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One in every five rural Mainers is poor. Like Monica, struggling to get by. Christmas rubs in the difference between having plenty and little.
Above: Route 1 in Biddeford.
Photograph by Tonee Harbert.
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Cover Photograph: Pam Berry
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*Subscribe to Salt by December 31, 1988 and we'll send you a copy of issue number 26 with the guy above featured inside. Free.
CONTRIBUTORS

Last fall, Salt undertook a special research topic on rural poverty in Maine. It was a difficult subject for us to tackle, requiring large amounts of sensitivity. Some of us had first to get over the "us versus them" syndrome before solid interviewing and writing could begin. We brought our reputation as careful documentors and listeners to bear. We brought in "experts" who knew something about poverty and Maine, not only the numbers, but also first hand. David C. Smith, professor of history at the University of Maine, flew in from Orono as keynoter and coordinator. Kathy Grzelkowski, associate professor of sociology at Orono, flew down for a visit as well. Then there was Lewis Ploch, a professor of rural sociology at the University of Maine. He brought with him a former student of his, Joyce Benson, of the Maine State Planning Office. She took us through the 1985 four volume study on poverty in Maine undertaken by the Planning Office. From the sociology department at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, came Professor Richard Fantasia. He spoke to us about poverty in the broader American context.

Five of the projects undertaken during last fall are included in this issue. Special issues of Salt Magazine on a single topic are often hard sellers in the market place. But we also know that the impact of such a special issue on a single topic can be very great. We are grateful that the Betterment Fund and the Maine Community Foundation agreed to help underwrite photographic and publication costs. We thought long and hard about when to publish this issue—in the spring, the middle of the summer when the tourists are around, or in the dead of winter. Finally we decided on our late fall, Christmas time issue. When other magazines are there with their red and green Christmasy covers, Salt's cover and its topic will stand out all the more.

PAM BERRY shot almost the entire issue. It is her photographic tour de force. She was our photographic fellow, the first for us, last fall. She comes originally from Texas and holds an MFA degree in photojournalism from Ohio University. For the photographic essay, "Monica", she made repeated trips into Oxford County through the fall and early winter. She also wrote the piece about Monica that follows the essay. And she made several trips to Washington County to meet the Bubier family. In between these shootings and two other photographic studies that appeared in Salt issue numbers 31 and 33, she took the photographs accompanying the article about a social worker making his rounds to his clients. Since that time, Pam has been working as a photojournalist for the Nashua Telegraph in New Hampshire.

FOX VERNON, who wrote the article on social worker Maurice Geoffroy, came to Salt last fall as a graduate from Stanford University in California. He grew up in North Carolina. In a note to us late last winter from Chicago, he said he learned about poverty at Salt. In Chicago, he said, he was learning about ethnicity.

MARK CHILDs came to Salt from Cape Cod and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He wrote the story about the Bubier family. He is an intern teacher of English at Northfield-Mount Hermon Academy in Massachusetts.

MELISSA BUXTON was here last fall from the University of Maine and from Bucksport where her father runs a newspaper. She wrote the article about illiteracy. Last we heard, she was working for her father's paper before heading to Austria.

CHRISTINE CLARK came to us after several years as a teacher at an alternative school in Maine. She graduated from St. Lawrence University in New York State. She wrote the article on poverty and rural education.

CLAIRE SULLIVAN and TONEE HARBERT are both photographers at Salt this fall. Claire is a student from Kent State University in Ohio. She shot the photographs with the illiteracy story. Tonee is Salt's photographic fellow this fall. He comes originally from Washington State and holds a degree in photojournalism from Ohio University. Prior to arriving at Salt he was working on an extended photographic project on the homeless in Washington, D.C. He shot the photographs for the rural education story.
In that year, John Paul Jones embarked from Kittery, Maine, on the 18-gun sloop Ranger and sailed on to defeat the British man-of-war Drake in one of the most dramatic victories of the Revolution.

Since its founding in 1884, Bath Iron Works has added many "firsts" to Maine's record of maritime achievements. We're proud that during our long and close participation in our country's naval defense system, the U.S. Navy has learned to trust the "Bath-built" hallmark as a signal of shipbuilding excellence.

Thanks, Maine, for a great shipbuilding tradition.

Visit the Bath Iron Works Exhibit at the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath.
Carolyn Chute Up Close

CAROLYN CHUTE up close is not as large as you might think. The camera turns her into a solid earthy Russian peasant, but when her face is a few feet from yours and she likes you, she is intense, direct and not an ounce bigger than you are. Large people often seem diffused but Carolyn Chute is anything but diffused.

In her home in the woods of North Parsonsfield, she is the welcoming country woman. Her jars of home canning sit on open shelves. Split logs wait to be fed into the stove in the large central room with its eye to the forest, a room that was once to be several rooms, still undivided. Its walls wait for sheet rock to cover the shiny rolls of insulation.

Her Wizard of Oz dog stops barking to watch her and her husband Michael bring unmatched chairs and stools for us, eight or nine people working on this issue of Salt about rural poverty in Maine.

She takes one high backed rocking chair and Michael the other. Michael looks young and as vulnerable as the squirrels darting through the bare branches of the tree outside the window. His eyes are tame, his hands quiet in his lap. He lets Carolyn do all the talking, but there is a connection between the two rocking chairs, as if one is plugged into the other.

Soon Carolyn is asking questions about the stories in this magazine. She knows what to ask. They are her people, the people who populate her fictional world. She knows about food stamps and AFDC. Especially she knows about social workers. "I’ve had really bad experiences with them in the Portland office. They talk down to ya."

Her voice jumps and splashes like water going over pebbles in a shallow stream. It carries fine sand with it. Her arms are batons for the voice.

“One of ‘em one time said to me,” and she pauses to assume a haughty dowager voice, “Carolyn Shoot?” And I says, ‘It’s Chute, ya know like in chicken or pork chops.’ And she goes,” again the bored dowager voice, ‘Whatever.’

Carolyn wrinkles her nose. "That was the attitude, who cares what your name is, you’re just a number anyway.

“Some of them have this attitude, like here’s my chance to feel better than somebody. You’re in the position of being down, so you are really sensitive to it.

“When you’re in the supermarket and you’re checking out, right away you feel like you’re on stage. You know everybody’s lookin’ at your food. And they don’t care if you buy junk food, they just wanna make sure you don’t buy anything too good for you. They wanna make sure you’re suffering, you’re not supposed to be too happy about all this. They wantcha to have soda and stuff, you know, macaroni—you’re supposed to eat macaroni, remember?”

We talk about a woman who bought a birthday cake for her daughter with food stamps. "I could see that happening. I could see doin’ something like that. Those little things mean a lot sometimes, so much, I mean you have nothing else. Something like that takes on a big significance.

“These things are there all the time, you’re always seeing these things. She turns to Michael. “You got so you could hardly breath in the supermarket you were so
mad, remember?" He nods. "He wouldn't even go in with me anymore. There'd be people in line just buying any old thing without even thinking about it, just tossing it in the cart. They didn't have to add it up like we did."

Someone asks her about the Beans in her novel. Is it so that there's a family down the road from her like the Beans? She laughs. "No, it's all made up. Since I was little I always wrote stories, and you just make up characters. In fiction writing, you have so much freedom. You can make 'em do anything you want. "Writing gives you a sense of control. You can make up things the way you like 'em."

Has success spoiled her? "Yeah, it's pretty much spoiled us," she deadpans. "We almost expect a meal every day." She says the first thing they had to do was get out of the crowded one-bedroom house in Gorham where she lived with Michael, her daughter, husband and baby.

"Because if I lived in that house any longer, I was not going to write the second novel. With the baby sleeping in the box and my daughter and her husband sleeping in the car outside with blankets over it for privacy. It was too depressing, you can't be artistic and be depressed."

In hard times, did Carolyn ever think of doing what other Main-
ers had done when they couldn't make a living in Maine? Had she thought of leaving Maine?

"Well what you're talking about is genocide. Because these people have a culture within their own families. There is this way of life that has been for a couple of hundred years, where they kept their families close. Like around here, we all help mother, brother helps brother and we're very very close.

"What's happening is in some sense a voluntary genocide. Forced on you by the economy, by overpopulation and all this stuff. You go to live in Massachusetts or some place where you're a stranger, you can make friends but it's not the same as where you grew up, where everybody knows each other, this network of helping each other.

"When you walk around Kezar Falls and you grew up in Kezar Falls or if you're married," she nods to Michael, "fortunately to someone from Kezar Falls, you're somebody. They know your whole history. They know everything about you. When they look at you, you register in their eyes. And you look at them and you know who they are.

"When you all start breaking up your families and going off in these other places, the culture goes down the drain. Some people expect it. Middle class people are used to moving around."
Documentary field work is the core of a unique academic program that takes advanced students off the campus for a semester of intensive original research. Students test their academic interests, practice field techniques and learn to shape their research for publication. The accredited semester program is offered jointly by the Salt Center for Field Studies and the University of Southern Maine.

DOCUMENTING MAINE LIFE

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT SALT AT (207) 967-3311 OR WRITE SALT, P.O. BOX 1400, KENNEBUNKPORT, MAINE 04046.
OVERTY IS THE DARK side of life in Maine. One out of every five Mainers is poor in a region that still carries its frontier faith like a shield against inequality.

The woods, the lakes, the coves, the meadows are the exceptional habitat of more than 200,000 people whose lives demand a daily struggle to get by.

Theirs is not the struggle to keep up with the Joneses, to acquire a microwave, a larger color TV, a power launch. It is the unremitting fight to pay the electric bill, buy Mary's arthritis medicine, keep the house warm, get a part to keep the old car on the road.

At any given moment in Maine, the poverty rate is about 15 percent, according to Joyce Benson, senior planner in the Maine State Planning Office. For rural areas this is closer to 21 percent. But thousands of others hover so close to the line that a cutback in work hours or family illness or other emergency sends them below.

So the numbers of Mainers who experience real poverty in a year is much larger than the statistics indicate. A family that might be just above the arbitrary poverty line in June might fall below in November. If we count all the Mainers who experience poverty in a year's time, the figures rise to one in five, or even to one in four by some estimates.

Maine's recent economic boom has failed to stop the growing numbers of poor. It has polarized wealth, with more people climbing into higher brackets and more people falling into poverty. The middle has thinned.

"It's like an hour glass," Joyce Benson says, "with more numbers at the bottom, more numbers at the top and a thinning middle."

WHO ARE THE POOR in Maine? The statistics paint a startling picture. From Joyce Benson's four volume study published by the State Planning Office in 1985 and from subsequent new figures, it is clear that Maine does not fit the national patterns of poverty. Neither does Maine fit the commonly accepted stereotypes. Here is Maine's unique profile:

* Working age adults between the ages of 18 and 44 are the fastest growing group who are poor. Numbers of elderly, disabled and children remain constant. Able bodied working age adults who do not make enough money to support themselves and/or their families are the "new poor" in Maine.

* Low income families without two or three paychecks are at risk of falling below the poverty line. If the wives and husbands weren't both working, the poverty rate for these families would double.

* Single parent families in poverty do not dominate the picture in Maine, as in national figures. Two-thirds of Maine families in poverty are two parent families, only one-third are single parent families.

* People in low paying service and trade industries make up a rapidly growing portion of Maine's poor. This is because three-fourths of the population now work in these jobs, compared to 58 percent in 1980. In the decade between the 1970 census and the 1980 census, the numbers of jobs in Maine grew by 21 percent, but a staggering 90 percent were in lower-pay positions.

A picture emerges of a growing sector of able bodied women and men working for wages that do not provide a safety net against minimum needs. This is not the poverty of the weak - the old, the disabled, the young — but the increasing poverty of the strong.

WHY ARE SO MANY Mainers poor? Almost all of the reasons are beyond the control of people who are poor. Statistics force us to reject the old judgmental words of lazy, shiftless and ignorant. Other profound influences are at play, with results often unique to Maine.

* Maine is heavily dependent on seasonal jobs. Fishing, farming and logging are seasonal, with spurts of good times and long "down" times to get through. This has been true for generations in Maine. The recent accelerated growth in tourism intensifies this seasonal weakness of good times and hard times.

* Underemployment is a continuing reason for poverty. Only half of Maine's labor force is employed in a full time job. Forty percent of the men and sixty percent of the women who work...
hold only part time jobs. While these figures may decrease in today's scarce labor market, employers continue to cut costs by employing part time help to reduce benefits such as sick leave, health insurance and unemployment insurance.

* Earnings per job in Maine are declining. In the 1970s, growth in jobs was 21 percent, but 90 percent of the jobs created were in low-pay positions, while jobs in such high paying industries as manufacturing and construction decreased.

* International economic forces now affect wages and jobs in Maine far more than before. Competition can close a mill or reduce its work force. Maine fisheries and farming can be hurt by European and Canadian prices. If a mill goes or a job goes, workers are forced into the lower paying service and trades sector.

* Traditional values and loyalty to their birthplace make Mainers vulnerable to economic change. When the mill closes or reduces its work force, many Mainers refuse to be driven from their homes. They choose their ties to place, family and community over economic well being. This places them at risk.

The story of being poor in Maine is best told through people, not statistics. Maine's fiction writers tell the story in shades of light, from Sarah Orne Jewett's luminous idealism to Ruth Moore's practical gray to Carolyn Chute's black realism. When we tell the story in nonfiction, through the lives and words of real people, we cannot choose the shades of our palette. Words and images are as we found them.

We brought one guiding principle to the collecting of these stories and images. We were determined to respect the dignity of our subjects. To be lacking in wealth is not to be lacking in wit and humanity. In this sense, we see this issue of Salt as following the tradition of Walker Evans and James Agee in their sensitive study of southern sharecroppers, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. It is a study in dignity and survival.

To tell the story of families "piecing together a year" from seasonal work, we chose the Bubier family of Perry in Washington County. Donna and Ervins Bubier and their three children shared their lives throughout the fall of 1987 with our writer and photographer. Mark Childs and Pam Berry ate, slept and worked with the Bubiers.

The story of "Monica" in our special photographic essay takes on some of the overtones of a Christmas tale. Monica is a single welfare mother who is pregnant. She lives in a school bus in the woods with her seven-year-old daughter. Pam Berry's camera and eye catch the physical hardships of their lives, but they also capture the care. The flour on Monica's hands making apple pies, the child's Halloween costume, the foundation for a house someday, and at Christmas, the birth of the baby. It is a powerful story that tells and transcends reality.

To suggest the broad spectrum of poverty in Maine, we followed a social worker on his housecalls. For five weeks, Fox Vernon of Salt accompanied Maurice Geoffroy as he made deliveries to the elderly, visited Head Start mothers, welfare mothers, families with handicapped children, people laid off from work and AID's victims.

We discovered that common threads link the lives of the people we tell about. One is trouble with schools. Another is transportation and substandard housing, the old cars and the old house trailers that don't get people to work and don't meet new rigid guidelines for driving and living imposed by a middle class society. We see the cars and trailers in every story.

School problems surface in two particular stories about literacy and dropouts. We meet Laurrette Elie and Emily Kinney as they overcome a childhood that left them illiterate. We meet seventeen-year-old Kristin Myers, who is at risk of dropping out in a school system that began flunking her in kindergarten.

