SALT, Vol. 11, No. 4
Salt Institute for Documentary Studies

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/salt_magazine
Part of the Human Ecology Commons, Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons, Sociology of Culture Commons, and the Work, Economy and Organizations Commons

Recommended Citation
Salt Institute for Documentary Studies, "SALT, Vol. 11, No. 4" (1993). Salt Magazine Archive. 42. https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/salt_magazine/42

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Salt Magazine Archive by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.
IRGINIA and her child find a place in Maine’s broccoli harvest, where 350 migrants “try to make it a home.”
"Take the Challenge"

If you want to chart a course that gives positive direction to your life, let Admiral Farragut Academy help you reach your full potential. Rich in the traditions of honor, integrity, self-discipline and pride of achievement, the Academy's balanced curriculum includes sailing, music, and sports. In addition to college preparatory courses, Farragut's college acceptance rate is 100 percent. At Admiral Farragut Academy we stand on ceremony.

Small classes, individual attention and naval training provide focus and teach students confidence, leadership and respect for yourself and the world in which you live. Our cadets accept responsibility eagerly and proudly. With so many routes to choose, Farragut helps girls and boys skillfully navigate life's challenges. Take the helm to the future. Call today for more information about Admiral Farragut Academy. And set yourself on the right course.

Admiral Farragut Academy
601 Riverside Drive, Pine Beach, New Jersey 08741
Admissions Office, (800) 927-3049
CONTENTS

3 Nineteen Pine Street
Soon the Salt Center will expand to Seventeen Pine next door, doubling its size and expanding its educational programs.

4 Contradancing: Rowdies and Revivalists
Maine has its “rowdies” that dance and play their music like the old time country dances of 50 years ago. And it has its “revivalists” that practice English contradances learned from Boston.

20 Broccoli Harvest
Move over potatoes, here comes the broccoli challenge. The new crop of Aroostook County for gambling farmers like Lance Smith brings a new kind of worker, Filipino and Mexican-American migrants.

29 “Making Home in Maine”
A photographic essay of how migrants in their camps “take whatever’s there for us. And we make the best of it and make it home.”

46 Under One Roof: the YMCA
Dormitory, health club, hangout, and home to the homeless, the Portland YMCA is a lot of things to a lot of people. It brings society under one roof, the rich, the not-so-rich and the poor.

57 Lonely Transitions
Living at the YMCA, for a month or for 20 years, can be lonely. At least it’s a place to hang your hat. A photographic essay.

65 When a Guide Was a Storyteller
Born in 1897, Chub Foster was a guide in the North Woods when everyone there was a woodsman. Storytelling for his “sports” was the extra skill a Maine guide needed, that and a dollar for a license.

Cover: Virginia with her son, Armilio. Photograph: Amy Toensing.
Salt wishes to thank the sponsors who have generously contributed to Salt's 20th anniversary celebrations.

Don & Ron's Catering
Finest Kind Caterers
Family Patch
Green Mountain Coffee Roasters
Kenduskeag Foundation
Lemon Tree Caterers
Portland Press Herald
Portland Regional Vocational Technical Center
Roak's Greenhouses
Saco & Biddeford Savings Institution
Shaw's Supermarkets
Ursula's Restaurant

Salt Magazine is produced in cooperation with the University of Maine at Farmington. It is a product of educational programs conducted at the Salt Center for Documentary Field Studies, accredited by and affiliated with the University of Maine at Farmington. Address: Salt Magazine, P.O. Box 4077, 19 Pine Street, Portland, Maine 04101 Telephone: (207) 761-0660

Staff:
Pamela Holley Wood, director
R. Todd Hoffman, photographic director
Hugh T. French, research associate
Jade Elliott, assistant director
Leila Childs, Emily Flint Fellowship
Faye Eaton, bookkeeper
George Hughes, design consultant

Contributors:
Kristin Atwell, Bert Cass, Leila Childs, Jim Chilsen, Chris Dardaris, Anne Hunter, Roger Price, Amy Toensing.

Board of Trustees:
Joan Amory
George Burns
Tom Donaldson
Mark Filler
Emily Flint
Hugh T. French
Heidi Hansen
Lynn Kippax Jr.
Neil Rolde
Peter J. Rose
Viola Sheehan
Polly Saltonstall
Pamela H. Wood
R. John Wuesthoff

Academic Board:
Peter J. Rose, Chair
Sophia Smith Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, Smith College
Joyce Antler
Professor of American Studies Brandeis University
Terry Eiler
Professor of Photography Ohio University
Burt Feintuch
Director, Center for the Humanities University of New Hampshire
Sue Huseman
Acting President University of Maine at Farmington
Stephen J. Reno
Provost and Dean of Academic Affairs Southern Oregon State College
Thomas Riley
Professor of Anthropology University of Illinois

A NOTE ON PRODUCTION
Salt is typeset in 10 point ITC Galliard ® from the Adobe Type Library with 2 point leading. Type output is by G & G Laser Typesetting in Portland on a Linotronic 200. Paper stock is Mountie Matte (70 pound text, 65 pound cover). Printed and stitched by Spectrum Printing, Lewiston, Maine.

Coffee provided to the Salt Center by Green Mountain Coffee Roasters.
ABOUT THIS ISSUE—This issue of Salt is the last to be produced solely from the Salt Center building at Nineteen Pine Street in Portland. After this issue, Salt will expand to a sister building next door. In October, we signed a purchase agreement for the acquisition of the adjoining three story brick townhouse at Seventeen Pine Street. This townhouse is essentially a mirror image of Nineteen Pine and will double Salt’s space once the building is fully used.

The push to purchase the additional building now comes from two directions. The continued expansion of Salt’s programs and operations pushed the Nineteen Pine Street facility to the brink this fall. Seventeen students are hard at work along with four full-time and two part-time staff. Every square inch of the building’s four floors is used. Our library and archive are overflowing. The number of participants in our photographic programs is limited by available space. What we thought of as our large round seminar room table which more than met our needs four years ago, now is too small for all of us to sit around.

The second push to purchase Seventeen Pine came from the continued drop in the asking price—the latest drop occurred in September. The agreed upon asking price is half of the asking price four years ago.

The new building will allow for our continued growth over the next three years. A stairway connector will be built on the rear of the two buildings to link them together. A new processing room, another darkroom (our fourth), and a new print finishing room will be constructed. Our archive will be moved to a new room in the new building. The old archive room will allow for expansion of the library. A new 37-foot seminar room and gallery will be established on the first floor of Seventeen Pine. The top two floors will provide housing for our students.

In three years time, the expansion of our accredited educational programs will occupy the second floor of Seventeen Pine, adding a third field studies track to the two we now offer in documentary photography and nonfiction writing and editing. We think we’re on a roll now and the world had better watch out!

CONTRIBUTORS

KRISTIN ATWELL, a native of Arizona, found Maine cold, especially without gloves in a broccoli field in the fall of 1992. A graduate of Stephens College in Missouri, she and photographer, Amy Toensing, are now in Michigan continuing their research on migrant workers.

BERT CASS came to Salt off a river boat on the Mississippi River. He photographed the Portland YMCA in the spring of 1993 while working nights as a bouncer. He now lives in Kennebunk and is staff photographer for the York County Coast Star.

LEILA CHILDS came to Salt during the fall of 1992 as a recent graduate of Mount Holyoke College. Her article on the Maine country dance scene allowed her to explore a childhood interest. She returned to Salt full-time in the fall of 1993 as Salt’s first Emily Flint Fellow in Writing and Editing.

JIM CHILSEN, a graduate of Marquette University, came to Salt during the spring of 1993. He settled upon the story about the YMCA while researching social issues in Portland. In the fall of this year, he began a master’s degree program in journalism at Marquette.

CHRIS DARDARIS came to Salt during the fall of 1992 as a photography major at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. The photographic work on Maine loggers he did at Salt won for him the Alan Jacobson award from the University when he graduated. His photographs of country dancing appear in this issue.

ANNE HUNTER has become something of a fixture with Salt Magazine since her illustrations first appeared three issues ago. They’ve appeared consistently since—with two more in this issue. She is a free lance illustrator living in Portland.

ROGER PRICE snowshoed eight miles in the spring of 1991 to meet with Maine guide, Chub Foster. A journalism major from the University of Nebraska, he is now Sunday editor for The Evening News in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.

AMY TOENSING was dubbed “Ansel Amy” when she brought back her first photographs of an Aroostook moon over the migrant camps of the Maine broccoli harvest in the fall of 1992. Her work with writer Kristin Atwell became one of seven finalists for the Dorothea Lange-Paul Taylor Prize from the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University.
"LINE UP your sets for Lady of the Lake!" Two by two we take
two places in the lines that run the length of the Rowdoinham Town Hall.
Overcome dancing men, bald men, bearded men. Women in skirts, women
in tights, women with long hair, women with cropped hair. Running shoes,
Birkenstocks, bare feet, dance shoes.

It's the first Saturday night of the month and dancers have come here
tonight, as they have every month for the past 17 years, and as generations before
have done, to share in this community, this spirit, this event that is an old time country dance.
“Hey’re starting a fourth set over there.” Like liquid the dancers flow to fill the space. Ladies on the left, gents on the right. “First, third, and every other couple cross over.” Obediently, we follow the caller’s commands. “Hi, I’m John, Alan, Susan, Ted. Did you come far?” “Not too far. From Portland, Belgrade, Augusta, Lewiston.” Enough talk. Time to dance.

“Evveryboddyyyy!” the caller bellows, “balance and swing the one below!”

The scuffling of shoes on a dusty wood floor. Flaring skirts, flowered skirts, brilliant colors swirling around the hall. Push off the left foot, pivot round the right. Familiar faces, new faces, forgotten names, remembered rhythms. “I haven’t seen you around for a while. Been working hard?”

“Active couples balance and swing!”


“Down the center four in line!”

Sweep down the hall as a set, like a wave.

“And back again!”

Step to the beat of a jig, of a reel. The lightning-quick bow of the fiddle. Ragtime flair from the old upright. An acoustic guitar, a coronet. Piano accordions, button accordions. Anything that drives the dance. The band takes a breath.

“Full ladies chain!”

Confused stares, outstretched hands, knowing eyes, shared smiles. Into the hands of a spinner, a turner, of someone who’s not sure which one they are. One spin, two spins, the elegance of a courtesy turn. It starts again. “Balance and swing the one below . . .”

Waltzes, two-steps, proper contras, circle mixers. They’re all part of an evening of dancing with the Maine Country Dance Orchestra.

“Evveryboddyy . . . POLKA!”

Sweating faces on a frost-chilled night. The distinctive smells of breath mints, patchouli, farm fresh cider, and rarely a hint of booze. The room and the band and the dancers warm up. Lady of the Lake, Chorus Jig, Petronella. All classics, chestnuts. Viva L’amore, a five step waltz. Mist creeps up the hall’s bare windows.

“Polka Mania!”

Sneak a glance at the band. They’re larger than life. Doug, Smokey, Carter, Kaity, Greg, John, Ellen, and whoever else happens to show. Feel the energy that comes from their music and bounces from wall to wallflower to dancer and fills every last corner of the bare-bulbed, pit-toileted Bowdoinham Town Hall.

Most people call it contradancing. The late great dance-master, Ralph Page, called the dances “contry’s.” The Maine Country Dance Orchestra prefers the term “old time country dancing” because it’s more like dancing used to be with contras, couples dances, and the grand march sharing equal importance in the social event.

Sixty years ago dancing was what you did on a Saturday night. Families, friends, and neighbors found an open space and a fiddler and kicked up their heels late into the night. Twenty years ago, old time country dancing had all but died out. TV and radio kept people at home till dances were rare and the tunes near forgotten. The dance was
revived in the early 1970s as a new generation became interested in traditional arts—even to the point of reinventing them—and moved to rural areas in search of the good life. Contradancing started back up in New England, quickly spreading across the country and even around the world.

While the dance is recognizable anywhere you go, each region has developed its own quirks and characteristics. Oregonians learned to promenade square-dance style, and Bostonians focused primarily on form, Mainiacs quickly developed a bare feet and work boots style that stemmed from the unrestrainable Maine Country Dance Orchestra, who were themselves learning straight from the mouths of the past.

RALPH PAGE has written the book, literally, on contradancing. The Country Dance Book, first printed in 1937, is known as a dance caller’s bible. Ralph was never part of a revival. He just kept on doing what he’d always done, and in his lifetime he did more, perhaps, than any other one person to spread the word about old-time country dancing. No discussion of dance would be complete without a word from him.

So here’s some darn good advice from Ralph Page: “The first thing to remember is that the general style of country dancing is quite different from the style of any modern dance. While there is a slinking motion to the moderns, a sort of vertical motion characterizes the country dances. Vertical may be too strong a word; liltingly buoyant may be too long-haired poetical . . . but visualize something between the two as the ideal. Unless you are an expert at doing numerous little filigree steps and knee-toe brandishings, you had best stick to an easy, natural walking step for a while. You men, though . . . might adopt a little swagger . . . the merest suggestion of raising the elbows at each step and sometimes ‘scuffling’ the feet. This always goes down big.

“The next important thing to remember is to keep exact time to the music . . . If your sense of rhythm isn’t up to par and you finish a bit ahead of the others, wait in your place until the prompter and the music indicate your next change. This is important, not only for traffic reasons, but also for the appearance of the set. You will have your critics, you know, all too willing to rave about the way they stepped ’em out in their day.

“After grace in style and good timing, individuality may then follow. In other words, first learn your fundamentals, and then you can try out your ‘fancy Dan’ steps. Gradually you will find yourself tapping to the beat while you wait your turn to dance, or maybe faking a sort of Charleston step of your own invention to garnish the unemployed moments. There is nothing like the realization of your own style to make you feel like the biggest pumpkin in the row.”

For me, what’s even more important than the swagger is the swing. Let’s take a quick and easy look at how it’s done. Plant your right foot with the outside edge next to your partner’s and push off with your left. Think about what happens to a canoe that’s only being paddled on one side. The theory is the same. The point is to go around in circles, moving in sync with your partner as fast and as smooth as possible. It helps if you lean back into your partner’s weight, so you’re balancing and supporting each other. It helps if you stare into your partner’s eyes and don’t focus on the blur of the hall whirling behind your partner’s head. Concentrate—on your partner, the motion, the smoothness. And what happens when it all comes together is a big part of the magic of the dance.

“There’s this major thing, this little zoning that happens when you go to a contradance,” says Rachel Nevitt, a 28-year-old regular at the Bowdoinham dance. “And you can’t help but stare into someone’s eyes

Left: Bowdoinham Dance.
because if you don’t stare directly into your partner’s eyes you’re going to get dizzy and you’re going to get sick. And some people you’re doing it so you don’t get sick. And some people you do it with, um... yeah, it’s the flirting aspect.”

“A whole study can be done on the swing itself,” notes Paul Krakauske who’s been calling for the Portland dance for about 15 years. “I mean, two really good swingers may not be able to swing well with each other. But you find the person that you really click in with and when that happens, wow. That’s one of the great, great pleasures of contradancing.

“You’re going down the line, say it’s like Lady of the Lake, so you get to swing everyone in line. And you’re going along and the dance is normal and then all of a sudden you come up to one person and that swing is like, whoa, it really works. You could see this happen with people. All of a sudden their eyes start to, you know, like whoa. You may not even have a chance to speak to this person while you’re doing it because it’s over just like that. It’s eight bars of music and then it’s gone.

“But you know, you know that that was something special and it really worked, that particular swing. So you go on and on and you may come back during the course of the dance depending on how long the line is and may get to swing with them again. And so you confirm your suspicions that this was a really great swing.

“And then nine times out of ten, later on in the evening, those two people are going to search each other out and want to dance with each other again. And you can even see it—people looking across the room, ‘I’ve got to dance with that person over there ’cause that worked so well.’ You may not make it at first ’cause there’s too many people in between and you get asked by other people, but eventually those two people are working towards each other at some point in the dance and so they’re going to get connected in some way. Then when it really works well, there’s some obligation in a way to have more contact with this person. Like you’ve got to find out what their name is or what they do or where they’re from or something. And it’s all because of the swing.”

“We do have a style that sounds different. It’s because we weren’t mingling with other revival musicians around the country, so our influence wasn’t from other revival musicians, but was from the old time Maine style.”—Jeff McKeen.

Right: Doug Protsik.

“We definitely sound different than other groups do,” says Jeff “Smokey” McKeen whose head and face are covered with thick curls of rich red-brown hair, and whose eyes shine out from behind round glasses with a laughing vitality that reaches out to everyone and everything in sight. “The more I travel outside of the area now, the more I realize that we do have a style that sounds different. And it’s because we weren’t mingling with the other revival musicians around the country, so our influence wasn’t from other revival musicians, but was from the old time Maine style.”

One of their strongest influences was Otto Soper. Born in 1901 in Orland, Maine, Otto played for his first dance when he was seven. He was
part of a marching band in school even though he couldn't read music, and kept on playing even after he lost a finger in a sawmill in the 1930s. He came from a tradition of itinerant fiddlers, summer pavilions, big bands, and dances six nights a week. He played fiddle and c-melody saxophone, but Otto's main instrument was the piano.

Doug and his cohorts caught up with him in 1975 when they started to realize, "Hey, what are we playing tunes from North Carolina for when we live in Maine? We should be playing tunes from Maine. We should be checking out Maine musicians." In the few years that they knew him, Otto taught them what he could of his scratchy, nine fingered style and what was essential if you were going to put on an evening of dancing in genuine old time Maine style.

"It's gonna come back," he told them. "It's coming back and it's started it now. Now you're young fellas, all of ya, see? And I'd like to see ya get on this old time stuff because when it does come back and it gets about so far along... who's gonna play for it, huh? If you're up to trim so you can play for it and up on this old stuff and them old waltzes and fox trots—boy, you're gonna be busier than a cat with two tails! Yes, suh."

"The biggest musician piece of advice he gave us was, 'You've got to have the heft,'" says Smokey.

"He was a fantastic piano player, and inspired me to take up piano," says Doug, "because I realized that piano is an inherent, important instrument in New England folk music and in dance music. It gives that driving beat for the dancing that's just so important."

