

*“Goûtes au vin
et à l’amour,
tu ne vivras pas
toujours!”*

Pulling through the gates of Wollersheim Winery on a late summer day, I am immediately struck by an odd sense of dislocation. A moment before, I was driving through a typical Wisconsin landscape, with gently rolling farmland, fine old barns, and herds of indolent Holsteins. But as I park my car near Prairie du Sac and gaze up a steep hillside to an old stone winery and to tiers of grapevines rising above, I feel as though I’m not in Wisconsin anymore.

“Savor wine and love, you won’t live forever.” That’s the motto of the Wollersheim-Coquards, an American-French family that has restored an 1840s winery above the Wisconsin River. It wasn’t quite rocket science — but it took the creativity of a UW engineer in space science, a business school graduate, and a French-born winemaker to succeed.

THE CHIRPING OF CRICKETS fills the air. Colorful pots of flowers perch on the edges of steps and windowsills. Workers move among the grapevines, cutting the great bunches of purple grapes that hang heavy on the vines. A genial, thirty-something man wearing dusty trousers tucked into his rubber boots directs them.

Perhaps it's because I've only recently returned from a trip to France, but I could swear I'm back in Provence. The crickets, the flowers, the hillside vineyard, and even the way the man tucks his trousers into his boots — they all seem so familiar.

I want to sit with a glass of wine in one of the wrought-iron chairs on the terrace and take in the scene, just as I sat on another terrace overlooking the hills of the Lubéron only a few weeks ago.



With her vaguely European air, Julie Wollersheim Coquard '87 fits right into my French reverie. She's slim, and she wears her thick, dark hair in a long, dramatic sweep. I am not surprised when she calls to the man working in the vineyard in French, her voice rising to the higher register that French women use. Then she switches to English, her voice dropping a bit, and taking on an amiable, Midwestern accent.

She introduces herself as the winery's director of advertising and public relations. Her father is Robert Wollersheim '66, MS'67, the founder and president of the winery, and her husband is the French-born winemaker working in the vineyards, Philippe Coquard.

How, I ask her, did a French winemaker wind up in Wisconsin? I can tell by the way she smiles that I am not the first to ask.

"Wine is such a fascinating subject," Robert Wollersheim tells me as we watch the newly harvested grapes ride down a conveyor belt to the vat where they will be crushed. "You can never learn enough to satisfy you."

His powerful build and tanned face and arms make him look as if he were born to an outdoor life. But back in the 1960s,

One day in 1972, Wollersheim heard of a long-defunct winery up for sale in nearby Prairie du Sac. When he saw the property, he knew he'd found the ideal place to plant his vineyard.

he was a lab-bound professor of electrical engineering at the UW Space Science Center in Madison. He made wine in his basement as a hobby, and this pastime eventually expanded into a mail-order

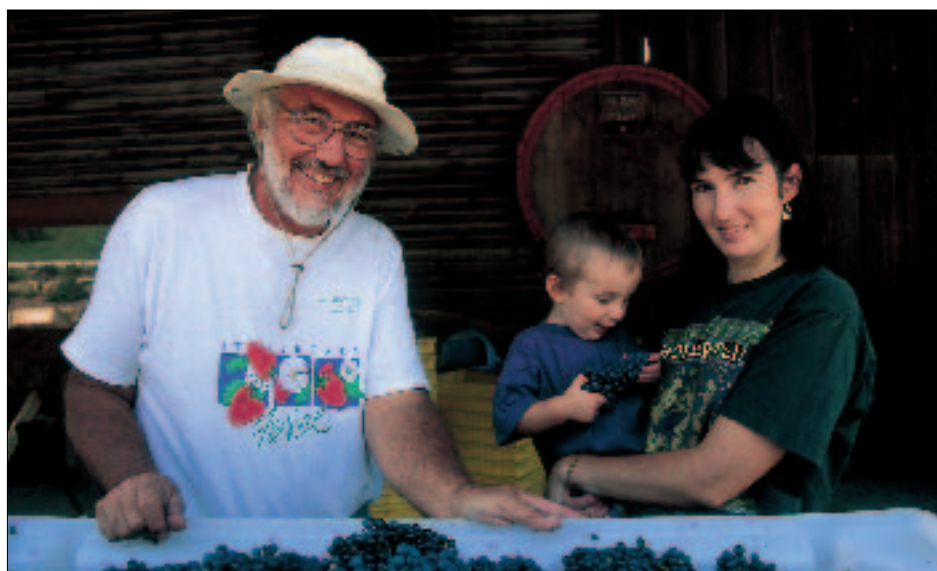
business and a shop selling winemaking equipment on State Street.

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Conventional wisdom at the time held that it was just too cold and wet to grow wine grapes in Wisconsin. But this property, situated on a bluff overlooking the Wisconsin River, was steep enough to provide good drainage and air flow, and it faced south, where it caught the full warmth of the midday sun. Surrounding hills sheltered the property from the brunt of winter winds, and the Wisconsin River helped to moderate the temperatures. In effect, it had a micro-climate that was milder and drier than the rest of the state.

But what made the property truly irresistible was its association with the flamboyant Hungarian "Count" Agoston Haraszthy, a central figure in the history of winemaking in America.

Haraszthy (who was of "dubious lineage," according to one source) had fled Hungary after ending up on the losing side of a revolution. Hoping to make his fortune, the Count (or "Colonel," as he sometimes fancied himself) decided that



Electrical engineering professor Bob Wollersheim left the UW Space Science Center to transform his home winemaking hobby into a full-time occupation. His daughter Julie (holding grandson Nicolas) is the director of advertising and public relations, and she says the national trend to buy local farm produce and microbrewery beers helped launch their Wisconsin wines.



In the beginning, the Wollersheims relied upon family and friends to help out with the planting, harvesting, and bottling of the wines. But soon, with the help of a French intern (soon to be son-in-law), the Wollersheim wines began to gain the attention of influential restaurateurs. Overall, the winery has increased its production 20 to 25 percent each year for the last decade.

what this country needed was some good, European-style wine. He acquired land overlooking the Wisconsin River in the 1840s and began to plant vineyards and build a winery. He also founded the nearby "Village of Haraszthy," whose name was later changed because people

found it too hard to remember. (It eventually became Sauk City.)

Had gold not been discovered in California a few years later, Haraszthy might have stayed in Wisconsin and become a household name. Instead, he left to follow the gold rush and made his mark on California.

Haraszthy traveled up and down the state of California (he is remembered as the first sheriff of San Diego, for example) before settling in Sonoma County and returning to winemaking. He is credited today with founding the California wine industry and is invariably referred to in promotional material as the "Father of California Viticulture" (perhaps his



Wollersheim's Philippe Coquard was named "Winemaker of the Year," and his Prairie Fumé was named "Blockbuster Wine of the Year" at the Wineries Unlimited Conference in Hershey, Pennsylvania, in 1995. The Domaine Reserve has been listed as a "Pick of the Month" by *Bon Appétit* magazine. The Beverage Testing Institute in Chicago has rated both the Dry Riesling and the Prairie Blush as "Best Buys." The Prairie Blush has also been named the "highest rated pink of the year" and a "Best Buy" by *Wine Enthusiast* magazine, which has also called Wollersheim Winery the "premier blush producer in the U.S."

only bona fide title). Haraszthy met his death with characteristic panache in Nicaragua, where, as legend has it, he slipped from a log while trying to cross a river and was devoured by crocodiles.

The count's successors in Wisconsin had considerably less luck growing grapes than he did in California. After a freeze in 1899 killed the grapevines, the property was converted to growing conventional crops, and the oak wine barrels were cut up for firewood.

By the time Robert Wollersheim and his wife, JoAnn, bought the property in 1972, it was nearly abandoned. All that was left of the old winery was the 140-year-old building, its cellars, and its limestone caves.

The Wollersheims had to start from scratch, planting the hillsides with winter-hardy, French-American hybrids, retrofitting the winery with state-of-the-art equipment imported from Europe, and furnishing the underground wine cellars with new oak barrels. The family, which included Julie, age seven, Steve, five, and Eva, four, moved into the stately mansion adjoining the winery, and Bob's parents, Ed and Clara Wollersheim, moved nearby to help out.

It took years to establish the vineyard and harvest the first crop. Much of that time was spent forming the young vines by training the trunks and shaping their fruiting zones. Wollersheim needed to rely upon his family and friends to help out with planting, harvesting, bottling, selling wines, and giving tours.

"There's a difference between home winemaking and commercial winemaking, but you don't find that out until you start making wine commercially," he tells me. Wollersheim kept his day job for a few years, commuting to the UW several mornings a week.

Even when the first vintage was finally bottled and offered for sale in a retail space on the old winery's first floor, there were problems to face. The new wines from Wisconsin were at first considered novelty items — something for tourists to take home and chuckle about with their friends. "People didn't take them seriously," Julie admits.



The Fruits of the Vine

"One of our goals is to demystify wines so people are not afraid of doing the wrong thing," says Julie Coquard. "We'd like to help them become more comfortable in buying and ordering wine." Wollersheim Winery's Web site

(www.wollersheim.com) offers a wealth of information on selecting and serving wines, including suggestions on pairing different types of wines with different foods. You can also order wines online.

The winery, located on Highway 188 near Prairie du Sac (check the Web site for a map), offers tours and wine tastings year-round. An outdoor wine garden is open in the summer. The winery's phone number is (800) 847-9463.

A number of special events are held throughout the year, including:

Grape Stomp Festival

October 2 and 3, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

Grape stomping and spitting contests, cork tossing, fall foods from the grill, and wine tasting

Ruby Nouveau Tasting

November 20, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. The first taste of the new wine made from the year's harvest

A Vintage Christmas

December 2, 5:00–8:30 p.m. A program highlighting wine and food for the holidays

Wollersheim's Ruby Nouveau will also be featured at a Nouveau Beaujolais party at the UW's French House, 633 North Frances Street, on November 19, from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. Call the Alliance Française at (608) 262-3941 to make a reservation.

Just for the fun and education of it, interested oenophiles can go to work in the vineyards in September for a few days. If you're contemplating such an experience, contact the Wollersheim Winery.

But then a funny thing began to happen. Gradually, the winery's greatest liability — its location — turned into an asset. It had become trendy to buy local farm produce and microbrewery beers, so why not wine? Locals were willing to give a Wisconsin label a try, and they liked what they tasted. Influential restaurateurs who had been promoting Wisconsin products began to feature Wollersheim wines on their menus. The business grew on word-of-mouth advertising.



Julie Wollersheim knew from a young age that she wanted to join her dad in the business, so she enrolled in the UW-Madison business school to earn a degree in marketing.

While she was cracking the books in her final year of college, a young wine-maker in France was poring over an atlas, trying to locate a place called Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin, where he was about to be sent on a Future Farmers of America exchange program.

Philippe Coquard came from a family that had been making wine in the Beaujolais region for hundreds of years.

Like Julie, he had wanted to be a wine-maker since he was a kid helping his

Philippe Coquard's wines now attract notice far outside Wisconsin's borders . . . wines from Wollersheim and Cedar Creek have won dozens of medals, including five double golds, at national and international wine competitions.

father and uncles in the vineyards, graduating with degrees in oenology and wine marketing from Macon-Davayé in 1983.

