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Salt Institute for Documentary Studies

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Monica waitresses in a bar. What she does is not where she's at. She's waiting to get there. Call it the 20-nothings.
That's The Image On The Cover

You'll find other images and writings produced by participants in the Salt semester program in the rest of this issue—a publication of the program. To learn more about the Salt semester program in documentary field studies with concentration in photography and nonfiction writing and editing call us (207) 761-0660 or write us (Salt Center for Documentary Field Studies, P.O. Box 4077, 19 Pine Street, Portland, Maine 04101).
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Cover: Monica Walsh. Photograph: Kate D. Philbrick.
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ABOUT THE CENTER—Now that we have completed our new 600 square foot gallery and conference room next door at Seventeen Pine Street, we have begun to develop earlier made plans to share the space and our collections at the Center with the public. We are enormously excited about the possibilities.

Our first such effort will start right away. In December we will kick off a series of year round exhibits of our photographic and other work which will be open to the public.

Since this is a new endeavor for us, we have much to learn. We mounted a trial run of an existing Salt exhibit for an open house on October 20th. Now we need to finalize an exhibit schedule for next year, build invitation lists and establish regular gallery hours. If you want to be on our exhibit mailing list, please let us know (call 207-761-0660 or write Salt Exhibits, P.O. Box 4077, Portland, Maine 04101).

We have already drawn up a tentative exhibit schedule, with eight exhibits to be mounted each year. The first exhibit will open December 9th of this year and will be the best of the documentary work done at the Center during the fall semester. The work of eight photographers will be represented. Their range of documentary topics is broad: from a cloistered monastery on State Street in Portland to a multigenerational Acadian family in Madawaska; from a family run lobster pound in Belfast to the Cumberland County jail; from behind-the-scenes coverage of the recent gubernatorial race in Maine to a country diner outside of Waterville. This exhibit will run until January 13.

“Salt and the Art of Documentary Photography” will be mounted from January 27 to February 24. This is a spectrum of photography over a five year period and was first shown at the art gallery of Colby College. Other exhibits planned include a one person exhibit of the work of R. Todd Hoffman, who directs the photographic program at the Salt Center; an exhibit focusing on Casco Bay in the spring; and an exhibit prepared by visual anthropologist, Phyllis Rogers, who is resident scholar at the Salt Center.

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I had been invited to the traditional Cambodian wedding of 17-year-old Sophy Im and 22-year-old Chuon Muth in a small apartment building on Grant Street in Portland, Maine. The bride and groom are part of Portland’s growing Cambodian community of 600 who struggle to find jobs, learn English, and preserve their culture. The wedding ceremony is one of the most important ways they have of doing this.
A

SAN ethnomusicologist, I heard the music as a familiar combination of sounds—Javanese and Chinese—which I know to have influenced the classical music of Cambodia. But there was much more than the music that became important for me. It was the people and what this wedding meant to them as a symbol of both their preservation of Cambodian culture and their adaptation to the new customs of America.

Sophy's parents Nop Sith and Phum Im carried her with them as they walked through the jungle of the "Killing Fields" to escape Pol Pot's Communist regime and the Vietnamese takeover of their country. They waited several years in a refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border to be sponsored to come to the United States, stopping several places before they settled in Maine. Sophy was eight years old when she arrived.

Chuon Muth came to live in the United States with his aunt and uncle who had taken him from his parents and the famine in Cambodia, travelling first to Thailand and later to Massachusetts. He has only recently regained contact with his family in Cambodia.

Cambodian history dates back even before the days of the great Hindu temple of Angkor Wat built by Suryavarman II in the early twelfth century. Many of the wedding customs observed today are in imitation of those carved in relief on Angkor Wat.

Sophy and Chuon's Cambodian wedding rituals took four hours to complete, even in their abbreviated version here in the United States, a sharp contrast to the Methodist ceremony which followed that took no longer than 30 minutes. In the evening, a six-hour reception combined both American and Cambodian traditions.

Chuon first met Sophy through a longtime friend of Chuon's father. Their marriage was arranged. Chuon said he fell in love with Sophy, but it was not the same for her.

"That time she don't like me at all," said Chuon. "She's hate me. Because I have long hair. Then after that I come engage her. She's listen to the parent and her parent want her to married me."

Sophy is still attending Portland High School with one more year to go. She has a beautiful face with large dark eyes, long hair, and a slim, delicate figure. She often wears a Cambodian print housedress at home. When she speaks, her voice is strong and confident.

"It's a tradition. You have to listen to your parents," explained Sophy. "That is the way you show that you love them. So I just did it 'cause of my parents."

Chuon has never finished high school. He works for Great Atlantic Seafood on the Portland waterfront as a processing manager for sea urchins. He has an open, honest face with large dark eyes, dark hair that is now short, and a slim, muscular body. His manner is friendly, easy-going, and sincere.

"We not going out and meet each other and make love," Chuon told me. "Parent make love for us. Her parent saw me the first time. She think I'm a good guy that's good enough to take care her kid like they do, not to leave her when we have kid, not to divorce."

The engagement, I learned, was a sensitive and involved procedure. The parents of the boy discuss it with the parents of the girl among witnesses from both sides. The girl's parents demand a certain amount of money, jewelry, and other goods in exchange. If both parties agree, the boy brings offerings of food into the house. Sophy's brother, Sopheoun, told me about the engagement of their parents in Cambodia.

"First they go talk about it and after that they bring the food, the fruit, the wine. After they talk it all over and then they agree, my dad give the fruit and the wine to my mom's parent, and then after that my mom's parent just take that fruit that my father offer, give it to the guests that sit around there for the witness. My father's relatives all go there to be a witness, and my mom's relatives go there, too, to be a witness."

Chuon followed the same custom in Maine. He brought food and his relatives came from Massachusetts and New York and sat and discussed the engagement with Sophy and her parents and relatives.

In most Cambodian engagements, the bride and groom don't know each other yet. "In the tradition, it doesn't matter," Sopheoun indicated. "It's up to the parent or the brothers. The oldest brother that's still living. Once he's arrange it, or the parents arrange it, the daughter just go along with it. Because they cannot refuse."

I was surprised to hear that Chuon lived with Sophy's family for a year before the wedding. This is done in Cambodia, I was told, to test the groom's eligibility as a husband. It is not done as often in Cambodian families in Maine.
“After come to engage the girl, have to live with their family about one year. Make sure you do all good thing,” says Chuon. “You never do anything wrong. If you do something wrong, their parent not believe that you are good guy. And then I have to work hard, to save all the money to getting married. I spend a lot money to getting married, and then her parent say this guy is good enough for married with my daughter because he is a working-hard guy, keep my daughter in good shape, not to fight each other all the time. I think her parent believe that I take good care of her. That’s why they let me married with their daughter.”

Chuon told me his long hair came almost to his waist when he first met Sophy.

“And then her parent want me to cut it up. And then I do cut it.”

Sophy’s parents met with Kem Moth, the Buddhist lay monk in Portland, to plan the wedding from the customs they remembered in Cambodia. They would hire Cambodian traditional musicians and dancers from Massachussetts to perform for the wedding, as well as a Cambodian rock band for the reception. They would rent the expensive looking traditional clothing from a Cambodian dressmaker. They would cook duck, rice, and vegetables and purchase fruits, spices, ground betel leaves, and tobacco for the offerings, as well as order food from the Wok Inn for the reception. There were also the decorations, the Asian carpets that had to be ordered from Massachussetts, and the setting up of articles to be used in each ritual. About 30 close friends and relatives would be invited to the Cambodian ceremony, maybe ten family members would attend the Methodist ceremony, and nearly 300 members of the Cambodian community, as well as some American sponsors and friends, would be invited to the reception.

On the night before the wedding, the groom was welcomed into the bride’s house. This is actually the first part of the wedding ceremony. “See when the groom comes, the bride had to wash the groom’s feet because it’s a tradition,” Sophy told me. Pretend like if your husband came back from a war, and then you miss him about a month or half a year, you have to come back and wash his feet, take off his clothes, cook for him. That’s the tradition. It’s just like respecting the husband.”

For Sophy this took one hour. “In Cambodia it’s much longer than this. It takes about at least six to seven hours to do this. Cause over there, it’s in Cambodia. It’s their country and they have more people who knows how to deal with this stuff.

“arizon, not much people. They don’t remember, and they don’t want to take it too long.”

I WASN’T expecting the wedding ceremony to begin at seven in the morning. I’m thinking I will be meeting Sophy’s parents to learn about the ceremony. Instead, I find it is already in progress. I enter one of two rooms that have been opened into each other by a sliding door. In the outer room sit the musicians and male guests amid family photographs on the surrounding walls. About fifteen people encircle plates of snack food and bottles of Coke, ginger ale, beer, and brandy. The smells of incense and cigarette smoke and the sounds of their laughter and conversation fill the air. I sit down in their midst toward the back of the room. A guest offers me a cup of sweetened coffee from a thermos.

I ask about the musical instruments beside me and a musician tells me about each one by name. Tro’sau is the lead fiddle with a slightly raspy tone, tro’un is its higher pitched relation, a trapezium-shaped dulcimer called khem plays a light airy melody, while the skor, a goblet drum with snakeskin head, and cheng, a small pair of cymbals, keep time.

I peer into the inner room. There are Sophy and Chuon seated beneath a parasol. The parasol over the bride and groom’s heads, I recognize from my studies of Asian culture, has been used as a symbol for royalty since the days when kings ruled as gods.

Sophy is transformed. She is no longer a seventeen-year-old Portland High school girl. Today she is a goddess-queen dressed in one of the nine ornate gowns she will wear during her wedding day, an elegant short-sleeved garment, with flowers
in her hair.

Chuon is also transformed, wearing the brightly colored traditional raiment of a god-king. He and Sophy sit at a circular table decorated with a pink table cloth threaded with gold, flowers, candles, and a silver bowl. Behind them stand two bridesmaids, their ruffled sleeves trimmed in gold, and two groomsmen, wearing bright gold bow ties with their dark suits. The bridesmaids and groomsmen, all cousins of Sophy, can only be unmarried children with both original parents. This protects the bride and groom from divorce or death. Laughing children run up and down the hallways and in and out of the ceremonial room where their mothers, dressed mostly in colorful sarongs, and close male relatives are seated on patterned Asian carpets.

About twenty people sitting very close together fill the ceremony room. They are the closest relatives of the bride and groom. On the wall to the left I notice posters of Paula Abdul, Debbie Gibson, Brooke Shields, several Chinese and American film stars, and the school certificates of achievement of Sophary, Sophy’s thirteen-year-old sister. But I am even more surprised to see three expensive video cameras, a monitor, and the brightest of lights, for videotaping the ceremony.

There are nine separate rituals in the entire Cambodian ceremony. The first took place the night before the wedding, wish them good luck, and make sure they stayed together. "That is when an angel comes from the sky, they landed at your home, and they wish you good luck and they said god from heaven sent them down here to make sure the couples will stay together, and they just dancing, cutting the hair, and putting on makeup so they look pretty in the wedding day."

Pirun Sen, a Cambodian community leader who owns The Portland Market on St. John Street told me more. "They believe that when the boy was single, the girl was single, they have different kind of thinking. Different kind of attitude. Different kind of ability to handle problem. So what they done before may not fit after they join together. So therefore they cut the hair."

The third ritual is the separation of the bride from her parents. The woman raises her microphone to sing a blessing for the bride and groom. Sophy and Chuon break into occasional smiles toward the end of the dance.

Sophy told me the dancers were nurses who came from heaven to make the wedding, wish them good luck, and make sure they stayed together. "They sing the song when they're separated you can't do anything anymore," said Sophy. "You can't help your daughter or anything. It's just like losing a daughter. If her daughter and her son-in-law get in a fight, they can't do anything about it. It's between the family. The two of them."

Pirun later explained, "The singer and musician try to bring back all the memory before she was born, like how many month when the mom was pregnant and how she tired, feeling sickness. . . . and she had a lot of pain while delivering the babies, and take good care, and grown up, give her education in the school, give her clothes, until now, that the parent give her to somebody else. So the musician make a lot of story for the girl to feel like she cannot forget what the parent done to her until now. Therefore, the girl thinking more about their parent, want to give them more food, more moneys, and just keep them com-
The fourth ritual symbolically tests the groom for his ability to meet the demands of the bride's parents. Two pillows of pink and gold are placed on a gold-threaded cloth on the floor. Sophy's parents enter and sit on the cloth, followed by Sophy's brother Sopheoun and his American girl friend, Tammy, who sit to their left.

Sophy is now dressed in gold and white, her hair decorated with pink and gold artificial flowers. Her bridesmaids lead her into the room and she sits behind her parents and holds the parasol over their heads. A tray of bananas, sugar, and two styrofoam cups of Coke lies before them. Phum Im peels a banana and carefully feeds it to his wife. Inside is a gold ring with a red stone. Nop Sith feeds him a banana and he also finds a ring inside, a silver ring. The relatives in the inner room wipe tears from their eyes with the napkins that were passed out earlier.

"They call silver banana and golden banana," Pirun revealed. "After they bite the banana, they have to have some gold, have to have some silver in there. That means the groom has the ability to respond to the demand of the bride parent. Now they use sugar to represent the soil. And eat sugar if sweet, and then they say yes. And sweet water, so they use [Coke]... to drink. It's everything sweet, which mean everything pass." Everything passes the test.

In the fifth and sixth parts of the ceremony, the groom pays respect to the bride's parents for raising her and taking care of her until this day and offerings are made to living relatives and ancestors. More offerings of bananas, coconuts, grapes, bowls of cooked rice and vegetables, small silver containers of tobacco, spices, and betel leaves, and two cooked ducks are placed on the floor. A sonorous gong is struck. Chuon enters wearing gold and orange and sits on the gold-threaded cloth. His groomsmen sit behind him. He places his palms together in a prayer gesture and presents jars of coconut flowers to Sophy's parents to hold while the lay monk Kem Moth recites a prayer. Chuon repeats the entire ritual with several pairs of relatives. The groomsmen sit behind him. He places his palms together in a prayer gesture and presents jars of coconut flowers to Sophy's parents to hold while the lay monk Kem Moth recites a prayer. Chuon repeats the entire ritual with several pairs of relatives. The groomsmen lead him from the room as the music begins again.

Pirun explained to me that there were two offerings, one to the people of the extended family who are still living and the other to the souls of the dead ancestors. The essence of the food and the smoke from the incense and candles brings the news of the marriage to the ancestors' souls as the monk calls them by name and asks them to bless the new couple.

More offerings of beer, candles with coconut flower stalks, and two more ducks are added to those already in the room and Kem Moth makes offerings to the ancestors of the bride and groom.

The gong is struck several times. Chuon enters for the second time and sits on the gold-threaded cloth. He wears a traditional pleated sarong made of a bright turquoise material and a gold and white lace jacket. The male dancer ties a white scarf around his waist and begins to dance and sing into the microphone as the solo tro'sau leads the other instruments.

The gong sounds again and Sophy enters in a matching turquoise and gold gown and sits beside Chuon. Her bridesmaids, now dressed in orange and white silk, sit behind her. The male dancer sings a speech-like song accompanied by the tro'sau. Kem Moth asks the names of ancestors on both sides and begins the prayer.

The lay monk, Kem Moth, who is conducting the wedding of Sophy and Chuon, has never conducted a wedding ceremony in Cambodia. He has conducted a few in America because he is elderly and the people asked him to do it. He learned how in a workshop gathering when community leaders came from other states.

The seventh ritual is the turning point of the entire wedding ceremony. The music, led by the tro'sau, signals the uniting of bride and groom as Sophy and Chuon place their hands in prayer position. A woman from behind gestures to Chuon to smile, but he refuses, looking sad and confused. A guest hands me a coconut flower. I don't know what to do with it, and someone shows me how to remove the seeds from the stalk to throw at Sophy and Chuon. Pirun cuts off a duck's tail and places it on a single dish along
with offerings of rice, vegetables, fruit, cigarettes, spices, brandy, and Coke. Sophy and Chuon lean forward onto the pink and gold pillows.

White threads are tied by each relative, first on Chuon’s right wrist and then on Sophy’s. The guests and relatives throw the coconut flower seeds and Chuon begins to cry, as do several of the women. They now tie threads around the bride and groom’s left wrists and sprinkle the holy water on their heads. Chuon’s tears flow freely, and occasionally someone wipes the tears from his face as family members massage the arms and legs of the bride and groom.

Responding to the strong emotions in the room, I feel my own tears starting to emerge. The guests vigorously throw coconut flower seeds, rose petals and holy water at Sophy and Chuon and place envelopes filled with money in Sophy’s hands. A young woman throws some of the coconut flower seeds at me and we smile at each other as our eyes meet.

The wedding usually lasts three days in Cambodia. The joining of the bride and groom with the thread tying ceremony usually happens on the third day. Sophy commented, “All the old people respect you and tie the string on the hand, it means good luck. And you leave it for three days and let your parent cut it for you. No one’s younger than me can do that.” Pirun explained, “That thread represent the rope that tie both of the people to be together for life. Which mean they have to love and care and appreciate each other until they pass away.”

Later I asked Chuon why he cried during the ceremony. “Because doing the ceremony is one in a lifetime. I should have father and mother to sit next to me and talk to me, to hold me, and when I look around, I feel so lonely, feel sad, why I’m far from my parent on my wedding day.”

The eighth ritual is one of protection. After Kem Moth recites aloud from his notes, he lights several small candles and three men begin chanting in Sanskrit. The atmosphere becomes peaceful and I feel that this is the most exquisite sound I have ever heard. The relatives pass the candles in a circle seven times and throw holy water, rose petals, and coconut flower seeds onto Sophy and Chuon. A gold sword in a black sheath rests on the pillows in front of them. They stand and hold the large sword in their hands as Kem Moth recites another prayer.

The candle passing and chanting protect the bride and groom from negative influences and ensure that they have a good life together. Pirun explained, “The chanting about Buddha, when he was born, he work so hard, he study, and he become enlightenment, and a lot of enemy that try to kill him but he could get away from that kind of things and he’s safe. . . . That’s all those seven circle mean.” The candle must pass from couple to couple. If someone’s husband or wife has died or is not present, they can’t pass the candle because negative influences will attack the new couple.

The sword also symbolically protects the new couple. Chuon explained, “When they let us holding the sword, that mean to protect me and her. Who will come to steal her, or who will come to steal me, she have to fight for it, because I don’t want to lose her. If someone try to steal her, I take the sword and fight, because the parent joins me and her together.”

