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Summer 1990

Tales

from the general store



The
**BIRD
MAN**
of
Robinson
page 7

Good news is in sight

Because we're making a few necessary changes, the U.S. Postal Service is warming up to the idea of *Tales* once again being distributed through area newspapers. We've tried to follow postal regulations and will submit this issue of *Tales* to the proper authorities with our fingers crossed.

Once we earn the stamp of approval, we'll contact newspaper publishers and editors about how they can begin providing their readers with the best cultural journalism magazine in the Midwest.

To fulfill one of the regulations and to get back into the papers, *Tales* can no longer offer individual subscriptions. But you won't have to miss an issue—you can either subscribe to a newspaper that will insert *Tales* or get your name on our mailing list by making a tax-deductible contribution, as many people already have done. Just fill out the form below and send it to us.

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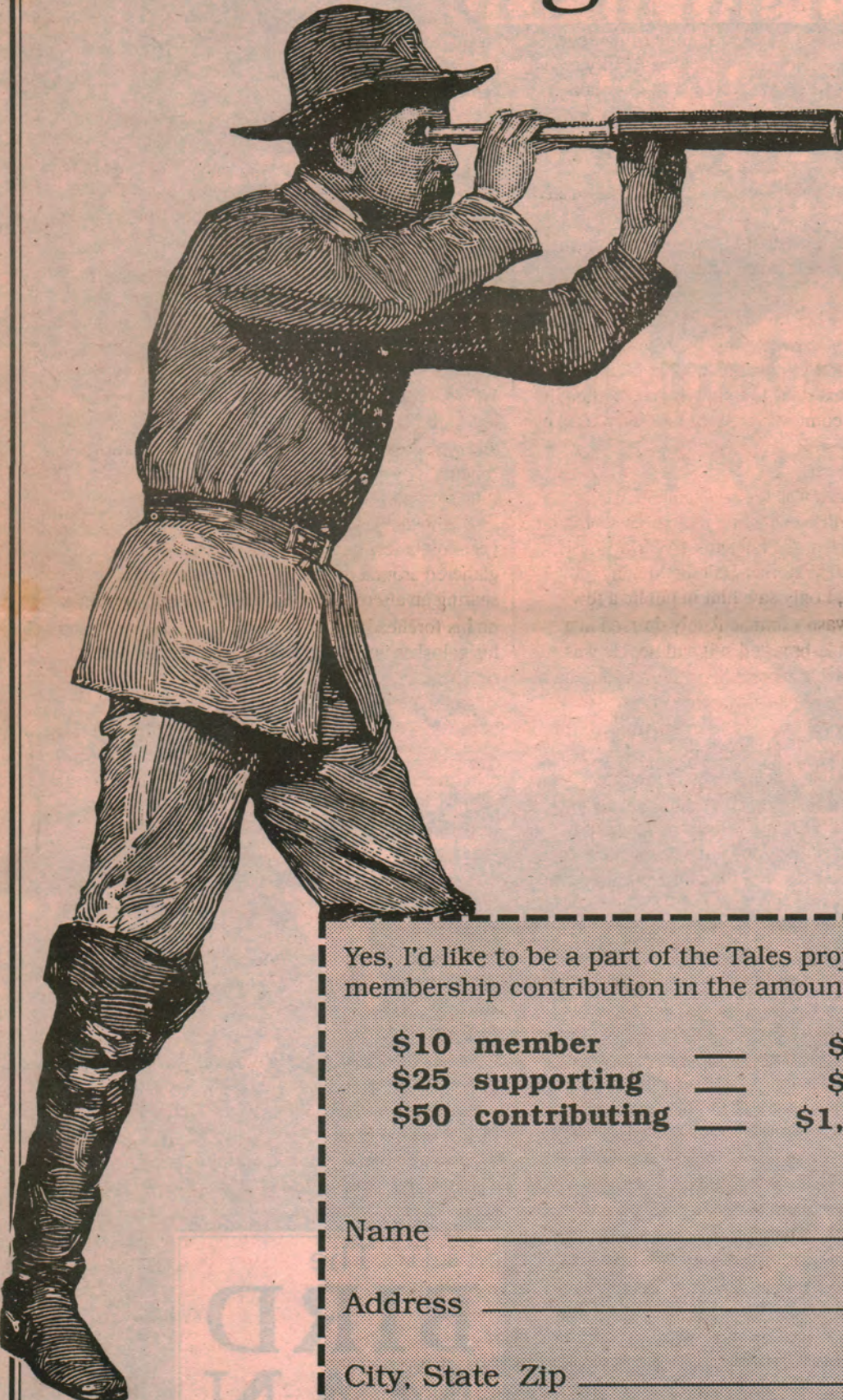
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Tales from the general store
R.R. 2
Oblong, IL 62449



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Furl Walden of Robinson, IL, keeps a watchful eye on a young barred owl until he can determine if the bird will be able to one day fend for itself in the wild.

Photo by Roger Walden

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Furl Walden cares for injured birds until they are healthy enough to return to the wild. He also tends to a bluebird trail that provides nesting places for the creatures.

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Tales from the general store

Editor
Ray Elliott

Managing Editor
Vanessa Faurie

Tales from the general store magazine is published by Tales from the general store, inc., a nonprofit cultural and community journalism corporation founded to preserve the history and culture of the Midwest. Address: all correspondence to Tales from the general store, inc., R.R. 2, Oblong, IL 62449. Or telephone 217/351-4846.

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By Ray Elliott

Just before school was out this year, I put a notice in the faculty bulletin to sell a 1983 Oldsmobile 98 Regency with 34,900 miles. Several people asked about it. Some were interested, some were just curious about a car that old with only that many miles.

On the last day of school, the PTSA served an appreciation breakfast in the cafeteria, as it does each year, for the staff and faculty. It's one of the few times during the school year the entire faculty is together. Everyone visits and jokes with one another and hears a few words from the principal before going off to finish grades and other last-day necessities prior to the beginning of summer vacation.

Coming out of the breakfast line, somebody asked me if I'd sold the car yet. Before I could answer, the guy in front of us looked around, smiled facetiously and said, "Are you kidding? Who'd buy a used car from him?"

I won't repeat what I told him. But that little pipsqueak barely knows my name, has never seen the car and wouldn't know much more about either if I lived right next door to him. No matter, though. Point is that his comment brought to mind a used car salesman I knew in Bellair when I was growing up there.

Russell K. Harris was the consummate used car salesman. From the time I first remember seeing him on the store porch at the tail end of World War II, laughing and telling stories with the Sunday morning loafers, I only saw him in public a few times when he wasn't immaculately dressed in a pin-striped, double-breasted suit and tie. He was always clean shaven, wore a Stetson dress hat, had his shoes shined and had a sparkle in his eyes.

As Charley says about salesmen in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, "He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine." That was Russ to a T. He lived catty-cornered northwest across from the store in a rather stately house on the hill among the shade trees that had been built in 1896 by Civil War veteran and old-time physician Doc Ferguson.

Russ always sold something, cars, home appliances, his own wares or anything else. Still, he spent quite a bit of time in Bellair and often had eight or ten cars sitting on the lot east of his house.

In those days, he'd often come to the store to play a domino game called Forty-two with the old-timers and loafers or just sit around and talk to the kids hanging around the store. He'd listen, ask questions in rapid-fire order, like bullets hitting the wind, and tell a story or make a comment the same way—everything he said liberally sprinkled with profanity.

"Let me tell you something about people, boys," he'd say. "Don't never trust a son-of-a-bitch that won't look you in the eyes. If a man's going to give you a square shake, he'll look you in the eyes when he talks to you."

Then you'd see him in a Forty-two game at the back of the store, a diamond ring sparkling on his thick, hairy finger, the hands with well-manicured nails stirring the dominoes, looking around the table, talking all the time. He'd drag out his seven dominoes, glance at his partner, then at his hand, keeping his eyes on it and say, "Why, pardner, with a hand like this, I'd ought to bid 42. Can you help me with one trick, pardner?"

Going through life on a handshake & a shoe shine

"Shore," Clyde Purcell would say, cackling as the smoke from a Lucky Strike drifted up and his eyes virtually closed to avoid it.

"Did you say you're goin' bid 42?" Billy Larson would ask and giggle, his pipe clenched tightly between his teeth, his daily "Pepsi Coley" nearby. "Cause if you did, we're afixin' to set you right off."

Russ would look up innocently, then back at his hand, laugh a belly laugh and say, "Well, I'll just bid 36 then."

He'd keep a steady chatter as he tossed out the dominoes. More often than not, he and his partner would win. But it didn't matter. He simply liked to play the game and talk a blue streak.

As I got older, I sometimes played with the older men if there wasn't a fourth to make a game. I looked forward to those times and learned as much about life there as I ever did anywhere else, particularly when Russ was in the game.

Over the years, I saw him in action many times. Regardless of what he was doing, he had a way of laughing at life that I really liked. Now and again, he'd fall off the wagon and go on a drinking binge and wasn't pleasant to be around. For the most part, though, he was a warm, caring man who always had time for you and was a good neighbor.

One blustery winter day during Christmas vacation, a few kids and some other loafers were gathered around the warmth of the potbellied stove sharing an afternoon. Russ had his hat pushed back on his forehead, his gabardine overcoat opened and his galoshes unzipped, a Camel between his thick fingers, entertaining us.

"Let me tell you something that'll save you a helluva lot of misery," he said, taking a drag on the Camel and blowing the smoke out through the little scar on the right side of his lower lip. "Women are meaner 'n hell, boys. Now you can't get along with 'em, but you can't get along without 'em. I been married five times, so I know what I'm talkin' about. And I'm goin' to give you some advice about 'em: never marry 'em for money, but let it make up your mind damn fast."

