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his job the best on the newspaper.

In those pre-word-processor days, the newsroom was a noisy, gregarious place, but French always found a small, cozy cubicle in a quiet corner where he immersed himself in higher matters. In the mid-1960s these were novels by Margaret Laurence and Robertson Davies, Marie-Claire Blais and Gabrielle Roy or new Canadian novelists by Pierre Berton and Peter Newman. In the summer months, when he did not have to dig into the pre-Christmas avalanche of Canadian books, he could enjoy the luxury of a new Graham Greene or Norman Mailer or John Updike—usually under a thick skin in his backyard.

When the mood suited him, he might take a trip off the protectionist policies of the federal government or discover an adventurous new publishing house in northern Saskatchewan. Or he might fly off to Spain to interview the Canadian expatriate writer Sinclair Ross or wander about the English and Welsh countryside visiting the homes, pubs and graves of Charles Dickens, Dylan Thomas, Thomas Hardy, George Bernard Shaw, D.H. Lawrence and the Brontes. Or he might go a-slimming, as he did when he reviewed a 1960s heavy-breather by Jacqueline Susann called The Love Machine—the review appeared in the erstwhile Globe Magazine under the headline: "Quintessentially speaking: ugly!"

French had a high time with Susann that morning. He began his review, "A novel like this presents a real challenge to the reviewer's vocabulary. Suddenly all the old reliable adjectives no longer seem good enough—inert, clumsy, banal, contrived, trite, vulgar and what not. Sure, they get the idea across, but they don't convey the real awfulness, the essential tawdriness of the thing." Susann happened to be in Toronto on a promotion trip when the review appeared, and she lashed back at French, calling him "green slime."

During his 28 years as The Globe's literary editor, French has been called much worse and by far better writers. He conceives that reviewing books is an "art of arrogance," but to his own delight the job also well it is an art form, albeit on a minor and parasitic one. "It is parasitic in the sense that the author's work is the host, and the critic feeds on it," French explains, "but even in nature some parasites are beneficial, perhaps even necessary."

French defines the book reviewer as a "kind of advance scout in an unexplored country, who can chart the contours of the literary landscape—the mountain peaks, the green valleys, the deserts, the swamps—and leave direction signs for the travelers coming behind." One of the hazards of the business, he says, is that negative reviews are easier to write than positive ones. "The vocabulary of invective," he says, "is much richer than the vocabulary of praise."

By the fall of 1958, when he turned 62, French had become the best-known and most influential book reviewer in the country. Most bookellers acknowledged that even negative French reviews sell books, and many automatically double their orders for a new book if French reviews it in his thrice-weekly column, whether he loves it or hates it. A Coles bookshop in Toronto enlarged French's savage review of Jacqueline Susann's novel and installed it prominently in the window on Yonge Street. Even writers who have been unfavorably reviewed welcome any attention from French. In October 1988, the writer Hugh Hood began a letter to French by saying, "I'm sorry you didn't like The Motor Boys a bit better, but I want you to thank all the same for running the big review you gave me in the G&M today."

No doubt his reputation is enhanced by being the literary critic of The Globe and Mail, which is transmitted across Canada by satellite and has for years been regarded as the most important English-language newspaper in the country for writers, editors, publishers, booksellers and readers. When French reviewed Herbert T. Schwartz's book on Picasso in the summer of 1988, Schwartz, who lives part of the year in Tolucaleyak in the Northwest Territories, was on Hornby Island in the Beaufort Sea on his way to Alaska. Schwartz's wife read the review at their home in Quebec City, then sent her husband a message via the DEW Line in which she said, "Get back as soon as you can. Mr. French reviewed your Picasso book. I can't cope with people demanding interviews."

For all the hoopla and glamour the job entails, French lives a remarkably unassuming life. He has a love of travel, and he and his wife, Jean, have seen much of the world together. But their day-to-day life is ordinary almost to an obsession.

They have been married since 1951, raising two daughters and twin sons, and they still live in the split-level bungalow they bought in 1957 in Don Mills, a northeastern Toronto suburb that has become a synonym for suburbia.

French seldom has time for movies, plays or musical performances, except for the occasional book launch or reading by a visiting world-class writer, such as Norman Mailer or Toni Wolfe, he rarely partakes of the literary social life. "My friends are not writers," he says. "A lot of my acquaintances are writers, but I deliberately try to keep some space between us." French thinks the ordinariness of his life keeps him sane, though he admits he really is not conscious of it because he does not know anything different.

Born in 1925, French grew up in the northeast section of London, Ont., the only son of a CPR fireman and a Scottish mother. As a boy, French entertained thoughts of being a railway man like his father and his grandfather, but these were firmly dispelled by his parents, who insisted he go to university. French attended Acadia College in Wolfville, N.S., starting in 1943. The Second World War dominated his high-school years, and he avidly read newspaper stories from the front by Ross Munro and Ernie Pyle and bunkered by the radio in the evening to listen to Edward R. Murrow's vivid reports on the Battle of Britain. He dreamed of becoming a war correspondent, as much for the glamour as to get out of London, which he regarded as a distillation of all that was insular and puritanical about small-town Ontario in the 1940s.

He had no thought then of becoming a literary critic, but he had cultivated an appetite for books, as a result of a near-tragedy in the family. His father was working as a fireman on a freight train that left London early one morning in October 1939 bound for Windsor. The freight approached a crossing at dawn, but the fog was so thick the crew on his father's freight could not see the flares by the track that signaled a stopped train ahead. The freight slammed into the rear of the train, killing the engineer and leaving French's father without a hand.

While he was recovering from the accident, French's father joined the Boul-de-
the-Month Club. One of the first books to arrive was Ernest Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. French remembers being “bashed out” by Hemingway’s terse, declarative prose, and the Spanish Civil War setting enlarged his dreams of becoming a war correspondent. Many of the books were railway adventures, which he loved but which, from the perspective of nearly 40 years of reading for a living, he realizes now were probably awful.

In his final year of high school, when French still wasn’t sure what he wanted to do with his life, the University of Western Ontario announced it would be starting the first journalism school in Canada. He enrolled in a general arts program at the university and then switched to the journalism program when the school opened in his second year. French was one of 29 journalists, many of them Second World War veterans. Toward the end of the 1946-47 academic year, The Globe and Mail approached George McCracken, director of the journalism school, to say it wanted him to hire a student to work at the newspaper in the summer. McCracken suggested one student, but the young man had already committed himself to work that summer for *The Peterborough Examiner*. McCracken’s second choice was French, who eagerly accepted a $25-a-week position as a general reporter.

He got his first byline for an article on an international meeting of missionar- ies in Whitch, Ont. French can’t recall the details of the story, but he remembers walking up to city editor Doug MacFarlane after the story and thanking him for the byline. In his gut, MacFarlane told him: “Don’t thank me, boy. Thank yourself.” It was all French needed to know he had arrived.