But he also had another cherished dream: to travel to America to see for himself, as he puts it, the land of "Harley-Davidsons, hot cars, and the West."

Coquard had hoped to intern at one of the prestigious wineries in northern California, so his posting to Wisconsin left him somewhat underwhelmed at first. But then he met the daughter of his sponsor.

For his part, Bob Wollersheim was immediately impressed with Coquard. Within months of Philippe's arrival at the winery, he asked him to stay on as the company's winemaker. Philippe, who by this time was enchanted by Julie, naturally agreed. The pair married the next year.

As in a fairy tale, everyone in this story (except the long-departed count, that is) is living happily ever after. Both Bob and JoAnn Wollersheim are still active in the winery, and JoAnn tends the winery gardens.

Steve Wollersheim, an architect in Milwaukee, still helps out occasionally and designed an addition in 1995. Eva is the cellar master at Cedar Creek Winery, another Wisconsin winery the company acquired in 1990.

The Coquard children — Celine, age eleven, Romain, eight, and Nicolas, two — are learning about winemaking the way generations of their ancestors did — by playing in the vineyards and watching their parents and grandparents at work. They understand wine the way other kids understand Nintendo.

“They already know the difference between a Beaujolais and a Riesling,” boasts Philippe, who admits that he would be pleased if some of the children eventually carry on the family’s wine-making tradition.



Watching Philippe at work in the fermentation room is an education. The newly harvested grapes are crushed into juice, which runs through clear tubing into a gigantic, steel tank at the back of the room. Everything looks very modern and very clean.

He stands by another tank of fermenting wine, pours a little from a spigot, takes a sip to test its progress, and judiciously swishes it about in his mouth for a moment. Then, looking satisfied, he takes aim at a grate in the floor several feet away, and spits. Bull’s-eye. Not a drop stains the immaculate floor.

We walk outside to the terrace and settle into the wrought-iron chairs I’d been eyeing earlier.

“European and American winemaking tend to differ in philosophy,” he tells me. “American winemaking is very high-tech and businesslike. Most American winemakers were not brought up in the business. Their style of wine tends to be market driven — that is, determined by what consumers like.

European winemakers are closer to their product. They drink it every day and take personal pride in it, so their wines tend to reflect their own individual tastes more. We’re trying to incorporate both approaches here by producing wines to suit a variety of tastes and income levels.”

Historically, Wollersheim Winery has sold more white wines than reds. Profits



When the Wollersheims bought Count Haraszthy’s defunct winery in 1972, all that was left of the 1840s operation were the sandstone buildings, the cellars, and the limestone caves built into the hillsides. But the micro-climate of the Wisconsin River never changed, and has proven to be an ideal one for growing grapes.

from its popular Prairie Fumé, a crisp, fruity white, paid for a large addition to the winery a couple of years ago. But sales of reds are now increasing three times faster than sales of whites. The Domaine Reserve, a full-bodied red, sells out each year. (The ’98 vintage, due out in November, was already half pre-sold by late last summer.) Overall, the winery has increased its annual production by 20 to 25 percent each year for the last ten years.

Philippe attributes the growing preference for red wine partly to the increasing sophistication of Americans’ tastes. Another factor has been reporting on the “French paradox” — the surprisingly low incidence of heart disease among the French, despite their fondness for butter, cheese, and cream. This has been explained by their consumption of red wine, which contains substances that lower blood cholesterol.

“We’ve carved out our own niche with a local style of wine that benefits from the unique flavor imparted by the soil here, as well as from a French touch,” Julie tells me. “Philippe works to bring out the best of each year’s vintage, rather than to standardize the wine too much. That’s where the art comes in.”

Philippe Coquard’s wines now

attract notice far outside Wisconsin’s borders. In recent years, wines from Wollersheim and Cedar Creek have won dozens of medals, including five double golds, at national and international competitions.

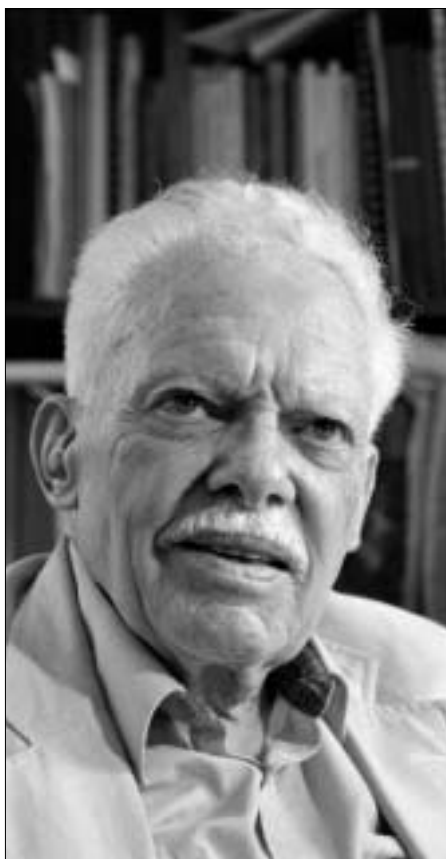
Yet for all his success, Philippe admits that it took him a while to adjust to the differences between American and European ways of doing business. “American thinking tends to be short term, bottom line. Perhaps that’s because the country has such a short history,” he says. “Here they put furniture that’s 150 years old in a museum. In France, we have 150-year-old furniture in our homes, and we use it. We tend to take a longer view.”

The “all work and no play” American ethic has also taken getting used to, says Philippe, who still prefers the “work hard, then play hard” French ethic. “Why be greedy? You won’t be able to keep it in the end,” he defends.

On the other hand, he doubts that he could do without American efficiency.

“The more time passes, the more American I become and the more French Julie becomes. That must be why we’re still so much in love.” ♦

Katalin Wolff and her son began to research this story while practicing their French on vacation in Provence.



By Michael Penn MA'97
Photos by Jeff Miller

Frederic Cassidy has relationships with words. You and I may think we do, as readers and as writers, but not like Cassidy. Ours are tawdry liaisons, use-'em-and-lose-'em affairs that have us gallivanting with another word before the memory of the last has faded. We are word gigolos, compared to Cassidy, who is the king of lexical romance.

ROMANCING THE WORD

THE UNFINISHED ADVENTURE OF A DICTIONARY MAKER'S LIFE

Observe Cassidy's method: recently, he has been reading Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*, a book thick with Civil War-era Appalachian dialect — and thus dotted with words, to borrow Cassidy's phrase, he "hasn't met yet." As he reads, he is distracted by the contours of those unfamiliar words, and he often finds himself plunging into one of his dictionaries to trace their etymologies. He ponders. He lingers. He stays for dinner, gets to know the family.

Cassidy reads dictionaries — actually reads them, as opposed to flitting through them in a purpose-driven manner. And whereas the rest of us may have one dictionary stuffed away on a remote shelf, he possesses several dozen, a selection that barely meets his need to explore the nuance of language. Paging through books such as *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* and *Trinidad Yoruba*, he rummages through flea markets of words, collecting them as most people do souvenirs. To him, they whisper secrets about exotic cultures and remote places.

"I'm a person who is especially gone on dictionaries, so I'm not typical," Cassidy admits. He speaks methodically, like a man trying to choose the perfect wine to go with dinner, and envies those who

do it better — people, he says, "for whom the whole panoply of words is alive in front of them" — failing to acknowledge that it is a rare person who stocks words like *panoply* in the pantry.

That pantry is full of extraordinary words, and among them is a truly intriguing collection that rarely crosses into Cassidy's everyday vocabulary. These are words like *pad'dybass* and *chizzyswink* and *ground itch* — words that for their peculiarity are pearls in the American fabric. Although they may not sound like products of American English, they're American at their very heart, part of the organic vocabulary that most of us learn before we ever learn how to speak "properly." To understand how people speak — how they *really* speak, as opposed to the artificially stuffy conversation we practice at cocktail parties — you need to listen to these words.

Cassidy has spent much of his life doing just that, chasing down the rare bits of Americana that hide in backwaters and bayous. He and a small band of fellow logophiles on UW-Madison's campus are in the middle of an effort to publish the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, known as DARE, the most ambitious catalogue of the country's vernacular

ever attempted. Some forty thousand nuggets of regional dialect, gathered from all fifty states, have been printed in the dictionary's first three volumes, which contain entries from A through O. When finished, the dictionary will include five volumes and an addendum, a work so mind-bogglingly huge that it has taken Cassidy and his team nearly four decades to get as far as they have.

It is Cassidy's life work, and one that he may not live to see finished.

Not that Cassidy, who will turn ninety-two in October, and who is still at his desk five days a week, is giving up just yet.

"Have you ever been working on something that you really want to finish?" he says. "I really want to finish this! Perhaps I will see it through. But I'm not immortal."

Cassidy may be mortal, but there is little evidence of it. There are concessions to age: his hearing is failing him, and he abandons Wisconsin for warmer climates during winter. But he is still every bit the bright, imaginative, witty English professor who joined UW-Madison's faculty in 1939. When I arrived to interview him in his office in Helen C. White Hall — a small nook lined from tile to rafters with yellowing volumes and pictures of famous dictionary makers — I found him redecorating, hardly looking like a man with plans to go anywhere soon.

Though the day-to-day operations of DARE are handled by associate editor Joan Houston Hall and a capable staff of twelve editors and production assistants, Cassidy remains DARE's bedrock. "Fred," Hall says, "is an institution." The pages of DARE reflect his passion and his unfailing standards, and he still reads every word before it is printed.

Over the years, the identity of Cassidy and the identity of DARE have become somewhat intertwined. DARE has a cult following of writers and language lovers who cherish it not only for its scholarly value, but for its sheer originality. And the same could be said of the sentiment toward Cassidy. As chief editor, his relentless efforts to uncover the

roots of folk society have rendered him a cultural icon. William Safire, whose column "On Language" appears in papers nationwide, once called him "America's folk laureate."

But Cassidy never set out to become an American icon. To begin with, he didn't even start out American.

Born in Jamaica to a Canadian father and a Jamaican mother, Cassidy grew up "multilingual," he says. He spoke standard British English with his parents, but delighted in the creole that flowed among the native islanders who worked around the house. Dictionaries were fixtures in his childhood, and the family *Webster's* even served as his high chair at the dinner table. "The words came up into me by osmosis," he says. When he wasn't planted on a dictionary, he was browsing one, placing wagers

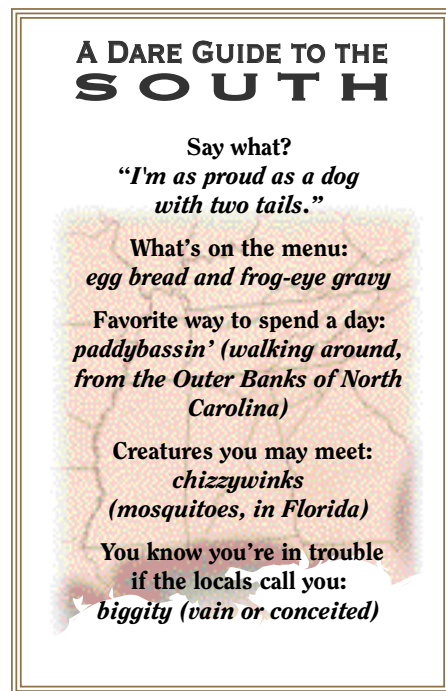
where cultures bump and hatch new ways of talking.

