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from the general store

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Winter 1989-90
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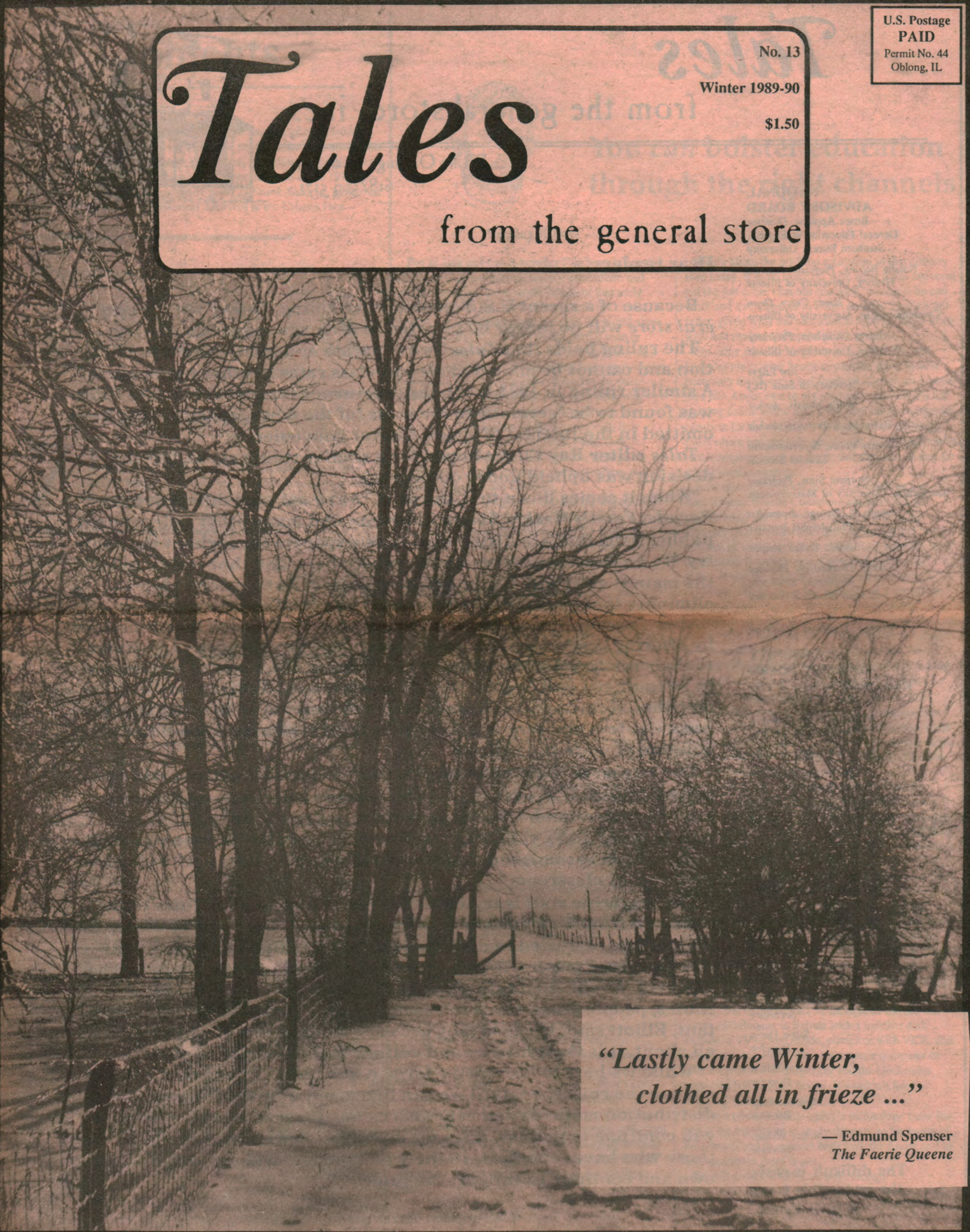

> *"Lastly came Winter,*
> *clothed all in frieze ..."*
>
> — Edmund Spenser
> *The Faerie Queene*

Tales
from the general store, inc.

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**The difficult is easy;
the impossible takes
a little longer.**

Dear readers:

Because of a recent U.S. Postal Service ruling, *Tales from the general store* will no longer be inserted in area newspapers.

The ruling holds that *Tales* "is a separate and independent publication and cannot be mailed at second-class rates in other newspapers." A similar ruling in 1984 was later overturned on appeal because *Tales* was found to be "germane to the issue (of the newspaper), having been omitted in the interest of space, time or convenience."

***Tales* editor Ray Elliott hoped for a similar ruling again, but the decision was upheld under our appeal.**

"When it comes down to it," he said, "we're not very different from *Parade*, *Family Weekly*, *Young American* and many other independent publications that are distributed in newspapers throughout the country. We do, however, have outside subscribers, and that seems to be the main reason why our appeal was denied. But we don't plan to eliminate those subscribers to satisfy the postal requirement."

After resuming publication last June, *Tales* expanded its circulation by offering the magazine free to community newspapers as a service to their readers. By the Winter 1989-90 issue, *Tales* was to be inserted in 20 southern and central Illinois and western Indiana newspapers, distributed through the Illinois Office of Tourism at 10 interstate Welcome Centers and sent to subscribers in 35 states for a combined circulation of more than 110,000.

The largest of those newspapers, the *Southern Illinoisan*, said in a recent editorial: "Postal officials have made a decision we don't like but can understand. ... In the meantime, we're trying to figure out how to bring *Tales* your way starting next year. But in case you can't wait, we can recommend this worthwhile publication, perfect for living room or classroom."

The magazine staff is trying to figure out how to offer *Tales* to the *Southern Illinoisan* and the other newspapers, too. Some of the newspapers are interested in distributing the magazine in just their carrier-delivered papers, thus avoiding additional mailing charges. That, however, would eliminate many of the people living on the rural routes, people *Tales* wants to reach. Keeping those readers is important, Elliott said, because they are very much a part of what *Tales* is all about. It is their history and culture *Tales* is trying to preserve.

"While we hate to lose such a large readership," Elliott said, "we can't change the ruling. So until we can figure out how to reorganize our distribution methods and establish a consistent advertising base, we will continue to publish *Tales* for our direct subscribers. We hope that those who have read *Tales* in their newspapers will subscribe on their own and continue to support the project."

(Subscription details are on page 16)

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The winter scene is one of the photographs of amateur photographer Frank Sadorus. Between 1908 and 1912, he photographed life around his family's east-central Illinois farm. Years later, 350 glass plate negatives of his were discovered. The cover photo is one featured in the 1983 book, *Upon a Quiet Landscape, The Photos of Frank Sadorus*, published by the Champaign County Historical Archives at the Urbana Free Library.

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Tales from the general store

Editor
Ray Elliott
Managing Editor
Vanessa Faurie

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You *can* bolster education through the right channels

By Ray Elliott

For as long as I can remember I've been interested in other times and places, history and culture and what's going on in the world. Much of that early interest was fed by grandparents, parents, other relatives and neighbors who brought the world alive with first-hand accounts of things they'd seen or second-hand stories they'd heard through the years.

Nearly everyone I talked to when I was growing up had a story that was somehow linked to the past. Radios and newspapers kept pace with what was happening at the time. Western books and a few books from the cloakroom shelves at the Bellair School put me in touch with Huck Finn, Tom Sawyer, Kit Carson, Andrew Jackson, George Washington Carver and other characters from earlier American history and literature.

Discussions of geography and current events made me aware of the world and provided an opportunity to get involved. When President Harry Truman fired General of the Army and World War II hero Douglas MacArthur during the Korean War for threatening China with air and naval attacks, ignoring the warning to clear announcements of policy through Washington, I was in the fifth grade.

Four or five of us fifth and sixth graders stood in front of the room discussing the situation. MacArthur was a hero who was getting a raw deal, we concluded. Something should be done about it, justice served.

"He could just reenlist in the army as a private," Keith Dorrough said, "and work his way up to general again."

We nodded. That'd show 'em. Anything was possible in America.

Still, I thought the world had progressed about as far as it could. We had flush toilets and running water in the house. Cars, trucks and tractors had all but replaced the horse. Airplanes could fly around the world. Telephones made possible coast-to-coast communications. Televisions brought pictures to living rooms the same way motion pictures brought them to theaters.

What more could you want? What more could there be? Oh, I dreamed about a machine that could pluck Lincoln's original Gettysburg Address out of distant air waves for posterity. But I didn't think that would ever be possible. That wasn't the future I imagined.

My grandfather had told me what life was like in his youth. Radio hadn't been invented. Neither had electricity, gas-powered vehicles, flying machines and a plethora of other modern conveniences. Newspapers and magazines were the only media.

"Just about everything in the world has been invented in your lifetime," I said to him one day when he was in his late 70s and I was just past 10. "What do you think I'll see in my life? What's left?"

"I expect you'll see plenty," he said quietly.

Obviously an understatement. But I wonder if he thought man would ever walk on the moon, transplant human organs and perform other miracles of modern science and human ingenuity. No matter. He'd have said make do with what you have but get the job done.

That's about the position education in this country is in today. It must make do with what it has but must get the job done: turn out educated citizens who can work and live together in a free society. That's a tall order, given what the educational system has to work with and the general mood of the country.

For other than altruistic reasons, education and business are joining hands to provide schools with necessary technology and finances. Computer companies like Apple race to get their wares in schools for training future users. Soft drink and candy companies compete for the collective sweet tooth of students everywhere and provide equipment, even scoreboards with company logos on them, and products to pay for educational programs.

Now comes television to the classroom as a permanent fixture. Whittle Communications is fast approaching its April 1990 deadline of providing Channel One, a 10-minute daily newscast and two minutes of commercials, to 6.5 million students in 8,000 schools nationwide. Other companies like Cable News Network are offering alternatives.

Whittle will be providing schools with one color television for every 23 students who view the programming daily, two VCRs and a satellite dish, all delivered and installed. One staff member at Urbana High School where I teach English told me the Whittle offer had instigated more heated discussions on a curriculum matter than anything else in his memory. And right it should.

Arguments abound, pro and con. Hardly anyone disagrees that the school district would receive some much-needed equipment to prepare the classroom for the 21st century. What they disagree on is the price and the morality of the price.

Opponents say it is immoral and unethical for schools to lease students to corporate America for two minutes a day to view commercials in return for the programming and the equipment. Others say it is inappropriate and unacceptable to allow an outsider to dictate curriculum 10 minutes a day.

Proponents say the newscast would make students more aware of their world and improve cultural literacy, the amount of information people who measure such things think is necessary for everyone to have to survive in the world. Some say Channel One would teach students to take an interest in world affairs and give them opportunities to critically discuss current events and the appeal of advertising.

I don't know what will turn out to be the best choice. But many times I've thought of the old one-room schoolhouse in Bellair with a satellite dish outside, a TV or two inside, complete with VCR, and complemented with a stereo system, a computer or two, a telephone with speaker and the cloakroom crammed full of good books. It wouldn't have mattered who put it all there.

What a place to learn--today's technology there for use in the classroom to study the past, to be aware of the present and to connect both with the future and to help guarantee there is one.

I'd still want the toilet outside, though.

Mail's Here

Encouraging words

Words can't describe how much my family enjoys reading the stories in *Tales*.

— CHARLES F. FERGUSON
Flat Rock, IL

I was so thrilled to receive the summer and fall issues of *Tales*. Please keep them coming!

— MARY A. FREELS
Albany, GA

We send good wishes. *Tales* is fun to read. Thanks for getting back to it.

— RAMONA & MONTE HEARD
Houston, TX

Recommendation

The *Southern Illinoisan* highly recommends your magazine, *Tales from the general store*.

— ELMER A. STEWART
Pittsburg, IL

No boring moments

I'm writing about a piece of journalism that I read in an issue of *Tales* (No. 12). It was on the history of the Heath bar. It was a very well written, interesting, well-rounded piece of work. I normally don't read when I don't have to. But I read your report on the Heath bar from beginning to end twice. It covered every possible ounce of background information and yet was not boring.

One day, after reading the article, I went out and bought my first Heath bar ever and it was very good. Now I've gone to the student council (at Urbana High School) and asked to have the Heath bar put in our vending machines.

To sum it up, I just want to say you even surprised me how well you could put so many little facts in one report without boring your reader to death. And in my case, that's not very hard to do.

— CHRIS NEWHOUSE
Urbana High School
Urbana, IL

Power of suggestion

Keep plugging on *Tales*. It's got to work, and it will somehow, because it's important and it's worth it. I hope the financial plans for the project work out as you hope.

Your advertising was a success, at least in me. Your back page (Leaf, Inc. advertisement) reminded me how much I liked Heath candy bars and Whoppers.