This then is the story of being poor in Maine. It is also a recognition that the poor are not a subspecies who deserve their difficult fate.

Finally this issue packs an editorial message. Watching the lives of Maine's rural poor, one can hardly wish them a lesser share of society's material goods and opportunities. Fairness would wish them more.

Pamela Holley Wood

Salt
PORTRAITS
COPING WITH ILLITERACY

Written by Melissa Buxton
Photography by Claire Sullivan

INTRODUCTION

"I THOUGHT I WAS dumb. I thought I was mentally retarded." That was the impression Emily Kinney had of herself growing up, never learning to read or write.

Now in midlife she has discovered she was wrong. She is not dumb. She is not mentally retarded.

She was poor. She was victimized by circumstances beyond her control.

Maine has about 110,000 residents like Emily who didn't learn to read as children—and unlike her, still can't read. A study by the University of Texas in 1985 estimated that 26 million Americans are functionally illiterate.

After talking to Emily and others like her in Maine, I began to ask why? Why had it been impossible for them to learn to read? I discovered some startling similarities.

None are "dumb." Yet all became convinced for one reason or another as children that they were stupid.

All came from lower income families without resources to seek help for their children when problems arose.

The schools they attended did little to help them as children, and in some cases made things worse for them by stereotyping them as "dumb."

In each case, they couldn't read because of situations they had no control over. Not because they lacked intelligence.

Take Emily Kenney of North Berwick who became a ward of the state at an early age. She was sent to a correctional school when she was thirteen. "I was living right amongst retarded people. I thought I was dumb, too."

Or Steve Halasz of Wells, who had a hearing problem. "Doctors in the Biddeford-Saco area said I was mentally retarded, but when I was thirteen, I went to the Portsmouth Rehabilitation Center. The final conclusion came out that I wasn't mentally retarded, but deaf."

Or Jean-Paul Godbout of Biddeford, who was chronically sick his first two years of school. "I got scarlet fever and mumps and I missed a whole lot of school. It slowed my learning. The school didn't have enough time to spend with me. They just let it pass and pass and pass."

Or Lori-Lee Moulton of Wells. "I had a learning disability. I think a lot of it is that I just did not want to do it. I could read a paragraph, but the comprehension was low."

Or Lauretta Elie of Biddeford. "Growing up the psychiatrist told my stepmother I was mentally retarded and could not learn. At the age of seven I lost a father who I was close to and I guess I just went into a shell."

From my interviews with these five people, I will tell the story of two. They are willing to share their experiences of never learning to read, as well as their fears and frustrations, their accomplishments and joy when they found the courage to learn to read as adults.

Faith Burnham, a literacy tutor in Turner, says, "If they had a bad experience in a school in the past, then school is the last place they want to come. Those people that finally make it here are incredible human beings to take that step."
A FACE APPEARED in the window as I pulled into the driveway. In front of the barn a dog barked furiously. The old weather-beaten house had settled into its own shape. Its uneven frame reflected a rich history of usage by many families that had grown up in it.

The gravel driveway led down to the barn, its open doors swinging. I could see bird nests, old farming equipment, an assortment of chickens, ducks, geese, rabbits.

The house is on West Street, half way between Biddeford and Cape Porpoise in a landscape of tumbling hills, small ponds and long fields that lose themselves in the sky.

The dog barked more furiously as I edged my way up to the porch. Lauretta Elie poked her head out of the door. “Oh don’t worry about Girlie. She won’t bother ya,” she called.

I still wasn’t convinced. I let the dog sniff my hand and then gently placed it on her forehead.

“See. She’s okay,” Lauretta looked small standing against the frame of the porch door. Her worn work clothes with a dozen keys dangling from her beltloop, her almost rough looking hands and scuffed up work shoes gave me a sense of a hardworking and determined person. I watched her shoulders unhunch and the slight lines around her mouth relax into a smile.

She started up the porch. She led me through an entryway lined with coats, jackets, boots, shoes, and other household items. Two pumpkins apparently left over from Halloween glared at us, their carefully carved faces sagging inward, growing more ugly and brutal as time took its toll.

We turned right at the end of the hall into a kitchen bright and clean. Sunlight danced across the walls, reflecting off several spider plants whose stems and leaves spread themselves out toward the windows.

Several books were stacked on the table, the top one a basic reader. Lauretta said they were her books. “When I first started reading seven years ago, I was only doing first grade material. Now I’m up somewhere between a sixth and seventh
grade level. I am learning to read and understand what I am reading. I hope to take a high school English course next June.

"You know I never hid anything about my reading problem. My mother said that's the worst thing you can do. But I had it rough in school. When I was seven years old a psychologist in the welfare office in Portland determined that I was mentally retarded. When I was young, they tested me and tested me, but the psychiatrist said I was mentally retarded.

"You see when I was seven years old, I lost someone who I was close to. My father died in the Pepperell Mill. An elevator fell on him. I guess I just went into a shell." Lauretta frowned and her eyebrows knitted again. She moved her chair up closer to the table and went on.

"He was my idol. I mean the man would come home from work and the first thing he would say is, 'Where is my redhead?' I had pure red hair. He would walk into that house and take care of me, rock me, feed me and bathe me until the day he died.

"I was Dad's little boy. I was a tomboy when I was growing up. I did a lot of things around the house. I put in the wood, shifted the ashes and brought up heavy barrels from the cellar and carried them to the other side of the road for the dump.

"It didn't bother me. I was little but strong. That's the thing. I used to do all the mowing, raking, washing windows and putting up the storm windows."

A small puppy scampered into the living room and scratched playfully at a small cardboard box under the table. "This is Buttons. She knows where her toys are. She'll get 'em out in a minute.

"Go ahead, those are yours," she encouraged the dog.

"I never learned anything in high school. The state got so scared they were going to have to support me for the rest of my life. When I was in second year high school, they sent me away to a hospital for a week or two to find out what my disability was.

"I went through tests like you wouldn't believe. One day I was supposed to go to a class at two o'clock, but I went in 15 minutes early. There were two doorbells there and I set those up all by myself. You had a piece of paper [diagram]. Here's the generator. Here's the wire. Connect 'em up to make the doorbell ring.

"I took a bicycle apart and put it back together again. I ran the switchboard. Your switches from lamps, I put those together in so many seconds. I ran a printing press. These were all tests that you had to do.

"And I can make anything work just by looking at the pictures.

"When I returned back to my regular high school, they called me down to the office. They must have gotten the results of those tests. They said, 'Lauretta, I don't believe this. I really don't.'

"They told me my IQ was a college IQ. The only thing keeping it down was my reading."

"When I was in the second grade, the teacher used to beat me up. She used to slap me across the face and wouldn't let me go out to recess. The third grade I don't remember much about. The fourth grade I used to get beat up all the time by the teachers.

"My mom thinks I was beat up because I was a ward of the state and she wasn't married. Because I was different you know. I met my real mother when I was three years old and they told me she was an aunt. The state paid for my room and board and my stepmother to bring me up.

"My stepmother was good to me, but she never would help me in any way. She would always say, 'See you sister, Doris.' She didn't have to help her kids. They were all bright. They did it themselves. She figured I was lazy. When I asked her to help me she knew I couldn't read. 'Look in the dictionary,' she would say, so I just lost interest.

"You know I used to get sore all the time from being beat up by all those teachers. I didn't even have to do anything, it could be another person pushing me.

"When I was in the sixth grade at Emery School in Biddeford, the teacher threw me down the
stairs and broke my collar bone. She was the meanest teacher I ever had. She used to pull me up the stairs by my ear or by my hair or choke me. She never taught me anything. She used to sit there and call me stupid and idiot."

Lauretta's cheeks flushed as she paused. "In high school the teachers left me alone. They didn't beat me up any more. I had six gym periods a day but the teachers left me alone. They were even going to let me graduate from high school with six gym periods a day."

The dog scurried under Lauretta's chair and she scooped it up. "I talk to her a lot. She's beautiful." She hugged the dog and laughed.

"Now I am a nurse's aid. I had to have all my classes done on tape. I used to come home and study and have oral tests. I am up front with them about not reading.

"I've been a nurse's aid for twelve years and before that I worked in shoe shops for a couple of years. When I went in for my driver's license, I had a girlfriend help me with the test. She read the book to me. I flunked the test the first time. The second time I didn't miss a question. I passed it with flying colors.

"All I did was listen to Priscilla read the book out loud to me. You really have to pick up a lot when you listen to a story. I am really skilled at listening."

Loud honking noises from outside interrupted our conversation. Geese. I asked Lauretta to show me her collection of animals. She got up and led me to the door.

Outside in the yard I liked the look of the old house, melting into the surrounding landscape—in the same way that woods, fields and meadows go together.

I could see chickens everywhere strutting about their pen, roosting in small cubicles just big enough to lay eggs, and sitting on lathes thick enough to give them support. They reminded me of a bunch of old ladies gossiping at the church fair.

I pointed to a small wooden structure on the side of the barn. "What's that?"

"Oh that's a house for the geese. I made it a few years ago." The ducks and geese came toward us dancing about the pen furiously, leaving impressions in the mud as the soft gook squished pleasantly between their webbed feet.

Then she led me to the side yard to meet Cocoa, a brown pony grazing in the grass, who acknowledged Lauretta with a playful shake of her head.

"Yeah I could do a lot of things. Most of the time when I was growing up I did a lot of the work around the house. I used to fix radios. I found an old radio in the attic when I was about nine. I asked my mother if I could have it.

"She said, 'Lauretta it's no good.' I said, 'Yeah, but I need something for the cellar. It's boring down there shifting ashes without something.'

"She said, 'Look girl if you can fix it go ahead.' Well, I took it down cellar and fooled around with it and I got it to work better than any radio in the house.

"I love electronics, too, and now I'm rewiring a humidifier. I'm always playing with record players and radios.

"I have a different way of learning. That is by seeing and doing. I learned on my own just by fiddlin'."

THE SMELL OF CHALK brought back memories of school days as I walked down the corridors of the old brick schoolhouse in North Berwick, a small town on the western border of Maine. Emily Kinney was waiting for me in a large classroom with the words "Lifelong Learning" painted on the blackboard. Maybe I was talking to myself when I asked her not to be nervous.

"Oh I'm not. Anything to help others to learn to read." She looked at the tape recorder I had brought. Her next words were a surprise.

"It's going to be honest," she blurted. "I don't know how to put this, but I'm going to do it.

"There was ten of us. I grew up in Florida, you know. My daddy wasn't well and he didn't have enough money to take care of us. It was rough back then. We were lucky if we had beans or rice, but we made it. It was God's help and our prayers that brought us through."

She paused and looked up at the ceiling. Her eyes grew moist. "So when I was in the third or fourth grade, the state came in and took us all
away. All of us. Some of ‘em was adopted.”

All of Emily’s brothers and sisters were split up. The oldest sister and two younger ones were placed in training schools, two brothers were placed in boys’ homes in Georgia and the other three were adopted out. At the age of 13, Emily was sent to Cedartown Georgia School, which was similar to a boarding school.

“I didn’t like it because I was away from my family, so I cut the superintendent’s tires. I busted out his windows. I made it miserable so they put me in Atlanta Training School in Georgia with my older sister.

“In 1957 Daddy passed away. I had a nervous breakdown when I was 13. I’d run away from the place because I didn’t like it. I wanted to be with Daddy, but he was gone. I wanted to be with my mama, but she lived far away from us.

“When you first go in one of those schools, they lock you up for two weeks in a room by yourself. Nobody in there to talk to you. In two weeks’ time the nurse comes around and gives you a physical to see if you have any disease of this sort or that.

“They lock the front doors so you can’t get out. They have bars on the windows. So tell me that’s not a prison.”

Emily went to an elementary school before she was put in the training school. She says she doesn’t remember much about it.

“I thought I was dumb. I thought I was mentally retarded. I used to stay depressed all the time in those schools because I couldn’t read, write or spell.

“I was right in there amongst retarded people. You talk about hell. They have mongoloid people who can talk but don’t make sense. I’ve been stuck in that building where they were. I was there for a year and a half. They treat ‘em like animals.

“If you’re not crazy when you go in, you will be when you go out. Physical therapy was a pitiful sight. You often saw people die.

“Whenever one died you get upset, but you have to keep going, I seen a lot of them die and it upset me. The family comes to get them when they die, but they never come to see them when they are in the hospital. It was heartbreaking to see them like that.

“I worked in Central Supply. My job was to bring the instruments out from the operating room. You have to wash ‘em. That was my job and it was gross! If I didn’t do it I would get punished for it.

“If I did something wrong I was put on trial
furlough through the school. They would give you a year probation. If I did okay then I could go home. If I did something wrong at home then I'd get in trouble and my trial would end and I'd have to go back.

"But if you don't have nothing to eat at home, you gonna find food somewhere, I don't care where it's at, and I've done things I'm ashamed of. I was 21 years old when I come out of Gracewood State Hospital and School. That was the last time they put me on trial furlough and I lasted because I got tired of going back and forth.

"When I got out of that school I tried to make it, but I couldn't, so I lived with my sister in Maine. She told me to get a job. Well, I got a job working in a laundry. I didn't know nothing. I messed up on it.

"I lost the job, so I got me another job as a waitress, so I worked at that. I couldn't do that. Didn't know how to figure, so I lost that job. I had a housekeeping job at a restaurant. I did that all right, but I'd get so depressed people would get on my nerves, so I lost that job."

In March of 1981, Emily met her husband Jim. When Emily was first married, she hid her handicap from her husband and two sons.

"We'd go to a restaurant and he'd say, 'Well, what are you having?' I'd say, 'I'll have the same thing you're having.' I didn't know anything about a checkbook either. He'd help me. I couldn't do nothing. Just sit home and watch TV. And right now I hate a TV. I wish it would blow up.

"When my son Johnny was in high school, he was very slow and he'd come home to me every afternoon and he'd say, 'Mama, help me with my homework.'

"I'd say to him I didn't know. It's hell when you love your kids as much as I love these and you can't help. They love me, too, and it's wonderful to have somebody who really and truly cares." Tears welled in Emily's eyes.

"Then my son came home from school and said, 'Mama, they have adult education at night,' and I told him, 'Boy, I'm not interested. I'm too old. People will laugh because I'm 42 years old.' So he kept after me to call adult education in Berwick.

"I kept telling him, 'No boy, no boy, no, no, no.' "I finally called and got ahold of Lisa, my tutor. Lisa come. I talked to her. That was back in 1984. I started going to adult education in 1985."

Lisa Heustis, Emily's tutor, had told me earlier, "When Emily first came to adult ed, she wrote very short sentences, she was afraid to use long words and she was uneducated, because the training schools never exposed her to the cultural parts of society. But you know, she's really determined. She's doing eighth grade work now."

From her harsh childhood, Emily has two toys she cherishes. "I have two dolls. One belonged to a girlfriend's daughter who died of a disease. The other is a black baby doll. I wouldn't take a million dollars for these two dolls.

"The first doll I ever had was the black doll. I got it for Christmas. When we was little, the state brought in a big box at Christmas time. We all sat around in a big circle and Daddy would hand things out. My sister wanted the doll, but Daddy said, 'No, Emily gets it,' and from that time on Daddy called me, 'Nigger gal,' because of the black doll. She's so beautiful. I cried for this doll.