Doug crosses his hands on the table in front of him. Solid hands, functional nails. He gives the impression of having mass. He's big but not imposing, round-faced but not cherry-cheeked. The hair framing his face and curling behind his ears is almost angelic in texture, but his eyebrows and moustache have that functional feel. No wisps, just straight, push-broom, covers the lip, offsets the twinkle in the eye just so. He wears a flannel shirt over a cotton one over a thermal one with loose jeans. It looks like he hasn't changed clothes too often in the 20 years since he moved to Maine. There probably hasn't been much need. He came as part of the back-to-the-land influx of the early '70s and spent 18 years living on a piece of land called Piano Acres. Each of the five home-grown log cabins had a piano and a lot of music came out of the time spent there.

In the beginning, Doug was married to Elaine and they were homesteading in Fayette with a hermit and an asparagus garden and were playing the fiddle and mandolin. They got together with John Gawler, formed the Pine Hill String Band and started playing bluegrass in bars. Then they met up with Greg Boardman who had graduated from Colby College a few years ahead of Smokey who was playing with the Cambridge Country Orchestra in and around Cambridge, Maine.

They all converged around an interest in playing old time country music, and it didn't take them long before they caught on that this music was meant to be danced to, but they didn't know what kind of dancing or how to do it.

One day, Dudley Laufman happened along. In the tradition of the 19th century itinerant dance master, Dudley was travelling around New
England teaching people how to dance. Sometimes he would bring a band. More often he'd hire local musicians, or he'd do the whole show himself with a fiddle or accordion. He was the only one left of his kind. For the most part, the rest of his generation had let the tradition of country dancing pass them by. He was hired by groups who'd seen the dancing done in Boston or New Hampshire where it was still going strong. And on this day, he'd been hired by Bowdoin College. Doug and Elaine saw the dance advertised and went to check it out. Greg also showed up on his own. And so the three of them got their first taste of New England-style old time country dancing.

"We went to this dance of Dudley's and we were just enthralled 'cause we loved the music because it was the kind of music we wanted to be playing and we saw how much fun the dancing was," Doug says. "And so afterwards, independently of us, Greg went back to his band, and we got together with our band, and we said, 'We love playing this music, let's learn to call and start running our own dances. And somehow we'll find a hall and we'll get out some publicity and we'll get this going.'"

That's when Dave Berry came into the picture. Dave is a native of Bowdoinham. As a mandolin player and a member of the 1975 Fourth of July Barbecue Committee, he wanted to see music come back as part of the annual tradition. In setting up a fiddle contest and dance for the event, he hooked up with the folks who were to become the Maine Country Dance Orchestra. Having the same sort of goal of reviving old time music and dance, it was a small step to arranging a regular dance in the old town hall which was suffering for lack of use. The dance featured various musicians, but the group that played most often was the Pine Hill String Band.

So the Bowdoinham connection was well established a year later when the musician friends who were playing as the Pine Hill String Band, the Northern Valley Boys, and the Cambridge Country Band started to get frustrated at never being able to hear each other play and decided to meet once a month to play for a dance as the Maine Country Dance Orchestra.

They took what they learned from Otto and added it to the high spirits that were already part of the dances they were running in Bowdoinham and other halls, and passed it on to the dancers, some of whom then started up dances of their own.

The result was that a lot of "heft" entered into the Maine dance scene and started to feed on itself.

"The dancing in Maine is, in general, rowdier than the dancing that I've experienced in Boston or in Vermont," says Elaine Malkin.

"There's a tremendous amount of interaction between the energy of the dancers and the energy of the musicians, and it grows."

Right: Bowdoinham Dance.

"The dancing in Maine is, in general, rowdier than the dancing that I've experienced in Boston or in Vermont," says Elaine Malkin.

"There's a tremendous amount of interaction between the energy of the dancers and the energy of the musicians, and it grows."
T'S SATURDAY night, eight o'clock, and the streets off the
main road through West Paris are lined with cars. Downstairs
in the Grange Hall they're setting out pies and soda for
intermission. Upstairs the music is going and the dance floor is
already filled with couples dancing cheek to cheek around and around
the hall. Tickets are $8 a couple. I'm advised to hang onto my stub for the
door prize.

Chairs are lined up two rows thick against the walls, and I catch a num-
ber of curious stares as I put my coat in what will be my place for the
evening. I'm young enough to be the
grandchild of the youngest person here. The band comes to a stop with a
twang and a drum riff and everyone
takes their seat while the musicians
collect themselves for the next set of
dances.

The players sit up on a well lit stage with a powder blue backdrop. They
have a good solid sound, a combined
effort of the seven band members and a
PA system. Dot Canwell is at the
piano, Richard Felt plays harmonica,
Bill plays banjo, guitar and a Hawaiian
style guitar whose "Tiny Bubbles"
twang resonates throughout the building
and beyond. The drum set is
shared by a man with a string tie who
keeps in front of her where most
white hair and a baseball cap to match
that she wears cocked over to the side.
The saxophone player is 86 years old.

"It's the old fashioned type mu-
sic," says Dot Canwell, co-founder of
Felt's Orchestra. She calls it "contry"
instead of "contradancing," like Ralph
Page. "[It's] the kind of music I grew
up with, with the waltzes, fox trots,
polkas, two steps, the schottische,
our old fashioned eastern contry
dances, like your Lady of the Lake,
Boston Fancy, Mountain Ranger,
Haymaker's Jig and all of those."

Dot shifts her considerable weight
on the piano bench and puts a hand
back to pat her short, styled red hair.
She picks a tune from a list of titles that
she keeps in front of her where most
musicians' sheet music would go, says
a few words to the band and they
starts in with another fabulous 40s
favorite. It takes a moment for the
tune to register, fox trot, with the
dancers, but soon enough they're
partnered up and out there on the
floor. A woman with frizzy brown
hair in a garish flowered shirt and
polyester slacks circulates among her
women friends, sitting on their laps
when there aren't any chairs left and
asking them all to dance.

The dancers go at it with an enthu-
siasm that younger folks would be
hard pressed to match. Each couple
has its own sense of style. Some are
out on the floor practicing their dance
class moves, some glide along with
their foreheads together shifting from
move to move like they're reading each other's minds. One man shuffles
around in highly polished cowboy
boots. Another steers his partner like
a well aligned car around the floor.
My partner and I draw the attention
of the inevitable wallflowers and get a
few good natured grins from fellow
foxtrotters.

"You might be a stranger when
you first come and not know any-
body, but you won't be for long,
because you're invited right in with
everybody and you're made to feel so
welcome. It's just like one big, happy
family," says Dot.

Young faces are especially welcome
these days because the dances are
literally dying out. There's one in
Belfast and in Greene, but the one in
Buxton recently stopped because the
piano player died in a car accident.
None of the band members read music
and the unique bounce of the country
style fox trot can't be taught in a
ballroom dance class.

"Our music is awfully hard to come
by now," Dot says. "It's the songs
that we have learned coming up and
we know them by memory.

"I learned to dance when I was
about seven years old. We used to go
to the grange halls and they had the
old fashioned dances and we'd dance
... and then when we got tired we'd
crawl up on the benches and go to
sleep. And our folks would dance
during the dance closed at midnight
and then bundle us all up and take us
home.

"People went to dances back then
to enjoy the music, enjoy the dancing,
enjoy friends and family and neigh-
bors and a lot of times during the
week when they were working, they
didn't get to see that much of. And it
was a social function. It was a get-
together. . . . There was something
there for all ages, no matter what
age."

Richard Felt walks around to the
front of the stage and flicks on the
When Otto Soper described the Haymaker's Jig (shown above) to a new generation of enthusiasts, he mistakenly called it Lady of the Lake. By the time the new generation learned of the mistake, years had passed. "It doesn't really matter," they said and kept the Lady of the Lake name.

**Invention of Tradition**

Illustration by Anne Hunter
lights. “Next dance is Lady of the Lake.” Couples line up in one long set that stretches the length of the hall. The pairs are no less than ten feet apart. The music starts and the dance begins. No one needs to call because they’ve all been dancing this very same dance in the very same way every week for as long as they can remember. They aren’t much concerned about the phrasing of the music. They move at their own steady pace. Swing with the one below. Active couples swing in the center. That pair walks down the center and back. Ladies chain across, and back again. And that’s the dance, the real Lady of the Lake.

They’ve been doing Lady of the Lake at dances in the Maine countryside for at least 200 years. Instead of regular, organized events, they used to have kitchen junkets or breakdowns where someone would decide to have a dance and they’d spread the word around town, then everyone would come over in the evening, they’d push the furniture out of the way in the kitchen or living room or wherever. People would bring whatever instruments they knew how to play. And they’d dance the night away.

Later the dances moved into grange halls as they became the center of community life, sometimes serving as a church as well as a dance hall. The book Sixty-Six Years a Country Fiddler says that “60 to 80 years ago. . . Overlock’s Orchestra was supplying music for dances within a distance of 25 miles and often played as many as five nights a week. . . . You could go dancing somewhere every night of the week but Sunday. Driving five or twenty miles to a dance didn’t matter. It took a little more time, but we started earlier and what if we didn’t arrive until intermission.”

As the band finishes the last note of the tune and flips on the lights for a short break, half the hall is already downstairs getting first dibs on the pie. Dot and Richard stay to entertain the stragglers. In a clear, soulful vibrato, Dot whistles Moon River while she accompanies herself on piano and Richard backs her up on harmonica. Since they worked out this act 15 years ago, Dot has performed in churches, in a night club in Rhode Island, in shows all over the state, and in a national grange talent competition in Sacramento, California. She has a whistling repertoire ranging from Tchaikovsky to the blues to Linda Ronstadt ballads to country western tunes to sacred hymns.

The dancers drift back in, the lights go down, and Richard walks over to the mike. “Do we have any birthdays today?” No birthdays.

“Any anniversaries?” One, and it’s golden. “Fifty years together. Let’s give ’em a hand.” The couple gracefully leads off the next set of waltzes.

For 42 years, Dot and her husband, Harold, have lived in the same house in Oxford, Maine. It’s the house they were married in when she was 19 though Harold hadn’t quite finished building it. It holds the solid oak piano that Dot bought when she was 15. Despite its chipped keys and out of tune sound, she treasures it as the
And it still is. It's as much a part of my life as breathing. I enjoy my music. I love what I do. And if I can bring a little bit of pleasure or enjoyment to somebody else listening to it, then I'm glad, then I've done what I was meant to do with it. The good Lord gave me this talent. 

“I've never studied. I can't read music. I play entirely by ear. This was given to me for free, no strings... And as long as people enjoy it and they really want me to keep doing it, I'll do it. But if I thought that they didn't like it I'd quit and never do it again publicly ever.”

“This is Ted's Triplet Number Forty-One!” Ted Sannella stands behind a full length mike stand, shoulders back, solid gut proudly protruding, as the dancers applaud. His red short-sleeved shirt is done up to the last button. The top of his head shines. His eyes acknowledge the admiration of the crowd, their appreciation for his skill as a caller and choreographer of dances that are as finely polished as his “Ted” belt buckle that gleams in the muted light of the St. Dennis Parish Hall in North Whitefield.

“This dance is only one year old—almost exactly one year old, November seventh... I keep my dances on three by five cards. Actually, I have them color coded. All the blue ones are contras, and all the white ones are squares and the yellow ones are mixers and the red ones are triplets... Right on the card it's got the date on it.”

Ted's been calling for contradances for 48 years. He used to follow Ralph Page with a little black book writing down dances and calling techniques. He's part of the Boston dancing tradition, and only just retired from pharmaceuticals to Maine three years ago. He was quickly approached about running a regular monthly dance in Maine by the Shoe String Dance Society, a group of dancers who were tired of the rough and tumble Bowdoinham scene and wanted to experience a more refined style of dancing.

“The triplet is an invention of mine. They're like mini-contradances... You don't have to wait very long before you become active 'cause there are only three couples there... And I've written so many of those dances that I had trouble finding names for them, so I don't even give them names. I give them numbers. Ted's Triplet Number 1, 2, 3, etc., up to 41.”

“Okay, shake hands with everybody in the set and find out their first names.”

“Hi, I'm Wes.”

“It's the old fashioned type music,” says Dot Canwell, co-founder of Felt's Orchestra. She calls it “contry” instead of “contradancing... The kind of music I grew up with, with the waltzes, fox trots, polkas, two steps, the schottische.”

Left: Roger Cartwright.

“Hi, I'm Wes.”

“Way down at the end, they're trying to complete a set. Anybody want to dance one more?” The stiff wooden chairs along the sides of the hall are already deserted, except for a few stragglers, a few partnerless women who look around with hopeful eyes.

“Is there one more couple? Two ladies together perhaps?” A man wanders into the hall, drops his five bucks in the box, zip, bang, he's in the dance. “Thank you. Give 'em a hand.”

Step by detailed step, Ted walks us through the dance. He says it, we do it. “Okay. So now we have a line of three with odd sets in the middle. Gents between two ladies. Ladies between two gents. Go forward six and back. Top two couples, ladies chain. Do not return. Stay there.” We give each other looks that say, “All right already. We get it. Let's get on with this thing.” But we still obey when Ted says, “Let's walk through it one more time from the top.” We all want the dance to go as smoothly as possible once the music begins. That's why we’re here.

While we go through the motions of the dance, the band warms up. They sit surrounded by cords that snake from speakers to amps to mikes to mixer. A string of chili pepper lights decorates the two mike stands and adds a splash of color to the scene. Doug Protsik is up there, adding color at his miniature, railroad car, portable piano with pieces of plastic fruit on top. Tonight he’s sitting in with the band. They're called Anything Can Happen and that's because every month someone new will join in to fill out the sound.

“Be sure not to rush that first figure. You've got a full 16 counts.” Ted looks expectantly at the band. They snap to attention. Fiddles up. Fingers poised.

The dance moves so fast that even Ted can barely keep up with the figures. A breath before the beat, each move must be called. The constant motion, the hum of his voice. The sing-song command to balance and
swing. Triple twirls on a ladies chain. Barely a moment to greet my new neighbor, to acknowledge his presence and importance in this dance, this figure, this moment. My foot slips on the slick wood floor and I laugh as I dizzily regain my balance. My partner gives me a worried look. Our opposites patiently wait for me to recover my composure. Dance with one couple, move onto the next.

"They call me the Dean of New England," says Ted, "because I've been around longer than anyone else, I guess. And I consider my role more as an educator of callers . . . so that's what I do pretty much is educate, spread the word, try to improve people's dancing. It's all in the philosophy of giving people a good time and educating them a little bit without them knowing it . . . and making the dance a little better than it was."

The people at the North Whitefield dance look like they're being given a good time. They whoop when the music kicks in. They applaud when Ted leaves his microphone behind and steps out into the middle of the floor to demonstrate the proper way to do an allemande. They get hot and sweaty and go home satisfied. This dance has quickly established itself as one of the best in the state.

Hardcore dancers have always been a part of the scene. They boycotted the Maine Country Dance Orchestra's first dance because they saw things weren't being done "right." Doug talks about the Contra Nazism and the Center Set Syndrome where there's a mad-dog rush to be the first couple in the set right in front of the band that cropped up about five years after they started their dances. Dudley says it's nothing new. He's been seeing that kind of behavior for years. Sixty-Six Years a Country Fiddler cites dances back to sixty years ago where "some couples wanted to be the head couple and believed that they got more dancing if they were at the head of the set."

One of the problems with hardcorism is that people get burnt out or they get married and stop coming to dances, Doug says. "We realized a long time ago, you couldn't rely on the hardcore dancers to keep things going. That's how things die out, when you limit it down to a certain specialized group of people. You always want to try to keep it open and be bringing in new people."

I LEARNED how to contradance from going to music camp for seven years in the Monadnock region of New Hampshire. We had a dance that the faculty would take turns playing and calling for every Saturday. We always did the same dances so that the people who were new to camp that year could pick them up from those of us who'd been there for a while and knew our moves. I didn't know at the time that we were in the heart of old time country dance territory. I didn't know that Steve Zakon, our chef, was a hot-shot caller who travels around the country running dances and festi-
vals. We just danced, and I expect that 50 years from now they'll be dancing there still.

The real question in this whole debate between "traditionalists" and "choreographers," or whatever you want to call them, is not who does what better but what is the best way to keep it going? Are enough new people coming to dances? Does it have too limited an audience? Will interest in dancing skip a generation like it did in Dudley Laufman's time?

The members of the Maine Country Dance Orchestra are doing what they can to see that contradancing doesn't die out again. Last spring Ellen Gawler, Greg Boardman, and Kaity Newell put on a fiddle workshop for children, teaching them the classic dance tunes and how to play as dance musicians.

Their children are learning how to play. Two-year-old Megan Newell has a fiddle her size. And eight-year-old Molly Gawler has shown off her skills on the fiddle for a waltz or two at the first Saturday Bowdoinham dance.

Orchestra members aren't the only ones trying to spread the word about dancing. Cindy Larock, an administrator at Bates who's attended the first Saturday Bowdoinham dance since 1975, started beginning contra and international folk dance classes at the college to get more students involved.

Despite these efforts, two informal written surveys I did at the Bowdoinham and North Whitefield dances show that the population base that contradances draw from is a narrow one. Most of the people who go to contradances are highly educated, liberal, transplants to Maine in the 30 to 45-year-old age range. They're teachers, pipefitters, social workers, boatyard inspectors, carpenters, artists, and environmental educators.

The members of the Maine Country Dance Orchestra find this somewhat discouraging. "I'd like to see a broader range of people at the dances," Smokey McKeen says. "It'd be more interesting, I think, for everybody. . . . It seems like there's plenty of people who would enjoy it and it's just a matter of getting them there and making sure that they're not intimidated by the fancy moves and the fast music."

As Smokey sees it, contradancing, is a very accessible form of dance. You don't have to take lessons to do it. Anyone can be thrown right into the fun and feel like they know what they're doing by the end of a night. And then there's this other aspect to the dance whose appeal is universal.

"I can't think of a better way to meet people," Doug Protsik says. "Well, the women in particular. But, I mean, it's just so perfect. It's just so easy. It's so natural, you know? There's nothing weird about it."