In spite of what should be sound, middle-age wisdom concerning sugar consumption, I've been hooked on the things ever since.

— C. THOMAS REITER
Superintendent
Lemont (IL) Schools

Story of Heath family sounds familiar

I have just received your magazine and have read the L.S. Heath & Sons article in particular. I find the magazine very interesting and have subscribed for it.

The Heath story sounds somewhat similar to that of the Weber family of Olney, who operated the Weber Sanitarium, medical clinic and nurses' training school from 1898 to 1952.

I am 88 now and of the second generation and I practiced ob-gyn, I'm the only one left of the first and second generations. The Heath story reminds me of our family medical history. Levi Tennyson of Olney is our historian and has written some articles about the family.

Dr. Fisher, our oculist then, told me years ago of treating one of the Heath partners in our clinic. He felt honored to have him as a patient.

We have a new hospital now. The old sanitarium building and nursing home has been torn down and the Olney Trust & Banking Co. is now in its place.

Reading the magazine has brought back fond memories of the past, for I have had patients from the (Robinson/Oblong) area and have enjoyed all of them.

I'm looking forward to future issues of *Tales from the general store* and wish you every success in this publication.

— PAUL C. WEBER
Olney, IL

No place like home

Thanks a bunch! The article on Edwardsville (*Tales* No. 12) was a real thrill. That's where I was born, and reading it brought back many great memories.

— HELEN MILLER
Champaign, IL

For the love of *Tales*

I enjoyed the editorial on why you went back to *Tales* (issue No. 12). I'm glad you are one of the people who does something because you love doing it. The part that made me laugh in recognition was about Thornton's storytelling. I have often enjoyed a story more because the storyteller was having such a good time with it. It seems true.

— SHERRY McCLELLAN
School District No. 116
Urbana, IL

Good to the last word

I received all of the issues and enjoyed them. I think I read every word of them.

I was born and raised just north of Bellair and went to Elbow School. By the way, I'd like to see a picture of the the Elbow School in the first part of the 1920s, if you can locate one.

I left Bellair in 1935 and went to La Porte, IN. I was there until 1947 and then came to Taft, CA. I retired from Standard Oil of California May 1, 1970. Taft is a good place to live. We love it here.

I know Harold & Mable Elliott (of Bellair) and remember boxing with Harold at Fred Ayers' little store.

The unknown one in the picture of the Bellair Store with the group in front of it in *Tales* No. 2 is Bill Cox. He lives in Michigan City, IN.

— DOYT AULT
Taft, CA

Editor's Note: Does anyone have such a photo of the Elbow School that they'd like to share with Tales' *readers? Send with SASE to: R.R. 2, Oblong, IL 62449.*

Rural mail carriers played role in history

In your Fall 1989 issue of *Tales* (No. 12), in the Did You Know ... section on page 7, I took the article "Word travels fast" as a real compliment. I say this because I am the rural mail carrier on R.R. 2 Oblong and service the Tales project.

These days we seem to hear a lot about the quality (or lack of it) in the U.S. Postal Service. I am proud to say I enjoy my work and the people on my route.

Tales should do an article on rural letter carriers and how they have tied rural America with the mainstream. Your magazine is about the preservation of the history and culture of the Midwest, and I believe that the rural carriers have had a big part in it.

— PETE DAVIS
Robinson, IL

Tales as teaching tool

I have appreciated *Tales from the general store* from the beginning and used articles and items from it in teaching local history to nursing home people from 1974-87. I am so glad you are publishing it again.

I have moved from Robinson to Lawrenceville and am making notebooks called "Bits and Pieces of Local History of Crawford County and Vicinity" using items I've collected. The Robinson Library is going to bind these notebooks (with duplicate copy in reserve) for use at the library.

Do you have any objection to me using some pieces from *Tales*? The "agriculture" section is much indebted to *Tales*. Since this is just a compilation of my collection and will not be published, I hope you have no objection to the items being included.

— DORIS DAVIS
Lawrenceville, IL

Editor's Note: Thank you for complying with copyright regulations and requesting permission to use the Tales *material. We are more than happy to permit the use of previously published material, along with appropriate credit, for inclusion in your historical collection.*

Book hunt

Thanks for putting out such a good paper.

I have wanted to receive a copy of *Five Senses, Four Seasons* by Harris L. Hitt for some time. I wrote to the Jane Var Publishing Co., R.R. 11, Box 129, Muncie, IN 47302. My postcard was returned "order expired." That indicates that they have been removed for at least one year.

If you find out where the publishing company moved to, or where we can get a copy of the book, please inform us.

I like your paper very much.

— OLIN ULREY
Akron, OH

Editor's Note: If we can find out any more information about the book, we'll let you know. In the meantime, can any other readers help us out on this one?

A grammar query

Thanks for the venture into *Tales from the general store*. It is of interest.

Realizing that you desire a broad readership throughout the state of Illinois (and perhaps even farther afield), I do understand the inclusion of articles from the many areas. Increasingly, I hear many folks express disappointment in the fact that they do not find more tales from the Bellair general store.

About journalism—has English grammar changed so drastically in the past 50-plus years? Is it now considered proper grammar to use split infinitives and misplaced adverbs (that is, adverbs placed so far from the verb that they modify)? I notice such more and more from the *Daily News* of Robinson and their kindred papers. Likewise, is the personal pronoun now spelled "there" (meaning "their")?

— HARRY C. RANDOLPH
Oblong, IL

Editor's Note: Our mail doesn't indicate the disappointment you speak about, but no doubt there is some. To pay the bills, it is necessary to broaden our readership and attract regional and national advertisers. (Our printing bill alone last issue was more than $3,500.) Local folks simply were not and are not providing the necessary funding, even though we have an all-volunteer staff and do not pay salaries.

We'll continue to do our best to provide tales of interest to as many people as possible. Please stay with us.

Undoubtedly, English grammar has changed "drastically in the past 50-plus years." Perhaps that change hasn't been for the best, and perhaps that change isn't correct. But it has changed. Still, the infinitive should be a single grammatical unit. The split infinitive might sometimes be defensible as an aid to clarity in certain constructions, I've heard, but I can't think of such a case.

Nor should modifiers be misplaced. Yet you will find writers, editors and grammarians who defend arbitrary placement of such words as "only," "scarcely" and "merely," for example, on the grounds that, through frequent use in conversation, the construction has become idiomatic. That is particularly true in the case of American English with the influx of so many immigrants in our society and the lack of respect society generally pays to the teaching profession and the use of standard English.

And "there" should never be confused with the pronoun "their." Sadly, it is sometimes. You never mentioned if these grammatical errors were within the pages of Tales. *Although we try to write and edit judiciously, we do make mistakes and appreciate our readers pointing them out to us. So if we make mistakes, let us know.*

1868
BRIDGETON

The annual Parke County Covered Bridge Festival draws thousands of tourists every October. The 10-day festival celebrates the historic covered bridges that dot the Indiana countryside, like this one in Bridgeton that was built in 1868. A throng of artworks, crafts and foods greet sightseers at various stopping points. *Photo by Vanessa Faurie*

Did You Know...

Outdoorsman writes about nature

Rodney Senteney of Toledo writes and syndicates a column about nature called, A Peek at Nature.

For more than 20 years, Senteney has earned his living as a woodsman, which included commercial fishing, hunting and trapping and the gathering of plants such as ginseng, golden seal and blood root.

"I've canoed across states and hunted river bottoms on horseback," he says. "Twice I nearly lost my life in rivers."

His experiences have provided plenty of stories for his columns, and he hopes readers will develop an understanding of what wild animals need to coexist with humans.

Sesser Opera House full of entertainment

The old gentleman wouldn't buy a ticket and go inside where he could sit down and watch the show in comfort. Oh no, not him. Maybe he thought the flickering images of the silent movies were just a passing fad and beneath his dignity.

Instead, he would slip up into the entrance and, leaning forward, peek through the doors to watch the action up on the silver screen. As he did so, he would take off his bowler (derby hat) and hold it upside down behind him with both hands.

After seeing him do this a few times, a couple of his friends realized how much he looked like a movie comedian. And they decided to carry the image just a bit further. So one afternoon, when he was standing by the doors in his favorite position, they quietly crept up behind him and poured a big glass of water in his hat.

Then they stood back and said, "Hey, John, why don't you buy a ticket?"

Startled by their call, John jumped back and clapped his hat on his head. The gag worked to perfection. He stood with ice water running down his face and into his collar while his friends doubled up in laughter.

That's the way it happened, according to one old gentleman I interviewed while researching the history of the old Sesser Opera House. There are lots of stories in that old theater. The more I hang around the auditorium and prowl around the projection booth, the more I seem to be able to relive in my mind those halycon days of silent movies and live entertainment.

But those days need not be gone forever. Sure, a lot of time has passed since then and entertainment has changed a lot. However, as the restoration of the Sesser Opera House progresses and we book more and more acts for our stage, the past can live again.

— Lon P. Dawson

Editor's Note: Lon P. Dawson did some publicity work for a small community theater when he wrote this piece. He lives in Christopher, IL.

Oil Johnnies ate at 'Hungry Hill'

During the early oil boom in Honey Creek Township, a boarding house was built atop a high hill on the north-south road east of the Parker Pool (the dammed creek branches on the Henry Parker farm five miles west of Flat Rock that caught the overflow of oil from an 800-barrel well in 1906). Many of the "Oil Johnnies" boarded here and others ate here. They christened the place "Hungry Hill." A former patron said if you stuck your head out after dark, you'd get it blown off.

— History of Crawford County
Illinois
1980, Vol. 2

Hermit of the Wabash

Recluse Roland Smythe lived in a cabin at the mouth of Turman Creek near Merom, across the Wabash River on the Indiana side. Young people visited him to hear stories of the Civil War in which he was a colonel in the Confederate Army. As a fisherman and mussel hunter, he sold his catch to people who came to buy. He lived off nature, eating fish, muskrats, turtle eggs, raccoon, etc. He also found a pearl the size of a hazelnut and perfectly round. Jewelers from Terre Haute tried unsuccessfully to barter for it.

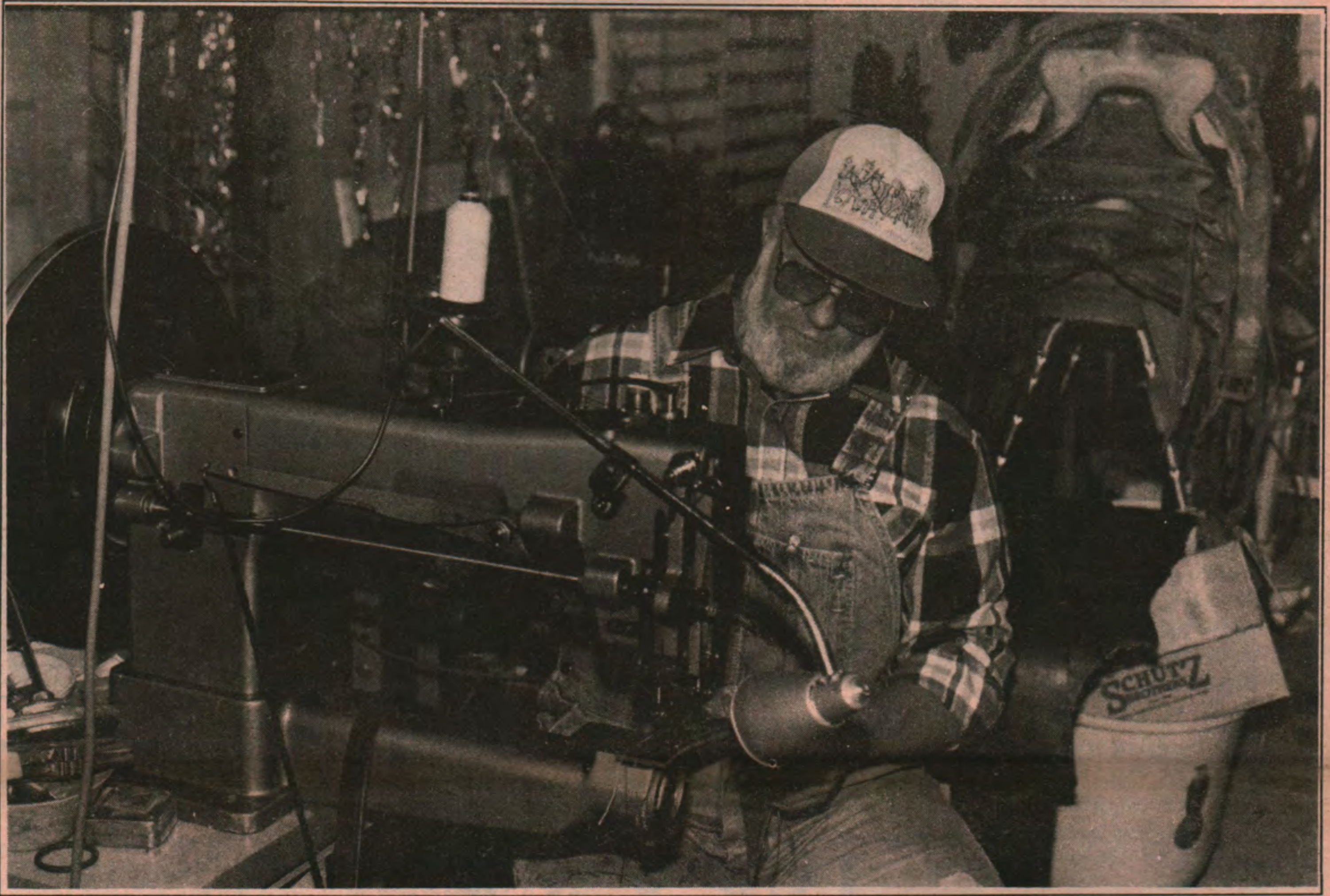
During the war, Smythe was known as Robert A. Caskie (Kaskie) of the Virginia Volunteers. But after the war, he disappeared from his family in Richmond, VA, for 22 years, until he was traced through a life insurance policy on which he had kept up the premiums.

