



"Rara avis in terra"... Juvenal

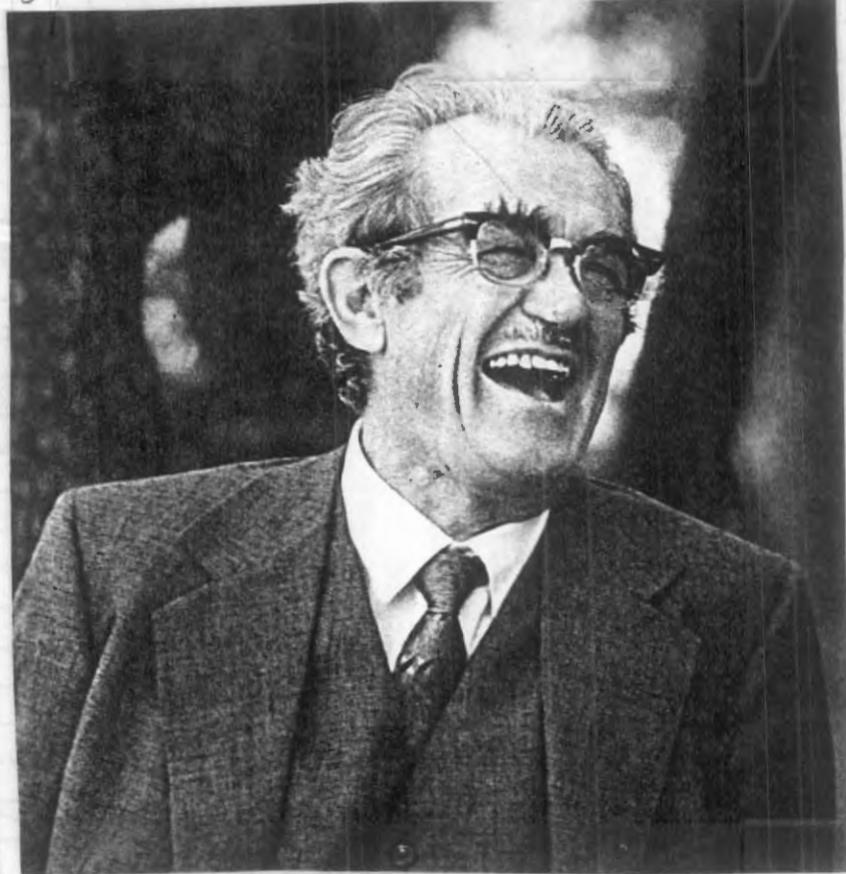
"And it nearly went extinct!... Ron Dougan

HE'S A TOUGH OLD BIRD

WE DON'T HAVE TO DIG POST HOLE YET, THO R.A.D. GLIMPSES CLOVEN HOOF

(Note how our feather [finger] points up, one down; one eye up, one down. "I wasn't in a position to offend nobody!")

Beloit, WI The story begins at 9:27 Christmas night when, up at the farm, Jackie was talking to Gillian in Reno & watching the clock on top of the TV, to tune in the King's College Festival of Lessons & Carols at 9:30. From the corner of her eye she caught something strange about Grandpa (who'd just talked to Gillian). Not a single sound from him, but he was frozen in his chair, slightly askew, and with a kind of surprised (& not a happy surprise) look on his face. "Something's wrong with Grandpa, some sort of seizure!" Jackie said & slammed the receiver. Demi, snoring on the couch, was instantly on her feet & yelling for Ellie, working upstairs on her computer for her Chicago job. We converged on Grandpa, began a kind of instinctual C.P.R. (Ellie'd had it back in high school), JJ frantically dialed 911 until she realized Beloit had no 911, then (it seemed interminable) got the operator who called the paramedics & got a calm woman on the line who talked us through the procedure and stayed with us: "They're past I-90 now" "They're almost to your lane" (Ellie'd raced down, coatless, to wave them in -- we



R.A.D., abt 1972. Note THE eyebrow!

none of us knew the fire number!) All 3 of us, during the 10 or so minutes from start to paramedic arrival were too busy to panic -- and it TOOK three of us -- I don't see how one could have done it. Then the paramedics swarmed in, took over; outside by the corn dryer the red light of the ambulance swung around, lighting up the snow & buildings like a lighthouse beacon. The fire truck was there, too. There was quite a lot of activity for a bit, in that narrow space between Dad's chair & the TV. We scurried around to find the medications he was on, we called Gillian back & told her we'd call again later; right in the middle Bart called in to say "Merry Christmas" to his grandpa, Ellie said, "you've called at a bad time! Bart, the paramedics are here, (cont P. 2)

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE YOUNG AT HEART, RON!



