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NOVA: The University of Texas at El Paso Magazine

The News Service, University of Texas at El Paso

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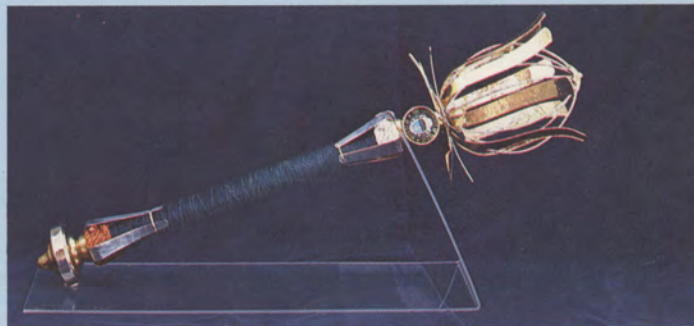
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NOVA

The University of Texas at El Paso Magazine



Celebration!

The View from the Hill

Bill Erskine has the kind of responsibility that boggles the mind of people like me—writers, editors, people who stand before the bank teller's cage, toe dug into the rug, grinning and asking can you help me balance my checkbook?



As Vice President for Business Affairs at UT El Paso (Hal St. Clair's successor), Erskine administers a \$40,299,074 total University operating budget. That is the 1980-81 budget and it goes up every year.

He had his 57th birthday on February 29 and he came to UTEP from the University of Nebraska System where he was Executive Vice President for Administration, "a leader in university finances and fiscal management," as President Haskell Monroe has termed him.

Born in Seattle, Erskine's father shipped to Alaska on a square-rigger and Bill was raised in Ketchikan, the fishing port town down the Pacific coast from Juneau. He lived there until age 19 when he was drafted into the Army Air

Corps, serving (1943-46) in Alaska, California, Texas, North Carolina, Okinawa and Iashima.

He is a business graduate of the University of Washington and a certified public accountant. His career has included work as auditor and controller in the Seattle area, at the Universities of Michigan and Washington, as vice president for business and finance at the University of Colorado, and Executive V-P for Administration at the University of Nebraska System offices in Lincoln.

Seven years of policy-making in Lincoln, removed from actual campus life, together with Nebraska's wicked weather and the Erskines' warm recollections of life in the Great American Southwest—these made the UTEP opportunity very attractive.

"In the two visits I made to the campus before being selected," Erskine recalls, "I was really impressed with what I saw—the compactness and beauty of the University, the international flavor of it, the outgoing people I met. When I started to work, all this was confirmed and I have not been disappointed in anything."

He says his reception was "very warm," especially for "a new

bureaucrat" coming on campus: "Many times, a business vice president will get one of those 'yeah, sure, glad to see you' greetings such as an IRS man might get who says 'I'm with the IRS and I'm here to help you.' But at UTEP, it was not that way. I even got flowers from the Faculty Senate—and it is that kind of warm and friendly atmosphere that makes this University very special."

Working with President Monroe was also a weighty point in Erskine's consideration of the UTEP position: "He and I hit it off pretty much from the start. He told me he needed my kind of experience and I liked the genuine warmth of the man. He is 'easy to support' even in times when we might have a slightly different opinion on a matter. He claims that the business side of the University is not his strong suit, but I've found him very shrewd and, when necessary, tough, on fiscal matters."

Erskine and his wife Mary Jean have two children: daughter Nancy is manager of a store in Denver and son Scott is a sales representative in Omaha who recently married in the Erskine home in El Paso. □

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"A Very Basic and Disturbing Dilemma"

Q: Amory Lovins, whose work you are familiar with, makes the case in a new book that "peaceful nuclear power, both domestic and exported, provides the ingredients for the continuing proliferation of nuclear weapons." In other words, Lovins says peaceful nuclear power cloaks bomb-making in a "benign civilian guise." How do you react to that?

A: There is some truth in it. For example, in 1974, India detonated a plutonium explosive device. They took the fuel from one or more of their reactors and chemically separated the plutonium from it. But they had to have special laboratory facilities to do this. It can be done if the facilities are available. In World War Two, our biggest problem was not building the bomb but getting the weapon-grade uranium-235 and plutonium-239. There are a number of countries now that have the capability of making, or have already made, nuclear explosives.

Q: South Africa, for a recent example?

A: Yes, near Pretoria is a laboratory which I believe is capable of processing reactor fuel. I believe the Israelis also have such a laboratory and perhaps the Argentines as well.

Q: All reactors produce plutonium as a by-product?

A: Yes. The basic material is uranium, which has two isotopes—235 is the fissionable material, 238 is the other isotope, but it is not fissionable. Very pure uranium 235 is one of the materials which can be used to produce an explosive but getting it is not easy: If you take 1,000 atoms of uranium as it comes out of the ground, only seven of those atoms are uranium 235, the other 993 are uranium 238. However, even with 238 you can *make* an explosive. Look at it this way: there are three fissionable nuclei that make good explosives: uranium 233, uranium 235 and plutonium 239. Uranium 235 is the only one which exists in nature. However, with all the neutrons running around in a reactor, the neutrons can sometimes be captured by the uranium 238, which turns it into uranium 239. Then by radioactive decay, this becomes first neptunium 239, then plutonium 239—which is a fissionable material.

Q: Then nuclear reactors can, if you have the processing capability, produce the explosive material for bombs?

A: Yes and this is the reason why the U.S., in selling reactors to other countries, set up requirements for inspection to see that the fuel is not being used for explosive-making purposes.

Q: Isn't it a pretty weighty argument in favor of abandoning nuclear power as answer to our energy problems that nuclear power is too expensive and that nuclear plants can be "bomb factories"?

A: *Can be* is correct. But there is another statement in that question—about nuclear energy being so "expensive." This is not necessarily true. We are using so much energy in this country that we have to get it from any source we can find. To give you an interesting number: In 1978, the United States used almost 80 *quadrillion* BTUs of energy. A BTU (British Thermal Unit) is the amount of heat or energy necessary to raise one pound of water one degree fahrenheit. A quadrillion is 10 to the 15th power—a thousand million million. In 1980, we were down to about 75 "quads," as a quadrillion BTU's is sometimes called.

Q: A quadrillion is beyond the imagination of most of us.

A: It is. Here is another way to look at it, putting it in terms of the Hiroshima nuclear bomb. When this bomb detonated over Hiroshima it levelled everything for about three-quarters of a mile. If such a bomb were dropped on downtown El Paso, it would level downtown El Paso and it takes a considerable amount of energy to do that.

Over the past several years, in the United States *alone*, the energy consumed is in the vicinity of 2,500 of those Hiroshima bombs *per day*, 365 days a year. In other words, for every 250 people in the U.S., the energy requirement is about equal to one Hiroshima bomb per year. If you look just at our campus with its 15,000 or so people, it takes the equivalent of about 60 Hiroshima bombs per year in energy just to keep the people on this campus going.

Q: This is astonishing, but what does it mean...

A: It means simply that if we are going to supply the energy people in the United States believe they need, we are going to have to get it wherever we can. More than 90 percent of our energy still comes from the fossil fuels: coal, oil and natural gas. There are other sources of energy available besides nuclear, but

A: And solar energy is as old as the hills. One problem is that, right now, *it* is relatively expensive—and natural gas is still relatively cheap. Retrofitting existing houses to solar is expensive, still probably not competitive with electrical energy even though new homes equipped for solar perhaps *are* probably competitive. But how many houses do you see being built with solar capabilities? Convenience is another problem with solar power. Electricity is not a very efficient energy, but it is *convenient*.

Q: With natural gas and oil supplies dwindling, what about coal to produce that convenient electricity?

A: Coal is loaded with pollutants. You've heard about "acid rain" in the eastern U.S.? That is produced when the nitrogen oxides and the sulphur oxides, which are formed during the burning of fossil fuels, combine with the

world such as West Germany, England, France, Japan, are all much smaller than the U.S. and as a result do not have many of the problems we have—they can get by on a much smaller per capita use of energy. But still, we are undoubtedly using considerably more energy than we really need to.

Q: What would it take for us to reverse our energy consumption trend?

A: Something I do not think we want to do—go from a machine-intensive to a labor-intensive society. Let me give you an example of what I mean. A friend of mine told me of a reactor demonstration being set up in India in a room a little larger than this office. On one side was a unit that had to be filled with water and the water outlet was on the other side of the room. What we would do in a machine-intensive society is to get a hose of some kind, connect it and fill up the tank. But they didn't have a hose and it was cheaper to hire a man with a goatskin bag to haul the water from one side of the room to the other than it was to buy a hose.

Q: We are not likely to do that...

A: No, not any time soon at least, although our population growth might one day force us to become more labor-intensive than we are now. But we are machine-intensive and it costs energy to be machine-intensive. Look at the distances food is shipped, for instance, across this vast country—a problem small industrialized countries don't have to worry about. And, of course, a lot of our problem *is* waste—what you have called "gluttony" of energy. One look at a supermarket freezer will show you that. It takes a lot of energy to *freeze* the food to begin with, but notice that the freezer is *open* for the convenience, I suppose, of the grocery shopper. It means that the freezer has to run all the time.

