A Gallimaufry of Books

By David Isaacson

The books that the Friends of the Libraries offer at our biannual sales are not simply a miscellany or hodgepodge, but a gallimaufry. In case you have not experienced a literal gallimaufry, it is a ragout made (usually) of leftover meat and other ingredients. And just as adventurous diners know not to disdain what a good cook can do with leftovers, booklovers know that some of the tastiest intellectual dishes are served up at used book sales.

A good gallimaufry is not simply tossed together. Library liaisons periodically examine the thousands of books donated to the Libraries each year. We select what we regard as the choicest books to add to our collections. On rare occasions, a first edition, signed author’s copy, specially bound, limited edition, or otherwise rather unique book has been given to the library, and the liaisons recognize that special attribute. More often, liaisons choose to add books to our collection that fall into one or more of a number of non-rare, but still significant categories, such as: the book is out of print; we already own it, as well as Web access to the 1998 Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory, but this expensive resource would be of value to an attorney, or even a layman obsessed with the law. A set of fat volumes listing the names, addresses, and specialties of the members of the American Bar Association, along with the texts of selected laws from all fifty states would be often referenced.

While we are not inhospitable to a career in this field, we really didn’t need 50 copies of the third edition of a textbook published in 1988 called Introduction to Management in the Hospitality Industry.

Although our staff, on average, seems to be approaching a median age with more than passing interest in this subject, we chose not to add two copies of the Starr-Weiner Report on Sex and Sexuality in the Mature Years. A liaison cannot help but wonder why a book like this, let alone two copies, was donated to the library, but that, of course, is none of our business, although we do feel that Starr reports contain some intriguing statements.

I, personally, as a resident self-proclaimed dictionary maven, chose not to add Webster’s New World Crossword Puzzle Dictionary. I did this in full awareness that the crossword puzzle is an American invention and its fans (and authors) have made a significant contribution to linguistics. Regardless, I, along with my addicted father (with whom I have had a few cross-Continued on page 2
words) believe that no self-respecting solver of such enigmas would cheat by using such a dictionary.

Although some of our nursing or physician assistant students or faculty may be interested in the history of medicine (along with resident hypochondriacs), we decided that the Libraries' patrons would have to struggle along without the 1933 edition of Practical Hematological Diagnosis. For a similar reason, perhaps, we did not add the 1948 edition of Common Gastrointestinal Diseases.

Perhaps because it is not yet, to my knowledge, possible to major in the instrument, or that research grants are not frequently given to support scholarly investigations in its history, we reluctantly did not add to the Music and Dance Library a copy of How to Play the Harmonica for Fun and Profit.

Because we already own a copy, we offered for sale a delightful collection of New Yorker cartoons published between 1950-1955.

Similarly, we already owned a number of copies of one of the old Roman classic love poets, Catullus, but I can recommend that this old Roman could teach quite a few things to contemporary practitioners.

We have no conscious bias against Tarheels—or educators—but decided to do without a copy of the 1991-92 North Carolina Education Directory. Some lucky person content to own a 1966 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (minus volume 13) could buy the whole set for $10! While the article on Bill Clinton in that edition is not accurate—in fact, I couldn’t even find it—one assumes that the article on Catullus would be just as accurate today as it was in 1966.

Some among my readers may be old enough to remember the nationally syndicated columns by Sidney J. Harris that commented, usually wryly, on all sorts of esoteric and surprising facts. These usually began with Harris admitting, almost as if he were a rather scatter-brained reference librarian, that he discovered a very odd fact while looking up something else. Well, we offered, in the final addition to our gallymaufry, a 1976 edition of 30 years of The Best of Sydney J. Harris.

If you were lucky enough to purchase one of these choice books, or something equally delectable from our servings at the book sale, you’ve done both yourself and the Friends of the Libraries a favor—and perhaps added a new flavor to your life. As the poet and lexicographer John Ciardi used to say, at the end of his NPR program on etymologies, “Here’s good words to you.”
Who Is Remote?