In 1916, after being rescued from freezing to death, he went to be with his son in Indianapolis, where he died.

— History of Crawford County
Illinois
1980, Vol. 2

'I just like harness'

The vanishing craft of harness making is a source of pride for Dick Elliott



Harness craftsman Dick Elliott stitches a piece of leather with a 1924 Singer sewing mangine in his shop near Atlanta, IN.

Photo by Laurie Goering

By Laurie Goering

Every once in a while, somebody wanders into Dick Elliott's old harness-making shop, corners Elliott back by the wood-fired stove, and asks for his help in learning the trade.

Elliott's patient advice is always the same: "Just go buy an old saddle and tear it apart," he says. "You'll learn the way I did."

It's good advice, too, judging by the sort of work that's laying these days in Elliott's shop, located on the east side of U.S. 31 near Atlanta, IN.

Take the double mule harness he's almost finished for a couple from Mississippi. It's an old-fashioned work of art—black and beautiful, patterned with shiny gold studs, and all cut by hand from patterns Elliott thought up or traced out himself.

The mules, you have a feeling, will prance a little when they wear it.

Elsewhere in his shop, which smells of rich leather and wood smoke, are draped long leather bands for draft horses, adorned with giant brass jingle bells, and new big, black horse collars and long sets of reins.

If you don't see what you need, Elliott, a 62-year-old retired farmer and part-time harness maker, will just plop down at his 1924 Singer sewing machine and whip it up for you, provided he has the time.

"I just like harness," says Elliott, sporting a beard, overalls and a farmer's cap. "This is something I always wanted to do."

Elliott operates his shop out of an old barn shared by his Belgian horses, Dolly and Duke, an old buggy and a couple of barn cats, all next door to his home.

From Route 31, the place doesn't look like much. But stop by any weeknight or Sunday, when the smoke curls up from Elliott's homemade wood stove—put together from two 55-gallon barrels—and he'll tell you his stories as he works.

He says he started in the quickly vanishing trade of harness making 12 years ago when he moved from his old farm in New Castle to Atlanta, where he now works days as a machine operator.

He made his first harness pretty much like he made his first saddle and his first pair of shoes, he says.

"I bought a buggy harness I liked, I took it apart and I just drew me up some patterns," he says. "It's fun to do it all, even shoes. I had a guy who was supposed to teach me, but he goofed off and I taught myself."

Over the years, he refined his skills and now does "a little bit of everything" at the shop, from repairing saddles, ice hockey pads and baseball gloves to building harness, saddles, shoes and something suspicious-looking he calls "cow pads."

A harness, made to order from scratch, will cost about $275 at the shop, bit to crupper. Fancy work or double harness is a little more, Elliott says. And a long strand of brass jingle bells, that might cost $500 in Chicago, goes for $175 in Elliott's shop.

"You won't catch me up in Chicago," he says and laughs with an exaggerated grimace.

The work all gets done in a shop that looks like something out of a 1900s sweat shop, with big black sewing machines and long work tables and benches, all littered with half-sewn harness pieces and old moldy saddles and bits of waxed thread and leather strings.

Elliott knows the history of every piece in the place. Those saddles, he points out, were dropped off for repairs a few years ago by a man who then went bankrupt and never came to claim them. That pair of shoes is part of an experiment he once worked on. And the big silver and black snow saddle he took in trade—he says he couldn't resist.

"It's just like Ron Reagan had—he was my hero on TV," Elliott says. "He had a big white hat and rode a palomino."

Elliott also points with pride to a pony saddle, stamped "Roy Rogers" on the side. The saddle, he says, was part of a series sold by Sears 40 or 50 years ago, that included Gene Autry, Lone Ranger and Tom Mix saddles.

In his shop there also sits an elegant but well-worn sidesaddle. It belongs to a lady who wants him to rebuild it "when he gets the chance." He hasn't had one yet.

Still, "I enjoy every minute of it," he says. "I don't like to lay around. And you meet a world of nice people in the horse business."

Among the visitors to the shop on one Monday evening were a couple of men from Ft. Harrison down in Indianapolis who wondered if Elliott might be able to make a harness for their horse-drawn hearse. Seems some of the Army folks who die "want to be buried with horses," one of the men says, and the fort had just managed to acquire the old hearse.

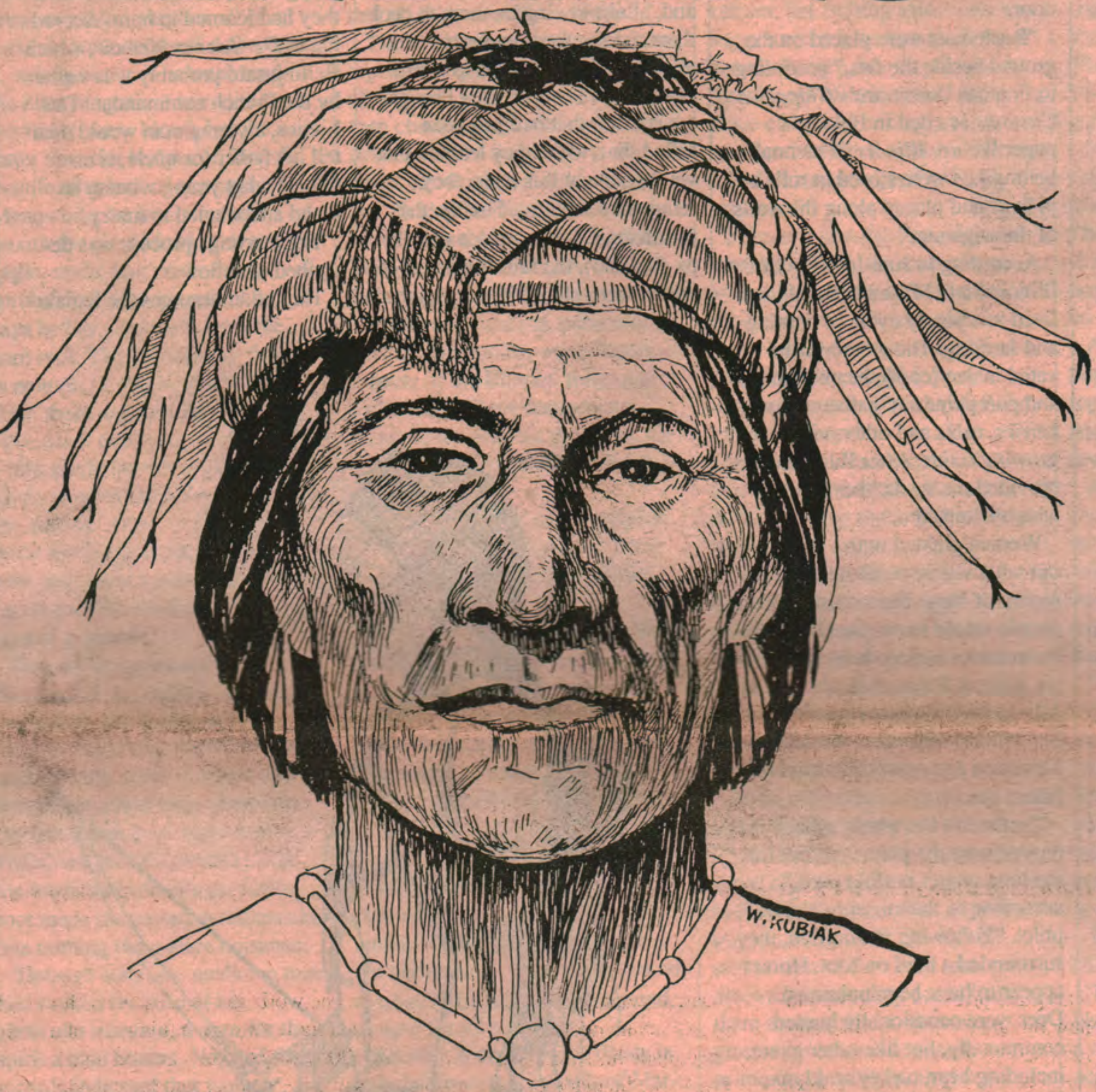
Other unusual requests that have come Elliott's way include harness for the spotted horses used in circuses, he says.

"They wanted harness with handles for the kids to throw themselves up," he says, referring to the circus acrobats. After he got the design worked out and the harness finished, the circus

Continued on page 14

Portrait of the ILLINOIS INDIANS

By Vanessa Faurie



Whether the use of Chief Illiniwek as a symbol of the University of Illinois Athletic Association constitutes racism has been a controversal issue throughout the state, and even the nation, in recent months.

Some students, Native Americans and politicians believe the athletic dance performed by a university student dressed in Indian regalia at football and basketball halftime presentations demeans the Indian race. Others, including many U. of I. alumni, believe the same character and performance instill pride in the state of Illinois and its flagship university and say it should be viewed as a tribute to the Indian race.

When the controversy came to a head, U. of I. officials announced that the Chief Illiniwek symbol would continue its 63-year tradition but that the school would take care to preserve its dignity and promote a heightened awareness of Native American culture.

Regardless of where an individual stands on the issue, a curiosity about the Illinois Indians was sparked. Yet to a great extent, the mystery of who they were and what they were really like remains. No true-blooded Illinois Indian is around today to tell anyone.

The person who probably knows the most is historian Natalia Belting of Urbana. After a 43-year teaching career at the University of Illinois, the professor emerita continues her study of the French colonization of North America and is in the process of deciphering old documents from French Jesuit missionaries who first came across the Illinois Indians in the mid-1600s.

When the Jesuits built missions, they were required to write reports and send them back to Quebec, Belting said. They also made dictionaries for the languages of the people with whom they worked.

"It would be as if the entire English-speaking race were wiped out and all that was left was a Webster's 2nd unabridged dictionary," Belting said. "It would still be a prime source of what the culture was like."

From a relatively scant collection of resources, historians gradually have been able to piece together a characterization of the Illinois Indians.

The word *illinois* is actually a 17th century French rendering of an Algonquian term for "men." The Illinois' had no written language except for the use of pictographs, but their spoken language most resembled the Algonquian linguistic group.

The Illinois nation was made of up several tribes, including the Kaskaskia, Cahokia, Tamoroa, Maroa, Peoria, Michigamea and Moingwena. The identity of some tribes were probably lost over the years, perhaps by merging with other tribes.

In 1650, the Illinois Indians numbered approximately 33,000. They lived seminomadic lives in an area along the upper Mississippi River that included what is known today as southern Wisconsin, most of Illinois and parts of Iowa, Missouri and Arkansas. In fact, it was the largest Indian group east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio River.

When the French began to build their western empire, they made an alliance with the Illinois. The French were mainly fur traders and farmed only out of necessity, according to Belting, so they were not land hungry like the English. A peaceful working relationship with the Indians therefore benefited the French economy.

Early Jesuit writings described various aspects of the Illinois Indian culture, but Belting cautioned that they be read with the "understanding that the lay reporter was writing in a day when the society he knew was a feudal society." Cultural biases were inevitable in such records.

In an early collection entitled *Jesuit Relations*, Father Marest related to Father Germon that "these Savages do not lack intelligence; they are naturally inquisitive, and turn a joke in a fairly ingenious manner."

When, in some accounts, the Illinois men were described as being "lazy," it may have been that the recorder did not have an understanding of the division of labor in the Illinois culture. Women did some work that 17th century French society considered traditionally male duties such as farming and food gathering.

