then revisit the garden, and then sit and chat and re-revisit the garden. After adequate rest and inadequate "nature facilities", and still no sign of the other four, we spread out the college-era quilt that "The Brief" had in the trunk (and which both Jay and Lisa would recognize*) on a rock. We thought this would serve as a sign that we had been there and would be right back. Legs crossed, we set out for the nearest village.

We determined that "those who come in from the sea must need to pee" so we headed for the pier area. Sure enough, lovely public facilities were available. Leaving the area, a number of wrong turns on one way streets found us back at the pier area where, who did we spy but another of the pairings (actually a re-pairing of the set of 4 that set off in the morning). They had tired of waiting at their Asticou (you guessed it by now, right?) and had shifted into "part C" of the master plan to call our hotel and leave a message.

Proving that two wrongs may not make a right, but three are very likely to bear fruit. And that six people can survive a day of fun AND frustration and not get aggravated! Or that six

people can make a good plan but sometimes it takes dumb luck to execute it.

* We got brownie points for the ingenuity of this move.

TRAVEL NOTES

So, there is something just a bit ironic (eat your heart out, Alanis Morissett) about driving to the easternmost point in the United States, only to learn that it is named West Quoddy Head.



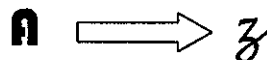
Driving back to Minnesota this August, we came upon the following sign: Prison Area. Do Not Pick up Hitch Hikers. Thanks to the state of Michigan for that warning.



Speaking of Michigan, a motel sign in Frankenmuth (home of the world-famous chicken dinner), proudly announced "Our Rooms Are Clean." Is this really the sort of thing you get credit for these days? What's next? "All rooms fully enclosed by walls?"



A hardware store we passed this summer described itself as selling "Everything from bolts to furniture." Is this a big span?



FALL, 2000:
Cemetery, Gravestone and
Memorial Marker Issue

Hometown Tourist

Lisa's mom, Carol Heldke sends in this issue's report on travelling in your own backyard.

Rice Lake, Wisconsin is a pretty small city by most standards; those of us who live here really don't feel that way though. We have Hardee's, McDonald's, Burger King and yes, Lisa, we also have Walmart! If you want anything, you probably can get it, especially if your shopping trip includes a visit to Farm and Fleet. Now that probably explains why we consider ourselves a small town; you'll never find a Farm and Fleet in Chicago.

That isn't what this story is about though. This story is about the Music in the Park on the Fourth of July, 2000. Weather: absolutely perfect. The hundreds of people who brought their myriad colored lawn chairs to sit among their friends and listen to the Community Band play mediocre music could not have been in better spirits. People were here on vacation, or coming home from a picnic or, like us, just coming to the park because we do that sort of thing. The Sousa marches are a bit slow, but the feet tap anyway. The dance music from the 40's and 50's brings a smile to all of us who remember the times and places where we heard these songs before. The little kids who can grab a swing are swinging. The rest are dancing around or begging for an ice cream cone or some popcorn, or playing by the fountain. The residents from the Handicap Home are there, enjoying their popcorn and pop as well. A lot of white hair is visible, and some bald heads too. There is a quartet of vocalists who sing each of the military songs and those persons who served in that branch of the service stand while it is played. They feel proud that someone still remembers.

And when the music is over and it is dark enough, the fireworks begin. We thought they were fantastic! Not like Wash-

ington, D.C., or even St. Paul, Minnesota, but fantastic for Rice Lake, Wisconsin. They shoot them from the little island off the shore from the park, and people move their chairs for a better view—and maybe another neighbor to visit with. We witnessed a mom and dad with two little kids on a blanket in front of us. They had to take the kids to the bathroom and they left their possessions, purse open and all, without a worry. We watched it for them. We had an our of oohs and ahs, ours included. Nobody seemed to be in a hurry, and there were no mosquitoes either.*

I came home with a sense of pride that some places in America we can still enjoy something as simple as this evening was. Not only enjoy it, but know that we are truly privileged to live in a place that considers something this simple worth our time. Because that is all it costs. Only a few wonderful hours of relaxation. Can it get any better?

*Ed note: My mother swears this is not a work of fiction.



barb's briefs

Our stay-at-home movie reviewer Ventures Out this quarter....

I went to see "The Tao of Steve" over the Labor Day weekend. Not much traveling but lots of philosophy. The review in the cinema's flier and the picture on the marquee made me say "this is going to be terrible". It wasn't terrible. I stop short of saying that it was "good" and it reminded me of "The Opposite of Sex" in that regard. It proves that a guy with a large belly can make philosophy relevant to everyday life. You might want to brush up on your Kierkegaard and Lao Tse before you go. Especially their love lives.

Letter from Brooklin

James Schwartz, friend and summertime neighbor (seven minutes away by the shore route, as timed by his field spaniel Anna), sends us this end-of-summer missive from Brooklin, Maine, home of E.B. White.

