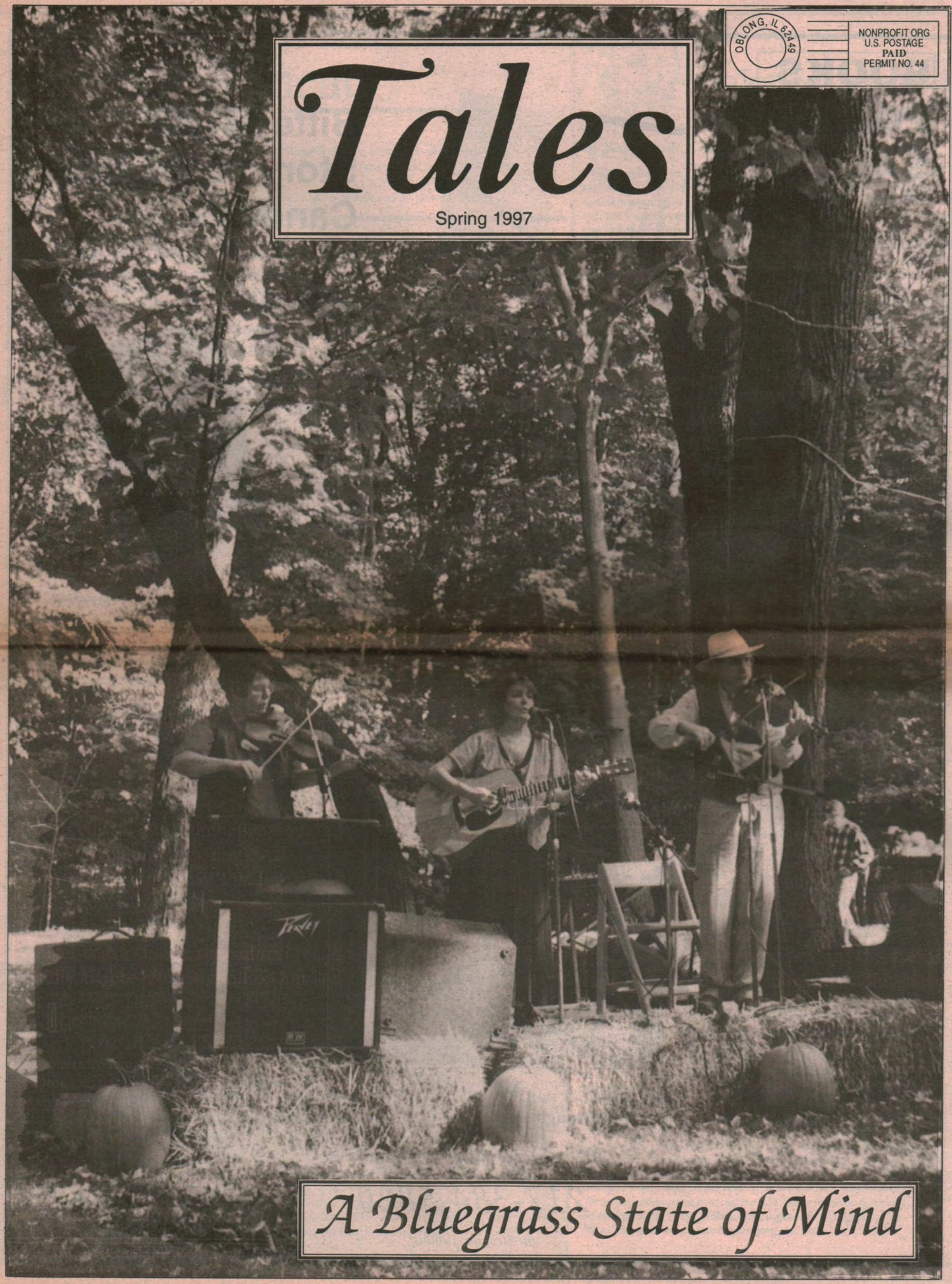
Tales

Spring 1997



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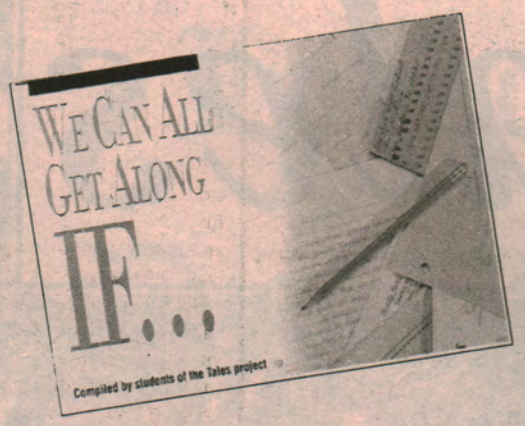

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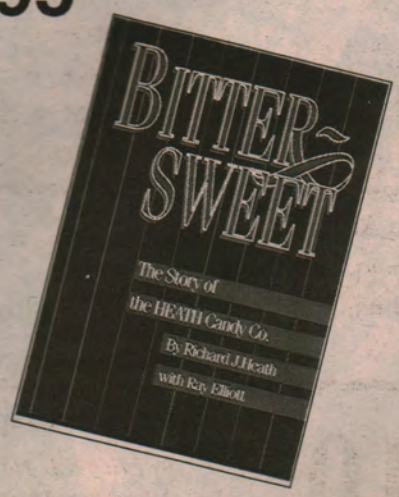

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Call local coordinator Ray Elliott at

217-384-5820

(in Urbana, Illinois)

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Tucked away in a private woods of central Illinois, there is an annual celebration of Bluegrass music for a trio of men and several hundred of their closest friends.
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Story by James Lyons / Story and photos by Vanessa Faurie

Departments

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The contents of *Tales* may be offered to other newspapers and magazines through syndication and may be published in book form as the material becomes available.

Anyone may submit articles, photographs and/or drawings for possible publication in *Tales*. If published, all material becomes the property of Tales from the general store, inc. No responsibility for returning unused submissions can be assumed, however, every effort will be made to return all submissions.

Tales, an idea that doesn't want to die

By Ray Elliott

Like many fools who teach or write, I've always wanted a place to publish stories and ideas that don't often make it in other publications. Coming from rural southern Illinois and being aware of the rich history and culture of the area that was slipping away from the younger generation, I decided a Foxfire-type cultural project and magazine would serve my purpose.

But living and teaching in the Chicago area made that difficult. For a while, I had my journalism students write about their world by searching archives and interviewing older residents who could remember when the suburbs were small towns with dirt streets and whistle stops for trains to the city.

Then I took a few of those suburban students on a camping trip in southern Illinois and showed them around the area where I had grown up. We visited the people I knew or had gotten reacquainted earlier and heard their stories and experiences. We ate sandwiches at the Moonshine store, a general store still in operation today and much like the one in Bellair that had been so much a part of my life when I was growing up there. It had closed down in 1974.

Around the campfire one night that week, I talked about the idea I had for the cultural journalism project. "Why don't we do it?" somebody said. And Tales from the general store was born. We spent the rest of the week collecting information, doing interviews and taking photographs. When the week was over, we had material for the first issue.

Later, *Robinson Daily News* publisher Larry Lewis said he'd print our efforts and run the publication as an insert in his papers. That established a circulation base that was later expanded to contributors across the country and to publisher Ron Isbell's readers as an insert in his small-town newspapers.

Before I got that first issue together, I got another bright idea. I wanted to buy the old Bellair store and some other property in Bellair to restore and set up headquarters for a place to bring students and older people together to help preserve a living piece of the history and culture we were writing about and to provide hands-on experience for the students.

"I've got $10,000 in my grandfather's foundation that I've got to give away before the IRS takes it," Stephen Patrick, Robinson, said one afternoon as we drove around Crawford Country. "I'll give you $5,000 for the project."

That helped buy the store, an old bank building and restaurant, a house and about three acres. I designed the publication, finished editing the articles and cropping the photographs and sat down one evening to dummy up the first issue. When I finished early the next morning and looked at the property, I was so frazzled and overwhelmed that I wondered if there'd ever be another issue and why anyone would even consider buying those dilapidated old buildings.

But with community and student help, we did publish several more issues, worked on the buildings and had fun at the gatherings at the store, much of which was written about in subsequent *Tales* issues. A few summers later I bought another house, and a group of University of Illinois journalism students and recent graduates came to Bellair to get the project farther off the ground.

That never quite materialized in the ways I had hoped. Even all the editorial help, the generous contributions and the support from throughout the area were never enough to pay the bills and develop the program.

"You need to spend more time behind the typewriter," Lewis told me one day, "and less time working on old buildings."

I knew he was right, but the buildings were part of the project. And I never could find the time and money to keep Tales going anyway. Then I started teaching full time again, and the project lay dormant for a period.

When we resumed publishing, I was teaching at Urbana High School. The focus shifted gradually away from the rural, small-town perspective and more on what I could find for my students to write about in classroom assignments and trips to Europe and the Washington (D.C.) Journalism Conference.

With that change in focus and perspective, financial contributions and moral support from reader letters dropped off sharply. In the early days, we'd receive contributions and letters for weeks after an issue was published. Now, with an increased circulation, we rarely receive contributions and hardly any mail.

The question becomes: Where to go now? Publication is one of the most effective methods I've found for teaching students to write well. The Tales nonprofit corporation has sold its property and has virtually every cent it ever received, including the initial $5,000 Patrick gave more than 15 years ago.

That money is sitting in mutual fund accounts waiting to be used for worthwhile publishing projects and student involvement in the writing process. Money from Tales book publications, other writing income and Academic Year in America (AYA) foreign exchange student placements all go to Tales.

As a teacher at Urbana High School, it is improbable that I can ever get back to the rural perspective of the early Tales days. And financing and getting public support and interest in a publication that spotlights student writing of the type in this issue also seems improbable, although that seems to be the most feasible way of getting material from a wide area.

