

## *Companions: Canton*

We received a form letter during the winter of 1981 telling us that our rent for the house on Swiss Avenue would soon be tripled. Jerry was working less (by choice), and my clerical job at the library didn't leave me much money to spare, with my travel expenses to and from library school in Denton two nights a week and every other Saturday. We were alarmed, and I called our landlord, who lived next door, and asked him to come over for a talk.

In the ten years we had lived there, we had gotten to know Mr. Topletz fairly well. I used to go over and visit with his wife before she died of cancer a year earlier (she had a statue of St. Francis put in the flower garden and told me "He'll protect me"). Every Christmas the Topletzs remembered us with a bottle of fine whiskey. But, Mr. Topletz now explained, maintenance expenses had risen so much for all the rental property he and his brother owned throughout the city that they had decided to raise rents across the board—and in looking at their holdings, they realized that what Jerry and I were paying was, relatively speaking, much too low. He did tell us, though, that we could continue paying the same rent for the next few months, but if we decided to stay, we would eventually have to pay the new figure. At least we had the time to consider alternatives and make plans.

I suggested we move to the country, and Jerry liked the idea. At first we thought we might live on the corner property Jerry's parents had bought 10 miles east of Canton, either building a small house or buying a trailer to put there. So far, the land had been used only for pasturing cattle and was being rented for that purpose by a couple the Hunts knew from Dallas. There were no structures on this property, other than the shed Mr. Hunt had built facing the highway intersection that he thought might someday be used to sell...something.

It was Jerry's idea to convert the big barn on the land where Mrs. Hunt lived into a house for us. We talked our plan over with his mother, and she seemed pleased that we would consider settling close by. Although she had many friends and kept herself busy with crafts and club activities, she was still uneasy living alone in what was then an

isolated part of the county. And I knew she was happy at the prospect of having Jerry near and being able to visit with him regularly. We made it clear that we intended to pay our share of the cost for utilities.

Jerry had just finished his music for the Ossia and Ruby series for PBS, so he was able to spend most of his time that spring in Canton, doing what he could do without help to get things ready. I had been promoted to the reference department of the library and was in my next-to-last semester of library school, so my time for house-building was limited. I came out every weekend that I could, bringing Leto.

Before any work toward converting the barn could be done, it had to be cleaned out. Mr. Hunt had filled it with tools, fencing supplies, and farm implements, and from his salvage work, there were thousands of white and blue-green glass insulators piled in a corner. Most of what Jerry did initially was to clear these things out, saving the heavier items for me to help with when I could join him. Mrs. Hunt inveigled several of her friends into helping her move the insulators to the little barn, where they stacked them on wooden pallets.

When the barn had been emptied, we got down to the serious business—and fun—of turning it into a place to live. I brought do-it-yourself books home from the library; Jerry studied them and devised our strategies, looking always for the least expensive, most energy-efficient ways of doing things. We used Mr. Hunt's old pick-up to transport supplies from Canton and Tyler, a much larger town 35 miles east.

It had been a cold, rainy spring. By late April, we were ready to cut windows in the corrugated steel walls, having drawn our floor plan and located where the kitchen appliances would go. Starting holes with a jigsaw and then cutting the window openings themselves with a large pair of tin snips, we made our way around the perimeter, taking turns with the tasks. Leto followed us, wondering at the sudden access of light and air. We put more windows in the south wall than in the north, and later, when we had boarded up the east and west barn doors, we installed a row of windows along the tops.

Putting the floors in was a challenge. The barn sits on a slope, and we wanted, of course, to

make the house as level as possible. We used broken glass insulators to fill in the low corner in what would be our bedroom. From one of the library books, Jerry had learned about the use of a water hose filled with water as a leveling tool: you lay the hose on the floor in various places, and wherever water spills out of the hose is a low spot, requiring more concrete mix. We carried on with this technique for hours one evening, alternately laughing and cursing at one another; as she usually did when she saw Jerry and me engaged in some long, incomprehensible enterprise, Leto went off and found a quiet, isolated place to sleep.

By the time we began installing the interior walls and ceiling, it was getting hot outside. Placing strips of glass wool insulation behind the wire matrix we had made to hold them in place was the most unpleasant part of building the house. We had to wear caps, masks, gloves, and long-sleeved shirts to protect ourselves from the fiberglass, and we sweated profusely as we unrolled, cut to size, and slid the strips behind the wires. We covered the insulation, both walls and ceiling, with bamboo fencing that we had brought in in huge rolls from Tyler. Nailed to the ceiling cross beams, the bamboo screens naturally sagged a little in places and gave the house a hut-like look by its undulations.

Again consulting library books, and talking with the fellows at the feed and hardware store in Canton, Jerry installed the PVC plumbing and wired the house, acquiring a separate light meter so that we could keep track of the amount of electricity we used. We dug a deep trans- evaporation pit on the low east side of the house for waste water, and we installed a self-contained anaerobic toilet using a 50-gallon watering trough and a marine commode (fitted with a hand pump). We bought a French-made water heater that runs on propane and comes on only when a hot-water tap is opened, and we put in a 5-burner stove which we connected to the same gas supply: two 10-gallon bottles, to be taken to Canton and refilled as needed. An apartment-sized refrigerator and a compact toaster/broiler oven gave us our independence from Mrs. Hunt's kitchen.

Moving our furniture from Dallas to Canton was a protracted ordeal. We made many trips, 50

miles each way, using the pick-up and covering our things as best we could with plastic sheeting and an old tarp. It often rained on us, and high winds would lift first one corner of the tarp and then another, forcing us to pull over and retie the cords. Leto made every trip with us; she would often stay in the truck, as though to be sure it didn't leave without her. She must have been a little confused and disoriented by all the changes that were taking place around her, particularly when we began carrying the furniture away, slowing emptying all the rooms she'd lived in for over ten years.

We temporarily stored some of our furniture in Mrs. Hunt's house until we could finish flooring. The large, central area of the barn that was to become our living room was where we put the double bed. It looked strange sitting there in the middle of the space, a nightstand on either side and an ornate chandelier hanging above it. It was a good place, though, to make love, to celebrate the beginning of a new chapter in our lives.

\*

Losing Mother had been hard for Judy: her best friend was gone. My new job and library school kept me busy learning new things and gave me the opportunity to meet people, but Judy was home bound with three young children and all the routine chores of caring for them. I think of her now as it must have been for her then, waking each day to re-confront her loss, feeling guilty for being sad around those young spirits and a stubbornly solicitous husband. And Mother's house, our family home, was just up the street and being rented by strangers. It was probably a good thing for them all that Paul was able to arrange a transfer to an Army recruiting office in Wisconsin, where they moved in the spring of 1980. Before they left, they gave Jerry and me a maple tree to plant in front of our new home.

When Jerry and I made the decision to move to Canton, he was still teaching a night course at the University of Texas at Dallas, and I was working full-time—although I was permitted to work a 4-day week. Thanks to an imaginative and understanding professor in library school, I earned credit for three courses through independent study: writing a long paper on the founder of the British Museum, Sir Anthony Panizzi, compiling an annotated bibliography of

sources of information on vegetarianism (later published in *Vegetarian Times*), and evaluating the general reference collection of the library by compiling statistics of use. I much preferred gathering data on breaks and at lunch and typing late at night to driving the 45 miles to Denton and back, even if it did mean carrying card files with me everywhere.

We needed a place to stay in Dallas, as a pied-a-terre, and I learned from Judy's and my realtor that the family that had been renting the house we jointly owned had fallen behind on their rent and would probably be moving. They did in fact leave in time for Jerry and me to bring furniture and other household goods by, as we left the house on Swiss. Then, as we finished areas of our house in Canton, we would move things there. Our goal was to be together as much as possible, to spend as many nights together as we could, in either Dallas or Canton, and we struggled with our schedules each week to accomplish that.

As I sit here now looking around this house we built, I realize that what I live in is an interactive environment Jerry created: it is in fact a piece, a work of art. All the interior walls, cabinets, and built-in shelves are made of particle board and utility-grade pine, much of it heated with a propane torch to emphasize the grain and knots, revealing sometimes startling patterns and odd symmetries. Lengths of chain, parts of old tools, scraps of railway salvage are displayed everywhere, dimly glistening in their coat of polyurethane varnish. Moldings of varying shapes and sizes outline geometric figures, sometimes concealing seams but often merely serving as accents. One could walk through this house as one might a museum.

And yet, for all the antic, exuberantly artistic quality of the place, it boasts a practicality that seems defiantly primitive at times. To facilitate drainage, both the toilet and the shower stall are mounted several feet above floor level. When she saw the toilet, with all its ancillary hoses and pumps and valves, my elderly friend Marguerite exclaimed, "Oh, no!"—even though Jerry had very thoughtfully mounted a shovel handle in concrete beside the steps to steady the user. (When she lived with us, my niece Jamie made an intricate origami model of this toilet "throne" as a birthday card for Jerry.) Hooks suspend storage

baskets and even shelves in many places, and the tile work in the bathroom and at the front door reflects in its unusual design the use of whatever materials were at hand at the time. When we got cats, Jerry cut triangular holes in the bottoms of three interior doors to enable them to move freely throughout the house; these holes can be playfully unexpected sources of light from the next room.

Our moving to Canton not only gave Jerry an outlet for his creativity and his nervous energy, it also made possible more freedom from having to make money. All of this is conveyed in his letters to Jacqueline at the time:

*After some looking and thought we decided a CITY was too EXPENSIVE and that left only the property my parents own...so we went there in May after I returned from NY and built a house there, directly by hand (Stephen and I doing ALL of the work): the result has been for \$3,000... a HUMAN but high-tech SLUM or DUMP...the utility costs have been minimized...this means I do not have to work any more than I want to BY NOT USING ANY MONEY: by doing a job for money for commercial television for example, I can live a year without working again...this means finally that the biggest cost is technical, the computer gadgets & so forth...I am including some photos I hope with this so you can see what happened here, most have a reaction of shock, misery or laughter: that depends upon their relation to us...*

And from a later letter, the work continuing and the costs rising:

*This house building business an endless TERROR; we have produced now a combination BARN/TENT/SHACK/BAMB00 THATCH HUT: the toilet system was a year's work, I still have fingers crossed, it is a kindness to the soil we think but a JOB to use: many PUMPS, THUMPINGS, ETC., makes you think every time you go for it, DO I NEED TO USE THIS NOW? OR CAN I WAIT? The odd part of course is living in the middle of construction*

*work always, I am flooring in the bath now, starting on kitchen this week, and walking over and around tools, etc., to live...you do a little as you can afford...the goal here was to KEEP ALL COSTS SMALL: the entire effort has cost only about \$4,000....*

The toilet, by the way, is still working, fifteen years later. A watery effluent is conducted to a leach field not far from the house; the solid matter is digested by bacteria while suspended in the tank along hundreds of strips of cedar paling that Jerry pounded flat by hand.

\*

Although we moved my much-traveled Magnavox stereo to the house on Ferguson Road, I wanted my books in Canton. The two rooms on the north side of the house were to be our studies; they are separated by a bamboo screen wall, with a small wood-framed door joining them. To house my library, we built a ceiling-to-floor wall of shelves made of composite/e boards and supported by 10" lengths of the creosoted timber that used to hold the insulators for power lines. This wood, needless to say, is irregularly shaped.

The shelves finished, I began organizing my books on the study floor, intending to get them up in alphabetical order. Leto, of course, was with me, lying in a corner and resting, assured that I would be there a while. I filled the top three or four 12'-long shelves, making it through K or L, when very slowly, but ineluctably, the books and the shelves began falling forward; I tried to stop the collapse, but there was nothing I could do. Within less than a minute, I was sitting in the middle of the floor, surrounded by books and lumber.

Leto's reaction to this calamity puzzled me. Normally she would have come up to investigate, to check on me and to nose among the rubble, curious to see what had gone wrong and how I would react. This time, though, she watched the little avalanche without stirring; when it was over, she got up and left the room.

I found her later sleeping under the bed (still in the living room).

I think it was at about this time that we began to worry about her, and to watch her. We reminded

ourselves of how much she had been through during the last several months, of the seemingly never-ending hauling of goods and changing of places. It would never have done to leave her: she made every trip with us, riding in the cab of Mr. Hunt's pick-up (and sometimes needing help climbing into it).

Leto was 11 years old and had never been spayed. She stayed so close to us, we always felt we could prevent her mating; we reasoned that spaying her, subjecting her to the anesthesia and the surgery, would be to make her suffer for our convenience. One of the veterinarians we used did recommend it, pointing out that it sometimes prevented problems with the reproductive organs down the line, but we put it off and eventually did nothing.

All the moving and uncertainty, the sudden changes after a decade of carefully nurtured habits, may have weakened her immune system. We began to worry for sure when she started to go off by herself more and more. Jerry was staying with me on Ferguson Road, and we agreed one morning that he would take her to the vet if she didn't perk up that day.

In the middle of the afternoon, Jerry called me where I was working in the general reference division. He had taken her to the vet and the news wasn't good: A uterine infection had developed into peritonitis; surgery would give her a 50-50 chance of surviving, but without it she would die very soon (she was already unconscious). I told my boss, Wayne, that I had to go, that this dog was very important to me, and I left the ringing telephones to rush across town.

By the time I got there, the surgery had been done. The vet took Jerry and me over to a basin to show us the infected tissue and organs he had removed. We stared at it all blindly. I think now that he had seen what losing her would mean to us, and this demonstration was his way of suggesting that that loss was likely. The question was would she make it through the night.

We lay in bed waiting for daybreak and drove to the clinic, arriving just as it opened. The kennel attendant went to check on Leto; she was gone too long—in fact, she never returned. In a few minutes the vet drove up, went back, and came out to tell us that Leto had died in the night.

Jerry and I walked outside and sat on the edge of

the brick planter, crying. We were there a good while. No one bothered us. Finally we went back in, paid our bill, and asked for Leto. We took her to the house on Ferguson, where I wrapped her in a gold thermal blanket Mother had given me, and after Jerry called his mother with the news, we started out to Canton, Jerry driving the pick-up and Leto in my lap.

Mrs. Hunt met us as we turned to head over toward our house. She walked in with us and helped me put Leto down on the bed beneath the chandelier. We combed her fur around the bandage as best we could, and then re-wrapped her in the blanket.

Jerry and I went to town to buy white pine for her coffin, asking the yard man to cut the boards in the dimensions Jerry had devised. We returned, made the coffin, put Leto in it and nailed the top on, and then we dug the grave beneath the post oak tree where the driveway divides. Hermie and Sassie and two of their pups had been buried there years ago.

We covered the coffin with earth and found a large, animal-shaped stone that we used to mark the grave. I later had a brass plate engraved with these lines from Hesiod's *Theogony*:

*Leto...a sweet (goddess)  
always...  
Sweet from the beginning, the  
gentlest of all who dwell on  
Olympos.*

The trophy shop charged extra for all the Greek ("We usually just do fraternities," the man told me).

After we had stood at her grave a while, Jerry, his mother, and I went over to her house. We began remembering incidents in Leto's life, in our life with her—how she'd howl when Jerry and I left her, how spoiled she was. Jerry reminded me of the time she bit the boot of the man who'd come to talk with Mother and me about re-roofing her house. "Well, she doesn't like boots," I'd said. Then there was the famous story of how she ate a wing off Jerry's banquet bird.