In the ninth and final ritual of the ceremony, a symbolic dance brings the bride and groom good fortune. Sophy and Chuon sit in the center of the room on two chairs covered with a magenta and silver cloth. The two dancers return. Inside a gold cloth are placed a pillow and some coconut flowers and rose petals. The female dancer holds the wrapped pillow, dancing behind the male dancer while the musicians play. The man sings to Sophy’s parents as he points to the pillow. Nop Sith holds money in her hand. The female dancer lies on the floor and pretends to sleep on the pillow and the man waves his scarf as the guests throw coconut flower seeds on her for good fortune and tickle her with the coconut flowers to represent the mosquitos that bite her feet and neck. She scratches and yawns.

When she awakens she opens the cloth and finds the gold pillow, money, a gold necklace, and a blanket. She gives the pillow to the bride’s father and he passes it to his daughter and son-in-law. The woman sings and the man dances as the cheng and the skor lead the other instruments.

Chuon said that the two angels heard that he and Sophy were getting married so they tried to sell a magic pillow to the parents to give the bride and groom good fortune. The parents didn’t believe the angels so they had to show the parents that it was true. The woman slept while the man sang a song so his wife would have a good dream. When the parents saw that, they bought the pillow and when the bride and groom slept on it they received good fortune through the symbols in-
side—coconut flower seeds, rose petals, money, and jewels.

Pirun explained that this story came from the time of the Buddha. It deals with dream symbolism which is important in Cambodian culture. The man and woman were told through a dream to make the pillow for the bride and groom and to sell it at a price that only the bride’s parents could afford. Wealth is an important symbol used on the wedding day. The jewelry inside the pillow also symbolizes the bride and groom’s relationship from a past lifetime.

As the ceremony ends, family photographs are taken and food is served—large green tubs of rice and smaller bowls of beef curry, spicy vegetables, noodles, duck, and watermelon. I sit and eat with Mom Bak, a cousin of the bride, and learn that it was she who threw the coconut flower at me. I also speak with Savuth Meas, the guest who explained the ceremony to me when I first arrived. He gives me directions to the Methodist ceremony which will be held in just a few minutes. Most of the guests remain behind for an extended Cambodian reception.

I DRIVE across the Million Dollar Bridge into South Portland, getting to the People’s United Methodist Church just in time. The inside of the church is dark, illuminated only by stained glass windows. Few of the guests from the Cambodian ceremony are present. Only ten people are here, the parents and young siblings and cousins of Sophy.

Sophy, wearing a long white silk dress with purple flowers on the sleeves and holding a bouquet of mostly yellow flowers, stands beside Chuon in his tuxedo and shiny pink bow tie. She laughs nervously, he is calm, as the minister speaks almost inaudibly. Sophy and Chuon exchange rings, move forward to the altar for a few brief moments, and kiss each other awkwardly, Sophy taking a few steps back. Organ music ushers everyone out in procession. Pirun told me that it is out of respect for the American sponsor that an American traditional wedding is held after the Cambodian ceremony. The sponsors of Sophy’s family did attend that church and Sophy herself had gone there since she was young.

Getting the American marriage certificate seemed to be uppermost in the minds of the bride and groom. “City hall did not believe us that we are getting married,” said Chuon, “and we have to go to church and get proof. This is the way that make them believe. That’s why we go there. So we having signatures from the church.”

THE RECEPTION begins at six o’clock at Father Hays Center and over the next couple of hours nearly 300 people drift in. Most are Cambodian but a few are American sponsors and friends. The women wear vivid colors—bright fuchsias, deep purples, and shiny blues and greens. The men wear mostly dark colored suits. Sophy in a full white lacey gown stands with her bridesmaids to welcome the incoming guests.

At first there is taped American rock music. But a Cambodian rock band is busy setting up a Yamaha synthesizer, electric guitars, and drum set. Someone tells me they will play Cambodian traditional music but that it will be loud. The music is already a little too loud for my taste so I take a seat as far back from the stage as possible. When the music finally begins, it is clear that I am hearing Cambodian rock music, but American songs such as the Eagles’ “Hotel California” are interspersed.

I hardly notice the basketball scoreboard and playing area behind the decorations of crepe paper streamers and colored balloons hanging above circular tables with solid red or blue table cloths. Food from the Wok Inn is served almost continuously. The meats are brought in first.

A Laotian man at my table pours me a glass of the cognac. Other foods are served, including shrimp and vegetables, fish and gelatin soup, and noodles hardened into bowl-shaped form which contain a vegetable filling. I try out several varieties of food which taste very good.

After eating, the dancing begins, with Sophy and Chuon having the first dance. Children join them on the dance floor along with other adult couples. I speak to the Laotian man who sits at my table. He talks a lot about money. The cognac costs $28, the band was hired for $1,000 a night, and the family will probably get $15,000 in donations.

Sophy, wearing an elaborate gown of dark pink and gold, begins to receive the guests’ good wishes and envelopes of money. In exchange she gives each a ceremonial cigarette. She stops at every table and I think maybe she won’t stop at mine because I am unfamiliar with the

Sophy and Chuon have an American ceremony after the Cambodian wedding. They honeymoon in Niagara Falls, like many other newlyweds.

LEFT: THE METHODIST CHURCH WEDDING.
wedding. Phum Im said it cost wedding, you must give ten or fifteen percent more in return. “If they give us $50, we give them $60 or $70. It’s the traditional way,” said Sophoeun.

The money will help Sophy and Chuon start their new life together and pay some of the expenses of the wedding. Phum Im said it cost $18,000 for the whole ceremony, including the rental of the Father Hays Center, the tables and chairs, the music, the Cambodian music at the house, the food at the house, and the food from the Wok Inn. The food alone cost $8,000.

Chuon paid for part of the wedding. He worked hard and saved for almost two years. “Before I got married I work twelve, sixteen hour. I work from seven [in the morning] to eleven at night. Some week I never work less than 75 hour. When I say that, people not believe. I work one big week, I work 96 hour in seven days, because I want some money to getting married, show that I’m a real working-hard guy.”

I keep waiting for the wedding cake but none appears. I eventually decide it is not part of the Cambodian tradition. Toward the end of the evening, after most of the guests have gone home, Sophy changes into a purple silk dress with white flowers on the shoulders. She and Chuon leave the reception after midnight in Chuon’s ’88 Toyota Supra which he bought especially for their wedding day.

Chuon takes three days off from work. He and Sophy spend their honeymoon in Niagara Falls, as do hundreds of other American newlyweds. But Chuon said it’s because he has an aunt who lives near there.

In Cambodia, there is no honeymoon, but it is the custom for the new bride and groom to present each other to the relatives on each side after the wedding. On the third day after the wedding the ceremonial threads are cut.

OP SITH serves apples, nectarines, and watermelon as we all talk in the family apartment one Saturday night several weeks after the wedding. Sophy’s aunt, Saroum, and uncle, Sam Dim, who have an apartment in the same building, are there. Sophoeun translates as Saroum talks about her life in Cambodia, the thirteen children she has had, and the steam treatments she underwent after childbirth to regain her strength to work in the rice fields.

Sam Dim had been a monk before he married Saroum. A monk must wear a special cloth that he wraps around himself. Saroum goes into her apartment across the hall to get the traditional orange monk’s cloth. When she returns, she and Nop Sith wrap Sophoeun in the cloth amid much laughter and drape a matching cloth over his shoulder, fastening it at his side.

Chuon proudly tells me about his job at Great Atlantic Seafood on Portland’s waterfront. After only one year, he is an expert at processing sea urchins that are flown to Japan. I taste one. They are an expensive delicacy in Japan, selling for $8 an ounce. The sea urchin tastes like nothing I have ever eaten before—it has a light, airy texture and literally melts in my mouth. Chuon tells me its ocean like flavor will last for about two hours.

Chuon says he writes often to his mother and sends her money. As he speaks, he points to her picture which hangs on the wall in the living room.

Chuon says he writes often to his mother and sends her money. As he speaks, he points to her picture which hangs on the wall in the living room. We watch a video of her receiving the money Chuon has sent. She is a beautiful woman, but the worried expression on her face shows the suffering she has undergone.

After graduating from Portland High School, Sophy plans to attend college for two years to study accounting and bookkeeping. Sophoeun believes that Sophy and Chuon may open their own business someday. They are still living at home with Sophy’s parents, brothers, and sister to save money and will wait a while before having children.

Phum Im wants his children to continue their education. He says life in the United States is very hard for someone who doesn’t speak English. He misses his country and would like to go back to Cambodia, even if his children decide to stay here. He believes his children can be successful in America, but he hopes for the day peace will come and he can return to his farm. Nop Sith’s main concern is that her children are safe and can make a good life in this country, but she has trouble sleeping at night because of the noise outside their apartment.

Sophy also works at Great Atlantic Seafood. For Sophy it is her first summer job. She and Chuon are not often alone. They may ride in Chuon’s car with several of Sophy’s younger cousins, sister, and brother to the Portland Market. Or they may sit with Sophoeun and Tammy and the others watching television at home. Or they may all walk down to the corner convenience store.

They have now returned to daily life, but the memory of the magnificence of their wedding day—the traditional music, the praying and chanting, the incense, the offerings to the ancestors, the ornate clothing of the king and his queen—is theirs for a lifetime. As Pirun said, their ceremonial day as king and queen gives the new bride and groom a positive attitude, that they can do anything, they can become anything.

I finally get a chance to ask Sophy, “Do you love him?”

“No, yeah,” she says strongly, but then adds quietly, “A little bit.”
Twenty Nothings

"I just don't want to push paper behind a desk and wear a suit to work every day. I don't know what's rewarding about that, other than money. But that's what you're expected to do." Eric Brown.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KATE D. PHILBRICK
(Who was part of the scene she photographed)
STEPHAN SMITH, AMY RAY, NATHANIEL DAVIS IN AMY’S APARTMENT.

MONICA WALSH AT HOME.
They help each other find jobs in places where you can’t get a job unless you know somebody. They spend their time together, from late nights to early mornings, weekend benders to quiet moments.
STEPHAN, MONICA AND AMY WALKING DOWN FREE STREET ON THEIR WAY TO SEE ERIC WHO IS AT Gritty'S WORKING.
"They just keep saying that they’ve been drinking so much lately and they don’t realize that they mean for two years."

Amy Ray.
AMY, ERIC AND MONICA HANGING OUT AT Gritty’s ON A SLOW NIGHT AFTER MONICA’S SHIFT ENDED.
"This downtown thing is like so many of the same people day after day after day. I love to see 'em. But I do hang out here a lot, more than I should."

Monica Walsh.
The Twenty Nothings

By Lisa Phillips

Call them the “twenty nothings.” Call them “downtowners.” Call them the Old Port Mafia. Call them the little posse.

Call them Monica, Eric, Matt, Joey, Amy Ray, Mandy, Mole Man, Jima, Jen, Annie, Kate, Kevin, Billy, Crickette, Paul, and anyone else they know. Ask them what they want to do with themselves and chances are what they’re doing now isn’t what they had in mind.

They work as waiters, waitresses, bartenders, brewers, dishwashers, doormen, janitors, managers and cooks in Portland’s Old Port. That pays for the essentials: rent, breakfast, lunch, dinner, utilities, groceries, cigarettes and beer. Maybe a phone or cable. Maybe a second hand VCR.

Then the decisions. Do they want to make art or car payments? Do they pay for tuition or a vacation? Do they need a couch or a camera?

What they have in common is that they are “singular” and living on their own, without their parents’ financial support. Many of them are at one end or another of “the most bizarre parts of their lives,” as Kate puts it, those years when anything can happen, when they’re anything but settled down. They are trying to find emotional and financial support outside of marriage-tracks, family-tracks, and career-tracks—at least for now—in the Old Port in Portland, where they work, meet up with friends, eat their meals and drink.

They range from trust funds to homelessness, from graduates of Master’s Degree programs to ninth grade dropouts. Most have had some taste of a college experience, whether they’ve graduated, dropped out, or are still enrolled. College can take a long time for them, because it’s part time. Eight or ten years instead of four.

In the Old Port they have a path, and it’s a short one. Portland has 148 bars altogether and 32 of them are within a two by five block area bounded by Union, Commercial, Milk and Pearl Streets, the heart of the Old Port. These bars couldn’t be closer unless they were all right next door to each other, and most of them already are.

So it isn’t very far from where they’re working to wherever their friends are working and hanging out. While they’re in the Old Port, this path may take them to Dewey’s, Granny Kiliam’s, the Dry Dock or Bob’s Café, but for the most part, Gritty McDuff’s and Amigos Mexican Restaurants are ping and pong.

Gritty McDuff’s, on Fore Street, aspires to English pubdom, with its brass railings, dark wood floor, red brick walls, barrels, black lights, poster sized pictures of rugby games, long tables and benches. All sorts of people meet here: lawyers, doctors, insurance men, wait staff from other bars and businesses in the Old Port, tourists, artists, young and old. Morning people, day people, night people.

There you’ll find Monica Walsh, waiting tables like she was moderating a panel discussion. She is 26 years old and has just graduated from the Portland School of Art. She came to Maine from New York nine years ago to attend classes and has worked in the Old Port ever since.

There’s Eric Brown, age 24, at the table nearest to the bar and the coffee machine, eating his dinner and doing the crossword before his shift. He’s a graduate of the University of Southern Maine, a photography major. He’s been working at Gritty’s for a year, doing almost everything except brewing the beer.

And there’s Joey Maza, 25, with one of his hats, sitting next to Eric and sipping a beer. Originally from the Philippines, he came to Rockport, Maine, when he was a sophomore in high school. He’s been in Portland working in the Old Port and going to the University of Southern Maine off and on for the past six years.

Amy Ray and Mandy Little come in and join Eric and Joey at the table after seeing a movie up the street. Amy Ray looks like a flapper in her cloche hat and curly chin-length bob. Born in Eastport, Maine, she’s been working various jobs in the Old Port ever since she got her Master’s Degree in Brooklyn three years ago.

Right now, they are not tied down and their friends are often the most important people in their lives. They share meals, apartments, passions for art, classes, shifts and cigarettes. As Monica Walsh once said, “If I was down to my last ten dollars, I’d give it to anyone here if they needed it.” They help each other find jobs in places where you can’t get a job unless you know somebody. They spend their time together, from late nights to early mornings, weekend benders to quiet moments.

Working in the Old Port gives them more control over their time than other jobs would. Their shifts are flexible, switchable. They can earn as much money waiting tables for 24 hours as office workers make in 40 hours.

There’s a seductive side to the downtown scene. The money they make, the short work week, the long weekends, the beer, the bourbon, and whiskey. Hanging out takes up time, money and energy from what they say is important to them, going to class or the studio. Some will stay long after the summer tourists and leaf people have gone home. Others will leave with them, before the snow falls.

They are, above all, in transition, like a roosting flock about to fly. Some will take off sooner than others, and a few won’t leave the ground at all.
Sisters of Mercy and the Winds of Vatican II

By Leith Warlick
Photography by Pamela Bonaguide
REACH OUT and touch the thick twisted rope, green and rough. It swings a little, a spasmodic twitch, then slower and slower . . . now only a slight, almost imperceptible sway. In the convent's central corridor, with its shadowy statues of saints and madonnas, surrounded by marble columns and gold-gilded icons of angels, the rope climbs up, up three floors between the polished railing of the grand staircase. Past St. Cecilia, past the grandfather clock Tick Tick Tick, past the chapel doors, and into the mouth of a small bell. The Voice Of God.

Thirty years ago this bell called the Sisters of Mercy to morning prayer and meditation, breakfast, noon prayer and recreation. To everything. The Voice of God directed their day. And St. Joseph's Convent in Portland, Maine, Mother House to the Sisters of Mercy, didn't move without its sound. Young sisters were trained to ring the bell, taught the special technique, the sound combinations. Some were complicated. Some required a special shake of the finger. It was a very important charge to be "on the bell." And to be late . . . she might have gotten that awful feeling in the pit of her stomach. The bell was the Voice of God. So the bell had to be punctual.

Today it rings only for the sisters' funerals. With the median age at 68, three quarters of the 89 sisters now living in the four story brick Mother House on Stevens Avenue are retired. And already, just within the last two months, three have died.

Since the Second Vatican Council in 1964, the total number of sisters in Maine has dropped from 1,336 to 595. And the number of Sisters of Mercy in the State has decreased by more than half: the order's diminishing size and rise in age reflects what is happening in religious communities around the country today. With increased options for women, and a church in which Catholic lay people can now actively participate, fewer women are interested in entering the convent. Only one novice from Maine is in training to be a Sister of Mercy.

Vatican II changed religious life forever. It was an awakening, a time for religious communities to examine their manner of living, to reexamine their roots, their goals as individuals and as a community. It was through this process of reexamination that many sisters recognized that they were in the convent out of some kind of compulsion, either from the influence of the Catholic culture, or from the influence of their families. Theirs was not a free offering to God, and many decided to leave.

Yet, with 158 members, the Sisters of Mercy is still the largest of the 23 women religious orders in Maine. After joining the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas in 1991, a nationwide organization, the Sisters of Mercy has now the largest order in the country. The newest, and among the smallest of the Maine orders, is the two-year-old Resurrection Community, located in Otisfield, in the hills on 133 acres of farmland.

For the Sisters of Mercy, their 85-year-old Mother House acts as the core, the foundation around which smaller Mercy Convent missions spread from Eagle Lake down to Kittery. The community is involved in ministries that range from the traditional teaching, nursing and administrative work in the order's sponsored institutions, to the newer ministries which now include housing and a renewed focus on social service work.

The gold domed Mother House, with its ordered rows of windows and imposing façade, once boarded as many as 400 sisters during the summers. No one can say exactly how many rooms there are in the place, but there must be at least 100. Along the main corridor, Victorian parlors richly furnished with velvet couches and chairs, chandeliers and grand paintings provide a sharp contrast to the small, simple rooms of the sisters on the second and third floors. A few administrative offices, including a room for the fax and Xerox machines, occupy the far end of the main corridor.

Each order has its own charism, a spirit they say has been given to them as a gift from God. The charism of the Sisters of Mercy is compassionate service and healing love, which they accomplish through their fourth vow: service to the sick, the poor and the ignorant. The order was founded by Catherine McAuley in 1831, in Dublin, Ireland. “God knows I would rather be cold and hungry than see the poor deprived of any comfort in my power to give them,” she said.

Catherine McAuley was progressive for her times. The Sisters of Mercy visited the poor, and the sick in hospitals, and started Meals on Feet—the forerunners of today's worldwide Meals on Wheels services. They were called the "walking nuns" because most other sisters at that time were cloistered. And Catherine McAuley's school became the first training center for Catholic female teachers. She was sending out trained

Thirty years ago the convent’s bell called the Sisters of Mercy to prayer, meditation, to everything. Today it rings only for the sisters’ funerals.
teachers two years before a similar school was opened for male instructors.

The order’s charism hasn’t changed since its founding, or since its 1843 arrival in the United States, but their response to it has. Responding to a changing society and the needs of the time has been the central focus for the Sisters of Mercy since Vatican II.