We need to hear from people who can help focus on a mission to re-establish a forum for student writing and get the community involved again or who can help in other ways. I hope to share these pages with you again.

Write, call or e-mail, but let us hear from you.

All The News They Could Fit

Editor's Note: *Mildred Cramer Barrett submitted this piece of nostalgia to the editor of the Robinson (Ill.) Daily News for publication. He sent it on to us since it more clearly fits our content.*

Mrs. Barrett wrote, "Soon I will be 90. It has been 45 years since I left Annapolis. It has been 70 years since I purchased half-interest in the Annapolis News, a weekly newspaper in Annapolis, Ill., from my cousin, Audrey Gower Weck. My partner, Merle Zellers, and I published the Annapolis News one year and then sold to the editor and publisher of the Robinson Daily News, Mr. F.W. Lewis. When I wrote the story, my sister, Irma Scope, took pictures of the of Hoe press standing in (the Robinson Daily News) office."

By Mildred Barrett

Early in the morning in last August 1926, I borrowed my dad's Ford and sped over the country roads from my home near Bellair, Ill., to Annapolis, a distance of about seven or eight miles.

Annapolis, a small country town of about 150 people in mideastern Illinois, was a busy town. Many of its residents still referred to the town by its former name, Four Corners. The town and outlying areas supported three general stores, two garages, two restaurants, a funeral parlor, a barber shop, a hardware store, a butcher shop, a bank, a post office and a newspaper office.

As I bumped along the road to Annapolis that morning, I was excited. Here I was, a young girl 19 years old, going into the newspaper business. The previous week, I had borrowed $150 from the Bellair Bank and bought half-interest in the Annapolis News, a weekly newspaper, from my cousin, Audrey Gower. My dad had cosigned the note. I had bought the business sight unseen, but it looked like an interesting and challenging venture.

My partner, Merle Zellers, was a local girl, 18 years old, and had worked in the business for more than a year. She could teach me what I needed to know.

As the car came to a jerky stop in front of the old gray post office building, my eyes centered on an almost faded-out sign, *"Annapolis News,"* hanging from the edge of the porch roof. The printing office was in the rear of the building. I walked through the lobby of the post office and at the far end I spotted a door with the words, *"Annapolis News,"* printed on it. I turned the key in the lock, opened the door and, with a sinking fear, I looked over this travesty of a newspaper office.

As I pulled the string of the light bulb hanging above me, the dim light shone down on an old printing press. It was like something out of an old history book. The old Hoe press stood huge and powerful.

Well, what did I want for my money—a modern office with red leather chairs? I turned about, and saw an old stove in a corner. It seemed to defy me standing there with a big hole in its pot-belly, propped up on bricks to take care of its missing fourth leg.

There was a long work table along one wall. On the opposite side of the room, there were shelves of cases of different sizes and styles of type. Other shelves were loaded with papers, and some were empty. A small hand press operated by foot pressure for handbills and small jobs occupied another corner. There was a back door to use when the post office was closed.

Merle rushed in and said, brightly, "Hi! Today's the day we gather the news."

Eagerly, we grabbed our notebooks and pencils and were on our way.

First, we called on the businessmen to pick up their ads. We talked to many people to see what bits of news we could learn about the residents. I appreciated my first interview with Uncle Joe Wolfe, a blind man. His keen insight about life amazed me. He inspired me greatly with his philosophy of life that he expressed so deeply in the article he dictated for our paper. As he talked, he played a beautiful hymn on his organ.

Back in the office, we sorted our mail. There were lengthy news items from our correspondents from Muddy Creek, Stringtown, West Orange, Pleasant Grove, Newlinville, Willow Prairie, Rabbit Ridge, Liberty, Porterville, Licking and Moonshine.

There were a few ads already set up by linotype from various companies. We were glad to get these because the companies paid in advance and also saved us a lot of work.

The young newspaper publishers, Merle Zellers (left) and Mildred Cramer, outside of the *Annapolis News* in 1926

Merle and I rented an apartment at Milo Newlin's house. Milo operated a barber shop, and his wife, Della, had a beauty parlor in the same shop. Audrey had moved out, so after work, I moved in with my suitcase. We didn't have much furniture in our two rooms—just a bed and two chairs. There was a small table and a gas hotplate in the kitchen. It didn't matter to Merle and me, though. We were happy to have a place to live.

The next morning, I started to learn to set type. I did not know the printer's vocabulary. To me, it was just cases of type and such. Since I had no experience, we thought it best that I set type for the back page—the news items—and then progress to the ads.

I sat before a printer's case that held a font of type, which consists of an assortment of all the necessary characters or letters needed for ordinary composition. A complete font required two trays—one placed above the other. The upper case held the capital letters, and the lower case held the small letters.

I picked out the letters, one at a time, and set them in order, backwards, into a small frame called a stick, which I held in my left hand. As each line was set, I spaced it out by inserting thin metal strips of lead between each word so that each line was the exact length of the stick. When 10 to 15 lines had been set, or the stick was full, the type was transferred to a galley in the press bed. The galley was a long narrow tray for holding type already set. There were enough galleys to fill the press bed, which held one large sheet of paper. We could print one large sheet at a time. When the sheet was folded, it became pages one and four. Pages two and three, on the other side of the sheet, were already printed with late news, in general, by the company that supplied us the paper.

When the galley was full in the press bed, we were ready to run off our first trial copy. Merle tightened the screws in the bed. The thick, black ink was applied to the type—not too much, not too little—with a heavy gelatin roller. The sheet of newspaper was carefully placed on the inked type. Merle couldn't work the press lever. We were both small girls—about 5 feet in height. It was all we could do to reach the lever. I pushed from one side, and Merle pulled from the other. Finally, the heavy platen, a plate for pressing the paper against the inked type slowly lowered down on the press bed. After a few seconds, we released the lever. The platen raised, and there was our first copy of the *Annapolis News*, dated Sept. 2, 1926.

I could hardly wait for the ink on the trial copy to dry. Before it was completely dry, I started to proofread it. There were not too many mistakes. I was dismayed to see that my father had an injured beak, instead of an injured back. The ad for Barrett's Hardware read, "Garrick's Hardwart." The ad for mustard pickles should have been on the back page. Our sense of humor saved the day. The errors were corrected, and we were ready for a local boy, Ralph Meyers, to run off the 400 copies needed for our subscribers.

With a great feeling of pride and accomplishment, we addressed and folded the papers. They went in the mail and on their way to our readers. We had met the deadline.

Fridays were tear-up-the-type day. Thursday evenings we washed the press bed with a solution to remove the ink. The type was sorted, and each kind was placed in its own case so that each font was complete. This helped to avoid mistakes in the future.

As I tore up the type that first Friday evening, I thought it had been one of the most important weeks in my life. I was doing something worthwhile, and I felt it was a turning point in my life. I looked down at my ink-stained hands—I hated that part. But to be my own, independent self—it was worth the sacrifice.

Printing the *Annapolis News* was work and fun. We struggled through ups and downs and hated our ink-stained hands. It was with regret that we decided to sell our subscription list and the old Hoe press to F.W. Lewis, editor and publisher of the Robinson Daily News. The old press still occupies a corner in the Robinson, Ill., office. Deano Miller, owner of the Miller Cafe, bought our small hand press and the cases of type.

In late August 1927, after 52 weeks and 52 issues, we closed forever the door of the *Annapolis News*.

Photo courtesy of Western Union Financial Services

A Western Union public office in the latter part of the 19th century, when the company's money transfer service was inaugurated.

Did You Know...

Western Union marks 125 years of wiring money

In 1851, the New York and Mississippi Valley Printing Telegraph Company was formed by a group of businessmen in Rochester, N.Y. Five years later, the name was changed to The Western Union Telegraph Company, signifying the union of western telegraphic lines with eastern lines into one system.

In 1996, the company has been celebrating the 125th anniversary of its money transfer service. The concept of wiring money has become part of the American way of life. This year the company will handle more than 30 million money transfer transactions within the United States and among 130 other countries around the world.

Usage of the service was modest in its first few decades, but the idea of wiring money gained popularity during World War I as anxious relatives used it for sending funding to their "boys in uniform" at military posts throughout the United States and Europe.

Western Union also has a history of other telecommunications "firsts." In 1866, it introduced stock tickers to provide brokerage firms with New York Stock Exchange quotations, and in 1914 issued the first consumer charge card. In 1920, it telegraphed the first pictures across the ocean from England to America on Western Union undersea cable. And the singing telegram was introduced in 1930. For nearly a century, the company held the distinction as "the nation's timekeeper," transmitting time signals from the U.S. Naval Observatory to set clocks at business and government locations throughout the country.

Book looks at Class of '50 as revolutionary

When World War II ended, a new nation began.

And it began on America's college campuses. Veterans returned home to the GI Bill, and many became the first in their families to go to college. They returned home to develop the technologies made possible by the war and to send men to the moon. They returned with still-fresh memories of the Depression, but also with unbridled optimism,

The faith and determination of those veterans and their classmates—and the quiet revolution they started—are captured in the book, "A Force for Change: The Class of 1950," recently published by Purdue University Press. The book is set at Purdue University in north-central Indiana, and the mosaic of memories is told by those who lived them.

Norman Coats arrived from Borden, Ind., where he grew up near the Civil War log cabins of his ancestors. His father was a berry grower and truck farmer, and the family was poor even before the Depression. Thanks to the GI Bill, Coats earned a degree in ag economics and went on to retire as a vice president from Ralston Purina.

The war shaped his generation, he said, recalling bombing raids where he lay in a fetal position in the turret of a B-17, where temperatures would drop to 60 degrees below zero and where there was no room for him to wear a parachute. After experience like that, he said, his generation was ready to take on the world.