"You're gonna think I'm crazy, but I want to take them dolls and wrap 'em up in towels and go out in the yard and play, because I never got to do this while I was growing up.

"I've taught myself how to do a lot of things. When I was in those schools, I used to sit down with paper and pencil and write. It didn't make much sense. I would print my name and scribble. Now I'm on an eighth grade level on certain subjects. I'm doing better than I thought. Now I can read the words and understand.

"Any way that I can help people to read and write, I'll do it. Don't be ashamed if you can't read or write or nothing like that. It will make you feel a hundred times better if you can learn it all.

"I don't care if you are 110 as long as you can get up and move. What I want most is to become a registered nurse so I can help people. One day before I die I'm going to become a nurse. I might be in a wheelchair, but I'm gonna do it."
PIECING TOGETHER A YEAR

Written by Mark Childs   Photography by Pam Berry

“If I need somethin’, I don’t buy it, I build it with my own hands,” Ervins Bubier tells me, as he turns a wrench beneath the open hood of his timber hauling truck. He is trying to repair a leaky heater core that poured anti-freeze into the cab this evening on his way home from the wood-lot. Ervins figures he can’t afford to spend money on something that he can fix himself.

The blackened seat and legs of his work jeans and the soles of rubber boots dangle over the side of his truck. Beside him, his 16-year-old son Tommy stands, silently holding the necessary wrenches and flood light so that his father can work in the thickening dusk.
I had traveled "Down East" to Perry, Maine, a coastal town of 780 persons, to interview a working family that knew the struggle of piecing together a year's income from seasonal work.

Ervins Bubier, a 43-year-old self-employed wood harvester, tells me he has lived in Perry with his family since he moved from Wilton 14 years ago. Ervins like many other people living in Washington County, survives by piecing together a year's income. Not only does he cut and sell pulp and cord wood, but he also does odd jobs on the side, such as welding and automotive repair. During the summer he picks up extra cash sardine fishing.

Like 270 of the 780 people in Perry, the Bubiers can't make it through the year without some form of public assistance—food stamps, fuel assistance and at times Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

Some people might call the Bubiers' yard an eyesore. But for Ervins it's not a matter of aesthetics. It is his livelihood.

"I take someone's rubbish and make somethin' out of it," Ervins huffs, winded from hanging over the engine. He gestures toward his yard, a vast accumulation of other people's discards.

"Out here I got my pile of junk, within a year, they're gonna tell me to get rid of it."

His wife Donna Bubier explains, "It may look like a mess, but what he's got out here he has to have it. Somebody with a fancy-fancy house will complain that we got a lotta junk here. But he's gotta have it."

"Someone else's rubbish pile is my gold mine."

Ervins' "gold mine" is littered with defunct, disassembled and abandoned cars and trucks. Rusted engine parts and pieces unhidden by the snow or mud lie strewn about the two acre yard, like stones in a gravel pit. Gears, nuts, bolts, iron scraps, bumpers, fenders, u-joints, radiators, pipes, mufflers, old batteries, broken glass and mounds of unsplit stumps and logs—it's all there.

"When I need somethin', I build it with my own hands see, it's cheaper that way," he says pointing to what he hopes will someday be his indoor shop. Several years ago he started building it with wood scraps and lumber he gleaned from various job sites. Unfortunately, building takes time and money. The wooden foundation sags in the back yard. It is convenient shelter for their Doberman Pinscher, Snapper, who protests our intrusion, baring his sharp white teeth.

"Quiet, ya bastard," Ervins yells, turning to me with a smile. "If he keeps it up he's going to dog heaven, I'll tell ya."

We walk past an arc welder, and a large gear head partially covered with remnants of a flowered bed sheet. I step over a yellow Tonka toy pay-loader on its side.

"Watch the bottom one, it's for balance," calls Ervins from the top of the wooden stoop, wiping his feet on THE BUBIERS rubber welcome mat. I step over the inch wide bottom stair and pet their cat Blackie perched on the railing as I turn inside.

Inside the Bubiers' house is warm with the heat from the woodstove burning hotly. A thick steam covers the windows. The inside temperature is a comfortable 74 degrees, while the outside an unpleasant seven degrees.

The house, Ervins tells me, had only three rooms when he bought it for $3,500 twelve years ago. Since then, he has added on a bathroom, family room and the kitchen, constructing them all out of particle board and tar paper. Eventually, he would like to put shingles over the tar paper outside.

Donna, who has just stuffed the stove with wood, tells me that the stove, along with the insulation and the storm windows, were bought for the Bubiers by the Washington-Hancock Community Agency Winterization Program. The agency works with low income families to help reduce heating costs. The old stove sits in the family room unused, across from the new one, beneath a pile of clothes, papers, magazines, and boxes. Like the reclining chair outside covered with plastic, which is in much better shape than the tattered green one inside, it waits for Ervins to fix it.

"Even though he sells wood, we're always the last ones to get any," jokes Donna. Their income qualifies them to receive fuel assistance, up to seven cords of wood a year. "The stove is our only source of heat."

"Out here I got my pile of junk, within a year, they're gonna tell me to get rid of it."

With his thick dark hair, broad shoulders, stocky mid-section, and big arms hanging at his side, Ervins is like a bear, marking his territory, leaving his scent on a tree.

I take a seat at the table, brushing a few crumbs off the metal folding chair. Its back and seat, once gold colored, are worn to the steel, and shined up in the kitchen light. The children float in from the television room checking me out, telling me a little about themselves.

Tommy, whom I had just met outside, says hello as he hides behind his thick lensed glasses. He is the most reserved in the family. He has a wiry frame and coarse blonde hair, which he says is recovering slowly from a shave this summer.
He tells me he is in the tenth grade, at Shead High School, in Eastport.

Janice, the only girl, is a nine year old Girl Scout, and a third grader at Clark School in Perry. She has thick, brown shoulder length hair, and clear framed glasses. She is a young mirror of her mother. When she laughs, a single dimple appears on her right cheek.

Seven year old Ervins Jr., is the least shy of the Bubiers. He says he's a second grader at Clark. He looks exactly like a photo of his father when he was a child and speaks with the same pursed lips. Ervins Jr. tells me he's not a four eyes.

As I talk to Donna and Ervins, the younger two children run in and out of the kitchen, occasionally hanging around their parents, but more often screaming into the microphone of my tape recorder.

"Testing, over and out," giggles Janice.

Ervins Jr. grabs the mike away from his sister, "This is Bangor Daily News back to you, Mark," he shouts, then whistles into the mike, piercing my ears, as I monitor the sound with a pair of headphones.

"Now I'll get back to you, if you don't cut that out," warns Ervins, Sr. The kids laugh and run off into the next room.

"I warned you about showing off," adds Donna, her voice lost to the din of the television. Her stout barely five foot frame stands slightly stooped in front of the small gas stove, which is squeezed in between a mint green GE icebox and the counter cluttered with papers, cans, jars, pans, magazines, and a stack of Holy Bibles. Next to the old refrigerator is a large broken food storage freezer supporting boxes, white plastic food buckets, and a fifty pound bag of dry dog food.

The frying meat hisses in the pan, like cool rainfall meeting the hot pavement. The scent of the cooking beef and aroma of boiling potatoes, rises in the kitchen, mingling with the heaviness of Ervins' sweaty clothes and chainsaw fuel.

Donna walks over to the table, laying down an assortment of dinner plates, cups, and utensils.

IT IS FIVE THIRTY in the morning and Ervins Bubier slowly crawls out of bed. He stumbles through the dark house aided by a flashlight. The rest of us are still huddled in the warmth of our beds.

I lie in my sleeping bag on top of an iron frame bed listening to Ervins' footsteps walking past my door into the kitchen area. Curled up alongside of me is Tommy snoring lightly. The thin blanket is pulled up almost over his face. The room he sleeps in
IT'S A DAMN HASSLE FOR FOOD STAMPS. WE'RE SUPPOSED TO LIVE ON $300 A MONTH FOR FOOD. IT AIN'T MUCH, BUT YOU GET BY.
she sits down at the table filling out the application for next month's food stamps.

Outside Ervins is again working on his blue dented timber truck, this time lying on his back beneath the body. He tells me that the back injury he got over two years ago still aches him every morning. It doesn't really bother him when he lies on the mud frozen ground, only when he's in bed.

"When I'm lying down, the agony gets me so I can't stand it. I have a hell of a time gettin' around."

The sound of his hammer tapping iron drowns out his voice. "I'm worse than an old horse in the mornin'."

Watching him, I can see him come alive with each breath of the fresh woodland air.

Ervins is fixing a repair he made last week, when the old drive shaft broke. Worse, it happened the day the Bubiers were to drive to Wilton to have Thanksgiving with Ervins' father. The gas money the family had set aside for the trip had to go toward buying a new drive shaft for Ervins' truck. The Bubiers had to stay in Perry. They celebrated the holiday with Donna's mother and stepfather who live in the small green trailer up the street.

"She's holdin' but she ain't pretty," Ervins utters to himself, referring to a weld he made when he added on a larger chassis to increase the truck's load capacity. He says he'd like to get a different truck, but it will be a while before he can afford to buy one. He crawls his way out from under the truck and stands up. The dried mud and sawdust cling heavily to his back and thick curly hair.

The below zero degree weather of the previous evening has slowly warmed up to twelve degrees, yet still it forces me to pull my wool hat down over my stinging ears.

"Yeah, just the weather I like, just put on a shirt and a sweatshirt, and some longdrawers," Ervins laughs, taking a deep breath. His heavy pink cheeks fill with the frosty outdoor air. He teases me, telling me that he'll put some gloves on his bare hands when the weather starts to get cold.

After several attempts, the cold engine cranks over, and we drive down Shore Road to the woodlot. At this early hour in the morning there aren't many travelers on Route 1, but the few that drive toward us get a friendly hello from Ervins. Just a nod of the head and wave of the finger gripping the wheel.

Through the mud spattered windshield, I can see the bleak, silver clouds hanging just above the tops of the tree line. Leafless maples and bare birches stand stark and exposed, while the young firs and spruces have grown the hearty evergreen coats that will insulate them from the long Perry winter. A thin four inch white blanket covers the ground.

Driving through the sparsely populated North Perry, we pass only a few small trailers and houses, and then a variety store and a dilapidated meeting lodge before turning left on to Lake Road, where Ervins works.

"Look at that old hound bastard, never moves," he grins, pointing to a thick brown-haired dog curled up tightly in someone's yard. Farther up the road, Ervins motions to a small house congested with old vehicles jacked up on logs and tall dried weeds and piles of unsplit wood. It is very similar to his own house.

"That fellah over there, he's the town pauper." Confused, I ask him to repeat himself.

"Ya know, the town poorman," he explains with a light chuckle. I am still puzzled. Even in a town like Perry, there is still a pecking order?

As we approach the lake area, we pull into a driveway leading to a large old house with a barn sitting just to the right of it. Both buildings, as well as the woodlot across the street, belong to Herbie Bishop.

Ervins jumps out of the truck and grabs the chainsaw he stores in Herbie's garage. Ervins tells me that Herbie is a long time acquaintance of his and that they also work in the woods together. Because Ervins can't afford buying or renting the whole woodlot, he just pays Herbie for the "stumpage." Actually, he says it is better that way, because he doesn't have to pay taxes on the property.

The road into the lot is just a rough set of tire tracks deeply carved into the wet mucky earth from years of weighted traffic. Slowly, side to side, the truck rocks, pausing and lunging forward over logs and through gigantic icy mud puddles. About half a mile in, we stop next to a monstrous metal Y-shaped contraption balanced on two wheels. It rests on a mound of sawdust a foot thick.

Ervins hops out of the truck and walks silently into the woods. In about ten minutes he returns. According to the old tracks in the mud, Ervins tells me that Herbie is a long time acquaintance of his and that they also work in the woods together. Because Ervins can't afford buying or renting the whole woodlot, he just pays Herbie for the "stumpage." Actually, he says it is better that way, because he doesn't have to pay taxes on the property.

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metal contraption. "I built her myself, see."

He puts his hand on his wood splitter, inspecting it, fiddling with a few levers, making sure it is in running condition. Ervins says he designed and built his dual action log splitter in 1984. He tells me it is different from most splitters because it has both a two-foot and a four-foot splitting piston. "It's designed for one man to operate it," he explains.

"A conveyor will pick up the wood when it drops here and drop it in the truck."

He tells me he's working on patenting it and plans to market it to self-employed wood cutters like himself. "Well, it would mostly be for the small individual, like me, someone who would need something that was more mechanized, so he could do the work himself. That's why I built it, see."

Ervins tells me the splitter is not the first piece of machinery he's made, not by any means. In 1980, he decided he needed something to help him drag logs, so he built a log dragging machine. It is similar to a skidder or a hauling tractor. He calls it a "power arch or wood twitcher."

Unfortunately Ervins says he had the power arch out for public display before he thought of patenting it, so that meant anyone could copy it. Someone did copy it, three years after Ervins first came out with his. Ervins says he lost a lot of money because of it, but that he's learned "the ins and outs of the system." Next time he'll be more careful about the patenting.

He says he's even making a portable saw mill, so that he can do more work, and pick up some extra income. "You call up and say, 'I got a thousand big logs that need to be sawed,' and I'll say I'll be over in two or three days to do it see. And that will give me maybe a thousand dollars for three days' work, see."

Without another word, but with a wide smile, Ervins climbs up on the tree skidder, the one he shares with Herbie Bishop. A turn of the key and the big yellow monster roars, rolling up over trees and stumps, and down through ditches and swamps.

He jumps off the skidder, moving quickly working the chainsaw, cutting and dropping eight trees in no time. He puts the twitching cables around all eight, so he can drag and carry them back through the woods and out to the splitter.

We work together splitting the wood. Ervins works almost non-stop, bending down getting the logs, splitting them, throwing them on the truck. In just a little over two hours, a whole cord is cut and split and loaded on the truck.

"Gotta go squirt my whistle," he laughs disappearing behind the skidder.

"Me, I don't like clear cuttin' or this strippin' stuff, I'm selective, I like to leave some. I could take five hundred acres and never cut it up in a lifetime, or two."

"I don't go for this mowin right down stuff. I think it's too hard on the earth. I've gone on a woodlot where a skidder crew took everything that was sellable, and I went back and cut the bad places, where they didn't get the good stuff that was there see, and I cut off of it for twelve years."

"People don't realize what they're doin'. I do know that you gotta turn over the earth after forty years of growth. If it's all spruce or softwood, it's gotta be turned over to hardwood. It'll all come in by itself.

"It's all a matter of doin' what Mother Nature wants you to do. And when these fellahs is freaks as far as Mother Nature goes, I try to do what is supposed to be done by Mother Nature, not by man. Man destroys too much of what he's doin'." He stares at me with one of his long, quiet uncomfortable stares.

"You know, cuttin' wood is just like anythin' else, ya gotta pay attention to what you're doing. Do it right or you're gonna get in a mess."

Though logging may be considered a seasonal job for some people, it is not for Ervins. "I go year round, I've cut wood under 17, 18 feet of snow."

Ervins says he first started working in the woods when he was only a teenager. He tells me that even his mother joined him in the woods. "My mother cut wood, too. She took no back seat, I'll tell ya."