When he graduated from Western in 1949, The Globe asked him back, and he became a full-time reporter, earning $45 a week. The closest he came to a Hemingwayesque experience was when he was stationed in the mining town of Timmins, north of Toronto with two other reporters to cover a manhunt. For three days in the bush, French subsisted on blueberries, lipped heffers and rum. Later he covered education, then city hall, and then the Raid on the Bold Wive, which entitled him to an aca- demic year at Harvard University. The turning point in French’s career, when his jour- nalism became more contemplative and literary, less reportorial, Nieman fellows were given a great deal of freedom, but they were required to take one course and follow it to its conclusion, completing all the assignments. French chose a course that examined novels of the last 100 years, which began with Gustave Flaubert and ended with Malcolm Lowry. When he returned to The Globe and Mail, French joined the editorial board, the group that determines the newspaper’s policy and writes its editorials. Still in his twenties, he felt at the center of power in Canada, convinced that the editorials in The Globe and Mail “made up the minds of the country.” In the 1950s, it probably was no exaggeration, as the board included some of the most distinguished journalists of the day. From 1955 to 1960, he divided his time between the editorial board and the new Globe Magazine, the editor of which was Richard Doyle, who later be- came editor of The Globe and Mail.

French often was superb

As a writer for The Globe Magazine, French often was superb, writing amusing first-person accounts of camping trips with his family and insightful essays on the state of Canadian literature. In 1960 he won the University of West- ern Ontario President’s Medal for the best magazine article published in Can- ada, a study of young French-Canadian writers such as Jacques Godbout and Claude Jasmin, which appeared in The Globe Magazine under the title, “The Cultural Guerrillas of Quebec.” He also won National Newspaper Awards for critical writing in 1978, 1979 and 1986 and the Canadian Booksellers Asso- ciation President’s Award in 1987.

Doyle had tipped off French before he went to Harvard that he was a likely successor to William Arthur Deacon, who had been The Globe and Mail’s li- terary critic since the newspaper was founded in 1936.

When French succeeded Deacon an literary critic in 1960, Canadian litera- ture was coming in from the cold, both fiction and nonfiction. “There was no way of knowing we were poised on the brink of an unprecedented flowering of Canadian literature,” he says. “Margaret Laurence published her first novel that year, *This Side Jordan*, and set in Africa; and Margaret Atwood was still an under- graduate at the University of To- nonto. But that year the pace began to quicken.” He mentions that Nor’Easter, Frye marked 1960 as the turning point in Canadian literature and recently ob- served that since 1960 Canadian litera- ture has become real literature, recog- nized as such all over the world. As The Globe’s literary critic, French found himself in the right place at the right time, but what made it exciting and re- warding was that he knew it. One of the joys of the job, he says, “is discovering a talented new writer or an unexpectedly fine performance by an old one.”

When he started the job in 1960, the number of books to review could be counted in the hundreds. By the 1980s they were in the thousands, and there are days when Jack Kappel, who assigns books to the other reviewers used by The Globe (French always selects his own books), staggered into French’s office with up to 200 new books from the morning mail. It reminds French of growing up in London, when he listened to the clatter of coal hurling down the chute to the basement. “Now,” he says, “I feel I’m at the bottom of the chute, looking for diamonds in the as- thract.”

At 62, after reviewing books for 28 years, French finds Canadian literature more exciting than ever. For the first time ever, in the fall of 1987, he required two columns to list the major books scheduled for the pre-Christmas rush. Canadian books are translated and stud- ied in Sweden, Norway, West Germany, the Soviet Union and Italy, where the most active foreign centre for Canadian studies is at the University of Bologna. Several Canadians have been mentioned as solid candidates for a Nobel Prize in literature, among them Robertson Davies and Northrop Frye. French estimates from singling out a fa- vorite Canadian writer, but if he were a betting man in the Nobel stakes he would put his money on Frye. He has cut back on some of his duties, including a 25-year association with Ryerson University, where he was a part-time instructor he taught editorial writing and critical writing. Many of his students have gone on to prominent journalism careers themselves, including Timothy Pritchard, editor of The Globe and Mail, and violinist Nancy Wilson. Wendy Mesley of CBC-TV; John Downing, editor of The Toronto Sun; Bryan Johnson, The Globe’s correspondence chief in Africa; and Don Obe, former chairman of jour- nalism at Ryerson.

French feels a responsibility to the writers and readers of the country and to the country itself. In a lecture at Dalhousie University, one of a series sponsored by *The Review*, he spoke of how Canadian writers create a portrait of a nation greater than the sum of its parts. “I like to think of this collective creative effort of our writers as a her- nes of words, protecting us from the dark night of ignorance, from the barbarians of prejudice and misunderstanding, and protecting us too from the insecurities and uncertainties that seem to be part of the Canadian heritage.”

For both the hell and glimmer, French says few people appreciate the demands and rigors of the job. One of the chal- lenges, he says, especially in writing his columns, is to make the job seem effortless. If the hard work shown through, he does not feel he is succeeding. One day last June, French began reading a 550- page book in the backyard at 10 o’clock in the morning. He carried the book with him throughout the day, to and set of the house, to the dinner table, to the bathtub—a William French theory of reviewing is a book gets wet, it’s no good. If it dries out enough to keep it dry, it must be worthwhile. The book finally sat up forlornly on the floor of the living room at midnight. It was such an engrossing and provocative book he had a hard time sleeping that night, and on the expression in the next morning he lifted the review through the book, machine, got to get his desk.

There are other rigors. For months, he had been suffering pains in his right shoulder, which his doctor diagnosed as severe tendinitis that might require sur- gery. One afternoon when he left The Globe, erasing his old leather saddle of books several blocks to the car for the drive home, he decided to put the saddle on a scale that evening. He dis- covered it weighed nearly 20 kilograms. He lightened his load, and after six months of rehabilitative therapy the pain disappeared. —
Making music for 20 years, the Boss Brass is a great big band

Think of these names as the beginning of a list: the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, the Stratford Festival Company. Seems obvious enough. It’s a list of Canadian artistic groups — musicians, dancers, actors — whose work is celebrated at home and abroad, heaped with praise inside Canada and embraced just as fervently beyond our borders. The Oxford String Quartet, the Boss Brass, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet... What’s it doing on the list? And what’s the Boss Brass anyway?

Put in the most minimal description, the Boss Brass is an orchestra that plays jazz. It has 22 members who among them play five reeds, five trumpets, five trombones, two French horns, guitar, piano, bass, drums and percussion. Its history dates back to 1968, when it came together in Toronto and set off on an adventure that took it and its recordings to every corner of the music world. For leadership, it looks to a gentle and gentle taskmaster named Rob McConnell.

McConnell, 53 years old, large, ram- péd, witty, conducts the Boss Brass. He also holds down a seat in its trombone section. What’s it all about? "I’ve been doing the way to go in big-band jazz these days."

The music called jazz has glorified in a format that is relatively recent, deceptively smooth and undeniably dazzling. Jazz began to form at the turn of the century in various parts of the United States. New Orleans is often claimed as its birthplace, but all over America musicians who were mostly black and mainly untrained fanned their way toward the new form of music that grew out of a tenacious amalgam of work songs, gospel hymns, the blues and European harmonic idioms. From the start, jazz was a highly personal music. And as it developed, two major characteristics came to distinguish it: a unique sense of rhythm, labeled "swing," and the genius of its players for improving melodic variations on the spot.

Like poetry, The New Yorker jazz critic Whitney Balliett writes, "Jazz is the art of surprise." And most of the surprise springs from the work of jazz’s mightiest soloists. Louis Armstrong was the first, a trumpet player whose improvisations soared into a pure and rich lyricism. But as jazz and jazzmen acquired musical sophistication, the soloists turned ever more inventive and adventurous. There was the cool, flowing elegance of the tenor saxophonist Lester Young, and there was the fire and brilliance of the alto saxophonist Charlie Parker, a man whose restless, tortured life was captured in film, the acclaimed film directed by Clint Eastwood.

