

A large sculpture flashed on the screen. Mr. Talbot said, "Let's ... look at it."

Our Quaker high school built a new auditorium and commissioned artist William Talbot to make a sculpture for the front plaza. When he'd finished the work Mr. Talbot visited the school to install it. He came with the understanding that he would not be asked, as artists usually were, to give any sort of talk about his art. But once he'd arrived someone twisted his arm and got him to agree to show slides at morning assembly. Mr. Talbot was a tall, quiet man and when he walked on stage wearing his work clothes — in those days a scandalous deviation from the regular suit and tie — he won the students' instant interest. After a lengthy introduction by one of the teachers he stood up and said, "First slide, please?" A large sculpture flashed on the screen. "Here's ... a large one," he said. "Let's ... look at it." He let some time pass. "Next slide, please?" Another piece appeared. "This is ... a small one ..." More silence. Another image. "This one is ... blue and red ..." And so it went for a quarter of an hour, until he thanked us and sat down, his silences leaving a deeper, more lasting impression than the many articulate talks we routinely heard.

Ever have trouble following TV plots? Cable companies will soon offer a new service, available at modest extra charge, that puts subtitles on the screen explaining

who the people are and what they're doing. "If you try to throw a good sized dead snake off a trail with a stick (so the people behind you won't freak out)," says John Bach, "chances are you'll somehow manage to fling it right back up at your head. On the second attempt, however, you're almost sure to get it right."

Filling the Gap

At a Fact University press conference this morning President Bob Varsity announced a major addition to the university's library: a copy of *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, the best one-volume general reference in print. FU's copy is the 1963 edition, admittedly lacking recent information, but Dr. Varsity pointed out that until now FU has relied on its multi-volume *American Academic Encyclopedia*, of which volumes I-J and Q-R have been missing for several years, "so now, if anyone wants to find out about India or Japan or quietism or radioactivity, we're all set, so long as it's before 1963. And we hope to fill the gap soon." The mind rejects things until it's ready to handle them.

Global corporations, increasingly committed to strengthening democratic institutions, are now endowing university professorships. Among the most prestigious are the General Motors Chair of American Culture at Yale, the I. G. Farben Chair of German History at Oxford, and the United Fruit Company Chair of Latin American Studies at Stanford. For sale at local thrift shop: hamster leash.

Up to a Point

On Thanksgiving we made collages from paper scraps and old magazines. Joe, a six-year-old visiting with his mother and grandmother, quickly finished his picture and then turned to watching Pamela. After a while he asked about her habit of crumpling the unused bits and throwing them on the floor. "Oh yes," she said, "I'll sweep them up later." He asked, "Well, may I crumple some?" In his

home, it seems, one did not throw things on the floor and he was keen to give it a try. Thereafter Pamela handed all her scraps to Joe and with firm deliberation he crumpled each and threw it down.

Are you a good volleyball player? Among the code phrases most often used by public leaders in recent months is "up to a point." It means "no." A diplomat, asked if pledges of foreign aid would be

honored, replied, "up to a point." A corporate president, asked if his company would take responsibility for toxic dumps on its lands, answered, "up to a point."

Throughout the story the captain thinks he is going insane but he is actually becoming whole, losing his anxious self-doubt by struggling for moral justice. The waiter picks up the napkin and inspects it. "Yes," he says. "Evidence. Most definitely." Pennies are a nuisance but you have to carry them to avoid getting more.

Clever Cooking

Improvisational cooks, take note: When young I tried all sorts of clever cooking ideas and to save you time with your experiments I suggest avoiding the following: (1) a tablespoon of instant coffee powder in a pot of oyster stew (this once cleared my apartment of a dozen jolly supper guests in about five minutes); (2) a dash of Scotch whisky in your scrambled eggs (similar to a dash of sherry, but not similar enough); (3) boiled iceberg lettuce leaves fried in mayonnaise (unsatisfactory).



How to read Rollmag: bits and pieces, slowly absorbing. Give it time to sink in.

After six months the "meat" is dug up and eaten. The aroma is unforgettable.