He laughed down in his belly, his big frame shook and his eyes sparkled. We laughed with him, knowing there was an element of truth to what he said and knowing that he knew we probably wouldn't heed his advice anymore than he had followed it.

Then I left home and rarely saw him. By the time I came back regularly, he'd moved to Robinson where I saw him a time or two for a quick hello and a handshake. The last time I saw him was at an event Tales had at the store a few years ago, not long before he died somewhere in his 80s. He didn't look much different than he ever had, only a little slower. He still had the quick wit, the suit and tie, a shine on his shoes, a sparkle in his eyes and a stately off-white hat.

I mentioned the hat.

"It's a Stetson," he said, taking the hat off and holding it out for my inspection. "Best damn hat there is. I wouldn't have any other kind."

Of course he wouldn't. Like the Stetson, he was one of a kind. How could you not trust and like a man like that? Even if he did sell used cars. I wish I had had him here to sell the Olds.

Back Issues Available

No. 1

General stores, hermit Walter Whittaker, Augustus C. French Maplewood estate, storyteller Thornton Stephens, frog gigging, subsistence farming

No. 2

Hog butchering, meat curing, butter churning, dressing chickens, Homer Adkisson's homemade car, tall tale of an Irish folk hero, benefit concert in Bellair, country living, old-time country doctor and his horse, Marvin Harrison's haunted clock

No. 3

Burl Ives, spring fair, furniture refinishing, rug braiding, quilting, first signs of spring and childhood memories, *An Ode to the Outhouse*, *Professor Whistledick and his Cure-all Elixir* by Thornton Stephens, Palestine history

No. 4

One-room schoolhouses and the teachers and students who attended them, cooking and canning with Grandma, summer barn raising, ice cream social, White's country store, Merom chautauquas, powerhouses, fishing, gathering wood

No. 5

Harry Caray, early schools in Crawford County, blacksmith Jim Tingley, George Gullett's baseball memories, trapping, recycling garbage into fuel, memories of an old man, *Cyrus Peck* by Thornton Stephens, pet squirrel, train trips, superstitions

No. 6

Studs Terkel, printer Moran Keller, caning chairs, making molasses, the old Sears catalog, *If Grandpa Could See Us Now*, political action committees (opinion)

No. 7

Salt cultural journalism project in Maine, wild asparagus, Thornton Stephens collection of tales, Bellair history, Morea history, how not to catch a cow, the hanging of Elizabeth Reed

No. 8

Barnstorming race car driver Bill Richter, fiddle player Harvey "Pappy" Taylor, *Aunt Melinda* by Thornton Stephens, old-time carpenter and Bellair restoration, prairie preservation, poetry, Walter Whittaker tribute

No. 9

Enoch's Comin' by Ray Elliott, madstone as folk belief, oil boom days, a child's pet remembered, St. Francisville history, poetry, country photo scrapbook

No. 10

Thornton Stephens tribute, fortune telling with tea leaves, secret trapping bait, child discovers true fate of her grandfather, a family's pet pig, Benjamin Franklin autobiography

No. 11

Oakland, old-time country editors in Champaign County, the Tin Lizzie, girl comes to terms with young sister's death, rural America for sale (opinion)

No. 12

Heath candy company, art of storytelling, Edwardsville's Main Street, Finn family tradition of harness racing, guns and flags (opinion)

No. 13

Illinois Indians, harness maker Dick Elliott, *The Hunt* by Jean Stoia, Urbana High School student essays, Canada geese migration (opinion)

No. 14

Searching your family tree, vaudeville days in Champaign-Urbana, the 1929 Bellair bank robbery, building one of the first gravel roads in the country, blacksmith and feed mill operator Basil Ikemire, language problems in a new country, the rural wasteland (opinion)

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Tales from the general store, inc.

R.R. #2

Oblong, IL 62449

Mail's Here

Tales no place for controversy

Regardless of how your readers of *Tales* may feel about the low-level radio-active waste site being considered (near Martinsville), we were sorry to see this issue aired in *Tales*. It hardly seems appropriate. Please, no more!

—ELLEN & RAYMOND
ZSCHAU
Martinsville, IL

Editor's Note: Steve Cloud's essay about the low-level radio-active waste site in Tales No. 14 was featured in the opinion column, The Last Word. All readers are invited to submit personal opinion columns about anything that relates to rural life, history or culture. Such columns provide a forum for community discourse and do not represent any official position of endorsement or opposition by the Tales from the general store staff.

Another bumper crop of writers

Congrats on *Tales* No. 14, especially Tammy Cohen's fine piece on vaudeville in the Midwest. It looks like the magazine is producing yet another crop of talented young writers.

—MILES HARVEY
Paris, France

Remember Bellair's amateur contest?

I sure enjoy *Tales from the general store*. Last summer, my wife, sister and I stopped in Bellair, and Harold and Mable Elliott took us on a tour through the store. I really enjoyed seeing them again and managed to get some pictures of the inside of the store that turned out OK.

An article on the amateur musical contest at the store in late 1939 or '40 might be interesting. It lasted a week, I believe. WLS radio station may have been the promoter of that musical show. Some of the contestants were Art Farley (clown), Bette Scott Frye and Reba Scott Serviceson (singers). Seems like most of the musical instrument players were from the Annapolis area, possibly Emory White was one of them.

Keep the paper coming. I believe we have saved every one of them so far.

—JESSE SCOTT
Rolling Prairie, IN

Editor's Note: If you have any recollections of this amateur musical contest at the Bellair General Store, let us know all about it. Mail information to Tales at R.R. 2, Oblong, IL 62449.

Old theaters had a lot of character

As always, I enjoyed reading the most recent issue of *Tales*. Having spent most of my school-age years in Urbana, I visited the Orpheum and the Virginia many times—often looking up and around as much as toward the screen and imagining days gone by.

—GREG BILBREY
News Editor
Marshall Independent
Marshall, IL

Sense of community

We had a funeral home in Oblong for many years and knew about everyone in the community. We both enjoy your paper very much, so keep up the good work.

—MARION MARSHALL
Evansville, IN

A pleasant surprise

I recently received a complimentary copy of *Tales*. I was not familiar with the paper and was glad to get it. I'm looking forward to future copies.

I live in Dover, NH, but I was born and raised in Lawrenceville and still have relations there. We get back to Lawrenceville about every year. My father was Lyle Steffey, who was county clerk (in Lawrence County) for 20 years. I also had a sister, Geneva. I married Harry Griffin, who came from Birds, IL.

—RUTH E. GRIFFIN
Dover, NH

Reader wishes she read Tales years ago

I work in a law office, and I just saw a copy (of *Tales*). It is just a lovely paper, and I wish I had been aware of it many years ago.

—WANDA E. KOSS
St. Louis, MO

An enjoyable read

I enjoy reading the *Tales* publication so much. Thank you for keeping me on your mailing list. Good luck in your endeavors.

—GLADYS O. TYHURST
Mount Vernon, IL

Best wishes

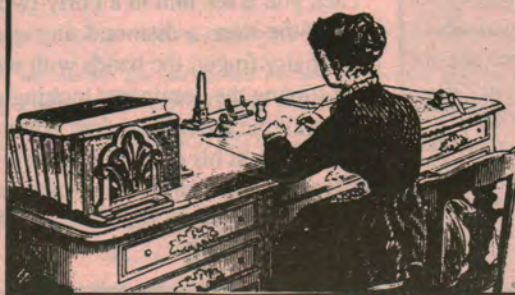
You sent (*Tales*) in the Casey Reporter for a time, and I liked the paper. My husband worked for Clark County for 20 some years and Jack Huffington. My husband, William Curtright, passed away six years ago last April.

I hope you have continued success in your work with the paper.

—BEATRICE CURTRIGHT
Martinsville, IL

Sit right down and write us a letter.

Letter to the Editor
Tales from the general store
R.R. 2
Oblong, IL 62449





The Hutsonville Historical Society will present a reenactment of the 1812 Indian massacre of the Hutson family Saturday, Aug. 4, at 8 p.m. in Hutsonville.

Photo courtesy of Scarlett Williamson

Did You Know...

Foxfire turns 25

The Foxfire project in Rabun County, GA, will celebrate its 25th anniversary during the 1990-91 academic year. To mark the occasion, the staff is working on a retrospective book, to be published by Doubleday, about the organization's past, present and future.

The book will feature interviews with Foxfire students; interviews with principals, board members, staff members and other adult associates; a timeline of events; updates on people who have been profiled in *Foxfire* magazine who have become readers' favorites; interviews with founder Eliot Wigginton; interviews with other teachers who have started similar projects; and a section of photos and quotations from people who have been interviewed for *Foxfire* magazine over the years. Although it does not have a final title yet, the book is scheduled to be available in time for the annual Foxfire picnic in May 1991.

Doubleday will also publish *A Foxfire Christmas* in time for Christmas 1990. This book describes some of the traditional Appalachian ways of celebrating the Christmas holidays.

Some of the original Foxfire students now have children of

their own enrolled in the cultural journalism program.

U. of I. acquires Jones manuscript

The original 1,300-page manuscript of James Jones' *From Here to Eternity* was acquired by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign last April as an addition to its Rare Book Room and Special Collections Library.

English professor George Hendrick helped negotiate the purchase of the manuscript from the Lowney Handy estate while he worked on his book, *To Reach Eternity: The Letters of James Jones*.

Jones was born in Robinson, IL, and enlisted in the Army in 1939. He was on the island of Hawaii when Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941. Jones later fought on Guadalcanal, where he was wounded. He then returned to Robinson and began work on *From Here to Eternity*, which he finished in 1950. Despite its groundbreaking use of explicit language and risqué sex scenes, the novel was a critical and financial success.

"It is one of the most important modern American novels," Hendrick said at a public program celebrating the university's acqui-

sition. The original work includes some material that was edited out of the final printed draft. Hendrick said the unexpurgated version is "an even better work than Scribners was able to publish at the time."