"After the war, we felt like we could do anything," Coats said. "We felt our nation could accomplish anything."

Jim Blakesley was born in Los Angeles and at 19 commanded a bomber with a crew of nine other equally young men.

"They didn't tell us we couldn't do things back then," he said. "If people don't know what their limits are, they go ahead and do what they're told."

U.S. presidents familiar with Union Station

Trains continue to be important vehicles for political campaigning in this century. And St. Louis' Union Station has been a frequent destination for candidates on their whistle-stop tours.

Most notably, perhaps, was President Harry S. Truman, who in 1946 escorted British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to St. Louis Union Station on board the B&O Special in preparation for Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech in Fulton, Mo. Union Station was once again in the spotlight Nov. 3, 1946, when Truman, from the rear platform of the presidential railcar, the Ferdinand Magellan, displayed to throngs of cheering Democrats a copy of the early edition of the *Chicago Tribune* featuring the blunder headline, "Dewey defeats Truman."

Another presidential train moments included the time when the station hosted President Dwight D. Eisenhower's special 10-car funeral train in 1969. A brass band played and 650 spectators watched as Mamie, son John and grandson David came out on the Santa Fe's rear platform and addressed the crowd for the first and only time along their 2,804-mile journey.

Visit to Italy more than art and architecture

By Michael Sabbia

I never thought going to Italy this past summer would be as memorable as it was. I'll never forget the streets of Venice, the art of Florence, and the architecture of Rome. But perhaps the most beautiful place I saw was right in the middle of the Mediterranean. With water so blue I thought it was dyed and cliffs and trees all around, I swore I was in paradise.

Paradise for me was the Isle of Capri.

Getting there required boarding a small boat and venturing out a few miles toward a massive rock structure. Every glance looked like it belonged on a postcard.

The Isle of Capri, Italy *Photo by Ray Elliott*

But beauty wasn't all there was to appreciate. What would an ideal afternoon be if not for a little adventure? The Blue Grotto provided me and my fellow travellers with an opportunity to actually go inside the middle of the island. We were told that inside the cavern was the bluest water we would ever see and fabulous rock creations that we would never see again. The only catch to this extravaganza was that three of us and a guide had to lie flat in a very small rowboat to get under the entrance, which varied from two to three feet, depending on the tide.

Our first attempt nearly decapitated our friend, Drew, when the tide came in extremely high, but the second try whisked us into another magical world where many others were floating around and listening to an old man play Italian favorites on his accordion. Being inside an island is a feeling that cannot be duplicated nor imagined. But the afternoon had only just begun.

Climbing a few steps up the mountain, we came to another postcard scene, only this one could double as a commercial for an extremely upscale Club Med. We spent the afternoon at the Club Neptune, which housed two huge saltwater pools, access to swimming in the Mediterranean, and all the sun you could possibly want.

Looking around, we saw some of Italy's finest basking in the rays of the powerful sun and occasionally making their way to a pool to cool off on the hot day.

Another highlight of the club was an opportunity to cliff jump right into the Tyrrhenian Sea. The height of the jumping-off point was between 18 and 25 feet, and we landed safely in deep water. Everyone on the trip, including our teacher, was gung ho about jumping, except me. I hate heights and especially big drops. But I also realized that if I didn't jump, I'd probably never have the chance again. So I made the jump not once but twice and helped overcome my fear of heights.

My trip to Italy will remain in my memory forever. The beauty of all the places, especially Capri, should be appreciated by everyone. I sincerely recommend that everyone, if they have the chance, visit a foreign country and learn the history behind the country and its early civilization. My trip to Italy is proof that a trip abroad doesn't only have to be culturally enriching; it can be fun at the same time.

Sabbia is an Urbana High School senior who plans to study communications at Northwestern.

Vacation recalls stories of war, tests sense of direction

by Luigi Marini

Traveling has always been a great time for my family and me. All the times that we are on our way to a new journey, my father changes like Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde. From the absent-minded professor always thinking about his job and his studies, he would change into the happy, carefree traveller always looking around to see something new or interesting. My mother, beside him, has always been the right counterpart. All the times there, in the right front seat of the car, with the right map in her hands, and ready to say things like, "O.K., Ma'" (That is what she calls him; my father's name is Matteo.) "I think--but I'm not sure--we must turn left at the next crossroad . . . if I'm not wrong. ..."

And then she would point with one of her long, thin fingers to a spot on the map.

By the way, our organization on the road has always been very good and so we've never had any problems.

Did I say "never"? Oh, I'm sorry. There was a trip in which we had a few problems.

We were on our way back to Castrovillari (my hometown in southern Italy) from a journey to Venice (in northern Italy) when my father said, "Hey guys! Why don't we go to visit your grandmother's birthplace? It's not very far from here, and we could see the central square where she says the Germans had come."

Her stories are very interesting because she was just 36 when the Germans invaded Italy, so she remembers a lot of things about it. Some times, when you speak about war or something related to it in her presence, you can see her face changing. She stops whatever she is doing and a mask of sadness appears on her face. And then, if you push her, she will start to tell you of how one afternoon, in the far-away fall of 1943, the Germans had killed 10 people in the central square of her town. The Germans wanted everybody to know that they were there, and to know that they didn't want any trouble from them. So the soldiers killed 10 people so nobody else would try to fight for his freedom.

My grandmother and her husband had a fabric shop in the central square, a place where everything happened and one could get all the latest news. The stories she told us were many, so I get confused!

Looking outside the window of my father's car toward a green valley on our left, I started to remember some of her stories. I remember how she lived in a tent with five children because death devices had fallen on their houses in a night full of stars.

One time, a German had come to her house when she was alone with her smallest child. She was so scared that she cried and asked him not to harm her. But he was only there to ask for some blankets.

So, happy to see that place and sad for what reminded us, we told my father, "Ok, why not" And so we were there, in that small, typical town in southern Italy.

As in all the old centers of Italy, and in particular the south, the streets are so small that, in a car, you can hardly pass through them. All the streets are one-way and have no signals. I remember very well all those blue signs with a white arrow in the middle of them hanging on the corners of old stone houses that instructed you to go in one direction. If you consider the fact that the town was built on the slope of several small hills, you can understand how all that seemed like a labyrinth. We were trapped inside it!

But on the other hand, everything was so beautiful, so old. The houses were so near one another that if you stood between them, you couldn't see the sun. They were very interesting and reminded me of how old the town was. The windows, too, were so close together that the people living there could pass things to each other from their windows.

But the most interesting sights were the people sitting outside their homes on chairs made of straw and wood, with their old, marked-by-time faces looking at you and asking themselves who you were, why you were there, where were you from, etc. It was because they didn't have anything to do that they stayed outside their homes where the air was fresher. And the reason why they could ask themselves so many things about you, is that they knew everybody in town and so they could recognize you.

Looking at the old men, the image of my grandfather went immediately in front of me. While my grandmother was suffering in her town, a lot of other people were suffering in the German prison camps. Among them was my grandfather. He was almost near death when the Allied forces saved him. He would remember things for all his life. To let us know what he, like a lot of others, had done--so that we know we live in freedom--he wrote a book and dedicated it to his grandchildren.

Because there weren't signs to the central square, we had to ask one of the men, and he said, "Keep going in that direction." So we did.

But at one point we couldn't "keep going in that direction" because we found a sign telling us to turn right. And so we did.

After a few minutes, we realized we couldn't find the central square, so we asked another man. But again, there was the same problem: a sign telling us to turn right.

We tried and retried until it was too late and we had to head back home. And then my father said, "We didn't get lost in New York. We didn't get lost in Los Angeles, London, Milan, etc. . . . But we couldn't find the central square in a small town like this!"

Marini, a native of Italy, is spending a year in America with his family and attending UHS.

Coming To America

By Loes Penninx

"America, here I come!" That's what I thought when I heard the results of my exams.

I surprised my whole family when it turned out that I didn't fail my exams. I couldn't believe it. I've wanted this for years, and now I was actually going to the United States for a year. I had about two months to say goodbye to my friends and family. For some unknown reason, I didn't have any problem with that. Even when I was at the airport and I had to say goodbye to my parents, I didn't show any tears. My friend and I couldn't stop laughing while our families were standing there, holding their tears.

When we were in the plane, my friend was excited about flying because she had never flown before. As for me, it was not a big deal. I even had been in America three years before. That was an experience that made me even more convinced in leaving.

We stayed in New York for an orientation for a couple of days along with about 400 other people. We received a grand tour through the city and attended workshops where we were told about all of the bad things that could happen throughout the following year. It didn't bring us down, though.

I had the best time there. I really hated to say goodbye to all the new friends I had made during those three days. When I had to stay in Chicago for four hours, I did leave some tears. But when I arrived in Champaign, I saw my host-parents immediately. They looked just like the picture they had sent me, so no surprise! It was kind of awkward at first, but soon after that it was really nice.

As we drove to my home for the next year, the first thing I noticed were the many fast food restaurants. I couldn't believe it; how can they cope with the competition?!

When we arrived at my new home, I noticed that they hadn't locked their front door. A lot of people here do not lock the door of their houses or their cars. There must be a lot of trust in the people here in America or a lot less crime, which I doubt, because in Holland you could never do that. If I would go to the bakery 100 yards from my house, I would lock my house in every way. It is just something I grew up with; I don't think it's because there is more crime in Holland. My host-parents thought this was really strange.

For the next couple of weeks, I still was on vacation before school started, so I watched some TV or I was taken into town. I really like the town. It is about the same size as my town in Holland. The big difference is that the shops are all so huge, and there are so many malls.

When I first heard I was to attend a big school with a lot of students, I expected that I wouldn't attract a lot of attention. I'm not that special in the school because there are a lot of exchange students. But there are still a lot of students who want to know something about the Netherlands. Some ask me to say or write something in Dutch.