"People who study the language and the way it develops are always discovering interesting things," he says. "Say a word didn't exist before 1950. Then how did you *say* that feeling? Did that feeling exist in someone's mind? Did it not exist at all? Did it have to be invented?" As a professor, he returned to Jamaica to research and write a dictionary of the island's folk language. It was a small-scale taste of what was to come.

In the 1960s, as Cassidy approached what for most people would be the pinnacle of his career, a new challenge surfaced. No one had ever attempted a linguistic effort the scale of an American folk dictionary. The American Dialect Society, a group of academics and language buffs, had formed in 1889 largely to publish such a text, but by the sixties, members still hadn't been able to get the project off the ground. Cassidy, who at UW-Madison was teaching Old English and Anglo-Saxon languages, was intrigued. In 1963, he wrote a journal article that laid out just how someone might tackle the enormous task of collecting and transcribing the nation's folk speech. Within months, the society took him up on his plan and made him chief editor.

"We must expect," Cassidy had written, "that collecting, to be adequate, must continue for at least five years, and editing, though it may begin before the collecting is completed, will take another three or four years." Now thirty-seven years into his eight-year project, he chuckles at the estimation. "I was young and optimistic then."

Lexicography is a slow business. Sir James Murray devoted thirty-seven years to editing the *Oxford English Dictionary* before his death in 1915, and it took another thirteen years to finish its fifteen volumes. Editors of a German dictionary (among them the Brothers Grimm) spent 122 years toiling away on their project, earning the all-time record for lethargy among dictionaries and considerably stretching the definition of "publication."



with his father over the meanings of words.

At age eleven, Cassidy and his family moved to Akron, Ohio, where his gumbo of linguistic influences added Midwestern peers, a Scottish schoolteacher, and, down the line, a Parisian woman who would become his wife. Each new experience and exotic twang fed a growing fascination with the soft edges of language —

And, it should be noted, the American Dialect Society had taken seventy years just to select DARE's editor.

You can understand the need for precaution; dictionaries aren't places for sloppiness. They are definitive works, reflecting the ground rules for acceptable communication. You can't so much as play a game of Scrabble without their adjudicating power. But in DARE's case, a couple of other factors made Cassidy's initial projection too hopeful. Most important, no one had accurately surmised the vastness of turf to be covered. Folk dictionaries had been done in smaller communities, even in Britain, but never in a place as large and diverse as the United States.

Between 1965 and 1970, Cassidy dispatched eighty field workers, most of them graduate students, across the country to gather the linguistic gems of the

A DARE GUIDE TO THE NORTHEAST

Say what?

*"He's got his nose open for her."
(to be in love, in Northern cities)*

What's on the menu:

*dropped eggs (poached) and hasty
pudding*

Favorite way to spend a day:

*belly-bumping on a double ripper
(riding a sled)*

Creatures you may meet:

*pinkwinks (small frogs) and beef
critters (large cows)*

You know you're in trouble
if the locals call you:

*bufflehead
(stupid, in Pennsylvania)*

land. Traveling in "word wagons" (Dodge campers) and carrying boxes of audio tapes, they visited 1,002 communities, from rural outposts to inner-city neighborhoods, looking for lifelong residents willing to complete the 1,847-question survey the DARE staff had designed to elicit localese. They asked everything



The race to finish DARE is a slow one, full of long days and meticulous attention to detail. Before they are printed, new entries are researched, prepared, and typed onto small paper slips, which end up on Cassidy's desk for editorial review. And, after nearly forty years and forty thousand words, Cassidy still reads every entry with the exacting eye of a perfectionist.

from what you call someone who's always in someone else's business (a *nebby-nose*, in Pennsylvania) to what you say when someone sneezes (if you're a Southerner, "*Scat!*"). At the same time, volunteers perused a library of novels, plays, diaries, letters, and newspaper clippings.

When the collecting was done, editors had more than two million responses and nine hundred hours of audiotape to sift through. Not all of the responses will end up in DARE; Cassidy and his staff first look for the words that demonstrate a regional pattern of use. But when it is complete, DARE will contain the definitions, origins, and uses for more than sixty thousand words. By comparison, most experts say that there are about two hundred thousand standard English words used commonly, and only about one hundred thousand in languages such as French.

For each word — including thousands that don't make it to print — the staff undertakes a painstakingly exhaustive investigation. They consult dictionaries, historical documents, and collections of folklore to seek out roots. They look for printed examples that confirm what the interviews have told them, and they analyze other quotations for differences in spelling or meaning. It's meticulous work that can sometimes stretch to weeks for a single word. And it's a process that really can't be hastened. Like a crossword puzzle, the answers sometimes come only after long and fruitless stretches of head-scratching. While DARE's publication process has benefited some from the rapid technologies of the information age, the grunt work is thought work. And, Hall notes, "we can't think any faster."

An example stems from one of Hall's favorite entries: *bobbasheely*, a versatile

word used in the Gulf States to signify both a very close friend and the action of moving or associating in a friendly manner. DARE was stumped by the word, which an interviewer thought might be Irish. Later, an editor discovered *bobbasheely* in a Faulkner novel, which pointed them toward Southern roots. Exploring the cultures of the area led them to a Choctaw dictionary, where they found an entry for *itibapishili*, signifying a brother or twin — *bobbasheely*'s certain ancestor. Not all words lead editors weaving through such rich history, but a few, says Hall, turn out to be downright thrilling.

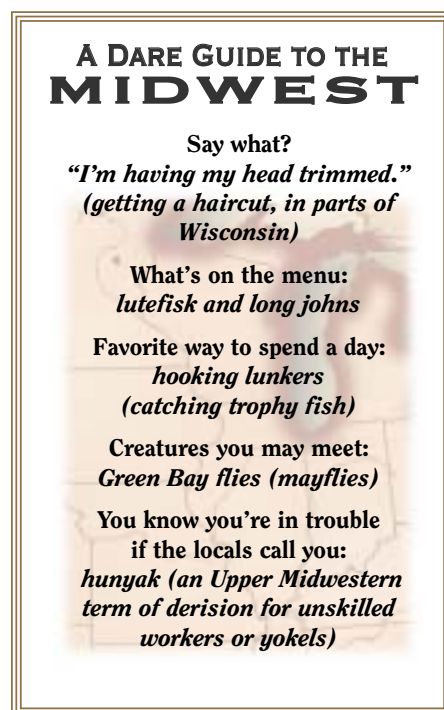
In 1985, fifteen years after the word wagons came home, DARE was ready to share the excitement, or at least three letters' worth. Volume I, containing *bobbasheely* and some ten thousand similar delights, was a minor sensation among both scholars and lay readers, who bought more than sixteen thousand copies, running through five printings of the 903-page tome. A *New York Times* critic labeled the project "one of the glories of American scholarship," and DARE's notations began to pop up regularly in newspaper columns devoted to language. Volumes II and III followed to similar praise in 1991 and 1996.

Many readers love the books for their wonderful oddity. A romp through DARE's pages is like a trip to a linguistic Disneyland, full of strange and exotic sounds and shrewd, down-home wit. It is as if Garrison Keillor invented his own language, where good hunting dogs are cold-noses and the local bore is a cold potato.

DARE contains not only definitions, but citations, histories, and even maps that trace where regional words are used. The result is a book that is part dictionary, part social history — a sort of American travelogue, told in the tongues of its inhabitants.

Consider the existence in the Minnesotan vocabulary (if not in actuality) of the wily *agropelter*, a ferocious beast that lives in hollow trees and drops tree limbs on the heads of wandering lumberjacks. Or the need of longtime residents

of Maine to have a word — *rusticator* — that signifies a boarder on summer vacation. Those words tell us something



about what life may be like in Minnesota or Maine. And they also disprove, at least partially, the notion that we live in a mass culture devoid of variety. The pervasiveness of McDonald's and Gap stores aside, DARE's pages bear out a nation that still harbors many views of reality, one that even today is channeled by gulfs of experience and culture. And as any *rusticator* will tell you, the common bond of English often isn't enough to bridge the gap.

DARE steps in as a cultural Sacagawea, leading the way through the thicket of strange dialect and custom. Physicians, for example, are trained in medical school to treat skin rashes, but may well be stumped by a case of dew poison or ground itch, words commonly used in some parts of the country. Because DARE knows the lingo, it has become a standard desk reference for doctors and lawyers who work in unfamiliar surroundings.

One of DARE's recent queries, for example, demonstrates that dialect is about more than just a colorful accent. A

few years ago, a psychiatrist asked DARE's editors if there were any regional synonyms for stilts. He was confused because some of his patients kept identifying pictures of stilts as either *tommywalkers* or *johnnywalkers*. Editors were able to confirm that those words are perfectly normal synonyms for stilts in the South, but that's not where the story ends.

The doctor worked with patients suffering from aphasia, and as part of their therapy, he administered a national standardized test that asked patients to identify pictures of common objects such as stilts. Since *tommywalkers* and *johnnywalkers* weren't in the answer key, he had to mark them as wrong, categorizing them as lacking appropriate vocabulary. If he administered the test again, after a period of therapy, with the same results, the patients could be labeled as showing no progress, a diagnosis that might cost them their Medicare coverage.

But DARE's most surprising use is in tracking down criminals. Cassidy and his team aren't exactly cut from the mold of Sam Spade, but they did play a small role in helping the FBI identify the Unabomber. After the Unabomber published his lengthy manifesto, the FBI brought in Roger Shuy, a Montana-based linguist, to analyze the text. Using DARE and other dictionaries to track regional influences of the bomber's language, Shuy built a profile of the bomber's background and experiences that proved startlingly accurate. "I keep my three volumes of DARE very handy to my desk," Shuy wrote in a letter to Cassidy. "I find it invaluable. Needless to say, it would be even more valuable if it went beyond the letter O."

That DARE is a masterpiece unfinished is a common complaint. The volumes are used widely by novelists, playwrights, and actors trying to master the speech mannerisms of a particular area of the country, and many grumble that DARE so far captures only half the landscape. Reference librarians keep checking to make sure they haven't received an incomplete set. In fact,

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DARE

Continued from page 27

whenever associate editor Hall encounters a DARE fan, “When is the next volume going to be out?” is usually the first thing she hears.

Second is, “How is Fred doing?” These days, Cassidy is careful to look both ways when crossing the street. He watches his step on Madison’s often-icy sidewalks. He takes his time, because he wants to stick around.

A few years ago, when Cassidy was in his youthful eighties, he was hit by a car while walking home from the grocery store. The accident, which broke several bones in his leg, left him unable to work and none too pleased. “I was using the crosswalk!” he still testily asserts. But the accident also amplified a rumble of concern that has surrounded DARE for years: Will Cassidy make it to see the end?

“He used to be optimistic about it,” Hall says. “But now I think he’s realistic.”

Volume IV is scheduled to be published in 2002, bringing DARE’s march through the alphabet halfway through S. If everything stays on course, Volume V will arrive just in time for Cassidy’s one hundredth birthday, in 2007. That’s merely a projection, though, a best-case scenario for a project that hasn’t always enjoyed the privilege of best cases. Although Cassidy is healthy today, the longer DARE drags on, the more he pushes the odds of longevity.

To his credit, Cassidy approaches the subject of his own mortality with characteristic wit and resigned patience. “There’s nothing I can do,” Cassidy says, “but work as long as I can.”