Jones died in 1977. His widow, Gloria, and daughter Kaylie attended the program, which culminated in a reception in the Rare Book Room where the manuscript and several photos of the author were on display.

Hutson pageant planned for Aug. 4

A reenactment of the Hutson family massacre will be presented at Hutson Memorial Village Saturday, Aug. 4, at 8 p.m. on Outer South Rose Street in Hutsonville.

In 1812, Isaac Hutson's wife and six children were killed by Indians while Hutson was away at Fort Turman in Palestine. Hutson later joined the Army in Terre Haute, IN, and died in battle against the Indians.

Hutson Memorial Village was begun in 1967 in remembrance of the Hutson family and is located 64 rods west of the original massacre site. Today, several restored cabins feature authentic period furnishings that have been

acquired by the Hutsonville Historical Society over the years.

Society members produced an outdoor Hutson Memorial Pageant, written by the late Elizabeth Winters, that was first performed in August 1968.

Programs unite young and old

Several programs throughout the country are bridging the gap between young and old with mutually beneficial results.

With more adults finding themselves in the position of caring for children and elderly parents simultaneously, one pilot program in Cambridge, MA, has an adjoining day-care center that invites interaction between children 18 months-5 years old and adults over 60. They share in planned activities and have informal get-togethers.

Psychologists say the children reap the benefits of having grandparent-like companions, and the older people feel less isolated and alone when in the company of laughing, carefree children.

Another program that has started in nine cities, Linking Lifetimes, brings retirees together with at-risk teenagers. Senior volunteers visit with chronically ill children as part of the Family

Friends program now operating in eight cities. Generations Together at the University of Pittsburgh has older people just a phone call away from "latch-key" children who return to empty homes after school until a working parent arrives.

According to *Time* magazine, such programs are changing the way generations view one another and even public-policy groups are beginning to "think 'intergenerationally' in seeking solutions to community problems."

Opera house on national register

The Fife Opera House in Palestine has been included on the National Register of Historic Places. According to Susan Conour, president of the Palestine Preservation Projects Society, the designation will help the group obtain future grants for the purchase and restoration of the building.

The structure was built in 1901 and featured community programs as well as professional road shows. The opera house closed in 1913. Handbills from past performances and several original backdrops and murals remain in the building.

The Universal Ocean

By Anna Fox

I tumbled down the spiraling stairs, clutching the little blue books tightly. After what seemed like an eternity, I reached the bottom of the steps. I wasn't exactly hurt—I just felt stunned. People gathered around me. I remembered my father saying whatever I did, I must not lose the blue books. I looked in my clenched hand and felt a wave of relief when I saw that the books had not escaped in my rapid descent. I had squeezed them so tightly they now had large creases down their middles. Most of the people around me were just staring, but some of them were jabbering in concerned, singsongy voices. Now I really was confused. A tear escaped from my eye and rolled down my cheek. A strange woman helped me to the door when finally, my dad caught up to me.

"Are you OK, Anna?"

"Yeah, I guess."

My mom came up and hugged me.

"Those steps were kind of slippery, weren't they?" she said. "But wasn't the fall worth flying first class?"

This was the beginning of my life in South America. My father, a biology professor, was beginning a sabbatical. The year's stay in Santiago, Chile, was its own, unique chapter in my life. I was still me—my family hovered about me with their understanding words and smiles and familiar jokes—but everything around me was different.

The little girl next door had shiny black hair and sparkling black eyes. I am fair-skinned and have light-colored hair. When she tried to speak to us, my brother and I smiled and nodded our heads when it seemed appropriate, but it was never quite the right response to how old we were or what games we liked to play.

By the end of that year, I had learned a lot about Chile and its people. Yet I also learned a lot about my own country. I learned much from the comparisons and contrasts between the two countries.

The landscapes were the same. The big cities were always filled

with bustling people hurrying to work, the sharp smell of lingering bus exhaust and tall buildings reaching into the sky. The craggy mountains loomed in the distance with their sharp, snow-capped peaks blending into the clouds. And along the smooth, sandy beaches, the foamy waves crept quietly in and then quickly fell back, leaving the sand dark and wet and cool.

My family was like the waves in its quest to break the language barrier. Each of us rushed in and out of conversations—sometimes understanding everything, sometimes understanding little and sometimes understanding nothing.

My brother and I went to an American school, but we were two of the few Americans. Every day I wore a navy blue jumper, a white blouse, blue knee socks, black penny loafers and a cranberry-colored tie to school. My brother wore a blue dress shirt, grey slacks, a tie, black shoes and a navy sportscoat. To keep clean, he took off the coat and put on a brown lab coat as we hurried passed the open sewer to school where we stayed from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. every day.

Our classmates were very kind and very interested in what life was like where we came from. They spoke quite good English, but our parents subjected us to a tutor three times a week so that we could learn Spanish. We sat through hours and hours of looking through magazines, describing pictures and answering questions slowly and clumsily. As our Spanish improved, the time with our tutor, Maria Eugenia, lessened, but by that time we had grown to love her visits. At school we heard English and used American text books except in Chilean history, art, music, physical education and Spanish.

The weekends especially sub-

merged us into this new, exciting culture. On bright, sunny days we sometimes ran into our neighbor's backyard and picked luscious apricots from the laden trees. A little girl, Danae, often appeared at her window and asked us to play. We played jumping games with elastic loops or drew a circle in the dirt under the shade of the weeping willow and shot clay marbles until someone got a whole handful. When evening approached, we went home and got ready to return to Danae's house for supper. She and her family greeted us at the door with a quick kiss on the cheek and then the parents went off to chat and have a few drinks and we played card games, the "blind chicken," or watched American, British and Japanese television shows dubbed in Spanish. Later, just as our eyelids began to droop, our parents came and said it was time to leave. We said goodbye and started back down the little stone path, grabbing a plum from an overhanging branch.

At other times, we walked down the hill to the little plaza. I carried an empty bag, and my brother carried one filled with empty Coke bottles. At the square we traded the bottles for full ones and filled my bag with freshly baked buns. On hot days we bought Popsicles for about a nickel. There were many little stores surrounding the plaza—a bakery, a bottle store, a book and paper store, a pharmacy and a fruit stand. The bakery was our favorite because we could smell the wonderful cookies from a block away. The *botilleria* (bottlery) was our second favorite because the two brothers who worked there always teased us and told us jokes. Sometimes in the plaza we saw our housekeeper hauling our clothes to the laundromat in a big cloth bag. Juan came to clean our house

once a week. If he wasn't cleaning inside, he was watering the bushes along the stone path or cleaning the pool or doing some odd job for the landlords. He always whistled or hummed while he worked and gave us a cheery smile when we passed by.

Some Saturday afternoons were spent flying kites, taking a trip to the circus or visiting the Pueblo de los Artesanos, where you could buy beautiful crafts such as baskets and jewelry and figurines carved from the speckled blue lapis lazuli stone found only in Chile and parts of Africa.

We also went on vacations. Chile is a long, skinny country that is geographically diverse. The barren Atacama desert, where rain has not fallen for more than 200 years, stretches along the north. The south is dotted with huge, shimmering blue lakes and green forests. And then there are various rainy, misty islands off the southern coast. Volcanoes simmer, bubble and smoke throughout Chile. The east is bordered by the snow-capped Andes Mountains, while the west is one long continuous coastline to the Pacific. The chilly water splashes against rocks, and people lie on the beach fully clothed. But no matter where we were, there were always tiny shrines along the sides of the roads in memory of someone who died there. The flickering candles seemed to burn forever, and the wilting flowers were quickly replaced with fresh ones. Sometimes the shrines along steep, sharp curves were adorned with license plates and the ground sparkled when the sun reflected off the metal.

After these extraordinary trips, we returned to the smoggy capital of Santiago where five million of Chile's eight million people live. Yet it always seemed as if the people were glad to see us return because they smiled and greeted us with cheery calls of "*buenos*

dias" when we walked by.

While we traveled miles and miles throughout Chile in our little red Volkswagen, we realized a lot about our own country. We realized that while the United States is technologically advanced, it seems to have fallen behind in the social areas such as close families and kind, gentle, simple personalities. In our country, money is one of the most important things a person can have. Everything is colorful and plastic and modern. We drink Coca-Cola from aluminum cans and buy our bread in rectangular loaves. We drive our cars everywhere and have flush toilets that work. We watch television a lot and are enamored with football. We eat a lot of pizza, french fries, hot dogs, fried chicken and other greasy "fast" foods. We shop in malls, and our clothes are made by machines. We idolize people who live in Hollywood, and we have very busy schedules.

But during that year off from my "busy schedule," I discovered that North Americans also are very similar to South Americans. We all experience the same feelings of love and hate and kinship. We have lovers and enemies and friends. We say the same things, although in different languages. We compete among ourselves to see who is the best. And we take pride in our country.

Some countries are underdeveloped while some have the highest technology and most modern conveniences. Some are ruled by dictators or kings and queens while some are directed by presidents. But all humanity is like one big ocean filled with starfish and spiny urchins and sharks and seaweed and dolphins. There are calm waters and strong currents and gentle beaches and rocky cliffs whose faces are sprayed with white droplets. There are storms and tidal waves and beautiful, blue, shimmering stretches of serenity. The world is like an ocean; everything in it is alike and different.

Anna Fox will be a senior at Urbana High School in Urbana, IL., next fall.

The BIRD MAN of Robinson

BY VANESSA FAURIE

PHOTOS BY ROGER WALDEN



Furl Walden checks the status of one of many homemade bluebird boxes throughout Crawford County.

The woman called Furl Walden just as she would call a mechanic if her car needed repair or a plumber if she needed a water line cleared. The common, yet rarely seen, rose-breasted grosbeak flew into her picture window and broke a wing. She saw that it could not fly and called for Walden's help.