"Wat wil je dat ik zeg?"

This only means:"What do you want me to say?".

In class I'm not treated any differently than my other classmates. I wouldn't want it any other way. I might be a minority, but that doesn't mean that I'm any different than others. I don't think the word "minority" should be used these days. Nobody should be judged by their race or their background or where they come from.

A friend of the family who also attends the same school showed me around my new high school. We also decorated her locker. That was new for me because in Holland you are not allowed to do that—not that it is of any use because the lockers are so much smaller.

The school was very confusing at first, but it didn't take long before I got it under control. During my first day of class, I just observed everybody—what they were wearing, how they acted and how they spoke. What was so weird for me was that some were wearing white socks in sandals! Gosh, don't even think about doing that in Holland—you would really be laughed at. Some girls wore boxer shorts and some people wore T-shirts inside out—are you kidding me? That was so strange for me to see. Is this normal here?

When I tell students I am from Holland, they often ask me about drugs: "Are drugs really legal there?" "Do you smoke joints?" "Will you get in trouble if you are smoking pot?"

One girl who didn't know that much about the Netherlands asked me, "Is everybody in Holland high?" Just to find out what her reaction would be, I answered, "Yes, of course!" Her response was to my surprise: "Oh, really?" She really thought that everybody in Holland smokes marijuana.

I'm not offended when somebody says something stupid about Holland. I realize that I know more about America than the average American knows about Holland or Europe. I think it has to do with the fact that you can choose if you want to take geography here. We at least have to take it for two to four years. The education system is so much different in America.

The classes in general you are able to take here are so weird for me because we just don't have them—psychology and photography, for instance— at a high school in Holland. I am taking a journalism class where the teacher is, by coincidence, my exchange program's local coordinator. Those classes are so much fun. In the Netherlands you wouldn't find a high school that offers driver's education because we have to be 18 to drive in Holland.

I really like it here so much. It takes a lot of adjustment, and sometimes I really think I'd be better off in Holland. But this year is an experience I will never forget. I definitely have a lot to tell my friends when I return home. Maybe I will even be wearing white socks in my sandals!

I'm not offended when somebody says something stupid about Holland. I realize that I know more about America than the average American knows about Holland or Europe.

Penninx was an AYA exchange student at Urbana High School for part of the 1996-97 school year. She had to return home to Holland early because of a family illness.

Mrs. Mullins
A Most Influential Mentor

By Hayley Ellis

My parents sent me to kindergarten when I was only 4. As a 4-year-old I encountered Mrs. Mullins, my 64-year-old kindergarten teacher—a spry, entertaining, tiny 64-year-old woman whose mission was to teach 4- and 5-year-olds about the joy there was in learning. Mrs. Mullins taught through the deep lines around her eyes that smiled every time she did. She taught with her steady hands that sat ready to reach out and help one of us tie our shoe or print our ABCs or lift ourselves up from a careless stumble. Everything about Mrs. Mullins gave our young minds glimpses of the amazing insight and knowledge she had into life.

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try again," I heard Mrs. Mullins say so often. Her words rolled in such an encouraging way that I now think of her whenever I hear that common phrase.

Though her body was old, her spirit never was. The hearing aids that adorned her ears served as a tool for her teaching.

"I can't hear you with my old ears," she would say with a chuckle, and we would have to speak uncomfortably loud and clear. Surely she heard our mumblings the first time, but she kindly insisted that we repeat ourselves until our request was clear, confident and polite.

"Ah ha! Well, let me see ..." Mrs. Mullins would always begin as she answered our questions in exuberant fashion. She would bounce around the room answering questions as if it was the only thing in the world she wanted to be doing.

Mrs. Mullins did not just teach inside the classroom. She used every opportunity to teach outside. Winter time was an adventure in Mrs. Mullins' world. The cross-country skis she used to get to school sat in the corner of the classroom waiting for Mrs. Mullins' small legs to direct them homeward after school.

"The best way to get from here to there is right through the snow," she smiled as she bundled herself in woolens and strapped on her skis. And while most of the teachers kept their classes inside the warm protection of the school walls, Mrs. Mullins ventured to take us outside in the white, wintry scene and show us how to make our own maple sugar candy.

"Remember, this is the kind of candy they had in 'Little House on the Prairie' books. Times were different back then, weren't they?" Mrs. Mullins succeeded in making us recall the vivid scenes of Laura, Mary, Ma and Pa and think of what it would have been like. We did not realize it, but playing in the snow was a history lesson. In our young minds, we all wondered if this old, wrinkled teacher of ours had actually known the family that lived in the Little House. We thought maybe she had been one of Laura's friends. After all, Mrs. Mullins did always say that she was "older than we could ever guess."

Even when Mrs. Mullins was on crutches with an injured leg, she made our days exciting and colorful.

"I can't let one old leg stop me. That's no excuse not to have fun!" she told the worried group of little kindergartners. On her crutches, she hobbled over to the out-of-tune piano where she sang with a somewhat wobbly voice, "O, say can you see. ..." She never hesitated to teach us our patriotic duties. She struggled to move around the room but made it to the little kitchen where she taught us to make the infamous "Stone Soup." "There really are stones in here," she whispered, her eyes twinkling. She loved to interest us in such "magical" things.

My kindergarten classroom was full of love, excitement, encouragement and respect. It was a room that overflowed with the irreplaceable qualities of the teacher it possessed. It was Mrs. Mullins' love of life that made her classroom a haven for me and all kindergartners who knew her. She was one of the most youthful, blissful and influential mentors I have ever encountered.

Ellis is an Urbana High School junior.

A Bluegrass

A Private Celebration Of A Traditional Music

By James Lyons

FOR THE PAST 15 YEARS, a trio of friends in central Illinois has been hosting an annual, private celebration of traditional Bluegrass music for what has grown into a few hundred friends in a large, wooded back yard belonging to one of them.

It all started years ago when Milt, Chuck and Bill lamented the modern shift in country music and longed for the more traditional sounds. They found what they were looking for in Bluegrass music and became "hard-core fans," according to Bill.

The way they ended up hosting their own music festival was sort of on a dare. The three agreed it could be fun, but they also realized they'd probably never have the time to actually do it. But just for the sake of discussion, they outlined the duties and who would do what.

Soon, they found themselves making plans for real, and Chuck had created an invitation announcing a Bluegrass, Clogging & Brats Fest with the disclaimer: "Not the first annual, but could be. ..."

The initial guest list for the by-invitation-only affair included some musicians and a few friends, a sort of impromptu jam session and party.

"Good musicians just like to play," Bill said, explaining that the get-together was simply an opportunity for Bluegrass lovers to casually get together and enjoy the music.

Over the years, the musicians extended invitations to more of their families and friends, and Milt's, Chuck's and Bill's lists kept growing. People have come from as far away as New England, Florida, California and even Hawaii. A number of the performers were already accomplished Bluegrass musicians or have since achieved quite of bit of notoriety for their talent.

Last year's event was a beautiful, early fall day when the music and the clogging performances got underway in the early afternoon. Families and friends sat on lawn chairs and benches or just on blankets as they listened or sang along or visited with one another. Children of various ages ran about with happy abandon, weaving in and out of the adults in their way. A small group of men stood watch over a large, black pot loaded with simmering bratwurst and onions and a few secret ingredients. Some other men operated an apple press and made fresh cider for everyone. Tables that filled a large screened-in porch area were covered with potato salads, baked beans, cakes and cookies, chips, vegetable dishes, etc.,—all potluck contributions from attendees. And a roaring bonfire in the evening took just enough off of the slight chill in the air as people gradually called it a day ... until next time.

The time is just too special and enjoyable to even imagine that there won't be another gathering the following year.

To hear Bill tell it, though, it seems there's always some question year to year as to whether the three friends will be able to pull off another Bluegrass, Clogging and Brats Fest. But then Bill said some of their musician friends will inevitably call to inquire about the next one and, should they hear any hint of doubt, will simply inform their hosts that they're coming anyway.

— Vanessa Faurie

THE JOURNEY FROM Chicago, Ill., to Knoxville, Tenn., when you go by way of the Greyhound, is a grueling, 24-hour ordeal, one which is exacerbated by the boisterous antics of the other passengers aboard, most of whom tend to be lower-income Southerners escaping from the big city and glad to be wending their way home. The day-long length of the trip is because of the fact that the bus driver does not speed down Interstate 75, as one might prefer, but rather stops in every small town, hamlet and village along U.S. Route 25.

Rolling through the undulating hill country of Kentucky, the "Bluegrass State," the bus provides the primary transportation service to the residents of Pine Hill, Hazel Patch, Wildie and other country towns. In urgent need of a rest stop, then, a traveler aboard this bus unexpectedly finds himself disembarking in the remote village of Renfro Valley, Ky. As it turns out, the passengers aboard this Greyhound bus are not the first to find themselves as unexpected visitors to this town.

The vagaries of time and place are key players in the drama that surrounds the establishment of musical styles and centers of musical activity, especially when one considers the development of various indigenous, "folk" musics. This is the significance of Renfro Valley. As itinerant musicians, championing the cause of country and western music, as well as the recently established phenomenon known as "bluegrass," found themselves arriving in this small community, for one reason or another, Renfro Valley found itself becoming a burgeoning center of musical activity. The village boasted a country music festival, or barn-dance, otherwise

Time & Place

known as an "opry," which drew performers and visitors from miles around. That it was not destined to retain this position of musical prominence is a matter of history, one which could not have been foreseen by the musicians at the time. But for some accidents of time and place, Renfro Valley could have emerged as a musical mecca, perhaps not to the same degree as a town such as Nashville, Tenn., but, nevertheless, one which would have been influential in the conservation of a folk musical style. Instead, Renfro Valley has had to content itself with the smaller-scale bluegrass festivals, those which peripherally attract the summer traveler in search of music along the southern interstates.