NOW IF I COULD ONLY DO SOMETHING ABOUT ALL THESE OTHER PARTS...

... such as knees, hips, ears...



OK- Let's have ANOTHER contest: CAPTION THIS PICTURE OF GRANDPA + DEMI at LANG'S 1989 PIG ROAST!

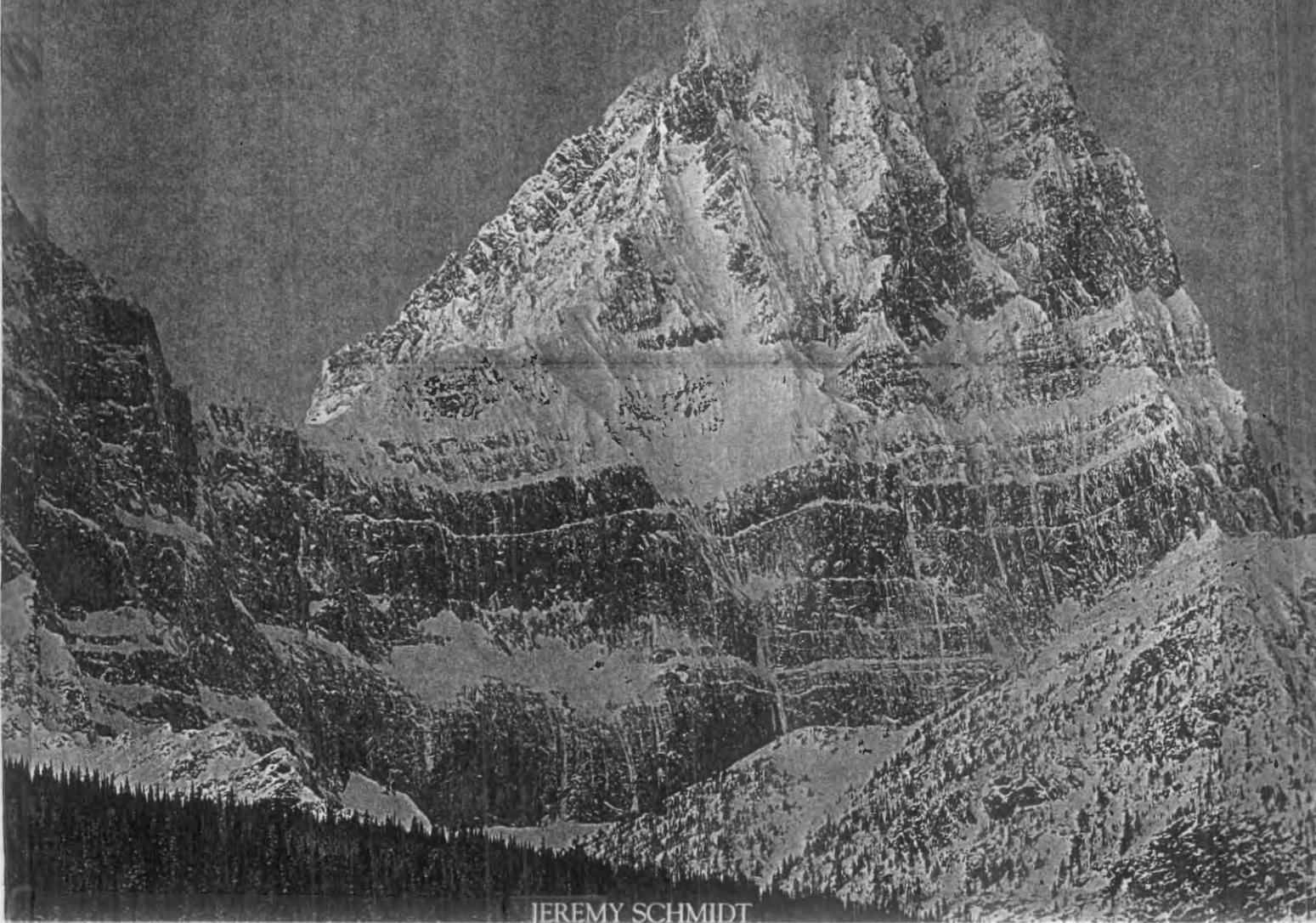
CARDIAC ARREST, con't. The ambulance raced him to the hospital ("Could you go faster?" THUMP! THUMP! I could hear behind); the ER staff took over, + Dad's cardiologist, Roger Lim. By 3AM he was up on the Critical Care Unit, he had a temporary, internal pace maker plus an external one, + every sort of wire + tube imaginable: respirator filling mouth, gastric tube, nose, IV's, etc. Damaris, Ellie + I spent from 3-5:30 helping the ICU nurse hold him down, till he finally zonked out. Jo arrived by noon, Craig by night, Pat stood by in Philly. Things looked grim. He got pneumonia from aspirating a bit of vomit during paramedic work + the drs. told us odds weren't good. By now, tho sedated, he was alert + terribly frustrated at not being able to communicate. We realized we all knew hand language, on acct of Gr-gramp Wesson; this worked to a degree: we could all write w/our hands but not read it well enough. Our best method was Grampa's eyebrows. We'd say, "If you mean 'yes' raise your eyebrows," and those marvelous appendages would shoot way up + his eyes open wide-- or else remain scowling over his narrowed eyes. By the next day he was able to write on a clipboard; the first thing, "WHAT HAPPENED?" Jo told him "cardiac arrest," + explained it. "Will it happen again?" he wrote, + Jo replied, "Not this way," + explained the pacemaker would prevent it.