He says he has to be outdoors, working by himself, setting his own rules, being his own boss. He has tried doing other types of work in the past, such as masonry, carpentry, and even working in the local woolen mill. The pay was decent at the mill, and it gave him steady work. But, for Ervins mill work is stifling, and too confining. It was as if he had been caged in. Inside the mill, if he had suggestions about how to do tasks, it didn't matter because no one was going to hear. So he got flustered and quit.

Ervins says even though he couldn't read a book too well, he could size up a blue print better than anyone. He laughs. "Some people say I have a photostatic mind. I look at somethin' there and could do that, see."

He goes over to a piece of freshly split birch, picks it up and sniffs it long and hard. "That's sweet, a good piece of burning wood I tell ya."

Even though Ervins enjoys wood harvesting,
he knows it isn't very lucrative. He's been on assistance ever since he's been out in the woods. Even weeks when he's worked "six, sometimes seven days a week," he still may not earn enough to get by.

"Some days you bust your ass working and ya don't make nothin'," he tells me, with a shake of his head. "You survive, that's about the extent of it."

Ervins cuts, hauls, splits and delivers timber to customers in the Perry and Robbinston area. He tells me he generally gets $55 for an unsplit cord, which is 185 cubic feet. He also sells split cords for $75 a cord, but generally does not because he loses time or money splitting it. "You don't make no money splittin' it." Ervins says he has to sell three to four hundred cords a year just to cover his expenses.

"If you're makin' minimum wage, you're doing well."

He says that even if he wanted to hire a worker to try to increase his revenue, he still couldn't afford to pay the $3,900 a year per man for Workmen's Compensation. "That's alotta bread, just to hire a man never mind what ya got to pay him. That's what's killin' us bad." He frowns. "Until you go for yourself, and try to make a job for someone else, you don't realize just what harassment you get from the government. I'm tellin' you it's somethin' else."

"But, you can't run away from your troubles. They keep right up to ya. See, if you tip over the wood trailer today, you can't clap your hands and say, 'I'll see you tomorrow.' If the skidder breaks down, you fix what ails it and keep right on going and don't worry about what happened." He pauses.

"Life is a bowl of cherries, and every other one has a pit in it." He adds, "You gotta take the bitter with the sweet."

Ervins says he plans to keep right on working in the woods for as long as he can. That is only for as long as his back holds up. Since he slipped and perforated the disk in his back over two years ago, Ervins always faces a risk whenever he bends over or picks up a log.

"I don't know how long I can stay in there, ya know before that disk goes out again. Doctor tells me it could snap just like that and leave me paralyzed forever.

"So you look at the situation and say what am I gonna do. I also got arthritis of the spine, and if I stop doing work altogether, then I'm gonna be in a wheel chair in six months."

Just the same, Ervins has to earn a living.

"So I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place,"
he grimaces. Ervins tells me that is why he is studying up at the High School Equivalency Program in Calais, trying to get his Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED). He says he never learned to read or write too well when he was growing up.

“I didn’t have time to go to school. I had to work on the farm see. It was in one door and out the other.”

Ervins says he’s hopeful he’ll pass the GED test within the next year, because he’s only seven points away from passing it. After he gets his GED, he thinks he’d like to get an electronics certificate, something that would allow him to get a shop job, where he wouldn’t have to risk his health constantly.

Until then, Ervins will continue working where he likes it best, alone and in the woods. And until then, he’ll probably still be on government assistance, trying to piece together a years’ income. He tells me it’s never been easy, and that it probably never will be. But he’s a man with no regrets.

“Well, it’s been a hard life while I grewed up, but I wouldn’t change the crutchiest thing. No, I’ve enjoyed the life.”

“YES, MY WORK never moves. It’s still right there,” Donna gestures jokingly toward the television room.

The room is heavily congested with piles of old pants, shirts, stacks of paper, old magazines, scattered toys, boots, newspapers, and boxes. Three thin ropes run from wall to wall, draped with socks, underwear and other drying clothes. Beneath the lines, a long green couch fights for space with the large unused wood stove and a disheveled arm chair that is burdened under a pile of clothes.

Donna tells me that in addition to taking care of the children and “their mess around the house,” she also works out in the woods with Ervins. She shows me a thick, scarred index finger that she crushed in the wood splitter last year.

Donna tells me that she is originally from Sherman, in Aroostook County, where she was born 40 years ago. She says she received her diploma from Wilton High School, and passed a test to do governmental work in Washington D.C., but decided against it.

“I didn’t go, figured I’d probably get homesick.”

Donna instead went to work in a shoe making factory, and at Fosters, a manufacturing company, where she assembled clothespins and wrapped plastic fork and spoon sets.

For the first four years of their marriage, she and Ervins lived on his father’s farm in Wilton. Because Ervins’ older brother had a back problem and his younger brother was going to school, Ervins and Donna had to work and manage the farm without ever being allowed full responsibility for decision making. She tells me the two of them really ran the whole farm, without ever getting paid for their time.

“I know you don’t make a lot on the farm anyway, but we still had to pay our bills.” She adds, “His parents offered to let us take the farm over, but only if we ran it their way. You just can’t do it that way.”

At the time Donna’s mother and father lived in the Perry area.

“Deeda, liked it up here. So we moved.”

She explains that Deeda is a nickname she and relatives call Ervins. “When he was little, he used to call his father, Deeda, you know instead of Dadda. So when he grew up the name just stuck.”

Donna tells me that when she and Ervins decided to have kids, she took on the toughest job of her life. At that time, they were unable to have children of their own so they adopted Tommy. Tommy’s real father, Thomas McCleary, was a friend of Ervins. He was an enlistee in the military and unable to take care of his child.

“His mother was a drug addict, and couldn’t take care of him. Well the state was going to take him.” Donna tells me that they took Tommy before it was too late.

“Yeah, it was rough times then,” Donna recalls. “But it was worth it. When we were thinking of adopting him, the state of Florida had him in their records as mentally retarded. But it was just because he was in six foster homes in one month before they sent him to Maine.

“He was a wreck and he wasn’t quite two. You could not lay him down. His eyes twitched all the time, and you couldn’t set him in a highchair, or in a shopping cart, or anything. He would just screech. He was petrified for a long time. Well, my sister-in-law helped and Deeda’s mother too.”

Donna pauses. She say she’ll never forget all those sleepless nights sitting up with Tommy.

“You had to make sure he was in a deep, deep, deep sleep, before you could lay him down. His eyes twitched all the time, and you couldn’t set him in a highchair, or in a shopping cart, or anything. He would just screech. He was petrified for a long time. Well, my sister-in-law helped and Deeda’s mother too.”

Donna pauses. She say she’ll never forget all those sleepless nights sitting up with Tommy.

“You had to make sure he was in a deep, deep, deep sleep, before you could lay him in a crib, because if he wasn’t, and you went to lie him down, he woke up and that was it, you had to sit and hold him and try to get him to sleep again.”

“It took a lot of work, but it was worth it. Tommy’s a good boy.”

Donna tells me that lately she spends a great deal of time doing homework for the classes she’s taking at the Washington County Vocational Technical Institute. This year, because the family
Because the family was on AFDC after Ervins slipped a disk in his back, Donna got the chance to take classes.
DONNA HOPES HER CHILDREN WILL KEEP UP THEIR SCHOOLING. "WE'LL TRY TO HELP THEM WITH THEIR EDUCATION COSTS."
was on AFDC, Donna got the opportunity to take classes, three nights a week for three hours, all tuition free.

On Monday nights Donna has accounting class. She tells me she has always taken care of Ervins' book work, but finds "accounting class homework is much different." On Wednesdays at thirty, after she has made dinner for Ervins and the kids, Donna goes to her secretarial skills class. She says it's her favorite class, especially on the days when she has to practice working a telephone switch board. On Thursday nights, she has Typing I. She got an "A" on her last typing test. She says it's her favorite class, especially on the days when she has to practice working a telephone switch board. On Thursday nights, she has Typing I. She got an "A" on her last typing test.

So far, Donna is doing well and hopes to continue on to get her secretarial certificate. Donna says her goal is to get a job at Georgia-Pacific, a large paper mill where the secretaries get paid very well. That is only if she can continue her education.

Donna fears that she won't be able to continue taking courses next semester, because Ervins' back is better and the family will go off AFDC. She tells me that each course costs $75, which means $225 alone just for tuition. And the textbooks are $35 apiece.

She hopes her children will keep up their schooling. "I'd like to see them go out and get something they'd like to do. You know if they want to go to school, we'll try to help them with their education costs."

As Donna counts out the food stamps she has to last the month, I ask her how she feels about receiving them.

"We'd be havin' it a lot harder, if we didn't have 'em." She tells me that the food stamps may be helpful each month, but that getting them is a lot of work. "You gotta take in all your receipts, records, reports, just to reapply every month." The amount the family gets differs each month. It is gauged according to Ervins' income.

"I stretch 'em as far as I can stretch 'em," Donna laughs.

Two years ago when Ervins slipped and perforated a disk in his back, he was hospitalized and completely disabled. The Bubiers went on AFDC, and received $613 a month. When Ervins could work again, they went off AFDC.

Donna tells me the worst part of getting off AFDC is not necessarily the overall money they don't receive. It is the medical benefits that are lost. She says the kids still get medical care, but she and Ervins do not. Donna says her high blood pressure pills and Ervins diabetes pills alone costs them almost $70 a month. "And we don't have any health insurance."

Ervins expresses a more cynical view of the welfare system than does Donna.

He says getting aid has its benefits for him and his family, but it also has its drawbacks. "Well, it's a damn hassle for food stamps, I'll tell ya. What we're supposed to live on is three hundred a month for food. For the five of us. Well, that ain't a hell of a lot. You go up to the store, Christ, it's nothin' to spend fifty dollars and you're lucky to come home with a grocery bag."

The Bubiers save a lot of money growing and canning their own vegetables in their two acre garden. They also shop for food bargains.

"Like I say, we have to pick out the meat that's on sale. If we find chicken legs for sale for 39 cents a pound, we buy 40 pounds and stick 'em in the freezer. If we can find meat that's a dollar or a dollar and a quarter, we buy it up and stick it in the freezer. We try to find everything ahead. It ain't much, but you get by."

DONNA IS COOKING the big Sunday dinner in the kitchen. The three children and she have gone to church, while Ervins spent the morning in the woods. I ask Tommy and Janice and Ervins, Jr. what they want for the future.

Tommy tells me, "I'd like to be someone who lives off in the woods by himself. I like the peacefulness and quietness. And also so I can go hunting." He says he isn't sure of what he wants to do for work when he gets older. He thinks he'll be a carpenter, so he can build houses like the ones he's designing in shop at school.

Most of all he wants "to get out of the state as quickly as I possibly can. Probably down south, somewhere towards Texas or Florida, explore the United States." It's much too cold in Perry for Tommy's liking. "I've always wanted to see what it's like outside the state of Maine."

Tommy's sister, Janice, likes Maine. When she gets older she says her house will be like the one she lives in now, except she'll have a horse. Janice likes school, especially "math and English, because they're easy." She shows me her honor roll report card, with almost all A's. Janice says she practices school at home now, because she is going to be a teacher when she grows up. She's even thought of being President. "There's a lot of money in the White House."

Ervins Jr, doesn't really care for school all that much. "I usually hate my school because the basketball hoops are busted. And it's junky. The playgrounds are always messed up and everything and the desks are all ripped up."

He says his favorite subjects are, "soccer, base-
ball, and basketball." He tells me his favorite activity is art. His portfolio includes an interesting drawing of a blue-haired moose.

Ervins, who has just returned from the woods, smelling of moist earth and sawdust, scrubs his hands at the sink. "Well, when I got off the skidder, I was hungry. So here I am."

Ervins Jr. and Janice, load up their plates with food, grab stacks of bread and disappear back into the family room, turning on the television. Donna tells me they always watch television when they eat.

"Need more bread," Ervins says, as he pours himself a drink of water, using a plastic orange juice concentrate container as cup.

Donna reaches into a grocery bag full of soft, bleached white sandwich bread, and pulling out a loaf, places it on a stack of papers and magazines atop the table.

"Do you know what's most important in my house?" Ervins asks me with smile. He pats his stomach twice lightly.

"His belly," Donna quips.

Even though I've easily consumed my share, Ervins urges me to eat more. "Well, if you leave here hungry then it's your own fault."

Donna interjects, "That's how I got so fat in this family! He says, 'Oh you don't eat enough, have some more.' Then of course after you do that a while, then you get used to eating that much and you just keep on."

"Well you couldn't boil water when I met you," Ervins cracks.

"Well, you haven't starved to death yet, so you'll survive," Donna retorts. The din of the television pours into the room.

"Pass the corn buttah, will ya Mark?" Ervins grins at me. I pass him the Cool Whip bowl full of half melted sticks of yellow margarine.

"Tommy, how 'bout some moo juice there?" Ervins asks.

"I'll get it," Donna motions to stand up. Tommy quickly grabs the milk from the refrigerator, and rests it down in front of Ervins. Without saying a word, Tommy sits back down, keeping his eyes on his plate.

"Got a lot done by myself today. Not like yesterday." Ervins teases Tommy. "You can't go handlin' wood like it was eggs. Ya ain't gonna get anythin' done that way."

Tommy continues eating.

The sounds of mouths chewing and the television playing is all that can be heard.

"Ooh, those two, forget it," Donna smiles at me nervously.

"He's young and full of piss and vinegar," Ervins grimaces. "He'll learn. I learned, I'll tell ya."

"Can't wait around when there's work to be done, bills to be paid. I discovered this a long time ago, time nor tide waits for nobody," Ervins adds prophetically. He is worried the tide might get him the end of the month, if he doesn't come up with the money to pay off the tax lien on his house. Worse, he complains, "more' half of it is interest."

As dinner ends, Janice and Ervins Jr. enter the kitchen investigating the dessert situation. Ervins Jr. climbs up on the counter, and pulls a white bucket of chocolate chip cookies from the doorless cupboard. They are the ones that Donna baked the day before. They each grab hefty handfuls and disappear back into the family room.

Ervins sneaks himself a single cookie. He tells me since this past year, when the doctor discovered that he had diabetes, he has been extra careful to avoid unnecessary sugar intake in his diet. His dessert, is a bowl of unsweetened applesauce.

Ervins Jr., with a tight pouting lower lip, runs into the next room. The ball rolls into the corner of the kitchen.

Ervins takes his chainsaw off the kitchen floor and puts it on the table so he can sharpen the dull chain. As he files, I ask him about the fleshy nine inch scar bisecting his bicep.

"I done that with a chainsaw a while back. The chain was dull so she kicked back and caught my arm, tearing up my jacket. Didn't realize I was cut till I looked down and seen the red snow."

He finishes sharpening the chain.

"Well, I won't make any money sitting in here," Ervins jumps up from the table. He puts on his sweatshirt and pulls on his orange cap and disappears out the door. In a minute I hear the tapping of a hammer on steel.
MONICA

NOVEMBER
"The quality of our lifestyle is pretty bare bones, as far as material things go."
"IT'S THE QUALITY OF LIFE, NOT THE AMOUNT OF MONEY YOU MAKE THAT MATTERS."
"I started doing the work myself. I became pregnant and winter was coming. This house will be an anchor. We won't have to leave because someone else is dictating to us to leave."
DECEMBER

Photography by Pam Berry
Monica is single, unemployed and on welfare. For three years she has lived in a school bus with her daughter Heidi. She says she had a choice to make. A low paying job, day care for her children and no health care—or the school bus and welfare. She chose the bus.

