WINTER'S CHILD

BY AUDREY GRESCO

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRUCE JOHNSTON

When the dismal winter rains come to
Vancouver, I like to think about the
umbrella manufacturer who started
his business in Toronto in 1918. In the
winter of 1935, when umbrella sales
were slow, he traveled by train to the
West Coast to_erect a raincoat he'd
heard about Vancouver. When he got
off the train, it was raining. A week
tele, when he got on the train again,
it was still raining. Back home he told
his family that he was taking them to
paradise. His sons are still here, sell-
ing umbrellas and smiling a lot all
winter.

Not many people can find much in
a Vancouver winter to make them
smile. When the Pacific storms come,
they usually settle in like God's wrath.
People whom the sun hasn't shone
for 60 days meet and grip together for
a moment, consoling one another
with the only happy winter thought
that West-Coasters can imagine: "Well,
at least you don't have to shovel the
stuff!" But I would prefer a
little more cold and snow. I was born
in Ontario on the first day of winter,
and for me cold weather was an
annual birthday gift. Whenever there
was snow on the ground I was born
ant as a helium balloon. I used to
imagine that I might find a place
where I could live in perpetual winter.
I would gladly have gone there to
avoid the blast-furnace heat and the
steam-room humidity that I though
were inevitable in summer.

As an adult I've discovered that the
Canadian winter isn't just the one I
knew as a child in southern Ontario.
London, Toronto and Hamilton have
big blizzards and freezing rain and some very cold days, a winter that might have been the creation of a press agent looking for national headlines. But on the Prairies, where the weather is less spectacular, you find real winter, with cold that cracks metal and turns concrete to dust and makes you feel the planet is inimical to human life. In the last decade I've had such a winter in Calgary and several dreary ones in Vancouver, and I'm homesick now for the blue-and-white, just below-freezing, shimmering, sunny days of my childhood in Hamilton.

My earliest vivid memory is of a day like that. I'm four years old and so is World War II. The day follows a night during which I was certain more snow fell than would ever again fall into my childhood. On that new morning, I step outside behind my father and plume to my knees in this strange element that traps me and supports me. My father, never one to coddle, leaves me to solve my problem as he works, building mountains on either side of the walk. When he's done, I tread a corridor with walls of white; I can see nothing but snow and sky. And then my father begins to tunnel into the mountains, and he makes a burrow for me, and I nest there until Dad shifts me with an icicle thought:

“You'd better come out; it may fall on you.” We go inside and stoke the coal furnace and eat cream of mushroom soup for lunch.

Because we were hardly ever interrupted by cars, the children in my neighborhood played in the snow on the street. Intermittently someone would send up that long, drawn-out, siren cry, “Car coming!” and we'd scutter to the curbs and stare at the driver as though we were part of a parade. In winter, after a good snowfall, we went sledging. You'd stuff your wooden glider to your chest and run as fast as you could, and then you'd fling yourself down on top of the sled all in one smooth forward motion, like a bazooka landing on water, and with any luck, you'd glide for two metres.

It seems to me now that I played outdoors as much in winter as in summer. Mother was always ordering me inside, even though that meant she had to help me get dressed, which she did with tight-lipped impatience. “Your mitts didn't dry. Go and walk away,” she'd say, just as my friends' mothers would say. When, later on, there were three of us with our white boots, hats and scarves to misplace, she had our father construct a storage unit of wooden orange crates. I don't remember that there was any improvement in our ability to flee away our belongings, nor did my mother ever cheerfully leave her kitchen, where she was creating a tuna-fish casserole, to struggle with still fastenings or with boots.

Once outside I'd stand still like a round lawn ornament, waiting until the cold air felt friendly, waiting until I'd ascertainment the right thing to do with that day's snow. Suddenly, at stillness gone, I'd drop to my knees, as if to propose marriage to the snow, and soon we'd be as involved as lovers. Snow would be in my boots, up my sleeves turning my wrists red and raw, under my collar and stuck to my mitts in little clumps. I'd make an angel, and then some neighbors' kids would join me and we'd all make angels, snowmen and treacherous slides which would rip our fathers when they came home from work. One day the boys across the street declared war on us. We built a u-shape, waist-high fort on our lawn and they did on theirs, and then we agreed that we wouldn't begin the war until we'd stockpiled snowballs. As the lights were coming on in the houses around us, we did battle, suffering losses as one by one our teams were called in for dinner.

And then from the afternoon of Christmas Eve it snowed, as it rarely did. With more spirit than usual, we built our forts and jeled one another and the cats and anything that stood still, leaving little lumps of snow on trees and brick walls. Every so oft'm I'd think to myself, “Hey, it's Christmas Eve and it's going fast.” And then I'd throw a snowball to the moon.

As I grew older my best winter hours were on ice. I began skating before I began school, on tinny contraptions with double blades which you wrapped onto your boots. By Grade I I had real skates with white boots and tube blades and belts threaded onto the lace at the tos, so that I jingled like a horse-drawn sleigh in a Russian movie. I finally learned to skate our Saturday afternoon on the tennis-court rink at Gage Park, with a girl I didn't know and never saw again, although I watched for her for 16 years. I was a little older but not a better skater. We were both off our ankles, at least, but weren't able to glide and keep our balance. When our balance failed at the same spot, we helped each other up, and she suggested that we continue to hold hands. At first we kept falling, clutching one another, having to stop to rest our ankles by burying them in the snow at the rink's edge. But we kept telling one another to glide, and soon we'd made a couple of rounds of the rink without either of us falling. We did another and another, and then she said she'd go and we'd wait and soon we'd gone around 84 times. And then we let go of one another, and she skated off halfway from me and I from her.

Because I always skated outdoors, I could see the moon as it seemed as evanescent as hope. I was a weather-watcher from October on. When would it get cold? And when it did, how long would it last? How many days of freezing weather would have to pass before I could dial the phone at the clubhouse and ask, "Is there skating yet?" I would always call too soon. The phone would ring and ring, eventually to be answered by a man who wouldgrow unintelligibly, and I would know the rinks weren't ready even before I'd asked. But one day, after the first ring, I'd hear a girl's voice. I knew she'd race across the wooden floor on the picks of her figure skates to be able to grab the phone before "Gay monger!" and hang up. I could picture the crowds of kids, climbing over the silvered wooden benches in their skies, standing around the black, woodburning stove watching their wet woolen mittens steam. There was a checkroom where it cost a nickel to secure your boots from thieves, but most people left their boots under the benches. My mother would give me a nickel for boot insurance, but I'd hide mine under an evergreen tree and buy a chocolate bar instead.

Just once the rink was entirely mine. I had gone to the park after school and found two perfect sheets of ice behind locked gates. Knowing I wouldn't be allowed to return after supper, I searched for a way in and found I could separate the halves of the main gate and squeeze through. The sun was still shining, low in the sky, and it was deeply cold. The virgin ice was hard and clear, and my blades were newly sharpened. I knew I was trespassing; I prayed to be forgiven and tried to convince myself to a corner. But as I skated in little circles, I made a remarkable discovery: every time my blades hit the ice, I could see a spark. I began skating faster and harder, wildly all around the rink, striking showers of electricity, forgetful of the workmen who would find my skate-blade graffiti. When the sun moved behind Hamilton Mountain, I stopped out through the gate and — suddenly afraid that I would be caught if I stopped to put on my shoes — walked home in my skates, through the nearly gray twilight, along empty streets, past the candy-cane factory, past Mercury Mills, where they made nylon stockings, past houses where the windows were still dark so that there seemed to be nobody in the world but me, the unknown creator of stars on ice.