But there is also the complicating factor of DARE’s financial health, which for much of the last decade has wavered near flatlining.

DARE is a project of such daring that it almost certainly never will be attempted again. It is no cheap venture, costing about \$600,000 a year to fund research and editorial tasks. That money has traditionally come from large grants:

the initial gathering stage was funded by the U.S. Office of Education, and several sources, notably the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the Andrew Mellon Foundation, and the National Science Foundation, have underwritten the long sifting-and-editing process. Those benefactors have

A DARE GUIDE TO THE FAR WEST

Say what?

*“I’ve got a hitch in my git-along.”
(a sore leg, to those on
the Western Plains)*

What’s on the menu:

long boys (submarine sandwiches) and bear claws

Favorite way to spend a day:

*bullwhacking
(driving a team of oxen)*

Creatures you may meet:

*kangaroo rats and pocket mice
(small gopher-like rodents)*

You know you’re in trouble if the locals call you:

*gazook (a general disparaging
label used by Westerners)*

been models of patience — in some cases ignoring their own guidelines to continue funding DARE. But editors knew that the money wasn’t endless.

In December 1995, the final Mellon grant expired, leaving precious little fuel for DARE’s engine. There wasn’t money to fill two open editor positions, and by 1997, the picture was so grim that Cassidy could not assure his staff that they would be employed by the year’s end. Hall recalls sending out staff memos with a rolling D-Day — *We only have enough money to pay you through October 27 ...*

Hall spent weeks writing grant proposals and seeking out individual benefactors. Every day was like treading water, surviving on \$20 and \$50 checks from fans. Last year, the university’s College of Letters and Science, which

oversees DARE, tossed a life raft, agreeing to fund a development specialist as part of a three-year push to bolster DARE’s coffers. David Simon, who had successfully raised funds in previous campaigns for the UW Foundation, was hired, and his efforts have already enlivened hopes. Not only have contributions from private individuals begun to arrive, but the big fish are nibbling again. In March, DARE won a new \$350,000 matching grant from the NEH, and the Mellon foundation has come through with some additional money this year.

The money — plus the fact that they’re now working on the downslope of the alphabet — has brightened the mood around DARE’s offices. There is a sense that, for the first time, the dictionary has the momentum of inevitability. “The feeling is that we’ve come this far, we can’t possibly let it stop now,” says Hall. “We’re like the little engine that could.”

But Cassidy has been burned by predicting the future before. He’s not about to try it again. What matters more is that when — or even if — DARE is done, it will be done right. “If we had all the monetary support we need, we could add a couple more editors and cut off a couple of years,” he says. “But until we have adequate support — until we’re not limping along — we simply can’t speed it up.

“If we had to speed it up seriously, we’d make mistakes,” he adds. “And that’s one thing we’re passionately serious about.”

So Cassidy is content to tuck his reading glasses under his tuft of chalk-white hair, open one of the thick manila files on his desk, and introduce himself to a word he hasn’t met. He may be in the race of his life, but it is a race he’d rather lose than hurry.

Michael Penn MA’97 learned about the color of regional dialect during four years of college in Nashville, Tennessee. Y’all’s accent ain’t nothing compared to your average Nashvillian. For more information about DARE, contact David Simon at (608) 265-9836 or visit <http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/dare/dare.html> on the World Wide Web.

the heart's deepest desire

In the beginning, you fall in love.

It starts in your feet and pretty soon it's in your chest and then your throat and finally you can't think about anything else. For me, it was boogie-woogie — specifically, "Pine Top's Boogie," by the great Chicago pianist Pine Top Smith. My father, Louis Sidran '37, had the record, and by age nine I had it memorized. I played it over and over again, like some kind of personal litany.

I had been playing piano since . . . well, actually, I don't remember *not* playing the piano. My earliest memories include the instrument, and I would spend hours at the piano, turning the pages of a comic book with my right hand while my left hand traced a boogie-woogie pattern. Slowly, unconsciously, I fixed the moves into my motor memory while my mind wandered. So even as a small child, jazz was, for me, the great escape: it spoke to me of something better, another world, greater than the world I knew in Racine, Wisconsin. Years later, when I heard UW Professor George Mosse speak on the importance of alienation in the growth of the personal conscience, I knew he was talking to me. I am living proof. I believe that alienation, to a greater or lesser extent, is at the heart of every jazz musician's story.

I went to school, and in general, led a normal life for a Jewish child growing up in an overwhelmingly non-Jewish, Midwestern community. On Saturdays, I went to temple and stood with the davening Eastern European refugees and pre-

tended to pray, too. I swayed with them and made little chanting sounds. I had no idea what I was saying, but I loved the feeling of being in that hypnotic state. I think of this as my first jam session.

I remember when, a few years later, I performed an impromptu piano recital for my fifth-grade class, and I got a kiss from Miss Pedley, my teacher. I think of this as my first paying gig. Years passed, and I collected records, one after another. I took the bus downtown to

*"It doesn't interest me
where or what or with
whom you have studied.
I want to know what
sustains you from the
inside when all else falls
away."*

— ORIAH MOUNTAIN DREAMER

Trudy White's record shop and traded the money I made pulling weeds and sweating in my uncle's auto parts store for something by Miles Davis, Horace Silver, or the "hottest new group in jazz," Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross. I would bring the discs home and go into my room, close the door, and get right next to my little record player, like an Eskimo huddling around a fire, absorbing the heat that came from New York, Los Angeles, Chicago. The world was

calling. I listened to Blue Mitchell's trumpet solo on Horace Silver's "Juicy Lucy" so many times that I thought he was related to me, literally — that we were blood brothers.

Life in Racine was generally slow. It got a bit more exciting when my schoolmates discovered anti-Semitism. I don't have to go into the details, as one can imagine how creatively and thoroughly thirteen-year-old boys can torture one another. But when my best friend said to me, "You can tell me, is it really true that Jews drink the blood of Christian babies?" I knew that I was from some other place. And it was jazz, that's the place I was from. Its voice whispered to me of a better life, where all men were brothers, and where having fun was not only serious business, but also the order of the day. The music itself was so warm and comforting, so free and on fire, and the players were so supportive of each other, and the solos — well, the solos were like rhetorical flights where no words were necessary. It meant what it meant, and even as a young boy, I knew it would be a dream come true to be able to speak this language.

After my bar mitzvah, I left the Jewish temple and planned to never return. What had the temple given me, I reasoned? A few memorized lines to say on cue and a sense that the ghetto was still alive and well in Wisconsin. How could it compare to the call of jazz? At age thirteen, I signed on at the temple of bebop, and I've spent the last four decades among the faithful.

in your throat
in your chest
in your feet

Jazz musician
Ben Sidran
looked far and
wide to discover
the true meaning
of his music —
then found it,
unexpectedly
beating, inside
where it had
always been.

by ben sidran '67
photos by
brent nicastro '77

coming of age

My first major stop was UW-Madison in 1961, where I enrolled in the Integrated Liberal Studies program and took courses from the likes of Wilmott Ragsdale, Herbert Howe MA'41, PhD'48, and Harvey Goldberg '43, PhD'51 by day — and from Steve Miller x'67, Boz Scaggs x'66, and Langdon Street by night. The Vietnam War was breathing down my neck when I headed to the University of Sussex in Brighton, England, where I received my PhD in American Studies. I went back to playing, and Steve Miller and his band arrived in London to make their first record — produced by Glyn Johns, the engineer who had recorded the Beatles. Months after they left, I was still playing — with Eric Clapton, Peter Frampton, and even one memorable session with the Rolling Stones.

By the time my dissertation had been published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston (as *Black Talk*), I consciously decided that it was time to stop studying the informa-

tion. It was time to *become* the information. Judy (Lutrin Sidran'69) and I ended up living in Los Angeles, where I signed a recording contract with Capitol Records. Then my learning really began in earnest. I discovered that to find my own voice, I had to first learn how to *hear* myself. Judy encouraged a move away from the noise of L.A., so we headed back to Madison.

Here, I became the artist that I had been avoiding since taking the academic fork in the road. Here, I began writing songs in earnest, going on tours with a series of bands, making one record a year. I also taught at the university for a year, a course in the Communication Arts department called the Social Aesthetics of Record Production. I earned my living producing pop and jazz records for other artists, and radio and television programs about jazz for NPR, PBS, and various companies, many of them based overseas.

I began a schedule of traveling that has to date kept me away from home for thirteen of the past twenty-five years.

three weeks, he could keep time well enough so that we could play together.

When Leo turned five, I wanted him to have some Jewish experience of his own, something he could feel on his pulse just as I had felt the spiritual energy of those old men back in Racine. I know now that I was also trying to reconnect with my own beginnings. As fate would have it, I happened to wander into the Gates of Heaven synagogue in Madison's James Madison Park on the day that Hannah Rosenthal x'73 was leading her second Rosh Hashanah service. It was wonderful, very hamish (down to earth), with a text and an atmosphere that nimmmed the heart. "The Gods we worship write their names on our faces, be sure of that," she said, "and a person will worship something — have no doubt of that either." What was I worshipping? What was written on my face? And if, as the text said, man is capable of change — indeed, *obligated* to change — was it time for me to change? And if so, what should I be doing that I wasn't doing?

In Hannah's service, God was not an old man or a removed omniscience, but a presence, the sum total of human experience, the knowable and the ineffable. And there was a kind of simplicity in her presentation that made me comfortable to sit among these people and think these thoughts. In my past, Jewish ritual was just that: the hollow scraping of reeds in the wind. Here, I found in the smallest of moments the largest of meanings.

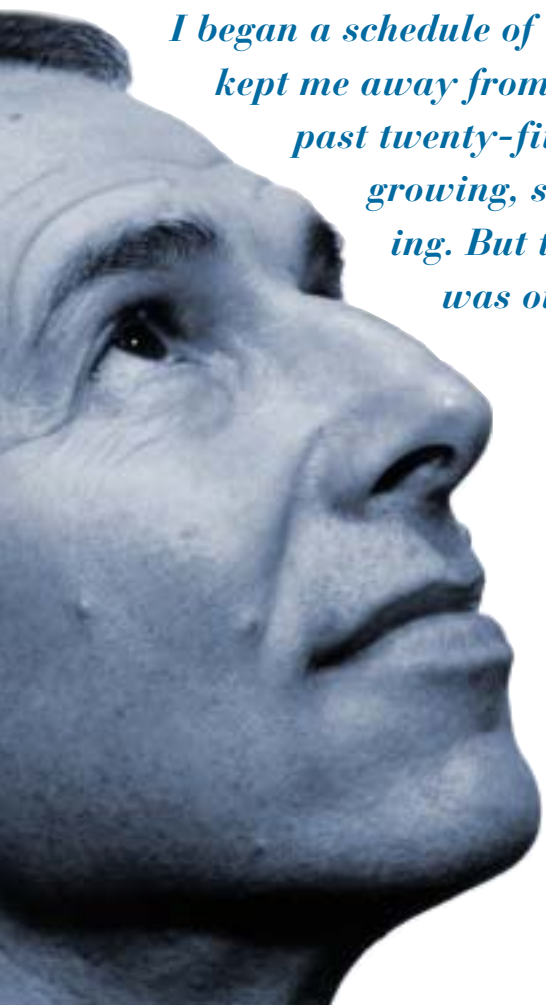
Now I believe that everyone wants and needs to think these thoughts. Who are we? Where did we come from? Why are we here? And, even if there is no retribution or justice on earth, what is the right way for us to walk the path, from the first step to the last?