Q: That is one of the many infuriating examples of our energy gluttony...

A: I know...I know. But whenever I talk to people about such things the answer is invariably the same: I don't *want* to give that up...that's what I *want*.

Q: But this returns us to the opening question: If we are to remain gluttons, it follows we will probably have to expand our nuclear energy capabilities, and following upon that, doesn't it mean we will risk the proliferation of nuclear weapons?

A: Basically the answer is yes. But I think the United States and the Soviet Union, despite basic disputes in many

"...it takes the equivalent of about 60 Hiroshima bombs per year in energy just to keep the people on this campus going."

one of the problems of the "soft energy path" propounded by Amory Lovins and others is this: With the quantity of energy being consumed in the U.S. today, switching over to other alternatives takes a long, long time.

Q: It has taken a long time to develop the small amount of nuclear power we use today.

A: We knew about nuclear fission in 1939, three or four years later the first nuclear reactor was built and by 1945 the first nuclear device was detonated. The Atomic Energy Commission was established in 1946 to promote nuclear energy as a replacement for the dwindling supplies of fossil fuels. So nuclear power has been a matter of fact for over 35 years yet it is supplying only 4 percent of our energy needs now. With a crash program, that might go up to 10 percent.

Q: Part of the "soft energy path" is to make more use of such energy alternatives as solar...

hydrogen in the water in the atmosphere to produce acids. Many of the lakes in the northeastern U.S. have become so acidic that fish cannot live in them.

Q: So, you are saying the fossil fuels have their problems too?

A: Yes, and we have to find some source to produce our electricity *if*, as I suspect we will, we are to keep up the standard of living most Americans feel they want. This is the reason nuclear energy is a viable alternative source of energy. Do we downgrade our economy—the health of which is dependent on our energy capabilities—or do we use the energy alternatives available to us. It is a very basic and disturbing dilemma.

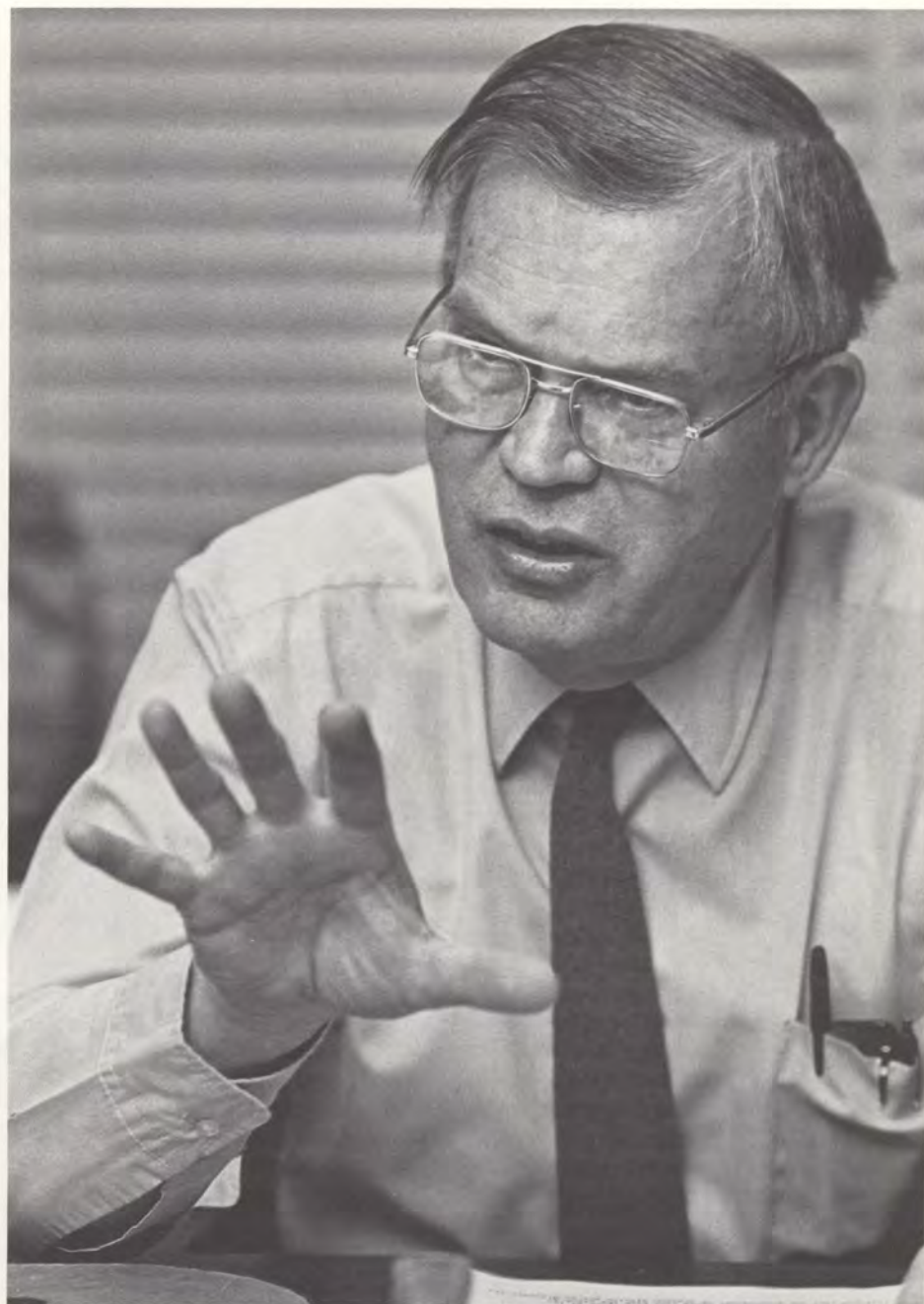
Q: I know it is easy to say, and not so easy to do without, but aren't we just perpetuating our energy gluttony? The Lovens book uses the phrase "petro-pigs..."

A: It is a debatable topic, to me. The other industrialized countries of the

C. SHARP COOK, chairman of the Department of Physics at UT El Paso, is a native of St. Louis Crossing, Indiana. He received his A.B. degree in mathematics and physics at DePauw University, his M.A. and Ph.D. in physics at Indiana University. His professional career has included teaching at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, and at the University of Santa Clara, California; a long period of service (as branch head, division head, physics consultant and scientific director) at the U.S. Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory in San Francisco, and Fulbright professor at Aarhus University in Denmark. He is author of many scientific works, including *Modern Atomic and Nuclear Physics* and *Structure of Atomic Nuclei*, the latter book translated into Spanish, Polish and Russian. He has been a member of the UT El Paso faculty since 1970.

areas, both have a good grasp of the destructive nature of nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union and France are pushing nuclear energy—both countries have demonstration breeder reactors in operation similar to the one we have debated for years at Clinch River—in the range of 300 megawatts. To give you a comparison, a commercial power station is in the range of 1,000 megawatts. Both France and the Soviet Union are in the process of constructing what they call “demonstration units” which go up to about 600 megawatts. And they have on the drawing board, for construction in the late 1980s, commercial-size breeder reactors. So they are not hesitating in pushing ahead with nuclear power. The problem comes with countries developing nuclear capabilities whose leaders are more volatile—what would have happened if Idi Amin had had a nuclear bomb? The so-called “nuclear family” now includes India, South Africa, Israel, China, France, England, the Soviet Union, the U.S., and perhaps a couple of nations we don't know about. There is no international government that could conceivably control the nuclear proliferation among these countries. If the leadership of one of these countries, one entering the nuclear family later on, becomes sufficiently belligerent—the weapon could be used.

Q: And there does seem to be a sort of inevitability about all this: more nuclear energy, more bomb-making capability and proliferation, more of



a chance of a disaster. Why not just quit nuclear and take the soft energy path of Amory Lovens?

A: Because while it looks great on paper, it is just not practical. Most people won't accept it, are not willing to be inconvenienced. We have built an industrialized society that won't be denied, that many other countries want to have and that in order to have are moving toward nuclear power faster than we are.

Q: Another scary issue is what to do with nuclear waste. Do you foresee any meaningful solutions in this area that will take our minds off of it for awhile?

A: Yes, there are meaningful solutions, but they won't take our minds off of the

problem. I say that because this has become more of an emotional than a technical problem. To illustrate what I mean: We can put nuclear wastes in granite such as in a mountain and seal it there. But the fear of radioactivity leaking is very real, as well it should be. Humans are forever having accidents and who can say that some many years down the line, when through human error records are not kept properly, or are lost, that somebody won't drill into that mountain? Can there be a scheme for disposing of nuclear waste that works perfectly?

Q: There seems to be few answers one could call “satisfactory”...

A: There are no easy answers, only the hard questions. □

Hospice:

A Better Way to Die

by Marcella A. Schapiro

The doctor's office is small—unpretentious with a sort of orderly clutter of books, charts, memos and family photos. The doctor, a gangling, boyish figure of a man in his early 40s, is usually relaxed and easygoing in his private sanctuary, but today he wears a sober face. Fred Ekery is a specialist in oncology—cancer treatment—and he never finds it easy to tell his patients that they are dying.