To enter the convent 50, 40, even 30 years ago provided women not only with the means to live in community in relationship with God, but also offered them a free college education, both for undergraduate and graduate degrees. Sisters were administrators of hospitals, and principals of schools long before lay women had the chance. And there was also a certain amount of status attached to being a “sister,” status within the family and also within the Catholic community. Probably most attractive to the young women just out of high school was the romantic aura that surrounded the sacrificial life sisters led.

“As kids we were spellbound,” one former nun remembers. Maybe half the girls, she says, in her high school class wanted to be nuns. Even the sisters’ “heavenly” smell as they glided by in their long black habits gave her “goose bumps. We thought they had a special smell, and we were sure it was because of their holiness. Today I would give my right arm practically, to have that smell.”

Many of the women religious orders first came to Maine in the mid 1800s, either from Canada, France or Ireland. They came mainly as educators and nurses to serve the immigrant population. A good number of these religious communities came down from Canada and settled around milltowns like Lewiston, Waterville, Sanford, Saco and Biddeford. They came to take care of the French Canadians who worked in the shoe factories, woolen mills and paper mills. The Sisters of Mercy first settled in Bangor, then later in Portland. Their focus was not so much on a specific immigrant population as it was on the poor in general.

The foundation shaking impact of Vatican II on religious life came mostly from the Council Fathers’ breakdown of divisions. First, their “call of the whole church to holiness . . . that one and the same holiness is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God.” No longer was religious life a “superior vocation.” Second, the Council’s reversal of the centuries long adversary stance of the Church in relation to the world. Throughout history, religious communities had identified themselves as separate from the world. They lived in convents and monasteries, dressed differently, followed a strict and scheduled regimen that could not be assimilated into ordinary contemporary life. And now, they were expected to become part of the world, “worldly.”

The changes in the women religious communities, brought about by Vatican II, far exceeded both the expectations and the intentions of the Council Fathers. And, as some sisters say, “When Pope John XXIII decided to open the windows and let in the fresh air, he let in a blizzard and hurricane instead.”

“Hey, Jesus didn’t wear any special zoot suit.” Sister Miriam Therese slows down to match the speed of the car inching along in front of us. God doesn’t care about appearances. And “I thought, ‘Hey, that’s where it’s at!’ ”

We’re driving north to visit three Mercy missions, and to see Sister Miriam Therese’s mother in Houlton, her hometown. She tells me she grew up on a potato farm there. It’s a cold day, the windows are rolled up tightly. I still have my jacket and scarf on, just waiting for the morning sun to warm the inside of the car. Sister Miriam Therese is wearing a denim skirt and a green button down pullover. Nothing fancy. But it took her three years to get permission to wear these clothes. That was in 1983. Almost 20 years after the Council. Maine, she says, is slow to move. The changes here have been very gradual compared with the cities. Even though some community members were ready for the changes, institutional traditions are hard to break down.

“Much of what I want takes ten years to happen,” she says. And that’s one of the reasons so many sisters left the order in the ’60s and ’70s. The changes just weren’t happening fast enough for many of the sisters. But for some sisters, the changes happened too fast. Three years ago when the community joined the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 12 sisters split off and formed their own more traditional order, the Diocesan Sisters of Mercy.

The majority of the sisters in residence at the Mother House still wear the altered habit, mid-calf-length black dress and simple pull on veil. Today they can buy
these at a store. None of them wear the traditional habit with gamp-armed neckpiece and starched head piece, black underskirt, corset and cape. The sisters used to make their own habits. No patterns, about five yards of heavy twill material.

"God bless us!" Sister Miriam Therese laughs. "I was glad when the rules changed!" As postulants, the newest members of the community, they had sewing classes. It was during these classes that the young sisters made their first habits. "It had to come down to the ankle bone. No higher." Sister Miriam Therese turns off on an exit. McDonalds. Plain biscuit, no butter. It's one of her favorites.

She explains that the sisters often sewed during their 45 minutes of "recreation" each afternoon. Mending stockings, taking out pleats. "Idle hands are the devil's workshop," she laughs, shaking her head. All these "cotton' pickin' rules . . . knew they were crazy as heck, but I wanted to be a sister so I went through it." Just had to put up with the rules.

Sister Miriam Therese is the Director of Communications for the Maine regional community of the Sisters of Mercy. For 30 years she taught social studies and history in schools around the State. She received her Master's Degree in American history from the University of Maine at Orono and wrote a book for her thesis: Aroostook Architect: The Life and Times of the Reverend Joseph S. Marcoux.

She entered the convent in 1956, the same year she graduated from St. Joseph's Academy for girls, a boarding school run by the Sisters of Mercy that was located on the Mother House grounds. Seven of the 25 graduating seniors from her class entered the convent that year, an extraordinary number.

"My poor parents thought we'd been duped." Sister Miriam Therese says she had even been accepted at a Catholic college in Massachusetts, but decided to enter the convent instead. She thought she had the "call," and if she passed it up, the rest of her life would be miserable. That's what Catholic girls were taught to believe, she says.

Within the last ten years, many sisters have opted to wear the navy blue suit. In 1984, when the proposal for the suit was made, a number of sisters objected. They said that it would never work, that they'd look like airline stewardesses. But within a month after approval, Sister Miriam Therese says 40 sisters had already changed to the suit. The number of sisters wearing contemporary clothes still represent the minority in the order.

"Clothes have been a real source of trouble" in the past, says Sister Miriam Therese. And many sisters have been "freezed out" for what they were wearing. Though today, the controversy within the convent has certainly died down, Sister Miriam Therese says she still gets "occasional scoldings for not wearing the habit," but mainly from people outside the convent. Older Catho-

lics, she says, who are used to seeing sisters dressed a certain way.

Sister Miriam Therese was one of the first eight in the community to change into contemporary clothes. Her decision followed a pilgrimage to Israel in 1979.

Sister Miriam Therese feels a person’s identity shouldn’t be wrapped up in what she wears. She wears contemporary clothes, not a habit.

Right: Sister Miriam Therese on convent stairs.

She feels that a person’s identity shouldn’t be wrapped up in what she wears. Now, says Sister Miriam Therese, "we can reach out to more people. It’s not the veil that makes the person.

"That was one of the toughest, craziest things I ever went through," she shakes her head. "A couple of sisters would almost crash into the wall when they saw me coming." Others, she says, were physically repulsed and would actually twist away.

"It was so maddening . . . Sometimes I would go down to the Old Port and walk and walk and walk, just to get the frustration out of me," she shakes her head. "I never dreamed that appearances had such a great hold."

The wearing of a "habit" dates back to the fourth century and the beginning of the Eremetical Movement. Finding it impossible to live the Gospel in the midst of the Hellenistic culture in which the church then participated, some men and women left the cities and fled to the desert. These desert mothers and fathers "donned a rude habit" and lived a life of contemplation and abstention. The habit, therefore, acted almost as a uniform, an identification of who they were and what their beliefs were. It identified a way of life.

So, for many sisters the habit is a form of identity and also a source of pride, something they feel they have earned, and others respect. And it is also something that is a part of their vows. For some, taking the habit off means pulling back on a promise they made when they chose this life.

Sister Miriam Therese checks her watch as we drive through the center of Houlton. We’re a little early. She’s always planning things out, looking to the future.
It "drives people crazy," she says. "They say not to worry, but I’m not worrying, that’s just the way I am."

The back seat of the car is hidden under a pile of clothes, bags and paperwork. Sister Theresa Conlogue’s apartment is just down the road, 1 Kellerman Street.

The number of Mercy missions outside the Portland area has dropped from 25 to 15 in the last 20 years. Sisters have never had the choice to live alone, it’s not a community policy. And most wouldn’t choose to do so anyway. But as the number of active sisters has dwindled over the years, the number of single-sister missions has increased. And Sister Miriam Therese says she worries that community will focus too much on the Portland area and not be able to hold on to its rural missions.

Sister Theresa lives alone. Not by choice. She’s the only sister left at St. Mary’s Elementary, a small brick Catholic School in the center of Houlton where she teaches the first and second grades. It’s the same school she went to as a little girl. A few years ago she lived in the large, yellow Convent next door with three other sisters. But due to changes and cutbacks in the school, the other sisters were forced to leave, and the order decided to sell the old Convent. Now it’s being painted to be a funeral parlor.

As we drag our bags and coats up the stairs to Sister Theresa’s second story apartment, there’s the warm smell of banana bread coming from the kitchen. On a rack, cooling, is the dark homemade loaf. And close by, a canister filled with cookies. It’s a very comfortable apartment, a living room, kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and guest room. The order rents the place from two married ministers who live downstairs.

On the table beside the couch stands a graceful statue of the Virgin Mary, and next to her a Halloween card says BOO! Behind the TV and VCR stand is a rack of records and potted green leafy plants.

Sister Theresa explains that she has just returned from vacation. Her students have been on “potato break,” a three week period in the fall when Aroostook County harvests its potato crop. As a little girl, Sister Theresa says she remembers picking potatoes, lining the barrels up along the rows. The mornings were really cold. “You’d dress up like you’re going to Alaska!” she laughs. But it was money to buy clothes.

Sister Theresa says she’s gotten used to living alone, that she really feels like part of the town now. And, besides, there are always sisters coming to visit, she says. Houlton, which has traditionally had a high concentration of Catholics, is “home” to many Sisters of Mercy.

This week, Sister Frances Gallant, a retired sister living in the Mother House, is visiting for a few days. On a short vacation, she says. At 71, she is still busy, working with the handicapped, driving the older sisters to their doctors’ appointments, and is very skilled and creative with her hands. A few years ago she made a creche scene from old Joy detergent bottles for the
main corridor in the Mother House. And she knits. Everything. Afghans, sweaters, hats, for the sisters and their annual fall craft fair. Everyone knows Sister Frances. They say she has friends “all over” the state.

We sit for a while and watch an old Elvis Presley movie on TV. Sister Frances always wanted to be a nun, ever since she can remember. At dinner she used to say, “I’m going to be a nun.” Her mother wouldn’t even look up. “Frances, eat your supper,” she’d say. Sister Frances laughs. A priest once gave her a book, *Life in the Convent*. She had to sneak it into her house, hidden inside her coat. And before going to school in the mornings she put it in the bottom of a drawer under some clothes. “Yeah, it was a bad book,” she laughs. “It was like I had *Playboy* or something.”

And when she entered the convent in 1946, her mother cried. To them, she says “it was like being buried alive.” Even though her parents lived close by, she couldn’t go home for seven years. “But it was a life we had chosen of our own free will,” her words are serious. “We were deeply in love with the Lord. “Sweet Mother!” She sighs, and tells me it took her a “wicked” long time to get her Bachelor of Arts degree, 18 years of summer school, she says. That was back in the ’40s when sisters were sent out to teach first and then received their schooling along the way, either at night or in summer school.

Sister Theresa switches through the channels. Fred Astaire comes on, dancing with Judy Garland. Her short skirt is pulled up high around the thigh, revealing stitched flowers on her black stockings. Sister Theresa gives a sly smile, “You’ll be wanting some of those for Christmas, Frances?”

It is 6:10 a.m. Five minutes before recitation of the Divine Office begins. The air is still. Except for a few candles burning near the altar and one overhead light, the chapel is dark. I bow my head and breathe slowly, silently. The swinging doors are still open and I can feel the ache of the hall stairs as they creak and moan under the weight of morning feet. The door hinges wheeze, and someone drops a set of keys on the wooden floorboards outside.

Inside it’s grand . . . beautiful. The chapel. More than 20 arched stained glass windows, standing six feet tall, line the walls in an array of rich reds, golds, purples, blues and greens, drawing my eyes down the wide central aisle to an altar of white marble. Baskets of pink carnations and daisies decorate the holy table and cross. To the left, a gold cup with red and green studded glass jewels rests at the feet of Jesus. To the right, a haloed Mother Mary gazes toward heaven. Painted blue ceiling and walls, flecked with gold that glitters with the sunlight filtered through colored glass, like thousands of little stars. Ornate moldings and carved borders. I feel small.

Thick soled shoes, black Reebocks, white Keds and Nike sneakers shuffle past. The sisters settle into their customary places. Someone coughs. The morning prayers begin with the Angelus. “Holy Mary, Mother of God”—there is a trance like vibrating rhythm to the recitation, spoken in low mumbled unison—“pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death . . . Holy Mary, Mother of God . . . .”

**Thirty years ago, 100 sisters chanted the Office in Latin, standing in two rows of wooden stalls. Today about 40 sit scattered in 60 pews.**

Thirty years ago the sisters chanted the Office in Latin . . . standing. Over 100 of them, in two rows of wooden stalls facing the aisle, their habits reaching almost to the floor. Today they sit—about 40 this morning—spread among the 60 pews. Most are veiled and wearing the altered black habit or the navy blue suit, though some bareheaded, silver haired sisters are casually dressed in skirt and sweater.

Only a few of the original stalls remain in the chapel. Some are backed up against the walls of the alcove. Others are reserved in the rear of the chapel, near the entrance. Just like the monks’ stalls, they have a hinged seat that rises, and underneath is a little stool where the sisters used to sit for meditation.

Sister Helen rubs her silver wedding band, the sign of her fidelity to Jesus, then reaches forward to straighten her prayer book rack. Her wrinkled hand moves deftly in this familiar space.

Among the large print Bibles, religious pamphlets and prayer books wrapped with rubber bands, are personal mementos individualizing each pew. A floral print bookmark with a pink tassel, packets of Kleenex, handmade green and pink yarn Kleenex holders, small change purses stuffed between the books, torn pieces of paper marking pages of the hymnals. Postcards and photographs, notes from friends stuck inside the pages of the prayer books, pink stick-up note pads and pencils and pens. A candy in a shiny brown wrapper lies on top of *The New Testament*. A folded navy blue sweater. And cushions where the older sisters sit, orange corduroy, light blue, black.
Even at 8 a.m., after mass and after breakfast, the chapel has a dusky feel and look. Quiet. The only sound is the click of rosary beads and the squeak of Sister Emerita’s wheelchair as she moves around the chapel, stopping beside every pew to pray. She’s 97 years old. And every day she makes the stations of the cross. A friend wheels her from the infirmary through the chapel doors, down the green carpet to the front left pew. A black habited figure sits in the shadows of the back pews, head bowed, lips moving silently. Two sisters step inside the chapel and talk in hushed tones, their words lost in their own echo.

Every morning at 4:30 Sister Simonne Laflamme walks the corridors of McAuley High School reading a book or magazine and saying the rosary. Back and forth. Back and forth. For an hour. When the weather warms up she moves outside to walk the convent grounds.

A silver Mercy cross hangs heavy, like a medal around her neck. Between narrow shoulders, she’s tiny. And yet, there’s something about her presence, it’s as if she fills up a lot of space. Something about the intensity of her look, the way her voice rises, and then falls suddenly to a whisper, the way her face twists with emotion.

Sister Simonne reads every issue of the Jesuit magazine, America, because “you get the Christian view of contemporary problems,” she says. “I think I have a pretty good sense of what’s right and wrong.” Sister Simonne developed her strong convictions after the Vatican Council, when sisters realized that their thoughts and beliefs were important. I mention Vatican II. It’s a topic she likes.

She sits straight up in her chair. “I thought it was so exciting!” Her eyes open wide and she leans forward, just a little. And whispers. “Oh! I just . . . I think I read everything I could get my hands on.”

Sister Simonne is the librarian at Catherine McAuley High School, a Catholic day-school for girls, that stands with its glassed-in foyer behind the iron fence surrounding the Mother House grounds. The high school opened in 1969, after the Sisters of Mercy closed St. Joseph’s Academy, their boarding school for girls. By the late 1960s, fewer families were sending their daughters to Catholic academies and the school’s enrollment dropped.

Within the last 30 years, the Catholic population in Maine has decreased by 24,585, dropping from 278,466 to 253,861 while the total population has increased by 238,662, climbing from 969,265 to 1,227,927. The sisters combined St. Joseph’s with Cathedral High School, a Catholic day school on Congress Street in Portland, and built McAuley.

Today, the school library is quiet. It’s afternoon. After school. There’s a girl sleeping on the couch, Seventeen magazine in her hand. Sister Simonne places a small box of nickels on the counter. For the Xerox machine, she says.

The collar of her white blouse is buttoned close to the neck. “I was a really good seamstress,” she tells me. “And I used to make all my clothes. So I thought, ‘I bet they’re going to put me into making the clothes for the other sisters, you know.’ ” She laughs, “Well, I was surprised when two days after I entered they sent me out to a sub-primary!”

Sister Simonne entered the convent in 1947. She taught primary school for 20 years, but resigned her teaching position when she was diagnosed in 1964 with Myasthenia Gravis, a neuromuscular disease similar to Multiple Sclerosis. And like Multiple Sclerosis, there is no known cure. The muscles in her chest, neck and face stiffened so that she couldn’t form words. She couldn’t talk. And “I couldn’t smile,” she shakes her head. “That was one of the hardest things.”

Sister Simonne got better suddenly in 1988, the year her mother died. She started to talk again, she could smile and laugh. “We call it a miracle,” she says. And community held a special mass in celebration of her unexplainable cure.

For 24 years, though, she lived silently, writing down notes on pads of paper, cutting her food into minute pieces. It was during this time that Sister Simonne returned to school to get her Master’s in library science from the University of Maine at Orono. She was 40 years old.

I lift an orange plastic library chair into her office. It’s a small office. There’s a table, a typewriter. Sister Simonne tells me that every night she thanks God for community. She says it’s like a support group, a place where “you don’t have to hide anything.” But this wasn’t always true.

“What we called community life [before] was really uniformity. We see that now,” says Sister Simonne. “Everyone dressed alike, walked alike, lived alike. They

“What we called community life was really uniformity. They used to say, ‘If you’ve seen one Sister of Mercy, you’ve seen them all.’”
used to say, “If you’ve seen one Sister of Mercy, you’ve seen them all.” “There was no individuality. To be an individual was considered selfish and self-centered, very “human.” Sisters were supposed to be above “human.” They were in the world, but not of the world.

Conformity through the “rule” was very important. “All those little things,” she says. Like the length of the habit, to the ankle bone, no higher. And the way a sister walked, arms folded in front at the waist, head bent, eyes down. No running. Running, they were told, was “not becoming of a religious.” The idea was to glide, not walk. And to do so without the sound of clicking blackthorn rosary beads—which hung with the wooden Mercy cross from the leather belt, or cincture, at their waist—was a mark of very high distinction.

“Externals were the way you conformed. And it was supposed to manifest your internal.” Sister Simonne explains that “insofar as you were obedient to your superiors and followed the rules, you were pleasing God.” It was blind obedience. No questions asked.