What was of particular interest to me, however, was the music. The service was full of songs that I found I remembered from childhood but hadn't thought of since I was five years old. Children's songs that were so unremarkable that they normally would have passed without notice. And yet, in this new context, they provoked powerful feelings in me.

I began a schedule of traveling that has to date kept me away from home for thirteen of the past twenty-five years. I was actively growing, searching, learning, producing. But the best production by far was our son, Leo, in 1976.

I was actively growing, searching, learning, producing. But the best production by far was our son, Leo, in 1976.

Judy says that Leo, who just graduated with the Class of '99, softened me. Certainly, I became less interested in being "hip" and more open to sitting on the floor in a pile of Legos and things with wheels. Leo loved music, all kinds of music, and it was all around from the moment of his conception. One day, he asked if he could play drums with such a serious disposition that, for his fourth birthday, I bought him a small set. Within



At the end of the service, I went up and thanked Hannah and said that I really enjoyed myself. But there was just one thing. “No offense,” I said very softly, “but your guitar playing is a little distracting. Would it be possible for me to help with the music?” And with that the path branched again.

Year after year, as Leo grew from five to six, and six to seven, and then seven to eight, I prepared and played the music for Hannah’s High Holy Day services at the Gates of Heaven. The night before, she would come by the house and worry me through all the songs. They were so simple — “Avinu Malchenu,” “Oseh Shalom,” “Mode Ani” — that I sometimes lost my way while playing them.

Bruce Paulson, a trombone player in the “Tonight Show” band during Johnny Carson’s reign, once told me, “I played Johnny’s theme song every night for twenty years, and I had to read the music every night. I never could memorize it. I can’t tell you why.” I think I can. It has something to do with ritual, and how it replaces normal consciousness, for better or for worse, with an alternative state.

life’s a lesson

Every year, I encouraged Leo to sit next to me on the piano bench so he would pay more attention to the service. And every year, as his feet got progressively closer to the floor, he played the music along with me, improvising on the top of the piano while I played the bottom. The same year his shoes actually touched the old wooden floor, Hannah asked me to include the song “Life’s A Lesson” in the service. “It helps me to understand the Kaddish,” she said. “You’ll play it right before we read the prayer for the dead.”

“Life’s A Lesson” is a set of lyrics I wrote in 1979 to a melody by Frank Rosolino. Frank was a legend in Los Angeles, a wild, happy-go-lucky guy who sat in the trombone section of Johnny Carson’s “Tonight Show” band right next to my friend Bruce. They called Frank the “Silver Fox” because of his rich,

white mane and his dapper appearance. He loved to sail and play golf, and he enjoyed a lot of friends, a lovely wife, and beautiful kids. All in all, he was on top of the world, leading what appeared to be the best jazz life possible. He wrote this lovely song called “Blue Daniel” back in the fifties. It was a simple, wistful melody, and I had considered writing lyrics to it for a long time. I met Frank in 1973 in L.A., when I hired him to play on my album, *Putting In Time On Planet Earth*. “What’s it about?” I asked. “You know,” he said, “like the Blue Danube? It’s just a waltz.”

Over the years, I kept trying to come up with some words for the melody, but my ideas always seemed too trivial, too inconsequential for the underlying elegance and beauty of Frank’s simple little theme. Then one night in 1979 I got a phone call from L.A. Had I heard about Frank? He had come home that day with a gun and without explanation, he had shot his wife, his child, and then killed himself.

There was a long silence. I couldn’t say anything, so I said nothing, and then we said good-bye and hung up. I was sitting at the piano, so I started playing “Blue Daniel.” And as if from out of thin air, the following lyrics arrived in my head:

*“Life’s a lesson, you can fail it
you can set your spirit free or jail it
but setting it free is no guarantee it’s
gonna fly when you sail it.
The object is to ride it,
But setting it free while you’re sitting
astride it
isn’t easy.
You can learn a lot by going crazy,
you can fail it,
you can set your spirit free or jail it.
But setting it free is no guarantee it’s
gonna fly when you sail it.
And if you feel like you’re in prison
and no one is coming to talk or to listen,
take it easy,
know that no one ever has it easy,
no one ever learns to fly by freezing.
Life’s a lesson you can pass or fail.”*

It was as close as I’ve ever come to receiving a dictation from a higher authority. Subsequently, I rarely performed the song in public. But one day, Hannah heard me sing it, and as she said, it spoke to her of the same questions raised by the Kaddish — a prayer recited in daily synagogue services. So every year thereafter, I sang “Life’s A Lesson” at her High Holy Day services. And year after year, the people leaving the Gates of Heaven Synagogue said to me, “You should record this music.” I knew I would have to do it, and after twenty years of producing records, I knew it would not be easy.

aligning the axis powers

There was no chance that anybody at a major record label would be interested in financing this kind of recording. At the same time, I was producing a series of jazz records in concert with a Japanese company, and I had an active European distributor from Germany. Whereas the American record companies were already deep into their love affair with gangster rap music, the Japanese and the Europeans were still enthusiastic about the jazz and social commentary albums I was making. I had just started working on the music for a film called *Hoop Dreams*, which no American label would fund, and I had taken it to my foreign partners, who had been receptive.

So, in the spring of 1990, I called a meeting at a nondescript hotel just outside the airport in Minneapolis. We discussed the usual business, and then, at the end of the day, I asked Nobu, my partner from Japan, what he thought about an album sung in Hebrew that would include famous Jewish jazz musicians performing liturgical music. In his wonderful, reasonable way, he said, “I think that would be interesting.” I turned to Vera, the German distributor, and asked how she thought her market would react. “It will be well received,” she said. The Axis powers had just agreed to help finance the Jewish record.

Within weeks, I was in a recording studio. First, I recorded all the songs with just myself on the keyboards and Lynette Margulies '74, who sang at our services, on many of the Hebrew vocals. Then, for the next four years, I traveled the world with tapes under my arm. I would call up a friend, or perhaps just a musician whom I knew had Jewish roots, and make my pitch. Like the call I made to saxophonist Josh Redman, who has an Afro-American father (the avant-garde musician Dewey Redman) and a Jewish mother. "Josh," I said, "I'm doing an album of Hebrew liturgical music, and I've got you down for 'Oseh Shalom.' Are you interested?" He laughed and said, "Seriously, what are you planning?" I repeated myself. It took a couple of tries, but invariably, it worked. They came, they played, and they left with tapes for their mothers. Twenty of America's finest Jewish performers played like angels on songs they hadn't heard or thought of since they were kids.

What was so striking was the similarity of the stories they told me. "I was born Jewish," Randy Brecker said, "but I'm not religious." "I know," I reassured him, "me, too. Just come down and try it, and if you don't like it, we won't use it." He, too, left with a tape for his mother.

There were some deep, almost primitive connections being made in the studio every time this music unfolded. I included only two songs in English — a song I wrote for my sister called "Face Your Fears," and, of course, "Life's A Lesson," which I sang as a duet with Carole King. The sound of Lynette's soaring Hebrew filled room after room, in city after city, as I traveled the circuit documenting our communal jazz childhood. In our day, each one of us had stood as a child in a temple somewhere, swaying and hypnotized by the language and the hope that there was justice in the world, a basic belief that all children bring with them into this life. As the word got out in the jazz community that I was making this record, I started receiving phone calls from musicians, some quite famous, saying things like, "Ben, you can't record 'Avinu Malchenu' with-

out me. That's my song." It was as if to become jazz musicians, we had all taken a fork in the road, and now we wanted to revisit lost territory.

If making this record opened up deep philosophical questions for me, it also opened up urgently practical ones. I got it finished. I got it paid for. I arranged for the Art Institute of Chicago to license Marc Chagall's *Praying Jew* for the cover. I saw to it that the record was distributed in Japan and throughout Europe, where the reviews were very positive, particularly one in Japan's leading music magazine, *Swing Journal*, that was virtually ecstatic about the fact that "Life's A Lesson" was a kind of cultural event, the first recording ever to reunite the two streams of Jews and jazz. But in the United States, I couldn't get my phone calls returned.

It's not that I didn't try. Over my decades as a performer and producer, I had come to know most of the men who ran the business. As the cliché would have it, many of them were Jews, some quite active in the Jewish community and well known for their philanthropy; several had even received the B'nai Brith humanitarian award for their good deeds.

Up until that time, I had lived my professional life by two guiding principles: Do not have boxes of CDs in your basement and avoid the Jewish thing at all costs — only to wind up with boxes of Jewish CDs in my basement.

Then I got it.

So originally, I felt confident that one of these gentlemen would see the beauty and the logic in this recording and at least make it available in his home country to his own people. I sent copies to a dozen of these top recording executives.

To a man, they were complimentary about the music. Likewise, to a man, they turned it down.

"sunday morning"

But as life would have it, a producer at the CBS "Sunday Morning" television show got wind of the record, and about me living a normal life in Madison and yet traveling the world, playing and recording so much different music with such a diverse group of artists. They contacted me, and I agreed to let them follow me around. They filmed me working with Diana Ross in New York, with the rapper Shock G for *Hoop Dreams* in San Francisco. They captured me in the control room with Mose Allison, and performing live in Tokyo. And they kept coming back to me and seventy-five of my neighbors at the Gates of Heaven Synagogue, singing these little songs and following Hannah's service. They even focused on this record that nobody would release.

When the program aired a couple of Sundays after the Jewish High Holy Days in 1994, my phone began to ring and didn't stop for weeks. People the world over wanted to know how they could get this record. But, of course, they couldn't.

I still hadn't learned the lesson life was trying to teach me. I wanted so badly to give my work away, as I had done so often in the past, perhaps so that somebody else might be responsible for my failures. But in the United States I couldn't even give this record away. Because I had promised a few of the folks who called that if they left their names, I'd send them an album, I did, for me, what was a dramatic, last-ditch move. I actually contacted a factory and manufactured five hundred copies of the album. Up until that time, I had lived my professional life by two guiding principles: Do not have boxes of CDs in your basement and avoid the Jewish thing at all costs — only to wind up with boxes of Jewish CDs in my basement. Then I got it.

The record sold and sold. More than twenty-five thousand copies. Out of the basement. The record executives were all

wrong. But that was only the beginning. I began to play the Jewish music in concerts all over the world — at Lincoln Center in New York, at the Simon Weisenthal Center in Los Angeles, at the Odeon Theater in Vienna, Austria, on the anniversary of Kristallnacht. And what was even more profound was that Leo played drums with me at all these concerts. Sitting with him on stage, playing this music that we had played together on the piano bench at the Gates of Heaven for so many years, was an extraordinary feeling. It was as if the contemporary adage, “Think globally, act locally,” had been turned on its head.

There seemed to be no end to where this record was taking me. Until, at last, it finally led me to my own end game of sorts. My whole life, I had been listening to jazz as if there was some way to unravel its message, to penetrate the ineffable and parse the mystery at its core. But perhaps this is the very purpose of this music. It speaks in ways that we otherwise cannot, without all the baggage of verbs and nouns, and it expresses, as the great African pianist Abdullah Ibrahim told me, “the heart’s deepest desire.” And isn’t this what prayer is? The heart expressing its deepest desire. Hadn’t I been praying all these years? Hadn’t I been running toward, rather than away from, my own past?