The Illinois were reported to be lighter skinned than the French. And Marquette, the explorer, described them as having a "gentle and tractable disposition ... they are active and very skillful with bows and arrows."

The style of clothing was very simple before contact with Europeans. Men wore a leather breechcloth and moccasins. The breechcloth was about 18 inches wide and 4 feet long and was worn between the legs with a flap brought up over a belt in the front and back. Women simply wore a wraparound skirt made from an animal skin and moccasins. The moccasins were soft and each made from one piece of tanned leather. They tied in front and had flaps on each side.

Men and women also wore leggings made of deer skins. The men's extended from the ankle to the hip, but the women's only went from the ankle to below the knee. They were tied on with leather thongs and had a fringed edge either near the front or along the outer part of the leg.

Once in the 1950s, when many towns along the Illinois Central Railroad were planning their centennial celebrations, Belting received a call from a woman who lived in a town with an Indian name. It was her idea that the civic leaders wear authentic Indian dress for the festivities instead of 1850s period costumes and wanted to know what the Illinois wore. Belting politely suggested she check the city ordinances for indecent exposure before following through with her plans. The woman quickly decided to stick with the pre-Civil War garb.

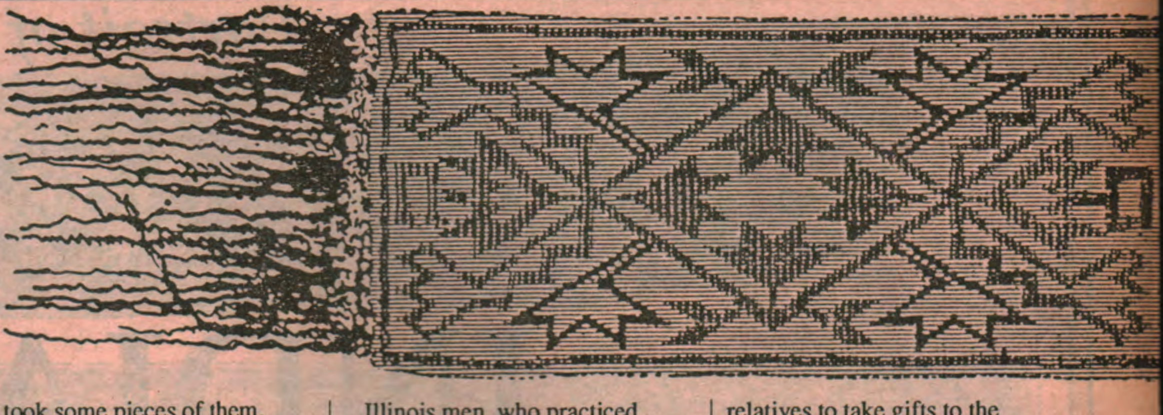
In a pamphlet series published by the Illinois State Museum, assistant curator of ethnography Judi Johnson described how the Illinois decorated their clothing and moccasins, usually for some special occasion because it was so time consuming.

"Porcupine quills were dyed red, black or yellow," Johnson wrote. "Paints were made from natural pigments in the same colors and white and applied with animal fat or a glue made by boiling beaver tail.

"Plain, undecorated moccasins were worn every day, but the center front seams and flaps were elaborately decorated with porcupine quills or moose or buffalo hair embroidery for special occasions."

Indian clothing did not have pockets, so they carried items such as knives and other tools in pouches tied to a belt or strapped over the shoulder. Sometimes in severe weather, they wore an extra skin or fur as a kind of shawl or cape.

"Clothing changed drastically after contact with Euro-Ameri-



cans," Johnson wrote. "Trade cloth, glass beads and silver ornaments were used extensively. Bone hair pipe breastplates, fur turbans, feather and bear-claw necklaces were worn as symbols of rank and honor.

"All clothing was still made by women; but trade material became more popular than skins. Red or blue wool cloth, calico cotton prints, black velvet, glass beads, ribbons and brass and silver ornaments were very much in demand. ... It was not unusual to see store-bought pants, shirt, jacket or vest worn with traditional Indian attire. Women continued to wear traditional clothing much longer than did the men."

Despite a lack of clothing, Belting noted in an article called "The Native American as Myth and Fact" (May 1976, *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*), that the Illinois seemed to naturally repel mosquitoes.

"It was a matter for much hilarity among the Indians to see the French slap and scratch and suffocate, hiding under heavy skin robes," she wrote. "I know of no explanation for the Indians' immunity, unless it was that, summer and winter, they covered their bodies with bear grease and that was too much for a mosquito to bite through."

Although scantily clad by French standards, the Illinois were more comfortable in their heat- and smoke-filled homes than their over-dressed visitors.

The Illinois lived in *wigwams*, but they were more like cabins than the misconception that comes to mind for many non-Native Americans. Belting described the rain-proof structures as being shaped like half of an egg cut through from one end to the other. They were made with saplings fastened together and small branches laced between them. Mats of rushes (usually cattails) were sewn to the frame in the winter and pieces of bark in the summer. The floors were covered with mats also.

The wigwams typically housed 15 to 25 people, most likely in the same extended family, and could be as much as 50 to 100 feet long.

"After 40 days of travel I entered the river of the Illinois," wrote the Jesuit priest, Father Rale, "and after voyaging 50 leagues, I came to their first village, which had 300 cabins, all of them with four or five fires. One fire is always for two families."

The cabin doorway was covered with a hide that had a stick attached at the lower edge. A person would lift the stick, roll the corner of the hide and hold it as he entered. If the wind was strong against the doorway, the rush mats at the other end of the cabin were separated for a temporary back door.

"Rush mats were placed on the ground beside the fire," according to Frances Densmore's *Chippewa Customs* as cited in Belting's paper *We are Illinois*. "Personal belongings were stored in rolls or in bags and placed along the walls of the wigwam."

According to Judi Johnson of the Illinois State Museum, the Illinois lived in a yearly cycle of hunting and farming. The women cultivated maize (corn), beans, squash and pumpkins and gathered nuts, berries, roots and other wild-growing foods. After Europeans provided the seeds, they planted watermelons, too.

Women planted maize throughout what would be about the month of May. Then most of the people would leave the village for the summer buffalo hunt (about six weeks). From about the end of July to late August or early September, the maize would be harvested and most of it dried for future use.

"In the fall the whole tribe moved onto the plains on foot for the long winter buffalo hunt," according to the museum's pamphlet. "Following the buffalo, they surrounded a herd on foot. Horses appear to have been unknown. Deer were occasionally hunted communally, but like other game, including bear, turkey and lynx, they were generally stalked by one or two hunters. After the long winter hunt and early spring raids, the tribe returned to their semi-permanent villages to begin the annual cycle all over again."

Father Rale reported that the Illinois annually killed more than 1,000 roebucks and more than 2,000 buffalo, which were abundant in the area.

Marquette described a feast given by the Peoria that he and fellow explorer Joliet attended:

"The first course was a great wooden platter full of *sagamite*—that is to say, meal of Indian corn boiled in water and seasoned with fat. The Master of Ceremonies filled a spoon with sagamite three or four times and put it in my mouth as if I were a little child. He did the same to Monsieur Jollyet (sic). As a second course, he caused a second platter to be brought, on which were three fish. He took some pieces of them, removed the bones from them, and, after blowing on them to cool them, he put them in our mouths as one would give food to a bird. For the third course, they brought a large dog that had just been killed; but, when they learned that we did not eat this meat, they removed it from us. Finally, the fourth course was a piece of wild ox (buffalo), the fattest morsels of which were placed in our mouths."

Illinois men, who practiced polygamy, could not marry until they had learned to hunt. According to *De Gannes Memoir*, which Belting said probably was written by the French commandant Des Liettes, a young man would then tell his father (or uncle, if no father) what young woman he loved and wanted to marry.

The marriage process was described as follows:

The father arranges for female relatives to take gifts to the woman's cabin. She leaves and the man's father talks to her father, requesting an alliance. The presents remain in the cabin, sometimes for days, if there are objections either by the woman or a relative hoping for a better suitor.

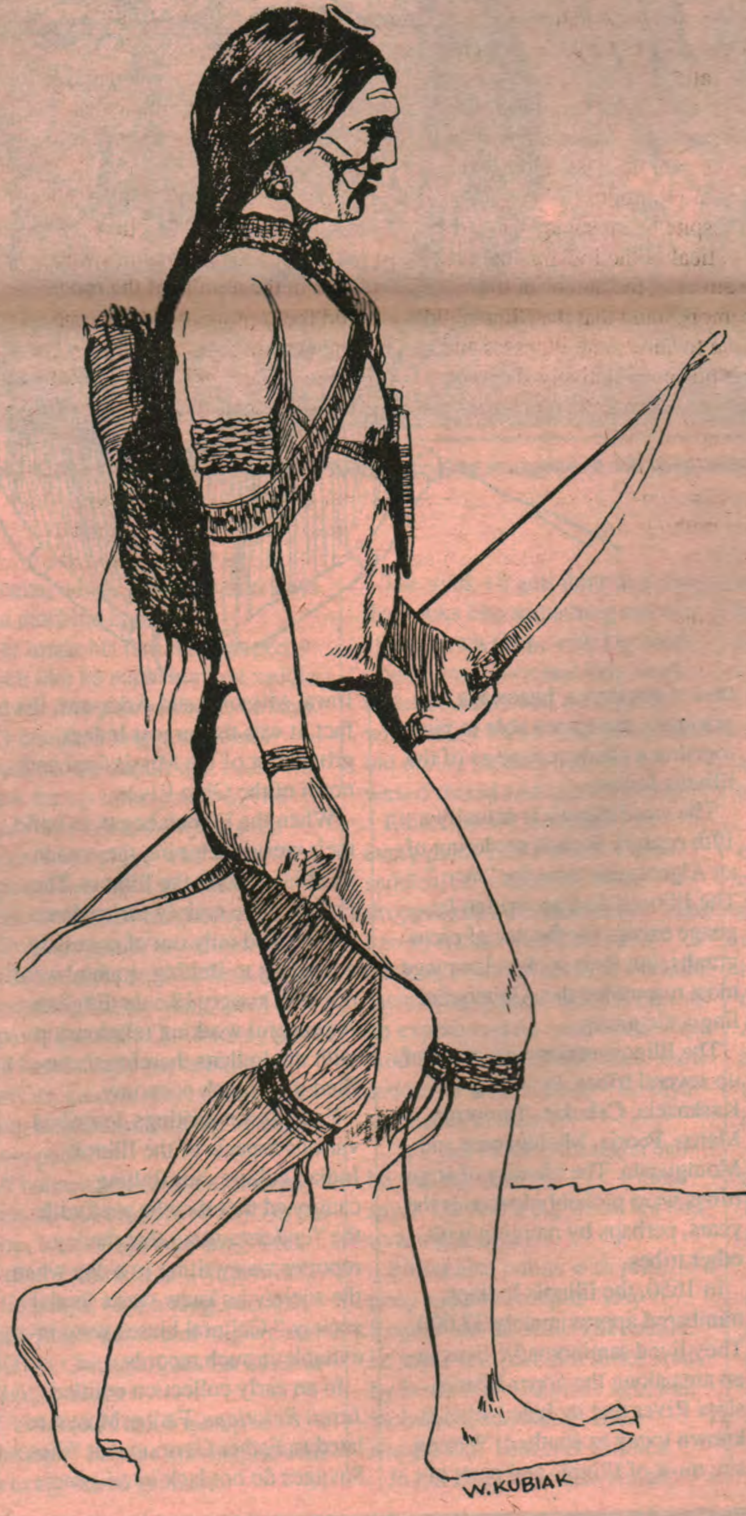
If the "request" is denied, the presents are returned without a word. The man's father will then add to the presents and try again. If the refusals continue, he may approach other women in the same way.

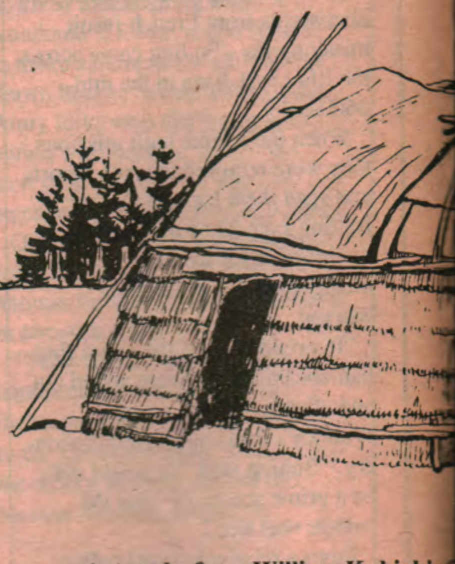
When there is a consent, the woman's family carries similar gifts back to the man's cabin and the woman goes along, "adorned with shoulder straps, glass beads, porcelain and bells, so that one who heard them marching would think they were mules."