This situation, of course, continues to manifest itself even today, as the number of small towns which host country music festivals does not seem to diminish. On the northern outskirts of Fayette, Ala. (a town of 7,000 which serves as the county seat of the still largely Confederate-minded Fayette County), a sign standing alone in the tree-lined margin of one of the community's many cotton fields advertises the Saturday night "Opry," a weekly get-together which occurs in a barn that is almost impossible to find.

This is not the "Opry" of Renfro Valley, however; this is a locally-oriented jam session which attracts musicians from around the area, people who you might see day-to-day during the week (or someone sees them anyway), but people that you are always surprised to discover actually live among us when they make their public appearance on Saturday night. These are not the "entertainers" of Renfro Valley; these are the "folk" of Fayette.

Farther down I-75 from Renfro Valley, in Knoxville, Tenn., radio station WNOX can only dream of what might have been, as it likewise experienced a "boom-and-bust" in its quest for musical fame. A weekly broadcast from the WNOX studios (a building which bears a great resemblance to a large barn) achieved great notoriety as it was broadcast into the night along those AM wavelengths which traveled vast distances, only to find a home in the automobiles of nocturnally wandering salesmen and others who traveled the night highways. But destiny was not to remain in Knoxville's favor, as station WSM in the middle-Tennessee city of Nashville was soon to establish the "Grand Ole Opry," a musical extravaganza which was later to eclipse the power of WNOX. And so it goes.

And so it does go, on and on. What is it about the special conjunction of time and place that gives rise to musical performance, to venues that endure or don't endure, to the uniquely human function of creating and arranging musical sounds in the presence of others? Is it something that causes other people to attend, to travel, to arrive, to want to share? Or is it just the sheer power of the sound which emanates from the place?

When three men decide to gather musicians together at a home secluded in the woods near a central Illinois town, only to discover that they are successful at this for 15 years running, how does one go about describing the significance of this event?

When the "Grand Ole Opry" first broadcast the sounds of a country barn dance from a Nashville hotel room in 1925, it is doubtful that anyone could have imagined that this particular conjunction of time and place would have gone on to become the phenomenon it is today. Performers such as Uncle Jimmy Thompson, Dr. Humphrey Bate and the Possum Hunters, and the Fruit Jar Drinkers brought a notoriety to the program that set the stage for the musical innovations which were to come when Bill Monroe joined the show. (Thanks, by the way, to Robert Cantwell and his book, "Bluegrass Breakdown," for this and subsequent information and insights.) When Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys (consisting of Chubby Wise, Earl Scruggs, Lester Flatt and Howard "Cedric Rainwater" Watts) brought their new style of "bluegrass music" to the Grand Ole Opry in 1945, this sound spread like wildfire around the country, from urban to rural areas alike.

And now we are together in central Illinois, when modern-day country music stars such as Allison Krause have come to this small gathering in the woods, and have since left. The music heard by the attendees at this mini-festival consisted of traditional bluegrass fiddle tunes and finger-picking guitar, but was certainly not confined to bluegrass alone. A particularly interesting set of cowboy music was offered up by a local trio, replete with yodels à la Jimmie Rodgers, and provided a colorful juxtaposition of time and place, especially when considered in the context of the impromptu jam sessions which were taking place by the trees around the periphery of the performance area.

The clawhammer banjo style eventually made its appearance, echoing the innovations of Bill Monroe in his mandolin playing, and more than one vocalist subdued the crowd with the re-telling in song of a traditional Appalachian-Scotch ballad, a tale of love lost through an act of murder, down by the riverside.

The spirit of Bill Monroe seemed to hang over the site, though no one seemed particularly beholden to the man. His memory was invoked by one of the organizers of the event, as he related an anecdote, originally told to him by Monroe himself, of how the bluegrass pioneer was able to roll two 55-gallon steel drums by himself while working with his brothers at the Sinclair refinery in Gary, Ind., during the Great Depression. The speaker attempted to tie this tale into the musical proceedings, saying that anyone who could roll two drums and play at 180 beats to the minute was someone worthy of our admiration. True, perhaps, but the musicians who followed this speaker with the country standby "Somebody Robbed the Glendale Train" did not seem to be timid about supplying their own musical interpretation, as the expansiveness and the unique timbre of their vocal sound echoed into the woods surrounding the stage, while the small golden leaves, signifying the just recently arrived autumn, fluttered from the trees and spun down around them.

The evening ended up with the group that had traveled the farthest to be there that night, a quartet from Terre Haute, Ind. These musicians were probably the greatest traditionalists to appear, offering up the closest rendition of the Monroe sound yet heard that day, echoing the strains that originally wafted along the airwaves, from Knoxville and Nashville, to Renfro Valley and Fayette. This group was relatively well-traveled, appearing at events presumably larger than this one, but they seemed comfortable and at-ease with the ambience of this particular time and place. They played that night not to a festival audience, an audience with tickets in hand, but to a gathering of friends, albeit some of whom were meeting each other for the first time, all quietly reveling in the unique sounds of bluegrass music in an east-central Illinois backyard.

Allison Krause did not appear, as she has not for several years. Her parents were there, however, as they have been since their daughter was a small girl, toting her fiddle alongside. One cannot hold time still, as it moves inexorably on, sometimes at the pace of 180 beats to the minute. Time does move on, but the place remains, and the music continues to be made. This is, perhaps, the true essence of music-making: that the human element of seemingly chance events, events which bring all these individuals together, must move on, but that the space occupied by the unique combination of rhythm, pitch and timbre known as "bluegrass" persists.

The 15th Annual Bluegrass, Clogging & Brats Fest featured excatly what it promised--Bluegrass music from regional musicians, clogging groups and a big kettle of bratwurst, with all the trimmings courtesy of the scores of guests who brought a dish to share. A couple of Belgian horses also were on hand to give wagon rides through the countryside.

Photos by Vanessa Faurie

James Lyons teaches music in Urbana School District 116 and is a Ph.D. candidate in music education at the University of Illinois.

Diary of a Japanese Journey

By Erika N.L. Harold

Japan is a country that baffles and mystifies many Americans because of the differences in language and culture. Last summer, however, I had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience Japan for myself when I embarked upon a two-week study trip of the country whose language I'd studied been studying for four years. But no amount of studying and planning prepared me for encountering the beauty, loyalty and tradition that is Japan.

I kept a diary of the notable experiences I was privileged to partaking of while in Japan. The following are some excerpts from that diary:

In Kyoto

We went downtown and visited some department stores. The clothing was very unique and fashionable. The people were dressed extremely trendily. Most of them looked as if they had just stepped off a fashion show runway. People wore high platform shoes, shiny, clingy fabrics and high socks. A lot of people had reddish-colored hair. I had expected people to be dressed more uniformly and conservatively, but I was wrong. Individuality in dress was prevalent in the attire of many.

We also visited a rock garden. It was a very spiritual experience for me. The small rocks were neatly smoothed out, and they were in small rows. About five big rocks on moss set on top of the layer of small rocks. The garden was surrounded by lush, verdant plantings. The rain, which had been coming down all day, fell gently around us. It was very quiet; no one spoke.

The silence was permeated only by the sounds of the raindrops gently hitting the trees. As I sat observing this lovely and picturesque scene, I realized that it was a metaphor for life and particularly Japanese life. The garden was orderly and simple—the way that we'd like our lives to be, perhaps. Yet the garden was beautiful and lovely—what we'd wish our life experiences to be.

Next, we visited the largest wooden building in the world (a temple), and it housed the largest Buddha in the world. The sight was spectacular and almost indescribable. The Buddha was enormous. One finger was larger than the size of one 6-foot man. Behind it, and equally large, was a gold statue that served as a backdrop. I have never seen anything like it, and it should be added to the list of world wonders.

Itami City

I met Miki (the girl whose family with whom I'd be residing) and her father. Miki is a cheerful person, and she seemed happy to meet me. When I got to Miki's house, I was surprised to see a vending machine outside of their home. It turned out that they owned a rice shop, thus they made cold beverages available for purchase by their customers.

Miki then took me on a tour of her home. There were traditional Japanese rooms along with rooms that we'd call American style. The Japanese rooms were exquisite in design. Less was more. Simple, green wallpaper was on the walls along with pictures of Mount Fuji. Tatami mats lay on the floor and the family name was spelled out in pearls. Two brightly colored kimonos were also in the room.

Then, I met the rest of the family and sat down for dinner. I politely ate the raw fish that was served on the table. However, the raw miniature octopus with its head and all of its legs still attached, sat untouched by me.

After dinner, I had the opportunity to talk with the family. The father asked me about gangs, the Mafia and Al Capone's presence in Chicago. He also inquired about John Wayne and his legendary westerns. In my best Japanese, I tried to explain these things to him. However, my classes hadn't taught me the words to accurately describe some things, so it was rather challenging. But I think that he was finally able to understand what I was trying to say.

Harold in a traditional Japanese kimono

Eventually, we all went to bed. I slept on a futon that was exceedingly comfortable. What jitters I'd had about staying with a Japanese family (who didn't really speak much English) proved to be unfounded. They were a perfectly lovely and charming family who opened up their homes and hearts to me in a way that touched me deeply.

Itami High School

I rode a bicycle to school the next morning. In Japan, bicycles and cars share the roads. If you are unaccustomed to busy traffic, you are in for quite a scary experience. However, I made it to school unscathed.

Our study group then lined up outside of the gym as we prepared to march in and be formally introduced to the school and the students. A sea of ponderous faces looked toward us. They were smiling, waving and trying to get a good view of us.