And we recalled that sweltering day at Mesa Verde. This was on the trip we made with Mrs. Hunt, and we had all four arrived at the park very thirsty. We stood forever in a long line, waiting our turn to drink from the public fountain. As we

got closer, we heard parents telling their drinking children to hurry up, that there were people waiting.

Our turn finally came. Mrs. Hunt drank, then Jerry, then I, and while he held the valve open, I cupped my hands and filled them with water for Leto. I heard someone say down the line, "Look! They've got a dog up there. We're waiting on a dog!"

\*

Shortly after I received my degree in library science, I began to work for the Humanities Division of the library. I was given the responsibility for selecting materials in classical literature and literary biography, as well as literary theory and minor European and Eastern literatures. This was the goal I had been working toward, and I derived a great deal of satisfaction and had a lot of fun in building and maintaining collections that had traditionally been strong in the library and that were of personal interest to me.

This was the library's golden age, we all realize now.

Generous endowments and strong municipal support meant that we could aspire to be a research library for the city, and as a selector I was told by my new boss, Frances Bell, that I could order anything we needed. Using a bibliography on cards of Greek and Latin authors that I had prepared as a library school project, I set out to be sure that the library owned texts, commentaries, and translations for the major authors and their works, with representative critical support. The job was made for me; I was being paid to do what I would have done anyway: reading literary reviews and articles, and exploring the library.

Dallas' new Central Research Library was opened in 1982 and Humanities moved onto the largest floor (an acre in size). In the old building, the building Jerry and I had grown up using, we had had to place plastic sheeting above some shelves due to a badly leaking roof. We were now in a magnificent new, 10-level building, and we were eager to show it and our state-of-the-art on-line catalog off to the public and to other librarians. When Dallas hosted the American Library Association's annual convention, a reception was held on my floor that spilled out onto the

spacious balcony overlooking the new city hall across the street. We were the envy of the profession.

I made several friends at the library who remain close today: Frances (and her friend, Drew), Marsha (later to marry Evan), and Jim (whose friend, Dick, was later to relocate to Dallas after a library career in Montana and share a house with him). As the coordinator of the Writers Study Room in our division, I met several interesting people during the ensuing years, one of whom, Eileen (with her friend, Marie), has become very dear to me.

As active and as fulfilling as were my days in the library, my nights in the sparsely furnished house on Ferguson Road were lonely. I wanted to be in Canton, but I couldn't justify adding two hours of commuting time (not to mention the expense) to my work day. So I went home, often picking up a pizza on my way, and settled sadly into an evening of desultory reading, listening to music, and ... drinking.

One night I listened to a recording of Hermann Prey singing Carl Loewe ballads. I had had a few glasses of sherry—one or two beyond the usual number that put me in a 'mellow' mood. Unaccountably, I developed a craving for buttermilk, so I decided to run to a convenience store not far away and pick up some to have before bedtime. I was vaguely aware as I drove of the need to be very careful, to be sure to come to full stops and look in every direction before going through intersections.

I suppose I was a little too careful. The officer who stopped me asked me to recite the alphabet. I got bogged down at P and Q, so he took me to the station for a Breathalyzer test, which I almost passed. I spent the night in jail sleeping it off.

The worst part of one's first night in jail is the morning after. I was finally allowed to call a bail bondsman, and I telephoned Frances at work to explain my absence by telling her I was sick but that I now had medicine and was getting better. In my shame, I was hoping to get through the experience without anyone knowing what I had done.

The bondsman provided transportation, and we stopped by the house on Ferguson for me to get my checkbook. Jerry drove up, Frances having called him, worried, before she'd heard from me.

(I later learned that Ron, the assistant manager of the division, had driven out that morning to check on me—had even forced the garage door open only to discover I wasn't there.) Jerry followed us to the bond office, then he took me to get my impounded car. When I finally got to work, I arrived at a very busy time at the service desk. I immediately began helping a patron, using the computer terminal. Frances walked over to me and very gently squeezed my arm.

It was a while before Jerry and I talked about the incident.

I had to admit that I had had a drinking problem before, during the last year at Cistercian. He had never suspected, probably because I drank late at night and always went to bed long before he did. We realized things had to change, that our separated life wasn't good for either one of us. Living so close to his mother, just the two of them alone so often, Jerry felt that he had in a sense returned to his childhood. In the letter he wrote to Jacqueline telling her about Leto's death, he said:

*This changed so much that it is as if a block of life is over, she was so much a centralizer for this time. No more dogs for a time though, & this leaves, in theory, some freedom to travel and so forth, but then OTHER TIES, so there you are, same BUCKET, same water.*

Just talking about it helped, as it always did. Until we could figure out how to solve the problem, we made an effort to spend more time together. Jerry drove in to spend the night more often, and I took vacation days here and there to give us several consecutive days together in Canton.

And Fate brought us another "centralizer"—two, in fact. I drove out one weekend to find Jerry standing at the front door of our barn house with a tiny kitten sitting on each of his size 12D feet. Their mother, we surmised, had been killed on the highway, and the little creatures had made their way down the hill to our house. They had gotten his attention, Jerry said, by mewing loudly; one of them, whom Jerry later named Frances (not after my boss), had climbed the screen door to make her screams better heard.

Jerry told the story of his first few days with Frances and Mary often. He had never had cats

and didn't particularly like them, and he was determined that they would stay outside. He gave them some milk and some scrambled eggs, and he built a little shelter for them out of scrap lumber. It was by no means certain they could even stay.

The next day a thunderstorm passed over, and Jerry realized their shelter was leaking when he heard Frances caterwauling pitifully and climbing up the screen door again. He let them in ("little drowned rats")—and they've never left the house again, these 13 years, except on leashes.

Living with frisky kittens is a challenge, and Jerry had to deal with it pretty much by himself. They explored their new home thoroughly, knocking things over on shelves, rummaging through drawers accidentally left open, and spreading books and papers around on desks and sometimes pushing everything off onto the floor. Jerry's electronic equipment, with its levers, knobs, and patch cords, was a special fascination for them. And feeding them turned out to be a problem: the vet told us they had probably not been weaned, so we had to mix up queen's milk for them (thereby, thankfully, putting an end to their vomiting and diarrhea).

We were lying in bed one night during their third or fourth week with us, and Mary and Frances were running wildly across the sheets, hissing at one another in play, and continually snagging the bedclothes with their scimitar-like claws. From time to time, they'd run across one of us, leaving a sharp pain in the place they'd used as a launching pad. "That's it," Jerry finally said. "I'm gonna drown 'em in the tank." And he got up to do so.

I lay there without saying a thing, thinking, "If he does it, he does it"; after all, they were mostly Jerry's burden. I don't know for sure what Jerry did. I heard noises in the kitchen among the paper sacks, and I heard yelling. In a few minutes the cats settled down and came to bed, where they slept together at the foot. Jerry soon joined us.

When my brother-in-law retired from the Army, he and Judy returned to Dallas to live in the Ferguson Road house. I rented an efficiency apartment for the nights I stayed in town, and Jerry brought Mary and Frances in with him when he came to spend a night or two with me.

The cats soon grew accustomed to our cars.

Frances, always the more adventurous, liked to ride sitting on the flat headrests of my (Mother's old) Nova; Mary's spot was in the floor in front of the passenger seat. In his VW Jerry usually held Frances to keep her from roaming and jumping back and forth across the seats. It was hilarious to see him start out, looking so serious and with a little kitten staring out the side window, her head just visible above the sill. I expect we entertained a lot of people on the road—especially when we all four traveled together, as we preferred to do.

\*

We invited our Dallas friends out to have dinner with us in the country, but we didn't see people as often as we had when we lived in the city. One reason for this was our ever-present need to do chores: something had to be done to the house, or it was time to do yard work. I dug a garden on the south side of the house where I planted the rose bushes I had brought from Swiss Avenue; each year I added vegetables and herbs, and the larger the garden grew, the more time it required.

Our friends' lives were changing too. Jerry's sometime associates were staying busy with their own work and personal lives: Phil had gone through a divorce and was seeing another person, Joyce; Gordon had taken a job in Colorado Springs, and he and Mary were later to move to Portland, Oregon, where they adopted a daughter; and David and Ann were kept occupied by two teenagers at home.

We did have dinner with Houston and Jill in Dallas on a fairly regular basis, and Douglas and Avalon almost always joined us. Houston and Jill had bought a beautiful home in North Dallas, and their son, Patrick, was attending St. Mark's. One evening in Jill's elegant dining room, Jerry embarrassed himself and amused us all by helping himself to so much soup that the tureen had to be returned to him for a refill before it could finish its journey around the table. At Douglas and Avalon's home in Garland, we were once treated to a concert after dinner: on the two grand pianos in their living room, our hosts played Rachmaninoff's Suite No. 2.

Our friends Paul and Oz took us to dinner every couple of months, and they continued inviting Jerry to give concert-lectures almost every fall.

One year Jerry offered a tribute to his mother ("At Long Last"), thanking her publicly for all her and Mr. Hunt's support over the years. She ate so many macaroons and drank so much sherry—on an empty, nervous stomach—that she was sick on the side of the road during her and Jerry's trip home.

Shortly after we had moved to Canton, my Houston friend Lillian died. She had been diagnosed with lung cancer a year earlier, and radiation and chemotherapy had not been able to prevent metastasis. I spoke with her a few times on the phone, and she asked me to send her some Westerns because she didn't feel like reading anything else. She had had a decade teaching philosophy at Auburn, and had shared her home with a younger lady, Elizabeth, for several of those years.

When her son called me from Houston (where she had been taken to a nursing home) to let me know about her death, I told him that we had been regular correspondents for almost fifteen years and that I had hundreds of her wonderful letters I'd be happy to share with him whenever he might like. I never heard from him, and it's probably just as well. Lillian was a very private person, and I doubt she ever told her son or her mother (who outlived her) that she was gay. If I'm right, I hope she destroyed my letters to her.

\*

As often as I could, I traveled with Jerry to the concerts he gave. In the early years, we could fill a car with all he needed to perform: speakers, monitors, amplifiers, power supplies, synthesizers, tape recorders, and various electronic keyboards and other devices—not to mention props. Technological advances in the early '80s reduced some of the weight and quantity of what he needed, and not only was traveling easier, Jerry was also better able to realize his work. He kept up with new technology and continued to serve as a consultant to audio engineers, and he was one of the early owners of the Amiga computer and a big fan of its sound and image capabilities.

Never, though, did he become a techno-freak—far from it. In a letter to Jacqueline, he wrote:

*Do you still work with computing machines?*

*The technical inevitable in music can breed and has bred hateful resentment; it has all become incredibly costly overall, in time, patience, money, etc. The more complicated all of it gets, the cruder it all seems to become, with a slick surface to shield this reality sense at the last until you see the ghost has gone out of it, or never was there in the first place....*

I'm sure Jerry appreciated the irony of using the computer to store and manipulate the arcane magical symbols he used in his compositions. Perhaps this was his way of keeping the ghost in the machine.

The theatrical element of his work, present from the beginning, gradually narrowed in focus. A videotape of his 1982 performance in Dallas with Sally Bowen dancing records the large movements and gestures (he stomped across the space wearing the heavy wood and metal boots he had made) that characterize earlier work. In subsequent performances, he scaled down his onstage activities, calling the audience's attention to small objects he often held up on sticks. Very frequently these objects could simultaneously be seen moving on video monitors. He began traveling with his own lights, a collection of bulbs of various sizes and colors that he mounted on poles and held by hand, often using these individual lights in a dim space to illuminate objects or gestures or even facial expressions.

What came to matter more and more, both to him and to his audiences, was Jerry's own apparent relation to what he was doing, the significance he seemed to place on his actions. He once referred to the objects he used as "lightning rods of attention";

I have seen him enthrall audiences by simple movements of his body, movements that convey some magical meaning that is heightened by the music and the video and the lighting. Reviewing a concert at the Kitchen, John Rockwell wrote that Jerry's performance "resembled that of some highly nervous witch doctor.... The result was wearing, but curiously appealing, too..." (*New York Times*, January 31, 1983).

He was invited to participate in the San Antonio Festival in the spring of 1983, where the *Express-News* critic Mike Greenberg described *Ground as*



"extraordinary... compelling, altogether magical":

*The music is a series of continuous roars, rhythms, chirpings and poundings, of gathering and waning intensity. While this is coming out of the loudspeakers, Hunt himself is on the dimly lighted stage going through 'an action flood of theatrical-mimetic exercise' with canes, rattles, sticks slammed against suitcases, electric torches, an artificial hand on a stick, a tambourine and an assortment of unnameable but clearly magical instruments.... I was bowled over by what I saw and heard. (May 28, 1983).*

Critics responded to 1984 performances with the same mixture of bafflement and awe. Patrick Lysacht described Jerry's appearance at the New Music America annual festival in Hartford, Connecticut, as the "one show [that] stood out among the virtuosi.... His interplay with vibration-sensing electronic sound selection was fresh and unprecedented." And John Santos wrote of Jerry's San Antonio Festival concert that year that it was "enigmatic but powerful... the centerpiece of the evening."

I attended these concerts and watched the effect Jerry and his work had on people. As he finished the last-minute preparations, he would chat pleasantly with the audience, inviting people to come and go as they wished during the performance. Those who had never seen or heard him were invariably startled by the intensity of his work, coming as it did after the modest, even self-deprecating comments he made at the start. A few outraged individuals would leave early on. Most of those who stayed came up to meet him or visit with him after the concert, perhaps counting on him to bring them back to earth just as he had transported them.

His sense of humor was an integral part of his work. Although he never smiled or laughed at anything that happened during a work, audiences felt free to laugh (perhaps they simply couldn't help it) at odd coincidences or outlandish behavior. This element of fun intensified the drama, making the work even more moving.

It often appeared that Jerry had been possessed by forces beyond his control; this created

tension, and laughter served to relieve that tension. Jerry exhausted his audiences.

I watched Jerry just as any member of the audience would, but also as someone more closely related to him, more intimate. My own bafflement and awe had a personal dimension. When he began performing, I felt him leave me, leave that comfortable plane we dwelled on together. Of course I was affected, was moved in much the same way others were, but I was also a little chilled, a little lonely. It was obvious to me that when he was on stage and realizing his work, Jerry was more alive and more fulfilled than he ever was elsewhere (with the possible exception of when he was making love). I would wait, on the periphery, for the people who had come up to visit with Jerry to leave the stage, and then I would help him pack his gear and load the car. It was a pleasure to share his exhilaration and sense of satisfaction to the extent I could, but, as we would drive away, I would already be looking forward to having him return to me from wherever he had been.

\*

When the opportunity arose, in the fall of 1984, for me to take a permanent part-time job with the library, I jumped at the chance—but not because the work had become unsatisfying. In addition to seeing the Humanities collection widen and deepen, I was participating in the library's user education program by meeting high-school and college classes, orienting them to our division, and showing them how to take advantage of its research capabilities. And I very much enjoyed the people I worked with, as well as other friends I had made elsewhere in the library. I took the part-time job because I had come to love being in the country and I wanted to spend more time there, with Jerry.

