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ON CUSTOM House Wharf, life stays much the same. That’s the way Fonnie likes it. Grime, fish and sweat. Not a place for Yuppies.
Salt Magazine is produced jointly by college students and professionals. It is a result of Salt’s educational programs. Salt also maintains an archives of tape recorded interviews and photographic negatives.

Above: Beach Front with Marie Joseph Spiritual Center at Biddeford Pool. Photograph by Pam Berry.
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Cover photograph · Pam Berry

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Spend a Semester with the Really Important People of Maine

For more information contact SALT at (207) 967-3311 or write SALT, P.O. Box 1400, Kennebunkport, Maine 04046. An affiliated program of the University of Maine.
Guide to Maine Eating
The Really Important Places

ALFRED
Leedy's. Route 202 in the center of town. Everyone takes their mother here on Mother's Day. It's mobbed. The two seaters at the counter are different. Avoid the pies. Hours: Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, 7 A.M.-8:30 P.M.; Friday and Saturday, 7 A.M.-9:30 P.M. Sunday, 11 A.M.-8:30 P.M.; closed Tuesday.

ANDOVER
Andover Variety Store. "Can't understand why they call it that because it's a place to eat," says Monty Washburn, who tests his fishing stories at the counter every year. "Maybe it's that you can get a variety to eat." Addie Feener opens at 6, closes 13 hours later at 7 and does it all herself at age 70. Coffee and hot chocolate go for 25 cents. Hours: 5:30 A.M.-8:30 P.M. every day of the week.

BIDDEFORD
Colonial Hut. 66 Alfred Road. Not what it once was or is popular. But the French Canadian Club Richelieu meets here weekly and the trademark of Greek food is still turned out. What the connection is to the restaurant's name is beyond us. Try their homemade spinach pie. Hours: 8 A.M.-10 P.M. every day except Saturday when open until 11 P.M.

Dan's. 106 Elm Street. Brash Biddeford Democratic Party politics are argued here. Heaps of cheap food spills over the edges of your plate. Open for lunch. Hours: Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 11 A.M.-6 P.M.; Thursday and Friday, 11 A.M.-7 P.M.; closed Saturday and Sunday.

BINGHAM
Thompson's Restaurant. In the center of town on Route 201. The kind of place where people still talk about the deer that broke through the front place glass window 20 years ago and ran into the men's room, ending people still talk about the deer that broke through the front place glass window 20 years ago and ran into the men's room, ending

BRUNSWICK
Miss Brunswick Diner. 101 Pleasant Street. Fourteen (10 + 4) stools front a long and short counter. Also several booths. Daily specials listed on board. Mexican food offered. A Budweiser beer costs $1.25. Placemat was a puzzle of finding presidents/vice-presidents' names from a maze of letters the shape of a U.S. map. People in three booths were heavily into it. Hours: 4:30 A.M.-9:45 P.M. Sunday through Thursday; 24 hours Friday and Saturday. Early Bird Special: 4:30-8:30 A.M.; 2 eggs, toast and homefries, $1.25. Breakfast listings available from 11 A.M. to 9 P.M.

CAPE NEDDICK

Eastport
Waco Diner. (Pronounced Waa-co, not like that foreign place of Waco, Texas) Bank Square, Water Street in the downtown. Originated as a lunch cart. Name comes from combining founders' names Watt and Cowell. The one place in town where a Budweiser is served during the day throughout the year. Locals eat the food. Outsiders often don't the second time. So much for outsiders. Hours: 6 A.M.-9 P.M. Monday through Saturday; 7 A.M.-11 A.M. Sunday (breakfast only).

FORT KENT
[New Listing]. Doris' Cafe. Route 11 on the way to Eagle Lake. Across from the Dodge Dealer. If needed you can grab a room for the night or have your laundry cleaned. You can brush up on your Acadian French while feasting on Doris's large succulent omelettes and thick homemade French toast. Only three bucks. Comes with a smile.

HERMON/BANGOR
Dysart's Truckstop. Just off exit 44 Interstate 95 in Hermon about three miles south of Bangor. See Salt's issue number 28 for article about this place. Dysart's own their own fleet of trucks and truckers have their own tables. Breakfast is the deal here. One of Salt's trustees from Bangor says he has a sticky bun here before driving to a board meeting.

Kennebunk
Glen-Mor. Route 1, just north of center of town. Good pies. Heavy on the fried food variety. A salad brings you half a head of iceberg lettuce. Rotary Club takes over back room once a week, but there's plenty more room out front. Hours: 7 A.M.-8 P.M. Tuesday to Thursday; 7 A.M.-8:30 P.M. Friday and Saturday; 8 A.M.-7:30 P.M. Sunday.

Hole in the Wall. Literally that. Route 1 in the center of town. Good, simple food and service. Carol, the owner/cook, is something. Easy to be in the middle of a minor war of give and take.

Kennebunkport
Allison's. In center of town, Dock Square. Bastardized descendant of the old wonderful Chat and Chew. Polished gold plated rails instead. Don't expect miracles with the food. Tourist types enter heavily through the summer, but locals still dominate the bar. Emblem rules the roost. Hours: Serves breakfast 6 A.M.-11 A.M.; lunch 12 noon-4 P.M.; dinner 6 P.M.-10 P.M. every day of the week except Sunday when open at 7 A.M. Bar is open until 1 A.M.

Liver
Tip's Lunch. On the land side of Water Street next to the Liver. Straight food. Put your feet on a chair and you'll be told to remove them. Just as you should be. Counter stools and tables. Hours: 5:30 A.M.-6:30 P.M. every day except Sunday when it's closed.

MACIAS
Helen's Restaurant. Unfortunately, now the New Helen's just north of the center of town on Route 1. Nothing like the old Helen's. But the thick pies with thick topping of cream are still the greatest. Counter area has closest feel to the old Helen's.

Milbridge
The Red Barn. Route 1 in the center of town. Straight food and a large salad bar. Has a wishing well out front where coins are tossed in. Eat blueberry pancakes in wild blueberry barrens country.

PORTLAND

Diphilippo's Ye Olde Pancake Shoppe. Forget what the name conjures up. 617 Congress Street. Breakfast and lunch. Hours: Monday to Friday, 7 A.M.-1:45 P.M.; Saturday, 6 A.M.-1:30 P.M.; Sunday 6 A.M.-12:45 P.M. "Lunches 10 A.M. till closing. But Never on Sunday" says the menu. Counter stools and lots of tables.

Jimmy Diphilippo's in charge at the cash register hard by the entrance/exit.

"George, you want a table?"

"No."

"You wanta table young lady?"

She takes it. Two minutes go by.

"George, there should be something breaking shortly for you." Port Hole. 20 Custom House Wharf. Near the end of Casco Bay Ferries pier off Commercial Street. First name place for people who walk on the waterfront. Sit down at the 25-foot counter and before you know it someone will be calling you "deah" — either Russ the owner or Linda the waitress or Louise the cook. Speedy comes in at noon.

"Sit down, deah. Louise has made you your favorite dinner. It's ham today.

"Just sit yourself right down, Speedy."
VIEW FROM PIER ROAD

Eastward Ho!

TADICH'S in the heart of San Francisco's financial district is a long way from Washington County, Maine. At least that's what we thought when we joined the crowd of bankers and lawyers that have congregated around its bar for 100 years.

They were standing three deep in a companionable buzz of conversation and cocktails. It was after six and no one seemed in any apparent hurry. Neither did they have to elbow their way to the bar for attention.

Big graying bartenders from Yugoslavia or Rumania or some other Balkan country took notice of them in the swirl of arms and glasses "Refill, sir?" or led them to semi-private eating cubicles built of mahogany.

If you weren't spotted as a customary patron, your best bet was to slink to the eating end of the bar, some 25 feet inward from the drinking end. Nobody here was a banker or lawyer. Just ordinary blokes stumbling in from a spectacular sunset over Golden Gate Bridge or honeymooning couples who had read about the place in tourist guides.

Thick slabs of sourdough bread were plunked in front of each person. So was a menu dominated by fish. A waiter ignores your question about what's good tonight.

The guy next to you doesn't. "The swordfish steak is always good," he advises. He points to a slab on his plate that looks like steer. Dark and thick.

You order trout and apologize. "I don't get much of this in Maine."

"Maine, huh. Got a neighbor that moved there a year ago. His company sent him, so he had to go. Factory somewhere east of Bangor.

He carves another chunk of swordfish and leaves it steaming on his fork. At a brief nod, the silver haired waiter brings three glasses of tea in water glasses. "They don't have tall glasses," he explains, downing one after the other.

"Got another friend that went out to Maine. He and his wife decided to start a Bed and Breakfast place out there. Near an island where President Roosevelt used to stay."

"Campobello?"

"That's it. I think he had rocks in his head. Two winters and he'll be back."

Highway Hucksterism

EVER STOP to think how many ugly things creep into your life without your sayso?

Like the new Maine license plates.

We understand full well the need for state license plates. They aid the police in giving us traffic tickets, a goal we all undoubtedly applaud.

But why must the plates be any tackier than necessary?

There was a time when state license plates simply bore a number. All the necessary evil we needed. Then slogans were added, and as we drive the...
interstate, we engage in a sort
of highway hucksterism.
"Birthplace of USA" we brag
or "Oklahoma is OK" we brag
or "Vacationland" we brag.
Whether we want to or not.
Now it's worse. We driv 'e
around with little pictures on
our plates.
Ugly little pictures. Scrawny
lobsters on the Maine plates,
not even one pounders. Skinny
liberty statues for New.
Yorkers. And is that a green
mountain for the Green
Mountain state or is that a
profile. of the 1987 stock
market

What's an Amendment?

FOX Vernon who has been
with us this fall as a
student put together the
following. He comes to us as a
recent graduate of Stanford
University and a native of
North Carolina.

"How ya <loin'," I said to the
twenty-year-old sitting on the
bench, clad in his camouflage
shirt. He knew we were up to
something.
"I'm living," he replied.
It hit me that this wouldn't
be easy, but I muttered an
explanation of our survey any­
way.

It was a project John and I
had conjured up after stumbling
into the middle of Portland's
Constitution Day, celebrated at
Monument Square Plaza on
Congress Street. Americans are
supposed to be proud of their
constitution, we thought, so
let's see what their favorite
amendments are.

"What's your favorite
amendment?" I asked.
"The right to keep and bear
arms," he said.
"Why that amendment?"
"I consider it a privilege and
an honor to be able to go out and
buy a gun," he explained.
He didn't like it that we
both stood while he sat, but
after looking us up and down,
he spared us a few words. Once
he had owned a gun.
I asked him his name.
"Jess," he said.
"And your last name?" I
inquired.
"Not important."
Up the street a painter put
the finishing touches on the
entranceway to an old office
building.

"Hey, how ya <loin'," I said.
"We're doing a survey on the
Constitution, and we'd like to
know what your favorite
amendment is."
Perched on her ladder, she
stared down at us.
John repeated the question,
"Do you have a favorite
amendment?"
"The fourteenth," she said.
John and I looked at each
other. "Uh, which one is
that?"
She kindly kept her history
lesson brief. We nodded our
heads.
Farther up the street, we
passed two construction work­
ers, one in his thirties, the
other much younger. Both stood
shoulder-deep in the ditch
they were digging. I told them
what we were up to.
"What's your favorite
amendment?" I asked.
"I don't know," said the older
one.
"C'mon," John said, "you
gotta have a favorite
amendment."
"Not really."
Around the corner, outside
Portland's Museum of Art, sat a
teenage girl wearing a tight
zebra dress. She was talking to
a man in a beat-up leather
jacket.
We crossed the street with
our sights on her, but when we
walked up, she kept speaking
to her friend. I explained our
survey.
"God damn," said the guy,
"I'd do anything for freedom; I
think people get thrown in the
penitentiary for nothing."
He had served four and a
half years in a Texas prison.
"That's no joke," I said,
trying to share my sympathy.
Maybe he thought I had
called prison a joke.
"You're damn right it's no
joke," he said. "If you got
thrown in there tomorrow I
wouldn't feel sorry for you
'cause I know what it's like,
man."
John cocked himself behind
his Nikon and shot pictures of
the ex-convict and the girl.
"What's an amendment?" the
girl asked me, while the ex­
convict explained that the cop
hit him first and why hadn't
that come up in trial.
"What's an amendment?" the
girl interrupted again, but my
ears were glued to her friend —
he bit the cop's thumb to the
bone while the cop tried to beat
him away with a billy club.
"Excuse me," she interrupted
a third time, raising her voice.
"Excuse me, I'm taking a poll
here," she yelled. "What's an
amendment?"
DID YOU HEAR what’s going on between the Park and up here?” I had gone to Renee’s Variety Store on Munjoy Hill in Portland to get the inside scoop about the recent shooting on Congress Street.

I live on the hill and I wanted to know if the shooting was part of a neighborhood gang fight between Munjoy Hill guys and Kennedy Park guys. If there is anyplace I can find out, it’s at Renee’s.

Munjoy Hill is not your ordinary neighborhood. It’s got more little stores like Renee’s than any section of Portland. It perches on the eastern edge looking west and it was for years the first home for poor immigrants coming to the city — Italian, Irish, Jewish, black.

Right now the Hill is betwixt and between.

BONNIE BRAGDON participated in the Fall 1987 Salt Program as a sophomore from Wellesley College. She comes from Vassalboro.

photograph. John Dale

Slum houses next to gentrified places. Renee’s Variety is a hub for the gossip that makes you feel at home when you live on Munjoy Hill.

“There’s a lot being said,” Renee answers me. “But you’d have to speak to the boy that did the shooting. All I know is that he shot over there, near Breggy’s. The house on the left. I don’t know the exact story.”

My instincts balk. I don’t want to know the “exact” story, that I can read in the newspaper. I want to know the inside story, the juicy details known only to Hill insiders.

“People, you know, they say different things. They’re all my customers,” she covers. “You know you see people coming and going, but as far as what they do once they leave here, what’s exactly going on, that’s a question mark.”

“As a matter of fact, the one that did the
shootin' on Congress Street, that's him out there in the turquoise shirt.” She points out the window behind the counter.