"In El Salvador," writes John Bach, "one of our guides said he knew who had killed his two daughters. He told us he did not seek retribution, only a national reconciliation to end the killing. We promised to tell the stories they told us when we came home. Their wants are few and simple: to live without bombs, to farm, to see their children live." *A friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, seeing her gracious manner with a woman who ten years earlier had cruelly snubbed her, asked her about it. Mrs. Roosevelt said, "Well, I think I may recall something like that happening, but I distinctly recall forgetting about it."*

They Learned to Eat

"In Iceland," says Jim Rizza, "people go by first name. Last names just tell whose son or daughter you are. My friend, for example, is Olafur Steingrimsson (OH-la-fyur STAIN-grims-son): Olafur, son of Steingrim. His wife is Bjork Finnbogadotir (Byork FINN-boga-daughter): Bjork, daughter of Finnboga. The telephone book lists people by first name, then occupation; no last names. Iceland has the world's oldest parliament, the oldest Western language, 99.9% literacy, and a fascinating history. During their extreme isolation for a millennium (900 to 1900 AD), on a barren island the size of Kentucky, they learned to eat foods some of us might balk at. The most famous comes from shark meat. The shark is buried in the sand for six months. Every now and then someone urinates on it, to counteract the ammonia buildup resulting from putrefaction. After six months the 'meat' is dug up, cut into little cubes, skewered with toothpicks, and eaten. The aroma is unforgettable."

A Second and a Half

Finally there were those, difficult to trace, who were so dismayed at being unable to adapt to the money-making world that they had cut themselves off from their comrades, resigned to living out their lives as factory watchmen or odd-job helpers, or in homes for the incompetent and the insane. Studies show the maximum time workers will wait for computers to display requested information, before getting impatient, is a second and a half. Everything is salvageable. Almost everything.

The USA now holds 426 out of every 100,000 citizens in prison or jail. (In South Africa it's 333, the USSR 268, European nations 35-120). For African-American men the figure is 3,109 — *over three per cent of all black men in the USA are prisoners of the state* (black South African men, 729). In "privatized" US prisons, workers paid a dollar an hour and controlled by tax-financed guards are an ideal labor pool for industry. As the Gulag Archipelago fades from Soviet life, the US national security gulag expands.



Why was science backward in the Middle Ages? *Galileo refutes Aristotle. William Harvey discovers blood circulation. Newton formulates the laws of nature.* "I seek things that fit no category," writes Ken Wilson, "things that fit nowhere but in the interstices between the big, the solid, the predictable. My record collection and library have more cracks than rocks." *Marriage is a taming thing.*

Common sense has been so incapacitated by sophisticated obfuscation that we no longer know how to pull our hand out of the fire when it's getting burned.

— Arthur Young

Voltaire attacks fanaticism. Richard Arkwright invents the modern factory. Montesquieu calls for the separation of state powers. Think on these things, and keep mum.

In the mental hospital the staff allows itself to be interviewed, written about, and read about by inmates via the "house organ" inmate newspaper, thus coming under some slight control of the writers and readers; at the same time, inmates are given the chance to show they're high enough on the human scale to handle the official language. Contributors, for their part, agree implicitly to follow the official ideology. **The chief political commentator for the national public radio says, "We can't take seriously these conspiracy theories claiming the US government started the war to divert attention from domestic problems. You'd need an awful lot of evidence for that. It would be just too awful to think anything like that." Remember, folks, Eisenhower is a great man. Believe me, he's a great man. And a vote for Eisenhower is a vote for what's good for America.**

What wisdom is greater than kindness? Kant defines enlightenment. Robert Bakewell improves cattle breeding. Tom Paine says independence is common sense.

A Good Job

Fred Lance, 72, worked as a rear bumper installer in a Ford plant for 17 years. "No front bumpers!" he said. "Rear bumpers only! Seventeen years, the same bumper. Of course, it takes a certain type of personality to do that type of work. But it was a good job, so far as I'm concerned." *Speaking to the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee in 1977, US Ambassador to the UN Andrew Young, former head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and co-author of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, said, "My approach to foreign aid is not necessarily humanitarian. It is in the long-range interest of access to resources and the creation of markets for American goods and services." Bumper sticker on red VW: "Visualize Impeachment."*

One measure of life is how much land you've cleared. Trees vibrate in the wind.