Frances and I devised a regular work schedule that has remained pretty much the same for almost eleven years: I work two full days (Saturdays and Mondays) and a half day (Sunday) each week. My selection responsibilities were reduced somewhat, but I continue reading reviews and buying materials in the subject areas that interest me most. I spend about half my time answering reference questions at the service desk.

For several years I spent Saturday nights with Marguerite, the lady whom Mother went to school with and who lives on Ferguson Road across from our old house. I attended Dallas Symphony Orchestra concerts or went to movies or plays with friends, and thanks to Marguerite's hospitality, was spared a long drive home. Eventually, though, as I lost interest in the symphony and its predictable scheduling of crowd pleasers, I began driving home every night.

Jerry and I were able to travel together more, due to my abbreviated schedule. With four consecutive days off each week, we could visit our friends Bob and Rany in Houston, taking Mary and Frances with us, in their separate kennels, for the four hour ride each way. I had begun to teach myself how to swim, and Bob and Rany's pool was an excellent place to practice—far better, if less picturesque, than Paradise Bay of Cedar Creek Lake, on whose shores I'd lay my library books, opened to the diagram of whatever stroke I was working on that day. Bob and Jerry spent a lot of time at the piano; in addition to sharing their enthusiasm for music, Jerry was helping Bob, who had begun taking lessons again, with technique. We kept our cats and their dogs separated, although there was frequently attempted trafficking beneath the doors, particularly between Frances and their schnauzer, Battery.

The cats had the run of the living room and dining room, and Jerry and I slept together under Bob's Steinway on a pallet or in a sleeping bag I had bought for the purpose. Bob and Jerry stayed up late talking and watching television and videos in the study adjacent to the living room. The cats and I turned in around midnight, Frances in an armchair and Mary in the piano. Jerry would join me around two or three under the piano—a good time, and traditionally a good place, for lovemaking.

Sometimes we'd leave Mary and Frances with Bob and Rany and drive down the coast to spend a couple of nights with Peggy and George in Corpus. One year Jerry kept the cats in Houston while Bob, Rany, and I and their dogs visited Big Bend National Park. Houston became a second home for us, a pleasant place to visit not only for the companionship of our friends but also for the

sake of the city itself—the variety of vegetarian restaurants and ethnic food stores, the films and concerts, and the beauty of the lush landscape, with its semi-tropical flavor. And Bob's willingness to look after Mary and Frances meant that Jerry and I could leave them there while traveling to New York and, later, Holland. A couple of times we were able to return the favor by looking after Battery and Vinci while Bob and Rany traveled.

Our routine at home settled into a comfortable pace and rhythm. I worked outside most mornings, often taking the cats out with me on their leashes. Jerry slept late; when he had awakened, we would run errands in Canton, or Tyler, or (less frequently) Dallas. We'd prepare a large evening meal and go for a walk afterwards, coffee mugs in hand. Then we'd return and settle in to the evening's activities: reading, writing letters, or listening to music for me, composing, making commercial music, or writing letters for Jerry. Since our studies were separated only by a bamboo screen (with a wall of bookshelves against it), we had to use headphones and earplugs—that is, I used earplugs.

At some point every day, Jerry would go over to visit with his mother in her house on the other side of the grove of post oak trees. We ate dinner with her one or two nights a week. She kept busy with club activities, and she regularly had several ladies she used to work with in Dallas out to spend the day. As long as she was able, she managed her own affairs and looked after her property—even mowing her own lawn with the Ford yard tractor she bought, protected from the sun by a large straw hat and skin cream.

One day when I came home from swimming in the Cedar Creek Lake, Jerry told me he had just heard on the radio that open bodies of water in Texas were no longer safe for regular swimming—"Look at your feet: they're green!" he pointed out. I wrote the state government to see just what the risk might be, and I received a letter explaining that, indeed, it was not recommended to swim more than occasionally in any Texas lake because of pollution from the chemicals used in agriculture. To tell the truth, I had begun to worry about exposure to the sun anyway.

I located an indoor pool at the Cain Center in Athens (a community athletic center with a

YMCA office on the premises), and I began going there to swim one day a week. Jerry would often go with me, visiting the Radio Shack or shopping at Wal-Mart while I swam. There was never any question of his joining me: he had always hated the water ("Swimming is unnatural," he'd say time and again, as though I'd never heard it before) from the time when his parents had taken him to Galveston as a little boy and he first stuck his toes in the "slimy liquid." In the late afternoons, I had begun riding a bike along the country roads near our house. I usually followed a circular route, taking me by several old cemeteries, a wild game preserve, and past fields of cows, sheep, and goats. Thinking I might persuade him to join me, I bought a used racing bike for Jerry. He had stopped lifting weights, and he agreed that he needed some exercise.

He made three trips out with me. We didn't go far or fast; I didn't want to discourage him. I felt certain that he would come to enjoy biking if he could just build up a little strength in his legs and a little stamina. I was wrong, decidedly—he complained of the heat and the hills, the gnats and the mosquitoes.

Something in the air was affecting his allergies. And the farm dogs that playfully chased us alarmed him.

On our last trip my patience wore thin with his whining, his litany of complaints. He began bitching about how his trousers cuffs (he refused to wear shorts in public) were always getting caught under the chain guard, so I offered to switch bikes. Now the seat was too hard, the handlebars too low.

I blew up. We turned around, and I pedaled home on his bike as fast as I could. When I got to our gate, I threw the racing bike over the barbed wire fence and rode it across the fields to the tank...where I pushed it in. It's still there today, as far as I know.

Of course I realize now that he already had diminished lung function due to smoking; he simply couldn't breathe well enough to ride a bike for any distance. Even at that time, in the mid-'80s, he was talking about smoking less ("not quitting—that would be too extreme"), and he had begun to chew Nicorettes to the point of irritating the mucous membranes in his mouth.

So nothing more was said about bike riding. I continued going out alone. But we kept up our after-dinner walks, I am glad to say. One July evening we crossed the little creek north of the property, and when we reached the top of the rise beyond, we were surprised to see the valley to the east filled with lightning bugs. We stood a long time, marveling at the spectacle of the thousands of blinking lights. It was good to know that these insects were coming back, with the reduction of the use of chemical pesticides. They reminded us both of our childhood.

There was little, generally, about the outdoor world that interested Jerry. We'd drive along and I'd point out a field of wine-cups or prairie phlox; he'd look, dutifully, but never stop talking. He'd sometimes mock me when I was in one of my demonstrative moods by pointing this way and that with both hands (once to the amusement of the people in the car behind us). Only animals really captured his attention: the stately Brahman cattle with their odd humps, a hillside of goats, or the symmetrically marked calf or pony.

Vultures did fascinate him, though, the turkey vultures that are commonly seen circling in the Texas sky or removing roadkill from the highways. "Hell chickens," he called them. We'd drive along and startle a group gathered around the body of an armadillo, or a dog, and Jerry would call out: "Tasty, girls? Dead yet?" Another bird he loved to see was the heron; he often called my attention to one flying overhead, heading back to Cedar Creek Lake at sunset, its long legs trailing behind it, feet tight together.

A goose came to live with us one summer, bringing a pair of mallards with him. We had never seen geese or ducks around the tank on our property because it is too close to the highway.

These birds came from our neighbor's tank—and, after the summer in question, we saw no more there. Jerry took a serious interest in the goose, who marshaled his ducks around the yard and looked out for them when they slept.

For several weeks they spent their days with us, leaving to go to the tank only at sunset. I had just planted a Shumard oak in the back yard, and when I filled the circular bed around the base of the tree with water every other day, the ducks would hop in and swim enthusiastically. The

goose strutted along the perimeter, squawking now and then, and keeping an eye out for trouble. The way he lifted his head and turned it to fix a seemingly vigilant gaze in the distance conveyed a sense of concerned disapproval: "These silly ducks will swim."

Jerry caught that look and added it to his repertoire. Whenever I would say something foolish, or presumptuous, he would lift and turn his head just like the goose, fixing me with one widely opened eye. It always made its point, and he kept it up for years.

\*

As did his mother, Jerry loved meteor showers, so dramatic in the August night sky. We used to stay up late and watch them when, as boys, we'd spend the night together. As it happened, they were especially dramatic during Jerry's last August. I put a butterfly chair on the front porch for him, and we sat there together for over an hour exclaiming at the brightness of the meteors and at the length of their incandescent trajectories.

\*

"Not now"—"Just leave them out, I'll look at them later"—"Let me get a cigarette first": these were some of Jerry's usual responses to my suggestion that we look at pictures together. And as we traveled, he didn't try to hide his impatience whenever I stopped to take a picture. In the five large ring binders I have that contain the hundreds of photographs I took over the years, there are more than a few of Jerry looking at me behind the camera (while he holds his glasses), his eyes saying, "Come one, get it over with."

When I did prevail and we sat for a few minutes riffling through stacks of recently made prints or turning the pages of an album, I always realized he was indulging me. He rarely commented on individual pictures, and he had no questions about exact locations or vantage points. He'd often look away, his impatience becoming more and more apparent. When we'd gone through the lot, he'd jump up and hurry off elsewhere, his duty done.

It was the same with reminiscing. Whenever his mother or I would tell stories from the past, recalling relatives or friends and incidents, Jerry

would pay little attention and change the subject as soon as his forbearance allowed him to. He shifted the conversation back to the present, to his current preoccupations, or to the immediate future, to plans for things ahead.

As much as I would like to be able to imagine him with me now looking at these pictures from the mid-'80s, I cannot do it. It may be just as well: alone, and without the tug of his resistance, I can journey so effortlessly into the black-bordered rectangles of sunlight or shadows and stand before a New York City bar with three names and an enormous replica of Miss Liberty's crown on its roof, or sit in Mark and Alan's Philadelphia apartment and laugh while Alan puts a pair of glasses on their dog Jake's nose, or gaze at a bundled-up Jerry standing in the courtyard of Santa Fe's Palace of the Governors as the record 20" snowfall commenced.

And so it was with reviews. Jerry never made any effort to find them (I'd do that at the library); when I brought them home, or when others sent them to him, Jerry would sometimes give them a cursory glance, but usually he'd put them on a shelf out of his way, commenting that he'd read them later. Only when he had to collect several to include in a grant proposal or for publicity purposes would he give them any substantial attention.

Of course favorable criticism pleased him, but he often told me that even that failed to convey what it was he thought he was doing. I sometimes joked that he was afraid of being "nailed."

The best reviews, he agreed, were the descriptive ones. But as it was with photographs, so it was with reviews: they're all from the past and of scant relevance to today, to tomorrow—time traps for the self-indulgent, the unwary.

What would he think of me now as I turn the pages of a photo album or reread the reviews I've carefully put in chronological order? Had he been left, would he have done the same with my papers and mementos? He never even reread a book, as far as I knew, unless it was to review information. It is hard for me to imagine him setting out to lose himself in reverie; come to think of it, that was always his objection to alcohol—that you lose control of yourself and your steady hold on time. I engage my imagination to evoke events, faces, and feelings;

the images Jerry made were mostly in the service of his art, and for him that was more than enough.

What years these were, though. The budget crisis that was to cut funding for the library so severely had not yet come, and I spent three days a week selecting books and assisting patrons, joining in the life of our magnificent new research library. Judy and her family had moved back to Dallas and they were now living in our old home on Ferguson Road. I enjoyed spending time with my nieces and nephew, taking them out for an afternoon by turns, going to playgrounds, to the movies, and to the malls. Sometimes Jerry accompanied us as we rambled along creek beds, raided a dumpster behind a department store, and sat and swung. He intrigued the kids because he insisted on talking with them as though they were adults. They called him "Uncle Jerry."

Twice in 1985 Jerry performed in New York. In February he appeared in the Brooklyn Academy of Music's "Meet the Moderns" series. Sharon Cucinotta described Jerry's piece for the Brooklyn *Phoenix*:

*Most exciting, however, was composer Jerry Hunt's Cyra—an eye-opener of intense originality—scored for chamber orchestra, electronics, accordion and performer.*

*As the musicians were ostensibly tuning up, a disoriented individual ambled into the theater stalking the space between the audience and the orchestra. As the orchestra began the formal piece, this person beamed lights into faces, stamped his feet, and spit hostile whispers into the audience.*

*Of course, this person was Jerry Hunt, gangly and spectacular in his uninhibited antics.*

*Because of this added dimension of participation, there was palpable energy from the orchestra. The score, dense and driving, blended well with the electronics. A coda pitted Hunt on a percussion suitcase with tambourine against accordionist Guy Klucevsek. Klucevsek succeeded in chasing the composer off the stage.*

(February 28, 1985)

Whenever Jerry went to New York, he stayed with Sally Bowden, our dancer friend from Swiss Avenue days, and her husband, Ted. They occupied two adjacent rent-controlled apartments on the Lower East Side, within easy walking distance of both SoHo and the Village. Sally was teaching dance as a guest artist in various schools around the country, and when her work brought her to Dallas, we were able to spend time with her and renew the friendship that had now gone back a decade.

In the summer of 1985, Sally, Ted, and their little daughter Nora visited us in Canton. I had just prepared the earth beneath the gazebo (which we had built from a mail-order kit) for planting St. Augustine grass, and Nora and Ted had a good time playing in the shade there, turning over the freshly dug dirt. All three of their New Yorker faces look pale in the pictures I took.

That July I continued a tradition I had begun several years earlier by going to Santa Fe to attend concerts in the chamber music series there. I celebrated a private homecoming by visiting St. John's, walking the routes through the grounds and the buildings that brought back memories from 20 years earlier. I had long since lost touch with Bob Davis, and with the exception of an on-again, off-again correspondence with Hugo, I had no more contact with the friends I made there.

From my lodging at the Galisteo Inn, near Lamy, I drove to Las Vegas, to Chama (where I rode the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railway), and to Taos, via the high road. Most every evening took me in to Santa Fe for music; a highlight was hearing the then relatively unknown Jean-Yves Thibaudet perform in the Dohnanyi Piano Quintet in C Minor. Mornings I spent reading Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet*, after a good swim in the inn's lap pool.

In an unusual symmetry, soon after our separate trips to New York and Santa Fe, we were to travel together to both destinations. Our 1985 fall vacation was planned around concerts Jerry was to give at Roulette, in New York City, and in Buffalo.

On our drive east, we stopped in Philadelphia to visit with my ex-student and friend Mark, the

same fellow who used to stand at the head of the stairs at Cistercian, waiting for me to arrive.

Mark and I had kept up a regular correspondence ever since he was graduated, the year before my last at Cistercian. Although several of my ex-students came by the library from time to time to say hello, Mark is the only one with whom I have grown close. He studied French and theology in college and, for a time, contemplated entering the priesthood. He ultimately settled on law and took his degree at NYU. After graduation, he moved to Philadelphia with his friend, Alan, who enrolled in rabbinical school there.

Spending several days with Mark and Alan in their apartment, with their dog and cat, and their bikes on the front porch, with their energy and unconcealed affection for one another, gave Jerry and me plenty to talk and think about. Of the two gay couples Jerry and I had gotten to know well, Bob and Rany had always kept pretty much to themselves, but Mark and Alan appeared to represent a new generation of homosexuals who maintained political awareness of gay-rights issues and who were determined to be open and candid about their sexual orientation in their everyday lives. Moreover, each man was committed to social work to some degree: Mark, as a teacher of paralegal studies, frequently discussed the law in relation to gay issues, and Alan was preparing to be an openly gay rabbi in a synagogue welcoming homosexual Jews. We had to admit that Mark and Alan made us feel a little stodgy—and even a little selfish.