"This I feel is self-imposed poverty," she says. It is poverty amongst the trees and hills of Woodstock, Maine. Poverty in a magnificent setting, but undeniable hard, poor living. There is no indoor plumbing, no easy hot bath, no flipping up the thermostat when winter sets in.

Inside, the bus offers a steamy hospitality. The warmth of the woodstove, shelves piled with toys and the sweet smell of something cooking on the stove. Heidi’s twin bed, also the couch, has a clutter of drawing pads and pencils, dolls and a pair of gloves.

Monica stands at a small table, her hands covered with flour as she makes apple pies to store for the winter. Heidi and her friend from up the hill play outside in the woods. The cat, “Meow-meow,” climbs up the woodpile that leans against the outhouse.

"The quality of our lifestyle is pretty bare bones, as far as material things go at this point, but the priority is providing the best in child rearing during the critical formative years. "It’s the quality of life, not the amount of money you make, that matters. And it’s been my choice, because I have other options, whereas some people don’t,” she says.

Monica went on Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) when her marriage broke up. She and Heidi moved from their home in Aroostook County to Oxford County.

There Monica took an apprenticeship at a pottery shop where she and Heidi could live for the winter. After five months, Monica bought a converted school bus for $700 and moved to the country. The decision to live in the school bus with no running water was the only way Monica saw out of the common dilemma many single parents face.

"It’s a real scary situation. Having a job again would be a wonderful thing for self esteem and to get off welfare. But the transition from welfare to work is hard. The money you make is taken up in medical bills and paying rent and utilities, so you wind up with less money than you would have being on welfare.

"It’s very scary, and you have to be sure that when you do take a job, it’s worth taking. You can’t settle for a pits of a job because you have to consider the children and day care. And there isn’t any of my family around to help with Heidi, so it’s a real problem."

Living three years in the school bus taught Monica to dream of a better future for herself and her family. She was determined to build a house. With a small sum of money she had saved over many months, she bought a piece of land, had a foundation dug, house plans drawn up and building materials bought. Even when she became pregnant, Monica and her friends kept working on the house.

When her money ran out, Community Concepts, Inc. which services low-income families in Oxford and Androscoggin counties, arranged for Monica to be one of the first recipients of a substandard house replacement program. This gave her a low interest loan to buy building materials as long as she and volunteers provided the labor.

To Monica this house is worth waiting for and worth working for. A place to call home.

"It’s an anchor. Finally I know that I won’t have to leave because of the rent going up or a relationship breaking up. We won’t have to leave because someone else is dictating to us to leave. It will be voluntary.

"With this baby, it will be a whole different situation. I’ll get support from its father and I won’t feel threatened even if we did fall out, because I’ll have an established home. I’m established here personally. And that’s very reassuring."
MAKING THE ROUNDS

Written by Fox Vernon
Photography by Pam Berry

"Just wait till you see what I’ve got for you," Maurice Geoffroy called to Stella, who peered out from behind her open screen door. The social worker unlocked the hatch of his Ford Escort, pulled out one of the several grocery bags full of cheese, butter, and rice, and held it up to the elderly widow in a self-ribbing gesture of triumph. Stella laughed at him.

Maurice Geoffroy—Geoff to his friends—was on what he calls a cheese and butter run, one of his several duties as a social worker for the People’s Regional Opportunity Program, known as PROP to its clients. PROP is Cumberland County’s community action program, one of ten private non-profit organizations contracted by the state of Maine to supplement the programs administered by the Division of Community Services.

For five years Geoff has worked in the field for PROP, visiting clients throughout the northwest corner of Cumberland County. He has known Stella all that time. She lives alone in a modest two-story home in Baldwin, one of the towns within Geoff’s assigned territory.
Stella is a 69-year old widow who doesn’t like to ask for fuel assistance. “I can’t have no extras, time I pay my bills.” Geoff says she’s a sweetie and hugs her.

“I was afraid you had forgotten me,” Stella said to Geoff as she opened her screen door to welcome both of us into her home.

I had come with Geoff to visit Stella. For the past two weeks, I had been following him on his rounds to observe how he interacted with his clients, the segment of our society put in the humbling position of having to ask for help.

“How are you doing, Stella Ella B.,” Geoff said.

“Oh don’t you call me that,” Stella replied in a friendly, fitful cackle. Stella was shy, but not withdrawn. She seemed to enjoy Geoff’s playful ridicule. She took the grocery bag of cheese, butter, and rice from Geoff and put it on her kitchen counter next to her refrigerator.

“I knew I could get you going,” Geoff bragged, grinning and chuckling, his round face framed in his black, well-trimmed beard. Stella laughed too, setting her right arm in front of her face to hide herself. Her cheeks flushed red and rippled as she chuckled.

“You know I don’t like that,” she said, but her laughter showed that she did like it. She laughed hard, in shrill, gay spurts—so hard that her dentures loosened, and she had to use her thumb to hold them in place. It made her laugh again.

“I was afraid you had forgotten me,” she repeated, because Geoff hadn’t heard her the first time.

He pointed to his black appointment book that he self-mockingly referred to as his “brain. Nope, I’ve got you right here in my black book,” he said. “Oh, he’s got me in his black book,” she repeated to me, cackling and hiding her head behind her hands again. Geoff hugged her and kissed her cheek just to tease her more.

I thought that Stella and Geoff looked much alike as they stood in the kitchen discussing Stella’s fuel assistance application. Both were short and plump, Stella being shorter and much plumper. And both had round faces, with full, fleshy cheeks.

Geoff, though, had grown a beard to conceal his youthful appearance. If he didn’t have the beard, he told me, then the older women would banter him tirelessly and make him feel like a 45-year-old grandson. It was a short, thick beard with sporadic gray hairs and it ran down the sides of
his face to form a "V" at his chin, 
a "V" that gave him an impish look and accented the mischievous kink in his good-natured humor.

"Me, I'm a walking head trip," Geoff had once confided to me on one of our car rides between clients. "There's always a lot that's seething right under the surface."

I recognized that in his relationship with Stella. His tease mixed frustration with affection. He had come to social work from a short career as a Catholic priest, and it had been his hope that his new role would allow him to do more for people. There was only so much he could do for his elderly clients like Stella, though, just keep her above water on the welfare benefits she qualified for. Sixty-nine years old, she would never be able to support herself.

"I need to be needed," Geoff had told me.

Stella filled that need. On her wall she taped a slip of paper that listed his visits: once a year for a review of her social security benefits, twice a year for a review of her food stamp allocation, once in winter for her to reapply for fuel assistance, and every season for her cheese and butter delivery.

"She's a real sweetie," Geoff said. "What I call the regulars. I automatically keep her on my running list of people that I know I have to come back to."

Stella would have preferred that Geoff didn't have to keep coming back to her. "I'd rather not be on this old PROP," she said to me. But her children had persuaded her to apply for fuel assistance, and because she qualified for that, she automatically received cheese and butter distributions.

Still, she barely made ends meet.

"I can't have no extras, usually," she told me. "The time you get all your bills paid, your light bill and all your other bills, you ain't got enough left to get anything good."

That made life especially hard for Stella during the Christmas season, when she had more things going "than the devil." Her furnace needed cleaning and her gas and oil tanks needed filling. She didn't have the money to afford more than a dollar to slip into an envelope for her grandchildren's Christmas presents.

"The older ones understand," she explained, "but the younger ones, they don't."

Geoff let Stella and me talk for a while, but he was anxious to get over to the Head Start Center in Baldwin. Because he had made cheese and butter runs all morning, he had missed his routine office hours at the center.

"Well, we're gonna head on down the pike," he said to Stella, but before we got out the door, she asked Geoff one final question about fuel assistance for the winter. Geoff promised to come by next week with an application for her to fill out.

On our way to Baldwin's Head Start Center, Geoff told me more about Stella. She first went on fuel assistance five years ago after her husband, a road construction worker, died. November last year, another tragedy struck. Her son died in a hunting accident.

"She went into a tailspin on that one," Geoff said. "I thought she'd never get over it."

The Head Start Center was not more than a two-minute ride from Stella's home. It was an old dance hall, called the Dancemore, that had once been the life of Baldwin's Saturday nights. Inside, there was a large hall with a wooden floor and an adjoining kitchen at one end. Geoff took me into the kitchen and introduced me to Mary, the program's mother figure, a woman in her mid-50s. Mary had been with Head Start since its beginning in 1966. To-
"It's bad enough that you don't have money and it's bad enough that your kids see stuff in the store and you can't afford it. They don't have to make you feel worse."

"In fact our little jam session in there, it seemed to spruce her up a bit, gave her a chance to vent some things."

"I hope I didn't put her on the spot," I said.

"No, no," he assured me. "Your request couldn't have come at a better time. Gave her some sense of something to look forward to."

I wasn't convinced, though. I didn't think she would look forward to being interviewed by a stranger, but I took Geoff's word for it. I wanted the interview.

"THE REAL WORST thing I don't like about social workers," Barbara Evans told me, "is this thing about the Department of Human Service's child abuse." Barbara was speaking of the child protection workers who investigate alleged cases of child abuse. "The only time they come to visit you is when you're low income."

Barbara sat across from me at a table in the main hall of Baldwin's Head Start Center. In her polyester winter coat, she slumped into a metal chair and sipped instant coffee. Her daughter, Amber, a miniature of her mother, played downstairs with the other Head Start children. Except for Mary, who cleaned pans in the kitchen at the other end of the hall, Barbara and I were alone.

"They figure if you're low income, you're not fit," said Barbara, exhausted from a Halloween weekend spent dismantling the travel trailer her family had been living in. Her husband, Christopher, was building a house for her and the children, and he had just finished one room for the family to move into.

"I mean one time—this is the scariest episode I ever had with them—they showed up at my house with a cop. The cop showed me the I.D. and he says, 'Ma'am, we want your kids in the squad car. We have a paper here on sexual abuse.'"

"He comes up, takes my kids out of my house, and puts them in the cop car so everybody in town can see this happening."

I could imagine myself walking by Barbara's former house in the middle of Bridgton, watching the officer escort her kids to his car.

"They wouldn't let me go near them. They were asking them questions that I wasn't even allowed to hear."

It turned out that Barbara's neighbor had overheard Barbara's children playing doctor with the boy next door and had called the police.

"It got straighted out," she said, "but they didn't apologize to me."

"I said, 'You guys actually waste your time on things like this. You come in, you degrade people for this.'"

Barbara had run into these problems many times, and it made her resent welfare agencies and their workers. Geoff, though, was an exception. "He makes you feel like you're human," Barbara said, "like you belong on this earth."

"He's not sitting there screaming at you and cutting you down. It's bad enough that you don't have money, and it's bad enough that your kids see stuff in the store and you can't afford it. They don't have to make you feel any worse, and they do a real good job on you."

Once a social worker had come to her house because there had been reports that her son, Chris junior, was being fed nothing but beans.

Barbara told the social worker, "If you find a can of beans in the cupboard, take it home for supper."

"It was funny," said Barbara, "cause when she came to my house, my son was sitting there at lunch time eating lasagna."

"They come out for some real stupid things."

I nodded my head in agreement.

Another time, her doctor wrote "suspicious" on his medical chart when Barbara's son had stitches sewn in his forehead for the second time in one month. She had been quite ready to defend herself.
"‘Suspicious,’ I says. ‘Suspicious you can think all you want, because I had witnesses see him each time fall down.’ I says, ‘There’s nothing you can do.’"

Barbara explained to me that it was stereotypes of the poor that continued this unfair treatment. "I mean, you go to a doctor you don’t know, if you give them that medical card over the counter, they just start imagining. Well what’s that bruise from? How did he get that? You know. It’s like, I’m not on trial here, mister."

As Barbara spoke, the clatter of pots and pans came from the kitchen where Mary put away her cooking utensils.

"It must be nice to be able to have servants and eat caviar every night," Barbara said. She chuckled.

Barbara’s contact with Head Start had begun three years ago, when she and her husband had placed their son, Chris, in the program. Chris had been born with complicated physical disabilities. His organs were reversed and his immune system crippled. He required on-going medical attention.

Barbara turned around to greet her husband who had just walked into the Head Start Center. He was a young looking man despite his yellowish-white beard. As he approached he looked from one side of the room to the other.

"Oh, you’re spying on me," Barbara said. "I knew you would."

Barbara introduced me to Chris as he sat down on her left. He wore a jean jacket and a baseball cap. I asked Chris to tell me about the home he was building.

"Who are you writing for?" he asked me. He wasn’t quite ready for me to be the one asking the questions.

"You can ask him what it’s like to go to the welfare office," Barbara said to me.

Chris gradually grew comfortable with me. He and Barbara told me about the time they went to the town of Bridgton for a town voucher.

"We were waiting for the unemployment check," Barbara explained. "You have to wait six weeks for your unemployment check. And if that’s not bad enough, they hold the first one."

"Told ‘em I’d work for it," Chris said. "I says, ‘I don’t want it for free; I’ll work for it. It must be something you gotta have down here. Give me a break here.’" But the town refused.

"The worst part is, when you call some of these people up they act like the money belongs to them," Barbara said. "Finally I says forget this. I went to Maurice," Barbara referred to Geoff by his first name, "and Maurice went to the town hall and got a food voucher and filled it out for me. It was like no one wanted to help."

Chris, Barbara told me, had grown up in a "welfare" family.

"Many Christmases I received one coloring book and one set of crayons," Chris said. "I never had the things I wanted. Now, my kids have everything they want."

Barbara looked at me and laughed, "Not expensive stuff."

"Well," Chris said, his crooked teeth showing, "I go to the dump a lot." Barbara, Chris, and I laughed. "You’d be surprised what people throw away there."

"It’s like Christmas," Barbara said.

As Geoff and I drove to Rita’s home, I could detect a streak of Catholic indignation in his words. "You know, I’m a 1960s hippy," he said, "so I’m still riding high on the idealism of brotherhood and plain," Geoff tore his left hand from the steering wheel and raised it skyward, "and just plain humanness. Let’s start there let alone whatever all else really needs to happen."

It was a curious combination in Geoff: ex-hippy on the one hand, ex-priest on the other. He had grown up in a French Catholic family. "I was gonna be the priest of the bunch," he said. Once he had fulfilled that ambition, though, his other side, the hippy in him, overcame his Catholic background, and he began to question Christianity. In the spring of 1970, he left the priesthood.
"I had some very serious doctrinal differences with the Catholic church," Geoff said. "There isn't a creature on the earth that isn't filled with divinity. What the Christian churches have done is think themselves superior. I've never felt comfortable with that."

At Rita's house Geoff grabbed his black appointment book from the back seat of his car and carried it to her front door. He was bringing her an application for WIC (Women Infants and Children), PROP’s nutrition program for the young children of low-income mothers and pregnant women. Rita's three-year-old son, Jacob, was eligible.

Rita had divorced her husband, the father of all three of her children, more than a year ago. They had both been heavy drinkers.