It’s well known that jazz is a means to transform grief into joy. (The expression is, “I love the blues, they hurt so nice.”) When the jazz musician plays, he is in fact transforming himself. During all those long hours he works not just to master the piece of metal in his hands, but to make himself the vessel, to learn to listen to the voice in his own head, and to sing it to the world. Marshall McLuhan taught us that the medium is the message. In jazz, the musician himself is the medium, so his life becomes the message. The kind of vessel you become is determined by your heart’s desire. I believe we all want to do something important, to be connected to something greater than ourselves. And jazz training, where you are forced to find your own voice, to accept yourself for what you truly are, to be yourself completely, is a kind of religious training.

wanting to play

In the spring of 1999, only days after Leo graduated from UW-Madison with a major in history, he and I went to Minneapolis to play a gig. As we often do when we travel together, we hired local bass and horn players to fill out the band. This time, we were joined by saxophonist Irv Williams at a little club called the

I believe we all want to do something important, to be connected to something greater than ourselves. And jazz training, where you are forced to find your own voice, to accept yourself for what you truly are, to be yourself completely, is a kind of religious training.

Artist’s Quarter. Irv was born in Arkansas eighty years ago and has lived in the Twin Cities for the past fifty. He has wonderful stories about his days on the road with Duke Ellington’s band and nights with Lester Young, but the best part of hanging out with Irv is the twinkle in his eye and the wisdom of his playing.

He acts as if he’s still in his midlife, and he plays with a romantic lyricism and a calm command that is the signature of the self-realized jazzman. The sounds that come from his old horn are as cool as fresh-squeezed juice on a hot day. In his music, he says only what he wants to, and he rarely repeats himself. He makes you play better when you play with him, because to hear him is to understand that your role in life is not to prove yourself, but to *be* yourself.

My favorite example of this axiom is something the great saxophonist Phil Woods told me. He is perhaps the most gifted and thoroughly accomplished saxophonist of our day, having worked with many of the great legends of this music

— Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk. His command of the horn is nonpareil. Several years ago, I asked him, “What is it like to be able to play absolutely anything you can hear? It must be liberating.” He just looked at me with those big, sad eyes of his and said, “Oh, playing is no problem. *Wanting* to play — that’s the problem.”

This reduction of the artistic process to a search for desire — the desire for desire — is, I think, at the core of jazz. Those who think that artists are merely flexing some abstract or intellectual muscle on a daily basis are really missing the point. Art is a transformative process, and the artist is constantly transforming himself, first of all, and his audience by extension. It’s this hunger to experience change — real, physical change — that drives the artist. If it’s a need to experience “wholeness” or “completeness,” then it is a wholeness with one’s own potential that one feels. It’s as if there is an almost genetic unfolding in the human heart of this potential, an internal command to follow this voice.

And isn’t this similar to the theme of the Jewish High Holy Days — the belief that man can change, that we can transform ourselves, and that there is a spiritual commandment that we do so? It is an act of surrender, of giving oneself over to something greater, and this, of course, is what musicians do. John Coltrane was not the first to say that “music belongs to no one — it passes through us all.” In the daily attempt to surrender, to transform oneself through confronting a brass tube or a row of piano keys or a set of drums, one is engaged in learning the heart’s desire, as a truth on the pulse, not as an abstract idea.

This is what I was thinking as I watched Leo and Irv play together. Or perhaps I was thinking nothing at all.



When people ask Ben Sidran ‘67 how he can live in such a small town, he smiles and says, “The road leads from New York City to Madison, not the other way around.”



Genetic engineering may result in hardy soybeans and in the perfect supermarket tomato. But is it safe for human health and the environment?

BY NIKI DENISON

You've just given the baby a bedtime bottle. Feet up at last, you settle down to a snack of Doritos and a can of soda, and leaf through a news magazine — only to learn that you and Little Tyke are now digesting genetically engineered foods in the form of soy formula, corn chips, and carbonated corn sweetener.

If you're American, your reaction may very well be, "So what?" But if you're European, you may instead switch to one of several grocery chains that have banned genetically modified (GM) products from their shelves.

Europeans, shaken by mad cow disease and other dietary scares, are worried that the newfangled foods are not safe. They're not so sure they want to eat products laced with genetic material from bacteria and viruses and — coming soon to a grocer near you — scorpions, fish, and even humans. (Think of the Flav'r-Savr tomato, which has a gene that was altered to slow the aging process and extend shelf life. Another classic example is the insertion of antifreeze genes from flounder into tomatoes to make them frost-resistant.)

The controversy over the genetic tweaking of our food supply is threatening to lead to the third World War of trade disputes. And it has become such an emotionally charged issue that it's hard to separate fact from fiction.

Go ahead, try it. Visit one of the many Internet sites devoted to this issue. Read about the Scottish scientist who fed genetically modified potatoes to rats and claimed that it damaged their immune systems.

Then read the report in *New Scientist* magazine, which maintains that "his results support only one obvious conclusion: rats hate potatoes."

Proponents believe that DNA-altered crops can save an overpopulated world from famine and pollution. Opponents say they are the equivalent of waging biological warfare on our planet, releasing strange new organisms that will reproduce perpetually and far outlast the effects of nuclear pollution.

If you happen to be the cautious type and you want to avoid gene-spliced food, you'll have to restrict yourself to buying organic. And forget about eating out — unless you want to dine in England, where even some of the fast-food chains have removed GM ingredients from their menus.



Under current U.S. law, most genetically engineered crops are considered "substantially equivalent" to conventional ones derived from plant breeding and don't need to be labeled. Chances are very good that you're regularly eating gene-spliced fare, because most processed foods contain soy, canola or cottonseed oil, corn, or potatoes — some of the first crops being converted to genetic acreage on a large scale.

Currently, some 25 percent of our corn crop is genetically engineered, and next year, all of the U.S. soybean harvest will be of the modified variety. All of our major food crops are slated to be genetically engineered within the next ten years.

If you have food allergies, you may be dismayed to learn that York Nutritional Laboratory in England has found a substantial increase in soy allergies in conjunction with the introduction of GM soybeans in that country.

Counter that with the claim of biotech advocates that genetic engineering is just like traditional plant breeding, and that all the foods whose DNA goes under the geneticist's knife are tested extensively.



Europe, once a major market for American soybeans, now refuses to take them, resulting in the sale of conventional or "identity-preserved" crops (for a higher price) overseas.

But sift and winnow this: in 1989, tryptophan, a dietary supplement manufactured from genetically engineered bacteria, killed thirty-seven people and sickened thousands of others. Although not everyone agrees on just what tainted the supplement, a study published in *Science* magazine concluded that it may have been a toxic "novel amino acid" created by genetic engineering.

Currently, some 25 percent of our corn crop is genetically engineered, and next year, all of the U.S. soybean harvest will be of the modified variety. All of our major food crops are slated to be genetically engineered within the next ten years.

News stories like this may partly explain why in England and Wales, gene-altered nourishment has been banned from school cafeterias and nursing homes, and the British Medical Association has called for a moratorium on the commercial planting of transgenics. Further afield, farmers in India burned test plots planted with Bt cotton because they believe their livelihoods are threatened by corporate biotech. The United States, says Professor of Rural Sociology Fred Buttel '70, MS'72, PhD'75, "is probably the only country in the world in which there is such a high degree of farmer and

consumer acceptance of genetically modified crops." But public opinion may be poised to shift here as well.

Two baby food manufacturers, Gerber and Heinz, recently decided to eliminate GM components from their products. And none other than U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman surprised many observers last spring when he said, in a speech at Purdue University, "We can't force these genetically engineered food products down people's throats . . . When it's all said and done, the public opinion poll is just as powerful a research tool as the test tube." He compared the biotechnology craze to the rush to embrace nuclear energy and Asian financial markets. "We have a way in this country," he said, "of latching on to solutions, pursuing them to the exclusion of others, and then watching them sometimes backfire."

The *Wall Street Journal* interprets Glickman's change of course as an attempt to forestall a European-style backlash here. The agriculture secretary recently resurrected a biotechnology advisory committee that includes experts, members of the public, and critics, and encouraged companies to voluntarily label GM food. And the Clinton administration plans to set up twelve regional centers to study the safety of bioengineered products. Is all this caution really necessary?

You might not think so after digesting what Heidi Flewelling Kaeppler MS'87 has to say. An assistant professor of agronomy at the UW who works to improve traits in wheat, oats, and barley, Kaeppler has full confidence in the testing that her transgenic crops go through. She's not afraid to munch on the grains of wheat in her test fields.

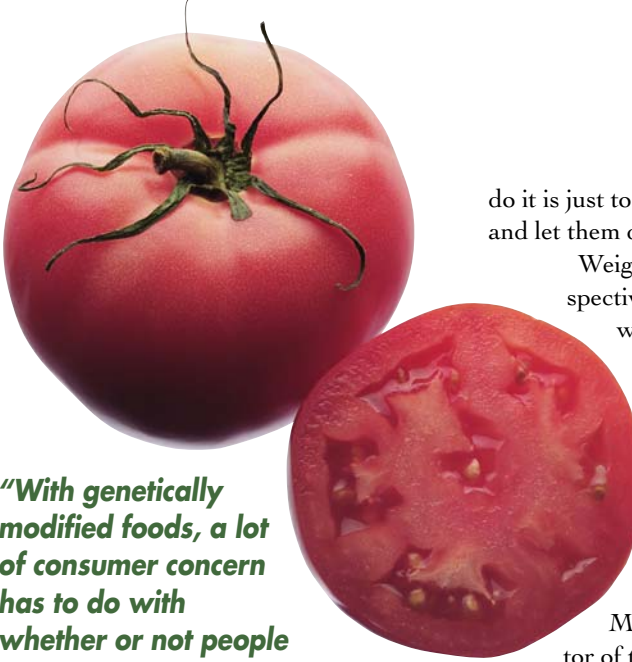
Kaeppler attributes safety concerns to fear of the unknown and a few vocal groups that get a lot of press. She deals with tough breeding problems such as crown rust in oats, a worldwide problem, and head blight in wheat, which has "literally knocked thousands of farmers out of business." With traditional breeding, she says, it takes ten to fifteen years to get a new variety out to the growers, and within a few years, the resistance breaks down. It's no wonder that breeders have turned to gene-splicing to increase the weapons in their arsenal.

Kaeppler is testing several different genes in oats to give the crop "more stable, long-term resistance. Hopefully we can stack up a multilayered system of genes and transgenes so that if one line of defense breaks, there's something else there to control the pathogen," she says.

Kaeppler adds that the genetic materials are tested for safety early in the development process, before they are planted in the field, and then again as they approach commercialization.

Nonetheless, she says that food fears in Europe are "trickling back here and making people wonder. Over here, the majority of people are happy with it and fine and dandy and accepting and eating their Cheerios and Corn Flakes whether there's Bt corn in there or not. I have four children, and I'd feed them a canful of Quaker oats made out of this stuff."

