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wisconsin academy review

THE MAGAZINE OF WISCONSIN THOUGHT AND CULTURE

100 Years of Lorine Niedecker

A Tribute to
Wisconsin Poet
Lorine Niedecker,
by John Lehman

David Maraniss on
Vietnam and the
War at Home

Bugs on the Wall!
The Insect Art of
Jennifer Angus

Short Story and
Poetry Contests:
A Call to Entry

The Fish Man
of Wisconsin:
A Remembrance

Grandfather

advised me:

Learn a trade

I learned

to sit at desk

and condense

No layoff

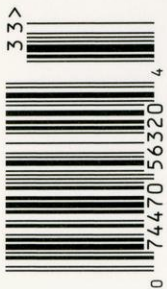
from this

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"Poet's work"
by Lorine Niedecker (1903-1970)

Price: \$5



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fall 2003

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UW-Madison, 1967.

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George Becker lives on as the god of Wisconsin ichthyology (fish studies, for the uninitiated). Erik Ness on a groundbreaking scholar and unforgettable character.

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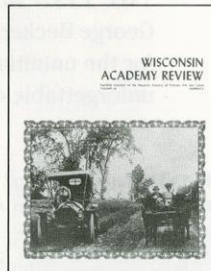
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We needed a strong, independent judiciary in our nation's founding days—and we still need one today. An essay by Wisconsin Supreme Court Chief Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson, who is also a Fellow of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. This new department features an essay by a Fellow in every issue.

Past and Present

“One of the most serious gaps in our knowledge of nature is in the mechanics and biology of flowing water—the river systems. Can we, in our present ignorance, afford to hit rivers with massive doses of poisons?”

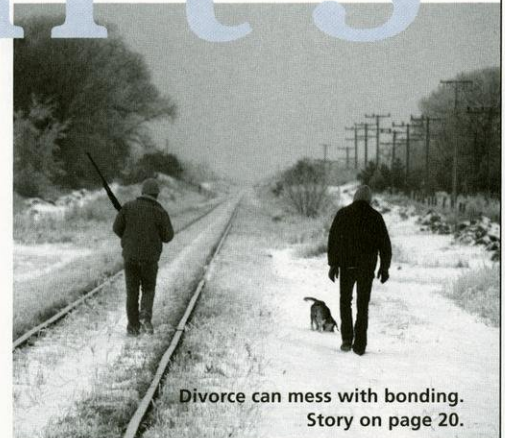
—The late George Becker, then curator of fishes at UW–Stevens Point, warning against use of the fish toxicant antimycin in the spring 1973 issue of the *Wisconsin Academy Review*.



You can learn more about George Becker on page 46—and more about the Wisconsin Academy's work on water in the Waters of Wisconsin Report. You can view the report at www.wisconsinacademy.org. It is available as a book for \$10 (or **free of charge** to Wisconsin Academy members, including those who join now). Call 608/263-1692 ext. 10 or visit our website to order a copy.

The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters connects people and ideas to create a better Wisconsin. We were founded in 1870 as an independent, nonprofit membership organization, separate from the state and the university. Our mission is “to encourage investigation, disseminate knowledge, and promote integrated application of sciences, arts and letters to preserve and further develop Wisconsin's heritage of cultural and natural resources.”

Enrich your life by becoming a member! Find out more on page 8.



Divorce can mess with bonding. Story on page 20.

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Horror in the jungle



I can't remember the last time I picked up a work of nonfiction that read so much like a novel. *They Marched Into Sunlight*, David Maraniss' new book about the Vietnam War and the Madison protests, made the war hit home for me in a way no other account has—and not because of its Madison focus, but because of the detailed, compelling writing about the fighting in Vietnam. Apparently my

response was typical. As Maraniss notes in an interview beginning on page 10, he keeps hearing that non-veterans were most interested in the Vietnam scenes while former soldiers were taken by the protests at home. The images from Vietnam are still with me vividly weeks after reading. Not to spoil any surprises, but you will probably never hear the song "Knock on Wood" the same way again. If there's any justice, this book will add more awards to Maraniss' already impressive collection.

You can hear Maraniss and some other excellent writers—Grace Paley, Tim O'Brien, Elizabeth Berg, poet laureate Billy Collins, and many leading Wisconsin authors among them—at the Wisconsin Book Festival in Madison October 22–26. Maraniss will speak at the Orpheum Theatre the afternoon of **Sunday, October 26**. Visit www.wisconsinbookfestival.org for the latest information on this and other events.

Same as last year, the Book Festival includes readings by the winners of the *Wisconsin Academy Review* short story and poetry contests. We'll gather on **Saturday, October 25, 4 to 6 p.m. at the Café Montmartre** (127 E. Mifflin Street, Madison). Hope to see you there! In the meantime, you can enjoy the second-place story by Nick Rydell starting on page 20.

CLEANING UP OUR ACT

"Politics aren't pretty, and they sure aren't clean. What happened to the days of civil disagreement and gentlemen's debate?" This question is posed by members of Wisconsin's Cultural Coalition as we embark on a new initiative aimed at improving political discourse. "**A More Perfect Union**" will feature a kickoff panel discussion with writers and political leaders from the right and left (organized by the Wisconsin Humanities Council) at the Wisconsin Book Festival on the afternoon of **Sunday, October 26**. The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters and our partners in the Cultural Coalition—Wisconsin Public Television, Wisconsin Public Radio, the Wisconsin Humanities Council, the Wisconsin Arts Board, the Wisconsin Historical Society, and UW Extension—will each bring our expertise and types of programming to the

table in exploring how to make politics more substantive and bring more integrity to the political process. The initiative will run from October to the November 2004 presidential elections, and include coverage and other relevant programming by Wisconsin Public Television and Wisconsin Public Radio.

The Wisconsin Academy's first contribution comes in the winter issue of the *Review*, where we will publish an excerpt from Joseph Ellis' Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Founding Brothers*, an engaging, "warts and all" look at the ideals, conflicts, and compromises made in creating a new democracy. That book is the cornerstone of a program by the Wisconsin Humanities Council called "Wisconsin Reads." Wisconsin Reads offers a series of four books for discussion in light of the themes of *A More Perfect Union* by people at libraries and other venues around the state throughout the year. The series begins with Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*—the story of a politician ruined by a character-blighting revelation—followed by Ellis, *The Oresteia* by Aeschylus—to reinforce the notion that moral corruption in politics is nothing new—and wrapping up with *The Children's Story* by James Clavell, a

simple but chilling tale about thought control and the importance of independent thinking. A reading guide with discussion questions for the four books is available. Stay tuned to www.wisconsinhumanities.org for details.

A MORE PERFECT Union

YEAR OF WATER CELEBRATION

It's hard to believe, but Wisconsin's Year of Water is coming to a close. And we'd like to get together to share what we've learned and celebrate the many accomplishments of the Year of Water and the Waters of Wisconsin initiative. "Water, Community, and the Arts" features Lt. Gov. Barbara Lawton; a panel discussion about successful projects around the state tying together water and culture; an update on what Waters of Wisconsin has accomplished and where it is going; and a water-related musical presentation. The event takes place **Monday, November 3** at the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts in Brookfield. Visit www.wisconsinacademy.org for more information, or feel free to contact Shaili Pfeiffer at the Wisconsin Academy, tel. 608/263-1692 ext. 21.

Wishing you happy reading,

Joan Fischer
608/263-1692 ext. 16
jfischer@wisconsinacademy.org

MEET THE JUDGE

"On most Monday evenings for many years—right up to the time of his death, in fact—Judge Dupree, a dyed-in-the-silk Episcopalian, had tutored children in reading and math in that brick building. It was for this sort of thing—as well as for the fact that a number of his major opinions had come down on the side of the weak and the afflicted—that Judge Dupree, a Republican whom Richard Nixon appointed to the bench, was known, in certain circles, as Judge Dugood or Judge Dugoodly Two Shoes or Judge Duright If Your Idea of Right Is Left."

—Dwight Allen, from his new novel, *Judge*

He may not come down on the side of the weak and afflicted, but novelist Dwight Allen has agreed to be lead judge in the *Wisconsin Academy Review*/Harry W. Schwartz Bookshops Short Story Contest 2004.

A longtime editor at *The New Yorker*, Allen, who graduated from Lawrence University and now lives in Madison, has published two acclaimed novels, *The Green Suit* and *Judge* (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2003).

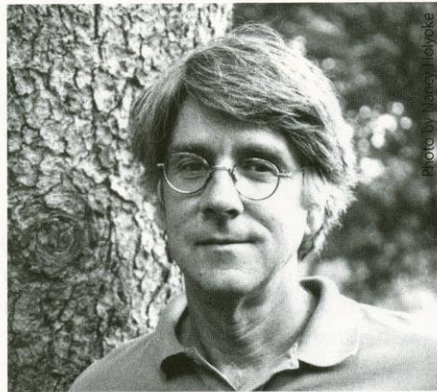
We asked Allen for his war stories and advice.

What makes for a good short story?

I'm not sure what thread connects one good story to another good story. Probably any story that holds us has in it what William Maxwell called "the breath of life." Sometimes it's the cleverness of the conceit or "idea" that grips us, sometimes it's the music of the language, sometimes it's the way character is revealed, sometimes it's the sublimeness of the humor. Often something about humanity has been disclosed in a surprising, striking way. We read different writers because while each one may give us what we want—beauty, tenderness, comedy, say—each one won't give it to us the way the other guy does.

Where, in your experience, do writers most often falter?

Well, each story has its own logic, its own pulse and impulse, its own ambitions, and so it's hard to generalize about what might have gone wrong when a story goes off the rails. But if I had to generalize, I would say that young writers—not to mention dog-eared veteran ones—seem to get lost, or to lose us, when they become self-conscious about what they are doing, when they start hearing voices say, "You can't do that, it violates Rule 2c in the workshop handbook," or, "That's been done, don't even bother," or, "You have to astonish them with something totally new."



What have you noticed and appreciated in writing from Wisconsin (and/or the Midwest)?

I have to admit that my reading of Wisconsin writers has not been very thorough. But I am a big fan of the late J.F. Powers, who taught at Marquette for some years and who wrote wry comedies about priests and nuns. The person who turned me on to Powers is Mark Dintenfass, a professor of English at Lawrence University—my alma mater—and the author of, among other good novels, *The Case Against Org*. I think *A Woman in Amber*, a memoir by the Latvian-born Madison writer Agate Nesaule, is a great book. I admire the stories of C. J. Hribal and Lorrie Moore.

Have you ever entered a writing contest yourself? How did you fare?

I suppose submitting stories to literary journals and magazines might be the equivalent of entering writing contests, and my file of rejections is quite a bit thicker than my file of acceptances. One of my stories was rejected 14 times before being accepted—and later becoming a finalist for a National Magazine Award. The moral of this little tale—and of no doubt countless others like it—is that there is an element of arbitrariness in the decisions of editors and contest judges, however conscientious those editors and contest judges may be.

What is the biggest challenge you encounter in your own writing process?

I tend to discover what I'm writing about in the course of writing it—I don't start with a map or even with much of a notion of where I'm going—and I sometimes find myself out to sea without an island in sight.

When I'm feeling confident, I'll strike out in one direction or the other and eventually wash up on some sort of shore. But confidence is not always easy to sustain, especially when writing long-haul sorts of things like novels. Sometimes it's necessary to start all over, which may mean throwing out stuff that you had thought was so wonderful—facing up to this isn't easy.

Any words of wisdom or encouragement?

I think for starters writers should follow their own instincts, hearts, obsessions, darkest fantasies, and when writing, try not to care too much what a reader (parent, spouse, teacher, fellow writer, contest judge) might make of the results.

SHAKING THEM UP DOWN UNDER

New UW–Madison faculty member Warwick Anderson caused a stir in his native Australia when his book *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* was published there last year.

Although most of the book discussed ideas about “whiteness” and racism in the context of the development of medicine and science, it also described experiments by medical researchers on Australia’s Aborigines in the 1920s and ’30s.

Anderson’s findings made headline news. An apology followed from Adelaide University, whose researchers had conducted tests designed to determine the racial origins of aboriginal peoples, including pain tolerance tests and the drawing of blood. The trials were subsequently denounced as “degrading,” in some cases “barbarous,” and scientifically unsound.

Another chapter recounted Australia’s “policy of absorption” that entailed removing children from their families, a topic treated in the recent feature film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*.

Aboriginal groups took up some of the issues in the book, organizing special programs and discussions, while in university circles academics planned major conferences on the book’s themes and encouraged new coursework and scholarship.

All the attention took Anderson, a physician and medical historian, by surprise. His book had been, in his words, an “excursion,” temporarily diverting him from his primary research interests in public health issues and tropical medicine, specifically in Southeast Asia. “It’s had a tremendous impact in Australia,” Anderson says. “It tells me something that I should have known, [about] the salience of indigenous issues at the moment—and a good thing, too.”

In the U.S., the book has yet to make its mark—it was published in April by Basic Books—but Anderson is about to make his on Wisconsin. He has just become a member of the UW Medical School faculty and chairman of the department of medical history and bioethics.

Trained as a medical doctor before pursuing graduate work in the history of science and medicine, Anderson has held eminent, discipline-crossing faculty positions at the University of Melbourne and the University of California in San Francisco and Berkeley. He was drawn to the UW because of its reputation. “Madison has such a strong intellectual community,” Anderson says. “Everyone was so enthusiastic that I couldn’t resist.”

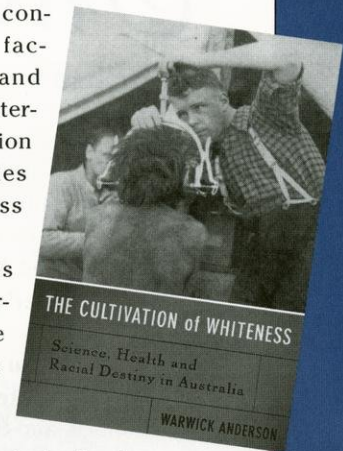
Anderson expects to strengthen the department’s medical ethics program while maintaining the vigor of the history of medicine program. He is also

eager to make connections with faculty, staff, and students with interests in population and area studies programs across campus.

As for his research, Anderson will continue his work in the field of tropical medicine. He has written extensively about American involvement in 20th-century public health services in the Philippines, and is finishing a book on the scientific investigations of kuru, a neurological disorder similar to Creutzfeldt-Jacob and other prion diseases, among the Fore people of New Guinea.

by Ronnie Hess

Warwick Anderson will speak on **Tuesday, October 7, 7 p.m.**, at Borders Books in Madison (3750 University Ave.) as part of the “World Beyond Our Borders” series sponsored by the UW–Madison’s International Institute and Borders Books (West).



Writers' Fest in Eau Claire

Formerly known as the Festival of the Turning Leaves, the Eau Claire Book Festival, now in its fourth year, is scheduled for October 16–19. Headlining this year is Sam Hamill, founding editor of Copper Canyon Press, one of the nation’s leading independent small-press publishers of poetry. Hamill, widely respected for his own poetry and essays, has also earned an international reputation as a translator of classical Asian poetry and philosophy. More recently, Hamill gained the national spotlight by initiating the Poets Against the War effort against U.S. policy in Iraq.

Also appearing are Peter Ho Davies (Ann Arbor), a highly regarded writer of short stories; Michael Dennis Browne (Minneapolis), an acclaimed poet, children’s author and librettist; and Andrew Sean Greer (San Francisco), a respected nov-

elist and short story writer. Eau Claire native and noted author of children’s books John Coy will also be a presenter.

Of particular interest will be a reading and discussion of Hmong literature by Mai Neng Moua (St. Paul), editor of *Bamboo Among the Oaks: Contemporary Writing by Hmong Americans* (Minnesota Historical Society). The program at the Chippewa Valley Museum on Sunday, October 19, will be the finale of the festival.

Readings, workshops, and panels round out the mix of offerings. Most activities will be staged in downtown Eau Claire, and all programs are free of charge.

The festival is presented by Eau Claire Regional Arts Council and the L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library. For more information, contact Peter Provost at 715/832-2787.

The Luminous Lunts

They were beautiful, they were gifted, and they grasped the concept of gracious living long before Martha Stewart. Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne brought style to everything they did—witness the lasting elegance of their residence, Ten Chimneys.

We asked Lake Mills resident Margot Peters, author of the forthcoming *Design for Living: A Biography of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2003) about the enduring fascination of the theater's most luminous couple.

What fascinates you about Lunt and Fontanne?

I have written theater biographies of Bernard Shaw, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, and the Barrymores. Obviously the theater fascinates me—and Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne were pure theater, stagestruck all their lives. Even more fascinating to me, however, is their creative living. My last chapter is titled “The Best Revenge,” as in “Living well is.” Not only did Lunt and Fontanne delight hundreds of thousands of playgoers from 1919 to 1960 (and millions of viewers with their few TV appearances), they also lived elegantly, stylishly, generously, and creatively.

Unfortunately, Lunt and Fontanne are largely forgotten today, the fate of actors who don't make movies (they made only one, *The Guardsman*, in 1933). My biography is a work of love, of restoration, so to speak, just as Joe Garton's restoration of the Lunts' Genesee Depot estate Ten Chimneys was a work of love. Hopefully, with Ten Chimneys open to visitors and artists and my biography being published this fall, Lunt and Fontanne's magic will touch people again.

How does your book differ from other books about them?

I've been lucky to have the full cooperation of the Ten Chimneys Foundation in writing this biography, meaning that I've been able to use dozens of personal letters found in a picnic basket in a secret closet at Ten Chimneys as well as photographs and Thomas Garver's interviews, commissioned by the Foundation, of locals who knew and worked for the Lunts. I have also used letters from research libraries like the Huntington, London's Covent Garden Museum, and the University of Texas at Austin that have not been previously tapped. Above all, my biography explores the psycho-sexual nature of Alfred and Lynn's marriage, friendships, and stage roles.

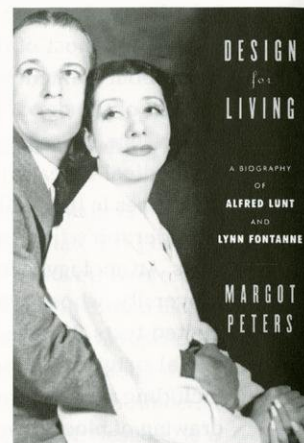
What surprised you the most as you did your research for this book?

I guess I was surprised most by Alfred Lunt's genius. After John Barrymore left the theater in 1925, Lunt was America's first stage actor. I hadn't fully realized his range and depth as an actor, director, and producer. What astounds me is that he was also a magnificent cook and interior designer. Add to that that he raised his cows, pigs, and chickens, was an expert gardener, made his own butter, cottage cheese, and jams, and

directed *Così fan Tutte* and *La Traviata* at the Met, and you have some idea of why Alfred Lunt awes me.

Why are the Lunts still important or relevant to people in Wisconsin today? What is their enduring legacy?

Alfred Lunt was born in Milwaukee in 1892. With the money from an inheritance, he bought acreage at Genesee Depot in the Kettle Moraine. Over the years he and Lynn created Ten Chimneys, now one of Wisconsin's most fascinating tourist destinations. Alfred is a prime example that you *can* go home again. Lunt and Fontanne were the foremost acting couple of the English-speaking stage, yet treasured their corner of Wisconsin.



Forum Seeks to Nourish Midwestern Rural Arts

People who care about the arts and their place in small and rural communities will gather October 23–25 in Spring Green for the 2003 Midwest Rural Arts Forum. Titled “Potluck Panache: Nourishing the Roots of the Rural Arts Community,” the forum will celebrate community connections that are the foundation of rural life and feature inspirational and artistic speakers, tours and workshop sessions, and participatory performances and exhibits. The gathering will draw artists and organizations from small towns and rural areas stretching from Minnesota to Ohio to focus on issues vital to the rural environment, including the ways in which the arts influence the changing nature of rural communities.

A preconference in Madison on Thursday, October 23, will focus on the arts and the Wisconsin Idea, a vision in which civic participation, public education, and the full development of personal talents were blended. Attendees will have the chance to meet “Bob and Belle La Follette” (represented by reenactors in full dress); get a complimentary copy of *The Arts in the Small Community*, a work by seminal thinker Robert E. Gard; attend the groundbreaking of a story circle dedicated to Gard on the UW–Madison campus; and, most important, discuss ways to energize community participation in local and rural arts.

For more information about the conference, including online registration, go to www.wisconsinarts.org or call the Wisconsin Assembly for Local Arts at 608/255-8316.

The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters is one of many state and local organizations to sponsor this event.

Musical Celebrates Pioneering Wisconsin Sculptor

When I first saw Helen Farnsworth Mears' sculptures at the Paine Art Center and the Public Museum in Oshkosh, I was captivated by their beauty, grace, and sensuality. Later, when the Paine asked me to write a dramatization of Mears' life for the city's sesquicentennial, I was not surprised to learn that Mears' works are housed in some of the nation's most coveted spaces: the Smithsonian, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Hall of Statuary in the nation's Capitol.

The dramatization became *The Fountain of Life*—a musical that follows Mears' life from her childhood in 1880s Oshkosh to her death in New York in 1916. It will be performed weekends October 31–November 9 in Oshkosh's historic Grand Opera House.

Reading the material that Mary Mears, Helen's sister and a tireless proponent of her work, had deposited at the Oshkosh Public Museum and the State Historical Society, I felt the magnetic pull of Helen's story. I read of her studies in New York and Paris; her many awards (including a prize at Chicago's 1893 Columbian Exposition for her *Genius of Wisconsin*, now in the state Capitol in Madison); and her work as an independent sculptor—something almost unheard of for a woman at that time.

The play takes its name from one of Mears' great sculptures, which she worked on for four years. Monumental in design, Mears' *Fountain of Life* won major awards at national competitions in Seattle and Saint Louis. In the play, Helen describes her concept for the design to her sister:

"It's an idea I've had for years—ever since my art student days. We're born. We live. We die. It's all so simple, yet so mysterious. We make so many choices along the way. And each one makes us the person we are. I finally have an idea of how to capture that idea. I see life as a fountain from which we choose to drink—or not drink. When people look at my 'Fountain of Life,' I want them to be jolted into thinking: Where have I been? How did I get here? Where am I going? I want to do a sculpture that is as huge as that idea...."

Done in plaster, the award-winning design was never commissioned in more permanent form. It was among the many works donated to the Milwaukee Art Museum after Mears' death. During the Depression, the Wisconsin Federation of Women's Clubs tried to raise the \$25,000

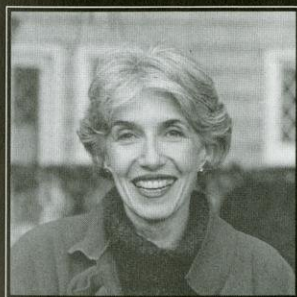


Courtesy of the Oshkosh Public Museum

necessary to have the sculpture cast in bronze. But hard economic times doomed their efforts. Over time, the plaster crumbled. Today only photos remain of what was to be Mears' signature work.