Jazz abounded in trailblazers. Miles Davis opened as an innovator in jazz evolution, a trumpeter who found musical legitimacy and inspiration in a startling variety of sources, not excluding rock. And Ornette Coleman, an alto saxophonist, paved the way for something entirely new, an abstract approach to jazz. By the time these men and others made their mark, jazz was equally at home in the concert halls of America and Europe. Without sacrificing its spirit, it found acceptance in the American classical composer Virgil Thompson observed, "is the most astounding spontaneous musical event to take place anywhere since the Reformation."

If jazz’s soloists were the masters of one-man musical flights, then its big bands provided the vehicles for the masters of form and composition. The leaders who put together the first large jazz groups in the early 1920s embraced them primarily as an opportunity to boost jazz’s excitement (live). More musicians equaled more power. But Duke Ellington’s arrival changed all the perceptions. He formed his orchestra in 1925, and for the following half-century he created it as his personal palette. He wrote music for it that came in an infinite range of colors and shadings. He composed tone poems, sacred music, pop songs, concertos, movie scores and exercises in fantasy. All of it, played by the band with enormous panache, was drenched in jazz, and almost single-handedly Ellington elevated the possibilities of the big band.

For the time, adventurous and exuberant big bands enjoyed status as household commodities. The best of them, as critic Gene Lees points out, "explored the first important new orchestral formation since the symphony orchestra took..."
shape in the time of C.P.E. Bach, and caused the spore-burst of brilliant music that we think of as the big band era." Behind much of the significant music there inevitably lurked a composer-ar- ranger who gave the band its identifiable sound signature. Ellington did it aptly for his own orchestra. But most other master writers labored in the honorable anonymity. Fletcher Hendes- son, a man little known outside the jazz community, wrote the arrangements that defined the Goodman Band. Ernie Wilkins accomplished much of the same for Count Basie. It was Pete Rugolo for Stan Kenton. Sy Oliver for Duke Ellington. Gil Evans for Claude Thornhill, for Miles Davis's dazzling orchestral excursion in their band. Gil Evans even wrote en- gaging ensembles of the 1970s and 1980s.

And it was this splendid jazz tradition, combining composer-arranger with big band, that Rob McConnell and the Boss Brass have kept alive and carried for- ward from the apparently unlikely out- post of Toronto, Canada.

A studio work we had in Toronto, the rehearsal bands, the jazz, the experimen- tation under writer like Gordon Delamont, they would have thought I was crazy for doing that kind of music.

Within a year, McConnell was back in Toronto and busy on commercial jobs and jazz dates. But that felt a lot more exciting than missing in his musical life. "I knew I was a writer as well as a player," he says, "and I needed that writing to write for." To fill the gap, McConnell orga- nized the Boss Brass.

Other musicians of his age and stature — Bickert, Kolkmann, Clarke, Basson, Ellington's Gil Evans and his fellows at the top. There are the unison passages that combine sweet and surprising passages that echo of French horns with reeds, trumpets with flutes. There are the pas- sages where the rhythm section drops out and the horns float free in large, bol- lowy chunks of sound. There are the startling shifts and accelerations in tempo. And the musical jokes. And the exquisitely legato — smooth, gliding — backgrounds to the solos. "All these things, at least the way Rob writes them, are his invention," Don Thompson says. "If anybody did them before Rob, I've never heard of that person."

"I love the way Rob writes for the brass instruments," Harry Freedman says. "It's very precise, very good to the ear." Freedman is one of Canada's pre- eminent classical composers and as a man with an affection for jazz. "Rob's writing in the band's version of Porgy and Bess" is one of the best big band arrangements in years." Freedman goes on. "He used the woodwinds in a very innovative and imaginative way. The whole thing. Rob's writing, the band's playing, makes the Boss Brass — I don't use this word frivolously — a great band."

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On the night of Friday, April 11, 1985, Rob McConnell was on stage at the Cen- tre in the Square in Kitchener, Ont., conducting the combined musicians of the Boss Brass and the Kitchener-Water- loo Symphony Orchestra in a composi- tion he wrote for jazz band and sym- phony orchestra. He felt a crushing pain in his chest. It was a heart attack, and for several months McConnell had to lie low. He quit his heavy smoking habit. "Healy?" McConnell says. "If there'd been a way to play the trombone and smoke at the same time, I'd have done it." And he dieted and took up a regi- men of long walks. His health came back and so did his leadership of the Boss Brass.

Until 1988. In the summer, McConnell decided on a sharp turn in career that may have been lingering in his mind from the time of the heart attack. He ac- cepted a post as full-time instructor at the prestigious Guelph School of Music in Van Nuys, Calif. McConnell's absence from Canada for a large chunk of the year meant that the Boss Brass is at best on hold and at worst has reached the end of its glorious 20-year run. Whatever the future, the band will live on through its record albums, its accomplishments and its secure position on any list of Canada's most celebrated artistic groups. The Ca- nadian National Ballet, the Canadian Op- er Company, the Show Festival Play- ers — the Boss Brass. (To he an- nounce of Porgy and Bess).
NO TIME TO WASTE

Caring for the environment, a priority at Imperial

BY RUSSELL FELTON

In last summer's sweltering heat, one of the most important international conferences ever held in Canada took place in Toronto's Metro Convention Centre. The title of the conference, sponsored by Environment Canada and chaired by Canada's former ambassador to the United Nations Stephen Lewis was "The Changing Atmosphere: Implications for Global Security." But the broad subject for discussion was nothing less than the survival of the human race. By comparison, issues raised at the seven-nation...
economic summit conference, held in Toronto just a few weeks earlier, paled into relative insignificance.

Some 300 environmental experts and government representatives from 48 countries had voiced their concern:

If atmospheric pollution continues unchecked, the dollar is likely to be un

habitable within 300 years. The reason: the earth’s ozone layer — the

gaseous “envelope” that filters harmful ultraviolet radiation from the sun — is

rapidly being eroded, and the so-called “greenhouse effect,” resulting from the

accumulation of such gases as carbon dioxide in the upper atmosphere, is

actually changing the world’s climate.

The keynote speaker at the conference was Geo Hambric, prime

minister of Norway and head of the United Nations World Commission on

Environment and Development. The commis

sion’s 1987 report, entitled “Our Common Future” and widely known as

“Brundtland Report,” called for a con

cernt international effort to ensure that economic development is fully integrated

with environmental responsibility. At the conference, she again called for action,

describing pollution as a threat to the human race and an
catastrophe.

“I have no doubt,” she said, “that the message is being delivered loud and
distinctly. The time has now come to start the process of change.”

Canada’s prime minister, Brian Mul

oney, strongly endorsed Brundtland’s remarks and promised action to address

the issue of environmental protection, in line with the recommendations of

the report. He acknowledged that the country enjoys a “very difficult task”

inherent in the implementation of the measures proposed.

But the real challenge lies not only in the technical and administrative aspects,

but also in the political dimension. The Mulroney government has been

under pressure to take decisive action, but the process of decision-making can

be complex and time-consuming.

Most Canadian provinces support the prime minister’s decision to address

environmental issues. In a 1987 publication, 66 percent of the respondents expressed concern about the

environment in their own areas, and 82 percent identified it as a specific

environmental problem.