"You go out," Rachel Nevitt explains, "you flirt, you feel desirable, you desire other people, but it's only momentary. It's like, you can live your whole life alone, you can do exactly what you want to do, and you get that closeness for four hours at a dance, and then you go home alone, you don't sleep with anybody, you don't pick up any diseases, and you're really happy, and you get all charged up and you go back again next week or next month and you get your little zing again, and then you go home alone and pet the cat. It's safe. It's not like the pickup scene at bars."

"I think it's survived for so many years as a dance form, as a form of entertainment, because it does meet a need," Elaine Malkin remarks from her vantage point as an original re­viver of the dance. "I don't think there's any other activity in modern life that combines enjoyment, entertainment, involvement and interaction on this kind of level. Having watched the dancing grow from maybe two dances a year in Maine to two a week—that's the need that I think dances are meeting, the social event where you're a participant. You're important. You're a dancer."

Dudley Laufman has seen contradancing nearly die out twice in his lifetime, but he and a few others have always been around to keep the tradition alive. He plays mostly for weddings and private get-togethers now. The hardcore dancers have boycotted him because he refuses to cater to them. He says he runs a dance by playing to the "lowest common denominator." And he has no doubts that contradancing will continue.

"The contradance is too big a part of New England culture to disappear."

ONIGHT the Center Montville Grange Hall is hosting a benefit supper and dance for Smokey McKeen who broke his leg in a bad way over the summer and doesn't have health insurance. That's what they tell me, but I wonder if it isn't just an excuse to have a party for all their friends and have Shop 'n Save donate the coffee cups. The food's been provided by the Ladies Auxiliary of the Grange Hall. Potato dishes, casseroles, and five varieties of pie. "I think it's a great deal," Doug Protsik says as he takes people's money at the door. "Only five dollars for all this food."

Upstairs on the dance floor, kids are romping, jumping, screaming. They've been up here playing since
they swallowed their last bite of pie. The grownups finally finish their jabbering and work their way upstairs. Doug, Smokey, Kaity and Carter Newell, and some friends collect on the kiddie-size stage and all the little girls in the room grab each other and start to bounce around the floor.

The band breaks into a polka. Keep an eye fixed at knee level, dodge the kids, swerve to avoid the old wood stove. Three turns around and you’ve circled the floor. Curious onlookers hang around the edges of the baby blue hall. They sit on the benches near the door amidst coats and shoes and cowering kids who will not, no way, no how, be dragged into the dance.

“I need to tighten my keyboard. I’ve got a couple of screws loose. You probably noticed that a while ago. I just noticed it the other day.” Smokey’s hearty laughter fills the small dance space.

“Smokey stands to me,” says Roger Cartwright, a long time friend of the band’s, “for a kind of vitality that speaks of just dropping your normal needed defenses and barriers. There’s a robustness about him, a spirit that kind of just calls forth the same thing in oneself. . . . It’s not a ‘put-up or shut-up,’ it’s more ‘come on, let’s cut the guff’ kind of routine.”

Roger gets up and teaches a dance with an English country feel. He prances and dances and talks to the kids with a twinkle in his eye and a lightness in his step that matches their own. The deep wrinkles on his face seem to disappear as he says, “Then turn around in your own little circle,” and does it himself, knees high, motions free.

“This is a verbal culture, modern culture,” Roger says. “Even with children in our culture, they substitute language for movement or the express potential of the bodies, or they’re stylized into little ballet classes or whatever. . . . So then you really see these grownups as those kids. They want to move and they’re all ready. It just makes communication as a word seem so clotly and big and formal.”

One-two-three, one-two-three. While the grownups waltz gracefully around and around, Smokey’s eight-year-old, Bridget Rose, is flat on her back being dragged by the arms by another little girl through the thick of the dance.

The music is accompanied by shouts and laughter and by one boy who seems to think he’s a chicken, of the singing variety. Squawk squawk squawk squawk. “I like that old world sound,” Smokey says. “Yeah, good old Ralph Page,” Doug agrees. “Was that one a Ralph Page original?” Kaity asks. “Yeah.”

No waltz is too slow, no reel is too fast. “Dinah, there’s nobody finah,” Smokey sings, “in the state of Carolina. To compare with you.” Quick, quick long long. “Mommy, is there going to be another song coming up?”

“Oh, definitely.”

“I think people may go to dances with some kind of private agenda,” Roger says. “Maybe I’ll meet some interesting guy or girl or maybe I’ll learn a great dance. It could be anything.

“But well beyond that is something... in my book totally deeper which is just a kind of almost communal, just giving-out of yourself on the floor. And you find yourself dancing with someone tall, short, old, skinny, narrow, whatever. And suddenly you’re flooded with something. . . . There’s a certain radiance in the later evening as you move down the line. And you see these people—hey’re larger than life in a way. They’re more delicious to dance with.”

Heel and toe and heel and toe and slide, slide, slide, slide. All the inactives are under three feet tall. As Bridget turns I spot the skid marks on the back of her pants. A gentle shove, a tug in the right direction. Confusion reigns, half the set is hopelessly lost. Ladies chain across. This way, kiddo, around you go. On to the next to find no one there.

They’re all piled up, three couples deep at the end of the set. Cast off with an invisible couple. Smile and know it’s all in the name of fun. “Hey, let’s do Mr. Sandman.” Kaity pulls out her horn, while the rest of the band tries to remember the words.

“Dancing is very social. You’re touching, you’re moving. There’s a community on the floor. . . . There’s a suspension almost of ordinary, tacit rules outside, but when you’re in this kind of thing, if you will, you give up a certain private sovereignty over your body and its movements. . . . You do this under a feeling of trust. No one will go too far. The music is a safe thing. . . . There is an implicit contract almost on the floor.

“And once this is set up and as it endures and gets more reassurance through the evening, you get that electricity that sometimes happens. And it’s interesting because it isn’t some like private intense experience with one other person. You’re moving down the line, and what you’re doing is kind of experiencing a mass communion with other people in a certain relaxed, open way, which, again, is protected.

“You can see when it goes askew, when a caller gets irritated and starts banging on the people for not doing the right thing, or something happens on the floor. All of a sudden that shell of kind of magic is broken and has to be reestablished. . . . And it’s simply amazing that people, with all their individuality can . . . find all this common ground so immediately, without words.”

As I leave the hall, the strains of a waltz drift down the narrow staircase and into the silence of the very early morning. Most of the dancers have gone, and the ones who remain have slowed their pace.

Looking up at the windows, I see a few kids are still at it, still running around the floor like windup toys wound one turn too tight. Doug and a partner waltz into view with a slow, shuffling step to the sound of Smokey Schmaltzing away on his accordion.

“It’s kind of like that song,” Smokey says, “you know, the one that goes, ‘The road goes on forever, and the party never ends.’”
SALT SENSE

Stand out in the field. It could be a pasture or a city walk.

Sniff out a story like Tony the rockhound sniffs out a quartz crystal.

Watch people. In synagogues, diners, malls and apple orchards.

Listen to a Cambodian refugee tell his first joke in English.

Rap with clamdiggers and Mohammad from Afghanistan.

Hold onto your pen or hold onto your camera.

Use your sense

Look into Salt

MAKES SENSE

The Salt Semester Program offers publication and documentary field studies experience for advanced undergraduates and college graduates from the fields of English, folklore, history, anthropology, American Studies, sociology, journalism, photography, fine art. The Salt Semester Program is an affiliated program of the University of Maine at Farmington with accredited courses in field methodology, a topic in research and advanced skills courses in nonfiction writing and editing and in documentary photography. Three semester programs are offered each year, in the fall, spring and summer. For further information contact the Salt Center for Documentary Field Studies, P.O. Box 4077, 19 Pine Street, Portland, Maine 04101. Telephone: (207) 761-0660.
“PICK A ROW and just follow it down,” Tommy tells me over the clatter of the broccoli harvester. We’re moving through fifty rolling acres of broad-leafed plants reaching their blossoming meaty heads heavenward. It is a breathtaking sight in an otherwise vast wind-scrubbed landscape.

It’s the last cut of the field, the pressure is off. The harvest is almost over, the crew is ready to romp, to laugh, to dare novices like me to keep up with them. I won’t be in anyone’s way. Go ahead. Here’s a knife.
HARVEST
In 1992 AROOSTOOK COUNTY, which is known for producing potatoes and the hard working folk who cultivate them, watched 350 migrant workers and their families come to harvest 3,000 acres of a new crop: broccoli. For Aroostook, which reverberates with sentiments of a time when everything was either home grown or American made, the newcomers in the community spark interest along with growing pains.

The crews come to the northern tip of Maine from as far as Mexico and the Philippines. H. Smith Packing flies in Filipinos from the Philippines and Mexicans from California. Maine Packers hires Mexican-Americans for congratulations, cohort to cohort. I gain some distance to concentrate on the cut. Oh, a gem. Cut it low. It’s going to market. Toss it to the steel tables for the bunchers, the boxers, the stackers, the icers, the trucks, the market someone’s fresh broccoli souffle, bam! It hits the lip of the table and falls into the ocean. It sinks back to the earth to nourish next year’s crop.


Walk, spot, bend, cut, trim, throw... Yes! Bank shot off the back of the table. Spot a crown. Grab by the head and cut the neck. Pull the limbs off. Toss with the twist of the torso. Interception! Blocked by the buncher. Smile painfully. Keep walking. Slide in the mud a little. Cut two heads. Walk them back to the steel table.

I wade behind Tommy through an ocean of knee-deep malachite broccoli. The cutters walk in front of the harvester as it moves like a trolling ship. Tommy, supple and sure, slices with his cutlass and keeps going ahead of the harvester’s wings, which fan out over 18 rows. He cuts a long stalk, strips the leaves, throws it over his shoulder like a football tossed to someone wide open. Ah, good aim, Tommy. It doesn’t look so tough to walk and throw with a machete in your hand and plants tangling at your feet in mud and 33 degree weather. His stalk lands on the steel table and slides in front of a woman in a large purple coat who is bunching. She arranges stalks into bouquets and pushes them into a machine which uniformly trims the butts and attaches a thick rubber band.

Broccoli, broccoli everywhere and all of it to eat! Breathe the emerald expanse. Picturesque air if I ever smelt it. One, perhaps the only blessing of the cold wind is that the broccoli does not smell ripe today. Okay. Choose a stalk. Cut the leaves off. Whoops! A diagonal slice into the stalk, no good. I chop it into smaller chunks and throw it to Arto, the helmsman, for ammunition. He has the position highest on the rig and can bombard anyone he wants. Arto steers the tractor with his boot and aims at Charlie packing boxes. Then at Efren stacking them. We smile and nod to each other with an upward toss of the chin, universal body language for congratulations, cohort to cohort.

Meanwhile, the fresh potato market has been declining since the mid-’60s. In 1965 Americans ate 75 pounds of potatoes per capita a year. Today it’s 48. To some, cooking fresh potatoes is a tiresome, tedious task. Processed potatoes—chips, French fries, hash browns, tater tots—are hot, along with any other food that’s quick. 1990 was a good year for potatoes. Aroostook farmers dug up an estimated $154 million dollars. But in 1991, 81,000 acres meant overproduction, the surest way to ruin a market. Potato revenues were only $92 million.

Broccoli’s in, it’s got a niche market. The New England Journal of Medicine says it combats cancer.
And your mother always said it was good for you. Broccoli feeds the ground for potato rotations and it likes cold weather. Simple enough. Northeastern farmers have other leads on California's broccoli game: irrigations falls free from the sky and few pesticides are required thanks to the soul-chilling winters. There's also a shipping cost advantage because of proximity to the biggest markets on the East coast, which easily swallow up Aroostook's 3,000 acres of broccoli; as much as seven to ten million greenbacks worth a year. If the ratio to potato acres was proportionate it would have meant about $225 million in broccoli.

"It looks like a license to print money but it isn't, the margins are close," says broccoli farmer Lance Smith. Broccoli is no picnic. Making it with broccoli requires heft and nerves of steel. As Matt Williams of the University of Maine Extension Service says, "It's not for the faint of heart." One pallet icing machine can run a quarter of a million bucks. So don't even bother without an ante of three hundred acres; volume is the only way to make the "horrendous" capital investments worth while.

Broccoli production shopping list: field pack rigs, tractors, trailers, icers, air conditioned storage, refrigerated trucks, seed, fertilizer, herbicides, hearty fields, housing for the crew. The hingepin is a dependable crew, no sense in growing a crop you can't get out of the field. After all that's taken care of, muster some market savvy, as fresh produce lives and rots by its market, and faith. Some solid faith that the elements beyond your control will cooperate for another season. Herschel Smith of H. Smith Packing says it's a complex formula. "You got a lot of variables: the weather, the people, the crop, the market. It's like a slot machine, got to get 'em to all line up. Once in a while they do."

Of the 40 some growers who dabbled in broccoli in the mid-1980s only four made the grade. Smith of H. Smith Packing, Ayer of Maine Packers, Richard Goughan, and Arrow Farms. They influenced the national broccoli market so significantly the first letters of their names were combined to christen a strain of seed: SAGA. By 1988 Richard Goughan folded. He said his 100 acres of broccoli "wasn't spit in the grand scheme of things. Corporate farming is what feeds America, us mom-and-pop deals, forget it."

Most farmers have little time to sleep let alone talk during the harvest. Of the three broccoli virtuosos who remain, Lance Smith, the head of the broccoli division in his Uncle Herschel's multi-crop corporation, is the most approachable. Trial and error have tight margins when playing with broccoli seed that costs $100 per acre. Lance acknowledges the stakes. "It's not all gravy. Sometimes you can really lose big." A four month harvest with 1400 acres of fields synchronized to come off in relation to the weather's moods and other fields, is not easy to orchestrate. Smith says, "I've got a boy in college. That's cheap compared to what I've learned growing broccoli."

He is catching on. In the last ten years yield per acre has nearly doubled.

Chip Beckwith gets $10 to $15 dollars an acre for his seed potatoes. He studied broccoli, but decided he didn't want to play. Changing from potatoes, which are a storage product with four week harvest, to broccoli with its long harvest and ultra-fresh, high end market game, was too much of a risk. Beckwith says broccoli is "an all new way of thinking . . . Smith, he's looking to the future." Lance Smith says he sees the future with "cautious optimism." One more large Eastern grower could flood his market. Quebec is already cause for concern.

As Lance Smith says about the pace of the harvest, "At some point this ground is going to freeze and not thaw out until spring. Every day, daylight to dark, we have to push as many cartons across as possible."
“ARM UP HERE by the fire,” Papa Albert says to me before he hops on a tractor with spriteness unexpected from a 71 year-old war veteran. Gladly. It is “only” 38 degrees, but it feels like twenty, maybe ten. Albert Doloja is the liaison between the farmer, Lance Smith, the field managers, and the crews. Field manager Pete Pierce speaks poetry on his behalf. “He’s magic. We’d all be lost without Albert.”

Papa Albert returns to the fire on the edge of the field and clasps his band-aided hands behind his back in a quietly dignified manner. He has a squared face, creamy sienna skin and a perpetual slight smile. Albert’s first job of the season is with too stumpy. Efren tells the crew who tell the broccoli. Lance Smith walks through the fields to check his crop. I watch him pinch stalks, twist heads, sniff leaves. He caresses his broccoli and curses it. He is vexed by headrot, teased by insects. His livelihood depends on his judgment and the beneficence of forces beyond his control. Timing is critical, he must catch it at its vulnerably ripe peak, but not wait so long that the ground locks itself around the stalks, or that the crop is swept by a plague of headrot. Just a week or ten days of humid wet drizzle can destroy broccoli’s waxy coat, soak into the blossom and produce a “black decay,” a slimy soft rot—surely you’ve come across it in the refrigerator. Lance has performed broccoli euthanasia: he’s had to have tractors plow under hundreds of acres and learn to live with it. “You don’t win at this game every year, you know, that’s why they call it farming.”

The crew is moving through 50 acres of Green
Valiant, which is so green it has a purplish tint. The pace is just shy of break-necked. It’s not harried, just constant. The rhythm of work like a rap; phrases working together to form a continuous song. The cutters walk, spot, bend, cut, trim, throw, walk-spot-bend-cut-trim-throw. The bunchers take the hand-off; place, push, pull, pass. The packers wail their riffs; assemble, pack, slide, assemble, pack, slide to the stackers on the trailers who lift, stack, tie, lift, stack, tie, lift-stack-tie . . .. And Arto, like Albert on a smaller scale, sings scat, oiling the whole operation. He fills in before rhythms get out of sync. He stocks rubber bands for the bunchers, cuts tie cord for the stackers, slides boxes to the packers, switches full trailers for empty ones, he even gets down and cuts. Art makes sure the show’s running like a river of silk.

The cutters are the cool cats of the broccoli trade. They walk ahead of the field pack rig brandishing their machetes, each sharpened and shaped to fit a personal style. Some blades are long and thin with the curl of a villain’s mustache. Some have stout thick blades which would make a butcher happy. Most everyone has the plastic handle wrapped with broccoli bunching rubber bands to keep them from slipping in cold weather. A slip, even with wool gloves covered by plastic ones, can cost some flesh, at least some blood. There were few accidents this season, but Papa Albert says, “You have to been used to cutting. No matter how expert you are, once in a while make mistakes.” Whether or not they all have ten fingers, many of the men have learned to smoke without the use of their hands and do so as they walk and cut.

Anatomy of broccoli attire. Thick rubberized boots to fight off the cold mud. Very perplexing mud, have you every come across earth that smells like it is alive, or rather, was once alive? I imagine these boots are filled with a locker-room worth of socks. Over thermals and jeans or overalls comes The Rain Gear, the most important component next to gloves. Some people have full rain suits in a sunshine yellow, just right against a backdrop of fall sleet. Some just have pants tied on like rodeo chaps. Garbage bags, secured with a chains of bunching rubber bands, also come in handy. And don’t forget a serious coat. Most every head is covered: the only shelter from sun and rain alike. The caps advertise ideas and organizations from the regional—Citgo, Perry’s Mini Mart, Snappy Vegetables—to the celebratory—Seagram’s 7, Coors—to the political—Union Yes, Support Our Troops, Red Sox. Across their mouths and heads, the women wear bandanas, which feature everyone from Mickey Mouse to Michael Jordan.