The musical is a collaborative effort of local schools and the UW–Oshkosh music, theater, and art departments. Tickets are \$10, available from Oshkosh's Grand Opera House, tel. 920/414-2350, www.grandoperahouse.org

by Mary Hiles



Galileo's Daughter Author in Madison

Acclaimed science writer Dava Sobel, author of the best-selling books *Galileo's Daughter* and *Longitude*, will visit the UW–Madison for a three-day residency this fall and also give her first public lecture in Madison on Monday,

November 17, 7:30 p.m. at the Pyle Center, 702 Langdon Street.

Sobel, a former science writer for the *New York Times*, probes areas of the physical sciences with great rigor and empathy,

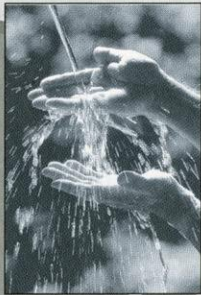
drawing out the drama and human dimension behind important—and sometimes unpopular—discoveries.

During her residency, Sobel will lead workshops and discussions with an interdisciplinary range of UW faculty and staff. Her visit is sponsored by the UW's Wisconsin Initiative for Science Literacy (WISL), in collaboration with the Center for the Humanities and the Arts Institute. You can find more information at www.humanities.wisc.edu

the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters connects people and ideas from all walks of life to celebrate thought and culture in our state and explore how, together, we may address our common problems. Our programs are a catalyst for ideas and action. By becoming a member, you will support these vital programs and enhance your life by becoming a part of them!

the idea

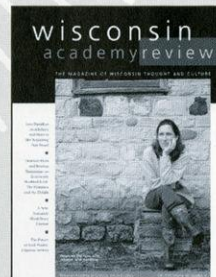
The Wisconsin Idea at the Wisconsin Academy brings Wisconsin residents together with a diverse array of experts and stakeholders to find solutions to statewide problems. Waters of Wisconsin is one of the significant initiatives of this program.



\$25 gets you here!

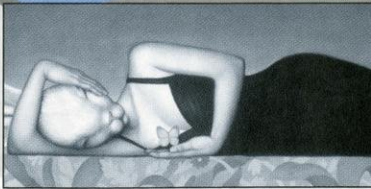
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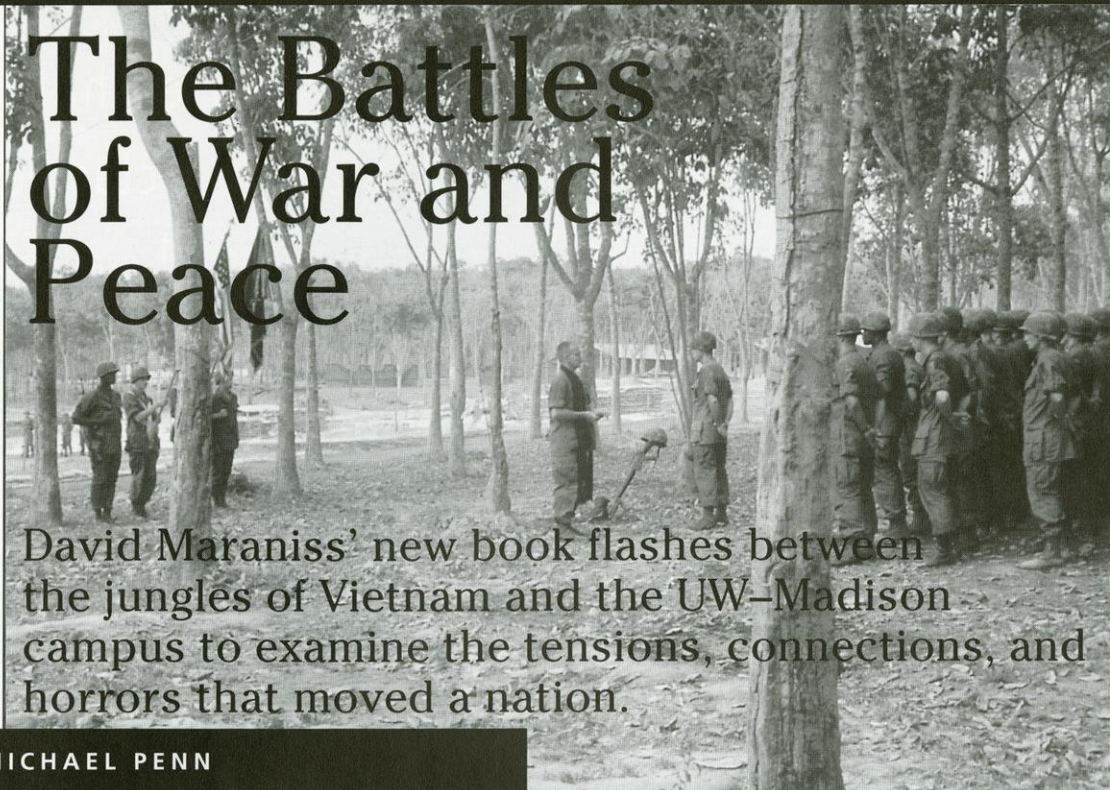
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WISCONSIN PUBLIC TELEVISION

The Battles of War and Peace

David Maraniss' new book flashes between the jungles of Vietnam and the UW-Madison campus to examine the tensions, connections, and horrors that moved a nation.



INTERVIEW BY MICHAEL PENN

A memorial service at the Lai Khe base camp in Vietnam for U.S. soldiers killed in an ambush.

Photo by Tom Grady
All photos courtesy of Simon & Schuster

DURING TWO DAYS IN OCTOBER 1967, dramatic events unfolded in the very different worlds of Madison and Vietnam. As a battalion of American soldiers crept through a jungle north of Saigon into the teeth of a deadly ambush, antiwar activists at the UW-Madison organized a campus protest against the Dow Chemical Company that would end in a violent confrontation with police. These two events, separated by thousands of miles, yet united by more than just coincidence, form the core of *They Marched Into Sunlight* (Simon & Schuster), a new book by *Washington Post* reporter David Maraniss.

Author of highly touted biographies of Vince Lombardi and Bill Clinton, Pulitzer Prize-winner Maraniss puts his narrative talents on overdrive in his sixth book, introducing readers to some 200 characters who play roles in a sweeping epic of war and peace. To retell their experiences, Maraniss conducted hundreds of interviews with former UW students (including former Madison mayor Paul Soglin and current Vice President Dick Cheney), professors, police officers, and soldiers on both

sides of the conflict. During a three-week trip to Vietnam, he brought together combat leaders from the U.S. and the Viet Cong sides to walk the site of the ambush, a remarkable tale of closure that completes the book's epilogue.

The Wisconsin side of the story brought Maraniss home, both figuratively and literally. A Madison townie who attended the UW and covered Vietnam-era protests as a young reporter for *The Capital Times*, Maraniss spent three months living in

Michael Penn is senior editor of *On Wisconsin*, the alumni magazine of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has written about Wisconsin people and places for the *Chicago Tribune* and other publications.

Madison while researching the book and recently bought a house in the city, where he and his wife, Linda, spent this past summer. Michael Penn caught up with him to talk about war, peace, and the lessons of the past.

First of all, welcome back to Madison.

David Maraniss: Thank you. It's great to be here.

It seems that with your books you've been coming closer to home, too. Last time you wrote about Vince Lombardi, a childhood hero. Now you have this book, which is largely based in Madison. Have you been making a deliberate attempt to write about things from your past?

It's solely so I can come back here to live. No, really, I guess it goes back in part to the idea that you can write best about what you know. But that's not the whole reason. This book started with an idea that I wanted to write something about the '60s and Vietnam. I knew that there was a lot of great literature about the war, and some—not a lot of great books—about the antiwar movement. I hadn't seen a book that put the two together. So that was my first concept.

When I was talking with some of my editors about doing the book, because I'm from Wisconsin, someone brought up the bombing of the Army Math Research Center, and I said I didn't want to write about that. It's been written about a lot, and it's too late; it's not an interesting time to me. And then I remembered that when I was a freshman the first big war protest was the one against Dow Chemical. I had seen the documentary "The War at Home," which dealt to some extent with those events, and so I thought I would look into it and see what was going on in Vietnam that day. Once I found the battle in Vietnam, everything came together. So even though it started with Madison, it wouldn't have been a book without the battle.

What appealed to you about combining the battle and the protest?

The more I delved into the battle, the more I realized that it was the power of the book. It was a relatively unknown battle that could tell a story that I could connect with Wisconsin. On the first day of research, I went to the *Washington Post* library and looked on the microfilm to see what was going on in Vietnam the day of the Dow protests. The story about the battle mentioned that [former Army football star] Donald Holleder, who was a major, was killed. I knew Holleder's name because he was recruited to play football at West Point by Vince Lombardi, and in my papers for the Lombardi book, I had the telegram that Lombardi had sent Donald Holleder's widow after he was killed. That was a sign to me.

That happens to me in my books—these coincidences. I think that research always leads to that, but everything just seemed to fall into place after that.

What kind of message were you intending to give by putting these events side by side?

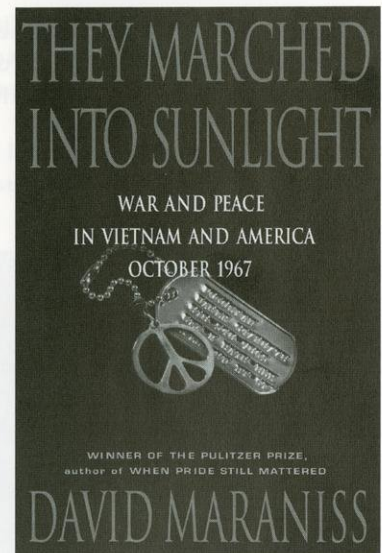
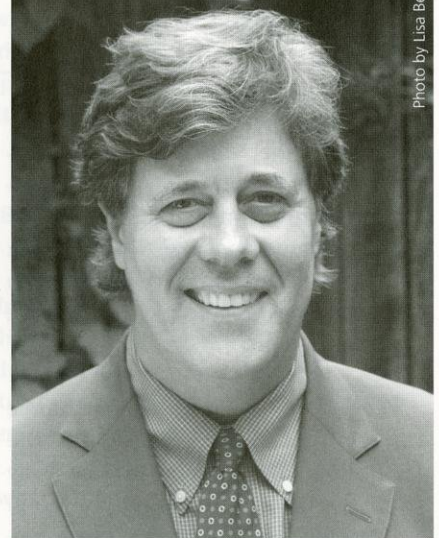
The original idea was, here are two events that were about the same thing, but took place in such incredibly different worlds that they never connected. That disconnection has been part of American culture ever since. And yet the people involved were relatively the same ages, and their motivations might have been quite similar, even though what they were doing was so different. I was looking for the connections between the soldier and the student, and those two very different worlds.

It's a very human story, told through so many different characters. Do you know offhand how many people are in this book?

Well, it's like a Russian novel. There are probably 10 or 12 major characters, and I spent much more time with them. I tried to write it in a way where you didn't really have to remember all 200

characters, because the course of the action would carry you along. I knew I would have to list a cast of characters if you wanted to try to remember them all. But I wanted to give it an epic feel.

Author David Maraniss



Some of these characters have difficult stories to tell. But you manage to present them all in a neutral, nonjudgmental way.

I'd say if there is a style to my writing, it is largely nonjudgmental. It's not that I don't have feelings, or that you don't see my take on life through the book. But my first goal always is to try to understand somebody and why they are

One of my favorite subthemes of the book is the dilemma of the liberals in that era—and in many eras—who are caught between the ideologues of the right and left.

the way they are, and then let the reader take it from there. If I do have an ideology, it's that I want people to be understood in three dimensions, and not as part of a stereotype. The '60s are lost in stereotypes, and I started in a sense to try to recover them from that, to make them real people.

In my interviewing, I tried to reinforce the fact that I was going to write the truth—that I wasn't going to bend away from the truth to make anyone feel better—but I would present it in a context, that it would be fair.

You were a freshman at the UW when the Dow protests took place. Did you ever consider putting yourself into the story?

I am in the epilogue, but even that I was reluctant to do. To tell the epilogue story the way I wanted to, I had to be in there, because I was there for the whole trip to Vietnam. But I didn't want to be in the book itself. There was no reason for me to be there. I was on the outskirts of the crowd that day of the Dow riots. My memory of it is very foggy about the whole thing. I had no real involvement in it, although it did have a deep impression on me.

You must have had friends in Vietnam ...

I had high school acquaintances in Vietnam. At that point, I didn't have many close friends yet in Vietnam. But certainly that whole era was enormously important to my philosophy of life. It affected me forever, and most of my friends, in different ways, whether

they went to Vietnam or were conscientious objectors or whatever.

Tell me about the significance of the title.

It's taken from, and with great apologies to, Bruce Weigl, a poet and Vietnam veteran who has written some wonderful poems about the experience of Vietnam. Most of them are in a book called *Song of Napalm*, and that's how I got interested, because Dow Chemical made napalm. I was interested in that connection.

The title is from the poem "Elegy," which is about a company marching into an ambush. The first line of the poem is, "Into sunlight they marched." That was the original title of this book, but too many people stumbled over starting the title with a prepositional phrase. It works really well in a poem, but as the title of a book, it didn't flow off the tongue as well, so we inverted it.

What struck you about that line?

The unit is marching into sunlight to their death, essentially. The whole irony of sunlight and knowledge and the sense of innocence really set up that point in our history. Nineteen sixty-seven was right before things hardened and became clear—everything was still up in the air at that moment. It was three months before the Tet offensive, which really finalized Americans' turn against the war. In cycles, there are moments when everything is clear, and there are moments when you don't know how it's going to turn out.

So "Elegy" could be read to be about more than just the soldiers?

Yes, about the students, too, and the country. It was about life at that point in 1967.

Were there elements of ambush in the other parts of the story—in Wisconsin, and in Washington among the policy-makers?

Lost in mayhem: Crowd control included vigorous use of billy clubs and tear gas.

Photo by Wisconsin State Journal



In practical terms, both the police and the students were ambushed by unintended consequences. Most of the students went into that building just thinking that they would get arrested. And most of the police, I think, were ambushed by their own fear and anger at that moment. It just overwhelmed them. I think the liberal administrators of the university were ambushed by the sense of losing control of life.

One of my favorite subthemes of the book is the dilemma of the liberals in that era—and in many eras—who are caught between the ideologues of the right and left. At times they, with their totally good intentions, can misread the situation. And that certainly happens to [former UW Chancellor William] Sewell, whose ambush was even more profound because he was opposed to even allowing corporations [such as Dow Chemical Company] to recruit on campus in the first place, and then gets stuck with this situation.

At one point, one of the soldiers says that he hated battles that made him respond rather than decide. Is that similar to Sewell's dilemma?

He had a little more power than that. But, yes, in the end he was left just responding, without any control over the situation.

But you don't think that the riots were inevitable?

I always struggle with that larger question of what forces are beyond our control. Even when there are larger historical forces at work, there is always free will, and every individual has that moment where they have to decide—whether that's Sewell, who was sort of frozen, when he could have tried to have done something, or a minor character who could have chosen not to push back against the cops or participate in the student violence, or a soldier who in the middle of the battle has the opportunity to retreat but decides to stay. Every human being has those opportunities, even in a situation where larger

ELEGY

by Bruce Weigl

Into sunlight they marched,
into dog day, into no saints day,
and were cut down.
They marched without knowing
how the air would be sucked from their lungs,
how their lungs would collapse,
how the world would twist itself, would
bend into cruel angles.

Into the black understanding they marched
until the angels came
calling their names,
until they rose, one by one from the blood.
The light blasted down on them.
The bullets sliced through the razor grass
so there was not even time to speak.
The words would not let themselves be spoken.
Some of them died.
Some of them were not allowed to.

Copyright © 1988 by Bruce Weigl; from *Song of Napalm*. Used by permission of Grove/Atlantic, Inc.

forces funnel them toward a situation that is beyond their control. Both of those forces are at work—it's not an either/or.

Police try to hold off a crowd that is shouting, "Sieg heil! Sieg heil!"

Photo by *Wisconsin State Journal*

Still, in all of those situations, you show that emotions have a powerful effect on the decisions that were made.

It's much easier in retrospect. One of the hardest things about writing history



is to place yourself in that context, even though you have the advantage of retrospect. Whenever I do interviews, I always say I don't want to know how you feel now—I want to know how you felt then. That's why all the letters and documents from that moment were so valuable. I did hundreds of interviews, but whenever I could get something that exactly or more clearly captured someone as they were in that moment, I could make the story much stronger.

There's a lot of mythology about what went on at the UW during those days. One of the interesting things in the book was to read about Dick and Lynne Cheney, who seemed to represent the so-called "silent majority" of students who didn't participate or believe in the protests. Did you find that their experience was more typical—that the radical movement was smaller than many people now believe?

It was, and the radicals themselves would tell you that. There was probably a core of 200 to 300 real activists on campus at any time, and particularly then, in 1967. The movement grew from there over the next three years, but that

became problematic for people who saw themselves as real radical activists because they had all these people against the war who didn't necessarily share their ideology or even know that much about the war. Some of them were just going on the emotion of not wanting to get drafted or being part of a student rebellion—which I say in the book can take a million different forms, including panty raids. The line between them is not that great.

In fact, didn't Paul Soglin become disappointed with the movement because it started to focus on other issues?

On the police brutality rather than the war itself, right. There were always conflicts over ancillary issues.

Soglin and Cheney make an interesting pair ...

[Laughs] I thought so.

Did you choose them because of their current notoriety, or was it because they best represented sort of the two faces of Wisconsin at that time?

Obviously, I chose Cheney because of his current position. There were hundreds of other political science graduate students I chose not to interview. But it wasn't just because of his notoriety, but it helps inform you about Cheney, to know his mood on these things. He makes an interesting cameo character in the book, but it turns out that I think he's very representative of a whole group of people. I think he represents George W. Bush, too—these guys who went through the whole Vietnam era without engaging in it, and I think it explains something about how they view the world now. They were able to survive, and in some sense succeed, by avoiding it, but I also think it left them with a gap in their souls.

Soglin, as I make clear in the book, was not really one of the active leaders of the movement. But he did emerge from that group as the one who to some degree succeeded in establishment politics, working through the system. I found him to be very astute, even at that time, in analyzing the situation.

MEET MARANISS

David Maraniss will give several readings in Wisconsin in October. Here are some places you can meet him. Please check ahead to confirm dates/times:

MADISON PUBLIC LIBRARY (central)
201 W. Mifflin Street
Thursday, October 9, 7:30 p.m.

MILWAUKEE PUBLIC LIBRARY
Centennial Hall
733 N. Eighth Street
Monday, October 13, 7 p.m.

WISCONSIN BOOK FESTIVAL
Orpheum Theatre, Madison
Sunday afternoon, October 26
www.wisconsinbookfestival.org

In addition, C-Span recently featured a show about Maraniss and the making of his book that will be aired again. Check www.c-span.org for further info.

Former enemies reunited:

For the book, Maraniss brought U.S. Army Lieutenant Clark Welch and Viet Cong First Regiment deputy commander Vo Minh Triet back to the site of the '67 ambush.

Photo by Linda Maraniss



You started working on this well before the war in Iraq ...

I did. I started working on it way before 9/11.

Did those events change the way you looked at the book?

They didn't shape the way I wrote it. But I'm sure they deepened my feelings about why I was writing it. Even though history doesn't repeat itself exactly, a lot of the themes of history repeat themselves. There is always something to be learned from history, and some of the same lessons, particularly about government's success in manipulating the truth, have echoes. The peace movement's ability to find a strong, clear voice has been an ongoing struggle. I found that to have interesting echoes to today.

I think one of the things that has changed is that, then, some of the anti-war hostility was directed at the soldiers. That's really much less so today. On the other hand, there is always some important lesson about patriotism—about what is the role of dissent in democracy, about what we are defending, if not that. I think that issue has played out again this time.

It doesn't seem like the current debates have the sort of generational divide that existed in the '60s. Is that true?

It's hard to separate the cause and effect, but the Vietnam War came at a time when there was a generational split and rebellion, which hasn't really been played out in the same way in any generation since—the larger cultural shift away from the traditions of the previous generation. The second thing is that there was a draft, and so every male of a certain age was vulnerable to that war in a way that no generation of males since have been. So that created a natural generational shift that helped the eruption along generation lines.

It's also important to balance the impressions of the '60s against the statistics of the '60s. The Gallup poll in 1967 showed that the strongest opposition to

It's important to balance the impressions of the '60s against the statistics of the '60s. The Gallup poll in 1967 showed that the strongest opposition to the war was among the elderly.

the war was among the elderly. And that's true today, too—you can't make assumptions about how people think based on generational stereotypes.

When you interviewed the people who participated in these events, in both the war and the protests, did you get the sense they see their roles differently now, with the benefit of time?

Yes. The most interesting part of doing interviews for this book was that most of the people I talked to were in their 50s and 60s, feeling their own mortality, less sort of stuck in the fashions of that time, and more willing to look back. They felt some regret, but no hatred. One of the soldiers, Clark Welch, who is sort of the ultimate soldier's soldier, told me, "Well, you know, if I was in Wisconsin, I would have been one of those protestors, too." Paul Soglin told me that he really wants to meet some of the soldiers. He said for the first time, somehow because this book interweaves, it drew him into the story of the soldiers much more than he has been in other books. And a lot of soldiers said that, too—that the most interesting part of the book to them was the Wisconsin story. And that's really what I was trying to do, to show the commonalities and to present them all as human beings.

Did you find your own feelings changed at all?

Not changed, but I certainly learned a lot. I had read all these great books, but I didn't really know until I started talking to people what it was like. I probably had some of the same superficial feelings about the role of the National Liberation Front [the supposedly independent group of guerrilla fighters who

operated in South Vietnam in the early 1960s] versus the role of [the North Vietnamese government in] Hanoi, but what it was like to be in a battle for these kids who are my age—I didn't really know that.

Tell me about the trip you took to Vietnam while researching the book. How has that experience stuck with you?

It was probably the most rewarding three weeks of my life as a journalist. Everything seemed fresh and exciting. The day that I walked the battlefield with Clark Welch, one of the soldiers in the story, and Vo Minh Triet, the regimental commander for the Viet Cong—when I saw those two old guys, who really couldn't speak each other's language, communicating together about that day as they walked through the fields, it was really one of those moments when I said, "This is why I am a reporter and writer." It reminded me that I was writing about a real thing.

Did you feel it was important for you to go to Vietnam—not just because you were writing the book, but because you were part of that generation?

Well, I didn't want to go to Vietnam 35 years ago. But I think everybody of my generation should go at some point. Vietnam in so many ways was a defining event in our lives, and to go there turns it from an abstraction into something real.

