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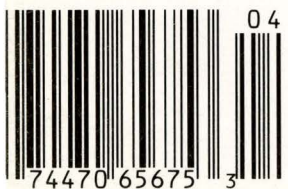
salt

Published by the Salt Center
for Documentary Field Studies

NUMBER
45
FOUR
DOLLARS



Marim works in Maine's new booming urchin industry. Pickers like her, divers and processors rake in the profits.





“Take the Challenge”

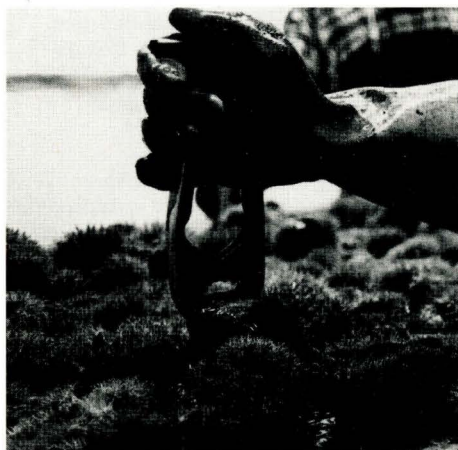
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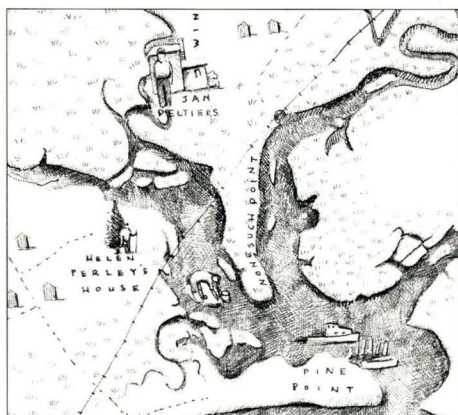
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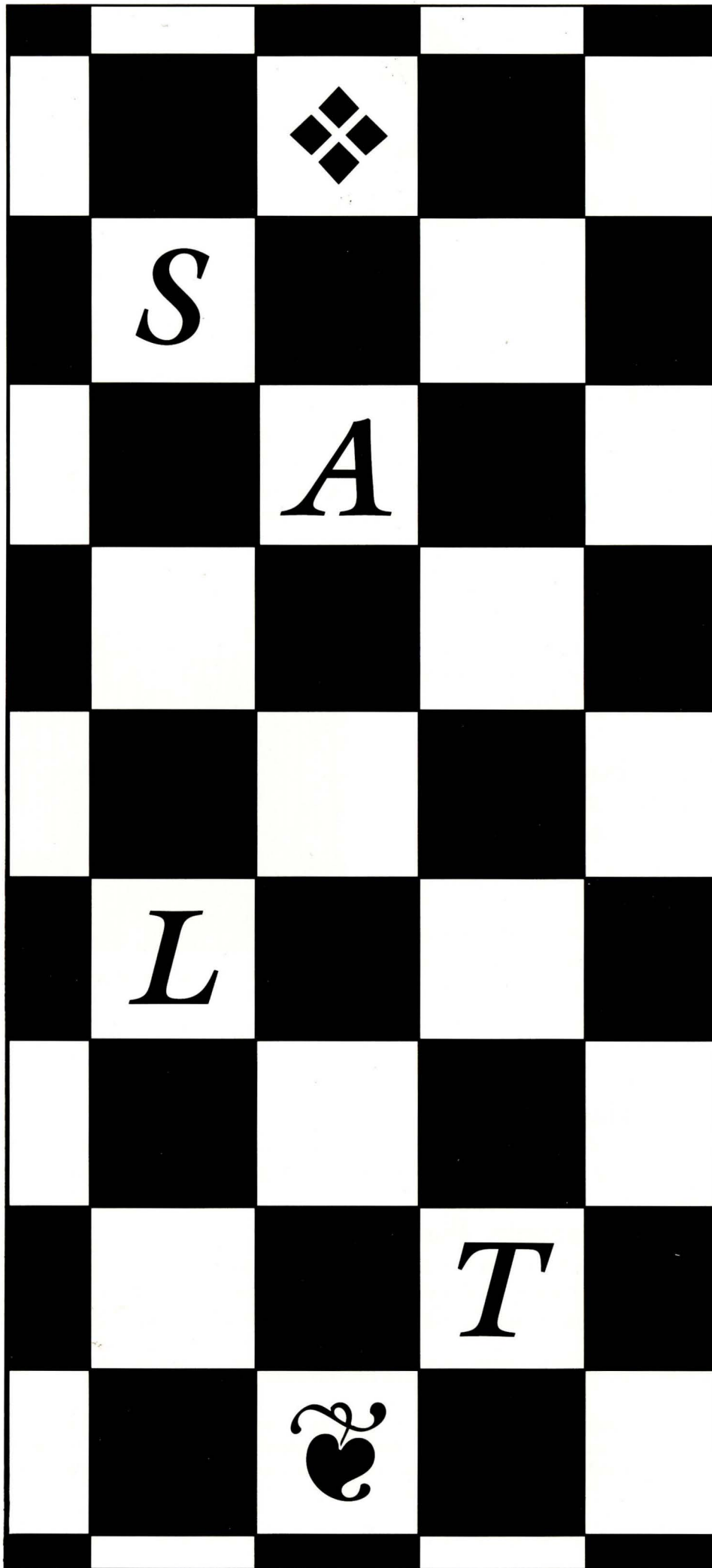
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Cover: Marim. Photograph: David Gavril.



SALT MAGAZINE

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

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A NOTE ON PRODUCTION

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ABOUT THE CENTER—Salt's 20th anniversary last year prompted the organization to begin to reassess where it has come from, where it is now, and where it is headed. Salt's Board of Trustees, enlarged to 20 members, met in retreat in June of this year to kick off this reassessment. One of the outgrowths of this retreat has been the initiation of a long range planning process. A planning committee of the Board of Trustees has met weekly throughout the summer and will continue to do so through the fall. We'll report on the results of these meetings in a later issue.

One of the most exciting events in Salt's future is a major photographic project that seeks to situate the past 15 years of Salt photography in a longer documentary photography tradition in America. The project has three components—a book, a traveling exhibit, and a conference. The Maine Humanities Council has provided support for this project, both a planning grant and a major grant. Scholars contributing to the overall scope of the project include Professor James C. Curtis, director of the Winterthur Program in Early

American Culture at the University of Delaware, as well as Professor C. Stewart Doty of the history department of the University of Maine.

The book, containing over 100 Salt photographs, will be published by the University Press of New England. It will include accompanying essays describing the Salt photographic process, the spectrum of documentary photography in Maine in the 20th century, and a comparison of Salt's photography with that of the Farm Security Administration of the 1930s.

An exhibit is also in preparation. It will contain about 80 Salt photographs. The exhibit will open in June of 1995 at the Portland Museum of Art and then travel to other sites in Maine, including the Hudson Museum at the University of Maine, as well as the University of Maine at Presque Isle art gallery.

A conference will be held at the Portland Museum of Art on June 17, 1995, in conjunction with the exhibit's opening. Scholars as well as practitioners will participate. An edited summary of the conference proceedings will be published in an issue of *Salt*.

CONTRIBUTORS

JOAN AMORY is a Vermont native and longtime Mainer who attended the spring 1993 program at Salt. She has taught at Howard University, among other institutions, and was a Fulbright lecturer in American Studies in France. Her two sons are Maine natives.

JENNIFER BREWER graduated from the University of Michigan with a major in Art and Society. She attended the spring, 1992 program at Salt and explored the world of the Central Beauty School.

MARGOT DOWNS, as a newly minted graduate of Bowdoin College, came to the summer 1993 Salt program. Her attraction to community bands stems from her family ties to Boothbay Harbor.

DAVID FLEISCHNER came to the Salt 1993 summer program as a student at St. Lawrence University. In addition to his photographs of community bands, David also photographed country auctions.

DAVID GAVRIL spent a semester of his college program at Hampshire College at the Salt Center in 1993. In addition to his photographic essay about urchin pickers that appears in this issue, he also photographed a maple sugaring operation in Whitefield.

ERIN HOOPER came to Salt from the Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Virginia for the summer 1993 program. Part of her work involved photographing community bands.

ANDREE KEHN grew up in West Paris, Maine, and was a student at the University of Massachusetts when she came to Salt for the spring 1993 semester. As an avid downhill skier, photographing urchin divers came naturally. Plenty of physical challenges.

RICHARD SITLER took part in the spring 1992 Salt semester as a graduate of Blackburn College in Indiana. He photographed the Central Beauty School story and an essay on violin making for issue 43.

EMILY WILSON grew up in Scarborough next to the marsh she writes about in this issue. She participated in the spring, 1992 Salt program as a recent graduate of Harvard College.

ANGELA WOOLDRIDGE came to Salt from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, for the spring, 1993 program. She photographed the Scarborough Marsh for this issue and plans on a career in photojournalism.



Phyllis Rogers (left), anthropologist and Salt scholar in residence, meeting with Salt student, Lisa Rollins (right). Photograph by Noreen Hogan.

SALT SENSE



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

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



Watch people.



In synagogues, diners, malls and apple orchards.

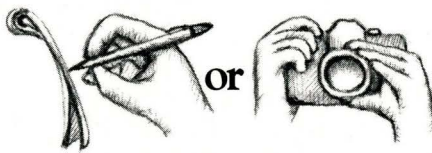


Listen to a Cambodian refugee tell his first joke in English.

Rap with clamdiggers and Mohammad from Afghanistan.



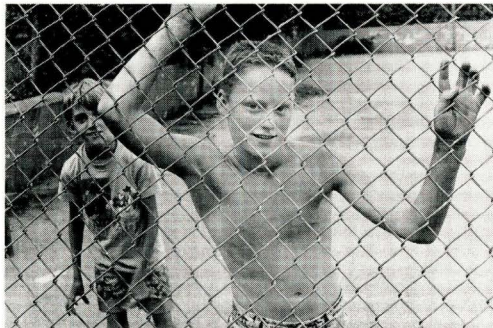
Hold onto your pen



or

hold onto your camera.

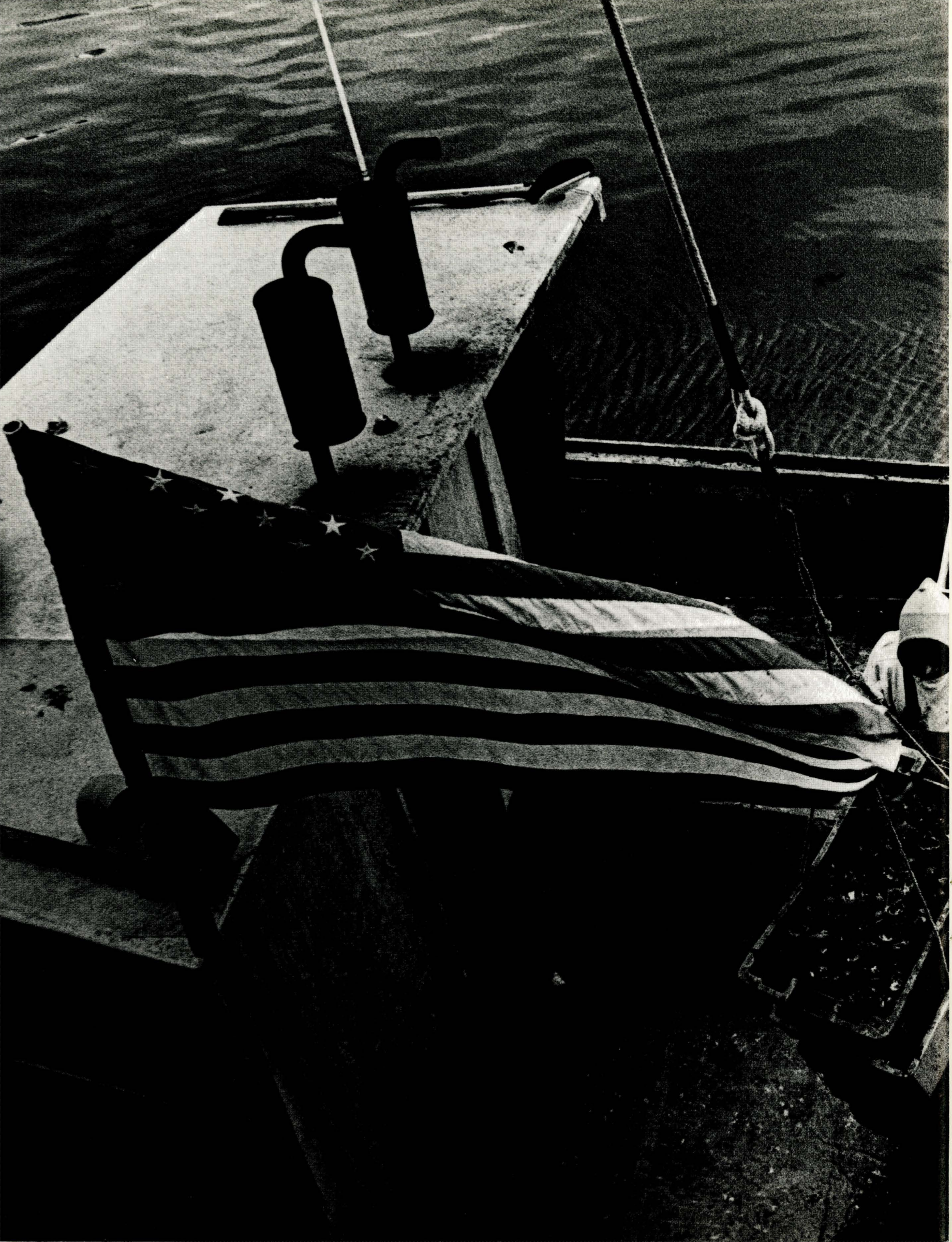
Use your sense



Look into Salt

MAKES SENSE

The Salt Semester Program offers documentary field experience for advanced undergraduates and college graduates from the fields of English, folklore, history, anthropology, American Studies, sociology, journalism, photography, fine art. The Salt Semester Program is an affiliated program of the University of Maine at Farmington with accredited courses in field methodology, a topic in research and advanced skills courses in nonfiction writing and editing and in documentary photography. Three semester programs are offered each year, in the fall, spring and summer. For further information contact the Salt Center for Documentary Field Studies, P.O. Box 4077, 19 Pine Street, Portland, Maine 04101. Telephone: (207) 761-0660.



URCHINS!

By Joan Amory

Photograph by David Gavril



CHUCK LEAVES Stonington around midnight and pulls into the International Sea Food Trading warehouse on Hobson's Wharf in Portland before dawn. Today he drives Marston Brewer's smaller truck, the one blazoned with "The Bandit and the Bitch" over a large green fish cavorting among Maine islands. It carries, loaded, about 300 totes of sea urchins, each tote weighing 60 pounds. At, say, 65 cents a pound, depending on the price faxed or telephoned for urchin roe from Tokyo's great fish auction, Tsukiji, that's about \$10,000 for the very sea urchins that seven or eight years ago Maine lobstermen considered worse than worthless.

Chuck drives for one of the six or more buyers in Stonington who daily truck these totes of whole sea urchins to processors along piers reaching out from Portland's Commercial Street. All night and all day other trucks pull into Portland from down and up the coast of Maine filled with prickly balls of urchins. Up

*Maine's sea urchin beds
rival the gold fields of California
for making a quick buck. Atchan
Tamaki boomed the industry by
new processing of roe for Japan.*

Right: Atsushi "Atchan" Tamaki.
Photograph by Andree Kehn.

from Eastport, from Jonesport, Milbridge, Winter Harbor, and Stonington, from Rockland, Friendship, Bremen, New Harbor, Five Islands, Boothbay, from Cundy's Harbor, Bailey's Island. Down from Cape Porpoise, Kennebunkport, Ogunquit, Wells, Kittery. All because urchin's golden-orange roe is prized by the Japanese.

The urchin beds on the ledges off Maine's 3,000 miles of coastline rival the gold fields of California for making a quick buck as entrepreneurs tug and shape Maine's newest fishery industry. Deplete it as well, maintain some in the business watching the increasing hordes of divers bring in smaller and smaller landings.

California's gold travelled to the East Coast, and in a nice twist, Maine's urchins fly off to the Far East. That translates to Japanese purchase of about 50 million dollars worth of Maine urchins in 1993.

Sea urchins represent real opportunity in a depressed

state. All kinds of people jump into the action. Urchining out of Stonington are a Portland firefighter, a house painter from South Portland, a fresh water mussel diver from Oklahoma and two former airplane mechanics from the Bangor area. John Williams dives in Boothbay Harbor when he's not the captain of a crabbing boat out of Alaska. Perry Williams dives in Jonesport when he's not tending to his Portland tax consultant business or skiing. One experienced diver based in South Portland, Joe Mokry, is a research biologist. Local fishermen and lobstermen make money in the off season taking divers out.

On Portland's waterfront Hispanics, newly arrived Cambodians, Vietnamese, and Ethiopians get jobs cracking urchins open or deftly picking out the roe and grading it. Salvadore, one of several Hispanic supervisors at International Sea Food Trading (ISF Trading), tests Chuck's urchins for the roe percentage. The main supervisor at ISF Trading is a 32-year-old Cambodian, Bory Pot.

The big buyers who own the processing plants in Portland are from away. The man most responsible for the surging sea urchin industry in Maine, Atsushi "Atchan" Tamaki, grew up in Japan. Vuthy "Woody" Chhloeum arrived from Cambodia eight years ago when he was 16. He now owns a small processing company. Lloyd Covens first bought urchins in California. Because of his longevity in the business, he's been called the "Urchin King." A buyer only, George Parr, the preacher's kid, filleted fish in Washington, D.C., and New York City, and searched for caviar sources in Alaska before striking gold in Maine. Just Dana Leavitt is a local boy from the South Bristol area.

Craig, the lone Caucasian working on the floor at ISF Trading, puts it this way: sea urchins are making some people very rich. And what's unique about this industry is that all the way down the line nearly everybody is making good money. People in the fisheries seldom disclose dollar figures, and those in the sea urchin business are particularly coy. Craig will admit that an urchin picker, paid piece work, can make \$1,000 a week. Perhaps even \$2,000 occasionally. It depends on how hard one wants to work. A picker can choose to work at a rate that earns him \$50 a day or \$300 a day.

For entry level pay to be this good, lots of money must be passing around. Craig calls picking urchins "a goon job like any other on the waterfront" because you "can bring in illiterates and within five minutes they can process." Where else, he says, can a non-English speaker or an uneducated person make that kind of money. A filleter in a fish market, an equivalent job, will make four to five bucks an hour.

Word on the waterfront has it that some processors who do their processing out of state employ illegal Chinese immigrant labor. Since they don't pay

workman's compensation, payroll taxes, or the minimum wage, they have a certain competitive advantage over Maine processors. When a Maine competitor tried to get the Immigration and Naturalization Service to crack down, he was told that INS didn't have the resources. Soon after he received threatening phone calls.

OUTSIDE ATCHAN TAMAKI'S second floor office is a large windowless reception room where three secretaries preside. Two Japanese calendars with lush vistas hang on the wall along with charts of Maine waters. Fishermen, divers, and buyers waiting to see Atchan fill chairs set up near the water cooler and on either side of the coffee maker. Bory Pot in tall black rubber boots comes upstairs to check something with a secretary. He passes smiles around, then returns to the main floor.

Because of his success, Atchan is the new "Urchin King" to many. But sitting in his large, spare office with a single window opening to the east, Atchan doesn't look like a marketing innovator. He is unassuming with employees. He greets a repairman warmly. With strangers he speaks guardedly, seeking the English words to convey his thoughts.

Yet Atchan dramatically changed the sea urchin industry. He did it in 1989 by extracting urchin roe in a Portland warehouse and selling it directly to Japanese supermarket chains in small clear plastic dairy tubs.

Traditionally sea urchin roe, called "uni" in Japan, was sold as an expensive seasonal delicacy. It was presented on cedar trays, usually in 100 gram weights, at fine sushi restaurants and gourmet shops.

In the mid 1980s Maine buyers shipped whole urchins to Japan not knowing if the roe was high or low quality. They also bore the cost of air freighting the whole urchins to Japan. Some batches were refused and tossed. Since the roe is only ten to twenty percent of the whole urchin, it was an expensive gamble.

"I ask myself, 'How can the regular Japanese housewife buy sea urchin roe?' The consumer can just buy from restaurant and gourmet shop . . . [The Japanese] thought it an expensive product. Now suddenly we introduce cheap products." As Atchan talks, he goes over to a cabinet and brings back several sizes of stackable wooden trays.

The 250 gram tray, the largest, measures three and a half by six inches on the inside. Atchan places a rectangular clear plastic 100 gram dairy tub with lid next to the traditional trays. He grins. "At first it was difficult to get to this. Something easy to pack. It is less expensive, especially supermarkets with volume. They want it as cheap as possible. Of course at wholesale fish market—when first tried, there was resistance—but price is good. Accepted now." When Atchan broke

with tradition he gambled that the plastic 100 gram tub in the supermarket costing around \$8 would attract new consumers who were unable to pay over \$20 for 100 grams of uni presented on a cedar tray in a restaurant.

Other big urchin buyers complimented Atchan's market initiative by copying him, but Atchan's ISF Trading processes more urchins in Maine than anyone else. In the high season, 210 regular employees work in the new warehouse on Hobson's Wharf, picking up to 2,000 totes of sea urchin daily. It takes around 300 divers to harvest 2,000 totes. That number of totes a day falls to 200-300 in April, May, June, and July when the urchins "melt," or spawn and are not acceptable to the Japanese palate.



Atchan punches numbers into a calculator. He figures that his 1987 sea urchin landings amounted to less than five percent of his 1993 gross. In 1987 total urchin landings were barely a blip on the annual Maine state sea harvest numbers, just 1.4 million pounds worth \$236,000. That's 16 cents a pound. But the 1993 figures of the National Fisheries Service in Portland underscore the importance of urchins now in Maine's sea harvests.

ISF Trading purchased around 11 million pounds of whole urchins in 1993. That translates into roughly a million pounds of roe picked by Atchan's employees.

1993 MAINE TOP SPECIES

	<i>in value (millions)</i>	<i>in pounds (millions)</i>	<i>ave price/lb</i>
Lobster	1st \$ 74.330	3rd 30.090	\$ 2.47
Farm Salmon	2nd \$ 42.554	5th 14.887	2.80
Sea Urchins	3rd \$ 26.802	2nd 41.604	.64
Sea Scallops	4th \$ 9.828	18th 1.552	6.33
Clams	5th \$ 9.024	16th 2.269	3.96
(shucked)			
Codfish	6th \$ 7.982	7th 9.217	.86
Flounder	7th \$ 7.392	9th 6.071	1.22
Bluefin Tuna	8th \$ 5.238	22nd 5.510	9.51
White Hake	9th \$ 4.895	6th 11.114	.44
Herring	10th \$ 4.833	1st 76.809	.06

Statistics compiled from the National Marine Fisheries and Maine Department of Marine Resources.

To sell that roe, he acts as his own agent. Atchan points to the telephone and fax machine: "We are in contact on a daily basis with several Japanese supermarket chains. How many pounds we have. What their demand is. Some places have less demand, so we can call another chain. Right now sea urchins from China and Korea are coming in since last week. Our competition."

Fortunately the peak of Maine's urchin harvest comes at the time when urchins are in greatest demand for the Japanese holidays in early winter. Urchins found in Japanese, Korean, and Chinese waters spawn then and are not marketable.

Sea urchins are found around the world. Atchan, and others, keep an eye on the undeveloped urchin beds in South America, Australia, and New Zealand. "[Japanese] consumer wants to buy cheaper products because economy slows down. If economy gets worse, price will be too much. Can't forecast," Atchan shakes his head.

Like a good entrepreneur, he's looking for other products to diversify his market. When sea cucumbers are mentioned, he laughs, saying he's working now on "some kind of seafood—come back in half a year." Over the last year he's purchased Canadian lobsters from Grand Manan and shipped them live to Japan, where some end up in a chain called "Maine Lobster Restaurant." He's also experimenting with shrimp this year, buying from around 20 boats, two of which are from Massachusetts.

Leaning forward on his elbows, Atchan chooses

what he will tell of his evolution into that favorite American character, the immigrant self-made entrepreneur. He came to Portland in 1985 to help export lobsters. His employer, Yoshi Hayashi, the owner of the Sapporo Restaurant, contacted Atchan in Missoula, Montana, where Atchan had completed his Bachelor's Degree and was starting on his Master's in Business Administration. Yoshi and his cousin Tak Sato also own an Oriental restaurant in Omaha, Nebraska, where Atchan first came in 1977 before going on to Montana.

One day Atchan noticed a fisherman throwing sea urchins off the wharf and "asked him if there is a lot. He said 'Yes, too much.' I opened one—and it was good." Atchan began shipping whole urchins in 1987. In 1988 he visited Japan to study the market and make connections. The rest, as they say, is history.

IN THE EARLY DAWN only the tall black boots of the Cambodians and Vietnamese stand out through the grayness. Alone and in pairs they stride down the steep hill from Portland's West End. Some carry lunch pails, some plunge their hands into their sweatshirt front pockets so that their hoods tug at their necks, some are tuned into their Walkmans. Crossing Commercial Street they go under the Million Dollar Bridge, past the the pickups of fishermen breakfasting at Becky's to the end of Hobson's Wharf, and enter ISF Trading through the plastic flaps at the loading dock.