For years people around Robinson, IL, have been calling him whenever they come across an injured bird that needs time to rehabilitate before returning to its wild habitat. Through an informal partnership with veterinarian J.P. Trimble, the two men gradually nurse the wounded wildlife back to health. Trimble sets the broken bones and administers any necessary shots, while Walden provides a temporary home complete with meals and a revitalizing exercise program.

So the rose-breasted grosbeak was admitted to a small cage in Walden's garage. A covering placed over the cage helped to shield the stressed bird from unfamiliar sights and sounds. The bird had a small bandage around its middle to limit its movement while the wing healed. But that didn't stop the bird from frantically hopping about the cage when the cover was momentarily removed.

"As long as they eat, they're OK," Walden said of his injured

wards. "They don't realize it, but we're trying to do the best we can."

One of two owls kept in the large flight cages in Walden's back yard seemed to be enjoying the hospitality. The small, round-headed barred owl sat contentedly on a tree branch inside its cage. The dark eyes, accentuated by the surrounding light-colored feathers, were undoubtedly taking note of every movement, yet remained still.

The owl has had an extended stay because it is young and does not know how to fend for itself. When Walden got the orphan about a month previously, it was just a little ball of fuzz. Now the bird is about 10 or 12 inches tall with talons powerful enough to seriously damage an unprotected arm. However, this owl has not attempted such an action against Walden, his feeder and friend.

That's not necessarily the way Walden wants it, though. He does not care for these birds to make pets out of them.

"There's been times that I would like to keep one," Walden said. "But actually, they belong in the wild. I don't need a pet like that at all.

"I can do anything with this young bird. Handle him and he won't bite you, he won't dig those talons in you. So I don't know. I'll just have to wait and

see if I think he can make it on his own. If I release him, it'll be right here. 'Course he knows the cage, and he knows I feed him. And if he gets hungry and can't make it on his own, he may come to me for food. He'll seek me out. I don't know how it's going to work yet because he doesn't know how to catch his own food. If I feel that he can't make it, well, then I'll try contacting cities that have zoos."

The great horned owl in the second cage should not have any problem returning to the wild. It's a full-grown adult whose wing is broken. During the 10 days it has been in Walden's care, the owl prefers to stay in the dark comfort of a small dog house in the cage until nightfall. So Walden has to reach his gloved hand inside the dog house and bring the owl out to feed it.

This one has sharp, yellow eyes with black pupils, and the feathers on each side of its head extend outward into points, making the bird look serious, majestic. Out of stress and suspicion, it would not eat for the first few days but now eats twice a day. A recent meal consisted of some old turkey meat.

There are a few small pellets on the ground inside the cages, the remainder of previous meals. Owls swallow their prey, such as mice and small birds, whole and

regurgitate the feathers, bones and other unwanted material into these condensed pellets like mini-trash compactors.

The great horned owl will know what to do when the hand-fed meals are no longer necessary.

"They are a lot of care to keep," Walden said. "But really the bad thing about it is when you get a bird that just gets so down that you have to euthanize him, put him out of his misery. It's just one of those things that happens."

Walden became a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in the mid-1980s after a major chemical spraying to rid the Marathon refinery in Robinson of starlings ended up poisoning numerous hawks and owls. Walden and his wife, Sarah, were finding dead starlings in their yard, which is some three-to-five miles from the refinery. Twenty-eight predatory birds that had then eaten the starlings became ill. Walden took what birds he found to Dr. Trimble because Walden was not licensed at the time. Some of the birds were saved, but most died.

One of Walden's subsequent success stories involved a red-tailed hawk that had been shot through the wing. All of the tail feathers and many of the wing feathers had broken off, so the bird could not fly even after the wound healed. Walden kept the hawk until it molted, grew new

feathers and learned to fly all over again. The whole process took about five months, much longer than the usual 90-day limit for keeping birds before releasing them, euthanizing them or transferring them to a permanent facility.

"I figured that was an exception," Walden said.

"He got to be pretty much of a pet, too. He wouldn't stick his talons in me, but he'd bite me if he got a chance. Of course, I really didn't try to tame him.

"I'd bring him out of the cage and set him on the bird waterer and he would fly back to the cage. He kept exercising his wings, and when his tail feathers got out, why, then finally one day he flew up in a tree. I tried to coax him down, but he wouldn't come down. So I said, 'OK, boy, you're on your own.' I checked on him and found him out here in the woods for three days, and he was doing fine. One day I caught him on the ground, and he had caught a squirrel and was eating it. So I knew then that if he caught a squirrel, he was doing OK."

CONTINUED

There is a feeling of satisfaction that comes with seeing a once-injured creature fly off and continue on its life journey. But Walden's long-standing interest in birds does not stop there. He has another hobby that has been a primary factor in the reestablishment of a small, beautiful and, at one time, seldom-seen bird in Crawford County.

Walden started a bluebird trail—boxes placed throughout the countryside to provide nesting areas for the birds.

Although bluebirds are native to the United States, their numbers have dwindled in correlation to the decrease in the natural cavities they nest in, such as wooden fenceposts that have been abandoned by woodpeckers, as well as the increase in pesticides and competition from the aggressive sparrow. Bluebirds are generally timid creatures and, because they only eat insects, are no threat to farm crops.

The idea to start a bluebird trail was first suggested by Walden's niece in 1979 during a visit to her home in New York state. The mutual bird watchers saw some bluebird boxes on sale at the Audubon Society's clubhouse. Walden bought one to get the pattern and that summer built 15 boxes.

"I didn't see a bluebird all summer long," Walden said, "and I was very disappointed. But then I'm kind of bull-headed anyway, so I just built more boxes. And in 1980 I had 50 boxes. That summer I got two nesting pairs of bluebirds—the first bluebirds I'd seen for several years. And those two boxes produced 18 young. I was just thrilled to death. That really encouraged me, so I got more boxes."

By 1988, Walden estimated he had peaked at 220 boxes throughout south-central Illinois. He even carried extra boxes in his car just in case he happened to see some bluebirds in an area where there was no box. Many times, he'd return the next day to find a bluebird nest inside the box.

The boxes are made so that the front panel can be reopened when Walden makes his rounds. Most of the boxes are on utility poles owned by the Rural Electric Association. So long as Walden does not nail the boxes to the poles (he wires them), REA employees do not disturb them. If work is done on a pole, the box is taken down and left by the pole

for Walden to put back up later.

Walden also has placed many boxes on private property, but always with the owner's permission. No one has ever refused, and some landowners have even adopted the boxes as their own and maintain them personally with Walden's whole-hearted support.

"I just want bluebirds to have homes," Walden said. "I just monitor the boxes to keep the sparrows' nests out of them."

One of the reasons why sparrows are so undesirable to Walden is that they take over the boxes for their own nests. They often kill the eggs in an established bluebird nest and even peck the adults to death. And because they eat grains, sparrows have no friends among the farmers.

"It's very discouraging when you have bluebirds who have incubated their eggs and have maybe five babies, and you go in the box and a raccoon has raided it and eaten all the babies," Walden said. "But that's part of nature, I guess."

"Once in a while you open up a box and there'll be a snake in there all curled up," he added and laughed. "That gives you a start."

Like bluebirds, the boxes themselves have been victimized by enemies. Awhile back, vandals were destroying the boxes, sometimes with bluebird eggs in them waiting to hatch.

"Oh I'd get so mad I could bite nails," Walden said. "One time I had seven boxes all in a line down a road that were stolen. But what really ticked me off was that I had a bluebird sitting on eggs that were to hatch two days after they turned up missing. That's when I got ticked off and wrote a letter to the editor in the *Robinson Daily News*. And I've had one box stolen since then."

"It's just ignorance. Sometimes it looked like they just took a tire iron and busted the box all to pieces. People don't have to steal boxes from me. I'll build one and give it to 'em, no charge."

Up until last year, Walden's hobby was almost like a full-time job, in addition to the full-time job he had at Marathon for several of those years until he retired in January 1985. He kept detailed records of all the boxes and checked them regularly so that he knew when the nests were being built, when they were completed, when the first and last eggs were laid, when they would

hatch, when the young would fledge, and on and on.

"I had (boxes) all the way over to Heathsville, clear up to about five miles west of Annapolis," Walden said. "They're just scattered all over creation. It took me two or three days to check them all. I felt the more I checked on 'em, the better the records."

The records were so detailed that a graduate student from Eastern Illinois University once wrote a thesis based on the information.

For a time, Walden also banded the bluebirds as a way to identify and keep track of them. One male that he banded as a baby in 1980 showed up four years in a row and had a mate and young of its own.

"I caught one the other day," he said, "a female that I had banded six years ago, and she was an adult bird when I banded her. That's the oldest bird that I know of."

Eventually, the banding and record keeping for so many boxes got to be more work than enjoyment for Walden, even

though his wife, Sarah, often helped him. The couple wanted to get more use out of their motor home and travel, but bluebirds can only be banded when they are 10 to 12 days old. That's when their legs are as big as they're ever going to get, but the birds have not yet left the nest.

"I got so involved in it, it got to be work," Walden said. "But now it's a pleasure. I just do it when I feel like it."

Walden also has taken breaks from the bluebird trail for the three times he had to have open-heart surgery and one gallbladder operation.

"As soon as I heal up, I go right back at it," Walden said of the activity which provides him with some beneficial walking exercise. "It keeps me going. It's something you've got to enjoy doing or you won't do it. It's a hell of a lot of work when you get right down to it."

But there are also priceless rewards.