But I was mostly focused on the people I was with. The emotion and the depth of that experience was not for me; it was for the people I was with. *

Theater of Terror

“It’s as if the bombing happened yesterday,”
says the author of a forthcoming play about the blast at Sterling Hall.



INTERVIEW BY
JOAN FISCHER

DAVID MARANISS’ NEW BOOK IS NOT THE ONLY LOOK back at Vietnam and Madison’s radical past this fall. The playwright OyamO (a.k.a. Charles F. Gordon) has been commissioned by the Madison Repertory Theatre to write a play about the protest-inspired Sterling Hall bombing—the nighttime blast of the UW’s Army Math Research Center in August 1970 that took the life of a physicist working odd hours. OyamO will spend time working in Madison as part of the playwright-in-residence program.

What is the Sterling Hall bombing’s relevance today?

OyamO: The lasting relevance has to do with the lasting relevance of the ‘60’s themselves. It was and is the most numerous generation in the history of America; it’s called the “baby boom” generation and there are 75 million of them and most of them are alive and functioning in utilitarian capacities today in every field of human endeavor imaginable. Those in that generation who struggled to break free of the stifling ‘50s, to rediscover the world with fresh eyes, to plumb new insights into the nature of humanity, are still active today, including in the Madison area. The U.S. government still wages a subtle war against its citizens and against various global neighbors, currently Iraq. The frustration of those who would still champion a new world based on cooperation instead of corruption and greed is a frustration that has become permanent. It’s too late to play imperialist; the world has moved on; hopefully the American fundamentalists who have

usurped the Republican party and made of the Democrats sniveling, me-too cowards will soon accept that the century belongs to all the people of the earth, not just the Americans.

Why does it appeal to you as the topic of a play?

The bombing appeals to me as a subject for a play for two reasons: First, I was commissioned to write a play based on it; second, it’s still quite relevant. The drama inherent in the situation has never been dealt with, as far as I know, on the stage.

Can you give us a hint of what to expect?

I do know that I’m going to write a piece “inspired” by the events as opposed to a factual exposition of the events. I understand that someone associated with Walt Disney has bought the rights to the book *Rads*, but I never intended to adapt that book anyway. My research indicates, however, that just about everything that is contained in *Rads* can be

found in the public domain of newspapers, magazines, trial transcripts, local oral history projects, and whatever other information I can cull from a variety of living sources and memories. Disney and I are on widely separated paths. I can be free like the ‘60s, but Disney must be corporate and not nearly as free or as empathetic.

Where were you when the bombing occurred? What was your response to it?

I was in New York City when the bombing occurred. I was married, had three kids, and was working three jobs, the main one of which was as a master electrician in the theatre. I had been in many civil rights and anti-war demonstrations and had bamboozled my way out of the U.S. Navy, which had been planning to send me to Nam. I thought that the bombers were righteously motivated, but were not professional in the execution. The loss of life didn’t set right with me. Many from my generation were caught up in the ideology of the ‘60s and acted chosen roles accordingly.

Sometimes our acting led to dubious results.

For some time now you've been living and working in Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan. Will this be your first time in Madison?

Yes, this will be my first experience working in Madison and being in the state of Wisconsin. So far I love the people, especially the librarians at the UW. The thing I find most appealing in this situation is the challenge of creating something worthy that is inspired by the bombing event. It will be difficult because everyone in Madison seems to be knowledgeable to some degree about what happened in August of 1970. And there are many folks still living who either participated in the student movement in Madison or witnessed it. Some of the perpetrators are still living in Madison. Madison is still sensitive to all that transpired, so much so that it's as if the bombing happened yesterday.

How are you doing research for the play?

I've been long hours in the library at both Michigan and Madison. I've talked to some people and hope to talk to many more. There are some folks, however, who won't talk to me, which is fine. I keep discovering new sources that are willing to talk and share. I listened to a few taped lectures and hunted down some obscure literature on various aspects of the '60s and on Madison itself. The Memorial Library's archives have been most helpful with their hundreds of news clippings. I've looked at films, documentary mainly, of the times—and the list goes on. It's not just the Madison bombings that interest me; it's the entire '60s and what they meant and mean to this U.S.A. *

A political statement ends in death and destruction: Sterling Hall, August 1970.



Photo courtesy of UW-Madison Archives

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Heather Lee Schroeder, writer and book columnist, *The Capital Times*

John McDermott, writer and contest coordinator

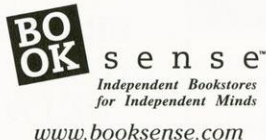
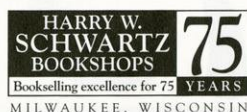
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2. Stories must be between 2,500 and 5,000 words in length.
3. Authors must submit **three copies** of a story (photocopies are fine).
4. Each story must be accompanied by a \$15 entry fee (non-Academy members) or \$10 (Academy members, including those who join now) payable to *Wisconsin Academy Review* Short Story Contest.
5. Writers may submit more than one entry, but each story must be mailed in separately with its own cover letter (see Rule 9) and entry fee.
6. Entries must be postmarked on or before **December 1**. Entries may be hand-delivered to the Wisconsin Academy (1922 University Avenue, Madison) by 4 p.m. on December 1.
7. Previously published stories (electronically or in print) are not eligible.
8. Each manuscript must be typed, double-spaced, in standard 10- or 12-point type. Each page must include the title of the story as a header. All pages must be numbered with both an individual page number and the total number of pages (e.g., The Smoker, page 1/15, The Smoker, page 2/15, The Smoker, page 3/15, etc.).
9. **The author's name may not appear anywhere on the manuscript itself.** The manuscript must be accompanied by a letter bearing the story title; the author's name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address (if available); and the story word count. Every contestant must be able to provide an electronic version of the story if needed, either on disk or via e-mail.
10. Keep a copy of your manuscript. Manuscripts will be recycled, not returned. Do not send an SASE.
11. Contest winners will be announced on our website by the end of March.



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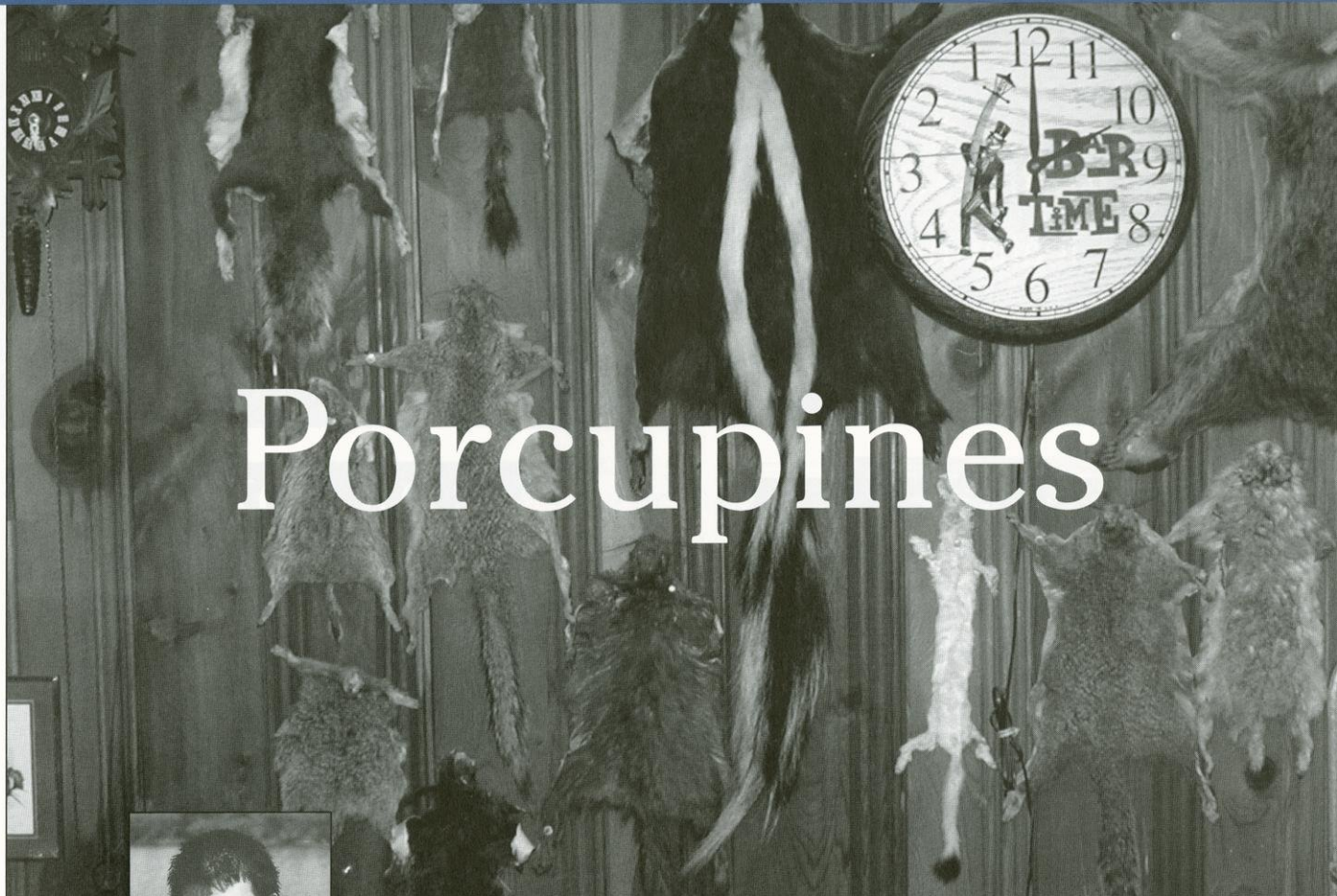
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1. Poets must reside or attend school in Wisconsin.
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3. Each entry must be accompanied by a \$6 entry fee (non-Academy members) or \$4 (Academy members, including those who join now) payable to the *Wisconsin Academy Review Poetry Contest*.
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9. Contest winners will be announced on our website (www.wisconsinacademy.org) and notified by the end of February 2004. Winning poetry will be published in the spring 2004 issue of the *Wisconsin Academy Review*, which appears at the end of March, in time for National Poetry Month (April).

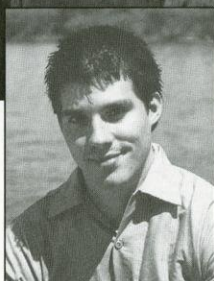


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Porcupines



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SHORT STORY
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**SECOND
PLACE**

BY NICK RYDELL
PHOTOS BY BILL BLANKENBURG

THIS MORNING I WOKE UP to my father's hand on my forehead. He knelt beside the bed, head bent, like he was praying.

Almost dawn. I rolled my tongue around my teeth. Had been dreaming about fireflies: a pair of them trapped in a jar. They mated and the female laid a string of eggs onto the glass.

"Time for breakfast, son," my father said. I got up and pulled long underwear on.

He was frying eggs. He moved through the kitchen efficiently, eyeing the frying pan, pouring coffee, rummaging through bags of meat. Checked on me occasionally. I woke up slow, spilled cold water over my face, shuffled through gray light. I sat down and he tossed an egg in front of me. He told me about porcupines while I ate.

"They kill the tree. Porcupine gets into it, strips off the bark, it's over. Bugs get in. Round this time of year you can see them pretty good, the leaves are

mostly gone. Easy to shoot. I'll bring you to the tree they're in and you can practice on them. Then in a couple weeks you can hit the big buck." I nodded.

There were antlers on each wall of my father's house. A strip of bone kept each pair together. They hung on old nails, or on lamps, or in windows. At night I sometimes thought I heard them clack together, which was something they couldn't do, because the strips of bone held them fixed. I finished my egg.

I went upstairs and kicked through all the scattered boxes. When my father moved in here a couple weeks ago, he unpacked his pots and pans first, then the antlers, then his clothes. Everything else was still lying jumbled at the bottoms of the boxes. Paintings of ducks. Cookie cutters my mom didn't want to keep. A clock that beeped a different birdcall every hour.

I found my bag in the corner and rummaged through it. Checkered pants, an orange coat stuffed with down. I wrapped myself up in them and went downstairs. Sat down on the sofa, pulled thick woolen socks onto my feet, then a pair of heavy boots. My father was all in hunter orange, and he was wearing his bloodstained flannel hat. He led me outside.

My father's house was old and white, and a skeleton was growing on the east face. Scaffolding for a new deck, to let more sun into the house. He'd said he'd fix the place up, knock out some of the old walls. Make the living room bigger. I pulled my collar up with my teeth and breathed into my coat to warm my neck up.

He disappeared behind the corner of the house and came back with the gun. He showed it to me, stroked it front to back like a dog, getting the dust off of it. He sniffled.

"Just a twenty-two. No kick in it." He spun it ninety degrees and pressed the butt into my shoulder. "Just hold it to get a feel for it."

I held it, balanced it. It was vacantly cold. Last year my dad and I had brought it down to the lake, and he'd stood at the end of the dock and shot fish. The trick, he'd said, was to aim a little above them. I'd waited at the shore while he swung the gun around smoothly: it made three sharp pops and three bluegills bobbed to the surface. White bellies like chunks of ice.

I took some time to get a feel for the gun. Looked down the barrel and sighted a bird's nest, a window, the tires of my dad's big truck. "I'll carry it," he said. Shells rang out in his pocket.

I swiveled back toward my father, lowered the gun slowly. He looked at me out of the corners of his eyes. "Porcupine tree is in the north woods.

By where grandpa found those honeydew mushrooms last year. We'll take the long way so I can show you some deer trails." The sun lolled dully in the east.

I pressed the gun back into his hands. We turned north and walked down a gravel road until it died out in a field. Dead grass snapped under my boots and sprang back up at muddled angles from the ground. I breathed into my collar again, clenched my teeth to keep them from chattering.

"It's good to see you again," he said.

"Good to see you Dad."

He produced a pair of binoculars from a pocket and handed it to me. "Usually deer coming down the west trail now. I saw the big one there a few days ago. Look." There was a brown dot on the trail, and through the binoculars it became a doe walking ponderously, stopping sometimes to chew a leaf. She looked up at me and froze.

"Buck or doe?" my father asked.

"Doe."

"A couple weeks till the rut, then the bucks'll be running around." He took the binoculars. "How's your mother?"

When I'd left my mother's place, she'd been crying a little. The past few weeks there had been strange. Half the pictures on the walls missing, no beer in the fridge, the TV in the kitchen replaced by a big, feathery plant. The handyman's nook in the basement was all cleaned out except for the little toolbox that my dad had left. It was his, but he'd left it just in case we needed it. At 5:30 p.m. my ears always perked up, but there was no rumbling truck, no jingling keys. Quiet. My mother fluttered around nervously, dusting all the time now. "So much easier to keep the house clean," she'd said, and I didn't know what to say back. Sometimes she disappeared into the bedroom and didn't come out for a couple hours. I'd turn on the TV, watch sitcom reruns, and still the house was so quiet.

"Mom's okay," I told my dad.

"You guys need any venison? I've got lots frozen."

"I don't know. I'll ask Mom next time."

"How about I give you some venison when you leave."

"Thanks," I said. We walked around for a while. He showed me some more deer trails.



Soon the woods rose up: exclamation points of brown and green. My father jogged forward to step on the barbed wire fence. He held it down and I leapt over.

"Just a little farther in here. Maybe we'll have something to eat first if we find a good place to sit." The air was heavy with the ache of coming winter: nature's sighing machinery, the musty death of leaves. We went deep into the woods.

I saw a dragonfly on a maple tree. Crept up to it, touched its tail. A wing snapped off and fluttered down onto the leaves.

"Dead for a while," my father said. "Too late for dragonflies. Not many bugs still around." I grasped the dragonfly and teased it off the trunk. A few legs

WINNING WORDS

Lead judge Mike Magnuson on why he chose this story

About 15 years ago, I had occasion to shoot a porcupine out of a pine tree in Hatfield, Wisconsin. I was drunk, and my buddies were drunk, and we had deer rifles, and we blasted that porky to pieces—six or seven shots—before he finally fell, right in the middle of us. I guess porcupines are bad for trees, and I guess the proper Wisconsin thing to do is get drunk and shoot them, but I remember thinking at the time, drunk in the woods and staring at that dead porcupine and wondering how it possibly could have withstood all that lead and not dropped, that shooting a porcupine is like trying to kill off who we are inside, prickly killers of trees.

Anyway, this story of a father and son and a porcupine brings this back to me, and the flat sad tone in which it's written reaches into my chest and makes my heart hurt.

broke off, and the tail cracked a little. "Gonna keep that?" my father asked. I gathered the pieces up and put them in my pocket.

"Yeah." I had a bunch of bugs at home, pinned to a sheet of Styrofoam. A silverfish, some cockroaches, a million beetles. Mother thought they were ugly. Maybe she'd like the dragonfly. The wing was gone, but I could probably glue on the legs. My father turned west, and soon we found a log big enough to sit down on.

My father set the gun down on the leaves and wiped his face with his bloodstained hat. I sat next to him and he patted my knee. "You're getting real big. Shoulders are starting to fill out." He squeezed my arm. "Really toughening up. Let's see if you can beat me yet."

We straddled the log and clasped hands. Dug our elbows into the bark. I held for a few moments, trembling, then my arm arched down. "You need to build a couple houses, like I did," my dad said. "Get biceps, hanging from roofs. Busting up concrete blocks." He reached into his coat and pulled out a couple of sandwiches in plastic bags. Some ketchup

had leaked from the sandwiches, and it was pooled up in red drops.

I unwrapped one. Venison and cheddar cheese. I licked my red fingers clean when I was done.

My father leaned back. I noticed the grids of wrinkles at the sides of his eyes. Whispers of gray in his eyebrows. He smiled at me wearily.

"I built your mother's house in three months. Only a little help with the foundations and the plumbing, the rest I did myself." It was the house I grew up in. Big and proud: a snapshot of my dad fifteen years ago. A new job, enough money to make ends meet for once, two well-fed daughters in grade school, a son swelling up in the belly of the woman he loved. And fifteen years weathered the paint off the deck, wore the carpets down to threads. When Mom got tired of sleeping with him, about five years ago, he built himself another bedroom. For a couple weeks, he spent four or five hours a day swinging alone from ladders and roofs.

"I maybe wasn't the best dad, and I put you through things that a kid

shouldn't go through. But I'm glad I could give you a roof over your head."

Last year she called the house, Sandy or Cindy or something. She'd found the number with 411. He hadn't told her he was married. I answered and brought the phone down to the basement where my dad was fixing something. My mom had picked up at the same time, in the bedroom upstairs, and she had breathed real quiet, never put the phone down during the whole thing.

My mom got the house in the divorce, and my dad had moved up here, to the place where he'd grown up. The old farm. Drove an hour to work every day, an hour back.

"Yeah, Dad..." I didn't know what to say. I usually didn't. Maybe if I'd said the right things, it wouldn't have happened. Maybe I was the hidden seam of weakness, and maybe their marriage had cracked right down it, that fault line, because I could never say the right things.

"I'm sorry," I said, and I squeezed my eyes shut.

My father put his arm around my shoulders. "Don't you ever apologize to me about that. Hey." He looked down at the leaves. "You listen. I..." Silent for a moment. "You shouldn't have to deal with this. Too much for you, at your age." But what he meant was, why were you always so quiet, why couldn't you make her stay in love with me.

"I'm sorry Dad," I said.

"Porcupine tree is just a little ways from here." He took off, northwest.



"It'll be easy to see," he said. "Just look at the ground. They gnaw off the little branches and scatter them all over the place." We found the tree; it was barren, stunted, and there were lots of branches on the ground. I imagined what it would be like to be standing there, arms outstretched, with bits of myself scattered beneath me: a thumb, a knuckle, half an ear, red strips of muscle.

"Shhhh," said my father. He crept forward and there was a rustle in the tree. A



porcupine, high up in a crooked branch. Too far away to make out any features: just a slinking blur. My father snuck back to me. "See it?" he whispered.

"Yeah."

He handed me the gun. My hands were numb. I worked my right hand underneath my coat, my sweater, until it was a spear of cold against my belly. I waited till my hand was warm enough to pull the trigger.

I leaned on a broad tree beside me and lifted the gun. The porcupine was chewing idly on a branch. Stripping away the bark, letting the bugs into the softwood. I saw the tree pressing calmly through the seasons: green, orange, barren, green again. But now the bugs were in it. Cold anger wrapped me up like a sheet of blue. Couldn't see the head, sighted the back of the neck. Exhaled. Shot.

When it stopped thrashing on the ground we went up to it. Little pink tongue dangling out, flapping like a dying bird's wing. Nose bleeding in ribbons. My father patted my shoulder. "Great shot. Right in the back of the neck." He walked away and urinated.

"Will the tree be okay?" I asked.

"No, it's done." He sniffled, zipped his pants up. "Tomorrow maybe we'll get the chainsaw, take the tree down. Ever taken down a tree?"

I shook my head.

"Well maybe we'll do that tomorrow, before you leave. Need to take it down before it rots." He poked at the porcupine with his foot. "We'll leave him here a couple days. The others see him like this, they'll go away."



In the evening I helped my father build a fire in the basement furnace. He opened up the iron door and I heaved logs into it, all the way to the back. He reached in with some small sticks, built graceful arches and spirals. Like wooden mazes. He tossed a piece of flaming bark into just the right spot, and then he

stood up, wiped his hands, and watched. In a minute the whole thing was blazing.

We played cards for a while. He let me win but I didn't say anything.

I went to bed early. He sat next to me for a while and watched me pretend to be asleep. Then he rose quietly, went to the kitchen and rifled through the drawers. His feet pattered and the front door groaned. A wave of cold air. I shuddered. Everything was quiet, like at Mom's. Everything was cold and quiet, and I saw myself floating in a bubble, over a tree, and on every branch of this tree there were kids who played loud board games with their mothers and fathers, kids who ate with their big families in the dining room, knives and forks clacking. And some days, in bustling cities carved into the wood, their dads took them to help pick out anniversary flowers; and some days their parents sat with them at the doctor's, holding hands, wincing when the needles slid in.

My father banged back into the house and his breath was quick and hot. He came to my bed, sniffed loudly. I opened my eyes and he was holding something messy in his hands. "Last one this year," he said.

He unfolded his hands and showed me a firefly caught between a shot glass and a sandwich bag. It danced, looked up, and offered me a flash of light. "I've got a real nightlight for you," he said, and he set it down on the oak table next to me. He stared at me a while. I didn't know what to say. He turned to leave, stopped, looked back. My eyes were opened wide. He started to say something. Then he closed his mouth and walked away. The firefly tapped the sides of the glass with its awkward head. My father washed his face in the kitchen. I heard him settle down for bed. He tossed and turned for a long time. *

Nick Rydell is a senior majoring in psychology and English at UW-Madison, and this writing contest provided him with his first opportunity for publication. He also writes poetry, and won honorable mention in a Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters High School Poetry Contest in 1999. Rydell grew up in Shawano.