I know that it was cold when I was a child, but I can't think that it was ever too cold to bear. There were signs of cold: I'd wake up in the morning to see the dawn through an intricate lace painting on my bedroom window, and at school we'd talk about Jack Frost as though he were real. When we came in from playing, we'd sit with our cold feet close to the kitchen stove and be warned that we'd get chills, although I never could get a good explanation of what they were. When we'd grown up, I would know other aspects of winter, and I finally did see chills in my youth, when we lived in Calgary and my son's ear froze during an outdoor jobbing class. Winter was cold: 30 below to no fun. We're back on the coast now, among people who aren't supposed to know anything about winter but who do know how to enjoy a snowfall. We usually get one good contribution of snow every year, and after the panic on the main streets subsides, my neighbors make use of it because it will be gone in 18 hours. Whole families, in gay colors, will ski down the road past my house. The young father across the way will put the kids into a box and slide them to sled and pull her gently round the block, wishing perhaps that she were a little older so she could be with other kids, sliding on cardboard and pieces of plastic and a few red wood toboggans on the little hill in our park. Our neighbor next door will make a snow house, as close to an igloo as anything I've seen. And I'll gaze outside at the flawless expanse of white in my backyard, like a giant sheet of paper on which I would write precisely. I'll sense again, just briefly, the possibility of perfection, and then I'll take my child outside and we'll create a lovely mess — until they send me in to make dinner.
Take a moment to imagine the following, rather nightmarish scene. Two ocean tankers collide. One is laden with 350,000 tonnes of crude oil, sailing some 50 kilometres due east of the entrance to Chedabucto Bay, N.S. The wounded ship founders and bleeds 360,000 barrels of its black cargo into the ocean. For a day and a half a pounding easterly gale drives the ship westward, before it grounds and breaks up on the shoals off Cape Canso. After that it is just a matter of time. The remaining 2 million barrels of crude washes into the sea, and the slick snakes its way along 1,000 kilometres of Nova Scotia’s prime tourist beaches and coastline. Churning in the water all this time, the oil turns into a gooey chocolate mousse, before it is driven to shore and coats the coast. It doesn’t take much imagination to envision an oil spill of that magnitude – an unprecedented disaster if it ever happened in Canada. Thankfully, it hasn’t. The scenario described is no more than a grim hypothesis. It’s real only on paper and perhaps in the minds of such people as Harvey Clare, Imperial Oil’s environmental protection coordinator and, in addition, a founder and currently an executive board member of PACE, the Petroleum Association for Conservation of the Canadian Environment.

Taken from a PACE working document, the scene described above is the kind of disaster that the group, which includes representatives from most of the integrated oil companies in Canada, is intent on learning how to handle. Of course, every company tries to ensure, through improvement of equipment and safety programs, that such a catastrophe will never occur. After all, a spill is the result of an accident that can also involve personal injuries and costly damages. But if the nightmare does come true, the problem is how to respond efficiently and effectively. And the solution — a war plan involving hundreds of beach workers guided by a coordinating team of oil industry and government experts — is currently being worked out in detail. A spill of 350,000 tonnes of oil would be unprecedented in Canada, so we need to know what kinds and classes of marine vessels would be needed for rescue and clean-up operations. What kind of equipment should be available on the beaches and at sea? How do we coordinate all those scientists working with industry clean-up crews and oil industry experts, working with officials from a handful of government departments?

This project is the culmination of a decade-long effort by PACE to set up an effective way to respond to all spills both on land and at sea. It is, however, just one of many programs — albeit one of intense public interest — that preoccupy the members of the association.

Since its official formation as a federally chartered, nonprofit organization in 1971, PACE has tackled a host of environmental problems, ranging from oil spills to a highly technical study on how to test toxicity levels in fish. It has monitored and helped draft guidelines for the safe transportation of oil and chemicals over sea and land and helped the government in establishing acceptable quality standards for refinery effluents.

Over the past decade PACE has become the industry’s voice, as one government official puts it, in environmental matters. “If PACE didn’t exist,” says Gordon Sinclair, a Transport Canada executive and head of the Canadian Marine Transportation Administration, “the inevitable result would be the government taking a much more active role in setting environmental regulations, without involving the industry. It would be too cumbersome for us to try and work out, say, 12 separate agreements with 12 different oil companies and keep the whole thing straight.”

It was precisely this kind of unwieldy industry situation that prompted Imperial’s Harvey Clare, back in 1969, to start discussing the formation of this organization. That year Bill Twaltz, then president of Imperial, had asked Clare to move from his job as planning manager for the refinery department in Toronto to head up a new environmental department. It became Clare’s job to report to senior management on all environmental matters in which Imperial might be involved.

“One thing occurred to me at the time,” he says, “and that was that there was going to be a lot of negotiating with the government in the future. And as I was thinking about all the problems we faced, it seemed much better that we deal with those problems — such as oil spills — on an industry-wide, cooperative basis.” Clare voiced his idea to Twaltz, who in turn started contacting presidents of the other oil companies, suggesting they come together as an industry united in its concern for the environment.

Meanwhile, Clare wasn’t the only company environmentalist thinking about such an organization. Eric Howe, environmental coordinator at BP Canada, was talking with his counterparts at Shell and Gulf about the same thing. Looking back at those first days, Clare says, “It seemed as if everybody was talking about the organization to come into being; all we needed to do was give the idea a push.”

Meetings during the early days were strictly informal, to hear Eric Howe remember them: “We had no offices in Ottawa at the time, so each of us would host a meeting. It might be Harvey Clare one month, Dr. John Lovering at Gulf the next. The advantage of hosting a meeting was that you got to be chairman for a day.”

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The disadvantage was that you also took the minutes of the meeting, because we hadn't appointed a secretary yet.”

What started as informal discussions among a handful of industry environmentalists in 1989 soon turned into formal meetings involving environmental representatives from major integrated oil companies, at first including only the refiners in Ontario and Quebec. But by 1971 PACE was a national association, stretching out west to include Husky Oil and Pacific Petroleums and into the east with members Irving Oil and Golden Eagle Canada.

In 1971, PACE's operating budget was $150,000. It's since risen to nearly $1 million in 1980. Even that figure doesn't reflect the organization's total costs because it doesn't include nearly 36,000 hours a year of company time spent by representatives such as Harvey Clare or his assistants, Bob Fern, Lee Scott and Evan Birchard, or the dozens of industry experts called in from the other oil companies to serve on committees set up to investigate all areas where the oil industry might affect the environment. Transportation, refining, marketing and the handling and use of petroleum products needed by consumers and industry all pose potential problems, PACE is even trying to find better ways of handling used lubricants — crankcase oil — left over at service stations.

All the companies in PACE are, year in, year out, competing against each other, but in environmental matters they share a common goal: to ensure the best possible protection for the environment in the course of producing and distributing petroleum products. It's a task that has involved compromise and commitment on the part of the companies, plus a lot of cooperation with conservation groups, the regional petroleum associations and the Canadian Petroleum Association (which represents the exploration companies on environmental matters), plus the federal and provincial governments.

Says Eric Howe at BP Canada: “When you get government and industry discussing environmental policies beforehand, the final result is a law or guideline that is not just effective but something everyone can live with.” And as Don Broughton, president of PACE this year and coordinator for policy and research at Petro-Canada in Calgary, says, “Our views aren’t always the same as government, but we work hard at communicating.” Ever year, for instance, PACE officials meet with senior members of Environment Canada in Ottawa and devote a day to exchanging research results, planning joint studies and initiatives and discussing proposed legislation.