There are over 3,000 continuing education students who take classes at WMU's regional centers in Muskegon, Grand Rapids, St. Joseph, Battle Creek, and Lansing. Most of them are in their 30s or 40s, and almost all of them work full-time and take classes at night. They are also more likely to be enrolled in graduate programs. In fact, continuing education students represent a growing segment of our total graduate head count enrollment, approximately 43%. The fact that a graduate degree, specialization, or licensing requirement is of singular importance to employment and professional advancement explains the attention and involvement of these students.

WMU and the University Libraries are committed to providing distance learners with an educational experience that is comparable to that of students on the main campus. This includes providing remote access to the Libraries' collections and research resources. Students can identify books, government documents, audiovisual resources, periodical holdings, etc., by searching WestCat, the online catalog, either from their home computer or at one of the regional centers' computer labs. They can also use one or more of the Libraries' electronic indexes (there are now over 130 available through the Libraries' home page: http://www.wmich.edu/library) to locate titles of specific articles and selected data for their research. After students identify what they would like from the University Libraries, they may fax their requests for books or articles directly to the Libraries' Resource Sharing office, or drop off requests at their regional center, where the requests are faxed for them to Kalamazoo. The Resource Sharing Office sends the requested materials (books and photocopies of the articles) directly to students' home addresses. The service is remarkably efficient and reliable even in the face of a steadily growing demands, and will be described in a future issue of Gatherings.

As "circuit rider librarians," we provide distant learners with information on library services and databases through a variety of means. These include an "open lab" program, in-class presentations, class-related instruction sessions, and a printed Library Guide, available free to all off-campus students and faculty.

What We Do

Open Lab Program. Every semester we schedule drop-in, hands-on labs for students at each regional center's computer laboratory. The open lab hours are posted at the centers and note when one of us will be there to offer individualized help. Students are encouraged to sign up in advance for these sessions.

In-Class Presentations. In-class visitation is another method of "getting the message out." Although there is no hands-on time with computers, the presentations provide an opportunity to inform students of the services available to them, provide an overview of WestCat and the FirstSearch system, announce open lab hours, and pass out copies of the Library Guide. The advantage of these visits is that we are able to reach many students by visiting several classes in one evening. And as always, we urge students to contact us by phone or e-mail if they need help.

Class-Related Instruction. The best method for teaching distance learners, built on the Libraries' information literacy guidelines, is to provide students with a class-related instructional session in a computer lab. When this occurs, the students receive an explanation of the several services available to them as distance learners (e.g., the Libraries' excellent document delivery service mentioned earlier); a demonstration of how to use and search effectively the online catalog, WestCat; a demonstration of how to select and use one or two of the several dozen indexes available through our home page; and actual hands-on experience with a computer research exercise that we will relate to a specific assignment of that particular class. These sessions, which last at least an hour and take place at the request of the faculty member teaching the class, have been well received since they are of immediate and requisite use to the students.

The Library Guide. Several times, mention has been made of the WMU Library Guide for Continuing Education Students that was developed especially for distance learners. The Guide is free, and is widely distributed at the in-class visits, open labs, instructional sessions, and at every regional center. Gathering together in one place all the information that students might need, the Guide is 60 pages long, and serves as a handy reference for any first-time or on-going user of the University Libraries. It contains contact and help referral information, a schema of the research process, and an explanation and examples—both simple and advanced—of how to search the Libraries' databases. All of WMU's electronic resources are listed with a brief description along with instructions for accessing them. In addition, the Library Guide includes sample forms for requesting services and maps to the main campus.

Reference Search Assistance. If students have difficulty finding material for a research paper on a specific topic, they can request personal assistance by contacting either Mae O'Neal or Elaine Jayne by phone or e-mail. Alternatively, they can send us a search assistance form, on which they enter their topic, search terms used, and databases tried. We review their work, identify the most appropriate databases, and search for the topic. Then we provide the student with a list of useful search terms, a search strategy, and some sample citations.