Winners' Reading

You can hear Rydell and the other contest winners read their stories at the Wisconsin Book Festival on **Saturday, October 25**, 4 to 6 p.m., at Café Montmartre, 127 E. Mifflin Street, Madison. This special Wisconsin Academy event includes readings by winners of our statewide poetry contest.

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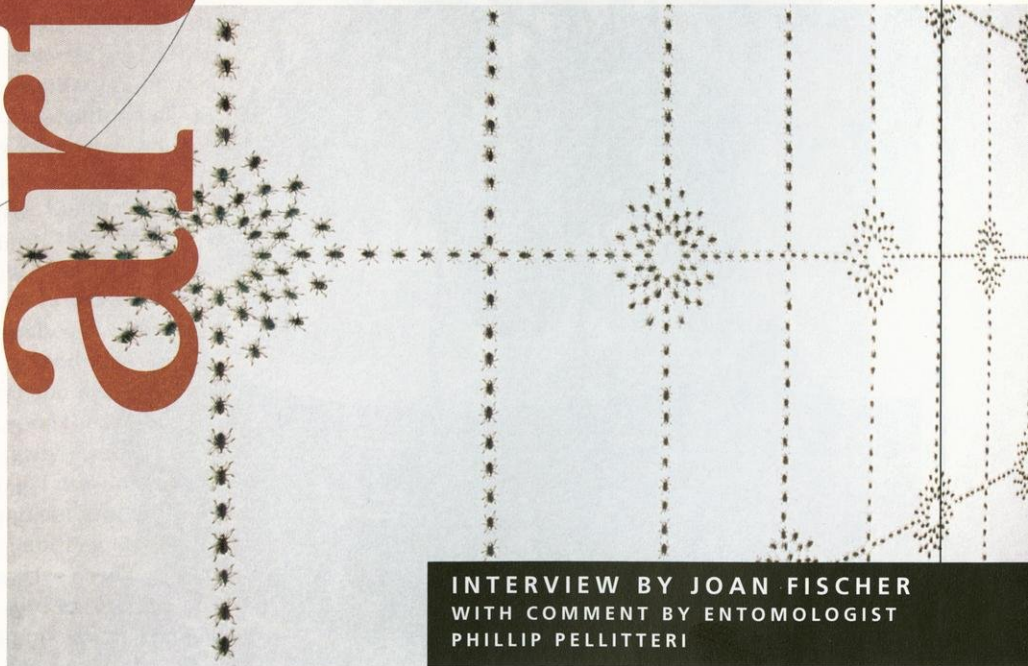
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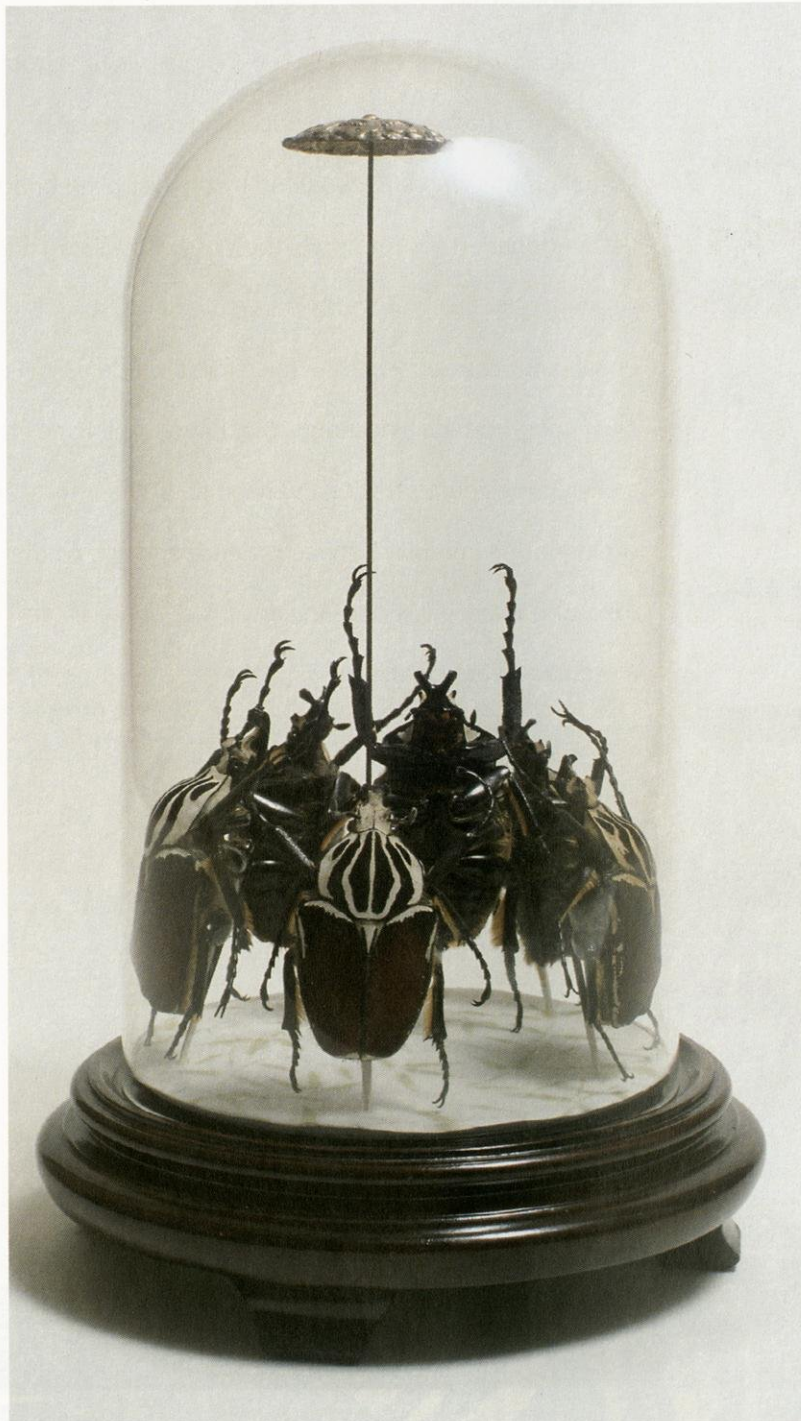
Jennifer Angus, a professor in the school of human ecology at UW–Madison, brings her insect artistry to the Wisconsin Academy Gallery October 7–31 in an exhibit called “The Observation Room.” Her work draws viewers from the worlds of art and science, including teachers and school groups who are fascinated by the discipline-bridging nature of her art. For example, the Wisconsin Center for Academically Talented Youth has created high school enrichment courses based on the exhibit. Students will do everything from helping Angus pin up her exhibits to studying the characteristics and habitats of the insects and exploring the interplay between science and art. As the following interview shows, the artist is as unusual and intriguing as her creations.

Eupholus Bennetti, 2002



INTERVIEW BY JOAN FISCHER
WITH COMMENT BY ENTOMOLOGIST
PHILLIP PELLITTERI

Jennifer Angus works in a most unusual medium: she pins real (but no longer living!) bugs to the wall to explore pattern and color—and challenge our notions of beauty in nature.



Surrounded, 2001

Which came first, your love of art or your love of insects?

Jennifer Angus: My love of art came first. My mother studied art history and archaeology at the University of Toronto. Growing up I was surrounded by works of art—my parents were avid collectors of contemporary painting, prints, and ceramics—and all of my mother's books on art and various artists. My interest in insects came considerably later. I spent several years in the late '80s and early '90s in the area known as the Golden Triangle (where the borders of Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar, formerly Burma, meet) researching tribal dress. At that time I discovered a particular garment known as a "singing shawl," worn by young women of the Karen tribe, that is embellished with metallic beetle wings in place of beads or sequins. It was very exciting to find something utilized that was so naturally beautiful and readily available. Since then I have found other groups that use whole beetles or the wings applied to garments, head-dresses, and baskets.

How and when did you decide to meld the two?

In 1995 I finally got my hands on some of the metallic beetles that I intended to use in a piece. I was doing a residency in Japan, just outside of Tokyo. Part of the purpose of the residency was to interact with the locals and any visitors who came to my studio. There were three little boys eight or nine years old—Yoshi, Daiske, and Nori—who came to visit every day after school. One day they saw me working with the insects and they thought, "Cool! She likes insects, we like insects!" and a friendship was formed, although we had no language in common. It is not unusual for Japanese children to keep insects as pets. Each day the boys would stop by and show me what they had caught. If it was dead they generally left it with me and if alive they took it home to put in little cricket cages. After a while my studio was beginning to look like a bug cemetery, and so to amuse the children I started dressing up the corpses in costumes. These were large rhino beetles, so I was able to dress them in paper

kimonos and mount them on a board so that they appeared to be standing. So we had rhino beetles modeling spring and autumn kimono fashions, dung beetles as sumo wrestlers, and so on. The culmination of my little insect sculptures was a whole three-ring circus done about five years after my time in Japan.

The bug circus was as far as I could go—there was nothing new or exciting to me about doing that any more, yet I still felt interested in the insects. Doing these works was always a sideline to my more serious sociopolitical-type pieces that were photo-based and utilized pattern in very specific ways to communicate ideas. At this point I thought, why not take the insects and put them into patterns? My training and teaching revolve around textile design and developing repeat patterns. It seemed obvious that this should be my next step. And so I began pinning insects to the wall in patterns that mimic textiles and wallpaper.

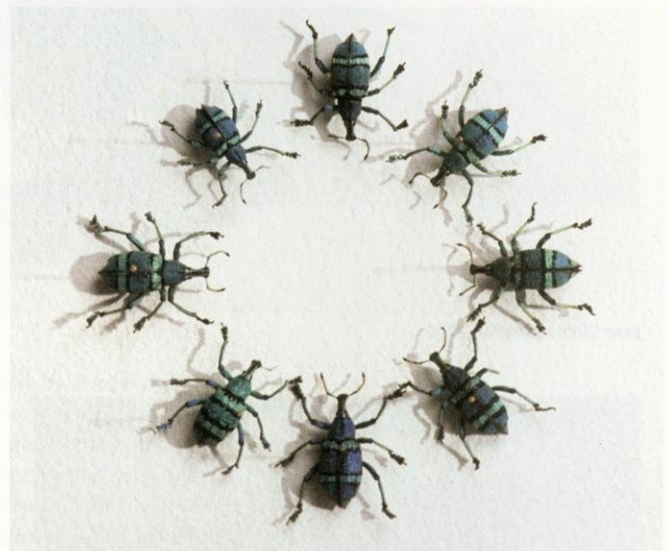
When people see your exhibits, what kinds of things do you want them to think about? What kind of response do you hope for?

I have thought a lot about how people will feel when they look at my bug wallpaper. I graduated from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, which is often thought to be one of the incubators of the conceptual art scene. Later on, for my MFA, I went to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, which is also very theory-heavy. While the insects I use are undoubtedly beautiful, I hope that after spending time with the work people will consider many things beyond the beauty. When you first enter the space, you are greeted with something you think you know—that is, a patterned wallpaper that could be in anyone's home. However, upon closer examination you discover it is made up of insects. I know very few people who welcome insects into their home. In fact, we have a certain hysteria about insects, particularly when found inside. Culturally insects signal dirtiness and disease to us. Some of that hysteria is based upon fact. For example, the bubonic plague was spread by fleas that resided on rats, West Nile virus is spread by mosquitoes, and I read recently that cockroaches in a crowded apartment block in Hong Kong may have helped spread SARS. However, most insects are quite harmless and don't deserve the blast of Raid that we generally inflict upon them.

When people are confronted with so many insects, issues about collecting are bound to arise as well. I draw references from the Victorian era in terms of color and pattern. Victorian collectors were seemingly insatiable and nothing was sacrosanct. I think the work addresses the obsessive need to collect and own at the expense, exhaustion, and extinction of a species. This in turn brings up issues of population, community, and environment. Different patterns seem to evoke different responses.



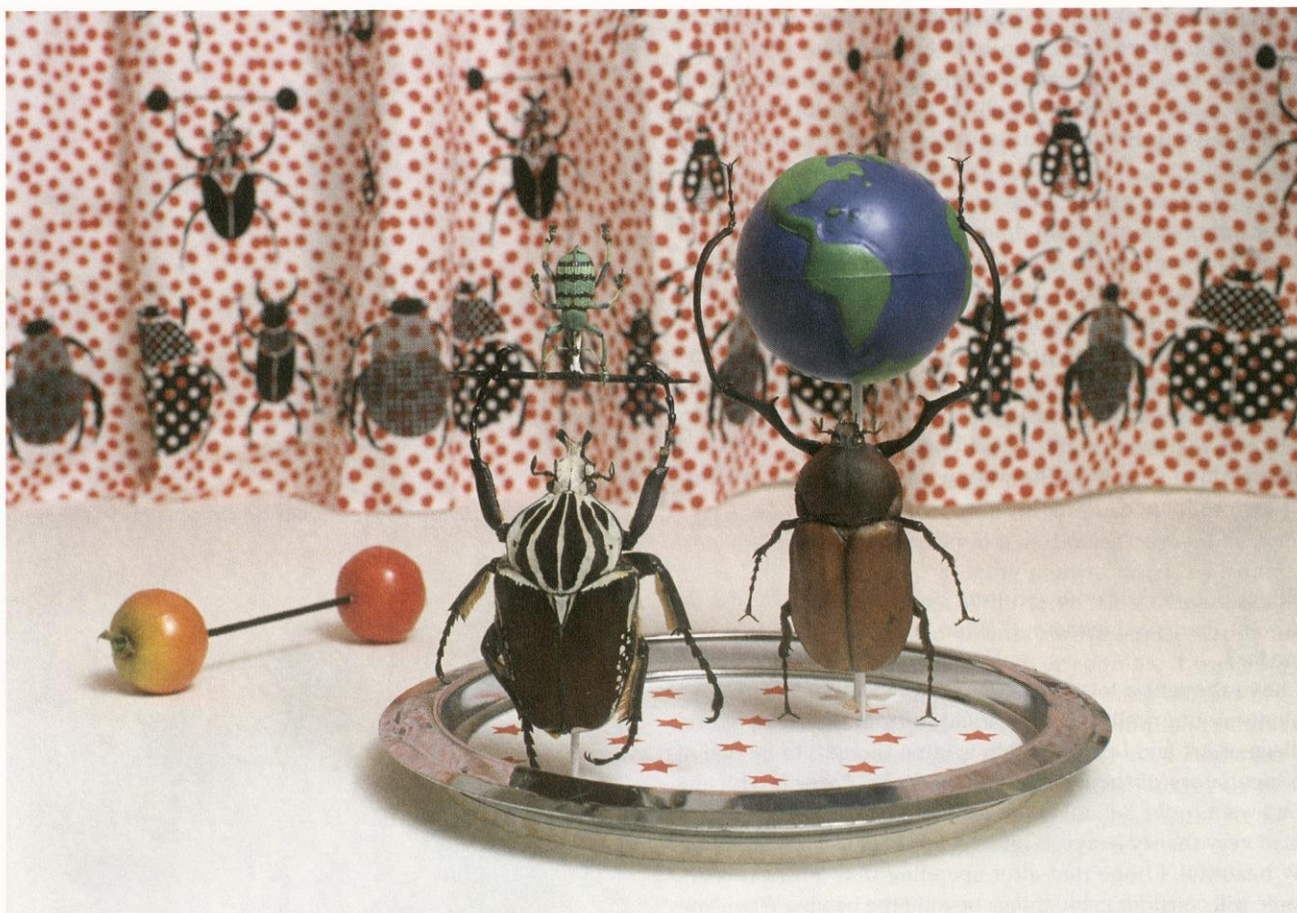
The letter "O" in *MOM* (detail), 2001



Eupholus Bennetti (detail), 2002



Eupholus Bennetti and Jennifer Angus, 2002



Bug Circus (detail), 2000

What kinds of responses have you had from different people?

The two most common questions I am asked are, "Where did you get so many insects?" and "Have you painted the insects?" The answer to the former is that there are many insect specimen dealers around the world. Most collectors only want two of a species—a male and a female. Since I want considerably more I have to deal with many people. The positive of this for me is that I have made some good friends. Last summer I visited the dealer I work with in Malaysia, and he drove me all around the Cameron Highlands, where most of the insects I use come from. In January at my exhibition in Stratford, Ontario, Ken Thorne, an insect dealer from London, Ontario, came to the opening and I was so happy that he could see what I actually do with all the insects I order from him. I deal with another man in Belgium and at some point I am sure we will finally meet in person.

As to the second question, regarding the color of the insects: I have not

Painted any insects. What you see is their natural color, whether it's beetles that are metallic green or blue or grasshoppers with pink and purple wings. Nature is truly amazing!

Perhaps the response that interested me the most came from an elderly man who was walking by the gallery in Toronto when I was installing an exhibition. He asked if he could come in and when he entered he asked me why there had to be so much pattern. I explained that I was trying to create a wallpaper effect. He stood studying the work, and finally he asked me, "Are you a drug addict or an alcoholic? Is this what you see?" I explained that that was not a motivating factor, but what he asked me raises some interesting psychological issues and is a reminder that we all carry some baggage. It reminds me of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's classic story "The Yellow Wallpaper." In the story a woman who is undoubtedly suffering from postpartum depression is confined to a room in which she begins to believe the wallpaper is moving and that something or someone is living and moving in

it. I've often thought, what if these insects came to life and started to move! There was a man named James Velez, I think, who for most of his life felt that insects were crawling upon him. Eventually he scratched himself to death—died of infection, I suppose. In extreme situations I have found there are people who have such negative feelings about insects they don't even want to enter the room.

Does your art send an environmental message?

I did not begin with the intention of having an environmental message, but I think it is unavoidable when one is surrounded by hundreds if not thousands of dead insects. Most people are unaware that these insects even exist, as most species we come into contact with in North America are brown or black, and bite or sting. People are simply amazed that such creatures exist, and I think they have a greater appreciation for Mother Nature's creativity.

Many people are concerned about the impact upon the environment that the culling of so many insects may have. Most of the insects I use come from the rainforests of Malaysia and Papua New Guinea. They are collected by indigenous peoples who are able to make a livelihood by these activities. Scientists, specimen dealers, and myself are of the belief that if these people continue to support themselves by collecting insects, then they will have little reason to cut down the forest that is the provider. Thus insect harvesting is an environmentally friendly activity, and they are a renewable resource. One should keep in mind, too, that insects reproduce at a tremendous rate. The vast majority of endangered species are endangered because of loss of habitat, not over-collecting.

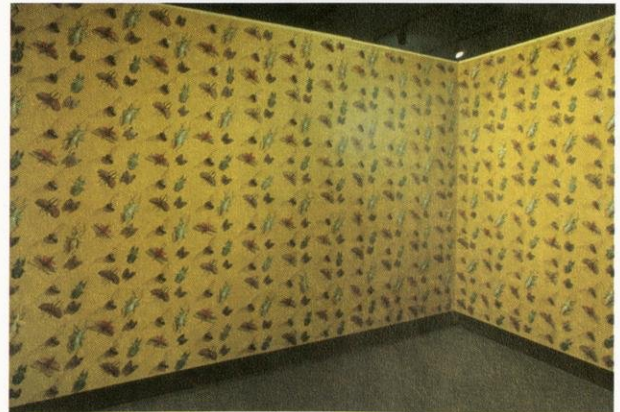
I hope that people will consider what is going on in their own backyard. How is the expansion of city limits impacting wildlife, and, in particular, the smallest of creatures? It is easy to take up the cause of larger animals and birds, but what about the less glamorous animals that have an important role to play in our environment, whether by pollinating flowers or aiding in the decomposition of various matters?

Could you elaborate a bit on where you gather your insects, and what kinds of insects they are?

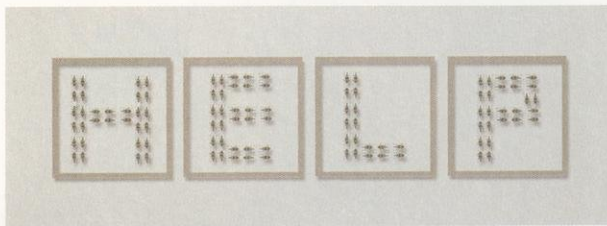
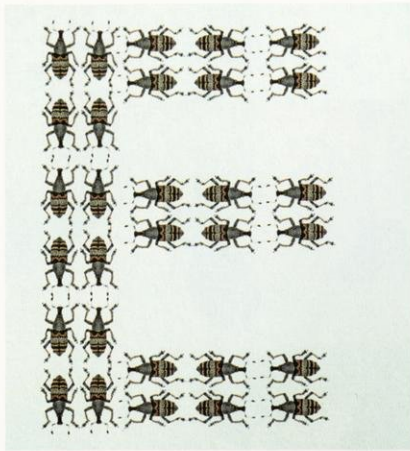
As I mentioned, I deal with many insect specimen dealers around the world. It took me quite a while to research what I wanted because when you get a catalogue of insects all the names are in Latin, and very rarely are there pictures. I'm an artist, not an entomologist. I had to learn about the various families of insects and then the subgroups within those. When I began I was primarily interested in beetles, or Coleoptera. At first I looked for those that had a pattern, whether it was stripes or spots, and were reasonably affordable. I discovered *Eupholus bennetti*, a colorful type of weevil (Curculionoidea) from Papua New Guinea. They have vertical black stripes and range in color from turquoise to royal blue to purple. Sometimes they have a metallic sheen, too. Initially I thought I would be arranging them and playing with their existing patterns, but what I didn't realize at the time is that their legs get



Relic (detail), 2003



Relic, 2003



The letter "E" (detail) and *HELP*, 2001.

in the way! I should have figured that out, but it's their legs that are actually integral to the pattern.

I lucked out when I chose *E. bennetti*, because not only are they colorful, patterned, and affordable, but they're also tough little creatures. I am able to reuse the insects from my installations. When I take down a show I just put the insects on foam trays and pop them into drawers. Sometimes when we are installing a show, we'll drop an insect, and they remain relatively intact despite the tumble, unlike other larger species that will completely shatter. So all in all I like them, and I am rather fond of their funny long snouts. They have personality.

More recently I have been working with phasmids, or those insects that mimic sticks and leaves. In my piece "Relic" I was interpreting a William Morris pattern. Morris' designs were always abundant in flora and fauna, and the leaf-mimic insects were perfect for that project. These insects are so highly and incredibly adapted to look exactly like the leaves upon the trees in which they reside that many people find it hard to believe that these really are insects.

My next project involves cicadas and grasshoppers. I like the grasshoppers because most people consider them pests due to the crop damage they have at times caused. They have an edgy quality, rather menacing faces, and sharp barbs on their legs, yet their wings are incredibly beautiful.

BUGS RULE!

An appreciation of our many-legged brethren.