Inside, standing at long metal tables, 60 workers

crack open urchin shells or scoop out roe into small graded baskets. Two Hispanics unload totes from the trucks that pull in; a third, Salvadore, is in charge.

Craig, because he is tall and Caucasian, looks out of place beside the others. Working across from him is his Korean wife, who found them both jobs at ISF Trading through a friend at church. Before this job Craig worked as a fisherman on boats out of Alaska. He was away from home for five to seven months each year, and his wife pleaded with him to stay at home. "Money in Alaska is better, but here it's hard to find a job paying more," he says.

Often several members of one family work picking urchins. Their combined take-home pay is impressive. It's enough to attract a large white Ram van from Massachusetts carrying eight or nine Southeast Asians. Craig describes the money picking urchins this way: "If one can compare the sea urchin industry to the fishing industry, it's more than the equivalent of a man getting a tuna license, and on his first day getting seven 1,000 pound prime quality tuna. I don't even want to fathom what Atchan's making."

An urchin picker may make very good money, but the day is long and the work conditions hard. Urchins must not freeze, but they also must be kept cool. All winter long the loading dock doors are open. The temperature averages 50 degrees. The cold is hard on women from Southeast Asia used to a warmer climate, and if they leave, it's usually because of the cold. Standing on wet cement for 12 hours, they wear layers of thin, bright colored sweaters.

A picker grades the roe according to color and texture, quickly dropping the roe into one of six or so small baskets. Roe color ranges from prime golden orange to mocha brown. Poor quality roe ends up in a fish paste used for flavoring foods.

The work day starts with setting up at six o'clock, then picking from seven until that morning's load of as many as 2,000 totes is done around one to two o'clock. A picker works quickly, scooping the roe out with a six inch tool shaped like a ski. Clean up lasts until 3 o'clock. The worker packs what was picked the day before in plastic dairy tubs: it's been soaked in preserving chemicals and dried overnight. Another, smaller second crew starts in as the first cleans up. When the roe starts to spawn out—"melt"—and the texture isn't as good, midnight cookers parboil the roe to restore some of the texture.

Piece work and language barriers create difficulties. But Craig praises his supervisors for being fair. And he's impressed that Atchan follows hiring regulations, particularly for foreign workers, to the letter. Craig's own patience is hard won: "I've worked with bone heads, lazy men, junk addicts, and I've burnt up my energies working with idiots. People can do pretty much anything around me as long as they don't punch me."

EVERY FEW MINUTES Paul Blais glances up so he can look into the mirror above and to the right of his desk. The mirror catches boats coming around the point, hidden by the peaked roof. Paul is looking out for the first returning urchining boat.

On this blazingly clear March day in Boothbay Harbor the temperature is holding in the lower teens and the cold cuts hard, so the boats won't be out too long after noon time. Frozen urchins aren't good to anybody. The clear weather follows a hard winter storm which might have affected the consistency of the roe and perhaps encouraged spawning. In fact, only a few boats are out, two with inexperienced crews.

"There are two dinosaurs left," Paul says, "myself and a friend of mine up in Rockland. We still just do whole urchin." These two companies, Paul's Roeboat Enterprises and Friendship International, hold on to the five percent of the Maine market for whole urchins shipped directly to Japan. "I started doing urchins, late 70s, actually 1977, and the reason we went diving for them is that at the time we were in the mussel business, selling mussels to Fulton Fish Market in New York." Paul's mussels sold faster if he also offered urchins for the specialty market.

"That continued that way for three years or so and

*Urchin pickers can make
very good money—up to \$1,000 a
week—but the day is long and the
work conditions hard, 12 hours
picking on the cold, wet cement.*

then we got hooked up with a guy in Ireland and began exporting to the fish market in Paris." In Europe raw urchins are found on a seafood cart in restaurants, the bottom cut off and presented upside down as a bowl. Diners spoon out the roe.

Paul and another diver kept this market supplied until a dispute closed certain French seafood markets in 1983. Meanwhile the West Coast, particularly California, had developed as a major source of sea urchins shipped whole to Japan. Occasionally, when Paul took urchins to Logan, he would meet some Japanese seafood buyers at Flying Tiger Airlines.

"I'd be breaking open urchins for them. They liked

the urchins mostly because the roe in this particular green sea urchin approximated their native roe. More so than their chief source of urchins in this country, which was California. That's a very different urchin. It's a larger urchin. The roe's much larger. The problem was that as much as they loved the urchins, they could not afford to do anything with them."

But in the mid-1980s, the yen, previously at 200 yen to the dollar, strengthened. "It wasn't until '85 or '86 that the yen got near 160 yen to the dollar. And that made all the difference. Now it was economically feasible to ship whole urchins from Maine to Japan and then have them processed there." At the same time on the West Coast, particularly in California, urchin landings were going bust from over-harvesting after a booming decade of record landings.

In these early years many Mainers shipping whole urchins didn't understand the market in Japan and didn't know what to look for in an urchin. Maine buyers air freighted over thousands of pounds of urchins on consignment. "If it hit at the wrong time, there would be 10,000 pounds sitting on the dock and a lot of money tied up in it because of the air freight and a lot of people got burnt. It was a mess the first couple of years.

"The big difference with sea urchins and other products from the sea is that whereas a lobster is a lobster, and a cod is a cod, an urchin is not an urchin. The quality can vary tremendously with urchins and you cannot tell by exterior appearance. You can get clues by what they are eating, if anything, but you never know really until you crack them open."

Paul credits Atchan for creating a market in Japan by processing the roe in Maine and shipping it in the plastic tubs to Japanese supermarkets. With Atchan's innovation, Paul says, "the urchin industry exploded and that really is not an overstatement. It exploded. And was big fast. And it just outpaced any effort to try to get a handle on it or get research for it. And plus, the time at which it blossomed was a time when there weren't a lot of monies around."

Paul at this time was working out of New Harbor and Round Pond, but he came to Boothbay Harbor in 1989. He was the local expert. "I had urchin seminars for every diver and every boat captain. Since I had been diving for most of the time previous to that, I was able to relate to the divers and explain to them what they should be looking for. I set up the system of quality for the boat captains or tenders who were on board to be able to look at the stuff that was coming up and check it. Eventually they understood what they were supposed to do. And nobody had ever really taken the time to tell them."

Paul looks pretty rugged. With his dark hair and thick black eyebrows, he's a presence. Perhaps in his late 40's or early 50's, he's older, though not by much,

than most others in the business. But his years of experience have developed a healthy sense of what works. Educating his divers and captains means that they "have a better feeling and a better understanding of how things work. It became critical because they understood that if they maintained a certain level of quality, we were going to keep our niche in that market. Guys that are here fishing have a vested interest in seeing this managed so that it is a fishery here four years from now, six years from now."

With many fishermen, "their attention stops at the dock when their products [are] unloaded. They don't care what else is going on, and if the price isn't right, then how come."

Looking up at the mirror, Paul says, "This is one fishery where you got more non-fishermen than fishermen out there. Okay, because of the diving. There are

*All night and all day
trucks pull into Portland from up
and down the coast of Maine
filled with prickly balls
of sea urchins.*

Right: Marston Brewer's truck from Stonington.
Photograph by Andree Kehn.

people now, they can grab anything that floats, they got it on the water trying to harvest urchin. It really has become a circus."

The mirror shows a boat rounding the point. Paul puts his jacket on, walks down the flight of outside stairs, through the cool storage area, and back out around some small wharf buildings to the dock. Two young men are already waiting to work the hoist as an old wooden lobster boat with snow on the bow swings around into the wind, sidling up to the pilings well below the dock. It's low tide. Paul explains that these two divers are new at this and he's not expecting much from them.

When the totes of urchins are on the dock, Paul cracks open a fair number of them. The roe is the right color, but he shows the two men that "this bunch has mostly spawned." The consistency is too soft. These aren't what's he looking for, but he offers to give them an advance. They take it.

Back at his desk Paul says, "I try to explain as much as I can to them about the market and what goes on so

they are prepared for what happens and know it's just not my whim. So I keep them informed as well as I can so they can see it coming."

An old green blackboard on the wall in front of his desk lists boats that supply him: *Rosemond, Samuel C, Julia, Shur Thing, Rag, Look, Pearl.*

"I don't take on too many boats. When the market slows down, you have to let the boats go. So I prefer to short my customers in December and be able to keep the boats going in January, February, and March. You know, it is almost a dishonor for me to have to tell the guy, 'Sorry but you can't go out.' So I tend not to overdo it. But others, you know, they just get as many as they can and then January 15th comes around and they say, 'Well, sorry guys, you can't go out. I don't need your urchins.'"

A second boat, painted lavender and called *Daddy's Girls* crosses the mirror. It is also manned by an inexperienced crew. The wind has picked up and the cold bites down harder. The diver in a wet suit shifts from foot to foot and rubs his hands as Paul checks his haul. His urchins are also melting. The two young men working the hoist poke index fingers into the cracked urchins and scoop up roe to their mouths. "It's good," they say. The one with shades has been working here for four winters. "I'm kind of grateful to have a job," he says quietly.

A third boat swings into the dock. A tall man clad in a black dry suit clambers up the long ladder to the dock, and Paul explains that part of the year this guy, John Williams, is the captain of a 100-foot crab boat in the Bering Sea off Alaska. John, a big blond bear of a man, greets Paul heartily. "I grew up in Mechanic Falls," says John, "Nice little town to grow up in, but I wouldn't want to be there for the rest of my life. The Androscoggin doesn't do it for water." The two talk about the sea conditions, but Paul doesn't bother to check his urchins. There's no need to.

CHUCK HAS BEEN sitting in his truck since five in the morning at ISF Trading waiting for the unloaders and supervisor to run the test on the roe percentage. His load this early April day is small, just 94 totes of sea urchins. The urchins are spawning, and the price has dropped a dime a pound since last week. Chuck says, "The tests are just like the weather, they change. Sometimes drastically from day to day, and sometimes they don't." As for the testers, "sometimes they can be aggravatin', sometimes accommodatin'. I can unload the truck in half an hour, but then you gotta wait around, wait around, wait around. It's good money [driving], but it ain't good enough to stay down here for two days for a day's pay, you know what I'm saying."

Marston Brewer is about the only buyer who pro-

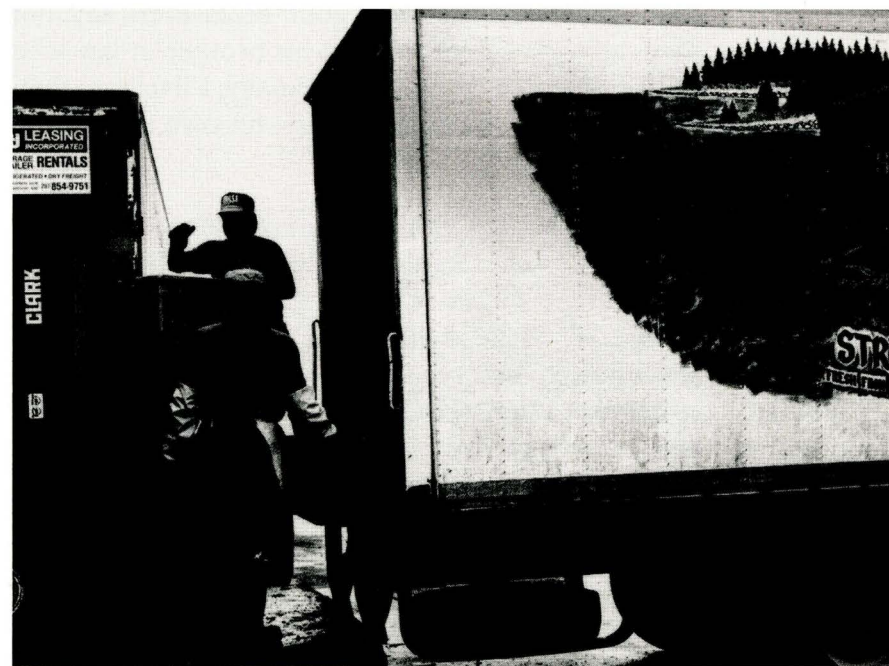
tests his divers by having his driver pick the urchins to be tested and then watch the tests carried out. A test is taken on six or eight or ten pounds of weighed urchins. Some of Marston's divers pick the test urchins in Stonington and place them in a plastic bag on top of one of their totes. The roe is weighed, and the percentage is calculated for each diver who has totes on the truck. The divers are paid the percentage of roe to overall urchin weight. It's a lot of paperwork for the buyer.

Twenty percent roe is excellent, and anything above ten percent is considered good. You don't last long as a diver if your percentages come consistently below ten percent. If any of the tests on Marston's truck come out below ten percent (or eight percent this late in the season), another test is done. Otherwise, the buyers and the divers are at the mercy of the processors.

A harvester is forced to trust his buyer, and the buyer must trust the larger processor who takes the urchins he delivers. The processor sells the urchin roe to a dealer in Boston or New York who is on the phone to the big uni auction, Tsujiki, in Tokyo. Usually buyers are Japanese-Americans.

As Marston says, "Gravity and greed are the two things you can count on."

Greed kicks in anywhere along this chain. Some divers sell to a new truck that shows up on the town pier, offering, say, one dollar a pound for urchins, in cash. The driver will pay in cash again the next day, but



the third day, he'll give a check, and not return. Some buyers, like Marston, set prices on the low side, but they will buy from the harvester all year long and protect his urchins at the processor.

As Chuck waits at the unloading platform he comments on the tests ahead. He mutters that it will "end

up in piss and moaning contest 'cause they try to cheat the fisherman, and I get bad-named out here, and they call Marston, and I call Marston and that's the end of it. I gotta start all over this morning, arguin', fightin', grumble and growl. And I'm going to get the Spanish guy doin' the test anyway. He's a good guy, but he don't like to give the fishermen nothin'."

In the past, when Marston's gotten Chuck's call at dawn, he's often driven straight down to Portland to settle the matter. Nevertheless, Marston prefers dealing with Atchan Tamaki even though he, like all the big buyers, "drive you nuts at times." Some years he sells to George Parr, and appreciates that Parr demands that urchins be culled at sea. But although Parr proudly claims to offer the highest prices around, a number of the small buyers no longer sell to him. Parr's outspoken style makes him a target even though he knows a lot about the business. "If Lloyd Covens and Atchan are Urchin Kings," Parr says, "then I'm the Urchin God!"

A little after six, Salvadore pushes aside the long plastic strips covering the loading dock opening and greets Chuck with a big hello. A fork lift rumbles out behind him. Chuck replies that he's got a "bionic eye so that now you can't cheat me." They all laugh.

Chuck holds that fishermen are liars. "An' there ain't no fisherman tell you the truth, so . . . you listen to 'em, they're all losing money, but you watch 'em and when they got everything hauled out of the water in the dry dock, and you watch everyone's got brand new homes, brand new cars, truck, an' go south for the winter, I don't know how they do it goin' broke every day, but they do." He volunteers that his brother-in-law who dives year round "makes good money, I'll tell you that, seventy, eighty thousand a year—his own money."

CHUCK MAKES four or five more stops on the return to Stonington, delivering crabmeat to Tiny Bigman and picking up bait in Bath. He's back in Stonington around two o'clock in the afternoon if he doesn't have to go on to Winter Harbor, farther down the coast. It's been a 14 hour day.

When Chuck delivers the truck to the town pier, Marston is manning the hoist, helping to off-load the first boats back. Terry Daggett weighs and marks each tote before loading it back onto Marston's other truck. He shares this job with Dan Harp, a young black man from Florida who works some evenings loading and weighing.

Through the fall and winter the town pier in Stonington sees up to nine buyers of sea urchins, six being the norm. Marston buys from around 30 divers, and that's about average. Usually one boat carries two divers. A boat with two divers typically brings along a culler, often the boat's owner and helmsman, and a

tender who mans the skiff. The tender collects the full baskets of urchins the divers hang on dive lines, brings them back to the bigger boat for culling, and returns the empty baskets to the dive lines. One lobster boat gives winter work to four men, more or less.

The Deer Isle lobster fleet, numbering around 300 boats, centers around Stonington. The town pier, built with funds from a 1977 state-wide bond issue, opened up new markets for fishermen. Before then the only outlets for the sea's harvest, clams or lobsters or crabs or scallops or groundfish, were five lobster buyers in Stonington, each with their own dock. You couldn't land if you didn't go through them.

In the three years of town meetings leading up to the state bond vote, the town of Stonington made a clear statement: it chose to continue to be a fishing village. That means trucks rumbling through the narrow streets at all hours. In building this pier, the town guaranteed an open marketplace for fish.

The building of the massive granite pier also represents further cooperation. The Crotch Island quarry, revived in the 1970s, donated the granite. The town gave the land, and the Army Corps of Engineers dredged the shallows. Reaching out into deeper water from the center of the village, the pier is a solid reminder of the 19th century when the granite from across the thoroughfare built immovable docks and piers in Maine and grand buildings in New York City or Washington, D.C.

At the long low tide of a full moon, the pier and the narrow slice of sea surrounding it stick out from town into the flats and low rocks like a finger, a lifeline to the sea. In the late winter's afternoon light, boats home in to the pier and tie up to unload in the shelter of its height and mass.

WHEN MARSTON BREWER, out of Boothbay Harbor, married Donna Shepherd, a Stonington woman, the two of them put experience, hard work, and opportunity together to develop their business. Marston, who had learned to dive working for Paul Blais, took a break from gill-netting and scalloping to look for urchins around Stonington.

"They were all junk," he says. The quality of urchin roe reflects what they've been eating. Merchant Row south of the Stonington thoroughfare has lots of ledges, but there's mud after 15 or so feet down—no laminaria, the long sheets of seaweed which sea urchins prefer to eat. The places to find urchins, Marston and others discovered, are south around Isle au Haut and down towards Marshall Island and the ledges there in Jericho Bay.

These urchins still were not as good as ones from
continued on page 23



HANDS GRAB FOR URCHINS TO CRACK OPEN.

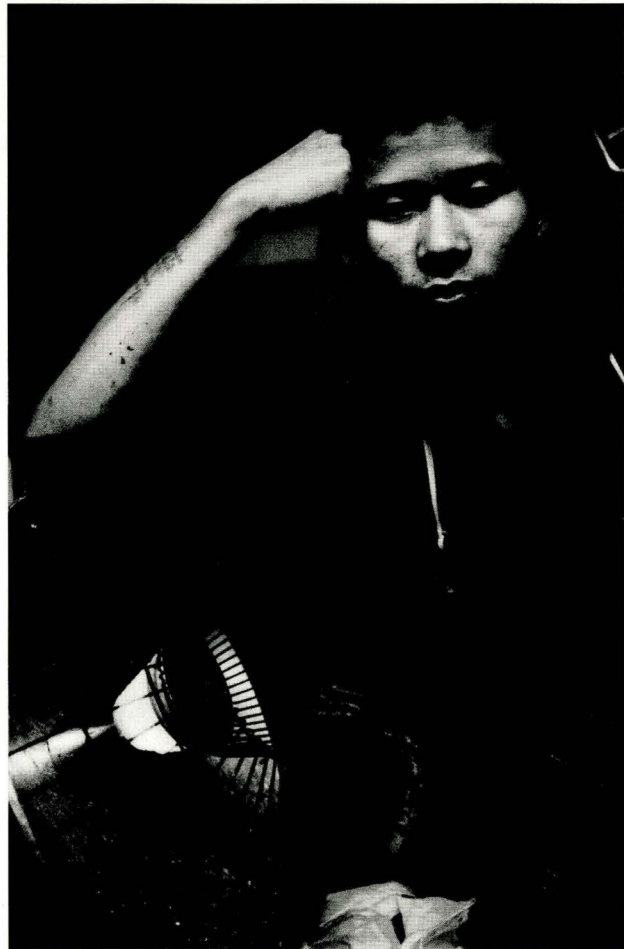
PICKING *UNI* FOR *JAPAN*

GREAT ATLANTIC SEAFOOD COMPANY
40 CUSTOM HOUSE WHARF,
PORTLAND, MAINE.

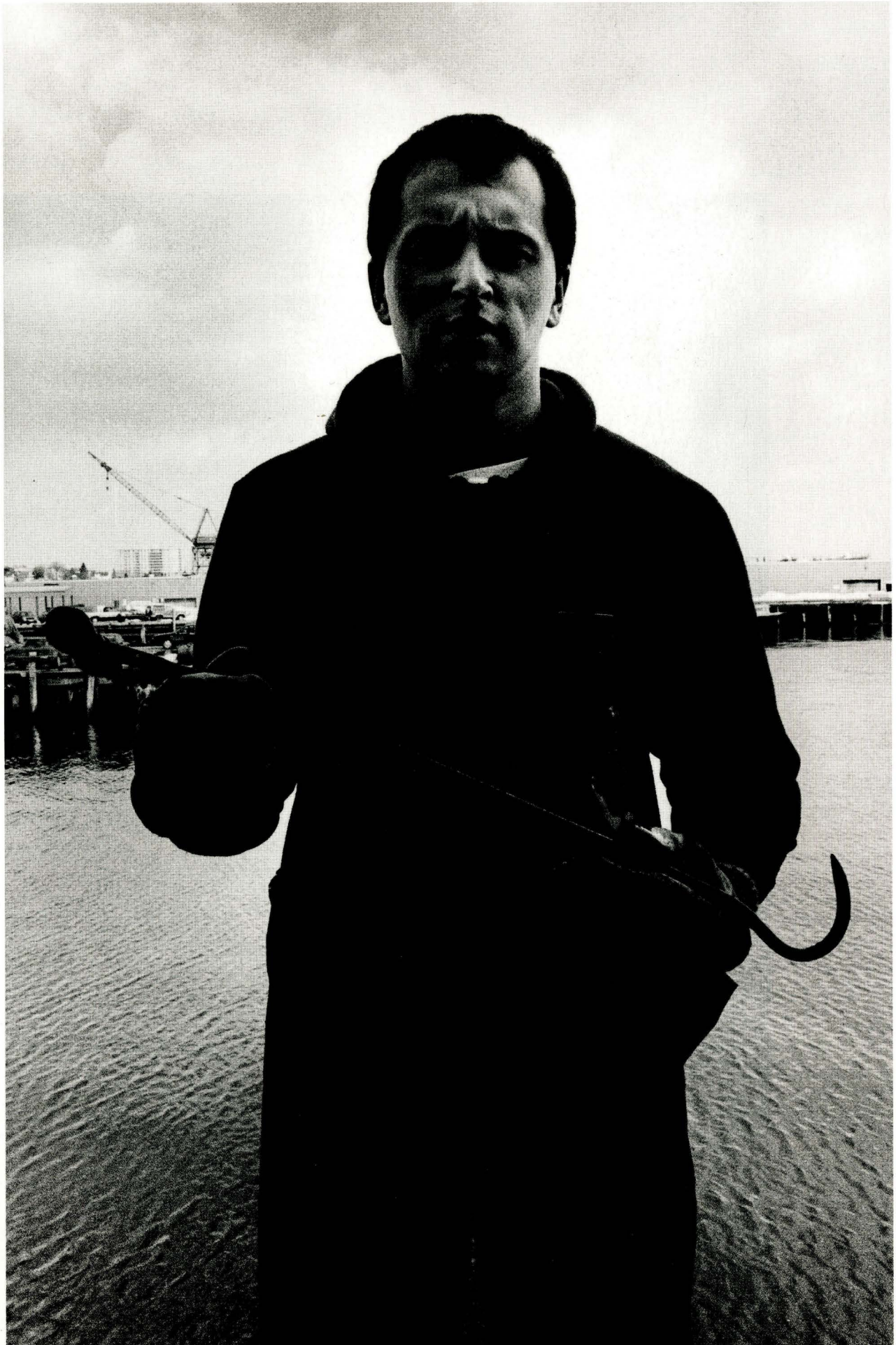
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID GAVRIL.



MIRAIM LOPEZ AND HER HUSBAND, FRANCISCO EELIS WAITING FOR WORK TO START.



SAMETH IM WARMING HIMSELF WITH PORTABLE HEATER.



DARREN CHANEY.