Not Remote at All

The foundation for all of our efforts as "distance librarians" is simple: We try to provide a friendly face to the WMU Libraries, its many research databases and services, and let "distance learners" know that someone can be called upon to help. There are wonderful remote resources available for their research that can be brought right to their homes and offices. Our goal is to make sure students know how to take full advantage of all that is available to them.
A Fortunate Life
A Friends’ Personality
By Gordon Eriksen

For a future history professor in a midwestern university, Hamilton, Ohio is a great place to grow up. Hamilton is a small city north of Cincinnati which was originally named Fort Hamilton, after Alexander Hamilton, in 1791. As Robert Hahn II, this issue’s Friends’ Personality, remarked, “Hamilton was the sort of town that had edges. I could walk a half mile from my home and be in the country, in the fields and woods north of town.” The Hahn family has lived in Hamilton for generations. His father was the supervisor of a machine shop; his mother of strong Irish stock was a homemaker. Robert and his brother attended the local public schools from which Robert graduated in 1941. He was able to study for two years at Miami University, but joined the U.S. Army in the late spring of 1943 in the midst of World War II.

When Robert comments on his war experiences, he points out that, unlike World War I, which had a high degree of unrelieved carnage, WWII was, for him, a great learning experience. The first “world” conflict had been fought on a few square miles of northeastern France. World War II was a global war; the allies fought in places that were unknown to them except possibly by name. Most of the soldiers had been geographically limited by a decade of depression; the truly world-wide travel that military service often required and offered was a liberating experience for those with an interest in places, history, people, self-discovery. For a young man from an industrial community in southern Ohio, even his first long trip by train to San Diego was unprecedented.

Military travel was less than speedy and efficient in the 1940s since supersonic jets were not yet available, and troop trains did not receive priority scheduling. In fact, they were bumped by any other traffic on the lines. Bob Hahn recalls all too clearly the long, slow ride that ended at Camp Callen north of La Jolla, where he spent the next 17 weeks in basic training, including two weeks in the Borrego Desert east of San Diego. His next stop in his military career was the AST (Army specialized training) program, first at a junior college in Compton, CA, and later at UCLA. Once “trained,” Bob joined a mortar battalion at Camp Roberts followed by a posting at Camp Carson, located in the mountains above Colorado Springs. Such a good life could not last, and in the late summer of 1944, the battalion embarked for England—and the war. Although not involved in D-Day, the unit found more than enough action in Belgium, Holland, and Northern Germany.

Demobilized after returning to the States in the late summer of 1945, Hahn returned to his home in Ohio on February 7, 1946, just one day after the beginning of the spring semester at Miami University. He rushed to the campus, was permitted to enroll late, and by July of 1947, he had earned his Bachelor of Arts, cum laude. Phi Beta Kappa. A master’s degree in history was completed by the summer of 1949 at Ohio State University. Along the way, Bob had acquired good French skills and some German so he was an excellent candidate for the Fulbright Scholarship that he received in 1951 to study for 15 months at the University of Strasbourg. From his Strasbourg studies, a dissertation emerged—an investigation of German unification efforts in the Revolution of 1848, and the influence of the French government on these efforts. The work was accepted at Ohio State University, and he received his Ph.D. in December 1955, with a specialization in early modern European history and English constitutional history.

Dr. Hahn’s first academic post was at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. Given his international experience and interest, it was not surprising that he was appointed Foreign Student Advisor one year after his initial appointment. One of his advisees was Gabriele Puetter, whose family had lived in Stralsund, Germany for more than three centuries, and who came to Knox as a foreign exchange student. Advisor and advisee came to know each other well, and some years later, Gabriele became Mrs. Hahn. They have raised four remarkable children: Robert III, a WMU graduate who is a lawyer in Detroit; Christine, a Kalamazoo College graduate who is a physician in Boise, Idaho; Sigrid, a WMU graduate, who is a physician in St. Louis; and Nicolette, a Kalamazoo College graduate, who is a well-known lawyer and City Commissioner in Kalamazoo.