In fact, federal, provincial, and

municipal governments in Canada have already proposed or enacted tough envi

ronmental protection regulations, many of which see as stringent as those in other

countries. This includes the Environmental Protection Act, or EPCA, which codified environmental protection legislation formerly contained in a number of statutes, has been de

scribed as the toughest of any federal environmental legislation to date. The

most serious violations, such as cr

iminal negligence causing death, can carry a maximum fine of $100,000 and a

maximum of five years in prison. Senior corporate executives may also be held

accountable for the actions of their compa

nies or agents.

According to Chris Kempling, an envi

ronmental services manager with EPC

A, the refining and manuf

acturing industries are the most affected. Oil refining operations are not only

regulated, but also explicit in writing and involve complex procedures.

As Kempling notes, “The more steps involved in the production of oil, the more

regulatory requirements are necessary. It is a very complex procedure.”

The “mixed message” of the government’s policy, however, has led to confusion among industry professionals.

“Some regulations are clearly defined, while others are more vague and open to interpretation,” says Kempling. “It is important to stay informed and be aware of the changes.”

Dealing with the complex requirements of environmental regulations can be frustr

ating, but Imperial has accepted the challenge and is working closely with the Environment Canada to develop and implement effective programs.

“Imperial has always been committed to environmental protection, and we will continue to do so in the future,” says Pauline Mennie, the company’s senior environmental officer.

In conclusion, the “greenhouse effect” is a serious concern that requires the cooperation of all governments and industries to

reduce the use of fossil fuels and promote alternative energy sources.

“We have a responsibility to ensure that all future projects are executed with a minimum amount of damage to the natural environment.”

Doug Cook, EPCO’s president and chief executive officer, notes, “We are committed to reducing our environmental impact and strive to minimize our impact wherever possible.”

Cook adds, “We recognize that we have a role to play in protecting the environment, and we are committed to doing our part.”

“The importance of environmental protection cannot be overstated,” says John Hill, the company’s chief environmental officer. “We must work together to ensure the sustainability of our planet.”

In summary, the challenges facing the environmental sector are significant, but with cooperation and commitment, we can make a positive impact on the future of our planet.

“Together, we can create a better tomorrow.”
And as an indication of its intensifying commitment, in 1987 it spent $328 million on environmental protection. Imperial's formal environmental policy statement, signed by chairman and chief executive officer Arden Hayes, is certainly unequivocal: "Imperial Oil Limited is committed to environmental protection and to safeguarding the health of its employees, customers and the general public." That commitment is more than smooth words designed to soothe the public. It introduces a highly practical and concrete policy statement, which has affected all aspects of Imperial's operations.

In the area of reducing trace contaminants, for example, Esso Chemical Canada has significantly reduced the concentrations of chemicals in water discharged from its Alberta petrochemical plant. Sampling and analysis by an outside contractor confirms the excellent quality of our effluent water," says environmental supervisor Mike Prudenthome. He also points out that, as of late August 1988, the plant had operated for more than a year and a half without any significant cases of water contamination. Meanwhile, Esso Resources' Cold Lake Limited, Imperial's oil sands operation based on natural resource subsidiary, has actually turned a pollution problem into an oil-sand product. Sulpher emissions associated with the production and processing of natural gas have long been recognized as a significant source of atmospheric pollution. As new technologies were developed to extract sulphydride from natural gas, sales of sulphydride have turned a profit by finding markets for the sulphur itself.

In the critical area of oil spills and other accidents, Imperial has evolved a national emergency-response system that has been cited as a model for all Canadian industries. In an emergency, a seven-member team of safety, spill-containment, clean-up and environmental experts can be mobilized in minutes and can be on the scene anywhere in Canada or on the U.S. mainland within hours.

Such an emergency arose in March 1988 when a tanker truck rolled onto its side and began leaking diesel fuel near remote Wading Lake in Northern Ontario. An Imperial emergency response team quickly contained the spill before it caused serious environmental damage, but completed the difficult clean-up operation within a week. The team's actions prompted a letter from the Ontario Ministry of the Environment to Arden Hayes. "The immediate response, the dedication and the diligence of the response team ... averted what could have resulted in a very serious environmental problem," the letter said.

Major company projects are designed, constructed and operated with environmental protection as a priority. Esso Oil and Gas Administration, who said recently: "As one of the principal operators in frontier lands, Esso is committed to its conduct and its environmental programs. Moreover, the active participation of its industry-wide organizations has helped immensely in solving environmental problems and developing and testing methods of operating on frontier lands."

Perhaps the most telling measure of the depth of a business corporation's commitment to environmental responsibility, however, is how it responds today to environmental problems caused by its operations in the past. Imperial faced such a test recently when lead contamination of water supply problems arose from former site of its refinery in Calgary. That refinery was decommissioned and dismantled in the mid-1970s and a portion of the site is now occupied by partly by residential homes and partly by Beaver Dam Flats park, owned by the city of Calgary.

Environmental problems first came to light in March 1987, when soil analyses of the site, prepared for the city and a park to improve the park, were re-viewed. Those analyses, says Andy Ihal, an environmental biologist and Esso Petroleum environmental adviser in Edmonton, revealed high lead levels.

"We realized right away that there was a major environmental issue at stake at a site we once owned," says Ihal. "By the next day we had gained approval from senior management to notify the city of Calgary and the Alberta government of the potential risk and to form a joint task force to deal with it."

The warning set in motion a series of tests and studies that have led, in turn, to substantial clean-up measures, even though the tests have shown no immediate health hazards to local families. Perhaps more to the point, in this case, as in other environmental situations, measures have been a secondary concern to Imperial. As Esso Petroleum president Gordon Thomson told company share-holders in 1987: "Our primary concern is for the health and safety of the citizens and the quality of the environment. The issue of who pays should be resolved separately, as so not to interfere with action ..." The financial issue was in fact resolved in July 1988 when Imperial proposed, and the Alberta government agreed, to share on a two-thirds to one-third ratio the estimated $4 million to $6 million cost of removing lead-contaminated soil and restoring Beaver Dam Flats park by 1994.

Despite such public acknowledgment of Imperial's environmental responsibility, the corporation recognizes that areas for improvement still exist. In every part of the company, environmental matters are being stressed even more strongly than in the past.

"It's no longer enough to have an environmental affairs department, with a team of experts trying to cover all operations," says Doug Cook. "We're now spreading responsibility for environmental protection throughout the organization to integrate it with other operating responsibilities. We're placing environmental experts within operating departments and divisions to help, advise and monitor, but it's the responsibility of every employee, from senior managers to operators who control valves to inspect all sites, not only to comply with legal requirements but to be actively concerned about the environmental impact of everything the company does."

Above all, Imperial strongly supports the major thrust of the Brundtland Report, which is that "sustainable development" requires environmental and economic activities to be managed within a single, integrated policy and management structure. As Maurice F. Strong, one of two Canadian delegates to the United Nations World Commission on the Environment, said in a recent lecture that it is "not possible for activities that affect the environment must assume responsibility and be accountable for the economic dimensions of these activities."

Imperial assumes its responsibilities and is willing to be held accountable. As Arden Hayes said recently: "Nothing is more central to Imperial's business philosophy than our commitment to environmental and safety considerations. We have a strong record of being environmentally responsible in the past, and we're going to build on it for the future. We're preparing now to meet the environmental challenges of the 1990s and beyond."