Still, some people would like the new transfoods to be labeled. Joseph Cummins PhD'62, an emeritus professor of genetics at the University of Western Ontario, recently traveled to Ireland, where he spoke about the need to require that GM food be tested to the same degree as pharmaceuticals and pesticides. Not surprisingly, the Irish greeted this



"With genetically modified foods, a lot of consumer concern has to do with whether or not people feel that they're being exposed to them involuntarily."

message with universal approval, just as they did his call for labeling. "If you don't label the crops," he says, "then if problems arise, you will not detect those problems. It's effectively virtually impossible."

Lydia Zepeda, an associate professor in the School of Human Ecology, doesn't claim to know whether gene-tweaked grains, fruits, and vegetables are safe or not. But one thing her research has taught her is that lay people tend to have different risk perceptions than scientists. Factors such as their personal health histories and diets, and whether they have children, she says, can make them more sensitive to taking risks.

Zepeda helped conduct a study of recombinant bovine growth hormone, one of the first bioengineered food products, and a survey revealed that people "overwhelmingly" wanted labels on their milk. "And that doesn't necessarily mean they'll act on those labels," she notes, but her research showed that when people have a choice and feel that they have more control over situations, they tend to perceive less risk.

"With genetically modified foods, a lot of consumer concern has to do with whether or not people feel that they're being exposed to them involuntarily," she says. Zepeda adds that there's been a lot of opposition by manufacturers to labeling, but "frankly, the labels tend to reduce people's risk perceptions. If they want to calm people's fears, one way to

do it is just to give people information and let them decide what to do with it."

Weighing in with the FDA perspective is Tom Zinnen PhD'85, who does biotech outreach on campus. He believes the labeling controversy can be attributed to cultural differences, and says that "compulsory labels should be based on certain criteria and not just popular demand." But

Michael Sussman, the director of the university's Biotechnology Center, doesn't have a problem with it. Sussman doesn't believe there's much risk in the proteins that have been expressed in the new transfoods so far. But "until we've decided what risks we're willing to accept, and until we know what risks there are, having a label makes a lot of sense to me," he says. "It creates a lot of economic problems, but I, for one, like to know what I'm eating."

Environmental Friend or Foe?

So what was it about this new technology that had government, academia, and industry all competing to get in on the ground floor in the early eighties? Brent McCown 65, MS'67, PhD'69, a professor of horticulture and environmental studies, cites one of the major arguments in favor of engineered crops as their ability to reduce the need for chemical pesticides and herbicides.

Last year, 71 percent of the GM crops planted were those designed to be resistant to herbicides, such as soybeans altered to resist the herbicide glyphosate, commonly known as Roundup. This type of product, says McCown, "allows one to use less herbicides, because you're applying the herbicide at the best time to kill the weed," rather than being limited to spraying it at the optimal time to avoid injury to crops.

Some environmentalists fear that this might actually encourage farmers to spray more liberally, however, since they

know the crops will not be harmed. McCown isn't worried. He counters that spraying is unpleasant and that "farmers just don't want to do that — they have a lot of other things to do."

But whether farmers actually use fewer herbicides or not, the popularity of Roundup-ready crops may be cause for concern in the light of a Swedish study published in the March 1999 *Journal of the American Cancer Society*. The researchers found a link between glyphosate and non-Hodgkins lymphoma, a type of cancer that has shown an alarming 80 percent increase in Western countries since the early 1970s. Due to the rapid rise in the use of glyphosate engendered by Roundup-ready crops, the authors are calling for further epidemiological studies.

That's not to say that there isn't still plenty of optimism on campus that biotech can benefit the environment. For example, Associate Scientist Sandra Austin-Phillips is developing a variety of alfalfa that will eliminate the need to add phosphates — which contribute to algae overgrowth in lakes and streams — to animal feed. Her alfalfa contains an enzyme that releases the plant's naturally occurring phosphate.

Still, some faculty cite a potential problem with Bt corn and other Bt crops. Inserting a gene for the soil bacterium Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) into corn gives it resistance to the European corn borer. Because Bt is a naturally occurring soil organism, it is also approved for direct application by organic farmers.

"Everyone agrees that the insects will overcome this gene for resistance," says Bill Tracy, a professor of agronomy, "and the organic growers are upset because that's going to leave [them] without their main form of natural pesticide." Margaret Krome MS'89, an advocate for sustainable agriculture in Wisconsin, fears that this could put organic farmers in jeopardy. "Bt is a broad public good, and it's being carelessly destroyed in the interest of corporate profits," she says. "That is unconscionable."

The other major purported benefit of GM crops is their potential to help feed starving populations. As the Biotech Center's Mike Sussman sees it, "The population is increasing explosively, and it's very clear that we have to increase world food production dramatically in the next



"The population is increasing explosively, and it's very clear that we have to increase world food production dramatically in the next twenty to forty years in new ways, because most of the good land is gone."

twenty to forty years in new ways, because most of the good land is gone. We're simply going to have to design crops that can grow on marginal land to reduce the possibility of future famines."

Sussman's own research centers around improving the ability of crops to grow in nutrient-poor soils. He's working on genetically engineering plants that require smaller quantities of potassium, phosphate, and other components of fertilizer. "Anything we can do to improve yields while decreasing environmental impacts, we must do," he asserts.

But critics point out that biotechnology has not yet delivered on its promise of feeding the hungry. Jack Kloppenburg, a professor of rural sociology, says, "It is the most specious kind of argumentation to say that the objective of this is to feed hungry people," given the current social context in which biotechnology is being developed and deployed.

"In the first place," he notes, "the companies are not in business to give their technology away. Most of the farmers in the Third World can't pay for seeds — they're not even in the commercial market now for existing seeds." Introducing genetically engineered materials will undercut Third World markets, he says, throwing a lot of poor farmers into the cities because they can't compete.

Why the Rush?

Many UW-Madison faculty believe that some of the transgenic materials got into the marketplace without being completely evaluated. Or, as Fred Buttel puts it, "Biotech was really prematurely commercialized. There was a lot of money sunk into it in the early 1980s, and there came to be enormous pressure to bring products to market."

Why the big rush? Buttel speculates that it was because the early eighties were characterized by slow growth and investment. "Many people felt that the economic problems which affected the United States, and to some degree much of the rest of the world, had to do with the fact that we had exhausted the potentials of postwar technology like automobile production, steel making, petroleum, the chemical industry, and so on."

There was a lot of fascination with high technology, and anything that had to do with it was viewed very favorably, he says. "There was an aura to these technologies that caused people to invest in them without necessarily looking into their real potentials very thoroughly."

Perhaps one legacy of that approach is a current lawsuit against the FDA by the Alliance for Bio-Integrity. The suit contends that the agency disregarded some of the findings of its own scientists when approving transgenics.

Charles Benbrook PhD'80, an agricultural consultant who has worked for Congress and who formerly served as director of the board of agriculture for

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Harvest

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the National Academy of Sciences, says, "My reading was that [the FDA scientists] did not feel that enough attention had been paid to certain potential problems, and they just felt that the science base on which some of these blanket judgments were made was thin. And I think recent developments have shown that they're right."

For instance, he cites the recent study that found that pollen from Bt corn was killing monarch butterflies. Benbrook thinks we can manage the risks without imperiling the monarch. But he echoes the thoughts of many UW faculty and other observers when he says, "You don't mess around with the genetic base of a food production system as fundamentally as some of these biotech applications are, without causing some things to change. It is really scientific hubris to think that we understand all that, because we don't. This stuff is just horrendously complicated."

"Astounding" Consolidation

Even UW-Madison faculty who are strong proponents of the biology of transgenic crops deplore one aspect of their development. Due to a recent trend toward consolidation that Buttel says has reached "astounding proportions," the future of our food and its production has fallen into the hands of a half-dozen or fewer giant agribusinesses. If they all pursue the same kinds of technology, says Buttel, it could decrease genetic diversity to the point where there may be long-term ecological risk.

"That's scary," says Brent McCown. "That's our food. And I think that's something that should be more under the purview of the local citizens through elections and government policy, not corporate policy. These are international firms, and so they don't have any allegiance to any particular country or state." As an example, he says he's unable to obtain important genes for his work on

cranberry breeding because they are owned by one of the corporations, and it doesn't stand to make any money by releasing them.

Some of the heavy-hitters promoting gene-tweaked products include Novartis, DuPont, Zeneca, Dow, and Eli Lilly. But it's Monsanto that seems to find itself in the news — and the target of protests — most often, because the multinational has

"It is really scientific hubris to think that we understand all that, because we don't. This stuff is just horrendously complicated."

been the most aggressive in promoting the new technology. Fritz (Carl) Behr '79, MS'84, PhD'94, who works with Bt corn at Monsanto, acknowledges that there are very few companies in the genetic engineering arena. But he points out that "the research is so expensive, there aren't many companies that can afford it. And it's just getting more and more expensive because of the scrutiny that the whole technology is under."

The fast growth of these multinationals also means that they now have to deal with "how to pay for \$15 billion worth of seed companies," says Benbrook. They must contend with the impatience of Wall Street should they have a relatively low rate of return, he says, and they are under "tremendous pressure to perform." Consequently, he and other observers say, they must sell a lot of product at a high profit margin, resulting in higher prices for farmers.

What does all this mean for the future of "gene cuisine"?


Mike Sussman believes that the problems we're seeing in the first generation of transgenic crops can be overcome as the technology becomes more sophisticated. He's excited about the second wave of biotechnology — the value-added dimension that will allow us, for example, to get soybean seed to produce insulin, so that we could obtain it by eating tofu rather than having to grow it in vats of bacteria, as we do now.

But he points to safety as a major issue. "We don't want some early products that haven't been carefully researched to jeopardize what is going to be many decades and centuries of technology," he says. "We're all aware that in the early stages of any technology there are often bumps and mistakes." He compares genetic engineering to the development of electricity, saying that a few people may have been adversely affected when it first came out, but that the benefits outweigh the risks. "The ability to manipulate life forms is going to be a hundred-year adventure. We shouldn't be too shortsighted," he cautions.

But thorny social, economic, and biological issues remain.

"I think scientists are naïve if they think that it doesn't matter who benefits and who pays the costs of the adoption of any technology, including biotechnology," says consultant Benbrook. And some biotech advocates, he says, don't understand the degree to which the public recognizes that when you're moving genes across species boundaries, "it's really different. Scientists can keep spouting off till hell freezes over that there's nothing new in biotechnology, and the public is just going to think that they're fools or liars," he says.

Benbrook is not too concerned about the popular estimate that 60 to 70 percent of our food currently contains bioengineered components, which he attributes to the small percentage of soy or corn oil that proliferates in processed foods.

"But if you start putting the Bt gene in tomatoes or apples, or viral genes into cabbage and squash, or engineering animals with different types of cholesterol — it's at that time that the actual foods that people consume will be substantially different," he says. "So it is definitely not too late to start to bring consumers into the dialogue about their food supply and the food that they will be eating. These things are coming. They're down the road, but they are coming." 

After researching this article, Niki Denison decided to drastically increase her intake of comfort foods while she's still comfortable about what they contain.

Young at Heart

Kevin Henkes writes books to express children's feelings — and illustrates them with Caldecott Honor-winning art.

BY SUSAN PIGORSCH '80

Sure, Kevin Henkes x'83 went to a toga party his freshman year (for a little while). He also paused on his way to the library to admire the flamingos that unexpectedly flocked to Bascom Hill. And he couldn't help but notice Madison's monumental creation — the Statue of Liberty, whose head rose above Lake Mendota's icy expanse. But none of the Wisconsin Student Association's wild ways could change how the then-nineteen-year-old would spend his days: reading and researching children's literature at the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) in Helen C. White Hall.