In 1961, Robert Hahn was enticed to Kalamazoo to join the faculty of the Department of History at Western Michigan University. For thirty-two years, he taught hundreds of students and served the institution with distinction and style. A self-proclaimed “quiet man,” he spent his time instilling a love of history in all with whom he came in contact. Near the conclusion of his interview, he raised an eyebrow and noted: “You haven’t asked me how I became interested in history.” This is what he said:

“I grew up in a town which had historical significance. My mother always read to us, usually from myths and legends which are a part of pre-history. I knew all four of my grandparents with whom I frequently took Sunday drives where we visited cemeteries to study family histories. History was taught throughout my school years: Beacon readers in the first and second grades, general history in the fifth and sixth grades, American history in the seventh and eighth grades, and European history in the tenth through the eleventh grades, and another year of American history in the twelfth grade. I never lost my interest in and love of history that was rooted in this tremendous exposure during every year of elementary and secondary schooling as well as at home.”

Robert Hahn II, historian, believes he has lived a fortunate, even privileged life. Perhaps it is because he has always taught that a knowledge of where he, and we, came from brings a unique understanding of where he and we, are going. Or, as Shakespeare said in Henry IV, Part 2:

“There is a history in all men’s lives, Figuring the nature of the times deceas’d, The which observe’d, a man may prophesy, With a near aim, of the main chance of things As yet not come to life, which in their seeds And weak beginnings lie intreasured.”
Popular myths not only affect how a society collectively determines its past, but also how its individual members react to and later recall their own changing experiences. Over the past fifteen years, I have been involved in a variety of oral history projects with Olympic gold medalists, inner-city residents, other disenfranchised Americans, and, most recently, former World War II and Korean War POWs. An indisputable conclusion to emerge from these undertakings is the striking degree to which popular culture and so many of its attendant myths affect the entire process of oral history. It is, indeed, fascinating to examine how popular culture massages collective and individual memories, as well as its effect on those who do the actual interviewing. In the end, we all have absorbed the messages transmitted through movies, television, photographs, advertising, periodicals, and various other forms of recorded information, including popular histories. ...

Oral history can free us from so many of our cherished myths which, in turn, have done much to distort our understanding of our society and its social and economic problems. We Americans have been taught about those nose-to-the-grindstone, over-achieving Puritans; the extraordinarily independent and resilient Colonists; the romantic and heroic soldiers of our many wars; and the rags-to-riches stories of the immigrants. Such myths embrace the Readers Digest/Ronald Reagan/Norman Rockwell interpretation of a homogeneous, small-town, loving America, where John-Boy Walton and his donut-faced siblings lovingly hug mom's ankles as she plays her spinet piano, while father reads aloud from the Constitution, and Rover reflectively scratches his ear. The realities of life for most Americans have always been clearly at odds with such romantic nonsense. ...

The popular myths of our history do much to make us feel guilty about our own experiences. We feel guilty because we have not succeeded economically or because we were not heroic enough. Many of my POWs still have trouble talking about their moment of capture (one German-held POW received a letter from his wife stating, "Even though you are a coward and a failure, I still love you"). After all, John Wayne was never captured; John Rambo was, but only in order to escape and exact his bloody revenge. The individual must develop a sense of history—if for no other reason than to escape or at least illuminate the myths that affect his judgment of his own existence. A marvelous example of such thinking is Vietnam ex-POW Larry Guarino exchange with John Wayne at a 1973 White House reception.

"Duke," I said, "I tried to think about how you might have handled the interrogators." He listened intently. "So when they asked questions, I told 'em to go to hell; when they asked me to do something, I told 'em to stick it up their asses... And do you know what, Duke? They beat the shit out of me!"

Studs Terkel argues that we are conditioned not to have a sense of history, or, as we have learned the wrong history, a history without blemishes or controversies which omits millions of Americans and copious amounts of reality. Consider for a moment, the feminine mystique, and all its attendant myths. Surely there must have been something more than Dolly Madison baking those delicious cakes, or Betsy Ross sitting cross-legged, stitching away. Go back for a moment to the stories we were told in our elementary schools about Clara Barton and other noble bandage folders; think how such self-serving nonsense contrasts with what real nurses went through on the battle fields; stories, by the way which you can best get through oral histories. Perhaps in more sophisticated schools you might have caught a mention of Margaret Sanger, but I would argue it is more important to talk to the women who so desperately needed her birth control information. What were their lives like? Indeed, what are they still like? ...