"It's the responsibility of every employee... to be actively concerned about the environmental impact of everything the company does"
CRITICAL APPLAUSE

Canadian drama is in the midst of a remarkable flowering

BY TED FERGUSON

For all of its historical significance, the first staging of a Canadian play in Toronto, at the Royal Lyceum Theatre in April 1853, didn’t impress newspaper editor Samuel Thompson. Writing in the Daily Patriot and Express, Thompson said he was quite disappointed because G. Simone Lee’s Fiddle, Faddle, and Fuzzle—a farce about three suitors wooing a rich widow—wasn’t Canadian enough. “The play is not a Canadian one, but English, both in its idea and its character,” he lamented. “We expected to see the mirror held up
in which we could see our own abstrusities, not those of the millioner country.

Although it took more than 100 years, Thronton’s complaint of being an English Canadian playwright, including our own Robert Louis Stevenson, has been answered. Plays dealing with Canadian (lyrics and issues and even some dialogues) into what is called "abstrusities" have become so abundant and gained such much critical acclaim in recent years that whole years that home-grown drama is actually in the midst of an unprecedented flowering. These used to be a little writer who could make more waiting-mails than they could writing plays," says John Gray, artistic and producing director of the Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto. "Now there are so many different productions of a single play give some artists are doing very, very well financially.

But writing-boom inspired the Governor General’s Awards com-
mittee to establish an annual prize in 1981 for the best original drama. Posi
tive, but also that it would be a strong point to play his part in this community in which he resides. His 40-
DO plays include "The Man," an exami-
nation of Canadian murderers’ strokes in Ontario. Do play; and "Effort Free-
ner," a look at the Catalan coal miners’ strike in 1951, and "French D
doing around weekend activities at pool Calvin de Austerity’s estate in 1957, Fl-
ants has been hailed by the New York Times as the most "magnificent, humor-making, the Lening-
extra-teal of the year.

What really makes Tama’s apart from other Canadian plays is its ground-breaking structure. The 10 acts are not as obvious in space; they perform scenes simi-
larly in different rooms. Audience members follow the characters as they move about a house and decide which rooms they will. The characters discussed art, politics, and even more serious topics, fearing they might be missing something intriguing, practically run around noon to see them. The plays have been described by many viewers as a living movie.

Krutzik has written several plays, but Tama’s was his first hit. Krutzik left school in Grade 10 and, while writing poetry, began working as a waiter for a bookstore. ‘I’ve been working at the Globe since I was 16, and I was accepted an acting job at the Globe. I had expected the Prairies to be boring, but I was wrong,” he said.
The landscape out to be par-

true,” he says. "His playwriting doesn’t get in the way of his work in the theater, or his writing. It all co-exists, I think. I wouldn’t be writing enough, with our moronic maelstroms. Yet his plays do re-

Another dramatist, Regina’s Box, has the same composition. "The writing is very similar, but he is also driven by a strong desire to play his part in this community in which he resides. His 40-
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The most striking trend in Canadian theatre: widespread public acceptance of new plays by our own writers.

A few dominant authors managed to work stayed through the rest of the 1970s. A Trip to Beaver River, a melodrama penned by a local resident using the penname Augusta Frowen, was noted in the bue-

I fear the turn of the century was spo-

19
pared with the impact touring foreign performers had on the country. Sarah Bernhardt, Ellen Terry, Henry Irving and Edmund Kean were among the illustrious stars who played to sell-out crowds. Meanwhile, talented Canadian actors such as Margaret Atwood and Marie Dressler left the country to become famous in American productions. The First World War stopped the foreign performers from coming here, and in 1919 the University of Toronto, striving to stimulate Canadian drama, established an on-campus theatre, Hart House, which promised to do at least one hometown drama a year. Hart House spawned two authors of enduring merit, Merrill Denison, whose 1920s play "Brothers In Arms" involved a conflict between urban and rural people, and John Coulter, who wrote a drama in 1937, "The Family Portrait," that was later performed at Dublin's Abbey Theatre. In its 1948 season, the first of the post-war professional theatres, the New Play Society, featured a number of Canadian playwrights, including Morley Callaghan, Harry J. Boyce, Mercer Moore and Andrew Allan. "We drew good crowds and made a small profit," Moore recalls. "But it wasn't the serious world that really went over big. It was the musical spoof. Spring Thaw. It stayed around in different versions for more than 20 years."

Although no single work can be credited with triggering a breakthrough for English-Canadian drama, there was one play that did more than any other to give French-Canadian theatre a major spur. The play was "Tit Cog," a novel by Gilmore, about a soldier conscripted into the Canadian army. "Tit Cog" premiered in Montreal in 1948 and ran for more than 200 performances. Gilmore's success launched a wave of new Quebec playwrights, headed by Marcel Dubé (Zone) and Jacques LaGuignard (Les Insolites). Michel Tremblay emerged as a potent force in the 1960s after he wrote a play about working-class children, "Les Belles-Sœurs," and in the 1970s, David Fennario produced his bilingual study of a poverty-ridden neighborhood, "Baltimore." The long and largely unfruitful bid to get an English-language theatre atmosphere showed some bright flashes during the 1960s. John Herbert's prison drama, "For"-tune and Men's Eyes, triumphed in New York, and George Ryga's portrait of a be-leaguering Indian girl, "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe," became an instant classic. But it wasn't until the 1970s that our playwrights truly began to make a tremendous contribution to Canadian culture. Inspired by Toronto's Factory Theatre Lab and other theatre companies devoted exclusively to Canadian drama, a new group of stellar playwrights emerged, John Palmer, James Reaney, John Murrell and Tom Wilmot among them. They steadily made waves during the last decade culminated in the current boom. But according to Glenda MacFarlane, a best is yet to come. As former tour coordinator for the Playwright's Union, until recently MacFarlane had a firsthand view of the next generation of playwrights. "There are lots of kids in schools these days who plan on making play writing a career because they realize they have a chance of having their work produced," she says. "There's going to be a wonderful mixture of seasoned authors and young new talent in the future, which will take Canadian drama to even greater heights."

The subjects that Canadian plays deal with have changed considerably in the last few decades. Once taboo, themes such as homosexuality, prostitution, racism, incest and adultery are being explored in graphic language and not just in tiny, back-street theatres either. Michel Tremblay's "La Bonjour, La Bonjour" was presented at Toronto's well-established St. Lawrence Centre in 1986; the play pivots around a love affair between a brother and sister. Why are audiences more willing to accept that kind of theme today? "My guess is that movies, television and books have a lot to do with it," says MacFarlane. "There's generally a more open attitude toward controversial subjects in modern society, and the theatre world is part of that development."