\*

Every place we stayed on that trip east was upstairs, and that meant lugging the Emulator synthesizer, other electronic equipment, and various percussion devices (including the battered Samsonite suitcase) up narrow stairways so that we could protect them in our room. Jerry sometimes had a little work to do on the equipment, repairing or readjusting things in preparation for the next concert. We re-created a homelike environment wherever we went, setting up cooking facilities, doing our daily laundry, and each of us arranging his study corner for reading (and, in my case, writing letters).

The equipment also posed a problem en route, and this was exacerbated by the rental car we drove. There were no intermediate size

automobiles available when we went to pick up a car for our three-week trip, so they "upgraded" us to a sporty blue Camaro, with very little storage space. The car drew attention wherever we went, and Jerry and I got a kick out of the spectacle of the two of us tooling around the country in such a sexy car.

The amusement ended in New York City, however. Parking on the streets there is a challenge: for years we had watched Sally and Ted move their car daily, from one side of the street to the other, to comply with the regulations designed to prevent long-term storage of vehicles on the street. One afternoon I drove Jerry uptown for a meeting and let him out. We arranged to meet at the New School in the Village a few hours later. I drove back downtown and began the block-by-block search for an empty space, listening to Prokofiev's *Overture on Hebrew Themes* on the Camaro's fancy radio and thinking what a pleasure it was to be in the Big Apple again.

Finally I found a place in front of a bodega—a little farther east than I would have liked, but still within walking distance of the Village. The men loitering in front of the store did seem to be impressed by the car, I later, embarrassingly, admitted.

After doing a little shopping in the book and record stores near NYU, I met Jerry at the New School where we had coffee and pastries in the cafeteria. We walked across town to where I had left the car, got in, and started the engine...but the car wouldn't move. "We're not going anywhere," Jerry said, dismally.

I got out to investigate and discovered, to my eternal shame, that both rear wheels had been stolen (the axle left sitting on cinder blocks). A couple of the loiterers walked over to commiserate with us.

We locked the car and walked to Sally and Ted's apartment and told them what had happened. Sally was disappointed that her careful efforts to instruct us in where you go and don't go in the Lower East Side had failed. I had, of course, to take all the blame. I had been lulled by Prokofiev, I said, into a false sense of security. Jerry put it more succinctly: "He left the Camaro at the corner of Rape and Dope Streets."

Finding a tow truck whose driver would even go

into that area was not easy. I did all the calling while Jerry and Sally smoked and paced. I finally located a driver in Queens who agreed to help us, and he picked Jerry and me up in front of Sally and Ted's for the short ride to the wrong side of town. The driver happened to pass a police car on our way; he pulled over and asked if the officers would escort us to the Camaro, and they agreed, readily. The car was towed to Queens for new wheels and tires, and while we waited, Jerry and I reminisced, a little forlornly, about our last visit to that borough, when Jerry had helped Bob choose his Steinway at the factory there.

A couple of hours later, the Camaro sat parked across the street from Sally and Ted's, easily visible from their front windows. We kept it under watch and ward until Jerry's concert was over and we could leave town. It would have been too much to have to submit a second insurance claim.

The October 5th concert at Roulette received what I consider to be one of the best reviews Jerry ever got. Linda Sanders, in her October 22nd "Soundings" column for *The Village Voice*, wrote:

*I've only seen him perform once before, and his towering oddity knocked me out. He's got the magnetism of a Bible Belt preacher or a snake-oil salesman. With electronic music blaring in the background, he'll attach metal claws to his feet and stomp and scrape around the room. Or he'll wave a pole, to which is attached some indescribable glop that rattles.*

*He does all this with such a serene lack of self-consciousness, it's like watching him putter around in the garage.*

*This time, though, the lights went down and an eerie tape came on, and off to the side there was a video that showed spectral color images.*

*It seemed like some kind of ritual. At first, he kept things merely fascinating, as he placed a crystal goblet on a table and waved around lights and wands that presumably triggered changes in the electronics. But then the music started getting louder, the room seemed darker, and the poles started looking phallic.*

*Things got seriously spooky, and when he looked up to (through?) the ceiling and began to yell 'COME ON DOWN!' I started wondering whether I was cut out for this line of work. Fortunately, nobody or nothing showed up, and Hunt continued the performance in a more rational manner, if you call lying inside a wooden outline of a coffin normal.*

I had always wanted to see Niagara Falls. There is something very appealing to me about traditional American tourist destinations that are no longer fashionable: the Borscht Belt, the Adirondacks, and Niagara Falls now serve as nostalgic links to the past, evoking by means of their dilapidated grand hotels, pokey amusement parks, and kitschy souvenirs a time when travel, and pleasure, were defined differently. The natural beauty that originally inspired these vacation spots remains, mostly, and it is all the more prominent without crowds of tourists. Jerry and I felt quite comfortable visiting passe places in the off-season, and we were glad to have a couple of days in Niagara Falls before the Buffalo concert.

Driving north and then west through upstate New York gave us a relaxing pleasure after the hectic time in the City. We visited our old high-school friend Fred in Peekskill and stayed overnight in Kingston (where I photographed some gravestones in the old cemetery there, outstanding for their sculpture or inscribed sentiments). We spent an hour or so at Schroon Lake in the Adirondacks, led there by Thomas Cole's famous painting, admiring the tranquil beauty and listening for loons. Our journey west then took us along the shore of Lake Ontario.

In Niagara Falls we stayed at a gay-owned inn, the Rainbow House, and were happy to lug everything upstairs for the sake of the view from the bedroom balcony, complete with a swing where we could sit and smell the shredded wheat being toasted in the factory a few blocks away. It was fun to think our being there represented a much-delayed honeymoon. The furnishings and amenities of the place certainly supported the image. There was a living room downstairs with a fireplace and several comfortable armchairs. It was always empty, though; Jerry and I were the only mid-week guests.

Ever economizing, we brought croissants in one night to have for breakfast the next morning with the coffee we always made in our room. I located the kitchen soon after daybreak, planning to heat the rolls in a toaster oven, but the shiny new microwave was too much of a temptation. I'd heard about these miracle ovens and thought I'd try it. I set the timer for a couple of minutes, opened the door at the sound of the pleasant ding, and removed three hard croissants de papier-maché to take back to show Jerry.

Everyone had told us to go to the Canadian side, that that's where the activity is. We crossed the Rainbow Bridge and explored the busy streets, enjoying the carnival-like atmosphere. We rode to the top of a look-out tower, but Jerry stood stiff against the back wall of the elevator, relegated by his acrophobia to a long-distance view.

Our last afternoon there we spent gazing at the American Falls and exploring Goat Island. We walked through the cold drizzle to the Three Sisters Islands, laughingly remembering our apartment at the Court of Two Sisters from 15 years ago. We lingered on the last "sister," the smallest, most remote island. The picture I made of Jerry reminds me of how cold we were; nevertheless, he stands in front of the camera holding his umbrella well to one side of his head, admitting enough light for a good photograph, yet looking none too pleased at having to endure yet another picture-taking.

\*

We celebrated our 43rd birthdays in New Mexico, where Jerry gave a concert in Santa Fe. We drove my Nova on this trip, and it was a relief not to have to worry about protecting someone else's property. Winter was imminent, and we saw snow flurries several times on our route through Las Vegas and Mora and north to Taos. Freshly cut pines lay bundled on the roadway in every small community, ready for pick-up and sale as Christmas trees.

Our friend Jane Van Sickle, from SMU's dance department, had married Lonnie and moved to Taos where they were trying to make a success of an art gallery they had bought. Jerry and I spent a couple of nights with them in their home northeast of the plaza. La Morada, the Penitentes' shrine, is literally in their backyard. Jerry and I

made a pilgrimage there with Jane and Lonnie's dog one chilly afternoon.

The next day we took a walking tour of Taos, stopping on our way to town to laugh at the windows D.H. Lawrence painted for Mabel Dodge Luhan, whose house stands just a little west of Jane and Lonnie's. We headed on toward the plaza, bundled up against the cold, where we visited a couple of galleries and stores and looked at Lawrence's paintings in the hotel there.

On our way back, we got lost—or, rather, I did, since Jerry always depended on me for directions. I liked to think I could orient myself by the light in the sky, but there was a uniform cloud cover that day, and I led us badly astray. Jerry was tired and cold and ready to be home in front of the fireplace. He'd indulged me, more of a tourist than he ever was, quite enough, even waiting patiently for me at the Taos Book Shop. (He once said accompanying me to a bookstore was his idea of Hell.) And the altitude was getting to him, giving him the headache he always said it did. By the time we finally found the right road back, we were no longer speaking. We didn't get over it in a hurry, either.

The Center for Contemporary Art where Jerry was to perform in Santa Fe put us up in the Fort Marcy Condominiums, a cluster of adobe buildings on a hillside within walking distance of the plaza. I swam laps in their indoor pool while Jerry made preparations for the concert he was to give that night. We took a walk to the plaza, and he made a picture of me standing in the courtyard of the Palace of the Governors, snow steadily falling now.

Later in the day, we drove up to the St. John's campus and then visited the Museum of Folk Art nearby, where Jerry was captivated by the miniatures. (He always seemed to like very small objects, often bringing home tiny china or metal animals, cloth roses, or even plastic doll hands from the crafts departments of stores.) On our way downhill, we pulled off the road and stopped to look at the sunset, a crimson glow we glimpsed between layers of dark clouds. Snow was still falling. We saw a jackrabbit dart between the pinons just a few feet from our car.

The concert that night was not very well attended, and the people who did come left early. Had we heard a weather report, we would have



known why. When we finished packing, we went out to discover that the Nova had been completely covered by snow: it looked like a little hill. We dug it out, loaded it, and I drove through snow so thick that the streets had become indefinable. I just tried to avoid trees, poles, and buildings, and for all I knew I might have been driving through parks and yards. We couldn't climb the hill to our apartment, so we had to leave the Nova and carry the largest electronic equipment up the snow-covered path to our door. I love snow and considered this my birthday present, but Jerry was less enthusiastic.

With the aid of pictures and reviews and the odd travel brochure or map, it is easy for me to recall our trips, the details of where we went and what we did. One memory recaptured lays a trap for another, and the details re-emerge. The good times we had come back for me to enjoy again, and even the unpleasant memories are welcome now, in my aloneness. But what startles me a little as I re-experience our times together on the road is that the clearest memories, the ones that engage my imagination and emotions most fully, are of those occasions when Jerry and I found ourselves alone together in remote places: on the shore of Schroon Lake among the newly fallen leaves, on the far side of the last of the Three Sisters Islands, among the foothills of Monte Sol watching a jackrabbit in the snow.

Perhaps these times are the most vivid because they summon a strong, familiar feeling and the truth I knew earliest, longest, and best: I shared a union with Jerry that was so deep and pervasive it was easy to take for granted, but when we were alone, especially when lying in one another's arms or admiring the beauty of nature, we became conscious of this union and were humbled, and uncharacteristically speechless.

The folks at the Canton feed and hardware store probably weren't too surprised to see Jerry and me come in one day and buy several hundred feet of PVC pipe and assorted elbows. They'd seen us regularly over the years, watching bemusedly as Jerry roamed the aisles, selecting the hardware he needed for whatever work we were doing on the house or for his own equipment building.

There's not a lot of turnover among the personnel of country stores, and, of course, they see the same customers again and again, so I imagine

they had a pretty good fix on the fast-talking eccentric and his sidekick (the one who browsed among the housewares and always bought birdfeed).

In fact, one year a television reporter from a Dallas station came out to our house and interviewed Jerry about its unusual construction. This was part of a program on some of the "colorful" individuals living in East Texas, and for weeks after it was aired, people in the Canton stores recognized Jerry and commented on the house.

So we loaded my Nova with the pipe and brought it home—not for a plumbing project, though.

Jerry was going to make a frame for a freestanding room; we were to put the frame together on the deck we had built in front of the house, labeling the various lengths for easy reassembly, and then take it apart and bundle like-sized pieces for transport to Houston. Jerry had been invited to participate in the New Music America '86 to be held there, and the PVC room was to be erected in the Museum of Fine Arts to house his installation *Birome (Zone): Cube*.

Jerry had last performed in Houston in late 1985, at DiverseWorks. (I didn't attend, probably because I had used up all my vacation time.) In the *Public News* for November 27th, Ann Walton Sieber wrote:

*Hunt's 'props' looked like the property of a modern-day shaman: carved sticks, straw tools, an aged tambourine, tiny bells, Tibetan bells...and a plastic wineglass with a purple... stem.*

*[He] used these objects as noise-makers, augmented by claps and feet-stamping, which his electronic system (reportedly built with computer chips taken from old football arcade- games) turns into an...alive beat which remains unbroken throughout the 90 minutes of the constantly moving show.*

*Perform[ing] in semi-darkness, Hunt uses the primal rhythm he generates as a setting for his dislocating performance: describing space patterns with lights, placing his objects on the end of a long*

*pole, eerily contorting his illuminated face as he lay cadaver-like inside a wooden frame, lifting the frame so that it became a doorway, swinging his long stick out over the audience as he shouted.*

When described, his actions sound absurd. But they had a...transfixing effect—as though we were witnessing an archetypal drama occurring deep in the unconscious....

While watching Mr. Hunt, I found myself thinking more clearly and bravely than usual.

There had developed a following for Jerry's work in Houston, and the installation would be an opportunity for people to see another facet of his art. Houston had yet to experience its economic hard times, and the city helped support music, dance, and art events and exhibitions at various sites around town, all comprising the Houston Festival (of which New Music America was a part). The variety of the offerings and the appeal of the artists involved attracted people from all over the world. *Birome (Zone): Cube* made quite an impact on many who saw it, and Jerry was later invited to take it to Holland and Germany. (Even the 1994 *All-Music Guide* I received not long ago mentions the installation, which "Blue" Gene Tyranny refers to as a "voodoo hut.")

With Bob's and my help, and with the somewhat skeptical aid of the museum staff, Jerry assembled the cube and covered the frame with old sheets, quilts, and blankets that we had rounded up in Canton for the purpose. He put inside the mannequin, or homunculus, David McManaway had designed: a sexless, or multi-sexed object lying on a bed-like structure and fitted with sensors that enabled it to respond to touch, movement, and sound. A video camera located in the cube conveyed images to the monitors located in the walls and ceiling.

In an interview with Bernard Brunon for *ArtsSpace* (Fall 1986, p. 26), Jerry described the installation as

*...an extension of my understanding of how people actually function and behave as opposed to how they describe their actions.*

*It is about the difference between the narrative and the action, a distance*

*much greater than most people pay attention to.*

*The idea was to create an isolated, thrown-together space within a public display setting, into which someone could enter momentarily and, by getting involved with an isolated object, build some change of reference. The mechanism was devised so that the participant's entry, timing and activity within the cube enclosure would reorganize what subsequent visitors might perceive and engage. The machine accumulates information over a period of time that will determine what it can possibly do later in the day.*

*...I made no effort to create a responsive environment that produces directly satisfying results. It doesn't produce a specific sound or vision for a certain action or rubbing or movement. Rather it operates on the basis of strategies of Rosicrucian chess (a multidimensional chess arrangement) in response to participant actions.*

Bob and I went to the museum one afternoon to see the installation. With the old bedding that served as walls, the cube looked out of place in the sterile environment, and the weird and wild electronic sounds coming from the darkened chamber seemed to be attracting and repelling people in just about equal number.