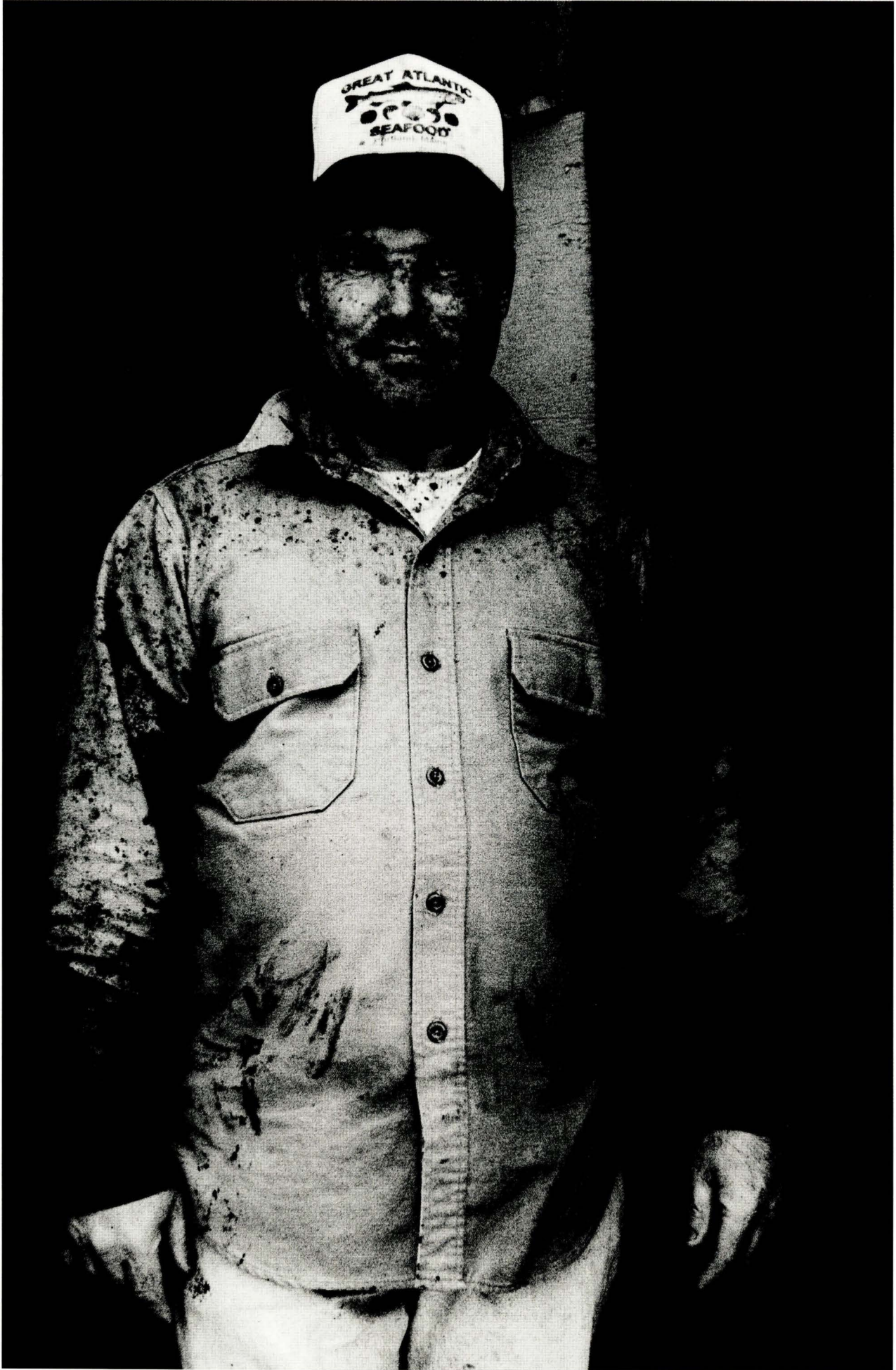


CRACKING URCHINS.



MARIM.





JOHN BODWELL.



GLOVES ON THE CRACKING TABLE.

Continued from page 14

Casco Bay. Japanese buyers explained that divers were gathering old as well as newly mature urchins. It would take a few years of diving to deplete the numbers of old urchins with their poorer quality roe. Marston kept diving and learning.

Four years ago Marston bought a second-hand compressor so he could fill his air tanks without having to run to Ellsworth, about an hour away. "When you got a compressor, then everyone starts bringing their tanks up." And while this started a new business, "it wasn't nothing I set out to do." He and Donna would take turns all night tending the machine, which had to be bled every seven minutes. "The automatic bleeder was like heaven sent," says Donna. Then they got a bigger compressor from ISF Trading.

Marston already had a truck to transport his fish and fish from another boat. The first summer with the truck he and Donna were the drivers. He added crabmeat, lobsters in the high summer season, and scallops in the winter to his load. One winter some Stonington divers asked Marston to lug sea urchins because "I had good luck the winter before down in Boothbay, you know I'd only missed two days 'cause of no market. An' up here, they'd only fish three days all winter 'cause they didn't have any market." Other truckers didn't want to mess with this new fishery.

Marston "had to come ashore to make it work. There's not enough hours in the day to do it all." He became a small entrepreneur in this new fishery. "Last couple of years is when we just exploded." In 1993 he "hailed well over two million pounds outta here."

As a buyer, a lot of what Marston does is "look after the urchins." That's why he has his divers pick the test and the drivers oversee it. "If the divers aren't happy, you're not going to have any divers. And if your buyer ain't happy, you know, it's just a balancin' act, that's all."

Marston sees a lot of new divers try urchining. "The new divers are a pain in the ass to deal with, you know, because they gotta learn. And the percentages is the teacher . . . The guy that lays junk is goin' to get out of the business . . . you're only goin' to out there and work real hard for just so many days for five cents a pound, ten cents a pound before you give it up."

A few divers never learn, says Donna. "It's always somebody else's fault, they're cheatin' them, rippin' them off. I can think of one guy who went to all nine dealers down here this year. And people are still cheatin' him!"

Marston cites Reggie Wichenbach and Scott Craig as two newcomers four years ago who "picked up most of what they know in the school of hard knocks." Now they are considered among the most consistent divers. It took a while to get there. Reggie's first boat was a dog he bought through *Uncle Henry's*, a second-hand

buying guide. Then he hit a ledge with Ronnie Eaton's boat and Scott was slammed up against the bulkhead. Scott's upper right arm now has a one-eighth inch steel rod running the length of it.

This first year they were out, says Marston, "I fertilized my whole garden with their urchins."

Donna continues their saga: "Then last year, they started taking our boat, and they've done really, really well. But boy, they learned a lot—the hard way. If anything could happen, it happened to them. I mean, they really faced just about every disaster except for drownin' that you could possibly have happen—they've had their panic moments."

HEY, THERE, Capt'n Ledge," Bob Chute calls out to Reggie and Scott on the way to his boat, *Sea Hunt*. "Hey, Baby Killer," Scott shoots back. "Baby Killer" because Bob's culling rack traps small baby urchins with closely spaced slats.

"Where you guys goin' today?" asks Scott.

"Way out front."

"Seal?"

"No!" No fisherman gives away information.

Reggie heads Marston's 34-foot diesel-powered boat, the *Dorothy E*, towards the northeast side of Isle au Haut on a particularly sunny, calm, and warm—for Maine—early April day. It's hard to imagine the windy, wet and cold weather that usually goes along with urchining in Maine.

"The first time we was out here—there's a table top, two miles from anything—and I hit it." The shoe, an oak skedge along the bottom of the boat meant to take a beating, was damaged. "Well, I felt bad about it. Martson's comment was, 'It happens. Everyone does it.'"

Reggie looks slowly over and continues, "I don't think two weeks went by. I was nervous from the last time—and I hit something else. Marston comes out for us, sees his boat, stem up, stern in 20 feet of water. Marston says, 'It happens. Get it fixed at Billings'." Later Marston told him about a ledge out in Western Bay that "was like a magnet." Marston hit it three times in one week.

Today Reggie has a cold so only Scott will dive. If both of them dive they hire a culler, Richard Hutchins, a local man, and a tender, Dick Hurst, a Pentecostal minister from Alabama who's newly arrived in Stonington. Both were waiting on the town pier with lunch pails to see if Reggie would be diving.

Scott says they've gone through 15 deckhands in two years. They've never had to fire anybody, they just leave. One guy was a good tender, says Reggie, "but has to be mad at someone everyday. We told him if you've got a problem with us, tell us so's we can fix it;

if you got problems at home tell us so's we know it isn't us. He says, 'If you want me to quit, I will.' 'Okay,' says Scott. Next day he showed up, but we got another tender."

Each boat works out its own percentages for payment. On Marston's boat 20 percent of a day's catch goes to Marston, 10 percent to the deck hand in the tender, 5 percent to the culler on board. Reggie and Scott pay expenses for air, gas, gear, and split the remainder equally. Scott feels they are generous; some boats pay the culler \$2.50 a tote.



Passing Fog Island, Scott points out the wild sheep grazing among the boulders. Beyond Fog is the ledge they were going to try this morning, but already a dragger is working one side and a diver on the other. Checking the chart they select another ledge to the northeast, and Scott's finger on the chart suggests a route around a submerged ledge. Reggie grins. Scott asks, "Have you heard of 'The Ballad of Captain Ledge'?" Near the ledge, in 20 or so feet of water, Reggie throws over the anchor and 40 feet of anchor rode.

Scott's black dry suit has been warming in a big plastic barrel of water heated by pipes running from the engine. Scott is a big, ruddy fellow. Once in the suit and black hood he looks like a Viking crossed with the black knight, accessoried by K-Mart colors, ready to do battle with the sea. His large flippers are a translucent baby blue, his air tank a hot yellow, and his prescription goggles are bright pink. He can find them easily if they come off underwater.

Reggie helps him put on the thick single-fingered mitts. Scott pushes bungee cord bracelets up over his ankles and wrists to keep cold water out. Then, facing the bow, he kneels on the stern deck and jumps,

landing on his back in the water.

From now on, Reggie will always have one eye looking out for his diver, and the other monitoring the seas and the swing of the boat on her anchor.

Five years ago both he and Scott were laid off, along with about 100 other mechanics and engineers, when Continental Express moved its maintenance facility from Bangor. They know how to do quality work. Reggie points out that "we had to test the planes we fixed. Pilots will not like a mechanic who refuses to go in a plane he fixes." Their professionalism makes them quick learners, but there's a lot to know on the water. Reggie chuckles that they've "learned enough not to keep us out of trouble, but to see it coming."

Scott designed the greenhouse that runs from the aft edge of the cabin housing to the stern. The frame, made with two by fours, is covered with four layers of plastic sheeting. It is bolted to the deck, but in a few weeks it will become a greenhouse for Marston's tomatoes.

Bob Chute calls it "the incubator." Lots of fishermen in Stonington are watching to see how it comes through the winter. It came through the big March blizzard just fine, though another day they got into trouble when they ran out of gas in a fresh gale—30 to 40 mile an hour winds. The heavily-laden boat with a big greenhouse "sail" came abeam of the wind and almost went over.

When Scott attaches his first full basket of urchins to his dive line, Reggie goes out in the tender to retrieve them and leave an empty basket. Back at the *Dorothy E*, he dumps the basket onto the culling rack at the stern of the boat. Scott designed and built this, too. The spacing between the PVC three-quarter inch pipe allows urchins smaller than two inches to slide back into the sea.

The heap of urchins looks like large burr nuts. Fresh from the sea, urchins are shades of olive, grey-green and purple. Nothing in a live fresh urchin looks like the fragile bleached dome-shaped shell found on the shore. Some of the spines, which are part of the skeleton, slowly rotate. When the spines penetrate a diver's skin, usually the fingers, pain and swelling may last a year or more. In the center of the flat side is Aristotle's Lantern where muscle holds five small triangle teeth to the shell. Urchins reputedly can munch through anything, even beer cans. In California huge beds of urchins have cut kelp forests, destroying the habitat of small fish and shellfish.

Reggie breaks a couple of urchins open to inspect the roe. Inside the urchin is compact: nothing but intestines and gonads. Much of the year the gonads store energy, generating the roe divers seek. Once a year the gonads function as either male or female reproductive organs and spawn. In Maine spawning, or melting, begins in mid-March, heading down the coast

over the next couple of months.

The conditions that trigger spawning are still a matter of conjecture. Water temperature seems to be a factor, and where different water temperatures are found is part of local knowledge. In early spring, snow melt cools salt water near the coast while water around offshore ledges may be slightly warmed, some think, by the nearby Gulf Stream.

Reggie scoops out the golden-orange roe with his forefinger and licks it. "Tastes better on a Ritz," he grins. The texture is intense, somewhere between velvet and silk, and the taste is sweet, "like raw scallops and apples," says Scott. He's been diving for an hour now, about four or five basketfuls, and returned to the boat for his second tank.

"The reason the Japanese like it is because it's an aphrodisiac," he continues.

Reggie says, "I knew this was coming."

Scott checks the chart, "There's lots of seaweed down there; it's like being in a room with a lot of wet sheets hanging." They decide to move over to another ledge about a half mile away. Before he goes in with his second tank, Scott fills a gallon plastic jar with hot water from the barrel and pours it down the front of his dry suit. He does this three or four times to "take some of the heat down with me."

Within 15 minutes Reggie is out in the tender retrieving another full basket of urchins. Sorting through them on the culling rack he points out a couple of sea cucumbers. While they look like very thick cucumbers, they are so flexible that eventually these two will slip through the rack slats.

A couple of years ago Reggie briefly went back to work again as an airplane mechanic. But he returned to urchining because "I don't have anyone telling me what to do. I worked for 20 years taking orders. We had basically last week off with the storms. I didn't have to call in. You can be late. We also know if we don't go to work, we don't get paid." In his old job he made \$50,000 or more a year, with \$12,000 going for taxes. This job earns "comparable," and he "can deduct a lot for expenses. It's easier to monitor how much is paid in taxes. Commercial fishermen are the only ones who pay once a year, not quarterly." Reggie also pays around \$3,000 a year for health insurance. Because he's single, Scott chooses not to get insurance.

Scott finishes his second tank and rests. He doesn't eat lunch because blood will concentrate in his stomach, leaving his extremities colder. His face is bright red from the cold water. Reggie claims he'd rather be diving than culling, especially on a cold day.

Scott pours gallons more of hot water down into his dry suit, puts on the vest that carries his third yellow tank, and jumps off again.

Reggie counts off the licenses they must buy: Commercial Shellfish \$63, Commercial Fishing (single

operator) \$33, Scallop (hand license) \$89, Sea Urchin \$89.

The Sea Urchin license was not required until January 1992, an example of the time it takes the legislature and the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) to catch up with new fisheries. Until then, DMR had no idea how many divers or boats were out there urchining. By the spring of 1994 over 2,000 hand harvesting licenses and 600 dragging licenses had been purchased.

Reggie and Scott get up at 5:30 a.m. to drive the 70 miles from Bangor to urchin. It's a long day, and it can be longer if any problems come up. If the roads are icy or there's a bad storm, they'll stay home, but once in Stonington, they go out in most any weather, the only ones out of the harbor. "If we can't make \$200 a day, we sit in the truck, look at the sea, go home," says Scott. They've earned the respect of fishermen in Stonington. Said one, "They go out every day. And they consistently do well."

But, even though they use a local boat, they are still from away. There are some things they may not do. They tried lobstering, but Reggie says, "We know people pulled our traps—it's easy to tell—they left the doors open with nothing in them." And another time a passing boat gave them a needed tow. Even though fisherman's unwritten etiquette is not to accept money, this one did. "We asked him if we could give him gas money and he said yes Marston was surprised at this."

How long Reggie keeps on urchining depends. He and Scott need to harvest something during the spawning months from mid-April to mid-July. They may try razor clams at this season this year, but they each need to clear more than \$80 to \$100 a day. They've investigated sea cucumbers, but that's still too labor-intensive. They've also harvested periwinkles, popular in Germany. They'll try just about anything.

*A diver can earn \$50,000 a year
after expenses, often more. Many are
in it for the adventure. One is a
Portland fireman making big extra
bucks on his off duty days.*

Left: Urchin boat, the *Dorothy E* out of Portland.
Photograph by Andree Kehn.

DONNA BREWER works as hard as her husband Marston. She's driven the truck, bled the old air compressor, filled air tanks, measured each and every clam. She's probably done everything but dive for urchins. She tends the garden, the goats, the sheep, the chickens. She's central control to the divers, crab pickers, scallopers, and clammers who check in at their home.

This business has meant a steady income "because we've always got something going on but, on the other side of the spectrum, it's so busy that, I mean, we start at about six in the morning and sometimes it's one or two in the morning before we are done. Because we are not done until the paper work is done, the trucks are loaded and the truck driver's in the truck and he's on his way. And it does make a long day and it's seven days a week. So when we get a little bit of stormy weather, we're kind of happy. It gives us a break."

She laughs often and she laughs easily. "It's like anything. It's, some days it's like, are the complaints ever gonna stop and then, you know, you'll get a few days that will go good, and most of the time it goes pretty good. It's easier now that we're issuing checks ourselves because we have a little more control over when the guys get paid. We try to keep 'em paid every two days so that they don't wait too long."

Donna came up with the name for their business, "The Bandit and the Bitch." "Bitch" is what she called Marston's boat "because it was like the other woman who always took the money away" and "Bandit" is the name of a former partner's boat.

One spring evening Donna is cooking spaghetti sauce, checking homework with their two children, and storing containers of picked crabmeat which women drop off throughout the evening. She carries the containers outside to the cooler down by the air compressor. Crabmeat is another part of their business. Picking crab is good home work for women. Last winter the largest employer on Deer Isle, Billings Marine, had to lay off about half its work force, and women needed more than ever to pick crab. But the crabs weren't there.

Today Marston dealt with engine trouble in the big truck and a broken air compressor as well as the usual work of the day. He relaxes with his father, Flash Brewer, and Flash's stepson, Randy, over a rum and coke. Flash is spending this winter here urchining. He's getting ready to return home to Boothbay Harbor in a couple of days to set up for summer fishing. Randy is culling for him. "Randy Shepherd, Urchin King," he introduces himself, and everyone guffaws. "Watched Ben put tomorrow's paycheck on his outboard today," he tells Marston.

Bob Chute, a Portland firefighter, Mike Smith, a painter from South Portland, and Joe Grego, a diver for fresh water mussels from Oklahoma, come for supper.

Bob is often back late because he may venture to the far side of Swans Island or Long Island to dive there. His boat, *Sea Hunt*, is the fastest one in the harbor. He likes to load *Sea Hunt* to the limit with 40 to 50 totes. His divers, Mike and Joe, are hungry, he smiles, the best way to be. Bob's shift as a firefighter in the Portland Fire Department is two days on, two nights on, then four days off. He combines his days off with his accumulated vacation time so he's been in Stonington more than not this winter. He rents a house in Stonington, paying \$450 a month. In summer, this same house rents by the week, for \$550. Even so it's been a winter of storms, and Bob wants to make up for lost days. Rob and Lindsay, the Brewer's children run to greet him. He calls them his second family.

Drinking beers in the living room, the men toss around the need for regulation. Joe, whose torso and arms are covered gloriously with tattoos so thick they look like a rich paisley, speaks from experience. He watched a lucrative fresh water mussel market disappear in Oklahoma because there were too many divers, too much pollution, and few regulations protecting the mussels. Bits of the mussels are used by the Japanese to seed oyster shells. Tennessee still has a fresh water mussel industry because the state regulated it.

Joe speaks in a non-stop stream. "They got to do something about overfishing. Bigger is not necessarily better. You get the big boats that are dragging up miles of ocean and stuff. You get the smaller boats, the guys

*Pickers grade the urchin roe
by color and texture. Color ranges
from prime golden orange to
mocha brown. Poor quality roe
ends up in paste.*

Right. Split open urchin showing roe inside.
Photograph by Andree Kehn.

are more selective. And that's what's cost our country. You got Wal-Mart—who can compete with Wal-Mart? Small businesses can't. Keep it small, you get more quality."

Mike Smith, who started urchining in Casco Bay, thinks the decimation that happened there will continue down the coast. "It's not that there is more urchins, there's more divers. [Urchining] will continue on a different scale. There will be a lot less people doing

it because it will be so hard to get to them . . . They should close during the spawning season.”

Bob, who took in 103,000 pounds of urchins last year, is quiet.

Marston says that this fishery “has the potential for being destroyed in three years, four years. Completely.” He thinks it should be protected the way lobsters are, by a size limit. Reggie agrees with this. Scott feels strongly that research is needed to understand the role sea urchins have in the sea’s ecology. Everyone believes that divers abuse the urchin population and hit them hard. A shakeout is inevitable.

Later, perhaps because he is a firefighter, Bob hears the fire truck first. Stonington’s three fire trucks come hooting down the road in the dark, signaling disaster. Donna gets on the phone to her mother. “It’s the Chess Team,” she explains. Seventy cars parade behind the trucks honking. They had just surprised the Deer Isle–Stonington High School Chess Team at the great green bridge to the mainland. The team, the Maine State High School Chess Champs this year, are returning from the National High School Chess Championships in Dallas. The high school is the seventh smallest in Maine with 120 students. They came in eighth in the Nationals, the smallest high school of the 96 teams competing. The whole island turned out for the chess jocks.

“**W**E KILLED IT. We really did. We wiped it out, here in Casco Bay, and Portland divers of course are responsible for it. And the reason we’re so involved in all the current efforts at trying to regulate and control it, is to be certain that this doesn’t happen anywhere else, ever again.”

Joe Mokry leans forward, talking in a rush. He’s a professional diver and worked for many years as a research biologist. With his considerable expertise, he contracts out to towns and departments to teach all kinds of water rescue: water, surf, river, high angle, cliff, rope, ice. He’s been an urchin diver for three years. Like other divers he moves down the coast during the season to find better harvesting areas. Some years he leaves Casco Bay in December and ends up the season in Jonesport or Mount Desert.

“We’ve been unable to manage this industry on our own without government assistance at laying down some laws. And you will have noticed at these meetings, the Portland divers are quite vocal about what needs to be done. We’ve learned the hard way, and we want to be sure that this doesn’t happen to these Down East guys the same thing that happened to us.”

Settling back into his chair, Joe refers to the February, 1993 hearing in Augusta at which 250 to 300 urchin divers unexpectedly turned up calling for some

kind of regulation. Fishermen look to DMR to regulate urchining because regulations are more easily adjusted to harvest results than would be any bills passed by the legislature.

He describes what the bottom of Casco Bay looks like. “Well, there are places in Casco Bay which are prime urchin areas which are as bare as this table when it comes to urchins . . . and an experienced diver can



recognize urchin spots and places where urchins have been. In fact, you can tell very often how long it’s been since that urchin area was picked . . . And there are lots of places in Casco Bay that should be producing urchins because everything is right, the feed is right, the ground is right, the wash is right, and everything is right about it from the environmental sense, but there aren’t any urchins.”

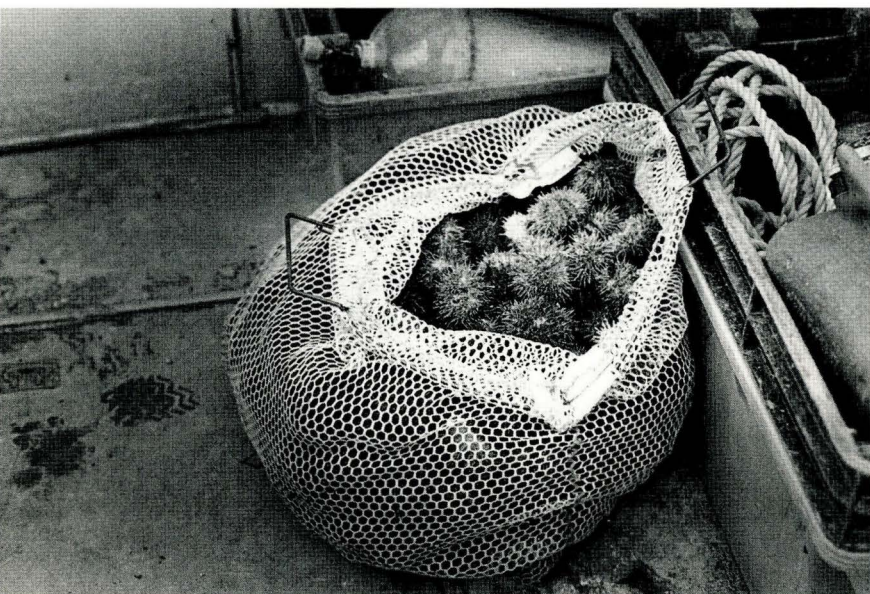
Unlike many divers whose interest in urchins ends when they are unloaded at the pier, Joe understands the whole urchin process. He thinks there ought to be conservation zones where urchining is prohibited. He looks beyond Maine harvesting. “One of the things that other divers like myself are trying to emphasize, is that maybe we are sending them too much. There are two ways to control price on a product, one is by demand and the other by supply. In December the divers out in California decided that they were not going out for that price anymore and they hung up their fins until they got three dollars a pound. Three dollars a pound! That’s phenomenal!” In Maine, he says, we get “anywhere from 45 cents to one dollar for the best quality stuff which we haven’t got from Down East yet.”

Joe speaks from the experience of a research biologist who has worked all over the world, most recently in Newfoundland. Few fisheries “operate at full capac-

ity all year round. Fishing by nature is a seasonal type thing, and if we can get eight good months out of the year, I think we are doing damn well compared to a lot of fisheries.”

In Newfoundland in the early 1970s “cod was still considered to be an unlimited species . . . but within a few years of my arrival many of the inshore fishermen were already beginning to say that the fish simply weren’t there anymore. In the last three or four years the drop in the catch was phenomenal. If you want to get a codfish in St. John’s [Newfoundland], you pretty much have to buy one that’s been brought in from Nova Scotia. It’s that difficult to find cod anymore. It’s a terrible tragedy; it was entirely preventable as well.

