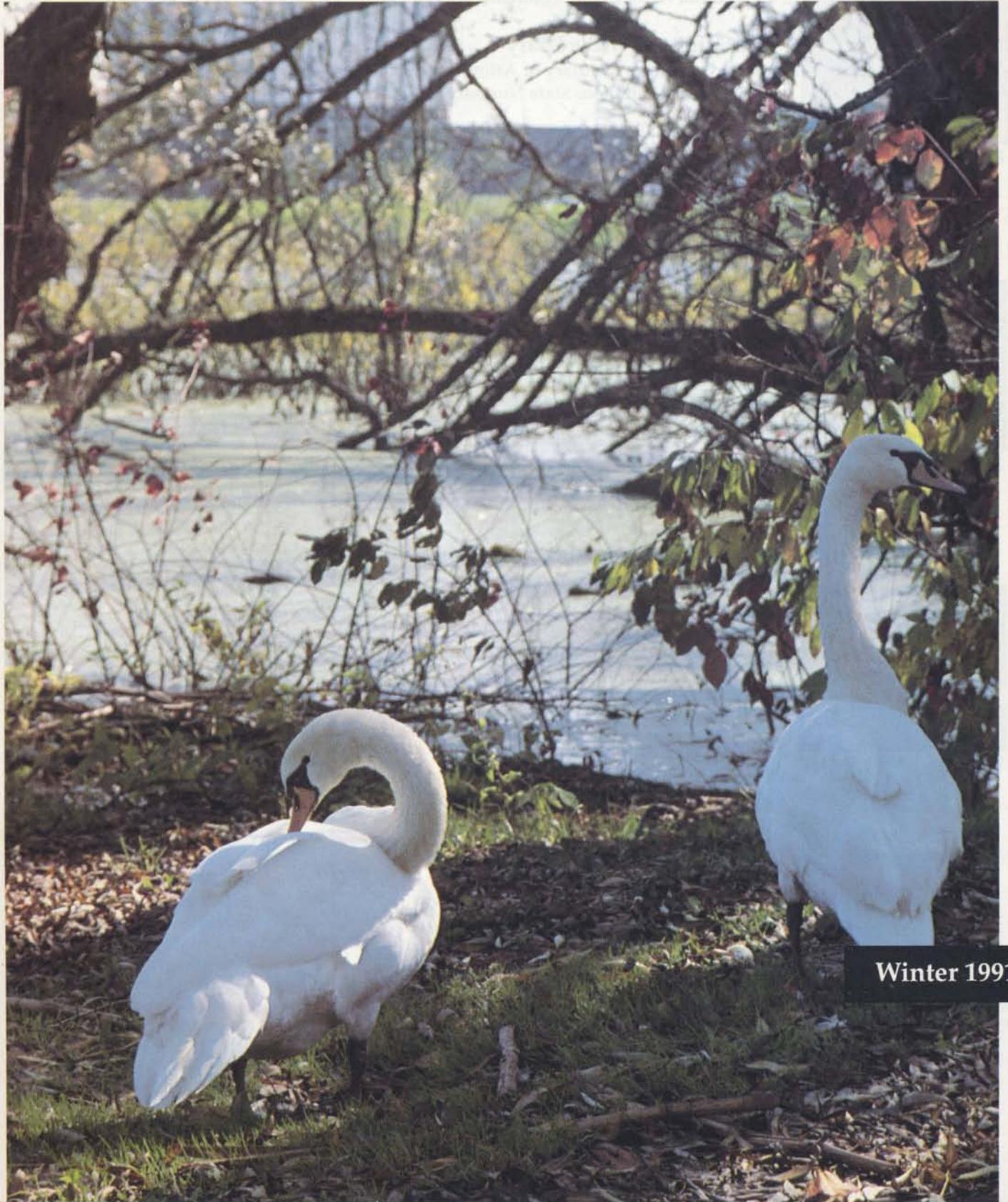


Alumni News

Edinboro University of Pennsylvania



Winter 1991



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Winter 1991

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Graceful swans, donated to the University by Syd and Shirley Cooling, can be seen in the grassy areas surrounding Mallory Lake.