We watched a school group approach the cube. The teacher allowed a few children to go in, at first; I can easily imagine their fascination with the spooky homunculus (which reminded me of the hermaphrodite in Fellini's *Satyricon*) as well as their started reaction at finding such a thing in a museum in the first place. The teacher walked in but quickly emerged, somewhat agitated. "Let's go, class," she almost shouted, and those who were inside came out—reluctantly, it seemed to me.

\*

After three years in Texas, Judy and Paul moved to Idaho in the summer of 1987, just after Paul received his degree from the Baptist seminary in Ft. Worth. They had lived on Ferguson Road for a couple of years; Judy worked in the library down the street, and Paul supplemented his Army

retirement income by working as a handyman. When he decided to enroll in the seminary, they moved to Ft. Worth and rented a house across the street from the campus. Judy got a job on the school's switchboard, using the skills she had acquired over 20 years earlier while working at Daddy's company, Ben E. Keith.

When they left for Sandpoint, where Paul had been called to be a pastor, my nephew, Paul Michael, was 8, and his sisters, Jamie and Jenny, were 10 and almost 14, respectively. I had grown close to these children during the three years they had lived in the area, and I frequently drove in to Dallas and, later, to Ft. Worth to spend the day with them—usually one child at a time. We went to movies and to the malls, to the zoo, and to amusement parks like Six Flags, Whitewater, and Sesame Street.

Of all that we did together, I especially enjoyed ice-skating. I had skated with Carol and Kirby years before, and I was glad to have someone to enjoy it with again (I can't even picture Jerry on ice skates—or any kind of skates). One afternoon stands out in particular: the rink had been decorated for Christmas, and Jamie and I skated to songs of the season beneath a Santa in his sleigh suspended from the ceiling above us.

One summer I took Paul Michael and Jamie to Aquarena Springs, a theme park between Austin and San Antonio. We watched Ralph, the swimming pig (or one of its avatars), from a submarine chamber, rode the funicular above the park, and threw food pellets from our seats in a glass-bottomed boat to the diving ducks.

Jamie bought me a black plastic sea horse that still hangs above my desk. Paul Michael bought an ornate plastic pirate's sword that made it intact all the way to the car.

Jenny liked shopping, and we spent hours in the malls looking at clothes and, especially, earrings. As I searched for more merchandise tags to read while waiting, I understood how Jerry always felt when he waited for me in bookstores.

Judy and I had become friends. Losing our parents brought us together, and my closeness to the children strengthened the bond. We are, indeed, alike in many ways, and we chose mates that have a lot in common: energy, volatility, and a desire to set the agenda. She had the task of coming to terms with my homosexuality, and I

with her strong religious faith; I believe we appreciate one another more for the effort each of us made.

I drove over to spend a Sunday with them a few weeks before Paul was to be graduated. When I arrived, they hadn't gotten back from church yet, so I sat on the swing on their sunny front porch and waited. I remember thinking about a comment Judy had made a couple of months earlier about Jesus's arms, how they'd have to be strong because he was a carpenter's son. I continued swinging; it was a beautiful day and everything was O.K.—except for the insects I couldn't put out of my mind that were beating against the sides of the jar where Paul Michael had collected them for a science project. Naturally, I let them out.

\*

Because he didn't have associations with schools or performance groups, Jerry depended on concert offers and grant recommendations to come from friendships he had made with other composers and performers who admired his work. The very fact of his being a free agent, politically speaking, strengthened those friendships; he competed with no one, and he made no enemies. His independence was accompanied by a disarming candor about others' work and a genuine sense of modesty about his own. People liked to be with him, partaking of his enthusiasm, put at ease by his lack of pretension and his sense of humor, and taken seriously as an artist in his or her own right.

We had many artistic guests in Canton during the '80s and early '90s: Jim Fulkerson, composer and trombone-player living in England and then Holland (and, lamentably, allergic to Mary and Frances); Daniel Dugas, a Canadian graphic artist who wowed the checkout girls at the local grocery store with his good looks and his French accent; Joseph Celli, composer and oboist, who managed early New Music America festivals and whose label, 0.0. Discs, lists a CD and a videotape Jerry made; Jane Henry, a composer and violinist (also allergic to cats), whose playing Jerry used in a piece on the CD *Ground*; Annea Lockwood, a composer Jerry collaborated with on a New York concert in 1988; Dain Olsen, a video artist from Los Angeles; and Jack Briece, a composer Jerry had plans to collaborate with, but who died of

AIDS before anything concrete could happen. As these guests and others (including Rod Stasick, who had moved back from Chicago in 1987 and met and fallen in love with Sharon) came to visit us in Canton, we enjoyed showing off the house we had built and getting the amused, or amazed, reactions of people who could believe neither what they saw nor that we had done it. Jerry usually took guests over to meet his mother, and the ordinariness of her house made the eccentricity of ours even more apparent. One or two guests elected to spend the night in Mrs. Hunt's spare bedroom.

Jerry and his mother continued to be good company for one another during the long periods of time when they were alone together on the property here. The three of us ate dinner at her house at least once a week; she preferred having us over there rather than coming to our house, probably simply because she was more comfortable in her own surroundings. And she didn't want to leave King, the German shepherd who had become so decrepit in his old age as to need help stepping off and onto the back porch.

Just as she had looked after Hermie and Sassie during their decline, perhaps even allowing them to live too long, so Mrs. Hunt now ministered to King, cooking and mincing chicken for him and cleaning up after his incontinence. Jerry tried to persuade her to have the poor animal put to sleep, but she just couldn't bring herself to do it. He finally died one cold day; I was not in town, but Daniel Dugas was here visiting and he helped Jerry bury King in the little pet cemetery beside the driveway where six dogs now lie.

Mrs. Hunt seemed to change some after King's death. She gradually stopped attending her women's club meetings, with one exception, and she did less indoors and nothing at all outside. Jerry knew she kept receiving invitations to go places, but she was deaf to his encouragement to accept them. Her longtime Dallas friends, especially Maydell, could see the change in her when they came out for birthday visits, as Jerry later learned.

Part of the explanation lay in the fact that Mrs. Hunt was suffering from adult-onset diabetes, and, of course, her sedentary manner of living was only making her feel worse. The diabetic condition was not discovered until she blacked

out one day while she and Jerry were coming back from Athens. And although she had the information she needed to adjust her diet, she found it almost impossible to alter a lifetime's eating habits.

It was hard for Jerry to see a growing dependency, and even a petulant quality at times, in his mother, who had always been so independent and so resourceful. The intercom he had connected between her house and ours buzzed more and more frequently: Had anyone been up to the highway to get the mail? Was anyone going to the store later? What was that loud sound? Jerry rarely showed impatience, despite the exasperation he felt. I would have to bite my lip to keep from saying anything.

I wasn't always successful. It seemed to me on occasion that her needs were gradually taking over our lives, that we were here to wait on and care for her. So many times I saw Jerry leave the work he was in the middle of to go do something for her; so many times we had to change our plans, for dinner or for trips, to accommodate hers. Sometimes I felt myself caught in the middle, and it was then that Jerry and I argued about the direction things seemed to be headed in and about what, if anything, we could or should do about it.

In the summer of 1986 Jerry was invited to give a concert and conduct a workshop ("on himself," as one reviewer put it) during the Sound Symposium in St. John's, Newfoundland. It was always an ordeal packing his gear, but it was especially difficult in the middle of a hot Texas summer to handle sweaters and overcoats. As the few pictures of him taken there show, however, Jerry needed them.

There were several unexpected pleasures that Jerry enjoyed on this trip. One was being able to visit at length with Pauline Oliveros, and another was working with the comedian and performance artist Sheila Gostick (this foreshadowing, I think, Jerry's later collaboration with Karen Finley).

A lasting pleasure, though, for both Jerry and his fans and friends, particularly now, is the long interview the composer Gordon Monahan conducted with Jerry for a Canadian magazine. "Stompin' and Beatin' and Screamin'" contains "excerpts culled from extensive monologues by Mr. Hunt as he proceeded to 'talk the clouds right

out of the sky' one afternoon at St. John's." Below are a dozen of these excerpts.

**On his work:**

*There are specific scenarios for each of my works that involve certain relationships with objects—what objects I carry, what are available. I have a list of strategies and a list of goals and interests and pursuits and exercises and desires that I'd like to work out with the audience. Some very personal, some confrontational and violent, some overtly sexual, some pretentious, some apologetic, some friendly. They're all just interpersonal games with tools. The way I organize my material is very much along the line of my conversational sense. I meander; it's just my nature. In some ways, the meander is a most meaningfully provocative organizer because it's driven by natural processes. For example, in any kind of interchange, there is the situation, the exploration of the situation, the feeling out of the environment, and the assessment of the strong and weak forces in the environment. Every performance that I do, and every compositional gimmick or technique or structure that I use, is based on this model of conversational interaction.*

*Someone once... described (what I do! as a kind of religious experience in which the system [of the piece] is the mechanism by which the priest makes connection between the congregation and the god.... Remember, particularly in charismatic traditions, a priest is not a person who says, 'Let me tell you what God just told me.' And, clearly, the leader of a voodoo ceremony is not there to say, 'God just said....' Instead, he says, 'Can you hear what he's saying?', and he sets up a situation in which your eyes and ears can be opened to that experience. And from time to time, these people become momentarily open, transparent, to this experience. And I think it's a pretty sensible explanation of my work as well,*

*although it's colored up a little bit more than I care to be colored up.*

*All you need is a map of Texas and a couple of books from 18th-century magicians and you could figure the whole thing out. Because in the little world I've created for myself, it all fits together.*

**On his reputation:**

*I'm developing a following that I don't completely understand. I attract boys in the ages from 19 to 27. (I can't touch a boy under 18; they have no interest in me at all.) After I do a concert, these boys come up to me and I'm sitting there and I'm looking at them and they're looking at me kind of funny...and I'm thinking, 'Why are you here looking at me? What's interesting about me?' My friend says that he thinks it's that they're at a point in their lives when, very soon, they're going to have to go to school, select a career, something like that.... And they can look at me and think, 'Well, look at that old fart. He's just kinda buggerin' on along. He hasn't lost all his marbles and he seems like he's kinda having a good time. There are options in life.'*

*I've always thought of myself as a new music novelty act in that if you call me, you can guarantee that I don't cause a lot of technical problems. I don't require a lot of complicated technical setup because I just don't believe in it. So, for instance, you've got no lights? I carry my own: four or five 15 to 35-watt bulbs, a few sockets. I have a few pieces that use interactive dimmers, but, I mean, it's still my own stuff. And the sound system?*

*Mono; up. The reflections are bad in the room? I re-equalize, or I change what I do. I get there and I think, 'This is awful. I'll X.'*

*The reason I've stayed in Texas is because it's always been relatively comfortable and I've been just sort of*

generally afraid to go anyplace else. And you hear of all these interviews with composers and artists and read in their bios, 'And then I went to blah-blah,' and you realize that what they've done over a period of years is written a fantasy about themselves which becomes part of their work.

**On music:**

I don't think I could have ever had a career as a pianist because I never ever wanted to play the notes the way they were written. I was too sloppy to learn them quite right. And I've found that there are a few pieces I can never, ever memorize—Rachmaninoff's, for example, because of the way he composed: First he wrote the pop song, the tune with chord changes. Then he slithered around a lot, up and down, and after he got the slithers in, then he'd put accent marks over a few of the slithered big notes and scrape some of the other slithers out, and voila! Sonata No. 1, Sonata No. 2. Which is the thing I like: it's kind of an aesthetic, degenerate cocktail music.

Once we were at a John Cage program someplace and this woman was coming out and she even had her fingers on her earlobes and she was saying, 'All the world is a symphony!' You know, I mean, it's not. It's just not a symphony. It may be a lot of things, but it's just not a symphony.

**On women:**

I think for many women still one of the easiest choices is just to socially relax, and that will result in a house and a life and a washing machine. Just by relaxing a little. It's still very endemic to U.S. culture. A girl really has to work very hard to stop being a girl.

**On life:**

I don't know how the world works; I just know it doesn't work the way anybody ever told me it did, if you

understand what I mean.

My whole life has been one great big happy easy accident in which all of my stresses and neurotic reactions and unhappinesses have been complete luxury items that I can indulge in to whatever degree I find satisfying. In a way I wish everyone could have that choice.

\*

Shortly after Jerry's return from Newfoundland, we installed three air conditioners. This was no coincidence, of course. It had indeed seemed as though our summers were getting hotter, and we were getting older, too. I had continued to enlarge our vegetable garden year after year until this summer, when I began to find the struggle against the relentless heat, drought, and insects thankless. We gave up on the little curry plant: after bringing it inside for the previous two winters and keeping it under a plant light, we were only harvesting a few leaves each summer—and most recipes call for 10 or 12. I kept growing herbs, but we began buying Indian and Chinese vegetables at ethnic grocery stores in Dallas and Houston, and we picked up tomatoes, corn, beans, potatoes, onions, and okra from Canton-area farmers selling their produce at roadside stands.

The new air conditioning was a mixed blessing. We were more comfortable and had more energy, but we hated the noise of the units and our growing dependency on them. Jerry's Amiga computer was undeniably happy, though, to be in a regulated climate.

As a direct result of meeting Paul Panhuysen at New Music America in Houston, Jerry was invited to take his *Birome (Zone): Cube* installation to Holland. Although Jerry had received several foundation grants, the reduction of the amount of federal funding for the arts that began in the '80s meant that he, along with many other artists and composers, had to depend more and more on financial support from foreign countries. Most of Jerry's friends and colleagues traveled to Europe regularly for exhibitions and concerts of their work, and as he himself began to go, he often met them there and

sometimes shared programs with them.

Paul and his wife, Helene, operate Het Apollohuis (the Apollo House), a government-subsidized institution in Eindhoven (the home of Philips) that exists to promote the work of contemporary Dutch artists through both publications and events. In addition, Het Apollohuis invites artists from abroad, giving the Dutch direct exposure to work being done outside the Netherlands. Paul is himself a composer, and he and Jerry were later to collaborate in a work.

Several years before Jerry first visited them, Paul and Helene acquired an old warehouse not far from the city center. They converted the warehouse's office space into several apartments, occupying one, with their daughter, Sappho, and making the others available to the guests who came to show or perform their work there. Although the Dutch government has looked closely at Het Apollohuis in recent years as a part of its effort to reduce the arts subsidy generally, Paul and Helene and the hundreds of worldwide supporters who have written The Hague have apparently demonstrated that this institution is unique and indispensable.