Inside the man's cabin, the bride sits on a skin in the middle of the floor and her relatives return to their home. Then in the evening, the man's relatives take her back with some more presents. "This is usually done as many as four successive days." Then, finally, on the last day she remains.

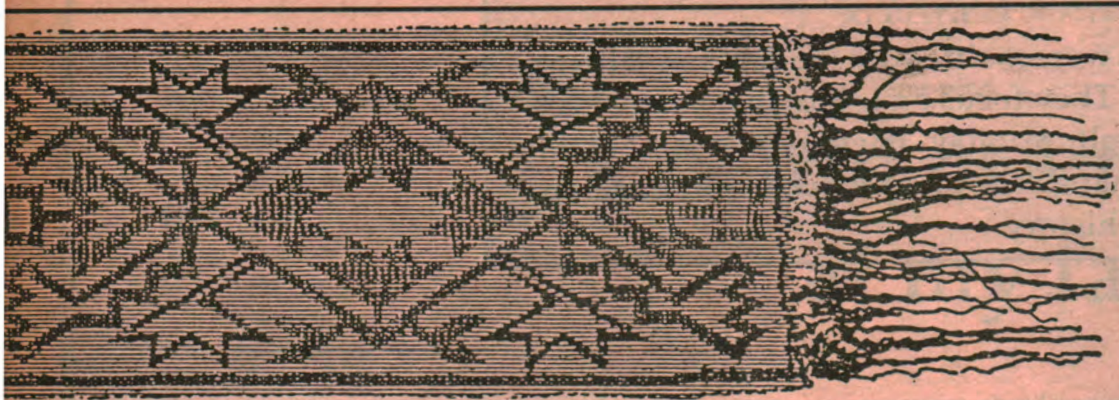
Not much is known about child rearing in the Illinois culture. Babies were carried on their mother's back—wrapped in a skin and fastened to a piece of plank with some moss under their bottoms. One report said they also washed the babies in the river regardless of the weather.

For entertainment, games of chance seemed to be the most popular among the Illinois. Another game they played was





Artworks from William Kubiak's



"plum stones," for which the rules varied, so it is not known exactly how the Illinois played it. But in general, plum stones involved a number of marked stones thrown into a basket or wooden bowl with certain combinations having different values. Beans or straws were used as counters to keep score.

Men and women also played some very physical lacrosse, according to Belting. And whole villages sometimes played each other. The racket was made of walnut, tied and laced with buffalo sinews, and the ball was a knot of wood about the size of a tennis ball. In *De Gannes Memoir*, the author wrote, "They strike their legs in such a manner that they are crippled sometimes ... It is at times as much as two months before they can make use of their legs, and often they break them."

When a person became sick, relatives would summon an old medicine man. And in exchange for some gifts as a kind of payment, although handled in an indirect way, he would try to heal the ill person.

Using a gourd rattle and various packages of powders, he would sing the appropriate song for that illness. In more serious cases, he may have mixed some of the powders in warm water and had the patient swallow some of it. Then he would have taken some into his own mouth, spewed the drug onto the origin of the pain and bandaged it. As the ill person improved, he would sing louder and eventually "extract" the cause of the illness.

According to *De Gannes Memoir*, "he fingers (the pained area) carefully and then all of a sudden throws himself down upon it, crying out as if he were mad. He bites his patient sometimes so hard as to draw blood, but the latter does not budge for fear of manifesting lack of courage. Meanwhile, he inserts in his mouth the claw of a dog or an eagle, or the hair of the bearod (probably a wildcat), which he says he has drawn out from the sore spot. The savages say that it is animals of this kind which send them these diseases because they have eaten their prey."

The medicine man would then sing a song of thanks and bathe the patient. As he left with the items the relatives had put out for him, they would often pass their hands over his head and legs as a sign of gratitude.

Despite being somewhat skeptical of the Indians' medical treatments, the author of the memoir noted that the Illinois did seem to cure some illnesses and wounds in a relatively short time. Broken bones were reportedly healed within two months. And the medicinal use of a particular root made the common rattlesnake bite nothing but a mere nuisance.

Through song, the medicine man had evoked the help of his particular *manitou*, a term for the spirit a man honors. None of the records indicated that women participated in this aspect of Illinois life.

"As all of their knowledge is limited to the knowledge of animals and of the needs of life," according to Jesuit priest, Father Marest, "so it is to these things that all their worship is limited."

The spirit adopted by a man was reported to govern all things and all aspects of life and death. A man chose a manitou based on the first animal he imagined in his sleep. He would kill that animal and display the skin or feathers in his cabin and honor it with a feast. Then he would call upon it in the future to help him in life.

Music and dancing, particularly during ceremonies, were important aspects of the Illinois' religious experience. Three instruments were most common: the drum, the rattle and the flagelot (similar to a recorder).

The only Illinois dance detailed in the historical documents is the calumet dance or "dance of the tobacco-pipe."

In one description from the Wisconsin Historical Collections, a pipe decorated with plumes was placed in the middle of the room. Amid the beating of a drum, one man began to dance and then yielded to another and so on. All of the dancers acted out a war, from preparation to finding the enemy to returning home in victory. After everyone danced around the pipe, it was offered to the highest ranking man present to smoke. Then the pipe was passed around for all to smoke.

Another account of the dance is detailed from the first trip of Marquette and Joliet, in which Marquette made some observations in the *Jesuit Relations*, Vol. 59:

"There is nothing more mysterious or more respected among (the Illinois). Less honor is paid to the Crowns and sceptors of Kings than the Savages bestow upon this. It seems to be the God of peace and of war, the Arbiter of life and of death. (The calumet) has but to be carried upon one's person, and displayed, to enable one to walk safely through the midst of Enemies—who, in the hottest of the Fight, lay down their arms when it is shown. For that reason the Illinois gave me one, to serve as a safeguard among all the Nations through whom I had to pass during my voyage.

"There is a Calumet for peace, and one for war, which are distinguished solely by the Color of the feathers with which they are adorned; Red is a sign of war. They also use it to put an end to Their disputes, to strengthen their alliances, and to speak to strangers."

The Indians knew of war before the arrival of the Europeans and a good warrior was held in high esteem, but Belting said evidence suggests that it was under European influence that they began to fight "wars of extermination in place of the old raiding party of a war band satisfied with a few men killed or wounded, a few taken prisoner."

February was the time of year for waging war, for example, to avenge the previous death of a tribe member. A leader and his small band of warriors, usually no more than 20, would follow various rituals before they left the village during the night. The youngest and least experienced among them traditionally had to do the cooking and mend moccasins.

The warriors hid food in different locations so they wouldn't have to waste time hunting in case they were pursued by the enemy. If they had to split off from the group, they marked trees and other areas that enabled them to meet up later.

Their weapons consisted of clubs, knives, bows and arrows. The Illinois also carried arrow-proof shields made of layers of buffalo hide. Even after guns were introduced to them, the Illinois still preferred their bow and arrows because they could fire them more quickly. However, guns were sometimes used, primarily as a frightening noisemaker, against their enemies to the west who were ignorant of them.

"Taking captives was considered more honorable than killing the enemy," ethnographer Judi Johnson wrote. "Slaves were apparently common, and captured women and children were often adopted into families to replace lost members."

However, according to Belting, prisoners were offered as slaves to families who had lost relatives in a recent war and, depending on the family's decision, were allowed to live or were condemned to death, usually by torture and burning. Yet Belting added that there is not much evidence that the Illinois burned many prisoners.

"It was the Iroquois who invented this frightful manner of death," wrote Father Rale in *Jesuit Relations*, "and it is only by the law of retaliation that the Illinois, in their turn, treat these Iroquois prisoners with an equal cruelty."

The Iroquois from the east often led attacks on the Illinois in an attempt to move in on the fur trade with the French. The high demand of pelts eventually wiped out the beaver population along the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes, according to Belting, and the Ohio Valley was one of the last sources. The increasing pressure of European settlement also forced the Iroquois west.

When the English eventually clashed with the French, the Illinois fought alongside their ally. The other major enemies of the Illinois were epidemics of smallpox and measles, which they had no immunity against.

As war and disease reduced the population, various tribes merged together. By 1763, the Illinois population had been decimated to fewer than 500.

A Kaskaskian Indian killed Pontiac, the Ottawa chief, in 1769 and incurred the wrath of the Lake tribes, according to Johnson's research. The Illinois sought refuge at the French village of Kaskaskia.

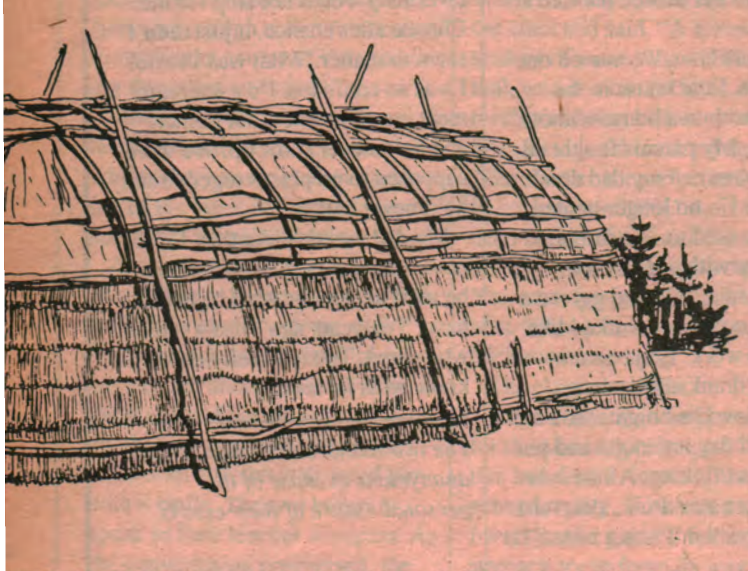
"In 1832, the last of the Illinois lands were ceded to the United States government and the survivors withdrew across the Mississippi River," Johnson reported. "Only eight Kaskaskia warriors were included in the group that settled with the Peoria in Kansas."

By 1851, the Illinois had lost all tribal identification.

There is a distant group of Native Americans called Peoria on a reservation in Oklahoma, according to Johnson, who numbered a little more than 400 in 1956.

"To suppose, as we do," Belting wrote, "that the Native Americans resident here when the first white man came resembled the latter-day Kickapoo or Potawatomi or Shawnee or Winnebago is to suppose that one knows how a fine grape wine will taste from a drink of the crushes wild fruit."

Controversal issues such as the University of Illinois' portrayal of Chief Illiniwek will undoubtedly continue without a definitive resolution to the satisfaction of all concerned. And historians and ethnographers will continue to uncover some characteristics of long-ago cultures. But it seems unlikely that anyone in the late 20th century, including Native Americans, will ever fully know the true heritage and the true spirit of the Illinois Indian.



eat Lakes Indians **reproduced with permission by Baker Book House Co.**

STUDENT ESSAYS

The following four essays were written by students at Urbana High School in Urbana, IL. They focus on topics that many high school students face in our culture today. They are also some of the experiences that will help shape their perspectives in the development of their own sense of history.

Alcohol abuse from two other perspectives

"We all paid for Dad's problem ..."

Dad drank a lot. That's the way it always was. My family and I accepted it as being a part of him.

Occasionally we got some benefit out of it, but not often. When he came home really drunk, it wasn't so bad because he'd pass out at the kitchen table or on the couch without much of a fight. No problem. And when he woke up in the morning and asked how he got home or how his favorite coffee mug broke, we took advantage of his amnesia and slipped something in that was beneficial to us.

When Dad passed out on the front porch one time, my brother and I helped Mom carry him inside. Then she gave us $5 from the "vacation" jar. The next morning, Dad asked what happened to the $5, and I told him that Mom gave it to us because we had to carry him into the house. He felt so bad he didn't ask for the money back.

The bad times were just as memorable, though.

Times when he came home late and we were still up usually prompted an argument between he and Mom. He would be angry that she would allow us to stay up late; she would counter in the same tone of voice that he shouldn't be coming home so late anyway. They would yell at each other for a few more minutes, savagely tearing at each other's feelings with harsh words and screeching voices.

When they lashed out at each other, they also tore parts of me into jagged-edged pieces. I don't think they were aware of it until it was too late. Mom would later find me in the corner of my closet, curled into the smallest person I could possibly be. I believed that if I could just shrink and keep shrinking, maybe I could get away from it. But no matter how hard I jammed my fingers into my ears or how loudly I sang or cried to myself, I could never get far enough away from the snarling animals my parents had become.