And, steadily, in spite of the odds + pneumonia, he was improving. Tubes came steadily out, the afternoon the respirator came out he was told not to talk for four hours. Ellie + I wanted to be on hand at 8 PM to hear his immortal 1st words (Demi'd had to return to MI ps) -- you all know the joke abt the man who invented the elixer of life + sprayed it on a statue in the park, the general creaked down off his horse + flexed his joints, the inventor said, "Sir, now that you've been brought back to life, what's the first thing you're going to do?" Growled the general, "I'm going to kill 50 million damn pigeons!" Anyway, there was so much ice on the drive that Ellie + I couldn't get out; her car slid down to the barn + stayed there. But Jo reported he only croaked undistinguished monosyllables, his throat hurt. ... He got off ICU, got off Intermediate Care, + as of this writing, is on the rehab floor practicing walking w/ his walker. Got permanent pacemaker on Tues Jan 10, is reading Tony Hillerman, + complaining abt the low sodium food. His chest hurts badly whenever he coughs, from where he was pounded so much. They shocked him 10 times in the E.R. The lead line is a quote from Dr. Lim who, the next day, when Dad was still with us, shook his head + said, "He's a tough old bird!" He's had no damage to his brain, + none to his heart muscle (exc. some old damage shaved up.) (Cont on p.4)



THE ROCKIES

Backbone of a Continent



JEREMY SCHMIDT

To my grandfather, who never got lost in the woods.

For you readers to appreciate fully this dedication in Jeremy's new book, the ENNL Ed is re-printing most of the letter Jeremy wrote to his grandfather in July '88, just after Gram died. Those of you who read it in Vol. VIII, Nos 3/4, Nov-Dec '88 will doubly enjoy rereading it.

Dear Grandpa,

2 July, 1988

I thought about you a lot the past week. I was sorry not to be able to make it to Wisconsin. But I was there in spirit. So was Wendy.

Gram had been ill for so long that her death was not a surprise. On the contrary, we've all been lucky that her health stayed as good as it did for so long. I have known that, but even so, I was much saddened this week. She's always been there before. I could look forward to seeing her. I'm sad to realize that I won't again. Not in this life.