Dear Philosophers Formerly on Holiday:

The windows are closed in Brooklin again.

Since you packed up the Golf and headed west from Maine last month, the days have grown shorter, the nights markedly cooler and neighbors are closing their windows before retiring each evening.

Peg's tennis court up the dirt road at Largo was "put to bed" on Sunday. The net's gone, carried off to the barn by the compost heap, where it joins the John Deere, two partial sets of croquet mallets and a weather vane that sat atop the garage until it lost its "N" and "S".

The lab pups Lisa saw in June are now five months old and scattered across the county. Jasper, ne Brutus, has mastered the art of house-breaking, but tassels remain a challenge. His owner gave up loafers for a while and strongly recommends sneakers with Velcro tabs.

There's parking at the General Store. No more jockeying for spaces with the bicyclists from Vermont or the trekkers from New Jersey or the Volvos or Audis or Suburbans from New York. Yes, there's parking again and plenty of hot coffee, but no New York Times. The delivery man says "season's over," though Lorna thinks he may still swing by on Sundays with a few copies of the magazine and book review.

My library has posted Winter hours.

Gretchen, the librarian, has been busy, what with starting up her granola line and baking the rolled oats in the kitchen of the Morning Moon Cafe when it's shuttered. (She said it was a great Summer behind the circulation desk. More patrons, more new books and greater interest than ever before, but "People from Away" have gone south now and the place is dark Mondays and Wednesdays.)

I drove into Blue Hill last night, passed E.B. White's house on the route out of town and didn't see a single car between Allen Cove and the bridge at Blue Hill Falls.

Yes, the windows are closed in Brooklin again. And as much as I love the peace and the quiet and the solitude and the aroma of the woodsmoke, I miss you.

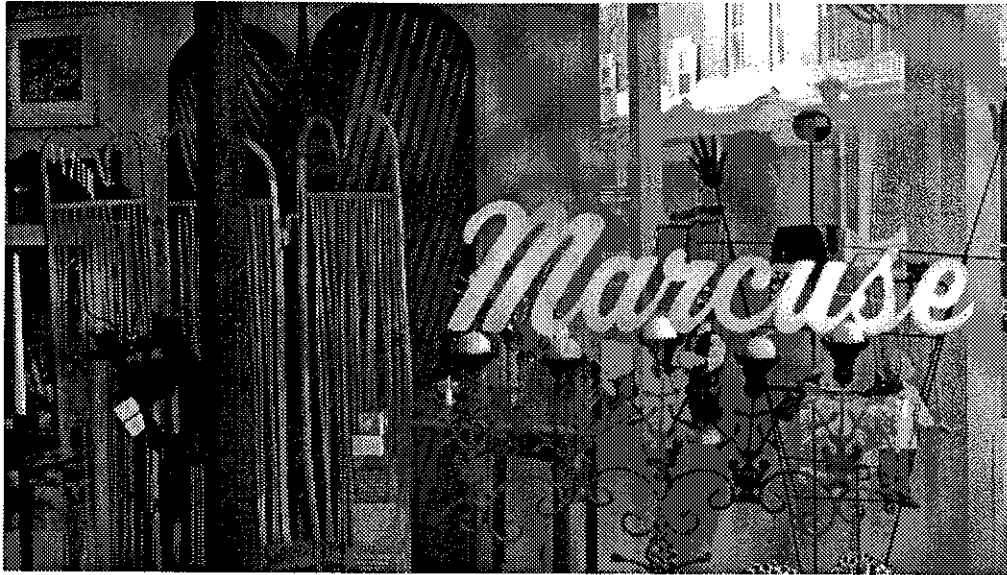


NEW WEB VIRTUOSO!

We welcome Jay Benjamin to the (always unpaid) *PonH* staff. Jay, a retired computer programmer, has designed a web page that is embarrassing in its perfection. (On the paper side of things, we're still trying to learn how to make Microsoft Word stop hyphenating our diphthongs.) Thanks, Jay--and welcome aboard!

Find us on the web at: <http://www.gustavus.edu/~poconnor>.

Where are they now?



Herbert Marcuse, playing hooky from the Frankfurt School, has opened a little shoppe in Kingston, New York, selling "art objects from jewelry to sculpture." Surprised? Well, as Herb always said,

As for the systematic manipulation and control of the psyche in the advanced industrial society... the general objective purpose is to reconcile the individual with the mode of existence which his society imposes on him. Because of the high degree of surplus repression involved in such reconciliation, it is necessary to achieve a libidinal cathexis of the merchandise the individual has to buy (or sell), the services he has to use (or perform), the fun he has to enjoy, the status symbols he has to carry-- necessary, because the existence of the society depends on their uninterrupted production and consumption." ("Aggressiveness in Advanced Industrial Society," 1967)

What's a guy to do, but open a little shoppe?