A group of men, disembodied heads and torsos, float against the rush of Congress Street, moving in and out of the bounds of the window. They accumulate and loosely bunch, drifting occasionally across street to Breggy’s Variety. They are a presence as constant as the Budweiser sign marking Renee’s and to me intriguing.

The Italian colored awning, red and green, of Breggy’s catches my eye and my curiosity takes another turn. “You see all these stores all over Munjoy Hill. How do they all compete?”

“It’s amazing how they all stay open,” Renee responds. “I have my regular customers the eight years I’ve been here. It’s the same faces, especially children.

“This is a children’s store. This is their favorite store cause they can take half an hour to pick something out and no one will bother them. See I don’t say, ‘Whata you doing, are you stealing?’ I know them. And you know who the crooks are. You just tell ‘em to put it back.”

Renee turns to help a sparsely toothed little girl find some crackers. She returns to ring up the order. “Do you remember those people living in the house next door and the kid who was maybe two years old and always by himself?

“He used to come in here for breakfast. Two of ‘em. They were lovely, those kids. Tossed around. Now they’re leaving there, which is a mess they say, going up country, ‘cause the father’s in jail, the mother’s boyfriend. It’s sad. It’s really sad. That house was nice when they first came here. And now they have to gut it right out.”

I try a different approach. “I was wondering, you see that man with the two tone shirt, the one that limps?” I point nonchalantly. “I’ve wondered who he is. I mean what do all these people do who hang out around here?”

“Well, one fella works nights, the one with the glasses. The other fella, I don’t know. He’s always around. I think he got hurt in an accident. He worked for Nissen’s and went to New Jersey. And I thought they said he fell off a two story building. That’s the way he’s been ever since.

“See I have to move ‘em from here every day. And I don’t think it’s fair. I don’t think they should be hanging around the area and I tell them that.”

“What about the police, don’t they come up here?”

“Their police work is really not — now they’re doing very well up here, but they should stay right with it. Right on top of it.

“But the hard part is, say all right, just say a person is selling joints. You’re aware of what’s going on on the streets, ’cause they don’t hide anything. So say they come in to this store or that store or any of these four or five stores. The store owner can’t follow a person around. You have all you can do to run a store.

“But a lot of times they’ll duck in stores to hide. This is what the cops feel. Then they get mad at the store owners. And there’s no way the store owners should get blamed for it. But they have to blame someone. They have to do that.

She turns the table on me and now she’s asking the questions.

“So how long have you lived in this area?”

“A couple of years.”

“Where you from originally?”

“Vassalboro.”

“Where’s your dad live?”

“He’s still in Vassalboro.”

“What do you think of the Hill?” I’d like to say it’s great, I love it, but I just haven’t found a way to get in. So I tell her I have mixed feelings and don’t like walking by the corner and all those guys.

My talking is cut short by a young man, dark haired and Italian looking. “God, this place looks like a supermarket,” he teases, as he scans the newly widened store.

“Hey, welcome home. It’s good to see ya!”

“It’s good to be home.”

“So where are you stationed?”

“Virginia for the time being.”

“So how long you gonna be home for? I was just asking your brother about you.”

“Till next week. Then I head over to the Mediterranean and that’s it.”

They talk in snatches, not needing to outline all the details to each other.

“My brother’s a jerk.”

“Like I told Lee, it’s very sad, you know, people that know each other all their lives, have a girl and . . . But it was a very sad thing. It makes you very embarrassed, you know, when you’re on the inside of the fence to hear different things. You can’t take sides because you don’t know the whole story.”

I listen with satisfaction. She hedges even with him. Still he has that inside edge over me at Renee’s Variety on Munjoy Hill.
"YA NEED ICE, hell I can make ya a shitload of ice in no time," Al Buzzell boasts as he moves about the inside of Gulf of Maine Fisheries ice making and fish packing warehouse, just north of Kennebunk. Al’s job is to monitor, weigh and distribute the ice, and to fillet and pack fish, which he says keeps him moving all the time.

“Busy, Christ you can find me here 24 hours a day. Yessir, them lobstermen come, haulin’ in here sometimes at goddamn four o’clock in the mornin’, and I gotta have ice for ‘em. They ain’t goin’ ta wait ’round none either,” he adds, finishing his Old Milwaukee.

Making ice isn’t the only job Al’s had in his life, but it is a source of income. “It keeps me survivin’, I tell ya.” In his 69 years he has had many jobs.

He takes a bent cigarette out of its generic white and black package and poking it between his tar-stained lips, he lights it with his 68 cent disposable. “Yessir.” His chin protrudes like a bony knee cap.

“I’ve had more goddamn jobs in my life than you can shake a stick at,” he points a thick leathery finger at me.

“I’ll tell ya this,” he hesitates, looking blankly at the wall, as if recalling the words to a favorite childhood song. “My grandfather said, ‘Don’t learn one trade, learn a dozen.’” He tugs on his cap, leaving another print on the greasy, thumb stained visor. “So, I learned ‘em.”

MARK THOMAS CHILDS met “Buzz” during the Salt Fall 1987 program. A senior at the University of Massachusetts, he says he’s proud to live in Barnstable, Massachusetts.

photograph Pam Berry
Al's what you might call a jack-of-all-trades.

"I was born on a farm in Waterville, an' raised on another in Norridgewock." Al tended over "two hundred head a catty." He shows me the squeezing and pulling motion he used on the cow's udders. "That'll tough your hands right up, I'll tell ya." He also raised "fryers" and slaughtered them too. "Christ almighty, it was nothin' for me to go out an' kill a hundred of 'em, an' clean 'em in a day."

He coughs, a loud hacking wheeze.

"Had a wire wheel, on an electric drill. Put him in a bucket of hot water. Turn that mother on an' stick him up there, an' peel those fuckin' feathers right off 'em. Those bastards would fly, in all di-rections." We both laugh heavily and Al begins to cough again. "How'd ya like to see that again?"

He walks over to the ice machine to make a few adjustments and monitor the ice level. "This here isn't your reglar ice ya see, nossir, this is salted ice, much colder, better packin'." He returns with another Old Milwaukee.

Al likes engines. He says he first began working on them as a teenager, during the depression Down East in Quoddy Village, at the National Youth Administration trade school and work program. He learned marine and auto mechanics, sheet metal repair, electronics, cabling and splicing, "and anythin' else they was willing to teach me."

"Those were tough times. Christ, ya had to do something then or ya wouldn't eat." Summers Al went sardine fishing and logging. "We'd drive that timber up that goddamn river with our picks fourteen hours a day. Ya busted your ass I tell ya." He also worked in logging camps as a cook. "Come suppertime someone had ta cook, or we wouldn't eat."

He says the most fun he had was working on a road construction crew with an Indian from the South, using dynamite to move huge rocks and earth. "Yessir, that crazy son of a bitch could move anythin' with that goddamn dynamite." He takes a long sip of his beer and gives me a wry look. "An' it killed him, too."

From the trade school he was placed in a job in Maryland building and repairing aircraft engines. He only worked there for two years. "Hell, they weren't payin' me nothin', so I left."

Tired of standing, Al walks to the corner of the building and reclines in his chair. He offers me his guest crate. I accept, brushing off a few fish scales.

The chair has assumed Al's shape. A missing leg tilts it to one side, while the stuffing seeps from the arms and backrest. With the crate to support his legs, the chair is his makeshift bed. Al's living area has a small black and white television, modified with a hand rolled aluminum foil antenna. He uses pliers to turn the channel. A handy fly swatter hangs on a nail on the workbench. "Got ya, ya bastard." Al says his record count is eleven flies in one day.

He tells me he began his 24 year relationship with the open road when he stopped working on airplanes. It was the best time of his life and he made good money. He started with one tractor trailer, a Brockway. That was Al's beauty. "Best goddamn truck I ever had."

He shipped coast to coast. "Anythin' you loaded on, I hauled it." Then he expanded to ten rigs and hired drivers for each truck. "Cept the Brockway, she was mine. I scraped my ass to make them payments, but I made every one of 'em.

"Then sure in hell my doctor tells me I'm passin' blood through my kidneys. Hey, that was the end of that." He looks quickly at me. "An' just when things were gettin' good, dammit all to hell."

Back to Maine he came, working at odd jobs as a carpenter, handyman and engine repairman. "Anythin' you wanted done, I'd do it." He also did some hauling for a junkyard until an accident ended that.

"Had an 800 pound bale of aluminum drop on my fuckin' elbows. Crushin' 'em all to hell. Swelled up like goddamn basketballs." He rolls up the sleeves of his thermal undershirt to show me arms so thin, white and uncalledous they look childlike, compared to his thick brown hands.

"And they were never operated on. I couldn't afford it and no one was goin' ta pay for it either." He pauses. "When I get lifting real heavy, they blow right up."

"Ain't no one goin' ta watch my ass 'cept me. An' that's all there is to it."

Al sits quietly smoking his last butt. In a minute he starts to tell me more about his trucking days. He says he misses the money and the road but not the South.

I ask him why he returned to Maine and he tells me what I should have known.

"Let me tell ya this. I was born and raised in Maine and you can bet your ass I'm gonna die in Maine, too."
MAKING A WILDERNESS

People come up here to Chesuncook and do a lot of crowing about, "Oh, we’re gonna make a wilderness." Well, what are you gonna MAKE? They contradict themselves. They want one thing and they want something else, too. And there’s a whole generation growing up that doesn’t know any different.

Basically, a wilderness means lack of control, lack of authority. But their wilderness has all the nice things. There are no black flies and plenty of flush toilets, but they can do what they want.

And they’ve forgotten the history of this place. People did such fabulous things here. They brought in locomotives to climb over the ice in the wintertime. They made a tramway at the turn of the century from Eagle Lake to Chamberlain. It was part of the wilderness.

Bert McBurnie
Interview at his Lodge
Chesuncook Lake, 1986
We flew into the North Woods in search of a story and adventure. What we stumbled upon was more than we bargained for. A hunter was lost and feared dead.

By Stephen Donahue  Photography by Lynn Kippax, Jr.

TINY BLACK SQUARES labeled “Chesuncook” mark the only community on topographical survey map 7175 IV. The village is a cluster of twenty or so buildings on the western shore of Chesuncook Lake.

The rest of the region, to the edges of the map, is uninterrupted green and blue, forest and water. Faint roads, marked in dashed lines to indicate dirt, stray through the green; they can be traced to the borders and then vanish, unseen, into forest.

This much we know as we wait on the dock of Currier’s Flight Service. This and what Harry Sanders has told us of the two year-round residents of the village, Bert and Maggie McBurnie.

“Bert’s a story teller,” Harry remembered about Bert’s trips to Sander’s Store in Greenville for supplies. “There used to be 67 people up there in Chesuncook Village. Now Bert’s the only one left. He married a girl from Paris and brought her up to Chesuncook Village. They run a little hotel.”

Now we wait on a dock at the southern tip of Moosehead Lake. Our baggage mounds, substantially, beside Roger Currier’s four-seater float plane. We peer into its narrow windows to see where everything will fit, if everything will fit.

The air is wet and cold. Our photographer watches the sky and checks his watch; if we don’t leave soon, there will not be enough light for photographs.

Ten minutes pass.

At last, Roger Currier arrives, grinning and ready to go. He is a big, balding man in his thirties. For almost a week, we have been in contact with him, watching and waiting for a stretch of clear November weather.

STEPHEN DONAHUE participated in Salt’s 1986 fall program as a senior from the University of Southern Maine.

LYNN KIPPAKX, JR. is a photographer and film producer.
Roger's airplanes are usually sheltered in a cove on Moosehead Lake, near the railroad bridge in Greenville. Today, only the red and white plane that will fly us to Chesuncook is in the water. It is light, yet boxy, not so much a dragonfly as a winged compact car.

This will be the last flight of the fall for Roger. Between November and January, there are days when neither pontoons nor skis can be used safely to land an airplane on the lake. Only a thin layer of ice coats the surface, too thin to support the weight of a ski plane and its passengers, too thick to allow a float plane to navigate.

But Roger has agreed to fly us to Chesuncook today. It is warm; the National Weather Service predicts only flurries. To slip in and out of the village before the winds and weather change is our plan.

Roger opens a hatch in the tail of the airplane. We hand him our bags and equipment. He braces his feet on the pontoon's supports and tosses them in.

I climb into the plane. Behind me, our luggage is stashed, as though we are in a tiny, hatch-backed car. My knees brush against the front seat. The others enter.

Roger grins. "Hope there's no ice up there." He searches our faces for signs of fear. He laughs.

Roger slams his door and starts the engine. It sounds like a chorus of lawn mowers.

We move across the lake, gathering speed. It is difficult to tell at which point the airplane leaves the water. Its nose lifts sharply; our faces tilt skyward. Beside and behind us, water churns.

Then, whether by steady rising or sudden lift, the lake is below. The sound of the engine is a thin drone, its noise weak, mechanical.

There are no boats on the lake. The sky is gray with clouds, the color of thick, soft ash, high and distant. A fringe of houses lines the edge of Moosehead; behind them, the forest is sparse — evergreens sprinkled among scarecrow hardwoods. The forest floor is a mesh of browns and fading yellow.

The shore houses give way to a strip of rippling beach, interrupted occasionally by cabins. The forest, too, changes. It becomes thick and stretches in all directions, stopping only at the lakeside.

Beyond the lake, patches of clearcut begin to appear. Graying debris and thick, swirling skidder tracks form patterns on the earth. Stands of trees are exposed in the center of clearings.

The airplane cuts through the sky, occasionally rocking over pockets of air. The farther we move away from Greenville, the greater the cutting is. First patches, then strips, then swaths are torn away, leaving tangled land and scrubby brush behind. Soon, areas of uncut forest seem incidental beside the cleared acres.

An entire network of roads straggle through the forest. Trucks and logging equipment dot the brown dirt like drops of gaudy paint; some move, others work in place.

A frozen stream, arrested in its course, sits starkly on the edge of a pond, its length exposed. At first sight, this stream, running through the naked forest, looks like a paper road, just as large streams once were used as water roads in the days of river drives.

From above, the expanse of cutting has a civilized
appearance. But the mark of civilization is strange here, a garish wound, too fresh and too deep even to scar. At one point, I am surprised to see masses of green that I had thought were young trees contrasted beside an uncut grove of hardwoods. The "trees" I had seen are scruffy underbrush; they are dwarfed by mature trees.