“Here are a number of areas where we consult directly,” explains Stan Winthrop, a senior official with the Environmental Protection Service of Environment Canada, “and we’ve been doing so on a regular basis for five or six years.” He adds, “I’d guess we’ve got more cooperative projects going on with PACE than with similar organizations in any other industry.”

Certainly one area of cooperation that is working is the National Emergency Equipment Locator Service, called NEELS for short. It’s a computer data bank in Toronto with a registry of all the oil-spill equipment in Canada. Simply by entering a latitude and longitude position into the computer system through terminals at a refinery or one of the government’s regional environmental offices or through a portable terminal at the spill site, anyone faced with an emergency can find out what kind of equipment is available in the vicinity of the spill, who’s got it and even the phone numbers of the people to contact. Ken Evans, Gulf Canada’s oil-spill contingency planning coordinator, and Bob Fern at Imperial helped put PACE’s masses of data into the computer back in 1975. “At the time, it was unique,” says Evans. “So much so that when the United States Coast Guard heard about our system they came up to see how we did it. Now they’ve set up their own system, modeled on NEELS.”

But NEELS isn’t the only example of cooperation. In conjunction with the Canadian petroleum associations, PACE has been instrumental over the years in creating and training B7 local industry groups in the most advanced techniques known for containing and cleaning up oil spills, be they from an overturned oil truck or a refinery mishap, a break in a pipeline or a leaking tanker.

This decade-long effort to establish a highly efficient way to respond to accidental oil spills — culminating in the ocean spill project now under way — not only is cost-efficient because it spreads the cost of manpower and resources among various refineries, but it works. And nowhere is that more evident than at Burrard Inlet, Vancouver, where five local refineries and one major pipeline converge. In 1976 the British Columbia Petroleum Association and PACE established the $1.4-million Burrard Clean project. While the project is a local effort, explains Martin Green, manager of the association, “it was PACE that set up the forum for us to do it on” and it was like a mother hen rounding us up and giving us direction.” PACE is currently working with industry and the provincial petroleum associations to set up similar organizations across the country. An Ontario project was established last year, and plans covering the Atlantic region and the major waterways of Quebec should soon be approved. The Quebec project alone will involve the purchase and maintenance of $4-million to $5-million worth of clean-up equipment in strategic locations.

The Burrard co-op’s arsenal of equipment includes two $700,000 oil skimmers and a boom-deployment vessel that can play out hundreds of metres of floating plastic fence to contain spilled oil, a mobile radio-communications and command trailer that can drive to the site nearest the spill and a contingent of trained industry people who are on call 24 hours a day. “All our equipment has been used at one time or another,” says Green. On average, the Burrard Clean unit is called out to a spill once every two weeks. Usually they’re small, says Green, anywhere from two to 60 barrels, although the unit has handled as much as 30,000 barrels on land. Recently it was called to some abandoned drums in Vancouver harbor, where 36 barrels of old fuel oil was draining into the water. It seems when the docks were abandoned, explains Green, the fuel tanks were removed, but the connecting pipes weren’t drained. Over the years, those pipes rusted out. “It’s one of those things that wasn’t foreseen at the time,” figures Green. “It’s no different for many of the larger pollution and environmental issues that PACE must contend with,” says Harvey Clare. “No matter what we do, the question often arises, ‘Why didn’t you do that 10 years ago? It’s a good question, and the reason is usually that we didn’t know it was a problem 10 years ago.’”

As Eric Howe at BP Canada explains: “In the old days you sensed a pollution problem when you saw clouds of smoke pouring out of a chimney or a bright orange plume in a stream beside an industrial plant. But today pollution problems are
much more subtle. So more and more we’re concerned with the sublethal, long-term effects of environmental damage.”

Times have indeed changed, as Howe goes on to note, “in the late sixties we were in the ‘semi-alarmist era’ when, quite rightly, people were becoming more and more concerned about the environment. In the seventies we went through what I call the ‘legislative era,’ and at PACE we tried to help establish legislation that was effective and sensible.” By and large, Howe and other PACE members agree that that has been accomplished. For example, even though water-efficient regulations set in 1973 governing the waste discharged by oil refineries cost the industry close to $400 million, everyone agrees that the rules are good ones and necessary; the industry can live with them, and the amount of contaminants that once flowed unchecked into the local environment around refineries has declined to generally acceptable levels.

Today, continues Howe, “we’re in the ‘nuts and bolts era,’ complying with laws, helping to establish practical industry guidelines or working with government on research projects. Everything is becoming increasingly complex. Environmental control is no longer as easy as people first thought.”

Not is it cheap, says Don Hoskins, previous past-president of PACE and former manager of environmental affairs at Shell Canada. Sooner or later the additional cost of controls must be passed on to the consumer. “It may only amount to a few cents per litre,” he says, but over the years it amounts to millions of dollars and often for negligible returns. For instance, says Lee Scott, Clare’s other assistant at Imperial, several years ago a Montreal bylaw was under preparation, requiring refineries to cut back air emissions of particulate matter. The cost to the industry was going to be in the order of $5 million per refinery, to reduce emissions by 90 percent. PACE studied the matter and discovered that the oil industry was only contributing one percent of the particulate emissions in the industrial area. So for the investment, the refineries would only reduce the local air problem by less than one percent. There’s got to be a benefit for each expenditure. “If you’re paying more than you should,” says Don Hoskins, “then it’s a poor use of money.”

Clearly in this instance PACE is looking out for the interests of its members, juggling the ideal aspirations of governments and public interest groups trying to achieve “zero-risk” in the environment with the petroleum industry’s need to find practical solutions to pollution problems at a reasonable cost. “Often,” says BP’s Howe, “we’re asked to employ the best available technology to solve a particular problem, regardless of the cost.”

In the case of establishing the water-efficient guidelines, PACE argued successfully for the “best practicable technology.” It still gave us good water standards, says Howe, but at a fraction of the cost. “Whatever it would cost to achieve 90 percent effectiveness would double if you went for 95 percent and double again if you tried for 100 percent.”

Throughout their negotiations and discussions with government, what PACE does, explains Clare, “is try to agree on what is to be achieved and then say, ‘Let us implement the controls.’” Thus, he stresses, innovation is not lost to the companies and the country. Needless to say, this emphasis on innovation plays a key role in PACE’s approach to research. Bill Hogg, the organization’s full-time manager in Ottawa, says, “The petroleum industry is so complex these days it takes someone within the industry to understand how a refinery might affect the environment.”

That situation puts PACE in a unique position. Rather than waiting for someone else to point out possible problems and dangers, PACE funds university research projects and its own volunteer committees’ (air quality, marine, toxic substance and occupational health, to mention a few) to look for troubles. One PACE member came across an article in a scientific journal describing the presence of neoplasia — a form of cancer — in freshwater fish. That set into motion some analysis to discover if the oil industry has anything to do with the problem. Similarly, though the oil industry is not considered a notable contributor to the acid-rain problem in Canada, PACE started studying the matter in 1979 to discover what, if any, contribution the refineries were making to the problem. Throughout much of PACE’s research, says Don Broughton, there is an underlying objective: “We must know what part of the problem we represent.”

This yeoman work into the finer points of environmental research sets PACE apart from what some might assume is just another industry group, lobbying for attention: “They put forth many industry positions,” says Gordon Sinclair at Transport Canada, “but I would certainly not categorize PACE as a lobby group. What we get from PACE is commitment. It takes steps ahead of time to identify dangers and then works with us to solve the problem.”