“When I think of the past, I should not have played that role,” says Sister Simonne. But at the time, that didn’t enter my mind. It was the rules first.” She pauses. “You felt guilty” for questioning anything. “You’d say to yourself, ‘That’s not from God, that must be an evil spirit that’s puttin’ these thoughts in my mind.’ ”

But this has changed. Sister Simonne has changed. She thinks for herself now. “If there’s anything which I would see as an injustice, I’ve got, you know, comebacks right away. I would not just let it go.”

Sister Simonne tells me she’s concerned that many of the older sisters are isolated, that they judge social justice and contemporary issues by what they watch on TV. Thirty years ago sisters didn’t even have TV or radio. But today both are common fixtures in the Mother House. The old sewing room, where postulants learned to make their first habits, is now one of a couple of TV lounges in the convent, crowded with comfortable easy chairs, covered in multi-colored handmade Afghans.

During the Gulf War, she says, “there were so few in our community that were against it.” Some of the sisters, she thinks, just couldn’t distinguish propaganda from the Christian viewpoint. “That was so aggravating for me, because I was so convinced that was wrong.” The Pope was one of the few who was against the war, but “evidently they didn’t get that message,” she says, shaking her head. “And that’s what I couldn’t understand.

“Our mission, or goal, is to become as much like God as we can,” says Sister Simonne. Striving for perfection. This hasn’t changed. But before Vatican II, following the rules was the means of attaining perfection, of becoming as close to God as possible. Vatican II, she says, helped crack this mold. Striving for perfection, today, means being a whole person, or a person
“fully alive.” To be mind, heart and psyche all in one.

“I see every part of life as spiritual. It’s God’s creation. And, therefore, every part of life is important,” says Sister Simonne. Including relationships. In the past, relationships were considered very “human.” Sisters were expected to be totally detached, their real support was to come from God alone. So to look to the human level was to appear worldly.

Interaction between sisters was minimal in the days before Vatican II. There was a lot of silence and “particular friendships” were frowned upon, and also very difficult to form within the monastic structure, which allowed for only regulated free time. The 45 minutes of recreation each day was around a table, in assigned seats. Only on certain occasions were the rules relaxed. Sisters’ funerals, for example, when community was allowed three days of recreation. And apple pie for dessert.

There were also strictly enforced periods of silence during meals. Even the mid-morning snack of bread and molasses was taken “standing and in silence.” And every night at 9 p.m. there were the “night tolls.” Three double tolls of the bell which announced the beginning of the “Sacred Silence,” after which no one was permitted to speak. This was very strictly enforced. A sister could be sent home if she broke Sacred Silence for anything except an emergency. “You know, that was the whole idea of lesbianism,” says Sister Simonne. “That’s what they were afraid of.”

With the Vatican II pronouncement that religious life was not a “superior” life came a change in relationships allowed. Sisters were, in fact, human, and entitled to the human need of friendship. The “night tolls” stopped and Sacred Silence was abolished.

“I can say that everyone’s my friend,” brow furrowed, she continues, “but I have special ones, you know. I have special friends. And today that’s not frowned upon, that’s looked on as very healthy. Everyone should have special friends.

“We’re living together in order to help us grow, to know ourselves and to know God, since it’s one process really,” says Sister Simonne. “I think that’s what religion is all about, because your relationship with God is the number one thing in religion and everything else depends on it.”

As the interaction between sisters changed, so did their interaction with the lay community. They became a part of the community, rather than separate from it. The monastic structure which had physically contained them in convents, was no longer feasible as sisters began to make their own schedules and to move into apartments in small groups. And their ministries broadened. They were given more freedom to become a part of the world.

“If course! Why didn’t I know that before?” Her eyes open wide. “We are the church.” And “the church” includes everybody. It just struck a right note.” Sister Simonne’s hand comes down on the table, the silver wedding band clicking against the edge. “That’s what was happening all the time.”

There was no individuality. To be individual was called selfish and self centered. Now to have special friends is considered healthy.

Left: Sister Mary Camilla Flaherty in convent corridor.

Before Vatican II, she says, “our life was separate from other Catholics. They knew we were put on a pedestal as though we were first class Christians and they were second class Christians.” Sister Simonne lowers her voice, as if confessing a terrible truth. “That’s what the Catholic church practiced,” she breathes. Now, that’s not true at all. “We’re all equal in baptism.” She shakes a finger at me. And “I feel very much part of the community now, which is the whole Christian community, you know.” So Vatican II didn’t change the theology, it just changed the practice of the church.

There was also a system of hierarchy within religious communities prior to Vatican II. The Reverend Mother, her assistants and local superiors, all represented God in the sisters’ lives. That’s the way they were trained. It was a superior-subject relationship. Sisters knelt down on the floor before the Reverend Mother whenever they were reprimanded, or whenever they had a question. Her rule was the law. She read their letters, ones received and sent.

“It was a very dependent relationship,” says Sister Simonne. It was like a “mother-child” relationship. Sisters did what they were told. They never had to think for themselves. And just the title “mother” reinforced this dichotomy.

Below the superiors, were the “choir sisters,” the educated sisters. They were the teachers, the nurses. During chapel they chanted the Office in Latin, whereas the “lay sister” did not. The “lay sisters” were the “domestics,” usually Irish immigrants who entered the convent specifically to do the manual labor. They did the laundry, the cleaning, the cooking, and their lives were separate from the choir sisters. They had separate prayers and recreation.
It's this hierarchical structure that "we've been wanting to erase in Vatican II," says Sister Simonne. There are some sisters "who are always wanting to bring it back." And there are also some who would much prefer being told what to do, she says. For many, this has been a "very, very difficult change." It means more responsibility, adult responsibility.

The third Saturday of almost every month is set aside for day long community meetings, targeting specified topics. These meetings are not only more frequent since Vatican II, but also allow the entire community to participate and share in forming new ideas.

Sisters now have their own "budgets," money allotted to them from the Mother House each month. Before, they never had a penny. All of their needs were taken care of by community. Today they do their own laundry. In the Mother House, washers and dryers are on the basement level, near the cafeteria. The order hires lay people now to run the kitchen.

Today the Reverend Mother is called a president and she is elected every four years. The title "superior" is no longer used. And their names aren't prefaced with "mother" anymore. In fact, within the last ten years many sisters have even dropped "sister" and just go by their first names. Like the current president, Sister Laboure Morin. Sister Simonne greets her as "Laboure."

"Yeah, I feel just as comfortable saying anything to her as I do to anybody else. We've come around a lot in that because, boy, at one time that was not true." Sister Simonne laughs. I smile, remembering my first glimpse of the parlors and dining rooms along the main corridor of the Mother House. In the priest's dining room, taped to the china closet door was a paper clown face saying, "Welcome home, Laboure!"

June 28, 1956. The chapel at St. Joseph's Convent was filled with sisters dressed in their "best" black habits. Parents and family crowded into the dim space, light filtering through the stained glass windows. Sarah Lagueux's Italian clan was there from "down Congress Street," and Mary O'Brien's nine Irish brothers and sisters, mother and father and Aunt and Uncle. The choir was in place and ready to sing.

The postulants had already received their new names, given to religious men and women when they were missioned to go out and do the works of the church. Sarah Lagueux became Sister Mary Magdalene. And Mary O'Brien, Sister Paracleta. "Needless to say, we didn't ask for the names," Mary mumbles under her breath. Sarah laughs, "She came up the stairs crying her eyes out!"

The 16 postulants marched in. Sister Paracleta, Sister Mary Magdalene and the fourteen others in their band, or entering group, each carrying a candle. They were wearing veils and dressed in long, white wedding gowns which hid the heavy black stockings and black shoes they wore underneath. Sarah remembers one of the sisters tripped and lit the veil of another postulant during the ceremony. They had to douse her with water, she says. "We had a little hullabaloo there for a while."

After their first nine months in the convent, postulants became "officially" accepted into the community and started their two-year novitiate training period. The wedding ceremony was symbolic of their marriage to Christ. The sisters were presented with the holy habit, blessed by the Bishop, which they carried, folded, down the aisle and out of the chapel. They went to a room, quickly changed out of their wedding gowns and into their new habits. And then an "angel"—a senior sister—cut off their hair.

The families waited.

Then, down the aisle in their new habits and white church mantle, choir singing, they glided past their relatives to the front of the chapel. Mothers and fathers crying. They prostrated themselves before the Bishop as a symbol of their renunciation of the world.

"We were laid stretched out on the floor, sixteen of us," Mary starts to hum the Latin "Ecce quam bonum"—Behold how good it is. Face down, arms stretched out. "We were down there for almost five minutes it seems. I mean, how could you quit after that!" Mary throws her hands in the air and laughs.

The day I left, I didn't say good-bye to anybody." Mary O'Brien runs two fingers along the blue edge of the kitchen tablecloth. It's a cold and rainy Halloween. I have come to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to talk with Mary and her friend Sarah Lagueux, who both left the Sisters of Mercy order. There's a glass jar full of leftover trick or treat candy on the counter next to a plate of steaming Irish bread.
"The stall would be empty for a few days and then you'd realize . . . you never saw the person anymore," Sarah shrugs. "It was like a death . . . There was to be no communication whatsoever."

Sarah Lagueux left the convent in 1966. Mary O'Brien, in 1970. Only three of the original 16 in their band remain in the order. After teaching for a few years, they opened Sabatinos, an Italian sub shop, along with another former sister from their band. "Because we weren't meeting anyone," Mary tells me. Now, they're both married. And that close bond still remains.

On the window sill above the sink there's a small portrait of Catherine McAuley, the Irish foundress of the Sisters of Mercy. Mary pulls it down to show me. She says she's had it sitting there ever since her son, Eddy, started his freshman year at St. Joseph's College this fall. To watch over him, she says.

Mary was 35 when she decided to leave the Sisters of Mercy. Fifteen years after she and Sarah entered the convent in 1955, and eight years after making final vows. Her decision, she says, was based on the community's unwillingness to change after Vatican II. "Pope John XXIII opened the windows and made a lot of changes," she says. "Community did not make them."

"I was too progressive for the times," Mary twists in her chair and points to the refrigerator door, plastered with photographs of habited sisters, family, friends and children, lots of children. Her kids, she says, when she was administrator and Superior of St. Michael's Home in Bangor, a home for girls from disrupted families.

"Our community stressed girls, and the Home was built for girls, not for boys." She tilts her head, "and I took in two boys." Normally brothers were separated from their sisters and sent to different orphanages or children's homes. Mary wanted to change that rule. She thought they should stay together. "And that did not go along with the customs of Mother McAuley who was so far ahead of her times," Mary laughs sarcastically, "and would have done this as far as I was concerned."

But Reverend Mother wanted nothing to do with it. And there were complaints from other sisters about the way Mary ran the Home. They didn't think children should be answering the door of the convent. "I thought that it was a children's home and that they should be answering the door." And some sisters, she laughs, were "very perturbed" by this.

Mary went into bars and brought fathers out to see their children. There was one man in particular, the father of two little girls in the home, she used to bake a birthday cake for. "I'd go in and get him and bring him out to the car and have his birthday in the car, you know, in the station wagon with the kids."

But before these incidents, and even before taking final vows, Mary says she thought about leaving. "I knew I was serving, I was doing it. But I also thought, 'You know, I really belong outside.' " And before making the vows, "a priest came and more or less convinced me that that was life and to stay. That was my vocation and if anyone had a vocation I had it, and you know how it goes. And you buy it. And so I stayed. I thought, 'Oh, what the heck, I can do it.' "

Sarah looks over at Mary. "I remember her talking about leaving off and on. Many times," she says. "And I never, never. Oh no." Her mouth is firmly set, serious. Sarah shakes her head. "This was it for me . . . or so I thought." She pauses. "I'd never leave. I loved it. And then I was sent on missions. That was what started it."

Some of the superiors, the older sisters were bitter. Angry, even paranoid Sarah says. And she became disillusioned. "See, we had just come out of our training, all full of zeal. We were going to change the world. Yeah, all this excitement and fervor, first fervor. And then to meet some of the older sisters . . . well, this was kind of like being hit with a brick."

When Sarah left the convent, the order had not yet instituted the three-year exclausteration period, or leave of absence, which is now granted to sisters who wish to live independently before making the final decision to dissolve their vows.

"I had to write to the Holy Father for a dispensation from vows, waited a good month before the okay came," she taps her fingers on the table, "had to stay and wait," she says. "That was tough." No one was supposed to know, of course, but "my leaving leaked out." Everyone started to ask questions, pleaded with her to stay. "I had one [sister] who knelt down next to me and thought that she, by her actions, might be responsible in some way for my leaving. And if that was the case she wanted to apologize and tell me that she was extremely sorry, you know, for this." This went on for a month.

After the okay came from the Pope, Sarah was taken

Of the 16 postulants who entered the Sisters of Mercy, St. Joseph's Convent on June 28, 1956, only three remain in the order.
by Reverend Mother to the Chancery where the Bishop finalized the dispensation. "We had to sign documents and so on and so forth, then back to the Mother House to remove my Holy Habit and everything else one by one." Her voice lowers. "Piece by piece.

"This was in the '60s during the miniskirt stage." Sarah leans forward. "My mother had bought me a few outfits. So I picked one out, put the dress on, and it was really just above the knee, which was very modest by those standards back in the '60s where they went really way the heck up. This was above the knee, though. And I really felt naked. Oh, it was awful, awful. My aunt picked me up and I was crying and crying and crying. I said, 'Just drive around the city. I don't want to go
home, I don’t want to see anybody, I don’t want to talk to anybody, just keep driving!” And she did. And we drove and I cried.

“IT was traumatic, extremely extremely emotional. Because I really had mixed feelings. This was something that I was going to do the rest of my life. And yet, when I was faced with some of these sisters and how, as I said, they were really sort of bitter, I said, ‘Gosh, I don’t want to get like that and I just might end up . . . ’” her voice trails off. She pauses. “You know, because I was beginning to be bitter myself. And I said, ‘I’m going to turn into that type of person I think.’ And I . . . I just couldn’t see myself doing it.”

Mary nods. “We had many bitter nuns that died after giving their whole life. They never knew who they were,” she tells me. “And you become angry.” There’s a story of a donkey who fell into a ditch on the Sabbath, she says. Christ took the donkey out and the people blasphemed because He was doing work on the Sabbath. “Cause that was the rule,” Mary says. So when Christ came He said there are only two commandments that one has to live by: to love God, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

“We stopped at ‘love your neighbor.’ So we were taught to help everybody. So everything for everybody, and we forgot ourselves. But we cannot love everybody unless we first love who we are. The idea was to give away yourself and get nothing in return. You were selfish if you did otherwise. So you forgot who you were and everybody else was more important than you.”

It was this denial of the self that Vatican II helped change. The breakdown of the divisions between religious and secular life, forced sisters to reexamine their relationship to the Church and with God. They had to look inwardly, know themselves. Through this process of discovery, many sisters feel they grew closer to God and saw Him as a kinder God than the one they were taught to obey.

“I think I looked upon Him more as a judge. As one who was ready to punish if you didn’t follow the rules laid out by Him,” says Sarah. “Because I was a product of the Catholic school from first grade right through high school.”

The old traditional Baltimore catechism. Questions and answers to memorize about your faith. Who is God? Why did He make you? “And there was a lot of sin. You studied sin. What constituted mortal sin as opposed to venial sin, and sins to avoid. And we went to confession—we were dragged really—over to confession once every month.” Sarah hits two forefingers on the edge of the table. “Once a month whether we wanted to or not, you went to confession. It was that idea of sin and walking the straight and narrow. Don’t do this, don’t do that. “So there was more fear probably, not totally, or not just, but that was a big part of my life.”

As sisters, they went to confession every week and to an extraordinary confessor once a month—for extraordinary sins. But Mary tells me confession was being misused. That over time it became more of a counseling session. Priests acted as therapists. And though this was wonderful at a time when the church didn’t have
therapists, it really wasn’t what confession was supposed to be about. Confession was for mortal sin.

“I left my house as a pretty decent lady, you know. And I didn’t do anything wrong then. And here I entered a place where there was nothing to do wrong. And I had to make up stories,” says Mary. “It was like, ‘What can I make up to tell? I must have done something!’”

Sarah says, now, she doesn’t view God that way at all, “as one who’s ready to, you know, send you to Hades.” She reaches for the bowl of cashews. “I believe you do the best you can, and He’s a very merciful, loving God who understands that you are trying . . . . He’s always ready to forgive, to love.”

But when they left the convent, they felt they had somehow failed God, because they were pulling back on a promise. “She lost weight over it.” Mary looks over at Sarah.

“Yeah, I lost a lot of weight.” Sarah nods. “And I became introverted . . . . Because I also had guilt feelings. I was one who thought I took these vows for life. And that was it. ‘Hey, come hell or high water this is it. So just grin and bear it.’” And suddenly “I wanted to say, ‘No, I’m taking that back.’

“When I was coming out, I had a hard time giving up the vows, and I was out two years! I was scared stiff!” says Mary. “Would I survive outside and all of that sort of thing.”

And “we weren’t really welcomed back in the beginning,” she says. “There was a feeling of betrayal, I think.” The Reverend Mother feared they might influence somebody else into leaving. Sarah remembers being taken in the back door when she first returned to see some friends. “We had to kind of sneak in.”

“They were let down.” The timer on the microwave beeps andMary snaps the door open. “It would be like you leaving your mother,” she says. “And they were hurt.”

“My first migraine headache I got when she left. I thought I’d die.” Mary carries a plate of Irish bread over to Sarah. “She wanted perfection, this one. She’s a perfectionist. Everybody was supposed to be if they were a nun, perfect.”

“This is the way we were trained from day one,” says Sarah. “It’s not a life of perfection. You know, they’re not perfect, they’re not perfect there by any means.” she says. “But I want to say, also, that I have never ever met a greater bunch of women in general than I met there. Never have since.” And “neither of us have any regrets whatsoever about entering.”

They are now welcomed back to the Mother House “with open arms” and allowed to go anywhere in the convent they want, says Mary. “There’s a bond, a very, very close bond there that’ll never ever change,” she says.

Crumpled napkins and crumbs lie scattered across the table, a few stray cashews have rolled behind my tea cup which is still half full, forgotten in the stories. The kitchen is silent for a minute. I can hear the rain.

Sarah looks over at Mary. “You know,” she says, “there was a time when I always said, ‘I wish it had been different, I wish it could have been different,’ ” Sarah shakes her head slowly. “I wish the ending could have been what I originally projected it to be . . . . to remain there the rest of my life. And I always . . . well not any more,” she adds quickly, “but, I used to have a lot of pangs of if only it could have been different, I would have—” She shakes off the thought.

I KNOW THAT IF I DIDN’T enter the convent, I wouldn’t have gotten the education I’ve gotten. No way.” Sister Annette Rioux sits with her hands folded quietly in her lap, fingers interlaced. Behind her, on her office wall, hangs a framed Masters in Social Work degree from Catholic University in Washington, D.C.