“It’ll be in the market in the mornin’ The fresher the better, see?” Sonny Donovan sits in his tan pickup truck on the edge of the field and cultivates his own brand of charm. To him the grandiose Green Valiant is “501.” So much for romance. Irish to the bone, his shaggy white hair and stubble match the visible blood vessels which run through his face like rivers marked on a map. The three field pack harvesters don’t break down often because Sonny spends the winter with them, going over their hydraulic arms, checking the bunching machines’ air compressors, greasing shafts and lubin’ bearings, pampering those babies so they’ll be ready to sail for four months come July.

“You really can’t shut down,” he says through his window. No time for maintenance when everyone’s paycheck primarily relies on how much the crew picks. If a belt snaps, Sonny will actually get out of his truck and fix the rig while it’s moving so the show can go on.

Noon means lunch. The crew is scattered, eating in the tall grass and sprays of chamomile, drinking coffee in the mud road that intersects the field, leaning against the rig smoking, hovering over the maimed box fire. Lance asks, “What’s for dinner, Jun?” Junior serves him a styrofoam cup stuffed with pork, carrots and potatoes. Lances takes hold of the brim of Junior’s flame orange hunting cap and affectionately tugs it back and forth.

“Good boy, Jun.” Junior smiles. Conrad hands Lance a spoon. “It’s clean, sir.” The field rig revs up and everyone takes their places. Lance turns to me. “I’ve got to give them credit for sticking with it. The fun goes out of it real quick when there’s sleet and your fingers get cold. They can see the end and they want to finish it up.”

Lunch lasts 18 minutes.
DAY OFF! Papa Albert got word that the broccoli needs another day to rest and stretch. No pay today, but plenty of time to go shopping or hang out at the Limestone camp and sleep, do laundry, write letters, watch TV or cook.

The kitchen of the elderly farm house is the camp’s hub. It is stirring with odors which have vibrant lives of their own. The farm house draws people from the three trailers and barracks style shed that make up the rest of the housing. On the peeling paper in the entryway I smell dried fish and heavy oil, which reads something akin to rancid sweet and sour sauce and newborn kittens. Conrad the cook is at work stirring a large pot full of what looks like a brew from a Halloween horror flick but is really “sopa de pescado,” a fish stew with heads, tails and bodies of fresh mackerel floating in a red sauce. There is a pile of chicken meat thawing naked on the counter and stacked in the freezer are four pigs legs, whole appendages, shapely and hoofed.

Arturo Ormita comes in hungry. Conrad tours me around the stove. “That is an old rice, but it is too much to throw away I think. And that is new rice. This is pig and pork, the same I mix with grin peas and bell paypar.” He opens the oven, which he uses for storage, “And then I have here chicken.” On the counter there is a jar of poignant purple mash, Bagoong Alamang, smushed shrimp. Conrad looks at my face and says, “I think you never like the smell.” He’s right.

Conrad speaks to Arto in Tagalog, the national language of the Philippines. Since four of the 85 Filipino dialects are spoken at the camp plus straight Spanish and English, Tagalog is the most certain common ground. Conrad plays maitre d’ and tells Arto, “Very cool this old rice, you wait for new one.” He turns and explains. “Don’t ever serve a visitor with an old rice.”

While the rice cooks, Conrad and Arto instruct me on some of the finer points of Filipino culture. One very important one is pasalubang, an unwritten law that people who have been abroad bring gifts to all the friends and family waiting for their return. “Especially not come for several years, when they see you it is sudden tears.” Conrad, more accustomed to lecturing than cooking, elaborates, “Now sometimes you give choc-o-lat, clothes, shoes, handkerchiefs, cookies, candles; if you are good enough, give them color TV. They don’t require you, but then it has been our custom.”

Conrad calls me “mi hija,” my daughter, and says in the Philippines elders are respectfully addressed with “kayo,” or at least an Americanized version, like “Mr.” or “Papa,” as with Albert. They try to teach me to say “Maraming Salamat,” thank you so much. I slaughtern their subtle language and Conrad laughs like bellows pumping up a fire. Art smiles and eats grapes. I revert to Spanish, which is more familiar, “Muchas gracias.”

“Walang anuman,” says Conrad, you’re welcome.

In his trailer Arto and his room mate watch a game show. There is a Playboy calendar above the television, opened to naughty Miss October, in case things get dull. Arto offers me a coke and IGA fig bars. Canned cling peaches are slid onto a plate and set on the floor with a fork for communal consumption. I ask if he misses his wife. “Sometimes,” he says. Next up is their favorite soap opera, “One Life to Live.” An older couple come in to get Arto to go shopping. While he gets ready a roll of Hall’s cough drops is passed around the room like candy. Arto changes his shirt twice, applies baby oil to his hair, combs it back and then slaps after-shave over his entire head. He finishes the peaches and they pile in the car.

The two Mexican men in the Limestone camp, Jesus Castro and Domingo Vargas, are outside playing with a mountain bike. Jesus greets me with a gesture of an open palm from the forehead and shows me the stub from his one dollar Caribou high school ski team raffle ticket. Fond of the bike’s sparkling blue beauty, “Es muy, muy bonita,” he elects to sell his prize instead of paying shipping to California. The bike is worth $460 retail, but he’ll let it go for $250, for me, $200. The last day he is in town we go to the pawn shop in Presque Isle where he trades it with his friend Ted over beers for $100 cash and two wedding bands.

In the garage of the shed, Paquito is cutting Beethoven’s hair in exchange for a pack of cigarettes. Charlie, in his Nike shoes and Ray Ban sunglasses, leans on the bar Dionisio bought despite not knowing how to drive.

Beethoven’s Debbie Gibson sweatshirt is full of grey-flecked black stubble. Paquito walks around him in his rubber sandals and sharpens a straight razor on a stone. He tests the blade on his wrist in the same spot a mother tests milk from her baby’s bottle, wets a sideburn, takes a wide stance, and slowly, deliberately, scrapes the hair line above the neck leaving only a clean red line.

Efen Ferolino takes a load of people into Limestone and Caribou on the white bus and does the grocery shopping for the week. He will return with 12 cans of sweet peas, four bags of carrots, 25 pounds of onions, a big bag of green peppers, a pound of tomatoes, five fresh packs of spinach, three boxes of garlic, four immense jars of instant coffee, two pounds of Cremora, three cans of corned beef, two bottles of Accent MSG, three bottles of soy sauce, eight cans of jack mackerel, twelve packs of hot dogs, eight loaves of 69 cent gooey white bread, six 32 ounce bottles of ketchup, about seven pounds of chuck eye roast and 50 pounds of rice.

I stay behind in the warm kitchen to listen to Conrad. He says his culinary skills were limited to continued on page 37
MAKING HOME IN MAINE

Northern lights over migrant camp, Limestone, Maine.

“Nice place, ‘specially when you come from too crowded place . . . . Peaceful. If I leave I miss the silent of the night.”

PHOTOGRAPHS BY AMY TOENSING
"It's like we come so far to work for a little while, so we take whatever's there for us. And we make the best of it and make it a home. And once you get through the season you look back and you go, 'Hey, we made it again.'"
“I began working here in 1987. And then I come back here 1992, this year. In Oregon and California I’m working in bunching cebollas, onion, picking pippers. That’s too hard. Also cutting asparagus is hard, always bend. It’s easy, easy work, bunching. That is why when I finish my six month I come back here in Maine, because I miss my Maine.”

—Flordelis Posidio Cuevas
boiling water for coffee and rice when he started cooking for the camp. “Fortunately I was able to know more.” For everyone’s sake. But even so, “They slander me sometimes, the Mexicans, if they don’t like the food. In Manila I get angry sometimes but I never slander people, especially in the office, because their dignity. They have their name to protect. Not here. I am slandered.”

Conrad isip is a troubled soul, frequently assaulted by the blues, the sniffs or both. “I asked myself what have I done. I don’t deserve this kind of treatment, this kind of suffering. Because I am a law-abiding citizen and I am a good husband, a good father. I am a very good employee. Why should I serve this kind of penance?” When he was a Professor of Economics in the Philippines he had a guard who protected his privacy, a janitor kept his office clean. “In other words, I live with educated people, college degree people. While here I am serving people. Exactly opposite.”

Trapped by the standards he set for himself, Conrad is frustrated with his involvement in the harvest and critical of manual labor since, in his eyes, it undermines education. “They keep coming back to Maine because these people expect no other job. I think that’s the only source. I think that’s the only venue or likelihood for them.” He believes many people don’t bother with college degrees because more education doesn’t guarantee an increase in pay. He’s got a point. “Once they receive dolers, money, it stops there.” He doesn’t mention Linda and Kenedy Parasio, a young married couple on the crew who work on six month visas, then return to the Philippines with the money to finish college, one semester at a time.

Junior, known to his parents as Moises Lapitan, Jr., walks in the kitchen in his unassuming manner, half curious, half shy. When he laughs he covers his smile with his hand. Junior is the link between the kitchen and the field. He goes to the grocery store, brings meals to the field, and whenever he is “vacant” he cuts with the crew. He says, “There is something good in working with others. There’s fun.”

The owner of the IGA calls him “Father Junior,” because Junior was studying priesthood in the Philippines when family and finances beckoned him and his little brother, Eugenio, to America. Five seasons in Maine, he says it is “Peaceful, if I leave I miss the silent night.”

Junior speaks gently about the crew. “At least there is unity in working here,” he says. “No discrimination. Just whoever you are, whatever you are, wherever you are going to, everybody is respected. Just like the people here in Maine, they are respectful. That is why I used to come back to here because I find myself important here.”

Rashid-Ramos Tomimbang, “Tommy,” cinnamon slick and bored shows up looking for trouble. He’s wearing his LA Raiders cap backwards with “Guns-N-Roses” written across the brim. I ask him if he’d go to college next fall if he had the money. “Money?” he says, “I need money to get my car.” Then he adds that he’s thought about college for “business, something like that.” Meanwhile, “Whoever give me a offer, you know, good job, I just go.” Tommy’s tired of going from camp to field, field to camp, camp to field, field to camp, shopping, campfield, campfield all week long. He asks me if I want to go to the disco in Caribou.

People trickle in from shopping. Jennifer Abella walks in smoking a ridiculously slim cigarette. She is sturdily built and the color of maple syrup. Djeni tells me she got stuck working the fields when she overextended the trip to the States she was given for graduating from college with a degree in Computer Science. She’s scared her mother will find out she’s working the fields and isn’t so crazy about it herself. She says, “I miss my night lifes. As you can see it’s kind of boring. You can’t go out at night,” too tired, “got no car, got no company.” Most of her paychecks have gone to pay phone bills.

In their room off the kitchen, Djeni’s roommate, Flordelis Cuevas lies on her two-by-four and plywood bed. She works crops year round. Onions, peppers, grapes, “also cutting asparagus. Thas too hard. Always bend. Is my back ache this one.” She tried Alaska. “I worked in a fiss processor,” but returned to Maine for her third season, “because I miss my Maine. In summer it’s nice this place.”

Carmela Ensalado comes into the kitchen. Originally from Mexico City, her smile warms her brown sugar skin. She laughs and leans into me to bridge the banks of our spoken languages while she shows me her pictures. Frost on the field. Carmela on the harvester nearly buried by a pile of broccoli waiting to be bunched. Carmela in the parking lot of Ames variety store in Caribou. A table full of workers at the Jade Palace Chinese restaurant. Carmela at the pawn shop in Presque Isle. Aldora, Papa Albert’s daughter, buying medals after the Sunday service at the St. Louis Church in Limestone. Carmela with Father Joel Cyr. Images from her season in Maine.

LET US PROCLAIM THE MYSTERY of faith!”

Father Joel Cyr says with a subtly dramatic flair. The St. Louis Church bells chime as if God has struck them himself. Conrad and Hermine genuflect. Hermine pushes two dollar bills into my hand for the alms basket and the service concludes with a flourish of choir voices.

At the foyer door Father Joel jokes with people, kisses babies, and laughs heartily, like an accordion being pressed and pulled. Conrad asks for a picture
with the Father to send to his wife in the Philippines. “Yeah, sure, sure,” says Father Joel in his musical English, which reflects his Franco-American roots. “Tell her you’re in good hands.”

Conrad and Father Joel go inside the sanctuary. I stand in the foyer and try to look Catholic as Hermino and four other workers from the Limestone camp make their weekly purchases of rosaries, protective medals and crucifixes. A woman in a yellow turtle neck and a pink cardigan sweater asks the workers if they’re done with the trinkets. Father Joel can be heard talking to Conrad, “Are you coming downstairs? You’re welcome downstairs.” Parishioners are communing in the basement for donuts, coffee and chat. The trinket lady asks Aldora in a Sunday voice, “So, are you going... wherever it is you go?”

I try to decide if she doesn’t want the workers downstairs or if she just doesn’t know anything about them.

Aroostook can be unnervingly homogeneous. One surname can span an entire page in a thin phone book. It has been long enough since the French, Irish, English and Swedes settled here they’ve forgotten they were once newcomers drawn to build a railroad or work a crop. Many County residents are masters of the sideways glance, a complete assessment of a stranger with rapid alert eyes and a motionless face. Although it was encouraging to find a culture so intact, when I came into the County, with my Russian Jew olive skin, fresh from the Southwest, it felt as if they could smell I wasn’t one of them. My fair skinned New Hampshire companion said she felt the same.

Downstairs at the St. Louis Church, some community women talk about how tough it is to find a farmer still hand picking potatoes and are dismayed because they want their kids to experience, at least for an afternoon, what they did as children.

The mechanical potato harvester came into widespread use in Aroostook in the mid-960s. It saved the farmer precious harvest time, but reduced the number of available jobs in Aroostook County. A broccoli harvest is a different story. The harvester enables the broccoli to be fresh packed in the field, but the broccoli itself can only be cut by hand. There’s a decision to be made over each head. It needs a “core of workers who are going to be there for the long haul,” says Matt Williams. That core work force was gone from the Aroostook population, which was dwindling in its own right. It has dropped 20,000 residents since 1960.

Diane Edgecomb, born and bred in Aroostook says, “I think the economy needs the migrant worker because Americans, regular Americans...” “Regular Americans?” I ask without breathing. “Like us, okay? Regular folk. Average Americans will not do the kind of labor that the migrant worker will do. They’d stay home first and draw an unemployment check than they would go out and pick broccoli or potatoes. And I think that’s country-wide. I don’t think that is just Aroostook County.”

Diane’s back-handed compliment rattled something a Caribou woman had said to me about the migrant workers, “They don’t directly affect me, so I don’t have a problem with it.” Then added, “I see ’em at the laundromat. Five o’clock on Saturday. About 50,000 of ’em. Believe me, I stay by my washer.”

Father Joel, out of his robes back into a flannel hunting jacket, has been trying to keep quiet but can’t. He prods, “Well, Aroostook County has the highest unemployment and we need migrant workers?”

“That says something,” says Diane.

Sharon Michaud says, “The primary income for Aroostook County is transfer payments,” which consists of unemployment checks, Social Security checks, and federal and local welfare payments.

The County unemployment rate, tallied by the state as people who are “actively seeking employment,” in September of 1992 was 7.9 percent; low for the year thanks to the harvest, but still disturbing when compared to all of Maine, which was 5.9 percent, and the entire United States, which was 7.2 percent.

A man who retrains displaced workers says, “You work in the rain, you work in the snow, there aren’t a whole lotta people who wanna do the work. Although you brag about your Aroostook County worker, I don’t think they want to do that back breaking labor.” A resident told me why he doesn’t have a job picking broccoli, “We’re hard working people, but the Mexicans will work for cheap.” Meanwhile Herschel Smith assures me that the migrants make “real money.” I have
seen a weekly pay stub for Jesus for $468.28 before taxes. Out of that he only has to pay for food, no housing costs or transportation costs. Community people work in the planting and processing of broccoli crops. But the farmers couldn’t put together local field teams since people don’t spring loose from year round jobs to harvest for four months, or people didn’t want to nullify their unemployment benefits with long hours, or they plain didn’t like the job and quit. In the early years the farmers spent more time hiring than harvesting. The first season Maine Packers brought in migrant labor, 120 migrants did the work of a turn-over of more than 400 residents the previous year.

It doesn’t concern Diane to see other people working the County broccoli land, after all, it’s not the traditional crop. “I’m just happy to have them come do the job.” Yet she admits she doesn’t have much contact with the workers. While 350 new faces don’t increase interaction enough to put old conceptions to rest, they do help. But for the most part cultures bump and excuse each other like strangers passing on the street.

Tara Smith, Lance Smith’s daughter, has held her own during uncomfortable situations. “You can’t understand what people are saying and it’s really nerve-racking. Especially when the’re a bunch of guys around you and, you know,” sing-songy, “Ah, buenos dias senorita.”

More often interpersonal contact is a brief glimpse into a life, at best. “I was in a doctor’s office at the same time a migrant mother was there with her child. All that she spoke was Spanish. She could not even explain to anybody what was wrong with her child and how concerned she was. And that was probably one of the most heart breaking situations that I have ever seen,” says Sharon Michaud. “So there are a lot of language barriers for some of them.”

“They bring us something of their own culture. It makes it more exciting.” Belinda Carter, head of the preschool division, admires the migrants. “They’re highly skilled farm workers. And they’re very proud of that and they have reason to be. They’re sort of like what I see our folks must have been.”

Sonny Donovan, Smith’s field manager, would agree. “They are here workin’ because there’s people in this town walking around here too lazy to work.” Go ahead, be blunt, Sonny. “I tell ‘em they’re lazy. One of the women in the store said, ‘Boy, you know they make good money,’ and I said, ‘Yeh, they do.’ I said, ‘You know, there’s a lotta people in this town don’t know where their next meal’s comin’ from.’ I says, ‘And these people has to come here and they take all this money and go home with it.’

“Well I know that,” she says, ‘But who’s gonna work in the rain?’ I says, ‘I do. I work in the rain.’”
'WE ALWAYS HAD THAT inner thought in me of 'It's only a little season. It'll be over with.' That's the only thing that keeps me goin'. Gustavo Solis squares off his thumb and forefinger, the same gesture I use for the Spanish I speak, un poco. "Everywhere I go it's only for a little while, so that inspires me to go for it." Gustavo is a foreman at Maine Packers' broccoli processing plant. He works diligently for his fellow laborers and for his family. The women at Headstart call him "a born leader."