When my Dad's mother got sick, everything got worse. Dad came home every night for three weeks drunk. He and Mom argued, but that wasn't the worst of it.

Instead of Mom or Dad sleeping on the couch after the usual argument, other things happened. Physical things. Plates and glasses were thrown. Lamps were broken. Then I heard the first sound of a hand slapping against unprotected flesh. Dad hit Mom.

It was always in the back of my mind that something like this could happen. But the conscious part of my mind refused to acknowledge it and pushed the thought away. It was a job well done, because when I heard it, I was surprised. But it didn't take long for me to react. I ran into the living room, but my brother had beaten me to it.

Dad was sitting on top of Mom with his knees pinning her shoulders to the floor. She was crying; Dad was laughing. When I looked at him, I saw things I had never seen before. Through his bloodshot eyes, I saw a crazed, wild man, a man who had been through hell and was making the woman beneath him pay for it.

He must have seen something in my eyes too, or maybe he felt the hatred that was gushing from my pores. It was hitting him in waves. All of the sudden, he got up and went to bed without a word.

Grandma died two weeks later. The funeral was hell. It was the first time I saw my dad cry. It wasn't just silent tears, but loud moans and sobs that wracked his body and forced him to stay in his own corner of the funeral home while Mom and I tried unsuccessfully to console him. We found ourselves sobbing hysterically, too.

I didn't cry for my grandmother; I had already shed my grief for her. I gave my grief to her the first time I entered her house without her there. It hit me then that I would never see my grandmother again.

Dad's whole body shook and I felt his repentance. With each of his sobs, a howl of my own followed. It was as if my dad had been stabbed, and the pain was unbelievable. I didn't cry for my grandmother then, but for my father.

We later moved into her house, which she left to us. But for many months, no one felt comfortable in it. The tension in the air was almost tangible. I felt as though I was intruding. Although no one was brave enough to say so, I believe everyone else felt the same way.

Eventually, we did get used to living in the house. In the six months following Grandma's death, Dad's drinking tapered off but never completely stopped. With every drink, he caused a crack to form in the fragile bond that held our family together until a divorce finally shattered it.

We all paid for Dad's problem in one way or another.

"I did not know him anymore ..."

He used to be so outgoing and so alive.

Mom has told me stories of him when they were in high school. She went to all of his track practices. Whenever he saw her looking at him, he'd fall into one of the hurdles because he wasn't paying attention to his running.

He was a star on the football team, the captain of the wrestling team and one of the best hurdlers in track. And he was very much in love with my mom. They dated all four years of high school and were married the fifth year. The same year she became pregnant with me.

I can recall my own memories as early as three. We lived in an apartment next to my grandparents' house. Mom was going to school and Dad worked construction. We lived in the apartment for about two years, or at least until my brother was born. Then we moved out to the country in a little white house with a green and white fence around it. There were huge, climbing trees everywhere.

As far as I could tell, my parents were always so happy. I remember days when they would sing and dance together in the kitchen. They'd laugh, then sing, then laugh, then sing again. On Sunday afternoons, they would lay my brother down for a nap and then the three of us would go to their room and we would take a nap.

My dad drank beer—didn't all dads? But as the years passed, it seemed that he began to drink more. He was usually at home when he did. By the time I was nine, I knew when he had had too much. I knew when to be quiet and what noises I could make and could not make. My brother slept a lot during the day, so I felt I was home alone most of the time with nothing to do. I couldn't wait for Mom to get home from work.

My parents argued a lot. When it started, I would run to my room and play with my Fisher Price Wind-a-Record. They really confused me one time when they tried to tell me what "separated" meant. The next day they told me they were getting separated. All I understood was that I would not see my daddy very much anymore. Then the next day they said they had changed their minds.

My dad and I were close. Wherever he went, I was not far behind. I would go to work with him on days when he wasn't going to be there very long. I played in the mortar and made mud pies. My dad always treated me like a princess.

Two years later, we moved out of our cute, little house in the country and into a house without memories. My parents fought all the time now, and my dad drank and drank. He no longer treated me like he used to. Instead of, "Let's play with your Barbie dolls," he said, "Go and get me a beer." He no longer worked like he used to work. He just sat at home and drank all day long. Mom now worked nights, so I sat at home all day and night and put up with his drinking. All he ever did anymore was drink, sleep and watch television. I was a bored 11-year-old.

I finally understood the full meaning of separation. It sometimes came before divorce, which I had heard of before but never thought I'd have to experience. I remember that day very well. My dad took all he could fit into his car and left. All I could do was cry. Why was he doing this to me? Why was Mom making this happen?

The next three years were hard for me to cope with. Every weekend, I had to go and see him. I hated it. All he did was drink beer, sit around and look depressed. I tried to tell Mom, but she'd just say it was important for me to keep seeing him.

I felt even more alone during that time in my life. It never seemed as though I would ever have a choice in the matter. Once I had a father and a mother who would listen to me and give me attention. Now I felt I had nothing.

Eventually I was old enough to make a choice whether to see my dad. He had changed so much, I was afraid of the man he had become. I did not know him anymore, and it really hurt.

I stopped seeing him all together. But then he would call me when he was drunk, come to see me when he was drunk—I just couldn't get away from it. I finally told him I didn't want to see him anymore if he kept drinking so much. But he would not stop. He would not stop for Mom, and he obviously would not stop for me. Chance after chance, it just didn't seem to matter. What was I to do? I was so confused. I'd ask him to meet me somewhere for dinner and he'd never show up. We were supposed to go places together but he'd never call.

My dad remains like this. He'll never change. Not for something he used to have or what he could have. Ten years ago I had a father who cared. Today I really don't know what he feels.

The two authors wished to remain anonymous because of the personal nature of their essays.

A world of knowledge at my table

Our family dinette table is where we eat most of our meals, but through the years it's been more than that to me—it's where my best learning takes place.

That learning began before I started any kind of school. At the table I learned to smash peas into my face all by myself, to gabble about my peas, to create art projects out of them. I'm told that I even learned a few manners, like asking with "please" and waiting my turn. But after I started school, that table saved my life.

First grade brought me pain and suffering. By October my teacher had informed my parents that I could not read anything, though I was in the lowest reading group. She sent home the book so that they could read it to me each night. Maybe then I could at least follow along when the other kids read.

By Christmas I was farther behind than ever. I got to enjoy Santa and goodies, but that year the gift I wanted most of all was the power to read. But it was a present I had to earn. I would sit for hours every day at the dinette table while my dad taught, repeated, dramatized, kidded and hugged me through a few sentences. I struggled like someone drowning and cried sometimes. Outside, the wind whipped the thin layer of snow every which way. Inside, the days were long that I spent with *Purple Popcorn*. But I went back to school in January a reader—shaky yet proud.

It was at the dinette table that I read more and more words, labored over my manuscript printing and messed with countables for math. There is where we spread out board games and threw dice, drew pictures and shaped Play-Doh. In time, I could puzzle out the notes my dad wrote me at night to read the next morning while he was at work. He took my dictation and wrote my letters to grandparents. Then I learned to write my own.

By the spring of my sixth grade, the teacher told my parents I was the best reader she had in her top reading group.

I didn't have it made, though. Junior high hit me hard. I had seven classes and teachers. During the first semester (my parents told me later), they worried about me because I was losing so much sleep. With a lot of time at the table, I managed.

I had other things going on, too. My parents didn't want me to miss out on everything else a kid would want to do, so they gave me choices, which we talked over at the dinette table. I took up gymnastics, played the piano, serviced a paper route and joined the Boy Scouts. We were at the table pretty often, blocking out the time for meets, recitals and campouts.

I learned a lot from all of these activities, but the sessions at the dinette table held everything together. With each year I was more on top of things. What I couldn't learn at school, I learned at home. Some things I've learned better than my friends because I was taught "the ways that will not let you down," as my dad put it. He knew it would be harder eventually to unlearn bad habits and put new ones in their place, so he insisted that I do things the way that would work in college, or as close to that as possible. I may have to struggle with new material, but my study methods will get me through my courses with a minimum of wear and tear.

What I need at home has changed a lot. As a high school senior, I already have a lot of the basics under my belt. Learning at the dinette table hasn't stopped, though. On Sunday mornings, the paper brings news from all over the world. I know that I'm going out there somewhere, and I want to know as much as I can about it.

If the outer world is important, so is the inner world. A few days ago, late one night before I headed for bed, I sat down with my dad and threw my latest hypothetical question at him: "If you had a retarded daughter married to a retarded guy, and they couldn't be counted on to use birth control, would you have her sterilized?" My dad took off his glasses and began by saying that the issues were complex and difficult. I got to bed late that night, but enriched.

As I get ready to leave home, I see that a lot of lessons from the dinette table have stuck with me. I know when to use a soup spoon, how to clean up my own messes, and how to bargain for a later curfew or trade newspaper deliveries with my brother. I know I can't linger too long over breakfast if I am to get to school on time.

After my brother and I squabbled over clothes we had borrowed from each other, we got called to talk about the problems of borrowing and the responsibilities that went with it. The lesson we came away with was to treat other people's things the way we'd want them to treat ours.

When I get ready to have kids of my own, I know the facts of life. I was told them at home in connection with health class, and the talk went beyond plumbing and mechanics. I know that being happy means helping someone else be happy, and that I have responsibilities to face as well as pleasures to enjoy.

It wouldn't be honest to claim that my learning has always been a pleasure. Often it was, but there has been pain as well. The effort has always been intense and learning new things has never been easy for me—whether it was to play out of the street or to master trigonometry. No matter how well I do, I always feel a parental push to achieve better. I can't help wishing that I could afford to ease up sometimes and play even more than I do.

When I get to feeling the pressure a little too much, I remind myself that I'll be glad in college that I've been spreading it out for years, not waiting for it to fall on me all at once.

In only a few months, I know there will be times I'll wish I could be back at the dinette table. I'm not too worried, though. I'm sure I'll be ready to leave my launching pad by then.

The author, an Urbana High School senior, requested his name be withheld.

A bout with grief

By John Schomberg

It was a Minnesota winter morning. Snow covered the ground and ice covered the streets. As the bell rang for my first-hour social studies class, students' spirits were high and conversation turned to the events of the upcoming three-day weekend.

Some students spoke of the latest "Miami Vice" episode, while others murmured in a whisper of the latest incident of punch spiking at a weekend party.

As my social studies teacher, Mrs. Warner, began the class, she settled the students down and began to summarize the film we were to see about the Civil War. In the middle of her summary, another teacher walked into the classroom and she welcomed him with a smile. The two began to speak in their teacher whispers. As the conversation progressed, the smile was gone from Mrs. Warner's face and a dazed expression of shock appeared in its place.

After the other teacher left, Mrs. Warner slowly turned her focus to the class and said, "A fellow student of yours, Naomi Mergenthal, was in a car accident with her mother and was killed instantly." She paused and breathed deeply. "Her mother is now in the hospital in critical condition." Another deep breath. "I guess I'll just turn off the lights and turn on the film. You can cry and hold each other." Mrs. Warner then walked into the back room and cried.

The class was silent.

I stared into space and waited for the alarm clock to go off to end this bad dream. Instead, I heard sobs of reality. How could a close friend just be gone? I felt my stomach try to force its way through my throat and the only images I could see were blurred. My concentration was focused on breathing as I struggled to keep my composure. I did all that I could to keep from bursting.

I think people tend to deal with strong emotions in one of two ways. They either let it all out or they internalize it. I tried my best to do the latter, to keep people from seeing my emotions.

I walked into homeroom from my first-hour class feeling like a time bomb that was about to go off. My teacher said, "It's all right, John. Let it out."

That was all it took. I buried my face into my hands and began to bawl at my desk. I couldn't remember when my shoulders had shaken so much as I gasped for air. Why couldn't I just turn my emotions off? Or just hide so no one could see me?

Walking through the hall, a friend stopped to ask me, "Are you O.K.?"

Oh, yeah. Life's a bowl of cherries. Am I O.K.? What kind of question is that? Do I look O.K.?

"I'm doing all right," was my only response.

The day seemed to go on forever. I sat in the library and stared at nothing in particular for probably an hour, thinking of what it had been like with Naomi around and how bad I felt. I sat in the back of the library where the two of us had had an independent study together because we took our math at the University of Minnesota.

I felt completely alone and began to realize that this wasn't just a sick day—Naomi was going to be gone forever.

After school, I had the option to either go to my church, where many other friends of mine were gathering, or to go to basketball practice. I opted for the latter because I thought the physical activity would help me relax and cope. The emotions had come in waves throughout the day, and practice wasn't much different when occasionally my eyes became blurred, and I had to force myself to choke back the tears again.