I've been remembering her this week. A lot of images come to mind, but for some reason, the strongest one is from our Minnesota fishing trips on Crooked Lake. At Leo's place. My first visit there was just after first grade. I guess I was six. Thirty-two years ago. I had a broken arm from when Arty Stiennon threw me down on the lawn and jumped on me. Having a cast on my left arm didn't seem to hurt my ability to hook a minnow on my line.

Letter continued, + more on Jeremy's book, on p. 4

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Jeremy's lost-in-the-woods letter, cont'd from p. 3



Few writers could approach a subject the size of the Rocky Mountains with the experience and enthusiasm of Jeremy Schmidt. A modern-day man of the mountains, Schmidt worked as a park ranger, winterkeeper, ski instructor, wilderness guide, and teacher before turning to writing full-time more than 15 years ago. Since then, his work has appeared frequently in *Audubon*, *Outside*, *International Wildlife*, *Adventure Travel*, *Arizona Highways*, *Reader's Digest*, *Powder*, and *Equinox* (a Canadian magazine of science and geography). He has also authored a guidebook called *Adventuring in the Rockies* (Sierra Club, 1987) and has recently completed an adventure narrative describing a nine-month Himalayan journey. Although writing assignments frequently take him to distant, exotic places, Schmidt always returns to his home in the shadow of the Teton Range in western Wyoming.

We stayed in a little cabin. I think it was you and Gram, Peter and me, and Mother and Dad. We had two canoes. Gram would sit in the bow of your canoe, Peter or me in the middle, and we would all fish for walleyes. She didn't seem to take it very seriously -- I mean she didn't concentrate as fixedly on her line as I did on my bobber, and I always thought it would help to will the fish to bite. That never seemed to bother her. She had a padded seat with a back on it and always read a book while she held her rod. It was usually Agatha Christie, wasn't it? And do I remember right that she usually caught the most fish?

You made up vulgar songs about Uncle George and Uncle Bert. We could hear them all over the lake. Peter and I loved the songs, even if we had no idea who these uncles were. The only uncle we knew was Craia. And each new song was punctuated by Gram. Without looking up from her book she would say "Oh Ron!" and her pretended disapproval was an essential part of our enjoyment.

Those were good times for me. You took me out one day fishing for trout in a little stream that flowed across the road. We put grasshoppers or something on our hooks -- at least you did. I figure I didn't do much fishing. I just tramped along behind you wondering if you knew where you were going, and in my six-year-old way, I was pretty sure you didn't. Then you confirmed my guess by saying "Gee, I wonder if we can find our way back to the road." I knew we could do it by walking back along the creek the way we had come, and I thought we should take the safe course, but you said "We can probably manage to find our way back before dark." And you took me on a round-about path through the woods. After a bit you stopped walking. "Which way do you think the road is?" you asked. I didn't know. But I started to worry. We went on a bit. You stopped again. "Haven't we been here before?" you said. "You know, when you walk in circles it's a sure sign you're lost." Now I was scared.

You had caught a trout. It was all of five inches long, a real sardine among fish. You pulled it out of your creel and said "Do you think we can survive on this until they find us?" I didn't think it was worth keeping. You proved me wrong that evening at the cabin. Of course we found the car. It took me thirty years to figure it out that you knew where we were all along. You were just pulling my leg. Weren't you? Hmm... We were probably all of 200 yards from the road the whole time, but when you're six years old that's as good as several miles. I thought we'd escaped with our lives, and put it down as a lesson that I should pay attention to where you were dragging me from then on. I don't know whether that had any real influence on me, but it's true that I never get lost in the woods now, and I do it by keeping close track of how to get back. Thanks for the lesson.

Well anyway, the fish. It was too small to clean, and to me that meant it was too small to eat. But you fried it with great fanfare, and held it by the tail and ate it in one bite. fins and guts and head and all! I was grossed out. So was Peter, and that's really saying something.

And we all know what Gram said. She said "Oh Ron!" and she smiled because she liked those little tricks as much as the rest of us.

I will miss her. I already do. I feel lucky to have had her for a grandmother. She won't be forgotten.

JEREMY PUBLISHES ANOTHER!