A 50-year-old man, appearing strong and virile, sits across the desk and listens expectantly. Dr. Ekery clears his throat and begins his unpleasant task.

"Paul, I'm going to level with you. I can't tell for sure how much time you have left to live, but it isn't long. The most we can do is make you as comfortable as possible."

The words fall silently in the small room. The patient, a man still in the prime of his life, sits dumbfounded—disbelieving at first. Then, he looks at the doctor in the eyes and speaks.

"Well, Doc, I guess I'd better get busy. I have a lot to do to get ready."

In the days that followed the patient made his own funeral arrangements, disposed of his business, picked out his casket and, with his wife and his children, finalized his will. Of more importance, he spent his few remaining days cementing his relationships. He wanted no unfinished business with his friends and his loved ones when he died.

To Dr. Ekery, this man's reaction was highly unusual and laudatory.

"There is no question that this patient was hard hit. But I knew him well and I could have predicted his response, even as I watched him in the pit of his despair."

Of course, this real-life example is the exception to the rule. More typically, a diagnosis of a terminal disease leads to denial rather than acceptance; usually the death of the patient occurs *before* essential matters are resolved.

To help the terminally ill in El Paso cope with death more realistically, the UT El Paso College of Nursing and the

El Paso County Medical Society recently introduced a concept call "Hospice," a program which has been widely accepted around the nation as an alternative way of caring for the dying. The word hospice means a community for sojourners along the way, a place for replenishment, refreshment and care. It is a demonstration of a way to look beyond the treatment of disease to the care of people.

Barbara Petrosino, associate professor of nursing, describes the hospice philosophy: "To live until death—not to exist in pain and isolation until it comes." Its goal is to help the terminally ill and their families live as fully as possible, to keep the patient at home as long as possible, and to support the family as the unit of care.

She describes three kinds of hospice programs which are possible. The first is free-standing—in its own building. The

"To live until death—not to exist in pain and isolation until it comes."

second is a hospice program operated in a section of a hospital, and a third—which may be the most appropriate for El Paso—is in the patient's home with support services provided.

"The terminally ill patient and his family," explains Dr. Petrosino, "Would receive a wide variety of assistance from a team of experts. A support team includes a physician who would become the medical director, a nurse who is known as the patient care coordinator, a social worker, one or more chaplains, and volunteers who serve a variety of functions." She continues, "A program may also include the work of a dietitian, a physical therapist and a psychiatrist or psychologist. The team is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

Patients are usually accepted on the

basis of health needs, rather than on their ability to pay, requiring the program to be dependent on grants (public or private) and donations.

Herb Rolph, immediate past president of the board of Hospice of El Paso, Inc., emphasizes that hospice care would be less costly than an acute care hospital. Based on studies made on 500 patients served by Hospice, Inc., in New Haven, Connecticut, the cost for the last three months of life in a hospice program would compare with the cost of one week of care in a typical hospital.

After the patient dies, the family continues to be served by the hospice team for about a year, since the months after death involve a normal period of grief and other adjustments in family life.

Dr. Petrosino says a city the size of El Paso could expect to have 10 or 12 patients at any one time eligible for a hospice program. This statement is based on studies of causes of death.

"People may have the impression that a hospice is where people go to die; this is not the main focus. It involves maintaining the patient's personal interests and needs in a setting where he may be made more comfortable by the people who care most about him," she explains.

The success of the hospice program will depend on the degree to which the patient and his family are willing to accept the inevitability of death from ter-

минаl illness and the degree to which the medical community supports the hospice concept.

"Listen, it's not all bravado and acceptance," says Dr. Ekery. "I couldn't begin to tell you about the well-educated folks, the sophisticated, knowing and intelligent people who bully their doctors for miracle drugs. Hundreds of patients read the rag-sheets which come out of California and advocate fads and bizarre cures, and those very people, desperate and naive, follow rainbows and give themselves over to chicanery. The will to live is the strongest will. The acceptance of a verdict is the toughest." As the doctor continues, his usually gentle black eyes flash the fires of frustration.

(to page 13)

Convocation

Sidebars

Mainly, when an event as complicated as the UTEP Four Centuries '81 Convocation ends, you wish everyone who attended knew what went into it. You wish more people *had* attended, of course ("It was *their* loss," said Vice President Joe Olander of those who did not come to the Special Events Center on February 19), but above all you wish people realized the work that went into it.

As Holden Caulfield would say, however, people never do. So, you list in the Program everybody who contributed

and you hope *that*, at least, shows, by the sheer number of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and citizens who helped, what a tremendous effort it was—nearly five months of work, and for some, every day had at least a few hours devoted to Convocation planning.

The covers of this March NOVA and the pages herein devoted to the Convocation, give only a *sense* of what went on. Rather than attempt a "history" of this important occasion—for the history is all that is left to us now, history and pleasant memories—we throw the spot-

light on some of the high points of the week of Convocation, February 15-20: Nancy Hamilton's fine little portrait of Myrtle Ball, the Ball-Strickland-Sonnichsen-Haigh get-together in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the advent of the baccalaureate degree at UTEP, Russ Banks' photo-feature on the splendid ceremony in the Special Events Center, Doc Sonnichsen's full houses, and these "sidebars"—a newspaper term for the follow-up stories that often accompany a story of major significance, or the "inside" vignettes seen by reporters at such events which do not fit into ordinary reportage.

Aside from the Main Event—the ceremony of February 19 at the Special Events Center—it is difficult to put a finger on the high point of the week, but many felt it was the gracious hosting done by President Haskell Monroe and his wife, Jo, at Hoover House, the elegant home of UTEP presidents at 711 Cincinnati. The University has been very fortunate in its first ladies over the years and Jo Monroe is an exemplar: a lovely, warm, gracious lady who, when something is scheduled for her home, gets involved with it.

What a fine moment it was when President Emeritus Joseph M. Ray and his wife, Jettie, came to Hoover House twice during Convocation Week—the first time the Rays had visited there since they occupied it during Joe Ray's eminent eight-year tenure in office.

Sorely missed, of course, were Presidents Emeritus Joseph R. Smiley and Arleigh Templeton.

At the February 15 Hoover House reception, some 600 people came through during the afternoon to visit the Monroes, have a cup of punch and some snacks. Nobody kept a precise count, but somebody suggested there be



Esther T. Cornell, left, works with designers Albert C. Ronke and Sally Bishop to complete the series of University and college banners unveiled during Convocation Week.



Designer-jeweler Jim Love helps President Monroe model the presidential chain of office Love created.

a count of the toothpicks left behind, and, figuring at least two chicken livers per person, 1,200 toothpicks would equal about 600 visitors. But whatever the count, the food served at Hoover House and in the Union at the several luncheons during the week, was superb. After the Thursday night ceremony, for instance, many of the distinguished guests who came to the campus for Convocation activities were invited to Hoover House for late-night refreshments. What *could* have been more appropriate and delicious than the chilled fruits—melon, pear, apple, pineapple, many others—on the dining room table?

At a luncheon on the 19th, honoring President Monroe and many distinguished visitors, master of ceremonies James M. Day (president of the Faculty Senate, English professor, director of Centennial Museum, among other duties) performed a “non-inauguration” of the president since inaugurations of presidents are proscribed in the University of Texas System. *If* inaugurations were permitted, Jim Day said, this would be how it might be done. He read the inaugural words. And *if* such an inauguration took place, these would be the appropriate words of response, Jim said, leaving the document on the podium for President Monroe to read.

A very nice touch to the proceedings was the opening prayer offered by Haskell Monroe, *senior*. President Monroe’s parents were present for many of the Thursday events, clearly proud of their son’s accomplishments and not hesitant to say so.

At that “non-inauguration” was yet another of the many touches which made the week altogether memorable. Sophomore piano student Mayumi Ogura played a lovely selection, the First Movement of Sonata in F-sharp Minor, Opus 2, by Brahms.

Myrtle Ball, featured in this issue of NOVA, delighted in participating in the “Matter of Fifty Years” panel in the Library Auditorium on February 18. Jean Miculka, who served as moderator for the panel (and who was one of Mrs. Ball’s students), reports that when she went to Mrs. Ball’s home to pick up some photos, she remarked on the amount of attention Mrs. Ball was receiving of late. “Yes,” said Mrs. Ball, “I feel like I’ve been recycled—until I look in the mirror.”

The Regalia. Have a look at the cover of this NOVA. Few really believed the University “regalia”—the word used for

the chains of office and the mace—and the banners for the colleges and for the University, could progress from concept to completion in four months. That they did is a tribute to the superhuman efforts of people like Larry Etheridge, Sally Bishop, Albert Ronke, Jim Love (the artist-designer who executed the chains and mace), Esther Cornell, Olive Tompkins, Ron Hammel, and Jonathan Gore, among others.