Dr. Donald Mackay, a chemical engineering professor at the University of Toronto and one of Canada’s leading experts on oil-spill research, says: “PACE is far from a public relations exercise. Their research is certainly valuable. Mackay himself has contributed to some of PACE’s research projects. As Clare himself says of the organization he helped to found, “PACE isn’t exactly a household term, but within government and the academic community it’s taken seriously, and what really matters, it’s making headway in safeguarding the environment in hundreds of ways. It’s got the expertise. And it’s got the energy and commitment.”

Whenever Clare looks up from his desk at Imperial Oil he sees a painting on the opposite wall of a ship unloading cargo in a smoky harbor. It’s reminiscent of the days when a nation’s health and wealth were often depicted with smokestacks and the grimy grins of workers coming off a production line. These days our perception of how our industries should look has changed dramatically. It prompts Clare to say, “What I really need is another painting with a clear blue sky; then I can label one ‘Before’ and the other ‘After’.”

There are something in the order of eleven billion litres of petroleum products passing through Canada’s refineries, terminals and storage depots every year. That’s a massive amount of oil, gasoline and petrochemicals going out to every part of Canada, into fuel-oil tanks, automobiles and seafreight; for hundreds of manufactured products. It’s the stuff that pumps us to work, powers industry and graces wheels. It’s an awesome task to keep it all flowing smoothly and safely. Working together through PACE the integrated oil companies have made considerable strides toward balancing energy and environment needs and ensuring that life doesn’t imitate the art on Harvey Clare’s wall. 

The promise of resources must not spoil the nature of the North.

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CONSIDERING CATS

Our fine, feline friends

BY DIANE FORREST

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALAN DANIEL

Joan McAllister chooses her families carefully. Every year, as Christmas approaches, she studies the obituary columns, then loads up with stray kittens and takes to the streets. "I know this little creature can never take the place of the person you've lost," she explains on doorsteps across the city, "but perhaps it will bring a little comfort into your life." Surprisingly, the beereded usually accept.

Some might call this scheme eccentric, but cat lovers will recognize it as a practical response to the problem of feline overpopulation. But there's good news for Mrs. McAllister. According to Dr. Ballard's of Canada, as of 1980, 29 percent of Canadians owned cats, and that figure is increasing steadily. Evidence of a growing admiration for felines is everywhere: cat stationery, cat aprons, cat tablecloths, cookie jars and teapots and, in every bookshop and library, shelves of cat books. Cats lend their elegance to advertising for everything from lottery tickets to Amalfi shoes and have been immortalized on the cover of Time and in a hit musical based on T.S. Eliot's Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats. Meanwhile, across the country, more and more cat lovers are gathering to admire their favorite creature.

Joyce Fraser closes one eye and sights the length of the self-assured tom stretched between her hands. Around her are every breed of cat and owner, gathered for the Canadian Cat Association's annual show at the Canadian National Exhibition. The CCA, which is only one of six cat associations operating in Canada — and the only Canadian-based group — organizers as many as 12 shows a year. Fraser, a judge since 1968 in a world whose intrigues verge on the Byzantine, speaks confidently of the increasing interest in cats and cat breeding. "When I started out, we were registering 200 pedigreed cats a year. In 1980 we registered 2,000 Persians alone." While Fraser speaks, an elongated Siamese kitten howls urgently behind her. But for the most part, these champions disdain their popular image, sprawling composdly in tastefully decorated cages, while their excited owners gossip and consume endless numbers of hotdogs and cigarettes. The most relaxed cat in the show, Misty, a champagne Burmese, belongs to André Gravel and Hélène Gougeon, who run La Champenoise, a large breeding operation in Ste. Julie, Que. While they still see Toronto as the centre of Canadian breeding, they agree that there's a growing enthusiasm even in Quebec, which has the lowest rate of cat ownership in the country. "People are starting to be able to tell the difference between an alley cat and a breed cat."

Back in the judging circle the onlookers clap as Fraser lifts high her choice, a silky black long-hair who gazes blandly down on his admirers. Whatever their preferences in cats, breeders and judges agree on one phenomenon: an increasingly responsive and informed public. "Back in 1966 we'd be lucky to get 500 people in two days," remembers Fraser. "Now we jam in several thousand."

There's nothing new about this acclaim. Worshipped as goddesses, burned as agents of the devil — through history cats have alternately attracted and repelled, but always
fascinated us. What is the reason for this intense relationship between man and a diminutive, furry household pet? Human beings have always been emotionally bound to the cats that they keep for their practical value or for their less tangible qualities. The greatest cat lovers of all, the ancient Egyptians, originally adopted them as protectors against the rats, mice and snakes that thrived in the form of the cat-goddess Bastet, patron of chastity, fertility, sun, moon and rain. Her temple, totally surrounded by water in the city of Bubastis, was attended by hundreds of temple cats. It became a crime punishable by death to kill a cat, and the demise of even the most humble feline was surrounded by elaborate ceremonies. Poor puss would never know that kind of appreciation again. The Romans respected its independence—the cat became a symbol of liberty—and granted it certain powers as a god of household protection. A Welsh king, Howell the Good, created laws to protect it. But the citizens of the rough-and-tumble world of the Dark Ages were too busy rescuing civilization to discern the cat's finer attributes.

People of the latter middle ages had more imagination, creating many fantastic myths about the cat. As a result, beginning in the early 14th century in Western Europe, hundreds of thousands of cats were tossed into bonfires, hurled from the tops of buildings, flayed alive and even crucified. In the middle of this persecution, the Black Death struck, killing an estimated one-third of the population. Gradually, Europeans made the connection between the declining cat and the rising rat population, and by the end of the century most of the savagery had stopped.

The cat was reestablished in our homes but not our hearts. There were a few cat lovers: Henry VIII's all-powerful minister, Cardinal Wolsey, kept his cat by him even during his most important audiences; and Richelieu, who was equally influential with his master, Louis XIII, was awakened every morning by a servant bringing him a handful of kittens to play with. But these were aberrations; for the most part the cat was still regarded with suspicion, barely tolerated for its skill as a ratter. It was not until the Victorian Age that the true renaissance of cat appreciation began. Pasteur's theories of microbes had created a widespread paranoia about animals as possible carriers of disease; the consequently clean cat was the one exception. Then, having welcomed the cat back into their drawing rooms, Europeans began to appreciate the charm of the feline principle. The loving picture it made there. Cat lovers published and bought books, formed clubs and, beginning in the Crystal Palace at London in 1871, organized shows.

The cat's career as a pest controller does not end here. Cats continued to prove their worth as raters, and many felines have attained high public positions in post offices, museums and libraries. But from now on their main service would be as companions.

Part of the cat's current popularity is still practical. For apartment dwellers, single people, couples where both partners work—in short, those who make up a large portion of the modern population—Shetland ponies and great Danes do not make good pets. The cat, on the other hand, is a loner and so can be left alone all day; it doesn't need to be taken for walks; and most adapt quite nicely to becoming a house design. While his present work companion, a warm-hearted tabby named Curchie and five other indiscernible fowls over the piles of books and papers that litter the shelves of his basement study, ponders the reasons why so many creative people have loved cats. "Any form of art is rather lonely existence. There are many hours of trying this and trying that and then having to start over again. The beautiful thing about a cat is that it gives a sense of presence, but it does not distract you," That's not strictly true. Carmina does occasionally hide his tools or try to detain him with her tiny claws. But cats can also be an inspiration, says Kalman. They have both discipline and elegance. "And there is no little elegance left in this world."