Farther, as we near Chesuncook, forest growth is more dense. The mad, checkerboard appearance disappears; clearcuts shrink to patches. We travel over the long, narrow lake. It is ice-free.

Roger tilts the airplane and guides it on a slow, clean curve. The buzz of the engine lowers by half an octave; the nose changes pitch and drops. Below us, Chesuncook Village is a cluster of buildings gathered in a clearing on the shore. It strikes me that the map is an accurate, if undetailed, representation of this village. Chesuncook's lines are few and simple. A large white house — the McBurnies' we learn — is the first noticeable structure. A church and small cabins come into view. A gravel road traces the shore.

The float plane dives straight and low. It hits the lake, still almost flying, before pontoons lift and float. Roger turns and slows the plane with the drag of water. He brings it to rest beside a narrow, wooden dock that juts into the water like a plank.

Bert McBurnie has come to meet the airplane. He is a stocky man, in his late fifties; he wears a bulky, blue coat, the swell of which gives him an exaggerated burliness. A wool cap sits low on his head, stopping at tufts of black eyebrow. Below the eyebrows are wide-framed glasses; they are light and stylish, not the sturdy spectacles that might be expected of a man who has lived in the wilderness most of his life.

Across the water is a dense, wooded island — Gero Island the map says. It is an almost circular chunk of land that dominates the center of the lake. Its extreme tips blend into the woods on the opposite shore.

A trim lawn, yellowing in autumn, surrounds the McBurnies' lodge and stops at the lake's edge, leaving room for only a thin strip of sand and rock.

We walk across the lawn, heavy with bags.

"I'm gonna take a boat across to the island in a minute," Bert says. "I've got to pick up a hunter." His voice rasps from a head cold. "I'll be glad when this hunting season's over. I've got the fall lazies."

Bert opens the door to the lodge. "We've been working around the clock."

In a moment, Maggie appears. She is a small woman, thin and dark. She welcomes us in a clear, accented English and shows us to our rooms in the upper part of the house.

When we return, down the stairs, Bert has already gone.
Gas Lamps Glow in the central room of the McBurnie's lodge. The flames do not flicker, as I would have expected, but burn evenly, casting light to all but the farthest corners. We sit in this room and wait for Bert to return from Gero Island.

Stacks of magazines lie, four and five deep, on a low, couch-length table. Most are hunting publications. We thumb restlessly through these, picking up one magazine and then another. Outside, it grows dark.

The thought strikes me, here, in their home, that we know very little about Bert and Maggie McBurnie. We have driven most of the day and chartered a float plane to get here but have only Harry Sanders' descriptions to go by. Bert is a "story teller" Harry told us. Those words could mean many things.

I try to remember more. Much of what Harry Sanders said was about the “pod auger” days for Greenville and the family store, which had been started by his great grandfather, David Sanders, in 1857. Rough days, when Sanders Store with its many warehouses provided lumbering camps in the Maine wilderness with supplies and food.

Our eyes are trained to the ground. We strain to find a man lying low in a gulley, just barely alive.

Harry's voice took on a certain respect when he talked about Chesuncook, beyond the reach of civilization. "When the Czar was deposed in Russia, one of his generals got out and hid out up in that country for years. Called himself 'Joe Clinchook'. He never heard from anyone until things settled down in Russia. My father knew his real name."

Harry Sanders laughed. "And then there was old Hiram Johnson. Hiram used to wear about six coats and three pairs of shoes. He was a recluse. He hated people and he had two words in his vocabulary — yes and no.

"Hiram came out in the spring to sell his furs. He'd have a list of groceries and he'd bring it into the store. Just shove it under someone's nose.

"So we'd take the list of groceries and start boxing them up. He'd pay — it was yes and no — and then he'd paddle his canoe back up to Cuxabexis. That was the way he lived," Harry shrugged.

"One time one of the game wardens flew over his trapping camp and it was burned to the ground. He said to the pilot, 'Hiram's dead.' They circled and circled until they saw these tracks in the snow going into the woods. It was five miles to Hiram's next camp."

Harry paused for us to take this in. "Hiram did the five miles in his bare feet."

"The warden went up to his next camp and saw the smoke coming out, and he went in and said, 'Hiram! Are you all right?' Hiram said, 'Yup.' End of conversation." Harry laughed.

"That country is so full of these stories. That is why you should talk with Bert McBurnie."

I push the magazines aside. They are a poor substitute for what I expect to find in this place. I stand to stretch and look around the room.

A wood stove is at the back; its chimney pipe extends, horizontally, to give off extra heat. I hang my coat on a row of pegs behind the stove. Pictures of animals are placed around the room. I look closely at paintings of deer and squirrels and foxes.

I am surprised to see that this room has no stuffed trophies, unlike other hunting lodges where I have seen the heads of animals hanging from walls. A single piece of evidence, a moose antler leaning in a wooden bucket, shows, with the magazines, that Bert is a hunter. Yet, these paintings of animals running through snow and forest hint at a coexistence with the natural world in a way that a mounted carcass would not.

In the dining room, places for three are set at a long, well-lit table. Behind the table, against the walls, are four or five wooden bookcases. Names stand out on bindings; Koestler, Roth, Hemingway. All are here in this remote village.

Soon the sound of a motor comes across the water. It stops. Bert returns to the house.

"Did you get him?"

"No," he says, "I'll have to go back in a while. He probably got a deer and was still trying to drag it out of the woods."

Bert disappears into the kitchen, his gloves in his hands, his coat unzipped.

I glance across the room, looking from one face to another. It may be an hour, perhaps longer, before we can speak with Bert. Tomorrow, at
noon, the float plane will return.

Bert thumps around the house; he pauses to explain.

"Well, Bob's an older guy, in his sixties. Probably what happened is he took off after a deer and didn't notice it getting dark." He pulls a rifle off a rack by the door — the only one there — and heads for the door. "I'll signal him if I don't see him on shore."

We dig deeper into magazines.

Maggie emerges from the house with a pair of binoculars; an orange knit cap sits on her head. She pulls the door shut behind her and stands, still and straight, on the porch. Maggie holds the binoculars with one hand and turns her head slowly, taking in the length of the island.

A deep explosion bursts outward from the island.

"That is Bert," Maggie says, and the glasses rise to her eyes.

Minutes pass, and another shot, from a different point, is fired.

"That is Bert, too." Maggie remains still, watching. The water is quiet. No rifle shot answers.

We return to sit by the stove. Maggie stands by the door, and peers out, with a hand to her face. She watches a moment longer and, then, turns to the kitchen, the orange cap still on her head. The window panes are black with night; it is five o'clock.

Now, the sound of the boat comes, churning and distant. It stops, and, then, comes again. From the porch, we watch as Bert McBurnie reaches the dock. Other hunters, from nearby cabins, have gone to meet him. Snatches of voices rise to the house. "No. I couldn't find him." "Supposed to meet me at the rock."

"I'll have to go out again," Bert says as he enters the house. "I just can't figure it, unless he's hurt himself." He pulls off his cap; Bert's voice is tired, scratchy from his cold. Watching him, his forehead folded into ridges, his eyes shadowed, I realize that this missing hunter has become more than a nuisance.

"I went all around that island. Almost have to assume the worst."

We offer our help.

"Well, I hate to go thrashing up that brook out there alone at night. But I've got a couple guys over here who know the land pretty well. I think I'll bring them over with me."

There is little to do but wait. I think of this hunter, Bob Archer, on the island. In my mind, he does not take form as a person, not in the way that Bert and Maggie, in just two hours, have become the people from Harry Sanders' descriptions. They are real, tending colds and preparing meals. I have heard Maggie's accent and seen their worry.

Bob, to me, is still an incident, a lost hunter in tomorrow's newspaper. I feel concern, but it is an abstract, obligatory concern. I want to go on this search but mostly I wish not to wait here, bored, among magazines.

Bob is real for Bert. He has known him for more than twenty years; he has spoken with him this morning.

"Bob usually sticks close to shore. I don't think he'd get himself lost." He stands, looking at the floor and, then, pulls at his hair. "But, Jesus, that island is like a hole if you get lost on it. You can't get out." Frustrated energy rises to Bert's face; there is a battle being waged there between anger and concern. At this moment, concern just barely dominates.

Bert vanishes to the kitchen; then he is gone. When Maggie calls us to dinner, I go upstairs to wash up.

In the bathroom, lining the sink's edges are Bob's toiletries — a can of shaving cream, a deodorant stick, a razor. Bottles of medication, labeled with Bob's name, lie on the sink. I look at the bottles, at Bob's toothbrush and, then, think of a man, in the cold dark, alone on the island.

I sit at the table. That we are about to eat while Bert searches seems unfair, that Maggie has cooked a meal during this trouble, extravagant.

"Would anyone like tea or coffee?" Maggie asks.

We decline, and Maggie leaves the room. The meal is enough. Maggie has prepared a chicken dish, simmered in a thick sauce. There are vegetables and a loaf of homemade bread. We eat hungrily. For now, all disasters are far away.

Then, concern returns; "I hope Bob's okay."

A silence comes until someone else speaks. "Look at the moulding on the wall." Ornate patterns are formed there by rounded, metal ridges.

The McBurnies' lodge is
hardly a rough cabin in the woods. With its woodstove and gas lights, their home is more civilized than many of the box-like houses of this century, with a permanence not hampered by technology. Maggie comes into the room again to see if we need anything. She sees us looking at a painting of a log cabin hanging on a wall. She laughs.

"Everyone says, 'the good old days'," Maggie tells us in her Parisian accent. "But they were not always so good. Those people worked very hard. Even now, we work sometimes sixteen hours a day."

Maggie and Bert met while Bert was in the service. They married, and in the 1950s came to Chesuncook, where Bert had lived since his father brought the family from Aroostook County in 1935. Maggie has lived here for over thirty years.

"Paris," she says of her past home, "the last time I went I was there only three weeks, I could not stay." Maggie rubs a hand over her forehead. "A constant headache," she mimics her reaction to city noises.

"And there is no wilderness in France. There are a few forests, but you would not see this." Maggie gestures loosely, expansively, with her hand. She returns to her thoughts of cities. "Montreal is nice. It does not have the same coldness as Paris. And Boston. Boston has kept some of it —" Maggie searches for the word. "Provincial charm."

In Greenville, when Harry told us about Maggie, an image entered my mind. It was an image of a war bride, expecting to come to prosperous, post-war America; I thought of the strangeness, the isolation that she, a Parisian woman, would find in Chesuncook. But this was not Maggie.

"I had read about the wilderness of Canada before I heard of Maine. Then Bert told me everything about this place. I was prepared." There is no wistfulness in Maggie's voice as she speaks of Chesuncook, no longing for other places, least of all Paris.

"I love it best in the winter here. I like to fish on the ice. Then I go into the middle of the lake and all around is this great wilderness." She speaks slowly. "And I am a little, tiny speck this big," Maggie takes a pinch of air between her thumb and forefinger. "It makes me feel humble."

Now Maggie dons her orange cap again and watches from the door. Rifle shots reach our ears. Then, the motor comes dully, tumbling over the waves. We sit in the central room, eyes meeting, and heads cocked toward the kitchen as the back door opens and voices come, low with disappointment.

We listen and, then, drift into the kitchen, one by one, where Bert and his friends sit, disheveled, at a long, wooden table in a corner of the room. Their faces are somber, their words unclear.

Then, Bert speaks, announcing
a conclusion to the room.  “Either that guy's dead, or he's awfully goddamned conservative with his ammunition.” He sneezes. A glass of whiskey is in his hand.

His friends, Hans and Bernie, boatbuilders from the New Jersey Pine Barrens, also sit by the stove, glasses in hand.

“Have we done everything we could? Can you think of anything else we could do?” Bert leans his weight onto his elbows, onto the table. His voice is hoarse but still powerful. “Christ,” he says, almost in disgust, “I think Bob's dead. What else could he be? We went all around that island. We fired from the ridge and in front and in back.” He sets his glass lightly on the table. “Nothing.”

“There's nothing else we can do at night.” Hans is a big, bearded man, dressed in flannel and still wearing a cap.

“Bob had good clothes,” Maggie says, “A down jacket. Thermal undershirt. He would survive the night.”

“Maybe his gun is broken.”

Bert shakes his head. “We could sit here all night talking, and we'd think of a pretty good explanation, but, come morning, we'd all be wrong.” This time, Bert removes his coat.

“Last time Bob was here,” he says, “I got a pretty little buck for him. I was carrying it out. You know how you double 'em up like a knapsack and carry them? Well, I'd carried it a good ways, and he said, 'Here, let me carry it a while.' He insisted, so I let him. Well, he hoisted it up, and then, he lost his hold; and it all fell down over him, guts and blood and all. And he just said, 'Get me outta here!' Puking and gagging, and I laughed!”

There is a pause. The mood begins to sink, but, before the laughter is irretrievable, Hans speaks. His face is red and ruddy and cheerful. “You know,” he says, “everyone says that McBurnie's the best woodsman. He's the best hunter, the best guide —”

“Oh, what does he want?” Hans smirks. “But the only thing he couldn't do is water ski. That boat just couldn't get enough power for him.”

We laugh at this picture of Bert, thick and solid, trying to ride a slat of fiberglass. For the moment, it is accepted to speak of other things.

Bert pushes himself from the table, a little of his weariness lifted. He crosses the room to the bottle of Jack Daniels. “Does anyone need a refill?” He raises the bottle. This time, the drinks are not intended as anti-freeze for the search. Bert pours healthy slugs.

“Well, we'll get some guys and head out early in the morning. Nothing we can do now.”

The heat of the kitchen's wood stove and the heat of whiskey pass through the room.

“But the old hunters are gone,” Bert says. “I tell these guys now that it's not like it was. Of course, it isn't. We don't have the game.”

“A lot of people say it's the coyotes getting all the deer.”

“Well, maybe, but you have to understand, they're just another animal that came along. We can sit here and pontificate about it, but they really are just another beautiful animal. Like the deer. We were watching some coyotes catching mice, and, by Jesus! Didn't you think they were beautiful, Maggie?”