The idea, the artistic renditions on paper, then the actual metal and cloth work—all this moved ahead apace. Coming up with the money to pay for them was another thing since clearly the University itself could not fund them from its regular sources of state appropriated and trust funds. The creation of the University Heritage Commission, chaired by Jim Day and Oscar McMahan, involved several outstanding retired faculty members, together with H.G. St. Clair, retired vice president for business affairs; Conrey Bryson, Ralph Coleman, Francis Fugate (who came up with the group’s name), Wade Hartrick, William S. Strain, Rex Strickland, and W.H. Timmons. This group has, as its first assignment, to raise the funds for the regalia and banners—an activity they are at present working on. The Heritage Commission will remain active after that goal is passed, with an expanded membership, and has an open vista of work to do in protecting, promoting and expanding the University’s nearly 70 years of history and heritage.

One note about the Thursday night capstone of the week-long Convocation celebration. As the faculties of the colleges lined up, preparing for the academic procession into the Special Events Center, we chatted a few minutes with Mimi Gladstein, English associate professor. Mimi had with her a copy of the *Portable John Steinbeck* just in case the proceedings got boring.

It is a tribute to the planners of that evening that Mimi’s bookmark didn’t advance more than a page or two in the course of a long ceremony.

All in all, the week of February 15 did what a convocation is supposed to do: it brought UTEP’s people—from the University community and from without—together. It celebrated the Four Centuries of the Pass, celebrated the new presidency of Haskell M. Monroe, celebrated itself.

It was a very good thing. □



"I Live in the Future"

Myrtle Ball Celebrates 90 Years

For a theater group with no hall of its own to perform in and no money for sets, "Our Town" was an ideal play. Besides, Thornton Wilder instilled in it the quality of dramatic excellence that earned it the Pulitzer Prize in 1938.

Myrtle Ball was entranced by the play when she saw it in New York and obtained the first amateur performance rights for the College Players of the Texas College of Mines and Metallurgy.

The play calls for no backdrops and minimal furnishings. It relies on the talents of the actors to stir the audience's imagination—and Mrs. Ball's cast did just that.

"I think that was the best show we ever gave," Mrs. Ball reflected a few days after her 90th birthday. "Those were glorious days."

Both she and her husband, the late William H. Ball, were faculty members from 1929 until 1958, she in drama and speech and he in chemistry. She developed speech activities in the English Department and started the College Players (now the University Players), Zeta Tau cast of Alpha Psi Omega, national dramatic fraternity, and the Forensic Society. "I had three programs I fostered. That's where I got my gray hair," she says with a gesture toward her meticulously waved coiffure and a twinkle in her dark eyes.

Back in the 30s and early 40s, she relates, speech was "a kind of stepchild. We had to use whatever room was available. For years I taught in the back of the first floor of Main Building, dark and dreary with pipes overhead and now and then the plumbing flooding on us. We had no stage to rehearse on and had to rent the places where we performed."

She did not try to cut corners by

choosing plays with low royalties, preferring instead such hits as "Arsenic and Old Lace" and "Stage Door."

Many of her friends from teaching days were among the more than 200 guests who helped her celebrate her 90th birthday on January 29 at a party hosted by her three sons. They are George, who teaches with the El Paso Public Schools; Russell, who has retired from Standard Oil; and Dr. Joe Ball, president of the University of Pittsburgh at Titusville, Pennsylvania. The family also includes her seven grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.

"Happy Journey," also by Wilder, was another milestone. In the spring of 1941 Mrs. Ball took her students to Lubbock for the Texas Intercollegiate One-Act Play Festival. Against such heavyweights as UT Austin and Texas Tech, they won not only the play competition but also top awards in men's and women's acting. Additionally, Mrs. Ball had arranged for Donivee Purkey to perform a scene from "Our Town" and invited talent scouts from two studios. Both were interested in signing Donivee to a contract.

"We were stunned by our good luck," she says. "After the contest, we went to a restaurant and poured Coke in the cup we had won and passed it around the table. We learned later that Donivee was coming down with the measles; if we'd known that at the time, I guess we wouldn't have all drunk from that cup." She reflects a moment and continues, "You know, that cup has disappeared. I'm going to try my darndest to get it back."

When the time came for Donivee to take a screen test, Mrs. Ball accompanied her to Hollywood where Paramount Pictures gave her a contract.

Despite El Paso's remoteness from centers where actors could gain professional experience, Mrs. Ball was dedicated to learning the ropes for herself in such fields as radio, movies and television, so she could pass on the inside information to her students.

Before becoming a teacher, she had developed her understanding of stage discipline as a member of a touring Shakespearean company.

In the early years of KTSM, she started a poetry program on which she and her students could gain radio experience. By 1941 she had expanded her radio interests to include a dramatic show by students on KROD.

Several summers were spent in graduate work at the University of California at Los Angeles. Before television reached El Paso, Mrs. Ball wanted to study the new art and qualified for a special course at UCLA. During another summer she explored the movie industry and ended up at 20th Century-Fox with a role in "The Shocking Miss Pilgrim" starring Betty Grable. She could have continued in that work, but preferred to return home to her family.

While Mrs. Ball was devoting her extracurricular hours to working with drama and forensics students, her husband was equally as devoted to tennis. He coached college students in the sport and the Balls' sons became well known tennis stars. Her grandson, Don Ball, now is the El Paso Tennis Club pro.

When she discusses her life as a faculty member, Mrs. Ball dwells on individuals and events, but never on dates. "What year did something happen?" she echoes and shakes her head. "I don't live in the past, I live in the future. I know no years."

One of her aims for the future—besides locating that missing drama trophy—is to complete some unfinished business from her years of graduate study in California.

"While I was going to UCLA," she explains, "I started a book on the art of the television master of ceremonies. I met all the people who were hosting shows, the top bananas, and interviewed them. It was a hot topic then, but I wasn't able to get my book done. I still have the notes, volumes of them."

"I thought I just might get around to writing that book this year." □

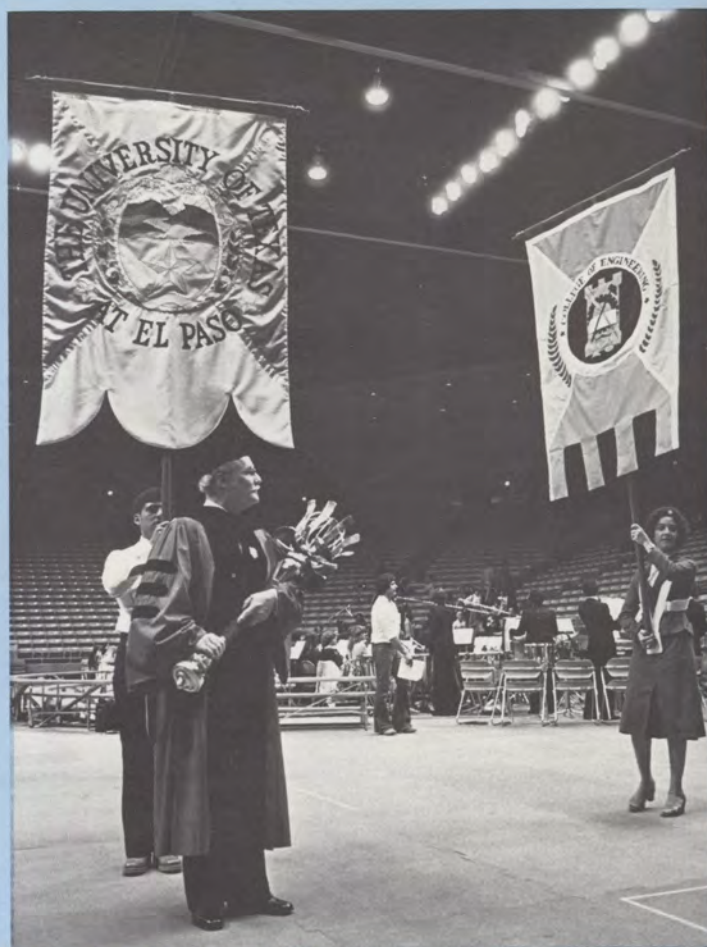
Celebration!

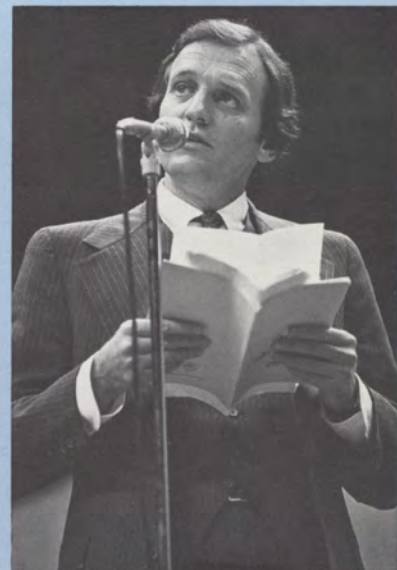
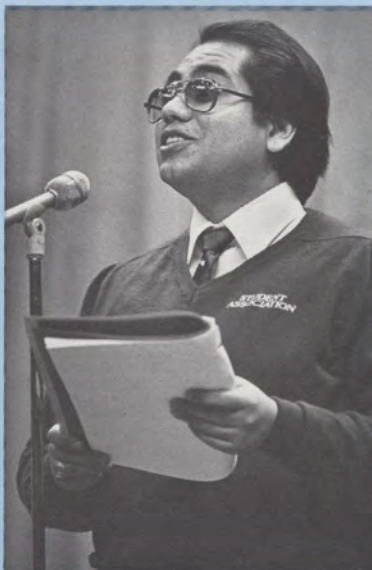
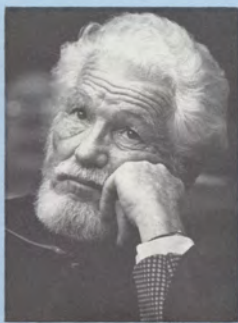
You should have been there.