Of course, truck drivers, secretaries and chartered accountants have also been known to love cats for their aesthetic qualities and companionship. But there are still many who argue that cats are selfish, destructive, cowardly and just plain creepy. The classic altruophobiologist was Count Buffon, an 18th century naturalist, who wrote that cats have "an inane malice and perfidious disposition." The cat, he sniffed, "appears to have no feelings which are not interested, to have no affection that is not conditional, and to carry on no intercourse with men, but with a view to turning it to his own advantage."

Those who know cats would question the count's powers of scientific observation. All have different personalities, but they can be just as capable of loyalty and affection. They're simply more choosy about whom they give that loyalty to, Kalman explains. His Tomcat, Cheech, a "very complicated cat," will often ignore him, yet when he has a toothache cannot be buffered. He is so shy until she is sure the pain is gone. In the early 1970s Nina Epton, a British writer and television producer, advertised for cat stories around the world. The resulting letters included incidents of cats being taken by their owners of danger, rescuing children and showing signs of grief at their owners' deaths, all in a manner worthy of Lassie herself.

The best-documented instances of cats as heroic shields were of cases in which a cat has traveled a great distance to find its family or its home. A brave cat named Semi-Persian, was left behind in California by her family, because they didn't believe she would be able to withstand the ordeal of driving to their new home in Oklahoma. They sent her by plane in the longest journey of endurance. Fourteen months later, a cream-colored cat materialized in their Oklahoma yard, identifiable as Sugar by a unique bone deformity in her left hip. She had apparently traveled 2,400 kilometres across some of the roughest territory in North America. J.B. Rhine, one of many scientists who have studied this mysterious phenomenon, recommended to a colleague who was studying altruism that he consider these cats: 'How deeply moving these performances are; what they tell us of the bonds of affection that so controlled the animals' lives through hardship and long, weary, years of wandering in the wilds. Not food, not sex, not fear — just plain love, isn't it?'

Eileen Kalman has since left Simon and Pierre to become a book designer. While his present work companion, a warm-hearted tabby named Carmina, creates a creative fur.
never get along with cats.

The list of famous cat haters would seem to bear out Dr. Johnson’s observations. Napoleon, who loved dogs, broke into a cold sweat at the sight of even a kitten. Lord F.S. Roberts, who put the fear of the Empire into the Boers, couldn’t breathe if a cat was in the room, and the French brothers Charles IX and Henri III simply fainted away.

Cats, however, don’t kill their victims. Whether from missionary zeal or a sadistic sense of humor, in a room full of cat lovers and one cat-hater, the cat will head straight for the person who least wants it. (A Toronto music student remembers the time his cat went so far as to climb onto the lap of the most indiffident member of the family and have kittens there.)

Eschewing cats may even be bad for your health. There’s a germ of good sense in Jean McLaren’s scheme to bring pets and the bereaved together, says Dr. Paul McCutcheon, a Toronto vet and the producer of People and Pets, a series carried on Ontario’s educational television system. McCutcheon is only one of a growing number of doctors and veterinarians who are convinced that animals may have an important contribution to make to human health. In a society that is largely urban and subject to constant, wrenching change, cats and other animals can bring an element of stability and a contact with nature.

“People need to be loved, and sometimes they don’t get that from their family, their work, their friends. Moreover, their pets are dependent on them, and especially in our society, a lot of people need to be depended on,” McCutcheon says he sees examples every day of people who benefit from owning cats.

Dr. Quentin Rae-Grant, psychiatrist-in-chief at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, adds that owning a pet can be crucial to a child’s maturity — helping him to develop responsibility, sensitivity and a sense of security. Many psychiatrists, continues Rae-Grant, have used animals in treating their young patients. Older patients can benefit, too. One of the favorite souvenirs of the Ottawa-Charleton Humane Society is a photograph of a tiny kitten, eyes closed in delight, being cuddled by an elderly woman. The woman is a resident of one of several local senior citizens’ homes that regularly receive visits from a van-full of animals sent by the society. “We could scarcely get the kitten away from her,” says Ken Switzer, managing director of the society. “Those few minutes of companionship were obviously important to her.

Cats and other pets, Switzer believes, can bring companionship and a continuing sense of worth in the face of the problems of growing older. There have even been studies suggesting that having an animal to love can improve a person’s physical health. The Pullman Convalescent Centre in Washington state reports two instances in which cat therapy programs actually saved the lives of residents. An elderly woman who had lapsed into a catatonic state was brought back to normal life through her contact with Handsome, a Persian placed in the home by the local veterinary college. And a man who was deliberately starving himself was persuaded to eat again by nurses who used visits with a batch of kittens as rewards. Of course, the cat is not the only animal that can help humans — a seeing-eye cat is hard to imagine. But again, for people living in cities or institutions, it is often the most practical companion.

My own Burmese, Moses, is considering me as I write this. Perhaps he’s wondering when I’ll be ready for a game with his catnip mouse. More likely he’s not thinking about me at all — his golden eyes brimming with self-admiration, disdaining within his sleek, sable self such subtleties of introspection, such mysteries of perfection that he can’t possibly spare a thought for anything else.

Perhaps this is the real reason why cats are so admired today. Our society values confidence, independence and style — all of which the cat has. Somewhat, without benefit of Dale Carnegie, EST or Michael Korda, cats like Moses seem to have arrived at a state of supreme self-satisfaction. Certainly a cat depends on you for food, shelter and affection; all of this it accepts graciously, but that does not mean it is your slave. It is impossible to compel a cat to do what it does not wish, and its love, if given, is freely given. If only we all could feel so secure.

Rules and regulations

When is enough enough?

Last June the Economic Council of Canada (ECC) released its 167-page report, three years and $3 million in the making, titled Reforming Regulation. It stated flatly that “direct economic regulation has become a much over-used policy instrument.”

The report made 66 proposals for the reform of direct economic regulations, reforms that, it was estimated, could save consumers several billion dollars a year in trucking, airline and food costs. It noted that 30 percent of Canada’s gross domestic product was subject to direct government regulation rather than the pressures of the market.

“Canada’s comprehensive system of direct economic controls,” it went on, “has resulted in a substantial waste of economic resources and reduced the degree of dynamism and innovation in several important sectors of the Canadian economy.”

This, it seemed, was the stuff to give the troops. Business people groaning under the load of government paperwork felt something might be done to ease their burden. Deregulation was in the air. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, who had commissioned the report, said he agreed with the need for deregulation in itself and particularly the need to prevent overlapping regulations between federal, provincial and municipal authorities.

But he didn’t commit himself to any specific action and apparently had no intention of going President Reagan’s route in promoting to reduce the role of government in the economic life of the nation. In the United States, a strong tide of free-enterprise economics is sweeping away many regulations and regulatory agencies. While consumer advocates such as Ralph Nader predict dire results, President Reagan’s advisers insist that deregulation will not diminish the quality of life and, in fact, because it will restore momentum to the economy, will actually improve it. Nader, however, remains skeptical, predicting that once deregulation takes effect the public will be disenchanted. “The Reagan administration’s approach.”

BY JEAN MARTIN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TINA HOLDcroft
he says, "will boomerang."

In Canada no such high controversy surrounds the idea of regulatory reform; indeed, there are those who rather doubt that any startling changes will take place. Even the chairman of the economic council that issued the report, Dr. David Slesser, seemed to feel that important though the report was in many ways, it might not result in history-making change. "I would be doubtful we would have an enormous, rapid wave of regulatory reform."

The report did, however, open a window on the immense storehouse of regulations that have piled up over the years, so numerous that it may be impossible to sort them all out and come up with any accurate estimate of their number.