“I imagine I would have stayed in the secretarial field, I wouldn’t have had much ambition for anything else,” she says. Before entering the Sisters of Mercy Convent in 1971, Sister Annette worked as a secretary

Because of Vatican II, sisters began to seek to know, not deny, themselves. Many found a kinder God than the one they were taught to obey.

for two and a half years in her hometown, Augusta. There was no incentive to move on, she tells me. “I mean, my family is not educated. We were a very working class family.”

But there was this “little voice,” this “gnawing feeling,” she says. “It was really haunting me and I couldn’t get rid of it.” Sister Annette shakes her head slowly, “just this feeling inside of me . . . . that there was something else I needed to do.” She laughs. “He’s the hound from heaven that keeps after you until you say yes or no.

“I entered alone,” says Sister Annette. “I never had a band.” She was the only woman to enter the order
between 1968 and 1974, a time when religious communities were in upheaval, trying to incorporate the changes brought about by Vatican II. Many sisters had already left the order, or were leaving community at the time.

“I never formed close friendships, real individual friendships,” says Sister Annette. She was alone in her classes at the convent, and had her own bedroom. After her nine months of postulantcy, when normally there would have been the ritualistic wedding ceremony, she had just a simple liturgical service in the chapel, which didn’t even include the whole community.

Five years ago, Sister Annette became the executive director of McAuley Residence, a transitional housing and support program for women and children on Spring Street in Portland.

She received her undergraduate degree in social work and family life and child development from the University of Maine at Orono. “Community allowed me to take that particular program,” she says. Even though, at the time, it was somewhat of a risk because “we were a teaching order. . . . And not that we should have been,” she adds. “I mean, Catherine McAuley, her first work was social work.” And social work is very consistent with being a Sister of Mercy, she says. “But we just haven’t done it for a while in Maine.”

There’s a small yellow smiley faced pin poked into the cork board on her office door. Pictures of babies, a basket of toys in the corner with Big Bird on top, trying to catch his balance, arms open wide. Her office is a clutter of typewriters and computers, parenting magazines and books.

Sister Annette was the first postulant to enter the convent wearing contemporary clothes instead of the traditional black dress and white lace bonnet. This, she says was one of the most difficult adjustments she had to make. “It was a pilot kind of thing,” she tells me. There was even a question whether she would receive the habit when she became a novice.

“That was very painful because I wanted to be like the rest of them . . . . I wanted to be a Sister of Mercy and I certainly wanted to look like one, you know. I was in that mentality back then where you’ve got to look like one to be one.”

“I’ve never been a really radical person,” she smiles. And the glamor of the past, of the dress and ceremony was appealing. “At the time, you’re so idealistic,” she says. “I wanted to be a sister so badly, and there was this whole aura around the sacrificial things that you do. That’s where the value came in being a person.

“I lived for years not questioning things,” she says. “I had grown up in a very Catholic environment, and I had grown up in schools with sisters. So I had assimilated a lot of their mentality, a lot of it,” she smiles. “So I had plenty of shame and guilt when I came to the convent. I wasn’t lacking for it at all.” And whatever a sister said that was fact, that was the truth, never doubted it. “You bought into the structure back then. You knew your needs would be met so there was no need to question anything.”

But there were certain values, she says the sisters taught her that she started to screen out. And just by listening to her own opinions, discerning her own beliefs, she became a separate person, an individual not dependent on her superiors.

“I was taught in my class around the vow of chastity—and today we call it celibacy—you were not to extend your hand to a man. And I’m saying to myself; ‘Really? That’s just common courtesy.’ ” she laughs. “But I would never have dared say that because I would be shamed somehow. I know the response coming back from me would have made me feel like I was bad if I thought this was not right, because this is the truth and this is what it is, and don’t question it.”

“But at the time, if I wanted to be a Sister of Mercy, I had to at least make them think that I believed in certain things or I wouldn’t have made it,” she says.

The doors in the infirmary wing of the Mother House are always open. Voices from the TVs, the jingle of infirmary bells and the squeak of walkers. Near mealtimes, there’s a heavy smell of institution food that coats the air as the trays are wheeled up from the cafeteria. At one end of the hall, the sun porch is always bright. Elderly sisters sometimes sit in chairs by the row of windows overlooking the McAuley playing fields and recite the Office as evening prayers blare over the intercom system.

With a growing number of older sisters in the order, upkeep of the Mother House has changed considerably from the days when sisters were assigned “charges,” or chores. They used to polish the woodwork every week, dust, and shine the glass doorknobs. They cleaned the tall windows and washed the rose-colored

“I know that if I didn’t enter the convent, I wouldn’t have gotten the education I got.”
Sister Annette who has a Master’s Degree.
draperies, swept the wooden floors and vacuumed. The Mother House was spotless.

Now they sign up for chores. Most of the elderly sisters can't polish the woodwork anymore. And as the active sisters have become more involved in their ministries, they say it is difficult to work, clean house, and also have time for themselves. Someone now has been hired to vacuum and dust the main corridor. And the old "charges" have been altered to accommodate the elderly sisters. Those who are not steady on their feet, for example, do the "top dusting." Sisters with poor eyesight mop the wide corridors, and some do laundry for the infirmary sisters.

In the infirmary, Sister Anna lies on her back eating a chocolate bar. She's 91 years old. Her small, pale blue eyes, are hard to see among the soft wrinkles of her face. But she's so alive. She keeps telling me how much she loved teaching. This must be the fourth time.

"I just loved it!" she's chewing the last bit of chocolate, sad that there isn't any left to offer me. "Sixty-two little boys." Her first class, St. Dominic's School in Lewiston. Sister Anna was only 18. "They were darlings," she sighs. "Just darlings. Course, I was lucky, 'cause if I didn't like it . . . take what you got!" she slaps the back of her hand SMACK into the palm of the other. "That's what you did then."

Each year on August 15th, a list was posted in the Mother House showing every sisters' assignment for the coming year. They went where they were told. And it might change each year, every two years. Or never. And it wasn't uncommon for sisters to receive a phone call during the year, or a note in the mail telling them to pack their bags and leave the next day for another mission. At the beginning of every summer they packed all of their belongings into their trunk, leaving it to be sent on if they didn't return in the fall. And then they went "home" to the Mother House for retreat and summer school. Today sisters enter the convent with their profession. They are never suddenly sent on a mission without first "dialoguing" with the administration.

Outside Sister Anna's window a tree shakes a full head of golden leaves. She's been waiting for the red ones. "Come little leaves said the wind one day," Sister Anna has a pretty voice, frail, but it fills the small room. "For summer has gone . . . We had some good times, believe me!" she sighs.

SISTER ANNE FITZPATRICK has always been one to "push the limits." She was the first sister in community to get her ears pierced, and one of the first to change into contemporary clothes after Vatican II. She organized hiking trips up Katahdin, and brought women home from the bus station and put them up in the convent rooms for the night. Just left a "little note" for the other sisters, she says smiling. So they wouldn't be surprised to find a strange person in one of the beds.
Sister Anne has lost the use of both legs, her left arm, an electric wheelchair, the sleeve of her bright red sweater. She has been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. At age 52, Sister Anne has lost the use of both legs, her left arm and hand. Last year she was forced to move back to the Mother House, into the infirmary. Her room, she laughs, is the largest in the house.

On a shelf over her bed is a small white statue of a shepherd holding a lamb. By its side an Anais Anais perfume bottle acts as a vase for three dried purple flowers. The statue, says Sister Anne, was given to her when she lost sight in one of her eyes. Something the doctors thought was connected with her MS. But her sight came back and she remembers the happiness she felt that day by this statue.

Three stuffed animals lie lazily on her bed among the big pink flowers of her bedspread. One has lost its green bow. She says her friend’s Black Lab shook him so many times that one day it just fell off. In the afternoons, when possible, Sister Anne likes to relax, lean back in her easy chair, open the window, close her eyes and listen to classical music. It shuts out the noise on the hall, and the antiseptic smell of the infirmary.

"People talk to me about miracles . . . and wouldn’t it be wonderful to have a miracle. And, yeah, it really would," Sister Anne nods her head, and smiles. "Certainly I’d love that and I pray for healing all the time.

"Like at mass we pray, ‘Lord I am not worthy that you should come to me, only say the word and I shall be healed.’ ” She breathes the last words a second time, a whisper, “Only say the words and I shall be healed. It’s a beautiful prayer. And I believe that with all my heart and soul, that God certainly could intervene in the natural course, and heal anyone.” She pauses. “And yet, I guess, ordinarily the miracle of every day is that God allows me somehow to deal with every day, and to live every day as fully as possible.”

I look at her electric wheelchair, at the leprechaun sticker she put on one of the steering bars last St. Patrick’s Day, at her left hand curled in a fetus-like position. She’s tired today. I can tell by the catches in her speech, the breath that runs out in mid-sentence, cutting a word in half so that she has to begin it again.

"I really was angry, angry angry. I cried a lot and just dealt with it. I thought I could put it on the shelf and, ‘Well, phew, that’s over, now I can get on with my life.' ” She shakes her head. “I guess that’s the way I tackle things, you know, that’s the worst scenario and if I can deal with the worst possible scenario, then I can deal with whatever. But I discovered that this is not something you can put on a shelf, because every year there are new losses. So you have to grieve the losses and own them and deal with them so that you can be whole and move on with whatever the life choices are.”

Sister Anne has dealt with a lot of change in her life. From entering in 1959, right before Vatican II, to moving to different missions or schooling on an average of every two years. “I’ve had a checkered career,” she laughs, and tells me she was “here, there and everywhere. I was so excited and so generous and just filled with zeal.” Her eyes open with joy, a joy I can see, almost touch, as if it were tears.

For most of her 34 years in the convent Sister Anne has been out on smaller missions. That’s not typical of every sister, she tells me. “I seemed to be the one who was just picked out of the hat to go.” Her words are steady, quiet. Sister Anne has taught in five different high schools, received her undergraduate degree in education from St. Joseph’s College in Windham, and later studied psychology at Fordham University in New York.

Only a year after taking final vows, she became Directress of Formation, the sister in charge of the training process for new members. She received her Master’s Degree in scripture, and was elected to the President’s Council in 1984. “It was like, I would get one thing under my arm and all of a sudden something new would be needed and they’d say, ‘Well, we’ll send you.’ And I’d say, ‘Well, here I am.’ And I’d go and try.’”

Sister Anne now works part time, teaching religion classes at Catherine McAuley High School. She also heads a spiritual direction workshop and tutors women who want to get their General Equivalency Degree (GED) to satisfy high school graduation requirements.

I spent a morning with Sister Anne at Jack Elementary School in Portland, during one of her GED tutoring sessions. I have changed the name of her student to protect her identity.

Cindy is 42 years old and she’s learning how to read. She looks like a giant sitting in the child’s school chair, and own them and deal with them so that you can be whole and move on with whatever the life choices are.”

Sister Anne was the first to get her ears pierced. She started hiking trips. She put up women from the bus station over night in the convent.

Left: Sister Anne Fitzpatrick (left) in convent.
her knees barely fitting under the table. Sister Anne sits next to her, pencil in hand, papers spread out on the table.

“I’m tryin’,” says Cindy. Her voice is determined. Then, just for a minute, her face falls. She’s apologetic. “But I’m so slow.”

“You know,” says Sister Anne, “I just keep saying

Before, sisters went where they were told. It wasn’t uncommon for sisters to be told to pack their bags and leave the next day for another mission.

you’re a strong woman to be doing this stuff!” She looks Cindy straight in the eyes. “God bless you!”

Later, she says to me, “I really admire them . . . their courage,” says Sister Anne, “their ability to live through really tough times.”

Many of the women Sister Anne works with in the GED sessions have been abused and “They just don’t know how to move out of that cycle,” she says. “They don’t know how to begin to respect themselves.” And this is what “mercy” is all about; restoring to wholeness that which is broken.

“I think we are very in tune with what’s happening in our world,” says Sister Anne. “I think that’s one of the calls that we have, to listen to the signs of the times as well as to community and church, and to the gifts within.

“And as I listen to the signs of the times, we’re so aware now of a patriarchal society where women have so long been considered second class,” says Sister Anne Fitzpatrick.

“The church is totally immersed in patriarchy. This is nothing new,” she says. “Our bishops and the Holy Father are very slow to bring about change. And I think the ordination issue is one case in point that you can look at right away,” she tells me. “It just seems, in this day and age, when so many of our Christian denominations are ordaining women, that it’s time we seriously looked at that issue and worked with it and began to recognize the gifts that are here.”

Even in many of what Sister Anne calls “the lesser areas,” the church has been slow to respond. “You know, we still don’t have inclusive language in the church,” she says. “Upstairs, we pray the Creed every Sunday and there’s one line that says, ‘For us and our salvation.’ And the translation that we have traditionally used is, ‘For us men and our salvation.’ And even today, in this chapel full of religious women—and the one man there would be the priest presiding—and they pray, ‘For us men and our salvation!’” Sister Anne tilts her head back, and laughs. “I think we need to change the books.

“But we’ve been so influenced by the Jewish tradition and the Western tradition of patriarchy that we’ve always thought of God as masculine. Within our being, we have the Anama and the Anamus, we have both male and female characteristics. How then could we exclude both from the nature of God who is all?

“If you go back in Scripture, there are so many references to God as feminine. There is a title in the Old Testament for God that is “Alshadai,” she says. And it means “God, the breasted one of the mountains.

“I think our God is an ever stirring God. That’s an image of God I like. And I think once you become attuned to it, there’s that stirring that’s almost constant, you know. You hear it every day in some way it seems. And, I think, sisters who have become attuned to it are very attuned.

“But I think we also have many who are not, and some who are probably as irritated by the inclusive language as I am by the noninclusive language,” she grins broadly.

“I think this house, particularly, is sort of sheltered from it because we have a large number of retired sisters here,” she says. Only about 20 of the 89 sisters living in the Mother House are active, or actively involved in ministry. However, in the convent chapel, there are some sisters who make a conscious effort to use inclusive language during prayers.

“One of the beautiful things about community, and about church, is, ‘here comes everybody.’” Sister Anne’s face opens with a broad smile. “We’re the very conservative and the very moderate and the very progressive. And community embraces us all. And there’s a tension that holds us together in a unity, within community. And the very differences, I believe, are part of the gift.”

It’s like a spinning spiral, she says. “In the core you have the very conservative people who preserve the tradition and hold you to the center. And that’s very important. And then you have the moderate people who are sort of in the center, and then you have those others who are out on the outside, sort of moving outward. And yet, the central people kind of keep you in that good tension that keeps you from spinning off.

“There’s the rubbing of elbows, sure, as in every human family . . . We get on each other’s nerves and the whole bit.”

She laughs. “We’re just real people.”

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HERE'S A REAL transformation happening, and it’s wonderful and good to be part of that. But it’s scary also,” says Sister Anne. “It’s a risk.” All religious communities, since Vatican II, have had to deal with change. Change, not only in their lifestyle, but also in the increase in age, the decrease in numbers, and change in ministry and direction.

“There are cycles, I suppose, in the way these ministries call us,” she says. But “we never have to wonder what we’re going to do tomorrow because we’re always called forth by whatever the needs of the time are.” And “there’s just so much out there,” she says. “The poverty of women and children, the AIDS population ... and abuse, what’s happening to young people, reform of the prison system.”

The Sisters of Mercy have already begun to expand their ministries, which now include homelessness, housing, and more involvement in the field of social services. Three sisters from the Maine regional community now work in New York City with the homeless. And Sister Carol Lachance, who entered the order in 1983, is now the Housing Authority educator at Pleasant Point Indian Reservation, in Perry, Maine, which supplies subsidized housing for the reservation. Housing is a new area of focus for Sisters of Mercy orders across the country. Sister Carol is the first, and only, sister in Maine working in this ministry.

Even though there seems to be a shift from the Mercies’ total immersion in formal education, Sister Carol says they will always be educators and full-time learners, but instead of in the classroom, they will be shifting this focus elsewhere. “I consider myself an educator even though I don’t have a degree in education,” she says. Sister Carol acts as a liaison for the Pleasant Point Housing Authority and provides training programs dealing with topics such as financial management for those receiving subsidized housing.

Religious communities, says Sister Anne, develop almost in a bell curve. There’s the founding, when the order starts out extremely small with the founder, or foundress and a small band of followers. Then there’s rapid growth, usually because the charism is so real and so responsive to whatever the needs of the time might be.

“And our growth as Mercy was phenomenal,” says Sister Anne. “Priests and Bishops everywhere wanted the sisters to come and work with the poor.” But after a while, the needs change. “And if you don’t change the response to the charism, then you move into a decline.”

To survive today, religious communities need a “very clear focus on mission,” says Brother Francis Blouin, Director of the Office of Religious for the Chancery Offices in Portland. Without this definite, clear focus—and one that reflects the needs of the times—an order, he says, will not attract new people.

He gives the example of Mother Theresa in India, who has attracted 4,500 followers in the last 48 years. This, Brother Francis says, is because she has a specific focus on the poorest of the poor. “She doesn’t even cater to the ordinary poor. It’s the abandoned, the street people, those who have no place to stay, those who have no food at all, nothing whatsoever, those who can’t even die in dignity.

“My guess is that there will always be religious communities,” says Brother Francis. But, he thinks they will take on different forms.

One of these new “forms,” which has been around since the late '60s, are prayer communities. Like the Resurrection Community in Otisfield, Maine, a retreat and place of healing for women who have had troubled pasts and now seek to live in community through prayer and connection with the land. They believe that through the death of past mistakes and struggle, resurrection of the soul is possible. There are six members, only two of whom are sisters.

Sister Carol Lachance says people sometimes get “hooked” on the decline in the number of women entering the Sisters of Mercy community. She says this doesn’t really concern her. “I don’t get all uptight and upset with the lack of numbers,” says Sister Carol. The church, she thinks, will adapt just like it did after Vatican II.

“We’ve had real abundant years in religious life where everything was going smoothly and well,” says Sister Anne. She uses the image of a river to thread the past with the future.

“For years the waters have been abundant ... just flowing abundantly. And then all of a sudden it comes to the desert and it gets quagmired and dries up. And in order to return to the ocean it has to be transformed. The sun has to draw the water up and then it’s released as rain to the ocean,” she says. “Right now we’re going through a quagmire time and we’re being transformed. And so now it’s just finding the way.”
From Tree to Tip to Christmas Wreath

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIN MILLER

TIPPING TREES FOR CHRISTMAS WREATHS IS A LONGSTANDING STAPLE OF FAMILY INCOME IN MAINE. MORE THAN TWO MILLION WREATHS ARE MADE EACH YEAR—THE VAST MAJORITY FROM THE BEGINNING OF NOVEMBER TO MID-DECEMBER. FOR THE MACLEODS OF COLUMBIA, WASHINGTON COUNTY, 2,000 WREATHS IS THEIR SHARE AND HALF THEIR INCOME.
MAKING WREATHS AND RAISING BLUEBERRIES ON THEIR 50-ACRE TARTAN HILL FARM WAS THE MACLEOD'S ANSWER TO A TRANSFER. THEY COULD STAY IN MAINE.