“Of course this bears directly on the whole question of sea urchins, because again it’s being viewed as a limitless resource. There’s a well-known buyer in Port-



land here who says there are millions and billions of sea urchins and there’s absolutely no depletion of stock, and we know better, and any one who can say anything like that is someone who hasn’t been underwater for a while. I think that kind of attitude, especially coming from someone prominent in the industry, can only encourage neglect on the part of people who might choose to regulate it.”

Joe makes a strong argument for the need for research to understand the biology of the sea urchin. Like a canary in a cage carried through a mine, urchins are easily susceptible to changes in their environment. On the other hand, he knows that DMR has no funds. More than a few divers have called for raising the \$89 license fee substantially as long as this money can be dedicated for urchin research. With over 2,000 licensed divers in 1994, that’s a tidy amount available for research.

Education would also help clear up the many misconceptions exchanged among urchin harvesters. For

example, many divers say that urchins filter feed from the water for a few months after they spawn. But in fact they are grazers only. “They do not have the equipment—they couldn’t if they wanted to—filter feed. It’s like saying that lions alternatively eat grass when they can’t find any meat. They simply don’t have the kind of teeth to be able to eat grass.”

Joe’s examples keep tumbling out: “There are many, many things that I could mention that do nothing but demonstrate our ignorance about urchin biology. We’ve learned very little that we can directly apply in the field to help us get better yields from our reefs, from our landings. Applied research projects would be one, for example, how long does it take a population to regenerate on a reef? Is it really true that the deep urchins for example will very quickly repopulate the upper levels? And that’s a common statement, but there’s absolutely no evidence to indicate that that’s true, that the bottom urchins crawl up to the top and repopulate.”

Joe continues, “In fact there’s even been suggestion in the scientific literature that those are two different species altogether. Certainly, any experienced diver will tell you that this is a deep water urchin and that’s an up top urchin. We can tell them by sight . . . They may be a different race, they may be the same species, who knows? It’s just one example of the kind of thing that we need to know . . . Does that population that’s lower down serve as the breeding stock for our top urchins?” It’s draggers who go after the deeper urchins. Most use a delicate drag, recently designed just to haul in fragile urchins. And while Joe says most of the draggers he knows are fine fellows, he’s yet to meet an environmentally friendly drag. He’s seen what drags of all kinds do to the bottom. “It’s like saying there’s an environmentally friendly bulldozer.”

Furthermore he says, “When they spawn on the bottom, does that spawn get deposited on top in the kelp beds? If so, that’s extremely important to know that kind of thing. Because the draggers are taking the deep stuff. We may be cutting off our lifeline when we do something like that.”

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS swarm over the unfinished buildings at the Department of Marine Resources’ Fisheries Research Lab balanced on the slope of Juniper Point in Boothbay Harbor. Of all the ironies surrounding urchining in Maine—divers asking to be regulated by the state, divers willing to quadruple their license fees to support urchin research, Maine harvesters learning to cater to Japanese tastes—the construction of these facilities when DMR’s budget and personnel are being cut presents the most visible irony.

“My understanding is we’ve lost 42 positions,” says Ted Creaser, a senior researcher at DMR. The money

for construction at Juniper Point was in the pipeline and they “just started blowing the hole up there when this whole thing broke. They said full speed ahead. Let’s go for it. I don’t think anybody had envisioned what has happened. We’ve gone two rounds of bumping so far and depending on what happens now with these three or five positions, these regional biologist positions, there may be another round of bumping too.”

Ted’s office, right on the edge of the water, seems as precipitous as his position at DMR. “I’ve been bumped down to where I started 29 years ago.” That meant more than the 17 percent cut in salary because research projects Ted and several others directed were completely obliterated. “I think a lot of motivation was lost when you take people from positions in which they are in charge, and suddenly they get all shuffled around.”

*Our ignorance about urchin
biology is abysmal, says diver and
biologist Joe Mokry. To say urchins
filter feed sometimes is like saying
lions sometimes eat grass.*

Left. Urchin diving bag.
Photograph by Andree Kehn.

Ted, leaning back in his chair, is silhouetted against the winter’s sharp blue sky. He speaks simply, without rancor, about the emasculation of DMR. “They completely eliminated all the fish pathology work that Stuart did and they completely eliminated all the shellfish physiology work that Sandy Shumway was doing. I still write manuscripts—’cause it’s the only thing that you can see that you’ve accomplished.”

Stacked on the tables and desks around him are evidence of his research. On one table rests “Cadillac Program” for sea urchin research that he wrote at former DMR Commissioner Bill Brennan’s request. Ted’s enthusiasm for research pushes through the gloom surrounding DMR as he outlines this new project. Two basic questions beg for attention. First “we need to know what the size is at sexual maturity. And we need to know if it varies from one end of the state to the other.”

Second, where are the small immature urchins? “They are not readily visible apparently, from what everybody tells me.” Ted thinks they may hide under

the litter of shells on the sea bottom. He asks which young urchins replace those harvested in the shallow kelp beds, where the good feed is. Many divers think that “those deep water forms that are a different shape” move up to the kelp beds. That is not Ted’s gut feeling.

“But it’s a crucial question, because now they are harvesting these things from the deep water and the shallow water. You know, you can’t harvest them from both ends and hope to have anything left.” Increased processing facilities in Maine created a market for urchins with a much lower percentage of roe. Harvesters now go after urchins with less roe even though they get less money for them per pound. Ted knows “it keeps these guys going during periods of the year when they normally wouldn’t be doing anything.”

Ted reviews policies of California, Oregon, and Washington, all of which have used various means of protecting the urchin population through limiting entry: landing a certain number of pounds the previous year, holding a license for a certain number of years, freezing the number of licenses issued. Over harvesting forced each state to take these measures. License fees and permits also cost more in those Pacific States. The receipts are dedicated to their marine departments, none of which suffer the way Maine’s DMR does.

DMR seems as much an endangered species in Maine as the sea urchins do off the coast. Perhaps vocal harvesters will be able to save both. Ted thinks so. “I think that when the chips are down, the fishermen seem to come through at the last minute and raise all kinds of hell to get people to pay attention. They really don’t want to lose the Department of Marine Resources. That seems to come through time and time again at the last minute.”

Most divers and buyers want regulation by DMR over legislation. But at one Fisherman’s Forum, Mark Crockett threw out a warning to former Commissioner Brennan, “Hell or high water, through DMR or the Legislature, we are going to protect this industry.”

LEGISLATION passed in the spring of 1993. An emergency act to affect harvesting right away, the law closed the season for two months that year and for three months in subsequent years, from May 15th to August 15th. This first effort barely pleased anyone.

Then OSHA, reacting to several diver deaths, shook the urchin industry, ruling that the diver was the employee of the boat owner. The boat owner was therefore responsible for the diver’s safety and had to meet OSHA safety requirements. Some of these requirements don’t make sense for urchin divers working in surf. Also, in this business it’s the urchin divers who tend to employ boats and their owners in their off-

season; OSHA had it backwards. Over the winter of 1993-94, many lobstermen wouldn't hire out to divers because of potential liability. The OSHA ruling was struck down in a legal appeal, but the threat of liability still lingers.

In August 1993, a lunch at DiMillo's Floating Restaurant in Portland brought together anyone associated with urchining: processors, buyers, harvesters, boat tenders, truckers. They formed the Maine Urchin Association. They hired an August law firm, Doyle and Nelson, to lobby. The bill they worked for included three major points: 1) a 2 month closure, over by August 1; 2) increased license fees for processors, boats, harvesters, buyers; and 3) creation of an urchin fund with money designated for research, management, and law enforcement, supported by the increased fees. The bill was killed in committee.

Meanwhile urchin divers, who had spearheaded the movement for conservation of the resource, wanted to be sure their voice was heard. They joined with some draggers to form the Maine Urchin Harvester Association. They helped to defeat the effort to shorten closure, arguing that the three month closure hadn't been given a chance yet, so why shorten it.

It's not surprising then that the harvesters liked, for the most part, the bill put forward by Jim Mitchell, the Marine Resources Committee Cochair, which passed in April, 1994. By all accounts the Committee tends to pay more attention to the people on the water than those on land.

Under this bill, an emergency four year period of limited entry begins in 1995. To qualify for a license from 1995 to 1998, one must have a 1994 sea urchin hand harvesting or dragging license. In addition, the Maine coast is divided into two zones with a separate closed season for each. Zone 1, from Penobscot Bay to the west, is closed April 1 to August 15. Zone 2, from Penobscot Bay to the east, is closed May 15 to October 1st. Licenses can be purchased only for one zone.

Under this measure, license fees from 1995 through 1997 also went up:

*Hand Harvesting	\$ 160
*Dragging	160
*Boat Tender	35
*Wholesale Seafood with urchin buyer's permit	500
*Wholesale Seafood with urchin harvester's permit	2,500

The bill establishes a Sea Urchin Research Fund in DMR. Funded with the increase in fees, the fund levels are estimated around \$400,000 a year. The bill calls for a half-time marine resources specialist. Who will actually do the study, DMR itself or an outside researcher, is yet to be decided. Under this law DMR may also

adopt rules requiring log books. Log books present all kinds of problems in layout design for draggers and hand harvester and in monitoring.

What the processors and non-harvesters would prefer is a series of zones with rolling closure periods so that some parts of the coast would be open every month. Processors then could stay open year round. ISF Trading in particular wants to compete with Japanese suppliers through mid-August over the important Japanese holidays celebrating ancestors. Many in the industry want to see funds for resource management and enforcement restored. Maine processors also wince to see that the big buyers who process urchins out of state only have to pay \$500 for a license. It's a good bet that the Maine Urchin Association will be back in the fall of 1994 working for changes in this legislation.

The Marine Resources Committee also took on

*To protect urchin beds that may be
wiped out soon by wildcat diving
and dragging, an emergency four
year period of limited entry begins in
1995. No new divers and draggers
will be licensed.*

diver safety, the politically sensitive issue that was getting the headlines. Another bill, introduced by Buster Townsend of Eastport, calls for new safety regulations for hand harvesters of urchins and scallops. Boat tenders must attend a training session to get their license.

Because of fiscal cutbacks and uncertain leadership, the state was unable to take the initiative in dealing with a clear crisis in a new industry. DMR instead waited for a consensus to develop among the divers, processors and buyers. Amid a bewildering variety of opinions, a reluctant consensus finally developed among the players, which led to legislation.

Whether it is fine tuned enough and in time to save a resource that had no value five years ago will play out loudly over the next few years. For the divers and pickers and buyers and processors who have struck gold in Maine's urchin beds, the stakes are high and the lure is great.

salt

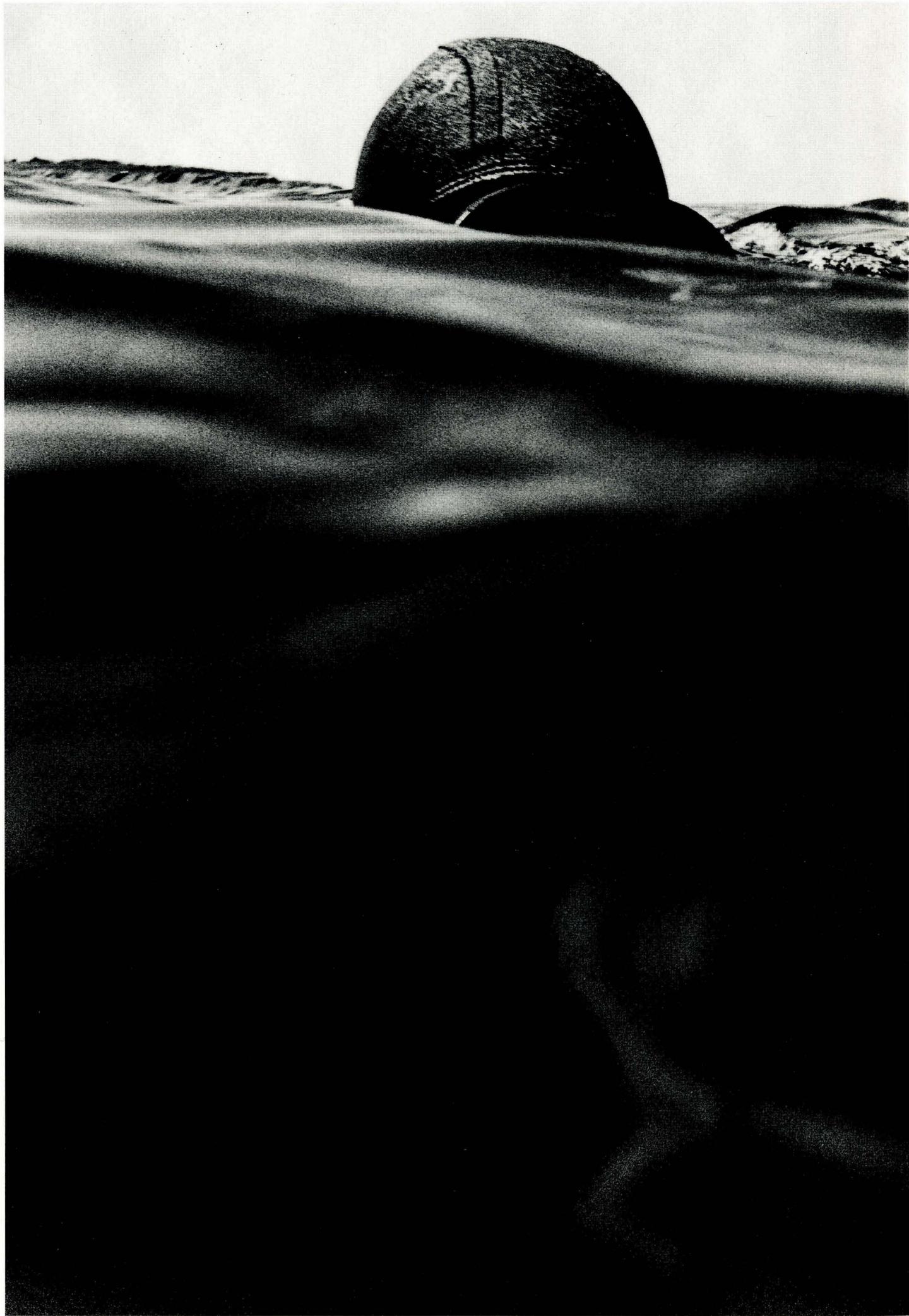
DIVING THE LEDGES
OF CASCO BAY



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREE KEHN











Sassy! Pg. 10 - Flashback '81 Parties Italian Style

W

Isaac Rains

Merry Christmas Happy New Year

ADOLEO

16 KANE 3TH STREET NEW YORK



The Beauty Escape

By Jennifer F. Brewer

Photography by Richard Sitler

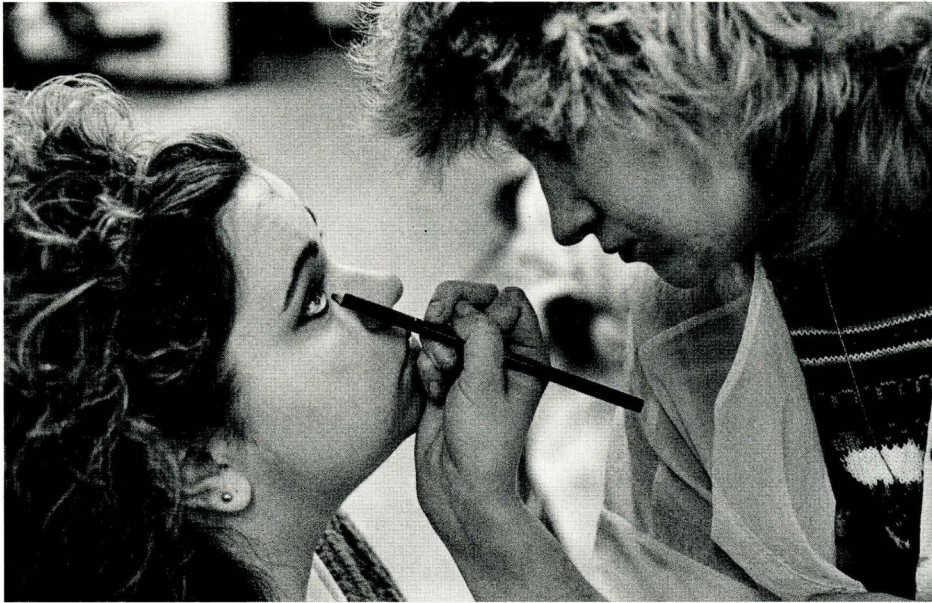
“Careful, I’m tender.”

Kelly Randall grins and slumps into the soft vinyl of her hydraulic chair. Before her, a silver mirror reflects the clinic at Central Beauty School in Augusta.

Kelly’s blond tousle brushes the collar of her stained lab coat. The shaggy mane will soon be transformed, tuft by overprocessed tuft, into a stiff, wavy mass.

“Hide that, okay?”

Left: Taking a break at the Central Beauty School in Augusta.



Unabashed, Kelly tugs at her dark roots. Her fellow student, Michelle, stands behind the battered upholstery. Michelle brandishes a curling iron and gives me a sideways glance before resuming her conversation with Kelly about brothers and boy friends.

Other figures in white criss-cross the wide open space of the clinic floor. They walk briskly to the supply room or to instructors for expert advice. Fingers maneuver in search of dexterity. They comb, wash, cut, curl, set, perm, color, dry and arrange the hair on the heads of their patrons and one another.

About them lie the tools of beautification: clippers and nippers and scissors and razors and tweezers and powders and sticks and cleansers and oils and creams and bottles and sprayers and polishes and rollers and pins and capes. A print from *Milady*, 1953, hangs on a wall to illustrate "New Hair Replacing Old Hair." In the picture, a dark sprout emerges from a bulb-like papilla below the follicle that preceded it. The old structure disintegrates into feathery matter. Blood vessels trail below cell walls.

Customers walk through the clinic door, seeking fashion at a discount. A \$3.50 microtrim. A shampoo, cut and style. for \$7.50. Colorings and permanent waves starting at \$14.

Two stations down from us, Tera

Wadsworth silently performs the preparatory steps of a permanent. Her own brown highlighted hair pulls back tightly from her broad face, bangs hairsprayed into an abundant crown of curls above her forehead. Her patron, a large woman with thin graying locks, holds up one translucent end paper after another for her young stylist.

A student without a customer swivels in her own chair, eyes unfocused. She yawns, covering her mouth.

CENTRAL BEAUTY School, with 31 students, is smaller than most of the 13 cosmetology schools in Maine. Like other owners of private vocational schools, Karen Sleeper charges the going rate. For 1500 hours of training, an enrollment of up to one year, each student pays \$4,300 in tuition plus \$400 for textbooks and hairstyling, manicure and cosmetic kits.

Enrollment in Maine's beauty schools now stands at 722, although this number fluctuates from month to month as students graduate or withdraw. When they graduate, they receive diplomas and qualify to take the State Board of Cosmetology's licensing exam. All but one of the schools in Maine are accredited by

the National Accrediting Commission of Cosmetology Arts and Sciences and can offer federally funded financial aid to students. In some states cosmetology is part of the public vocational education program but none of Maine's technical colleges offer this curriculum.

According to Kelly Randall, Central Beauty School is like high school all over again.

"It's like being with your mother. You're gonna do this, you're gonna do that. I mean we're all grown adults. We know between right and wrong. If we can't figure it out for ourselves, then maybe we shouldn't be here. We should be in a padded room somewhere, you know?"

"But don't get me wrong. They're people, just—they have their days just like everybody else."

In the break room, rock and roll ricochets off painted cinderblock walls and peeling contact paper decorates one of three institutional tables. Girls tease one another good naturedly and gossip with less benevolence.

A cigarette balances between Kelly's long fingers. Her other hand dangles casually from the wrist, elbow pivoting on her knee as she sits on the back of a chair.

I lean my head back against the concrete wall and look at her through lowered eyelids. A little like Kelly, I put in my time at this place.

Dreading the poisonous odor of a permanent wave solution, I am more comfortable on this hard bench than I am in the clinic. There, the soft rubber scalp of a mannequin head reminds me of the Barbie doll that lived in my bedroom for half a decade with flapping green eyelids and glued-on, mascara-drenched lashes. I will stay long enough to find out about these women's lives and their work, their hopes and their dreams.

When the schoolday ends, Kelly also will leave, but she will return. Tomorrow and the next day and the day after that until she completes her remaining 12 days.

"It beats sittin' home every day

with two screamin' kids. Not that I don't love my kids, but—no phone and one vehicle and he's usually gone in the car so I'm stranded home. It tends to suck. It's gonna suck when I'm out of here. Especially if I don't get a job. Just sit at home, be a vegetable."

Behind her head, a large round black and white clock reminds me that she has not signed out of the clinic.

"Eight hours a day, 40 hours a week. Sign out five minutes early and they'll chase you down with the clipboard. It happened one Friday."

Of the 29 women and two men who study at the beauty school, this cynical 20-year-old has been here the longest.

"I'm the last one left from my class. So I'm kind of the lone duck, all alone, you know. Left sittin'."

"We stress things like perfect attendance," Karen Sleeper tells me. She runs the school from behind a large pane of glass. The door to her office stands open.

Of the current six-person senior class, Tera Wadsworth has the best attendance and will graduate first. She is the daughter of a beautician named Kathleen Parker who attended Central Beauty School 11 years ago. Kathy now has her own salon in her home in East Union. Tera will work in her mother's shop after graduating.

"I've done a complete turnaround here from what I was like in high school. My grades have stayed in the 90s; in high school they weren't very good. I haven't missed a total of five days; in high school I was missing time constantly. I hated it. Didn't want nothing to do with it. I did what I had to do and graduated, basically.

"In the long run, I want to have my own business, too. I want to develop my own clientele. I don't think I'll ever move too awful far, so I won't have a problem with them moving with me. I don't want to live in anything too awful crowded. But, I don't know, it depends what hap-

pens once I get out on my own and who I meet and where I end up, basically."

I leave the school by the office door. A hallway lined with frame after frame of Central Beauty School class photographs follows me out of the building. Feathery boas drape bared shoulders. Beckoning faces smile with the allure of a promise. For some of these women, this place can fulfill that promise. It will hasten a dream with the granting of a diploma. For others, I fear, a dream may be suspended—adapted, to the boundaries of each woman's circumstance.

For me as for them, the dream is an old one. The dream of becoming a glamorous image, a beauty incarnate. A being so perfect she might even ignore the marketplace voices that constantly tell her how to be more splendid.

Outside in the parking lot, the spell shakes loose reluctantly. Along Riverside Drive, a load of knotted softwood hurtles northward. The patient face of a draft horse dozes behind the barred window of a trailer trucking south. Across from Central Beauty School's neat hand-painted sign, Kirschener's meat-packing plant distributes supermarket-bound hot dogs, sausages, hams and roast beef. On the other side of the school, down an embankment, Statler Tissue churns a soup of frothy waste into the Kennebec River. A large

pussy willow grows through the industrial diamond wire mesh fence at the edge of the lot.

Parked cars wait to carry students home from the beauty school. A few live in Augusta, others in neighboring towns. Many live in small communities up to an hour away. Owl's Head, Oakland, Wayne, Whitefield, Palermo, South Monmouth, Winthrop, East Union.

YOU FIGURE there isn't anybody that gets closer to a person than a hairdresser, other than their doctor." Kathy Packard is a Central Beauty School graduate and the mother of Tera Wadsworth. I talk to her in a sunlit alcove of her salon, "Hair It Is" in East Union. This cluster of homes at the top of a rise is one corner of the 1,989-person town of Union.

"You are the only other person that is allowed, or has a license to touch someone. And as a matter of fact, you know more about that person than their doctor does. You have to be their confidant, their psychologist."

Around 350 customers come to Kathy's home-based shop from a radius of 25 miles. They come because she is the keeper of a dream, an image-maker. When they give her "that total trust," they grant her the

For some of these women, this place can fulfill a dream. For others the dream may be dashed by the boundaries of each woman's circumstance.

Left: Kelly applying makeup to Tera.



Fingers comb, wash, cut, and curl, seeking dexterity.

Above: Beginning students cutting hair on mannequin.

power to create with her hands, the power to reflect with her words.

Kathy must be accustomed to living directly above her own beauty shop. Poised, she crosses her legs neatly and folds her hands in her lap. A diamond nestles next to her wedding band. Her round eyes meet mine across an antique table of dark

carved wood. Its marble top offers promotional fliers and presents a brittle plastic display of hair care products in squeezable plastic bottles.

Outside the salon, an ancient apple tree remains from the farm that earlier residents of this house once cultivated. Terraced steps lead from

the shop entrance to the front of the property. An assemblage of trucks advertises Bill Packard's pavement maintenance business. The roads in this area turn from tar to gravel in places. They probe low gray woodlands and leap to broad vistas of open pasture. I can't blame Tera for wanting to live in this country idyll.



The Packard's house sits back from the road a few feet more than it did at one time. The structure was "what they considered 50 percent depreciated which was uninhabitable" when they purchased it. Tera says that when they bought the place, you could see right through its walls.

Two men walk in and out the

door to Kathy's shop carrying metal tool boxes. A monkey wrench, a heavy duty drill. Eventually they strain through the door under the weight of a hot water heater. One of the workmen is Kathy's nephew. He takes a Polaroid snapshot of the work's progress.

"You like the way that heat looks, huh?" teases Kathy with affection and her ever-ready smile.

"Oh my god, I'm gonna take it home right under my pillow," the young man joshes in return.