Maggie says nothing but nods slowly.

“I was watching them, and I thought, 'Why do I want to shoot that Christly animal?' And I just put my gun down.”

Bert shifts his weight at the table. “It's just, in my opinion, Man created a vacuum for a predator, and that vacuum has been filled.” For a time, the room is silent.

It is past nine o'clock now, the night seems much later. Bert
takes his glasses off and rubs a hand across his face.
"Geez, I wish that yahoo was here."

THE DOUBLED-ENGINED speed boat turns sharply from the dock. Bert McBurnie settles his weight evenly on the floor and yanks at the elbow of an eager hunter. "Get down low," Bert tells him. The hunter crouches. Chesuncook is not rough today, but the boat bounces on the waves.
The bow rises and points, like a needle, as we cross the narrow stretch between Chesuncook Village and Gero Island.

We land. Those with high, rubber boots splash through waves; others attempt to leap to the rocky beach. On the shore, men gather in knots. The seven from Bert's boat talk in two's and three's with those who arrived in another boat. They are hunters; most are from out of state.
“Bob wasn’t wearing anything orange. Just a hat and gloves.” He gestures over his shoulder with his thumb. “His jacket would blend right in with those alders.”

A string of men, McBurnie at its head, walks down the shore to the point where the hunter was last seen. They pause and then continue. The wind blows harder across the rocks.

The group reassembles, roughly a hundred yards into the woods. A sense of grim excitement hangs in the air.

“What we’re gonna do,” McBurnie says, “is sweep across the island. Get a southeast bearing and spread out.” Stragglers join the group, and Bert, annoyance swelling his voice, repeats his instructions. “Keep in sight of each other,” he says. A line of camouflage and orange forms. The searchers stand, waiting for the signal. To some, this is a strange serious game. An unusual sports event.

McBurnie scans the line. “All right,” he says, “let’s head out. But keep it slow.”

The searchers advance. Some move steadily; they look about carefully and peer into bushes. Others charge forward, eager to reach Bob Archer first.


We move on, patches of orange weaving through brush and crawling over logs. Age, size and eagerness come into play, causing the line to waver. Some people move over easy, big-treed land. Others stumble through patches of swamp; some plow forward through thick undergrowth, their eyes clamped tight to avoid the snap of twigs. Those with guns are encumbered and curse. Throughout, McBurnie brays a steady stream of instructions: “Slow it down. We’re gonna walk right past him. Slow it down!”

Our eyes are trained to the ground, ready to see a log change form and become human, to find a man lying low in a gulley, just barely alive. It is a fearful, tantalizing prospect.

McBurnie’s warnings grow harsher. “You’re going too goddamned fast. You’re going —!”

A rifle shot cracks.

For a moment all is silent. Orange men stop where they stand and look angrily about. Then, voices break up and down the line.

“That went right by me, dammit!”

“Who the hell was that?”

“Did he hit someone?” McBurnie’s voice cuts through the babble. “Who was that?” he demands.

There is a moment’s pause.

“Who was that, goddamnit?”

Finally, a young hunter speaks. “I didn’t mean to. I got it caught on a branch when I was walking by.”

“What do you mean you
didn't mean to, by Jesus! What do you even have a gun for if you don't know how to handle it?"

"Mike, you meatball," another hunter says, "You could have killed someone."

Mike holds his rifle sullenly. "I'll unload it."

"All right," McBurnie says, his anger giving in to tiredness, "Let's straighten up. No loaded guns." Over an hour has passed since we began our search.

We reach the banks of a muddy brook. Some cross and continue far onto the other side. They are blobs of orange, fading into trees.

"Get those guys back here," McBurnie tells the man next to him. He thinks for a moment. "What we'll do is move upstream and sweep back to shore."

A stretch of blowdowns block our path on the outer edge of the island. Logs stretch chest-high, dirt and rocks clinging to their roots. Brambles and small ravines add to the difficulty of walking.

The line falls into impossible disarray. Feet slip into wet patches and struggle to keep balance. Orange patches bounce, orderlessly in and out of sight; keeping pace with the left and right is forgotten. If Bob Archer is here, among the blowdowns, he will not be rescued by our struggling, random search.

After twenty minutes in this tangled stretch of blowdowns, people begin to emerge from the forest. Order is hopelessly scrambled, and men stand on the beach two and three places out of line.

A boat approaches Gero Island. From a distance of several hundred yards, we see the green of a uniform. The warden sits low in the boat, calmly steering toward us.

"Move down to the boat." McBurnie motions the party along the shore. He moves slowly; disgust tinges his voice. "Let's see what the Christ he can do," Bert says. The warden reaches shore; he talks quietly with Bert. None of McBurnie's tight, anxious energy shows on his face. The warden radios his post and, then, is gone, looping around the island.

"We're gonna sweep that area," Bert announces after the boat has vanished. He points to a stand of pines. "But, first we're gonna sit here. A plane's coming over, and we don't want any orange out there except Bob."

The search party gathers again. Some of the energy lost in the blowdowns returns. We stand on the beach, where small frozen waves make ridges of ice, and watch the sky.

"There it is!"

The float plane appears and sweeps, once, over the island. A clutter of voices offer encouragement.

"That's right. Not too high, not too low. You go too low, and everything just rushes by."

"He'll see him, even if Bob's crawled into some bush out there."

The airplane's engine fades out of hearing. Just as hopes were raised, now they fall with the disappearance of the plane.

"I think we're looking for a corpse."

"Jesus, Bob would've heard us by now. Why don't he shoot?"

Minutes pass.

Bert speaks. "All right. I guess that's it for him. We're going back in." Guns lean against rocks. "Leave them," Bert says, "We don't need guns."

The group moves slowly, trading grim theories of death. Radios and wardens and airplanes have not helped.

We move across stacks of driftwood in a frozen inlet. Bert McBurnie has gone ahead and stands on a point of sand. He looks at the ground and then at the group of men following him. He shakes his head and waves the party farther onto the island. We stumble back across driftwood. Bert watches the sky.

And, then, a mechanical baritone hums from the air. The airplane returns. It arcs from behind the island and swoops low, almost beside us.

A flash of orange appears in the passenger's window. A hand waves.

And, then, a sort of cheer goes up, stretching back to where the last stragglers hear the news. The plane rises sharply and then lands in the middle of Chesuncook Lake; it cuts across the water to Bert McBurnie's dock. Hands are shaken. "I knew it," someone says. "I knew it."

Bert McBurnie sighs and walks back to his boat. His job is done. Bob Archer is off Gero Island.

First of a two part article on Chesuncook and the North Woods.

Bert McBurnie sighs and walks back to his boat. His job is done. Bob Archer is off Gero Island.
Wharf
Custom House Wharf on Portland’s embattled waterfront is rife with the stench of fish, the grime of a city and the hustle of heavy work.

Mud flats exhale decay. Haddock from the cutting floors mingle in the air with diesel smoke from boats and 18 wheelers. Fumes of frying burgers drift from the Porthole Restaurant.

It is the pulsing, unprettified remnant of the old working waterfront, doing business as usual by the sweat of its brow.

By Peter Millard
Photography by Pam Berry
Fishcutters know fishermen, waitresses know commuters, engineers know winos, and wharf rats know seagulls.
From Commercial Street, two long rows of wooden and metal shacks face each other across the wharf's narrow sagging road. Eighteen wheelers, like monolithic bulls, rumble in and stop to pick up lobster from the Harbor Fish Market, unload mattresses, box springs and groceries at the Casco Bay Line terminal, and collect fish at Old Port Fillet.

The fishing boats unload, the cutting floor brims with haddock, hake and dogfish, and then is empty. The Casco Bay Line ferry chugs in and out, horn blowing as captains make announcements to passengers, "You might want to cover your ears. This horn is the loudest in the fleet."

Nearby multi-million dollar condominiums rise on neighboring wharves. Neatly manicured shops and brass and glass restaurants populate the tree-shaded streets of Portland's revitalized Old Port commercial district, where shoppers stroll and street musicians fill the air with banjo and guitar.

Commercial Street is the Maginot Line between work and leisure, grime and glass, trucks and Peugots. That is until last year when the almost overnight conversion to condominiums of two wharves brought protest, a referendum and a five year moratorium on the waterfront for non marine uses.

It is no trick of fate that Custom House Wharf has held its own against gentrification. The biggest single reason is gruff John Macgowan, now 66, who controls ownership. His contempt for condominium use of the waterfront is unprintable. John Macgowan keeps the rents on Custom House Wharf low enough so its regular users can afford to stay.

Longtime users of the wharf are another reason for its resistance to change. People who work on the wharf have their own way of doing things. They know what to expect of each other and they abide by their own unwritten rules.

Custom House Wharf is a small, intact community that continues to exist as it has long existed, taking its energy and livelihood from the sea.

The wharf is never empty. The new day comes unremittingly and it all starts over again. Fishermen inaugurate the days. Days that last long into the evening, until the clinking of glasses and silverware ceases at Boone's Restaurant. At night, boisterous, drunken voices drift down from the trendy neon-lit fern bars of the Old Port, rippling a rare silence on Custom House.

A young man promenades by the wharf, wearing a pair of eighty dollar sunglasses. His linen suit is wrinkled in the back, knees and elbows from sitting at a desk. He talks to a woman in grey flannel.

As they pass the entrance to Custom House, a phrase floats down the wharf, "It's the Vanderbilt thing, if you can't buy it, what's the point?" The bustle of the wharf ignores this haughty comment.

Spray painted on the corrugated metal and wooden shacks of the wharf are messages to motorists. "NO PAHKEN."

A blonde in a gleaming Saab with Massachusetts plates honks her horn impatiently. She is pinned in by the Dodge pickup whose spot she took. A bare chested man emerges from a dilapidated wooden building and says with a snarl, "Want to get out, eh? Shouldn't park where you don't belong."

The blonde leers behind her tinted windshield, checks her earrings and waits for him to climb slowly into the cab of his truck and pull out of her way. When she has disappeared around the corner onto Commercial Street, he moves into his spot and goes back to work.

As Dana Neuts, retail manager of Harbor Fish Market puts it, the wharf handles its own traffic problems. When the traffic clogs up too much, "usually one of us will go out and you direct traffic a little bit and help them out. And that is the end of it."

"It never gets really heated, never becomes a problem unless the person coming into the wharf is having a problem themselves. Anybody can come in and create a problem."

On Custom House the fish cutters, retailers and fishermen know each other. The waitresses know the commuters. The people who clean up toxic spills know the winos. The rats and seagulls know each other.

Custom House Wharf is a developer's nightmare. It is an example of the efficiency and community that development cannot achieve, despite comprehensive planning. The wharf has what condominiums, malls, and sites of urban renewal do not have; history and tradition. It has its own unique and time tested way of doing its job.
IN DANA NEUTS' OFFICE, a sign on the wall reads, "Stress is that confusion when the mind overrides the body's basic need to choke the living shit out of some asshole that desperately needs it."

Dana spins around on his stool as he switches his baseball hat backwards. The phone on the wall in front of him rings and he picks it up, "Fifty more softshell? Okay, Archie just got back so we'll be sending your order to you right now."

Dana hangs up the phone and checks the plain white wall clock that hangs over a row of clipboards stuffed with ragged memos and order forms.

"On the waterfront, it just feels like it is kind of a family atmosphere. When you go down and see the fishermen and the lobstermen, you are part of their environment. If you go down to say hello to someone in the morning, you are always going to get a hello back.

"People on the waterfront are very open people for the most part. There are a few people that have been here all their lives that are out on the boats by themselves. Some of the lobstermen don't like to talk that much. They're pretty much people who keep to themselves. That is why they go lobstering by themselves in the first place.

"For the most part, you get into a group of fishermen and ask them a question about fishing or ask them a question about the waterfront in general and you're going to get some frank answers. They don't beat around the bush."

Dana picks up the phone, "Say what? $2.99 on the Atlantic salmon, Phil, plus take those two fish out front, fillet and skin them and add them to it."

A man with curly brown hair comes to the door of Dana's office. His clothes are dishevelled. He leans his arm against the doorway, "Heard you were looking for a part time driver."

"Are you looking for part time work? How many hours a week? What have you got for free hours? From anytime in the morning until four in the afternoon?"

"Now you understand on a driving job here, it is not just driving. It is also putting orders up and putting inventory away. It is all that stuff combined. It is not just total driving. We don't drive that much."

The man looking for work ponders the offer, trying hard to look like he is debating, "Yeah, that would be great."

Down the wharf, Paul Goudreau has the same view of Custom House Wharf as Dana Neuts. For 14 years he has worked for Seacoast Ocean Services, known on the waterfront as SOS. He cleans up oil spills and chemical leaks.

He leans against one of the wooden uprights that supports the roof of SOS's murky shed filled with racks of oily overalls, shelves of tools, and heavy machinery, looking for the words to describe Custom House Wharf to an outsider.

His oil ringed, racoon eyes peer back over his shoulder at a boat floating in the water, covered with black tar. "We know everybody. Everybody knows that everybody else watches out for everybody else's property."

Though the seedy shacks suggest a shifty underworld underside, Paul pierces this illusion. "It's not a high crime area by any stretch of the imagination, even at night. It is not that kind of area, even though you would think it because it looks this way.

"We've been broken into several times over the years, but they've been caught. Usually you don't catch things like that, but there are so many people around at all hours of the night.

"The fishermen are around all hours of the night and so are we. We leave our keys in our vehicles on this wharf. We don't worry about it. Never had one stolen yet."

Vern Keith , like Paul Goudreau and Dana Neuts, has worked on Custom House Wharf many years. He grimaces now as a cutter offers a piece of dogfish. Vern is the manager of the Old Port Fillet cutting room.

"Mainly I get a sense of self accomplishment when we have a lot of fish and I get the fish done. Keeping the crew here, the same people that keep coming back after they get done with another job.

"I tell people to stick it out. No one ever gets enough money per hour and they always seem to come back.

"People like it down here. They like being on the wharf. We're pretty flexible here with hours too. When you get done at noon and you still get your eight hours in, it's like you got the day off.

"It's a long day in the summertime on the waterfront. It gets hot down here. And all the people, the vacationers, you see them all out there walking around. You don't feel like working either.