UPS TRUCK AT THE MACLEOD'S SHOP IN COLUMBIA. NOVEMBER 1991.
A L O N G P O

By Kimberly Haslinger
Photography by Clint Karlsen
Strange things happen to a family when they’ve been in a place for a long time. They become part of their surroundings. They live in many houses. They work almost all the jobs in town. They see people come and go, see buildings shuffled around town or just plain fall apart. They can predict the rain. They see change. They secure the past and the present to the future. They leave but keep coming back.

The Paradise family of Long Pond, Maine, is just such a family. Five generations in this place, 106 living Paradises, 120 acres of wooded land near the northwest border between Maine and Canada. Some of the Paradises still live in Long Pond, some have moved away, some plan to move back. They all return for extended visits, for the family gatherings to celebrate a difficult yet enduring past in a place that they still call home.

They keep the memories alive and pass down their family history through stories which are heard by four generations at the gatherings in Long Pond.

Route 15 travels east from Jackman Station along the water, then gently curves through the woods northeastward to Rockwood. Small dirt roads jut in and out of the woods, broken by pavement. This is where past and present meet. Some who used to live on the main road from Jackman to Long Pond now seem to have settled on remote farms far removed from civilization. Many a horse and buggy or Model T was pulled out of the mud on the old Long Pond Road before it was straightened, leveled, and paved. Now trucks carrying logs burden the roads creating potholes and passenger cars fall into them. “Thank you, Ma’am,” they say and curse. Occasionally someone will stop in Long Pond.

Long Pond was almost a town. It’s still pretty isolated. The lights didn’t go on until 1972, but that was long after its heyday. It was first settled in the 1840s shortly after the first settlers came to the Moose River Valley. There was no road at the time and traffic went by water so they probably went down the Moose River to settle on the northwestern side of the lake. Or perhaps they walked from the Forks to Spencer where there was a trail and took a boat to Long Pond.

By 1850 five families were living in Long Pond. American settlers from other parts of Maine, Irish and Scottish from Canada. They came to work in the woods. Teamster, lathmaker, boardpiler, chopper, millwright, sledtender, logdogger, foreman, cook, papermaker.

All the cut logs were driven down the river and towed across Long Pond to Moosehead Lake. The Coburn Lumber heirs were the big landowners at the time. Hemon Whipple worked 60 years for the Coburns of Skowhegan and made his way up to master river driver. He was so well respected that the Coburns gave him 700 acres at the head of Long Pond. Michael Redmond, an Irishman, purchased the clearing next door from the Coburn heirs in 1870. He was a farmer and so was his son. The whole area is still known today as the Whipple farm.

So they lumbered and farmed. Hay was a cash crop selling at $15 per ton, not that much different from today’s price, and that was used to feed the oxen and horses that worked in the lumber industry. There was an annual summer influx of French Canadians who came to Maine looking for work in the hayfields. They’d head toward Waterville on buckboards or wagons, three to five men on each, and as the season progressed they’d work their way home to do their own haying. They’d camp on the roadside and turn their horses out to graze.

Joseph Paradis left his home in Frompton, Quebec with $2.50 in his pocket and headed for Moose River in 1886. He walked for two days covering 80 miles on foot. There were only four or five houses in Jackman when he arrived. The Canadian Pacific railroad didn’t quite reach Jackman at the time. Supplies came part way by train and then they were brought down the Moose River. He lived with his Uncle Pieter, who was already established on the head of Long Pond in what was known as Jackmantown and worked in the woods as a teamster.

When Joseph arrived he didn’t speak any English, and none of the residents of Jackman at that time spoke French. He learned his English from a couple, the O’Neils, who read to him from a newspaper. Joseph became an American citizen in 1906. He was part of the first heavy influx of French Canadians who came to Maine to work and settle down. He started out doing odd jobs for $8 a month for Hemon Whipple on the
Whipple farm before he went to work in the woods. He married a local girl, Matilda Redmond. They bought a house nearby and had three children, Mary, Eva, and William John. According to Paradise legend, this is the generation that added the "e" onto the surname.

The first train rolled through Long Pond in 1888 on its way to Brownville Junction. Two years later it stopped at Long Pond Station and there was always some work to be done on the rails. The opening of the Kellogg Lumber Company Mill in 1906 gave rise to the settlement of Long Pond Plantation. It employed 275 men. They logged all the way up Route 201 in Bald Mountain Township. With the mill came a company store, a school, a post office, and a jail. Soon there were 92 inhabitants in Long Pond. Paradises, Vigue, Poulin, La Parquette, Fournier, Fountaine, Le Page, and Le Page. These were French Canadians.

After the death of his first wife, Joseph Paradise married her younger sister, Lizzie. When William John was of age to go to school they moved across the lake to where the Paradises now have over 120 acres of land. He ran the Long Pond House for a while, then sold it because he wasn’t making any money. Lizzie washed clothes for the men at the boarding house. According to her grandson, Shupe Paradise, Lizzie smoked a pipe, but not in public. He says, “If anyone came she’d always stick it in her apron. She burnt holes in her apron because she had to shove the pipe in fast.”

The mill was rebuilt and expanded after a fire in 1909. It operated day and night. A road was built from Jackman to Rockwood. Haulers, skidders and trucks replaced oxen and horses. Steamboats pulled timber across the length of the lake during the spring log drives. There were a lot of boarders in town working at the mill. And dances every week.

When the area was logged out, the mill closed. That was 1926. When the mill burned down in 1935, it was never rebuilt. There were many smaller outfits that opened up afterwards but the hope that Long Pond would become a thriving town disappeared with the lumber company.

Many people left in search of work elsewhere, picking up and leaving behind the remnants of a flowering past. A record population of 142 inhabitants of Long Pond in 1939 had dropped to 39 by 1950. The school was sold for $50 and taken apart. The post office eventually moved to Jackman.

Now the train passes by the empty lot of the old station. Someone has moved into the Long Pond jail and built an addition on the front. Moss grows on the stones of the old mill foundation. A bed of pine needles blankets the footprints of the men who labored in the mill. The chopping sound of axes against the skin of Yellow Birch and Rock Maple is stilled.

Sherburn Paradise, a grandson of the first Paradise settler, witnessed some of these changes. He says, “It was all economics. People in Long Pond were workers. They wanted jobs and they left to go to work. Nobody stuck around and lived off the government or lived off of handouts.” Of those who left, most moved beyond the Jackman area and spread out around the country. Even the Paradises left and have extended the reaches of their family as far west as California, but they have maintained a presence and are one of the few with land that’s never left the family name.

Today Long Pond is a peaceful place. The call of the loon can be heard over the lake where moose yard in the fall. Some people have called it a ghost town. There are a few dozen houses in Long Pond. Some are permanent residences; others are mainly summer homes; still others are camps that are used for hunting and fishing. There are a couple of people who never left. There are a couple who married in Long Pond and stayed even after the divorce. There are some transplants from Maine, Connecticut, New York and surrounding areas who came to hunt or fish, some with John Paradise when he was guiding back in the 1930s. They liked it so much that they moved to Long Pond and their families followed. And there are always one or two who made it to Long Pond for no reason anyone can see.

And then there’s the old house that sits on the hill that Sherburn Paradise is fixing up to make into a museum. Every year he goes into the basement and screws the jacks a little more, half an inch, to straighten the floor. And someday when he finishes it there will be a sign up for anyone who wants to visit. About his family coming back Sherbie says, “I guess it’s probably roots. I guess we live in the past, a lot of us, and we get together and we talk about the old days and we don’t..."
dwell on the negative as a family. We dwell on the positive and there’s always something good in life that brings you back.”

M AMERE PADS ACROSS the linoleum floor and opens the cupboard. She rummages around and brings out a bottle of wine that her son Shupey made from old fruit that the IGA owner gave him when he was working in the store after school. It is 40 years old, a favorite souvenir she likes to show to guests.

Albertine Paradise is the oldest surviving member of the Paradise clan. She is 90 and she just stopped skiing three years ago. Every room in her house displays old photos, furniture, and knickknacks. She has pillows with poems praising “mom” lined up in her bedroom from each of her boys when they were in the Service. On top of the piano in the dining room are photos of her children. Ornate liqueur bottles line the mantelpiece in the family room.

Pictures of generations of family hang on the walls in the living room. She still has the pitcher that George sent to her from Italy, the punch bowl that Shupey sent from Korea, the Wedgewood sugar bowl that Garry sent from Greece. She has her mother’s mahogany rocking chair upstairs in the attic.

Albertine returns to the table and sits on the edge of the chair with her arms crossed over her belly. Her back is straight, legs crossed, and she holds her head and shoulders high. Her head tilts upward when she speaks. Her voice is scratchy and sometimes tapers off into a barely audible mumble. She smooths the transparent vinal sheet that covers a lace embroidered tablecloth as she talks about her parents.

“They came from Quebec, both of them,” she says of her parents. Her father, Gideon Rancourt, (Gideon, pronounced with a “J” in French) came to Jackman when he was 11 years old with his brother who took care of him until he went to work in the woods at 14. “It was only a trail then in the woods to come to Jackman.” Her mother came to help out her older sister who had married a man from Jackman. Albertine recalls how they met. “They used to have shindig, they call it, like we had at Long Pond every Saturday. We used to meet all couples and we had a grand time square dancing to the violin or the accordion and she met my father.”

Her father, Gideon, fenced in a place on the Long Pond Road in Jackman and fixed up an old barn into a home that was three stories high. “Them days whatever they fenced in was theirs,” says Albertine.

The Rancourt house was always full. Albertine’s mother preferred to have the kids and all their friends at home. “We used to have a house full and they’d sleep on the floor and everything.” She remembers playing games like turn the bottle and musical chairs and dancing.

“Well, we were a dancing family,” she laughs. “My father was a dancer. He used to dance on stage with his sister. Oh he could dance, my brother, too, beautiful tap dancers.” And her mother loved to dance, too. They would go every week. “We could go three times a week. It was big dancing them days when I was young from 14 up. We had three mills going. A lumber here, in Newcastle, and one in Long Pond. And they were all running on three shifts night and day. So there was so many people there was nothing to have 200 people dancing on that floor.” And after a while Albertine danced, too.

Why she even danced with Senator John F. Kennedy when he came to Jackman in October of 1958. “The kids always started to call him ‘Mama’s boyfriend’ because I danced with him and passed the evening but he was a real gentleman,” she says excitedly. He said he was going to be president and nobody believed him because he was so young. Albertine and her sisters were talking in French about his handsome face, trying to figure out who he was. They decided he probably sold hotdogs for a living. She was rather embarrassed to find out that he understood French and overheard their conversation. “He told me he’d send me a carload of hotdogs,” she laughs. “I didn’t know he was a senator. “See with a big family you’re not in the know,” she says raising her eyebrows and shrugging her shoulders.

She met her husband John Paradise through her sister who was married to John’s cousin Ivan Fournier in Long Pond. “When I first got married I was small, I didn’t weigh 100. My husband used to rock me and read Westerns to me,” she says. Then she’d fall asleep.

Paradises are easy to find in Long Pond or Jackman. They’ve owned almost two dozen houses in Long Pond and two dozen houses in Jackman, not including the rents.
The cradle in the Paradise household was always full. Albertine never had any time to spoil any of her children because there was always another on the way. There was always wood to chop, bread to bake, clothes to wash and mend, dishes to clean, cows to milk and water to pull. One year she knitted 70 pounds of wool. Stockings and mittens. She relied on the children to help her and look after each other. They grew up in pairs: Jay and Jackie, Roland and Janice, Wilder and Sherby, Dolly and Rodney, Bubby and Shupey, George and Garry.

Albertine remembers their nightly ritual when, before going to bed she and John would take the kerosene lamp upstairs to check on the children.

"'Let's go upstairs and count heads,'" John would say. "And we'd go in each and every room to see if they were covered."

When the eldest boys were home, they'd play baseball in the field where the gravel pits are now. Garry was just beginning to crawl and they had him as an outfielder. Albertine remembers her husband saying, "Just think! We're raising a baseball team.

John Paradise was a hunter, a trapper, and a guide. Some of the Paradise children are named after the people that John guided. Wilder is named after Wilder Bellamy, the famous actor. Sherburn was named after Sherburn Ellis, a jeweller from Boston that John used to take fishing. He gave Albertine an opal ring and John a wristwatch the day that Sherby was born so they named him Sherburn Ellis. Howard "Shupe" is named after Howard Shupe, a Pennsylvania Dutchman. He gave Albertine $25 because he wanted a namesake so they named him "Little Shupe." George Simpken Paradise is the 11/11 baby because he was the 11th child born on the 11th day of the 11th month and the doctor had to drive 11 miles to Long Pond to deliver him. He is named after Dr. George Simpken from New York City who offered Albertine five dollars a month if she named her boy after him. He's "stuck for life" with the name and now he drives around town with SIMPKEN on his license plate.

When Jay and Jackie were old enough to take care of the children, Albertine accompanied John into the woods. That's when she learned to set traps. She loved to go hunting for partridge, rabbit, and deer. "I was hunting with a .410," she says. She and Jay would hunt and trap together. "I kinda grew up with him. I was young when I married." They are 17 years apart, Albertine and Jay; closer in age than Jay and her youngest child, Garry.

She remembers one time when she and Jay were tending to John's traps. "Jay and I almost got caught one day. Jay came on a furlough just before he was sent into World War II," Albertine says. "His father was sick and I was tending a few traps. And I said, 'I have a wildcat trap and if there's a wildcat in it I don't want to see it.' And I said to Jay, 'While you're here we're gonna go.' And he was so glad he had ten days home.

"And we were goin' and I just glanced and I saw just one leg go around that tree. The game warden was following us. He was following us to try and catch us. He knew I was tendin' the traps and I had no license. And I told Jay I had brought a camera in case there was a wildcat in the trap or something.

"And I said, 'Jay don't look back. We're being followed. Let me get ahead of you and take a picture.' So we stopped and I took a picture and we turned back. He [the warden] didn't have a chance to run. He felt foolish. He was hiding in back of the tree. So he had to come out when we passed the tree."

John became sick. He developed a rare liver disease that became the source of medical curiosity. John was still in the hospital the day the house burnt down. She watched as everything was devoured by flames.

"One day we were all downstairs in March. Cold weather. Big wind. Big snowfall. Fella come in scream. 'Get out! Your house is on fire.' And the neighbors said they saw the fire. The whole top was in flame. And we didn't know. We were all downstairs. We were all talking. We didn't hear. So now I ran into the hallway. Your grandfather was trying to pull me back. He had come down, too, had seen all the flame . . . . 'No, Bertsin,' he said. 'Come out!' He pulled me out and the fella that come in runnin', I remember took the baby which was just a couple months that I had in the crib and the two youngest were missing.

"And I was looking for them. I went crazy; I couldn't find 'em. It's funny. I had started bread that morning and all I can remember now is mama walking around. She had my dish of bread and she didn't know where to go with it. Then I remember watching; I had
a beautiful white stove, my stove falling in the cellar. All that was left was the chimney.

“And Jay had gone. He was young. He had gone out in the woods with his dog to cut wood. He’d cut a sled every day. He come down there was no home. They didn’t know. The kids were in school. They come back and there was no home, just a chimney.”

The family moved around a lot after the fire. They spent the winter at Fuller’s camps and then moved again in the spring. Shupe remembers, “There was one room inside and the outhouses hooked onto that one room and the jail was in back. My mother used the jail for the bedroom and we slept in the big room.” When John was released from the hospital, he bought George Ganier’s house and fixed it up. His Uncle Pieter decided to sell and move to Skowhegan, so John and Albertine moved into his house, the one that Sherby is fixing up.

John always said, “Albertine, when I go, if I can come back, I will catch you by the big toe. You’ll know it’s me.” He used to take me by the big toe and I’d get mad and wake up. And he’d say once, ‘If that something gets you by the big toe it’s gonna be me.’ He never did but sometime in the night I think of that and I kind of put my feet up. I don’t know why, I’m afraid he’s going to grab it.”

Peper was sick for many years. “I picked up traps when he couldn’t go anymore in the snow in the lake. I worked hard trying to chisel to get the trap out of the water,” she says. When John died in 1945, Albertine took care of the trapline until they were all picked up.

It was a year of tragic loss. Bubby, her son, died in a hunting accident soon after. “I can’t tell you about my son,” she whispers. “I’m glad today I have a big family. It helps. I’m sure they grieved as much as I did.” And she lost her brother, too.

Albertine moved the family to Jackman in 1949. “I couldn’t live down there. The children had to go to school and there was no high school in Long Pond,” she says. She went to school the longest of all of the Rancourt children with one year of high school at the convent in Jackman. She always encouraged her children to learn.

“I had Sherby, Dolly, Rodney in high school. I couldn’t see my way and I had no way to board ‘em and believe me I started at $15 a week payin’ rent, lights, water, heat. I was workin’. I went to wash floors on Sunday night for the Culligans makin’ extra money and I waited on tables at the restaurant,” says Albertine. Times were really hard and that’s when she met Clermont.

“The guy became my best friend,” she says. “He really saved my life.” Clermont Mayeux came from Canada to work in the lumber industry. He came into the restaurant where Albertine was working and asked if he could rent a room to store his clothes so he wouldn’t have to go back to Canada as often. He paid her $5 a week.

She hardly ever saw him until the time she took sick. She was in bed for two weeks and there was talk of taking her to the hospital. Albertine began to worry that the state would take her children away if she couldn’t keep them. So Clermont began to get breakfast for the kids in the morning and he stayed around. When Albertine recovered, he told her, “I’ll help you. Don’t go to work . . . . And I never did,” she says.

Albertine never remarried but she and Clermont are still together and he’s a part of the family. They watch a lot of baseball together in the summer and spend the winters in Florida going to flea markets and garage sales. “We do that all winter long. That’s what we do to pass the time away in Florida. Then we’re loaded. We bring it back and look what I do with it? Everywhere.” Albertine raises her arm and points out into the living room at the shelves of knickknacks. She’s so comfortable with Clermont that sometimes when she tells stories about her husband John, she calls him “Clermont” and sometimes she calls Clermont “John.”

PARADISES ARE EASY to find in Long Pond or Jackman. Just go into any restaurant or stop by any house and ask for a Paradise. There’s sure to be one nearby. With 106 living members spanning five generations, the Paradises have owned almost two dozen houses in Long Pond and two dozen houses in Jackman, not including the rents. They are spread across the United States, but a central core of the family is still located in Long Pond and Jackman.
The family was the community. They depended on each other. They enjoyed being together. There wasn’t much else. “I recall playing mostly with my brothers because there were so many of us we always had each other to play with,” says Garry Paradise. Aunt Joann lived right down the road. Grampy and Grammy Paradise were right across the street. Mainly they were surrounded by family.