What are government regulations? In a publication called Government Regulation, published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy in 1980, R.A. Jenness of the Economic Council of Canada explained that: "Regulations substitute a political decision for a market decision. They normally require an administrative executive to take a structure to exercise surveillance and to identify and punish those who violate their provisions. Their very intrusion on one's freedom of choice raises questions about their efficiency and fairness. The concept of deregulation has a very respectable origin.

Once one of the Canadian business people who have tried over recent years to understand the regulatory maze is Douglas MacAllan, Imperial Oil's vice-president for corporate affairs. In the fall of 1979, speaking to the Institute of Canadian Advertising meeting in Ottawa, MacAllan gave some idea of how regulation reaches every nook and cranny of business when he referred to a book, published by the federal law review commission, listing the discretionary powers contained in federal statutes. "The tables," he noted wryly, "covered more than 1,000 pages and listed 14,895 specific discretionary powers."

As Michael J. Trebilcock, a University of Toronto law professor, says in an essay called The Consumer Interest and Regulatory Reform, "Few areas of our lives are now untouched by regulations."

Why this proliferation of government statutes, rules and regulations? For "food and drink"? Partly because this country, much more than the United States, has a history of government involvement in the affairs of its people, from the day of their birth to the day of their burial. When the experts look for the reasons behind this, they often begin with the nurturing experience of early Canadians, a community of immigrants who were encouraged, assisted and supervised by a government that had usually invited them to come, paid their passage and acted as their guardian in settlement. From the early years of the last century, government was a major presence in the day-to-day life of Canadians, so that while our people endured the inevitable hardship of immigration, they were not, as in the case of their American counterparts, inspired to believe that personal initiative — the legendary "can do individualism" — was a special, even aborning, ideal. In time, this experience of government's close partner or guardian was strengthened by 20th century immigration, which brought to Canada, especially the West, many reform-minded or radically inclined European settlers, who held fervently to the conviction that government had a right and duty to plan and oversee much, sometimes most, of society's economic life. Moreover, the absence of financial capital in the hands of early Canada's entrepreneurs made it natural that almost a necessity, for government to become involved.

The result of government initiative in Canada's economy has not been without its notable achievements. One early and famous example was the establishment in the 1880s of a railway linking the country. The CPR was completed after government used its considerable influence to direct the private sector toward a socially desirable goal. In this century, government established, by act of Parliament in 1956, a crown company to develop broadcasting in Canada - the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation - so that the country would be linked east to west not just by rail, but by radio. Both the CPR and the CBC, inspired in varying degrees by government, remain historic accomplishments. Subsequently, of course, came a growth in government bureaucracy - transportation commissions, broadcasting commissions - and an ongoing growth in rules and regulations. Loyd Brown-John, a political scientist and author of Canadian Regulatory Agencies, points out the "cumulative impact of two global wars, one global depression (and numerous recessions), a seemingly limitless frontier, and a facet of other factors have contributed to the growth of government activity in Canada. And it must be reiterated by way of warning that implicit in the growth of government activity is a growth in regulation."

One of the myths surrounding regulations is that business is opposed to any and all regulation in principle, whether it be for consumer protection or for public safety. Not so. On the contrary, studies of regulation in Canada reveal that, in many instances, business has been an active partner in the regulatory process, often helping to frame the regulations that have ultimately been developed. This is not to say that business has not at times used the process to its advantage, but the fact remains that regulation has been an effective tool for government to address a wide range of societal issues.

"Government, through regulation," he said, "is supervising, so would say managing, the petroleum industry."

Some of these regulations, of course, deal with the environment or safety and railway; but the industry itself is subject to many regulations that are of interest to the whole province. The railway, for example, the railway companies, the railway labour, is concerned with plumbing, electricity, and various other matters. The railway companies, for example, have to be careful in their dealings with the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Labour, to name but a few. The railway companies, for example, are subject to many regulations that are of interest to the whole province. The railway, for example, the railway companies, the railway labour, is concerned with plumbing, electricity, and various other matters. The railway companies, for example, have to be careful in their dealings with the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Labour, to name but a few.

Indeed, Staut, an Imperial vice-president and the company's natural resources coordinator, says somewhat, "The railway's environment, the railway's environment, the railway's environment, the railway's environment."

Nevertheless, variegated as regulation may be, it is clear that the railway industry is faced with a complex web of regulations that can be challenging to navigate. The railway industry must ensure that it is complying with all regulations in a timely and efficient manner, while also ensuring that its operations are safe and environmentally responsible.

Growth and Development of the Railway Industry in Canada

However, it is when Staut attempts to enumerate the degree of federal, provincial and municipal regulation, surveying the multiplicity, explaining the inconsistency, mentioning the
overlapping and estimating the cost, that his voice takes on a mild degree of exasperation. And he adds: "Somewhere, sometime, someone has got to say enough is enough, let the market sort itself out. In addition to the cost and delay, a whole new issue emerges as the regulations multiply and multiply: the removal of decision-making from the hands of the individual and the placing of it in the hands of government.

There are other voices, not just among energy executives, that are sounding concerned about the kind of thing that worries Peter Staufi. "Canadians," says Carl E. Beige, president of the C.D. Howe Institute, "are generally quite relaxed about their economy being run on a 'mixed basis' — a combination of private and public enterprises working in harmony. As government's role has increased, however, questions should be raised as to whether Canada's economy and society are in danger of shifting from a mixed to a fixed environment...."

As Lloyd Brown-John explains, a growth in governmental activity of the kind queried by Carl E. Beige is always followed by a growth in regulation. And as reported by the Institute for Research on Public Policy, there has been a massive growth in regulation in the last decade: "Approximately 19 percent of current federal statutes were originally enacted in the 1970s, while over 16 percent of the current provincial regulatory statutes were enacted for the first time in that decade."

Any mention of rolling back regulation is not just a practical question of how and if it can be done, but a philosophic question: should it be done? Michael J. Trebilcock concludes his essay The Consumer Interest and Regulatory Reform by saying: "Do we want more or less government? Do we want more or less open government? Do we want more or less accessible government? Do we want more or less central economic planning? These are not only technical but philosophic questions. Experts can assist in providing rigorous assessments of the costs and benefits of each of these options, but ultimately only the Canadian polity can weigh the relevant social choices." In the United States, that choice has been made in favor of a freer economy which, in turn, is intended to benefit everyone. Since nobody is certain of the number of regulatory processes in Canada, nobody can be sure of how much it all costs. But one thing all sides agree on is that regulation does involve costs, some obvious, some obscure. For example, Imperial Oil, before embarking on any project, small or massive, must go through regulatory boards and hearings that, depending on the project, may take years. In the Davis Strait off Canada's east coast, the petroleum industry had the expertise to begin drilling for oil in the summer of 1978, but permission to go ahead was not granted for a full year and only after a special hearing and $5-million worth of studies. The direct costs, of course, are paid for by the companies. But what about the total costs of regulation to consumers? Another of the numerous myths that surround regulation is that it comes "free." As G. Bruce Doig, a professor of public administration at Carleton University, Ottawa, points out in The Regulatory Process in Canada: "Economists are not necessarily arguing that regulation should not take place (although some deregulation may in fact be beneficial) but rather that the costs and benefits of regulation as a policy instrument ought to be more critically assessed in relation to other instruments."

One of the most obvious costs of increased intervention by government is increased staff, as new offices are established, new bureaucracies appointed and all the accompanying prerequisites put in place. For example, last winter The Financial Post reported that in the wake of the National Energy Program of October 1980 — which carries the interventionist and regulatory disposition of government to its fullest fruition yet — "a huge army of federal regulators is being organized."