"She and her husband tried AA," Geoff said. "It worked, but then she'd fall back." Now Rita was living in her boyfriend's two-story house.

Geoff joined Rita and her friend Lucy at the kitchen table. He asked Rita the questions on the form he had brought. Rita hadn't graduated from high school, and she couldn't read. As she described her son's daily eating habits, Geoff wrote the information onto the form.

Rita was a good example of the kind of clients Geoff called low-income mothers—young single women trying to support families, usually of two or three children. Geoff explained to me that few people realized poverty's prejudice toward women. At one of his meetings with community businessmen, one person had remarked that a certain welfare proposal was sexist because it only mentioned women.

"I remember blowing my stack at that point, trying to point out the feminization of poverty, which was an issue they hadn't dealt with at all."

As Geoff completed Rita's form, her son Jacob came into the room to say hello. Geoff patted him on the head and asked him how he was getting along. For a few moments, Jacob stayed to watch Geoff and Rita talk, but he was soon bored. He climbed on the kitchen stool and reached for a pencil lying on the counter. He wanted to take it into the TV room.

"Jacob," Rita said, with a raised, authoritarian voice. "No pencils in that room." But Jacob ignored his mother and kept after the pencil.

"No," Rita repeated herself, "listen to your mother. Now beat it."

Rita turned away from Jacob and addressed her friend. "Lucy, can you see what they're doing in there?"

Rita took a drag on her cigarette, while Lucy got up and walked over to the TV room.
"Get them to sit down and watch TV," Rita called to her.

Geoff asked Rita more questions from the form. Rita told Geoff that she did give Jacob sweets some of the time, but not too many. She didn't have the money to spare on sweets.

Melissa, Jacob's older sister, came into the kitchen and scooted a Hot Wheels car along the kitchen table. Its little wheels squeaked as Melissa made engine sounds. "V-room V-room."

"Melissa stop," Rita ordered. She could barely hear what Geoff was asking. "Back into that room so I can talk."

Geoff finished the form, but before he could get up from the table, Rita made sure to ask him a few things. "When can I apply for fuel assistance," she asked. "You still into Salvation Army stuff?" Geoff was authorized to distribute Salvation Army vouchers.

"Don't they have some kind of program around the Bridgton area that I can get into for food. I mean I'm talking about a food basket." Thanksgiving was four weeks away.

In the car, Geoff told me about Rita's boyfriend, Buddy, who had just come out of open heart surgery. He hadn't been granted Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

"There's no reason he shouldn't qualify," Geoff said. Like most cases up for SSI, Buddy's case would be appealed, and most likely he'd receive the benefits. The process often took at least six months, Geoff told me, six months of filling out forms, receiving rejection notices, and filling out forms again. Rita also suffered from medical problems, Geoff told me, medical problems that caused her to fall into severe depressions.

At first her doctors thought that her condition was the psychological fallout of her having so little money to support her three children, but reluctantly they had come to realize that Post Menstrual Syndrome was the culprit. Finally they prescribed medicines that brought her depressions under control.

"She attempted suicide two or three times," Geoff told me. "The last time she pulled a knife on herself in front of the kids."

Geoff and six of his colleagues, including his supervisor, Vicky Doughty, sat around a meeting table in the small basement room of PROP's Portland headquarters. In the adjoining room the children in PROP's day care program played on a miniature slide. Vicky had called today's emergency meeting to update all her social workers on the status of the Home Energy Assistance Program, what everybody usually called the "fuel assistance program."
"I've always had a bug, or a hair across my rump about the fuel assistance program," Geoff admitted to me. "It was always the program that literally gobbled up six months of social worker time, with horrible federal and state regulations thrown at us. The only way I'm able to do it is that I know it's a service that my clients desperately need."

The director of the fuel assistance program, Anita Geary, sat on Geoff's right. She explained the specifics about this year's fuel assistance program. The program's administrative budget had been severely cut, which meant that the staff of 17 had been reduced to seven.

"How much are we losing?" asked Debbie, a social worker whose territory covered Naples, a town only five miles from Geoff's home.

"We're down to $5,000 out of $40,000," Vicky answered.

"That's what I thought," Debbie said. She turned to the social worker sitting next to her, her friend Diane, and held out her hand. "Nice knowing you Di. See you later."

Luckily, though, PROP still had $15,000 left over from the previous year, and that $15,000, added to the $5,000, amounted to $20,000 available for this year's administrative costs.

To save as much money as possible, Geoff and his colleagues had asked clients if they would be willing to volunteer their time to take applications.

"I've got two volunteers who are practically crying looking forward to this," Geoff said. He exaggerated, but many of his clients were eager to help out friends and neighbors who were having hard times.

"I know," responded Anita, "but you know if I can't process them, then they don't do any good. It's thirty days to process them from the time you take it."

That was the state regulation, or "over-regulation" as Geoff put it. If PROP took more than 30 days to process an application, then the state would fine the agency five dollars per application for each additional day. Usually, PROP could process an application within two or three days, but during peak winter season, the backlog made that impossible.

Geoff described these kinds of regulations as bureaucratic sabotage, a clever way for some politicians to make welfare programs difficult to administer. "If they're impossible to administer—"See, that program's no good, it's not holding it's own'—then you can cancel it."

One of Geoff's colleagues asked Anita when the Energy Crisis Intervention Program would begin. ECIP was a program for clients who needed fuel delivered immediately.

"ECIP starts when they send money," said Anita. "I had a call this morning, young woman with a couple of little boys. The furnace won't go; they need to have the lines bled." Anita relaxed in her chair. "They didn't have any money to have anyone start that furnace, so I have to say no."

With years in her work, Anita had a calmness about her as she told her story.

"It's real hard to say no," she continued, "especially when you know they're sitting on $1.6 million up in Augusta and won't send it. They told us we're getting $39,000, but where is it?"

Geoff and his colleagues nodded their heads. As social workers, they were all familiar with the frustrations of bureaucracies.

"We went to a stress workshop," commented Diane, who sat across from Geoff. At the workshop the topic of conversation had drifted onto the fuel assistance program. "It ended up being one major bitch session," she said.

Vicky passed around a piece of white cardboard paper on which everyone's schedules were written. She wanted to arrange a time when the group could meet for a short seminar on how to fill out the fuel assistance forms. It seemed comical to me that social workers would hold a seminar on filling a form. Geoff explained later, though, that the forms were complex, and the slightest mistake delayed processing. Another instance of "over-regulation," I concluded.

To make time for Vicky's seminar, Geoff volunteered to reschedule a few clients.
"They’re used to that," he said. "I’ve trained them well." He and Vicky chuckled nervously. Geoff’s joke revealed an important truth about social work. His clients relied on him. If he were neglectful, they would suffer because of it. If he were diligent, they would benefit.

Daily Geoff worked under the weight of that responsibility, and if for one day he were to forget about it, then the hypertension pill he took every morning would remind him.

WHEN GEOFF drove into the Bridgton Town Hall parking lot, Peter and Suzette leaned against the bumper of Suzette’s car waiting for him. It was a quarter after one this Wednesday afternoon, and Geoff was 15 minutes late.

Geoff waved to the two of them and chuckled humbly as he mouthed an apology through the windshield. He parked his car, and grabbed his “brain” from the back seat.

Inside the Town office, a small crowd had gathered in the foyer, joined by Peter and Suzette. Geoff greeted everyone by their first names and asked who would be first. Abby, said Suzette, because Abby was there first and is too old to wait all day to see Geoff.

While Geoff met with Abby, I spoke with Suzette about Geoff. "He’s just flat out a nice person," she said. She went in to see Geoff after Abby finished. Her husband was sick, and she’d been laid off from her job at the knitting mill.

"I have been misled, misdirected, misinformed, since October, so I’m a day short or a month late or a month too early to qualify for anything," she said. But Geoff, "He is a big piece of hope."

"Suzette and her husband," Geoff explained to me, "are badly caught in the situation of the working poor, ‘cause they both plug like hell when there’s work enough, and they keep trying and trying and trying. The next thing you know, Suzette’s laid off. She barely gets a day or two of work, Richard’s laid off.

"Nothing personal here," Geoff looked at Suzette and put his hand on her knee, “but they’re treated like yo-yos.”

"Exactly," Suzette said.

Peter met with Geoff next. Peter had been a thorn in Geoff’s side lately, having followed a pattern familiar to Geoff, sliding from a state of temporary need into one of utter dependency.

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"What he does now is come in, takes his bills, and throws them at me and says, ‘Here, that’s for the town office.’

"He’s definitely put me in a position where I’m being manipulated very badly," Geoff said, the confidence gone out of his voice. "I’ve got to pull out of that."

Geoff was susceptible to these situations. His instinct was to help first and think later. That approach might work with older clients like Stella who would always depend upon him, but at 35, Peter was young. His excessive reliance on Geoff crippled his ability to support himself.

The pay phone in the foyer interrupted Geoff’s meeting with Peter. "That silly phone," Geoff complained.

Mike’s sister was calling to tell Geoff that Mike, who was dying of AIDS, had had his blood tested only to find that his red blood cell count had dropped 75 percent. Since May, Geoff had been working closely with Mike. Tomorrow he would need a ride into Portland to get blood transfusions. Geoff glanced over his black appointment book to see whose visits he would need to cancel. For a few, this would be the second cancellation.

At five o’clock, after Geoff had seen all his waiting clients—Kathy, Shirley, and Michelle—he headed home to North Sebago.

On the way, he dropped by Mike’s house in Naples to plan the next day’s trip to Maine Medical Center in Portland. Mike was watching Walt Disney in his living room, his house heated to 70 degrees and his TV dinner cooking in the oven.

Eleven months ago, when Mike..."
first learned that he had the AIDS virus, he left Boston as impetuously as had come, returning to his mother and two sisters in the Naples area where he had grown up. Mike's mother, though, had never accepted his homosexuality, and when he contracted AIDS she grew even more distant from her son. With little or no family support to back him, Mike had to depend on Geoff to drive him to his doctor's appointments in Portland.

Geoff sat down beside Mike and clasped his wrist to check his pulse. He held his other hand to Mike's forehead.

"Your pulse is fast and you feel hot," Geoff said, concerned.

"That's 'cause I'm scared shitless," Mike replied.

BARBARA RAISED her brow and confronted me with her eyes. "Do you know what it's like to have people come Christmas time and deliver a Christmas dinner to your house and deliver toys to your kids because you haven't got the money?"

I didn't speak. I hoped that she would answer her own question because I had no idea what it was like.

"It's not something that you're smiling about. I was crying all last Christmas. I didn't even have a dollar for a toy for my kids."

Barbara sighed. "Here it comes Christmas again, and it's going to be the same way."

Recently, Barbara had signed up for free gifts. It made her think about the welfare benefits she received: AFDC, food stamps, and Supplemental Security Income for Chris junior.

"It's degrading to go in the store with food stamps. I sort of slip them on the counter real quick and then they have to count it right there and do it real slow so everybody in the store can see it."

Barbara nodded her head from side to side.

"The mailman will come and deliver you mail to your house: 'I bet you were looking for these.' And they'll hand you your envelope of food stamps.

"They have free samples in the mail," Barbara continued, "we always seem to get extra. 'Well, we thought maybe you could use a little bit more than anybody else.'"

Barbara snickered. "It's sickenin'," she said.

So sickening that Barbara refused to apply for free hot lunches for her children. "I'm not going to tell everybody that I don't have money, you know. I can afford three dollars a week for my son's lunch."

But the school officials pleaded with Barbara to sign the papers. "So I just overdid it. I put down too much money. I'm not cheating, I'm just telling them I make too much."

"Yeah, this town was something else," Chris senior said. "When I first moved to this town I moved a scummy old trailer over there and I says, 'Well I'll build my house and get ahead, you know.' All pipe dreams."

"We've had nothing but problems ever since," Barbara explained. Eight months later the Code Enforcement Officer came down to tell Chris that his trailer couldn't stay on the land. "He comes and he takes out his tape measure and measures out the trailer, 'You can't live in this.'"

"Why not it's registered isn't it? Why can't I put it here?"

"Because it's out of code. It's too old."

Eventually they took Chris to court over his trailer and the house he wanted to build. "I made an agreement with them that I would build my house and be living in it by October 31st, and have that trailer removed by October 31st of this year."

The house was almost finished, but he never got the building permit. Chris claimed the Code Enforcement Officer wouldn't grant it to him.

"I'm putting up the rafters now; I've just about got my house built. I destroyed my trailer yesterday. It's sitting on my property."

"If they say, 'You were supposed to have that trailer moved,' I'm going to look right at them, and I'm going to say, 'What trailer? All I see is a pile of rubbish.'" Both Barbara and Chris chuckled.

The Code Enforcement Officer, they explained, was a friend of their belligerent neighbors, a
man and his wife, who didn’t want Barbara and Chris to move their trailer into the neighborhood.

“They looked right at me several times,” said Chris, “and says, ‘We don’t want you down here in the first place.’ Well I’ll tell ya, when I was a younger man and I was single, I’d a popped them in a minute.”

Chris chuckled again with his mouth half open and his head leaned back.

“They called the Humane Society on us,” Barbara said, “saying our dog’s not being fed. The humane society comes down, and the guy gets out, takes one look at my dog, and he says, ‘Is that a dog or a pig? That dog is not underfed.’”

The wife used to wait for Barbara to get home to yell at her. “I’d be getting off the PROP bus here, and this woman would ‘Mrs. Evans,’” Barbara raised her voice to mimic the woman. “I mean she screams at me in public, in front of everybody. She’s got her kids doing it at my kids.”

“I’m literally coming down to the bottom line,” Chris said. “They don’t understand me. I usually get what I want. That’s a fact.”

I knew that Chris was exaggerating just as he had exaggerated that his children had “everything they want.”

“When I want peace of mind,” he continued, “then I have peace of mind. I don’t like anything destructing that. And I’ll go through any extreme, if I’m forced to it, to show them I mean it.”

Geoff MET ME at PROP’s main office in Portland. Mondays he usually came in to see his supervisor and to catch up on all his paperwork. In his office I could hear the rhythmic thud of music coming up through the floor. Geoff explained that the basement below housed an exercise gym. Sometimes, Geoff said, he could barely hear his own thinking over the grunts and groans of men lifting barbells.

“Sounds obscene from up here, doesn’t it?”

Geoff had a gift for turning his frustrations into a laugh, and his background as a priest added an interesting twist of innocence to his sometimes crude humor.

Geoff was just getting off work when I arrived in Portland. He

"Geoff makes you feel like you’re human," Barbara Evans says. "Like you belong on this earth. Others, they cut you down, they degrade you."
and his housemate Bill had invited me over to dinner that night. Bill promised to cook his favorite dish, smothered steak.

On the way to North Sebago, an hour’s drive from Portland, I asked Geoff about the Evans. The interview with Barbara and Chris was still fresh in my mind. I knew already that the Evans family was a complex case for Geoff, especially because they had only recently moved into the one completed room of their otherwise unbuilt house.

“What Dad did,” Geoff said, “was he sectioned off one part of the house, and Mom and Dad, two kids, and a dog are living in a room about the size of my office.

“It’s not a case of outright neglect, but it’s jeopardy for the kids.

“My concern is for little Chris,” Geoff said, “because he catches everything that comes along.” I remembered Chris had been born with a crippled immune system.