Maine Packers' camp is a collection of second-hand cars parked between haphazard rows of trailers. In the corridors a pack of young boys wrestle over an air gun, all trying to be next to shoot at an empty Coke can. Kinetic energy spins off of them and the gun makes me worry for their little sisters' eyes. On another day they may turn discarded hose and rubber bands into slingshots while the girls jump rope.

Gustavo says, "Where we live at, it's not what we call home. It's like we come so far to work for a little while, so we take whatever's there for us. And we make the best out of it and make it a home. And once you get through the season you look back and you go, 'Hey, we made it again.'"
Crews are made up of everyone from family members to complete strangers. Regardless, Gus says the joint effort creates camaraderie. "There's that special bondage in there. People have more respect for their work here. Believe it or not, whether it's raining or snowy, people wake up in the morning and they want to go to work. I think it's cause the bondage there is between the camp people and their boss. They get you and say, 'Let's go, let's go.' They're out in the field playing races, see who loads the first trailer.

"There's a couple of days here that rained for two or three days straight, people were literally pushing trailers by hand. I saw that, and I go, 'You're crazy people.' And he goes, 'Nah, we gotta win their guys, you know?' Their trailer was getting a little bit stuck. They kept on going."

Perhaps a farmer's care for workers helps workers care for the work. Andy Ayer, their farmer is "so helpful, he buys those, we call 'em 'banana suits' for the showers. Tear one up, throw it down on the floor, burn it, get another one, it's cool." Gustavo says the same goes for the camp. If appliances break they are replaced that day; if doors split, the heat goes out, all fixed that day. It is a switch from four years ago when Pine Tree Legal brought suit against Maine Packers for substandard worker housing. Andy Ayer was consistently unavailable to me for comment about that.

Delucia Solis, five years old, tears into the small kitchen as if her hair is on fire. Gustavo sets Delucia on his lap, "You didn't go to school today?" Delucia answers in Spanish. "Doctor? Oh, a shot. You cry?" She shakes her head. He changes the subject, "Once upon a time there were three little bears, mama bear, no, papa bear, mama bear and baby bear." Delucia asks, "And Goldilocks?" Then breaks into Spanish and retells the story replacing porridge with Cokes and popcorn.

"No, mi hija," Gustavo says affectionately as laughs shake his body.

Delucia scampers out. Gustavo sends some Budweiser into his ample belly, adjusts his cap with the Chevrolet symbol which says, "Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Fords," and says, "I've been lucky. I can't consider myself the least bit misfortunate." Whenever he's needed a job, he's found one. In Texas "I went and asked for a job at a produce company. And they told me, 'Okay, we need a stacker here.' I be willing to do that. She," he tosses a thumb at his wife Philipa, "had already gotten a job at bunching broccoli." He whistles to her. "She couldn't take her eyes off me." I look at Philipa's striking bone structure and toasted skin and tell him I think it was the other way around.

I ask Philipa in English if she misses Mexico.

"Que?" What? She asks me. I realize why she has been so quiet.

Gustavo gives her a love glance and says, "My baby doll baby." Philipa works outside the house only when they migrate. Gustavo says, "I don't like for her to work, I prefer for her to take care of my kids and keep my house, see, it's our home. That's our home. It's not that I'm being old fashioned or anything like that. But in a way for me, I think it's better for her and I think it's better for me and I think it's better for my kids."

Philipa sets down the freshest tortilla I've ever encountered. Ingredients—white flour, lard, water, a little salt and her touch. It is thick and chewy with a crisp crust slathered in pan-cooked refried beans. For the first time I feel at home in Aroostook.

During the day Delucia, Naomi, and 92 other
migrant kids go to Headstart. Gustavo is the parent representative. “I gotta lotta confidence in our Headstart, a lotta confidence. I’ve gone unannounced to Headstart centers and I see our staff lean down on the ground, playing with our kids. [or] trying to put ’em to sleep. And you feel good because you’re working and our kids are being well taken care of.”

He rallies parents to get involved with their kids’ educations. “My kids are really the ones that turned me around. I work my butt off ‘cause I want them to get a better way of living than we do. Every once in a while you meet one [a migrant] that says, ‘It’s a way of livin’ and it’s good, you know, and I wouldn’t mind it if they did the same thing I did.’ But very rarely, you can count ’em. The majority would rather have their kids educated and stuff.”

Delucia brings out a drawing to show him. Gustavo’s face registers terror. “God, it’s ugly mi hija, looks like rp.e.” It is.

“I try to brainwash her you might say. That one to be a doctor,” he points to Delucia, and then at his two year old, Naomi, who is scribbling on paper at the table. “And I want her to be a lawyer. Then I got it made in the shade. If I get sick, she cures me. If I go to jail, she takes me out. A kid’s like a piece of clay. You try to mold along to what you want ’em to be. I mean they can be whatever they want. I just hope they don’t follow the same mistakes I did.”

I remind him he told me he’s had a lot of opportunities. “Oh yeah. But I’ve also worked in bars and strip joints. I’ve been a bouncer and bar tender. I used to,” he clears his throat, “do a little bit of this, a little bit of that. I used to be a big gang member when I lived in Chicago. Had a Harley, wrecked a Harley. I mean, party animal, put it this way. But I look at these guys, you know, ‘Daddy,’ and I’m totally different. It gets my inspiration. I look at ’em and I go,” he whispers with pride, “‘God, my kids.’ I never thought of myself as being a father, you know? So I sit there and stare at them for a long time, they’re both sleeping and I go, ‘God bless ’em. Please, please bless ’em. Just bless ’em.’ It’s all I can do, you know?”

“They’re beautiful girls, big eyes,” I say, wanting to squeeze Naomi’s meaty cheek. “They’re mine,” Gustavo says.

“If you keep going from Texas to Maine, like when they’re in high school . . . .”

“Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Soon as Delucia gets school age I’ll stop migrating. Oh, no, I don’t want my kids to be doing that.” Gustavo is resolute. “Even if I gotta come alone or work alone. I’ll survive one way or another. I’m a survivor.”

In her family’s trailer Sulema Ruiz tells me that she is not interested in surviving as a migrant. She shows me her collection of gold wire and beads which she makes into jewelry to sell and says, “I don’t want my children to see us always travelling for work. I want them to see us having nice job, you know, inside work. . . . We’re thinking about going back to Florida and buying a house so we can start settling down.”

Sulema is 25 years old and caught between two lives, the one she envisioned for herself and the one she is you might say. That one to be a doctor,” he points to Delucia, and then at his two year old, Naomi, who is scribbling on paper at the table. “And I want her to be a lawyer. Then I got it made in the shade. If I get sick, she cures me. If I go to jail, she takes me out. A kid’s like a piece of clay. You try to mold along to what you want ’em to be. I mean they can be whatever they want. I just hope they don’t follow the same mistakes I did.”

“I like to work for myself and I want to help my parents with the bills and all that we have over in Texas.” But she says, “I miss my school. I need to go to school.”

Silvia Benevides is facing the same decision Sulema Ruiz made. After sizing me up she confides, “If I could be able to go to college [I would], because over at Texas we’re used to that when we get married and your husband don’t want you to go to school, he don’t want you to work. He just wants you to be home, stay for him.”

Silvia Benevides is fiercely self possessed, potently beautiful and 15, the age of womanhood in her culture. “I like to work for myself and I want to help my parents with the bills and all that we have over in Texas.” But she says, “I miss my school. I need to go to school.”

Silvia will take “migrant” classes when she gets home to Brownsville, Texas, to compensate for time spent working. “Up North I don’t like to go to school. I
don’t get to have that much friends because people keep staring at us.” Silvia works with local women in the processing plant.

She asked them, “Why do these people keep staring at us, it’s like they have never seen Mexicans before.” Silvia said her boss told her, “That’s true. It’s because Mexican and black people are not to be seen all the time here.”

What is commonplace to me baffles Silvia. “I’ve heard that here girls, in Maine, women, they live with their boyfriends and I’m like, ‘Woah, they’re not married then?’ It’s ‘No, if our relationship fails then we don’t want to have to pay for the divorce.’ They say over at Texas that divorce costs $1,000. And it’s too much to pay. Five weeks working here.” She snaps her fingers, “A whole month and one week.”

Silvia’s boyfriend walks by the window of her family’s trailer so that she can see him. He does not pause or send a message, but there is something in his manner that makes his presence known.

What is commonplace to Silvia baffles me. “Unless he asks my parents if I can get married he can’t step inside this house.” Why so drastic? “Because if we get into a fight and we don’t see each other anymore, it’s like, ‘You were only messing around with him.’ ”

“It’ll probably be a while before you get married, don’t you think?” I ask. After all, she wasn’t allowed out of the house to the movies or dancing with friends until her Quincinera, the day she turned 15.

Silvia lets out an uncharacteristic sigh. “He wants me to go with him, Rodriego. He’s only two years older and I’m like, ‘We’ve only known us for a little bit of time, let us get more time passed through us.’ He says, ‘No, that’s not for me.’ He’s from Mexico, Metamoros. They’re more stricter down there.”

Rodriego was born in Texas, he’s not trying to marry her for citizenship, maybe for her lionine walk, chestnut skin and black coffee hair.

“Would you finish high school if you got married?”

“If he would let me I would. It’s because over at Texas it doesn’t depend on the wife, it depends on the husband. The man is the one who rules.” She adds slowly, “I don’t like it at all.

“Well, my parents, they have always treated me good and I don’t know if he’s gonna treat me good. I don’t know if I’m gonna make it with him or not.” Her mother says, “It’s on my decision. For her she wouldn’t like for me to get married too young because she says, ‘You are barely knowing your life.’”

Silvia’s little sisters sits quietly beside her. Graciella is 11, has ermine eyes and doesn’t display the slightest whisper of the command she held over herself and her three younger siblings in the afternoon before Silvia and her parents came back from work. Gracy says kids at the public school in Caribou tease her. “They talk a lot of things, but I don’t listen to them.”

I ask Gracy what they say but she won’t tell me.

Silvia steps in, “The main reason I have been into fights is because they call us wetbacks. I have a high temper, see? I went back, ‘If I’m a wetback, what the fuck are you gonna do about it, who cares?’ ”

Born in Texas, Silvia and Gracy are Mexican-Americans, not illegal aliens, not wetbacks. “Over at Texas, yeah, we tease each other and we call ourselves wetbacks and all, but that’s between us, not between other people we don’t know.

“It’s because they don’t know who they’re talking to”

ONE THING I WISH is that I could speak their language so I wouldn’t have to expect so much of them,” says Emily Smith. Speaking Tagalog or Spanish would help, but is not prerequisite to her getting along with the rest of the crew. She works her father’s broccoli during her high school’s three week potato harvest break. Emily is athletic, well-spoken and 15, a year shy of getting a job in town. She says, “I’m really thankful for the opportunity to work.”

Emily sits on one of the generous couches in the Smith’s family home. I lounge on the other one. The walls are covered with pictures of her, her older sister Tara, and her brother Shamus, who is away at Vassar College. The house feels very much lived in, homey, not at all ostentatious despite the Mercedes Benz and Miata sports cars in the garage.

She does share a common language with the Filipinos and Mexicans: work. “There’s two women working together off the same pile of rubber bands. You pull a few out on top so that you can work faster and when
there’s one rubber band left they won’t take it. So when you come back there’s always one there. If I switch bunchers and I’m working with someone else, they all do it. It’s like a courtesy or something.”

Brunching has its techniques, and the Filipino people have a customary graciousness. Emily says, “I think they’re proud of what they do and I think they realize how important they are to this whole operation. Dad can’t watch every broccoli that goes out. They select what’s going to the store.”

Everyone on the field team is paid equally depending on how much the team cuts and packages each day. Emily says of the migrants, “These people not only work hard, but they do it with a smile on their face, graciously, knowing that this is only going to better themselves. They’re not going to be doing this all their lives. I think a lot of them realize that this is just a starting point. I think they all have other, higher expectations of themselves.”

Emily’s sister Tara has an opposite take on the crew and the work. She plunks down on the sofa and tells me, “I know that some of those people don’t have another choice, I mean, this is everything to them at this time of the year. For me it’s just a job for a few weeks. I think it’s good that I have been exposed to it enough to appreciate that I have an opportunity to have more for myself, ‘cause those people don’t have more. It makes you set goals for yourself.”

Tara just returned from Boston where she was looking at colleges. After the summer she vowed never to work the field again. “I can find other jobs that are a little more suited to my liking than working out in the cold, wet, gross awful broccoli.” She laughs. “And I do realize that broccoli is what put these clothes on my back. But, I don’t know, I’ll leave that to my dad.” She laughs again. “I just guess I’m not one for mindless menial tasks.”

Even though picking broccoli is not for her, Tara can appreciate the endurance it demands. “I’ve seen those people work and some of those men and women are the most dedicated people in the world. I’ve seen a guy cut his thumb with his knife, I mean just slice it. I would be in a hospital bed screaming with a cut like that. And he jumped up on the machine, wrapped a towel around it, taped it up and went back to work. It’s just amazing how diligent and dedicated they are.”

The family converges in the kitchen. Emily hacks at a ham with a butcher knife. Her Grandpa Ralph sits at the table, he’s 75, still trim and full of wit. Tara Inspects her sandwich, Emily has pilfered her tomatoes. Dotty, Emily’s mom, settles over a cup of tea and tells me how awkward it is for Papa Albert to address her as “Ma’am.” “Considering how many years my senior he is it just seems peculiar that he would be showing me such esteem. The gentility is really nice.”

Dotty, like Lance, does not look old enough to have a kid in college. She is petite and spirited. “I often wish I could have been here when all five Smith farmers were farming. Lance is fifth generation. They had a wonderful heritage. Their farms stretched from the mountain to Presque Isle and wide. They all had six or seven kids and they all worked. It was a romantic ideal, a really wholesome lifestyle.” In the County at that time, “Farming meant wealth.” The crops, the farms and fields, even the families were abundant. “There was just some sort of mythical prestige associated with having been a part of what farming was when it was good.”

“When I started farming I never broke the habit, which was too bad.” Something of a gambler, Ralph Smith has run the farming gamut. “I lost all my own money and all I could borrow. And then I got pushed into an FHA.” Getting stuck in a Farm Home Administration loan “really put us out on the road. They tell you when to plant, how much you can plant. You’re not making your own decisions any longer. So it was just self-defeating, you can’t compete with the government.” Especially when Uncle Sam was subsidizing surplus crops out West. “Kind of knocked us in the head here,” Ralph says, bringing a shaky fist down on the table. Many Maine farmers lost their market, subsequently their land and livelihood. “One time, I believe it was 1948, we planted 240,000 acres here in the state of Maine. Now we’re growing 86 or 87,000,”—to be exact, 81,000 in 1992. “Fields that I saw in potatoes are grown up to trees.”

Lance walks in from work. Slowly the family drops what they’re doing and listens to Grandpa Ralph tell
me their collective past.

“My great grandfather was given a land grant up here when he got back from the Civil War. Oliver had farmed on the West Ridge, first [Smith family] farm in Aroostook County . . . . Yeah, when Granpy started growing potatoes he used to plant them around the stumps and have to dig them by hand. And they stored them in the house cellar. He was hauling potatoes to Houlton from Mars Hill,” about 40 miles, “with a team of oxen, eight barrels at a time for 25 cents a barrel. And he’d go down one day and come back the next . . . . When he’d get back he’d stay one night home and go again on the road. With a little ox cart with eight barrels of potatoes.”

“He’d probably be surprised to see me delivering broccoli overnight to London, wouldn’t he?” Lance asks.

Ralph’s eyes catch a spark and he says, “Yes, he would.” His eyes dim, “It’s just gone too far too fast since then.”

“Yeh, it’s changed, but the world’s changed in the last few years, 75 years, a lot. I’m not sure for the better, but it’s changed,” says Lance, who is making a living on those changes.

THE CUTTERS ARE THE COOL CATS OF THE BROCCOLI TRADE. THEY WALK AHEAD BRANDISHING THEIR MACHETES, EACH SHARPENED AND SHAPED TO FIT A PERSONAL STYLE.

LEFT: Broccoli cutters in the fields.

EL ULTIMO DIA.” The last day of picking. Limestone, Maine, 5:36 A.M., 35 degrees, 18 degree windchill. Charlie comes into the camp kitchen wearing a satin jacket and a grin, “Last day, shit, I can’t wait.” Conrad scurries around and points things out to people who are moving without the heaviness and dread of other mornings. Junior holds his gloves over the bare flame of the gas stove, “I’m warming it up.” Carmela is spilling light. She says, “No mas trabajo!” No more work, for now.

Efren starts the bus to knock the chill out of the engine and swaggers in for some coffee and pontificates over his styrofoam cup with untypical loquaciousness. “I have my happiness tonight because it is my last day of work. Vamanos.” Let’s go. The bus is loaded and off for the field.

I remember that I forgot my gloves again when I climb up and touch metal on the field pack rig. The women teach me how to bunch but I am not very effective, so I jump ship and wade through the field to the shelter of Sonny’s truck. Efren hangs in the driver’s window and is wearing a baseball cap that says “Some­body in Maine Loves Me.”

Playing the straight I have to ask how long they’ve known each other. “Too long,” Sonny comes back. Efren slightly swings back and forth on the door and tells me that he has “no easy job.” That it can be a “big headache,” waking up 40 people and then getting them to do what you want. Sonny cross examines, “Were you drinking Tequila last night with Carmela?”

“No,” Efren answers earnestly, “I just drink anything.” Sonny compliments him, “Your eyes look like two flies in a bowl of tomato soup.”

Junior brings the break food to the edge of the field. Beefy slices of ham, marshmallow white bread, and sugar brewed coffee. I ask why no one’s eating broccoli while I nibble on juicy stalks and recklessly toss the heads. Papa Albert says, “When it is fresh, newly cut, it tastes somewhat sweet, like fresh lobster.” Arto gives his opinion, “Broccoli es caca.”