Terkel argues, in American Dreams: Lost and Found, that the common folks have been objects to be acted on, and seldom in their own interests: "Forfeiting their own life experience, their native intelligence, their personal pride," he writes, "they allow more celebrated surrogates, whose imaginations may be no larger than theirs, to think for them, to speak for them, to be for them in the name of the greater good. Conditioned toward being 'nobody' they look toward 'somebody' for the answer."

For Terkel, imagination is the key, because if "you blunt imagination you blunt humanity." Our popular culture often reduces the lower classes to a level of banality, vicious baseness, or comic relief, but oral histories can often illuminate a raw intelligence, complexity of character, and intuitive understanding of historical forces that should put many professional historians to shame. ...

It is important to note that certain aspects of history can only be gleaned through oral history—damned documents just won't tell us. Certainly this is true of what it means to be a soldier and a prisoner of war. Secondary sources can describe such experiences—even much of their horror—but they can never capture what war does to the individuals who do the fighting and dying. Arguably, oral histories also fail, but they come closer. ...

We must get older people to talk about their lives, their personal self-esteem. Seniors need to review their own history to see how much of it and their recent ideology is based on myth or truth. How we gray-hairs approach our twilight years has as much to do with perception as it does with reality. We need to understand the forces that have buffeted us and are now molding younger Americans. For example, I remember my mother saying, during what became known as the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings, that no woman can be sexually harassed if she chose not to. Gadzooks, she sounded just like Phyllis Schlafly. I had to remind her of a story she once told me about her days as a single parent working in a factory during the depression. One of her bosses was notorious for hitting on the young girls in his department. My mother escaped his unwelcome advances largely because she was protected by a family friend who worked in management. I reminded her that, at the time, her wages were our sole financial support, and I asked her what she would have done if our very survival had been predicated on her being more "cooperative" with her boss. ...

As is the case with those who study Continued on page 6
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popular culture, oral historians ask their subjects to individualize or personalize events and experiences. Our subjects tell us not only what happened, but what they thought happened, that is, what they have internalized and interpreted from their own experiences. Studs Terkel insists, “In their rememberings are their truths.” We oral historians are attempting to get at these “truths.” How has the past affected our view of the present? POW support groups in which the men tell and retell their experiences over and over—and almost always the same way—are cases in point.

In the final analysis, the people we interview become our teachers. Interviewing soldiers and POWS, for example, teaches us just how cheap life is in war. Their stories make both subject and interviewer realize the naturalistic forces that buffet them—forces they cannot usually control, but which, through personal narration, they can at least come to recognize. After all, it is the grunts who do most of the dying in war, and this should not be a happy or rational prospect for present and future soldiers. We males are taught to worry about our personal courage. We must always appear brave. Yet, the capricious whims of Dame Fortune do not always recognize or reward courage. Unlike most fictional portrayals of war, it is chance that often dictates one’s fate in combat or in a prison camp. Interviews with veterans also teach us how thin is our veneer of civilization, and how quickly it is stripped away in conflict. We learn that in war truth is quickly lost, and that soldiers also lose their sense of compassion and caring. Had Studs Terkel’s The Good War been available in 1950 or, indeed, in 1963, one wonders if we would have been so willing to send our children off to Korea and Vietnam. The answer is “probably yes,” because our popular myths about sacrifice, courage, and national glory are so deeply entrenched in our nation’s psyche. Nevertheless, our hesitancy to become involved in a land conflict in the Gulf, and in Bosnia has certainly been affected by what we learned from our Vietnam experience....

Descartes once wrote, “I think, therefore I am.” We oral historians change only one word in his famous maxim: “I tape, therefore I am.”