On the one hand, I thought to myself, I could see Geoff’s point. The Evans should do better than have their children live in one room of an unbuilt house, a house with no indoor plumbing, no running water, and no electricity. “They’re keeping warm by using the gas stove oven,” Geoff said.

On the other hand, the Evans didn’t have the money to do better for their children. They had dismantled their trailer on October 31st, as they had promised the town of Baldwin they would, and they couldn’t afford the expense of living somewhere else while Chris worked on the new house. Chris’ arguments with the Town over acquiring a building permit complicated the problem.

“Technically, if the town of Baldwin wanted to push,” Geoff explained, “they could have him strip down every board of that house.”

As the Evans’ social worker, it was Geoff’s concern to mediate between the couple and the town, with the hope that Chris would soon get a building permit. Otherwise the town could undo what progress had been made on the house and prolong the family’s crowded living conditions.

“It’s interesting,” Geoff said, “I’m always in the middle. I’ve gained the trust of the town officials, but I’m trying to be an advocate for my clients too.”

Being an advocate for the Evans sometimes proved difficult.

“Your pulse is fast and you feel hot,” Geoff said to Mike, who had contracted AIDS and whose family had turned their backs on him. “That’s because I’m scared shitless,” Mike said.
"They have no common sense understanding of the children's welfare," Geoff said, "at least not from my middle class point of view."

Geoff tugged at his beard as he spoke. He seemed uncomfortable criticizing the Evans. I remembered what he had told me about being "a 1960s hippy," and I knew that he rebelled against his own lingering middle class values, that he favored "the idealism of brotherhood and sisterhood" to the cynicism of the me generation.

The Evans, though, were still stubborn. "They approach the problem like they're going to be rejected," Geoff said. "It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. Chris has not applied for a building permit saying, 'They won't give me one.'"

"But Chris told me that he had applied," I objected. "I hope that's the case," Geoff replied. "Then it makes everything good for the Evans, but the head selectman told me outright that he had never bothered to come in and request an application."

Geoff shrugged his shoulder and stared out the window at the windy road. We were maybe 20 minutes from his home.

I recalled Chris' story about asking for a building permit from the Code Enforcement Officer. "He just kept giving me diddly squat excuses as why he wouldn't give me a building permit," Chris had said.

I wondered whether or not Chris had exaggerated his case. Geoff seemed to think so. In his view, the Evans were too eager to point the finger of blame at the town, rather than sit down and resolve issues calmly. A lifetime of being on the bottom of society, I thought, might have something to do with that.

"They've had some rough breaks," Geoff admitted, "and I'm not denying that. I just wish I could snap their awareness around so they wouldn't create a crisis every time."

"Have you ever told them this, about their negative approach?" I asked.

"I've been trying to educate them that the town isn't necessarily the enemy," Geoff said. "Here's where being an advocate puts me in a strange position. I feel like when they're off the wall, I should be putting them back on the wall." Geoff sighed. "I really haven't been very successful."

By this time, Geoff and I were almost at his home. When we drove up his driveway and parked his Escort in the garage, it was dark outside.

In the kitchen Bill watched the six o'clock news, our dinner simmering on the kerosene-converted wood stove. Geoff had forgotten to stop by the store to pick up beer, Bill said. Our talk on the way home must have distracted him.

"He forgets everything," Bill joked. While Geoff ran to the store, Bill and I sat around the kitchen table watching TV and talking about Geoff, who, according to Bill, was applying for a higher position opening up at PROP.

"I wish Geoffroy would get that position opening up at PROP," Geoff explained, "but he qualified his thought by approaching things differently. 'Then there's a chance."

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"I wish Geoffroy would get that other job before he drops dead like his father," Bill said. Bill usually referred to Geoff by his full last name. It was the maternal instinct coming out in him. Like Geoff, Bill had once been a nurse and a monk.

Geoff never had mentioned his father's death to me. He had died of a heart attack at the age of 54, Bill explained. The thought shed new light on the seriousness of Geoff's hypertension. Though he might decaffeinate his coffee and desalt his food and take a hypertension pill every morning, he still couldn't avoid the stresses of his job. Stella Ella B., Chris and Barbara Evans, all his other clients—they would all be there, day to day, month to month, year to year. Once in a while there might be a change in one or two faces, but the problems, they would remain.

Geoff got back from the store with two six packs, one six pack of Old Milwaukee, Bill's favorite, and another of Colt 45, Geoff's preference. Geoff poured himself a mug of beer.

Over dinner our conversation, like many of my other conversations with Bill and Geoff, turned to the subject of social work and helping the poor.

"Why some people don't blow their brains out living in their situations, I just don't know," remarked Bill in his characteristically blunt manner. Bill's cynical wit often balanced well with Geoff's idealism. Tonight, though, Geoff wasn't so idealistic.

"The only reason they haven't blown their brains out," Geoff explained, "is that they don't deal with the real issues. Instead, they create a common enemy and that keeps them going.

"The key factor with most of my clients is just to help change their attitude a slight bit. If they could bring themselves to just say, 'Maybe if I approach things differently,' then there's a chance."

Geoff worried that what he meant by approaching things differently was to see things his way.

"I guess there's something to be said for mainstreaming," he said, but he qualified his thought with a quick reconsideration. "But if mainstreaming means middle class values, we're in for trouble: there are a lot of middle class values that suck."

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KRISTIN'S SCHOOLS
“Kris, come here, please,” the teacher says. Kris does not leave her seat. “Kris, would you come here, please?”

“What for?”

The teacher motions Kris outside the classroom where I stand waiting. Kris rises from the table muttering. She knocks a chair out of her way. The other students stop their work. She marches into the hallway. “What do you want?”

Her arms are crossed. Her body is tense and rigid. Her face is unsmiling.

“This woman wants to talk to you.”

At that moment, I am not so sure that I do really want to talk to her. Having been a teacher at an alternative high school in Maine for four years, I knew the signs of a defiant, distrustful student, or at least I thought I did.

“What for?”

“She’s writing a magazine article about school.” Her arms unfold and go down to her side. She stops staring at the floor. Her eyes focus on my face. Her frown has disappeared. She realizes she’s not in trouble again.

“How come you want to interview me?”

“Your teacher recommended you.”

“Oh.” She stares momentarily at her teacher and agrees to be interviewed.

Kristin Myers, age 16, is a ninth grader at Bonney Eagle High School in Standish, Maine. She lives in a modest house in Hollis, Maine, with her family. Both her
parents work. Her father works two jobs and her mother works part time to support their family of five.

Kris should be a junior in high school this year, but she is two years behind in school. By kindergarten, she was already falling. She is one of thousands of students who are considered at risk of dropping out of school. According to the Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services, the 1987 graduation rate is 75 percent. This rate is computed by the numbers of students who enter ninth grade and who graduate with their class four years later. This rate is comparable to the national figure.

Over 2,700 students left Maine high schools last year. What this number does not show is how much higher the dropout rate is in poor families than middle and upper class families. According to the most recent census done in 1980, the Maine State Planning Office concluded that the high school dropout rate was more than double for poor youth than for non poor youth.

A poor youth is identified as one from a family living below the federal poverty line, which was $6,700 for a family of four in 1980, and about $11,000 now.

Joyce Benson of the Maine State Planning Office suggests several reasons for the higher dropout rate among the poor. Higher absenteeism due to inadequate clothing, lack of transportation and lack of money may be contributing factors. Yet she feels that these reasons alone do not fully explain the situation. Others suggest stereotyping of poor students as “dumb” by the community and school, lack of role models and parents’ attitudes about the value of education.

Through Kris Myers, I wanted to learn about the human side of these statistics. Even though I had worked with many students who had dropped out or were on the verge of doing so, I never completely understood why they left.

I wanted to know Kris’ views about her struggle through an often hostile school system. I wanted to understand her feelings about what she is facing, because she ultimately will make the decision about whether to stay in school or not.

A MIDST BELLS ringing, announcements blaring, and students walking noisily down the hallways, Kris and I talked about school. During our conversation, I learned that she stayed back in first and second grades because she didn’t understand the work and did poorly. She is frustrated by being behind two grades, but insists she will continue.

“I can’t do nothing about it. I’d be graduating in 1989 if I hadn’t stayed back twice. But I’ve already got my mind to it that I’m going to take night classes when I’m a junior.”

She says it’s hard being 16 and only in ninth grade. “It ain’t too much fun, believe me. Oh man, I’ve had a lot of people come up to me and go, ‘How old are you?’ Almost seventeen. You’re only a freshman?”

Kris says she likes school, but when I ask her about individual subjects, she doesn’t seem happy. “I hate English. I’m flunking it. It’s so boring. Sit there and do nothing.”

“I am dropping geography. I don’t understand it. He goes too fast. So I’m getting out of that class. Don’t like gym. Gotta change up. I hate gym.”

I am interested to know what classes she does like. “Third period, I have math. I have Mr. Russell. He’s pretty nice. He’s very easy. Fourth period I have Mr. Hatfield. He’s cool. I can talk to him about anything I want.”

And even though she hates gym, she likes the teacher. “She’s cool. She’s real funny. When you come in the gym, she goes, ‘How ya doing?’”

Kris has a tutorial lab two periods a day for extra help with a special education teacher, Marie Tanguay. “She’s cool. I like her. She’s really funny. She doesn’t yell a lot. If you need help, she’ll help you, no problem. Sometimes I don’t understand some of the material that the teacher gave us, so I get her to help me.

“But if I didn’t have it, man, I’d be in trouble. I wouldn’t pass any of my classes. I mean being in high school till I’m 27.”

She tells me about her future plans. “I want to be a cop. I don’t take drugs and I don’t like what is happening on the streets.” Her voice races and gets louder. “It’s going to keep me in school. I’m gonna be a cop no matter what.”

Kris gets excited and she begins to stutter. She later tells me that this is due to her learning disability. It’s hard to understand her. She says that teachers get frustrated by this.

“I don’t care if I become a police officer at the age of 36 as long as I become a police officer.”

The bell rings and she has to go to class. As Kris leaves, I ask to meet with her again, this time at home. “Sure.”

Kris lives in a small house in Hollis with her brother Freddie, her sister Kelly and her parents, Shirley and Fred Myers. Fred Myers is 39 years old. He dropped out of high school when he was 16. He went into the military service and later earned his GED. He works hard to support his family.

Fred is working two jobs right now. He is a mechanic at U Haul and a postal worker. One reason he is working two jobs is to get the family through Christmas. “Last Christmas we had a hard time of it. And this Christmas here we want to breeze through
without any problems.” He does get tired but he shrugs it off. “The extra money right now is coming in handy. So if I get a little bit tired right now, it’s no big deal.”

Shirley Myers is 36 years old. She dropped out of high school in her senior year. She currently works part time at Sears in the shoe department.

Later I talk with Kris alone about her parents working. She says it’s hard for her. “I got a lot of responsibilities when my parents aren’t there. I have to take care of Freddie and Kelly, make sure they’re fed. Make sure their homework is done. Make sure the house is clean. Make sure they are in by 8:30 at night.”

She feels overwhelmed sometimes. “They gave me too much responsibilities and I just can’t handle it. I just feel like saying, Pfft. Heck with it. I have enough problems here at school than to worry about what’s going on at home.” At school she worries about home. “I do a lot of thinking, believe me. A lot of thinking about what’s going to happen. If my father works too hard and dies and what’s going to happen to us kids. I think all the time.

“Sometimes I think so much that I can’t even hear the teacher. I just go and daydream. Sometimes, I just think too much and sometimes I just go off somewhere’s else.

“Sometimes I just feel like crying, just punching something or someone, but I keep my cool. Don’t say nothing to nobody.” I know these strong feelings don’t just go away. I ask her what she does with them.

“I cry a lot. In my room. Nobody knows. My parents, nobody. Not even my sister, not even my friends. But it’s the way I want it. “I hide it in school. I got to. Cuz everybody is used to seeing me in a good mood. If I come to school in a bad mood, I’ll have twenty thousand million people going are you all right? What’s wrong?”

SINCE SHE WAS five years old, Kristin has been a special education student. Getting the proper educational services for her has been a battle. Her mother, Shirley Myers explained as Kris, her father and I are sitting at their kitchen table.

“The early years were extremely frustrating. She was unable to keep up, grasp new material, got a lot of things backwards. She would get the letters of her name Kristin, but sometimes it would look like a jigsaw puzzle. She just had a lot of problems with small motor coordination, following directions, that type of thing.
Kris repeated kindergarten and had a hard time in first grade, which she also repeated. "It was a terrible year for her. I remember her coming home and she just boldly announced, 'That's it. I quit.' She was frustrated, extremely frustrated."

Mrs. Myers explained that at this time her sister, who was a former special education director in Connecticut, and a friend who was a special education teacher, gave her a lot of guidance. With their assistance, it was decided that Kristin be tested for learning disabilities.

The tests were given to Kris by the school system. They recommended that Kris be placed in a classroom for educably mentally retarded children (EMR).

"I just completely lost it. She absolutely showed no signs of retardation. She was a very bright, happy child," Mrs. Myers exclaimed.

Her sister urged Mrs. Myers to have Kris retested. "The test they used, it was just a basic I.Q. test. What they were seeming to do was to give Kristin tests and set up a picture of a child who fit into the EMR pattern.

Through Mrs. Myers' persistent efforts, Kris was retested by a clinical psychologist, Dr. Barbara Heath. She concluded that Kristin was learning disabled, not mentally retarded.

Mrs. Myers explained that the school agreed to give Kristin one
and a half hours a week of time with a learning disabilities teacher, far less than what she needed. At this point, Mrs. Myers took Kris out of the school and placed her in the Salmon Falls School, a private school.

"Every penny of it was worth it, because they were absolutely marvelous. It was the perfect atmosphere for Kristin. It was such a turn around for her. There was a lot of positive reinforcement where Kristin had always met with negative reinforcement, and all the positive encouragement just brought her around."

Meanwhile, the Myers sued the school district and they won the suit. The school was ordered to provide intensive instruction daily for two to three hours from a learning disabilities specialist. A resource room was established at Hollis Elementary School.

"When I left, I was hurt because I had to leave," Kris remembered. "I met a lot of friends, I didn’t want to leave ‘cause I liked it, but I had to leave."

Back in public school, there were some good teachers and some bad ones. "I had Mrs. Waters in third. She was sweet to me. She gave the kids a big lecture about me. She said I try hard enough and that they should learn from me. She cared a lot.

"When I was in fourth grade, I had a teacher I couldn’t stand. I hated her. She gave me all these rules to go by. Like I had a little sheet and if I was good for the rest of the day, she’d put a smiling face on the sheet. And if I got five smiling faces in a row, I’d get a prize at the end of the week. Well, I couldn’t do that."

Mrs. Myers added, "She had teachers that didn’t know what learning disabilities were. And one of her teachers liked to draw sad faces on her paper.” This upset Kris. When Mrs. Myers asked the teacher to stop, "She was adamant that she was going to use her sad faces. She felt her little sad faces were a very big part of her teaching curriculum.”

Kris remembered another teacher, Mr. Casey. "I didn’t like the way he treated me. He treated me like I was always a criminal. He’d always pick on me. He’d always say you ain’t doing that right. You ain’t doing this right. Sometimes I just couldn’t do it."