“I think the family was always very close. And when we did things, we did them together. And when we wanted something we knew where to get it,” says Sherby. He used to get pocket money from his sister Dolly when she worked at a restaurant in Jackman. “If I needed money, I went to see Dolly. If she had a pocketful of tips, it was mine,” Sherby says. When the going gets tough, they’re always there for each other. That’s the way it is with the Paradises.

Sherby tells a story that reflects the family understanding. “Jay blows an engine in his Volkswagen in New York. And he calls up Rodney in Jackman and he said, ‘I’m really hurtin.’ I blew an engine in my Volkswagen.’ Rodney said, ‘No problem. I’ll be there tomorrow.’ Rodney had a Volkswagen convertible. He put the top down, loaded a Volkswagen engine in the back seat, drove to Long Island and put the engine in Jay’s car. Took him two days in the middle of winter outside to put the engine in. Jays says, ‘How much do I owe you?’ Rodney says, ‘You’re insulting me.’ Jay said, ‘Well you need some money to get back.’ He said, ‘Don’t worry about it. I’ll get back.’ So Rodney comes to Connecticut, stops at my house. He says, ‘Hey Sherby, I need some money to get back to Maine.’”

Before Paradises go anywhere, they get long lists of addresses of all their relatives. In fact, when Sherby and his wife Agnes leave Long Pond, it takes them three days to get back to Connecticut because they have to stop and visit family along the way. The Paradise way of doing things extends beyond the immediate family too. Albertine communicates with people that her husband guided in the 30s. Sherby recalls in disbelief, “I remember the Knotts. The Knotts that used to come to Long Pond in an Air Stream trailer in 1938. And a couple of years ago my mother went to Florida and looked ’em up. And she communicated with these people and she never saw them since 1938. We’re talking over 50 years. Ask to see her address book.”

Garry is the youngest of the Paradise clan. He always had a keeper. He was seven years old when the family moved from Long Pond to Jackman. Albertine was working two jobs at the time to support the family. “Strangely enough I don’t even recall my mother back then,” he says. “I think that most of the time was spent with my older brothers. I think they were my keepers. It was such a large family. Mother had so much work to do that I don’t think she spent a lot of time with us.”

When the older brothers used to tease him, call him “baby of the family,” Sherby was his keeper. Garry remembers when “he’d come downstairs and say, ‘Okay Garry, upstairs to bed with me’ and I used to sleep with him.” Garry was 13 years old when Wilder got out of the Service and bought a house on Long Pond Road. “Then he was my keeper,” he says. “And he had a couple kids and I used to be their baby-sitter and I spent a lot of time with Wilder at that period.”

As the children got older their paths crossed and recrossed. Many found themselves in the same place or in pursuit of the same interests throughout their lives. All of the Paradise boys served in the military. World War II, Korea, the Eisenhower years to pre-Vietnam.

They cropped their hair and snapped lapel pins onto the uniforms of the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy. The older Paradises were drafted but the younger ones volunteered. Garry says, “I had no goals in life and I looked around me. A lot of people stay in Jackman; they get stuck here. They get these menial jobs. I remember a fella who had a decent job for about three years and all of a sudden he got drafted. That I think had a little influence on me. I said, ‘I’m gonna go and get it over with.’” George and Garry signed up at the same time and went through basic training together. They weren’t split up until they went overseas.

Jay, Jackie, Roland, Janice, Wilder, Sherby, Dolly, Rodney, Bubby, Shupe, George, and Garry. There was one room school house in Long Pond and at different times they shared the same classroom. Garry remembers when the family moved to Jackman. “When the Paradises pulled out, that was most of the school population. The teacher used to pick up a whole carload of Paradises and transport us to Long Pond so she could still teach down there and they would still have a school in Long Pond.”
Wilder, Sherby, and Dolly went to the convent in Jackman. George and Garry went there, too. Sherby was the first Paradise to graduate from college. He studied biology at Willimantic Teachers College, now Eastern Connecticut University, and became a junior high school teacher. Two of his daughters, Tena and Kye Reen, and his brother Garry followed in his footsteps at the same alma mater. Garry says, "What turned me towards science was just an interest in nature. As far as education, I think it was the fact that when I moved away I wanted to be next to Sherby." He studied to be a junior high school math and science teacher. "My older brothers had a lot of influence because I didn't have a father. I always looked up to them." Sometimes Garry regrets being the youngest Paradise. "That's probably the sad part of being the youngest one in the family. All my brothers and sisters are getting older and I think that someday I'm gonna have to face seeing them go."

Shupe studied biology and education at "Ole Miss" with his brother Rodney. Then he returned for a master's in entomology and embryology. "I wanted to be a teacher at one time," he says. "I think it was my brother Rodney who talked me into going." Shupe taught high school for a few years before he started working full-time as an Immigration Inspector at the Border Inspection station in Jackman. He'll retire soon from his position as Area Port Director but Garry will still be working there as a Customs Inspector.

Seems they've often found themselves working in the same place. Sherby and Garry pumped gas for Wilder when he owned the Citco Station in Jackman. When Albertine worked at her Aunt Evonne's restaurant, the Arnold, in Jackman, Jackie and Dolly were waitressing and Shupe was in the back doing the dishes. When Clermont owned the Moose River Inn, Albertine and Dolly worked together in the dining room and Shupe washed dishes in the kitchen. Janice, Sherby, Rodney and Shupey all worked at the A&P throughout high school. Some of them have worked in the woods. Jay and George hauled logs for the lumber companies. Jay, Rodney, and Shupe were cookies washing dishes in the woods.

George owns Paradise Auto Parts in Jackman. He hired his nephew Rodney Jr. to help him out at the store. At one time he owned two stores, one in Greenville and one in Jackman. Greenville is twice the size of Jackman and his store there did twice as well. He had no competition. After his marriage broke up, George sold the store in Greenville and moved to Long Pond where he has a piece of land. He guesses it's the old saying, "You hate to leave your hometown." Greenville is not far away unless you're a Paradise.

Paradies seem to make few personal sacrifices for the sake of profession. This doesn't seem to be an issue. Shupe knows that in order to move up in his career, he has to work at Immigration in a large city. He doesn't want that. His family is here and there's no traffic. He says, "I never really thought about moving. If I have to move, it'll be because I have to."

It's dark and balmy outside. All the lights are on at Albertine and Clermont's house in Jackman. The windows are fogged up. It's warm inside. Silhouettes of four generations mill back and forth from the family room to the living room to the kitchen. The oldest daughter, Jackie, and her husband, Ben Tritt, are up from Massachusetts. Sherby and Agnes are in from Connecticut. Kye Reen Paradise Wayne and her children, Jessup and Casten, are up from Sanford. Landa Paradise and her daughter, Kelsy, are up from Boston. Ritchie Paradise and his wife, Jennifer, and children, Wilder and Maddie, are in from Wells. The World Series is on and the Blue Jays are playing the Phillips. It's a Phillies crowd. Sherby and Ben take a seat on opposite ends of the couch. There's a 12-pack of Piels between them. Clermont sits in his comfortable chair across the room.

Albertine looks content tonight in her red velour shirt. Her hair is fixed up. She brings some chairs out into the living room. Her grandchildren look at an old photo album and everyone visits. Jessup runs through the house making car noises. His brother Casten follows along. "Memere, Memere," they call. Memere rocks back and forth gently in a wooden rocker across from Agnes. She loves to see her children.

"I always tell them I hate to leave them. I say, 'Oh, I hate to leave you all but there must be day when I go,' I don't want to say anything to make them sad. I know they'll be sad. I know they love to come here. That's why I still have a home. I can't think of selling. Not have a place for my children to come and see me?"
The house is warm and smells of fresh baked bread. Clermont baked five loaves of crispy white bread in the evening. Jessup tells his mother that Memere said he could have some bread. Kye Reen goes to the kitchen and butters a piece. All the grandchildren and great grandchildren file into the kitchen. The zipperring sound of a serrated edge on the crust of a fresh baked loaf continues throughout the night. Butter streaks stain the knife and a wooden cutting board. Memere comes in and brings out some zucchini bread. Toronto is winning the game.

Some of the Paradise women gather in Albertine’s kitchen. Jackie and Kye Reen are seated at the table. Agnes sits next to Land who’s cradling Kelsy in her arms. There’s a certain pride in being a Paradise and carrying on the family name. This is reflected by the women in the family who have guarded their surname. Albertine says, "Paradise is a beautiful name." It means, one who dwells in the garden or woods.

“I told Memere I was going to keep my name and she said, ‘I don’t like that.’” Landa remembers the day she got married. It’s a tradition. “And we’re breaking it, but I’m just so proud, especially for me, I felt I’m marrying someone from very far away. What if that happens to me? I don’t come home that much or something happens, that’s about all I have sometimes you feel. When you get married a lot of times you just go where they go or [do] what they do and I didn’t want it like that,” she says.

“I like my name. I’m just so proud of being a Paradise.” Her long chestnut hair falls down around her shoulders as she lifts her sweater to nourish her baby. She lets it roll off her tongue. "Landa Paradise. When it’s together it’s Land of Paradise.”

Her older sister, Kye Reen, sits forward and peers out of her glasses. She laughs heartily. Her intonations are the same as her father’s. Legally, she kept her surname although she’s often known as Kye Reen Paradise Wayne or Kye Wayne. Kye Reen says, "I never changed it. My name is Kye Reen Paradise. But what I do because I teach, I teach elementary school so everybody calls me Kye Wayne in Sanford.”

Albertine makes baby sounds and plays with her great-granddaughter’s hand. “Well you should be proud. It’s your name,” she says. “But it wasn’t been done in my day.” She was asked to remarry but she never considered it then. She’s said, “I wouldn’t want my children to know me as Mrs. something else.”

The Paradise women visit Long Pond often but none of them live there permanently. They’ve become central to the making of their own families. Landa says about her husband, “He loves my family. He comes to Long Pond every year. I love him dearly but I always tell him I wish I married my neighbor because his family is too far away and now we’re gonna have to decide who we’re gonna live next to.”

Agnes always told her daughters not to marry young. She wanted them to get an education and then marry. “There was always a little contradiction there,” says Landa. “She did want us to stay home. She still does. She doesn’t want us far away, my mother, she wants us very close.” Jackie agrees. “Me, too.”

“Home is always home,” says Albertine in her low scratchy voice. “And it bothers her when I leave. It really bothers her. I feel bad but then I marry this guy from 2,000 miles away.” Landa struggles with her predicament.

Kye Reen feels the strength of the family in her generation. “For us as we grew up our best friends were more our sisters and our cousins. Vonda and I, we’ve been sister cousins since we were very little. People are always confusing us. They call me Vonda and I don’t even correct them any more and neither does Vonda. And there are still people in this town my parent’s age that think we are sisters.”

Paradies adopt in-laws and others into the clan. Kye Reen says, “You may have someone who is not related by blood or is related by a distance and that’s not important. And they love taking people under their wing and after a while they become part of the family.” Armand Pomerleau was a dear friend of the family back in Long Pond. He owned a store at one time and helped the family through many rough times, especially when John Paradise was ill and when the house burned. He was officially adopted by the clan and the documents were signed and sealed at a family reunion by Albertine Paradise, “Mother of the Clan,” and Jay Paradise, “Father of the Clan,” and Kye Reen Paradise, “Clan Secretary,” for the “years of friendliness and aid to the family.”
Jackie has four generations living with her now. It's a real house full. But she's used to that. She considers the extended family to be important. She says, "We got up one time in New Jersey. We went to bed there were ten. I got up in the morning there were 32 people sleeping all over the floor," she says in an accent flavored by years in New Jersey.

Even as a young girl she learned to extend herself to others. She tells the story of her brothers and a simple peppermint. "My grandfather lived up on the little hill in Long Pond. My father would visit "Papa" every night. The minute I'd see him put his coat on . . . I'd throw my coat on . . . I'd be watchin for him right after supper. He'd go up there. My grandfather would give me one peppermint, but what he didn't know was that I couldn't wait to get home and they were waiting. And I'd take the knife and cut it in four. I didn't get any, there was only enough for four, little tiny pieces like that to give to them," she says folding her forefinger down into the crux of her thumb.

"One time I went up there and it was in the winter and it was snow. I was running down and I lost that peppermint and they were waiting. I went back and looked in that snow and I was crying and crying and I never found that peppermint. And every time I tell that story I swear my heart breaks. To think my brothers wanted that peppermint and I had lost it. I never did find it."

"I WEREN'T GOING to be bird hunting, I'd be going about one mile an hour," says Vonda Paradise Krukowski as she drives over the bumpy road that leads to what is known as the Whipple Farm, where her grandfather, John Paradise, was born. The morning sun reaches over the trees that grow in the field beside the Paradise family burial plot. "They're not hauling out of here are they?" Vonda says as she stops behind a delimber blocking the road to find out if the roads are clear. Her father, Rodney Paradise, sits in back with an Old Milwaukee beer in his hand next to his niece, Kye Reen, herburn Paradise's daughter, and they talk about the last log drive down the Moose River in the mid '70s.

"These men would go on log runs and they would ride down the river on the logs and the king log was the symbolic part of the drive. It was the first log that went down and the leader, he was the rider of the king log. I miss that a lot," says Kye Reen, named after her Great Uncle Kye Rancourt.

"Did you see one?" asks Kye Reen.

"No there's two birds. Now I see it. Get your gun loaded and get closer," says Rodney. Vonda picks up her .28 and gets out of the truck. The partridge runs off the side of the road into the brush. Vonda steps forward, aims, and shoots. BANG! She gets it right in the head. Vonda runs after the flapping mass, then she grinds off the head with her foot.

"What a woman! What a woman!" Kye Reen applauds her cousin.

"We're gonna get my limit today, I got a feelin'," says Vonda. She gets back in the truck and lays her gun aside. The smell of gun powder lingers in the air.

They're hunting for partridge today. That's easy enough. Harder to find the foundations of the old homestead where their great-grandmother was born.

"You know where that foundation is at, the first part, Dad?" asks Vonda.

"Yep. It's the first foundation we found. The second one had the ghost in it," says Rodney. There are camps there now.

"This is all Whipple farmland," says Vonda as everybody descends from the truck to search for the ruins.

"There used to be fields on the Whipple farm. Now I can't even find it," says Rodney. He tries to get his bearings. Rodney looks for the old apple trees that grew near the house. He makes a path through the dry brush. A limp left over from an accident slows him down. "I trapped with Dad, muskrat trappin' in here I think, all along the shore and all the way up the river," Rodney says. It's chilly outside and the wind blows against Rodney's face, pushing him back as he tries to find the basement of the Whipple house and the Redmond house. "Boy I can't get over how much this place has changed," he says.

Kye Reen runs toward a small grove of Yellow Birch. She calls to her Uncle Rodney, "We found it." Only the gray slate foundation exists. The thick rock walls have withstood the elements over the years. "This is the Redmond House and this is where Grammy was born. Pepere's mother," she says, using the French name for grandfather.
SHERBY PARADISE HIKES down the hill through the birch and pine with a two handed grip on an aluminum pot of homemade split pea soup, corn muffins and a 12-pack of Piel’s beer under his arm. Agnes, his wife, has her arms wrapped around a big grocery bag full of Fritos and extra clothes for the kids. Their daughter, Kye Reen, crosses the railroad tracks holding Casten’s hand. Jessup trails behind.

They stop long enough to put small change on the railroad tracks. Five pennies and a dime on one side; three pennies and a nickel on the other. Sherby’s youngest daughter, Landa, carries her newborn baby, Kelsy, into the camp. Sherby named it “Teekemkyelandy” after his daughters: Tena, Kemmie, Kye Reen and Landa. He tells everybody it’s an “Indian name meaning ‘Paradise.’”

Sherby prepares the fire. Suddenly his brother, Shupe, and wife, Carmelle, come down through the trees past the horseshoe pits with Carmelle’s sister, Gervaise and her husband, Russ, from Quebec. Shupe and Russ grab a couple of Old Milwaukees and stand by the edge of “Pomerleau’s Bluff,” christened by their late friend, Armand Pomerleau, at one of the gatherings when he went to relieve himself and fell over the hill. Sparks from the burning pine pop out of the flame, shooting up to the plastic lanterns that are strung between the camps. Red, yellow, blue, white and green. Ash falls like light rain.

Sherby stands feet apart with a keen ear to the conversation, a beer in one hand, the other in his pocket. It’s a crisp sunny afternoon. He wears just a sweatshirt layered over a t-shirt and his pants hang loosely below the waistline. A moss green flatop hat, his “company hat,” covers his disheveled brown hair. His eyes grow bright as he is reminded of a time when—

A ready thin lipped smile breaks across his face as he tells a Long Pond story.

Sometimes they are stories his father told him and sometimes they’re memories from his own past. This is one that’s been told at many a family gathering about a man named Felix. He made himself a set of false teeth from teeth that he yanked out of horse skulls from the boneyard next to John Paradise’s butcher shop. There was a whistle stop near the house where the train would slow down and a lot of railroad bums would get off before they got to the station.

“Course, you know that was during the Depression, when work was very tough and people rode the rails. We called them railroad bums. And they had symbols they put on houses telling the next bum this is an easy mark. Well, the symbol was on our house. And anybody that went by knew they could get a meal if they were willing to cut a little wood. And this guy came by, his name was Felix—I stretch this one a little bit—he wanted a meal and my father said you cut enough wood for supper, we’ll feed you. And Felix cut enough wood for supper; he ate. The next day he cut enough wood for supper, he ate, and ten years later he was still there. And they even built him a little cabin down in the woods, Felix Cabin, where we used to go every time mama had a baby.”

John Paradise was a hunter, a trapper, and a guide. Some of the Paradise children are named after the people he guided.

Sherby is restoring the old homestead in Long Pond to the way he remembers it in 1945. Each year he puts in a window, takes off a door, and jacks the foundation. Someday he hopes to serve Thanksgiving dinner there. 

"It was a home to us for only five or six years but it must have been the years when I did the most growing up. It just happened I guess at exactly the time in life when it really became a part of me," he says. His sentimental side shows through a deep respect for family tradition.

Storytelling is part of that tradition. Sherby attributes it to his upbringing. "Well, you have to remember that when we were growing up in Long Pond we had no electricity, no running water. We had outhouses. You usually had one light and it was the center of attention in the evening. One lamp. A kerosene lamp. So you sat around the table. . . . You had some long evenings. And even the radio didn't come in in those days very well."

Many of the stories are so vivid and they are told so often that it's almost like being there. Garry says, "Sometimes we get together today in family conversations and I hear someone tell something and I'm not sure if I recall it or I'm just so familiar with it. . . . I get confused as to whether I was there or not."