Jackson Hole, WY. And this one you simply have to see to believe. It's BIG! 13" x 12" (12" high.) The cover is breathtaking: it's dawn, or sunset, the sky and the mountains are deep lavender, and the peak is tinged with pink. And some inspired designer had the T, R & S of THE ROCKIES tinged w/ white; they too catch the sun. Our shrunken, colorless Xerox can't begin to show you the splendor of this book. Inside, the vast number of pictures rival the cover & continue to dazzle. They range from the spectacular to the minute. But it is Jeremy's prose that outshines all this beauty. I've only begun to read, due to Grandpa's cardiac arrest coming just hours after I'd opened my gift copy -- but open the book anywhere, & start: you'll be hooked on Jeremy's simple and eloquent style. He writes beautifully and personally, full of love of place, creatures, peoples. No plump prose, lots of quiet humor & acute observation & information. The book sells for \$50 & is worth every nickel.

CARDIAC (cont.) and is probably better than he's been, for the pacemaker will prob. stop those intermittent blackouts he's been having. (cardiac arrest is like blowing a fuse, in those earlier ones, the wires were frayed.) So the ol' curmudgeon is probably going to be with us a while longer. We'll really learn CPR, & our fine numbertoo. Happy New Year! ... At supper, Xmas, a few hours before the Event, we were talking about the Catalpa Forest, how it was planted to provide fence posts. Dad said, "Remember, when I die, just dig a post hole & drop me in." Demi said, "Head first or feet first?" Said RAD, "It'll depend on the direction you think I'm going to be going!" ... If Jack wondered, since the cardiologist said RAD'd been dead, & we'd brought him back, whether he'd had an "out of body" experience. I asked; he said, "No ... but I do remember looking down and seeing a cloven hoof." (I figure Mom or Gr. Grandpa or Darwin or whoever came to meet him at the end of the tunnel just had to go back & wait.) ... Yesterday at the hosp., I was full of energy, RAD said, "Go home, you're like a fart on a griddle." (P.S. we did call Bert & Giesan back.)

IF YOU WANT TO CAPTION THIS, OR THESE, PICTURE(S), GO RIGHT A HEAD!



GUESS

who the radiant young woman (8) is, to your left. Of course! (Cressida! (Some pigs huh!)) Now guess the slightly older young woman to your right - Got it again, her name Gillian, at about 10. Both are school pics, I came on Gillian's during my (forced) cleaning of the attic, just when Cross's came in the mail, & raced to compare. (I have a nice copy of Gillian's, in some album somewhere.) Don't they gladden your heart? And I love Cressie's ribbon!



They're so surprised because they haven't gotten letters from them." It seems that they were forced to leave their home before the German advance and it was retaken by the Americans. Now, after five years, they find a rather sentimental letter from an American soldier on the fly leaf of a song book... Here is part of the letter as I translate it:

USA TODAY has been printing excerpts from letters sent home by soldiers in the desert. Since the duty so far has consisted of waiting for some thing to happen, most of the letters are mundane — asking for cookies, Walkmans and letters from home.

Usually, one of the soldiers wrote by the time the last man gets out of the showers, mail arrives. Mail call looks like a bunch of puppies waiting for a doggy treat. Some get lucky, some don't. Everyone then goes to be alone with their little bit of news from home...

Throughout history, letters from soldiers have contained some of the most vivid descriptions of war. Such letters were the foundation of the popular and literate PBS series on the Civil War.

Letters from important figures in literature and history are preserved and published in book form. Lewis Carroll, who wrote "Alice in Wonderland," wrote and received 98,721 letters during the last 37 years of his life. Charles Dickens, afraid someone would publish his personal letters after his death, burned hundreds of them.

But advocates of publishing letters from famous figures argue that the letters give a unique insight into the person's character. In Abraham Lincoln's case, a letter he wrote to a David Lincoln in Virginia helped biographers trace his family tree.

Personal letters are often kept as a record of family history. Jackie Jackson, an English instructor at Sangamon State University, has compiled her father's and grandfather's letters into books. Reading them is like stepping through a time warp to the 1920s.