The indigenous drama scene isn't, of course, entirely problem free. A Playwright's Union survey two years ago revealed that roughly a third of our universities still offer no courses in Canadian drama. And there is a near-depressing need in some urban centres for more performance space. But Globe and Mail theatre critic Ray Conlogue says that the positive things happening vastly outweigh the few drawbacks. "The most striking trend in Canadian theatre in the last two years is the widespread public acceptance of new plays by our own writers. Both Nothing Sacred and 8-Movie: The Play, which broke box-office records at the St. Lawrence Centre, have had and enthusiastic audiences." Conlogue believes that some homegrown writers will eventually be recognized as world-class talents on a par with Sam Shepard or Harold Pinter. "Many of our authors have the talent and work produced in foreign lands, but only one, Michel Tremblay, has had a major intellectual impact," he says. "Tremblay is considered an exciting, theatrical genius in France." Of the new generation of French-Canadian playwrights, Conlogue is most impressed by Robert Lepage, who often directs and appears in his own works, which include "Vinci, The Dragon is Trilogy and Tectonic Plates." While Lepage's work is avant garde, says Conlogue, "he uses an incredible amount of wit and personality, which make his works accessible to the audience. Among English-Canadian playwrights, Conilogue singles out David French and another Toronto writer, George F. Walker, as prime candidates for international renown. French's Salt-Water Moon has been performed throughout North America and Europe, and Walker's Nothing Sacred is receiving no less than four major U.S. productions this season. An earlier comedy, Filthy Rich, which plunges a reporter into a murder case, prompted New York Times critic D.L.R. Brickner to praise the author for having "an eye for the ridiculous, a good ear for old film dialogue, and an imagination that packs his play with action and mystery." Janet Amos, one of the country's better known directors and actresses, says she will be happy if any Canadians achieve global fame but adds that pleasing foreign critics and audiences shouldn't be the first priority for Canadian playwrights and theatre companies. Running by the Blyth Festival, an Ontario company that only stages Canadian works, for several seasons, she took "Over There" to New Brunswick in Fredericton in 1984. Under Amos' wing, Theatre New Brunswick mounted Sharon Pollock's "The Pollock's Doc" (Pollock herself replaced Amos in mid-1988), John Gray's Don Messier's "Jubilee" and Anne Chislett's "The Tomorrow Box." "It has taken a painfully long time for Canadians to see themselves up there on our stages," she says. "If our regional theatres have a common goal, it is to make sure that the climate for original works stays healthy so that the mirror will never, ever be taken away."

Brian Bamberis: reflecting the new vision of employee responsibility

At Imperial, training paves the way to the future

"I attended the University of Manitoba," Arden Haynes once said with a grin, "and then I attended the University of Imperial." Haynes, the chief executive officer of Imperial Oil, was making a joke but also a point—that in joining Imperial, he may have lost the campus but not necessarily the classroom. Life at Imperial included so many courses and seminars on so many subjects, from energy development to human relations that his light-hearted analogy was particularly apt. From the very beginning, when it was founded in 1880 by the Standard Oil company, the corporation's head offices were in London, Ont., Imperial, partly
because its work was so specialized, seemed to have a deep conviction about the importance of training people to understand their jobs better and to increase their skills. In the early fifties, in response to the demands of the war effort and modern technology, Imperial formalized that conviction by becoming one of the first companies in the country to set up a training program, conducted by full-time trainers from its employee relations group. "Almost overnight," said a writer in The Review of those years, "Sarnia refinery became a kind of university." For three-week periods, groups of 50 employees could be seen each morning streaming into a classroom, listening as engineers and foremen explained subjects they needed to learn to do their jobs. It was the same in every refinery — there were actual classrooms set up from Dartmouth, N.S., to Norman Wells, N.W.T.

There was, then as later, more taking place in the classrooms than met the eye or ear. For training (or development, as some called it), when at its best, did a lot more than impart information. It made people aware of the importance of their contribution and hence more confident and committed. One day in late May 1953, when Imperial’s training program had been set up for two years, the company director, Cecil E. Carson, who had joined Imperial in 1922, and hence had seen its training program develop, stood before a meeting of the Canadian Manufacturers’ Association in Toronto. He was to speak on the subject of developing top managers in a company. But very quickly he told the executives listening to him that training for top management was a mistake if a company didn’t have training for everybody. "On the grounds of common justice and to safeguard morale, development must be all-inclusive. The technician or specialist, for example, without whose skills industry would not progress, must not feel that his development is being ignored or is not important."

By then, there were numerous people in Imperial who were full-time trainers, spending day after day giving courses to staff members at every level. At Sarnia, one of the first people to coordinate the teaching of Imperial’s newly developed petroleum processing courses in the Sarnia refinery, found it a busy, exhilarating time. "Everyday, from morning until night, scores of employees were being taught, from first-class mechanics to engineers to operators. The demand was so great that what had started as a trial program was to become a mainstay of Imperial."

By the sixties, it seemed that there was never an hour in the life of the company when a group of people somewhere in Imperial was not involved in some form of study session. And the range of what they were studying and how they were going about it was striking in diversity. Naturally, many courses were in the technical area, where engineers would spend months becoming specialists — petroleum engineers. In human relations, hundreds of people were taking courses of a week or more, learning how to communicate, how to interview, how to lead a conference. Others were spending time in branches of the company completely new to them, gaining a broader knowledge of Imperial through a program called "in-terdepartmental familiarization."

Still, there was another aspect to training not always evident on the surface: the opportunity it provided for the development of those people with training combination of talent and energy to become Imperial’s future leaders. "In any organization that is intelligently run you simply must spot the talent and develop it," says Bill Moler, a recently retired Imperial vice-president who during his career had a lot to do with developing senior managers. "At Imperial we did this not as a reward to individuals for their excellence, but for the welfare of the organization — its future, its employees, its shareholders. It is in everyone’s interests to find future leaders and give them the opportunity to strengthen their skills."

Some of these men and women, and others who would advance to supervisory levels, took courses specifically designed to help them become effective managers — of projects and people. In the main, the courses, beginning with rudimentary principles of supervision and moving on to more sophisticated levels, were to be widely known and regarded in Imperial throughout the sixties and seventies: Management I, II and III. They guided imitators through the basics of managing to the nuances of operating a business in a global economy. Beyond this, those employees showing leadership potential were often invited to embark on what was peculiarly called "the blue plate special." For five weeks they traveled across the continent, familiarizing themselves with the workings of different facilities and groups at both Imperial and Exxon Corporation, Imperial’s largest shareholder.

Norm Perrett, a friendly style who joined the company in 1947 and is credited with formulating Management I, II and III, recalls the courses vividly. "As crowded hotel rooms from Vancouver to Dartmouth, these intensive programs were conducted scores of times each year. Participants came from all over. There were sales reps from British Columbia, engineers from Alberta and production managers from Ontario." According to Perrett, the greatest value of these gatherings lay in their selectivity. "It was the exchanging of ideas that was important," he says. "Certainly people came away with new information or new techniques that would make a difference in their jobs. But also, through meeting so many people right across the country, they came away with a better understanding of Imperial."

For many Imperial people, there was more still. For almost 40 years now, many potential management people — who were usually already university graduates in the natural sciences or in finance and commerce when they joined the company — have been sent off to Harvard, Queen’s, the University of Western Ontario, the Erb School of Advanced Management and elsewhere to enhance their ability, to gain more
depth and to broaden their intellectual understanding through lectures and mingling in the academic community. In addition, many of them have complemented their university experience with a stint in one of the most global business environments anywhere — Exxon. Ron Brennenman, now vice-president of production at Esso Resources, was sent to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1979 and later spent three years with Exxon. Of his MIT experience he says: "With 27 other people who came from various industries around the world I was exposed to some of the most innovative thinkers of the time. It was a meaningful experience and its value was permanent." Simi-
larly, Brennenman also benefited from his stay at Exxon: "During my years in New York, I was given two assignments. The first was to head up a group that was analysing the long range energy outlook and determining a crude oil pricing basis for Exxon's investment planning. The second was to learn as much as I could about Exxon's upstream business strategies. What this gave me was a global view of the entire industry, which I would never otherwise have gained."

All of this, of course, has called for an enormous commitment of time, talent and money from Imperial. There is probably no way to estimate the cost, but it is safe to say that since the fortes, when training first became a formal practice, Imperial had backed it with tens of millions of dollars. "But it is, without a doubt, time and money well spent," says Grant Nutall, vice-president, executive development and organization. "Look at it this way. Other petroleum companies have access to the same technology that we do. They may even have access to the same resources. But they do not have access to our people. We recruit the best and we train the best. Taken together that gives us an edge that other companies just can't match. That's why it's such a sensible investment."