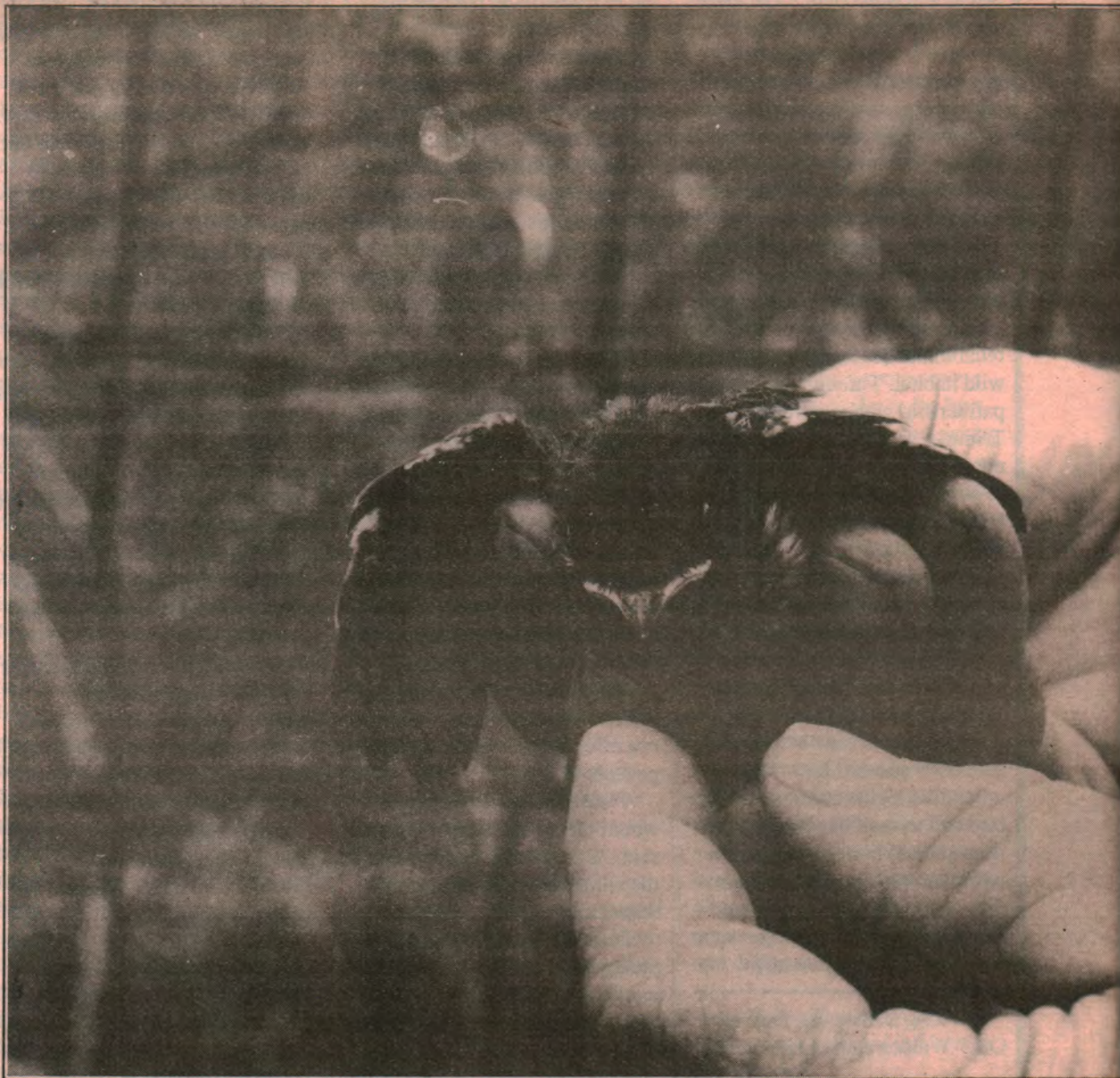
Walden described how, at least once each year, he has come across a bluebird sitting on eggs

that will allow him to open the box, gently reach in with his finger, lift the bird up to see what's going on with the eggs, set the bird back down and close the box.

"I don't know whether they get used to you and kind of know that you mean no harm or what," he said, "but it kind of gives you a good feeling that a wild thing will let you do that. Another good feeling, too, is to know that you've helped a creature produce their young and replenish the species in the wild."

Walden only wishes other people, particularly young people, would become interested in helping the bluebirds. He has given presentations to Boy Scout troops and other civic organizations who all believe it's great that Walden is providing these nesting boxes. But few people have backed up those beliefs with action.

"A lot of people think that bird watchers are a bunch of little old ladies who go out with binoculars and look at birds," Walden said with a small laugh. "Well, they





are to a certain extent. But it really is a fascinating hobby. When you get to bigger organizations—we went to three Audubon

meetings in Tucson, AZ—you'd be surprised at (how young the people are) in the cities who are really interested in those things."

But Walden needs no excuses for enjoying his birds. There are other things in life much more frivolous, in his opinion.

"Some people play golf," he said, "I play with the birds. I think golfers are goofy for running around all over a dang pasture field chasing little white balls. I go to chase little blue bluebirds.

"But it is nice to have golf courses to put a bluebird trail on."

Vanessa Faurie is managing editor of Tales.



Clockwise from top left—Furl Walden feeds the great horned owl in its flight cage. The young barred owl's future is uncertain. Walden and his wife, Sarah, an accomplished artist, enjoy bird watching on their many trips across the country. A recently hatched baby bluebird is handled with care. Bluebirds are a fragile and beautiful part of the landscape in Crawford County.



Black settlement part of Douglas County history

By Helen Parkes

Some of Oakland's important history has been neglected and almost forgotten by many residents. Landmarks Inc. has restored the Dr. Rutherford house in Oakland. The organization's members often tell the tale of the slave family who ran away from their owner north of Oakland and came to the doctor for help. They rode a horse, and some of them walked. All were frightened and out of breath.

The four small black children of Anthony and Jane Bryant were to be taken away and sold in the slave markets of the south when their owner, Robert Matson, returned his slaves to Kentucky after the crop in Illinois was harvested. Each spring he brought about 25 slaves north of Oakland to help him tend a farm.

In 1847 Dr. Rutherford was sued for \$2,500 for "harboring" the slaves. Seeking an attorney, the doctor approached his friend Abraham Lincoln in Charleston and was disappointed to learn that Lincoln had already promised to represent Matson on the other side of the case.

Lincoln lost the case, and the slaves were freed. It was the only case Lincoln ever tried for a slave owner.

After the slaves were freed throughout the South, Matson felt a responsibility for his former slaves. Matson purchased some land in the area from William H. Coffey and Isaac Burgett. Many of the slaves had been in the area on and off since 1833, but eventually other blacks came to live on this land about six miles northwest of Oakland. They brought their families and meager possessions in wagons along the trail through southern Indiana and Illinois, possibly through Oakland and what is now Sargent Township in Douglas County.

Each family had about 20 acres, mostly along a lane that came to be called "Nigger Lane" from the old-time colloquialism used by early settlers.

Much of the following story is fact but is probably sprinkled with quite a bit of fiction.

The settlement survived for about 30 years, long enough for a cemetery to be filled with 31 graves. The settlers built a log church of the African Methodist Episcopal faith. It was small and stood slightly north of the cemetery; however some historians believe it was south. The building was also used as a

school, and some accounts mention that a family lived in the building when the church was abandoned.

There are several references to these black residents in Douglas County records. At 4 p.m. on June 13, 1876, a deed was filed at the Douglas County courthouse recording the sale of a small portion of land owned by George and Lucy Manuel to Joseph Martin, Edward Minnis and Levi Jessee. The three men were the trustees of the church, and they paid \$10 for the small tract. As trustees, they had to be a member of the church for at least one year and be 21 years old or older.

Only recently were efforts made to clean up the old cemetery and place a permanent marker there. Whether fact or fiction, area residents say that at one time there were several grave markers in the cemetery that disappeared one by one. Only one grave marker is known to exist, that of 76-year-old Nancy James, wife of Lewis James, who died Sept. 19, 1860.

There are many stories about what may have happened to the other markers. One such marker for Isom Bryant was said to be in the cemetery, but no one has been able to locate it. Some old-timers think field stones may have marked the graves and wooden markers were made. When restoration began, sunken spots in the ground marked some gravesites.

The George Coffey family has collected a lot of information about the black community and the graveyard. One item of record is that Lewis James, Joseph Martin and Sarah Martin sold their 60 acres to Isaac Burgett for \$1,800 on March 27, 1877. Another deed is dated June 25, 1877, and includes the names of Lucy Dupee, Melissa Armsted, Edward

and Susan Minnis, Lucy Manuel, George Manuel, John Peyton, Elizabeth Peyton, Sophia and Jacob Fuller, Andrew and Sophia James and records the sale of 80 acres for \$2,400 to William H. Coffey.

The story goes that a local real estate man in 1877 sold the group on the idea that there was better free land in Kansas, and the group decided to relocate there. Sometime during that summer, families packed their belongings in covered wagons, took their chickens, pigs and a milk cow or two and traveled to Lyons, KS. About 70 people were in the group that left Douglas County.

Again, one of the rumors is that the white people wanted to get the black people out of the community and so instigated the wonderful opportunities out in Kansas. There were rumors of a lot of stealing in the area that was attributed to the blacks. However, after the group left, the stealing continued. At the time, though, there was some friction between the whites and the blacks. But the blacks were actually good neighbors and stayed much to themselves as they tended their small farms. They lived in cabins, tended the land with mules, sent their children to school and went to church on Sundays.

In the following letter written many years later by Olive Coffey Newman, an aunt of the late George Coffey, she describes some of the people in the settlement, including Lucy Manuel. The first part of the letter is missing.

There was quite a family living in a house on the 40 acres given to Minnis. I remember they had an apple orchard and there were two old women, said over 100 years old. They called them the "Malissis," and old man Joe

Lewis. Most of them were slaves brought north after the war. Most all of them went west—Kansas in covered wagons. I don't know when they went.