Meat consumes oil: If all humans ate a meat-based diet global oil reserves would last 13 years; if no humans ate meat the oil would last 260 years. Polls show US citizens believe by a 5-to-4 margin that the Constitution can overrule National Security directives "most of the time."

Widely Believed to Be Linked

A recent article on Guatemala said the death squads are "widely believed to be linked to the military," a phrase typical of the smoothness of US propaganda. "Widely believed," supposedly citing truth, actually raises doubt (compare: "George Bush is widely believed to be honest"), and while the death squads are indeed "linked to the military" it's equally true that US troops are "linked to the Pentagon." Everyone in Guatemala knows the death squads are the military and that the US government dominates the military, truths so well known to international observers they're beyond denying, so "linked to" comes to the rescue, suggesting loose, casual ties. We think of propaganda as lies but much of it is correct fact, artfully presented. Phrases like "widely believed to be linked" saturate the US media, facts that lie, so smoothly that it takes constant mental effort to keep them from slipping past one's intelligence.

"The trick to writing dialogue," says Tennessee Williams, "is to write it the way people think they talk. If you write it the way they really talk it it sounds artificial, so you write it the way they think they talk, and that sounds convincing." At the local library a young mother takes out *Things To Do With Your Two-Year-Old* and *Hypnosis Made Easy*.

When a friend went to a psychiatrist some years ago the doctor advised, "Write letters to the editor — it'll get your mind off yourself."

"The pond's north shore," reports Charles Farrow, "is a tangle of thorny green creeper. Rooting it out is easy but slow. Cut with long-handled pruners it falls to the ground. A piece slashes my nose and the cold rain keeps the blood running. The oak trees crack in the wind and the rain chills my hands. From the dam I survey what I've cleared. Grape vines are the toughest. They arch over the ground and I snip them back, runner by runner, to the primary vine. Grape has the feet of a centipede. Cut a section and nothing gives way: roots still hold it to the ground. A hundred roots fill a ten by ten plot. One measure of life is how much land you've cleared. A leaf rides the air currents through the trees; it advances and backs off, dips and rises; snags, and is still. Trees vibrate in the wind like a thumbed comb."

Fill a milk bottle with sand. Seal the top with red wax and an emerald if you have one. Put it on a shelf.

After supper the electricity fails. (No one knows why; there's no wind, no rain, it's not even cold.) Out come the candles, first time this year. The computer shuts off but the manual typewriter works fine. From each side of the desk a cluster of candles casts just enough light to see. The ones on the left had to be elevated; what to use? The perfect thing: a tin cannister that once brought pumpkin seeds from Asia to the local grocery. The typewriter's clacking sets the cannister resonating: a running commentary from another world. After two hours the power comes on, electric lights overwhelming the candlelight, welcome yet intrusive. Later we hear a car had hit a phone pole. Some homes lost power for seven hours. Minor bothers aside, people say they liked the outage: a visitation of things forgotten, unseen, vital.



Artist: Pamela Worthington. Sources: George Eliot, Dick Pavier, The Sentencing Project, Beverlee Burke, Erving Goffman, Richard Nixon, Daniel Schörr.

Dinner at St. Jerome's

When I lived on the streets of New York I learned, as one must, where to sleep and how to eat. This was over ten years ago, before homelessness became so widespread. To be homeless then was to dwell at the bottom, derelict and shunned, but one was not, as now, part of a horde flooding every cranny and provoking public controversy. The city could more easily fit the homeless into places no one else would go and with skill one could live on the street and get by with a measure of dignity. Like anything it was a question of learning how.

Along with a place to sleep and put one's things, food, of course, came first. One spent hours every day worrying about eating, a grinding search for opportunities. They were few and mean and after one had gone the rounds of pan-handling and garbage cans and restaurant back doors the boring sameness of it made the prospects all the meaner. In this hard landscape it was a lucky man who found his way to St. Jerome's Dining Room.

Felt Like Garbage

There were two soup kitchens on the lower east side that between them showed the range of human possibility. One was a shabby, uncared-for place. You could eat there but you felt like garbage just going in. The workers were surly, the floor and the tables were messy, a soundless TV flickered game shows, stray stuff lay tossed about — everything oozed perdition and unless you were too numb to notice you wanted to get out as soon as you went in.