It was dazzlingly splendiferously mediievally baroque: the haunting processional composed by Richard Henderson... Grand Marshal C.L. Etheridge bearing the University mace as he might have done in a previous life in England 400 years ago ...the banner-bearers wending their way across the floor, followed by the faculties of the six colleges in gowns both somber and bright...the "regalia" of banners, mace and chains of office, graciously bestowed and accepted and the beginnings of a tradition and a heritage...a few speeches, some poetry, some sonorously wonderful music by wind ensemble, chorale, chorus, choir...challenges and responses from a student leader, alumni leader, a faculty leader, and the leader of the University.

February 19, 1981, 7-9 p.m.: The University celebrated a number of things—the Four Centuries of the Pass of the North, the advent of President Haskell Monroe, and, well, the University celebrated itself.

It was a very good thing. □





Ball, Haigh, Strickland, Sonnichsen:

When We Were Small, We Loved Each Other

by Nancy Hamilton

Girls were not allowed to wear slacks on campus—except for an oddball engineering student—and faculty members took to their tuxes when President Dossie M. Wiggins invited them to a reception in his home where the Liberal Arts Building now stands.

That was the College of Mines and Metallurgy as four former faculty members described it during the University Convocation Week forum on “A Matter of Fifty Years: The Bachelor of Arts Degree at UT El Paso.” A former student of theirs, Jean Miculka, who now teaches Drama and Speech, guided the discussion by the four, whose years of teaching at the institution total 107 and whose “experience in living,” as she put it, amounts to 344.

The College was just starting its Bachelor of Arts degree program in 1931 when Charles Leland Sonnichsen found his way from Harvard to El Paso. Myrtle Ball was already teaching speech and drama as “a stepchild of the English Department” and her husband, the late W.H. Ball, was teaching chemistry. Berte Haigh was midway through his six years of filling in for absent geologist L.A. “Speedy” Nelson, and it was to be another five years before Rex Strickland came along to teach history.

The four drew a capacity audience of former and current students and University personnel to the Library Auditorium to share in many laughs and a few nostalgic sighs.

“Prof” Haigh, as he was known to the students, traced the period leading to the Bachelor of Arts degree. As a graduate of the College of Mines and then a faculty member, he recalled, “We were quite happy to see the B.A. We had just taken over the old El Paso Junior College and our enrollment jumped from 127 in 1925 to 550 in 1928. We had five buildings—Old Main, Seamon Hall which was the

metallurgy lab, Engineering, Kelly Hall, and Keno Hall (now Graham, then a nickname for Burges Hall).”

When Holliday Hall was built in 1932, Haigh related, an ardent booster of the College appropriated some of the WPA’s cement meant for street surfacing. “Most of the cement in that building got lost on the way to the Scenic Drive paving project,” he said, “and for a number of years the ‘hall’ of Holliday Hall was spelled ‘h-a-u-l.’ ”

Doc Sonnichsen described the composure with which Mrs. Ball conducted classes in a room located just below a restroom where the noisy activity of the plumbing was a distraction. “She heroically went about her business,” he said. “And I remember when Irwin Brand was in a play, something like ‘The Moon Is Blue,’ where he planned to put back in the objectionable lines she had omitted. When the cast gathered backstage before the performance, Myrtle prayed with them and he was so startled he left the bad lines out.”

She smiled at him and told the audience: “When I retired, Doc gently joshed me about praying before the plays. Now, I pray before everything.”

Then she told one on him. Professor E.A. Drake, Doc’s predecessor in the English Department, had been so very well liked that most people had assumed he was irreplaceable when he left for Minneapolis. Sonnichsen, however, soon began enjoying the same degree of popularity and news of it reached Professor Drake, who told Sonnichsen, “If you ever get within 60 miles of Minneapolis, stop!”

Sonnichsen quipped, “Yes, he was my John the Baptist.”

The line of demarcation between this institution and El Paso High School was “very dim indeed” in his faculty days, Haigh said. “A number of high school students was trying to downput the collegians,” he related. “They would come

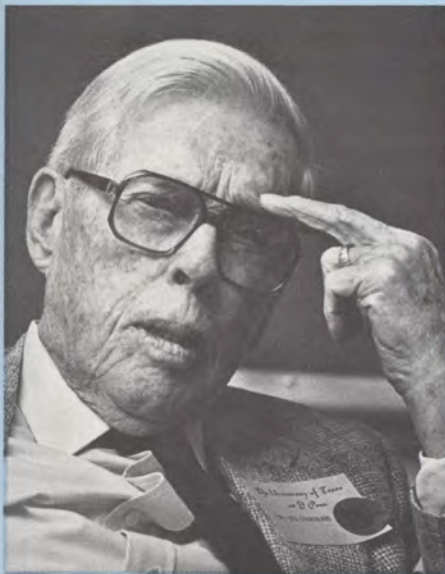
to dances in Holliday Hall and create quite a bit of rumpus. I was on the Student Activities Committee and their members didn’t want to sponsor the dances any more because of this trouble. I felt the kids were entitled to dance and it was up to the faculty to see that they went on, and first thing I knew, I was chairman of the committee. I called all the boys in for a conference—kept the girls out because I wanted to talk plain. I told them I didn’t object to a drink if they needed one to keep up their courage. The glove compartments of their cars were filled for that purpose.

“I told them that at the next dance, the first one to start a rumpus would land on his posterior. They said, ‘Who is going to do that?’ and I told them, ‘I am.’ After the first intermission there was a rumpus, and I got a high school boy by the collar, took him to the door, and two students came and helped me out. We had no more trouble after that.”

Dr. Strickland, as a new faculty member, was assigned to serve with Mrs. Lena Eldridge, dean of women, and another faculty member on a “supreme court” that handled infractions of sorority rush rules. “The first infringement was by some girls in my class, and we punished them by not allowing them to have their spring prom. You never saw as much copious weeping as then.”

Dr. Strickland looked on the Depression years as “a blessing in disguise. Most middle class families in El Paso had been sending their sons and daughters away to the University at Austin, to Arizona, Yale and Harvard. But they couldn’t send them away in the years from about 1934 to 1938. We got as fine a group of students then as I have ever seen.

“Then in 1946, when the men came back from the military service, we had West Pointers and other commissioned



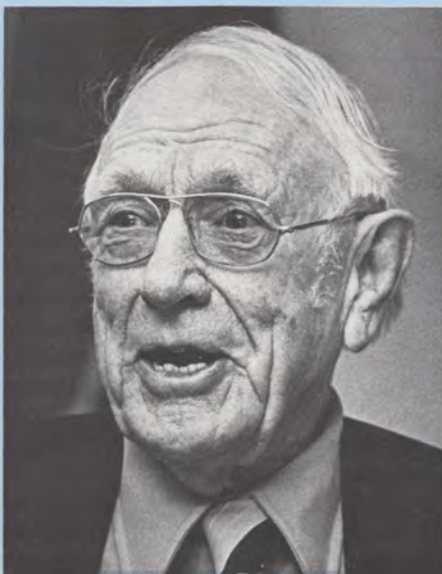
Strickland



Haigh



Ball



Sonnichsen

officers, and sad-faced young men with old faces who had stormed the beaches at Normandy, Anzio and elsewhere." He paused in reflection, then added, "There was a great spirit of camaraderie in the classroom then."

Sonnichsen remembered the traumatic period when the community pressed for a change from "College of Mines" to a more appropriate name for an institution that had become much broader in scope than a mining school. He remembered returning from a trip to see Dean Gene Thomas and several of his friends mourning the change.

After having a secretary at another university write "College of Minds," Strickland said he proposed that the name become "Texas Western College" because one could get no further west in Texas. He even brought it up in a serv-

ice club speech. When the change to that name actually came about, he had to get out the crying towel for his good friend "Speedy" Nelson who wondered whether his degree from the College of Mines still had any validity.

There ensued a few minutes of recalling names of well loved faculty members from the old days, with members of the audience calling out a few as well. Among those mentioned: E.A. Drake, Frank and W.H. Seamon, William W. Lake, E.J. Knapp ("He kept our basketball team honest for years," interjected Mrs. Ball), Howard and Mary Quinn, Dean C.A. Puckett, "Speedy" Nelson, Tony Berkman, Fred Bachmann, John Waller, Joseph Roth, "Cap" Kidd, Carl Hertzog...

There were alligator stories, both the one about the beast in Doc Quinn's of-

fice and another one that was left in the swimming pool, to the dismay of the health officer, Dr. Burt F. Jenness.

Dr. Strickland recalled having shared an office with Miss Norma Egg, who had joined the English faculty in 1929, the same year the Balls came to El Paso.