The fires built to consume broken boxes and warm frost nibbled fingers become hot beds for an impromptu end of the season ceremony which consists of slicing off rain gear, especially those pants and overalls held together with structural duct tape and throwing it to the flames. It’s cool, there will be new rain gear, boots and knives next season. Jesus protests but is fairly helpless as two guys slash each of his pants legs; understandably so, he is only wearing thin cotton clothes underneath.

Break is leisurely, people are laughing and talking. Charlie is singing “last day, it’s the last day,” to a tune of his own invention. Only three turns of the field remain, the end is in sight.

The men dismantle the table tops and wings of the harvesters with collective grunts and cheers. Sonny hangs his arms over the back of his truck and waxes nostalgic, “You like my crew? I’ve been working with this crew for six years. Always smiling, no complaints. These are the best people I’ve ever worked with.” The workers head for camp, soon for the airport. Sonny gets on his radio to the office in West Field, “You’re gonna have eight pallets of Stag and about eight pallets of tag. We’re done for the season.”

salt

NUMBER FORTY-FOUR • 45
Under One Roof:
IT IS LATE afternoon at the Greater Portland Young Men's Christian Association and the five-story brick building is filling up with people.

The parade that files through the front and back entrances and past the desk receptionists is heaviest around this time of the day. It is a parade that ranges from senior citizens to toddlers, from doctors and lawyers to street youth and the unemployed. They come to exercise. They come to play. They come to kill time before a shelter opens. They come to live.

It is society under one roof.

And with $91 dollars and a signature I will enter this society for one week as a resident and member of the YMCA or, simply, the Y.

The YMCA has been in Portland since 1853, only about a year after the first American Y began in Boston. It has been at its 70 Forest Avenue location since 1927.

No longer is the Portland YMCA solely young, male or Christian. Its mission statement embraces all ages, both sexes and generic spirituality:

"The Greater Portland YMCA is dedicated to building a healthy body, mind and spirit through a supportive residential environment and programs that promote health enrichment, strong families, recreation, and self improvement."

The front lobby at the YMCA is like a city street. There's a park bench, a newspaper machine, a pay phone and a spectrum of people that walk through it. The "street" signs at the front desk remind residents not to loiter and that pennies will no longer be exchanged for other coins and that food stamps will be kept at the front desk.

Richard Reed is at the desk. A former English teacher and tour guide, with a white beard straddling his chin, he calls the Y a "wonderful cross section of the human race. You get it all here."

He gives me a contract that lists the
dormitory rules. They read, in part: 

"Visitors are not allowed upstairs in the dorm area."

"No women allowed in the dorm."

"There is NO cooking permitted in your room."

"Do not hang anything on the walls of your room."

"Failure to comply with any of the above rules will be grounds for eviction."

The residence has been called a nuthouse, a dump, a family, a zoo, a place to hang a hat and a home. In 1992 the average stay of a YMCA resident was 33 days.

The top three floors of the Y have 85 single occupancy rooms for men only. The second floor has an instructional pool, gymnasium, aerobics studio, child care room and a new women's locker room.

The first floor has a child care center, a Nautilus Center, Fitness Center, the John B. Malcolm pool, boys and girls locker rooms, two squash courts, two racquetball/handball/walleyball courts and a small kitchen and television lounge for residents. Just outside those courts is the office where the Youth and Family director supervises programs for young fathers, youth at risk and youth leaders. The basement has a men's executive locker room and a youth game room.

The YMCA also branches outside its four walls through programs such as camping, youth soccer, home swim lessons and school enrichment programs.

In the 1992 fiscal year the largest chunk of the Y's expenditures, 35 percent, went to social service.

Richard Reed sees a tension between the social service and the health club role of the Y. He says the Y has a strong sense of social service, "but at the same time they can't go bankrupt." The "wonderful women's locker room" with the sauna, whirlpool and steam room brings in money.

"On the other hand you've got this 85 room hotel here which deals with a population that is very different from the people who can afford to buy memberships here . . . ."

Currently, the Y is the largest provider of permanent housing for single men on general assistance in the city. The national YMCA office in Chicago confirms that housing units at the more than 2,000 YMCAs across the country have fallen from about 60,000 to about 20,000 in the last 30 years. In Portland, the Y board of directors considered closing the residency in 1986, but eventually voted 20 to one in favor of upgrading the facility. Renovation of the decaying facility was made with a $775,000 Housing and Urban Development loan and the residency was officially added to the mission statement.

John, a 32-year-old resident who says he's on a spiritual journey, sees a "definitive line of identity—who's who" drawn by staff, other members and residents themselves. The "separateness," he says, comes out of a legitimate desire to not have residents "jade and influence" children. But, also, he says, the line is drawn by a fear of poverty.

"That goes for the people in all of society," he says. "People down and out scare people at the possibility that they can also be down and out." Richard says the stigma of the residency is "definitely a problem because if you told someone you live at the Y it's like, 'Oh,' you know, 'what's wrong with you.'"

One staff member teased me about actually choosing to live at the Y. On a later visit to the residency floors, she asked me if I had brought my knife or gun.

I walk past the bathroom I will share with the 29 other rooms on the fifth floor. It has two showers, five sinks and two enclosed toilets. The sinks will double as a dishwasher. Later that bathroom will swallow the bottle of shampoo I carelessly leave there.

The hallway is infiltrated with the faint odor of cigarette smoke. I unlock my door and am introduced to a stale smelling cubicle with desk and chair, closet and a hard bed. The radiator's blue paint is chipping. It will be a loyal companion, chattering to me in loud "clangs" at intervals as I try to sleep. It reminds me of a college dormitory with the sounds of hallway conversations, music and a television across the hall. Door pounding, footsteps and the sleep jarring closing of doors also will greet me. This is the reality for my fellow residents and me. I am in room 524. Barry is a few doors away.

Five days a week, 10 to 12 adults gather to hit a “bird” of goose feathers and cork under the silent glass backboard and a dark scoreboard. It's a quieter, more gentile affair than the body-banging intensity of the pickup roundball games on the same court.

Right: Dick and Betsy Hewes.

MONDAY is pay day for Barry Barnard. But today is Saturday and he says he's been broke for about a week. The first time I saw Barry I was intimidated. His brooding-like silence and the untrimmed black hair climbing over his head and face gave him a protective, angry look and made him appear much older than 26. But he turned out to be a friendly and easy going guide into his world of general assistance, temporary work and the YMCA. It is a world of adversity that Barry adapts to.

Barry is using a glove and can opener to get to some clam chowder as he sits in the small, box-like television lounge on the first floor. The YMCA has
been his home for about seven weeks, through Portland's workfare program, which provides rent and food vouchers in return for two to three days of work a week from Barry.

The Y residency reflects a Maine economy that is short of good jobs. In 1992 the rooms at the YMCA were rented 26,238 nights, or about 85 percent occupancy. The city paid for 42.3 percent of those nights. Employee estimates of those Y residents with steady jobs that would give them choices to live at other places ranges from 17 percent to 25 percent.

"A lot of these guys, I understand why they quit," one longtime resident says. They quit looking for work "because it's easier to hold your hand out than to go work for nothing and be treated like a slave because the man thinks he's doing you a favor."

The residency seems like a warehouse, a stop in the system. While people exercise on the treadmill in the Nautilus center a few rooms away, Deb Atchison, who is in charge of the residents' needs, says most of the residents are on a "treadmill going nowhere."

"They're sidetracked. They're recycled through the system. They end up in whatever door's open at the time. Usually they have one door closing behind them and another one open and they just keep hoppin' around."

Richard Reed says an "incredibly diverse" group of people live in the residency. Barry's fellow residents include John Wedge, a 20-year resident who likes to sit on the park bench in the lobby. There's Dario from New Orleans, who says religion turned him from drug dealing. There's Jason, a Gulf War veteran, who writes poetry and has made his arms a collage of tattoos. And there's Mike, who says he left a good job, a car and a computer in California to "learn about life" and be with a woman in Maine.

John Wedge "kinda" misses the lounge that used to be where the Nautilus and Fitness centers now are. It had vending machines, a microwave, ping pong and pool tables and chairs where he could sit and look out the windows, John says. Now John sits on a park bench in the lobby and the residents have a small television and kitchen area, with a stove, in what used to be storage and office space on the first floor.

Once a resident was told by a desk receptionist to "bite your tongue" after he swore loudly when he burned himself on the stove. It's like the stove cut his fingers. After work a fishy smell hangs on him and spreads when he gestures.

"It goes by fast when you don't watch the clock," he says. "It ain't that bad. As long as we keep our mind to it, keep music going. Once in a while we have a break. It goes by pretty fast."

"I gotta make some money," Barry says. "I go crazy if I'm broke."

After his divorce in 1992, Barry says his home was the Oxford Street city-run shelter or friends' apartments before coming to the Y. Born in Trenton, New Jersey, Barry came to Maine with his mother when he was six. He doesn't know his father. His mother told him "they was always at each other's throats."

A few months after coming to Maine, Barry says his mother "just decided to put me on the State. She tried to explain to me that I would be around more kids and go more places and stuff like that. I understood a little bit, but, I agreed with her ... ."
ent times. Barry's three children, five-year-old Christopher, four-year-old Geannea and three-year-old Katherine sit frozen in photographs in his room. He doesn't know how to spell "Geannea" or "Katherine." He says his former wife is the speller.

"He's got my ex-wife's eyes, not mine," Barry says of Chris. "They all do." Barry sits on his bed. Most of the time while we talk about his kids, he keeps his head bowed and his hands between his legs, seeming shy, uncomfortable.

The children were taken away by the State, Barry says, because of a pattern of "fighting and separating and getting back together... was just too much for the kids." Another reason is "hard to say," Barry says and then laughs nervously. A man living with them was accused of sexual abuse by somebody else in the project where they lived.

"They didn't have no proof," Barry says, of the police. "I knew he never did it." Barry says the Maine State Department of Human Services wanted the man to leave, but he didn't.

"So one day the Human Services came along with a social worker and a policeman..." They took Barry's children to a foster home. "I was at work so I didn't know nothin' about it until I got home. They were gone.

"I was a State kid my own self," Barry says. "I was brought up in the State since I was six years old—and my son's doing the same thing."

Barry says he won't be able to see his kids again until they're 18.

He keeps other pictures of his past, including a wedding shot in the trunk that doubles as a night table next to his bed. "It's not very often somebody gets married," he says. Atop the trunk a jar cap serves as an ashtray.

Barry is getting $26 a week in food vouchers through the city workfare program. Later he will apply and get food stamps. His desk has become a food pantry for four loaves of bread and remnants of a fifth, peanut butter, jelly, powdered punch, spaghetti, lasagna, roast beef and gravy and clam chowder in can or box. "I just buy what I can and what I think is going to last you for the week," he says.

Abuoy Barry holds onto as a simple and practical description of his life is "Keep myself busy... Well, I just don't like being bored," he says. Keeping busy means working, looking for a job, going out. At the YMCA it comes from behind the closed door. "I can win it if I'm practicing, but I can't win it in a game," Barry says. "Oh, that just kills me and you know what else kills me? That was her first win in 301."

For members that don't live there, the Y is a place to go, a place to exercise and play. For Barry, the Y is a place to leave. He bums a cigarette off another resident, although he says he hates bumming. It is rolled and he prefers filtered but he smokes it anyway. "Calms my nerves," Barry says.

He smokes outside the main entrance. Other residents have gathered to smoke at these doors but it isn't encouraged. According to one staff member, walking through a "crowd of people and a smoke screen" is not "too inviting" to members coming to exercise and play at the Y. But there is no problem today. Barry smokes and then goes back in to watch television. A good night at the Y, Barry says, is "when it's quiet."

"There's always people having an argument with somebody. They're always fighting over the TV or something like that," he says. "If everyone can agree on one show, then we would be better off because there is a lot of people who like to hog the TV."

Everyone seems able to agree on Sunday, as they watch a "B" movie about invading Martians. It is one day before Barry picks up his paycheck. The waiting and the craving for cigarettes eats at him.

"Make it Monday," he says.

Erin Floyd's thin, lanky, 11-year-old body seems to be made for cutting through the water.

She swims in the shadow of nine records she has set for the Pine Tree Swim Club at the YMCA—listed along with others on a large sign towering over the pool.

Right: Erin at the Y's John B. Malcolm pool.

EXECUTIVE Director Bob Oickle holds a piece of his "lucky stone" while he delivers a pep talk to the young swimmers of the Y's Pine Tree Swim Club. The Maine YMCA State Championships are only days away for the team, which ranges
image from about seven to 17. Coaches Dee Saintcross and Don Murphy stand with him on the deck of the John B. Malcolm Pool. "These two folks love you," Bob Oickle says. "You're real special to them."

Bob Oickle heads the business of an association with a $1.6 million annual budget. The swimmers are training in a pool which got a new filtration system through a $2.5 million capital campaign begun in 1989. Other physical improvements financed by the campaign are the new women's locker room, renovation of the child care area and renovation of the Nautilus and Fitness centers.

Program fees provide 29 percent of the Y's revenue. The United Way and membership account for 22 percent each. Membership fees range from $86 for youth to $551 for a family. In January, 1993 the YMCA had 1,588 male members and 995 female members. In addition 4,753 people had signed up for programs like aerobics or swimming lessons.

Today the mood of the young swimmers of the Pine Tree Swim Club is light, unlike the humid air. The strenuous practices are behind them and now they are "tapering." The workouts are lighter and the emphasis is on form and technique. Assistant Coach Don Murphy says these are the most difficult practices to keep the swimmers focused.

"What time is it?" a little swimmer asks.

"It's Howdy Doody time," he says quickly, sending her on her way. "You have two more 25s to do."

The 66-year-old Murphy is in his second year of assistant coaching for the Pine Tree Swim Club. He doesn't exactly know how long he's been coaching YMCA swimming—about 36 years. During that time he has coached Olympians, YMCA national record holders and a Y national championship team. He jokes that he has chlorine in his blood.

In the wooden bleachers above the pool, parents watch and wait through practice. At the state meet they will don "Pine Tree Power" t-shirts and clutch state meet programs and pen or pencils as if they're at the horse track.

And Erin Floyd will be there. Her thin, lanky, 11-year-old body seems to be made for cutting through the water. Erin swims in the shadow of nine records she has set for the Pine Tree Swim Club. They are listed along with other record breakers on a large sign towering over one end of the pool.

"She actually understood what swimming was all about as an eight-year-old," Murphy says and points to his head. "Right here."

Erin's two brothers also swim on the team. She says sometimes they "try to boss you" but sometimes they "congratulate you." Her brother Heath, who is 14, grins, "She's good, and it makes me want to do better because I don't want her to toast me."

"We're street kids," Holley says. Maybe she is trying to impress me with the label. She and Theresa stand before me in the Y gymnasium where I have been playing pickup basketball—one of my privileges as a resident and member.

Holley and Theresa were referred to the YMCA for membership through the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Street Program, a licensed mental health agency across the street from the YMCA. The program offers basic support services for those 21 and younger who are on the streets. Last year, about 100 kids and young adults were referred to the YMCA, and about 75 took advantage of the facilities.
Theresa is taller with blonde hair often worn in a pony tail. She says she “used to be pretty—till I came to the streets.” Theresa has been on those streets for about six weeks—ever since her sister “couldn’t pay my way” any more and dropped her off in Portland. She grew up on a farm with her parents, 12 foster kids and two sisters. Theresa left home, she says, because it was “really, really strict.” She seems perceptive of the politics of her street world and protective of herself. Yet she tells me she tries to care for others first and think of herself last.

For Holley and Theresa and other street kids who are members of the Y, the streets seem to be a world of sad stories and cigarettes and pimps and drugs and stealing and finding a place to kill time until a shelter opens for the night. Some of the kids—although they seem too experienced to be called kids—could list the drugs available like they would list their classes if they were in school. There were stories of rape and stealing and prostitution and trips to “rehab” and detox and jail. Talk of pregnancy and abuse from home and getting the “living shit kicked outta me” on the streets. In some ways it was like listening to bragging veterans showing off their war wounds. And I am an ear—maybe myself a novelty—to listen to their war stories, real or exaggerated or untrue.

They have a mental map of their world and its network of personalities and free food programs and hangouts. Holley and Theresa have a mental map of their world and its network of personalities and free food programs and hangouts. Then there is the Y where they can play racquetball and basketball. Holley and Theresa talk to me about their street corner. Theresa says she is sure the rule is “because we’re street kids.”

On a winter evening while Portland temperatures hover in the 20s, Holley and Theresa talk to me about being like family as they sit in another hangout, an enclosed, heated bus stop. “You have to learn who you can trust and who you can’t really fast,” Holley says, “because there are a lot of people out there—I mean I’ve been in a lot of situations that weren’t really good. I mean I’ve done a lot of things that I wish I hadn’t because I’ve been on the streets and it’s kinda sad.”

Theresa’s voice is heavy with the flu—part of the reality of living on the winter streets. She says she has “nobody else.” She lied to the Lighthouse, an adolescent shelter, about her age because she wanted to be with her “family.” When the Lighthouse found that she was 18, she had to go to Oxford Street, a city-run shelter. But, as a personal rule, she avoids the bathroom and shower facilities there.

There’s like wicked weird people there. People that seriously think that they’re like in World War III, you know,” she says and laughs. “This lady that sleeps next to me . . . I don’t think she’s there at all. She sleeps with her shoes on. She sleeps with her clothes on her cot. And then when I was coughin’ one night she started growlin’ at me.” She laughs.

Many times I see Holley and Theresa snuggle. Holley says Theresa is like a sister.

“And we’re supposed to get an apartment this week, so we won’t be in the shelter,” Holley says. “We’ll be together.”

Holley and Theresa do move into an apartment—on the same block as the YMCA—along with others who have been on the streets. Their leader seems to be a 29-year-old whom Holley calls a “brother.” The apartment is strewn with clothes and people. Mattresses on the floor serve as beds and when there are no mattresses left, they use blankets.

Holley is packing to leave because of a breakup with her boy friend and other disputes. Her raspy voice moves to little girl sobs when she talks. She wears a jade stone around her neck that “feeds on negative energy.”

“He says he hates me,” she says of her ex-boyfriend who also lives in the apartment. “I just don’t understand how somebody can love somebody in the morning and hate them at night.”