"But the people keep coming back. And I do too for some strange reason."

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Custom House Wharf
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*Subscribe to Salt by January 1, 1988 and we'll send you a copy of issue number 26 with the guy above featured inside. Free.
THE WATERFRONT’S FISHING industry is a complex machine. It ran almost entirely on local ball bearings until recently. A year ago the government fish pier opened its doors to business, altering the balance of the industry.

The pier is home to a new display fish auction warehouse patterned after European fish auctions and bankrolled by city, state and federal support. Here wholesale fishbrokers bid daily for the catch and fishermen sell their goods.

The auction was designed to bring a competitive fish market to Portland, along with price schedules easily quoted over the phone to other marine hubs like Boston, New York and Baltimore. The auction has attracted buyers from these hubs, as well as more competition, better quality, and—sometimes—higher prices.

“I think it is a crock of shit myself,” Reggie Lamb places a forearm across the edge of his desk and juts his face out. “They are supposed to get three cents a pound for everything they unload and anything sold is supposed to get three cents a pound, but they don’t get both of them sometimes.”

Reggie shuffles through a stack of pink and yellow invoices and pulls a sheet from a heap on his beleagured desk, “The Portland Fish Exchange had a record 201,544 pounds of fish on the auction floor today. When it was all over they only sold 166,00 pounds. They carried 36,000 pounds over the next day. And it is supposed to be fresh fish.”

The auction house was supposed to improve the quality of fish being sold out of Portland. Nick Alfiero, who runs Harbor Fish’s cutting floor on Commercial Street, is pleased with the auction house.

He remembers business before the auction house. “The off loader,” businesses that buy fish from the fishermen for shipment to processors, “could send us sight unseen the product that he wanted to and send other product elsewhere. We could either fight over the price and quality structure or accept it. Now we can look at what we want and pay accordingly.

“If we want to buy off product,” lower quality fish, “for a particular customer who wants off product, we can do that. If we want to buy top shelf products,” high quality fish, perhaps for fine restaurants, “we can now do that. So the auctions are there for us where they weren’t before.

“Basically you have got the off loaders” like Reggie Lamb, “who are not in favor of this thing happening and you have got people like myself,” retailers, “who are in favor.”

Nick explains the differing viewpoints. “You would get two different opinions from Reggie and Gerry [Genaro Balzano]. Reggie would give you one view, because Reggie, along with two other people, controlled where the fish was going through. Boats left Reggie to go to the auction.

“What the auction has done is open up the market, not only to outside people that come in and purchase and bypass the middle men, but it also opened up the pricing to the fishermen. The fisherman knows what he is getting. He knows what the end user is paying.

“He doesn’t feel suspicious that there is someone in between pocketing all kinds of money. Reggie would differ with you on that, because he would say that he wasn’t pocketing all kinds of money and he is probably right.

“The only thing that Reggie and guys like him did was control where the fish went. We are a processor and wholesale-retailer who uses whole fish and processes it into fillets. We never offloaded boats. We used to depend on a guy like Reggie or other people like him for our source of supply.”

As a result of the recent controversy about Portland’s waterfront, Genaro Balzano, a fisherman on Custom House, got involved. “First time I ever voted, ashamed to say, was fighting for the auction and the fish pier, but I didn’t think it was going to be regulated so.

“I thought we was building a pier for the fishermen and now it has turned out to be quite a bureaucratic thing. And the auction, I don’t know where that came from. Wasn’t in my thinking. That came from city hall, I guess.”

Genaro does not sell fish at the auction house. He continues to bring his catch to “another wholesaler.”

At Old Port Fillet, Vern Keith lights a Marlboro Light and pulls the brim of his stained straw cowboy hat over his eyes. “I have not bought fish there for a year, because I’ve gotten enough fish over the road and between R&S to keep busy.

“It is cheaper to get it that way than to pay handling charges over there. We have our own boats. We cater to them instead of the boats that go to the auction. Instead of giving the auction good prices, I cater to R&S because that is their business, unloading boats, just like the auction.”
The wharf is never empty. The new day comes unremittingly and it all starts over again. Fishermen inaugurate the day.
GENARO BALZANO MENDS fishing nets outside his aluminum shack on Custom House Wharf as his boat, Gerry and Joe, rocks gently in its berth. Behind his back, $250,000 luxury condominiums reach skyward on Long Wharf.

Genaro points to the condos, "The only thing I see trouble with is if they start bringing in yachts over there. This," he says pointing to his boat, "is not a yacht." A rusted hydraulic lift, piles of tangled nets and wooden crates that crowd the deck of the Gerry and Joe verify that it is not a pleasure cruiser.

"We start up at two o'clock in the morning, whether they are going to like the sound of that diesel or not. That is their problem. I'm not going anywhere."

As Genaro speaks, his hands nimbly cut away the torn strands of his net and replace them with new nylon. The worn orange netting contrasts vividly with the new bright orange knots.

"If anyone is in the wrong place, it is them, not me. I can't bring that," he points to the Gerry and Joe, "up on Commercial Street. It won't go. They can bring those," Genaro gesticulates towards the condos with the shuttle of orange twine, "anywhere in the world, any goddamn place they want to put them."

Although Genaro says he is not doing anything, he has mended several yards of netting in half an hour. Genaro is 48 years old and has been fishing off Custom House Wharf since his father, also a fisherman, brought him there on his 21st birthday. His boat is named after his two sons.

Opposite Genaro Balzano's shack on the wharf, on the cutting floor of Old Port Fillet, Vern Keith relaxes on an old wooden crate. His eyes peer from underneath his cowboy hat's creased brim. He talks about how people who live in the condominiums will react to life on the waterfront.

"Give them something to talk about Friday night when they're sitting there drinking champagne out on their deck. When the diesel smoke comes up in their windows, that is the way it goes. They'll have to hire somebody to wash it off, because they probably won't do it themselves."

Vern leans over and snubs the cigarette out on the cement floor. "I'm no one to judge anybody. It is just that I wouldn't know why they would want to move down here, guess to look out and watch the boats go by.

"The smell of fish will always be on the waterfront. Just the water and the pilings, if there wasn't fish down here, there would still be an odor down here, a musty smell. The rain drains that run off into the water here at low tide, that's going to smell.

"The mud flats up along Commercial Street, that is going to smell whether there's fish down here or not. There's not much you can do about it. There is always going to be lobstermen loading bait on their boats or leaving it all night."

Dana Neuts too has been thinking about the people whose shadows he will see crossing past the lit windows of the condos on the next wharf. "Waterfront property has always been a lot of people's dream. Sure, to live on the ocean is a very nice thing. I would love to live on the ocean in its place.

"But these people, they don't see the side of life that we have here on the waterfront. A lot of the people that are buying $250,000 condominiums are in an office all day. They don't see what goes on on the working waterfront. They haven't been involved with the working man.

"Ten years ago when they were rezoning, that is when they should have been jumping on people. No more rezoning. Don't let them in at all!"

Dana leans back on his stool and rubs his chin. He is thinking about the people moving into the condos. "These guys, maybe they've been in the office until nine at night and they've got a pressure job. They need that relaxation time.

"That is going to make him mad. Then you are going to have nothing but hostilities. That is when it's going to get real difficult. I don't want to see it come to that. I don't think it has to come to that. The fishermen don't want to go and bother this guy over there, but they're just doing their job, which they've been doing for twenty years.

"It is not their fault. They have done well for themselves. That is great. That is what they chose to do, no problem, but it's awfully hard for them to understand what the needs of the people that are going out on the boats every day are."
They always say the old bastards are against change, says Reggie Lamb. He considers himself among the accused.
"COURSE YOU KNOW they always say the old bastards are against change," Reggie Lamb aims tobacco juice into the garbage can of his office. Reggie is a wholesale fish seller who runs R & S Seafood on Portland Wharf. He considers himself among the crowd of accused.

Reggie and John Macgowan represent the old order on the waterfront. Reggie Lamb, in his 70s, and John Macgowan, now 66, are shrewd and powerful men, who have built the present system and stand between it and change.

Neither of them have much use for city hall and no use at all for the condominiums on Long Wharf and Central Wharf. The two major changes along the waterfront — condominium development and the new city and state sponsored fish auction — affect both adversely. Condominiums drive up John Macgowan's taxes and the fish auction takes business away from Reggie Lamb.

The two, fast friends, are hardly old dogs without fangs. They stand guard with considerable success. Anyone who wants to wipe out Custom House Wharf's present way of doing things has to start with them.

John Macgowan's family has been involved with Custom House Wharf since his father ran it from an office above the Porthole many years ago. As long as he is around, the wharf will continue to operate as it does now, adjusting to day to day business of the wharf, resisting major change. Money will change hands in the old way, based on verbal agreements.

Sitting in his home on the Eastern Promenade, John Macgowan says he doesn't do much on the wharf now - not like when he ran the Porthole Restaurant years ago. But he checks it out each day, talks to people and knows what is going on.

He has been collecting the rent from the wharf since the end of World War II. He controls the corporation called "Proprietorship of Custom House Wharf" that owns the wharf. He has no intention of selling it to the same fate as that of Central Wharf or Long Wharf.

John Macgowan says his taxes went up 24 percent in one year. When he protested at city hall he was told, 'Well, you can have condominiums down there.' And here they are preaching that they don't want condominiums. Such hypocrisy I never saw in my life."

Now that people are moving in to Liberty's condominiums on Central Wharf, some problems have reared their obvious heads. John Macgowan smiles, his eyes wide in mock amazement, "One of the boys on the board of the wharf is interested in the moving business and he has jobs down there. They can't drive a truck down there. They won't let him put a truck down on there.

"They have to use a pickup truck to move a family into those chicken coops down there."

"How could a fire truck ever get down there? I don't know. The only thing they could do is jump overboard. That is the chance they have. They are right handy. But they would have to jump good. You couldn't have an elderly person there, like me. I would not be able to get that far over the little cat walk."

"They wouldn't let that kind of density anywhere else in the city. It is unbelievable."

Reggie Lamb has worked on Portland's waterfront since the 1920s. He calls his shots from an office above one of his cutting floors. Ollie, his mutt, is curled up in a leather chair beside his desk. Reggie's usual headgear is a battered blue baseball cap.

Ask him to talk about John Macgowan and he laughs, "You want to see somebody fight with city hall, you want to see him fight!"

Reggie spits a wad of tobacco and pats his dog. The door to his office bursts open and a tall man in a soiled tee shirt walks in. "Mr. Lamb, I presume."

"Whaddaya say? Want to settle up?" Reggie asks.

Lenny is one of the fishermen who supplies Reggie with fish. He needs an advance to buy diesel and ice for his boat.

Reggie pulls a checkbook from under one of the piles of magazines, invoices and garbage that blanket his desk. He scrawls a check and hands it to Lenny, who leaves it on the edge of the desk and walks into the back office. "Hey, Jim, you've got to stop picking on me," he says to someone who works with Reggie. "I'm sensitive."

Lenny returns and says to Reggie, "He don't believe I'm sensitive." More cackling and tobacco stained teeth from Reggie.

Lenny speaks like a standup comedian. "If I'm gone for more than two months, worry about me, okay? Or I'll send you my address in Aruba. I'm taking a short cut. I'm going east to get west."

He turns toward the inner office. "Hey, Jim, in case I don't see you in a couple of days, fuck you."

Lenny stalks out smiling, his thumbs hooked around the worn brass buckle of his belt. The check rests on Reggie's desk. Reggie grins and picks it up. "He'll be back soon enough."
Never judge a book by its cover, Margie Profenno told her customer at Boone's, where she has worked for 30 years.
ANY DAY OF THE WEEK from six o'clock on, fishermen, tourists, wharf rats, and yuppies hunch over the lunch counter of the Porthole, gobbling home fries and hot dogs, eggs and coffee. The sizzling of the grill plays harmony to conversations. There are three sizes of coffee cups.

The pinball machine by the bathroom announces its presence with electronic beeps and shrill giggles. You can find the lobsterman who rents the shack at the end of the Casco Bay Lines offices playing when he is not at work. The walls are sky blue with murals of whale's tails and dolphins flirting with the waves.

Russ, the man who runs the show, stands at the antiquated cash register, arms across his ample tee shirted chest and belly. He closes one eye, squints the other and looks toward the ceiling, calculating change. "There you go," he says handing change to a customer. "The only modern appliance in the place is a slick refrigerated cooler emblazoned with the Pepsi logo.

The day cruisers dock at the wharf and crowds of vacationers push into the Porthole to buy candy bars and soda. When they leave, things return to normal at the long counter.

John Macgowan ran the Porthole for twenty years, up until the late fifties. "I gave up the Porthole because the Health Department would come down and they would say, 'There is grime on the floor.' Well, what are you going to do everytime someone comes in with rubber boots on? Go around behind him?" John pan-tomimes bending over and sweeping along the ground with every step of the boots.

"'Well, you should be able to eat off the floors,' the health officials would say. 'Look, you can eat off the floor if you want to,' he says he replied. 'It is kind of ridiculous to expect that kind of environment under the conditions that are prevalent.'"

John secures his glasses on top of his head, "I know Russ real well and I don't envy him. It is tough. Of course it is going to be better when the Casco Bay Lines leaves, because then you are only dealing with fishermen that know the area instead of tourists that are coming down to go down the bay."

The people John Macgowan finds oddest to see in the restaurant he used to run are Portland's young executives, the yuppies. "Nothing surprises me more than seeing them in the Porthole. I mean, if I was a yuppie I don't think I'd go anywhere near the place, but that is just me and not any reflection on the Porthole.

"It doesn't seem to fit their character to me. I can't figure it out. But I don't argue I just observe."

Just beyond the Porthole is Boone's Restaurant. In her three decades as a waitress at Boone's, Margie Profenno has met many customers, waitresses, waiters and cooks.

"They are all nice people. Talkative, you know. There is a bunch of businessmen that come in at least twice a week. They are really nice people. They talk and tell you what they're doing to keep out of mischief and what they're doing to get into mischief."

Margie has known Dianne, another waitress at the restaurant, for a long time. "She works nights and I work days, but we both been here thirty years. She is really nice. We get along good. She works nights, so I don't see her unless I'm here at four when she gets in, but we talk on the phone.