Kris feels that her learning disability requires patience from teachers. She feels all kids deserve patience. "Because I have a learning disability that takes a lot of patience and a lot of time. If I study for a test overnight, I forget everything by tomorrow morning by the time I take the test. That’s why I flunk it. I think that teachers have to have patience with kids without what I have."

What does the future hold for Kris? Shirley Myers wonders. "She’s going to be seventeen in March and she’s still a freshman. That does bother me. She does seem to like school so much. She has talked about possibly doing two grades together, which I don’t think she could handle. I don’t know what’s going to happen.

"It’s a fear. Will she stay in? I’m hoping. That’s all I can do. Keep my fingers crossed.”

Kris has major obstacles to overcome if she is to graduate. She doesn’t seem to like any of her classes. She still has three years left to go. She gets discouraged.

Kris also has some things in her favor. She has two parents who care about her and support her efforts to stay in school. She has some teachers, a guidance counselor and friends she is able to talk to.

She has a goal. She fervently wants to be a police officer. To reach that goal she must finish school.

Most importantly, she believes in herself. Her attitude is her greatest asset. She believes she will succeed. “I promised my father before he died, he’d see me graduate. That’s what he wants to see, so I’m going to let him have it.”

This article was written when Kristin was a freshman. She is now a sophomore, one year closer to gaining her high school diploma.
Our list comes entirely from unassigned and utterly unpaid for reviews. We wouldn't pay a plug nickel for any of them. And though it was suggested, with merit, we've resisted mentioning Burger Kings. This is an informal guide to places where locals feel comfortable enough to sit, eat and talk and not have to worry about looking right, eating right or their wallet. We reply on suggestions from readers. We welcome others. Tell us about the place, what goes on and how it came to be.

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 Frenner opens at 6, closes 13 hours later at 7 and does it all herself at age 70. Coffee and hot chocolate go $1.50. There's one lunch special every day.

BIDDEFORD
Colonial Hut. 66 Alfred Road. Not what it once was or as popular. But the French Canadian Club Richeleau 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.

BINGHAM
Thompson's Restaurant. In the center of town on Route 201. The kind of town on Route 201 where people still talk about the deer that broke through one of the front plate glass windows 20 years ago and ran into the men's room sending the occupants out with their trousers down. Hours: 5:30 A.M.-8:30 P.M. every day except Sunday when it's closed.

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 P.M. Sunday through Thursday; 24 hours Friday and Saturday. Early Bird Special: 4:30-8:30 A.M., 2 eggs, toast and homemeals, $1.25. Dinner 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 beer 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
Doris's Cafe. Route 11 on the way to Eagle Lake. Across from the Dodge Dealer. If 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' large succulent omelettes and thick homemade French Toast. Only three bucks. Comes with a smile.

HERMON/BANGOR
Dysart's Truckstop. Just off Exit 44 of interstate 95 in Hermon about three miles south of Bangor. See Salt issue number 28 for article about this place. Dysart's 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 he's driven 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 soups. Carol, the owner/cook, is something. Easy to be in the middle of a minor war of give and take.

LIVINGSTON
Tip's Lunch. On the land side of Water Street next to the Lubec Narrows. 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: 9 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 great old Helen's. But the thick pies with thick topping of whipped cream are still the greatest. Counter area has closest feel to the old Helen's.

MILBROOK
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 blueberries' barrens' country.

PORTLAND

DI Filippo's Ye Olde Pancake Shoppe. Forget what the name conjures up. 617 Congress Street. Breakfast and lunch. Hours: Monday to Friday, 5 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 DeFilippo'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 the old Casco Bay Ferries pier off Commercial Street. First name place for people who work 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 nam today."

"Just sit yourself right down, Speedy."

Village Cafe. 112 Newbury Street. Inexpensive Italian food. You get what you pay for. Serves as a reminder of Portland's Italian community before it was dispersed by housing renewal projects, and a link for the remaining community. Micucci's Italian grocery is around the corner on India Street. Hours: 11 A.M.-11:30 P.M. Monday to Thursday; 11 A.M.-12:30 P.M. Friday and Saturday; closed Sunday.

PORTSMOUTH (NEW HAMPSHIRE)
Rosa's. We realize this is just over the state line, but it's one of the two places outside of Maine that's worth eating at. 60 State Street in the downtown. Straight Italian food. Not the
same since recent expansion and renovations. Catch the Memorial Bridge All Stars musical group—a mixture of ages and instruments from piano, trombone, drums, to clarinet. Heavy on old tunes. Play every Wednesday evening.

**SACO**

**The Plaza.** Main Street. Don’t befooled by the fancy new front. The Plaza is a great old girl in a new hat. The steam that clouds the windows on a winter day comes from the same 50-year-old coffee and water urns that began belching out strong black coffee in 1936. Wooden booths and teak wall paneling are also that vintage. Mashed potatoes, meatloaf and realline from a can in the two dollar range.

**Rapid Ray’s.** Center of Main Street. Gussied up from former elongated van of duo Rapid Ray and Dynamite Don. Part of the gentrification look for Saco which no one thought possible two-three years ago. Biggest bargain: steamed hot dogs. This is pure hot dog heaven with servers you’d think if you met them on the street sold hot dogs for a living. Have hamburgers as well.

**SANFORD**

**Redman’s Corner Diner.** Corner of Washington Street and Pioneer Avenue in the center of town. Eighteen stools line a long straight counter. There’s a gumball machine behind. A couple of two chair tables plus one for four round out the seating options. Hours: Monday to Friday, 5 A.M.-2 P.M.; Saturday, 6 A.M.-1 P.M.; Sunday, 7 A.M.-12 noon. Breakfast served 5 A.M.-11 A.M. Monday to Friday and all day Saturday and Sunday. Homemade toast rivals Wonder Bread for airiness. Homemade pie: 90 cents. Daily special that day was steak and eggs for $3.50. Highest price on menu is under “Dinners” at $4.50. An 18 Wheeler goes for $3.50.

**SEBAGO LAKE**

**Sam’s Corner Cafe.** Intersection of Route 35 and 114. Breakfast from 4 A.M. to 2 P.M. daily. Coffee 25 cents. This is where real men eat. Late one recent Sunday morning the three sided counter is all locals. A man in late 30s, early 40s, balding, unshaven, wearing loose clothes comes in through the front door.

“How are ya,” someone says to him.

“Not bad.”

He sits down next to three women in their twenties, then leans over the counter and looking at them says, “Morning, girls.”

One asks him, “You just get up?”

“No, I’ve already thrown some hay.”

Jim the waiter in turn asks him, “What do you want?”

“Scrambled.”

“Anything else?”

“Nope.”

An older man behind the counter area in the kitchen queries, “You want some toast with that, John?”

“Yup.”

“Any other?”

“Yup.”

When he gets his eggs he leans and stretches over the top of the counter in front of the girls with most of his belly—“Excuse me,” he says—and puts his hand down inside the counter for a bottle of ketchup.

At the other side of the counter (there are a couple of booths off to one side) a man with his wife asks, “You got your rifle oiled yet, Jim?”

“Nope. I don’t think I’m even gonna go this year unless my boy comes up.”

“No, two years ago I did. Didn’t even see one last year.”

“Your boy’s coming up isn’t he?”

“Yes. He says he’s going to.”

**TURNER**

**Jimbo’s Restaurant and Truckstop.** Route 4, a mile or two south of the center part of Turner and on the same route. Open 24 hours daily. A long open room inside with a bunch of tables along with a front counter on one end with a couple of stools. A sign above the counter proclaims, “Senior Citizens Discount 10%.” A board near the same spot says “Weekly deluxe steak dinner drawing. This week’s winner—Todd.”

A full salad bar lines the opposite end of the room. $3.85 gets one an order of liver and onions.

On one Friday night, three Androsoggin County sheriff department members in brown uniforms occupied two sides of a booth. They were deep in conversation, particularly in twisting their waitress.

“Give us a can of Alpha (dogfood),” said one to her when she first approached their booth. They’re regulars no doubt.

“Put it in the microwave and put some gravy on it,” the one continued.

“Black label, that’s raunchy stuff.”

**WALDOBORO**

THE SALT PILE
BACK ISSUES, BOOKS & BINDINGS

The Salt Two book (hardbound, 433 pages) sells for $14.95 plus $1.00 for shipping. The cost of back issues is $3.00 each plus $.50 shipping, with the exception of Nos. 21 & 22 (Eastport for Pride) that costs $6.95 plus $1.00 for shipping. Library rates for back issues are available. Binders (each holds 8 issues) are available for $9.25 including shipping cost.

No.1---Sold Out.
No.2---Sold Out.
No.3---Sold Out.
No.4---Farming with Clifford Jackson; How to Build a Lobster Trap (Stilly Griffin); Dowser (Gordon MacLean and George Martin); Wildwood Chapel; Blueberry Hill Ghosts; Wild Honeybee Hunt (Monty Washburn); Charcoal Making (Ava Ross); Cottage Cheese (Eleanor Nedeau); Masonry (Willie Grendell).
No.5---The Forks; Bear Trapping (Russell Kennedy); Old Bottles (Ted Towne); Willis Gowen’s Drugstore; Making Flintlock Guns; Arthur Fretwell’s Wooden World; Gooch’s Beach.
No.6---Sold Out.
No.7---Maine Barn Raising; Bean Hole Beans; Perkins Tide Mill; Early Greek Immigrant in Maine (Pericles Economos); Snowshoe Making.
No.8---Sold Out.
Nos.9 & 10---(Bicentennial Issue) North Haven Island; Goat Island Lighthouse; Gill Netting; Sea Moss Pudding; Sam and Hazel Wildes; Designing with Shells; Ships in Bottles (Richard Nickerson); Boat Building (Herb Baum); Logging (Grover Morrison); Horse Pulling (Dick Wallingford); New Sweden; Making Maple Syrup; Cluny McPherson in Potato Land; Basket Making; Making Potato Barrels; Stone Walls; Country Auctions (George Martin).
No.11---Dragging (Lester Orcutt); Fiddleheading; Making Bait Bags (Ada Foss); Making a Duck Blind; Willie and Elizabeth Ames; Whistle Making.
No.12---Tuna Fishing (Ken Hutchins); Butter Making (Mary Turner); Stone Walls (Mortared); Fly Tying (Martin Pieter); Porcelain Figures; Sail Making; Sumach Sap Spiles.
No.13---River Driving (12 chapter series); Cider Making; Old Time Christmases (interviews with scores of Salt’s people about Christmas 50 and 60 years ago).
No.14---Grandfather’s Golden Ear; Marie Gallaros: 50 Years in the Mills; Felling a Tree; Paddle Making; Cod Liver Oil; Ken Berdeen’s Lilacs; Swan’s Island (Part 1); Maine Diner.
No.15---Fishing Cutting; Laying the Keel; Swan’s Island, Part 2 (Ruth Moulton); Walter Stinson, Basil Joyce and Edwin Colet; Country Sawmill.
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.
No.17---Friendship Sloops (RALPH STANLEY); Rigging the Endeavor; Sam Polk; When You’re Married to a Fisherman; Stenciling; Medicine Man (Senabeh Francis), Part 2.
No.18---Cecil Kelley’s Tales; Digging Clams with Jake; Greek Easter; Fly Casting; Wreck of the Schooner Charles; Sam Miller, the Minstrel Man; Alewives; Bertha Guerin; Lofting a Boat; Helen Perley.
No.19---Mount Desert Island; Draper and Coneheads; Island Sheep Drive; Lobstering (Casey Stender).
No.20---Island Shepherdess (Jenny Cirone); Island Sheep Drive; Lobstering (Casey Stender); Boat Building (Herb Baum); Old Time Christmas; Tour Bus; Rusticator.
No.21---(Eastport for Pride) Eastport: Then and Now; Inside a Sardine Factory; Politics, People and Pittston; Revival of the Waterfront.
No.22---(I Could Never Call Myself a Yankee) Five Immigrant Experiences: Italians (David Broggia); French Canadians (Antoinette Bernier); Russians (Ilsa Pasechnik); Greeks (John Anagnostis); Japanese (Suzuko Laplante).
No.23---Shakers at Sabbathday Lake; Fitzhenry’s Store; Weaving (Bessie Swain); Blacks in Maine (John Caskill and Geneva Sherron).
No.24---Waiting for Spring (Glady McLean); Island Shepherdess (Jenny Cirone); Island Sheep Drive; Lobstering (Casey Stender).
No.25---Quilting; Salt Marsh Dikes; Wild Blueberry Harvest; French Canadian Musician (Toots Buthol).
No.26---Beals Island Storyteller (Avery Kelley); Fencing the Sea (Lobstermen vs. Musselmen); Maine Says No to Nuclear Waste; One Room Island School (Cliff Island); One Room School Teacher (Ruth Jackson Pinkham).
No.27---Beals Island Storyteller (Avery Kelley); Fencing the Sea (Lobstermen vs. Musselmen); Maine Says No to Nuclear Waste; One Room Island School (Cliff Island); One Room School Teacher (Ruth Jackson Pinkham).
No.28---istoryteller (Avery Kelley of Beals Island); Dysart’s Truckstop (Bangor); McCurdy’s Smokehouse (Lubec); Francis O’Brien, Bookseller (Portland).
No.29---Maine: Myth and Reality; Being Young in Maine; The Great North Woods; The Homeless; UPS Man (Saco Peary Valley).
No.30---Tourism in Maine): Colonists and Coneheads; Young workers in the trade; Boynton McKay Drugstore (Camden); Tourism on the Seashore and the Lakeshore; Tour Bus; Rusticator.
No.31---Lost Hunter at Chesuncook; Custom House Wharf (Portland); Repairing engines unseen (Ken Doane); Woman rural doctor (Marion Moulton).
No.32---Life at the Summer Hotel; Airline Road Tour; Les Acadiens du Madawaska; Lost Hunter of Chesuncook (Part 2); Fifty years a bellman (John Foster); Outsiders in Friendship.
No.33---The Mall: Community and the Concrete Beast; Vassals of the Farm; The Farming Edge.
Edited with an introduction by Pamela Wood

SALT TWO
Bangor Truckstop
Portland's Philosopher-Bookman
McCord's Smokehouse

"The clouds clamp a lid over the vital blueberry flats of Maine. A hopper prints prices and waits, 40,000 pounds in and empty. Two thousand girls. They keep the ra. Ya gotta beat that one, course she'll wear it right under ya. ... (page 11)"

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"The movies make trucking so glamorous. It ain't though. I want you to see what it's really like. There's sunshine in Bangor. A Maine institution for truckers and locals. "From Kentucky to Canada, it's the only one."

"This is Walter. The bear is Cuddles. Walter's struggling to overcome child abuse. He's also trying to find a home. The two may be the same."

"Six million people come to Maine on vacation each year. Do they make life better or worse for Mainers? How are they changing the state?"

"On Custom House Wharf, life stays much the same. That's the way Fannie likes it. Grime, fish and sweat. Not a place for Yuppies."

"The big, old Summer Hotels are a dwindling breed. They cater to a lost elegance. But some people go without jacket and tie!"

"Malls may not be the village square, but people meet in the neon light of the concrete beast to forge the same old links of belonging."
"Our life is pretty bare bones as far as material things go."