Jerry was to be gone almost two months—the longest period of time we had been apart since my graduation from college. We packed the homunculus and its attendant electronics, leaving the actual construction of the cube to the exhibition halls that were to house the installation. (In addition to the exhibitions in Eindhoven and Middelburg, Jerry was to give concerts in Cologne, Berlin, Ghent, and Brussels.) He gave me copious and detailed instructions for tending to things here; he always did this when he went away, even for a day or two—a manifestation, I think, of a certain distaste for or unease at leaving home. He knew I would look after his mother.

What he didn't count on was getting sick at his first stop, Middelburg. At the time we believed he was suffering from a flu-like infection, but we later came to think he had pneumonia; in any case, Jerry spent most of his time in this picturesque Dutch town in

bed in his hotel.

He had been very busy during the months before he left. He had given a concert in New York ("Texas's Jerry Hunt is sufficient proof for me that beings from Neptune are infiltrating new music," Kyle Gann wrote in *The Village Voice*, January 12, 1988). In February he performed in St. Louis in the Sheldon ballroom and, again, in New York at the Alternative Museum ("*In his business suit and loosened red tie, furiously chewing gum, Jerry Hunt resembles a slightly wasted Wall Street commuter who has descended at the wrong station,*" according to Bernard Holland in the *New York Times*, February 19).

The gum was Nicorettes; Jerry was still trying to cut down on his smoking, without much success, sometimes chewing and smoking at the same time. And that "slightly wasted" makes me wonder whether he might not already have been ill. But in Middelburg he couldn't have had more considerate hosts:

*Anton & all others have been wonderful throughout the time so far—I feel better slowly, I'm not sure what it is that has caused such a slow recovery, everything at once I suppose.*

*The alderman carried me to Domburg & West Chapelle yesterday to see the coastal dunes & to stand on the very spots, each of them, where Mondrian stood & painted. In fact, the light there, & here too, is so bright & clear that it's no surprise to see the look of the old Dutch precise & clear painting.*

*I think most of the audience was left in a tumble of confusion from the program & the installation box. I'm trying to find some photographs of the place, de Vleeshal (the medieval meat-packers guildhall now converted into a museum, so you can see how monumental it is. My box looks like a little bit of left-over rubbish in the corner.... Middelburg land! all its surroundings, houses, etc., [are] all neat as a pin. At night, everyone's asleep by 11:00 &*

walking home is like being in a miniature movie set. As if that wasn't enough of the sense of close, they have a miniature of the area, in precise scale, in a park.

*Although everyone has treated me wonderfully in every way, I've seen it, I'd come home in a shot.*

*As I had expected, it's like a fixed-up, set-up Canton. Once you've seen a little, you've seen a lot. I'm not designed to be a tourist. This is all something like a very high-class military service: I've got to get through it, I'd rather let someone else do it all & tell me about it, show me slides, etc.... This is too long to be here alone, no matter how nice, yawn—*

As often seemed to happen, crises developed at home while Jerry was away. During the spring of 1988 both our friends Houston and Jill died; their joint funeral was over by the time Jerry returned.

Jill had always had moles on her fair skin, and over the years she had had the larger ones removed. There had never been a problem until 1986, when her doctor recommended a biopsy and discovered malignancy. Melanoma was diagnosed and Jill was given little encouragement about the prognosis.

The news of her condition came as a shock to her and Houston's family and friends—especially so since everyone was more or less prepared for Houston's earlier death; his hemophilia, with all the transfusions and blood products it had necessitated over the years, had affected his liver, and his knees and hips kept him in constant pain and made it difficult for him to walk.

*Your last letter came today. It made all we discussed the other day clearer.*

*I'm still sorry about the situation with Jill, particularly here alone—there's just time, time, time to think about her and the problems she continues to have...all complicated*

*by the fact that I felt terrible the first week here—I thought I might get into such a state as to require doctors.*

After his stay in Middelburg, Jerry went to Cologne and then to Eindhoven. Worrying about transportation, ever a problem with all his equipment and, now, with the need to deal with customs, and concerned about Jill and Houston, and not much enjoying sightseeing ("Get a book called *Holland* and look at it: it looks just like the books show"), Jerry must have been lonely and depressed a good deal of the time he was there. What alleviated the anxiety and the boredom was the interest he was developing in the Dutch people and their language.

*Bob would go crazy looking at these Dutch boys: they...look something like what he seems to like, although I'm not sure: they're not 'tough' looking, & when they get dressed up to look tough, they look 'tuff.'*

He pored over the Dutch and English Bible in his hotel room and bought a Dutch-English dictionary. He began speaking Dutch a little.

*I've finally begun to hear Dutch so I can see the words in print. I've watched some TV also: *Miami Vice* w/Dutch subtitles: that helps. I can now read magazines, etc. Today is also Thursday—*donderdag*—see? I know a word or *twee!**

Here in the letter he drew Mary and Frances, their tails out straight behind them, quizzical looks on their faces with question marks suspended above their heads.

*Poesje slim* means 'smart pussycat': try that on Frances ('*No comprendo!*').

He missed Frances, "his" cat, particularly:

*She likes some stirring around: walk around the house some: she's not like Mary. You have to work her some.*

And he wished I could be there to enjoy:

*the things you seem to like most: libraries, bookstores, parks (all along the canals)...there are*



*concerts every few nights.*

With Paul and Helene in Eindhoven, he found warm hosts and the ideal tutors of Dutch:

*Paul gave me some second-grade readers, so that has helped. I still don't get the sounds right, though. They have been very patient.... Because being here is like being with a family, it's a complete change from Middelburg.*

Jerry loved the rich pastries found everywhere in Holland, and he visited a nearby bakery often for almond cookies filled with marzipan. One afternoon he bought

*...a wonderful tart: a slightly cookie-like deep crust filled with an excellent cold cherry filling which was covered with a layer of the same pastry: on top of that was a layer of almond macaroon, cooked until crisp. That was topped with whipped cream & finally coated with light chocolate shavings.*

I had, myself, begun to take a greater interest in preparing food during the long time Jerry was away. Jerry had always been such a superb cook, I felt outclassed in the kitchen—and usually in the way. Alone now, I began practicing basic skills (I remember how proud I was of my first roux), and I started baking muffins and breads and sharing them with Mrs. Hunt and my friends at the library. I took some okra gumbo and cornbread to Houston and Jill's home—more for the sake of the other family members than for the two of them, now too ill to eat.

Houston had been hospitalized with jaundice and I visited him a few times in the intensive care unit. Jill was in a hospice program; she stayed at home and was no longer taking anything by mouth. She and Houston talked a time or two by phone. After Houston's death and interment, I went by to see her, to tell her how lovely the grave site looked in the shade of the mimosa tree. She lived another couple of weeks, and when she died a joint memorial service was held for her and her husband; a recording of her singing a

movement from Brahms' *Requiem* with the SMU symphony was played.

*I was surprised to hear that Houston had died.*

*I knew he was in serious trouble too. I think I've had Jill in mind so much that I'd forgotten how he looked in December. I suppose by the time you have this letter Jill will be dead too. It does seem like a daytime soap opera.*

*I fully expected never to see Jill again, but I did forget Houston. I hope he had my last letter. He was a sweet, gentle & generous friend for many years. I'd have stopped in NY years ago: he got me to London. It's odd that I'm here alone and he's dead.*

The concerts in Belgium and, especially, in Berlin went well; Jerry made friends there who would invite him back, and he was planning a collaboration with a Belgian artist, Maria Blondeel, shortly before he died. But the best part of Jerry's long sojourn was getting to know Paul and Helene and Sappho, and the young man, Peter de Rooden, who had just come to do his alternative national service at the Apollohuis. They spent hours at Paul and Helene's dining table, drinking coffee, enjoying the meals that Jerry was preparing more and more often, discussing art and politics, and speaking a little elementary Dutch (Jerry had to work hard on the difficult "g" sound).

*(Paul and Helene) are easily two of the nicest people I've ever met. When I returned from my shopping trip, I met Paul at the door; a light shower seemed about to start. He asked me to join him on a walk since he can't stand to be indoors during spring rains. We made it to a sidewalk cafe table, covered, just in time to avoid a downpour. I had forgotten how pleasant rain was once when I spent time in Mart. Although it was raining very hard, it was completely windless. The rain*

*falls straight down. After living in that horrible thrashing weather (in East Texas) for so long, I had forgotten that rain doesn't always bring terror.*

His descriptions of Holland and of the Dutch friends he had made excited my curiosity, and I began to hope that I could go there with him someday. One thing, though, was certain: we never wanted to be apart again for so long a time, and we never were.

*Give the cats big sloppy kisses & some fish, give yourself a big sloppy kiss, I miss you to the point of reading your letters over & over...*

\*

On my weekly trips to Athens to swim, I'd become curious about the Trinity Valley Community College there. Driving by the campus and seeing the students enter and leave the modest buildings stirred my old loves of school and of teaching, and I stopped one day to talk with the academic dean about the possibility of my teaching an English course there in the fall of 1988. As it happened, they needed additional faculty, but the dean suggested I consider participating in the college's extension program at a state prison a few miles south. The idea appealed to me.

A few months later I was in a college car with three other men (another English teacher, a speech teacher, and a teacher of civics), on my way to one of the state's maximum security facilities about 30 minutes from Athens. We entered the building under the gaze of the guard posted in the lookout tower above, and a turnkey admitted us to the cell block. A sign above the door reminded the guards (and us) that even a moment of relaxed vigilance could result in trouble or even tragedy.

Walking down the long prison corridor, trying not to stare back as the prisoners in their white uniforms stared at us, reminded me of my night in jail years ago. I was shocked then, as now, by the sudden entry into a netherworld of despair and desperation, ineffectually camouflaged by apparent cocky defiance.

Most of these men were black, a difference sinking that netherworld they inhabited a plane or two lower still from the height of being white and free. I felt wretched and ashamed being there, and I had to remind myself often, during the semester to come, that I had come to help.

The education wing consisted of four classrooms, two on either side of a common room used for waiting and smoking (this was before smoking was outlawed in state prisons). My students were already waiting for me in the classroom I had been assigned; these men had earned the right to enroll in the college extension program by good behavior (and because they had either finished high school or had earned an equivalency diploma). Twenty fellows, mostly young and black, regarded me with suspicion and some evident distaste; they attempted to conceal their true feelings by showing me a respect that, for some, was the same old Uncle Tomism that I had so often seen, since the time I worked with my father on the produce market. There were two prominent exceptions: a black man who sat in surly indifference in the back of the room, and a very young white man up front who would not meet my eyes.

I had the idea of writing a paragraph with them on the board, even before taking roll or issuing textbooks. I suppose I knew I had to prove myself, to show them that they'd get something out of the class that they could use. We settled on a topic, a few fellows contributed ideas and sentences here and there, and we revised the rough draft into a respectable brief composition, with thesis, logical development, and conclusion. By the end of the exercise, we'd forged a workable teacher-student relationship; we were going to be able to do business together because they knew I had something to offer them.

Most of them figured out I'm gay. I expected this, even tried to facilitate it in the way I introduced myself and by not reacting at all to the macho camaraderie that sometimes emerged whenever women came up in our discussion of the assigned readings. I think I made it easier for them by my honesty:

without suspicion, there wasn't much of an issue. I know I made it easier for myself, and in some strange way, I felt as though I were now putting right the sad wrong of my hypocrisy as a teacher in the prep school ten years earlier.

After the dropouts (some due to misrepresented qualifications), I ended up with about 15 men in my class. The range of abilities was huge, so I tried to work as much as I could with individual students, helping them outline their essays and pointing out errors in spelling, grammar, and usage. I began each 3-hour class at the blackboard, focusing on common errors (sometimes copying out sentences from papers turned in the previous week), then sketching a model of the type of essay we were to write that week and soliciting as much input from the class as possible. Sometimes I gave them tests on grammar and usage.

The last hour or so was a workshop. As the class revised returned compositions or began the newly assigned one, I called individuals up to discuss specific writing problems. One afternoon I was going over an essay I had corrected with my red-ink-filled fountain pen when I was startled by seeing a drop of blood fall onto the page. I glanced up at the face of the man sitting beside me and saw that he had apparently been in a fight, perhaps during the 10-minute break we had had before the last hour. "It's O.K. Go on," he ordered me. I did.

The warden and guards were barely tolerant of the college program. Classes were never allowed to interfere with prison routine. Students arrived late (once because they'd all been issued thongs to wear on their feet in the showers as a precaution against AIDS), and sometimes the guards showed up early to escort them to dinner. We just had to quit whatever we were doing. On two occasions my colleagues and I arrived to find our classes canceled due to prison-wide lockdowns. There was never any chalk on the blackboard trays; I began bringing my own—as well as pencils and paper for those men who would sometimes come without supplies

(I never asked why.) The isolation cells were in an adjacent wing, and the yells of the men being punished there could be heard in my classroom.

I got into trouble with the prison and the college. So that the class could retain their compositions (and learn from past mistakes, in addition to seeing their progress), I got permission from the English department chair to issue the white Trinity Valley Community College folders with the school's mascot, a red cardinal, on the front. These folders became hot items in the prison community; soon every college program enrollee wanted one, and they began asking the other teachers for them. Having one of these folders conferred special status and, accordingly, undermined the prison hierarchy. A sudden halt was called to issuing folders by means of a memo sent to all the faculty.

It was good to be teaching again, planning lessons and even grading tests and marking essays. I spent a lot of time working at home, and my class worked hard in response. During the second half of the semester, I distributed copies of one of the essays I had received the week before to use as a model for analysis. The men in my class got a kick out of being "published."

The surly black man finally came round, and not surprisingly he turned out to be one of the smartest members of the class—not as smart, though, as the shy white fellow up front. He was a Californian who had been convicted of selling drugs, he later told me, while passing through Texas. He had another year in prison, after which he hoped to transfer to a University of California campus. He asked me to help him arrange to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (for college admission), and I found out that the test was periodically given to the incarcerated at a regional testing center. The only question was, would the prison provide transportation for him. I never learned the answer.

The best writer in the group was a soft-spoken young black man whose compositions were too good to be useful as models for the class. One of his essays described his room

at home, when he was a boy: the dark, airless bedroom at the back of the house, with its faded floral wallpaper peeling from the upper corners and the massive old furniture, once belonging to his grandmother, that in the twilight or early morning looked like gods watching over him— or beasts lying in wait. This was the fellow who had bled at my desk.

Jerry never wanted me to teach in prison. He was afraid something would happen to me, and his fear was heightened by a report he heard on the radio one day about a prison librarian having been taken hostage in a facility near Houston. He always seemed relieved when I drove in, just after dark. I hadn't planned to teach the next spring because we had a couple of trips planned. As it turns out, I never went back. But I was glad to have helped over a dozen people earn college credit. And I was aware that Jerry was proud of me; that mattered almost as much.

\*

Arriving at daybreak in an unfamiliar foreign country after a night of travel is a magical experience: with no cues for habitual behavior and the biological clock disturbed, everything looks unreal, dream-like. I'd flown from Houston (where I'd left Mary and Frances with Bob and Rany) to Amsterdam, having been held back from departing with Jerry when he left a couple of weeks earlier by my teaching duties. I was to join him now for over two weeks in Holland at Christmastime.

Jerry had been invited to participate in a new music festival in Rotterdam, where he met Karen Finley—and the two of them hit it off so well, the seed for a future collaboration was planted on the spot. Then he was to give a concert at the Apollohuis in Eindhoven, where I was to join him in Paul and Helene's third-floor guest flat.