"There was no more original mind on this campus than Miss Egg," he said. "We settled the question between ourselves of whether I was permitted to swear in the office. She said, 'I don't give a damn if you do, because I do sometimes.'"

He also pointed out that there was an "old" faculty, the one put together in the years before he arrived in 1936, there was the "second wave" in which he was included along with Berkman, Bachmann, Waller and others, and after the war came the "third wave." One important difference of those days was, he said, that freshmen were taught by full professors.

What are they doing now? Jean Miculka asked of them.

Haigh, whose teaching years were from 1928-34, went on to take charge of the University of Texas System lands. Now at 91, he has completed a book about the University lands, due for publication by Texas Western Press.

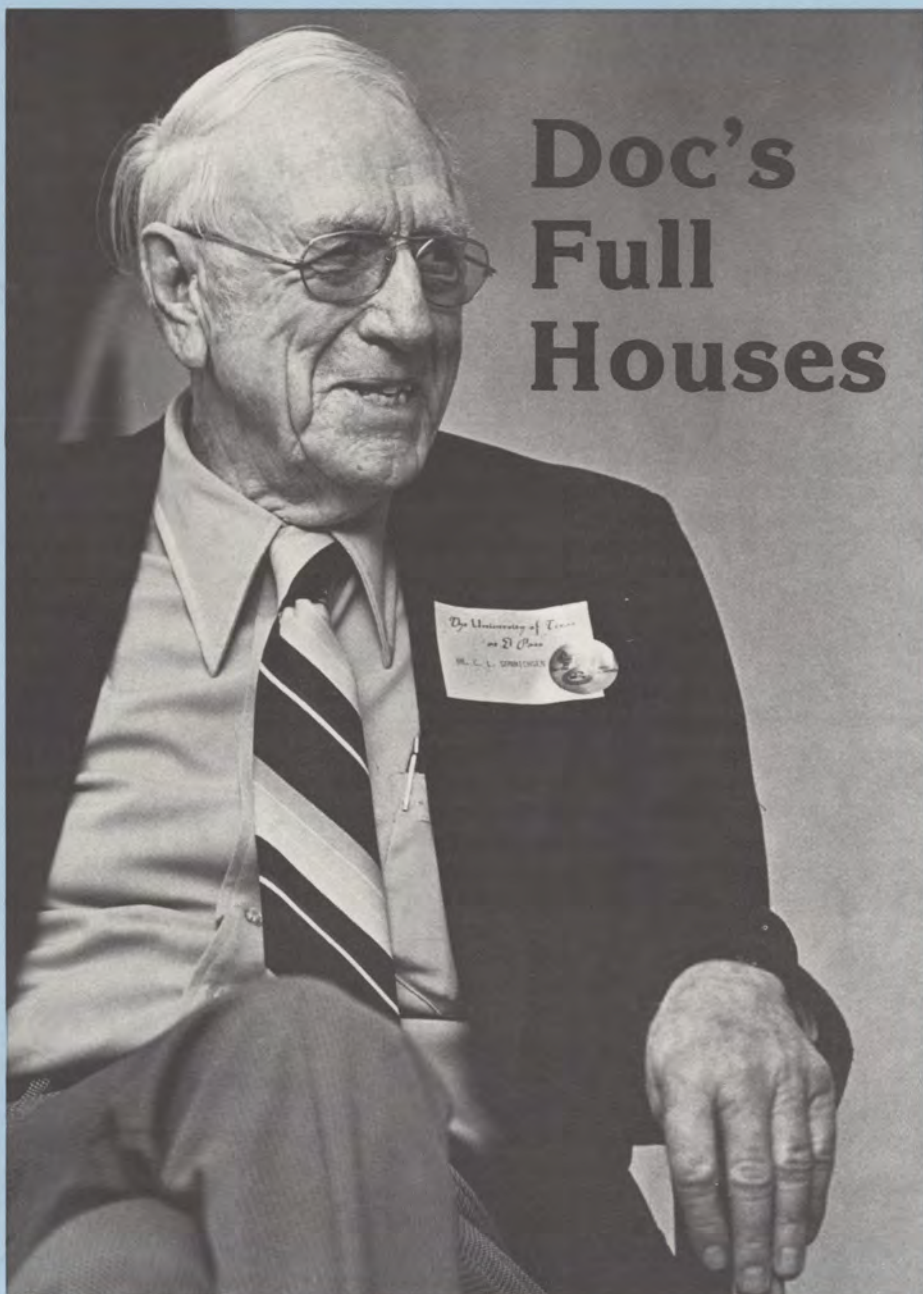
Mrs. Ball, who retired in 1958, has specialized in raising camellias but now is taking up gardenias.

A faculty member from 1936 to 1967, Professor Emeritus Strickland, at 83, has been helping three doctoral candidates complete their dissertations in history. "Tomorrow for me is better than today," he adds. He was looking forward to taking part in the state historical meeting scheduled in El Paso in March.

The youngster of the bunch, Doc Sonnichsen, at 80, just published his second volume of *Pass of the North* which brings El Paso's history up to date. Texas Western Press printed the new Volume II and reprinted its all-time best-seller, Volume I, as a new set in December. Professor Emeritus Sonnichsen, who retired in 1972 and moved to Tucson, is completing his monumental history of that city.

In reflecting on the times when people dressed up for faculty parties, Dr. Strickland called that a time of "dignity. Maybe education has lost some of the dignity it had."

Sonnichsen also had a comment on changing times. "The bigger you get, the harder it is to know everybody. When we were small we loved each other." □



Doc's Full Houses

C.L. Sonnichsen walked to the podium in the Fox Fine Arts Center Recital Hall at 7 p.m. on February 17 to give a speech for the University's Four Centuries Convocation, and also to help commemorate the 50th anniversary of the baccalaureate degree at UTEP.

Doc didn't mention it, but John O. West, who introduced him, did: The speech also marked 50 years (less about four months) since that summer day in 1931 when Charles Leland Sonnichsen, Ph.D., rolled into El Paso for the first time, by way of Harvard, Boston, Tucumcari and Alamogordo, on an S-P passenger train.

And Doc himself may have forgotten it, but the title of his speech, "Serpents in the Western Eden," also had an added significance since it was very nearly

50 years since he had his first introduction to a "serpent" in the Western Eden of the College of Mines.

He had been escorted from Union Depot to the Mines campus by English professor E.A. Drake and installed in the dormitory then known as Burges (or Keno) Hall—Graham Hall of today. Anton H. Berkman was in charge of Burges Hall and became one of the first of Doc's campus friends. A few days after his campus advent, Doc was preparing for his morning ablutions when he saw clinging to the curtain over the shower stall a hideous creature which scared him half out of his wits. He reported it to Berkman, a biologist, who took a look and coolly informed the Harvard man that this was a mere *vinegaroon*, and though certainly ugly,

was harmless.

Sonnichsen's skin crawled all day.

Doc's "Serpents in the Western Eden" speech had to do with the current "low road" in Western fiction, the so-called "Adult Westerns," a euphemism for pornographic Westerns. The old, traditional Western novel, he said, was a sort of American morality play in which the bad guy was evil personified to such a degree that "we never thought of him as having a mother." The new wave Westerns, he added, pointing to a display of paperbacks flanking the podium, "have scales and a forked tongue."

"I'll bet you never saw a square snake before," he added.

The full house Doc drew in the Fine Arts Center was duplicated in the Centennial Museum after his speech where he was scheduled for an autograph party. Texas Western Press director Haywood Antone said over \$1,000 worth of copies of *Pass of the North* (now in two volumes, the second bringing the history up to the present was released in December) was sold. Doc signed so many books somebody revised the old story that 50 years from now the real rarity will be a copy of *Pass NOT* signed by C.L. Sonnichsen.

The English Department hosted a luncheon for Doc at the Lancers Club on February 19—another wall-to-wall-friends affair—and, with Mimi Gladstein as mistress-of-ceremonies—lightly "roasted" the guest of honor.

Joe Leach held up a copy of *C.L. Sonnichsen: Grassroots Historian* and said the author had left a lot of stuff out of the book. Everybody helped fill in the missing, if sometimes apocryphal, information.

Doc drove back to Tucson Friday morning. In a letter he wrote to thank people for their efforts in his behalf, he wrote: "I thought to myself as I was driving home that if Padre Junipero in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* was right, and that there *was* an intention behind the removal of each of those persons who fell with the bridge, then somewhere between Deming and Lordsburg the Lord should have called me home. I would have passed a high crest and the timing would have been excellent." □



Petrosino



Ekery



Small



Rolph

Hospice...(from page 4)

"You would not believe the games people play—the reluctant ones. Neither the dying patient nor his family—both aware of impending death—is willing to accept and share the truth. I have seen cases where the anxiety is almost too much to bear. The isolation, the grief, the fear—God! It's devastating! How much better to begin the bereavement early.

"My 'macho' patient demonstrated a better way to me," claims the doctor. "He took care of getting his lawyer's advice; he and his wife read the insurance forms together; and in my opinion, they avoided the hassles that families have to deal with after a death."