No sign hangs from the signpost outside the house to advertise the salon.

"My whole career has been based on word of mouth," says Kathy. "I can honestly say there isn't a client that I don't like to do. They pass the word along. If you're doing somebody you like, chances are they're associating with somebody that you'll like also. People that you're willing to bend over to help out.

"You're there for the marriages, and the special occasions. The proms, the first dates. You don't think of age until you look at it in kids and the fact that the ones that I started out with, some of 'em now have not only graduated high school, but they've graduated college—to watch their lives change in that way is kind of neat.

"We usually set prom day aside and we do nothing but girls for the prom. We've taken before and after shots. You watch 'em in one picture and then in the next one and then it looks like they're all grown up.

"The only thing that disappoints me is I never get to see the complete picture. Some of 'em will bring back what the picture was after they've got their prom gown and all that on, but you never actually get to see 'em all dressed up that night. You get the hairdo and the jeans, but you never get the hairdo and the dress."

Tera's decision to work with her mother pleases Kathy. "In what I've seen, I think she's gonna be very, very good with her clients. And she's got a real knack for doing it."

Kathy occasionally travels to other parts of the country for educational programs. There is an annual show in New York that she sometimes attends with her husband.

"He's kind of passing that part of it on to Tera and having her go with me now. But that's really another whole life. You go there to experience it. You almost get claustrophobic when you go into that show because it is so mobbed with people. And you see all the things that could possibly be. And his comment was, by the second or third day, he says, 'I think it's time to go home, because this is beginning to look normal to me.'"

For both of these women, beauty school provided something that high school did not.

"Looking back in my yearbook, one of my goals was to go to beautician school. But I never made it out of high school. It was ten years later before I got to go to beautician school. So it was after a career in bookkeeping, and marriage, and one child, and a business of my own that I decided now was the time.

"So it was a very long year between working a job, caring for a home and a child, and doin' school, too. But because it was something that I really wanted to do, well, it made it worth while."

Kathy thinks that Tera's decision "was probably a little bit easier for her because she could do it right from high school and didn't have the other pressures on her.

"I think it makes a difference, having been out in the working world for a period of time before you go to beautician school. And I see this in kids when it comes close to graduation time.

"They'll say, 'I don't know what I want to do.'

"And my advice to them is, 'Then take that year.' Take a job, or whatever, for a year and find out.

"Because you'll find out real quick that you don't want to work in McDonald's for the rest of your life."

Mother and daughter went to the same beauty school. On Career Day they tell junior high students they like their work and their customers.

Right: Tera Wadsworth and her mother, Kathy Packard, speaking to junior high students.

GIVE YOUR attention to this young lady and please be courteous." Mr. White, the supervising teacher, quiets the clamor of seventh and eighth graders so that Kathy Packard can offer her Career Day presentation. She does this every year for the junior high students at School Administrative District 40. This year Tera accompanies her.

In the Home Economics room, legs dangle from desks and overflow onto countertops next to kitchen sinks.

"And people sitting on the stoves, don't burn your butt," adds Mr. White.

With a titter, Kathy steps forward to introduce herself and play a videotape produced by Pivot Point International, the educational system used at Central Beauty School.

Smiling young cosmetology students slide past the eyes of the silent children. A quick glimpse of a skyscraper-lined city street. A high fashion stylist snipping a model's short fluff of tight curls at a frantic pace. Hands and shears move so fast that cut hair flies in all directions as part of a fantastically lit stage show.

"You have a dream! Shining so bright! . . . Service businesses are going to flourish. . . . Cosmetology is going to be bigger than it's ever been! . . . The job security in the future in this business will be spec-

tacular . . . So if you're doing it well, you've got a job forever and you'll make great money . . . Freedom of expression. And success."

As Kathy and Tera tell their audience, Maine's beauty school programs require 1500 hours of training. After 200 hours of classroom and technical training with textbooks and mannequins, students learn primarily from hands-on work. Each school has a clinic where customers pay low fees for work by student beauticians. Periodic quizzes on such things as anatomy, color theory, chemistry and mock State Board exams on techniques of hairstyling, nail care and skin care prepare students for licensing exams.

"Is it fun?" a quiet girl ventures forth her short and simple inquiry.

"It's fun," Tera replies, swaying ever so slightly with self-consciousness in her low-heeled shoes. Her flowered print dress is soft and loose about her sloping shoulders. At her neck she has pinned a small pair of gold scissors.

Within weeks after graduating from Medomak Valley High School, Tera began studying cosmetology. Michelle, her neighbor and friend, signed up when she found out that Tera was going. There were originally nine people in their class.

"The first six weeks, you're off in a room. You have to learn. 'Cause you all've got a different personality and that's your best test for whether

you're going to be able to deal with this in the field. You've got to change, every time you talk to a different one.

"You get downstairs and you start working on real people. It's a lot more fun. You get to meet people. Especially for me because I chose to go to Augusta. And I don't know anybody up there."

The Maine Department of Labor projects that between 1988 and 2000, the employment of hairdressers, hairstylists and cosmetologists will increase 36.8 percent, from 2,874 to 3,635. In a State of Maine 1990 survey, the average hourly wage was \$8.70.

But many beginning beauticians earn less than that amount. Nationally the beginning weekly earning of a full-time licensed beautician is only \$120 to \$160, according to the United States Department of Labor.

As Kathy tells the inquisitive school children, "When you're first starting out, you probably are barely making minimum wage for the number of hours that you gotta put in." Turnover is also high in this field, nation-wide and within the state. In Maine, over two-thirds of the 222 expected number of average annual openings will be to replace workers who leave their jobs.

As in the rest of the nation, over half of Maine's working beauticians are self-employed and around 90 percent of them are women. Most of the remaining wage and salary workers are employed in salons. As 40 percent of the cosmetologists in the state work in Cumberland County, it would appear that there is room for growth in this industry in other areas.

Further, competition from persons trained out-of-state is low as Maine's licensing board has more extensive requirements than other states in New England.

But the capital required to equip a new shop with the furnishings and supplies necessary to compete with other salons in most areas requires a

major investment. Further, the textbook used by the vast majority of cosmetology students in the state has only one chapter on salon management.

At Central Beauty School, some effort is made to impress upon students the importance of service-oriented communication and public relations. Their graduates, however, do not necessarily leave with the full range of abilities needed for success in small business. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, experienced cosmetologists earn \$250 to \$400 per week.

In answer to a boy's question about potential earnings for an "independent" hairstylist like Kathy, she replies, "Now you would probably be working anywhere from \$20,000 to \$40,000 a year."

Her own prices are "about average for the area. Perms go for \$45 and up. And haircuts are, for a male, \$10, and \$14 on a female." In many salons, permanent waves can go up beyond \$100.

To earn the boundless salaries of the platform artists and other specialists employed by the businesses that fuel the international fashion and personal care product industries with advertising, film, television and marketing, a young person's indoctrination into beauty culture requires more than a basic vocational education. It also demands a cosmopolitan education in well-connected salons, clinics and schools in other parts of the Western Hemisphere to acquire advanced training in product and technical knowledge.

Between presentations, chaos ensues as enthusiastic youngsters rush forward to plunder samples of gel, face cream, shampoo.

"Excuse me. Excuse me."

"What is this purple stuff?"

"Do you have any of that black and white stuff that you had last year?"

Out in the hallway, a clown is traipsing in full costume. A game warden offers his knowledge in another room. The principal represents

the Coast Guard.

Two girls bounce up to Kathy for a moment.

"Hi!" the more courageous one announces. "I put gel in my hair!"

Sure enough, above their delighted smiles, a few individual strands of hair twist on their foreheads like damp, tangled wires.

Facing her pupils, again, Kathy crosses her ankles in narrow-heeled pumps with bows on the sides. Black lace peeks out from under her short purple knit mini-dress and a structured black princess-sleeved jacket shows off her large shield-like silver earrings.

Under a full cap of loose brown highlighted curls, her warm eyes scan the room for a response from the faces before her. Her own face has been painted so carefully that its shadows blend into the smoothness of a sculpture.

"Have you ever made any big mistakes on real people?"

"Does dying your hair a lot stunt the growth?"

"Did you ever give anybody a Mohawk?"

"Do you get much call for Prisms?"

"What colors can you do that are, like, different from normal?"

"I have all the array of colors," Kathy replies. Looking at a girl seated in the back of the room with a brightly colored streak down the

front of her bleached blonde touse, "Like she's got probably—?"

"Eggplant."

In front of Tera a straight-haired girl leans forward onto her elbows. Her head lollygags to the side.

"Who did your hair?" she points at Tera.

Tera smiles. Without a word, she lifts her thumb from her lap to indicate her mother.

The girl moves her outstretched arm to point at Kathy.

"Who did your hair?"

Kathy echoes her daughter with a swing of her thumb and a tilt of her head. "Tera."

Mr. White asks the girls when their parents first let them use makeup.

"They still don't like it but I still do," declares a girl in the back even before Mr. White can finish.

Another girl's hand shoots up. "I was 11."

"She said I couldn't in the sixth grade but she don't—"

"Anybody else? Nobody else wears any?"

"I do. My mother don't have no say word in it!"

"She don't have no say word in it?" Mr. White challenges the girl's grammatical errors.

"My cousin bought it for me and I just wore it.

She said 'Take it off' and I said 'Get a life.' And she shut right up."



I ASK KELLY RANDALL if she'd like to have a beer. "I would, but I ain't drank in two years and Billy'd come home and freak." She sits on the sofa in her clean but sparsely furnished apartment in Winthrop, an hour's drive west of East Union. With her infant, Nicole, on her lap, Kelly feeds butterscotch pudding to her 17-month-old daughter, Brittany. Shop 'n Save brand Tater Tots heat in the oven.

From my seat on the floor, I ask Kelly what she'd do if she won the Megabucks.

"I'd buy a shop," she answers softly. "A nice shop."

She already knows how she would decorate it all in black and white with paintings of red flowers to break up the starkness. It would have lots of plants and a stereo.

Kelly figures she wouldn't even work behind a chair. She'd run the place.

"Big. Real big. Open a chain. If they're good. All goes well. And a big house. And horses. I want horses."

She would buy new wardrobes for herself and her children, a new Z71 Chevy shortbed pickup truck and a Monte Carlo SS. Black with a red interior. She might even think about going to Boston, if things were different.

"I'd love to go there. I'd love it. But I don't have the balls to move there. I'd never take my kids to a place like that. I wouldn't want to raise my kids in Boston. I like Maine. I don't think I'll ever move out of Maine. Not—I can't say that. If my kids were old enough and there was very good job potential, you bet your ass I would. If I thought I could do this and really get somewhere, I'd go for it. But you should have that attitude anyway. You know what I mean?"

But Kelly hasn't won the Megabucks yet. She moved out of her parents' house and quit high school before finishing her fresh-

man year. Two years later she returned to school to earn her General Education Diploma. In February of 1991 she signed up at Central Beauty School with her boyfriend's sister-in-law. Her four-person family now lives off of unemployment checks and Aid For Dependent Children.

"There were days I didn't know where my next meal was comin' from. I didn't want to live in an apartment for the rest of my life. My mother's got a big, beautiful house. I was brought up where you're married, you have kids, you have a house. The white house and the fence and all that."

Like Billy, the father of her children, Kelly was the youngest in a large family. Her brother was a hairdresser in Winthrop before he moved to California where he met Christy Brinkley and Madonna and eventually joined the service. He used to do Kelly's hair when she was younger.

"A lot of people see it as a get-away. My mother had seven kids and she used to love to go to the salon. She'd go in and—you're just pampered for hours. Somebody waitin' hand and foot on you. Lot of people enjoy coming to the salon. The majority love it.

"I like to have somebody sit down in my chair and just say, 'Go ahead and do whatever you want to do.' Once you learn how to make something happen by putting your fingers a certain way you can do anything. Anything you want to make.

"You can go a long ways. I could go back, get my instructor's license. I could be a platform artist, I can be a demonstrator. I can be a distributor. I can work for State Boards. I can give exams. Anything—you could join an artistic team and travel across the country. You could become Karen Sleeper."

With a low overhead investment, Kelly could go to Old Orchard Beach and work person to person.

"All you have to have is your own gear. Everybody wants to look good."

But once she gets her beautician's



license, Kelly is not sure that she will take a job. After being out of work for 18 months and leaving Local Union 327 in Augusta, Billy says he wants to look for another job.

"I said I don't give a f—if he goes to work at McDonald's pushin' a broom."

Unless they find a cheap



"I'd buy a beauty shop if I won the Megabucks."

Above: Kelly Randall in her Winthrop apartment with daughters, Nicole and Brittany.

babysitter, Kelly may have to stay at home. Even if she does work, she doesn't want to be a beautician for the rest of her life. She has a \$2,500 loan to pay back, but after that she wants to see about going back to school again to study something else. She'd like to work as a welder but isn't sure that she'd feel com-

fortable learning that kind of work. She has thought of becoming a radiologist.

When she went back to high school, she worked hard to earn A's on the stories she wrote for her English class. She did well in spelling bees and she used to draw rainbows and unicorns and roses

with arrows through them. For the same cost as beauty school, Kelly could earn a two-year associates degree at the University of Maine at Augusta. I wonder if she has thought of it.

"Nicky, Nicky Noodle," Kelly croons at her screaming baby.

Around the corner in the kitchen,

Brittany discards her supper, one golden brown Tater Tot at a time.

"Eat!" her mother menaces.

"Eat 'em! Yummy!"

She clenches her teeth, but the rising corners of her mouth reveal her amusement. From where I sit in the living room, I cannot see the suppertime antics.

"There's about ten Tater Tots on the floor—eleven."

With a sly grin the child accomplishes her escape. I lift her out of her highchair and she throws me a scratched plastic ball with colorful shapes inside. She amuses herself next by trying to dance.

As she bounces up and down her bare feet stick out of her fuzzy pink pajamas. Earlier today Kelly curled and hairsprayed her blond locks. They wave like antennae as she bobs her downy head back and forth. I can't smell the milk that she spilled in a temper tantrum earlier.

The little girl frowns and then smiles. She hits and then hugs, scowls and then laughs. She yells and then opens her eyes wide, feigning innocence.

"She knows she's puttin' on a show. Look at her. She's wicked. She is a little character."

"She loves hair. If there's a brush on the floor, she'll get it. And—if I'm layin' down on the couch—come up behind me and rub my head and brush it. Pat me on the

head and then look me in the face, see what I'm doin'.

"She likes it. She laughs. 'Pretty Momma,' she'll say. If you comb her hair and tell her that she's pretty, she'll rub her hand in her hair. She thinks her hair's done.

"She'll put my shoes on and walk in 'em. I had a pair of pumps. She used to put 'em on and walk in the kitchen. Listen to 'em bang."

Kelly gropes for words to describe her experience at the Central Beauty School. "It's hard to explain unless you've been there yourself. There's a lot of different people that go there. You got people with kids, you got people that got boyfriends and they're going to the movies. Everybody's different. Some people woke up in a good mood. The day went good, their check came. Other people, they're broke and bummin' and sick and sick of school.

"Like some of 'em there are very high class and ritzy, snooty almost like. And their friends are them type people. Other people that just sit back and do their work. Some people don't get along with others. They have best friends and friends, you know what I'm sayin'?"

"Everybody's in it to make money. She's gettin' money for our tuition. All the retailers are getting money. You go in and you go to f—in' work. And then at the end of the day, when they say you can go home,

you go home. While everybody's starvin' and sufferin' and goin' without.

"See? You think about it that way, it's sickenin'. But there's other ways to think about it. You figure you're gonna be out of there and some day you're gonna be makin' money and—You know?"

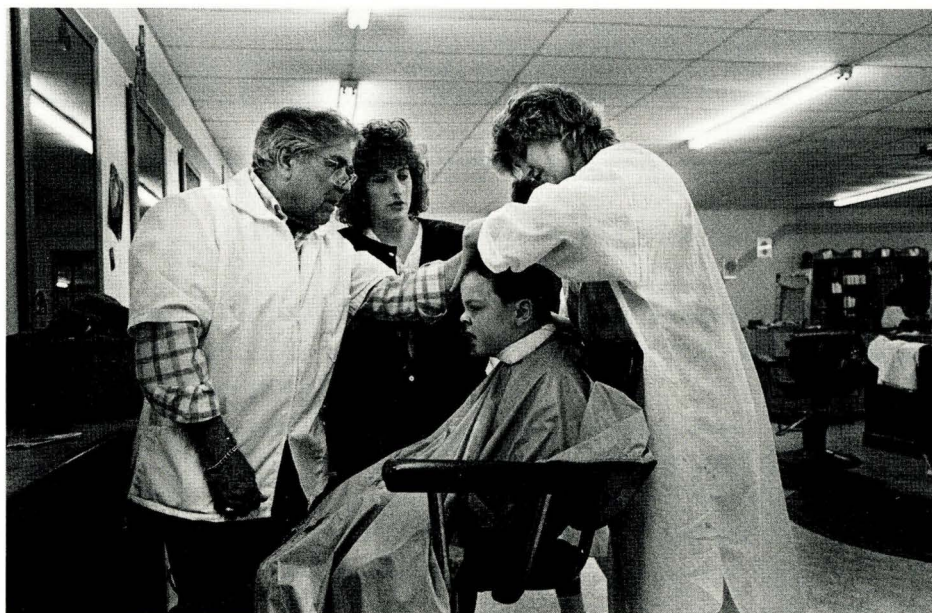
Kelly looks to my eyes for understanding.

Yes, I do know. Sitting here on the floor, dodging her hair-pulling daughter, I know that there are other ways to think about it. How many little girls don't, at least for a minute, aspire to the mystique of the hairdresser's art?

But here, away from the clutter of the classroom and workplace, the starkness of Kelly's predicament is excruciatingly visible. I go to the door to leave. The fan next door at Carleton Woolen Mill is silent for now. Garbage bags overflow from oil drums at the foot of the stairs outside the slate blue aluminum siding of the building. A man in his shirtsleeves stares out an upstairs window across the parking lot. Kelly tells me about the mill rat that she has seen in the parking lot. After Billy killed it with a flat rock, it lay there for several days before somebody else got rid of it.

I HAD NO IDEA that Tera's graduation would be such a spectacle. Just inside the clinic door, I plunk myself into the nearest seat. I blink and then blink again as a dream materializes. Star-spangled sheets of white paper cover mirrors and doorways. A mound of balloons floats above the expanse in a hammock of tulle. More rise from drawer knobs and hover at the end of a carpeted runway. Crepe paper twists to festoon a corner entrance. Tinsel streams over another.

All of this work, the students have done. With some prodding from the Central Beauty School staff, a hand-



ful of young women have planned this event.

White cloth blankets students' stations. An offering of cherry cheesecake, crackers, dips, and brownies waits for a feasting crowd. A tiny hand-folded staircase of spray-painted silver cardboard ascends from gray-green moss to offer handrails of pearl.

On the wall above my head, gold letters congratulate TERA, JEAN, MICHELLE, SUE, JULIE and DEBBIE. Out of sight, the six graduating seniors prepare their models for the fashion show that will precede the awarding of diplomas.

Tera's cousin passes through the clinic floor in a short dress of satiny fuchsia. Her shirred bodice gathers, bustle-like, at the hip above black-stockinged legs.

"It's a woman!" Karen Sleeper calls to her, standing beside me in a lacy pink gown.

Krystal, one of the student greeters, pushes a broom with one hand. A cigarette in the other, she skillfully teeters in her stiletto heels and short black miniskirt.

Rain falling outside unites arriving guests in warmth and humidity. We fill half of the 99 chairs.

Young men sporting fresh shaves and clean dungarees saunter in to find seats. In heels and skirts, young women patter. They greet one another familiarly. Former students attend to experience the spectacle and honor their colleagues.

A family straggles in with a sleeping infant in a portable carrier. One balding father in dress slacks and loafers leans against the reception desk. Lanky pre-teenaged girls in pegged blue jeans, long hair, and costume jewelry giggle excitedly, far from a mother with a camcorder. Instamatic cameras pass back and forth.

Kathy Packard arrives in heels and trenchcoat, with her entourage of mustachioed husband and younger child. Tera's father, his family, and a few of Tera's "close, close friends" make up the rest of her ten-person

*For Tera the stairway to
heaven glitters on graduation
night. For Kelly it is different. "She
didn't want much," they say.*

Left: Kelly cutting boy's hair while instructors observe.

contingent. Michelle's beau sits down in a clean collared shirt and wool jacket.

The fluorescent lights overhead blink off twice to warn us to take our seats. When darkness falls for the third time, the rosy half-light of a spotlight shines on the white trellis and artificial fig trees at the center of the runway.

Familiar arpeggios of the guitar solo "Stairway to Heaven" open the show. "All that glitters is worthy of gold!"

Bedazzled, my eyes witness women and girls strutting, parading, prancing, dancing, swinging and mincing their way down the runway in trappings of velvet and rhinestones and sequins and flounces. From this distance, their stage makeup looks natural to me.

"And now for the moment we've all been waiting for."

In black harem pants, Tera looks older and more confident tonight. With a widening smile, she strides up to her beaming instructor and receives her diploma. The five other graduates follow.

Families and friends mingle and make ready for the drive home. On the graduation cake, pink cutting shears and a blue hairdryer bloom in hand-decorated rosettes. The taste of made-from-scratch yellow crumbles onto my hand through a light paper napkin. Sugary icing curls sweetly around my tongue.

"I'm goin'." A little nostalgic, Tera says her good-byes.

"You're a good kid." Karen embraces her before the young woman walks out the door of the Central Beauty School.

I linger to see the tablecloths lift off of work stations. Silk flowers move to a corner of the room. Guests' folding chairs collapse into piles and the hydraulic chairs return to the center.

I walk through an empty classroom. Five rows of desks line up in the quiet. Dollops of pastel-colored pigments wait on a palette for tomorrow's make-up class.

I imagine that Kelly is home tonight with the television on.

"She didn't want much," Karen Sleeper's assistant told me on the day Kelly graduated. Only one friend was her audience when she took her diploma and left.

When the electric company turns off Kelly's power, she will run an extension cord to the garage below. And then she will move again, for the umpteenth time in the last several months. To a house trailer in Fairfield.

But for Tera, at least, the stairway to heaven glitters tonight. In the damp parking lot she climbs into her small Ford, along with her friends. Together they will ride back to East Union. In her hand she holds tightly to a silver balloon.

—salt

M A R S H



PEOPLE

By Emily Wilson.

Photography by Angela Wooldridge.



FROM THE CORNER of my eye, I see them moving in over the marsh, slow and heavy, the windjammer creak of huge wings. Two great blue herons sweep the land in a wide arc, part somewhere down near the cattails, one landing, the other heaving northward toward the upland slope where the peat bank abruptly gives into white pine and hardwood.

I know this marsh.

I know this marsh because, as a child, I saw it nearly every day through the windows of a Scarborough schoolbus. Because I sought out places along the roads near my house where I could get a glimpse of that coarse, brown sweep, the twisted grasses, the roots, the muck. Could smell the rampant, sulphurous odors, almost taste them. Could stand at a point immediate enough to feel the strain of its distances.

Back then, my experience of the marsh was bounded by my own tentativeness. A creature of the margin, I poked and prodded along its edges, only guessing at what lay "out there." I discovered an old boathouse half fallen into the river down on the tip of the old Payson Estate, a high nub of forest and abandoned fields jutting out into the marsh just south of my housing development. Through the gaping timbers, I could see all the way across the marsh toward Blue Point and Dunstan Corner. It unsettled me to realize that this point of land, my "back yard," was actually only a short bird flight from those villages. The uncrossable marsh.

Like an optical illusion, this new, contracted map came into my head, undermining the one I had formulated on the long rides around the marsh to ballet class every Tuesday at the Dunstan Grange. I am still not quite used to the actual nearness of the pieces of this town that border the marsh. Strange paradox for a 3,000 acre tract of open space.

Even if I did not physically venture out onto the marsh at that age, I was deeply engaged with it. I felt its presence as a kind of brooding inescapability, the way it always seemed to be there at random turns in the road, the contours of its waterways like some unearthed massive, bulky vasculature. I was held by the mystery of its rhythms, the seasonal shifts from summer's

velvety greens and golds into autumn's russet, then winter's press into uniform browns, the familiar husked-out feeling. There was the daily transformation from the muddy grooves of low tide to the shattered mirror surfaces of six hours later and the fact that I never knew just what the marsh would look like before I saw it. Back then, I needed a space upon which to loose my imagination and instead of going "out there," I let the marsh seep its way into me. From the earliest I can remember, I was in its grip.

I understand this only after years of absence from the marsh. Suddenly, without warning, its force has pulled me back. Just as instinctively as I did twenty years ago, I have found my way to its edges and farther, trudging

a course along an old railroad bed right through the center of its vast, corrugated acreage. I know the marsh now because I am in the middle of it, tracing its distances, its periphery of settled compass points: to the east, the low arm of Pine Point; then going west, the rise into Blue Point and the bowed line up to Dunstan Corner; to the north, the thick pine forests of Black Point and the high buttress of the old Payson Estate; back east to where the land flattens to the incoming wedge of the ocean.