Offer Sherby 500 acres somewhere else and he still wouldn't trade his part of the 120 acres of Paradise land for anything. "Long Pond is heaven," Sherby says. Good memories bring him back. He may never settle there because he's got family now in Connecticut, but he always, always comes back. Sherby taught junior high school biology for 31 years in Connecticut, but he always spent his summers in Jackman and Long Pond. His daughter, Kye Reen, in Sanford remembers, "We grew up with seven, eight hour trips. That was nothing. We got so used to it. We would tell Long Pond stories the whole way." Even though Kye Reen is grown and has children of her own, every time she comes to visit, Sherby has to tell her the stories that he used to tell her when she was young. Now she tells the same stories to her two boys, Jessup and Casten. But when their Pepere is visiting, the grandchildren are after him to tell them a Long Pond story.

"One time I learned how to ride a bike," he says. "We only had one bike; eight kids, we had one bike. I just learned how to ride. Rodney couldn't ride yet. He couldn't reach the pedals. So I put Rodney on the crossbar against the well in Long Pond. I gave it a kick and I started pedaling. I don't know how I got up the hill to Grampy's where Jay lives now but I kept pedaling until we got to Jackman. Just beyond that [at the Mobil station] there was a drugstore and they had a porch there that was high off the ground where I could stop without killing Rodney. That's where I stopped. I was exhausted. I couldn't stop a bike. I didn't know how to get off a bike. So that's nothing.

"When we get off there we each had two nickels. We went in Barney's [drugstore] and bought each an ice cream and we sat on the porch and ate the ice cream. And I said, 'Rodney we gotta get back home.' It took us half a day to get back. Every time we came to a hill, I couldn't pedal with him on that crossbar. We'd fall in the middle of the road. And we'd walk the bike up the road until we found something on the side of the road that was big enough to climb on. It could be a stump or an orange crate or something like that and we pull it in the road and I'd stand the bike up and it took us hours to get home. And when we got back, I remember Dad saying—he just came back from town—he said, 'I don't know what was going on,' he said, 'all the way from town there was garbage all over the road . . . stumps and boxes.' " Sherby breaks out laughing. "It was me and Rodney," he says.

Then there's the story about the shoes. "In summer we never wore shoes. I was about 14 years old and my father decided that that winter I was going to do a little more work on the trapline. And he'd always start the trapline in the fall, but he'd always take sick and so we had to finish it. So he said, 'You go to Corriveau's store and get a pair of boots because you're gonna do a little more work this winter.' Well I went down to town to get a pair of boots and we always had a running account. After he sold the skins, they paid the bill. And Old Man Corriveau said to me, 'What size do you wear?' I didn't know they came in sizes. I didn't know shoes and boots came in sizes. We always got them in a box and if you found a pair that fit, you put 'em on! And I get thinking to myself.

"He says, 'Take your shoes off and I'll measure your feet.' Well I didn't want him to know I had four pairs of socks on and each pair was covering holes in the previous pair so there was no way I was going to take
my shoes off in front of Mr. Corriveau. And I looked up on the shelf and I said, 'Oh, that's my size over there, size nine.' And he said, 'They look awful big to me.' I said, 'No, that's mine. Those are my size. That's what I want.'

"So he gave them to me and I brought 'em home and I wore 'em for a couple of days and my father said to me one night, 'Come over here. I want to see those boots you bought.' And he said, 'What the hell do you have on your feet?' I said, 'You told me to go to Corriveau's and get some boots!' He said, 'Those boots don't fit you!'

So I gave him the story about my socks and my holes and sizes and he said, 'Anyone who's that stupid deserves to wear a pair of boots like that. You're gonna wear 'em out!' I never wore 'em out. I wore 'em for four years. I wear size seven and a half right now so you can imagine what size my shoes were when I was 14.

"When we were growing up in Long Pond, you never had heat on the second floor because it was too darn cold. And it was not unusual to move all of the beds down on the first floor," says Sherby.

"Every fall," Albertine nods her head in agreement.

"When we'd have three sets of bunk beds in the living room, and when you went to bed at night, all of the irons that we used for ironing clothes would be on the stove. And you each took one and wrapped it in newspaper and brought it to bed with you to keep your feet warm," says Sherby looking over his silver-rimmed glasses at his mother.

"And we'd fight for the dogs," says Sherby. "If you could have a dog sleeping on your feet it was as good as a brick," Sherby says in long high pitched chokes of laughter.

"Dogs, did we?" says Albertine bringing her arms to the ceiling. "We had 36 at one time, 36!" Her husband was selling the dogs. "They were registered huskies, beautiful huskies. In the wintertime, we always had a great big pile of snow, almost as high as the house with wind," making drifts. She extends her arm full length.

"And I'd call one Gnome or . . . ."

"Baron, Kistler. . . ." says Sherby.

"They were beautiful. . . . We had them for many years," Albertine remembers. "Jay used to harness a dog, put a few bones in his pocket, bring the kids all to school. And then there was a shed to school. He'd put the dog in the shed and give 'im bones at noon and then at night the smaller kids would all get in the sled and he'd get in back . . . . The dog would bring 'em all home," says Albertine. Her fingers point to the ceiling in affirmation of the truth.

It was a good life. Sherby says, "I never felt poor. We always had enough." He tells a story that shows how far a can of deviled meat will go.

"Deviled meat in those days was 18 cents a can. And I remember I'd cut the deviled meat so thin I could make three sandwiches with my share of the deviled meat. We'd get up in the morning to make sandwiches. The first one who got to the can of deviled meat made sandwiches for everyone that was going to school. I don't remember what we wrapped 'em in. We certainly didn't have sandwich bags. It had to be waxed paper.

"But I remember we used to have this kid Gary Wilson that used to come to my house every morning on the way to school and he'd sit and he'd wait. And he told Rodney, 'How come you guys eat deviled meat for lunch every day?' Rodney says, 'It's because we have our own devil trapped in the basement and he turns it out for us.'"
Jay Paradise at his home on Long Pond.

roofed shack with no phone, no indoor plumbing, an old station wagon that sits on the roadside that doesn’t always run, rabbit cages, gas cans, barrels and piles of wood stacked up in his yard.

Inside, a path is cleared around a table edged in clutter from the wood stove to the unmade bed, back to the guest bed and around to the cupboards and sink. Jay rarely does dishes and hardly throws anything away. An Alcoholic’s Anonymous handbook sits alone in a stacked plastic crate. A National Enquirer and Reader’s Digest sit on top of a dusty television. A mallet and a hatchet with handles he’s carved himself rests against the woodpile. He’ll finish another handle if he has time this winter. The walls are a collage of pictures: a portrait of a young Indian woman with long black hair hangs next to an Indian man and photos of his children hang over his bed. Black rosary beads drape over the brown, oblong plastic tiled lampshade on the night table.
A stranger might be afraid to ask to come in, not knowing whether he'll turn away out of shyness or contempt. But a closer look reveals other things about Jay: a spring out back, birdhouses in the trees, plump chickens in the yard, and sometimes a fresh kill on the stoop. Inside, he clears a place to sit down, stokes up the fire, washes out a cup and brings some water, offers fignewtons, doughnuts, and a place to sleep. He doesn't even have to know you.

Jay has a long face. Deep wrinkles are worn into his forehead. A beard of muted browns, grays, and tans fans across his chin. He wears a grey and pale yellow plaid shirt. His pants are baggy. Copper bracelets keep his arthritis down. He smokes a Basic cigarette.

Jay sits in his house after dinner. The nutty smell of the wood stove fills the air and penetrates his clothing. He hears a noise outside and looks up. “Was that out on the porch? Must be that cat that’s back,” he says referring to the tomcat that dragged a rabbit off his stoop during the night.

He tells about the time he was sick in the hospital. Everyone came to see him. The doctor came out to the waiting room and asked to see a Paradise. Thirty of them stood up. Sherby went into the room. Jay’s eyes were half open. Sherby asked, “Jay, do you know who I am?” Jay said, “Maybe if you ask the receptionist she can tell you.” Jay’s torso shakes with quick whistled laughter.

Jay is independent. He’s always liked the outdoors. He likes being his own boss. There’s a freedom in that which comes from living close to the land. He’s hunted, fished, guided and worked in the woods most of his life. His father got him started at an early age. “When I was six years old he bought me a pistol—a .22—and he gave me a bullet to go hunting with” on the condition that he brought back some game. Jay always came back with something: bird, partridge, rabbits.

He and his dad made their own scents out of musk oils down at the scent shack on the homestead. “Skunk for a base because it has staying power,” he says. His wheezy laughter turns into a cough. “Ah-ah-ah-hem.” Jay clears his throat. “If you’re trappin’ mink you use fish oil. Fox, you can use most anything. Wildcats, they don’t have a good sense of smell so you have to put something red or shiny or a squirrel tail in a tree so they draw their attention. You get close enough they can smell. Different animals, different ways.”

The skin on Jay’s hands is smooth and splotchy where he was burned in an explosion in New York that seared over 50 percent of his body. “They didn’t think I was going to make it,” he says quietly clearing his throat. Jay went below deck to help a friend start the motor on his boat, not knowing someone had turned on the gas. The minute he hit the switch there was an explosion that blew him out of the hatch. Out into the bay. “And I had my hands up over the water like this and I’m treading water with my feet to keep afloat and somebody on top yelled, “Let go of them rags.” Jay shuffles his white canvas deck shoes across the floor to imitate himself treading water. “The skin peeled off all over my hands.” And that’s what was hanging off his fingernails. This night he sits hunched over picking at his thumbnail with his fingers as he reflects.

Jay’s Uncle Pieter was a farmer. He raised his own
vegetables, had a cow or two, and a team of horses. And he pulled gravel out of a pit to sell for the building of the road. "Pieter the tightwad!" Jay says with a mischievous look. "He was tight. He couldn't count, but he knew how to add money. He'd watch. He started a gravel pit by the old farm there and they hauled with horses when they first started; then they had Model T trucks. And he'd sit there by the hour lookin' through a knothole and every time they'd take a load out, he'd mark it on a board in the barn. They never beat 'im out of a penny, let me tell you. He knew how many loads went outta that gravel pit." Jay breaks into a low wheeze filled laughter.

His Grampy Joe Paradis used to work in the woods, too. When there were no more big companies around, he'd cut stove wood. Jay used to go out in the woods a lot with his grandpa and sometimes without him. He remembers the still. "Grampy used to make corn liquor, too. That was good stuff," he laughs and wheezes. "He had a special camp that he used to keep his still in. We'd go there with a little spoon. It'd come out a drop at a time. Throw it in a glass . . . hot water and sugar. He'd find us laid out in his bed." Jay pretends to snore and imitates his grandpa's rough voice. "Ah, you've been at my whiskey again!" Grampy Joe used to run rum during prohibition. "Yeah, used to bootleg it. Everybody had a hand at that," Jay laughs.

His Grammy Lizzy used to speak out about the drink sometimes. Jay and his friends came home one time half drunk on Saturday night and Grammy Lizzy Paradis had made a big pot of beans and they ate them. She used to "give 'em hell" but the same thing happened the next Sunday. "Grampy Paradis," he says in a French accent. "She had arms as big as my legs," he says clapping his hands around his thigh. "Grampy used to have bad legs and she used to haul water for him. One day Grampy got to feelin' good with the boys and he started dancin'. Grampy came in and gave him hell. 'You mean I've been hauling water all these years and you've been hiding this?' "

Jay stands up to stretch his legs. "Nature calls," he says. "Coffee's going right through." As he opens the door it creaks and the cowbell resonates a deep wet clang.

Jay started guiding at an early age. He took his first party out when he was 12. They were from Pennsylvania and rather skeptical about going out with a young boy. But it was never a problem because his dad trained him well. "My dad told me, 'If you can't make it back to the camp, first thing you do is pick up enough wood to last you the night, build yourself a fire and settle down. And if you're lost, you don't know where to go, don't move, we'll find you.' " Jay never got lost. "Got mixed up a little bit," he laughs. "I never got lost." He spotted the trees with a hatchet.

And he's had a lot of close calls. "A bear one time. That's the first time I remember," he says. His dad put a ten foot line on the trap and tied it around a tree so the bear wouldn't break the trap. When the bear falls into the trap it can drag the slack and hide and wait for the trappers to return. That's what happened when Jay returned with his dad to check the trap. Jay says, "My dad had it in a trap and he was teaching me how to follow signs." Jay watched the ground and followed the bear not knowing that it had made a big circle and was waiting for him. "My dad give me a slap on the side of the head and he threw me on the side. I says, 'What did I do?' He says, 'Look.' The bear was waiting for me. If I'd 'ave gone a couple more steps he would 'ave had me. So I learned to look from side to side instead of watching the ground after that."

Jay's worked in the woods almost as long as he's lived in Long Pond. "Everything from cruising to making roads, spotting lumber for the companies." He wasn't much of a student and liked to play hookey every chance he got. He'd hide his fishing pole and can of worms down by the railroad near his house. Then he'd sit there all by himself and fish, then come home with the rest of the kids. His dad finally said to him, "You don't want to learn in school, you might as well go to work." That's how come I started in the woods young.

Kellogg had already moved out so he worked for different contractors. He started as a bull cook doing dishes and cleaning tables. He says, "The first one up in the morning wore the best socks in the camp. The bigger you are, the better dressed you were. You'd get a little fella like me, all you'd find is holes."

When his father got sick, he took a factory job in Hartford. He was 19. He says, "After my dad got sick
most of the money I made went home. In fact all the
time I was in the Service I sent my money home.” The
following year he was drafted into the Army, trained in
chemical warfare to fight in the infantry on the front
lines. Albertine cried when he left. She wrote to him
every day. “William Jay Paradise, Jr.,” she put on the
envelope.

Jay’s woods skills served him well in the Army. “I was
good with a compass,” he says. It was taking orders that
was the hard part. “I’d ask for a pass, they didn’t give
me a pass I’d take off anyway,” he says. But Jay fought
under General Patten, “old blood and guts,”
so he saw his share of
the action. Three years
later, his mother and
Uncle Henry Paradis
picked him up from
the train station in
Waterville. They
stopped to have a bite
at the restaurant in
Jackman. Jay didn’t
recognize his brother.
“I said, ‘They got
strangers in town.’
Mother said, ‘That’s
Wilder.’ I didn’t know
who they were.”

His father changed too while he was away. He had
been bedridden for almost five years. Jay says, “He
melted away. He was just a skeleton... He lost a lot
of his hair.” Jay looks down at his shoes. “He knew he
was dying though, ‘cause Dr. Zansen and Dr. Smith
after told me, he says, ‘He told us to keep him alive’—
he had like 96 blood transfusions—’till my boy gets
back.’ ” His dad died several months later. He didn’t
have to tell Jay to take care of the family. Jay is the
oldest. He knew he would anyway.

He became father and brother all at once. He
married and started his own family in Long Pond. He
tells a story about his youngest brother Garry. “I used
to take him on the trapline, hunting, fishing. Fact he
caught his first salmon with me. I had to hold him, the
water was so fast, down there in the rips. And he kept
floatin’, tryin’ to float away. I had to hold ‘im while he
was fishin’ and he caught this salmon. Boy, was he
tickled. My motor conked out on me and we were
walking back; it’s about seven miles from here. So I
said, ‘Well we’re not gonna paddle up. We’re gonna
walk up.’

“And he was so tired. I’ll never forget it. He’s
walking alongside of me, and he says, ‘I wish I was a
bird. I could fly.’

‘You know birds get tired of flying, too.’ ”

‘Yeah, but then I could walk.’ I got a kick outta

Jay tells about the time he was
sick in the hospital. Everyone
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them stood up.

LEFT: JAY PARADISE.

That. He was so small I used to carry him in my pack
basket when he got too tired.”

Jays says he doesn’t like work, but trapping, hunt­
ing, and guiding are not work to him. He did a lot of
it when he returned, but he couldn’t depend on it. A
growing family called for a steadier job. “That’s why I
moved to New York. So I’d have steady income.”

Jay moved back to
Jackman after his mar­riage broke up. He
never wanted to live in
the city anyway. Too
many people. A lot of
noise. “It’s my way of
life I guess,” he says.
He is retired now. He
still goes hunting for
partridge in the fall,
reads, and cuts paths
through the woods to
haul his winter wood.
The sound of his four
wheeler can often be
heard back in the trees.
His children come
to visit him whenever they can or he goes out to
Colorado to see them. One time he found himself 40
miles from the nearest kid with only 11 cents in his
pocket. “Thirty-three miles exactly,” he laughs. “Maybe
I walked 40 because I didn’t know which way I was
going. I left Denver at six o’clock in the morning and
hit Idaho Springs at 11 o’clock at night. Hungry,
thirsty, and tired.”

Jay doesn’t see much changing in Long Pond. “It’ll
never come back. Just be a little town.” He just wants
to live on the land although Paradise land will always be
Paradise land. Jay says firmly, “They’d never sell.
Unless they sell to someone in the family. That’s the
understanding we have.”

And he doesn’t see much changing in his family as
the generations with the strongest connections to
Long Pond grow older. He says, “We’ll still get
together. By that time Sherburn will be settled here.
We’ll probably get together in the old house.” There’s
a long pause.

The train whistle blows as it goes through Long
Pond. “You can tell it’s gonna rain. Different sound.
It’s like an echo,” he says. Jay predicts rain. “Tomor­row
night most likely,” he says. He tells another story,
then steps out his door. Sure enough it begins to rain.
A little earlier than expected but all the same, it rains.
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ISSUES

But Who's Counting?
One Humongous Pile of Salt.

We've published 46 issues of Salt (45 before this one). We'll sell you a piece of the pile. The cost of back issues is $4.00 each plus $0.50 shipping, with the exception of Nos. 21 & 22 (Eastport for Pride) that costs $6.95 plus $1.00 for shipping.

Young in Maine; The Great North Woods; The Homeless; UPS Man (Saco River Valley).
No.30; (Tourism in Maine); Colonists and Coneheads; Young workers in the trade; Boynton McKay Drugstore (Camden); Tourism on the Seashore and the Lakeshore; Tour Bistro;...
This year, 44 students attended the Salt program. They came from as far away as Brittany in France and California. As near as Portland and Ellsworth. They shot 1,018 rolls of film, 32,445 frames. They printed 1,018 contact sheets, 1,600 work prints, 309 final prints. They spoke to 202 Maine people from all walks of life. They talked to people at Bonnie’s Diner outside of Waterville. Followed junior staff members around the political campaigns. They tape recorded 284 hours of new interviews. Compiled 4,227 pages of transcripts and summaries, 428 pages of field notes. Wrote 27 final edited manuscripts. They helped organize better Salt’s archive (250,000 negatives, 2,500 hours of taped interviews take a lot of organizing). The fall term inaugurates our new gallery with an exhibit of their best photographic work beginning December 9th. We’d like you to join us.