By Phillip Pellitteri

Because insects are so different from us, many people have a hard time warming up to anything other than butterflies. Most of us have heard the opinions that insects are a sign of filth, neglect, or disease. Why else would you have bugs? It seems to be part of our culture to have insect and spider phobias, and demeaning terms such as a maggot, roach, or slug have an arthropod basis. Once you get past the alien nature of these creatures, there are amazing life histories, colors, patterns, and shapes to see.

Very few entomologists come into the science without being drawn to the incredible beauty and diversity of the insect world. The biological reality is that insects are the most successful group of animals on the planet and have been this way for more than 300 million years. They are the dominant life form whether we like it or not.

My first impressions of the work of Jennifer Angus are from a practical side. The amount of time and effort it takes to prepare each specimen for display is easily overlooked unless you have taken a course that required an insect collection. Every leg, antenna, and body part must be positioned and allowed to dry. Parts can be very fragile, and to have hundreds of properly mounted insects is quite a task. It also shows a strong devotion to do it correctly.

Exotic tropical insects have become a more common viewing experience than they used to be. Concerns for the rainforest, natural history programs, insect zoos, butterfly houses, and exotic pet stores have exposed people to many strange creatures. The advantage of many of the tropical insects is that

their large size makes it easier to see the bright colors, unique shapes, and endless diversity found in the insect world. Small insects are just as exotic, but people rarely look close enough to realize this. When we display insects, people often accuse entomologists of painting or somehow enhancing the large tropical specimens. They cannot be real, can they? The *Eupholus weevils* used in the exhibit are a great example. Even after looking at creatures like this for more than 30 years, I am still fascinated by the colors, textures, and shapes. They bring the same delight they brought when I was 8 years old. It is easy to see why insects and their parts are used as jewelry throughout the world.

Jennifer's work goes beyond the visual because it forces you to experience insects. It would be impossible not to stir some unique feelings or thoughts after an exposure to these pieces. As you move close enough to realize the patterns on a wall are made up of real, exotic, six-legged creatures, you might be amused. When you are surrounded by hundreds of cicadas, grasshoppers, and walking sticks, you may even feel you are taking part in a science fiction movie. Actual insect specimens have so much more of an impact than prints or pictures. A room full of patterns made of insect bodies even forces an entomologist to experience insects in novel ways. Exhibitions such as these are likely to leave you in awe of the creatures we often ignore or step on in disgust. As with so many experiences in life, if you go in with an open mind and look closely, you will be rewarded. There is so much more to insects than just pretty butterflies.

Phillip Pellitteri is an entomologist with the UW-Madison Insect Diagnostic Laboratory.

It's probably worth mentioning that the insects don't come all ready for me to just pin to the wall. They are individually packaged on a piece of cardboard with cellophane wrap over the top. Usually they are curled up in an almost fetal-type position. They are very dry and brittle. I have to stick them into a humidity chamber, usually for a couple of days. When I bring them out they have rehydrated and I am able to move their limbs and pin or position them. They dry again and then they are ready to go. This is a very time-consuming task. On average I can pin about 15 weevils an hour and grasshoppers maybe six an hour if things are going well—which usually they're not because their legs are so strong and difficult to wrestle with.

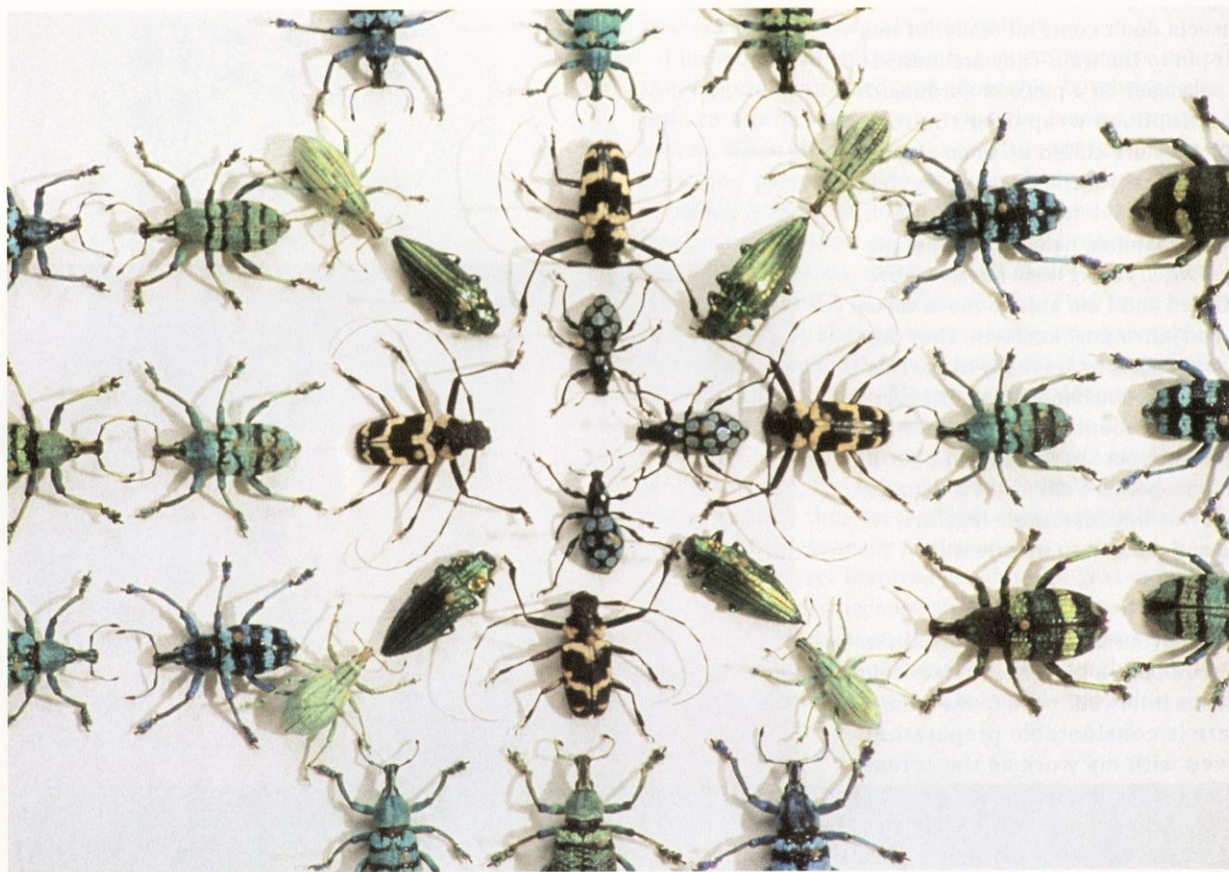
Describe your work process. What's it like to compose a piece? How does the idea move from your head to the wall?

There is considerable preparation involved with my work as the actual piece is created on site. Usually I need a lot of lead time since all parts of the process are very labor-intensive. The greatest amount of time is spent relaxing and pinning insects, which I have already described. Before that happens I need to work out the pattern for the installation. For me this is challenging and fun. I need information regarding how much wall space I will be covering. I like to know something of the history of the space or the place the installation will be in. This gives me direction as to what the pattern should be like or inspired by. Sometimes I have to make decisions based on how many insects I have on hand. This is not ideal because it can cramp my vision of a piece, but at times I am not in a position to obtain more insects. If I'm lucky I am in a situation that allows me to order what I need, but economizing is always important. I have to spend time on the internet communicating with dealers, making sure of availability and arrangements for the shipping of insects. When I have all the information I can begin designing.

As my training is in textile design, I enjoy working out what we know as the "repeat." This is an acquired skill in which the viewer should not be easily able to recognize where the repeat unit begins and ends. I apply the same



Bug Circus (detail), 2000



Below: Cross, 2001, and in detail above.



knowledge I use for designs on cloth to the insect wallpaper. Part of the design process is playing with the actual insects in various arrangements. From this I take measurements and then I am able to create a facsimile pattern tile on the computer. I like to have pictures of the actual space I will be installing the work so that I can do a mock-up on the computer. It's amazing how much I can learn from this.

Of course one can do all sorts of planning, and then in the installation changes need to be made. It's a matter of thinking fast.

Is there anything you'd like to add?

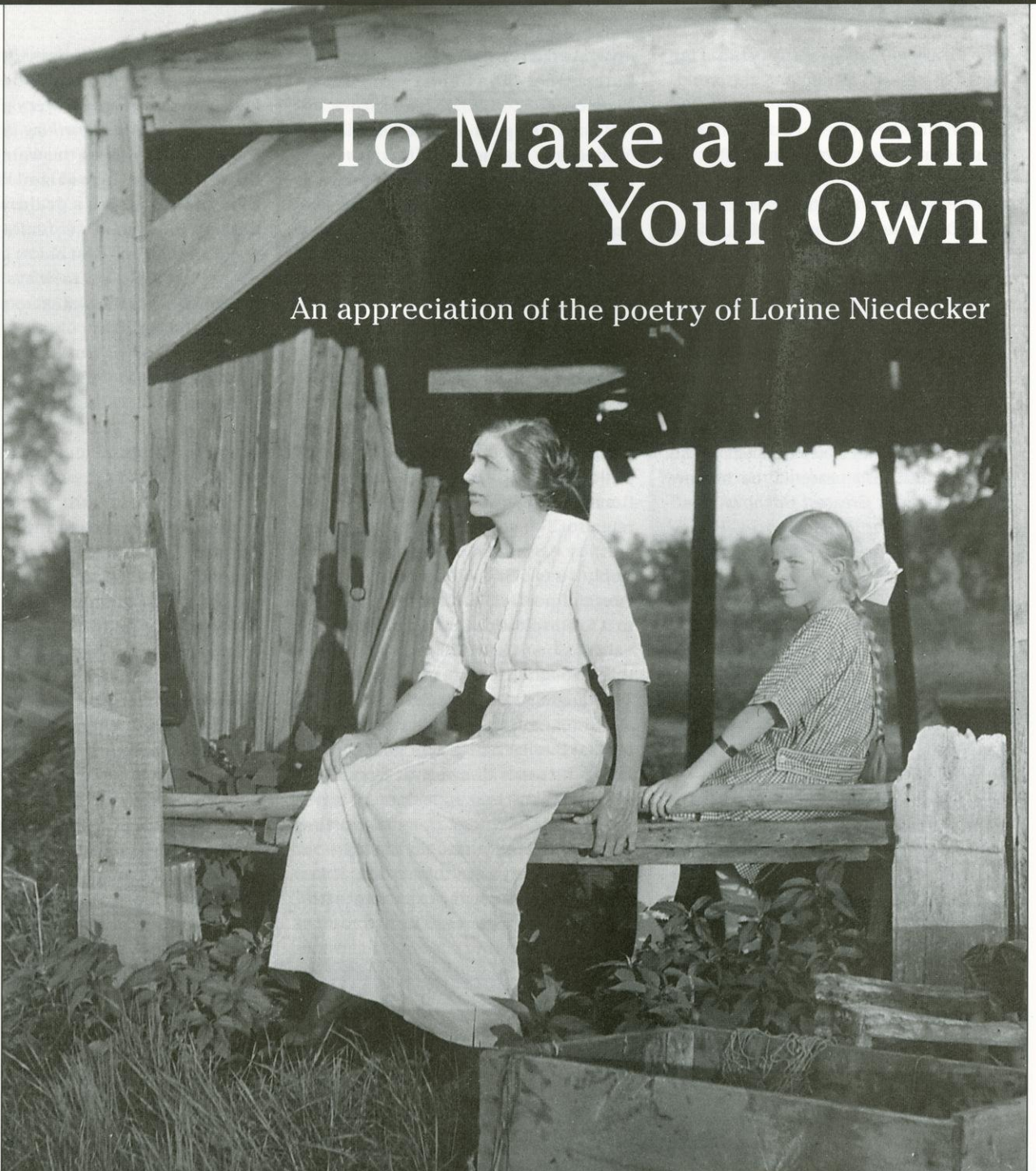
One other thing I would like to mention is that thus far I have focused on negative Western attitudes toward insects. There is one case in which we have positive opinions on them, and that is in children's literature. The first-ever children's story that was not a moral tale is *The Butterflies Ball and the Grasshoppers Feast*. There are plenty of famous insects in children's literature, from the caterpil-

lar on the hookah in *Alice in Wonderland* to the insect companions in *James and the Giant Peach*. I mention this because something I am trying to capture in my work is that wonder we experience as a child. I would like people to discover it once again when they see my work, and for a moment just stand there and say "Wow!" *

Jennifer Angus holds an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. A native of Canada, she is currently an assistant professor in environment, textiles and design at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Angus has an extensive exhibition record that includes shows in Toronto, Chicago, and Tokyo. Her Wisconsin Academy Gallery show runs October 7 to 31. You can meet her at an artist's reception on Friday, October 10, 5-7 p.m. at the Wisconsin Academy Gallery, 1922 University Avenue, Madison.

To Make a Poem Your Own

An appreciation of the poetry of Lorine Niedecker



Lorine Niedecker and her mother, Daisy. Daisy was deaf, and Lorine communicated with her mainly by writing.

All photos courtesy of *Rosebud* magazine

BY JOHN LEHMAN

SHE WAS THE DAUGHTER OF A CARP FISHERMAN and spent most of her life in obscurity writing on Fort Atkinson's Blackhawk Island. The year 2003 is the 100th anniversary of Lorine Niedecker's birth, an event that will be marked by a three-day centenary celebration October 9–11 in Milwaukee and Fort Atkinson. Her reputation as a poet has

been steadily increasing over the years in the United States and throughout the world, and with a new edition of her collected works from the University of California Press, her standing is assured. Robert Creeley has said, "Lorine Niedecker proves a major poet of the 20th century, just as Emily Dickinson was for the 19th. Bleak indeed that both should have been so curiously overwritten and ignored, when their work defined the time in which they lived with such genius."

In honor of her centenary celebration, our poetry editor, John Lehman, focuses on the art of Lorine Niedecker's work and the significance it holds for contemporary readers (whether or not they read much poetry). The following article is an excerpt from his new book, *America's Greatest Unknown Poet: Lorine Niedecker Reminiscences, Photographs, Letters and Her Most Memorable Poems*.

Novels and short stories love the past. Maybe it's because they're longer, but each work seems to draw on a wider scope of experiences than an individual poem does. And that means the writer has to reach into experiences and observations that have happened over a longer period of time. It's why prose writers use the past tense. Poetry is more comfortable with the present. It is immediate, brief, intense. It may take advantage of poets' and readers' wide experiences, but it lives in the here and

now. And no work exemplifies this better than the poetry of Lorine Niedecker.

Before taking a look at some of Lorine Niedecker's poems you might ask yourself three questions: What do you bring to the reading of a poem (what are your expectations)? What is the experience of reading a poem as you do it, either aloud or to yourself? And finally, What do you take away from the poem—what stays with you after the experience has passed?

There are all kinds of languages. That of science, for example, attempts to codify as exactly as possible what we can know through our senses, or that of philosophy utilizes logic and abstractions of truth. We turn to fiction most often for the stories it offers of others and, by extension, how these stories apply to us. But what about the language of poetry? Most notably, we look to it for inspiration and consolation and expression of our feelings. Poems do this through extensive use of metaphor. The language of poetry lets us understand one entity (usually beyond our normal intellectual grasp, like *death* or *love*) in terms of another (usually a physical thing) that appeals more to our senses. All language is metaphoric—words stand for what they signify—but poetry not only uses this, it does it in a way that makes us appreciate the metaphoric process. The wonder of

Lorine Niedecker's work is that since it is so "stripped down" it allows us to look at that process in a very pure form. For example, with *Something in the water* the words, as well as the water and the flower, are being swirled down, as though into a sink's drain, while we observe them.

Something in the water
like a flower
will devour

water

flower

In a 1962 letter she wrote to Cid Corman, Lorine Niedecker said, "For me the sentence lies in wait—all those prepositions and connectives—like an early spring flood. A good thing my follow-up feeling has always been condense, condense." But the stripped-down form offers both advantages and disadvantages. When I look at today's contemporary poetry I see it appealing to people in two ways. First, there is a strong narrative quality to it. It is as if we are entering a miniature movie theater and the poet will tell us a story in a very prose-like way, though shorter and using some musical devices that make it stick in our memory (like a catchy theme song). I'm not criticizing this. In fact, that's the way I write. I'm saying that people today enjoy being entertained and have rediscovered that poetry can do this. A second appeal is that it either plugs into our emotions easily or we can easily plug into the poet's. We like poems we can quote at a graduation, wedding, or funeral, poems that offer solace when we feel lonely or courage when we need to strengthen ourselves. Unfortunately, Lorine Niedecker's work is less entertaining for the passive reader and not as easily accessible for someone wanting to make a quick connection. Despite its simple appearance, it isn't easy.

So what advantages does her work offer instead? It forces us to slow down. To understand, rather than be understood. It reduces life to essentials in a way few things in our overwrought world do. It is demanding of us, but the



A poet of place, Lorine loved her river-island world..

result is we leave the experience with a sharpness and intensity that make our own existence more precise.

What that means in terms of approaching her poetry is that we need to set a different kind of expectation. For example, reading a page of prose might take two minutes; therefore reading a half a page would take one minute. But if that half page were one of Robert Frost's narrative poems laid out on a full piece of paper we would probably devote two or more minutes to it, even though it is half the number of words of a page of prose. That's because we give each line of poetry more "weight" and each word of its line more significance than we do to words of a line of prose. Niedecker gives us poems that use 20 percent of the words of the average Frost poem. Rather than zip by them, because they're short, we need to allow them as much time as we would a page of prose or a narrative poem. And attention shouldn't be just to the words. It needs to be to what they represent. More than any other poet, Lorine Niedecker stops us in our tracks. She forces us to block out all the distraction of our frantic, noisy world and experience life. If we are to get anything at all from her poems, it is first and foremost the gift of being *deliberately* in the moment. It's what Thoreau talked about in *Walden* and what the great teachers of the East have always reminded us of. Notice how small and elemental and real the world of *Popcorn-can cover* and *July, waxwings* are.

Popcorn-can cover
screwed to the wall
over a hole
so the cold
can't mouse in

*

July, waxwings
on the berries
have dyed red
the dead
branch

But for those of us not accustomed to reading poetry, how do we begin addressing a particular poem? Start by

reading it aloud. Don't worry about meaning, or about vocally interpreting the words. Just read. Read it three or four times. This is a physical thing, letting our mouths shape the vowels and consonants, our breath breathing life into the words. It's like relishing the taste of food without verbalizing it, or gazing on the face of someone we love for the pure enjoyment that provides. As with a song, we first enter it through its melody, and once that is internalized, we become conscious of the meaning of its lyrics. Edward Hirsch claims, "Poems communicate before they are understood... Let the poem work in you as a human experience. Listen to the words and pay attention to the feelings (as opposed to meanings) they evoke." Reading a poem out loud is delighting in language; it's seeing how words taste.

Don't get bogged down in the rhythm or rhyme of a specific line in any poem. We want to simply be conscious of the patterns of sound behind the particular form the poem takes. This is like the enjoyment of jazz or classical music despite not being able to explain it in terms of musical notation (how restricting that would be). But there are some things to be conscious of, such as the pause at the end of the line. Line breaks are like rests in music, and stanza breaks like rests that are twice as long. These are silences that are as important to the music as the words. You'll also be aware that you naturally stress some syllables of words more than others (this becomes the basis of meter in certain poetry). How does that pattern of inflection make you feel? Is there a rapid pace that makes you feel tense or a relaxed one that releases tension? Are these the rhythms of joy, love, despair or expectation? Generally, the words at the beginning and end of a line stand out a bit more than the others when you read them. The poet works with that, saving those positions for words whose meaning he or she wants emphasized. Also, the shorter the line and the shorter the poem, the tighter the language has to be. And rhyme? It goes back to the elemental pleasure we had reciting nursery rhymes as children. Better when subtle, rhyme is like hearing again a note that has already been struck. A poem doesn't include as exact-

ing a direction for the human voice as the notation of music, but its patterns and breaks do provide us with some direction. Best of all, a poem gives us the freedom to vocally make it uniquely our own.

When reading poetry aloud to ourselves, we all dream of sounding like James Earl Jones, or like Gwyneth Paltrow in *Shakespeare in Love*. Here are a few hints: Slow down, breathe regularly. A person has more emotional range if he or she is not straining for volume or running out of breath. Recite the alphabet with exaggerated lip movement before you begin in order to limber up those muscles, and stand or sit straight so that your breathing is deep



Lorine at age 10 with her parents, Henry and Daisy.

from your chest. Emphasize nouns and interpret verbs with more exaggeration than you would in regular speech (as Carl Sandburg said, make nouns echo and verbs quiver). Improve your delivery by recording it on a small cassette recorder, and listen to it carefully, just like you do when making a message for your telephone answering machine. Over time, your diction will magically improve. Try your hand reading *Hear* with interpretation.

Hear
 where her snow-grave is
 the *You*
ah you
 of mourning doves

Poetry is also pictures. Before worrying about “what it means,” identify the images of the poem. Most of these are visual, but notice how some appeal to our senses of touch, smell, and even sometimes taste. They are moving pictures. Not only do we “move” through the poem as we read it, we move through physical images which themselves are in motion. These images are not exhaustive in description, but more

often are suggested by one or two significant details. Images are what make poetry an experience rather than talk about an experience. And, readers are partners in creating completed images through the use of their own rich imaginations. Much as a painter creates the illusion of depth and perspective, the poet (with our help) creates a three-dimensional world from words on a two-dimensional page. And sometimes he or she does something even more amazing.

Some of the images are more than constructs of physical things. They also have a figurative meaning. We enter a world of correspondences with ties between our physical, emotional, and spiritual levels of experience. And here

“meaning” comes to signify making connections (real connections more powerful than fanciful thinking). Niedecker, Emily Dickinson, and Frost, to mention a few poets whose work uses images as springboards, do this in two ways. First, by what they give us. For example, they choose one image over another, because it offers multiple levels of significance. Second, they do this by what they hold back—often the images when examined closely receive too much emphasis for their strictly literal value. They send us searching for meaning beyond the obvious.

Fog-thick morning—
 I see only
 where I now walk. I carry
 my clarity
 with me.

Consider at the outset

Consider at the outset:
 to be thin for thought
 or thick cream blossomy

Many things are better
 flavored with bacon

Sweet Life, My Love:
 didn't you ever try
 this delicacy—the marrow
 in the bone?

And don't be afraid
 to pour wine over cabbage

by *Lorine Niedecker*
 1903–1970

Lorine on Blackhawk Island.