There was one family that I remember named George Manuel. Wife's name was Lucy. She was quite a worker. Mother would have her come and help butcher hogs and wash bed clothes, and she was black. Husband was rather light. So were his two daughters, Sue and Ella. I was about seven years old, and Amanda lived one summer close to this family, and Ella would come and play with me when I was there. They had a son that moved to Tuscola and ran a barber shop there.

This family never went west and lived in the darky church after they quit having their meetings there. They went to school at the white school where your mother went and the Burgetts. We never had any colored pupils at Pleasant Grove. ...

*Love to all,
Aunt Olive*

Lucy Manuel also was known as Aunt Lucy and cared for George Coffey's cousin, Alice Taylor Van Voorhis, when she was a child.

"My mother said they stopped at our house to say goodbye on their way to Kansas," Van Voorhis related. "Aunt Lucy, who had taken care of me so much, was standing in the back of one of the wagons. When I saw them start off and I knew she was leaving, I ran down the road with my arms held out to her, crying as I ran. Aunt Lucy stood there in the wagon with tears running down her cheeks, holding her arms out to me. My mother always said that that is the way me and Aunt Lucy parted."

Another letter, by Susan

Edwards, was written many years after the group moved to Kansas.

*Lyons, Kansas
May 7, (possibly 1940)*

Dear Friend, Wes Coffey:

... I and my sister Magg are all the ones that are living of my father's children. Uncle Ned Minnis has two sons living. Do you remember Ned Minnis and Uncle Joe Martin? Joe has two children living, Aunt Sophi Fuler and one in Mattoon. I have a son living in Danville, and that is why I wrote to you. He saw this piece in a paper, that you put in the paper, I got in 1939. So he cut it out and sent it to me. I am so sorry to hear of so many of our old friends being dead. ...

... Now in regard to Isom Bryant—he was not drowned. He died with old-fashioned consumption. Mother had a tombstone put up at his head, and I think if you look you will find it unless it has fallen down and covered with dirt. There were only two tombstones in that graveyard. One is at Nancy James' head and the other at Isom Bryant's (sic) head. I have heard my mother talk about that time so many went in the "Ambraw" River and came near drowned. She said my old Uncle John Paten were there on a horse that could swim. He went in and rescued them. I think one were Jon "Case Bear." He lived between us and Newman. ...

Susan Edwards

After the people from the settlement left the area, William H. Coffey, grandfather of George Coffey, kept the cemetery mowed with a team of horses until his death in 1905. Other caring people have fenced the area, put up signs and told the story to many historians. The land is currently owned by John Albin of Newman, who has been cooperative regarding restoration work there. In October 1987, a permanent marker was placed at the site.

Helen Parkes was a member of the town council in Oakland, editor of the Oakland-Hindsboro Prairie Sun and president of Landmarks Inc., a historical preservation organization that cares for several of Oakland's noteworthy landmarks. While this issue of Tales was in production, Parkes became ill and died June 6. She was 83.



Members of a black settlement, circa 1875, gather at a church meeting near Newman, IL.

Photo courtesy of the Lynnita Sommer collection, Tuscola



A Dark Wish

Mama's in the kitchen, and Bessie, I know she's in there too, probably mixin' the cornbread an' askin' Mama if she can stop 'cause her wrist is sore.

Today was close to the worst day of my life. I couldn't take no more. But I'm not cryin' now, an' I wasn't cryin' when it happened. I almost never cry.

But one day not long ago, I couldn't help but cry. I come home from sellin' newspapers an' saw Bessie settin' on the porch cryin'. I asked what was wrong.

She said, "Grandma wandered off, and me an' Mama an' Rosco been lookin' for hours till finally Mama done sent me home."

I kinda felt somethin' like this might happen 'fore too long. Grandma lived 'cross the street an' she'd been sick, so Mama been watchin' over her. Sometimes Grandma yell at me for no reason. She'd be in Mama's room restin' an' I'd be in the kitchen suckin' on some ice an' Grandma just yell out, "Frank, you be a pretty boy, be a pretty boy!"

But I loved her, an' I liked bein' around her. She used to tell me bedtime stories when I was smaller, but her stories were so good, I didn't want to go to bed. I'd just lie on my back thinkin' 'bout what she said till I got too tired to think anymore.

Bessie could barely get her words out.

"An' then Rosco come home 'bout 10 minutes ago an' said Grandma is dead! He said after an hour more of lookin', they went to the police, an' the police say they picked up an ol' colored woman and sent her to the old

folks' home. He said when Mama and him got to the home, the nurse say she died 'bout an hour ago! That was all she say."

I sat down next to Bessie an' cried the hardest I ever cried. Mama come home later that day an' told us what really happened. Mama said they killed her and done away with her body. That's what we always believed, anyway.

I try not to think about that day much anymore 'cause it makes me real sad. When I get back today, though, I know Mama's gonna do some hollerin' 'cause it's dark now. Mama's saved my plate and put it in the bottom of the ice box. Tonight was my turn to say grace, but Rosco probably said 'em already, even though his turn ain't till tomorrow.

Mama don't so much care when we late for supper, but when it's past dark and we still out, then we in a mess o' trouble. Ever since they got poor Benji, who lives next door, we have to use the outhouse only when it's light out (an' everybody go after supper). Benji said it was three of 'em. They hurt him bad an' lock him in the outhouse. His papa found him early the next mornin' out there. Benji walks with a limp now an' can't even come close to beatin' me in a foot race no more. But I sometimes let him win now.

But right now I'm not scared o'

Mama or even the dark. I'm still thinkin' 'bout what happened earlier today. I think I knew it was gonna happen, but jus' not so soon. My newspapers cost a nickel, an' I sell 'em for six cents. I cut people's grass, too, like Miz Wilson's an' Mr. Stevens' clear 'cross town.

"You did a fine job today, boy, as hot as it is. Let me see if I have two for you," Mr. Stevens say when he's in a good mood. Miz Wilson talks more, but she don't ever give me more 'n one penny.

"How are you today, Frank?" she say.

"Just fine, ma'am," I say.

"It shouldn't be too bad, the way the weather has been, but it could use just a trim. How do you folks manage in this hot sun, I wonder?"

"Oh, you know, we jus' try to stay out of it, much as we can."

"Yes, I suppose so. Well, you'd better get started."

Other than cuttin' grass, I been collectin' bottles an' turnin' 'em in for something. Well, I been savin' all this money up for somethin' I been dreamin' about for so long, seemed like forever. I wanted to buy me some skates. They cost 60 cents at the drug store, an' I finally had enough. So I went up to the counter in the store an' poured out my can of pennies. Everyone turned and looked at me, but I didn't care

'cause I was gonna get my skates.

"What is it you want, boy?" Mr. Jenkins said. He wasn't never friendly.

"Uh, I wanted to get those skates, those over there," I said an' pointed to them.

"Think you got enough? I don't want to make my customers wait for nothing."

I could see nobody was in line. He finally got the skates for me and took my money. I went right home.

Just when I was tryin' on my new skates, Mama told me to go get some bread. I don't like goin' to get bread. I don't like goin' downtown at all—mostly 'cause of the bathrooms. Seems like every time I go there I have to use the bathroom, but I can't. They have white fountains an' colored fountains, an' white bathrooms but they don't got no colored bathrooms. Why didn't Mama just ask Bessie?

I knew I couldn't get out of goin', so I was gonna go on my new skates an' I'd be back in no time. I wasn't goin' real fast 'cause I was jus' learnin' how, but by the time I got to the sidewalks downtown, I was skatin' like it was nothin'. It was just like I dreamed. I jus' sailed on down the sidewalk 'cause there were no sticks, no rocks, no nothin' to slow me down. I was havin' a time when all a sudden I hear

someone yell, "Come here, boy!"

I knew who it was before I stopped an' turned around. He was right in front o' me with his faded hat an' long boots an' shiny star.

"No skatin' on the sidewalks, boy. Now get off them damn skates."

I looked down at my skates like I was 'bout to lose a friend.

"Go on!" he shouted.

I remembered what Mama said—"Let them have their way 'cause it's the only way now."

When I got the skates off, he grabbed them out o' my hands an' went over to the side of the street. He dropped my skates down the gutter. Some people had stopped an' was starin' an' pointin'. My skates was in a hole right in front of the old shoe store. They had to be only 'bout two feet down. There hadn't been any rain for a long time, so I reckoned the hole had to be dry. But thing was, he was standin' right there an' wouldn't leave. I was gonna walk a block away an' wait till he left, then I'd go back an' get my skates an' run home.

But then there was a man come up an' looked down that hole. He reached down an' took my skates and walked away with the policeman jus' standin' there watchin'. I couldn't do nothin'. I felt like cryin', but I didn't.

I jus' started walkin' and thinkin' to myself; sometimes I wish my hair was straight an' my eyes were blue.

Renato L. Smith is a 1990 graduate of Urbana High School in Urbana, IL.

By Renato L. Smith

Journalism students explore nation's capital

Each spring for the past six years, the Washington Journalism Conference has offered the nation's top high school journalists the opportunity to take an up-close look at what it's like to be a working journalist inside the Washington Beltway and visit some of the landmarks that are central to America's history and culture.

A group known as Washington Educational Resources, in affiliation with the National Press Club, sponsors the conference. For five days, the student journalists participate in writing workshops, attend lectures and panel discussions about current

issues in journalism, visit Capitol Hill, the White House and foreign embassies, meet with congressmen, senators, journalists and other dignitaries, see a play at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and generally get a feel for Washington, D.C.

On April 25-29, Tales editor and Urbana High School teacher Ray Elliott and five UHS seniors attended the Washington Journalism Conference with more than 150 other students and teachers from across the country. Four of the Urbana students have recorded their impressions of the experience in the following articles.

Wall reflects the price of war

By Adam Wilson

The night tour of Washington, D.C., was nearing its end when we stopped to view the various monuments that surround the Mall area.