According to The Financial Post, the division of the federal department of energy, mines and resources responsible for the NEP was poised to triple its size to an expected 1,200 employees. The NEP may well require such numbers of staff, since its ambition for government intervention in the energy field (some would say control) is so considerable as to be a watershed in the country's history. Dr. Donald H. Thain, who specializes in the relationship between government and business at the University of Western Ontario in London, says, "The continuing intervention of government in the market system may be turning Canada into one large public utility."

The program, which so perturbs Thain and which has rarely been free from controversy since the day it was revealed, spells out the ways in which the federal government, through numerous methods — ranging from ownership to grants to regulation — aims to Canadianize the petroleum industry, though some analysts believe its ultimate goal to be full government control. As one observer put it, "The NEP is the regulatory state in full bloom." It has natural public appeal — few citizens and politicians would be anything but favorably disposed to Canadianization — and therefore it does well in the opinion polls. But beneath its straightforward image, it signals an enormous change in the relationship between government and business in Canada.

Peter Bartha, an economist and an executive in Imperial Oil's external affairs department, says that while the NEP is a very strong measure, we should put aside alarmist rhetoric and look at it in a calm, cool light: "I think we must recognize that the NEP does have public appeal; he says, "and we must also recognize that it is indeed a watershed; never before in Canada has government moved so broadly, so deeply into the market. For while the NEP embraces regulation, it embraces a lot more; government ownership, government legislation (from which flows more regulation); moral suasion; and the use of market incentives such as grants, allowances and so on. When you have all of these happening at once, and happening in one sector of the economy — the energy sector — the effect is very concentrated. And so when all of us, as citizens, consider the NEP, we must consider not just its objective but its philosophic nature. Is more regulation, more intervention, more bureaucracy, the way to solve our energy needs?"

Carl E. Beige of the C.D. Howe Institute also reflected on this question recently, and while his tone was, as always, moderate, his misgivings were obvious: "When the private-enterprise system is working effectively — meaning an absence of excessive concentrations of decision-making power — there is no other system capable of generating as much growth in society's over-all well-being. There is a positive complementary role for government to play in providing a framework for growth and in promoting fairness in the distribution of this growth. But unconstrained government actions may result in a significant reduction of independent decision makers in society, in the ability of the economy to adapt quickly to change and in the willingness of the economy to take risks."

A large number of Canadian economists would agree. The best security for our energy future, they insist, is in the vigor and competition of the market system, which has shown the ability to foster the human well-being of which Beige speaks. All economic theories both influence and are tempered by forces in our politics and sentiments among our people. Perhaps, therefore, instead of the spirit of all-embracing government that runs through the National Energy Program, Canadians may find one within which government and business will seek common purpose. We may well find it through another Canadian characteristic with a long history, the ability to compromise. 
When the March days grow longer and the sun's rays begin to melt the snow like crystals of course salt, an old memory will urge Quebecers into the woods — not, like many of our ancestors, to trap or to cut down trees, but rather to escape the daily grind for a few hours in the great outdoors, swimming in the sweet aroma that rises from the chimneys of the rustic cabins known as cabanes à sucre. During the brief sugar season they will experience once more the simple pleasures of a well-laden table, lively conversation and a walk down paths made muddy by the thaw, to taste at the source the incomparable maple sap.

In bygone days sugaring time marked a transition between the rigors of winter and Lent, and the beginning of nature's reawakening. This period also brought the joys of fresh produce after a winter of preserved food that had been set aside for the long months of solitude.

From the beginning of the recorded history of the French colony in America, there have been references to maple sap and the products derived from it. A Récollet priest, Father Sagard, recounts that the tradition of tapping maple trees and drinking their sap is derived from the native peoples. In Le grand voyage du pays des Hurons (1632), he wrote: "At the time when the sap was running we would make a slit in the bark with a large knife, and then, holding a bucket beneath the cut, we would collect the juice, from which we would later distill the syrup."

The colonists were quick to take advantage of this natural resource. In 1672 Nicolas Denys, then traveling in Acadia, wrote: "... the sap of that tree is different from all the others. From it is made a very pleasant drink, the color of Spanish wine." Another Récollet, Father Le Clercq, wrote in his Nouvelle relation de la Gaspésie in 1661: "By boiling, [the sap] is reduced by one-third and becomes a syrup whichhardens almost like sugar... From it are made small loaves which are often used for want of French sugar." In those days, certain properties were attributed to the sap. La Houssau wrote in 1704, in his Mémoires de l'Amérique septentrionale, "We have found no medicine more suitable for strengthening the chest."

Although the maple industry was improved by the colonists and their descendants over the years, it did not really develop until the mid-20th century. Before then, farms in Quebec were worked only to provide for the needs of those who lived on them. In those days farmers produced not only their own food, but their lodging, heating and clothing. Naturally, they produced only enough maple syrup, sugar and taffy to meet the family needs. But more recently, the mass media told rural people, like all of us, of the marvels that were indispensable for their daily happiness. In Quebec, as elsewhere, rural families discovered new needs, and farmers had to create new ways to provide their families with ready cash. They quickly realized that one of the most profitable was the sale of maple products to satisfy the nostalgia of city-dwellers and former farm-dwellers alike.

Germain Richard, now 82 years old, has been making sugar since he was 16. He lives in Ste-Noréine-de-Beauce, a small community in the very heart of
by horses. In some large, modern "cabane à sucre," the sap is collected by means of a sophisticated system of pipes that brings it directly into the shack. But since those who live close to nature are always cautious about accepting technology, the sap is normally transported by fairly conventional means; often the horse still holds the place of honor.

In Quebec, until the beginning of the 20th century, "places de feu (literally "fire places") were used for boiling the sap and transforming it into syrup and sugar. Each consisted of a wooden structure formed by two vertical pieces joined by a crossbar, from which a cauldron was suspended. Next came "feux de terre" ("earth fires"); the sap-filled container was placed above a hole dug in the ground in which fires were burned, and the sap drained off into a trough (called "feux de roches" or "rock fires"), in which the sap container was surrounded by walls of small stones, their insides coated with clay. This model was subsequently improved by lining the trough and enlarging it to hold two containers (feux de fonte). Nowadays, the sap is boiled down slowly in large, stainless steel vats in number, placed over an industrial fire. Although this method may be less colorful than the older ones, which used fragrant wood, it is more efficient. And the surrounding air is still scented with the trayelles, sweet aromas that delights visitors.

Agathe Laviolette and her husband, Roland, have been making sugar products on their rented sugar bush at St-Joseph du Lac, a small town 50 kilometers north of Montreal, for 11 years now. Roland is descended from a long line of sugar-makers, and he sees to the operation of the sophisticated network of pipes that brings the sap from 17,000 maple trees to the evaporator that reduces it to syrup and crystalizes it. The sugar is then ready to strike, the more it is stirred, the harder and whiter it will become. Perfectly cooked sugar is no more than 16 percent moisture.

Another product much enjoyed by gourmets is soft sugar, which is made by adding warm water until it is completely cool. If fresh cream is substituted for the water, the result is sugar butter, which may be pressed into molds shaped like hearts, stars, flowers or fruits. These molds are made by untrained craftsmen, are now prized by collectors. In their way, these objects record the day-to-day life of the Quebecer and the sugar butter made by hand.

The Quebec department of agriculture keeps a close eye on the sale of maple products. Qualified inspectors follow every step of production, from the sugar shack to cooperative to the package and finally the retailer. Maple products that are not made from the sugar bush must have been made solely and entirely from maple sap, and nothing may be added during the transformation process. In addition, the producer must print on the label of the container the product designation, his own name and address and that of the processor, the net weight of the container, and, for maple syrup, the class of the product. The word "maple" on the label guarantees that it is a genuine maple product.