"You know, get all the dirt and tell each other what we don't like and what we do like. Not that it does any good, but at least we complain to one another. At least you get it off your chest." Margie returns four days a week for her shift.

Casco Bay Line's first berthing space faces the outdoor cafe of Boone's seafood restaurant. "They keep talking about moving Casco Bay Lines over to the other wharf, but I don't know when the heck they are going to do it and I don't know if a lot of people will like it.

"We have a lot of islanders that come in here and have a drink on their way home, waiting for the boat. We have a lot of people in at lunch time that live on the islands.

"I had a woman come in, this was a long time ago, before they painted the outside. She said, 'Oh, I didn't know. I've heard about this place for years and years and I had to come down here.' She said, 'I looked at the outside of the building and said I'm not going in that dirty hole.' And when she came in she said, 'Oh, this is lovely.'"

"And I said, 'Never judge a book by its cover, honey.'"
"THE WATERFRONT SHOULD BE exactly what it is for, waterfront people. Not a mess of yuppies down on the chicken coops down there," says John Macgowan. "Most of them just got in there and figure they would make a profit on transferring the sale of the places. They don’t want to live there. "I don’t understand these big building things, the whole philosophy of this growth, because I think it is going to come tumbling down around Liberty’s ears primarily [the developer], but that is none of my business. It is not my money."

On May 5, 1987, a referendum on waterfront use was passed by a two to one margin by the citizens of Portland. Its purpose: "To secure the Portland waterfront for marine uses." The area between Tukey’s Bridge and Memorial Bridge lying between the waters of the Fore River, Portland Harbor, the Casco Bay, but excluding the Casco Bay Islands is protected under the referendum. The referendum prevents any development other than marine related for five years.

Nick Alfiero recalls the message coming out of city hall with a look of frustration and disbelief. He says the message was loud and clear from the planning board, "Go ahead Mr. Liberty. You want to build a whatever story building? Go ahead and do it. You want to have a density of no open space at all? Fine, no sweat. No parking? Fine. You want to put up a seven story parking garage that blocks everyone’s view? Fine, no problem.” It was really ludicrous to watch.

"The timing on the thing was kind of interesting. A week before the referendum was coming to vote, people were driving down here, trying to make up their minds. They were looking at the big monstrosity on the old Central Wharf,” the luxury condominiums erected by the Liberty Group, “and saying, ‘God, I don’t want that.’"

“At the same time the people who owned the condos on Central Wharf were putting the guardhouse up,” Nick chuckles quietly and crosses his legs, “which did not make a lot of sense to me. People were walking by going, ‘What the hell is that guardhouse doing on Central Wharf? We used to go down there to the end of the wharf and fish. My grandfather used to also. Look at that thing. It is a guardhouse. By God, I’m not going to have that thing in my city.’

“I think everyone is in favor of some positive change forward, small change, but when something drastic like that,” Nick leans back and points out the window of his office towards the condominiums on Central Wharf.

“The thing dominates the waterfront from the bridge, from across the way. Anyway you, you can see that big condo. It’s an eyesore.”

Although the referendum was an outcry from the citizens of Portland to save the working waterfront, the working waterfront is ambivalent about the referendum. Aside from stopping the Liberty Group dead in its tracks, at least temporarily, many say the referendum has had a negative impact on the waterfront economy and the people it was supposed to be doing a favor.

Genaro Balzano points this out as he works. The knife flashes from his palm at the torn net with neat decisive strokes, “Nobody read the second part of it. No condos for five years, beautiful. No condos forever, that would be fine, but the part that came second that said everything else had to be 100 percent marine related, people did not read that part.

“People thought they were helping me by going the other way. Friends of mine. I’ve had many, many people say, ‘We won, we won!’ I got tired of explaining it.”

The waterfront is adjusting to a new set of restrictions. First floor spaces are easily filled by marine use, but second and third floor are not.. Many second and third floors that might have easily been used now stand empty.

Nick leans back in his creaky wooden chair, “I voted for the referendum but it was a real reluctant vote. I did not feel that the referendum was the route to go. I do not necessarily believe that the entire waterfront can exist with total marine use.

“I favored something in between with second floor use to be along the lines of small business use would have been acceptable to me, with absolutely no residential condominiums, with absolutely no office spaces over a certain size within limits. We all need doctors, lawyers, architects. We do not always need to go uptown to get that sort of service.”

Genaro owns property on Hobson’s Wharf down by the Fish Pier. “I got a building 30,000 square feet and the second floor is practically empty. The first floor I can rent ten times over, one hundred and ten percent fishing related, but the second floor is a little different story. You got to have a chiropractor or a guy that makes zippers or something, just not one hundred percent marine.”
Boats unload, cutting floors brim, 18 wheelers roar like monolithic bulls and the ferry chugs in, horn blowing.
IT IS FIVE O'CLOCK in the morning. The dawn light is cloaked in fog. Outside the Casco Bay Lines building, two passengers, an older man and woman, wait in the dim light of a single clear light bulb for the 5:20 “down the bay run”. The run goes nine miles down the bay by way of Little Diamond, Great Diamond, Long, Chebeague and finally Cliff Island.

Captain Chuck Caliandro walks out of the cargo loading area next to the offices. Today is his twenty third birthday. He climbs up the gangplank onto the Abenaki, which sits silently in the dark water. A light switches on in the wheelhouse and the loudspeaker crackles awake.

The fog makes it impossible to see more than 75 feet in any direction. Custom House Wharf slips silently into the fog behind the Abenaki as she glides through the still water around Portland Pier, State Pier and the Bath Iron Works dry dock out into the bay. Chuck blows the piercing horn every minute into the fog that settled on the bay five days earlier and still remains.

He switches on his radar screen and picks up the short wave radio. The moisture in the air forms droplets on his short, curly, blond hair.

“I've really liked boats, these in particular, ever since I was a kid. We have a summer house out on Long Island that overlooks the water. When I was a little kid, I would sit on the porch and watch the boats go by.”

Casco Bay Lines is moving its terminal from Custom House to State Pier. “I think it is a real shame that Bay Lines is moving. I guess they are supposed to be out of here next fall or winter. It’s not just the fact that it is habit going in and out there, but it is a good spot for us. State Pier, where they are moving us to, is in much better shape because it is brand new, but it is not going to work as well.”

“One of the benefits of Custom House Wharf is she has give. Rarely does a captain ever bang it hard. In the wintertime if it is blowing hard, he might nail it, but the wharf is old and the pilings are old. You can bump up along side of them and never feel it on the boat, because the pilings take all the give.”

CUSTOM HOUSE HAS BEEN a thorn in their side,” says Nick Alfiero, who runs Harbor Fish's cutting floor on Commercial Street. “From a planner's point of view, it's a thorn. It's the one wharf that's right in the middle of the old mixed use zone that was not going to be sold and turned into something glorified.

“I think the planners would love to see that happen, because originally that area was left a mixed zone - the three [wharves] sort of fronted the Old Port. They would have loved to see those three wharfs, Custom House, Old Portland Pier, and Long Wharf, become newer and a show place to the Old Port. That hasn't happened on Custom House and it is not going to for a while.”

Tom Balzano, brother of Genaro, agrees. "This wharf has not changed in 35 years.” But it’s not for want of trying in the last year or two. “They want to make Portland another San Francisco.” He leans over to spit contemptuously through a hole in the wharf.

Dana Neuts is more expansive. He crosses his arms as he leans comfortably against his desk. "This wharf does resist change. I think because the businesses on the wharf are really well established. I don't know how the owners of the wharf feel about it, but it just seems that the businesses that have been here are doing well and there really isn't any need for change.

“That might bother some of the people who are looking for development. That might really upset them, but that's another nice thing about this wharf. It hasn't seemed to change much over the years.”

The attention caused by the referendum has made people aware of the area, he says. Dana drums his fingers on his desk. “I think it is extremely important not to change something like this.”

Dana Neuts remembers citizens coming down to the wharf to see for themselves. They liked what they saw on Custom House. “They definitely formed an opinion and usually it is for the working public that that opinion will go to because these guys are making a living on the waterfront.

“I think ten years ago people were not as aware of how things can change and how they can lose the beauty of an area, how they can lose what has always been there and always been taken for granted.

“Now I think they look to these things and they don't take it for granted any longer. They say, 'That is nice. I like it. Let's keep it because that is part of Maine, that is part of Portland.'”

PETER MILLARD researched and wrote this article during the 1987 Salt Summer Semester. He is a senior at Hamilton College.
Out of SIGHT OF
Within sound of the sea, Ken Doane repairs machines. He was going to be a lobsterman, until that day when he was 17 —

By Patricia Dugan
Photography by Christiana Fachin

Static from a marine scanner crackles through Ken Doane’s small machine shop by the river. Outside his open window, a fishing boat chugs slowly past the wharf where Ken once berthed his own lobster dory. At the shop doorway, Ken listens for a moment, then with a grunt, lowers himself to one knee beside a broken lawnmower.

Blunt, grease-stained fingers brush over the machine surface as he searches for, then locates, the starter cord. He snaps it — once, twice, again. The engine sputters and whines, but refuses to catch.

“Well, you’re right. It don’t start,” he drawls in down-east tones, tilting his head in the direction of his customer’s voice. “Do you leave it outside?” He nods his head at the affirmative answer. “Probably water in the gas tank. We’ll see.”

Bushy eyebrows slightly raised, lids dropped over his eyes, he bends back to his work, feeling for the first of two screws. “Here is it,” he whispers, carefully pocketing it. “Where are you...? I gotcha,” he twists off the second.

After a pat of his hand to check the double bulges in his workshirt, he grabs the tank with both hands and yanks. The pale liquid spills onto the dirt road that separates the shop from the mobile home he shares with his wife Margaret and their children.

He hauls himself to his feet and heads inside. Rapping his knuckles on the wooden desk, a ladder, then the back doorframe, he disappears in search of gas.

“Judas Priest,” he shouts over the clatter of metal, as he trips over the can.

“Oh, I knew it was there,” he cries. “That’s how you break your neck, or leg or arm. I call that walking along and paying no mind to where I’m going. Thinking of something else.”

The rest of the job is routine. He retrieves the screws, refits the tank, fills it, revs up the motor.

Payment in hand he jokes, “I’ll have to give
the twenty dollars to Mother. She don’t let me keep the big ones.”

He counts out change from bills arranged by sequence inside his worn billfold. Pulling a fistful of coins from his pants pocket, he methodically fingers each around the edge to assemble the correct amount.

Laugh lines thread the corners of his eyes, etch his broad cheeks. They deepen as he smiles, waving his customer out.

Ken Doane has been blind for 31 of his 48 years. For the past 24 he has been a mechanic, fixing small engines — lawn mowers, chain saws, snowthrowers. He’d rather be a lobsterman.

T WAS STILL DARK the July morning when 17-year-old Ken Doane walked the few steps from his house to the wharf, slipped the rope from pilings holding his 22 foot open dory, and headed down the river.

It looked to be the start of “one of them perfect summer days. It was right glassy, smooth...there was no wind whatever,” as he steered past quiet houses.

Just the occasional cry of a gull and the “put, putter, put put” of his “make and break” engine disturbed the silence.

At the mouth of the river he pulled back on the tiller, slowly bringing the boat, which “took a country acre to turn” westward toward his 100 lobster traps.

Dozens of brightly colored buoys blurred on the water. His were red and white with barber-pole tail sticks and a white “K”.

Once he had the first buoy, he cut the engine and hauled the 75 pound wooden trap; eight or ten fathoms of line, hand over hand. Heaving it over the side, he measured the catch, rebaited with fish racks and got underway, setting the trap back on its string.

He liked being out there on his own. “If you’re doing your own hauling, you’re busy all the time, not setting back to wait.”

He liked the anticipation, “What would be in the next one?” It was the best part of lobstering.

On a good day, he could haul 20 traps an hour. That morning he only got to a few before the sun came up.

He doesn’t remember the dawn. The sun might have come up yellow, or maybe bright red as it did sometimes. Maybe there were “sundogs”, that melding of clouds, sun and atmosphere that creates the illusion of two suns. “Sundogs” might have stuck in his mind. He always looked at them a little closer.

He only remembers what happened after the dawn. The brighter the sun, the less he could see.

“It was bothering me bad. I suppose it must have been sun glare on the water, or something, but I just thought, oh, this is one of them things. It will go by. It will pass.”

But it didn’t. It was a clear day. He was only 150 yards from shore. He couldn’t see land.

“Something was wrong bad and I just couldn’t do that anymore. I had to run home by compass and the sun was shining bright and I was just out here in the bay.”

It was the last solo trip for a teenager who, according to the old family joke, was born and already fixing lobster traps before the midwife arrived.

He had first boarded his father’s fishing boat in a cardboard box at 10 days old. When he was 14, Ken bought a fishing boat for $45, “cold, hard, cash on the barrelhead” with earnings from a 50 cent-an-hour job.

Despite the fact he had juvenile diabetes “almost from day one,” Ken had 20/20 vision through his mid-teens. Blindness never occurred to him.

“It was back in the days when you kept things like that a deep, dark secret. The doctors didn’t tell you. Directly.”

During his junior year at Kennebunk High School, his sight deteriorated. By the time he was a senior he had trouble reading, severe headaches. He didn’t tell anyone. He didn’t want to think about it.

“Probably what you might say is, ‘This isn’t happening to me,’ you know. Things don’t happen to me, just the other guy.”

It became hard to ignore. In July after graduation, he was pronounced legally blind — 20/100. Doctors predicted a 50-50 chance of retaining the little sight he had. “Go home,” they advised, “‘keep on doing what you’ve been doing.’”

“...which was probably a mistake. I don’t know. Being on the water. The eye strain was fierce and one day the eye just broke down entirely.”

In September of 1957 acute glaucoma erupted, in first one, then the other eye. The pain was severe.

“I went into the hospital and that was the end of lobstering — as a vocation for me.”
Holes in both work-soiled pantlegs testify to hours on his knees, bowed to the altar of nuts, bolts and metal.

During the months that followed, the reality of his blindness began to sink in. "This is happening. It has happened. I can't see and I'm not going to be able to."