Paring back the number of words is not enough. It is the particular choices of what is presented that also makes Niedecker worth studying. Think about what you would or would not write about if you were a poet. On your deathbed what would you choose as the most poignant events of your life? We can compare Niedecker in her letters and in the eyes of those who knew her with the content of some of the most memorable work she wrote. Yet these are not often uplifting in the same way that a song or painting might be. That's because the troublesome things are most deeply ingrained. But even here she's selective. She writes about her working-class husband, but very little about her philandering father who “kept” another family. She writes about her deaf, long-suffering mother, but not about Louis Zukofsky and Cid Corman, whose friendships she courted over her lifetime. She writes about the child, Paul—Zukofsky's son—but (with one exception) not about the aborted twins she would have had by him. Or is this true?

It seems to me that someone who lives a life of metaphors can also easily substitute one person for another. Her father and husband meld together, as do Lorine and her mother and the live child and dead children. Of course it's more

complicated than that. But part of the fun of literature (despite disdain for it from the academic community) is this gossipy, quasi-psychoanalytic speculation. Niedecker's cryptic poetry is full of tantalizing clues and references that encourage it.

Wilderness

You are the man
You are my other country
and I find it hard going

You are the prickly pear
You are the sudden violent storm

the torrent to raise the river
to float the wounded doe

What is clear, however, is that she chose not only subjects that were difficult, but ones that have multiple layers of meaning and in which there is some kind of resolution (if from nothing else, from the beauty of that perfect match of content and form).

One suggestion many believe is a first step in grasping the full power of a poem is to paraphrase its meaning. In Niedecker's work there are at least three levels of meaning: 1) What literally is the physical subject of the poem and what is she focusing on with regard to it? 2) What is the meaning in terms of Niedecker's own life? There are enough biographical materials in this book to make a loose correlation between her life and her poems fairly simple. But a good poem is more than self-expression. It may begin as that, but it becomes art when a reader can enter it and make its experiences part of his or her own, and therefore... 3) Paraphrase what the poem says in terms of its meaning to us and our lives. This last may not be as easy. But we are searching our own experiences and trying to find some patterns we share as human beings. Ultimately poetry makes us work harder, but we will find the results all the more satisfying.

Some of these last two levels of meaning involve subjects that we cannot deal with easily using regular prose. We turn to metaphor. It describes one thing in

Lorine married Al Millen
on May 26, 1963.



terms of another, but these are very seldom of equal importance. One side of the comparison is physical, specific, and can be grasped through the senses (and poetry uses more than our intellect). We hear its sounds and see its images. We even smell and taste it through our imaginations in a way that is often startlingly vivid. It's true that other forms of writing use these same devices, but never with the intensity of poetry. In fact, they seem to define a piece of writing as poetry, even more than its form on the page. But the other side of the metaphorical comparison, though no less real, is less substantial to our senses, but more profound. And this is where poetry's real strength lies. As Marianne Moore once said, "The power of the visible is in the invisible." With poetry, through the visible, we are emotionally, intellectually, even physically, grappling

with *love, death, success, defeat, the future, our past*—the forces of life.

One reason poets select some subjects and not others is that they feel they can wrestle with them using the tools of poetry. When the poem is successful, the transformation process leads to some sort of an understanding at the intellectual, sensual and musical levels that proves satisfying. Lesser poetry tacks on a moral. Greater poetry, like that of Niedecker, preserves the complexity of the subject. It doesn't simplify the subject, but with ordinary words celebrates its density. Though her poems may appear simple, they aren't. But that doesn't mean they don't lead to some sort of resolution. When people refer to the redemptive quality of art, they mean that even though the subject may be depressing, there is a hopefulness about being able to express it that gives us power and allows us to

move beyond that depression. It may not be the same as a solution to a problem, but even an expression of something unpleasant, if done with grace and efficiency, can take our breath away. Sometimes this is done by as little as a single word or phrase at the end of a Niedecker poem that surprises us, confronts our expectations and makes us re-examine the poem's theme all over again.

I walked
on New Year's Day

beside the trees
my father now gone planted

evenly following
the road

Each
spoke

Niedecker's poetry is not a journey to another place. It takes us neither forward nor backward in time. Rather, it's a journey into nearness and immediacy. If we take the time and the effort to make some of these poems our own, they can awaken us and make us more fully aware of our own lives. Thoreau wrote, "Men esteem truth remote, in the outskirts of the system, behind the farthest star, before Adam and after the last man. In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime. But all these times and places and occasions are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the laps of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us." We understand what Thoreau means through his writing. We experience it for ourselves in the poetry of Lorine Niedecker. *

10 Practical Suggestions on How to Make a Poem Your Own

1. Can you recall a moment in your own life that seemed unusually intense, where you were more aware than usual of being entirely in the here and now?

2. Read through a selection of poems and pick one that you especially relate to. In your own words tell how it expresses the essence of its subject.

3. Other poets and writers take an opposite approach to that of Lorine Niedecker. They write long work overflowing with detail. What advantages does that offer you as a reader?

4. Take a particular poem that attracts you for some initial reason and read it out loud three times without thinking about any deeper meaning. Try to imagine you were the poet and the experience of the poem is coming to you as you read; and try to communicate that to someone hearing it (even if there isn't anyone besides yourself).

5. Make it easy on yourself and pick a short poem that resonates with how you often feel. Now memorize it. When you do this, you're using the same lip movements and breath the poet did when he or she first said the poem while writing it. If you feel up to it, try memorizing another.

6. Take the rhythms of a particular poem and try to substitute word for word your own subject on your own theme. If there's an adjective, noun, verb, conjunction, verb, noun, do the same in the same order for your own piece. This is the equivalent of art students' copying the work of a master in order to understand the choices and challenges the original painter made.

7. Find a poem that particularly captures your interest and give its literal meaning, the meaning you think it has in terms of the poet's life and how it's meaningful to you. Now take a poem by Niedecker that initially you don't find appealing and try to do the same thing.

8. Of course a poem is more than levels of meaning. Think of it as a story, a painting, and a piece of music. Choose a poem and tell it as if it were a story. Then describe its images as if they were a picture or series of pictures in a gallery. Finally, what are the musical devices the poem uses—certain sounds and rhythms—and what popular, classical, or jazz pieces does it bring to mind?

9. Another way of penetrating poetry is to take two poems that seem to be on similar themes and compare and contrast them in terms of both form and content. Try to decide what affects you and how, and don't be afraid to have strong preferences.

10. The ultimate way to appreciate and show appreciation for a writer is to do an informal presentation about him or her to others not familiar with the writer's work. Why not ask for 15 minutes of your next book or writer discussion group's meeting to do this for Lorine Niedecker's or some other poet's work? Present a few of the poems as you've come to value them, and don't hesitate to give your personal reactions. Who knows, this might encourage others to follow your lead.

John Lehman is the poetry editor of the Wisconsin Academy Review, founder of Rosebud magazine, and author of America's Greatest Unknown Poet: Lorine Niedecker Reminiscences, Letters, Photographs and Her Most Memorable Poems, \$12 (available from Zelda Wilde Publishing, 1-800-7-TO-KNOW, at bookstores, better-writer.com, amazon.com and bn.com).

Lorine Niedecker: A Centenary Celebration

When/Where:

October 9–10, Milwaukee
Woodland Pattern Book Center and
Milwaukee Public Library/
Centennial Hall

October 11, Fort Atkinson
Dwight Foster Public Library,
Hoard Museum, and Blackhawk Island

Who: Presenters include Michael Ondaatje, author of *The English Patient*, Thomas A. Clark, and Lisa Jarnot, along with other Niedecker experts from the U.S. and around the world.

More info: www.woodlandpattern.org,
tel. 414/263-5001

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The Best Way to Read Lorine Niedecker's Poems

First wander through Emerald Grove's antique store
amongst fishing nets and rusty kerosene lamps
for a spitbox in which to plant Queen Anne's lace.

Unpin dishtowels from a clothesline
and notice how the leaves
of the neighboring poplar
shimmy in the wind.

Enter a cabin that has been sitting empty
while its owners take a cross-country train
to New York.

With her book on your lap, cup the chin
of a cat as it sprawls beside you
on a windowsill, the breeze thick
with the scent of cherry blossoms.

Remember how your husband's former fiancée
whose pregnancy was terminated
asked to come visit, couldn't take her eyes
off your little boy.

by Shoshauna Shy

Shoshauna Shy works for the Wisconsin Humanities Council and is the poetry editor for the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets' quarterly newsletter. She is a member of the Prairie Fire Poetry Quartet and maintains www.BookThatPoet.com, a listing service for poets who are available to do readings and workshops nationwide.

Keeping Still

Sound
travels best over water
and through
darkness. Exactly
like fear.

Beside the lake
on a night with no
moon the loon cries,
the chorusing frogs
shrilled in our ears then
went so suddenly still the silence
started us.

Punctuating
that stillness, the faint
rhythmic sound of quiet
oars—not
splash and lift, this oarsman
handled his boat
so noiselessly we heard
only the small click of oars
in their locks, a sound
he could soften but not
stifle unless he shipped
his oars. Which he did
for a while.

Before the frogs
trusted his silence,
we heard again
that almost-inaudible
click of someone rowing
as near to absolute silence
as he could. We sat a long time
wondering who
on that waiting expanse of water
didn't want us
to know he was there.

by Lois Beebe Hayna

Rules of the Table

Rutabagas and turnips are vegetable cousins.
In my stubborn childhood I wasn't

fond of either. But they were vegetables
which, served at our table,

I was required to eat before being excused.
In my mother's maybe-justified view

foods brought fresh and pristine from her garden
deserved to be relished. But against chard and

rutabagas I protested each time,
refused them so fiercely we finally resigned

ourselves to a truce
and she let me eat rutabagas slice
by raw slice.

by Lois Beebe Hayna

*Lois Beebe Hayna says, "I miss Wisconsin though I've lived in Colorado long enough to be named a State Poetry Fellow and to share writing endeavors with Western poets." Hayna is the author of four collections of poems and has published in **Westview** and **Whetstone**.*

Foreshadowing Afterlife

I've heard the neighbor's wind chimes in the dead
still winter dark. I've heard, from hollow
bones that quiver in the cold,
chants, faint tones, that note the slightest wed
of pipe to pipe.

I've breathed the rose-thick atmosphere in wake
of late spring storm. I've smelled the flower
on ripped, still dripping stem,
fragile petal flesh, sweet incense ache
for skin to skin.

I've tasted scraps of light on stones half buried
in summer paths. I've eaten daily
suns at night's tunnel ends,
thrown rinds down at dusk, this ground so married
to light, to light.

I've watched the captured last careening flight
of autumn leaves. I've seen the weight
and the weightlessness rehearse
sparse steps, dance a delicate remembered rite
as twin and twin.

by Jan Carroll

*Jan Carroll lives in west-central Wisconsin, where she works for a local publishing company as a technical editor and web coordinator. Her poetry has appeared in **Cider Press Review**, **Inklings**, **Samsara Quarterly**, **California Quarterly**, **Borderlands**, and **Taint**.*

A Celebration for Whitman

I celebrate fat-bellied pike
and schools of minnows in cool water,
and the wolf on the run, I celebrate,
and the hunter and the hunted.
I celebrate fresh cut lumber and the smell of
sawdust,
and the touch against skin
and the scrape of beech bark, I celebrate.

An unknown voice
and the thump in the dark, I celebrate,
and I celebrate butter-fried fish
and scent of mustard,
and wet wood in autumn.
I celebrate people with beating hearts,
who keep time in rockers on wood porches.

I celebrate water falling endlessly
on rock and the taste
of field onions left drying on lines,
and the words I celebrate,
and the grass and sea and sky.
Myself I celebrate and you, Walt Whitman,
for changing and being the same.

by Gary C. Busha

Gary Busha is a writer, poet, editor, and publisher living in Sturtevant. He recently reinvented himself as a teacher of English and writing at UW-Parkside and Gateway Technical College.

My Father's Bow and Arrows

At one time he owned a high-powered bow, and took me along, with my own light-weight crescent of red fiberglass, to the archery range by the river. Bow-hunting, he argued, was more sportsmanlike, gave the deer a fairer chance. His biceps bulked drawing back to his cheek the tense string. Arrow tips sliced accurately into target-practice paper clipped to straw bales in the same piney woods he'd combed, as a boy, for flint arrow heads. But he ended up not dispatching a single buck to that twilight forest into which the old Ojibway hunters had tracked their quarry. He disliked, he said, the flavor of venison, and perhaps truly was content with squinting his desire down a narrowing shaft at the bull's-eye and then the subsequent release when the arrow twanged free of his muscular grip, to sing itself breathlessly, almost without resistance, into the warm, ventilated darkness of straw.

by Thomas R. Smith

*Thomas R. Smith is the author of three books of poems, most recently **The Dark Indigo Current** (Holy Cow! Press). He has also edited a selection of the Canadian poet Alden Nowlan, **What Happened When He Went to the Store for Bread** (Thousands Press). He lives in River Falls and teaches at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis.*

Impressionist Calendar

While we slept, June gave way to July,
Monet's wheat fields to Sisley's canal.

Time is passing: that's what all
calendars say, and all music.

Has my life turned
its page from June to July?

The heart's thin walls
of lightning won't stand forever.

To know the summer in winter
and the winter in summer

is our curse and consolation.
Those French painters accused

of poor vision saw more clearly
than most the circles within circles—

the boats held by the harbor, the blown
cloudstacks held by summer sky,

the summer sky held by longing.

by Thomas R. Smith

Socks

I want to write you a love poem that will knock your socks off.
 I want to send you flowers and jewelry.
 I want to lie at your feet.
 I would roll on my back like my cat does when she's hungry
 offering my self.
 You would never trip over me you would never step over me.
 You would lie down and spread yourself over me like a comforter
 on a cold night.
 which we would have to
 throw off.

I want to send you a pie chart about where your skin touches
 my skin
 and why you should and I could and just where our lives
 can overlap.
 I want to eat pie with you. Something creamy we could lick
 from each other's lips.
 I want to write you a love poem so powerful you can taste it
 and no distance, no demons, no pain
 would get between us.
 I want to write a love poem that will knock your socks off
 and bring you to me naked and hungry as a god.

by Ruth Nichols

*Ruth Nichols (formerly Ruth Merrill) has been unable to stop writing poetry since a vision many years ago in Mr. Gambrel's high school geometry class, during which she stood up and began reciting her first poetry sequence, "Ode to Geometry," which included the now "famous," "Angle, Angle, Angle." Her work has appeared in **Cup of Poems, Mobius, The Bridge, Night Thoughts, and Meditation on Life, Love and Others** (a book on American poetry published in China in 1994) and on the WORT website. Her chapbook is called **Waking to Gravity** (1999.) She was a prize winner of the Hill-Muller contest at UW-Madison in 1995. Her loves include open mic poetry, her two kids, her husband, Jim, and Madison, Wisconsin, where all of them come together.*



BY C. J. MUCHHALA

PHOTOS BY KANT MUCHHALA

Water rich, water poor

A personal reflection on varying water needs
around the world and in different eras.

“Fortunately, our state’s waters are not in immediate crisis. We are not among the growing numbers of people—estimated to reach 40 percent of the world’s population by 2015—who do not have enough water for basic needs...”

Gaylord Nelson, former U.S. senator, Wisconsin governor, and founder of Earth Day, writing in the Wisconsin State Journal, October 7, 2002

I take it for granted that water flows from the tap and, when I will it, the water flows hot. But at our lake cabin, the water runs upward of 60 seconds before it even begins to warm. This exasperates me.

One summer I am alone at our cabin when the pump fails. I have to haul buckets of lake water to flush the toilet. I begin to conserve the water in the tank. “Three pees and a flush” becomes my mantra. I heat water on the stove to do dishes, buy water from the store for drinking and cooking. I learn to build a fire in the sauna stove on the first try. The sauna is my only source of hot bathwater.

The week I am without running water, I think a lot about poor women—in Africa, India, South America—whose days are spent fetching water on foot from wells miles from their homes. I begin to appreciate the unfettered flow of water from a tap.

While visiting our son in Quito, we carry bottled drinking water wherever we go. I take a lukewarm shower in the mornings. If I ran the shower all day, it



would go dry before I got hot water. I get into the habit of tossing used toilet paper into the plastic-lined basket found in every bathroom, public or private. The ancient septic system can barely handle the water, let alone paper.

While vacationing in Beijing and Shanghai, I am always surprised when I turn on the tap and the water runs clear, and cold or hot at my desire. I am in a five-star hotel. Most *hutongs* (backstreets) have communal faucets. We carry imported bottled drinking water wherever we go.

In Mumbai, where my husband and I lived for three months, the city water supply is turned on for several hours early each morning. The homeless queue up with *lotas* (water jugs) to collect their day’s water supply at public faucets located throughout the city. Women balancing full *lotas* on their heads are a common early-morning sight.

They have no backup plan. If they don’t get to the tap in time, their families don’t have water for the day.

We, too, carry water—UV-treated and bottled. Even the city fathers admit the water isn’t safe. Mumbaikers are urged to boil their drinking water. Most do.

Almost every building has a water tank on the roof to collect the city water. A friend, unfortunately, lives with an erratic tank. For whatever reason, it doesn’t always maintain or distribute its portion of the water supply. So when the water comes in, she fills buckets and buckets from the tap, just in case the tank plans to take a day off.

When I use the WC at her flat, I pour in a bucket of water to flush. I wet my hands in another bucket, soap them, and dip water with a small cup to rinse.

When we visit a relative’s office, I find the staff have kindly saved the one automatic flush for “Madam.”

At the Ajanta Caves near Aurangabad, there is a 30-gallon tank of water in the public WC. I scoop water out of this tank to flush the toilet. There is no running water. Ajanta is a major tourist attraction, drawing an international crowd. Those in the know carry an antibacterial gel lotion that cleans the hands without water—we hope.

One day our Mumbai apartment inexplicably “loses” its hot water. My husband takes a cold shower. I cannot. Nor can I do without my daily bath.

When I was a child, our family took our weekly baths on Saturday night, the only exception being my father, who went to Juola’s Sauna, a commercial establishment, for his weekly cleansing ritual. We girls were allowed a couple of inches of bathwater. During the week, we washed our hair and took “sponge baths” by filling the sink.

I have already forgotten what it’s like to haul water from the lake. The room boys bring two buckets of boiling water for “Madam” each morning until the hot water mysteriously returns.

We take the metro train to Mahalakshmi to see the *dhobi ghat*. We exit the station, take the stairs up to the pedestrian bridge, and there, spread below us, is one of Mumbai’s largest open-air laundries, where *dhobis* (washermen) beat the populace’s clothes—ours included—to cleanliness. Acres of cement stalls are filled with murky gray wash water. This is the entire supply of water for the day’s load of laundry.

My mother did the laundry using an old-fashioned wringer washer. When she got a new machine, she chose the same kind because she could regulate the water flow. By then, the automatic washer was the norm in all my friends' households. Long after I had fled the nest, she succumbed and bought an automatic washing machine, but she still reused the wash and rinse water for each load of clothes.

When we return home from India, I flush the toilet with abandon. Even the toilet paper. Even if a square of clean paper is floating in the bowl, I flush. I have forgotten my lake cabin mantra.

I open the tap. How sweet it is to have water at my fingertips. I fill a glass with clear, cold water, drink half, and pour the rest down the drain. I run the hot water until it is truly hot before filling the sink to wash dishes. When I'm finished, I will do the laundry. For each wash cycle, for each rinse cycle, for each load of dirty clothes, the machine will fill with clean, warm water.

We no longer carry bottled drinking water wherever we go. *

"However, our state's waters are seriously threatened, and the challenges they face are the stuff of daily headlines: overdrafting of our aquifers, arsenic in our groundwater, mercury and PCBs in our rivers and lakes, the spread of invasive aquatic species, cryptosporidium outbreaks, beach closures along Lake Michigan and other shores, polluted runoff from our farms and cities.

An alarm has been sounded..."


Gaylord Nelson, *Wisconsin State Journal*,
October 7, 2002

*C. J. Muchhala is a writer and poet whose work has been published in the **Worcester Review**, **Porcupine**, **100 Words**, and the anthology, **Wisconsin Poets at the Elvehjem Museum of***

*Art, as well as in her poetry collection, **Traveling Without a Map**. She also took part in an art/poetry exhibit titled **"Threaded Metaphors: Text and Textiles."** This is her fourth appearance in the **Wisconsin Academy Review**. Muchhala lives in Milwaukee.*

Interested in learning more about Wisconsin's waters and how to protect them? The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters has for the past three years conducted a statewide initiative on sustainable water use called "Waters of Wisconsin." To view the Waters of Wisconsin Report, or to order the report in book form—which is **free of charge** to present and new Wisconsin Academy members—go to www.wisconsinacademy.org

You can also learn more about our state's waters at the Year of Water website, www.wisconsinyearofwater.org



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The Fish Man of Wisconsin

George Becker and his amazing collection.

All photos courtesy of UW-Stevens Point

BY ERIK NESS

George Becker was a seminal scholar in the world of fishes, and his contributions still inspire conservationists today.

ON AN INCLEMENT DAY NOT LONG AFTER the close of the Second World War, a young veteran pressed forward into the nasty weather and quickened his pace: the Professor was waiting. George Becker was only auditing Aldo Leopold's class on game management, yet he didn't want to miss the field trip. But when he finally got to the game management building he found only the unflappable Leopold. No other students showed, allowing Becker and Leopold to talk for a time. When Becker ventured back out into the abysmal weather, a very special gift was tucked in his bag: a copy of *Game Survey of the Midwest*, signed by Leopold, to Becker.

George Becker had always loved the natural world, but he'd started out studying music, then languages. Auditing Leopold's class laid in a course for the final leg of his professional education. The result was one of the more significant—and unheralded—acts of

natural resource scholarship in state history. Becker would spend the next few decades hip-deep in the rivers and lakes of Wisconsin, collecting fish from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi, from the Rock River to the Brule. The result was his monumental book, *Fishes of*

Wisconsin, a hefty, 1,052-page tome detailing the state's 157 known fish species.

Given the encyclopedic nature of his achievement, you would be forgiven for picturing George Becker as a genius of the pigeonhole, single-minded, laser-focused, all about fish. Nothing could be further afield. Becker was a polymath who mastered nearly every skill he put his mind to. He could build a garage from scratch and plumb a house. He collected stamps, played violin, and practiced taxidermy. He was a popular and dynamic teacher and committed activist with no fear of questioning the status quo.

"How many men are you?" marveled his daughter-in-law Patty Clayton Becker, considering his roll call of accomplishments and abilities and passions. "Droll and amusing and mischievous" is how his friend and colleague, mammologist Charles Long, remembers him. "I'd sure like to see him again."

EARLY YEARS

George Becker was born in Milwaukee on February 26, 1917, to master tailor Peter Becker and his wife, Theresa. He grew up in the city, learning the violin and watching birds in Washington Park. "He had such an interest in the natural world," says his son Dave. "He knew bird calls very well." One teenage summer he and his brother hiked the Lake Michigan shoreline from Milwaukee to Port Washington and back again, fishing and camping on the beach. He attended Washington High School, and then Downer College, also in Milwaukee.