To quote Dr. Ekery, "I chose not to send my own mother, who was a cancer victim, to search out the miracle cure. With a hepatoma (liver cancer)," he declares, "her life expectancy was about three months and she lived for three years—mostly in her own home."

The doctor is firm in his conviction that families need reassurance that they will not be destroyed by the disease. He is adamant about pain control—medication around the clock, if necessary, to anticipate the pain and remove the psychological trauma. The nurse's role here is critical.

"The nursing care in El Paso is excellent. I find that brighter folks are going into nursing—people who are aggressive and efficient. The nurse is able to perform many of the functions of the physician. It has been my experience that oncology nurses are knowledgeable about drugs. They don't continue to fit only into roles of administrative experts. These men and women are trained to give the finest

nursing care. In my opinion," states Dr. Ekery, "they give away a lot of themselves."

Alida Small, associate director of the Visiting Nurse Association, sees it from the point of view of her group—health care nurses who, she says, "have been doing hospice for years."

Traditionally the nurse goes into the home of the terminally ill and provides many of the services that hospice promises.

"They've changed the climate in the home of the dying because the visiting nurse regularly provides health and home care, sharing the deepest emotions and feelings and, more often than not, the truth about an illness."

Mrs. Small continues, "So often the patient refuses to tell his loved ones about the reality of fear he suffers. He seldom, if ever, talks about how isolated he is and often never mentions pain. People," she says, "try to protect their families from the truth." Mrs. Small, a very open, warm and candid woman, smiles, her eyes clear and her manner direct. "The point is that the bereavement process should begin while the patient is still alive."

She shares Dr. Ekery's feelings that no one ever gets the chance to tell a dying person everything there is to tell, but with honesty and with family involvement the patient can know that he is loved. Mrs. Small feels that the hospice environment encourages life at a peak of quality.

In hospice the individual has more freedom than in a traditional hospital setting. "Support is such a vague term," says Barbara Groves, professor of primary care at the UTEP College of Nursing, "but basically it means: 'I am here, you can touch me and you can reach me.' It is putting people back in touch with people." Professor Groves talks

in our teaching program.

"Nobody's life is the same; neither is their death. It is so personal. Often those who accept the inevitability of death are the better for it." She pauses thoughtfully. "I think the denial of death keeps a lot of people going. We are taught that it is undesirable to be sick. We grow up surrounded by a mild degree of denial against illness and there will always be denial of death." Gentle but firm, she adds, "Families need hospice because they have such a difficult time during bereavement."

In strong agreement is Becky Horowitz, social worker and panel member of the UTEP-sponsored Hospice Workshop held recently at the College of Nursing.

"I'm convinced that a 'good' death is not just keeping dying persons free of pain, but keeping them and their families functioning through their grief." Mrs. Horowitz explains that the social worker performs the task of understanding "where the patient is"—helping to dispel isolation and loneliness through communication.

"One old gentleman, whose closeness with his wife of 40 years was threatened by her terminal illness, lamented during one of our counseling sessions: 'I feel that I need permission to disconnect from my wife to say goodbye.'

"I encouraged him to begin to sleep with her once again and to hold her and talk with her. I assured him that the feelings of isolation and loneliness, for both of them, would begin to disappear."

Loneliness, even in a room that is filled with family members and friends, is prevalent with dying persons—particularly those who are elderly. Norma Bastin, student nurse at UTEP who graduated in December, relates her experiences.

"Nobody's life is the same; neither is their death. It's so personal..."

about the third year of nurses' training.

"The concept of death is introduced here and can certainly be integrated into the hospice program," she emphasizes. "Teaching of death and dying includes talking about feelings, experiences and realizations. The role of the nurse in hospice is that of being supportive to the family members—a must

"I talk with a lot of nurses when we begin chemotherapy on elderly patients." Bastin is all business but her eyes are expressive with compassion and give the promise of good humor. The subject, however, is of death—the bad way. The example she cites is one of many.

Rita is 75 years old and helpless. Her

family, unable to cope with her condition, stands by helplessly in her two-bed vacuum of a room in a local hospital. The I.V. connected to her arm nourishes her, the shades of the windows are drawn, and the dried remains of flowers sit outside the door of her room. The surface of everything around her is cold, slick and lifeless. Rita, as though she no longer cares to acknowledge life, no longer opens her eyes.

Mrs. Bastin talks of Rita's plight. "This all seems so useless for Rita to go through. She's suffered some wide effects of the therapy—hair loss and nausea. She doesn't have any personal control in making a decision, and," Bastin's voice trembles, "her dignity...Rita's dignity! She is pressured by her family and accepts their decisions because she just doesn't want them to be upset with her."

Norma Bastin is the mother of five children, and the wife of a pastor. The couple use their spare time to counsel the youth in their parish.

"Sometimes I want to cry for her. During one particularly tough aftermath of chemotherapy Rita noticed that I was sad and she asked me not to feel bad for her. 'I know that I don't have long,' said Rita, 'and I want the children to know they did their best for me and to be happy.'"

"I witness this often," said the young woman, "the attitude of the patient feeling pressure to please the family. What she really was saying was that she didn't want to have any more of the life-saving therapy, and that she didn't want her children burdened with her. So,"

alone. The patient *wants* to go to the hospital." Horowitz penetrates the practical view. "After all, who will and who can handle the job at home of taking the patient to the toilet? Grief and guilt—all of those negatives come out. It's difficult to erase them and often there is simply nothing to do but get the family through it.

"A hospice team literally saves lives," she states emphatically, "from physical illness, depression, divorce—even suicide. The traditional system has failed; people are not trained for crying nor for pain. We are a population which needs help. We are neglected, we Americans, and we need to take time to feel compassion and concern."

"Our nurses learn to say," relates Barbara Groves about her UTEP students, "that they do not help a terminal patient to die—they try to help that person live *until* he dies. They learn to stop isolating the patient and they hug, touch and talk. Of course," she adds with a rueful smile, "even nurses run out of things to say, but the patient generally comes through with his own special kind of honesty—one that the nurse has been trying to draw out. Deception disappears—never to interfere in the health care process again."

Floyd Fierman, rabbi at Temple Mount Sinai, agrees. "I've found the nurses more courageous, at times, than the physicians." He expresses this in the context of dealing with dying persons who seem to have lost contact.

"We don't want to play God," explains the rabbi, "but clergymen want to let families know that people who are



Groves



Bastin



Horowitz



Fierman

ly problems faced by nurses as they work at the bedside of the dying. M.D. Dunn, author of *The Hospice Program of Care*, suggests that at any one time a nurse is both teacher and one being taught, giver and receiver, healer and one being healed. These are realities that require highly skilled, compassionate and technically proficient nursing personnel.

"When the federal government turns on the funding switch for Medicare and for research and development grant monies, we'll be ready to go in 1981," says past president of the board of Hospice of El Paso, Inc., Herb Rolph. "We want to make sure of providing an organized interdisciplinary team as well as well-trained volunteers to make the hospice program work in El Paso."

In a sense, hospice is not a new concept. In the Middle Ages the hospices cared for people who were sick, weary and sometimes dying. There are numerous individuals and hospital staffs who are dedicated to treating the total person. Hospice is bringing this type of caring to public attention. It is providing a structure, a demonstration of a way to look beyond the treatment of disease to the care of people.

The hospice teaches a new attitude toward dying and death, with the realization and conscious acceptance of dying and death as part of being born and part of the struggle of life. □

Marcella Schapiro's previous appearance in NOVA was in the June, 1979, issue. This article derives from her work in a course in magazine feature writing at the University, taught by Dr. Joe Lewels.

"A hospice team literally saves lives..."

sighs Norma Bastin resignedly, "she will suffer until death releases her."

One objective of hospice is to change social attitudes about death. Becky Horowitz, through her counseling experiences, discovers simple facts.

"We're afraid to be around dying people—afraid to 'catch cancer.' And we must live with the fact that there are those who feel it is better not to talk about the disease or about dying—both the patient and his family avoid the subjects to protect those they love," says Horowitz. "And...the illness is often so complicated that no one can handle it

dying need to be treated with sensitivity. They must be spoken to in a humane manner—with consideration, affection and even humor. Nurses feel to the point of tremendous personal involvement. I've found them weeping with their patients, laughing and joking with the dying and bringing necessary levity into a grim hospital situation."

The primary burden of patient care in a hospice setting falls upon the nursing staff; indeed, the hospice program provides a challenge to the nursing profession in particular and the medical community in general—solving the dai-

Alameda Avenue, down by the old Falstaff Brewery, is a tawdry, ramshackle part of old El Paso that blitzes the senses with bursts of colors—vermillion, fuchsia, magenta, indigo and cobalt blue, chrome yellow and tangerine orange. Low-riding Chevys with lilac-colored fur on the dashboards, murky honkytonks with old Christmas greetings stenciled on the windows, decrepit bakeries, laundries and funeral parlors splashed with the hues and characters of local sign painters, and the pungency of frying tacos, simmering menudo and sizzling burgers dazzle the nerve endings.

With the coming of darkness, however, the area has a more unsavory side. This busy four-lane thoroughfare is also known for its many stabbings, shootings and hit-and-run fatalities.