I know the marsh now because I am stepping out onto its spongy banks, my hands combing the dead strands of the salt hay, my ears catching the brunt of the wind and the pocketings of bird sounds, my eyes scanning

the smudged bands of the peat banks for the flair of a white underwing.

At last, I am "out here," held upon the gnarled expanse between worlds, air and water, land and sea. The breadth and grittiness of the whole. I walk now with those early experiences tucked close, the old tentativeness left somewhere back at the edge of the woods.

MY MOTHER, like most of the mothers in the Olde Millbrook housing development, told her children never to go out onto the marsh. "If you fall in, that's it!" None of my friends ever ventured beyond the fringes of the woods. Not once.

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Right: Jan Peltier in front of her house on the Scarborough Marsh.

Jan Peltier did not know the marsh either when she and her husband moved to Olde Millbrook. Like my parents, they were part of a wave of upwardly mobile young families moving into Scarborough in the early 70s.

"I'm not sure I even knew [the marsh] existed," she tells me. "I just happened to be in the market to buy a house and I wasn't about to do it in the city."

Her first house was located just down the street from mine. A few years later, when the development expanded into the high ground of the old Payson Estate, Jan and her husband decided to build their own house. They bought a wooded piece of land overlooking the marsh very near the spot where the old boathouse stood. They were the ones who finally tore down its remaining rafters. Just beyond a steep rise behind Jan's sundeck, a dozen or so saltboxes, capes and garrison-style houses lie scattered among the fields and woods.

On the sundeck behind her house, Jan finds tranquility. The edginess which surfaces with the topic of town politics is gone.

A town councilor for six years, she has witnessed first hand the divisions within this diverse and rapidly growing community. She has told me that the biggest benefit of her term was "finding out how things really function, how the community is divided along certain village lines and age lines and education lines."

There are times when passing legislation in such a context is next to impossible. "Sometimes a benevolent dictatorship looks a lot nicer!"

Jan also knows about the tension that exists between newcomers like herself and members of families who have lived in Scarborough for generations. She saw it in criticism of her decision to build on the marsh.

"I think probably some of the negative came from people who had always lived around the marsh. For them it was, 'You can't grow corn on it, you can't build a house on it, it grows mosquitoes,' and I was thinking, 'Oh, this is really so beautiful.'"

Since that time, many more people have sought a place of their own next to the marsh. They are more willing than my parents were to put up with temperamental sump pumps and hearty mosquitoes. The population of Scarborough has mushroomed since the 20s from two thousand to more than six times that number, nearly doubling since the late 60s. The devel-

opment of land around the marsh has become a complex and impassioned issue. It is especially threatening to older people who have lived on the marsh all their lives.

"Not long after we built this house, my husband was out in the yard and a man came by," says Jan. "He had been the caretaker when this was the Payson Estate. It hadn't been many years since the houses here started going up so he was still familiar with how it used to look." She motions to the area behind her sundeck, once the site of a rambling orchard. "I think he was really lamenting. These ugly houses go up on this gorgeous piece of property that he used to care for. He saw the wheels of progress and I guess he didn't like them."

The marsh itself is now a state and federally protected wildlife management area, recognized for playing a key ecological role. It is a nursery for fish and shellfish, a sanctuary and feeding ground for thousands of shore and migratory birds, a vast holding tank for flooding

tide waters. It is the layering of thousands of years' worth of sediment and decaying spartina grasses. The mesh between five rivers and the sea.

Over the years, the marsh has been many things to its people as well as to its wildlife. Native Americans traveled here to dig its clams. Farmers harvested its salt hays from colonial days well into the 20th century.

Hunters came for the ducks, the snowy egrets, and hunted them to near extinction. Battles continue to arise over the use of its valuable and fragile border lands. In the late 50s, it was the sportsmen who called upon the state to intervene, to bring back the birds. Now, the environmentalists keep them and the rest of the marsh protected. Birdwatchers and tourists take over the pathways where hunter-trappers and salt hay farmers left off. The clambers go on digging the flats and people like Jan keep coming in search of something else.

I began to know the marsh from a point like Jan's, this view from afar, and then passed through stages of proximity. I have traversed the old railroad bed and I have spent time in the company of people whose lives have been entwined with the marsh, Jimmy Nye who grew up hunting its ducks and trapping its muskrats, Glen Downs who has clammed its mudflats since he was a boy, and Helen Perley who began exploring its



channels from the moment she arrived as a young woman.

All three of them have witnessed the changes in this town, the population boom, the shift from tracts of farmland to groomed housing developments. They've watched the marsh change both its natural patterns and the ones cut upon it by humans. They have experienced the shift from unspoken rules of activity within it to written laws.

An urgency has brought me to them, a fear that in losing the kinds of engagement they have had with the natural landscape, we are in danger of losing something of ourselves. It is this that has me trying to grasp their ways of knowing the marsh.

There are many things I will never know about the marsh. I come to it now a sojourner. But things happen. If I am out here long enough, the herons might sweep in to complete their circuit. They might come so close as to let me see the down of their underwings, their eyes. They might hang over me just long enough.

I AM STANDING with Jimmy Nye on the banking behind his red cottage, watching the boxcars of the Boston & Maine trundle across the marsh toward Black Point. I remember placing pennies on the rails of that line, then standing far back on the Winnock's Neck hill as the train passed through, hopping across the ties in search of a shiny wafer. Now, the rhythm meets a current in my bones. Remembered.

A narrow channeled throbbing.

Beside me, Jimmy removes his work cap and runs a sturdy hand across his white, close-cropped hair. Today the marsh is stark, pithy, a dull sheen outlining its waterways. Jimmy's blue eyes are fixed upon it. He seems expectant almost. I think of a story he told me once when I asked him about the changes he has seen on the marsh in the 77 years he has lived here.

"Well, they used to cut the hays on it when I was small. If they could get on the marsh, they'd hay it. Used the hay, I think, for bedding. That's all. And this part of the marsh, Portland Farms had a big bunch of cattle up there, cows and everything and they'd break through sometimes and come right out here on the

Black Point Road. Right down across the marsh there." Jimmy laughs easily. "They didn't care about the fences I don't think. See what I mean? Bunch of cows."

Jimmy was born and raised on this site in the Hunniwell House, a 300-year-old landmark built by one of Scarborough's early "Indian fighters." The "old house," as he calls it, was moved across the road some years back and fashioned into a museum and craft shop. The house behind us is the one Jimmy built for himself. To me, it is as much a landmark. After Jimmy retired as custodian of my elementary school, I remember looking for him as I rode past on the schoolbus every morning. I still find myself doing it now.

A few days ago, I saw him out here pushing his Rototiller through the black earth of his garden, getting it ready. Now, there are two or three rows of

carrots and onions in place, a string staked out for the sweetpeas. Throughout the growing season, Jimmy sells flowers and produce from the stump of an old tree in his front yard. In a small shed beside the garden, he seeds his sweetpeas in a long wooden tray in front of a plate glass window overlooking the marsh.

"If I can sell ten bunches of sweetpeas a day and get two dollars a bunch, that's good."

At the back of the shed, a collection of rusted steel traps hangs from a hook.

"I think I was 14 or 15 when I started [trapping] down here." Jimmy now sits comfortably on his living room couch, his feet stretched out in moccasins.

"Get up about five o'clock in

the morning when the sun was up, go all across the marsh. Gee, that was nice. Wasn't just me. There'd be four or five other fellas that was trappin' over there, too." He lowers his voice to a near whisper, pauses along the line of the story as if in the process of revealing a secret. "The tide would be in and I'd go down . . . and there'd be a muskrat in my trap. And I'd have to wait till the tide goes out first!" Jimmy's eyebrows shoot up and a big smile fills his face. "Three dollars a piece, you know? That was good money in the olden days."

As Jimmy unravels his account of growing up on the marsh, the pattern of his relationship to it begins to emerge. A common theme. Mink and muskrat, steel

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Right: Jimmy Nye.

trap, a pocketed income. From the beginning, he showed a knack for making extra money from what the marsh and the area around it had to offer. He worked at odd jobs harvesting hay for local farmers, digging graves. He sold his pelts to a furrier in Portland. Even collected copper wire along the roadways. When he was 15, he started picking blueberries up on the old Payson Estate.

"I was only 15 and I got a dollar a bushel, five bushels a day," he says. "I've done that all my life."

Perhaps because he could be out on the marsh alone in the early morning, his own boss, Jimmy put all of his energy into trapping when the short season called for it. Mink in the fall, muskrat in the spring. "I used to walk all the way from here on the marsh way over to there," he swipes his hand from south to north, indicating the strip of marsh that follows the Nonesuch River up to the Portland Farms area behind Route One. "Take me about two hours or three hours to check all the traps." Roughly 200 of them at his peak. "About 60 days, I'd get about 60 muskrats or more." He often used the money to buy school clothes.

Eventually, Jimmy even made money from the 12 acre piece of the marsh he owned himself when the state began its conservation program back in the late 50s. He says he was offered "about \$35 an acre." Nearly all of the marsh's 3,000 acres are now managed by Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW). Ironically, the shift from private to public domain has meant a lessened sense of freedom for people like Jimmy who grew up roaming the marsh.

"Used to be you could do most anything you wanted on the marsh," says Jimmy. Now fewer and fewer people take advantage of the hunting and trapping opportunities offered in the DIFW's management plan. Some stop because of the stringency of the regulations. Others just assume that these activities are no longer permitted here.

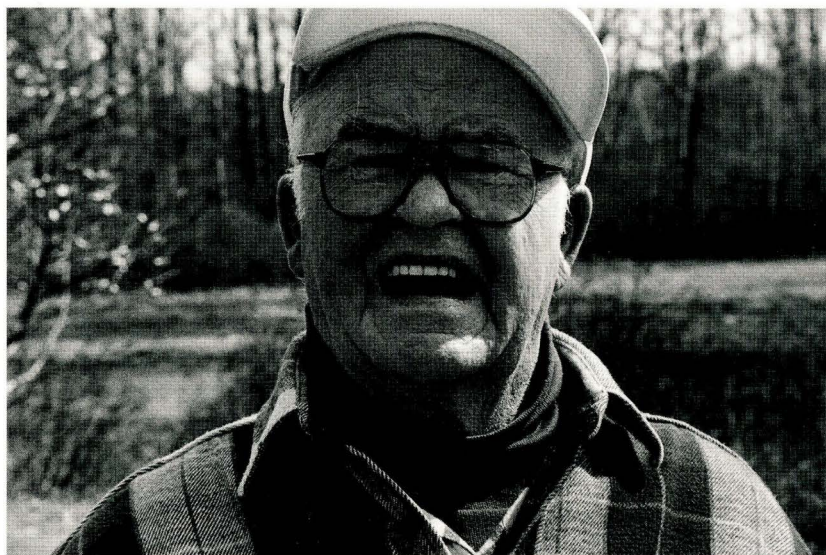
Still, Jimmy concedes, there have been many positive returns from the changeover. Not long ago he remembers being able to walk for miles out on the marsh without seeing a duck. Now the ducks are coming back.

It was Jimmy who suggested I accompany him on one of his walks down the abandoned path of the Old Eastern Railroad. Like the Boston & Maine, the line

plunges through the heart of the marsh from south to north, Blue Point to Black Point, in all, about a two-and-a-half-mile traverse. A couple of times a week, he comes here scouting for aluminum cans and anything else that might prove valuable. He tells me he once made \$16 in one trip to the redemption center. That too is good money. He has pinpointed a regular dumping spot near a culvert on the Black Point end of the road and that is where we are headed. Still, I suspect there is something else he wants to show me out here.

We've both brought a feeling of comfort to the outing, even a touch of festivity. Jimmy has dressed for the occasion in a smart red turtleneck, flannel shirt and chinos and wears a crisp white baseball cap inscribed in pink: "Maine: a State of Mind."

All around us, the mid-morning sky and the outgoing waters of the marsh form a bold, blue continuum. Jimmy seems extra alert, pitched slightly forward with



an expectant look on his face like the one he wore the other day watching the Boston & Maine from his backyard. He carries himself with a vigor I have not seen in him before. Shoulders squared, back straight, his stocky frame moving along briskly beside me, slightly ahead.

Jimmy still possesses the eye of the duck hunter. As we

walk, he keeps spotting pinpoints of white out on the brown plains. There are ducks all over the marsh today whistling into their landings.

"Now I don't care about shootin' 'em," says Jimmy. "I don't think I'd shoot one now." When I ask him why, he replies, "Oh, just the idea, let 'em live. And they ain't never much good to eat anyway. You have to know how to cook 'em." He laughs. "Oh, what a fishy taste if you don't cook 'em right!"

As we cross from the open marsh into an area of thick woods, Jimmy begins scanning the banks on either side of the path. From yards away, he fields a crumpled beer can from the bits of trash. A couple of Budweisers off to the left down the banking. Stiff-kneed, he levies himself down into the brush and positions himself on the roots of two alders. He squats and makes a grab for a half-submerged can. "Now these could have been hunters, you know it? Duck hunters a long time ago."

We're about a mile now from our starting point on the Pine Point Road, half way to our destination. The wide-open stretch of the marsh lies behind us. A bare

mass of hardwoods crowds the land on both sides. The path has become thick with mud.

Through the trees to the left, I can see the aluminum span of a warehouse, part of the industrial park that borders the marsh on the site of the old Portland Airport. Then, beyond that, the hilly tracts of the Willowdale Golf Course. "Never was a pond there when I trapped," says Jimmy, stopping again to identify an object out on the receding ice. A flag stick. "I got minks in there on the banking." On the other side of the path, the familiar ragged brown banks of the marsh curve toward us. Jimmy seems comforted somehow. Reoriented.

"You see that place in the woods there where the river is, over this way? I think it was down in that other turn, the tide was out about a foot deep and that's all and I see this mink. He was after a small eel, tryin' to eat it and I had a shotgun and I said, 'Jesus, if I shoot him, I'm gonna blow him all to pieces.' And he went down and under and I fired at him and I jumped in. I knew I had him 'cause he was kickin' and I jumped in and grabbed him and threw him up on the bankin' and one beebie hit him and it went in an eye and into his head. Never had to shoot him again." Jimmy is searching my face with the now familiar crease in his brow, the look of concern.

Suddenly, I think I grasp what it is that he has been trying to show me out here. It is about more than simply making an income from the bounty of this marsh. Jimmy has been showing me how it is to grow up a part of it. Up to his knees in creek mud. This is why he follows so many of his explanations with the query, "Know what I mean?"

Now, I think I do know. Seeing him out here, witnessing the way his movements strengthen to the land, the way the land pulls the stories out of him. So much of his life is embedded in the curves and passages of this marsh. I think of something Jimmy said to me a while back, words that did not make much of an impression the first time around. Now, they are like the pebble dropped in the middle of the pond, a source of resonance.

"I'd know a marsh anyway. 'Cause I used to be on the marsh when I was young, awful young, too young. Know what I mean?"

GLEN DOWNS and I are standing on the marsh side of Pine Point getting ready to board his small boat. This morning, we can see Mount Washington from the mouth of the Scarborough River, a pinkish cone above the far line of Scottow's Hill. Dark, unsettled, the marsh is like a steppe laid out before it.

Glen wanted to wait for a short tide to take me out to his clamming site. We'll only be out for an hour or so, enough time for him to dig a leisurely peck of clams.

The boat is so small that by the time we are settled our noses are about a foot apart. Glen tells me to cover my face while he pulls the cord of the outboard motor. As the little engine buzzes to life, he turns to look over his shoulder, his eyes narrowed like a sailor's. A cigarette angles from his lips as he guides the craft out of the shallows and up into the wide channel of the river.

"We get very territorial," he says. "The other clammers'll be watching you just as bad as seagulls."

As we move up the river, I spot one other figure far out on the broad sandbar to the north. Back in the parking lot, Glen identified the pickup of one of his fellow diggers. From what I can understand, the relationship among the 25 men who make a living clamming in Scarborough is based on mutual independence, a kind of inarticulated granting of space. For the most part, each man works alone, rotating around to the open flats according to his own schedule.

"I can't stand to dig in one area more than three days," says Glen. "I start wondering what's over there, you know? You have to move."

At my request, as we make our way up the river. Glen points out the various digging sites, the Big and Little Spits, Dock Creek, Jones' Creek, the Butterfields. The flats themselves are bounded by the banks of the marsh, now four-to-five-foot walls of mud and the exposed roots of spartina grasses. From this angle, the marsh is a rough tableland and we are cruising up a shallow canyon.

Soon, the gray wedge of Moulton's Island comes into view, the tip of a finger of land severed by the changing course of the river.

"She's cuttin' a whole new channel," says Glen.

He cuts the engine and grounds the boat in the smooth sand. He's been digging here for two days so

GLEN SAYS, "IT'S A SALT WATER
GARDEN." IT GIVES HIM HIS INDEPENDENCE.
"WE'RE ALL NATURAL LEADERS," HE SAYS.

Right: Clammer at work on the marsh at sunset.



he knows where the clams are. Wide tracts of lumped up sand cover an area of the flat. Glen carries his small anchor up the beach a few yards and sets it in the sand, then returns to the boat for his equipment, a ten-quart aluminum pail and an old-style digging rake. He walks up the shore slowly, his eyes scanning back and forth across the sand.

"There's a razor," he says and I follow his point to a small, oblong hole. He bends over and begins to rake the coarse sand. I ask how he can tell what kind of clam it is.

"Shape of the hole." A jet of water arcs up from the gash and there it is in his hand, the long purpled shell, the opalescent sack of the clam itself bulging from one end. It is unmistakably alive. Slick and turgid as I have never seen a clam before. Glen passes it to me cracking a smile at my obvious wonder.

He says, "It's a salt water garden is what it is."

Farther up the beach, Glen again surveys the sand around him, then sets down his pail to begin digging. Feet spread apart, bent at the waist, he rakes the thick, gray sand up with a front-to-back motion, leaving a track as he goes. I am careful to keep my distance. From where I am sitting a few feet away, I can see the little spout of water that signals the pressure release within a clam as the sand around it is loosened. The gray disc appears from out of the dark hole, finds its way into Glen's palm. He holds the clam between two tines of his rake to see if it reaches the two-inch limit. Just barely. He tosses it into the bucket.

In the next few minutes, the clams stack up like eggs. The rhythm of the digging sets in. Smooth, instinctive. After a while, Glen stands up to take off his jacket. I notice for the first time that the sun has grown warm against my back. Beneath it, the waters of the rivers between the mud flats are like streams of mercury.

"You come down here, you can hear a town come to life," he says.

I close my eyes and listen. A family of eiderducks coos from over near the river. Farther out, the thin strain of a diesel engine gets perceptibly stronger, a heavy knocking from the direction of the Scarborough Industrial Park, all carried clean through the still marsh. The shifting of gears down Route One.

When I open my eyes, Glen is looking up at the sky

at a faint, feathery cloud pattern. He tells me such a "herringbone" guarantees moisture within two to 48 hours. Tells me to watch what comes along after it. The stillness of the marsh seems suddenly heavier. We are both quiet for a moment. I know if I give him the space, he will keep talking.

He turns toward the west and points out a string of rooflines curving down to the lip of the marsh, the Seavey Landing Road where he was born and brought

up. A clammer from the beginning, Glen left the business once for a more lucrative job in the winding room at S.D. Warren's Westbrook paper plant. The whole time, he says he longed for the fresh air and independence of the flats. After seven years at it, he and his wife, Betty, worked out a dual income plan. She would sew out of their house and he would return to clamming.

Now he digs on the flats every day. He speaks of the work in economic terms, but his other reasons for doing it come through in the way he handles himself out here. A kind of freedom of movement that seemed to take over as soon as we got to the landing back at Pine Point, strengthened as we moved up the river and into the

marsh. Now, as he pauses between bouts of digging, a quiet confidence settles in.

"Once you've had a taste of independence," he says, "it's impossible to work for someone. We're all natural leaders. We're not followers."

He tells me about the time one of his sisters went in for a hysterectomy. She had been clamming all her life, like him. The surgeon was astonished, said he'd never seen stomach muscles so tight and wanted to know what she'd been doing to make them that way. I ask if there are any women clamming for a living in Scarborough now and he says Helen Perley was probably the last. The admiration comes through in his voice as he recounts the story of the birth of one of her children.

"She went back to the house [from the flats], had the baby, strapped the kid to her chest and went back to finish out the tide. There aren't any tough women like that around anymore," says Glen. For a moment, I want to see how that clam digger feels in my own palm.

I ask him if the marsh has changed for him over the

I'VE COME TO HELEN TO LEARN THE SECRETS OF THE MARSH. SHE SHOWS ME THINGS GROWING THERE ARE EDIBLE OR USEFUL—AND BEAUTIFUL.

Right: Helen Perley in her home
by the marsh.

years and a tone of wistfulness comes into his voice, edged with anger. "Used to be a lot of privacy down here, but not anymore. Used to be able to strip right down and go swimming." Now, he says, there are a lot more tourists coming down to the marsh, recreational diggers. "Messers," he calls them because they trample the sand and make it impossible for him to see where the clams are. They do not honor the clammer's sense of territory.

Glen has told me he will leave Scarborough eventually. He will head to an island Down East where he will be able to clam without being disturbed. This town has changed too much for him in the last decades, too many people moving in, too many houses springing up where they don't belong. He points to a new house on the shore beyond the river. "The guy built it right on one of my prime digging spots," the site of an old settlement he had only recently begun to excavate. But his resentment goes beyond the personal impact. Glen sees the development in Scarborough as part of a general movement away from respectful use of the land.

"I know I'm a throwback of some kind," he says. "People own land and they don't take care of it." He admits it will be difficult to leave, to pull up deep roots. But he feels crowded here now.

After a while, Glen resumes his work and I get up to wander out to the edge of the flat where the now shallow stream of the Nonesuch flows down to enter the Scarborough. I crouch down to listen. The white sun breaks over the waters of the creek. Following its curve, I can see the low trestle of the Boston & Maine and the high ground of Winnocks Neck and Payson's beyond it. As a child tramping through those woods, I came across snowy heaps of clam shells left, I was told, by a tribe of Native Americans that once lived there. Glen remembers finding them, too.

Suddenly, everything about the marsh seems very, very old. I set my hands against the soft sand and press downward, then release. The prints are strong, defined for now. A few feet away, the water continues rising as it has done twice every day for thousands of years. I think of the idea of the marsh's immense, cyclical buildup, of our placement within it, mine and Glen's. Of its fluctuant relationship to all the communities that take their energies from it, the birds, the shellfish, the

grasses. Its continuities of shape and appearance despite the constant exchange. Despite the encroachment of this expanding town. The passage of time.

I turn to look back at Glen and find he has left his digging and is now walking over to join me. He says he's done what he came here to do. He lights another cigarette and continues talking. Once in a while, his gaze breaks free of the marsh and veers in to meet mine. At those moments, I sense that there must be one thing, one central question that if I were to ask, would break down the remnants of the barrier between us.

Maybe something more about the marsh, about the way his life has come to be shaped by it or maybe the way its shape has come to fit some part of him. But it is this notion of the granting of space that stops me. If he wanted to cross that ground, I know he would.

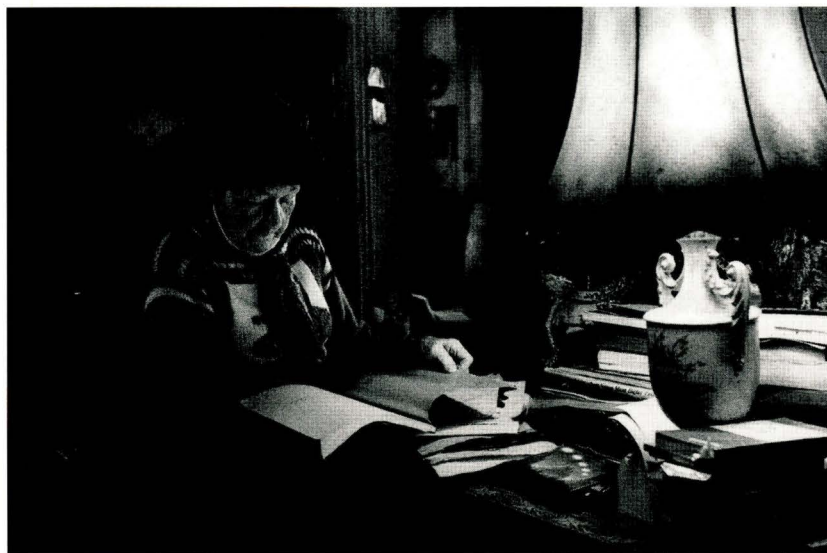
For a little while, we are both looking out across the expanse of the marsh, the mountain no longer visible above it. As we turn to walk back toward the boat, Glen nods his head westward where a rift of solid clouds has begun to move across the sky.

"That's your storm comin' in," he tells me.

"**M**AYFLOWERS." Helen Perley points up the hill toward a patch of sunshine in the middle of the dark woods. "Up there on that little ridge, there might be some. Wanta look?" Together we trudge up the soft pine needle bank. Stands of white and pitch pine populate the slope behind us all the way down to where the forest gives way to the brown bed of the marsh. From this vantage point, the river is a sparkling gash of blue.

Helen and I have been tramping these woods near her house on the Seavey Landing Road in search of spring. She has agreed to show me her self-designed nature trail. Might as well get me educated, she says. Just shy of ninety, Helen has been educating herself about the natural world since she was a child.