Edinboro University is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all in every aspect of its operations. The University has pledged not to discriminate on the basis of race, sex, color, age, religion, national origin, handicap, organizational affiliation, affectional or sexual preference, and marital status. This policy extends to all educational, service, and employment programs of the University.

Edinboro in the Sixties: A Microcosm of Change



by Brett Rutherford

Make no mistake about it: college life changed forever in the mid-1960s. A student was expelled from Edinboro in 1964, solely because he wrote a letter to the *Spectator* suggesting an improved curriculum.

Female students were locked in their dorms at ten o'clock, under the watchful eyes of a strict Dean of Women. The college regarded it as a legal obligation to protect the morals of its adolescent charges. The Lakeside area of town was regarded as so hazardous to decency that women students were disciplined for attending parties there.

Male students were ordered to wear a jacket and tie to the cafeteria for the dinner hour. No tie, no service.

I was privileged to be part of the generation that changed all that. By the time I left college in 1969, women students had demanded their rights; dress codes were unthinkable; Edinboro had the state's most unbuttoned independent student newspaper; and a vibrant, all-volunteer "Free University" had sprung up to supplement the college's regular curriculum.

A Way of Living

When I remember college, I don't think much about classrooms and exams. Those who worry about the formal part of education majors miss the major advantage of college: it's a way of living, the only brief period in a busy lifetime when one's sole purpose is to grow and learn. The poor saps who spent their four years on beer and sex and sports missed out on a great opportunity.

For me, only a little of that learning occurred in the classroom. I always mixed my on-campus studies with a lot of off-campus anarchy.

If asked what was important, I would say that Journalism class under Kay Ryall Miller was a high point. From her I learned the craft of

news writing, public relations and technical writing. Sometime last year I published my 500th article, and every one of them employed some skill I acquired while working for Mrs. Miller on *The Spectator*. For a working writer, I think one journalism course is worth half a dozen creative writing courses.

My "underground" writing, though, was the most fun. I edited and published the infamous *Edinboro Prometheus*. Named after the mythological figure who stole fire from the gods, the *Prometheus* lambasted college administrators, ridiculed fraternities and sororities, and trashed the archaic rules and regulations that, to us, were a nasty hangover from Victorian times. It was one of only two independent student newspapers in Pennsylvania, and the only one that was not closed down.

I don't think too many people understood the mimeographed *Prometheus*. We were anti-authority, anti-Vietnam war, and – unlike most "underground" newspapers – pro-free enterprise. I was a classic libertarian in the vein of Thoreau, Paine, Adam Smith and Ayn Rand. But some college administrators and many locals thought me a ferocious, drug-ridden hippie communist. In fact, I avoided drugs, loathed Marxism, and used my little newspaper to advocate whatever I thought would result in more freedom, more fairness and more happiness.

This didn't stop a suspicious faculty wife from sending my photo to the FBI. At one point a group of town housewives started an "Edinboro Decency League" and tried to get my newspaper out of the college bookstore.

I loved the attention, and every act of official disapproval only confirmed that *Prometheus* hit where it hurt. Every institution needs an independent watchdog, and ultimately, even faculty members wrote for my newspaper.

The Useless Art

Leaning toward that most useless of all arts, I wrote my first mature poetry at Edinboro. I recall the kind encouragement of my advisor and mentor, Jack Tohtz, as well as that of a succession of fascinating British visiting professors who then graced the English department. Edinboro lacked no brilliance if you wanted to hear lectures on Joyce, Shakespeare, Milton or other great writers!

Like most poets, I discovered that the most assured way to be published is to start your own press. This led to the printing and hand-binding of my first book, *Songs of the I and Thou*, which launched my poetry career. It was printed at the Episcopal Student Center, where I was housed for two years as the most unlikely "church mouse" in Edinboro's history.

Designing, printing, illustrating and binding a book alone, I later learned, is a thing seldom done. But that is precisely the advantage of youth turned free on a college campus – everything seems possible. This little book was the first step in a long road. After college I founded The Poet's Press in New York, and 134 books later it is still, somehow, limping forward, publishing good but little-known writers.