As she sits on the kitchen counter, Theresa walks up to Holley and speaks gently but directly. “I think you guys are over, you understand.”

“I don’t want it to be over,” Holley says, her voice sounding desperate. “I hate living here,” Holley later says. “This is so bad. This isn’t anything like it was supposed to be.”

“It’s better than the shelter,” Theresa says.
About a week later, I find Holley in the apartment, giggling and eating ice cream. She hasn’t left town after all. Theresa explains that Holley is "baked."

Cigarette smoke hangs in the air as they tell the story how the night before she got high and took tranquilizers and had to go to the hospital with some type of muscle contractions. I ask if it was frightening. It was funny, one of them quickly replies. Holley herself laughs when she describes how she tried to drink milk and it went down the front of her.

Later I hear Holley took another trip to the hospital after taking tranquilizers. 

"I was depressed and I didn’t feel I wanted to live anymore, so, you know," she later says. "I just felt like shit and so I tried killing myself . . . "

Theresa says when kids get to know the streets it seems "they don’t dare to leave them, afraid what will happen if they leave them." It seems to be a perplexing—and even sad—thought for her. While she fears the streets becoming her own life, Theresa says, she also feels the pull of friendship.

"I’ve thought about it and it’s scary ’cause I do wanna leave ’em," Theresa says, laughing. "But I wouldn’t wanna feel like leavin’ my friends, you know. I wouldn’t wanna leave my friends to the street if I got up in the world. You know, I’d want them to come too. You know. I have thought about that, believe me, and I don’t want it happening to me. You know. I really don’t want to be on the streets."

The bonds of sisterhood weaken between Theresa and Holley when Holley spends $6 Theresa had entrusted to her on alcohol. Holley later leaves town to visit her father and brother. I don’t see her again.

"Got any weed?" the young man asks.

"I wish," Jeff replies.

He tells Jeff he is going to get "inebriated."
Jeff calls out, "Get inebriated for me."

We trudge past Maria's Restaurant where the Veal Ala Maria goes for $19.95. Next to that is the Preble Street Resource Center where Jeff can eat a free breakfast each morning.

As the wet cold surrounds me I speak sarcastically of what a beautiful night it is. Jeff tells me I shouldn't get down like that. On the streets, he says, that's when a person starts to drink.

As we approach the Lighthouse, I ask him if this is his last night at the Y. He says no. He tells me he'll most likely be back on the streets. I am confused.

"Just the way I am," he says.

"The World's been good to us," Dick Hewes says. "Like this morning. Look out the window and see the snow on the branches and twigs. It's a winter wonderland. We live right on the ocean, out on Cape Elizabeth, and we're blessed with five children and nine lovely grandchildren."

Dick Hewes has a gift for gab. The lawyer and former Republican speaker of the Maine State House of Representatives comes to the Y to play badminton with his wife, Betsy, a registered nurse. Dick is 66. Betsy is 63.

Eleven to noon, five days a week, as many as 10 to 12 adults gather to hit a "bird" of goose feathers and cork under the silent glass backboard and a dark scoreboard. It's a quieter, more gentle affair than the body-banging gentile affair than the body-banging pickup roundball game. Dick was a fellow lineman and has a knobby nose to show for the days when face masks weren't used.

"I like the camaraderie with the other fellas that are playing here," Bud says as he watches the action on the court.

Betsy is the only "fella" wearing lipstick and earrings. She went back to school to become a registered nurse after raising her five children. And she covers the court with intensity.

Betsy has won singles, doubles and mixed-doubles state championships in Massachusetts, each more than once. She coached college badminton and tennis. As a high school tennis coach, she led the Cape Elizabeth girls' team to a state tennis championship and was named as the state girls high school tennis coach of the year.

Betsy sometimes carries an embarrassed smile as her husband pours out accolades about her. He is quick to fill in any gaps that she may leave—sometimes maybe too quick, as when he proclaims that Betsy played six years on her high school field hockey team.

"Jesus," Betsy says, laughing, after explaining that she didn't go to high school for six years but that field hockey began in junior high.

"I meant that as a compliment," Dick replies, searching for damage control.

"Well, it isn't a compliment when you say you played six years in high school," she says. "I sound like a jackass." Dick laughs.


"Obviously, if I married a badminton player I had to learn to play or I'd be staying home all the time," Dick says. "I never played badminton till I met Betsy."

Betsy says, "He thought it was a little backyard outdoor game."

The first five games he played were against his wife, and those first five games were losses. In fact, he didn't even register a point. But since then, Dick says, he has come to love the game. And Betsy points out that he has won some tournaments himself.

Perley is having a good day, playing on the victorious team for the third straight game. But in the end, the victor is always the clock. It is noon. Time for basketball. Players have been milling in the hall outside the gymnasium. One enters.

"C'mon," he says. "Let's get this gear out of here."
"Screw you guys," Darrell Doughty yells, after hitting the floor of the Y basketball court. "You can find somebody else if you don't like it. All right, screw you guys."

Darrell's 17-year-old brother, Eric, begins to form new teams to compensate for Darrell's departure.

"This is a basketball game, not a football game," Darrell interrupts from the sidelines.

For 22-year-old Darrell, cooling down is related to a past that includes breaking into cars as well as staying at what he calls—in dark tones—"P6—sort of a thing that you don't wanna know."

"Didn't like it at all. It was at Maine Medical Center. It's where the crazy guys are, that can't control their temper," Darrell says, quickly adding, "I can. Nobody else can. This was a long time ago when I couldn't control my temper."

Darrell and his brother play basketball at the Y. They are part of a group that ranges from a 12-year-old Michael Jordan worshipper to a 21-year-old radiologist to a 36-year-old musician to a 46-year-old resident.

Darrell has been coming to the YMCA since he was 13. Now he makes the trip from an apartment that he says he pays for with his Supplemental Security Income checks.

He governs his world with an acute sense of what is right and wrong, with definitions that seem as solid and defined as the painted lines and the rules on a basketball court. When he saw me with Holley and Theresa, he took me aside and, in genuine solemnity, told me of the dangers of hanging out with the street kids. Another time he told me of a fellow weight lifter who "sort of picks on me."

"I don't think it's right—you know what I'm saying—people picking on other people."

He has sculpted a lean and muscular build with the free weights on the first floor of the Y. On the court his face is chiselled with intensity as he approaches the ball handler like a wrestler. Off the court he tells me of the 200 "bologna moves like Michael Jordan" he has created and he recounts his game time feats with a deep laugh, sound effects and animated hands pushing through the air. Darrell is a disciple of Hulk Hogan muscles and Michael Jordan perfection.

He says one of his biggest dreams is going to the championship of the YMCA Adult Basketball League tournament. "I heard that you get trophies and sometimes you get on channel 13," Darrell says.

Basketball is a better addiction than trouble, he says. "Trouble can be a nicotine, too," he says in a deep, slow tone full of conviction. "Get you in more trouble."

"That's why I try to forget it. You know. That's only the past. This is now. You know what I'm sayin', the new world in Portland, Maine."

Darrell's younger brother, Eric, also can look at a time when trouble was like nicotine. He has been coming to the Y for about six years and now volunteers there about 20 hours a week. He has been named volunteer of the year and is president of the YMCA Leaders program. His best friend is vice president and his girlfriend, Angela, is secretary.

"I kept on gettin' in trouble when I was little and I figured if I came to this place—keepin' myself busy—I wouldn't get in trouble," he says.

Eric says he's been under state support since age six. He first met Angela, who he lives with, in the YMCA swimming pool. They've been going out off and on for six years. Their son, Dylan, is about a year old.

With brown hair falling to his shoulders and a moustache coming to a point under his nose, Eric tells me of his 1984 Jordan Olympic card—worth $3,000, he says—as he helps out at a high school basketball tournament. Dylan is in Mickey Mouse slippers and a playpen a few feet away. A Y staff member enters and offers to watch Dylan if Eric needs to run the clock for a game.

"I have to be settled down now 'cause I have a baby now," Eric says. "I can't do what I want and it just gets me frustrated at times.

"We were first plannin' on givin' him up for adoption but when I saw..."
him there I just knew I had to keep
him. I couldn’t give him up ... . He’s
my flesh and blood.”

Dylan and his 16-year-old mother
both wear black high tops—like Eric—as they watch him play one night. It is
getting late and Angela wants to watch
Beverly Hills 90210. But Eric wants
to play one more. Angela says he
would spend his entire life at the Y if
it never closed.

“That’s what he always says—one
more, one more ... .”

“I’m A FIRM believer
in the old saying,
‘mens sana in
corpore sano.’ A
sound mind in a sound
body,” says W. Phelps
Carter, Jr., M.D. He comes
to the YMCA to play squash
two to five times a week in
the winter. A graduate of
Yale with a medical degree
from Tufts, he says the Y is
an escape. He likes the ca­
amaraderie of the YMCA.

“It’s a facility where there
are a lot of good squash
players and I play squash,”
he says.

Surrounded by the towering white
walls of the YMCA squash courts, the
47-year-old doctor hits the ball with
his “Tuesday” man, former YMCA
board president, Eugene Waters. The
walls are scuffed by a rash of ball­
markings. Phelps Carter is wearing a
red, white and blue headband, pro­
tective goggles, striped shorts and a
sweat-laden t-shirt that proclaims
“Carpe Diem” across the front.

The two men descend the stairs to
the Executive Men’s Locker Room
where members pay an extra $87 a
year for a locker, towel and sauna. A
red sign in the stairwell announces
“Men with lockers only.”

“He’s been my Tuesday man for
16 years,” Phelps Carter says of Eu­
gene Waters. The 57-year-old senior
vice president at the insurance firm of
Morse, Payson and Noyes was agent
of the month for February.

They used to play for dinner, the
doctor says. “We stopped doing that,
but I’ll tell you something—it’s al­
ways close.” Eugene Waters says that
he’s afraid the doctor is being “gener­
ous.”

Phelps Carter puts on a pin stripe
shirt and his characteristic bow tie and
makes the conveniently short drive to
the Maine Medical Center for his
eight hour shift in the emergency
room.

Richard Reeves sees a tension
between the social service and
the health club role of the Y. He
says the Y has a strong sense of
social service, “but they can’t go
bankrupt.” The “wonderful
women’s locker room” with its
sauna and whirlpool brings
in the money.

He has been an emergency room
physician for 21 years and in 1980 he
became one of the country’s first board
certified emergency room physicians.

“Well, I like excitement, I guess,”
he says. “It’s not all blood and guts,
the way you think it is.”

He likes the fact that once he leaves
the hospital, “It’s over.” Long term
management is not part of his job. He
also likes the fact that he can teach the
doctors in training who have a man­
datory emergency room experience.

“There’s really a wide gamut of
patients we see here and it’s that
variety that I like,” he says. “You
never know what a shift is going to be
like.”

At times he says, it’s like a zoo.
“That’s why I have to play squash,”
he says. “Everybody has to have
ca tharsis, right?”

“So I go in and beat the ball.”

IT IS EASTER Sunday and
the YMCA is recovering
from a bomb scare. The
bomb is a hoax, the police
have come and gone and the residents
who have left their rooms are now
filing back into the building. One
obese resident has fallen asleep on the
park bench in the lobby. He never
made it outside. Richard Reed, at the
front desk, says it’s the medication the
resident is taking. He has dealt with
this before. The resident needs “con­
stant supervision,” he says.

A cluster of residents stand
in front of the elevator. Rich­
ard asks them to help the
sleeping man up to his room. No one
for the moment seems
in the mood to help. Instead,
chuckles come from the
crowd. The jokes come.
Somebody says to put food in
front of him. Others say a
woman or a keg of beer could
entic him to rise. One com­
pares him to a movie alien.

The man doesn’t notice
that he’s become center stage.
At this point he seems to be
the lowest person in the
“wonderful cross section” at
the Y that Richard talks about. Rich­
ard blares his name and lifts the park
bench and bangs it on the floor, but
it’s no use. The man continues to
snore and make slurping sounds. He
slowly bobs up and down, almost
kissing his knees, like he’s on puppet
strings. At one point he takes off his
shirt, apparently thinking he’s in his
bed. His pants hang down his back­
side, exposing him. Eventually he leans
to one side and a resident calls, “Tim­
ber.” Richard says he’ll let the security
guard take care of it.

“What an end to Easter,” he la­
ments and laughs. Another resident
puts a newspaper over the sleeper so
he looks like he is homeless and in the
park.

And it seems he’s only a step away
from that.
LONELY

TRANSITIONS

For men living in Portland's YMCA, a single room can become a home of 20 years, or, a place where lives make lonely transitions.

Photographs by Bert Cass
“How can I complain? I’m not gonna say I’m a rich person. I’m very happy the way I am. I am very happy.”
Dario Mayorquin, 29, has lived at Portland’s YMCA for two months.
"They say home is where you hang your hat. I've got a lot of hats."
John Wedge, 59, is the YMCA's longest standing resident of 20 years.
For Barry Bernard, 26, the Y has been his home for seven weeks.
"Keep myself busy. Well, I just don't like being bored." At the YMCA it means watching television. "But I'm never here that much."
Gulf War veteran, Jason Lamy, 21, lived at the Y for one month.

"The Y's like the army in a way... all of us living together like in a dormitory."
When a Guide Was a Storyteller

OVER a glass of brandy, Chub Foster and I are swapping stories about the Maine woods, where I have spent three summers and he has spent a lifetime, a lifetime that began in 1897. I can relate, but I can’t compare. Chub is a real Maine Guide, not today’s version with a fancy patch and red wool jacket, but a true woodsman and storyteller. With his canvas canoe and spruce pole he opened the woods to hundreds of sportsmen in the more than 40 years he lived and worked in the forest. I have worked summers as a trip leader at Chub’s old sporting camps, just a mile up the shore from his current home. The camps are now a Boy Scout high adventure base.

Out of these camps on Grand Lake Matagamon, Chub paddled on almost all the waterways of northern Maine. On the Allagash River, he trekked north toward Allagash and Saint Francis. On the branches of the Penobscot, he journeyed south as far as Millinocket and Medway. On the Aroostook River, he headed east towards Ashland and Presque Isle. The headwaters of the Saint John took him west almost to Quebec.

I can visit the places Chub talks about, but the experiences he had there are gone. I can travel the same rivers, but his descriptions are of another place. Time is erasing Chub’s woods.

Now, in his cabin on the north shore of Matagamon, Chub describes the woods he knew while Fran, his wife, listens from the kitchen just to make sure he doesn’t exaggerate. Together, they ran Foster’s Wilderness Camps for 38 years before retiring in 1970.

Listening to Chub takes me back to when the woods were foreboding and mysterious, when guides took sportsmen days away from any sign of civilization, when the woods of Maine seemed as impenetrable as any Amazon rain forest. For people like Chub this was never the case, but for his sports, the Bostonians and New Yorkers, it was.

“The woods—it’s just like a damn fever or something. If you go into it once, you never can leave it.”

Chub leans forward as he tells me this. I think he’s trying to warn me. He has tried to leave the woods many times and for many reasons, but he has always returned.

He was born in Bar Harbor 96 years ago, and spent his childhood near the woods. His birth name was Albert C. Gott. “My mother and father split up. I couldn’t have been more than four or five. Then she had to get out and work some place with the kids, my brother

Text and Photographs by Roger Price
Above: Grand Lake Matagamon

NUMBER FORTY-FOUR • 65
and I. So I think she went to Ellsworth. She worked all over until she died. So they put us in the children’s home, my brother and I. And that’s how I happened up to Newry, the Fosters adopted me.”

High school was next at Gould Academy in Bethel. He tells me that it was at Gould he lost his birth name, Albert, and became Chub. He had the lead in a school play about a simple country boy named Chub and the name just stuck. He didn’t finish at Gould. He ran out of money after only one year, so he worked odd jobs until 1916 when he joined the army.

When he enlisted, he became a private in the cavalry earning 15 silver dollars a week. As he tells me this, I picture him in a bright blue uniform with white gloves, riding through the deserts of Texas hunting down the infamous Mexican bandit turned revolutionary, Poncho Villa. “I never saw him and I don’t know if any of his troops was ever there, but that was the same time
that Pershing was going in there to take him and clean him all up. . . . But it was a friendly thing. When we'd get down to Rio Grand City—that was Fort Ringo—we'd go down there and right across the river they'd be having dances and everything. We'd go over there and they treated us nice.

The cavalry was disbanded in 1917, and then Chub found himself serving in France during World War I which was not such a friendly little war. “The head-quarter would be . . . back of the lines. Well, a lot of time they'd be shelling their own troops, didn't have the range, you know. And that was one of your jobs is to get in there and get that stopped and quickly as you could. So with a horse you rode in 'cause they had horse artillery then.” After the war ended, he kicked around in Paris for eight months doing two hours of duty a day and going to school the rest of the time, but they closed the school and he missed the Maine woods—especially the baked beans. “So many times I thought of those wonderful baked beans, bean-hole beans. Sometimes you'd be a little hungry in the service and I'd think of them and I thought, ‘If I ever get back I'm going into a lumber camp,' and I did.” He took a job as a teamster in a pulpwood camp when he got back.

“I DON'T KNOW what muddles them up so. They know there's not a thing in the woods that's going to hurt them, and I'm sure you're not going to die just staying out one night.” Chub leans forward and takes a fatherly tone as he talks about lost hunters. “Make yourself as comfortable as possible, and the next day try to figure it out. But you can't tell them that. Would you believe the antics? I've had them actually tell me the compass points to camp. Of all the goddamn, I've never. I couldn't imagine anyone as dumb as that.”

Shaking his head, Chub tells me about his sportsmen, the people he kept from killing themselves in the woods with their own ignorance.

“We've had an awful lot of good sportsmen and I don't condemn those that gets lost, any more. There is no need of acting like a damn fool about it.”

Chub is proud that “we always picked up our own men,” and he has never had to call the game wardens to help search for lost hunters. It was his responsibility, and either he or the guides he hired found them all the next morning, at the latest.

He laughs now about some of his hunters, but we both know that when a party gets in trouble, the guide feels the heat. Chub tells me about one sport who got lost and in the few hours he was away from camp went crazy.