Soon, the orchestra began playing "Washington Post" as we marched down the center aisle toward the stage. Once on the stage, the orchestra played "The Star Spangled Banner." With hand over heart, I stood before the students, very proud to be an American. In a foreign land, hearing your country's national anthem makes you realize just how lucky you are to be an American and live in a place that allows for you to have so many freedoms and opportunities.

After the ceremony and introductions were finished, we visited some of the classes. The students were eager to meet us. They shook our hands and smiled broadly. It didn't matter if they spoke English, sometimes a simple gesture can convey so much.

We spent the next day at the high school again and had more opportunities to interact with the students. I went to a speech class and asked the students questions and answered some of theirs. We spoke about music, hobbies and future goals.

I was surprised to find that they were all similar to my American friends. I suppose that no matter where one lives, there will be certain innate human characteristics that will be prevalent among teen-agers everywhere.

I also went to a calligraphy class. The students were practicing drawing the kanji for "I love you." After they had completed the task, some of the boys gave me their papers as a sign of friendship. I gave them my paper with my name and country written on it. I also attended an orchestra concert that the school put on.

Words cannot convey the remarkable talent that was possessed by the performers. The musicianship was phenomenal and amazing. They played as if they were professionals. I was speechless and dumbfounded as I watched these high school musicians far exceed my expectations for people their age.

Toward the end of the concert, I was asked as a representative of Illinois and America to present one of the lead performers with flowers.

The next morning, I awoke with an unmistakable feeling of sadness draped about my soul. This was the day I had to say goodbye to my host family and the students of Itami High School. It was something that I did not relish at all. In the few days that I had lived in my host family's home, I had formed bonds and friendships that I would always cherish.

We all spoke in Japanese and delivered farewell speeches during a ceremony at the school. I hoped that the students could understand me. They had all been so kind and hospitable. Their warm reception had given me hope that kindness and consideration of others still exists, despite what newspaper headlines may say.

The principal had asked me to sing "The Star Spangled Banner" for the students. I felt very honored to be singing our country's national song. When I got to, "Oh say does that star spangled ..." my heart beat faster and I was filled with pride and patriotism. After that, we walked down the aisle, and walked out of their sights forever. But hopefully, we will remain in their hearts and memories.

Tokyo

Tokyo is more modern in appearance than Kyoto. In Tokyo, lots of tall buildings climb toward the sky. There are also lots of department stores, expensive jewelry stores and American brand-name clothing stores. We went to see a temple and then went shopping in a place called Oriental Bazaar. I bought lots of presents for my family. Buying them made me very homesick, however.

We also visited the extraordinary Imperial Palace. We weren't able to go inside, so we had to be content with viewing just the outside. It was very beautiful, with the surrounding trees and lakes combining to form a very regal scene.

We spent a lot of the time in Tokyo attending lectures and musical performances. It provided the group with some time to reflect upon the many things and people we encountered.

While in Japan, I learned a lot of things. I expected to gain more knowledge about the history and culture of Japan. However, I didn't think that the people would have such a profound impact on me. Their kindness and efforts to make us feel welcome and comfortable was touching.

It was also refreshing to see how the elderly are treated in Japan. In America, people have a tendency to disregard the insights of the elderly once they reach a certain age. In Japan, the older you are, the more respect you are accorded and your advice is intently listened to and sought after.

Young people are very goal-oriented and think about and prepare for their futures in ways that might seem strange to many American students. I also learned that there are many different ways to do things and approach problems. However, different doesn't mean better or worse; it is just a deviation from what I'm used to.

The trip was more than a cultural excursion in which I learned more about a people and culture. I learned more about myself in the process.

Harold is a senior at Urbana High School who plans to attend the University of Illinois and major in broadcast journalism.

During their exchange trip to Japan, Urbana High School students Shannon Humes and Erika Harold (center) visit with students at Itami High School.

A dAy IN THE Life OF A DivorcE

BY KRISTI BROWNFIELD

I was reading on the couch in the living room when my mother and stepfather walked in. My mother asked me to leave the room.

Shrugging, I left and went to my bedroom and shut the door. I climbed into my loft bed and attempted to read. I was extremely nervous, sensing that something was wrong.

I couldn't really concentrate on the book I was reading, because a few of the words that my parents were saying were drifting into my bedroom from the living room right outside my door.

"We should ... tell her ... not now ... upset ... hard for her." All these words led me to one conclusion. Even if the dreaded "D" word never reached my ears, I knew it. Intuitively, something inside of me added up all the clues. Even to this day I do not know how I knew. My parents were getting a divorce.

As soon as I reached that conclusion, my breath started coming in hitches and tears slid down my cheeks, adding salt to my already open wounds.

Silently, so as not to disturb my parents, I lay on my bed in a misery that I cannot even attempt to describe in words.

Soon, but to me it seemed like an eternity, my parents called me out of my room. Even prepared for the worst, I was speechless at my mother's calm pronouncement.

"Steve and I are getting a divorce, Kristi. We just don't love each other anymore."

"I am going to move out this weekend. We'll get it finalized as soon as possible," Steve said, with as much composure as my mother had.

Closing my eyes to stop the tears that were once again forming, I uttered the only word I could.

"Oh."

The tension as well as the silence in the room were as hard and as tangible as concrete. We sat like that for God knows how long, languishing in our own private hells.

"May I be excused?" Not waiting for an answer, I picked up my coat and walked outside into the drizzle.

Outside, the day matched my mood. It was raining—not enough to be annoying, but enough that you would get wet if you were in the rain for an extended period of time. The sky was the kind of gray and overcast type that occurs when you are about to take a trip to some place really neat, and outside. The dreariness of my surroundings only served to depress me more.

Luckily, my Walkman was in my coat pocket so I wouldn't have to listen to the sound of my own thick voice as I told myself to calm down and deal with the situation. The radio came in fuzzy with a lot of interference, so I switched on the tape, not really knowing what it would be.

"Crazy World," by Tom Cochrane. A good tape, but with depressing songs. Just what I needed to listen to, something more depressing than my situation. Maybe I might even find some humor in what was going on.

"Oh, boy. This is going to be a doozy of a week. I wish I had some idea of what is going to happen." I said, realizing that the comfortable situation I had become used to would be torn apart shortly. I noticed that I was rounding the block onto Race Street. I hadn't really paid any attention to where I was going until then. I figured the best move would be to walk from Race to University and University to Lincoln and Lincoln to Main. Over and over again until I had control of my feelings enough to deal with the travesty at home.

Walking along, I realized a few things about myself, and my life.

Yes, they do not love each other. But that doesn't mean that they do not love me. Or that I have to stop loving Steve just because he and Mom are getting a divorce. If I did that, then I would be as much of a failure as their marriage turned out to be.

Even with this realization, it didn't stop the agony, the torment. Inside of me something had died. The wall I had so carefully constructed around my feelings to keep them in was demolished. I was a ruin, only a shell of what I had been just an hour ago. Nothing would change that.

Even now, more than three years after the fact, that ruin still exists. I may have built new walls, but they will never be as strong or as sturdy as the one that my parents massacred that day. I will never be the same. The agony will never stop. Inside of me, there will always be a 14-year-old girl who silently screams in protest at what is being told to her.

Going back into my home that day was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do. The courage I had to muster to walk up the steps and open the door is incredible in itself.

I could describe, as some people would, how time stood still. How I looked at my parents and suddenly knew everything would be all right. But that didn't happen. I walked into my living room, and my parents were still seated where they were when I had left.

An hour had passed while I was out walking. My mother's mouth was curled and her forehead was furled in worry. My stepfather sat impassive. His wall was evidently stronger than mine had ever been. I sat down.

Once again, the tension and the silence reigned supreme. I didn't want to speak for fear of the answer. And I'm sure that my parents felt the same way.

Closing my eyes, I sighed and uttered the five words that would change my life.

"What's going to happen now?" The answer came. Not the one I wanted to hear though.

"Steve will move out, and we will start over. Just you and me." My mother smiled weakly at me. It didn't make me feel any better, but I gave her credit for trying.

"Of course, you can come and see me anytime you want to."

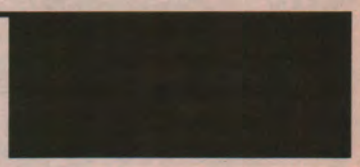
Steve's reply came quickly after my mother's statement.

Once again, I was speechless. Dumbfounded by the fact that my parents had to argue while I was in total misery. Were they completely oblivious to my pain? Why were they doing this? Wasn't a divorce bad enough? But they have to argue as they were telling me also? Why?

My questions were never answered. Over the years I have learned many things. I think I have changed significantly since that fateful day in April when my parents gave me an unexpected and unwanted gift. The greatest gift my parents gave me over the years was love.

On that day they gave me my greatest fault. Trust no one.

I THINK I HAVE CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY SINCE THAT FATEFUL DAY IN APRIL WHEN MY PARENTS GAVE ME AN UNEXPECTED AND UNWANTED GIFT.



Brownfield is a junior at Urbana High School who plans to graduate early and enroll at Columbia College to study animation and film.

Home of the Brave

By Kelsey Bankert

It was a miserable day. The sun blazed down on us without mercy, and my mother and I complained endlessly.

"How much longer is this going to take, Judd?" my mother peeked out from beneath her hand, held up to protect her eyes from the glaring sunlight.

Dad glanced at her with a vengeance, and she turned away again to peer down the valley below her. Dad walked over to the historical marker on his left and began to read it quietly to himself. I considered walking over to join him, but knew that a lecture about the marker would soon follow. So I walked to the edge of the hill and blinked my eyes at Little Round Top.

My father had tried to bring us here, to Gettysburg, Pa., for years.