Getting off the bus, it was easy to see the Lincoln Memorial shining forth from a nearby hill. Everyone was excited about getting up there to see it. Dashing off in a frenzy, many groups headed directly to ascend the hill, while another, smaller and seemingly less enthusiastic group headed for a lower part of the park. Following a friend, I opted for the second group to discover what they were so intent on seeing but that was hidden by the night.

Barely distinguishable by the light of the moon, the sheer, granite wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial jutted out into the darkness, sturdy in its foundation and solemn in its presence. There was a brisk breeze blowing, but it did not account for the chilling effect that The Wall seemed to evoke in those who stood before it. I saw people all around me reaching through the light's reflection to touch the names that were chiseled into the stone as if they were testing the reality of its presence or just trying to make a special connec-

tion with the person whose name it happened to be.

No words were spoken, just silence as the cool touch of fingers tracing the outline of a name of a friend, a loved one or a complete stranger. The list just didn't seem to end. The names stood silently as stark reminders of what once was but that is no more. I guess that is what makes it so powerful for people to see, no matter how personal their connection may be. What really could be said anyway? The countless questions would come later; all that mattered now was being there.

It is really difficult to sum up the feelings that people experience when they view the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington because each individual reacts differently. Unlike the Lincoln Memorial or the Washington Monument, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial isn't something that instills nationalistic pride. Rather, it is a testament to individual sacrifice, patriotism and the horrors of war. Each name etched into the sleek, black granite presents us with a paradox concerning the glory of war and the price that it often requires. The cumulative effect of all of those names is nothing less than intense.



Adam Wilson, left, and other students spent a few moments with U.S. Senator Paul Simon, D-Illinois, in his Capitol Hill office.

Photo by Ray Elliott

Although individual numbers on the death count may seem distant and even disputable, individual names—their lives, their whole existences, can never be disputed. Who knows? One of those names up there could just as easily have been yours, your parent's or your neighbor's. In that sense, The Wall really serves as a tribute to the irrevocable contribution that was made in the name of freedom, while also serving as a powerful warning about the toll that such a contribution will cost.

The visit to The Wall was a very somber experience. And as I stood before the final group of the

seemingly endless columns of names, John H. Anderson Jr. stared me in the face. Who John H. Anderson Jr. was and what he did I will never know, but I do know that he is one of the thousands of Americans who died in the Vietnam War and it just so happens that his name is listed last on The Wall.

I will never forget that.

Adam Wilson is a 1990 graduate of Urbana High School in Urbana, IL.

Ideals brought to light

By Sara Karasick

We saw the "illuminated tour" on the schedule for Thursday at 8:30 p.m., and everyone just passed it off as fancy way of saying a tour of Washington at night with the bus headlights on. It turned out to be so much more than that, though.

I realized for the first time the significance of the ideals that this country was based on. The significance lay in the countless number of men who gave their lives fighting to uphold freedom, as well as the countless number of people in our country who are still denied the basic freedoms of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The first stop on the tour was the White House. The buses dropped us off on the opposite side of Lafayette Park so that we had to walk through the park to get to the White House. As we walked, a man shouted obscenities at us from inside a bush. At first everyone thought it was merely a joke, but we were forced to face reality when, through the darkness, we made out other figures of people lying on park benches with all their worldly possessions in a knapsack.

What was so ironic about the whole scene was that the White House stood right across the street, proud and tall with bright lights illuminating it and making it stand out in contrast to the darkness. What really shocked me was that here was arguably the most luxuriously furnished home in America, complete with red, blue and green rooms, and right across the street was a home that consisted of nothing more than a green, thorny bush. What ever happened to "all men are created equal"?

After everyone was through taking pictures of the White House, we reboarded the buses and headed toward the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The statue dedicated to the survivors of the war totally captivated me. The detail of the three men was fascinating. I reached out and touched a rifle one of the men carried. I don't know why I felt compelled to touch the weapon, but I think maybe it was because they looked so real and I had to reassure myself that it was really only a statue.

Then we started down the path that runs along The Wall. We walked a few feet past the beginning of the memorial before I noticed the lights on the ground that shined upward and illumi-

nated the names of all the men and women who died in the war. What sticks in my mind most was the way The Wall seemed to stretch forever. At its highest point, The Wall towered over my head. To see all of the names of the people who died made me realize the countless number of people in the country who must be grieving for those men and women. They all had friends and relatives who cared about them, and reading their names made the experience much more powerful.

We continued along the path until we reached the end of The Wall and continued on to the Lincoln Memorial. There I stood in awe not so much of the statue of Lincoln itself but of the writings etched on the walls. It was difficult for me to see, though, and I had to walk almost right up to the wall and stare directly upward to read the Gettysburg Address.

The tour supervisors were trying to rush us along and get back on the bus, but I couldn't bring myself to leave until I finished reading it. I had read the address before in school, but somehow reading it within the context of that evening, being in Washington, D.C., and being aware of its historical significance made it have a special impact on me. I think I realized the importance of the freedoms we are all supposed to have in this country, and I was able to relate it to the prior events of the evening. I saw what life looks like when those basic freedoms are denied, and I also saw the extent that people will go to uphold those freedoms.

When we all got back on the bus, hardly anyone spoke. Everyone was in his own thoughts, reflecting on the experiences of the evening. It was getting close to midnight when we drove back to the 4-H Center, where we were staying. There were pizzas waiting in a conference room for everyone to snack on, but I wasn't much in the mood to eat pizza.

Instead, I went to my room and decided to get ready for bed. I crawled onto the lumpy mattress and lay my head on the flattened pillow. Then I turned on my Walkman and listened to Phil Collins' song, "Another Day in Paradise." And I was thankful for the life that I have.

Sara Karasick is a 1990 graduate of Urbana High School in Urbana, IL.

Students meet with the U.S. representative from their home district, Terry Bruce, in his Washington, D.C., office.

Photo by Ray Elliott



Foreign embassies mirror cultures

By Julie Lebenson

One afternoon during our five-day stay in Washington, D.C., the participants of the Washington Journalism Conference visited various foreign embassies and practiced their journalistic skills on diplomats and delegates.

Students went to the embassies for China, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Canada. Each student chose one to visit for about an hour and a half. I went to the East German Embassy and was astonished by its primitive facilities. The embassy was located at the top of an office building. The telephone system seemed archaic—there were no push-button phones and the dial ones looked as though they dated back to World War I.

We met a delegate from the embassy who apologized that the foreign minister was unable to greet us because he was suddenly called away to meet with a

visiting diplomat. The delegate seemed very willing to answer our questions, although he did not always provide straight answers. It was obvious that he was adjusting from being a representative of a communist government to that of a democratic republic.

He repeatedly said he wished the transition in East Germany had taken more time so more of the problems, such as unemployment and rapid migration, could have been prepared for and prevented. He also stressed the importance of U.S. economic support and investment in East Germany to help bring the country up to date with the modern world. With reunification on the horizon, plans for a new East German Embassy have been discarded in order to merge with the current West German Embassy.

The students who visited the Chinese Embassy came away feeling angry and frustrated. Although they received a warm welcome, the response to their questions about the Tienanmen Square massacre last year was astounding and very disturbing.

The Chinese delegation reiterated the government line and claimed the American media blew the entire incident out of proportion. It claimed that trick photography was used to make it appear as though people were being shot when in reality no one was killed.

Such blatant disregard for the truth prompted a lot of discussion among the students throughout the rest of the day.

Julie Lebenson is a 1990 graduate of Urbana High School in Urbana, IL.

Fear and loathing in the White House

By Rachel Katzenellenbogen

"Rachel, you get to go to the White House tomorrow!" Julie Lebson yelled and grabbed my forearm.

Our "breakout" leader didn't tell us anything about going to the White House in the hour-long summary of the schedule changes. I was going to the Czechoslovakian Embassy because a guy in my group conned me out of the East German Embassy.

So I checked, and it was true. Eight people were chosen from different geographic regions to go to the White House and attend a press conference. I was one of the eight.

Being inside the White House seemed like it would be a magical event—the place where profound decisions are made and calligraphed documents are signed. I was going to see how the big people worked—not only important politicians, but network correspondents and print journalists who knew all the ropes of a political bureaucracy. Eight seats amid the action were for us.

When some of us arrived in one taxi at the White House, we stood outside the northwest gate. We tried to peer into window-tinted limosines as they went through the gate, trying to figure out who the important people were. Eventually the others met up with us after their taxi had dropped them off at the wrong gate.

We proceeded through a security check. Our driver's licenses were checked with the lists the security people had on their clipboards, and the women's purses were scrutinized. Each of us received a lavender, laminated badge with a large letter "A" printed in black to drape around our necks. I took a picture of the side of the White House with a camera I borrowed from Julie and continued on to the West Wing where the 11 a.m. press conference was going to take place.

One girl got her picture taken with a Marine who was guarding a door to the White House, and others held a pretend press conference when they saw a podium and some unhooked microphones



The five Urbana High School students got a view of the nation's capital few of their peers have an opportunity to see.

Photo by Ray Elliott

set up outside. I took a few more photographs until I realized I only had four left and had to save them for the press conference itself.

Bustling is the word to describe the action and commotion in the conference room. Several rows of theater-style seats were in the center. On the wall to the right, a permanent stage provided a backdrop for the speaker at the press briefing. A blue velvet covering hung from the wall, and a White House seal was positioned high and in the center. Behind the last row of seats on the left, TV cameras on tripods were in position, and yards and yards of cable covered the floor. Men were editing video tape in small, open closets with monitors and equipment that all sat on a platform behind the cameras. Other people were talking in English and Spanish, joking with each other and working hard at their jobs.

Our group leader, Candy, told us that the press briefing was not going to start until 11:30 a.m., so we roamed around the rooms, no doubt getting under the feet of important people.