At St. Jerome's one left the gutter and took a place at the human table.

The meals were a hodgepodge of market cast offs and one typically faced a dinner of warm spam, stale hamburger buns, unnamable vegetables boiled to death, and Hawaiian Punch. There was no malice about it, as there is in prisons, and the managers undoubtedly did what they could. It was just that indifference reigned, driving out care, leaving only the dregs of human possibility.

“And – I – Mean – Perfect!”

One morning, a few blocks away, I came across a long queue of destitute souls palpably different than what you expected: more alert, more like part of civilization. I spoke with some men at the end of the line and they said it was the best place anywhere to eat. The line ran around the block and formed each morning hours before opening time. They urged me, with that childlike generosity unique to the very poor, to get in line — well worth the wait, they said. I joined them and soon we were moving forward.

My linemates told me seating was limited but you'd surely get in if you waited. They also explained the rules. After you entered you took a free spot along a wall and stood there until a seat came open. The important thing, they stressed, was that no matter how hungry you were, never push or crowd the next man (we were all men; homeless women lived in a separate world), and above all, at all times you acted the perfect gentleman. “And – I – mean – perfect!” a toothless old fellow barked, jabbing his finger at each syllable. “Like at grandma's! No grabbing, no horsing around, no burping!” Once you sat down you could stay as long as you liked, and the Sisters would serve you at your seat.

The Sisters

A half hour later we entered the dining room. One saw right off it was a place of strict decorum. Ten tables and a hundred people filled the room and after the roar of the streets you were startled by the quiet and the orderliness — not dull and slack, like the other soup room, but crackling with best-behavior esprit-de-corps.

A team of nuns in habits moved about, serving the diners with a gliding efficiency any waiter in the finest hotel might emulate. They served from the left and cleared from the right, and asked in hushed tones if you wished another serving and if so exactly what you wanted, and thanked you when you told them. One felt the urgency of the hungry waiting men yet also the dignity in their restraint. To a man living on the street the Sisters' example — their respect, their inner resolve — revived one's faith, however crushed, even before you reached the food.

The room was clean and bright and though austere showed the hand of constant care. The floor was scrubbed, the windows clear, and closing your eyes you heard the reassuring rhythms of a well-run house. When a diner got up to go a Sister reset the place and nodded to the next in line. A bowl of bracing stew appeared before you and the table was heaped with dark bread, salad, and bowls of vegetables. There was plenty of milk and good coffee, and fruit for dessert. A little vase of flowers graced each table.

A Place at the Table

What an uplift! After the degradations of the street one felt so honored to be treated so well, with nothing asked in return, that best manners were one's reflexive response, a way to say thank you and do one's part.

“Would you please pass the carrot sticks?” your table mate, a derelict, would say; and a few diners even had the presence of mind to ask first if someone else wanted some before helping themselves.

It all ran counter to life as we knew it. To be homeless is to be part of the dirt, shunned like trash. At St. Jerome's one left the gutter and took a place at the human table. The daily grind of shuffling and begging, skulking and idling, washed away, replaced by upright posture and setting your fork down in the right spot and filling your belly with enough food to last a day. Just by the way they served dinner the Sisters turned your thinking inside out. Here we were, life's failures, and *they were serving us* as if we were princes and they, in their own poverty, were queens. St. Jerome's was an oasis amid shabby soup rooms and fast food outlets, and for that matter stylish restaurants where glamour fed envy, an oasis one never forgot because it proved forever that failure is nothing and triumph is asking politely for the carrot sticks.

Go On

How did those Sisters do it? Faith, one can say, yet the word is too easy. What upbringing, what calling, what training had they known? What did they think about, carrying plates and scrubbing floors, going to sleep at night and waking up to another day of serving bums? Low pay, long hours, no prestige, and they ran a heaven on earth.

And the diners? It's likely any man there would have traded his place for a home or a job or a car, if such magic were offered, but dining at St. Jerome's you knew you had something money never knows, and back on the street after dinner the hurt of being shut out from the city's getting and spending was a little easier to bear, and you could look up at the sky and go on.