"It almost puts you from doing something to doing nothing. All of a sudden you can't do it on your own."

He was supported by family, friends, the community.

"They didn't consider me an invalid. Maybe not as much as I did at the time. Wherever they'd go, why I'd go. I went roller-skating, ice-skating, bowling, out on dates, foolish things like canoe races. I even went deer hunting. Didn't shoot of course, but I went along."

Ken's older brother was also a diabetic. Because of significant advances in the treatment of diabetes in the seven years separating the brothers, Ken was spared severe related problems that affected his brother's health. Ken called him, "a victim of the times."

When Ken's brother became blind about the same time as Ken, "It finally just got to him."

The good Lord called and away he went."

The outlook was different for Ken. He had decisions to make.

"If you was going to lose your eyesight, what picture would come into your mind? Well, there was this old fellow in town who was blind. I remember seeing him as a kid walking down Main Street stooped over, a little short cane, a bucket of pencils hanging off his neck. That was the impression I had. Then you say, 'what am I going to do?'"

Sixteen weeks at St. Pauls, a center teaching daily living skills to the blind, was Ken's first step toward independence.

He practiced cooking, handwriting, braille, "only use it for cards now," housekeeping, memorization, even fencing for coordination.

He learned to walk with a cane, to use all his senses. "The biggest thing is to train your ears. Everything goes together. The better you are at it, the better other people don't think of you being blind."

The next hurdle was living a month entirely on his own, regulating insulin with a specially designed syringe that locked at the designated
dosage.

Now that he had proved himself he was ready for vocational counseling at the New England Rehabilitation Center. Alone and scared he traveled from Maine to Boston.

"I stepped off the bus. I stood there a minute and I says, 'What the heck do I do now?' and the answer came right quick. There was a guy hollering 'Taxi' and I say 'Guess that's what I better do.'

"There was nobody there to help me. You know you get a little apprehensive about something like that. But I'd only lose one night's sleep over anything I did, the night previous. Then you laugh after it's over."

He decided to be a mechanic. "It was entirely up to me what I wanted in life, what vocation."

"Back in that era, the problem with rehabilitation was, nobody would hire you when it was done. I couldn't get a job. That's why I'm in business on my own."

He fixed mowers at a local garage for a while, then located at his present site. The low, red-shingled shop squats on Doane's Wharf Road, tipping the peninsula his father bought years ago.

It is steps from Ken's childhood home. "It's where I've spent my life, most of it. Home."

I T'S ONE O'CLOCK on a July Afternoon. Lunch over, Ken heads back to work. He'll put in four or five more hours before quitting.

Crossing the road, he tips the toe of his foot to calibrate the edge of the cement lip bordering his three-room shop. Reaching one sinewy arm full length to touch the building, he pauses a moment to get his bearings before easing his compact frame through the wide doorway.

Under open rafters dripping with planks, rope, oars and a battered hockey stick, fifteen mowers and at least six chain saws wait. They swallow all but the thinnest aisle of floor space.

He asks for help in locating a certain machine. "There's a lot of things a blind person can do as well as a sighted person, but there are some he'll never be able to do."

Metal gnashes on metal. Ken growls, "Get out of there," as he tussles the chosen machine from the line-up.

He approaches a job, "just like anyone else I guess. First thing you do is interrogate the guy running the machine. This old guy I knew once said he always listened to the customer. He did what they said and when he got that done he turned around and fixed it.

"Process of elimination. Take ahold of the starter rope and you pull it. You don't start, you check the spark. You keep going down the road till finally you come up with answers."

While he talks he fingers the length of a dozen or so of the tools scattered on his bench. Finally, with a grin, he brandishes one in the air after barely a touch.

"A wrench. Sensory perception. In most everything you do, you use it. The perception part was I'd looked at just about every other wrench, so that's got to be the one I'm looking for. Process of elimination. I know the general area where everything is, but sometimes I forget."

He listens as a truck rumbles by and tries to guess the driver. "Could be...No it ain't. I smell a cigar. Don't know this guy."

"This business is not the best to be in if you want to keep all your hearing, running a chain saw in a room that's 18 by 20. I cannot wear earmuffs because I have to hear the engine running. When you start to lose a lot of hearing you commence to wonder," the words drag more slowly, "if it's worth it all...Not a big living. Not my favorite thing."

He exhales, curls his tongue over his top lip, "Be right back."

"Work," he says, smile back in place as he reenters the room. "Tried it once and I didn't like it, so I give it up."

His neighbor and former teacher Georgianna Wilson stops by. She inquires about his son Tod, a cadet at the United States Merchant Marine Academy.

"He's at sea now," says Ken. "That's where I'd like to be this morning. Nice clean air — sailing along." He heaves a sigh, folds his arms across his chest and settles back against the door as she heads up the road.

"Now he's on the ocean and I'm not." The jingling of coins in his pocket keeps pace with his words. "I wish I was 20 again. Actually, for a lot of reasons I'd rather be 10. When I walk the beach and see those little kids running around, I say, 'How come that went by so fast?'"

A car pulls up. It's the coffee brigade, a couple of retired friends who stop by almost daily. An arm reaches out the window handing Ken a styrofoam cup of coffee.

"You be a good boy," the owner of the arm admonishes as the car rolls away.
There's a lot of things a blind person can do as well as a sighted person, but there are some he'll never be able to do.
I'd rather be 10. When I walk the beach and see those little kids running around, I say, 'How come that went by so fast?'

"Why?" cracks Ken, savoring the first steaming mouthful.

Ken has only one piece of equipment not standard for any machine shop. Designed by him and one of his coffee pals, it is a blade sharpener. He needs it because, "I had problems running the blade across the wheel more than one time in the same place."

Pulling safety glasses over his head, he demonstrates. Wheels hum, a piercing 'Ee-Ou-Ee-Ou' bounces off walls as he guides the blade back and forth on the specially designed clamp. The smell of smoke mingles with the salt air from an open window. Like a gigantic sparkler, yellow and orange rays spatter the floor, ceiling and Ken. "Just like the factory," he shows off the finished product.

The phone breaks the sudden silence. "She's late today. She's gonna ask what I want and I'm gonna say nothing." He picks up the phone, "Nothing," he says, before waiting for the voice on the other end.
It is his wife Margaret. He met her 25 or 26 years ago on a "blind date," he insists, shoulders shaking with laughter. He turns serious as he adds, "Couldn't operate this business without her." Although he keeps up with trade advances through periodic seminars, she handles paperwork, plows through thick service manuals. Mechanically inclined, she provides eyes for detail work, "half hour jobs I might start this morning, get done next Thursday." Tod and daughters Ellen, a student at Dartmouth, and JoAnne, still in high school, provide coffee and extra hands when they are around.

Several years ago, when the opportunity for a TORO franchise came up, both Ken and Margaret had to do some thinking. "Could we handle it or not. Those who never fail, never try. We tried it. There again, I had an awful lot of help from the distributor. They went out on a limb with me," says Ken. "What I'm saying is, there was and still is, a lot of good people around. There was some that wasn't. There were people when they found out I couldn't see, why they left. And some of them people that did that are now good customers. This business that I've got here this year is growing leaps and bounds."

As he talks he methodically scrapes dried grass from beneath a machine propped on two wooden sawhorses. "I don't ever, ever," he emphasizes, "remember wanting to give up. There may be jobs here that I'd like to give up, if there's something that just ain't worth fixing, but at any point in my life yet anyway, can I say that I honestly wanted to give up."

"Endurance. You just keep trucking, don't let it get you down. What's the saying, 'I didn't promise you a rose garden...' think about it." The steady scrape - scrape - scrape fills the silence before he takes a deep breath.

"There was some hard old roads at times." He clicks his tongue and sighs, walking heavily away. He stands with his back turned, face averted. His words drift round the cluttered room, "There's a lot of things in life there's no answer to. They're just there."

BACK AT WORK again, he says, "Everything is sewed together. It's as simple as that. Your family, your friends - Ahhh." he lets out his words slowly, "You can say a faith, it's do you or do you not believe, that there is something you know, bigger than here, or whatever."

He pauses, then with a rush of words, "In other words the Good Lord wanted me to see, I would of seen, for some reason I guess he didn't want me to, so he's the boss. Right? "I like that old saying, 'It's a hell of a lot easier to smile than to cry.' It don't take so much work." Proving his point he shakes his head, belting out a deep chuckle. "Ain't life bad enough without crying about it and making it worse?"

"Life is something anyways...my chances for survival were down on the bottom of the totem pole...health problems you know. If I take care of myself I can live close to a normal life. But one thing about diabetes is you heal hard."

Holes in both work-soiled khaki pantlegs testify to hours on his knees, bowed to the altar of nuts, bolts and metal. He raises the one trouser leg to reveal a shin massed with bruises and scars. "Running into stuff, hard metal. If I forget something is setting there, I may take a flying dive over the top of it and in the process of doing so I've lost quite a bit of skin."

He sweeps his hands under the machine to check for elusive grass clumps. Feeling none, he puts aside the scraper. In a habitual gesture he tips up his red and white cap and scratches his head before reflecting on the future. "Tell you this much, I'll never be able to sit down. I might think, maybe in ten years or so, about something not so demanding."

The crunch of stone under tires signals a new customer. Ken threads his way past the remnants of his labor. Whistling a snatch of tune, he navigates the wooden shop threshold, worn by years of workboots, scarred by thousands of machines. He steps outside into a shaft of sunlight.

The moan of a boat horn slides over the river. "Must be about four o'clock. The whale watcher's coming in."

A woman stands by the open back of her station wagon and gestures to the lawnmower inside. "I need help," she says.

"I'm right here," he answers, moving toward the car.

PATRICIA DUGAN, a staff reporter for Beacon Publications in Massachusetts, took part in the Salt 1987 Summer Field Program.

CHRISTIANA FACHIN studied photography during the 1987 Salt Summer Semester. She is a senior at Moore College of Art.

salt
As I settled my bill at the Eastland Hotel in July 1978, the room clerk asked me if I was in Portland for business or pleasure. I told him I had a job interview in Kezar Falls, a town about forty miles northwest of Portland.

“What do you do?” he wanted to know.

“I’m in the health field,” I evaded. “I’m interviewing for a job at a new health center in Kezar Falls.”

“Kezar Falls! You won’t have any patients there. There’s only trees out there!”

I wondered if I should return immediately to my job in the city emergency room in the Bronx before it was too late, or better yet to Duke University Medical Center where I received my training as a Physician Assistant. I reminded myself that my goal was to be a family practice physician assistant in a rural area.

Consulting the Maine map once more and imagining rivers, deep woods, and forests, I wondered if my Girl Scout skills gathered in the suburbs of New Jersey long ago might be as valuable as my newly acquired medical skills.

The hotel clerk was proven wrong — or half right.

There are many trees around Kezar Falls, but there are plenty of patients as well. The tiny village of Kezar Falls has white clapboard homes, with green shutters and trim, flower boxes, and neighborly front porches. It is divided by the Ossipee River, which flows through the abutting rural towns of Porter, Parsonsfield, Cornish, and South Hiram.

The area is characterized by a mix of cleared fields bordered by stonewalls on hillsides that command a view of Mount Washington and the White Mountains in the distance. Backroads connect fresh water ponds and sporadic pockets of mobile homes bordered by last year’s Christmas lights and rusting cars.

Second growth forests cover the surrounding hillsides like Saturday night’s beard and woods provide seasonal work as do the apple orchards, woolen mill, and the local summer camps.

The people are those who have been here stalwartly forever and those who are
struggling to pass each season's test. Those who have been here forever train oxen teams and cultivate roses; the young newcomers raise sheep and goats, and those scraping to stay anywhere warm awhile, count paired sneakers and change for the laundromat.

My job at the health center required total immersion initially and I did not allow myself to worry about the acceptance of a "female health provider" or "non-physician practitioner" in this rural New England community.

When I moved to the area I lodged temporarily with a college friend's parents in Limerick. They told me the area had been medically served by another woman for many years. That's when I first heard of Dr. Marion Moulton.

"Her husband runs a lumber mill and their boys work with him. She says her boys think doctoring is woman's work. I suppose she was just about your age when she moved here in the early 1940s."

The years passed and at times the patients' complaints were universal: pain, isolation, and anxiety showed no peculiar rural versus urban flavor. But at the end of some days, there could be no mistaking where I was. Like when I removed a retired farmer's sock to look at his puncture wound, explaining the benefit of a tetanus booster every ten years.

"What's that on your foot?" I asked, interrupting myself, while peeling a rectangular piece of smooth leather-like substance from the planter surface of the foot.

"Why that's salt pork; it draws infection."

I received a call via my beeper early one morning and an elderly, worried voice told me she had swallowed a marshmallow whole, and thinks it's stuck, and she can't call her doctor, "...because it's three a.m. and he gets precious little sleep."

The receptionist's mother called one Sunday morning. Her daughter-in-law was pregnant and had a bad toothache that kept her up all night. Would I...
stop by the house? As I left their home, where other grown children had begun to assemble for their weekly Sunday dinner and volleyball game, I was handed a freshly baked apple pie from a long row of steaming pastry on the kitchen counter. Embarrassed and somewhat confused, I accepted the pie. (I'm not a country doctor, the health center does not barter our services and I didn’t want to get too close to our patients.)

How difficult it was to maintain a clinical distance, especially in Kezar Falls! Half-heartedly I reminded myself that the desire to be part of an alternative faction within the medical profession defies the benefit of role model. The PA profession began in 1965 at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, with the retraining of Vietnam medical corpsmen in an attempt to alleviate the health care crisis and maldistribution of physicians in the United States.

I wondered how others like Dr. Moulton maintained the balance. Does it come with practice, like removing fish hooks from the skin and suturing chainsaw lacerations?

The father of a young patient called seeking advice for a cough expectorant for his sheep herd. I answer rather guardedly, words like "liability", "malpractice", and "usual and customary" running through my head. He and his wife are about my age and are also "from away." Like many others here, they have a two-year-old child with frequent ear infections.

They were genuinely welcoming to me, the new medical person. I held back personally, and instead related through our professional encounters, explaining middle ear effusions, recommending humidified air for croup, suturing cuts and dog bites with care.