"I think it's amazing that I didn't partake in it all," Henkes says of his

student days. "But I was driven. I think I always have been."

The soft-spoken creator of the Caldecott Honor-winning *Owen*, and of the American Bookseller's hit pick of 1997, *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*, in fact landed his first contract in the summer following his freshman year. He went to New York and sold an illustrated story that had begun as a class project, then took off the fall semester of his sophomore year to finish it.

"*All Alone* was a young book, but a very finished book,"

ented and knew what he wanted — to be a children's book author and illustrator." Greenwillow, which markets about fifty new titles a year, was looking then as they do now for a new voice.

about imaginary play — is anything but lonely. It is crowded among nearly twenty Henkes titles on library shelves all across America.



Tick . . . tock. Tick . . . tock. The mouse is running out the clock — and she's the star of the Seattle Children's Theatre production of *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*. She's stuck in the dark at the top of a pyramid of stairs — in none other than the "uncooperative chair" — for singing unflattering lyrics about her baby brother, Julius.

Suddenly, strobe lights flash upon the antics of the defiant mouse, whose ears seem to amplify her anger. Why do her parents call Julius the "Baby of the World"? Then all goes black again as the clock goes *tick . . . tock*. The scene repeats as Lilly broods in numerous petulant positions for "what seems like ten years," says the character's creator.

"Then Lilly says, 'How much time is left?' Of course, only half a minute has passed. It's *very* funny," laughs Henkes. It's so very Lilly.

Later on, when the personified Henkes characters of Wendell and Owen

pedal a huge, Rousseaulike painting across the stage, subtly nodding to Henkes's own practice of exposing readers to the great masters — the author is ready to approve a plan to take the theater adaptation of *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* on the road.

"They were very nice about it," Henkes says in a voice that's humble and vulnerable — yet exacting. "I really dragged my heels about saying yes. Then we came up with a great compromise, which was that the Seattle Children's Theatre could perform the first round of the production. And if I liked it, and gave it my approval, then it could travel."

He liked it! This fall, *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*, the stage production, will travel around the nation, animating the humor, the conflict, and the resolutions machinated by Henkes and his mercurial mice.

"Kevin does a marvelous job of taking children's feelings and finding a way to express them in pictures and text," says Jack Kean, the associate dean



of the School of Education, who says he was "lucky enough to be present" while Henkes created *All Alone* in his class on children's literature. "Kevin's books give children a good feeling about themselves, and help validate their feelings."

"Whether or not every family has an uncooperative chair, every family has some means to encourage young children to cooperate," adds the CCBC's Ginny Moore Kruse MA'76. "Kevin knows about parenting

mechanisms, and children know that he understands *them*."

The author's insights into children's fears — about the comings of new siblings or the goings of their baby blankets — will soon be translated to a musical score, in addition to the theatrical stage. The Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra (WYSO) commissioned composer Daron Hagen to bring Henkes's characters to life in the tradition of the classic children's symphony *Peter and the Wolf*.

"They commissioned the music for *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* for their holiday concert," says

Henkes. "In November, they'll play the music while images from the book will be projected behind the musicians somehow . . . and I will narrate the story," he adds shyly.

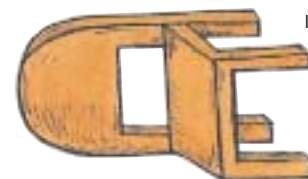
For someone who writes in the car once his baby and preschooler fall asleep, and who dips his watercolor brush into the same lucky, plastic Imperial Margarine tub that he has used since he was a boy, such a public appearance — no, performance — is no doubt intimidating. But since WYSO plans to premiere the symphony in Racine, where Henkes and his four siblings grew up, and where he began to dream of becoming a children's book author, he had a hard time saying no. Likewise, he had a hard time saying no to a second performance of the work in Madison, since that is where Henkes realized his dream, met

Why do Lilly's parents call her new brother, Julius, the "Baby of the World"? A stint in the uncooperative chair provides Henkes's main character with nary a clue — while giving readers all the right answers.

Illustrations by Kevin Henkes. Copyright © by Kevin Henkes, from *Chester's Way*, 1988; *Owen*, 1993; *Julius, Baby of the World*, 1990; *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*, 1996; and from *Chrysanthemum*, 1991, all from Greenwillow Books.



BRENT MC ASTHO



Kevin Henkes (above) took every available UW course that related to children's literature, warehousing knowledge gleaned from the Departments of Art, Library Science, and Curriculum and Instruction, and the School of Education. He also met his spouse, artist and alumna Laura Dronzek, in Madison. She created the pictures for their new book, *Oh!*, as well as for the couple's dining room, shown above.

his wife, had his children, and began to live an otherwise quite ordinary life.



"The snow falls and falls all night. In the morning everything is white. And everyone wants to play. *Oh!*" The scene could take place in Henkes's own back yard, in a graceful, old Madison neighborhood. But this time, he will not paint it. The illustrations for *Oh!*, a new book that will be released this fall, were created by his spouse, Laura Dronzek '82, MFA'93.

"I'd seen Laura's work in Madison, in murals in the kids' rooms and in their dining room," remembers Greenwillow's Hirschman. "*Oh!* was in the file, and we didn't have an illustrator [which means that Henkes was busy writing another novel for young readers]. Then one day Kevin said, 'Why not Laura?' " After all, they had collaborated as a pair before, on the jacket cover of Henkes's novel, *Sun & Spoon*, which won Wisconsin's Elizabeth Burr award for writing.

"We wanted to do a book together, for our children," says Henkes, so *Oh!* is written uncharacteristically for the very young. It's also one of the only books that Henkes has read out loud to their two children, Will and Clara.

"I don't like reading my books that much," the author/illustrator confesses. Perhaps it's because he enjoys an excuse to explore the full universe of children's



Kevin Henkes's *Chrysanthemum* feels great about herself in her favorite dress on the first day of school — until the other kids make her feel like a fool. Who knew that *Chrysanthemum* is too long to write on a nametag, and too hard for the average kid to pronounce?

literature. Every night, he and Dronzek share in the parental pleasure of reading three books to each child, one-on-one. Six titles and maybe sixty minutes later, they will have successfully surveyed the landscape of their profession — and observed their children's reactions to various authors and art.

"People ask me all the time if my kids have given me lots of new ideas for books," Henkes says. "They haven't, probably because my books come from within. Some of the best people who write these books for children never had kids. Yet they treat kids' feelings with great respect."

Authors such as Charlotte Zolotow x'37, who has written at least sixty-five books and edited works by the likes of Nathaniel Benchley and Louise Fitzhugh for Harper & Row, are not writing to teach "those little beasts a lesson," says the UW's expert on children's literature, Ginny Moore Kruse. "Somehow inside of them, somewhere, is a memory from childhood." Again and again, she says, they find "that moment, that instant, that

appeals to children, and then they develop it and make it something a parent would *want* to read, and a child would want to see and hear."

Henkes's ability to set a narrative pace, and to acknowledge that children are important people, is at the core of his popularity. But he's also not afraid to use big words in context if the rhythm is right, and the words are appropriate.

"Oh, pish," says the mother in *Chrysanthemum*, when her little mouseling comes home from school indignant about being named after a flower. "Your name is beautiful." "And precious and priceless and fascinating and winsome," says her father.

Later on, Chrysanthemum's mother says "Oh, pish" again, in reference to the taunting schoolmates. "They're just jealous," she says. "And envious and begrudging and discontented and jaundiced," says her father. Henkes's picture books gain strength through his ingenious use of internal repetition. What's more, as a writer who can illustrate his own work, he's able to gain momentum without describing every detail.

For example, the author never mentions Lilly's crown or cape or boots in *Julius, Baby of the World*, even though he "knew she would have them" — in fact, *must* have them. In *Owen*, he shows Mrs. Tweezers tottering on flower pots to peer over a fence so that the reader knows that she's impossibly nosy. He foreshadows her meddling by painting a scene of the fence on the first page of the book, and repeating it again on the last. And he uses the end papers to demonstrate how much the whimsical Owen loves his baby blanket — the one he *can't* take to school with him.



"If you have a mouse, jumping for joy, three feet up in the air — in a kind of contorted posture — it looks joyful," writes Henkes. "But if you try to draw realistically a human child doing the same thing, it looks all wrong."

Animals gave this creator of children's books the means to express his characters — from their highest highs to their lowest lows. They freed him from his serious, *All Alone* persona — from the determined young man whose campus experience was more about reading the

works of award-winning alumni such as Ellen Raskin x'48 and Nancy Ekholm Burkert '54, MS'55 than about turning bed sheets into togas.

Henkes's affinity for animals started with *Bailey Goes Camping*. "It was the first book in which I used animals, and they were a family of rabbits," Henkes explains. "I wanted to do another book using animals, and I ended up choosing mice, because there's something about them. They are vulnerable creatures in a certain way," he says. Like kids. And when washed in soft watercolors with delicate pen and pencil lines, they take on expressive qualities that transcend the medium.

Still, what holds readers through repeated readings are Henkes's characters, from Bailey and Owen to Chester and Chrysanthemum. But who could have predicted the public's instant infatuation with Lilly?

"Only several other characters have been taken into people's hearts like that," says Hirschman, still awed by Lilly's success. "There's Madeline, for example, and Arthur. Now Kevin is one of the pillars of the industry, which is unusual because he is so young" — and thankfully, so young at heart.

Lilly Takes Another Lead

Lilly, the star of Kevin Henkes's children's book *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*, will head across the country this fall to light up a number of new venues. From September 7 to November 7, she'll take to the stage in Minneapolis for a children's theater production of her namesake story [for tickets, call (612) 874-0400], and then appear at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. from November 26 to December 28 [contact (800) 444-1324]. In mid-November, Lilly will alight within a Daron Hagen score commissioned by the Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra. Performances will be held in Racine and Madison [call (608) 263-3320]. Meanwhile, Lilly will be stealing the show at the National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature in Abilene, Texas, where she will be featured with other illustrations created by Henkes and his spouse, Laura Dronzek, from October 14 to December 5.



A Legacy of Children's Literature

Kevin Henkes x'83 could have attended Pratt or Parsons School of Design in New York. But he chose instead to attend Wisconsin, and to follow in the footsteps of the luminaries — and UW-Madison alumni — in his field. They

include: Charlotte Zolotow x'37, author of some sixty-five picture books, including *Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present*; Ellen Raskin x'48, winner of the 1979 Newbery Medal for *The Westing Game*; illustrator Nancy

Ekholm Burkert '54, MS '55, best known for her striking *Snow White and the Seven*

Dwarfs; Arthur Dorros '72, creator of *Abuela*; Barbara Monnot Joosse '71, author of *Mama, Do You Love Me?*; and Avi [Edward Wortis] '59, MA'62, known for his novels for young readers, such as *Nothing But the Truth*.

For more information about Wisconsin authors and recommended books for youth, contact the School of Education's Cooperative Children's Book Center at www.soemadison.wisc.edu/ccbc/, or call (608) 263-3720.



Zolotow



Raskin



In honor of their young children, Henkes and Dronzek collaborated on *Oh!*, a book that celebrates the wonder of a perfect winter's day.