One might not expect to find a college professor (a former Chicagoan, born of Russian-Jewish immigrants) working and living in this predominantly Spanish-speaking neighborhood in South El Paso, only a few blocks from the Mexican border. Yet, there he is, Bruce Berman, a youthful, trim, 36-year-old photojournalist, a shaggy mane of unkempt hair, a scraggly beard and lively, methodical eyes, working Alameda Avenue, stopping here and there to let the late afternoon sun illuminate his subjects and clicking his camera rapidly and efficiently when the time is just right.

He stops to catch an old, peeling Coca Cola sign, its erubescence fading from years of exposure to the elements. Then his attention turns to some graffiti—"Fred y Gloria"—scrawled on an aquamarine wall. Just as he is about to click the shutter a woman in a yellow dress scurries by in front of his lens. Click. "Great! Just what I'm looking for," he says excitedly. The woman unknowingly becomes the object of his attention as she hurries toward a bus stop.

Quickening his pace, he passes her and finds a spot where the low rays of the sun produce a certain effect. Her bright dress and her armload of shopping bags stand out in sharp contrast to the brimstone-colored wall of a junk shop, the words "Alameda Trading Post" visible above her head. The shutter snaps again and again. "Got it!" he mutters happily.

A neon sign hanging over the doorway to a dingy bar attracts his attention. The sign, which appears to have been there for at least 40 years, reads "N & L Bar." He poises himself to catch its im-



Berman in his studio-home.

Living in Art in South El Paso

by Joe Lewels

age in the warm tones of the quickly-fading winter light. Just then a squat Mexican woman in her 50s, the barmaid, steps out and smiles inquisitively. He motions her to stand under the sign and with a South Chicago accent asks, "Me permite tomar su retrato!" Giggling, she agrees and poses self-consciously as the strange *gringo* snaps a few shots. Straining to suppress embarrassed laughter, she hurries back into the darkness like a blushing school girl.

"I'm living in living art," explains Berman, who has taught photography at UT El Paso since 1975. "There's a lot of energy here on Alameda. People are moving all the time and I want to capture that energy by showing the people and the color. Everywhere you look in this neighborhood there is art. The color of the houses, the decorations in the front yards, the advertisements on the walls, the neon signs on the bars, the graffiti on the fences—it reveals the artistic nature of the culture. But one thing I try to avoid is the idea of Mexicans as quaint. Rather, I have tried to show the Mexican as youthful, energetic, on the move and positive. 'Viva Mexico!' my images say. 'Viva la gente!'"

"What I've learned by living and working in this neighborhood is that Americans are for the most part visually poverty stricken. These people are not. Chicano people are very aware of color

as a living element in their lives. They use it as a daily expression."

For this reason, Berman switched from black and white photographs (such as those represented here) and recently concentrated on color work.

Berman, who was born and spent a large part of his life in the tough neighborhoods of South Chicago near the steel mills, also appreciates the similarities between the two disparate environments he has learned to call home.

"This is very much like my old neighborhood in Chicago where I grew up. It also had a distinct culture, but it didn't have the color and affinity to art that we have here. Most of America is really wiped out as a culture. These people have a culture that is intact. They have a religion, a language, common traditions, and they cling to these even though they live in what is technically a foreign country. Anglos should come down here and walk the streets to see what they are missing. I envy what these people have; it lures me."

But capturing the culture in photographs presents problems for an outsider! "To some people I look wild," Berman explains. "People sometimes react to me in ways that alter the reality of the situation. One time in Chicago I was taking some pictures of a man in a park feeding the pigeons and suddenly

he bolted up and chased me down the street, threatening to smash my head with his cane. But I don't have that problem here. I don't look Mexican, but I guess I look like I belong."

Perhaps even more important is the fact that Berman *feels* he belongs. "To avoid trouble and get the right results in this neighborhood you have to look people right in the eye and smile. For example, when I go to the corner grocery and the cashier says 'thank you' I always smile and say 'you're welcome.' Around here, warmth and friendliness are the norm; it's expected."

Berman's next step is to move indoors, into people's homes to document their way of life in a more intimate manner.

"What's inside these homes and establishments is much more incredible than anything I've shot so far. But you have to be respectful. It must be done with the confidence of the subjects and in a leisurely fashion."

Berman's insights into this phase of his project came to him one day when he was shooting in the neighborhood. "I found this incredible house painted a bright, two-tone violet so I set up a shot. Just then I heard a voice coming from

the side of the house—'Hey man, you want a beer?'

"It was a young, Mexican American man about 18 years old who was curious about this strange person photographing his family home. But his reaction was warm, not hostile. Nobody had ever offered me a beer before when I was shooting, so I accepted. We ended up drinking all night and eventually he in-

vited me into his home. What I saw was amazing. His mother was an artist in her own right, not a professional artist, but a person sensitive to visual expression. She was the one who insisted on repainting the house each year in some new, exciting color. He told me, 'She makes us get out there every year and paint it just the way she wants it.' And inside, the ceilings were lined with hun-



dreds of hand-painted roses that she works on as her sons paint the exterior. "I'm planning to go back and ask to shoot the interior of their home, but I didn't feel right about doing it at the time. They didn't know me well enough," Berman says.

For Bruce Berman, who as a photo-journalist worked for the *Christian Science Monitor*, published his photos regularly in *Chicagoland Magazine* and the *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, and worked for a New York fashion photographer, his work is both journalism and art. "I'm just a reporter," he says of himself. "I'm very aware of the work of Otis Aultman, the old-time El Paso photographer whose work stands today as the primary visual documentation of El Paso's history. I owe it to the future to make my work useful to people. It should describe a reality that would otherwise disappear and be forgotten."

Yet, his work has been shown in many well-known galleries throughout the country. Most recently, his work on South El Paso, titled "The Neighborhood," won acclaim while on display at the prestigious Delahunty Gallery in Dallas. His work has also been exhibited at the Cronin Gallery in Houston, the Rudolph Keiken Gallery in Germany, the Art Institute in Chicago, the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson and, in January, 1981, at the Washington Project for the Arts.

To keep in daily touch with his work, Berman has set up a studio in what was for many years a brewery. Only one short block from the hectic traffic of Alameda Avenue stands this fortress-like structure, rising high above the sur-

rounding buildings. Its salmon-colored facade facing a junk yard filled with old scrap metal, the old Flagstaff Brewery today provides shelter and office space for a small group of artists, artisans and small businessmen.

"It's the closest thing to a New York loft El Paso has to offer," explains Berman about his third floor studio-apartment. The vast spaces within the massive old brewery provide ample studio space for oil painters, potters, stained-glass makers, a media consulting firm and a sign painter. And, from the building's many upper windows, a panorama of two countries unfolds. To Berman, this is important. "I like being able to look down and see the constantly-moving traffic of South El Paso and the huge overpass leading into Mexico," he says.

His studio is reached by way of a dark, steep, industrial staircase with neither pretention nor decor. A menacing freight elevator provides an alternate means of ascent, but generally remains unused. A heavy metal door that could have come from an old bank vault, guards his entrance. But inside, the darkness opens up to a bright, two-story studio, the afternoon sun washes the white walls with its amber glow and vibrations from an old Beatles album fill the huge hall. An aged and splintering plywood table, stretching the length of one wall, is covered with photographs—the results of his many journeys through the neighborhood and across the river.

An eight-foot high wall supports a neat row of older black and white prints each in a shiny, chrome frame. Behind

the wall, which divides the studio and darkroom from the residence, are a small bedroom, bath, kitchen and office.

At one end of the studio stands a wooden platform with a set of narrow steps leading to its summit and on top, next to an enormous arched window, stand a lonely chrome and naugahyde chair, two stereo speakers and a pile of papers and books. From here, he can see both his neighborhood and the expanse of his studio below. Often Berman brings his students here to work with them and to help them visualize photography as something more than "f" stops and shutter speeds.

"Though the mechanics of photography are important, more important in the long run is the development of a visual sense. Photographers call this 'seeing,' meaning not just observing, but true and selective decision-making about what is seen. The time to start training people to 'see' is in kindergarten, not college. Photography is a better tool than fingerpainting for developing visual expression. A five-year-old child can shoot a picture and begin to develop his selective vision and discover the world around him."

Berman explains about his teaching:

"One of my first assignments to students is to have them 'shoot' an odd or bizarre person and present their images to the class. Most of them discover that what is odd to them may be the norm for other students. It is our lack of knowledge that makes others odd, not their personal attributes. This exercise helps them discover their own subjectivity and to begin the process of learning to 'see.'

"I am more aware of teaching humanism than I am aware of teaching mechanics. I am more aware of hoping they'll have open minds than of hoping they will get the right exposure. If a person leaves my class with the aesthetic ability to 'see' for himself and an awareness that others see through their own eyes, then I feel I have aided society."

Berman sinks deep into his chair, comfortable and content in his special place, looking out over his neighborhood. He tries to explain why he feels so strongly about his project: "I'm not from Chicago anymore," he confides. "I'm from here." □

Bruce Berman teaches photography in the Mass Communication Department at UTEP; Joe Lewels teaches journalism in the same department.





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