Nonetheless, training was never static at Imperial. The company — contrary to the image that many large companies may have — has never been a coast-to-coast monolith. It reflects a healthy diversity transferred by a range of positions and a multitude of activities, from exploration and development at Esso Resources, to refining and marketing at Esso Petroleum. As well, the times themselves bring their natural change and evolution. For example, ever since the sixties, there has been, in the world at large and in the world of business, a growing awareness of the importance of individual creativity and enterprise. Imperial sensed that early on and sought to reflect it in its approach to training. "Our aim," says Jim Levens, the company's vice-president of human resources, "is to maximize the potential of individuals, to make them leaders in their own jobs. After all, people are, after all, a single, double, the great and critical resource."

In keeping with Levens' vision, and reflecting the particularities of their own needs, various parts of Imperial — Esso Resources, Esso Petroleum, Esso Chemical, for example — have embarked on training programs carefully tailored to their particular needs and contemporary to their approach. For example, at Esso Resources, a number of supervisors and managers have been taken during the past year on tours of leading companies throughout North America to see what might be learned and applied back in their own jobs. "For example," says Ro-

Paul Robinson: practical ways of getting first-hand experience

bland Mulberg of Esso Resources, who headed Esso Resources' study on super-

training, Bamells reflects the new vision of which Jim Levens speaks. He is not just a skilled technician but a deci-
sion maker, executing his own judg-

ment calls — calls that affect millions of dollars of equipment — and doing it with a fresh confidence that is extrem-
ently. "It's all very rewarding," he says with obvious pride. Not far away in Esso Chemical's offices, Mary Thayer, a poled woman with an easy smile who joined the company as a typist and is now a senior technologist, has spent much time with her co-workers in the past year on courses dealing with such things as job effectiveness and elimination of waste. "As a result of these training courses," she says, "we came to the conclusion that a lot of the internal mess and messos didn't really need to be typed. This has halved the amount of typing I do and freed me for other, more crucial projects. As a result, I now feel that I can live up to my potential at the company and make a more valuable contribution."

As well as petrochemicals, Esso Chemical produces agricultural chemicals, mostly from a plant near the Alberta town of Redwater. There, as elsewhere, there is a constant effort to focus on the value and desire to delegate increased responsibility to its people. For example, techni-

Training has and will continue to help bring about improvements throughout Esso Chemical

clerical employees have been trained to do numerous supervisory tasks, even to the point of sharing in the hiring of new staff. The result of all of this training upgrading is summed up by Dave Greacy, Esso Chemi-
cal's manager of human resources: "The training has and will continue to help bring about improvements throughout Esso Chemical — whether one measures productivity, manufacturing yields or product quality."

"Training has and will continue to help bring about improvements throughout Esso Chemical"
management reports and external correspondence in his 'in basket.' They discuss with him how they would handle each issue. He, in turn, tells them what he actually does. What more practical way of getting a first-hand experience of how a top executive does his job.'

Top executives themselves have not been excused from the ongoing training programs. During the past few years all have attended courses to make them competent in the use of new and far-reaching instruments of office technology, from the word processor to a communications system known as PROFS, through which roughly 4,000 Imperial people across the country can communicate almost instantly with one another. For example, a message from a Calgary manager can appear in seconds on the screens of managers in Vancouver, Edmonton, Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal. Today, executives, including the chairman, Arden Haynes, can be seen at their screens each morning, reading and sending messages that once would have taken the form of paper memos. More and more people are being taught every day to use PROFS, so about 200 people join Imperial's network every month. Says Haynes: 'The technology is obviously a superb tool. But it's only with expert instruction that we can use it to its full. That makes the difference and gives us the tremendous leap forward in communications and productivity.'

The trained of Imperial are currently making their own leap forward. Once, training was mainly the responsibility of people in the corporation's employee relations department at head office in Toronto. Now, in response to new times and the desire to be more efficiently run, training is looked after by people closer to the scene in the various organizations that make up the widespread Imperial family of companies — Esso Resources, Esso Petroleum, Esso Chemical and the corporate group in Toronto. The approach in each instance is tailored to the needs of the organization, but whereas ideas may be slightly different, ideals are not. The national goal is to strengthen the entire fabric of the corporation, by helping people find a new way of approaching their work, assuming more responsibility for it, becoming, in a sense, their own managers. In so doing they will bring a new spirit, a new creativity and a new energy to Imperial that will propel it toward the coming century. In short, Imperial and its trainers are working together to reach a new stage in the evolution of training, one in which people are not seen as students awaiting instruction but as people of potential and promise, seeking opportunities to work in new and more productive ways.

For many months now this broad vision has been very much on the mind of Arden Haynes. For one thing, he sensed its necessity. As Imperial was to retain healthy and to flourish in years to come, it had to face the scene in the various organizations that make up the widespread Imperial family of companies — Esso Resources, Esso Petroleum, Esso Chemical and the corporate group in Toronto. The approach in each instance is tailored to the needs of the organization, but whereas ideas may be slightly different, ideals are not. The national goal is to strengthen the entire fabric of the corporation, by helping people find a new way of approaching their work, assuming more responsibility for it, becoming, in a sense, their own managers. In so doing they will bring a new spirit, a new creativity and a new energy to Imperial that will propel it toward the coming century. In short, Imperial and its trainers are working together to reach a new stage in the evolution of training, one in which people are not seen as students awaiting instruction but as people of potential and promise, seeking opportunities to work in new and more productive ways.

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A while ago my wife and I were on a promotion for a new secret apartment complex, located to a solar bath by a glossy grackle who perched on finger nails, who told us that one of the great things about the time-share idea was that if you bought into the plan you could trade your week for somebody else's in another part of the world. When you wanted to travel to, say, Greece, you have an apartment wait...
say, for instance, the Greek words for cold water — “zero kroko” — stare at us, unspeaking, until we said them back to her and then kept our order of 10 Sfakas from the hot, still, happy Australian forest.

My wife and I have fond memories of quiet, shy inconsiderate men and women who brought warm messages of goodwill to our trips, like a little woman in a brown coat who, apparently noticing us looking lost and baffled in a big, gloomy, underground cavern connected with the railway station in Lyon, France, bought us two paper cups of coffee from a vending machine. It was an instinctive gesture meaning “we’re coming to your city,” which couldn’t have been more gracious if she’d served us champagne in long-stemmed crystalware. Another person I often think with pleasure is a businesslady and helpful little man in a railway conductor’s cap who rented airplane seats for 50 cents in a sort of attic above a railway station in a town in France for the benefit of people who, like us, left too late to find a hotel room for the night.

...looking out at the stars

He made a note of the time each person wanted to wake up and chalked it on a board, a model of quiet efficiency, and he came into the room at various times in the dark, whispering “time,” touching the traveler on the shoulder, like Pate in a conductor’s cap. The fact that men and women slept all in the same room seemed irrelevant there in the din, cold dawn, with men getting dressed hastily, in silence, braces dangling, struggling into the new day.