I first met Helen when I was 12 and a student at the Scarborough Middle School. As part of a fledgling magazine project, I was sent out to her White's Animal Farm to interview her. I had a little tape recorder which I handled timidly as Helen introduced me to the "family" of mice, guinea pigs and exotic birds she has



SCARBOROUGH MARSH

WINNICKS NECK

ABANDONED
AIRPORT

JAN
PELTIER'S

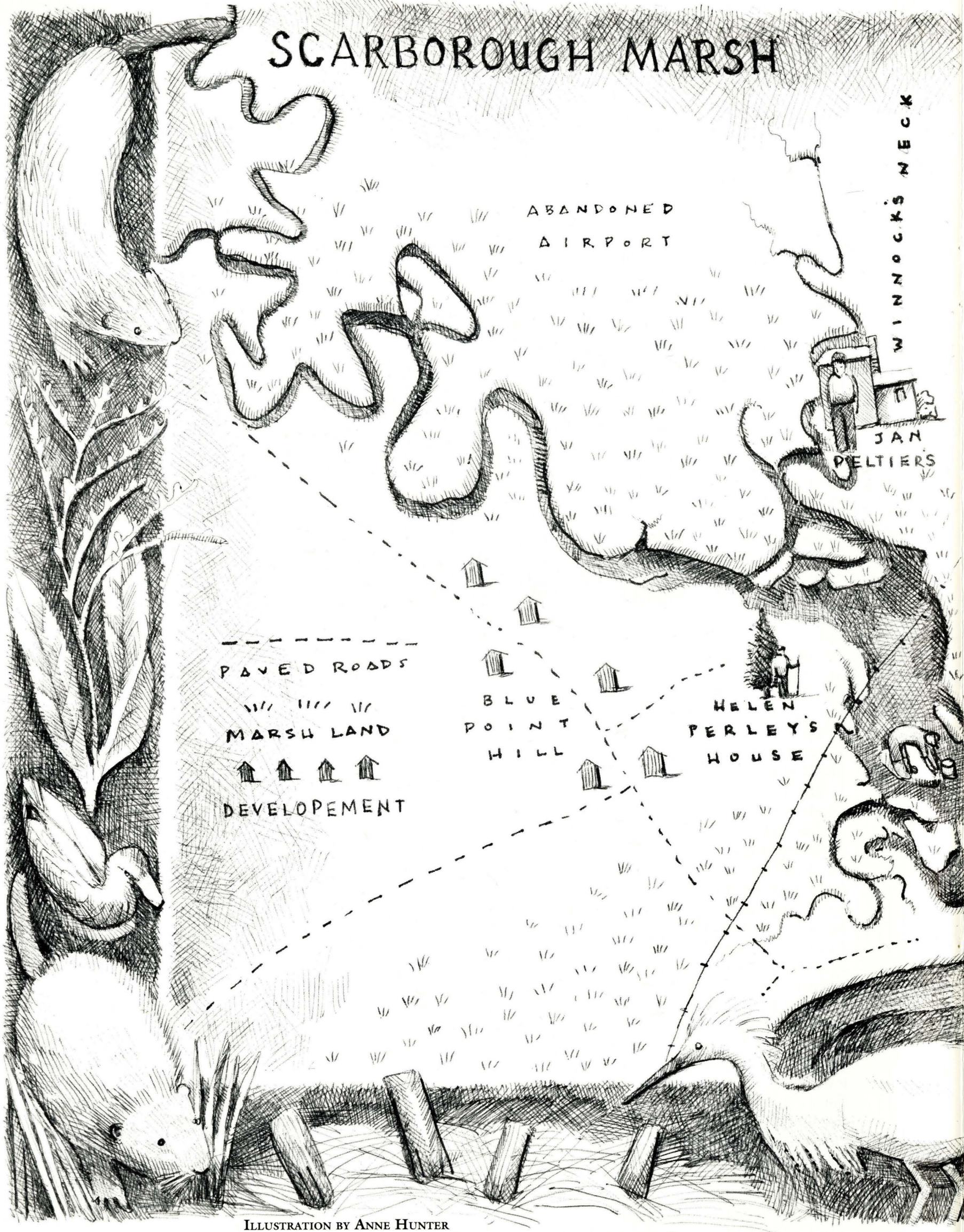
PAVED ROADS

MARSH LAND

DEVELOPEMENT

BLUE
POINT
HILL

HELEN
PERLEY'S
HOUSE





JIMMY
NYES

SCARBOROUGH

NONESUCH POINT

RIVER

NONESUCH

PROUTS NECK

SCARBOROUGH BEACH

PINE
POINT

OCEAN

AH.

been breeding and raising for decades. What has brought me back to her after so many years is the special colloquial body of knowledge she has amassed about this place, the woods, the marsh. She knows how it all works, the cycles, the transformations. She knows when it is time for the faerie circles, the rings of new mushrooms, to appear on her neighbor's lawn.

I've come back to Helen in search of such secrets and she knows that, too. As we left her yard this morning, she showed me how to tear off a clump of tender new leaves from a notch in a long, prickly branch, take it between my teeth. "That's the most marvelous thing in the world is the ordinary raspberry leaves for tea. It makes the most marvelous tea. You must remember that."

When we get to the sunny area of thick, green ground leaves, Helen crouches over them and begins raking them up in clumps with her hand. "Lift 'em up and get some blossoms," she instructs. Dutifully, I find a clump of my own. At the base of many of the heart-shaped leaves, a tiny unfurled bud curves out of the stem.

"Usually, they're all gone by the first of May," says Helen snipping some of the plants with wire cutters she has produced from her back pocket. "We've had such a cold spring." She comes over to see how I am doing and offers to trim the stems of the plants I've collected. "Take those home and they'll bloom."



As we descend the hill, Helen stops frequently to identify a shoot, rub the bark of a tree, continue the lesson.

"Pitch pine . . . gray birch . . . goldthread for canker sores . . . juniper, a blood purifier."

The path in front of us angles down through a clump of evergreen and Helen reaches out to break off a cross-shaped sprig. "There. That's to go with you," she says pressing it into my hand. She continues on in front of me, guiding herself down the steep path toward an opening at the edge of the forest, her compact body suddenly taut with care. The stubborn swelling in her left leg, the result of an injury, is a source of frustration to her. As she struggles to manipulate the limb down the bank, it seems apart from the rest of her body. A stiffness in the midst of fluidity. A kind of betrayal. But she is determined to defy it out here.

"There's our marsh," she says. From the shade at the

bottom of the incline, we emerge into bright sun and the full, open reach of the land. A light wind creaks in the pines behind us, the air above them a circus of crows. Beneath our feet, the pine needle carpet has given over to the fibrous mat of the spartina grasses. Farther out, the river washes over the tops of its banks and all around there is a trickling sound.

"It hasn't woken up from the winter yet," says Helen striding across the bank to get a closer look at the clumps of dead cordgrass. No hint of green yet. She turns toward the point of land to the west where the crows are making a racket in the treetops. "We get the sea lavender all over there. Glasswort." She has told me that Native Americans and gypsies once came here to gather the stalks of sweetgrass to make baskets and other tradeable items. "You braid it and keep it for it to scent up the whole house."

Helen tells me there are few things growing on the marsh that are not edible or useful in some way.

"'Course everybody I think knows what cat o' nine tail is. You pull it up, roll it back and you've got something very nice to eat." The area behind Helen's house reaching down to the marsh is thick with the tall reeds. "I've got three kind of cat o' nine tails. I got the narrow leaf, I got the common, I got the black. Now the black is over an inch wide and it's three quarters black, but it's not in any book. I'm always gettin' very, very rare plants out

there" on the Scarborough Marsh, Helen says.

From the moment she moved to this area as a young woman, Helen began venturing out onto the marsh. As she talks about her discoveries, I begin to see the marsh as a living whole, an organism full of wondrous minute parts, rarities, fantastic sights.

"Now there's no flowers grow in the sea. But they were flowers growing down there. Here, this marsh here, there's wonderful flowers . . . There's a little anemone that grows in the ocean that has a little red blossom. It's beautiful. It's on the piling down there and it was on the mouth of the river when I used to go over in my boat. Down to the bridge is wonderful . . . You go through the bridge and the eels are all settin' just like cobras."

Through her wide-ranging inventory of the marsh, Helen has developed an understanding of the diversity of its parts. There is the freshwater cattail fringe behind

her house where streams run down from the Blue Point hills into the river. Then there is the more purely saltwater environment of the mudflats east of the trestle bridge of the Boston & Maine. "It's a different marsh over there. Altogether different."

Directly to the north, the high ground of Winnocks Neck rises from the brown sweep of the marsh. I can just make out the flash of a plate glass window or two amid the trees. Like Glen and Jimmy, like me, Helen remembers spending time there when she was young. "I used to go onto that land there, the Paysons . . . They had a house up there but there was a field there and it was full of high bush blueberries, lot of things like that. Boy, I'd go exploring in my boat all the time. Find out about things."

I try to picture Helen guiding her little craft up through the slick channel of the Nonesuch. She would be wearing a cap, maybe suspenders to keep her trousers on, a pair of old boots, the ever-present hammer slung from her hip. She would be climbing the muddy banks up into the trees, combing the land for a tell-tale depression, an ancient cave. She would be finding exactly what she had been looking for.

The marsh is different for Helen today. She no longer plies its waterways but is content to gaze across it now from the banks behind her house. She has been here long enough to witness the gradual spreading of the marsh's saline environment as the earth continues to rebound from the long press of the Laurentide Glacier. The ocean keeps rising, thrusting its tides farther up into the cattail swamps.

"I had a cranberry bog down here and I had the carnivorous plants, the little sundews. They're all gone and in place of it is the salt grasses growing. Weeds. It's just like the ocean has risen and it's come in there with the salt and spoiled what we had there before. It's all so changed."

Helen has knit these changes into a wider pattern of loss resulting from human negligence as well as natural processes.

"We haven't any turtles left, we haven't any skunks left. The cars going over the road. Yesterday they killed a lot of muskrats. There isn't anything left. They're destroying the planet."

Such moments tell me more about Helen's long-cultivated tenacity than anything else. They reveal a kind of pain underlying all of this discovered beauty. A recognition of its vulnerability. In the face of these losses, Helen goes on insisting on the legitimacy of her own discoveries, the rarities, the creatures that are not listed in the field guides, that the "experts" say do not exist.

"There's a giant white heron and a lot of people say there isn't any such thing. I said, 'Come on. I'll show it to you. Just look and see. There's a giant white heron over there.'"

In Helen's presence, the marsh itself begins to take on a sturdy tenacity. Defiant. Determined to hold in its spring green for just a little longer. To harbor its mysteries.

"We got something green over here," Helen calls to me. She has moved off the spongy bank, back toward the forest. "Sheep laurel," she says fondling a branch of waxy leaves. "Come down when they're in bloom and oh, boy!"

As we begin to make our way back up the steep bank, Helen reaches out to take hold of my hand. Her "wooden leg" is impossible to bend, must be dragged almost manually and she needs me for an anchor. The whole way up, she continues to examine the ground in front of her, determined to ignore the trouble, to continue pointing things out to me. Through her grasp, I can feel her energy, wiry and strong. We are, for a brief moment, tied to one another, connected by the marvel of this place. By the urgency we both feel to keep hold of it

somehow.

Helen once spoke of a little spot she knows about up in the woods not far beyond the marsh. She would like to show it to me one day.

"It's a paradise in there," she begins. "The trees never die, the blueberries go on being blueberries weeks after the other ones are all gone by. Everything is full of life, no death, and there's an apple tree there that's got the fruit comin' right out of the trunk itself."

**"THERE'S OUR
MARSH," HELEN SAYS.
"IT HASN'T WOKEN UP
FROM THE WINTER
YET." SHE SAYS
INDIANS AND GYPSIES
USED TO GATHER
MARSH SWEETGRASS
TO MAKE BASKETS.**

Left: Staddle posts used to support salt marsh hay.

salt



Community Bands

By Margot Downs
Photograph by Erin Hooper



KATHERINE B. COOK blows her silver whistle and the drum cadence begins. To the rousing march of "You're a Grand Old Flag," Jay Warren, baton held high, leads the band down the streets of Boothbay Harbor, Maine.

I watch people scatter themselves on the lawn or line themselves along the parade route. Some neighbors, some strangers, sharing the moment. It is community in the happening.

This band is not your ordinary high school marching band. This is a community band, the Boothbay Harbor Alumni Community Band, made up entirely of local residents. Two-thirds of the band performed together in high school 30 to 40 years ago under the direction of this same Katherine Cook, who is now 87 years old.

Like other community bands that perform in Maine for the Fourth of July and other special events, this band is long on spirit, short of wind, and bound by friendships. The band formed in 1991 to fill a void when the local high school marching band stopped performing on Memorial Day. It then continued as a community service by playing strictly for local events from December through the Fourth of July.

"This town had been without a good marching band for so long I

think any marching band would have been special," says Phil Roberts, a Boothbay musician, "but the fact that this community alumni band is a community effort makes it even more special."

It's the familiar American marches that "get people excited," bass drum player Cliff Allen says. "You get people rolling in it. You hear people fighting all the time, but then they get to a parade playing 'God Bless America' and forget they're enemies. You gotta play something that people feel they are a part of."

Just as unusual as the rebirth of its high school band after its members had graduated 30 years ago is Boothbay's reputation as a two band town.

The older of its two community bands has been playing summer afternoon concerts in Boothbay for 45 years. The Hallowell Community Band is made up of musicians from a number of communities near Augusta in central Maine. It plays in Boothbay only during the summer tourist season.

Its director, David Stetson, jokes that "we are a community band in search of a community. But we actually are closer to Boothbay 'cause we play our summer series there. I think they are very aware of the band as being part of their own tradition."

In this busy coastal community of

"summer folk" and "some are folk," as Barbara Grover of the Boothbay Harbor Alumni Community Band puts it, my family have been "summer folk" for over 80 years.

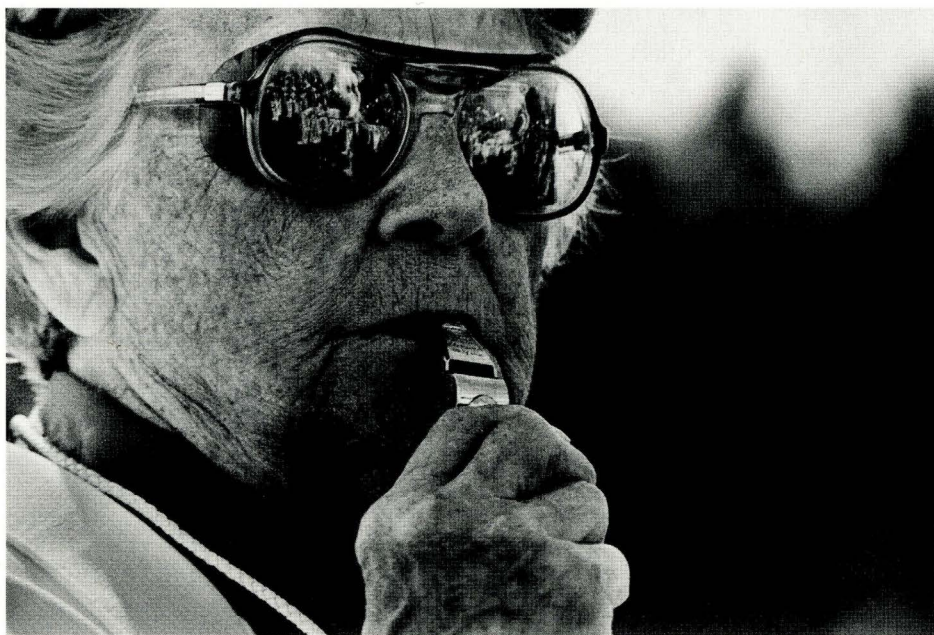
Nestled between two rivers, the Damariscotta and the Sheepscot, Boothbay Harbor is the place I call home. It is where the sidewalks fold up come January, but water rights, the high school budget and community service keep residents active and opinionated. It is here that I took my first steps. It is here that family and friends gather. It is where for generations we have listened to the sounds of summer.

When my father was a kinky haired teenager, he accompanied his grandparents to band concerts on the lawn of the Memorial Library in Boothbay. One evening the audience, unaware of the billowing black smoke in the air behind them, watched in bemusement as the tuba player, then the trombone player, followed by a few woodwinds and a French horn, put down their instruments and disappeared behind the library. In five minutes only a handful of musicians were left seated to finish blowing out a tune.

My father waited in anticipation for the musicians' return, perhaps all sporting red noses and blue wigs. Instead the conductor calmly announced, "Sorry, folks, we'll be cutting the program short this evening. There seems to be a fire in the area of Ned's Wharf. Too many volunteer firemen in the band." It was August 16, 1958.

Thirty-five years after the fire, I can be found sitting behind the trumpet section of the Hallowell Community Band as it plays its summer concert series on the lawn of the Boothbay Memorial Library. Or I am running alongside the parade route to keep up with the marching Boothbay Region Alumni Community Band.

Because of my loyalty, local musicians refer to me as their first "community band groupie."



LEANING AGAINST a car in the YMCA parking lot, I watch as members of the Boothbay Region Alumni Community Band discuss whether they should wear their band t-shirts tucked in or pulled out. Untucked shirts win by a show of hands.

Al Roberts, a trumpet player, is telling me how he and his wife along with a core group helped get the band started.

"You should talk with Bert Howe, the band historian," says Al. "And Phil, my brother, Becky, my wife, Barbara Grover, John's another good person, and of course, Mrs. Cook." He turns and calls into the crowd of musicians. "Hey Bert, could you come here for a minute?"

And so my introduction to the band began much the same way the Boothbay Region Alumni Community Band started, one person passing his or her enthusiasm on to another.

I begin with Al and Becky Roberts, who first generated the idea and mobilized local musicians in the community.

"We hadn't had a good high school band for several years," recalls Becky. She and her husband Al run the Little Ponderosa Campground, where I have come to talk with them. "You just hated going to Memorial Day, because you felt so bad for the kids that were really trying, but they didn't have a leader like we did when we were in high school." Finally came the news that the high school band would no longer march on Memorial Day.

On March 14, 1991 they saw in the *Boothbay Register* a photograph of the 1951-52 Boothbay Harbor High School Band recalling the band's first place wins at the state level and a dedication to excellence by the band's director, Katherine Cook. An editorial in the same edition expressed remorse over the demise of the polished high school marching band since Mrs. Cook's departure from the local schools in 1959.

"I think Al and I both said it together, 'Wouldn't it be kind of nice to get a group to have a band for Memorial Day?'"

Becky and Al's proposal to form a marching band of local musicians for Memorial Day was first voiced in a letter to the editor. Their first meeting at the YMCA brought out a handful of people. Out came the year books from high school, the phones started ringing and people began dusting off instruments they hadn't touched in 30 to 40 years.

"I'd like to play again, but I can't play that instrument now."

"I can't remember the fingering."

One by one they came. Pulling talent from alumni and community members, the Boothbay Region Alumni Community Band came into being. They even recruited a band director.

"Hi, Mrs. Cook, this is Al. The American Legion let it be known that there would be no more parades for Memorial Day because there is no music. A few of us were wondering if we couldn't get together a crowd of us."

"That would be lovely. I hope you have a successful tryout at it."

"Well, of course you know we can't do this unless you help us out."

"Oh, Al, you are asking quite a lot from me. I've retired three times now. You'll have to give me a little time to think about this."

No one remembers for sure whether it was the first, second or third rehearsal when Mrs. Cook, then 84, appeared, but it was unforgettable.

"I walked through the door and they were playing and Al was conducting," Mrs. Cook says. "I stood there a few minutes and when they got through Al hollered, 'Look who's in the door!' They looked around and began to cheer and laugh and come hug me.

"I hadn't seen some for 40 years. It was a regular homecoming. But you know after not seeing them for so long, I didn't even know some of

**Mrs. Cook
at 87 directs a
community band
whose members
she trained
in high school.
Boothbay Harbor
has a longtime
tradition of
community bands.**

Below left: Katherine Cook.
Photograph by David Fleischer.

them. They had all grown up. They had married, some with children, some with grandchildren. To think that we could even get together again. We started having rehearsals once a week and that June we had a marching band on the street for Memorial Day."

Alumni, who make up two-thirds of the band, felt as though they were right back in high school sitting in their band chairs.

"Playing was like riding a bicycle. The fingering came right back," says Becky, who picked up the clarinet after 25 years. "For those of us who had Mrs. Cook for a teacher in high school it was mainly getting the lip back and the breathing."

Kay Brown came in one night late and started fixing her trumpet, and Mrs. Cook, she says, 'Come on, Kay, we are waiting for you.' Then everyone was waiting, so Kay went like this." Becky hops down from the office stool, hunches over and puts an embarrassed expression on her face, hiding her glasses behind her eyes. I have to laugh. "She says, 'I feel like I'm 16 again.' And that

was so typical. That's the way you feel."

John VanDyke isn't alumni, but he has lived in the Boothbay Region since 1976. He refers to himself as a "permanent summer person." For a couple of years he and Mrs. Cook were neighbors. Now he sits comfortably with me in her music room drinking freshly squeezed orange juice. While Mrs. Cook is in the kitchen preparing mine we talk about the band.

"I think a lot of people move into an area like this from out of town and it takes them a long time to be part of the community," he says. "I lived in several places right here in town and the only people that I really knew are the ones I worked for. You come and spend your money in the grocery store and cash your check at the bank, but that's all there is until you become part of the community. Then you have connections with people all over the place. When this band sprang into existence, suddenly there were at least fifty more people that I knew."

R.B. Hall Day in Maine brings community bands from 13 towns and cities to play R.B. Hall marches and other music. R.B. Hall, born in 1858, pro- moted community bands.

Above right: Samuel Wyman, Jr. of Bangor playing tuba.
Photograph by Erin Hooper.

"And all this time I thought it was because you liked me," says Mrs. Cook accusingly, coming in from the kitchen.

"Well, I wouldn't have come if you hadn't been part of it," John says soothingly. He gestures with boatbuilder's hands still paint stained from a day's work and laughs. Mrs. Cook hands me a glass. Her short white hair frames a stern face. Glasses rest squarely on her nose. Lips are pursed, but her eyes are amused.

"I knew we were in for a good time," says John. "We didn't have any music yet and a couple of drummers had shown up and she decided to see how we were at marching. So she lined us all up in rows right there in the Coastal Club room of the Y. She couldn't see us so she got a piano stool and dragged it into the middle of the floor and climbed up on it. She didn't require anybody to assist her either.

"I said, 'We got ourselves a band leader.'"

Red t-shirts were purchased with the band's name printed across the front in white superimposed on a bar of music. White turtlenecks, white pants and white shoes or sneakers were the regulation uniform. And when Mrs. Cook said white, she meant WHITE. Alumni majorettes got out their batons and Jay Warren, who studied drum major instruction at Ohio State University, led the band in his red, white and blue, stars and stripes, Uncle Sam outfit. A suggestion was made for Mrs. Cook to ride in a car. Her reply, "I can march circles around any one of you guys." They couldn't march without her. She carried the whistle.

"I don't think anybody was ready for what happened that first Memorial Day," recalls Phil Roberts, Al's younger brother. We sit on his front porch in rocking chairs, backs against the afternoon sea breeze. "We were all so nervous and butterflies. The crowd that was at the library in Boothbay when we marched down the street, I mean, I couldn't play because I had a lump in my throat.

"Band members had tears running down their eyes, veterans had tears running down their eyes because after what they had given for their country and the town can't even come up with a band to play for Memorial Day. We didn't sound great even playing elementary school music, but the effort that was put forth. There was music and excitement and it's an emotion I get choked up about. Every Memorial Day thereafter is the same, but not quite what the first one was."

Phil is silent for a minute, lost in a private thought. I hesitate to break the silence, but then he smiles and begins again.

"I get to march beside Mrs. Cook most of the time and everybody says it's because she had to make me behave, maybe there is some truth to that, I don't know, but it was a little rainy that day and she was shivering while the minister is talking," he pauses.

"I took a chance because she wants you at attention when you are supposed to be at attention. I put my arm around her and I didn't know whether she was going to kick me out of the band or whether she was going to accept a little warmth from me. But she put her arm around me and says, 'Oh, these ministers are so long winded.' So she has a sense of humor. People offered her an umbrella and a coat, but not on your life. If the band has to march in the rain, she will, too. A very proud lady."

Phil considers himself to be the weakest member of the band. He was in 8th grade when Mrs. Cook left Boothbay in 1959 to teach in the York schools.

"It was easy to give up. I didn't start caring about the trombone or how I sounded until somebody cared how I sounded," says Phil. His small gentle eyes narrow when he smiles. He loves to talk about the band. "That was Mrs. Cook. She is as demanding now as she was back then and I care about it now. You've got to have someone there who



cares enough to make you care about doing a good job. When she walked in that night and heard us play that first piece, the first thing she yelled, 'I hear sour notes!'

"Sour notes?! That was us gasping for air."

Rehearsals may be demanding, but Phil finds room for fun.

"I try to interject a little bit of humor into the band, because there are nights that are pretty tense," says Phil. "Once I wore a red wig to rehearsal. Everybody was cracking up. There I am right in the front row, Mrs. Cook walked right by me, never had a clue, probably thought I was a new member in the band."