Becker began his collegiate studies in music, but after quaking through his first recital he shifted his focus to languages. It was here he met another young language scholar and kindred spirit, Sylvia Helen Klenk. It was a classic love-at-first-sight scenario that led to their marriage in 1941. But there was a war on, and soon George was drafted, assigned to the Army Signal Corps. Deployed to the Pacific theater, the young linguist mastered Morse code and established radio stations serving Australia, New Guinea, and the

Given the encyclopedic nature of his achievement, you would be forgiven for picturing George Becker as a genius of the pigeonhole. Nothing could be further afield. Becker was a polymath who mastered nearly every skill he put his mind to.

Philippines, attaining the rank of master sergeant. Sylvia, meanwhile, took over George's teaching position in remote Phillips.

After the war, with the help of the GI Bill, Becker went back to school, earning master's degrees in German philology and science (zoology and botany). The combination may seem strange in today's tightly disciplined academy, but "he was always interested in the sciences. As he put it, he wanted to keep it pure," says Mike Dombeck, a fond former student who went on to head the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, then returned last year to Stevens Point as a professor of global environmental management. "He didn't want to take a lot of biology courses, and yet throughout his career his interest drew him like a compass." As he completed his degree work he taught in Port Edwards and in Madison, and was a principal in Clintonville. He worked at a game farm in Poynette, where he ruined his back lugging feed bags. In 1957 the road led to UW-Stevens Point, where he taught biology and acted as chief ichthyologist. In 1962, with renowned fish biologist Arthur Hassler acting as his dissertation adviser, he earned his doctorate.

THE FISH ROOM

Bill LeGrande fumbles for his keys and unlocks an unassuming cinderblock room. A motion sensor trips the lights, revealing a space-saving accordion shelf system. LeGrande spins it open, exposing shelf upon shelf of glass and plastic lab jars stuffed with fish. Precise lettering on the majority of the jars identifies the contents, site, and collector: George Becker. Once upon a time, this fish col-

lection was housed in the basement of the Becker home in Stevens Point. Now owned by the Stevens Point Museum of Natural History, it bears Becker's name. LeGrande filled Becker's position upon his retirement, but as LeGrande says, "No one could fill George's shoes."

Even before he left graduate school, Becker knew he wanted to draft a compendium of the state fishery. His first choice might have been mammals, but Hartley Jackson had already done that book, and Becker wanted "a niche that had not been explored in great depth," says his son Dave. He began collections in 1958, the summer after taking up teaching duties at Point. Fish became the centerpiece of family life. "If it weren't for my sons, I would never have been able to make it," Becker told a biographer in 2002. "I had a home-raised team for getting this underway."

Becker's middle son, Dale, even became a fish biologist himself, and he fondly remembers a childhood in piscine pursuit. "When I was a kid it was my whole lifetime," he says. "We'd go out every summer with a 16-foot house trailer and park ourselves up by the Pine River in northern Wisconsin for a couple of months, then go down to Boscobel and do a summer there. We pretty much traveled the whole state that way."

It was a rustic life, with the family stacked like cordwood in the trailer and graduate students in tents outside. The day began at sunrise with a hearty breakfast cooked by Sylvia. Once they reached the sampling site, they surveyed the area, noting stream flow, turbidity, bed composition, human touches. "We'd stand at the bridge for a few minutes and look upstream and downstream and come to grips in our

minds with what we thought would be there,” says Dale. “Then we’d look at each other and say: okay, this looks like finescale dace territory, or least darter territory. And then we would start our search.”

George had built a little wooden flat-bottom boat that he could put a generator in, then built his own electrodes for electroshocking fish. George would run the electroshocker, while the boys waded along behind with nets, scooping up the stunned fish. Most were returned to the water after identification, but a representative few made it into the collection jars. In time, they could guess what was there before they even set foot in the water. “That was his legacy, because he had such a sensitivity that way,” says Dale. “He could read an environment and list 10, 15 species that were

absolutes, and maybe a couple that would be real corkers to find.”

It was an intellectual exercise, not a clinical one; George never did anything without enthusiasm and a certain sense of wonder. “Anytime we found something really rare it would just stop our hearts for a minute,” says Dale. Some fish became almost legendary, “fabled species that we had been going after for years, that we hadn’t seen and came to think might be close to extinct. And all of a sudden there they were in the net. I remember the first gravel chub we ever saw, we all were just marveling at it because it was such an unusual fish. Only ever found in the cleanest streams.”

Other times they didn’t even know they had a rare one until they got back to the lab and worked up the fish. That’s

where George’s expertise was unparalleled. “He was the last word. If anybody had a real question, they always sent him the specimen because he was the one who could figure it out,” says Dale. “He was the one who worked out the keys that allowed us to come to grips with whole families of fish.”

Even on vacation the family fished, trading in the electroshocker for more sporting tackle and exploring high mountain lakes in the Rockies, walleye country in Canada, and ocean fishing in Florida.

You can’t spend that much time with your feet wet without learning something, and over the years George began drawing uncomfortable conclusions about the health of Wisconsin waterways. “As I prepared the distribution maps, it became evident that an irretrievable loss had occurred in the fish resource,” he wrote in his introduction to *Fishes of Wisconsin*. Pollution of every type—heavy metals, pesticides, PCBs, acid precipitation, phosphorus, nitrogen—was pressing hard on fish populations. “Our present effort to control pollution problems are not succeeding,” he warned. “As population and industrial growth continue, we attempt to control increasingly complex wastes with antiquated and ineffectual treatment methods ...”

A FIGHTING SPIRIT

When he was a Boy Scout, George Becker took an oath that he would never smoke and never drink. Other than one perfectly defensible beer while returning from the war, he stayed true. “He made a promise and he kept it,” says his daughter-in-law, Patty Clayton Becker. “That was one of the things that was so wonderful about George. He wasn’t afraid to take a stand on an issue. His principles really came first.” She met George even before she met her eventual husband, Dave. “He liked to tweak people. I was a high school student when he spoke out against the Vietnam War. I saw him at teach-ins. Even though he knew I was a supporter of his, he would pick little fights with me.”



Becker researched exhaustively, and put together the most comprehensive record of fishes in Wisconsin.

High principles and a fighting spirit inevitably led to conflict. Reflecting on his career as a gadfly, he wrote: "I have earned the titles atheist, pervert, murderer of babies, rebel, radical, and communist." He often referred to people as supporters and non-supporters.

He had many issues: nuclear power, the war in Vietnam, evolution, population growth, and reproductive rights. But his most impassioned activism was reserved for what he knew best, the rivers of Wisconsin. In Stevens Point, "the Wisconsin River was at our doorstep," recalled George in one essay. "We could see the decline in water quality during the '50s and '60s. The river was brown and lacked its former clarity. It had a terrible odor. Massive fish kills were occurring.... We were turning the river into a sewer, and I knew something had to be done."

One of the more bitter fights was with the DNR itself, when it made plans to use the poison antimycin to take out the rough fish in the Tomorrow-Waupaca River to improve the trout fishery. Becker had done his Ph.D. work in that river, on the diminutive longnosed dace, and he didn't like the DNR's definition of rough fish, which seemed to include just about anything that a sports fisherman wouldn't keep. He knew there were dozens of other species of fish—never mind the insects and crustaceans—that would be hurt by the poison. He made his views known, loudly, even attempting to get a restraining order. "He made a lot of people in the DNR very, very upset," recalls colleague Virgil Phiesfeld. "It turns out he was right. He was way ahead of his time."

"We weren't even talking about biodiversity in that era," adds Mike Dombeck. "He knew the diversity of fish that were out there and he knew what would happen if we eliminated a whole segment of these diverse fish populations and that we would also take out a lot of them that we didn't intend to."

Becker presided over the Citizens Natural Resources Association of Wisconsin (CNRA) from 1972 to 1974, where his passions led to the creation of the Wisconsin River Restoration Committee. Becker's grand vision for

"He made a lot of people in the DNR very, very upset," recalls colleague Virgil Phiesfeld. "It turns out he was right. He was way ahead of his time."

the river—it became known as Becker's pipe dream—was to create a central treatment plant with state-of-the-art technology for cleaning every drop of wastewater that went into the river. Becker's plan was never implemented, but as a result of this kind of activism the 1972 Clean Water Act was passed, and the Wisconsin River is cleaner than it's been for decades.

THE FISH MAN'S LEGACY

George Becker retired in 1979, when he and Sylvia dove full-time into the book. "He was at the office a lot," remembers Dave. "He would work non-

stop on it. And after he retired, he went into full gear. They just worked around the clock getting that book out. He would take his bike, flying back and forth." Finally finished in 1982, 24 years after it was started, it's an encyclopedia of biology, management, distribution, habitat, and status of the state's fish species. "He left an enormous legacy in terms of the book, which is among the best on state fishes," says Bill LeGrande.

But there are so many more stories that define the man. For example, shortly after Sylvia was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and couldn't drive, George taught her how to ride a bike. When she could ride solo no more,

Signing his book for Governor Tony Earl.



“His skill as a teacher was incredible,” recalls Mike Dombeck, who spent his undergraduate and graduate years with Becker and eventually became chief of the U.S. Forest Service. “I might not have even majored in the sciences if I hadn’t met George.”

George ordered a custom-built tandem. “They were just a sight all about town,” remembers Patty Clayton Becker. Then there was the time in 1973 when they installed one of the very first solar collectors in their backyard. It didn’t work all that well, but at least they walked the walk. And they didn’t hang around Stevens Point long after completing the book; once he completed a task George moved on to the next goal on his list. Late in life he took pilot lessons, just because he had always wanted to fly. He even wanted to write a book about sex. Their early retirement included a lot of time in Florida with a nudist community. It was a long-held interest, though he refrained from participation until after retirement because he didn’t want to give his opponents ammunition.

As important as the book is, Becker’s biggest legacy may be as a teacher. In 1968, Becker’s colleagues voted him to head their department, but he turned them down. Virgil Phiesfeld, who wound up with the job, says Becker just wanted to focus on his students and his other projects. He remembers one day when he walked by George’s classroom, and “everyone was looking out the window. They were talking about anything they saw—the trees, the clouds, anything. He would take that and connect it to what he wanted to talk about.”

“George Becker’s skill as a teacher was incredible,” recalls Dombeck, who spent his undergraduate and graduate years with Becker. “I might not have even majored in the sciences if I hadn’t met George. That was a distinct turning point, seeing his enthusiasm, the way that he was able to connect the pieces together, his ability to make you work at 120 percent of your capability and like it.”

Dave says his father considered Dombeck to be a fourth son, following his rise through the Forest Service. He even passed his signed copy of Leopold on to his star pupil; Dombeck insisted that Becker add his own inscription. Dombeck’s warmest memories are of a very special fishing trip. “I had just finished my master’s, and it was sort of the capstone of my working with George. It was the most amazing trip I’d ever been on.” Venturing into Canada, they first hit a series of lakes where the walleye “practically flipped themselves right out of the water into the frying pan. He was just absolutely in heaven.” But the best was yet to come. Dombeck had worked as a muskie guide, so next the pair went to Eagle Lake and fished muskies for three days.

The muskie chapter in *Fishes of Wisconsin* editorializes a little more than usual on the intersection of sport and conservation: “I have suggested that muskellunge fishing be continued on a catch-and-release basis,” wrote Becker, a decade after the trip with Dombeck. “Large muskellunge which would be continually returned to the water might serve as checks on the competitive northern pike, and would provide a continual source of fishing for other fishermen. A single trophy fish, rather than ending up on one person’s table or wall, might instead be commemorated by successful fishermen either through the ‘thrill of the moment’ or through a snapshot taken prior to releasing the fish to the water. As an added protection to the fish, only artificial baits with single hooks should be allowed. Catch-and-release programs work by offering more fishing fun, and provide the moral satisfaction that comes with leaving some-

thing for the next fisherman, rather than contributing to the exhaustion of an already strained resource.”

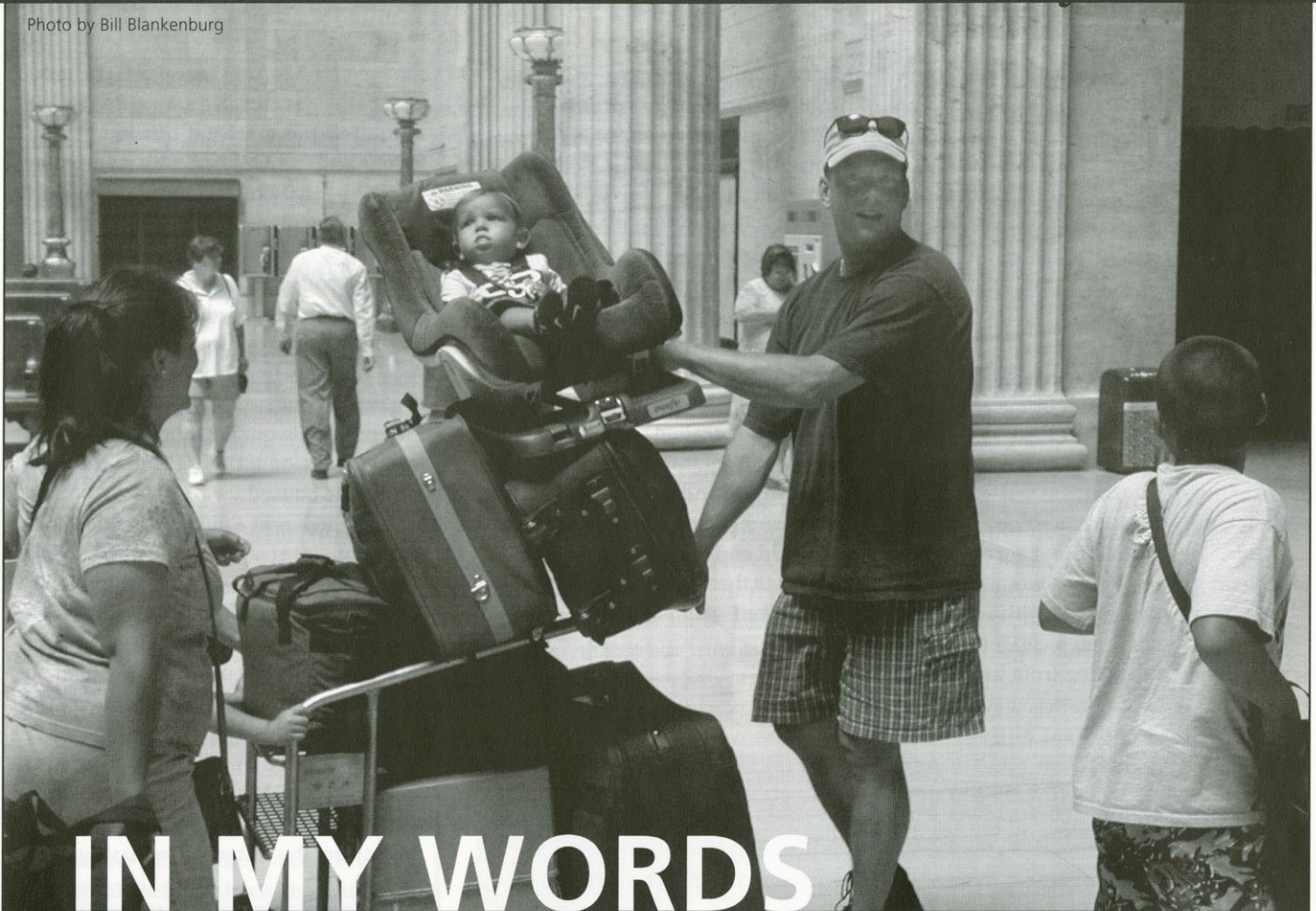
But catch-and-release was not what happened on Eagle Lake. Nixon had just resigned, and the professor and his student were basking in the glow of history taking a momentous turn in their general direction. In the evening, just before dark, Dombeck landed a 26-pound muskie. Many who stalk muskies go their entire lives without seeing a fish that big. But the next morning, in the exact same spot, Dombeck reeled in a 40-pounder. “I caught the largest muskie I ever caught with George,” says Dombeck, still wondrous. “Today it would be catch-and-release. This was one we had mounted.”

George Becker died in November of 2002 in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. He took with him his unique perspective and knowledge about the fish and waters of Wisconsin, but that’s only because some things just won’t fit in a book—even one with 1,052 pages. “It was a very special gift for anyone to get that deeply into the lives of these fish,” says Dale Becker of his father’s defining passion.

Perhaps even more special was the ability to enjoy, observe, and adapt. Somewhere between Eagle Lake and the publication of *Fishes of Wisconsin*, George Becker and his star pupil changed their minds about what constituted the best conservation practice for the muskie fisherman. To do so required a willingness to both examine new science and reevaluate cherished memories and habits. No skill is more needed today in the woods and waters of Wisconsin. *

Erik Ness writes about environmental issues for a number of national publications.

Photo by Bill Blankenburg



IN MY WORDS

For this edition of "In My Words," readers were asked to describe any travel experience.

Five

The four of us walked out of the Seattle airport. Faintly familiar dampness greeted us, more memory-filled for our mother. She was coming home.

Since sitting in the basement of the Sturgeon Bay funeral home, faded dusty plastic roses on the desk, I had swung between the surreal world of raw grief over my dad's death (hadn't he promised he would be part of our lives forever?) and a safe, compartmentalized cognitive curiosity about the procedures of death and burial. How does the casket get to Evergreen Washelli? Will burial be in someplace called Garden of the Eternally Deceased? And what of all

Are we there yet?

the relatives—seven brothers and sisters and likely 100 cousins, nieces, and nephews we'd not seen since the 1962 Seattle World's Fair, when we walked under the angular Space Needle and my sister's new leather moccasins became so wet and slippery that we formed a five-member family chain to hold her up as we laughed aloud, arms linked.

Tears welled with the laughing family memory. Was there no way to stay in that safe world of funeral details? We'd never done anything important as a group of four.

Does this taxi smell salty? Why is there an Interstate highway on Puget Sound? Is my brother now the man of the family, sitting in the front seat of the cab? Does he want to be?

We got to our motel, placed suitcases in the mildewed rooms, and gathered with our mother. Everything seemed

unfamiliar and uncomfortable. My sister and I sat on the bed, giving our mother and brother the chairs. There were long silences until the knock on the door. I rose, opened it, and stumbled. There stood my father.

Weldon was the oldest of the siblings, and our father was second in line. Weldon laughingly talked of the times in college when he and his brother would sit for each other's exams, nearly twins, one good in math and one favoring the liberal arts. He spoke about first meeting our mother and of not having seen us all since 1962. I didn't care what he talked about. Family stories. Seattle growth. Funeral plans.

This familiar stranger sat on the bed. I balanced on his left side, my sister on his right. Bookends. We touched him. We intertwined our arms with his. He

seemed to know. For those few minutes, we were five again.

*Judith Adrian
McFarland*

When He Was Low

We descended Pike's Peak as fast as a marble in a downward spiral, my father steering my grandfather's yellow Cadillac with his knees. "Look girls, no hands," Dad shouted, looking back at us instead of the winding mountain pass ahead of him, his eyes lit with something darker than mischief, a cigarette with a one-inch ash dangling from his bottom lip.

My sisters and I sat shoulder-to-shoulder in the back seat, afraid to look out the windows at the blur of ponderosa pines and Queen Anne's lace. Descending from the high altitude so quickly made us a little sick, but we didn't complain, and we didn't dare throw up. We just held hands, squeezing each other's small fists every time the car wove from the shoulder into gravel.

Earlier, at the top of Pike's Peak, my father took an instant picture of the three of us, our Dorothy Hamill wedge hairstyles blowing in the thin mountain air, smiling because he told us to. "I'll send this to your mother," he said, waiting for the photograph to come into focus, "from wherever we end up."

He didn't use the word kidnap. He never did. But on some of his custody outings, when he was low, he threatened to take us south of the Four Corners for good.

He applied more pressure to the accelerator with the old-man shoe he bought from the \$2 bin at Woolworth's. Unlike the wingtips he wore before the divorce, the tops were constructed out of a kind of canvas minnow net that revealed his cracked toenails, the bottoms just flimsy rubber skiffs.

"Are we there yet?" I asked, swallowing back bile, but he couldn't hear me over Bing Crosby's "Pistol Packin'

Mama" on the eight-track. When he was high he bought us candy at the 7-Eleven, as much as we wanted, and parked the DeVille next to the runway at Stapleton airport. He whistled at the belly of a descending plane and promised to take us to Rome to see the fountains and send us to charm school in Switzerland. He told us John Wayne was a distant cousin and insisted we had an eighth of Cree Indian in our blood. When he was high, he listened to Elvis and talked about scaling the state Capitol to steal gold from the dome.

But that Sunday he was low, and I wasn't sure which side of the mountain we would end up on.

"Are we there yet?" A stupid question. Still, I asked again, a little louder.

*Christina Clancy
Whitefish Bay*

Aspen Woods and Musty Books

While growing up in north central Iowa in the 1960s, my birth date, Flag Day, marked the beginning of summer that was pregnant with prospects: fishing at Hank's Creek, swimming in the sandpit, biking to summer baseball, and a two-week vacation spent with my grandparents in Duluth. Deep-seated olfactory memories of damp aspen woods that I explored above Duluth Harbor, and Grandpa's dim musty study lined with books too many to count, linger on to this day.

One trip to Duluth was particularly memorable because I came to understand a dichotomy that exists between people and their relationship to standing water. Some folk turn away from it—others are drawn to a pool or a stream like spring peepers are to sodden wetlands in April.

The night before departure, Mom and Dad crammed battered suitcases and cardboard boxes into our wood-paneled 1958 Ford station wagon. An unpainted homemade wooden cargo carrier, balanced on colossal rubber suction cups,

crowned the top of the wagon. The tarp-covered carrier was a godsend. It engulfed the material burden of two adults and five children with such effect that the eight-hour trip was negotiated with sufficient legroom and modest haggling.

Mom roused us from our beds at 6 a.m. Sleepy-eyed, yet keen, we clambered into the Ford wagon and made our way to Highway 65—a straight shot to Duluth. About two hours north into the journey, while our neighbors back home did chores or milled about the post office, we paused for breakfast.

Upon arrival at a public wayside, Mom and my sister spread a cloth over a weathered picnic table. Dad lugged a beat-up ice chest from the car. My three older brothers and I migrated toward one lake of 10,000. We hadn't gained 10 yards when Mom reeled us back in. "Go wash for breakfast."

I'd scarcely finished my milk and cereal when Mother announced to everyone, while gazing at me: "Stay away from the water. We're leaving right away."

When I registered that command, I understood that I had been separated from my brothers. Furthermore, I deciphered her proclamation to mean: "If you must see the lake, do it straight away, because we have a long trip ahead of us." The division was clear—my fellows would lollygag behind while I veered toward the water.