Sundays at Bertha's, Nights at "The Cup"

Some of my most treasured memories of good conversation come from Sunday mornings at Bertha's restaurant. An ever-shifting group of faculty and students gathered at her big round table to devour the *Sunday New York Times*. Plato's Symposium had nothing over the talk, ranging from politics to literature, drama and music. We sat from eight in the morning until well past lunch, debating, expounding, listening. Students and faculty drifted in and out, making it an endlessly varied day. (Certainly no one went to Bertha's for the food.)

And who can forget "The Cup," the off-campus coffee house run by the campus ministry? Locals referred to it as a "dive" and by conservative terms, it was indeed a subversive setting: poetry, folk music, play readings, films and debates centered on all the important issues of the day. The Rev. George Lower and his wife Nancy created a welcome home for all the brilliant and sometimes troubled students of the sixties. It was a place to sit elbow-to-elbow with teachers and enjoy a remarkable fellowship.

Soap Opera Aida

I have fond memories of working at the campus radio station, then called WJKB. One year I was on the air eighteen hours a week, playing classical music, talking weird politics and poetry, and coordinating spur-of-the-moment readings of Shakespeare plays.

Once, we played Verdi's opera *Aida*, explaining the plot to our student audience through a soap opera called "The Amorous Adventures of Aida." ("Can an Ethiopian slave girl find happiness with an Egyptian general? . . . stay tuned!")

Eventually, the campus station succumbed to the mediocrity of a

rock format, but in our day it played classical, folk music, show tunes, jazz and interesting special programs. It was exemplary college radio, fighting to be novel and experimental.

The Stolen Wise Man

Can any college career be complete without hoaxes and pranks? Once, we garbed one of our friends as the Frankenstein monster and had him wade neck-deep through Edinboro lake to a line of cars where couples parked for romantic interludes. We knew that all the car lights would come on precisely at ten minutes before ten, since the girls had to be rushed back to their dorms. The instant the headlights went on, the monster emerged from the lake, lurching in that inimitable Karloff fashion. You could hear the screams all over town.

One Christmas season, I was in the lobby of a women's dorm and marveled at the manger scene they had assembled. One of the Wise Men looked just like an alien from space. "I wish I could have that!" I exclaimed.

My overzealous friends took me literally: the next morning I awoke to find the Wise Man in my bedroom.

With great embarrassment I returned the Magus to the outraged Dean of Women.

Looking back to assemble these brief reminiscences, I marvel at how much fun we had in these college years, even when we felt we were struggling against overwhelming opposition. My generation of students had to contend with a controversial war, a draft many regarded as immoral, rampant drug use, and the lure of religious and political "cults." Like today's students rallying for freedom in mainland China, we felt a tremendous commonality of purpose, a belief that men and women are inherently good and know how to live when they are not led astray by sinister ideologies.

I still believe that, just as I believe we had something special in those years. We were a community, and I have never, in all the years since, felt as connected to any people or any place. We struggled and contended, but we lived.

BRETT RUTHERFORD, a student at Edinboro from 1965 to 1969, lives in Providence, Rhode Island and makes his living as a widely published freelance writer concentrating on the graphic arts, publishing and computers. He is co-author of *Piper*, and author of *The Lost Children*, two horror novels published by Zebra Books. His own press, The Poet's Press, has published 134 volumes of poetry, including his own books; several of his own books, especially *The Pumpkined Heart*, *Whipporwill Road*, and *In Chill November*, contain poems about the Edinboro area from Indian days to the present. This fall will mark the publication of two new books, *Poems from Providence* and an illustrated poetry book celebrating the liberation of Eastern Europe. He comes back to Edinboro occasionally to do poetry readings and visit friends, and assures those who remember him that he is just as weird as ever.

Distinguished Alumni Nominations Sought

The Alumni Association is seeking nominations for the June 1991 Distinguished Alumni Awards. The awards honor Edinboro graduates who have distinguished themselves in their careers and in service to the University and the community in the categories of business, education, industry, arts and humanities, natural and social sciences, and volunteerism.

Each nomination should be accompanied by a summary of the nominee's accomplishments. Deadline for nominations is March 31, 1991.

Candidate's name _____

Address/Telephone _____

Class Year _____ Category _____

Summary of Accomplishments (use additional sheet) _____

Your name _____

Address/Telephone _____