With an odd mixture of exhilaration and fatigue, I took the subway from Schipol Airport to the Centraal Station in Amsterdam, and then I rode a train south to Eindhoven. The fields of grazing dairy cattle were scored by irrigation canals that had

been lined by rows of poplars, the villages with their tile-roof dwellings emerged from the mist as we passed by, and an occasional windmill could be spotted in the distance: all this comprised my magical landscape, and the fantasy element was only strengthened by the incomprehensible language the passengers around me were speaking.

Paul and Helene were the gracious hosts and the wonderful people Jerry had prepared me to expect. I could see right away how fond they had become of him, how much they enjoyed being in his company. Helene's unobtrusive efficiency and ironic sense of humor and Paul's intellectual curiosity and slightly distracted manner made for a very appealing combination, assuring comfortability and yet promising adventure. Although the age difference between them and Jerry was not that great, the Panhuysens are a great deal like Jerry's parents were. No wonder he came to love them. And just like parents, they were mentors for him, guides to a new country and a strange language.

After Jerry's concert at the Apollohuis, where I met and instantly liked Peter de Rooden, Jerry and I had a week for sightseeing before we were to fly home. There was some talk about planning excursions with others, with Peter and the composers Arnold Dreyblatt and Ellen Fullman, but I, privately, asserted my right to see Holland with Jerry, to discover it with him. With other people he was a bit of a performer; I wanted him to be the relaxed companion I loved—and I wanted him to myself. I couldn't explain all of this very well, and we exchanged a few sharp words and a threat or two, but we finally compromised on a plan to visit Peter in Groningen, his home in the north, and then return south and west to Zeeland on our own. Paul and Helene offered to let us keep Jerry's equipment in the flat until we returned to take the train to Amsterdam and the flight home.

At the end of a day of sightseeing in Groningen, we booked passage on a ferry to Schiermonnikoog ("grizzled monk's cowl"), the smallest inhabited Wadden island; only

residents are allowed to keep and drive cars on it. We took the *voetgangersstraat* (walkway) from the dock to the village, minding the *fietsers overtrekken* (cyclists' crossings) that everywhere in Holland testify to the bicycle's importance there—and that can be sites of embarrassing accidents if you don't look out (*pas op!*) for them.

We rambled through the village, admiring the fastidiously neat gardens and enjoying the unexpected animal encounters (dogs and cats, mostly, but also a goat tethered to a shed in the back of a house). After lunch, we walked to the lighthouse near the dunes along the isolated north end of the island. We had read that half of all the plants that grow in Holland can be found on this island, and there were indeed many unusual-looking wildflowers and grasses, even in December. We stood and looked out to the North Sea, our heavy coats welcome against the cold wind. We imagined what it might be like living in such a secluded spot, perhaps settling in the lighthouse. It seemed an attractive prospect. It was fun picturing Mary and Frances racing up and down the lighthouse stairs.

We were in Amsterdam over Christmas, staying in the gay-owned Hotel Engeland (so named because of its architecture, a British-looking structure in a row of houses that reflects a variety of national styles). Our room was at the top; its windows opened onto the street, and I moved a chair there one morning to read what I could of *De Telegraaf*. I ran across the obituaries and my attention was called to a simple black-bordered notice in the center of the page announcing a man's death; "no flowers, no memorials," it said in Dutch—and then:

*Ik heb u in mijn handpalmen gegrift.  
(I have you engraved in the palm of  
my hand.)*

I was struck by the simple eloquence of the statement and committed it to memory.

On Christmas Eve I attended a free sing-along concert of carols and hymns at the Concertgebouw, just a few blocks away. After a few songs, I felt I had to explain to the man next to me that I wasn't singing only

because I knew no Dutch. Jerry declined to accompany me ("Why would I want to go there?"), and he called his mother while I was gone. When I returned, we ventured out to find a store open late (always a challenge in Holland) where we could buy something to eat. We returned to our room with some cheese, dark bread, and beer and celebrated the occasion, if not the holiday.

When we went down for breakfast, we found the small dining room freshly decorated for Christmas; there was even a big, red bow on the just-filled bird feeder in the garden beyond the windows. The other guests who had come down before us were enjoying champagne (on the house) with their juice and coffee.

Our table was located near those of two English-speaking couples, as it turned out: the women were over from London for the holiday, and the American men were on their way to Innsbruck for skiing. This was the first Christmas Jerry and I had ever had away from our families and apart from the usual round of gift-exchanging.

We enjoyed the difference.

We visited the Rijksmuseum, toured the canals by boat, ate hot *stroopwafels* (*syrup-filled wafers*) on the Leidseplein, and drank beer in a "brown cafe" (pub). While Jerry met with Jim and Mary Fulkerson (the composer and his dancer wife were now living and working in Holland), I swam in the old Zwembad near the Rijksmuseum. After dressing, I took a picture of the ornate tiling around the pool; an attendant rushed up and explained to me that what I had done was not permitted ("for the privacy of our guests"), and I stumbled an apology.

An afternoon's train ride took us to Vlissingen, in extreme southwestern Holland, where we spent a few nights in the modest Pension Golflslag ("wash of the waves"), a bed-and-breakfast catering to the many Germans who come on holiday to the seaside town, with its busy harbor and ferry service to England. From this home base, we took a train east to Middelburg to spend an afternoon there seeing De Vleeshal, where Jerry's installation had been earlier in the

year. We attended a terrible piano recital, but we had a sumptuous rijsttafel at a Dutch-Indonesian restaurant afterwards.

The next day we took the ferry across to Breskens, where we got a bus to Brugge (Bruges). We rode a boat through the canals of this medieval city, watched a very old lady make lace, and bought some expensive chocolate candy for dessert. (Reading Alan Hollinghurst's *The Folding Star* just a few months ago brought back a lot of the places, as well as the atmosphere, of this strange old town.)

On New Year's Eve we left the Golfslag late and went out to find a little festivity. To our amazement, the town was dead: the streets were deserted, the cafes and bars all closed, and from what we could see through the drawn lace curtains in the windows, the people were all at home watching TV. We walked along the dock, aware in the still cold that midnight was near. All of a sudden we heard the blasts of the distant ships' horns, just as the lights on their masts and rigging came on to greet one another at the beginning of the New Year. It was a magical moment, one we said we would remember always as we lay later in one of the twin beds, plenty big for such a cold night, in our tiny room.

Our trips brought us together, renewed the intimacy we took for granted as we pursued our separate interests at home. The close quarters of the barn house intensified the need we felt for privacy: it became important for us—and for me, particularly—to have our own spaces. I was determined to make good use of the four days a week I had at home, and I got up early and spent the morning hours working on Spanish, listening to the *Puerta del Sol* tapes I received from Spain each month, reading Spanish-language newspapers and magazines, and translating a few poems and short stories. My three weeks in San Miguel del Allende, Mexico, in the summer of 1988 (where I attended concerts in the chamber music festival) had reawakened my interest in speaking Spanish, and I made weekly trips to converse in the language with Rita, a native of Monterrey, then living with

her family in a trailer not far from Athens.

As a night person, Jerry awoke around noon each day. We'd spend the afternoon doing chores and running errands, and our only sit-down meal was in the evening, around six. I cooked for us more and more often; Jerry would go over to visit with his mother while I prepared dinner, and sometimes I would have to call him on the intercom to tell him that dinner was ready. My meals were simple ones, nut loaves and macaroni and cheese and steamed vegetables—although Rita had taught me how to make my own corn tortillas, and we'd have those with chile rellenos stuffed with TVP-based picadillo and Negra Modelo beer every week or two.

In the evenings, while I read or listened to music, Jerry would work at his computer and synthesizers. He had entered "the netherworld of interaction using a variety of videodisc retrieval mechanisms, with associated program changes," as he wrote our English friend Jacqueline. He also continued working on music for educational TV series. When he wasn't listening to sounds, he'd listen to TV using his earplugs, occasionally looking up from his work at the monitor to see what was going on. He especially liked horror movies, shown usually in the early morning hours.

Toward the end of his work-'day, he'd turn to Dutch. His conversations with Paul and Helene and Peter in and about the language had strengthened the interest in it that had emerged during his long stay in Middelburg. Jerry had discovered Marten Toonder, probably through Paul, and he enjoyed reading about the adventures of the quixotic, bumbling bear Heer Bommel and his sagacious sidekick, Tom Poes (rhymes with ruse) the cat. These adventures frequently took place in a fantasy realm illustrated by the cartoon panels at the top of each page of the text.

I gave Jerry a subscription to *Donald Duck* in Dutch (as a boy Jerry had especially loved that cartoon figure), and each week the thin magazines would arrive in their plastic bags all the way from Haarlem. Sometimes when I got up, I'd find Jerry sitting at the vanity

table in the bathroom reading about the latest crisis befalling *Oom* (Uncle) Donald and his nephews, *Kwik*, *Kwek*, and *Kwak*, just before going to bed. (Jerry slept only five or six hours a night.)

One week an issue of *Donald Duck* arrived stuck to a second copy addressed to a boy in Houston (the plastic mailers had adhered to one another). Since Jerry and I were planning a trip to Houston that next week to visit Bob and Rany, we decided to take the magazine with us and deliver it by hand. Months earlier we had discovered a Dutch grocery and gift shop in Houston, and the address label on the second issue of *Donald Duck* bore the same zip code as the Holland House. We'd planned to visit the store anyway, to stock up on *stroopwafels*, *boterkoek* (butter cake), *Oude* (old) Amsterdam cheese, and *bosvruchten* (forest berry) tea.

We found the child's address, and I went to the door to deliver the magazine while Jerry waited in the car. There was no one home, and I returned to the car to suggest to Jerry that we just leave the magazine in the door with a note explaining how we had gotten it and why it was late. While we were looking for something to write on, three or four elementary school-age boys came walking down the street and approached the house. I jumped out of the car and asked if the comic book I was holding up might belong to one of them. Rather self-consciously, one of the fellows admitted that it did. I explained why we had it and gave it to him; he thanked me, and he and his friends went indoors.

Jerry and I had fun telling about this innocent little episode with its sinister overtones. I suggested he join the *Oom* Donald Fan Club as a way of meeting other Dutch children, and if his letter should get the *Brief* (letter) *van de Week* award, with his picture published in the magazine, he'd be sure to be popular with the *jongens*. When we told Marten Bal, the owner of the Holland House, about our escapade, he explained that there are quite a few families in the area with one or both Dutch-speaking parents, having relocated to Houston as a result of the oil business Shell conducts with the

Netherlands. These parents, Marten told us, often try to preserve their heritage by speaking Dutch at home—where, I suspect, most kids prefer to keep it.

We began making regular trips to Tyler, about 45 minutes east, to shop, have dinner, and sometimes go to the movies. We'd compare Spanish and Dutch linguistic notes on the beautiful drive through the pines, each of us interested in the other's interest in his adopted language if not so much in the language itself. On our way home, driving into the sunset, we'd talk about our more serious concerns—sensing, I suppose, that then was the time to talk, before we got home and we allowed our habits to overtake us again. Were we really doing what we wanted to do? Was living in Europe, in Holland or Belgium, a viable alternative? What would happen to Jerry's mother? Would she be able to live independently much longer? Where was Jerry's career headed? Shouldn't it take a new direction, and, if so, what would that be? And why did he feel so bad so much of the time?

After giving concerts in Boston and Los Angeles in early 1989, Jerry participated in the Almeida Festival in London that summer. He stayed with Jacqueline and her daughter, Emma, while he was there, and in his letter thanking them for their hospitality he wrote:

*...I returned here sick: I've had allergic problems of increasing intensity and frequency for the past four or five years; the allergic problem (to some very local plant, I think a grass) works in interaction with my peculiarly designed sinuses: any mild infection along with the strain of travel, etc., leads to a major attack: I've had several terrible stretches of misery after spring or summer airplane flights (the compression changes in the airplane seem to complicate the problem beyond some limit of immune tolerance, and I get really sick instead of having a mild cold). I'm finally getting at the bottom of it, though:*

*I've made friends with the doctor here who has me on a series of investigative trials of drugs for the allergic reactions and has me next week on the latest in smoking control, a skin-patch-release nicotine system with tranquilizers, etc., etc.—an all-out war: Stephen can't stand cigarettes anymore, and my body can't take them much longer, I have early stages of emphysema already.*

Jerry was caught in two cycles that he knew and admitted were self-destructive. Due to his physical addition to nicotine, he couldn't quit smoking, and the more he smoked the more damage he did to his already compromised lungs. As the chronic obstructive pulmonary disease worsened, he was even more susceptible to allergens—to the Bahia grass in our pasture, or whatever it was that always made him feel worse here at home. The more he suffered from allergic reactions (often complaining of an intolerable pressure in his sinuses), the more irritable and depressed he became, and the more he craved tobacco, the nervous habit he had built up over three decades. Dr. Morris tried to help him break free of these cycles by prescribing tranquilizers, but that didn't work very well either because Jerry hated the way they made him feel—and in a "dopey" state, he couldn't do his work.

I, however, was grateful for the tranquilizers, at first. It had become hard to get along with Jerry at times. Feeling bad, frustrated, and angry, he would throw violent fits, slamming and banging things around, and sometimes yelling abuse at me (who else?). We visited our old friend Peggy in Corpus Christi the Christmas after George, her husband, died, and she saw one of Jerry's outbursts up close. He wanted cigarettes (probably having put off buying more as long as he could), and I was driving. I saw a service station at a busy intersection and began trying to plan my route to it. I made a wrong turn, and we were delayed at a traffic light. He was beside himself, threatening to get out of the car and walk through traffic to

the cigarette machine that was tantalizingly close. Peggy was startled, even a little shaken, I think, at the virulence of his angry, abusive outburst.

It happened several times that we would start out for a few days in Houston, the car packed and Mary and Frances waiting in their kennels in the back seat, and Jerry's mood was so bad I nearly aborted the trip: the thought of being with him in the car for over four hours was intolerable. But, as we headed east, then south, the cloud would lift, and Jerry himself would remark at how much better he had begun to feel, having left behind whatever it was here that affected him so.

Although I never seriously took his outbursts personally, I was sometimes embarrassed when they occurred in the presence of our friends. If we had words later, Jerry was always quick to apologize and I to accept, and there the matter ended. The worst times, though, were when we were alone together: he'd flare up and I'd go off by myself (to my study, to the yard, and, once, to a rest stop on the highway four miles away), thus protracting, and magnifying, the incident.

I realize now that I gradually developed the habit of gauging Jerry's mood whenever I returned from a day of work in Dallas:

What was he doing when I came in? What had he been doing? How did he seem? If I ever tried to cheer him up, or merely distract him, he'd lash out at me, or withdraw. We simply didn't have very much control over what was happening, given his illness and our natures.

Each week I had my "day out" in Athens, swimming in the athletic center and visiting Rita and Modesto to practice my Spanish. I usually stayed late in Dallas one night a week, having dinner with my library friends Marsha, Jim, and Dick. And I had begun taking car trips with Uncle Henry and Aunt Hazel: twice to Idaho to see Judy and her family, and several times to scenic areas in Texas and adjacent states. Jerry seemed happy for me to have these diversions; nothing in our relationship changed, fundamentally.