Some members wanted to play at more functions than Memorial Day, Windjammer Days and the Fourth of July. Others who were working two, three jobs with tourist-town hours, couldn't make a significant time commitment. A trimester program consisting of a summer marching season, a winter concert and a spring concert, enabled members to choose a time of year that

would be more convenient. In keeping with the spirit of community service, the band also decided it would only play within the Boothbay region.

"I don't remember when I first heard them play," says Bert Howe, the band's historian. "But whenever I heard the music, I wanted to be part of it. I just couldn't stay away from it."

I drive down the dirt road to Bert's home on the back narrows of the Damariscotta River. Bert spent his first summer in Boothbay in 1932. He and his wife moved permanently to the area in 1978 and "gave up all things urban." They built their own log cabin, grow much of their own food and learn from their mistakes.

"I had to sorta make my way in, but I have never been made to feel more welcome in anything that I have ever participated in, in my entire life," Bert says as we walk down to his dock and sit down. He carries his baritone with him. "Each part needs each other. There is a glorious feeling that comes over one when

you can feel, never mind hear, your music build in with the other parts and produce what my wife calls the glorious whole."

His cheeks expand around his gray beard. Lips pressed against the mouth piece blowing, creating a sound that carries across the water. He stops to give his lips a rest.

"Each rehearsal is a little bit different," he says. "Can you imagine grandmothers and grandfathers really intimidated and sitting just a little bit demurely in anticipation of a scolding from the director, deferring to her like a 15-year-old would in school. Anybody that is out of line or is talking when they shouldn't be or just isn't playing the note as it is written on the paper is liable to be hollered at."

I ask Bert if he minds. "No," he says. "There is one thing about music. You don't produce music without discipline."

Good music cannot be produced without discipline and Katherine Cook produces good music. She calls herself a taskmaster. She be-



believes that through practice and a military style discipline you can do better than the time before.

"I have worked all the time and loved every minute of it because it was all music," says Mrs. Cook. Born in East Boothbay to a family of musicians, her father and eldest brother played in local bands.

Her music room, dominated by a Moller pipe organ, is decorated in soft green tones. She has been an organist at the Boothbay Congregational Church since 1937. Shelves are stacked with books, sheet music, unopened tapes of music waiting for her to retire again, and chairs where for years students came for their lessons and still come.

"My musical training was very good," she says. "In those days we learned every instrument, band and orchestra, and choral work. They don't do that anymore. So today if someone makes a mistake way in the corner I stop and say, 'You made a mistake, that was an F sharp not an F.' They look at me blank, 'How did you know?' My ears are trained so completely to hear it."

In 1941 the Superintendent of Schools in Boothbay Harbor hired Katherine Cook to begin a music program. "I had grade schools to visit every week and the junior and senior high band, the junior and senior orchestras and 150 voice choir. Then I was asked to produce a march-

ing band. I said, 'Give me five years because I'm starting with nothing.'

"In five years we put a band on the street. I taught there 18 years and during that time we travelled all over the state. We were the first ones to play in the State House and we always came back with an A+ from state competitions. Now that group I had in '50 to '59, they are the foundation of this band, they were my babies. I taught them all in school and brought them home after school and taught them here. We really worked hard."

Having gotten through all the nostalgia about her babies, Mrs. Cook says she knows that these musicians are grown adults. "I had to stop and think I can't be too forceful," she says. "It's different from high school. I don't scold them but look them in the eye and say, 'Couldn't you do it for me?' and they think enough of me that they will. But I don't make their decisions for them. They make their own decisions. I feel they must."

Her fingers point toward a large framed photo of the band taken at their first Christmas Concert. The picture is surrounded with colorful ribbons and plaques awarded to Mrs. Cook and the band.

The Christmas concerts are free. It is the band's way of saying thank you for the community's overwhelming support. Support shown with

spoken blessings, tears by the side of the road and more than \$13,000 in donations. The band has never asked for any money from the town.

"Our first Christmas concert was Saturday, December 7th, 1991 and, oh, it was a big blizzard," says Barbara Grover, a saxophone player and a core member. "I thought, 'Oh, there will only be about 50 people and here we have worked so hard and we have beautiful pieces and a sing-along.' Time for the concert we marched out and sat down and there were over 500 people in that gym."

No one is sure of the band's future, but members are determined to make the most of it while it lasts. Some feel as though Mrs. Cook is at the heart of the band's unity, while others believe that a core group of dedicated and enthusiastic musicians ensure the band's existence. But they are fighting the odds according to Bert, because there is "no regiment of young musicians coming along, unless they move into the area."

Standing on the road leading to the Town Commons, I watch as another marching year draws to a close. It is the Fourth of July.

Band members fish instruments out of their cars parked by the playground. They are getting ready for a short march to the Town Commons to open the day's celebrations.

Dressed in her very white shoes, very white suit, whistle around her neck, sunglasses and a red felt cap trimmed in gold, Mrs. Cook attempts to line up the rows. She has no idea how many will be able to show up this Sunday morning.

"Now, we've only got four in this row, 'cause two are missing."

"Sorry I'm late. I got stuck at the Southport Bridge."

"Oh, look, there's Brenda. We've got a majorette!"

"Is that a drummer?"

"Yeessss. Da, da, daaaa—Charge!"

Mrs. Cook grabs the shirt of a trumpet player wandering off and pulls him back into line. The morning sun is strong and already Bert is

mopping his forehead.

"We'll start with 'You're a Grand Old Flag,' Mrs. Cook calls out. "Then we'll play as many as we like until we reach the Commons where we will stop and play the 'Star Spangled Banner.' I made it as simple as I could. Have a nice summer and I'll see ya all in September.

"Let them ham it up today," Mrs. Cook tells me. "They've got some work to do when we get back in September. We're going to try jazz."

Taking her position by Phil, she blows the whistle. The drum cadence begins. Feet move up and down as Jay with his baton held high leads them down the pavement into the cheering crowd.

THE 13TH annual R.B. Hall day is hosted this year by the Auburn Community Band at the Great Falls Plaza in Auburn. One dollar will buy you an official button and a program. The music is free. Bring your own lawn chair or sit on the grass.

Feeling out of place without a lawn chair, I weave about under the blue and yellow striped canopy protecting the band and audience from the intense sun. A local newspaper photographer, trying to capture the generation span of the audience, photographs a man holding a three month old baby against his chest.

Sandals, support shoes, velcro sneakers, cotton lace sneakers, black military polish shoes, Buster Browns and flipflops, all keep the beat of familiar marches. Programs move the air to the rhythm of summertime. Some keep time better than others.

R.B. Hall Day is the closest thing I have found to a state organization of community bands. In 1981 a successful campaign was led through the Maine Legislature to establish the last Saturday in June as a day to honor composer R. B. Hall, born in Bowdoinham, Maine, in 1858. Recognized as a composer of marches

and an accomplished conductor and cornet soloist, R. B. Hall dedicated his life to organizing and promoting community bands. Following the legislative act's charge to observe the day with "appropriate ceremony and activity," community bands from all over the state gather to play, among many musical pieces, R.B. Hall marches.

"Summertime is inclusive," says Ben Barr, a trombonist for the Auburn Band. "In summertimes before television, everybody came out to hear the band. A time to be together." He leans against the unfinished wood support of the canopy listening to the Bath Municipal Band play their 45 minute program.

Attached to Ben's R.B. Hall commemorative button, which is a picture of the distinguished composer himself, a red satin "host" ribbon flutters against his pressed white shirt. A breeze brings welcome relief from the smell of stale noon air and trampled grass.

"Couldn't have been a better day. That breeze is wonderful, just enough to keep the heat away." An elderly man in pink suspenders motions Ben to bend down so he can be heard. "Band sounds good, don't they, yup. Big asset that kettle drum."

"That breeze is something."

"Yup, there is nothing like a good breeze." The man takes off his cap to wipe his forehead beaded with sweat. "Couldn't guess what a kettle drum cost, could ya?"

Ben shakes his head and smiles. He knows it would be great if every band could have a kettle drum. I find it difficult to carry on a conversation over the volume of brass, but others seem not to mind.

"I just assumed she was a Congregationalist," says a woman in a tight fitting polyester flower print dress. She takes an enormous bite of an Italian sandwich. Her friend adjusts her white hair around a blue filter visor, then re-examines the photograph of a middle aged woman in a bathtub filled with bubbles.

Chewing her sandwich the woman continues, "Nowadays, it's so difficult to tell a Presbyterian and a Congregationalist apart."

There is an immediate applause when the music ends. The din of conversation continues, while in ensemble the audience picks up their chairs and turns them around to face the next band playing at the opposite end of the tent.

"If you liked the Bath Municipal Band so much, take them home with you," announces Milt Simon, the Auburn Community Band director. He is sporting a festive red bow tie. His right hand moves about in circles as he clutches a clipboard in his left. "Audio Systems, a professional recording company, is recording in stereo every band playing here today. Tapes sell for seven dollars only."

"Now, let's give a big welcome to the Lincoln Community Band who are joining us for the first time." The crowd applauds as Milt shakes hands with the band director, then steps off the platform to mingle among

Hallowell community band has played summer concerts in Boothbay Harbor for 45 years. Its director, David Stetson, leads the band in the Old Hallowell Days parade.

Above left: David Stetson leading Hallowell Community Band. Photograph by Erin Hooper.

“We can’t have a prepackaged program. I have to look and see who’s around. We can’t do this one because he’s not here. When it’s very hot, I do little stories so the trumpet players can rest their lips.”

Right: Hallowell Community Band concert in Boothbay Harbor. Photograph by Erin Hooper.

the lawn chairs.

Director Ron Dobra, quickly pushing up his wire frame glasses, introduces the band. “We are a relatively new band just formed in 1991 and we are really pleased we could be here.” Band members ruffle through music folders nervously. Some are wearing plaid, others loud floral prints. A baseball cap covers a balding head, a blue ribbon pulls blond hair from a young girl’s face. Ron makes an inaudible comment to his band before they begin. Smiles of tension burst into a release of laughter. Now they are ready to play.

In the audience musicians seek one another out, carrying their instruments under their arms like small children. Many of the musicians play in at least two if not more community bands.

“It keeps us busy and active,” says Craig Webster, a trombonist. I ask how he manages to play almost every night of the week. “Develop a deaf ear,” he says, “that way you

don’t hear all the nagging at home.”

The Hallowell Community Band is one of the many bands of which Craig is a member. Arnold Barrett, Hallowell Band president, also is the chairman of the R.B. Hall Day Committee. He tells me that each year a different community band hosts the event. About 13 bands are currently participating. “It’s a lot of fun because some of us see members of other bands that we might not see from year to year,” says Arnold.

Facing the backs of chairs sagging with human weight, Hallowell Community Band musicians remove highly polished valves, horn bells and mouthpieces of brass and silver plated copper from molded compartments in black cases.

John Jicha is oiling his sousaphone. It is difficult to imagine that all these twisted pipes and valves can produce a warm deep sound. Looking into the enormous bell of the sousaphone, I see the reflection of my distorted face. John is unimpressed when he is told his instrument is very photogenic.

“I got this sousaphone for a couple of fish,” he tells me. “I was a lobsterman for 20 years. Used to give extra fish to these old guys who hung around the dock. I had just taken up the tuba again. This tuba looked like it had come from the top of the Empire State building, a one way trip down. You had never seen anything so dented in your life. So one of the guys on the dock says he’s got a sousaphone in his barn and I could have it. It was all black, but I polished it up and made some minor repairs, all for a couple of fish.”

The rattle of aluminum chairs indicates that it is time to start. Milt makes his way over greeting people as he goes, keeping one eye on his watch. His face is very animated. “There is really a great turnout this year. In the past the festival crowds have just mostly been comprised of other band members who come out to listen to each other, but this time there are a lot of people just out enjoying themselves.”

An elderly man approaches. “I have a request. Could you make an announcement asking people to keep the conversation down.”

Milt looks around as if searching to find an answer in the crowd. “Well, that would be difficult.”

“It’s hard to enjoy the music with all that talking.”

“Some people here are serious music listeners and the others,” Milt shrugs and gently smiles, “well, the others are people who enjoy more than just the music.”

THE DARK clouds above threaten rain, but Hallowell band members continue to pull chairs out of the library cellar and arrange them in front of the Memorial Library in Boothbay Harbor, as Hallowell band members have done for 45 years.

The Hallowell Band formed in 1948 was originally invited to Boothbay in 1950 to play summer concerts with the Boothbay Region Band, which was beginning to decline in membership. Eventually the Boothbay Region Band ceased to exist, but the Hallowell band continued to come.

Sitting behind the trumpet section, I have a good view of the band, the director and the audience. Most of the audience is over the age of 40, but there are some young couples with their children spread out on blankets. Local residents come 30 to 45 minutes early to stake claim to choice sections of the lawn with their webbed folding chairs before the tourists in summer stripes and floppy pastel hats descend.

With long strides a man with long dark brown hair flowing off his shoulders, thinning at the top, approaches the director’s stand predictably late. David Stetson chuckles, runs his right hand through his thick beard and announces to the band, “Sorry, I’ve been dragging my kids through water all day.” He lifts his brown tinted glasses off his sunburned face in

proof.

“Raccoon eyes,” shouts a Hallowell musician oiling his trombone.

David played with the Hallowell band as a youngster in the 60s, then came back in the 80s as the band’s part time director before assuming the position full time. “I’m a little looser than some of the former conductors, so the band is a little more relaxed than it used to be.”

“Welcome folks to our first concert this season.” Arnold Barrett, microphone in hand, addresses a crowd of about 300. “We have a director that may fool you a little bit. He has a degree in music, so musically he’s pretty well versed, but as an amateur comedian, well, we’ll let you be the judge. I’d like to welcome David Stetson.”

“There was this trumpet player see . . . you can dress them up, but you can’t take them anywhere.”

David starts warming up the audience with his theatrical Maine accent as Arnold moves back through the maze of music stands to his seat in the back row in the trumpet section.

“You want a long drum roll, so you can have enough time to put your mouth piece on?”

“No, you can start without me, I’ll catch up.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of.”

Raising his baton David looks out over the band and says, “First number is two in the Sousa book, then ‘New Colonial,’ then ‘Liberty Bell,’ page four.”

“What did he say?” asks Charlotte Niles, snare drum player. “Standing way back here you are always the last to know.”

Well into her eighties, Charlotte is one of a few original band members. I was told she was the band’s historian, but her only response to that was, “Oh, am I?” and a genuine look of surprise. She stands for the entire one hour concert like a wax statue except for her wrists and hands which move while her body remains perfectly still.



“See any clothes pins about?” muffles the bass drummer through his gray beard. He is trying to arrange his music around the enormous bass drum so he can play and read music at the same time. Usually David will toss clothespins to the musicians like candy from a parade float, but at the moment he is busy trying to arrange his music as well.

“We can’t have a prepackaged program,” he says. “I have to look and see who’s around, that’s why while I’m doing one number I’m looking at the folder to see, ‘We can’t do this one because I haven’t got him here.’ I do little stories and stuff in between when it’s very hot and trumpet players get very tired, so it gives them a chance to rest their lips. Sometimes we only have one trumpet player, so it’s all part of the strategy.”

“There is something special about a band,” says David. “I don’t know how to put it. The only thing I can think of is, ‘Stop and take time to smell the roses.’ It’s like, ‘Oh, wait a minute, this is fun.’ And I think it would be missed more, people don’t realize they would miss it, but they would if it weren’t there.”

With a membership averaging between 30 to 35, depending on how many people come up from the South during the summer, no more than four members are actually from

Hallowell, and about half the band members are retired. In addition to the concerts they play in Boothbay, the band will perform on average ten parades or concerts in various communities in central Maine.

The band charges a minimal amount of money, anywhere from \$150–250, for their appearances. For their summer concerts in Boothbay they receive a flat rate of \$900. They don’t charge with the idea of making money, only to cover their expenses of music, transportation, sound equipment, a director’s fee and a lobster feed at the Fisherman’s Co-op in Boothbay at the end of the season for all band members, which Arnold tells me “will usually set us back 400 dollars.”

For parades the host community must provide a flatbed with chairs, since the band does not march. One year when the truck stopped suddenly, a tuba player bounced off the back end. He was bruised but not seriously injured.

“We hold our rehearsals in the winter at the Kennebec Long Term Health Care Center in Augusta. By letting us use the space to rehearse, we play free concerts for them in the winter.” Arnold’s voice is even and deliberate, dependable sounding. “If I get 18 to 20 out for rehearsals we are doing pretty well. If I sense that something is beginning to drop off,

I'll call people up. 'Haven't seen you in a couple of weeks. How are you feeling?' and just getting a call from me sometimes bring them right back in."

The musical programs on the library lawn are usually an hour long, give or take a few musical numbers, depending on weather and the crowd's enthusiasm. Tonight the gray blanket of thunder clouds seems to have moved on without dumping its load and the crowd is ready to be entertained.

"Hello my sweetheart, hello my darling, hello my—" a man sings along to a medley of big band tunes from the 40s, while a boy in red overalls bounces all over his mother's lap.

I know I have set myself up when I ask why the trumpet section is so large this evening. Including Arnold Bennett, there are seven trumpet players.

"Hmm, didn't realize we were any heavier. Do you think we need to lose weight?"

"One too many of Brud's hot dogs."

Brud's hot dog motor cart is parked at the corner. Everybody knows Brud, the local character-historian.

"I think Brud is making too much money over there selling hot dogs," says David "Let's bring him up and have him play a couple numbers on the spoons with us." David addresses the crowd like a game show host. Brud leaves his cart across the street to take his seat next to the director, pulling his spoons from his apron. I can tell by fixed wide eyes in the audience those who have never seen a spoon solo. Flying between Brud's hand and knees, the spoons tap to the melody of "Gaslight Gayeties."

"I would like to point out that Arnold asked me to physically shift to the left. It is not a political statement. Okay, folks, on this date, July 8th in 1835 what happened?"

"Nothing."

"Wrong. This is the day that the Liberty Bell cracked."

Community bands are long on spirit, sometimes short of wind, and bound by friendships.

"Awww."

"It's cracked, but it's still there, so we are going to play for you Sousa's 'Liberty Bell March.' "

The piece gets off to a slow start resulting in a dissonance I do not find uncomfortable. These are the imperfect sounds of musicians who play because they love to produce music and entertain. For many who have retired it keeps them busy, active and connected. As David put it, "This is not nostalgia, this is real."

"If you have a director who makes you feel tense," says Arnold, "you are apt to make more mistakes. We've always called the Hallowell Band a fun type band. Everybody plays as best they can. Some are pretty good, others are well, you know, but overall we do a fairly decent job."

Tonight David pulls from the audience a guest conductor, a blond girl in pigtails. Even when she climbs on a chair, the band can barely see her eyes over the director's stand. David guides her hands in his as they direct the "Root Beer Polka." After a few measures David steps back and she continues to direct, using her own technique, windshield wiper style.

"Sorry, folks, I don't think we have time for the "Grunt" song tonight," says David as he swings the young conductor off the chair. A groan comes from the mass shadows of a crowd not ready to end the evening. After a quick conference with the band, David, given the

okay, says, "Doesn't bother me, I don't have to play. I just keep waving my arms."

"Si, Trocadero," more popularly known as the "Grunt" song, is a mambo that requires audience participation.

"Okay, we are going to practice grunting on cue. When I give you the signal, grunt with feeling," says David.

"Uugh."

"Send them home . . . Okay, try it again."

"UUGH!"

"Now, that's a grunt."

David turns to the band. "Two measures for the drums. We haven't done this in a while."

Latin music moves the air. On cue, Arnold stands up in the back and puts his hand to his ear.

"UUGH!"

Second time through the melody, the band members put down their instruments and sing.

"Si! si! si! Trocadero, Si! si! si! si! La Mambo, Si! si! si! Trocadero,

"Si Trocadero, Mambo!"

"UUGH!"

They sing like they play, a little off key, but with a lot of feeling.

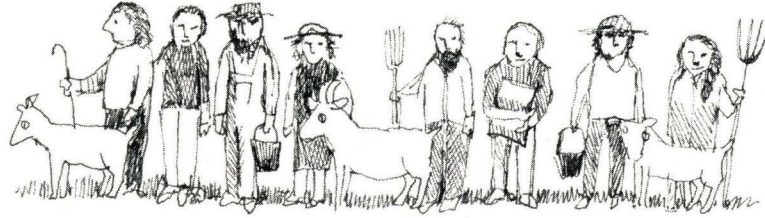
"I think this is why our band likes to play down here," says Arnold. "The audiences are very receptive. They usually go along with us pretty well."

"When the communities get something like this," says Arnold, "they begin to take pride in their community. Someone says, 'Hey, I think it might be nice to have a community band where I can try to encourage others and young people to play,' 'course the youngsters are very busy when they're in school. But we'll have during the summer probably six or eight young people that will sit in with us and play from time to time."

"We encourage this because we feel that later on in life they will come back to us. Hopefully this will keep the band going for many years."

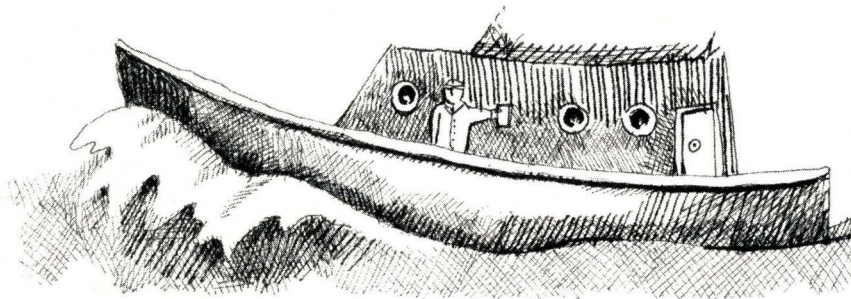
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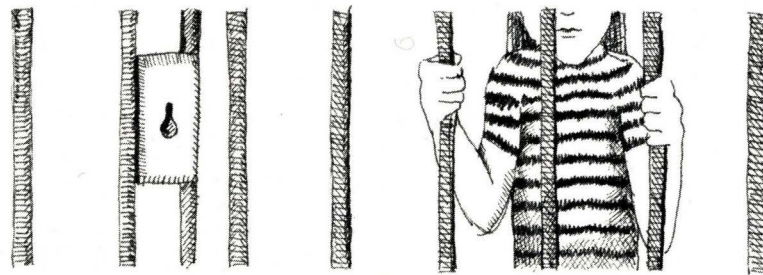
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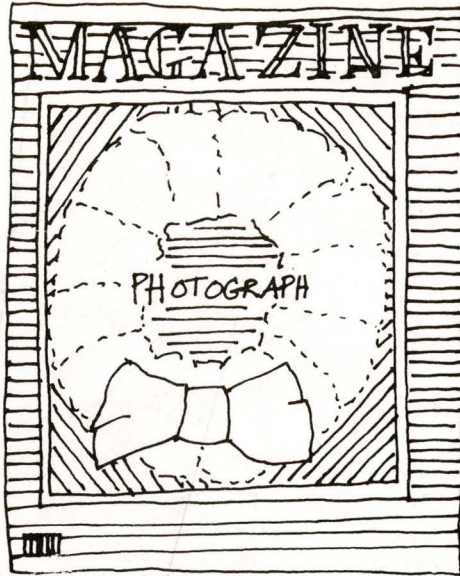
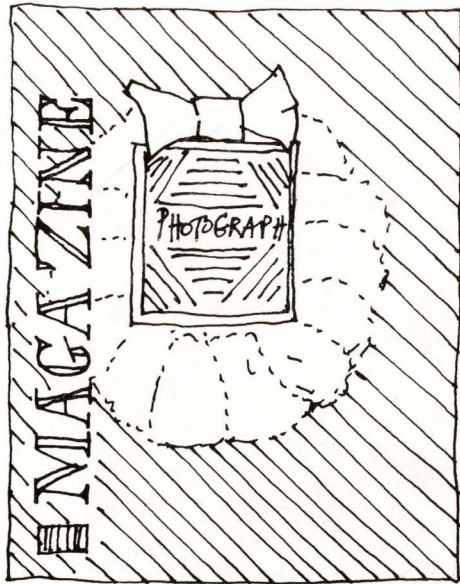
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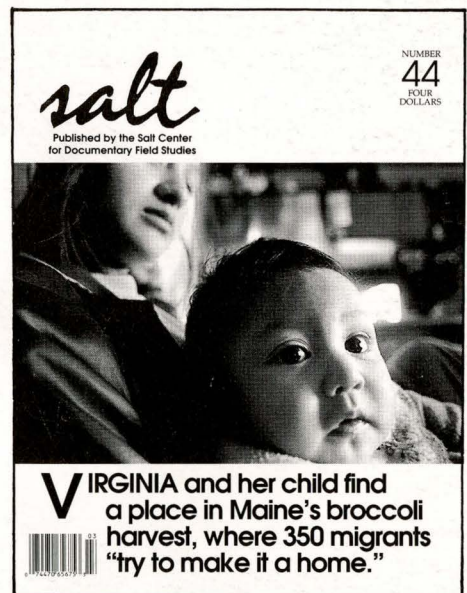
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