"I don't see how touring old Civil War battlefields will be any fun for me or your daughter. Honestly, you could at least pick a vacation that we would all be interested in." My mother had been unrelenting that summer, so I don't know how he finally persuaded her. Maybe she did it out of kindness, my father had always been a Civil War buff, and she must have known how much it would mean to him to visit a place he'd only read about. Regardless, two weeks into July 1994, I found myself on a plane for Pennsylvania being quizzed about the first day of Gettysburg.

My father was obsessed with the art of war. He used to quiz me about the Civil War, and if I answered his question correctly, I would receive my allowance that week.

I was fairly annoyed with my father when we got there. After depositing our belongings in our hotel, we immediately rented a car and drove straight to the battlefields, less than three blocks away. It was only 4 p.m., and the next three hours were spent driving through mile upon mile of flat field with my father pointing out where things used to be and reading every marker aloud to us.

Mom and I were bored to tears. I expected a museum at least, or maybe just for Dad to go off by himself so Mom and I could go shopping. But he dragged us around with him everywhere. I paid as little attention to my surroundings and to Dad's lectures as possible.

We went back to the hotel, finally, to bathe and eat when my father suggested we attend an old Civil War sing-along to be held in the park's gazebo. My mother asked my father if he was crazy and said she had some TV to watch, but I envisioned my poor father sitting all alone and singing hopelessly out of pitch among 30 strangers and, boring as it sounded, I gave in.

It was a nice night and the gazebo was lit with paper lights of every color. We sat in the back row and listened to one of the rangers tell us about the history of the songs. The fireflies dashed in and out of the large open sides of the gazebo, and the summer wind blew reluctantly across our necks as we sang songs written by those long dead.

I turned to look at my father once and was surprised to see him quiet. I stopped singing, too, and listened. These were the words of the young men of the war. We heard songs like "Dixie" and "Bonnie Blue Flag," a Southern song so moving that a Northerner named Ben Butler, commander of the Union garrison that occupied New Orleans, had threatened to fine anyone who sang it because it would inspire the Southerners. The ranger played "John Brown's Body," a touching Northern marching song. After the war, a Southern major had listened to this song and said, "Gentlemen, if we'd had your songs, we would have licked you out of your boots."

The next day, *sans* Mother, with those songs still ringing in my head, I showed a bit of loyalty and accompanied my father to the battlefields again. About mid-afternoon, we came to Little Round Top again and the monument for the 20th Maine Regiment.

"Oh, the 20th Maine ..." my father crooned.

"Uh huh." I nodded. I'd never heard of it.

Before I even asked, my father had launched into the story. I watched the monument, half-listening, and as he continued, my ears perked up. The 20th Maine had been the last of four regiments to be sent in on the second day of Gettysburg to defend Little Round Top from advancing Southern forces.

The 20th was hopelessly outnumbered—300 men were ordered to protect the extreme left of an army of 80,000 "at all costs." They had no choice. Had Little Round Top been taken, the Union Army Top would have been flanked, giving General Lee's army a great victory. The Confederates drove the 20th back at least five times and within an hour and a half, 40,000 rounds had been shot off, gnawing trees in half up and down the hillside.

"At times I saw more of the enemy than my own men," the 20th's Col. Chamberlain said later. A third of Chamberlain's men had fallen, and they were running out of ammunition.

Assuming that the Southerners had surrounded the hill by this time, Chamberlain knew they must advance, outnumbered by a factor of 10, or retreat. He ordered his men to fix bayonets, and as the right half of the regiment held, the left half swung down the hillside like a great gate.

The Confederates were so surprised at the charge that some surrendered where they stood and others turned and ran. Little Round Top held.

"The regiment we fought and captured was the 15th Alabama," a Union soldier wrote. "They said they never were whipped before, and never wanted to meet the 20th Maine again."

"That's one of my favorite stories from the Civil War," my father said.

"Me, too," I sighed.

I looked up at the marble statue in front of us. Someone had laid a wreath of flowers along the side of it, and they were wilting under the sun. Looking up at the hill before me, I envisioned the troops swinging down through the mass of forest, trampling over the bed of leaves covering the hill.

My father's fascination with the war had always been centered on the men involved. He was awed by their acts of selfless bravery during battle and how ordinary men could become heroes in a matter of minutes.

I envisioned Col. Chamberlain and wondered what it was that turned him into one. Had he just been blindly following orders, to hold the hill "at all costs"? Was he willing to sacrifice his own men, try such a risky charge, just to follow orders? Or did he think of his brothers, both enlisted in the 20th Maine, of the land they were fighting for, and home? Did he hear the gentle notes of "John Brown's Body" and cry inwardly for the Union?

"I can't believe," my father said finally, "that Chamberlain was so brave."

We shuffled down the path back to the car, and I watched the leaves on the ground before me. I knew that the Civil War had been the first time our democracy had been truly challenged. Our very government had been in jeopardy. Half of our country had already denounced it.

Chamberlain couldn't have known how important his victory was, couldn't have known that our nation would become a great world power, and that other countries would mimic our government some day. He was doing his duty as a soldier, for his men, for his home.

"I guess anyone can be a hero," I said as we pulled away in the car.

"Not anyone," my father replied. "Everyone."

Any man can be a hero as long as he has a cause to fight for. What better cause than freedom? Than liberty? Than democracy? Chamberlain wasn't looking to become a hero, but in protecting what he knew to be right, he became one. Where else but in America? Where else but here is there a government that provides so much freedom and hope that people will die for it?

The next day was July fourth, and my mother, father and I attended the flag-raising at the entrance to the battlefields. As the flag was raised in the early morning haze, the band struck up and I heard my father, hopelessly out of tune, next to me.

"... and the home of the brave."

Never has anything been more true.

Photo by Brent Faklis

A marker at the Gettysburg Battlefield gives a brief description of the 20th Maine Regiment's fate.

Bankert is a junior at Urbana High School.

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My Struggle

The Joy and Pain of a Recovering Intellectual

By Hadley Beth

It has been said that the insults which hurt the most are the ones which are true.

After years of failing to get under my skin, my younger brother finally gave me an insult one summer which was true enough to actually hurt. He said that when I talked, I sounded "like a professor."

On the surface, this may not seem so bad. But you must understand that I had just finished my second year of college and was weary of being in discussions where intellectual, academic types use big words for no apparent reason and over-analyze small statements of prose to the point that they are too confusing to understand at all.

Any of my humanities professors could, and often would, take a statement such as "apples taste good" and give it an interpretation like the following: "Here, the author is affirming an age-old paradigm. She asserts that the apple, either red, yellow, green or an amalgam of the three--conjuring images of post-renaissance fruit salads and ancient Roman cinnamon desserts—is objectively appealing to the subjective aesthetic of our sense of taste. The incommensurability of subjectivity and objectivity is thus thrust together provocatively in a keen parody of a trite three-word phrase, which she ultimately embraces and simultaneously rejects."

Up until one week after my brother's stinging remark, I had considered myself to be above this silliness. I thought I was one of the good guys—someone who just said what he meant and did not worry about impressing others with academic fodder. It took an odd experience at work to make me realize that I was turning into the very thing which I had previously shunned.

Coming back and working in my hometown that summer allowed me to experience Urbana, Illinois, from a different perspective. Before, Urbana was the place that I played Little League and basketball as a child. It was the town which we later drove around on Saturday nights, and the town which the "U" on my jacket stood for.

Suddenly I was viewing Urbana from the driver's seat of a 16-ton powder-blue tree truck. As the only part-time employee of the city forestry department, I was required to drive it around town constantly, looking for potential tree problems. Instead of going to high school chemistry class, I was climbing trees. Rather than going to University of Illinois sporting events, I was pruning trees. Instead of working my previous summer job at central Illinois' only waterslide, I was using a 3-foot chainsaw to cut down trees.

My post-high school life in Urbana definitely seemed to have more to do with trees than I would have expected.

My experiences that summer were not limited to learning about the trees in Urbana. I also learned a good deal about some residents who were markedly different from my high school classmates. Primarily, I worked with a burly 40-year-old guy named Ted who had been doing tree work for 12 years. At first it seemed he and I didn't have much in common. Ted liked Harley-Davidson motorcycles, Red Man chewing tobacco and beer. He hated everything else.

As a result, many of our first conversations were limited to Harleys, Red Man and beer. I didn't learn much from the last two subjects mentioned, but I can say with pride that I can now give a rough estimation of when any Harley was made, take a good guess at its net value, and differentiate between a soft-tail and a fat-back just by looking at the shocks.

After several weeks, Ted also talked a good deal about how much he despised our boss, Willie, because Willie was always initiating new plans in a feeble attempt to make us work harder.

Eventually, Ted and I got to be good friends, and he also taught me a great deal about tree work. So please do not think of me as too elitist when I tell you that Ted had a working vocabulary of six words—five of which shouldn't be printed in this article. The sixth word, strangely, was "lozenge," although Ted never had any lozenges with him, nor did he ever complain of any throat problems.

Ted also had one phrase, "a monkey beating a chicken," which he used to describe a variety of situations. If Willie didn't give Ted the time off he wanted, it was a monkey beating a chicken. If Ted had a bad hand at cards, it was a monkey beating a chicken. If we didn't get a job done in time, it was a monkey beating a chicken.

Sometimes if Ted got really mad or excited, he would sputter off a nonsensical and extended variation of the phrase, for instance: "MONKEY ... DAMN RABBIT-CHICKEN ... BEATING A DAMN CHICKEN-RABBIT-MONKEY-CHICKEN-MONKEY!"

With this in mind, you can imagine my surprise when one day Ted, a high school dropout, said something which, in my mind, was chock-full of intellectual stimulation and literary profundity.

Willie had come up with another plan and had told it to Vince, another co-worker, who relayed the message to Ted. The plan concerned us getting time off for meeting quota on tree removals for a given number of days in a row. Ted always disregarded Willie's plans and thought Willie should not interfere in our work, but he also saw this particular plan as a way to exploit his employer and get some free time off. When Willie entered the room, Ted inquired about the plan although he had just heard it from Vince.