Many of the letters in the collections are from a son to his parents or from parents to their son. Jackson's father was in France in 1923, working for the equivalent of the Peace Corps. His well-written descriptions of what he saw outside, and what he saw happening inside himself, are preserved through his letters.

In one, he describes a poignant scene, a letter within a letter:

A French woman and her rather plain daughter came in this morning. I understood some of the things they were trying to say, but at last called our cook who speaks both French and English to verify my suspicions.

"My dear Mlle. Jeanne, I hope you will pardon me if I write some words in your book. Perhaps I am a little sentimental, but after three months I am again seated before a grande piano, my two eyes fixed on a book of music with the name Jeanne written on the first page, and perhaps I think of another grande piano in another music room, with another name Jeanne written with another hand and — oh, well.

"My poor little child! When I see your beautiful little face with the large eyes so like your mother's, when I see the keys on which your pretty little hands have rested; when I survey this room full of soldiers and their paraphernalia (sic); the guns, the helmets, the explosives; the furniture smashed and the tables ruined, oh then I wish I beg of the good God, that I could express my thoughts in the French, when, as you see, I write so badly.

"Eh bien, I will stop now. Perhaps you will never see these words, written so badly. Perhaps when you find them I will be dead — forgotten. We set out for the front tomorrow, but if you would write to me and tell me about yourself and your home, and that all is well with you, I am adding my address.

"And now goodbye my little one, and may the good God guard you from all harm."

Today, the soldier might have sent a videotape to his girl. Videotape has supplanted writing in several areas, including family histories that normally would have been written.

"We did a couple of videos of my father," says Jackson. "They had a bunch of questions lined up and they didn't give him a chance to talk. Given the video format, they wanted to get on to the next topic quickly."

What it comes down to is this — would people rather see a video of grandma's wedding or would they prefer reading a description of it in grandma's own handwriting?

(Whew! Didn't think I'd get that all in! I reduced the print in Spfld; am cutting & pasting in Belmont.)

GRANDPA'S QUOTE QUOTED IN FEATURE

Spfld. Nov. 18, '90, "The Waning Power of the Pen" by feature writer Dave Baake in the State Journal Register. He knew I'd taught "Personal Letter" and came to see me. I gave him Lovingly Ron and You! Loving Father, & he excerpted the soldier letter, because he was skirting this toward writing soldiers in Saudi Arabia. I've cut out that middle section; wish he'd used family stuff. This article moved R.A.D. very deeply - he read & re-read.

THIS IS A LOVE

LETTER TO LETTERS — to the way they look, feel and smell; to stationery and letters from grandma and envelopes with shiny red hearts on them and "S.W.A.K." written on the back of the envelope.

Handwritten letters are sensual. Computer messages are sterile. Letters are warm. Faxes are cold.

Letters are real. You can keep them and read them over and over. Telephone calls are abstract. They are gone as soon as you hang up.

I don't have a single memorable phone call stored in a box in my attic or basement, wrote CBS's Andy Rooney in his essay on the virtues of letter writing.

But the personal letter appears to be going under — skewered through its shiny red heart by the cold, stainless steel sword of high technology.

Nobody writes letters anymore, are you kidding? A letter takes too long to get where it's going. Who wants to wait?

And who's got the time to sit down and write a letter, anyway? There

are kids to take to soccer practice, homework to do, meals to cook, meetings to attend, kids to bring home from soccer practice — and all of this after eight hours of work or school.

There's an art to putting thoughts and feelings down on paper. It's not usually something that can be done well without putting some time into it.

But, as Garrison Kellior wrote, it's not necessary to agonize over letters:

Don't tear up the page and start over when you write a bad line, try to write your way out of it. Make mistakes and plunge on. Let the letter cook along and let yourself be bold. Outrage, confusion, love, whatever is in your mind, let it find a way to the page.

Writing is a means of discovery, always, and when you come to the end and write "Yours ever" or "Hugs and kisses," you'll know something you didn't when you wrote "Dear Pal."

"It's getting to be a lost art," says Carol Vermeire, head of the English department at Sacred Heart-Griffin High School in Springfield.

"Even the thank-you note is a lost art. At some weddings now, they have a 'thank you' built right into the program at the wedding."

It appears that the burden of keeping the art of letter writing alive is falling to English teachers.