There were superficial differences, however. For one, I was doing most of the cooking now. I won't pretend that this didn't occasionally spark little explosions between us; things went better when Jerry went over to visit with his mother while I cooked. And for another, and for a change, if one of us resisted sexual overtures, it was now more often he.

\*

Jerry's appearance with Karen Finley during the New Music America '89 held in New York was the first of several collaborations in which Jerry and another composer/performance artist shared creative responsibility. He had many times used others in his work: Sally Bowden and Jane Van Sickle, dancing; James Fulkerson on trombone, Joseph Celli on oboe, and Guy Klucevsek on accordion; and Rod Stasick and Michael Galbreth acting. Working with Karen was something different—perhaps a new direction.

Kyle Gann's review of the first Finley-Hunt collaboration in *The Village Voice* for December 12th reflected what a lot of Jerry's fans felt:

*I couldn't imagine how these two weirdos would work together at Merkin Hall, but they each did what they do separately, and somehow the combination was inspired. Finley, as usual, obliterated the life/art barrier:*

*'I don't know why they booked us on electronic music night. I wanted to play BAM [the Brooklyn Academy of Music], but this is what I got.'* After throwing chocolate candy at the audience, she screamed one of her repetitive, slice-of-life poems, ending *'Whenever I see a rainbow in the sky, I just see an angel being raped.'* Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Hunt shook rattles and bells, played with mirrors, and blew through a shofar in surreal antiphony. It was unexplainable and irreducible, like most of life's significant events.

Karen and Jerry became fast friends and

began planning a future joint appearance. He was grateful, as he told me, for the chance to work with her, both because her following would increase the size of his own audience and because her creative energy stimulated his own. This latter, of course, was a common theme that ran throughout Jerry's work; as he told Gordon Monahan:

*Every performance that I do, and every compositional gimmick or technique or structure that I use, is based on [a] model of conversational interaction.*

In the fall of 1991 Jerry was a resident artist and guest teacher at the Hogeschool voor Kunst (college of art, or conservatory) in Arnhem, Holland. The international students who attended his "workshops on himself" must have been deeply engaged by the "conversational interaction," judging by the correspondence he continued to receive from them. A young woman and man from Finland wrote regularly (and when I informed them of Jerry's death, they sent me a beautiful card with a Finnish wildflower on the cover). Jerry was to have returned to the Hogeschool in the fall of 1993, but his health wouldn't let him. It was the first engagement he had ever had to cancel.

Had he lived longer, Jerry would have collaborated with three other artists: Joel Ryan, a composer and software designer based in Amsterdam; Maria Blondeel, an artist and composer in Ghent; and Michael Schell, a video artist in New York. He had begun making plans with each of these on interactive projects, some using optical discs. In time, a couple of these projects may be realized, using the notes and stored sounds and images Jerry left behind.

\*

Mrs. Hunt had always done close work. My earliest memories of her, from the late '50s, have her sitting in a chaise longue in the den doing embroidery; when I spent the night with Jerry, I noticed that she always went to bed with a book. After Mr. Hunt's death, she took up painting. As she became more and more housebound in her 70s, she watched TV a lot of the time. When she learned she had

cataracts on both eyes, she was determined to have lens transplants—both because she knew she couldn't remain independent unless she could see, and because she had come to realize how constricted her world had become and she wanted to do something about it.

Jerry worried a great deal about her. It was hard to see this intelligent, gregarious lady spend her days in front of TV. It had become just about all she could do to prepare simple meals, do her laundry, and pay her bills. Getting ready to go anywhere had become such a chore that leaving the house rarely seemed worth the effort. So, we encouraged her to have the surgery. Jerry carried her to the doctor for the preliminary visits and to the hospital in Kaufman for the procedure on the first eye. In time she could see so much better out of that eye that she was eager to have the other one operated on.

Her physical condition, otherwise, had worsened. She was not able to manage her diabetes, and she felt bad a great deal of the time. She went into a diabetic coma one afternoon, and after that she began getting help at home from visiting nurses, who not only monitored her diabetes but prepared hot lunches on the days they came.

Jerry returned from giving a concert on the tenth anniversary of the Apollohuis in time to help his mother through surgery on the second eye. Although she still wanted to have the operation, she became increasingly anxious about it as the date grew nearer. The Canton doctor even prescribed a mild tranquilizer for her, but she had to stop taking it because the medicine made her so sleepy. On the morning of the day the surgery was scheduled, she awoke us—over an hour before the time she and Jerry had arranged to leave—by honking her car horn in one long blast.

Jerry had alerted the ophthalmologist to his mother's diabetic condition, and he assured us that that would not be a complication. The surgery went well, and Jerry shortly left for Vienna to participate in the music festival *Tone und Gegentone* in March, 1991. I had agreed to take Mrs. Hunt in for a

postoperative checkup in a couple of weeks, and the visiting nurses were maintaining a regular schedule. Mrs. Hunt's friends, particularly a retired school nurse, Clyta, called every few days.

One cold Sunday morning Clyta came to my door to tell me that Mrs. Hunt wasn't doing well. The visiting nurse arrived just as I did, and we were both alarmed by the weakened state Mrs. Hunt was in. We were also a little surprised by her telling us that she didn't think she could make it alone, even with the help she had, any longer. I knew well of her distaste for nursing homes; that she was considering going to one startled me and made me see more clearly the condition she was in. She talked about how helpless she had become, and we could all see how anxious she was. If she could check herself into one of the Canton nursing homes for just a month and regain her strength, then she could come back home. That she hadn't given up seemed clear to me by the fact that, whatever else she might have let go, she stayed on top of the eye-drop regimen the surgeon had prescribed.

We called Jerry from her bedside. I could tell he was surprised by her decision, but he thought her plan was for the best if she did. Since I had to work in Dallas that afternoon, Clyta took her to the nursing home and helped with the paperwork.

She seemed to be doing a little better early in the week. A good sign was that she'd begun going to the central lounge to read at night (her roommate probably turned in early, as did most of the residents). However, when I went by Wednesday to take her to the ophthalmologist, I found her dazed-seeming and disoriented.

We had a hard time getting her dressed, and she wasn't able to tell me where the doctor's office was (in fact, she directed me to the wrong clinic).

The office staff could see how weak and confused she was, so they agreed to have the doctor examine her before her turn. I don't know why the ophthalmologist wasn't more alarmed at her condition; it was all Mrs. Hunt could do to read the letters on the chart

—and for lack of the ability to concentrate, not see.

The eye had healed well, though, and we were sent on our way.

When we got back to the nursing home, I had to have help getting her out of the car.

Clyta called me after dinner that night concerned that Mrs. Hunt seemed to be growing weaker still and was drifting in and out of consciousness. By the time I got there, the ambulance had arrived. When Clyta and I got to the hospital in Kaufman, we learned that she had been put in a critical care unit; an electrocardiogram revealed that she had had a heart attack—perhaps more than one. Female diabetics, we were told, are prone to "silent" heart attacks.

I called Jerry when it was morning in Vienna, and the hotel staff found him at breakfast. He had been sick too, the usual result of the strain of travel and the pressure changes and stale air in the airplane. He was feeling better, though, and I encouraged him to go on with the concert as planned but to try to get an earlier flight home if he could. His mother's condition appeared to have been stabilized.

Bob met Jerry's plane in Houston and drove him home, and he arrived exhausted from a transatlantic flight and a 4-hour car ride. Bob stayed with us for a couple of days, and during our hospital visits the three of us often stood looking out the windows at the east end of the second floor corridor onto the green lawn and newly leafed-out trees—a view I was to have, in another season, two and one-half years later.

By the time Jerry returned, they had put Mrs. Hunt in a private room; she was still on a heart monitor, however. We left after spending the evening with her Wednesday with the expectation that she would be returning to the nursing home soon. The hospital called early the next morning with the news that she had had another heart attack, and when we got there the internist explained that the attack had seriously damaged the heart muscle and the prognosis was poor. He went over with Jerry the living will that I had given him the previous week.

There were to be no "heroics."

When she died they called us in and left us alone in the room with her. I held Jerry and cried with him, just as he had with me when my mother died almost 12 years earlier.

Before Jerry had gotten back from Vienna, I was at Mrs. Hunt's bedside in critical care one afternoon, moistening her lips and combing her hair. She became animated all of a sudden, opening her eyes wide and asking how Jerry's concert had gone and when he would be back. I answered her questions, and she went on to talk about Jerry in the amused, mock-impatient manner she used to employ with me years ago when we'd discuss his obsessive devotion to his work and his "impracticality." I felt an access of love for her then, a renewal of the feeling that she early on evoked in me when my own love for her son let me see that she and I shared something extraordinary.

There was no church service; instead, Jerry and I invited Mrs. Hunt's many friends, both from Canton and from Dallas, to come to the house for a memorial gathering. The violets she had planted soon after the house was built were blooming at the front door, and her irises (most brought from the yard in Casa View), were just beginning to open. We put the text of an American Indian prayer she liked on the piano.

As she had done when Mr. Hunt died, Jerry cleaned her house from top to bottom. He spent hours examining the accumulation of her lifetime: letters and photographs, boxes of fabric remnants and buttons and craft supplies, and personal mementos, some of which meant nothing to him or to me. Jerry was never able to deal with her clothes; several months later, I took them to Goodwill, leaving only a couple of items—a party apron, a black shawl that Mrs. Hunt had crocheted—that Jerry had caught me bagging and rescued.

The sad time was not without its dark comedy. When we went to the Canton funeral home to make the arrangements for the cremation, an elderly employee with rheumy eyes met us at the door and commiserated with Jerry over the loss of his mother. "I

used to send her my *Upper Rooms* [devotional pamphlets] as soon as I'd finished with them. I hope they helped her in her suffering." Jerry and I both thought it unlikely that his mother had received these pamphlets, but we thanked her anyway. Then, in the funeral director's office, we were told that the expenses would be paid from a "pre-need" account that Mrs. Hunt had established years earlier. This was news to us, but we were touched by her forethought.

A week later we went back to the funeral home to pick up the "cremains" and take them to be interred in the Mart cemetery. We learned then that there had been another Mrs. Hunt (Ruth, though) who had recently died, and she was the one with the pre-need account (and the stack of *Upper Rooms*).

The funeral director in Mart had told us to bring an interment certificate along with the ashes, but no such paperwork had come from the crematorium. We stood in the office—Jerry, I, and the two clerks—examining the contents of the plastic receptacle, looking for the needed form. I pulled the plastic bag containing the cremains out of the box, thinking the slip of paper might have been inserted at the other, sealed end. The bag was loosely closed with a piece of paper-covered wire, and it almost came open as I lifted it out. "Watch out—you'll spill her all over the floor," Jerry said—to the uneasy amusement of the office ladies. But we found no certificate, so we had to call the crematorium and have them mail one directly to the cemetery.

We made our trip to Mart with the ashes. Jerry had wrapped the receptacle in a piece of silk he had brought his mother from India in 1975, and we met the undertaker (the same man who had handled Mr. Hunt's funeral arrangements: "Fish Paw," Mrs. Hunt called him, for his limp handshake), and he "opened" the grave with a post-hole digger. The receptacle would not go down. "It's probably the cloth—hangs it up, somehow," Fish Paw said. Jerry removed the silk.

After French fries and Cokes at the Mart Dairy Queen, Jerry led me on a sentimental (and farewell) journey to the places he had

known as a boy. He showed me the house from whose second story he and his cousin Ronnie used to entertain passing motorists with their spooky light show. We drove over to Waco to see the movie house where he watched the science fiction serials he loved on Saturday mornings. We found where the ice cream parlor used to be, and we located Jerry's old school. I could picture him so easily standing curbside in his coat, waiting for his mother to come pick him up over an hour before dismissal on the day Mrs.

Quay had said, "You may go now, Jerry."

The place that most excited my imagination, however, was the radio and TV repair shop where Jerry used to get the parts he needed to finish the electronics course that his grandfather had ordered and then abandoned. The tiny structure—a shack, really—had long since been boarded up. I could see Jerry going by there after school, or after the movies on Saturday, or off and on during the long summer vacation, buying or trading for parts. I expect the repairman gave him quite a lot, tickled to see the bright boy take such a serious interest in the subject.

I went out to the storage house the other day to find a wall switch. I sat, for the first time, at Jerry's electronics workbench, taking in the piles of resistors and capacitors, the circuit boards, and the equipment that Jerry had cannibalized and left stacked in the corners. Jerry's father's golf trophies sat among the cobwebs on the windowsill, and his mother's early oil paintings stood in the corner of an open closet. They were three very different people who yet shared a huge capacity for enthusiasm that impresses me, still, in my gratitude.

\*

Over the course of the next year, Jerry moved his study to the back bedroom of the brick house. (He kept his library in the barn house.) He made wooden shelves and work tables for his audio and videotapes and his equipment, "torching" the wood to darken it and bring out the grain. For the first time since we had begun living together, he was able to produce sound at any time of the day or night without having to worry about

disturbing me. With some of the money Mrs. Hunt left, Jerry was able to buy new electronic equipment. He finally had the professional set-up he needed to do his own work, as well as whatever commercial jobs might come his way.

And he rediscovered the piano, seldom played in the last years during Mrs. Hunt's illness and now in need of extensive repair to the action. A piano technician came out from Dallas and did some work, but to bring the instrument back to a really good condition, he said, would require several thousand dollars.

Since we were now going back and forth so much, I laid a steppingstone walkway (275 blocks!) through the post oak trees between the two houses. Often when I'd go to get him to come over for dinner, I'd hear Jerry playing the piano from a distance. He had become interested in Zez Confrey's rags and novelty pieces from the 1920s, and I'd stop to listen to "Kitten on the Keys" or "Poor Buttermilk" or "You Tell 'Em, Ivories"—punctuated, of course, by regular outbursts of temper when he failed to execute a rough passage satisfactorily.

I had become interested in the fortepiano, and Jerry shared my enthusiasm for the music of George Frederick Pinto, a member of the London Pianoforte School of the late 1700s. Sometimes, instead of rags, or Cage, or Scriabin, I'd find Jerry playing one of Pinto's sonatas; then, I'd sit for as long as he would play, in "Leto's chair" (the one with the low seat) beside the keyboard.

When the weather grew warm in the spring of '92, Jerry's allergies and attendant breathing problems really began to bother him. On occasion the temper outbursts at the piano were due not to mistakes but to his not

having the strength, or "wind," to get through a piece. He finally got to feeling so bad and so desperate that he agreed to go back to the doctor in Canton.

I knew he had lost weight, but neither of us realized he had lost so much; the clinic record was irrefutable. The doctor assumed the jocular but candid manner he had always employed with Jerry, never one to appreciate the rhetoric of medical care-giving. "You either have a viral infection aggravated by allergies and emphysema or you have lung cancer. Since an infection is easier and cheaper to treat, let's start there."

I waited in the car while Jerry went to Eckerd's to have a prescription for antibiotics filled. "Cancer." I watched the people going in and coming out of Wal-Mart, the kids waiting for corny dogs at the little stand in front of the shopping strip, and I watched myself watching—and the film I was watching that was my life broke: all that I had seen so far wound tight and flapping on the take-up reel, and all that was to come spilling off the spool in a useless pile on the floor.