“We had one who was supposed to be an airplane pilot in some war, and he told me, 'You don't have to worry about me,' but, by Jesus, he got lost. Finally we found him. I think it was only overnight up there on Trout Brook. So they went to pick him up in a boat, and he jumped right into the water and swam across the stream into Trout Brook Farm. He was running to beat hell and was scared to death.

“Well, they caught him running down there, and he didn't know who he was or where he was or anything for a while. I think it was that night or the next morning
I was asking him and he says, 'I don’t know what happened. I don’t know what I’m afraid of, and I don’t know anything.'

‘You wouldn’t think anyone would lose their mind in that short a time. No animal is going to get you. You’re going to be a little uncomfortable. Nothing to get all wobbly legged about, but he was.

‘Christ he couldn’t find himself the length of his nose with a compass. I might have known this young kid was no goddamn pilot in the World War. I was just as stupid as he was.’

Guiding has changed. While today’s guides still protect their clients from harm, Chub and the rest of the older guides did much more. They cooked, they set up camp, they paddled the canoes, they dressed the game, and they were the fireside entertainment.

Since 1980, guides are licensed by the state only after passing a written exam, appearing before a state board, and completing a physical. When Chub got his license around 1920, he just sent the state a dollar.

Early in his career as a guide, Chub worked for sporting clubs, camps, and farmers who took sportsmen. Later he went to work for Virgil E. Lynch, who ran sporting camps on the Machias River in southern Aroostook County near Ashland.

Virgil Lynch insisted that his guides come back with game. “He always told us if your party doesn’t come down all filled with deer, keep on going with them, you’re no good here. So, Jesus, we were damn sure that we come down with deer. They were pretty good in those times. I was getting five dollars a day and our board.”

Chub smiles as he starts to tell me about two “sports” that he can’t help but laugh about, the Kellogg boys.

Chub was called to Lynch’s camp one summer because the president of the American Tin Can Company had left his two sons at the camp for the summer. Well, these two “hellions” were causing trouble all over the camp. They were shooting arrows into the cabins, poaching game, and putting arrows through the boots drying on the porch.

Lynch told Chub to “take these goddamn rascals right straight west and be gone three weeks with them.” Chub had to be their babysitter and guide, as well as the one person who was to keep them from killing themselves or each other.

“I suppose you’d say that they were a little bother-some around the town, but out that way they were awfully good kids, and I liked them. Of course, they raised a lot of hell.” Their father had sent them to camp with his chauffeur.

“Oh, that poor colored chauffeur, though. By Jesus, he took a beating. They wouldn’t think anything of picking him up and throwing him into the river.”

“Oh, they fought. Jesus, they’d get into a fight over a camera and drive it right under, throw it right into the river. Well, Jesus, sometimes it was so deep you couldn’t find it. Didn’t matter.” When their parents picked them up and Chub tried to explain the missing gear, they weren’t surprised. They said, ‘Yes, I expected it. I didn’t think they’d have anything when they come back.’

“Well, you had to be young to deal with kids like that. If you was older, you’d give them hell or something. The things they done were so goddamn funny they should go in a show.”

WHEN a guide went into the woods, he had his compass and his pole, but the tool he relied on the most was himself. He knew the woods and he had the skills. With these, other tools were not always necessary.

Chub says it took a resourceful person to survive some of the problems the woods threw at him. He fell through the ice when he was trapping on Snowshoe Lake, northeast of Matagamon, near where he spent the winters at Lost Pond. In fact, this story is where the lake got its name.

He managed to pull himself back up onto solid ice, but to free his feet, he had to cut off his snowshoes. Chub was able to get back to Lost Pond, but didn’t have a chance of getting out of the area without sinking into the waist deep snow.

Near his camp, he found a white ash tree, cut it down, and split off flat pieces about three inches wide. He curved the tips and drilled holes for straps. He used these home-made skis to make his way out, but it wasn’t easy.

“Wasn’t they heavy, Jesus.”

In travelling through the North Woods, Chub came to know the country better than any atlas. He knows the geography, but he also has a story to go with each place. He lets me in on the secret of Coffeelos Pond, his favorite place to take sportsmen for fish.

I have never actually been to this pond, but I know

To trace the history of camps that Chub owned and ran is to trace the history of the Great North Woods, from lumbering to sporting to recreation.
HISTORY OF A CAMP

C. 1880 - 1923 LOGGING CAMP
1923-1941 SPORTING CAMP
1941 - 1970 CHUB FOSTER SPORTING CAMP
1970-1971 SPORTING CAMP
1971 - BOY SCOUT CAMP
the area. Coffeelos is about 15 miles west of Matagamon and three miles east of the Chamberlain Ranger Station on the Allagash Wilderness Waterway. I look the pond up in the atlas and roads now extend to both shores of this pond, and from talking to other people in the area, the fishing is gone. Before roads, and before floatplanes, Chub got to Coffeelos by poling and hiking.

There was a real art to poling, an art that few practice today. Poling is probably the most efficient way to travel upstream in a canoe. When he poled his canoe, Chub stood in the back and used a long wooden pole with a metal tip to propel the canoe from rock to rock, working up the stream, always avoiding the swift current which would sweep the canoe sideways down the rapid. Poling requires a quick eye, good balance, and lots of practice, but when it’s done well, it looks like it takes no effort at all.

“Knowing a set of water, that’s what poling amounts to. You learn a set of water, and it’s nothing to it. You can go half asleep.”

Chub tells me he would take his fishermen by canoe up Matagamon Lake to Webster Brook where he then poled the canoe through the nine miles of whitewater that make up the brook to Webster Lake. From the western shore of Webster Lake, he and his party would then hike one mile up to the dam on Telos Lake. From the dam, they would turn north and follow an overgrown winter tote road for the mile and a half over a ridge and to Coffeelos where he had a canoe waiting to reel in the trout.

“Coffeelos, you could guarantee them fish, if they’d do what you told them to. Most everybody who’s fly fishing wants to cast the fly out and then they’d yank it in here slowly. In Coffeelos, in the springhole, the fish wouldn’t take a fly on the surface under any condition. You would cast your fly out there and then you’d let it sink to the bottom, about 11 feet of water there, beautiful spring, and then you’d start bringing it up.

“And they’d hit. Well, you didn’t need too many of those fish if you was just going to keep them to eat. They’d go anywhere from a pound to sometimes you’d get a five-pounder. You would always get some. Never a time that you didn’t get some trout.”

Chub confesses that sometimes luck had a little to do with the legendary reputation of the guide. When Chub was working for Virgil Lynch, a salesman came to the camps trying to convince the guides to start using the guns he was selling.

“Lynch said, ‘Why don’t you go with this man today? Show him some bucks.’ So, I did, and we went up on the ridge and travelled all day. We had dinner, and I cooked for him. Jesus, that afternoon, coming back to camp, I didn’t even see him [the deer], but he tore down over the ridge, hell bent for lick. I just pulled up and fired, and, by Jesus, I heard him fall.

“He says, ‘You hit it.’

“I says, ‘Yes, I hit him, of course. I fired at him didn’t I?’

“He says, ‘What did you see of him?’

“Well, I said, ‘I saw his head and tail.’

“He says, ‘You don’t seem to think that was any great stunt shooting.’

“I says, ‘No, it wasn’t. When you’re hunting, guiding for a living, you have to be able to produce game.’

“He said, ‘Where do you think you hit him?’

“I said, ‘God, I don’t know.’ All I saw was a blur, but I said, ‘I presume somewhere in his forequarters, his neck.’ And sure enough, I hit him right across the throat. That’s why he went such a short distance, he bled to death.

“He stood looking at him while I was dressing him, and he says, ‘Well, I’ve never seen anything like this before.’ ”

It was events like that which helped to make Maine guides like Chub Foster folk heroes.

“YEAH that was quite a gang that used to be around here.” Chub describes the other guides and woodsmen who used to live around Matagamon. Just beyond the dam on the East Branch was Fred Walker, a guide and “a clown if there ever was one.” Charlie Marr lived at Trout Brook Farm just off Matagamon Lake and worked for Eastern Woodlands. “No matter how much he drank, he was a gentleman all the time, very soft spoken and very nice.” Pat Steen lived at the dam. “He was harmless, but he was so goddamn big. He’d grab hold of you and he could pick you right up off the ground.”

Listening to Chub and thinking about the people I have met, I realize that the woods really attract an amazing bunch of people. Take Chub whose life is more colorful than the spots on a rainbow trout.

I also think of Jack, the root beer man on Chesuncook Lake. All the trip leaders I work with make a point of
visiting him with our Boy Scouts when we’re in the area.

Jack lives in Chesuncook Village, basically a logging ghost town that has three year-round residents and a few summer cabins. The village is on the western shore of the lake just below where the West Branch of the Penobscot flows into Chesuncook. We all like to stop at Jack’s when we canoe by because he runs “The Store,” where he sells home-made root beer, bread, cakes, cookies, and sometimes even pizza. The kids all get their sugar fix and the trip leaders get to hear Jack tell us about life in the woods.

Chub also has his favorite woods characters, his co-workers and friends. He describes these folks so I feel like I’m there too.

He knew Percival Baxter who gave the Baxter State Park to Maine. “Baxter, he was a very nice, soft-spoken person, the few times that I met him. An old gentleman. I thought he was doing a wonderful job buying that [land] and giving it to the state. . . . Moose over there, they died from old age.”

Tellis Coolong was a French-Canadian guide who worked for Chub. Although he spoke in broken English, he made his name as a storyteller.

“By God, if he were alive today, he could make a fortune just telling his experiences. He always has sickle tobacco that you whittled off. He always cut off just enough so that it would fill his pipe. He’d start telling you a story and that pipe would go round and round.”

What separated guides from other woodsmen was their ability to tell stories and keep their sportsmen entertained. When I was talking to Carroll Bates, a retired game warden and longtime friend of Chub’s, he told me why Chub’s camp had such a following.

“The old saying that the Maine guides are ten percent Bean boots and ninety percent bullshit is not all that far out. Not that they didn’t do a good job, because they did, but the ability to talk with people and to tell a good story and to entertain, that was where they really shone. They were woodwise and very capable, but most anybody that grew up in the era the Fosters did were very capable woodsmen. They started it from childhood. But the ability to entertain and to keep people entertained, that was where the few like him really caught on.”

Even today, many of the people who visit Chub and Fran are there for his stories. In the winter people come on snowmobiles, and in the summer they come in boats and four-wheel-drive trucks. They bring in the news and gossip of the area and Chub takes them back to when he was guiding the Kellogg boys or fishing on Coffeello. Unlike many guides, Chub doesn’t stretch the tales of his adventures. And just to make the point, he’ll throw lines like “And that’s just exactly the way it was.”

Chub is modest about himself as a storyteller. “I learned young that I couldn’t compete with those guys. They could tell a story and varnish it up in good shape. You saw a lot of guides on the rivers. They were good entertainment.”

Chub tells me about Roy Dudley, a guide who had a camp at Chimney Pond at the base of Mount Katahdin, Maine’s highest peak. “I think he’s the best hunter I ever saw, and the best trapper. Now, he, back along there, he and Ray Porter was trapping together. That is, they wasn’t in the same country, but they were selling together. And they were picking up $30,000 a winter in fur. Well, that’s a big business . . . . God, he had some great stories,” and the stories he told (and that were eventually told about him) made him a little bigger than life.

Many of Dudley’s stories were about him and his “friend,” the mythical Indian goddess of Katahdin, Pamola.

“Pamola and Roy Dudley, they were awfully good friends,” Chub says, “He palled around with Pamola quite a lot and Pamola lived up in the mountain of course. One time, by Jesus, the moon got low and got stuck on the mountain. By Jesus, Roy didn’t know what in the hell he was going to do, but he went up.

“Pamola says, ‘Jesus, you’ve got to help me some­way.’ So they finally pulled up one of the goddamn big spruce, about a hundred feet tall, and they got that under the moon. Took them a long while, too. They worked hard at it. They started lifting and lifting and prying down. It took them a long while. The moon was a day late then, but finally it let go and it went around and around to catch up with the time.”

By the end of the story Chub is spinning his arms round and round to show how the moon was catching up.

The lakes in the upper Allagash, Telos, Chamber-
lain, and Eagle, were a meeting place for guides. Guides from Moosehead Lake to the east, the Saint John River to the north, and from the Penobscot to the south all travelled through this area.

Chub says one of the guides he always enjoyed seeing in this area was Henry Red Eagle.

“He was a full-blooded Indian, and a very well educated man. I used to like to have him drop by or get to the same camp site with him because he was entertaining, and you learned a lot from his talk. The sportsmen enjoyed it.”

Red Eagle had his camps on Moosehead Lake and travelled throughout the woods. “He was also the chief of his tribe and had worked in the movies.” Chub remembers him for his quick wit.

“He'd snow 'em under every time.”

GUIDES LIKE Chub are becoming scarce, and his friend, Carroll Bates, blames roads that opened up the woods. “If you can drive a camper trailer wherever you need to go, there's no need of hiring a guide to show you there. All you got to do is buy a Delorme's Atlas and follow the roads, you can get about anywhere in the state now.”

Because Chub and Fran retired in 1970, they missed the brunt of the more drastic changes in the woods, the roads that opened the wilderness and the clearcutting that is flattening it.

Carroll Bates told me that some friends of Chub took him on a drive through the woods recently. Chub just shook his head in disbelief when he saw the miles of barren fields with only the stumps of trees and piles of decaying brush, a clearcut.

Until the 1960s, Maine's largest landowner, Great Northern Paper maintained less than 1,000 miles of roads through its two million acres of woodlands. These roads were mostly designed to support the river driving which was banned by 1975. Today, Georgia-Pacific, which took over Great Northern Paper in 1990, maintains more than 3,500 miles of road in its 2.6 million acres and builds an additional 100 miles each year.

“It's like driving down the interstate. There's nothing really mysterious about it. You know what's at the other end,” Carroll Bates says. “Running these woods roads is basically the same thing. Once you've been over them, you've seen it. You take a canoe or a pack basket and strike from here to Allagash Lake, and every trip you make is so different. You do the same thing in a vehicle, and you're going so fast that what you see is just the same bumps in the road. You don't really see the things that are interesting in the woods. He [Chub] had time to do those things.”

Today's younger guides usually only guide part-time. The need isn't there for year round guides. As the need for guides has declined so has the number of sporting camps. When Carroll Bates was the game warden for the twelve townships around Matagamon Lake, he counted five operational sporting camps out of the seventeen that once operated in the '50s and '60s.

“It's really gone downhill, but by the same token, I don't think the number of people that are using the woods have gone downhill. It's just that people have gotten away from the sporting camp type of operation. They have camper-trailers and tents. Modern technology has made it so much easier to do that, the logistics of it. When you can hook a camper-trailer or whatever behind your vehicle and go, then you really don't need to stay at a sporting camp or hire a guide. I like to say they miss a lot.”

AFTER DINNER at the Foster's cabin, it is TV time. To most people this is an ordinary event but things are different on the north shore of Matagamon Lake 17 miles from the nearest public utility. It all starts when Fran turns on the light by the sofa. Back in the shed, there is a pause and the generator sucks some propane, then roars to life and the bulb begins to glow. Next Fran plugs in the battery charger for her radio telephone which is their social connection to the outside world.

Finally, she turns on the TV. Chub moves his rocker from the wood stove to the right side of the room. Fran tunes in the station. Channel 5 from Bangor is clear tonight. She sits in her rocker on the left side of the room. Both don their glasses and stare at the box.

Chub and Fran have their snowmobiles for getting out in the winter, and they have an ATV for the mud season. Chub and Fran have their radio phone to call the world, and a crank phone to call their neighbors. And they have Dan Rather.

The flashy opening of the six o'clock news replaces the stories of Chub's adventures in the woods. The rest of the world has suddenly come into the Foster's cabin. Conversation can wait—the news is on.

When Chub and Fran were running their camps, this scene might have been replaced by sportsmen talking about the size of the one that got away.

“Up there in the living room,” Chub told me, “they'd get telling stories and the stories keep growing. Remember one night they were telling about the big beaver houses, and oh Jesus, the houses were getting bigger and bigger. Some were as big as this [waist high], you know big as that [shoulder high]. Finally they got one, and Jesus, it was about 10, 12 feet high. Hell of a big . . . and someone says, 'That must have been a beaver motel.' ”
BRIEF HISTORY OF SALT

(IN THE Beginning (1973 A.D.), there was PAM (Wood). And then there were her Students at Kennebunk High. They thought it would be a Great Idea to go outside of school (who wouldn’t?). And so they did. With cameras and tape recorders they interviewed and photographed their parents and grandparents in the community. They made a magazine, called SALT, produced two books, kept their tape recordings and negatives for an Archive. And they learned something about writing and about photography and about the place from which they came.

THEN FIVE YEARS LATER (1978 A.D.) came the Era of Groovy Tuesday. Salt bought and moved outside of the high school and into a Boatyard in lower Kennebunk, expanded its programs to include boatbuilding, wood harvesting, and solar energy construction. But groovy times never last.

TWO YEARS LATER (1980 A.D.) came the Era of Darkness. Salt retrenched, retooled its programs to its earlier era and took them to the college level. It moved into rented space at the former Pinkham’s Hall in Cape Porpoise. The first “semester” program was run in 1982. Two years later, Salt bought the former James Freeman House in Cape Porpoise. Programs expanded and divided into two areas —writing and photography.

The Era of Light (1989 A.D.—) WAS BEGINNING. Salt moved to Portland in 1989 and purchased 19 Pine Street for its Center for Documentary Field Studies. Renovations took place over the next four years. Programs expanded to 17 students by the fall of 1993. At the end of this year, adjacent 17 Pine Street was bought to allow for further growth.

AND PAM is still here. Along with others now. Students are still here. Only now they come from all over the country. And they still think to go outside of school is a Great Idea (great ideas won’t go away). They still interview and photograph people around them. They still produce a magazine (still called SALT). They still contribute tape recordings and negatives into an Archive. And they still learn something about writing and photography and about people and about place. AND THEY STILL . . . .
Most Magazine Christmas Covers Are Pretty Much the Same.

A Few Aren’t.

The caring gift for Christmas with more than glitter and glitz. Individual subscription $16/4 issues. Salt Magazine, P.O. Box 4077, Portland, Maine 04101. (207) 761-0660