Behind the room with the theater seats and TV cameras there was a stairway leading down. There were pages and pages of information about President Bush's schedule, official declarations and letters

from government officials posted to the wall opposite the stairwell. Beyond the stairs, a second room contained tightly packed desks with half-walls separating them for use by the television news reporters.

I went back to the stairs and down to the basement. There were more desks everywhere I looked and small closets about as wide as a man's shoulders built into the walls. These were radio booths where news flashes were sent out. One woman had a television tuned into Cable News Network, but she was reading a newspaper. I was so excited to be seeing where the news of the country was being made and documented.

Back upstairs, I spoke with a cameraman from a Spanish television network. He described to me and two other students his job, the camera, the White House reporters, how he became a cameraman and what press briefings were like. He was the kindest person there; it seemed like most everyone else was too busy or too rude to want to talk to us.

The press conference eventually started at 12:15 p.m., more than one hour late. Suddenly the bright lights came on and a State Department representative went on stage. He told reporters what President Bush and President

Perez of Venezuela had discussed in their meeting that morning.

I took a couple more pictures of the reporters and the State Department speaker and had a friend take two more. Surprisingly, there was still some film left. So I snapped one more, and the camera sounded like it was going to grind to a halt. But it didn't. It began to rewind the film noisily, and faces turned in my direction. My friend took the camera from me and stuffed it under his arm to muffle the sound. I was embarrassed, but the briefing continued.

After the representative was through talking, the floor was opened to questions. I think every person had his or her hand raised, and "journalistic Darwinism" (a phrase coined by Chad Soriano of Seminole, FL) took place. When one person was pointed to, he did not turn around to see if it was in fact he who was being called upon. He just immediately began to ask his question. Of course, three other people behind him evidently thought the same thing and began their questions as well. The rudest journalist who continued to talk over the other people got his question answered. The irony of the situation is that everyone's questions were answered in the end.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater then came onto the stage and made two announce-

ments. He knew all of the reporters by their first name, and I could see a kind of camaraderie between the politicians and the journalists. They both saw the game they were playing. The press secretaries protected their parts of the government from looking bad in the media, and the journalists were trying to squeeze opinions rather than whitewash out of the rosy answers given by the secretaries. The pointed questions and the pat answers passed back and forth showed that they all knew the game and were expert players.

After Fitzwater answered some more questions, the lights dimmed and everyone dispersed. My feet were killing me because there no seats had been left for us and we had to stand the whole time. Cameramen lined up to move into the Rose Garden for an open photo session. A man towering over me yelled for me to get back in a manner that made my gut curdle. We sheepishly slipped back inside and left with the others. And after posing for everyone's camera by the circle drive of the White House, we piled into taxis and left.

Was it a disappointment? Yes. After the wonderment of staring at technical equipment for five minutes and seeing all of the important people at work, I realized that it was all pretty cut and dried for those who work there. The journalists wasted half the day waiting for an announcement that lasted 20 minutes and seemed disgusted by the effort it took them to get any kind of response with enough substance to merit writing a story.

I was also angered after the briefing by the rude people and unfeeling atmosphere of the whole event. But I am glad that I went because it shattered a lot of lofty visions I had of government and the job of a reporter. I learned how our government works and how the politicians and the journalists depend on each other despite their opposite responsibilities.

Rachel Katzenellenbogen is a 1990 graduate of Urbana High School in Urbana, IL.

The Last Word

The prairie's own companion

By Emily Armitano

"The first duty of society is to give each of its members the possibility of fulfilling his destiny. When it becomes incapable of performing this duty, it must be transformed."

—Alexis Carrel

Society, throughout history, is a group of people that stand together in their beliefs and their actions. There have been many times that a certain part of the society disagrees with some beliefs and a conflict has arisen.

Rarely does a single person have the courage to go against society alone. For the individuals who have the courage to stand up for their ideals and values, many lose the battle with society.

However, some have succeeded. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Ghandi were two courageous individuals who fought against society, often times alone, and triumphed in achieving their goals.

One man in Champaign-Urbana seems to be headed toward his own triumph. David Monk is battling for the preservation of the natural surroundings of Illinois. He is not only battling for nature, but he is also battling against a society that does not always agree with his views of prairie preservation.

Monk is the director of Education Resources in Environmental Sciences (ERES) in downtown Champaign. He has no funds, no salary, no staff and survives on \$3,000 a year. Despite some controversy, he manages to make approximately 200 speeches a year on behalf of the world of the prairie settlers. Monk wants everyone to become aware that much of the environmental and cultural heritage of Illinois is being destroyed. That destruction includes cutting down prairies, shutting down old railroads, destroying Indian remains and even misusing old wood.

He wants people to care about the natural and built landscapes of Illinois. However, instilling concern in the community is no easy task. Despite his admirable attempts to preserve Illinois heritage, Monk has encountered much opposition from various individuals and organizations.

A native-born Australian who

came to study at the University of Illinois in 1961, Monk had hopes of meeting people and seeing places that would show the history of Illinois. But he couldn't find what he had hoped for. Instead, he found farms, roads and cities that took away from what he considered to be the beauty of Illinois. He expected to see prairies, wildlife and signs of the past.

But from his disillusionment came a dream—a dream that he could bring back some of the beauty that Illinois had lost to society's advances.

However the conflicts that Monk has had in trying to achieve this dream seem almost endless. In almost every attempt he makes to save a railroad or prairie landscape, there is someone who opposes him.

The biggest problem is the general public. Monk wants people to realize the value of what he is trying to do. He is concerned with this lack of awareness because, he said, "people do not know what they are missing."

The majority of people seem to believe that the prairies are just a bunch of weeds, that old railroads are useless and that better things could be done with houses that are so old they are falling down. But Monk believes differently.

He believes the prairie, the wildlife and the historic structures of Illinois should be kept for future generations so they will know about the past. And the only way he sees it possible to make the public more aware is through education. Monk gives many informal and formal educational speeches to anyone willing to listen. He tried to get people interested and involved. Even though more times than not he emerges empty-handed, he never gives up hope.

"The success rate in this particular sort of job is about 1 percent," he said. "In that context, you are becoming a foil ... you are sort of reminding people that there are other ways—that building perhaps shouldn't come down, that little bit of landscape should remain, the presence of this plant and this bird and this butterfly will allow a person to live three days longer."

Sometimes it is the farmers who stand in the way of Monk realizing his dream. One farmer said he did not like the prairie because "the potential always exists that such an area could serve as a reservoir for insects, diseases and rodents which could threaten neighboring farmland."

Some farmers in the past and present continue to destroy the prairie lands, mistaking them for weeds. Some even go to the extent of plowing up the prairie and planting their crops instead because of this case of mistaken identity.

Another group that has not been very receptive to Monk's ideas are local politicians. He said many of them do not take him seriously and think he's too radical to know what he's doing. Because of this mistrust, ERES receives little or no funding. It survives by soliciting donations and volunteers. But the most devastating setbacks are the results of political decisions.

For example, Monk recently lost seven acres that he had planned to use for prairie to a \$12 million road that will be constructed directly through the land. Monk debated with the powers that be to no avail.

Yet he keeps on trying. Monk has asked for volunteers involved in political science who have good debating skills and who are "able to stand in front of a bulldozer" to try to fight such decisions.

The effect such conflicts have upon Monk is that they have made him realize that one needs to educate people more about what is important in life. "We are bowing down to god," he said, "and the god is money." Monk believes the value placed on money in our society should not be considered so important and that our cultural and environmental heritage is more valuable.

The conflicts have also made him tougher about getting what he wants if he believes it's right. The best evidence of this is his progress in recent years. When the decisions do not fall his way, he does not quit—he only fights harder. When a workman dumped



David Monk strives to protect the natural prairie lands of Illinois.

Photo by Steve Warmowski

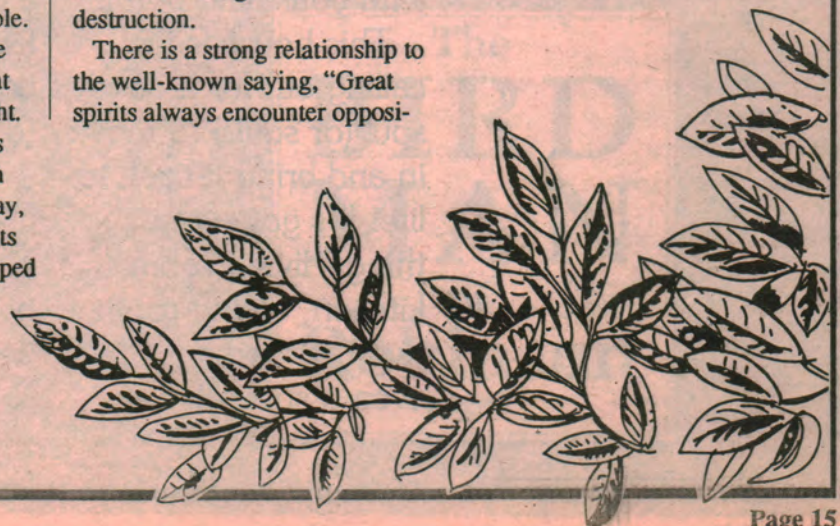
two tons of soil over prairie land, mistaking it for weeds, Monk was undaunted. He just continued about his business and looked for another site to plant. In a sense, he is "like the Johnny Appleseed of the prairie."

Over the years, Monk has fought against what others might say is progress. What he is really fighting against is society's destruction of the environment and history. He has taken it upon himself to change this course of destruction.

There is a strong relationship to the well-known saying, "Great spirits always encounter opposi-

tion from mediocre minds," and Monk's efforts to save the prairie. Though he continues to encounter opposition, the strength of his spirit may yet save some of Illinois' valuable past from the mediocre minds who would have the past disappear forever.

Emily Armitano is a 1990 graduate of Urbana High School in Urbana, IL.



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