My wife and I go over our memories of these people more often than we get out our slides of bridges and famous buildings and Greek pillars. One person I still see more clearly than Notre Dame cathedral or the Parthenon is an amiable man who rented not one, but a room for two, a room for the night at an inn, with, as far as I could see, only one room, in a remote village in France near the birthplace of Chaplin. (You can still see the crumbling stone foundation of his house in an adjacent village.) After spending a sleep-er at the end of a long plank table as rough as a workbench (just put a flower in a vase beside my place), he led me to my room, up a worn wooden staircase, ignoring, with wandering, vast, and cold amusement, the jeers, yelps, whoops, thumps and hilarity of the customers at the dingy bar. Then, slipping into my meadow, as if the man were there, I kicked the mud, stirred up the grasshoppers, the only visitors wandering around the majestic ruins of a theatre and the site of the great city where science began. It was a feeling I won’t forget — as if two trips, when we pulled our bags along cobble streets before dawn to catch trains and ferries, stayed at obscure hotels listed in the guidebooks for frugal travelers and often picked the wrong hotel, or what we thought was the wrong hotel until we realized that what we thought was awful, ghouly furniture was fine old carved oak and that the place was us up anywhere we wanted. We wouldn’t have met people who helped us when we got lost — people who stepped out of our pleasant memories, like the brusk young woman in Amsterdam who appeared one night out of a faint mist, carrying a red rolled-up umbrella and kept herself late for night class, somewhere, pointing out clock houses people in the year, say, AD 3988 went into a silent, but field to look at a low stones that had once been the Place Ville-Marie in Montreal or the Bank of Commerce tower in Toronto. My wife and I still talk of someday tak- ing a trip for which everything will have been arranged, with accommodation in the best hotels. “We’ll just sit there,” we say, “and watch someone put our bags in the right place and go up to our room.” But I somehow doubt that we will ever will. We’d miss the people who were the most memorable part of those warm and comfortable and that the cluttered, untidy-looking lobby led to a cheerful dining room where breakfast was served on good chinaware while birds sang around us on a sunny patio. We would have missed people we still talk about fondly, like the tall, friendly, husky Dutch maid who made room for us in a bedroom not much bigger than a clothes closet at the top of three flights of stairs, steep as a step-ladder, by hoist- ing our bags, so heavy they made my shoulders sag, up onto high shelves, looking around as if she’d cheerfully lift

The Review, Winter 1968
In Closing

The high school I began to attend in 1949 was only a short walk from the house I grew up in on MacLean Street in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. It was spare and straight and designed with two floors, wide hallways and plain classrooms and was given the name of a popular mayor of the day and so was officially known by both his name and the town's—Morrison Glace Bay High School—although it would always be called simply Morrison High. I graduated, along with 85 others, in the spring of 1951. I had not been back to the school and seldom to the town.

One morning, more than a year ago, I picked up the phone to hear a soft-spoken man, the current principal of the school, wondering if I might come back to speak at the graduation of 1986 to be held in June. I was on the verge of declining—because of the distance and the time it would take to prepare and then to attend—and when he added something that gave me reason to pause: "Morrison High is closing. The land for a new regional school has already been chosen. This could very well be the last graduation of the school." I found myself saying yes, of course I would be there.

I arrived, along with my wife, a day early on an afternoon in late June. We were met by an aunt with whom we would stay, and we left the airport, driving through the dump air of early summer beside the Atlantic, the wind off the water and hinting of rain. The highway into Glace Bay is straight, the hills are low, and on the edge of the town there are no strip malls or shopping plazas. The frame houses were still there, covered in afternoon silence, standing beside corner stores that have been there forever and would have much to tell if they could only speak. The town's main street, which is called Commercial, was crowded, as if the population had not declined by thousands and as if, as in the days when Glace Bay was young, coal was still king.

I phoned the principal, a pleasant man named Evan Kennedy, to let him know I had arrived. He reminded me of a reception the following evening—the night before the graduation—and I assured him that I'd be there. It was to be at the school. Many people I had not seen for almost 40 years had been invited to come, old neighbors, old friends, old classmates. It could never happen in a city, and it is a tribute to towns such as Glace Bay that you can be gone for many years and return with neither name nor fanfare to discover that you are still remembered. There were, at the tea-and-sandwiches reception, many people I expected but many I did not expect and felt all the more touched that they had come through the rain—a man I lived beside until I was five and had not seen since; a young woman I'd never met, who introduced herself as the daughter of a friend I had visited in hospital many years ago when the young woman was an infant and my friend was sick with an early and final illness. In all of them there was a quiet, almost deferential courtesy that is passing from our world, but is not passing from the old small towns of the East.

The next evening, the rain falling in sheets, the Savoy Theatre was packed for the graduation of the 124 members of the class of 1956, the seventy-ninth, and perhaps final, graduation of Morrison Glace Bay High School. In some parts of Canada a high-school graduation is a different affair, sometimes not even attended by some of the graduates, but in Glace Bay it remains as it always was, a huge community event, at which attendance is so prized, seating has to be rationed by tickets—so many to a family. They came early, filling the 970 seats and the hundreds of extra chairs placed in aisles, up front and in the balcony. Most of the men were miners, too many of them out of work, but there was, about all of them, a Sunday-best appearance and an open pride, as if they had been waiting for months for this special family night. "I've often thought about it," my friend Howard Mackinnon, a retired principal, now a local historian and publisher, told me. "I think it has to do with the closeness of the family here. And some of these men and women may not have finished school themselves, so when their children do, it's a major milestone."

I sat to the left of the stage with Evan Kennedy as, at sharp seven o'clock, the familiar first chords of the graduation march drifted from the piano and the graduates entered, moving with the practiced pace of numerous rehearsals, even their smiles serious, each one gowned and capped, so that not even a conversation at Cambridge could have held more anticipation. For many years their town had been unduly drawn, as many mining towns are, as hard-drinking and hard-living, yet for them there would be no drinking on graduation night. Each one had voluntarily agreed to a celebration pron after the graduation that would have neither drugs nor alcohol, and while other schools in Nova Scotia offered the same program—called "safe graduation" and conducted in cooperation with local police departments—students in Glace Bay were the first to have every class member sign up to take part.

The school had a number of academic and professional achievers in the distant and near past. The shadow of its first principal, a classicist and disciplinary named James Bingy, who came shortly after the turn of the century, is still in the school as are some of his old classics texts, his notes scribbled in all the margins. Not long ago, a graduate took almost all the final-year prizes in medicine at Dalhousie University—a fact that may be rooted in several things: a combination of old-fashioned education attitudes, a community belief in making something of oneself and a frank recognition that, especially for young people, academic standing is a necessary ticket out of a town relying on one industry that has long been depressed.

We who take such school graduations for granted may never know the sacrifices and prayers that accompany them. I was sitting by the principal as the certificates were handed out. He turned to me and nodded in the direction of a boy, scrubbed so clean he seemed to sparkle, approaching to accept his diploma. He was, the principal said, a bright student, one of the best, and had received a university scholarship and planned to go on to study medicine. His mother, his only parent, was poor. So that she might save extra money for her son's ambition she had taken on a paper route.

I spoke briefly. I recalled our own class, with its 85 students, and some words from our valedictorian of that year, Eoin Land, who went into law and who that night in 1956 expressed the hope that the half of the century then beginning would have none of the world disasters of the first half. I did not give advice so much as I tried to offer sincere thanks to the school in those its final days for its gifts to so many and its standards, which I have talked about more than I have honored. I ended by remembering that after I graduated that spring of 1951 my days in Glace Bay had been brief. So, by necessity, may the new graduates' days there be brief. I hoped it would be the most memorable of their summers and as they left Morrison High they would never forget why they had come.