Whereas my brothers loitered obediently about the picnic shelter, I cut a beeline down to the lake and was immediately captivated by the shore. Literally. I was up to my waist sinking in the mire! This was no ordinary shoreline. Here was a waning lake basin filled with organic muck. Struggling, I may as well have been some Pleistocene heavy-weight trapped in the La Brea tar pits.

I didn't cry out, but in moments I felt Dad's muscular grip beneath my armpits, lifting me out in one fell swoop. I was mud from waist to toes. I don't remember being thrashed for disobedience. Nor do I recall any lectures. Mom and Dad understood that of all their offspring, this was one who swerved toward water—whatever the cost.

To ease the monotony for the remainder of the trip, Mom dispensed peppermints and lemon drops while Dad stared ahead and listened to baseball on AM radio. Hours later, after the landscape metamorphosed from level farm fields into rolling woodlands and stony clearings, we arrived at my grandparents, tired but happy—with me reeking of fetid lakebed and fresh peppermint.

But it was the smell of aspen wood and musty books in Grandpa's study that answered my wondering: Are we there yet?

*Thomas L. Eddy
Green Lake*

A Tale of Two Tickets

My father died on September 29, 1993—my 14th wedding anniversary. That same fall Badger fans were in a fevered pitch. It had been decades since the football team qualified for a Rose Bowl. My husband and I were long overdue for a vacation, so we bought a package—hotel, air, and two football tickets. After confirming everything, I started singing, “Do you want to be a Badger?” I pulled out everything red and white from the closet, including my rose hat, a pink-petaled pillbox.

As we boarded the air bus in Milwaukee, the rumor mill was buzzing. The huge plane was a mix of other game “packages,” and passengers were animated.

“Do you have your tickets?”

“We’re getting our tickets on the plane.”

“Someone said we will get them at the hotel.”

“We’ll get them at the Welcome Reception.”

“Tomorrow morning.”

I began humming, “By the light of the moon, by the light of the moon.”

At a special meeting at the hotel, our tour director finally fessed up: “We do *not* have all tickets in hand. We are doing everything possible to acquire tickets

for everyone. Tomorrow morning, we will hold a lottery drawing for the tickets we have. And we’re adding in the Rose Parade and the UW Brat & Beer Tent into your package.”

With the cloud of disappointment, we decided to connect with my aunt and cousins for a personalized tour of Los Angeles, and we connected with my husband’s friend, who assured us, “Go to the game. Tickets always surface there.” Little did we know how true that would be.

Parade and game day arrived. The sun was shining, floral floats galore, but not all of us were smiling. Even with the bonuses of parade and party tent, we were all still tense. A wild bus ride to the stadium post-parade broke some of the tension, but then it was worse—so close and yet no seats.

At the tent we commiserated with fellow Badgers who were not part of our tour group—a school administrator from Whitefish Bay, his brother and father. It was supposed to be a trip of a lifetime. Their disappointing story and others finally moved me to complain. Now, I wanted in—rose hat and all.

Someone directed me to “that man” who wore a white blazer. When I queried him about the ticket situation he said, “I have three available seats.”

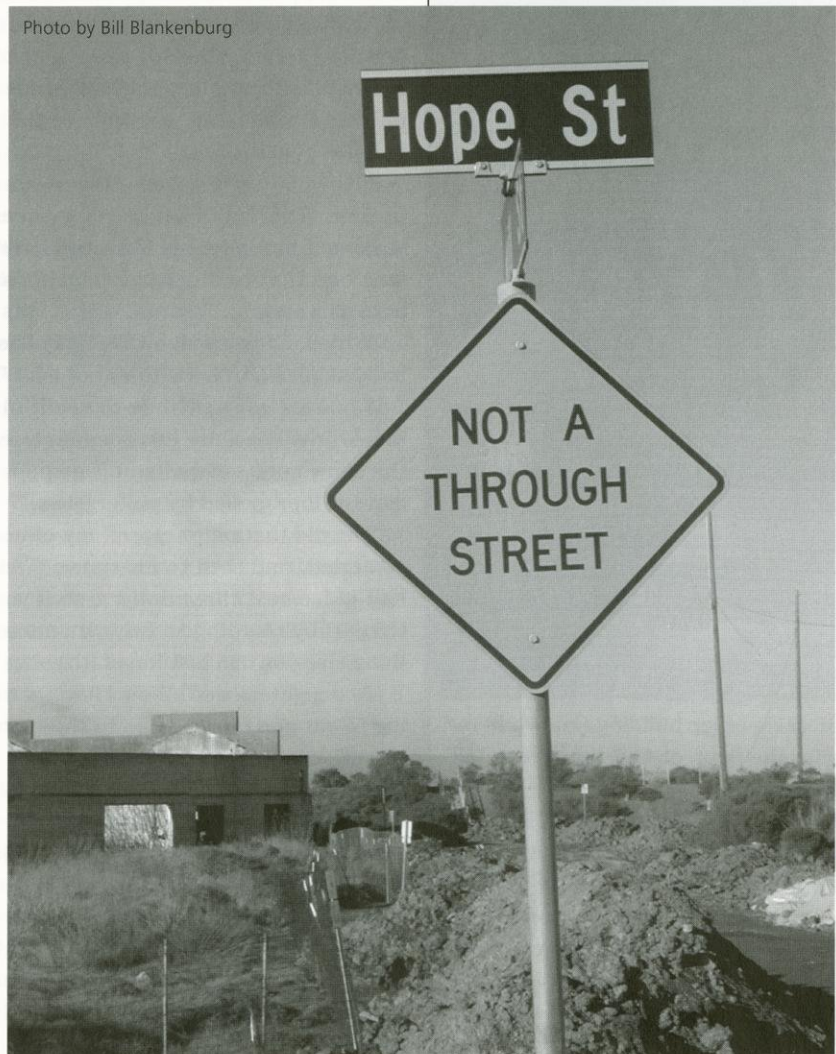
We had heard of people paying up to \$3,000 a seat, but I didn’t hesitate. “I will take them. How much are they?”

He responded, “Mine are at face value.”

I waved to my husband, “We have tickets!” When he arrived at my side I said, “I need \$135 for three tickets on the 50-yard line!”

“\$135 apiece!?”

Photo by Bill Blankenburg



I said, "No—for three at face value!"

Simultaneously, our tour guide made the announcement that they had seats for everyone! We had gone from zero to five tickets in less than 30 seconds. I asked my husband to find the man from Whitefish Bay.

We told our new friend that we had three tickets for him, too, at face value, and one of them would be sitting with us on the 50-yard line. We all started singing, "Do you want to be a Badger, just come along with me."

I couldn't help but think about what my father would have done—probably sold the tickets for enough to pay for his entire trip.

I think this true tale of two tickets answers the question, "Are we there yet?"

"Oh, yes—by the bright shining light of the moon!"

*Mary "Casey" Martin
Wisconsin Rapids*

A Must-See in D.C.

Unlike most tourists visiting our nation's capital, my family of five didn't waste time looking at mundane sights like the Lincoln Memorial or the White House. Instead, we went someplace most people never go—the Department of Agriculture, a large building filled with people whose biggest concerns are soybean production and drought monitoring.

If you've been to Washington, D.C., and didn't get a chance to visit this impressive office building (known hereafter as the Dept. of Ag.), I'm here to tell you about it.

To begin with, Washington, D.C., as seen on tourist maps, appears to be well laid out, with everything in easy walking distance. Ha, ha, ha! A person could walk their fingers around this map in a matter of seconds, which is what my family should have done, and then got

on a tour bus and called it a day. Instead we went the pedestrian route.

My husband, three kids, and I had already logged approximately 87 miles that day in July, including the Capitol building's 3,726 steps, which contrary to common sense go up regardless of whether you're going into the building or exiting it.

We slogged along, held upright only by the heat rays radiating off the pavement. The whole process ground to a halt when my children announced in unison that they were hungry. By fortunate coincidence, this happened right in front of an ice cream vendor.

My oldest son opted for a fudge-sicle—the perfect accessory for his white T-shirt—my daughter chose a multicolored snow cone, and my younger son picked an ice cream face on a stick solely for its gumball nose.

We stopped on the steps of the Dept. of Ag. building so they could eat their delicious treats. The kids were uncharacteristically quiet, a fact I attributed to their overwhelming gratitude at their parents' generosity.

Within minutes the silence was broken. "This isn't like the snow cones at home," nine-year-old Maria said. Her face had that rain cloud look. "It's as hard as a rock."

"Why don't you wait awhile?" my husband suggested. "Let it thaw out a bit."

We never got a chance to see if his idea worked because just seconds later the snow cone catapulted off its paper cone as if propelled by poltergeists.

"She did that on purpose!" my oldest son cried. And then to his sister, "That ball of ice cost three dollars, so if you think they're going to buy you something else you can just forget it."

My daughter cried. "Now I have nothing to eat *and* I have to go to the bathroom."

I took my daughter in search of a restroom, leaving my husband behind to pry out the gumball nose with his pocketknife. I didn't realize, at that point, that the Dept. of Ag. took up an entire city block, which of course it would, since it houses such things as the Farm Service Agency and the Food Guide Pyramid.

We'd circled the block and were getting frantic so when I noticed a door that said "Visitors," it spoke to me. Weren't we visitors? Didn't the Dept. of Ag. belong to all of us taxpaying citizens? Or at least that's what I rationalized because by then I really had to go as well.

Once inside, all that stood between us and the bathroom were two women in uniform who took their jobs and their personal grooming very seriously. I interrupted their nail filing to explain the purpose of our visit, pointing to my daughter, who, fortunately for me, looked miserable. The two Dept. of Ag. employees exchanged glances like "Oh, the old bathroom story—you expect us to fall for that?" But eventually they put down their emery boards and cuticle shapers and allowed us to enter. For insurance they took my driver's license, which they promised to give back if we ever returned.

We walked down a long hall passing dozens of open doorways where Dept. of Ag. employees worked to ensure the best situation for agriculture in America. They were a quiet and somewhat curious bunch; as my daughter and I went by, the slap-slap-slap of her sandals attracted attention, and several of them rose from their desks to identify the alien noise.

The ladies' restroom was distinguished by stall doors that were oddly high off the ground, like saloon shutters. Apparently privacy is not a priority at the Dept. of Ag. As a citizen I was glad to see that employees in that building won't be lingering in bathroom stalls, at least not on taxpayers' time.

Maria and I completed our Dept. of Ag. official Visitor business as quickly as possible and headed back down the corridor. The learning curve along the hallway must have been a little off that day—our departure generated as much interest as our arrival, with the same heads popping out of the same doorways to check on the still-puzzling sound.

As we exited the building, the two women handed over my driver's license without any signs they had mocked the photo or my claimed weight.

The rest of the vacation was not nearly as exciting. Once my younger son got over the trauma of the gumball rolling into the sewer grate, everything else seemed anti-climactic.

Next time we'll have ice cream at home.

*Karen McQuestion
Hartland*

Cat on the Hat

In 1937, my grandparents moved to Indiana to work as caretakers at a thoroughbred racehorse farm near Westville, Indiana. In June, we made plans to visit them.

"Can Fluffy come with us?" I begged. Fluffy, my cat, was the most recent addition to our family. "Please, please, Mama?" I begged as pitiful tears puddled in my eyes. Mama reluctantly gave Fluffy permission to travel.

While Mama packed our clothes, I tried to decide what wardrobe Fluffy and my doll would need for the trip.

"Hold still, Fluffy," I demanded. "Don't you want to look pretty?" Fluffy growled deep in his throat as I struggled to dress him in a ruffled doll dress and bonnet. I wrapped him into a blanket and arranged him in my doll buggy. "R-e-e-e-a-o-w," Fluffy yowled, leaping out of the buggy. In a Gypsy Rose Lee minute, he shed the ruffled bonnet and dress. Trailing the blanket behind, he scooted up the tree to safety.

Great Aunt Zelpha asked to ride along as far as Janesville. When Great Aunt Zelpha was born in 1898, she weighed 2 pounds. Her mother put her into a small box lined with mason jars filled with warm water and fed her with an eyedropper. She is my grandmother's half-sister, so my mother and her brothers teasingly call her "Half-Aunt Zelpha." As we pulled into her driveway, Bobby and I cleverly maneuvered for window seats. With Great Aunt Zelpha wedged between us, I imagined myself and my brother as big, blue mason jars.

Zelpha, dressed in a tailored suit, wore a large picture hat that took up most of the space in the back seat. Her loud, irritating voice grated against our small, sensitive ears. Fluffy crouched behind her on the back window ledge and batted the brim of her hat with his white paw each time her head moved.

While driving down the long Baraboo hill, Fluffy emitted a deep-throated "Meeeee-ow," gagged, and vomited on the large, wide brim of Great Aunt Zelpha's hat. Great Aunt Zelpha screamed, and my brother and I burst into tears. My father swore all the way down the hill and into the nearest farmyard. Above the din, we heard the disgusting sound of a sick cat.

Mama consoled and cleaned up Great Aunt Zelpha, whose hat, no longer a pretty picture, was thrown into the trunk of the car. For a price, the farmer agreed to keep Fluffy until our return. We continued down the highway, windows wide open to freshen the air and the hatless Great Aunt Zelpha.

"Are we there yet?" asked Bobby, breaking a long silence.

Daddy answered, "Not for a while, honey." He was in a kindly mood. Perhaps he felt guilty about his loud, shameful language. Daddy sang, "Red Sails in the Sunset" and soon we all joined in. We delivered Great Aunt Zelpha to her destination in Janesville, and Bobby and I spread out in the roomy back seat. Daddy said we'd be in Indiana in about five hours.

Outside Chicago, I looked out my window and saw tall, smoke-spewing chimney stacks rise from the flat prairie. Fascinated, I watched a large ship balance on the horizon of Lake Michigan. Restlessly, I prodded and poked Bobby with my foot and a wrestling match ensued.

Daddy yelled, "*Someone* isn't going to like it if I stop this car!"

"Are we almost there?" Daddy's hands tightened on the steering wheel and I decided not to ask any more questions.

*Joan Vanden Heuvel
Madison*

Share Your Stories

We welcome your contribution to "In My Words." Stories should be no longer than 600 words. The next topics are:

ANIMAL CONNECTIONS, Deadline Dec. 1 (for the spring issue). Your experience with a nonhuman animal—domestic, farm, or wild. (Does your dog understand you like no one else?)

THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY, Deadline March 1 (for the summer issue). Anything you wanted—a job, a person, an opportunity—that eluded you. Was it for the best, or is it something you still regret?

E-mail submissions are greatly preferred. Please send them to: jfischer@wisconsinacademy.org with the subject heading "In My Words." You may mail your submission to In My Words, Wisconsin Academy Review, 1922 University Avenue, Madison WI 53726.

We will contact selected authors; names may be withheld from publication on request. We regret that we cannot take phone inquiries or return submitted material.

An uncommon portion of fortitude

Reflections on a strong judiciary as Wisconsin's celebrates its 150th.

BY SHIRLEY S. ABRAHAMSON, CHIEF JUSTICE, WISCONSIN SUPREME COURT

About an hour's flight from Puerto Rico is a tiny West Indian island called Nevis. Its 36 square miles lie in the shadow of the larger and more romantically named island of St. Kitts, and together these spits of land comprise what travel guides call the "secret Caribbean." Once a British sugar colony, Nevis is an island that likes its quiet; indeed, a local law forbids the construction of any building taller than the surrounding palm trees, ensuring that high-rise condominium complexes do not invade the landscape.

Years ago, a story not unlike those often told in Wisconsin's big cities and small towns unfolded on the tiny island. A charming, unemployed merchant came through Nevis and romanced a young married woman who bore him two sons. He later took off, leaving her to raise their children on her own. She worked to try to make ends meet and was able to educate her sons with help from a local clergyman. But she contracted yellow fever and died young, leaving her sons on their own. The younger boy, just 13 at the time, was fortunate enough to work for a man who saw some promise in him. The employer helped raise money for the boy to emigrate to New York to attend college. His sponsors hoped he would go to medical school and return to the island as a doctor. But that was not to be. He started college, dropped out, joined the military, and, in his late 40s, was shot to death on a New Jersey street.

But between his hardscrabble childhood and violent death, Alexander Hamilton changed the course of history by helping to join 13 separate and diverse colonies into a new nation called the United States of America.

Among Hamilton's greatest contributions to the fledgling nation were the Federalist Papers, a group of propaganda sheets designed to win public support for a new federal constitution. Perhaps the most meaningful of these tracts, not only for judges and lawyers but for all the people who depend upon our courts to resolve their disputes fairly and impartially, is Federalist #78, in which Hamilton argues the benefits of an independent judiciary. Judges, he knew, could preserve the constitution and protect the rights of individuals against the will of the majority only if they were outside the control of the other two branches of government. Hamilton's explanation of the value of independent courts is just as valid today as it was 200 years ago:

This independence of the judges is equally requisite to guard the Constitution and the rights of individuals from the effects of those ill humors, which the arts of designing men, or the influence of particular conjunctures, sometimes disseminate among the people themselves, and

which, though they speedily give place to better information, and more deliberate reflection, have a tendency, in the meantime, to occasion dangerous innovations in the government, and serious oppressions of the minor party in the community....But it is easy to see, that it would require an uncommon portion of fortitude in the judges to do their duty as faithful guardians of the Constitution....

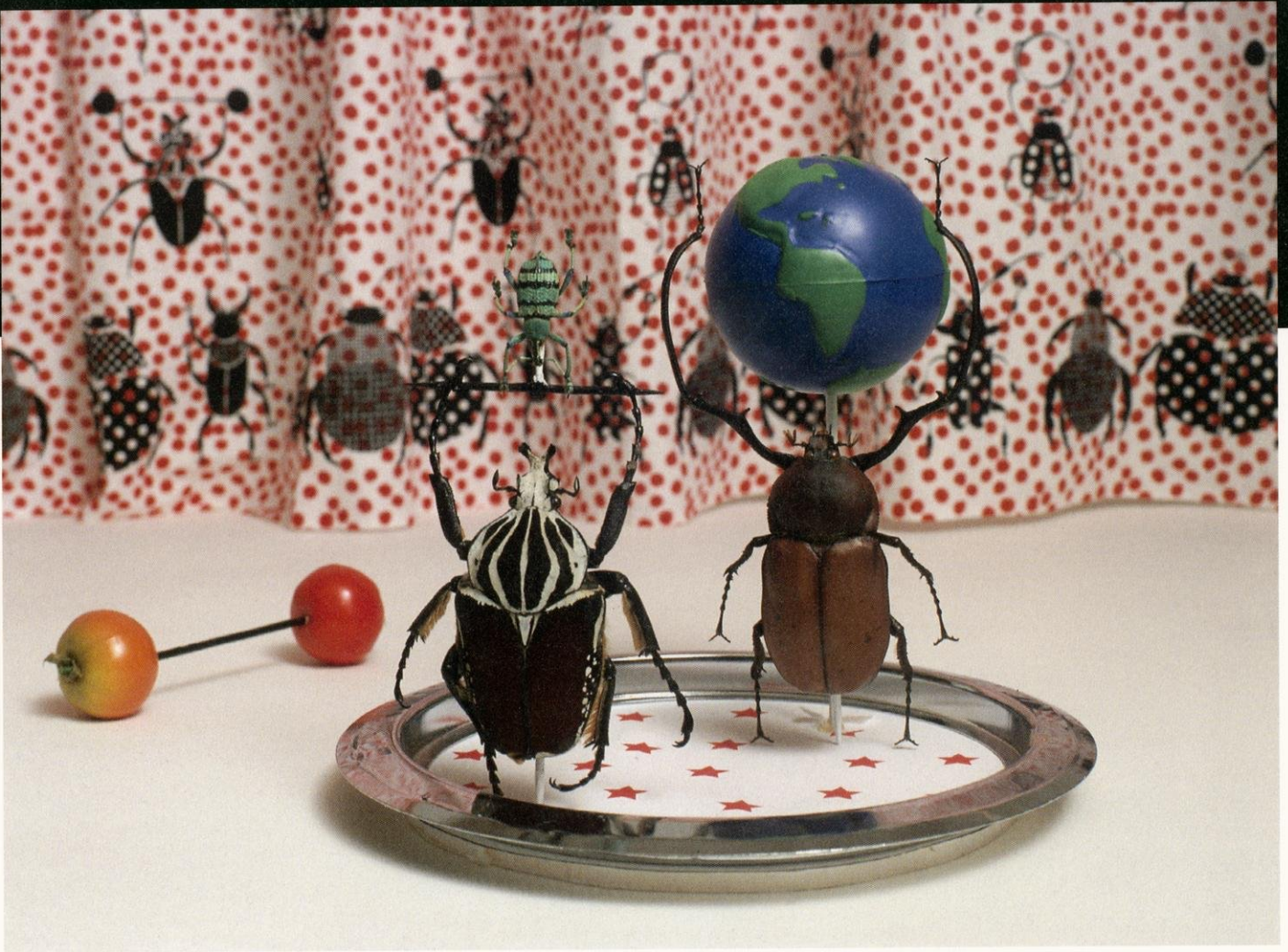
Perhaps because of his background, Hamilton clearly understood that a government of the people, by the people, and for the people would rise or fall on the strength of the public's trust and confidence in the legal system. He knew that the government would become too weak—or too strong—without a strong, independent judiciary to interpret the laws, decide controversies, and enforce individual rights and responsibilities.

My Capitol office overlooks the intersection of streets named for Alexander Hamilton and Charles Pinckney, another member of the Constitutional Convention who argued eloquently in favor of a strong and independent judiciary. As I look out, I think of how the writer Jonathan Swift defined vision in his *Thoughts on Various Subjects*. "Vision," he wrote, "is the art of seeing things invisible." Our nation's founders had a vision for a nation where the homeless would have the same protections under the law as the wealthy, where those accused of common street crimes would have the same protections as those accused of financial fraud, and where the minority—any minority—could be protected, under the law, against popular sentiment. They built such a nation, and a cornerstone is our independent judiciary.

It has been 216 years since the Constitutional Convention first convened, and 150 years since Wisconsin established a separate Supreme Court. We are celebrating the Court's anniversary not with parties or proclamations but by recommitting ourselves to preserving the independence of our judiciary and educating the public about the value of an impartial forum for resolving disputes, just as Alexander Hamilton did more than 200 years ago when he wrote: "[N]o man can be sure that he may not be to-morrow the victim of a spirit of injustice, by which he may be a gainer to-day." *



Shirley S. Abrahamson joined the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 1976 and became chief justice in 1996. She is the 23rd chief justice to serve the state of Wisconsin since the separate Supreme Court was established in 1853. Chief Justice Abrahamson is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. This piece introduces a new department featuring an essay by a Wisconsin Academy Fellow in every issue.



It's a bug's life with artist Jennifer Angus (yes, they're real).

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