"I already done told you that," said Vince impatiently.

"I know," replied Ted, "but I wanted to hear it from the horse's own peturd."

I spent the rest of the working day thinking about what Ted had meant by the phrase "from the horse's own peturd." I thought about it while driving the huge tree truck and again when I was sweating inside my hard hat as I fed branches into the chipper and loaded logs, and even during our card game at lunch.

I thought about it like a professor: analyzing every connotation of each word in his cryptic phrase. At first glance, one might think that Ted had meant to say "straight from the horse's mouth," meaning that he wanted to hear Willie's plan directly from its originator.

However, the phrase he used also sounded similar—too similar for coincidence—to that famous quote from Shakespeare's "Hamlet": "hoist on his own petard." This also seemed to be an apt quote for comparison. In the context of "Hamlet," the phrase meant that the king's own scheme is what led to his undoing. In our case, Willie's plan would also lead to his undoing, since Ted intended to simply use the plan as a way to get free time off without doing more work.

I spent an hour and a half wondering if Ted, who claimed never to have read any literature besides *Easy Rider* magazine, could somehow have subconsciously absorbed enough Shakespeare to have it influence his speech once every few years. Finally, I wondered what the significance was in changing the last word, "petard," into "petur d."

It occurred to me that Ted wanted to give the connotation that, like a turd, Willie's plan smelled. It would not have been enough for him to say that Willie's plan would lead to his undoing, since that didn't really get at the heart of Ted's concern. By saying "petur d," Ted implied that Willie's plan was excremental and "crappy," or more literally, that it was something Willie had pulled out of his rear end.

To say the least, by the end of the day I was amazed at how much meaning and depth Ted could convey with one five-word statement. I was also, for the time being, content with my intellectual ability to analyze accurately his complex statement. Perhaps college was teaching me something worthwhile after all.

But as we were punching our time cards at the end of the day, I knew that I needed to verify my interpretation with Ted. If he had meant something entirely different, my brother's insult would ring true— it would mean that I did just talk pretentiously, or at least think, like a professor.

"Ted," I asked tentatively, "what did you mean earlier when you said that you wanted to hear Willie's plan from the horse's own peturd?"

"What?"

"You said that you wanted to hear Willie's plan from the horse's own peturd?"

"What are you talkin' about?"

Amazing, I thought, he doesn't even appreciate his own innate genius. I decided to try once more.

"Okay," I said. "Just tell me what you think of Willie's idea."

Ted looked up at me, and from the look in his eyes I knew what he would say. My brother was right. I was interpreting and analyzing and using fancy-pants words when there was entirely no need for it. I was becoming like my professors— but worse. Instead of using intellectualism in a classroom or on a term paper, I was using it while punching out a time card in a warehouse in the center of the 200-acre mulch dump where we worked.

"Willie's idea," said Ted, pausing to spit out an oily glob of tobacco, "is a monkey beating a chicken."

Editor's Note: *When Beth graduated from Urbana High School, he still owed English teacher Ray Elliott a piece of writing. His mother offered this one after she and her son had a talk about his outstanding debt.*

The Last Word

Criticism without knowledge helps no one

By Ray Elliott

"I never saw anybody better themselves by criticizing someone else," my grandfather used to tell me long ago when I'd make a derogatory comment about one of our neighbors or a kid down the road. "Runnin' off at the mouth doesn't help you, especially if there's nothing to what you say."

Like a lot of other things he told me back in those days, I paid little attention to what he said and went right on saying whatever I wanted to say about whomever I wanted to say it. Still do sometimes, although over the years I've come to realize the wisdom of his words.

Awhile back, for example, I let the paid advertisements of a Champaign (IL) resident who has some kind of vendetta against people who live in Urbana, where I live and teach, get under my skin. This persnickety nincompoop writes scathing indictments of the people who live in Urbana, calls them "bozos" and tells the bozos how stupid they are for living in such an inferior city, paying higher taxes than those living in surrounding areas and turning out kids with lower test scores than students elsewhere.

(Urbana High School has four National Merit Scholars this year. These are selected by committees of professionals who consider academic records, test scores, personal achievements and principal or counselor recommendations. Champaign's two high schools together had six, and University High School, the University of Illinois laboratory school had seven, four of whom reportedly came up through the Urbana school system.)

The nincompoop runs ads regularly in the *Champaign-Urbana News-Gazette* that berate and criticize just about everything and everybody connected with Urbana. One of these paid logorrheas and jeremiads has the headline "Urbanaeus Taxpayerus Ignoramus (UTI)–" and then defines the UTI in critical, judgmental terms in dictionary fashion: "(a) a species of low savvy concerning civic matters ..." And so on.

A recent ad headlined "Vote by 1 Apr (sic) for the Urbana Bozo of 1996!!" listed nominations for the 1997 Urbana Bozo, submitted, the ad claimed, by "Urbana employees and others." The Urbana High School girls' basketball team had apparently been nominated because of its lengthy losing record but "was disqualified for recent victories."

At Christmas time this past year, one of his *soi-disant* ads was headlined "Even Santa Claus Shuns Urbana" and uses words like "mean-spirited," "dumb" and "stupid" to describe laws and plans in Urbana. The ads always carry the following information at the end: "(Paid advertisement, CKG Co., 328-4711, M. Fuerst, Chmn.)"

So forgetting my grandfather's sage advice, I called the chairman not once but several times. I had some things I wanted to say to him, some questions I wanted to ask him. He never answered the phone, but I left several messages with my questions.

That was more than two years ago, and I still haven't heard a word from him. But with what information I had and his ads, I wrote a column that goes out to several newspapers. Although some papers ran the column, the *News-Gazette* did not.

Knowing how critical and judgmental I undoubtedly was of the chairman and his comments and how sensible the editors are at the *News-Gazette*, I'm sure the decision was made not to run the column because someone there had heard the same advice my grandfather had given me. And I appreciate the fact that I wasn't given the opportunity to stoop to that fellow's level of criticism in a way that would have hurt me more than it helped me.

I do wish the chairman would channel his criticism into something that would redound more favorably to the community and back it up with a few bucks rather than making himself look so much like a fool and providing the *News-Gazette* with unnecessary revenue and controversy. He'd look a lot more like a hero than an ass and might help improve some of the things that are less than perfect in the Urbana community and the Urbana school system.

And then there's the point of view from the other side. That's the perception that many Urbana residents have about a conspiracy that the *News-Gazette* is out to make Champaign schools look like a professor's theoretical model of the perfect educational system and Urbana schools look like real inner-city failures in education.

One of the examples these people use is that Urbana students are always singled out in police crime stories as Urbana students whether an alledged infraction of the law is connected to school behavior or it happened in the community. And students were identified as being of one school or another a few years back, but the practice was discontinued some time ago. That can be verified by simply reading the newspapers regularly.

Still, many Urbana residents believe there is a conspiracy by the *News-Gazette* to make Urbana schools and students seem more violent and unruly than they really are and receive less positive coverage in the media. These claims have been based on the fact that students faced with legal problems show up in the news identified as Urbana students regularly while they don't in Champaign.

Some Urbana residents say this is because the reporters' and editors' "kids go to Champaign schools" and these journalists want the schools their children attend to appear safer and better. Reporters and editors that I have spoken with about this perception are aware of the claims.

"Yeah," one reporter said, "we've got quite a 'cottage industry' going at the paper to make Urbana look bad. That's all we've got to do."

An editor laughed and said, "You can tell them over in Urbana that we're probably not above a conspiracy, but we simply don't have the time to pursue one."

Regular reading of the *News-Gazette* over the last several years or looking at back issues will bear out that given the size of the schools and the number of young people, coverage of sports and school events are about equal. But the same research will bear out that Urbana students have had their names in the paper more often over the years for crimes committed in school than have Champaign students, although the latter schools have nearly twice as many students as Urbana schools.

A bit more investigation will explain this disparity. Both school systems have police officers assigned to them and to individual buildings. In Urbana, when an infraction occurs that requires police involvement, a report is written and filed at the police station where it is entered in a computer and made available to beat reporters for release and compliance with the public's right to know. (Names of minors are withheld if the case goes to juvenile court where names are not released to the media or to the public.)

In past years at Champaign schools (I have been told that that has changed this year and have seen evidence that it has), when an infraction occurred that required police involvement, the case was handled as an investigation and no report was filed while the investigation was ongoing. And when a report was filed, the hard copy was available long after the timeliness of the incident had passed.

Urbana police officers have often said that the computers made their department's reports available more quickly than Champaign police reports. Beat reporters say there are advantages to both systems. While the Urbana Police Department reports may be available more quickly, the reporter only gets to see what was entered in the computer from the original document.

At the Champaign Police Department, the reporter previously got to see only the original report from which to take the relevant information. That information went to the reporter unedited.

All of this may be a moot point now since the Champaign department has reportedly gone to a computer system (that is said to have some glitches and is not always operational), and Champaign schools no longer have the public relations luxury of having reports filed as investigations. And with everything on an even keel, the public's right to know what's happening in our schools and in our communities will no longer be infringed upon by anybody.

My grandfather was no doubt on target when he said he'd never seen anyone better themselves by criticizing someone else.

What I hope has come across here is that many things would be better off with a bit of investigation before making all kinds of wild accusations. My grandfather was no doubt on target when he said he'd never seen anyone better themselves by criticizing someone else. That's particularly true if you don't know what you're talking about.

With that in mind, it seems to me that we should be more concerned with bettering ourselves regardless of which side of Wright Street we live or where we live in the world, period. Our money and our time can be better spent trying to make things a little better rather than putting somebody down or getting even with them for some real or imagined hurt.

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