Oeléine and Étienne Nadon, of Lac Carbiou, belong to a new breed of sugar-makers; it is their chosen profession, not an inherited one, and they have studied the most modern techniques. Initially made from the Montreal area, they moved to Lac Carbiou, 150 kilometers away in the Laurentian-Ouantais region, four years ago.

Last year the Quebec government leased them a provincially owned sugar bush east of Cèrènes, and Cèrènes set to work and built a rustic cabane à sucre, made according to plans and with materials used by its ancestors. At the Henri-Bourassa CEGEP junior college in Mont-Laurier, Étienne took courses in sugar making while his wife took cooking courses for the sugar shack. This year they will tap 500 new trees in their sugar bush in the Laurentians, "where the best-tasting maple syrup is made," according to Étienne. Making the syrup for a group of 20 to 30 in their cabane à sucre, their guests will be able to watch syrup being made and taste samples of traditional sugar dishes, as well as such house specialties as Étienne's viettes (poached fresh pork) and sugar donuts.

All over Quebec, thousands of visitors wind up on the sugar shacks, where they will work down hearty meals that may begin with thin slices of boiled meat until they are crisp and golden, or with viettes. Next might come pea soup, followed by a gargantuan omelette with salt pork or ham and other main dishes, and beaus made with maple syrup. To the Quebecer there will be a variety of succulent desserts: raisin and maple-syrup pie, eggs poached in maple syrup — the list is endless. In the opinion of many, the best of the homemade bread covered with finely grated maple sugar, the whole spread of dishes, the taste of the maple syrup — this will satisfy the most demanding guests — and keep alive traditional ways, an additional source of revenue.
African violets are beautiful, delicate little plants with names like Ballad of Happiness, Dimpled Darling and Bud's Pink-O-Wink, and the people who grow them spend countless hours potting and pricking and spraying off suckers and worrying about strange things like thrips and mealybugs and springtails. When African violet growers are involved with their violets, they're off in a world apart. And it's a world that goes far beyond the plants themselves — a happy, friendly and fascinating world full of intricate crossbreeding, intriguing discoveries, close-knit clubs and en-
In Canada, where growers have a reputation for producing exceptionally fine and specially large vi...
In Closing

There are times when I think that a Sunday afternoon spent idly in the middle of winter may be as much help to the spirit as all of the therapies we spend so much time and effort on, often so little avail. The other day, a Sunday, was that kind of day for me. I came home a little past noon, and after lunch I went into the living room and looked through the back window at the frozen yard and the fields beyond it, bright in the snow and stretching all the way to a stand of spruce trees that are, I'm sure, much older than the house. Even the sun looked cold. The thermometer outside the kitchen window—which has been there a long time and is therefore fahrenheit—was showing a few degrees above zero. But that was close to the house, out of the wind and in the sun, and as a naturalist told me, the temperature in winter can vary several degrees in one area, depending on where you place the thermometer—near a shed, near a tree, down by the fence or close to the snow cover. In fact, he said, if you were to place it beneath the snow, it might rise by as much as six or seven degrees, a fact that clearly shows the insulating value of snow, something the farmers have long known and which all of us would be wise to consider.

This winter the window at the back, which looks south, is giving us more light and more view; in September we took down a maple that had grown so close to the house that, along with hiding the sun and sky, it began to scrape the side of the house, causing much noise as a thrashing machine. Now it rests in pieces, about a hundred or so, waiting its season as firewood once the wind has gotten it ready. But what we lost in summer shade, we gained in winter light—not just the kind that warms the living room and makes the old oak chair my son bought last year seem right at home, but the kind that does something else, reminding you of the warmth of a favorite place in winter, of the pleasures of aloneness.

Since the house was silent, and since I cannot read in complete silence, I turned on the radio, hoping it would be a good day for reception so that I would have no trouble bringing in my favorite station from the city, CJRT, a station with a quiet, almost reserved personality—premiere everything about trivia—which plays classical music most of the time, but does it in a way that is light, friendly and never pompous. For months now, the signal has been much clearer, because the station is now sending out its pleasant sound from a transmitter on top of the CN Tower in Toronto, which means that it reaches tens of thousands of new listeners in the small towns of southern Ontario, a fact not only for the listeners but for the station, since it carries no commercials and depends upon donations from the audience (along with business and government) to stay on the air. I listened to the music of the time that I am home, but would gladly donate if it were only to help repay CJRT for the pleasure of its company in the living room on Sunday afternoons, when the world is silent except for its courteous presence.

I began to read, trying in vain to stay awake over a book by a poet of the philosopher who was trying, also in vain, to explain sex, but I found there was not much sense in my trying to understand the subject, at least not on a Sunday afternoon. My eyes glazed over as I took several runs at the professor's earnest effort to educate me: "It was suggested that if the monogamous principle is presented as a basic moral tenet, there will be something incoherent about arguing for it, and that if it is therefore insisted on rather than recommended, it will on the one hand, . . . ." I put the book down, not out of any disrespect for its author but with a sense of sympathy for those people still trying to understand sex, which may be difficult in the best of circumstances—a not surprising fact of life. I hope it is not so for some philosophers.

I find it much more pleasant, and perhaps more worthwhile in the long run, to turn to books on gardening—a part of the literary landscape that is rarely given its due—for even if you don't have a garden or, like me, like to dream of gardens in winter that other people will tend in summer, a good gardening book read on a cold day in January is the best testimony to the faith that Thoreau held: "All the year is a spring." That being the case, the drifts of snow beyond the window melt away when you open the pages of the garden books and enter what Katharine White has called "the gardens of the mind," with their waves of daffodils, tulips and the welcome colors of spring.

Mrs. White's expression is contained in her book Onward and Upward in the Garden (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979), which must be the most literary of all books ever written on gardening, containing, as it does, essays on her own garden and reports on the literature of gardening, all taken from her contributions to The New Yorker, where she was once an editor. Recalling her father (who like many of us dreamt of spring all winter long), she recommends one book by saying: "This beautiful volume would have given him many happy winter dreams, as it may give them to others today, just as it has to me. After all, winter reading and winter daydreams of what might be—the gardens of the mind—are as rewarding a part of gardening as the pastoral successes of a good summer of bloom."

Mrs. White was in failing health for a number of years near the end of her life (spent in Maine with her husband, E.B. White), but almost to the last—when she was writing propped up in bed—she kept on overseeing her garden. Her essays on the subject range from flowers, to shrubs, to seeds. She even wondered about lawns, reflecting on why, unlike Europeans, North Americans are so taken with greenward.

"Consider the many special delights a lawn affords: soft mattress for a creeping baby; worm hatchery for a robin, croquet or badminton court; baseball diamond; restful green perspectives leading the eye to a background of flower border, shrubs or hedge. . . ."

I like to think that Katharine White would have understood and affirmed the kind of Sunday afternoon I spent recently, with a bit of music, a book or two, my mind meandering toward spring. Even in the Maine autumn, her husband recalls, her thoughts went past the ice to come to the spring of which she dreamed. "As the years went by and age overtook her," he writes, while recalling her fall planting sessions near the end, "there was something comical yet touching in her bedraggled appearance on this awesome occasion—the small hunched-over figure, her studied absorption in the implausible notion that there would be yet another spring, oblivious to the ending of her own days, which she knew perfectly well was near at hand, sitting there with her detailed chart under those dark skies of dying October, calmly plotting the resurrection."