My sisters visited me in "vacationland" and we took in the local Ossippee Valley Fair. A woman grabbed her son from the sidelines of the oxen pull. "Look, look at his forehead. You can’t even see the scar!" My sisters admired my handiwork and I moved along hurriedly.

But we were stopped again. A young mother pushing a baby carriage insisted upon showing me her dentures. I knew how long she had been putting aside the cash for them, but my enthusiasm was thwarted by my interpretation of patient confidentiality.

I married and settled into the rituals of a rural small town life. I laughed with a patient in his eighties when I asked him if he could say "99" while I listened to his lungs and he replied, "I can count higher than that."

I started swapping perennial plants with patient-friends and looked for, rather than avoided, familiar faces at local functions. One weekend I
was called back to the health center to suture a child’s cut chin. The grandmother accompanied the young family and as we all settled into the evening’s task, she told me that all her children were delivered at home by Dr. Moulton.

Dr. Moulton came to the woman’s home during the early stages of labor and filled the time before delivery knitting and listening. Yes, she is a real country doctor, I reminded myself. As if she were reading my mind, the grandmother added, “But she’s retiring in June and there aren’t any more like her around.”

On a warm June Sunday in 1984, the Massabesic High School in Waterboro, Maine, was crowded with party-goers of all ages. It was not a high school graduation, but Dr. Moulton’s retirement party. Her husband Arthur Moulton stood stolidly beside her in the reception line, while friends, patients and relatives moved back and forth between them and the refreshment tables.

I wondered if Dr. Moulton is relieved to stop practicing after 42 years. Would she start out as a general practitioner in a rural area now? Does she think her life would be interwoven as closely with all these families if she were establishing her practice now in Newfield?

Two years later I am given a chance to ask these questions and others, when she agrees to let us interview her for Salt. The familiar stretch of backroads between East Parsonsfield and Newfield takes on a new look as I slow down and surrender to the slushy remains of an early November snowfall. Squinting through the fogging windshield, I feel like I’m peering through an old 3-D slide viewer. Every detail jumps out at me, then settles into the overall picture.

Piles of neatly stacked lumber mark the approach of Moulton’s Lumber Company. Like stored energy waiting to be released, the milled wood stands ready in row after row. There is no human catalyst in view as I scan the lumber, the graceful bend in the country road, the neatly maintained lumber mill store, and the long narrow storage sheds.

Low, thin clouds drift across the sky behind the lumber mill, layering Rock Haven Lake, pine trees, and worn foothills of the Ossipee mountain range, sifting the rural scene like the wood stickems on the lumber piles, separating then uniting the tiers of lumber.

Down the road is the old mill. Built in the late 1800s, the old water powered mill’s sloping roofs and faded shingles are reflected in the run-off pool from the lake. The mill is worn and tired, but it still commands a position of resting power at the junction of Route 11, which meanders southward to Shapleigh and Sanford, and Route 110, which leads westward to Newfield village. Just beyond the old mill on Route 110 is a long, gray shingled house, Dr. Moulton’s home and former office.

Inside the house, Dr. Marion K. Moulton moves with a steady, determined calmness. She is a woman who does not waste energy. Like her surroundings, the hills, the lake, the family lumber mill, there is a no-frills sense about Dr. Moulton. Yet she smiles readily and laughs generously and often.

Certain characteristics leap out as if through the stereoscopic slide viewer again. Her laughter starts with a preview in her eyes, first catching the light, then crinkling in the corners, and then the delight takes over her voice, her body.

Her hands, competent and steady, relax in her lap ready for what life’s next moment brings. Soon her inquisitive, non-judgmental gaze and balance of open reserve puts me at ease and I’m drawn into her world of vivid, non-sentimental memories. Her stories create scenes I can easily imagine.

It is the late 1940s. Dr. Moulton stirs a pot of soup warming on the range. She peaks under the lid of another pot. Most of her attention is directed toward the man in the plaid wool jacket who fidgets at the table with his orange knit cap.

“You take confinement cases?”

“Yes.”

“You go to the home?”

“Yes. How far along is your wife?”

“Well, she had the baby last night, but I wondered if you’d come up and make out the certificate and put the drops in the baby’s eyes.” It was their twelfth or thirteenth baby, Dr. Moulton remembered with a laugh.

Initially the Boston trained doctor wondered “how people would react to having a woman physician in a rural Maine area... They started coming and the practice grew like topsy.”

As often as not, the farmers came to the kitchen door rather than the side door with the shingle Arthur Moulton had made as a Christmas gift.

“Well come into the office.”

“Oh, you’re doing something. I’ll just sit down here. I can talk with you here.”
A few kitchen chores served as a decoy, and eventually the neighbor-patient tells his doctor about his back pain, his shortness of breath, and the lengthening of hills, his wife’s preference for staying at home even after the snow has melted, and his son-in-law’s drinking habit.

Unlike many younger women physicians today, Dr. Moulton did not grow up planning to be a medical doctor. “I always liked animals a lot. We were living in Woburn, Massachusetts, and in my senior year a small stray dog came to live with us. She needed the attention of a veterinary and I went with my father to the veterinary.

“The next morning I woke up and told them I wanted to be a veterinary. Well my father didn’t take to the idea very well. He thought I’d be the only female in a class of men. So he took me to Boston and we went to Boston University. I enrolled in the pre-medical course because I thought maybe I could transfer after a year and it would be similar to the basic work of the veterinary course.

“There was one other girl that was signed up for the course and we became fast friends and thereby hangs the tale.”

Seven years later Marion King graduated in 1938 with Bachelor of Science and Medical Doctor degrees. She completed a rotating internship at the New England Hospital for Women and Children in Boston and became a staff doctor at Smith College for two years.

One summer she and her sister Ruth were vacationing at their family camp in the Newfield, Maine area. “We’d always been brought up to go to church and so we continued. There were these two young men, brothers, from locally, that went to church. Before the summer was over, we were dating these two fellows.

“Well, it turned out that we, two sisters, married two brothers the next year.”

Two months after the Moultons were married, Pearl Harbor Day happened, and many of the physicians in Sanford and the chief doctor in Kezar Falls were called into service. Dr. Moulton was asked to cover the practices in their absence.

“When I married, I thought I would stop practice when the family started, and then after the children got into school I’d take a refresher course and start again. But they never let me stop! And we had six children.

“I remember one winter, I was seven months pregnant and I had a call from this patient that was a month early for her delivery, but it was in a snowstorm. Arthur drove me over there, it was snowing like mad and she wasn’t really in active labor.

“They didn’t have a toilet, inside plumbing. And they had this family sitting around and I was kind of concerned. So we decided that we would bring her back here to my home. We started back and we got to Limerick Village and there was somebody at the corner telephone.

“It was the husband of a patient I had delivered a week ago and had discharged from the hospital that morning. He had his wife and baby in the car and he was unable to get where he lived. He was calling somebody to come with a plow to get him home. I guess the telephone was out or something, so we told him to follow us.”

Arthur and Marion Moulton arrived home with their entourage. “I found a place for the two women and new baby. The husband of the mother of the new baby finally made it home and came back the next morning for his wife and baby. And the other one, it proved to be false labor and she went home.

“But we decided it would be better if she came here to have the baby, so I did that. Oh yes, it was easier if I were pregnant to do that.” Dr. Moulton recounted three or four births that took place in her home while she herself was pregnant. Then she laughed.

“Course with six children, I was pregnant a lot of the time!”

Once when Dr. Moulton was attending a sick minister, she ended up taking his place in the pulpit. “Saturday evening our minister called and said for me to come up. He had a temperature of 102 degrees with the flu and laryngitis and I said, ‘Well, you certainly can’t preach tomorrow.’

“They got together by telephone. Are we going to have church service or would we have church service? He had the sermon all written out. So I was delegated to read the sermon the next day.

“I thought, well I’ll get up early in the morning. So I went to bed and an hour later got a call this patient had gone into labor, was going to have a home delivery in South Sanford. So I went down. I didn’t get back until five o’clock in the morning.

“So there were a number of hours down there. I’d taken the sermon along and I was reading it. Well, she was a little upset that I wasn’t paying attention to her!” Marion Moulton laughed heartily.

“My husband used to ask why so many babies came at night. So I used to tell him, ‘Well, most of them start at night.’”
I WANTED TO ASK if the poverty of some of her patients ever over­whelmed Dr. Moulton. Did their limited options in life, their run-down farms, their muddy dooryards, their trail­ers perched near tumbling stone walls and overgrown fields ever make her want to look the other way?

Instead I mentioned that I’ve been appointed health office of Parsonsfield. Dr. Moulton has been health officer of New­field, Acton and Shapleigh since 1982 and she has seen a lot of poverty.

"We had one older woman who was mentally off and what could we do? The thing that she was doing — this was in the summertime — she would hear a car coming, she’d run across the road as they were coming just wearing an apron....

She didn’t have a very attractive figure either. Oh dear, a woman near eighty, you know.... Oh, that was one of the funny things."

Dr. Moulton became reflective. "It isn’t easy. When I think of one episode that happened when I was early in practice in hunting season, and it was a young man that was shot over in an isolated place in the woods.

"He had been in the Korean War and had been home less than a year. His wife was expecting a baby in another month. And he had gotten his deer earlier in the day. There was a group of six that were hunting. And so he made a last trip around trying to chase one through this swamp to where his father was standing and his
father shot him.

"It was just dusk, and it was dark by the time I got over there, and the father was just out of his head from the shock and the realization that he'd done it. He knew the woods too, because he had lived there when he was younger and he'd always hunted. He was just devastated. I guess it was months before he went out of the house at all afterwards."

She sighed. "We had quite an experience, Arthur and I. One foggy night there had been an automobile accident over toward East Parsonsfield. It was near midnight and Arthur got up and went with me. It was really very foggy, quite dangerous driving, and we got over there and this car had been speeding and it missed a slight turn.

"And there was a tree that was very close to the road, a large oak tree, and they ran into it. Two of the occupants were killed, and they were both boys that I had delivered. One of them worked at the mill. And the other one's father worked for my husband. So we were both involved really in that episode. That was really difficult for everybody."

Soon Dr. Moulton told stories of making do in a country setting. "It was in the evening and we had a thunder shower and the lights went out and so we had to deliver the baby by lamplight. And my nurse had not been to a home delivery, she wanted to, and this is the one she elected to go to.

"And so she ended up holding the light. The only other place that she could put it in that little bedroom was on a chest of drawers which was at the head of the bed and it wouldn't suffice for what we needed.

"She said she felt like Florence Nightingale. That's some of the things you do as make-shift."

Another thing she and Arthur Moulton did as make-shift was fashion an ambulance out of a two-door car. "The only ambulance service that was available was from the local undertakers. And they would convert their hearse. They put a red light on it and put in a cot instead of a basket. Many people did rather not go to the hospital that way.

"In the early days I had a two-door car and we rigged it so that we could tip the front seat back, and then had a stretcher which we managed to get in there and we took patients to Portland, patients darn near to Massachusetts even a couple of times. After World War II, I had a station wagon and I used a cot-stretcher in that for ambulance service.

"Yes, yes. You make do. "Country folks had a fear of going to the hospital. Because Aunt Harriet died in the hospital, you know, you go to the hospital to die. That was their feeling, for many of them. And to try to help them overcome that. They wouldn't go till it was absolutely necessary."

Dr. Moulton leaned toward me, her gaze direct. "It's been very rewarding really. It's been different than an average practice because I didn't have to practice to earn a living. My husband developed a pretty good job. But I felt that, since I had the education, and my parents really sacrificed for me to have my education, and there was a need in this community, that I should practice. And so it was more as a service than a money making thing."

I left Dr. Moulton when a stomping of boots at the kitchen door told me some of the Moulton men were home for lunch. Outside the fog had cleared and the snow plow had finished its first run of the season.

Passing mailboxes with familiar names — Berry, Libby, Sanborn, Tarbox, Day — the stories began to blur. Did I remember seeing him as a patient or was that Dr. Moulton's recollection?

My list of interview questions were not all answered. Did Dr. Moulton miss the city? Did she ever tire of being on call? Did she feel she had plenty of patients, but few friends? Would she do it all again?

Near the side of the road, I saw a small child facing her morning's work, a snowman with an orange cap. Her mother watched from a porch that probably wouldn't make it through the winter. A red and black plaid jacket was hugged across the woman's protruding front.

The little girl added more snow to the arm and smoothed the snowman's neck. In the rear view mirror, I watched her turn from the snowman, pick up a toy shovel, and scrape at the snowy porch steps.

The gesture reminded me of the first time I had heard of Dr. Moulton and of the anecdote she laughingly retold this morning in her home, turned office, turned home again. It was about the three eldest Moulton boys, who have now joined their father in the Moulton Lumber Company.

"When they were twelve, thereabouts, I had a conversation with them one day about what they wanted to do when they grew up and did any of them think they were interested in being a doctor."

"They looked at me so funny as if to say, 'Why that's a woman's job.'"
THE SALT PILE

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No. 16: Indian Island, Madasa Sapiel, Clan Mother of the Penobscots; Medicine Man (Senabeh Francis), Part 1; Ships in Bottles; Fishermen’s Superstitions; Fire of ’47; Metal Spinning.
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No. 28: Storyteller (Avery Kelley of Beals Island); Dysart’s Truckstop (Bangor); McFerdy’s Herring Smokehouse (Lubeck); Francis O’Brien, Bookseller (Portland).
No. 29: (Maine: Myth and Reality) Being Young in Maine; The Great North Woods; The Homeless; UPS Man (Sacoo Valley).
"When Saint Peter says to me, 'You ready?' I'll say, 'Wait till I git my learn.' Seems to me I grew right up in that hot barrel. I don't hardly know what it is to be tired. One day a fellow at Shawmut said, 'Glad yous, you don' look like yourself. Are you well?' I said, 'What the hell are you talkin' about? I can't eek out any three people you have.'"

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"Het clouds clamp a lid over the wild blueberry barrens of Maine. A bumper crop means cloud, 45 million pounds in a vast oven. Even thousand workers toil the heat. 'Beat the sun. You gotta beat that sun, cause she'll wear it right outa you.'" (page 16)
A hunter is lost. How could we find him in the blowdowns and swamp? It seemed hopeless.