"Nobody teaches writing anymore but English teachers," says Bernice Rappel, head of the English department at Springfield High. "We don't live in a reflective age. In their leisure time, people exercise their bodies, not their minds. You're not going to get reflective letters in an age like this."

It has gotten to the point where one Springfield teacher was criticized by a student's parents for even trying to teach children how to write.

"Nobody needs to know how to spell today," the parents complained. "The computer does it all."

"It used to be," says Rappel, "that when you were away at college, you wrote to your parents once a week. You don't do that anymore."

"I think that's one reason why parents are surprised when they see their kids' writing, putting their thoughts together, at school."

No, this → isn't to lay a quilt trip on Cress for not writing a T.Y. note - she hasn't even GOT her Xmas presents from me yet. The article above (3rd column 1st line) refers to TY notes! And I hope you're all enjoying (& using) the "Procrastinator's Thank You sheet" published in the last issue -- which sheet Demi & I worked out 2 years ago, but I only, last issue, got a round to printing!

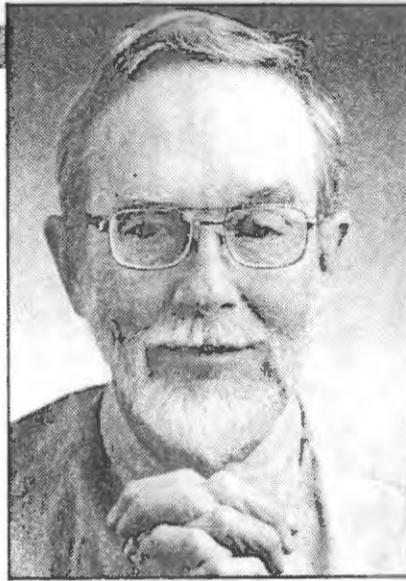


Quarterly Radio Guide

As a new season approaches, so does a new issue of *The Radio Guide*.

The guide is now published quarterly, rather than bimonthly. The winter *Radio Guide* covers December, January, and February; spring will cover March through May; summer, June through August; fall, September through November.

The change will enable us to continue to offer free copies of the monthly *Music Listings*. Increased requests for the listings have dramatically increased our printing and distribution costs. Publishing *The Radio Guide* quarterly will allow us to provide both services without diverting funds from on-air programming—the most important service we provide members of the Wisconsin Public Radio Association.



CHAPTER A DAY reader Karl Schmidt

Chapter a Day

The CHAPTER A DAY schedule is as follows:

- *What Am I Doing Here* by Bruce Chatwin (started Nov. 27)
- *Christmas Stories* (starts Dec. 15)

*** SPECIAL NOTICE: TWENNED was a new and UNLISTED PHONE, recous nospare to go into. ITIS: 217-544-2916. mdyne as usual: 916 21 6th, SPFLD, IL 62702

You can't open anything around the farm, here (where I'm writing this issue), without seeing a Schmidt. Or turn anything on. Have I said in these pages how, when I drive north to Beloit, & am finally close enough to get Wis. Public Radio's signal, & hear Karl's voice at station break, saying "88.7 -- WERN -- Madison" I picture Karl as a great guardian angel, brooding over the state of Wisconsin with ah-bright wings? Just thought you'd like to see a picture. This is an oldie from a year ago. What means that arched eyebrow, that sphinx-like smile, the odd configuration of fingers? I know, let's make it a contest, we haven't had one in awhile, & it's usually Uncle Lewie. CAN YOU CAPTION THIS PICTURE OF UNCLE KARL, FOLKS? (Craig & Sam, note!)



No *Empty Nest* is complete without an update on the Editor's soul-mate, Shoe. This episode depicts the ENNL Ed's worst night-mare. The solution of my friend (& ENNL reader) Marian Levin, who helped me for a while, has been not storm but fire: "BURN THE PLACE DOWN!" My latest effort -- and it's working! -- is, I've hired a splendid young woman as manager-secretary, and we're making progress! Phyllis Walden's *Fire Don't Pile* system, recommended in an earlier issue, helps. My helper is Susanne Gu-banc, student, writer, radio professional for 15 years.