Later that night, I just assumed I would have trouble sleeping. When I finally lay in bed, though, sheer exhaustion set in and I felt like I wouldn't be able to get up for weeks.

My mom had said earlier that, "grief can take a lot out of you."

This certainly wasn't the way I wanted to find that out.

John Schomberg is a junior at Urbana High School in Urbana, IL.

THE HUNT

By Jean Stoia

I came during the night, and I was frightened by what I might find. I pulled into the dirt driveway, trying to make as much noise as possible to scare away intruders. It would be a relief to get into the cabin and get the lights turned on and take a look around. The cabin smelled stale and musty, and the furniture had an unhealthy earth odor. Tomorrow I would unboard the windows first thing and try to push the old air out using a round floor fan. At least the cabin had electricity, even if I did have to bring in water. Tonight I would just sleep in the sheets left on the bed from last year. And I would try and make it through the night without peeing, for I refused to enter the wooden outhouse in the dark, flashlight or not. I lay in bed with disturbing images running through my mind—visions of thick-legged spiders, tirelessly weaving white sticky webs; a diamond-back rattler, slipping across the cold, hard wooden floor, swaying its head in the air, searching and smelling with its tongue. I shuddered. "This is snake country, sure thing; people know better 'n to poke 'round wood piles; just be askin' for trouble." I could hear Wendel speaking, the old, white-haired man who owned the cabin next to mine. "Have a way of gettin' in places, they do, 'specially when folks ain't been 'round fer a long time," he'd shake his head up and down and the loose flesh under his chin would flap back and forth. I wrapped the sheet around my body like a shroud. An owl hooted somewhere.

Next thing I was walking and could feel the hard, South Dakota prairie sod under my green leather boots. My feet were sweaty, but I wouldn't go walking without my boots, summer or not. I could feel the sun burning straight through my straw hat, and sweat streaked down my temples. I was breathing hard, too, and felt like there was a great weight pressing against my chest. Where had I been going? I looked ahead and saw miles of stiff, straw-colored prairie grass, curving in great and gentle swells, then falling away steeply into green gullies, where what little rain fell, drained. It was on the slopes of these miniature valleys that the only trees grew. They didn't grow straight up, though, but tilted toward the gully's center where their tops twisted and grew together. The gully floor was narrow and lined with hard packed dirt, rounded stones, and coarse undergrowth.

It was toward one of these gullies that I proceeded with a sense of purpose that frightened me. Why was I going down into one of these places? My pace quickened suddenly, and I watched my feet trudge ahead, unfaltering, pushing on. I stepped into the undergrowth, down the slope, into the darkness; I could smell the earth at once, and the cool hit my face; sweat evaporated on my skin, and my body trembled from the sudden chill. Down, down, further in, unrelenting, unstoppable. Some part of me pleading, begging—"stop, you must stop"—all the while sick with the knowledge that my body would not listen.

My feet hit the hard stones on the gully bottom, and I turned at once, pursuing its winding course. It was darker than it should have been. What was happening to the sun? It was then that I heard the noise—a sharp, whirring sound coming from somewhere in the rocks. I froze, listening to it. It stopped suddenly, and I took in a short breath, a gasp. My eyes feverishly searched the rocks, my body rigid. Nothing. I could see nothing except the ghostly outlines of sandstone rocks. I pivoted slowly on the balls of my feet. There it was again—the low, rapid, menacing, clicking.

I sensed something moving; to my left—no, the sound had surely come from behind me. I jerked my head a quarter turn and saw it at last, a dark shape moving against a rock, less than two feet from where I stood.

Its whole body was in motion, coiling, and uncoiling, a dizzying pattern of brown and cream markings, twisting in and out of himself, its villainous head dipping and swaying above its body; a set of hard, horny, opaque, joints rising stiffly from the end of its tail.

Heat rose through my body, a sudden sweat, cheeks flushed, then nausea, my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth. Paralyzed. "Move!" a voice demanded from somewhere. "Move for Christ's sake!"

I wrested my eyes from the writhing creature below me and turned to move my leg; slowly, slowly, my leg rose heavily into the air, moving as a swimmer's through water, sluggishly, time suspended; down it came again only a foot in front of me. I turned my head to look back, my hair swung gracefully through the air, falling about my shoulders as if weightless. There it was, moving at lightening speed, its neck stretched out a full two feet. I looked down at the back of my pant leg. It was there, its head striking, sinking its treacherous fangs into my calf, releasing its dark evil liquid. I heard a scream somewhere in the distance and reeled back, clutching at my burning leg.

"What? Huh? Who is it? Who's there?" I stared dumbly into the darkness, blinking my eyes. I sat up and reached to touch my leg, it was hot to the touch and swollen. "Mosquito, mosquito," I whispered hoarsely and fell back onto the bed, the fingers of one hand still curled around the edge of the sheet. What had I been dreaming? I couldn't remember quite, but the fear still gripped me and my body was damp with sweat. No matter—only a couple of hours before dawn. I drifted into an uneasy sleep.

I awoke just an hour after sunrise. The bedroom was already beginning to feel warm. I would get used to it, as I always did, used to sweating all of the time. I slipped on a pair of tube socks, jeans, and a cotton tank top that was too short in the waist, and leaned down to fit my feet into my green leather boots. It took forever to lace up the stiff leather shoe strings; the boots came four inches past my ankles. Why did I wear these things anyway? Good for walking, I suppose, and for other things, like protection.

Wendel and I were going rattlesnake hunting today, if you could call it that. We usually wound up wandering all over the hills until we were too hot and too exhausted to move. Then we'd drop and sit somewhere, sip warm Coke and start talking snakes again—how we knew they were up there, if we could just find them; pretty soon we'd get our energy up again and trudge up on last rocky bluff, hoping to catch one sunning himself. run into any, though once we found part of an egg, white, rubbery and split down the middle, about two inches around, lying in a rocky area near a small dark hole. Had to be a snake egg, we told ourselves, no proper place for a bird to be.

Better get moving. He'd be by to get me at half past seven, and he was never late. I stepped out onto the porch. The outhouse was a couple hundred yards off, the red paint badly peeling off the door with the crescent moon carved in it. I picked up a 6-foot stick I had left leaning against it for such purposes and began to beat on the door wildly. I waited and didn't hear anything, so I reached over and undid the metal latch. The door swung open on its hinges, and I stepped back a few feet, peering into the dusty blackness. There was the wooden seat, same as always, splintered and warped. Couldn't think of a worse place to get bit, sitting on the toilet, my pants down around my knees, some sidewinder stinging my bare ass. I laughed out loud at the image. What a ridiculous fear! Besides, a rattler could only strike one-half of its body length at best. I knew that.

I went back into the cabin and packed up a few things: a jug of water, a couple of Cokes, two boxes of shells, my 20-gauge shotgun, a straw hat and my belt knife.

"Why do you wear that thing?" Wendel would ask, teasing. "You gonna stab a snake with it?" He'd roll back on his heels, throw his white-haired head back and laugh. I'd smile and slip it onto my belt anyway. I liked the feel of it—the leather sheath pressing into my leg with each step I took. And I liked knowing it was there.

I put the shells into a small, blue suede pouch. We'd use up the shells, of course, snakes or not. It wasn't natural to carry a gun all day without firing it. We'd set up our Coke cans somewhere and practice shooting. I'd get off a shot and there the can would be, just sitting there, not moving. My hands wouldn't be used to the feel of the gun; couldn't sight properly; it would feel foreign, strange, after a whole year of disuse. I'd mumble something and try a couple more times, and finally, I'd get the feel of it and start hitting the cans. We'd fire until there was nothing left of the cans, ripped into unrecognizable pieces of metal, our ears ringing from the thunderous sound, my nostrils full of the smell of sulphur, my shoulder red sore from the shotgun pushing against it each time I fired.

I supposed the shotgun wasn't a proper weapon to use on snakes, yeah, I knew that—should use a .22 for a nice clean kill. But you had to be good and find your mark. Not with a 20-gauge—one shot would blow the whole snake up in my face, and the way the buckshot scattered, there wasn't much chance of missing.

I picked up my shotgun, cradled it in my arms, feeling the power in it, resting my warm cheek against the cool barrel, and laid it gently into its vinyl case. I stuffed a few more shells into my pocket. Then I saw it, lying unobtrusively on the oak table, my snake bit kit: three inches of red, hard rubber—a cylinder that opened in the middle into two parts. Each part was to be used as a suction cup, placed on the fang marks, to draw the venom out of the wound. I hesitated a moment, staring at it, then picked it up and studied the grooves in the rubber case, turning it over in my hand, rotating it between my fingers. I turned the cylinder in the center: "Snake Kit Cutter," the words turned as I carefully twisted it open. Inside was a small half cylinder—another suction device nestled within it—a paper tube of instructions, a small vial of antiseptic, and a long, sharp, triangular blade. I pulled the vial out. "Antiseptic, Thimerosal Solution 0.1%." Then I studied the steel-grey blade. The cutting edge ran a full inch along one side of it, 1/8-inch at its widest, tapering into a long fine point, like an elongated Exacto blade.

I uncurled the instructions: "Make cross incisions at fang marks, 1/4-inch long and 1/8-inch deep. Apply suction cup over bite." The swelling would begin to spread up the limb as the poison moved through the tissue. Multiple cross cuts would have to be made at the edge of the swelling, and the cups attached, like leeches, to suck out the venom. Fifty, 100, 120, X-shaped slashes into the skin, encircling the limb in a spiral-like pattern, the suction to be endured for 15 hours or more.

"Hey, anybody in there?"

I turned, startled, letting the cylinder slip from my hands and roll across the linoleum floor.

"Wendel?" Of course, who else? I picked up the rubber case and quickly placed the contents inside.

"You comin'?" The wooden screen door started to open. I stuffed the snake bite kit into my jeans pocket.

"Yes, I'm ready."

"Then let's go."

We rode in the pickup for 20 minutes or so, along a dirt road, bumping and pitching. Must have been a hard winter, the roads all ruts and holes and nobody bothering to fill them in. Couldn't really talk much, what with the noise from the truck's engine and the hot wind blowing in. Wendel said something and pointed, but his words were lost in the wind; I nodded anyway. Pretty soon we turned off the dirt road and onto the prairie. You could drive straight across the prairie sod; the grass was stiff and the ground dry and hard; never had to worry about getting stuck—better than the road, really, more predictable. We drove for a while, listening to the sound of the prairie grass scraping the underside of the truck.

"You see that ridge up there?" Wendel jerked the truck to a stop, squinted and pointed, "That's where we're goin'."

And we did. Up that ridge and five more like it—four hours, hauling our guns, poking around in rocky places and sweating—still no snakes.

It was the hottest part of the day now. I could feel the sun burning straight through my straw hat and sweat streaked down my temples. Wendel didn't look so good. His face was flushed red with heat, his thin white hair was twisted and matted and sticking to his scalp. How did he take the heat at his age, I wondered. He eased himself onto the ground, his back sliding along the side of the pickup, and sat there leaning against the tire, his breath coming in short gasps.

"One more bluff; it's a sure thing." He sat there staring at the ground, wheezing and panting, his shoulders slumped over.

"Yeah." I shifted my weight uneasily, then suddenly said, "I'll go. You meet me up there."

"Yeah, that's good. Yeah, we'll do that." he nodded, relieved.

I pushed damp hair off my forehead with the back of my hat and slid the hat back onto my head. Just one last haul across the grass, 4-, 500 yards, then up the side of the bluff to the rocky face to search its crevices and shadows. I shifted my gun back and forth between my right and left hand and started to walk; the gun had gotten heavier, and the metal was no longer cool, but instead held the sun's heat and burned my hands. My lips were dry and beginning to crack. I took a sip of water, but my mouth seemed to absorb it before I could swallow. My calves burned and ached from walking, and my heel was starting to blister where the leather was rubbing against it. I looked up. I had made no headway, or so it seemed. Why hadn't I narrowed the distance between me and the bluff? Maybe I would never get there. Yes, I would walk endlessly across the stiff, straw, sun-bleached grass, and the distance would always be the same. I was tired, more tired than I had gauged—tired of the blue suede bag bouncing against my leg with each step I took, tired of the dead weight of my gun, tired of the great weight of the heat pressing against my chest. Where had I been going?

I searched the landscape in front of me. The prairie sloped down into a shaded gully. To the gully, yes, of course. It would be cool there. See the shade, the trees with their tops twisted together? I let the gun fall out of my hand and onto the grass with a dull thud, my eyes still fixed on the gully. Arms freed at last! Eager with anticipation, I undid the leather bag tied to my belt and let it drop also. I ran and plunged headlong into the gully. But my foot caught on the stony slope, my leg shot out from under me. I skidded, one leg stretched out in front, the other tucked in under my body. I reached my hands out to catch myself, the stones burned and scraped the flesh on my palms. Then the cool hit my face—ah, the relief—I would never come out. Further in and down into the coolest depths, my feet hit the hard, stony bottom and I let my body, limp with exhaustion, slump down onto the rocky slab.

I surveyed the rock-strewn ditch; how strangely familiar its winding course appeared. I sat upright, trying to remember something, staring intently into the gully, my back suddenly stiff. What was it? Some knowledge of fear grew and twisted within my stomach. My throat was tightening, closing in on itself. The heat rose up through my body. The trees, the rocks, the earth—all were known to me!

I stood.

My eyes were drawn to the gully's ridge where, carelessly, I had cast down my gun. Why had I left it there, lying useless, abandoned to the summer heat? How I longed to feel the weight of it in my arms, to pull back the stiff hammer and squeeze the half-circle trigger. Surely, by sheer force or will I could draw it to me. But no, it was not possible.

Then I was drawn to something else—a sharp whirring sound, a low staccato rhythm rising up from within the rocks. What was that sound? Of course, I knew and with sickening terror, turned, at last, to face what I had foolishly sought.

Jean Stoia is a student at Parkland Community College in Champaign, IL.

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Harness

Continued from page 6

managers were so pleased they called Elliott's wife and had her secretly whisk him to one of the shows, where "I was an honored guest," he says, smiling.

Since then, he has sent two more of the Elliott-designed circus harness to California.

His love of horses and harness making started back in his childhood, he remembers, when his mother refused to let him have the bridles for any of the family horses.

"Mom didn't want us to ride," he says. "But I'd just take a strap and some No. 9 wire and I'd go riding. I got some whuppings for it."

He also trained a calf to pull at one point and drove it successfully until "Dad butchered it."

Now Elliott says, "I'd like to have me a team of oxen—I think that would be neat."

But until then, he gets by with his Belgian draft mare, Dolly.

"We put her to it about every Saturday and go for a ride," he says, stroking the big blond mare's neck. "She's so gentle, the grandkids drive her up and down Route 31."

Another pulling mare of his died of colic last year, but her colt, Duke, now is growing up and maybe next spring Elliott will hitch the youngster up with Dolly to learn.

Meanwhile, there is plenty of inside work to be done over the winter, he says, particularly since the orders are coming in steadily for new harness.

Driving horses for pleasure, he says, has made a comeback and "is getting bigger all the time," with large sales of draft and pulling horses now held several times a year in Indianapolis and Topeka, and every week or so in Shipshewana.

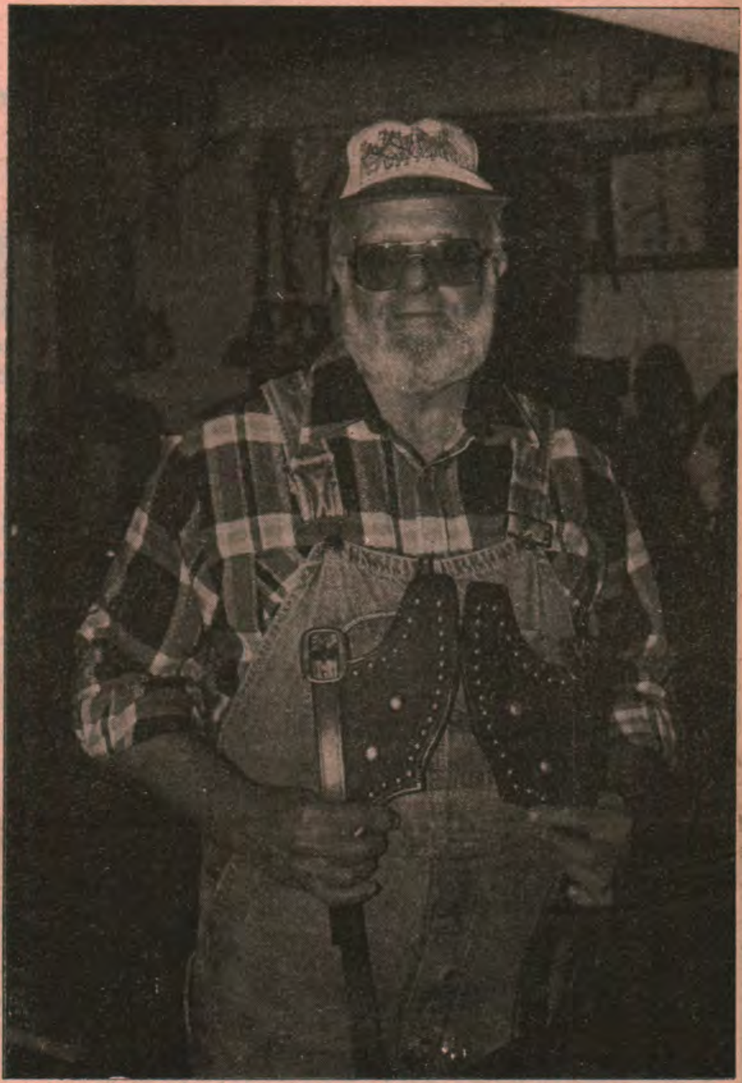
But almost nobody still handmakes the harness, he says, except for Amish farmers.

So come January, Elliott is going to retire from his machine operator's job and turn to his hobby full time.

"It's time," he says. Besides, he adds, now he'll be able to get a harness done a lot faster.

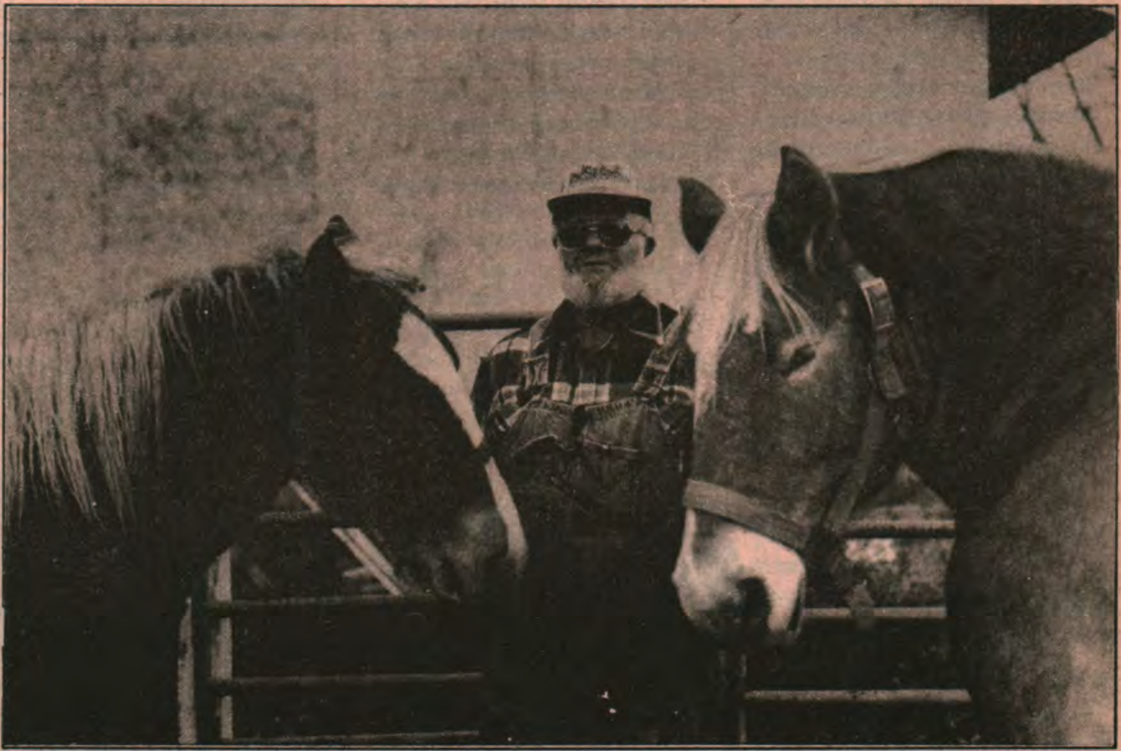
"One should take me a week. But I don't know. I haven't done one all at once before."

Elliott's Harness and Tack Shop is located five miles south of Highway 28 on U.S. 31. You can write to him at: R.R. 2, Box 110, Atlanta, IN 46301.



Elliott is working on a double mule harness patterned with gold studs and cut by hand from his original patterns.

Photos by Laurie Goering



Almost every Saturday, Elliott hitches up his Belgian mare, Dolly (right), for ride. Next spring his colt Duke (left) will probably get a few lessons from her.

The Last Word

Understanding the nature of things

By Lynn Lustig Frick

While I was growing up, marshes and swamps were synonymous. Both were cold, wet things shrouded in fog, gloom and mystery, with Spanish moss dripping off dead, deformed trees.

Of course, I am now able to admit my perceptions might have been a bit skewed. After all, I was familiar only with waving rows of central Illinois corn, and my experience with either swamps or marshes was limited to the cover of *The Mystery of Blackbird Swamp* or some such paperback I had never read but purchased for 75 cents through my grade school's reading program. I had never expected one autumn afternoon to dispel this picture that I had held for years.

It promised to be a long, lazy October day. "Unseasonably warm," according to Wisconsin natives who assured us in their next breath that this would be the last one, for snow was undoubtedly on its way.

We wanted to make use of these weekends exploring our newly adopted state, and self-appointed travel agents encouraged us to visit Horicon Marsh—a national wildlife refuge in central Wisconsin.

The drive up was uneventful as our journey wound off interstate, along a two-lane highway and through tiny towns with church steeples picturesque enough for a Hallmark calendar.

The closer we came to Horicon Marsh, the more abundant were the gentle Wisconsin hills teeming with rust red oaks, yellow maples and golden birches. Cresting one of these hills revealed a bit of the marsh's expanse, and a whole new palette of colors blended before our eyes. The ripening prairie grasses and brush ranged in color from sage green and grays to golden rod and pale, wheaty yellows. But the weathered white-pine cast of the reeds dominated the landscape. Set in among this variety of color were silver slivers of water electrified by the sun.

We drove along the white slash of Highway 49, which divided the upper tip of the marsh from its bulk and led to trails that curved through the marsh and prairie.

After finding a place to park and armed with a trail map, we plunged down the path that delved into the midst of what had only been color moments ago. Between cockleburs and ragweed, red sumac and prairie grass, continuous wooden piers led down into the marsh itself forming a row between shoulder-high cattails.

In spite of others exploring the marsh, there was a profound sense of isolation amond the reeds. We were the only ones, it seemed, making some marvelous discovery and enjoying the sound of our shoes on the planks, the occasional rustle or plop of unseen creatures, and the bone-chilling slither among dead, dry grass.

We stopped to watch a sandpiper strut on skinny legs in shallow, stagnant water, then followed the path again to a stand of trees. Here, interrupting what seemed like uninhibited nature, was the remaining stone foundation of an old farmhouse. I imagined the people who had once claimed, cleared and cultivated this land. They would never know that what they had tilled and tamed had returned to its original state. Fragments of rock walls still stood in declaration of obsolete boundaries—the leftover reminders of man's hand.

The sudden laughter of running children, the noise of others on the path, brought me sharply back to the present. And the rest of the trail led us back to Highway 49.

As the sun began to set and the October light muted the once vivid colors, a charcoal smudge appeared in the distant sky—a hint soon to become a thread, and finally, an alphabetical formation of Canada geese. Their constant honking was chatty clatter overhead, but from the occasional straggler separated from its flock, it sounded hideously forlorn. The sun gilded the undersides of the geese as they turned in synchronized flight. They would glide, descend, dip a wing, drop, recover and bend in parachute fashion to land with barely a splash on the water's surface.

We joined the onlookers already gathered along the highway who were equipped with cameras, binoculars, blankets and lawnchairs to admire the patterns repeated by each flock. In a sense, we were spectators to some natural ballet, and we oohed and ahhhed together over a flock slightly larger than the previous one. And we all but applauded perfect takeoffs and the orderly vying for flying positions.

Ironically, the backdrop for our admiration society was wooded geese blinds set up just outside the perimeter of the refuge. The echoing booms of gunfire combatted the clicking of our cameras. The instincts which drew the geese south to rest in Horicon Marsh year after year also threatened their lives as hunters, too, watched wave after wave of geese circle, land and leave to continue their migration.

The end of our day was not brought about when daylight ceased, but by the chill which made bright afternoon clothing sadly inadequate. Reluctantly, we returned to the car and made the way to our own home.

But for weeks afterward, I would scan the sky for geese. And for each glimpse of a flying V, I was reminded not of the swamps of my childhood, but of a warm, vibrant marsh bursting with life.

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